

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

Mahoney, Daniel

US Navy

Interviewer:

Interview conducted by Mr. Eric Adrien, Salem State University, on 12/02/2013

Summary of transcript:

Daniel Mahoney was as a Machinist Mate in the Navy from 1986 to 1989, where he served in posts in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Mayport Naval Base, FL, Djibouti, and at Bahrain's Naval Support Base. While at sea in the Suez Canal, Mahoney witnessed an explosive attack upon and sinking of a tanker, an event that he describes as unforgettable. He received an honorable discharge in 1989, but faced subsequent struggles with alcohol and drug addiction and spent a period of time homeless. By the time of his 2013 interview Mahoney was long sober, received an Associates Degree with high honors from North Shore Community College, and had made the Dean's list as a Social Work major at Salem State. He speaks forthrightly and passionately about PTSD, addiction, recovery, and veterans' services.

Daniel Mahoney

Narrator

Eric Adrien

Salem State University

Interviewer

December 2nd, 2013

at Salem State University

Salem, Massachusetts

Eric Adrien: Hello. My name is Eric Adrien. I will be conducting an interview of Daniel Mahoney. He's a four year Navy veteran. He served from 1985-1989, and today's date is December 2, 2013. How are you Daniel?

Daniel Mahoney: Doing well, how about you?

EA: I'm good. First off, where did you grow up?

DM: I grew up originally in Rockport, Massachusetts right on the ocean. So it's like that's That's where my love came in about the service and being in the Navy.

EA: What was your childhood like?

DM: Hmm?

EA: What was your childhood like?

DM: My childhood was very good. My parents were individuals and had good morals and in turn around brought me up right. The idea of like doing the next right thing was incorporated in my life, all my life. There was a church right next store to my house. We used to go to church intermediately at that point. But it was a great upbringing. They really made sure we had what we needed.

EA: What did your parents do for professions?

DM: My father worked at General Electric until he ended up retiring-- up in Lynn, Ma. He was there for many many years. My mother was like a housewife when she had me and my brother. She, at one time, went to college and was a phlebotomist. Which means she took blood.

EA: Oh, okay.

DM: That's what that is, but she hasn't gone back to it because she just hasn't had time. My father's been doing okay with like taking care of the house.

EA: Where did you go to school? How high did you go with your education before joining the military?

DM: That one is actually a long drawn out like question. Because I actually went to Rockport High until 9th grade. My background is I like to do things with my hands. When I do things with my hands, is like I'll remember it better. If it is something in class that I see that has relevance to something I am going use, I have a tendency to try harder. So at 10th grade I went to a vocational school which is kind of funny cause math was a bad part for me. When I went to the voc tech I was getting As and I was doing trigonometry and calculus because it had to do with being a machinist.. So it was like all stuff that intertwined. So I did that. Then after that I went to diesel mechanics. So I did that. When I was at Tad Tech in Chelsea before it shut down. They gave me all my money back because they didn't give me the full certificate.. Then I went and lived in Pawtucket, Rhode Island during the week; I went to school. After all that I turned around and ended up taking-- having problems with my recovery. I'm in recovery. I've been there a bunch of years. It's keynote to what happened in the military and where I am now. All right. Because of it I have an associates degree in drug recovery with a counseling certificate and honors and deans list every semester, and now I am doing a bachelors.

EA: Good. What were your reasons for joining the Navy?

DM: My reason for joining the Navy was something that you don't usually hear about. It was for me it was to serve my country. A lot of my family had been in the service. And that's the way it was. My uncle was in the service in the Navy, and my uncle was-- one of my second cousins he was in the Air Force. And it's like just, ya know, what it was.

EA: So would you consider your family like a military family?

DM: For the most part, yeah, there's a lot of military in our family.

EA: Was there anything prior to joining that made you kind of like anxious or nervous?

DM: Yeah, actually it's like you always get anxious when you hear about like boot camp and stuff and how they treat you and I'll tell you what, I'm here to tell you when you wake up the next morning you go to bed at like 2am. Then they come down and they have a trashcan with a

baseball bat and they slam it and that's how you wake up. I mean, it's like the movies, but that is exactly what happens.

EA: What time do they wake you up?

DM: Huh?

EA: What time do they wake you up?

DM: 5 o'clock in the morning

EA: So you are really only getting about 3 hours of sleep....

DM: 3 hours of sleep, and you are ready to go!

EA: (laughing) So what was the rest of the training like and was there anything in particular at boot camp that stood out in your memory?

DM: Yeah, actually I remember people and it's like when you did something wrong or when someone did something wrong usually the whole platoon got punished. And we had this one guy that it was like they tried to break him. No matter how they tried to break him down it wouldn't work. He was a muscular guy. He used go underneath the two racks and bench press the two racks with two people on the racks...on the beds. Ya know, and he'd say you aren't going to break me and through the whole time there not one of the company commanders could get him to break.

EA: And so they wanted him to break or they just wanted to see how far they could push him?

DM: They wanted to see how far they could turn around and push you. To turn around and get you mold you into their idealistic idea of what a soldier should be. So being complementary to what they want. In other words when they ask you to do something and you turn around and do it. Ok do it instead of causing trouble like I don't want to

EA: How long was boot camp for the Navy?

DM: Eight weeks, and it was up in Michigan.... Great Lakes. And it was cold, cause when I went it was the cold part of the winter. And I'll tell you what, if you haven't had a cold winter, Michigan is one of the colder places to go.

EA: Yeah, I've heard the Midwest is pretty brutal during the winter.

DM: Yup.

EA: So when you left the training what position did you get?

DM: I ended leaving up there, and I stayed up there to go to school to be a machinist mate. Which unlike what it sounds like it actually work with the steam turbines and the ship service turbo generators which did the electricity and the evaporator which turned around and made the water for living on the ship. That's what our job us. You were actually in the hull of the ship.

EA: What ship was that on?

DM: The ship I was on was the USS Luce DDG-38 it was one of the older ships it was about 475 feet long and a crew of 375 people on board. And it was a pretty good ship. I mean we did really well in like battles and like competitions that you did down in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

EA: Cool. So was the position you got on the Luce the position you had hoped for while you were in training?

DM: Actually, I had taken a couple of different positions. I was originally down in, what is it, the machinist's mate...engine room What ended up eventually happening they try to take people that are on the ship for a longer period of time and get them to know different parts of the ship. So I did some damage control petty officer which meant you were in charge of like fire parties and making sure the like fire systems and everything were up to snuff and like everything else. I did an engineering [unintelligible] I was dealing with like a gang [unintelligible] as it is called. So I had done different things when I was in the service

EA: OK. How long were you on the Luce?

DM: The whole time I was in the service. I was there four years.

EA: I also saw on your bio that you were on a C5 cargo plane

DM: A what?

EA: A C5 cargo plane... it said on your biographical information

DM: Yup.

EA: What was that like?

DM: The what?

EA: On a C5 cargo plane... your biographical said you served on that?

DM: Yeah

EA: What was that like?

DM: It was different. I actually don't know how to answer that one.

EA: Did you move around a lot in the plane or were you stationed at one airbase.

DM: We weren't on an airbase. We were down in Mayport, Florida. What ended up happening was...When I originally went to the ship it was from Boston on a regular commercial plane to Virginia. Sat Virginia we went on a C5 which is the big plane for cargo. Where the nose flips up There's seating up in the top. Then after that they took us to Madrid. Put on a regular like small helicopter and we were actually dropped down to the ship 10:27

EA: OK

DM: I mean that's how we moved around. To turn around...Get over there. That's where all the travel with planes came in

EA: When you were in the service did life aboard the ships ever get dull or anything? What did you do to pass the time?

DM: There was lots of playing cards did a lot of reading When you are in the service there's not a lot of books are on board. Read anything you can get your hands on believe it or not. Which is kind of funny. I read romance novels because I wanted something to do The thing is when you are in the service and don't have a lot you want connections with the outside world pick up a book and actually get lost And it would take you away from what was going on. When you were out to sea for like three months it gets hard with no other human contact and people you are around

EA: Right

DM: It would give you an element of relaxation.

EA: Would you consider yourself really close with the crew?

DM: I'd say I 98% of the crew. The other 2% it just didn't work because there were issues with some people thinking they were better than others. I have a hard time a hard issue with that because I believe no one is better than anyone else.

EA: prepared to face combat

DM: Actually the training and everything else it turned around and prepared you for all that. when you were on the ship they actually had drills called general quarters put the water system to in turn wash off everything on the ship so it would be decontaminated. [Unintelligible] went through all this stuff. The whole time I was in it Never actually ended up happening overseas you see things sometimes you don't like I was part of an '86 Suez Canal We picked up ships with fuel in Bahrain. Bahrain is a neutral island. Iran and Iraq. Pick up ships fuel crisis in '85-'86 saw a tanker get blown up and it was about a quarter mile off of the bow. And there's nothing you can do, and you never forget it.

EA: You us have had to go help them afterwards

DM: Yeah, There were people closer than our ship lots of injury and stuff at the time and we were in a war zone at the time So you gotta understand that can always gonna be a possibility.

EA: So what was a normal mission for you? What would you normally do out on deployment?

DM: Normal mission had a med cruise. Med France is known as one of our allies. They had this thing called French-American Day and requested a Navy ship to go up into the mountains and stuff and lay wreaths in dress whites and march in a parade. They turned around and Fed you gave you a cocktail hour gave you pool time had a dance for us but because they didn't tell the people who organized it the buses that were getting us back So I felt it was a kick in the teeth

EA: No time to

DM: Not so much a kick in the teeth for us but generated so much for us as Americans and asked us to take part in a celebration and we ended up having to go back.

EA: moved around a lot or more in one central location

DM: Actually it was more in one central location Mayport, Florida It was little bit away from Jacksonville, Florida, which is where the airbase is. Mayport, Florida was like a big port. You had some major aircraft carriers you had the Super Sara the Saratoga, which is a major one. The Forrestal which was a major aircraft carrier. So you had some major players in the area. And that's where I was stationed the whole time with the exception of deployments. Whenever we deployed go to like the Mediterranean, Puerto Rico Over in the Med I crossed the "line of death" which is the Lebanese area...and stuff like that so-

EA: So when you were deployed out on missions deployments like that... were the reasons behind the missions made clear to you in the briefings and the debriefings?

DM: Actually, yeah, I was very lucky to have the captains that we had on board the ships. On the ship that I was on, it went through a bunch of captains every few years somebody else would come in. They were very very-- Some were more crew oriented than some of the others. We had one guy when we came back from a cruise we were gone six months, and then they extended us two more months. WE came back into Mayport and they had no tugs to put us next to the shore and tie us up. The captains decided we were going in and were going to do it by ourselves. Our families were sitting on the shore waiting for us That's a captain that actually cares about his crew. I mean you are out to see for months. You have limited contact by mail. So, of course, you are missing your loved ones

EA: Were you ever sent out on a mission that conflicted with your beliefs in any way?

DM: No

EA: No

DM: No, because the way I looked at everything, I joined the military to serve my country. So if they were telling me I needed to do something I looked at it as more or less a necessity.

EA: You were telling me about celebration in France. Were all of your interactions with locals in Spain and the Suez Canal positive like that? What were some other interactions?

DM: (laughing) No, they weren't all positive. Overseas was very nice. 90% of the time you had positive interaction how you treat them is usually how you get treated. The only place I got sick and tired of going to was France. We went to St. Tropez, Sainte-Maxime. The French people some of them looked down upon military even though we were supposed to be allies and everything. And you could tell when you were into a port stepped off ship and people were different. St. Tropez, where we got off in Sainte-Maxime and up into the mountains they treated us with respect. When you went to other places... They didn't treat you without respect but you could see the feeling of the respect issue was totally different the minute you stepped off. The way people treated you was different.

EA: Not as warm.

DM: It wasn't as warm.

EA: Were you ever deployed out on a peace keeping mission and were you feeling like the US was trying to police the globe?

DM: The only thing I was actually on was the fuel '85-86 when we were getting the fuel to the US cause we were dealing with the fuel crunch over here.

EA: Out on the ocean was it difficult to stay up to date with US news and politics and how did the Navy try to keep informed?

DM: Actually, it wasn't that bad. Prided themselves with the Navy on keeping up on political things they had our own news people. We had TV on the ship but it was TV coming from inside the ship. It was generated in the ship. It wasn't like

EA: Is that normal on every ship?

DM: At the time it was normal to have it on the ship like that.

EA: Yeah.

DM: When there were big things like the Super Bowl.

EA: Yeah.

DM: Some stuff coming in that you were able to see because it made you feel good. You know, if you were here in the US you would be doing

EA: OK. So they try to accommodate you and make you feel

DM: They try to accommodate which is interesting

EA: Yeah

DM: Victory at Sea National Geographic thing.

EA: OK

DM: they try to keep up positive feeling with everybody on the ship.

EA: it's a way to keep up morale

DM: yeah

EA: did you have plans going out, any kind of career move in mind?

DM: See this is where it gets a little complicated. I actually did a 3 year with an honorable discharge and then I reenlisted. I had problems with addiction. And the military their way of dealing with it back then Give you a general discharge which ends up being a problem because it shows what when you get out you need the help turnaround change be able to change who you are. Get's into when you get out need Veteran stuff. Seven years of recovery where I don't do drugs, smoke I don't do alcohol because of it I have an associates with high honors and I have three semesters with Dean's list

EA: yeah

DM: So it make s you who you are But I've had to struggle to get there. When I got out of the servie these services were still offered. Change where you were at. veterans services get cut all the time. When veterans need the help, there's not the help there. One of the easiest things for our government politics is to cut is problems and programs see things overseas in war zones PTSD at home with their families doesn't come out until years later. Ya know, by that time there's no structure and no consideration to help these people. It's getting better now because it's being brought to the attention of people. But one of the first place theses people usually Want to cut welfare programs there's no structure and there's no consideration to help these people. Want to cut welfare programs or anything that helps people. Might not have had motorcycle accident elbows ripped out of socket. But it's like I'm here to relearn something so I can go back in the working world. I want to work. I'm not one of the people that get a disability and say, ya know, I don't want to work. I want to work. That's why I get help with federal grants Mass rehab

EA: Do yo u think the Navy should have tried to help you more with ;the addiction problem

DM: Taking help they did try to help certain things but the problem is if you don't do things when they want it, they shut you off. That's when I got the general discharge. Which isn't a bad conduct. But a general discharge means you Don't get to wear the uniform don't get help from military backgrounds. It's getting better because it's changing. Went down to my veterans' agent and he told me I'm now eligible it's changing positive things in the work of change for veterans I'm a product of my own ideas. If you think about it, I made the decision to go where I went with the drinking and everything else. So I can only blame myself. I don't blame the military. The military was only a device. Does it change my love for my country does it change my love for the military not at all. To this day even with the way my arm is if they asked me to go to war I'd do it in a heartbeat. There would not even be thought in my mind, "do I want to do this"?

EA: Well that's good. you still have the same drive When you transitioned back to life find it difficult

DM: when you transition back to life you are going to think this is messed up and you are going to think that this is strange in all reality one of the transitions I had was eventually when I got back and had girlfriends you're in the military you are used to sleeping in a rack by yourself sounds messed up but when I got back into reality and I had someone sleeping next to me I was uncomfortable. Because I wasn't used to it. You are talking about four years of being a certain way It changes. Believe me, it sounds like a simple thing, but psychologically it's not. and there were other issues PTSD for some people that saw stuff things you see overseas that you see that you never think you will see Djibouti Africa we offloaded our trash into a dumpster and it was like ants over 200 people rummaging through that trash to get stuff. That's poverty when you see that Tot his day I've never forgotten that So when we think we've got it bad I think about what they have. makes me grateful anything can be better but ,ya know what, it's not as bad as it could be.

EA: did you stay in contact with your comrades, shipmates, any friends?

DM: The problem is like I said earlier I had problems with drinking. For the first year, yeah, people don't want you around when you are staying sober and clean. It's almost like you are an impingement on their fun. So more or less people fell away from me because of the direction I decided to take. Does it mean that from that point I stayed doing the right things no. I struggled many, many years to get to where I am today.

EA:

DM: in a heartbeat

EA: yes, Is there anything maybe I didn't touch upon that you would like to say?

DM: It's an important thing to turn around and realize something. The world is not in my eyes up to snuff there's always people protesting it the problem with that is they protest against soldiers who are told they need to be there. Might not support the war but support the soldiers don't turnaround and belittle them when they get home because they don't jive with your personality or what you believe. They are people just like you and I. They deserve respect the idea of respect when people come back from overseas and fighting wars Perfect example, Korea Viet Nam and stuff like that When people came back they were called baby killers all types of things need to take and diffuse that way of thinking we need to get people to understand that soldiers are here so we that we have freedom of speech, freedom of religion. We have freedoms in America that other places don't have and it's the soldiers that live breathe and can die for this country that can give that to people. So if you don't support a soldier when they are doing stuff like that it Doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

EA: Cause they are going out there and supporting your rights

DM: in history to turn around and fight for what's right.

EA: I think that pretty much concludes it. Thank you, Dan.

DM: Thank you.

EA: I appreciate it.