

Transcription: Ben Davis

Today is Friday, August 27th, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and I'll be interviewing Mr. Ben Davis. He is at his office in Huntsville, and I am at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. It means a lot, and I guess the first question, one we kind of always start off with is tell us a little bit about your life before you entered the Marine Corps.

Ben Davis: Well, I grew up in Oregon, and went to college. I always thought that I would go in the Marine Corps because my father had been a Marine officer as well. So I visited Quantico, Virginia, when I was about 7 years old, and from there it was kind of always in the back of my mind. I went to, in high school we had to go job shadow somebody as part of one of my classes, and I went and showed the officer, selection officer, and from there I stayed in contact with him and he kind of recruited me heavily the next fall when I became a freshman in college, and I signed on the dotted line when I was 18, and I did the platoon leader's course program which took me to two summers. I actually got to, the lucky chance to do three because I broke my leg the first year, the first summer.

And what was that like, because I know officer candidate school can be kind of a difficult and trying place, and I imagine to have your leg broken must have been a pretty frustrating experience. Kind of describe to us what your thoughts were. Did you always envision that you were going to go back and go through it even after you'd broke your leg?

Ben Davis: Yeah, I never had any doubt just because I broke it. So soon it took, I think I broke it a week and a half or so into the training itself. I was a young, bright-eyed 18-year-old, and so I was still kind of getting over the initial shock of showing up to OCS, so to me there was really no question because I felt like I hadn't finished what I started. So to me the first question when I got back to the OSO was how do I get back in the program. They actually disenrolled me and I had to start from scratch, which as you might know was pretty difficult getting all your paperwork together with the recommendations and everything, but as soon as I got healed up, I got back in the program and got back the very next summer.

When you went back, did you have any fear or concern that you would get injured again?

Ben Davis: I did just because I had broken that same, pressured that same shin bone when I was in 8th grade, and so having broken it twice about an inch apart on those two separate occasions, it did cross, it made me pretty nervous, and also my leg had atrophied and stuff, so I was trying to rehab it as well as prepare myself, the rest of my body for the difficult time at OCS.

Describe for us, especially for people listening that are not familiar with Quantico and officer candidate school a little bit of what that's like.

Ben Davis: Well, you get off the plane and those of us from climates that are a little bit more mild, you get off the plane in the summer time in Washington D.C. there at Reagan National and it's like a wall of heat has hit you, like you just stepped into a sauna. So that was the first thing I noticed. And then you look around and find your sergeant or whoever, the corporal that's going to drive the bus and take you, that's when the butterflies kind of kick in for me anyway, when you knew that that was kind of your last vestige of normal civilian life for the next six weeks. So

you get on that bus, and it's similar to the experience with boot camp, although we don't have the yellow footprints as I recall, and also it's not in the middle of the night, but it still, for what I was experiencing was just as nerve racking because as soon as you get off the bus, you're now in the hands of, even though they weren't your drill instructors for the next six weeks, they were still some pretty unfriendly folks waiting for you.

I know at Quantico, a lot of candidates talk about that first day that the sergeant instructors get them because they go through the in processing of medical and admin and that sort of thing, and then there's a point where the sergeant instructors take over and start screaming and yelling, and then do a thing called the C bag drag. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about what the C bag drag is and your memories of that.

Ben Davis: Well, the C bag drag, that is a very eventful time in a young candidate's life. It starts like I said from the bus where you get off the bus – I'm sorry, I was mixing my thoughts. When you go and sit in a quonset hut classroom, it's over there by the medical center and stuff, and the little headquarter building I think, and on the opposite end of that, it's probably I don't know, 100-150 yards long, and you have all the squad bays that are in the barracks, and in order to get from the place you're at in that classroom, you've got to drag your C bag 150 yards or so across the parade deck which is scalding hot, and I think they also call it the grinder. Anyway, they get you in formation there in the classroom, or not really in formation, but they tell you to stand up and get all your gear ready, and then once they tell you to go, chairs are flying, tables are flying, elbows, it's like a mosh pit, people are running into each other and all you can do is focus on yourself and getting your stuff picked up and headed in the right direction, and it's so, there's so much, it's such a major melee that you kind of lose track of time. I don't know what your experience was, but you lose yourself in this strange, give a war tech some time, and so you kind of get from point A to point B just on nerves and excitement and you pretty much, it's not so much a drag, you're actually running because the sergeant instructors are screaming at you the whole way and you definitely don't want to be toward the end of the bunch. You want to be in the middle, probably not towards the front because then you'll still get screamed at, but you want to kind of just get in the middle and then once you get there, that's when it really gets exciting because you get in formation of the platoon and they start screaming at you and I think, it just depends on who you get as a drill instructor, but my first year they made us dump our suitcase or our C bag or whatever we had, they made us dump everything out. So at that point it's pretty difficult because you've got stuff flying all over the place and spilling and jars come undone or whatever the case, and so you do the best you can to get it all put back in. But it's pretty scary time because you know if some of your stuff rolls away or you lose track of it, then you're going to pay for it later because you won't have what you need.

When the training all starts up, and I know that the days are really long and there's not a lot of sleep and a lot of physical activity and there's also classroom time, what did you find the most challenging during your time there at OCS?

Ben Davis: Probably like you said the lack of sleep. A lot of people wouldn't necessarily draw the correlation between needing to have mental awareness just to do physical training, but when you wake up first thing in the morning and you're off to the PT field, if you're real tired, you may not understand what they're telling you to do or it may just not click, and you're running the risk of getting in trouble. A couple of times, as a matter of fact I think it was because of you, James Crabtree, you were off at medical because as you recall we were rack mates, you were off at medical getting your injury looked at, and I was carrying your rifle, and the slew keeper had broken, and as it started to fall to the ground I caught it with my left hand, but in the meantime,

the barrel had flagged a few of the other candidates. Well I got to write a 300-word essay about why we don't flag candidates.

I had never heard that story. I didn't realize that.

Ben Davis: Yeah, so obviously there is no animosity or ill will towards you. It was just something that happens but that leads back to what I was getting at is that in order to finish this 300-word essay where 5 letters make a word, I had to stay up all night at the head there, and I was dozing off falling to sleep while I was writing it, and it's kind of funny because I ended up writing kind of a smart aleck response, just to catch and see if the drill instructors would read it or not. And sure enough they didn't because otherwise I would have been in a lot more trouble.

Yeah, I think the key, you know candidates are assigned those essays as punishment, and if you can be really verbose and you have the ability to write a lot quickly, it's not that big of a deal. However, I had a couple of times having to write essays and because they would just assign them at random to people it seemed like at times. You know, the whole platoon would have to write one or they would just throw them out, just general harassment. But if you could go off on long tangents and just start writing all sorts of stuff, because like you said they never read them. They obviously didn't have the time to read 'em and they weren't looking for grammar or story line, they just wanted to see the word count. I think I remember writing one, I don't even remember what the topic was, I think our platoon had not done a proper field day at a head or something, so we all had to write about hygiene and sanitation and I went off on tangents about how Napoleon's army had to maintain good hygiene and sanitation on their long marches to Russia, just all sorts of whacky stuff that allowed me to get a lot of words.

Ben Davis: Yeah, I wrote about that if you were to flag a candidate it might ensue a riot because you then caused him to think you were pointing a lesson at him. But I just kind of took it the more narrative or storytelling type route, but it was pretty funny because I had a good laugh at it that I didn't get into further trouble for doing that. But like you said, you've got to get, while you're writing if you're in a groove, you've got to keep going until you get your 300 words because otherwise like with me it pretty much did take all night, so luckily I think in my three summers there, I think I only wrote maybe three or four essays, so I did a pretty good job at blending in and being a fly on the wall.

Describe the physical training. I know that is a big, big deal at OCS where every morning except Sunday you are spending about two or three hours doing physical training and I know it's a big thing to be in shape before you even get there. Talk a little bit about your memories of the physical training at OCS.

Ben Davis: That kind of correlates to what I was talking about. I think I would much rather, at boot camp you get what they call thrashed or sent to the pit, that stuff you really don't have to engage your brain, but at OCS where your punishment was right in those ____, you now move in time at no sleep, and if you get sent to the pit at boot camp, you're losing time during the day which you're still going to be able to recover at night when you sleep, I would imagine. I didn't go through it myself, but I think that sleep is really key in, and I discussed that earlier as well with it being key to your physical training, like I say coming from the west coast, with the program only being six weeks long, it usually took me about three or four weeks to get acclimated, and by that time you're in your downward swing.

Well it was six weeks long, but you did two summers so you did 12 weeks. It was six weeks long but you did two different increments.

Ben Davis: That's right, so you go to a junior class and then a senior class, but like I said, because I broke my leg, I ended up doing about 15-1/2 weeks.

Talk about that a bit, too, because that's unique to the Marine Corps in the way they have the option of doing the split summers at OCS. I know basic training, a recruit goes and they do 13 weeks straight through, and there's also like after I got hurt, I went back to OCS and I did 10 weeks straight through. What was it like going for six weeks, being in that hell, and then going back home to school and everything, and then having to come back the next summer and do another six weeks of that?

Ben Davis: For me it really wasn't that bad because I'm sure you felt the same way, but you kind of get filled with this sense of pride once you completed the first six. I'm sure it's different for everybody, but for me it was like I was feeding on that and I couldn't wait to get back the next summer. There's a lot of people who were, tried it out, the program, and they just decided not to come back, but I think for guys like us, I couldn't wait to go back and get it done with. It's interesting that both you and I were hurt. I would say I think there's probably a majority of candidates that do have injuries where you get sent home and not just recycled. I think the attrition rate is probably pretty high where they don't come back. It is such a taxing, I mean it's not for everybody and if you get injured and the thought of having to start from scratch, it's pretty daunting.

Talk a little bit too about the attrition rate. I know in boot camp unless you get hurt, you're pretty much gonna graduate from basic training, but at officer candidate school, the attrition rate is sometimes 20, 30, 40 percent of a platoon. Talk about the attrition rate in the platoons that you were in.

Ben Davis: Well, to give you an idea, someone told me along the way I think while we were there at OCS I think they thought like three percent of the American population will ever become a Marine, and of that three percent, only one percent will ever become a Marine officer. So right there you've already got pretty low numbers to begin with.

I'm sure it's even less than that.

Ben Davis: Right, to give you a better idea, I think the first year I started we had a company of four platoons with around 70 candidates in each platoon. When I went back, that was my junior class, and when I went back for the senior class, it was three platoons of 39 to start. So right there it shows you it was probably cut in half. And of that three platoons of 39, you attrite even more to where you're cutting because of injuries or people that just fail out, you're already cutting another 10 to 20 candidates out of that company, so the attrition rate is, although I know a lot of the junior Marines had the misconception that boot camp is so hard, and it's cool, it didn't even compare.

I think also, too, at OCS, you really, they give you enough rope to hang yourself with. At boot camp, you're gonna get through, they're gonna push you through it. But at OCS, any little thing could get you sent out. I remember integrity being a big one and having one of our candidates sent home, kicked out simply because he had lied about something and was caught. Did you see similar things in your platoons?

Ben Davis: Yeah I did, whether it be from lying to if they had failed something and said that they, I guess even there was some cases where some candidates were disagreeing and arguing and I think that got them sent home. I mean it could be a variety of things but the bottom line is like you said, there's so much riding on your time there, where like you said in boot camp you're gonna get through no matter what unless your Congressman gets involved or something, but for OCS there's that added stress and apprehension that you don't know if you're going to make it. Although I showed up in what I considered myself to be pretty tip top shape, throw in that humidity of Quantico and the hills and mountains that we were hiking up, you just never know. It's definitely a taxing situation. I think seniors was a lot easier because you realize that you can do it. At juniors it was a little bit more stressful.

I know, too, in boot camp, really they won't let you quit. They push you through there. But I know at OCS you could quit and there were some that after the first three or four weeks when they were allowed to quit, I remember in our platoon we had some that actually did drop out.

Ben Davis: Right, and as you remember, they actually not only can you quit, but they prey on the people and they encourage those to quit that they think are weak, and it's to me the analogy would be somewhere of piranhas or sharks swarming. I remember this poor, he was just a kid at the time, but you're actually a young man at that point, not a kid, but he had done something, I don't remember what it was. It was on the PT field I think he had just quit, and they swarm in like a pack of hyenas or something and they ended up having him crying and he was in tears and I think he was hauled off the next day. We never saw him again. So like I was saying, it's just that added stress of any day -

Rather have them do that at OCS than in the battlefield where Marines are counting on him for leadership.

Ben Davis: That's right, and a lot of people don't understand. They say well why, some friends of my girlfriend made the comment why are they so mean to you? They could do training differently. I said well if you're not able to handle the stress of officer candidate school, then there's certainly no way you're going to be able to handle the stress of the battlefield.

Exactly and I think that's a good segway for us. I know from there you went through six months of the basic school which all officers go through and that's a pretty intense experience, and then you were on to artillery school and then finally into the fleet. But then speaking of combat, tell us a little bit about your going into Iraq and all of your memories from that time.

Ben Davis: I was attached to 2nd Right Armor Reconnaissance Battalion as a liaison officer, so I had three forward observer teams that were working for me, and I reported directly to the battalion commander as an asset. I remember we were in Kuwait for about three or four weeks I think and then at one point they moved us up within five kilometers of the border and I just remember there were a lot of strange feelings because at this point all you've ever seen is video games or movies, and at this point it becomes a reality. I think the first time it really ever hit me was when the scud missiles were being fired toward the border and we had those reports in the command post that they were talking about Iraqi battalions moving their tanks up to the border, and so at that point you try to tighten your gear and stuff and get ready. I remember when we crossed the border, it was a pretty eerie feeling because we had gone through, you know the engineers went and cut through. There was a berm that was very large. I can't remember, it must've been 15 feet tall, 20 feet tall, and I think it had been burned up on the border after the

first Gulf War. Anyway, our engineers, and also a concertine wire fence that was probably 10-20 feet wide as well, plus 20 feet tall. So they had multiple strands of chain link and concertine. It was a pretty substantial border fence. But soon our engineers cut through the berm and then we were driving through a bottleneck. But I remember the eerie feeling because on the other side, it's like you were going through an old graveyard of vehicles if you will. There was burned out tanks from the first Gulf War -

Still there, 13+ years later I guess.

Ben Davis: Right, and so your first thought is did these just happen, but then as you get closer and closer you saw that no, these were old, burned out vehicles from the past war. But it just added to it, that morning, I think we left in the middle of the night probably midnight or 2 o'clock on the morning, I don't recall exactly, but there was a very dense fog, too, so that made it even more eerie and to cross into Iraq.

What did you guys expect to encounter? What did your battalion commander say or what was kind of in your mind in terms of your expectations when you were rolling through that first night?

Ben Davis: Well, like I said, we had heard, there were situation reports where they had supposedly a bunch of Iraqi tanks up on the border, but also before we got there, the word to move out, we had seen a bunch of rocket assisted propellant artillery rounds that were flying through the night sky, and those will go 30,000 kilometers, so -

Being fired by our side?

Ben Davis: Right, those were being fired by us probably from my cohorts from 10th Marines actually, but so by the time we actually rolled, I wasn't really concerned about meeting any resistance there at the border. We were actually going up kind of the west side. You heard a lot about some fighting up in the oil fields on the very far east, but my battalion was going up kind of the middle of the country straight to Baghdad, so we actually once we crossed the border we just ran into open desert and kind of pushed the pedal to the metal at that point.

Did you ever run across any Iraqi troops that tried to surrender to you, or any civilians?

Ben Davis: For the first few days, like I said, we were just kind of out in the open desert on our own, and then once we got to a major highway we started meeting some resistance along each little town that we would go through. We were getting shot at. But as far as the actual any Iraqis surrendering, we didn't really see too much of that until we got closer to Baghdad and then you would see all kinds of uniforms thrown on the ground and you'd see these groups of young men, age 20 to 40 walking your way, and doing the surrender type motions with their hands, but I don't think my battalion really handled, we were kind of out in the front of the RCT, the regimental combat team.

Did you ever go into any of the towns ultimately or did you always stay more out on the perimeter?

Ben Davis: No, we stayed on the highway and our objective was to get to Baghdad as fast as we could, and we ended up flying up the highway as fast as we could and all our resistance was met right there pretty much on the roads. There was a little town that we passed through that their

housing and complexes or compounds I mean, they were all pretty close proximity to the highway itself.

So how long was it before you felt like things were pretty well in hand and that there was not gonna be the chemical attacks and the real fierce resistance that Saddam had been advertising?

Ben Davis: I think that had taken three or four days that we were in those mop suits. I forget, I want to say that we were in a little run down business, like a warehouse, just southeast of Baghdad, so this had been probably three or four days into the fight, and at that point they told us we could take our mop suits off, and that was before we headed into Baghdad. So we kind of knew I think at that point Baghdad had fallen anyway, so I was never real concerned about it anyway just because the resistance we were meeting wasn't any kind of organized, we never had artillery fights or anything like that. It was all just small arms from rogue -

And you never encountered any of the Fedayeen forces like they did on Nasirayah?

Ben Davis: I actually went through on Nasirayah, so we did encounter them but by that point I think the 2nd Battalion, was it 28 that had gotten into trouble there, or I don't remember exactly, I think it was 28 and 31 maybe. But anyway, they were ahead of us and so by that point, again, we were just taking pot shots from individuals. We didn't feel a whole lot of fighting force.

When did you finally learn that most of the fighting was over, or the situation was pretty much completed?

Ben Davis: It's a little bit difficult to recall, but I want to say it was after we got to Baghdad, we then got a mission, again I was in light armor reconnaissance, so we were having mobile, we had our vehicle was called a light armored vehicle, and it was an 8-wheel vehicle much like the Army Striker, with heavy fire power on -

Coaxial, was it -

Ben Davis: We had a coax, and we also had a 25mm canon unlike the Army Striker, so we had a lot more fire power, and we also had some variants with us where it's called a gow and it was designed for anti-aircraft, but it was actually a Gatling gun with five 25mm canons on each barrel, to make it turn into a Gatling gun. So we had quite a bit of fire power. We had a platoon of tanks with us and we had, oftentimes we had escorts from Elo, from the Cobras, so we were pretty armed up there. But as far as once we got sent north from Baghdad up to Tikrit, which is Saddam Hussein's home town where he came from, we got sent up there and at that point we met some resistance as well, but pretty much it died down. So at that point we were now shifting into, I can remember one of our things was we got intelligence that Chemical Ali was headed our way, and so we were now focused on trying to catch the high visibility -

High value targets?

Ben Davis: Yeah, stuff like that.

You mentioned going up to Tikrit, you mentioned Saddam, did you see any of his statues or paintings, murals, that sort of thing while you were there?

Ben Davis: I saw statues all throughout the country pretty much, but as far as like ____, just because of my job as the liaison officer, we never really had a chance. It was mainly the intelligence officers who always, within the company commanders or what not, they got to go to the palaces. So I didn't see a whole lot of the spectacular things that people brought back pictures of. I didn't get to witness much of that.

You didn't get to see them pull down his statute in that one square –

Ben Davis: No, but there's a very famous picture, not picture, but a sight that people I think would recognize of the crossed swords in Baghdad. I think it's in front of one of their soccer fields or something like that. We drove right past there quite often.

That's cool. What were the civilians like at that point? Did you see much of them?

Ben Davis: We actually encountered them. Once we got on those main highways, we were starting to encounter civilians all the time and for the most part they were very happy to see us. There was always a strange aura about them though that I never knew if they were going to pull a weapon out, because we had had the encounters where people in buses were waving white flags and then as our battalion would roll by they would open fire on us. So I was always highly skeptical and cautious of civilians and tried to keep them away from our vehicle. But as you probably recall, that's pretty much impossible because of the way their traffic is set up. You just can't keep them away from your vehicle without actually shooting them.

Sure, I know, too, that was before a lot of the IEDs and land mines and all that sort of thing started happening. It was all several months later that kind of the organized Saddam forces, the Baathist forces started doing their insurgency stuff. So how long ultimately did you spend in Iraq?

Ben Davis: I think I was there around five months, six when you include the time down in Kuwait, and well and the time when we went back down to Kuwait. It was actually a fairly quick deployment, although it seemed like an eternity, it was pretty quick.

When did you finally get back home? Do you remember the month?

Ben Davis: I think June, at the end of June or the first of July.

June or July of 2003?

Ben Davis: That's right.

What was that like getting to come back home and see family and stuff again?

Ben Davis: Oh, it was a pretty good feeling. You don't really realize how much you depend on your family and the support that they give until you're in a situation like that. It was pretty neat. My mom's a school teacher and I had told my parents that I was flying home because I was able to stand in line, I think I actually stood in line for a couple of hours to use a computer at the division headquarters in D1E in Iraq, and I ended up sending them an email telling them I'd be home to the States, but then I actually surprised them and flew home and I just showed up to my mom's classroom on her last day of school. So that was pretty neat.

Yeah, that's a pretty cool thing. I never knew that story.

Ben Davis: So they knew I was going to be home, I think I had told them that following Monday or something like that, and that was on a Friday, and then my dad had no idea so when we got home, my mom told him she needed help with the groceries or something, and he went outside and I was standing around the side of the house and then just – it was pretty tear jerking situation. My parents, my dad always tries to act tough, but the one time I've ever heard him cry was before I left to go across the border into Iraq from Kuwait.

Sure, I think anyone that's been there can identify with that. So tell us, too, I know when you were there you got hurt a little bit. Maybe tell a little bit about that situation, what happened there.

Ben Davis: OK, well like I was saying, we were going over the open desert at pretty high rates of speed, and our vehicle, although it was a light armored vehicle, it was still very dangerous. So our driver had fallen asleep. We came to a security halt, a quick one for five minutes or so just to take a break real quick, and my driver because these guys have been pushed to the limit – they had driven for two or three days straight to get us down from Kuwait up to where we were at in part of southern Iraq. He fell asleep and once we woke him up, he got going and it's funny because in all your training throughout all your Marine Corps career, they will tell you there is no catch up speed when you're in a convoy. In combat, that doesn't really apply, so our driver was going probably 60 to 80 mph trying to catch up to the lead vehicle, and I was talking on the radio because like I said, I was the artillery liaison officer, so I was keeping in contact with my forward observers to find out their positions and stuff, and next thing I knew, my friend who was the fire officer for the battalion, he was gesturing and pointing and hitting me on the shoulder, because we, in those vehicles you ride with your torso exposed so you can be a rifleman basically on top. It's basically an armored personnel carrier. So we were riding up top and with a view of the whole layout there, and I had my back turned, but when he finally got my attention, I turned to the front to look and it was right around that time that I saw what was going on. We were about to go over a ravine that was probably 15 feet high on the other side, and so it was like a ramp. We went up the one side and literally jumped off it, and at this point I had crouched down to brace myself for the impact, but when we landed thank heavens we didn't roll, because if we had, all of those of us riding up top would've been crushed under the vehicle, but we landed on all eight wheels somehow miraculously, but in the mean time the force of the impact slammed me into the turret there and the hatch cover had come from it's locked position and broke free and hit me over the head. So the same buddy who alerted me, he got hurt, too. He cracked a couple of ribs and I hurt my ribs. I never had any x-rays so I don't know if they were cracked or not, but I also jammed my wrist pretty bad where I thought it was broken because I couldn't use my hand for a couple of days and I hurt my jaw from the chin strap on my helmet slice my jaw open pretty good.

Didn't you also have some neck and back injuries from that?

Ben Davis: Yeah, and that's the thing is that with all those other little injuries, I didn't realize that my neck was hurting. I have a journal that I kept and it says in there that I had extreme, some neck pain and it wasn't until months later once we were back States that I woke up one morning and was in the shower and I couldn't move my neck, and so from there I found out that I had herniated disks that were pressing on my spinal cord, and I ultimately had to have surgery to remove and then fuse my vertebrae together. I still have herniated disks in my back as well.

And you got a disability rating from the VA because of that?

Ben Davis: Yeah, they rated me a 40 percent.

Describe that process because I know there's been a lot of talk and frustration with the VA, some of the bureaucracy and that sort of thing. How did your particular case go?

Ben Davis: For me, the initial process was fairly easy. I was very lucky that I had good guidance. There was a very senior staff NCO in my battalion who was about to get out and he had gone through the same process, so he gave me the direction I needed to go. I actually went to the Disabled American Veterans Office there at Camp Lejeune before I ever got out and, I mean I'm talking three or four months in advance I did all this, and so I had my VA physical, I had all my paperwork, everything was locked on before I ever stepped off Camp Lejeune, and I think it wasn't but a month after I came off of active duty that I already had my first disability check, so I think where people run into trouble is when they're not proactive and they don't seek out the guidance they need before they come off active duty, so then -

Yeah, they wait too late -

Ben Davis: Because once you're out, then it's a waiting game of now you have to wait on the VA to move at their pace. So when you're on active duty and you have the DAV or the American Allegiance or whoever at your disposal to help, it's a lot easier. I know a lot of people had a bad experience, but I think a lot of it is self-inflicted just because also another big problem a lot people have is they don't, a lot of Marines especially, we're so hard headed that we don't go document. You don't go to sick call because you suck it up and like kind of like to battle, show I had those injuries, but what could you do – you weren't going to leave your Marines, so a lot of the problem comes in the documentation because the VA is demanding you to have prints, and I had with my broken leg, I mean I had it documented, but even though they said that I should be fine, even though my leg hurt sometimes. But so all in all, my experience was OK. In recent years, I've tried to go back and be re-evaluated because my back has really been giving me a lot of issues, and that experience was much worse because now you're looking at civilian, I had a civilian doctor, some guy who couldn't even speak English and he saw me for like five minutes.

Yeah, I can understand.

Ben Davis: And I know a lot of older vets, like my dad, he spoke of one of his doctors, and one of his best friends was a pilot in Vietnam and he went to the VA doctor, and guess who his doctor was, a Vietnamese doctor. So it's very ironic that a lot of your doctors are foreigners who can't speak English, and in this guy's case he had been a prisoner of war so he flipped out when he saw that his doctor was like his former enemy.

Yeah, I can understand. Well I've got to tell you, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today, and I think as I mentioned before we started the interview that a lot of, we have documents here that go back several hundred years. We have a lot of history here, and our hope behind this program, the reason why Commissioner Patterson started it was to record these stories from our veterans so that future generations can hear them for posterity so that these stories won't be lost to time. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to anyone listening potentially a hundred, two hundred years from now to this interview, in particular about your service or that sort of thing?

Ben Davis: Well, it's not so much my service but all those that have gone before us and the camaraderie that the Marine Corps has and not only that, but American service members. Our nation wouldn't be great if we didn't have those that were the volunteer service. So I guess a couple of hundred years down the road I would hope that they still have that same fighting spirit and that distinguishes us as a nation throughout the world. The Marines have been the finest fighting force in the world for 300 years and I'm sure that won't ever change.

That's right, I hope so. Well again, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the Land Office, he's a veteran, I'm a veteran, and there's a lot of us that have served, but even those here at the Land Office that haven't served, we want to thank you for your service to our country and this program is just a small way of saying thanks.

Ben Davis: Well I appreciate that, but like I said, I was just doing my job and semper fidelis means a lot not only to the Marine Corps, but being always faithful to your country, it's something I feel like is in jeopardy right now, so I'm hoping a couple of hundred years down the road that we regain control of ourselves and get back to the great nation that we should be.

That's right, well thanks a lot.

Ben Davis: I appreciate your service as well, and like I said, all those that went before us.

Thanks, well this concludes the interview, thanks very much.

[End of recording]