

A Personal Narrative

Michael Greene

Old Dominion University

IDS 493

April 1, 2023

A Personal Narrative

The path toward receiving my bachelor's in Cybersecurity has been one of many challenges. The process was not only challenging mentally but full of personal hardships I had to overcome. I had left my home in San Diego to join the US Navy, moving to Virginia and deciding to stay in Virginia to get my degree. During my college career, I had family health issues that required me at one point to go home and assist my parents. Complicating the matter was the worldwide COVID-19 Pandemic making travel difficult. Despite the hardships I experienced, I was continuously motivated by family, friends, and the experiences I've had through this challenging period. Now being only one semester away from graduating, I am more determined than ever to receive my bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity.

My journey began in 2013 When I decided to join the US Navy. Before this, I held various jobs but felt unsatisfied with where I was in my professional life and need to make a change. The Navy provided a wealth of benefits for active-duty members and veterans such as paying for further education, making it an appealing choice for me at the time (US Navy News, Navy pay and fitness resources, 2023). It was in November of 2013 I would begin my four-year contract and start Basic Training in Great Lakes, IL. This time in my life would serve as a major contributor to what defined my character. It would provide me with a strong foundation for soft skills no other job or experience could match. I learned time-management skills from the very tight schedule we abided by each day, the ability to adapt to the transition from a relaxed civilian environment to a strictly military one, Teamwork from having to accomplish tasks as a group, Dependability relying on each other to accomplish a task in a life or death situation, attention to detail ensure uniforms are inspection ready at all times from the shine on our boots to the length of our hair, communication relaying pertinent information reliably to others, and many more.

Unlike other jobs, each task performed could have a dire consequence not only for us but others around, motivating you to do the best job possible. Upon successful completion of Basic Training, each sailor is sent to what is referred to as A School. While Basic Training prepared us for the military lifestyle, A school provides us with specific technical training on our specific jobs within the Navy (Nicole Utt, 2021).

I was assigned the rate STG or Sonar Technician for surface ships and sent off to A school in San Diego, CA. The Sonar Technician rate consisted of detecting, tracking, and identifying underwater assets or targets (Career Management, 2023). The foundations for a few of my hard skills were established during this period. However, due to the sensitive nature of what the job entails, it is difficult to go into detail. From what I can say the job involved maintaining and operating acoustic equipment utilized to detect underwater targets, understanding the fundamentals of electronic equipment, oceanography, acoustic analysis, torpedoes, and torpedo countermeasures. While many of these hard skills are difficult to directly contribute to the field of Cybersecurity I am currently pursuing, they do contribute indirectly. For instance, electronics training established a solid foundation for understanding computer hardware, and acoustic analysis provided me with the ability to recognize data patterns. Once I completed training, I had been sent to the fleet to refine and apply my skills in real-world scenarios. As time went on and it got closer to the end of the contract, I had the decision to make that would change my life drastically. Either continue serving and extending my contract or get out and utilize my GI Bill to pursue my degree. The GI Bill is a benefit granted to those that have served honorably in the United States Military and offers full payment of any further education the veteran wishes to pursue along with a monthly living stipend (About GI bill benefits, 2023). During this period, I viewed extending my contract would be an interpretation of making Sonar

my ultimate career choice, but this was not what I wanted. In my free time, I developed a hobby of building computers and learning everything about them, especially how the internet worked. Near the end of my contract, I attempted a third option to retrain as an Information Technician and continue with the Navy. However, due to the low retention rate and high demand for Sonar Technician, the option was not available to me. I ultimately decided to pursue my interest outside the Military with the help of the benefits provided to me.

The first few months outside of the military had been a rough experience. I had applied to Tidewater Community College or TCC for short, but because I was late registering there were not enough available classes for my degree. I had planned on starting at TCC to receive my associate degree, then transferring to Old Dominion University through their articulation agreement (Transfer to old dominion university: TCC to ODU College Transfer 2022, 2022). I decided to wait till Fall 2018 to fully start on my path toward a bachelor of Cybersecurity. The motivation behind waiting had to do with my benefits. With The GI bill what determines your monthly stipend depends on how many classes you are taking, to receive full benefits you must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours to classify as a full-time student. During this time before school would start, I worked as a security guard at a resort on the Virginia Beach Oceanfront for a few months transitioning to a delivery driver for a Lumberyard in Portsmouth, VA. Although working at the lumberyard provided no benefits, lower pay, and strenuous work. The location was closer to my house and the TCC campus in Portsmouth, and I was allowed to work any hours I was available provided I notified them of my schedule one week in advance. This period between getting honorably discharged and waiting for the semester to begin proved to be an extreme financial challenge for me. While I didn't gain any new skills I had previously received in the military, I was able to continue reinforcing them through continued work and my hobby of

computers. Before I realized it the Fall semester started, and I felt nervous not knowing what to expect.

Despite the initial nervousness in my first two years at TCC, the feeling quickly turned to excitement and encouragement. The classes I had taken consisted of Introduction to Networking, English, Pre-Calculus, Computer Hardware, Computer Operating Systems, Introduction to Programming, and other Cybersecurity Fundamental classes. The first year of my College Career was fascinating and enjoyable with my favorite class being Computer Hardware. I had already built my first computer and truly motivated me to continue forward in my degree. These classes would lay the foundation of Hard Skills necessary for my degree. My second year, however, would prove to be some of the most challenging in my life. The school year would continue as normal, and I would have more advanced classes learning about ethical hacking and network security. Then during the Spring of 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic occurred causing the need to social distance and all in-person classes to transition to fully online with very little notice. Also, at this time both my parents would develop health issues unrelated to COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19), 2023). I finished the semester with only several classes to go, but I decided to take a break and fly to my parents in San Diego, CA to help out. I spent some time with them skipping the Fall 2020 semester, but with the encouragement of my parents, I would go back in Spring 2021 to finish my associate degree at TCC and transfer to Old Dominion in Fall 2021. My father had passed away before I was able to show him, I had received my degree from TCC. I was determined to finish my bachelor's degree at ODU (Cybersecurity (B.S.), 2023).

I would find that my first year at ODU would be extremely discouraging. I had some administrative issues, with ODU receiving an older transcript having an entire semester's worth

of credits missing. Because of this I technically did not satisfy the prerequisites for a majority of classes and could only sign up for a few classes, in particular a Red Hat Linux Class. This class will teach you the fundamentals of the Red Hat Linux operating system. During the first few weeks, the Professor was absent from class and after a few weeks finally got in touch with us but was unable to have the virtual environment working properly. About halfway through the semester, the environment was functional, and the work was stressful having to play catch up. The spring 2022 semester was a slight improvement, I was able to get the correct transcript sent to the administrative office, but due to how late it was received in enrolment I was again limited to the number of classes available to me. However, I had come to learn that the Red Hat Class I previously completed could not be applied to my degree making it pointless that I took the class. At this point, I had begun searching for a cybersecurity internship opportunity which I successfully acquired during the summer. It was a position for a Cyber Futures Intern at the MITRE Corporation in Hampton, and I was able to finally get some hands-on experience with Cybersecurity (Student career programs: MITRE, 2023). The position involved learning to program a microcontroller within embedded systems, learning about the MITRE ATT&CK framework, cybersecurity policies, and other opportunities within the field of Cybersecurity. This opportunity was an amazing experience that allowed me to see the real-world application of my field. It motivated me to go forward into my final year of ODU.

In closing, my final year at ODU has been a more positive one than the initial year back in 2021. I was able to successfully enroll in more classes. Including, learning about ethics within Cybersecurity, another Linux class that had been a marginally better experience than my previous Red Hat Class, learning about the perspective of law on cybersecurity, and other cybersecurity classes. My experience during the internship has played a major factor in

motivating me to complete my degree. As of now, I am currently in the Spring semester of 2023 with only one class to go in the Summer of 2023. I was unable to fit this final class into my Spring schedule, but being so close I am excited to finish. I have been on the lookout for employment opportunities and have a positive outlook on all future endeavors.

References

- About GI bill benefits*. Veterans Affairs. (2023). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/>
- Career Management*. MyNavyHR. (2023). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Career-Management/Community-Management/Enlisted/Surface-CS-OPS/STG/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Cybersecurity (B.S.)*. Old Dominion University. (2023). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://ww1.odu.edu/academics/programs/undergraduate/cybersecurity>
- Nicole Utt. (2021, May 12). *Navy a school: What happens after navy boot camp*. Military.com. Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/military-jobs/recruitment-navy-rating-training.html>
- Student career programs: Mitre*. The MITRE Corporation. (2023, January 9). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://careers.mitre.org/us/en/student-programs>
- Transfer to old dominion university: TCC to ODU College Transfer*. TCC.edu. (2022, November 4). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.tcc.edu/programs/transfer/old-dominion-university/#transfer-agreements>
- US Navy News, Navy pay and fitness resources*. Military.com. (2023). Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.military.com/navy>