

Robert Morris University Oral History Center

Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project



Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Victor Edwardo Molina

Marine Corps, Am Trac Crewman, Iraq War (Two Tours)

November 18, 2015

**Molina, Victor E. (1985 – ), Oral History Interview, November 18, 2015.**

Audio and Video Recording (ca. 45 min.)

Biographical Sketch:

Victor Molina was a Marine Corps Am Trac Crewman. Molina did two tours of duty in Iraq with 2<sup>nd</sup> AAV (Amphibious Assault Vehicle) Battalion. During his time in Iraq, Molina deployed to the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. Victor Molina left the Marine Corps as a Sergeant.

Topics Covered in Interview:

Ramadi

Fallujah

Los Angeles

Am Tracs

“Mission Accomplished”

Interviewed by: Josh Caskey

Transcribed by: Sean Steele

Edited by: Josh Caskey and Dr. John McCarthy

JC: This interview is part of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran's Project undertaken by the Oral History Center at Robert Morris University. I am Josh Caskey and today is November 18, 2015. I am joined by Victor Molina. Um ... can you please state your full name and if I have your consent to interview you?

VM: Uh ... yes. You have my consent. My full name is Victor Edwardo Molina.

JC: Excellent. Alright. So we're going to jump straight into some of the questions about your service in Iraq. Um ... let's start off with when and where were you born?

VM: Uh ... I was born August 21, 1985 and the great city of Los Angeles, California.

JC: And where did you enlist out of?

VM: I enlisted out of there. Funny story that the Marine Corps came to my school around November 10 during the Marine Corps birthday, saw Sergeant Luers, a recruiter, and I talked to him and I I wasn't really doing much. I was a horrible high school student. Horrible kid. But I enlisted from ... from ... uh ... Clover City. That's where the recruiting station was, but even though he went to my ... uh ... (stuttering) high school in the middle of LA.

JC: Okay ... oh wow. And what year did you join? You said straight outta high school?

VM: Uh soon as I ... as soon as I graduated.

JC: So what year was it?

VM: '05

JC: '05. Okay. And ... uh ... when you finally did get out of the Marine Corps, what rank did you get out as?

VM: Sergeant

JC: From the Marine Corps.

VM: Yes.

JC: Excellent. And ... uh ... you already said where you enlisted out of and you kind of stated why you did. Um ... what impact did 9/11 have on your decision to join? Or did it have any impact on your joining?

VM: It did. Um ... but when I saw ... when I saw the news and it was going down. I ... I ... I ... couldn't believe it. It was like, "This is not real." Like is this real? Um ... and obviously I had felt pressure to join, but I felt like, "What's going to happen now?"

[0:02:11]

JC: Mm hmm

VM: And um ... that was one of the reasons why I wanted to join, even though it was 2001 and I had a couple years (inaudible). But obviously there's other reasons ... um ... obviously one of the reasons was I wanted to get out from where I was from. Just LA.

JC: Okay. What was the environment like for you growing up?

VM: It sucks. It was ... I grew up in ... you know I literally grew up in the ghetto of LA. Um ... it was mired with violence and all that. The streets weren't kind back then. Like it was like dog-eat-dog every day. And your stuff would get jacked and all that. But I needed ... the main point is I needed discipline in my life and I needed to do feel like I needed to do something ... uh ... for our nation or, as a whole, bigger than myself.

JC: Okay. And did you have any history of family service in the military?

VM: Negative. I'm actually the first one in my family to get a high school diploma and go to college.

JC: Oh wow.

VM: Yeah.

JC: And is your family was ... are they originally from the Los Angeles area as well?

VM: Um ... my mom was from El Salvador.

JC: Oh okay.

VM: She came. She's legal and everything and my dad was Mexico. And he's legal and everything. He unfortunately passed away.

JC: Oh. Sorry to hear.

VM: No big deal, but ... they ... their ... their ... their ... thought process was, "You gotta go to school. Go to school." But I mean, I knew growing up. That's impossible. I wasn't gonna pay for it. They didn't have any schooling. Any formal schooling you could document. So I was the only one to go through.

JC: Wow that's amazing. Um ... any other kind of intangible things that attracted you to the military. I know I've heard everything from people saying, "Oh, I like the uniform," "I like the discipline." Is there anything else that sticks out in your mind?

[0:4:07]

VM: Oh yes. I mean I'm not gonna lie. Like... it wasn't his chalks. He was in his blues and I was like, "Yes. What is that?" Little did I know that it was a representation. It was much bigger than what I thought. Obviously, had to teach you what the blues mean, but to me that was sexy thing I wanted so bad (both laugh).

JC: That's awesome. Um ... so what was your understanding about what was going on in Iraq? Um ... you said you ended up joining in 2005.

VM: Yes.

JC: So the war was probably, at most, two years old.

VM: Yes.

JC: Um ... what did you know about that and you know did that ... did your perception change of what was actually going on once you got over there?

VM: Uh ... from what I knew, is the only thing that I knew of was ... most of what most people knew. Like apparently there was weapons over there. Apparently there was a radical you know. We need to stop this before it becomes another Hitler situation. Um ... and I honestly, as far as ... during ... as when I was ... like before I knew a little bit more, I had some vague idea, vague at best. But when you're in the Marine Corps, you're always training most of the time. I had no chance myself. I really just went to boot camp, (stuttering) MCT, went straight to school, schools pre-deployment training. So I really had nothing to catch up ... up until I got there. And then I got there and had ... uh ... we had to do our missions.

JC: Okay.

VM: I really ... I don't know.

JC: (Laughs) so ... you ... you kinda answered part of my next question. Um ... you talked about your ... the whole process of so ... um ... your training, so ... talk a little more about it. Where did you go to boot camp? Where'd you go to Marine Combat Training? And then MOS school and all the way up to your unit? Talk a little bit more about that.

VM: So I came in on 1800 [MOS code] from ... I wanted to be a tanker.

JC: Okay.

VM: Little did I know that did not happen. So I went over there. I got picked up from the ... an LA dude with a bus. I didn't know where boot camp was to tell you the truth. I didn't even make any research. Like kids now can make research about how boot camp's like. How the first day is. I had no idea. I just came in blind. All I knew was that I needed PT and I needed to be the strongest person ... the strongest version of myself at that time.

JC: Mm – hmm

VM: So then I ... uh ... they picked me up from LA on the bus, charted us all the way down to San Diego, MCRD, and that's when I stepped in the yellow footprints there. Uh ... and ... uh ... I remember March 15, 2005. Uh ... because ... apparently the fifteenth is pay day.

[0:07:01]

JC: Oh okay.

VM: So then ... uh ... I get there. The ... did my thing ... uh ... MCT immediately right afterwards, within like a week or two. I guess ... I guess they pushed it real quick. I don't know if that's quick. I don't know, but I just knew like MCT time is this time.

JC: Yeah.

VM: It was in July or whatnot ... yeah it was around July.

JC: And that was Camp Pendleton?

VM: Yes.

JC: (Inaudible)?

VM: Yes. And then ... um ... from there ... uh ... many times my MOS changed from ... uh ... from ... artillery to tanks to, all of a sudden at the very end, "You're going to be Am Tracs." And I'm like, "I'm gonna do ... trains?" I didn't know the Marines Corps had trains (laughs). Little did I know that was not going to happen?

JC: Um ... so when you finished up with your AAV School with the Am Tracs ... um ... what ... what unit did you go to and what was it like when you got to unit?

VM: Uh ... 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. 2<sup>nd</sup> AA [Amphibious Assault] Battalion in (inaudible) North Carolina. Um ... I immediately went to H&S Company.

JC: Okay.

VM: which kinda sucked cause it not a ... it's a non-deployment company. Which, for a young Marine that wants to prove himself and you know we had older ... uh ... Marines ... or not old Marines ... seasoned Marines there who had just came back from Fallujah. Just came back. So we had all these stories there and ... um ... my experience as soon as I got there was, "This place sucks." There's nothing ... it's nothing like California where it's all like ... you know (stuttering) city like. It was just ... but then I grew to love it. That's a different story though. But I got there and you have that feeling like that everyone is working towards a goal and everyone has this mindset; this warrior mindset. It's infectious. Like... you know what I mean? You hear in these stories when the Sergeants, Corporals, and you're like, "I want to be I want to learn as much from you. And I want to go forth in that." Finally got to Alpha Company and that's when I started my deployment rotations.

JC: Okay. So you went to Alpha Company and when did you finally ... um ... what what ... I guess what month or what year, month and year, did you deploy?

[0:09:20]

VM: Oh jeez.

JC: Did you leave for Iraq?

VM: Year was ... I think it was '06, '07 ... ish.

JC: Okay.

VM: But ... uh ... month ... I know I know

JC: That's fine.

VM: I remember the month cause it was a summer's hell. I remember just going through crap and .... I was there during summer. I remember that.

JC: Okay. So '06 or '07?

VM: '07 yeah.

JC: So '07. And ... um ... when you got there ... talk a little bit about getting over there. The process of getting over to Iraq and where you ended up.

VM: Um ... we got Cherry Point I believe. And then from there ... you have your (inaudible) all your gear over there and obviously it's a waiting game and ... uh ... your just ... you have a lot of things ... what your perception is gonna be like over there. Like ... and ... finally you get there. You get to Kuwait ... I think you get to Kuwait ... no ... you pass by some countries like Germany or Ireland. One of them. I really don't I really don't remember. I was like ... I guess I was like really sleepy because I came by as much sleep as possible. Cause the night prior I had, I'm not gonna lie drank, so that I could get my party out of the way, but then during that day it was a blur. So we get to one plane (inaudible) and then finally you get to Kuwait. In Kuwait, we wait there for maybe a couple days, and then ... uh ... we got into Al Asad or, or, or ... somewhere in Iraq.

JC: Okay.

VM: And finally to Fallujah.

JC: And that's where you ended up was ... was in Fallujah in 2007?

VM: Yes.

JC: And when you guys got out there, what was kinda going on? What was your mission that your unit was doing on a daily basis?

[0:10:59]

VM: Uh ... it was ... it was mostly all patrols. It was it was presence and patrols and you know looking out for stuff.

JC: Is this ... uh ... vehicle ... the AAV ...

VM: Vehicle ... vehicle mounted and all that. Uh ... our platoon got tasked with route clearance, which ... uh ... we had to forward uh forward Marines had already been there from our company to a forward advance or forward guard and ... uh ... they ... I remember Smith comes up to me. He's, he's from Texas, so he comes up to me and he's like, "(in a Texas accent) Well Molina, I been out here already and I already got blown up." (both laugh) And I'm like, "Smith, congratulations on not seeing IEDs. You've been trained for this buddy." And he's like, "Oh you think it's funny, huh? I tell you what. You're in Fallujah now. You're gonna git it." And that's that's when I had a huge fear of IEDs cause apparently everyone was getting hit by these things and it was nearly almost impossible, obviously when you go on patrol you're like trash, dead dogs, um etc. But that was the climate. Was our route ... we got tasked with route clearance with the with the Army pathfinders.

JC: Okay. And um ... what was what was the comradery like with the guys that you deployed with? Were you guys tight? Were you guys arguing a lot?

VM: Um ... I don't ... I think ... um ... (name inaudible) was Staff Sergeant at the time. I really really liked him. He was a really good leader. And he was really strict on me. But, I do thank him for that because ... I had never got hit by an IED while I was there. I saw everyone get hit, but not me.

JC: Yeah.

VM: Um ... but ... I think as the time went on like you got really tight. And then was you start like ... was the concern for other people in the company start getting hit and more getting sent home cause they're with three concussions or whatever arbitrary number they at the time. And ... uh ... was you've had a couple casualties happen, you get really close. Oh man. Like don't get me wrong. We were like ... sometimes we'd get angry with each other. Like, "Oh (inaudible)! Fix this vehicle!" You know, "We've got an IED that just hit it!" Or, or, or whatever stupid. Like ammunitions hit it. And now we've got to replace this. We're getting angry. We've had no chow. We haven't had any sleep. Basically, that's the whole ... that deployment was no sleep.

JC: Yeah.

VM: I don't remember sleeping at all.

JC: So when you were doing route clearance talk a little about what ... what a day in the life was of what you were doing. You know maybe some of the things that were happening, some of the attacks, or some of the ... anything that sticks out in your mind from your time over there.

[0:13:54]

VM: Alright. Um...

JC: And you did ... did you deploy ... you'd once over there ... twice?

VM: Mm hmm

JC: Okay.

VM: Um ... the first time was tough.

JC: And you can do that. Do one and then go into the other.

VM: So first time was Fallujah and then the second time was Ramadi.

JC: Okay.

VM: For the first one, um ... Fallujah ... uh ... it seemed like a simple mission ... uh ... (chuckles) sorta. Uh ... it was route clearance. It seemed like all we had to do was be ... you know pathfinder was with us with the army. So these Army Soldiers ... um ... were a little too ballsy. Like they were all about getting these IEDs and were all about like naw. Like if we get fired on ... like we're cool with that. You know any kind of incoming fire, we were cool with that, but IEDs were just ... IEDs were like not meant for ... to take that kind that kind of damage underneath the whole.

JC: Okay.

VM: But ... on a day in the life would be in the morning, if there was morning, it all depends. Let's just assume it was the morning. We'd get up. We'd figure out what our route and mission is. Staff sergeant would go talk to the lieutenant ... um ... from route clearance, they would get together. They would know their deal. We would go down the ramp. We'd fix the vehicles up cause they're always getting hit.

JC: Mm hmm

VM: Something's always going down or overheating them cause they're not meant to be in a desert environment but whatever. So wherever you are, we're fixing the vehicles. And then we'd get a time at which we're supposed to head out. We'd head out. We'd do our route clearance. Depending on different portions of the city different portions of you know ... um ... uh uh uh ... anywhere. They could send us anywhere. And ... um ... they ... uh ... and if we ... if we don't encounter any IEDs, it would be a good day. If we did encounter em and we have EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] on deck, it'd be a great day cause then the EOD could just dispose of em easily and then we'd just move on and hopefully we'd come back ... hopefully come back to get some chow, but that didn't happen. And most of the time, believe it or not, we were out there for ... on average twelve hours, but we could be out there ... we were sometimes out there for ... actually more than that. We'd be out there all night cause something happened. And obviously, you're going to get your usual pop shots. You're gonna get ... uh ... the guy and you'll see an IED there. And you'll be like, "Can we shoot that guy?" I mean like we see him and I'm like, "Come on, man. We've seen you and your dumb, stupid vehicle." And it matches the (inaudible) description. Like come on. That would actually happen a lot. We're always like attentive for that.

Um ... the first time I got shot at was in August. And I remember it cause it was close to my birthday cause my birthday is August 21<sup>st</sup>. But it was like August 19<sup>th</sup> or something like that.

JC: Yeah.

[0:16:57]

VM: And we were doing route clearance around OP Viking. And we were going like ... and we pass OP Viking and we got that and ... um ... there's a river to our right and a little narrow road around and pathfinder was in front of us. They find an IED I think and then all of a sudden ... like ... and it ... I'm half asleep cause we'd been up all night ... I'm like, (sounding tired) "Oh god." And all of a sudden I hear Corporal Deacon. He's like, "Hey. You hear that?" I'm like, "What?" And it's like, "No do you hear that?" I'm like, "What are you talking about?" And then I hear it. It's like, "Take off your combat (inaudible) real quick." And then all I hear is like (making gun sounds) ting ting ting ting ting. And I'm like, "Oh snaps! Are we getting fired upon?" And he's like, "Uh yeah!" We're getting shot like, "Oh wow! This is ... this is crazy!" So then to our right we just see like maybe like ten dudes, literally with their AKs or whatever guns they had on em, and they were pounding towards us, but we couldn't move our vehicle cause there was a river there. There was a creek. You know what I mean? And we couldn't literally traverse over there cause our vehicles would just get stuck and all that. So they're firing freely upon us and I was like, "Like Deacon just like let the fifty cal roll." And ... um ... that was the problem though because then onto our north was another unit coming down from the other side. Uh ... we're like scratch that. The fifty cal has the possibly of going through them and possibly ricocheting ... we don't want that. Let's just use our rifles. So we come up. We're shooting our rifles and whatnot. As this was happening, I see ... uh ... the vehicles ... uh ... IEDs popping front, rear and then ... um ... Bradleys ... Army Bradleys ... 50 cal. [Heavy machinegun] shooting a school. I don't think it looked like a school. It just looked like a building. He's shooting it up. And just destroying it.

JC: IEDs were going off during?

VM: Yeah.

JC: It was an ambush.

VM: Yeah. It was a complete ambush. So then they were just like ... so we got Brownings, shooting 50 cal at the buildings, we got the right side being attacked, we have our ... um ... like we got like me, a driver, shooting with an M4 and so is like the decman of the (inaudible) weapon station. We can't use our forty or 50 cal. cause we don't want to incur any kind of damages in case, but we are shooting. And then right in front of us, Scooner's got his 240 [Medium machinegun] and he just lights em up. And man he he ... I don't think I ... I wanna say I got one, but I didn't. I think he nailed em all.

JC: Yeah.

[0:19:45]

VM: And that was ... that was the first time that that that happened to us. Then I saw the Iraqis ... the one that stuck out in my mind, and I make fun of (inaudible) all the time cause even online is the Iraqi police. And I hear over the comm., "Hey, somebody got shot in the abs." Doctors gonna have to open. So he's in like a ... like a cooler vehicle ... whatever their vehicles were. They have the doctors in that and he comes in and ... uh ... I see that he wasn't shot in the abs. He was shot in the ass (both laugh). So doc is there and he opens up the pads of the back and he's repairing this guy. Meanwhile, like all his junk is flaying around and I'm like ... I'm standing there watching this and is like, "Is this happening?" And the worst part was I actually see this guy, the Iraqi guy the Iraqi police his partner grabs him and later on the doctor told me what was going on cause he kept fumbling with his junk, and I'm like, "What is going on in there? Just patch his butt and get outta there." And later on, doc told me that ... uh ... he thought the guy had an exit wound and the guy was saying, "There's no exit wound." And finally they kicked him out. Told him, "Get outta here." And I see Corporal Heart kicked those two guys out. After he had done his job repairing him and all that and his medical thing, I don't know why I remember that mostly (chuckles). But I had to laugh.

JC: Oh yeah.

VM: But that was the first time. And then my second time in Ramadi was ... uh ... a lot more like ... it was '09 I think.

JC: Okay.

VM: So by then like ... when I was ... these are new troops that I've been training and I ... they thought I was paranoid cause of all the situations that had happened to me. I'd tell em, "Guys, you don't understand. Everybody gets shot at for no reason. It's going to be weird. There's going to be IEDs everywhere. VBIEDs [Vehicle Bourne Improvised Explosive Devices] are atrocious. Like it's gonna suck."

JC: Yeah.

VM: And they and they were prepared for it. And they were one of the best Marines ever trained. But they ... it didn't happen.

JC: Okay.

VM: It happened to other people, but not us. And that that's

JC: So things were slowed down.

VM: Yeah.

[0:22:18]

JC: What was the ... what billet were you from the first to the second?

VM: The first billet I was a driver. That's it. (Inaudible) Roger this. Roger that. Second time, I became ... it was ... we were no longer vehicles. I mean, we had vehicles, but we were foot patrols. And ... um ... and ... uh ... I became ... uh ... the ... first I was on the fire team and eventually I became a squad leader. Um ... and uh ... and then at that point in time, not only was I squad leader, I became a Corporal of the Guard forming our (Inaudible) cause we were just in the middle of Ramadi and (Inaudible) was heading west. Heading east. I'm sorry. Out west is our other half team.

JC: What did you ... uh ... do in your free time on your deployments to Iraq?

VM: Geez. Free time?

JC: If you had any.

VM: Man I ... you know when you're those those DVDs they sold we were into that. They had like ... it was almost like ... they had Arnold Schwarzenegger, but they couldn't spell his name (both laugh). You know what I mean? We had those and then we'd watch those all the time and we'd try to keep up with, hopefully, what was happening in the States. I didn't have any computers. We I ... and then once computers they we did have were shotty at best. And ... um ... what really pissed me off was that even if we did have time, if we did have time to contact any family, it seemed like it was always packed, you know?

JC: Yeah.

VM: Just like. Do people live here or what's going on here? For free time, if we could, we'd try to get our PT in.

JC: Yeah.

VM: Um ... there were days that you definitely needed PT because you needed to vent and you'd get angry. It didn't care how tired you were, so you'd do push-ups in your flak jacket or do something. You know they had the TRX thing.

JC: Yeah.

VM: But we'd do that or watch the movies. I mean ... if we had time. Hopefully had time.

JC: Yeah.

VM: For each how that was or shower water. That literally is a basic right.

JC: Yeah. Yep. And you can approach this question individually by your first and second tour: Do you feel like you were being used effectively? You can start with your first time over then and your second time?

[024:48]

VM: Uh ... the first time it was ... I ... (sighs) I think we ... we made ... we were definitely as we got more experience we were definitely used best possible. Like we were top notch. We knew how to find IEDs. You could find it and I don't even know how it would happen. Sometimes you would find a little red comp wires. We were effective. As a team, as a whole, we got really good at it. Uh ... uh ... I wanna say the first time, I was really effective. The second time I was just like ... I don't know what I'm doing over here anymore. This is ... this is a different situation.

JC: Mmm hmm.

VM: It was literally black and white from here til all of sudden it just became a completely different world. Like it was nicer. These people are as bad as I thought they were. It did change my mind, but I think the second time was just a little redundant.

JC: Okay.

VM: If anything, now seeing it from a different perspective, I wish that we had stayed there a little bit longer because the Iraqi police really needed to understand what their job was, and sometimes I felt like they're just lazy and they weren't understanding these concepts.

JC: Okay.

VM: No matter how hard ... like no matter how hard ... I felt like no matter how hard ... it wasn't a question of how effective we were. It was a question of time frame.

JC: Yeah.

VM: Because we were really we were taught as best we could. We learned the language the best we could. And you know cause there was shot and interpreters and which was kinda crazy, but ... um ... there was never a time where I thought, "Oh! We're doing so bad at our job. We're ineffective here." I always felt like if we had much more time, we would definitely be making a difference or at least in a more impactful way. Cause if we had more time this situation that has risen now unfortunately came up.

JC: How'd your family deal with you deploying ... um ... multiple times? Did they handle it okay?

VM: See, that that's a good one. Um ... we I met with the Marine Corp when I left for the military, I literally almost felt like I left my life behind.

JC: Mm. Okay.

VM: I didn't want to deal with LA anymore. I didn't want to do with being with that type of world. I kinda like ... they were supportive ...my mom... she's a great person. I love her. And I feel like if anybody I feel bad about was her, but everyone else it didn't matter to me. (Stuttering) You should know. The people that are right next to you, you fight for them. You just have so much more invested interest in them and you realize family is just ... you know ... depending on how you define what family is ... family to me is there.

[0:27:57]

JC: You ... you can make whoever your family.

VM: Yeah. And I think I really did make ... that part and they were my family. And I kinda felt bad, mostly for my mom, but for the most part didn't mind being away from them.

JC: Yeah. Um ... as far as the media is goes, do you think that Americans get an accurate portrayal of what went on in Iraq? Do you watch a lot of news or ...?

VM: When I was in ... I had no concept of what ... what the ... I didn't care about the media.

JC: Yeah.

VM: I'm not gonna lie, but there's some things that like ... I remember Mission Accomplished came up and President Bush said that and I'm like, "What is he talking about?"

JC: That was in 2003 too.

VM: Yeah.

JC: May 1<sup>st</sup> so ...

VM: That was kinda weird cause like as I was going in I was like, "So there's no more war?" And then after I came ... once I got in I was like ... I had no idea. To me, the media did not matter. To me, it like ...

JC: Yeah.

VM: It was like I was so secluded in the subculture of the military I was like ... you know what I mean? I had no other thought process. And plus, I wasn't living with my parents. I had no cable or TV. I had TV to play like video games and that's maybe it. And watch ... um ... a lot of movies. I am well versed in movies.

JC: (laughs) So how ... since since you ... how has the war changed you personally? You know if you're doing two tours ... uh ... in Iraq? Or has it changed you?

VM: I ... I ... I think it has, right? I know I see ... (sighs) I don't know. I think it has changed me. I am more ... this is hard because like I don't know. I know that it's changed a lotta other people.

JC: Mmm hmm

VM: Like you know you're friends that get outta the Marine Corps and some of em aren't doing too good some of them are doing well and ... and ... I remember being and ... and ... and ... coming out now I've been out for three years I think and ... um ... I see that ... I don't know. I don't have no definition for it, but I feel bad for some of my boys cause I didn't know if they have problems cause they didn't say anything. And they committed suicide. So like I (inaudible) ... uh ...oh god

what was his name ... Corpland ... and they committed suicide. Some of em in horrible ways. Like, Corpland committed suicide via cop. He had a fake gun and everything.

JC: Wow.

VM: Yeah. So like I don't know if I when I look at the same images that my boys did and I ... if I interpret them differently ... or I always had the mentality that um ... whatever you get put through and and ... uh ... you get stronger. So it shouldn't be a weakness. Well that's my mentality, but ... clearly it changed them.

JC: Mmm hmm

VM: And now being out, I'm kinda like, "Man, I kinda miss it." Cause I'm out here in the civilian world, like other than you, I don't to anyone. I hardly ever talk to anyone. I just stay quiet. I go to show up to class. I get there take the notes and I'm like what do I need to study. I don't talk about it much like other than my wife. That's it.

JC: Okay. So you're maybe a little more ... um ... disconnected from the civilian population would you say?

VM: I ... you know what ... that's actually you know that's probably it. I don't ... I've become more secluded. Don't get me wrong. I'll talk to my people that I go to work with, but I'm not gonna talk to em about personal stuff like this. But I don't ... yeah ... I don't associate with ... even walking down the halls here, I don't feel comfortable. If I see you, I'm freaking comfortable as heck.

JC: Yeah.

VM: But, it's not that I'm paranoid or anything, I don't ... I feel very disconnected.

JC: Yeah.

VM: Yeah. I don't feel connected at all. If it's a soldier or a sailor or anybody, I feel happy being around them, but if it's somebody else, I just don't care. That's probably what's (inaudible) me the most.

JC: Yeah. So what have you done since you've ... since you've ... you got out 2012, so a good seven years ... um ... what did ... when you did finally got out, talk a little bit more about how you've adjusted. What did you do when you first got out? Um ... did you have anything any other challenge? It sounds like you've done pretty well, but I think everybody has some sort of challenge.

[0:32:51]

VM: Oh man. Um ... I mean yeah. We're ... we're all gonna have challenges in our life. I agree. Uh ... the ... the ... when I got out, I was still in California. My wife and I lived there in San Diego and I

was like, "You know what? I'll (inaudible)" And ... um ... I put my application in. While doing that you know what I'll do, I gotta get a job somewhere. You know... and first I was like I wasn't getting any. Like at all. For literally six months. Which sucked. I'll do anything.

JC: You didn't have any income?

VM: Well, no. No. I didn't anything. Other than the ... um ... what's it called?

JC: VA?

VM: No, no, no. The um ... when you put like you have ... um ...

JC: Unemployment?

VM: Yeah. Unemployment.

JC: Okay.

VM: I eventually put that down. Cause I did save money so I was smart enough to do that. Uh ... but I realized I don't have a job and everyday was like looking for a job. For six months living out in California. Um ... and then finally I said, and you know how expensive it is to live out there it's like expensive as heck, and I said to my wife, "You know what?" She's asked my like, "Hey why don't you go, you know, go to Pennsylvania? It's a lot cheaper. I have more connections over there."

JC: Is your wife from here or no?

VM: Mmm hmm.

JC: Okay.

VM: I met her from when I was camp Lejeune which you know how all the Marines are like, "Oh I live in Pittsburgh. I live near Pittsburgh. Let's go."

JC: Yeah.

VM: And so I met her here and then we linked up a couple years later. We met and stay together this time.

JC: Wow.

VM: Yeah. But I said ... she said, "We should just go to Pittsburgh. It's cheaper there... Housing much cheaper. Houses are much more affordable. You have more places than here." You know what I mean. "It's a lot more patriotic over there. California don't give a crap about you." Alright. So I did that and I said, "You know what?" And then when I left, it was funny cause San Diego was like, "Hey." San Diego PD was like, "Hey, come take your written test." But by then I was like I don't care. I'm leaving this state. Um, but once I got here ... you realize from the first couple of

months I was out here after six months, I missed PT all the time. I didn't have anything else to do. So I PT, PT, PT, PT. And at first, I loved it. I love PT, but I never was so obsessed with it as I am now. And ... um ... so I just PT-ing for until I went to PTI. And I met the chef of police there and I was like, "Hey. You know what? Maybe law enforcement's a thing that I want to think about." So let me study this for two years and see what. I got my Associate's there and then I got a job just being a bouncer at a bar and ... um ... so through all that process I remember I put my application in for, during PTI, I put in my application for the Pennsylvania State Police. Passed all the physical. Passed all the written. Unfortunately, there was a credit issue that I couldn't fix immediately, so I was denied. And that really crushed me. You know what I mean? Cause to me that was that was to me that was the job that I really, really wanted and that one or Pittsburgh PD.

[0:36:12]

JC: Okay.

VM: And ... uh ... I was like, "Yes. I'm gonna finally get a job. Finally be around." Cause that's what was missing. You said, you know, how I had changed. I want to be around people like me.

JC: Yeah.

VM: How do I get to do that and then everyone else is like, "Ooo. Move out of the military and into law enforcement." I'm gonna go over there. You know, and that's a good career too. And benefits. I'm not gonna lie. So then ... I decided to do that and then now ... I'm obviously going to school here, but as I'm going on getting my bachelor's I'm also in the process for the Pittsburgh PD. (inaudible)

JC: What's your ... what Bachelors are you working towards?

VM: Uh Organizational.....excuse me. I'm sorry. Organizational Leadership.

JC: Leadership. Okay.

VM: Yeah.

JC: Awesome. Um ... so we're kinda going back to a question we asked earlier, but this is after ... sitting here right now, how do you look at your experience, as far as the war? Do you look at it as a positive thing? Do you look at it as a negative thing? Do you look at it as we accomplished something over there? Um ... what are your thoughts on that?

[0:37:15]

VM: My thoughts on the war is, once again, I think we should have more time there.

JC: Okay.

VM: We really shouldn't have pulled out that early. And you know what? I can't even tell you how long we should have been there either, but I know that 2009, 2010 was a bad idea. Um ... I don't know if we accomplished anything. I always felt ... our mission was to ... get Osama Bin Laden, but once did that, then ISIS grew up and, you know, the situation is going up. There's a lot more radicals now and they're gaining massive amounts of funds, massive amounts of troops, and you see what's happening over there and the Paris attack now. It's like geez! Did we really do enough impact or did they forget how bad that when we were there did they forget how badass we can be?

JC: Yeah.

VM: You know what I mean? Did they ... (sighs) as for me personally, believe it or not, like I said, I miss it. I miss being around (mumbling). Like that's just (inaudible). I miss ... I miss being hungry. I miss being tired. I miss being ... uh ... just ... you know wet and in the field. Like I really miss that, and every day I'm just like, "Why did I get out?" Like ... I thought I had ... I felt like I had accomplished everything. I felt like I had could ... at this point in my career, I think I had accomplished everything. I don't want to be a recruiter or a drill instructor, but now that I think about it I feel like ... I kinda feel like, "Man, I shoulda stayed."

JC: Mm hmm.

VM: But obviously, I'm gonna make goals to

JC: Yeah.

VM: to benefit myself. You know, I'm obviously going to school.

JC: Yeah.

VM: I never thought that I would do that. I was one of those guys like, "I'm never going to use my G.I. Bill. Who cares about that?"

JC: Yeah. And since you've been out, have you utilized the VA at all for anything? Anything come up that you need to utilize the VA or do you have private insurance or ...?

VM: I have private insurance.

JC: Yeah. Any ... what are your thoughts on the VA? Have you used the VA at all?

VM: The G.I. Bill?

JC: The VI ... the VA. The ... um ... medical care at the VA.

[0:39:27]

VM: I don't ...

JC: The Veteran's Administration?

VM: I know ... I ... (sighs)

JC: You never used it I'm guessing?

VM: I don't know what to do. Like I don't ... I can't ... you know what I mean? Cause ...you've seen me. I think that this is reserved for people who got their legs blown off.

JC: Okay.

VM: And stuff like that. And I'm like (sighs). Olsen, a good friend of mine, got his half his face blown off. You don't want to go in there and see a guy that got his face ...

JC: Yeah.

VM: This guy was a pretty boy, by the way.

JC: Oh. (Both laugh)

VM: He was a freakin' ... he was he was a stud muffin sex machine, alright? So ...

JC: Yeah.

VM: when that happened to him, like ... like ... it was ... you know. I know some other friend ... uh ... oh what's his name? He got burnt all up.

JC: Yeah.

VM: From an incendiary IED. He had like sleeves like a badass tattoos. It was cool as hell.

JC: Yeah.

VM: Uh ... then later on, I'd seen it. Like I'd never ... it looked like just a smear.

JC: Okay.

VM: I don't know if you've ever seen it. It was just weird. It was smeared.

JC: Yeah. I have.

VM: So he had like ... to them I understand when they go, but I mean me? I'm just like ... and then you always like I'm not hurting. I mean (inaudible) there's things. But I think I'm attribute to that age thing.

JC: Yeah.

[0:40:40]

VM: Plus, the Marine Corps and, you know, the military just ages you. I believe. I think that's the theory.

JC: Yeah (chuckles). So since you've been back, how do you think you've been treated by people around you and Americans? Been treated well or ...?

VM: Oh not in California.

JC: No.

VM: No. No. I think putting your resume ... uh ... putting there that you're military, I don't think it was a good idea.

JC: You think that it was a negative?

VM: I think that it was a negative cause I put you what I mean? And even that, I remember, I forgot to say this, but ... um ... I was like, "You know what? Maybe I need to boost my resume." So I went to this training school, this vocation school.

JC: Okay.

VM: And it's like, you know, training myself with Tasers or whatever when I was looking for a security job, and they paid like ... there was one that paid like twenty bucks an hour. It was like, you know, well I'm going to school and then it will cover everything. And then wait for San Diego PD to call me up, but that didn't happen and I started getting really worried. First two or three months, I was like, "You know what? It's okay. This happens to everybody." But then after that I was like, "I'm not getting anything here. Like at all." And I could be like I had put my application in for like Wal-Mart and ... um ... I mean I remember putting myself in for some place like Spencer's and ... you know what I mean. The malls like I don't even care. At one point in time, I was like stop chasing that fifteen plus twenty dollar job and said, "I don't care. Just give me something." You know what I mean. Learn how to do a register. I'd never done that. That didn't happen. And then not until I came here to Pennsylvania, that's when things started to turn. That's when people started to call and offer jobs. You know what I mean?

JC: Wow.

VM: Yeah. Like, here you're like ... oh my God! What a huge difference.

JC: What do you think they're more patriotic or what do you think it is?

VM: I think so. I mean, you look around here in the city and you have so many monuments and so many veterans stuff. And it's beautiful .... Well, at least I see it's beautiful.

JC: Yeah.

[0:42:42]

VM: And ... and ... and then people when they see you in a Marine Corps shirt on and they ask, "Hey are you a Marine?" Whereas in California, "Eh whatever."

JC: Okay.

VM: And I grew up there. And that's why I (inaudible).

JC: Okay.

VM: But out here ... for example, when I was going to PTI going to school, I remember going there. I was using my G.I. Bill, and they're like, "Hey. You're military?" And I was like, "Yes." It was like, "Did you want a job?"

JC: Oh wow.

VM: And I wasn't sure, and they're like, "We love hiring vets here." I'm like, "Okay. Cool." So I was like, "Okay. Cool. What do you want me to do?" And it was like, "Do you want to work with maintenance and like fix stuff up?" I'm like, "Yeah. Let's do that." That got me that. And then ... I went to other part timers like a bullet. Like I went to this bar and they're like, "Hey. I was wondering if you wanna get ... I see you're a pretty big guy and whatnot. You work for a security company or anything like that? Do you have a card?" I was like, "Why do you say that?" And they're like, "Cause you're a pretty big guy. Do you have any experience in anything like that?" It's like, "Well yeah. I mean, I have so many years as for security. I've done this, this, and that." And it's like, "Would you like a job? Cause we need a bouncer here, you know?" I was like, "That sounds great." So I've been working there for two years now and I get food and get fed and all that.

JC: That's good.

VM: Yeah, but as soon as I got here, I felt much more happier here. You know colleges here are much more like, "Why don't you apply over there for college?" And it was like ... it was weird. It was like they didn't care. And I was like alright cool. Here it's like, "Oh come in. Enroll. Let's talk." I mean, like yourself and everyone else. It's ... it's weird cause I'm so apprehensive. I'm like, "Cool (mumbles and stutters)."

JC: Yeah.

VM: I don't know. You're a civilian, unless you're not a civilian, but yeah. It was a different change.

JC: Wow.

VM: Coming out here is much, much better. I love PA!

JC: That's good. And that about wraps everything up. Anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to talk about ... you know as far as your service or ... or do you think we covered it all? I

always ask cause sometimes people ... they get to this point and people ... there's something that they wanted to talk about. Whatever that is.

[0:44:52]

VM: (Sighs) Let's see ... I mean, we pretty much covered everything personally.

JC: Okay.

VM: Pretty much covered ... yeah. There's nothing.

JC: I always ask cause you never know.

VM: Yeah. You never know. That's true. I mean, I have no (inaudible) at this point in time.

JC: Good.

VM: So I'm (inaudible).

JC: (chuckles) well excellent. Uh ... well this uh concludes our interview. And the interview is going to stop now.

[0:45:18]



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