

PREFACE

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Knight Library, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: about three hours

Interviewee: Henry Huynh

Interviewer: Josh Yates

PREFACE

Josh Yates:

Alright, today's date is February 22, 2012. I am Josh Yates. Could you state your name please?

Henry Huynh:

My name is Henry Huynh.

Josh Yates:

Which branch of service did you serve in?

Henry Huynh:

I served in the Marine Corps.

Josh Yates:

Around what time frame was your enlistment?

Henry Huynh:

October 23, 2006 to October 22, 2010.

Josh Yates:

What was your main MOS [Military Occupational Specialty]?

Henry Huynh:

My main MOS was 0311 Rifleman, Infantry.

Josh Yates:

Was that your chosen MOS?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

Where are you from originally?

Henry Huynh:

I am from Portland Oregon, around the southeast area.

Josh Yates:

Why did you pick the Marine Corps?

Henry Huynh:

Well, back in high school my buddy joined the Marine Corps, right after he graduated. And before then he told me about it. And I decided to go in because I wanted to become stronger, more self-confident and make a better person of myself. I didn't want to follow all those normal rules and go to college right after school and all that stuff. So I spent summer after I graduated in 06 in Portland and then I left for boot camp in October.

Josh Yates:

You had no desire to go to college right after high school?

Henry Huynh:

My parents wanted me to but at the stage where I was at, I just wanted to do something else. Make a better person out of myself and just do something fun and prove that I can do something.

Josh Yates:

So you went MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] San Diego for boot camp in 2006, correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. Yeah that is correct, MCRD.

Josh Yates:

What did you think of boot camp down there?

Henry Huynh:

Boot camp is a little scary at first. Once you get off the plane you get to this bus, you

know, and the Drill Instructor are there and tell you to put your head down. So you're not really knowing what is going on and you get on the bus. And your head is on the back of the seat [in front of you] the whole time and they don't really let you see where you are going. And right when you stop you know something bad is going to happen. And this Drill Instructor gets on the bus and tells you get out and you step on these yellow footprints. And you are like "Oh shit, I am in the shit now, this is real." And that is the start of boot camp.

Josh Yates:

What was your favorite part about boot camp?

Henry Huynh:

Boot camp was a haze to me. I see like vivid memories, because the three months there I was not allowed to smoke cigarettes. So I was off nicotine. I think I woke up in the third month of boot camp. But for the first month, I just did everything they told me. Tried not to get in trouble and then I got sick at the first PFT, Physical Fitness Test. It wasn't because I was sick it was because it was hot out in San Diego at that time and we just got finished running. They said I had pneumonia. So they automatically dropped me for two weeks in MRP, which is like a platoon for sick people...

Josh Yates:

Yeah, Medical Rehabilitation Platoon

Henry Huynh:

Yeah. So I got dropped there for two weeks and then put into a different company. Second phase was pretty good, because the new platoon or company I got dropped in, they were lacking on people being [physically] fit so they asked me how many pull-ups I did, I did twenty right off the bat. And they were like "alright," and didn't bother me at all. When we went up north, which is to Camp Pendleton area for the rifle range and that was kind of fun that I got to shoot. And a lot of hikes, and then at the end of the second month, we did the Crucible and the Reaper. Which is like three to five days...

Josh Yates:

The Crucible I think is around 54 hours...

Henry Huynh:

Yeah. Around 3 days, but around the third day there was a hike up the Reaper and I remember digging in the trash for anything I could eat at night when I was on firewatch [interior guard]. So like no one would know. And when I got to the Reaper, I had an orange, because they were giving out one piece of fruit. And it was the best orange I ever had, because I was starving. When everyone had their gear on there was this truck went up this hill. It struggled to get up that hill so we knew it was going to be bad. When I got up that first very steep hill, there is just more and more and more walking. So this Reaper ended up being like five or six miles. When we got to the top it was the most memorable feeling out there, because the Medal of Honor recipients and all these heroes [are memorialized] up on top of this hill. And you just accomplished something, so that was second phase. In third phase we got treated like we were men, like Marines by the Drill Instructors. We got our uniforms all ready and did some drill for the show at the end. When I got out of boot camp after graduation, my family didn't come down, because when I left for the Marines I ran away from home, so they didn't show up for graduation. When I was on that week leave the first thing I got out of boot camp was a pack of cigarettes.

Josh Yates:

So was that the hardest part about boot camp was not smoking for three months?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, that was basically the thing I missed a lot. You know, the addiction [laughs]. But there were times the hiking and being hazed on the quarterdeck, those times were pretty hard because I got picked on a lot [by the Drill Instructors].

Josh Yates:

Did you get IT'ed [Intensively Trained, a euphemism for corrected by physical punishment] frequently on the quarterdeck?

Henry Huynh:

Well the Drill Instructors IT'ed me a few times, and then the whole platoon or company, we ended up asking for more, so we would line up. Then they [Drill Instructors] would get tired of IT'ing us, so they stopped for a while. It wasn't scary anymore it was just like exercise.

Josh Yates:

Second nature stuff by then right?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah.

Josh Yates:

What platoon and company did you graduate with at the end of boot camp? Do you recall?

Henry Huynh:

I believe it was Bravo Company, because I was in Lima Company for the first month then I got dropped into Bravo. And I believe it was [Platoon] 1043 or something.

Josh Yates:

Was that hard for you to graduate and not have anyone there? Was that awkward or...?

Henry Huynh:

No, during boot camp I wrote a few letters back to my parents telling them that I left to join the Marines and they were not really happy about that. They obviously accepted it because they had to, I was already there. We get one phone call during the middle of third phase, so I called back and asked them how they were doing. They were really happy. Before then, I ran away because they were controlling my life, but then I felt like they just stopped, controlling my life. They know that I am grown up, that I can do my own thing. It wasn't hard having no one at graduation; it's just that I didn't really care. I just accomplished something brutal and it made me feel good about myself.

Josh Yates:

But your family later came on later to accept you as a Marine and your choice as a Marine?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, they liked my choice because I never take the hard road. Like I take the straight

road, like straightforward. Like my brother went to school to become a pharmacist and he thinks too hard about certain things, I just move straightforward, I think about things easier.

Josh Yates:

With boot camp successfully completed, is that one the proudest achievements in your life?

Henry Huynh:

That's one of the achievements, not the best but it we'll get into that later on.

Josh Yates:

But it was a landmark in your life?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, because during graduation you run like a mile and a half in the morning to show the Marines off and everything.

Josh Yates:

You talking about the Moto [motivational] run?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah the Moto run. I twisted my left ankle, I think the day before, so I couldn't walk on it at all. And during this Moto run you had to run it. So I was using my right leg, to boost myself the whole time without putting too much pressure on my left. So during that Moto Run basically I was hopping on my right leg, but keeping pace too and it was just horrible.

Josh Yates:

What did you do during the mandatory leave after boot camp? Did you just hang around and relax or...?

Henry Huynh:

That week I went home, to see family. They see me back, saw some friends and relaxed. Then went to School of Infantry afterwards.

Josh Yates:

So you went to School of Infantry in Camp Pendleton?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

What was your most favorite aspect about that school?

Henry Huynh:

Well, School of Infantry is easier than boot camp because the instructors are more laid back than Drill Instructors, but they would still be hard on you. When I got to school of infantry after my leave from boot camp, they said if you came early you would get put into a platoon right away. So I came early, in the morning and the first thirty people got put into a guard battalion for Camp Pendleton, so I was in guard for a month before I got put into a platoon. Yeah that sucked, because you are just in a void for a month. After I got back into training again we just went into more advanced infantry tactics, and shooting, spending nights in the field, it was great.

Josh Yates:

So this guard unit you were put into was it just a limbo, a kind of holding pattern doing firewatch?

Henry Huynh:

It was a base guard. We would be guarding ammo, fire watch on patrols around base around Camp Pendleton. And we would play reveille and taps. I would have to play that, because they put me in charge of that, at exactly those times. You know 0800 or 2200 and that was for the whole base.

Josh Yates:

Which camp at Camp Pendleton were you actually doing your School of Infantry at? I can't remember is that Camp Onofre or Camp Horno...?

Henry Huynh:

Umm, no it wasn't at Horno it was at the one next to the PX [Camp Onofre]. I don't remember which one. No it was just SOI's... [School of Infantry]

Josh Yates:

Since there was a split of non-infantry and infantry, one through School of Infantry and the other through Marine Corps Combat Training, did you like that you were more in with people of your same MOS as opposed to those going different ways? Did you like that better not being grouped in with them?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. The difference in boot camp is there are reservists, and there's people other than grunts...

Josh Yates:

POGs... [Person Other than Grunt]

Henry Huynh:

Yeah POGs, people doing like mail and some are going to become chefs. It was good for me to get out and be put into my own kind, with full infantry. But everyone was a rifleman then, because during the School [of Infantry] they hand out the jobs. Because they test you on certain things, if you're big or small you're going to be a machine gunner or if you are smart you are going to be an assaultman or mortarman, and stuff like that.

Josh Yates:

Did you want to be selected for one of those special billets or MOSs or did you want to be a basic infantryman?

Henry Huynh:

Well a lot of the mortarmen they don't really get into the same stuff as everyone else because they are in the back shooting mortars, that's the way I pictured it. Assaultmen get to blow stuff up, and shoot rockets, but they're not the ones kicking in doors. They can be, they breach. And machine gunners hold heavy machine guns, which is heavy and I am a small guy so I wasn't going to do that. So I wanted to be a rifleman, just a basic pointman, with a rifle.

Josh Yates:

So you were happy where you were?

Henry Huynh:

I was happy where I was.

Josh Yates:

What was an average day like at SOI? What kind of weapons did you use?

Henry Huynh:

Well the little bit bigger people, they got SAWs, squad automatic weapons. I got an M16, [with] a M203 [rifle mounted grenade launcher] and we would go on range runs. We would go to different ranges every day and just train throughout the week. Shooting, night shooting... weapons cleaning, then we would have our weekend. And then every two, one week and a half we would go on a hike until the end, and these hikes would get longer. And the third week, was field week and we would just stay a week in the field. We dug our own holes, and set up security and then hiked back to our barracks, our squad bays. Average lie was just like hanging on with the other person, your buddies and just trying to get through it, that's how life was. It was more like the second month of boot camp for the whole month and a half for SOI.

Josh Yates:

What would you guys do for libo [liberty-free time] on the weekends?

Henry Huynh:

On weekends I would go to LA or San Diego, just to hang out, because I have family in LA. Mostly a lot of people were desperate at the time to go on libo, because they wanted to go. Whoever had firewatch had to stay, so I would stay on base and make money off these people. I didn't really care, I didn't mind being on base, I just studied or go on fire watch. And I would make deals with these people, like for their hour of fire watch they would give me a hundred dollars.

Josh Yates:

And you would take their firewatch?

Henry Huynh:

I would take their firewatch. You know? I would have two or three spaced out firewatches during the day on a Saturday and two or three on a Sunday. That's five hundred dollars I made in two days [laughs]. But these people are so desperate, to get out [on libo].

Josh Yates:

Where did you go for training after SOI?

Henry Huynh:

After SOI they sent me to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. After I got there they put me in the battalion, 2nd Battalion 8th Marines. I got dropped with such a big boot drop, that they alphabetized the people who would be dropped into Echo, Fox and Gold Company. From the "H" to the whatever letter was in Fox Company. I got put in there with the 1st Platoon.

Josh Yates:

Was this big boot drop because of the holidays? Because you should have been graduating boot camp, well I guess you would have a big back up from boot camp and SOI due to the holidays...

Henry Huynh:

No the big boot drop was because most of that battalion, the senior Marines were leaving and they just needed more [Marines]. Because it is in phases, where like four years go by and they get out and they need more Marines to fill the spots. Then there will be a few seniors [Marines] and a few boots [low ranking Marines] and a few seniors... [motioning a cycle with hands]

Josh Yates:

Did you have any unusual billets while with 2/8?

Henry Huynh:

Well the first year I was just a boot. So I didn't have any leadership things or nothing of the sort besides being a Marine, just no billet whatsoever. Just following at the time...

Josh Yates:

Learning the ropes?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah I was learning from the seniors, trying to get everything I can and do my job.

Josh Yates:

Going back to the POGs after SOI, what is your opinions on POGs, people other than grunts?

Henry Huynh:

Well I know that POGs support Marine infantry; you know everyone has their part. Whether they work at a desk in admin, or they [Headquarters] fuck up our money or something, they have to fix it. They do their part but I hate them, they get the nice barracks, the barracks with the four stories with the elevator and the nice rooms. They work the nine to five job and for grunts we don't get the nice things they have. The nice chow halls, we get the nasty chow halls, the shitty barracks with mold and fucking... Just don't like them [POGs], they think they're good just because they're college like... They're in the Marine Corps but they think that they are college students. They have no discipline, nothing. They wear their cold weather beanies out in town, just like their uniforms are disgusting. For grunts we keep a standard of like the Marines, we haze... Even though there is no hazing in the Marine Corps, not saying we did or anything, but we strictly put a hand down on people who do not keep their uniforms straight [laughs] and uniformity and like the professionalism that the Marines are supposed to have, in a grunt unit.

Josh Yates:

So you went to [Training Operation] Mojave Viper in 2007, I believe. How do you feel that prepared you for Iraq?

Henry Huynh:

During training at Camp Lejeune when I was still new, it was just following and learning the ropes. Then Mojave Viper was a test for the battalion to see if they were combat ready. I felt like it prepared me even more because there is more practical application in Mojave Viper, more training, you work more with combined arms than you do at Camp Lejeune. There are

these two ranges at Mojave Viper at 410 and 400. Range 400...and oh my god these two ranges they are like looking at a football stadium and there are two mountains on the other side. You just have to get from these trenches to the other side and basically attack the enemy, in like notionally. It's like running up this mountain. It was crazy, because there was so much going on. It was pretty hard.

Josh Yates:

So Mojave Viper was from August to September of 2007?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

And that is at [Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center] Twenty-nine Palms?

Henry Huynh:

Mojave Viper and Twenty-nine Palms at Camp Wilson.

Josh Yates:

Camp Wilson... Did you like training at Camp Wilson for Mojave Viper, did you think it was worthwhile? Or did you think it more busy work?

Henry Huynh:

It was only for thirty days but those thirty days were packed with training. It's like being in country or preparing for theater without being over there. Because it is sandy, you know it's in the desert and it sucks. Living in the field most of the time and just training, it was definitely good.

Josh Yates:

What can you tell me about your first tour to Iraq after Mojave Viper?

Henry Huynh:

My first tour to Iraq, I thought it would be a more kinetic environment. We stopped in [Al-] Taqadum, [Iraq] for about a week then we flew into Ramadi, Iraq. From Ramadi we flew

in the V-22 Ospreys. Those helos were called flying coffins because the rotors would fail. I personally did not want to get on them, but we had to. The one I was on started sparking on the roof and transmission fluid started spewing everywhere, and I swear we dropped 100 feet in the air. So we get to Ramadi and they put us on these 7 tons [trucks] and put us on this FOB[Forward Operating Base] Ashreen, it's a hotel basically. It was not kinetic at all. We each had our own squad rooms and even though the Iraqis would shoot pot shots every day, we would go on patrols and I would work out during the day, during my free time and watch TV shows, up until about three or four months into the deployment. Because we opened up MSR Michigan, that's Main Supply Route Michigan, and then we moved from Ashreen because we handed it over to the police to do patrols from there...

Josh Yates:

The Iraqi police?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, the Iraqi police. We moved to East-Rips, because the intent was to hand over the inside of the city back to the police and people. So that our battalion moved out of the city and we just conducted patrols through and around it. So we moved East-Rips after we opened up this MSR, and then we had a checkpoint about a mile away from East-Rips. We moved from that checkpoint, was called Seven-West, to East-Rips every third days. So we would have two days at East-Rips and one day at Seven-West, and then we would switch off. Towards the last month of my deployment there, there was a SBIED, Suicide Borne Improvised Explosive Device, it was in a dump truck and it was up north of our position. It was at a checkpoint where a few Marines were at, this guy named Corporal Yates, he saw the truck that didn't stop at the checkpoint so he fired on it. But the guy, since it was packed in a dump truck, he had 3,000 to 4,000 pounds of HME, which is Home Made Explosives, it blew up that checkpoint and that Marine died. That was the only thing that I would say was significant in Iraq at Ramadi at the time I was there.

Josh Yates:

How did the unit react to the checkpoint being destroyed?

Henry Huynh:

Well we were definitely pissed and we were just about to be relieved by 1/9 [1st

Battalion/ 9th Marines] and we were wondering how they would get a dump truck because they would have to have to pass through our checkpoint to get that far. It was just confusion, and like how did we let this happen... a month before we leave? That was our platoon/companies thoughts about it.

Josh Yates:

So your unit opened up MSR Michigan?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. We opened that up and deemed it safe for everyone to travel on. The history of MSR Michigan is it was the most IED ridden road, MSR in Iraq. That was the road that no one could travel on.

Josh Yates:

Civilian or military?

Henry Huynh:

It was just military. There were so many IEDs on that road.

Josh Yates:

What were the terminal ends of the MSR? Ramadi and Al-Asad or...?

Henry Huynh:

I am not sure. I just know that the military used it to travel pretty far throughout Iraq.

Josh Yates:

Was that the main objective of your unit in that section of Iraq?

Henry Huynh:

No, that was one of the objectives. Our main objectives were to clear out Ramadi and to create projects to help rebuild the city and see what the people needed and hand over the city back over to the people and have them protect themselves.

Josh Yates:

Would you say that objective was completed?

Henry Huynh:

By the end, when we left, yes it was definitely safe because when we did hand over [Ramadi] and closed down four FOBs for the people and we just let them run themselves. And then we just watched.

Josh Yates:

Do you think the Iraqi nationals in that area generally appreciated your efforts or were they just tolerating the unit as an occupational force.

Henry Huynh:

I think they liked up being there because during the time we would go on patrols, we would see what is wrong on the street. And we would try to fix things like sewage problems, try and get engineers or Seabees there. Try to fix their electricity and just generally try and help out the people and provide security. We would go on humanitarian missions where we would go on patrol with bags of rice, sugar, salt and just hand them out to people, and like gasoline. I think they enjoyed it.

Josh Yates:

Just for reference what was the time period for your Iraqi deployment?

Henry Huynh:

It was in the end of 2007...

Josh Yates:

So from 2007 to 2008? And that was a seven month... eight month deployment?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

What would you say you took personally out of that deployment if anything.

Henry Huynh:

Personally I hung around my squad leader a lot. Asking him, enhancing my knowledge in certain things. Because there is a lot of down time and the way to be a leader is to look at other leaders and you take the good things from them but you leave out the bad to create your own style of leadership. So I got a lot of knowledge on how to become a leader and in training new guys and a bigger picture of how things are run instead of being new and just following orders.

Josh Yates:

So you picked up intangible benefits in terms of leadership and comfort with being a leader over there.

Henry Huynh:

Yes. Just my personal competence in being overseas and being able to communicate more than as a boot.

Josh Yates:

So you are generally happy that you had the chance to go to Iraq?

Henry Huynh:

Leading up to my second deployment...no. If I think about it now it was better for me to be over in the Iraq Theater first, because it wasn't as kinetic. And I had a chance to see how things worked in real life, in real time. What we do in training we apply to those tactics and it prepared me for the next deployment.

Josh Yates:

How did you feel about being mostly in a static position doing checkpoints and patrols like that instead of being on the move?

Henry Huynh:

It fucking sucked. It was just boring, six hour checkpoint, six hours on post. But it gave the people a chance to get to know each other and build camaraderie which helped us out on

the next deployment. We got to know each other, and everyone knows the ins and outs so we worked better as a team.

Josh Yates:

Do you have any certain part of the Iraq deployment that you want to mention that we haven't covered? Any anecdotes or lessons that you have learned that you think are important?

Henry Huynh:

No not really.

Josh Yates:

So returning back from Iraq, I assume your unit had a little bit of down time for leave and recuperation?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah after we got back we had the one month of classes about don't beat your wife and don't drink all the beer because it's [always] going to be there and don't go crazy and if you need help call someone. Stuff like that, then we had leave. I took about thirty days of leave, just to go back home and relax, and hang out with friends. They would just be like "Hey you just got back from Iraq?" Nobody really noticed because I was gone to North Carolina, so they didn't really know, that kind of sucked. But when I got back [to Camp Lejeune] it was just like being home again with all the people I left with.

Josh Yates:

So approximately were you back at Camp Lejeune before you headed off for your second Mojave Viper training session?

Henry Huynh:

About a year and a few month in Camp Lejeune.

Josh Yates:

So in that time your unit was acquiring new Marines, and training and maintaining their skills?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah we got a small boot drop. Not as big as the one I came in, and we had a chance to become the teacher now. We trained some more, and taught the new guys. Since we got back from one deployment we were, I'd like to say better than them, so we just basically did the same training as before and switched commands.

Josh Yates:

While you were back did you go to any more school, did you go on to any follow-on schools, did you acquire more billets now that you were more senior in the ranks?

Henry Huynh:

Yes due to a few accomplishments in Iraq, I was put up for this class, CLIC, Company Level Intelligence Cell, It's company level S-2.

Josh Yates:

The intelligence office[S-2].

Henry Huynh:

Yeah the intelligence office. We would basically gather intelligence from our platoons and bring it to higher [echelons]. Or the other way around when S-2 from the company had something they would tell us and we would tell the platoons.

Josh Yates:

So you basically would gather or disseminate the information accordingly?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. So in the CLIC class, it was about patrol briefs, patrol de-briefs, how to read a map and area of effects. What they have intel briefs, how to know what they are talking about. Design target packages, what real intel Marines do, they taught us about target packages and what we had to gather to put these packages together. I went to a follow on class called UAVs, for the small UAVs which are the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. In that class I got to fly a [RQ-11] Raven. Launch and land and observe with the Raven.

Josh Yates:

The Raven was just a backpack carried UAV correct?

Henry Huynh:

It wasn't a backpack, it was more like a suitcase, a big suitcase.

Josh Yates:

But it could be launched from like a platoon sized unit correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, it can be launched from four people. All you need is a fire team[four man unit] to carry it. One person to control it and one person to throw. That was pretty fun.

Josh Yates:

Judging by your general reaction it sounds like you enjoyed these classes, the CLIC class and the UAV school?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, I like to expand my skills, so being in intel rather than regular infantry and just doing regular training, I got to do something else. I also became a Humvee driver because we need to drive, apparently there is no Motor T [Transportation] out there so we need grunts to drive everyone around. So I learned to drive a Humvee, a 7 ton[truck], an MRAP [Mine Resistant Ambush Protected] and to drive with a trailer.

Josh Yates:

What was your opinion on the MRAPs? I mean these are supposed to be armored and provide adequate protection from IEDs and roadside threats. Do you think they lived up to the hype or do you think they were overrated?

Henry Huynh:

I feel way safer being in an MRAP rather than a Humvee, because it curves at a V at the bottom and 7 tons they're pretty safe too. But MRAPs I have seen them blown up with the front end off but the people inside are still safe. But rather than the Humvee when they get blown up everything in that Humvee becomes shrapnel and there is like an 85% chance that you are going

to die if an IED goes off underneath it because it is just going to wipe you out. For MRAP it spreads out the explosions and it is more armored.

Josh Yates:

So you felt safer in an MRAP?

Henry Huynh:

I felt safer in an MRAP.

Josh Yates:

Did you ever get to use one of those in a combat theater or was it mostly Humvees?

Henry Huynh:

I would have liked to have used the MRAPs but I would like to say our unit had other priorities with MRAPS, so we had Humvees and trailers, that's what we used in theater.

Josh Yates:

Did you guys try to jury rig some kind of homemade armor for the lightly skinned Humvees or were you issued the factor up armor packages?

Henry Huynh:

Our Humvees we acquired were pretty new, all the hype were in the deployments, so we got pretty up armored Humvees while I was over there.

Josh Yates:

Did you learn any new skills during your second Mojave Viper?

Henry Huynh:

Leading up to Mojave Viper I was still kind of like a team leader, a fire team leader, I was learning to be a point man that's why I was like in-between billets, between point man and team leader. I really wanted to be at the tip of the spear as a pointman and to lead my squad wherever the needed to go.

Josh Yates:

Why is that?

Henry Huynh:

I knew our upcoming deployment was going to be pretty awesome, I just didn't know how. I just wanted to be the first one out there.

Josh Yates:

You wanted to be at the forefront of the fight?

Henry Huynh:

I feel safer having me lead the way rather than someone else lead the way. Because as I was in intel I was a little smarter than everyone else so I just knew things about patrolling and observation and things of that nature more than everyone else.

Josh Yates:

Did you feel that due to your skill it would make it a safer patrol and more successful?

Henry Huynh:

Yes that goes into practical application through like Mojave Viper. My second Mojave Viper, it was just another go; it was my last time at Mojave Viper. And I was like I have to run range 400 and 410 one more time and that was the end of that. During Mojave Viper our Lieutenant Colonel came and talked to us. He said that President Obama wanted a surge of 15,000 Marines in Afghanistan and that's where we were going. So he vouched to become part of that surge, and that's when the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade [MEB] formed. We were one of the three infantry battalions that were there picked to go to Afghanistan with the MEB. Everybody was excited about that.

Josh Yates:

So there was a general sense of excitement and happiness to be selected for the MEB correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, because as infantryman we wanted to see some action, we wanted to fight the

Taliban. When they told us this, we were like “Fuck yeah! We’re going to go shoot some people and it’s going to be awesome!” We were going to have all these Marines with us, because there are a bunch of them. And they are all going to be supporting three battalions of infantry Marines. That’s how Mojave Viper went. We were excited, we trained and then we went on leave afterwards. We ended up deploying around May 2009.

Josh Yates:

Since you left for Afghanistan where were you mostly stationed out of over there, or was it a dynamic tour?

Henry Huynh:

Well Afghanistan was moving around a lot. You want me to go into detail?

Josh Yates:

If you are comfortable with that.

Henry Huynh:

Okay. Well we first flew out of Cherry Point [N.C.], we went to Manas Air Force Base. There we stayed three weeks, it was good. Air Force they’re like POGs, they get everything. You know, fucking nice chow halls, females and good looking females and nice showers, hot showers. That’s deployment for them they get paid extra, tax free money and they don’t do shit [laughs]. I would love it over there too. But they complain about it. Let’s see after Manas we stayed three weeks. The reason why we stayed there, the surge of 15,000 moving them all the way into Afghanistan is going to take some logistics. So we were waiting for our flights. My days there were going to the chow hall, working out and sleeping, and that was basically my days. Watch a movie go online, and yeah they have internet there too. So we flew out to Camp Leatherneck and finally we get there on these helicopters and when we get there it is hot as fuck. Manas wasn’t that hot, it was like more chilly. We get there it is smoking hot in Afghanistan, Camp Leatherneck. We get on these bus, and we’re suffocating in these buses because it’s just a bunch of Marines and they’re packed. They say you can always fit one more, well fit two more [laughs]. So it was like smoking hot, when we got to the tents, there were a few Marines from our company already there. They were building tents, we were like “Why would we need to build tents?” And they were like “Well this base just got built like a few weeks ago. So there isn’t room enough for you guys.” So we had to build our company tents

and we stayed at Leatherneck for about three and half weeks. Every day there was like go to chow in the morning, and then we train, acclimatize in the weather, and then go out on patrol, because that is real time, real life. The heat is real and everything and we would train in that and at night we would just study knowledge. I would go get briefs from regimental and then report back to my platoon and company. That went on for about two weeks, like at the end of my stay at Leatherneck.

Josh Yates:

So was Leatherneck the main base you were stationed at in Afghanistan?

Henry Huynh:

It was one of the main bases over there, I didn't stay there the whole time. After Leatherneck we actually moved on July 2nd, we did like the biggest helicopter assault since Vietnam. Because there was like thirty something, forty helicopters. Each flying in and then picking people up and flying off because this landing pad can only fit six helicopters dick to ass [very close proximity]. These helicopters are almost touching, but we fit six at a time, and then six flew off, six helicopters came, and six flew off...

Josh Yates:

Are these [CH-47] Chinooks or ...what kind of helicopters were they?

Henry Huynh:

I think they were Chinooks...53?

Josh Yates:

The Sea Stallions, the ones with the giant rotor?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah, so we had those. On July 2nd we flew out, the whole battalion flew out to where ever, southern Helmand area. What I remember about Leatherneck was the briefs that the General that was in charge at the time and our Lieutenant Colonel would give us speech. He said "If you look on a map, as Marines fly out tomorrow, we are going to be like ink drops and as we drop inks on this map we are going to spread out until it's all covered in black. Because ink spreads. So we flew out on July 2nd and the place that we were going was supposed to be a

factory, but it didn't look like a factory it just looked like two pieces of a house, mud and shit put together. We get to a place called OP [Observation Post] Norzai, you know we land with a hundred something Marines all this gear and packed for four days, because they said we would only be there for four days and then we would move further south and clear our way there. We ended up staying at OP Norzai for two weeks. We ran out of logistics and they had to helo drop MREs [Meals Ready to Eat] and water for us. They didn't drop it inside the place where we were at, they would drop it like a hundred meters off to the side, where we had to walk and get it. It sucked getting bottles of water, because they break when it gets dropped. Life at OP Norzai, sucked because it was dry. And we ran out of wag bags, that we shit in, so we shit in the ground and we would dig holes. We didn't have sand bags, so we used MRE boxes and filled them with sand, and we stuck them up to provide some kind of cover. Patrols they kind of sucked, there was this one time this corpsman who was part of my platoon, 1st squad because I was in 2nd squad, who went down because of heat stroke. I was actually on QRF, Quick Reaction Force and we ran down the street, and I like sprinted to this "Doc" we basically had to carry him back, he was like 250 [pounds] [laughs], he was a fat old corpsman. The Navy people are disgusting too. They're lazy, sit in the BAS [Basic Aid Station] all day, eat pizza and do nothing. I don't like them.

Josh Yates:

So what kind of terrain was OP Norzai in? Was it mountainous I am assuming because it's Afghanistan?

Henry Huynh:

Southern Afghanistan is actually farmland, so it was a bunch of plowed mud or like plowed dirt everywhere. When we got there, it was just the finished season of poppy. So they had all these dried poppy bulbs everywhere. It was kind of like doing the Stairmaster all patrol because you are stepping into these plowed mountains.

Josh Yates:

Did you have any news reports embedded with your unit while in Afghanistan?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah we had one news reporter with every platoon or squad. It was big, it was like everyone wanted the news coverage with what was going on. It was the surge into an

un-invaded area with like the most opium out of Afghanistan, so they wanted to see that. We thought we were going to get into a firefight at OP Norzai but nothing happened for two weeks, and we ended up leaving around July 18th. Then we stayed at this other camp, I can't remember the name but we stayed there about a week. We were told we were going to attack the Lakari Bazaar and there was supposed to be a bunch of Taliban there. Do you have any questions?

Josh Yates:

Yeah what can you tell me about the attack on the Lakari Bazaar?

Henry Huynh:

We left on a Saturday, I believe July 25th. We were supposed to leave on Friday, but due to some problems with logistics we left on Saturday. Though Friday if we would have went, it would have been their day to shop, it's like their Saturday is their Sunday and their Friday is their Saturday. But obviously we had our problems and we went on Saturday. So on the attack on the Lakari Bazaar we had DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] embedded with us, that could come when we took over the bazaar. So we were attacking this bazaar from the north and pushing south, through it. It took us two days to get there and when we got there, there was no one there, all the shops were locked up. We patrolled through the bazaar and kicked in the doors and blew up locks and shot locks. It took us about four hours to get through the whole bazaar, and then clear everything out and fortify the position.

Josh Yates:

The area was completely abandoned because it was basically their version of the Sabbath?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah.

Josh Yates:

I did a little research into the attack and it says here that during the attack you seized: 270,000lbs of poppy seeds, 33 bags of opium, 13 bags of hash, 50 barrels of explosives making material, several bolt action rifles and approximately 20 IEDs. Does that sound about right?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah that sounds about right. Its more on a higher level would know that, but since I was in intel I got a little bit of the knowledge of it. Then we ended up destroying it.

Josh Yates:

Who destroyed it, was it the duties of the combat engineer or EOD[Explosive Ordinance Disposal]?

Henry Huynh:

It was part of EOD's job and the DEA went with them. It was way too much to carry back most of that stuff so we just put it in a 7 ton, unloaded it in the middle of the desert and then put some Willie Pete, mortars into it, which is white phosphorous mortars that burned it and destroyed it.

Josh Yates:

How many DEA agents did you have embedded with you guys?

Henry Huynh:

I believe it was about four, they came in a helicopter once we cleared the area. Those guys are lazy, just fucking assholes.

Josh Yates:

What was the size of the unit participating in the assault on the bazaar? Was it a company size?

Henry Huynh:

It was our company...

Josh Yates:

And that was Fox Company?

Henry Huynh:

Yes, Fox Company.

Josh Yates:

What was the opinion of the unit of having the DEA attached?

Henry Huynh:

A lot of the people didn't know that DEA was coming but I knew. There was surprise because people were like "What the fuck is DEA doing here? This must be important." And shit like that, but we don't get paid enough to know more about what is going on and that's our nature. Just a bunch of people getting camera time, reporters and DEA and obviously our company commander, he's the shit.

Josh Yates:

How long did the assault on the bazaar take, was it a few days long?

Henry Huynh:

Total it lasted three days. We took over the bazaar in four hours, as soon as we got there at daybreak. So we get there, [by] about 11 or 12 in the afternoon we have it taken over and we set up our perimeter. Basically secured the position, that whole day there were working parties to load all those drugs and all those explosives onto 7 tons, just working parties all day. What's interesting is there are a few patrols going on at night in the area and our platoon, 2nd platoon, had a patrol at six in the morning. That was when we got into our first firefight while on patrol.

Josh Yates:

And this was at the village?

Henry Huynh:

Well it wasn't at the Lakari Bazaar, it was off to a village kind of close to it. Our mission was on that patrol was to clear that village with our platoon and we asked the reporter if he wanted to go. He said it was too early so he didn't go, this will be funny later on. It gets later on and we walk along these two creeks and we satellite patrol through it and my squad, 2nd squad was on the right side of this creek...Yeah it was flanked with these two creeks and 3rd squad on the left side and 1st squad clearing up the middle. So as we moved, we would coordinate and move up in a line but we would be spread out. Around 8 o'clock we get to the end of this village, and there is this wide open field and there is a tree line 800 meters in front of

us. With previous knowledge of ambushes and stuff like that, my squad leader put up machine gun positions in front of us like 50 meters to 100 meters in front of us. And we would just hold and wait for 1st squad to clear the village. Then I was just chilling behind like a bush, looking at this weed [marijuana] plant because it was as tall as me. I was like “Oh man it smells good [laughs].” And I was just staring at it, asking my squad leader “Don’t you wish you had some of that?” He was like “Yeah that smells pretty good but can’t have any of it.” And then a round goes off. I look around and my squad leader looks around. “Who the fuck ND’ed?” ND is negligent discharge. Then we were looking at each other, all the Marines making sure we didn’t shoot off a round, because we are scared of our squad leader because he hazes us. So he asked again “Who the fuck ND’ed?” Then a machine gun burst just bursts out of nowhere and he was like “Oh shit!” He gets down on the ground and everyone just drops. This is the start of the firefight. The machine guns started, they did a really good job just shooting at the tree line. We wanted our FO, Forward Observer to call in mortars. So as he was calling in mortars, there were mortars I could tell they were 80mm mortars landing in the field in front of us. And we told them, they were off and the people back at the Lakari Bazaar who were shooting them off said they didn’t shoot any yet. “Oh they must be the Taliban’s mortars.” Then we called again and this is a matter of five minutes for mortars, and there were mortars landing in the tree line. So we were like “Hey, you are on target. Keep shooting, fire for effect.” And they called back and were like “We still haven’t shot any yet.” And aww fuck they’re fucking themselves up [laughs]. We’re doing pretty good laying down rounds, and them shooting themselves.

Josh Yates:

You think that that could have been another American unit in the area or another coalition force? Or do you believe it was their own rounds?

Henry Huynh:

No, because Taliban shoot mortars out of telephone poles or pipes, they make so they are highly inaccurate. Highly inaccurate, and they have no aiming devices on them so they are just trying to shoot them. Anyways as they are firing these mortars someone yells out that the machine gunners are running low on ammo some a smart ass or my squad leader said that because we didn’t have communication with them [machine gunners] they didn’t have a radio up there. So my team was put into resupplying the machine gunners. So I grabbed two hundred rounds from everyone who carried machine gun ammo and then a few of my teammates did too. Then we buddy rushed up to the machine gunners, the hard thing about buddy rushing is that due

to the farm lands, the ground goes up and down, so you are kind of running up stairs but the ground is moist too. So the mud wasn't just mud, it was like peanut butter mud, and it just stuck to your boots, it just keep sticking and weigh you down so it would suck even more. We buddy rushed to the machine gunners and I gave them their ammo. I was like "I heard you needed ammo" and they were like "No why the fuck would we need ammo? We've only shot like 60 rounds." [I replied back to the gunner] "Oh fuck, we just got, up here take them and shoot them. We don't want to carry them back you know. Just lay them down range." [laughs]

Josh Yates:

Where these M240 Golfs or M249 SAWs?

Henry Huynh:

They were M240 Golfs, we had two of them going off

Josh Yates:

In your platoon?

Henry Huynh:

In just my squad.

Josh Yates:

In your squad.

Henry Huynh:

Yeah so each squad had their own heavy machine gunners.

Josh Yates:

Each squad had one?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. So after my team resupplied the machine gunners we had to egress, back from the gunners to meet up with the squad. So that was another 50 meter Aussie peel back the other way, back towards the creek. We took cover on the side of this creek. Once we get there the

mortars are fall and the Taliban are still shooting. We call the helos in and these helicopters, there's this one [UH-1] Huey, a Huey has a minigun attached to the side and umm....

Josh Yates:

Rockets?

Henry Huynh:

No... it was a different helicopter. A [AH-1] Cobra! And that [the Cobra] started flying in and they wanted us to mark [targets] with smoke, so we shot red smoke into the tree line and then as we were waiting for these helicopters, they were circling around in the air. And the striker just goes straight up into the air like it was a jet or something, it just starts flying straight up and then it dives straight down like... it looked vicious. It shot like four [AGM-114] Hellfire missiles, and it just goes BOOM BOOM BOOM [mimics sounds of explosion on impact]. Before it [the Cobra] hits the tree line it flies off. You could tell the Taliban was shooting back at it as the helicopter was leaving this Huey was flying a circle and all you could hear is this minigun rev up [mimics minigun whirl]. It just littered the whole tree line and as the Huey flew off, the Cobra came around for another run. It shot its 40mm rounds or some shit and lit them up again. Then the Huey goes another round. As soon as the minigun [on the Huey] goes off, everyone was cheering. "Yeah, fuck yeah! Get some!" Then my squad leader was like "Alright to time to assault the enemy." So we get online [abreast] in the middle of this field, and we buddy rush trying to close the gap of 800 meters while buddy rushing. It totally sucks, but we get to the 100 meter mark and our company commander just told us we had to egress and go back to the bazaar. So we were never able to see what we did at the tree line. The helicopters said they confirmed about six dead Taliban from what they could see. When we egressed back to the Lakari Bazaar, everyone in the company was pretty jealous. They were happy, but were jealous that we got in the first firefight of the company. The news reporter guy was pissed because he could only film from the roof and he could only film the helicopter and he was angry. I was really tired at this point, it was about noon. Not even a half hour later the Taliban came and tried to attack the bazaar. So everyone started running and I said "Fuck that I am just going to sit here. Let them handle it." They were like "Huynh what are you doing get up and go!" And I was like "Why? There's fucking everyone here!" And they [Marines] were shooting .50 calibers [M2 .50 caliber machine gun] and Mark 19s [automatic grenade launcher] into this building. That was the end of that attack and we decided to leave the day after. After we blew up some more drugs and stuff. Egressed out of Lakari.

Josh Yates:

Just to get the layout of the battlefield you said it was about 800 meters between you and the tree line where the Taliban was held up?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah.

Josh Yates:

Do you have an estimate of how many Taliban insurgents there were in the tree line?

Henry Huynh:

What the company commander said was about a platoon sized force in the tree line. They had two 80 mm mortar tubes about 50 meters behind them. So they had their support. The Lakari Bazaar is at the 13 line in latitude so it was kind of close to the border with Pakistan and that was close to where Echo Company was. But the Taliban has more logistics and supplies down there so it was a pretty reasonable fighting force they had.

Josh Yates:

It was just your company, Fox Company engaged in that first firefight correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

Then when the Taliban engaged the bazaar proper.... What was the size of the unit?

Henry Huynh:

It was just my platoon that got engaged in the firefight.

Josh Yates:

Oh just your platoon?

Henry Huynh:

Then when they attacked the bazaar, the whole company was there.

Josh Yates:

The whole company... During this engagement were their casualties on the coalition side?

Henry Huynh:

No we had no casualties at all.

Josh Yates:

None at all... I assume there was a sense of euphoria after the action, you know this is the first firefight but we kicked butt?

Henry Huynh:

It was the best feeling I had, like throughout the whole Marine Corps because everything led up to that... fifteen minutes or thirty minutes of shooting at each other. Every moment of training and everything that I wanted to do was expressed in that small time period of that firefight. It was so exciting, it wasn't scary at all because I had tunnel vision. I had so much adrenaline going. My buddy was laying down and he said he saw an RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] fly like right above me and I didn't even see that I just kept running [laughs]. There were rounds impacting next to me, it was a pretty good feeling afterwards.

Josh Yates:

So you enjoyed it?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

Is so during the firefight or only after the fact?

Henry Huynh:

I enjoyed it both times, because even while I was in the ditch shooting at them, the

Taliban shooting at us, it was fucking awesome to be with my squad, the people I have been training with and knowing that we are going to take the fight to the enemy. And it was just that.

Josh Yates:

So did your years of training pay off or was it mostly instinct during the firefight?

Henry Huynh:

During the firefight it was kind of instinct. Yeah, because someone told me what I needed to do and I would go do it. But it was tunnel vision, so like training offsets the tunnel vision and it did come into play but altered some of it to help me.

Josh Yates:

What happened after the bazaar?

Henry Huynh:

After the Lakari Bazaar we spent a week at this camp to cool off, regroup ourselves. Then we got shipped off to OP Jugroom, which was by the Helmand River. That was on the 33 line. We just stayed there and patrolled for a month and half, two months, just did local patrols, I collected intel from the surrounding villages and on a day to day basis it was just hot. I just worked on keeping my squad safe at this point.

Josh Yates:

How did you feel about being more of a policing force around Afghanistan instead of an assault force, like you were probably hoping to be?

Henry Huynh:

This is where during Iraq trained me for because we would kind of act like police and help out the people. It was more non-kinetic. So after knowing Afghanistan is going to be kinetic we went to these villages and I was totally prepared for it due to Iraq. I would go and be as polite as I could to the people and it is a give-give, give-take relationship. They give me information, I give them the supplies they need or refer them to someone else that can give them money.

Josh Yates:

So you dealt with the village elders in Afghanistan?

Henry Huynh:

Yes it was part of my job. Normally a squad leader would talk to village elders but I would go with the squad leader. He would talk to them but I would also come in and tactically question these village elders. Get them to tell me like... build some rapport and be friends with them. Get them to tell me in a way they wouldn't know about Taliban activity or some kind of activity.

Josh Yates:

Did that make you feel good or important, being a kid from Portland talking to village elders, being a face for the U.S. government in Afghanistan or was it more of a hassle?

Henry Huynh:

I actually enjoyed it because as I was talking to these people I would collect intel. I like to know the area I am at and the people that are in it, so it made me feel safer. It was my duty as a pointman, as a team leader, as an intel Marine. I don't really think about myself from Portland and the face of the government or whatever. It is just about my squad and the mission at the time.

Josh Yates:

So more of a team contributing factor?

Henry Huynh:

Yes the more intel I get from these people the safer it keeps everyone else.

Josh Yates:

On average, how reliable was the intel gathered from village elders was?

Henry Huynh:

A lot of it... not reliable at all. I write it down and send it to someone who analyzes it and they figure if it is reliable or not. But you know, most of it... I don't know what they do with it, it's bullshit.

Josh Yates:

Were the village elders very forthcoming with information or was it more difficult to extract information?

Henry Huynh:

It was very difficult to gather information since they were afraid of the Taliban and since we don't stay with them we just patrol around the area they don't tell us the information we need. But there are a few of them that would come into the FOB blindfolded and give us information and we would send them home at night. So that helped out.

Josh Yates:

Do you believe that had genuine fear of the Taliban or more sympathetic ties to them?

Henry Huynh:

I think they do have fear, because they like us trying to help them. They know we are trying to help them. But the Taliban they look like the regular people and we are not going to be there at all times so they can just go in there and kill whoever they want. There is a sense of security there, that is what we tried to provide many security patrols.

Josh Yates:

This FOB Jugroom, correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

That is down south in Afghanistan?

Henry Huynh:

It's kind of in the middle of the Helmand Province, in the Gharmisir District.

Josh Yates:

What was life on the FOB like when you had the little free time that you had?

Henry Huynh:

Well since I was doing the intel thing and pointman coming up with patrol routes I didn't really have that much free time but we had a creek running through the FOB, so I would clean my clothes in the creek. Dip in because it was cool. Nice to have running water, cool water, shower and clean my stuff. Writing letters back home. That was mostly my free time.

Josh Yates:

So did you have much contact with folks back home?

Henry Huynh:

No, mail would just be once every month, once every two weeks, once every two months. We had a satellite phone but the line for that was a whole platoon lining up for one phone and you only get to talk on it for twenty minutes. There is like days wait to talk on it, on a phone that runs out of batteries fairly quickly and no reception on a satellite phone.

Josh Yates:

Was that the unit's phone or an embedded reporter's phone?

Henry Huynh:

That was the company's phone that they gave out to each FOB. The reporters they had like internet connection and their own satellite phone but we weren't allowed to use any of it, at least that the leaders knew of. We would go ask him, well I wouldn't go ask him, but some of my buddies asked him to use his computer and stuff.

Josh Yates:

So around the FOB did you have much contact with civilians besides mission critical objectives like gathering information? Did you just walk by and demonstrate presence?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah we would. During patrols we would go by villages and clear them out. Then clear roads of IEDs, and show that we are there throughout the day and sometimes even throughout the night too. We patrol through people, checking in on people.

Josh Yates:

How do you think the people reacted to you? Was it a favorable or was it more of a we don't want you here?

Henry Huynh:

Some people had mixed feelings about it because, some people think they are in the middle of the firefights. They don't want to be caught up between the Taliban and the Marines. They just want to continue to living their lives farming and eat sheep. That's it sleep, eat, and farm.

Josh Yates:

They just want to be left alone?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah they just want to be left alone in their little cave houses. They don't want to get better, they're already at rock bottom.

Josh Yates:

How did the Marines in your unit react to the civilians? Was it more favorable or did they classify them as helping the insurgents every chance they got?

Henry Huynh:

From my position, the team leader, and squad leader and up, we viewed the civilians and village elders differently than everyone below. Because everyone below they didn't have the higher picture, they hated them.

Josh Yates:

They demonized them?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah. You know these guys are working with the Taliban. They are working against us, they are evil people. But from team leader and higher we knew the bigger picture and what we needed from these people. It was intel to capture the Taliban.

Josh Yates:

So having this higher point of view, being in the intelligence, you were glad to have a higher perspective correct? You were glad to be focusing on the big picture?

Henry Huynh:

It is better to know more, and it actually helped me out in looking out for ways to attack the situation of the hearts and minds, which was like the campaign that was going on at the time.

Josh Yates:

So with a general feeling of animosity towards the many Afghani civilians by the lower ranking personnel over there, how did they feel about the Afghani Security Forces as a fighting force?

Henry Huynh:

The Afghan Security Forces, most people thought they were lazy and didn't know what to do or why we were even working with them in the first place. From my perspective they hold the Afghan's governments face and they can actually communicate with the people in the village. They know facial expressions, what is going on in the area better than we do. So I thought it was helpful, but when it came down to firefights and stuff with the Afghan Army they would just shoot in the air... just stupid. They had no military training.

Josh Yates:

So what you are basically saying is they are an asset in the regions because they know the norms and the customs of the people and they are familiar with what it was to be Afghani but from a tactical perspective they were a detriment?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah they were just not tactical at all. They were like poster boys kind of. Like here are some of your own people working with us to help your country. And that would be it, they were basically useless after that.

Josh Yates:

Do you think they were more of a political crutch to kind of save face for the Afghani

government or for the American government to say we have allies or were they contributing in a worthwhile manner?

Henry Huynh:

They helped a few times. They'd take the place of a Marine, when they would have to clear certain things or like go check something out instead of... The way I thought about it and a bunch of my Marine buddies in the infantry "It was better them than us." You know that could relate to IED, or better for them to do it than for us to do it. Not to get hurt but searching and what they are supposed to do as an army or a police force. You know we can't babysit them all the time they are going to have eventually so I do think we are allies with them.

Josh Yates:

Do you think they will be effective once the U.S. military and coalition forces pull out of Afghanistan or are they just going to fall into chaos being the policing force?

Henry Huynh:

I believe they are just going to fall back into chaos. Especially the ones away from the bigger cities, the more western cities because in Helmand it is more farmland and countryside. They are definitely going to go back to the way it was, that is how Afghanistan is.

Josh Yates:

What else can you tell me about... Was it FOB Jugroom or OP Jugroom?

Henry Huynh:

It was FOB Jugroom. In Pashtoon it's called the "Snake's head." We just did normal security patrol throughout the time we were there but we had a clearing operation around September. The Marine Corps started this LINUS team with female Marines. They had us take them with us to this village and have them basically search the females. So they were embedded with us, while we were doing this operation.

Josh Yates:

How did you feel about having females embedded in your unit in a combat zone?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah they were alright at the beginning because they hadn't had any female contact in a while and it was good to have eye candy but they were pretty ugly but it was still good to have some females around. One was kind of good looking. When we got to this village it was about a mile and a half, we walked down there and cleared some IED. As soon as we got there my squad was setting up a perimeter and these females [Marines] were searching the females nationals and rounds start going off and IEDs start blowing up Marines, but luckily no Marines got hurt. These IEDs just blew these Marines into the air, and they were just dazed a little bit.

Josh Yates:

These were the female Marines correct?

Henry Huynh:

No, they were the infantry Marines. And these females [Marines] what would happen would go haywire. Like "Oh my god! What is going on and shit?" And fucking pisses me off that they don't know what to do, so my squad leader just grabs this female Lieutenant and throws her on the ground. I remember her going "You can't do this to me I am a Lieutenant!" And he goes "Shut the fuck up bitch! I am the Patrol Leader! You're going to listen to me." And she just shut her mouth. But we were clearing this village and no one got hurt, everyone checked out, once we had helos in the air looking for the Taliban, they didn't bother us anymore. So that mile and a half walk back after like four or five hours of clearing, these females fucking walk back and they are complaining the whole time. "We are out of water. Anyone got any water?" And it's hot out so this bitch takes off her helmet. In a combat zone she takes off her helmet! [She] sits down on the ground and says she can't walk anymore because it's too hot. Like what the fuck did you sign up for? You're in Afghanistan it is going to be hot! So we basically had to carry, she took off all her gear, and we had to carry her gear, had a truck drive down an uncleared road to pick these bitches up. Female Marines are useless, they should not be in an infantry environment, they should be back on base doing whatever they do on base. Getting pregnant or some shit.

Josh Yates:

So you feel like they were hindrance to your mission?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah. Some females, the really athletic ones, can I guess do better as assets but they should not be in the front lines where we were.

Josh Yates:

So does that mean that you feel that women should not be allowed to be in the Marine Corps in general or just relegated to positions behind the lines?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah they should be in supporting positions. I mean LINUS teams, they're made so that we don't piss off the Afghan people because of their women. But they are just going to hold infantry Marines back from doing our mission. If you want to help out and infantry battalion in combat, they need to make a job to make a job where the females you know, well this is my personal bias, but they just need to comfort the male Marines in the FOB [laughs]. You can take that anyway you want it but that's what females need to do [laughs]. That is how grunts think, we don't need them for anything else.

Josh Yates:

So what's your personal opinion on Congress reevaluating the restrictions on females in the combat zone in that has been going on the past couple months?

Henry Huynh:

I don't like it, I don't care for it. I don't agree with female Marines being in combat. They just have too many problems with their build and they are not capable of carrying that much weight and stress.

Josh Yates:

What happened after FOB Jugroom?

Henry Huynh:

After FOB Jugroom we turned it over to occupying force, like a POG unit that had to be stationed there. We met up with our company at the company FOB and then we did a three klick [kilometer] movement to FOB Barcha in October. This three klick movement took us two days to move down, three klicks is about two and a half miles [1.86 miles]. Two days to move

two and a half miles, because along the way we cleared over 28 IEDs and we blew two bridges with explosives called an APOB [Anti-Personnel Obstacle Breaching system.]. It's grenades in a suitcase, about a hundred and something grenades linked together and when they set it off it shoots out into the air. They use it to clear minefields, and we used it to blow this bridge up.

Josh Yates:

Why were you leveling bridges?

Henry Huynh:

Because at Barcha the FOB we were taking over there is a bridge there, so we wanted to clear out any bridges along the way. So the only bridge to move between the river was through checkpoints. So they had to get past us to get up north, any vehicles. This operation was with over 300 Marines and we had over 30 Humvees, 7 tons [trucks], MRAPS and even construction vehicles with us.

Josh Yates:

How did you feel about the success of that movement?

Henry Huynh:

It was good, we actually found so many IEDs and no one got hurt. Felt very confident in the that movement. When we got to Barcha, we were all pretty tired and dropped our gear down. About two hours later we had an army, person, like a guy is whose job is to talk shit over this big loudspeaker. Tells [an] interpreter what to say over and they play it over the loudspeaker. So he is talking shit to the Taliban like "Hey we are here, we just took over this place. We are ready to fight you, come fight us." He goes on plays this for 30 minutes, and the Taliban definitely heard this because they shot an RPG through an MRAP window and blew up the truck. Luckily no one got hurt. This started the firefight at Barcha.

Josh Yates:

The RPG round went through the window of the MRAP?

Henry Huynh:

Yes. It is an armor penetrating round for the RPG, so it went straight through and hit the back of the MRAP, but the gunner and the driver were still in the truck. They came out with

scratches, they were safe, I don't know how but they were safe. Then this firefight we were just shooting back and forth. There were over thirty trucks there each one with a: [M]240, a [M2] .50 cal, or a Mark 19. We had [FGM-148] Javelins on the side of the MRAPs and everyone is shooting at this village across from Barcha. Engineers are shooting, everyone is shooting. I saw some people, these fucking POGs, throw grenades in the river and they shoot with their pistols. I am like "What the fuck is going on?" And six of them got shot, but they didn't die, they just got shot, because they were trying to do an infantryman's job. They were running around these trucks like chickens with their heads cut off instead of bounding or buddy rushing to the trucks because we are at this FOB and the trucks are on the road. They would just run in a straight line. And one of my friends now, he was a Sergeant, he was running next to an engineer and the engineer was like two feet away from him got shot in the arm. The Sergeant just dropped down like "Shit that could have been me." [Laughs] It's a POG, it's all good. Yeah during this firefight I ran, since there were so many Marines were there, there was no point in shooting, so I ran medevacs [Medical Evacuations of the wounded]. I just carried a litter around with my team and we just ran around and actually found these two Sergeants and a guy on the ground who said he got shot. He got shot in the leg and these two Sergeants were looking at him, they didn't know what the fuck to do and they were just panicking, I don't know why...

Josh Yates:

They were the combat engineers?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah they weren't combat engineers, just regular engineers who build stuff. Combat Engineers are embedded with us, they blow up stuff and actually like rifleman too, there's a difference. So this engineer gets shot and my buddy comes down, and we get some water and tourniquet him up and put some dressing on him and take him back to get medevaced out via helicopter. That was the firefight at Barcha and the rest of the day we spent building a defense in this FOB.

Josh Yates:

So with all the units and vehicles were you guys being engaged outside the wire, outside the FOB or were you already in the compound? I am a little a little confused in that area.

Henry Huynh:

The trucks were outside and this compound has a giant rock in the middle, so that's why the commanders picked it, so we could oversight of the area, because it is the highest position out there. But that also left us to be really exposed on this rock. The road was probably about 50 meters away from this FOB and there were people inside the FOB: the docs [Corpsman], and the COC, the command operating center, was inside. Everyone tried shooting, you know the trucks had it, helos came, they shot artillery, which is probably the scariest sound next to sniper fire that I have ever heard. Incoming artillery is so scary. Even though when we set up a defense, it was just illum [illumination rounds], lights but I thought they were coming down on us.

Josh Yates:

The shriek of the artillery made you nervous?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah you can tell when it is coming because it takes like five seconds to get there but you can hear it coming. So so scary. [laughs]

Josh Yates:

How long did the firefight last at Barcha?

Henry Huynh:

I'd like to say about an hour, and hour and a half it was a long firefight. I mean most of it started calming down about 45 minutes after we got the medevacs out. It was just ridiculous how the POGS acted, because from my experience at the end of the firefight I was calming down, sipping some water and these guys are taking pictures for like Facebook. Because in a week or so they are going to be back on base on the internet, and they would be literally posing in front of other Marines and stuff to take pictures. I was pissed at how unprofessional they were.

Josh Yates:

So you feel as if they were ill prepared, ill-trained, or otherwise not ready to be at that point in combat?

Henry Huynh:

They were all. They were untrained, unprepared and they wanted some action. But

once it happened, they were just like... they wanted to do the firefight but just didn't know how to. So they were just running around shooting their guns like little kids. It was just fucking stupid.

Josh Yates:

What happened after the firefight at Barcha?

Henry Huynh:

During the next few days the engineers started building posts [and] HESCO barriers around the FOB. After everything was built and they thought everything was good they left. They took all the trucks and just left us there. After about a week or two in it, the Taliban came out with a really smart idea, because we had high walls in this compound. They actually flooded the fields, flooded the area around Barcha. I don't know how they did it but they opened some gates, and the water kept rising and the water actually broke some walls off our compound, because it's mud, a mud compound. It just soaks in water for so long it gets weak and falls over. That was really smart of them, they broke these walls. I was taking a shit, one day in the shitter, and I just got out, my buddy was still in there and as the flooding is going on the wall falls on the shitters, and he was in it. [laughs] Luckily he didn't get crushed. The rock wall was like halfway onto it, leaning on it and he was like "Holy shit!" and was so scared. We just continued patrols, operations, we engaged in a few firefights but they were just ambushes, once we obtained the fire superiority they stopped. We actually set up shot across the street a pharmacy with a corpsman for people nearby. Part of the hearts and minds [strategy], where we set up a pharmacy whoever came, it was like a four hour patrol op, and whoever came got treated. That how we built some rapport with them. About November we get relieved by 2/2, they came around noon on CH-53s. These guys have all their packs on them and everything they owned. They were struggling to walk to the FOB because they had two sea bags and their main bag, their rifle and all their gear, so they were struggling. At this time, as the helos left, there was a Taliban [fighter] in the middle of the field and he shot an RPG at the CH-53. Luckily it missed off the side and there are still these people ant trailing in, and we were like "Your helicopter just got shot at with an RPG, hurry the fuck up!" They didn't know what the fuck was going on; they were just new fresh meat into that area. So they were getting all fucked up. Once they came in and started relieving us, took over the posts, after left seat right seat. We actually left about two weeks after they got there, after they got the hang of area, and we left at night because we didn't want to get shot down. So we left at midnight, first thing I remember

was getting back to this one camp and it was Camp Leatherneck and we smell like shit, we haven't showered in like a month and we walked to the chow hall at like one in the morning, it was still open. There were sandwiches, and they were the best sandwiches ever because everyone was so hungry because we never had like a real meal. We had these giant MRE, like the individuals but they came in platoon sizes and we just had those the whole time. And I got a Fanta, the first soda I have had in seven months, and once I cracked open that Fanta I could taste the sweetness and it was so good [laughs]. We left Leatherneck, well when we got [back] there it was all built up, it was so different from when we got there when we first arrived. It was all built up, female Marines were pregnant now after seven months of deployment, all these fucking chow halls and stuff was built up. Then left back to the states, in Ireland, we stopped in Ireland, I got a Guinness, I don't know why I got a Guinness, I should have got a Bud Light or something. But that first Guinness that I had, I sipped the foam and it got me drunk, I was fucking hammered after sipping the foam. I don't know why but it instantly went into my bloodstream. So we returned to the states at the end of November into like December 2009. Then that's about a year before I got out. I went on leave afterwards.

Josh Yates:

What did you do for the year after the deployment?

Henry Huynh:

Well we had a bigger boot drop because a lot of the senior Marines got out. So along with two deployments under my belt I had a lot of seniority, I had a lot of experience I had to share with these new guys so I spent the time training the new guys for about four or five months. Training them in everything I knew taking over. I was happy being in a leadership position, and then this new Staff Sergeant comes in who replaces our old one. He's the dumbest mother fucker I have ever known. It was this Hispanic guy, he's lazy, he didn't do his work at as a Staff Sergeant. He decided to take over and so I just gave up after that. I stopped teaching these guys and I just go play video games in my room or drink beer at twelve in the afternoon. They [command] couldn't do anything because I was getting out. I wanted to teach these guys but this Staff Sergeant... I made sure everyone in the company office I made sure knew he was a shitbag. I have been in that company for four years, and I had bigger pull than this guy that just came in, even though he had a higher rank than me, I just knew everyone. I trained these people and relaxed my last year, basically. These new Marines went on a deployment after I got out a few months later. The Staff Sergeant got kicked out into headquarters battalion because

they finally listened to me and they found a better Staff Sergeant to lead the platoon. All my guys that I taught survived, they did well over there. Then I got out in October 2010.

Josh Yates:

What made you want to get out of the Marine Corps?

Henry Huynh:

Well my parents wanted me to go to school, and I wanted to go to school too but I loved the infantry. But I also knew I couldn't do it for another sixteen or four years, because it takes a toll on your body. And that is the only thing I will ever do in the Marine Corps, I won't ever be a POG, I won't consider any other option because that's not what being a Marine is in my eyes, infantry is the way to go. I just felt like the Marine Corps got soft, because you can't haze people anymore, even though that due to Marine Corps history and how we are supposed to be ruthless, hazing was a way to instill discipline and professionalism. Boots [new Marines] do deserve it their first year until they deploy, but once you got off you got treated like a man; it's like another step in life. But they have taken that away and you can't really do anything, like you can yell at people that is about it. They [Headquarters Marine Corps] recently passed that sleeves down thing, and that pissed me off because Marines are supposed to stand out from the other branches because we are supposed to be the shit and now we just look like everyone else. Sleeves down and it just doesn't look good as a Marines. The Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy, I don't like and I believe no one in the infantry likes because we are surrounded by guys the whole time and we just don't want it in there, and it just ruins the Corps.

Josh Yates:

How would you characterize the Taliban as an enemy force?

Henry Huynh:

They are very smart, they have been fighting for a long time. They fought the Russians and a bunch of battles, they have been fighting for over twenty years and just really experienced in guerrilla fighting. They are good at ambushes and they know they can't kill Marines from firefights, they can just blow us up. There is one thing that happened over in Afghanistan, there was radio interception that happened. It was between two Taliban members, one was the Taliban leader and the other was his workers or his buddy and he [the leader] asked something like "Why didn't you stay fighting the Marines?" And he [the follower] replied back "Well,

these Marines we shoot at them but they chase after us, not like the Army. The Army we can fuck up and shoot at them and they will just stay there, but the Marines we have to kill them or wound them up we can't engage them in firefights." That message broadcasted to every Marine FOB and we were pretty happy with the reputation we put in the area.

Josh Yates:

Do you feel that reputation was appreciated by the civilians as well or just the enemy combatants? Did they notice a distinction between the Marines and the Army?

Henry Huynh:

They definitely noticed. The Marine Corps, we overcome by firepower, we go one step ahead of what they have. If they have machine guns we call in helicopters, if they have mortars we call in bigger mortars or artillery, something bigger and we would just blow the shit out of them. The army, I don't know what they do, they just shoot back and forth at each other but never chase after the enemy. We are the crazy ones that run after them.

Josh Yates:

While on deployment did you notice a change in the morale of your unit due to events back in the states due to political changes, social changes, economic changes...?

Henry Huynh:

For myself no, I didn't have any problems with politics or social life. But there were some people, I noticed this on both deployments, when they have a wife, I would like to say a big majority of them their wives end up cheating on them, they have these problems back home or all these problems with money that they can do anything [about] while they are in theater. And it just affects them... on a patrol basis, their concentration and their focus. That's why I never got into a relationship; I wanted to focus on the job, because it is a dangerous job. If you lose sight especially as the pointman for even a minute, then you step on an IED or you lead your squad into an ambush. So it was just good for me to have my mind in it.

Josh Yates:

Was there a general distrust by politicians by Marines over there? Like they don't have their best interests in mind back home in Congress?

Henry Huynh:

I don't think anyone thought that way because we are not at that level of pay yet. Because Marines over there we just look out for each other, have each other's backs and that's all that matters, we don't care about anything else. Just get through it together and get back home.

Josh Yates:

You mentioned there were several instances of domestic issues overseas, how did that weigh on the minds of the unit as a whole?

Henry Huynh:

As a whole, there would be some people but the camaraderie was there and we'd them get through that problem and help solve it. Or at least try to find some way to make it better for those Marines. There was a few casualties we've had in our battalion, thirteen of them and that was definitely a factor in the unit morale.

Josh Yates:

Can you talk a little bit more about this camaraderie, the Corps is famous for its camaraderie and brotherhood. Can you talk a little more about that, their esprit de Corps?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah, esprit de Corps... [laughs] When we are training, especially in the infantry we have a lot of camaraderie because we are out in the fields a lot during training, it will be in the wintertime cold as fuck and we will be huddled together. We've gone through the misery to come out a better team. In Afghanistan it was hot as fuck and we are still a unit working together. At that time, even today I still talk to the people I went over there with. We had our backs and we would lay down our lives for each other, if it came down to it. I don't think anyone in my squad, if he had a chance to run or stay and fight and die, that they would not have ran. Even if it was an overwhelming force, we would have stayed and gave it all we got.

Josh Yates:

Is that a reason that lead to such high confidence in your unit, in your fellow Marines?

Henry Huynh:

In my fellow Marines and squad I was with we had been together besides two boots

around three years. I was confident in knowing how everyone acts and how they move and what's wrong. I could tell what they do just like the back of my hand, like their reactions to things. Or if they have a bad or good day, so that was very helpful.

Josh Yates:

Do you still keep in contact with the Marines that you considered brothers?

Henry Huynh:

Yes I do. I contact them on a regular, month to month basis and ask them how they are doing. Every year or so I go visit them, a few of them.

Josh Yates:

Have they mostly transitioned out of the Marine Corps as well?

Henry Huynh:

A few of them are in but most of them got out. They are enjoying the civilian life now.

Josh Yates:

What are some aspects of the Marine Corps that you miss the most?

Henry Huynh:

The camaraderie definitely. Just being able to teach Marines how to fight in combat. I love everything about combat and the tactics and how everything works and applying it to situations and scenarios.

Josh Yates:

Since you have such an affinity for combat and everything military related have you had a tough time rotating back to civilian life?

Henry Huynh:

No actually, I left all the bad problems or all that stuff over in theater. I just take what makes me happy or what I like out of it and keeping the memories.

Josh Yates:

But as far as you know routine, military training and coming back to a more lax environment, has that been difficult? A less structured environment?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah it has. People are rude and not as professional. Like in class, it pisses me off how people get ready to leave before it is time to leave and in the military I would tell them to sit the fuck down and shut the fuck up and it's not as organized. Morning PT [Physical Training] and stuff like that. I try to make a schedule out of my life.

Josh Yates:

How important was contact with people back home during deployments?

Henry Huynh:

Pretty important because the few phone calls I got were...I cherished those moments where I had a chance to talk to someone. That's when I knew some people were going to be pretty important in my life and some people I didn't need to be friends with anymore. One of my best friends this one girl, answered my calls and my mail throughout May and June but then July came and on my birthday, July 26, which I was in Lakari [Bazaar], she got with this boy, her boyfriend. She stopped mailing me, answering my calls after that, so the entire time I was at Jugroom and Barcha, I received no contact from her. And that just kind of messed me up for about a week then I just forgot about it. So I didn't want to let it affect my job.

Josh Yates:

What do you feel was the most valuable bit of training you received before your deployment? What did you utilize the most?

Henry Huynh:

How to patrol, how to basically have like formations of patrolling and reactions to ambushes, because that how the Taliban works, they ambush. We never initiate a fight unless we know they are definitely Taliban, most of the time it is them in the tree line and they ambush us.

Josh Yates:

So I take it SOI was your favorite school?

Henry Huynh:

SOI was kind of a phase after boot camp so it wasn't my favorite school. I would say the UAV School was pretty fun. On the transition out the last year I went into the Sniper Indoc [indoctrination] because I was physically fit. I passed it and I wanted to be a sniper, but then I just wanted the training and the knowledge of a sniper, I didn't want to sign another four years and be a sniper. That is what they told me, if you want to be a sniper you have to sign for another four years. I was like "No I am not going to do it."

Josh Yates:

Why did you want to be a sniper?

Henry Huynh:

Doesn't everyone want to be a sniper? It's super cool and you get to shoot people from far away and it's in like video games and stuff. Everyone wants to be a sniper, you don't know it. But it sucks, in video games you can run as long as you want but in the infantry you can only run a certain amount of time before you get tired. And being a sniper you have to stay in the area for three days, pissing in a hole and you're laying in it. It sucks but I just wanted to learn sniper tactics and how they work, and how it is different from infantry tactics.

Josh Yates:

Was that sentiment shared by your fellow Marines? They wanted to be a sniper?

Henry Huynh:

Some people wanted to be Recon [Special Forces Reconnaissance Marines], some people wanted to be snipers, but then to be anything super cool it required more work. At that point we were living the life, we were seniors, we didn't do anything and we're not going to do more work.

Josh Yates:

How would you characterize your deployments? Would you say they were successful?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah I would definitely say both of them were successful. The Iraq one it was non-kinetic even though a year before we went there it was the most dangerous place on the earth, Ramadi. We cleared the city and gave it back to the people, opened up the main road and left. For Afghanistan we invaded the highest opium distributing province in the whole country. Then we stopped the Taliban movement and we claimed that area. For the 2nd MEB that I was with there was an intent, because it was either we clear this Helmand Province or we go and attack Marjah, the battle of Marjah. That came in the with 1st MEB that came in after us. The reason for that is because we shut off the supplies from the Taliban into Marjah so they would have less to fight with. That is where that movie came out, *The Battle of Marjah*. Yeah.

Josh Yates:

I have not seen that. Did anything strike you as unusual, odd or out of place during your deployments like something you did not expect to see or find?

Henry Huynh:

I was prepared for the casualties; I was prepared for the combat. What was unusual was the way I felt about it all. I just had no feelings... nothing, about everything. The only thing where I actually felt something was when there were these dogs, these Afghan dogs or Iraqi dogs and just like play with them. It just reminded me of home I guess.

Josh Yates:

Was that your favorite moment on deployment was playing with the dogs or what was your favorite moment on deployment?

Henry Huynh:

In Iraq my favorite moments were... since it was non-kinetic we had an Xbox there. During off time after I worked out, after patrol and I would play with my squad leader, that's how we grew closer to him. We would play Call of Duty [video game] and I would whoop up on him and that was fun [laughs]. In Afghanistan since it was farmland there would be canals and we would be jumping over them. My favorite moments would be getting up into these canals and everyone would be like "Fuck Huynh, is leading us through the canal again." The canal is full of shit water and nasty shit. I would go through the places no one else would go because

those places no one would think to plant an IED. I brought back everyone safe and that is my most memorable memory.

Josh Yates:

What do you think your most valuable piece of equipment was during your deployment?

Henry Huynh:

Most valuable piece... most definitely our weapons.

Josh Yates:

And your weapon was an M16 correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

Did you have an M203 attachment?

Henry Huynh:

Not on this deployment, I just had an M16. Definitely I would say a Marine and his weapon is all you need.

Josh Yates:

What was your favorite piece of equipment, not tactical related, like a book you would read or the Xbox or...?

Henry Huynh:

For Iraq my relaxing time was my workout time, I'd spend time working out. In Afghanistan my favorite moments were the stupid things that Marines come up with. Like we'd sit on these racks [beds] about ten feet away from each other in a room and we would have these Frisbees that people would mail us and we would be in skivvies, no shit just shorts. We would throw these Frisbees at each other, trying to hit each other and if you caught them you would throw them right back. I go for the shins on people and this is like a fun game for an hour. You know just throwing Frisbees at each other. Definitely the piece of equipment I relied on the

most out there was my iPod. I had everything: I downloaded movies before I left, the 250 Gigabyte iPod is the best thing you can have on deployment, I had music, porn and movies always changing. A lot of porn, I shared my iPod, I shared the love, my squad members loved it, they fucking used it, I didn't care. Everyone [was] so happy. And cigarettes, love cigarettes on deployment.

Josh Yates:

Anything else memorable about your deployments?

Henry Huynh:

Well in Afghanistan we went mice hunting every night at Barcha. At the end of summer the mice just overran us and started eating everything so me and my buddy we would be out five hours a day just hunting these mice, kicking them and just killing them. Our Staff Sergeant and Lieutenant thought we were fucked up in the head. We were! Four of five months into it [deployment] we were getting crazy. Especially when our relief came too and I would dive under their racks to catch a mouse. There were like "Oh my god, the guys are fucking crazy." It was just something we did.

Josh Yates:

Going back to both deployments, especially the Iraqi one. Do you feel that your unit's patrols and checkpoints along the supply lines that you were trying to cut off for both deployments, do you think they were successful? And do you think they contributed greatly to the effectiveness of follow on assaults?

Henry Huynh:

Yes I believe it works in a bigger picture kind of deal. I do think it helps out, because we do check everything thoroughly and it is better to find it at that time than later on when we are doing an operation and they have these supplies.

Josh Yates:

You mentioned that your unit had thirteen casualties over the deployment correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah.

Josh Yates:

How would you or your unit cope with these high intensity situation after the fact, after a firefight was there some way of decompressing or some ritual that you and your unit would do to unwind?

Henry Huynh:

Not during the deployment we couldn't really mourn their deaths; especially we had three deaths in our company. One was an assaultman, one was a machine gunner and one was a mortar man. All the machine gunners, all the assaultman and all the mortar men they were down in the slumps. I have never seen people be so depressed, but they were just down. Well we couldn't mourn them while patrolling so we set up memorials with their weapons over in country. Then when we came back we did a real memorial and that was pretty rough.

Josh Yates:

What was your least favorite memory of the Marine Corps?

Henry Huynh:

The humping, which is hiking a number of miles. It just sucked because we walked on and on with the main packs, the big pack. Now that the Marine Corps got softer you can't walk with the big packs anymore, they got lighter ones. I hated the field, like going out to swampy areas. I like the field when we go shooting at the range, but the swampy areas where we get wet and all that misery stuff and camaraderie that's where it entails. It sucks at the time but then it gets you better. I didn't like being a boot, I just wanted to get my deployment out of the way as quick as I can.

Josh Yates:

You were discharged as a Corporal correct?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

What intangible benefits do you think you gained from your service? Besides the leadership traits that you have mentioned?

Henry Huynh:

Better person, professionalism, just the way I do things. More scheduled and like thoroughly thought through. How I do work and just personal self-defense, the way I see things, like the world is not a safe place.

Josh Yates:

So judging from this interview I take it your glad you joined the service and the Marines especially.

Henry Huynh:

At the time I hated it, but now that I think back about it I miss it and I am glad I did it. But it is a once in the lifetime opportunity that I did and I feel like I accomplished something great. Yeah I definitely would not trade it for the world.

Josh Yates:

So you would do it again?

Henry Huynh:

Yes.

Josh Yates:

Let's go back to everyday life, could you basically describe what an average day would be for an infantryman just for record sake?

Henry Huynh:

Well it was life in the barracks for me. Wake up at 0400-0500 in the morning. As a boot I would have to police call in the morning, we would just pick up trash in front of the barracks like cigarette butts or whatever. As a senior I'd just sleep in and watch the boots pick these things up. After they were done around 0600 or 0700 formation we would go PT for an hour, which is physical training. As a boot I would follow someone with a training schedule, we

would go run maybe three to six miles and go do exercise in between. As a senior I came up with the plan and I would lead the runs and come up with things. We would get back at 0800-0900 go shower and go eat and whatever. Then we teach classes, as a senior Marine we teach class or we go [to] someone who has knowledge. Teach classes until noon, noon to one we had lunch. One o'clock until around four was more prac ap [practical application] about what you taught. Patrolling you would go out and patrol, or clear rooms or whatever. At five or six, company formation and everyone get off around work around that time. That like on admin weeks but then field week when we go out which is most of the week we usually leave Monday, go out to the field in the afternoon and stay out there shooting like the range or dry runs, we teach classes, we do prac aps, scenarios. [This] goes on until Tuesday or Wednesday, we come back and clean weapons on Thursday and Friday is like chill out, admin day. That happens three weeks out of the month and then you have admin week. Just a little free time that I get after like a work day is play video games, drink beer, and watch movies and eat some food. A lot of Dominos [Pizza] gets ordered. That's barracks life

Josh Yates:

How would you describe base life around Lejeune?

Henry Huynh:

Base life was pretty busy. Everyone is doing their training. I don't really know much about base life... like what do you want from that?

Josh Yates:

I was referring more to the community surrounding the base. Is there much entertainment or is it Marines left up to their own devices will wreak havoc?

Henry Huynh:

It's kind of like that, technically when you are on base you are inside the wire which they phrase it and when you leave base you are outside the wire. The towns that are nearest to Marine bases are... pretty fucked up. They have strip clubs close to the base entrance so people can get there easier. About five hundred barber salons that black people run to cut Marine's hairs because they have to get them cut every week. A bunch of uniform shops and pawn shops in the areas. You can see the wear and tear that Marines put on the towns. Strippers are

making so much money and I don't know... the towns all fucked up. I don't like any town outside a Marine Corps base.

Josh Yates:

If you could give your younger self at any point in time through the Marine Corps, what advice would you give?

Henry Huynh:

I would tell myself get into some specialty training, instead of being an 0311 rifleman, you should strive for something more spec op [special operations warfare]. Because there is more to do and even though it sucks because you do more there actually... you can continue with like that. Not like infantry where you are basic infantry and it just wears and tears and breaks down your body. If you get into MARSOC [Marine Corps Special Operations Command] or something and that's pretty good, you are one of the few. It is like the reason why I joined the Marine Corps infantry, kind of that same reason getting into the Special Forces, like to prove something.

Josh Yates:

You mentioned how you don't like the direction the Marine Corps is going, is there anything else that you would like to add to that? As far as softening up as you mentioned? Regulations have changed recently such as the CFT [Combat Fitness Test], the tattoo policy, the sleeves down...?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah all that it just pisses me off because Marine history, they actually in 1775 started at Tun Tavern. Like a bunch of people getting drunk decided to fight in the war. They created the Marines there in Tun Tavern, and the history of the Marine goes is we fight quickly and then we leave and let the Army occupy. We're just like ravaged beasts, what was it like Germany that called us "Devil Dogs," you know the black boots. A little more into Marine history, like if you get in trouble and you either have a choice join the Marines or go to jail, most people would join the Marines but they were like killers or rapists or like angry people who they got in trouble. That is why the Marine Corps is so good. Because they just have the best, not like just the best breed, but in the infantry you have just the shittiest breed, but they are the best fighters.

Josh Yates:

What would be the most iconic moment of your entire Marine Corps career? Is there one particular instance that stands above the rest?

Henry Huynh:

The one time that stands out is the helicopter assault. The hype about it was crazy, we're going to go in blazing like shooting and we are going to get off and have to fight our way through everything. When we got there nothing happened, just like on Guadalcanal [the Battle of Guadalcanal WWII], when they went there nothing happened until later. The same shit, so much hype about it, we get on thirty something helicopters, we get there... nothing. We just carried all this shit for nothing [laughs]. That was definitely most the iconic moment in the public eyes but in my eyes for me getting on top of the Reaper [in boot camp] that was pretty intense for me. Yeah that's about it.

Josh Yates:

When you are speaking to civilians and especially your family, do you feel the need to censor yourself about things that you have seen or done as far as communication wise or just to protect them?

Henry Huynh:

I just feel like no one needs to know especially specifics about what I have done, because they don't understand it, they are just going to nod their head and be like "Oh that's cool." They weren't there with me, but if I was with my buddies I could talk on all day about everything. Like "Remember that time when this happened...and that happened?" But like to a civilian or my family it was cool, I didn't get hurt just went on patrol a few times that's it, and I just give them a short story that they want to hear. Like that's it. Especially when civilians ask, since I am in the infantry, "Oh did you kill people or whatever?" I am like "I don't really know. So..." I just stare at them with a blank face and then they leave me alone after that, but it is nothing that I like to talk about. I know the helicopters did, they definitely killed people.

Josh Yates:

So do you feel that some people try to sympathize that did not experience the same situation as you are a little insulting when they are trying to relate to your stories or when trying to understand what you have been through?

Henry Huynh:

Yeah I feel like they shouldn't ask. "Hey I heard you came back" or like "Hey you're a vet? Good Job" and that's it. They don't need to hear my story, they don't understand it anyways they don't need to show me sympathy or whatever.

Josh Yates:

Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to include in this interview?

Henry Huynh:

No I think we covered a lot. Yeah I think that's about it. I would just like to say to the Marines in Fox Company that we lost in 2009 is LaTorre, Vincent and Ferrell. I hope they will always be remembered as long as this interview lasts.

Josh Yates:

So do I. Thank you so much for your time.