

**Veteran:** **ANDERSON, Gary**  
**Service Branch:** **ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**  
**Interviewer:** Contreras, Francisco  
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Interviewer: Today is Monday, April 29, 2002. My name is Francisco Contreras, and I am here with Mr. Gary L. Anderson. We're located at his place of employment at Earthman's Funeral Home. Before we begin, sir, I'd just like to tell you that this conversation is being recorded, and the tape and transcription will be in place at the Lee College Library, and I just want to ask if we have your permission to do so.

Veteran: That's fine.

Interviewer: Thank you, sir. Before we get started, I'd like to get a little history. Where were you born and raised?

Veteran: I was born in Wasso (sic?), Wisconsin, August 28, 1950. The first fourteen and a half years I lived in Wisconsin and we moved around in Wisconsin. In 1965, we moved to Charlottesville, Virginia. From there we went to Baltimore, Maryland, and once I graduated from high school I moved off to New York and back to Maryland and Pennsylvania, and down to Texas. I moved to Houston, Texas, on April 21, 1977.

Interviewer: And you've been here ever since?

Veteran: That's correct.

Interviewer: Why did you join the Army National Guard?

Veteran: Back then in the late 70s, I felt that I owed something to my country for the freedoms that I enjoyed and taking some time out of my life to serve my country was the reason that I joined the Army National Guard.

Interviewer: How did your family feel about you enlisting?

Veteran: There was no say about it, because I was an old man by that time as far kids in the military. I was 25 years of age, and so I had been out on my own, and just wanted to join, and so I did.

Interviewer: And you were not married at the time?

Veteran: No, I was not married. In fact, I was qualified 4-F by the Draft Board, but I went in and told them that I was a 1-Y, and they had me take a neurological physical, research and what-not, and the doctor said I was OK to go ahead and enlist, and so they allowed me to enlist.

Interviewer: Where did you do your basic training?

Veteran: Basic training was done at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri.

Interviewer: How long was it for?

Veteran: It was six months—eight weeks of basic training, and then I went to Fort Sam Houston to do my medical training.

Interviewer: Where were you stationed the majority of the time?

Veteran: I was at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, for the basic training and then I was stationed at Fort Sam Houston, and then my home base was Baltimore, Maryland, with a medical detachment. When I moved to Houston, I was stationed down on OST and Fannin, which was the 389<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion. So it was either Baltimore or Houston.

Interviewer: So you were pretty close here to the Houston area.

Veteran: Yeah, and I did one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer. And then my unit got called up for active duty when they had the flood in the Friendswood area in 1979. I was in Texas City, and I was on the other side of the flood, so I did not get activated, but the rest of my unit had been activated, and they worked with the flood in 1979.

Interviewer: Was that the only time you were activated?

Veteran: That's the only time that we were activated as a unit—right.

Interviewer: You did state on your questionnaire that you were a medic. What was everyday life like for a medic in the National Guard?

Veteran: When we went out on duty I would help to facilitate any injuries that occurred. I would help to get them out of there if necessary, and so forth. It was just basically to practice and to teach good habits so that we didn't have any accidents. Fortunately, during my time as a medic, we had no real accidents of any sort, and so there was nothing life threatening. A lot of times, actually, it was boring, because there wasn't anything going on. I mean, there weren't accidents happening so all you could do was sit there and wait to see if anything happened.

Interviewer: What was the worst accident?

Veteran: Just a sprained ankle. In basic training and what-not and then when you'd do your summer camp you'd get people, but you'd treat them.

Interviewer: Nothing ever serious?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Because of the Cold War at the time, were you ever worried about having to serve in an area of conflict?

Veteran: No. If we'd been called up, that's fine, I'd have gone.

Interviewer: So, you were ready to go.

Veteran: Sure.

Interviewer: You weren't scared at any time?

Veteran: Not any more scared than you'd be at any other time. I mean, if you go to war and you die, you go to war and you die, but you can step out here and go across the street and die, too. You can get hit by a car or drive your car and get in a car accident and die. When the Good Lord wants to call you home, He'll call you home, so that shouldn't stop you from doing it.

Interviewer: What would say was the mood of the armed forces during the Cold War? Let's say, the gentlemen in your unit.

Veteran: The majority of them that were there had been there for fifteen, eighteen, twenty years that were working towards retirement. We had some like myself that were just wanting to serve their country. We had some that had opted out instead of going to full-time Army that they had gone to the National Guard. We also have to realize that when I went in they had eliminated the draft, and so this was an all-volunteer Army versus having to be drafted, and then the early 70s and late 60s, you know Vietnam was going on, and then people were joining the guard to get out of being drafted, because the draft was still in. But by the time I went in they had already gone to an all-volunteer Army, and so people were there because of their choice.

Interviewer: And so you did not have any gentlemen there that signed up to avoid being...

Veteran: We had some older gentlemen who had had some active duty time, and then they were working toward their retirement, and then we had some gentlemen that had been in there who would have been in there prior to the draft ending, but I never got in a conversation if they were trying to avoid the draft or that they had—you know a lot of guys back then would join the National Guard and go to college, because they would rather do one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer and still facilitate their college education. And so some of them may have done it for that reason. I have no idea.

Interviewer: How would you feel about somebody enlisting in the National Guard to avoid being drafted?

Veteran: If they could have joined the Army and had their selection, I'm sure a lot of them would have. If they joined just purely out of reasons for themselves, it's kind of selfish. But everybody has to live with themselves, so I'm not going to try to judge somebody else. But I just hope that if we went to combat, he was there and he was going to cover me as I would cover him. It's kind of a touchy subject.

Interviewer: It's easy for me to ask that question, because I was never in that situation, and it would probably be easy for me to say, "Yes, I'll go," but when it comes right

down to it, you know, I'd like to say that yes I would. As a matter of fact, I've tried several times to enlist myself, and the first time I didn't get my parents to sign because I was sixteen, and I had to have parental consent, and the second time I kind of got into some trouble, so it just wasn't meant to be, and I went back to college. But it's something that I always wanted to do.

Veteran: That's good.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the training you received in the National Guard helped you in civilian life?

Veteran: The military training I received teaches discipline and teaches you to, in a sense, respect authority, to listen, and to work as a cohesive unit, because the idea behind the basic training was that when you heard something they wanted the whole platoon to react in the same fashion. So it would be like they wanted the whole company to work toward one common goal, and that's the same thing. And of course in the military they can instill it a little better than they can in a company here, because in the military you have exercises and they have leverage that you don't have in private life. But it gives you good training, and a good basic foundation so that when you come out you have an idea as to what's important in real life.

Interviewer: So would you recommend that?

Veteran: I think everyone should have to pull two years or three years of active duty, or if they're not qualified for active duty, to go work at a V.A. hospital or something drawing the same pay as what a private would draw, or a corporal or whatever under the same circumstances just for the privileges that we have as free individuals of the United States of America.

Interviewer: That's a good concept. Do you have many friends in the service that you still keep in contact with?

Veteran: I don't have any. I've been out almost sixteen years now, and so I've lost contact with all of them, because our lives have all gone in different directions.

Interviewer: Was it difficult for you to adjust back to the civilian life once you did your time?

Veteran: No. When you pulled your one weekend a month and you did your two weeks during the summer, you know that you had to come to order and do according to what they were telling you to do and what-not, and then you'd come out and go into civilian life. And even once we were through with basic training over at Fort Sam, it was an open post, so you could go off the post anytime you wanted to come and go. I looked at it like as a job when I was there. During those hours that we were in class, or we were on drilling team, or whatever, that was the time that I had to spend with them, and then the other hours were my home, and so I could do basically what I wanted to do. It was not that bad of a life. The pay isn't that good, but the pay isn't good anywhere right now.

Interviewer: Overall, what would you say was the best part?

Veteran: Just experiencing the basic training and the camaraderie that you are able to share with people at least once a month, and then on weekend duties you'd build friendships, but it's like any friendship. How many of us have stayed in touch with people that we have graduated or gone to elementary school with. You know, I'm coming up to my 35<sup>th</sup> reunion—they're all back in Maryland, and I'm here, but they've all moved, too. But the camaraderie at the time is great. Plus you're all in it for the same cause, or the same goal.

Interviewer: What would say was the least favorite part of serving in the National Guard?

Veteran: Calisthenics in the morning. I enjoyed it all, because even the KP duty wasn't bad. It gave you something to do, and you went in and did your KP, and once you were done with KP, you were free to go on that particular day. You didn't have to stay the rest of the day for full day. And so as long as you looked at everything with a positive attitude, there's not much that's bad.

Interviewer: Before we start finishing up, September 11<sup>th</sup>—the big disaster. What's your feeling on that?

Veteran: Well, I think it shouldn't have happened. We should have been on top of it, but we had had a president of the United States that didn't have the respect for the military, and he wouldn't help them. He had a chance to get Osama Bin Laden and let it go by. He didn't seem real interested in our national defense. I don't

think it should have ever happened, but if the man in charge isn't staying on top of it, and running a country is just like running a company—you've got to stay on top of it and look at all aspects of it, and follow through with it. And you might not like the military, but the military is what's going to protect you. And sure there's going to be some mistakes made somewhere, but there's mistakes made everywhere. And I'm not surprised that it happened, because we let our defenses, we said, "oh, let everybody come in," and we didn't do background checks. Our society has gotten so that if we ask questions, "well, why did you ask them that question—who are you to ask that?" And we need to protect our country and our borders, and it's not that you don't like anybody or that you don't want anybody to come into your country, but you don't want them to come in to destroy your country. So, if you have questions, ask questions. If they don't meet up to the questions that you ask, then don't let them in. I mean, it's your country and my country—if we don't protect it, then look elsewhere

Interviewer: So you think back in, I believe it was in '91 or '92 during Desert Storm, you think the situation with Saddam Hussein we should have...

Veteran: As far as I'm concerned they should have gone all the way up. But that was in Iran, and they should have gone all the way in. We were protecting Kuwait, but we were fighting against Saddam Hussein, and they're talking now about Bush going in and eliminating him and putting someone else in charge that would be friendly towards America. And Swartzkopf wanted to go in, but because of the rules and regulations that had been set out by Kuwait, we couldn't go in, but we should have gone all the way and taken care of it back then, but again it's a political game. If we had taken care of it then, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now. It's one of those situations you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Interviewer: At the time that happened, that was when I was enlisting to go, and I was removed right before that situation happened, and I had a couple of friends that were on call to take off to go. It was very...

Veteran: You know if they went and they died, we're all going to go sometime, but we don't want to go that way, because we don't have a choice as to when we go.

Interviewer: I'm not too sure how many casualties we had during Desert Storm, but I do feel we should have gone in and taken care of that situation. Had Saddam Hussein been removed from that dictatorship, and we probably wouldn't be in the situation we're in now. Before we wrap things up, is there anything you'd like to add?

Veteran: Well, just like I mentioned in the beginning. I think we have a fantastic country, and I think we need to fight for its preservation and keep our rights. And I think everybody should take time—two years or three years minimum—and serve, which everybody can serve. Like I say, if you're not qualified to go into the military training, you could still work at a V.A. hospital or things of this nature and get some training and give some time back to the country, it's just like in Israel. All of the people there serve in the military, and they're reservists or what-not, and we don't have to get that fanatical about it, but I think if our younger people when they came out of high school, if they don't have a sense of direction, and if they have two years to where they were under the guidance of someone teaching them as you would in the military or set up a system of training it would be better for people, because when we moved the adult age from 21 back to 18, there's three years there that they mature a whole lot. And at 18 they're not ready for adulthood as you are when you're 21—not that everyone that's 21 is ready for it either—but that's three years of maturing. So if we had a period of time when people had to go into the military to help them in the maturing process, because just because your 18 you're an adult and can do anything you want, it's really not that way. There's still rules and regulations, and if you don't follow the rules and regulations you're going to be slapped. And so I think we need to come up with a system of paying for our freedoms by serving our country. I don't think that's asking too much of anyone.



Interviewer: I agree with you. I guess that's basically all that I have. Like I said, I just want to reiterate that the conversation was being taped, and it will be for Lee College to use for future references, future studies. I have a sheet that I need for you to sign to release it, and I would like to thank you for your time, sir. I know that you went out of your way to visit, and I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Veteran: Thank you.

{END OF INTERVIEW}