

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**THOMAS A. FISCHER**  
Supply and Logistics, Army National Guard, Operation Iraqi Freedom  
2016

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2064**

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**2064**

**Fischer, Thomas A.,** (b. 1970). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate Length: 2 hours 18 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, Thomas A. Fischer, a Neosho, Wisconsin native, discusses his twenty eight year career in the Wisconsin Army National Guard where he worked as a Battalion Retention NCO and in unit supply, his deployment to Iraq in 2007 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom where he worked in logistics, and his position as an Army ROTC military history instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater starting in 2009. Fischer explains how his family's military tradition influenced his decision to enlist after graduating high school, and he mentions his basic and advanced training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. After completing AIT, Fischer worked at a manufacturing job before enrolling at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for the fall term in 1989. After graduating in 1994 with a major in political science and a minor in history, Fischer worked as a paralegal in Green Bay and later as a manager at a Radio Shack. A couple years later, he took a fulltime position as a Battalion Retention NCO and then moved to unit supply.

Fischer deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2007 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In Iraq, his unit was based at Camp Cedar, near An-Nasiriyah, and his responsibilities included tracking movement of military vehicles in the area and managing supply transfers to other bases. During this time Fischer was involved in funeral preparations for several soldiers from his unit who were killed. He returned home to Wisconsin in 2009 and took a position at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater as a military history instructor for Army ROTC. He returned to unit supply in 2015 at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Madison, Wisconsin. Finally, Fischer comments on setting high expectations for himself and his students and soldiers, and provides his reasons for taking part in the Wisconsin Veterans Museum oral history program.

Additional subjects and topics covered include: his experience as a student at UW-Whitewater while part of the National Guard, annual training in Alaska, finishing his master's degree while on deployment, playing soccer with Ugandan troops in Iraq, and his eldest daughter enlisting in the military.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Fischer (b. 1970) has served in the Wisconsin Army National Guard since 1988, holding positions in battalion retention and unit supply. He served one tour during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2007 where he worked in logistics. Fischer took up a position at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 2009 where he served as a military history instructor for Army ROTC until 2015.

**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 Helen Gibb, 2016.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016.

Reviewed by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

Abstract Written by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

## Interview Transcript:

### [Beginning of OH 2064.Fischer\_user\_file1]

Gibb: Today is Monday, February 22, 2016. This is an interview with Thomas A. Fischer, who served with the Wisconsin Army National Guard from 1988 to the present day. This interview is being conducted at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Madison, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Helen Gibb, and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum Oral History Program. So, do you want to start with where and when you were born?

Fischer: All right. I was born in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, January 15, 1970 and the third in a list of family of six. My dad served active duty, and then he did quite a few years, like thirty plus years in the reserves as well. He served in the early '60s, during the Berlin Crisis and that kind of stuff, in Germany, and so he's considered veterans—VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] status, or whatever you want to call it. Said it was pretty tense over there at the time. Two older brothers, Tony and Troy, both served active duty, army, as well. Oldest brother Tony, he's a Gulf War veteran, first Gulf War back in 1992. Myself, I joined in '88 and I basically joined army reserves, went to college at UW-Whitewater [University of Wisconsin-Whitewater] after my initial training. A couple years later I joined the Wisconsin Army National Guard—did that really through the next eleven years. Back in 2001 I went to active duty reserves AGR [Active Guard Reserve], of which during the time I've done, multiple different types of jobs. Battalion retention NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer], supply NCO. For nearly six years I was a ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] cadre as a senior military instructor, UW-Whitewater, army ROTC, and currently, for the last, well, eleven months, I've been here at the reserve center as the battalion supply NCO for 641<sup>st</sup> troop command battalion. Other than that, married, twenty plus years, to my wife Kay [sp??]. I have two daughters. First born is Hadley, and she is nineteen. The other one is Macey. She is sixteen. Very proud that my oldest daughter, Hadley, chose to serve as well, and she is currently serving in the Wisconsin Army National Guard with the 4, 5, 7<sup>th</sup> chem [??] and is also a student, and just recently started at UW-Madison. So, that's pretty cool, plus it's a few dollars taken off Mommy and Daddy's pocketbooks for college, so that doesn't hurt either. Plus she'll get a car out of it, so. [Laughs] I guess that's about it for my introduction.

Gibb: Yes, the overview. So, growing up, you heard stories about your dad being in service, or—

Fischer: Well, absolutely. You know, my dad spent most of his time in Germany and, again, during the Berlin Crisis and that kind of stuff, Cuban Missile crisis, that kind of stuff—said a lot about it. Plus, he would like—he had also joined the reserves and my father joined the drill sergeant, the reserve, army reserve drill sergeant company in Milwaukee, and so it was always interesting because sometimes that would come out a little bit and you're like, "Hey Dad, that's what

you do on the weekends, not at home,” but it was always kind of entertaining, at times. But having two older brothers and there’s kind of a separation from myself to my first younger brother, and so it was—we certainly had a lot of, I would say, structure, in the family. Discipline, if you want. But, and one thing I always kind of say is, you can tell it from my two older brothers, when you got to the age of eighteen or whatever, quite frankly, it was, you’re expected. It was an expectation to serve in one way, shape, or form, or another, and so it was, I didn’t even not think about joining in some way, shape, or form, and I think my dad instilled that, probably, into us, and my mom never thought we should never applied any type of pressure, any type of expectation. It was just what we were expected to do.

**[00:05:00]**

My grandpa, by the way, was also—both my grandpas—were World War II, and one was post World War II, so it’s just—it was just expected. Which is fine. I mean, basic training, IT, that stuff is all, was relatively easy if you’re in good shape, and it’s paid for a lot of schooling and whatnot, and I don’t know, just wasn’t that bad. It was fun. We got a chance—I mean, that’s the thing I liked about military stuff is you actually get to see some pretty cool experiences and, and it takes you places that I don’t think a lot of kids have the opportunities to, whether it be just Fort McCoy or Fort Leonard Wood, or wherever. It was just, it was just kind of cool. I mean, it made you a little bit different than the other kids, but that was a good, a good thing. So, not sure if that answered your question.

Gibb: So, in high school, was, was it—were a lot of other kids going into the military, or was it just very much a family thing?

Fischer: Well, in—I’ll just specifically talk about my circle of friends and also the sports teams that I were on. I honestly don’t know anybody else who joined. And so, from soccer, wrestling, baseball, even tennis a little bit, and I don’t think I know a single other person who joined the military. I knew a couple, now, that joined a couple years—that were younger than me. And my circle of friends, none of them really did, and so it seemed like it was just a family thing. But you know, all my friends, they all called my dad Sarg, and they liked coming over and a lot of respect for him. I don’t think it was what everyone else was doing. I don’t know if that’s a good way of putting it. It’s just maybe a family thing, for all I know.

Gibb: And so, going to basic training, when was, when was that?

Fischer: It was June of 1988, and it was in Fort Sill, and it was in Oklahoma, and if you go back and look at the record books, it was like the hottest summer on record in Wisconsin. It was hotter in Oklahoma, and so that was June through September, October timeframe. And for me, it was not that difficult. Again, having two older brothers and a dad—and my older brothers, especially, they let me know what to prepare for and everything, and you know, how to get yourself on the, on the good list, and the biggest thing was always physical fitness. If you were able to pass

your physical fitness test when you get there, they let you eat stuff like hamburgers, which was, everyone else was so jealous and you always got first in the line and, and quite frankly, the drill sergeants—if you were in good physical shape, and they knew that you were. We always chuckle about it because we would do drill and ceremony and marching and they would say, “Left face,” and about a quarter of the people when you first get there, they turn right and so you’re like—I always knew, going there, what was expected and how to stay, I always forget what the term is. Fly underneath the radar, and so honestly, I had a lot of fun, because if you’re in good graces, you don’t get extra duty and you don’t, you get better food and you don’t got to clean barracks and a lot of this stuff, and so you just knew how to march and do PT [Physical Fitness] and you knew how to do the academic side of it, pass all the tests. It was kind of fun. Interesting that you’d say that because I gave a lot of the same recommendations to my own child, and she said pretty much the same stuff. She’s like, “Yeah, those people couldn’t tell their right from their left or couldn’t pass their PT test or whatever, they stood out a little more in not the kind for way you want to stand out.” So, I hope that helps.

Gibbs: Was there anything specific that you were redoing before you went off to prepare, in terms of physical fitness or just talking with your brothers, or your dad?

Fischer: Run, run, push-ups, push-ups, run, push-ups. That was about it, really. I mean, it was just—the biggest thing a lot of people had problems with that I guess I was a little bit worried about was, back in ’88, people just didn’t—be gone for three, four months.

**[00:10:15]**

I always really kind of worried about how much I was going to miss, like girlfriend, and all that kind of stuff, and so I kind of prepared myself for that. I broke up with my girl at the time, and, and I just, I literally said, “I don’t want to get into my summer pattern.” I just, after high school, so I said, “As soon as I can after I graduate high school, I want to go, and not think about what I’m missing,” and that was one thing my brothers had told me. Just the mental side of things and you get to basic training and you know, you’re hearing—I’m in a—I was in an all-male unit at the time for field artillery—and they were, guys were crying because they’re missing Mommy and Daddy and their sweetheart back home and stuff, and so I was very mentally prepared for it, where a lot of guys, they weren’t. They were in some rough shape, and so I was really thankful to my, my dad and my brothers for giving me that kind of guidance, more so than tell me to run. But a lot of basic training in the IT and so forth, and even deployments later is—it’s mental more than it’s physical, so I hope that helps.

Gibbs: Was there anything that was particularly challenging, though, that even despite all preparation you’d had, that you were still—

Fischer: It was—I [inaudible] how I want to say this. I come from—Neosho, Wisconsin was where I grew up, which is a town of about 400 folks. Let's just say you don't—it's a very, very small bubble, and you're tossed in with an open bay with folks from Alaska to California to the deep South and out East and stuff. And just the whole being introduced—I mean, introduced to the different cultures and the way people talk and the way people act, and having kind of like what I said before with the whole discipline thing, to me it was just second nature of how you talk to a senior NCO and that kind of stuff. For them, it was just like you want to just be like, you wanted to tell them, "Don't talk to them like that," or, "Just do what they say," or "Clean the barracks the way we're supposed to," and so yeah, the whole culture shock was probably the biggest adjustment that I had. That's a big part of the military is that you, you know, we have every different creed and culture in the military, and we all have to learn to play along and come together as a team, but that was pretty weird. I never had much, familiar with other folks, so, it's all good.

Gibb: So, basic training was until September, and then you went on—

Fischer: Yeah, until October, I went through artillery, which was a great time. It was, get to fire these big cannons and it's like a really big gun, and It's just six weeks of playing with some really big toys and learning how to do your particular job skill, and so, and back then, and again, things were, in '88, it was Operation Just Cause in Panama, and was the pre-stuff, before the Gulf War, so artillery was still a very, very commonly used piece of machinery, and it was a—I really thought AIT [Advanced Individual Training] was kind of awesome. It was, like I said, the more you get up and you're like, What am I going to do today? We're not going to do push-ups. We're not gonna go running. We're gonna go play with the howitzer and run operations, and it was, it was a lot of fun.

Gibb: Was it—were there any particular people that you got on well with, you continue to, to know afterwards, or—

Fischer: Yeah, mostly folks from, to be honest, that were in the reserves or Guard and that were from the upper Midwest, and over the course of the years, you kind of lose touch with them. Unfortunately, this was the dates that predated anything like email or anything, so if you wanted to call Mike or call Joe, you called them on the phone or you sent them a letter, so we stayed in contact for a good seven, eight years and a friend of mine was, used to drill at Fort Sheridan in Illinois and we'd see each other all the time.

**[00:15:00]**

And for quite a few years, you'd still run into them from time to time and you just cross paths and stuff, but the majority of the friendships, if you want to call it, that I made really became, when I joined, when I came to my units, back in Wisconsin, and some for the best friends I have—it's strange because you go a

year or two or six months without seeing or talking to them and you make contact and you're like, you're best friends again, because you have a—and I try to explain this to my daughter as well—I said, “It's [a] very strange, fraternity sorority, brotherhood, sisterhood, and y'all have the one common bond that you all went through basic and AIT and everyone's got their war stories and whatnot.” And so yeah, it's always—it's kind of a strange friendship situation, and a lot of my—most of my—my best friend, he used to be my Commo [Communications] NCO and, and it's just the way things have shaken out. You have that in common, and it's a good thing.

Gibb: After AIT? Unless there was any particular stories you had about being in AIT.

Fischer: Not really from AIT. I mean, it was relatively quick. The time went fast. Then, you know, then I came home and my intent, getting home in October, was to start at UW-Whitewater in January. And just looking at some of the financials, I made the decision that I could start in January, but I wouldn't want to do a lot of student loans and stuff, so I decided to take the full year off of school, off of college, and I worked in a manufacturing business for a while—made a lot of gas grills for some reason. And so then I started at UW-Whitewater in 1989 instead, and—which was a great decision because I never really had to worry then about, with my army money and also with my, what I'd saved, I never really had to get too worried about money in college, which was, compared to like roommates and that kind of stuff. They're always struggling for getting loans and trying to dig in the couch and find a few pennies for pizza or something. So, it was financially an excellent decision. Strangely enough, I think—I know I did, I won't admit to it to my parents—but I matured a ton in that one year. I went to basic and AIT and then I worked at a manufacturing business for a while, and so it taught me a lot about what I wanted. Maybe not, what I didn't want to do, let's put it that way. I know I matured, and strangely, I got to college and everyone that I was starting with were all just out of high school and just seemed like I was ten years more mature than them. In reality, I was one year older, and so it was, just because of that it just was so much better of an experience, and what—because I knew what I didn't want to do. So, I don't know.

Gibb: What did—what were you studying?

Fischer: Well, what I started for, just like 99 percent of the college students, is not what I went to school for eventually. But I changed. I eventually went to school for political science, with a minor in history, which is somewhat ironic because the history wound up benefiting me a lot more than my political science. After, through my—so I was still doing the National Guard, the Army Reserves, then I switched to the National Guard just a couple years later because there was a—they opened up a unit in my hometown, which was great because I could go home, see Mommy and Daddy. They live about a mile from the armory, which was kind of great, and come home, get a lot of laundry done, you know, grab some groceries, they probably don't know about that still, and go to do your drill,



weekends and stuff. And then do the stuff in college and I got out of school in '94. That sounds right. Yeah. And with a degree in political science, a minor in, like I said, history. And went off to the wonderful job market and did some work for a while and, then I was—didn't exactly play out the way I wanted it, but the one constant was always the Guard. Always had that one weekend a month and steady paycheck and all that kind of stuff. It was, it was good.

Gibb: Were you in dorms, when you were at school?

Fischer: Oh, yeah. First two years in, I lived in the dorms. Can't say it was—I liked it, but it was what it was and you know, even that, I mean, when you live in open bay with a bunch of guys for four, five months, living in a dorm with one other person is really not that big a deal. Like, oh, this is kind of sweet.

**[00:20:10]**

Again, I grew up with two older brothers and we had kind of like a studio type upstairs, so I grew up with two older brothers in the same room, so dorm living was not out of the ordinary. But a lot of, a lot for people that I knew, they would come home—come from places where they had had their own room, their own privacy and everything, and it was a strange world for them—didn't have that. We eventually moved into apartments there at Whitewater, and even the same stuff. I—they—roommates had some trouble adjusting to cooking their own food and stuff, and living on their own, and that was something that I was more than familiar with so, and I still say a lot of that was just attributed to kind of that sense of independence that my dad instilled in us, and the sense that Mommy and Daddy's not going to make your macaroni and cheese. You're got to learn to make it yourself—which isn't that tough, by the way. [Laughs] But, no. Anyway, yeah, it's—wasn't an issue in any way, shape, or form.

Gibb: Were there other—was there anyone else who was in the reserves that was at the university, that you knew about, or was it sort of you were, again, an anomaly in that sense?

Fischer: Honestly, it was—I knew nobody. Now, at my unit I knew, Cody was at Madison and Mike was at Green Bay and that kind of stuff, and it was always kind of neat to get together and drill weekends and discuss various things. We always had—May was always a trouble child because we all were cranky about drilling when we had final exams the next week, and that kind of stuff. And so, there was a lot of, you know, we had a lot of—people I knew were in the same situation, but at Whitewater? No. I can—one thing I'm very, very pleased with, how that has changed, having just left there a year ago, we were very, very lucky, or fortunate, to put together a vets program. Basically it's a student org, kind of what you see in a lot of universities, and so that has developed into a really good resource for other student vets and so forth, to come in and get some camaraderie. But I didn't, yeah, I didn't have that back then. There was a big, '88, '89, '90, there was a big

draw-down in the military, and you just didn't see that many people. Again, didn't have any student orgs that were student veterans or military, and didn't have social network to find other people, so unless you, somebody's wearing a uniform, you really wouldn't know if they were in the service or not. And Whitewater I just didn't know anybody, which was fine.

Gibb: Can you just say a bit more about the attitudes towards that, towards the military? Was that something that you sort of personally experienced, or just aware of?

Fischer: See, see my [laughs]—that's a great question, because I had a great experience, and usually after drill weekends or something, when I was coming back to the dorms, whatever I typically would just come straight from drill and I'd be in uniform and, and I got a lot of my floor mates, like in the dorm, they all thought it was pretty cool. It raised a few eyebrows, it kind of made you just a little bit different than the normal college student, if you want to put it that way, and I think it was an instantaneous, or pretty close to instantaneous, level for respect or appreciation, and so I had no issue wearing my uniform going back to school or whatever, and if I was going to go off and do some physical fitness, I'd wear my army physical fitness clothes. I mean, why wouldn't I? I'll use that stuff versus my own stuff, so yeah, I had a great experience. And my dad used to tell stories of, because he got out shortly before the Vietnam experience, and he had a good experience with his return back from the Berlin Crisis and Cuban Missile, and he would tell us—I mean, he really instilled in our, in his voice—about the stuff that took place. Vietnam, post-Vietnam, and that kind of stuff. I have some very, very, very good friends who are Vietnam veterans, and so I mean, it was—I never experienced any negative.

**[00:25:17]**

I can't say never, but nothing I could never handle. People would be like, "How could you do that?" And be like, and you know what you kind of explain to them, that it's kind of a family thing, and that's one thing I've always thought was kind of neat. Majority, vast majority of people, they all have a cousin, a sister, an uncle, a grandpa, a dad, or a mom, or someone who's served, and so I think everyone, pretty close to everyone, like ninety-five percent, have a level or appreciation, and some say thanks and some don't, and that's perfectly fine. Doesn't bother me whatsoever, so. Yeah, I'm not one who—yeah, I get a kick out of it when I leave work, go to the grocery store, and on my way home just to pick up something, people, you get fifteen people who thank me for my service, and I just say, "You're welcome," but I just say, "Thank you," back to them, as well. I mean, it's just what you do. I don't know. So, so, yeah, so that's that.

Gibb: And you said your studies weren't that useful, or some—

Fischer: They weren't. Well, even, my intent was to continue on to go to law school, and I did not test all that high to get into law school. And so, kind of guidance from

professors was to seek employment, kind of like as a paralegal, so I eventually, at my—who I was dating at the time, we eventually got married—up at UW-GB [University of Wisconsin-Green Bay], so I lined a position as a paralegal stuff up in Green Bay, and that, I chuckle about it, but that was the beginning of this thing called the internet, and some of the fresh faces out of college had experience to how to do legal research on various databases. This day and age, that's like, oh, of course, that's how you do it. Back then, they used to just go up into the law libraries and page through, try to find it. I could do various database searches and that kind of stuff, and so it was pretty cool. I mean, the people, the attorneys I worked for, they really thought that was amazing. I could sit there at my computer and research various databases around the country, and do my research via search engines and certain keywords versus spending time in the dusty old books. I did that for a couple years. Didn't really pan out, I'll just put it that way. The—I was always trying to get that next step to get into law school, and I kind of saw the part of the law, law school, that I didn't really want to do. I mean, it was a little more cut-throat than, than I had expected it.

Always had these grand illusions about getting in, about being an attorney, and a lot for it was, I'll just put it, ambulance-chasing kind of stuff, and so I was like, I chose to—I made a tough decision to not do that, and I wound up—I'd been working part-time, make some extra cash, actually, at a Radio Shack, which was a lot of fun, by the way. I wound up getting into the management training program, and they specifically even said that some of my leadership traits and so forth from my military, the way I carried myself, the short hair, that kind of stuff, suited their management program extremely well, and so I did that for several years, and I was about to get my own “store” when the full-time thing took place, and this is a tough decision, but you know, ultimately with the, the benefits and the chance to serve full-time, it was, because I was still going to be in the Guard I was working at Radio Shack, so I'm like, I could work sixty hours, sixty-five hours a week at Radio Shack, I'd still be in the Guard, or I could work fifty-five, sixty hours a week and be in the army full-time, in Active Guard full-time. It ultimately wasn't that tough a decision, so that's when I decided to do the army thing full-time.

Gibb: Was that, was that offered to you? I assume there was—it was something that was going on.

Fischer: Well, I was highly encouraged to apply. At the time, when I first came, which is back in 2001, they were doing these positions called battalion retention NCOs, which, the job, again, was brand new at the time. They, their job was to deal with—at the time, there was a lot of attrition losses.

**[00:30:05]**

People were getting out. Again, this is shortly before 9/11, and so people were just leaving in droves, and recruiting was not doing so well, and so you'd have a young troop who joined and six months later got cold feet, and so we need to have

positions around the state to make sure those young people who joined were going to see their, their contract through, and also people who are taking retirement or, after their six years of service obligation, they're just going to be like, I'm good, I'm done, that kind of stuff, and so the process was trying to keep those individuals in. I mean, if you have someone who does what's called a six by two enlistment, they drill for six years, active drilling status, you've put in about a year and a half, two years, from when they go to Basic and AIT and they're fully trained up, and then they go to college and then, so you finally have this really, really well-trained soldier, and then they leave. And that's a huge, huge, huge financial and just team detriment, and so a lot of times, it really came down to, sounds strange but those people wanted to know that you cared, or that you—they didn't really know what benefits they would receive to being in the service beyond the college money, which is, everyone knows about that stuff. I had a lot of fun with it. I put together some, some benefits packaging, some benefits briefs, and that kind of stuff. I attended the—I became a certified education counselor, certified retirement counselor, and so I could say, "Okay, you accumulated this many points and when you retire at this age, this is what you're going to collect per month," and a lot of them had never seen, they're like, "I'm going to collect that much as a person who retires from the Wisconsin Guard?" They're like, "I didn't know that. That's more than I get paid on a drill weekend." I'm like, "I know."

But you can actually—so I was really fortunate to sit down with a lot of those soldiers and convince them that just convince them to stay one or two more years, and they always say that getting people—it's called over the hump, which is the ten year mark—once you get over their hump, you're going to stay in until twenty. A lot of these guys and gals that were at seven, eight years just needed a little, a little convincing that what they're doing here is to their benefit, and I think we did a pretty good job of that, so that was a lot of fun. Then, not going to lie, I eventually switched positions because that position had moved from one location to another, so I was kind of like displaced—it was here, and then, so it's only the unit that I was with, was moving like forty miles, and so I was offered a different position doing supply with an infantry unit in Hartford, and my first day on the job, I always say that I'm kind of cursed. My first day on the job was 9/11, and so supposed to train for a couple days. I didn't get a lot of training done, let's put it that way. Which was ironic, because in the first day, I went to my next job, it was the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, and that's when we attacked, we invaded Afghanistan, so I was like, "I'm not gonna switch jobs anymore. We're gonna, we're gonna go to another combat zone." So, so yeah, I did supply with the infantry unit for a while, and it's been fun. I've had a good time doing the logistical side. It kind of fits my personality, the way I do planning and whatnot, and it's been pretty good.

Gibb: Just going to take you back a little bit. Could you say more about what your weekend drills were like? During that time.

Fischer: Well, again, one thing I would still say, I was—I always felt very fortunate. Some decisions, either that I'd made, or things that just kind of fell upon good luck, and you know, the units I was with was the 64<sup>th</sup> rear operations center, and we are—it wasn't like we would do a drill weekend and then we'd go to Fort McCoy for two weeks. We did annual trainings in Tokyo, Japan. I did three annual trainings up in Alaska. We went to Fort Pickett, Virginia.

**[00:35:11]**

We went to several places in South Dakota. The Black Hills Badlands, and so we would do a lot of—and we did sort of refer to it as TOC operations, Technical Operations Center operations, and so because I had some artillery experience and I also had some communication experience, I was either doing artillery or communications. Kind of became more communications than anything else because I was pretty decent on that, with the equipment and whatnot. And so we'd set up our, just to get ready for the big event, and Yama Sakura in Japan and Northern Exposure up in Alaska. They were multi-faceted, multi-forces operations, and so, twenty-four hour TOC operations. So we'd set up, a lot of times, in a drill weekend and they let you know that Fischer and Bus and Smith, you show up at this time, you're gonna be on for the next twelve hours. And so after the drill weekend, you were spent. You were tired. But it was kind of cool. I go back and some for the tales I tell people when I was in college, they'd say, "Oh, what'd you do this weekend?" They sat around watching football or whatever, and I tell them what I did, and they're all like, Hm, that's a little more than just lying on the couch and eating pizza and watching football. So, I always love the fact that when you went to your drill weekends, you were in that environment and it wasn't sitting around pushing paper or whatever. It's interesting because when I'd mentioned earlier that I was a battalion retention NOC on the full-time side, my other job at the unit, I volunteered to be a unit retention NCO. So, when I wasn't doing the communications or artillery stuff, trying to plan various events, like family support events or whatever so I always stayed pretty busy and that's actually—I mentioned that I was highly encouraged to attend. They saw that I did a lot of good things just at the unit level and as a weekend soldier, and they thought that I would be a good candidate to do that at the state level, and so I thought I was just doing stuff to stay busy, and it turned out to work out pretty well for me.

The rest of the story, you know, that's really kind of the rest of the story for that, but drill weekends were a blast. They were absolutely—I remember one time we were doing PT and we had to all be in our chemical suits. You always had to spend a certain amount of time each year in chemical suits, and you had to do PT too, and so we decided to be out in the middle of winter. We were playing, basically, flag football in our chem suits. You're supposed to get your blood rate up and that kind of stuff and you're like, well, what—could sit here and jog in place. Well, that's kind of boring. And so, the NCOs that I always worked with, they were so creative and they wanted to make it interesting, and so it was always

something. You're like, "What are we gonna do this month?" It was a lot of fun, and then you had a chance, like I said, to do the travelling that I did, which has been probably one of the greatest benefits, and I've been to Alaska three times and they were like three, three-week annual trainings, and one of the coolest stories, though, is we're going to Northern Exposure in Alaska one time. We're sitting at the Madison Airport, and just you know, really early, like 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning—got to love the army. And we're sitting there with all of our duffel bags, getting ready to fly out, waiting in line, and here, just through one of the doors, comes in Coach Alvarez. Back in '92, '93, they'd gone to the first Rose Bowl and he was considered, he was an icon. Everybody's like, "Wow," took Wisconsin back from the brink. And he just totally made a beeline for us. He was there to welcome a new recruit, just to kind of greet him, but he saw us and he sat there and talked with us and he had one of his assistants go out and get a bunch of footballs and stuff and so we all got signed footballs and he sat there and it was all—and we weren't in uniform, we just had our duffels. And, "Where you boys heading?" Blah blah blah. And you're like, "That's pretty awesome." You know, when that stuff happens. So, makes you kind of grin from ear to ear. Hope that answers your question.

Gibb: What was, like, going to Japan? What was that like?

Fischer: Well, I didn't make it to Japan. [Laughs] I only made it to Fort Lewis. We actually had a small group work as the conduit between Wisconsin and Washington and Fort Lewis, which is in Washington.

**[00:40:12]**

The rest of the group went to Japan, so, but it was Yama Sakura, which is the operation, but so yeah, I was like, one of three out of—it was like fifty people. I was one of three who had to stay, so that was kind of a bummer, but on the other side of it, I went every single year to Alaska. And from what I know, from what I've talked to the guys about going to Japan, I don't think I would've liked it, because I don't like big cities and I'm from a very small town, and they said it was just people and everything, lights everywhere. I'd think I was pretty happy to be at Fort Lewis, which is an absolutely beautiful place. So, I was okay with that, in the long run. [Laughs]

Gibb: Good. So, maybe jumping forward again. What was—obviously, you must have noticed a difference between being in service in the 1990s and then coming into the 2000s. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that shift, and maybe what 9/11, the impact that had, and all that.

Fischer: That's an excellent question, and you know, early in 1992, the Gulf War, there was a small period of time, the Gulf War effect, where I guess the Guard and everything, the active duty kind of got their mojo back if you will, but it didn't last that long. It was maybe a year or two and then we kind of went back to, and I

don't want to specifically say the army in general, because I don't want to be that vague about it, but we didn't really know what our mission was. It became more like we were doing almost like civil affairs or something like that, and trying to find our niche. I don't think at any times, the people that I worked with ever lost any type of professionalism or whatever, but especially when it got into the late '90s, you know, the early '90s and mid-'90s were quite a bit different. From '92 to '94 it was, we'd still train really hard kind of because the Gulf War situation. Then we started getting to more of these civil operations—floods, tornadoes. Again, what we were doing up in Alaska and over in Japan. We're dealing with kind of the beginning of what we see now with like chemical and radiological type stuff. That was so new to us back then. We didn't really know, I want to say, what we were doing. If you remember there was an attack on the World Trade Center I believe it was '96, that I think it was, I could be wrong, but—and they were trying to release some gasses and there was, and it's just, starting the whole thing with chemical attacks.

And that was the next threat, and no one really knew then, how we fit into that environment. It's like, it seemed like we were just a little bit lost in terms of where we were going with, in the service in general. Then 2001, it kind of changed that real quickly, and then everyone really got focused and big thing too, from at least on the Guard side of the house, was the Army Reserves and the active component did a lot for the heavy lifting during the Gulf War. The National Guard didn't do a great deal, and so I remember sitting in my dorm room in Whitewater waiting, waiting for the call. It just never came, and everyone's like, "Are you gonna get deployed, you gonna get deployed?" And you're like, "Phone's not ringing." What are you gonna do? You can't like get on the phone, say, "Hey, when am I coming?" But with the 9/11 it affected everyone, and being full-time at the time, it was a major impact and it seemed like it just refocused everybody. Training was so much more intense. More realistic, and it just, I don't know what you can say. I just call it refocused. It's, honestly, it's been that way very high, op-tempo, very mission-focused training, for the last fifteen years. It really hasn't died down since 2001, that I can—and I think that was one of the greatest, what am I gonna say, lessons learned from 9/11 and the Iraq War and Afghanistan, is that the Guard became such a piece of the toolbox that the overall armed forces would use, and I remember my deployment in 2007.

**[00:45:07]**

We were fully accepted into—it wasn't like, oh, these National Guard—no, it was, you were expected to maintain the same exact level or readiness and combat effectiveness as every other branch of the service, and so, and I think that really has carried over, because now we're dealing with guys and gals I work with. They—most have been deployed, they know that it's, we're in—you got to be ready. So, hope that helps.

Gibb: So, sort of the immediate aftermath, what were you, you were doing the supply and then you switched?

Fischer: Yes, that was a rough week. [Laughs] It was, strangely enough, it's one of the two times I ever cried when I was in uniform. Like I said, I was in training those couple days in supply, and we basically kind of went on like a lockdown type status, where we had to man the armory 24, and just getting bombarded with phone calls and people knocking on the door wondering what's going on, and it's 9/11 plus one or two. They don't tell Staff Sergeant Fischer what's going on in the big world, and it was like four or five days, and you're running basically, effectively, twenty-four hour operations, this kind of being on, whether it be security or making calls to the unit members just to make sure everyone's fully informed of what we know, the current level of threat con and stuff. It was later that week, a place called Mineshaft in Hartford. We finally got a chance to, like, we were not on lockdown and more, so we all went into Mineshaft and the whole place just erupted with applause. It just, it was very emotional that that happened. A lot of people came up and would thank you and all that kind of stuff. It was pretty emotional. The other time I cried was getting back from deployment and seeing my wife and kids. That was, that was pretty neat. So, but yeah, it was—it really, really, really hit home. I don't know what it was like back in December 7, 1941, with Pearl Harbor, but there had to be some similarities. I mean, it just seemed like you, you knew what you had to do and hate to say it, a lot of other things in life just didn't seem as important anymore, and so yeah, it was, I mean, it was pretty amazing—scary. It was all kinds of different, a myriad of emotions, but you just have to look at what you can do on a daily basis and focus your efforts and try to drive on. It wasn't easy, but that's kind of why you, why you wear the uniform.

Gibb: And so, day-to-day, what were you, what were you involved in, and then the other jobs that you did after that?

Fischer: Well, I did a—I mean, for the most part, I did, it was, I did supply, not quite non-stop. Since then I did another short stint as battalion retention NCO. I was contacted to kind of help with another battalion to kind of fix their stuff. One of the more unique experiences I've ever had. I was telling my guy—he's the chief of staff in Wisconsin Guard now, Colonel Schrader, as they always tell him. He's the one who sent me to prison, because there was a, there was a soldier they couldn't find to get his—when you have a retirement person, they have to sign their retirement paperwork. It's just saying that they acknowledge that they've accumulated enough points and it's just, it's like a law of Congress, for all I know. And could not find, could not find, could not find. I went onto the whatever, CCAP online. The troop had gotten into a little bit of legal problems and I just happened to call the Department of Corrections saying, "Is this guy by any chance in one of your?"—he's like, "Yup, he's stationed at—he's at Dodge Correctional," and so I actually [laughs] I went to the prison to have him sign the paperwork, and I told my boss, Colonel Schrader, at the time, I'm like, "He's in



Dodge Correctional,” and I said—and you have to physically watch the person sign it, you can’t just mail it to them—and I said, “The only way I know of is to like give it to a guard.”

**[00:50:14]**

Inmate, a guard, you know, correctional officer. “And have him take it to him and sign it,” and I said, “I don’t”—it’s very specific. You’ve got to say they acknowledge—it’s got to be done right, otherwise it’s just a pain. So I’m like, “I think I have to go to prison.” He goes, “I’m sending you to prison.” So, I went there and took care of that. It was just kind of one of the weirder stories that I have, and but for the most part, I did supply, and I was supply with mostly infantry and artillery units, which really hits at home too, because I’m, I don’t think anybody trained harder than infantry or artillery. They, they are pretty serious about what they do. I mean, those infantry guys, they were rucking fifty, sixty pounds and they’re going fifteen, twenty miles in a day and through some for the nastiest, thick stuff, and ticks, and everything else, and all they ever want is more socks. You know, and they’re always so appreciative that I was there with their supplies whenever they needed them. It was more than socks, but it was, they were just so appreciative of giving, getting a hot shower, something like that, and so yeah, I made some great friends with them, and they took care of me, I took care of them.

And yeah, I picked up a lot of—I am extremely comfortable in the woods, so I picked up a lot of infantry skills and I’d even do some of the missions with them and that kind of stuff, and I had a lot of fun with it. A lot of it’s just, I think as a leader, you have natural leadership abilities, and I mean, you learn how to attack an objective or approach an objective from a, say, you need perspective or something. You just don’t go straight at it. You come at it from a certain angle, look at terrain, and whatnot. It just, they would do that—you’re talking about drill weekends, what they would do on drill weekends, that’s what they would do. It was kind of fun. I mean, yeah, you’re pretty tired after the weekends, but you just didn’t sit around and do nothing.

You were training for what your mission was, and isn’t that why you—that’s what soldiers want to do, and if that means that I have to, as a supply person, jump through some hoops to get them hot soup or some various supplies at whatever time, then guess what. That’s the way life is, and that—and it really, really, really, really, really prepared us for our deployment, because that was a daily thing. You just needed to know how to procure stuff, improvise, train with what you had, and although when you’re deployed, you’re not exactly training, you’re doing the real stuff, and strangely enough, I did not do supply, I went over, actually, as supply during my deployment, but we had—we’d consolidated units and so I was kind of not needed. I was, I was one of the newer supply people at the time, and so I didn’t do supply. I actually worked, and I’d had, I mentioned earlier, I’d done TOC operations, and pretty good with the computer, and so I actually wound up

doing TOC operations both in Kuwait and Iraq during my deployment. And they still would talk to the—they need guys from the TOC to fill in if somebody was on leave or somebody was ill, or injured. You'd still go on missions. And our mission during deployment, the 1-2-1, was convoy security. So, gun trucks. We would be the escort for the huge 18, the 50-60 convoy, 18 wheelers. They'd be out there and we'd be just, we'd be covering them through all parts of Iraq. Some places that I didn't know even existed, but I didn't—I personally did not get on that many missions. I was kind of on the schedule where I would do like a weekly mission, because I was also working the TOC, and like I said it wasn't training, then. It as the real stuff, and you were using a lot of machinery and you were, you were fully protected from top to bottom with all your body armor and stuff, and when you crossed the wire into Iraq it was, or you crossed the wire outside.

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When I was in Iraq, we went over to a couple different bases. It felt pretty real. [Laughs] It was always interesting, because rarely—I never, we were on missions, I never took any fire, but almost every single mission, you see the convoys coming in, they'd have bullet holes in them, on the 18 wheelers. You're like, because they wouldn't be shooting at the guys that could shoot back. They'd be shooting at the 18 wheelers, and you know, they're just hauling stuff like mail and Dr. Pepper, or whatever, parts and supplies, and so the enemy wasn't dumb. Why shoot somebody that could shoot back? So, [laughs], I don't know. It was interesting.

Gibb: So, maybe tell me a little bit about the build-up, the lead-up, to deployment. Obviously that was a few years, a few years later.

Fischer: Yup. Well, the build-up, for me, it was 2007. I went from January to August, was my deployment of 2007. And we did four, three, four weeks at Fort Bliss, Texas. That was one thing that was kind of nice about Guard-wise, you didn't have to do a lot of the earlier stuff because you already had weapons qual[ification], and so you'd done a lot of the preliminary checks that maybe other folks might have had to do. So, we were reasonably prepared. They kind, when you got there, they said, Where are you in terms of readiness? And we were, again, a lot of intense training, so we were pretty far in terms of the readiness levels, which really reduced the amount of time that we'd be spending at Fort Bliss. Though, you do that for a few weeks, they check the box that you're ready to go, you do all your stuff like combat lifesaver course, you do convoy security missions, and they have these virtual trainers. And when you get overseas into theatre, quite frankly, it was a lot for the same stuff. You did more CLS, combat lifesaver, you did more convoy stuff, but this time it's a lot more real. They had some pretty amazing training sites over there to make it feel as real as possible. The convoy—the Humvee rollover thing is where they actually take you and flip you around in a Humvee. Because that's a common thing when you're out doing missions and you're driving and you get hit. The Humvee could roll, and so you got to know

how to, you got to drown proof and then you got to do that kind of stuff, and so the level of, the intensity level once you got into Kuwait, getting your ready to go—term is to cross the wire—was significant. I mean, you're, you're just getting so familiar with every single weapon system that you might be using, and it just really hit it home that this is, you need to be ready once you cross the wire for the first time, and it's the real deal then.

So, that was—people often refer to it as the surge. Late 2006, early 2007, so you know, the enemy combatants had stepped up their, I don't know, what's the word I'm thinking of? Operations, or whatever. In force, in kind, the army had stepped up. [Inaudible] surge took place, and so yeah, it was, I mean, it was pretty intense. I know when I worked at the TOC, I'd be tracking all of the guys in the convoys and stuff, and a thing called Blue Force Tracker and I was the first one that they called when something happened, and you had to know how to deal with those situations. I don't think anything ever really trains you for that stuff. I think when you're actually doing—I personally never took fire or anything like that when I was on a convoy or doing a, doing a parts run. We used to do a lot of, the maintenance guys always needed to pick up equipment from various bases and stuff and so I'd go in with them. And so you just have to just try to, quite frankly, just do your job and maintain a level of professionalism, composure, whatever you want to call it. Nobody, nobody benefits when you freak out. Let's put it that way. I felt that was kind of a nice little kudos to me, is that I was the least experienced of the guys that were over there but they quickly saw that I was able to keep a cool head, and so they moved me to the primary shift when a lot of the stuff happened and that kind of thing.

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I think it's because none of them are really good at computers and I was really good. That's what I personally think, but that's my opinion on the matter. I was in Kuwait for a while and then I was—then they moved me to the movement patrol team up in a place called Camp Cedar Iraq, which is kind of like the big gas station in the southern part of Iraq. That's one, what it's referred to as. It's a few miles outside of a place called An-Nasiriya, next to Toledo Air Force base. I was there for a few months. Movement control team was, was a unique job. You basically tracked—as soon as they crossed the wire into Iraq from Kuwait, they kind of became your property. You tracked them from the wire to where you're at, and then from when they left your place at Cedar, up to a place called Scania, they were under your control. So if something happened, they got a hit, or they had vehicle problems—mechanical breakdown—you had to be the one who went through with the various recovery services and that kind of stuff, too, and then also when they came into the wire you had to make sure all their vehicles were there, everyone was properly accounted for, if anybody needed medical attention. I would try to take care of the guys and girls to make sure they had a nice, hot meal or something like that. I mean, they've been on the road for seven, eight hours. They just got down eating an MRE [Meal Ready to Eat] or something. So,

when they came in the wire I'd have twenty-five, thirty meals sitting for them. They seemed to appreciate it. And you know, at Cedar, because it was kind of like the big gas station and the enemy seemed to think that they could blow up all these fuel tanks, which were buried like hundreds of meters underground, they would do these, they'd mortar the place from An-Nasiriya. They knew very well that we could not retaliate to An-Nasiriya, because it's a residential city, and so they'd set up their mortar tubes on the top of some residential building and they'd just pop off four or five rounds.

And what are you going to do? You can't just light up the entire city, so you just—and the mortars never came anywhere close to going the 200 meters that they'd set up the fuel tanks underneath the ground, so it was kind of funny. Once in a while they got inside the interior compound, which is where we all stayed, and barracks and chow hall and stuff like that. And we had some, we had some people who were killed and that kind of stuff there, and you walked around fully armed and everything, just going to the shower, going to do PT, whatever. So, I always got a kick out of one of the funniest stories, though from being in Cedar was, I got to know the Ugandans very well, because I worked 8:00 at night, or 2100 until 0600.

That was my normal duty shift. I always had additional duty when we had to, once a week—at least once a week, sometimes more to go do supply runs over to Tallil. And you had this interior compound, which is monitored by Americans—the gates. They had the exterior one, that was kind of like, inside security and outside security, and that was—the security force—was the Ugandans. They were a trip. Every night—I mean, honestly, the first couple weeks there, every night—I would hear gunfire. You're like, "What's going on?" You don't know. And so I eventually talked to a couple of them. I love soccer. We got talking about soccer, and I started asking them, I said, "What are you guys always shooting at? I'm always"—and it was just like, every night, du-du-du-du, you're like, "What are they shooting at?" And he said their rules of engagement said, the sign very clearly said, you can't come within 500 meters of the gate—the wire. Their rules of engagement said anything moves outside that gate, you can shoot at it. It didn't matter if it was a piece of flying paper or if it was a goat or a person. They would shoot at it. I'll be honest. I slept a little better knowing that, because if anything moved, they were shooting at it. This is like, Okay, that's a little different. [Laughs] You know, our rules of engagement were, you kind of identify the enemy and then engage the enemy, if they're a hostile.

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They didn't like, shoot the goat or nothing. They would just kind of, you know, and a lot of times, especially around bases and stuff, they're based around waterways, they have available water, and so some of the prime real estate was where the bases were at, and so if you have a farmer who's raising camels or goats, whatever that's where the fertile land was, and that's where the water

sources were. And so, the farmers, sometimes, might have stepped a few steps a little too close or something, but it was, it was just a realization that our rules of engagement versus other rules of engagements were, were different, and yeah, I slept a little better at night, knowing that. I felt a little more protected [laughs] by the Ugandans—started playing soccer with them, actually. They were good guys.

Gibb: So, what was the base like? How big was it, and who was—

Fischer: You know, the interior was probably one square mile. I'd run or something, and you could run back and forth. You couldn't get out to the exterior, because that's where all the fuel is stored. I don't even know—I mean, it was probably, well they drove around quite a few times. It was probably four, four miles from one side to the far side. That includes the exterior. But they were some massive, massive fuel depots, that's why I always called them big gas stations in the south, and so yeah, it was pretty significant. I mean, Cedar was—Camp Navistar, which was in Kuwait—that's where I started at—was really small. All that was, was basically the stopping point that these convoys would stop at before they would go cross the wire into Iraq, and so, convoys would stop there, get a laugh, get some chow, get some fuel, and then cross the wire. While I was there—actually, while I was up in Iraq—they shut down Camp Navistar and moved our entire operations to a place called Camp Virginia. I was only in Camp Virginia for a few weeks after getting back from Iraq, and that kind of replaced Navistar as the step-off point into the theatre. Again, I didn't really spend that much time at Camp Virginia before we headed home. Maybe a month, but it wasn't that much, so yeah, it was—Virginia was a huge base, and I mean, that thing, I used to do some ruck marches around the exterior and it would take me an hour and a half just to do a running ruck march kind of thing. Like, this place is big.

So, so yeah, I think Tallil Air Force Base, which is where I went to in Iraq, as well, sometimes. That place, Air Force bases, because they're—kind of have planes—they got to be bigger. It's always nice going over there because it was so much bigger and they had stuff like Burger King and Starbucks, whereas Cedar, we didn't have anything like that. We had a pizza place that was awful. [Laughs] And so I always liked going over there on our weekly parts runs or supply runs. I don't know, it was just cool to get some, I don't want to say normal food, but the food at Camp Cedar was just, still—it wasn't great, but we didn't have anything special like that, but still, people even talk about, they still know that Cedar was a place where they had this—he was a local Iraqi, but he would make paninis and amazing sandwiches, and they also had this other guy who did the most amazing desert type stuff, and like, where do you find these guys? They're like—I always get paninis and stuff, and I love those things—wraps. Yeah, you wouldn't think it, but every—people always talk about that, is, every base, we had something that was kind of unique to it, and everyone knew what was at that base, and whether it be there was the sleeping conditions, the quarters, and if you were a chew, housing unit, or if you had certain—the chow hall—everyone just knew what, through word of mouth or whatever. So yeah, it was always kind of interesting to,

through chance and experience—I had a good time. I’m not probably in the majority, but I had a fairly decent, good time during my deployment. I had some free time, and I made a promise to myself. A lot of guys, they would do their missions, they’d come back, and they’d sleep, maybe play some video games, or whatever.

**[01:10:00]**

I’m not that kind of person. I’m not a gamer. I don’t sit there and watch movies. At the time, I was finishing—I had the last year left on my master’s degree, and I was completely fried. I was burnt out on—like, I don’t know how I’m ever going to complete this thing. It was a Masters of Business with a concentration in logistics, you know, supply. I made a promise to myself that said, “This is what I’m going to focus on. This is what I want to do for”—because I knew we had pretty decent internet service. It was a lot better than I expected and so that was my mission, and so literally I would work ten, twelve hours a day. My whole deployment, I actually say, for the eight—I had three days off, the whole time. So you don’t get any time off. [Laughs] I didn’t take—I didn’t come back for any kind of leave. I actually took—I could’ve, but they offered me the position on the movement control team, which was considered a dream job. It was like, it was one of the more choice assignments. Very independent, drove around in a four-wheeler, that was pretty cool. And had your own housing units, though I opted for that versus coming home on leave.

So anyway, that allowed me to do some more work with my master’s and so I was very happy. After about six months I was able to complete my master’s while I was over there, and so it kind of gave me a, kind of gave me a personal mission and I think that really helped pass the time. Where a lot of guys would sit there and dwell upon what’s going on back home, and just worry themselves to death. If I had to sit there, and I called home as much as I could and emailed and chatted online and stuff with my kids and my wife, but if you let it just eat at you, it’ll just tear you, tear you apart, and so I had to have something that took my mind off that, and finishing my master’s was, was that, and so, I’m very thankful. But I never would’ve finished—I honestly say that to this day—I don’t think I would have finished it, which is kind of ironic because my wife is now one week away from finishing her Masters. She’s on her last two papers, and seeing the look on her face the last six, eight months, she’s just fried. I’m able to kind of like tell her. I say, I can really empathize with her, and so I’ve been able to provide that level of encouragement to her just to get her stuff done. She’s just as fried as I was, but she didn’t have a deployment, so, so yeah, I found some silver lining in the whole process and I had a pretty decent time during deployment. There were some scary moments, but I have scary moments when I drive back and forth to work every day, and so it’s not—can’t let it eat at you. It’s just the way it is, so.

Gibb: Did you talk with your family—I mean, obviously you would have done—but, what were the conversations like before, before deployment?

Fischer: Well, it was interesting. The way it timed out was every couple weeks before Christmas, my whole family—I got a big family, it's a total of six kids in our family, and then the extended family, all that kind of stuff. We always did a thing in Wisconsin Dells, one of the water parks, mid-December. As I was, as I was pulling into Wisconsin Dells on the freeway, I got the call. I had to pull over, and it was actually a guy named Don, a good friend of mine. He's like, "Fisch, where you at?" I told him. He goes, "You probably want to pull over." I'm like, "Well, I'm just at the exit, let me get in here." He goes—and so yeah, there's the initial shock, and so I didn't—my wife was coming up the next morning, and so I had probably about ten hours, twelve hours or fourteen hours, whatever, to kind of get my bearings, and there, I'm there with my brothers who deployed, and so they understood little bit. I'm there with my dad, and so I told my wife first. I took the opportunity—that weekend, it was just entirely timing—to share with everybody, and it was rough, but it wasn't unexpected, and I thought I was going to be going over, doing supply.

**[01:15:00]**

That's what I was told. Bit of a surprise factor when you get in theatre and you're like, "Uh, yeah, you're not doing that." You're like, "What?" So I mean, sitting there telling your wife or your family that, "Don't worry about me, I'll be in the rear with the gear, don't worry about that, I'm all good," and all that, changed a little bit once I got over there but they didn't know that. And my dad was great. My mom was pretty broken up over it. My brothers were very supportive. I have one sister, too. But then I had like a couple uncles and cousins and that kind of stuff that were at that thing, so it was, it was—you always hate to do, when you hear stuff like that, then it gets all word of mouth, like, "Hey, Tom's being deployed," and my mom calls her sister. It's just, I was able to just tell everyone at the same time, just get it out there and deal with it. I couldn't have asked for a better situation. My only regret was—not with my kids. Trying to think how old they were. That's a good question. [Laughs] How old are they now? So, they were like maybe nine and seven? Ten and eight? Right around there. I could do the math if I thought about it. And we didn't really tell them—that kind of stuff. How do you tell them? As we took some free time trying to tell them that Dad's gonna be gone, that kind of stuff, it—I didn't think it was gonna be that big of a deal for them, but I was wrong. It really—and I'm very, very, very, very close to my older daughter. That's the one who is in the Guard now, and people say she looks like me, blah, blah, blah, she takes a lot after my own traits. My younger daughter is kind of like her mother. It was—I don't know. When you're ten years old, it was really, really, really hard on her during deployment, for reasons that were completely unexpected. Teachers, people—especially people in our church, very, very supportive.

Once a week, twice a week, my wife would come home and there'd be a casserole dish or something, you know, a note, or whatever, and the pastor would come

over and they'd call all the time and teachers were always very supportive of saying, "How you doing, Hadley?" That kind of stuff. And, but it was—a lot of the other kids who kind of thought that my daughter was getting a preferential treatment, who made life very, very difficult for her during deployment. And you—I mean, you—there's no way of predicting that. There's no way of seeing that, but it really had a major impact on her during deployment and post deployment. Who—kind of like, where her friends—I mean, it really lasted. I mean, it's still going on. She was really good friends with, on the basketball team, all that kind of stuff, and after that she never really became, was that close with her grade school friends and that kind of stuff. Which is so strange because then, my younger daughter, she didn't have any of those situations, so that's one of my, I want to say regrets. When I came home, I presented the school, it's a parochial school, Peace Lutheran, in Hartford. I knew they were so supportive. My wife would just be like, "Enough already!" There's also a thing in town, an organization called Treats for Troops, or something like that, and they're always sending me stuff and they're always checking in with her. My dad, there's a VFW, so my wife was just like, "This is non-stop." It was great, but it was—so I did the presentation at the school, and the kids were just amazed at seeing what a Mountain Dew can look like written in Arabic, and I had some really cool pictures.

**[01:20:03]**

For example, I did some slides of me standing in front of the temple of Ur, and also the birthplace of Abraham, and they're all like, "What? We just studied about that." I'm like, "Well, and I was there a few months ago. It was pretty cool." But yeah, it was tough on her, and I guess when you're nine, ten years old and you think you have really good friends and then suddenly you lose them, or I don't know. I guess that's how kids are. But that sucked. [Laughs] Just put it pretty directly. It just kind of sucked, and yeah, again, I mean, my wife had a pretty easy experience. I never cut the grass. I never—my neighbor was awesome. He would cut the grass, he'd weed whack, he'd shovel the snow, and this neighbor would do this, and so she had it, I don't want to say easy. That's never a good term to use, but yeah, except for my one older daughter so. So, yeah. That was it.

Gibb: And so you were in contact with them while you were in deployment?

Fischer: Yeah. It was mostly email. We didn't have a lot of access to phones, and if you did it was, "Okay, you have ten minutes." I mean, what do you say to your—you break your time? You got three minutes for each kid and four minutes for our wife, but then you have ten minutes you want to talk to your parents—I guess a lot of guys, it really, really, really, really ate at them that they couldn't be more in contact and I tried to put it out of my mind as much as possible, but that was a big deal for a lot for people and a big deal for me. I mean, you're not shut off from your—one day you're home, the next day you're at Fort Bliss, and you've got okay contact, and the next day you're over playing in the sandy area. It was a



major adjustment. I fortunately am married to a very independent woman so she was able to resource and if there was a dead mouse in the basement, she wouldn't freak out. She would just take care of it herself, and a lot of people didn't have that type for situation or arrangement or marriage or whatever it was, and it was really hard on them. But I was fairly fortunate, so.

Gibb: Are there any other particular stories that you have from being over there?

Fischer: I have a lot of stories about being over there. [Laughs] Like when I was in the movement control team, one of the things, for example, the people how drove the 18-wheelers, some—there was an army—sorry, not army, but a US contract. There were Americans driving, but if it was just like, they needed drivers to drive the, I'll say, Dr. Pepper from point A to point B, they'd use—there are lot for people from India or from Pakistan, that was a common thing. I mentioned earlier that virtually every convoy that came in or something, they'd have bullet holes. I could not believe those people. They would come in and they'd actually have bullet wounds, and they would refuse medical care—that was my job, I had to make sure they were being—because they knew that if they were injured, they would have to, they'd be sent back to Pakistan and they would lose this very lucrative—they were making really good money and that kind of stuff, and [laughs] I just was in complete shock that they would come in. They'd be, a lot of bullet holes. I mean, some people are like, “Dude, the whole side of your car, your truck, is bloody,” and they would just, they would drive on, and that was kind of strange. I always tell the story of, I think it's probably one of the [laughs] more interesting of the stories, or funny stories, I have. Again, I'm a huge, huge, huge fan of soccer and I played soccer at Whitewater, I coached it, and all that kind of stuff. And when I got talking to the Ugandans, every time I walked to work, I'd always see them playing, I'm going to call it a field.

[01:25:00]

It was really a gravel pit, but it had a couple soccer goals, and I'd come to talk and they're like, “Oh, you got to come play!” They didn't have any Americans playing. It was just them playing. “You got to come play, you got to come play, you got to come play.” And so I'm like, “Okay.” One of these days—we saw each other at chow hall every day, so they were relentless, and funny as heck, too. Just their accent and the way they, just the way they act. And so I went and played. I absolutely got smoked. I mean, let's—and they played a rougher style. Again, this is not a nice field. This is a field that had a lot of gravel on it and call it a field. I got out of there, I was bruised and battered and bloodied, and Tom Fischer's had more than my fair share of knee surgeries and I'm like, “Okay, lesson learned, that was a mistake.” And so I didn't—they're like, “When are you gonna come back and play, Sergeant Fischer? When are you gonna come back and play, Sergeant Fischer?” And for a few weeks, I was just like, you know, “I'm busy, I got this,” whatever. A story a tried to make up hoping they would just relent. Well, they didn't, and so I eventually confided with a couple of the guys that I

became friends with and I said, "Let's just say you guys play a style of soccer that is a little rougher," and I told them about my knee surgeries and that kind of stuff, and they're like, "Oh," they're really, really sorry. But, "You got to come back, you got to come back and play. We got to"—and so eventually I conceded and I went back and played, and you'd have thought I was Pele. I was like, because anytime—I often say it's like the parting of the Red Seas. Whenever I got the ball, they—nobody would come close. They'd let me take space, I would pass, I was like the best soccer player in the entire planet, and I was like, "This is awesome." It was funny because I think I scored a couple goals, whatever and made all these great plays, because nobody was pressuring me. They were really backing off. I mean, it was really obvious, and towards the tail end, one of the guys must have got tired of it. He slid tackled and took me out.

And you know something? I deserved it, too. I mean, it was a perfectly legal play. But they pummeled the hell out of the guy. [Laughs] Don't pick on Sergeant Fischer. We want him to come back and play. I was the only American who'd shown any interest and knew anything about some of their national players and that kind of stuff, and so they were sitting there like, "What are you doing?" They didn't hurt him, hurt him, but they roughed him up pretty good. It was pretty funny. So then I started playing soccer with them every week, and I told them, I said, "You guys can—don't treat me like I got kid gloves on. I know how to play, just I don't want to walk out of here with two fractures and a concussion and a couple ligaments broken, either." So, it was pretty funny.

So, that's really not much of a deployment [laughs] story, but it was pretty neat. But yeah, the only situations, for example, we got mortared quite a bit and once the stuff came inside the interior, you just looked around, put your head on a swivel, and found the closest mortar bunker and you probably would, you'd set an Olympic speed record getting to that mortar bunker, because that was your safety right there, and I don't know. Such a weird job, because I fortunately was able to deal with a lot of local Iraqis in my job. I love tea, and they make this chai milk tea. Every time I came in, once I showed some interest in it, they'd always have it ready for me and stuff, and I love talking to them. I learned some of their language, learned all their numbers and that kind of stuff, and they were amazed at just the fact that I had a boat and I could go fishing, because they don't have a lot of water over there, so you learn—I made some pretty good friends with some of the locals. You take care of your troops, you give the locals the respect that they're entitled to. I asked about all the kids we would see when we were doing our supply runs, that kids just looked in rough shape so you'd try to throw them some food or something, an MRE, and so I was just I honestly, I looked forward to every single day, going to work, and taking care of the troops. There were some bad days, some very bad days. We lost a couple guys, and you do, what you do, there. Towards the tail end of our deployment, a guy named Parker was killed on one of our last missions, and they put me in charge of the funeral detail, which I was very—I was involved in every aspect of, not every, but a good chunk of the aspects of the funeral, the proper military honors rendered in-theatre.

[01:30:00]

That was tough. It happened so close to the end of our deployment. Just four or five days later and we'd have been, we'd have been ripping out, basically getting ready to get out of there, and it's just, and it's one thing when you see it on TV, but when you're actually building the display with the, the boots and the weapon and getting the, getting the rehearsals done for the twenty-one gun salute and the proper way of doing the flag and whatnot, it was—I remember it quite vividly, so.

The first guy that we lost overseas, a guy named Steve Kastner, he was an interstate transfer, I believe from Illinois, and at the time I was doing battalion retention when he came in, and that was part of my job, to deal with all interstate transfers, made sure they found a home. They were properly acclimated to the Wisconsin Guard and to the unit, and so I got to know Steve very well. And he was killed within the first week of being deployed. That was tough. I mean, you—we weren't, I would say, best friends, but he was someone that I knew him very well and I tried to—I'd see him at his unit and I'd go up and talk to Kastner and, "How are things going?" That kind of stuff. And knowing he was the first KIA [Killed In Action] for us while we were deployed was tough. The other tough one, I would say, was a kid named Steve, too. Kiri[sp??].

So, when I leave at the airport, my mom is there and my wife. It's pretty emotional, and I haven't seen my mom in a long time, and I chose to just, at the terminal—not the terminal but the, after you check your bags, whatnot, just to say goodbye there. Kiri—your parents are allowed to go in back to the terminal, and basically see you onto the plane, so to speak. So I sat there with Kiri and his mom and dad, and his little sister. And Kiri's a young kid. He's only twenty, a little private and his dad knew that we were going. Going to probably be in the same unit, that kind of stuff, and he said, "Look out for my kid." And you know, he—we got over there he got put on a gun truck and I was on TOC operations, and I always checked with him at least once a week. Kid always seemed to be sleeping all the time, but he was son mission, he was sleeping, or he was playing on his Xbox. Anyway, like, "Dude, read a book!"

I knew what mission he was on. That's when I was on the movement control team and I mentioned earlier that it was the one who responded if it was in my region, and I was on duty when he—he was driving and, I won't discuss the whole details of it, but basically they went in—they went off the road, went into some water. They fortunately all got out, but he was really, really, really, really, really banged up. I mean, he was—I think he was the gunner, and if you know anything about the way—if you go off the road and you're strapped in as a gunner, you're, you're being tossed around like a ragdoll, and so he got pretty, pretty roughed up. That stuff sticks with you, too, and so he was at the Tallil Air Force Base hospital, and so I was the one who responded to all this stuff, and I always felt bad because, you know, the dad walks up to you and says, "Take care of my kid," and we

didn't have too many situations where our guys got injured, we were good. That was one of the situations where something bad happened.

[01:35:00]

So, I don't know, that was that. But you've just got to deal with it, so. I saw the dad when we did our demob[sp??] stuff, and we talked a little bit about it, but you know, he knew that I wasn't—if I was in the truck with him, that'd be a different story, but I was in TOC operations or movement control, and he was on the gun truck, and it was outside of my control. He was kind of happy his kid came home alive. Really, that's what—it was perfectly legit that that situation, I mean, someone could've died. But he came home bruised and battered, but he came home, and that's the end of that story, so. I don't know. That's what I know.

Gibb: And so, what was the homecoming like?

Fischer: Whoof. [Laughs, relief] Well, we spent four, five days on Camp Atterbury, Indiana, doing all this demob stuff. I spent most of the—I mean, it sounds strange, but you had like two hours a day where you're doing stuff. You had to go turn in all the equipment. Okay, that's done. Now what do you do? Well, now you've got to be back at 1800 to get this briefing. Okay, I have eight hours of nothing. Go hang out, go relax—a lot of relaxing. All of us just want to get home. We're like, just let me get on a bus and go up to Wisconsin. Anyway, so we did that stuff and I actually, quite frankly—again, I'm small town, I love hunting and fishing, and being outside. I just enjoyed, quite frankly, just going out and going on long walks where it was green and there's trees and that kind of stuff. So, I spent a lot of time on my own for that. Other guys were just kind of driving themselves batty with being, just wanting to get home. Well, so we then eventually came back. They did a pretty cool thing, completely unexpected, to us. We had a, it's called an escort—Harley Davidson escort. They had like—I'm not kidding you—a mile and a half, two miles, that they—so we pull off at Kenosha, Wisconsin. It's right by the state line of Illinois. We're like, why are we getting off at the rest stop? Let's just get to freaking Milwaukee so we can get with our families.

And we pull in and there was just like, a thousand people in Harley—like, what—now, it is Wisconsin, and they have these Harley Davidson reunions, and found out they were an escort. They were going to take us to where we did our homecoming event, and so that was pretty cool looking. You're looking, as far as the eye can see, just, and got the flags on and stuff. And we got to Milwaukee. It was Cudahy I think, and you know, you get off the bus and. [Pause] Just pause for a second. So then, back at the Cudahy—I know that the business there they were super military supportive, and so they let us just use their whole complex. And you're just itching to get home and it was kind of cool. We saw a bunch of signs, various businesses that put up "Welcome home." I got there. My oldest brother who deployed, his wife my kids, my little brother, who was like twenty years

younger. He joined the Guard, too. They were all there to welcome me home. And you know, to their credit—let me stand back up. Not to their credit. The people who were in charge of us, they didn't draw it out. They knew we just wanted to get off the bus, and so they had a very, very, very, very short closing ceremonies, saying, "Go." It's always kind of cool, because you know, your wife—you lose a bunch of weight, or whatever, and [inaudible] tell you, "You can't drive because we were told that when you get home, you're gonna have—you're not used to driving vehicles. You're used to driving defensively and stuff." And so I mean, it was really, really quick there in Cudahy. Just basically get in the vehicles and my brother, who deployed, he was, grabbed my bags and stuff.

**[01:40:06]**

We went to where I live, and big old banner on the house, and all my family was there. That was pretty cool. Neighbors and stuff, and you know, everyone was really cool about it. An hour, hour and a half, and they just said, "Give me the time." It was interesting because [laughs] when you're deployed, there's no drinking or anything like that. You don't have any vices. And so I wound up picking up a little bit of a habit, or I picked up, started smoking some cigars when I was deployed. It was the one thing you could do. That's if you're like, after a long day or something happened just to walk back and smoke a cigar and just relax, and my wife, I pulled one out and I told her that, and [laughs] she's like, "Eh, you could come back with worse." And so we sat there on the deck and just, it was so surreal because nine months earlier, it was just life. You were just—normal day, and then suddenly you're just back to normal. It—a couple days go by and a couple weeks go by and a couple months go by and they have—Guard does a really good job of doing homecoming events where they don't make it happen like the first couple of weeks. They give people a couple months to get acclimated and get back to their normal lives, and then they bring in all kinds of mental health professionals and make sure you're being well acclimated, have all the, all the awards and all the ceremonies, that kind of stuff, that you didn't want to deal with when you got home.

So they do it really, really, really well. We did ours at Chula Vista in the Wisconsin Dells, and they have some big dome-looking, weird thing. That was pretty—it was really good timing, and a lot of times, the next couple of months, you're just collecting your, getting your breath back, and trying to find a way to just get into a normal routine with picking the kids up at school and dropping them off and cutting the grass and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and all the things you've got to do. And so yeah, I mean, it was probably six, four, five six months until I got, what I felt, back to normal. I hate saying that term, because it's not a good term, but where I was just comfortable being in the house and I think the one who probably missed me most is my dog. I don't think he liked it because he was my buddy. I took him everywhere I went and I think he didn't like the fact that I left. He didn't say much. And, but he was fat though. I always take him out running and everything before I left. I came home and I'm like, "Dog put on

twenty pounds.” Took him out running, I’m like, “You got to be kidding me!” At two miles, he’s already tired. Like yeah, the wife and the kids didn’t take him out and exercise him, but we did a lot of hunting that fall, and he got back in shape, and so. No, I took advantage and I shared it with as many people as I could. There’s a lot of post deployment, I want to say benefits, but like, there’s a place in Minnesota, Leach Lake, called Andersons Grand View Lodge. They gave a week free fishing, at the fishing resort, for people who deployed and stuff, as a way of kind of R&R, and so the guy there is actually, he’s in the—he’s in the Minnesota Guard, so he’s a way of thanking people and stuff.

So, I took advantage of that, I did a thing—two trips, in fact—with an organization called Outward Bound, which is a way of connecting veterans with one another and kind of getting them out into the wilderness and just kind of letting them reconnect with other people, other vets, and also with just their own thoughts and stuff like that. I did a trip up to the Boundary Waters, which was a lot of work. Then we did—then I had a trip down to, a whitewater rafting trip, down in Moab, Utah area. All expenses paid, and it was awesome. A kid from Wisconsin going down and whitewater rafting and that kind of stuff, and doing some of the hiking and that kind of stuff down there was, it was pretty cool. Going to Boundary Waters in Minnesota, not exactly much of a stretch, because I canoe anyway. It’s like, “Okay, we’re canoeing. Now we’re carrying. Why am I carrying this thing?” So, if I’m canoeing, I’m going to be fishing. But just canoeing just for canoeing, that didn’t make any sense to me.

**[01:45:03]**

So yeah, I took advantage for the—they say that the demob stuff, here are some options and take advantage of them. You might think you’re fine, but you probably aren’t. I’m always the kind of person who believes that there’s a lot more smarter people out there than I am. If they’re saying, Take advantage of this stuff, or look into it, they probably know better than I do. Now, if you talked about how to do my job here I would tell you I know what I’m doing, but that’s their job and so I tried to heed some of their advice, and I try to share that as much with my soldiers as I possibly can. Which was, and career-wise, the timing of it, when I got back in, what was it, August of 2007? Then it was August of 2009 that I got promoted, and then I went down to UW-Whitewater and taking that somewhat fresh perspective from deployment and being Reserves, Guards, weekend, full-time, the whole—and the deployment—it was, it was a really nice, and then also having been an alumni of UW-Whitewater, having some for the education that I have. It just made my time at Whitewater just the highlight of my, so far, of my career. My boss at the time, who’s an awesome guy, Lieutenant Colonel [inaudible], now full-bird colonel, [laughs] he asked if I was interested in teaching military history, and I don’t know the way it works at Whitewater, but certain your department gets more money the more education your people have, and so that’s one of the reasons I got the job, was actually because I had a master’s degree. The list was pretty short. There was only two people, so [laughs]

it wasn't like—and I was an alum of the university and I had a history minor, and so basically I was offered the opportunity to do the military history instructor's course in Leavenworth and then teach military history. Also instruct as the MS3s, which are the juniors in the program, which is kind of like where you want to, that's where they really become—you can really influence them as incoming officers and that kind of stuff. And you always had that crusty old NCO who's the one who's supposed to teach them the ways of the world and the way things really work. And when you're working for your alma mater doing something you love, and we'd do staff rides or battlefield tours out east and down south, it was a dream come true, and then [laughs] I mentioned earlier I love soccer with a passion, and we—I got to know the soccer coaches.

We're really, really close with the athletic department on campus, and I got to know the soccer coaches and actually one way, I had done some coaching, I knew some of the players that were playing there because I coached them in high school, and I actually wound up being assistant coach with the women's soccer team for five years. Went to the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] a bunch of times, went on a ten day Costa Rica trip, that kind of stuff, and so I was "living the dream" in Whitewater, and then I got a chance to do that and it was just like, This is pretty cool. It was pretty awesome, and so, but everything, you get a little burnt out, but here in the military, you have to keep—you have to move around just to kind of, I don't know, just so you keep your skills fresh or whatever. I'd gotten away from doing supply stuff there. I did more tactical and I did more mentorship, and so for me to then transition back to the supply side of the house was a very natural thing. I also got to look at where I'm at career-wise. I have, what, four years left until I can retire, and having the logistics degree and being in supply sets up pretty well, pretty sure I can find a job, at least stocking a shelf or something, when I'm done doing this. Maybe a little bit more than that, although my wife wants to know what I'm gonna do, but we'll cover that down the road. So, I don't know.

Gibb: I'm curious to know what—so, you're working a lot with young people coming in. I'm just wondering what, what their motivations, when you were talking to them, what their motivations were for joining at this, the last few years, and how that was different to previous.

Fischer: Well, that's a good question. It was probably one of three things. A lot of times, it was almost like a continuation of service. They had a family member or something like that. That was still fairly prevalent. A lot of the cadets, especially at Whitewater, their mom or dad or brother, somebody, was currently in, and there was a role model or was expected. I could name probably twenty names that that took place with. Some, I'll be honest, it was kind of financial. They needed money for college—nothing wrong with that. Then a lot of it was, and I get Facebook pings all the time from my former cadets and it's very patriotic. I mean, actually one of them, the cadets, it's his birthday today. He calls me young man, I call him old man. It's really the opposite way around. I got to visit him sometime

in Montana, but he—it's just patriotic. I never really saw any other of those three. I mean, it was really those three things. And like I said, sometimes they were expected to, and that's one thing I'm fairly proud of my own daughter, is I say—and people ask me, "Like father, like daughter." Like, no. I remember us sitting down at the kitchen room table one night after my daughter had taken her ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] and she talked to some recruiters and I was trying to have the conversation about her interest, and she said, "No way, no how, it ain't gonna happen, blah blah, stop asking, not happening, Dad. Let it rest." I was fine with that. And so then we had a discussion a month or two later about, "Okay, you want to go to UW-Madison. You're looking at this much in student loans, which Mom and Dad can't pay for your whole college. It's just not happening." Three, four months later, just sitting down at dinner one night she's like, "Mom, Dad, I need you to sign this paperwork. I'm going to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] next week to enlist. My wife and I are just sitting there stunned. Just like, "What?" Apparently she'd been following a classmate who was a year older and seen all the cool things she was doing in AIT and chemistry and chemical, and so she wanted to join, and I don't think I played any part in it. Thank social networking. I appreciate it, whoever came up with that idea, and so I mean, it was a whole myriad of different reasons, but it kind of was focused around those three.

The other one, if I would say, played a part—and this is something I took a lot of, take a lot of pride in at Whitewater—was, we tried to be very, very seen and heard on campus. I mentioned earlier, there really wasn't out there, no student organizations and that kind of stuff. I tried to take as much opportunity to get us involved with the athletic programs. [Laughs] Every Veteran's Day, for example, or the week of, we would do like a Veteran's Day walk, ruck march, you call it, around campus. And UW-Whitewater is extremely military friendly. I mean, the chief of police there is a combat veteran, Marine Corps, and much of the police officers and the chancellor used to be there, I mean, heck, even the current chancellor would come out and do our cadence runs with us, and she'd be out there yelling with—so, it was a very unique experience and people even told me that, that "You guys are kind of unique here." By the way, we even had the coolest golf cart. Had like ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] on it. It was like the envy of the campus. The chancellor would do his—every year when they do a welcome ride in, he'd right in in the ROTC golf cart. It was pretty cool. And so we, all the cadets would walk around with their dummy rifles or rubber ducks. It's a dummy rifle, and some of the students would be like, freaking out because there's people walking around in uniform around campus doing a pretty hard-core—we called it a Vet's March, and you just, you don't see that stuff.

**[01:55:14]**

But you want to get yourself very visible, so I think a lot for the, sometimes that those new recruits, those young troops, they wanted to be part of the organization. They were very excited to see the things that we were doing. Now, did that play a



ten percent or fifty percent or ninety percent role in them signing up? I don't know. But I know they—I know it was really important to them, just the camaraderie and the friendship that we tried to develop there, over the years.

Gibb: And what was the military history that you were teaching?

Fischer: It was American military history, starting pre-Revolution, kind of like, minutemen kind of stuff kind of started taking place, and the military history course takes you basically from pre-Revolution all the way kind of like the Gulf War, and it's not a very in-depth, detailed military history, but it's a pretty good overview. There are certain areas that you put more influence on. Civil War is always one. But you also do stuff, you do some pretty in-depth battle analysis. World War I for me is a big part of it. I, on a regular basis, took advantage of people I knew, and I have a good friend, really, really good friend, who did multiple tours in Vietnam, so I'd bring them in to guest instruct. I had a friend who flew supply missions over Korea for the Korean War, and I'd drive him down and let him talk to the cadets. And we had cadets and we had other students, too. But I—if you're gonna pay me to read, as part of my job, to read *The Guns of August*, about World War I, okay. I'll get paid to do that, and call it job research, and then we would do trips to Gettysburg and Shiloh, and Chattanooga, with the students. Again, then we were considered a student org, so we got some student org money to take us on those trips. Military history course was phenomenal out of Leavenworth, Kansas. The World War I Museum is really close to there, and I got really, really, really good at learning what I would call the—I'm a big vignette guy, the little stories that kind of make it personal.

So I had a cadet in my class who was Russian. And I always—I like to teach American military history, but I also understand that American military history is military history around the world. You can't talk about the World War I, or even World War II, without discussing the impact of the Russians and German, Japan, that kind of stuff. So I was able to—I would almost make it a personal quest to learn something interesting about, you know, some specific story. Everyone knows one of the greatest vignette books ever written was *Band of Brothers*. It's basically a long vignette about one specific company, and it really made it very easy to teach. So I remember when we learned about the Russian situation in World War II and how they kind of came into the war and Lenin and Stalin and so forth, and it's just those cool little things that you just once you get a little bit of it, you just want to know more and more and more. I was always kind of drilling that into my kid's head. She is as fascinated about it as I am, and I even said something to my wife about it, and I said, "I think it's pretty common, a lot of dads like this stuff." She's like, "No, it's not that common." I'm like, "Oh." [Laughs] So, you know, when I take vacations, I'll, always got to do some of that stuff. I took my dad on a—he'll say it. I mean, again, my dad served. A couple years ago I took him to Chattanooga and also Shiloh, both in Tennessee, and he said it was the best vacation he ever had.

[02:00:00]

I know the battles like the back of my hand, Shiloh especially. Oh my goodness, I've been there a bunch of times and Shiloh is really, really a great place because Wisconsin played a pivotal role in that battle. It was considered the tip of the spear, took the first engagements. They have a, it's called a spot of honor where, their flagbearers have the best—they're buried in the best spot next to the river and stuff. So, taking my dad, along with my daughter—It's one thing to teach students it and then take them on a trip there, but also to share with your own family that you know something that is pretty neat. But I mean, and then Whitewater, you start talking with the people from the history department and at times, I would forget that I was wearing a uniform. You're like, This is—it was kind of a dream come true, to teach the military history, and I remember when Colonel Wollhopper offered me to teach it, I was just like, "Seriously? Really?" Like, "Dude, I'm a supply guy." [Laughs] He goes, "I think you can do it, Tom." I was like, "Okay. What do I got to do?" And you got to do this, you got to do this, these steps, and fill out a thing called a Curriculum Vitae which is a college thing for a resume. I was like, "Okay, let's figure that out."

So yeah, it's so nice knowing the history not only of the army but also the Air Force, and I wished I'd have taken that. That's why I like talking about World War II, is because, you just, and a little bit of World War I. You start dealing with the other branches, with their impact. One for the coolest things, I remember a cadet named Eck. He used to be Marine Corps. I talked about, it's called Belleau Woods, or something like that. And he goes, "I know this. That's where my regiment got their name from." I'm like, "Go ahead, tell the story." I was like, "Wow." It was just so cool to see the, make it. I mean, the spark in their eyes that they're actually finding something of interest in history. Lieutenant now, she's out in Wahoo, she's stationed out there, and she's one of the last people before I left Whitewater, I had taken her on a—we did a trip to Shiloh, and she's like, "Sergeant Fischer, I hated history. I hated it." She goes, "But I don't know what you did, but it was just, you made it interesting and that kind of made it real, and it is so interesting." I know she came in, she hated me, because I pushed her. I think she was a very strong-headed young lady and didn't like to be told she was wrong, and I told her she was wrong, but I did it in a way that, I think, a good professional NCO should do, and I let her say what she had to say and sat down and I didn't just bark orders or anything. I let her fail to some extent, but then I helped her out and that kind of stuff, and Lieutenant Gorse, she actually married Lieutenant Rupegog so. But I took them on a trip to Shiloh and stuff. So yeah, very proud that I was able to at least instill some of that in the younger soldiers. It's nice because you still—my birthday came up last month, and I'm getting bombarded with all these ex-cadets, now lieutenants or captains, and they're saying hi and stuff, and it's pretty neat, so. Makes me feel old, though. [Laughs]

[End of OH 2064.Fischer\_user\_file1] [Beginning of OH 2064.Fischer\_user\_file2]

Gibb: Was there anything about it that was, you know, difficult? You hadn't taught before in that way.

Fischer: I wouldn't say difficult. It was challenging. There are some, just like anything with me, there are some gaps in what I know, and I just—I didn't know about the Mexican American War—The Alamo. When I first started, I thought that it was part of the Mexican War. No, apparently it is not—but the Texas Emancipation. So anything that I really said, "I am really weak in," I would just try to—I'd go to the library, get some videos, and I read books and that kind of stuff to educate myself. But again, I think much earlier, I'm not a guy that can watch TV or play games or something, so I got to the point where I was almost infatuated with doing it, so I made like a little agreement with myself, and I said, "Okay, you're reading too much history books. It's just like, this is stupid, and you put down one." And so I started doing where I said, "Okay, can read a history book, then I got to read a fiction book or something." Some science fiction or some Tom Clancy or something like that, so I started to—Gresham I like—and so I started. Now I do a history book and then I do a fiction book, so just to get my mind away from all the history stuff that I'll do.

But yeah, I just, I like the challenge of it. It's just, I think that's what—if you are teaching that stuff, you owe it to your students to, if you don't know it, you need to learn it, and you expect the same from them, they expect the same from you, so that's all I know. I mean, the same boat here. I was away from supply for a while, and came back in kind of almost like I was starting fresh and I could sit there and say, "Woe is me, I forgot how to do this," but you just teach yourself or you ask the right people. I work with a lot of great troops and they're—you ask the right way, and they're more than willing to help, and I help them as much as I can, too, so it's, it's just what I think you're supposed to do. I mean, if you're afraid to ask for help then I think you have an issue or two. So I just had a situation the other day where a soldier, I was trying to pay a compliment. Person did not take it as a compliment, and like I was basically saying, "You don't know how to do your job," and I'm like, "No, you took it the wrong way." I said, "I'm showing genuine concern about your wellbeing. Spend time"—and the soldier's like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were questioning how good I can do my job." I was trying to take some work off the person's—and I'm like, "No, I'm not saying you're bad at what you do, I just think that the way we could"—I'm a big fan of trying to be more efficient with your time, and so if we can improve a process, let's improve it, and that doesn't mean you're—it's the old work smarter not harder. You gonna work harder, then what's the point? Work smarter. So it was interesting the way that person took it, but we squared it away. [Laughs]

Gibb: And so where you're at today, just looking to the future?

Fischer: So I got four left, and people ask, "Are you gonna go past your twenty years of active service?" I don't know, ask me in a year or two. Again, I do think I set

myself up fairly well for a career or a job beyond the military stuff, and at the time I'll have done a total of thirty-two years of service in general, so it might be good enough for me. I might have to check that box. But every day, the way I see it is if I'm not learning something new, then it's time for me to move on to a different position or something, and that's not the case. Today I was just doing some stuff and I'm like, "I don't know how to do this. Let's make a phone call." And so I'm just trying to be the best I can, and the people that work for me, all the unit supply NCOs, I try to instill in them, "Let's try to be more efficient with our stuff," and I'm gonna try to take work off of their plates. But you got to kind of, you try to influence them in the right way without telling them you want them to be in agreement with you.

**[00:05:00]**

You try to be as influential as you can, and try to teach them, or show them, that the way you want to do it is more efficient and everyone would like—everybody would like ten more minutes of their day, and if you can save five minutes of that by one thing, guess what, you just completed half your goal, and so I mean, it's just trying to do what needs to be done. This is a very unique organization here, more so than any other place I've ever been, because it's got the army band, it's got a chemical unit, it's got the engineers. So it presented some major challenges in terms of the way my mind is used to working in a very, in a certain structure, but that's—you can talk to my boss, Major McDonald. He said that's one reason that he—he came pretty aggressively to get me to come here. [Laughs] That was very weird, the way that took place. I was actually taking a PT test and he wanted me to come up to Madison for an interview and I'm like, "Ha, blah, blah, blah." And kind of said, "I'm about to take my PT test." "Oh, maybe we can do something tomorrow." I'm like, "Oh, I got something going on," and he called me between my push-ups and sit-ups and basically had an interview, then he called me between my sit-ups and my run, and offered me the job. Like, I'm like—"Don't you want to meet me?" But a couple of the people I've worked for at Whitewater put in a good word for me and I appreciate, I very much appreciate, the kind words they put in. That I would work well in a very diverse type environment. And so, until I figured this job out 100 percent, I'm gonna keep doing what I do and then when I figure that out, I'll look for something else, but that's not happened yet, so.

Gibb: I don't really—I have a few, little bits and questions, but if there's anything else that you sort of feel we didn't cover that—

Fischer: No, that's pretty much, that's it in a nutshell, I think. Big nutshell. [Laughs]

Gibb: I'm curious to know what was your interest in doing the interview. I know you said you had, you brought things into the collection of the museum.

Fischer: Well, first of all, I think you guys are doing a great job at the Vet's Museum. I've talked to quite a few folks, and for example, every year I always took a field trip up to, with the cadets, up to Madison. We did a tour of the capitol. We also then walked across the street to the museum, and so I know you guys are doing amazing things. If you guys, the look on some of the faces I've seen when I've told—I mentioned earlier about the young man who died in Vicksburg from the, Civil War kid, and I mean, if we can't talk about experiences, obviously I'm a little bit of a fan of history, so if you're gonna ask me to sit down for a little while and discuss—if you talk to anybody who does history, they don't know what history is, and so, this is history, okay. If it's not, okay. But I love, like I mentioned earlier, I love the whole vignette stories and that kind of stuff, that I would try to bring to the classroom, and if I make an eight second sound bite of some goofy vignette story, then I'll sleep better at night knowing that. I want to say, drop the mic? Mic drop? [Laughs]

Gibb: If there's anything you're particularly proud of in your service, or if there's anything that just, you would want someone else who was listening to this to know about you and your experiences, and the part that you've played.

Fischer: I think it's already been discussed. I always try to influence the younger troops, and I said this to mine own kids and I tell my younger troops that, I don't know, maybe it's a societal thing. I don't know when high expectations became a bad thing, and I have high expectations for my own children. I also had very high expectations for all the younger troops that I've worked with, and you know, is there any legitimate reason why I should have gotten a master's degree? It has zero benefit in terms of where I would be, promotion points, or anything like that.

**[00:10:00]**

So, why would I do it? It's just that I think you want to continue to make yourself a better person, more diverse, more marketable, if you want to go on the civilian side. Why do I look at a word of the day calendar? I want to expand my vocabulary, and I remember sitting, I was doing some tactics out at Fort Lewis with some cadets, and I remember one of the cadets, we're sitting around just chilling, waiting for the next mission to start and one of the cadets said something to me like, "Sergeant Fischer, do you have like a degree?" And, what? "You don't talk like a lot of the people and stuff. You don't act the way a lot of my NCOs and that kind of stuff, that I normally work"—I said, "Yes, I have a degree." I told him, I said, "I have an undergraduate degree," and they're all like, "You have a master's degree? So you're like, smart." I said, "No, I'm not smart. I'm persistent, I'm resilient, I'm assertive. I'm goal-oriented, and that kind of stuff."

A couple years ago, I was able to attend the master resiliency course, and I teach resiliency here. I taught it quite a bit at Whitewater, and I mean, you can kind of accomplish a lot of things if you just set your mind to it and do it, and it's not

rocket science. I'm no smarter than most folks out there, but if I want to do something, I'm gonna do it. Just, I don't know. I don't know when high expectations became a bad thing, and so that's the approach I try to bring to the table. I can safely say, bigger picture, framework, is so many of the folks that I work with, I've worked with over the years, are in complete and on the same page, of the agreement. They are always looking for the next course to attend, to improve their skillset. To make themselves a more diverse educated person. I've told a lot of folks—especially counterparts, years ago—that if you are not seeking to improve yourself, you're just gonna get by the wayside, and you have to continue to seek that, and whether I love, [inaudible] personal life, I love, I want to know why I didn't catch that one fish, I'm gonna try to fix that, and I love to travel, so if I'm gonna go to Italy I'm going to learn some of the language, and it's just—that's the way I think you should, makes you happy. So, I don't know, that's that.

Gibb: Okay. Something else?

Fischer: Not that I'm aware of.

Gibb: I'm going to turn this off, then.

Fischer: Okay.

**[End of OH 2064.Fischer\_user\_file2] [End of interview]**