

Maritime Studies Capstone Seminar Oral History Project

Zachary Howe Oral History

Date of Interview: April 28, 2020

Location: Ledyard, Connecticut

Length of Interview: 00:15:05

Interviewer: CR – Christopher Rice

Transcriber: NCC

Christopher Rice: For the record, what is your full name and what town do you currently live in?

Zachary Howe: My name is Zach Howe, and I currently live in Ledyard, Connecticut.

CR: What year were you born?

ZH: I was born in 1988.

CR: Did you or your parents grow up in this area?

ZH: No, they did not.

CR: Where'd they grow up at?

ZH: So, I actually grew up in Frankfort, Indiana, initially. Then I kind of lived in the area there for a little bit – even down in Tennessee for a little bit as well.

CR: How long have you lived here, then?

ZH: I have lived here now for fourteen years.

CR: How did you end up here?

ZH: So, I ended up here obviously because of the military. After I enlisted, my first base was in Groton, Connecticut, and I've been there ever since.

CR: Can you tell me more about your family? You got parents, brothers, sisters?

ZH: Yes. So, obviously I [inaudible] know my mom, so I've never met my dad before. But I have a brother and a sister, which I am fairly close with. I was raised a lot by my aunts – both my aunt Tammy and my aunt Steph, and then my grandma also. So, I've been raised and surrounded by women for most of my life.

CR: What do they do for a living?

ZH: So, my mom actually works as like a retail specialist at Walmart, currently. My grandma is actually retired now. She actually worked in like an old nursing home. She actually made all the food and all that kind of stuff and took care of the people there. Then my aunt Steph, she's actually a dog groomer. She kind of runs like a dog hotel, if you will. Then my brother, he works in construction. Does all that kind of stuff with, like, contracting and things like that. Then my sister, she also works with retail with her mom.

CR: Where did your family originally come from?

ZH: They lived in Virginia for a little while. Then they kind of migrated to the Midwest way before I was born, and then they just been there ever since.

CR: So, besides yourself, has your family been affiliated with the military?

ZH: My aunt Steph enlisted for a short while. My cousin Casey enlisted for a short while. My uncle was in the navy. My cousin Keith is currently in the military as well. He has a few years more than I do, obviously, because he started before I could. Pretty much all of us in some way, shape or form were either enlisted, did our time then got out. Or, in the case of my cousin Keith and I, we're planning to retire.

CR: In regard to your navy life, how did you get your start?

ZH: I was in high school – last year – just talking to some buddies of mine. We were all going to join at the same time. There were three of us all together. One ended up not doing it because of some stuff that happened. But then a buddy of mine and myself both joined. We both went to boot camp together and kind of that's how it started.

CR: Did you take any time away from the navy, like, go to college or vocational school?

ZH: No. I've been doing the navy ever since I got in and never got out. I've been doing this ever since.

CR: So, have you worked in any other industries?

ZH: No. Other than farming, but that doesn't really count.

CR: Have you ever thought about life without the navy?

ZH: Yes, of course. Obviously, after I go to retire there's obviously going to be something after that. You can't be in the navy forever. Eventually they end up pushing you out so –

CR: Did you ever think of joining a different branch of the military?

ZH: It was never really an option. Just the navy was like, the first thing that came up. But since I've been in there, there were actually programs that you can go from like, Blue to Green, is what they call it. So, you can go from navy to army because they have some of this most similar stuff in certain fields. There are options, but since I've already put in the time for the navy, there's no real reason to really swap to another one.

CR: In your opinion, how important is the military to your household?

ZH: Since obviously, I live in this area and this is pretty much all I've known. It's actually quite a bit and actually provides a lot of people that I know even the jobs that they even do around here. I know myself and some friends that even have already retired, they're still working essentially with the navy even afterwards, which I plan and possibly could be doing the same after I get out.

CR: So, it's important to the community as well.

ZH: Yes.

CR: Okay. Can you tell me about what a typical day of the navy looks like? Where do you start?

ZH: So, obviously, everything's electronic nowadays. So, a lot of my position that I have now, we check our emails a lot. That's how we kind of coordinate with the submarines because that's really all they've got. If they're in port, obviously, a little bit easier. They'll just come up and talk to us, let us know what kind of stuff that they need. Pretty much if they ask, then we try to do whatever we can to try and help them out to make their lives a little bit easier on the boats.

CR: How do you get assigned? Where do you get stationed? Walk me through it.

ZH: Depending on what rating you have, you have a certain rotation where you either have – like mine, I currently have three years on shore and then three years on sea duty. So, then a year before or even longer before, you're about to rotate here the next year. So, you start looking in this program called CMSID. Then they give you pretty much like a ranking system. You'll say, "Hey, I want to stay in this area. I want to go here or here," so on and so forth. Then depending on your family, kids, all that kind of stuff, or the spots that are even currently going to open whenever you're in the window. That's whenever you apply for certain jobs. So, you're still working within the navy, but then you go do different jobs within your rating that you currently fill.

CR: So, what's the first thing you do when you get into work?

ZH: So, the first thing is just getting the kind of work schedule put together so that I can put it together for other people to kind of follow. So, I'll get in. We'll check our e-mails first, see what's going on. Then if we didn't cover anything for the last day, then that just goes on to the work list for the day that we're currently holding. Then we'll just go through and just start tackling things out one after another.

CR: So, we're going to transition here. So, what do you like most about being in the navy?

ZH: The biggest thing I think about being in the navy is just having that sense of togetherness with all the people that are there, all the camaraderie and stuff. Kind of the small knit group of the submarine community, kind of know pretty much everybody. So, pretty much if you need something, you're going to ask somebody for it and they're pretty much going to do it most of the time. It's just really tight knit and being in that kind of stuff, at least in the navy.

CR: So, it's a nice small community that you can rely on.

ZH: Exactly.

CR: Well, with that being said, what do you like least about being in the navy?

ZH: Essentially being on call 24/7 no matter what. Very much if you're told to do something and you have to do it. There's no rule saying "no" or "I can't do it because of this." There are some leniencies in some ways. Obviously, they're not going to kind of say, "Hey, I need you here in about five minutes." Because obviously, I live twenty minutes away from the base, so –

CR: So, how satisfied are you with being in the navy?

ZH: Oh, yes. I like it a lot, obviously. I want to put in the fourteen years that I've already done already. So, obviously it's provided me and my family quite a bit. They've paid for quite a bit. All the healthcare and all that kind of stuff that they provide is actually pretty decent compared to – in the civilian community.

CR: So, would you still have joined the military if you had the chance to live your life and career over again?

ZH: Yes. I would think so. The benefits and stuff kind of outweigh everything else that you could have started. You start out a little bit slower compared to other communities, but you have the potential of moving up a lot quicker and paid more. Obviously, the longer you've been in – as long as you at least study, you're going to be making E-6. Whenever you get up to E-5 or E-6 is pretty much whenever you start making enough money to kind of live on your own pretty much.

CR: During your career, have you ever considered leaving the industry? When and why?

ZH: Yes. They always talk about, obviously, always do your first sea duty, then always do your first shore duty. Then after the shore duty, that's kind of the turning point whether you're either going to get out or stay in. So, if you want to stay in, then obviously, that's the point where you want to kind of get your stuff together. I was always told to plan to get out and plan to stay in both at the same time, so you have all your ducks in a row. I did plan to get out at one point, yes. But that's just having to make sure that you have a backup plan in case you couldn't stay in for whatever reason.

CR: Would you advise young people to enter the military?

ZH: I would. If they definitely do not know what they want to do in life, then obviously the navy is definitely good for that. As long as you do four years of service, you're pretty much paid way through college no matter what. They even start an even retirement plan for you as well, which is also good.

CR: Do you have any advice for them if they were to join?

ZH: Oh, yes. So, the advice is obviously, it's pretty easy. It's the military. If you do what you're told, show up on time, clean shaven, look good, all that kind of stuff, you're pretty much going to do pretty good at the job compared to most people that are in.

CR: From my understanding, 2020 has brought a lot of changes with the pandemic, COVID-19. How has this changed and/or affected future recruiting?

ZH: We're actually, for the most part, not really slowing down the recruiting process, because obviously, there's still a lot of holes to fill. There are still people rotating in and out, kind of. So, you still have things to fill. You still have people that need to go to other places. There are people that still want to get out, those types of things. So, if you don't have that incoming pool of people still recruiting, then that's going to be really hard for other people to pick up that slack if you're not getting extra people in.

CR: So, the pandemic itself hasn't really affected navy life?

ZH: No. I don't think so. It does affect it a little bit obviously, because we're going on this – they call it a port and starboard rotation. So, you pretty much cut all the work people in half. So, you have one crew working every other day, then the other crew is going to work the other days. So, essentially, those two crews are never going to see each other, just so that they don't have to come in contact with each other.

CR: So, would you say the navy was prepared for this pandemic?

ZH: I would say that there was definitely, it was pretty easy transition into. Because obviously, if you treat it just like a war, if you would, then obviously you got to prepare for almost anything that comes up. We were pretty easy to adapt to the thing we were just waiting on. As the information came in, we adapted to what they had to pretty much faster than , I would say, even the civilian sector.

CR: So, do you have a favorite boot camp story? Something perhaps dangerous, fun, scary, beautiful, unexpected, or maybe your best or worst day?

ZH: Yes. So, I would say the most memorable moment I have is we were actually in boot camp. You always have to fold everything a certain particular way, and folding the socks is probably the worst one. So, me and a buddy of mine, we would each hold an end of the socks. We would kind of get it as tight as it would go, and as soon as we were folding it, they saw us doing that. They gave both of us a five-minute phone call to be able to make to somebody. That was probably the best thing in boot camp is getting that phone call. Yes. So, my favorite thing that I think I've probably ever done was going under the ice –

CR: [laughter]

ZH: What? Jesus – [laughter]

CR: [inaudible]. I'm sorry.

ZH: Yes. Folding socks.

CR: I'm sorry. That's great. Oh, geez. All right. We'll rerun that question by you. Do you

have a favorite story overall, being in the navy after fourteen years?

ZH: Yes. The one place I really like to go, compared to all the other port calls and things like that, was ICEX, going up there. Even obviously, as cold as it gets up there, obviously, just being able to do that on a submarine that no one else can really do, is kind of crazy. Where you get to go up there. You drive under the ice. You get to go through the ice. Then you get to have what they call Ice Liberty, where'd you get to go out on top of the ice and walk around the boat and kind of stuff like that. We actually played football while we were up there on the ice. Then we had someone bring like a North Pole and a Santa outfit. So, we took pictures with Santa pretty much at the North Pole, which was kind of cool. Then we all got to bring all the ice water back as well, which was really salty.

CR: So, with that being said, basically some free liberty going on with being able to venture on the ice. Is there any time you can do that in the middle of the ocean? Like, jump off the boat?

ZH: If you plan it outright, obviously. Even in the local ops here, as long as the water is fine and it's obviously warm enough to be able to go swimming. Obviously, the more south you go, like, going to the equator is probably the best time, I think. You go to certain parts of the equator, like we did this one called the Emerald Dragon, I think is what it's called, or the Emerald Shellback. That's what it is. So, that's where you go to zero/zero. We went there and had to swim cold, just to say that we did.

CR: Community perceptions. I'd like to talk to you about your border or community here. What is this place like when you first stationed here? What's been the biggest change in a town since you've lived here?

ZH: There hasn't really been much of a bigger change, except for obviously, now they're starting to build a new class of submarine. I think that's probably the biggest change they've started. That's kind of combining the old and the new together in one new ship that's going to replace all those eventually. With the overall community, that's obviously provided a lot of extra jobs around the area, which is fairly good, especially for like people at work at EBs, like, contractors and things like that.

CR: I mean, I did hear we're getting a new *Chipotle*. That's pretty big.

ZH: That is pretty big. It's actually going to be down there in Groton, which is obviously where a lot of the military people work and all that kind of stuff. Obviously, if the military people weren't here, then there obviously wouldn't be much of the community around here either.

CR: So, what do you like most about the area and what do you like about it the least?

ZH: I think the best part about the area is how close you are compared to like New York or Boston, being able to go in places. They got the casinos to where you can go and for like shows and things like that. So, there's obviously always something going on for the most part. I think the least part would have to be probably the weather. I had the same weather back home and I didn't like it then. I still don't like it now. So, all the snow and stuff are never fun, especially in

the New England area.

CR: All right. So, your final thoughts here, consider someone who might listen to this interview in twenty years. What would you like to make sure that they would remember about the navy life during this time?

ZH: The navy life is something that everyone has to get accustomed to. It's obviously not for everybody. It's more structured. It's a lot more having the time and investment into it as well because it definitely takes up a lot of your time – or can. There are some obviously different jobs you can take that could possibly take up less of your time. The sea duty part of it is always going to be the one that takes up way more than your time because obviously, the boat is what is the biggest part of the navy. Obviously, going out to sea and providing deployments and staying out there kind of stuff and providing that deterrence out to sea. But if you want structured, if you want a steady paycheck, no matter what, pretty much no matter what's going on, if you want the health benefits, if you even want to go to college, the navy's going to pay for all that kind of stuff. Yes, I would highly recommend the navy. Especially for even just doing the twenty years and then retiring after that. It may seem like a long time to get there, but you can definitely retire fairly young.

CR: Is there anything else you would like to talk about today?

ZH: No, I think that's about it. I think we covered quite a bit there.

CR: All right. Thanks so much for your time and I really enjoyed talking to you today.

ZH: Thank you very much.

[end of transcript]