

**Summary of Oral History Transcript**  
**Student, Citizen, Soldier: Oral History and Student Veterans**

**Lynch, John (Jack)**

U.S. Marines, Lance Corporal

*Interviewer:*

Interview conducted by Christine Liu, Salem State College, on 11/16/2007

*Summary of transcript:*

Jack Lynch grew up as a member of a military family in Cape Cod, MA. He received his Marine Corps training at Parris Island, NC in 2005 and was deployed to Iraq in December of that year. His primary post was in in Fallujah where he witnessed heavy fighting and encountered several Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). In May 2006 Lynch's convoy was hit by and IED, in which he was knocked from his vehicle and sustained long term hearing loss. His interview covers a broad range of topics, including combat, distrust of the Iraqis, PTSD, and the culture of the Marines.

John (Jack) Lynch  
Narrator

Christine Liu  
Salem State College  
Interviewer

November 16th, 2007  
at Salem State College  
Salem, Massachusetts

Christine Liu: Today is November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007. My name is Christine Liu, and I am a senior here at Salem State. I am a History major, and I am here with Lance Corporal Jack Lynch who is in the United States Marines and was deployed in Iraq from December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 to December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006. He grew up in the Cape Cod area, and he is currently attending his first year at Salem State, and he's also a History major with a Criminal Justice minor. Thank you so much for being here today, Jack.

Jack Lynch: Thank you for inviting me.

CL: So why did you decide to come to Salem State?

JL: My parents said you should go to college. I told them I wanted to be in the military, so we kind of met at the crossroads, and I joined the Military Reserve, so I could go to college and be in the military; however, I got deployed before I got a chance to go to college. So now I am here.

CL: Okay, how was the transition from military life to college life?

JL: It is a little difficult and hard at times because in the military you're, you know—you're told what to do, when to do it, you have a very defined chain of command and people who have to take responsibility for their actions. College life, you don't really have that.

CL: Yeah. So why did you decide to enlist in the Marines?

JL: Truthfully, I wish I could tell you, you know, because I'm really patriotic, because I feel like I want to do more for my country. I really don't know why. I just knew, always

knew, that I was going to be in the military. Maybe it was family history, maybe it was the way I was brought up, but I just did it because it felt like the right thing to do.

CL: Was your father in the Marines or any close family members?

JL: My father tried to join the OCS [Officer Candidate School], but he hurt his legs. My grandfather, however, was in the Marine Corps, and I have quite a few other family members who are in different branches of the service.

CL: I see, so what did your family members think of you getting deployed to Iraq?

JL: Let's see. Oh, as I said, my mother really wanted me to go to college before I joined the military, so she was none to thrilled to hear that I'd been deployed and hadn't even gotten a chance to go to college, so she was very, very upset. My father was kind of, you know, "Well, hey, he signed up. He knew what he was doing," and he took it a little better, but he wasn't happy. I really—that's what I signed up to do. I joined the military. I knew I was going to join whether there was a war and/or conflict going on or not, so I was ready for it.

CL: Did you have any expectations before joining the Marines? About the Marines did you have an idea of, ah—?

JL: Did I have an idea of what the Marine Corps was?

CL: Yeah.

JL: Yeah, when you go to the recruiting stations, and you see the different things you realize, you know, what branch of the service—Air Force, you can fly planes and you get lots of money. Navy, you go on boats. Army, you get to play with tanks. And the Marine Corps, you get to be a Marine which might not seem like a lot to some people, but the brotherhood and bond that all United States Marines have with each other is something you really can't describe.

CL: Yeah, so do you have any really good friends here locally in the Marines, or do you miss them after being in Iraq?

JL: Yeah, locally I don't have, you know, since we are a reserve unit, we come from different places. I have to go up to New Hampshire to drill, so you don't have that constant tight knit group that you have with, like, an active duty unit group because they all live in a barracks. You know, they see each other every day. That's their job, but I definitely have people that I will never ever forget like Lance Corporal MacAleer, who for more or less seven months we were hip by hip. We slept—he slept on the bottom bunk, I slept on the top bunk, and we were with each other literally like 24-7, so there wasn't much we didn't know. I had a buddy Aube. He was in our fire team. I was also really, really close to him, and all the Marines that I got to deploy with. I will really never ever really forget for one reason or another.

CL: Did you have any expectations of Iraq before you went there?

JL: Well, I didn't—I thought it would be a lot more sandy. I thought, you know, that flowing seas of sand, and I thought I'd see a ton of camels and kind of excited about seeing camels. I only got to see one, and he was in the back of a truck. But as for my expectation when I first got there, I really felt like, "Hey, we're here to help the Iraqi people. I want to help them," but after a few months I just didn't—that all went away. We were trying to help them, and it seems like they just were taking and taking and taking and never helping us back, so it was a very one sided relationship. You know, we'd do great things for the kids on one street, and then like two days later on that same street our convoy would get hit with either small arms fire or an Improvised Explosive Device, which is an IED, so—

CL: So you said that you were first motivated to help the Iraqi people, and after a couple of months that kind of faded. What kept you going after that in Iraq? I mean, what motivated you if anything?

JL: The fact that I was doing my job was thrilling. You know, you go through so much training, and it's just pounded into your head. Training, this is what you are getting ready to do. OORAH-KILL! Do your job, and now you are actually there doing it. So you're kind of like, "Hey, this sucks, but at least I'm here actually experiencing it."

CL: Yeah.

JL: What kept me going was their bullets, and bullets kill people. I'm a fan of being alive, so I'd like to avoid that situation. And then also knowing that if I'm not doing my job, I'm probably not going to be the one that gets killed. It's the guy on my left, the guy on my right, he's going to be the one taking the hit, and I don't want to live with that. So do your job, do it well.

CL: In your biography you said that you saw combat two times. The first time your vehicle was hit by explosives. You say you were knocked out. Do you remember what was going through your head before that?

JL: Well, it was the second patrol of the night, and it was two really long patrols that night. The sun was coming up. It was like eight in the morning, and we'd been going all night, so we were all tired, and our captain was like, "RTB." And that's pretty much like saying, "Hey, we're going home," so we were all thrilled. "Hey, we get to go to sleep, cool." We were going to pick him up, and then suddenly there was no noise because the explosion was so loud. I really didn't think I heard it, and then there was all that black soot in the air, and I'm like, "No way, somebody just tried to kill me! Get out of here!" After I realized that my vehicle was okay, I really did just got blown up. I was angry, angry as hell. "Somebody just tried to kill me, goddamn bastards. What the hell?" I was ready to just go nuts, but I was more or less okay. You know the ringing in my ears still hasn't gone away, so it keeps me up at night sometimes, but I was more or less upset that somebody tried to kill me. I knew it was coming, but we weren't expecting it.

CL: Did any one get hurt in that first explosion, no---? ( *CL shakes her head no in agreement with JL*)

JL: They buried it wrong. They buried the shell too deep, so the ground took most of the blast. It just kicked up a lot of dirt, you know, jostled me around a bit, gave me a little bit of hearing. Other than that, no, not really.

CL: After that first time, do you feel like you were better prepared to face combat?

JL: You're never really prepared to hit an IED. I mean, the stress that it puts on you every time you go out on patrol, you know, to have that set of mind. "Oh my god, that could blow up on me" (*in an excited voice*). After a few weeks you're like, "Hey, that could blow up. Let's avoid that" (*in a calm voice*). So you know not to go anywhere near craters. They say do not go near piles of trash, but the Iraqi streets are covered. They just throw their trash out into the street, so they have been doing that all their life. There's giant piles of just garbage. So you never know where it could be, it could be in a dead dog. They're [IEDs] everywhere. They plant them all the time, and sometimes they will plant fake ones just to make us go out there, and they're very crafty about the way they plant IED'S, where they put them. They make them out of anything and everything.

CL: So what was day-to-day life like in Iraq? I mean, you say you were always prepared for this, or this, or this, and being aware of your surroundings. I mean, were you awake all the time? Were you stressed all the time? Was there any sort of relaxation period?

JL: Well, day-to-day life was different every three days because we had a cycle we'd go on—like three days you'd be on guard duty, so you'd be pulling guard duty eight hours on, eight hours off, four hours on, four hours off for three days. You know, the next three days you'd be on patrol during the day which means that if something happened to the night time patrol, you'd have to get up, and you'd have to go support them, so that could be a very long stretch of day and night patrols. The only kind of real vacation or relaxation time we got, this might sound a little funny, is when we'd go on observation posts. We—our company was in control of three of them, and they were on the main road that went through the city, and your job there was to just sit in a bullet proof encasing with all your gear on and watch the road and make sure nobody put down an IED. You know, rather simple, make sure that nobody puts a giant bomb in the middle of your road. When you weren't doing that, you were free to do whatever you wanted to do inside of this house that was in the middle of Iraq, in the middle of Fallujah more or less. If you want to get behind enemy lines, that's about as behind as you can get because it's your house and then the rest of Fallujah around you. So we just kind of hung out, made the most of it. We had iPods with speaker systems going in the background, so it's kind of nice. You play a lot of cards, a lot of cards, a lot of card games, and Chuck Norris jokes. I've heard every Chuck Norris joke, and they're still coming out with more, so you just kind of relaxed and joked around and made the best of it. You're sitting on this rooftop. It's one hundred something degrees, you're in shorts, and you're just

looking around like, “Oh, I’m in the middle of Iraq in shorts on a roof. Yah.” (*JL pumps his fist in the air.*)

CL: Was it overwhelming for you to first come into Iraq? Did you, I mean—?

JL: The most overwhelming thing was when you got there was the smell you got on Fallujah. You were like—“Oh, that smell is not going away, Oh man,” you know, you got used to it, but it was just a terrible smell. But it’s definitely something you have to get used to, and you do get used to hearing gunshots go off all the time. An AK just goes off in the background like, “Oh, hey, that was weird.” You might be going on a patrol and somewhere across the city a huge explosion goes off. When you first got there everybody freaks out, and you know everybody’s looking around. Two months into it that same explosion goes off halfway across the city, and you’re like, “Wow, hope everybody’s okay.” You wait a few minutes for the radio, you know, find out nothing happened, find out it was just a mortar round that the insurgents shot. It happened to hit in the middle of the Jolan district which was where everybody traded, so, of course, there were no American casualties, but the civilian populace just got a mortar round in the middle of them. So somebody has to go out there, and help them, and make sure everybody’s okay.

CL: So what did you miss most about home when you were in Iraq?

JL: Food. We had the worst food ever. We—when you were back at the base, you had two meals a day, breakfast and dinner, and they came in these green vats, so we had to drive them from a base that was, you know, just away from the city, so that was a little safer. They had a huge chow hall, they had ice cream, they had steak and lobster every Friday. It was great there. We got cubed beef and egg noodles, and we’d have like Mexican night, and we’d have some kind of taco thing, and the food was not good, not good. The MREs [Meal, Ready to Eat] they gave us which are that standard government thing you will see in a package. You open it—water, food. Well, they had been sitting in these steel boxes—steel containers for about like—years, so they were old and gross, and there was almost nothing edible about them, so you’d try to get a lot of food from home. Chef Boyardee. Thank god for Chef Boyardee. I mean, you’d just sit there, pop open a can and just start eating it right out of a can. I still do that. My parents and friends are like, “Why don’t you just heat it up?” “Because I don’t need to. I have my can and my fork, and I don’t need to heat it up. I can just eat it right now.” It’s a little weird, but you get used to it. That and ramen noodles—you got a water heater and ramen noodles, you’re all set—

CL: Good to go.

JL: Oh, yeah, it’s great. So that’s what we lived off of, ramen noodles and Chef Boyardee.

CL: Did you have a lot of contact with your family? Did they send you, like you said, Chef Boyardee a lot, or—?

JL: My parents—while they were not happy I was there, they were so supportive, and as soon as word got out in my home town that I was deployed, I was getting packages every day and just huge boxes. One of the most important things I got was socks. I changed them twice a day. Just threw them away. Two socks for seven months every day, just a fresh pair. That was nice; I liked it. I can't do that at home as much because, well, socks are expensive.

CL: Yeah.

JL: Yeah, my parents—a lot of letters, a lot of letters. And, you know, AIM and email are lifelines. When you don't have that anymore you actually have to get the paper and pen and do that funny writing thing. Not as much fun—my writing is terrible, so it's just chicken scratch all across the page. And when you got nothing to do you're just sitting there writing a letter, and sometimes all of a sudden, you're like, "I have six pages of a letter. Oh my god, I've done nothing, but I've got six pages of nothing." You send it home, and your family back home is thrilled to read it. Six pages on you doing nothing, and just because it's something, they're happy to get it. We had no internet, and we had no email, but we did have something called a sat phone which is a satellite phone. It's a big old phone like an old school cell phone with a giant antenna, and that's what we used. But there was like two sat phones for the entire company, and that's like 150 to 200 people. Two phones for 200 people—yeah, the math doesn't work out very well, so you'd call about once a week. You'd call home.

CL: Once a week. Did you have a time limitation on it?

JL: They wanted to keep it down to fifteen minutes to a half hour, give or take—only fifteen minutes especially if you had somebody waiting. But you want to call everybody, and you got to figure it might be noon in Iraq when you are calling, so it's like two in the morning back home. So your family, after like a month and a half, they are used to just waking up in the middle of the night the second that phone rings, and they will answer it. They're tired but happy to hear from you. It's nice.

CL: Did you just most of the time call home to your parents?

JL: At the time I was dating, so, yes, I called home whenever I could—(*JL whispers*) kind of. I'd call my girlfriend a lot. She was in high school, so she'd be going to class all tired in the morning. She'd write me like, "Oh my god, such and such girl was complaining she hasn't seen her boy friend in a week in a half." She'd just flip out because she hasn't seen me like in five months, and I'm in the middle of Iraq, so it was interesting.

CL: Did your girlfriend at the time and your parents have a good relationship?

JL: Very good, oh, yeah—a lot of contact between them so they always knew—they would always tell her when I called them.

CL: What would you like others to know about Iraq that maybe we don't normally hear about in the media or is portrayed inaccurately in the media?

JL: Don't believe the media. I hate the media. I don't like the way they do things. Everybody's got a political agenda, you know, so everything has a different spin on it. The people—the Iraqi people—they know what is going on. They know who is putting in the IEDs. They know who's taking pot shots at our troops, so that drives us insane. Absolutely insane. It's like, "You people, you know—you know who is doing this. As soon as we get the terrorists out of Iraq, there's no need for us to be here any more. We leave. So no terrorists, means no Marines, means you get your city back."

CL: Yeah.

JL: "Let's work together here. Let's figure this out, and we'll be gone. Promise. We'll have a little base over here, and that will be it. We'll stay out of your city. We'll leave you alone and do what you want as long as you don't invite terrorists back, and we get bombed or some crazy stuff. You can have your city; we don't want it. We don't want to be here." It's not like happy fun time. This is not what the Marine Corps wants to do, but they don't seem to comprehend that we really just don't want to be there.

CL: So there's a lot of trouble with communicating with the Iraqi people?

JL: Yeah, everybody doesn't know English.

CL: Right.

JL: They've come to know a few key phrases that we throw out when we get upset. I don't know what kind of language I can use on this, so I'm going to refrain from repeating it. I mean, the basic Arabic we know is like (*speaks in Arabic*) which just means "Stop, stop or I will shoot!" (*JL speaks another Arabic word.*) "Search", so when we bang on the door, and we're like (*speaks an Arabic word*), they already know we are going to come in, we're going to search their house, and going to leave. The Arabic we know isn't happy nice Arabic.

CL: Yeah.

JL: It's very specific commands. This is all we know, so even when we go peacefully into somebody's house, we don't know how to be like, "Hey, everybody, how are you? We're having a nice day." It's like, "Here's our commands. You need to do it right now," so communication tends to be a little broken up unless you have a translator, but even then, you know, you don't know what that translator is saying. You have no idea.

CL: Was the translator part of the Marines?

JL: He wasn't a Marine. He was—he'd be from—I don't know how we got him. They were given to us. "Hey, here is your translator." Some of them would be like, "Yeah, I'm from Baghdad." Oh, great, so we have a translator from Baghdad. I hope he is reliable. We got a translator from Canada. I don't know how we got a Canadian Arabic speaking—it was just funny, so there's that layer of communication that we just find hard to break, and—like I said, we go there, and we really don't want to have any trouble. We are not like, "Please just shoot at us today, so we can put like a 1000 rounds down range." We just want to get there, and make sure everything is secure, and do our job; and if we had more help from the Iraqi people, or the Iraqi Police, or the Iraqi Army, we really wouldn't have a need to be there. So I guess that's the only thing I'm trying to say is, if we had more support from the Iraqis themselves, there'd be less we need to do, and there'd be less of our involvement. We could move on.

CL: So there was this hostility between the Marines and the Iraqi people there. Was there any instances of the Iraqi people actually being thankful for you guys being there or any sense of that whatsoever?

JL: There were some incidents of, you know, of them being really thankful and telling them how much they love us, you know—you couldn't believe a word they said. For example, we lost two marines in August to a sniper attack—

CL: Yeah.

JL: We had a building, one of the ops I was talking about, and they were patrolling from there. Well, we took heavy machine gun fire from this house down the road. We'd been to that house like two nights before just to, you know, stop there and check on it. It was a house of an imam, a religious figure in the Muslim community, and he spoke amazing English, you know, like we had just met him in like New York or Denver somewhere. He just spoke English great, "Hey, cool, you can talk to us. How are you?" We got really comfortable with him. We were sitting on a couch like this, Kevlar off, gun just hanging out. We were talking to him. We still had Marines at the ready up on the roof and stuff, but when you weren't up there, we sat there, and we talked. It was great, and we talked to this guy for four hours, just sat there, and it was great. At the end of it he was like, "Hey, thank you for what you are doing for us," and we gave him a card. And we said, "Hey! This is your card. Call this number if anything happens. If you find out anything is going on, nothing can happen to you from this card. You're just calling a hot line and leaving a message. We don't need your name. We don't need to know where you are. Just say, 'Hey, bad guys are here. Come help,' and we'll come. Nobody will know it was you." Two days later heavy machine gun fire from that guy's house—

CL: Really?

JL: Like two machine guns going off at once, pinning us down on the road, and we came up and got to that house. We could smell the gunpowder. We could see the bullet holes that we put in it, but there was no brass casings on the ground. There was no sign of the enemy actually being there. It's like he shot a machine gun and then picked up all his

rounds and left. That's a lot of trash to pick up and leave. You're telling me the family had no idea— they had no clue this was happening? We give chocolates—chocolate and candy to ten year olds. We had a ten year old throw a grenade, pull the pin and throw the grenade, at our convoy. How are you supposed to deal with that?

CL: Yeah.

JL: It's just—like I said, the Iraq people—they know what is going on, and they just don't stop it. Whether it is because they hate us, or who knows? But I just feel like they don't care, so why should we care, but we do. We're Americans, and that's our job, and I'm a Marine, and I don't need to question orders. "Hey, we're going on patrol." Got my helmet and put on my gloves (*mimics putting on a helmet and gloves*). "Okay, let's go on patrol; that's what we do."

CL: Did you see that religious figure again at all?

JL: I didn't, no, and it's probably good I didn't see him. Just, you know— when I was on a random patrol, we were in a house, and I was on over watch with the people. I noticed all the girls were huddling in a corner crying when they were looking at me. And I'm like—I haven't done anything. I'm just standing here. The translator came in and was like, "Why are these girls crying." "I don't know. Do I speak Arabic? Ask them." One of them pointed to me and pointed to my chest. He was talking to them, and he came back over. I had a K-bar which is our knife—I had a knife right here (*points to the left side of his chest just below his shoulder*). And he took it out and said, "See this?" "Yup." "The terrorists or the Iraqis tell them that the U.S. Marines will cut their toes off."

CL: Oh, really?

JL: "Oh, so they think I'm going to take this and cut their toes off. Great, I've actually got a toe collection, and I'm running low." Yeah, because that happens, ever? So it's crazy.

CL: So part of— do you think part of their hostility towards the Marines was the terrorists kind of poisoning them at all, like you said, with the toes?

JL: Yeah, the terrorists definitely do spread their own propaganda, and obviously the terrorists have more ability to be with the local population more than us. So, you know, our big thing is that we're going out there to—"Hey, we are going to give you security," and protect them. And then as soon as we leave, the terrorists come in and say, "Okay, who believes it? Come here," and then they cut somebody's head off and leave it on the ground. And how can they believe that we're going to protect them against terrorists when the Iraqi policeman just got his head cut off and put on the ground? It's crazy stuff like that. The terrorists definitely use propaganda really well.

CL: Do you miss anything about Iraq?

JL: I've been asking myself that a lot lately. I do. I miss the camaraderie. I mean, just the bond I had with First Platoon Bravo Company. The first squad was amazing, you know. I would gladly do anything for those guys from Sgt. Garcia, my platoon sergeant, to Sgt. Lee who saved my life twice. I could list off everybody: Cortelli, Dunstrum, Sergeant Weeks, Dooby, Rogers, all my boys in First Platoon First Squad. It was great. I turned 19 in Iraq, and at age 19 I had an M4, and I had a pistol on my hip. I had a grenade, and when I walked up and down the streets in Iraq, I was like the law more or less. If somebody looked at us funny, we had full right to go over there, question and ask them, "Hey, what are you doing? Hey, why are you counting us? Why are you counting the number of the people?"

CL: Yeah.

JL: Now I'm back home, and I'm just, "Hi, I'm Jack Lynch. I go to Salem State." I felt useful. I felt like I was actually accomplishing something with my life over there. As weird and as little sense as that might make, I felt like I was being a good Marine, and that means a lot—a lot to us because they just—it's training, and they trained it to be a Marine, OOORAH! I'm in the infantry. That's our job. We go out, we do patrols, we secure things, locate, close with and destroy the enemy; and it was our job, and I had a tight knit group of people. It was great. At the end of the day we had something called gay soup time. We'd just sit around the little hot water maker, and we'd sit around and eat ramen noodles. We'd just sit there eating ramen noodles and talking. We had nothing really new to talk about, but we just sat there. Everybody had those stupid soup things, and we sat there and ate soup, and it was fun. As weird as it might sound, it was one of the highlights of the day. Just to—"All right, everybody get your soup out. It's soup time." Sergeant Garcia would get soup, and we'd all just sit there.

CL: What would you tell a marine who's going to Iraq for the first time?

JL: You need an iPod. You need to go get a 60 gig video iPod. Even though you might never fill it up, you need it, and get a case for it, too. I didn't have a case, and my iPod's beat up pretty hard. Fill it all up with all the music that you can, all the videos you can. That's your lifeline. You will sit there; you will listen to the same CD over and over and over again just because that's all you have to do. Make sure you've got stuff to write with. Get iPod speakers, too. That's fun. Then Everybody gets to listen. Make sure you know basic first aid. To this day I joke about it with all my friends. They talk about getting cut, or if an accident happens, "Okay, I'll just throw a tourniquet on it. Everything will be all right." Because that was one of the first aid things we learned. "Hey, here's a tourniquet. Use a tourniquet." Because we're going to get medical attention to him in like two hours, so a tourniquet wasn't a bad thing. Direct pressure—you know, know how to do all your medical stuff. Make sure you're buddy-buddy with your corpsman because the corpsman's the guy with the morphine. *(Jack gives a thumbs up.)*

CL: *(Christine laughs)* Yeah.

JL: Rely on your training. They train you well, and make sure you learn from the guys that are there. The guys that you go to relieve, pick their brains and learn everything about your AO [area of operations] that you can.

33:42

CL: Do you want to go back to Iraq?

JL: Yeah, I just volunteered myself back—Bravo 225. They're out of New York. They're going back, and they're getting deployed. I know a few of the guys, and I guess they need to be augmented which means they just need more people. We have a bunch of guys who haven't gone, so I can't see myself getting redeployed. I did call my chain of command, "Hey, if you need people, send me back." My friends are not thrilled at all about the fact that I did that. They think I'm crazy. My mom just found out recently actually. I forgot to tell her, truly I forgot to tell her. I didn't think it was a big deal, and she wasn't thrilled. My cousin Andy, he wasn't happy. He's been like my bigger brother. He thinks I'm absolutely out of my mind, but then again he's a structural engineer living in California working on these giant houses. He got a full boat to Northeastern. Life's a little different. He's got that math thing down. I'm like (*counting on his fingers*) 2 plus 2 [equals] 5, 4, somewhere in there? I am very proud of what I do. I'm very, very proud of being a Marine. When I look at WWII veterans, WWII Marines, who, you know, they were given a pat on the ass, "Hey, you're going to war. Come back when it's over." They were there for like four years, two years. I was only there for seven months. That's nothing. We still have Marines that are going over there—they're on like deployment number six. I've only done one. My friends say that's more than eighty percent of the people around you have done. You—well, I just don't feel like I've done enough. I don't feel like I've, you know, done all I can.

CL: So that's part of the reason you want to go back?

JL: I feel like I can do more. As crazy as it sounds, it's just part of being a Marine. I want to go and help other Marines.

CL: Did you find it really hard to talk about Iraq when you came home to your family?

JL: Yes and no. I'll be more than happy to talk about it with anybody, but, you know, I'm not going to lie. There've been nights when I try to go to sleep, and I just lie awake in my bed thinking about Iraq—for hours. Look over at my clock, only twelve. Look back, it's 3:30. Like, oh, just go to bed, and I can't; but I don't find it to hard to talk about it—you know, I'm pretty open.

CL: What was the hardest adjustment for you coming back home from Iraq?

JL: When I first got back, if anybody made a loud noise around me—oh, I was on the ground, you know, trying to find cover. We have an air compressor at my house, and one day somebody released it, and that makes a huge popping noise that sounds like a gunshot. I freaked out (*ducking*), “Oh, hey, hi, dad. Don’t mind me, sorry.” You know, I still don’t drive near potholes because—

CL: Oh, really?

JL: You never know. There could be an IED in any pothole because—just stuff I’ll never really get over, but that’s just the way of staying safe. Yeah.

CL: Do you want to stay in the Marines for the rest of your life, or do you have any other career aspirations?

JL: Right now I’m more than happy, “Yeah I want to stay in. I want to be a lifer.” Then when I am actually there, “This sucks! When am I getting out? When is my contract up?” It changes every day, but I can see me probably signing up for a second contract extension. For career goals, I’d like to become a police officer. Whether—High, high goal would be like a Massachusetts State Trooper. I like troopers a lot. I think they are really cool people, but then local PD is really cool, too. I would like to become a police officer, living in the community and knowing everybody. I just—sometimes I find it a little hard to get talking with police departments and stuff. I do want to become a cop. Hopefully my military background will help me. That’s a goal I do have.

CL: Is there any thing else you would like to add? Anything you’d like to say that I haven’t asked you about?

JL: I appreciate the chance to come out and talk about it because, you know, some people have really bad ideas. There was an incident in Haditha [Iraq] where Marines went in, and they just slaughtered a bunch of people, but what people don’t understand is what I was telling you about that close tight group. I can’t imagine what would happen if any of them died. I would have lost my mind. I lost my mind when we did lose those two Marines, Lance Corporal Glover and Captain McKenna. We lost them both to sniper fire one day, and they weren’t— they were in my company. You know, I knew them. Captain McKenna was a state trooper. He had 2 daughters. I was so angry. It’s like people won’t understand it until you’re actually put in that kind of situation. And I’m not trying to be like, “You don’t know. You weren’t there,” but— You grow up, you live with these people, you—you just form this bond that you would never ever—you just can’t describe it. If McAleer had gotten shot and killed, I would absolutely lose my mind—I would have went nuts just because five minutes ago we might have been talking about soup time, and two weeks later trying to have soup time with McAleer’s seat empty. Oh, I can’t imagine it, so people are, you know—Marines, we do have our jobs to do, and we are very professional in what we do. People just got to understand we, no shit, love each other. We love every Marine that we were there with, so we get emotionally attached to each other. So to lose a brother like that just—it kills you. Yeah.

CL: Do you find people look at you differently—like you're wearing a United States Marines sweatshirt right now. Do people look at that, and do you find that they treat you differently?

41:00

JL: When I've gone to parties and stuff, they'd be like, "Hey, what do you do?" or "Hey, that's a nice sweatshirt." "Yeah, I'm in the Marines." "Really?" "Yeah, you know, I'm just going to college now." "How long you been in?" "About two years." "You've been to Iraq?" "Yeah." "Oh my god." I mean sometimes it's hard for me to think about it. I'm twenty years old, and I'm a veteran. It's kind of crazy, you know, when I think about what my friends were doing last year and what I was doing. It's definitely—people view me differently. Some people—they're like, "Oh, I don't want to get in a fight with you." I'm like 180 pounds soaking wet. I'm really not—I've never been in a fistfight, and yet people think I can suddenly know Kung Foo, and I can just choke them and somehow with my mind disable them or beat them senseless.

CL: Yeah.

JL: Yeah, I know how to gouge your eyes and choke you, but that is about it. I promise. I don't know crazy turning a spoon into a knife techniques. It's funny the reaction you get from some people, but a lot of people are so thankful. Everybody always shakes my hand. I've never had one person be rude to me which is great because when I do find that one person who is rude, they are not going to be happy people. I don't mind the peace protests and stuff. I've got a few friends from high school who are really into pro-peace and stuff. Well, my response is if we have peace, then I'm out of job, and that's no good.

CL: Yeah.

JL: I don't mind it as long as you don't take it out on—if I found out somebody spit on a service member, I'd go nuts. Those protesters that protest at funerals—I'm happy I haven't been there because I'd—I'd lose my mind. I'm part of the Patriot Guard Riders. Those people are amazing. They are just a group of veterans who will ride their motorcycles to military funerals and just hold American flags in respect. Those guys are great. So, yeah, everything—college has been all right. It takes a lot of getting used to. Going from being told, "Hey, Lance Corporal, you will be doing this right now," to "Yeah, you have a paper due. Try to get it done." I try to bring that military part of me back into—but, uh, I find that a lot of my papers and a lot of my conversations all tend to gravitate back to my experiences in Iraq for better and worse. It was an experience of a lifetime. Not all bad, not all good, but I can't say I didn't enjoy it in some sick weird way. It was interesting.

CL: Final question, why did you agree to do this interview today?

JL: I really, really wanted a chance just to speak my mind, to help shed some light on, you know, what a normal veteran feels. You know, when I think of veterans I still think

of the grizzled WWII vet. He's got his WWII cap on; he's got more wrinkles and has seen more stuff in his lifetime than I'll ever forget. He is just that guy, and when people find out I'm a veteran—and when I think of it, I'm a veteran. It's weird. It definitely sets me apart from my peers for better and worse. Sometimes I wish I had never experienced what I have so I could just be a normal—normal college student, but I won't be. I will always have those thoughts of Iraq, always thoughts of my buddies. You know, when we got shot at one night just looking up and seeing tracer rounds go over my head. They are just orange like laser—they look like lasers almost. Sitting there laughing to myself thinking I am in *Star Wars* somehow, and hearing rounds go off the door and stuff. My friends, you know, they look at me funny sometimes when the door slams and (*JL imitates himself looking over his shoulder*) “What in the hell was that?” They don't do that. They just think it is funny. And I'm like, “It's hysterical.” I like being—I love being a Marine. I love everything I've done, and I'm happy about it. I wouldn't change anything.

CL: All right, well, thank you so much for this interview today, Jack.

JL: Thank you for doing it.

CL: I've really enjoyed it. Thank you.