PREFACE

February 8, 2013

3:00 PM (PST)

Knight Library, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: 53 minutes, 57 seconds

Interviewee: David Sullivan

Interviewers: Amanda Rudd, David Scott

David Scott is an undergraduate student with a history major at the University of Oregon, and is a student in the UO Vets Oral History Project.

Amanda Rudd is an Undergraduate student at the University of Oregon, and is also a participant in Professor Dracobly's UO Vets Oral History Project. She is in her senior year and is working towards a Bachelor of Arts in History.

TRANSCRIPT

Amanda Rudd:

If you can start with your name, and your military branch.

David Sullivan:

My name is David Sullivan and I served in the US Air Force.

Amanda Rudd:

How long did you serve?

David Sullivan:

I am just shy of three years, so for two years eleven months and some change.

Amanda Rudd:

Okay, and what made you choose the Air Force?

David Sullivan:

A lot of it was how well they take care of their people, and the education that they offer. All of the branches offer, because of the GI Bill, schooling after the fact. Some of your training can transfer directly over, but the Air Force has the Community College of the Air Force, which is an accredited community college; so where you are going all of you military training directly transfers over. There is a huge emphasis of education and furthering yourself as a person in the Air Force, because it makes you more valuable to them, if you can think critically and have a wider scope of knowledge, so that it really big, I would love continue my education. A lot of the reason I joined was because I got to the point where I was working so much to pay for school that I didn't have time to go to school any more. I wanted to break that cycle and get out. My father had served in the Navy; so I had the knowledge that if I wanted to go where I'm going to; the Air Force was a good way to get there, and I love my country, so it was not all completely all touristic. I wasn't all like "Yeah America!" It was more like "Yeah America, and a degree!" [Laughter] I didn't really have to talk to any recruiters. I was older when enlisted because I had a few years of college; so I was twenty-one when I enlisted. I was able to walk into the Air Force recruiting and say, this is what I want to do, can you actually offer me that? They said, this is what we can give you for where you want to be. It was actually a pretty quick process. I think I walked into her office for the first time in July and I was shipping off to basic training in October. It was a quick process.

David Scott:

Yeah, what job did you have in the Air Force?

David Sullivan:

I was 1 Charlie 3, which is command post; we're kind of an interesting job. We were built during the Cold War era; we were there 24 hours a day incase the Russians decided to launch a bunch of missiles off. We were the ones that would get the warning, and be able to get the troops ready. Now it has evolved because we are not staring down someone across our missile silos. So what we do now is coordination with all the agencies on base. We are kind of a filter for the commander; he has to think about so much bigger things, like tactics where is this going, where is our budget, what are we doing, how is everyone, is everyone up for inspection? We're doing good there, he can't deal with "Hey, we had someone hit a fire hydrant outside the base. What are we going to do with that?" We were the filter of information, anything on a lower level he was like, "This is the action I want you to take," so we could just create a list of things we needed to do for each thing, and then take care of them. We could then just tell him "Hey, something happened," and we were there just to pretty much to make his job easier, so that he could focus on the big things.

Amanda Rudd:

Maybe you could share some of your experiences in the U.S. Air Force these past three years.

David Sullivan:

It's definitely been a wild ride; I've enjoyed every minute of it. I was an older guy; I thought I would be this older guy going off to basic training with all these kids, but it wasn't that bad. There were a lot of people older than me too. I was already was like "This isn't too bad" right off the get. Basic training, I'm sure there are a lot of stories about it. It was definitely a culture shock for me; I had been living on my own for a few years at that point, and had been paying for my own college. Suddenly I came somewhere where I was treated like dirt, like less than human, everyone screaming at you, you can't ever do anything right. You are always too slow or not accurate enough, or wasn't sharp enough, or wasn't good enough. It was just hitting that culture shock of getting thrown in with a bunch of people you don't know, and you don't necessarily like them all that much. You are living thirty guys in just one long bay of beds, and every minute of your day is managed. It was just this big, big culture shock. I then moved from that to my training, which was at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. As soon as we finished in Texas, we left San Antonio and the last day of training they threw us on a bus and drove us over to

Mississippi. It was straight into the next chapter.

I was kind of lucky, our tech schools give you freedoms in increments. You've just come out of basic and you don't get a cell phone, and you right letters in what ever spare time you can possibility find to mail off to your families. They give it back to you a little bit. When you are first there they have this "phase-one" where after your time it's your own at the end of the day. You have to be in uniform all the time; and you can't leave the base, but now you can eat at Subway, and everyone is excited. Then you get to "phase-two" where you don't have to wear a uniform after hours but you cannot leave the base, but now you are in civilian clothes. Then "phase-three" finally you can wear civilian clothes, and leave. Luckily I came right on Christmas was when I left basic training; I graduated basic training on the eighteenth or nineteenth of December. So when we got to Mississippi, everyone was just gone. They gave everyone leave. "Yeah, if you want to take leave you can go home, from school and spend time with your family." I was like "Eh, yeah whatever." So I came in this time where they were like "Yeah, you can wear civilian clothes, if you're twenty-one you can drink." [Laughter] I was like "Oh wow, I love tech school." Then suddenly we had to lock it down again, once the school year started. That was an interesting situation, because it goes so fast. My tech school was six weeks, I think. I ended up getting delayed going into it, just because there are so many people that they are having to push through the school. It goes so fast. You spend like a week on this huge concept like on "How do you control aircraft that are coming in here, if this aircraft is suddenly injured and explodes, what do you do?" They run it for a week and are then like "Well that was fun, now onto the next thing." You have to retain all this information because at the end they stick you in a simulated command post, with all your computers and displays, and then through like the apocalypse at you. You are just expected, do "Oh, ha ha, this is what I was supposed to do, okay, ha ha."

After that I was lucky. I like traveling a lot, even before, so I pretty much just said send me overseas. That was all I wanted. I got Yokota Air Base, which is just outside of Tokyo. I was able to go there and spent most of my time. I deployed in a short time in the middle, but I spent the next two and a half years at Yokota Air Base. That was completely different thing because you are a human being, and you are doing your job; you having like that culture shock everywhere you go. That was kind of an eerie experience, because you are in a completely foreign culture and the language isn't even similar. Everything is so different; you are driving on the opposite side of the road. You cannot read any road signs, because they are all in symbols. You are on this tiny little base; it was [pause] very interesting [pause]. You could have a lot of fun there; completely getting lost. You could just go off, and that was a lot of the difference. Some people hated being stationed there; it was the same people that never left the base. "I don't know Japanese, I don't know any Japanese either, just get lost." [Laughter] There was so much to experience there, and so I had so much fun being stationed there. That was one of the things that

was cool about the Air Force. Not many places you can go, "Yeah, we will pay you to go live in another for country for two years. Don't worry about rent, we've got that covered, and don't worry about food. Just live in this country and do your job." "Cool." "On your weekends, go crazy." It was really cool; I got to climb Mount Fuji. I got to go down to Kyoto and see the old imperial palace, and all kinds of just fun adventures. That was really valuable.

In the middle of that, in July of 2011, I deployed out and went to Iraq. We were closing; I went to Balad, Joint Base Balad[1] and we helped close that down, when we transitioned out of Iraq. We then handed it over to the Iraqi people. So I spent four and a half months over there, for that. That was an interesting time.

It's weird because my job isn't a front line job. We're the one you keep back with the commander, if anything happens something went really, really wrong, if we are ever in danger. So it's kind of like, everyone else is gone already. It was a really interesting experience; going there and you are suiting up with body armor, and you have your gear on. I was like "What am I doing here, like I don't know, oh my gosh." We had people firing at us, so you would be walking to work or walking to the gym, walking to go get food at the chow hall. You would just hear the sirens going off, and you would just hit the ground. You would just see a mortar fly over your head, and say "Why?" [Small chuckle] It was this bizarre feeling, because on the base, we were at, it didn't feel like we were at war. We were not the Army guys that had to drive out and get shot at. We were just these guys; I went and did the same job that I did in Japan. It was just really darn hot outside, but then suddenly you have people actually actively trying to kill you. That was a weird, weird thing for my brain to comprehend for a while.

Amanda Rudd:

I bet.

David Sullivan:

It was a lot of fun. We also got to spend sometime, a week, working with some of the Iraqis that came on base. We were teaching them various infrastructure jobs. There were some people teaching them how to drive around with potable water trucks; and there were people teaching them how to pump out the sewage tanks. We were teaching them how to run the garbage trucks, the ones with forks that actually pull the dumpster over the top, and then dump it into the compactor. We did this so that they would have those skills, when we left. We would leave the equipment behind for them, so that they would have an infrastructure system once we left. That was a really cool experience, because a lot of times when you see

[1] Joint Base Balad was one of the largest military bases in Iraq during the war in Iraq. The media often called it "Camp Anaconda."

anything on the war, from the states or even from when we were just in Japan, you would see, "This many people have died, this many civilians got hit, and collateral damage. This much money has gone into it." To see that where wasn't just destruction; we were trying to build something, we were leaving something that was really, really cool.

Amanda Rudd:

You felt like your work was important then?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, it felt like we were not there just to tear things down. It made me feel better about leaving the country, because we weren't just like "And deuces, have a nice day." We actually gave them something, something to have. A lot of the guys were really nice guys. We had a lot of fun with them; we barely spoke each other's languages, but there's that human connection that you are able to have with some of them. That was just phenomenal. Then I went back to Japan. I got back in Japan in December of 2011, and then I actually applied; what brings me here now is I'm on a program where the Air Force lets me separate earlier than my contract to go finish my bachelor's degree. Then I will come back in as a commissioned officer; so I will be coming back in as a Second Lieutenant, once I earn my degree. Then I owe that time that they gave me back to them. That's my story; that's how I ended up here.

David Scott:

Did you feel like had enough supplies to be in Iraq and outside of Tokyo?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, I mean, it's tough. There are a lot of budgets, as much money as you see going into the defense spending, there is a lot of tightening of belts. There is a real effort to be a leaner, meaner, fighting machine. So there were times, especially in Iraq, when maybe our printers wouldn't work. There was always a work around; we also had people that were dedicated to help that out. "Oh yeah, you can link it up over here, or this shop has a spare one that they are able to give." Everyone, especially with the budget tightening, is really willing to work together. We never had a point where we were just like "I don't think we can accomplish what we're supposed to do." We never hit that point. Sometimes you would just have to have work arounds, but you were never at that point where, "This isn't going to work anymore; we just don't have what we need." It never felt like we were clinging onto barely being able to stay alive. [Laughter]

Amanda Rudd:

Going back to Iraq, just living in that environment. How did you feel about that, were you just kind of numb to it after or awhile?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, it was really weird. We flew in the first day, and we flew through Kuwait, and then into Iraq. We got onto the plane and they were like "Okay, everyone put on your body armor, helmets, and everyone get ready. If we have to do an assault land we'll let you know, so you can go crazy." "Oh good." So we came in and it was weird, they were like "Okay, throw your stuff, this is your bunk, this is where you're going to live, food is over there. You will be at work tomorrow morning." I went to bed that night and there were a few mortars that came in and you hear "Boom!" I hit the ground, and I was panicked, I had my body armor over my body. I had my M9 [*9-millimeter handgun*] ready. I was like "I don't know!" I look over and my roommates are all just sleeping, I was like, "What is going on." Over time, you fit that first shock of like it's hot, I'm confused, I'm tired, and I'm learning what is going on. I don't even know how to find my way to work, and I am expected to be doing this job, and you have this very short learning curve to catch on. By the end of it, it was like two weeks in, I could sleep through jets taking off, and attacks coming in, you just got to that point where it seemed normal I guess. You had acclimated to the fact that things were blowing up. [Chuckle] It, I guess, sounds weird. I don't know, it was kind of an interesting thing. Looking back on it now, I don't know how that happened. I came back to Japan, and I felt like I acclimated back to that; I heard a jet taking off and it would wake me up. When you are in that situation, you have to get used to it or you will break. [Chuckle]

David Scott:

Did you get to communicate much with your family?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, one huge thing, especially just being in Japan and being sixteen hours ahead and then going over to Iraq; Skype[2] was a huge, huge thing. It made such a difference being able to talk with family. Sometimes one side of the conversation would have to get up at a weird hour just to make sure it would work. It made a huge difference to be able to keep in contact. In Iraq our Internet connection was a little spotty, there some days you would be like, "Sorry, this can't work," but at least you were able to least talk once a week. I mean if all else fails you could call them in the morale tents. So it was good, they did a very good job. That was a huge anchoring point, when you just got so stressed and everything kept rolling

[2] Skype: VOIP [Voice Over Internet Protocol] service.

and rolling. You were able to just talk to someone who knew you, that could calm you down, and get you back focused onto being sane again. Skype, I don't know; I'm not sponsored by Skype or anything. [Everyone laughs] That was the good, that was so, so valuable over the two and a half years, of not being anywhere near home.

David Scott:

Did you get to come home on leave at all, like two weeks or a week?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, I was able to. Being in Japan, it was tougher, you had to save it all up and then try and find a place where you could find three weeks, or a month of leave. It was tough, because in the States it's a three hundred dollar plane ticket to come home and go back. But there when you are making E-3, E-4 pay, you are not making the big bucks, in any way, shape, or form.

Amanda Rudd:

What is that pay like [for] *E-3, E-4?*

David Sullivan:

It is tough to figure out because we got various add-ons because of where we were. I'd have to look it up online at the pay scales. It came down to almost a month's worth of pay just to get a plane ticket home. So like $1300, or $1200 a month. So it was one of those things where you had to plan ahead and try and find time. One time I was coming home on leave for a month and we had it all planned out, and then the earthquake hit in Japan.[3] "It was like, ha, yeah no. Leave is canceled." [Laughter] The earthquake hit and I was looking at my deployment date coming up, and I was like, when am I actually going to get leave in between this mess and heading of to there? [*Iraq*]. My leadership was really good about being like "The earthquake is done, get out and go." You had to plan it out, over on that side, because it was so expensive to do it twice a year. Just a once a year visit, saw everything you needed to do really quickly; scheduled out your leave. Okay, on this day I am hanging out with these people, and this day is dinner with the family, and this day...then you came home, and you were like, done, done, done, and then you would head back. Otherwise you would not have enough time, to get everything in that you needed to get in.

Amanda Rudd:

[3] The Tōhoku earthquake of March 11, 2011, commonly known as the Fukushima earthquake.

What was it like coming back to the University of Oregon, and you just served for this long time, and now you are coming back as a student?

David Sullivan:

It was a huge, bizarrely huge, culture shock. I was not expecting it to be. I was like, well it's like going back to school. That will be fewer hours that will be awesome; I will have so much free time. Coming from a situation where, you have everything planned for you, you know, you are going to live here. This is your roommate, this is where you live, this is the base you are going to be at, and for this amount of time. You are going to work at this job, for this amount of hours. You show up at this time. You can eat, here is this; here is your free time to do with, as you want. I separated out, and showed up, and it was like, "What do I do?" You just hit this shock of "I know a need a house, I know I need somewhere to live, and I need a vehicle. I need to register for my classes," but so much of it is just open that you are not used to, that you are just like "I don't know where to begin with this search." [Laughter] You are used to being told, "Show up here, be here, and go." They just leave it out; school starts on the 28th, see you then. That was a big culture shock, and then coming back from Japan as well, culture shocked me back to an American culture. I was not used to it at all. I cannot even point out specifics about it, that were so different, but it was this weird, I felt like I wasn't connected to anything in here. I am coming back to my home state, 40 minutes from where my parents live. It was this weird—I didn't feel connected to anything. The veterans' group here, and a few of veteran friends were really good about reaching out, and making sure that I adjusted. It is very easy to just fall behind and collapse and not really know what to do, and just do nothing instead.

David Scott:

You mentioned friends and other veterans' groups did any help specifically, to help you get acclimated?

David Sullivan:

It wasn't so much like an acclimation, like "Here is a class, here is how to become acclimated." It was more that I had someone who had been there before, who I could just go to like, "Oh my gosh, can you believe this?" and they were able to be like "yeah I remember when went through that." So a lot of it was just having that other person who understood what you had gone through. If I had just gone out with some student group, and been like "I don't get why these people are doing this, this is so frustrating. Why can't they just do this?" The people were like, "That is a normal behavior, for that to happen." "Not where I'm from, back in my day!" [Laughter] It was one of those things, that like you get used to a certain level

of discipline and formality, just because of the military environment. You get used to that; that is the normal for you. Even a lot of the dependents, so the spouses and children of military members, they've been in the system, they understand it, a lot of them still subconsciously just do that. Then you come somewhere where you don't have that clear rank and file, this is the person in charge of this person, and this person will act this way because of what they are. You come back and it is just so, it grates you, and you don't really know why, because they are not doing anything wrong. It is just not the way… [Pause] It feels so off. So having someone that is lik,e "Yeah, no I get that, just punch your barista. I promise it will be okay. I promise you will get your coffee." [Laughter] It's just one of those situations, just having that person that you are able, and having that community that can look out for you. You go out for a beer and just vent for a while, and they just get rid of all that stress. So that you can come back in and have a fresh look at it.

Amanda Rudd:

Is there [anything] *else that you feel from your experiences that you want to share—for example just coming back, or your time overseas?*

David Sullivan:

I guess the weirdest situation that I have come into there is a lot of support for military and veterans, and coming back it is almost weird. Not necessarily that we are like "No, don't support us." Every person you talk to whenever it comes up that you are a veteran it becomes a different [pause] relationship instantly. So a lot of the classmates, we would be in a group, and they would be taking care of things working on a project, and it pops up. Suddenly they are like "Oh well, if anything offends you or something." We will be talking about politics or something, "Oh well, when this happened," and they are like "Oh well, uh if, let us…uh." We're just people too. We just happen to be in the military for a while. That was one of the weird things about it. Anytime it pops up, suddenly you are a different creature.

Amanda Rudd:

Yeah, as if everybody who is a veteran is the same.

David Sullivan:

Yeah, we are all this weird little animal, subspecies of human, we're like a "Homo sapiens soldiers" or something, I don't know. [Laughter] Something important for to me get out, is if you know a veteran in your life, just treat them like a person, because it not like anything you say is going to be like "Oh man, thanks for your service, it must have been tough over there." I appreciate that but at the same

time, someone who has been there knows how it felt. I would prefer that you just treat me like a normal human being, and then we can just be like "Hey, yeah let's go play basketball or something." Then when I am having that weird, like I can't readjust, I can go to a veteran, someone who felt it, who has been there. That was one of the weird things; it's…[pause] yeah.

Amanda Rudd:

Did everybody just assume that you were in combat?

David Sullivan:

That is one of those things that you do get pop up quite a bit, "What was it like over there?" I don't even know, I was over there and wasn't serving in a combat role. I wasn't even outside of the wires so I can't even speak, like the Army guys, the Marine guys, even the Air Force security force guys that were patrolling the fence. I cannot even speak to what they experienced, but it is like "Did you shoot anybody?" No, no, just because I was over there doesn't mean we were like *Call of Duty* all the time.[4] It's not literally that bad, I've been glad that there is a huge focus in general, where for veterans, no one expects that you were Rambo. We've been in conflict for 12 years now, and so a lot of people already know someone who has been there; they've had a cousin, or a brother, or a spouse, or a friend of a friend, or a friend has been there. It's a lot, I feel like it's—I cannot speak from experience, I don't know what it was like before, but it feels like a lot of people are a lot more understanding, that you just did that. You served and now you are just living your life, and that is really great for me at least, I've enjoyed that.

David Scott:

Do you think nonmilitary personnel, so the general population, have any misconceptions about veterans or the military in general?

David Sullivan:

I haven't really experienced anything too extreme. I'm not really flamboyantly a veteran I guess. I don't wear my Air Force shirts, and have stickers on my car and stuff like that. I guess the main misconception you get a lot of stories, the stories that make the news, are always the PTSD. You don't hear the story about "This Major came back from a combat role, and he had his wife and his kid and lived happily ever after." You don't hear those news stories. So a lot of times, if someone doesn't have someone that they know who has been there, you get the PTSD question. They might think that you are just waiting to snap. [Chuckle] I haven't really run into that, too bad. I've had a few veteran friends who

[4] Reference to the popular video game series *Call of Duty*.

have said they've gotten the PTSD question, they say "I've never deployed, I don't know how I got PTSD, but thanks, thanks for asking." [Laughter] That is one of those, as far as misconceptions, I can't really think of anything. It's kind of frustrating when you see someone de-spousing [*espousing*] military political ideas. I know they are speaking, from like out of trying to do good for this country, they want to save money, but when someone says the military doesn't need another pay raise, doesn't need that. That is a little tough to deal with, because the military does take a lot of money, but at the same time, doing my job, I was making half of what I would have made in the civilian market, like working as a FEMA [*Federal Emergency Management Agency*] person. So that was one of the tough things with someone wailing about how much the military wastes their money, and they don't need, and why do military people make that much pay. It's like I could be making a lot more, if I had not of done this. Those are usually rare cases. [Chuckle]

David Scott:

You mentioned you were on a joint base in Balad, was there much friction between the different branches of the military?

David Sullivan:

[Chuckle] We all give each other crap all the time. I mean you'll run across a Navy, you know, "Freaking squids, they are ruining our forests." You run across all these people, yeah, Marines are idiots; you always josh across the branches. It is almost like sibling rivalry, you give each other crap, and you end up making each other better out of it. As soon as someone comes toward from outside, you are locked tight, there is no one separating you. The only issues we had were like how we do business. We did things differently from the Army. If the Army had to load paper into their printer, they would requisition the thing, grabbed it, had a two guy paper team; just how people did things were different. We would have just gone down to the local store like Office Max and buy a few reams of paper and put it in. It is just how each side does things because that is how works for them. Every so often we would run into like "Oh, can you guys do this?" and they do not what we wanted them to do at all. Just because the way we told it to them. It was never like, degrading, "Oh my gosh, it would be so much better without the Army on this stupid base." We would run into each other in the chow hall and give each other crap, but if the bullets started flying, there is no one I would rather have by my side than the Army battalion we have sitting behind us. There is a lot of competition between the two of us, there is a lot of trash talking, there is a lot of that but once the work has to get done, it's going to get done and its going to get well.

David Scott:

You mentioned the chow hall, was the food any good? Was there anything you liked or didn't like?

David Sullivan:

Surprisingly enough, there was a lot of really good food. Shrimp especially; I don't know why the shrimp was really darn good. The steak was awful. They did a really good job of trying to make it not the same thing, it wasn't just gruel on a tray. We had a surf and turf night, we would have an Italian night, and then of the course the week. It would rotate every week, so the exact same things. So Tuesday was always Italian night. They did a really good job of making sure that you were as comfortable as possible. You can't make it any more comfortable than, I mean it's a 120-degree weather, people are shooting at you, and you can't really be too comfortable. They did their best; it wasn't like MRE [*Meals Ready to Eat*] out of the sack, which the poor Marines probably had to put up with because they were wandering off into the desert. We didn't have too awfully bad. We had air conditioners that worked every once and a while. [Laughter]

David Scott:

Do you remember the temperature they were set at?

David Sullivan:

Anything was better than normal. They were probably at 86, and that was making them work way too hard. [Laughter] Anything would have been nice; they did their best to make it not an awful experience, as it could have easily been.

Amanda Rudd:

Did you serve with men and women when you were in Japan or Iraq?

David Sullivan:

Yeah, we had a very—actually pretty evenly split shop, for us. In the desert, not so much. I think we had about eight men and three women in the shop. In Japan it was split pretty fifty-fifty. It always adds an interesting dynamic just because of the different ways you approach problems. It was always nice to have some one who thought a whole heck of a lot differently than you did. You get real close to a lot of them, because you are spending, we were working twelve-hour shifts, so you spend twelve-hour shifts with people you get really, really close. A lot of them are like my little sisters and my little brothers and stuff. It was very close, because our shop was so small and you had so many hours. It was nice

environment. There were a lot of environment[s] for learning from people. Just life lessons, beyond just how to do the job better which is how it is set up. Then just seeing what you wanted to be and trying to put you in that direction to help you out there.

David Scott:

Did you leave the base often when you were in Iraq?

David Sullivan:

No, no I didn't leave the base at all. I was a delicate little tomato. They were not going to let me out of their sight; I bruised easily. The job I had was very compartmentalized information. So we had no real reason to leave, and so they weren't going to let us. We couldn't, they didn't want us volunteering for convoy duty or anything. If we managed to get nabbed it wouldn't have been so good. They had vendors, Iraqi vendors would come onto base, and they cleared, so you were able to see at least some of the culture. I got some cool little mats that I was able to send home; but no, I didn't get to wander off too much. You didn't really have time to wander off, it was pretty much just like, work, gym, sleep, work, gym, sleep, and that was it.

Amanda Rudd:

You mentioned earlier that you were E-3, E-4. What does that mean exactly?

David Sullivan:

So everything is on a grade. The "E" is just the enlisted designator; then "O" for officer. When you go into basic training you are an E-1, an Airman Basic. As you progress you put on rank. I spent most of my time as Airman First Class which is an E-3. It is pretty much the starter rank for everyone. By the time you get to your first base, or shortly after, most fresh kids will have that rank [*E-3*]. After about two years you put on E-4, and that is just a time thing. Then people almost take you seriously, you've been around the block, and they know you kind of know what you are talking about with your job. I was separated in September; I would have tested in the next for Staff Sergeant E-5 in February-March. Then I would have found out about that later that year, and then be put on the year after.

Amanda Rudd:

What is the highest rank in the Air Force?

David Sullivan:

On the enlisted side it goes up to the Chief Master Sergeant, which is an E-9. There are a few extra little bumps beyond that; you can be a Command Chief. At a base you would be the guy in charge of all the enlisted personnel. You job is to advice the commander on the enlisted perspective of everything, and to implement all the enlisted side of things. Each of our area commands, I was in PACAF, which is Pacific Air Forces. There is also USAFE, which is US Air Force Europe, just various ones like that. There is a command chief over that area as well, and then over the Air Force we have the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, which is run on the enlisted side for all things there. The officer side goes up to O-10, and that is General.

David Scott:

You mentioned once you graduate you will become an officer. Will you be doing the same job, or how is that going to change your military life?

David Sullivan:

It will change it nicely. [Laughter] When you go back into officer training, some of the jobs translate pretty well. We don't have an officer equivalent for my job. The officer that was in charge of out shop was actually a pilot. So his real job was flying, he ran our shop as an extra duty that was his job for a while. Once that was done he might go back to flying, or he might go somewhere else. So because we don't have a direct change over; when I come back in I'm pretty much—I have to compete against all the people who are looking to become Second Lieutenant. Whether they're prior enlisted like myself, or just kids that went to the Air Force Academy, and they are just graduating college after four years, and being twenty-two years old. We will all just compete against the job that we want for that. So it will all be fresh, I could end up being like a toilet paper re-stocker officer. That's not really a thing but, I could be anything from—if I qualify for it, and I'm better than the other candidates for it, I could be anything from a pilot to someone who is running the gym and chow hall. I could be anything, so I'm all back into the mill again.

Amanda Rudd:

How many years do you have left until you finish your degree?

David Sullivan:

I am a junior now so; I will be graduating in 2014, June of 2014.

Amanda Rudd:

Then right after you will be going back?

David Sullivan:

It all depends on—like we've got the tech school for the enlisted side, some of the jobs have schools that they go to, to learn how to do theirs. So when ever those schools start would be when I leave. So if I commission in June, and then they are like "Oh, sorry, the next class doesn't start till March," I would just being hanging around until March, when they would send me off.

Amanda Rudd:

Would they have somewhere for you to stay?

David Sullivan:

I would just be like civilian waiting. I would be a Second Lieutenant, but I wouldn't be active, so I wouldn't be paid as a lieutenant. I would just be waiting to go. There wouldn't be any drill things that I would have to go to or work, as far as I know, I don't know. [Laughter]. It could be that they put me into the ROTC recruiting or something.

David Scott:

Back to Balad. You mentioned while you were there things were starting to wind down. Did the base get smaller at all, or Iraqi government come in to help transition, or how did that work out?

David Sullivan:

First thing that went away was the fun stuff. So we lost our Pizza Hut and our Cinnabon. They just closed down various things. There were a few of the construction guys that were tearing down the buildings that wouldn't be used anymore. We just pretty much lost people; they just wouldn't refill people. So if someone left to go back home they just wouldn't have a replacement. So it just started to wind down, you had less and less people, and a lot less things happening on the base. We had less of a mission to accomplish. By the time we closed down it was just the bare bones working. "Who do we need to keep this thing working, who do we need to keep the lights on, and people safe?" All of those people, all of us got onto planes about the same time, and turned out the lights, and took off. Then the Army got to truck it out. [Laughter] I don't know how the Army did it, I don't know if they all just stayed all in the same sides, since they knew they would all have to leave on foot or not. We all got it down to about six planes' worth of people.

David Scott:

Do you think the Iraqis were ready to take it over? From what you knew.

David Sullivan:

It was kind of a weird situation, because I only dealt with the guys running the dump trucks. We didn't really have any coordination with the government at my level. I never had to call an embassy or talk to anyone. So the guys that could run the dump trucks were good to go; they were ready and excited to be taking that over. They were making really good money for what they were used to, so they were excited. The ones I had contact with were excited and ready to go, and excited for the opportunity.

David Scott:

Did you ever get any awards or medals, or citations even?

David Sullivan:

I did. I got a few, and I mean there are a few that you get just for going to Iraq. You get your Iraq Campaign Metal. I got an achievement meal out of Iraq for the work that I had done there, and I also got an achievement metal out of Japan. I also got a humanitarian award for helping with the earthquake and tsunami out of Japan, because we had a lot of the northern side of the island was devastated. We were able to, from our base, send a lot of planes. We were one of the closest places, so we had Austrians and British people flying though, using our base as a staging point. Everyone was compiling their resources. Austrians were bring giant tanks to hold fuel to help out with all the trucks and aircraft up further north. They were doing the helicopters, and search and recovery. The British came up and they had their search dogs, their search and rescue teams; they were out looking for survivors. We had that coordinated from our bases, like a nexus of distribution. We were flying all of our planes out and dropping off clean water tanks, and then fuel and construction supplies for the crews that rebuilding until we could rebuild one of the northern airports that had been wiped out. We were able to rebuild that and start staging all of our search and rescue from there. We keep ferrying them food and water and trying to get power restored up there. We got a humanitarian ribbon out of that. Yeah. That was one of those times where a lot of people, I guess going back to the misconceptions, a lot of people don't realize that the military doesn't just do war. We do so many humanitarian missions running all the time around the year, being able to be a huge part of that.

We have a few other humanitarian missions where we drop out supplies to the Micronesia Islands that don't always get it. We use Christmas drops; we go and give supplies and presents to the people that are geographically largely separated from anything. So a few other things, the Navy out in Japan does dental clinics in the Philippines and other islands. It was a lot to actually be an active part in one of those,

and to see the impact. It was my home that I just saw get wiped out by a tsunami. I was attached to the people and the country. So to be able to be a part of that, and just see what we were able to do and they hope that came out of it was worth more than the ribbon. That was valuable, probably one of the highest points in my career, probably the best time I ever had. We were working thirty days straight, no sleep, you know, fourteen to sixteen hour days, but every day you came into work and you were excited to—yes, like you were pumped up and always ready to go, because you saw the good that was being done immediately in your backyard.

David Scott:

Were you on the ground at that point or were you still…?

David Sullivan:

We were still coordinating back from Yokota. We weren't really running the missions, and the flying squadrons were the ones who had the planes [and] were running the missions. We were keeping track of who was flying where, and what they were flying, when they were taking off, when they were landing. Any needs that they had, did they need more water, and did they need more this. We would report that up to the Wing Commander so that he was always apprised of the situation. We weren't actually able to go out and be like boots on the ground, search and rescue crews, because our jobs were back, back on the base.

Amanda Rudd:

How long did that last, cleaning up the area?

David Sullivan:

It lasted a long while; I mean they are still in recovery, just rebuilding. There were two towns just entirely swept off the face of the earth. We were in heavy recovery, finding as many survivors as we could, getting water, food, restoring power. That lasted for about a month. So about into early April, I think, when that really started to slow down, and we were still flying a lot of missions every day, and then over the course of April into May was when the Austrians or the British started leaving, because their portion of the job [was] done. We were able to handle it. The Japanese government was really competent. They have their emergency plans in place, so they were just overwhelmed in the beginning, so when that late April early May came they were able to take it into their hands. May time frame it was almost completely out of our hands; they were able to become self-sufficient and take care of it. It was still in recovery, we just really see it past about a month and a half after.

Amanda Rudd:

Is there anything else out of the questions we asked that you would like to share or anything that comes to memory?

David Sullivan:

No, not really, no. That is all I had.

Amanda Rudd:

Yeah, you shared a lot, thank you.

David Sullivan:

Yeah, definitely. I've enjoyed the project, and hearing about it from the idea behind it, getting everyone's story. I'm glad you all signed up for the class to actually do the hard work of it. I just have to show up and talk for a while, so that is whatever. [Laughter] Thank you guys.

TRANSCRIPTION NOTE

None.