

Tyler McGrane

Born:
Sheboygan
Died:

Period of Service Gulf War
US Marine Corps

Sources: Himself, John Gay
interview

Entered service January 1, 1990

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See interview following.



VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Tyler McGrane

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

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We're sitting with Tyler McGrane on Washington Island, Wisconsin in front of his home on Green Bay Road, October 11, 2010. Tyler's going to tell us about his time in the service. Tyler, go ahead.

Life Before Entering Military Service

My name is Tyler McGrane. Before I joined the Marine Corps I was going to school at Sheboygan North High School in Wisconsin. When I graduated from school I was working at a few jobs. I was a photographer doing small weddings and stuff like that. I was also, I guess, waiting just to join the military.

Entering and Initial Training

I went into the Marine Corps on January 1, 1990.

I went to San Diego for boot camp. A few months later I graduated and went up to Mare Island for security force training. After security force training I had gone over to ... Actually, after boot camp there was Marine Corps combat training, where you learn more basic infantry, since I was going in as an infantryman, which is an O311. And also security forces, which is 8152.

Now, you did training for security forces. Is that a special training?

Yes. And then, after MCT – Marine Corps Combat Training – I went up to Mare Island in the northern part of California. It's near San Francisco. And that's Security Force Training for 8152's and 8151's, I believe; there's a different type of security there also.

What did you have to do? How did they train you for that?

Security Force Training is like an anti-terrorism school. I was trained in terrorism before terrorism was a household word. Now it's on the news every single day. Back then it was: Okay, there's terrorists out there in the world. We learned about training with suspicious packages; close ... like you see in the *Navy Seals*, that old 1990's movie, where the close combat – they call it CQB – close quarters training – where you walk into a building, you veer left and you veer right, you do your button hooks, and you clear the room fast and swift.

From there, when you graduated you got to pick where you go next. There was a listing of security departments throughout the world. A lot of the guys were picking Bangor, Washington because they wanted to stay stateside. And I asked, I think it was my sergeant, "Where is this USS Midway; what is this?" He said it was an aircraft carrier stationed out of Yokosuka, Japan. I said I'd take it. I wanted to see the world.

Duty Assignments

I think I went home on leave for 30 days, and from there I flew back from Wisconsin out to California; from California I continued on to Yokosuka, Japan where I boarded the USS Midway.

The Midway had about 50 Marines to about 3,000 sailors, and the Marines on the ship ...

Was that an aircraft carrier?

Yes. It's an aircraft carrier. It's a CV41 – carrier vessel 41.

The 50 Marines – there were one or two Marines who were assigned to the captain of the ship for his personal security pretty much 24/7. Wherever he went, the security Marine would be at his side, especially if he was going off the ship. For the rest of us, we were in charge of the ship security and the special munitions on the carrier itself. Inside all ships there's a chamber that has all the special weapons and ammunition and whatnot. And the Marines are in charge of the security of that.

We also changed out the money in the ATM machines once in a while, too (both chuckle).

Is that non-nuclear ammo?

I'm not able to say. We did homeland clearance back then, so I'll continue on. I'll let everybody's imagination just go with that.

While on the aircraft carrier, we left port out of Yokosuka, Japan and we went to the Philippines. From the Philippines we went back to Japan. From Japan we went back to the Philippines where we had loaded up sandbags and had bunkered up all around our gun mounts we had on the aircraft carrier. This was when the Gulf War was starting to happen – the end of 1990. From there we went to Singapore. After Singapore we continued on to the Gulf War – we went to the Gulf. We went through the Straights ...

How did you get around?

Well, from Japan – I think we just went down ...

Did you go down around Africa?

I wasn't a captain (chuckles). I'm not sure of the direction of the travel.

So we were there pre-Gulf War. Our carrier launched sorties – they did their missions. Then our carrier – once the war started – was the first one to launch and drop bombs on Iraq.

My mission, specifically, was the security of that vessel. We had other ships in the Gulf at that time. The Marines had gun mounts 360 around the ship that we rotated non-stop, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There were, that I can remember, there were always general quarters – that's when the whole ship battens up and prepares for attack.

There was one, for sure, that I recall where there was a helicopter inbound that was disobeying the orders of the ship to turn around. So we were all locked and loaded

and ready to go. And it was shot down by one of the other ships with us in that fleet. So it was shot down before it came to the carrier.

Was it an enemy?

I don't know. Since it never responded it could have been a terrorist at that point. We didn't know and we were protecting the ship.

Also, during the Gulf, we had other boats that came up to us – other large ships – that would bring us ... we had a problem on the Midway with one of the machines that turns the water from salt water to fresh water, so we actually had to bring on fresh water at one point. So the Marines, again, would jump on the Zodiac and go over to the other boat along with an EOD (executive officer of the day) diver and language specialist. They would do the translating. Where I came into play, we'd do the CQB. We'd go through searching every single room on the ship. EOD would go below, looking for any explosives. We were looking for anything that could destroy our ship. And once we cleared the whole ship, and EOD cleared, that ship could come up next to us.

We did it also for garbage pick-up. For whatever reason, I remember us unloading an ungodly amount of trash.

So we went through the Gulf War doing this type of thing.

That was in 1991?

That was in 1991. After that we went to Thailand.

So you were in the Gulf for four, five, six months?

I think so, yes. I know we were there for Christmas. We did the war. I actually had a piece of paper written down once, because my Mom wrote down where I was. I was either sending her a letter or calling. They were going broke when I was calling because I'd always call collect.

They were glad to hear from you anyway.

They were.

We went to Hong Kong. I'm trying to think of the other countries we went to. And back to the Philippines.

In Manila?

Subic Bay.

From there we went back to Japan. We weren't there that long. We just got back to clean up from the War and the ship was called back into service. They cut everybody's liberty short and we went back full-steam to the Philippines.

In the Philippines, Mt. Pinatubo had blown its top. So we went in to rescue – do the humanitarian thing – and we pulled soldiers' families and whatnot onto our carrier.

Our carrier then became a hospital ship. We brought them back onto the ship, and from the ship we took them down to Manila where I believe they were taken off by helicopter to the airport and flown back to the States. So we were more in the effort of retrieving American soldiers' dependents that were stationed there with their families – with their husbands or wives.

And Pinatubo blew ash all over the world, didn't it?

I believe so. I've got some pretty neat pictures of that. It looked like the moon. Basically it was devastated. It looked like white powder everywhere. We went marching through that for days at a time, going house-to-house searching. Some decided to stay back, but we took a lot onto our carrier.

How deep did the ash get?

Oh, gosh. They had payloaders pushing it in the streets. There were three, four, five feet of it and the payloaders were pushing the stuff down the roads and trying to find anywhere to put it. It was just a mess.

Where is Pinatubo? Is that near Manila?

I don't know! I'm not sure, exactly, on that one.

So the city wasn't that affected.

I don't think so. I thought we went to Manila where they were evacuated, but it could have been down in the Philippine Islands south or north – however that works.

From there we went back to Japan.

Returning to the United States

In late 1992, early 1993, the aircraft carrier USS Midway was going to be decommissioned. We rode the ship from Yokosuka, Japan back to Hawaii. On the way to Hawaii we off-loaded ammunition, and we also go to Hawaii and unloaded personnel onto another carrier. I don't remember the other carrier's name off the top of my head. Because another carrier was taking our place in Japan. So we gave them supplies off our ship to go to Japan.

After Hawaii we went to Seattle, Washington where we picked up Naval dependent fathers, brothers and sons. They were able to do what's called a dependent cruise, where you can bring your brother or father onto the ship. And it cruised from Seattle, Washington down to San Diego where we decommissioned. So on the way down the fathers, kids, brothers got to shoot. They would come down by us and they would shoot. We'd throw grenades off the back (both chuckle). They all had a pretty good time. And they got to see how it was to live on an aircraft carrier.

They're monster vessels.

They are, absolutely. I was just floored by how big these things are.

Growing up my father worked in a machine shop. He was an engineer working with metals, building machines. That oil and that smell – that welding. That's what it reminded me of. When I got on that ship it took me back to where my dad was working in the shop. Because they're doing the same thing. They're working on planes – they're grinding; they're welding. They're doing all the maintenance. Not on the flight deck, but where the elevator brings the planes down on the lower deck hangar where they're doing all the work on them.

During the Gulf War it was interesting. We did have to do security patrols. Along with securing the outside of the ship from the enemy, we also had to start doing security patrols on the inside and on the flight deck because there were some Naval personnel who didn't believe we should be in the War.

Not on our ship, but there was another ship in the Gulf that had had sabotage on the aircraft. They would take nuts and bolts and throw them down into the intake for the plane. You'd start it up and it would rip them apart.

So we started security patrols on that. We had a pretty good role.

Did you find any evidence of that on your ship?

We never did. There wasn't anything on the Midway.

So probably just one disaffected guy who was going to put our guys in mortal danger just for his belief.

Right.

So we decommissioned the ship. I don't remember the dates on that – probably late 1992, early 1993.

So you had been on the vessel for the better part of a year.

I was on the aircraft carrier for one year and 28 days. That's what it says on my discharge papers.

After that I was stationed on Coronado Island in San Diego to finish out my security forces – I had a one year contract for security forces and had to finish out security forces there. And on that base there's a secure area that holds a lot of ammunition. And we walked a perimeter fence line and on roof-tops – we had a lot of training into that stuff. But we protected national security.

That's right near San Diego itself – a little causeway goes over there?

Yes. There's a bridge that goes to it. And the area we were in was on the southern part of that island towards Mexico. It was right on the water. It was a beautiful base.

Not bad duty.

Not the worst, no.

Then I finished up security forces and had one more year left. So now we're into 1993-1994.

I left there and went home on leave. I came back again.

This time I came back to 29 Palms, California. And I started my infantry as an 0311 rifleman. As soon as I got there I was notified that our company was going back overseas again. So I had spent the last year overseas and I was going again.

This time we flew out to Okinawa, Japan. We did infantry training throughout the jungles of Japan. I think we trained there for about a month or so. Then we flew up to Korea. We trained with the Korean Marines for an "X" amount of months.

And once we were done training with the Korean Marines, we finished up on a beach one day and the USS Germantown was sitting out on the ocean. And these LCAC's – the inflatable troop transport things that come up on the beach and the air lets out of them; they're called LCAC – all the Marines jumped on that, all the tanks, all the Humvees and all the equipment trucks. And they went back and forth all day long taking the Marines off this beach in Korea out onto the USS Germantown. And the Germantown, actually the back end opens up and the bottom drops down into the water, and they go shooting up into there, unloads us, goes right back out and gets more. It's such a cool ship.

So we left Korea probably that same day. And we floated back down to Okinawa and we trained more in Okinawa. And we finally flew back to 29 Palms.

I was getting close to discharge, and we got orders to go to border patrol security down in Mexico. So everybody started packing up their stuff. And they told me I didn't have to go because I'd be gone longer and they didn't want to have to extend me. So they took off and went down to the border. And I was going to do administrative work.

And shortly after – within the week – they were back. And I think it was a Marine helicopter pilot who went across the border too much and they canceled the whole thing. I don't know what the outcome of that was, but they decided that was the end of border security for the Marine Corps at that time.

So they came back and we trained more as general infantry. We hit the desert. We did a lot of combat training in the desert because we figured we'd be going back over. And, of course, as you can see, we went back over.

Discharge and Return to Civilian Life

I was supposed to get out. Because I went in January 2 of 1990 I was supposed to get out January 2 of 1994, but I saved up my leave and I got out before Christmas. My Dad flew out and met me in Las Vegas, because 29 Palms is not that far away. I drove out – I had my truck out there – so I drove up to Las Vegas and my Dad flew in. We hung out there for the day and then we took off and drove back to Wisconsin.

That was the end of my career in the military.

You were in Okinawa. How far is that from Iwo Jima? Is that nearby or pretty far away?

I don't know (chuckles). Unless I've got a map in front of me looking at things. Being in Hong Kong you were able to go over to China. But you needed a passport. And it was a communist country and I don't think any of the Marines went over there because of it being a communist country.

It would be too sticky.

Yes. I remember right before the Gulf War we were in the United Arab Emirates. We went ashore and actually pulled along the docks at UAE. And there were tours going into the desert. I remember when we were there – the Marines only went a few times; it was sticky then. The people there seemed like they really didn't want a bunch of Americans around in that area, even though they probably assisted us as allies during the Gulf War. But I remember on a tour bus – a tour bus actually rolled in the desert, and it killed three or four Naval personnel. Those were our first military honors we did as Marines on the ship that I could remember – probably the first and last I can remember; these three Navy guys killed on the tour bus. But other than that, during the War I think we never lost a plane. I think a couple came back with shrapnel, but that was it. We launched a very successful mission off of that carrier.

How many planes does a carrier like that have on it?

I think I probably told you a lot of these questions ...

Yes, I suppose they're technical.

I don't know how many you fit on the flight deck and how many below, and you continue to rotate them.

So there's some fixing going on all the time with those things.

Yes. You've got constant maintenance, probably like anything else. So there's always guys working on them, filling them up with fuel. When we were launching them, like everybody was watching on TV, when they were dropping bombs across Kuwait and what-not, it was just nonstop. Our carrier never stopped launching. It was just day after day after day. We continued to launch whatever the Marines or Army was calling to drop onto. I think the United States knew what they needed to drop on, but whatever the intelligence came up with during that War I'm sure that's what we were dropping stuff on.

So you got home with your Dad.

We got home, and I think I started college using the GI Bill shortly after. I think I started in the middle of January. I got my Associates Degree in Police Science. And two years later ...

Was that at Madison?

That was at Lakeshore Technical College in Cleveland, Wisconsin. Because I was originally from Sheboygan and I could stay at my parents. Actually I ended up getting an apartment at one point or another because I was working and going to school at the same time. I was working for the American Club in Kohler. And when I graduated from LTC with my associates degree that the GI Bill paid for – I don't have one loan; that's why having the GI Bill was one of the best things to come out with.

They did it after World War II and then continued it. It was a great idea.

Then I got a job with the Elkhart Lake Police Department. I started on boat patrol – there are three lakes in the Elkhart area. So I started on boat patrol and then by winter I moved onto the road. I was working part time. And I was working part time for the Sheboygan Falls Police Department. And I was still working full time for the American Club. And then I quit everybody!

I took a job with the State Patrol. I worked with the State Patrol for three or four months. I quit them and went back to Kohler security on the other side of the street from the American Club is Kohler. I went to work for their security department and went back to Elkhart Lake. In June, 1999 I came to Washington Island. So I left those jobs.

How did you know about Washington Island?

I had a friend who gave me a call and said the Island was hiring. And I had actually gone to college with him. I made contact here and there with him. His name was Jim Lukaszewski. And Jim actually worked here part time on Washington Island as a police officer ...

I remember the name.

He was working here part time while he was going to school. I think I graduated earlier than he did. So when he called me he was already working full time at the Sheboygan Falls Police Department. And I came up here. And I was here for a day or two. And the other officer who was working, she said she had resigned from here and was going to be leaving in two weeks. So I called my friend – Jim Lukaszewski – and Jim worked here until he retired. He was my partner for the first five years on the Island. And he retired and moved to Florida.

So you've been here eleven years?

Eleven-and-a-half years.

I didn't realize you'd been here that long.

Yes, it's been a while.

That's great. I'm glad to have you and glad you gave us all this information.