Sheryl Cannady: Hello, I'm Sheryl Cannady at the Library of Congress. Joining me are four of the nearly 100 men and women who served in the nation's armed forces and now work at the Library of Congress. They are…

Ken Lopez: Ken Lopez. Kenneth is my formal name but I go by Ken.
Judith Conklin: Judith Conklin.
Jeff Gangi: Jeff Gangi.
Shawn Miller: Shawn Miller.

Sheryl Cannady: Well, could you share what your military experience was and how did your time in the military prepare you for your current position at the library? And can you describe what that position is and the responsibilities that you have here at the institution?

Ken Lopez: This is Ken Lopez. I went in the military through the ROTC program. After graduating from college, I was commissioned as a lieutenant and then within a year I was deployed overseas to Vietnam and I served as an armored cavalry platoon leader for a year. And then after that I was reassigned to Washington, DC, and I changed to the military intelligence branch and I served three years here in Washington, DC, on active duty.

And then after that I separated from the Army in 1971 and went to graduate school and then after that I sought employment with the federal government and I've been with the federal government since 1973 with five different agencies, and my last agency is with McCarran Agency, The Library of Congress, which I joined in 1997 as the first Director of Security and I still serve in that capacity.

Sheryl Cannady: So, Judith, can you tell us a little bit about your military background and what you do at the Library of Congress?

Judith Conklin: I served in the US Army from between the years of 1980 and 2000 in the signal corps which is communications – nowadays we would call it IT. I was active duty for ten years and reserves for ten years. I now, at the Library of Congress, am the Deputy CIO Chief Information – Deputy Chief Information Officer – which directly relates to what I learned in the Army.

Sheryl Cannady: And Jeff, could you give us a little information about your military and work background?

Jeff Gangi: Sure. I joined the Marine Corps in 1994, spent about 12 years in. I was an artillery cannon _____ first and then did a lot of – moved
to counterintelligence for about 9 years. I joined the Library of Congress about three years ago – was a Presidential Management Fellow in the contracting office and now I am a management and planning analyst for the copyright office: I work with the chief operating officer.

*Sheryl Cannady:* And how long did you work in the military?

*Jeff Gangi:* It was 12 total years. I did a few deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa.

*Sheryl Cannady:* And Shawn.

*Shawn Miller:* Hi, this is Shawn. I served in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard from 2005 to 2012 and I did a deployment to Iraq in 2010 and '11. And the entire time I was in the 109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, so I was a public affairs noncommissioned officer, so basically I was writer and photography and I helped edit the newsletter. So that directly ties in to what I do now as the libraries photography: I cover all the daily events here at the library and visual information work.

*Sheryl Cannady:* As a member of the military what life lessons proved beneficial in your career? And who wants to start first? Ken?

*Ken Lopez:* This is Ken Lopez again. Well, that's a good question. I went on active duty as a young 23-year-old and within a year I was deployed overseas for a one-year tour in Vietnam as a platoon leader. And many people in my unit were draftees – about 25 percent – and they looked at me as the young lieutenant, what is he going to do?

Well, I learned real quick what it was like to be in a leadership position in combat operations. And I came back after one year as an older and wiser 24-year-old. And I've used that time on active duty and in the reserves to certainly learn more about leadership and leading and responsibilities which I've carried over into my civilian career. And I think that's what I gained out of the time in the military, both active and reserve, was being placed in positions – leadership positions, positions of responsibility, which certainly the military gave me that foundation to succeed in my federal civil service career.

*Judith Conklin:* I look back at my military time and I think it taught me an appreciation of others – of people – and an appreciation of life in general, but of our American life. And there isn't a day that I wake
up and I don't appreciate the I'll say easiness of life that we have because in the military if you get deployed a lot or spend a lot of time away from home it's a hard life doing that and when you're back at home now as a civilian I truly appreciate the wonderful life we have here in America. And I appreciate the people around me a lot and I'm not sure I did that before I went in the military.

Another is responsibility. The military very much holds you responsible for your actions and when you become a leader the actions of those under you and the buck stops there; so you carry out the orders of those above you, and that was a big life lesson that I've carried throughout my career.

If my immediate boss now states, "This is what we need to do," I carry out those orders as if they're my own and that's taught in the military.

Another is change. Whereas a lot of people in the civilian world – in civilian careers – are bothered with change – I think all four of us here can attest to the fact that we are used to change in the military – we could be told in a week that we're being transferred or that we have orders or that we're going to a different unity or getting a new supervisor.

In the military, especially on active duty, I was very use to getting a new supervisor every year: either I was transferring or my supervisor was transferring. And maybe at best it was every two years.

Here at the library that doesn't happen as much. In fact I've held my longest job – I've been at the library for 20 years – but I've had my longest job in my entire career for 7 years and to me that was phenomenal – with no change.

But I can accept change a lot – when things are changing around me I've learned to accept it because of the military.

Sheryl Cannady: And you've sort of had the same experience?

Jeff Gangi: Yeah, I've had similar experiences. I mean I was deployed a lot so I interacted and my position in the military allowed me to interact with a lot of foreign cultures, a lot of foreign people so I had an opportunity to understand their culture and their points of view and their views of the United States and the US military, so I was able to learn that first hand versus watching the news or reading it in a book.
I was exposed to a lot of different leaders. I was enlisted so I was at the bottom of the totem pole when I first started, but in the Marine Corps they encouraged us to be leaders from a very early rank so I was developed by some very good leaders.

I also learned from some very bad leaders too so you know it's just as important to learn what's not good and what's not valuable lessons to carry on, so I was fortunate enough to have some very good leadership early on that helped develop me throughout the years and go to courses and other military education that allowed me to improve my leadership skills and management skills and organizational skills.

So those are the things that I learned throughout the 12-and-a-half years that I was in the – that I am able to carry out to the library and in the current position that I'm in right now. As a management and planning analyst it's kind of important to understand work flows and management and leadership styles and helping people develop those skills themselves.

But I did seize an opportunity – the post-9/11 GI Bill – to finish college and go to law school, so I did that. And then from law school I went to the PMF program which is for graduate students. So I just sort of seized opportunities – I went along to improve my education – and then the PMF program had openings here at the library that I was interested in and I wanted to learn a new field.

Sheryl Cannady: Okay. And Shawn, can you share your experience?

Shawn Miller: I think I'll probably echo what everyone else has said so far – much like what Ken said I learned: leadership at a very young age. I enlisted in the Army when I was 20 years old and like Jeff said, I quickly learned – I was put into leadership roles as well as being trained by some very good leaders. I learned what it's like to have a good mentor; I learned what it's like to have bad mentors and how to balance that.

And also echoing what Judith was saying was saying, I think the military gave me a lot of perspective. Just when you have that time away and you're coming back and you're going it gives you appreciation for the things you have.

But I think the greatest lesson I learned and what's really helped me in my professional career – I got out of the Army in 2012 and I went immediately into grad school, and I think the best thing about
deployment and then going into grad school is stress management and how to put things in a proper mind frame because when I was deployed, you know, we would come under rocket and mortar attacks and everything so it's like it's a different level of stress and you still have to know how to do your job and do it well and managing stories on tight deadlines and being sent out in the field with very little guidance as to what you're doing so you have to go out there and be innovative and find stories because you don't always get specific assignments: they could say, "Go out with this unit for a week and come back with four stories," and you just go out there and you have to figure it out on your own and push yourself out of your comfort zone.

Because I think – and what guides me now is I think that personal growth begins at the end of your comfort zone because you need to push yourself beyond what you're comfortable with – I keep trying to bring that into my job here. Like innovate new ways that I can put things out there and find new creative ways to tell stories with photos and visual means.

**Sheryl Cannady:** If you had to share some positive word that you think would help those who have not had your experience, who haven't had that kind of leadership or pressure to perform, what would that be? How would you encourage your colleagues to do better?

**Ken Lopez:** Well, this is Ken Lopez again. In college I studied urban planning – and of course I'm not doing urban planning now – when I went into the military and came back from overseas here in Washington I was in a security and intelligence unit and that started my career in compliance and standards and policies. And that has stuck with me because my different agencies I've been with I've been in that business.

And what it's taught me – and I've imparted on subordinated managers and employees the ability to work with standards and compliance but be flexible in terms of their different ways to meet those standards; you can't be a dogma: you need to be flexible but at the same time never lose sight that you have standards and you have criteria that need to be followed – not only just to fulfill your responsibilities – whatever they are – but in my field you're talking about protecting assets, protecting people.

And I think Judith can speak to the same thing in the IT world. And so much has changed in our world of security and keeping up is important. But I think it's good with the new workforce who are more oriented toward technology – they've had to to survive – but
they've never lost sight and I try to impart in them never losing sight of maintaining what you need to do to maintain standards and discipline, but at the same time be open-minded about a changing world and how you need to adjust to those without losing sight of what you're goals are.

_Judith Conklin:_ I would say – I'll take it back to my first statement of appreciating – I like how Shawn said it – the perspective – your perspective on life, your perspective on your job – but from a how would I do better or how would I encourage someone to do better, or in the same situation, I would state that have a very positive attitude, a positive outlook and a good work ethic and those around you – to include your management chain – appreciate that.

It shows confidence and I think when I look at veterans among me in my job and even in my personal life I think that that is something that we bring to the table is the military teaches us confidence in ourselves and our abilities and to exude that.

So have a good work ethic and a positive outlook and others will think we're confident – you know, will see that confidence.

_Sheryl Cannady:_ Jeff and Shawn what would you recommend to other transitioning soldiers returning home and entering civilian life?

_Jeff Gangi:_ I would say that there's a lot of organizations out there now that help veterans sort of work on resumes and job interviewing and other areas. If you have found your job I would seek out a mentor. I have two: one in the agency and one outside of the agency, so a sort of different perspective from outside the agency and then some background for the person inside the agency.

I would also encourage people to, as Judith said, stay positive because although a solution might be difficult it's still possible – there might be a lot of work involved but keeping in mind it's still possible to do although you might have to use a lot of assets or expend a lot of energy.

And the other thing is to think outside of the box. I mean that was one of the first things that when I did my lateral move to counterintelligence was we always have to think outside the box – it's very easy to stay within our own little world and not go outside and look for other solutions – sort of the "Who moved my cheese?" kind of perspective on life: not everything can be contained in one small area, there's other things out there to utilize and help make – help solve your problems.
Sheryl Cannady: Thanks Jeff. And Shawn.

Shawn Miller: This is Shawn. I think the biggest thing for my generation is if – when you're transitioning out of the military is finding your community again and finding your niche because that was my struggle with transitioning out is you go from this intensely tight-knit group of people in your platoon or your squad or wherever you are and then you get out and you no longer have that tie and you come back in to almost anonymity – if you don't have that community it's easy to fall off by yourself and wonder what it is you want to do with your life now because you look at your military experience as such this crowning achievement in your life at sometimes or just like if it's the biggest thing you've done in your life so far and then you get out you find yourself kind of lost and wondering what to do after, especially with our generation it's we have the longest war in American history and also the least percentage of the American public serving since it's an all-volunteer force and there weren't any draftees – it's a much smaller population pool that served in the military even though we've been at war for over 15 years.

So I think coming out – just – it doesn't have to be a military community but there are so many groups out there right now and every generation it seems has had their own sort of niche with that – the older generations started the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and my generation has started so many – like The Mission Continues and Team Red, White and Blue – and there are so many organizations out there that all have their own kind of niche within the veteran community, whether it's like Team Rubicon goes out and does disaster relief because they use – they utilize veterans with those military skills that have been in disaster zones to then go out and do humanitarian work, or The Mission Continues is one that I'm a part of that we go out and we do public service projects – so it's a way to serve again, not in the military but as a civilian, so it kind of – it can fulfill that need again if that's what you're looking for.

When sometimes it's just getting together with a group of people to go out and maybe just go for a run or a bike ride or just get to know a community again – because like I said, you can easily be isolated when you get out. And I think that's one of the most dangerous things for veterans is getting out and not know what to do with their lives afterward.
So my advice would just be find your community, find your tribe and find your purpose again because everyone had such an intense purpose when they were serving, especially if you were deployed overseas you had this number – like you had this mission that you were doing every single day is come home, bring all your guys home, complete your mission, and I think finding your mission again once you return as a civilian is pretty crucial to being successful.

_Sheryl Cannady:_ Well, you all have written your own success story. Do you see your success as the exception versus the rule? You've been very successful – Director of Safety and Security at the Library of Congress – is that the norm?

_Ken Lopez:_ A lot of it. I think that that was my goal to be in positions of responsibility. And a lot of veterans they're more comfortable in other roles – that doesn't mean they're not successful in life. Everybody doesn't have to be out front: you can still be part of the pack and be successful because there's more to life than work.

A family is important. You may be a sort of in the middle in your career – not necessarily at the bottom – but you have other attributes. And that relates to family. And I think that's important that many skills that you learn in the military sort of fall over into your day-to-day life outside the workforce.

So I think that the responsibilities you learn in the military carry over into your family life. And your children see that too and hopefully they all follow in that mold.

_Sheryl Cannady:_ And Judith, did you always want to be in IT?

_Judith Conklin:_ After leaving the military I knew that I should stay in IT because it clicked for me and I had a lot of experience and training in it. Also I think what helped me be successful in my career after the military is – there are several things.

One is when I joined the military it was shortly after the WAC – the Woman's Army Corps – was dissolved and I think the Army hadn't yet decided how to handle women in their regular ranks – in their normal ranks – and so I was obviously in a male dominated military at that time. And I could have succumbed to that or accepted that and learned from it. The IT field through the years has been very much like that. It's a very male dominated field – career field to go into. And so through my IT career there's been many, many times where I'll be in a
meeting and I'm the only female in the meeting and I was used to that in the military – or I'm leading people where there's a ratio that is very male – a high male percentage in the workforce.

So that doesn't scare me at all in the IT field. I kind of don't care because I learned that in the military it just doesn't matter. What matters is can you do your job? Can you lead what you're supposed to be leading? Are you proficient? And I think that's taught me, walking into my civilian career, to just forge ahead and not worry about it.

*Sheryl Cannady:* And Shawn.

*Shawn Miller:* I like what Ken was saying about success can be determined many different ways for veterans. So many veterans now are coming back and they're being entrepreneurs and starting their own businesses or going into public service in other ways. So I think going literally from what you were doing in the military to having that job outside of it, yes, that's a success but there are other ways to determine that.

And I don't want people to think that you can't be successful if you're not doing what you were doing in the military and transitioning others – there are so many different ways that veterans are contributing to society now and I think too often we only hear the post-traumatic stress story or how veterans are getting bad treatment through different agencies and everything.

But I think far more veterans than people realize are incredibly successful now and they owe a lot of that to their military experience and that discipline and camaraderie they learn there.

And going back to the question about encouraging people that never served or are civilians about how they can kind of get the same experience I think back to Theodore Roosevelt, you know, growing up in kind of a higher-class life and purposely challenging himself. So I think go out, find your own challenges and rise above your comfort level, like I was saying before, to grow because war and the military make ordinary people and like you can have an extraordinary career and you can rise up above what you would normally do without it, but you don't have to be in the military to do that: there are ways to go out, find challenges in your life and seek out things that can make you a better leader, a better person, better at your job or whatever it is that you want to do in life and where you want to go.