

Navy Medicine Oral History Project
Oral History Interview Synopsis
Robert D. Gerardi, HMCM, USN, Ret.
Assistant Department Head, Programs
Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control

Date and Location of Interview: 6 June 2013, San Diego, California

Interviewers: COL Richard V.N. Ginn, USA, Ret., Office of Medical History, BUMED

SYNOPSIS:

Mr. Gerardi was born on 23 July 1962 in Morristown, New Jersey, and with the exception of a sojourn in Woodruff, Arizona, grew up in Morristown. His life story is especially compelling as an example of the extraordinary range of personal histories of American military personnel.

Mr. Gerardi's father was the foreman of a family-owned press that was profitable until a shady investor ruined the business. His mother remarried, and his stepfather, an editor in New York, became disgusted with Federal hiring laws in the '70s, and bought, sight unseen, fifty acres of land in Arizona. Gerardi, who was ten, his parents and five siblings moved to a primitive existence as they initially camped and later built a shanty that would also accommodate their pigs, while rattlesnakes took shelter underneath. His mother worked as a teacher, and his stepfather worked as a used car salesman. "We were freezing in the winter because we had pot-belly stoves, no running water, no electricity. We used lanterns, and we had to go to a well to get water." Their isolation was complete. "We either walked two miles to a bus stop and then took a bigger bus to school; or we didn't go to school, because we lived on dirt roads, and when it rained or snowed we couldn't access it and I couldn't go to school."

However, he believes the austerity paid off because it gave him self-reliance and resilience. "It was miserable to my brothers and sisters, but to me it was an experience. I explored the prairie. I mean, I have been chased by wild dogs, I've ridden wild horses, I've learned how to catch rattlesnakes. I got shot at by a hermit." After four years his mother sent him back to New Jersey, where this self-described lackadaisical student began applying himself and graduated high school in 1980. He moved out on his own, attended a community college, and worked in a series of jobs, but finally decided he was not getting anywhere and in 1985 joined the military.

He completed boot camp and Hospital Corps School in 1985, followed by Pharmacy Technician School, where he received the Outstanding Student Award. His initial assignment was in 1986 as

Navy Medicine Oral History Project
Oral History Interview Synopsis
Robert D. Gerardi, HMCM, USN, Ret.
Assistant Department Head, Programs
Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control

a Pharmacy Technician at the Naval Hospital, Lemoore, California, the first of a string of assignments in California, alternating health clinic and shipboard duty. From 1988-1991 he served aboard the USS *McKee* (AS-41), a tour that included deployment in support of Operation Desert Storm. He completed the Independent Duty Corpsman course in 1994, and would serve as an IDC aboard the USS *Juneau* (LPD-10) as well as two destroyers, the USS *Higgins* (DDG-76) and USS *Benfold* (DDG-65). Steady promotions led to duty as the LCPO, Miramar Health Clinic, LCPO of the IDC School, Command Master Chief of the Naval School of Health Sciences, and Force Master Chief, Naval Surface Forces Command. He retired from active duty in 2010 and was recruited to work with the NCCOSC where he is the assistant department head for programs. An ardent physical fitness buff, he is a regular participant in Ironman events. He lives with his wife and three of his children in San Diego.

KEY WORDS:

Boot camp
Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC)
Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF)
Corpsman duty aboard ship
Independent Duty Corpsman (IDC)
Navy Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC)
Navy Medicine
Operation Desert Storm (ODS)
Operational stress control training
Resilience training
Surface Warfare Navy
Suicide prevention training
"West Coast Navy"

KEY FIGURES

Gilday, Michael M., RADM, Ret., USN; in 2000, commanding officer of the USS *Higgins* (DDG-76); in 2014 Director of Operations J3, U.S. Cyber Command.