

PREFACE

February 22, 2012

2:15 p.m. (PST)

Knight Library, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: 1 hours, 0 minutes, 14 seconds

Interviewee: Marcus Laureta

Interviewer:

Jakeb Prickett is a twenty-eight year old senior student in the undergraduate geography degree program at the University of Oregon. Prior to enrolling at the U of O, Jakeb served nine years (2001-2010) in the Oregon Army National Guard. During his service, he served multiple tours of state-side active duty, and in 2006 deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan for eleven months as part of Task Force Phoenix V.

Casey Klekas is a twenty-two year old undergraduate student at the U of O, studying Philosophy and History. His primary interests and studies in history are centered around the service of young men and women in uniform.

TRANSCRIPT

Jakeb Prickett:

I'm the main interviewer for this interview. I'm Jakeb Prickett, and the interview is being conducted at the Knight Library at the University of Oregon, at 2:15 on February 22.

Casey Klekas:

I'm Casey Klekas. I'm a senior at the University of Oregon.

Marcus Laureta:

I'm Marcus Laureta. I'm the interviewee. And I'm a junior at the University of Oregon.

Jakeb Prickett:

Nice. All right Marcus, thanks for agreeing to do this interview. I'd like to first ask, which branch of service were you in?

Marcus Laureta:

I was in the United States Army. Actually, I started off in ... a year and 8 months in the National Guard and broke branch and went regular Army.

Jakeb Prickett:

The Oregon National Guard?

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah, the Oregon National Guard.

Jakeb Prickett:

What was your military occupational specialty [MOS]?

Marcus Laureta:

For National Guard it was thirteen echo (13E) which is now thirteen delta (13D) and that was fire control ... fire directional control specialist for artillery. And then when I joined regular Army is was sixty-three bravo (63B), which was light-wheel vehicle mechanic.

Jakeb Prickett:

So did you go to basic training through the Guard?

Marcus Laureta:

I went through basic training through the Guard and AIT [Advanced Individual Training] as well through the Guard. Then I went to Fort Sill which is, you know, “home of artillery” there ...

Jakeb Prickett:

Right.

Marcus Laureta:

And when I went into regular Army I also went through AIT again as a prior service, and that was actually a lot better than the first time.

Jakeb Prickett:

How so?

Marcus Laureta:

Well, you know how it is training. When you go through basic training and AIT, you’re treated as a soldier in training and they’re on you constantly. They want to know what you’re doing and where you are, and make sure you’re following the p’s and q’s. Whereas, when you retrain as prior service it’s like being on post on a day-to-day basis without the drill sergeant’s foot in your ass at all times.

General laughter

Jakeb Prickett:

Your AIT for the light-wheel vehicle mechanic, where was that at?

Marcus Laureta:

That was in Fort Jackson, in South Carolina.

Jakeb Prickett:

After AIT where was your first duty station?

Marcus Laureta:

After AIT for National Guard, it was 2-218th Field Artillery which was right outside of PANG [Portland Air National Guard] Air Force Base, that little notch there. I think they still exist, I'm really not sure. And then when I graduated for 63B school, my first duty station was in Babenhausen, Germany.

Jakeb Prickett:

Oh wow, that sounds like a nice assignment.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah, it was fun. Nineteen-year old being there ... it was fun.

Jakeb Prickett:

Were you able to see a lot of the sights, and tour around Germany?

Marcus Laureta:

Actually, I did more than that. I actually became part of the culture and part of the people. Pretty much, anytime I was with my friends there ... I understand the culture, what's the cultural norm. Even when I speak German I have a southern accent, which is located to southern Germany and Bayern or Hessen, which are actually two southern states. I just know how it is, the customs, the culture, what it is to be German really. And of course I saw the European sights for the most part. I'd travel through Europe, while I was there, for what I could when I was allotted the time.

Jakeb Prickett:

Nice. And how long were you in Germany for?

Marcus Laureta:

I was in Germany for two years. I was actually there when September 11 happened. I don't know how it was like in the States. I can only tell what my friends told me, but Europe, they locked everything down. We couldn't leave base. Every building had a guard posted with an M-16 and actual live rounds in it. All the gates had like thirty plus soldiers there. I mean Babenhausen was a small base. We had to do our two-mile run for the PT [Physical Fitness] test off-base because it was so small.

Jakeb Prickett:

Oh wow.

Marcus Laureta:

So, and to put it in perspective how small it was, even when we went on our PT runs we'd go off-base and run around. You could literally walk it in probably fifteen minutes from one side to the other. It's pretty small.

Jakeb Prickett:

Was your unit prepped for activation at that point once they started locking everything down?

Marcus Laureta:

There was a lot of stuff going on, and we knew we were going to go. And hindsight, when I got to Iraq with my second duty station, they were just leaving. I actually got to run down there and talk to some of my old buddies. And also, when I went on R and R [Rest and Relaxation] I went to Germany and I visited them too as well. I was interesting.

Jakeb Prickett:

After you left ... you were in Germany for two years, and then you got reassigned back in the States?

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah, I got reassigned to Fort Hood, Texas. That's where I became part of 1st Cav. I went to a support battalion and that's who I got deployed with to Iraq.

Jakeb Prickett:

OK. And, what year were you deployed to Iraq?

Marcus Laureta:

I was deployed in March of 2004. I was actually stop-lossed in 2003, in December.

Ironic laughter

Marcus Laureta:

I wasn't happy about it, because I was supposed to be out in May, so you can see how close they stop-lossed me to getting out.

Jakeb Prickett:

So you had about six months left before you were supposed to be out of the military?

Marcus Laureta:

Pretty much, yeah. It was a shitty deal. So then, I get deployed with them and left March 2004. And it was around the end of March ... we got out there, I think April 2, because we had to stop in Germany for some reason. Something happened to the plane and we had to get another plane, and we had to switch all that stuff out. Got to Kuwait in April and sat there for a month training, learning how to drive while holding a weapon, shoot out the window, just ... all the norms that's ridiculous. I think the biggest reason why we sat there for a month was just to get used to the heat, hydrate your body, go through that whole acclimation period. I mean, you literally were drinking over eight quarts of water a day. It was ridiculous. You know what I'm talking about ... you're wearing the uniform ... they're trying to get you used to wearing the gear too, so you're wearing eighty pounds plus of gear and you're just sweating so much that you just have got to keep drinking water. And then, the month I was supposed to get out, May 1 is the day, or a couple days after that, is the day I went into Iraq. I should have been at home drinking beer on the couch somewhere. Obviously, they were sending me over there.

Jakeb Prickett:

Did you have any kind of idea at that time when you realized that they stop-lossed you and you weren't going to be discharged ... did you have any idea how much longer you would be in ... in the military?

Marcus Laureta:

Oh no. When you get stop-lossed, you're stop-lossed. It's just like what's the best way to put it? It's like someone showing you your retirement papers and saying, "Oh you can't have these for another year." You really don't know when you're going to get out. They do everything ... they try to keep you in to reenlist. They were offering insane amounts of money for people to reenlist while they were over in Iraq.

Jakeb Prickett:

How much money are we talking about?

Marcus Laureta:

Umm, thirty to forty grand plus [\$30,000-\$40,000+].

Jakeb Prickett:

Wow.

Marcus Laureta:

That's just like a ... I believe it was just like a three-year reenlist contract? Either a two or three, which is, I mean normally when you reenlist it's four years. They were trying to get people saying, "Oh, we'll only give two years if you reenlist." And the good thing is that ... part of me almost did ... but it's a good thing I didn't, because when I got back I realized they were changing over to the battle groups, to where when you get to your duty station, you spend a year there training, get deployed for a year, and then you come back. So if I would have joined for two years, I would have got stop-lossed again for another year. So it's a good thing I didn't. I mean, the whole purpose of me joining the military was so I can go to school and get my education. My parents weren't going to pay for it.

Chuckle.

I really didn't know when I was going to get out. And when I did, I only had a couple of months to get out.

Jakeb Prickett:

Right.

Marcus Laureta:

It's like, "Oh, now you can get out. But you only have a month and a half to get out." Thank you. I mean the process of getting out of the military is about the same amount of work as the process of getting in ... all this paper work, making sure that you turned in everything that doesn't belong to you, and it's just a pain in the ass. It really is.

Jakeb Prickett:

It's a long process. So, what was your job in Iraq? Did you actually do your MOS that you were trained to do when you were deployed?

Marcus Laureta:

Not really. My job was to be a light-wheel mechanic, which just basically fixed vehicles all day long. The first month we were setting up the motor pool. And the bad thing about the unit I was with is, it was that unit where I didn't get along with anybody in the unit...all my friends were outside the unit. It was that rare thing that just happens to you in those units. It really was a shitty time for me at that point, being in that unit. So, we were setting up the motor pool and we got this huge, huge conex. It had to have at least been three stories high for the roof, and it was just a huge maintenance bay, a warehouse. So we're setting it up, and pretty much we close up the doors and I get hit in the head with a piece of sheet metal ...

Jakeb Prickett:

Geez...

Marcus Laureta:

And so it left a nice little nine-inch scar in the top of my head. It's actually funny, a cool story, because when that happened, because of how hot it is over there and you sweat so much, and all that sand and dirt, that they had to gauze my whole head so that I wouldn't become infected. So now here I am, gauzed head, and I'm looking like a Muslim. I had this Sergeant Major come up to me and he's like, "What are you? Is this like some fashion statement?" And I'm like, "No, I'm actually injured." People looked at me weird like, "What is this guy doing here?" And the Iraqis are looking at me like, "What is this guy doing here?" So, that was pretty funny.

So, for the first month we're setting up, and that's when there was a need for gun trucks, basically security trucks that would go on convoys and take supplies. We were a support battalion and we would take supplies from base to base ... from our main base to other bases. It ended up being that my unit kicked me to them and made me the happiest person in the world because I was away from them, and I was with people who were my actual friends. For the most part we did convoy security, but there were a few times where we'd do route security. From that moment on I was on the road every day for the most part. We got one day off during the week, but the rest of the time we were on the road. I can attest probably about two...two and half weeks, maybe three weeks of where I wasn't shot at, I didn't have to shoot anything, or I didn't have something blow up near me. It's not your average typical duty for a soldier. I think it's like ten percent (10%) that are always on the road over there. You can go from base to base and get shot at and what not, but when it's a day-to-day thing, it's a whole new ballfield because you're getting shot at every day, you're shooting at something every day, you're getting blown up every

day. You're watching the road so vigilantly that when you come home ... I still today, I've been back, what, seven years, and I still watch the road like I'm over there. I can't be around other vehicles ... I'm close to hitting vehicles just to get them out of my way. It's that training that just screws with your head. And that's basically what I did over there, is convoy security and route security. It was very interesting ... the traffic there was insane. It's like, try driving sixty-five miles an hour in New York traffic.

Jakeb Prickett:

Right.

Marcus Laureta:

And literally you have the right of way. If they don't move ... you know those LMTV's (Light Medium Tactical Vehicle) up-armored? Like 50 or 100 tons of steel and engine with three soldiers in there, all of them who have weapons. And they hit you, and they're honking at you, and they're telling you to get the hell out of the way. They get so pissed off that they start throwing water bottles that they pissed in because you can't piss on the side of the road ... you can't stop in the vehicle. So they throw these water bottles at you to get you to move out of the way and you don't move so we take off the back end of the trunk of your car with the vehicle. You still don't move, then they start shooting at you and you're still not moving. To the Iraqis I can see how it was like, "Ok, these guys are just crazy." But to us, it's like, "Look either you move out of the way, or we're going to kill you because we think that you are trying to fuck us over. I'm not dying for your dumb ass," one of those things. It's a kill or be killed situation and, "Fuck you. You're going before me."

Jakeb Prickett:

Right. So did you know ... so you're deploying to Iraq with this support company. It was a battalion or a company?

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah, it was a whole battalion that went. The 27th MSB (Main Support Battalion) battalion that went.

Jakeb Prickett:

Ok. So you get word that you're deploying. Did you know at that point that you were going to be on a gun truck?

Marcus Laureta:

No. But when it came up I prayed that I was going to do it. And I was glad that I got to do it ... on a level that I was with people that I trusted, because there is a thing with soldiers. It doesn't matter who the soldier is, you're going to die for each other no matter what. It's that camaraderie we all share, we're all trained the same way ... "I have your back, you have my back." With the unit I was with, it was just, I didn't click with anybody, with my peers. All my NCOs (Non-commissioned Officers) hated me because I was just a different soldier compared to what they were used to seeing. And I think that has to do with the locality of where they were from. It had some people who were from Washington, D.C., some people from Michigan, some people from Georgia. And here I am, from the Northwest ... not a good mix normally. And they just didn't understand me. And of course, I had just come back from Germany too, which didn't help because ... and what I mean, like when I was talking earlier, is I became culturalized to German culture. I understood things differently than American traditional ways. So they saw me as different or I was foreign I guess ... which kind of put a lot of things in perspective for me. So because of that I didn't get along with anybody. When I get transferred over to the gun truck platoon I'm with these people that I had made friends with and a lot of these guys were ... New Hampshire ... Boston, Massachusetts ... my friend Friels [sp?] is from Arizona. So I mean it's like, back country boys, home field. We're out in the woods, "Oh, let's just go blow something up, fuck it." I mean, it's not how it is in Oregon here, but this was their mentality. And I'm like, "I get you. Let's go do it."

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

We just had a good time. It's pretty much how I ran my gun truck. My NCO, my squad leader, did not like the fact that I ... because I had two years of National Guard. Up at this point I'm six years as an E-4. Well, excuse me, four years in the regular Army and then two years prior service. So here I am, six years time-in-grade. You understand ... I mean I'm getting paid more than this E-5 at three years. And he's like, "This shit isn't cool. Today you are a fucking corporal."

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

So he didn't like me being paid more than him and having no responsibility. That's basically what it was, which, OK fine, whatever. And I think that it's because my unit I was with that they weren't going to promote me. Which, I didn't really care because I didn't want the responsibility to begin with at

that point in my life. Why be in charge of somebody who hates me to begin with? Trying to get them to do ... it's just going to end up fucking you in the ass.

So, they promoted me to corporal and I had a crazy driver. His name was Knowles. This guy, I swear, he should have been put in an asylum after we were done. But, while we were there, I was happy he was in my truck. I would say "hit that car" and he would hit that car. This guy would go so overboard. He created this ... he braided 550 cord [550 Pound-test Nylon Parachute Cord] to like shipyard-strength rope, literally. And he made probably a good twenty-five or fifty feet of it. I can't remember how long ... I know it was twenty five, at least. And then he went to the maintenance bay ... this is without my knowing ... and he literally took the welding machine and made this makeshift grappling hook. And then he wrapped it around in front of our hood of the vehicle. And the first time I saw him I'm like, "What the fuck is that for?" And he's like, "Oh, that's in case we need to move something." I'm like, "When are you going to get the time to get out of your vehicle to move something?" And the sad thing was, I didn't question it because it had already been made, it had already been put on the vehicle. I'm not... "Fine, whatever. Fuck it"... I'm not going to fuck his day up. But we actually ended up using it, which threw me off! We had taken out some vehicles. We had gotten into a little fire fight, and one of the vehicles had blown up and was blocking the road. He just threw the grappling hook in there and we pulled it out and continued on. I'm like, "OK, I can't talk shit. Do what you need to do." It was cool, you know. It was one of those random things were you're just like, "Why?" He was just that crazy. I'm glad I don't know where he lives, because if he lived here, I'd move.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

And then my TC [Truck Commander], was, poor soul, this guy. His name was Barista. It's a weird name, Barista. He was Filipino and Thai. And I'm half Filipino, so him and I kind of got together. It was actually pretty interesting because over there, the people that do your laundry, who are cleaning the restrooms and latrines up, they're Filipinos. So when we realized they were Filipinos, him and I would always go talk to the girls, like, "Hey, you need to bring us some food," because the Filipinos had their own chow hall, one that soldiers couldn't go to. But they made banana lumpia, chicken adobo ... Filipino food that we grew up with. So we got these girls, who are cleaning our latrines, bringing back chicken adobo and all this good Filipino food. Him and I are just in there just digging it up. And of course, regretting it later because the food over there is designed to keep your system a certain way ... and this Filipino food is all fat, grease, and just really good. So, it got us in trouble. But he was fresh out of AIT, and like my stepfather, I was one of those guys that was like, "Hey, I got you man. I'll take care of

everything. Nothing's gonna happen to you ... I got you." He was supposed to be the gunner, but I ended up making him the TC because, fresh out of AIT he didn't need to be sitting there as the gunner trying to make those kinds of choices. I had been in long enough to understand what those choices meant, not just decide what to do.

Jakeb Prickett:

So, you were in the turret running the gun most of the time?

Marcus Laureta:

For the most part, yeah. Either I'd have a .50 cal, or a 240 bravo [M240 B]. The gunners in the turrets were supposed to have M203s on their M-16s, or M-4s, excuse me, I'm thinking of another weapon. He had a 203 [M203 Grenade Launcher], so basically what happened ... I don't know why we had to have a 203, because we didn't get issued 203 grenades.

Jakeb Prickett:

Really?

Marcus Laureta:

It threw me off. It was only until I realized like six months later ... he's like, "Oh, yeah, here are the rounds." And they were the training rounds that you use to train with the 203s. Those are supposed to be used as your warning shots. It's basically a paint round. But it threw me off because there's still a metal slug in there that breaks the plastic outside. And it's like, "You still can kill somebody with this thing! What the ...?" They gave it to me, so I started having fun with it and I started painting cars just for the hell of it.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

People would get too close to me and I'd just paint 'em. And, you know, every once in a while I'd get tired of driving up and always in the gunner. That was a rare occasion, because like I said, that man was crazy. The first time I did it ... because you can't do things over and over because it just becomes monotonous. That's when you become complacent and that's when people die. So, the first day I let him in the truck, we ended up being the rear gun truck. The Iraqis can only follow so close ... during that rule of engagement period [ROE], they could only follow so close to us. And apparently they were

getting too close to us, and all of the sudden I just hear him start firing rounds, and I'm like, "What the hell?" He told me, "Oh, I just drew a dirt line on the road." And I'm like, "What?" He basically drew a line on the road with the rounds and the vehicle stopped being like fifty meters, and they went to two hundred meters out. He's like, "Hey, it kept them away from us." And I'm like, "OK, but it's a little excessive to draw a line with the 240 bravo on the street. Why didn't you just fire a couple of shots? Why don't you let me know next time?" So, it was about a good four or five months before I let him back in the turret.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

They don't question how many rounds we fire over there, because nothing was kept ... the only thing that was kept in control was if all the weapons were locked up, all the sensitive materials were where they were supposed to be. They didn't care how many rounds we fired. They didn't check how many rounds we had for our M-16s. If we needed more rounds we would go to supply and get more rounds. There was no round control over there, so you could just fire rounds just for the hell of it. It was ... pretty insane ... being able to get away with a lot that normally you would think would be under tabs.

Jakeb Prickett:

Did you have the equipment you needed when you got there?

Marcus Laureta:

When I got there, no. What I mean is, I had all the equipment I had. But as far as the vehicles went, when we first got there ... we rolled into Iraq with the doors off the Humvees. An IED [Improvised Explosive Device] goes off, yeah, nobody's living from that. That's what threw me off, like, "How do we go from doors off the Humvees when we first come in, to just straight metal boxes that have no air conditioning?" It just roasted the shit out of you. To me that was the only thing that was missing, the up-armored humvees. The air conditioning systems in those vehicles were just shoddy as hell, and they need to ... it was so bad, the air conditioning system in those vehicles after, I'm thinking like after a month, the Freon would just be fucked. Because it's just outputting the air conditioning system so much that it just ... the Freon dies. Getting your Freon replaced over in Iraq? Yeah, no. That's the only complaint I think I had about the gear. As far as the vehicles, the protection we had for the vehicles. As far as gear for ourselves? Oh my god ... I came home with two Gortex jackets, three pairs of those ... they actually made specially designed tennis shoe boots, suede tan. And you know how heavy those boots are ... those

boots are like eight, nine ounces apiece? The tennis-shoe boots they made were like three ounces. Oh, they were gorgeous man, I loved them! A six ounce difference on your feet makes a huge difference, especially when you've got a flak vest, SAPPI plates, LBE or LVE (Load Bearing Equipment), and then six magazines full of rounds. Six ounces makes a difference.

Jakeb Prickett:

How many pounds of gear would you say that you wore on a daily basis?

Marcus Laureta:

Oh, at least a hundred and fifty plus. Especially as the leader of the truck ... I can't remember the term for it ... I also had the CLS (Combat Life Saver) bag ... certain things that each leader of each truck would have like maps and what not ... SINCGARS radio codes, shit like that. So, on top of that, I probably carried like thirty more pounds than the normal non-responsible soldier would have ... the non-sergeants, the privates and the E4s ... and yet I was an E4. Yeah, I carried a lot of weight over there. It definitely messed me up a little bit.

Jakeb Prickett:

Yeah, I imagine it took a toll on your body, physically.

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah.

Jakeb Prickett:

I'd like to hear about what your daily life was like outside of the convoys. What you did, if you had free time on the deployment ... what you did for entertainment to take your mind off of combat operations?

Marcus Laureta:

Oh, I didn't need a day off for entertainment. There were about sixteen or eighteen of us from ... like I said, most of my friends were in this platoon. The majority of the platoon that came from the gun truck was from bravo company, and bravo company was where a lot of my friends were. So what we'd do is, we'd basically come home after mission, after taking supplies somewhere, and either getting shot at or shooting at, the whole nine yards ... only to come back and play Halo 2 [video game] to blow each other up on the TV. That was our way of relaxing, you know ... just blowing each other up. We'd get in these

sixteen on sixteen ... excuse me ... eight on eight, so sixteen people ... pick the smallest level and just go rockets. I mean, you couldn't spawn for more than a second and a half, I swear to God. But it felt good, because you'd get like five seconds of life and in that five seconds you would kill like four or six people ... oh man. And the whole time people around us would get pissed off in the rooms next to us, going, "Get that mother fucker!" just yelling at each other, you know. Then we'd come out and talk shit and go back and do it again. That's actually how I earned one of my nicknames from Iraq. It's going to sound weird, but the nickname I got was Magic Waffles.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

You'll understand here in a minute. When you're playing video games, especially like Halo 2 or Battlefield 3, or Modern Warfare, whatever the case may be ... when you get into the pre-game, you see everybody who joins. You don't look at the names of the people. You're like, "Start the fucking game, I want to shoot somebody. I want to kill someone. I just want to destroy." That's just the mentality. And it's only when you're in a game that you realize that you're being killed so much by this one person. What had happened is, we had kind of got this little inside game of who can come up with the craziest name. It was just the day I was like, "Oh how about Magic Waffles? I'll just go with that." And that happened to be the day I went on this like twenty-seven killing spree and was just fucking shit up. Basically we were playing fifty-kill death match, or team death-match. And here I had more than half the team's kills. They'd see me at the top of the list in the game ... it was like forty-eight and fourteen. By the time we got to forty-eight I went outside and started lighting my cigarette, and J.J., my buddy, he was coming out. As I'm lighting the cigarette I hear the door swing open from the other room ... we played in separate rooms so we couldn't cheat and look at each other's screens, and the only people between were our friends who couldn't see the enemies ... and so my sergeant comes out and he's like, "Who the fuck is Magic Waffles?" And my buddy J.J.'s like, "What? You don't know about the magicness of the waffle?" And from that day on, anytime I would come around the gun trucks and I would be checking our trucks, I'd hear, "I can hear the magicness," or "Feel the magicness coming up." The name stuck with me. That wasn't the only original name around there. There was my buddy, Torrin. His name was The Milkman. It was this play on, "I'm gonna come to your mom's house" type of deal.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

It wasn't just that. There were some pretty ingenious names. It's just that's what kind of started the whole, "OK, who can come up with the craziest name?" That's how that name stuck to me, and from that day on I just played with Magic Waffles ... just so they knew who I was.

When I actually had days off, I'd go and buy pogie bait ... movies to watch, you know, in the barracks room. Basically I would sit inside and keep cool, watch movies, sleep, make phone calls if I needed to make phone calls. It was actually pretty interesting ... there were a bunch of females, it was coed and everything ... the funny thing was, there was a beauty shop there. I saw more males in that beauty shop than I did females. And it was interesting because more males would go there and get facials ... more males would go in there and get manicures, pedicures, the whole nine yards. It made sense to me because if you think about it, it's a spa for us. It's like, "Let's go relax." While they're giving you a pedicure and manicures and all that, they massage your fucking hands, they massage your arms, your legs. And you're just like, "Fffff ... yeah, I'm not in Iraq right now." It was do anything you can to get your mind off of being in Iraq. The problem is, you'd step outside in that heat and you knew where you were. Whatever you could do to get your mind off Iraq, whether it's blowing each other up on Halo 2 ... going to the beauty salon ... going to get on the Internet and check your emails, which we had access to at that point. A lot of the stuff was rundown, what we could get our hands on to. But for the most part it was either watch movies, go to the spa, or sleep.

Jakeb Prickett:

What were your living quarters like?

Marcus Laureta:

My living quarters ... I had a room with a roommate. For the most part it was pretty small. I can show you how it looks.

(ML takes out cell phone and shows photo of living quarters to Jakeb Prickett and Casey Klekas. Photo is of a small, dorm-type room, inside a metal shipping container. An army cot with a sleeping bag sits to one side of the photo).

For the most part it was like a little trailer, really, a trailer.

Jakeb Prickett:

Right. So you slept on that cot the whole year?

Marcus Laureta:

You could go buy a bed. I was like, “Fuck that, dude.” This was like three months after we got there. Originally we were sleeping in warehouses...it was hot all day...just fucking hated life. These at least had air conditioning. I had a cot, and this rug was a plastic rug that they made. It has a little Middle Eastern culture design to it. Pretty much, a small TV, three sets of drawers. It was just sleep, watch TV, stay in an air conditioned place. It got the job done. The only bad thing about it was mortars that would land around there. Those things did nothing ... no protection what so ever from the mortars. I didn't bring the picture for that, but we had a mortar round that landed ten meters from my room.

Jakeb Prickett:

Wow.

Marcus Laureta:

I had happened to have been sleeping. I think it actually was one of my days off. While you're over there, at least for me, and most of the males that I knew, we slept in our boxers. Like, “We're in this fucking gear all day long. Fuck this. This is the only way I can sleep, in my boxers.” I was sleeping, and my roommate actually had the day off too, so he was sleeping. He was still part of alpha company working as a mechanic. A mortar hit near, like ten meters. We both jumped up like, “What the fuck was that?” As we're both saying it, we hear the dirt hit the top of our roof. We're like, “Fuck this,” and we flew out of the room. I did not grab my rifle, I did not grab my clothes ... I didn't even put shoes on my feet. It's not just sand out there. Where we were at, there's rocks to keep the sand down from getting inside of the rooms. So when I ran out, I get into the jersey barriers that kind of protect us from these mortar attacks. My first sergeant was a female, and she looks at me and ... I can't remember his name ... she looks at me and him and we're both here in our boxers, no weapons, no nothing. “Where the fuck's your shit? Go in and get your weapons.” And I'm like, “You go get the fucking weapon. I'm staying right the fuck here.” It's one thing if you hear an explosion. To me that was an everyday occurrence, for the most part. But not that close, and not having dirt hit the top of my building. I'm sorry, that's like, “Oh! They have me zeroed in. Get the fuck out!” So yeah, shitty day there ... of many.

Jakeb Prickett:

Were you involved in any major operations during the deployment?

Marcus Laureta:

Uh, the only major operation was taking supplies from base to base, which is the main operation for a support battalion.

Jakeb Prickett:

That's an operation in itself, yeah.

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah.

Jakeb Prickett:

Were you able to take a pass or leave while you were there?

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah. I got to take R and R. I actually went back to Germany for my R and R. It actually gave me an extra day on my leave time too, because everybody else has to spend a day getting back to the States. And then on top of that flight, once they get in the States they have to fly from that point to wherever is their final destination. So, I got an extra day of leave out of going to visit friends in Germany. At the time I was dating a girl who was German. I stayed with her. I got to see my friends, go to ... like I said earlier ... I got to visit my old unit again and talk to them. That was fun. That's pretty much what I did for my R and R. I got to see my ex again.

Jakeb Prickett:

So, once you redeployed back to the States, at that point, were you set to get out? Or did you still have time left?

Marcus Laureta:

Oh yeah. They said, "You have two months to get out." The process of getting out of the military is no joke. You have to turn in all of your TA-50, which is basically all of your field gear. You have to do all of your dental work ... all of your medical work. You have to sign out of the PX [Post Exchange] making sure you have no outstanding debt in the PX. You have to sign out of not only the unit, the battalion, but the brigade as well ... a lot of signatures. I had to get like probably twenty-five to thirty plus signatures to get out. The biggest thing on ETSing [End Time of Service] was the physical for the medical. The problem with the physical is a lot of people got stop-lossed for getting deployed to Iraq.

Because of that, it created such a long list for physicals to be done. The nearest appointment I could get was my physical was like three months out. So that means I would have had to spend another six months in the military. You have the option of taking it or waiving it and I said, "Fuck you. I'm waiving it. You guys already held me ten months past my fucking ETS. Fuck you. I'm gone."

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

That's pretty much where I was. It was like, "You guys send me to this place where I get shot at, blown up at, forced to make choices that I really don't want to make." And of course by choices I mean life and death situation choices. I was done, I wanted out. So, I got out. I waived that. And my first sergeant...not the first sergeant I was talking about earlier, the female. She actually got in trouble. She got caught sleeping with one of our platoon sergeants. And they were both married.

Jakeb Prickett:

Oh wow.

General laughter

Marcus Laureta:

So, my actual platoon sergeant from alpha company that I belonged to, he became acting first sergeant. This dude had the audacity to come tell me a week before I actually got out, "You know, if you stay in, on the 1st you get promoted up to sergeant." And I'm sitting there like, "So? That's not gonna get me. If forty grand in Iraq's not gonna get me to reenlist, you think having a chevron is gonna make me stay in? Are you serious right now?" So yeah, I got out and said, "Fuck you," pretty much. That's the way of the military, you know? "Oh, let me try and goad you to stay in." "No. I'm not an idiot." This was just a means to an end to get me to, you know ... hopefully at the end of these next two years I'll get my degree.

Jakeb Prickett:

Is your military service paying for your college right now?

Marcus Laureta:

Oh yeah. I'm definitely getting that money to use. I will use every nickel I can.

Jakeb Prickett:

One thing I would like to know is, I'm sure that before the deployment you had certain ideas about Iraq and about what it would mean to be there. Did your feelings change compared to before and after, coming back?

Marcus Laureta:

See, that's a tricky question for me, because I don't have the traditional view of a soldier ... the "Be all you can be" American proud soldier, "Fuck 'em, kill 'em all" type shit. When I was stationed in Germany, one of the influences in my life was my ex-fiancé's father. He was a philosophy professor and got me into philosophy. I started reading a lot of different philosophical texts like Nietzsche, Heidegger, the whole nine yards. Basically European philosophy for the most part, which also can be considered western philosophy. It opened me up to a lot of things, to the fact of being open. You just can't judge people based on, "Oh, you're wrong because your culture is wrong." I mean, that's just not the right way to look at things. So because of that, my view of Iraq wasn't necessarily bad or anything. My question was, "Why are we going to Iraq on this argument that Colin Powell made, that there WMDs there?" That's what my question was.

For the most part, when I got there, other than all the combat and war, I did get to interact with a lot of locals. For me, that was the best thing for me because I got to understand a bit of their culture, they got to understand a bit of American culture as far as not the ignorant and arrogant, as far as I considered. I know I'm ignorant and arrogant, but not on a level like some of these soldiers are. So, I got to share this culture with them. I didn't go around like all these other soldiers buying prayer rugs and prayer beads and all this shit they took home ... like they're buying Iraqi culture. That, I didn't understand. I do, however, have a prayer rug. But it's not one I bought. I traded with one of the locals I had become really good friends with. I had known him for about eight months during my tour. We ended up trading an American artifact for an Iraqi artifact. It was among friends. I wasn't buying anything. It was a "Oh, this is to remember me by" type of thing. You know, I have it, and it is in my house. It reminds me of him, because we had that relationship. Not as Iraqi and American, but as human to human. That's what I look at. It's like, "You can't judge these people based on how they are." Yeah a lot of them are fighting for their religious beliefs, or they think America is a bunch of infidels. It's the educational level. They think America's bad, they think American's are bad. So when they see these soldiers coming into their country and overtake their country, I can see how they see that. The relationships I had alone were like, "Look, personally, me, I'm not here to overtake your country. I'm here because my government ordered me to be here. All I can do is have these conversations and talk to you. Have some kind of a trust and hopefully

build that trust so you can say, 'Not all Americans are bad'." That was the message to a lot of Americans, that that's what these Iraqis thought of us, that we're bad, we're just dominating their whole country. So my ideas of Iraq were not typical of every other soldier. My ideas of Iraq were like, "This is a country that has been under duress from a dictatorship that just abused them and used them." The only flaw I saw in my argument was, here we are doing the same thing by overtaking their country and trying to force our democracy down on them. It's not for us to decide their democracy, it's for them. Of course, who am I to tell our government that? Our government's going to do whatever they want, unfortunately. And out of this, a lot of discourse came with me on my personal experience with the locals and what not there. I took a lot from them, and they took a lot from me through our conversations. I guess that's the best way I can probably answer that question.

Jakeb Prickett:

Yeah, well, that is a complex question.

Marcus Laureta:

You know, it is. It really is. And that's why I say it's tricky for me. Because, like I said, I'm not the average soldier. I got out because I wanted an education. For the most part of lot of the people that join the military, they cannot afford to go to school. My roommate, he had already served and he was forced to rejoin because he was, like, fifty grand in debt. And not through school or anything, but through a divorce with his ex-wife. So it's like, a lot of the reasons people make choices around the military aren't because they want to serve. It's because they're forced to, it's their last result. If I ever get put in a position, I know it's there, as a last resort.

Jakeb Prickett:

Did you have any family in the military?

Marcus Laureta:

My stepfather. I met him when I was nine. He was in the Navy at the time. When he married my mother, I believe it was after the Navy. A few years later he joined the Oregon National Guard as well. He was one of the main reasons I joined the military. I found out later that my grandfather on my real dad's side of the family had spent some time during World War II in the Philippines. He was Filipino, so he was part of the integration of Filipinos in the Army over there, and that's how they immigrated over here, to America. My dad's grandfather was a P-51 [WWII aircraft] mechanic. My stepfather was the main reason why I joined the military. That and because my family could not afford to pay my schooling

for college. I mean, I have two sisters and a brother. What money do they have to pay for my college, pretty much, right? It was a means to getting my education as well.

Jakeb Prickett:

Just a couple of more questions. Was there anything about your experience overall in the military that just really surprised you, or you weren't expecting?

Marcus Laureta:

I'd have to say, the biggest surprise to me about the military was something that I've learned from my experiences in Iraq. That is, this ability that humans have to look at people as nonhuman. And it scares me because, in essence, that's how humans interact in our world, through extension. I'm human. This is an object. I interact with this object. The problem is, when you put two humans together and have them interact with each other it's a human-to-human interaction. But there's a mode that happens when a human looks at a person and says, "Oh, you have something I want" or "You have something I need." That whole level. And that want or need or mistrust, whatever the case may be, ends up causing that human to look at that person as non-human. What I say about this is this is the choice of life and death situation I talk about in Iraq. I know you're a veteran, so you'll understand what I'm saying here (*points to JP*). And this will help you understand as well (*points to CK*). When you look at the choice you have to make ... when someone is pointing a gun at you, or a weapon at you, and you're pointing a weapon at them, it becomes "Either it's you or me." A lot of people, veterans, get asked, "Have you killed anybody?" or "Have you shot a woman? Have you shot a kid?" These ignorant questions that people ask veterans, I just want to smack the shit out of them. It's those questions ... it has nothing to do with them being a woman. It has nothing to do with them being a child. It has nothing to do with how old they are. When it becomes kill or be killed, you have to look at that person and strip their humanity away from them. That's the only way you can pull the trigger. Because you have to shoot without remorse. You have to pull that trigger without regret. Without any morals. And that's what gives you that ability to not look at their age, not look at their gender, not look at if they are a child or a woman. That's the only way you can do it. And so it's this ability to look at people inhuman, which I recognize from it. It's that same ability, looking at people inhuman, that I see people doing every day and not realize it. That's the biggest thing that surprised me ... that if I have this ability to do this, to kill someone, that means everybody else does. So, where are we now? That's never going to change because this is how pretty much colonialism, modernity, everything that has come up to America. Especially in North America, this is how we run our country when we go into other countries. We go to Iraq ... people say it's because we went there for

WMDs, people say it's for oil. In purpose, the reason we're in Iraq ... now this is my personal opinion ... the reason we're in Iraq is that we need a presence there. Because there is so much shit going on there with religious wars, that that place is just going to fucking blow up and go crazy. And if we're not there, we have no means to control anything that happens there. So if another Saddam Hussein comes up, or another Osama bin Laden comes up, and we're not there, that's going to end up being another Hitler. That's why we stayed in Germany for so long. We only recently started shutting down the bases in Germany once we started going into Kuwait and Iraq. It's one of those things, people should be able to pick up on it but they don't. This is that problem where as long as we are going to have these differences we're all going to look at each other as nonhumans. And that's the thing that surprised me about my experience in Iraq. I know that's a lot to bite down on.

Jakeb Prickett:

No, that's a good response.

Marcus Laureta:

A lot to bite down on and think about there. But, that's what I've found.

Jakeb Prickett:

Is there anything about your service that you think would surprise someone who as not served, or maybe even served in a different branch of the military?

Marcus Laureta:

It would have to be camaraderie. You can never have a friendship or a connection with another person ... not through serving in the military, but actually going into combat with the military. I have four friends that I still talk to, and I talk to them almost every week, that I served with over there. That connection that you have between brothers in arms ... I mean, if you watch *Band of Brothers*, if you watch *Saving Private Ryan* [movies set in WWII], it will have it in there. I'm pretty sure the movie coming up, *Act of Valor*, is going to definitely have it in there. For the most part, there's this connection that happens between two people, or two humans, or more than two humans ... but for the most part between two people ... in combat that is a connection that goes beyond friendship. It goes beyond brothers and sisters and family. You basically become part of each other's family. The connection you have between each other, like the connection I have with Chris and Ken and Jay, it's a connection that I can never have with my mother, that I can never have with my sister or my brother. The strange part is that I had this connection with my stepfather because he served. We always were coming and going in the same areas. He was in Germany with me when September 11 happened. He was leaving Iraq when I was

entering Iraq. It's very strange. It's that connection that you can't find with another person who's outside of your family without that combat. But, I don't wish anybody to go to combat to make that connection at the same time, because it's not something that I would recommend doing. But, that experience of having that connection with somebody is something I'm going to cherish for the rest of my life, definitely.

Jakeb Prickett:

Yeah, that's a connection that's just not easily made.

Marcus Laureta:

Oh yeah.

Jakeb Prickett:

It's not easily broken either once it is made.

Marcus Laureta:

Yeah, oh yeah.

Agreeable laughter

Jakeb Prickett:

Well, that's all the questions I have for you. Do you have anything that you would like to add?

Marcus Laureta:

Not really, I mean, I've talked a lot today. The only thing I guess I could say is, don't ask that ignorant question of soldiers.

Jakeb Prickett:

Right.

Marcus Laureta:

If a soldier trusts you enough to talk about his experience, or her experience, about whatever combat they saw ... or their military experience, whatever the case may be ... take it as an honor for them to tell you that stuff because it's something that's really hard to talk about. It's taken me seven years to get to here. I mean, I've had PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) for seven years. My first year after being home, I just sat in a room all day playing video games on the fucking computer. Depressed for a year, playing this video game was my escape from reality. I didn't want to face anything. I had this view that how could anybody understand what I went through. How can I have a connection with someone who

is not in the military anymore? These things play on us, and PTSD is no joke. Especially combat PTSD. There's a huge difference between the two. I always use PTSD, and it should be combat PTSD.

The thing is, I understand when people say, "Thanks for your service." I understand what they are trying to do. But, there's just no way you can thank that. It's like me trying to say, "Oh, thank you for washing my windshield," or something so trite. I mean it really is. The military is a job, and most of us don't sign up to go to war. I joined in '98. In '98 I didn't even think there was going to be a war. What the hell happened? I don't know. Somebody attacked us, that's what happened.

When a soldier talks about his or her experience, at least for me ... not to sound all egotistical or something ... but it's basically to share their knowledge of what happened, of what I've experienced. This in some way puts me as an empiricist because I live through my experiences. The whole reason my major's philosophy is to put reasoning and put meaning to these experiences that I've experienced in Iraq. So when I share it, it's in hopes to share some of that knowledge that I've learned from these experiences with other people in hopes that they can understand ... maybe not get, but understand ... what I'm trying to pass along. This is one of the big reasons why I chose to do this interview is because I want to pass that knowledge along, and let people know that war is no joke. It's something that will literally affect somebody for the rest of their life. I know I have to live with PTSD for the rest of my life, just as well as a lot of Vietnam veterans, Korean veterans, World War II veterans ... I think that actually the last World War I veteran just died recently. I mean, it's something that they go through. One of the biggest thing's that I've noticed is when I was going through group therapy ... when I was going through how to handle this PTSD ... I met this sixty-seven year old World War II veteran, and this guy spoke exactly the same way like if he was still in combat . You know, he used racial slurs ... I could see how fucked in the head he was. I see where I'm at now, and I know I've made a lot of progress with my PTSD. And I see where he is at, and it's like, "Is this because his wasn't caught early on? Or is this just because his experience of his war was different than mine?" The only connection that I can say is, each war is different, and his experience is definitely going to be different than mine. He should have had that help when he got out, just like I did. That's my whole worry, that this PTSD is always going to affect me ... it's going to screw me over in the end ... and I don't want it to. So, be careful when you talk to soldiers about their experiences, because some of them might not what to talk about it.

Jakeb Prickett:

Thank you for sharing that ... those personal aspects of your service, and for contributing to the veteran's archival project. I appreciate it.

Marcus Laureta:

You're very welcome.

Jakeb Prickett:

This will conclude our interview.

TRANSCRIPTION NOTE

The context of the entire audio interview has been recorded in this transcript verbatim.

For the purpose of ease of reading and clarification, some words occurring in the interview audio have been dropped from the transcription. Dropped words include instances of:

- False starts: interviewee or interviewer began a sentence or thought, and then started over.
- Filler words/phrases, such as: *like, you know, whatever the case may be, so, umm, I mean, basically, you know what I'm saying...etc.*
- In some instances, filler words were included if they were deemed important to the written tone of the conversation, or to provide contextual accuracy.

- In a couple of instances, both the interviewer and interviewee talk at the same time. For ease of understanding, these instances have been separated into two separate dialogue lines, and appear in the transcript as each individual speaking solely.

- The use of ellipsis (...) in this transcript DOES NOT indicate omission of the audio. It is used to indicate a spoken thought mid-sentence, to indicate trailing into silence, or to indicate a transition from one subject to another, mid-sentence.

- Acronyms or uncommon terms have been followed by brief explanations, indicated by *(italicized text)*.

- One short anecdote from the audio has been removed from the transcript per request of the interviewee.