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Transitioning from the Out Date: Information Seeking Behavior of Junior Enlisted Army Veterans of Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom

Leah Hannaford



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

TRANSITIONING FROM THE OUT DATE:
INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF JUNIOR ENLISTED ARMY VETERANS OF
OPERATION IRAQI AND ENDURING FREEDOM

By

LEAH HANNAFORD

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The members of the supervisory committee were:

Melissa Gross

Professor Directing Thesis

Mia Lustria

Committee Member

Sanghee Oh

Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploratory study of the information seeking behavior of junior enlisted United States Army veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF and OEF). During this study, 25 qualitative interviews were conducted with veterans residing in the vicinity of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Veterans in this study discussed their experiences with the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), the Veterans Affairs Office, non-profit agencies, and extended families as primary sources of information during and after transition using their reported expiration of term of service (ETS) or “out date” as a frame of reference. Most services focused on assisting veterans rely on the date of ETS to schedule appointments and services; this date for the majority of veterans of OIF and OEF in this study refers to their ETS date as “out date.” The types of information that the veterans sought prior to transition and currently seek were discussed and compared to analyze their information seeking behavior and how it changes as veterans seek to contextualize and make sense of their place in the civilian world.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Veterans have always had unique factors such as long periods of separation from their families unstable work schedules, family role confusion, and dynamics of long distance support systems, which have historically created unique challenges for services assisting veterans. Services catering to veterans' situations are necessary in order to promote family stability. There are many programs and agencies interested in assisting veterans and their families. At times, veterans and their families are challenged with knowing where to begin in order to gather the information needed to get to the services that will help them the most. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is currently responsible for providing services to veterans as set forth by Title 38 Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans' Relief, 1 C.F.R. § 1.1000. Agencies and programs that assist veterans as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs require research dedicated to veterans of OIF and OEF in order to explore veterans' specific informational needs.

Brenda Dervin (2010) approaches information seeking behavior as sense-making; individuals seeking information are attempting to make sense of the world around them. This model of information seeking behavior can be adapted for veterans' information seeking behavior as the majority of veterans are trying to contextualize their world as they adjust to the end of prolonged separation, challenges with medical issues stemming from various experiences in the military (e.g. PTSD, traumatic brain injury, etc.), financial difficulties, transition to the civilian workforce, or pursuing education. Approaching veteran information needs and examining their information behavior as sense-making allows information professionals to examine how to assist veterans and the agencies providing information to veterans in order to help them contextualize their world.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is important that research is conducted to assess the information needs of veterans of OIF and OEF in order to help these families continue their transition back into society,

particularly at a time when the Army is rapidly decreasing deployments and making efforts to reduce its overall size. This study of the information needs of junior enlisted veterans can assist agencies and programs supporting this vulnerable subpopulation of United States military veterans.

1.3 Significance of the Problem

Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) represent a unique population of veterans that have been employed during compounded periods of combat for the first time in United States military history. Veterans of OIF and OEF represent three distinct generations of Soldiers employed during these conflicts. An estimated 1.6 million troops have served under Operations Iraqi and Enduring freedom since 2001 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). This estimate includes the 5,774 Veterans who died in theater. These numbers and their associated health care have been compiled and reported quarterly by the VA since October of 2003 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The VA stated that as of December 2012, an estimated 286,134 veterans were seen by the VA for potential post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This estimate does not include information concerning frequency of deployments, duration of deployments, or accurate statistics concerning the nature of operations on deployment. There is not an accurate system for tracking veterans who do not seek treatment with the VA or other agencies focused on assisting veterans with transition services.

This exploratory study highlights information provided by twenty-five junior enlisted Army veterans of OIF and OEF regarding information they sought during transition, information they currently seek, and their recommendations to help with these services.

1.4 Research Questions

In response to the above, the research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What agencies or programs do junior enlisted veterans use for information?
2. What types of information do junior enlisted veterans seek?
3. How are former enlisted soldiers referred to these agencies?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Junior enlisted soldiers (the military ranks of E-1 through E-5) represent a vulnerable subpopulation of the United States Army due to military culture factors, financial constraints, and age of the majority of Junior Enlisted Soldiers (Kidd, Peters, & Holcomb, 2008). Little research has been dedicated to assessing their unique needs; particularly research conducted focusing on veterans of OIF/OEF due to the recent and ongoing nature of these conflicts (Erbes, Polusny, MacDermid, & Compton, 2008).

Predominantly, research dedicated to assessing service members and their needs due to military-culture type factors has revolved around family psychology or communication within families (Merolla, 2006); research dedicated to exploring psychological issues stemming from continuous deployment (such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)) are in their infancy in relation to OIF/OEF (Erbes, Polusny, MacDermid, & Compton, 2008). Hall (2011) discussed some of the challenges of providing services to military service members and their families and stressed that agencies (as well as their researchers) must take into consideration the unique military culture in order to assist military families.

Individuals volunteering for the armed forces are drawn to the unique culture of the military for various reasons; Rohall, Ender, and Matthews (2006) examined the different factors that drive individuals to be a part of military service or remain in the civilian population and how these factors relate to political affiliation and level of education. Overall, the factor of level of education has changed over the past few years; however, there are still consistent individual traits that lead people to volunteer for the armed forces. Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal (2006) summarized the literature that has been dedicated to enlistment motivations stating that these motivations include the propensity to serve, the desire to have adventurous or coming of age experiences, or pragmatic motivations such as monetary, educational, or circumstances which do not provide other life alternatives besides service in the armed forces (Kearl & Nelson, 1990; Lawrence & Legree, 1986; Pliske, Elig, & Johnson, 1986; Schmitz, 1990; Tarver, Miller, & Ginexi, 1994; as cited by Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006). Regardless of a soldier's motivations for joining the military she is willing to accept the unique culture of the military and work within its constraints.

This unique culture of the military has an impact on the way individuals exchange information, in particular, the way that soldiers exchange information between those of similar rank and also receive information from superiors. Soldiers become conditioned beginning with basic training to receive and provide information in a specific manner. Military rank structure establishes a framework that soldiers are introduced to in basic training that continues throughout their military service; it is important for soldiers to work within this structure and varying levels of power in order for the military organization to function properly (Rotter, 1999). The conditioning of the soldier depends on the length and varied experiences while in the military and can have a profound effect on the individual soldier even after the conclusion of his military service; the particular soldier's chain of command can have a profound impact on the smoothness of the transition out of the military due to this aspect of military culture (U.S. Army ACAP, 2013).

Mobley (1982) explored the concept of work-home conflict as it relates to turnover within an organization. Literature suggests that financial stress and work-home conflict are major reasons that soldiers chose to leave the force (Heilmann, Bell, & McDonald, 2009; see also (Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Castaneda and Harrell (2007) explored the employment of military spouses (particularly those of lower enlisted soldiers) as a means to supplement the income of the soldier. The average salary of junior enlisted Army soldiers according to the 2013 Army Base Pay Charts ranges from \$18,194 to \$32,490 depending on time in service. Soldiers of active duty service also receive additional allowances for housing (which vary by location) and stipends if they also have dependents (family members). Employment (or lack) of military spouses can have an impact on the financial strains that link to the work-home conflict (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008). These factors combined with grievances of prolonged periods of separation, compact stresses of multiple deployments, and the general distance of extended family can all tie into the reasons soldier chose to leave the force.

As service members leave the force, they are still conditioned due to the military culture to receive information in the manner that it was presented to them while enlisted. As they leave the force, it becomes apparent that they are integrating into a society with a possible civil-military gap. Research conducted to explain the phenomenon of the civil-military gap states that there are three distinct periods in American history where a civil-military gap exists and that the

time period (and associated generations) for Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom fall within the third time-period but that such a phenomenon will need to be examined within the context of each generation involved in the current society and the individuals that this gap might affect (Feaver & Kohn, 2001; see also Collins & Holsti, 1999).

The process of transitioning out of active duty Army service often begins with integration into the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). The ACAP website homepage suggests that soldiers begin this process as early as possible and set aside at least “forty hours, spread over a six-month period of time” (U.S. Army ACAP, 2013). Congress mandated in 2011 that soldiers transitioning from active service will receive a “preparation briefing no later than ninety days prior to separation” (preparation counseling; transmittal of medical records to Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). The ACAP website provides information linking soldiers to particular transition offices located on major military installations, such as the one located in the Fort Bragg Soldier Support Center.

After a soldier has transitioned into civilian life, they are entitled to benefits with the VA when they meet qualifications. Research conducted to access the VA has focused on subpopulations such as women and Vietnam veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs is currently responsible for providing services to veterans as set forth by Federal Regulation Title 38, Volume 1, Chapter I, Parts 0-17; veterans of OIF/OEF are entitled to the G.I. Bill for education benefits and can seek treatment for service related disabilities through the VA. Duggan, Rosenheck, and Singleton (2010) stated that the “DC program, administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provides \$31 billion per year in benefits to more than 3 million veterans and their families.” Their research focused on VA disability compensation (DC) program on Vietnam veterans due to the fact that these particular veterans and their conditions are currently considered responsible for the increase in disability claims (Duggan, Rosenheck, & Singleton, 2010). VA research has also been dedicated to women veterans accessing services (Hoff & Rosenheck, 1998); but there is still a lack of literature specifically focused on veterans of OIF/OEF and vulnerable subpopulations of these veterans (such as junior enlisted).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

3.1 Participants

Participants were invited to volunteer for an individual interview via flyers posted in public locations around Fayetteville, North Carolina. There was not exclusion criteria for gender, age, or military branch of service; inclusion criteria focused on time of service during the post-9/11 years of service, deployment in support of OIF or OEF, and they cannot be members of the U.S. military reserve components. The participants of this study were 25 junior enlisted veterans who served between the years of 2002 – 2012 (these years of service reflect the years of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom – also known as post-9/11 years of service).

The ages of the veterans interviewed in this study ranged from 22 to 35 with an average age of 28 and all were Army veterans. The average number of deployments was two; the highest number of deployments (reported by four veterans) was four to five; the majority deployed to the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan. The average deployment length was nine months with the shorter deployments lasting six months and the longest 18 months.

3.2 Procedure

Individual interviews were conducted between January – March of 2013 with junior enlisted veterans residing within the vicinity of Fayetteville, North Carolina who were enlisted in the U.S. Military during the years of Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom 2001 - 2013. According to the 2010 Census, 23.3 percent of the Fayetteville population identified themselves as civilian veterans (U.S. Census, 2010). Although the census provides an option for civilian veterans, there is not a listing that provides a starting point for adequate sampling of veterans and additional information that can be used to locate veteran populations within Fayetteville, North Carolina that met the inclusion criteria. Initial contact was made by five veterans in this area who met the inclusion criteria; following the initial five interviews, the researcher used snowball sampling in order to locate twenty other veterans who met the inclusion criteria. The initial

participants were recruited for the study via flyers posted in public locations in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

The interview questions were designed to qualitatively assess the information seeking behavior of these veterans during their transition (or ACAP) and as they currently seek information. The interviews consisted of ten questions total with several prompts associated with certain questions to gain additional insight. The interview began by discussing the basic demographic information of: age, rank at time of discharge or Expiration Term of Service (ETS) or “out date,” and deployment information; the interview continued by discussing the subjects’ transition out of the military, services used and how the veteran was referred to these services, general information concerning how life has been after the military, and concluded by discussing suggestions for improvement of these services. Interview questions did not ask for specific information of medical services or information needed from the VA, if participants offered this information it was voluntary and the interviewer did not ask for sensitive information. These interviews were transcribed and systematically coded for consistencies within the interviews and analyzed in order to provide information that can be used to contextualize veteran experiences through information seeking behavior.

The interview session began by exploring the time of transition out of the military, continued with discussing information seeking after transition, and concluded with suggestions for how to improve the services or information provided by these services. Participants were encouraged to expand on services that were most helpful and explain differences between information seeking prior to transition and after transition.

3.3 Limitations

This study focused on veterans currently residing in Fayetteville, North Carolina. More research is needed to determine a representative sample of veterans of OIF and OEF; these conflicts encompass multiple countries, combat zones, deployments, and variations by deployment length and job description while deployed which make it difficult to specifically quantify how this population should be sampled. Although it was not the intention of the study to only interview Army veterans, due to the interest in the initial participants of the study and the snowball methodology, all veterans interviewed were Army veterans.

The researcher is currently an active duty soldier and to keep with good order and discipline required by the military she only interviewed those within her peer group and below. No specific information concerning former units, duty positions, or leadership information was collected during the interviews. Although junior enlisted soldiers represent a vulnerable sub-population they only represent a fraction of OIF and OEF veterans.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Veterans discussed their attempts to put in place future employment, education, medical correspondence with the Veteran's Affairs Office (VA) for injuries or conditions sustained while on Active Duty Status, or unemployment information during this period of 6 to 12 months of transition. Several reported the Transition Office of Fort Bragg's Soldier Support Center provided an initial checklist to aid in appointment scheduling for transition services to ensure that all of the above mentioned items were addressed prior to ETS or termination of their enlistment (see Table 1).

There are four main agencies these veterans used as primary resources for information while in transition from active duty to civilian life: Fort Bragg ACAP Office in the Soldier Support Center; the Veterans Affairs Office; non-profit or private agencies that specialize in tailoring services to veterans; and the Department of Social Services. They seek medical, educational, financial, and civilian job related information. When the veterans described the initial transition, twenty of the veterans discussed Transition Services at Fort Bragg's Soldier Support Center.

In general, the veterans of this study most often sought information regarding educational and medical benefits while in their period of transition; fifteen veterans sought information regarding education benefits and fourteen sought medical information. Five veterans sought financial information from Fort Bragg Transition Services. All six of the veterans that reported consulting social services stated they were seeking unemployment information. Five veterans reported seeking financial information prior to getting out of the Army so they could better plan for the financial obligations following transitioning out of the military.

Veterans are referred to these services through various means; 80% (20) stated that they were referred to the necessary services by the Transition Office of Fort Bragg's Soldier Support Center and 40% (10) were willing to discuss that they seek information independently of any agency or veteran service by using the internet. Two veterans stated that they used friends that had either gone through the process or knew a lot about the transition process and four stated that they used to Veteran's Affairs Office of Fayetteville to get information.

When the veterans discussed their current information resources eighty percent of the participants use the Veteran's Affairs office, twenty percent continue to use information they received from Fort Bragg's transition services information, thirty percent use an outside non-profit agency, and another thirty percent use social services for unemployment benefits (percentages exceed 100% because some veterans reported using more than one source of information). Veterans described their current information resources by convenience; if the VA office can answer their questions and service needs promptly then they do not seek other agencies for information.

The participants of this study mostly seek information in reference to issues that have arisen since their "out date." Forty-eight percent (12) stated that they seek financial information in comparison to 20% (5) that sought financial information prior to getting out of the military. Eighteen seek medical information and 12 seek educational information in regards to the G.I. Bill.

There are three main categories of responses from the interviewed veterans concerning their overall transition out of the military: positive or smooth, rough/difficult, or lonely/on his/her own. Forty-eight percent (12) described their transition out of the military in a positive manner; five of those veterans cited specifically support they had received from their extended families. Eight described the experience as rough or difficult with three stating that it was "harder than expected." Five veterans stated that it has been a lonely transition or described their current status as "on my/our own." The veterans of this study had an average time of transition while still on active status of eight months.

The final interview question inquired for suggestions on how current services could improve or what services the veterans would like to see offered. Several veterans took this opportunity to discuss that some services, such as the G.I. Bill application, should be simplified. One veteran suggested that there should be an abbreviated reference guides that provide veterans of OIF/OEF a "quick guide" for financial or education services. The subject stated that while on active duty there were "quick guides for everything;" these guides (typically one to two pages) include where to go to get important information as well as the steps that need to be taken to accomplish certain tasks. These guides exist within the Department of Veterans Affairs; however, these guides vary by location and are not necessarily standardized by content.

Table 1*Participant Characteristics and Information-Seeking Behavior*

Deployment Location	Number of Participants		Percentage of Participants	
Iraq	6		24	
Afghanistan	16		64	
Other – Non Combat Zone	1		3	
Other – Combat Zone	2		8	

Information Sought	Number of Participants		Percentage of Participants	
	Before “Out-date”	After Transition	Before “Out-date”	After Transition
Educational	15	12	60	48
Medical	14	18	56	72
Financial	5	12	20	48
Other	6	6	24	24

Organizations Providing Information	Number of Participants		Percentage of Participants	
	Before “Out-date”	After Transition	Before “Out-date”	After Transition
Transition (ACAP)	20	5	80	20
Veterans Affairs	4	20	16	80
Internet	10	10	40	40
Social Services	6	6	24	24
Non-profit Agency	4	6	16	24
Other	2	0	8	0

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The time allotted to transition out of the military also influenced their information seeking. The immediate response from several veterans when asked to discuss time allotted to transition was “enough.” In their opinion, “enough” means six to twelve months of time to transition out of the military; this time frame is representative of the ACAP office’s suggestion that soldiers begin (at the latest) six months prior to their ETS date (ACAP Process, 2013). Veterans stated that the time allotted to transition was contingent upon the unit (with some units providing as much time as the veteran requested and others overlooking the fact that the veteran was due to leave the service). Four veterans stated that they were “done,” which they defined as extremely dissatisfied with their enlistment and hurried their transition process. One veteran stated that “by the time I was getting close to my out-date I was so done with the whole experience the last thing I wanted was another mandatory meeting.” The concept of being “done” began with these veterans a year prior to their date of ETS; they hurried through the necessary appointments and did not take the time to fully take advantage of the transition services.

Fort Bragg’s ACAP office was cited twenty-one times throughout the interviews as a primary source of information regarding transition. Soldiers looked to the center for job information, VA benefit information and services, resume writing assistance, and services to assist with transition (such as unemployment benefits or moving assistance). Medical information sought while still in the transition period was often through the guidance of the Fort Bragg ACAP office; the office guided soldiers through the process of being proactive in seeking assistance for disability claims in order for these claims to be processed promptly through the VA. Four veterans said they had a smooth transition and received medical information or services from the Fort Bragg Transition Office; the office provided them with the necessary steps to properly fill out forms, obtain copies of their medical records, and schedule their initial appointment with the VA for disability benefits (when qualified).

The educational information sought by these veterans during transition mostly focused on the desire to continue their education using the G.I. Bill. All veterans interviewed qualified for the Post-911 G.I. Bill, which if attending an undergraduate program full-time offers an additional

stipend for housing. Veterans who were single or only had a spouse (no children) stated that this money was sufficient to meet their financial obligations while in school, however, five veterans that had children in addition to a spouse stated that they still had to seek additional forms of income. Four veterans expressed the need for the services and information surrounding the process to apply and obtain the G.I. Bill needs to be simplified.

Five veterans discussed inquiring for financial planning information from the ACAP office. All five said that Fort Bragg Transition Services was able to help them plan appropriately for financial obligations by providing useful information such as estimated cost of living and moving budget information. Six veterans needed information regarding unemployment benefits (three due to the fact that they were going to go to school and did not plan on working while enrolled in full-time school and three because they were having difficulties finding employment prior to their respective ETS dates).

The Fort Bragg Transition Services provided these veterans one place to gather the necessary information to transition properly. Four veterans described the staff as friendly and helpful for whatever information they needed. Fourteen veterans used the ACAP office for resume writing assistance; ten noted difficulties in translating their experiences with the military into a resume for civilian employment. As these veterans transitioned out of the Army, it is apparent that some were still seeking one place to get the right information to continue the transition process; however, outside of the military they did not find one place to get the right information, they found various places that were often overwhelmed with the volume of veterans using the services or the veterans had lacked the right information to get the appropriate information.

Military culture has a profound influence on veteran information seeking behavior. While enlisted, soldiers are inundated with informational briefings and official order that cover every aspect of life (to include behavior outside of official duty). According to the participants of this study, the major difference in seeking information outside the military versus seeking information while enlisted is in the Army there was “always someone to ask.” One veteran had tremendous difficulty finding the right office to call for medical information as she did not have a “first appointment” scheduled prior to her ETS date. Once she found the right office she was scheduled for an intake appointment three months from the date she called and following her initial appointment was informed it would be another three months before her first appointment

with a mental health professional. The mentality of always having “someone to ask” is imbedded into soldiers from basic training and after the military the mentality remains but the support structure is fundamentally different.

Some of the veterans interviewed elaborated upon their experiences with the Veterans Affairs Office to seek medical information or treatment. Sixty percent (15) discussed that the VA offices they visited often had a long wait and seemed “overwhelmed.” Although the veterans had needs ranging from follow-up appointments for injuries sustained while on Active Duty to mental health for reoccurring issues the majority felt as if the system was slow to respond to their needs.

Six veterans stated that using a non-profit or private agency was essential for seeking information outside the military. The veteran who had a prolonged waiting period because of the Veterans Affairs office stated that her family sought the medical services from a private agency that specializes in veteran services during the three month wait period. Other veterans stated that because they had unrealistic financial expectations for life outside the military or had difficulties finding a job used non-profit agencies to assist with food, small expenses, and Christmas presents for their children. They all stated that these services were able to assist them in finding the right resources to either get their families back on track financially or direct them to the right information.

The Department of Social Services was used by six veterans for unemployment pay while the veterans attempted to find work outside of the military. These veterans had set up this service prior to transition through the Fort Bragg ACAP Office and had the appropriate information to use this service appropriately.

Four veterans stated that they thought that after they were out of the military that the challenges that they faced in the military would subside. Two specifically stated that did not expect that they would have ongoing issues that continue in their civilian life. One veteran elaborated on this point and discussed his struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); he said that he had unreasonable expectations for his life outside the military as he thought that his symptoms would subside in a different environment, however, he has noticed that his PTSD has a “creeping” effect as it continuously resurfaces. He did seek treatment prior to getting out of the military but stopped treatment after his ETS date; he has since contact the VA office and after three months of assessments he is getting the treatment he needs. His experience is similar

to the female veteran who failed to make the necessary “first appointment” and got caught in the backlog of the overwhelmed VA office. Neither veteran knew the exact number to contact to get the help for their service related conditions.

Other veterans opened up about the fact that they had unrealistic expectations as far as the family struggles that led them to leave the service; they thought that their struggles would end without the strain of the unique military stresses (prolonged periods of separation, role reversal, etc.) but found that they needed to seek help to address these issues. Four veterans that discussed these issues that continued to surface outside the military used non-profit agencies to assist them with getting the appropriate help to address these needs. This is another example of veterans seeking information to appropriately contextualize their new life after their “out date” into the “civilian world” and another example of how military culture-type factors influence information seeking behavior.

Aside from social constraints within their family, financial stress was another component to the stress. While enlisted, the military pay form itemizes categories for budgeting purposes (such as an exact housing allowance that varies by location, a food budget, and additional income); veterans that did not have budgeting skills prior to joining the military did not have the skills to budget appropriately for transition into civilian life. Although there are financial planning classes offered through ACAP, only 48% (12) of the veterans interviewed took advantage of these services prior to transition.

One reason the veterans that had unreasonable expectations for finances could possibly be due to the age of the veterans interviewed as junior enlisted soldiers tend to have less life experience prior to enlisting (Kidd & Holcomb, 2008). Some of the veterans who suggested the need for financial resources stated that budgeting outside the military is different because they do not receive additional allowances for housing and living expenses they have to calculate those costs as a part of their overall budget planning. Others needed financial information because they underestimated the cost of moving or selling their homes. The military’s pay system greatly influenced their expectations for how money is paid and distributed; although the expenses in civilian life are the same, the veterans without the basic budgeting skills were left without a reliable system to budget appropriately to support their families and veterans that encountered unexpected expenses did not know how to access these types of financial information outside of military information systems.

Thirty-two percent (8) of the participants stressed that without the support of their respective families that transition would have been much more difficult or impossible. Five of the eight veterans that described their transition as “good” stated that their extended family was the reason for that smooth transition. Extended families supported these veterans financially, provided child care, and also provided housing as needed. A few of the veterans remarked that they felt like no one cared about their previous experiences other than their extended families and those that had experienced life in the military with them. One in particular stated that “no one on the other side cares about what happened while I was in. They just care that I am out and expect me to be able to just forget. I expected I could just forget.” The importance of having extended family as additional support after military service is important to understand how some veterans make sense of the civilian world.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The veterans in this study clarify the importance of the Army Career and Alumni Program as an integral part of the transition process. It is essential that these services continue to be offered to soldiers transitioning from military life to civilian life. ACAP is currently mandated and focused on providing essential information in regards to education, medical, and civilian employment. Veterans currently see transition services offered by the ACAP as a primary resource of information that they need in order to assist them through transition.

The VA is also a primary source of information prior to the “out date” and after transition into civilian life. Research focused on the unique needs of veterans of OIF and OEF should be conducted to assist the VA in providing the best services possible and the best information resources for these veterans.

Currently, there is not a single place to go for information outside the Army that reflects the ACAP program and there are differences in the information that veterans require outside the Army in order to contextualize their new life. Although there is not a single place to find the needed information, veterans are still able to locate resources in order to continue settling into the “civilian world” through the VA, non-profit agencies, and extended family support systems.

Extended family support systems are crucial in providing additional assistance to veterans in transition by providing monetary assistance, child care, and support as issues stemming from the military experience continue to manifest over time. Veterans who chose to live in areas without the support of extended family run the risk of not having this element to assist them through transition into civilian life.

Overall, there are similarities in the types of information sought during transition and currently sought by the participants in this study; differences in the types of information tend to link to the experiences of veterans outside the military (such as miscalculations of finances or prolonged periods of unemployment). The major difference is the number of veterans seeking financial information prior to transition versus those that seek the information after their ETS. Other veterans thought that their challenges with PTSD or similar military experiences would subside after transition; however, three veterans stated that this was not the case and needed these services years after their ETS. These differences show veterans attempt to contextualize

their transition into civilian life by seeking the necessary information to access services that can assist with their unique needs as they arise.

6.1 Future Work

This study only had one coder, transcriber, and was limited to one location and branch of service due to the methodology. There were also factors that were unexamined as a part of this study such as frequency and duration of deployments. Although some veterans only had one deployment, some were extended deployments (longer than one year) and had a profound impact on the veteran due to the time frame he/she was deployed (such as veterans deployed during the first Iraq invasion). Future research should take these factors into consideration to determine if there is any correlation to the information these veterans seek.

Interviews should be conducted with more veterans, agency representatives, VA representatives, and other information professional to provide a complete perspective concerning veteran information seeking behavior. Comparisons should be made between the services provided and veteran perceptions of these services. Specifically, future research should also consider understanding veteran perceptions of what they view the VA as being able to provide and what services the VA actually provides.

Although the veterans who participated in this study mostly spoke favorably upon the ACAP services of Fort Bragg, more research is needed for transition services in other locations. Research conducted on transition services should explore services that are required and those that are optional services and compare these services to the information seeking behavior of veterans of OIF and OEF. There is a need for services focused on financial literacy and these services should highlight the differences in military and civilian pay.

Several veterans indicated the desire to see reference guides that are easily assessable and provide general information for services such as applying for the G.I. Bill benefits or financial planning. Although these guides exist within the context of the Veterans Affairs Office, these resources are not readily available or standardized for all VA locations. The veterans who made these suggestions stated that they were conducting independent research using the internet. For the purpose of this study, the research did not evaluate how they were accessing the internet (via a home computer or a mobile device). If veterans are accessing the VA or ACAP websites

through mobile devices, this might explain why veterans are not finding these resources that currently exist.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS BOARD LETTER OF APPROVAL



Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 12/19/2012

To: Leah Hannaford ***Personal Data Removed***

Address: ****Personal Data Removed****

Dept.: INFORMATION STUDIES

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Information Seeking Behavior of Junior Enlisted Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 12/18/2013 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Melissa Gross <melissa.gross@cci.fsu.edu>, Advisor
HSC No. 2012.9294

APPENDIX B

APPROVED PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ agree to participate in this research titled _____ which is being conducted by Leah Hannaford, Library and Information Studies Department of Florida State University. By signing this form I understand that:

1. My participation is entirely voluntary;
2. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty ;
3. I can have the results of my participation withdrawn at any time to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed;
4. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The tapes will be destroyed after transcription.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The present research is being conducted to better understand information seeking behavior of veterans of OIF/OEF in relation to information services.
2. My voluntary participation consists of a face-to-face interview that will last no longer than 30 minutes.
3. No physical discomforts or stresses are foreseen. The interviewer understands when discussing transition from military life emotional subjects might emerge. We will not discuss the topic of transition in detail, subject will not be pushed to discuss subjects that cause emotional stress.
4. Although sensitive subjects such as financial struggle, unemployment, etc. might emerge during the interview, specifics will not be discussed and interviewer will ensure confidentiality of the information disclosed.
5. The results of this participation will be anonymous.
6. The interviewer will answer any further questions about the research now, or during the course of the project.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Interviewer

Date

FSU Human Subjects Committee approved on 12/19/2012. Void after 12/18/2013. HSC # 2012.9294

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Leah Hannaford is originally from Winder, Georgia. She graduated from Young Harris College in 2004 with an Associate's in Religious Studies and then graduated from North Georgia College and State University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Science in Sociology. She is currently serving in the United States Army in Military Information Support Operations and is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Leah's publications include a contribution to "The Future of Military Information Support Operations in Unconventional Warfare" featured in the January 2013 edition of *Special Warfare Magazine*.