

## **Andrew Fassett (AF) talks to Niall Munro (NM)**

**Niall Munro** Thank you very much Andrew for spending some time with me here and talking about some of your work and experience. Could you just begin by saying a bit about your military background experience?

**Andrew Fassett** I was an officer in the Marine Corps and I served for about seven years. After my initial training was done I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan and I became a part of the 9th Engineer Support Battalion. And as soon as I got there, they were actually working up to deploy to Afghanistan. Actually, part of the battalion was still deployed but then they were getting ready to deploy again later that year so some people stayed on but then there was a bunch of new people including myself. So as the unit reconstituted, I became a platoon commander for 1st Platoon. And so we worked up. We did some training in mainland Japan. We did some training in California. And then we deployed in November to Afghanistan, to Helmand province. So I was a platoon commander there. We were in more of a support role: building bases, taking down bases, improving bases, building fighting positions, took out a bridge that was going to flood, so travelling around quite a lot of Helmand as we were travelling to these different sites, saw a lot of convoy operations, a lot of time away from our main base but on different bases most often. And so we did that for seven months and then I came back to Okinawa and was more of a planning operations officer and then I was an instructor for three and a half years at the Basic School which is where all Marine Corps officers go for their first sixth months to learn about leadership and tactics and all that which was a great experience. So that's more or less my military experience.

**NM** What kind of things were you tutoring? What kinds of things were you teaching?

**AF** As an instructor there, you kind of fell on a lot of things. My main platform that I was teaching was land navigation in terms of reading maps, compass, how to actually do it in the woods, marking maps, all those sorts of things. But you're also teaching how to call on air support, how to call for artillery, how to plan a squad attack, how to plan a platoon attack, how to plan a platoon reinforced attack, plan a defense, do an ambush, do a night attack. All these sorts of things were things that we were teaching them. And then on the back end of that I was in charge of another platoon that was instructor support. So they were teaching the students too but it was focused on engineering. I had engineers, assaultmen, and combat missilemen in my platoon. And I ran a demolition range for a while which was quite fun actually.

**NM** When you came home--when was that?

**AF** So from Japan?

**NM** Yeah.

**AF** I spent only two years in Japan. Was stationed there from 2011 to 2013. And then I spent about three and a half years in Virginia and I got out of the Marine Corps in August 2016.

**NM** But you're also thinking of going back in?

**AF** Yep. Yeah, I have been trying to go back in since about close to October last year. The issue has been, for whatever reason, the U.S. military doesn't look positively on people who are trying to get back in. It's more like you just have a longer medical history and anything that went wrong in the past, we've got to make sure it's right now, even though I was just doing these things. I was selected for expeditionary warfare school which I would have gone to if I hadn't chosen to get out. You know it's not that anything was wrong. But that's been a very slow process of me getting the records and me getting approval. In fact, I have an appointment on Tuesday, as soon as I get back, to have my shoulder and knee checked out by an orthopedic doctor. It's like a final check and then Lord willing that will be the last step before the board--when they accept me. And I'll be an Army Reserve Chaplain in the Massachusetts area.

**NM** Being an Army Reserve Chaplain--was that something that you had thought about for a while?

**AF** So intriguingly, no. People would ask, I was pretty clear with people I was serving with that I had to get out, go to seminary, and felt like that was what God was leading me to do. So at first I would say "No, I don't want to be a chaplain". And then I would say later "It's not at the top of my list". But I had never, really just for whatever reason, I had never considered the reserve chaplaincy. So I still have no interest in being an active duty chaplain. But the reserve chaplain... my brother who was in the Army Reserves mentioned that they were short on chaplains and I was like oh, Reserve Chaplain--that seems like a good way for me to minister to people that I feel a deep connection to. And I think I could really lean on my personal experiences of the spiritual aspects and to really help people in that sense. If there's a need, I have the perfect skill set and an interest in doing it, then.... That was the summer last year.

**NM** Right. And then you went to the seminary when?

**AF** From fall 2016 to this Spring. Just graduated with my masters in divinity.

**NM** Congratulations. How was that experience?

**AF** It was great. I mean, to learn a lot more church history. I was studying Greek and Hebrew and translating the scriptures from the original language. The class focused on prophetic which is a harder interpretation I think to do and you see all that we read is a translation in terms of English so all the decisions that are made, and just the deeper understanding. It makes you think a lot more about words doing something like that, doing a lot of translation work.

**NM** So that leads us very nicely into thinking about poetry. What does poetry do for you?

**AF** For me, I think it's a way of trying to bring people or just express an experience or a feeling or you're trying to share more than just a narrative. It's beyond prose in such a way that, I mean for me, I'm particularly interested in trying to one, just express certain things for

myself in more of an exploratory way but also to try and connect with other people whether it be around an idea, whether it be around an experience, and so I really view poetry as a way of doing that in a way. You can't experience everything but through poems you can inhabit that space in a sense.

**NM** That's really interesting. I wonder what it is then about poetry specifically that does that? Is it the use of language? Is it the fact that poetry tends to be short, shorter than prose pieces?

**AF** I think that it's not the only form that does it. I wouldn't say that. It's like when you watch a film you have almost this glaze of whatever film you were watching. You start to view things differently or at least I feel that way so there are other ways of doing it. But I think that you can't make a film about that much. It's a whole production so it's really not accessible to many people in a real sense. But poetry is. Anyone can write a poem and so in that sense there's a collective opportunity associated with it.

**NM** Do you think that, just thinking about, how you might write about, if you wanted to write about your military experiences and your spiritual experiences as well--is there a way that poetry can help you to connect with people who don't have or haven't had those experiences?

**AF** Oh that's definitely a big piece. I'm trying to get a military-related chapbook together, focus more on military experiences. But also, I've incorporated some poetry into preaching or into messages. There's more of a rich history of spiritual poetry that I haven't really looked into but I know it exists out there. You can often get it in the forms of hymns or... which aren't quite poetry but other people have done it. Because I think in that realm people take things for granted or you've heard it told a certain way but then when you hear it told differently it really helps you to engage and think about it more deeply.

**NM** That sounds great, yeah. Do you think that's the kind of thing that you would like to do? Would you like to introduce military personnel to poetry? Could you run workshops?

**AF** Yeah, I mean I'm connected with Warrior Writers, Boston and I've been talking to one of the guys who... and there's no official person running it, he's the one who's most often taking the lead, about running a workshop in the fall, and as I become a reserve chaplain, I would love to not wait until people are veterans or this sort of thing to write. I mean, if people are going through an experience or maybe providing people with workshops within that capacity, I think would be definitely within the role, and something that people might be interested in doing. And it could help people I think process their experiences better closer to the point of impact and maybe that helps more than, I think Tom said he discovered writing as part of his healing process. But it would be better to have the tools more immediately present for those who particularly it would serve as a restorative outlet I think.

**NM** Well, I wish you all the very best with it. It sounds like a great project. Thank you for speaking with me.