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Transcript: Chris Wilson

A: My assignment is just to interview someone that has been in the military and has fought in a war. So to start can you please just give me your first and last name?

CW: Chris Wilson

A: Do I have your consent to record this conversation for the purposes of my assignment?

CW: Yeah, that's fine.

A: Ok. I heard that you fought in the Vietnam War?

CW: **laughs** No

A: Oh, sorry! Someone else must've told me that. So, uh, what war did you fight in?

CW: The first Gulf War

A: What was that?

CW: The first Gulf War

A: Oh ok.

CW: Yeah, the first one. In 1990-1991.

A: Are there any other wars that you've participated in, or is it just that one?

CW: Yeah, other things – some of which, I can't talk about. But that one is the public one.

A: So what was your job in the military?

CW: I flew. So I was an engineer. On, uh, airplanes.

A: So what were you supposed to do in the plane?

CW: Yeah, so what we would do is uh – the kind of airplanes that we flew, we would drop stuff to people. We would drop people, we would drop stuff. We could land and pick things up in pretty remote places.

A: Oh ok.

CW: And uh, yeah. And drop things off.

A: As in supplies?

CW: Supplies and people. Yeah, those kinds of things.

A: What was your living conditions like? Did you have a camp?

CW: Yeah, it was a camp. Yeah. In a tent. For about nine months.

A: How was that?

CW: Uh, yeah. **laughs** Not that great.

A: **laughs** Sorry.

CW: Yeah, you're away from your family in the middle of nowhere. The living conditions weren't so great.

A: Did you already have Isaiah at this time?

CW: Oh yeah. Yeah. So he didn't see me for like nine months.

A: Right... What was your status in the military? Were you an officer?

CW: Yeah, yeah. Active duty.

A: I don't know if this is a weird question for you. What was the hardest decision you had to make being in the military?

CW: Ok. In context of uh – the war or just the military?

A: Both. Let's start with the war first.

CW: That one – I mean, by the time you get over there you don't have many decisions that you really get to make because you're just working every day. So, uh, yeah but as far as the military – the hardest decision was to stay, to continue in the military or get out. That was just based on how much time you spent away from home and a lot of the things that you see and a lot of the things that you do. And whether you want to continue doing that... You know, and a lot of times you would be faced with situations where everything in your body says, "run away" but you cannot because there are other people relying on you. So you have the decision to stay and do your job. You know, despite what your – everything – your brain tells you.

A: What made you decide to leave?

CW: I was in the military for about 22 years.

A: Oh, that's crazy. What lessons did you learn while you were out there?

CW: A lot. I think the biggest thing out there was [learning] to put others before yourself. Because everyone relies on one another. We tend to be selfish people. But when you have other people whose lives depend on what you do, then you kinda have to put aside your own things. Um, yeah. I guess that's the easiest way to say it. The little stuff doesn't seem as important anymore.

A: Was there a moment where it was hard to put other people ahead of yourself?

CW: Uh, oh yeah. I mean. Like I said, we all tend to be selfish people. I mean, so you're always having to fight against that. To sleep rather than doing your work. It's a constant battle with yourself.

A: Sorry, I'm so awkward!

CW: Yeah, that's ok. It's pretty awkward doing this on the phone. So what class is this for?

A: It's for a class on war, terror, and genocide.

CW: Oh, ok.

A: Yeah, so she just gave us an assignment to interview people –

CW: Is it a positive class or a negative class?

A: What do you mean?

CW: Like what's the point of the class? Just studying war?

A: Yeah, pretty much. Just studying the experiences of individuals that have been in war. We studied a little bit of the Holocaust.

CW: Oh ok. I see.

A: What did you do after you left the military? I heard that you became a pastor. Is that right?

CW: I am. Yeah. I'm a pastor and I also work to support being a pastor. So yeah, that's what we do. That's what I do. Yeah. So uh, yeah you bring a lot of those experiences that you learn into life. So that's kinda how God used that to change your view point on life and how you treat people. So yeah, that's what I do.

A: How did it change how you treat people?

CW: It just gives you, uh – for one thing, any time... have you ever been out of the United States?

A: Yeah, I've been to the Philippines.

CW: Oh ok. And you were in the Philippines to live...?

A: Just to visit family out there.

CW: Ok. So you know there's the haves and the haves not. And it's a pretty wide gap. At least my experience in the Philippines. There's a lot of people that are pretty poor. But then you have

the other side. So it just gives you an appreciation for what you have and changes your perspective. When you come back to the United States and you realize we don't have it so bad. You know?

A: You're not in the United States right now are you?

CW: I am not. I am in Korea.

A: Oh ok. Did you decide to start up a ministry there?

CW: We did. And we are. So we've been here almost two years.

A: Is that "we" as in you and your wife?

CW: Yes. Yeah. It's always a "we" now **laughs**

A: Did you decide to become a pastor because of your experiences in the war?

CW: I actually never really thought I was going to be a pastor. That was never something that was in my mind. And God called me, pretty explicitly. And that's pretty much why I am here. But I wasn't living my life thinking that some day I was going to be a pastor. It wasn't like that. So that's kinda changed the direction of my life.

A: How did you find out that that was your calling?

CW: Well, everybody's different. But for me, I was out jogging in Hawaii, and it was probably one of the few times you hear the voice of God speak. It was a very distinct voice. I was out jogging and there was nobody around me. I just heard – there's a story that goes with it – but God was basically saying, "now you don't have any excuses now, do you?" It was just so distinct that it just stopped me in my tracks. I looked around to see if someone was there and there wasn't anyone there. Then the following day I went back to church and there was some things going on there. From that, eventually volunteering for third and fourth grade Sunday school. And fifth and

sixth grade Sunday school. And from that became a pastor. But yeah, from my experience it was very distinct. It had to be, because it was never something I ever considered.

A: That's crazy.

CW: Yeah, it was. And it still is. And we're still going strong.

A: That's awesome. And what made you decide to have your ministry in South Korea?

CW: We lived here years and years ago and had been gone for thirty years. Again through a series of events we had never really thought back to Korea. We were pretty much established in the mainland. Then God started opening doors for us to come back. So we started praying about it and just, one thing led to another and here we are. That's just kinda how things work. So we kinda put the, "if this is You then these are things that have to happen" – and those are the things that happened.

A: Have you been a Christian your whole life?

CW: I grew up in church my whole life, but until about fifteen years old when I was too big for my dad to force me to go to church. So for about ten years, I didn't go to church. I just kinda turned around and walked away. And then when I was about twenty-five I came back, but to a different kind of church. My parents grew up in a Presbyterian church. There wasn't a whole lot of experience was there. But when I was twenty-five, we came back to Calvary Chapel. I don't know if you've heard of it?

A: Yeah, I'm familiar with it.

CW: Yeah. So that changed my viewpoint of church. They're more just happy that you're there. Then I've been going ever since. Through that I ended up receiving Christ.

A: That's awesome. How old were you when you joined the military?

CW: I was nineteen.

A: Oh, wow.

CW: So I got out of high school and went to college for a little while. I was sick of school. I was just tired of school and decided I didn't want to go to school. I came back and got a master's. But I just took a ten year break from school. Then you realize somewhere along the way that you can't survive in this world without school, unless you just want to work at McDonald's for the rest of your life. That's why I went in the military - to do something different.

A: Do you think God helped you while you were in war? Did he help you in those experiences?

CW: Yeah, I think so. But at that time I was a Christian, but I wasn't really a strong Christian.

So that wasn't at the front of my thinking at that time. Later, it was. And then as you look back you can see God's hand in lots of things that could have been one way but ended up another.

You know, even though I wasn't aware of it at the time. But a lot of that looking back, is because for me – my faith didn't really become really, really strong and the center of my life until about 1993. Which was after the Gulf War. But I didn't actually become a pastor until 2000. But yeah, God uses everything to form our faith.

A: Can you tell me a little about a moment where you realize now that God's hand was in it while you were in the war?

CW: Yeah, I mean when you have airplane problems. Let's say, which we had, that can potentially kill you and has killed people. And yet, we were able to land in a place, in the middle of nowhere. It's just those kinds of things that you look back at and realize that there's people that have died doing the same things we were. And you know, we walked away from it. We're still here today. So there's lots of experiences, not just in war, but in life. As I look back in life,

there's really stupid things that I did but God's grace brought me through it. Now I wonder why. You begin to see that you've just had an impact on people's lives. Then you begin to realize why God did what he did.

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Chris Wilson

The Gulf War, otherwise known as Operation Desert Shield or the Iraq War, was waged and led by the United States against Iraq in reaction to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. The Gulf War started in August 1990 and officially ended in February 1991. Chris Wilson, a U.S. Air Force veteran, spent eight months away from his wife and son, Isaiah, to participate in this war. I know his son, Isaiah, through a mutual friend. Isaiah mentioned that his father was a U.S. Air Force veteran, and that his father would be happy to assist me with the purpose of this assignment. At the time, Chris Wilson was in South Korea with his wife. Because of this the interview was conducted over the phone, and quite honestly – it was awkward. It was uncomfortable for me because I had never met the man, and there I was asking him to reveal some of the most defining and personal moments of his life to me... over the phone.

Thankfully Chris, although cautiously reserved, was gracious for conversation. I quickly felt at ease speaking to him. Chris mentioned that he did not feel as if he had a clear sense of direction after graduating high school. He had grown weary to the prospect of spending another four years in school. Feeling spent, Chris enlisted in the U.S. military and trained in the Air Force as a pilot. This decision was partly motivated by money: Chris needed a job to provide for his family and if he were to decide to return to school in the future, being previously employed

by the U.S. military would afford him great financial benefits. By the completion of his training, he was deployed to Iraq in 1990 for Gulf War I. By this time he had already married and had a son. Leaving his family was difficult for Chris, especially because his son was still young. There was this fear looming over him that there was no guarantee that he would return safely to his family.

Wilson's fear of never returning to loved ones, is reminiscent of my study of Willy Coppens in World War I. Coppens, like Wilson, was a U.S. Air Force pilot. Wilson was cautiously guarded about revealing personal information to me, a perfect stranger, however I cannot imagine that Coppens's and Wilson's feelings towards leaving family were far removed from each other. Coppens went into depth about how being separated from his family during World War I made him bitter towards Germans. Coppens recounted leaving his base while still a novice at flying, to briefly see his family from a distance, even if the risks of doing so meant death. At this point in his training Coppens was disillusioned by the actual threat of war, since there were countless deaths of fellow pilots in training. Because death had become such a common occurrence not only on the battlefield but also in training, he treated death as an old friend, as if death no longer had power over him. I can safely assume that the ferocity of love with which Coppens was willing to risk his life to see his family for a brief moment, was similar to that of Wilson's. I cannot imagine having to endure the unbearable pain of being separated from loved ones for an indefinite period of time. Like both Coppens and Wilson, I think I would have had to place my thoughts on other things and the immediate task at hand, in order to bear the pain.

Living away from his family for nine months was difficult, but what made it more difficult for him were the living conditions. He explained to me that he had lived in a tent for the entire time of his experience in the Gulf War. He chuckled, reminiscing over his living conditions in the war, giving very few details about it. It gave me the impression that his particular living conditions were unpleasant and not worthy of recounting. I then asked him what was the hardest decision of his time spent in the war. He explained to me that he did not have the opportunity to make many decisions once he arrived to the battlefield, because he had to work every day. According to Wilson, you had to work or do nothing. Wilson later stated to me that working as an engineer helped distract him from facing a lot of the trauma he had experienced. I then asked him what was the hardest decision he had to make being in the military. He answered that the hardest decision he had to make was to either continue in the military or get out; based on how much time he spent away from home and a lot of the things he witnessed and did on the battlefield. Chris did not wish to go into detail in explaining some of the difficult things he had to do. He explained that a lot of times he was faced with situations where everything in his body told him to run away. But in such situations he chose not to, because there were people relying not only on him, but also on every single person to do their job to survive. In response to my question asking what lessons he learned from his experiences, he stated, “[putting] others before yourself because everyone relies on one another.” He explained that everyone has their own selfish desires, but when everyone depends on each other in some way it becomes difficult to deny them help because people are counting on you. He told me that there were many times that he had to fight his own selfish desires to indulge in certain

things that many people take for granted, such as sleep. He was motivated primarily by the amount of people counting on him to do what he was assigned to do.

Wilson held a position in the military as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. His primary assignment was to fly over the battlefield and drop supplies to the infantry below, drop off people in certain locations, or to pick up certain items in remote places. He recounted several times when his aircraft would undergo certain malfunctions. Confused, he wondered why his team had always been able to land their plane safely. He's come to the realization that several people had died doing the job he did, and for the same reasons that he could have died but did not. Chris currently resides in South Korea, where he leads a Christian ministry as a pastor with his wife. From hearing about his experiences in the Gulf War, I have learned that people ultimately have the decision to either give up or persevere through the many trials waged by war. From hearing about Chris's experiences I have come to the realization that people like Chris answer the greater call in expelling their deepest fears and committing to the hardest decisions in life, with the motivation of surviving to help the people who depend on them. Chris simply chose to put aside his own self-interests for the greater good. I believe his motivation in the war, rested in the foundation of helping others, and his family's dependence on him, helped him endure the trauma of war.