

TRANSCRIPT- DUANE FLEMMING

Interviewee: DUANE FLEMMING

Interviewer: KIERAN W. TAYLOR

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KIERAN TAYLOR: So, just to start us out, can you tell me your full name and where and when you were born?

DUANE FLEMMING: My name is Duane Flemming and I was born in October 1960 in France.

KT: In France?

DF: Yes.

KT: You were born in France? How did that?

DF: Army brat. My parents were in the Army, so my father was stationed in France.

KT: Whereabouts?

DF: It was near Bordeaux, in the wine country.

KT: How long were you there, do you have any memory?

DF: I have no memory of it. We came over on the boat when I was probably about a year old. So --

KT: Okay.

DF: Then we lived in Connecticut for about a year or so and then my father retired. After that, then we moved down to Baltimore and settled there.

KT: Baltimore is where you grew up?

DF: Baltimore is where I grew up and lived there until I went to college.

KT: Did your father go to the Citadel?

DF: No, my father was born in Gettysburg. So, anyhow, so, he never finished high school, got his GED, it was during the depression, so he needed a job, so he enlisted in the Army and then he later got his GED. He served in the Army for twenty-seven years.

KT: Did you have a sense at a young age that you wanted to pursue a military career?

DF: I guess part of it is that most of my family has served in the military, most of the men. So, it just seemed one of those things, you just grow up around it and are exposed to it throughout your life. I knew that I never really planned to make the military a career, but I figured it can't hurt, in terms of getting that experience. That it would certainly help later in life. So, that's where I always thought about going into the military, so as a result of that, when I was looking for colleges, I always looked for a university or college where they also had an ROTC program.

KT: Did you do high school ROTC?

DF: No. No, that wasn't on the radar I guess back in high school.

KT: Do you have memories of your father in the military or had he already retired?

DF: He had already retired, because he retired, I guess in 1963.

KT: Okay, so you were --

DF: So, I would have been like 2 1/2, 3 years old.

KT: Nevertheless, you had this awareness that this was a family tradition and it's something you might pursue?

DF: Correct.

KT: How did you hear about the Citadel?

DF: Well, actually I guess when it was -- one of the processes I used was, when I was in high school, I'd gone to a college prep school in Baltimore, and when I was going through, I was looking at different universities and everything and I was looking at schools that had ROTC programs. And, then, of course, being in Baltimore, you heard about VMI and then I guess, just by looking around a little bit further, going through the books because we didn't have the internet back then, I realized that one of our math teachers and the head of the football -- the head football coach in high school had gone to The Citadel. So, I guess that became my initial connection. So, then I started looking for more information about The Citadel and then one weekend, went down and visited the school. I didn't do the knob weekend, I didn't do the overnight in the barracks, but --

KT: Was that an option back then? Did they have that?

DF: They did. They did. But I just went down, you know, after high school one day, my folks picked me up and we drove down there. And, Saturday we visited the campus, walked around and everything and of course, more than anything, you visit Charleston and you just fall in love with the city. And, it's like, this would not be so bad. So --

KT: With the assumption that you'll ever see anything in the city.

DF: That's true. That's true. The tour is very good - they really don't take you around where you see the fence with the barbed wire.

KT: (Laughing), especially knob year, these poor guys.

DF: You do see the knobs walking in the gutter. There was truth in advertising back then and everything, but I thought it would be a good experience. So, then I had applied to a couple different schools and was accepted at several and I made the decision that again, more than anything, I just really love the school. The thing that was also attractive to me was the fact that it's a small school because, I didn't want to go to a school where I would be just a number, I wanted to go to a school that had a couple thousand, rather than measuring their enrollment in terms of ten thousand or twenty thousand.

KT: What about -- you must have been aware of some of the more negative aspects of the experience. Did somebody tell you about what you might face during knob year and that kind of thing? Did that give you any reason for pause?

DF: No. No, because I guess I figured the discipline aspect would always be good and I just mentally felt that I could handle it, so --

KT: Any trepidations or questions about going to an all boys school?

DF: No, because actually my high school was all male, too, so -- so you know, you wouldn't have the other distractions and things.

KT: Was it a Catholic school?

DF: Yes, it was a Catholic college prep.

KT: What was the name?

DF: It was Calvert Hall. I think one of our most famous alumni is John Waters.

KT: Oh, really? Oh okay. (Laughing).

DF: Come to Baltimore, we'll give you the guided tour.

KT: I did go to -- several weeks ago, I went to the Waters inspired festival. Do you know what I'm talking about, it's with the women with the teased-up hair?

DF: Oh, HONfest.

KT: I went to HONfest.

DF: Yes.

KT: A few weeks ago, that was a lot of fun. So, Baltimore, do you still have family there?

DF: I still do, yes.

KT: Yeah, once you mentioned Baltimore, only then did I start to pick up on the slight Baltimore accent.

DF: I've worked very hard and The Citadel worked very hard to get rid of that accent, so.

KT: (laughing), it's only slight. And, I suppose you had the benefit of those first two years, having been outside of Baltimore, that it didn't really root itself and didn't have time to --

DF: Right, correct.

KT: What about any sense at this point of your own sexuality. Through high school or college, would you put yourself in the category of the vast majority of us who were just, you know, all over the place adolescence, or were you starting to have some kinds of questions --

DF: I guess there were some kinds of questions because you know, back in high school, being in an all-male school, I mean, yeah there were some guys who were always dating and things like that but then there was still probably just as equal number who

aren't, so you either went with one group or the other. So, when it came to like the mixers where they would have like the girls' high school come over and things like that, half of my friends went and half didn't. It was just one of those things, so --

KT: What do you remember about -- did they call it Hell Week back then?

DF: Except it lasted all year, yeah.

KT: What do you remember about your -- the first week or first days of The Citadel?

DF: I guess the first thing that you remember of course is that morning, you show up to sign in and everything. And then I guess because we had auditioned right before then for the -- I was in the band, so you audition for the band and you find out, okay you're in the band or not. So, you know you're in the band, and the band seemed to be on the fast track, so we were probably the first company that went over to get our haircuts, then you're off to get your uniforms and things like that and stuff and I guess the parents go off and meet with the administration to say, Okay, you're -- you know, you're not going to see your sons for months, you might as well leave now and don't bother trying to find them because you won't recognize them. Just go away and you'll see -- come back in two months, so.

KT: Was it traumatic losing your hair?

DF: No, no. Because I guess, having grown up in a military family and stuff, I was never really allowed to have long hair. Getting your hair to touch your ears was considered long. So, that even -- back when I was young in the summer, you may get like a buzz cut or something like that, so, it was a little bit shorter, but so what?

KT: You don't remember any particular trauma with the separation from your

parents more than any other kid leaving for college?

DF: No, because I mean, it wasn't that I'd never been away from home or things like that, because I had been in the scouts, we'd go camping on weekends and things like that and for extended periods, like two weeks away and things like that, so --

KT: Yeah. Physical demands?

DF: Physical demands, they of course said you have to get in shape before you come and everything and I had done a little bit, not a lot, to get in shape, but I think -- I was fairly, you know, thin, and had a fairly good metabolism so I think that probably helped. I didn't feel that I was lagging a lot because one of the things is, you do everything as a class. So, there were other guys who were bigger, heavier, slower and weaker, so as a result, I mean, you just -- you all pull each other through, and you move as -- you advance as a group.

KT: So, as I understand it, it's either -- some of those who kind of struggle with the physical demands or even sometimes those who excel are -- I guess, more generally, those that stand out for one reason or another, they're the magnets for discipline for attention from the sophomores. For the most part, you felt like you blended -- you kind of --

DF: This is where it's probably good to be normal, average.

KT: And you did for the most part?

DF: Yeah.

KT: Now, The Citadel, at this point, was also -- I mean the institution -- were you a business student right away?

DF: Yes.

KT: You knew that's what you wanted to do pretty much?

DF: Yeah, because in high school I had toyed with -- I had taken a lot of science courses in high school because I was thinking originally, I thought, gee, I wanted to be a vet, so I was looking at a lot of the science courses and everything. And, those I found, I was struggling with; the chemistry, the physics and stuff. So, after that, I realized -- I had taken a couple business courses and that seemed more in line. So, then I was more interested in business and healthcare administration, so that's why I just gravitated toward the business program.

KT: Being in Band Company, that also gives you a kind of -- somewhat separate identity from the rest of the corps?

DF: Yeah, it does. And, of course it was -- I guess, that's one of the things that makes my experience a little different than others is that, the band, you're much closer to the upperclassmen, because you're in there with your practices and things like that, so there's a lot more interaction with the upperclassmen by being in the Band Company than you probably would have had in some of the rifle companies.

KT: Interaction that's more normal or humane.

DF: Yeah, because when you go band practice, it isn't about -- you kind of drop the military piece of it. So, I guess it's like being on Corps Squad or something like that, for those hours. And, you have the other upperclassmen that aren't in your cadre, your chain of command. So, they're really not as uptight about the military piece, so -- you do have some light, social interaction with them.

KT: Were you aware -- this is a period at least within the institution of some leadership changes at the top. How aware were you, of that, as a student?



DF: Well, there was a lot of leadership change when I was there.

KT: You were there through three different --

DF: We had three different presidents when I was there. So, the first year, we had General Signeauss and then of course he was there the first year, and then he left to head the SALT Talks and things, so -- he left to move onto bigger and better things.

KT: He was tapped by the administration, essentially.

DF: Right and then of course we wound up having an acting president, and then we had Stockdale come in, and then of course those things, we just -- that was just a really tough year. And, then --

KT: For the Citadel? Or for the cadets? Do you remember that?

DF: It was a tough year for The Citadel, and I think it was also tough for the cadets. I mean, as an individual, I certainly respected Admiral Stockdale and what he had gone through as a POW for seven and a half years, but then I guess even then, you would -- in thinking about it more after leaving The Citadel, was -- it just really affected him, mentally and stuff and nor could you expect anybody to be normal after spending so many years in solitary and everything. But what happened was, you saw such public confrontation between the president of the school, the board of visitors and everything where basically, he would say, "Okay, you know, I want these changes. If I don't get all these things, then I'm going to leave." And, basically, I guess, the board said bye. So, then he was gone, and we were back to, you know, another president.

KT: You would have been aware of that kind of conflict though as a cadet?

DF: You would have. I mean, you would -- it was probably reported in the school newspaper but of course it would have also been in the local paper. So, you were reading

about it. I remember that we had one -- you know, one of the interim presidents and things. And, then when he had left, it was like, okay, Stockdale was going to have something at lunch and nobody went to the Mess Hall because they threw together this lunch time parade for this other school official that was leaving, so --

KT: Wow.

DF: So, I mean, you know, there was -- there was -- that was -- and that was just so overt that -- so, I don't think he ever gained I guess the respect or, you know, the confidence of the corps and stuff. We just did not appreciate him. It was not a good fit.

KT: Much of this comes down to his personality.

DF: I think it was his personality and of course, while he was very, very bright, and he even taught you know, a couple courses on campus, you know, looking back to some of the Greek philosophers and stuff, it was -- I just don't think he was effective. He didn't have the charisma to communicate and connect with the cadets. He never did that, whereas, and that's one of the things that you've got to be able to do when you're the school president. You've got to be out there. I mean, General Grimsley, he was always out there, you can see him, you can talk to him. Mark Clark - you know, he was in his -- probably eighties back then and but, I mean, you would see him around campus, you knew this guy was this living legend and stuff, and you know, they would dust him off for parades and he would come out and everything but he was great, always just warm and caring and stuff. Stockdale, he just had this angry look about him. You would see him walking in front of the barracks and stuff, you know, going over to, you know, the field house to go swimming or something like that. And he'd go walking by and it was like, there was no connection there at all.

KT: This is obviously speculation, but how much of that was a reflection of his feeling that he was being undermined by the board?

DF: I think this was before that. This is just during the course of the year. It was never anything out there where he was connecting one on one with the cadets, at least I never saw it.

KT: So, you were there long enough then to -- what, Grimsley's first year?

DF: Mm-mm.

KT: Did you detect a change immediately in your senior year?

DF: Oh yeah. Yeah, there was definitely a change. Grimsley had been with the school and stuff, I mean, he -- you know, he had that charisma and stuff, and everything.

KT: And the spirit of the corps?

DF: Right. So, I don't know if it was whether, you know, because of his assignment, being a division commander and things like that, that he had just had much different experiences in terms of leading individuals as opposed to, you know, a highly decorated naval aviator who was this pilot and thing, different experience.

KT: And I suppose Grimsley would have the advantage of having been a graduate, having those deep ties to the institution.

DF: It probably doesn't hurt.

KT: Do you remember at all, any kind of changes or fluctuations in the expectations in the four-class system while you were there? I mean was there any kind of radical changes that took place? Or -- did you notice things either getting -- tightening up or becoming more lax?

DF: Tightening up and lax? I don't necessarily know I would agree with it, say it

was -- describe it in those terms. I think what it was, was more recognition of the importance of academics that, you know, my freshman year, I don't -- I didn't see that there was much emphasis on academics for freshmen that there was in subsequent years. And, I think that was one of the things though, that probably, to Stockdale's credit, he really sought to change some of that and maybe that was part of what he left, that now, as I understand it, there's much more time when freshmen are off limits, so to speak, that upperclassmen, you cannot have any contact with the freshmen, it's their time to study, leave them alone, that's all they're doing. You didn't have as much as that when I was a freshman. So, I have lots of classmates -- my grades weren't stellar my freshman year and I had lots of classmates that were also there, too. So, we took great pride in those who got a 2.0.

KT: Your first year was seventy --

DF: I started in the fall of seventy-nine or -- seventy-eight.

KT: Would this have been -- would you have been there during the De La Roche, the kid who went home on Thanksgiving break? I thought it was seventy-eight or seventy-nine, the kid who killed his family essentially in New Jersey?

DF: No.

KT: Does that ring a bell?

DF: It doesn't.

KT: Maybe it was just before you got there. As I understand it, he was a knob who went home for Thanksgiving break. His father was a Citadel grad and had told him you're not coming home, stick it out. He said, you don't understand, they are doing awful things to me, etcetera, and etcetera. He came home on Thanksgiving break and killed his

family; his mother, father, maybe two of his brothers. His defense was temporary insanity, and essentially put The Citadel on trial and said they drove me to this, had no other option and he reported that -- really egregious things that if true, are just horrendous, that they had cut his leg and poured nail polish remover on him and just terrible things, you know, to what degree there's truth behind it, it's unclear. He was essentially found guilty. But, as I understand it, in those years -- in a sense, and you can see where this would happen, would be a lot of people in the institution then became very defensive around this national story. And, so, there's some thought that what that did is it put a renewed -- I guess it ignited this debate over the nature of the four-class system and with some arguing that we need some reforms, we need to guard against these kinds of abuses. But then other people really embracing it even more strongly. But it doesn't sound like -- if you knew about that, or if there's talk of that, it doesn't even ring a bell at this point.

DF: It doesn't ring a bell at all. The one event I do remember actually at the beginning of our time there was, this was the whole time with Iran and stuff. And, we had the Iranian students and that's when they -- they were at the school and of course they all come over and have lots of money, they all have cars, those Firebirds and those cars. I remember seeing that the Iranian students were basically told to pack up and get out in no time.

KT: That's right, I've heard this. Was there sort of harassment of the students that preceded that?

DF: There was no harassment. I never saw any harassment or anything. I think it was just that, the political thing with the Iran hostage crisis, and the diplomatic relations,

I think that's what just basically said, you know, we need to cut this, and --

KT: (laughing), do you have any idea -- it would be interesting to find out how that was even done. Were they asked to leave?

DF: I think it was something through State Department. I think it was some political --

KT: Oh, so it may not have been The Citadel's call.

DF: I don't think it was The Citadel's call. I think it was something bigger.

KT: I was wondering about that thinking about the transition from Carter to Reagan, which you would have -- you know, witnessed. You would have been there for that. Did you have a sense of how that was playing out on campus? I'm sure that there's a strong support for Reagan, but do you remember that period and anything particular about the politics and the degree to which you were aware of politics?

DF: No, not really because I guess at that point, a lot of us, your political views are still forming, so a lot depends where you grew up, where you come from, what your exposure and your family was, whether your family is more Democrat versus Republican and everything. In the South, I think with the conservative base, yes, the Young Republicans was a very strong group on campus and everything, but then you look around, you say, alright, yeah but we still have -- but then you've got Fritz Hollings in the senate. So, you do have some fairly important Democrats out there, alumni as well.

So, I think it's probably just half and half, there. So, the politics of it never really became a lot -- I don't recall having a lot of conversations with classmates or on campus about those things. So --

KT: One thing that still surprises me is my students -- a lot of times I'll bring up

current events and they won't be aware of certain things -- of a lot of things taking place. And, it has everything to do -- even though they are -- they have access to the internet, obviously, but, it's -- they still feel just very much isolated, that they're not getting a daily newspaper, that they're just so exhausted that what they're doing at night is homework, and God knows what else they're doing online, but they don't have, I think, as much awareness -- because you are really isolated and cut off in a lot of ways. I guess, television. They don't have access --

DF: There's no television, I think you can have a radio, and back then, you didn't have the internet, so it's just -- the newspaper, if you subscribe to the newspaper and you had one delivered. So, yeah, the opportunities to learn what's going on in the real world were more limited.

KT: Yeah. Discussions at this point about women ever coming to The Citadel? Do you remember anything in the --?

DF: I guess this is not too long after the military -- the service academies went co-ed. So, I guess there -- every now and then there would be some grumbling about going co-ed and stuff but then I think much of it was felt that, you know, it's a state school, it's not going to happen. Or, if it does, then they'll just take the school private. So, it won't happen.

KT: So, that wasn't a real central part of the dialogue?

DF: No.

KT: How about the sense of the old corps -- getting that from the -- which seems to be a kind of eternal --

DF: Well, the old corps was definitely there, and I think it was more manifested,

more in my time there because of the fact that we'd just changed uniforms the year before. Because, back before that, so I guess the class of 1980 would have been the last class that had the grey nasties, where the pants were grey also, just like the shirts. So, then, the next class, the class of '81 I think was the class that came in that actually had the blue pants with the black piping. So, talking about the long gray line, the old corps, things like that, that really was the point of demarcation, I think. Old corps and new corps, just look around, look at the pants, you can tell the difference.

KT: Interesting. And, was there a sense that this new uniform somehow represented a kind of -- new values?

DF: I don't think the values had changed, but I think it was just one of those things - it's the new corps, and I think that's one of the things that -- every year is probably the same conversation and stuff, and it's like, well, are the new graduates really that much different than the graduates that graduated thirty years ago or fifty years ago? Probably not. I mean, yes, the world is a different place, but I think if you look at the core values of the institution, of the students, they're still the same.

KT: My students are convinced to the person, that they're being denied the full Citadel experience because of -- whether it be the inclusion of women, whether it be protected study hall hours, whether it be -- whatever it is, they're absolutely certain that once upon a time there was this Citadel and it's no longer -- what we have now is a bastardized version of it.

DF: It's the legend of the old corps, so.

KT: (Laughing), it is so strong. They've -- nothing I can say will get them to question that.



DF: Have to bring in some old graduates and --

KT: It's really fun. They're just -- they just, you know, some of these things, they are intended to benefit you. Maybe to protect you. They don't want to hear it.

DF: If you look at what they charge for tuition nowadays, I mean, I think one year, tuition is more than what it cost me for four years. I think their parents would be very grateful that we are putting the emphasis on academia and grades.

KT: Absolutely. So, do you -- going through the Citadel, do you have any sense at this point of your own sexual identity? Is that becoming more of -- at all of a pressing question or something that you feel the need to define?

DF: I -- you know, I guess at this point I really think that I knew I was probably gay. But, again, I think that being in such an institution and stuff, it wasn't something I would feel comfortable confiding in, or telling -- talking to other cadets about. And, at that point, there was just no other medium or outlet where you can express that. Again, I think part of it is, you have this culture where the weakest -- you know, it's almost like *Lord of The Flies*, with the weakest cadets -- we had tremendous attrition, too. I remember during our first week of orientation in my knob year, -- one of the senior cadets came into the auditorium and said, "Look to your left, look to your right. And, in four years, one of you will graduate." And I remember the two people that sat on my left and right, and I was the one who graduated. I mean, just thinking about that, you know, it was four years later, that Saturday morning in May when I was graduating. It's like, wow, they weren't kidding. We had tremendous attrition and everything. So, I think that -- and you saw it even in the barracks, in your class and stuff, that the weak ones, they would be just pushed to the point where they'd either break or they'd leave and stuff. So, we had a

lot of folks leave during that first year.

KT: Could you confide to anyone in your family or anyone outside of the Citadel about what you were thinking? Or, what --

DF: No, and I guess one of the things that was different for me was having older parents. My father was born in 1913, so I came along very late in life. My parents had been married sixteen years before I was born, so it's just not something that I would talk to them about. It wasn't an issue that's brought up and even today, it's an issue that we just don't talk about. You know, I think -- I'm sure my family knows, but it's just an issue that I don't see a need to push it into their face, so to speak.

KT: Brothers and sisters?

DF: I have none. I'm an only child. So, again, one other venue that I don't have.

KT: What about high school classmates that you maybe had an inkling, or -- friends that you kept in touch with, there was really no one that you could have a conversation with? A confidant, a female confidant?

DF: No, I really -- once I -- because having gone away to college, back then, the only way you really kept in touch with people was writing letters. There was no email. So, you -- I kept in touch with a couple classmates for a year or two and then after that, I mean, we just kind of drifted apart. You know, so I really don't keep in touch with anybody from high school so to speak.

KT: Was this at all, you know, coming out stories where people are really kind of driven to figure out what's happening, why am I different, you know, the classic story is like, going to the library and trying to read up, surreptitiously trying to find any sort of mention of homosexuality and -- do you remember any sort of process like that?

DF: I probably did. I mean, you know, because, like you say, you're just curious and there's no other resource at that time for you. So, yeah, you go, and you look at the library or bookstore or whatever. See what you can find.

KT: Pressures on you regarding dating? Is there peer pressure about -- a group of us are going down to this party at the College of Charleston?

DF: Sure, there was some of that, but then again, I mean, just like -- you know, in high school, again, you still had a group who really weren't into the dating and stuff like that. So, if we weren't doing that, then we were going down to Dino's and having a pitcher of beer after a parade or something, hanging out and doing those kinds of things. So -- so I think there was always that other - I guess, ambiguous relationship that you'd just hang out with some other folks. You'd go bowling or do other stuff.

KT: No awareness of any other classmates at the time of -- certainly nobody who would be out, but would there have been some people who you could identify as confederates?

DF: Yeah, and it's interesting because through the GALA [Gay and Lesbian Alliance] group, I've actually seen one other person who I knew at the Citadel who is on the group. So, it's like, I always thought that, and it's like, okay, suspicion confirmed thirty years later.

KT: Right. Another thing is -- again, this is something I'll hear in my classroom. There is still -- the, you know, how -- I wouldn't -- not that they're taunting one another, but I'll continually hear "fag", I'll hear -- constantly hear "That's so gay", in my class. I'm assuming that's been a part of the culture for quite some time. Do you remember that being a part of your experience, that the kind of questioning of one another's sexuality,

no matter how -- no matter what -- I'd imagine that was --?

DF: Yeah it was always there, so --

KT: Would that have been scary at all for you, problematic? Did you ever feel like you might be outed?

DF: No. No, because I mean, again, I don't think there was anything that I did that would have signaled someone to think that. And, I think that's -- you know, you just kept it to yourself, not so -- again, you just keep -- you know, those cards very close to your chest and that wall of privacy around you. So, I guess -- I guess that's one of the reasons that -- with the GALA group, they've been so careful in hopefully screening people who have expressed interest in the group to make sure that it isn't someone just trying to identify, well, are there any current gay cadets that are members of the group, and things like that.

KT: Do you remember meeting your first gay person, your first out person?

DF: Geez. Not really. I mean, I guess, because even back in college, I guess even some of the faculty you would think -- they seemed different and things, and you would think that -- I would just kind of think to myself, I bet he's gay, or something. So -- to just think about that.

KT: But these are all very private experiences?

DF: Yeah. And then of course, for me -- a lot of it was -- after graduation, was going on to the military - was again, you know, it wasn't something that you just -- you needed to protect your career and things. You just had to keep things very compartmentalized.

KT: Right, and in some ways, the stakes are even higher.

DF: Yeah.

KT: So, after graduation, your parents were alive - your father --

DF: My father passed away about two years ago. So --

KT: He almost lived to a hundred? Ninety-five?

DF: He was ninety-five. So. Yeah.

KT: Wow. And, how old is your mother?

DF: She is eighty-seven now.

KT: How wonderful.

DF: So, that means I have to work a long time, if the genes are any indication. I'll be working till I'm eighty. So --

KT: So, they were at graduation?

DF: Yeah, they were at graduation.

KT: Absolutely beaming?

DF: Yeah, sure. Sure. So --

KT: Was it a relief by the time you -- I mean, it sounds like your experience was mostly very positive?

DF: My experience was positive. I mean, my classmates were great, I still keep in touch with them and everything, and I think that you know, for a while, because of the military career and stuff, you move around a lot -- so, a lot of times, I didn't have that exposure to lots of other Citadel grads because I went into the medical service corps and then I was in Army hospitals and things. So, a lot of my duties were at the Presidio in San Francisco, and then with the Army Surgeon General's office. I was -- didn't have the exposure to lots of other combat arms, Citadel grads and things like that around. So, I

didn't have a lot of those alumni connections but, now, you know, my class, we're all pretty much settling down now, and so when we get together, like, in the D.C. area with our alumni breakfast, we typically have, maybe eight or ten of my classmates the same year there, together, and so -- you know, we get together and you know, we do keep in touch a lot more, now.

KT: How long were you in the service?

DF: I was in the service for ten and a half years.

KT: Oh wow.

DF: So, and I stayed in, and at that point, in the early nineties, the military was beginning to really go through a lot of drawdowns. So, that's when they were offering a lot of financial incentives for people who would choose to leave, and I had always said -- and because I grew up in Baltimore and I was stationed here in Washington, I was tired of moving around. I moved I think nine times in the ten years. So, and they were -- I was getting ready to be moved again and I was just tired of it. So, I said if they offered me the money, I'd leave. I was tired of moving around, I wanted to settle down, having older parents and things. It was a good place for me to be and I thought it was a good time for a career change.

KT: By the time of -- I mean, at some point, you must have come out to -- to someone? (Laughing). Do you remember that being a fairly smooth process or something that caused anxiety?

DF: I think it was a fairly smooth process. I had some close relationships in the Army and stuff, with a female lieutenant who -- because we were stationed together. And, over the course of time, our careers intersected again, and we reconnected. I guess

at that point, it was like, Look, this is not who I am, and this isn't going to work or anything. So --

KT: So, that relationship in some ways kind of crystallized things?

DF: Yeah. Yeah, for me it did.

KT: Then, are you put in a situation where, you know, that your sexuality could be a threat to your career? Was that ever a --

DF: No - that wasn't a --

KT: Source of anxiety?

DF: No, not for me. I think I had known this person for a long time, and I trusted her and everything.

KT: Well, not even that she would out you, but anyone.

DF: No.

KT: No?

DF: No, not at that point. Because, again, I think -- it was -- the experience, my military experience was different. It wasn't like being on an infantry base or a military installation or anything. You're working in an office building and come four o'clock, everybody goes to the four wings and stuff, so you really don't have this constant interaction where activities are always together. So, it's a very different Army experience.

KT: In terms of discovering the Citadel GALA which is only but a few years old, how did that happen?

DF: I guess I --

KT: I'm curious as to how this network kind of emerged.

DF: I guess I must have typed -- I guess I found it through the internet and just

Googling it. So, I guess that's how I found it. And, I probably found it second because I guess the first thing that -- I maybe found it concurrently with the VMI GALA and stuff because being in this D.C. area, that was really my first exposure, was -- the first event I went to was the VMI GALA event, where I was the only Citadel grad there, but there were all these other VMI grads and stuff because there was a guy who was kind of like the founder of the VMI GALA and he had kind of organized this first meeting at the Tombs in Georgetown. This kind of renowned haunt. So, we got together there for drinks and dinner one night, and stuff.

KT: I think it's so funny that the thing that unites VMI and the Citadel are the GALA groups. It sounds like the most sort of coherent or cohesive relationship between the two.

DF: And, it is. I guess it's because -- part of it I think is because it's a different sort of bond and everything. And, I guess for a lot of folks, what you probably would find is that, alumni, you have -- some have this really true love for the school and all that stuff. Others just really hated their experience. I think that maybe in the GALA group you find more that hate about the experience - Yes, I value my experience, I think I'm a better person because of it, I would, you know, I would not -- I don't regret doing it and all that, but at the same time, am I as Citadel forever, and stuff? I'm not sure. I think organizations need to change.

KT: Is that how you would sum up here, your Citadel experience? Would you recommend it to a young person?

DF: I don't know if I would recommend it. I think that's their decision. I don't want to influence it. I would just want them to understand what they are getting into.



And, based on that, give them the information and say that they need to make their own decision and whatever your decision is, we'll support you. And, I think helping them to realize that there is this network of alumni out there that will help them, you know, whatever they need, whenever they need it, I mean, that's one of the things that you just can't -- where else do you find that? I mean, that's what you really see. And, here, having such an active alumni group, it's always stepping up to the plate, regardless of what it is. You need something, you can go to the GALA group or alumni group and you're going to find what you need.

KT: You see that as one of the real positives, the real strengths of the Citadel, the alumni network.

DF: Yeah.

KT: What are some other things, with regards to either shaping your character -- what did you take away from the Citadel?

DF: A lot of it was the character, the honor code I think is something that I try to live every day. I think it's -- I think a lot of the values, I mean, you really, you know, seek to just not -- it's -- I guess to lead with compassion and empathy and not to just be you know, a bully, so to speak, or you know, to walk over people to get to be number one and things like that. That's not me, and you know, I have those experiences in work and stuff and, you know, it troubles me sometimes when you have folks who just are so cutthroat in terms of work, because at the end of the day, you think about it and say, it really doesn't matter that much, you know. The way that some of the people play or go about things is just -- I find reprehensive. So --

KT: Tell me more about the VA and what you're doing now, and the kind of work

that you do and the things --

DF: When -- I was in the Army for ten and a half years, so I left -- in medical service corps, so I had been like a company commander, platoon leader, company commander, then I went on to become a hospital controller so working budgets and things like that. Afterwards, I left the Army, went to work at the VA, and I was the resource planning and management coordinator. So, my work was really looking at a lot of data -- analyzing data, looking at resource budgets and how we would secure the resources we needed to provide care. So, I did a lot of work at the hospital, looking at those types of things. And, later, I transferred to headquarters where I do work with an actuarial model because one of the things, we need to do is understand how many veterans are going to enroll with VA. So, we have an actuarial-based model that we have developed with some consulting health actuaries to project better enrollment, what types of services are they going to use, how much money do we need, and then we integrate that with all strategic and capital planning and legislative analysis, policy analysis, policy formulation, so -- it's really a key product of VHA that feeds just so many different activities.

KT: These days your head must be spinning, anticipating the kinds of numbers?

DF: It's been busy.

KT: It just -- it's a pretty unenviable task.

DF: It's never boring, to say the least. One of the things that's really kind of cool is, the people you get to work. So, for instance, back in the late nineties when VA transformed its system from an episodic inpatient healthcare system to this integrated system, focused on preventive healthcare, making sure we give people outpatient care,

keep them out of the hospital, keep them healthy and things like that, it really -- and also, prior to 1999, we really only treated veterans who were service connected and the image - - in Ninety-nine, we opened our doors up to all veterans who wanted to enroll and as a result, that's why we had to get this actuarial model so we kind of knew what we would be expecting, so Congress would know much money to appropriate to us, because we're a discretionary program. It's not an entitlement so we always have to fight and justify our budgets before Congress. The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan certainly add a new wrinkle to it and a new challenge, because everybody is interested in making sure that VA has the resources, we need to take care of the returning combat veterans. So, what we've had to do is we've actually been able to do some pretty cool stuff in terms of developing some different models to project how many veterans are going to come back, based on deployments and the administration strategy for both of those theaters.

KT: Generally, how are into the future are you projecting? Twenty years?

DF: We go twenty years because that's the capital planning process in the government. We do -- the main purpose of it is that we need to support our appropriation process, our budget. So, right now, we just - they are finishing the work for our 2012-13 budgets. So, that's the first piece. The second piece will then be developing -- carrying those projections out twenty years, so we have to do a lot of work to come up with our best assumptions regarding what we see as the different trends in health care, in terms of, "How is the healthcare delivery system in the country going to change over the next twenty years?" And, of course our actuaries understand the mortality of our population, the morbidity, how they're going to be sick, how much sicker people are going to be in the future and things like that. So, as a result, we have a very complex model that gives

us these projections that tell us, you know, twenty years from now, we're going to be providing forty-three percent more office visits than we do today. You know, even though our, the number of veterans that are going to be enrolled and coming to us for healthcare remains relatively flat. So -- it's -- it's very interesting exercise.

KT: And you've been working downtown for how long?

DF: I've been downtown for ten years, now. So -- in the same office.

KT: These are some of the -- you talked about the alumni networks and the character and values of the Citadel, but what are some of the weaknesses of the problems that you see that are based on your experiences?

DF: Well, I guess part of it -- the one thing that I see, and I really see from my experience when I was in the Army, was the whole issue of gays in the military, that I -- I've always -- I've served with other gay soldiers and I at least, maybe because I was in the medical service corps, our composition of our unit is just much different. When I was in a field unit, we had thirty-five percent females. We don't see that when we're in an engineering battalion or something. And then of course, a lot of those folks will then spend time in hospitals, working, and alternate between fields in these fixed facilities. So, yeah, you are going to have gay soldiers in your units and stuff and my experience back then was, yeah, okay, so they're gay, it doesn't matter. And, I think that there's a lot of sensationalism or hype about the whole issue of you know, folks saying, well, you don't want to be serving with them. The fact is, hell, you have served with them whether you knew it or not. You were in that fox hole with them already. You know, and then, so, I think that they really are doing a disservice by trying to come up with all these slick ways to try and couch it. Well, if they don't say anything, it's okay. Why can't the folks

just be honest with themselves? Part of the -- one of the just rationales you hear is just, well, if they are gay, they can be subject to blackmail and things like that, well, if you would let them be open and out and honest, then they're not going -- it doesn't -- that becomes a non-issue. And, I guess I was really interested when the Pentagon released at least parts of the survey they released that they are doing now regarding the move toward ending Don't Ask Don't Tell and I was really almost shocked and really disappointed in the way the questions were phrased. I cannot believe that they would actually design a survey and ask those types of questions. I mean, you know, asking somebody, "Would you shop at the commissary if you knew someone else there was gay?" It's like, what kind of question is that?

KT: (Laughing). I asked my students -- I forget what the context was, but I was noting that just in the -- I don't know, the ten years or so that I've been teaching, I've seen a real change in student attitude and certainly major, major change since, you know, when I was going through college that I've made this point. I said, because you all have brothers or sisters, you all have friends who are gay, you have cousins, whatever the case is, it's my sense that on things like gay marriage and on terms of your openness to gays and lesbians, it's -- especially among you eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year-olds, it doesn't seem to be much of an issue. And, for the most part, you know, I didn't get any resistance that made sense. And then I said that, I think within a few years there's going to be a campus group that's going to be a gay campus group that's open and operating on campus. At that point, they said, "Are you kidding? No way. That won't happen. No, no, no. That'll never happen." I think some said, "Maybe twenty years down the road by not in the next few years".

DF: You should reaffirm that, well, then I guess you're a part of the old corps.

KT: (Laughing), but I thought that was interesting to see the sort of, kind of, where they stepped off -- where the line was that --

DF: And I guess part of it was -- maybe because of the way that, you know, they do have so much exposure now, with you know, seeing like, Don't Ask Don't Tell, and with - I guess a lot of them still do pursue ROTC, you know, scholarships and contracts and things. But, also I guess the whole issue of the gay marriage, I think that is one of those things where -- I think folks really just wrestle with it and I see it as a more polarizing issue, primarily because I respect a church's -- I think a church has the freedom to choose who it wants to marry in its -- in that religious institution. And, I guess I would see marriage as being a religious institution. So, maybe what you really need to do is redefine it. If you go down to the Justice of The Peace, you become unionized, but, it's not a marriage. And then, that should be to all persons. So --

KT: Are there things that you think the Citadel could be, you know, that would have either made your experience more positive or that it continues to wrestle with?

DF: I haven't been back to campus all that much. I have been back a couple of times and I guess one of the things that brought me back the last time was the GALA group. The opportunity to see more -- see these friends that I've made over the -- the past few years and an opportunity to reconnect and see them. And, it -- the group has been really good for that. And, of course it started out, you know, on one mail group and now it's really through Facebook and stuff. That seems to be the way everything is going and that's how folks are communicating. I think it's great. It's really an opportunity to connect more with other classmates and stuff. I see that really, the things that bring alumni back --

is -- are two things; one of course is when you have the big reunions, you know, your five- and ten-year reunions and things. But, then I find out a lot of other folks really say, gee, it's great to go back on those off-years, because that way you get to spend time together with your friends, your alumni, who -- because you're not driven by all these other functions.

KT: Right.

DF: Okay, eight o'clock you gotta be here, ten o'clock you gotta be here, twelve o'clock, you got lunch and you have to march to the football game, blah blah blah. It's just crazy and I think being able to go back on the off years is so much better because it gives you the lazy opportunity to kind of casually hang out with your -- this family.

KT: Are you out to your classmates?

DF: To some of them, yeah.

KT: Yeah.

DF: Yeah, and it's kind of interesting because one of my classmates he -- I believe he has a brother who is gay and stuff. Or, and then -- or a brother-in-law that's gay. So, we've been to -- I see them, even at the VMI football game, if we only went down to Lexington once, I was there with my partner and I introduced him and stuff. I'm not hiding it.

KT: For the most part, it hasn't been an issue with classmates that you can tell?

DF: No. No. No, and I mean, one of my classmates is a southern Baptist minister in South Carolina. But we get together, we talk and we're very close to this day.

KT: Is there anything that we might have touched upon that you wanted to go back to and elaborate on or maybe something that was an essential part of your Citadel

experience that I haven't brought up?

DF: I don't know. I think the first year, yeah it was rough and stressful and everything. Again, I think that times have changed where the physical or the mental aspects have been appropriately partitioned so that more emphasis can be on academics because that's really important. I think that, you know, and then the other years, things were good for me; I spent a lot of time as a private, I was a senior private. So, I think that one of the things when the Commandant of Cadets recently spoke before our alumni group, and said it was the lore of the senior private that everybody still aspires to be -- lots of cadets still aspire to be that senior private. It's a legend.

KT: (Laughing).

DF: So, it's good to know that some things haven't changed.

KT: (Laughing).

DF: And there are still a lot of things the school does that you take pride in. I mean, just like with the Regimental Band going to Edinburgh this month or -- August and stuff. I think that's great and those things all bring good recognition for the school. Those are things I do take pride in, and stuff.

KT: Thank you very much for coming up here and sharing your experiences with me.

DF: Thank you.

KT: I really appreciate it.

DF: My pleasure.

KT: Great.



END OF INTERVIEW

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