

Veteran: WARREN, Gary Wade
Service Branch: ARMY
Interviewer: Thibodaux, Dana
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Interviewer: This is Dana Thibodaux, and I'm recording an interview with Wade Warren on December 1, 2003. Wade, do you understand that our conversation's going to be recorded, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library, and do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you state your name?

Veteran: Gary Wade Warren.

Interviewer: And your highest rank or grade held?

Veteran: E-4, Specialist.

Interviewer: Your current address?

Veteran: 631 Tarpaulin Way.

Interviewer: Your city?

Veteran: Crosby, Texas.

Interviewer: The company or troop that you served in?

Veteran: Primary was 814th Specialist ____ Engineers.

Interviewer: It was commanded by whom?

Veteran: Capt. Randy Turner, 559th Engineer Battalion.

Interviewer: It was commanded by?

Veteran: Lt. Col. John Williams, I believe was his name.

Interviewer: And regiment?

Veteran: Instead of regiment it was brigade. 130th Engineer Brigade.

Interviewer: And commanded by?

Veteran: I cannot remember his name.

Interviewer: Do you remember the division?

Veteran: It was 5th Army Corps.

Interviewer: Do you remember who it was commanded by?

Veteran: I don't remember.

Interviewer: Do you remember the date that you enlisted?

Veteran: I believe it was December 7, 1989.

Interviewer: Do you remember how old you were?

Veteran: 21.

Interviewer: And how long were you in?

Veteran: Three years active duty; five years reserve.

Interviewer: Where did you go to enlist?

Veteran: Went to a recruiting office in College Station and actually recruited in Houston, Texas.

Interviewer: Did you have a previous occupation before you enlisted?

Veteran: College student.

Interviewer: Can you describe the local enlistment or draft process?

Veteran: No draft in the 80s or 90s. Just kind of courted by enlistment personnel. You received information, and if you pursue it, then they give you a liaison to help you go through the process and get you signed up.

Interviewer: What were your initial reactions when you entered the military service?

Veteran: Little bit of confusion and uncertainty. Most of the initial responses were laid out before you so you knew what to expect.

Interviewer: Where did you go to boot camp?

Veteran: Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Interviewer: What were your specialties that you were trained for?

Veteran: Combat engineer and demolitions—primarily demolitions.

Interviewer: Were you trained in first aid, signaling radio, or any special equipment?

Veteran: I had entry level first aid training, basic radio communication training, all kinds of weapons training, and then some special equipment like certain vehicles and things like that.

Interviewer: Did you seek out that training yourself, or were you ordered to do that?

Veteran: During basic training and your A.I.D. training, that's all required training.

Interviewer: Do you have any experiences you could share about those?

Veteran: Basically, the first four weeks were rifle marksmanship training. That was very tedious—lots of repetition. Once everybody got qualified on their weapons, then it was a big relief on the rest of the training. That was the primary push, to get everybody qualified on the rifles. Demolition training was kind of unique. There was one pretty serious accident that killed eight people when I was in.

Interviewer: Did you enter an officer's training program at any time?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Where you stationed during your stateside assignments?
Veteran: The only stateside I did was 13 weeks at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Interviewer: While you were there, were you able to see any weapons?
Veteran: Yeah, pretty much the full gamut.

Interviewer: What were your opinions of the weapons?
Veteran: They weren't any surprise. The techniques were quite a bit different than were taught about rifles. Pretty much forget everything you learned as a kid and just relearned everything their way. The process of using weapons is different.

Interviewer: Did you consider the weapons you saw to be reliable?
Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: As far as the clothing and rations and the equipment you were using, did you feel that they were adequate for the climate and weather conditions that you were to encounter?
Veteran: Yeah, I believe so.

Interviewer: What about the food that you received?
Veteran: It was pretty good, as far as quality. Sometimes it was lacking in volume.

Interviewer: How responsive were the supply services to your unit?
Veteran: During peacetime, they were right on the spot, and then during large or combat operations their lag time was a little larger.

Interviewer: When you first learned that you were going to go overseas, what was your initial reaction to that?
Veteran: I was happy, because I volunteered to go overseas.

Interviewer: At what time in your movement overseas did you learn of your real destination?

Veteran: The initial movement overseas was a civilian airplane and a civilian route all the way. I didn't know exactly what unit initially that I was going to, but within a week I was at my permanent duty station in Annov(?), Germany.

Interviewer: Did you have any apprehensions about going at all?

Veteran: No, I was actually pretty excited.

Interviewer: Did your unit experience any difficulties while you were getting ready to move overseas?

Veteran: No, I don't believe so. We moved individually in groups of ten people, so I can only speak for the small group that I traveled with. All the paperwork and stuff like that was done up front, and all the immunizations, and traveling orders and equipment, so it was just a matter of getting on a plane.

Interviewer: How long did it take you guys to be ready to go?

Veteran: We could move in 24 hours pretty easily, so there weren't any problems.

Interviewer: What kind of information did the military give you about the countries where you were going to serve?

Veteran: When I went to Germany, we actually had like a five day orientation on customs, how to get around, how to travel, how the currency works, and how the transportation system works, and things like that. It was a five day orientation, so it was pretty good.

Interviewer: Did they give you an initiation on how to interact with civilians?

Veteran: Yeah, in Europe that was included in the orientation. As far as some of the other countries I went through you just had pick up the information as you went. I went to Turkey one time, and it's primarily a Muslim country, and they're real particular about abiding by Muslim customs that you kind of picked up as you went, but there wasn't any formal indoctrination beforehand.

Interviewer: What were your first impressions of service abroad?

Veteran: I guess that the structure of the military was a bit overwhelming. It's kind of amazing how that large a group of people can be moved from continent to continent without real difficulty. Large amounts of equipment, large groups of people on short notice.

Interviewer: You said you were excited about going and serving. Did your views in that aspect change after you got there?

Veteran: No. Going to Europe, particularly, just kind of became routine. It was some place I'd wanted to go before, and after I lived there over two years it was just routine. You never had enough time to do everything you wanted to do with your military obligations. Some of the other smaller trips to Turkey, Iraq, and Croatia, they were all real short term. You got a snapshot impression of it and that was it.

Interviewer: We talked about the civilians just a little bit, but how did you and your comrades get along with civilians overseas before, during, and after hostilities?

Veteran: Before hostilities, the interaction was very good. During and after hostilities, particular the first Gulf War, the whole tide of the European community was kind of against the whole operation. There was quite a bit of peace activism and stuff like that, so we went from people buying you beer and giving free cigarettes to throwing rocks at you.

Interviewer: What was the morale of your unit?

Veteran: I'd say fair to very good.

Interviewer: Did you see any enemy propaganda?

Veteran: I kind of consider some of the French and German propaganda enemy, but no, I didn't.

Interviewer: How and to what extent were religious convictions expressed in your unit?

Veteran: Basically, I guess they were nonexistent. There was a lot of religious practices, but there was chaplain services every Sunday, and probably five or ten percent went to services during peacetime and probably ninety to ninety-five percent went during combat situations. That was the primary difference.

Interviewer: During wartime and the religious convictions then, did it seem to influence the performance of the men?

Veteran: No, it just helped people bring their thoughts together and react individually better to have an overall impact on the unit operation. At my level, I didn't see any upper level decision-making, but on the ground, it was just more of a personal solace type of thing. It wasn't any direct interaction with operations.

Interviewer: You've talked about being in several different places where you were involved in hostilities, so you did take part in some combat action?

Veteran: Yeah, to a certain extent.

Interviewer: Where were you when that happened?

Veteran: It was in Iraq and Turkey during the original Desert Storm from the day after Christmas, December 1990, to March 27, 1991 in Turkey and Northern Iraq, and then a very short-term operation in Croatia-Bosnia, Serbia. That was in '92 and again in '95, I believe.

Interviewer: What was your baptism of fire like and your reaction to that experience?

Veteran: Man, that's a hard one to answer. I guess it was just the first time that we received direct and indirect fire. It's kind of like a rush of adrenaline. Hardly anyone I spoke with ever felt fear from it. They'd just get a real rush of adrenaline, almost to the point of being overzealous and things like that. You're not able to sleep for long periods afterwards and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Did you find it hard to concentrate?

Veteran: Yeah, for a long time.

Interviewer: When you were involved in this, what was a typical day like for you?

Veteran: Most days were just a lot of waiting—kind of sitting around and just waiting for orders to move from one place to another, but then you may not move at all. Making sure equipment inspections and other type of inspections, and a lot of

logistical planning for ammunition and food—preparation, you know. Probably ninety-five percent of the time, that's what it was.

Interviewer: So, with the experience you had in ballistics and things like that, what exactly did you do?

Veteran: What I was trained to do and what we actually did turned out to be, particularly in Desert Storm was two different deals. We were there in a position to use demolition on bridges and structures that the United Nations—or what we called the Coalition—had gone on into Baghdad and we were supposed to come into play, and then by early mid-March, they decided they weren't going all the way into Baghdad. I guess we later did, but we were just turned around and sent back home. So basically we did some scouting of potential targets, and turned out doing a lot of recon and stuff. We'd survey areas that were destroyed by bombs from the air and artillery.

Interviewer: Did you ever come under enemy air attack?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: How would you characterize your unit's combat performance?

Veteran: Excellent.

Interviewer: What were the results of the performance? Was it leadership and discipline or the camaraderie and cohesion, or what do you think made it to be as excellent as it was?

Veteran: I'd probably say the training. You trained to an extent that everything is just reactionary. If you do it repetitive enough, then when you get in a combat situation, then it's automatic. There's a certain amount of unit cohesion, particularly at the squad level, to not let your buddies down in a particular function, but if you're trained up to the extent that they want you trained, then it's automatic. There's very little thought required. You just kind of react like a robot, I think.

Interviewer: While you were doing what you were doing, did you ever participate in a cooperative operation with a sister service?

Veteran: Not really.

Interviewer: Did you ever work alongside allied or foreign auxiliaries?

Veteran: Yes, I worked on short term operations with the German military, French commandoes, Polish army, Czech army. I think that's the only ones.

Interviewer: When was that?

Veteran: That was '90 or '91 with some French and a few Germans, in '92 with Germans, and '95 again with Polish, Czech, and Germans, and some African country. I can't remember the country, but they had a small contingency force.

Interviewer: Did you feel they were effective?

Veteran: They weren't very effective. They just basically stood in the background and let the Americans do all the work, and then they just observed. They were there just to build the numbers up—not to actually serve a function, in my opinion.

Interviewer: What was their attitude towards the U.S. forces?

Veteran: Most of them, like the former Eastern Bloc countries like the Polish and the Czechs, were real appreciative if you tried to teach them or show them something, or you shared food with them. The Germans and the French just thought they were equal or slightly superior. In fact, there was a lot of tension and skirmishes, and things like that during downtime.

Interviewer: So, there were some problems then between them and the U.S. forces?

Veteran: Yeah. It was mainly not really a cultural deal, but more of a 'my team and your team' type deal.

Interviewer: Did you have any experience with gathering of intelligence, like scouting, or interrogating prisoners, or patrolling?

Veteran: No, I never messed with prisoners of any type. I did some small scouting, and actually took some photographs on a couple of occasions, but that was really about it.

Interviewer: How did you regard the enemy troops as fighters?

Veteran: I'll start with Iraq. They were well armed but they weren't organized and not very well trained.

Interviewer: Did they have a good leader?

Veteran: They appeared not to have any leadership, because it looked unorganized.

Interviewer: How effective were their weapons?

Veteran: Most of them were given to them by Americans, so they weren't well maintained, and they didn't have spare parts, but they did serve their purpose.

Interviewer: What did you think about the enemy just as a people?

Veteran: I don't know. I didn't really have enough interaction with the Iraqi people to really have an opinion. They had real young people, 16 or 17 years old, that basically didn't want to be in the position they were in. It was pretty obvious. Like the Serbians in Bosnia, the forces there were there for a purpose. They were driven and were particularly vicious in their actions. They had a different calling, so to speak. They weren't forced to be someplace they didn't want to be. They were on their own account, so they were fairly well trained. Most of their stuff was learned in guerilla fashion. Didn't like any formal military training, but they were pretty good soldiers.

Interviewer: Were they well armed?

Veteran: No, they were typically just small arms and rifles, bayonets, pocket knives, and some explosives.

Interviewer: So their weapons weren't very effective?

Veteran: Since the Americans never actually fought against them other than in an air campaign, later on their particular style of fighting was them against the helpless

civilians so they just basically relied on intimidation. They could come in and kill 20 people, and then intimidation runs throughout the rest of the town, so they basically can do what they need to do with very little weapons.

Interviewer: When you were serving in Bosnia, did the opinion you had when you first went over there of the enemy soldiers, did it change after you encountered them in battle, and even after battle?

Veteran: Yeah, my opinion on how ferocious they were. I don't know how to describe it. They were able to kill with what looked like little force—almost demon possessed. The few encounters I had were just really out there. It was like a demon possessed driven thing, which most genocide is, I guess.

Interviewer: Did you capture any enemy prisoners?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Did you help liberate any enemy prison camps or concentration camps?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: How was the morale and discipline of your unit after the end of hostilities?

Veteran: It was initially up, and then very quickly it was pretty poor. Probably within two weeks, it was pretty bad.

Interviewer: Was this in Bosnia?

Veteran: This was after Iraq and again after Bosnia. I remember coming back from Iraq, there were two suicides and then three guys went wacko and had to be committed within two weeks of coming home, so when that stuff begins happening, the morale drops pretty quick. The Army's real good at filling those voids and getting it going again.

Interviewer: What about discipline? Did you see a change in that after the war?

Veteran: No, discipline might even pull a little tighter after hostilities. The importance of being disciplined is understood better after you've been in a situation where you need to be disciplined.

Interviewer: Speaking of discipline, what were some of the disciplinary actions that the military units would take against those that had some type of an infraction against them?

Veteran: The infractions I saw were minor, so the punishment was typically pretty minor. They'd get some kind of crappy duty for two weeks, or have to give half their pay for a couple of months. That was for drunkenness or something stupid like that. There was one serious one where a guy was selling stuff on the black market, and he wound up getting eighteen months hard time for selling cigarettes.

Interviewer: What did you think about the military courts?

Veteran: I didn't have a lot of interaction with that.

Interviewer: Do you feel like the discipline you did see was fair?

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were there any desertions in your unit?

Veteran: One, and I never found out if it was a desertion or not. I think it was just some type of family problem, or something. They gave him a discharge.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of theft between the military men?

Veteran: Yeah, there was a little bit. Mostly it was just money. At payday, you really had to guard your paychecks sometimes. In fact, one guy in my battalion was killed by his roommate for what they proved later was his paycheck, which was six or seven hundred dollars.

Interviewer: After you got back from the war, did you receive any awards or decorations?

Veteran: I got two Army commendation medals, four Army achievement medals, and they gave the Kuwait Liberation medal to everybody, I think. I got one award from the German army for serving in a combat operation with German military.

Interviewer: In your opinion, do you think the awards and decorations were distributed fairly?

Veteran: I really don't know. Most awards issued so far after the fact that you might not even be with the same people that you were with when they finally got some type of award. I didn't see any big Medals of Honor or Silver Stars go out to anybody I knew, but that's proportional to the combat experience, I think.

Interviewer: Tell me about your welcome home.

Veteran: There was really two of them. Coming back to your permanent duty station, which mine was in Germany, and that was a real cold welcome home. People were throwing rocks at us, and we had to wear flack vests anytime we went outside the post for awhile.

Interviewer: Was this after the Iraqi war?

Veteran: Yes. They had to lock down the post, and we couldn't go to certain establishments because of peace activists and stuff like that.

Interviewer: What was your welcome like when you came back to the United States?

Veteran: Pretty much uneventful, except for my family. It was kind of like "you're home now" kind of feeling.

Interviewer: How long were you in Germany before you did return to the United States?

Veteran: I was gone two years before I ever came home. Came home for two weeks, and then went back and finished the rest of my time there. When I left active military, I was home, so I was home for two weeks in three years.

Interviewer: How long did you remain in the service after the end of hostilities that you were involved in?

Veteran: I guess the five years reserve time was pretty quiet during that period of time.

Interviewer: Why did you choose to leave the service?

Veteran: Kind of a personal deal. It's not a real good place to start a family, just a place to go sow your wild oats for a few years. I had no desire to do twenty years and have a career, just part of plan to do three years, get the college money, and then come back out.

Interviewer: And is that why you joined the service?

Veteran: Yeah, it really was.

Interviewer: How hard was it for you to adjust to civilian life after you left the military?

Veteran: Very, very difficult. That was the hardest part of the whole deal. Going from living with 200 guys and then you're by yourself in your own apartment. It's kind of difficult. Plus how you react when somebody honks a horn at you, you respond differently as a civilian than you do in the military, so it's a pretty difficult adjustment.

Interviewer: So you used your G.I. benefits for schooling when you returned home?

Veteran: Yeah. I went for one year on the G.I. Bill.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about the G.I. Bill?

Veteran: It's a good plan. If I had my way, every teenage boy would go in specifically for that benefit, as well as for the benefit of the discipline and learning basically just how to grow up.

Interviewer: So you would recommend the armed forces to others.

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about women?

Veteran: I don't want to sound like I'm a chauvinist or anything. There's a place for women in the military, and there's some real fine gray lines that are being pushed one way or another, and they definitely serve a function, but I wouldn't recommend every young girl or young lady to go. Those that have a desire, they can definitely get training if they want to go into dentistry or the medical field or nuclear power, they can get a good education in the military, and then get money to go to school afterward. I don't buy into women in combat and all that type of deal.

Interviewer: What was your date and place of discharge?

Veteran: I left active duty late 1992—probably September. I left reserve duty December 7, 1997.

Interviewer: Thanks a lot for your interview, and we are finished.

Veteran: Right on.

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