

Maite Jimenez

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Peter A. Mayes

From reporting for different community newspapers to joining the Army and rising the ranks all the way to master sergeant, Peter Mayes has been through the thick and thin, seeing it all.

Although the experience of being a reporter covering school boards, city hall meetings and crime was enjoyable, nothing was more impactful in Mayes' life than in the military.

"My life (in the Army) is called 'The Army, the Grand Adventure' and it has been the grandest adventure of my entire life," said Mayes with great proudness.

Before being recruited into the Army, Mayes was working at one of the first online news sources, Houston News Today in 1998. A few years of working for the "New Media," the company filed bankruptcy causing it to shut down and with no other source of income, he called his sister who at the time was an Army recruiter, and began his journey.

"I left my car at my mom's house in Houston, I got on a bus with very little money, took a several hour trip from Houston to Louisiana...started the delayed entry program...getting ready for life in the Army," said Mayes.

Mayes dropped everything, not looking back, as he departed from the Greyhound station in Houston to Advance Individual Training School in Fort Worth, S. C. He started the late entry program for recruits who begin after summer vacation in 1998 at the age of 31. Many events occurred while Mayes was in the Army, but nothing was as impressive as the attack on 9/11.

“With 9/11, I had just gotten promoted to the rank of sergeant in the Army, one of the lowest...officer ranks, and literally one month later things go off,” said Mayes.

He was not expecting the attack as he was at the time working at a ceremonial event for new recruits in Fort Jackson, S.C. when the sergeant major of the battalion reported the incident to everyone at the base. It was difficult for Mayes to process the information until he saw the second plane crash into the second building of the World Trade Center.

“The reality hit, (he thought) ‘holy crap, this is happening, we're under attack right now,’ your watching everything going on...and your just going from shock to just sad, and honestly, I was just pissed, I was angry,” said Mayes, “We knew at that moment... it was going to become a war.”

An emergency operation center was prepared, and Mayes was sent on a combat tour in Afghanistan where he believed the war would end quickly but was proven wrong. Even though the death of Osama Bin Laden marked the end of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, the Army had to rebuild what was destroyed during the war.

“We get him and it’s over but now time has gone on and things have changed...I looked at my watch and go ‘alright six more months,’ that’s the only thing that went through my mind, six more months,” said Mayes.

During all that time, Mayes went from sergeant to senior sergeant, first class, and matured tremendously after having seen all the brutality, the “other side” or “different perspective” of what it means to be in the Army.

Being in the Army let Mayes have the ability to travel to different parts of the world and go to places like Egypt, Korea and Afghanistan. He had made it to the rank of master sergeant in

2013, one step below the highest rank of the Army, when he announced he would stop seeking promotion.

“I made a public declaration that I would not seek sergeant major, because I didn’t want to spend any more time away from my family,” said Mayes.

In 2018 he officially retired from active duty status after being in the Army for 20 years and 27 days as part of the 25th Infantry Division in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii and returned back to Houston.

Mayes’ background in journalism helped him tremendously in getting the Army’s message out to the public. Previously, before joining the military, Mayes worked for eight years for different newspapers such as the Houston Sun, the Houston Newspages, Humble-Kingwood Observer and Beaumont Enterprise.

“The writing background was very, very crucial...the ability to write clearly and effectively, to help people understand exactly what you're trying to say... was crucial,” said Mayes.

If Mayes had taken another route besides the Army, he would have not known what to do. Joining the Army made a huge difference in his life. It helped in gaining immense experience and creating a strong bond with the people around him.

“Coming back after 20 years...it’s definitely been a changed experience, it’s actually been an incredible experience so I look at things very differently now than when I did 20 years ago,” said Mayes, “I don’t think I would have had that mindset,” if he hadn’t joined the Army.