THE REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF ENLISTED ARMY AND NAVY NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AFTER COMBAT

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this study was to understand the reintegration experiences of Military Leaders after combat. This study was open to both commissioned and noncommissioned military officers from all 5 branches of the United States Military: Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, and Navy. The researcher contacted counselor colleagues to gather a purposeful sampling of military leaders. Through referrals, this study included 5 participants who were noncommissioned officers in the Army or Navy. Participation included two semi-structured interviews: one centering on the combat experience of the individual while the second focused on details of the reintegration experience.

Results of this study indicated that the military leaders’ deployment missions left a lasting impact on civilian life, their deployment experiences elicited strong emotional reactions stateside, the leaders’ sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life, leaders have sought positive ways to deal with stress, and the connections with others in civilian life had a significant impact on reintegration.

It is unknown if the positive outcomes of this study are in part due to the positive experiences participants had with counselors and/or reaching out to others. Nevertheless, results indicate leaders’ insightfulness of their experiences, many who have stated they
have made a conscientious attempt to look at the positive side of situations. Thus, results suggest that leaders have experiences that could help others view reintegration in a positive way while simultaneously working through challenges. Further research is warranted in order to further explore variances among leaders.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Between 2001 and 2014, approximately 2.5 million military personnel have been deployed to the conflict in the Middle East to address the Global War on Terror (Baker, 2014). In 2011 alone, greater than 85,000 troops were deployed from the following branches: Army National Guard and Army Reserves, Air National Guard, Coast Guard, Marines, and Navy (Bauman, 2013). R. Bray (2014a) discussed the aftereffects of combat, which have a direct effect on reintegration.

Therefore, an understanding of the dynamics of combat is key in order to comprehend the aftermath of the combat experience. Mental health professionals, as well as the family members of military personnel, would benefit from an understanding of this phenomenon as military individuals return to civilian life. The review of the current literature underscores the relevance of the research question and methodology of the study.

Military Overview

In order to truly understand the impact of combat, it was first necessary to understand the process of the military. In each branch of the military, there is a process commonly referred to as the deployment cycle (Baker, 2014). The deployment cycle typically consists of four main phases: Pre Deployment, Deployment, Post Deployment, and Reintegration (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). Pre-Deployment includes Combat Training, where one initially undergoes an official training which transitions one from civilian life to military life (Star, 2014). This is an important
process in which the individuality of a person is left behind, while the survival and mission of the unit become priority (Schading, 2006). This mentality is identified as groupthink ideology and is ingrained through daily interactions by military personnel relying on one another, acting as one unit while not questioning the purpose of the mission (Buzzell, 2005). The training not only prepares one for the physical demands of combat, but to become mentally attune with military ways of thinking (Bowling & Sherman, 2008).

Basic Combat Training prepares one for deployment (MilitaryOneSource, Department of Defense, 2012b). The second phase of the deployment cycle is actual deployment. Deployment is the phase where military personnel go to a particular country to fulfill the duties assigned; often this includes a combat operation (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). The experience of military personnel during deployment may cause high stress (Sherman, 2014). Oftentimes, there are many factors involved in military combat missions. According to Killgore, Stetz, Castro, and Hoge (2006), during one’s experience in combat, a number of incidents may be encountered. Some examples are: experiencing the death of fellow military personnel or American civilians, being in the presence of dead bodies or body parts, feeling helpless while others are in need of help, having a near death experience, being near an Improvised Explosive Device, more commonly referred to as an IED (a home made bomb), fighting in close proximity with the enemy, killing others, or witnessing the death of the innocent. The way an individual responds to any of these events may vary (Rhoades & Sar, 2005).
After military personnel conclude the assignment(s) of their deployment phase, they enter the third phase of deployment, *Post Deployment*. *Post Deployment* is when the individual is removed from the operation/combat situation and stabilized in a peaceful setting of a peaceful country or the United States of America (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). At this time, a series of debriefings about the mission and the preparation to return home are addressed (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). During the post deployment phase, individuals experience a connection with others with whom they shared these events, and naturally experience a sense of comfort and security (Corbett, 2004). Also, during this phase, individuals prepare for the challenges of returning home (Yosick et al., 2012).

The last phase of deployment is *reintegration*. *Reintegration* is the phase when military personnel reconnect to their loved ones and return to their pre deployment environment. One of the challenges military personnel face during reintegration is that the individual is removed from those with whom similar experiences were shared during deployment (i.e., other military personnel); there no longer is that sense of connection (Demers, 2011). Therefore, when military personnel return stateside from combat, the absence of being able to consult with fellow comrades who experienced the same event may pose a challenge to the reintegration experience (Bolton et al., 2008).

The deployment cycle described above speaks to all military personnel. Kreie (2014) added to this conversation by including further implications for military officers. Officers have experienced the above-mentioned phases of the deployment cycle: pre deployment, deployment, post deployment, and reintegration; however, there have been
several additional responsibilities for leaders. Responsibilities have been all encompassing for military officers, meaning, for each regiment and mission, there is accountability for the troops, decisions to be made, and tactical strategies for each specific set of duties assigned to that officer (Kreie, 2014).

Military leaders have to possess many characteristics essential for survival during times of war (Packard, 2006). They hold great responsibility for their troops while having to make split-second decisions (Voyer, 2011). The experiences of combat have an impact on military personnel’s day-to-day civilian interactions upon returning home (Marek et al., 2014). Therefore, according to Coll, Weiss, and Yarvis (2011), leaders have the duty of making the best choices for all under their care and have to uphold the virtues of the military within their command. Depending upon the experiences of the officers during their missions, this responsibility could have lasting effects as well (Kang & Hyams, 2005). These lasting effects speak to the residual consequences of the experiences once the officer has been removed from the deployment phase of the deployment cycle (French, 2008). These residual consequences are addressed later in this chapter.

**Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of returning military officers after combat. The existing literature focuses primarily on the reintegration of military personnel as a whole, not taking into account the various roles and responsibilities of each participant. Therefore, to look at more specific components of the reintegration experience, it was necessary to look at the variations among military
personnel. Military leaders, specifically, holding responsibilities and authority have offered varying elements to not only the combat experience, but reintegration experiences as well. Due to the authority and responsibilities leaders are entrusted with, their combat and reintegration experiences vary from those who are not in leadership positions (Ritchie, 2007). On average, leaders may have had 100 decisions that must have been made during a 24-hour period (O’Neill, 2001). Depending on the outcomes of these decisions, leaders’ self-perspectives may have been impacted accordingly (French & Parkinson, 2008). Therefore, this study hopes to unlock nuances of the reintegration experience of military leaders that may not have surfaced in previous studies.

For counselors working with military personnel, this study is extremely necessary, as counselors should, at minimum, possess a basic knowledge of military culture. Secondly, the need to advocate for counselors to be employed through the Department of Veterans Affairs is critical, as the current trend in intervention strategies for veterans focus specifically on pharmaceuticals, as many barriers exist for military members to work with licensed professional counselors (R. Bray, 2014a).

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this qualitative study was: What are the reintegration experiences of returning enlisted Army and Navy non-commissioned officers after combat?

**Definition of Terms**

*Combat:* The experience of combat varies for each deployment and for each branch of the military, as different assignments are distributed accordingly.
this study includes individuals who are in the combat zone and are experiencing the threats and dangers of battle. Combat also includes putting oneself in harm’s way to fulfill the goal of a mission.

*Military Officer:* A person of authority responsible for the lives of other individuals during combat. This person is often in charge of the tactical or strategic decisions of war, as well. Ranks may vary, but having the responsibility for others’ lives are consistent among leadership roles. Within the ranking systems of the military, classes of enlisted officers range from lowest to highest with a designation of a pay grade E-1 through E-9. The first eligible leadership position in combat is a grade E-4 designation, the lowest noncommissioned officer. Typically those in combat operations in leadership positions typically range from grade designations E-4 through E-9. Militaryfactory.com (2014) offers a comparison of the enlisted rankings of the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy, within grades E-1 through E-9, those between E-4 through E-9 are considered in leadership positions with the corresponding titles as shown in Table 1.

Commissioned officer positions are higher ranks than enlisted positions. They also have varying titles among branches of the military, but still have comparable designations, which fall between categories of O-1 through O-10 (lowest to highest) as reported by Militaryfactory.com (2014). Each of the categories are considered leadership positions, however, the higher rank, the greater the responsibility. The comparisons across military branches are listed in Table 2.
Table 1

Summary of Enlisted Ranks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Marines</th>
<th>Navy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-1</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Airman Basic</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Seaman Recruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-2</td>
<td>Private 2</td>
<td>Airman</td>
<td>Private First Class</td>
<td>Seaman Apprentice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-3</td>
<td>Private First Class</td>
<td>Airman First Class</td>
<td>Lance Corporal</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-4</td>
<td>Corporal/Specialist</td>
<td>Senior Airman</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>Petty Officer 3\textsuperscript{rd} Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-5</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Petty Officer 2\textsuperscript{nd} Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-6</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>Technical Sergeant</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>Petty Officer 1\textsuperscript{st} Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-7</td>
<td>Sergeant 1\textsuperscript{st} Class</td>
<td>Master Sergeant</td>
<td>Gunnery Sergeant</td>
<td>Chief Petty Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-8</td>
<td>Master Sergeant</td>
<td>Senior Master Sergeant</td>
<td>Master Gunnery Officer</td>
<td>Senior Chief Petty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-9</td>
<td>Sergeant Major/Command Sergeant Major</td>
<td>Chief Master Sergeant/Command Chief Master Sergeant</td>
<td>Sergeant Major</td>
<td>Master Chief Petty Commander Master</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Summary of Commissioned Officer Leadership Ranks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Marines</th>
<th>Navy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O-1</td>
<td>2nd Lieutenant</td>
<td>2nd Lieutenant</td>
<td>2nd Lieutenant</td>
<td>Ensign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-2</td>
<td>1st Lieutenant</td>
<td>1st Lieutenant</td>
<td>1st Lieutenant</td>
<td>Lieutenant Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-3</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-4</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Lieutenant Commander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-5</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>Commander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-6</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-7</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
<td>Rear Admiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-8</td>
<td>Major General</td>
<td>Major General</td>
<td>Major General</td>
<td>Rear Admiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-9</td>
<td>Lieutenant General</td>
<td>Lieutenant General</td>
<td>Lieutenant General</td>
<td>Vice Admiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-10</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Admiral</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Reintegration: The transition process military personnel experience when returning home from deployment (Pearson & Miller, 2006). Reintegration in this study includes the process of the emotional transition of military personnel into the family system and typical demands of daily, stateside living.

Review of Literature

In working towards developing an understanding of the impact of combat on military officers’ reintegration experiences, it was necessary to explore the reintegration experiences of military personnel in non-leadership positions. The research reviewed will help the reader develop a deeper understanding of the deployment cycle, specifically
focusing on the combat experiences during deployment, then the return to civilian life during reintegration, including physical, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal transitions. Furthermore, treatment issues and counseling method considerations have also been investigated. The researcher explored how the emotional experiences reflected challenges within the individuals who have faced combat and how the memories, imprints, and emotional experiences of combat may have directly impacted the ways in which military officers have interacted with their families and the societies with which they were once familiar.

**Understanding the Deployment Cycle**

Before a civilian has enlisted in any branch of the military, that person was made aware of the magnitude of sacrifices and commitments necessary to fulfill one’s obligation to the military (Soames, 2005). De Torrenté (2002) explained that for the Global War on Terror, military personnel have been prepared to face diverse means of combat. Buzzell (2005) stated that even though new recruits have gained a basic understanding of the deployment cycle, have trained for severe conditions, and learned strategies of varying combat styles, the aftermath of the deployment experience may have been more difficult of a challenge than one initially anticipated.

**Pre deployment: conditioning for combat.** At the onset of one’s military experience, the deployment cycle was launched. During the pre-deployment phase for a newly enlisted recruit in any of the military branches, basic training has been the first step (Schading, 2006). During the basic training phase, physical fitness is one of the major components, along with combat and survival skills (Schading, 2007). Throughout all of
the physical challenges one faced in training, mental conditioning was an underlying component (Soames, 2005). Military personnel have been challenged to face extraordinary conditions (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). From early training, military personnel were conditioned to prepare themselves to react in situations that would not be the typical human response in a non-combat atmosphere (Grossman & Christensen, 2004).

Military personnel trained in stress-simulated environments to practice their skills in order to prepare the conditioned responses to become the automatic responses (Mundt, 2009). Military personnel who reacted according to their training in real-life high stress situations, were the ones who had the greatest chance of survival (Grossman & Christensen, 2004). The experiences of combat then reinforced the teachings of training, solidifying the combat survival mentality (Schading, 2006).

**Deployment.** The deployment phase of the deployment cycle was the time when military personnel may have faced combat (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). Due to the Global War on Terror, the United States has launched deployments of greater than two million military personnel (Alfano, Balderas, Lau, Brunnell, & Beidel, 2013). The Global War on Terror included specific operations such as Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, which have required continuous deployments (Bonds, Baiocchi, & McDonald, 2010).

**Connecting with the home front during deployment.** Maintaining connections with family and friends stateside during deployment could have been experienced as both positive and negative. The technology with Internet and cell phones available during the
Global War on Terror regarding communication with one’s family has offered convenient and instant means of communication in comparison to previous wars (Cawkill, Van Den Berg, Arvers, Puente, & Cuvelier, 2008).

While being in contact with family members seemed positive, this too may have led to a sense of powerlessness (Tupper, 2010). For example, as military personnel heard negative situations going on at home such as children acting out or not doing well in school, bills not being paid, spouses venting in frustration, or even experiencing a break-up on-line or over the phone—communication could have left the military personnel upset, devastated, or distracted (Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008). In this way, communication technology has been a negative factor. In a multistep analytic inductive study, Durham (2010) found that although military personnel needed to be focusing 100% within the combat zone, their thoughts have been distracted and preoccupied with situations happening on the home front due to convenient means of communication.

**Combat.** During deployments, military personnel had to be ready for combat at any time (Killgore et al., 2008). During the Global War on Terror, the combat experience has been fought through indirect as well as direct styles of warfare (Derfner, 2011). Through indirect means, the majority of attacks has been through hidden styles of warfare and has been executed through unexpected means such as: Suicide Bombs, Improvised Explosive Devices (car bombs), and Rocket Propelled Grenades (Killgore et al., 2008). Because of this indirect style of warfare, military personnel had to maintain a state of alert and readiness at virtually all times (Rhoades & Sar, 2005). Regardless of how
skilled military personnel have been, this type of warfare along with the difficulty of device detection has led to various levels of feeling powerless within the individual (Foulkrod, 2006). This feeling could have been further compounded if the experience of death was attached (Gallagher, 2010).

Throughout combat, death has always been the largest potential sacrifice (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). The majority of military personnel at any point during combat may have been involved in situations where they were injured, or they had handled human remains, or seen fellow military personnel brutally injured or killed (Gallagher, 2010). According to Grossman and Christensen (2004), when the source of trauma has been another human or if one had to inflict trauma on another human, the lasting effects of the trauma have been more profound, than if the source or object of the trauma was non-human, that is, a natural disaster or destroying an inanimate object. The experience of combat has had the greatest capability of causing atrocities to the human soul (Rhoades & Sar, 2005). Thus, the understanding from both Grossman and Christensen (2004) and Rhoades and Sar (2005) was that strong emotions increased the likelihood of the brain retaining such information far beyond the combat experience.

The combat experience, in turn, had made the reversal process of the war mentality extremely difficult (Adler, Bliese, McGurk, Hoge, & Castro, 2009). The reason is that combat situations are not typically experienced, causing high levels of stress, which initiate the release of adrenaline, increasing the likelihood of encoding memories into long term memory storage (Cahill, 2003). Therefore, it has been understood that these encoded memories may have been imprinted on the mind so deeply
that they may have had lasting effects on individuals (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007). Once military personnel have returned home, even though they would be experiencing non-combat conditions in the states, it was common for military personnel to react to environmental cues that were associated with memories from the combat zone as a transfer of the stimulus (Dymond & Rehfeldt, 2000).

**Post deployment: debriefing after combat.** According to Army G1 (2009), after combat, military personnel have typically gone to a stable environment to debrief and process their deployment experience as well as prepare for their next step of their deployment cycle. During this time, any concerns with one’s initial mental status following deployment would have been addressed (Military Deployment Guide, Department of Defense, 2012a). This stabilization period typically lasted 60–90 days (Army G1, 2009).

During this time, the individuals returning from combat have often experienced conflicting emotions (Killgore et al., 2006). These emotions have included feelings of relief from being out of the combat zone, excitement for being reunited with one’s family, or even anxiety or apprehension for leaving the combat zone while peers had been left behind (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Alder, 2014). Reunification with one’s family has been one of the target goals of post deployment in preparation for the reintegration phase of deployment.

**Reintegration.** For military personnel returning home after combat, reintegration has been a very personal experience (Wegner, 2011). Verburg (2010) emphasized readjustment as one of the main challenges military personnel had to face. Even though
individuals may have been returning to a previously familiar environment, the transformation during combat may have left military personnel redefining themselves upon return (Killgore et al., 2006). Just as one acclimates to a brand new situation and environment, so too was the reintegration process a brand new acclimation for individuals who have returned from combat (Verburg, 2010).

The following addresses the rippling effects of combat upon military personnel as they returned to their pre-war life. As individuals shifted from deployment to civilian life, each faced diverse physical, emotional/mental, and family/environmental transitions. These transitional categories are addressed below. These transitional points may have been more pivotal for some than others (Bolton, 2006).

**Physical transitions.** As military personnel exited the combat zone, the physical aspects of the environment and demands shifted from an intense, life-threatening atmosphere to a more familiar climate, the ability to maintain hygiene, the increased accessibility to food and drink, the absence of carrying supplies and carrying a weapon (Mundt, 2009). For some, the change was viewed as relief. However, for others, the absence of constantly carrying heavy supplies or weapons may have left a void or even a sense of compromised security (Foulkrod, 2006).

In order to assist in filling a void or helping one feel more secure, some military personnel living in a safe environment have chosen to sleep with a weapon close at hand (Mundt, 2009). Some military personnel have sought situations that were risk taking, and adrenaline releasing (Mundt, 2009). The switch from a continuous adrenaline surge to typical mundane civilian life has been a major shift for some military personnel (Currie,
Day, & Kelloway, 2011). Typically in one’s life, the “flight or fight” mechanism is occasionally accessed. However, during war, this mechanism was accessed on a regular basis, continuously releasing adrenaline into the body (Mundt, 2009). According to Cantrell and Dean (2005), during reintegration, the lack of adrenaline surge may have had a similar effect to that of addicts no longer receiving their substance. In the same way, some military personnel may have experienced a similar type of withdrawal, thus leading to complications during the reintegration process (Currie et al., 2011).

Others who have become accustomed to the physical demands of combat may have felt incomplete as a result of the change in environmental factors (Yosick et al., 2012). Still some military personnel, who had previously transitioned out of the combat zone, have reacted to environmental cues (Currie et al., 2011). The way in which physical senses trigger memory is so powerful that at times military personnel have felt directly connected to their experiences within the combat zone regardless of how removed they may been from the combat experience (Milliken et al., 2007).

**Emotional/mental transitions.** For many, combat has left impressions on military personnel that lasted far beyond combat. This may have had rippling effects on their internal belief system, relationships, family life, careers, and their outlook on society (Bolton et al., 2008). The following explores negative and positive effects of combat in one’s intrapersonal experiences as well as interpersonal experiences after combat.

**Intrapersonal experiences.** As individuals returned from combat, their first post deployment transitional time before returning to families has been extremely critical (Tripp, 2007). For many, this could have been the first time one had the chance to
decompress and reflect on personal feelings of the combat experience (Mundt, 2009). For some, this post deployment period may not be long enough. Research has been conducted confirming military personnel returning home and having a difficult time (Currie et al., 2011). This may be due to many factors, including: lack of other military personnel who have experienced a similar situation, or the military personnel not being amply prepared to experience the switch back into civilian life (Goldman et al., 2012).

Instead of using the post deployment phase for debriefing and reflecting, some have focused instead on celebrating being out of the combat zone or have used the time to look forward to seeing their families. For these military personnel, Ferrier-Auerbach, Erbes, Polusny, Rath, and Sponheim (2010) stated that after returning to civilian life and after the celebrations, the reflection of combat experiences has taken place for the first time. When there have been no other military personnel or professionals to process their experiences with, this has led to negative interpretations of either the combat experience or their new civilian roles (Schmitt, 2003).

For instance, upon return, some military personnel have experienced stagnation with civilian life (Killgore et al., 2008). As stated by many in the research, without support from others, this transition has been interpreted quite negatively, such as experiencing feelings of guilt, remorse, and moral conflicts for their actions during war (Goldman et al., 2012). Nevertheless, not enough military personnel have been seeking help (Kang & Hyams, 2005). According to Wain, Bradley, Nam, Waldrep, and Cozza (2005), military personnel have often been reluctant to pursue mental health care treatment due to the negative stigma by the military; they have been viewed as weak
military personnel if pursuing treatment. Hoge et al. (2005) reported that military personnel have been hesitant to report true symptoms, fearing their current positions and future promotions within the military may be compromised.

In a more positive light, some literature has also presented encouraging outcomes from experiencing combat. For instance, according to Killgore et al. (2006), the experiences of combat had a profound impact upon the personal belief systems of some military personnel. For instance, they viewed their combat experiences as life changing: an experience, which gave direction in helping to prioritize their lives (Schmitt, 2003). In turn, some have experienced spiritual growth. The realization of the fragility of life is brought to the forefront during combat (Cantrell & Dean, 2005). Military personnel may have thought about life in a different perspective and some wanted to reorganize their lives to truly value the lives of others (Pisano, 2010). Some may have focused on living simply and giving to others less fortunate. Others may have placed a greater emphasis on family and meaningful relationships (Goldman et al., 2012). Overall, it is imperative to understand that some optimistic views have surfaced from the experiences of combat.

*Interpersonal effects.* The intrapersonal experiences of a person impact the interpersonal. Therefore, both positive and negative interpersonal effects have existed as a result of experiencing combat (Wood, 2011). Negative interpersonal experiences have included individuals who had difficulty redefining their family roles, which led to feeling displaced within their family unit (Hollingsworth, 2011). Others may have had difficulty connecting with their families who could not understand fully the combat environment, thus leading to further feelings of disconnection within the family (Hoge, Castro, &
Messer, 2004). Marital distress has also been prevalent due to the differing experiences of the spouse and military personnel during deployment (Baptist et al., 2011). Sayers (2011) reported that the re-establishment of intimate relationships has been a difficult task for military personnel returning from combat. Spouses or significant others may have found the reconnection challenging (Jonas et al., 2010).

Even though many challenges have existed interpersonally with many, others were able to use combat as an inspiration for their lives after combat. For instance, some have placed greater emphasis on meaningful relationships, therefore, once reunited with families some individuals may have been spending more time with their loved ones (Currie et al., 2011). They may have changed entirely from their pre-combat lifestyles altogether (Grossman & Christensen, 2004). Perhaps before their combat experience, they may have spent countless hours at work; however, after combat they may have decided to retire early, take more time off, or do more activities with their families (Pisano, 2010).

Interpersonal experiences also must include the family members of the military service member. Families have also needed to be willing to adjust to their new lives once military members return (Jonas et al., 2010). Families must adjust to both the positive and negative changes in the outlook and mindset of the returning military member (Bolton et al., 2008). According to Goff, Crow, Reisbig, and Hamilton (2007), repercussions of combat have not only impacted the individual experiencing combat, but those with whom the military member is interpersonally connected. Therefore, Wain et al. (2005) reported the need for the family to undergo reconstruction in order to facilitate
a positive transition for both the returning military member of the family and the
individuals within the family system. These transitions may have been major changes in
lifestyles because of the experiences military personnel encountered during deployment
(Sayers, 2011). Along with military personnel having concerns with reconnecting with
their family members, Zoroya (2009) also discussed the expectations of families for
returning military personnel. Oftentimes, the expectation was for military personnel to
return to a typical daily routine (Hutchinson & Bank-Williams, 2006). This meant a
transition from the military strict minute-to-minute schedule with increased vigilance, to
a laid back and secure environment at home, with the expectation that all would be well
(Taft, Schumm, Panuzio, & Proctor, 2008). Not only has the routine shifted, but the
levels of responsibility and duty as well (Cantrell & Dean, 2005). Wessels (2004)
indicated that military personnel were no longer assigned to complete a particular set of
tasks, as during deployment. Therefore, no longer having a mission was also a
significant adjustment (Hutchinson & Bank-Williams, 2006).

Oftentimes patience has been warranted by the significant other in order to
understand how combat has impacted his or her loved one (Hutchinson & Bank-Williams,
2006). At times, these may have surfaced as symptoms. The symptoms experienced by
the individuals, such as flashbacks and nightmares, may have adversely affected the
relationships with their significant others and within their family unit (Goff et al., 2007).
Oftentimes, these symptoms may have been interfering with the emotional component of
relationships resulting in dissatisfaction of those relationships (Sayers, 2011). Families
have often found it difficult to know what to do or how to help; in turn, they may have felt
helpless or powerless (Hutchinson & Bank-Williams, 2006). Families may not have fully understood the need of their newly returned loved one to spend more time with other military personnel; this desire may have been interpreted instead as a personal insult to their loved ones (Jonas et al., 2010).

Military personnel oftentimes felt most comfortable turning to fellow combat peers for support (Durham, 2010). However, when military personnel returned from deployment, they may not have always maintained such close connections with their fellow comrades (Jonas et al., 2010). During the war, experiencing high stress and near death situations with fellow military personnel created such strong bonds, the connection was that of a brotherhood (Negin, 2002). Once military personnel dispersed into their civilian families, this brotherhood may have split up. The absence of the individuals with whom such strong bonds were created left a significant void, one which caused a difficult transition, creating deep negative feelings where the individual may have grieved the absence of fellow military friendships (Scranton, 2006).

The need for military personnel to be supported by one another was underscored in the research conducted by Currie et al. (2011). Their research focused on looking at differences between single and multiple deployments through covariance matrices (Currie et al., 2011). What Currie et al. found to be significant was the military personnel’s perception of the best support in the reintegration phase to be from other military personnel with similar experiences. Therefore, without the support from other military personnel, the reintegration process may have been all the more difficult.
Compounding the feelings of missing fellow comrades, the perception of lacking a purpose of one’s life, and feeling displaced in one’s own family have taken a large toll on some returning military members (Burgos, 2004). Emotionally, once military personnel left deployment and returned to a typical civilian life, some felt they no longer had a specific mission or task, thus possibly developing a reduced sense of self-importance, often creating a desire in that individual to return to combat (Buzzell, 2005). Frequently, this may have been due to the fact that the individual’s positive support system which was comprised of other military personnel who had experienced similar events were no longer available to offer support; the brotherhood which was once an integral part of their lives was absent (Negin, 2002). Military personnel may no longer have felt connected to others because their new support system, or family, upon return from deployment, offered a different type of support—one that may not have matched the individual’s needs (Hutchinson & Bank-Williams, 2006).

**Further Implications for Leaders**

Reintegration for leaders included all of the previously discussed physical and emotional transitions. However, there have been further implications, as leaders had variations to their experiences, which may have included greater responsibility, a multitude of decisions that needed to be made, and they were held accountable for each member within their command (Kreie, 2014).

First, as previously mentioned, leaders held great levels of responsibility. This constituted not only being responsible for one’s own actions, but for the actions of all under that command (Gresser, 2014). The commander received the orders that were
assigned from higher ranks, then was responsible to interpret and distribute the commands, while motivating the troops (Leighton, 2013).

Gresser (2014) further discussed the importance of decision-making skills in terms of day-to-day care for troops and military action plans. Many leaders had to make decisions to carry out certain missions and tasks assigned. Guthrie (2012) emphasized the need for creativity from a commander; problem solving was critical. There were many things to consider in any given situation, such as: the mission, environmental factors, potential enemies, supplies, weapons, and safety concerns (Sullivan, 2013).

During combat, each commander had been given a unique combination of the various factors listed above. Each mission has been unique. Sometimes, these missions may have looked or felt similar to other missions, or, on the contrary, may have been an entirely different experience (Drumsta, 2012). Often, the outcome of the mission may have indicated how the leader would interpret his combat experience during reintegration (Varljen, 2003).

Furthermore, the leader was accountable for every action within the mission: the troops themselves and the mission, whether or not it was successful (Gresser, 2014). Furthermore, if there was an incident with one of the members of the command, the leader was responsible for dealing with it directly, or reporting it to the next level (Leighton, 2013). Not all leaders may have been close with their troops, however, many strong leaders were (Varljen, 2003). Leaders may have looked to the cause of the incident and may have found it to be a mistake of the leader’s orders, or, it could have been unforeseen circumstances, or even a mistake of the military service member in
question (Drumsta, 2012). Regardless, the leader was responsible (Varljen, 2003). This responsibility for some leaders had even stretched to the family of their troops. For instance, if one of their troops had been killed, a leader may have taken it upon himself to speak with the family members (Mundt, 2009). Again, all of these factors of responsibility may have had an effect on the leader during the leader’s own reintegration experience (Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, intervention strategies are imperative to explore in order to help assist military combat leaders.

Treatment Issues

It is important to note, not all returning military personnel from The Global War on Terror experienced all of the factors discussed. The exploration of the research was a sampling of the types of experiences military personnel may have faced or encountered. However, these experiences have varied among military personnel, the type of deployment, and the combat experience (Doran, Gaskin, Schumm, & Smith, 2004). Rhoades and Sar (2005) reported some of the risk factors to experiencing more severe stress-related symptoms were the following:

1. *inexperience with combat and casualties*
2. *isolation and feeling out of touch*
3. *sleep deprivation/feeling powerless*
4. *ongoing exposure to danger*
5. *dehydration*
6. *overwork*
Rhoades and Sar (2005) described trauma as “a threatening experience, which turns an adaptive process to a maladaptive one” (p. 7). Nevertheless, it was necessary to acknowledge the possibility that the symptomology military personnel experienced may have also been in part attributed to the individual’s own personality, nature, or disposition, rather than the traumatic experience in and of itself (Rhoades & Sar, 2005). Individuals experience the world from their own perceptions, a worldview unique to each person. It is possible that resiliency factors differed between military personnel, which may have also accounted for variations among stress-related symptomology (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006).

Mundt (2009) stated that military personnel often found difficulty in relating to the daily stressors civilians faced, and viewed civilian daily stressors as insignificant in comparison to the stressors during their combat experiences. In turn, this has caused strong feelings of anger and created greater complications in the re-establishment of relationships or even in the way military personnel re-immersed themselves into civilian life (Jonas et al., 2010). As a result, oftentimes there may have been a shift in relationships leading to separation or divorce, family violence, impaired parenting, intimacy concerns, or a change in employment status (Doyle & Peterson, 2005).

According to Wain et al. (2005), the majority of military personnel have not sought treatment for their mental health care needs. Various interventions and treatments have been available depending on the need(s) of military personnel. Carter, Capone, and Short (2011) indicated a perceived negative stigma toward military personnel who
actually received psychological help; these were often perceptions of being weak and vulnerable.

The effects of war contributed to psychological issues such as thoughts of suicide, problems with brain injuries, lack of ability to adjust to civilian life, as well as depression and anxiety which military personnel have been left to deal with for the rest of their lives (Goodman, 2005). Oftentimes, self-medication had been the chosen remedy of some military personnel when other treatment options seemed to create an overwhelming sense of susceptibility (Carter et al., 2011).

**Types of Counseling and Programs Available**

There have been multiple programs and aid available in which military personnel had opportunities to receive assistance and counseling. National resources as well as sub organizations by states have offered resources for all stages of deployment: pre deployment, deployment, post deployment, and reintegration for military personnel and their families. For instance, Military OneSource has been a resource available to military individuals as well as families of military personnel. Resources available included information on the various types of counseling available. These included counseling services for individually identified issues, those which included but have not been limited to substance abuse and addictions, post traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, suicidal ideation, adjustment concerns, career counseling, anxiety, inter-relational communication, abuse and neglect, stress management, parenting, parental care issues, and grief (Military OneSource, Department of Defense, 2012b). These issues had diverse approaches available through counselors in order to meet individual needs.
Through the Military OneSource (Department of Defense, 2012b), the types of counseling offered included individual, couples, parent support programs, family, or group therapy. Oftentimes the approach may have included solution focused, systems approach and cognitive behavioral counseling (Military OneSource, Department of Defense, 2012b). Furthermore, resilience approaches were also implemented to help individuals develop or expand their strengths in areas of spirituality, self confidence, prioritization of life events, effects of one’s actions, and finding meaning in life (Army G1, 2012). Overall, the goals had been focused on learning and encouraging productive perspectives as well as healthy means of coping with life stressors after combat (Military OneSource, Department of Defense, 2012b).

Numerous programs have also been available through various agencies and government programs. These included, as stated above, Military OneSource; Military Homefront, which has been a branch of the Department of Defense that offered support to families and their communities; Army G1, which offered suicide prevention support for military personnel and strength based counseling; SAMHSA, which stands for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and had offered assistance for behavioral health services, suicide prevention, and resources for treatment locations. The Department of Veterans Affairs has continually offered resources to all veterans; however, health care professionals have not included licensed professional counselors (B. Bray, 2015). Counseling resources have ranged from education and career assistance offered by licensed Social Workers in order to find a local chapter of the Veteran Centers to further assist with counseling and intervention services in the area in which one lived.
Aside from the previously mentioned programs and resources, several other programs have been in existence in various areas. More and more agencies have been developed as charity organizations, such as the *Wounded Warrior Project*, which are created to help veterans. Locally, agencies have specialized in counseling returning veterans. The private sector also offered services to military personnel in order to offer aid to address areas of need.

According to the Interagency Task Force on Military and Veterans’ Mental Health in the 2013 Interim Report, not enough research is in existence regarding the efficacy of counseling interventions and the most effective approaches in helping returning veterans (Department of Defense, 2013). Therefore, in this report, the President made an executive order to conduct research on intervention and counseling methodologies that are most effective with returning military personnel and families, as well as to improve access to overall mental health care, and to strengthen suicide prevention (Department of Defense, 2013). Results of this order have not yet been published. Furthermore, Licensed Professional Counselors, not being employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, could be impacting the reason the research on counseling intervention strategies is limited. The Department of Veterans Affairs employs social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists for behavioral health care, ignoring the impact and benefits Licensed Professional Counselors could provide (R. Bray, 2014a).
**Integrating Meaning and Healing**

As military personnel worked to redefine their new civilian lives after combat, it was important to work on the maintenance of on-going understanding and acceptance of these roles. According to Military OneSource (Department of Defense, 2013), military personnel have been encouraged to accept that life would be different after combat, and the relationships within the family system must be redefined. This included turning inward to patience and building trust with loved ones, two key elements that have been challenging for those coming from the combat zone (Military OneSource, Department of Defense, 2013).

Oftentimes, combat may have taught the lesson of the fragility of life and the uncertainties attached (Munsey, 2007). For some it has been healing for returning persons to use their experience in combat as motivation to reconnect and redefine their roles within their family and communities (Barlas, 2007). For all involved with the returning military personnel, a realistic expectation of the returning member, and each of the members within the family are critical, including realistic expectations of oneself (Munsey, 2007). Military persons have been encouraged to connect with others—family, friends, or other veterans (Barlas, 2007). This has been an ongoing challenge military personnel have been facing, as many have had the urge to withdraw and isolate themselves (Military OneSource, Department of Defense, 2014). Yehl and Scala (2014) reported that military members may benefit from giving help, for they reported that it has been found to be helpful and therapeutic for military personnel to help others in need, regardless if helping other service members or others in general. Therefore, finding what
is helpful for each individual has been a key factor in helping one’s reintegration process. It has been pertinent in helping military personnel understand the potential to have meaning in their lives after combat and that there would be possibilities of moving beyond the combat experience by continuing to evolve as individuals with the instillation of hope in a new perspective (Garrison, 2005).

**Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the effects of combat on reintegration of military personnel in order to highlight the purpose and rationale for the current study. The diverse combat experiences and individual perceptions of military personnel were explored to underscore the need for this study. The following chapter provides an extensive description of the methodology for the current study focusing on combat military officers’ experiences during reintegration.
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter emphasized the necessity to understand military officers’
experiences of combat in order to gain greater insight to their reintegration experiences. 
Potential differences in the reintegration experiences of military officers versus those not
in leadership positions exist due to the additional responsibilities of officers (Ritchie, 
2007). The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of military leaders’
experiences of combat and how combat in respective leadership roles have affected their
reintegration experiences. The guiding research question was: “What are the
reintegration experiences of enlisted Army and Navy Non-Commissioned officers after
combat?” To collect the answers to this question, the researcher implemented a
qualitative phenomenological research design for this investigation.

This chapter first looks at the rationale for using a phenomenological approach for
this study. Information regarding the researcher is also included. The procedures utilized
for the investigation are detailed which include the data collection strategies, scripted
dialogues, and interview questions. The researcher also addressed strategies that were
used to validate the research. This chapter concludes with ways in which the data were
analyzed.

Phenomenological Approach as Qualitative Inquiry

The researcher wanted to utilize a comprehensive approach to the research, as the
goal of the study was to gain as much information from the phenomenon studied.
Therefore, a qualitative method was the best fit, as this allowed the researcher to utilize a
holistic approach (Creswell, 2007). The researcher found the best qualitative approach, which allows for the examination of all facets of a phenomenon, to be through the phenomenological research method (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological approaches are qualitative in nature as they are inductive and allow for the understanding of experiences to unfold through individual narratives (Bawalan & Ballad, 2012).

According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative analysis opens the scope of the study by looking at the phenomenon through the complex patterns of emerging themes. A phenomenological qualitative study allows the researcher to closely examine similarities among the participants by extracting commonalities and themes (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). According to Moustakas (1994), the comprehension of a specific phenomenon is accomplished through the examination of the pure experiences of the participants including descriptions, reflections, and actions within the examined experience. Through phenomenology, the researcher would be able to comprehend reintegration through the lens of the participants studied, as the individuals are the experts of their experiences (Waters, 2014).

A phenomenological approach was the best fit for this study as the researcher’s goal was to understand the experiences of individuals through the reintegration process. A phenomenological approach is the best way to explore the insight of subjective experiences of participants. Phenomenological approaches describe the phenomenon studied, thus matching the goal of the researcher of this study. The participant is the expert and yet through this method, the researcher is able to extract similar themes.
between each of the participants (Hatch, 2002). The intent is to understand the phenomenon from the participants investigated, their viewpoints and experiences.

Furthermore, research examining the experiences of military officers is limited. Therefore, through phenomenological approaches, information and knowledge of the experiences of military officers could be gained, in turn, adding to the scholarly dialogue of understanding reintegration. Therefore, aligning with the goals of the phenomenological research, this method was the logical means for conducting this study in order to understand military officers’ reintegration experiences.

**Researcher Involvement**

In qualitative research studies, it is imperative to understand that researchers may have presuppositions and biases. It is of utmost importance to recognize this in studies utilizing phenomenological methodologies. The researcher utilized the strategy of *epoché*, which is the researcher’s ability to be intentionally objective by being able to focus on the information gathered through a clear lens without inserting judgment (Moustakas, 1994). Through the process of *bracketing*, the researcher is able to contain thoughts, opinions, and assumptions of the study through bracketing personal reflections (Creswell, 2007). Bracketing is the acknowledgment of the researcher’s own assumptions and subjectivity throughout the research process (Fischer, 2009). Bracketing allows the researcher to filter and separate her own thoughts from the pure information of the research.

The researcher’s biases include both, information from immersion in the literature as well as any interaction with military personnel prior to this study. From the literature,
the researcher had concern about pharmaceuticals being the main intervention for returning military personnel, instead of being counseling with mental health counselors or support groups. This has led the researcher to have even greater concern that not enough mental health support is offered to military, thus leading to more negative aftereffects (as reported in the previous chapter). The researcher strongly believes that it would be advantageous for professional counselors to offer the scaffolding necessary for military personnel to reconstruct their lives after combat in order for them to learn strategies of working through the obstacles of reintegration. It is unfair to have unrealistic expectations of continuing life simply as before without the resources and strategies essential for military personnel to understand how their experiences can fit into their civilian lives. Counselors are necessary to provide the relevance and structure to help foster the independence and to assist in the internalization of positive strategies to be able to assist in the reintegration process in a positive way.

Throughout the recent years, the researcher has spent several weeks near Camp Lejeune with friends. Through these friends, the researcher had the opportunity to meet friends of friends who were somehow connected to the military. These connections turned into conversations with military personnel, military spouses, and hospital chaplains. Therefore, the researcher wanted to be mindful of these influences in order to separate them from the research participants’ experiences. One of the concerns that had come up in these conversations was the gap between the day-to-day entrenchment of those immersed in combat military life versus the common civilian perception of current events of the Global War on Terror. For instance, after speaking with some military
members, even in some of their social circles, typical civilian peers were disconnected and did not even realize that troops were still engaged in combat in the Middle East. As the researcher, I feel this is a huge concern, as the ones for whom the military members are putting their lives on the line are not even aware of the sacrifices military personnel are making every day. It is disheartening to see how the experiences of the military are not recognized, in turn, then perceived and internalized by military personnel as being dismissed or no big deal. The lack of knowledge the common civilian has seems to be a frustration for military personnel. Therefore, military personnel internalizing the day-to-day issues of civilian life and putting them in perspective with what goes on in the combat zone without resources or support seems to be how military personnel experience reintegration, thus leading to great concern for one’s mental health.

Moreover, the researcher’s bias for military leaders takes the level of concern to another level. Typical civilians may not understand the infrastructure of the military, thus not comprehending the effects of a chain of command. With each mission, potential benefits and risks exist. In the combat zone, survival is key. At times, the minimization of risk is difficult depending on the situation. Decisions must be made in which the leader has to weigh the decisions made. At times these could be decisions, which jeopardize the wellbeing of troops or even result in tragedy. The responsibility of these decisions may have a lasting effect. Yet, as the military leader faces civilians, they can be faced with additional perceptions of judgment or blame. Without the support of counseling, these effects could be haunting, and even detrimental to one’s life. Again, as the researcher of this study, I strongly believe in the need to help military officers work
through their struggles in order to offer perception and guidance during their reintegration process.

**Procedures**

Phenomenological research is used to understand the essence of a specific phenomenon. Because of the specific nature of phenomenological research, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling is key to the study in order to access individuals who share an experience that is the center of the researcher's investigation. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), there are typically 5–10 participants in a phenomenological study.

The researcher started this study with first gaining IRB approval (see Appendix A). The study was projected to last between 4–6 weeks. The researcher contacted counselor colleagues who are either working with military leaders or who are acquainted with military leaders (see Appendix B). Counselor colleagues were given the criteria for military leaders to be included in the study as well as a dialogue to utilize to ask for interested potential participants to contact the researcher (see Appendix C). When the potential participant contacted the researcher, the researcher spoke to the participant about the research process (see Appendix D). The research process included two interviews and member checking for each interview. A more detailed explanation of each of these steps is included below. The following addresses criteria for participant selection and sampling procedures.
**Participants**

Potential participants who met the following criteria were referred to the researcher: (a) military officers from any branch of the United States Military, (b) held leadership positions during combat, (c) have been removed from combat for at least 2 years, and (d) were interested in participating in the study.

The first element of inclusion was that participants held the position of being a military officer (commissioned or non-commissioned) in any of the branches of the United States Military. Various branches each have unique roles in combat, and no branch of the military was excluded from this study. Length of time commitments in the military vary between branches, therefore, this was not specified as to not exclude any particular branch.

The second criteria, leadership positions, are the officer positions held during combat. As previously stated, within the ranking systems of the military, officers in combat operations can have various rankings across the branches Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, or Navy. The description of these positions is located in the operational definition of *Military Officer*.

Another inclusion criteria was having been removed from combat for at least 2 years and living in the United States of America during that time. Wood (2011) described the potential of further thought and insight of one’s combat experience after being removed from deployments for a length of time. The first year typically may include a honeymoon period with a transitional focus, that is, re-acclimating with family, finding a job, visiting with friends, and so forth. Beyond the second year, other issues
may surface as the focus shifts to the day-to-day routine of civilian life offering greater reflection of the reintegration experience (Barlas, 2007). Furthermore, only including military personnel who live in the United States of America during the time of reintegration from the most recent deployment would help eliminate some of the confounding variables a different country would add to the reintegration experience. Typically, as one reintegrates, the adjustment period allows for the focus on the transition experience. This transition may be a process where military personnel redefine and reestablish their life roles.

**Sampling Procedures**

Once the researcher received approval from the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), 7 counselor colleagues of the researcher, who were known to work with military personnel, were consulted in order to refer participants for this phenomenological study (see Appendix B). Scripts for identifying potential candidates were given to each of the investigator’s contacts to follow (see Appendix C). A part of this script included the researcher’s contact information to express interest. Once the researcher received communication from the participant, a conversation between the researcher and participants occurred in which the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and allowed for clarification of any questions; and, if the candidate was interested in participating, an opportunity to set up the official interview (see Appendix D).

At the first part of the meeting, the researcher addressed confidentiality and its limits through the procedure of informed consent (see Appendix E). All participants
were encouraged to participate throughout the entire study; however, participants were informed of their ability to cease participation at any point of the study. Furthermore, the researcher utilized pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants throughout the entire study.

**Data Collection**

The procedures for working with participants and collecting data are included below. The detailed procedure for participant gathering is included first, which initially transpired through reaching out to the researcher’s counselor colleagues who had been known to work with military personnel.

The researcher contacted 7 counselor colleagues who had worked with military personnel (see Appendix B). The researcher’s colleagues referred individuals who had the potential to be well suited for the study (see Appendix C). Participants could have been previous or current clients or acquaintances. The participants contacted the researcher through phone or email. The researcher introduced the study and gave further information regarding confidentiality, the collection of demographics, and the potential length of the study, including 2 interviews and member checking for each (see Appendix D). The first five participants who met the inclusion criteria and wanted to participate in the study became the subjects of the study. Each participant received $25 for the first interview, and another $25 for the second interview for participating.

During the initial contact, participants were made aware in greater detail of the confidentiality issues, the procedures of the interviews, and the goals of the study. The researcher reviewed the steps of the data collection process once again during the first
part of the interview. The process included: (a) collection of demographic information, (b) combat interview, (c) member checking procedures, (d) follow-up interview, (e) verification of information. Data collection interviews were conducted at a time with which the participant felt comfortable, typically in an office or study room in the library. Interviews were recorded through digital means, as agreed upon by the participant. The data were saved to encrypted, password protected computer files. Further details of the data collection process are addressed in the following paragraphs. An overview of the data collection process is presented in Figure 1.

Data Collection

Researcher contacted counselor colleagues for potential participants

Potential participants contacted researcher, and researcher addressed overview of study. Initial interview set up

Combat interview, including: review of study, demographic data collection, and the content of the combat interview conducted

Textural-structural summary reviewed with participant for member checking

Member checking, followed by reintegration interview

Textural-structural summary reviewed with participants for member checking

Final verification and end of correspondence between researcher and participant

*Figure 1.* Illustration of the data collection process.
Demographic Information

During the initial phase of the data collection, the researcher administered forms to participants that included the informed consent (see Appendix E), the audio recording agreement (see Appendix F), and the demographic information survey (see Appendix G). All forms were collected and stored by the researcher.

The goals of collecting the demographic information included allowing analysis of similarities and differences between responses that could potentially be influenced by any demographic factor. Once the consent forms and demographic paperwork were complete, the researcher moved to conduct the initial interview.

Combat Interview

At the first meeting, the researcher addressed confidentiality and its limits through the procedure of informed consent. The researcher also addressed the conversational format of the interview in order to impress upon the participant the informal, relaxed atmosphere. The researcher discussed the goal of recording the interview for transcription analysis purposes. The researcher explained that after the completion of the interviews, the interviews would be transcribed and the participant could verify the researcher’s findings.

Following the explanation of the procedures, the participants had opportunities to ask questions and sign the informed consent and consent to be recorded if they agreed. All participants agreed to be recorded. The researcher retained the original paperwork signed by each participant. All participants were encouraged to participate throughout the entire study; however, participants were informed of their ability to cease
participation at any point of the study. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants that pseudonyms would be utilized for reporting purposes.

**Semi-Structured Interview Format**

Due to the nature of this type of study, the researcher utilized interviews and narratives for data collection. This also created the opportunity for conversational dialogue rather than a strict series of questions and answers (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The researcher formulated open-ended questions and prompts from studying the literature, the researcher’s personal communication with military personnel, and through historical and archived data. In this format, the researcher could further research the depth of knowledge of the participants’ experiences and perceptions of their reintegration experiences. The initial interview focused mainly on combat. The combat interview stemmed from the speaking prompts created by the researcher after studying the literature including that of Mundt (2009), Buzzell (2005), Tripp (2007), Barlas (2007), as well as consulting with *The New Handbook of Psychotherapy and Counseling with Men: A Comprehensive Guide to Settings, Problems and Treatment Approaches* (Brooks & Good, 2001), which addressed counseling military veterans. Furthermore, insights provided by Garrett and Hoppin (2009) specifically influenced the combat interview as questions speak to deployment experiences; Garrett and Hoppin emphasized the preparation for reintegration begins prior to one’s deployment. Each participant had a unique experience; therefore, some of the prompts were varied dependent upon the information presented by the participant. Nevertheless, the initial talking topics are presented below:
1. Preparation for deployment(s) in terms of preparing the transition with family (and/or friends)
2. Typical day-to-day goals in the combat zone including responsibilities and leadership duties during your deployments
3. Interaction with family during combat and its effects
4. How subordinates affected leadership style and approach
5. Conclusion of first interview, assessment of levels of discomfort, and preview of what is to come

**Member Checking**

Following each participant’s initial interview with the researcher, the researcher composed a textural-structural summary in order to offer trustworthiness to the study (Carlson, 2010). This type of summary is included in phenomenological studies as it not only allows the researcher to summarize the context of the interview, but also its subtext to take into account any of the participants’ reactions and behaviors that are observed throughout the process by the researcher as well (Doyle, 2007). Pairing observations with the context of the interview helps the researcher understand feelings not openly discussed. By sharing these reflections through the textural-structural summary, the researcher may clarify with the participant any information from the combat interview while offering a seamless transition to the reintegration interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The participants chose to schedule the second interview immediately after the first.
Throughout the interview process, the researcher checked for accuracy and verification. This included: collecting feedback of the combat interview, checking on accuracy of the information offered to the researcher, and clarifying any information inadvertently left out. The researcher was sure to take the time to conduct these member checks, as the researcher wanted to report credible data. It is the participant who is the expert in one’s own experience, therefore, to truly understand the phenomenon, the researcher had to understand the participant (Carlson, 2010). Through the textural-structural summary, the researcher was able to bracket any personal judgment as well as brainstorm potential follow-up questions for the optimal interview gathering procedures. The member checking procedures allowed for the participant as well as the researcher to offer feedback to one another, thus allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon explored.

Reintegration Interview

When the researcher engaged in the reintegration interview with the participants, the researcher once again utilized member checking to verify the information gathered. The reintegration interview was critical in the investigation of the phenomenon. However, the combat interview was the groundwork in preparing both the participant and researcher for the individual’s personal, and intimate interpretations of the combat experiences, which offered context to the reintegration phenomenon.

The researcher focused on the topics of reintegration that stemmed from the speaking prompts that were extracted from works of Cantrell and Dean (2009), Rhoades and Sar (2005), and Killgore et al. (2008). Each interview was unique, therefore, some of
the prompts varied. However, the topics at the core of the reintegration interview are as follows:

1. Follow up of previous deployment experience bridging topic to reintegration back to the states
2. Mental health services received during the transition process
3. Experience within the first few months of being home (greatest challenges and best experiences)
4. Experience after being back for a year (Intrapersonal/Interpersonal reflections)
5. How life priorities remained consistent or have changed since combat
6. Advice for other returning military combat officers
7. Assessment of levels of discomfort

Following the interview, participants were informed of the last phase of the process, which once again included member checking and finally, a verification of information.

**Saturation of Data**

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher was analyzing the data simultaneously, as this is key to a strong phenomenological study (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The data analysis process included emerging themes of military officers and their reintegration experiences. The researcher recorded emerging themes. Ongoing data collection that supported like themes were grouped accordingly; new themes were created as separate ideas emerged. The researcher had to determine when each participant reached saturation, meaning no new information about the phenomenon studied could be gained from the participant (Given, 2008). Secondly, the determination
that no new data were available from any of the participants after collecting all of the data from all of the participants was another indication of saturation (Given, 2008). This was evident when no new themes were emerging as the researcher was analyzing the data. Furthermore, the researcher was able to determine saturation through member checking of textural-narrative summaries. More specific information regarding the data analysis process is specified later on in this chapter.

Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2007), in order to prove the dependability of a qualitative study, it is necessary to establish trustworthiness. Establishing trustworthiness is through means of verifying the ways in which the researcher is conducting the study with the least amount of bias and ensuring objectivity. The researcher utilized three methods of establishing trustworthiness: (a) research journal, (b) member checking, (c) textural-structural descriptions, and (d) peer review.

Research Journal

As the researcher collected data, a journal was utilized in which she recorded reflections throughout the research process. The researcher was mindful of bracketing personal views to best eliminate judgment from the data (Fischer, 2009). The research journal served to record findings from the data collection as well as observations of participants during the process (Ortlipp, 2008). The journal also served to track the data collection process, to maintain organization, and to house emerging themes that surfaced along the way. Through this process, the researcher was able to record ongoing
reflections of the process as well as key points of interest that helped with the data analysis.

**Member Checking**

The participants are key to any study. Specifically in a phenomenological study, the participants are the experts of the phenomenon being investigated. Therefore, validating the findings with the experts is necessary in order to verify the outcomes of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this verification procedure constructs the credibility of the study. Therefore, the researcher summarized the initial and reintegration interviews in order to openly dialogue with the participants about the accuracy of the findings. This was key in order to ensure the researcher understood the information accurately from each participant. Summaries gave the participants opportunities to clarify and offer further feedback. Further information was also potentially gained, as perhaps the participants had greater reflections and offered more information than was initially included in the original interview responses.

Member checking included questions after the summaries were discussed with the participants including: (a) Does the information interpreted represent the essence of your reintegration experiences accurately? (b) What areas need to be clarified so as to accurately reflect your experiences of leadership and reintegration? (c) Throughout the interview process, participants may have had the opportunity to reflect in greater depth about their leadership combat experiences and reintegration experiences. Is there anything you would like to add or change to what we have discussed so far?
Textural-Structural Descriptions

The researcher reviewed each participant’s data. Summaries were completed of each categorical theme corresponding with descriptions from the participants’ reintegration experiences. This process allowed for the organization and clarification of the meaning of the themes and of the interview data. These summaries helped construct the textural-structural information of what was conveyed by the participants to help understand the phenomenon of the reintegration experience (Moustakas, 1994). Some of the statements presented by the participants may have indirectly been a reflection of their reintegration experiences. Thus by the researcher including textural and structural descriptions, the phenomenon could be understood from statements with latent descriptions of the reintegration experience. For instance, the textural focus was the specific narrative while the structural focus offered links to the feelings and thoughts that were connected to the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, as the researcher was tying the themes to textural-structural information, member checking was a continuous part of the process in order to maintain the integrity of the phenomenon. Member checking included the researcher creating an outline of the interview for each participant highlighting the specific components of the textural-structural summaries.

Peer Review

The researcher consulted with an objective peer reviewer throughout the data collection process in order to help the researcher maintain objectivity. The peer reviewer offered input through a variety of means. The peer reviewer had no connection to the study but assisted the researcher in reviewing the interview questions, to try to avoid
leading participants responses, or asking bias questions (Mertens, 2005). The peer reviewer also assisted in reviewing the researcher’s analysis of the data and emerging themes. The peer reviewer investigated through dialoguing with the researcher, the process in which the researcher identified the themes. This allowed verification of accurate themes.

**Data Analysis**

As previously stated, the goal of the study is to understand a specific phenomenon, the reintegration experiences of military officers after combat. Through the analysis of data, themes surface in the exploration of each individual participant’s experience of the phenomenon. Following individual analysis, commonalities across the entire group emerge which further helps explain and understand the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher utilized data analysis in which Moustakas outlined as (a) first the identification of categorical themes; (b) then verified themes and outlined further findings with the use of NVivo; (c) then created a summary of the experience through descriptions of the phenomenon in conjunction with the corresponding behaviors, thoughts, and emotions (textural-structural descriptions); (d) the researcher analyzed commonalities within the data matching themes between participants; and (e) concluded with the summary of the phenomenon of the reintegration experience of military officers after combat through the textural-structural descriptions. The researcher describes in further detail these phases of data analysis for this particular study in the following paragraphs.
Step 1: Identification of Categorical Themes

In order to maintain the integrity of the true experiences conveyed by the participant through the interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview as soon as possible following each interview. This allowed the pure essence of the information to be preserved by the researcher. After each transcription, the first step of the analysis took form. Once the transcriptions were complete for each interview, the researcher began to determine emerging categorical themes (Iborra, 2007). As transcriptions were studied, the researcher looked to identify statements that were describing the elements of the reintegration experience. The researcher then highlighted these statements and copied them into a separate computer file for the next step of the data analysis. Meanwhile, the researcher evaluated each statement within the transcriptions using the following guide:

(a) Does this statement relate to the relevance of the reintegration experience? (b) Is this an idea that could be categorized with other presenting thoughts? (c) Is this statement repeating the same idea of another part of the interview? When analyzing the data with these questions, if a statement satisfied the first two guiding questions, this statement was kept as a categorical theme. The wording of the statements was maintained as the true words of each participant to maintain the integrity of the meaning of the experience, thus understanding the phenomenon.

Once the categorical themes were identified, the researcher put the categorical themes onto a spreadsheet in separate columns. When each categorical theme was extracted from the information from the participants, the researcher began to cluster categorical themes together. This process was repeated as the researcher read each
statement line by line from the data collected from each of the subjects. Once all of the emerging themes were grouped, this part of the process was completed. Simultaneously, the researcher repeated the process to be sure no more categories emerged. The researcher reviewed the categories continuously throughout the process to ensure all categories of emerging themes were included and no categories were left out.

**Step 2: Qualitative Technology**

After the researcher identified the emerging themes, the researcher cross-checked the data analysis with a program specifically designed to do so. The researcher utilized NVivo, a computer software program, to assist in further data analysis. The program was objective, which further added to the validity of the study. Through this program, the researcher input a matrix that was driven from the categorical themes she had extracted through the transcripts. This would further offer verification of the researcher’s initial findings as well as bringing new themes and or connections between themes to the forefront. Therefore, the validity and reliability factors were strengthened by the use of the computer program.

**Step 3: Reinforcing Categorical Themes Via All Participants**

Once the researcher completed the reintegration interview, the researcher updated categorical units to include the data from the second interview. The researcher analyzed the data by grouping similar themes into categorical units. Once again, the researcher reviewed each categorical theme drawn from the interviews editing to avoid duplicate categorical themes. Then, the researcher copied the similar themes into the ultimate categorical units.
Step 4: Understanding the Phenomenon Through Understanding the Essence of the Participants’ Experiences

The categorical themes that emerged directed the textural-structural summaries of the reintegration experiences of military combat officers. Summaries included narrative descriptions of the experiences from the participant interviews as well as underlying attributions from the combat experiences that affected the reintegration experiences. This step helped the researcher obtain the essence of the phenomenon at varying levels, the narrative along with thoughts, feelings, and reactions that can only be captured through the textural-structural narrative.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 presented phenomenological approaches as the method of best fit for the study of understanding the experiences of reintegration of combat military officers. Participants included 5 military officers from varying branches of the military across the United States of America. Participants selected were willing to share both their combat and reintegration experiences. Participants varied in gender, age, family roles, community relations, and civilian experiences. The researcher implemented methods to maintain the integrity of the study through detailed data collection procedures. Each participant worked within the limits set forth in the study by the researcher and fully engaged in the data collection process.

The next chapter outlines the results of this study. The researcher’s hope is that the findings contribute to the study of helping counselors assist combat military officers with the reintegration process.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter reflects the results of this phenomenological study. The results are the direct findings as reported from the participants’ own personal reintegration experiences. The goals of this chapter include: (a) understanding each participants’ background and credential information which validate their views and perspectives of military leaders’ reintegration experiences, and (b) presenting the overall themes of the findings of the military leaders of this study which are a reflection of their experiences in combat.

Participants

This research study explored reintegration experiences of five military officers after combat. Particularly, this sample included two males whose combat experience was with the Navy, two males whose combat experience was with the Army/Army National Guard, and one female whose combat experience was with the Army National Guard. Participants’ ages ranged from 29 to 47 years of age and each held officer positions of E-4, E-5, E-6, or E-7 [see Chapter 1, Table 1]. Each participant was referred through the counselor’s colleagues. Colleagues tried to be helpful, but in doing so, some referred potential candidates who did not fit the criteria. For instance, a colleague tried to recruit a military leader who was currently stationed in Michigan, and who had just returned from combat only one year ago.

Even though the researcher never requested the counselor’s colleagues to contact the researcher when a referral was made, each of the colleagues notified the researcher of
a potential participant. All of the five participants contacted the researcher within 2 days of the researcher’s colleagues notifying the researcher. All participants were veterans from combat experiences in the Middle East and met the inclusion criteria for this study (military officers from any branch of the United States Military, held leadership positions during combat, have been removed from combat for at least 2 years, and were interested in participating in the study). Each participant was interested in this research and wanted to help other military personnel returning from combat, as evidenced by their dialogue with the researcher during the conversation in which each participant engaged with the researcher at the first encounter. As the researcher was reviewing the research study, in each participants’ own words, the participants agreed that they have witnessed a need to reach out to military personnel, and would be willing to help in anyway they could.

The following introduces the participants, individually, by describing their military branch affiliation, their leadership title and classification, the focus of his or her interview with the researcher, and examples of how the participants voiced their thoughts on the research topic. Table 3 offers the demographic summaries from the participants. To protect the identity of the participants, each was assigned a pseudonym to help maintain confidentiality. The participants are in the same order in which they were interviewed by the researcher. Each of the participants was cognizant in not disclosing too much of their combat experience. They either stated they could not disclose information, it was classified, or they asked if the researcher had clearance to hear the information, which the researcher did not.
### Table 3

**Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Specialist E4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married/1 Son</td>
<td></td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Engineman 1st Class E6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married/2 Daughters</td>
<td></td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>2nd Class Petty Officer E5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married/No Children</td>
<td>Army/National Guard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sergeant 1st Class E7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>Army/National Guard</td>
<td>Sergeant E5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mike**

The first participant interviewed in this study was Mike, a 29-year old, single Caucasian male affiliated with the Army. During his combat experience he was an Army Specialist, Grade E-4.

Mike reported he was in the Army between 2008 and 2012, and was deployed in 2008 to Afghanistan. Under his command, at times, he had a minimum of 3 individuals or a maximum of 19, depending on the mission. Mike reported that his focus was trying to stay alive, but at the same time, put his men’s needs before his own. Mike shared his passion regarding the Army, and shared that he continues to have the urge of wanting to help his country. He further contributed that “we were there so no one else has to worry about it.” He further shared that he is willing to help fellow military veterans through contributing his own personal journey with the researcher of this project.
Mike’s reflections of his experiences seemed from the heart, as he shared some deeper insights of his experiences, both positive and negative. Mike stated he felt like the exception with some of his experiences. Many of Mike’s reflections of combat centered around Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detection, thus putting his role at a high-risk capacity. Mike shared that the training for his deployment mission centered on software and transportation of supplies. However, he shared his role was never one that he trained for and instead was solely centered on security operations and checking vehicles for IEDs. He provided some examples of his roles with IEDs as well as some of his internal dialogue during those times. He further shared experiences of his leadership roles, the dynamics he experienced, and the reflection of his reintegration experiences in terms of his beliefs during and after combat. Mike further examined his family’s role as a vital part of his reintegration experiences. At the end of the interview process, Mike stated he was glad help is available to returning military leaders and stated, “I think it’s great . . . people do all sort of stupid stuff when they got back, so it’s a great idea [to work with counselors].”

Jason

Jason, a 33-year-old, married Caucasian male, was the second military leader interviewed. During his most recent combat experience, his rank was an Engineman First Class, Grade E-6.

Jason reported he began with the Navy in 2001, and is still employed as an active member of the Navy. He has been on six deployments. His combat experience was both in the seas of the Persian Gulf as well as ground support. Under his command, he
typically had 2–6 men. Depending on the mission, his role fluctuated between the maintenance of small ships utilized during deployments, managing vehicle transportation, training subordinates, and ordering necessary equipment.

Jason contacted the researcher to set up the initial interview immediately after he was invited to participate. Jason’s career is military; his devotion to the military was evident, as throughout the interviews, he referred to the Navy as his main support, that the Navy is essentially a family to him. He informed the researcher of his interest to participate in the study. He stated he, “has no issues reaching out to others,” referring to helping his fellow military personnel with psychological concerns. Jason shared his frustrations with his experiences and shared that he had also been referred to counseling after his fifth deployment. He shared that his fifth deployment was terminated prematurely due to the stress and frustration he experienced with his superior officers.

Jason shared his reintegration experiences regarding his interpersonal relationships, specifically, with his wife and son. Jason shared how his sacrifices within the military have affected his stateside personal life.

David

The third participant interviewed in this study was David, a 47-year old, married, Caucasian male affiliated with the Navy. During his combat experiences he was a Second Class Petty Officer, Grade E-5.

Under his command, he had 5 to 9 military personnel, depending on the mission. His combat experience was within the seas of the Persian Gulf. David reported that his focus was the entire electronic equipment for the ship, and they were even the support for
other military branches’ supplies. Therefore, David explained the critical role and the
great responsibility he had for both the equipment, and the military personnel under his
command. David shared his passion regarding the Navy, and shared that he would “do it
all over again. I was in war, I fought for our freedom, and I’d do it again. My part of the
watch is over . . . , it is the best fraternity in the world.”

It was evident throughout his interviews that David still holds a special place in
his heart for all veterans. During his interviews, at times, David became tearful. David
further shared that he wants to help send the message to fellow comrades, that they must
“let it go,” when they return home. He was eager to have this chance to help potentially
other veterans by sharing his own narrative with the researcher for this project. He
further added that Veterans’ Day is his favorite day of the year.

David’s wife was supportive as she was in the next room during David’s
interviews, and reconnected with him at the conclusion of each interview.

Lisa

Lisa, the fourth participant interviewed in this study, was a 39-year old, married
Caucasian female affiliated with the Army and National Guard. During her most recent
combat experience she was a Sergeant First Class, Grade E-7.

Lisa reported she was first in the Army, and then she was deployed to combat
through the National Guard. Under her command, she typically had 12 individuals. Lisa
reported that her focus was not only being a mechanic, but managing her soldiers. Lisa
had tasks of going on convoy operations, recovery operations, and transporting supplies
or infantry personnel from one location to another. She also shared that because she was a female, she would acquire other females from commands of her male counterparts.

Lisa shared her passion for helping veterans. She stated she “always took pride in taking care of my soldiers,” and she has that same mentality and connection with fellow veterans, regardless if she knows their specific story or not. She stated there is an unsaid connection among veterans, which is another reason she was willing to participate in this study.

Furthermore, she shared that her leadership experience was impacted partially because she was a female and partially because she was a new sergeant. Lisa further added she was “not just trying to survive the war, but my comrades, and proving to them I was worthy of being a sergeant, of being a woman there.” Therefore, Lisa shared that she is not only willing to help other veterans with this study, but would like to help empower other female leaders as well.

Matthew

The fifth participant interviewed for this study was Matthew, a 31-year-old, single Caucasian male affiliated with the Army and National Guard. During his most recent combat experience, he was a Sergeant, Grade E-5.

Matthew reported that he has been in the military since 2003, and was deployed in 2005 and 2010 to Iraq. His position was unique, as he was a medic. Therefore, even though he had typically 3 soldiers working for him, it was mainly during times of medical emergencies. Beyond that, he did not associate much with his subordinates. Matthew shared that during his first deployment, his platoon was brand new. Therefore, some of
his experiences were a direct result of the lack of organization and the lack of good leadership above his rank. For instance, the commander above him, Matthew stated, “really didn’t like me, . . . and he went out of his way to make my life miserable, and he succeeded.” Matthew left his first deployment prematurely due to the stress experienced with his superior officer.

During his deployment, Matthew experienced numerous tragedies and deaths. Several times during his interviews, Matthew had to pause and gather his thoughts. He was emotional when discussing certain losses. Nevertheless, as the commander of 3 of his men, he was always cognizant of their mental health and stated, “My soldiers under me . . . I would make sure they got to see them [mental health professionals] and I would make sure . . . we had the resources needed.”

Furthermore, Matthew shared complications of his second deployment. Prior to his second deployment, he was in all male units. The difficulty of his second deployment centered on complications with female relationships on his base. As he reflected on his experiences, he shared that he still held bitter feelings about some of his experiences. Matthew, however, did see the benefit of seeking help of mental professionals even for himself. He stated he had recently been seeking counseling and that he thinks “it’s good to be able to speak with someone.” Due to the emotional content of his interview, the researcher called one of Matthew’s friends (whose contact information was given by Matthew as someone he could trust as a friend) to be sure he was not alone, and to be sure he would be okay. Matthew had brought to the surface many of his tragic
experiences with friends and loved ones during combat, and the researcher wanted to be sure he had support when he returned home.

**Summary of Participants**

All participants voiced their interest in helping returning military leaders of combat. Each participant shared what they felt would be helpful to returning veterans and truly were genuine in helping civilian counselors understand what would be helpful to military leaders upon return to the United States. Each of the participants described above had very unique experiences. Each participant had diverse roles and shared varied experiences due to the branch of military, the culture of the platoon, and the dynamics of the individuals. Each participant also shared varied experiences due to personal beliefs, family dynamics, and social support. Nevertheless, through data analysis, the researcher was able to gather commonalities within their combat and reintegration experiences as well as their beliefs while simultaneously offering insight for counselors based off of their personal experiences. The next part of this chapter examines the commonalities of the participants.

**Reintegration Experiences of Enlisted Army and Navy Non-Commissioned Officers After Combat**

As stated in the previous chapter, Moustakas (1994) stated that the phenomenological approach tries to understand the experience the way the participants experience the experience including their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. For instance, the texture of the reintegration experience includes the deployment experience of combat, access to support, and life factors that are present, whereas the structure of the experience
includes the leadership style of the individual, the personal beliefs, and the motivation toward his or her reintegration experience.

The researcher understood the structure as the driving force of how the experiences (the texture) were interpreted. Therefore, the researcher was investigating the phenomenon of the reintegration experience of non-commissioned military officers after combat. The research question driving the study was: What are the reintegration experiences of enlisted Army and Navy non-commissioned officers after combat? Along with this overarching question, the exploration of the combat experiences and leadership styles were investigated.

The phenomenon of the experience of reintegration among the participants was comprised of two underlying components. First, the participants shared the circumstances of deployment and resources available during deployment and upon return. These factors accounted for the texture of the phenomenon of the reintegration experience. Second, the participants shared their internal beliefs and priorities both during leadership and reintegration experiences. These underlying beliefs were the structure of the phenomenon of the experience of reintegration.

Through the data analysis, data themes emerged that were connected to the reintegration experiences of military officers. Each theme is supported by data that have been collected through the structural-textural experiences as reported by the participants of this study. As the researcher was analyzing the data, even after the third participant’s interviews, the researcher was inclined to believe she was reaching saturation, in that no new data were emerging. Nevertheless, to be sure, she went on with beginning the
interview process with the two final participants. At that point, after conducting the interviews of the fourth and fifth participant, this had indeed confirmed the saturation of data.

Through the data analysis, five prominent experiences were significant to the reintegration of the military officers. These five experiences included: (a) deployment missions of a leader have a lasting impact on civilian life, (b) deployment experiences elicit strong emotional reactions stateside, (c) a sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life, (d) leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress, and (e) connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on reintegration. Each of these experiences are further detailed in the following paragraphs.

**Reintegration Experience 1: Deployment Missions of a Leader Have a Lasting Impact That Carries Over to Civilian Life**

A common thread between what was shared by each of the participants of this study was the impact of their deployment experiences on their reintegration process. Participants clarified that they had worked so hard to make it home, yet carried various aspects of the deployment experience with them into their stateside, civilian lives. In Table 4, the common words associated from the five participants’ interviews are listed, as they are associated with how various aspects of combat carry over to civilian life.
Table 4

Summary of Experience 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Common Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Significant Differences Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deployment missions of a leader have a lasting impact that carries over to civilian life</td>
<td>Stuck with me</td>
<td>If something needs to be done, I will do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replicated</td>
<td>More vocal with boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here in comparison</td>
<td>Discovered my passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before, Now</td>
<td>Sense of direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Didn’t do that before</td>
<td>More concerned with safety of self/others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affected me</td>
<td>Inspiration/Motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, Jason shared that ever since his leadership experiences during deployment, “day to day, if something needs to be done, I will do it.” He described that during deployments, he often was given tasks without any direction, only a deadline. He had to figure out the strategy and execute the mission with his men. As a result, he finds that he is now more flexible. He further stated, “In the Navy, we have Semper Gumby—you must always be flexible, so that has stuck with me.”

Jason felt that the leadership experience offered him better problem solving skills, as there was no other option. So, in civilian life, he has found there is no other option but to handle the day-to-day challenges. Jason described his personality as introverted. However, through his leadership experiences, he found that he had to be more assertive. Therefore, in his civilian life, he finds himself being more vocal with his own boundaries and limitations.

David also discussed how some of his leadership experiences have impacted his civilian life. Through the Navy, he had discovered his passion for electronics. This had shaped his future career. He also shared that he is talented at recreating things.
shared that in the Navy, his role was commanding the electronics for the entire Naval system on the ship, a huge undertaking. David always manned the 2M Station, for 24 hours during his entire deployments, and this is where he lived during his deployments. Therefore, the 2M Station was his home away from home. He shared that he loved his job and his men. As a tribute to his position, he stated, “I replicated it [the 2M station] in my basement—I have like a 2M station in my basement . . . so I have one, I love it.”

David spoke of his time deployed fondly, even though he shared there were negative experiences as well. However, David chose to focus on the positive. He further revealed that he has shared his passion for the tools of the 2M Station by collecting what he could to incorporate replicated tools into his own 2M Station. One of the tools he was able to incorporate into his own life was a specific type of microscope. He shared that because he loved working under the microscope, he has always tried to share his passion with his children. David shared that his daughters grew up with using the microscope and have developed a curiosity to explore the world through the lens of a microscope as well.

Furthermore, David addressed the impact his deployment experiences had on his current career. When David started his civilian life, he continued to work as a technician. He stated his position as a leader in the Navy “gave me a lot of confidence.” When he started his role at his new position, he found himself in a team environment again; however, he was back at the bottom and had to make his way once more. From his experience of his deployments as a leader with the Navy, he was able to work well in his
team environment, and was able to work his way to a leadership role in his civilian career as well.

Through Mike’s deployment and leadership experiences, he was often in charge of getting his men safely to various checkpoints. Due to the nature of needing to be constantly alert, Mike felt his problem solving skills were honed. This has bled into his civilian life in terms of watching for IEDs. Mike shared, “most IED attacks occur [while you are driving], so you are supposed to keep an eye out for anything unusual. Like, something like a plastic bag, or an empty cartridge, or a bunch of rocks piled on top of each other.” Mike shared it was his job to not only keep himself safe, but all of his men under his command. Due to facing these challenges daily during deployment, Mike later stated, “Even today, I occasionally see something on the side of the road, and like for a half of a second I will be like, ‘Oh, Shit!’”

Also, because of the IED concerns, Mike shared that it was most advantageous to drive quickly in Afghanistan. So when he returned to his civilian life, he said, “sometimes, if I get a chance to pass people on the road, I will do it 100% of the time; I needed something happening. I need something, like an adrenaline rush.” When the researcher further inquired, he stated before his deployments, he did not experience as many adrenaline-rushing activities. Since returning from deployment he said,

Sometimes I need something like some stakes are on the line. So, with my friends, I will pass people, and will be like a little close and my friends will lose their minds and say, “stop it,” but literally there is no danger, really. So, now . . . I need something to be happening. . . . I am so sick of being so foreign here [in
Ohio]. So, this winter, I went snowboarding 12 times and had to go on higher ramps. So, once in a while you need that adrenalin rush, and there’s none of that here in comparison [to Afghanistan], which is why I am excited to begin working in trial work, because I think that kind of pressure will be good, to kind of fill that small void.

Lisa also discussed carrying over some of her practices from her leadership role in deployment to her civilian role. Lisa stated,

[During deployment] I was so concerned with my soldiers that they have what they need to complete the mission that sometimes, I am not getting my own needs met. So, in my current job, I treat these guys like my soldiers, making sure they are okay—even before my own needs. It’s embedded, like never leave a fallen comrade or soldier. So I do the same thing here, I never leave anyone behind, never let anyone fall, because that’s my job . . . everything inside of me says, don’t let this person fall.

Lisa also shared that she channels her experiences during deployment as motivation in her civilian life. Prior to her deployments, her college major was business. When she came back and resumed her schooling, she explored teaching, but then ended up working on her counseling degree. Lisa feels her experience in combat helped her become the person she currently is. Lisa stated,

I am using those experiences [from deployment] to help others. To let them [clients] know there is light on the other side. I still have my ups and downs, but I get to help people all day long, and that’s what I want to do. That’s what I wanted
to do when I was in Afghanistan. I wanted to feed the hungry and do humanitarian work. And, I was depressed about not being able to do those types of things. You see people suffering and you want to help. So, I am grateful that I am in a position where I have figured things out enough, where I could help other people—but I still don’t have everything figured out. But, I am working on it.

Matthew was also inspired by his deployment. During his deployment experience, he made plans for his future. Prior to deployment he shared that he had lacked motivation. He had graduated from high school, but had no direction until his deployment experiences as a leader. He stated,

When I was there, I was really motivated to finish college. That’s when I decided to go to law school. I really developed the feeling like I was behind in life. So when I came back, I had a plan.

Matthew’s deployment experiences were challenging. He inferred that without his leadership experiences during deployments, he would probably not have decided to pursue the track he has chosen in the legal profession.

To summarize Reintegration Experience 1, all of the participants’ deployment experiences had a lasting impact on how they live their current civilian lives. All of the participants felt they wanted to improve their own lives, and the lives of those around them. Three out of the five participants shared that their deployment had a direct effect on their career choice. Out of the remaining two participants, one had chosen to be career military, while the other previously had the intention of finishing his four years of college, and starting law school.
Reintegration Experience 2: Deployment Experiences Elicit Strong Emotional Reactions Stateside

The second reintegration experience that was reflected by all of the participants was the emotional impact their experiences had on them, both during deployment and during reintegration. Each had experiences that brought up strong emotions as they talked about it. Many of these emotions seemed either painful and sad, or angry and frustrated. In Table 5, the common words that are associated from the five participants’ interviews are listed, as they are associated with how various aspects of combat elicit strong emotional reactions stateside. It is important to note, these strong emotional reactions are not categorized as negative, primarily because David, during member checking, even though he mentioned sadness, wanted to be sure to clarify that he did not want his experience to have any negative emotions attached, as he viewed his experiences as something necessary to motivate him for the civilian life he has created.

Table 5

Summary of Experience 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Common Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Significant Differences Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deployment experiences elicit strong emotional reactions stateside</td>
<td>Bitter, Struggles, Stressed, Anger/Sadness, Disappointment</td>
<td>I wasn’t prepared for it, Made me depressed, Can’t fail/I can do this, Have to move on/let it go, Got to work harder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Matthew was reflecting on his deployment, he shared, “you know, I am still a little bitter . . . coming back from Iraq.” Matthew shared that he experienced great
hardships from both deployments. From the first, he had difficulty with one of his superiors. From the second, he had been involved in relationships that ended badly. For instance, he shared he was part of, as he called it, “a love triangle.” Originally, the three of them were close friends. When things fell apart, he lost the friendship of the other parties within the love triangle. He stated he still had five months remaining of that particular deployment; therefore, it was a struggle—one in which he stated, “It wasn’t something I was prepared for.”

The other relationship experience he shared during his second deployment ended tragically. Matthew was at first hesitant in sharing this experience with the researcher. He stated he,

kind of became smitten with this girl . . . she was a unit intelligence person who would ride around to talk to these people at certain check points. She was actually killed by a rocket attack. That was the first time I had experienced someone I [personally] knew being killed.

This was significant further because he shared that he was isolated from his support network. He said he “became emotionally numb and kind of shutdown for a while.” He shared that typically (as a civilian) he gravitates towards being alone during times of stress now.

He admitted, “I actually had some personal struggles when I was there the second time which was really complicated, and made the deployment a lot harder than it would have been.” This was Matthew’s general reflection of his relationship struggles during his second deployment.
However, even beyond his interpersonal relationships during deployment, he experienced more tragedy. As a medic, he stated he witnessed a lot. He stated,

The last significant thing I recall is the attack on the glass factory in Ramadi . . . I think those of us who were there that day did not deal with it too well. There were 96 people who died that day.

At that point, Matthew did not share further. He stated this was one of the topics he would prefer not exploring further. The researcher respected his privacy on this issue and moved on. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the Ramadi glass factory incident had a huge emotional impact even now, years later.

His reflection of how these events have impacted his life now: “I have a bad habit of laying in bed and dwelling on things, and that’s not good to do.” As Matthew stated, he decided to take the path of pursuing an advanced degree, and is currently attending law school. The routine and accountability of classes seems to be helpful for Matthew. He reflected on how the change of lifestyle had impacted his weight. It was evident to the researcher that Matthew was self-conscious about his body and that this had an effect on his self-perception. Matthew shared, “[I was] 148 in Iraq, and I came back and I’m 160, 170. The next thing you know, I’m in law school and 197.” It was apparent that Matthew’s hardships of deployment still had a significant impact on his day-to-day life.

From Jason’s reflections of his deployments, he consistently used the word, “stressed.” However, he was very careful with what he shared. The researcher felt Jason may have held back certain feelings or sentiments due to the fact he was career military.
At various points he inferred that anyone in the Navy needed to be careful with how they represented themselves.

Jason shared that through his deployments “in the Navy . . . there is a lot of waiting.” During this down time there is room for reflection of what is going on both in the combat zone and back home. Jason stated during these times, “thinking about things back home made me depressed.” When asked about ways he worked through those feelings, he stated “recreation.” Jason defined recreation as “physical activity.” He stated there were times when he could not have a lot of physical activity on his ship due to the mission they were assigned. He stated, “Other Navy personnel on their crafts had chow halls and stuff, but we had a smaller facility—others were able to have recreational activities available to them right there on the ship, we did not.” He stated that he often was “stuck,” and felt annoyed and frustrated.

Due to Jason’s role of working in the maintenance department with his men, he explained that there was often frustration in trying to repair things without the proper equipment and parts. His role included ordering parts for the missions as well as managing his men. He stated, “I try to plan for things, but I am a person in the now.” He had to work with what he had. He compared the frustration of deployment with his current situation stateside. The only way he had learned to deal with his stress was physical activity. However, while he is stateside, the challenge is finding the time to work out. He said,
I tried to make goals . . . but it’s been hard to sustain them. My biggest overall goal, I want to get in my twenty year [with his Navy career]. I am at 15 years now. They say I am overweight. . . . If I don’t lose it, they kick me out.

Once again, Jason reflected on his current situation as “stressful.” Jason further stated that he is “trying to please work, family, the self . . . you can only please one person, yourself. But there’s a push in all directions. Deployments. Come home. Stress.”

David shared his feelings that have come about due to his deployment experiences as both sad and motivating. He shared, “I knew, you can’t feel sad about it. You are done with it. You have to be confident. You can’t be sad and crazy.” He further reflected that when he had returned from deployments he began dreaming about his battle stations and his leadership roles. In response to his dreams, he stated, “I don’t want all that problem stuff, you just got to put it away.” Throughout his interviews, David reflected upon, essentially compartmentalizing pieces of his life as he dealt with emotional experiences.

He further shared from his deployment experiences. “There were things I did, I would never do again . . . It made me stronger. It’s never going to be as bad as what we did in the Navy. Civilians will never understand it.” At the same time, he reflected upon his experience with his Chief as his boss in the Navy. He shared, “He [the Chief] owned me. Owned the air I breathed. I was standing on his floor.” He further reflected that the Chief would offer feedback to David’s decisions as a leader.

He [the Chief], would pat you on the back or mash you up if he had to . . . he was in charge of training me, bringing me up. I was almost like his son, almost. If
you go into the work place now, your bosses don’t even come close. [Stateside employers] have so many excuses: time, money, man power. But in the military, it’s like we have a job, let’s do it. We can’t fail. We have to do it, one way or another.

David further stated about his experience with the Navy: “I don’t want to be at sea, [out of the Navy] I want to have a life . . . I wanted to finish my time in the Navy, learn stuff, and live my life.” It was evident that his experiences offered motivation. David was able to view his life now in comparison with his leadership experiences during deployment. “It just makes it like stronger, whatever, so this civilian life is whatever, I can do this.”

Mike shared his perception of current employers in comparison with those in the Army. He stated about his current employer:

She was like in our face, like yelling—like super knowledgeable, but in your face, literally. [She was] very aggressive about how important it was to not italicize a comma in certain spots. She’s a little bit—like shouty and yelly, and being mean to me . . . like it was the most important thing in the world.

Mike further compared this experience with his military deployment. He stated,

I know the last person who was yelling at me was a colonel, who was shot in the neck in Vietnam. You [inferring the employer] are not the next person to tell me what to do. The next person to tell me what to do is going to be someone a little bit higher than you. So, every once in a while, it gets really disturbing when
people are hammering at you like their stuff really matters. I get frustrated, a little bit upset.

Not only was Mike comparing his civilian employment experience, but the job search experience once he returned from combat as well. He stated,

And so, to be sitting with some twenty-five-year old employer who is like trying to grill me, and tell me why I’m not good enough seems like, seriously? You haven’t done anything that’s compared to what I have done. So, that’s a little frustrating. It made it hard finding a job.

He shared that he was disillusioned with the job search process in its entirety. Mike shared,

That was disappointing because people were not friendly to you [military]. I thought there would be a little bit of a credit to me that, “oh, you served, we’ll give you a little credit for that” but there was none of that.

He further shared his disheartening experience of the nation’s reactions to returning military personnel.

There were nitwits across the whole process. This was a huge disappointment.

And also, because you know America’s not like the way it was a long time ago— . . . you know, like it was in World War II, where everyone was patriotic.

It took Mike five frustrating months to land a job. His reflection of this time, “It was a disappointment when I was feeling entitled, and told myself not to feel entitled.”

He then turned his perspectives around and began reflecting on his leadership experiences in an empowering way. Mike shared, “I told myself just continue to work hard and you’ll
eventually find something.” And eventually, he did. Even though his deployment experience had empowered Mike to be persistent with his job pursuits, he still expressed further frustration.

The only person I felt mad at afterward was the recruiter. Some commanders made decisions, risky decisions with peoples lives, and I was not mad at that. I know, that is a hard job. But for some reason the recruiter was the only person I was intentionally mad at. You [the recruiter] intentionally deceived me.

In further description of the recruiter, Mike stated,

You [the recruiter] said you [Mike] are going to get this crazy signing bonus, you’re never getting deployed, and when you come back [from deployment] they will make you mayor of your town. But not one of those things were true. Well, I got a small signing bonus, but none of the rest.

Lisa also had shared feelings of frustration. She stated, “Anger is [still] not completely gone. But it took four to five years before I felt a little more comfortable. That makes it sound like a long time. I still have anger here and there.” When asked how she worked through her anger now, she stated, “It is just like, you are a soldier, you have to keep soldiering away.” Lisa stated the origins of her anger, “I was still angry that I was even there. I still didn’t understand why we had to go. I was definitely mad at America.” Lisa had shared that she had completed her active duty with the Army before she was deployed. She shared that she signed up for the National Guard to continue with the military, but her goals were to be a part of humanitarian aid stateside. Her unit was the first National Guard unit to be called to active duty deployment in the Middle East,
and Lisa felt betrayed by this, as this was not a part of the National Guard she had signed on to do.

Upon returning from deployment, Lisa stated, “So at first, I was depressed. I didn’t know what to do with all the thoughts and feelings I had. In 2003, we didn’t have reintegration type stuff, we didn’t do any of that.” She further stated she experienced “a lot of confusion, anger, loneliness, bitterness . . . I was actually disgusted with the military. But, I didn’t want people to know.” As Lisa further reflected on how her leadership experience during deployment was affecting her now, she stated,

There was so much destruction. People were dead. People, children, without limbs. Like how could I be a part of something like that? It was kind of disgusting. So why would I want anyone to know I was a part of that? The truth is, a lot of people didn’t know what I was a part of, or they might not have viewed it the same way I did. I really took it to heart . . . that really hit me hard.

Then, Lisa reflected on her personal interpretation of her reactions. “How could I be depressed when I am at home and have all these things, but I am depressed. That doesn’t make any sense.”

After further inquiry from the researcher, Lisa stated,

I was feeling depressed, but I didn’t want to tell anyone about it. That would make me look weak. And, I’m a soldier. I worked so hard. Afghanistan and Iraq. I was able to do that. But, to tell someone, “yeah, now I’m feeling depressed and overwhelmed?” . . . You can’t tell people that. That makes no sense. You’re a soldier, right? And here, I have men saying I couldn’t do this, or
soldiers saying I couldn’t do that, whatever, but I proved all of them wrong. So, I come home, and I’m depressed, then what do I do with myself? I don’t know. There’s no one there to save me. You know. It’s just you, a soldier of one when you are home.

**Reintegration Experience 3: A Sense of Duty and Responsibility are Still Prevalent in Civilian Life**

According to Jason, Mike, David, and Lisa, each stated their life priorities have changed since their experience as a leader in deployment. They voiced having a greater sense of duty and responsibility toward others. For Jason, Mike, David, and Lisa this was responsibility toward family; for Matthew this was a responsibility for the greater good. The commonalities of words and significant phrases from the five participants are presented in Table 6 of how their sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life.

Table 6

*Summary of Experience 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Common Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Significant Differences Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life</td>
<td>Duty/Responsibility, My Men/My Soldiers, Grew up, Commitment, Care</td>
<td>Look out for each other, Still keep in touch, want to know they’re okay, It’s a part of me, Connection with other veterans, Need to care for my family like my soldiers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jason had shared a shift of his duty since deployment toward his wife and son. He stated concern for his wife’s ability to adjust to living in a new city and state. Regarding his responsibility toward his wife, he stated, “I try not to put it back on her. Even now, I don’t put the daily activity back on her.” Jason has said this regarding trying to get everything arranged with their housing, neighbors, and bills.

In response to his son’s development, Jason stated his son is 2 years old, and he encourages his wife to make connections in their community in order for his son to have play dates. Regarding his wife, he stated, “She’s shy. She’s introverted as well . . . She’s worried about what others are thinking of her.” Jason expressed concern for her feeling comfortable and fitting in. He stated he did not get as involved with her assimilation into the community prior to his leadership experiences during deployment. Jason stated he has been trying to reconnect with his wife since the return from his most recent deployment and encourages her to start getting to know the phone numbers of their neighbors.

Mike shared that since his leadership position during his deployment experience in Afghanistan, he is closer with his family, saw greater value in his parents, and began pursuing his law degree. In reflection he stated, “I am closer with my brothers and parents, and see them as individuals. I think because of their values, I understand why I like them so much even without being related to me.” While he was talking, it was evident he truly cherished his parents through the tone of his voice, and the smile on his face as he spoke.
Furthermore, Mike shared that he remained connected to his squad even after returning to the states. Even now, approximately once a month, he makes connections online (through Facebook). He shared, “Like, once a month . . . just to see how they were doing, but it was just me, not a mandate or anything.” Mike shared that he was connected with “his” men. He reflected on his deployment experience. He stated, as squad leader, he felt it was his responsibility to check for IEDs before his men checked. He stated,

It wasn’t policy or anything. It’s just for you. It would be very sad for you, and you would lead a sad life if something were to happen . . . So, I guess in terms of being concerned with their lives, I was.

Mike’s concern for his men’s lives carried through to civilian life. It seemed like an underlying connection he had shared, and would continue the connection for a lifetime.

David’s experience was similar to Mike’s in terms of responsibility to his men, and was similar to Jason’s in terms of the sense of responsibility toward his wife. David spoke fondly of his men from the Navy. He stated he maintains his friendships, and with one of his particular friends, when he goes through the area, he stays with David’s family. About his friend, David stated, “He’s a good guy . . . he’s a Christian.” He further spoke of his relationship with his friends as those of siblings.

David further explained about the military, “The brotherhood is very real. Once you are a military person, you are always a military person.” David inferred that he would help his military friends, as this was always going to be a part of him.

Furthermore, at the time of his first deployments, David was in a relationship. Once he returned, he stated,
When I came back it was like . . . I was all grown up. I had a lot of training. So, I wanted to find a job . . . get married . . . this was do or die right here. This was the motivation.

He reflected on the challenges he faced during his leadership experiences while deployed, and stated, “Correspondence [with my wife] is what I was holding onto. It was my strength . . . it saved my life.” Therefore, his leadership experience was not only reflective of his duty and responsibility to his men, but to his wife, who was able to give him hope in his times of despair. He further explained his motivation in moving up in his current job and going through extra training in order to provide for his wife and daughters, as this had become the most important focus of his life after his deployment experiences.

Lisa also had a sense of duty and responsibility toward her family. She shared, Within 30 days of being home from Iraq, my mother-in-law died suddenly. So, there I am just newly back . . . she dies, then I have to take care of my husband and father-in-law. And no one is taking care of me. There was a lot of pressure, and I had to step up and take care of two men.

Lisa was not at all resentful about this. She seemed to take it into stride as her duty. Lisa further puts her family’s needs before her own, again just as in her leadership role, she put her soldiers before herself.

As stated previously in the experience of the “impact on civilian life,” it seemed that Lisa truly embodied her leadership role as a part of her identity even after deployments. As previously stated, she treats others, even those who are not family, as
her soldiers, meaning she puts their needs before her own. She takes it upon herself personally to help others through their pain. She stated,

Even through all of these [my] traumas, I can still be the survivor to help others through their issues. I feel like wow I can help others because I can get it . . . pain, depression, hurt, anger. I feel it too.

Not only did this seem to be a part of Lisa’s duty she felt towards others, but this simultaneously seemed empowering to her as well.

Matthew’s focus of duty and responsibility was on a wider scope. He spoke of a sense of duty to make a difference in the world. He stated prior to his deployment and leadership experience, he had no direction, as he had graduated high school, but did not have a particular goal for his life at the time. But it was during his deployments when a sense of duty kicked in. He was able to see the world from a new lens. This was through the lens of leadership and experience. Matthew saw much devastation both in the Middle East and through his personal relationships. There was so much more going on within Matthew than what he was able to express and share with the researcher. Nevertheless, Matthew’s drive was to attend college.

Matthew did not only pursue his undergraduate degree, but his law degree. Simultaneously, he continued with the National Guard. It was a challenge to balance his commitments to the National Guard and Law School, but he stated, “I was committed to this law school thing.” From the researcher’s reflection of Matthew’s self-description prior to and after deployments, his commitment level shifted from that of being care-free with no responsibility, to now carrying the responsibility of the world’s well-being on his
shoulders. Matthew did not say as much, but it was what he did not say, and through the inference of current events that he wanted to make a difference. This was the impact of his duty, and now he felt he had to continue his duty and responsibility through a legal career.

Reintegration Experience 4: Leaders Seek Positive Ways to Deal With Stress

All participants sought ways to deal with the stress and burdens they brought back from their deployment experiences as leaders. Mike and David focused on their Church to relieve the stress they carried. Matthew, Jason, and Lisa sought out counseling. Table 7 presents the phrases from the five participants’ interviews, as they are associated with how leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress.

Table 7

Summary of Experience 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Common Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Significant Differences Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress</td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>Spend time away/with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Alone</td>
<td>Do things to make yourself happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>Recreational Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching to religious beliefs</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Spending time at Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Talking with Pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Put it behind you/don’t think about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking help through counseling</td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>It’s helpful to get it out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Nonmilitary may be better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td>Listen/Military will share what they want/don’t want to be pushed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reaching to religious beliefs. Mike shared that through his deployment, he felt he needed to maintain a close connection with God. He stated even though his platoon was not religious, he expressed his beliefs freely because as a leader he felt it was his duty to help his men. Moreover, he knew death was a real possibility for any of them. He stated, “overcoming mortar fire . . . that is really the most terrifying thing in my entire life. These were the biggest obstacles.”

When the researcher further inquired about the reactions of the other men to his expressed beliefs, Mike stated, “A lot of people started to come closer, because like the one that is close to God will not get bombed.” He also commented that his men were actually very receptive to his belief. “If you are a nice guy, more people will accommodate what you want since it’s from a genuine place. Since I was religious, it was like they were more compliant with what I asked.”

Therefore, during deployment, he stated he consistently prayed and read his Bible. He further stated,

Tons of guys died. I was very afraid the whole time that I was going to die. So I was in a constant state of prayer throughout the day . . . whenever someone wasn’t talking to me, I was kind of like in a semi-state of quasi prayer all the time . . . and it was hugely comforting. It was very, very nice, so I wasn’t afraid all the time, which was a necessary thing. My faith blew up at the time.

When Mike returned home, he stated when he reflected on his deployment,

It was like morose later on, but not in a regrettable sort of way morose, . . . it saddens me that this is the nature of things. That people die. And, especially as a
religious person, knowing that people die and maybe don’t have a good outcome after it, is like very hard for a little while.

As the researcher inquired as to how Mike dealt with these feelings, he stated, “I went to church a lot.” Mike shared that he sought the pastor of his church to talk through his experiences and concerns.

David also shared that he was religious, as he stated he sought ways to deal with his stress when he returned home after his deployments. “I go to church and thought, enough of that . . . the church helped. One day I thought, it’s over. That’s it. Yep, it was tough, but not anymore.” David reflected that he realized other military personnel had it “ten times worse.” But he shared that he hoped that they would be able to put it in the past and move on as well.

David did not explore the stresses he had faced; as he expressed to the researcher, he had put them in the past and moved on. The researcher respected this. David at various points became emotional, and took a few minutes to compose himself. He instead opted to give the researcher the analogy: the leadership experience during deployment was like a “thorn under your skin.” He made reference that it will always be there. David shared that when he was in Washington D.C. with his family, he visited the Arlington Cemetery. There, he put one of the thorns from a bush at the train station between the seems of his cap, as symbolism of how he felt. “I am a veteran and wouldn’t change it.”

**Seeking help through counseling.** It was evident that all of the participants valued the assistance of counseling through the reintegration process. Lisa, Jason, and
Matthew spoke specifically of their experiences with counseling during their reintegration experience. They each spoke of their counseling experiences as helpful. Lisa, Jason, and Matthew spoke of some of the reasons why they sought counseling.

Lisa spoke of her time with the military as bitter sweet. She viewed the military as her family. Nevertheless, Lisa shared, “Especially as a leader, it was a lot of pressure.” To deal with the pressure during deployment, she shared that she exercised, at times even two to three times a day. But, in reference to her duties during deployments, she said, “Well, there was no choice. What else do you do? You have to do it. There is no option. That’s the way I look at it, you have to move forward and keep going.” Lisa seemed to mirror this same mantra once she was back from her deployments.

Still, she saw the benefits of seeking help through counseling. Initially, Lisa shared,

There will always be a stigma with getting help. I know when I was first back from Afghanistan and Iraq, I was like, I don’t want to get help. I don’t want to talk to a stranger about my issues. How will they understand anything?

Lisa had a comrade during her second deployment who became a good friend, one she referred to as “like a sister to me.” She thought very highly of her, and when she knew of her friend using counseling services, explored the option herself. Lisa stated,

So even for me to know that, okay, she went [to counseling], it was like, why am I not doing that? People don’t necessarily want to tell others they are going to counseling. But, if they speak up and say “I struggled and went to counseling
too” that might open doors to others who are like, “You? Okay, then maybe it’s okay for me to go too.”

As a counselor, Lisa stated she tries to dispel the negative thoughts about counseling and shares the normalcy and benefits.

    Jason shared his thoughts on counseling as well.
    
    Military [personnel] are comfortable with civilian counselors, like non-military. I think some prefer [it]. Because, let’s face it . . . they are afraid of what the command would think, fear jeopardizing the job. Leaders talk. So, if you are talking with someone at the job, they will know.

    Jason seemed to be disheartened by this fact, but at the same time recognized it for being the way it is.

    When the researcher inquired about his experience, Jason shared that he had spoken with chaplains and counselors. “I sought out counseling or a chaplain when I came home. Every couple of weeks I had to see a counselor. He said he didn’t see an issue aside from being stressed.” Jason felt comfortable with counseling. As a leader, he felt it was his duty to refer his men to counseling if he felt it was warranted. Regarding this calling he said, “[I have] no issues reaching out to others who are having an issue as long as I can see it. A lot of people hide it. Just like ulcers, they can be there, but you just don’t know it.”

    Matthew too stated he referred those under his command to mental health services, as his medics witnessed trauma each and every day. For himself during his second deployment he stated, “[I] sought out the chaplain; I spent many hours with the
chaplain.” Matthew reflected positively about the support he had during deployment and experienced the benefit of counseling.

Upon returning from his deployments, he stated,

The first time I came back from Iraq . . . I seized the opportunity to speak with a social worker on a regular basis. I think for weekly appointments. He [the counselor] was a civilian. I didn’t have a hard time talking to him. I don’t recall why that was.

Matthew seemed almost surprised that his counseling sessions went well. He further reflected on the counseling style, “He [the counselor] would have a chess board, and we’d have something casual going on, so we weren’t just talking, so I think that was cool.”

Matthew, as a college student, sought counseling services through the university as well. He stated,

Sometimes, I think it’s good to be able to speak with someone who is not in the military . . . just because, you know, when you are in the military unit and you are around military, you feel like you’re suppose to act a certain way, or something like that. So, it’s kind of good not to have that pressure.

There was evidence that seeking counseling outside of the military was helpful. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.
Reintegration Experience 5: The Connections With Others in Civilian Life Have a Significant Impact on the Reintegration Experience

Jason and Mike addressed the connections witnessed of those around them in terms of self-destructive experiences. Specifically, Jason and Matthew spoke of their own experiences that centered on experiencing isolation. Mike, Lisa, and David shared personal experiences of connecting with others both within their families and with fellow military personnel upon return. Therefore, these experiences cannot be generalized to either positive or negative, as both are represented. In Table 8, the common wordings from the five participants’ interviews are listed, as they are associated with how the connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on the reintegration experience.

**Self-destructive behaviors of others.** Jason shared that one of his peers, who was a Marine, decided to relocate to Hawaii after his deployments. He spoke of his friend’s isolating choices that became self-destructive. Jason stated, “He had everything going for him, but he was going down a destructive path. He would live his life smoking cigarettes. He drank alcohol like crazy. . . he developed Type I Diabetes.” Jason further stated that this same friend started experiencing suicidal ideation. He stated he would post on Facebook, “I don’t want to be here.” Jason was concerned about him, as he found out that he would talk about overmedicating himself with his Diabetes medication. Jason shared that seeing his friend like this made him realize the effect of bad choices. By learning of his friend’s experience with isolation, Jason inferred that he wants to pursue what makes him happy while making healthy choices.
### Table 8

**Summary of Experience 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Common Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Significant Differences Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on the reintegration experience</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Someone to understand what you are going through/or just to be there for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Need to reach out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self destructive behavior of Others</td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>I’ve seen some of my buddies have a hard time/looking to avoid/deal with their feelings/goes on a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fellow Military</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bad Choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation within Relationships</td>
<td>Fit in</td>
<td>It wasn’t working/challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>Trying to figure things out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard to find how to identify with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Connections</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Be with the people who love you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay Connected</td>
<td>Don’t be alone/Relationships are strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>I am supported/Family and Friends are there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Veterans</td>
<td>There’s a connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have things in common/share</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mike shared that he witnessed some of his own men who looked to connect with things, rather than people upon their return home. He shared he had,

Eight or nine junior enlisted guys who constantly spent all their money. Some guys went out and spent all their money they earned in a month and stuff like that . . . like something like BMWs, even though they didn’t have homes. They didn’t have jobs.

Mike inferred that they were trying to make themselves feel better by “purchasing big ticket items.” Others spent their money on alcohol or drugs. Mike stated, “Some guys
prior [to deployment], they were occasional drinkers. [After deployment] they drank
every night after that . . . drinking was the main thing everyone went to.”

Mike further explained the disconnect some of his men experienced upon return
from deployment. Instead of turning to others for help to work through their feelings and
experiences from deployment, they turned to alcohol. This had a domino effect on their
civilian relationships. Mike stated, “Three guys [I knew] ended up getting a divorce
within two months [of returning home from combat].” He further qualified, “I don’t
know if they were that crappy of a person before they left—so maybe it would’ve been
more helpful for them . . . to hash it out.” He further explained they were “making really
bad family decisions and not hanging out with their kids and stuff.” Mike seemed to be
sympathetic for the families of his men and their situations. He stated, “I didn’t have kids
or a wife or stuff like that, so I didn’t have an issue . . . that happened with a lot of our
guys.”

**Isolation within relationships.** Jason shared that his relationship with his wife
has become strained since he has been home from deployment. He stated, “But now that
we are together more and more, we are falling apart.” He shared that for the majority of
their marriage he had been deployed. So, when he came back, Jason had a difficult time
defining his role within the family. Moreover, he stated his wife has been focusing on the
negative, on, “what is going wrong, with the family and stuff.” He further experiences
isolation from his two-year old son. Jason consistently referred to his son as “the kid.”
He expressed his sadness with the disconnect he experienced with his son. “When I get
off of work, I have a two year old, he is still Mommy’s boy.” However, as Jason tries to improve the situation, he stated, “he’s just slowly coming to Daddy.”

Because of Jason’s most recent assignment, he is in a state away from his friends and Navy comrades. This has been difficult for Jason. Due to his feelings of isolation, he shared that he and his wife may be separating soon. Instead, Jason focused on feeling connected to the Navy, and the Navy being his main support.

Matthew, as a part of the National Guard Unit in Ohio, felt isolated, as he had changed units immediately when he returned from his deployment. He shared the difficulty he experienced in being separated from his peers. “It would’ve been a little better if I didn’t have to immediately change units . . . just to be able to regularly see the people you’ve been part of for a year, [rather] than cold turkey.” Matthew further explained, “you miss certain people’s company or whatever, if you get accustomed to seeing them.”

Matthew further reflected on his first sixth months immediately following his return home. He stated, “I didn’t work right away . . . I think that was a mistake, not working . . . if I had to do it again, I’d find a job for the first six months or so.” When Matthew returned from his deployment, he was working on his undergraduate degree. He reflected,

I was a non-traditional student and everyone else was 18-22. I was 27 at the time. I guess that also contributed to me having a hard time reintegrating. Everyone else is gone, and those I am with on a day-to-day basis are young, and it’s hard to identify with.
**Positive connections.** When Mike returned home, he stayed with his parents. He stated, “For twelve weeks or more . . . I just hung out with my parents, and we went out to eat everyday. I saw my [nonmilitary] friends everyday. Slept in everyday. Went to the beach everyday.” Mike spoke fondly of his family. He stated they have had the greatest impact on his life.

He further shared, “[Military] should trust what their family is saying as true. Your loved ones can identify pretty quickly what’s off with you when you can’t.” Mike referred to himself as the exception, but attributed his positive adjustment to those factors outside of himself, his family, and faith. He further explained,

My mom, you know when I thought I was 100% fine, there is a couple of times, she’d be like, “you seem really uneasy, and you seem like you’re very frustrated and like testy. Is everything okay?” Your family can identify. They know you so well it’s good to trust them. Trusting your family is good advice.

Mike shared he had many good experiences when he returned. He maintained open connections with his family and pastor, and had reached out to his soldiers.

Lisa shared that she connected with her husband and father-in-law after her deployments. She stated her relationship with her husband is strong. Lisa continues to put his needs before her own. She shared her husband was non-military, but her father-in-law was in Vietnam. Regarding her husband, Lisa stated, “I think he has done his best he can to support me, some days better than others, like any relationship.” While Lisa’s father-in-law was alive, she stated, “I had that to relate to, so that was kind of nice.” She further explained that they never discussed their actual deployment
experiences, instead, Lisa shared with the researcher, “You don’t talk about it, but being in the presence of another veteran is comforting. Because you know they understand the dynamics and structure of that . . . it’s just an unspoken language.”

David stated he maintains connections with his military friends. After his leadership experiences with his deployments, he was in contact with his military peers. With his military friends, he openly talks about his deployment experiences. He shared, “We’d talk about our experiences [to each other], but [to] no one else.” He further shared that when he first returned home, his priority was to see his family and his wife. He shared that after his deployments, his wife and family became his priority. David shared that all of his duty and sacrifices were to be able to provide for his family, as he stated his two daughters and his wife are his life.

In summary, Jason and Matthew had experienced difficulties with their reintegration process due to the lack of connection they experienced with others. Mike, Lisa, and David all shared positive experiences. The common link was they were supported by others and were close with their families.

**Summary of Chapter 3**

The results of the study have been included in this chapter. Through phenomenology, the researcher was able to gain insight on the experiences of military leaders following their combat experiences. Through analyzing the data, the researcher discovered core experiences participants shared. These experiences were: (a) deployment missions of a leader have a lasting impact on civilian life, (b) deployment experiences elicit strong emotional reactions stateside, (c) a sense of duty and responsibility are still
prevalent in civilian life, (d) leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress, and (e) connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on reintegration. Evidence of these experiences was also included in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the analysis of the research results. The researcher further relates the results to the existing literature and introduces new contributions to nonmilitary counselors working with veterans.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The previous chapter included the results of the phenomenological research study, which indicated that reintegration of military leaders is shaped by their leadership positions during deployment. These experiences were possibly due to factors of deployment, internal factors, and external resources available during post deployment and reintegration. The following five experiences of military leaders were identified as experiences of reintegration through the data analysis: (a) deployment missions of a leader have a lasting impact on civilian life, (b) deployment experiences elicit strong emotional reactions stateside, (c) a sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life, (d) leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress, and (e) connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on reintegration. Each of these factors was reflected in the experiences reported by the participants.

Discussion of the research findings of this study is included in this chapter. Discussion focuses on the comparison and the differences between what has been explored in the existing literature regarding the reintegration experiences of military personnel and the findings of this study: the reintegration experiences of military officers. Implications for counselors based on the findings of this study are provided. Moreover, recommendations based on the research are offered as well as the limitations of the current study. Lastly, the researcher includes observations and details from the research process.
Data Analysis Overview

In this study, the data analysis revealed the reintegration experiences as reported by military leaders who participated in this study. In addition to the reintegration experiences, the participants explored their deployment experiences. The participants commonly made a link between the two experiences with the interviewer. The interviewer confirmed this connection with the participants through the member checking procedures.

The link between deployment and reintegration is not original. Both Grossman and Christensen (2004) as well as Rhoades and Sar (2005) suggested that the experience of deployment is likely to affect life after deployment. In their research, findings focused on the strong emotional experience of deployment, which was linked closely with the memories that would surface during the reintegration process. Bolton et al. (2008) also noted that combat has rippling effects on one’s return to civilian life after combat. Their research suggested one’s combat experience impacting one’s belief system, relationships, family life, career, and outlook on society upon return from deployment. As revealed through previous literature, the experiences of deployment have lasting effects on reintegration. Nevertheless, the experiences shared by the participants in this study offer rich contributions to the scholarly literature for counselors to understand the nuances of the reintegration experiences specific to military leaders after combat.

The Experiences of Military Officers After Combat

This research study tried to understand the phenomenon of the reintegration experiences specific to military officers after combat. Through analysis, the data of the
five participants, who were military leaders in combat, revealed the five most significant experiences of reintegration.

The following paragraphs explore the significant experiences of military officers that were identified through the data analysis from the interviews of the participants, in relation to the established literature that was initially explored by the researcher. The goal of the following is to discuss the information that has been discovered in this study and to fuse it with the existing literature.

**The deployment missions of a leader have a lasting impact on civilian life.** As with the research reported by Dymond and Rehfeldt (2000), it was common for military personnel to react to environmental cues that were associated with memories from the combat zone as a transfer of the stimulus. This was noted through Mike’s transference of his experience of combat to his civilian life. It was clear that his deployment missions as a leader had an impact on his civilian life though environmental cues. Once he returned home, at times, he mentioned being watchful of “anything unusual [on the road].” During combat, this was a necessity for the survival of him and his men. However, he stated, even now, stateside, he finds himself assessing the situation when there is typical litter on the side of the road. Similarly, David commented on his civilian commute to work, driving past a shooting range daily. He stated,

I pass it everyday . . . one day a shot went off, and I was like, okay, that’s weird, remember, gun range, they just shot off a few rounds, no need to worry. I don’t know why it made me jump, just my body’s reaction, but my brain knows better.
Lisa also shared her experience from her first deployment. In Afghanistan, she and her unit were trained to detect mines, as they were underground on their base, as the mines were left there from the 1980s. She stated they were always vigilant of not stepping on the mines, as it was literally a matter of life or death. Lisa further stated how this has transferred to stateside civilian life,

You might literally see soldiers walking around with their heads facing the ground, because we are trained to look for mines so we don’t kill ourselves. And . . . I do catch myself looking down, even now, and it’s been like 12 years.

These are some of the examples of how the participants in this study illustrated the effect of combat on civilian life as also reported by Adler et al. (2009). Reflexes that have been basic survival skills in combat have become part of the typical reaction that the participants of this study have continued to experience in their civilian lives, even years later.

“The experiences of deployment missions having a lasting impact on civilian life” not only implied that leaders also continue to be affected by the day-to-day reflexes for survival, but more specifically to leaders, the responsibilities that were entrusted to them during combat which have carried over to civilian life. Grossman and Christensen (2004) wrote about the potential for those returning from combat experiencing an entire change of lifestyle. Jason, Matthew, David, and Lisa each experienced a lifestyle shift once they returned home. Often, the literature has pointed to the negative effects of combat on reintegration. However, during member checking, participants wanted to be sure the researcher represented the positive effects as well.
Jason had discussed *Semper Gumbi*. Jason shared that the Navy’s motto is to *always be flexible*. As someone in charge, Jason was typically given a mission, and needed to figure out the particulars of how to execute the mission. He stated, “It was hard . . . not having the information to make decisions . . . we are told ‘we need this done’, and it’s like okay, [we do it].” Just as in the current literature, Gresser (2014) and Guthrie (2012) discussed the necessity of a leader having the proper decision-making and critical thinking skills to ensure the success of a mission and the safety of those under the leader’s command. It is this same mentality that Jason refers to utilizing in his civilian life. He stated, “Day to day, if something needs to be done, I will do it . . . I do what I need to do, what I can do.”

Furthermore, Matthew, David, and Lisa discussed returning from their leadership experiences with a sense of direction and passion for a civilian career. Again, this lifestyle shift is commensurate with the findings of Grossman and Christensen (2004). Matthew discussed gaining the sense of motivation he needed while deployed for his civilian life. He stated, “I mean when I was there [deployed in combat] I was really motivated to finish college. That is when [deployed in combat] I decided to go to law school.” Matthew further explained that his experiences in combat and as a leader changed his outlook on life. “I really developed the feeling like I was behind in life.” Therefore, once he returned, Matthew finished a four-year degree, and is currently finishing law school.

David was also inspired through his leadership experiences during deployment. He stated while he was a leader during his combat missions, he developed a strong sense
of self-confidence. Even when in his civilian career he started out where he stated he was “back at the bottom,” he was driven and determined to work hard. He stated,

I had my stuff to do . . . I’ve done this before, it’s just new equipment. I was good at it. My boss liked me; I got raises. Internally, [I had] confidence; externally, [I was] working with my team with electronic repair. I just wanted to do it. That’s the world I stay in.

During this study, David primarily focused on the positive aspects of how his leadership experiences during combat impacted his civilian roles, and was very proud of his accomplishments.

Lisa’s leadership experience had also impacted her civilian career choices. Prior to her deployments, she was majoring in business. However, once she returned from her deployments, she became even more motivated to help others. This motivation evolved into Lisa earning her counseling degree. Throughout her interviews, it was evident Lisa was passionate about helping others. It seemed that her deployment experiences as a leader truly left a lasting impression on her, both intrinsically and in her counseling role.

Lisa shared that the leadership roles assigned to her during her deployments were not left behind in combat. Instead, they became a part of who she is. She stated, “You see people suffering and you want to help [both during combat and stateside]. So, I am grateful that I am in a position where I have figured things out enough, where I could help other people.” Lisa was referring to her current position of a counselor.

Prior to their leadership experiences, Matthew, David, and Lisa did not have a specified goal for their life’s career. They specifically attributed their civilian careers to
their leadership experiences during combat. All of the participants shared that their experiences during deployment, as a leader, had an impact on their civilian lives. Throughout the interview process, the researcher noted that each of the participants had diverse experiences, yet all utilized their experiences in a positive way during reintegration. The researcher found this as both fascinating and humbling. The researcher had previously bracketed concerns of some of these experiences from the first interview as potentially having greater negative impacts on reintegration. However, the researcher was relieved to learn the positive effects the participants would later share in their second interview.

**Deployment experiences elicit strong emotional reactions stateside.** Each of the participants made reference to, and some even involuntarily revealed, their emotional reactions that are present still during their civilian lives. In reviewing the data, it was evident that such strong emotions were connected to their combat experiences as leaders, and were still quite visceral. Many of these emotions seemed either painful and sad, or angry and frustrated.

Schmitt (2003) identified that some military personnel, upon returning from their deployment experiences of combat may have a negative perspective of either their experience of deployment or their new civilian roles. Matthew, Mike, and Lisa each expressed their perspectives of the negative sentiments they had toward their experiences. Matthew shared, “you know, I am still a little bitter . . . coming back from Iraq.” He further expanded on his statement through referencing his first deployment where he stated his superior officer “went out of his way to make my life miserable, and he
succeeded.” Matthew further explained that it is was never about what he did, it was more so a difference of personality, one in which his superior officer did not like Matthew’s personality, even though he was not being insubordinate.

Furthermore, when Matthew was stationed in Ramadi during his first deployment, he witnessed the death of 96 people. At the time, he had a hard time processing it, and declined to explore this topic further with the researcher. Matthew did make mention, with all of the tension currently going on in Ramadi, now in 2015, his sentiments of his first deployment he shared, “sometimes I think it was all a waste.” During this time, the researcher bracketed the strong emotional reactions she had toward the sentiment that Matthew shared. The researcher felt concern for Matthew, and for the other countless troops who were perhaps sharing similar thoughts about the current threats in the Middle East.

When Mike returned to his civilian life, he had expectations of finding a job without any roadblocks. Mike shared about his job search,

[It was] disappointing because people were not friendly to you [military]. I thought there would be a little bit of a credit to me that, “oh, you served, we’ll give you a little credit for that” but there was none of that.

It took Mike five months to find a job. As he reflected on the experience, he shared,

There were nitwits across the whole process. This was a huge disappointment. And also, because you know America’s not like the way it was a long time ago— . . . you know, like it was in World War II, where everyone was patriotic.
Once again, the researcher made notes of the empathetic feelings she had for those returning who were not given the proper respect of their roles.

Nevertheless, Mike honed in on the outlook he utilized as a leader. He reflected on his leadership role as one in which he worked diligently for both the success of the mission and the safety of his men. He decided to apply the same mentality to his experience: “I told myself just continue to work hard and you’ll eventually find something.” This sentiment is congruent with the findings of Schmitt (2003). Schmitt agreed that combat experiences have been life changing in terms of offering veterans opportunities for a new perspective of their civilian life. The researcher made note of the resiliency that was experienced by the military officers. David’s perspective was commensurate with Mike’s and Schmitt’s (2003).

David’s perspective was one of perseverance as well. The mentality, which resulted from his experience, was one of strength. David said about his deployment in combat: “It made me stronger—it’s never going to be as bad as what we did in the Navy—civilians will never understand it.” He intentionally focused on the positive aspects of his experiences. David explained, “Learn from it and let it go. Let the bad go. My idea is that is the true meaning of prisoner of war, when you can never let it go. Just let it go. I did it myself.” David explained that he channeled his experiences to drive himself to do well in his career and to be able to provide for his family. He paralleled his civilian role with that of his leadership role during deployment. “In the military, it’s like we have a job, let’s do it.” David stated, in his civilian life, it’s the same, “We can’t fail, we have to do it, one way or another.” The researcher made note that David’s views
seemed empowering, as they were able to harness the momentum of the leadership role toward a positive outcome during reintegration.

Lisa also shared her own perspective. In congruence with Currie et al. (2011), Lisa confirmed the research of those returning home from combat and experiencing a difficult time. Nevertheless, Lisa further stated the underlying origin of her negative feelings. From her first deployment she said, “Anger is [still] not completely gone. But it took four to five years before I felt a little more comfortable. That makes it sound like a long time. I still have anger here and there.” When the researcher inquired about this, she stated her intention was to be a part of the National Guard to focus on stateside humanitarian aid and not foreign deployment. Instead, she was given the command to deploy as a member of the National Guard to Afghanistan for her first deployment, then Iraq for her second. Prior to her unit being deployed to Afghanistan, Lisa shared that the National Guard had not been deployed to International Combat. This resulted in Lisa feeling betrayed by the country she fought so hard to protect. This was a sentiment that has not been truly represented in the literature. Often it may seem that military personnel often safeguard the military. However, through these interviews, especially Lisa’s as she even stated she “was disgusted with the military,” the researcher believed this gives further information to the experience of military officers.

Jason’s experiences aligned with the research reported by Grossman and Christensen (2004), which shared that one’s lifestyle after combat may have changed entirely, in comparison to what it was prior to deployment. Jason shared that he had experienced stress while deployed, which continues to be a consistent in his civilian life,
which was a switch from his lifestyle prior to deployment. Jason stated he had many
duties during his deployments. As a leader, he became accustomed to trying to
accomplish many goals, as he had multiple individuals to whom he needed to answer.
Therefore, as a person who has pursued a career with the military, Jason said that now,
the biggest challenge is, “Stress. Trying to please [military] work, family, the self.”
Once again, he finds himself needing to answer to multiple parties. He shared during
civilian life, “there is a push in all directions.” During deployments the push was just the
military, now he realizes all of the other responsibilities entrusted to him, which cause
him further stress. The researcher commented in the research journal about how common
this frustration must truly be, as there would be a huge shift from being 100% focused on
the military, to then being accountable for multiple responsibilities. The research has
reflected the dissatisfaction with civilian life upon return from combat deployments and
compared it with the literature of Killgore et al. (2008).

All of the participants had strong feelings about their deployments that transferred
to their civilian lives, as confirmed with the studies of Buzzell (2005). The leaders in this
study shared strong feelings as a result of their deployment experiences. Some used these
strong feelings as motivation for a life changing perspective in their civilian lives.

 **A sense of duty and responsibility are still prevalent in civilian life.**

Throughout the interviews with the participants, frequently there was mention of various
leadership qualities that carried over from combat to civilian life (i.e., taking ownership,
being more vocal and assertive, having concern with the safety and well-being of others,
and operating with a set goal). Part of the participants’ experience of taking ownership
included taking responsibility for not only one’s own actions, but instead extending that responsibility for caring for others as well. Many of the characteristics the participants described of their own reintegration experiences were rooted in leadership identities. The participants discussed using the skills they employed as military leaders as skills they continue to utilize in their civilian lives. It is important to note, through the thorough analysis of the data units, the participants made the distinction that the sense of duty and responsibility were not at the same capacity prior to their deployment experiences.

Participants agreed with Guthrie (2012) that leaders possessed a sense of duty with an accurate blend of skill to be successful leaders in combat. It is that same sense of duty that has carried to their civilian lives. Furthermore, as commensurate with the findings of Goldman et al. (2012), Jason, David, Mike, and Lisa all discussed the shift of their priorities to their families and relationships after their deployment experiences. Therefore it was a combination of the studies of Guthrie (2012) and Goldman et al. (2012) that participants essentially agreed with the sense of duty and responsibility embedded in them as a leader during deployment, which transferred to having a sense of duty and responsibility toward their loved ones in their civilian lives.

Some examples that were uncovered through analysis included Jason’s experience. He shared about his son, “[I am] trying to get friends for my kid.” Jason has been taking it upon himself to socialize his son with his neighbors. Jason further explains about his wife, “[because] she in introverted, I try to help her reach out to have friends.” These statements give a direct illustration of how Jason is taking ownership for the socialization of his wife and son. Through member checking procedures, Jason shared
that prior to his experience as a leader, he would not have been as invested in his wife’s and son’s socialization.

Mike also shared his shift in what he thought was important after his leadership experience in combat. He shared, “I am closer with my brothers and parents. I see them as individuals.” Mike went on to discuss his commitment to his family. He shared his enthusiasm for wanting to return home to Florida to be with them once he finishes law school.

David also focused on his family and his goals for his civilian life. He shared he did not want to “fade back into the person I was before I left [for deployment].” David made reference to “growing up” during his deployments. Before his experience as a military leader, he stated he was “young and unmotivated.” However, when he was a leader in the military, he was very proud of his accomplishments and wanted to carry the same feeling into his civilian life. In reference to providing for his family, he stated, “This was do or die right here. This was motivation.” David’s interviews seemed to share sentiments commensurate with the findings of Cantrell and Dean (2005) who stated that some are more likely to see the fragility of life after combat, and truly cherish those in their civilian life. It was clear that David put his family first, and there was nothing that would be put before those he loved. After the first interview, David was conversing “off the record” to the researcher about one of his daughters. He spoke so highly of her and of her accomplishments; he was so proud, and the researcher could just feel the love he had for his daughters as he spoke.
Lisa embodied her leadership role in her civilian life immediately upon returning from one of her leadership deployments. She stated,

*Within 30 days of being home from Iraq, my mother-in-law died suddenly—so there I am, just newly back [from deployment], she dies, then I have to take care of my husband and my father in-law . . . There was a lot of pressure, and I had to step up and take care of two men.*

Lisa shared there was never a hesitation, it was what she was trained to do.

Just as Gresser and Kreie (2014) noted that leaders in combat have the great responsibility of holding the well-being of others in their hands, the participants in this study widened this responsibility in their civilian lives to not only include their families and loved ones, but their comrades, co-workers, and even those whom they did not know.

For instance, Matthew, during his deployment, made the decision to not only finish college, but to go on to law school. He found the sense of responsibility in his civilian life, through his pursuits to continue fighting for justice for those he has not yet met.

David found his responsibility expanding beyond his family and extending to his military peers, both with whom he was deployed, and others he had met along the way. David shared, “The brotherhood is very real.” David implied that he would do anything for any of his fellow veterans.

Mike shared similar thoughts. He said about those in his command, “I still keep in touch with most of them . . . it is like the idea of ‘band of brothers’—[it’s] a very real thing.” Both of these sentiments confirmed the findings of Negin (2002), who identified the connection of those experiencing combat together as creating a lasting bond of brotherhood. As both discussed this connection, the researcher
made note of the pride and love that exuded from their words as they spoke of the brotherhood. It was something that the researcher felt was sacred to both of them.

Lisa’s sense of duty and responsibility resonated through her interviews. She stated,

[During deployment] I was so concerned with my soldiers that they have what they need to complete the mission, that sometimes, I am not getting my own needs met. So, in my current job, I treat these guys like my soldiers, making sure they are okay—even before my own needs. It’s embedded, like never leave a fallen comrade or soldier. So I do the same thing here [in my civilian life], I never leave anyone behind, never let anyone fall, because that’s my job . . . everything inside of me says, don’t let this person fall.

By being a leader, it seemed clear that the elements of the mission assigned to a leader and the responsibility entrusted to her for the well being of others carried over to civilian life.

It was clear that leadership left an impact on all of the participants of this study. Each of them utilized this impact in different ways. The focus of the responsibility toward members of the family was a prevalent focus, while trying to work toward the general common good was also a centralized theme.

Leaders seek positive ways to deal with stress. Each of the participants in this study voiced value in seeking outside help and support. Each participant provided examples of where they had turned in order to alleviate their stress. All discussed the important role counseling plays in helping returning veterans. The researcher was
cognizant about her own biases since she is a counselor in order to not influence the interviews of any of the participants. Lisa, Jason, and Matthew stated they have each received counseling services. Mike and David, while endorsing counseling, decided to turn to their spiritual connections for support. Even though all of the participants voiced their support in returning military personnel receiving counseling, they did echo the concerns of Wain et al. (2005), that the military as a whole continues to maintain a culture where seeking help is viewed as a weakness. For example, Lisa specifically stated,

> There will always be a stigma with getting help. I know when I first came back from Afghanistan and Iraq, I was like I don’t want to get help. I don’t want to talk to a stranger about my issues.

Jason also added his concerns, which were aligned with those of Hoge et al. (2005) that military personnel fear seeking help because this may jeopardize their career with the military. Jason, whose career is the military, voiced his concern for protecting his livelihood. Jason instead endorsed seeking counseling from a counseling professional outside of the military. Jason stated,

> Let’s face it, going away [outside of the military] for counseling is preferred because they [military personnel] are afraid of what the command would think. Fear of jeopardizing the job. Leaders talk. So, if you are talking with someone at the job, they will know.

Jason seemed to be disheartened by this fact, but at the same time recognized it for being the way it is.
**Reaching to religious beliefs.** Mike and David both expressed turning to their spiritual roots to alleviate the stressful impact deployment had left upon them. The study of Morin (2011) confirmed religious beliefs have a positive effect on veterans returning from combat. From the participants’ experience as combat leaders, both expressed a deepened connection with their faith, which opened them to a greater awareness of their priorities in their civilian lives. This life changing perspective was one, which could be found in existing literature. Killgore et al. (2006) noted that experiences of combat have the potential of impacting one’s personal belief system. This was true for Mike and David. Both used their experiences during deployment as life changing. As Pisano (2010) shared the potential of the deployment experience as one that offers spiritual growth, Mike and David experienced that growth.

Mike expressed that his connection with God deepened while deployed. Facing death at essentially all times of his deployment was the biggest reality check, which initiated his need for a greater connection with his faith. Mike expressed that many men he was with during his combat experience had lost their lives. He shared that it was during his deployment when his “faith blew up.” The researcher noted as Mike was recounting his spiritual experience, he exuded a peaceful joy that could be felt in the room.

As Mike recounted his reintegration experience, he reflected on the mortality experienced by those around him.
It saddens me that this is the nature of things. That people die. And, especially as a religious person, knowing that people die and maybe don’t have a good outcome after it, is like very hard for a little while.

From the member checking interview, the researcher clarified this statement with Mike, and he was referring to non-believers who may not have a positive experience after death.

In dealing with these deeper feelings and stresses during his reintegration experience, Mike stated, “I went to church a lot.” He further sought the pastor of his church to talk through his experiences and concerns.

Through David’s interviews, he referred to the stress of combat, but did not want to explore them deeper. He made mention of a fellow friend who had drowned during one of their combat missions, but was firm in not discussing it further. During this time, David fought back tears and the researcher offered David some time to compose himself and take a break from the interview.

When David returned he talked about his experience during a family vacation. David shared that he was in Washington DC with his family, and he visited the Arlington Cemetery. There, he put one of the thorns from a bush at the train station between the seams of his cap. He shared an analogy with the researcher about being in a leadership position in combat. He said it was like a “thorn under your skin.” He made reference that it will always be there. The thorn from Arlington was a symbol of how he felt. And still he shared, “I am a veteran and wouldn’t change it.” The researcher was able to understand the lasting effect of the deployment experience from David’s analogy.
When the researcher explored how David was able to work through the feelings and stresses, which were a direct effect of his combat experience, he shared that he cherished his religious supports. David spoke of his spiritual experience as one in which he turned to when he returned home: “I go to church and thought, enough of that . . . the church helped. One day I thought, it’s over. That’s it. Yep, it was tough, but not anymore.” David’s experience of going to church, the researcher noted, was one of empowerment. The church experience allowed David to reflect on the severity of his symptoms in relation to others. As he put his experiences into perspective, he realized other military personnel had it “ten times worse.” Nevertheless, from his faith connections, David was able to be more compassionate to the others who had experienced harsher factors in their combat and reintegration experiences as well. He further shared that he hoped that: “one day they can put it in the past and move on.” The researcher noted that this was very insightful and could potentially be helpful to other returning military officers.

**Seeking help through counseling.** Contrary to the existing literature of Wain et al. (2005), which discussed that the majority of military personnel do not seek mental health care, three out of the five participants of this study had sought counseling. Lisa, Jason, and Matthew each have received counseling services when they returned home from combat. Lisa, Jason, and Matthew, as in step with the findings of Military OneSource (Department of Defense, 2012b) reported receiving individual counseling focusing on their individual needs which helped each of them find positive coping strategies in dealing with their stressors, both from their combat and reintegration
experiences. They further endorsed referring those under their command to counseling; as for some, they knew it was a necessity.

Lisa reflected on her experiences in combat as one with a lot of pressure. Throughout her interviews, the researcher noted that Lisa shared contradictory feelings of both loving and hating the military. The researcher found Lisa’s input as helpful in understanding her perspective of counseling in order to learn possible ways of encouraging other military personnel to participate.

When Lisa was initially contemplating seeking counseling, she was concerned for two reasons. First, she was afraid of this being viewed by other members of the military as weak. Secondly, she thought about counselors and wondered, “How will they understand anything?” Therefore, it was only after her second deployment when she truly considered seeking counseling after one of her military peers had confirmed that she had been to counseling and that it was helpful. Lisa stated,

So even for me to know that, okay, she went [to counseling], it was like, why am I not doing that? People don’t necessarily want to tell others they are going to counseling. But, if they speak up and say “I struggled and went to counseling too” that might open doors to others who are like, “You? Okay, then maybe it’s okay for me to go too.”

After Lisa experienced counseling, she stated she tries to dispel the negative thoughts about counseling and shares the normalcy and benefits to other military personnel.

Jason shared his thoughts on counseling as well. The researcher made note of his care-free attitude toward seeking counseling, both with chaplains and with civilian
counselors. Jason had spoken with chaplains and counselors alike. “I sought out
counseling or a chaplain when I came home. Every couple of weeks I had to see a
counselor. He said he [the counselor] didn’t see an issue aside from [me] being stressed.”

Jason felt comfortable with counseling. As a leader, he felt it was his duty to refer his
men to counseling if he felt it was warranted. Regarding this calling he said,

[I have] no issues reaching out to others who are having an issue as long as I can
see it. A lot of people hide it. Just like ulcers, they can be there, but you just
don’t know it.

The researcher noted the inflection of Jason’s tone, as he had discussed fellow peers who
were suffering and had chosen not to pursue counseling, and instead were suffering in
isolation. Jason seemed upset by this, but also realized that he could not hold on to the
responsibility of making others go to counseling, especially those not under his
command.

As ways of coping with their stress, both Lisa and Jason discussed physical
activities, such as working out, as helpful to decreasing their stress. Physical activity is
helpful in relieving stress. Therefore, both Lisa and Jason have found positive ways to
de-stress. They both stated these types of activities were helpful while deployed, and so,
they continue to engage in physical activities to help reduce their stress on a regular basis.

Matthew also spoke with both chaplains and counselors: “[I] sought out the
chaplain; I spent many hours with the chaplain.” Matthew reflected positively about the
support he had during his deployments. Then, he decided to continue with his mental
health care when he returned home. As R. Bray (2014b) noted, social workers have been
more common for military personnel to have access to for mental health care needs. Matthew noted,

   The first time I came back from Iraq . . . I seized the opportunity to speak with a social worker on a regular basis. I think for weekly appointments. He [the social worker] was a civilian. I didn’t have a hard time talking to him. I don’t recall why that was.

Matthew seemed almost surprised that his counseling sessions went well. He further reflected on the counseling style, “He [the social worker] would have a chess board, and we’d have something casual going on, so we weren’t just talking, so I think that was cool.” The researcher made note of how having an activity going on while simultaneously working through the counseling session was helpful; this may offer more ideas to incorporate for other counselors.

   The researcher also made note of the fact that Matthew continued to initiate seeking mental health care services. This is an exception to the norm, as Kang and Hyams (2005) reported that not enough military personnel are seeking help.

Nevertheless, even as a college student, Matthew sought counseling services through the university as well. He stated,

   Sometimes, I think it’s good to be able to speak with someone who is not in the military . . . just because, you know, when you are in the military unit and you are around military, you feel like you’re suppose to act a certain way, or something like that. So, it’s kind of good not to have that pressure.
The researcher also noted this as very positive for Matthew, as he experienced such hardships through his deployments. The researcher had concerns for Matthew which were aligned with those in the existing literature of Burgos (2004): those who had experienced multiple layers of ill fortune, such as Matthew’s loss of a love interest to death in the combat zone, losing his close friends due to the love triangle that did not work out, and being placed in a new unit when he returned, where he did not know anyone; all of these layers taking a toll on Matthew where his greatest supports were no longer present were concerning factors.

All of the participants in this study shared a positive attitude toward counseling. Even though in previous studies this has been the opposing stance. For instance, Wain et al. (2005) stated the reluctance of military personnel pursuing mental health care due to the negative stigma of receiving such help. Three of the participants had experienced counseling after their deployment, whereas the other two participants pursued religious counsel. Nevertheless, each participant was open to receiving support, which left the researcher extremely optimistic.

This is very promising for counselors working with veterans. The impact of this study offers hope to not only counselors but to returning military veterans, as perhaps this guides the understanding of more individuals being open to receive counseling services.

The connections with others in civilian life have a significant impact on the reintegration experience. All of the participants discussed the impact of others (or the lack of the support of others) as having an impact on reintegration. The researcher realized that each participant would have his or her own perspectives and experiences of
the return experience in terms of interaction with others. Each participant used his or her own encounters during the reintegration process to discuss the impact of combat deployment. Some chose to address the self-destructive behaviors, which they had witnessed first hand from their subordinates or fellow military peers. Jason and Mike both shared witnessing such behaviors. Both used their leadership experiences to reinforce that self-destructive behaviors are not helpful in reintegration. Other experiences encountered included the isolation within their personal relationships. Jason and Matthew both discussed their experiences of isolation. Both addressed how their experiences of isolation have impacted their reintegration experience. Lastly, positive connections were also addressed as having a beneficial impact on the reintegration process. Mike, Lisa, and David shared personal experiences of connecting with others both within their families and with fellow military personnel upon return. Even though Mike and Lisa were married during deployment, they shared positive experiences of reintegration, which is contradictory to the findings of Morin (2011), which stated those who are married during deployment may have more difficulty transitioning back to civilian life than those who are single during deployment.

**Self-destructive behaviors of others.** Jason and Mike discussed their experiences of witnessing others engage in self-destructive behaviors upon returning from combat. Both made note that eye-witnessing these behaviors reinforced for them, that such behaviors were disparaging. Contradictory to the findings of Goodman (2005), the participants in this study did not report the desire to engage in any detrimental behaviors.
Instead they shared their observation of how other military personnel engaged in such self-destructive behaviors.

Of a military comrade in the marines, Jason noted, “He had everything going for him, but he was going down a destructive path. He would live his life smoking cigarettes. He drank alcohol like crazy . . . he developed Type I Diabetes.” Reaffirming the writings of Carter et al. (2011), Jason’s encounter was one in which his friend was opting to self-medicate instead of seeking outside help and support for other treatment options. Jason further stated that this same friend started experiencing suicidal ideation, a finding aligned with the research of Goodman (2005). Jason stated his friend would post on Facebook, “I don’t want to be here.” Jason was concerned about him, as he found out that his friend would talk about overmedicating himself with his Diabetes medication.

The researcher noted that Jason was genuinely concerned for his friend, but felt helpless. He expressed that his friend declined receiving help for his mental and emotional anguish. Through this experience, Jason realized the detrimental effects of continuous bad choices. During member checking procedures, Jason shared that by witnessing his friend’s experience, he was more compelled to pursue what makes him happy, while simultaneously focusing on making healthy choices.

Upon returning from combat, Mike shared that not only were men under his command self-medicating as stated by Carter et al. (2011), he witnessed some of his own men trying to fill the void combat left upon them with things, rather than through connections with others. He discussed alcohol as having a great impact on family life.
Mike explained that the spending of money, by men under his command after they returned home, had an effect on family finances as well.

Mike further explained that alcohol was often the substance of choice. Mike stated, “Some guys prior [to deployment], they were occasional drinkers. [After deployment] They drank every night after that . . . drinking was the main thing everyone went to.”

He further expanded that the choices several of his men had made during their return home affected their relationships. “Three guys [I knew] ended up getting a divorce within two months [of returning home from combat].” He further qualified, “I don’t know if they were that crappy of a person before they left—so maybe it would’ve been more helpful for them . . . to hash it out.” He further explained they were “making really bad family decisions and not hanging out with their kids and stuff.” Mike seemed to be sympathetic for the families of his men and their situations. He stated, “I didn’t have kids or a wife or stuff like that, so I didn’t have an issue . . . that happened with a lot of our guys.”

Mike further explained,

Eight or nine junior enlisted guys who constantly spent all their money. Some guys went out and spent all their money they earned in a month and stuff like that . . . like something like BMW’s, even though they didn’t have homes. They didn’t have jobs.
Mike felt they were “purchasing big ticket items” to make themselves feel better. As Mike reflected on the behaviors of his fellow comrades, he explained, “I didn’t spend a cent.”

The researcher noted that Mike maintained strong convictions throughout his experiences; however, he also had the capacity to learn from the negative choices of those around him as well. Mike expressed concern for his comrades, yet noted the limitation of his involvement, “people were reluctant, maybe a little, that they did not want to be told to do anything anymore after a whole year [of deployment].” Nevertheless, Mike stated he continues to reach out to check in on his men, not because he has to, but because it is a part of who he is.

*Isolation within relationships.* Jason and Matthew shared experiences of isolation when they returned home. Jason’s isolation centered on his relationships with his wife and child. Matthew’s isolation centered on his removal from his friends and social peer group.

Jason shared that his relationship with his wife had become strained since he has been home from deployment. He stated, “Now that we are together more and more, we are falling apart.” His sentiments were similar to the notions of Jonas et al. (2010), which stated that family members should also work on adjusting to fit the needs of the returning military member. But, this was not happening in Jason’s marriage. Instead he was feeling displaced, as in the findings of Hollingsworth (2011), since the dynamics of his marriage had shifted since his pre-deployment relationship with his wife.
He shared that for the majority of their marriage he had been deployed. So, when he came back, Jason had a difficult time defining his role within the family. As stated with Killgore et al. (2006), even though Jason was returning to a previously familiar environment, he had a difficult time redefining his family role. The researcher noted Jason consistently referred to his son as “the kid.” This implied the disconnect he had experienced. He seemed to be saddened that his son was “still Mommy’s boy.” Nevertheless, as he had experienced the determination through his deployment, he was willing to continue improving his relationship with his son; “he’s slowly coming to Daddy.”

Jason further talked through some of his irritations with reconnecting with his wife. He felt that he was putting forth so much effort, as he was feeling compelled to through his sense of leadership and responsibility, but felt empty in return. He stated he continues to feel her lack of empathy toward his experiences both of combat and of his reintegration. He was visibly annoyed when he discussed his wife. This was evident by the tone of his voice, the tightening of his jaw, and his furrowed brows when he spoke of her. He stated his wife constantly focuses on the negative of “what is going wrong with the family and stuff.”

Because of his most recent assignment with the Navy, he is in a state away from his friends and Navy comrades. This has been difficult for Jason. Due to his feelings of isolation, and the difficulty reconnecting with his wife, he shared that he and his wife may be separating soon. This potential change of family status is confirmation of the findings of Doyle and Peterson (2005) who shared that due to the change of the family
dynamic, it is common for returning military personnel to further change their family status, through such means as a divorce. Both the individual military service member as well as the family members remaining state-side have experienced so many changes. Therefore, Jason focused on feeling connected to the Navy, and the Navy being his main support.

Matthew, who was reassigned to a new unit immediately upon his last return home from combat, shared symptomology that were aligned with concerns of Scranton (2006). Scranton noted: military personnel develop a void that is parallel to one experiencing grief as they are separated from those with whom they were in combat. Furthermore, Matthew was indeed grieving the loss of his love interest who had died, further complicating this grieving process. Regarding the separation from his comrades, Matthew shared, “It would’ve been a little better if I didn’t have to immediately change units . . . just to be able to regularly see the people you’ve been part of for a year, [rather] than cold turkey.” Matthew further explained, “you miss certain people’s company or whatever, if you get accustomed to seeing them.”

The researcher noted further experiences with isolation, as Matthew commented on his lack of routine once he returned home. Matthew stated of his first sixth months home, “I didn’t work right away . . . I think that was a mistake, not working . . . if I had to do it again, I’d find a job for the first six months or so.” As noted in the works of Hutchinson and Bank-Williams (2006), no longer having a mission or a strict minute-to-minute schedule was an adjustment. This was confirmed through Matthew’s experience. Without knowing it at the time, he was isolating himself. The researcher
noted that the implication Matthew offered at this time was a transition that was made more difficult because of the isolation.

Matthew further experienced isolation when he returned to college. He realized that his peer group was no longer at the college level, once again he was alone; this time with those significantly younger than him. The researcher noted that Matthew had a difficult time relating to his new cohort. He reflected,

I was a non-traditional student and everyone else was 18–22. I was 27 at the time.
I guess that also contributed to me having a hard time reintegrating. Everyone else is gone, and those I am with on a day-to-day basis is young, and it’s hard to identify with.

**Positive connections.** Mike, Lisa, and David each reflected on their return experience in a positive way. This is opposite of the perspectives of Young (2014), who stated that military personnel may have difficulty connecting with civilians outside of the military. Mike was reintegrating with his family of origin, whereas Lisa and David reintegrated with their spouses. The common thread was the connection they had been able to make. The researcher also noted with each, that the family members of Mike, Lisa, and David had each accommodated the necessary adjustments that were needed for each of them, as returning members of the military to civilian life. Just as Jonas et al. (2010) stated that families must undergo adjustments in order to make allowances for the new roles of their returning family members, the researcher understood the families of Mike, Lisa, and David, to be making those accommodations.
Mike discussed his reunification with his parents. He stated, “For twelve weeks or more . . . I just hung out with my parents, and we went out to eat everyday. I saw my [nonmilitary] friends, everyday. Slept in everyday. Went to the beach everyday.” As Mike reflected on his reintegration experience with his family, he spoke fondly of them. He stated his family had the greatest positive impact on his life.

The researcher noted Mike’s excitement of the positive attributions of his family. He stated, “[Military] should trust what their family is saying as true. Your loved ones can identify pretty quickly what’s off with you when you can’t.” Mike referred to himself as the exception, but attributed his positive adjustment to those factors outside of himself, his family, and faith. He further explained,

My mom, you know when I thought I was 100% fine, there is a couple of times, she’d be like, “you seem really uneasy, and you seem like you’re very frustrated and like testy. Is everything okay?” Your family can identify. They know you so well it’s good to trust them. Trusting your family is good advice.

Mike further explained that he had many good experiences when he returned. He maintained open connections with his family, pastor, and had reached out to his soldiers.

Lisa shared that she connected with her husband and father-in-law after her deployments. She described her relationship with her husband as strong. Lisa continues to put his needs before her own. She shared her husband was non-military, but her father-in-law was in Vietnam. Regarding her husband, Lisa stated, “I think he has done his best he can to support me, some days better than others, like any relationship.” While Lisa’s father-in-law was alive, she stated, “I had that to relate to, so that was kind of
nice.” She further explained that they never discussed their actual deployment experiences, instead, Lisa shared with the researcher, “You don’t talk about it, but being in the presence of another veteran is comforting. Because you know they understand the dynamics and structure of that . . . it’s just an unspoken language.”

Lisa’s experience she described with her father-in-law was confirmation to the existing literature of Durham (2010), who reported that military personnel often felt most support from other combat veterans. David’s experience also confirms Durham’s findings. The researcher made note that this offers further insight to the treatment modalities of those returning from combat, in terms of incorporating more interaction with fellow veterans.

David stated he maintains connections with his military friends. After his leadership experiences with his deployments, he was in contact with his military peers. With his military friends, he openly talks about his deployment experiences. He shared, “We’d talk about our experiences [to each other], but [to] no one else.”

He further shared that when he first returned home, his priority was to see his family and his wife. As Military OneSource (2013) explained, military personnel have to understand that life would be different after combat, and the relationships within the family system must be redefined. David shared that after his deployments, he became closer with his family; his wife and family became his priority. Just as Barlas (2007) shared that military personnel can find new ways of connecting and finding meaning in the civilian world, David shared that all of his duty and sacrifices were to be able to provide for his family, as he stated his two daughters and his wife are his life.
Implications for Counselors Working With Veterans

This study was conducted through phenomenological means in order to ascertain the purest form of the reintegration experiences of military leaders. However, it is important to note that the results may only be a small representation of what is experienced by military leaders. This study, although not conclusive of all leadership experiences, could perhaps be viewed as a catalyst for further dialogue about the combat experiences of military leaders, which affect the nuances of the reintegration experiences of military leaders, and how a leader’s quality of life after combat is affected. These conversations, in turn, would provide a greater understanding to the individuals themselves, families of military leaders, and counselors working with returning military leaders. As confirmed by Coll et al. (2011), there is a need for counselors to be prepared for military personnel with reintegration concerns, specifically, those returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Department of Defense, as stated by Military OneSource (2012b), stated there are 12 counseling sessions available to all military veterans, free of charge, which are preventative of any issues that could potentially arise from their combat experiences during reintegration. There are varying eligibility requirements through Military OneSource regarding the time span of return from deployment. Sessions are 50 minutes in length face-to-face, over the phone, or on-line. Furthermore, varying providers are approved through Military OneSource, both military mental health providers and those within the community in which one lives; programs are available both nationally and internationally (Department of Defense, 2012b). Nevertheless, as stated by the
participants, some military personnel may prefer to pursue counseling entirely outside of the military parameters, as to not have their counseling experience associated in anyway with their military records, especially leaders.

The descriptions of reintegration experiences reported by participants included the nature of their combat experiences (i.e., number of deployments, deployment duties, missions, life-threatening moments, interactions with others during combat, experiences with death, connection with their family, and resources available) and the support available at home. Although some participants placed greater emphasis on certain aspects over others, the commonality was that each participant’s life was changed drastically from their life prior to deployment. This is a finding commensurate with that of Mundt (2009).

There was supporting data that the participants had experienced life-changing events during deployment, which had a profound effect on their civilian lives once they returned from combat. This confirmed the findings of Verburg (2010). Through careful consideration, participants could recount vivid examples of their combat experiences and how each of those experiences impacted them either at that exact time, or afterwards, during the reintegration process. The participants were mindful of their role as leaders, and viewed their role with utmost responsibility and duty. Their duty to their command as well as subordinates was evident, while simultaneously, they were the embodiment of duty to their country.

All of the participants’ reintegration experiences had ties with their experiences as leaders in combat. Varljen (2003) had discussed the leadership responsibilities that affect
reintegration as well. Therefore, it would be appropriate for counselors to engage in practices of understanding the various aspects of combat experiences. This was a sentiment that was also shared by Coll et al. (2011). Participants further shared that it has been helpful to have someone simply be patient, and to merely have someone listen, and not drill questions. As stated with Military OneSource (Department of Defense, 2012b), the goals of counseling veterans is to teach and encourage productive perspectives of combat as well as healthy coping strategies for life’s stressors after combat.

Participants explained that military members would share with a counselor what they want to share, what they need to share, when they need it. Even through the sampling of participants in this research, and through the opportunity to talk about both their combat and reintegration experiences, through member checking, some participants reported the cathartic nature of talking about their experiences and perspectives. When the researcher was conducting the member checking interview, Matthew shared, “Sometimes it’s good to just talk about it.” Mike shared from the interviews, “Patience is key. Hearing people out, probably the simplest thing to do, but so helpful.” Similarly, Lisa stated further for those who were hesitant to talk about their experiences, “Even if you’re not going to talk, just being in the presence of that person is helpful.” Similarly, David in his member-checking interview appreciated the listening. He further stated counselors should “listen, just listen to see how good and or bad they had it.”

As participants were describing their experiences of reintegration, they were often defining themselves as continuing their role as a leader. They shared how their experiences ignited a sense of obligation toward guiding others. They permitted their
leadership roles to surface during reintegration. For many, this happened as second nature, what they were taught to do. All still identify as leaders and in one way or another, have made the decision to continue with that leadership role. For some this was within their families, for others, at the workplace, with colleagues, and still for others their entire career was a shift to be a leader as a civilian.

Aside for being reflective about their combat and reintegration experiences, the participants of this study, who were military leaders, were mindful of how their perspectives of life has been altered. For instance, in a member-checking interview with Mike, he shared, “Certain things are real concerns. And, maybe before it would have bothered me, but now, you know there’s other much worse things that could be happening.” Each of the participants made reference to comparing worries stateside with those they experienced as a combat leader. Each time, the civilian worries were minimal in comparison to combat worries. Therefore, the participants found they are better equipped to deal with civilian high stress situations because they continue to be significantly less stressful than what they had experiences in combat.

Participants reported the need for military personnel to receive counseling services when they return. Military OneSource reported that the Department of Defense (2012b) offers counseling services to all veterans. Furthermore, the participants, as leaders, voiced their comfort in referring others to counseling, as they stated they appreciated the benefits of counseling. Therefore, as military leaders, such as the participants of this study are referring military personnel, the counselors themselves
should be receiving training on what to be prepared for, and how to counsel combat veterans.

Furthermore, as underscored through the participants of this study, the findings of Durham (2010) addressed the importance of receiving support from fellow combat peers to help with the reintegration process. This is something counselors need to be mindful of, as support groups could potentially be extremely helpful as well.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The participants of this study revealed their own experiences of leadership during both combat deployment and reintegration. Specifically, participants discussed how their deployment missions affected their reintegration experiences, and the influence their leadership roles left on their civilian lives. When considering future research, the possibilities of variations of the existing study have the potential of producing further information. The outcomes of this study may expand as a catalyst for future research.

One of the considerations to the current study includes the possibility of separating the specific branches of the military. For instance, variations existed between the experiences of the Army, Navy, and National Guard, each of which was represented in this study. Those for the same branch shared similar experiences of leadership and combat, which in turn affected their reintegration process in a certain way.

In the current study, the participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences of reintegration with their families. A variation of this study could focus on the specifics of the family. For example, the researcher could focus their sample on (a) those who are reintegrating with their family of origin, (b) those who are reintegrating with a spouse,
(c) those who are reintegrating with spouse and children, or (d) those reintegrating with their friends and peers. The researcher could specifically understand more specific experiences within the specific family dynamics and understand commonalities among the participants if their reintegration within similar family dynamics (married, single, with or without children, or with their friends).

Another variation of this study could include selecting the participants to be an immediate family member (or friend) of the returning military leaders. For instance, Mike shared his mother was able to identify when he was having a rough day even before Mike was able to identify such things. The immediate family members may offer a more objective observation of what the reintegration experience may visibly look like.

Therefore, interviewing those closest to military leaders may offer another perspective of the reintegration process. These interviews may enrich the information about what it is like to live with a military leader after combat during civilian life.

Another deviation of this study could be the way in which participants are recruited for participation. In this current study, the researcher turned to counselor colleagues for referrals for the study. However, because not all military leaders pursue counseling, or are acquainted with a counselor, this offers a limitation. All of the participants in this study had a positive outlook on counseling services. It is unknown if this perception is skewed due to the connection each participant had with a counselor. Therefore, it may be possible to recruit individuals from local VFW’s, Veteran’s job fairs, or other public functions for returning veterans. If relatives of the military leader
become participants, than local support groups as well as advertisements could potentially be a way of recruiting potential participants.

In this study, there was no limitation as to the length of time after one was removed from the combat experience. Only a minimum was given, as a person had to have been living stateside for a minimum of two years. Therefore, some of the variations experienced could be linked with what the combat experience was at the time. For example, one of the deployments in 2003 was described quite differently than the deployment experience of 2012. Each of these experiences have an affect on reintegration, but there may be more commonalities found with those who had served at a similar time or with similar missions during combat. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to pursue a longitudinal study with participants two years removed, then again later on (after more time had lapsed) to analyze at the variations time offers, and the affect on reintegration within increments of time.

Furthermore, a potential variance could also be conducted which focuses on the country of deployment. The participants in this study were deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Oceanic Stations. Each offered a unique experience due to the geographic location and the situation that was present in the area at the time. Looking at a study in a cohort fashion may also identify key issues with specific missions and deployments.

In this study, only enlisted military leaders were participants. It would be of interest to focus a study on the commissioned officers to understand their reintegration experiences as well. There may be commonalities and variations among those in commissioned and in enlisted positions.
As a result of the current study, the outcomes indicated commonalities among the experiences of the participants. Further research may conduct a greater examination of the differences of these experiences using Q-Methodology. For instances, utilizing the results of this study, the experiences of reintegration could be listed as statements, and the participants could sort statements according to *most like my experience* to *least like my experience*. This may help the researcher best understand whether particular groups of military leaders (based off of their branch, rank, age, relationship status, sex, etc.) experience similar reintegration experiences.

An implication from the current study is that military leaders have a motivation and drive for their actions upon their return to civilian life after combat. An area of further research concerning this implication could be to focus on the belief system and motivation, which drives one’s actions. Some of the participants in this study centered their motivation on their spiritual beliefs. Therefore, it may be advantageous to specifically focus on the role that religious beliefs and spirituality has on both the combat and reintegration experiences.

This study serves as a narrow lens from which to view the reintegration experiences of military leaders who have held a leadership position in combat. Further exploration of this topic would offer a deeper and wider lens to the understanding of the experiences of combat leaders in order to help others, such as family members and counselors understand the needs of military leaders. From such information, the goal would be to help improve their quality of life during reintegration.
Research Limitations

When examining the research, limitations were found in this study. For instance, the criteria for participants, even though exclusive to military combat leaders with a rank of E-4 through E-9, could have included more females, or more variability of race. The sex of the participants in this study included four males and only one female. Regarding race, all participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Therefore, potential variability among reintegration experiences of different races is not identified from the current study. Another limitation was in the recruiting process of the participants. The researcher relied on counselor colleagues in an effort to identify participants fitting the criteria of the current study. At times, colleagues recruited individuals who were not a fit with the exact criteria of the study, and although individuals expressed interest, the researcher had to decline their participation. Furthermore, this may have skewed results of the study, in that participants were connected to a counselor either as a client or an acquaintance, which may have driven the result to indicate that the participants had a positive view of counseling; this could have been a confounding factor.

The peer reviewer of this study was a non-military colleague. It may have been more insightful if the peer reviewer would have had military experience, thus having a more in depth background knowledge on the topic of combat to be better able to help the researcher with content information for the semi-structured interviews. The peer reviewer offered insight on the information the participants presented, but had limited knowledge, as she was not familiar with the military culture.
Although the first semi-structured interview centered on the deployment experiences and combat, there was no specific question linking specifically those experiences to reintegration in that first interview. The researcher could have potentially mixed the two interviews, in such a way that the participant could have given their deployment experience, and perhaps the researcher could have directly reflected on how that exact experience impacted reintegration. Instead, the researcher made the connection in the second interview, after the member-checking interview, at which time the participant only chose certain experiences to offer the reflection of the reintegration experience. The researcher wanted to maintain the elasticity of the interviews in order for the true experiences of the participants to surface. However, it is unknown if this may have been limiting to the data collection process of more specific reintegration topics.

During the data analysis, the researcher studied the textural-structural summaries that were utilized for the member checking interviews. Participants throughout the interviews frequently asked the researcher questions such as, “Is that what you are looking for,” or “Is that kind of what you mean?” or “Am I okay to say that?” The researcher noted that the participants were possibly looking for validation or approval from the researcher. In turn, the researcher was curious about what the participants were not sharing, as this perhaps indicated that participants were filtering what was being shared. The researcher understood that the interviews were only a small glimpse into the participants’ experiences of combat and reintegration.
**Researcher Experience**

In order for the researcher to be truly invested in a phenomenological study, it is recommended that the researcher be connected with the actual phenomenon under investigation (Van Manen, 1990). As a researcher, my connection is two-fold in this study of the reintegration experiences of military leaders after combat. One, I am a counselor and understand there is a great need to help our returning military veterans. As a counselor filled with empathy for those who are in need, I want to be able to contribute my services to help fill the gap of that need. Secondly, as a counselor educator, I feel it is my role to take a leadership position in areas in which more growth and development are warranted. Not many counselors understand the culture of the military, or the variations of the reintegration experiences due to the diverse factors of the individual’s deployment, support, and core beliefs.

The experience I, as the researcher, had during this investigative study was humbling. After interviewing the participants, I felt truly connected with each of the participants and obligated to represent their stories in the most, purest form. It was genuinely a privilege for me to be able to share in a part of their experiences. I hope to be able to represent them in a way in which they too could be proud of my work as I am of theirs.

My decision to earn a doctoral degree in counselor education was driven by my passion to educate both counselors as well as the public on the mental health issues that have inundated our military. Those who are a part of the Armed Services have sacrificed
so much, and need the support of the American people in order to be re-immersed with their civilian lives in a positive and productive fashion.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain a pure depiction of the reintegration experiences of military leaders after combat. The researcher utilized a phenomenological approach, as it allowed for the greatest range of diversity while allowing for the opportunity to identify commonalities from the phenomenon among the participants studied. The data asserted that the experiences of military leaders during combat left a lasting impression on their reintegration experiences. The data revealed five primary experiences the participants experienced that were common through the reintegration process. Further research could improve the understanding of the needs of military leaders, both for the military individual and family members. Specifically, counselors, through this understanding, could help improve the quality of life of the individuals returning from serving in combat.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
Appendix A

IRB Approval

RE: IRB # 15-212 entitled “The Reintegration Experiences of Military Officers After Combat”

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants. This protocol was reviewed at a fully convened board meeting on April 8, 2015. **Approval is effective for a twelve-month period:**

April 8, 2015 through April 7, 2016

*A copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.*

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. **However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials.** Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); **FWA Number 00001853.**
APPENDIX B

SCRIPT: INVESTIGATOR SPEAKING TO COLLEAGUES
Appendix B

Script: Investigator Speaking to Colleagues

Hello,___________________,

I am currently working on my dissertation with Kent State University. My dissertation study investigates the reintegration of military leaders after their experiences of combat. I am the Co-Investigator of this study along with Dr. Jason McGlothlin. We are working with our Principal Investigator, Dr. John Rainey.

Therefore, I am asking you to let any of your combat military leaders (who have been back from combat for at least 2 years in the States) know about my study in case they are interested in participating. (I have a script for you to follow, if you feel this would be a potential fit).

I would be asking them about their combat experiences to give context to their reintegration experiences. Then, the main focus will be on the reintegration experience in terms of reintegrating back into family and society. My goal is to try to fully understand the transformation of combat and its effects on reintegration.

Please let them know their identities are confidential. Nothing will be reported back to the military or anyone else (unless there is risk of harm, of course and this will be covered in the Informed Consent with each participant). The goal of my study is to help counselors better understand military experiences in order to be more equipped to work with the military population. At the conclusion of participation, each participant will be given a $50 gift card.

If you have anyone interested, please share with him or her the information enclosed (the attached script). The script includes my contact information, as they would need to voluntarily get a hold of me to be a participant. (I cannot contact them due to your confidentiality with your clients).

If you have any questions for me prior to you reaching out to your clients, please let me know, I will be more than happy to address any questions or concerns. Thank you!
APPENDIX C

SCRIPT: FOR COLLEAGUE TO USE WITH A CLIENT WHO IS A POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT
Appendix C

Script: For Colleague to Use With a Client Who is a Potential Participant

I have a colleague who is working on a study that centers on military leaders. She is a co-investigator of research with Dr. Jason McGlothlin. Dr. John Rainey is their Principal Investigator. My colleague, Marian, is looking to speak with military officers who have had combat experience while they were leaders, have been back in the US for at least 2 years, and are willing to talk about their experiences from deployment and reintegration.

I thought you may consider sharing your story with her. Her goal is to understand the experiences of military leaders so counselors like us can better help the transition process with both military personnel and family members.

Your identity will be kept confidential. Just like in our counseling sessions, only if there is a safety risk or concern for you or someone else would confidentiality need to be broken. So please be assured if you choose to participate nothing will be communicated with your military colleagues or superiors about your participation in her study.

If you have any questions you would like me to relay to her, I would be more than happy to. Or, if you would like to talk to this counselor directly, or let her know that you are interested, her name is Marian Beresh. You can contact her by phone or email: 330-280-2029 or mberesh1@kent.edu.

If you are interested you have to contact her directly. There is no pressure to participate. Even if you get a hold of her to ask questions you can still decide not to participate, there is no obligation.
APPENDIX D

SCRIPT: WHEN PARTICIPANT CONTACTS INVESTIGATOR
Appendix D

Script: When Participant Contacts Investigator

Hello, ____________________.

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation study. As one of my colleagues shared with you, I am interested in working with military leaders to understand your reintegration experiences. I work with Principal Investigator, Dr. John Rainey, and Co-Investigator Dr. Jason McGlothlin.

Can you tell me which branch of the military you are a part of? What is your rank? Have you been stationed or living in the US these last 2 years? Thank you for answering my questions. I just wanted to make sure we are on the same page before I explain my study in further detail.

In my study, I would be asking you about your combat experiences to give context to your reintegration experiences. Then, the main focus will be on how you have transitioned back to society and with the specific individuals in your life.

Your identity is confidential. Nothing will be reported back to the military or anyone else unless a concern arises regarding yours or someone else’s safety.

My goal is to really get an understanding of your experiences, as there are so many other military personnel who may be sharing a similar experience. Therefore, my goal is to help counselors better understand military experiences in order to be better able to help the military population.

If you choose to participate, we would set up 2 interviews that would each take 45 minutes to 1 hour. The first interview will include demographic information as well as your deployment experiences. Following the interview, I will e-mail you a summary of our discussion in order to double-check the information I have gathered, and I will ask for your feedback. The second interview will focus on the reintegration portion of your experience. This too will be followed up with an email summary and verification to help me be sure I have understood your experiences accurately. At the conclusion of the first interview you will receive $25 for your participation, then another $25 at the conclusion of the second.

Interview would take place in person. I can arrange a study room for confidentiality purposes at the library.

Please feel free to take some time to think about whether you would like to participate.

If Yes: Can we schedule a time for our first interview? Great. Thank you.

If No: No problem. Thank you for your time. I wish you the best.
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Appendix E

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: *The Reintegration Experiences of Military Officers After Combat*

Principal Investigator: *Dr. John Rainey (Faculty)* Co-Investigator: *Marian Beresh (Student), Dr. Jason McGlothlin (Faculty)*

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Purpose:** The researcher is interested in understanding the combat and reintegration experiences of military officers. Limited research exists that focus specifically on the reintegration experiences of military officers. By understanding the experiences, counselors may further understand how to best help military officers with the reintegration process.

**Procedures**
You will be engaged in dialogue through semi-structured interviews. Through these interviews, you will be asked to share information regarding your positions in the military, including responsibilities and tasks as well as your combat experiences. This will help offer context to the reintegration experiences of the participants. Then, you will be asked to discuss your reintegration experiences in relation to you interactions with significant others, family, friends and the community. You will be asked to review interview summaries from the researcher’s notes and offer any clarification. Interviews will be transcribed; your identification will be confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym.

**Audio and Video Recording and Photography**
You will be asked to agree to being audiotaped. Recordings will be transcribed in order to analyze the information of the interview into groups and categorize themes of reintegration. At the conclusion of the study, the audio files and transcripts will be deleted/destroyed.
Benefits
This research may not benefit you directly. However, for some people, sharing one’s narrative could be therapeutic. By contributing your personal narrative, you may benefit others in validating their experiences of reintegration to help normalize them.

Risks and Discomforts
As you recount combat and reintegration experiences various emotions may surface. This may be stressful. Some of the questions asked may be upsetting, or may cause uncomfortable feelings. You may choose to decline to answer any of the questions.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Your information related to this investigation will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. You will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

You will have a pseudonym. When interviews are transcribed, the pseudonym will be used in place of your true identity. At the conclusion of the investigation, any documents with personal identifying information will be destroyed. All audio files will be deleted at the conclusion of the investigation as well. If at anytime throughout the investigation, you mental health is in question, the researcher will contact 911 if deemed warranted, as confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate you may do harm to self or others. However, if a referral is warranted, the researcher will refer you to your personal counselor or to the Kent State University Counseling Services located at 325 White Hall Building of Kent State University 330-672-2208.

The participants’ information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies.

Compensation
You will receive a $25 at the first interview, and another $25 at the second interview.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely a personal choice. Each participant may choose not to participate or may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
Contact Information
If participants have any questions or concerns about this research, contact can be made to Dr. Rainey, Principal Investigator, at 330.672.0694 or Marian Beresh, Co-Investigator, at 330.672.2662, or Dr. McGlothlin, Co-Investigator, at 330.672.0716. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, please call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

__________________________________________________________
Participant Signature Date
APPENDIX F

AUDIOTAPE/VIDEO CONSENT FORM
Appendix F

Audiotape/Video Consent Form

REINTEGRATION OF MILITARY COMBAT LEADERS

I agree to participate in an audio-taped/video taped interview about Military Reintegration as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Marian Beresh may audio-tape/video tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                        Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

___ want to listen to the recording  ___ do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Marian Beresh may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes/video tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

___ this research project  ___ publication  ___ presentation at professional meetings

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                        Date
APPENDIX G

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Appendix G

Demographic Information

Gender: __  Age: __  Ethnicity: __ African-American __ Hispanic __ Multi Racial __ Pacific Islander __ White

Relationship Status: __ Single/Never Married __ Singe/Divorced __ Married __ In a Relationship

Number of female children: ___ and their ages: ____________

Number of male children: ___ and their ages: ____________

Who depends on you, i.e. older parents, children/step children, etc.?

Highest Educational Level: __ High School __ Some College __ Bachelor __ Masters __ PhD/MD

I. Which branch of the Military do you belong to?

___ Air Force ___ Army ___ Coast Guard ___ Marines ___ Navy ___ National Guard

How many years have you served? ____________

II. What is the highest rank you have achieved? ________________

III. Where have you been deployed?

___ Afghanistan ___ Iraq ___ Kuwait ___ Saudi Arabia ___ Other ________________

IV. How many combat tours have you served? ___

How long were your tours? ______ ______ ______

V. In which of these tours were you serving in a leadership role?

VI. How many men and women were under your leadership?
APPENDIX H

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROMPTS
Appendix H

Semi Structured Interview Prompts

Initial Interview
1. Preparation for deployment(s) in terms of preparing the transition with family/friends
2. Typical day-to-day goals in the combat zone including responsibilities and leadership duties during your deployments
3. Interaction with family during combat and its effects
4. How subordinates affected leadership style and approach
5. Conclusion of first interview and preview of what is to come

Member Checking
1. Any thoughts/feedback from participant since our meeting
2. Specific thoughts/feelings after reading summary
3. Check on accuracy and clarification
4. Any information inadvertently left out

Second Interview
1. Follow up of previous deployment experience bridging topic to reintegration back to the states
2. Mental health services received during the transition process
3. Experience within the first few months of being home (greatest challenges and best experiences)
4. Experience after being back for a year (Intrapersonal/Interpersonal reflections)
5. How life priorities remained consistent or have changed since combat
6. Advice for other returning military combat officers
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REFERENCES


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