

Transcript of Interview with Anonymous by Brandon Presley

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Brandon K. Presley

Date: 03/12/2021

Location (Interviewee): NA

Location (Interviewer): Knoxville, TN

Transcriber: Brandon K. Presley

Transcription Perfection: Kathryn Jue

This interview was performed under the ramifications that the interviewee would remain anonymous.

BP 0:01

My name is Brandon Presley. I'm a graduate student intern with the COVID-19 archive at Arizona State University. Today is March 12, 2021. And the time is 7:45pm. So I wanted to ask you a few questions about your pandemic experience being in the Marines. But before I do, I just want to ask your consent to record this response and put it in the COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 archive is a digital archive at Arizona State. And we're collecting pandemic experiences. So do I have your consent to record your response and add it to the archive?

A 0:34

Yes, you do.

BP 0:35

Thank you. So if you wouldn't mind as we begin our interview, would you state what branch of the military you currently serve in and how long you've been serving?

A 0:46

I'm a part of the United States Marine Corps. And I've only been in for about nine, nine and a half months, so I'm fairly new.

BP 0:55

Okay. What was it that led you to joining the Marines?

A 1:00

Um, I came from a patriotic side of the country. And I would say, and so that kind of played into it quite a bit. And I wasn't too adamant about going to college right away. So I wanted to put myself in a situation that would set me up for getting some more life experience before I threw myself into a four year university, or something along that line, so. And this way I'll get

schooling for free, and have a guaranteed job right now, which is good. So.

BP 1:35

So at what point, I guess, did you like first kind of start talking to Marines? Like, how long have you been like in conversation with him before you actually joined?

A 1:47

It was at the end of my senior year when I enlisted. And so before that, it was probably halfway through senior year, I started thinking about it. And then at the end, I finally enlisted. And I went to community college and finished out there while I was in the delayed entry program. And I just waited there and trained and prepared myself for basic. And then after that year was over, that's when I left, so.

BP 2:17

Okay. Well, since you're fairly new to the Marines, you said, you've been in nine, nine and a half months, and you were part of like the delayed enlistment deal. Describe kind of what you were thinking last March. So you would have been home at that point, you hadn't actually gone in yet. So what were you thinking, as the pandemic first kind of kicked off last year?

A 2:41

Um. Well, like everyone else, nobody, I wasn't really afraid of it. And people thought it was just going to go away. And we know how that turned out. And so when it the way that it worked out, was like when I was in the delayed entry program, and it kicked off. We stopped training for a bit. And then with the recruiting office, and then eventually it came back and it sort of went away again. But still, the whole time that I was home, I never had any concerns about it lasting, you know, a year and or being even longer than that. So I wasn't really too afraid of it, and so those were my feelings while I was in there.

BP 3:24

Yeah. So were you worried at all about impacting when you were going to actually be able to start your service in the Marines or were you worried, they were going to delay that or, you know, how did you feel about all that?

A 3:36

That actually was a concern? Yes. I was told that it might, I might have to wait. I think it was a month. Or just because we thought like we said it wasn't gonna last very long. And so that being delayed a month wasn't much of a concern. It was still, it still impacted things. But then that ended up not happening and I left on time, but, yeah, it gave a lot of concerns and uncertainty about when I was actually going to leave, so.

BP 4:08

Yeah. So if you would kind of tell me what your experience was as far as going through basic during the pandemic, as far as you know, when you left home, from the time you really from the time you left home to the time you finished basic training. What was your experience like in basic?

A 4:27

Well, it started off much slower than other people's basic earlier on before the pandemic happened, it started off much slower with having to go to a quarantine for two weeks, and then that happened in the Citadel, which I think is an army college, and that was an interesting time. So having to quarantine at a place like that. It was it was hard having to transition like that, that quickly and being away with no contact for two weeks before I even started training. So I started the mental challenges of having to go through with COVID. And, and then once after the quarantine is over, as soon as you get to boot camp, everything's already set up to work around COVID. And it made in general, the entire, like, basic training process much slower, and much more challenging, not just for me, but like for the higher ups and all those that have to schedule it out to form it around COVID. So of course, we had to wear masks the whole time. And having to run around and do all that stuff with mask is very challenging, so. And then just the biggest challenges were, I guess, mostly, uh, just like I said, how slow things would be and how, um.

BP 6:07

So like...

A 6:07

It probably wasn't as it wasn't as like, how do you say it...

BP 6:13

It wasn't as, it wasn't expedited. It was it was just kind of slow going.

A 6:17

Yes, It was very slow. That's what I'm trying say.

BP 6:19

Yeah, yeah. So like, with it being so slow. How long does it normally take for someone to get through basic outside of a pandemic? And how long did it take you just to put it in perspective?

A 6:30

Well, what I was trying to say is like, it took the same amount of time, I mean, minus the two week quarantine. So I got out in the same amount of time that people normally went through basic and, but the thing is, was they had to like change the training as in making, couldn't do

certain things. And if we were to do certain things, it would have to be rearranged in ways that it was just the people that went before the pandemic experienced way differently than like, I did. Not saying it was less challenging. It was just,

BP 7:07

It was different.

A 7:09

Different, yes.

BP 7:10

Yeah, okay. So it was the same amount of time, like you said, you, things were slower, you had a two week quarantine at the start of it. So it kind of prolonged being away from your family being able to talk to people that you knew. So that's, uh, sounds like a pandemic experience, for sure. If you would, as well, what steps did the military take to kind of protect you all as new recruits? You mentioned wearing masks all the time. How, like, how difficult was it to actually, did you have to wear masks like outside while you were training all the time and, you know things like that?

A 7:50

Yes, we had to wear a mask. Well, if we were outside, there was a certain there was a certain time frame and boot camp, there was after two weeks after the two week quarantine. And after we were there for two weeks, we, there would be some moments like if we were spaced out enough, he wouldn't have to wear a mask, or if we were eating chow, of course, or food, of course, who would have to wear a mask. But most of the time, we were just wearing masks. And it was always the big six feet distance was being pushed the whole time. And so for example, like with close order drill, or drill, which is marching, that two weeks, we had to have, it was like double the space. So there's like that they're implementing that six feet distance. And so that's like a way they change drill. So when we packed practice drill, it was a way different because we had to have that extra space. Then after that two weeks, they brought it back to the normal amount, but they really just pushed the six feet distance and just trying to like change those those certain parts of training to where we didn't have to be as close or tried to keep contact with people that were able to go off base that they lived off base try to keep contact with them as little as possible. So but despite that, I don't know if you want me to talk about my experience during boot camp, but...

BP 9:22

Yeah.

A 9:23

I got Yeah, I did get COVID and boot camp, if you want to save that for later.

BP 9:26

Okay, no, that's fine. I mean, how is how did that affect you going through boot camp with COVID? Did that did that slow? Because I mean, I'd imagine you'd have to at least quarantine for a little while. So how did that delay things?

A 9:40

Well, the way that okay, the way that happened was, despite them trying to, you know, implementing all the basic things like masks, six feet, keeping us away from people that were, you know, able to go off base and stuff. We still had to be trained by the Marines that were living off base but and so. Despite all those, you know, them trying to keep us safe through six feet and mask, it still spread. And it came to my platoon and I ended up getting it. And I went to medical and got, I had to do a ten day sort of restriction of movement, or quarantine. And I thought I was going to have to get dropped from my platoon and my company and go to and not be able to finish as early. But they ended up after I finished up my I got rid of COVID and I healed healed up if you want to say it that way. And I was able to come back to my company and finish on time, but there's a lot of people that got screwed over. Unlike like I did, and were there time from graduation was delayed. So COVID may have caused other problems with them other medical problems. And so luckily, I didn't have to deal with that. But a lot of people, you know, had to stay an extra month, basically, because you have the two week quarantine and then having to wait two weeks to get picked up by the next company. So I didn't have to deal with that. But I did still have to go into a quarantine and risk getting dropped.

BP 11:17

I gotcha. So, you know, since you're training, I guess it wasn't necessarily extended. But since you have this two extra weeks added on to start with how did what really kind of got you through the process of actually going through basic what kind of gave you your motivation, as I guess to get through it, besides the military, you know telling you, you had to do that you had to, uh.

A 11:41

I would say just trying to keep myself in a mindset that are you talking specifically just the quarantine section of it, or

BP 11:51

No no no, well, the whole thing, you know.

A 11:52

The whole thing? Well, I'll start with the the quarantine side of it. Because like I said it was very challenging having to be thrown right into that and then getting homesick really quick. And

having like zero contact immediately because letters, letters were kind of iffy, because they knew we weren't gonna stay there the whole time. So it'd be moved to Parris Island eventually. So and we were kind of the whole mail situation was slow. But in that part, I just had to remember that I had to keep myself in the mindset that it was, I'm only here, I've only been here for like a week or a week and a half. So I need to calm down and just realize, and realize that everyone else at home is alright. But when I got into, into boot camp, it was kind of just trying to push away my thoughts of focusing on everything that's at home. And not letting all the having to deal with the COVID challenges, get in my mind and just focusing on the training. So just getting into the daily routine of everything we did in boot camp, and getting used to that, because that definitely helped it go by quicker. And also just then, once we got into letters that helped a lot to get communication with my wife, and that helped. And then the religious side of it. Praying every night, I read my Bible quite a bit through quarantine, and read it throughout boot camp and just staying close to God and having a strong mindset is really what got me through.

BP 13:36

Okay, that's good to hear that you had all those different things, you had people back home, you had your faith, all these things, were helping you kind of giving you motivation to get through those tough challenges that you faced. So you mentioned that your graduation wasn't necessarily affected by COVID-19. Well, I guess it was, but it wasn't delayed any so.

A 13:56

The date...

BP 13:58

Yeah. So how was it affected by COVID? Outside of the date?

A 14:04

Well, so the graduation and you know, the whole ceremony side of it is a very big part of boot camp. And that was probably one of the most mentally challenging things was not being able to have a regular like, Family Cup, Family Day. They come and see you see what you've done. And so not having that was probably one of the one of the things that made COVID boot camp, one of the more mentally challenging than physically. So. So there was basically there's no one's family there. It was just staff, Marines that were just on the base. Like really recruit training marines. Yeah, but so it was just, it was just Marines. There was no family there and so it was kind of it was a little, it was a little dreary. It was kind of dry. You know, we had our graduation. And then we, we went back to the Squad Bay and that was it. It wasn't really. There wasn't much to it.

BP 15:10

There wasn't much of a celebration.

A 15:12

It was lackluster. Yes.

BP 15:15

I gotcha. I gotcha. So after you finished basic training what was your experience like after that? How did the pandemic impact the normal steps that someone would have after they were finished basic. So if you'd gone through at a normal time, how do those timelines differ of what you would have done without a pandemic, and what you ended up doing because of the pandemic?

A 15:39

Well, we went to Marine Corps, or Marine combat training after that, things weren't really affected too much. Like I said, training everywhere I've been has been slower, but you still get what you need to get. It's just the mask thing is pushed, it's always been annoying, but it is a necessity. And there were certain things that have worked out of training that weren't like necessary, but like, and so usually, I think, and Marine combat, in MCT. You do MCMAP, which is the martial arts for the Marine Corps. And we can't, we weren't supposed to do that, because of your being close to people, you're touching people and stuff like that. So small things like that were cut out. But after that, there was there weren't too many challenges, because of COVID, during Marine combat training, but after that, I went to Pensacola. And the training there was different than it usually was probably because it was when we did our PTing or exercising, we had to be spaced differently, and wear our mask and, at certain times some the way we do like physical tests, they can't touch each other. So like doing crunches, it's usually someone holding or sit ups someone's holding, the other person couldn't do that. They had to like, format a different way. So it's just not too much. It's really just the way that they, like I said, they formed the training, they just had to form around COVID. So.

BP 17:30

So since you've done all that, and I know you're still in training, right now you're not stationed anywhere permanently yet, how is COVID still affecting you even as we kind of, I'm hopeful that we're slowly slowly starting to, you know, kind of turn the corner myself. But how is it continuing to impact you and where you're at?

A

Um.

BP

Or is it at all?

A 17:59

I mean, there's still there's still the, you have to wear mask inside, mask is, it's it's the main thing. Other than that, there's not really many challenges in the normal like, besides it sort of just at this point in training, it's like a normal work day. So it's just, I get up, I have to go to school house, have to wear my mask in the schoolhouse. And other than that there's not really like any many restrictions here. And am I suppose, say where I'm from?

BP 18:25

No, you don't have to.

A 18:27

Here where I'm training at. So things are things are kind of slowly getting back to normal, where I'm at.

BP 18:36

Yeah. So is there like a feeling among people that you come in contact with, like of you know, your friends, maybe even your teachers that as is there like an optimistic, I said that I was hopeful that is there an optimistic feeling from a lot of the people there that it's kind of closing out a little bit?

A 18:52

I would say there definitely is because we recently got the vaccines here. And so that's, a lot of the instructors are getting the vaccines. And I think soon it will be mandatory for military everywhere to get them but it's everyone's having the choice of doing it right now. But a lot of the instructors are, they've spoken about it, and it's they're very hopeful that that once we all get vaccines and they're encouraging it, once we all get the vaccine that we'll be able to come to class without mask on, life will be a lot more normal. And uh. There definitely is that optimism there with everyone. Because it's like I said here it's getting slowly and slowly. Better. So yeah.

BP 19:42

I've spoken with someone else who's also in the military who's a chaplain. And he was telling me that he kind of went into chaplain school or he got off his chaplain training right at the start of COVID so his entire time of being a chaplain in the reserve, he only knows COVID there is no other normal outside of that. So you're in that you're kind of in the same boat that you kind of came in, during right in the middle of the pandemic, and you're still in it. So really all you know, is the military life during a pandemic, do you think it'll you kind of said, it's not very different now from what you had expected? But do you think there's gonna be any kind of changes other than mo more mass, social distance, things like that in the future?

A 20:23

I think it'll, once everything clears up, I think the sort of normal military life will be a lot



different than what it is now, even though it's, there's not much that needs to change. It's just like, having to make decisions to let people off base. I know, when I when I was at training in Pensacola. There was one time we got to go off base, and then after that, it was shut down. Because the cases had rose. And then so they just because of that, and the local population, they didn't want to put us at risk so and then cause a big thing on the base. But so like having to make those decisions and those like, having to do risk management. And like that all I think a lot of that will go out the window. And that's what will normalize the military life again, when they don't have to, like I said, I this whole thing has been about is forming everything around COVID. So it'll just be normal.

BP 21:28

Yeah. Well, that's good to hear. Well, I'm glad you allowed me to talk to you and have a discussion with you. So I appreciate your time.

A 21:36

Thank you.