Oral History

with

James Marcus Wade

Interviewed and Transcribed by Jamie Annel

HIS 520

Fall 2006
Introduction

When deciding on a narrator for this project, my first thought was to approach a Vietnam veteran I knew. However, he was reticent to talk about his experiences and ended up declining my request. I was therefore forced to find another interviewee. Since my original narrator was going to be a Vietnam veteran and I already started researching that era, I became determined to find another subject from that war. Luckily, my friend and classmate Justin Law was aware of a veteran in a class of his who appeared to be open and willing to talk about his experiences.

Marc Wade, the veteran in question, had been in the Navy for over twenty years and served in a wide variety of theaters, including Southeast Asia, and at a variety of roles, including as a Navy SEAL. As of this writing, he is here at UIS working toward both a bachelor’s degree in English as well as his teaching certification.

After getting Wade’s e-mail address I approached him with the following invitation:

Justin Law gave me your e-mail address, as he’s in your Monday night class. He said he talked to you about me, but I thought I’d introduce myself anyway. I’m with Justin in Oral History Methods class, and I’m looking for someone to interview for what will be an oral history interview that will then go into the IRAD (Illinois Records & Archives Depository) collection. Since Justin said that you sometimes talk in your class about your experiences in Vietnam as a SEAL, he thought you would be a great person to interview who wouldn’t have a problem discussing that time of your life.

I know Justin said you were willing, but I just wanted to make sure, and possibly get your phone number so I could speak to you “live” and give you more details. Would it be convenient for me to call you in the afternoon or early evening tomorrow (Tues.)? I have a meeting in the morning but any time after that I could set aside for whatever is convenient for you.

I received a reply along with his phone number, and was able to then talk with him personally. He seemed open and gregarious, and we set up an interview session for
October 26th, 2006 at his home. Early that same week, I sent him an E-mail confirming the date, time and the directions to his home, as well as a brief reiteration of what the interview would be like:

Just to give you an idea of what I'll be asking about: it will start with general stuff - biographical information, your childhood and education and decision to go into the military, following along chronologically from that. At the beginning, I'll ask you to sign a release - that simply allows UIS to use it in the archives, but you can put whatever restrictions on it you'd like (i.e. have it closed until after your death if you want so no one can read it until then). At the end, we'll schedule a follow-up interview just so I can come back and ask any clarifying questions or anything we didn't get to the first time!

If there are any photos, maps, etc. you'd like to show me, feel free. I'd love it. Even though it will be an audio only interview, that doesn't mean photos can't be talked about and described during an interview (in fact, it often helps!)

Anyway, I'm looking forward to seeing you and don't stress about it: it's casual and not a memory quiz, all you have to do is talk about yourself! I did it myself briefly in a workshop and it was actually quite fun (good ego boost!)

Prior to the interview, I wrote a checklist to make sure I brought all my necessary equipment: the tape recorder, two blank ninety minute tapes, extra batteries, a notepad, pens and the release form. I practiced several times with the recorder, familiarizing myself with its buttons and most importantly, placing it at various distances away from me and recording my own voice. That allowed me to determine the best position to place it during the actual interview.

It turned out that the recorder actually had a very competent microphone and it was able to pick up both our voices speaking at a normal volume. The actual interview took place in the furnished basement of Wade’s home with me sitting on a couch and him in a chair opposite me. The tape recorder sat on a coffee table between us where I could monitor the red light.
In preparing for the interview, I wrote a list of about seventy-five questions—insurance that I wouldn’t be caught short in case he clammed up and gave extremely short answers. As it turns out, I needn’t have worried: Wade was a remarkable narrator and gave lengthy and interesting answers. I believe I ended up only asking two of the questions on my prepared list, and the rest were follow-ups I thought of on the spot as I listened to his actual answers.

The interview in total lasted two fifty minute sessions, with one brief break in-between. Wade told me, off the record, which subjects of his career were off-limits because of security concerns. Ironically, we ended up going in-depth into other areas of his career and barely touched on the Vietnam War.

In transcribing the interview, I took as my guide Cullom Davis’ From Tape to Type, which had been given to me by Davis himself this previous summer when I worked under him as an oral history transcriptionist. Through that job, certain parts of Davis’ methodology had become second nature to me, such as replacing most “Yeah’s” with “Yes” and eliminated common place fillers like “uh” in favor of ellipses. I was lucky in that my narrator was well-spoken: his only real vocal quirk was saying “you know” frequently as a place filler. I eliminated most of those instances so that his sentences would read better, and kept only the “you knows” that I thought were germane to his speech or the point he was making.

I largely disregarded the rules of grammar; I tried to put in the punctuation that best reflected his vocal rhythms, rather than being concerned with whether something was a sentence fragment and so on. I did, however, do my best to make sure the spelling was accurate. My most difficult task came in the varied place and people’s names he used
in his responses. While transcribing, I spelled those names phonetically as best as I could and then relied on Wade to correct me.

Aside from those spelling corrections, when reviewing the final transcript he only wished that in a couple of instances I correct his grammar ("never driven" for "never drove," for example). Considering that those were such minor requests I had no problems granting them (he is, after all, an English major). Wade otherwise congratulated me on a good job well done.

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with the project. I was particularly happy that my narrator turned out to be articulate, entertaining, and most willing to give long, lengthy answers. As previously mentioned, my original intent was to focus on his experiences in the Vietnam War, yet we ended up only briefly touching upon that. I thought it was better to drift with the natural flow of our conversation, and it seemed important to him to order his own recollections in chronological order. Through experience, I realized that the best way to approach an oral history interview is to listen and be adaptable, rather than try and steer the narrator into answering a rigid set of questions. I found that oral history is best as a collaborative effort between two people participating together.
Narrator's Information

Parents:
Clarence David Wade
Valeria Jane (Warren) Wade

Spouses:
Debra Lyn (Boggs) Wade, 1972-1976, divorced
Stella Marie (Martindale) Wade 1978-2001, deceased
Dixie Ilene Shanks (Cochran) Wade 2003- Present

Children:
Valeria Louise Wade, 11/23/73
James Marcus Wade, Jr. 12/6/75
Cynthia Lynne Wade 12/13/1978
Heather Marie Wade 12/31/79

Step-Children:
Robert James Wade 10/26/75
Eleanor Adrianne Potts 1/15/77

Schools:
1959-1965 Holy Rosary, Memphis, Tennessee
1965-1968 Colonial Jr. High School, Memphis, Tennessee
1968-1972 Overton High School, Memphis, Tennessee
2003-2005 Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield, IL
2005-Pres University of Illinois at Springfield, Springfield, IL

Work History:
1970 Paramount Theater, Memphis, Tennessee
1970 Park Theater, Memphis, Tennessee
1970-72 A & P Grocery, Memphis Tennessee
1972-93 U. S. Navy
1992-2001 Schneider national Carriers, Inc. Green Bay, WI
2002-03 Royal Oaks Nissan, Springfield, IL
2003-05 Jiffi Stop Stores, Springfield, IL

Cities of Residence:
1954-55 Nashville, Tennessee
1955-72 Memphis, Tennessee
1972-82 San Diego, California
1982-2001 Escanaba, Michigan (Home of record)
1985 Pensacola and Jacksonville, Florida
1985-88 Virginia Beach, Virginia
2001-Pres Springfield, Illinois
Q: Alright, this is October 26, 2006. This is Jamie Annel. I'm here with James Marc Wade. You prefer Marc, right?
A: I prefer - my actual middle is Marcus.
Q: Marcus.
A: And I go by Marc, my middle [name] for some unknown reason. I think it has to do with my parents. My parents, all their children - I'm the second of four - and it is Margaret, Marc, Marty and Mary Jo, all four of us start with M-a-r, so...
Q: But they went with James for you, for some reason?
A: Well, it's a family name, I guess. I'm actually named after a great-grandfather whose name was DeMarcus -
Q: Wow.
A: And they shortened it to Marcus. I do not know where the James comes from. No idea.
Q: Well, we'll start at the beginning, which is: where and when were you born?
A: I was born March 14, 1954 in Nashville, Tennessee. My parents moved to Memphis, Tennessee before I was six months old and my stepmother still lives in the same house that I grew up in, and the telephone number is still the same as that I learned so that I could go to kindergarten!
Q: (laughs) Really?
A: With the exception of - today, all the telephone numbers start with numbers: when I was a kid, all telephone numbers started with a word. And our phone number was Mutual-55902 which was MU-55902, and today it is 685-9902 and it hasn't changed. So in 52 years of life I've never had to learn another number to pick up and I will get someone from my childhood at that number still (laughter).

Q: So your parents weren't from Nashville then originally?
A: My father was born and raised in Paducah, Kentucky. He was born in 1919, served in World War II; he married my mother in 1939. They graduated from high school in 1938 and he married her just before World War II. I had a sister that was born in April - April 27, 1941 - and of course you know what happened in December of 1941. My father went and spent four years in the Navy in World War II. I came along in 1954; I had a younger brother in 1959 and my littlest sister was born in '63, so the four of us are actually - we're spread over three decades, you know, and it worked out to there's 21 years difference between my oldest sister - or 22 years - between my oldest sister and my youngest sister.

Q: Wow.
A: So in a weird sort of way each one of us grew up as kind of an only child for the longest time. My sister was 14 when I was born; I was almost 6 when my brother was born and he was close to 5 when my sister was born, so if any two of 'em never had the only child I guess it was my brother and sister. But my sister and I - older sister - and I, we both experienced it.

Q: So was your father career Navy or did he get out?
A: No, no, no. My father did just the four years during World War II and out. However, he had started a job at about the same time that he married my mother in '39. He went to work for a
company called Kentucky Transport as a truck driver, and he left his job just for the four years.

And what his company did was they were the delivery drivers for A&P stores in the South: in Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana area. And when I was born he was working out of Nashville, Tennessee taking care of all the A&P stores in the region there, you know, and they were opening a whole chain of stores - it was like 13 stores in Memphis - and they just asked him if he would go down to Memphis, and of course he worked for that company for.....43 years, before A&P kind of went out of business. But his whole life was spent with one job and the Navy. One of the funny - it kind of made a comparison for us - because my mother passed away when I was 15 in 1969 and he remarried a couple of years later. And of course my stepmom's a great person, she's - like I said - she still lives in the same house I grew up in, she really did a good job with my brothers and sisters.

The parallel with my dad's life and mine, and there's absolutely no....parallel, I guess...I got kind of in a rush: I knew that when I left high school I was going to join the service. College at that time was not an option for me, for a lot of reasons - and it was academic, it was personal. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that it was something that I should have done and could have done but I wouldn't have been successful at it. So, after, I guess, years of listening to Dad's experiences in the Navy, and coupled with the fact that in the late 60's, early 70's when I was thinking about this Vietnam was still going on and....to be honest with you, I went into the service just because I needed, I wanted, to get in before that was over. I kind of thought that would be my one chance to experience anything like that. And then I went into the service and spent 22 years - 21 years and change - in the Navy, came out and I drove a truck for ten years (laughter). Where my dad went and he drove a truck for 40 something years and did four years in the Navy; at just about the same point in life, you know, we lost our wives for reasons and....my dad always wanted to have an education, and he did have an education. My dad was a life long learner. I was...I don't know....I wasn't in high
school yet when my dad got his degree. Him and my mom got a degree about the same time, but he
never really did anything with it. But it was just a lifelong ambition to get a degree.

Q: So they went back to school, to college?

A: They did night school, the whole lot, you know, telecourses back then: this was in the mid-
Sixties. But my mom was always a homemaker and my dad was always a truck driver, and a well-
read one, I'll say. And then...I went into the Navy, did my thing, had my family while I was in the
service and....l lost my dad in 1998. And I kind of miss him.

Q: What did they get their degrees in?

A: In English, as a matter of fact. Actually, it had no bearing on myself. The only thing I knew is
growing up, what was our den there in our house was a library. And it was every wall in this
particular room was just bookshelf, bookshelf, bookshelf, bookshelf. But my dad was kind of an
avid collector of books - oh, he had some impressive books now that I think about it. They were
just old books when I was a kid but my sister right now is the keeper of the library. She took all that
after my dad passed away, but there's things like a first edition of Milton’s Paradise Lost.

Q: Wow!

A: That dates back to late 1700's, it's oh - just beautiful gilt bound book and all the printing in it is
calligraphy and it's a giant book. Great, great plate illustrations - and I love that book. I'm kind of
into contemporary – I went into contemporary English. I like contemporary literature, nothing
really turns me on before the nineteenth, twentieth century. My total goal about getting an English
degree is I want to teach and I want to teach English. And it's very pragmatic. I look at young
people my whole life and I must've read a thousand reports about something, and I've seen people
that just cannot communicate in the English language. And I discovered that the secret was - if you
have to write something that somebody's going to read - and they can't go, "Come here! What are
You talking about here?" - You know, they don't write well. Your goal in written communication is that whoever picks it up, reads it, understands what you wrote, and they're out the door. And I've found that young people don't have the skill - or, if they do, it's a very disorganized skill. Well, I think I write well and I think I can organize well and...I think I can get through to them. So that's my goal with my English degree now, is I want to teach English. If I get to teach other things then it's serendipity for me, but it was very hard this time in college to keep myself on a track because, as I've grown older, I'm very eclectic in my taste. When I first got to Lincoln Land, for example, I would open up the course booklet and go, "Geology, yeah! Biology, yeah!" (laughter) "Look at this! Advanced public speaking, oh yeah!" And it was like, (stern voice) "Mr. Wade, you need to stay on a schedule here. You must take speech, you must take Comm 111, you must take Comm 112. It's nice to want to take geology but you have to fit it in." I could've spent - it's the same thing happens at UIS now, you know. This semester I'm taking acting, for example.

Q: (laughs) Are you?

A: Introduction to Acting. But I can tell myself, I can say, "Self, you have a use for this. You're going to be a teacher. They'll probably make you put on the school play. You need to know how to teach acting." And so I have to learn how to act, you know. I've taken fencing here (laughter). Just because I thought, "Wow, I've always wanted to be a swashbuckling fencer!" So when they offered the fencing course at UIS, Marc's there! (laughing) And I tell myself, "This is going to be really great - if you ever put on Shakespeare and they need to do [a swordfight], you can show them the moves so they don't look like, you know (demonstrates) chink, chink, chink! (laughter) So I'm very eclectic. And that's another reason I would like to get into higher academia. You know, high school would be fun: high school will probably pay the bills in the beginning. It's just that I think that my age now - I'm 52 - I'm going to be like my dad in a lot of respects, because while it appears that my
dad retired, he never retired a day in his life. When he didn't drive a truck anymore, then for a long time he had a great series of jobs. He was a chief engineer on one of the boats that goes out into the Gulf of Mexico to deliver supplies and men to all the oil rigs. He did that for a couple of years. My stepmother is 100 percent Cajun, which means that all her brothers - which are now my uncles - I have uncles with great names like my uncle Francis LeBlanc. I have my uncle T’Clair Rabineaux, there's a bunch of Thibodeauxes, Beaujoises, Pitres, Guidrys....all these people are my relatives now by this marriage. And oh, my little brother is so into the Cajun lifestyle that he now lives in a town called Golden Meadow, Louisiana. He's a tool pusher for an oil rig out in the Gulf.

Q: So was your stepmom from New Orleans?

A: She was - to this day the phone will ring, I'll pick it up and what I'll hear on the end is this: (drawls) "Marc?" "Yes?" Depending if it's evening: "Bonsoir, como ce va?" "Ah, tres bien, Mama!" Just to talk to her mother, my grandmother, I had to learn pidgin Creole [Cajun], because my mother never learned to speak English until she was 5 years old when she went to school in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. They said (drawls), "Mrs. Pitre, we gonna tell you this now, right now, your little girl so she can come into be schooled here, she need to learn English." And to this day that's pretty much the way they're going to be talking down there when you talk to them (laughter). And I love to go down there because it takes me a day - within a day - just because it's so much easier for me because I learned to listen to it as a kid. It's great. I go down there and the next thing you know I come back for two week and I talk like this all the time to everybody because this is the way I been thinkin'. I go to Memphis, I spend too much time down there my milk – you know you have a milk accent, that's what I call it.

Q: Really?
A: You know it's the one you grow up with. Well, here's the one I grew up with: "Yep, my name's Marc Wade. I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. And I got tired when I first joined the Navy and a guy out there in California used to call me 'Tex,' and I don't know why. (laughter) And I got real tired of people lookin' at me and they would tap their foot when I talked cause they thought that it took me a long time to say a sentence, you know?" (laughter) And so slowly but surely I began to talk like the Californians did because it was so much quicker, so much easier, and so much nicer. I married a girl in California when I was 25 - my wife who passed away, we talked about earlier - she was from the upper peninsula of Michigan. Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. And she talked me into, in 1980, to take recruiting duty up there. So then slowly but surely I became a yoo-ber, eh. So for 22 years I started talking like this and everything was cool, you know, you just listen to the people talk up there, they're really clipped with their vowels and everything. So I've lived kind of an interesting life, but every place I go has got their own little accent. And I came here to the Midwest and it's kind of flat and I like that. It's somewhere between my Tennessee drawl, you know, and my Michigan and my California and my pate in high school. I like it.

Q: So you moved to Memphis then when you were a kid, or did you just stay in Nashville?
A: No, no, no, at six months of age, we moved to Memphis and I lived in Memphis all the way up until...well, six days after graduation from high school I joined the Navy. And other then a few leaves and things like that, I never went back. I visit there, but I haven't lived in Memphis at all since I was 18. I went - following graduation from high school, in case anybody ever wants to know this, I went to Watkins Overton High School - and one of the reasons...Overton High School is actually a reason that I left the South and said, "I'm never going to come back." Not because I hated the school; it's a wonderful school, it's a great school. However, I grew up in the Sixties, okay? And the Sixties are such a hodgepodge: it is the defining decade of the twentieth century.
Everything that the twentieth century became and everything the new millennium became happened because of the Sixties. And...you know it's funny - I took an expository writing course this past summer with Dr. Jim Ottery out here. And actually he made me work my butt off. This is all I did this summer, thinking, "Oh, I'll just take this four little hour course, eight weeks, unwind, good to go." And I spent probably thirty hours a week for those eight weeks. And if you think about it, that's about the level that you take for an eighteen hour semester during the regular school year.

Q: Yes.
A: And he said, "What are you going to write about?" I said, "I don't know." I've got to be expository about something so I said, "It'll be about the Sixties." Which required me to do research about the Sixties; parts of the Sixties that I didn't remember, parts of the Sixties that I do remember, and what was it about the Sixties that made me, me, and all of us, us. You know, the kids that went to school then, because we weren't Boomers. The Boomers were kind of before us. We were on the tail end of that, okay, and we're not yet ready to make Gen Xers - that's kind of our legacy. So I've spent all last summer revisiting the Sixties. And which required me to really...I don't know, what's the word I'm looking for here? Articulate! I needed to articulate what the Sixties were to me, what I saw, what I remember, what affected me. And actually, it was racial.

Q: Really?
A: The whole thing was racial. Memphis, Tennessee for me consisted of my school, and I went to - my elementary years were spent in a parochial setting, a parochial private Catholic school. My neighborhood was, I would say, 60% Catholic and the other 40% was Protestant and we all got along. We were in East Memphis, which at that time was, you know, a new subdivision was growing up, Memphis was this experience of urban sprawl. It was 100% white. I didn't fully understand the ramifications of segregation and all that, how it worked. However, I got my fair
share of Jim Crow. And when they made my end of town, when they laid out the subdivisions, they left one entire city block free to become a city park. And you could say that pretty much defined my world as a kid was where I lived, this whole city block that was a park for kids, and probably two blocks away was my grade school - of course being a Catholic school it was 100% white. We all got used to - we never really thought about it at all, we didn't...we saw black people but we didn't....live with black people. Right across the street from the park - it was actually at the corner of Mt. Moriah and Park Avenue in Memphis, Tennessee - was a gas station and just like every gas station [in the] South it had three bathrooms. There was a men's and women's which were inside, and you needed to get a key and it was usually hooked to a chain and it was like you drug a spare tire with you [laughter] and then of course there was one in the back marked colored and also had its own water fountain there. And it was just as bad if you're a little white kid and you're in a kind of a rush passing by the gas station, you want a drink of water, don't get caught drinking out of that water fountain in the back. There's something wrong with that one. And if you're the other color you don't drink from the one inside that makes cold water and's got the neat foot pedal you step on and all that stuff. We finally got a McDonald's at my end of town. We waited years and years and this was when McDonald's was just a little building and it had two arches that were part of the building. You didn't go inside, you just walked up to a window and everything and ordered your burger and your fries -

Q: Like the one over on MacArthur [Boulevard]?

A: They used to look like that but they actually just looked like the old hamburger joint you walk up to and there were some tables out front. Some of the fancier ones actually did have girls that came over on roller skates and brought your stuff - McDonald's was one of those. But when you walk up the little thing - when ours finally opened - it did have, right there painted on the glass,
were the hours that they were open and right on there it said, WHITE ONLY. And I kind of...that bothered me. And it bothered my dad so much that, as far as I know, my father? I don't think he ever ate a McDonald's hamburger his whole life.

Q: Wow.

A: I know for a fact the man never drove a Japanese car. And when the Japanese cars first started coming to the States in the Sixties, actually they were a joke then. "Look at that, that's a real car?" (laughter) People would buy them in Memphis. This guy bought them and he built - you know like Knight's Action Park over here?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, there was a place like that called Lakeland in Memphis and this guy actually built a little demolition derby thing, where you could go out there and if you paid three dollars for fifteen minutes, whatever, you could drive around, crashing into everybody in these little Datsuns. They were at the time were Datsuns, instead of Nissans. And they had roll cages on them and that's all they were good for, just being an amusement park ride. But my dad said, "Those are the people that tried to kill me!" and "I'm never going to buy a car from them!" and he never did, and never drove one. And he was from Paducah, Evansville, Indiana, Metropolis, Illinois - all that area up in there - they didn't have the same identity that you have when you're in the South, growing up. So...my dad was probably the most racially fair man that I ever met. I never heard him use a racial slur, never heard him talk bad about people. The projects that he wanted to do in his life he'd, normally speaking, hire black labor to do it. He was a pretty fair man about it. He was pretty outspoken about how he saw race relations. But you have to remember; my whole family is an immigrant family.

My great-grandfather, his grandfather - my dad's grandfather - came to the United States from Lithuania in 1862. And when he got off the boat in New York City, he didn't get to go into New
York City. They processed him at the end of that pier, walked him to another pier and on that pier he was given a Union uniform and put on a ship and sent down to northern Virginia to fight [in the Civil War]. I mean, this is the same day, the same moment. That was the big story of my family. My grandfather, my dad's dad, was born in 1885 and ended up just being old enough for the draft for World War I and he served in France. My dad, being 21, 22 in 1941, went to World War II. I had an uncle Jack, his younger brother - my dad's younger brother - ended up in Korea. I think that there was a great uncle, which would've been my great-grandfather's brother, that was in the Spanish-American War. So everything America got involved in, all the way to the first Gulf War in '91, there's been a Wade somehow or other involved in it. However, my [great] grandfather was conscripted upon arrival, my grandfather was conscripted, my dad would've been conscripted - though he might've gotten out of it because he had a child that was born before the war happened. So but he did his part, and when it was my turn I was in rush to get in - I was kind of in a rush to get into it, because it was a "family tradition."

Q: Did your dad talk at all about his World War II experiences?

A: Yes, yes. My dad was a gunner - a gunner's mate - on an aircraft carrier. And he talked quite a bit about his...they saw - the ship that he was on, which was the USS Monterey, was one of the Jeep carriers that they built quickly at the beginning of World War II - they saw quite a bit of action. They were involved in the battle of Midway, they were involved in a lot of the Pacific operations. As a matter of fact, his ship ended up right alongside the battleship...God, I can't remember the name of the battleship...Missouri! The battleship Missouri in Tokyo harbor that took the surrender. Well, my dad actually - because an aircraft carrier is taller than a battleship - my dad was manning the rail and got to watch Emperor Hirahito sign the surrender. So he was kind of proud of that.

Q: So was he the reason you joined the Navy?
A: I can't say that. My actual reasons for joining the Navy were....I did want to get in on it, but I didn't want to be in on it from the standpoint of a ground pounder. I didn't want to think about going in the Army and by the time you're 18, 19 and you have enough friends that have been drafted by this point. You know, the guys who were a couple of years ahead of me in high school that didn't end up going to college and getting their deferment, eventually they saw that you got this neat letter in the mail. You open it up and it says, "Greetings from your president!" and then you had to go down to the Military Entrance Processing Station on such-and-such a day, and show them your letter and you got processed. And halfway through the deal, I remember this from my day when I joined the Navy - they'd line these guys up and they'd call them "B.P.'s," board people, and they had all these colored lines on the floor - if you were joining the Navy that day, "Stand on the blue line" or...yes, blue line. "You're joining the army, stand on the green line." "You're joining the Air Force, come stand on the yellow line." And they had this big black line: (bellows) "And if you're a B.P., stand on the black line!" And so all these guys were on the black line, there we were in our underwear, you know. And here comes a Marine Corps gunnery sergeant and an Army staff sergeant and they came walking down the line of all these guys standing on the black line. And kind of like in order they were going, "I'll take him," "You take him," "I'll take him," "I'll take him," "I'll take him," they'd get to a guy, "You want him?" "No, I don't want him." "Well, I'll take him." (laughter) And that's what it was like to be drafted, you know. It's just you got picked, just like in the sixth grade when they're choosing up sides for softball you got picked to be in one branch of the service or the other and that was the draft. Well, Air Force and Navy didn't worry about this. That's what you joined. And so knowing that college wasn't going to be in my future, and the fact that I did want to be there but I didn't want to be there, I went and joined.....I joined well in my senior year, but it must've been not long after my - it was right at my 18th birthday because I turned 18 in
March of '72 and I was gone to boot camp by the sixth day of June of '72. And our high school graduation happened May 31st. So I went.

Q: So there was an awareness then of what was going on at that time?
A: In the world?

Q: Yes.
A: Oh, I knew exactly what was going on! (laughter) There was no doubt in my mind what was going on in the world. Jeez....days that I remember specifically about the Sixties - okay, I could talk about November 22nd, 1963. I know where I was, what I was doing and I could even tell you what Sister Rose Aloysius was teaching that day! (laughter)

Q: What was she teaching?
A: We were learning fractions. And the principal, Sister....Sister Virginia Louise, she came walking up to the door and she was a mean old nun (laughter). Everybody called her, "There comes Ginny Lou!" That's what we called her instead of Virginia Louise, it's Ginny Lou. "Ginny Lou's on the rampage!" (laughter) At least all the boys did. She came and knocked on the door and she says, "The president's been shot." And then about 15 minutes later she came back through and the entire school went into the church, in Holy Rosary Parish, and Father Breen came out and said Mass. This was like two o'clock, one thirty in the afternoon. And then we were all let go, and school was all the way out till his funeral was done.

Q: Wow.
A: Of course you have to understand President Kennedy was a Catholic president, and we were all good Catholic kids. But I remember the day President Kennedy got shot well. Another day that I remember quite well is April 12, 1968. That was the day Dr. Martin Luther King got killed right downtown from me in Memphis.
Q: So you were in Memphis when he was killed?
A: I was there that day, I remember that day well. I relived that day for this little project that I did this summer very well, talked to my brothers again about it, talked to my sisters about it, but...Memphis burned that day. The downtown area, some of the areas - I lived in East Memphis, we were way out - it didn't touch us, but things that I remember about that day, that afternoon, particularly well is that...my dad had this thing, he always talked about being "out of pocket." If you're not where you're supposed to be, "By gosh, you're out of pocket!" And when the whole thing happened and the pressure, you know, Memphis really turned into a pressure cooker (snaps fingers) just like that. And riots started in the Hollywood section of Memphis, cross-town section of Memphis. They weren't really bad - you know we're not talking Watts here, but they got that...they got up there with it, okay. I mean, Memphis was in an uproar. And it was just about dark when my dad says, "You gotta go get find your brother." I said, "Okay." And my dad gave me a loaded pistol. I was 14 years old. I got a loaded pistol in my pocket. And he looked at me and he said, "Put this in your pocket. Don't take it out for any reason, but if you need to, but if that reason comes you need to take it out you use it, end of the story." And I went everywhere looking for my brother, and Memphis was all of a sudden like a ghost town -
Q: Your younger brother?
A: My younger brother, five years younger than I am. And I ended up finally over by the - you know, going every place I could think of. I went to this Marquette Park that I talked about. He wasn't there. I went over to the schoolyard, he wasn't there. I went down behind the schoolyard and...all through Memphis is a series of - they're concrete rivers, about eight, ten feet deep, you know. It's a storm drain system, is what it is.
Q: Yes.
A: And they're great places to play when there's no storms, because there's very little water in 'em and everything like that. Well, if you go to where one of them crosses a street - you know, where it goes under a bridge on a street - well normally there'd be a streetlight right there and you got a great place to play. Especially like playing baseball?

Q: Yes.

A: Because if there's only three or four of you [and] the ball gets hit long, well you know pretty much where it's gonna be inside this concrete river (laughs). You just gotta follow it till you find the ball. On the other side of the coin, with all that concrete there, when you do get a hold of good one, right, you can rip one five, six hundred feet, we're talking pro distance. It won't go that way in the air, but it'll go that far (laughter). I found my brother and three little of his friends and that's what they were doing. They were down under one of the streetlights under Colonial Road, playing in the drainage ditch. And I grabbed them all up and took them all home and it was just a weird - it was dark by then, and nobody was out. You could hear things in the city but you didn't know where they were coming from. And...it was just a bad three days. I don't ever want to go through with that.

When I got to high school - Watkins Overton High School - it was, it's a Memphis city public school. And it was the only all-white one in this whole city. And to make matters worse, I wish I - you said find artifacts and I was looking around and it's at my daughter's house in Michigan. I wanted to find my senior yearbook, because it's blue and grey and our mascot is a little Rebel colonel.

Q: Whoa.

A: The name of it - everyone talks about University of Illinois with Chief Illiniwek, okay?

Q: Yes.
A: Great. How would you like to have your mascot where you were called the Overton Rebels (laughter).

Q: Oh God!

A: No kidding. Believe it or not, from our flagpole in front of the school, right beneath the American flag, right beneath the Memphis city flag, someplace -

Q: The Confederate flag?

A: The Confederate battle flag would hang.

Q: Oh, Lord.

A: We would go to pep rallies and there would be a Confederate battle flag. We would go and play football - and we had the worst football team. You're talking about a bunch of white guys that could not play football (laughter). Our star basketball player, a great kid, a great kid. I don't remember his first name but his last name was Bledsoe. And this guy was like five foot nothing, but he was a scrappy little guy, and he could play basketball, you know, but...

Q: He was white! (laughter)

A: He was white. We didn't have any black players - the first black kid came in my senior year. One! Not a busload, one poor black kid! I never felt sorry for a guy in my life that I felt sorry for him. Because I never knew him, I was a senior, I don't know tenth graders. You don't talk to them people.

Q: Yes.

A: So I didn't know him. I wasn't in any class of his, but I know he didn't last. He didn't last all the way through to Thanksgiving. I heard stories - I don't know if they were true - but I heard he got hung out the third floor boys' room by his ankles and was threatened and everything. But to go and see everything Rebel, everything South, and to....the worst part of the South, the worst time of the
South, and I'm just a kid and I don't understand all you gotta do is pass a law and all this stuff goes away. All they gotta do is start honoring the laws we already have and this stuff goes away. All you gotta do is act fair, act nice, act polite, and all this stuff goes away. And it never went away, it was just a part of life. And I joined the Navy at the perfect time. When I got to my first school, a lot of the people that were in the schools were more senior petty officers - they weren't recruits, they weren't E1's, E2's, these were E5's and E6's - and now they were going to the school, and a lot of them were Filipinos, and a lot of them were blacks. Because right up until I joined in...late '71, early '72, up to that point my beloved Navy was segregated. Blacks could only be cooks or blacks could only be commissary men. Blacks could only do - and blacks and Filipinos could be dispersing clerks or they could be in administration, but a black wasn't going to be an aircraft mechanic, a black was not going to be a torpedo man, a black was not...you know, down the road.

And then that changed. And I was glad, because number one I never experienced the segregated Navy. What growing pains with race the Navy had....I think we were able to deal with them just because the simple fact, number one, you had to. We were a fighting force.

Q: Yes.

A: And most of us were generation kids of the Sixties, so the old bigoted ways of the Navy died. And by the time I left, yes I knew a lot of black master chiefs and senior chiefs and chiefs: good solid men that were leaders. That maybe thirty years before that would never have gotten the opportunity. As I'm leaving the service, the man who's in charge - the chief, oh, the....General Colin Powell. Five star general, okay. I mean, he's it. Here's a black guy that - well, there's nothing black about him, right? He is a man who does a job, as far as I'm concerned.

Q: Yes.
A: Okay, and he did it well. And if history would've been different history would treat him different, and history treats him very nicely. If I ever get to the point again where I can pick up a book because, "Gee I want to read that book!" rather than, "I gotta get this book read, you know, that's all there is to it, I gotta do a paper on it" (laughter). But my top three books to read the minute I can read for pleasure are My American Adventure by Colin Powell, the Geisha memoirs, and I don't remember who wrote that; and I want to revisit The DaVinci Code one more time, because I kind of skimmed through it and I know I liked it but if you asked me to sit here and have a discussion about one solid part of it, I can't. But it was a good book! I remember that! (laughter) And so I won't watch the movie - not because everybody says, "Oh, it's a terrible movie," but because movies and books just are never the same, you know.

Q: Yes (laughs). So when you took your training did you go to Annapolis, or where did you take your training?

A: Oh no, Annapolis is....I had my shot at Annapolis, but.....let's keep this in order.

Q: Okay (laughs).

A: I went to boot camp in Orlando, Florida. Orlando, Florida was opened maybe a year or two before I joined. It became the first military installation that was coed. Women showed up at the same time that I did, but prior to this women who were joining what they called the Waves at that time -

Q: Oh, yes.

A: - were trained up in Bainbridge, Maryland. And they moved their boot camp and pretty much brought them on to the same - pretty much the same curriculum for training as men in 1972, because of the war in Vietnam and....yes, there was a drawdown in forces in Vietnam. On the other side of the coin, it was because they were also moving at that period of time from a draft into an all-
volunteer military. They were trying to get a lot of people in the fleet, so rather than do a nine week boot camp, I was in boot camp seven weeks, day for day, at Orlando. I got two weeks leave from there, I went to - I went home. I went back to Memphis. I went to Naval Air Station Memphis Tennessee, which is just right outside of Memphis, and I went to Aviation Structural Mechanics Safety Equipment School. I learned how to work on air conditioning, pressurization, canopy systems and ejection seats on aircraft. It's pretty cool, because I'm a hometown boy, I'd go to my mom's house for food anytime I wanted to. I could date my own girlfriend because she was fifteen minutes into town, you know, and I could go see my buds anytime I want to, and that was like five months. My next period of training was in San Diego. I got done in Memphis around November of '72 and went straight to San Diego, California. At San Diego, California I checked into an aviation squadron - Fighter Squadron 124 - at Naval Air Station Miramar. And....as I showed up, when I got there, they were at that time flying the F-8 Crusader aircraft, but it was being phased out in favor of the F-14 Tomcat. So in actuality I did nothing for a year while they brought the F-14 Tomcat online, and that was the first aircraft I learned how to actually work on. Following that, I went to Fighter Squadron 211, which was based aboard at that time - started out the USS Hancock....I know I'm going to screw up the number here, I believe the Hancock was......44. 41 was the Midway, 43 was the Coral Sea...I don't remember what the hull number was anymore, but I wasn't on her long. We immediately transitioned over to the USS Constellation, which was CVA 64, and I made my first deployment with those guys and we went to Southeast Asia: Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines...oh, we went everywhere. We were gone eight months.

Q: This was '73, still or '72?

A: This was '73. I was with these guys, I was with VF 211....on and off up until 1978. In 1978 I transferred to Kingsville, Texas, Naval Air Station Kingsville Texas. I stationed there with VT 23,
they were the primary jet squadron training for the Navy - they flew the T2 Buckeye, which is the first jet that any Naval aviator will ever fly. They start with the T2 Buckeye, then they go over to the TA4, which was two other squadrons there, and then they'll go into the fleet and learn to fly all - the Navy had a lot of airplanes at that time. I was there about maybe a year and a half; I wasn't there long. And of course things were starting to heat up by the early '80s over in the Persian Gulf for the first time. You already had Iran and Iraq at that time, they were at war with each other. By the end of the decade, they'd kind of - it was pretty devastating on both sides, you know. It was a war that wasn't really going anywhere and I think that finally Saddam Hussein decided he would find easier targets, but it would take him ten years to do that. Unfortunately, the wave of religious fanaticism was at its peak in Iran, they overthrew the Shah of Iran...I had a lot of Iranian friends [up to this point].

Side B

Q: Oh, you were talking about [how] you had a lot Iranian friends?
A: Yes, I had quite a few Iranian friends because at that time, at Miramar - Naval Air Station Miramar - we were training Iranian pilots and the Iranian ground crews.
Q: For the Iran-Iraq War?
A: Well, they had purchased from Grumman Aerospace the F-14. And we were teaching them how to fly them. The shah was still in charge around...don't ask me this date, because it doesn't make any difference to me (laughter). But I do know that the shah got overthrown and the Ayatollah Khomeini became in charge and that culminated, of course, in the late 70's with the Iranian hostage crisis: that was all part of the fall of Iran. And of course...at that time that is when the war with Iraq
started, because with the shah, and he was pretty pro-Western - and had a nice, pro-Western military built up and had a good fleet of ships, a good Air Force and...he started a war with Iraq which of course ended terribly, just terribly. Iran got to the point finally, they were throwing fifteen and sixteen years olds unarmed into battle. You know, it was just terrible. During this time, I went to Fighter Squadron 1. I got called away from Texas and said, "We're putting together Fighter Squadron 1," and it was F-14s and, "We're going to do the Gulf thing." And of course the Iranian hostage crisis happened - this is right after I got there - and of course we deployed on the USS Ranger, and we spent better part of a year in that part of the world.

One of the neat thing things that I can talk about was, and it happened....it was in '81, it's my best recollection of it, '81. President Carter was still in office and he decided that we needed to do a - we were going to try and extract the hostages out of Tehran. And they gave the....the ball got handed to Delta Force, Army's Delta Force. They're basically anti-terrorist, they're a hit squad that can go right in, so this was going to be primarily an Army operation. The Air Force was involved with transport and being out there, just outside the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean on the Ranger. The Navy's job was to perhaps fly a little bit of air support and they decided that in the southern Iranian desert that they were gonna land: they had four C-130s, a bunch of helicopters, I remember this, and they landed out in the desert to form their final plan, refuel all their aircraft and begin the drop. And being on one of the ships they called me up and they said, "You have a little bit of expertise in this area, would you...?" They flew me into Iraq and me and a team of five other guys, our job was just to secure perimeter. We were there the day before they were, we kind of knew where they were gonna land, we made sure that there were no hostile forces anywhere that could come within....we secured like a thirty mile perimeter around there, we weren't involved in it. They brought this whole fleet of ships in and everything, and they started doing their refueling operations, refueling all their
Wade

helicopters, getting everything ready to go, you know. They went to take off and we were just waiting for a helicopter to take us back to the Ranger and we were just gonna live our lives. When the whole thing went crazy. A helicopter bumped into one of the C-130s on takeoff and the next thing you know there's a broken airplane and there's men running everywhere on the desert. The whole...it was terrible, it was just a terrible day. I mean-

Q: Was anyone killed?

A: Oh, there were quite a few Americans killed that were on one of the C-130s that...a big airplane like that when it crashes, no one walks away from it, you know, it's kind of like a big airliner. And of course, we were busy trying to clean up, trying to get these guys evac'ed out and sent back to Germany, and some of them went down to the boat; you know, the injured and things like that. And of course there was never gonna be a [rescue] - that was their one shot. By then, the whole world knew what was going on, what we were planning and there's no way, with the political situation in Iran, you would ever gonna get another rescue mission together. So...we know that they lived in captivity for 444 days. President Reagan became president, they let them go and world politics moved on. I've never stayed up in world politics; what was going on in the world, as a sailor in the Navy, was none of my business.

Q: Really?

A: I didn't have - whatever was gonna happen was gonna happen. Yes, I voted. Yes, I listened to a lot of the things that were going down. I had my political ideas of how I wanted the country to go but I didn't campaign, I didn't talk about it - none of us did, really. You know, my job was to do whatever my commander-in-chief, whoever he was, whether I cared for his politics or not, whether I...I never made an opinion about what was going on in the world or what my part in it was or any of that. It was none of my business. My business was to raise my hand and I promise to follow all
the orders and to protect my country against all enemies foreign and domestic, end of the story. As things will happen, of course, that ended around '80, '81. In 1978 I married a girl in San Diego, and she was in the Navy. Met her - I was stationed at Miramar and she was stationed out at the Navy Training Command where the boot camp and all the schools were for sailors there. And...I don't know, we just met out in town, got to know each other and eventually we got married and....our paths kind of crossed, I think we got together more because we understood each other. She understood what my job in the military was. She was a yeoman, however, and I did what I did. And before she came to San Diego she'd been stationed in Washington, D.C. She had a great job. She had actually, in the early 70's, the chief of naval operations at the time had been an admiral called Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, and she had been his personal yeoman. And the thing that she was proudest of - and believe me, I was very proud of her, too - was in 1975 when the final peace talks had been finalized between the United States and Vietnamese government, and they were releasing all the prisoners of war, my wife was the person that coordinated all the flights into Hanoi, and the prisoner exchange, and everything that was going to happen to them in Germany, and everything - that was all her. She put that entire package together, you know, I mean she had this great scrapbook of things.

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was Stella Marie Martindale Wade. She was a yeoman second class. Her time was up just about the time I was - she got out when I first went to Texas. We married while I was in Texas and she became a stay-at-home mom for the rest of her life, all the way up till 2001, from 1979. But she'd been in the Navy for 11 years.

After my time with Fighter Squadron 1, VF 1, I took a set of orders up to her neck of the woods. She talked me into becoming a - well, I was actively recruited to become a recruiter. My job, and
the fact that I was a part time Airdale and I was a part-time Special Forces guy - which most of us were at that time, before the SEALs became just a real solid cohesive unit, I would work maybe two or three years at a SEAL job and then two or three years at an aviation job or any job they could find [for] me to do - and they came and recruited me and said, "We want you to become a recruiter." They recruited me to be a recruiter (laughter). And I said sure, and I went to Naval Recruiting District Milwaukee, which covered the upper peninsula of Michigan. My wife was from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and I took a town at the other end of it in a one man recruiting station. For three years of my life, I was the only sailor for basically a 400 mile radius except for other recruiters, and that's how I got to the upper peninsula of Michigan. Of course, my kids were all little - my kids were just starting first grade at this point, they were all born in the '70's. And my wife liked being home, and she liked being near family, she liked being near where she grew up, so in the early 80's we bought a house and she stayed behind, and when it was time for me to transfer on to other duties, I kind of went by myself.

After recruiting duty, I went to Air Crew Candidate School down in Pensacola, Florida. Then I went to Jacksonville, Florida, and became a flight engineer on P3 aircraft. I did that pretty much until the late 80's around, you know, about the time that the Iron Curtain fell, the wall came down in Berlin. Russia fell apart, their Navy fell apart, there was no need to have anti-submarine warfare people out there, so I went up to Virginia Beach, Virginia, and with nothing happening in the world there I went to Fighter Squadron 143, lovingly known as the "Pukin' Dogs" (laughter).

Q: Why are they known as that?

A: They have a really neat squadron patch, I wish I had one I could show you, but unfortunately my daughter took a lot - my daughter took everything (laughter). All my memorabilia, all my pictures, all my books and everything from that period, and so she's the keeper of those and they're
all in Michigan and I don't know, she's kind of, "I've got 'em, they're mine!" (laughter) "Cool, kid, whatever," you know. But their squadron patch has the griffin from ancient Greek mythology, the winged lion, and the way that this thing was drawn and he's blowing a thing of fire...

Q: Yes.
A: And it kind of looks like it's a dog that's throwing up (laughter). And actually the real story behind this is that when the squadron was first formed and the officers were at the Officers' Club doing whatever officers do to celebrate, one of the junior officers was....had drank a little bit too much and was getting sick outside the O Club in a flower bed, and one of the officers' wives looks over there and they said, "Boy, that's one pukin' dog sick guy!" (laughter) And of course they started looking at the squadron insignia, and so they became known as the Pukin' Dogs until they disbanded. Just the other day I was on a website because the F-14 finally went out of service, which I thought was...I'm sorry I didn't get to find out about this sooner because I was there the day it showed up, the first one came, and I would've liked to have been there the day the last one flew away.

Q: Sure.
A: But it happened this past September at Oceania, Virginia and I couldn't go but one of the stories that came up was the story of the Pukin' Dogs. And it seems that after I retired in the early 90's, that just before they disbanded, someone in the power structure, the powers that be, decided, "Oh, that's very terrible, these guys calling themselves the Pukin' Dogs," so there was a three-year period, I understand, that they were not allowed to use that. And then the power structure changed and they go, "Why don't you guys call yourselves the Pukin' Dogs anymore?" (laughter) "Well, we can't." So the Pukin' Dogs were the Pukin' Dogs right to the end, now they've been decommissioned and they're gone, so they're history.
Q: I want to go back to the recruiting for a second.
A: Okay.

Q: Did you enjoy that? Because I know the recruiting has been in the news a lot lately.
A: I loved recruiting.
Q: You did?
A: I loved recruiting. Number one, I was in Escanaba, Michigan is where they sent me. Recruiter in charge of a one-man recruiting station. I had an area that probably covered...well, it covered six counties of upper...are you familiar with the upper peninsula at all?
Q: Not -
A: Maybe I should explain this -
Q: Yes, not really.
A: Everybody that - whenever you talk to somebody from Michigan and you ask them where they're from, they love to hold their hand up like this (holds hand up, palm out) and they love to say, "I'm like from here, near the thumb." Because Detroit would be like here -
Q: Okay...
A: And then way up here is a little town called Mackinaw City. And then there's a bridge, a five mile long suspension bridge, that goes to a chunk of land that actually comes off of Wisconsin. And you have Lake Superior on the north and Lake Michigan on the south, so the upper peninsula of Michigan is its own little thing. If you look at a map, you just look at that long stretch of land that goes out there and it's not connected to Michigan in any way shape or form, but it's Michigan. Well, that's where I was. And it's a totally different world up there. They still have moose up there, bears, you know. Well, you can go to the dump on Saturday night and watch the bears eat. It's nothing to see a porcupine walk down the middle of the street or every now and again a deer would get lost in
town. It was great, but I was dealing with way, way, way upper Midwestern kids, most had never been out of the U.P. in their whole life. Nothing was really going on in the world: it was a good time to recruit. And I was quite successful at it, I enjoyed recruiting. I enjoyed keeping up with my guys for the longest time. I was quite successful at it. I was...I made Recruiter of the Year one year for that district. Oh, I would say at least - out of the three years I was there - at least seven times I was Recruiter of the Quarter. Recruiter of the Month eighteen times, so that's half the time I was there. But it was...there were other factors, too. There's no employment up there. Unemployment - when the national average runs 5% - they're running 13 to 20%. Work is very seasonal there; most of the guys, they work in the woods, cutting pulp wood for paper mills or there's iron mines up closer to Iron Mountain, up that way, that ships out of Escanaba of course, Lake Michigan, that end of it, Lake Michigan freezes over solid, so there's a short shipping season. So you figure if you a 15 to 20% unemployment rate, sometimes recruiting for the military is like shooting fish in a barrel. And it was quite lucrative because....let's just say that there were a lot of smart kids that should've gone on to college but without that option really available to them locally, they didn't. They ended up going off into the military. Not just me, all branches of the military were very easy to recruit up there. And I enjoyed it, I loved the town and...I guess that I moved there in late '82, '83, and I lived in the same house right up until my wife passed away. And I moved away from there. After recruiting duty, like I said I went to Florida to learn how to become a flight engineer on P3's. I did that right up until American cut way back on its anti-submarine warfare need, thanks to the fall of the Soviet Union. I went to Virginia Beach - the only thing I really did of note there, as far as I'm concerned, is I got to see Europe aboard the....that squadron deployed aboard the USS Nimitz. No, not the Nimitz - the Eisenhower. And we went - our deployment there took us, well, let's see...we went to Palma, Spain, Anatolya, Turkey, Haifa, Israel....Tortellino, Italy, Siganelia, Sicily, Naples,
Marseilles, France, Cannes, France twice, so I got a nice – it was a pretty nice little vacation in seeing the Mediterranean and I enjoyed that. Whereas it was totally different from all my previous cruises, a bit what they call West Pacs, Western Pacifics. I enjoyed Asia, I mean, don't get me wrong: Asia was my home away from home. After - I thought about going back to recruiting duty when my time was up in VF 143, however, I got real sick due to an accident that happened years before. I'd broken my jaw and it was kind of a hairline fracture and never knew it. And I had little bit of dental work done, nothing major, and all of a sudden my face just went crazy. Then it turned out that I’d broken my jaw and it had set badly and I had gotten an infection in the bone marrow of my jaw called osteomyelitis. And I ended up staying in Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia for nine months. By the time they figured out what was happening - you know, what had happened to me - I was pretty well rundown with this infection. They couldn't figure out exactly why this was going on: they knew I had a massive infection, they couldn't figure out where, and of course this dental work just brought it all to the forefront. I spent nine months there and after that I decided not to go back to recruiting duty and try to go back to northern Michigan; it would've been very hard to do so, anyway. But I took orders to go to Recruit Training Command at Great Lakes, Illinois, and I became a company commander for brand new recruits. And that was just an excellent job.

Q: What was involved in that job?

A: That job - we were the first people that new sailors - we're talking guys that are fresh out of the civilian world, you know - they put them in a receiving barracks where they said, "Well, you're going to be taught to be a sailor today." Did you ever see the movie Full Metal Jacket?

Q: Yes.
A: Well, they had the boot camp part, where the guy comes in just basically - the idea is to make a good sailor, to make a good SEAL, to make a good anything, right, you have to take a man - not a man, I don't mean to use gender specific English (laughter) - but you take a person and you have to completely strip them down of all their inhibitions, of everything that they feel that's good or great about them and then you have to rebuild it. Part of that is it's a mental conditioning in boot camp; it's a physical conditioning, don't get me wrong, but it's mental, too. And yes I was the guy that walked in at three o'clock in the morning, picked up a metal trash can and threw it right down the middle of the compartment and I would tell the watch, "The minute that makes the first noise, the light goes on," and I am sitting there screaming at them, and I'm getting them out of bed and I'm getting them on the line and I'm not letting them think, I'm not doing anything. You got two minutes to get up if you need to go to the bathroom or the head, you hit the head: "Now now now, I'm waiting," you just don't even think about it. And I would just scream at these guys constantly, nothing to think about, and I would take them out, put them in some kind of a line and I would take them to the chow hall and I would give them their first Navy breakfast. And then the whole time I'm screaming at them, "You've got three minutes to eat, take what you eat, eat what you take!" yada yada yada. And then from there I would march them back to the other side of the base and to a barbershop and all these nice long goldilocks that they had were gone (laughter) and they would come out with their head totally shaved; the first thing they would do is go up there and put their hands to feel this buzz job and I'm screaming, "Get your hands down!" Then finally get them back in some kind of a formation and I would tell them, "Okay, one time, take your left hand, reach the top of your head, touch your head, feel that buzz job, that's what your head's gonna feel like for the next sixteen weeks! Now do I have any problems with you?" "No, company commander, you do not!" And then I would take them over and I would take away their civilian clothes and I would
give them these uniforms that fit like...hell itself (laughter). Just bad fitting uniforms, they weren't tailored or anything. But you'd put them in one and made them roll up their unhemmed seams practically to their knees. You'd take 'em around and just finally around six o'clock that night you'd dump them into their compartment - into their "house" we called it - and it was just a big long room that had bunks on each side for eighty guys, you know. And let the fun begin (laughter). And probably for the first three weeks you'd run them through everything, you'd find out if they were healthy enough, get glasses on 'em, medical physicals, start 'em with a little bit of - not real heavy - physical training, a few push-ups here, a few push-ups there, but normally speaking by the time a guy comes out eight weeks later, ten push-ups on day one was like, "Oh, I can't do this at all and I'm on my stomach," and eight weeks later a hundred is nothing, it's just, "I'll pop out a hundred and that's pretty much it." And I got to train three companies and I mean it went from – they would call me up on a Friday and say, "You pick up this company on Monday morning, at three o'clock in the morning," and I would pick these guys up and I would have them for eight weeks and I'd get rid of them on a Wednesday, a Thursday or a Friday. And then the following Monday I would go down and there would be eighty more kids for me to mess up for eight weeks, and then that cycle repeat. Well, at the end of three cycles of this I would go to a hold job and I had some pretty interesting hold jobs, some jobs I really liked. The first one that I went to I was what's called receiving petty officer, and I'm the guy that they would show up at O'Hare International Airport, report to the military liaison with this big envelope and go, "I'm going to Great Lakes, I'm going to be in the Navy!" (laughter) and the guy would go, "Stand right here and you wait for one of these buses, that have Airport Express painted on the side of it and he's going to take you to Great Lakes." And so probably every thirty-five minutes - from all over the country - a busload of these kids would pull up in front of the receiving building at Great Lakes, and of course I would walk out there and oh, I
was just hateful (laughter). I was just a screaming machine, right. And my perfect uniform and everything, and we had a red agulet that we wore that just said, "You are a company commander," and I would let these guys know that whenever you see one of these, whenever you see this red rope right here, you're looking at a company commander, and his only name in this world is Sir. "It is not petty officer, it is not chief petty officer, it is Sir. He is god with a small g, any questions? Good." And I would put them on a line and I would run them through the building and we'd go through this great big process of making sure they got their first night issue. First night they got a diddy bag, which is a big mesh bag, and we'd give them one towel, one bar of soap, a pair of shower shoes, a washcloth, and then we would put them at long tables and we would have them empty out everything they'd brought with them and we would take their contraband away from them. And contraband was anything in a glass jar, anything you could smoke - Great Lakes was a non-smoking base in 1990, went totally...recruits could no longer smoke in boot camp. We took away their lighters, we took away knives, Penthouse, Playboys, anything that they brought with that they're not supposed to have. And basically we kept them down to whatever they could put back into a box the next day and ship all this stuff back home to Mom and...after we went through this, then it was like everything's rush rush rush. Gotta get (claps hands) your diddy bag, do this do this do this. And then we would take them into an empty classroom and we would just dump them and leave them there for hours (laughter) and long and some of them would start arriving as early as five and six o'clock in the evening, because...the way it works for a recruit is, is the day that he's going to go into service, at wherever his entrance point is - wherever the, they called them MEPS at that point, Military Entrance Process Stations - or did they call them AFEs then? I can't remember, Armed Forces Entry whatever. But anyway, they would go to these places and they would have another physical, they would check all their paperwork, make everything is fine and usually around
two, three o'clock in the afternoon somebody would drive them to an airport, give them an airline ticket, stuff them on airplane and they would go here. And depending on the proximity to Great Lakes - say a guy coming out of Chicago, for example - basically he'd just have to catch a bus up there, so we'd see these guys as early as five o'clock in the evening. And guys that were maybe coming from like St. Louis, okay St. Louis is only an hour flight up to Chicago, so we'd start seeing these guys around seven, and you'd have Milwaukee and Detroit. Well, as you got farther away, guys coming out of Memphis, guys coming out of Miami - we met guys coming out of Los Angeles to us. Well, that's a seven or eight hour flight, so two o'clock in the morning - usually around one o'clock in the morning we saw the last of our arriving recruits, and so on any given day - on any given weekday, Monday through Friday, we would be able to populate two companies, anywhere from 160 to 300 men. Three hundred men would probably populate around....eighty. Four hundred men is five companies, and the usual graduating class every week of recruits out of Great Lakes is around ten companies. However, by the end of ten - you figure if you started off with eight hundred men in the beginning, you would probably graduate seven hundred at the other end, just from attrition, for various reasons. And that was a part of it, part of it was to....we did have to prune the vine. That was part of it. Not every person that comes in the military is made for the military. It is an imperfect life. Am I going to...I get that a lot, becoming a teacher. They're gonna go, "You're probably going to steer a lot of these guys towards the military," and I'm thinking, "No, that's not really true." I will run across a good section of kids that, "You know, if you don't do something like this, with the way that you're heading, you're going to end up on the wrong side of the law. And you're never going to make it at Lincoln Land, you're barely making it here, you're never going to make it at UIS." And if we think about higher institution as being - let's just call it just a middle of the road college, it's not like Bill's College (chuckling) but then again we're not going to....we're not
Wade going to Urbana-Champaign, and we're not going to DePaul and we're not going to Purdue and we're not going to Harvard or Yale or anything else. We're going to University of Illinois, the cute little university in the prairie (laughter). But we're getting a good quality education. But these kids still couldn't handle it there.

Q: Sure.
A: So those kids I might. I might talk about the military as a good position. But for every kid, no. For every man? No. Every woman? No. But...for people that have the attitude and the aptitude? This is a great thing. I mean, it's a good thing to do with your life, and whether you do it for four years or whether you do it for twenty-two years is immaterial. By the time my first hitch was up, we go all the back to kind of the beginning of this conversation when I talked about reasons I left Memphis, and they were mostly racial - I realize that a lot of those problems no longer exist, but they exist in my mind. And when I look at Memphis I still see the Memphis of the Sixties.

Q: Really?
A: I do. And...before I didn't have the...I didn't have the tools to make it a better place. Perhaps now I do - as a teacher.

Q: Exactly, yes.
A: I can go now into the Memphis city school systems - I've given serious thought about returning to my hometown and saying, "Hi, I'm an English teacher in high school and I really want to teach for you guys." I even want to go back to my own high school. With my high school now, it no longer has a Rebel as its mascot. It's now a cardinal. The colors are no longer blue and grey, they're maroon and white. Watkins Overton High School is no longer a redneck, white only, city public high school - it is the high school of performing arts for Memphis, Tennessee.

Q: Wow.
A: So when I think of it in that respect, my city - the city that I gave up on - has moved on, I've moved on, maybe I might go back there. Maybe I now have something to offer. Maybe I have a reason to go back to Memphis. But as a kid, even at eighteen, as a kid, I was helpless to change Memphis. I was helpless to make Memphis anything other than it was. In a lot of ways it was a shame to be from Memphis, and I was even more ashamed that some of my friends that were from Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia and Florida, you know. My time in Texas wasn't a whole lot of fun, but I'm going to say Texas was probably less bigoted than anyplace that I ever lived. And I'm not saying I haven't run into my share of bigotry and just meanness in the Northern states or the Western states; I have. But it's not as prevalent, they're kind of anomalies rather than the mean, the norm, you know what I'm saying?

Q: Yes.

A: So now I could probably go home. I could probably do that, but is Memphis my home? No. Springfield's not my home. Springfield is a place that I'm stopping off on my way to life. That's the way my life has been. I left Memphis and I spent a few years - on and off, ten years - in California. On and off I spent probably a grand total of a year or two in Florida between schools: I went to boot camp in Orlando, I went back later in the 80's, that's where the Navy Enlisted Recruiting Command School was. I went to Pensacola, Florida to go to Air Crew School. I went to Jacksonville to learn how to become a flight engineer. Spent three or four years, on and off, in the Norfolk, Tidewater area of Virginia. In a roundabout way I spent 22 years in the upper peninsula of Michigan and I wouldn't have got there other than through the military. When my wife passed away, I woke up one morning and realized that my children are grown and gone....I'm not from there. I'm not a part of there. I'm like this - it's kind of funny. I will say that in my town of Escanaba I was perfectly accepted, nobody thought anything about me, I had reached the point where when I
Wade talked like everyone else. They didn't turn around and look at me and think, "Wow, where are you from?" But they are - you know, you have to understand that all small communities, especially ones that are as isolated as the upper peninsula of Michigan is, they become very closed societies. In some respects, central Illinois is that way. They recognize their own. Unless you sound like them, unless you act like them, unless you talk like them. So what I really have to learn when I came to Springfield: I learned to call it a sody (laughter). When I first moved to Michigan, I had learned to call it a pop. Growing up in Tennessee, it was a Coke. "What kind of Coke you want?" "I'll take an orange." "Okay." (laughter) "Want a Coke?" "Yeah, what kind?" "Dr. Pepper." Because a soft drink in the south is a Coke. End of the story. It's just little things like that.

Q: Well...
A: That's kind of the story of how I came to Springfield and the story of my life and it's been a good life. The end of the story is by no means written here.

Q: Yes.
A: A lot of people have told me, especially since I've started this whole project of education. For the record - I'd like to go on the record for ever and ever and ever (chuckling) - of saying that, as an old guy, a 52 year old guy, I am doing my education in a totally traditional manner which makes me a non-traditional traditional student.

Q: Yes.
A: And pretty much the only things that I don't get involved with out at school are athletics, other than my fencing, and that was just something to do to say that I did it before I died. But I will become one of those weirdo alumni with our basketball team. I can dream that someday we'll truly turn into a big time four year college and we'll get a football team, and I can paint one half of my face silver and the half blue, and do the Prairie Stars thing with a motor home, and go tailgating and
all that neat stuff. But it may not happen. But I will still - that will be my school, but it's a wonderful life. It's a wonderful life being out here. And people look at me all the time - and my story comes up in different ways and different times - and they look at me and they go, "Wow, you've lived this really interesting life." And sometimes when I listen to it, like talking to you for this hour or so, I think, "Yeah, I did live a pretty interesting life" (laughter). Then the other side of the coin: I'm going to have to go back upstairs in a little while and think to myself, "No, what I did was: I lived my life."

Q: Sure.

A: I lived the cards that were given to me. And I enjoyed it. I will say this about the military: I miss the military. To this day, I will go to sleep at night and those dreams that you have just before you wake up, the ones that you remember bits and pieces of?

Q: Mmm-hmm.

A: They're about being back in the military. It was a good thing for me, and it was a good time in history for me. But I didn't see it all, I'm still piecing what happened during this period of time together. Because I didn't see it all, I just saw what little portion I saw, you know. I got to see Vietnam, sure, but I didn't see the Vietnam that a lot of guys saw from walking through the fields. By the time that I was fully incorporated into the Navy, there were nine SEALs left in Vietnam. That was it. I wasn't one of them. By the time...different things happened in the world, I would be in another portion of the world. And the times that I was in the right section of the world: I don't want to think about those too much anymore. And the guys that were with me: they don't want to think about it. But I got lucky. I got lucky with my job. I got lucky with my job because number one, it made me always think about being the best. There was no other choices. There was no options here: you will be the best. Which meant that the guys that I served with, the guys that I
worked with, the guys that I lived with: they're pretty much all alive now, only a few have passed on for other reasons, but no one lost it in combat, no one lost it in action. Just because that's the nature of our business is not to do that. I am proud to be - I am proud to be a part of a group of men that can honestly say that until the year 2003 had never lost two men in the same action. Yes, we lost a guy here and we lost a guy there and lost a guy there, but I can honestly tell you that those guys, if you could resurrect them for a moment and sit them down and ask them the question, "What the hell happened?" They're gonna tell you right off the bat, nine times out of ten, in the honest way that men do have, "I screwed up." They would...and you can point to it that way. This is...a human operation, you know. The human is always going to be in control here and the final decision's always made by a human. But as I was talking to a bunch of sixth-graders today. I said, "Do you know what the secret of making a decision is?" They go, "No, Mr. Wade, what's the secret of making a decision?" "The secret of making a decision is to (claps hands) make a decision." More people get hurt, more things go wrong, because people won't make a decision. They want to wait, "Well, we'll get a study going on this and we'll see how it's going to work out, then I'll make a decision when I can see the best possible decision to make." The best possible decision to make is a decision. The minute you make a decision, the second you see it going wrong, you can start to steer that puppy. And if I have anything to tell my young people out there, it's not, "You need to make good decisions!" I tell them you need to make decisions. Right, wrong or impossible, you make a decision. And then be willing to adjust with it and follow it around, because you're not leading a decision, a decision will lead you every time. And you can think about this in your own life as a grad student, okay.

Q: Yes.
A: You made a decision that you're gonna go on for just a little bit more. Give me a couple more years of this, I can handle it, I'm up for it (chuckling). But however, it's now that decision that's leading you. Just like my decision to get a B.A. and a master's in English is leading me.

Q: Sure.

A: I don't know where it always is gonna take me, but...aren't we having a good time on this trip?

Q: Yes (laughter).

A: Aren't we? (laughter) So...I have a good life, I have a good attitude, I have a good outlook. I like myself in spite of a lot of things and when I run across something about myself I don't really like, I don't try to be the kind of person that says, "Well, I'm not going to think about that a whole lot," okay. I'm gonna actually pull it out, I'm going to think about it a lot. I'm going to figure out how to take it out and say, "What can I do to make me like myself more about this?" Because if you don't...if I don't really respect myself, if I don't care for myself, how am I going to respect the people that I'm around? And that's what we see. We see every day that...I love going to UIS. I love my days when I'm in class. Because we're cooperative, because we talk to each other, because our goal is in common. I've never heard a student say - in four years of education - I've never heard a student say one nasty thing to another one. I spend one hour at Springfield High School in observation and I hear three kids going at it. I hear girls with their claws out going at each other and I'm thinking, "Self, how do you deal with that? You have to just remember that, one upon a time, you were here (laughter). Once upon a time, all these things happened. And now you're here, and what is the difference between these kids" - and they're not kids anymore, you're not a kid, but you were a kid when you were in high school.

Q: Yes.
A: And you knew you were and you know that probably for the first two years you were doing this you were pretty much a kid. And - beauty of life. There, and I got some philosophy in this (laughter).

Q: (laughs) I think that’s a good place to leave off here.
Bibliography


