

Transcription: Allen Zehr

Today is Friday, July 29, 2011. My name is James Crabtree and today I'll be interviewing Mr. Allen Zehr. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Zehr is at his residence in Blue Ridge. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's always an honor for us. The first question we always start off with is just tell us a little bit about your life and your background before you entered the military.

Allen Zehr: Okay. My background is pretty wild because my family, when I was growing up, my mom just did random jobs. My parents divorced when I was just really little and my dad died when I was 11. So my mom worked three jobs. I lived all over the United States. In Ohio, Georgia, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, mostly in the south. So, growing up was really wild 'cause I got kind of a broad perspective and no matter where we were, the interesting thing was we had family land in Blue Ridge, Texas and we'd always just, they'd either send me and my sister out or they'd come too and we'd spend the summers in Texas. That was always real interesting. Especially 'cause how hot it is.

You have siblings? Brother and sister?

Allen Zehr: Yes. I have two sisters and a younger brother.

And so, you consider Texas home then?

Allen Zehr: Yes.

Okay. So tell us, then, going through your childhood, you're moving around a lot. At what point did you think you might want to enter the military?

Allen Zehr: It was always pretty interesting to me. I mean, it may sound lying, but I remember when I was a kid I had a G.I Joes and I always thought that was really cool. For me really, when I turned into a teenager, I was a rebel. I didn't wanna really do the military and then 9/11 happened, and then I said I wanted to go.

Were you still in high school?

Allen Zehr: I was. I was still in high school. Because I'd moved around so much, actually they told me it'd take me an extra year to graduate. I told 'em, you know, that wasn't going to work for me. So I got my GED and I went in the service shortly after.

So you were kind of like your senior year timeframe when 9/11 happened. Were you in school that day?

Allen Zehr: Yes. Actually I was.

Tell us a little bit about your memories of that day and, I guess you knew at that point you were going in?

Allen Zehr: Well, it was the picture taking day, you know, they do the yearbooks, and your family buys the pictures. And I had no idea that it had happened 'cause they weren't telling anybody until I went to get my picture taken, and the guys were talking about it. And I was just like, "What are they talking about?" You know, because I mean, when something happened in America, at least since I was born, and then we saw it on the news, and I was like, "Wow, this is crazy." Actually, when I saw this initially was when I went home and I saw the second plane flying into the tower. And I was just like, "No way that plane was off course that bad to fly into a building." And it was really sad, you know, the smoke's coming out with people jumping out of the building and it was pretty bad.

And so, at that point, you make the decision that you want to join the military at some point. Did you know what branch of service you were wanting to go into?

Allen Zehr: Well, that's the interesting thing. I actually, when I was growing up, _ and I'd seen Green Berets and I always thought that was the coolest thing ever, you know, the focus on indigenous people. That's what I wanted to do, to be a Green Beret. And because I had not completed high school, they said, no, we can't give you a contract. Anyone I talked to said, "You know, if they don't give you a contract, they're not giving you anything you want." And so I walked next door to the Marine recruiter and I said, "They won't let me be Special Forces. The Marines infantry is about as good as you can get, from my understanding." And he said, "Well, yeah, we'll take ya." So I enlisted. This was in 2004, December 20th, I want to say, is when I went down and did my first oath.

And did you enter the delayed entry program or did you ship out pretty quickly?

Allen Zehr: I entered the delayed entry program for like two weeks.

So not very long?

Allen Zehr: No. They said they didn't want to ship me out during Christmas or New Year's. They said, "How would January 17th or 18th work for you?" I was like, I was kinda nervous, it was like, "Wow, that quick?" And I was like, "Whatever, go ahead, sign me down." And they did and I remember going down and I was like, "Man, this is gonna suck!" And, so, yeah because, I mean, people were telling me like how boot camp was. I didn't really know 'cause no one in my family had been in the service really ever talked about basic training 'cause they always went in during wartime and so the focus wasn't on that. My grandfather was in the Marines. His stories of basic training were horrible. It was just like, "This is going to be a nightmare."

And did you think you were ready for it physically?

Allen Zehr: Yeah. I was in pretty good shape and I was running and doing pull-ups and stuff, and I was pretty, I was ready for it.

I know some guys that go in, the ones that would get hurt were the ones, a lot of times who hadn't gotten ready at all and they would get stress fractures and that sort of thing.

Allen Zehr: Oh yeah. I think everybody gets a little bit of stress fracture. I remember my legs were hurtin' from runnin' around all day and marching and then carrying a pack. That was the

only thing I was worried about 'cause I'd never really carried a pack of stuff for such a long distance. That was a rude awakening.

Did you go to the enlistment processing station as soon as you signed up and then you went back two weeks later to get shipped out? Or did you only go down there one time?

Allen Zehr: I went down there twice. The first time I did my contract and did my initial oath. And then the second time, I swore in again and then, you know, started the process of flying out to MCRD, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego.

Tell us about that trip.

Allen Zehr: It was interesting. I remember one of the kids sort of had a Mohawk. I was like, "Dude, you're about the dumbest person in this line." And he was like, "Aw, it'll be all right. It's only three months." But it was pretty good, man, they gave us a meal ticket, rode on the airplane, fed us, everything was nice. And I was just like, "Wow," you know. "All right, this looks good." And then, of course, you get off the plane and the guy, you know, is just yellin' at you and he just looked so fierce, you're just like, "Man, this guy looks like he's going to just run all over me." But you know, you're standing there and then he gets you on the bus and he's like, "Y'all better keep your hands in your laps. If I see anyone looking around, I'm gonna tear you up." And it's just like, man, you know, I was actually like, "Oh crap, I get to live with this guy for the next three months?" You know, I didn't know you get assigned drill instructors and all that stuff. I was totally going into it, you know, double blind. So yeah, and then we finally got there and got on the yellow footprints and someone's just hollerin' something and that's how it was for a while.

Did you feel like you were in a bit of a fog that first night when you arrived at the depot and they're yelling and have you in the footprints and that sort of thing?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, it's pretty crazy 'cause actually, I think we only got a little bit of sleep, which was fine because we came in the middle of the night and everybody slept on the plane. But, no, I just remember the next day was real interesting. It felt like, you know, you're a cattle. In line for the chute to get vaccinated. Yeah, it's like an assembly line and they're sticking you on both shoulders and then you step forward and they stick you in both arms. You know, that was interesting.

What were most of the recruits like in your platoon? I know they were all from west of the Mississippi. What were they like in terms of, at that point, it's one thing to enter the Marine Corps during peace time, but to have gone in after 9/11, you know that there's wars going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. What was the average recruit like in your platoon?

Allen Zehr: Well, the interesting thing is that, it's good to say right now, is I've had a lot of people talk and be like, "Oh, you know, going in the military is such a good choice." All these benefits and stuff like that. And everyone that I knew, when I went through boot camp and stuff like that, they didn't know about any of those benefits. And everyone there was like, "Well, you know, the country needs men to volunteer and here I am. And I think it'd be a good thing to do." A lot of guys were saying, you know, like such and such family members have stepped up when the time was needed for people to do that. It was really nice and the interesting too was most of

you were from Texas. And that's when I found out why 50% of the Marine Corps is from the State of Texas.

It's certainly a large number. Definitely true. Tell us about your drill instructors.

Allen Zehr: Man, they were terrifying. One guy, you know, they wear their Charlies when you first meet 'em at the uniform. They got their ribbons and the guy that was our, I guess you call him your J Hat, supposed to teach you everything, he had a stack that went all the way up to his shoulder, and you were just like, "Wow, this guy's some kind of big hero." And he was. Found out some stuff about him. But he was crazy, at least I thought so. He had a pair of pipes on him. He could yell and make your ears wanna bleed. And he's running us around in circles and all kinds of stuff, and, I mean, he wasn't bad, but in the end he's just, "I just wanna make sure you guys were ready for whatever comes your way." And he told us about his experience about being in Iraq and stuff and he said that he just wanted to make sure the Marines were gettin' what they needed. And he said, "So we're all gonna need it." And he was right. Sometimes I was pretty sure that he was crazy.

I think it's that way with every platoon. There's the senior drill instructor, there's kind of like the father figure that he's there to kind of mentor you guys. And then if you make him mad, you know that things are really bad. But then there's always the one drill instructor that's the heavy hat that always angry and yelling. And then there's a few others that kind of fill that place in between. Tell us a little bit about some of the moments in basic training that stand out the most to you.

Allen Zehr: Well, one of the hardest things in basic training, which is so funny now, was the rope. Because I'd never climbed a rope. And I couldn't figure it out, and they're like, "We're going to fail you if you don't climb this rope." Which I found out later wasn't true at all. But I was so scared just about the rope because I always knew it was the one thing that was going to fail me. I shot good. I was keeping up in the runs and the hops and everything else. I mean, I even had my pack break on me in The Crucible, carried it almost with one strap, but, you know, like six miles. But I couldn't climb the fricking rope. And, that always stuck out in my mind, you know, really big. Another thing was how cool I thought it was that they went through the history of the Marine Corps. They weren't just making, you've all heard it, "Oh, you know, Marines are cannon fodder," and stuff like that. That's not true, actually. We go in and they educate us on, you know, what being a Marine is supposed to be. And I always thought it was really good how they sit down and like, "Okay, well here's an ethics class, basically, you know, this is what we stand for." And they would bring up scenarios and we'd talk about it and I was just like, "Wow." 'Cause you know, you would've thought that Marines like all they do is run around in circles and you know, or little robots, and it's not true. They teach you, you know, tactics in basic training.

Yeah. It's people who don't know what they're talking about. I agree. I'm biased as a Marine myself, but I think the Marine Corps does a better job than any other branch in teaching its customs and its traditions and its history, and it starts from day one in boot camp. You can ask any Marine, you know, when's the Marine Corps birthday or who's Chesty Puller, or things like that, and you ask the equivalent of any soldier and they might not be able to know that sort of thing.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, I would hope a Marine would know who Chesty was. I don't know about you, but they made us drink that canteen every night and they'd do like, "Okay, toast to Chesty." And you go like, "To Chesty." And you had to drink the whole thing.

We did that. And then you'd hold the canteen upside down over your head to prove you drank the whole thing.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. Exactly. And it was almost like torment. You had to 'cause we were sweatin' so much and everything, but in the middle of the night, you'd be so asleep, you'd wake up, like, "Oh, I gotta go to the bathroom."

Going back to the rope climb, I guess you finally got up the rope, right?

Allen Zehr: Well yeah, I figured out I was strong enough not to even worry about my legs. So I just climbed around. Like I didn't freehand it 'cause I tried that before and they yelled at me, but I made it look like I was holding on with my feet, and I just freehanded it most of the way up the rope.

That's kind of the hard way to do it.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, it sucks, but I was scared to death. No way I'm going back to first phase and redoing all that.

Were you having trouble with the S method of putting, wrapping the rope around your foot?

Allen Zehr: They wanted me to do the leg wrap thing and eventually what I found out was that I did the S method. I just went right up like it was easy.

Exactly. I was wondering. I never did the leg wrap either but the S style is like the easiest thing in the world.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, it is. The leg wrap, I would do it and I would stand on my toes, and I'd just slide right down that rope. And I was just like, I just didn't know what to do.

It's kind of weird they were teaching you that.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. It was just the way it happened, I guess. That's the way that went.

I think most of the Marines that I can remember with rope climbs, seems like 90% of them or more used the S method of climbing the rope because it's just the easiest. I mean you can stay up there all day that way.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. And you can manipulate the rope easier too. You can readjust. Yeah. And now that I'm thinking about it, probably the most challenging time in boot camp, was actually, I had pneumonia. A lot of guys got it. I had a really high fever and they put me in the sick platoon for a week so I picked up with a later.

So you had to pick up with a later platoon?

Allen Zehr: Yeah.

That couldn't have been good. So you got a whole new set of drill instructors, a whole new group of recruits. What was that like?

Allen Zehr: Well, at first, I was just like, "Oh man, I've ruined everything." And you don't know what's going to happen. They tell you you're going back to first phase, basically scare the crap out of you, see if you can just take it, I guess. No, I remember they made us pack everything up and a couple of guys that got dropped with me. One guy's name was Paul, and he was a Navajo Indian. It's funny because me and him ended up on the same unit and everything but he was a radio operator. But I remember on the walk over he was like trying to make us go fast and I started to pass out, big time. The first time the guy was nice to me, you know. No, that was probably the worst thing because you know you're sitting in that sick platoon and you're just like, "Wow, I'm not making any progress. I'm still getting yelled at."

They still yell at you when you're supposed to be recuperating, I guess.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. Well, you know, I mean there's times when you're having to move to chow hall or whatever and, you know, got something to yell about.

Did they let you sleep more?

Allen Zehr: A little bit. I think we got like an extra two hours or something. No, when, well, three days through the week, I felt like feeling like tremendously better. And when I went to the doctor, like we were listening to our lungs with each other. And I still had a little fluid on mine. So, actually, when he listened to my lungs, I didn't breathe out all the way. And, so, when he was doing my inspection, I was just like breathing out real slow, and I didn't breathe out all the way. He's like, "Oh wow, you're close to normal again." He's like, "All right, you can pick back up." And I was like, "Oh, thank the Lord, I don't have to stay here anymore." Yeah, it passed. I knew one guy, he had it so bad he was coughing up blood. But he didn't tell anybody. But he didn't get the fever so it was okay. He just had fluid. His passed in a couple of days. But that was just really weird like the stuff that was going on.

It's like definitely being in purgatory when you're in a platoon like that waiting to get better so you can resume training.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, that's a great analogy 'cause that was about it.

So when you finally graduate, did you already have an MOS picked out from your recruiter? You mentioned before infantry. So you already had a contract for that?

Allen Zehr: Yeah. Initially they got me to sign with an open contract. And I told them, you know, "We talked and you said I was going to get an infantry contract." They said, "Well, there's none right now." And I told them, "Well, I'm not going to boot camp until I have that." And the week before I went, you know, he had that contract ready.

I'm sure there's a number for him right there as a recruiter.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. I was just an 03 contract.

Tell us about your graduation day. Because I know for a lot of Marines that's a real highlight.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. It was actually pretty good. It was real, kind of Hollywood, you know. It's for the parents. Because you just endure everything. You're like, "Man, I just wanna get outta here and go sleep in a real bed. Get something to eat that doesn't taste funny." So, no, I really did the opening, the motor run and yelled out a bunch of nonsense. Parents were hollerin' for us, but you know we had to look straight ahead. I thought that was pretty funny. Then, you know, we got dressed and we marched and they made us a Marine. I thought it was really cool. 'Cause the company I picked up with, the Junior Hat, he was the drill sergeant, he was actually, I really liked him. I thought he was a good guy. He gave me my Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, and I still have it.

That's great.

Allen Zehr: I thought it was really good. Yeah, and so, after that we were Marines. I remember that night, we had to get something. I can't remember what it was. I just remember that we were frantically searching for some kind of cleaning material or something to finish. Oh, you know what it was? It was part of a uniform. Someone had broken something. We needed it for graduation. So I was like, "All right, I'll go to the other squad base and see if we can get one." And I remember this staff sergeant, he was yelling at me. He said, "You _ yet. You're not a Marine." I said, "Actually, they made me a Marine yesterday, staff sergeant." And oh man, I thought he was going to kill me. But you know, I was right and I don't care what he thought. And the next day, they're like, "Congratulations, y'all have graduated from boot camp." And that was really what stuck out with those events. 'Course my whole family came down and they thought it was awesome.

That's great.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. It was really good.

And did you get a week or so of boot leave at that point?

Allen Zehr: Yeah. They gave me 10 days. I went to the recruiter and I was like, "Hey can I be a recruiter's assistant?" 'Cause I was going to try to see if I could get a promotion by talking some other guys into joining. And he told me that no, they needed infantry guys. And I didn't know it at the time. See I had went in and it was, you know, it was in 2005, and Iraq was having a lot of casualties so they were calling for guys, especially of the unit I went to. In Hawaii, they had a helicopter go down. They lost an entire squad, plus. So, you know, they're like, "No. You're going." So I just took my leave and then I went back to California, but you know, I went up to Camp Pendleton this time.

Did School of Infantry?

Allen Zehr: Yeah. The infantry training battalion over there. I was with Charlie Company, that's right. So, yeah, it was actually, I was so glad I was with Charlie Company. All the other companies, for some reason, they wanted to be super hard on everybody. Guys that were in charge of us were all, you know, had been in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. They were a good group of guys. There were like, "You know what? Y'all just like little brothers. I just want to teach you everything I can." They said, "We're going to do a lot of running and stuff so I'll make sure y'all are in shape, but other than that, there's nothing for me to do. And I'm not going to try to find something to do." So I thought that was awesome and I really looked up to those

guys. I thought they were great. But I'll tell you what. They wore me out. I remember we'd run the rifle ranges. It was a walk, run, with a pack. I just wanted to die. You know, they always talk about how tough it was being in such and such place, you know, oh well, "I was in Air Force, in their Special Forces." And I was like, "Yeah, I've seen that on TV." I do that in my sleep.

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: But, yeah. That was pretty tough. Pretty tough school.

Then you were assigned to a unit out in Hawaii? Kaneohe Bay?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, it's funny 'cause I'd heard like bad things about Hawaii, and how they didn't get to do any combat rotations. So I actually went to the first sergeant you know, "First Sergeant, I know I probably shouldn't ask this but I would prefer to stay with the unit in California if I could." He said, "Well, that's too bad. You're going to Hawaii." So that was the end of that conversation. I went to Hawaii. They're like, "Yeah, we're rotating off to Afghanistan." I was like, "Oh. Well. Nobody didn't tell me the truth."

They do a lot of training out there. What was your impression of Kaneohe Bay? Had you ever been to Hawaii before?

Allen Zehr: No. You know, I was kind of excited, and at the same time, I was like, "Man, it gonna suck trying to fly home." The price, which it did. No, I thought it was really, you know. I came in 'cause there was two ways to get to the base. We came in on the back gate. Not the back gate. Trying to think of the name. The H3. But we went through the far side, through the tunnels, and over there it's kinda dry. So I was like, "I thought it was supposed to be like triple canopy jungle." It was actually, you know, it was the other side of the island. I didn't know that Hawaii's got like pretty much every climate you could look for in the United States. So, yeah, and then I saw the other side of the island and it was really pretty. But other than that, you're there for two weeks and you're just like, "Wow. I'm on an island."

You were in the barracks there?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, I was in Mackie Hall. I don't know where you were stationed but that place is pretty renowned.

No, I've only had a chance to visit there just a couple times and never really toured the base or anything, so I don't know exactly where that is on Kaneohe. But I know it's a beautiful base. I went to the beach out there.

Allen Zehr: Oh yeah. The beaches are some of the best on the island there.

Yeah, really nice. So when you arrived to that unit, what's it like now that you're finally in the fleet, as they say.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, yeah, they're like, "Yeah, you're all going to the fleet, man. Good luck, y'all fresh meat." I was like, "What does that mean? That sounds like a prison term." And, you know, we were on the bus there and even the guys are telling us, "You know, no matter what those guys say to you, you've earned the right to be a Marine." And I was like, "Uh, yeah." And we got there and everybody once again, like hollering at ya, like, "You're just so screwed up. What's

wrong with you? Didn't you just get out of boot camp?" And that was interesting but . . . No, we got assigned rooms and we're kinda nervous 'cause everyone was like pretty much just telling lies to scare us, you know. Like the big brother playing a big prank on you. But those guys were pretty bad. The unit I was sent to was 1st Battalion 3rd Marines in Alpha Company, and they were in Fallujah for the big battle, so, you know, they just came back and a lot of 'em were still edgy and it was kinda a little, you're like, "I don't know." You really don't know anything and that's like the worst part.

Sure.

Allen Zehr: But we started training and it was just hot and raining all the time, and it was horrible.

How often would you be in the field there?

Allen Zehr: Pretty much every week we'd be in the field except for once a week out of the month. For some reason we had this safety stand-down 'cause someone did something they weren't supposed to or had a motorcycle wreck, and the command thought the best way to handle it was to tell everyone, you know, "Hey, if you drink and drive, you're gonna have an accident." It's like, "Well, didn't some of these people have parents?" But it was kind of a, you know, break from hiking around all over the place.

So your training schedule then would be, typical day, you would go out to the field Monday morning and come back in Friday afternoon, and then after the weekend do it again the next week?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, pretty much every time, and sometimes, you know, I didn't even know this but, you know, when you got to the fleet, you'd end up standing duty. You'd look forward to just having the time off and it was like, "Hey, you got duty." And you're like, "What is that?"

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: And, you know, you just sit at this desk and make sure that if anything happens, you know, you can call for help or get to someone's responsible. Yeah, so that was horrible, just working all the time.

What would you guys do in the field, a lot of patrols?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, it was mostly working on our patrols and our formations and making sure that, you know, people are not gettin' complacent. Even when we're really tired, like to make sure you just look back, 'cause, you know, if someone called a halt in the rear and, you know, two guys would see it and the whole patrol would just disappear into the dark. It was pretty bad. It's stuff like that, and then we work on like how to respond to seeing enemy units ahead, you know, and making a hasty ambush, and doing ambushes and playing war games and just all that general training. And then, of course, we did a hike either once or twice a month. And we had this lieutenant colonel whose name was Bierman. He's a colonel now, in charge of the 3rd Marine Regiment up there in Hawaii now, but he thought it was the best thing in the world to train for combat, and we all hated it. But he got us up to where we would hike the 20 miles. In the end, I

was just like, “Oh my God, that guy’s gonna kill me.” But, you know, full pack. He’s just like, “Put everything you got in there.” And I’m like, “No.”

Yeah, that’s right.

Allen Zehr: The problem was it was so humid, you know, and you’re hiking in Hawaii and every once in a while they’d find a hill for us to go up.

Yeah. How long were you there before you were deployed?

Allen Zehr: Well, I got there just after the July 4th weekend, and we deployed right after New Year’s. And I remember because I was in Bagram Airfield and it was my first flight on a C-130, and they tried to shoot it down. And I remember it, I was like, “It’s not even my one year mark yet and I’ve already been shot at.” And I think that was around January 10th. It was pretty wild. You know, you’re like, what can you do? You’re sitting in a death pod, you know. But, yeah, so it wasn’t even a whole year with the unit.

Did they send you guys anywhere to train kind of in a more desert-type environment, or do you go straight from Kaneohe to Afghanistan?

Allen Zehr: No, we did a . . . We did the Twenty-Nine Palms and Bridgeport, and we were in northeast Afghanistan, so actually it was better, the Bridgeport training ’cause it was actually full of trees, it was very green. And it was still funny ’cause they’re like, “Oh, we’re all gonna wear deserts.” And then we got there and we’re like in green trees and I’m just like, “This is really stupid.” But you end up getting your uniform dirty and it kinda matched a little bit more.

So when did you arrive in Afghanistan?

Allen Zehr: It was the beginning of January, and, you know, I didn’t know this but since Vietnam, you know, . . .

January of ’06?

Allen Zehr: Yes. Yeah, see I didn’t know anything at the time, of course. You know, the salty guys that just know everything and they’re just ready for it but, we got on a commercial plane. I was like, “I thought we were gonna fly on like a C-17,” you know, the big military aircraft. And they’re like, “No, since Vietnam Marines have traveled commercially.” You just land somewhere before you go into the combat zone. So we flew into Kurdistan. So we went from hot Hawaii, we landed in Kurdistan and it was like four foot of snow on the ground, and I was just like, “Holy crap.” So, you know, the fun had already started, and with some Air Force general that greeted us, and he was like, “Hey,” you know, “See ya Marines. Au revoir.”

How long did you spend there before you went into theater?

Allen Zehr: Well, the good thing about having last names there was the fact that I was on one of the last sticks from my company to actually move into theater. But we got snowed in as soon as we landed, and so the first stick actually stayed on the flight line just freezing to death waiting for the weather to clear to leave. They ended up coming back and then they ended up leaving. I ended up staying there. I got to sleep through the night instead of waking up in the middle of the night. And then I got up in the morning, went into the PX, got some stuff and then we left. But

that was actually, you know, a little bit better of a deal instead of freezing all night waiting for the plane. But, no, we weren't there long.

And then where did you fly into in Afghanistan?

Allen Zehr: We flew into the back of Bagram Airfield.

Tell us about what your first impressions were when you arrived.

Allen Zehr: Well, we couldn't really see anything but we did with, you know, combat landing. They make a sharp dive and then they land on the run field. I mean, you got to think, you know, it's just like diving and then the wheels are on the deck. But it was just like, you know, it's safe. It was all real safe but it was just, you know, not normal air flight. But we landed and I was just shocked. I was like, "Wow, so this is what it's like to be overseas." They had, you know, big PX, they had a Dairy Queen, Subway. And I was like, "Man, this is, I thought this was gonna be horrible." And they're like, "All right," told you what stick you were in and they said, you know, "We're gonna fly into Jalalabad off of a C-130." So finally my flight came around and I was surrounded by guys I knew which was great. We took off and, you know, as soon as we're coming up over those mountains 'cause Bagram is surrounded by mountains, and they really need a bigger perimeter around that base. But, no, they fired a volley of RPGs at our C-130 and then popped flares, they didn't know if it was heat-seeking, and they dove, and, you know, it was real exciting and then we landed in Bagram which is a real short runway so it was a fast stop. We got to Bagram, it was a small shop that a local ran but there was no Dairy Queen, no Subway. They still had nice bathrooms. And I was like, "Well, you know, this ain't too bad." Hanging out, and we knew we weren't staying there. We were going to a place called Methalam in Laghman Province. But, we got our stuff, got all of our stuff ready and they came in the middle of the night in a convoy and we went out and we got to our FOB. I know it was really exciting 'cause they're like, "Yeah, we've had a lot of gunfire along this route." You know the unit that was relieving us but they were like, "It's been quiet for a month but just keep your eyes open." 'Cause during the winter, you know, Afghans aren't stupid. They don't come out and fight, they go and stay in their warm house for the most part. But, so anyways, yeah, we got there and I didn't know where anything was. It was a really tiny base. There was only a small HESCO area, and they're like, "That's where your tent is." We went in the tents. We didn't have air conditioning. We had heat at the time but it ran off diesel, you know? But there was nothing. There wasn't even a shop or anything. I was just like, "Oh, okay. This is what I was actually expecting."

Was this just your battalion there?

Allen Zehr: It was actually just my company. It was a company base.

So it was a company FOB. For people that don't know, that's pretty small then in terms of overall size.

Allen Zehr: Yeah. There was half, well, the base was, pretty much from the outside you'd see a base, and it was pretty much cut in half by HESCOs. One half was American and the other half was Afghan forces. So anyways, the only other unit there was a PSYOPS team that was Army. And then a unit that worked with the Afghans. And they were just National Guard, they weren't Special Forces which was kind of interesting 'cause I thought they were supposed be. But, yeah,

so I mean that was the FOB. The bathrooms were, you know, a wooden box with a burn barrel underneath it. Lucky for us though, we didn't have to burn it. We hired locals to come and do all the work on our FOB.

What was your chow like? Was it tray rations or MREs?

Allen Zehr: A lot of times we'd get an MRE but they had cooks attached to us, so they actually cooked. And we had, which was really wild, a Soviet, an old Soviet bird would come in there once in a while and bring us all of our supplies. And I was just like, "Why is it not, you know, U.S.?" And they're like, "Oh, it's a private contractor." And I was like, "Private contractor?" But at the time I didn't know about it but the private contracting industry is freaking huge.

That's right.

Allen Zehr: It's actually, I think, a little ridiculous.

Sure.

Allen Zehr: But, no, so they'd bring us our stuff so we kinda had, you know, whatever. But they were still mostly the T-rations which, you know, and MREs that you cook and then it's supposed to be better. It's a little better.

So you had that pretty much your entire deployment then, living off of that?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, unless we did a, you know, overnight mission. Then we would take MREs. But we didn't eat 'em. We would trade with the locals because we always had an interpreter so we'd just be like, you know, whoever we had just kinda like, "Look dude, tell them we want something to eat. We're not gettin' fed well." And, you know, one of those memories sticks out in my mind really heavy is whenever we had a checkpoint inside our firm base, and then, you know, we push patrol bases outside of that, but somebody came through, we're like, "Hey, can y'all cook us a big meal that we could split." And they're like, "Yeah, I'll bring it back tonight." And the guy came and we went to give him the money and he was like, "I can't take this." And, you know, the interpreter is obviously interpreting all this. The guy didn't speak any English. And we're like, "Why can't he take it?" And he told us, you know, that, "Y'all are here to protect my family and trying to help me, help my country. Why could I take money from you?" And I didn't know it until later but that's what's called Pashtunwali, their code of honor, that, you know, if you're a guest, they're supposed to take care of you, and that's what he was trying to do. But we got him to take the money. We told him that, you know, we have plenty of money. But he said, "You know, hey, it's gonna be really cold tonight. Let me come back with some blankets so y'all aren't too cold." And I was just like, "Why is this guy being so nice?" So, yeah, the Afghan people were not the enemy. You know, they were actually trying to be as nice as they could. And, you know, we had just stopped this guy and just rummaged through his car and he was still, you know, killing us with kindness. But it was just like, "You know, it's gonna be cold. I don't want y'all to get, you know, sick." I was just like, "Wow." So, yeah, we got some help from the locals.

What was a typical day like for you if there was one over there? Were you doing patrols every other day or what was kind of your typical mission?

Allen Zehr: Well, we got rotated around. I was originally a contract 0311, but right before we left, they were like, “We don’t have enough people for a weapons platoon. They’re supposed to send us more guys and they’re not going to.” So they said, you know, “Who wants to be a machine gunner?” And to be honest with you, I hated my squad leader. He was actually a good guy but me and him just completely clashed. So I was like, “You know what, I don’t like you. I’ll go be a machine gunner.” So that didn’t go over well. So anyways I went as a machine gunner so I was always on the front vehicle, and I was the lead machine gunner with a 240. We had the golfs and we had bravos which is just a minor difference. But, no, so I mean we’d just ride around in the trucks and . . .

You were up in the ring mount?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, yeah, up top in the turret. I mean we drove all over the country ’cause, you know, you think that you’d be able to walk everywhere and that’s how it’d be from watching TV ’cause you generally see guys walking. But the reality is is that we had a company in charge of an entire province.

Yeah, that’s crazy.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, and we even had a part of Nuristan which was north of us, and we’re the first Americans to go up there. And they were asking if we were the Russians and if we were there to hurt them. And we’re like, “No, we’re Americans.” And they’re like, “Oh, okay.” You know, I mean, the contact with the outside world for most of those people was small ’cause there was no need to. But, yeah, I mean, we had to drive a lot, drive kilometers, and then they’d do like small patrols, and if we’re gonna do anything major, we’d stay out for a week and then we’d come back. But it was really hard to because we’d have to maintain security on the FOB. So, whenever we’d leave, whoever stayed behind was basically just doing small security patrols, and then running, you know, the post which we had, you know, like five. And one of them was the gate where you had to have more than two guys sitting up there. But, yes, there wasn’t a lot of sleep if you stayed behind which we’d rotate through the platoons. And the good thing, being a machine gunner at that point was that I generally went on missions and got more sleep than the guys stuck at the base.

So how long were you there from? When did you arrive in 2006?

Allen Zehr: I arrived in January.

January of ’06. And then you did seven and a half months there?

Allen Zehr: Actually, no. We were the last Marine battalion in Afghanistan. That point before they went back. And there was ETT teams which was the embedded training teams that were there but as far as Marine battalions, the commandant said, “No, we’re not sending more Marine battalions. We’re going to Iraq ’cause that’s where the fight is.” And there was, there wasn’t a whole lot of fighting but there was. And the Army was like, “We want to take over Afghanistan.” And I guess that’s what the generals decided. But I was only there for five months. I left, I got there in January, and I left in June, beginning of June. So, yeah, that wasn’t that long of a tour. It was unusual.

Then when did you next deploy because I know you sent me a copy of the one award citation you have, the Navy Marine Corps Commendation Medal for Valor. That was in 2009 though so, jump ahead a little bit then and tell us about what tour that was.

Allen Zehr: That was my third tour. Yeah, they were telling me that they wanted me to do a third tour anyways, go to Iraq. I was in Iraq in 2007, they changed tactics and actually the violence shut down overnight in the Anbar Province. But, so I told 'em, "I don't want to go back to Iraq. I joined the Marines to fight." And so they were telling me they were going to try to make me go but there wasn't enough time on my contract. But one day the platoon leader said, it was a platoon sergeant, and he said, "Hey, they're calling for volunteers to go back to Afghanistan as advisors." I threw my hand up, and I kinda had to fight for it 'cause they had sent me to a couple schools, but I got to go. And so in 2008, I worked for a, 2008 through most of the part of 2009, I worked for a Army major, Green Beret. His name was Rocco Barnes. He was killed before we left though so that was weird, you know, being a Marine working for an Army .

..

Yeah, so you were kind of a joint task force in a sense or joint, you know, being in the Marine Corps and serving with soldiers and that sort of thing?

Allen Zehr: Yeah, a majority of the deployment was just one soldier and then later on we were getting hammered really hard, and we were in a French area of operations. And the French wouldn't do anything to support us. It's really sad with the French soldiers. They'd like to fight but the French generals in France say no. So, the Americans and the Afghans get left out in the middle of nowhere with nobody. So technically we were about 25 kilometers behind enemy lines.

So tell us a little bit then about this award you received and kind of just set the stage for us a bit and then tell us about it because it's pretty impressive.

Allen Zehr: Okay. Well, just so it's understood, I was there as an advisor. They call 'em embedded training team. I did training with 'em, worked on 'em with tactics and stuff. But I'm not gonna, you know, try to impress anybody. Those Afghans can fight. They pretty much had most of the stuff down, it was just like minor things that I was like, "Well, what about this?" And they were like, "Oh, yeah. Let's try that." And so that was the good thing about being there as an advisor. But when we went out on missions, my job was to make sure that the friendly units that were adjacent to us would know where we were. The only friendly units that were adjacent to us were American aircraft, so I coordinated American aircraft. And I also would call for indirect fire assets. Ended up getting an attachment of Georgia boys from the National Guard and they had 120s, so that was nice to have.

Yeah, I bet.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, those things are wild. They would shake our camp when they'd fire. So basically what was happening was is we were put in this place called the Uzbun Valley in northeastern Afghanistan. It's actually, some people will say it's in Kapisa Province, but, as everyone knows, the capital, Kabul. Kabul is actually a city and a province, and if you look at Kabul, the most northeast corner, it kind of has, it looks like a spike, is a valley. And there's not been any forces there. Well, intel was telling everybody, "Hey, this is a major place of

operations. Pakistan and al Qaeda units are trafficking through there.” So they were like, “Okay, well, the Afghans are gonna put a FOB there.” And we’re like, “Okay, cool.” So this is where we were, and later on down on deployment, come July, Special Forces detachment wanted to operate in our AO, so we’re like, “Okay. Well, we’ll coordinate a mission.” What we told ’em was, “Our Afghans aren’t lackeys for you to come and look like heroes. If you wanna do stuff, we have a Special Forces unit.” It was a recon platoon. “Like, y’all are gonna work adjacent with them.” And they’re like, “Yeah, that’s cool.” So I was like, “All right.” Of course, I wasn’t in charge of this. It was, at the time, it was Captain Buckley, Michael Buckley, ’cause Rocco had been killed, which was our commanding officer. So, middle of the night, get up, start getting ready for this mission. We’re gonna go to way up in the valley where no one’s ever been. So it was pretty interesting because anytime we had gone to a certain point, we’d take, you know, pretty heavy fire. And they wanted to go way past that. And we’re like, “Y’all realize what you’re getting yourselves into?” And they’re like, “Oh yeah, we’ll be fine.” So we get up early in the morning, they make a movement before us so they can sneak through, and they weren’t sneaking anywhere. We told them that. We told them, they’re gonna know, as soon as you roll off out of this gate, that you’re coming. So then we, once it got light, that’s when we started our movement, and we had, I had a staff sergeant that was a machine gunner. He was in my turret. Captain Buckley was there to help coordinate units so he drove so then he could be with the radio, and then I was in the VC seat, and the guy coming to relieve us for the next team which was the advance party, was in the back seat, Captain __. And then I had, I don’t want to say his name for his protection, but my interpreter was behind me. So, yeah, we just cruise up and we’re hanging out. Well, it wasn’t like a pleasure cruise but we get up to this village. The Afghans set up a perimeter, we look around, everything’s good. We radio in our positions and let everybody know. And things are pretty quiet. And the platoon sergeant, really great guy, was already talking to the villagers like, you know, “Hey, can you tell us anything?” A lot of times they wouldn’t tell us anything ’cause, to be honest, we weren’t spending the night there and we were leaving and they were left to the wolves. But they told me, “No, hey this is dangerous for y’all. There’s people in the area that wanna hurt you.” So I radioed it in and everybody knew it. And shortly after we heard explosions ahead in the valley and we radioed the Special Forces detachment and we told ’em, “Hey, what’s . . . do y’all need any assistance with anything? If you do, let us know.” And, you know, I wasn’t in a hurry to run in there. As far as I knew, it was just harassment. So, I’m just waiting. The captain radioed me back and said, “Uh, well, we’re taking contact. We’re gonna break contact ’cause this is not what we’re here for.” They were actually there to survey for polling for the voting. There was a big election that they had. So, you know, a couple minutes go by and we get a call and he says, “Hey, we’re gonna need that unit to help us get out of the situation.” So we started pulling everybody down and getting our vehicles, and he’s calling up a medevac at this point. So, I mean, you know, so the next thing you know, “No, we’re just going to break contact.” Then it’s, “Hey, we’re gonna need your help.” And then they were calling up an urgent surgical. So we knew it was really bad, but the thing was is, you know, the fog of war, we couldn’t actually see them because of how the valley goes up. And that was the really interesting thing is like, you know, people don’t understand this is we were already at six to seven thousand feet and we weren’t even on a mountain because of how the valley just goes up. So it’s like a draw, just really huge. So, at that point we’re moving up and we get to a southern portion ’cause they’re asking for an LV, and it was perfect, and then we knew that they were just right on the other side of this little lift, you know, like a small mountain. It was something you could run up. It was mostly terraces they had cut out of it for farmland but we

couldn't quite see them 'cause it kinda dropped right behind that. So we set up security and at that point we started taking fire from the west, up in the mountaintops. And it wasn't a big deal, you know. We had our Humvee. We had two M113s which are American vehicles that we gave to the Afghans and they had the big DShK, which is their version of the 50-cal, and they were just lighting up the hillside, and I was like, "All right." But we had to get to that unit so we had to cross this field, and it was just terraces. And, you know, just terraces basically when you cut flat land out of a mountain so at some points the terrace was taller than me so I had to climb up over it, and I had front and back SAPI plates, I had a radio, a whole bunch of water. I had over 20 grenades 'cause I had to throw three. Most of them were for signal, so flares with smoke, but they're still heavy. And then, of course, all my magazines and my helmet. So we're just running through this thing, and at one point they stop. And I'm just like, "This is the worst place in the world to stop."

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: And they're like, "Hey, they're calling us back." And I'm like, "What?" And I got on the radio and the captain I'd been working with in modest English, I told him, "You're out of your mind. We got to keep moving. Tell him to move." And he said, "I understand. Y'all go." But the lieutenant was confused. So I'm trying to get these guys moving and we're taking fire, and, you know, what I wanted to see as an advisor was I wanted to see them do it, not me. At this point the platoon sergeant comes up and he says, "Zehr, I understand." And he lifted his hand and he waved towards the front and he said, "—" which means "let's go." And everybody got up and they went charging through this field, and I was just like, "Hallelujah!" And I'm running after 'em, behind 'em. And we got to where they were taking fire and the Afghans saw what was going on, they started returning fire. And this whole time, you know, I'd been trying to coordinate where we were and explain to the Kiowas, they were overhead which are the small assault aircraft. They're little helicopters. And after that, you know, I just, coordinating what was going on, the bird came in. When the bird came in, right before, like five minutes before, 'cause they heard it and saw it I'm sure, everything fell quiet and I was just like, "Uh." The bird landed and, man, it was a hornet's nest because what they wanted, is they wanted to shoot that bird down. So I wasn't taking any fire. The bird, you know, we talked to the guys afterward, they even said it was like Swiss cheese.

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: But the bird, you know, made it. And the soldier got on it, was able to be carted out which was, you know, we were all like, "All right, great." And violence had stopped. Units that came back up, my one buddy, Ethan Nagle, he was a corporal and so was I, he worked with the recon platoon with the Afghans 'cause he was a sniper. First thing, you know, I make jokes with snipers, I never . . . You know, I said that their training wasn't worth the money but . . . He was a good guy and I thought, you know, "Well, you can teach him how to be a sniper and stuff and work with him." And it was a good place for him. But he came up and he had blood coming down his face and all kinds of stuff. And I was like, "Holy crap dude, you okay?" He's like, "Yeah man, I got shot like three times." I'm like, "I don't see that big a bullet hole." And he's like, "Well," you know I saw his leg. It barely missed his femoral artery. He got a nice graze.

Jeez.

Allen Zehr: And then the rest was shrapnel 'cause in the field there was a lot of rocks. The rounds were just exploding and, you know, he had shrapnel like so close to his eye, and I was just like, "Aw dude." But I was glad he was okay, and my corpsman came up and we were separated 'cause he was in a different truck and they had pushed ahead to try to get him out there. You know, he had worked and tried to help this guy. His pants were ripped, and I was like, "Dude, you okay?" And he's like, "I had to get down really fast 'cause I almost got shot." And it ripped his pants up and he wasn't, there wasn't any metal or anything so I was like, "All right." But he could hardly walk so I took his bag and we walked back to where my unit was. We got back and started to head back, and the next thing we know, the unit that was halfway down the valley that was holding it for us, it was almost like a door that if you closed it behind us, they would set up and be able to pretty much just do whatever they wanted to us. Well, they started taking heavy fire so we raced down there, and another unit had sent up a truck to hold the, even placed past that to try to make sure we wouldn't be cut off. It was so dangerous. I remember just going so fast in this truck. I was just like, "Oh, this is crazy." You know the roads were originally just goat paths and they widened 'em for a Toyota pickup truck, and I'm in a Humvee. It's just like, you know, right on the edge of the road.

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: And I remember looking ahead and seeing that one truck up there, and they're moving it back and forth, and there's just explosions all around 'em. I was just like, "Holy crap." And then there was a group of Afghans, and these are all the guys I'd worked with because there was just one company of Afghans there. And they were up on this hill, and, you know, RPGs came flying in over us and detonated, and at that point we were up to where we needed to be and I got out and I started running, taking these guys to this wadi, you know, just a dry riverbed, really deep. And they ran around a finger and the captain of the Afghans, I ran up to him 'cause I saw him on his radio, and I said, "Those are the bad guys, right?" And he said, "Yeah." And I was like, "All right." He had a Russian version, Soviet, of a, you know, the grenade launcher, M203. I said, "Like this, man." And we both started just popping rounds in there. And, you know, I mean, we had been under fire, on the award it said five hours. I could've sworn it was more around six to eight. It was so long. And running at that altitude was crazy. I couldn't believe I kept going. I just kept going. And the whole time I'm having to talk to the aircraft. I was talking to Apache gunships and the Kiowas. And I was still able to go, and I was like, "All right, well, we gotta finish this." And we moved along the side of this area where we were taking fire to see if we could see anybody and provide security for the rest of the element to move through. I mean, it's almost impossible to describe what the terrain looked like. It was like two rivers forked out of there so there was like two places where we had to cross where you went down, traversing down this hillside. And you had to traverse back up. So the best thing we could do was stay on the other side, and then we could keep that side clear so they could traverse down and traverse back up. So, we walked around, took the long way, and I hear this Special Forces guy calling in for a UAV. And he's talking to UAV and the UAV is saying, "Oh yeah, we see enemy fighters moving adjacent to your unit." And, you know, good thing that Captain Buckley was there. He just like, "Hey, Zehr, you know, check your position and send it to me." I did and he's like, "Hey, that's my unit." And the guy for some reason was still just like, "Oh yeah, yeah, we're gonna get 'em." And the Kiowas were like, "You're a freaking idiot." I'll tell you what. I love those boys that flew the Kiowas because they told the UAV guy was pretty much a, all I can

just think of is a kid playing a video game because there's no danger. They're in a completely safe area. They have no idea what's going on.

That's right.

Allen Zehr: And, yeah, they're like, "Look, you're an idiot. You don't need to do anything right now. Just go away." It's like, "That's a friendly unit that they're talking with you about." So, yeah, I mean, I was a few weeks away from coming home and I almost got five-hundred pound bombs dropped on me.

And that was almost two years ago today according to the award. It was 27 July to 29 July 2009. When did you finally get out? When did you leave active duty?

Allen Zehr: Well, you know, shortly after that we got to rotate home, and at that point, we got home, basically to Hawaii, it was in September. And they were like, "Well, hey look, your EAS is coming up. What'd ya wanna do?" And I was like, "Well, I really like what I just did. I'd like to do that again." Well, there was a lot of problems because the economy had just sunk, and all the guys that were saying they were gonna get out ended up staying in. There wasn't a lot of jobs available, and they told me I could go MSG, which is guard embassies, or I could just reenlist in the infantry battalion. I told him I didn't want to do either one. And so I ended up just opting to get out, you know. And it was for the best. My family was hurting really bad 'cause they had lost their house and twenty acres of our land. And it was really sad 'cause I came home and I was like, "Look, I was overseas fighting. My mother is claimed as my dependent, and it's illegal for y'all to do what you did." And the judge ruled in favor of the bank. You know, who likes the bank?

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: Yeah, the Soldiers' Sailors' Protective Act protects you. They're not allowed to take something from a service member while he's overseas for good reason. So, but anyways, we've had to overcome that, and so that's a lot of the reasons why I got out. But, definitely glad I got to serve my country and do that stuff.

Absolutely. Well, we're proud of you for your service, and really appreciate you just taking some time just to tell us about it. I know a lot of people here at the Land Office, Commissioner Patterson is a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, Vietnam veteran, and there's a lot of us here that are veterans, but even those that aren't are appreciative of those that have served. And so this program is just one small way the State of Texas can say thank you. But also we have here at the Land Office, archives that go back to the 1600s and 1700s. We have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand of all the original settlers in Texas. And we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our goal is to add these interviews to that archive so that potentially hundreds of years from now people can listen to these archives and maybe learn a thing about it, about those that have served. With that in mind, is there anything that you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview potentially years from now?

Allen Zehr: Yeah. You know there are some things that are never mentioned, and it's really sad. You know, I turn on the news and what do I hear about the war? I hear, you know, somebody died today. You know, it's like, "Well, what did that guy do? Why can't I hear that?" And then

the sad thing is like for us, when we were out there in the middle of nowhere, using the bathroom in a trash bag and it was really rough. And the people around us that were the Afghans, they didn't know what to think of us. But I remember one day a kid was in his family's home I guess, and this dad had brought him up. He had grabbed a teapot 'cause, you know, tea is like the thing over there. But he had pulled it towards him, and when he did, it spilled and it burned over fifty percent of his body I guess is what it was which is fatal, for to have over second-degree burns in that much of your body.

Yeah.

Allen Zehr: And the dad was just like, there's not a hospital anywhere around here, and he's like, "Well, I'll take him to the Americans. Maybe they'll help." And so he did, and I really didn't have much to do with that. It was Angel Gilbert and Luke Conoyer that were corpsmen, and then also Will Hyatt and Ethan Nagle again. They saved that kid's life. They had to pretty much perform CPR on that kid until they got him to the bird. Three months later the dad brought him back and said, "I can't believe that y'all did this for me." You know, we called in a helicopter, a Blackhawk medevac, got him out, saved the kid, you know what I mean? But, whoever heard that story? It was actually printed as a story but no one ran it.

Sure, that makes sense.

Allen Zehr: That's just really sad because, you know, we did something good. I'm a Christian and I felt like we have to reflect Christ and have mercy on some people's lives.

Absolutely. Well, again, I really appreciate you just taking some time to share with us some of your memories for this program. Like I mentioned to you before we started recording, in about a week or so, we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs so you give to friends and family, and we'll also send a nice letter and certificate signed by Commissioner Patterson that comes in a commemorative binder. And then if you have any photographs or anything that you want us to add to our archives, feel free to get those to me. You can either send me copies that I can scan and send back to you or you can just email them to me, whatever works best for you.

Allen Zehr: Okay.

Again, thank you very much for your service and for sharing with us about your service.

Allen Zehr: Well, I'd also like to say, you know, a lot of people, since I've been home, have called me a hero and things like that. I'll tell you that the real heroes are the ones that didn't make it home. For me, it was three of my good friends. It was Corpsman HM3 John Fralish, PFC Bertolino, and then, of course, Major Rocco Barnes. All three of them were great friends of mine. And I just want people to remember that, you know. The real heroes paid a real price and the family has to live with that.

That's right.

Allen Zehr: Can't forget those people. They were the, you know, the real heroes. The ones who gave everything.

That's right.

Allen Zehr: There's no greater love than to give their own life.

That's right.

Allen Zehr: And, I'm glad I got to talk with you, man.

Absolutely.

Allen Zehr: Now maybe it will give someone some history, some things they didn't think about.

Absolutely. And I'll be in touch with you soon and have these CDs out to you as soon as we can get them all printed up.

Allen Zehr: All right, I appreciate it.

All right, thank you very much. Have a great weekend.

Allen Zehr: You too.

All right, take care. Bye bye.