**Ok, today is December 16, 2013. This is Fidencio Marbella with the Westchester Public Library in Westchester, Illinois. Also present is Patrick Callaghan, a reference librarian here at the library. Today, we will be speaking with Mr. Charles Louis Berra. Charles served in the United States Marine Corps Reserves for about two-years, and this interview is being conducted for the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.**

**Ok, let’s go ahead and get started, Chuck. Why don’t you tell when and where you were born and a little bit about your family when you were growing up?**

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, so I’ve stayed pretty much close to home my whole life. I grew up first in the western part of Chicago, and then we moved first to Cicero, and then to Westchester. So basically followed Cermak Road just west. I went to St. Frances of Rome Grammar School, St. Joseph High School, Western Illinois University down in Macomb, Illinois.

**Ok, before we started this interview, so spoke quite a bit about your father. So, obviously, you have a tradition of service within your family. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about your father’s service in the U.S. Navy.**

My father was born in Murphysboro, Illinois, down in southern Illinois, and in 1936 he joined the Navy. Again, back in ‘36 it was still the Depression. Coming from a small town that was a big step to get out of Murphysboro and get out and see the world. So, he joined the Navy in ‘36 and after he graduated from Great Lakes he went on the USS Chicago, which at the time was one of the premier cruisers in the fleet.

**I have to ask you this: Did he get to pick that ship, with him being from Chicago, or was it just random?**

I don’t think so. I’m not sure. I’m not sure. I don’t know the answer to that. And then from ‘36 up until the beginning of the war, he was on the Chicago, they were basically, from my understanding in the Pacific. They went San Diego, Seattle, and Honolulu, basically, and then all around. So, they had gone various places. I know he went to Australia and New Zealand and New Guinea on stuff like that on the ship. And obviously he crossed the equator because I have that thing there. And he says he was in Hawaii, and then, of course, in California. And then in 1941 or 42 at the beginning of the War he transferred off the Chicago and went into the amphibious forces, and he talks about being in New York and then being shipped to England. And then he went on the Invasion of North Africa with the amphibious force, he said, as an electrician they were trying to take the harbor. So they had Navy people there who when they went in they would secure the harbor and then open up the harbor and get ships in there. So he was as an electrician he was in the combat engineers. He was part of the group that was supposed to go in there and secure the harbor. Well, he tells stories that it went wrong. The invasion, you know, he used to get very, very angry, he said, oh yeah Mark Clark was supposed to go over there and get everything worked out.” And he used more colorful language, but that didn’t really work. I guess they put a chain across the harbor, and the boats sank and stuff like that. Well anyway he got captured, and he was captured by the Vichy French. And he didn’t like the French. He said that when they marched him through the streets they spit at him and stuff like that. And he sustained an injury; I guess he was somehow on a halftrack or something like that and he got blown off of it and hurt his back. But then ultimately as the invasion progressed, they got liberated or he got freed. And then he was assigned to the harbor at Oran, Algeria, so he was in Oran for most of the war, or a lot of the war. And he was doing the operational stuff there, I mean being an electrician and stuff like that. Funny story. He ran into a guy that he knew from Oran, years ago, again, here in Chicago, because, again, like I said back then there were a lot of guys with previous service. It was a very fraternal kind of thing. You know, you’d go to American Legion and there’d be hundreds of guys at the American Legion because they’d all served in World War II. So, as a kid growing up, those American Legion picnics, god, it was like Taste of Chicago. I mean, it was unbelievable.So, he ran into a guy he knew from Oran. And he was a salesman and we had gone out to dinner with him and stuff like that. And the guy gave me a dictionary, in fact. But anyway, they were talking and he told a story about how they were all amazed because my dad had wired the big freezers for the base with telephone wire. And he says it’s amazing that stuff didn’t burn down because it had big freezer motors running on telephone wire. But, again, that was during the war in Oran. I guess they didn’t have enough wire, and he wired the freezers with telephone wire.

**Yeah, you do what you gotta do.**

Yeah, so that was kind of a funny story, but then he left the Navy in 46 and then we lived in Chicago. He married my mother, and then, you know, we came here. And that’s how it started.

**So, obviously, you do have that tradition in your family of serving our country. What made you decide to join the Marine Corps Reserves?**

Two things: First, I always wanted to be a pilot, and as you look back in the seventies they had Navy and Army aviation programs, but the Marines had what I considered to be the best option if you were going to be a pilot. At least it had the shortest service requirement after you had flight training and after you were commissioned. I think it was only like four years, whereas the Navy would have required six, and the Air Force much more. The Navy and the Air Force were much harder to get into. And I didn’t even make it in the Marine Corps, I didn’t get the aviation training. You know, it was a better deal. And the second part of it was everybody, or, at least growing up, you know, the image of the Marine Corps is that they’re the toughest outfit. And quite honestly, I wanted to see if I was tough enough to be a Marine. I wanted to test, I wanted to challenge myself: Am I good enough, am I tough enough, to be a Marine?

**Now, what year was this that you enlisted?**

I enlisted it was the end of 1971, basically the beginning of 72. Honest to god true story, I had always had in the back of my mind, you know, that I wanted to be a Marine. My father, being in the Navy, never liked the Marine Corps. That was not one of his favorite decisions. But my dad would let me do what I want. But, I mean, I could tell, he didn’t like the Marine Corps.

**Did he try to talk you into joining the Navy?**

He didn’t say anything one way or the other. He told me clearly about his experience. You know, he always said it’s your decision, it’s your life. You have to live your life your way. Don’t live your life for me, or following me or something like that. He said, it’s your life, live it. He told me about the Navy. The thing he always said is if you’re going to go in, go in as an officer not an enlisted man. It’s a better deal as an officer than as an enlisted man. So if you’re gonna do that, do that. He said, don’t just run away and join the service right after high school, go to college and get a commission, and go in as an officer. It would be much better than if you go in as an enlisted man. He says, I went in as an enlisted man because I had no other options. He says, I was hungry. You know, they fed us three meals a day in the Navy. And that’s one of the reasons why he went in. But, he said if you have the chance and you really want to go in, go in as an officer. So, I went to college, and I was looking at ROTC and stuff like that, but the Marine Corps was always in the back of my mind. I was looking in the student newspaper one day down in Macomb, and, at that time, the service in the early seventies was just changing over from the draft and the lottery and all that in the post-Vietnam era, they were just starting to go into the recruiting of volunteer service. They were just starting to, to beginning recruit, but there was still a lot of sentiment in colleges against the military. I mean, the post-Vietnam dislike of the military didn’t go away. I mean, it went all the way into the seventies. So, on one hand, the military was there trying to recruit, and, on the other hand, there was still people throwing stuff at them and carrying signs and saying we don’t want you here and baby killers and war mongers and stuff like that. So there was still tension. So when the Marines first came there it was there officer recruiters. They would set up tables in the lobby and have their signs up and stuff like that. Well, the first day they had some trouble, so they didn’t set up a table in a conspicuous part of the lobby. They had a room way in the back or something like that, kind of out of the way. Well, I had looked on the schedule of the events and I saw that they were going to be there. So, I was going to go there the first day and that was my first step in joining. You know, you have to go, you have to talk to somebody called an Officer Selection Officer—“OSO.” So, you go there and you talk to the OSO, and they interview you, you take some tests, you know, they do the processing. I went there and the table wasn’t there, so I looked on the board, and I see they’re back in the room. So, I go back to the room. They were really out of the way back there. And I knock on the door and walk in and it’s just them there and they’re just sitting there. And I say hi and introduce myself, and I met the guys and his name is Morrison. And I talk to him and I said I’m interested in the PLC program. He goes, god, that’s amazing that you found us. We’re not even out in the lobby yet. He goes, you must really be interested. And I go: yeah. And that’s the way it started. I found them in the back room. And then, of course, you have to take tests and interview and stuff, it’s a pretty rigorous process, they do look pretty closely. And then, that’s how it started. And then, I was a junior, at the time the Marine Corps had in their PLC program there was two options: You could go two six week periods if you were, like, a sophomore or junior, and then basically you get your commission when you graduate, or if you were already a junior you go for ten weeks, for the summer between your junior and senior year. So it’s two six weeks if you’re younger, but if you’re a junior, you go for one ten week in between your junior and senior year, you get commissioned when you graduate.

**What did PLC stand for?**

Platoon Leaders Class. So, basically, I was a junior. So I signed up for that ten week, this is in 1972, that ten-week stretch, the ten week OCS class in Quantico Virginia. But then, as I said, I wanted to be a pilot. Well, unfortunately, my aviation aptitude isn’t all that good. So, I flunked the aviation aptitude test.

**So, they tested you for that?**

Yeah.

Do you remember what kind of question they asked?

Basically, there was a lot. I remember they asked questions to the effect of when was the first time you changed a tire. Do you use tools? They had those little pictures where they have the sky and they say, ok, if you’re this way, which way is up and stuff like that. And I go: how do I know which way is up? There was a series of test like that, and I did not do well on them. So, I basically, but even having done that, I still wanted to see how tough I was. I still wanted to see if I could cut it. Which, looking back now, is kind of risky. Because, I graduated, so I successfully did it, but a lot of guys didn’t. The washout rate at OCS in the Marine Corps is very high. It’s 30 or 40 percent. You know, they tell you, it’s half the guys. A good, solid third of the guys don’t make it. Either by discharge upon request, they call it DOR, or they ask you to leave. I mean, it’s very physical, very mentally demanding, not so much that they’re throwing trigonometry at you or something like that, but they put you under intense pressure. I mean, they rattle your cage from the time you get off the bus to the time you get back on the bus. I mean, they’re continuously putting pressure on you. Their philosophy was if they can break you in training, you’ll break in combat. So, they’re cranking on you all the time. And that’s what they do. If you can do it, and you graduate, it’s a tremendous feeling, but a lot of guys didn’t. And, some of those guys I knew. In fact, one of them was from Western. In fact, I knew two guys. One was—and I’m not going to mention these names—but one guy was very, very good, and he got caught shoplifting. I mean, he was a much better officer candidate than I ever was. And the Marine Corps has a very high moral, ethical code. He ripped off a CD tape, you know, and he lost his commission. And they discharged him, and, I mean, no way. In the Marine Corps, if you don’t project the image that they want, I mean, and they’re very big on integrity, very big on integrity, moral conduct and stuff like that. I mean, he got caught shoplifting, he was gone. And he was a good guy. There was another guy I know and he just wasn’t that physical. I mean, he just couldn’t keep up. I mean there was a lot of guys there and they had a good heart, but they didn’t have the body. And they talk about it being tough, it is tough. I was an athlete my whole life, I’m not mister super poster Marine, as you look at me, but, you know, I can work out, you know. I can run, I can climb, and stuff like that. A lot of it is the mental side of it, too. So, if you can do it and you graduate, it’s a tremendous feeling. But a lot of these guys wanted to but they couldn’t. I don’t what it would be like going through life with that kind of failure, or having that kind of ‘oh yeah, I couldn’t do it.’ You know, you do it, and then, like me, I resigned to go to grad school and stuff like that, ok I made a decision right or wrong, good or bad. But it was my decision; it wasn’t really forced on me. Somebody who really wanted it and flunked, that kind of failure is kind of hard to live with. That’s why I say it’s risky. It’s a tremendous risk. I don’t know what it would be like to carry that, you know, you’re whole life knowing, yeah, but I’m just not good enough for that, I’m really that kind of screw up, you know, and kind of just have your head down. You can make decisions and almost laugh about it, but to have a failure like that, you know, it really eats at you. So, that’s why I say it’s kind of risky, but I did it, and I got through it. And, I’ll tell you, on graduation day when we walked down that parade ground, you know, flags flying and music playing and stuff like that, it was the most exhilarating feeling of my life. Because I knew I had accomplished, I had gone through one of the toughest military programs in the world. I did it; I got through it. And I can’t tell you how great that feeling is. It’s one of the highlights of my life. Even now, and that was 1972, and I still get excited. It’s just the way it is. So it was great like that, but the risk if you couldn’t do it would have been just as devastating, I think.

**Well, it’s a great motivating factor for you not to fail.**

Yeah, well, you almost…I’ll tell you a funny story. You guys like stories. I’ll tell you a story. We have time for this, though?

**Absolutely.**

Ok, when go up to OCS, you know, you great grouped in with people and stuff like that, and you fly on something called a group ticket. So you don’t get an individual ticket. You meet a bunch of guys at the airport, there’s, like, ten of you on the same ticket, and you go as a group. Well, obviously, you know, the Chicago OSO, Officer Selection Officer, put his ten guys going to Virginia, you know, on the same plane, and you were all on the same plane and stuff like that, so, one guy had the ticket and other nine, ten of us, or whatever, we fly into DC. And they have an officer meet you at the gate, you know, to take you to the bus and stuff like that. So the guy there says who’s in charge here. And all of us have never seen each other before. We look around. I don’t know who’s in charge. Well, there was a guy there, and this guy looked like a Marine. He was big. I’m about 5-7, and this guy’s about 6-2. And I’ll never forget he had a fraternity shirt on. He was from the University of Illinois. He had a fraternity shirt on and stuff like that. And he looked the part, he goes, “Well, I guess I’m in charge.” And I looked and I go, “Yeah, that’s a pretty good decision, you look like a Marine, you know, and stuff like that. And so, he had the stuff, and they take him in there. And we get on the bus, and, you know, you go through the gate at Quantico, and that’s the last peace and quiet you have for ten weeks. The start shouting from the time you get off the bus to the time you get back on. I mean, I’ve never heard human beings shout like that. I mean, the first night, our two sergeant instructors, they shouted continuously for four hours. Nonstop. I didn’t think human vocal chords could do that. I have never heard two people shout like that before. I mean, continuously. It was unbelievable. Anyway, so they’re shouting. Well, anyway, they break you up into platoons and companies and stuff like that. I don’t know if they had a method to what they were doing. I’m sure they did, but it seemed random to us. You know, you’re running around, it’s night, you don’t sleep. The first night you’re there, you don’t sleep. I think they give you two hours sleep or something like that. So, you’re tired. Not only are they shouting, you’re tired. You ain’t sleeping. The training starts. Well, anyway, the Chicago Group, we were basically in the same company, so you know you have four platoons in a company and stuff like that at the time. So you know you see em, I wasn’t right next to the guy but I saw him around and stuff. Well, so the training starts, and part of what Marines do is Marines march a lot. You put your pack and your rifle on and you go and they run ya. And part of that training part of those marches is they see who drops. So in other words part of it is you gotta you gotta keep up. And it’s designed; I mean it’s designed, a lot of the guys fall out. Oh it was one of those days. ’72 there was a lot of rain in Virginia. And it was rainy, and it was muddy. You know there’s a stretch of land that starts at Washington and runs all the way through St. Louis. You know that whole stretch in the middle part of the country there. You get into July and August it’s humid and a 100 degrees. I mean it starts at Washington goes all the way through Cincinnati goes all the way through St. Louis. And it’s just hot there. You get down there in July and it’s hot and it’s humid. And it’s just that stretch in the middle of the country. I mean at least I know it’s there. Well, Quantico is just a little bit south, and it’s hot, and it’s humid. Well, it’s one of these days, and it’s muddy. And it’s hot, and we’re on that trail, and we’re carrying the full marching packs and the rifle and the helmet and struggling to keep up. And a lot of guys are falling out. And there’s this guy who—five weeks ago was in his fraternity shirt and he’s in charge, Mr. Marine—I’ll never forget this. He’s on the side of the trail. He has tears coming down his eyes. He says, “I can’t do this. I wanna go home. I wanna go home” And, as I went past, I kind of looked down, and I said that’s the guy who five weeks ago I was in the airport following because he was the Marine, and, you know, he was in charge. And, so, a lot of times you have trouble making up, keeping up, and that’s the mental side of it. But, again, that’s not trigonometry or calculus or something like that, that’s just mentally, you know: Am I going to make it to the end of this trail? Am I going to go up that hill? You know, am I going to do what they want me to do, for myself personally. I don’t know how they figured this stuff out. I’m not the most gifted person when it comes to heights. You know, I’m not exactly Mr. Graceful. I don’t like heights. I don’t know how they did this, but every time there was something with heights I was the first. You know, “Berra, go do it.” You know, and I go, “how do they keep picking me?” I mean, I never told them I was afraid of heights. I don’t like snakes. All that stuff. I was the guy that got the snake thrown on my chest. I’ll never forget that. I’m going under the barbed wire. You know, you crawl under. When you go under barbed wire, at least the cow fence, you go on your back, you put the rifle up, you crawl under like that. I’m just under the wire. They threw this snake. There’s a snake on my chest. I’ll never forget this. It was a green snake. It had black eyes and a pink tongue, and I had eye recognition with the snake. Because, you know, I couldn’t move. And I’m there and there’s the snake, and he’s looking right at me. And I looked at it, and it looked at me and stuck its tongue out. Then it crawled by. You know, how did they know that I don’t like snakes? I don’t how they knew that, but I got the snake on my chest. Anyway, so heights. I don’t like heights, and I guess they saw that. There’s an obstacle on the obstacle course. It’s called “the composite.” You climb up a rope. You go through the top, and jump off the rope. You go down a big, long log. You know, down the log. Well, I’m not the most graceful person coming down the log. I get down the log, and there’s my platoon sergeant right there. I’ll never forget this. His name was Vaughn. Very, very good guy. Vaughn is standing there with his hand on his hips, and he saw me come down the log. He said: “Berra do it again.” So, I go back, and I come down again, and he goes, “Berra, we’re gonna keep doing this until you come down that log like a Marine. Go back and do it again.” So then, after about three times, I get to the point where I don’t care if break my leg. I don’t care if I fall off this. He’s going to stand there and keep making me do this forever, so I might as well do it.” So, after about the third or fourth time, I just come down that log, I run down that log, you know, I don’t care if I fall off. I don’t care. At least if I go to sick bay and break my leg, I won’t have him hollering at me anymore. So, then he just walked away. But, that’s almost the mindset you have to have.

**So, that was his point.**

That was his point. You do it, and, you know, if you break your leg or you fall off, you do it. And that’s what you have to have, and when you’re on the trail. One of the lessons that I learned—you asked what you learned—I’m telling stories about the hardship, but I learned so much. It’s such a educational experience. You do different jobs there. So when they’re training you to be an officer, they’re training you to be a leader. One of the things they told us, which is very, very true, we were there, and we’re doing, and we’re obviously going up the hill, and you say “come on guys, one more step” and blah blah blah and all that stuff, one of the things, he pulled me aside, he says, “Berra, when you’re leading your platoon, or you’re motivating, you don’t motivate them just to the top of the hill because what happens when you get to the top of the hill, and you have to go further beyond that?” You motivate somebody in such a way that you don’t just motivate them to a certain point because then if they have to go beyond that point, it’s a let-down. You motivate them in such a way that you keep going and then you go beyond that point if you have to. He said, “but you don’t just take somebody from there to there because if you get there and have to go further, you’ll have a let-down.” You know, that’s an invaluable piece of information, and that’s not just when you’re going up a hill in Quantico, Virginia. That’s in life. I mean, that’s in business. That’s in sports. That’s all the way across the board. And, you know, he told me that ankle-deep in mud in Quantico, Virginia, but that’s a life lesson that you learn. And carry it with you if you can. It’s invaluable. I mean, they teach it to you in a rather harsh environment, but that stuff is golden.

**But, obviously, it stuck with you.**

Oh yeah. You can’t go through OCS half-ass. I mean, you got to put it all on the line, and let the chips fall where they may. And, again, that goes back to the risky part. If you do that, and you pass, that’s great. If you put it all on the line, and you fail, that’s that part where you’re motivating yourself to the top of the hill and all of a sudden you get there, and, that’s the let-down. And I think it’s very, very, again, it’s very emotionally risky to take that kind of risk. But, if you take it, and it’s successful, and you do it, it’s such a tremendous feeling. It’s worth the risk. It’s worth the risk. There was one guy there, I’ll never forget this, I guess a lot of the officer selection offices they were trying to fill a quota. So, there were a lot of guys who were there. There was a couple guys there, even you could tell that they didn’t belong there. For some reason, they were just there. There was one guy there in our platoon. He couldn’t even do three pull-ups. I mean, he was tall and skinny and stuff like that. They got him aside, and they were yelling at him. They’d yell at you all the time. And they just looked at him, “what did you expect to do here all summer, read?” That’s kind of funny. So, you do have to do some pull-ups. You do have to do some running and stuff. But, by the same token, you also learn a lot of stuff. I mean, everything from leadership to, you know, obviously, you know how to take apart a rifle and stuff like that, but also just about yourself and interacting with other people. You know, that group dynamic or just management, for lack of a better word. Tremendous.

How did it make you feel when you saw these men who you thought were bigger than you, tougher than you dropping out, along the way?

I looked at that and I said, “oh my god, maybe I am tough enough to do this.” You know, maybe I can. I’ll be honest with you. One of the problems that I have always had is self-confidence. And, you know, ok, now I’ll tell you a very, very funny story, and this is the honest to god truth. The first night, they’re cranking you and all that, at some point they kind of go good cop bad cop on you. So what they have, is they have the enlisted sergeant instructors yelling for hours on end. And then you go in and see the commanding officer. He he goes, “oh, come on, relax, and tell me how you feel, and how was the trip in.” So, it’s kind of like the god cop bad cop. Well, I slipped, and I let my guard down. So, I go in there, and I’m talking to him. And I honestly told him, “geez, they’ve been yelling for the last four hours. I haven’t had any sleep, and I don’t even know if I really want to do this. Boy, this is hard. I didn’t expect them to yell like this, and I didn’t expect all of this. And he goes, well, you know, it’s part of the training. You know, he starts talking to me. So, I figure, ok fine. He’s a nice guy and stuff like that, so I walked out. That was, like, the third night. Then over the next nine weeks, I mean, they’re on me like a dirty shirt. I mean, I have this guy in my ear yelling, and nothing I do is right. And, in fact, they intentionally tried to mess me up. I mean, they would relieve me of command when I had the student billets and stuff like that. And then it got to the point where I think, well geez, it doesn’t make any difference what I do. They’re going to yell anyway, so what the hell, I might as well do what I want. But I am thinking, clearly, out of all the other fifty guys that were there, they were coming at me the hardest, and I could see it. And, I’m thinking to myself, why? Why? I haven’t done anything. I’m doing alright. So, one night, I’m on the fire watch. You know, fire watch is one of those things they have in the Marine Corps where it’s kind of like a sentry. Somebody’s always awake. It goes with the nautical tradition where they used to have candles on ships, and stuff like that, they were afraid of a fire. And they call it the fire watch. So I was the fire watch one night, so I figured, I’m curious. It’s the middle of the night. Nobody’s awake except for me because I’m fire watch, so I go in there, and I pull my file. And I’m reading my file. What are they saying about me? I look. The first interview that third night, the officer write: “Questionable motivation. Not sure if he wants to be here. Should be tested.” The first night when he went with that good cop bad cop and I let my guard down for a couple minutes, I told him, hey, they’ve been yelling for five hours or whatever, and I’m not sure. I haven’t slept. And he wrote that down. Questionable motivation. Not sure. Should test him. See how bad he wants to—and they kept yelling, “Berra how bad to you wanna be here? Berra, how bad do you wanna be here? Berra, you gonna quit? You gonna quit?” And then finally one time I just told them, I said, hey, we just had the lottery. My number is 243. I’m here because I want to be here, not because I’m going to get drafted. You know? Because, you know, back then they had, that was the first year they had the lottery. The put everybody’s birthday in the fishbowl, and pulled it out, and they drafted from one all the way down to 365. Well, I don’t think they ever drafted past about 150. You know, I don’t know the exact number, but they didn’t go all the way down to 365. They filled what they needed at about 150, 160, somewhere around there. I was 243. I say, hey, I am a volunteer. I said: really, really, really I’m not here because I’m afraid of being drafted in the Army or something like that. But, yeah, that was it. So, you know, they cranked on me for nine weeks. But, you know, again, I wanted to see how tough I was, and I found out.

**What other kinds of training did you have to go through besides just the physical aspect?**

Basically, well, when you get there they go through a lot of classroom stuff, too. So a lot of it is obviously the physical. A lot of it is what they call leadership training, so you do everything from practicing leadership to—everyone rotates through what they call a “billet.” They call them billets. It’s like a job. So everyone’s a platoon commander, squad leader, fire team leader, and stuff like that. And what they do is, they let the students run, or they let the candidates run the company or run the problems, and they just watch. So, in other words, you’re kind of doing it, but they’re yelling at you and they’re supervising you. They’re setting the stage, and you have to act out on the stage what they do or what they do or what they want. So, you do that. They have a lot of classroom stuff where you learn everything from land navigation. Funny story. Back then, we were still using maps and compasses.

**No GPS.**

No GPS. I know how to orient a compass. They had a thing called “orienteering.” That was one of things they do. That’ where you get a compass and run through the woods, and go from point to point and stuff like that. The Marines were very big on that. So they had that, and, obviously, the rifle and stuff like that. Bayonet fighting and all that stuff. But they had everything from military law to uniforms and stuff like that. And then, of course, just individual—we had to give speeches, write autobiographies, stuff like that. We had to get up there, and we had to do impromptu talks. You know, you talk about speech class. Well, they had their own kind of little speech class there. You had to get up, and, they look through your biography. And they pick a point, pick out something. And then you’d have to go up and give a 10-minute talk on that point. So I had put down in my biography that one of my summer jobs I was a landscaper. So, I had to give a 10-minute talk about how to plant a tree, or how to plant a shrub. There was a guy there who was a door-to-door salesman, a guy from Detroit, I’ll never forget it. He was one of the funniest guys. And he used to sell stuff. He was a salesman. So, they had to go, he had to go give a 10-minute talk on selling stuff. If someone said they were a scuba diver, they had to give a 10-minute talk on scuba diving. If they said they were a judo player—I didn’t tell them any of that stuff. See, I had done all that. I was already a judo and a scuba diver and all that, but I wanted to go through as inconspicuously as possible. So, I gave a talk on planting a shrub. And various stuff like that, all the way through. So it wasn’t just doing pull-ups and sit-ups. There were other things in there, too. The guy who gave the talk on the salesman, the guy from Detroit, it was the funniest. It was the funniest. The commanding officer even said, you are one of those rare people who can make people laugh. You have a gift to make people laugh. And he was just a really cool guy. So it was a combination of a lot of things like that.

**I got to ask you: How do you train with bayonets without hurting each other?**

Ok, honest to god true story. It’s something called a “pugil stick.” It looks like a curtain rod but it has two things on the end. One end is, like, where the bayonet is, the other end is like the—

**The butt.**

The butt. Funny story. My platoon sergeant, before he went to OCS, he was the head hand-to-hand combat instructor at Camp Pendleton. Only the best guys, the best officers and the best sergeants get to be at OCS. I mean, everyone one of them had that airborne wings on there. They were all recon. I mean, everyone. The guys that were there, at least when I was there, were the cream of the non-commissioned officer crop of the Marine Corps. So they’re there, so, first day, you know, we go out there, and you a book that they show you, and you go there, and you have the pugil stick. The weird thing about the pugil sticks is that’s the one area that’s totally at the purview of the enlisted men. So, in other words, officers carry pistols, but the sergeants, they would say good enlisted men will take all of these officer candidates. You know, they’d always say: “don’t call me sir. I work for a living.” You know, and stuff like that. But anyway, so, the sergeants are all there and Vaughn is there, and he was the head hand-to-hand. So we all go out there, and they call me. Well, again, I’m not the biggest guy in the world. And, you know, even though I was athletic. I had never had one of these sticks before, and they showed me. So I go out there and what they do is, you put on a helmet and stuff like that, and you square-off with someone, they blow the whistle, and you just try to beat the heck out of each other. Well, the guy was a little bit bigger than me, obviously. Well, for some reason, that damned stick slipped out of my hand. You know, I went like that, so there he is, and he’s coming, so I couldn’t think of what else to do, so I kicked him in the shins. So I went *boom!* and kicked him in the shins, and he took the stick like a baseball bat and hit me in the side of the head. *Pow!* like that. Well then they stopped it. So, you know, my head was buzzing, so we go back there. And in the background you hear them. And then the other guys are starting to rib my platoon sergeant—the other sergeants. Oh, Vaughn, what, are you developing a new system to fight? Maybe we’ll just go out and kick the enemy in the shins. You know, like that. Because then they started riding him—the other guys—because it’s kind of like a game for them. So, we get back to the squad bay, and we’re getting there, and all of a sudden I hear, “Candidate Berra report to the platoon sergeant. Candidate Berra report to the platoon sergeant.” So, I said, ah shit. Nothing ever good happens when you go. So, I go in there and I report, and I’ll never forget what he said. He goes, “Berra, you embarrassed me in front of god and the platoon commander.” What happened out there?” I go, “I slipped.” You know, what do you mean what happened? He goes, “you’re not going to slip again.” So, I got private lessons, you know. He said you’re not going to embarrass me. That’s not going to happen again. You’re not going to embarrass me again. So, you know, he shows me how to do it, you know. I go out there, you know, I fall out with him. He explains all this stuff. The trick is, you go right for the jugular right away, and then you come right back. But anyway, so, a couple weeks later, we go out there again. And, again, I don’t know that they’re playing games with me. So, I’m getting ready to go. All, of a sudden—you guys know what Oakies are, right? I mean, there was a lot of hardnosed—this Oakie, I mean, thick forehead, no neck, slobbering down the side of his mouth, he’s coming up. He runs up, and, what you do is, you fight against other platoons. So our platoon was kind of in a contest with the other platoon, and we’re going one-on-one with the sticks. This guy runs up in front of me, and they were still putting the helmet on me. You have a thing to cover your groin area, too, so they’re still putting that stuff. He runs up to there and he starts, “I’m gonna kill you! I’m gonna kill you!” and this big old guy like this. “I’m gonna kill you! I’m gonna kill you!” And I looked at him, “why the hell are you yelling at me like that?” I said, “why are you yelling at me?” I said, we got to go out there and do that. And I’m thinking, why is he coming at me that hard? Why is he all of a sudden trying to rattle my cage? It’s just another guy. And then I look over, and I see, because they have different referees, all of a sudden I see Vaughn come over and become the referee now. I go, “ah-ha! This is a test. This is the test.” Then I realized. I said, “oh boy, he wants to see how his lessons have paid off.” So, then I’m thinking, ok, the first thing you do is vertical butts or vertical slash and butts and stuff like that. So, basically, I got the guy to a draw. You know, we did it three times and stuff like that, and we got to the draw. That’s how you train with a bayonet and then with a pugil stick, basically, if anyone comes at you, the first one’s like that and the second one’s like that. But, they got the guy, and that didn’t just happen. They set that up. They matched me with that big Oakie. I mean, that wasn’t just the luck of the draw. I mean, now I look back, that was a set-up. I mean, that wanted to see if I’d fold. There was no question about that.

**And you didn’t fold.**

And I didn’t fold, no. And I remember, coming right at the jugular right away. But that’s how you do it. But I’ll never forget: “Berra, you embarrassed me in front of god and the platoon commander.” Sorry. But, yeah, so, but again, now here was a guy very, very—you know, you laugh about the sergeant instructor like that—but, I mean, he was a smart guy. I mean, he was a senior Marine. Very well trained. Training us. Now training methods are hard. I mean, they’re not coddling you. But, I mean, they know what they’re doing. I mean, it’s the best training in the world. I mean, it’s not a game. It’s not a joke. And, you know, we’re sitting here laughing about it and telling stories like that, but, then, the final part of the story is, after that, I kind of went in there to thank him. I said, “well, platoon sergeant, thank you for helping me,” and he looked up and goes, “Berra, don’t thank me. I would be remiss in my duty if I allowed you to leave here defenseless.” Remiss in his duty if he allowed me to leave here defenseless. And that’s the way it was. It was business.

**Don’t get all warm and fuzzy on me.**

That’s right. That’s it exactly. You know, and that’s the way it was, and that’s how you train somebody to fight with a bayonet.

**Now, what other kinds of weapons training did you have?**

 Basically, what they told us. We asked them that. We said, “well, how come we’re not getting more of this?” And they go, “well, they said, you’re going to be officers, your weapon is your platoon. You’re leaders. You fight with your platoon.” If you’re leading your platoon from the right place, and the enemy gets that close to you, there’s nothing we can do that will save you except for own instinct to survive.” You know, and they said, “if you’re in the wrong place, you deserve to die.”

**Wow. Harsh.**

Harsh, yeah. Oh, I’ll never forget. The first time the company first sergeant walked in there—his name was Lee. He was a Korean veteran, of Korea—walked in. This guy walked in. He, he had creases on his face. He was so perfect. All he did was he walked in. Pointed to his three stripes, three rockers, you know. There’s a full armful, there. He says, “I am the company first sergeant.” Looked and pointed at this. “Korea—that’s the old Marine Corps.” And, you know, he walked up and down, and, I don’t know how he did it, but it felt like he was talking to each one of you individually. He was talking to the group, but somehow it felt like he was right in front of you, you know. And he said, “you think I’m going to salute you just because you went to college, you’re wrong.” And then he said, he says—and I’ll be candid—he says, “if you think I’m going to let you get any of my young privates killed because you fucked up, you’re wrong, too.” He says, “you’re not going to get out of here and fuck up and get somebody killed.”

**So, they only had the best NCO’s training the officers.**

Yes, that’s right. Everyone one of them was recon. Every one of them had the little eagles and the parachute on there. They were all recon. All of them had Vietnam—well, he had Korea—but all of were Vietnam. “No sidewalks in Vietnam,” when we were in that mud. “No sidewalks in Vietnam. What do you think? There are no sidewalks in Vietnam.” And we’re in the mud up to the ankles and stuff like that.

**Now, when did you think in your own mind, “I’m going to make it.”**

Not until the very end. I didn’t waltz through. I mean, that’s part of the reason why I left. I was not MacArthur, you know, going through at the top of my class. What they do is, as you go through, you have various, you know, they score you, you have various tests. You have peer-eval’s. You have their eval’s. You have your evaluations from all your billets and stuff like that. Funny story. As they were testing me, one of the things they were testing was my confidence. So every time I did something, they relieved me of command. You know, they were trying to rattle my cage. So, I was relieved, I was relieved, I was relieved. Well, it got to the point, where they didn’t have anything to evaluate me because they relieved me all the way through. I’ll never forget, the captain, I forget this name, but he was from Annapolis, our company executive officer was a captain from Annapolis. There’s two kinds of commissions in the Mrine Crops: reserve commission and regular commission. All the guys who go through OCS and stuff like that get what they call a reserve commission. They guys who come through Annapolis, or the Navy, the ROTC can opt for the Marine Corps and they have a regular commission. You can convert your reserve commission into a regular commission, maybe, if they like you and let you do it. But the reserve commissions are at the pleasure of the President and all that other stuff. I mean, a reserve commission, you put in your two years and you’re gone. The regular commissions are the guys who are the team. You know, that’s the group they want. So, this guys was Annapolis, regular commission. We were going to be reserve commissions, and they’re looking at us, and if they like you they’ll keep you around. If not, you’re gone. So, he was there, and he looked at me—we were out on a field problem—and it was a little bit messed up. But it wasn’t really my fault. It was just, what had happened was, we were out in the field and we had some stuff to do, and various, various platoons and squads were out doing stuff. And, some of these idiots got lost, so we were late. But, shit rolls up hill, so it’s my fault. So, he’s there and he goes, “Berra, I’d relieve you of command, but I can’t because I have to evaluate you, and you’ve been relieved of every other command you had, so you gotta stay.” That was the motivation, so, anyway, I go through it, so I had all of that stuff. Well, at the end, you know, as you get through, they come down to the final cut. You know, it’s like the final hurdle. If your marginal, if you’re right on the line, you have to go through, an evaluation—a board eval. Well, we’re getting to the end, and I know I’m not scoring real high on all the tests, you know, especially because they’ve been rattling my cage. So, I’ll never forget this. We had a last inspection. You know, one of those things like that. So, we’re all there, this is where the battalion commander, Colonel Wickwire—P.A. Wickwire, Colonel, United States Marine Corps, commanding—Wickwire is walking down the line. Big gold—colonels have eagles. Well, this eagle, I don’t know if they shine them up or if he had an electric charge, this eagle glowed, I mean, like, filled up the whole room. We’re going down, and we’re just standing at attention, so he’s doing the inspection. And, did you ever see the thing on the Dirty Dozen, the movie, where the guy is a joke and he’s walking up and down the line?
 **Yes.**

Well, Wickwire decides to stop and talk to me. Now, I know that’s a set-up, too, because he walks all the way down the whole thing and then he decides to chat with me. So I’m there, and he stops. And the major, Vidos, he’s right behind him. Then the captain, Crawford, he’s right behind him, so all three of them are there. And he stops, and he wants to talk. So, you know, he’s there and looks at the rifle and stuff like that, but he’s talking, and he goes, “How are you doing?” “Fine.” “How have your evaluations been going?” “Badly.” “Well, how badly?” “Well, six unsats and marginal.” And he goes, “Oh, have you gotten instruction from the staff to help you along?” “Yes, sir.” “You think you’re going to graduate?” “I hope so, sir,” you know, stuff like that. So, he’s there and he’s looking right at me. And, you know, there were guys, some other guys, and they were shitting in their pants when he stops. They’re shaking. But, I figured, what the hell, he wants to talk. And, I’ll never forget, he’s standing right in front of me, and all I could see is that eagle. I mean, that eagle. I don’t even know what the guy looks like because all I saw was that eagle. It’s right in my—and I think they do that on purpose, too. It’s right in your face. So, I say yes sir, yes sir, yes sir. And he then he goes down the line to the next guy. And, I’ll never forget this, the major, Vidos. He had just made major, and as he stood in front of me, squared-up right in front of me, he looked me right in the eyes. I mean more so than you’re doing right now, and I looked right back at him, and I didn’t blink or I didn’t break, and I’m trying to think—you know, why is he staring? He’s clearly looking, he’s looking right into my soul. And, I’m there, then I look, and he walked, and Crawford did the same thing. And he stands there, and he looks, and I look. What I did was, I figured I’m not going to lie, I’m going to tell him. He asked how I’m doing, you know, six unsats and a marginal. I mean, that’s the way it was. He knows what the record is. I mean, he knew what that record was before he asked me what is was. But, I’ll tell him. I’ll fess up, and I’ll fess up in front of the whole, in front of the whole platoon. You know, I can’t hide it. It is what it is. And I did it, and I said it. So then we go through, I have to go through the board evals. Basically, you what do is, they go there and they make a final decision whether they want you or not. And I’ll never forget this. This is one of those moments in your life you never forget. I go up there, they’re all sitting up there. There’s, like, eight guys sitting up there, you know, in front of a big long table, and you’re sitting over there, and you walk in, and you sit down. And I’ll never forget Vidos was there, and he says, “Well, Berra, what do you have to say for yourself?” And I looked at him, and I said, “well, sir, I’ve been here for nine weeks. You’ve been watching me, basically, twenty-four seven,” and I said that, “I’m kind of at a loss for words. You know as much as… I don’t know what to say.” And he says, “well, let me be a little more clear. What you say in the next few minutes is going to affect the rest of your military career.” And I looked back, and I said, “well, I may not be the best candidate here, but I’m certainly not the worst, and I don’t deserve to get thrown out of this program.” You know, and then it went on from there, and then they start asking you all kinds of… and then there was one, Cunningham, he was a first lieutenant on the end. He was one of the other… Cunningham goes there and says, “well, Berra, did you ever think you were unjustly relieved of command?” And I go, “yes, sir.” And I have him a, “Harris relieved me on one of the three-mile conditioning marches. There was nothing wrong.” And I went through that, and he looked, and checked it off. Obviously, they were doing that. And they asked a whole bunch of other questions and stuff like that, and then I left. And, you know, then they left. And then ultimately, I made, I’ll never forget—again, two exhilarating moments. One is when on graduation day, when I marched down the parade ground, down the ground during that. The second one was when the guy from Annapolis called me in his office—the XO—I’ll never forget what he said. He said, “Berra, we’ve decided to keep you and the company level. At the company level, the decision was made to keep you in the program,” –because you can go all the way up to the battalion commander, company, and stuff like that—he said, “We decided at the company level, the decision was made to keep you. You have all of the qualifications to be an outstanding Marine officer. My one bit of advice to you is don’t wait until the last minute before you decide to make a good impression.” And I go, “thank you, sir,” and that was it. And, again, you talk about one of those, one of those things that make it all worthwhile, the thing that made it all worthwhile, here was a captain, an Annapolis graduate Marine, you know, recon, you know, all that. He said, “Berra, you have all of the qualifications, all the attributes to be an outstanding Marine officer. My one advice to you when you get to basic” –basic school is the next thing. He says, “don’t wait until the last minute before you decide to make a good impression.” I go, “thank you, sir.” I wasn’t really trying to wait until the last minute. It just kind of happened like that. But that, that was it. And that, that was the fruition. I mean, that was the thing that I take away. I mean, that made my whole life. Up to that point, that made my whole life. That was the recognition, or what I had sought, you know, all the time when I went there, and I’m saying, “do you want to see how tough you are? Do you want to see if you can cut it?” You know, all of the mystique about the Marine Corps. It all came down to that, and those few words, I mean, I wasn’t in that office more than forty-five seconds. I walked in, saluted, you know, he said that, saluted, and got the hell out of there.” I mean, it—less than a minute. But that minute, up to that point in my life, that put it all together. And it’s all worthwhile just for that. That’s why you do stuff like that. You know, the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat. Well, that was the thrill of victory. The risk is you always have the possibility of the agony of defeat, and that’s the risk you take. But, you know, sometimes you got to roll the dice.

**So, at the end of the ten weeks, and you had made it?**

Yes.

**You mentioned that there was a ceremony that they had. Did your family come?**

You could, but, like, my family was in Chicago. And, you know, I mean, some people’s families came. But, again, it was just a graduation from OCS. They actually went through, I guess, there were guys there, some, what they call, what, legacies? They went through, and asked us to fill out, “is any military people to the rank of general coming? You know, because we want to know if a general is going to show up or anything like that. So, they were trying to get a handle on who was going to show up. Because, well, some guys, their fathers were in the Marine Corps. They were officers and stuff, so their kids were following in their fathers’ footsteps.

 **But, obviously, they absolutely did not get any kind of preferred treatment because they didn’t even know that—**

No, no, no, not at all.

**Ok.**

But, again, they, well, ok, if you come to graduation, is anybody from the rank of—and they were going down the list because they wanted to arrange the seating. You know, and stuff like that, and then they started to get ahead. They wanted to see who was going to show up. In fact, we had one guy, he was from Hawaii, and his father was a colonel or something like that, and so they wanted to know if he was going to show up and stuff like that, you know. But then, on the last day, what we had was, we had a final parade, a final inspection, final parade. There was five companies: four companies of the PLC class, and one company that was commissioned right on that day. They were right… seniors. They weren’t going back for their senior year. They already had bachelor’s degrees, so they got commissioned that day, and then the other four companies were going back to college for their senior year, and then we would be commissioned at some other point in time.

**So, what came next?**

Well, after I did that, I—what came next? Ok, I’ll tell you what came next. Ok, we had just gone through ten weeks of, you know, all this camaraderie. All for one, one for all. Ok. Go to the airport, again on a group travel ticket. I’m sitting in Regan, you know. Well, then there’s a bunch of—and these—and what they did was, going back, it was even less, less commonality than coming out of Chicago. I mean, there were just ten guys going back to Chicago. So, we’re there and we had this—somebody else had the travel ticket. So, we’re there, and we got to the airport about twelve-thirty, you know, hurry up and wait. And the flight wasn’t going to leave until three, so, ok, we’ll all meet back here at two-o’clock or something like that. Well, somehow, there was an earlier flight with some open seats. And I had gone to look in a bookstore or something, and I come back, and they’re all gone. And I go, well, that ticket has been cashed in, and they all went on an earlier flight. I go, ok, well, there was ten spots on that open travel ticket. I said, “obviously eight or nine guys went.” I said, “there’s still got to be an open spot.” I said, “I’m on the three-o’clock flight.” “Oh no, that travel ticket is all at once. You either all—you travel it all at once.” I said, “well, how the hell am I going to get to Chicago?” They said, “well, you have to buy a ticket.” I go, “what?” They said, “no no, that travel voucher was to be used only that once. I was a group travel voucher. The group left. You weren’t in the group. So, you know, you have to buy a…” So I had to buy my own ticket back to Chicago. So what happened next? So, fortunately, I’d gotten paid, so I had cash. You know, so I cashed. So, I’d gotten that. So, I bought my ticket, got that. So I go down and—and I have to petition back. You know, send an expense report back and stuff like that, to get my, I think it was ninety bucks or something like that at the time, a ticket from Washington to Chicago. And I go, “oh great, all this time we’re talking about, you know, we’re all together and stuff like that, those assholes, they wanted to pick up an hour and left me stranded in the airport—and didn’t even make a provision that, hey, we got one guy left that’s going to be on the three-o’clock flight. They were just so eager to get back home that they left me there with my thumb up my ass. Great. But, then, ok, so, then I went back to college. And I still had—at the time, Western was still on quarters—so I had to finish my senior year. What they did, what the thing was, you know, the OSOs came down, like, once a quarter on their recruiting trip. And they basically reviewed, I mean, we had to stay in shape. We had to stay out of trouble and stuff like that. So we’d come down, they’d come down once a quarter and give us the physical training test—the PT—push-ups, sit-ups, three-mile run. We had to do that. They had us work with the Army ROTC guys, so what we did was, the Army ROTC guys needed need stuff like that. They’d go out and do a field problem, let’s say. And they needed someone, you know, to play aggressor or something like that, they’d send us out there. They’ll chase you and stuff like that. And then, for some reason, you know, the Army, any time they fired their rifles and stuff like that, we ended up cleaning them. So, let the Marines clean them. They’re good at that sort of thing. So, you know, basically, I cleaned a lot of rifles for the Army ROTC program and went out and crawled around Argon National Forest Preserve down in Macomb to play with them. But, the Marines did come down. We had meetings once a quarter where, actually, they went through stuff. They, you know, just updates on what’s going on and stuff like that and came down and looked us over. I mean, they didn’t want everybody going there being drunk for ten-weeks or ten-moths, something like that. They came down and looked. And, they were just starting—I don’t even know if it’s still down there—a PLC club. Again, the Marine Corps—especially the officer Corps—is very fraternal. So what they did was, they started a club. They called it the PLC Club, and it was like the Marine version of a fraternity, and we were the charter members. So, I was one of the guys that had my hand on the sword and took the oath and all that stuff. You know, when the club first started at Western, I assume—I haven’t been back to Western in years—I assume the club is still in existence. I don’t know how they’re recruiting now, and I don’t even know if they’re still recruiting out of Western. I don’t know that. But, at the time, they had started a PLC club down there, and what it was, it was exclusively for Marine officer candidates. They wanted us to stick together. They wanted us to be together. So we’d work out together, we’d go running and stuff like that. But it was very informal. It wasn’t like we had formal classes or anything.

**Ok, and then after you finished your four quarters at Western, what happened next?**

I was late, as far as, I was supposed to graduate in May or June of seventy-three, and I was a couple quarters short. So, and at that time, I wasn’t in the aviation program, which was the original reason why I wanted to go in there. Now, I had accomplished what I wanted to accomplish as far as graduating from OCS. I signed the papers saying that if a commission is tendered to me I will accept it, if not, I’ll go in as an enlisted man. I mean, I had signed up. But then I’m figuring, well, you know, again, knowing that my rank in the thing, I said, “what’s in store for me?” I said, “probably a rifle platoon in Okinawa, crawling through the mud.” I said, “I’m not going to the embassy, and I’m not going on a ship, or anything like that.” I said, “I’m going to the mud.” So, I’m thinking, what the hell, I’ll apply to graduate school. And, again, I wasn’t really the best student in the world, but, I figured, I’ll try. So, I applied to graduate school at Western, and I got in on probation. You know, which, basically, I had a, coming out of there I think I had a two-eight. Which, you know, is ok, but you ain’t getting into grad school if you don’t have at least a three point even. So, I applied to Western’s grad school, and the dean at the time in the business college—I had a bachelors in business—his philosophy was, well, if we give you a bachelors degree from our undergraduate program, “how can we say you’re not qualified to be in our graduate program?” So, he says, “well, we’re not sure with the two-eight, you know, what your academic prowess is, so we’ll let you come in on probation.” I said, “ok, fine, I’ve been taking almost graduate-level courses, four-hundred level courses.” So, I figured, well, here I have two options. I can go in the Marine Corps with a commission, or I can go to grad school. And it was a very, very difficult—you know, you talk about the decisions you lose sleep over? Well, this is one you lose sleep over. I said, “well, I’m not going to be a pilot.” Well, that’s another story. I have bad eyes and bad ears, too. I’ll tell you the story how I got into the infantry. So, I’m looking. Well, then I decided I’m going to grad school. So, I resigned. They call it discharge on request. Fortunately, at the time, the Marine Corps was cutting back. In seventy-three, it’s the post-Vietnam era. So, they’re cutting back and officer billets—first of all, it’s very, very esprit de corps, gung ho in the Marine Corps. If you don’t want to be there, they don’t want you. I mean, it’s no iffy, wishy-washy kind of stuff. You’re a Marine or you’re not a Marine. You know, hit the road if you don’t like it. So, I never took any money from them except to pay when I was on active duty. I never took tuition reimbursements, flying lessons, book money, anything like that. I mean, maybe a couple of beers, and that was about it. So, when I resigned, they weren’t happy about it. In fact, they said, “think about it.” I’ll tell you two funny stories. They accepted my resignation. So, I went to grad school, and I resigned in the beginning of seventy-four—seventy-three, seventy-four, something like that. So, basically, my Marine experience was ten-weeks at OCS, a little reserve time at what would be an ROTC program at Western, and that was it. Funny story. I told you my dad was in the Navy. Well, we had several things, they had social functions. So, in other words, they’d have dinners. Like when Hines used to have—if you go down 1st Avenue and Roosevelt, on the right-hand side of the road, there used to be—just a little bit north of Miller’s Meadow—there used to be some houses back there. Those were the officers houses for the officers that were at Hines. There were some very nice houses back there, like a little subdivisions. The Marines, the officers, were living there. So the captain, they invited us over for dinner and stuff like that, so I brought my dad. Now, my dad hates Marines. You know, he was in the Navy for ten-years. So, but met them and stuff like that, blah blah blah blah. So, when I resigned, the officer, they didn’t really want me to resign, you know. So he called my dad, and he goes, “well, maybe you can talk him out of it. Maybe you could influence him, you know, because we don’t want to see him leave the program,” and stuff like that. Maybe you could—well, my dad hates Marines. He’s been waiting for this. I don’t really want to tell you exactly what my dad said, being a salty sailor, you know. He had some choice language about the Marine officer that called him on the phone and asked him to persuade me to stay in the Marine Corps. But that didn’t work, so, but that was that. But anyway, the second story was, you know, how I got in the infantry. I have a whole range of sound that I don’t hear. I had a middle-ear infection when I was a little kid and stuff like that. But anyway, so, you go there and you take the physical. This is way back in the beginning. You go there and take the physical, and you have to take a hearing test. I don’t know if you ever took a military physical. They go in—I call it the horse physical—they count your fingers and your toes and all that stuff. But, anyway you go there, you put the earphones on, and you have a little button there, and you press it when you hear the sound, you know. A hearing test. There’s a movie called Windtalkers with Nicholas Cage. He scammed the hearing test just like I did. If you watch that movie and see the way he scammed the hearing test, I did it substantially the same way, only I didn’t have a hot looking nurse flashing me the signals. I’m there, and I’m taking the—and what it would be, you’d press the button—back in the days when they used to have those index cards, like, for the computer cards, the rectangular cards—they’d have, you’d get squiggly lines. So I looked at my card. I look at everybody else’s cards and they’d have squiggly lines. You press the button and it makes a squiggly line, or goes up and down and stuff like that. I’m looking at mine, and it’s squiggly lines, a whole big, flat part and then squiggly lines. And I’m looking, and so they called me aside, “well, Mr. Berra, you’re going to have to take the hearing test again. The audiologist wants to reevaluate it.” So, I’m thinking to myself, well, shit, I need squiggly lines all over that card. I can’t hear it. So, what I did was, I counted the beeps that I did hear. I counted the distance between the beeps, like, “one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, one-thousand-three, one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, one-thousand—” So, when I stopped hearing it, I counted, “one-thousand-one, one-thousand—” I pressed it, and pressed it, and pressed. So, come back to get the card, it’s got squiggly lines on it. The audiologist looks at it. He goes, “well, geez, you must’ve had a bad head set on the other test.” I go, “yeah, must have.” That’s how I passed the hearing test. And then I saw that movie just recently, just the last few years, Nicholas Cage in the movie Windtalkers.

**Ok.**

He basically did the same thing, only he had a nurse flashing him the signals, you know, and stuff like that. But, yeah, same thing. So I ask—here’s an intellectual question—I wonder how many other people scammed the hearing test to get into the Marine Corps just like that? But those are my two stories.

**You were pretty clear about how your training in the Marine Corps has influenced your life after and during your career.**

Oh, yeah, a tremendous amount. I’ll tell you, you know, it’s almost, I’d almost be willing to say it’s probably something everybody should do. But, you know, I guess everybody can’t do it, or everybody wouldn’t be motivated to do it, or everybody wouldn’t want to do it. But, as far as the quality of the training, the way it influences your life, it’s just invaluable. One thing, just as an aside, just as an observation, I think one of the things that’s wrong with this country right now is there’s not enough commonality. So, in other words, there’s not enough, if not a shared experience, or at least a shared base that you—I mean, differences are fine, and diversity is fine. But, it helps if you have some sort of common base to start from. And I think the one good thing about the military is that it gives everybody a common, at least some sort of common denominator. Like I told you, when I was a kid, all the guys that had been in World War II and the American Legion, picnics being like Taste of Chicago or something like that, well, all those guys, I mean, there was everything from doctors and lawyers, to construction workers. But they were all in the American Legion. They were all together. At least superficially, as far as, “oh yeah, well, you were in the Army, you were Navy,” and stuff like that. And I think that’s one of the things that’s missing, or that’s one of the things we have to overcome as a country, right now is the fact that diversity is fine, but you need at least a basis—some sort of basis—of commonality. Some sort of basis of shared experience, or shared values, or shared something. Shared conversation. And I think when everybody starts going at each other like this, I mean, and there’s no basis. You know, you say, “why isn’t there any basis for compromise?” Well, because there’s no basis, you know, “who is that guy? You know, why should I compromise with him? You know, he’s an idiot.” You know? There’s nothing together. There’s no togetherness, and I think, you know, one of the best things about the military—I mean, there’s good and bad about the military, and god knows I didn’t go in for very much of it. But the one thing it does, it does bring people together. I mean, you all sleep in the same room. You’re all wearing the same clothes. You’re all eating the same food. You have a shared experience. I mean, even if one guy ends up being a lawyer or a judge, and the other guy ends up being a criminal. I mean, at least, you know, at one point in your lives you were together. And I think as a country, you know, that’s one of the things you probably should kind of maybe strive for. So you say everybody should go in the service, or universal draft like Israel, or something like that. You know, you say, that’s not us, but, by the same token, you need some sort of—maybe everybody should go to summer camp together. I don’t know. But something like that, where you bring some commonality in. But that’s just my opinion.

**Any other last thoughts you’d like to share with us?**

No, that pretty much covers my, like I said, my experience was somewhat inconspicuous. I mean, very inconspicuous. I mean, I went through OCS for a lot of personal reason. I mean, I certainly haven’t made any great contribution to the country or to the Marine Corps or anything like that. I’m just a guy that went through. I’m very satisfied that I did it. I like to think that, you know, if they needed me, yeah, I would have gone. But, I mean, at the time, Vietnam was winding down. There was no war. In fact, they were cutting back. I mean, there were guys fighting to keep their jobs. I mean, there were second lieutenants that were on reserve commissions that weren’t getting their regular commissions that were being rotated out. So, you know, the fact of me going in and doing whatever I could have done, I probably, I like to think that maybe I left a spot open for somebody who really wanted it much more than I did.

**Ok, well, thanks so much for sharing your memories with us today.**

Thank you very much. Thank you.

**Yeah, yeah. Great stories.**

\*\*FINSHED\*\*