

My Military Life

—Guy Robert Lubin

I remember growing up as a child in Haiti, always wanting to be a part of the military. I especially wanted to be a part of the United States military. So, when I went to Brien McMahon High in Norwalk, Connecticut, I took one year of Navy JROTC. That is where my journey started. We had a Marine instructor and a Navy instructor. Every year, students from the graduating class enlisted in the military. I didn't know what to do otherwise. I hadn't taken the SAT, so I couldn't enroll in college or at a university. I just knew I wanted to get far away from my father. He talked too much, always asking me what I was going to do with my life. Some of my friends were not doing anything with their lives, so my father thought I was going to end up like them. I decided that the military would help me to get away from my dad. But I did not really know what I was getting myself into.

On July 13th, 2001, I was in Springfield, MA enlisting in the Marine Corps. My recruiter and I talked about a whole lot things. I asked him questions about the Marine Corps—about what I should expect to see when I got to Parris Island—and other basic inquiries. He would tell me what I wanted to hear, keeping me interested. After the physical and blood work, he showed up with a packet and a pen. He wouldn't give me the time to read anything and my dumb ass didn't bother to read the paper before signing it. Later, I found out that this packet gave my life to the government. My date to ship out for boot camp was February 11th, 2002.

I signed up for the Marines well before the events of 9/11. On the morning of September 11th, I was sleeping when my dad called me and told me to turn the TV to the news channel. I really couldn't believe what I saw. For a minute, I thought I was in a dream. But I quickly realized it was reality when I heard

President Bush was about to declare war. To be honest, I was scared everyday leading up to when I got on the bus in South Carolina.

Eventually, I arrived in Parris Island. The way the drill instructors treated us over there, well, it was unbelievable. They did everything possible to make us nervous. Every morning by 0430 we had to be awake and ready to go PT. Then, they would “smoke” us by taking us to the sand box and making us exercise. At the chow hall, we would only have two minutes to eat. Once the “guide” (the guide is the marine who carries the Marine Corp flag when a group is marching. He is the first in line and the last to enter the chow hall as a result) is done, so is everyone else. They made us march everywhere. The drill instructors would mess us up on purpose, just so they could smoke us with pushups, sit-ups, or running in place. Another thing they would do—when we’re on the quarter-deck spit-shining our boots or cleaning our weapons—was get boxes of flour and spread it over the deck with water. They would start counting down as we cleaned: “1:59, 1:58, 1:57,” skipping some numbers until they reached ten seconds. By the time we blinked our eyes they would be at zero. And at zero everyone better stop cleaning, or suffer the consequences. If we were not done they would take us out to the sand box and start smoking us at temperatures of 100 degrees and more.

Despite everything, I was really confident. I told myself, “If you came here, you won’t leave until you do what you came here to do.” But before graduation there’s one last challenge everyone must complete. It’s called the “Crucible.” And it’s pretty much like being crucified. It consists of two days in the jungle. The funny thing is that they only give you two MRE meals. I thought to myself, “How the hell am I supposed to survive for two days with just two meals that only last about six hours?” I thought, “Damn. These people are really trying to kill us.” Did I mention that we only had one canteen of water? I remember thinking, “Wow! Somebody shoot me, please.”

We had to do navigating courses and casualty courses (that’s when one of your team members fake being shot or dead), carrying away the wounded from

the imaginary “hot zone.” I only weighed about 115 pounds at the time, so carrying someone who weighed 180 pounds was quite the task. At the end of the first day, we all swore out loud because of the lack of sleep. The lack of sleep was mostly because we had to do night watch. Like I said, there was always something.

Finally, we humped back to base while singing cadence at 3am the second day. We were tired, hungry, thirsty and we stunk. Once we arrived at our quarter-deck, they gave us some extra minutes to get showered and put on our C-uniforms for the drilling qualification. After the qualification was family time; all of our families showed up to visit. They gave us liberty from 1200 to 1800 hours to be with our loved ones. The day after that was graduation day. We walked across the parade deck and received our “Eagle, Globe and Anchor,” the Marine Corps’ emblem. I became a Marine.

After boot camp, I went home on leave for ten days. After that, they sent us to camp Geiger in Jacksonville, NC for Marine Corps Combat Training (MCT). They taught us how to handle our weapons, clean them, break them apart, and how to use explosive devices. The training lasted twenty-four days. MCT is like boot camp all over again, but it lasts only twenty-four days. This time, we got treated like humans instead of animals. It was a bit relaxed, meaning that the instructors didn’t scream at us too much if we were not acting like dumb asses.

I wanted to be an administrative Marine, so they sent me to a Navy officer’s administrative school in Newport, RI. I wasn’t focused and things didn’t go well. Eventually, they decided to send me to another school. This time, they got to pick. When I arrived at the new school I went to the front desk and asked what the place was. The lady responded, “Food Service Specialist.” I was extremely mad. But there was nothing I could do about it. Plus, I was already there. I attended the school for the four months it lasted.

After that, I went to my first duty station Camp Lejeune, NC. It was early in December of 2002. On the 17th of December, our Gunnery Sergeant told us that

we were going to Iraq and that our orders were already printed. I said to myself, “This is crazy because I just got here and I don’t even know anything about the base.” I also had a girlfriend at the time and we had just gotten serious. Nevertheless, on January 3rd, 2003 they shipped us out.

We boarded an assault ship called the USS Bataan. This was my first time being on a ship. And this one was huge. It had everything. From where we entered (a place called the hanger bay) I saw other boats inside the ship and military trucks and humvees. I also saw big steel trailers used to carry supplies and ammunitions. On the next level up, I saw helicopters and people fixing them. There were a few airplanes, too. At the very top was the flight deck where there were so many planes and helicopters that I couldn’t believe it. The ship held nearly 6,000 people. It took us two hours to get to the part of the ship designated for Marines. And by the time I reached the flight deck to check out the view, we had already pulled off shore. It was an exciting trip. But Kuwait was a different story.

We were at the border between Kuwait and Iraq for a while, getting ourselves ready to invade Iraq. While we were at the border, it took us three days to get all our supplies off of the ship. We stayed on the beach for a few days before heading north. We got everything ready to be transported to the border, vehicles and supplies. I remember being on the main road driving when a white minivan closed up the distance to our truck. We instantly got all our weapons ready to start blasting bullets at that van (because it looked suspicious). We were told to keep locals one-hundred feet away at all times. And we did not see the difference between Kuwait and Iraq. When we arrived at the border, we practiced taking enemies down, vehicle checks, and POW simulations. Once President Bush declared war, we crossed the border. My heart was beating at least one-hundred miles per hour. I felt like it was going to get ugly. I was right.

The first marine who got shot in front of my eyes lay on the ground before bleeding to death. I froze in place, thinking things like, “Is this really

happening?” or “Is this real?” I had to put my fear behind me and accept that I was in the middle of a war where people will do everything in their power to kill me and my fellow Marines. I had to learn how to survive and protect myself and my fellow Marines at all cost.

On April 28th, 2003 we headed to Fallujah. Our commander said it would get bloody because Saddam Hussein’s people were there. We were told to prepare for anything. I thought about three things: my parents, my sisters, and the woman I was with when I left. Everyone made a last phone call to their loved ones and families before leaving for Fallujah. I called my girlfriend before anyone else. She broke up with me and hung up the phone. I was devastated. I felt exiled from the world—like no one cared about me—and walked around carelessly with my head down, waiting for an Iraqi to shoot me. I didn’t care about existing anymore.

When we arrived in Fallujah, the United Kingdom soldiers worked side-by-side with our unit, fighting house-to-house combat, defeating the Iraqis. I almost died so many times. My attitude did not help matters. And things went on like that until one of our men shook the hell out of me and told me to “get my head in the game” because the situation “wasn’t a joke.” If I wanted to get back home, I had to start thinking about staying alive in the meantime. After a while, I had a vision of one of my little sisters, Jessica Lubin, standing in front of me, crying. For some reason, strength came upon me and I stayed focused the rest of the time that we were defeating the Iraqis in Fallujah.

We were out for about a month before rotating with another unit and heading back to our camp. For that whole month of combat we couldn’t contact family members. My dad was extremely worried because he hadn’t heard from me. He would spend days without eating and watched the American death tolls on the news. This only made him more worried. When we finally had the opportunity to call home it was a relief for most of our families. But it was also sad because some of us didn’t make it back.

Combat came when an Army supply truck was captured. The Iraqis killed three soldiers and held the last one in captivity. They sent us out as a rescue team to find that captured soldier. The Iraqis would move her to one location and then to another every time we got close. Eventually, we found her tortured, beaten, and raped at an old hospital outside of the city.

After that, we stayed on base until we went back home in July of 2003. Before Thanksgiving, we were already on our way to Afghanistan. There wasn't too much hostile activity going on over there at the time; but *we* would get attacked by RPG's almost every day. The weather over there was extremely cold and we were outside the wire for weeks at a time. I got frostbite in my feet, and one of our humvees hit on a roadside bomb. But no one got hurt. We got shot at a few times while looking for the bad guys. And when we found out we were going home in May of 2004 we were very happy. We needed a break from the desert.

We stayed home for about nine months before our second trip to Iraq. For some reason, I felt like something was going to happen this time around. I would get scared every time I thought about it. I will never forget our second tour to Iraq. I lost way too many of my friends over there. Friends died in front of my eyes; I came only two or three feet from getting shot; and one of my friends was killed by an Iraqi sniper on a Sunday morning while patrolling a village for security.

That morning we were talking about girls back home—just having guy's talk—when suddenly we heard shots fired at 9 o'clock to our left. Someone yelled, "Contact Left! Shots fired!" And I looked over my right shoulder to see one of our men on the ground, shaking and holding his neck. We rushed to him to see how bad he was hurt and called for a medic. But they didn't arrive on time and he died, eyes-open looking at all of us. I cried like a little kid. That Marine was a good friend of ours, and after his death none of us wanted to be in Iraq anymore. Every day, someone else would die or get seriously injured. One of my

friends lost his legs from a roadside bomb right outside our front gate at 0200 in the morning.

My experience in the United States Marine Corps is one of experience I will never forget because it changed my life forever. The person I was before that is long gone now. I miss all of my fallen brothers to this day. But the fact that I'm still here—that they didn't die in vain—will be a fact I repeat again and again until the day I die. I will never forget the sacrifices they made for our dear country, the United States of America.

2nd Battalion, 8th Marine division

AMERICA'S BATTALION

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