

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TIMOTHY BRAUN
Amtrack Driver, Marine Corps, Operation Desert Fox.

2002

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Braun, Timothy J., (1977-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 115 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 115 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Timothy Braun, a Fond du Lac, Wisconsin native, discusses his service with the 1st Marine Division in Kuwait during Operation Desert Fox. Braun details why he chose to enlist in the Marines, boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (San Diego), and Marine combat training at Camp Pendleton (California). He addresses being processed, techniques to disorient the new recruits, having his head shaved, the different phases of training, using the rifle range at Camp Pendleton, and missing a couple days of training after a knee injury. Braun evaluates drill instructors and training received, comparing them with what he expected. He talks about having difficulty learning navigation and shares anecdotes about mail call: one about when his instructors ate the twelve dozen cookies his mother had mailed to the platoon, and one about doing push ups every day because his mother was addressing his mail to "Pvt Braun" rather than "Recruit Braun." Braun describes military occupational specialty school and duty on work details. Assigned to amphibious armored vehicle school, he touches on training with armored vehicles and describes driving an Amtrak assault amphibian vehicle. Braun describes Joint Task Force duty at Yuma (Arizona), assisting the border patrol along the Mexican border, using a CB radio to report activity from a Listening Post Observation, and getting heatstroke. Just after arriving at Okinawa with the Marine Expeditionary Unit, Braun tells of being deployed to Kuwait. He details being transported by ship: the daily routine, boredom, taking a history class, practicing the drill for general quarters, and getting frequent immunization shots. Stationed at Kuwait City near the Iraqi border, he speaks of two weeks of exercises, cleaning off the vehicles in preparation of leaving, and then being called back again to a defensive position at the border. He tells of volunteering to go out with a rifle company for exercises in the desert where he almost got injured by an underthrown grenade. Braun recalls a night exercise when his whole unit was firing tracers. He portrays an incident where a Marine lost an ammunition clip and the platoon had to comb the desert for it. Braun highlights the amount of live ammunition he used in the desert. He touches on the troops' mixed reception by the Kuwaiti civilians. Braun discusses his return to the United States, arranging to be discharged early so he could attend school, getting married, and using the GI Bill. He recalls some Camp Pendleton stories: running across some Dutch Marines who had killed an endangered desert tortoise for dinner, an incident when a sheep wandered onto the firing range, and the valley getting accidentally set on fire during nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare training.

Biographical Sketch:

Braun (b.1977) served with the Marine Corps during Operation Desert Fox in the Middle East. He returned to Wisconsin after military service.

Interviewed by Aaron Krebs, 2002
Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008
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Corrections typed in by Angelica Engel, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

- Aaron: Okay, this is an interview with Tim Braun, who served in the Marine Corps. The interview is being conducted at his home in Verona, Wisconsin. Today's date is the 9th of November, 2002. My name is Aaron Krebs. I will serve as the narrator, or—correction: I will serve as the interviewer. Tim, thank you very much for giving us this interview today. Let's start with some easy questions. What year were you born and where were you born?
- Tim: June 17th, 1977, in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin.
- Aaron: Okay, and did you always live in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin, prior to going into the Marine Corps?
- Tim: Well, north Fond Du Lac, but yeah [laughs].
- Aaron: Handy. Prior to going into the Marine Corps., what was your life like? What were your aspirations?
- Tim: [Sighs]. I don't know. I actually was planning on going to Marine Corps technical college for computer programming. I had that picked out my sophomore year in high school, and I don't know if—what help that would do. I was just walking down Main Street and—aspirations? I don't know. I didn't have any.
- Aaron: Why did you choose the Marine Corps?
- Tim: Everyone always asks you that question your whole four years. I don't know. Well, everyone was—because I was in band and everything—“Why don't you play in the band? And blah blah blah.” I figured if I was going to make it fun, make it worthwhile—I mean, I knew I wasn't going to be in infantry, but I don't know. The Navy—actually, I almost went into the Navy, because I got a scholarship to go to officers training. A scholarship where they pay for officers training, but I didn't do good enough on the math because I hate math. Math sucks. They called me and asked if I want to retake the test and I was like, “Nah.” I was like—I wasn't sure if I was going to do it or not, and I looked at the Navy and I was like, “No.” I didn't want to get stuck on a ship, and the Air Force—I wear glasses. The only thing they want to do in the Air Force is fly, so I didn't—there's the Army—like, “Nah.” The Army is always trying to play catch up with the Marines, so if you're going to do it, do it right. A lot of times I think about the different services, and the Marine Corps as well as the Air Force always stand out for me as far as excellence, not only discipline-wise but intelligence. I mean, when you think of the elite in the

services, you always think of the Marine Corps, as well as mentally and physically challenging.

Aaron: It wouldn't be my favorite either. You have some hunting background. Did that play any part in the Marine Corps side, being your familiarity with weapons?

Tim: Not really.

Aaron: Okay.

Tim: Me and my brother, I don't know what started this [laughs]. You know, we've always been into guns and stuff, and just like knowing what each gun is, looks like, and all that kind of stuff. At hunter safety, the guy got mad at me 'cause there's one test, [with] the ammunition sitting there, you have to tell what each one is. Well, you can always look at the stamp on the bottom. I just said, "30/30, 22, 12 gauge, down." He was like, "How do you know?" and I was like, "Because I'm smart." He gave me a heavy look and he got mad. I said, "Oh, you can look on the bottom." I was a smart-ass. "See, this one says 30/30. This one says 22." I don't know how it started, but I don't know if that played a factor or not, but I've always been fascinated by the military, so—

Aaron: Outstanding. How about any of your family? Were any of your family also in the military, and if so, did that play a part in your decision?

Tim: Not really. I think the only one in the military was my uncle Karl. He was in the Army, and he was a tank commander in Vietnam, something like that. My cousin Steve, he was a cook in the Marine Corps, but I think that's about it. I don't know if any—I don't think any of my grandparents were in the war. That didn't play a part. Not a big military family, I'm just saying. Joel, my brother, was going to go to West Point, to the Army to teach school, but he's got asthma. He's a wuss.

Aaron: But he's smart, but a wuss. Prior to going into the Marine Corps—I know that's a very difficult time for any family, especially a young family—when you've just gotten out of high school. How difficult was that for you and for your family?

Tim: As far as—?

Aaron: As far as emotionally, like your mom letting go of her youngest son, knowing that she might not see you for a few months.

Tim: I don't really know.

- Aaron: First real time away from home.
- Tim: I don't know. As far as the family goes I—they were okay when I left, but I don't know. At least, if there was stuff, they didn't show it. They were real supportive of me. Really it was not my first time away from home. I was in that DNR camp that one summer. Worked for a month with the DNR and stuff so—but I don't think it was that emotionally—I don't think I wanted to go to college at that time. I would have gone. I would of done well at it, school, but it wasn't what I really wanted to do, but that's just something that would be cool, so I—emotionally, I don't think was that difficult. The hardest part was just waiting, because I was scheduled to go—originally it was going to be June, like two weeks after I graduated. Then it got moved up to July because my MOS [military occupational specialty] was filled up, and then I didn't get in until October. Well, I just waited for October, so I just sat there waiting for it. Only I didn't think it was that tough. I made up my mind, "I'm going to go," and I was excited about it.
- Aaron: I'm sure that made it a lot easier going through basic training, being a tech school and then—outstanding. Great. What day did you enter the Marine Corps? I mean, what day did you actually leave Wisconsin?
- Tim: Leave Wisconsin or enter into the Marine Corps?
- Aaron: Both, if you remember.
- Tim: We had to get onto—which sucks and everybody hates—
- Aaron: Did you stay in that Howard Johnson dive?
- Tim: Yeah, actually we got shuffled that night. There was a drive by shooting death. So, that was fun [laughs]. We left the next day, which was the 9th of October, I think, because the last day was going to be the 9th if—so I think it was the 9th that we technically left. We had delayed flights and all that junk. We didn't get into the airport until ten o'clock that night. Technically the 9th was my first day. So yeah, that sucked.
- Aaron: And when—prior to actually going in, how did you decide what job you were going to do? Did they just pick it for you or—
- Tim: Um, they—
- Aaron: How did this work?
- Tim: It's a lot different with the Marine Corps from a lot of other services. They have almost a couple hundred thousand jobs, but never everything is

always available to you. The Marine Corps has about two hundred thousand people in it. You had a list of what was available, and that—and I went through it and picked. I didn't actually pick an MOS. I picked infantry support, which could have been artillery vehicles, which is what I got, motor tee. I think there's one other one in there. There was like a couple grouped together and all that, that you could have went into and stuff. I didn't actually pick something I wanted to be, like a vehicle crewman. I went under the infantry support option which had four things under it. They just stuck you with something, and actually I think artillery was my second choice, I think. That wasn't available, and then I don't know what my third was, because they have you pick like your first, second, and third choices and stuff. So, I don't know.

Aaron: When did you find out that this was going to be your job?

Tim: We didn't find out what our actual job was until after MCT [marine combat training]. You go through boot camp, you go through MCT. It's like an infantry school. Then you found out. Some guys pick what they want to do. I didn't know until after the last week. I didn't know what hardly anything was, like, "Dude, what's that?"

Aaron: Most people don't.

Tim: So I didn't find out until after a couple months already in the Corps.

Aaron: And then let's start with that 9th of October you mentioned, when you went down to the MOS station for your—

Tim: They woke you up at about four o'clock and junk. We went to eat breakfast and then you just sit around and wait, because I'd been there four times before.

Aaron: Why four times?

Tim: When I was a kid, me and my brother both had swollen lymph nodes' glands in the neck.

Aaron: Oh.

Tim: We actually had tuberculosis. Well, we were *carriers* of tuberculosis. We didn't actually *have* tuberculosis, so any skin test would come up positive but an x-ray would come up negative.

Aaron: Okay.

- Tim: So with that in my *history*, they took a skin test. It didn't come up negative, so I had to go down and see a specialist because they wanted—first for the initial physical and all that junk and then I had to go down and see a specialist to make sure I didn't have anything. It was a mess, and then in high school, you're supposed to take the—that written test.
- Aaron: ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test. This is a multiple choice test used to determine qualification for enlistment in the US Armed Forces].
- Tim: ASVAB, yeah, and they never showed up like three times at our school. The tester didn't. I actually went down there the one time to take the stupid ASVAB. And then I went back the second time for my physical, the initial physical. And I went the 3rd time when they did the whole big huge physical thing once you're leaving. And then the 4th time when you're going to leave—because I had to go see a specialist and crap—and the 4th time is when you actually get the paperwork and you go.
- Aaron: Can you describe the general feeling that next morning when you were getting all ready to go?
- Tim: I just wanted to get the hell out of there, because we give so much crap to the guys that were there for their physical and stuff, because we're all there and we know what it was. We always tell the guys, "You gotta be careful when you go in there, because he's going to ask you to bend over, and he's got really cold hands, man. Don't be surprised." You're like, "Just go easy and it won't hurt so much." One guy chickened out and walked away [laughs]. But all the young guys that had gone through this, we just wanted to go, because we just sat there. We didn't actually leave until like 2:00 in the afternoon. We got there by like 6:00 in the morning. We just sat there doing nothing.
- Aaron: And then at 2:00 o'clock they took you to the airport or something.
- Tim: Yeah, well they gave us bus transfers to be bused down there.
- Aaron: Like on public transportation?
- Tim: Here's your bus pass to the airport. Get on the bus to be bused down there. They gave us a couple meal tickets because we had a layover. Basically we were on our own to get there.
- Aaron: Okay, so you got to the airport, I imagine, and everyone loaded on an airplane.

- Tim: Actually, in my group there was only four of us actually leaving. That was in my group. But we all had to stick together. We all were under the same meal ticket. We flew out Saturday [sighs], yeah, to some place, to, I think, Pittsburgh. Yeah, go figure.
- Aaron: Wow.
- Tim: Go to Pittsburgh. Have a lay-over in Pittsburgh. Go to San Diego. I did that a couple of times. But we sat there and had lunch and waited. Did the waiting game and then on the plane to San Diego, everybody was a recruit in there. I bet you 80% to 90% of the guys on the plane were people going to MASH and that. There's a couple of guys crying, freaking out and stuff. I was like, "I better get some sleep now on the plane because once we land there's no sleeping." We landed at like 10:30. Of course, then they were waiting for you. The drill instructors were in the airport because—
- Aaron: They had them in the airport?
- Tim: Yeah, because the thing is easy. You don't know this, but the airport, you find out later. The airport is right on the other side of the fence from boot camp. They had them waiting there because they knew they had a planeload of people coming in. So they would be like "Get in here," you know, and what have you, and, all the paperwork and stuff. Get on the bus and then, of course, you had to put your head down. They drove in circles around the parade deck and stuff to disorient you, because it was kind of funny, because we didn't know how close we were, because you cannot see. You could never see beyond the fences and the walls of your boot camp. So you never really know where you're at, because we drove around for probably an hour just in circles. Weird crap around town and stuff. Your heads down. So you don't even know where you're at. Then, when you pull in there, all of a sudden, you're on base. You didn't know that you're right in the middle of San Diego.
- Aaron: It seems like they obviously do that for a purpose, for disorientation.
- Tim: Right, so you don't know where you're at.
- Aaron: Did you know that they were doing that?
- Tim: I did, yeah. You could just tell. My recruiter had told me that the base is right next to the airport. You could just tell the way he was driving, you know, taking turns and circles and stuff. Yeah, it was like they tried to disorient you. You couldn't tell how close we were, like in the middle of downtown.
- Aaron: And on the bus was it quiet then?

- Tim: Yeah, you weren't allowed to talk. Keep your heads down. You can't say anything because the drill instructor is already on there. I wasn't going to say nothing [both laugh].
- Aaron: What happened then when you arrived?
- Tim: You'd get off and of course there's the famous footsteps painted on the sidewalk. You go through processing which took all night long. You do all the paperwork. You have the stupid amnesty period where like, "Does anybody got a waiver for drug use or carry any stuff they shouldn't?" They box up your personal affects. They sat you in this room and, "Who wants to go home now?" You sat there. It was the middle of the night, and you just sat there, getting warmer. I was like nodding off. They're like, "Don't sleep. No sleeping." You know, all this famous stuff, yelling and screaming. You got all this paperwork to fill out. You get your hair cut. It's never like in the movies, not even like on the History Channel, where they had that boot camp series. Where they treat—"Oh, how do you want it cut?" You just stood there and leaned over a garbage can and just "Voomp, voomp, voomp." Gone.
- Aaron: And this is all that first night.
- Tim: Yeah, and we went through. We got all our stuff issued to us. We got like all our canteens and that sort of stuff issued. We changed clothes. We put all our personal effects in a labeled box and they were put in storage. You had to write one letter home saying you got there. You got to make, I don't know, like a 30-second call saying, "Hey, I made it here. I'm okay. Don't worry about me. Talk to you in four months," or whatever. We did all that and all the paperwork. And then, because you go to—I forget what they call it—like a waiting platoon before you actually start. You're there for a couple days. They give you the basics before you actually start on your boot camp. We got to the barracks. We had to put the numbers of our platoon on all our stuff. I got to be one of those guys with the stencils. Four or five of us. Just up there. Everybody brought their sweatshirts up there, put boot polish on the sweatshirts, platoon number real big across the front. Get all your gear straightened out. Go over all the rules and you meet your head drill instructor who takes care of you. And they do drug testing and all that stuff. And we got to go to bed at—I don't know—at four, something like that, for a couple of hours.
- Aaron: Wow.
- Tim: It was in alphabetical order. Actually, I was lucky. I went first, which is good. Well, actually, no. I think the first night we didn't sleep at all because—

- Aaron: Okay.
- Tim: —but the first night for fire watch. They went by alphabetical order. I went first. The second and third guys sucked. They get to sleep for an hour and then you got to be awake again.
- Aaron: By “fire watch” you mean the guy guarding the door or something?
- Tim: Yeah, actually it was four guys. Two guys had to clean all the brass and all that. Two guys had to wear a sign around their neck that said if someone came in, they knew how to report to them, and stuff like that. But yeah, I did. Two guys watching the door so nobody could come in and mess with you. They cleaned it up and all that stuff.
- Aaron: At this point, the first couple of days of basic training, you were still feeling like you just wanted to get it over and done with? Had your feelings changed at all?
- Tim: I don’t know. At this point you could tell some of them didn’t quite know what to expect. You still get all the administration junk. Going getting fitted for your uniforms and all that kind of stuff and that. And you couldn’t eat that much. And they start with the physical training, going over the basics and stuff. I never really thought about getting out because then they told us—well, once we got handed off to our regular drill sergeant—count down until at least the last month. “We’re going to kill you.” I didn’t care. I was there for the fun of it, so--
- Aaron: Sounds like you had the right attitude to get back into it.
- Tim: Yeah, because they ask you, “Why’d you join?” “Why are you here?” You had a year and a half to figure it out. I was like, “Oh, you know.” Everyone gives stupid canned answers. “Well, I wanted to.” “Blah, blah, blah, crap.” “Got in trouble. It was either this or jail.” “Paying for school.” Or something stupid like that but I actually never thought about it.
- Aaron: And they accepted that as a reason, or—
- Tim: A year and a half, because otherwise you don’t know what to say, you know. They’re like, “Well, why?” “Because I wanted to.” “Well, why’d you want to?” “I don’t know” [Both laugh]. But that was never a good enough answer and stuff, so with the right attitude it’s really pretty easy.
- Aaron: How long does Marine Corps basic training last?
- Tim: [Sighs]. Ours was twelve weeks, I think.

- Aaron: Twelve weeks.
- Tim: Eleven weeks, twelve weeks, something like that. It was right around three months.
- Aaron: Is it separated into phases?
- Tim: Yeah, there's three phases. The first phase is when you're on base. They teach you the marching, do the rifle drills and physical training. You learn your history and stuff like that, your weapons and all that stuff. And then you always have the events which the platoons participate in, which we rocked in the pugil sticks. We were mauling everybody. And then, second phase, you go actually to Camp Pendleton where it's all the rifle range and field training and stuff. And then you come back for third phase. You do two weeks. Is it two weeks or one week? Actually, I think it was a week of nothing but swimming. You're in the pool everyday all day. Everyone has to qualify in swimming. So we did that. The third phase is the final drill and polishing up and all that kind of stuff. We had to get ready for the fleet and that. We spent two weeks with the gun. The first week you don't even go on the range. You just learn how to shoot with your gun. You sit. They put you in positions. It sucks. It hurts. At first I was, "Oh. Ah." It helps when you're on the range. The second week you shoot all week long. You do nothing but shoot from sun up to sundown. If you shoot in the morning, you run the pits and that in the afternoon, up and down and square and all that. And vice versa if you shoot in the afternoon. The last day you qualify. Then, after, it's two weeks of field training, and you go up to the field platoon. You stay in the hootches, the shelter halves and all that. You come back. You pack up and go back to MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot].
- Aaron: Where did—you mentioned you went to Camp Pendleton. Where did you start, then?
- Tim: In San Diego, because MCRD is the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. It's actually in San Diego, right in the middle of San Diego. It's weird because all of the sudden you drive up to the gates and you're like right in the middle of town. You're like, "Holy geez." You don't realize it. And that is one-hour—45 minutes to one-hour drive all the way up to Camp Pendleton which is like right between San Diego and LA. You go there and come back to San Diego.
- Aaron: How long were you at MCRD?
- Tim: Oh, the first phase. One month. Each phase is a month, I think.

- Aaron: Yeah.
- Tim: So, a month there, a month up in Pendleton, a month in the field. Then you come back. Because when you come back, that first week back is what they call mess and maintenance. Like you get assigned to like the chow hall or cutting grass or something [“chow hall” is military jargon for dining hall]. I got assigned to the CD [clean-up duty]. You like empty garbages and clean up on the weekend and stuff like that.
- Aaron: Litter patrol?
- Tim: Kind of, yeah. I got stuck answering phones in an office. In the one office, there was a major. The other, a colonel, and in with me sat two captains, and I had a corporal who was like office personnel, kind of, in charge. I was by myself.
- Aaron: And you’re just a recruit.
- Tim: Yeah, yeah. That sucked. What’s cool was that on the weekends we were by ourselves.
- Aaron: Really.
- Tim: We had the run of the building, yeah. Because no, well, you know, administrative personnel don’t work on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Aaron: Right.
- Tim: We were pretty much all by ourselves. We had a real small building. If anything spilled we just cleaned it up. Mopped the floors, cleaned the brass, stuff like that. We were pretty much on our own.
- Aaron: Fantastic. What about the famous GI parties?
- Tim: We didn’t really have any of those at boot camp. We didn’t need to. They kind of clamped down on that because the drill instructors pretty much did all that stuff. At boot camp we didn’t have to. At least not my drill instructors. They took care of everything. Yeah, we had a couple of guys who were screw-ups and stuff but they took care of them. We really didn’t have anyone really *that* bad.
- Aaron: Mm hmm.
- Tim: That really needed to get whooped on.
- Aaron: Whooped into shape. So to speak.

- Tim: Yeah.
- Aaron: What about, along those same subjects, the contact part of basic training?
- Tim: Aw, I was disappointed.
- Aaron: You were expecting the drill instructors to—
- Tim: Drill instructors couldn't touch us, because of stupid General Krulak [commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995-1999]. He was the worst thing that ever happened to the Marine Corps, I would say, because he let the mothers of America push him around. They couldn't touch us. They could yell and stuff, but they couldn't touch us. And the pugil sticks fight over a bridge with water that was like, what, three feet deep, or whatever. They had to fill it in with sawdust, because, you know, someone could fall and get hurt, you know, and "Oh my God." We were actually one of the last ones to still do the hitting school and the boxing stuff. You go in a small ring and basically you just knock the snot out of each other.
- Aaron: Okay.
- Tim: They cut that out for a while because, you know, people were getting hurt doing that and stuff. But, yeah, I was actually disappointed in boot camp. I was expecting a lot more, or for it to be tougher, too.
- Aaron: That seems to be much better then being blown away by boot camp.
- Tim: Yeah, there were some days that were overwhelming for the first couple of weeks. But I was—even like the physical training, the running and all that. I expected it to be much worse. But I actually only got intensive training, which is when the drill instructors single you out and make you do pushups. I only got that three times and two of them were platoon wide, when they do the whole platoon.
- Aaron: That's basically what they want you to do right?
- Tim: Yeah.
- Aaron: Okay. Did anyone else you know not make it?
- Tim: Um, I think we had two guys get hurt. They got dropped for medical reasons, which I almost did.
- Aaron: They got dropped all together?

Tim: No, just back a couple of weeks because they hurt themselves. But I actually had tendonitis on my knee and I had to wear an immobilizer plate for like two or three days, so I didn't train for those three days. I got stuck on barracks watch. When another platoon would group to like the upper phases, instead of keeping somebody back (because you have to have at least one person or two back to watch the barracks to make sure no one messed with it), they used us. They stuck us in there. So, for like six hours I'd be sitting there with no other guys all by yourself, on crutches. But yeah, I don't think anybody got dropped, just the two for medical reasons. No one got dropped totally. Well, the third phase, we got guys—because there's always guys that refuse to train or get kicked up and stuff like that. [Missing words] to see what they should be working on. And the one guy, in the middle of the night, started jumping rack to rack, says, you know, he's getting out and all, "Screw you." The drill instructor walks. There's nothing they can do to him. He's leaving. And he's jumping rack to rack and like, I don't know, two, three, and the drill instructor goes. I hear yelling and screaming. I don't know what is going on, and we had this big guy, big black guy. He's from down south somewhere. He was huge, like 6'2, 6'3 something like 210, 220. This big old farm boy man. He was cool. He was jumping racks and all of the sudden our drill instructor goes, "What's going on?" All of the sudden he's like, "Fire watch, subdue that guy." He jumped in the middle rack and he's punching, swearing and shit, dropped and stuff in midair and dropped him and they stuck him to the rack and left. The drill sergeant was like, "Fire watch, if he gets out of his rack, it's your ass." Someone just stood at his bed with his arms crossed. He didn't move the whole night. As far as that guy dropped, he was leaving the Army anyway so it didn't matter.

Aaron: And then after basic training you go to some sort of a tech school, is that correct?

Tim: Well I—you go to a—I think they changed it now. You go to a MCT which is a Marine Combat Training, which is basically an infantry school. That's a month. Is it? Something like that. A month, five weeks, or something like that. Where it's just all in the field.

Aaron: Also in California?

Tim: Yeah, that's actually at Camp Pendleton, up in the northern parts, way up in the middle of nowhere where you do all your humping ["humping" is military slang for heavy exertion and heavy field work]. You just live off of your own for four weeks. Your base is a Quonset hut, but that's just all heavy weapons training, all infantry training, skills training, throwing more grenades. Learning your squad tactics and all that kind of stuff. Because every Marine is a rifleman. So the basic equipment infantry school, every day you're in the field. It was Corporal Johnson was one of

our commanders. It was hilarious. It became a joke everyday he was in charge of us, because he had three—and everyday he was on duty it rained. Every single day. So, yeah, it was fun.

Aaron: So, like, he was notorious for that.

Tim: Yeah, it was fun.

Aaron: That was easy? Hard?

Tim: Ah, [sighs] I didn't find it difficult. It was demanding at times. I got upset with other guys. I didn't think anything was really hard. It was demanding, all the humping and stuff. You learn about old Smokey and motherfucker and that, too, where you learn—yeah. The hardest part, you have hills, three hills, three fucking hills. You have to put up all the fire breaks so BFG's or the bears—that was the toughest part. It just depends on who you get stuck with. For, like, for night landing. It was pouring rain down the side of the hill. They had these pigs all over. You were starting—you had a set of coordinates. You have to do this drill. You're going to have to use your compass and find the points so they match the numbers on the post. You get the numbers off the post from the plots you've been given. You have to go back and get it accepted, and once it's been accepted you're all right and pass it. It was raining and the guy I got stuck with—I could do the math and all the figuring. That didn't bother me. The only thing I told him was, "All you have to do is count steps so you know how far you're going. That's all you got to do. I don't care, I'll do the rest. Don't worry about it, just count how many steps we take so I know how far we're going." It's pouring rain, so of course pens don't work on wet paper. So I was kind of like scratching, you know, what measurements are and stuff. We were walking out there. It's the middle of the night. It's dark. You can't use flashlights because you have to use night discipline. The compass glows in the dark so you're just going off that. We're walking, we're walking. I was just up ahead. We're walking, we're walking. We got to the first post. I'm like, "How many?" He goes, "How many what?" **[End of Tape 1, side A]**

Aaron: Okay, we're back, Tim. I switched sides. Please continue with your night navigation.

Tim: Night navigation. It sucked, because it was pouring rain. It was going downhill, so everybody was about twenty yards off on their post because even though you try to walk a straight line, you slipped downhill and everything. We failed miserably and they kept us out there. We were out there until 11 o'clock at night. Finally the drill instructor is like, "Get it. Go back. Go to sleep." At the time we were actually staying out in the

field, so we had shelter mattresses. Each guy carries a half a skin. You have to snap them together.

Aaron: Mm hmm.

Tim: And we went back. There's just—you have to angle them when you pack, just like water running through all of ours and stuff because we still had the old cloth sleeping bags. We didn't have any new gear yet and everything. It was so funny because I was actually the platoon guide at the time. We had two platoon guides and stuff when I first got out there. We were in the tent together and we had just got back. We were soaked to the bone. All of our stuff is soaked, like our tent, our pup tent. We tried to build trenches around them, but there's still water going right through the middle of ours, so we put a pole on each side. We always brought garbage bags. We put them down so we could—that way. There's three posts that you stick together and carry front and back. You still have a post front and back. We just got climbing in there and Kurt kicked it and it broke. And I had to—

Aaron: [Laughs].

Tim: We were sitting there and it was pouring rain. We were soaked to the bone [laughs]. The tent collapsed in on top of us and he freaked out, swearing, screaming, and cussing. He was all pissed off and I was rolling around laughing. Sometimes there's nothing to do but laugh and he just busted—we had to rig up our tent because we didn't have like the metal pins that stick in the back for the other post.

Aaron: Okay.

Tim: It broke off inside there, so we couldn't put all three back together again. So, we only had two posts on the front that angled down. We had pins around it to tape it to try to help sturdy it and stuff. Yeah, that was fun.

Aaron: Sounds like you just had to jury rig something just to make it work.

Tim: Make it work, yeah. Pretty fun.

Aaron: How often were you—how often did you do the navigation portion of it? Was that just once?

Tim: We had both day and night landings, so yeah, you had two of them. I failed every land navigation course I've ever taken. Even refresher courses, boot camp, MCT, our MOS school, the fleet, all that kind of stuff. Words like you're not the one doing everything. But yeah, I failed miserably every time.

- Aaron: I guess they're trying to teach you to work together as a group, perhaps.
- Tim: Yeah. That's probably it, but there's always the slack off people that don't ever do anything. Yeah.
- Aaron: Did you ever have any contact through basic training, MCT, tech school, MOS school, as you mentioned, with, I mean, fellow Wisconsin recruits?
- Tim: Ah, there was actually one guy from Wisconsin was in my platoon at boot camp. The four guys that I left Madison with, we were all in the same company in boot camp. We all went to MCT together because we were all in different platoons. They do it all in alphabetical order for MCT-wise. We still found each other, but you become friends with other people, but at first that's what you cling to, like, "Finally, a familiar face." You know, "I'm so glad. Somebody I recognize to do stuff with." You get to know other guys and stuff, and then you don't care where people are from.
- Aaron: Sure. After MCT, then, you went to your MOS school?
- Tim: Yeah.
- Aaron: That was also in California?
- Tim: Mm hmm. That was at Camp Pendleton too. I didn't—we didn't pick up a class right away. You go into a holding platoon or whatever. You're still in your platoon, but you're waiting to pick up a class in rotation. I didn't get stuck on guard. I missed that by a week, thank God. That's one thing I never had to do is be on guard, ever. It was awesome. You're basically maintenance people. You go to school. You help clean. You cut grass. You had to. One of the details we had to do was paint bleachers. The bars were gold and the seats were red or vice versa, either one or the two. We had to paint the bleachers all nice, because that's where they had the dog and pony shows when the higher ups would come and whatever. We wore green coveralls and I—we were painting the bleachers and all of the sudden, "Aw shit." And all of the sudden I felt something hit my head and I dodged. The guy a few seats above me had kicked his paint tray over. Hit me in the head and shoulder, and I was just covered in paint, and then I had the green and gold. Yeah. A couple guys from Wisconsin offered to trade coveralls with me, but no. But yeah, we were there, I think, like a whole month, doing all that stuff before we actually picked up classes. Our MOS school wasn't that long. I think it was maybe eight or nine weeks, something like that. You just go out and learn everything about the new vehicle and everything about it. Taught us how to drive it in land and water, how to operate the weapons stations, and all that kind of stuff.

- Aaron: By the end of your MOS school and from the start of basic training had you had much contact with any of your family or your girlfriend at that time?
- Tim: Um, boot camp, you got one phone call home like in the middle of boot camp, like a ten minute call. I placed the call, nobody was home. I finally did get a hold of her. She didn't recognize my voice. It was so hoarse from yelling and stuff. She didn't know who I was. So, I got to talk to her then. Then, after boot camp, my family came out. They brought my girlfriend with them. I went through graduation and all that. Then, I went home for the ten day leave and stuff. After that, no, I didn't see them at all, because you're in. You go to MCT. You go to school, and then, when you're in school, you can still call and stuff. It isn't like you're restricted. You still live in the barracks and stuff. You have your weekends off, and I went to [see] my cousin. And her husband was in the Navy, stationed down in San Diego, so I went down by them on the weekends. Then, I could call home and write and stuff but not actually see them.
- Aaron: And, speaking of writing, how about letter-writing during basic training? Did you receive many? I think you have a funny story about that.
- Tim: Oh my God! I got on average about two and a half letters a day. Between my mom, my girlfriend, friends, family, and all that kind of stuff. Actually, the funny story is you're not supposed to get anything that can't fit in your foot locker, which is about, I don't know, three feet by two feet, or whatever proportions, whatever. The other guys got care packages. Everyone's like, "What's this guy getting?" One guy got some clothes, a picture frame, and all that. I was like, "What?!" They have to stick it in storage and all that. One time—and, too, our drill instructors always said—you know, like someone would get a care package like, "Is there enough for everybody?" Like, "No." It was like, if you send anything, there better be enough for everybody, because it was—like, they would make you eat it as fast as you can and then IT the hell out of you so you puke and stuff. One day, we're sitting there and stuff. My mom would always joke, "Oh, can you get care packages?" "Yeah, but there has to be enough for everybody." "How many in your platoon?" There were like 67 or something like that. "67 guys." I never thought about it. Never brought it up. I was like, "Yeah, you have to have enough for 67 guys."
- Aaron: Sure.
- Tim: One day this big huge box came and everyone's just like laughing, "What got a big ol' box." It was like three feet by three feet, a three-foot cube pretty much. This thing was huge. All of the sudden, like, "Group run!" There's Colby Braun. Well, we had another guy named Brown, "B-r-o-w-n." The first day there, Recruit Brown played it off like, "Do you want to

be called ‘Brown’ or ‘Braun?’” They call you by your last name. They called me “Braun.” It got me in trouble a couple of times because the drill instructor is like, “Braun, Recruit Braun.” “Aye, sir.” All of the sudden, you hear, “Recruit Brown.” “Aye sir.” “Recruit Brown.” “Aye, sir. Oh damn, that’s me.” We were sitting there. This big huge box is sitting there. “Recruit Braun, sir.” “What?” I was like, “What the hell?” I go up there, and [he’s] like, “What’s in this thing?” I’m like, “Recruit don’t know, sir.” “Open it.” Anybody at all that knows my parents [knows] they know how to mail a box. Not a single seam left untaped. Duct tape, you got packaging tape. You got everything. I didn’t have anything to open it with. You don’t carry knives. Your bayonet is locked up with your rifle. I busted two pens trying to open it. I finally got it open. My packing peanuts, a note, and all that stuff. “What is it?” “Recruit doesn’t know, sir.” “Well, open the damn thing.” There was a note on top. “Twelve dozen chocolate chip walnut cookies for the platoon 1053 and its handsome drill instructors.” I balled that up and I shoved it in my pocket before anybody saw it. I’m like, “I’m not showing that note.” “What is it?” I’m like, “Cookies, sir.” “Enough for everybody?” “Yes, sir,” and they were like, “What?!” “At least two a piece, sir.” You know, 144 cookies and we got 67 guys, you know. They’re like, “Seriously?” and I’m like—everyone was like, “Ah, homemade cookies.” I’m like, “Yeah, homemade cookies.” All of the sudden the drill instructor and his buddy said, “Is it poison?” I said, “No sergeant. My sister and mom wouldn’t do that, sir.” “Are you sure?” “Positive, sir.” “Well, could it have been poisoned in transit?” I’m like, “Yes, anything’s possible.” “Eat one, but not off the top.” “Okay,” so I ate a cookie. “What kind is it?” “Chocolate chip, sir.” “If you’re still alive in the morning, we’ll eat the rest.” They took the whole damn box.

Aaron: Did you ever see it again?

Tim: Three days later they came out, “Here hand out the crumbs and junk.” We got the leftover busted-up cookies and crumbs and stuff. They ate 12 dozen cookies in like two and a half, three days.

Aaron: “They” as in the instructors?

Tim: The drill instructors, yeah. I was the series secretary, because each series—there’s like two series to a side. A company is divided into two series, and there’s a series gunnery sergeant who’s like in control of all three platoons—actually, six platoons. There’s three on a side, so we rotated. I had to get the books in the morning before PT. It was a bitch. I always got out of some of the bad stuff. I had to go help him and stuff. I told the gunnery sergeant, “So that’s what they’ve been eating the last three days,” and stuff. He was mad at them, because he didn’t get any and stuff. Yeah, it was pretty funny. I got letters all the time. I wrote quite a

few, because you get like that hour at night to get your stuff ready and all that, but I was trying to keep up with everybody, you know, but I got a ton of mail. The worst part is, at first, it tells you to put “Pvt” on there for private.

Aaron: Oh.

Tim: Yeah, you know where this is going.

Aaron: I think I know where you’re going.

Tim: My mom started. “Aw, so you think you’re a Marine already? Did you graduate? You don’t need to be here?” I was like, “Aw shit,” because I had to do push-ups for every fuckin’ letter. My God. Of course, it takes about a week or so for the mail to go through to basic. “Don’t write that on there. It’s ‘Recruit Braun.’” Boy, I got a week of letters. I was getting madder and madder. You know, she’s—“Don’t write any fuckin’ letters anymore.” My mom got kind of mad at that, but I was doing push-ups for a while for my mail, which pretty much sucked. But, yeah, I got quite a bit of mail.

Aaron: Good. Then at tech school, going back to that part. What did you actually do at tech school?

Tim: In the morning, you go out and you have classes. You know, you have classes at—each class had, I don’t know, five vehicles, something like that. There’s a crew chief of each vehicle. Plus, you had your instructors. We had classes in the actual classroom where you interact and that, and then you worked on your vehicle. The instructor showed you stuff and then you do basic maintenance and then you have classes. The vehicle had to have ground guides. You had to know all your signals and hand signals for turning the vehicles. We practiced that. We practiced throwing rope for dead vehicles in the water and stuff like that, and we went to do driving day and night. We even had to do driving with the night school—which sucked because they’re only 2-D (they’re only two dimensional, not three dimensional)—when we were finished with the AVs for drive school, because they’re a track vehicle [AV stands for “Armored Transport Vehicle]. So like, what’s called the final drive. Our truck just hauls. You don’t have to worry about bounce or anything, control, because it doesn’t matter. Well, the AM track—for some ungodly reason—they decided to put them in the front, which I don’t know why they did. So, you can’t bang them too hard. If you hit a ditch, you can actually sheer them off. Yeah, exactly.

Aaron: Outstanding.

Tim: When you're driving, you hit a ditch or whatever. You "cross ears," they call it. Like when you're steering, you steer at an angle so you won't hit the square. You hit one, you know, and then the other. You would hit it, and then, right at the bottom, you would steer back the other way, so when you went in to pivot, the front would hit the pavement in order to turn out of it. That, and you're not hitting any other truck drivers, and you're not jostling anyone around in the back. At night you're cruising along and you have a scope that mounts in your hatch. You close your hatch and you got six inches, about. Say about that big. You're looking, because it's two dimensional. We drove it in the day. We kind of—we're cruising along and hit the nose. You drive by your ass. You drive by the seat of your pants because—you're driving along, flying going along good. All of the sudden, we're going fast, always want to drive fast. I didn't even see anything. All of the sudden, "Bam!" There's a ditch, a little dip in the road, and I didn't even see it, man. I didn't turn. I didn't steer. I did nothing. I almost knocked the scope out of the hatch, and yet—then the instructor kicked me in the back (because they sit right behind you). He said, "Quit banging so hard!" Yeah, but then we drove during the day. Water operations, we had to go out to the beach, splash out and all that. All that kind of stuff, so—

Aaron: For those that don't know or don't have any knowledge of what an Amtrak AAV is, can you describe that a little further? [Amtrak AAV is an Assault Amphibian Vehicle (AAV-P7A1) used for transporting US Marine personnel over both land and water].

Tim: It's a 26-ton armored transport carrier. It can carry, I think, textbook is like twenty to 24 troops in the back, but, I mean, you can pack in as many as you want. There's a, basically, a three-man crew: a driver, the crew chief, who sits up in the turret and mans the guns, and the crewman in the back, who keeps track of all the drums and kind of keeps the peace back there. The infantry commander sits right behind the driver and is also in charge of his own hatch and stuff and the ramp which will drop down in the back where you can get out. And that, coupled with the turret, which is off to the one side, and you have a MARK 19, a grenade launcher that is on the other side where you have the M2.52 caliber machine gun, and you have—opening behind it. You basically drop off the back end of a ship. Because you have—they call it a "bow point," to help keep your nose up. And then there's propellers that open up in the back when the ship goes on the side so you can maneuver in the water, because it actually floats. You go on the beach, switch over so your tracks can run on land. So, you can basically go right on and use it as a transport carrier.

Aaron: How fast can this thing go on water and land? [Both laugh].

Tim: Top speed is like eight miles an hour or something. I think track is like five to eight miles an hour. If you're desperate, you can use your tracks. They'll still move you, crawling. And I think with the jets you can go like eleven [miles per hour], or something like that. That, too, sometimes depends how the armor is on there. I don't know what it stands for but basically, [it is] angled and corrugated on the side. It is thick steel armor embedded in like a—if a bullet hits it or whatever, it'll bounce off it. It won't be a straight hit, because the side is all grooved like that, so it won't hit straight on. It will bounce off each other. That slows you down, especially in the water [laughs]. Fairly important, but in the water you go pretty slow. On land it all depends, because the engine is a diesel 900, a big V8 900 cubic inches. I can like crawl in the engine column. The transmission is even bigger yet, but up to 1,000 horsepower. They govern it down to like 400 because the transmissions can't handle all that much horsepower. The fastest that I've had a track going [both laugh] is, I guess, about 65 [miles per hour].

Because one time, we were out doing a—we always called it Highway 100. It's this paved road up to Camp Pendleton that goes to where the trooper engine training and all that stuff is. We had to do some maintenance runs, because we were also trained in all—about five vehicles are ours. We set off to go where the mechanics are. They had to make—so we were following, you know, chase and all that stuff. We were coming back. We had gone to do something and we were coming back. We were driving and we had a mechanic on our vehicle for our section, and he jerry-rigged the governor for us. There's a couple of other things you can do because the gas pedal has like a bolt to stop. You can take that out of there so you can floor the gas pedal down a little bit and tighten up the linkage a little bit. You get just a little bit, so you actually open the gas up a little more. They don't give you gallon wrenches, because that's how you adjust the governor and only mechanics have it. If you do too much you will blow your transmission, but he can tweak it just a little bit for us. We were coming back in the R-7, going kind of slow (all the welding and just packed full of tools and all that kind of junk), and they were going so that we could catch up to them. Wait, wait, wait. They'd take off ahead of us. "Okay, ready, set, go." "Go, go, go." "Catch them," which was cool, because when you drive, your head is sticking up out the top. Most of the time, you don't let your head stick out the top. In the hedges it doesn't matter so much, because you're pretty much right out in front off to the left side. And it's night and we're sitting there without all our lights on, just our cat's eye, just a dim light, so people can see you up close. And we turn our lights off and we were just cruising. We were on a downhill grade and pavement. We didn't have anybody there except us three. We were just flying. Back to the road, I go "Wha—? Wha—?" We were going about 60, 65 on a downhill grade, which is really fast. Average speed depends on what you're driving on, but on the beach 40, maybe 45 [miles

per hour], if it's on hard-packed sand and all that kind of stuff. If it's over grass, if it's on level, even road or whatever, like 50 [miles per hour], I forget. I think the textbook top-speed is like 55 [miles per hour] or something like that.

Aaron: You could go much faster if you didn't have the governor.

Tim: Yeah. They had some where they put rally suspension on them, and those could go a lot faster, because you don't have to worry about the—which pushes it up a little higher and stuff. The new ones, the triple AVs coming out, sweet. It's—on the water they go what, about 70 miles an hour in the water. And they're sticking a new turret there, putting a 28, 30 millimeter gun on top, instead of the, you know, the .50 caliber. On land it goes about 70 miles an hour. It flies. They have the prototypes. I've seen them. They're awesome. They actually work like a hydroplane. The tracks come up and go over the track. It's just like a hydroplane flying over the water so fast. On the first bulkhead they took the Corvette engine. But yeah, [laughs] definitely cool once it does come out. There's—you can't get onto the beach fast enough. But, now, with that thing you might actually be able to use it again.

Aaron: Great! Throughout your time at—when you left for basic training, you of course saw your family. When was the next time you saw your family or a family member?

Tim: [Sighs]. Christmas. I went in October, was it? Yeah. Went through all that stuff out in the field. Went to MCT [Marine Corps Combat Training]. Went to my school. I hit the fleet in June. It was like a week before my birthday [laughs]. I kept it a secret for two years. I never did, and I was going to go that fall, but I decided to wait for Christmas, so I went all the way to Christmas, which was a year before coming home again. Then, after *that*, it was another year, because I went—my brother and girlfriend came up to visit me in—I forgot when. But they came up and visited me and stuff. Then, I went a whole year without going home again so—yeah. Then, after that, I came home on the one weekend for Christmas and Thanksgiving. I surprised my girlfriend. I didn't tell her I was coming home. And then I went on leave before I went on deployment. Went on deployment. Went on leave again when I got back. And then I pretty much went home. So I went on leave four times, three times, something like that. So, yeah. It got kind of long in a stretch, but that makes it worthwhile when you go home.

Aaron: Right. Where was your first duty station after MOS school?

Tim: Camp Pendleton [California].

- Aaron: So you spent basically your entire time—unless you went out on ship, out on float—was at Pendleton?
- Tim: Yeah, which, praying to God, I didn't get stuck at Twentynine Palms, or Twentynine Stumps, as they call it 'cause, well [Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Air Ground, located in Twentynine Palms, California]. When you finish school you can put in what you *wanted*. You didn't know if you were actually going to get it. East coast, which is Lejeune [Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base, located in Lejeune, North Carolina]; west coast, which is Pendleton; or Twentynine Palms; or overseas, which is basically Hawaii. And Twentynine Palms is like the asshole of California. There's nothing out there in the middle of the desert, nothing. But I chose west coast because I didn't want to go to Lejeune. It gets cold there. So yeah, I was stationed at Pendleton the whole time. Then I moved around on deployment, you know. You're there for a while. Because you'd go to—out doing an exercise at like Palms for a month and a half. Went out to a bunch of those. I was stationed in Yuma, Arizona, for like a month or two on a JTF [Joint Task Force]. Worked border patrol, and then I was in Okinawa for my deployment, but we got sent to the Middle East and got sent back to Okinawa and then shipped back to Pendleton. So I was pretty much basically at Pendleton the whole time.
- Aaron: Can you describe for me your experiences JTF at Yuma?
- Tim: That sucked.
- Aaron: What did you do? Besides, probably, sweat in the heat?
- Tim: We were—
- Aaron: Probably sweat in the heat.
- Tim: LPO, which is Listening Post Observation post. Because, you know, the military can't act as a police force, but we can help. You know, we still help the border patrol. We'd go out in the middle of the night so no one would see you. You would sit in a position [and] call in anything that you saw. We were out there sitting on the border, and, yeah, it was hot. It would get to like 110, 120 in the middle of the day and that. It'd get cold at night down to 40, 50, and we'd just sit there. If we saw anything we radioed, which would go back to our base of operations. We had to learn how to use CBs to talk to the border patrol, because that's what they used. But, because the whole thing is, we're not supposed to—and no one is supposed to—know we're out there and stuff. The people on the other side of the border always listen to CBs and stuff, so you learn to talk non-military on the radio. "Hey Chuck, how's it going? Why don't you come on over here?" Stuff, you know, instead of doing the military on your

radio, which is all you do. It was kind of fun, but you'd sit there and you'd go up in the middle of the night. Spend all night, spend all day, then the following night you could rotate back in. You'd come back in when they relieved you. So, you would go out there basically two days and then have off for four and a half, because you would have four days off for the other two rotations. Then you'd have that day off, but you go up that night so it's kind of like a half day off. And it sucked, 'cause it was freaken hot. Actually I kind of got heat exhaustion. I got pulled out. I took the night shift because I would rather sleep all day. The other two guys drew three-man teams. They were asleep, and I was up all night, and I woke them up about 6:30 a.m. because they weren't quite up yet. So they woke up. I'm crashing out, curled up in a poncho liner and that, and I woke up at like—it was like noon or one o'clock, you know, 1300 or whatever. And I'm still laying in my poncho liner. It's up over my head and stuff. I was dying. I woke up and I was like—I was drenched. Actually, I was dry because I wasn't sweating anymore. I'd been laying there for six hours, and my nice team (thanks guys) crawled into the bushes and made little shelters for themselves to get out of the sun and stuff. I wasn't even in the bushes, because we were in a line of bushes kind of like this. All of the sudden, I was like behind it, like right out in the open, right in the middle of a clearing. I was in the sun for like six hours, wrapped up in an insulated poncho liner. And they call it a shakes because it was too hot for them. They let me sit out there (yeah thanks). So you know, we tried everything. Drinking. A rag under the arm pits and crotch. And I was still light headed, dizzy, and all that stuff. They pulled me out, and they took me back to our base of operations and stuff by the Border Patrol. Freezing, great. I almost went into shock on them. The corpsmen were cool. They took my canteen, and the water from a canteen is what we were used to drinking because they gave us like that powdered Gatorade that you put in it. It was hotter than their coffee. And this was the first day. So, then, what we'd do is—and they were letting us—“We got to do something because you're drinking hot water. What I would do is to take your canteen covers that you have on your belt and soak it and hang it up. Actually the wind would get it actually a little bit cool.”

Aaron: Interesting.

Tim: But what we ended up doing is you take—because you take five gallon jugs of water out there with you, but we just needed enough for two people, and they would resupply if needed. One was solid ice. We'd freeze it, take it out there, and then we buried it in—stick them in the ground. Bury them. By the end of the next day, it would be drinkable. Like not even cold anymore, so but at least it wasn't hot. But yeah, that pretty much sucked. The off-days were cool because you didn't have anything to do. We'd like go to the gym and go swimming, go get something to eat, watch

TV, watch a movie, whatever, because you couldn't leave base and stuff, but it was all right.

Aaron: I heard that you were the ping-pong king. Is that true?

Tim: Yeah.

Aaron: Not much else to do during down time?

Tim: Yeah, no one would play with me anymore [both laugh]. "I'll let you win," and they're like, "No." So I switched to foosball, so—

Aaron: Outstanding. Okay, so that was JTF, right?

Tim: Mm hmm.

Aaron: And then you also went out on float. You went out to Okinawa and then out toward Southeast Asia, then Southwest Asia area. Can you describe for me when that happened?

Tim: Well, we were actually assigned to the MEU which is part of the Marine Expeditionary Unit [originally called "Marine Amphibious Unit" or "MAU"], which was good because one of the—

[end of tape 1, side B]

Aaron: Okay, we're back. Tim, please continue with your description about starting your Okinawa adventure.

Tim: Yeah, I said [that] luckily I got put in a platoon where you go for Okinawa for a little while for a month or two aboard ship, then come back and go home. But we got put over there—we didn't even unpack that day, and all the sudden we got called up to go to the Middle East. It was a nightmare because the vehicles stay, so we were over there. We didn't even accept the vehicles yet. "You guys are leaving in three days." "What?" The day we got there and we found out we had to leave in three days.

Aaron: And this is because your vehicles went separate and then you flew, or your vehicles stayed back in California and you just picked up vehicles in—?

Tim: The vehicles stay at the base. Just the people move. The vehicles stay in Pendleton, except if you go onboard ship. They can go with you on ship but, well, vehicles stay in Pendleton, vehicles stay in Okinawa. It's just people who rotate. I had—I don't know. Probably in my whole career I had six different vehicles. It's just the vehicles at Okinawa, you don't know what shape they're in. You don't know what they look like, you

know, because the last platoon had them, you know, did the change over, because you always send an advance party wherever you go. Get them all packed. You're supposed to get them ready before the platoon got there. We got there, so they knew to set up the barracks and that kind of thing, change over the vehicles, that much stuff. We didn't know what they looked like. We're like leaving in three days [sighs]. It was like, "Okay, don't even bother unpacking," and stuff. Like, okay, some of the vehicles were in pretty bad shape. We got them in okay order in three days. A lot of long nights, so it's like leaving two and a half days, because the first night is getting all settled in and junk. So we just scrambled and got everything done, then went out to the ship to head out to the Middle East, which kind of sucked. It's a long trek.

Aaron: What time frame was this? What date, month, do you remember?

Tim: Oh God, it was—I know we spent Thanksgiving on ship. August or September when we left.

Aaron: Of '99?

Tim: '98.

Aaron: Okay, and do you remember what was going on in the world at that time that required you to go to the Middle East?

Tim: It was after Desert Storm and stuff, and there were sounds of a big build up again and crap again on the border. And we were starting to bomb them again. We were basically sent over there because they were sticking us on the border between Kuwait and Iraq. We were walking force before they got to Kuwait City, in case Iraq decided to try to come across again. So we were actually stationed right outside Kuwait City, which is actually pretty close to the border. We were six miles.

Aaron: I think you have a t-shirt that says, "Six miles."

Tim: "Kuwait '98, six miles from Iraqi real estate." We still had the Kuwaiti army in front of us, but—

Aaron: [Laughs].

Tim: Yeah.

Aaron: In the Air Force they would call what you guys were "speed bumps." What would you call the Kuwaiti army that was ahead of you?

- Tim: A nuisance, because we were over there before. We actually did that. We were sent over there. Our initial thing was just a show of force. We were originally sent over to go do exercises out by the border. We got lost one time because we were too close [laughs]. Originally, they sent in—which is three ships, fully combat-loaded and everything, and so we were there. There was an aircraft carrier there as well and all that kind of stuff. We were doing exercises, stepping up our presence on the border, and all that kind of junk. And we were there for a couple weeks—two, three weeks—and we were getting ready to leave. Because what sucks [is] we were operating out in the field and having fun and it was great. When we leave it isn't like just cleaning the vehicles to go back on ship. I don't know if it's like the Health and Agricultural has to inspect it.
- Aaron: Okay.
- Tim: You can have no plants, no dirt, or anything when you leave the country because of ecological ramifications. So, you have to like pretty much spit shine your vehicle with the pressure washers, inside out, upside down, all that crap. They have to inspect it and okay it before you can leave. We cleaned our vehicles for three days straight before they okayed them. So, we just got all cleaned off, okayed. We were supposed to be going back to ship the next day. You know, it's the last day going to go back, you know, head back. The call came out: we're going back on the border to sit in a defensive position. We were like "More exercises?" but it wasn't. It was actually going out there to sit and dig in and stuff. I was like, "Oh jeez! Heads up!" and stuff. And then as we're all heading out there, we don't drive our vehicles out there because it's too slow and you don't get enough—we stick them on low-boy flatbed trucks.
- Aaron: Okay.
- Tim: Drive them up, and we just rode in buses and stuff. On our way out there, everyone was like, "Damn. We could have cleaned our vehicles so we could get up and leave." So we set out, outside of Kuwait City, because there is the main highway. The main city, they just drove their tanks and blew the hell out of stuff because there's no opposition there. We were sitting on that.
- Aaron: Mm hmm.
- Tim: Kuwait out in front of us. But yeah, we had the big bases, vehicles. We actually dig foxholes for our vehicles. So, like, the—in front of us were dug-in fighting positions and stuff. You had a foxhole per vehicle and stuff, so when we were out there for a couple of weeks. We were out there for Christmas. Actually, no, I take that back. We left on Christmas Eve

and we came back on Christmas Day. We got to go back. Yes, we were up there for a couple of weeks, just sitting there.

Aaron: How long were you in Kuwait?

Tim: A month, a month and a half, something like that.

Aaron: Okay. Let me take you back a little bit. How is it—from Okinawa you picked up your vehicles and then got on ship and then basically sailed all the way to Kuwait City, where you unloaded. What was that like?

Tim: Yeah.

Aaron: What was that like?

Tim: It sucked [laughs]. Well, I mean, it's ship life. There's nothing to do but work on the vehicles. We actually had to do a lot of maintenance, and we had a lot of time to do it when we were in Okinawa. You just wake up in the morning, sit there. You have morning formation and that, then you'd go eat. At first it was very unorganized. You'd sit there and you'd wait in line for two hours to eat because there's only one mess line. You have the Navy, the whole company of infantry with you, plus all of us, plus other people and stuff. There's no semblance of order. You just go. You'd be waiting in a line that would stretch all the way around the ship and junk, waiting to eat and that. And then we had where—somebody finally decided to come up with a schedule where these people went now, these people went now, these people went this time, this time, so they didn't have just a big mass. So, once you got a schedule, you know, like that, there's really not much else to do. You sit there. Ship sucked. It was hot and humid. Worked on our vehicles and stuff. It just got boring. The other thing that sucked, too, was at night you can't go up out on the deck at all because there's no lights. Once we crossed the—I don't know, the—I don't know what they called it, but the danger area or whatever. There was like a line. There's no lights outside of the ship. Well, the thing is we always, "Why won't they let us outside?" You could literally walk off the end of the ship and you wouldn't even know it. One time we had to take trash out and the door was open. They had the light from the door to show us, and it was dark. You could see right where the light was and that was it. The ship—I think the longest time I went was four days without seeing sunlight. 'Cause you wake up in the morning, eat inside, get ready, stand in line to eat, then we eat, then we go straight down to the well deck. That's like the bottom of the ship where our vehicles were all day. Go back up to eat. By the time we're done eating, you couldn't go outside. But, I mean, they had the chow line open at midnight, because the Navy has people constantly working and stuff. And you wake up in the middle of the night and go eat and do stuff in the middle of the night, just because

you're bored and stuff. A lot of guys went to the gym and lifted weights, which is—I'd go ride bikes and stuff, but I'm not a real big weightlifter and that. Played a lot of cards [laughs]. But really, that was it. There was nothing much else to do on ship. Well, we had what they called a steel beach, I think is what they called it. They had like two or three of them. They had like a big picnic out on the flight deck. They'd pump music through, and they had a big barbeque and stuff like that. First day, we lost two footballs, two basketballs, a soccer ball, and I don't know how many hacky sacks over the side, so they kind of cut that down. Sometimes they did what they call "Cinema At Sea." They would pull a big projector outside, go watch a movie out on the deck and stuff like that. So it was almost like a drive-in movie theater. Otherwise, it was pretty routine and—but other than that not a whole lot else to do on ship.

Aaron: While you were on ship did you have much contact with family members then?

Tim: Just by mail and stuff, but mail would only come if they flew it to you. We'd get mail. We got it regularly in the beginning, because by the time they got it routed to you and you would get it, it's two months old and stuff. But that's really about it.

Aaron: Mm hmm. How about taking any school classes? Did you take any of those while on ship?

Tim: I took one. I took a history class. Our lieutenant was offering it through Texas Central University or something like that. There's History 1 and History 2. I wanted to take both, but I only had time to take the one because of all the crap that happened and that, but—from the start of American history up through the Civil War. The next one was from the Civil War to modern history. I was going to take a math class but we just didn't do it. There wasn't any interest in it. There were only six or eight guys in the class to begin with, so...I mean, I got three credits [laughs]. That's not shit, but that's about it.

Aaron: Keeps you busy as well.

Tim: Yeah.

Aaron: I think you also have a funny story about a gas alert one night or something.

Tim: We always practice the drills for general quarters. If the ship gets attacked, it sucks. There ain't nothing you can do. You go to your bunk. You just stay in there and you lock all the hatches. Obviously, if something happens—you get hit—you don't want it flooding the whole ship. You

just go into that. They turn the ventilators off. You sit there just dying because there's no air condition going, because it's for biological and chemical attack too. You don't want to be pumping poison through there. We would just die, and we would just go for a couple of hours or whatever. Our burning area was twenty feet long and ten feet wide. It had all of the—we had like 30 guys there, because racks are stacked four or five high and all that. So you got 30 guys packed in this little room that's all closed up. You got—the one time it was at night around 9 o'clock. I just got out of the shower. The alarms went off. I was like, "This is a drill." All of the sudden, it's like, "This is not a drill. This is not a drill!" We were in the Persian Gulf already. I was like, "Oh shit!" And so the funny thing is we kept all our gear in our vehicles and not where we were. We went to general quarters. You got to get your gas mask and all that. It was pretty much chaos. I was in a bath towel. I wasn't even dressed, so we went in there. We quickly got dressed real quick and stuff. We didn't know if we were supposed to go to general quarters or to get our gas masks or what to do, and it was just a mess. A couple of guys were told to just get dressed and stay here. I went down to get the gas masks and all that kind of stuff. It turned out to be that one of the guys was painting too close to the sensors and that set it off [both laugh]. But yeah, kind of a jackass, but it was good because they made us carry our gas masks and a canteen of water around in case we got stuck. What good does it do if it's down in your vehicle and stuff like that. So, yeah, that wasn't too much fun.

Aaron: Can't imagine that was very fun. And I know that you mentioned this, later on, after returning. How about immunizations?

Tim: Oh god. Normally, [laughs] I didn't even keep track. There's all this ridiculous metal crap and all this. Who gives a crap? Just stick me. You got—jeez, I don't know—like three, four shots a month just normal. And then when we were building up to go overseas, we had all the screwy immunizations for the area, malaria and South East Asian something or other and all sorts of weird crap like that. And then when we're on ship, oh my god, (especially where we're going and why we're going) we got at least one shot a week all the time. They stuck us so much. One shot was about that big. It's fun, but they stick you all the time and stuff. I don't even care. It's like, you know, if they're giving it to you, it's for a reason. I kind of—the anthrax vaccination—I can't give blood any more. I don't care. I'd rather take my chances with vaccinations than get gassed with it and take my risks that way.

Aaron: And while you were in Kuwait, what were your feelings at that time? Were you happy to be there? Did you feel patriotic? Were you counting down the days?

Tim: At first it was cool being there. You're just doing exercises, seeing a new country and all that kind of stuff. That's cool. Actually, the one time when we were on ship, the grunts [infantry marines] flew in while we were on ship to do an exercise a couple days out in the desert, and they asked if anybody wanted to go, and I went. That was cool, because that was the first helicopter ride I ever had, finding out, which is pretty cool. We got to take off a couple of days, sort of like a mini-vacation. I got to—it sucks—but it was pretty cool and that. We threw grenades and I almost got blown up [laughs]. We did this drill where we had this great big—you go in two-man teams. We had pistols, 9 millimeters, out there, and one guy had two rounds and the other guy carried a grenade. We went running up there. As we were running up there, the one guy shot twice, dove down, sent a grenade down, kind of like if you're assaulting a hill, shooting and the cover kind of thing. So we did a double-take from about twenty yards away, because we started going and I heard, "Make your shot count." He started running and the truck commander yelled at me, the captain, their CO [commanding officer] about twenty yards away. I took both my shots from far away and we still ran up. You can't throw a grenade that far, you know, and he threw it quite a ways, twenty yards. I shot twice, dove at about ten. The guy with me didn't throw it real well and it hit the front of the bunker and kind of came back at us. It didn't—well, you just dive down (put your head down, anyways) and I put my head in the dirt and he dove down and all the sudden you hear, "Oh shit!" All of the sudden it went off. We pretty much got sprayed with shammy. It was still pretty far away. It was kind of up in the hill. It hit the front and came back at us. We got covered in stuff. You could feel the "flump" when it went off and stuff. The infantry guy said, "What the fuck!" He went off and stuff. He—because they always told us, "If you're going to throw it, overthrow it." We'd rather have it go behind the hill than not far enough. "You guys could get blown up, but—" "What the hell are you doing? At twenty yards away, you don't be shooting your pistol." "Why?" and he's like, "Can't shoot at all." He says—he's like, "Never mind." And I actually got complimented because the 'trackers [Amtrackers is the Marine Corps term for Amphibious Assault Vehicle crewmen] did better than the grunts did on our assault and stuff, and I got complimented from the guys. The infantry lieutenant said, "He's not one of mine." "Who is he?" "Amtracker." Then, the Amtrackers were better than the grunts, because this is their job and stuff. And then, too, we were doing a drill where we were doing like rapid movement where we practice shooting and stuff. They were mad because we were just screwing around and we were the only ones who could hit the targets.

And then the cool thing was we did a night raid, which was awesome. It looked straight up like *Starship Troopers*. We were in a line, the whole company of grunts and stuff. Our section was out in the line running. We were so tired. I shot more in those two days than I ever did. I had more

rounds than I had magazines for. You carry six magazines with 200 and some rounds. So like one, you shoot it off like okay. We were running—it was like a mile—full gear, our packs and everything, up there in a line, and stopped, dropped all our packs and stuff like a half mile from the actual assault out there. Then we went running up there and we spread out. Like abreast the whole company and a couple hundred guys, and there's live fire. Then we sent out a tracer when you're shooting and it was cool. We were clipping off rounds. We were just leap frogging by sections. So you have twenty guys to a section. I take this much, start shelling and all that kind of stuff. We had flares and mortars dropping, we had smoke that popped, and I was just running on line. It was a blast. We had fun. All the rest were like, "You suck." I was like, "Yeah." So that was pretty cool.

Aaron: Sounds like a good time. Sounds like something that while you were doing it you were thinking back, "This is why I joined the Marine Corps."

Tim: The only stupid thing is one—there's two idiot things but they're—some stuff is like if you lose it, it's like big time trouble. Well, one guy we flew in when we were leaving didn't really say anything [but he] lost his MPGs. He didn't have them. When you put something on your belt, you tie it on so that if the clips fall or whatever it's not going to—we were out there in a line, literally combing the desert. We combed ten square miles, one line walking each section, looking for the MPGs. What happened is when we disembarked from our helicopters on the first day, he jumped out and it fell off right as he got out of the helicopter. A sergeant went over and found them. He didn't know whose it was so he picked them up thinking someone was going to come looking for them. Nobody said anything. We didn't find out until we were all done searching. We didn't find it. The sergeant's like, "I found an extra the first day." All that crap for nothing, full gear packs and everything. After we hiked back to our departure zone, we had to go back out and look for all that crap.

Aaron: Did that guy get a GI party on him [laughs]?

Tim: I don't know. The other thing that is—when we flew back to the ship out of the helicopters, I was one of the last ones getting off, and all of the sudden the crew chief says, "Hey." I'm like, "What?" He says, "Here." He hands me a rifle. I'm like, "Whose is this?" "Somebody got [unintelligible]." "Oh well, they'll find it." So I went in to put my stuff in because I was late for chow. Went up to the chow. Weapons aren't supposed to be carried around the ship in the first place. I walked out [with] the rifle, went up—I went straight to the company gunnery sergeant said, "Hey, gunny." "What?" I knew him. We were out there talking the last couple of days. "Hey, I got something for you." He said, "What?" I held up the rifle. He's like, "Where the hell did that come from?" I'm like, "It was left in the helicopter."

- Aaron: [Laughs].
- Tim: He wasn't happy about that. But yeah, those were the pretty dumb things to happen when we were out there.
- Aaron: I don't know if this was about that time, but you had mentioned to me prior about some guy mailing pieces of a rifle back.
- Tim: Oh yeah, that was a guy at Pendleton that had—he was basically stealing a rifle a part at a time. He was mailing it home.
- Aaron: Ah ha.
- Tim: This is a story that we were told. Supposedly his wife wanted to surprise him. She called and asked him how to assemble pieces of an M-16. He was like, "Well, your husband—." Surprised she had it all assembled and stuff. So yeah.
- Aaron: No.
- Tim: But one of the cool things in Kuwait was that we went in our vehicles and we had the whole MEU [Marine Corps Expeditionary Unit] out there, on line, for night fighter. We had everybody out there. It was awesome. We had some videos and stuff. The whole platoon was out there shooting up with .50 caliber tracers. Every gun was out there on line shooting tracers. We had the machine guns out there on line shooting tracers. We had the CAT team, which is counter armor team, which is humvees with the TOW missiles on top of it [TOW missiles are anti-tank missiles. TOW stands for "tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire command link guided"]. They were out there live firing. We had dragon teams out there firing [dragon antitank weapons team]. We had mortars out there dropping live rounds. We had artillery out there dropping live rounds, popping flares, smoke, everything, and all the lines all shooting off at the same time.
- Aaron: You were lighting up some sand dunes.
- Tim: That was pretty cool until the one idiot guy almost—one of the dragon teams, oh my god, because the dragon teams always sit back a little because we're up high and all that stuff. He shot his dragon at about twenty feet and it hit the ground ["dragon" refers to M-47 Dragon weapon system shoulder-fired medium-range antitank weapon]. It blew up. One of the tracks got out the sight vessel because in our station, you know, we got the little sunglasses out. They are seven layers thick. I mean they're like well, that thick, you know. First two layers got cracked by shrapnel from that rocket. Yeah, they weren't too happy about that one. It was pretty

cool. I got it on tape from my drivers station, so it was pretty cool. Yeah, we actually shelled a lot of stuff down range, so—

Aaron: That's dandy. Sounds like fun.

Tim: Yeah, it was pretty cool. That's one of the coolest things I've done, so—

Aaron: So your experience in Kuwait overall was interesting.

Tim: It was interesting. It was pretty cool, because when we were in the defensive position it sucked, because you can't even do a countdown. You don't know how long you're staying. We didn't know whether you were coming or leaving or what. And this—we were the second line of resistance. We didn't have that much ammo at all.

Aaron: Okay.

Tim: The infantry had one magazine of ammunition per guy. Machine guns had one belt of 100. We had 100 rounds for the .50 caliber machine gun, not much at all. It can fire like 500 rounds a minute. And the Mark 19s we had 45 rounds for, but the Mark 19s didn't even work. That's like it, "Yeah, thanks." It was kind of funny, because we actually made history, because they had—you know, CNN was out there and all that stuff. The Kuwaiti president came out, you know, to thank us and walk up and down the line, you know, with our commander and all that kind of stuff. And then you had—because we had some Army tanks on our flanks come up by us too. We didn't have our tanks with us out there. They were asking how the war—we asked for like a shower, cots to be brought out and all that. It was funny to ask this one PFC drunk, "So is there anything you need or want? How's it going?" He says, "I want more ammo" [laughs]. That actually made—it's in the news, out at boot camp and stuff. It made history, and that was the one thing that stuck out in my mind because we had our debriefing at the end, and we got to put down the new commander in charge of all three ships that are out there. He had to laugh because that's the one thing, "Oh, you know, the Navy wanted this, and we want more ammo." It's like—but it was interesting. We just sat up there and lived up there for a couple of weeks and stuff but—

Aaron: It sounds like what you could call the theme of your time.

Tim: The weird thing though is we were—well, they called it a city or town but it was all tents. It was the craziest thing I'd ever seen, because you'd see a tent out there and next to the tent is a generator, a septic tank, and a satellite dish, next to a tent. It was weird over there because some people loved us. Last time, we could just walk in and nobody hassled us. Other people hated us, which is weird because like when you go up to town and

stuff, some people would be spitting at you and other people would be cheering and stuff like that, but most of the people were glad to have us. They'd bring—like the one guy that came out to our tracks. It was so funny. One track over from me, he brought out tea on like a nice silver tray with a porcelain tea set with hot tea at 0200 to the guys on watch and stuff [0200 is military time for 2 a.m.]. They were always bringing stuff out to us to keep us cool and that, but the bad thing is all these guys were always coming up to us in and out of our lines. We were on both sides of the highway and stuff and the one tent which I—the guy would have died if something would ever have happened. The guy was twenty yards in front of us. I mean we're sitting right in front of—right by this village and stuff. Guys would be driving up and down on their motorcycles, like civilians and stuff that you don't know and all that stuff but it was interesting. It was pretty fun.

Aaron: You had told me a story a long time ago about this guy. I think you were walking in town or something, and he came around a corner and he yelled, "Hey! You Americans!" or something, and he stormed up to you or something, and you didn't know what to do.

Tim: Yeah, it actually was in the middle of the street.

Aaron: Okay.

Tim: A group of us, we were there, and I think was that Kuwait City or maybe Hawalli? No, because we didn't get to go up to the middle of town. I think it was in—we were walking in Hawalli, you know, and there's a couple of us. He yelled at us, and he came walking across the middle of the street. Almost got hit by three cars. You know what's going on. He came marching right up to us, stopped, and saluted us just like, you know. You don't know what to expect, because some people spit at us, but it kind of—some people wave at you and that, but it was kind of cool but kind of freaked us out at first, because someone yells at you and comes storming up to you through traffic. We're just like, "Oh my god, what?"

Aaron: In a foreign country, where some are hostile and some are friendly towards you.

Tim: Yeah, and we're like in civilian—because they handed us a list of places we weren't allowed to go, like hotels, bars, clubs, because they're known terrorist fronts, like, "Ah, thanks." [Laughs]. But yeah, that was pretty cool. And we still—in every part we went to [both laugh].

Aaron: After Kuwait, and you guys were finally done there, you guys went back straight to Okinawa, is that correct? You stopped off in Thailand for some R and R.

Tim: Yeah, for five days, and they allowed us to stay in town. You don't have to go back to ship at night like the other ports. So we each got a hotel room and stuff. It was pretty fun. It was pretty crazy. Just all over the place and we got really drunk [laughs].

Aaron: Used it kind of as a way to get away from—

Tim: Well, yeah, and we also earned it. I mean, you know, three days over there and they sent us on a ship and other ports where we stopped like for a day or two. You know, we had to stay on ship. We couldn't go anywhere, and then we were in Kuwait. We could go for a day or two but then we got sent out there. We always had to go back on ship and head *back*. It was kind of like get some R and R kind of thing, but that's pretty cool. We had a lot of fun.

Aaron: What did it feel like when you finally left Kuwait?

[end of tape 2, side B]

Tim: It was kind of cool, knowing that nothing really happened and stuff like that and to finally get out of the desert, you know, to—[pause in tape]—except cold at night. It would be really cold at night and hot during the day. It'd be like 100 degrees outside. At night you'd be freezing, so it was good to get out of there, but knowing you had a long trip back on ship with nothing more to do than just the daily routine and stuff.

Aaron: Then you just went to Okinawa and then flew back to San Diego at that point?

Tim: Yeah, we stayed in Okinawa for like a month or a month and a half and then yeah, went back to San Diego.

Aaron: So from the time you initially left San Diego, Okinawa, Kuwait City, Okinawa, back to San Diego, how long of a period was that?

Tim: Um, it was supposed to be in all six months. I think it came out a little bit longer because of being sent out on deployment and all that kind of stuff. I think it was like seven months, eight months, something like that, yeah. The funny thing is as we were flying there, because you go from Pendleton, drive up north to an airbase, and fly to Alaska. You have a layover, then go from Alaska west, I guess you could say, over to Okinawa. You cross the international date line. We leave Pendleton at ten o'clock in the morning. We land at Okinawa at eight o'clock that same day, in the morning. How the hell do you travel all day and arrive two hours before you left? That kind of sucked. Coming back, though, it's like

you lost a day. You leave on Wednesday, travel 24 hours, and all of the sudden it's Friday. So it's like, "Hey."

Aaron: I've heard stories of people losing their birthday that way.

Tim: Yeah, it's just going backward, landing two hours before you left is kind of funny, but, yeah, it was fun.

Aaron: What did you do when you finally got back to San Diego?

Tim: I got back. Well, for me, it was kind of—I went on leave and a lot of guys went on leave. When you come back, there wasn't any vehicles for us because the rotation of people. It got kind of screwy. They didn't have vehicles for us right away. What is there to do? They sent everybody on leave. You could take leave if you wanted to. I was like working party. Stuff like that. I went on leave, came home, and for me it was kind of—I didn't have a lot to do, because I was done in October, but I got permission to get out early to attend school. Well, with deployment being so late towards the end of my enlistment, I had to get all that set up from the Marine Corps, get all the paperwork done, get all that stuff faxed back and forth, and get the okay from the command to let me go early and all that stuff, so I went on leave and came back. I was doing a lot of paperwork and stuff like that, kind of hurried. Getting out too they—[sighs] because you're supposed to start your getting out process, or whatever they call it, early.

Aaron: Separation process or something like that. Within six months or something?

Tim: Six months. I had like two because even—I got out in August, I think, August or September, yeah. August was when I got out, which would have been September, but there were two months when I was in all these classes. How was I going to get my stuff home? Well, "When do you go?" And I'm like, "In two weeks," and they couldn't for three months, so I pretty much had to truck my own stuff home or get it home in my own way and stuff, but that was pretty rushed. Getting paperwork done, getting the okay from command and that kind of stuff, but I made it. That sucked.

Aaron: How early did you get out, from when you were supposed to to when they let you?

Tim: Two months.

Aaron: Two months.

- Tim: Two months, yeah. You can take up to—oh god. Well, there's two kinds. You can get a 90-day one that lets you get out six months early, or whatever, but I just took two months, and we didn't have all our vehicles and stuff, so it wasn't like there's a need for you to be there still and stuff, so two months early, to start school right away.
- Aaron: Any thoughts of re-upping? ["Re-upping" is military jargon for reenlisting or renewing one's military contract.]
- Tim: [Sighs]. No. Well, yeah, yes and no.
- Aaron: How's that [laughs]?
- Tim: Well, the one thing is, I had—I started going out with my wife now, but before I left, I had a deal with her that if we stayed together the whole four years, I would not reenlist. I'd come home. We got engaged, jeez, two years before I got out, a year before I got out, something like that. Before I went on deployment and that, I was ready to come home. I liked it and I wanted to, but I also got into trouble which was a big old mess, you know, for stuff I didn't really do and all that kind of stuff, and that really threw me off and I was just ready to come home, so [pause] I went to that—I had a fiancé and stuff like that. At the time, I would have reenlisted, probably would have reenlisted, but I was ready to come home.
- Aaron: You had mentioned that you toyed with the option of Reserves or Guard.
- Tim: Yeah, going into the Reserves, you have your every other weekend thing. I went full time for active duty initially, because if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it, and you still had the four years of inactive reserve. I thought about that and all the extra money and all that. I was looking at it. The only problem is [that] in Wisconsin, you only have infantry and air wing. That's it. And I thought about becoming one of the CAT teams, which is the counter armor team, because I already got my humvee license when I was in the Marine Corps, and I know the .50 caliber Mark 19s. That's what I did. That was my job and stuff. I still would have had to go to school, though, for it, and the every other weekend a month gets to be kind of a pain. The one weekend a month kind of a thing, because like a lot of jobs can't fire you for it but that's a given on the application. "Can you work every other weekend?" "No." That's one of them gone, you know and stuff. The money just wasn't worth it, nah, and, too, the possibility of something happening, too. It's like, I did it. I'm glad I did it, but I'm ready to move on and to go to school, go to school full-time. If something would happen, you get called away, then you come back, and I was just like, "Forget it."

- Aaron: You were ready to have what I like to term “your life back into your hands.”
- Tim: Yeah, just, you know, I did it. I was ready to be done with the military and ready to move on, you know, kind of. I think it made adjustment to civilian life a lot easier, not having [pause] you know. You’re home for this weekend because you got to keep, you know, the regulation haircut, the hair short, the regulation haircuts and all that. Your one weekend, you go here and all that. It just made transitioning easier for me, I think, and I was ready to go back to school and stuff, so—
- Aaron: Describe for me when you finally came home. You finally came back to Wisconsin. What did you do? I’ve heard that people said they kiss the ground or something. Were you overjoyed?
- Tim: I went to bed [laughs]. I felt like shit. Well, because me and my—my brother flew out to San Diego. Rented a Ryder Truck, drove home, but we took a detour through Idaho, because one of my friends in the Marine Corps lived there. We stopped and drove home. It took a couple days, but I was sick on the way home. Actually, I got sick before I left, but I didn’t know it until my throat was sore, feeling tired and that. Because when I got home, I had a sinus infection. I had strep throat really bad. I had a fever and I couldn’t breathe, so I basically came home and went to bed for three days. I was stuck in bed, sick, for three days because my throat was solid white. You know how when you get strep throat you get white spots in the back of your throat? My whole throat was solid white, plus I had a sinus infection and stuff, so I pretty much stayed in bed and didn’t do anything [laughs] and, you know, so—
- Aaron: When you finally got home and you started going to school was that a difficult transition for you to make?
- Tim: It wasn’t a difficult transition because I was ready to go to school. I think the reason I went into the military was because I wasn’t ready for college. Now, I was more mature. I saw the value in it. It was funny because, though, I was all of 22 years old. All these little young punks at school and stuff, you know. I don’t think the transition was that difficult. It helped, because the school I went to was a technical school, and there was a lot of older people, you know, going to be retrained there that were in the same position I was. You know, that school. It had been four years since I’d been to high school and all these kids said, “Oh, this is so easy. We had this and we had that.” I had taken computer programming in high school. We didn’t have Windows when I was in high school, you know, and that, so it was kind of nice that I had older people there, like in their 40s and 50s, so I wasn’t like the only *old* guy there.

- Aaron: Did you use the GI bill?
- Tim: Yes. It worked great. That's the one thing. We were always told that there were a couple guys didn't get it because you put in \$100 the first year and the guys like, "Oh, no, no, no." I actually made out pretty awesome because tuition was \$1200 for me a semester. That's it. The GI bill at that time was \$650 a month, plus I got 50% of it reimbursed to me through the state of Wisconsin, so I pretty much made a lot of cash, which was nice because it helped pay for the wedding and all that kind of stuff. So, yeah, it helped a lot and then, too, after we were married and all that. It helped a lot with rent, because we basically took financial aid to pay for school and used the GI bill for rent. It kind of made it a lot easier. We also had a student loan from the VA for \$5,000, because if you're a student, you can get up to \$10,000 or something like that. If you're a student, just say, "Hey, I need more money." I actually bought my car with that, so it was kind of nice. We didn't have to put all the expenses and stuff, you know, up front.
- Aaron: You used your benefits.
- Tim: Yes.
- Aaron: Outstanding. And speaking of Mrs. Braun, your wife Kelly, what was her overall impression of your Marine Corps experience?
- Tim: She hated it [Aaron laughs]. I mean, well, I don't blame her. For me at least it was cool for me, because I'm doing new stuff, the exciting stuff. I'm out in California doing this and doing that, you know what I mean? I'm doing this today. She's still stuck at home here. She went to school at Stevens Point, you know. She went up there and didn't have a whole lot of friends. She had some and that, but she's kind of stuck at home. I'm not here, just writing and talking on the phone and stuff. I mean, I think it was a lot—well, I *know* it was a lot tougher for her than it was for me. I give her all the credit in the world. I'm doing new stuff, going here, going there, you know, where she's still stuck here, so—
- Aaron: Interesting. Okay, your overall experience in the military, in the Marine Corps. Would you do it again, and if so, what would you change?
- Tim: You mean like if I could go back in time, would I do it all over again? Definitely.
- Aaron: Okay.
- Tim: I would do it again, changing stuff. Maybe change my job, my MOS. I don't know. I pretty much liked what I did. Really about the only thing I

would have changed, yeah, the one thing I would have changed is before going on deployment with my original company and stuff, a bunch of them went on float. I think the gunnery sergeant over there who was our platoon sergeant he, like, he wanted me to go and be part of his section. He said, "I have a track for you," and everything ["track" is military jargon for Marine Corps Amphibious Assault Vehicle]. "You'll have your own track, you know. You'll be with me. I'll take care of that stuff." I was like, "No." I should have gone, and it would have changed everything. But, yeah, but then I could have avoided all the trouble in the company, got turned upside down, and it would have been a great experience and stuff like that. It would have given me a little more time when I got out and stuff like that. That's one thing I would have changed. And I would have started saving a little bit more money sooner. If I set this much aside, you know, \$50 a month or whatever. Just so you have a little bit more money. I started doing that later on, but, you know, it would have been nice to have a little bit more money when I got out.

Aaron: How about joining any veterans' organizations?

Tim: I was actually talking with my wife about this today. It's funny, because a lot of them are dying out, so to speak, because they can't get a lot of young people in. It's—I would like to do it, but this is my own self being stupid, and it's just that I don't have a lot of time to do it, [that] kind of thing, you know, and I would like to do a lot of stuff on the weekends, and with a family, you don't really want to get into that very much. It's, especially right now, it would be tough. Going to school and work and all that stuff, and, now, I have a new job where I commute a long ways. It would be even tougher, but once we settle down, I want to look into it. You know, I think it would be cool, because they don't get a lot of new people in to keep it going. A lot of World War II veterans are dying off, not to sound *bad*, but, you know, they're getting old and dying. They're the ones keeping it alive. You don't see a lot of Vietnam veterans (for good reason) doing that kind of stuff. Especially like younger people, they go in and do their time, because they haven't been in a conflict or anything, you know. They aren't actually a veteran of a foreign war, you know. I don't think the tie to the military is actually that strong with actual war veterans, you know, who actually have something to show in the history books to be proud of, because a lot of them aren't even that proud of it, but, you know, there's just a lot—I gave my four years and I'm done. I want to get on with my life. I want to get out. That kind of thing. But, I—you never get the time. Once we settle down a little bit more, I'll look into that and actually dedicate time to doing something like that.

Aaron: Okay. Outstanding. I just remembered something I was going to ask you before. You had told me a story about—probably when you were at MOS school or something—about you guys were out in the field and it was in

Pendleton, like a preservation or something. There's this sheep or something that went across.

Tim: Oh, that's a different story. The one I was thinking of was when we had the Dutch Marines with us. Out at Camp Pendleton, they have the like the desert tortoises or something like that. They're an endangered species. They're like a dinosaur. They have rules. They're very protected. You can't touch them. We had one sit under a humvee just to get in the shade one time. We sat there for four hours. You don't dare move that vehicle, you know. They're an endangered species. They're millions of years old, all kinds of stuff like that. Well, we had the Dutch Marines out there. They had a lot of misconceptions about us. In the field one night, I saw a fire going. There's been like no—I went over there. "What the hell are you guys doing? Put the fire out." They were just like, "We're making supper. What did they call the Marines for?" "You don't need a fire for the Marines." I was like, "Oh, what kind of stuff to eat? What the hell are you making?" "Turtle soup." I'm like, "What?!" They caught one of those damn things, killed it, cooked it, and were going to keep the shell as a souvenir. [Aaron laughs]. So, yeah. We kind of went out and buried it and didn't tell anybody. "Don't you dare say anything to anybody." Those things carry like a \$100,000 fine and like up to twenty years in jail for that. I was like, "Oh my god!" you know, so [pause]. Camp Pendleton is a wildlife preservation thing. You can't kill anything on it. I mean if a snake comes up and bites you, you can't kill it [laughs].

Aaron: Okay.

Tim: By rule. We were out on the range, and we have sheep and cows and stuff out on the range, because it's kind of like the old canary philosophy with the miners in the mines. They used to carry canaries with them. If there was poisonous gas and carbon monoxide, the canaries would die sooner, and they would know to get the hell out of there. But at Pendleton they have, at the Naval Base, they have all the missiles and stuff. The cows and the sheep are kind of like the same thing. [If] they start dying off, [then] they might know there's a leak or something here. You always get ceasefires out on the range, because something would walk out on the range and you can't shoot it and stuff. On the range one time, we had the grenade launchers with the high explosive rounds, you know, and we were all sitting there and we had all twelve vehicles up on the line. Somebody had called a ceasefire. A sheep, one of the sheep, had wandered out downrange out in the middle. It was just like, "Ah-ha! Something live to shoot other than like tanks and trucks!" You could just see every turret just tracking that thing, just grazing along, and you could just tell it wasn't going anywhere any time soon. It got out there because it was scared of the grenades. It's walking along. It was just munching, kind of walking. You could just see all the turrets homing in on it, and we're sitting there.

All the sudden our lieutenant came across. He is our range safety officer. He's like, "I don't know why everybody ceased fire. I don't see anything out there. Commence firing!" All the sudden everybody cut loose on that thing, and, jeez! We figure each vehicle shot five or ten grenades in a burst out at that thing. You know how a grenade is supposed to arc really bad. "Thunk, thunk, thunk." Everyone shot a big burst and all of a sudden you hear, "Ka-bam! Ka-bam!" You figure there's twelve vehicles shooting five grenades. There's like 60 grenades going down there to that thing. It just lit up and it was gone. There was not a single trace of it [laughs]. Yeah. We probably shouldn't of done that. We didn't see anything out there. There was supposedly, you know, somebody thought they saw a sheep out there but I don't know. After the smoke cleared there wasn't anything out there, so I don't know what they were talking about. Yeah.

Aaron: [Laughs]. Do you have any other stories, anything we missed?

Tim: Oh wow. There's always stories [sighs]. I started Camp Pendleton on fire [Aaron laughs]. There's NBC training (the nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare training) out there. Our CO [commanding officer] threw a gas canister out in the middle of the road, which we weren't supposed to do, because the fire danger is real high in the middle of summer. One of the tracks hit it, and it skidded off the side of the road and caught the grass on fire. We were in a valley. The whole valley went up. They sent us up the hill, tried to drive fire breaks and all that, and I was all by myself. The vehicles you're not supposed to drive by yourself and all that kind of stuff. Our CO is like, "Get the hell up there!" I said, "I'm all alone" "I don't care." So I drove up there with gas mask on. We were driving up there in the middle of flames and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, that was pretty funny [laughs]. We came back. Some of us were burned really bad. Yeah. But the funny thing was that the CO was firing the humvee around the corner to go and get help and all that. The fire truck was coming the other way and hit him and [pause]. That's about the only other funny story. Well, there's others, but there's always stories. I don't have enough time.

Aaron: Never enough time.

Tim: Yeah.

Aaron: Well, thanks Tim.

Tim: Sure, no problem.

[End of Interview]