**TRANSCRIBER NAME: Wyatt Long**

**Date: 1/31/2022**

**Participant #: 627**

Interviewer (Code in blue): CDR Andrew Ledford

Participant (Code in black): #627

**Interview Guide**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, are you okay with me recording this? And this is... I'm gonna transcribe it, just because I can't take notes-**

**627:**

**Yeah, absolutely.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Fast enough. Uh, so today is 4 January 2022, this is Andrew Litford. I'm with, uh, 627, and we're getting started. So, what phase did you... Were you in when you left?**

**627:**

**First phase.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**You were in first phase. Uh, were you 351?**

**627:**

**Yes.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, 351, first phase. And where were you at in first phase? Were you in first week, second week, third week?**

**627:**

**First week.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**First week. First week. Okay. Um, so that is about 10 weeks from now. So, can you, uh, tell me a little bit about your childhood, like were your parents together? Did you move around a lot? Siblings?**

**627:**

**Um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Sports?**

**627:**

**I grew up in a small town of Pennsylvania. I didn't move until I left for college. I have a older sister, younger brother, um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So you're in middle?**

**627:**

**Yup. Normal childhood, I played football, baseball, basketball. Um, I got into junior high, my Mom went to rehab for alcoholism. Um, got to high school, my parents separated. She went back to rehab a few times, and I moved in with my, uh, Aunt and Uncle for my senior year of high school, and I lived with them.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm.**

**627:**

**Um, played golf when I got to high school. Went to college for that.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Where'd you go to college?**

**627:**

**Uh, Jefferson University, Philadelphia.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. And did you go four years?**

**627:**

**Yes.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**What is your degree in?**

**627:**

**Communications.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Nice. [inaudible 00:02:05] Four years. And then you went... So you went from high school to Jefferson University, and then... But you enlisted right after that?**

**627:**

**I enlisted my senior year. I left for Navy bootcamp two weeks after college graduation.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay.**

**627:**

**So, all in the last-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Two weeks.**

**627:**

**Year I enlisted, went through that, went to BUD/S and-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**After graduation. So, if you had to describe your personality in three traits, uh, what, what traits would you use? How would someone describe you? How would you describe yourself, actually?**

**627:**

**Um, I think maybe quiet, compassionate, and loyal.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And... Okay. So, I think we covered over the last five years, what you, you did leading up to BUD/S, but with any of your previous experiences, your life experiences before BUD/S, were there any that were... Kind of shaped you, that had a significant effect on who you were? Like any kind of life changing, or life molding, maybe, experiences?**

**627:**

**Yeah, well I had a son when I was 15, so I grew up fast then. And then, uh, like I said, I moved out in my senior of high school. Um, worked a lot in high school, worked a lot in college, so I grew up, I think, faster than most.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Now did you... Were you raising your son?**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Yeah, you definitely had to grow up fast. Interesting. How do you think those experiences impacted training for you, BUD/S?**

**627:**

**Um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**At BUD/S. [inaudible 00:04:52]**

**627:**

**I think... I think maybe I was a little more organized as far as getting places, and just little remedial things, maybe, just how to even stage stuff to change out quicker.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Um, I think it also, though... I think I wasn't naïve to the fact of what was going on-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative) With what?**

**627:**

**Maybe just the, uh, reality of everything. I don't... I don't know. I struggled with, uh, if it would have been better to come younger, and maybe not-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm.**

**627:**

**Had some life experiences.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Really?**

**627:**

**Uh-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Why is that?**

**627:**

**I don't know, I thought-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**That's interesting.**

**627:**

**I thought going in that going through college, and growing up a lot would help-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. In fact, I think that's one of the things we look at in our research, that it does help.**

**627:**

**And that's what I've always heard, and I don't-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**I think it was just my personal experience, but I think if I came here and had no idea, any preconceived notion about what else there was to do in life, or anything like that, that I might have been more successful.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Really? Interesting. Okay, so why do you, uh... Why do you think that? Yeah. Just because there's life out there, you know, there's different-**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Opportunities?**

**627:**

**I think that's what it is because I've struggled a lot, because I always wanted to come here, even before college, and everything, and-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Huh.**

**627:**

**I thought that I was setting myself up for the most... Again, I just think that actually being here, that's just something that I thought maybe I would have done differently.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Is that, uh, go in-**

**627:**

**Right after high school.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Straight after high school?**

**627:**

**Yeah, and, like-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Huh.**

**627:**

**Get to see what life is like. Especially, like, living in Philadelphia, like a big city.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So is that what you notice from your own experience? Like, did you see this with other guys in your class who were, like, in high school, had no experience?**

**627:**

**Um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**And you felt, like, "Oh, man. They don't even really know what's out there."?**

**627:**

**I think yeah, I've seen it with younger guys.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hm.**

**627:**

**I've, I've talked with people who were in my class, and same thing, went to college, even had jobs with their degree for a year before coming, and they-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Seem to almost understand what I was saying, where if you came and were almost naïve, and, not even naïve, obviously, but-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Yeah-**

**627:**

**Um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**I know exactly what you mean.**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**That there's life. You don't... Yeah, like, this is not the end of the world.**

**627:**

**Right.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**You go back to something, and it's gonna be there.**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Huh. Yeah. That is really interesting, that's not something that we've thought of. That's what so great about d- doing these interviews, there's somethings which you guys see, and we... Yeah, it's just not something that we considered. It's great. Um, so describe your background that led you to join the Navy.**

**627:**

**Um, well, again, like, I grew up in a town of less than 1,000 people, in the coal region, Pennsylvania. My Uncle served in the Army in the 90s. Uh, my Nan, my Mom's mom's brother met his wife in Vietnam. Um, my neighbor served in Vietnam. I mean-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**You go down Main Street and they have the, the flags on all the-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Telephone poles. The veterans, I mean.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**A lot of people I knew, and I always wanted to join the military when I was young.**

**CDR Ledford:**

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

**627:**

**Just, for myself, I just want to be better, but I came here in the N-... Military, the Navy in general. I just want to do something that actually has a purpose-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Whether I see that or not, it does-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Something.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**All right. Can you describe your experience at BUD/S?**

**627:**

**Um, it was definitely a shock.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Um, orientation before phase was a lot of fun, actually. Uh, wasn't all really challenging, I never had any even inkling of dropping during then. I thought get to hell week, and it'd be, you know, see how that goes, but the first day was just a total shock to the system.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**How? How so?**

**627:**

**Um, I mean, we were up early, earlier than we needed to be, but from the PT to the run, and then it's, uh... When something's going on, you think, like, "This has to end soon." And it just never ends. It just keeps going, and going, and going. And you're so tired by lunch already, and then, you know, you finish the day, and it's only Monday.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**I think I thought it would be easier to keep in the moment and not look ahead, but, uh, all I started doing was just dreading what was coming next.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. And that was at the end of that first day, you're dreading-**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**What's coming next? And what about as far as interaction with the class, instructors?**

**627:**

**Um, the class, I had some guys I was close with. I respected everyone-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**And I think that was mutual. Uh, I think egos are probably always a little bit of an issue. Um the instructors were-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Ego with the class?**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**With the class.**

**627:**

**Just in... Some people, uh, you know, maybe rolled back, or-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Just been in the Navy a little longer, think they know what's best, or I don't know.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Um, but the instructors were intense but professional. There was... I'd say that maybe the only thing I really wasn't surprised by was the demeanor of the instructors.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Really?**

**627:**

**Yeah, I think that was as expected. They were-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**[crosstalk 00:13:02] Yeah.**

**627:**

**They were intense, they were... Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision, in BUD/S and-**

**627:**

**Um-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**What was going through your mind when you made it?**

**627:**

**I think the only difficult decision I had to make in BUD/S was dropping-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Uh, because not being an Officer, like, even, like, a ranked enlisted person, I didn't have any responsibility. I can just show up-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Um, and I mean, the hardest thing was... Feels like especially for me, that early, it was not a waste, but, like, we worked so hard to get there, and then-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**End up there, but also... I mean, the guys in my boat crew still had to go through the rest of the day, and I'm gone now, so I felt bad about doing that, but I also just said, I mean-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**"If I'm gone, they're not gonna see me again, or they'll see me in the same place." So...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**So, is that something you were thinking about that... In that moment? Um, was it relatively quickly, when you made that decision, or at the end of that first day, you're thinking, "I gotta do this for six months." And it slowly built up?**

**627:**

**Yeah, I mean, I was thinking that, and then I got to the second day, and I was telling myself at the end of that first day, like, uh... We'd been told the first day is the worst day of-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**BUD/S in general, like, you get through that second day, figured I'd go and see what was going on. The morning wasn't that bad, and, uh, it was... For me, it wasn't about, uh, being cold, or volatile's not the right word, 'cause there's never anything disrespectful the instructors do, but-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Like the, the mind games of, you know, go, just get wet just because. It was... Really, for me, it was the physical, like, uh, just feeling like my legs were gonna break-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**You know? Um, so that's where I was just... I just felt like I couldn't go any further. And that was... Yeah, I mean, I guess the decision to quit, it wasn't... It wasn't like I knew going into the evolution, it was just during the middle of it, I just couldn't do it.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Right. Is there anything you would have done differently?**

**627:**

**Um, I think... I mean, I've regretted it since. I would have... It's easier to say now I would have just went until my legs actually broke, or-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**It's not just, like, a... It's like I said, it seems like it should end soon. It doesn't, but it does end eventually.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**You know? I've... I think I was so concerned with being a nuisance to the guys in my boat crew, that I didn't want to... I didn't want to be the reason that we were getting remediated. I mean, looking back, I would have taken the remediation and moved onto the next day.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Are you, uh... Do you... Would you consider coming back?**

**627:**

**Yeah, I've... I think about it often.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Um, I mean, I just feel like I made it here, and I didn't put forth the total effort that I could have.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Um, I think I just need to... If I were to ever come back, that there's nothing else in my world, there's no focus on anything else. I just need to be living on this base and concerned about what happens-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**Only to the BUD/S class, and nothing else.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Did you feel like while you were here, you had focus elsewhere? Like, your son, is he here, and-**

**627:**

**Yeah, no... Uh, not in, like, a negative way. It wasn't-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay.**

**627:**

**Taking away from that, and-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**I just think I was, um, what I said, uh, to friends I have in the next class, was just that there's got to be nothing on your mind, good or bad-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Other than, like, what's going on.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative) What practices, uh, physical, mental, spiritual, uh, did you use to kind of push through challenges?**

**627:**

**Um, I went to church a lot as a kid.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**I stopped as things in my family started becoming a little more, uh, broken, I guess.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**But I've gotten back into going to Mass as I was on my own. And, um, I'm not, like, devout word for word, but I mean, I'm a practicing Catholic, so that helps.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Um, I don't... Physically, I mean, I've started running to come here, and that is just something that I think, uh, just exerting yourself, I think, is something that helps when things get, um, bad, or stressful, personally.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Okay. How has this experienced changed you [inaudible 00:19:38]?**

**627:**

**I don't... I think I've definitely changed. I don't know, uh... I don't know if I... I don't know if I care as much about remedial things that don't actually matter anymore.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm-hmm (affirmative)**

**627:**

**I think I... I just don't bother with certain... Uh, not even anything specific, but if I just know something's irrelevant, um, yeah, I don't... I don't really know how to describe it. I think maybe I prioritize better, I...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Hm. And you've noticed this in the last 10 weeks?**

**627:**

**Yeah. I think... Um, I think I've been humbled a lot by it, actually, is a good way to put it.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Mm.**

**627:**

**Maybe that's...**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**I've always kept to myself, but now it's just... I don't know.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**I don't really have any reservations about what comes next, I'm just kind of go as it goes.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. [inaudible 00:21:00] Is there a question that we... Knowing what we're trying to get after here, of, like what makes you tick? What has gotten you through these things, is there a question that we should ask to you or us that would probably help?**

**627:**

**I don't... I'm always interested, I don't know if this helps. I'm always interested to know, like, why do people choose to go as [inaudible 00:21:39]-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**As opposed to other special operations, and other branches. Um, they came here to say they just came to BUD/S or if they... Whatever it might be.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah. Yeah. Why, why do you think that would be an interesting question?**

**627:**

**I think that of everything, there's most information on the SEAL teams, and it's most-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Yeah.**

**627:**

**Publicized, just well known, I guess, of all the branches, and I don't know if, uh... I know that's not intentional from inside, but-**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Well, some folks make it intentional.**

**627:**

**Yeah.**

**CDR Ledford:**

**Unfortunately, yeah. Interesting. Yeah, that is a good question. Awesome. Okay. I'm gonna stop this.**