

I served from 2014-2019 as an F-35B Avionics Technician and later software manager attached to VMFA-121 (the first deployable F-35 unit in the Military at the time). To this day, I tell people that my experience in the Military was one of the best choices I made. Along with having a challenging and technical job that at first included the direct maintenance and troubleshooting of avionics systems, but then the pilot-related software and database management of one of the most impressive weapons systems our military has ever had, my military time helped me find my passion for technology, comradery, competition, volunteering and travel.

I was fortunate to be stationed at two desirable duty stations while on active duty, both Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, AZ and later, Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni. When I wasn't working, or increasing my aptitude for the aircraft I was assigned to maintain, I was lucky to spend my time working out and exploring the Southwestern United States with great friends as well as volunteering in Yuma, AZ.

Shortly After my first duty station of Yuma, AZ, I was informed that my unit was being deployed to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. From 2017-2019, this is where I became an experienced maintainer and was subsequently assigned to focus on pilot-related software and Cryptographic Coding. Along with spending my free time bonding with close friends, volunteering on base and in the local area, Japan is where I discovered my niche of being a detail-oriented software nerd of some sorts. While working alongside the pilots of VMFA-121 I became a sponge and learned from some of the brightest minds and admirable leaders in Marine Corps Aviation.

The exploits and advice of people like Fighter Pilot Major Michael Wyrsh, Intelligence Officer Captain "Billy Mays" Hayes among countless other role-models and mentors (whether officers or enlisted) kept me focused and diligent despite intense operations (i.e., 31st MEU deployment), difficult decisions and the loss of a few beloved Marines. These men helped me decide to pursue my education after my enlistment to seek a meaningful, interesting career in something data related. This brought me to decide to attend MSOE, a University that quite honestly, I never thought I'd have the chance to gain admission to or afford for that matter before my military time. Upon a bittersweet, but Honorable end to my time as a VMFA-121 Green Knight and Active duty United States Marine (a group of men and women that I still hold dearly to my heart), I moved home to pursue that love of learning and data. Since leaving the military, I have some days where I yearn for the camaraderie, companionship and adventure affiliated with military life, but have realized that there are so many other ways to obtain these satisfying factors of life through friends, hobbies, school, work and experiences and I consider myself a lucky person for that.

Upon moving home to Southeastern Wisconsin, I've studied hard at Waukesha County Technical College, been employed at an extraordinary machining business in Hartland, WI called Versevo inc., volunteered at Clement. J. Zablocki VA Medical Center, made countless memories with friends and family in the area, and eventually gained admission and transfer to the school of my dreams where I am lucky to be attending thanks to my Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. My experience at Milwaukee School of Engineering thus far has included stimulating but challenging studies as I pursue my BBA in Management Information Systems, but I am thriving by staying focused. With the guidance of Academic Professors like Beth Slayman and Dr. Michael Payne among others, and members of the Student Veteran Organization, I am proud to call both the Lower East Side of Milwaukee and the halls of Milwaukee School of Engineering my home. As well as studying hard, I'm lucky to have found gainful employment as an Uber driver-contractor in Milwaukee.

As I wrap up the Spring 2021 quarter, I am proud to say that I've achieved a Junior status, maintained a 3.7 GPA and accepted a fascinating opportunity to Intern at Komatsu Mining in Analytics. Analytics is the most fascinating sector of Management Information Systems in my opinion and I am excited to head in this direction in my career in technology as I pursue eventual full-time employment in the field. I am also proud to be marrying my Fiancé, my best friend, at the end of the year.

As I strive to improve myself as a young mind, worker, student, friend, partner to my Fiancé, son to my admirable parents, and Veteran of the Milwaukee community, I relish the chance to take a page from Rick Kemp's book and lead a meaningful life, because unfortunately, he didn't have that chance past the young age of 22. As someone who has experienced loss of loved ones, mentors and friends, I see Rick Kemp as someone who I'm sure I could've been friends with. Since that isn't possible, the best we can do as Milwaukee Engineering Student Veterans is to keep going and trying to achieve things that people like him never got the chance to.

While there are many Student Veterans applying for The Rick and Josh Kemp Memorial Scholarship, I think that what separates me from others is my dedication to my work, studies and family, as well as my leader-mindset, technical aptitude and dedication to helping others and making others smile. Through the stressors and obligations we experience, and the meaning which we all seek in everyday life, I think that it's important to keep things light, enjoy the grind and find what makes you tick.

On behalf of myself, my professional network, as well as loved ones, I appreciate the opportunity to apply for this scholarship, but more importantly learn about the story of Rick Kemp.

Thank you,

Gabriel Smith