

THE
TRANSITION
MISSION

A Green Beret's approach to transition
from military service



HERB THOMPSON

This book is a compilation of the author's research, conversations, and experiences. Some names or unimportant details may have been changed. Any conversations quoted in this book were captured from the author's memory to the best of his recollection. If there is a mistake, it is the responsibility of the author and not intentional.

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This book is dedicated to:

CW2 JONATHAN “BIG JON” FARMER

U.S. Army Special Forces KIA, Manbij, Syria

16 January 2019

Below is my speech at Big Jon’s 5th Special Forces Group memorial ceremony. It was my last act on active duty. These were the best words I could think of to talk about this amazing man who decided to stay in because he was uncertain about his transition and loved being a Green Beret.

We can now add two minor accomplishments to Jon’s illustrious and accomplished life. One, in the last six months, he was the only person in group who figured out a way to make me work. And two, he made me cry for the fourth time since I was ten years old the night that I found out he was one of the casualties in Syria. But really this is not about work; this is about love.

Unfortunately, Jon and I attended too many of these memorial ceremonies here, sometimes sitting by each other out there in the pews. Like every Green Beret, we sat there assessing—what others might call critiquing. Afterward, we would talk about if the firing party was on point, if the chaplain said a good prayer, and of course, we talked about the speeches. Were they too long, too boring? Maybe they were okay, or maybe they were really good. Right now, there’s a chance Jon is looking down and saying, “Oh Lord, watch out.” Probably the same thing Colonel Powers is thinking too. But there’s a better chance Jon is saying, “Buckle your seatbelts, we are going for a ride.”

Big Jon was on 5321 TCB longer than anywhere else in group. (Taking Care of Business, for those not in the know.) In speaking about Jon, I'm representing a large number of former TCB teammates. Jon was one of the best human beings I ever met in my life—not one of the hundred or so best, but top one or two—just in case I forgot someone in my life from my younger years. Since hearing about Jon being taken away from us, I have spent a good amount of time grieving and reflecting. I was thinking Jon might have been the perfect human being, and then I remembered... Jon sucked at combatives. For a man who could pick up this first pew—with all of the brass sitting on it—if you got him in the fight house, he could not fight his way out of a wet paper bag. So, he was as close to perfect as one could be.

Jon was not just a special Green Beret; he was an amazing husband and father. When we were in Lebanon years ago, we got to take one day a week to do cultural excursions. It was a chance to get a good meal and visit an interesting site. For Jon, what he heard was “shopping excursion.” Without fail, Jon would have talked with our Lebanese hosts about a winery to stop at. While we would go see a site, he would buy a few bottles, bring them back to the team house, and not drink them. This went on for a while until I had to ask him what the deal was. He said he knew Tabitha was at home waiting for his return, and he knew it would make her happy if he brought back some wine. He looked forward to playing with the kids and enjoying some quiet time with her. I said, “Okay, Jon. That makes sense.” But the bottles started to add up: 20, 30, 40... If you want to know how many bottles fit in a standard size, black tough box, or how many bottles Jon could buy for Tabitha in two months—the answer is about 60.

Jon was a great Green Beret. He excelled. What few know is Jon almost got out of the Army four years ago. We would talk like only those who have been in close combat and who have children and a wife at home can understand. What's the right thing to do? Be home with family

or be one of the few that keeps our families safe? We would have these talks regularly. I would ask him, "Where are we at today, Jon?" And he would say, "51–49 getting out." The next time it may be "52–48 staying in." I would ask him the number, and then we would discuss how or why it changed. At one point, his score was 80–20 getting out. One day, much to my surprise, he said he was reenlisting. We talked. He loved being a Green Beret. He loved the men he worked with, and he worried that he couldn't provide the same quality of life for his family if he got out. Most importantly, he wanted Tabitha and the kids to be safe and not have to deal with the evil that we face overseas.

I stand here filled with immense sadness and honor as my last act in the Army is to tell you that Jon made me a better person. I'm far from the only one he affected this way. In true Green Beret fashion, he was a force multiplier. For Manoj, it was mentoring him to pass his first course as a new guy to the team and impressing Wharton with his letter of recommendation. For Pat, it was giving him wise counsel and believing in him. For Matt, it was mentoring him when even Matt didn't realize that was what he was doing. The list goes on for the men and families of Third Battalion. Jon helped many become better Green Berets and people. To us, Jon was a giant presence physically, but his heart was so much larger. Tabitha, Mr. and Mrs. Farmer, the Farmer family—that's the legacy he left behind here at 5th Group.

Big Jon will live on inside all of us, inspiring us to be better Green Berets, spouses, parents, and people. 5th Group, the United States of America, and the world would be a lot better off if we had more Jon Farmers.

I challenge the warriors of this great unit that Jon loved. Let it not end here today. Continue to honor Big Jon and his legacy. Wake up and ask yourself how you are going to make a difference today.

TCB
De Oppresso Liber

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Introduction

THANK YOU FOR PURCHASING this book and trusting me to offer you my insights on transitioning from military to civilian life.

While this book covers most aspects of the transition, it is not all-encompassing. The knowledge contained in these pages was gained over three years of personal research, experience, and conversations with thousands of people who have come before us and successfully navigated in the private sector.

Why should you pay your hard-earned money and give it a read? Great question and one I would be asking myself. Here is why: Approaching my own transition out of the military after 20+ years, I had no clue as to what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I was lost but knew I had time. What I was sure of was I did not want to become a statistic, and I wanted to be successful. This was not an easy thing to say for a kid who grew up poor and joined the Army at the age of 17. I was not going back to where I came from—not a chance in hell.

I began the process of figuring out civilian life roughly two years out from what I anticipated to be my retirement date. It all began at a marriage retreat sponsored by one of the many great Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) in this country. I spent over three hours on two consecutive nights speaking with Terry, a Vietnam-era Green Beret, who went to Wharton after his service. I began to realize where I was headed. I had never been an adult citizen in corporate America and would have to rely on the skills and knowledge I had gained in the Army. I was an “expert” on unconventional warfare and building

rapport. Figuring out how I could use those skills as a private citizen would be my next and, in some ways, most important mission.

In my free time, I pursued my exit from the military and planned like it was a deployment to save the world. And it was. I would save my world. My laptop and I became best friends in studying the problem. I left no stone unturned. I researched careers, the mental aspect of transition, how to dress, life, industries, how people succeeded, why people failed, language, and where in the country I could deploy too. I used my experience of preparing for a deployment to deploy again. I was deploying into America.

During this journey, I spent thousands of hours researching banking jobs on the Internet and LinkedIn. I conducted over 2,000 informational interviews. Yes, I admit that may be overkill—but understand—to me, finance jobs were the tellers at my local bank. I had no clue what the banking industry was. I did not know what I did not know, and I knew I did not know a lot. The only way to figure out how I was going to become successful in my transition was to immerse myself in the process and use the skills I had developed over my time in the military. I knew nothing would be handed to me.

The end result: I was accepted into a graduate degree program at an Ivy League school and landed a job at a top consulting firm. Some may say I overachieved. Others may say I made it to where I belong. What I will tell you is, it was not easy. I had bad days and moments of self-doubt. I was not able to succeed by myself. Countless people have and continue to help me on my journey. It had its ups and downs, just like any other deployment. The constants? Just like on deployments, I kept a positive attitude, worked my ass off, maintained perspective, and built upon small victories.

I have assisted and mentored hundreds of veterans for one simple reason: the more of us who successfully transition and spread

around the United States into communities and companies, the better our country will be. Our nation's people need us now more than they may know.

You have been alerted for an assignment. Now is the time to start your transition mission.

Transition Truths

- ▶ It is your most important mission
- ▶ It takes more effort than you realize
- ▶ Everyone's transition is unique
- ▶ The earlier you start, the better
- ▶ Transition is a team sport, but you own the journey
- ▶ There are ups and downs
- ▶ Thank you for your service, means just that and nothing more
- ▶ The more you identify as a service member, the harder it will be
- ▶ Transition happens for everyone except for our fallen brothers and sisters
- ▶ You are going to make mistakes, learn from them
- ▶ You don't know what you don't know
- ▶ Success depends solely upon you and your attitude

Transition Rules for Success

- ▶ Stay positive
- ▶ Smile
- ▶ Network, Network, Network
- ▶ It's "ME" not "WE"
- ▶ Leverage your military experience; you earned it
- ▶ Translate your skills and experiences
- ▶ Turn assumptions into facts
- ▶ Get out of your comfort zone
- ▶ Give back

You Are Not Owed Anything!

LET ME REPEAT IT: YOU ARE NOT OWED ANYTHING! It doesn't matter that you're a veteran, or Special Forces, or some other "cool" status. Nothing will be given to you. Just like when you are in uniform, everything will be earned through hard work and dedication. If you have any entitled expectations, then you are failing yourself. That's not the attitude to have. You know damn well that mentality wouldn't work in your unit, and there is no reason to adopt it now.

Let's do a thought experiment. If this hotshot businessman walked into your unit looking for a job, what would happen? But wait, he has this stellar business resume and an excellent education. He seems like a good guy, but he doesn't have a lick of military training. He appears to be physically fit and says he's a good shot. Would he be placed in charge? Made the company commander or a sergeant major? We know the answer to this scenario. Not a chance! His rucksack would be outside before he got started. He would have to earn his place amongst us and start somewhere at the bottom after a vast amount of training.

Unlike this fictional person, a lot of your skills will be useful in the private workforce. You just have to show that to future employers when trying to assimilate into the business world. You have desired skills and experiences; they just need to be translated through the correct prism. I'll tell you more about transferring your skills in a later chapter.

When interviewing, we can expect a handshake and a thank you, but expecting much more than that is insanity. Our veteran brand

will give us about 30 seconds of credibility. What we turn that time into depends on us and how well prepared we are to seize the objective. As you transition and approach your next mission, think about what you can give and earn versus what you may think you're owed.

The only thing owed is what you owe yourself. Work your tail off and enable yourself to succeed in your transition. You owe that to yourself!

Let's get started.

1

Where to Begin

EVERYONE, EXCEPT FOR OUR fallen brothers and sisters, will transition out of uniform. You are not alone. Millions of American patriots have had a successful transition before you, so it is within your realm of possibility. Now it is your call to action; it is your time to take control of your journey into the civilian world. I know this change is a little funny for people who have been in gunfights, around explosions, and done numerous other things that an average person would be afraid of. We are scared to leave that behind and join the real world back home.

When notified of an upcoming mission, we begin studying the problem set. The culture, the language, the partner force (mission, capabilities, hierarchy, etc.), the area, the enemy, and the list goes on. Once on the ground, we immediately begin conducting an assessment, building rapport, managing our internal and external expectations, and again, the list goes on. Why wouldn't we use the same approach to transition? We can't expect to know everything about our future careers and get by on instinct alone.

We can use the same approach in our transition. What is the culture of the business world in general, and what is the culture of my targeted industry? Study this on the internet and in networking. We speak a different language than the private sector. Learn the new

language and also lose the military jargon. We can even take this down to the micro-level of a specific business. Learn their culture, language, mission, hierarchy, etc. Then we can understand the problem set that we are jumping head-on into.

Fortunately, our military experience gave us a framework to solve problems. In the Army, we call these frameworks a few different things, but the end state is the same. They are Troop Leading Procedures and the Military Decision-Making Process. For this mission, why would we not use the same tools with some twists? We know these processes, we are well rehearsed in them, and they are comfortable for us. Change some terminology, use a little imagination, and boom, we are in business and in our comfort zone.

U.S. ARMY TROOP LEADING PROCEDURES

RECEIVE THE MISSION
ISSUE A WARNING ORDER
MAKE A TENTATIVE PLAN
INITIATE MOVEMENT
CONDUCT RECONNAISSANCE
COMPLETE THE PLAN
ISSUE THE OPERATIONS ORDER
SUPERVISE AND REFINE

Receive the Mission: You will deploy to somewhere in America IOT start a new career and the rest of your life NLT your ETS/retirement date.

Issue a Warning Order: Tell your mission to your family, friends, and unit members.

Make a Tentative Plan: Where do you plan to go, how do you plan to put food on the table, how will you have a sense of purpose? And you can include much more.

Conduct Reconnaissance: Yep, I changed the order up. Start doing digital recon over the internet. Research where you want to live and talk with people who live in that area. If you do this well enough, you can go all-in on your move and not have to conduct site surveys. I did. I made an offer on my new house and went all in without ever having set foot in the area (I wouldn't recommend this ;)). The same process goes for industries and companies.

Initiate Movement: Move to the new location and, hopefully, begin your new job. No—scratch that—hope is not a course of action. You will be going to your new career and home.

Complete the Plan: Initiate all of the items that will be needed for your new home and career.

Issue the Operations Order: Probably not necessary but give it a shot and see how it fits. If you did everything well, it wouldn't look like a military operations order because you will have begun the transformation to becoming a civilian.

Supervise and Refine: Just because you got the new career and are beginning to get comfortable in the new setting doesn't mean you rest on your laurels. Keep refining your plan and ensuring you are on azimuth to your desired end state.

MILITARY DECISION MAKING PROCESS		
KEY INPUTS	STEPS	STEPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher headquarters plan or order or a new mission anticipated by the CDR 	RECEIPT OF MISSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDR's initial guidance Initial allocation of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDR's initial guidance Higher HQ's plan/order Higher HQ's knowledge and intelligence products Knowledge products from other organizations Army design methodology products 	MISSION ANALYSIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem statement Mission statement Initial CDR's intent Initial planning guidance Initial CCIRs and EEFI Updated IPB & running estimates Assumptions Evaluation criteria for COAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Statement Initial CDR's intent, planning guidance, CCIRs and EEFI Updated IPB, running estimates Assumptions Evaluation criteria for COAs 	COA DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COA statements & sketches Tentative task org Broad concept of operations Revised planning guidance Updated assumption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update running estimates Revised planning guidance COA statement & sketches Update assumptions 	COA ANALYSIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refined COAs Potential decision points War game results Initial assessment measures Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update running estimates Refined COAs Evaluation criteria War game results Updates assumptions 	COA COMPARISON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluated COAs Recommended COAs Updated running estimates Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated running estimates Evaluated COAs Recommend COA Updates assumptions 	COA APPROVAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDR approved COA with modifications Refined CDR's intent, CCIRs and EEFI Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDR approved COA with modifications Refined CDR's intent, CCIRs and EEFI Updated assumptions 	ORDERS PRODUCTION, DISSEMINATION, AND TRANSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved operation plan or order Subordinates understand the plan or order