

John Corns Transcription

Dean Wetzel: Hello my name is Dean Wetzel. I am the interviewer. I am here with John Corns who is interviewee. This project is through oral history at Western Michigan University for the Library of Congress Oral History for veterans. John if you could introduce yourself and today's date. Yea and start with that.

John Corns: Alright. My name is John Corns. It is March sixteen, two thousand and twenty-three.

Wetzel: Ok.

Corns: I am the interviewee

Wetzel: Continuing on pass the introduction. So, John, start off just where were you born?

Corns: I was born in Alexandria, Virginia.

Wetzel: Who are your parents and what did they do for work?

Corns: John Michael Corns and Rebecca Susan Bowen Corns are my mom or my father and my mother.

My dad was a computer uh software engineer he recently retired and my mom bounced around a little bit, stay at home mom but she ended by owning a jewelry store. She also has retired.

Wetzel: Did you have any siblings and did anybody in your immediate family ever serve before?

Corns: Yes, I have two sisters, one older one younger. My older sister joined the Air Force um approximately two to four years before I joined the Marine Corps, and my grandfather was in the army for 35 years. Retired as the lieutenant general.

Wetzel: and which branch did you join?

Corns: I was in the United States Marine Corps

Wetzel: and when did you join the marines?

Corns: I joined in August of 2014

Wetzel: Now, was that right out of high school?

Corns: No, I was 26 years old

Wetzel: What kept you from joining right out of high school?

Corns: Um I was on different paths. Just out of high school I went and did other stuff instead of joining the military. I almost did in 2007, right after high school, my grandfather talked me out of it.

Wetzel: OK so you went in so you joined in August you obviously shipped out to boot camp then or was that when you dubbed in and dubbed in is just the process of like entering military service.

Corns: yeah, no I dubbed in eleven months before that I was in the late entry program for 11 months and then I left for boot camp in August of 2014

Wetzel: how was that?

Corns: Boot camp?

Wetzel: Yeah

Corns: It's definitely a game. It's definitely a game. And being older I had a lot more patience for it at times. Also, being older I had a lot less patience.

Wetzel: anything you remember standing out as you were to reflect back on it like any positive's good bad negatives.

Corns: I was really self-conscious about being 26 years old and once we became marines it was our last week in the squad bay and our heavy drill instructor was walking up and down the highways

lights had gone out and was asking us if we had any questions people are asking all kinds of questions about the Marine Corps what comes next, what the fleet was like and I said what do you think of older individuals joining the Marine Corp and he stopped walking and he hadn't stopped walking yet and he stopped walking and he said better late than never and he just kept walking next question. So, that that was pretty reassuring. I remember that very vividly. I also remember looking across the squad Bay at my buddy, Bottine, he was directly across from me most of the time and ended up serving all four years in the exact same platoon with him my whole time, from boot camp on and then I remember my buddy Prophet who was my rack mate who was also from Virginia and he ended up in the same unit first battalion 5th marines he was an alpha company.

Wetzel (4:15): After boot camp where did you go? What was the next station after boot camp?

Corns: After boot camp and boot leave camp we headed off to Camp Geiger from the School of Infantry on the East Coast

Wetzel: Is that where you also attended bootcamp? East Coast

Corns: No, yes, I was East Coast I was an East Coast boot, but I was that wasn't at Geiger. That was at Parris Island.

Wetzel: Just to kind of place the whole situation was Parris Island, Geiger... where they are in the same base in the same location or were they different places?

Corns: So, Paris Island is outside of Beaufort, South Carolina, yeah, South Carolina and then Geiger is outside is Jacksonville, North Carolina. So, they're not very close together. No, I think one in the northern portion of South Carolina, one is in the northern portion of North Carolina. Both on the coast

Wetzel: How were the sand fleas?

Corns: The sand fleas were pretty bad and the drill instructors like marching back and forth through them which is always fun because they'd be like clouds. What you've learned is that if you moved really slowly you could scratch your face and no one would notice. You just had to move really slow when you're marching around.

Wetzel: I bet that was fun.

Corns: Yeah

Wetzel: Well in ITB (Infantry Training Battalion), what were the best and worst parts that stand out to you particularly?

Corns (6:00): Alright at ITB um Infantry Training Battalion but stood out the most that I can remember that I got to shoot my first missile there. We were also going through training with it was kind of like there test period for the Marine Corps but it was the female marines going through the infantry school with us.

Wetzel: How was that? Female marines being interducted (introduced) first time around you?

Corns: Um being older was very helpful but you could tell the young bucks the 18 19 year olds, they had a hard time concentrating. You know boot camp you're separated the all the sudden there's ten women in this company of what like probably 100 and 150 men, young men. They were all our platoon. They were all in weapons none of them were 0311s they were all either 0311 being riflemen you're either 0331 machine gunner, 0341 mortarmen, or 0352 missileman. We had one female in our section. It was, It was, I never had a problem training with the females. My problem is training with males who are training with females. I think of in the movie GI Jane the

seal instructor says it best, you know, they're not the problem, we are, and he is not talking about women being in combat units. He is talking about men being around females in the combat units and not being able to get the job done when they are around. So, that was that was that was that was that was frustrating. The instructors were great. I had a number of conversations with them about with the females students as well how they felt about females and the like as far as long as you can do the job. As long as you do the job, we don't care. which meant if I get shot pick me up or drive me out of the line of fire if you will. So that's essentially what they got at.

Now how the females worked though the first half of ITB is 03 training, basic infantry skills and then they could um drop it at that point they could drop out if they wanted to freely. No problems. You know they're allowed to DOR at that point. Once you started I forget the consequences I don't think there was much of one work they had it was this this was the second MOS. they already had their primary that they were gonna go to that school after 03 training and more 03 specialty whatever special was but what happened was most of them make it to the infantry no problem. They had no problem getting through most of them, couple of them quit really early, like this was this isn't for me. Most of them got through no problem. I think one or two DOR at the halfway point went off to their schoolhouses for their original MOS's. Then I think only like three or four actually graduated with us because the hiking in the second-half is what got up with the heavies, with the machine guns, with you know simulated missile rounds, uh you know all that stuff the hiking intensified they're dropping than but mostly was a good experience.

Corns: Um about half the guys I went through 0352 training with I ended up at 1/5 CAT, um you know, with my buddies Ethan Eversole, um and Dean, a bunch a bunch of guys,..Bottine, Chimirri, it

goes on and on, there was Chang, there was like nine or ten of us that made this 1/5 out of my 52 class. Which only had probably 15 guys in it so.

Wetzel: Do any of your instructors... do you remember any of them, who you got taught by?

Corns (10:19): yeah so 0352 instructor was Sergeant Zello. He was he was you know all of them were serious combat vets. We had a machine gun instructor that went away halfway through he was there for infantry then he showed up our last week and we had found out where we were getting stationed, and he was asking he was like Oh no kidding you guys going to 1/5 oh I was in CAT there that's where you guys will end up but he went on deployment. I forget his name, is from West Virginia and then we had a Mormon instructor. Oh no I had his name, um, Sergeant, uh shucks I lost it. But he was he was pretty cool too. Um it was good instructors, it was definitely. Zello was awesome.

Wetzel: Awesome. You kind of already hinted at this but after your ITB after the boot camp experience you say you went to 1/5. Where was 1/5 in all that?

Corns: 1/5 is the first battalion five marines are the first green division which is stationed at camp Pendleton. The 62-area camp Mateo on camp Pendleton which is the one of the most northern camps on Pendleton. so that's where I spent the majority of my enlistment, was there.

Wetzel: How was it moving across the country? You know we all talk about the hardships of leaving family on deployments and friends on deployments. Obviously, South Carolina's a whole lot closer to your home in Virginia than California what was that experience like? Was there a lot of friction there for you?

Corns (11:59): Not in regards to moving, no, not really and your so busy when you first get there as a boot. You're so busy. You're a new join to the fleet. You trying you know at that time you know

that. I got there wanna say January February of 2015, so we still believed that there was a chance we'd end up in Afghanistan. um so when we got there you know, you're new they're not really explaining much to you, they're just telling you what you have to learn. This is what you have to learn, and this is why. Which is the keep other people alive. So, it was a little, it was pretty heavily focused on keeping...keeping up on what I needed to learn and making sure I was physically fit enough to do the job. So, I didn't have a lot of time. I hated life. um Everyone hates being the new join and being the boot and having to pick up cigarettes every morning, having to sweep the catwalk and having your seniors walk through your room every Thursday night. Just be super anal about how cleanly your room is, your barracks room and dust bunnies under...it's miserable. But it is for everybody and there's a reason why they make it difficult um multiple reasons and I don't know if our seniors necessarily understood the multiple reasons. I think they just enjoyed the hazing of it. There's supposed to be a rhyme, not a rhyme but a reason behind all that. So, when we became seniors, we tried to keep that reason there, I think it kind of upset us that our seniors weren't as cognitive of the fact that this is a part of training, this isn't just enjoyment because your bored. It's supposed to teach them you got to keep your area clean, you have to stay on top of stuff, to be responsible as well as a little bit of hazing in order to induce a friction into your lifestyle that you would experience if you were to go to combat. Um so yea there's the answer there, I guess.

Wetzel (14:23): now so to back track a little bit cause you use a couple terms here. Can I have you fully elaborate what exactly constitutes a boot, cause I think of a shoe. You talk about cleaning a lot. How does that play into the military? We will start with those two questions.

Corns: A boot is a new join Marine. I think you'll see I tried to say that, but I may have skimmed over it to quickly. But it's a common term used especially in the infantry used to describe new joins. A

lot of people, especially higher ups found it to be degrading, like new joins not, I called myself a boot. I kind of owned it and then took all the bite right out of it. You know my seniors would laugh; "you call yourself a boot?" Well, don't you call me a boot, aren't I a boot? They would say "Well, yea." Well, I am a boot. It'll go away soon. It's a rite of passage. It's just a term used.

In regard to the cleaning, so, when you are enlisted and living on base in the barracks there's many different reasons why you do such intensive cleaning. One, you know, so that you learn some discipline, it keeps you disciplined. It's the same reason when you go to the field you shave when you go in the field. It keeps a pattern because when things get bad it's nice to have a pattern, something you can control. Because in combat there's not a lot that you can control from what I've learned or been told. I never experienced it myself. But I'm sure we'll get there. But no it's not, as well as you're living in a government building so they need to maintain the building and they should try to make it last for as long as possible, especially for marines we don't get a large budget. In the 62 area the most... the newest infantry barracks were donated by a wealthy family from San Clemente. His son, I believe died in Afghanistan, or Iraq was it. I think maybe it is one or the other. I can't remember his name now but Duggan Duggan something like that but yeah no, so maintain the facilities and then there's always we're living in close proximity. So, we're living in such close proximity to make sure your area is clean in order to avoid you know germs, infections, all the good stuff.

Wetzel: OK thank you for that. You also talked, I think, you used the word field day?

Corns: Yeah, field day. So, once a week, it's a Marine Corps thing. All Marine Corps, some chain of commands decides it's gonna be on one day. Most decide on Thursday. The reason why it is the end of the week but that way you're not cleaning on a Friday night. You can get it clean, go to work on Friday. Friday evening. Hopefully you're giving a libo and you've got the, which is

liberty, they give you time off for your weekend because the military owns you so you're you know seven days a week, all year round until they tell you can leave and usually, hopefully on a Friday they say you can leave you have you have your 48 hours of the weekend to enjoy before you have to be back.

Wetzel: So, I guess kind of sum it up. Have you had any specialized training outside of your military occupation specialty?

Corns: Um, yeah I got so there's certain rank training. So, like when you reach a certain rank you go through Lance Corporal seminar. Which is really basic training. it focuses more on less on rank more on what you should be expected to know as an infantry man and then it also kind of preps you for becoming a NCO. and then once you become an NCO you pick up E4, corporal. Then go to Corporal course. Corporals Course teaches you leadership skills. Some you know some practices. It reiterates a lot of the Marine Corps you know honor courage commitment and because it kind of it's a refresher course of some of the basic things you learned in boot camp as well as it builds on things in drill. It also builds on like I said leadership traits and gives you scenarios to work through as a group and sometimes they have some pretty cool people come through and tell you some pretty wild stories about their time in the military specifically combat since I was infantry, so there's a lot of that. And then after that I uh let's see uh ... some I wasn't I never actually did it, but I went to ammo driver's course. So, I would have got certified to drive explosives and by vehicle whatever I've been certified to drive in a vehicle. At that point it was a Humvee only. So, I could drive ammo to and from a range or from the depot to the range from the range to the depot. And I was certified to handle it. I also got geez, so we got it's called a heat trainer. I don't remember what it stands for but it's a rollover for a Humvee training. I got that. I also got; I forget what was that there was a helo. So, it was you going to the pool they put you in

a fake helo and they flipped it, after you do some other training in the shallow end. And then you have to egress. So, I think it's helo egress or something like that. And it's to prepare you for the Helo goes down in water. and they flip it because helicopters are heavier on top so as soon as they hit the water they go to flip over and then they slowly go down. So, you flip over and in this they submerge you as you submerge you flip and then you have to take your gear off, take the buckle off, find your window or exit whatever it maybe you have to exit the helo at that point. So, we did that I didn't I was supposed to do that twice you're supposed to do it between before every deployment that involves flying in a helicopter over water so when you're on a marine Expeditionary unit or part of that you travel by water lot. I'm sure we'll get to that.

Corns: But yeah so, we did that I also got training as an RSO so I was a range safety officer certified. They sent us to go do that. I only RSO 1 range, thankfully. That's a little stressful. and they're all senior marines who just came back from deployment on my second deployment so that worked out great. Everyone knew the rifle safety rules and it was just the BZO range. so but yeah no other than that yeah combat triage type of training I got that constantly though. One of our Sergeant Major, the head enlisted of our battalion his rule I think it was know your combat care, or teach your marines combat care and that's just so if someone gets hurt at the very least they know how to patch you up at the minimum. They can stop the bleeding and they get make sure you're breathing. there's kind of the most important two parts of that. but other than that... I actually did some fast roping; we did some fast roping so I got some helo operations so I had to learn how to faster about of different types of helicopters; rotor wing vehicles I should say as well as at different heights. so, all the way from 10 feet to 90 feet. I think is what we did that's about it.

Wetzel (22:42): promotions what was your entry rank your end rank and (what did promotions look like) look like?

Corns: Alright I entered as a private So a E1 boot camp I eventually got out as a Sergeant in a E5. I I've made it let's see how do they look like. It's interesting because I was lucky because I had an MOS that would promote you rather quickly because they shortage of NCO's that they had within that MOS and that's kind of how the Marine Corps promotes you depending on your job and their needs that they are the the number of people they need to fill at that next rank is how quickly you can get promoted now you have to do certain things a lot, which a lot of my peers didn't do which is another reason I picked up a little bit faster. They're like how do you pick up so fast and I told him like I did my MCI I did the click through his online dude I was hitting him in I forget the TRS I forget what that stands for transition readiness seminar that's what it means and that's where you go to when you're getting that and that we did that my last point so I was just sitting in that class learning on what I gotta do to get out prepping for my next promotion just doing a clip there I'll let you know just that there click click click click click click and then so I was able to pick up Sergeant in November of 2017 so 7,8, 9 months before nine months I guess before I before EAS but yeah no so I wanna mention that's one of the coolest parts about those picking up was where I picked up. So, I went from I picked up from private to first class in the squad Bay there's no formation at SOI no formation. He just started calling her names out we walked up we picked up our warrants so I'm not doing a formation for all of you so we just walked up grabbed our work went back to our rack put it away and then after I hit the fleet I picked up Lance corporal on the football field that was by our barracks. That was standard that was pretty normal had a formation platoon size and called up about three or four of us at the same time we got a little snake bites from them hitting us on the rank and then I picked up

corporal on range 400 in 29 palms at night. So, we are tripping over rocky 29 palms kicking them out of our way, and getting kneed by NCO in the Dark that was fun to, getting our blood strips just tradition stuff, no one was hurting us. Then and then I picked up Sergeant on the battle the USS San Diego in November and I believe we were in the Mediterranean at that time so I got I got some pretty cool locations to pick up my ranks which I always thought was fun.

Wetzel: that's awesome! That would be interesting to have. yeah, let's dive into with the real meats and potatoes of this interview... deployment. Now I think you mentioned two different deployments...correct?

Corns: first one was the 15th sorry 31st and second one was the 15th Meu, Marine Expeditionary Unit, is what it's called.

Wetzel: And where did they take you, general big idea obviously?

Corns: Okay so starting with the 31st MEU, they flew us to Okinawa, Japan. We spent two training and hanging out for the first month maybe, and then we started training the second month, and then we started prepping to board ship. almost about the same time we started doing some training, so it's pretty chaotic. The second month got on ship in Okinawa and then we did the race track the Okinawa 500 where we spun around Okinawa a couple times then we drove, drove, then we sailed off to Korea, got so LIBO, and where we have some we did a pretty large previous part of it one of the largest amphibious landings in the last two decades I think it had been at that point. Show of force for North Korea because they were shooting missiles over Okinawa, so it was just political, then we got back on the ship we headed back to offboard it for about a month. We hit some pretty exciting stuff which was not really all that exciting. We did a bunch of PT, a lot of PT and ran a PFT in the Okinawa heat, that was fun! and then we that started coming back up

and fly home to California. I wish I could remember his name now the Sergeant major reason a famous photo he was the first Sergeant from the kill house, and I think that was in Fallujah.

Where he's being carried out because he got shot in the leg...

Wetzel: Castle?

Corns: what? Yeah, Sargent Major Castle was there. He greeted us when we landed, he was the MEU not division not but MEF Sargent Major and he was helping us the bunch of Lance Corporals sweating in California, unloading everyone's bags off the planes. He was up on the left with us and line helping us, "good see you guys back here", you know it's kind of cool and everything. that's the first version that we did with the pistol they got shot yeah, yeah that's him. So, I got to meet Sergeant Major Castle when we landed that was pretty cool and worked with him. That was cool to see that war dog. We landed and that was it. And then we did training to watch lots of training the next workout was pretty intense it was not like the first one was pretty laid back. we're only out in the field maybe a couple times a month at most. second workout we're in the fields every other week for about a week. we were out there maybe every two weeks I should say we were out there for at least a week. doing something whether it would be a range whether it be actual like operation training, whether it be humanitarian OPS. we were out there constantly and that was because all the second deployment we were planned for were slated for the 31st MEU, Marine Expeditionary Unit, you again that's marine next unit and but we were told we were gonna go replace the unit that was in I think it was the army at this time but I might be wrong about that it was in Syria helping with the assault that the Iraqi army was conducting against ISIS. I remember telling guys, if they get they get to I forget the name of the capital Rocka, they get the Rocka of before we deploy we won't go which was isis self-proclaimed capital. I was like if they get there we won't go and guys are like ohh 90% chance we're going. So, I got all worked

up with it that we're going. and we hit Hawaii and we got past that they took Rocka, were no longer slated for Syria so no combat at that point as far as we knew we weren't we weren't weren't going as combat so but the 31st MEU was awesome because we left California, like I said, for stop, got Libo. Got drunk then we moved on had a lot of ship problems. I think the latest in Hawaii at one point then the latest we have the go to Guam. We were kind of off the track with everybody else kind of is in the Marine Corps we say OFP which is Own Fucking Program. So we're doing wrong thing there and then we made our way to Guam to India from India we then we're heading towards the towards the Middle East and Africa and East Coast of Africa and we got a mission and the mission was to support a unit in Africa. Actually, I'm not sure how much of that I'm allowed to talk about I don't think it's classified anymore. it wasn't very big deal but it was technically classified. So I won't say anything other than we got the supporting unit that was doing some Ricky ticky stuff in Africa and we were just the hilo operations QRF medevac and QR medevac and something else. I guess I guess we were air support you know for fires because we came with skids which included Huey's and which I think they're called something different at the time but Huey's and yeah cobras so yeah so we did that we were on station in the Mediterranean for that after we did some training and Djibouti, Africa and then like I said we went to Med, we went through the Suez, got to see Greece twice turned around stopped in Jordan, then came back and on our way back we stopped to Singapore and then into Hawaii and Hawaii I jumped at the opportunity without even talking to my dad and I just told him yes my dad wants to do this and my dad got to do the tiger cruise. He flew himself out to Hawaii met us got on ship and then took a week with us back to California. He never got to serve. His dad was in the army for 35 years. Two of his kids have been in the military, so I kind of jumped at the opportunity to say dad wanted to do it, and he never wants to it again. He

talks about how miserable he was, how bad his knees hurt from walking up and down those stairs and how little space you have on ship so but that was 31st MEU, sorry that was the 15th MEU.

Wetzel: During your deployments did you have a memento or something you cherished whether it be from home or something. Like when you have it, you had good luck, whenever you didn't have it, you seem to have bad luck?

Corns: No, I'm not very superstitious. I like to say the only thing I'm superstitious about is not being superstitious. It started when I was in high school playing football I've watched guys wear certain socks but that means they're certain gloves or get dressed with very specific way we're doing they're only eat this or go they have to throw up they,... I make sure I've never had to do anything I just would get ready. So it's the same concept don't worry about all these other external things focus on what I had to do so I was very focused. didn't really take anything with first deployment I think I took an old copy of the Old Testament from my grandmother that that it wasn't it wasn't special to me but a special to her. So, I took that I'm not very religious but you know I took that because you know I thought she like that. and I guess I took my tattoos with me. Those were the only things I've got some tattoos that are very directly reflect my grandfather and not only things he did when he was in the military but also things he told me before I left for the military. so I took those with me, that's about it

Wetzel (35:10): More personal you know go keep it personal if you don't want to do it but friendships. Did you by any chance for your like your military service what you went through made friendships stronger than what you would have had is like friendships from like high school or shortly after before you enlisted?

Corns: Absolutely I've got so I was like I said I have two sisters I have no brothers got out of the military I can't count my brothers. Certainly, can't do it with my hands and feet, not too many of them. but there's probably a smaller group of those that are still in contact with regularly. like I could call them right now just get them up and chat for an hour each easy, so yeah without a doubt being that I was 26 and all my friends are you know at least three years younger than me with exception to one of them. it is interesting that even that time difference didn't know that age difference didn't really make a difference and in our relationships and how they budded into such close brotherhoods, you know. Camaraderie is definitely not the same thing as a friend if comrade is something very special. With that said I also got to see a huge difference between that and my high school friends, because I got to the Marines Corps so late in life if you will for marine it is pretty late. joining the 26 started trying to join in 24 took a while for me to get in, but joining at 26 I had already watched my you know post high school by gone left home and went out and got a job and went to big city and worked and got away from all my high school friends and then went back and then got to rebuild those relationships still those, I only have one friend to from high school that is my brother and I've got like I said countless from the Marine Corps. so yes, it's definitely a difference

Wetzel: Thanks, it's always talk about there being a special bond that happens when you're in and it's interesting to hear that.

Corns: if you don't mind, I'll elaborate on that really quickly. that bond the longer I'm out that bond expands past just the guys I served with because you're such a small community within the veteran community. That bond expands to not just the boys but like I met a veteran. I live next to a guy who served in the army for his enlisted he served he's spent over 20 years they said 26 years and I'll get out of my car when I see him in his front yard I'll get out and start walking at

my house. I'll say hey Mitch what's up you know we'll talk not because he's my neighbor name but because he's a Veteran I talked to the other neighbor who lives with him he's a nice guy but I talk to Mitch and I know Mitch's name I don't know the other guys and that's because it's the veteran thing, so that that bond expands the long especially the long the longer you're out of break word really does it expands to the whole veteran community. doesn't matter who you are what you did or you know what you did while you were in what job you had doesn't matter it's you sacrificed your time and you put yourself in harm's way because even training and military is inherently dangerous so that's all I got

Wetzel: You also talked a little bit ago about the different places you went, your liberties that you experienced. did you have one that maybe stood out more than the rest what was your favorite and least favorite Libo (Liberty was often given when an American naval warship enter a port) port would you say and could you kind of tell us why you think that ?

Corns: Yeah, OK favorite was Greece for a couple reasons one are Libo time there was longer than all the other ports. So, you get do you get kind of a new rhythm where you're going you know, you're gonna see. You know the bartenders and some guys get to know strippers or something I don't I don't know about that too much but I I knew guys that were hitting up those strip clubs a lot. You get to know you get to know the people around you in that area so that's that was probably the most exciting. and we made two stops there I think there were separated by about a month. so that was we got to see Honey and Crete, Greece. we have to see that during their during their like their you know they didn't season for when all the European tourists were coming in and then we got to see what it was just dead, it was just U.S. military and locals running the town so that was fun. I got to see a bunch of drunk Navy and Marines try to flip a bus that they were supposed to be getting on to go back to the ship. that was I have a video of

that that was cool. It was me and my buddy Bottine from boot camp where we're watching we were just like what are these guys doing? I mean we stood away we were like no we're not getting near that but yeah that was interesting I forget why that was they wouldn't let them on the bus and they were like there's more of us than you getting on the bus they started rocking it and so that was the that was the end of the night left them on the bus they eventually left on the bus. and then the least favorite...that's really hard to say because I didn't have probably Jordan Jordan Jordan was least favorite because for some security risk some guy with glasses behind a desk somewhere said that we can't let these guys off the docks. so, I was hoping to go see I forget which Jordan one of the seven wonders start with an A anyways (?)

Wetzel: Petra?

Corns: Want to say anyways I'm supposed to go (?) for that and that got pretty quick so we got to drink on the dock and it was the booze that they had from ship because yeah some guys stopped in there I think know that you stopped it early earlier than us and they got to go to like the embassy and get all dressed up and get drunk at the embassy. We did not get that opportunity so probably Jordan just because we just got to get off the dock but I bought a bunch of really cool trinkets and some to my parents and my sisters so they got some stuff from Jordan

Wetzel (42:00): That's awesome, alright well let's transition to you getting out and the immediate aftermath of your release from service. When you were EAS, end of active service, how is that like what was in turmoil was there a lot going on is it easy to get out because it sounds pretty easy to get in is it is it just as easy to get out of the military?

Corns: For me both were hard but it was definitely harder to get out. it's hard to explain it to people because they watch you join and they say man I must have been hard bootcamp must have been

hard. it's like Nah when I got out of the military I got a divorce from the Marine Corps because I didn't I wasn't involved with anyone from the majority of my time at when I was in. so the Marine Corps was my wife I was married to the Marine Corps. so I lost my wife, I lost my job, and I moved to the other side of the country as either away from my buddies that stayed in or as my other buddies move to not only the other side other points of the country but some move to other points of the world. so we got so I lose my my my whole support structure and it helped that I was able to move back in with my parents. I'm blessed to have extremely supportive parents but with all that with all those conflicts of leaving something that I loved. I knew I was gonna miss it. I mean I I knew I was gonna get out when I was on the second on the second point I remember Facebook messaging my mom from the computers on ships telling her how bad it was how bad ship life is how miserable the Marine Corps in the Navy is at times and then I and then I follow up I'm definitely getting out but I know I'm going to miss it every day for the rest of my life. It's a weird relationship. It's a love hate thing but yeah I guess so when I got out my buddy actually flew actually I think I paid for him to fly yeah I did I paid for him to fly out with to California. He stayed with me almost a week. I wanna say it was two or three nights. He said it was the best part of our trip back and we stopped in Vegas we stopped outside Denver we stopped at Lincoln Nebraska like he was getting married the next month. I got out in August he got married in September so Vegas was like our his little bachelor party if you will and so I I I drove us back but we stopped there for a couple nights. they were there three days. and in which there was a fun trip but him getting to see how we lived and he got to see me with Sergeant chevrons on and you know or maybe maybe you don't I should say actually I'll assume you don't but you in the Marine Corps when it comes to living in barracks there's rarely a rank over a Sergeant. so when you're living there everyone's like rah Sergeant rah Sergeant rah Sergeant and

you know and I and I had my boots were no longer boots you're now seniors and had boots there so like you have to see these boots scared to death of the Sergeant and he loved it. He thought it was hilarious. He was like "Oh my God, everyone is so afraid." So that was fun and then we got when I got home it was hard. It was hard. I had I took six months and did nothing. Then I took some classes I think I took three classes of Community College and hit up an old friend who's at varsity soccer coach for high school in the area or a high school varsity soccer coach in the area and he needed a JV coach and he asked me if I'd do it I played soccer with him. So, I played soccer with him for many many years.

Corns: So I went and coached his JV team which was useful it's helpful it was it was it was a test because it was you know I was training 13, 14, 15 year olds to play soccer and I've just been training you know 18 and 22 year olds, 24 year olds to you know be Marines. So it was a very different concept with some of the some of the basic principles were still there but like you know. I think I think I made a during tryouts I made a while comment because some guys were messing with each other when I was trying to talk so I just got quiet and they just kept messing with each other and then they realized that I was just looking at it wait you know doing the old are you through yet type thing and I made a I made a a nasty comment I think I told him are you guys done finger popping each other's assholes or what and I mean but most of them left almost all of them laugh but I immediately went I can't say that it kids. so you know that was a part of like getting that was a part like that was one of those moments where I was like Jesus why did I say that? uh I told the varsity coach immediately. I mean moments after it happened we ran the drill that I was having to do for tryouts and then I went over I was like dude I'm might have been a mistake first day of tryouts he's like don't worry about it they're not they're boys, they're boys they'll be alright. so that was interesting I eventually quit the college courses I was taking

him go back to coaching and I took another I took that summer off of doing anything else. still living under my parents roof but I had savings from the military which was nice. so I lived off that rent free the basic bills vehicle and some other thing phone and insurance nothing crazy and then then I decided to go to school for electrical work started started working as an electrician apprentice. just trying to just trying to make some money and within a trade that if I if I decided to stick with and then if I decided to do something else and always come back to because it's something you learn we get certs that don't expire. so so yeah it it was hard. I I went through some depression. I went through some anxiety issues. Depression wasn't that bad, the anxiety was bad. I think that because I was so anxious all the time it made me a little bit depressed. I was I don't think I was ever as depressed as I thought I was because well no I don't think I don't know that's an incorrect statement. I don't think I was ever that depressed because I've been through real depression before when I was in my early 20s three or four years before I joined the Marine Corps you know. life sometimes hits you when you don't want it to. so I had you know I went through you know anger issues I had a buddy kill himself abruptly that really put me in a downward spiral and I and I got more angry and eventually install a counselor. it took me 3 visits first visit was helpful because it made me come back for the second visit second visits when I learned what I needed to learn. The third visit was to make sure I already learned what I needed I didn't need it anymore, but I pretty much learned that anger is a secondary emotion. Once you figure out what you're angry at once you figure out what made you angry at first the primary emotion which is what you're actually angry about with that emotion instead of just being angry you're not angry anymore. so that was good and that helped me get through the Marine Corps because of that too but yeah getting out was much harder than getting it. Much harder.

Wetzel: I know you mentioned trade school and stuff like that now did you get to use your GI bill. I know that's like one of the big benefits that military members have. I mean everybody talks about serving and then going off to college.

Corns: I was no I didn't use I could have yes but I did not. I didn't use the I didn't claim the GI bill when I was taking those three classes right after I got out when I was coaching because I wasn't sure about it and I didn't claim I didn't use GI bill for the electrical work either. I worked for a company that pays for my classes. I paid for my first class because I signed up for the class, started the classes and then I got hired by an electrical company. just a small company nothing big just doing basic you know house calls generators in some commercial work. but yeah so I didn't claim any of the GI bill until I decided to go back to college. after I quit the electrical company and I did that for two reasons, one because I wanted to get paid to go to school because it's a lot easier than electrical work, quite frankly. and another reason I did it was to force myself to stick with it. I figured if I was to you know external motivator if you will, to keep me pushing through school and then I found out I liked it, even though I was dealing with kids again. I found out that Oh my gosh I'm just gonna be so much better at this than they are. So, it was fun. It was fun but I did eventually claim the GI bill, just not intentionally.

Wetzel: One next question kind of two folds they know you've talked so severe about your friendships and how much that mattered to you. how did that change and then kind of why after you got out

Corns: Friendships changed because of time and space. they didn't really change or fade. they just put on pause and what I mean by that is I got out August 2018. I didn't see anybody until I wanna say it was a year maybe more. I can't remember the exact date. I wanna say it was 2019, we went up to New York for my buddy, Ben Chimirri engagement party in New York City and a bunch of us met up there in Long Island and it was wild. It was because we were all the exact same all of a

sudden at the exact same time. We're all very different at that point we're all doing very different things, but as soon as we got around each other we reverted back to that relationship. we all talked about how man it's been so long since we've seen each other but it feels like it yesterday. so it's like the relationship got just put on pause and it because it's such a strong bond time and distance didn't really weather it. it was it just was stuck in time until it caught back up to us where we were together again and it just flourishes again and that have experienced that time and time again now it's still when you get around them now they've got kids and they live in different parts of the countries they've got real careers or they don't or whatever it is they got going on revert back to it being you know December 2017 and your on ship again and it's like it never goes away. it happens over phone calls all of a sudden would be right back in it it's very well at least that is for my friends today so that was my experience.

Wetzel: As we get ready to wind down this interview here. I just got a couple more questions I would like to ask you, the first one where do you wish more people understood about veterans?

Corns: What do I wish more people understood about veterans. Um don't get me wrong, I like the people you know in today's climate sort of post Middle Eastern wars, society has decided we were not gonna do what we did in the 60s and 70s with Vietnam Veterans. where you know spat, we through blood, we called them baby killers, we pushed them aside, and we didn't appreciate them. so they there's more appreciation for us and and when I say don't get me wrong I appreciate that they appreciate us so when someone for example would say thank you for your service I say well thank you for your support right and it kind of throws them off because the concept of serving is just the decision. it's a decision. That's all it is. what I'm going to do this, and you go and you do it in in people don't really understand when it seems crazy and it is a little more than what I'm about to deduce it down to but it's just a job. it's a lifestyle but that comes

with the job. So, it's just the job the lifestyle changes because of it but it only changes because of job. So, I think that sometimes people don't really understand they think they think you're a hero or something. Thank you for your appreciation but you don't need to glorify the time that I I spent in the military you know. I never I never got shot at and I never shot at anybody. So, I you know not a hero I just showed up. I showed up. as my dad likes to say you stood on the wall. I yeah I stood on the wall but it's just a job.

Wetzel: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to cover or would you like to talk about. I know we kind of went you know wave tops here we really dive too deep in that things I didn't wanna get down any rabbit holes into a different direction but is there anything that we possibly have left out here that you would like to add to your story?

Corns: I mean to be honest, I could sit around for 10-15 hours and talk about the military and my stories and it's my dad likes to have a couple drinks with me when we're when we have guests visiting him and I come into town and I'm hanging out with him and he likes to have a couple drinks and then prove me and start in prod me into start talking about it because I think there's a I think he's not only proud of the service that I have but I think he knows how much I like to talk about it. a lot of veterans don't but the most important things I could that if I were to leave this collection of my opinions and experiences for other people to someday hear or listen to has to be the importance that the military my experience with the military is playing in my relationships with other people. The job sucked. The job was great. The job was fun. The job was miserable. But I remember telling my dad when I was joining he was I thought I would join an infantry and he's like he was trying to test me to see if that's something I really wanted to “do really want to be 26 in the infantry” between you know he he wasn't questioning that desire he was just making sure that I understood and I and I did I flirted with some other MOS and I was like yeah he's like why

I was like well because I'm gonna get to go camping and play war with the boys. at the very least I might go to war you know I might die but I'm gonna get to go play war for four years. like it's just don't get to go play and learn how the greatest military in the history of the world does business and I was like and I get to practice and I get to hold in you know I was like yeah I wanna go do that so the relationships when you get to go play war with the boys the relationships that are built doing that not nothing comes close, never. I have not I have yet to find that type of it's not joy but experience it's just so different than any other relationship I've ever had it's unique the uniqueness of It guess is what I have yet to find.

Wetzel: Well John, let me be the first one to say thank you for allowing me to be the one to record your interview here. It was a great pleasure. I know some of that may have been difficult so thank you for all of that and thank you for your time.

Corns: I appreciate you. thanks for having me and it's my pleasure!