**TRANSCRIBER NAME: Wyatt Long**

**Date: 1/31/2022**

**Participant #: 626**

Interviewer (Code in blue): CDR Andrew Ledford

Participant (Code in black): #626

**Interview Guide**

**CDR Ledford:**

**All right, I am with 626, and it is 4 January, 2022, and I just wanna kind of review the informed consent... pieces of the informed consent as, you know, this is voluntary. You can opt out, just like those other two did. Um, I told you a little bit about the purpose of this study. The survey is just the psychological test that I'm... I mentioned, um, and then, there is no cost to you to do this. There shouldn't be any discomfort. I'm not gonna ask you any c- crazy questions that's gonna make you weirded out. Uh, I told you there's no personal benefit to you, whatsoever, in doing this...**

**626:**

**Hmm.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**... but there is benefit for the Navy, there's benefit for social science, in general, by participating. Um, there's no compensation. Uh, I'm the principal investigator for this study, so I'm, uh, in charge of this research group. Uh, my name is Commander Andrew Ledford at Naval Academy, so, if there's any issues with that, you can get in touch back with Master Chief Cruz. You know who she?**

**626:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah, so, she can get back in touch with me, uh, if you have any other questions about it. Um, do you have any questions?**

**626:**

**No, I don't have a question.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**No? Okay, so, this is your consent. If you can put your name there. And this is the only p- place where your name and your number is going to be put together.**

**626:**

**Done.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And if you can put your number up top there, yeah. Perfect, and then, on the... this page you're gonna sign it. You're signing... saying that you're a research participant. Yeah, and then printed name and research participant. The date.**

**626:**

**Today is the?**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Today is the fourth, yeah. 20, uh, 22. Crazy.**

**626:**

**Yeah, really is.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, same thing, uh, this you can... and, uh, same thing. It's... it just... two places that you gotta sign. One was for the psychological test, the survey, and one is for this interview, but it, it, basically explain the same thing, but you do have to sign the second one, too. Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Birch. Process, all right. So, um, just to get started, what, what phase were you?**

**626:**

**I was, uh, First Phase.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**About what time in the system... or 626. And you're in First Phase, so roughly, where in First Phase? Was it first week, second week, or?**

**626:**

**Uh, the... then... Like, when I DOR'd?**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**Uh, end of, of Friday, of Friday morning, of first week.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**First week, okay. First week. All right. All right. Uh, so... and what... was that 351, or?**

**626:**

**Yeah, 351.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay, so about ten weeks ago...**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**... roughly?**

**626:**

**Damn.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah, I knew it. Let me go get another pen.**

**626:**

**Do you wanna use [crosstalk 00:03:30]?**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Uh... Oh, yeah, this is a pen?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Awesome. Yeah, thank you. So, um, can you tell me a little bit about, uh, your childhood? Like, were your parents together, or siblings, you guys move around a lot?**

**626:**

**No, just grew up in, uh, in, uh, New York. No- not... We didn't move around a lot. Like, only the time we moved around, like, to travel, and the first time when I moved out the house was, you know, to join the Navy.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Siblings, or?**

**626:**

**I was a older sister. I'm the second, and then two younger brothers.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Two younger brothers. And parents? Still together?**

**626:**

**Yeah, still together.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Parents together. Any, uh, sports in school?**

**626:**

**Yeah, I grew up... I played basketball, um, soccer, a little track in college. Uh, that's about it.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**All right. And then track in college. Where'd you go to school?**

**626:**

**St. John's in, uh, in Queens.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Oh, okay, I was gonna say, not the St. Johns in Annapolis.**

**626:**

**No.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Am I crazy? Track in college. So... and you went to St. John's...**

**626:**

**University.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**In Queens.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**In Queens. Did you go all four years? You-**

**626:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, my, my bachelor's in homeland security and then minor in Arabic.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**I-... Online security?**

**626:**

**No, homeland security.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Oh, homeland security. Oh, really?**

**626:**

**It's like an... It was a new major when... that was coming out [crosstalk 00:05:19].**

**CDR Ledford:**

**That is very cool.**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And then, minor in Arabic?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**That's frigging awesome. Minor in Arabic.**

**626:**

**Grew up a lo-... w- watching too much [James 00:05:35] Romano, you know, he's, uh, Jason Bourne, you know?**

**CDR Ledford:**

**(laughs) Dude, that's a great major and minor, uh, for the Navy.**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**How would you describe your personality in three traits, or, you know, if you picked three traits that describe you?**

**626:**

**Adventurous, calculated...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... uh, lawful.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Lawful, okay. And... So, what did you do the five years prior to coming to BUD/S?**

**626:**

**Uh, while I was in school, uh, to... getting my degree...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Uh-huh (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... um, I worked E-... uh, EMS in, in New York. I started as an EMT when I was 18, and then I upgraded to paramedic when I was 21, and I was wo- working, uh, response lane, 911 calls in New York City, and then, you know, work in the pandemic before it came.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And this is while you were going to St. John's?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**You were frigging busy.**

**626:**

**I like to keep my mind busy, 'cause...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**... I can't sit at home placing all my other [inaudible 00:06:58].**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, you went from high school to St. John's. You're doing EMT, paramedics, and then you finish St. Johns and you went straight to bootcamp at BUD/S?**

**626:**

**I was in delayed entry program for a little bit, and then train- training up, and then I shipped out in March of, uh, 20... uh, 2021.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay. How would you des-... what, uh, of your background, led to you joining the navy?**

**626:**

**It's something I always wanted to do, but then once I was... got my feet wet in EMS and, you know, the things that you're, you're seeing, you know, I related it to, you know, w- where the Seals go, you know? And, you know, you're dealing with gunshots, you know, you, you know, pre- pretty crazy situations, you know, you just, you see evil... Well, you know, I've had a three-year-old, like, get burned alive by her father, like, a week before Mother's Day and... So, like, you s-... you see that evil and then you, you know, you see what else is out there, and, yeah, that helped me harness, or focus, on my, on my mission, on my role.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm. What motivates you on a daily basis?**

**626:**

**Purpose.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**What's that, what's that purpose?**

**626:**

**Wherever there's a battlefield, in can be in medicine... anywh- anywhere there's a, there's a, like, chaotic situation where everyone is running away, and you're the one that's calm, and m-... you... that's the one environment where you're the most calm.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Can you describe your experience at BUD/S?**

**626:**

**It was... you... it was... you, you were forged, you know? Like, you, you... mentally, physically, emotionally, and it's depends on your outlook that dictates the next, the next part of your life.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**It what? It...**

**626:**

**And, ba- based on that...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... it's, it's your own attitude, like, how, how the next part of your life is gonna be. You go downhill, or, or uphill.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Good. What about, uh, interaction with, uh, your classmates, instructors? [crosstalk 00:09:48] How do you describe that?**

**626:**

**It was, um... everyone was, like, aggressive. Like, everyone was, like, fighting with each other. Team, team dynamic was stuck, stuck, everyone had their own cliques, but the instructors... it was, you know, it was casual. They only... it was... they had to do... they had a, a job they gotta do, you know? They're, they're the gatekeepers, so.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Did you start in class 351, or were you gonna go to 35... or were you in 352 and...**

**626:**

**No I s-... [crosstalk 00:10:32] I started-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**You were always with 351?**

**626:**

**Yeah, I was always with 351.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay. Who, um... where did that come from, in 351? This is from the boat crew leaders that would cultivate that within their boat [crosstalk 00:10:48]?**

**626:**

**I didn't mean to interrupt, sorry, but, like...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay.**

**626:**

**... uh, the, the, the leadership, you know, it... just like how I said where, you know, the fa-... the, the actions of a few, you know, dictate the fate of the many, and you need leadership, so it all starts from, from the top. So, the extra beatings that we got, like... The secret to BUD/S is it's not actual buds, so, the, the, the extra beatings that we, that we had, you know, extra pu- push-ups we've had to do on, on, you know, at this... at the CTC, or turn that evo-... evolutions was from lack of leadership.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**From boat crew leaders?**

**626:**

**Boat crew leaders.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**You think? Yeah.**

**626:**

**And also, you know, OIC.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Oh, and the OIC?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, you... and this is not an [inaudible 00:11:28], I... we're not trying to... I'm just trying to get a handle of... [crosstalk 00:11:35]**

**626:**

**Got it.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**... what... What was different about 351, uh, because I've done a few of these interviews now, and I'm hearing some of these same things come out. Um, and it's a pattern we've seen with other classes, um, but that... so, you're saying the leadership, boat crew leaders and OIC, the boat crew leaders, was part of that?**

**626:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative), and I... It's also a in-... the individuals, too, where... you know, guys that... their maturity levels, where it's, like, y-... it's not about you, you know? Like, if you, you know, continue, like, duck and bolt, and, you know...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... guys get injured or it causes g-... you know, that [inaudible 00:12:30] buzz and all that, it's...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**... it, it's the maturity level of individual people count as well.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm. Is there a time you had to make a difficult decision at BUD/S, and what was going through your mind when you made that decision?**

**626:**

**Uh, Thursday, of the, the first week. It's, like... that was the first time I ever were, like, uh... the thought crossed my mind where, like... to, to, to DOR. Um, and, you know, we got [inaudible 00:13:10] in... I mean [crosstalk 00:13:11]**

**CDR Ledford:**

**I know, that's a...**

**626:**

**... you know, in, in the morning and all that, and I was, you know, I had a moment of weakness, and... but my shoulder was b-... messed up, so I went to talk to the, to the instructor...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... uh, prior to the evo, and I was just, you know, in my head and all the... mo- moment of weakness, and he, he advised, "No, you're good. Go, get your wetsuit on," 'cause we had to do, uh, the two mile ocean swim...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... and I was, you know, I, I had a moment of weakness and the thought cr-... you know, crossed my mind where I was, like, you know, I was, you know... to, to DOR, and this is where... you know, having someone else there with you, you know, to, to, to go for that, 'cause, you know, it's... You know, another guy there, I, I... we barely talked, but he [inaudible 00:14:05] DOR... DOR [inaudible 00:14:06], he was my new swim buddy, so...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... you know, I'm going to, to change out, but, I'm in, you know, I'm, I'm having like a moment of weakness, then the thought crossed my mind, and then I didn't know where I looked, my swim buddy come, and he's like, "You, you need help putting your wetsuit on?" And I just snapped right back into it, and just crushed the whole thing.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Interesting. So he, he, um... Did he know this, that's going through your mind?**

**626:**

**No.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**He was just like, come on dude, let's go?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And you snapped back into it.**

**626:**

**I snapped right back in.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And then when was the next time that you kinda felt that?**

**626:**

**Um, Friday morning. Like, I didn't wake up thinking to, to DOR...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**... but, um, um... I didn't prep my gear the night before, 'cause, 'cause we were going into the, the next day, or, like, 2:30 in the morning...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... and, you know, I... no excuses, but when you're sick, you [inaudible 00:15:06]. You know, I come from a paramedic background, I was, like, you know, just a little bit of rest, you'll be good. So, I, I took the easy way out, and...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... you know, didn't prep my, my gear to be re- ready to go in the morning. And... so I took, like, 45 minutes to sleep, and then, like, I, I overslept, and I'm, like... when I, when I woke up, like... because all my stuff wasn't taken care of and all that stuff, you know, I was just caught in a, like, in a bad spot, 'cause I'm, you know, [inaudible 00:15:36] get [inaudible 00:15:38] again, and then... it was easy to, to, you know, like... this was all, like, that was the m-.. the main reason where it, it was, like, all right, I just stop.**

**626:**

**And then, also, kinda like a moment of weakness, you know, you think about, about all the weekends there, you know, it's, like...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**... it's like, I'm older, let me just, you know? A- and I'm in charge of you, like, you know... moment of weakness.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Is there anything that you would have done differently?**

**626:**

**Less aggression towards my boat crew, or my, my class.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**From you, [crosstalk 00:16:23] or from...**

**626:**

**Yeah, from me.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Oh, really?**

**626:**

**Or, like, commu- communicating better, instead of yelling, you know, like...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**Um...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**How do you, how do you feel like that? Uh, why would you have changed that? Like-**

**626:**

**'Cause it, it causes, like... 'cause calm is contagious, you know? If you're...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... the one yelling up... uh, you know, you know, just as, you know, as calm is contagious...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... you know, craziness is contagious, too.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**So, just being level-headed, and I tried... I, I, I guess it was just the, the environment, 'cause, you can't be, be doing this, you know... I, I, I... at least what I thought was, you know, like, all chill and whatever, but, like, when I working, in, in the EMS, we would do things without even saying a word. Or, like, we would be, like, con- controlled. I might say, "Oh," you know, you know, "pass me the," you know, "an IV," or stuff like that. It just, it's more calm.**

**626:**

**And then, you know, I felt like that that would be... that would've been a lot better, 'cause it's... when we f-... when we were doing land portage, um, you know, it was, like, 20 boat crews, and only two boat crews were able to keep up with the instructor, and everyone else, you know, [inaudible 00:17:40] dealing with that, but, like, what, what it comes down to is, is if, if everyone's ho- holding their weight... It's... all it is, is 25 pound, you know, running with 25 pounds, uh, for... on a 12 minute pace, you know, with boots on sand. It's doable...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**... but... 'cause you have the, the boat and it adds, adds up to the chaos and all that. The, the reason why the... only two boat crews were able to do that, is they were, they were communicating. They're like, "All right," you know, "[inaudible 00:18:07] position's good," you know? Being there for, for the boys, not s-... you know, staying there and suffering for, for yourself, and, you know, just, detaching and, and just letting your body go into overdrive and, you know, not, not thinking about anybody else but yourself.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Good. Would you consider coming back?**

**626:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Pretty quick answer. What practices, uh, did you use, if any, that helped you push through some of the hard times, the obstacles?**

**626:**

**I used... I had, I had my, my faith, so that helped me out a lot, too, where, at least for me, I'm, I'm saying from what I experienced...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... you know, there, there will be times where, you know, you're in the, the surf for a, you know, a long time, and you just finished chow, you know, and, and, you know, you know, you go from meal to meal, and, you know, you're just laying there, and, like, non-stop and then, you know, finally, like... I had, like, a, a moment we- weakne- weak- weakness again, so I... and like, I pray, and I was like, I like, "Please, Lord, have mercy." And I'm l-... I'm not kidding, as soon as I said that, the instructor was like, "Feet." I'm like, get out of the water.**

**626:**

**And, and there was other times, you know, you, you get back [inaudible 00:19:38], you know, it's cloudy, cloudy day, or whatever... [crosstalk 00:19:41]**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative).**

**626:**

**... or whatever, and you're about to do in... on a, you know, the ocean swim and all that, and, you know, I prayed again, like, the sun comes out of the clouds, and, like, me and my swim buddy who crushed, like...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**So, um... And also having your, your demons locked in a box, 'cause someone... something that helped me push through certain things was, I remembered, um, you know, traumatic calls that I had, when worked EMS...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... and, and it correlates with my faith, too, where, um... This was another call, but it was, was, like, a, a seven-month-old, was, like shaken baby syndrome.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**It was, like, you know, a beautiful kid and, you know, you do what you gotta do every day, all you had to do, and then, like, so... I was saying a prayer for the... you know, we pronounced it, and I was saying a prayer for kid, but he had, like, you know, beautiful curly hair all that, so I was, like, you know, I, I was saying a prayer for him.**

**626:**

**And then, uh, there was times during, like, l- log PT that we do with, like, in five hours, and, like, you're feeling... you're exhausted, like, you know, your body go up, kinda like... For some reason it just came to me, you know, we've, you know, saying a prayer for the kid and I just, like, locked on, and I was like, "Let's..." you know, you just, like, you'll deal with aggression. Like harnessing your, harnessing your path.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**How's, uh, this experience changed you?**

**626:**

**Myself, be there for other people. Um, understand what really matters in life. Wh- where...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm.**

**626:**

**... you know, it's, it's your, your family. And good leaders versus bad leaders.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**626:**

**How far you can... you, you think you can... yo-... it's your limit and you can just keep, keep going.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Great. Is there a question that we ha-... Knowing what we're trying to get after here, is there a good question that we should have asked? Then an- another question that might get to the heart of these things?**

**626:**

**The heart of, of what? Like, how to make, make it through BUD/S?**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Resilience-**

**626:**

**Oh, resilience.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**... and... yeah.**

**626:**

**Um, nothing that comes off the top of my head.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hmm. Awesome, all right. Let me stop the recorder.**