

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**DANNY XIONG**

Tank Operator, Marines, Operation Enduring Freedom

2016

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**Xiong, Danny.** (b. 1984). Oral History Interview, 2016.  
Approximate length: 2 hours 8 minutes  
*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

This oral history interview with Danny Xiong covers his time serving in the Marine Corps from 2008 until 2012, including four years on active duty and one tour with the 1st Tanks Battalion in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. Xiong discusses his decision to join the Marines, his basic training at MCRD San Diego and his subsequent trainings at Camp Pendleton (CA) and MOS School at Fort Knox (KY). He was briefly assigned to Delta Company and then to Alpha Company, 1st Tanks Battalion. He was deployed to Afghanistan in the spring of 2010. His company was based out of Camp Dwyer and they were responsible for checking and clearing roads in the vicinity, close to the ongoing Battle of Marjah. Xiong and his company were on this assignment for approximately seven months. During this time Xiong's vehicle, a Husky, was hit twice by an IED, leaving him with moderate concussions both times. After Xiong returned home with his company he remained on active duty stateside for a time until he decided he did not want to apply for another deployment. He returned to Wisconsin and at the time of the interview was a student at Madison Area Technical College. Other topics/subjects covered in the interview include: the mental and physical toughness demanded in Basic Training, details about road clearing and the vehicles and procedures for handling IEDs, the camaraderie amongst his Company and his platoon, the transition back to civilian life, and some reflections on what Xiong's service and the conflict in general have meant to him.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Xiong (b. 1984) served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks Battalion in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom from 2008 to 2012. Xiong was involved in IED route clearance close to battle of Marjah. Xiong spent four years in inactive reserve and was discharged in 2016.

**Archivist's Note:**

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2016.  
Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016.  
Reviewed by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.  
Abstract Written by Ellen Brooks, 2016.

## Interview Transcript:

### [Beginning of Xiong.OH2063\_file 1]

Brooks: Today is Friday, February 19, 2016. This is an interview with Danny—how do you pronounce your last name?

Xiong: Xiong.

Brooks: Xiong. Okay. Who served with the Marine Corps from 2008 to 2012 in Operation Enduring Freedom. And you are a member of the First Tanks Battalion, correct?

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: Okay. And the interview is being conducted in Danny's home in Verona. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. All right. So if we can just start with where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Xiong: Yes. I was actually born in West Bend, Wisconsin in 1984. We moved around a little bit—my parents did—between Michigan and Wisconsin. Then they decided to just settle here. I was raised in Sheboygan so I went to Sheboygan—all the school districts there—and I graduated from North High. After that I worked for a little bit—couple of years actually. And then I decided to join.

Brooks: Okay. And what did your parents do?

Xiong: My parents? They were just manufacturers. They worked in a manufacturing company. My dad was a forklift driver. My mom was, I believe, an inspector for vehicle parts. So that's what they did. And then I have an older brother that joined the Navy as well. He was in a lot earlier than I was. I believe it was '98. And then—that's what, I guess, pushed me to join a little bit.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: You know. Having a positive role model.

Brooks: Did you have other siblings?

Xiong: Yes. Yes, I did. In our family, we have a total of seven.

Brooks: Wow.

Xiong: Uh, I have three sisters and three other brothers. I am the middle child so, yes, that is about it.

Brooks: Yeah. Okay. And then you said you worked for a while after high school. What were you doing?

Xiong: Uh, I was a screener at a company called Alumaroll based out of Sheboygan. And then, after that, worked for Johnsonville Sausage. And I worked there as a sanitation tech on second and then I transferred to third and then after that I just decided to join. I didn't see myself progressing within the company so—

Brooks: Tell me a little more about that decision. You said you were influenced by your brother. Were there any other factors?

Xiong: Yes. It was because—I guess you could say it was my surroundings. Getting mixed up with the wrong crowd. Being more ambitious, wanting to do something different. Not wanting to be “stuck” as you could say. And then, with the benefits of the military and remembering, you know, being a junior and watching the Twin Towers and everything, it just kind of stuck in me. I was just like, “Well, I should probably go.” So that's why I went.

Brooks: And why the Marines?

Xiong: Um—I don't know. It was just—I think it was just seeing how tough I was. Just to see. Just to test myself and push myself. But on top of that, it was any branch, actually. But the first recruiter I talked to was the Marine Corps. So that's why I chose the Marines.

Brooks: Did that recruiter say something specific to you that kind of drew you in or—?

Xiong: No, no. He actually just sat me down and went over my options. And then he was, just like, “Well, you know, there are other branches that you can go to if you want to. It's really up to you.” So he pretty much left everything open for me; but then, I think it was more the laid-back attitude of him, not like—not guiding me towards the Marine Corps. I think that's what got me into it more because he was just more like “Well, this is really your choice. You could go to any branch or else you could come to the Marine Corps.”

Then we went over some of their training, for basic training. We took a look at their schedule and everything else and I think that appealed to me a little bit more. So, yes.

Brooks: And how did your family react to your decision?

Xiong: They were actually very shocked because they didn't know I was going until the day I left—or the night before, actually. My older brother was, like, “Well, you made your decision and just don't back out. Just go all the way in and don't quit. Don't try to leave. You got to finish this. This isn't one of those things where you're not dedicated to it or anything. You have to be fully dedicated.” Yes. So I had a—we had dinner that night and then the next morning, I believe it was around noon, my recruiter came to pick me up and I was gone off to basic.

Brooks: Wow. And what did your parents think?

Xiong: I think they were shocked. They were really shocked. But then at the same time it wasn't something very shocking because they've already experienced it once. But then to experience it twice—I think that's what got to them. But then they knew that, you know, when, when I left and when I came back, it wasn't just, it wasn't just like you were going out to have fun. It was—you made a decision and you're going to change. And you're going to learn things that not everybody else will learn. So I think that's what got to them the most.

And then, they were very supportive along the way so, yes.

Brooks: And this was in 2008?

Xiong: Yes. This was January 2008. It was the beginning of the year and, like I said, it was just kind of out of the blue, I guess.

Brooks: Mm-hm. And tell me about your basic training.

Xiong: Basic training. I got sent out to MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] San Diego. We are also known as "Hollywood Marines." So—it's just like an inside joke that we all play on each other for East Coast and West Coast Marines.

Basic was very tough. I was—I think one thing that I regret the most was going to the poolee functions due to the fact that I was still working and I was kind of restricted with what I could do due to the fact that not only was I working, I was working third. I went to school in the morning. And trying to go to the poolee functions was a little bit difficult.

Brooks: What are the poolee functions?

Xiong: They are just when—it's known as "the depth program." I believe that's what it was called. That was right when you'd already signed the papers, sworn in, but you weren't ready to ship out yet.

Brooks: Ah.

Xiong: So—Yes, I wish I would have went to them a little bit more but I think I surprised my recruiter as well because I was always out of contact with them due to the fact that the working schedule and the school schedule, I was sleeping a lot, whenever I could actually. Between the breaks and then—I believe he was pretty surprised the morning of. He's like "All right. Well, I guess we're not going to have to call the authorities on you because you're not running so—" He knew that I was really ready to go. I think that caught him a little bit off guard as well. So—

**[00:08:18]**

Brooks: And that happens—so that's before basic?

Xiong: Yes. That was right before basic—

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: —when I received that phone call. “Are you sure you’re still going to go?” So, yes.

But basic was tough. It wasn’t really physically tough. It was just mentally tough. The physical part was—you knew that it was tough on your body but then if you train your mind to overcome and not feel pain or not feel tired, I think you could always overdo it because the mind plays a lot of games on you when you’re in that kind of situation. It was pretty—it was a shock, a pretty big shock because, you know, you had other grown men yelling at you and the intensity of everything. Everything just rush, rush, rush.

But it was very interesting. I think if I could go back and do it again I probably would. Just for boot camp again.

Yes, I went in around two hundred pounds and I came back at around one-forty.

Brooks: Wow.

Xiong: That was just three months later. So, it was very intense.

Brooks: Yeah. Were there any specific drills or any specific things that you can remember that were particularly difficult in that period?

Xiong: [Laughter] Yes. I think the difficult part was the fact that you weren’t in control of anything. You know, you used to have control over what you wanted to do, what you wanted to eat and here, you didn’t. It was very structured that way. But at the end of it you learned a very valuable lesson which was if you have structure in your life and you know what you want to do and you pursue it, with what you went through there, you could pretty much accomplish anything in life. And that also ties in with deployment and training as well.

But the hardest training I think we’d done so far was the Crucible. I think that would have been the toughest one because it was a three-day field op with maybe six hours sleep total. And you were constantly on your feet. You were constantly moving. You were constantly marching, going through obstacles, team-building obstacles, going through fire maneuver procedures, I guess. You’re staying up really late. You’re very exhausted and then toward the third morning you march. You wake up probably around three or four. You march to, like, the base of the hill or the mountain and then you’re just going up it. You’re just going up. You know, you’re in full combat gear and everything and the further—you could lean over to balance yourself and your hands would drag on the ground. So, I think that was the toughest part.

But then, that was the part where if you made it then you made it. You were known as a Marine after that. You weren’t just a regular person anymore because you’ve learned the Marine Corps traditions. You’ve been through some—the beginning of your phase of training. And on top of that, that was when you were embraced by everybody else

around you that “We’re Marines.” It was just a big welcome into, like, the brotherhood, I guess. The bigger entity of the United States Marine Corps, I guess. Just being welcomed as a brother. And there was a lot of learning you had to do beyond that, but it was a sense of relief, saying that “Hey, you made it.” All your hard work and the sacrifice, it was all for something. I think that’s the biggest accomplishment so far during your career.

Brooks: Was there anything about boot camp or those first few months that you were really surprised by? Anything that was really unexpected?

[00:13:00]

Xiong: Um—I think everything was a surprise because you didn’t know what you were getting yourself into. You know how everybody has that fear of the unknown and some people have that fear, some people don’t. But I think that’s the biggest part because you’re not—like, two months before you were just doing whatever you wanted. And now, it’s like, holy cow, you’ve actually—you’ve seen yourself grow and change from your peers. I think that was it. You know, like—the obstacles and stuff? Yeah, they were tough but you always had somebody there to be like “Hey, let’s go. Let’s go. Don’t quit.” So, yes.

I think the funniest part about boot camp was marching up the Crucible. The Crucible is the funniest part because you would never expect your body to go through so much. And, having done it, you know, it’s just intense. I’ve seen some people fall out but I’ve seen, I’ve seen people urinate themselves, poop themselves during the Crucible. I’ve seen what is known as “the silver bullet,” which is an internal thermometer, get shoved up somebody’s butt because they were close to heat stroke. So that was very interesting to me because I’ve never seen that before.

It was just kind of funny when I think back about it because as I was marching up the mountain, I see that to my left and my drill instructor’s to my right and he’s like “Get some” and I’m like “Nah, that’s okay.” That just motivated me to push even harder. [Laughter] So, yes. I guess there’s like a sense of humor in certain things. It’s kind of twisted in a sense, but it’s kind of funny, so.

Brooks: Whatever you have to do to get through it kind of thing?

Xiong: Yes, pretty much.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: If you don’t, you have your drill instructor right there to make sure you go through it. Because they don’t want you to fail. They really don’t. Their job is to make sure that you succeed and for you to not—for you to pretty much have faith in yourself. That’s their job and they teach you that. I think they’re very—a lot of people hate them when you’re actually in that situation right there or during the few months of boot camp. You really hate them but then at the end of it, if you actually sit back and look back on it,

they actually taught you a lot. And I think it's not just about the military. They teach you a lot about life, too.

Brooks: So three months of basic?

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: And did you know pretty much as soon as you got in that you would be deployed overseas?

Xiong: No. Actually I did not but then we knew that we—there was a strong chance for us doing it because before basic you actually took two tests to figure out which job you qualified for. So you already knew but then the recruiter, they were just more—it was just a more broad aspect of it. So when you're actually in boot camp they tell you right before you graduate. They're like "All right. Well, this is your MOS [military occupational specialty]. This is where you're going." After they read you your MOS, they're like "All right, well, you're probably going to go to war. You guys are going to be sitting behind a desk. You guys won't ever see anything." So they tell you that. And they're like "You know, if you ever do find yourself in a situation where you are overseas, just remember everything that you're taught. Remember how to survive. Remember what we taught you here because further from here on everything else that you do is just going to be built on the core values that we taught you here."

So, yes, you do know in a sense. But then I think the biggest thing is when you go to your second level training. That's when you really—everything kind of sinks in a little bit more because when you go in for your second level training, you either go to SOI [School Of Infantry] or MCT [Marine Combat Training]. SOI is just for everybody in the O3 field pretty much, all the grunts. And the MCT is for everybody else that's not really in that field, even though they might work with people in that field. You know, it's different training. SOI is more rigorous. It's a lot tougher. It's a little bit longer because that's actually their school and from there, more than likely, they're going to be based at that camp. Or else if not then they could get shipped anywhere else in the Marine Corps.

I signed up as an 1800 Options, so I knew that my job would consist of three different fields that I could choose from. But then, at the same time, it's just where they need the people. With the 1800 I could have been artillery, M1A1 tank crewman, or anti-air defense. So those are my three jobs that I could have been but then I got picked into tanks so I guess you could say that's where more people are needed because people are rotating in and out. So that's where I went.

Brooks: Did you have an initial reaction to getting that assignment?

**[00:19:36]**

Xiong: No. I think I already went through that. [Laughter] Because I was just like—you know, when you're on leave after boot camp or [inaudible], you're already looking stuff up on the Internet. Like, all right, well, what is this? What do I do? And you're already seeking outside resources to find out what it is. And then—the only thing that came



back to me was just, all right, well, I'll be dealing with tanks. I didn't know if I was going to be an operator or a mechanic yet. But then, right after MCT, they're like Yeah, you're just going to be an operator. It's a lot easier. But then, as an operator, you still learn first and second echelon maintenance on the tank itself, so you're pretty much operating on your own and if anything breaks down that's simple, that you could fix, then you'll be able to fix it without the mechanics being there.

Brooks: Mm-hm. And as an operator, what does that mean exactly?

Xiong: That means you operate the tank. So you're one of the individuals inside the tank. You could—the positions start as a driver or loader for right after you're done with armored school. And then after time and experience then you get pushed up to the gunner, depending on how good you do or how much knowledge you know about the tank, the weapon systems. You're usually a corporal when this happens. So it could be, maybe two years in, maybe three, two and a half before you even get promoted into the gunner's hole.

And then, to become a TC [Tank Commander], you're a sergeant already or else as a corporal you could be tank commander but that's very unlikely because the majority of the tank commanders are sergeants just because they have to have more responsibilities and their role—they play a little bit more of a bigger role. So—and then the tank as well is also structured as well. So if you're not a loader then you're a driver. And then—those are the—like I said, those are the only positions that you come into the Marine Corps or to the fleet as you could say. That's what you're position will be and then, like I said, throughout time you could get promoted.

Brooks: And how long did your advanced training last?

Xiong: My advanced—the second level training lasted a month. During that month I believe we did a 5K, a 10K and a 15K hike. We were based out of Camp Pendleton at that time. You learned a lot about machine guns and survivor—more survivor skills. How to set up different fighting positions if need be. Doing more patrols.

There's more that you learn but then that's all that I can remember. But I remember the 15K. We went up and it was like a weekend. I think it was like a weekend or a week field op that we did. You were—you went up this hill and you were just like "Okay, well." It's pretty tough and you're carrying—you're in full combat gear. And you're Oh, it's pretty tough. Come to find out, I think it was like about ten miles you hiked. A little bit over ten maybe. And then when you came back into garrison, into camp, and you were like Okay, well—you come down what is known as "the ankle breaker." What it is just a really steep hill that you come down and you're marching. And there's a lot of loose rocks. So then—you could slip, fall, break your ankle. You could tumble down. But, yeah, it's a pretty big loop.

If you were the selected few, if you're on I-5 in California and you're by Camp Pendleton, if you look up to the right on the top of the hill you see a board. And it's just—I think it's just like a lazing [??] board for the ships but I'm not sure. But if you were the selected few you had to actually march up another mile or two with full combat

gear. Just go touch that and come back down. So it just depended on if you could keep up with the platoon, if you could keep up with the march, if you didn't mess up in any of the drills, if you knew how to, I guess, engage the enemy when we did scenarios, if you knew what to do and you didn't hesitate, then you were fine. But then for the individuals who did, they got extra training.

[00:25:17]

That was just more along the lines of "Hey"—when you're actually going up there, there's other scenarios that they play out so you get more comfortable with doing your job.

Brooks: So did you have to do that extra mile or two?

Xiong: No, I was actually lucky enough not to. But I volunteered to—I volunteered to actually go ambush another base, like another little setup FOB [Forward Operating Base] that they had for a different platoon. So that's what we did. We got rewarded pizza after that because, you know, we broke enemy lines and it was just more along the lines of just "Hey, you guys did a good job. I didn't think you guys were going to actually make it this far. And you guys actually penetrated through their camp, their lines. You've done everything correct. You guys took out a couple of [inaudible] here and you guys went up to the COC [Combat Operations Center] or whatever and you guys took care of it." So that's what we got rewarded and on the march back we got a pizza.

It was pretty funny. We got—I think we just took it from one of the trucks. It's just all fun and games. The reality of it doesn't set in yet. It's like you know that this is just training. It's not real life until later on; but then everything that you learned you have to actually—you have to keep it and you have to remember everything before you can even push on. I think that was the biggest part.

After graduating from MCT we got sent to our actual—I guess you could call it MOS. So, like, if you were motor T you get sent to a motor T school. If you were infantry, you stayed there. If you were intelligence or, like, refrigerator care or water purifier, you would get sent to those schools. I got shipped out to Fort Knox, Kentucky for the armored school there. From there—that was probably around—maybe July? June-July timeframe? We got shipped out there for—I remember I was in the—right when we got received we were, we didn't go into the platoons yet because we were waiting for everybody to fill up and so that way they could rotate the cycles. The cycle ahead of us, they were almost done but then they had a couple more ops to go to so we actually stayed there—I was there for a couple of months. I think like four months, three or four months—before actually hitting the fleet.

[00:28:24]

Brooks: What do you do during that time? Is it just down time?

Xiong: Yes, it's—yes. It is down time but then, you know, you still got to—you have to—what we did was we actually cleaned our barracks or whichever floor we were on. We were

still learning stuff and waking up every morning PT-ing [Physical Training] with the platoon and everything else. But then, to deal with the actual tanks, we didn't really do that yet because we weren't in the second level of training yet.

So pretty much it was just a lot of down time and a lot of cleaning. We did some marching. A lot of PT. That was pretty much it. And then I think in August, maybe August, we got accepted into our platoons for the next cycle. You had a wish list from there either to go to East Coast or West Coast after you were done with your training. So then they actually split up the whole platoon into two sections to form your own smaller platoons. So all the West Coast guys, they slept on one end of the barracks. All the East Coast guys slept on the other. Just so that way you could start building the cohesion and teamwork and you guys could know each other a little bit better. That way when you guys hit the fleet, you guys have each other to talk to. And if you guys need extra training or whatnot, if you need help with anything, you guys have each other in your class to help each other out.

That was pretty much it. And then like we—I think we went to one gunnery as tankers in the school—a lot of training on the tanks, though. It was very intense because it was just a lot of classroom and then you had to know and identify different vehicles from the U.S. and from the allies and the enemy forces and then you also had to know the helicopters as well because being in a tank you are very limited to what you could do. But your limitations are only what you set upon yourself. Like with the lasers—you could shoot maybe two miles out. Maybe—I forgot but you could shoot pretty far. And then you'd have to actually—you'd have to identify the vehicle or the helicopter just in case something happens because being in a tank you are very vulnerable to a lot of things. But not as much as being in, like, a truck or a Humvee or a seven-ton or anything like that.

You knew that you were always going to be right up in front, too, if anything was to happen. So you learn the basics there and once you graduate you get shipped out to a fleet. When I got shipped out to a fleet, the first company that we were thrown into or put in was Delta Company which was a float company. They were the first, the quick reaction force I guess you could say for the Marine Corps. If anything was to break out overseas they'd be the first ones there before everybody else came in. I consider this my parent company because I stayed with them the longest, which was Alpha Company. There was a difference between line companies and float platoons.

Float platoons were—or a float company was just all Delta Company. They had your Alpha, Bravo, Charlie. They were all the line companies. When we got thrown—when we got shipped out to Alpha Company, they just came back from deployment from Iraq. And then—I believe that was around 2009. Late 2008, 2009.

**[00:33:08]**

Brooks: So you just spent a little bit of time in Delta Company? And then they—

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: —reassigned you?  
Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: But I do call them my parent company because I was with them the longest. So like, when you were there, there was more training. It was more intense then because everything you did now was just dealt with the tanks. You didn't do anything else but then the weapons systems, the maintenance, how to maneuver a tank, what the—I guess you could say what formations to be running. When they tell you to switch formations you have to know where to go. So we did a lot of that and we went to a lot of ranges as well so that way it prepped you for whenever you would have to actually use that knowledge. When you would get sent to a different country or if there was a war that broke out or whatnot.

I remember that when we first got our orders to go, they were like, Well, you know—the speech we were given was “If we can't bring tanks there, we could definitely bring tankers there, so you guys are going.” We're, like, “Oh, okay. Well, cool.” You know. But then—everything wasn't for sure yet. It wasn't set in stone. But we were already excited because we knew that that was what we wanted to do because that's what we signed up for. So—when we actually got our marching orders to go, there were some individuals in the company that didn't go and some that did. Some went early, some went late. So we didn't get a chance to go on tanks. So we had like maybe a month and a half of training on a different job. And that was very quick. So we were—we weren't—we were proficient enough in the secondary job that we had to learn but we wanted to go in tanks and that wasn't possible.

So—what we did, we were attached to engineers and we did—we were assigned route clearance, all of Alpha company tanks was assigned to third CB, the combat and engineering battalion. We went out there and cleared the roads of any IEDs [Improvised Explosive Device] for follow-on troops or anything else like that.

**[00:36:00]**

Brooks: And so—and why couldn't they make it work with the tanks?

Xiong: The tanks—the reason why it didn't work with the tanks was because we were always told that tanks were a sign of force, especially when we're trying to keep the peace. So that's the reason why we didn't get any tank assets up there until after we rotated back in. So there was two companies of tankers that went. Alpha company went first. They ripped out. Bravo Company took over with their TB. They ripped out. And the Alpha Company went back with tanks.

So within—within a year and a half—maybe a year, yeah, about a year and a half, tanks decided—they were actually bringing in tanks to Afghanistan. The conflict that we were involved in was the Battle of Marjah. We got shipped out there in April, right after it had already kicked off. I believe they kicked off in, um, February.

Brooks: This is—

Xiong: 2010.

Brooks: Ten. Okay.

Xiong: So we got shipped out in April. We stayed there until sometime in November and then we came back.

Brooks: So, um, tell me a little bit about just kind of the first initial reaction and experience of being in Afghanistan. Maybe kind of how you guys got over there and then first impressions.

Xiong: Okay. Um, well, we took a plane. We had a couple of stops along the way which delayed us a little bit because of other conflicts in different countries or surrounding countries. So we were delayed a little bit. I think the biggest thing was everybody was just excited to go. But then once we hit—once we hit Kuwait everything kind of sunked [*sic*] in because we were like Holy cow. Okay, well, now we're really going. You know. I think that was the biggest—that was the biggest shock along the way. Being your first deployment, you know, you don't know what to expect. But being out in Kuwait was just like Whoa, okay. Well, it's hot. You have to drink a lot of water. There's a lot of sand. A lot of—that was pretty much it, you know. It didn't hit you until you hit—when we flew in we actually flew into—I can't even think of the base now. But we flew into—we were based out of Dwyer and that was one of the biggest bases. I believe that was the second biggest base in Helmand Province. So we were based out of there. We got there pretty late. We got there around, like, maybe nine, ten at night. And it was just rush, rush, rush, you know. From the flying line to the buses or to the seven-tons and it was just rush, rush, rush.

So when we got there they were just like, Alright well, you know, prep for tomorrow. Get everything set out. We're meeting here at, like zero seven. So the first couple of days we were there we were just settling down, getting ready. Just—I think just getting climatized [*sic*] to the weather because it was extremely—it wasn't actually very hot yet. It was still their winter season, their rainy season, the cold season. So everything was just, like, "Okay, well, now we're here, what do we do?" You know?

Later on that week we met the other platoon that we were taking over their AO [Area of Operations] or their patrolling areas. So then we meet them, and we actually go through the trucks. Run a lot of inventory, the gear that we had, the weapons. Different serial numbers for various equipment that we would need. When we did the RIP [Reconnaissance Indoctrination Platoon] that was more of the Okay, well, now this is what's really going to be going on. This is what we're really going to do. From there, you're still behind a—I guess you could say a guarded gate. You weren't able to see the real Afghanistan yet. So when we got shipped out we did the left-seat, right-seat or the RIP. We went through all the routes. I think we went through, like, three or four routes. And then they were like, All right, well, this is what's happening. This is where we go. This is where we are. You need to know where you're going. You need to know the hot spots and what's not. And that was just right after the Battle of—the Big Battle or

the Big Push. So we were operating out of a smaller FOB. Everything was built but then that's when everything sunk in. Like, Okay, well, holy cow. This is really different.

So I think that's when you start realizing that, you know, all your training kicks in and everything. They always tell you never to let your guard down and to remember everything. Don't, don't—I guess you say, Don't lose your sanity. Always remember. That's when you know that you're, like, Holy cow. All right. These guys are leaving. Now it's our turn to take over everything and—

You have to know your job because if you mess up, somebody else could get—and this isn't just training anymore. So everything is just fast. It really is. Everything comes at you really fast and it's just like, Holy cow. You know. It seems like yesterday we were just still on the plane and now we're here. By the time you know it, it's time to go home already.

So the best way that we did it was just to keep busy. When we first started our routes took us ten or twelve hours just to clear. And that was—that was actually on the easy day. It just gets harder as you go, I guess. But then you just learn to live in that environment. Like, you learn to deal with all the stresses of combat and being in a different country. I mean, it's really sad when you see what the people over there have and what you have at home. It's sad because you know that they could do better and know you want to give them better but then you got to remember that that's not your mission. Your mission is different and you see how fortunate you are compared to everybody else in the world. You kind of reflect on what you have and then what you stand for and why you guys are there. And it just helps you get through a lot of things.

[00:44:05]

That's where a lot of friendships, I guess you could say, um, get more personal, or you get to know who your real friends are and who will always be there for you, I guess. Having friends is always good. I tried to keep a diary but—one of my best friends kept calling me out on it, saying I was too sensitive. I was too emotional. [Both laughing] That I, you know—he was just like “Man, everybody—he kept making fun of me. I was like “Dude, it's just so that way I could document everything we do, you know. It's not for me. It's for later on, you know. You can look back at it.” But then, you know, we—he had a pretty good point where he was just “You know, I think you—that's good, but you can't do that, man. You're not built that way.” So I was like “All right, well whatever.” So I burned it. But he was like “You know, you lived it, man. Why do you want to remember it?” [Laughter] I was just like “Well, okay. It's fine.”

Brooks: How do you feel about that now? The fact that you burned it?

[00:45:12]

Xiong: I'm still okay about it because, you know, I think there's, there's definitely a part of you that you will never forget, what you did and who you are. You know? I think what he was just trying to say was, you know, do you really want to relive it? Because you've

been there. You've done enough. Are you sure you want to relive that experience. Why don't you just bury it and move on? You know, like, shove it down. I think that's what he was trying to say. We had each other to—but then our platoon, we had a lot of people to talk to but then, you know, you usually stick to the guys that you get along with the most. Or else, you know, everybody is doing their own little thing during your down time.

So, yeah. I think that was—you know, I kind of took that to heart and I was just like “Yeah, well, whatever, you know. You're right. I don't need it.” So, yeah. I don't, I don't feel bad that I burned it but I think it would be nice to have but then at the same time it's just, like, you know, if you still—it triggers memories, you know. You still remember how the air smells. You still remember very vividly where you slept. You know. What your surroundings were. You remember everything. It's just—I don't know.

I'm kind of glad that he told me that because in a sense you don't want to relive it. [Laughter] Because it's like one of those things where it's just like, Uh, yeah, it's probably best to keep it in the past.”

Brooks: Can you tell me—you said a couple times “the RIP.” Can you explain what that is? What that means?

Xiong: Okay. The RIP and the left-seat, right-seat?

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: Is just when you go in, when you first get your equipment and you meet the other platoon that you're replacing. It's just where they show you the routes, and you're actually going out on patrol now. So that would be your first patrol is the RIP. Which is—they're just like, All right, well, this is what's happening in this area. You have to watch out for this. You have to be careful for that. You could usually tell—there's indicators if there's something odd about the route. There's always indicators. So they're telling you everything that they know, that they learned, and they're just passing that information on to you while you're doing the route yourself. And they're just staying there, making sure everything is done correctly.

Brooks: Okay. And what is the left-seat, right-seat?

Xiong: Oh, that's the same thing.

Brooks: Okay, just called different—so then, so you worked in the platoon clearing roads. That was the main, your main assignment?

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: And how exactly does that work? How many guys go out and what do you have to do?

Xiong: Um, pretty much the whole platoon went out unless if you got injured.

Brooks: Which is how many?

Xiong: Um, out—maybe about twenty-five—

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: —to thirty per—so it's—everybody in your platoons goes out, like I said. Within the company you have three platoons or four platoons within a company. And then—our platoon had about—yeah, about like twenty to thirty individuals that operated different equipment. Or else—we had mechanics with us. We had EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal]. We had engineers. We had a corpsman with us. And that was pretty much it.

We had—the equipment that we operated was a husky. Two huskies, two four-bys, two six-bys and one—I can't even think of the name now. Yeah, I can't think of the name but it's—oh, it's a buffalo. Um, one buffalo and one six-by for EOD. So we had, like, about—seven or eight vehicles with us whenever we would go on patrol. We always had up guns, so we had vehicle-mounted, heavy machine guns. We had fifty calibers, Mark nineteens, two-forties and those were our up guns. And then, yes, we just had the EOD somewhere in the column whenever we go patrol.

[00:50:35]

Um, I think that the most—the hardest part was, you know, some—like, they were very tricky. Like, trying to find—when we're clearing the routes of IEDs, it was very tricky because there's—there was—there—the enemy's always watching you, so whatever you do now, today, you have to change tomorrow. Because if you keep doing the same thing over and over again, they're going to find—there's going to be different ways where they could find your weakness and then exploit it. Which, when they do, that's when somebody—when somebody gets hurt. You have to—you have to be aware of that.

Our LT was very—he was very smart. He always had us utilize our vehicles instead of get out on foot to patrol or to sweep. He was—he all—he cared about us a lot. He was, with his knowledge and everything, being prior enlisted and—he didn't want to see anybody get hurt. He wanted everybody to come back home with him. And I think that was one of the—like, you don't see that then, but that's one of the things that made him such a great leader I think is. That he had so much knowledge, and not only that but he always looked after everybody, no matter where you—where you were or whatnot. I—it doesn't just come with the role. I think, I think it's one of those traits that you learn with time.

Yeah, he always—every single day we always did something new just so that way whoever the enemy was wouldn't recognize that we had a pattern to doing it. So once in a while we'll switch, with one of the other platoons, we'll switch routes with them so that way you're not always—you're always on guard. You're never—you never let your guard down because the moment you let your guard down that's the moment



something happens. So we would switch out with different platoons, with one of our platoons and patrol their routes for a day and they'll patrol our routes just so that way if there's something different that you see, you can call it out or you can go investigate it.

Brooks: What was your specific role? Did everybody kind of have their own job when you went out to patrol?

Xiong: No, actually. Our jobs varied. I was supposed to be a mark nineteen gunner. That was the job I had state-side so that's the job that I had trained on. I trained on all the, like, the mark nineteen, the two-forty, the fifty caliber, the saw. So that's what I trained on but then when we got overseas I became a husky operator. I became—the huskies are in front of the convoys in our case. They were in front of the convoys. They were detecting for IEDs. So that's what we did. And then once, once the husky operators—like, the thing about the husky operators is they're—it's kind of hard to depict because your view is so—you're kind of restricted. So, yeah, it was a little bit difficult.

But then, um, the equipment, like for example the tires on the husky, they're deflatable [*sic*] and inflatable for—due to the terrain. So when you set them—so that way they do that so it doesn't set off a pressure plate or any of the other wires that could possibly trigger an IED to go off. They would deflate so they would—they would counter the weight. So that way you could actually go through. But then the other—like I said, it was very different because there was different ways that they could have set up IEDs. There were various ways, actually. We found a couple—I shouldn't say that but—you know, there was kite string. Where they would tie kite string to it and all they had to do was pull it, and the IED would go off. There was pressure plates. There was RC-style IEDs. There was pressure cookers. There was, um—there was a different one that we ran into where it was a—they could trigger it off by cell phone and everything. So it was—you dealt with a lot of different, different kinds of ways that an IED could go off so it was just trying to figure out what it was.

I mean, sometimes there's indicators. Sometimes there's not and it's hard—it was kind of hard to figure it out because sometimes when you go out on patrol, you know, one day you see a hole right there, the next day the hole is gone. It's all buried up. So you know there's something in there. And that's like one of the possible spots that you would look for an IED or else you would go up to it and try to read it off with your panels on the husky.

And then once you get hurt-like, if you get hurt twice in a husky, then they would send you to, like, one of the back vehicles or like one of the vehicles with offense [??] due to the fact that, you know, you've already had two concussions or three concussions. I believe, I believe that if you had more than four they didn't want you going outside the wire anymore because you could really seriously get hurt. There's a lot of brain issues I guess you could say, that deals with it. Like TBIs [Traumatic Brain Injury].

So after, after, I believe, it was around—I actually got lucky. My husky blew up. I hit two IEDs with my husky. The first one I hit clipped my rear tire of my husky and forced my husky forward. The second one was right off to my right and there was a lot of moon dust. And moon dust is flour-like substance sand. And it's really floury so

when you step in it, it just goes everywhere and sticks to you. The second one hit right off to my right side as I went up to it to scan it with the panels to see if I could detect anything metallic. And then, after that, I was put into one of the medevac vehicle as up gunner. So I was a fifty cal[iber] gunner after that. So the jobs that you have during deployment, it ranges. It just depends on where you're needed or what happens to you.

But, you know, like radio operators. They're not just radio operators. They're—if we have to mount off, we have to dismount the vehicles and patrol, they have to go patrol now. So your jobs will vary depending on what is needed and where you're needed.

Brooks: And how often would you find an IED or something?

Xiong: It just depends on how active your area is. Some other platoons, they found a lot of IEDS. I think total—I can't remember. But I think total we found, like, I think it was over one hundred, maybe more or less. I can't really remember. But I do remember out of all the platoons, we ran—within the seven months we were there, I think we ran, like, four to—three to four hundred missions. So I don't want to exaggerate the numbers—

Brooks: No. Yeah. I get—yeah, I'm just wondering, like, if there's like a half the time you found something, half the time you didn't kind of—

Xiong: Well, yeah. It just depends on your AO. If it's—since we were north of Marjah, so the guys that were inside Marjah that patrolled inside the city, they found more. Or the guys outside the city, sometimes they would find more. It just depends. They had a—the way it was was if they didn't throw us off, then it would be weird. They would plant—the enemy would plant IEDs there for like a month before even—they would just put it there and not set anything up until a month later and then they'll hook it up and, you know—so it's just—it just ranges. Sometimes you find it. Sometimes you don't. Sometimes it finds you. That's the downfall to it because it's like a hidey-seeky. You know, you don't know where it is. You're just trying to find it. So sometimes when you find it, that's a plus side because you could bring back all the materials and everything else and you could analyze it or send it to the lab and get it fingerprinted or find out who's making it, you know. Who has access to all these materials and everything else like that. So it—when you do find it, it is a great day. But when it finds you, I mean, your day is—it just drags.

Brooks: What was it like those two times that you were in the husky that got hit?

**[01:01:32]**

Xiong: The first time rocked me pretty good. We were just on a normal patrol. We patrolled a different route that day. Um—I remember pulling up to a little water pump. And I saw rocks, like an indicator, along the road. And I'm like, Okay, well, you know, there's indicators there. There's markings on the buildings. Everything else like that. All the signs are there. And you're like, All right, well, now is just where is it? So you're, you know—when you're looking for it, it's kind of tough because whatever you see in front of your vehicle, that's five foot away. Or in front of your vehicle. When you look down at it—the only time you can actually get a really look is when you're pulled up

right next, beside it. And you're marking that spot so that way the buffalo can come up and do its thing.

Or else EOD could dismount and they could go look for it. But then the thing about EOD dismounting, or anybody dismounting at all is that you could get into an ambush. Sometimes that's what they did, too. Like, they would just put markings there so that way you dismount and they would just ambush you. And that's worse when you have men on the ground and you're in a firefight. You really have to be careful then.

So the first time, I went up to it and I knew the indicators were there, but we were always told if it's a source of—well, if it's a resource that they need, they wouldn't blow it up because it's hard to get that resource. And, in that case, it was a water generator where it was just pumping water out of the ground and going into the river. So you would think that they're not going to blow that up. And when I went up to it, you know, I was inspecting—I didn't see any wires coming out of it or anything so I didn't see anything. So as I was looking right at it, I had my panels down, scanning everything. I didn't detect anything. So that was the weird part and plus it's right next to a generator so it throws off all of our equipment. And then my rear tire clipped the pressure plate. So the IED went off right behind—right behind my back bumper which forced my vehicle forward. The only thing that happened to my vehicle is my mirrors blew out.

But the thing about it, too, is that you're so close to it. And when it goes off you don't have any ear protection or anything because you have to listen to your equipment when it's going off and everything so you can understand where, what you need to do. So when it went off, it just went off right behind me.

I was pretty dazed. It forced my vehicle forward. And that was it. But then—this was really stupid on my part because—you know, when I was—I was just like, All right, well, I'm okay. The only thing that happens is just my mirrors blew up. I should be fine. But when we got back—I just, I decided to continue with the mission. Instead of being the lead husky, I became the second husky but then they threw me in the back of the—and they were in the middle of the convoy because I didn't have an up gun. So the only weapon system I had on me was my nine millimeter. So as we were going through the—to finish the route, you know, we got back. I got checked by our corpsman and he's like “All right, dude. I think you need to go to the hospital. I got to run some tests on you.” And it comes back that I had like a class two concussion. So I was like “Okay, well, you know.” “Did this happen to you?” I'm like “Yes.” “Did you feel this?”

So I just—you know, it's just one of those things where it's just like you think you can continue going but then, like, after that incident then you realized. What the IED does is, right? The initial explosion actually contracts your spine going up and down so all those little, uh, your vertebraes [sic]? They expand and then when you come down or, like, when your vehicle comes down it all just crunches back up again. So that's—they were like “Oh, you got to get that checked” and everything else. So that was the first time it happened.

[01:06:23]

The second time, um, I believe there was a string that was running off to my left side by the canal. On my right side there was a canal and on my left side there was like a little trench canal that they did. I didn't see it but, you know, like, you can't clean mirrors so, um, I believe my—that was one of the different IEDs where they had a battery source to it and all they had to do was connect the wires to the battery and it would go off. So there was no pressure plates. And the way they did it was very smart. It was—there was a hole in their wall than ran to the battery source so they could just look through that hole and see us where we're at and blow us up and run away. So that's the second time that that happened to me.

And then, after that, they just—we were on our way back. So it was pretty interesting. And then, after that, I went to the hospital with my corpsman and they were like “Yeah, you have a class one.” So after that they were just like “Well, if you already had two concussions, we don't want you to have another one because then you're really not going to be able to come out with us no more.” And that was one of the things. When you get hurt, or for me it was when I got hurt I didn't want to stay away from my platoon because you worry about your guys. You know? You worry about everybody but then you have a stronger feeling towards the guys that you came there with, the guys in your platoon. You ate with them every day. You did everything with them every day. So that camaraderie and that brotherhood, you didn't want anything to happen to them without you being there with them. So if anything happens at least you were there and you could help them out or back them up or something. So, yeah, we were going back to the main FOB and that's what happened and after that they just said, Hey, you're going to be the—you're going to be the gunner for the medevac vehicle. So that was my primary mission for the rest of the deployment. So probably, like around—maybe four months?

What we were told was everything slows down during the winter season because there's a lot of snow in the passes and stuff. So we didn't—you didn't really expect much, but there was a lot of—there was still a lot of fighting because that was just the battle for the city, I guess. So, yeah.

Brooks: I'm trying to kind of picture the kind of environment you were in because you said there were like walls and buildings. Were you in like small towns when you were kind of clearing these routes?

Xiong: Yes. Yes. Actually—if you want to—

Brooks: Pause. Sure.

Xiong: Yeah.

[End of Xiong.OH2063\_file 1] [Beginning of Xiong.OH2063\_file 2]

Brooks: Okay. Now we're going to start a second file for the interview with Danny Xiong. Am I saying that right?

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: Okay. All right. So what we were looking at some pictures on the laptop that Danny had while he was in Afghanistan.

Xiong: All right. That was the day we shipped out.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Uh, so that was the morning. We were leaving our home base here to go to Afghanistan. So out of our platoon we had, like, four saw gunners. These are the four.

Brooks: And this was—you were in Kentucky?

Xiong: No, this was in California.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: At, uh—Tornado Palms.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Where I was stationed.

Brooks: Was your family there?

Xiong: No. No. I didn't have them come up because it was so fast. There was—I didn't see a—I came home and then, like, I think like a week later we left. So then there was no point of having my parents come out unless if I didn't go home for the time they let us leave. I think it would have been harder on them.

So this was the flight over there.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: These were—I think this was Germany.

[Laughter]

Brooks: I only saw the first half. That's fine.

Xiong: Okay. [Both laugh] This was, uh, Kuwait. The airport in Kuwait.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: This was when we were in a C-130, AC-130—or C-130.

Brooks: So how many—did you have any women in your company? Is this your company here?

Xiong: Uh, no. We just caught a ride with them. These are—they were in the Navy. These were Seabees.

Brooks: Oh, okay.

Xiong: Um, we just caught the same flight to Dwyer together.

Brooks: So no women in your company?

Xiong: No, we were an all-male unit, because we were still combat-oriented. So the way that I see it was whenever the grunts get in trouble or whenever they need backup, we would go there and back them up, because we would be able to provide more cover and on top of that they used us as an asset a lot because of our weapon systems.

This was our corpsman.

Brooks: Sleeping?

Xiong: Mm-hm. It was a long flight. It took—I think it took, you know—a lot of us didn't sleep during the flight from the United States to Germany because you just can't sleep. By the time you know it—it's like daytime when you leave and you're flying through the day, all day, and by the time you know it, you get there and it's still daytime.

Brooks: Mm-hm. Confused.

Xiong: Yeah.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: This was the platoon sergeant.

Brooks: He looks very serious.

Xiong: Good guy. He's a good guy.

And then this was the first photos that I took when we were in Afghanistan. So.  
[inaudible]

And that was me carrying the two-forty.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: And then this was the city we were patrolling, outside the city. And that's just like a little, like, I guess you'd call it a sub-area because it was very remote.

Brooks: Mm-hm. So that's not Majrah [sic]?

Xiong: No.

Brooks: Right. That's just a little city outside.

Xiong: Yep.

[00:05:07]

So this was northern Marjah. So this was—all these photos from here on out are just on the north end of Marjah. So remember the wall I was telling you about?

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: Yeah, they had a little hole down here and the wire ran through it.

Brooks: So those are, what, like clay walls it looks like?

Xiong: Mud walls.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Mud clay. So these were around all their houses and their houses were—

Brooks: And were those occupied usually by families? People were actually living in them or were they—?

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Yes. Sometimes there would be—I'm assuming there would be a lot more than just one family. It would be like the whole family of like—for example, their parents, them, their wives, their kids, so on and so forth.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Because these compounds are—some of them are actually pretty big. Some of them were really small but then they had—the way it was structured was it was very—so, there was a lot of land, I guess you could say, around their, their gates or their mud walls per se. It was pretty big.

Sometimes these compounds look—like, you could go a whole block and it would just be one compound still. And these are their poppy fields. So, yeah. This is just one compound. And more of their poppy fields.

This was a sandstorm that came in.

Brooks: What was the protocol for a sandstorm? Do you know?

Xiong: For us, if we were out on patrol it didn't matter. We stayed up there. The only thing, the only protocol we had for a sandstorm was either, if we couldn't see the vehicle in front of us, then we would halt the whole column and then we would wait until we could actually see each other again to move on. If not, and we were already inside the FOB, then the first thing we would have to do is just cover up our weapon systems and then clean it again the next morning or whenever the sandstorm went away so the weapon system would always operate.

And then that right there is a camera that shoots up so you could—it'll shoot up like thirty, forty feet. And you could see everything around you. It has, uh, black and white-hot.

Brooks: And what vehicle is this?

Xiong: Uh, this is, um, I believe one of the four-bys.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: And this is a jammer. We call that a jammer. It just jams signals and radio frequencies.

So this is pretty much our convoy. So from that vehicle all the way up there, coming back here. I believe that's a cobra flying around when we were doing our missions.

And, so, like I said, this is going to be north of Marjah. And this was—it was just open desert—like one of the roads we actually took from Dwyer to Marjah. So this is—  
[inaudible] better picture—this is how it looks inside a husky. So there's just enough room for one person and the steering wheel detaches and then you have all these—your gages, um your tilt, the vehicle tilt. And over here is where you'd have to listen to the instruments working when you're actually detecting for IEDs.

Brooks: And that's just one person? Just the driver?

Xiong: Yes. And then this is the four-by that was right behind us. You have the mine detector right there in the front or mine roller. So these are weighted and if any of the IEDs would hit it, this part would just blow off and then instead of hitting the actual crew, this would be the only part.

And this is a husky.

Brooks: It's not very big, huh?

Xiong: No.

Brooks: It kind of looks like a little land rover that you'd see, like, from Mars or something.

Xiong: Yeah. It sounded like one, too.



Brooks: Yeah?

Xiong: Yeah. So this is when we were detecting IED and we all bunched up. The husky is right there. The buffalo is right here doing its thing. And they've got EOD to make sure everything's okay.

These were the new—we called it the bat mobile. I believe these were the M—HMTV or MTV [Medium Tactical Vehicles]? But we called these the bat mobile. We didn't get it, get it for our company but we would have loved to because they could go up to sixty-five or seventy miles per hour on rough terrain. Yeah, these were the newest ones that came out.

So the thing about these vehicles, the husky, is when you strike an IED this mod is just held in by three bolts. It's designed to blow apart from the vehicle and the hull, this area right here, just drops down. And you have two mods, so, the rear mod and the front mod. And that's the way this vehicle is designed.

**[00:11:26]**

Brooks: And why is that helpful or useful?

Xiong: Uh, well, I think it's just more—it just makes more sense if—since the vehicle is just detecting IEDs. Instead of having, like, a four-by blown up you could just have a smaller vehicle where you could just buy mods and replace it instead of—if it was a four-by then it's going to cost more. I think it's just cost effective but I'm not—I don't know.

Brooks: [Laughter] They didn't always tell you everything.

Xiong: No. So this is a six-by. The reason why it is just six vehicles—or six wheels. The other one has four.

Brooks: Makes sense.

Xiong: And then these are the helos—I can't remember what they're called. But these are awesome, though. They could lift up and fly but the rotors on top were also—it will rotate and it could fly just like a regular plane. Our buddy got sent a little Barbie doll so—we were going to give it to the kids but he decided to leave it up in his truck.

So this was the canal I was talking about.

Sandstorm.

Brooks: Yeah. Almost looks snowy.

Xiong: Mm-hm. I think I have a better picture of it. Um—

Brooks: Camel?

Xiong: Camel. Yep. It's my first time seeing a camel.

Brooks: [Laughter]

Xiong: I wanted to ride one but—

Brooks: Didn't get the chance?

Xiong: Yeah, I didn't get the chance to. And this was just on the road going to Marjah.

And then this is inside their—going out of their market area. So you'd have to go through a little sector of the city before you hit the route. They have markets on both sides of the street where they live and whatnot. So the main roads would go this way and the base would be a little bit further back.

Their compounds look just like this. So this was in the husky looking over their compounds. And then, like right here, this is a little market area. And the canal running through here.

Brooks: So did you interact with civilians regularly or at all?

Xiong: No. We were taught just the basic minimum Pashto words which were "go," "leave," and that was it. Or like "How are you? How are you doing?" And then, you know, you—when you were interrogating— IAD [Intelligence Analysis Division], you know, you just say for them to "go" and point in that direction. Usually that works. If not, then—if you're detecting an IED and if there's individuals coming by with motorcycles or whatnot, they usually try to bypass you but then you don't know what their intentions are. So then you could shoot flares at them or something just to get their attention and stop them from leaving, because you don't want them to get hurt either. That's not the kind of relationship you want, especially with the people in the areas. You don't want to leave that image on them that you're not looking out for them either. That's really not why you're there. You're there to look out for them, too, and to help out the economy.

**[00:15:48]**

Brooks: Did you interact with any other, um—

Xiong: We had an interpreter with us.

Brooks: Oh.

Xiong: And we had two Afghan army personnel with us.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: Yes. But one of them was—like, he stuck with us throughout our whole deployment so we learned a lot about him and the culture and then he learned certain things from us, too, which—you know, it was against protocol to teach him a lot of stuff but then, you know, just have him watching cartoons or something with us on our iPads or iPods, you know, just to, just for—I guess you could say just to show him that, you know, you're not there for something else. There can be friendships.

But—one of the Afghan army guys, he kept—one of them kept getting rotated out because he had a problem with using hashish which is a—I believe that's marijuana or a strain of marijuana over there. He had a problem with using that around the platoon and inside the trucks and everything so we had to rotate him out because it wasn't safe for us either.

And then you get like these little small-size energy drinks. Rip Its. You would always trade those for whatever you needed and if—if—that was pretty much currency out there.

Brooks: So they supplied you with that? You didn't have to buy that?

Xiong: No.

Brooks: The Rip It?

Xiong: Yeah. The government—but then, like, you use it as like a bargaining chip, I guess, for like if you need supplies or whatnot. If you're not—and like when you go to like the smaller FOBs, which we did, we would operate six to seven, about six to maybe thirteen days straight and then we would go back to our main base and then we'd gear up again, make sure everything is right, check the vehicles. Pretty much all maintenance that needs to be done, has to be done within two to three days. And then restock and go right back out. So.

Brooks: And FOB is “field operations base”?

Xiong: Uh, forward operating base.

Brooks: [inaudible; crosstalk] Okay. Kind of close.

Xiong: Very close.

Brooks: [laughter]

Xiong: And then this was just with my—this was, I believe, a night mission. I had to put on my NVGs [Night Vision Goggles] so that way I could see where I was going at night. You try to avoid night missions but—

Brooks: I was going to say, how often did you have to go out at night?

Xiong: I think during our whole deployment we only went maybe just a handful of times. Maybe like three or four. It just depended on what we needed to do because you're very vulnerable at night, especially being out there in—you don't know what's around you because you can't really see that far. Even with the NVGs on. Only if you're, like, on foot or if you, you know—because you can only see through one eye unless if you have the adaption for both eyes. So—I mean—you're kind of—like I said, restricted.

So this is where we parked our vehicles inside the base. And this was a little wall and then right outside is Marjah.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: So.

Brooks: A dirt wall.

Xiong: Mm-hm. And then we have, like, a post right here to make sure that—a guard, a guard post. And then the main road goes this way and then there's a canal on the other side of this little rock, I guess, sidewalk wall. And then—yeah, so the only way that anybody would be able to come through is if they come through a river or on the road.

So we would park our vehicles against this little berm and then that's where we staged our vehicles. And there was like a big, berm pit on the other side.

These are just some of the supply trucks that we cleared the route for. So that way they can bring supplies to us smaller bases.

And then that camera I was telling you about.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

**[00:20:24]**

Xiong: And then that was one of the IEDs we found and blew in place.

That was just before we left.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: We had a big—we had grill-outs. So, see, where I was stationed it didn't really matter. We just traded one desert for another one.

Brooks: Yeah, that's what it looks like.

Xiong: Yeah. So we were already used to not doing anything, being around the sand and the atmosphere.

Brooks: Pretty different than Wisconsin, though, huh?

Xiong: Yes, yes. You do miss home but then at the same time it's like you don't really miss it. You miss it, but then at the same time you don't miss it because you've got the weather, you know. It's California. You get really good weather there anyway. You just miss, like, the green grass.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: And then this was at night. The berm pit that I was telling you about and our vehicles staging.

This is a good friend of mine. Brown.

And then this was going back into our main base. So this is Camp Dwyer.

So another sandstorm. We had to hold because we couldn't see where we were going. And then this was the main base, our main base where we staged our vehicles or our parking areas. So on the other side over here is, like, conex cones or [inaudible]-is it like forty-footers where we had our supplies and stuff and what we needed. Our company battalion was on that side as well.

Brooks: And what was the sleeping arrangement? Were you guys in tents or—?

Xiong: Yeah, we were in a really big—we were in a really big tent that the whole company—so, like, we all just slept together. We had our Afghan army individuals that were attached to us, we had them sleeping with us, too. They had their own little section of the tent and then we had our own section or the other section of the tent. I believe I may have a picture of that as well.

So these guys right here are—[inaudible] while we're on patrol. That happens.

Brooks: Yeah. Sometimes I imagine there's not much to do or see.

Xiong: Yeah.

Brooks: A lot of the people I talk about-I talk to talk about how boring it is most of the time. It's, like, five percent action, ninety-five percent boring.

Xiong: Yep. Yep. That's true. You really didn't do much out there. If you weren't on a mission, you would either work out—yeah, if you weren't on a mission you either go work out or else you go to—tell me I can't think of it now—the calling center. So you call home. Sometimes you could call home. Sometimes you can't. It just depends.

Or else the Internet café or the PX [Post Exchange]. That was pretty much it.

So this is their market that I was telling you about.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

[00:24:45]

Brooks: Did you get packages in the mail from home or was it mostly e-mail and—?

Xiong: Yes. [inaudible; cross talk] Yeah, yeah. I got a couple of packages from home. But most of the time it's, like—sometimes you'd be able to call home but then most of the time you don't because you're, like, Oh I don't want to wait up that late and I got an early mission so there's some point where you're up till three in the morning, you know.

But because of the time difference, I believe I called home a couple of times and it was about seven o'clock or eight o'clock and there it was like early morning over here. You know. It's like one of those things so it's—you try not to because it's just easier on you and you don't want to get that—you don't want to get to comfortable with using the cell—like, calling center and Internet café or whatnot. But there—the only time you call home right away is when you get hurt, you know. And then they're like, All right, well, here's a sat phone. Go call home. Make sure they know you're okay before the Marine Corps calls them and tells them. They don't want that. They're like, Oh, hey, he got hurt and that's a—so all, the only thing your parents know or whoever, your point of contact at home, knows is that you got hurt. So it's easier for you to call and be like “All right, well, I'm good. If they call you, I'm good.” And then that's it.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: Because you can't really go into detail either. Or you're not supposed to.

Brooks: Did you call home after your, the two incidents?

Xiong: Mm-hm. Yeah, I was made to. They made me.

Brooks: [Laughter]

Xiong: But then they were like, you know—my platoon sergeant and platoon commander, they were very, very straightforward. They were like “You know, you got to think about it, too. Even though you don't want to call home, it's better that you call instead of the Marine Corps calling saying, Hey, you got hurt. And then your parents are going to worry.

Brooks: Why didn't you want to call?

Xiong: Well, because—I didn't want to call because I was like, Oh man, dude. Like, um—it's really early and then sometimes, like you don't even get a call till, like say nine or ten at night. And then it's like, Okay, well, I'm sure they already got the phone call. So it's not—[laughter]

Brooks: Right. [Laughter]

Xiong: You know? And plus—I eventually did. I called to my brother that was a Navy vet because I knew he would understand a little bit more. Instead of telling my parents and I'd be like "Hey, dude. I got hurt. I'm good. Just let everybody know. Tell them if the Marine Corps calls, I'm good."

Brooks: That would be kind of a scary phone call to get.

Xiong: That's what I'm saying.

Brooks: Right.

Xiong: Right?

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: It's like you don't want to, you don't want to make that phone call because you already know, but at the same time it's better that they hear it from you instead of somebody else.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: And this is all their marijuana field. We burned it, by the way.

Brooks: Oh, yeah?

Xiong: Yeah. And then, cigars. We had friends that actually shipped in cigars for, like, some of the corpsmen got cigars and we'd just go buy it off of them. And this was our interpreter.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: And sometimes when you go on patrols and there's certain areas—like, you patrol your area so long that you already know that this is a safe spot or these people are safe or, you know. You can hand them candy or food or whatnot. This is one of the kids. He would always come up and be like "Hey, you guys want to buy cigarettes?" So a pack would be like a buck. Course some of the guys that was stationed at the forward operating bases, like, this was the only cigarettes they had unless there was supplies coming in. But if not, then that was a way to get cigarettes. I believe those are Pines. I bought them a couple of times, too.

They can't get on top of your vehicle so the only thing you can do is buy it yourself. Get out of your vehicle and buy it.

Yeah, this is the second time my husky got hit.

Brooks: Oh.

Xiong: Just my panels fell down—broke off my intake. Well, it disabled my vehicle. I think that was like a forty pounder. The first one was a—one of those two—either the first or the second one was a forty and the other one was sixty. I have a video, too, but I'll play that for you.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: So, yeah, these heavy vegetation. Sometimes it's hard to see. And then they have a water pump station there. So, you know, like I said, you didn't think that they wanted to blow up their own resource. Then this is the hole it made. And it was ran—the wires were—when I was told, the wires ran down this canal over to the other side into a compound.

Brooks: So you were taking pictures right after it?

Xiong: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Wow.

Xiong: Right after isn't, like, exactly right after.

Brooks: Right.

Xiong: Right after is like [both laughing] It's like, you know, they investigate. It takes like thirty-five, forty minutes, maybe an hour or an hour and a half.

Brooks: Right.

Xiong: So then, you know, you're—I was already in the CASEVAC [Casualty Evacuation] vehicle which is the one the doc's in, our corpsmen's in. And then he already checked me out. He was like "Dude, you're good." But then you're still drained after getting, like, your vehicle getting blown up. You're so tired. And it just takes everything out of you. I remember him slapping me around. He was like "Hey, dude. Stay awake, man. Don't go to sleep. Stay awake." It was just one of those things where they're like, yeah, we want to make sure that you're functioning. Because if you knock out, it's worse.

Brooks: Right.

**[00:31:14]**

Xiong: So. Yeah, I knocked out a couple of times but—it was just like, yeah. They check your breathing and you're fine. Sometimes they go and sometimes they don't.

So this is—we called it—so, our hooch was pretty big. It fit four rows across with a lot of walking sections. We slept on cots throughout our whole time. And then when we were at the forward operating base we had cots, too, but I slept on a cot for like a couple



months and then I was just like “Well, whatever. I’ll sleep next to my gun” because it’s safer, I guess.

Brooks: And where was your gun?

Xiong: It was on top of the vehicle. It was a mounted—

Brooks: Oh.

Xiong: —firearm.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Machine gun.

Brooks: So then you slept outside?

Xiong: Mm-hm. Because when we went to smaller bases we didn’t have a hooch like this to sleep in. We slept outside anyway and then we would just sleep on cots or else we would sleep in our vehicles. And being in the husky, you can’t sleep there. And then when I was in the CASEVAC vehicle as the gunner, I didn’t sleep in that thing either. I slept on top of the roof, right by the gun. And then our corpsman slept on the other side. It was just a lot easier because—and sometimes at night you hear a lot of gunfire. Like, it’s constant. So then it’s like, Okay, well, I’d rather sleep next to my gun. If something happens then I’m right there.

And since we slept right next to the berm, I could just turn my gun around and I could help out the guys on over watch or whatnot. But that never happened. We didn’t have something like that happen which is good.

And then—yeah, just photos. And this is the morning we were leaving. So we already went to flight line, had everything packed. This is the morning we left Afghanistan to come back to the United States, you know, to summarize. It’s like the last time you’re going to be there.

Brooks: And how long were you there? Total?

Xiong: About—a little—maybe seven months. A little over. And then family pictures and—that was it. Let’s see. I know I have a video. See, this thing is ancient.

Brooks: Yeah. [Laughter]

Xiong: It takes forever. Some of the programs don’t even work anymore.

Brooks: Yeah, I mean, if it’s four years old.

Xiong: Yeah, six. [Inaudible] Actually I have a picture I’m going to have you take back to—if you guys want.

Brooks: Something you're donating?

Xiong: Yeah.

Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: I have extras so that way it's—if anything, then—if you guys decided to do like a memorial or whatnot.

Brooks: Yeah, yeah. It's good. We like to have images whenever possible. So did you have any particular coping strategies or anything you did to kind of relax or de-stress specifically after a mission?

Xiong: Um, no, not really. I would usually just talk to my friends. They're the first person—they're the only guys that you really talk to. Like I said, you know, you had your close friends that you'd do anything for and you hung out with each other before you guys even left so—yeah. We would just talk. That was about it. Most of the time we just kept it to ourselves because you knew what each other was feeling and there was no point of talking about it. You know? But then, like, you had your mentors there, too, which were the sergeants and they could tell, like, they knew that—they knew when you were going to snap and they knew when you weren't. And they knew how—a really good friend of mine, he's from Wisconsin, too. His name is Sergeant Keel [sp??]. He's from Janesville. There was a couple of times where I came back and he knew and he was just like, "Yeah, dude, just calm down, man." You know. "It's cool. You're here and we're all here and—" No, he was more of the older brother figure that would pep talk you.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

[00:35:57]

Xiong: Yeah. But that was about it. And then—most of the time you kept to yourself or else when you talked to your friends, you just bust on each other, like, make fun of each other. So that was another thing. That's why you kept it to yourself.

Brooks: Mm-hm. [Laughter]

Xiong: You talk to them, everybody's going to get made fun of.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: [Laughter]

Brooks: Open yourself up.

Xiong: Yeah. [Laughter]

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: Let me see. I think for—when I came back from deployment, I think that was one of the things, too. You know, like, trying to reconnect because you're so used to it. I guess—well, one of the sergeants from float platoon said—he's like, you know—because where our team stations were, right across from it was—they would practice blowing up small, miniature, controlled IEDs.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: So, like, every single time those things went off, he was like “Yeah, dude. I see PTSD throughout the whole company.” [Laughter] A pretty fun guy.

Brooks: So you came back. So it was 2011 when you got back to stateside?

Xiong: 2010.

Brooks: 2010 still?

Xiong: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Okay. And then you were still in for a couple more years?

Xiong: Yeah, I was in—

Brooks: Or just a year—

Xiong: —for another year and then I got out.

Brooks: So when you signed up, did you sign up for a four-year—I know some different branches have different kind of requirements.

Xiong: Well, yeah. I signed up for a year contract. Well, I think it's all a year contract. But I did four on or four active and then four inactive reserve. So that's what I did. Some of the—I had the option of going back to sign up for more, I guess, but I don't know. I think four was enough.

Brooks: Mm-hm. And what did you do in that year that you were still active but you were back in the United States?

Xiong: Um, that year we—I just continued working with our platoon and then when they—when they know it's almost your time so then they're like, All right, dude. Do you still want to join? Do you still want to stay or do you want to get out or whatnot, and then—I asked my best friend. I was like, “Hey, dude. If you go for another round, I will with you.” Because that's the truth about it, you know. There's a lot of things that you hate about your job but then the only thing that makes it worthwhile is the guys that you're there with. And then I couldn't find another reason. I was just like, “Hey, man, dude, you got to let me know, man. If you're going to go, I'm going to go. I'll go with you.”

You know? “You going to do another”—because after your four, you can sign up for—they want you to do another four years or else if you got in trouble then they want you to do, like, a probationary period of two years. And I asked him, I was like “Hey, man. Yeah, hurry up man. Let’s—you know, we’ve got like four months left, dude.”

So then I—he just said—he didn’t give ma straight out answer so I was like “All right, man.” I had my package ready, though, just in case. And then I spoke with our master gunnery sergeant and he was like “Yeah, if you go, we want you to go for another four.” But then I wanted a lat[eral] move. I want to do a different job after the deployment. And I thought about it and I was like, you know—I looked at my options and I was already told from one of the S4 guys. They were like “Dude, you’re not going to go anywhere. Everybody that lat moves out of tanks, they don’t get lat moves. They stay here. If you really want a lat move, I suggest you get out and go to a different branch to do whatever you want.” Our unit was so small. There’s only four battalions, fourteen battalions. And we were in the first marine division and then—or that’s where I was stationed. Second marine division was in Camp Lejeune and then the other bases were just reserve bases. So it was very hard for you to lat move. Some of the sergeants that came back from MSG [Mission Support Group] duty were like “Yeah, dude. I had to push for my stuff. I was a lansen [??] I wanted to go. It took a lot of signatures and a lot of people had to back me up to go. So I don’t if you’re going to be able to go.”

And then—when the two—second or third month came up I was like “Hey, dude. You need to let me know” and he was like “Well, I don’t know yet.” So then I was like “All right, well, I’m telling them I’m not going then.” So then I talked to Alpha company again. I told them I wasn’t going so they threw me in the—like, a headquarters platoon and after that they transferred me to a different unit. So I stayed there for—I think like three or four months and then I got out.

Brooks: And then you were in reserve duty for four years?

Xiong: Yes, inactive reserve.

Brooks: Okay.

**[00:41:33]**

Xiong: Inactive reserve is just—it depends, too, though. I guess it depends on your disability rating that you get. So that’s going to determine whether you’re still inactive or not. But I just got my discharge papers, I think, last month.

Brooks: Wow.

Xiong: So—and that was the actual certificate. I already had my DD-214 back when I got out in 2012 but I finally got my certificate saying that I’m actually out.

Brooks: Wow.

Xiong: So, it’s good.

Brooks: And what was your transition like when you had to kind of get back into normal life after those four years?

Xiong: What's normal? [Both laughing] What's normal?

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: I don't know. Um—I—I don't—I don't think it's ever going to be normal because of, you know, it's harder for you to share life experience with somebody that's not a veteran that has similar experiences as you do. So, like, I still see myself—I see myself with everybody all ready. I'm adjusted. But then I stick to myself more because it's just easier that way. There's like drama, I guess, and you're not a traditional college student. You've been through more things than half your peers so it's kind of like, you know—the only time with your peers, your military peers, like, yeah the Veterans' Club at school helps out because they're all veterans, too, and you understand each other to a different level than if somebody else that hasn't been through that experience.

So, yeah. Being sociable? Yes, I am sociable. It's just—sometimes it's just easier to—because you're really focused now. You're focused on, you're focused on what you want to do and you know what you want. So you don't get sidetracked from everything else, I guess you could say. So, yeah. I think I'm adjusted. It's just I feel as though I'm more focused and I don't want to have detours, you know?

Brooks: Did you have any relationship to kind of what was going on in terms of the politics of these recent conflicts and people's reactions and responses?

Xiong: With what is going on right now with Afghanistan? Yes. Me and actually a buddy of mine, he posted something up on social media site and I agree with him because he— with what we did when we were there, it's like we did it for nothing. People got hurt, you know, and for what? To hand it right back to them. [Inaudible] Well, what do you want me to say? You know what I mean? Like, it's one of those things where it's just like, you know, now I know what some of the other veterans feel like from different areas, I guess you could say. Of like, you know, look at the Iraq area. They're like— it's all again taken over again and I'm sure they feel like it's a waste of time, that they wasted their time in that conflict. But I think, I think if you really look at the real problem, then I think you know what your judgment is, like, you know what you're thinking but—it's like one of those things where you shouldn't think or say it either. You get in trouble for saying it.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: So.

Brooks: Yeah. You're not allowed to do a lot of your own thinking when you're in the military—

Xiong: Right.

Brooks: —it seems.

Xiong: Yeah. Yeah. So that's the thing. But, like, with recent conflicts it's just like—I feel as though we should have never pulled out. But then at the same time it's like, you know, it's a different conflict now because who are we really after in the Iraq and Afghanistan [inaudible]? You know? Like, okay, we got—they say that we went after, what was it, Osama bin Laden? All right, we got him but we're still over there. What are we doing over there? You know? And then all these other Islamic groups are taking over the region. It's like, okay, well, you're pulling the troops back but just to send them back over there? Why did you do that in the first place? It seems as though everything, like, your sacrifices or whatnot went for nothing.

But then you also got to remember that even though you might think that, you signed up for it so you can't have that attitude towards it. I think that's just the way I see it.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: But I can't speak for everybody. I think it's difficult to see that everything you did and what your friends did, the sacrifices, you know, went for nothing.

**[00:47:15]**

You've—I can't say I had any friends about it but, you know—I remember the first thing that we did when we got there to our forward operating base, which was we went to a ceremony which I will never forget. I think that was what shocked us the most. And that ceremony wasn't—it was to remember one of our brothers that we lost a couple of weeks before. So, you know, when you think about everything that happened now and the people, like, the brothers and sisters that we've lost over there and you think about it and it's just like "Did we really do it for nothing?" You know? I think it's just questions that you ask yourself but then there's like no answer to them, because whatever answer you have is just your opinion and everything else could be wrong. That's what I think. But, yeah, I don't—I don't know. I try not to think about that because it's like what's the point? You know? In a sense it's like you knew why you were there and after a while you questioned it and then after that you were just like "Okay, well, I'm going home." You know.

With the recent events about Marjah and the Middle East, I don't know what to say because look at, look at, you know—I can't even—uh, the individual that was in the Army that they were calling him a deserter or whatnot. Look at his case. It's—

Brooks: Is that Bowe Bergdahl?

Xiong: Yeah.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: So look at that case and then it's kind of like—I don't know. You question a lot. So I can't really give you an answer.

Brooks: No, that's okay. It's—and it's definitely a personal question. Everybody's answer is different—

Xiong: Mm-hm.

Brooks: —about how they feel. I guess I'm also curious because just the different conflicts have had such a different reaction and such a different homecoming. And so with the new conflicts, it's still kind of fresh and it seems a little unclear about how people are transitioning and how people are being treated by civilians and—

Xiong: Well, yeah. With that, yeah, I—let me see. I got out and—I got out on terminal in 2011, December 2011. I came to school here in Madison, at MATC [Milwaukee Area Technical College], in 2012, fall of 2012. I had a classmate—I forgot what we were talking about. We were talking about something. And then I had a classmate come up to me because I was wearing my military hat during the winter and he was, like, “Uh, you're military?” And I'm like “Yeah,” you know because you don't tell people that. So then—and then he goes off on a rant about, “I wish I had free college” and this and that. So, I mean, they don't see the sacrifice. It's easy for them to make [accusations] and, like, make fun of you and stuff. But, I mean, if you want free college why don't you go to the military, you know? You'll find out how free it is. You know? Some people just need to have a center, I guess. But then that's the thing about it, too, is that freedom of speech, they can say whatever they want, you know. Just as long as they don't cross that line because I've had a couple of friends of mine personally come up to me and say “Hey, have you killed anybody?” And it's like, that's not appropriate, you know. I don't need to answer that. So I don't. Because that's something you don't need to know.

Some people, I think, it's just their curiosity but then at the same time, like, if you give them the answer are they going to think of you as a monster because you did something? But then do they understand the—in full detail that if you didn't do what you did, somebody else wouldn't have been alive? You know? So it's like you have to censor yourself, too, being a vet. You can't—you have to censor yourself and you have to be careful of what you say as well because it could come around and bite you in the butt, I guess. But then it goes—I think it goes for everybody because some people just don't—they just don't understand certain aspects of military life to civilian life and, you know—if you go around the VA, I mean, you get treated just like a vet, just like everybody else. It's not that you're entitled to anything. Some people feel that you are and, I mean, I think some people—that is ingrained in them. They're like, Oh, hey, well, I did this now you have to respect me. It's like, you know, No. It's not the military here because in the military that's how it's—some people think of it. You know? Out here it's not like that so it's—the way you get treated out here is—yeah, some people do look down on it and everything. But then you just got to remember that you can't react the way you used to. I think that's the best answer that I have for it.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Xiong: But, um, yeah. I think there is some people that do need censors but then at the same time you can't, you can't really tell them.

Brooks: Yeah. And what are you in school for now?

Xiong: Um, business administration.

Brooks: Do you have a career plan or—?

Xiong: Yes. I'm actually, actually just graduated the transfer program at Madison College and I am enrolled at UW-Whitewater as of right now as well. So that's where I'll be.

Brooks: That's great.

Xiong: Mm-hm. Um, it's tough, though. It's tough because it's like you're a non-traditional college student. So it's not tough that—about that, but it's just tough because you got to remember that, you know, school is different. [Laughter] Because, you know, in the military, you're like, Oh yeah, I've been through worse. I've been stressed out worse and I could do it. But then as long as you just remember that, you know, this is just another chapter of your life. And you can just keep pushing, you know. You can't give up on yourself so easily.

Brooks: Do you miss the military at all?

Xiong: I used to. I miss the camaraderie, you know, and your friends. But there are certain aspects—like, I miss listening to a tank fire up. I miss driving a tank. I do but then at the same time it's like you got to close that chapter or close that book and open up a new book. I think if—I miss, I do miss it but it takes time for you to get a, like, a grip of it, of yourself, I guess you could say. I'm like, Yeah, I'm not that person anymore, you know. I've got to concentrate on something else and—I think talking to somebody helps, you know, get over being in the military but then I think it's just your perception of the military life culture to the civilian world, and I think that's what you got to do for—between yourself and—you got to remember that you can't just go around yelling at people, you know. It doesn't work that way. Yeah, I don't miss that part but I do miss my friends, though.

Brooks: Yeah.

Xiong: That's about it.

Brooks: Okay. Is there anything else that you want to touch on that we haven't talked about? Any topics or stories?

Xiong: Um, yeah, I think that, I think that if—when you come back from deployment, if you are having issues, do seek help. Don't wait. That's what I do think. And when you get out of the military, if you have somebody to talk to, to open up to, definitely do it. It helps with the healing process. That's what I think. That's—yeah, that's about it.



Brooks: Okay.

Xiong: Unless if there were any other questions.

Brooks: No, I think we covered everything. I'm usually, I'm kind of curious and sometimes ask people about why they agreed to do an interview. So maybe if you could tell me kind of why you thought this was something you wanted to do.

Xiong: Well—do you want to know the truth?

Brooks: Yes.

Xiong: I did it to help out a buddy because he brought it up to my attention. And I also think that it's good to hear from veterans from different conflicts because every conflict is different. There's none that is the same. But then the effects of it are the same. And plus, I think this is, it's good. So that way there's a documented record of military personnel in different conflicts if there is an exhibition [??] that is open. And I think it could shed light to a lot more people and open up their eyes a little bit more about what kind of world we really do live in and some of the sacrifices that people make, you know, that don't talk about or anything else. And I think—plus it's for the Veterans Museum. Why not? That's the main reason why.

Brooks: That's a great reason.

Xiong: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Okay. Great. Um, well, I think that covers everything on my end. Um, if you think of anything else we can always sit down again. So I'll go ahead and turn this off if that's all right.

Xiong: Yes.

Brooks: Okay. Thanks.

**[End of Xiong.OH2063\_file2] [End of interview]**