

# Part 1: **Recent Air Force retiree tells us first-hand how he transitioned to a new civilian career after 20 years in the service.**

**Hello. My name is Doug Whittamore.** For the past 20 years it was my distinct pleasure to serve my country in the United States Air Force. I retired in October of 2006.

I grew up in modest surroundings in the heartland of America in Omaha, Nebraska. I had three brothers and three sisters and we all grew up in a small house with one bathroom. I'm not quite sure how my parents did it, but it was a good childhood and my parents instilled good values in me and my brothers and sisters.

My father had served in the Air Force during the Korean War. He would take my family to Offutt Air Force Base (AFB), Neb., during their annual air shows. I remember going to the various booths and asking all sorts of questions to the airmen there. I can still remember their professionalism and it made quite an impression on me. That is where I originally acquired my longing to join the Air Force.

Back in 1986, I was working for a company called Control Data Corporation in Omaha and had been laid off, so I went and

talked to the local Air Force recruiter. I can still remember that he did not seem too interested at first since I was already married. However, after I scored real high on the ASVAB, all of the services were trying to recruit me. When I first joined the Air Force all I knew is that I wanted to do something mechanical. Initially, I wanted to work on as many mechanical systems as I could so the recruiter advised me about the aerospace ground equipment career field. It was a good fit for me and I loved it. My personal goals were to learn as much as I could and make chief master sergeant (E-9) by the 20-year mark. While I fell a little short of that second goal, I did have a very successful career and ultimately achieved the rank of master sergeant (E-7).

I basically had two career in the Air Force. For my first 13 years I was in the aerospace ground equipment career field. Then the last seven years were spent as a

logistics planner. I learned a lot in both areas that will help me out down the road.

The Air Force took me to many interesting and sometimes dangerous places. My first assignment was to Incirlik AFB, Turkey (1987-1989). I still remember the conversation with my wife when I told her where we were going. She was not excited at first, but after we got there she had a great time.

I then spent the next 10 years stationed at Offutt AFB in Omaha, Neb. (1989-1999). While I was there, I had several temporary duty assignments to Saudi Arabia — one to Eskan Village (1991) and the other to Prince Sultan Air Base (1998).

From Offutt, I transferred to Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota, as a logistics planner. While assigned there, I was once again sent to the Middle East on TDY to Ali Al Salem Air Base (Kuwait) in 2001. That assignment was a neat experience as we supported the Predator unmanned aerial vehicle that can be flown by remote control from thousands of miles away.

In 2002, I went to Osan Air Base, South Korea, for a one-year remote tour as a logistics planner for the 607th Air Support Operations Group in support of a tactical air control party outfit. After Korea I went back to Ellsworth AFB for the remainder of my career (2003-2006).

My last TDY was to Kabul, Afghanistan, where I supported Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFCA, CJ5). I got to work with another great bunch of people from many different nations and services. That was also the first time I had to learn to run convoys. Operating in a combat zone over austere terrain, there were quite a few hairy moments, but it is the quality people with whom I served that I will always remember most.

During my career I always tried my best and received a little recognition along the



\* Doug Whittamore (right) receives an award for top performance from his commander in 2000. Photo courtesy Whittamore



\* Doug and his wife, Phoebe, look forward to spending more time together with their children, Chelsea (13) and Rachel (16), now that he's employed by BNSF Railway. Photo courtesy Whittamore.

way. When I was stationed in Turkey, I received the General Leo Marquez award for aircraft maintenance. I also received a Meritorious Service Medal, and several commendation and achievement medals during my career. However, I will always recall the people I worked with first when I look back on my stint in the Air Force.

After 20 years of moving and being away from home, our family collectively decided we had enough and I decided to retire. I have been married to my wife,

Phoebe, for 23 years. We have two daughters, Rachel (16) and Chelsea (13). I had been gone from home almost three out of the last five years of service. That is very hard on the family. Our family goals immediately shifted to finding a civilian career for me and establishing a new home to successfully prepare our girls for college in the next few years.

I attended the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) at Ellsworth to prepare for a new career. It had been 20 years since I last

had to fill out a résumé, but the TAP team helped me out. A wonderful woman by the name of Karen Moore was a great help in this area.

During the formal program, *G.I. Jobs* magazine was distributed to all of the participants. Inside the magazine, a list of the Top 25 Military-Friendly employers immediately caught my eye. I began my quest for a new career by sending my newly-written résumé to some of these companies. During my research, one company stood out from the rest – BNSF Railway.

**February Issue:** Read how Doug Whittamore gets on track with a new civilian career at BNSF ([www.bnsf.com/careers/military/index.html](http://www.bnsf.com/careers/military/index.html)), ★



**Dig deeper at [www.gijobs.net/gidiaries](http://www.gijobs.net/gidiaries)**

- Link to the October Sr. Enlisted Profile of BNSF's Keith Thomas.
- Check out more about employment opportunities at BNSF on page 45 or go to [www.gijobs.net/bnsf](http://www.gijobs.net/bnsf).
- Link to the May Recruiter Intel of BNSF.
- Ask Doug questions at the BNSF forum: [www.gijobs.net/bnsfforum](http://www.gijobs.net/bnsfforum)

# Part 2: **Prepped** for Success

● BNSF's Doug Whittamore's journey with the company takes him from the ranks of the Air Force through an offer to become one of the railroad's first-line supervisors.

In the last issue, I told you a little about my military career. I'd now like to tell you how I landed a great job as a first-line supervisor with BNSF Railway.

During the transition assistance program (TAP) at Ellsworth Air Force Base, several of the presenters spoke very highly of BNSF as being a military-friendly employer. At the time I wasn't quite sure how my skills would transfer to a civilian job, no less one with a railroad company. It was hard to pinpoint a specific job to target a résumé toward. During one of the briefings, an issue of *G.I. Jobs* was distributed. Inside I found a link to BNSF as well as many other online links to send my résumé.

My first attempt at BNSF was for a conductor's job in Lincoln, Neb. I went online to the BNSF Web site ([www.bnsf.com](http://www.bnsf.com)) and filled out the application. It was self-explanatory and you simply paste your résumé to the application. Unfortunately, I did not succeed at my first attempt at a job. There is a lesson in that for everyone.

It wasn't long before Connie McLendon (BNSF's military staffing manager) e-mailed me another opportunity in Lincoln as a first-line supervisor. I filled out another application and it wasn't long before I received another e-mail from Connie recommending that I tailor my résumé very specifically toward the job as the competition is tough.

I took Connie's advice to heart since it had been 20 years since I last created a résumé. I used the chronological method for my first draft, but it was too broad. I

decided I needed some help. My first step toward improving my résumé was Karen Moore, a TAP counselor at Ellsworth. Karen was extremely helpful in fine-tuning my résumé. She suggested ideas and I would take those ideas home to rework the résumé. Karen recommended using reverse chronological order (present to past)

\* *Doug Whittamore documents his transition from the Air Force to BNSF Railway's first-line supervisor program.*



BNSF photo

and it worked very well. I attached a revised copy to my application on the Web site.

By this stage there were many things that impressed me about BNSF. Their Web site was very easy to navigate. Plus, it was easy to see exactly what jobs were available and where they were located. Connie impressed me, too. I had sent out résumés to other companies, but Connie was the only one that cared enough to advise me on how to tailor my résumé to a specific job. I'm very thankful that she did.

The BNSF Web site streamlines the online application process. It is very simple

and straight-forward. The financial details of various positions are all on the site and each job posting explains what the salary is so you know before you apply.

After I updated my résumé online all I could do was wait to see if I would be invited for an interview. I received an e-mail from Dane Freshour, BNSF human resources representative, inviting me for an interview. I was a little worried because I didn't have any railroad experience. The e-mail did not mention what to wear so I got out my best suit and traveled from Rapid City S.D. to Lincoln, Neb.

The interview was held at a Holiday Inn. Six other people were invited to the interview. Also all seemed to be very sharp individuals. Dane and Mike Barr (the Lincoln diesel shop superintendent) gave a brief introduction and then sent us on a break before we took a test. The test had two parts – a math test and a personality test. Once the test was finished we donated a sample of hair for drug testing purposes. Next, each person was given a specific time for their interview.

I decided to squeeze in lunch before my interview. When I got back to the room where the interviews were to take place, the

doors were closed and locked. I was surprised and not sure about what to do next. I thought if they were still interviewing the person in front of me I might interrupt. Then again, perhaps they were simply waiting for me to knock. I didn't want to take any chances on being late so I knocked. Mike came to the door and informed me they were running a little behind.

The actual interview was more than I expected. Once they invited me into the room for my interview, I felt pretty relaxed. I think it was because both Dane and Mike were very professional and made me feel at ease.

Everything was pretty straight-forward. They asked me a few questions and I answered them to the best of my ability. The railroad lets you know up front that they operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day including holidays. Most of us in the military are very familiar with those kinds of hours.

The BNSF personnel were high-caliber individuals. I was impressed. My first thought was I'd like to be on their team. Both Dane and Mike were very articulate and seemed happy to be part of BNSF. I got the sense they enjoyed what they were doing and had a lot of pride in the company. That means a lot when you are on the outside looking in.

After the interview I felt pretty good,

but I knew the competition was tough. I was not confident that I had landed the job since I didn't know anything about the backgrounds of the other candidates. But I was also encouraged by the fact I was apply-



*\* Connie McLendon, military staffing manager, actively recruited Doug Whittamore for BNSF's first-line supervisor program.*

ing for a first-line supervisor's position with BNSF and I had been a supervisor in 17 of my 20 years in the Air Force.

I was also well prepared because of TAP. The program helps you prepare for job interviews because they run you through mock interviews and coach you on how to improve. I would advise everyone to take full advantage of TAP. I also had skills as an aerospace ground equipment (AGE) mechanic on my side. A railroad locomotive consists of a large diesel engine and a large alternator that powers motors that move the wheels. AGE exposed me to all of

these areas. I've always enjoyed being in a maintenance environment so the BNSF job seemed like a perfect fit for me and my family.

A few days later I received the call I had been waiting for. Dane Freshour called and asked me what I thought about Lincoln, Neb. It was great timing. The movers had arrived and were packing up my house. I was very glad I still had the phone hooked up. It was such a great feeling of relief.

When you are retiring it is kind of a leap of faith. I still knew my family was counting on me to make ends meet. Yet, I knew I needed a job that could provide a livable wage. The first-line supervisor position at BNSF could provide this for me and my family. I was and am very thankful for the opportunity. ★

**March Issue Part III:** Find out what happens to Doug as he reports to BNSF ([www.bnsf.com/careers.military/index.html](http://www.bnsf.com/careers.military/index.html)) for his first day.



Dig deeper at [www.gjjobs.net/gidiaries](http://www.gjjobs.net/gidiaries)

- For more on careers at BNSF see page 55 or go to [www.gjjobs.net/bnsf](http://www.gjjobs.net/bnsf).
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*Making the transition from military service to successful civilian employment can be a difficult challenge, even for the most battle-hardened and technical trained service members. G.I. Diaries documents transition of a recent service member from preparing for separation through the TAP process and ultimately reporting for work in corporate America. Learn what it takes to be successful from someone who has cracked the code.*

## Part 3: **Heading on Down the Line**

BNSF's Doug Whittamore, heads on down the line to tell us about his first days on the job as part of BNSF's First Line Supervisor Program. Whittamore recently transitioned to the *G.I. Jobs* Military-Friendly Employer<sup>SM</sup> after a distinguished 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force.

It was a moment I'll never forget. Literally, I had the movers packing up my things as I lived in military leased quarters and had to move somewhere. Dane Freshour, a human resources representative at BNSF Railway, called and asked me what I thought about Lincoln, Neb. To say the least, I was very happy when he offered me a job with BNSF's First Line Supervisor Program.

I am originally from Nebraska and I was hoping to land a job near home. I was very relieved since I wanted to be able to provide for my family at the level that we had become accustomed to during the 20 years I had served in the U.S. Air Force. But I was

also feeling sky-high, because I always loved being in a mechanical environment and knew my military experience would be a great fit for the job.

There was very little for me to consider before accepting the position. BNSF lists the job, pay and benefits up front so you know what the offer is and there is no need to negotiate. Dane sent an official employment offer letter to my e-mail address. It was time sensitive so I had to sign it and send it back to via overnight U.S. mail. Everything worked out fine and my acceptance was received on time. I was now a proud new full-time employee of BNSF Railway.

Accepting this opportunity was the culminating event in my transition from the

military to the civilian marketplace. I can't say enough about the TAP program and its counselors at Ellsworth Air Force Base who helped me get there. They are all there to help you in every way possible. There are many resources available for transitioning service members to research future career opportunities. Plus, the counselors give you many tools to help build résumés and various techniques tailored to specific jobs.

### Back to Work

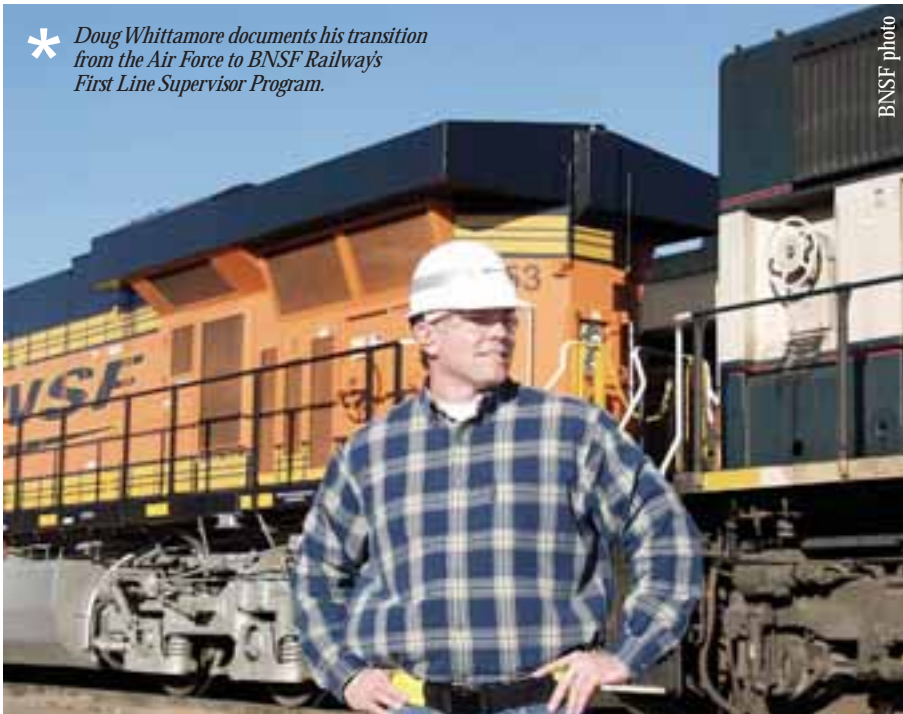
On my first official day of employment, I reported for work at 7 a.m. I went to the main office to see what they needed me to do. Safety is a huge consideration at BNSF, as it is with the Air Force, so my first day was spent with Gary Hughes and Allen Hansen, the local BNSF safety personnel. I already had steel-toed boots, but I was also issued a hard hat, safety glasses and a reflective belt before I was given a tour of the Lincoln Diesel Shop and the rail yard. Everyone was great and very receptive towards me.

I was briefed in detail about local operational procedures including what to be alert for when locomotives move. A rail yard is a dangerous environment since everything on a locomotive is heavy and made of steel. The belief is that every accident is preventable. Each employee is valuable and BNSF goes to great lengths to prevent injuries. I also watched a few safety films to get familiarized with the rail yard.

My biggest challenge the first day was trying to remember everybody's name. The craftsmen are all very talented and excel at what they do. Everybody takes pride in their work. It's almost like a big family and they try to take care of each other, too. In that regard, it is very similar to the Air Force.

Unlike the Air Force though, nobody wears a uniform and that takes some getting used to. All of the craft and labor force

\* Doug Whittamore documents his transition from the Air Force to BNSF Railway's First Line Supervisor Program.



belong to a union. It was initially a challenge for me to put a face with a specific task that needed to be done, but it gradually fell into place. We have mechanics, pipe fitters, machinists, boilermakers, hostlers (train movers), hostler helpers (people that guide the hostler in the yard while moving locomotives), and general laborers (who clean, fuel and sand locomotives). There are many other crafts in other shops such as signal maintainers, track teams, carmen, bridge and building maintainers, to name just a few.

Most of my Air Force career was spent in a shop environment and BNSF's shops

remind me of the aerospace ground equipment shops I had worked in, but only on a much larger scale. The building I work in has three tracks that can fit five locomotives on each track with a pit going beneath each track and a ramp that stays level with the walkway of the engine. There are drop tables to change out the electric motors from beneath the locomotives. It is impressive to see everything come together and everybody working to maintain these \$1.8 million assets.

Much care is taken to keep the railroad running safely both inside and outside the shop.



There is also a wheel turning machine to repair the flat spots that develop over time. You can hear the flat spots when the wheels turn if you're at a rail crossing. It is the clicking sound you hear. I love the shop and rail yard environment and look forward to going to work everyday.

Most of my training has been on-the-job training. I've been learning the operations of the freight pit. It is kind of like a big gas station for locomotives. Locomotives are separated from trains in the yard and

sent to the freight pit. We fuel and sand them before fixing any minor repairs that we can.

The major maintenance is taken to the main shop where they can fix almost anything. We also must keep track of where each locomotive is in case it is needed for an outbound train.

For me, it has been fun and challenging at times to pick up the railroad lingo (See box on this page). It's English, but the meaning is completely different. To learn more about my job and the rail business, I will have to go to school at Overland Park, Kansas, for about four months beginning in March.

There are many veterans working in the shop. Some had recently retired from the military like me, but there are also a few members of the National Guard and Reserve. Since I started, we have welcomed home a few employees that had been deployed to Iraq and returned back to work. Many patriotic people work for the railroad and I'm honored to be working with them at BNSF. ★

**April Issue Part IV:** Read the last installment in this series documenting Doug Whittamore's transition from U.S. Air Force service to successful civilian employment at BNSF.

## Learn the Lingo

*The caller called a dog catch to catch a dog.*

**Caller** – A person whose job it is to call out a train crew.

**Dog Catch** – A crew sent to relieve a crew that has worked the legal limit.

**Catch a dog** – Catch a slow moving train.

*That guy is a hot-footer. One day he'll be hitting the grit.*

**Hot-footer** – An engineer or conductor in switching.

**Hitting the grit** – Falling off a car.

*There is a cow and calf pulling a bare table to pick up some pigs.*

**Cow and calf** – A yard engine coupled to a slug.

**Bare table** – An empty flat car.

**Pigs** – Locomotives.

*Drummer told us to hook up a fred, then go to beans.*

**Drummer** – A yard conductor.

**Fred-a Flashing** – A rear end device used at the end of a train in place of a caboose that indicates the end of the train.

**Beans** – Eating breakfast, lunch or supper.

*Spike a torch and get a snipe out her to fix this iron.*

**Spike a torch** – A fuse.

**Snipe** – A track laborer.

**Iron** – A switch.

*Dinger says there's a reefer with flat wheels and a hot box down in the hole.*

**Dinger** – Yardmaster/trainmaster or assistant trainmaster.

**Reefer** – A refrigerator car.

**Flat wheels** – A wheel that has flat spots.

**Hot box** – An overheated journal caused by excessive friction between bearing and journal, lack of lubricant or foreign matter.

**Hole** – A passing track enabling one train to pass another.

Dig deeper at [www.gijobs.net/gidiaries](http://www.gijobs.net/gidiaries)

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- Link to Recruiter Intel with BNSF's Connie McLendon.
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- Links to first and second installments.



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# Part 4: On the Right Track

BNSF's Doug Whittamore concludes his transition experience to BNSF Railway's First Line Supervisor Program with Part IV of his G.I. Diaries. Whittamore recently transitioned to the *G.I. Jobs* Military-Friendly Employer<sup>SM</sup> after a distinguished 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force.

I feel blessed that I've received such a great opportunity to be working at BNSF Railway. BNSF is a wonderful place to work — both challenging and rewarding. Everyday I've learned something new about the railroad industry. That helps keep things interesting and makes my job easier as my understanding of the industry grows.

I look forward to being "on top of my game" again. Working for a railroad is similar to the feeling you get when you join the military. When you begin you're an apprentice ... then a journeyman ... then a craftsman, and so on. Thanks to 20 years in the Air Force, I had the opportunity to be good at what I did in two different military career fields. As a civilian, the supervisory part of my job has been a natural transition. I'm working with people that have been with BNSF for 30 years and in some cases more. They know a whole lot about the industry. And I'm doing my best to absorb as much of it from them as I can. With their help I look forward to getting on top of my game with BNSF.

Even though I am now outside the military, I will always fondly recall all of the great people I was honored to work beside. The people in America's military are awesome. I knew when I retired that I would miss them. It was also incredible to have my children raised in a military community. Our families would look out for one another. It was not uncommon for us to pick up a neighbor's child from school or a sporting event if they couldn't for some reason. I also think fondly of all the people I've had the privilege to work with throughout my career, not only in the military, but civilian co-workers, too.

I don't think you can ever replace the military camaraderie at least not in the same way. In the military you rely on each other to save lives. In the civilian world you know there is a job to do and you get it done together. It still takes a team of people to accomplish great things.

BNSF moves a lot of freight, coal and other commodities. The more efficient we do our job the more these items are available to our customers. Almost anything you can imagine can be moved by rail and most consumers benefit as a result. In a way it gives everyone in the railway industry a purpose to do their job well.

Working at BNSF is all I expected and more. That is not to say that I don't miss my military experiences. I will value that forever, but I am very fortunate to be with a company that wants me to grow with it. There are many opportunities here — both personal and professional. If you want to move or try another position within the company you can just go online and apply at [www.bnsf.com](http://www.bnsf.com).

For anyone facing an upcoming transition from the military, I would tell you to take advantage of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The facilitators are there to help you and want to see you succeed. Work on your résumé and seek advice from your TAP and VA counselors to help improve it. Take advantage of the TAP programs mock interviews also. Don't be discouraged by interviews where you don't land the job, learn from them. Be yourself in the interview and you'll know if the job feels right. Finally, use *G.I. Jobs*. It was the first stepping stone in my fantastic journey. I'd like to wish all transitioning service members good luck, too. ★

**This Concludes:** This concludes *G.I. Diaries* with BNSF's Doug Whittamore. Go to [www.gijobs.net/gidiaries](http://www.gijobs.net/gidiaries) to link to the first three installments.

*Doug Whittamore documents his transition from the Air Force to BNSF Railway's First Line Supervisor Program.*



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A Shared Vision of Success



Trust Built on Integrity



Leadership



Clear Communication

## It All Moves Through Me.

The impact you will have on millions is just a taste of what makes a career at BNSF so rewarding! You'll also thrive in a work environment where fresh air and breathtaking views are an everyday perk. We seek talented individuals with previous military experience that are making the transition from military to civilian careers. At BNSF, we salute your service, value your skills and welcome your unique experiences. If you are ready to continue to serve the nation – in a whole new way – you are ready to join the BNSF team.

We're seeking qualified candidates in the following areas:

Conductor • Track Maintenance  
Various Mechanical Positions • Management



To learn more and apply online, visit our career website:  
[www.bnsf.com/careers/military](http://www.bnsf.com/careers/military)

BNSF is an EEO/M/W/D/V Military Friendly Employer. We welcome diversity and encourage diversity in our workplace.