Preface

January 29, 2013

Eugene, Oregon

Interview Duration: 30 minutes, 51 seconds

Interviewee: Cody Schmidt

Interviewers: Brandon Parry, Andrew Koch

Transcribed: Brandon Parry

Transcript

Brandon Parry: For the record will you state your name, your rank when you retired, and the branch that you served in?

Cody Schmidt: Cody Schmidt, U.S. Navy, and I was an IT 2 or Information Systems Technician 2nd Class.

Parry: So, to start, when did you join? What year was it? How old were you? Where were you at in your life when you joined the military?

Schmidt: I joined when I was eighteen. September, 2007. I actually went to boot camp September 11th. I just decided that I didn't want to go to college. I was sick of school after, what, 13 years of it. And it came down to either Air Force or Navy, and Navy let me choose my job more. So I ended up going to boot camp to be a FC, or fire controlman.

Parry: So you said that the Navy let you choose your job more, right? What about IT … did you initially go in to be an IT or did you have something else …

Schmidt: No, I went in to be a fire controlman, because they told me that I'd be able to play with missiles and shit. And they gave me like a five thousand dollar signing bonus. But … after I graduated boot camp, I ended up getting dropped from A-School [post-boot camp job training] because of some political stuff going on within the school that a lot of people in my situation got caught up in. They tried to send me to the fleet undesignated, basically where I'd be on the … just get sent straight to a ship and just be cleaning and doing rope work all day and stuff. But the detailers, the people that give you your jobs and stuff in Great Lakes [location of the A-School in Great Lakes, Illinois] were upset with my school house because they were sending almost everyone … trying to send them undesignated to the fleet. So they gave me an option: either to be a corpsman or an IT and I didn't want to be a — corpsman are like navy nurses — I decided to be an IT and go down to Pensacola.

Parry: Pensacola, Florida?

Schmidt: Mmhmm.

Andrew Koch: So when again did you say you went to boot camp?

Schmidt: September 11, 2007.

Koch: So, would that mean you were wearing utilities or dungarees?

Schmidt: We were in utilities through boot camp.

Koch: What do you think your favorite memory of boot camp is?

Schmidt: There's actually quite a few. My favorite little story was this guy Martinez … he was sitting there polishing the bottom of his boot, like the actual tread on his boot. My brother division's RDC [Recruit Division Commander] walks out, and it was this big black guy, and he just stands there and he's like, "Martinez, what the fuck are you doing son?!?" [Group laughter] He beat— IT'd [intense physical training] that kid, made him do extra work outs, for probably like half an hour … and he was the only one that I saw that got beat for that long to not cheat on a single exercise. My other favorite story was me and another guy from my division … or another guy in the barracks … we had to strip and wax a P-way — a hallway — because the CO [Commanding Officer] was coming the next day. We have it all stripped, and I hear one of my division's commanders … they're going to go check on the compartments in the barracks, to make sure that everyone is sleeping, it's like five minutes after lights-out and everyone is supposed to … like as soon as the lights go out, you're supposed to stop talking. It *never* happens. It's always like fifteen — twenty minutes at least for everyone to stop talking and to stop getting in little arguments. So I hear [the commander coming] … and I go out to the quarter deck area and I tell this girl that was on watch, "Call our compartment and tell them that they're coming, and to be quiet." Well, somehow they [the commanders] found out that she called up there [to the compartment] and the commanders come back down and they go up and they question her like, "Who told you to do that?!?" And the girl couldn't remember how to say my name, or couldn't remember what my whole name was. So she's like, "Seaman recruit Smitt?" [Group laughter] and I'm just sitting there listening to this right around the corner from where it's happening. I hear my RDC go, "I don't even know who the fuck that is!" [Group laughter] So when I walk back across, I had the mops and stuff covering my nametags so they couldn't see what my actual name was.

[Group laughter]

Koch: That's funny. What do you think your least favorite part about boot camp was?

Schmidt: The boredom. It's just … especially like the first few weeks, when we're just sitting there and all we had to do was read our recruit manuals because we haven't really started any classes — waiting for everyone to get cleared medically and physically and everything like that. It was just real boring just sitting there all day. Once we got to week three and started [inaudible] line handling and stuff, stuff started to fly by a lot faster.

Koch: What was your favorite evolution, or, I don't know, did you get to go on the new battle stations?

Schmidt: Yeah we were one of the first groups to go through the new battle stations. It was finished, I think, probably like mid-2007. I thought battle stations was actually really boring compared to what I heard about the old one, where they would have to run around the base and do different stuff, where we were just locked in that one big building in the ship.

Koch: A theme park ride.

Schmidt: Yeah. [Laughter] Um … my favorite part of that was probably the ammo transfer, like when we had to get in to our coveralls and the tanks started filling up. But outside of that … the marching there was fun, when we got to make up our own cadences and stuff. My favorite thing was probably gas chamber, just looking back at it now, how funny it actually was. Seeing everyone have all the mucus come out of them, I thought that was pretty fun.

Parry: So, you entered boot camp September, 2007, right? So when were you done with basic?

Schmidt: I graduated beginning of November sometime. We were an accelerated division so we were only there for like eight weeks rather than the normal nine.

Parry: And then from there, what happens after …

Schmidt: We graduated and then we actually had to stay there for a few more days to go through a few more class right after boot camp that most people go through before they graduate. But, we left the next week and I went right over to the other side of Great Lakes to a training support center. We got checked in there and had to go through a few preliminary classes before getting to start some more technical classes for my 1st rate that I had as a fire controlman.

Koch: So you mentioned that you got experience Corry Station — in Pensacola — for the IT side, and also TSC — which is what? Training Support …

Schmidt: Training Support Center … Training Support Command, something like that.

Koch: In Great Lakes, it's my understanding, or at least it was told to me, that Great Lakes is notorious for drug use and Corry Station is notorious for, well, ridiculous amounts of partying. Did you have any experience, you know … was that true when you went there?

Schmidt: Uhhh … yes and … yes. Great Lakes had a lot of partying going on too with alcohol as well. This one time these guys in my barracks decided that they wanted to smoke some pot, and they did it in the bathroom of their room. So one of the other guys in their room that we were friends with in my room, he had a new wife and baby, so he couldn't afford to get caught up in that. So he leaves the room and comes down and we tell him to go tell one of the guys in charge. This FC-2 [Fire Controlman 2nd class] and E-5, he's been in probably eight or nine years, was there on shore duty, who was in charge of the barracks, he comes up and he says that he can't smell anything … that all he could smell was Axe [body spray deodorant] because they tried spraying a couple bottles of Axe to cover the smell. It was the worst smell of weed and Axe. [Group laughter] And the next day they drug tested two of the three. One of them popped, one of them was clean, and the other guy refused to do the test, which counted as being guilty. Then there was a couple of other people that got kicked out for doing cocaine. There was, like a gang fight. [Laughter] Yeah, like legitimately, there were gangs forming in some of the engineering barracks apparently, and they got into a big fight and brought them all to captain's mast [non-judicial punishment hearing in front of commanding officer] at the same time. Then there was a big party down on the beach at Great Lakes, so base got put on lockdown.

Koch: Nice.

Schmidt: Then Corry Station … there was a bunch of people that were all getting busted for hotel parties and drinking. One guy in my class tried to walk back to base with one shoe on, no ID, under 21, and then he walked up to the quarter deck and told a chief or a senior chief to fuck off. Yeah, he got dropped.

[Group laughter]

Koch: Was Spice [synthetic marijuana] big when you were in? Was that around yet?

Schmidt: No … uh … I mean it was always rumored way more than I actually saw people using it.

Parry: Are you talking about the synthetic …

Schmidt: Yeah.

Parry: Okay.

Schmidt: They were telling us about it and stuff, and telling us not to use it, but I never saw anyone use it or anything. It was kind of just one those rumored things.

Koch: It was huge when I went through Pensacola.

Parry: So, how long is the gap between finishing basic and going to Italy?

Schmidt: Between finishing boot camp was a little over ten months. So I had been in over a year by the time I had actually made it to Italy.

Parry: And what's happening in that year?

Schmidt: I was in school in Great Lakes until middle of April, maybe it was late April, but either way I got transferred down to Pensacola the last day of May. Went to school through June, July, most of August and then I had like a month of leave before I went over to Italy.

Parry: Okay. So do you want to talk a bit about your experience in Italy? Because that's where you said you spent most of your service, right?

Schmidt: Yeah. I was on a ship out of Italy so we were always traveling around and coming back.

Koch: So, I did a little research, your ship was the USS *Mount Whitney*, is that correct?

Schmidt: Mmhmm.

Koch: So that's a flagship, a command ship for the Sixth Fleet?

Schmidt: Yep, we were the Sixth Fleet flagship and the NATO flagship.

Koch: I imagine your experience was quite a bit different from most sea going sailors. Do you want to comment on that? You know being around that many admirals is different than say having a commander as your skipper.

Schmidt: I mean, most of the time we got underway we didn't actually have any admirals or anything with us, it was just our crew. When the staff would come on board, we would have a three-star [vice admiral] occasionally. Most of the time we would only have … maybe a one-star [rear admiral]. But that was a little bit different … the very last couple of weeks I was there we were the commanding control ship for the Libya operations. We had twelve flag officers. So twelve admirals, generals, colonels.

Koch: Soooo, how awesome were you at swabbing decks by the time you left that ship?

Schmidt: [Laughter] Not very because we were a hybrid crew. So we were half civilian mariners and half Navy. So the MSC — Military Sealift Command — did all the cleaning …

Koch: Wow.

Schmidt: … cooking, engine room, the only thing the Navy did … we did the communications … really the technical stuff. So the ITs, ETs [Electronic Technician], and then the OSs [Operation Specialist] up in (command?) and combat, but we didn't even drive the ship. That was all civilians.

Koch: Wow. So you guys [ITs] did a lot of the communications then, not necessarily NMCI [Navy Marine Corps Intranet].

Schmidt: No we didn't have NMCI. That's not a ship … that's just a shore-based internet system.

Koch: Shows you how much I know about being on a ship.

Schmidt: Yeah, we brought all of our stuff in through SHF.

Parry: What's that?

Schmidt: Super High Frequency. It's just a frequency spectrum.

Parry: What are the day-to-day operations like for you on the ship then?

Schmidt: If we were in port, wake up at like, 7:00 or so … eat some breakfast, we got to be up to our work center by 7:45 or so to get ready for morning muster [attendance check] for quarters, and that would be at 8:00. Depending on how long they wanted to yell at us and talk to us we

were there until 8:10 to 8:20. Then we would go about our day until 11:30 or so, have some lunch, that'd be over at about 12:30. Go back and try to finish up work … we'd normally try to get out of work by 3:00. 4:00 was the scheduled time to get out but we didn't really go by a schedule. Summer hours were about 8:00 to noon just because the town - we were the only Navy people in the town - and it was just a little beach resort town in Italy…

Parry: What was it called again? Sorry …

Schmidt: Gaeta … so people would flood in to the town from all over the coast there. So they tried to get us out before the major flood of people during the day.

Koch: What did you think of the city?

Schmidt: Boring for most of the year. There wasn't much to do. There's no sort of American… theaters or anything like that. It was all Italian. The only places that you could go that were really Americanized were … there was like four or five bars. And then we had one basketball court on the pier. And that was about it.

Koch: How did the Italians perceive the service members? I mean being in an area where there's not a lot of military, what was community relations like there?

Schmidt: The ones that actually knew us liked us. But the local media there tried to paint us as … like … monsters. Like this one guy on our ship … he was arrested and charged with attempted rape. From outside of a bar. The story that everyone told was he went in and he tried to buy this girl a drink. This girl had a boyfriend. He brings it out to her, standing in a group of people, him and the guy start to get in a fight, and when the cops show up, none of the Americans there knew how to speak Italian, so this guy tells the cops that this guy tried to like rape her, molest her, and the next day in the Italian newspaper there is just an article basically calling him a monster. This guy was like … 5'5 130 lbs, just a little guy. But that was just one story about how they didn't really know us.

Parry: Do you think that perception was because … like do you know what they thought you were doing there? Do you have any sense of the public perception about why you were in their town?

Schmidt: I mean they probably thought that we were just sitting there spying on them but … I don't really know, we didn't really talk to, I personally didn't talk to a whole lot of the locals that weren't friendly to us.

Koch: Were you living out in town?

Schmidt: No, I was on the ship. I got E-5 like … November of 2010, right before I got out, so I wasn't getting any sort of housing allowance.

Koch: Did you get a COLA?

Schmidt: Uh, yeah. That's cost of living allowance.

Parry: Okay, thank you. [Laughter] I was about to ask. I assumed he didn't mean a Coke or something like that.

Koch: Did you guys do the standard six-month deployment rotation?

Schmidt: No, most of the time when we'd go out it'd be for a month or a month and a half and we'd go to a port … I think the longest we were underway when I was on that ship was like eleven days without pulling into a port. So we'd go out for a few days, pull into a port for a few days, go out for a few days, pull into another port. Summer of 2010 we did do like five months or something like that. And we went all over the place. We went up in to the Baltic back down to Portugal, back up … it was crazy.

Koch: Where was your favorite port?

Schmidt: There was so many. I mean …

Koch: You can say Thailand if it was Thailand.

Schmidt: I didn't do a Westpac [Western Pacific]; I was all in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Just for relaxing and stuff like that it would be the Seychelles, which is about five hundred miles off the coast of Somalia. The most to do is probably in Dubai, there is so much to do there and my favorite places to party were England and Germany probably.

Koch: Where did you start playing with the idea of separating from the Navy?

Schmidt: Ummmm it was … I mean I'd already been thinking about it because my first six months on the ship were awesome. I'd say the first time that I really decided that I was probably going to get out was October, beginning of November of 2009. I wanted to stay out on the [USS] *Donald Cook*, the ship that I went to temporarily for a three and a half month deployment. I wanted to stay on that ship and the *Mount Whitney* told me no. They wouldn't give me the transfer. Then I got back … it was probably like January or February and my sister was planning on getting married that August … and I tried to route a request up to let them know that I was going to try to take leave for that … but it was in the middle of our pleasure cruise around Europe. People had always taken leave on our deployments and stuff like that, it was no big deal because we weren't doing anything important. Well, my chief comes back and says that they just decided that no one was going to take leaving during that deployment unless you were having a baby or an emergency. I asked my chief, "When the fuck did you guys decide to start playing Navy?" [Laughter] And at that point I was just like f this, I'm done with this place. Just seeing like all these people get awards that were just complete fuck ups … and people getting higher evaluations without doing as much, like I was the second or third highest qualified person on our ship for my rate and I got absolutely no credit for it. Right as I was supposed to take over as a watch supervisor I got transferred divisions, just stuff like that. I'm done with just sitting around all afternoon not doing anything.

Parry: You mentioned the ship that you were transferred to for like … three months … what was that called?

Schmidt: The *Donald Cook*.

Parry: The *Donald Cook*. What about that experience did you like in comparison to the other ship that you were on?

Schmidt: On the *Donald Cook* there was only like twelve ITs, on my other ship we had like ninety. So I was a big fish in a … on *Mount Whitney* our whole mission was a communication ship. That's all I did for about the year before I went to the *Donald Cook* was the communications, radio side. When I got to Donald Cook there was only one other person that knew radio. The second day I was there I fixed a circuit that they hadn't been able to get up for like a week and a half since they got underway and the department head was wanting me to do training and stuff like that. Then, like a weekend, they transferred my shifts so that way I was on the opposite of the other girl that knew the radio side. So I was the lead comstech [communications technician]. We had a major outage on one of our systems and I ended up being able to fix it after like four days of it being down and the captain actually gave me recognition for all the work that we put in because me and the other girl were putting in like sixteen/seventeen hours a day trying to fix this. Literally just going to sleep and going right back to work. That was the way that I imagined the Navy actually being, like when you're under way and nothing is going on, you can be a lot more relaxed as long as you're getting your work done. Like one day after we switched shifts, everyone on my watch shift is asleep, probably like two o'clock in the morning. I'm asleep behind an equipment rack, our LPO — the person that's in charge of us — is asleep up on a counter. Another person's got his feet kicked back on a desk, another guy asleep in the back corner, and our chief walked through. She didn't wake us up. She made fun of us about it in the morning and it was because we got our stuff done. It wasn't like that on the *Mount Whitney*. You had to keep up appearances and … that's not the way that I wanted to be in the military.

Parry: So when was it when you actually left … like when did you leave the military?

Schmidt: I left Norfolk after out-processing like middle of … I think it was April 18th, 2011. Then I had seventy-something, eighty-something days of terminal leave. Or maybe it was like fifty-something days. I didn't actually get discharged until the beginning of June.

Koch: How was your transition from active duty to civilian?

Schmidt: Pretty easy for me. I drove across country back to Spokane, Washington, lived with my parents that summer, coached baseball at my old high school, just kind of chilled until November or so of that year and came down here to the University of Oregon. So it wasn't … the transfer from military to civilian wasn't hard for me.

Parry: It sounds like your overarching experience was maybe a little bit on the negative side, is that fair to say?

Schmidt: Mmmm …

Parry: I guess I didn't word that right …

Schmidt: Because I mean people always ask me if I'd do it again and I absolutely would. I've been to twenty-four countries, I went to twenty-four countries in two and a half years. Probably no one else that you know can say that they've been to twenty-four countries outside of North America by the time that they're twenty-one years old. There is very few people that I'll ever know that I'll ever know that will ever go to some of the places I've been. I mean I got to spend Halloween night at the base of Dracula's castle in Transylvania. Got to go to Dubai … Oman … I mean who the hell is ever going to go to Oman. [Laughter] Just the stuff I've gotten to see … I mean the Libya operations … getting to see what it was like for war planning and stuff like that. There were just so many experiences that I wouldn't trade at all. There was a lot of stuff that sucked and that's part of being in the military.

Parry: So just kind of like anything … where you did it, you got your experience and it kind of ran its course for you?

Schmidt: Yeah, I mean I was glad to be done. The further and further I get away from it the less that it seems like it sucked. Because day-to-day I absolutely hated it, but, looking back at it now, sure the work wasn't fun but the stuff I got to do outside of work was great.

Koch: Do you think the Navy has had a lasting impact on who you are? Or has it steered you in a particular direction?

Schmidt: Absolutely, because I can walk down the street and not care what other people think. And it helped me grow up and know that there's consequences for my actions. Just being here at school, I know that I'll wake up and go to class when I'm not feeling great because I feel like if I were to skip a class, that would be the most important class of the term or something like that. And I just feel like that's a huge part of what the military instilled in me, that work ethic and going everyday regardless of how you feel, and I can hold my head up high walking down the street. I don't look down at the ground. I have confidence in myself.

Parry: I was just curious, it doesn't seem to have any connection to your military service but you went from being an IT in the military … you're here at the U of O now as a journalism major, what kind of sparked that?

Schmidt: Well I've always loved sports. Like I grew up and sports is what I do, it's what I'm known for and I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I got out. I'd already kind of made the decision in my mind that I was thinking about getting out … and it was on my deployment to the Indian Ocean on the *Donald Cook* … it was probably like 5:30 in the morning and I'm talking to a friend of mine back in Spokane and I asked her what she could see me doing with the rest of my life and she said, "Sports journalist." So I thought about it for a little bit and decided to do some research and a friend of mine recommended Oregon over Washington State or any of the other schools because we have a sports marketing program here too. I ended up dropping the

sports marketing part of it and just focusing on journalism. It wasn't really my idea even but something that was always kind of in the back of my mind.

Koch: Alright, before I get to my final question there is a few acronyms that I think we spoke of. Maybe you can help me clarify some of those? What does RDC stand for?

Schmidt: Recruit Division Commander.

Koch: When you're in boot camp you talked about IT what does that stand for?

Schmidt: Oh, intense training, or something like that I think.

Koch: And then a CO?

Schmidt: Commanding Officer.

Koch: And an LPO.

Schmidt: Leading Petty Officer.

Koch: Awesome. Before I conclude this interview, are there any closing thoughts, or comments, or corrections you want to make on something you've said, is there anything you want to add?

Schmidt: Not that I can think of.

Koch: Cool. Well thank you for your time.

Parry: Yeah, thank you.

Schmidt: Mmhmm.