

Edited Interview Major Kelly Waugh (1)

[Speaker 2]

My name is Samantha Gershner, I am a junior at the University of Tennessee and I am an intern in the Tennessee M4 program. This is Major Kelly Grant Waugh, who I am interviewing. Can you introduce yourself?

[Speaker 1]

Kelly Grant Waugh, I was born October of 1972, Cherry Point, North Carolina. This is the Marine Corps Air Station. Grew up a little over two hours north here in Abingdon, Virginia.

What else do you want to know?

[Speaker 2]

What got you over here to Tennessee and then from there on to when you first enlisted?

[Speaker 1]

When I first enlisted, both of my parents were in the Marine Corps. That was what made me decide to enlist in the Marine Corps back in 1991. In fact, I signed up for delayed entry two months before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait back in 1990.

So I've been doing this a long time. Finished out my senior year in high school. Joined the Marine Corps, did five years active duty.

As a mobile air traffic patrol radar technician. Spent most of my time in Millington, Tennessee for schools. I went out to California for my assignment.

Got out of the Marine Corps. I got married when I was in the first time. Married a high school sweetheart.

We dated when I was a senior, broke up. And then when I finished schools in Millington, I went back home for a leave before I went to California. We started dating again, ended up getting married, had two kids.

And that was the reason I got out of the Marine Corps. Because I knew right after Kyle was born, my second, that if I didn't get out, I was going to go to probably Japan. And my wife did not want to go to Japan.

So I decided to get out. Then after 9-11, six years, about a six-year break, I decided to come back in. The Marine Corps wasn't taking my MOS at the time.

So I switched over to the Army National Guard as a 19 Delta CAV scout with the 278th out of Bristol. Deployed with them in 2004-05 to Baghdad, Iraq. Most people in 278th and that deployment deployed up north to Boswell.

There was one company size element, that was us. We went to Baghdad by ourselves. So we were just about a month shy of a year and a half on deployment for that one.

Came back, switched over to the Army Reserves. Made my way up to E6. Received a direct commission in 2010.

Went to Bullock in 2010 out at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for Engineer Officer School. While I was at Bullock, started trying to find a job, a better job than what I had at the time. Because I was a regular reservist.

I was lucky enough to get hooked up with an AGR, Active Guard Reserve, position right after I finished Bullock. So I've been on active duty ever since I finished Bullock. First assignment was at 721st Engineer Company out at Grand Prairie, Texas.

Oddly enough, as soon as I got there, we immediately started preparing to go to Afghanistan. So I went as their XO, Science Construction Officer, to southern Afghanistan, southeast Afghanistan. We did stuff all the way over from the Marines area of operation, all the way over to the Pakistani border.

Big area. I think I was responsible for like \$14 million in construction projects at that time. Came back, left Texas, went to USCAPOC, which is the United States Army Civil Affairs and SOB Command out at Fort Bragg.

I was the Mobile IC for Reserve Units for a year and a half. All Reserve Units that were going overseas, the CA or SIOB, came through me so I could make sure they got all their training before they went overseas. Did that for a year and a half.

Then I went to CAPS Career Course out at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri again. After that I was sent to the 412th Theater Engineering Command as the current Operations Chief in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Did that for a little over three years.

Traveled a lot during that time. I went to Korea a lot because the 16-18 timeframe was pretty warm with North Korea. So I made many trips over there in that year and a half period.

Ten trips to Korea, one to Tokyo to count bridges in case something happened to me if we had to go. Then I came here and this has probably been the best job of my whole military career. I've really enjoyed ROTC and struggle.

Now I'm getting ready to retire.

[Speaker 2]

What are you going to do after you retire?

[Speaker 1]

Probably something in operations or something. I may actually be going to work on the Colonel High. Yep.

In fact, I just got off the phone with him.

[Speaker 2]

I know we talked about you going down to Florida. I think it was Bristol.

[Speaker 1]

I looked at doing JROTC up in Bristol, but there's more money to be made staying here. I want to go to Florida, but with my granddaughter's situation, my wife wants to stay here for a while.

[Speaker 2]

So we can get you for a little bit longer.

[Speaker 1]

You can get me for a little bit longer. 108 days.

[Speaker 2]

Told you he's counting down.

[Speaker 1]

Hey, it's a messaging tool. You have 108 days to ask me whatever you want. After that, I'm gone.

[Speaker 2]

What made you switch branches?

[Speaker 1]

I wanted to go back into the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is very small, less than 200,000 people. My MOS is a very small sliver above that.

They were full up. They didn't need anybody.

[Speaker 2]

You didn't want to switch your MOS?

[Speaker 1]

The Marine Corps? No, I didn't want to. I was like, why?

Why do that? So I switched to the Guard, which takes a while to get trained up and reclassified anyway. The day I graduated from my reclass school, we deployed to Iraq.

[Speaker 2]

What did you do after you retired from the Marines? Got out?

[Speaker 1]

A bunch of jobs. I worked maintenance for a couple different companies. I was maintenance manager for an aesthetics company.

You know what aesthetics is? No. The places that do your facials and stuff.

I worked for a company that sold their equipment, so anything that came back to the company that was damaged, I fixed it or sent it back out or made sure it got fixed. I did maintenance for a company that had 10 gas stations. I was their maintenance supervisor.

I would go around and make sure. I was a licensed electrician. I did electrical work.

A variety of jobs.

[Speaker 2]

What was it like having those jobs with two sets of Irish twins?

[Speaker 1]

Very hard. That's why I get kind of upset with some of these kids that say, oh, it's so hard. I was like, listen, if I can do it with four kids, a wife, working full time, doing guard or reserve, because I switched back to doing guard and reserve, and then doing electrical jobs on the side, you're just not committed enough.

[Speaker 2]

Just not paid.

[Speaker 1]

You'll get paid.

[Speaker 2]

What made you want to go to college and become an officer?

[Speaker 1]

First, I'll answer what made me want to go to college. I got tired of working for idiots just because they had a college degree. Sorry for the language, but I did.

I literally called Amanda one night. I was pissed off. I said, I'm so stinking tired.

I said more than stinking. Tired of working for idiots. I was 32 at the time.

I should have went to college when I was younger. I stopped myself. I was like, I'm still here.

I can still do this. And I did. Now I have a master's degree teaching in a Division 1A school.

Who would have thunk it?

[Speaker 2]

Why did you commission?

[Speaker 1]

Why did I commission? It goes back to my first deployment in 2004. When I was a prior service Marine, I was a corporal in the National Guard.

Corporal slash sergeant. I got promoted about halfway through the deployment. And RPL at the time was an idiot.

Not ignorant. He was literally an idiot. Would not listen.

He would not listen. He did not want to learn. He did not want to take input from NCOs that had a lot of experience.

It was so bad our platoon sergeant would not even go out with him. I was our platoon sergeant's gunner. So I got to deal with him all the time.

And he was just that bad. And I was like, I can do a better job than this. And I hope I have.

[Speaker 2]

Is that how you tell us to listen to everybody?

[Speaker 1]

Yes.

[Speaker 4]

I'm just making sure.

[Speaker 1]

Your NCOs, they had the experience. That's why we give you an NCO babysitter when you first get promoted to lieutenant.

[Speaker 2]

What have you liked most about UT?

[Speaker 1]

The kids. I'm serious. It is so awesome to watch you guys go from freshmen.

The change and how confident you guys are when you go out. It is huge.

[Speaker 2]

What made you want to go engineering corps?

[Speaker 1]

Funny story about that. When I did my direct commission packet, the Sessions NCO that was doing it, the Master Sergeant Teagarden, he said, hey, you've been selected. You got your direct commission.

What branch do you want? I was like, well, I want to stay as close to combat arms as I can. He goes, well, in the reserves, that's engineering.

I was like, well, I guess that's where I'm going. And that was literally how the decision was made.

[Speaker 2]

You don't want to go anything else like CHEM?

[Speaker 1]

No.

[Speaker 2]

Good save. Can you explain why people hate CHEM?

[Speaker 1]

God forbid we ever have to be in an environment where we have to use CHEM or nuclear, biological, chemical, yada, yada, yada. They have an acronym that's forever long. But in all reality, even the stuff that they say will save you, won't save you.

It's a waste of space, if you ask me. It is.

[Speaker 2]

I know. I didn't think all this was going to happen. If you wouldn't have gone engineering, which one would you have gone?

[Speaker 1]

Probably supply or something like that. Because I was in reserves at the time, so there had to be a reserve. Because other than out in the Pacific, two rifle companies, the reserves do not have combat arms.

Now the Guard does, but the actual reserve does not.

[Speaker 2]

Where were you hooked? Did you get to choose where you were stationed at when you were in the Guard or reserves?

[Speaker 1]

Guard and Reserve, if you're a regular Guard and Reserve, you pick your unit. So it's easy. Now when I went AGR, I had no choice in it.

And it's kind of weird. When you get accepted into the program, they're just going to call you one day, and they literally do call you one day, and they say, this is your first assignment, do you accept? And if you say no, you're going to go to the bottom of the list with prejudice, and they're never going to call you back.

So I told my wife, I was like, I don't care if it's Potok, Wyoming, we're taking it. And they called, they said, we're going to Grand Prairie, Texas. I was like, I'll take it.

And I got off the phone, I was like, where the hell is Grand Prairie, Texas? It was right in between Dallas and Fort Worth.

[Speaker 2]

That's not bad. Yeah, it was awesome. It's bad in Fort Worth.

Yeah. So when you got, I don't know the process of being selected for ROTC instructor.

[Speaker 1]

It was odd, because I was about a year out from leaving Vicksburg, and my career manager from Fort Knox up at HRC called me. And we were starting a discussion, and I said, where are you thinking about sending me? He goes, I don't know, probably ROTC.

I said, I don't know if I want to do that. I'm old, broken, I don't run anymore. He's like, I don't know if I want to go do that.

And then I talked to some friends who had done it, and they're like, dude, you're passing up an opportunity. You're going to love it. And I talked to my wife about it, and she goes, well, what schools are available?

So I had a friend who had access to the openings, and she said, all right, this is where we're going. She goes, we're going to UT. I was like, really?

Because I grew up a Virginia Tech fan. My wife knows that I – The Goddard Orange? Yes.

I still don't even wear that bright orange.

[Speaker 2]

Look, it's mostly – Yeah, we do have the bright orange polos.

[Speaker 1]

I refuse to wear them.

[Speaker 2]

I will admit, thankfully they switched to the gray.

[Speaker 1]

So my wife finds it very funny that a Virginia Tech fan who despised UT for so long is now teaching at UT.

[Speaker 2]

You mean like my parents?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

My mom went to UF, and then I go here. So we kind of relate to that one.

[Speaker 1]

But honestly, after I got here and went through a couple semesters and watched how kids progressed, I was like, this is the greatest job.

[Speaker 2]

What is the worst part about ROTC? I can name two.

[Speaker 1]

The worst part?

[Speaker 2]

UT.

[Speaker 1]

No, because we don't push all that hard. Y'all think we do.

[Speaker 2]

No, I just don't like waking up.

[Speaker 1]

Well, nobody does.

[Speaker 2]
I don't know.

[Speaker 1]
Lives do get boring. Especially for Cadre, because we're just sitting there. We're bored out of our minds.

[Speaker 2]
Can you just start taking rifles?

[Speaker 1]
I do steal rifles. But I literally enjoy it all. Even the FTXs, I actually look forward to that.

Because that's when we get to see you guys out of your comfort zone, out in the woods where most of you have never been, and we get to see the real you come out. And it's a lot of fun. For you.

It is. But you guys will always have these stories, the stories I have from deployments and stuff. This will be your first chapter in those stories.

[Speaker 2]
You mean like when we tell you we've been ranting about MS-1s? Mm-hmm.

[Speaker 1]
You will never forget these stories. You're going to be able to, like, when you do these ruck marches and stuff, you're going to be able to tell your kids when they're whining and crying about something, listen, when I was your age, your mom did this.

[Speaker 2]
Back in my day?

[Speaker 1]
Back in my day.

[Speaker 2]
I'm going to pull the old card.

[Speaker 1]
Yep. Back in your glory days, like John Mellencamp says. Who?

John Mellencamp. John Cougar Mellencamp. Sorry, Kyle.

Can you believe she just said who? I don't know who that is. Because he says, the bad thing about glory days, you've got to be old to enjoy them.

[Speaker 2]
I don't know who that is. Did I just pull you guys' age out? I don't know.

Sorry. What is the stupidest thing a kid ever said to you? That one's a big list.

[Speaker 1]

That's a big list.

[Speaker 2]

It's my favorite list. I'd say this week.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. I have been doing this for longer than some of these little kids, and I call them little kids because my kids are older than these kids.

[Speaker 2]

Your youngest is my age.

[Speaker 1]

He just turned 23. My youngest one just turned 23.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, he's three years older than me.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. So these little kids will argue with me about haircuts. I've been doing this longer than they've been alive.

And they're saying, I think. I was like, I wouldn't be talking to you about it if you weren't out of rags. It's like, don't tell me you think.

Just do what I told you.

[Speaker 2]

Other than haircuts. Because you complain about that every day.

[Speaker 1]

I complain about haircuts every day. Because if I can't get you guys to do the little things, how can I expect you to do the big things?

[Speaker 2]

Yesterday in a class when you walked in, you pointed at Ethan, which is a kid in our middle history class.

[Speaker 1]

The prior service Marine.

[Speaker 2]

I thought you were telling him to get a haircut, and me and another cadet were like, he's bald.

[Speaker 1]

I wasn't talking to him.

[Speaker 2]

No, but you pointed at him. So we were like, what is he going to shave?

[Speaker 1]
His eyebrows? But you know he's working on his officer.

[Speaker 2]
OCS?

[Speaker 1]
OCS packet for the Marine Corps.

[Speaker 2]
I got a message from him too.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah? That's why I kind of started talking to him like he's a cadet recently. He needs to know this stuff too.

Because it's not an Army fight anymore. It's not a Marine fight. It's a purple fight.

All the colors together. The blue, the green, the red.

[Speaker 2]
What's Space Force? Blue?

[Speaker 1]
They're blue still. Blue, black. But it's all purple.

You're going to be fighting together. So he needs to know this stuff. I'm teaching him.

[Speaker 2]
What's some advice you could give the cadets? Like when they commission.

[Speaker 1]
When they commission?

[Speaker 2]
Other than listening to the NCOs.

[Speaker 1]
Listen to your NCOs. Fall back on your training. Keep your soldiers busy.

Train them well. Give them good training. Don't give them stupid training just to be stupid about stuff.

Take care of your Joes and your Joes will take care of you.

[Speaker 2]
Do you want to retire? Other than counting down the days.

[Speaker 1]
Not really. It's my body. I've had seven knee surgeries.

Getting ready to have two more shoulder surgeries. My body can't do anymore. Brain can.

My body just can't do anymore.

[Speaker 2]

Are you just going to be Mr. Newhart and just hang out?

[Speaker 1]

I'm going to go make some money.

[Speaker 2]

Give me like a year and a half.

[Speaker 1]

No. February 5th is my last day in uniform.

[Speaker 2]

Aren't you going to be excited? It would be sad. We're going to do a little sampling for you.

We did it for Cromwell. So we'll probably do it for you.

[Speaker 1]

But it would be sad. It's a lifestyle. People join this because they think it's going to be a job.

And those are the ones that doubt after three or four years. The ones that stay in are the ones that enjoy the lifestyle.

[Speaker 2]

Because you've been in for what? Almost 30 years?

[Speaker 1]

Over 28 years total service.

[Speaker 2]

You've been in for almost 30 years. That's almost an extra 10 on that. I know.

[Speaker 1]

That's why I get mad when you guys argue with me about stuff. I've been doing this longer than you literally get along.

[Speaker 2]

I don't argue. I just want my fat.

[Speaker 1]

You argued with me the other day in class.

[Speaker 2]

Which one? Which time?

[Speaker 1]

About how I told you to get something fixed. And you were like, but, but. Shut up.

Just do it.

[Speaker 2]

I got it fixed. Mr. Newhart complained about it, but I got it fixed. That's right.

[Speaker 1]

Nobody cares about you more than me. You have to be that squeaky wheel.

[Speaker 2]

But when I'm that squeaky wheel, people complain.

[Speaker 1]

You get what you need fixed, right? Got it. I'll be over.

I'll be all right.

[Speaker 3]

What else?

[Speaker 2]

I think we have some more questions. Kyle, do you have any questions?

[Speaker 3]

I do have a few, if you don't mind. I'm off camera, but Kyle Rotarich, intern, research assistant with the center. What was it like growing up in a military family?

And how did that kind of shape your early life?

[Speaker 1]

It literally shaped everything. That was my whole focus through high school. I just knew I was always going to join the Marine Corps.

Because my mom was in the Marines. Dad was in the Marines. Two of my uncles on my dad's side were in the Marines.

I mean, it was just Marines. So it was like, you're recruited and you have to, I just walked in and was like, hey, I'm signing up. He said, okay.

So it was easy. It literally molded. I mean, high school, I didn't really focus on academics because I knew where I was going.

Graduated with like a 2.1. I mean, and I grew up in a small high school. I was in the middle of only 72 graduated seniors. So I was not a stellar academic by any means.

Then I dropped a 3.4 from my undergrad and 3.8 from my master's. You can do it. You just have to commit to it.

[Speaker 3]

Could you tell us a little bit more about your family, early life and then your family today?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, early life? Just a little bit about all of them. I grew up on an itty bitty small, you could call it a hobby farm.

Tobacco farm. Poor and other than having military parents, that was my best option to get out of poverty basically. Because I grew up poor.

I mean, divorced parents when I was in sixth grade. So, didn't have a whole lot. So, now I have four boys.

They're all, two of them, well one of them is about to finish up his associates. He's a respiratory therapist. One has a degree in the classics.

The other two never went to college. They're just working. Two grandkids.

Miracle five. Ari was two. All the stuff that I didn't have.

Full time parents. Me and Amanda will be married 30 years this coming May. So, tried to make sure they had the family life I didn't have.

What's your favorite story from your deployment?

[Speaker 2]

Can I hear this one?

[Speaker 1]

The coolest story I think that is for public consumption is we left Kuwait, coming home at the end of my first deployment four minutes after midnight on my birthday. So, we left on my birthday. That's great.

So, you come back, you gain in seven hours as you come back. So, my birthday was very long.

[Speaker 2]

Is that the same one where you got back to beer?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. They had a pyramid of beer stacked up for us when we got off the bus. Pretty good way to spend a birthday.

It was.

[Speaker 2]

Free beer.

[Speaker 1]

So, yeah. I mean, there's other stories, but it kind of can get boring.

[Speaker 3]

How did your role change along your different points of service? Because you mentioned that you were in and out and then back in. Back in.

What were your different roles and which did you enjoy the most?

[Speaker 1]

Which role? I honestly would have to say my captain and major time here because I felt that has been the most impactful because teaching these kids, they're going to go out and be a platoon leader for 30 or 40 individuals. And I've put just over 200 through the system so far.

So, you figure if each one of them as a PL is affecting 30 or 40 people, look at that impact. And then you see their individual. It's not like a drill sergeant at boot camp who has them for like three months.

Yeah, you see a lot of change. I've been lucky enough to be here a little over four and a half years. I've seen kids go through the whole process.

And to see somebody like Macy Capsic, now Macy Vaughn, who the first two years I never heard a word out of her. To now, she's at Bullock and saying, Sir, you guys prepared us so well. We're way ahead of the other lieutenants in our class.

To see that change is just huge.

[Speaker 2]

Lieutenant Vaughn. Lieutenant Vaughn, yeah. Because it's so weird.

That's when I will admit, as soon as they graduate and they're in uniform, instead of calling them by their first name, it's lieutenant. And then it's like, oh, like Pompeo. It's Lieutenant Pompeo.

That one I hung out with a lot. Same with James and now it's Lieutenant Cunningham.

[Speaker 1]

Well, James, Macy, and Layla all came to D.C. while we were up there. Because I bought their metro card so that they could follow.

[Speaker 2]

Now I've never seen them in uniforms. I don't know what to call you. Pompeo's like, just call me Michael.

I'm like, okay.

[Speaker 1]

But the C, you saw, you've been here, what, this is your second year? Second full year?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

I mean, you saw changes. You've probably seen changes in your classmates. Which class?

Your MS3 class. You probably don't realize it in yourself yet, but those changes are there.

[Speaker 2]

I know. Sometimes I look at the MS2 class now and I'm like, oh, my goodness.

[Speaker 1]

They don't know anything.

[Speaker 2]

No.

[Speaker 1]

And that's based off of what you've already been taught and experienced.

[Speaker 2]

Going back, I kind of wish, instead of doing dual enrollment, I wish that I went straight into college as a freshman. But I'm glad I did it because I'm ahead.

[Speaker 1]

If I went straight into college after high school, I would have drank or partied my way out first or second semester.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I mean, I did a year and a half in high school, so I was like, do I wish I could have gone just straight in? Yes.

[Speaker 1]

I wish I had known about ROTC. I didn't really know anything about ROTC until I got assigned to it. Really?

I didn't. A lot of people tell you that. They don't know anything about it.

[Speaker 2]

I didn't know that. I knew about it just because my uncle did it.

[Speaker 1]

But a lot of people are like, what is ROTC?

[Speaker 2]

Reserve Officer Training Corps.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Do you have anything else? I don't have anything else, Sam.

It's kind of hard to keep me on subject, so.

[Speaker 2]

No, that's why I keep going off subject.

[Speaker 1]

Sam, do you have anything else?

[Speaker 2]

I don't think I do. It'd be one of those, like, I ask you off interview, and I'm like, wait, that would have been a good question.

[Speaker 3]

Well, we thank you so much for coming into the center today. No problem. Telling your story.

We'll do our best to preserve it for generations to come. All right. Thank you.

♪♪♪