



ABOVE: (l/r) 1st Lt. Mike Ernst, serving in 2009 as a rifle platoon leader in Iraq, communicates with his headquarters in a military vehicle. Above right, he's shown in a military portrait. By then reached the rank of captain. Below he's in civilian garb as he appears today. Ernst is now a major in the Army Reserve.

WHETHER YOU'RE IN THE ARMY OR THE LAUNDRY INDUSTRY...

'YOU BETTER BE READY TO ADAPT!'

This is the latest in our series on U.S. military veterans and their roles in the linen, uniform and facility services industry

Below are excerpts of an interview with Mike Ernst, southeast regional sales manager, Meese Inc., a manufacturer and supplier of carts and related equipment for laundry operators and other businesses. Ernst had completed a bachelor's degree and spent several years in sales before deciding to join the U.S. Army. After completing numerous

training courses, he served as an infantry officer, including nine- and 12-month tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. A key challenge/accomplishment was leading a platoon of 40 soldiers in combat conditions. After 10 years on active duty, he transitioned to the U.S. Army reserves and began a civilian career with Meese Inc. (formerly MODRoto).

Can you tell us a little about your military background?

I graduated from college and worked in sales for several years before I decided to join the Army. On a whim, I visited a

recruiting station to ask some questions and, not long after, boarded a bus to basic training. It was a big change and a big commitment, but the best decision I ever made.

I went to multiple schools over my first two years in the Army before I arrived at my first unit, the 172nd Brigade (Grafenwohr, Germany). I spent four-and-a-half years there as an infantry officer serving in multiple roles, including rifle platoon leader, mortar platoon leader, and battalion operations officer. I served two tours during that time, including nine months in Iraq and 12 months in Afghanistan. One of the more difficult challenges in

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you or someone in your company is a veteran and would like *Textile Services* to publish a profile on them similar to the one shown above, please contact senior editor Jack Morgan at jmorgan@trsa.org.

my life was leading a platoon of 40 soldiers in combat conditions. But it was by far the most rewarding.

I returned stateside in 2012 to attend a Captain's Career Course in order to prepare for a company command. I was fortunate enough to be selected for a Master's of Science program following that course, where I spent the next year obtaining my degree. Immediately following graduation, I took command of a company at Officer Candidate School. My mission was to produce trained, agile and adaptive junior officers for an Army at war who are ready today and relevant for tomorrow's challenges. It was an honor to mentor and develop future officers of the Army. Observing them build self-confidence and competence over 14 weeks was truly heartening. I am proud to say I swore in over 400 second lieutenant's during my tenure. Following command, I continued to work in operations at the Brigade and Division level. After 10 years, I decided to transition from active duty to the Army Reserve.

How did you end up in the commercial laundry industry?

During my transition from active to the reserve, I was introduced to the recruiting firm, Lucas Group. They presented

me with multiple opportunities, one of which was Meese Inc. I knew very little about the commercial laundry industry, but after my first interview with Dan Rodriguez (National Sales Manager at Meese), I was intrigued. I went through multiple interviews with human resources, regional salesman, and even the President of the company (J.R. Ryan). After every interview, I was more confident in the company and excited to work for the Meese team. By the time I was offered this opportunity, it was an easy decision to accept.

Are there any similarities between work in a commercial laundry and the military?

It's not about you, it's about the people around you. Teamwork is essential to success in both industries. In the Army, we cannot complete the mission alone. I had a platoon of experts assisting me through hundreds of missions to support not only the unit's mission but to help the local populace. Together over time we built trust, camaraderie, and respect for one another. It is the same with the team I am part of now. We work together to meet the needs of our customers and support the mission of the company. My day-to-day responsibilities as a regional sales manager involve many moving

pieces that could not be accomplished without the support of my team.

Are there skills that you learned in the military that have helped you in your civilian job?

There are many skills I learned in the military that I can attribute to my success today. Some of these skills include discipline, adaptability, resilience, empathy, problem solving and leadership. Every day presents a new challenge that I am ready to overcome because of the skills I learned. There is only one constant in both industries, and that is change, so you better be ready to adapt.

Is the laundry industry a good place for veterans to work and develop their civilian careers?

Absolutely. This industry provides an easy transition for a veteran looking to make a career change. Veterans know how to get things done and solve problems with limited resources. If you're looking for a career to challenge you and enable you to grow, this is one to consider. Meese Inc. is a veteran-friendly company that continues to look for motivated individuals to join the team. **TS**