**TRANSCRIBER NAME: James Velten**

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**Participant #: 354**

**Length of the Interview: 20:09**

Interviewer (Code in Blue):

Participant (Code in black):

This is participant 354. So I just have a series of questions - we got about fifteen minutes to go over them - they are somewhat open ended questions, so answer them however you feel appropriate.

Okay, Awesome.

Um when did you start BUD/S?

Started BUD/S, let’s see, I started with 38. Um, I couldn’t tell you the exact date, I believe it was in June.

Of ‘19?

Yes, umm, But yeah I couldn’t tell you the exact date of when we started BUD/S Orientation, but I know it was somewhere around then.

Um is this your first BUD/S?

Yes.

How many uh siblings do you have?

I have two sisters.

Are they older, younger?

Uh, both of them are older.

So sister - sister - you?

Yep.

What was your, um, parental situation growing up?

Umm… had ya know, mom and dad were never divorced. Had a really solid family life. Umm, they were really supportive.

So your parents are married?

Yep.

What’s your relationship with them now, is it good?

Uh..yeah - normal. Good relationship with my parents. Call them about once a week.

What, if any, life-changing events happened in your life prior to BUD/S?

Uhhmm. I wouldn’t say there were any big life changing event. Ya know, I don’t really have any big life changing moments like that.

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

Umm… I’d say just being like stubborn, or not, I guess, just the idea of ya know whatever the guy next to me can take, I can take that. Kind of uh, tough and competitive personality.

Describe your background that led you to pursue becoming part of the SEAL community? So for instance, do you have any SEALs as family or friends? Do you have any um family members in the military? How did you - what motivated you to do this?

So I don’t know anybody in the community. Umm, and the only people in the military in my family were my grandpa on my dad’s side - I believe he was in the Army. And then my great grandpa on my mom’s side was in the Navy. Umm, but they never really talked about their involvement in the military. Umm so I wouldn’t say I had much of a military influence growing up. If I did, I would say I probably would’ve decided to do this sooner. Umm, but yeah, I didn’t really have any military influences, I just decided to do it.

So there - so there’s no military influence, but what made you decide to?

So, I decided to do it just because I uh finished college and… I - just to back track from that - so I grew up on a farm. I, uh, kinda always had it in my head that I was gonna farm someday, and I was always working on the family farm, ya know every summer. When I got to college it was just every summer, but growing up I was always helping out. And uh, I uh, ya know, I knew that - it was kind of like when you know your future - it’s almost a little scary, ya know. Like when you know exactly where you’re going to be - I wanted something that was exciting, something that was challenging. Umm, I always had this idea in my mind that I would do something big. I really had no, no reason to think that - just kind of always had this sense of confidence that I could accomplish something, but I never really had a chance to prove that, until I decided I was gonna do this pipeline. Um, so I would say, ya know, after college, just working on the farm, driving tractor for long hours, listening to podcasts of, ya know, ex-Navy SEALS, and, um kind of getting turned on to um, the uh, the challenge of it, kind of led me to wanna pursue that and see a recruiter and start talking about it.

Okay, so tell me a little bit about your childhood - for example, how were you disciplined?

Umm.. so as far as disciplining, I was definitely spanked - um ya know for, for good reason, and I deserved it when, when it happened. Umm..I think my dad, uh, used a belt like one time, um, in a, ya know, a spanking way, um but definitely no abuse or anything like that. It was - I have no, ya know, traumatic memories of that happening.

Did you get grounded, or have things taken away?

Yeah - yeah. Uh I remember in high school I got my truck taken away for a while. Umm, yeah I’d say - spankings, umm, yeah nothing too crazy.

Did you move, uh, through your childhood and teenage years?

No, I stayed - I like moved - so on the farm I grew up in this kindof older house, and then we built a new house right next to it, so I lived in the same little small town my whole life.

Where?

Uh it’s right outside Sacramento.

Oh in California?

Yeah, in California.

So tell me about your teenage years, did you participate in team sports?

Yeah so, my freshman year I wrestled and played football. My sophomore year I just played football. And then, my junior year I played basketball and wrestled, or played basketball and played football, because between my sophomore and junior year I switched high schools and they didn’t have a wrestling team, so I decided to play basketball instead. And then my senior year I believe I did, uh, football and track.

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

Uh last five years - let’s see so 20 to, or 19 to 24. So I was up at Chico State, I was going to school up there, um graduated in 2017. And then, after college I traveled for about a month - and then, started working on a ranch down outside of Monterey, where I worked until I decided to do this. So I worked there for almost two years, um, mostly doing manual labor, driving tractor, um working with livestock, so basically just living kind of a ranch life. Tra- training, uh after work, running, um I didn’t know how to swim so I had to teach myself how to swim, kindof after I had already talked to a recruiter. I failed my first PST horribly. Uh, and then got in the pool like every day.

What’s a PST?

PST is like the physical screening test.

The screening test?

Yeah - so they, you have like a swim time and I think it’s like 12 minutes to pass. I was like - it’s a 500 yard swim and I had never swam 500 yards before in my life. So I like, ya know, realized I had a lot of work to do. And then, like, one, I like swam everyday and passed and they gave me a contact, and I was like holy crap, about to go, ya know, to bootcamp, and I just learned how to swim, ya know, like a month ago. So that was kind of the uh...

In Navy bootcamp do you do any swimming?

You do, you do - they don’t teach you anything. Ya know in Prep they taught you how to swim a little bit, in BUD/S Prep. But uh, that was probably where I had - ya know, the biggest warrior for me was the water. Because, ya know, it’s not like I, ya know, didn’t know how to, I had swam before and gone to the lake and ya know swam, ya know, but I never really like swam laps or had any formal training and, ya know, swimming lessons and stuff like that, so. But yeah, to get back to your question, it was either, ya know, during the summer working on the farm, during the school year going to college, and then after college back to work on a different ranch.

So after you - so, you quit working on the ranch and joined the Navy?

Yeah, so uh.

How long have you been in the Navy?

I’ve been in the Navy for about a year now.

So you signed up specifically to come to BUD/S?

Right - yeah.

So you, you came in, you went to boot camp...

Yep.

And then you went to..

BUD/S Prep

Great, Great Lakes?

Yep

And then here?

Yep.

Alright, wow. Um, would you consider yourself to be impulsive?

Uh, I can be, yeah, I would say so.

And it sounds like you decided to join the Navy, that - that wasn’t really an impulsive decision, it was, ya know, thinking about it, right?

Kind of, I kinda... I kind of realized that like I was ya know - I think I was still 24 at the time. Um, or no I was 23 at the time. I kind of like, kind of had like a life crisis I guess, an early life crisis. Where uh, I figured ya know I can do this farming thing for the rest of my life and get into it right now, or I can do this - ya know - try the whole Navy SEAL thing, and ya know, do something more. Um, I guess you could kind of say, I just, I just felt kinda stuck, I needed uh, needed a change. So...and, ya know I feel like most all the guys that make it, they just kind of have this sense about them, or they, they have some, some sort of, ya know, confidence that just, I don’t know what is stems from but they just - they know they’re going to make it. Ya know, like when I signed away 6 years of my life, like, I knew I was going to make it. Ya know, I mean, if you don’t believe it, then ya know who’s going to believe it? So, looking back on it, it seems pretty crazy that I just like signed a paper, ya know, here we go, six years but, ya know it’s all worked out, so.

Do you have any tattoos?

No, no tattoos.

That’s an example of impulsivity, or so, or so they think.

Right, yeah.

Or so someone has written.

Makes sense.

What was the most challenging part of, of BUD/S? Like a particular event, or particular day or?

Umm, I’d say first phase was the worst, I mean that’s where I was had, ya know, I was tested the most was definitely in first phase, where ya know, for me I would say like the log PT’s were, were the hardest thing for me. Um, coming into it I thought the water was going to be the hardest thing. But uh, I would say log PT and OC8. I got rolled for OC8, that’s why I got rolled to 39 - so pool comp. Um, but...

Is that where a lot of people get rolled?

Yeah that’s pretty common. But uh..

For the drown-proofing, or ?

Uh so that was in first phase - I didn’t have any problem with that, uh, but in OC8 I, I uh failed it - ya know, I passed my fifth attempt so I failed it - passed out like two times, almost three times in the water. Um, so yeah I would say probably logs and pool comp were the two hardest things for me.

So what motivated you to push through?

Just being stubborn I would say - just, ya know - and then, thinking about, like I always had a rationale, like clear head, where when you quit, you like know where you’re going. It’s like - yes, you’re gonna ya know have comfort for, ya know, that day, but ya know your mind isn’t going to let you live that down that you quit, and then to go home, ya know, and tell your family that you quit, and all your friends and everyone that knows that you’re doing this pipeline, ya know. There’s a lot, a lot on the line there, so. No matter how bad it was. As long, as long as you - as long as I kept a rational mind and thought about the consequences of what it means to quit I was never going to do it. And, ya know, I never thought about doing it as hard as it got, ya know. There were times where I was like worried that am I going to get performance dropped right now, am I like not performing well enough right now. But never in my mind was it that I was going to go voluntarily end my BUD/S career, ya know.

Did you feel like you were supported by others?

Oh yeah, yeah, because you are with the guys since boot camp, so - you’re all, all in it together. For sure.

So what practices, and to some extent you just answered this - but maybe there’s something more, what practices: physical, mental, spiritual, or etc. did you use to push through the challenges?

Um, I think the biggest thing for me, was like I said, just keeping, not making an emotional decision, and keeping your rational mind where ya think about, ya know, how stupid it is to quit, especially when you’ve made it this far. Like by the time you get to Hell Week, you’ve already put in, ya know, months and months of training, and boot camp, and BUD/S Prep, and BUD/S Orientation, just like by that time it’s like, ya know, it doesn’t make any sense to just tap out, ya know because...

When you made a difficult decision during training at BUD/S, what went through your mind as you made the decision? Um, and what decision, you can give an example, did you really struggle with? And the examples that give here are: running classmates out or turning in someone who’s cheating.

Um, let me think about that one for a second. Um. I can’t think of any particular instance. I know...I know that’s happened, ya know. That happens a lot in this pipeline, ya know. Like, If someone is really underperforming, they will get run out. And then, as far as turning someone in, like my attitude, um, would be to handle things in class, and not, and handle it at the lowest level. But, I really can’t think of any decision I’ve made personally, although I have witnessed, witnessed those kinds of decisions being made.

Did you notice - so, we’re pretty much out of time, I don’t know where the time went here- um, why do you think you were successful in completing BUD/S?

I would say just, it sounds super cliche, but just showed up everyday and didn’t quit. That’s all it comes down to - I’m sure you hear that from everybody, but, just a stubborn guy that doesn’t quit.

Did you notice anything different about the folks who didn’t make it?

Uh, I would say they had a moment of weakness and made an emotional decision. Um, other than that, that’s ya know, everyone has a time where it’s like, ya know - they, everyone has something they struggle with ya know, and some people get through it and some people feel sorry for themselves, and just end up quitting. So - they make an emotional decision and just want to get out of the pain right away, and just, just quit.

How did this experience change you as a person, if it did?

Um, I would say it just makes you realize that you can do things that before you thought were impossible I guess, or. Basically you are capable of so much more - and the human body can do so much that, ya know. When you are pushed to do something, you can step up to the plate and do it, so.

Well, that’s about it, so thanks.

Cool, thank you.