

Beneath The Surface

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Abstract

This paper is a brief personal narrative of different and influential parts of my life. I started my childhood, moved into my naval career and ended with my time at Old Dominion University. Each segment of the narrative has the goal of giving examples of how this part of my life has made me a motivated, disciplined and educated member of society.

Keywords: motivation, discipline, technology, cyber security, diving

Beneath The Surface: A Story of a Navy Diver and Security Professional

When it became apparent that writing a personal narrative essay was a cornerstone of this class I initially thought it would be an easy assignment. However, having to identify key moments in my life that have shaped the person I have become today, the task seemed slightly more daunting. Being an almost 40-year-old, soon to be retired from the Navy, I have experienced quite a few trials and tribulations in my lifetime. I am a motivated, resilient, educated, technologically savvy, and devoted member of society because of my life experiences and academic achievements.

Childhood

I was fortunate to grow up in a working-class household in rural Beaverdam Va. Both my parents are musicians and taught music in local middle and high schools. With both of my parents working there was always food on the table, clothes on my back and a relatively modern computer in the living room. My dad has always been a bit of techie and always liked to have new computers and devices. This trait was certainly passed down to me as I would spend lots of my spare time figuring out what every little windows dropdown and subfolder did. I was a pioneer of the internet when we got America Online accounts and had to fight for the single phone line for dial up internet. My early interest and curiosity of computers and how they lead me to become a cyber security major in my adult life.

Playing on computers was not the only extra-curricular activity I was exposed to as a child. My parents were adamant that I learned to play a musical instrument. I started playing the cello in the fifth grade and kept at till I was a freshman in college at 18 years old. Learning to play the cello at a high level requires dedication and discipline which has carried over into

everything I set out to do. I was accepted to James Madison University in the fall of 2004 however, through a series of unfortunate events, I was unable to pursue a college degree after my freshman year and ended up back at home with my parents. Knowing I couldn't live there forever, I took that determination and discipline I had acquired as a child and early adult and decided to join the Navy.

Naval Service

I enlisted in the Navy on December 6th, 2005, to become a sonar technician onboard a submarine. After basic training I was sent to Groton Ct. to learn how to be a sonar technician and learned how to network computers, trouble shoot complex electronics and operate sonar equipment. Having exposure to new and different technology really made me feel at home because I had grown up computers. I graduated sonar A school easily and was on my way to my first duty station when I had a chance encounter with a Navy Diver. He presented me with an opportunity that would have been foolish not to explore. The [Master-Diver](#) said if I was motivated, mentally tough and comfortable in the water, I could attend Navy Dive school and become a navy deep-sea diver. With little hesitation I decided to put my computer technical career on hold and head to Panama City Florida attend second class dive school.

Second class dive school is a grueling 26 week course aimed at testing you physically, mentally and emotionally. Days started at 6:00 am with a two-to-three-hour physical training session that usually included getting completely wet and sandy within the first few minutes. During physical training all the instructors were actively trying to get you to quit by making every task harder than it had to be. Classroom time included learning diving physics, medicine and standard diving operating procedures. This was a far cry from the computer, information technology coursework I had in sonar school, but I was completely hooked and felt like I had

found my passion. I was thankful I had the required level of attention to detail and discipline required to operate and maintain the specialized diver's life support equipment. The motivation, discipline, and physical stamina I gained from Navy dive school has been the cornerstone of my personality and a major contributor to my work ethic.

Throughout my naval career I have been on numerous deployments from the Mediterranean to the middle east to the far east of Japan. My extensive travel experience has opened my eyes to different cultures and customs. Deployments are not just about seeing new places, there is still the mission at hand and the leadership expected results. On one such mission, our dive team was tasked with moving a 400-ton sunken pier from the Tigris River in Umm Qasr Iraq. Our dive team had work around the clock for nearly 12 days in extreme heat with daily temperatures over 110 degrees. Grinding in this stressful and exhausting environment made me realize the boundaries of what I was capable of. I am still an active-duty navy diver to this day and will be retiring from the profession in February of 2026. I have enjoyed the majority of my time in service and am thankful for the opportunities that I have been given.

Old Dominion University

I first enrolled in ODU in spring of 2019 after receiving an associate's degree from Coastline Community College. Transitioning from a community college to a major university made me nervous because I was concerned, I wouldn't be able to keep with the more rigorous curriculum. I initially declared a major in engineering technology because Navy diving has close ties with the engineering field. After a few classes into the major I was having a hard time being fully committed to the coursework and found myself looking at different career paths. When I read the description of the cybersecurity degree plan, I could feel my inner nerd coming back from my days before I went to dive school. I started researching information technology, network

security, penetration testing and other cybersecurity topics. I read Edward Snowden's book about his life as hacker and NSA analyst. It was then that I emailed my academic advisor and changed my major to cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity is a broad topic with many areas of specialization such as network security, data security, identity and access management and penetration testing just to name a few. I knew going into this field I would need strong networking skills. I took Networking 315 and Networked Systems Security CS 464 to gain a strong foundational level of networking knowledge. The most difficult class I took in my collegiate career was Cryptography for Cybersecurity CS 463. I took CS 463 online and had to devote many hours of self-study to learn the content. I was struggling miserably and beating my head against the table trying to understand the content. I had to reach down deep and lean on the motivation and discipline that I used in dive school to battle through and learn cryptography. The final phase of my time at ODU will be completing an internship class. I am fortunate and excited that I will be able to work with my current naval command and will be working in the cybersecurity department for the summer. The classes I took at ODU were challenging and I was determined to learn and master the content, ultimately ending up graduating Magna Cum Laude.

Writing a personal narrative essay is a challenging proposition because choosing which stories from your life will be applicable is often difficult. My childhood, naval service and academic studies at ODU have certainly shaped my life. These stories and snapshots have given me discipline, motivation, resilience and have motivated me to be a meaningful member of society, ready to embrace whatever comes next.