**TRANSCRIBER NAME: James Velten**

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**Participant #: 310**

**Length of the Interview: 13:57**

Interviewer (Code in Blue):

Participant (Code in black):

Okay, I have a series of questions for you, um, and we’ve got 15 minutes, so uh, most of it has been running right around 15 minutes. Um, so if you have any questions about the questions, or clarifications or whatever, let me know. When did you start BUD/S?

I started BUD/S in August, 2019.

Is this your first BUD/S experience?

Yep.

How many siblings do you have?

I have four siblings. I’m the youngest of five, so...

You’re the youngest of five?

Yep.

Um, were they brothers or sisters?

Three brothers, one sister.

Can ya, Give me the, just so i can write it down, can you give me the order, like brother sister brother?

Yeah. So it’s my brother Nate, my sister Paige, brother (inaudible at 0:58).

So three sisters - three brothers, one sister.

Yep.

And you’re the youngest?

Mhm.

What was your parental situation growing up?

Um. Both parents present. Good relationship with my mom and my dad. Um, very blessed.

What is - err, so uh, you’re parents were married?

Yep.

And you had a good relationship?

Yeah..very good relationship.

What uh life-changing ex- uh events happened in your life prior to BUD/S?

Um so my parents, my family moved to Ethiopia, we’re cause we’re missionaries, when I was about 14 so probably say that was the most formative experience for me. Came from a very small town, and then just moving overseas and experiencing a whole another culture, and then kinda going through the culture shock and having to reset all my relationships and stuff, that was, pretty big for me, and opened up my uh horizons a little bit, to see more of the world, from just small town america.

So how do you think that experience factored into your experience here at BUD/S?

Umm, I think it definitely motivated me a lot. I was in East Africa, and definitely heard a lot about like the spread of like Islam and a lot of horror stories of what was going on with that, and that kinda motivated me and my decision to come to BUD/S. Um so yeah, it was kinda my why, was just hearing that stuff and wanting to be involved and do something about that so.

How do you think your personality contributed to your progression through BUD/S?

Umm I've always been stubborn, so haha that definitely helped. Umm.. yeah - I think that's like the biggest thing. I have always been kind of a quiet stubborn dude, so it paid dividends here to just shut up and do your job and not quit. So, worked out well.

So, describe your background that led you to pursue becoming part of the SEAL community and, what they have in parentheses is: do you have SEALs, any SEALs as family members or friends, or do you have military family?

No uh I, no military members in my family so - just grew up watching military movies and stuff and was always very appreciative of people that served and thought it would be cool to serve myself and then like I said growing up overseas a little bit really gave me a passion to kind of defend the American way, and be a part of that.

So, how were you disciplined as a child? Spanking? Time-out?

Umm freely, haha yeah all of the above, spankings, timeouts, yeah.

Grounding? Anything like that?

Yeah, grounding, pretty much all the, all the traditional means.

Yeah uh all the, anything they can come up with. Did you move around a lot uh during your childhood? I mean you moved to Ethiopia, but.

Yeah, no up until then I lived in the same house for the first fourteen years of my life. Just moved over to Ethiopia, and then kinda came back to the same area up to college when i graduated high school.

Where is that?

Grand Rapids, Michigan.

So, so you moved to Ethiopia, when you were like 14?

Yep.

Until you went to college?

Yep. I was there for four years.

Did you participate in any team sports in high school?

Yeah, a lot of them. Played soccer, basketball, volleyball, was on the track team, uh cross country team - it was a small school, so if you were ever athletic, you played everything. So.

What have you done in the last five years of your life prior to coming to BUD/S?

Um I went to college - I got a chemistry degree. Uh met my wife, got married, um the summer after graduating college. And then, worked as an industrial roofer while I was getting ready to come to BUD/S.

So you joined the Navy specifically to come to BUD/S?

Yeah, yeah.

So how long were you in the Navy before you came to BUD/S?

About four months - two months at boot camp and then two months over at Great Lakes at BUD/S prep, so.

Yeah, uh did you, is that something uh you worked out when you signed up?

Yeah, so I was able to enlist with a contract to come here to BUD/S. Most, most of the first time attendees had kind of similar deal with their (inaudible). Enlisted and came here pretty quick.

Would you consider yourself impulsive?

Umm.. maybe a little bit. I haven’t made any like major life decisions impulsively, but maybe in the smaller day-to-day decisions.

Do you have any tattoos? That's an example of…

Uh no, haha no tattoos.

Let me check the time. We’re supposed to go no more than 15 minutes. What was the most challenging component in BUD/S? And it says just think about your hardest day or event.

Yeah I think the hardest part of BUD/S is just when you, when you do mess something up, or like when the class pays for something that you messed up. Like, not even like the guys are going to give you a hard time for it, but you just feel bad for letting down the team.

What motivated you - well - so not, it wasn’t any particular physical or, um, event, um, that was particularly challenging? I mean all of it was challenging.

Yeah, it was all pretty challenging, I wouldn’t say there was any particular test gate that really stood out to me as being a lot harder than any of the other ones. Um, it was kind of, kinda day-in day-out, just grind.

Did you feel you were supported by the group?

Yeah, definitely. You become like family with the guys from the class, so. I was a 39 original so I went through hell week with a lot of these guys, became pretty close.

So what practices: physical, mental, spiritual, Etc. Did you use to help you through?

Yeah, so I'm uh a Christian, so I'd go to church every Sunday and kind of have a lot of support from that community at my church. I think that's really been big for me to kinda reset on the weekends. It’s just, spending some time in worship.

So when you made a difficult decision during training, what went through your mind as you made that decision? Now, the example that they use, that they put in the questionnaire, is for example turning in a cheating classmate or something along those lines.

Yeah, I think for me the closest thing to that is just like in hell week making the decision to stop supporting somebody and just decide that it was time for them to go and kind of usher them out the door because they were just going to get people hurt, so. Because, I mean obviously, everybody here, your first instinct is just to help guys along, but then it comes to a point when somebody's not gonna do their part then you kind of just have to get rid of them. And then at that point, I guess what went through my head was just the inevitability of the decision, and doing what’s best for the team even if it doesn’t sit well with you. Umm (inaudible).

Why do you think you were successful in completing BUD/S?

I think I didn’t take anything personally and I never, I never got angry about what they asked us to do, or like said it wasn’t possible. I just...just decided that whatever they said we had to do, I was going to do it. I kind of just made that decision beforehand, so I never had to - it wasn’t like I was revisiting the issue and having to make that decision every time. I just told myself that I was going to make it through and do whatever they said to do, so. That was a big part of why a lot of guys quit, is that they, the start of every evolution they would try to make that decision again and again, rather. I made that decision before I ever joined the Navy, so.

Spend a lot of energy questioning what you’re told to do. Did you notice anything different about those who did not make it?

Yeah, uhh say like self-doubt was like pretty big with a lot of them. I mean there's a lot of like humble guys here, but I think the trend in like guys that didn't make it was just perceiving themselves as being weaker than other people even if they weren’t.

How did this experience change you as a person?

Humbled me, probably.

Is there anything else I should have asked you, that I didn't ask you about or that helped you or hurt you get through the program?

No.

Okay, I guess that's it. So. Yeah. Perfect timing.