

Emily Nichols interview

Veteran Voices

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Sadie Levinson and Sydney Ellis had the honor of interviewing veteran Emily Nichols. Emily Nichols is part of the Army National Guard. Nichols describes the Army National Guard as the “best of both worlds because [she] has a service element, the military element, and then also [she gets] the civilian side. Nichols enlisted in 2018, and has been a part of the Florida Army National Guard for 6 years. Nichols wanted to be able to give back to her community, by advancing in her civilian career and eventually becoming a teacher.

Nichols joined the Army National Guard for many reasons. She explains how the military is actually the largest employer in the entire world, specifically the largest employer of musicians in the world. This was significant to Nichols because she herself is a musician, and this is what caused her to want to join this branch of the military. Nichols states, “Once I learned that, I was in grad school and I had heard about the military bands. ...I can use something that I've been studying for a long time to give back to my community, I can help the other soldiers; we do things for morale and inspiring them. And then I can help the civilians. See, there's more to the military than just the guns and the bombs”.

First, Nichols went through initial entry training, which is also known as basic training, which is 10 weeks. Nichols then went through another 10 weeks for MOS's, which is your actual job. In addition, because she was also occupied with another job of teaching, the army allowed her to split her training. After being enlisted and going through basic training, she came back to teach. The following summer, Nichols went to the Army School of Music.

Nichols is currently in her first assignment, and she is assigned to the 13th Army Band, which is a Miramar. She covers the entire state. Nichols explains how every

day is different because every day is geared towards a different mission. According to Nichols, “In the musical civilian world, you would call these gigs. In the military world we call them missions. A Lot of times we'll be in the capital, so Tallahassee. So we did the inauguration for the governor. We've done things like civilian concerts, community concerts.” Overall, Nichols experience in the Army is different and unique to other members of the army. Each day is a new journey and adventure, and only about two weeks throughout the entire year she works more closely with the center of the army. During these two weeks, Nichols explains, “Well just do the basic army training to keep up with that because there is always a potential that you could be called to service for something.” Lastly, she states, “I love it because everyday is a little bit different. You really don't know what to expect.”

Nichols earned some awards while enlisted in the Army National Guard. She enlisted as an E4 specialist. In 2023, Nichols was promoted to sergeant, which is considered an E5. She has an army achievement medal, which recognizes the fact that she does multiple ensembles.

Nichols experiences hardships as well during her time as an Army National Guard. She goes on to explain how being away from her family was one of the hardest. According to Nichols, “There's a lot of sacrifices that you make. Even though ive been able to maintain my teaching career, sometimes I'm gone, and that's hard. Also with my family, my wife is also enlisted. She's currently away on a deployment, and she enlisted because of me.” In addition, she states, “you have to put everything on pause or try to keep everything going. A Lot of times at Saint Andrews I'll be doing grades, and I'm in full battle.”

Nichols adjustment to going into the military as an older person compared to other people who were there just out of high school was unique. She was different because she has multiple lives (teaching and military), but she knew many people in the military where that job consumed their whole lives. She states that being in the military is a unique experience because you never know what you're going to be doing, and in a way, your life is basically planned out for you. In addition, she says that independence skills, such as learning to be autonomous, are important when it comes to joining the army.

Nichols is constantly growing and changing as a person while in the Army. She states, “I think I gained a lot of leadership skills out of it, a lot of confidence in my performance ability. I also learned how to lead while not always being in charge, lead by being influenced and just being there for other people that are struggling with things too, because we all make sacrifices. I gained a family out of it too.” Nichols describes one of her favorite parts of being a part of the Army National Guard as the supportive group of friends and colleagues who check up on you. Currently, Nichols is thinking about opportunities for advancement, and where she could go with it, and how long she will stay in, and it has overall shaped the way she thinks about her future.

“I think the greatest message is that there is a provision for everyone to give back,” Nichols states. In addition, Nichols was able to find herself a place in which she was able to be creative, and use that in order to help the country and community.

It is also important to mention the different units of the Army National Guard and different types of enlistment opportunities. Nichols states, “you have people who were active duty, and are retired; you have reserve, a lot of people use this as a way to pay for college, or as a way of going to school; you have national guard, full time and some part time.”

Before Nichols career took off, she applied to the air force academy, and also began to start her journey on getting her pilot's license. After she got sick multiple times, she was discouraged, and decided to pursue another career, one that combines two things: music (in which she was very passionate about) and military (another thing she wanted to pursue). In doing this, Nichols found herself as an Army National Guard, in which Nichols would be very successful.