From Army Warrior to Cyber Warrior

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As an Information Sciences major concentrated in Information Security, I have gotten to experience a little bit of everything in the tech field. From learning software development languages like Python and JavaScript, to securing operating systems in a virtual machine. Last semester I was enrolled in an Ethical Hacking class which I was looking forward to taking since beginning my degree. Within the first few weeks it piqued my interest enough to start taking part in USF's "Whitehatters Computer Security Club." This semester I hope to take part in various Capture the Flag and Hack the Box events to try and get some more real-world experience in, as well as studying for my COMPTIA Security + certification. Ultimately, I chose cybersecurity because it's an exciting field which will continue to grow as hackers find new ways to exploit vulnerable systems.

Although I am still preparing to take part in a live competition, I have begun practicing using online tools such as TryHackMe, and hackthebox. As an Army veteran who specialized in creating defensive positions and clearing landmines, I know a thing or two about protecting critical systems and personnel. I believe this knowledge of physical defenses will come in handy in the cyber world as it gives me a unique perspective on security. In the cyber field, there are also countless different abbreviations for different protocols and systems which draws another similarity to the military. Veterans are extremely good with abbreviations and learning them feels awfully familiar to us. Prior to writing this I have talked with career services here and there at USF, and I have an appointment with them next week to discuss portfolio projects and other certification resources. Although that will be my first real appointment with them, I have attended their events in the past. Last semester, I went to their technology focused career fair

where I got to talk to a plethora of different recruiters about a broad range of different positions. This is where I first encountered ReliaQuest.

ReliaQuest is a major provider of cybersecurity services with a broad range of clientele. ReliaQuest uses GreyMatter, a cloud based, open XDR architecture system which automates detection and investigation of cybersecurity events for over 700 customers worldwide. While talking to their recruiters, I was almost immediately drawn to their company culture and mission. This is where I first heard about their "Spring Labs" opportunity. The ReliaQuest Spring Labs takes place towards the end of March and involves 4 days of hands-on experience as a security analyst, right from the ReliaQuest headquarters stationed right here in Tampa.

Meeting with people actively in the industry marked a huge turning point for me in my scholarly career. Before talking with the ReliaQuest recruiters, I felt like I lacked direction in a way. Like many college students I asked myself "what exactly am I going to do with my degree?" ReliaQuest seems to be the perfect fit for me. When I got home, I immediately began applying for the Spring Labs even though they were months away. I highly recommend all students take part in a career fair hosted on campus.

Back in December I began studying for the CompTIA Security+ certification which is an industry standard for cybersecurity. Although the certification isn't necessarily a requirement to be hired as they offer certification programs, it shows I am taking the initiative and investing in my own future. In preparation for the interview process I have begun listening to the company podcast "No Show Dogs" to understand their culture and values better, as well as connecting with graduates of the program. Some of which are also members of the whitehatters computer club I am a part of. I have also found Darril Gibson's book "Get Certified, Get Ahead: SY0-0601" to be an extremely helpful preparation tool. The book has taught me so much about

cybersecurity and just how in-depth it goes. This has given me an added level of confidence in my ability to become Security+ certified. Although I was unable to secure an internship last year, I hope to put my best foot forward into the Spring Labs program which according to them, is an interview in itself. Many graduates who fully apply themselves end up with either an internship, or full-time job by the end of the program as a security analyst.

As it stands, my plan to become a security analyst is to first get my COMPTIA Security+ certification. Armed with this certification, and a more personal understanding of the company culture from listening to their podcast. I am confident that they will see me as a prime candidate to take part in their Spring Labs program. There, I will put my absolute best foot forward every day and won't be afraid to ask questions when needed. After which I hope to successfully transition into my career as a security analyst. This essay has covered my goals and aspirations of becoming a security analyst. We saw where these goals originated from by utilizing a vital resource provided by the career services department via one of their many career fairs hosted on campus. If any students aren't sure about what they want to do after college, I believe a career fair is the place to start. It's one thing to have goals, but its another thing to begin working towards them which is reflected in my drive to get the proper certifications and experience under my belt. I look forward to showing the good people of ReliaQuest just how motivated I am to work with them.