Preface

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Eugene, Oregon
Interview Duration: 1 hour, 30 minutes, and 43 seconds
Interviewee: Kevin Wiles (KW)
Interviewer: Brandon Parry (BP) and Andrew Koch (AK)

AK: Alright and we're rolling.

BP: Okay, so present at the interview is interviewer Brandon Parry.

AK: Andrew Koch.

BP: And we are interviewing, can you state your name.

KW: Kevin Wiles.

BP: So, just to get started, for the record can you state your the rank at which you retired and which branch you served in.

KW: I didn't retire but I served in the United States Navy. I was a machinist's mate first class, submarine qualified. I was an E-6 which is about midway in the mid, a little bit above midway in the enlisted rank.

BP: Just a little bit of background before we get to your military service, where are you from?

KW: I'm from Sealah, Washington.

BP: And what age were you when you joined the military?

KW: I was 17 years old.

BP: 17 years old. And what year is this?

KW: 1986.

AK: What led you to start talking to the recruiters?

KW: The first picture of me is dressed in a small sailor outfit when I was approximately a month old and that's been kind of assumed that from that point on that I would be in the military. I didn't have a lot of options. My family was very poor so we didn't, uhm, college was never even spoken of in my house let alone even having an idea of how to apply and so the military was just an assumption that that is what I would be doing.

BP: Did you come from a military family?

KW: My father was in the Navy. He was aircrew as well. He was an aircrew captain of a plane in Vietnam. And my uncle was in the Air Force and he was a military policeman. His son, my cousin, was

in the Navy and he did something... And my grandfather was in an Airborne and he went in in the Battle of the Bulge. And so there's various other folks in the family that were in the military as well.

AK: Is there any reason why you picked the Navy specifically?

KW: I didn't like sleeping on the ground. Uhm... I really wasn't interested in flying around a lot and I just thought it sounded spectacular to go out and see the world and it was also I mean the best thing I did was look at future career goals. And while I didn't actually have any goals I recognized the Navy with the technical training would probably give me the best options when I got out.

AK: So for a lot of people their first taste of what military life is like for themselves is MEPS. Which is the, I think it stands for Military Entrance Processing Station? Do you remember going to MEPS? Is there anything about that experience you remember?

KW: I went to MEPS twice. I went the first time, I was driven up there by my recruiter and it was very quick. We drove up in the morning and drove back that night so there was a whole lot of standing in line, people being fairly decent to you and being poked by needles and so on like that, medical exams. I don't remember the second one because we sort of got a little drunk. And I don't remember much about anything in my first two days in the Navy to tell you the truth. Something about standing in line with a bunch of folks and taking an oath and then a little bit about an airplane ride and then I was in Orlando, Florida. And something about a hotel and the security I can neither confirm nor deny anything happened there.

[Group Laughter]

KW: And it was quite a weekend

AK: So do you remember when you were in boot camp those first few weeks or... so when I went through it was called P-Days. Do you have a favorite P-Days experience?

KW: I was one of the tallest people. So therefore I was singled out immediately as being a leader and I'm not sure why they picked leadership and size but I guess that works. I ended up being what they called an RPOC, Recruit Chief Petty Officer, I managed to hold on to that for most of boot camp. I only got fired twice and then got rehired later that day. I do remember it was a very challenging time because I had lived all of my life actually in central Washington. I could remember I had only been to Seattle a few times, Spokane a couple times, Portland once, and various places around central Washington. I had only talked to one African-American person and she was a quarter African-American and so I had absolutely no idea what to do when I got to boot camp because ... I got myself in so much trouble I had no idea what to do. And I was completely culturally unaware of how to handle boot camp because of the melting pot. I had grown up with many Hispanics as being very close friends of mine. That was the problem but I was at a total loss for the other ethnic groups that were present in boot camp. And the striations that were there were readily apparent at that point. This was still in the mid-80s and the race card was very prevalent in the military at that point still. So that part of boot camp was particularly challenging. That and the fact that I managed to do more pushups than I thought humanly possible because I was the guy with the anchors on my collar.

BP: So you mentioned already a couple of the struggles from boot camp. Do you have any particularly funny stories from boot camp or any fond memories from boot camp that you want to tell?

KW: Ohhhhh .... Fond memories? I took up smoking in boot camp and since I really enjoyed smoking that was kind of a fond memory although it's not one that I care to repeat anymore. Strangely enough I really enjoyed it. And I think I enjoyed it more because I knew that it would piss my dad off to no end because he had taken up smoking in the Navy and had given it up and didn't want me to start and I knew it would just totally twerk him. Did I say twerk?!!?? I totally did. Oh my God ...

[Group Laughter]

KW: Anyway ... Other times I, I made some really good friends in boot camp. I am not in contact with any of them anymore. We went our ways a few years after boot camp but I made some great friends, had a great time. We were a pretty good company and I actually got to the point where I think me CC actually liked me.

BP: Civilian question. What's a CC?

KW: Company Commander. So one of the guys who was in charge of making us who we were.

AK: Those were like drill instructors. We called mine RDCs, Recruit Division Commanders. So, my boot camp was in Great Lakes from December to February.

KW: That sucks.

AK: Yeah ... Pretty much the exact opposite of what I would imagine of Orlando, Florida in the summer. How were things like the heat and the humidity in the land of Mickey Mouse?

KW: I never recuperated from that. I went from dry, not knowing what humidity was, to Orlando, Florida overnight and my body went through a change that has still not recovered. I still sweat. Instantly when I walk into a humid environment it's ridiculous. I have no control over it, it's kinda like a hobby, it's what I do. All of my white uniforms had a yellow stain that would not go away and I was just too freaking stubborn to buy a new one because I was like: “It's not my fault. You bastards put me in this.” I enjoyed Florida what little I saw of it. I didn't see any of it once I started my second school there because that was a tough one. But I spent spring break in Daytona and Cocoa Beach and a few other places in between that I can't really recall. But I did have fun there. It was good times. I had been to bike week. I have no desire to go again. I have no desire to actually go back to Florida again. I have gone to the South or, as my daughter calls it, the "Dirty South." Twice since boot camp I went to South Carolina. And that's it. I have no intentions of ever going again if I can possibly help it.

AK: So you touched on going to a second school in Orlando? Would you like to talk us through your pipeline, what your "A" school/"C" school was like?

KW: For some reason I was deemed one of the smart ones so I was chosen for nuclear power school where I went to A school which taught me how to be what is called a machinist's mate which basically is a mechanic, a high-end mechanic operating the ship systems, the power plant systems, the water, air, hydraulic, some electrical, steam, and so on. That was a three-month school and it was a brand new school that they just opened up in Orlando. I was the fourteenth class to go, through if I remember correctly, 86-14. Then I went to nuclear power school, which was a six-month journey through hell, particularly because I wasn't terribly book smart oriented. I did beautifully on hands-on things but when it came to books I had the brains for it I just could not put what was on that page into my head. I remember my first heat transfer fluid theory test. I couldn't remember the stupid formula they had,

Bernoulli's equation, I still remember what it is, but it's some god-awful long thing so I made my own equation and it actually worked. Yeah ... I made my own theorem to prove Bernoulli's and that's kinda how my mind works. I can do that. I suck at math but I can do statistics and physics so it worked out beautifully. And of course I failed the test because I didn't use Bernoulli's equation even though I got the right answer. So that was pretty much hell for me, six months. Nuke school, they rated the schools across the nation, nuke school is rated in terms of difficulty and stress and we were just under MIT Engineering grad school. We were number two in the nation for stress and difficulty. MIT grad school engineering and right about Harvard Law. So, that's where we sat. We went through basic math through reactor design physics in six months. So that gives you an idea of basic math through calculus and reactor design physics in six months. We went through basic chemistry to advanced water chemistry, all this concurrently in six months. We went through metallurgy. [Laughs] Technically it was only about sixty credits but in reality it was far, far more.

AK: And here my "A" school was two weeks long ...

KW: So I had nine months worth of training and I ended up after that I wanted to get back to the Northwest so after squeaking by in nuke school, well I didn't squeaking by, I passed with enough that I made it through, I went to prototype, which was, thank God, out of Orlando. And it was up in Idaho Falls, Idaho which was it's own version of, I mean ... You couldn't have had two more distinctly different places. Idaho Falls was a training facility that was in the middle of the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, which is a moonscape of fields of lava beds and it was in the middle of fucking nowhere and I mean the middle of nowhere. It was an hour and a half ride on a bus everyday to the site. And an hour and a half back. And that was another six-month journey, which was actually a really pleasant one because I got to operate a nuclear reactor plant. And so that was cool. I qualified on that two months early and after being injured and out of commissioned for two weeks, I still came back and qualified two months faster than most of my other compadres. Now the only quirk to that whole thing is, one, we were in Idaho and, two, I found some sort of calling to get married. Between nuke school and prototype and so I was hauling my eighteen year-old wife and myself out to Idaho. That was the second stupidest thing I have ever done in my life. The first one was that weekend at MEPS we talked about.

[Group Laughter]

KW: That wasn't very smart either. But getting married was not a good call at that age and then at that stress level and she had nothing to do in Idaho. So that lasted for a while. So that was my training pipeline. I should clarify that. That was six months. I finished prototype and I was considered trained as a nuclear mechanic, nuclear machinist's mate. I was sent off to the operational Navy.

BP: You're in the middle of nowhere, Idaho. How did you fill your free time?

KW: There was very little free time actually because I spent most of my time on the site because it was three hours drive, just there. We were working ten to twelve hour shifts so, you know, it'd be fifteen hours a day I'd be spending just at work. We were in rotating shift works, it would be four on – two off; that sort of thing. We didn't have much free time. When we did I was pretty wiped out.

AK: Were you in a barracks?

KW: No, we lived in the basement of some people's house. I was married and there weren't any barracks anyways. It was all live in town. Which was fun, our first place, first experience with rent, and all that.

AK: That beats most barracks experience people have these days.

KW: Yeah, it did. It beat it. But there's not much barracks experience either in some places like that. There's just no facilities. I mean we had a small Navy clinic that we could go to and take care of our medical and our spouses could go and take care of medical but beyond that there were just no real facilities.

AK: So you said that they selected you for nuke. That wasn't a rating that was assigned to you at MEPS? How did you link up with that?

KW: I did well enough on the ASVAB that I was ... the Navy nukes are academically-wise the top 1% of the Navy when it comes to whatever brains they say you have. That may or may not mean anything because it takes a whole lot more than academics. You have to be smart enough on the ASVAB to get in and then you've gotta have both the brains and the practicality that goes with it. And that's where a lot of guys actually failed out. The academics are just too much for them or they got through it just fine and discovered they couldn't turn a valve without hurting themselves. I happen to have a good mix of the two and so it worked out well. Worked out well.

BP: You ended the last story with the beginning of your experience with the operational Navy. Where did you first get sent to?

KW: I was sent to the USS Florida, Gold Crew. Which is a Trident ballistic, at the time, was a Trident ballistic submarine: SSBN 728. Which is still around and is actually celebrity nowadays. As you probably found out if you did your research.

AK: Yeah, I think they fired something like seventy some-odd Trident missiles during the whole Gaddafi incident.

KW: I hope they weren't Trident though. The Trident would have been the big boys. That would have been the thirty-foot intercontinental ballistic missiles. If you would have said, guided missile, like a Tomahawk or something like, then I would be more inclined to go with that. The submarine is actually in *Act of Valor*. *Act of Valor*, yep! That's the submarine.

AK: So they have the SEALs drydock?

KW: Now they are a SEALs Delivery Vehicle[1] and my submarine was converted to a guided missile launch platform with SEALs Delivery Vehicle and it was in *Act of Valor* so it's still around and kicking. So I can say somewhere my initials and some very inappropriate things on the boat are still there. Because they're not in a place anybody would ever find them.

[Group Laughter]

AK: So they didn't have a sub school when you went through?

[1] SEAL Delivery Vehicle: a manned submersible used to deliver US Navy SEALs [ed.].

KW: Nukes didn't go to sub school. Everybody else went to sub school, nukes did not. They figured we would pick it up when we got there because we went to prototype and they trained us in some damage control. Sub school is basically where you go and you learn how to do damage control and you learn a little bit about submarines and they kinda weed out the people that might go a little nuts onboard a submarine. Which there were a few, they missed a few. We learned a lot of that at the prototype that I went to. The prototype was actually, they built an engine room in a ... it was like going into a submarine hull. A very old one but it was very much like being in one.

AK: So you said you were Gold Crew. I don't know too much about how, I know they do a Blue Crew/Gold Crew. Does that mean you had your own skipper, you had your own COB [Chief of Boat], you didn't have CMCs [Commander Master Chief], you had COBs.

KW: Yep, we had one ship – two crews. And so we would come in and we would mix and meld. When the boat came back from patrol the crew would turn over to the oncoming crew and then we would get to work and they paint, which is where a lot of that stuff came from – all those inappropriate things and my name signed all over the boat. And then they would go out to sea. We would go out to sea and be gone for ... I don't know what their rotations are now and I don't know how they do the crews now but we would be gone anywhere from forty to my case eight-nine and a half days because they didn't want to give me a Sea Service Ribbon so I missed it by twelve hours. I was pissed. But ... that's a whole 'nother politics behind that. Tridents didn't Sea Service Ribbons. It was just a politics game because then the fast attack submarines got Sea Service Ribbons and we can't have a ballistics ... A whole lot of things, it would take a whole another hour to explain the difference between the two worlds. Just trust me, politics. So anywhere from the shortest patrol was somewhere in the neighborhood was forty-five to fifty and the longest were about ninety days. Most of them were in the seventy-five, eighty range.

AK: And these were your deployments? Or separate from deployments?

KW: These were deployments. We would be out doing what we called punching holes in the ocean. Making holes. And we would be primarily in the Pacific the entire time and the water was usually quite cold where we were. Occasionally it would get warmer.

AK: How did you like the command structure being on a submarine?

KW: It was fine. Everybody knew everybody. The submarine community idyllic in that I knew everything about everybody onboard. There weren't any secrets. If there were we figured them out, hashed them out, got 'em out. Made it all go away. It was very close knit. And it was high expectations. Very high expectations. Now that goes throughout the Navy in any unit. The submarine has it unique that not only are we out in the middle of nowhere and can't really ask for help but we are underwater in the middle of nowhere and we can't really ask for help. So our main goal was keeping water out of what we called the people tank. We like the people tank to be full of air, not water. So we had that added benefit. Things had a heightened sense of urgency: if something went wrong it needed to be fixed and hour ago not an hour from now. That is that way on surface ships as well, don't get me wrong, or on aircraft. Aircraft particularly you might have a very similar thought process there at thirty thousand feet we need to fix it pretty quickly or otherwise things can ...

AK: You can't pull over and change a tire.

KW: No ... it kinda sucks And there are no windows on a submarine by the way. If there is, we just don't put them up and leave the screens shut. That's a joke. Everybody always asks me, I can't tell you how many times: "Do you guys have windows on the submarine?" "Well, yeah, work great until we opened it and forgot to keep the screen shut. Fish get in."

AK: How did you guys do sunlight?

KW: What sunlight?

AK: Exactly! How do they combat vitamin D deficiency?

KW: By having lots of fluorescent lights, I guess.

AK: You never felt odd not seeing the sun?

KW: I felt white. Very white. It's quite interesting because even the African American/Latino folks would actually lose a shade of darkness. [Laughs] Because you still tan even with dark skin, you still tan, you still have the pigments, you know, the change, and it was quite interesting because I remember I guy, he was an African-American guy and he was a cowboy and he loved riding horses and he was always out in the sun, by the time we got off that ship he looked more like Latino than an African-American. He was pissed [Laughs]. He was not happy! He hated going to sea because of that. And that was part of it. There was no race onboard a sub. On surface ships, my understanding is, they would often have a great deal of striation with that. There's not onboard a sub. You are the person next to me and if I can count on you then you're my brother. And if that person count on me then I'm their brother. And if I can't count on you I'm going to do everything I can to make sure you do not come with me next time. And that's kinda the way it worked.

BP: I was wondering, so you go on these eighty-nine and a half day trips on board of a submarine, is it the same people most times?

KW: Where would we go? You mean on each trip?

BP: Yeah.

KW: There was some change, I thought you were saying throughout the eighty-nine days.

BP: No! no! no! No!

KW: Well, we could throw some out the torpedo tube I guess? Well, we would have some change out. We would get a mix generally of more senior folks and then some more junior folks as well each patrol.

AK: So you said you're submersible warfare qualified?

KW: Submarine. Submarine qualified. Submersible is a different ball game.

AK: Like the SDV [SEAL Delivery Vehicle]?

KW: Yeah, SDV would be a submersible.

AK: Can you talk about getting your dolphins?

KW: Getting my dolphins? Here, hold that. I'm going to stoke a fire.

[audio paused to stoke a fire]

KW: There we go.

AK: Getting your dolphins.

KW: Dolphins. Getting qualified. My first day checking aboard I was a NUB, which is a "non-useful body." It's an acronym. The Navy is full of acronyms, so that's one. I was not a popular NUB because I was kind of a little whiney and a little bitchy and a little bit ... I thought too much. So it made perfect sense that if I did things a certain way that would work out but I had to be brought back into line. I was one of those guys. And most nukes are actually that way because we're ... we're nukes for a reason. We're nukes because we have a brain and we don't necessarily fall into ... there's a lot of things that we have to think and act outside the box and we have to come up with a brain new plan right now because we have a certain many things that there are procedures for. And we have those initial procedures for and once we do those ten items, if something goes wrong, we have to come up with a brand new plan out of the box and it can be any one of hundreds. Literally hundreds of scenarios. And you've gotta be prepared for all of them. That's one of the reasons why the nuke process was the way it was. It weeded out the folks that couldn't do that. And so we always had a different way of doing things and that wasn't quite, quite welcome [Laughs] when you're a NUB.

The submarine qual card was a small, about a five by six laminate covered book with two hundred and fifty six points worth in this thing. Now major checkouts, what we called them, were worth about five points. Most were worth between one and three and there were approximately a hundred points worth of major checkouts and end quals and the other hundred and fifty six points were ones, twos, and threes, so that should tell you how many points were on this thing. Dear God ... And there were certain people on board the boat that could do it so for example if we were to have a qual card for the house we were sitting in we would have a piece of paper and the first thing on it might say: "Explain the function and operation of the fireplace." At which point I would expect for you to be able to tell me about the electrical system, be able to draw me the electrical circuit that operates both fans, you would be able to tell me about how to turn the power off of it from the two different locations that you can do that, three actually locations that you can do that, you would be able to tell me the control switch, all the different speeds, the functions of those fans, when each speed was used, what is the heat transfer ratio of the fireplace, for example when you're using wet wood versus dry wood, what happens if you don't have the flue all the way open, what happens if the atmospheric pressure changes outside, and we're inside the house, what if you don't have a window open inside the house, explain to me the emergency procedures such as if the flue flops shut or if the smoke starts coming in, or if the ash gets too ... that's what I mean by checkout. You are going absolutely in depth to every system on the boat. Every system. Every. Single. System. On the boat. And considering that there are thousands upon thousands of miles piping and thousands of miles of electrical wiring and literally dozens of systems on the boat it was a fun time. The average person got it done in about a year? Nine months or so ... because it would take two runs. You are expected to have it done in two runs or two patrols. And that would be just one. So that fireplace could take you an hour/hour and a half. That might be a three-point checkout. Or it might just be a one point, whereas the operation of all the kitchen appliances could be a three point because there are several different systems that are interacting in that. Does that make sense? So on an airplane you would have landing, the landing gear, and that would include the controls, and all the mechanics,

and all the hydraulics, and the air actuators, and whatever else you had on those. You know? And in this case it could be the operation of the microwave, which is not just how to punch in the buttons but tell me all the safety features on a microwave? What happens when you actually take the element out and you know, that type of thing.

AK: So you're doing this while you're getting qualified in your nuke watches additionally?

KW: Absolutely. And by the way the whole boat knew if you got behind. They had a denq list, delinquent, it's another freakin' acronym. It was posted every week so the entire boat knew who was on top of it and who wasn't. And you would get kicked out of the movie lounge, for example, if you were on the denq list and you would be resoundly booted out. And it was everybody on board knew your biz, it just wasn't the people you worked with directly. And at the same time, you know, you were a decent human being and you worked hard, people would help you out and say: "Hey how are you doing on your points this week? What do you need?" "I need three and I'm working real hard." And the guy would say: "Meet me on my watch." So he'd take you and walk you through the entire system and then you wouldn't get a sign off just because of that. You would still have to go and walk back through it but if you did they would sign it off for you. I got to the point were I could sign two thirds of it. Two thirds of that book off by the time I left after eight runs. I could sign off just about everything except radio, because I had no desire to, and the missile systems. The specialized systems like that I didn't sign off because I, well one: I didn't want to. But everything else, all the general systems of the submarine from the bow to the stern I could sign off. And that's a lot of power actually because everyone on board that comes on board has to do that with the exception of the CO [Commanding Officer], XO [Executive Officer], and the Department Heads. They don't have to but every other person, every officer, every enlisted person. Chief. Didn't matter. They all had to go through it and they all had to come find you and you could rake them over the coals. That was the one time where if they outranked you, you were still respectful about it, but you'd rip them a new asshole if they didn't know their stuff.

AK: That was probably fun.

KW: It was fun because they knew that I was training them to be my leader. And so therefore I was training them and that's probably one of the most important pieces about it. I don't know how the surface Navy does it. Clair can speak more to that. She has her surface [Surface Warfare Device] pins. But I needed those people, khakis, we called them, chiefs and officers, I needed them to be at least as good as I was and expected them to be better. Because some of them had the past experience and we would go from there. Because I needed to be able to know they could trust me and that I could trust them.

AK: Alright, let's talk about a fun one. Are you a Shellback?

KW: No. I am not a Shellback. I never crossed the equator.

AK: Blue Nose? Any of that stuff?

KW: No. Never crossed the Arctic Circle either. I was on the Trident. We didn't do anything. It was disgusting. I was close. Real close to being a Blue Nose. Real close. But not.

AK: If it makes you feel any better I've crossed both and they didn't give it to me so.

KW: Really? That sucks. Honey, can we do something about that?

CW: Hmmm ...

KW: She's a Shellback.

AK: That means we would all have to dress in drag. And we'd have a court. We take over the house. She would be King Neptune. We haze her and then she hazes the hell out of us.

KW: Like you wouldn't even want to go there. Nope. Lard exists. Lard is a very real thing. No, I didn't have any fun with that. I did go to Hawaii twice. I was in Long Beach a couple times. That's all we really pulled in. I mean our job was to go out and disappear. The ballistic missile submarine was a deterrent. Which meant that somewhere out in the ocean we were ... somewhere. And even our own command structure didn't know where we were. I mean on the sub we knew where we were but our command structure on shore. We were given a block, a certain square mileage of ocean and on a certain day and a certain time we were to be in that block. Somewhere. And we had a lot of leeway on where and how we got there but as long as we were there when we were supposed to be there that was all that was expected. Nobody knew where we were. And we were very quiet. Which means that the noise that you hear from an outboard motor, I mean, this is a 560 foot long submarine with a 175 megawatt nuclear reactor that's producing, Jesus, nineteen-thousand shaft horsepower or something like that, hundred and ninety thous ... It's a huge amount. It's been too many years to remember that. I mean, we could do upwards of thirty-plus knots underwater. And we were making noise that was similar to a big school of shrimp. Maybe. They may make more noise than we would.

BP: I'm curious to go back to your first time on a submarine. What was that like? Being submerged in water, in a dark place for that long, for the first time.

KW: Some idiot said, "Ohhh. We're underway on nuclear power." Which were the first words ever put out by a nuclear submarine. It was like the, "One small step for mankind." Somebody thought that months and months ahead of time. He looked at me and said, "Underway on nuclear power." I just looked at him and was like, "God ... I'm gonna watch you. You're an idiot. I'm new but you're an idiot."

[Group Laughter]

KW: Turned out I ended up liking the guy. He died of stomach cancer several years ago. I'm really kinda bummed. Uhm, by the time you figure out that you've been underway for three days and you're under water. Under water is like ... I'm under water. By then the drills start and then the training starts and then the shakedown starts. By the time that gets over with, you've been underway for three days and you realize: that hatch has been closed for three days and I'm in the middle of nowhere already. "Okay. We're here." That's it. That's really all there was to it. We did some cool things. Every patrol we would do angles and dangles, so we, the captain would decide we would see if anything was not stowed for sea which means it was not tied down. So we'd put a forty-five degree or more up angle on the boat. Or forty-five degree or more down angle on the boat and away we'd go. Anything that was not tied down would start sliding 'cause if you've ever tried to walk up a forty-five degree slope, you can imagine what it's like. It's pretty amazing.

AK: Did you ever get to do an emergency surface or anything like that?

KW: Absolutely. I've done emergency surfaces for training. I've done emergency surfaces for things I really rather not talk about. But yes, I've done them both.

AK: Well maybe not the latter but the former sounds like it would be a lot of fun. It's pretty cool to see the videos.

KW: Oh yeah. The emergency blows. As long as the equation, the equation is very simple: the number of surfaces must equal or exceed the number of dives on a submarine. As long as you keep that equation, it's very simple. It's kind like an airplane. The number of successful landings must equal or exceed the number of successful takeoffs.

AK: And any landing's a good landing.

KW: And any landing's a good landing. Well, landing is the key here.

AK: So it is true then that you guys all grow out beards and wear tennis shoes while you're underway?

KW: Yep. It's true. I also had a mohawk for a little while. That was kinda cool. Shaved my head. I looked like that after a while if I didn't shave. Yeah, yep. Tennis shoes, poopie suits, beards, the whole shabang. We pretty much would do whatever we needed to. The mohawks were a little more frowned on but there was a picture of me floating around somewhere. I have no idea where it is now. Of me in a mohawk.

AK: What about hot racking? Did you have to do any of that?

KW: Didn't have to do any hot racking. On the Trident it's big enough that very seldom, very, very seldom, we would have to hot rack. Generally if we had riders, people who came on board for special functions, whatever the case is, contractors, or Admiral's staff or something like that. Maybe we would hot rack.

BP: What's hot racking?

KW: You would share a rack with anywhere from two-to-three other people. So it was essentially always warm when you got into it, which is a really, really ... the one time I had to do it was just a couple of days and it was just nasty. You know everything about the guy who just got out of it and you're like, "Oh, man, that ain't right."

AK: I also heard when you guys go deep enough you guys can start to see, is it true that the hull kinda flexes a little bit.

KW: Yeah, did you ever see *Down Periscope*? That is absolutely true. Not so much on the big boats as on that boat. On the small boats it's really apparent. On the big boats you can still stretch a string across and it'd and ... [makes clicking sound] it'd get loose. Very interesting. Makes all sorts of, it does make some popping noises. A few. Not like in that movie but again that was a smaller boat. That's very true.

AK: How would you communicate with shore while you were underway?

KW: We had a few ways. We had a wire, which was strung out behind us, which operated on ELF, which is an extra-long frequency. This wire was very long, like a mile long, type of wire. ELF, if you look that up, there's an antenna buried in the granite bedrocks somewhere up in the Northeastern part of the United States that is a very long antenna. Several miles. And it would send a signal out through this,

it would actually go through the bedrock of the Earth and then it would be veeerrry slow. It might take minutes just to get a word or two through because it would be extremely, a wavelength, sixty Hertz wavelength is very fast, and this could be something like, might be the length of this house. One wavelength where as a sixty Hertz wavelength, you know, you could fit a million of them in between the length of this house.

AK: So you're not making any ship to shore calls or anything like that.

KW: No. We're not. We did have the ability to do so. We did have some, *some* communication ability. We had some buoys that we could float up. We could have a satellite call if we needed to and we had a couple other antennas that could go up if we're up near the surface that we could, *could* if we had to make a long-distance radio transmission. But we weren't doing that on a regular basis. Well, we were receiving. We weren't sending. We could receive all sorts of stuff. We received stuff every day all the time because the buoys that were floated or that long wire but we weren't sending things.

AK: So once you go under you are cut off from the world. Your personal life stops.

KW: Yep. We would get things called family grams where somebody back home was given, I think, ten of these things and so you could get a little over one a week. No, one every two weeks. Something like that. Anyways, it was fifty words. They could write whatever they wanted to in fifty words or less but you couldn't send anything out. I was married for my entire time on the boat to that woman and she never got ...

[interview pauses to tend fire]

KW: She never heard from me when I was out. Ever.

BP: I'm curious, so you go on these eighty-nine and a half day excursions, what's the interval of time in between your trips?

KW: Usually equal. Anywhere between forty-five to whatever days, however long the other crew's mission was. They would come back in and then we would take over the boat. There would be about three a three week upkeep period and then we would be back out at sea again and we would came back in and there would be a three week upkeep period and they would be back out at sea again.

BP: So what is the daily routine when you're not on the boat?

KW: Uhm, it's eighteen-hour days for the operators. We still operated on a twenty-four hour day ... [more fireplace interaction]

AK: That's why you're a fireplace qualifier and we're fireplace NUBs.

KW: You're fireplace NUBs. Absolutely.

[Group Laughter]

KW: Let's say your day started at six o'clock in the morning, you got up at five, you eat breakfast, you relieved in the back of the engine room and relieved whatever watch station you were relieving at five-thirty and they went and ate breakfast and at six o'clock or six-thirty drills would start. Drills are

simulated things that go wrong - training and so on. Training, maintenance, whatever the case. So at eleven-thirty you'd be relieved by the next section that came on and you would go eat and the afternoon would start and that would be drills, training, whatever it was. And you would have usually the evening free and then you could either sleep or you could watch movies. Most of us slept in that case because you would come on at midnight. So your day starts at six in the morning, eighteen hours later you're back on watch again and then you're midnight to six-thirty and guess what? You're up all day and you're back on watch again twelve hours later. After you get off you're back in watch again without any sleep and then you're on until midnight so you get six hours sleep and then the whole cycle starts again.

AK: What was the advantage to that? Why doctor the clock?

KW: You have a lot of really tired people. [Laughs] That's about the only advantage. It was called three sections so it minimized the amount of folks you had to have on board. Very seldom were we in four sections where it was a twenty-four hour rotation. Sometimes we're in two sections which is called port and starboard and that was your six on/six off. And I've done that for weeks at a time. That's really rough to do that. Hi Mr. Buttons [cat].

AK: How was the food?

KW: The food was outstanding. It was outstanding because it was a well known fact we would launch a cook out the torpedo tube if the good sucked. So the food was always good. Very good. Fresh bread every day. They baked every day. The fresh vegetables. The fresh milk. Much like any other ship, only lasted a couple of weeks. And then after that it was all canned or frozen but they still created miracles. I don't know how they did it. They had pizza every Friday night. It was fantastic.

AK: That's funny because shore galleys are usually pretty bad.

KW: Yeah, they suck. All the best food I've had ...

BP: Sounds like they send the best cooks to the submarines.

KW: Yep, all the best cooks are on the submarines. The White House chefs are Navy cooks. A lot of them were submarine. It was great food. We had surf and turf a couple times a month. Gained a lot of weight on the sub out at sea.

AK: What kind of gym facilities did you have on there?

KW: We usually had a treadmill, an exercise bike, and some weights.

BP: Like free weights?

KW: Well, we had a weight set sometimes. Free weights are kinda dangerous on a ship because you do rock and roll back and forth when you go up to the surface. That kinda sucks. So we didn't have too many weights but we did have pull up bars and a treadmill and a bicycle. Stationary bike.

AK: You guys all, uhm, screwheads?

KW: Bubbleheads.

AK: Bubbleheads. How did you guys view other aspects the Navy? Surface?

KW: Oh! It was very simple. They were targets. That was it. If you've done any kind of research on it, you're bound to see the picture of a surface ship through a periscope. You know, with a little crosshairs on it. They were all targets. Even the P-3s[2] couldn't find us. Sorry guys. [Laughs]

AK: It's true. Many wasted weekends on submarines.

KW: Yep. Many, many wasted weekends. We've come into port with a broom attached to our periscope more times than I'd care to say. Which is indicative of what's called a clean sleep when we'd go out and do war games. We would stalk us, a 560 foot submarine would stalk a ship and they wouldn't have any idea we were there until we got on an underwater sound powered phone and called them and say: "You're Dead! Here's your coordinates."

[Group Laughter]

KW: And they would say: "Crap. Where the hell did you guys come from?" And if you do that enough times during war games, you do it on each of your targets you're supposed to hit, it's called a clean sweep and you come in with a broom lashed to your periscope. And every single time. That's a sweep.

AK: How much interaction did you have with P-3s or, did they have MH-53s[3] when you were in?

KW: Not that I remember. I mean I don't know that much about them because we didn't have any interaction. I've participated on board the ship. My submarine participated in several searches for P-3s. I was in one when two collided off of San Diego. I was transiting and we high-tailed it back to the operational area and we were there five days just going around on the surface looking for anything we could find and we didn't find anything. I've done that off of Hawaii. I've done that off of Washington and off of San Diego. Looking for pieces. I know what the sonar buoy sound like from the other way. I know exactly what they sound like when they go in the water.

AK: That's really funny to me.

KW: Uh huh [Laughs]. I know what one looks like in the periscope. I've spotted them in the periscope.

AK: I know what they look like before you put them in the plane. A big plastic tube.

KW: I know what they sound like underwater. They sound like: "WWWwwwwAAAAaaaahhhh-Nahmp. WWWwwwwAAAAaaaahhhh-Narhmp." They're not the: "PIIIIiiiiiinnnnnnnng. PIIIIiiiiiinnnnnnnng." It's a totally different sound than that. It was pretty cool. It was a pretty cool life on that. What do you have [directed towards BP]?

[KW begins eliciting questions from the interviewing team]

BP: Question wise? I'm just rolling with the punches. You guys seem to have a nice little dialogue. Okay, this is a simple question. How long were you on these rotations of ninety, eighty-nine and a half days one or off? How many years was that?

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[2] Lockheed P-3 Orion, a maritime surveillance aircraft.
[3] Sikorsky MH-53, a search and rescue helicopter.

KW: I was on the submarine from Marching 1988 to October 1992. So almost five years. Four and a half years.

BP: That's my question.

KW: Yeah ... that's a question.

[Group Laughter]

AK: So forgive my ignorance on the specific days but I was probably single digit age when the Soviet Union collapsed so you were a Cold War submariner. Is that correct?

KW: Yes, that's correct.

AK: How does the Cold War interject into your experience? I mean, you already touched on it. You were an important part of MAD, Mutually Assured Destruction].

KW: How does that fit with me?

AK: When I think Cold War submarines, I think *Hunt For Red October* and Sean Connery going, "One ping, Sir!"

KW: "One-single ping!"

AK: There you go. You know what I'm talking about.

KW: Cold War. How did I see myself in the Cold War? Honey, when did the Soviet Union fall?

CW: When I was in boot camp.

KW: 1992 then?

CW: '91.

KW: So I was on the boat. What month was it?

CW: August to September.

KW: [Whispers: '91 August to September. So I think I was out at sea] Yeah, anyways. That's hard to say because you didn't think about it. You really didn't want to put a whole lot of thought into that. Because doing so would bring to light the potential that you held in your grasp. And held in your grasp as more of a unit than an individual thing. You didn't want to think about the alternative. You didn't want to think about why you were ... You wanted to think about why you were there as a deterrent because the alternative was unspeakable. None of us wanted to. I knew how to fire a missile. I wasn't an expert at it but I could make my way through if I needed to. And I've pulled the trigger that simulated, the simulated trigger ... and all that. I've been on board the ship when we fired two of them. Training ones. That was quite an experience.

AK: That was out of the top?

KW: Yep, actually out of the water. I used to have a picture of it but it disappeared with a lot of my other stuff. None of us wanted to but each of us would. And if we couldn't do it and we couldn't accept that type of responsibility, that would then be one of the many reasons why we would have been, I won't say kindly or even politely, we would have not been there the next time, the next run. We had ways of making sure the people that we couldn't trust to do what needed to be done weren't there. So we didn't have to worry about them. Does that answer your question?

AK: It does. And maybe a piggyback off that, did you ever get to work with the E6-Bs, the Mercuries. The TACAMOs?[4]

KW: I never worked with the missiles at all. If that's what you're talking about.

AK: They're the 707s out of Oklahoma and they're sort of like ...

K**W:** 707 what? Oh, the planes!

AK: Yeah! And they talked to the submarines.

KW: No, that was not my end of the world. I was on the other end of the ship. I never did any talking to anybody in that respect. I had no idea who was flying up above us unless I heard it was a P-3. I could hear the splash and that was cool. Every now and then you could hear the splash if we were shallow enough when they would drop something. But no. I made the screw go 'roundy-'roundy. I made the boat go forward. Or backward. Or up or down.

AK: Were there any precarious or humorous situations that you had while you were on the sub?

KW: We had a lot of fun. Halfway nights were a lot of fun because that was our one night where we would have fun. We would have casino nights on board every now and then but halfway night was kind of a fun time. I started one year making a scavenger hunt for halfway night. That became a very popular thing for several runs. I did that for four or five runs, I think. So I'd spend the entire day before hand going and hiding little notes and clues around the ship, around the boat. And I took great pains to make sure that they were all, you know, there'd be five pieces of paper and there'd be five different clues and you'd have to find the one that matched and so on and so on. But I had a matrix that was three or four pages across. You know, it's what we did. We had to have something that killed the time. We would have raffles, we would have games, and all sorts of neat things. So it was kind of fun.

There were a lot of humorous times. Qualification boards were always fun. And it was good. That was back in the days when you could pin on the dolphins, which means I have two holes in my chest and a lot of bruises. Because they were actually pins. That was fun for a little while. We tacked on crows. We did everything together. You didn't do anything by yourself. There were no ... Walkmans just started coming out. They just started out. Somebody brought a Gameboy and they could play a game by themselves. And that was crazy. Why would you do that? We've got this perfectly good Nintendo in the crew's lounge and I remember sitting in this space that is roughly the size of this [Gestures approximately fifteen feet by fifteen feet], from that corner over to here and this couch and having

[4] Boeing E-6 Mercury: an airborne command post and communications relay for the fleet ballistic missile submarines. Their mission is known as TACAMO (Take Charge and Move Out).

fifteen guys watching Paula Abdul video. Because Paula Abdul was the big thing back then. Or watching a movie and then all sitting on naugahyde which is fake leather, plastic stuff that; there's nothing like naugahyde sweat after you've been there for six hours, you're still watching the movies nonstop, you're sticky, and you're like, "Oh crap! I've gotta go shower now ... Nah! Screw it!" Anyway, there are lots and lots of good times. Every now and then we'd do something stupid like water-gun wars. And we had grease pencils. We'd play assassins with grease pencils. So you'd have this big bucket of names and you'd draw a name and that's who you'd have to kill with your grease pencil and it'd have to be across the throat and nobody knew who it was so you had a bunch of paranoid guys running around the boat. You know, absolutely paranoid to go anywhere [Laughs] and had a grease pencil always in your hand, just in case. It was nuts. Yeah, we got in a lot of trouble for stuff like that but it was just good times. The highlight of the trip was drinking a near-beer on halfway night. Because we couldn't have real beer so they had a near-beer.

There was a lot of things that I still have nightmares over as well. There is the other side of that. We ... we had some real shit go down. I've ... had water in the people tank. That's not a good thing. I've done emergency surfaces. I brought ... I've had a hundred and fifty lives in my. My. MY. These two hands had a hundred and fifty lives in them. And I pulled it off. And that was the time that I don't even tell Clair. I haven't told Clair much about it. But that's ... If I hadn't of been there we hadn't, we may not have come back up. But that is not, it's not ... If it hadn't of been me, it would have been somebody else. So it wasn't just me as an individual, if I hadn't have been there, if it wasn't me and it was somebody else, I would have trusted whoever it was. Because by that time I had trained most of them that they would have been able to do it. They would have had the hundred and fifty lives in their hands and we would have made it out. If that makes sense, so when I say me it's more of an entity rather than an individual. And that's the piece about the submarine community that is so unique. I know that you have those dolphins and you're next to me, I know that I can go ... we may end up on the bottom but we will have put every bit that we could into it and I would trust that you would have done that. I would have never questioned it. It just wouldn't happen. Luckily not many of us have ended up on the bottom. But there's ... I've had times where afterwards I was just go back to my rack and shake. For a long time ... And I know what smoke smells like. And I know what it's like to ... I know what fire looks like. And fire's not a good thing in a closed tube with a finite amount of oxygen. You know, you can't ventilate much. I know what blood looks like. I know what it feels like. I know what it smells like. I know what shattered bones look like. I know what it's like to carry somebody, somebody unconscious, out of an area. It's ... There's a lot that goes into that. So it's, uhm ... You've got to balance those. You've gotta balance the good and the bad. And accept it all for being a part of the lifestyle. 'Cause that's what it was. I can't even say a lifestyle because it's not something that we could just pick up or drop. It was a life. It was, it was who we are. Who we were. At the time. If that makes sense. You're next [to BP].

BP: Okay, so '92 happens, you're off the boat. What's next after that?

KW: I was transferred to Pearl Harbor. I went to what was called RADCON Division, so Radiological Controls because that's what nukes did. We did something nuclear. We didn't get to do fun stuff on our shore duties. We got to go work our asses off yet again. But I get to do it in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii so I was okay with that. It was a pretty good time. Pearl was an excellent experience for me. I had a ball in Pearl. I had a lot of free time compared to on the sub. I went out on my own. I got a certification to teach SCUBA so I was a SCUBA instructor. So I had the beach life. I never did learn to surf. I was too stinking uncoordinated to do that but I spent more time in the ocean than any person has any right to do. Most of that was underwater of course because I was a submariner so SCUBA diving really appealed to me. I had a blast. I did mountain biking. My God ... I took up SCUBA because mountain biking was too expense because in Hawaii there aren't these nice sloped hills and things like that. No! It's a

freaking volcanic range. I've busted more rims. [Laughs] I had a Cannondale mountain bike. I'd go through $400 of rims a month on this thing because it was just ridiculously insane and that was part of the, always searching for that high. Always searching for that adrenaline rush. To look at me now, I'm kind of a little bloated, wasteland here but God! It was just crazy back then. Absolutely crazy. Single track. Going mountain biking on a single track. Do you know what a single-track trail is? Now picture a single-track trail with a sixty degree on either side. Both sides.

BP: [Laughs] That sounds like an adrenaline rush!

KW: That was an adrenaline rush. And you're like: "UUUuuuhhhhh! I've gotta get over there somehow!"

[Group Laughter]

KW: "Okay! Here we go!" And that's the type of things we looked for and we sought them out and searched for them and found them and did that. And that was just, it was the beginning of the X-Games experience and we were living it on the side of a hill. On top of a ridge. And that was badass before there was badass. And it was just a blast. I had a great time. I came close to being an alcoholic, which thank God I had a family and they adopted me and they pulled me back from that just in time. Otherwise I would have probably gone right down that path. I was carrying around a lot of baggage. I probably would have drank that baggage right into a problem. Not probably, I would have. I was well on my way to it. I had a great time. I partied. Oh my God... [Whispers: Jesus]. But anyways.

[Group Laughter]

KW: But we worked truly hard too. I put in some really long hours. The longest workday I ever had on the boat was a fifty-six hour day. Most of them were around thirty-six hours to forty-eight hours. That was a workday. On shore maybe twenty-four. Occasionally I'd do a thirty-hour work day. But mostly it was a twenty-four.

BP: I had to feel like a vacation.

KW: Oh yeah! A huge vacation. I mean some days I'd come in in the morning, I'd be off that afternoon. I'd go diving on lunch. I'd go over to Hickham Harbor. I worked with the dive team on the shore command and that was really cool. I also had one of the more traumatic events I have ever had on shore duty. When I was on a floating dry dock, which is a dry dock that is a ship essentially, a non-powered one. It actually floats and when it floats up it brings up the submarine that's in it or ship that's in it, bring it up out of the water. And the submarine that I was helping to put in the dry dock rolled over when it was in the dry dock. It rolled over on the blocks and that was one scary freaking day. That was a really, really bad day. But we go through it. But I ended up having knee surgery and back surgery because of injuries I had suffered on the boat and then further suffered, I had been hurt, I took a really bad fall in the dry dock off some scaffolding so I ended up having back surgery and knee surgery. And that ultimately ended up, I doubt I would have stayed in anyways, but that ultimately ended it. I didn't have a choice at that point. After I had those two surgeries back-to-back I didn't have a choice. They ain't having it. So I was out after ten years.

BP: So that's '98 then?

AK: '96 was when I got out. And then I got VA disability so I'm a disabled veteran. The VA has been taking really good care of me. The VA sent me to school. I got my undergraduate and my Master's degree from U of O.

BP: Both in psychology?

KW: Undergraduate in psychology and Masters in counseling. So now I'm a counselor and a voc rehab guy with the VA. That's what I do.

AK: I know the nuke program is a feeder for a lot of our power and energy companies in the United States. What led you to choose academics rather than going to work in a reactor?

KW: Well, the first thing I did when I got out of the Navy was I worked for Intel up in Beaverton. So I made Pentium chips at that time. Those Pentiums. So I worked on a lot some really sophisticated equipment they had up there. That was really cool. Gas plasma etchers. And that was awesome. Then I worked for at a couple of other places in the high-tech industry. Then I went to work for EWEB and managed a hydroelectric facility for six and a half years. I guess, five and a half or six and a half years babe? Six and a half years. At the Carmen Smith site which is seventy miles up, east of town, up in the mountains. So I did. I put that training to use. People would look at that and say, "God! That's a great job." I made a shitload of money doing it but it was in the middle of nowhere and I was living with people who were hermits for a reason and it was really unsatisfying and I hated it. I hated being away from my wife. I hated seeing her five days a month. And I hated the people I worked with. It sucked. It totally sucked and the money wasn't worth it so I went back to school. After Clair went to Iraq for a year I realized that life is a little bit too short to be chasing a dollar.

BP: I'm curious because you just kind of mentioned, Clair already did the interview with our project, and she mentioned in her interview about how you got to play Navy wife. What was that like?

KW: Yep! … That's for bringing that up!

[Group Laughter]

KW: Did you catch that babe!

CW: MmmHmmm!

BP: What was that like being on the other side?

KW: Ooohhh! The other side. I was Lieutenant Commander and Mister Clair Wiles. That was kinda cool. Actually I was really proud of my wife. I was one of those pain in the ass Navy wives, Navy husbands, whatever. I was interesting to see because I was always the one that got deployed and left somebody back at home and now all of a sudden I'm the one back at home while she's in harm's way. And that was a really hard ticket to punch. That was really difficult. I had a really, really tough year that year. And because that was, it didn't make any sense, I had to grasp that society sees the male as the warrior and I didn't have the issue with her being a warrior. That was never an issue in my mind. I knew she was. But I couldn't accept that I wasn't either at that time, that I wasn't one. I had been one. But I wasn't one at the time. And so that was really tough. I was very proud of her. Very proud of her. And still am today. It was just very difficult, because I was treated like the Navy wives. I was actually called and asked if I wanted to come to tea and I managed to politely decline. But it was like, "Which

part of me do you think would want to have tea? With the ladies?" And I would have had to go up to Washington. And that was the last time I had any time with the wives' club. Thank God. It was tough because it's hard for anybody to have their partner be under that much stress and that much, in that kind of danger on a daily basis. But I was still struggling with the societal expectations that, you know, "I'm the guy and I'm supposed to be going." But I'm not going and I'm really proud of her for going and I think she's amazing and she can do things that I can't even begin to do. But I really struggled with that. I came to terms with it probably through her four months into the deployment, that she was gone. It changed her significantly. She's got a Navy voice. She's got Clair's voice that you heard today at dinner and then she's got a Navy voice. And physically they are very different. Very different. Because she's a very powerful person and she had to overcome a lot, as a woman in the Navy, as a woman officer in the Navy, she had to overcome some significant barriers. And she did that. And was successful at it. I felt very humbled actually. I felt actually, in a way, that I wasn't worthy of that even though I know that I had done my time in other realms. It's easy to forget that. It's easy to kind of put yourself down a notch or two on that. Overall, it was tough. It was tough being the Navy wife. But I think that there were a lot of bennies [benefits] to it. I was able to live some of that lifestyle, kind of the glory day lifestyle without having to do it. She was kind enough to allow me to be a part of it. She'd let me drive up to Bremerton with her on some weekends when I could. She'd let me play Santa Claus at the Navy's Christmas parties. Which was ... I won't get into that but that was quite the time. It was an experience that I think was very rewarding, being a Navy wife. I was a bit of a snit. I enjoyed the prestige that came with it. [Laughs] It was kind of nice because she was well thought of and is still well thought of in her unit and therefore by proxy I got to partake in some of that, so that was kind of cool. It gave me a good feeling. But at the same time I know that it was not me that was doing it. And that was also a little hard to take at first because I was used to that. I also was well thought of. I was very very good at what I did and that was very well known but that was back in those days. It's hard to take those days, leave them there, and then deal in the reality of today. It was a valuable valuable lesson for me. I can't say I learned it all that well but by God I tried. Decent question. Very decent question.

BP: Thank you.

AK: Now you're also a Navy dad too, correct?

KW: I am a Navy dad, as well. I can't ... I can't understand that. Jennifer decided to join the Navy and she didn't really tell us that she was doing so because I think she was afraid we would try to talk her out of it, forbid her to it. Which is far from the truth. But, yep, she's now stationed in Kandahar, Afghanistan. She's a Navy Corpsman, which means she's a medic. You know, in a hospital. She'd be the equivalent of a civilian nurse without the registered part. She can do pretty much anything a nurse can do and beyond in some cases. She's been over there for six months now. We don't know for sure when she's coming home but she is definitely taken to the military lifestyle. She's got more tattoos than I ever dreamed of having let alone got. And she takes after her mom. She's very, very dedicated to what she does. She is an absolute pain in the ass but there is no one I would rather have on my side. There's no one I'd rather have working on my than her if I needed her. And that fits right along with her mom. There's no two people I'd rather have on my side than those two. At any junction in life. None ... And I'm not a person who - I don't like people, quite frankly, so that says something.

BP: I'm curious what the transition was for you from Navy back to civilian life.

KW: It was very difficult. I had a lot of anger. I had a lot of trauma. Psychological trauma and physical trauma when I was in the military. And transitioning to civilian life was very difficult. It's still difficult to this day. I have PTSD. And I deal with that. It significantly impacts my life. I had a lot of anger

issues. Lots. I damn near got fired from a couple different jobs. If it wasn't for the fact that I'm a fairly decent person, I think, and I can come to a conclusion that this is not a good thing and I need to change my ways. I can do that. If it hadn't been for that fact, I'd be out on the street. But it was hard. It still is. Even ... four ... eighteen years later? So, I got out in 1996 so, yeah, almost twenty years.

AK: If you could go back and sit down to seventeen-year old you. Would you do it all again?

KW: Oh, absolutely. I'd do it all again. Only I'd have put money away. And that way I could be retired right now instead of still working. I would have put some of that away. Yeah, I wouldn't, I don't look at these as glory days I look at them as life-building days. Those building blocks that were put in place in those ten years are a solid foundation. I mean there's a lot of good and a lot of bad that came out of it but the brick and mortar that was laid down in those times is irreplaceable and I wouldn't give that up. At all. Wouldn't change it. I don't recommend it for everybody. There are some people that it's just not... I don't want them. I either wouldn't wish it on them or I don't think that they wouldn't, they're not who I would want beside me. I'm usually pretty upfront with that if somebody asked. And I've had a lot of people ask me that. I think one of those things that I'm able to take out of it is I do a lot of work around in the community, talking about veterans in transition. I do a lot of work at the U of O. I mentor veteran students there. I do presentations to faculty and staff. I do workshops. I got one coming up. The Registrar's Office is having something come up, I think in March, and I've been invited to that. So I'm able to share this experience and able to take my new found career choice and transfer that into: "Okay, now suddenly I've got letters after my name so I have some credibility." Apparently and I can use that to promote veteran causes and educate people on how this all works. So that's a plus. That's a big plus. It's amazing what a couple of consonants after your name will do for you. Apparently I guess. What else?

BP: That's pretty much all I have.

AK: I don't have too much more. Is there anything you want to add? Anything you want to say? Any questions that we didn't ask?

KW: You didn't ask me why I stayed in ten years.

BP: Okay ... Why did you stay in ten years?

AK: That means you reenlisted twice?

KW: Yes, twice. I stayed in ten years because I decided when I went in I would do that, at least ten years and I did. Ten years and one day actually. I made that decision because ten years to me was enough that when I got out that was my plan, that that would be enough to say, I'm able to stick with something long enough that you should give me a shot on it. And it's worked out very well actually. Ten years is, people ask: "well why didn't you stay in the rest of the time?" Well, one: I didn't have much of a choice and two: I would have probably ended up in Leavenworth if I had because I had some serious, I had some serious authority issues by that time mainly because I'd ended up training most of my chain of command and at one time or another and I was very good at what I did and I knew it and I was cocky. So I probably would have ended up in some place. Combine that with anger issues and I probably would have ended up someplace very bad. The ten years was a good round number. It was enough to know that I didn't want to go any further but enough to know that I had done what I came in to do. So that's the big piece that I found. Uhm ... What else would there be? "What has been the biggest take away? What was the biggest take home lesson you learned?" That's probably another

question I would have asked and, “what is the lesson you would have rather not learned?” Those two. Uhm ... The biggest take home lesson I had was that your integrity is everything. You have to be able to, if you say you'll do something you need to do it. And you need to quietly do it. You do not need to let the world know that you've done it. And I wish I would have learned that lesson a little bit better but I did learn it. And the one lesson that I wish I hadn't learned was that one as well. Because I got it stomped back down my throat a few times. It was a hard lesson to learn but I learned it [Laughs]. I'm really glad I did but I wish the method would have been a little bit easier. What else?

BP: I think that's a good ending point but what about your military service do you think would surprise someone who's never served in the military or even someone who hasn't served in-

KW: In what way?

BP: I guess everyone kind of assumes different things about military service, especially even Navy service, what do you think about your service that you could tell someone who has never served and they would have no idea if you didn't tell them that.

KW: Most of the people who go in the military, if they really look hard, they do have a lot of options. People who go in the military aren't there just because there's no options. And they're not there just because they had nothing else that they could do with their life. And there are a lot of people because it's a sense of service. And it's a sense of commitment. And it's a sense of pride. And I think that there was a period of time that society believed that people believed that people who were in the military were there because they were dumb shits that didn't have any other route in life. If I had truly pursued it I could have gone to college without going into the military no problem but it was something that I just wanted to do, I wanted to do from a very early age. And I say that I didn't have any options for family-wise but there were plenty of options for me. And I think that one of the things that society gives the impressions of is that if you're in this, particularly if you're in the Army or the Marines, more of the grunt time of, eat-dirt type of thing, is you're not very smart. You can't be very smart otherwise you would have done something with your life. Well, we are doing something with our life. We did something. And some are still doing it. And so that's the message that I would like to get across. It's something I didn't have to do. I don't expect to have accolades and I don't expect to have parades for it but I wouldn't mind if people recognized it as something I didn't have to do but I was willing to do and that I was able to take away a lot from it. I think that's one of the things that people really devalue that the maturity that comes with that kind of responsibility. And it's, there are a lot of expectations that go with it but it's devalued because they don't know what to expect and what to do with it when it does come up. They expect you to be a leader when you come out of the military and they may very well be the case but many of us don't want to be leaders. We want to start from the ground up and move forward with it and it's, I think the expectations are somewhat skewed of the veteran. It's very difficult to explain in a short period of time and off the cuff but I think that if you look at your average vet, most of us just kind of want to disappear into the crowd. We really aren't looking to make a difference in the outside world. Except in a way that is quiet, just sort of happens. Does that make sense?

BP: Yeah.

KW: What else have you got? That's it?

AK: We're not only through all of my notes, I've done many more on top of that.

[Group Laughter]

KW: Outstanding. The transcript for this is going to be out of this world!

BP: Yep. I'll help you with it.

AK: And we're still adding to it right now!

[Group Laughter]

AK: Well on that note, I guess, unless either of you two have anything, I'd like to personally thank you for letting us interview you.

KW: Thank you for doing so. Thank you for taking the interest.

AK: And I'm not going to hit stop because it's on your lap.

KW: That's very cool.

AK: We'll let Mr. Buttons do that.

KW: Well I was a submariner. [Click]