



Second Lieutenant Timothy Francis is a Naval Academy graduate, currently serving as a Platoon Commander for the Marine Corps. After graduating from high school, Tim accepted a commission to the US Naval Academy. The Naval

Academy is among the most competitive collegiate institutions, accepting only about one of every 10 candidates who apply. After graduating from the Naval Academy, Tim trained with the Marines and is now one of the few and the proud! Tim is also a dog lover and recently added a new dog to his life.

Tim – I'm so proud to be speaking with you and would like to thank you for your service to our country. It's a comfort to all of us to know that our safety is in such capable hands. Can you tell us a little bit about what life is like at the Naval Academy?

TF – Thanks for having me. The Naval Academy is just like West Point for the Navy and Marine Corps. It's a four-year college, and when you graduate you earn your Bachelors of Science and a commission in the Navy or Marine Corps. You start out with a seven-week indoctrination before you begin freshman year. Each summer after that you do some sort of military training. The academics are pretty rigorous. As you mentioned, the USNA typically ranks among the top few schools academically.

The movies always show the rigors of the physical training at Military Academies. How are the academics at the Naval Academy different from one might find at a typical college?

TF – We have very few majors. I was a History major, but I got a Bachelors of Science in history. The reason for this is the high number of

core classes we have to take in the sciences, including Chemistry, Calculus I-III, Differential Equations, Physics, Electrical Engineering, Weapons Engineering, and Systems Engineering. This is in addition to core classes in leadership, ethics, and navigation, among others. With all that, I sometimes felt like a general engineering major who did some History on the side.

That's really interesting! I bet most people don't realize how intense the academic training in math and sciences is for officers. Even with that rigorous schedule of classes, they obviously didn't work you hard enough at the Academy since you immediately entered Marine training on graduation! (Just kidding!) Since you were already an officer, did you have to go through a boot camp training again?

TF – Sort of. All Marine officers go through The Basic School in Quantico, VA, just south of Washington, DC. The school is about six months long. It's a very valuable experience where you learn marksmanship, orienteering, tactics, leadership, and a whole bunch of other stuff. It's not boot camp, but it's fairly challenging. Following The Basic School you go to another school that teaches you how to do the specific job you're going to do in the Fleet.



So now that you're a Marine, what can you tell us about what you do?

TF – I can't really get into specifics, but all junior officers have similarities. I'm trying to learn as much as I can about my job. Even though I've been to a lot of school, I have a ton to learn. It's the same as any other job in that there's a ton you learn after you begin the job, but the consequences for doing your job incorrectly are much more serious than in the civilian world. I also try to help my Marines in whatever way I can, or I get them in touch with whoever can solve their problems.

What's the best part about serving your country?

TF – The best part is working with other Marines. These guys are great. They make my job really easy, and they make me look good. Marines truly are a different breed—no pun intended.

What's the hardest part about being in the military?

TF – I don't know if there's a "toughest" part. There are a lot of things that are unexpected or last minute because it's such a huge bureaucracy. The most senior Marines do their best to minimize the red tape, but it's inevitable that you run into it.



I know that you've recently brought a puppy into your home, but you also grew up with dogs. Can you tell us a little about how you and your famous then 3-year-old dog Reina were invited to David Letterman's program to showoff Reina's trick when you were 13 years old?

TF – Well, my Dad did the actual try-out to get onto Dave's famous Stupid Pet Tricks. They accepted Reina, and my Dad was all set to go to New York when he got injured. Reina's trick was catching oyster crackers in her mouth faster than you could flick them off your finger. I could flick the crackers just as good as my Dad — Reina was the real talent. I was going to take his place, so I went up to New York and did the rehearsals and everything. Unfortunately, Dave's monologue ran a lot longer than they had expected, so one of the Stupid Pet Tricks had to get cut. Reina

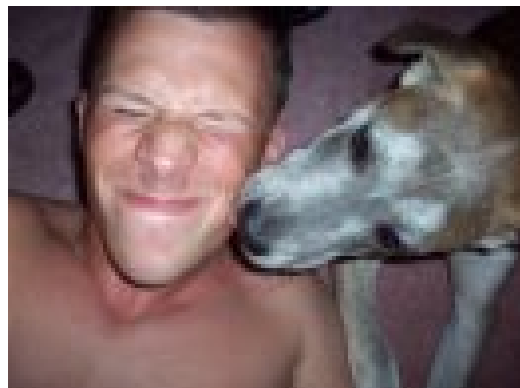
and I got axed. It was embarrassing because I had told a lot of people that I was going to be on David Letterman.



Now 14-year-old Reina still shows off her perfected rapid-fire cracker-catching trick!

What made you decide it was time to bring a new dog into your life?

TF – I bought a house, and I've missed living with a dog for the last five years. It was something I had talked about for a long time, so I was really excited to finally get the opportunity to have a dog again. I found an ad on



petfinder.com, contacted the owners, and picked up Donnie.

Why did you name your adorable pooch Donnie Iris?

TF – Donnie Iris is the King of Kool and the greatest Pittsburgh rocker of all time! He started his career as a member of the famed Jaggerz whose hit, “The Rapper” was introduced to me by one of my best friends, Michael Ban. Michael and I saw Donnie live at the Big Butler County Fair, and we again saw Donnie at a Clarks concert downtown. I wanted a reminder of home around me all the time, so Donnie Iris seemed like an easy choice.

So has Donnie been as easy to train as the men under your command?

Not at all. Donnie is ten times as tough.

In my wheatens’ obedience classes, they always have us practice “puppy push ups” – where the dog shifts from lying down to sitting up and then lying down again. Do you have Donnie “drop and give you twenty?”

TF – Donnie’s tough. He only works in sets of fifty.



Even as a puppy, Donnie Iris has already mastered the one-ear salute!



Looks to me like Donnie might be supervising Tim’s exercise, saying, “You call that a sit-up, Marine?!”

Anything else you'd like to add.

TF – www.FitAsFido.com is a great site. I'm looking forward to reading more Fit as Fido in the future. One thing I've heard about dogs is that they were built for speed, and they need to sprint to stay strong. I keep myself in shape, and I try to help Donnie do the same thing by getting him sprinting in the back yard. Make sure Fido stays in shape, too!



If you're interested in more information about the US Naval Academy, visit <http://www.usna.edu///homepage.php>



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And for more information on the Marines, visit <http://www.usmc.mil/>



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And if you'd like to hear the original Donnie Iris playing his famous *Ah Leah!*, check out this YouTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i19DrZUr7u0>