

Transcription 1-

Interviewer: Cameron McNamara

Interviewer: Gonzalo Flores

Interviewee: Tom Rodenhaver

Interview Date: April 13th 2017

Interview Location: Miracosta Community College Library

Acronyms: CM = Cameron McNamara (primary interviewer)

GF = Gonzalo Flores (secondary interviewer)

TR = Tom Rodenhaver (interviewee)

CM: My name is Cameron McNamara, I am conducting this interview with Gonzalo Flores and Tom Rodenhaver. We are at miracosta college library it is 12pm, the organization we are representing is Mira Costa College Student Service Learning Project.

CM: Were going to start of by asking what rank and what branch were you in the military.

TR: I was in the navy and then I got out as an E-4, Air 3, Petty officer 3rd class.

CM: Can you explain what E-4 Represents?

TR: Your enlisted and you're in charge of the E-3 and below.

CM: How did you manage to get into that?

TR: Overtime you take test, once you're at E-3 you take a test, once you pass you receive "FROK" when you receive your higher rank or E-4 emblem.

CM: So through testing is getting up to E-3?

TR: No so E-1 and E 3 its with time you wait nine months to get from E1 to E2 and then six to get to E3. From there you test into you're E4 ranking.

TR: I have two grandfathers, one was in the army the other in the navy. my little sister in the airforce, uncle marine, brother in law and entire family is army.

CM: So you come from a big military background?

TR: Yeah it's spread around and then my wife was in the Navy.

CM: What led you to joining the navy?

TR: I lived in a small town in Kentucky nothing going on. I was getting in trouble in high school, bad friends, pretty much my grandpa said you don't have nothing going for you here, the military came in and my grandpa said you need to do it get away don't worry about anything here.

CM: What town of Kentucky?

TR: Split-up lived with my grandparents in Elizabeth town, and the next town over called Radcliff?

CM: Getting in trouble and stuff, normal stuff in the country as a teenager?

TR: I was going out a lot staying out late. Coming home late.

CM: Time to do something new?

TR: Yeah.

CM: Are you married?

TR: Yeah.

CM: Is your spouse apart of the military?

TR: Yes, she's in the navy as well she's a core man. She joined a year and a half ago.

CM: Where have you been stationed before and deployed to?

TR: Stationed in 32nd street in San Diego on the USS Boxer for four and a half years. Boot camp for two months in great lakes Illinois and three months in Pensacola Florida, 32nd street in San Diego. I've deployed to Guam, Hawaii, Israel, Jerusalem, Oman, Dubai, Jordan, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

CM: Wow that's a lot, what was your favorite out of all those deployments?

TR: Well a lot of those happened in the same deployment, so it's different for different times because it's over two deployments. Hawaii, and Guam because of the people I was with. Then the second would be Singapore it was the cleanest place i've ever been and the architecture was great there.

CM: How was your experience at boot camp at great lakes?

TR: I feel like it was a joke so it's pretty much getting ready for ship life, fold clothes, live small on bunk bed's the size of a coffin.

CM: How small was your bunk?

TR: A coffin, on the ship called coffin racks, bed opens up in a little space, Three racks high.

CM: How was your experience during your first deployment? You said that your first deployment seems to be a different group of people than your second deployment.

TR: When you're an E1 straight into the ship I worked with a lot of bigger gym rat guys that were out going and stuff. These are the big brothers you could always want, they would take you out to have fun, The group of people looked out for you more, and that's what made it better. Obviously brothers fight so that's normal but nobody stays mad everyone's forgiving and gets over small things that happen. Second time around softer crowd of people lazy people did not go out to the gym or stay active. So you looked for the same group of people.

CM: They were there to watch your back and stuff, what about mentors?

TR: There's this one guy named Anthony strain, antwoine, he's really mellow he would bring serious stuff down take everything away when you talk to him.

TR: A different guy his name was Joe he was guamanian, had tribal tattoos, we would always joke around where's your spear and grass skirt and stuff. He was a good guy. And then there was this other guy one of my mentors his name was patrick he was a comedian he knew when to be serious when working and when to be serious, joking around he was cutting up too.

CM: When you went in the navy what was your occupation on the ship and did you expect it to be what you signed up for?

TR: No, so that's where recruiters get you and stuff, I joined the navy as an aviation navy ordnance man.

CM: What is that?

TR: You build bombs or deal with ammunition anywhere from a 9 mil to a 2,000 pound bomb, and then missiles and rockets. I originally wanted to be in navy aviation mechanics and was told I could build bombs and work on the jets and stuff. With being an ordnance man it didn't turn out like that.

CM: Small arms ammunition?

TR: No, anything from missiles, rockets, still missiles.

CM: Do you have any jobs that stood out while you were on deployment?

TR: No, so you have one job, so within each department of the navy you have separate jobs within that department, so you have flight deck crew, mag crew.

CM: What's a mag crew?

TR: Where you have the ammunition and stuff, and then the administration which is all the higher ups.

TR: It's called aussie, it's pretty much how you transfer bombs and stuff. They supply all the lifts for the ammunition.

CM: So like stands?

TR: Skids. They're called skids.

CM: The skids that rockets are holding on to while they are going on to jet.

TR: Yeah so they're metal or aluminum trailers you drag them around.

CM: Is there anyone you relied on for a support system?

TR: So first deployment, no.

CM: So first deployment you were split up and stuff, you were yourself.

TR: Yeah, so I was separating from family,

CM: What about friends and stuff at home?

TR: Yeah so I wasn't worried about anything going on at home. literally everything I had was what I had in my bag, and then I guess yes and no because you're counting on the people there to support as well, as a support system.

CM: So pretty much your buddies you were close with were your support?

TR: Yeah so everyone I was working with directly that's who my support system was, second time around I was married by that time

CM: So your wife on the second deployment was your support system, because you didn't have your buddies anymore?

TR: Well I mean, for the ones that were still there. So we met she came down from seattle, washington we met at a rave.

CM: What rave? Beyond? Wonderland?

TR: Yeah, so she was here with friends and stuff, and we just kinda hung out

CM: Was it mutual friends and stuff?

TR: No.

CM: Just randomly met her?

TR: Yeah that's how it is we kinda met through that I wasn't introduced to her, and I was just going to all these raves for awhile, then met and hung out and moved out and moved in together.

CM: Really, so it was pretty quick?

TR: Yeah kinda was.

CM: Alright so you're saying she was your support system throughout your second deployment or pretty much your support system?

TR: Sending supplies, care packages with food, or snacks, because the ship does run out of food and it's good to have your stash and back up stuff, that's where that would come in and she would send me a box a month.

CM: So sweets to remind you of home, or stuff to keep you.

TR: Yeah like chips, or gum, or candy.

CM: No chocolates and stuff?

TR: No so funny story about that, my mom sent me this giant fudge caramel candy and it melted and it just melted it was in dubai for a week, and it was in a vacuum sealed bag with second wax papers to separate it but it was just melted chocolate.

CM: Just all smushed together?

TR: Yeah liquid it was completely melted.

CM: So that was the last time you got sweets?

TR: Yeah pretty much so, But I did get sent a cake.

CM: Oh so it just depends on where you're stationed.

TR: Yeah pretty much just depends on what days we got mail.

CM: Did you feel the need for a support system while away on deployment, Like with your wife?

TR: Well no just cause I believe I could of done it if I didn't have it because I had met other people by that time on the ship and you have them there with you.

CM: Would she write you letters?

TR: Well email and only letters when we had too.

CM: How was writing letters back home, did you ever worry about spelling or structure?

TR: Well no just cause they were to my mom or my wife I wasn't worried about how they were put together they weren't going to get graded by someone.

CM: How were you in school?

TR: Well I made it, I was just an average student.

CM: Did you feel as if you were just waiting to graduate?

TR: Yeah exactly.

CM: Did being in the navy change any of your views on life?

TR: Yeah a ton, I mentioned earlier i'm from a small town so you have a small town mind, you see with third world countries that our problems in the states aren't shit compared to what they're going through, so I backed off myself, I realized like oh mine will pass their first world problems.

CM: So it put it into perspective for you?

TR: Yeah I use to think my problems were bad till then.

CM: Do you have a specific deployment that stands out to you most, that made you think like damn we have it good back home?

TR: Yeah actually I can, I was in the middle east in Oman I never heard of it until I was there. so I guess when you go to houses they have normal toilets but when you go out in public it's not like that. it's literally a hole in the ground with a slant in it, it was like flat urinal and you had to squat, so when you go to flush its like a jet and it sprays out and sucks it up like a pancake. So even not having a toilet that's when I started to realize how good we had it.

CM: How was the process of transitioning from civilian life to military life?

TR: So that I feel like was actually easy because I already knew I was leaving everything behind, like friends and stuff and just started fresh and new, getting into the military mindset was very easy for me.

CM: What skills did you acquire in the military that you feel can apply to being at school today?

TR: I wanted to become aviation but I didn't get to do the mechanics so what I did do was aviation which was building bombs handing out ammo and shooting guns.

CM: So you wanted to become aviation ?

TR: Yeah because I wanted to do mechanics because I wanted it to be a really hands on thing that's kind of what I wanted to do but I did not do that.

CM: You said earlier your perspective on boot camp was a joke?

TR: Well yeah because of the mind set, we were just running and folding clothes, you know I was waiting to do stuff that was applicable and that was what was applicable its learning how to live small.

CM: How was your transition from military life coming back to school here at miracosta?

TR: So when I got out of high school there was a year of working and then I joined then five years service then another year and half working so almost eight years and you don't use any of that knowledge from your school and it's just really hard to get back into it.

CM: Were you reading or anything or up to date at the time while on your deployments?

TR: No not at all, so up to date you pretty much have the freshest news that deals with like world problems and like I guess where your at or where you're patrolling you have the freshest news to date.

CM: So you were finding out stuff your wife wouldn't find out about for a couple of weeks?

TR: Yeah at least, sometimes it was almost a month until she was finding out and hearing about the things.

CM: Coming back into college life were you already with your wife?

TR: Yeah.

CM: Did she help you with your transition process of coming back to school?

TR: No, so when we moved back out here from ohio it was really hard to get a job because you have to have more qualifications in california, so I was like well I need a way to get money and going to school I get the G.I. bill and along with the money I take in so we split all my bills with her money she brings in too.

CM: You said the transition was hard, what made it hard for you?

TR: Like getting out you couldn't, like your friends who were still in were on a strict schedule so you couldn't hang out with them so pretty much I didn't have any friends outside of the military, so when I came here I just went for it. what really helped is when I was applying and coming here face to face and getting to talk to other vets that was the most help I was getting and interaction with people.

CM: Was there anything easy about your transition to college?

TR: For me no, I didn't know anyone and coming from a working and labor background. Coming to school with that mindset of not having to work and only attend school. I'm just not working i'm just focusing on school and stuff to stay busy.

CM: What was your first day of college like?

TR: We'll come back to that one.

CM: Was it hard for you to have to adjust to the civilian lifestyle at school?

TR: So you guys listened to Hector's audio, and I felt the same way he mentioned it. You just see people get up and leave and I thought it was kind of rude because you don't do that.

TR: I felt like the same way you'd just see people get up and leave and I thought it was pretty rude, or people walking out of class and being on their phones and stuff, or people talking while the professor was talking and stuff I just felt it was very rude. I guess that's what they're here paying to do though.

CM: You said when you came to college you didn't have any friends, was that the same as when you joined the military? Like having to start new and stuff or was it harder having to come to school and meet people compared to the navy?

TR: Yeah it was definitely harder coming here and being in college. When you're going to bootcamp you're in the same shoes as everyone else, even if they didn't leave their friends, their your support system. Because everyone has that fresh mindset of that were in the military. So it's easier to talk to them because you're experiencing the same stuff together. So the vet center is literally like being back in because either they've served or their spouse has served. But they understand the language and stuff, like if all the vets were in the library, someone's going to the dean's office because of the language and stuff. But I would just say look for like minded people, the vet center has always helped and stuff.

CM: What school subjects are you taking or currently interested in ?

TR: I'm taking classes for architectural design right now and i've just started the main classes for it but last semester I was just doing the basic general ed.

CM: So i'm guessing you have an interest in architecture then, what has been the hardest part of getting back to being academically successful so far here at mira costa?

TR: Getting back to writing properly at a college level, lots of papers and stuff, Stronass class.

CM: So how was that transition getting back into reading and writing, Did you feel behind or anything?

TR: No, so we would literally have a page and I wouldn't write anything until that day when it would be due at midnight , so I was just cramming it all in.

CM: But you were getting it done and such?

GF: Like procrastination?

TR: I wouldn't say that because I was going still but I guess stronass class specifically that's where I was still trying to use word and stuff I didn't know anything about google docs or anything like that or like other resources on how to write shit but other than that yeah.

CM: Are there any skills you learned in the military that you can apply to using at school?

TR: Yeah patience, and another one is being on time, I would say that's like a big thing I was taught.

CM: Do you do any reading outside of school?

TR: No, I strictly just read what's for school.

CM: Do you speak any bit of Tai?

TR: No I don't.

CM: How is your situation at school now compared to when you first transitioned?

TR: So my first semester, I was doing a math english history and communications class, all that packed together took a tole. Now I tone it down I'm doing my major classes and it's more enjoyable. I get a break from like my math and history class now to start on like my architecture side.

CM: How did your grandfather influence you to join the navy?

TR: So my grandfather the one that was in the army, he was like I guess growing up always like joe army and whenever he would punish us it would always be either situps or pushups, so I guess in the long run it was something that would be beneficial for more like discipline and me and him always bonded more than anyone else in my family.

CM: Why'd you choose the navy?

TR: So actually navy wasn't my first choice, when I went and saw a marine recruiter he's like oh you're too little, at the time it was all about being big and stuff. So I went to the air force and they were like your ASVAB is too low, so they said you can take this book and study for three months and then come back and we'll think about signing you, so fuck that. Navy was the next door down open and signed up that day.

CM: So the marines were your first choice?

TR: Yeah so I had already signed up in highschool and was just waiting to graduate.

CM: Is there anything you feel can get improved on campus for other vets or even other students?

TR: Yeah so an easier way to just find help you know, you here help is out there but you still have to go find it maybe just have it more open or out their.

CM: Are the student vet counselors veterans themselves and does that help with talking with them?

TR: I'm not sure if all of them are but a few and yeah I would say it does.

CM: What subjects were you good at in school?

TR: I like history a lot and in a lot of my free time I draw so I guess art and architecture, also when I was in singapore I saw a really cool structure it was three buildings with a cruise ship up on top of it.

CM: Did being on deployment strictly interest you in architecture

TR: Well No being from the suburban country I would always build stuff and such for fun with my grandfather.

GF: How long was it before you came to mira costa and knew you wanted to study architecture?

TR: So as a vet you sort of have to know what you want to major in before you apply so they can help you choose what classes to take.

CM: How long have you been attending Mira Costa?

TR: This will be my second semester.

CM: How long did you serve in the service for?

TR: All together five years.

GF: Do you feel as when you became an architect that you got inspired through art when you were leaving the navy and waiting to transition to school? Do you feel like you wanted to do architecture because of your love for drawing?

TR: Well it was between Engineering and that, so I want to get into solar energy power or something like that and that kind of goes with architecture, architecture is what was offered here so I had to choose between that and engineering.

GF: If you could go back into the service would you want to participate in the construction side of things?

TR: Yeah actually I would love to do that and I actually think that is the plan.

CM: Before the interview we were talking about you reenlisting this summer?

TR: I would go in as a reservist.

CM: Would you still have to go through the process of enlisting, and would you be doing the same thing?

TR: Actually i'm not to sure because if I went back into the same field you can't just really go out and build bombs once a month ya know, I think I would just have to go back and work on training a bunch.

CM: Is there anything you miss about home in Kentucky ?

TR: Negative this is home, California is home.

GF: What is one of your favorite things about California ?

TR: Last semester I met one of my good friends Rob, I've always wanted to surf so he pretty much helped me get that started he gave me a board and I bought a wetsuit and we go surfing all the time now. I only started last semester but I really like being out on the water and enjoying it.

GF: Have you thought about joining the surf team?

TR: No so I only started surfing last september ish because it wasn't very good, so I am fairly new to it but it's something I really do enjoy, you know I love being on the water so that's the closest I get to it.

CM: Does that correlate back to you being in the navy?

TR: Yeah actually because of being on the water and rocking back and forth just going through it, it's fun to be in. Last week or the week before we were in the water and there were like twenty dolphins with us in the waves, it was awesome you could see them in the water I actually almost hit one.

CM: So what was some of the stuff you guys would do on the ships for fun?

TR: To do on the ship literally nothing, it goes back to the brother thing you literally just fuck with each other all day, so this guy fell asleep in an empty rack it didn't have any sheets or anything, so we got a condom and lotion and put it on his hand and stuff, we put two condoms on someone's feet before, also someone wakes up before you and puts toothpaste on your handle so you grab it right when you wake up.

CM: What was it like coming back into port?

TR: It's always a work day so the ship would either pull in on payday or right before payday, so you're always going in with a fresh paycheck, everyone's already making plans of what to do and where to go.

CM: How was your overall experience in the navy?

TR: It was great, if I wasn't going back to school or married it would definitely be something I would still be doing.

CM: Does it take a toll on you and your wife when one was away on deployment?

TR: For her it wasn't too bad cause she was only gone for six months, but when you're used to cooking and coming home to two people and then you stop it's like what do I do now, I don't want to have all these dishes and then have the same meal for like three days now.

CM: Do you have any pets?

TR: Yeah so my wife has two rabbits.

CM: Do you like them?

TR: Yeah they only seem to chew up my shit though.

CM: Were there any cities that did not like Americans doing service over there?

TR: We were in Hong Kong and we were trying to get a taxi but because we were American right when we would walk up to them they would flip their signs to not in use, so we had to take this train all the way back.

CM: Were there any places that were stoked on the Navy being there?

TR: Well just Hong Kong treated us badly, when you go other places with small economies you come into port with so many people it helps out their economy immensely. But Hong Kong was so stable,

like we pulled into a pier and you got off and you were in a mall so they just didn't really have any benefits of us being their.