

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Shawn Corcoran

U. S. Marine Corps, Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq

2006

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Corcoran, Shawn, (b.1972), Oral History Interview, 2006.

User Copy : 2 sound cassettes (ca. 120 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy : 2 sound cassettes (ca. 120 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Shawn Cocoran, a Clinton, Iowa native, discusses his service in the Marine Corps during the Persian Gulf War, Los Angeles Rodney King riots, Somalia, Bosnia, and the Iraq War. Growing up in a military family, Cocoran reports his childhood was largely spent in Stuttgart, Germany where he attended Department of Defense schools until age sixteen when he came to Stoughton, Wisconsin to finish high school. He relates his decision to join the Marines in 1990 and describes his family's reaction as unfavorable. Cocoran outlines his training including boot camp in San Diego (California), infantry school at Camp Pendleton (California), and explosive ordinance training at Redstone Arsenal (Alabama). He describes his participation in the Persian Gulf War as "kind of disappointing" in that it was primarily an air war and his unit, the First Service Support Group out of Camp Pendleton, spent time in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and, as the war ended quickly, returned home without engaging the enemy. Back at Camp Pendleton and assigned to the Air Contingency Force, a twenty-four hour on-call unit, Cocoran describes being called up for the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles and stationed at El Toro Air Base for about ten days. He tells of having no traffic as the California Highway Patrol closed down Interstate 5 and describes it as "a little odd" to be carrying a weapon around in an American city. He mentions his next assignment to Okinawa where he was deployed as part of the 9th Engineers to Somalia on a humanitarian relief effort in which he explains, "things kind of fell into hell in a hand basket," He describes it as his "first real experience...how human beings can treat each other and how some humans live." He talks of being broken hearted over seeing the African children starving to death. Out of military service briefly, he subsequently entered the Reserves as Marine Forces Europe; involving color guard ceremonies throughout Europe during the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-Day, Rwanda during the Ebola outbreak, and active duty in Bosnia during their civil war. He characterizes Bosnia as "another eye-opener" and describes the country and cities as similar to those in the U.S., only ravaged by war. Likening a Bosnian city to Madison, he speaks of people in tattered clothes, bombed out homes, snipers shooting people getting water, and the arrival of winter. Identifying a greater value in family following his experiences in Bosnia, Cocoran left military service, settled in Madison (Wisconsin), had two sons, and a good job at Charter Communications when 9/11 occurred.

Finding himself radio-listening all day, Cocoran says he decided to join the Reserves thinking, "This is my Pearl Harbor." He describes losing twenty pounds in six weeks and going in to the Marine Reserves, Gulf Company located in Madison as a sergeant. He characterizes Gulf Company as well disciplined, one of the best units in the state, but he recalls feeling antsy about not being called up and decided to go into active duty; a decision that led to his divorce. Entering a Camp LeJeune artillery unit, the 1/10, First Battalion, Tenth Marines, Tenth Marine Regiment; Cocoran comments on his training, observing that military training is always "a war behind." He describes his call-up to Kuwait while home on leave. He discusses conditions on the USS Bataan; the LSD taken over to Kuwait, including the thirty days it took to get to Camp Shoup, tense moments going through the Suez Canal, and technological conveniences such as internet access and satellite television. He describes conditions at the camp including no tents, no chow hall, no showers, porta-johns that tipped over, and MRE meals. He explains cell phones were not permitted, but recreation included catching pet lizards, Game Boys, and MP3 players. He describes learning they were moving out, emotions and last minute activities, and being fired upon by Iraqi artillery that were subsequently obliterated by American rockets. Upon entering Iraq the next morning, he speaks of his surprise in finding everything quiet except for some Bedouins that waved as they proceeded on to An Nasiriyah. He discusses confusing tactics and states that An Nasiriyah turned into a larger battle than expected with eighteen Marines killed the first day fighting the Fedayeen or Republican Guards. He elaborates on combat conditions such as Iraqi ambushes and set-ups; saying that the Americans did not yet realize how vigilant they needed to become. He details his heart-wrench over the death of his friend, Lt. Pokorny; later revealing that Pokorny's wife heard the news on CNN. He speaks further about media involvement in the war. He tells of seeing a man with his head ripped off and a dead baby with brain matter leaking out; which moved him to write to his two sons, to let them know what he was doing was important, and to his parents, to apologize. He recalls sitting on an ammo crate and thinking, "Man, this is bad." His combat recollections are sometimes hard to follow, but compelling and speak of mortars, things not going as planned, ending up in "Ambush Alley," rain and mud, sand storms, Marines dying, a lot of trickery and distrust, "confusing stuff," the difficulty of "second guessing," and trying to interact with Iraqis while keeping his guard up. His unit's combat duty also included chasing an Iraqi armored division to Al-Kut, securing bridges and an oil refinery, and bridge checkpoint stations. He describes good times such as whistling at the Iraqi women and their beautiful eyes, feeling safer if a lot of children were about, and the intelligence of the Iraqi people. As a tourist, he speaks in awe of seeing Babylon, the Garden of Eden, and where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers meet. Throughout this portion of the interview, Cocoran describes social conditions in Iraq including the poverty of the people. He describes feeling "shell-shocked" at their return to Kuwait and of the unit's American homecoming in June 2003. Serving as a Marine recruiting officer, Cocoran says he wants to go back to Iraq because "this is what Marines do" and explains what sense he has made of American involvement there.

Biographical Sketch

Shawn Corcoran, (b.1972) currently works on recruiting duty in Madison (Wisconsin.) He participated in the Persian Gulf War, and was stationed in Okinawa (Japan), Somalia, Bosnia, as well as touring Europe as part of a Color Guard. More recently, Corcoran participated in the Iraq War. He has two sons and currently lives in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2006.
Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2007.

Interview Transcript:

John: This is John Driscoll, and today is June 13, 2006. And this is an oral history interview with Gunnery Sergeant Shawn Corcoran, of the United States Marine Corps. And we are meeting at the Marine Corps recruiting office in Madison. And Shawn, thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview.

Shawn: Oh, thanks for coming.

John: Okay. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Shawn: I was born not too far from here, actually it is Clinton, Iowa, right outside the state. Born in 1972, January 7.

John: Brothers? Sisters?

Shawn: I have one sister. She was born before me. She's about six years older than I am. She was born in Missouri. My dad was in the Army, so we grew up a military family.

John: Okay. Did you travel much as a youngster?

Shawn: We did. Actually, you know, we traveled shortly after I was born, we moved to Europe. The Cold War was going on at that time. And my dad was stationed overseas, and I spent twelve years there. Twelve years in a place called Stuttgart, Germany.

John: Yea. Okay. How about education? Schools?

Shawn: I ended up going to school there overseas, in the Department of Defense schools, called DOD Schools, at a place called Patch Barracks. In Stuttgart, Germany. That still is, as I say the headquarters for the U. S. European Command. In the area. Everything is starting to slow down now since the Cold War does not exist any more. But at the time that was the place to be. About the age of sixteen, I grew up there. Went to high school there. Came up to my sophomore year in high school, sophomore or junior, I don't recall. I think it was my sophomore year. Ended up coming back to the States without my mom and dad. They were finishing up there. My dad was retiring. I moved back because I was getting, you know, it had been twelve years I hadn't been back to the States.

John: Okay. Sure. You were how old?, coming back?

Shawn: Sixteen years old.

John: Okay.

Shawn: Sixteen going on close to seventeen. And so I moved back to a place called Stoughton, south of Madison there. Which is a place for Norwegians. Moved there and lived with my sisters in-laws. A lot of my family are in Wisconsin so it was appropriate to come back to this area. Went there and went to Stoughton High School. Ended up finishing there and always thought about doing the Marines as a young child. I never really was around a lot of Marines growing up, contrary to popular belief Marines weren't stationed overseas in Germany as many of the other branches were. So growing up there, I think I ran into one Marine. I think he was a football coach for the varsity team when I was in Germany. I think the way he carried himself planted a seed in my mind. How most Marines carried themselves, how they walked, and the honor and his discipline. I think I wanted to emulate him, you know. So that stuck with me for a while and, after getting out of high school, I contacted a recruiter and gave some thought to it. And came up into Madison, and started working at Woodman's grocery store. I was bagging there, bagging groceries for a living, yea. Side jobs to find something that would do me well. Tried a couple different places in town. Being right out of high school, I wasn't really sure. I ended up going to the recruiter's office which was located at Washington Square, right down East Wash.

John: Okay.

Shawn: Yea. Yea. Right past First Street, right there. And went in there. I think I was a recruiter's dream. I walked in and said, "I want to enlist."

John: This was when?

Shawn: This was in 1990. It was 1990 I enlisted and, I remember calling my Mom, because they were still overseas at the time. "Hey, ah, I joined the Marine Corps."

John: What did she say?

Shawn: "What did you do that for?" And I remember my sister wasn't too excited about it, either, at the time. Just to the fact that there was a stigma with the Marines, you know? They are going to twist your brain and you'll be the first ones on a beach somewhere in some far off land. But I ended up leaving for recruit training. That was in the winter, it was in February.

John: Where did you go to boot camp?

Shawn: San Diego, California. I remember stepping off the plane in February and I

couldn't believe the temperature change from Wisconsin, you know?

John: Yes. Oh, yea.

Shawn: Quite cold from what I remember. We took a Greyhound bus from Madison to Milwaukee. Got off there and they ended up shuttling us to the airport from there. Got on a plane and before I knew it I was in San Diego. And then the fun began from there. And it was evening and we ended up going to the other side of the airport where the MCRD is located. The Marine Corps Recruit Depot. And that is where the fun began. I didn't know what I got myself into until I got off that bus.

John: That was the question I had. "What in the hell have you got yourself into?"

Shawn: That's right. You know it was the best thing for me. I didn't have anything to go back to. Mom and Dad weren't saying, "Hey, come on back home if something is wrong." I had only one way to go and that was forward. That was the best mind set to have. So I ended up doing that and I graduated, come April, May. Quite a few years ago now for me. But graduating from there. Coming home for ten days. Back to Wisconsin for vacation, as all Marines do.

John: Boot leave.

Shawn: Yea, boot leave. And then ended up going back out for my schooling, infantry schooling.

John: What school?

Shawn: Camp Pendleton. Infantry.

John: Okay. Okay.

Shawn: Went back out there, did infantry schooling. At the time it was a thirty day school, that all Marines went to. It was MCT, Marine Combat Training.

John: Okay. Sure.

Shawn: And it was located at a place called San Onofre. Camp Pendleton.

John: Okay. We had something called the Infantry Training Regiment.

Shawn: Yea. Something similar to that. After that, I ended up going to school in a place called Redstone Arsenal. It was an Army base for missiles and munitions school. And for explosive ordnance. I did a hitch there, and I think it was about six weeks

school, and I ended up doing that with the Marine detachment in Alabama there. And I recall, I ended up getting stationed at Camp Pendleton. I know I did. And shortly thereafter was Desert Storm. Desert Shield was going on at the time.

John: Okay. Did you fellows know this was going on?

Shawn: Yea, we did. We did know there was a build-up. Among other things.

John: What was going on among you guys during that?

Shawn: I think it was some excitement, maybe. You know. People had different frames of mind. Some people were concerned and other people, I think at that age you don't really think, you still think of immortality that you have. So you are pretty excited about it, and before you know it, you end up flying overseas. Landing at some country that is, I won't say it was quite barren. A country I've never been to. Growing up in Europe, it is similar to the United States but, when you get over there in the Middle East, it is a lot different.

John: Where did you go?

Shawn: Into Riyadh. Saudi Arabia. We operated out of there, as far as forces advancing, moving. The war didn't kick off for a while. You know. It was an air war forever. So when the war eventually kicked off, it was over before I knew it. And we were kind of disappointed. You know, this is all there was? You know, with all that came to bear? And, you know. And we ended up coming home. So, it was somewhat anti-climatic. The war really was, to us. It was more an air war.

John: Yea. The ground war was what, a hundred hours?

Shawn: Yea, it was like ninety-six hours. I mean, there were a lot of brave soldiers and Marines and airmen and sailors that participated, and did engage the enemy. However, the vast majority of the U. S. forces did not. And that is just how it transpired for that battle. And we ended up coming back to the States and came back to Camp Pendleton.

John: You were with what unit then?

Shawn: That was with the First Force Service Support Group out of Camp Pendleton.

John: Okay.

Shawn: Yea, that is who we were with. It may have changed now but I think it was the First Force Service Support Group, right at Camp Pendleton there. Out of Las

Podas.

John: That was a bunch of specialists?

Shawn: Yea. They did a myriad of everything. They were combat support detachments. They detached out of there and they detached, or they were assigned, what we called TAD, Temporary Additional Duty, to infantry units or engineer units. They were like the, yea, like you said. A group of different specialties.

John: We had something called Force Troops. Force Troops Atlantic, Force Troops Pacific. And they had everything from searchlights to shoe repair to recon to trucks to med. Okay.

Shawn: It sounds similar to that. You know, I don't know the whole inner workings of how all those things work, to this day. It is intricate how these different programs work out. I know a brief overview of how everything came together. But, yea, it was something similar to that. And I was living at Camp Pendleton at the time. I had gotten married.

John: Oh, okay. Before you went over?

Shawn: Ah, after. A high school sweetheart from Madison.

John: Great.

Shawn: From right here in Madison. She went to Madison East High School. Ended up getting married and, you know, time passes by, and before I knew it, I remember being assigned to an Air Contingency Force. Well, this was a force that was assigned to be on call. Twenty-four hours a day. We didn't have pagers at that time, or phones. Cell phones like we have today. So whenever you left your house, or wherever you went, you had to call. You would say, "I am going to be going here for so long. I'll be back." And the reason for that was that if they had a recall, you had to be ready to pick up and go and be anywhere in the world in like twenty-four or forty-eight hours. We ended up getting a call for the Los Angeles riots. The riots with the Rodney King incident, you know, the police beating Rodney King, and there was a riot in Los Angeles. And we got called up. We got called up for that and we spent about ten days up in Los Angeles. At a place called El Toro Air Base.

John: Oh, yea.

Shawn: Did you operate out of there? That is now closed.

John: Oh, is it?

Shawn: Yea, that is closed now. El Toro. With the drawback during the Clinton era. They closed that base and we were based out of there, and we ran operations into Los Angeles from there. They wanted to keep the riots from spreading into Long Beach, and so on, and so forth. And we were up there for about ten days. And that was quite interesting, because there you are. I was nineteen, twenty. I recall carrying a weapon around an American city. You know, a little odd. So we ended up doing that. That was another piece of excitement for me. Coming back to the States. Coming back down to Camp Pendleton. One thing I remember from that, quite vividly, when we were deployed to Los Angeles, they closed down Interstate 5, which is the main thoroughfare in Los Angeles. The California Highway Patrol just allowed those big busses to get on the highway. And you can imagine traffic in California. And we drove in the fast lane all the way up. The coolest thing in the world, you know. And I was one of the few people from Wisconsin because I think the majority of the people who enlist out of Wisconsin end up going to North Carolina. The majority of them don't go to Camp Pendleton. They figure North Carolina is closer. It's about a nineteen hour drive whereas California is about three days.

John: Yea.

Shawn: So it was quite unusual for someone from out in the Midwest to be out and doing those things. So it was quite interesting.

John: Now, this was when?

Shawn: This was in the early '90s. I think '92, I think the Los Angeles riots was. '92. And then after that, shortly after that, I remember my platoon sergeant coming up to me and asking me if I wanted to go on a MEU. What a MEU is, is a Marine Expeditionary Unit. The ones that go out on ships. And I said, I'm not sure. I am getting out pretty soon and, you know, it was just not for me. Okay. Lo and behold, about two months later I get orders for Okinawa, Japan.

John: Oh, wonderful. Nice place.

Shawn: I tried to get out. I tried to get back on that MEU. The MEU was only six months. Deployment to Okinawa was a year, unaccompanied by a spouse. It was too late. They had already filled it. Okay. I ended up going to Okinawa.

John: Where on Okinawa?

Shawn: A place called Camp Hanson.

John: Oh, yea.

Shawn: It is about the middle of the island, I think. Beautiful island. Lot of history there. A lot of Marine history.

John: I spent all of 1958 there.

Shawn: Did you? Yea, I was there in '93. Ended up deploying out of there with the 9th Engineers, combat engineers. To Somalia. Okay? We were under the mission to help rebuild their country, essentially. It was more of a humanitarian relief effort. You know, we were sent in there to, infantry units were sent in there to quell the rioting between the warlords that were not allowing the food to get through. We were going to go in there and start rebuilding some of the infrastructure because the country had started falling apart. We ended up doing some studies. We ended up getting over there and things kind of fell into hell in a hand basket. And we spent about six months there and rotating back to Somalia. That was my first real experience, I think, with human, how human beings can treat each other, and how some humans live. Especially on the African continent. And people who were just in poor health, and children that were starving to death. And I think that was an eye opener for a lot of us, too. A lot of us. I didn't have children at the time so I don't think, now that I have children of my own, I don't think, I think if I had children at the time, I'd even be more heart-broken because of the children. I think as a young man you don't really, with children, you can feel sorry for them but unless you have children of your own, you just don't have that instinct. And I thought back, after having my own boys, that those children in Iraq and Somalia, it was little more harder for me psychologically to deal with than not having children at the time. I recall thinking that, years later. After I had my first son. I ended up getting back to Okinawa and after six months. Spent my time there and I loved the island.

John: Did you?

Shawn: Sure. I thought I wouldn't, but I ended up enjoying my time there. Enjoyed the food. I got my taste for sushi. Which just doesn't make sense. Here in Madison, we have these sushi places to go to. Took in some of the culture and saw some of the sights there. Shuri Castle. And did some of the sightseeing out there. Got to climb to Mount Fuji on the island of Japan. Climbed up one side and went down the other. Best time of the year to go, supposedly, and it snowed on us at the top. So go figure.

John: Well, doesn't it have snow there most of the time?

Shawn: I don't know. I was told the weather was supposed to be decent but it turned pretty cruddy when we got up there. Ended up doing that and ended up rotating back to the United States, and getting out of the Marine Corps in 1994. Off active duty.

John: That was after four years?

Shawn: After four. Right. Got out. Came back here. Wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I am sure there is a lot of Marines do that young. Never had a real job to sustain myself. So I thought, the Marine Corps, that is great, but I can do better. Well, I came back and got a job here. Actually, went back to Woodmans. I took a leave of absence. I needed a place to work. I could have lived on unemployment, but I figured that wasn't fair. Being a Marine, you just don't want to do that. So I went back and worked there for a while, and a place called TCI called me. Telecommunications Communications Incorporated, out of Madison. They were looking for line techs. Pole climbers, essentially. So I applied with them, and was working with them for a while. They sent me to school, and I was working with them. And had a gentleman from Europe call me. Marine Forces Europe. In Stuttgart, Germany, attached there, where I grew up, called. "Hey, we're looking for some people with your specialty over here. Would you be interested in signing up for the Reserve program? That brought you overseas for a period of time?" Sure. Why not. I talked to my wife, see what's going on. What turned out was that every year that I was with this unit, I would call in and they would send me plane tickets, and I would fly out there. What it turned out, the first year I went over there, it was the 50th D-Day commemoration. For World War II. Or for D-Day, essentially. So we traveled throughout France, Germany, Austria, some of those countries, doing color guard ceremonies. Jointly with the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy, and the Marine Corps. Had a good time. I speak French and German, so that really helped out. We had a pretty good time doing that. Also, Rwanda was going on at the time. There was the recent breakout of ebola. And there was, there was no genocide at the time but there was ebola and there was starvation. People were starving to death over there. So we took some parts in that, some care and relief, some search and rescue operations. But those two months turned out to be like four or five months stint over there.

John: That happens.

Shawn: Sure. So you have to call back to work, or send a fax back to work, telling them you're not coming back to work like you thought. Which is fine and dandy, because they did real good by me. They really did. Ended up coming back to the States, and that following Christmas I was actually called by a buddy of mine who said if I volunteered for active duty, he'd get me orders after Christmas. What was happening, Bosnia had kicked off. The civil war in Bosnia. And what was happening, they were calling all these guys up. They were assigning these units

and they were bringing them back before Christmas. So he was saying, if I get you orders active now and they are in place, we can get you up the day after Christmas and let you spend Christmas Day with your folks, or with your family. Sure, put me on that boat. Sure enough, I went there, I went to Fort Benning because they had to process all the forces going over to Bosnia. Got our shots and did all our fine tuning to our gear. Hopped a plane into, we flew into Canada, Nova Scotia, I believe, the eastern part of Canada there, and then over to Germany. Flew into a place, I think it was Ramstein. Ramstein Air Base. And then we were shuttled to Stuttgart, and then we formed out to Bosnia.

John: What was Bosnia like?

Shawn: Ah, Bosnia was another eye opener, because you were looking at cities, a country that was similar to ours and now had, was at the end of the ravages of civil war. That was a shocker for me, too.

John: Yea, that would be hard to imagine downtown Madison like that.

Shawn: Yea, that is essentially what it is. A city like Madison now ravaged by war. And, you know, there was genocide going on there too. Two different peoples killing each other for no apparent reason. And it was still continuing while we were there. You know, again, you had families. Famine that was going on. Winter was coming in. You know, it is not really a hospitable place during the winter. It gets ungodly cold there, you can imagine. It is like Madison would be. You can imagine people with tattered clothing and no place to live. Bombed out homes. People still being, there were still snipers, rogue snipers shooting people trying to get water. I mean, what you would consider innocent. Innocent people were being murdered, just on their way to get water, food for the day. That was pretty tough to deal with, too. And there was a major with us that was also shot. He wasn't killed, but he was wounded. He was shot in the neck while we were there. That was an eye opener for me, too. After spending some time there. My brother-in-law at the time ended up getting deathly ill here, back in Madison, so they ended up sending me home. So I didn't spend my whole year there, like they expected me to. But I spent enough time to see what civil war does to a place.

John: What were those people going to do? How were they going to live there?

Shawn: You know, I guess they just carry on. You get in a different frame of mind and what was important before, I don't think is as important any more. And some things I've learned, I think, maybe not to the magnitude those people those people learned it. Yea. Some of your earthly possessions really aren't as important as maybe your family is. You know, I don't think we all realize that unless we ever have to go through that again. Your own countrymen killing you, murdering you.

And that is essentially what happened with that country. So your neighbor is killing neighbor. So that was enough for me. I came back to Madison and figured it was time to get serious with work, and I ended up leaving that unit. I didn't re-up with them at all. I didn't reenlist with them. I ended up getting out of the Reserves, completely. And really turning to work. Bought a home here in Madison, finally. Had a son. Had a couple boys during that time as the years went on. Had a real successful job at, it is now Charter. ATT had bought out TCI and went to Charter Communications. I was now a bucky, I worked on the bucket truck, those lifts, you know. I worked on the pole lines. So I had a really good job. My wife had a good job. I had two sons now. A home right there on Carpenter Street, off East Wash. 1305. The Burke-Ridgeway, or Carpenter-Ridgeway Neighborhood Association there. Real nice. And things were going well. And I missed the Marine Corps from time to time but, you know, once a Marine, always a Marine. I was putting on weight over the years, yea, and kind of going about my business. And then, before I knew it, I was at work one morning. We used to gather at work, the Engineering Department would, and we would watch the news, or whatever was in TV. And here I see this burning building, on the news. What the hell is going on there? It's the downtown cityscape, of New York. The burning building was the Trade Center. So we were trying to figure out what is going on and I watched the plane go into the building. So we were thinking, private plane attacking the building. And then after watching it, another plane crashed into the building. And I remember telling them in there at that time. And then once we started figuring out it was probably a terrorist attack on the country. I remember saying to them, "Whoever did this is going to pay. I guarantee you. We'll retaliate." And I think that really got the wheels spinning again. I heard a lot of people talking about how this affected them psychologically. You know, they were going to seek counseling, and things of that nature. But I don't think it was with me. But I found myself listening to the news running at the time, the AM stations, CNN, Fox News, twenty-four hours. That never happened. And I ended up sitting in my vehicle at work, listening to the news all day. I didn't want to do anything else. Had no ambition to do anything else. So I thought, well, I am going to go in the Reserves. This is my Pearl Harbor.

John: Oh, okay. Okay.

Shawn: Talked to my wife. I think that caused some strife between us. And ended up, ended up going in the Reserves here in Madison, Gulf Company. I worked my butt off. I had to lose some weight, had to get back into shape. So I ended up working my butt off, running, I lost probably at least fifteen, twenty pounds. In about a month, six weeks.

John: Wow. That was fast.

- Shawn: Yea, that was moving. I had to make it within weight, make sure I was where I had to be. You know, getting back with the Reserve unit, after my first couple of drills, I thought, that is just where I want to be. You know.
- John: What was your rank when you went back?
- Shawn: I went back in as a sergeant. Yep. I went back in as a sergeant, which was what I left at. Because I left when I got off active duty with that Reserve unit in Europe, I left as a sergeant.
- John: Okay.
- Shawn: And thinking back to that, the way I got promoted. You know, Marines use that fanfare for promotion. When I got promoted to sergeant in the Reserves, they came to me. I was living in Sun Prairie at the time and I got this thing in the mail, you know, U. S. Government. It was a warrant for my promotion. That was the greatest day of my life. I got promoted to sergeant. You know, that is a big deal for a Marine to be promoted to sergeant. You know. I will never forget that. So that is one thing I asked for. I wanted to keep my rank. So ended up going into this infantry unit here, and after a couple drills, I thought that is something that I really wanted to do. I thought, you know what? This is what I've been missing. This is what I need to go back to.
- John: How was the Reserve unit here? How capable was it? How well trained? How disciplined were they?
- Shawn: They were very disciplined. They are one of the best in the state, Gulf Company in Madison. I know that. Their reputation precedes them, without a doubt. They may be one of the best in the battalion, which is located in Chicago. Infantry unit. Company. We had Major Barrett, who is the I&I at the time. He was the instructor. In fact, he was the head guy there, the head Marine. Captain Wisnett was the, I believe, the CO of Gulf Company itself, a Reserve commanding officer who is now, I think, a major out of Chicago somewhere. But they were good to go. The Marines were good to go. They knew what was going on. I think the seriousness was hitting them. A lot of them, some of them, were left over from the Desert Storm era, but not as many. It had been many years. You are looking at ten years, now. Or about there. A lot of them had gotten out of the Marine Corps at that time. There was one, everyone was kind of antsy. I was wondering if we were ever going to be called up. On account of we were waiting for the word. We might be called up. Might be called up. Afghanistan was going on at the time. Watching the news. September 11 occurred on September 11, 2001. I ended up going in the Reserves in October, 2001. Somewhere around there. Late October. But I started playing with the idea of going back on active duty full time. Needless to say, my

wife wasn't real excited about that.

John: Yea. I can imagine.

Shawn: I think that caused, put a wedge in there between us. I think we had other issues. You know, us getting married really young. We got married at nineteen. Maybe we weren't mature enough, or maybe it was just at that time we just weren't. It was really hard to put a finger on. And got to where, we still loved each other but maybe we just weren't there. You know, we grew apart over time. I hate to use that verbiage, but the thing that was holding us together was the boys. You know, we had two boys at the time. So that was real difficult. And so we had a long talk, and I think we both came to the realization that, that is what happens. Looking back on it, hindsight is twenty/twenty. But things happened, and I was going on active duty and it happened thereafter that we ended up getting a divorce. So that was real tough to deal with, and I ended up questioning the decisions I made about coming on active duty. I don't know if it was right or wrong. But, I made that commitment and I had to see it through. I couldn't just walk away. And, no fault of the Marine Corps. It was not the Marine Corps' fault. I know me. It was mind. But, we ended up going on active duty, and she was here, the house, the boys. As one of our friends did, too. Another close friend of ours whose husband was on active duty in the Marines, he was an officer, an artillery officer, stationed at Camp LeJeune. She lived up here and he worked down there. So it was similar to that. Ended up going to this active duty and I ended up coming into this Madison office, here.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

John: Okay.

Shawn: Yea, I ended up coming in the Reserves, I wanted to go on active duty. You can't just decide one day. You have to put a package in. I came in to 1781 Thierer Road, where we are at today, here in Madison. And I came into the recruiting station and said I want to come on active duty. It's no benefit to a recruiting station to have an argument from the Reserves because they don't get anything out of it. So luckily, a guy by the name of Jeff Johnson, who works in the VA now, on the 8th floor, he was as master sergeant at that time. Worked in this office. And he ended up, he understood my plight. And he ended up helping me out.

John: Good. Good.

Shawn: Came back on active duty at the same rank. I wanted a unit that was either infantry. Or combat arms. I wanted something combat arms. No infantry unit was available, not possible. So I took an artillery unit. Out of Camp LeJeune. It was

1/10. First Battalion, Tenth Marines. Tenth Marine Regiment. Ended up getting orders for there. Leaving, which was the hardest day of my life, because I remember leaving my boys to something where I wouldn't see them on a daily basis.

John: Sure. That's normal.

Shawn: Transferred down to Camp LeJeune and served with them for a while. They were locked on. They were getting ready to what we called locking on, for training to go on float, which is on ship. Marines now go through about a six month work-up so they go to riot control, humanitarian relief, they go through every scenario they may run into while being out on float. So were getting ready to lock on for that. We did a lot of training, maybe Afghanistan, maybe not. We didn't know about the Iraq thing at the time because that was still coming down the pipe. But I ended up training there for quite, I am trying to think, here. It seems like the closer we get to the time we're at now, I tend to forget more than what happened in the past. Ended up working with them, doing training. Went out to California a couple of times to, they have a thing they call Combat Arms Exercise. They don't do that any longer because the war in Iraq has now changed it. Actually, I think the Combat Arms Exercise back then, called the CAX, was designed to fight the Soviets. Large scale kind of artillery and tanks and infantry on a large scale basis. Whereas now it has been reconfigured and is called a Viper Exercise now, designed for more small scale engagement. It's funny how things change. You know, we have to wait until we get into another war for things to change.

John: Yep.

Shawn: Because prior to this CAX, they were still doing jungle warfare from Vietnam. Because we had done Desert Storm, which changed the whole face of warfare, which gave us the Combat Arms Exercise for desert warfare. Before that it was all based on Vietnam. Now it is all based on what is going on in Iraq again.

John: We're fighting the last war.

Shawn: We are. We're always training for what happened before. So I ended up doing that. We did some training. And before we knew it, we were getting to lock on, getting ready to lock on to, I think it was the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit we were going to get together with. And we were looking forward to it. We would go out into the Mediterranean. Maybe get a chance to go to Afghanistan. What was going on was still there. So we were all pretty excited. I made some good friends there. Learned a lot of things about artillery I thought I never needed to know. I found out the shells are about a hundred pounds apiece. I can tell you that. And I don't consider myself a huge guy or a little small guy. I'm not huge either, but

ninety-nine pounds and having to lift that over your head onto a truck to load it. Because they went to this new truck, which is called the seven ton, which are made in Oshkosh. The bed of that truck is probably eye level, at least neck level. And you got to get this hundred pound shell off the ground and up to that truck is taxing. Even for today. So I found out a lot of things about that and ended up enjoying myself with those guys. But we ended up coming home on a Christmas leave block. There was a two-week leave block then. I tried to get home as often as I could to spend time with the boys. I tried to get home every time I had vacation set up, or saved up, I'd come home. We accrued about two and a half days a month. So every time I had enough saved up, I'd fly home and stay with the boys. And we had a lot of quality time. Well, I ended up coming home for that Christmas, and I think it was Christmas of 2002. About a year later, now. I think it was about a year. Christmas, 2002, and I am home, and spending time with them. And we did, I want to make sure I have my dates right here. Yea, it was Christmas, 2002, and I end up getting a call on Christmas Eve, or on New Years Eve. From one of our platoon sergeants, saying that, hey, all sections leaders have to come back to LeJeune as quickly as possible. I had an inkling something was going on before I left. One of my buddies was telling me that, hey, the unit just put an order in for desert cammies. At the time this whole thing was boiling around about Iraq. Those little snippets here and there about things going on. But we weren't really sure. And there wasn't a large scale going out of LeJeune because we didn't take a large part in that. Camp Pendleton did.

John: Okay.

Shawn: So we didn't hear a lot about it. When I heard the cammie thing, I thought, you know, they don't usually prep for that. Because when you lock on for a MEU, the parent command that you leave is not responsible for you any more. You go on to a different, your whole company, Bravo Battery, tasks on to a whole new unit. They form a whole new unit. So your parent unit has no responsibility over you any more. But when the parent unit is ordering uniforms for us, I am thinking, it doesn't take a scientist to figure these things out. So New Year's Eve day I ended up calling the air lines, which weren't too friendly at the time. Because they didn't want to help me out, to get back home. They wanted to have me buying a ticket, they weren't allowing me to change my ticket. And I ended up paying for a new ticket and solving that later. And, obviously, to their defense, they didn't know what was going on either. I told them I needed to get back. It was an emergency. Taking my boys home. They were good to go. Kissed them goodbye and got on an airplane that same day. Flew back to Camp LeJeune and sat in on a brief about seven p m. that evening. Saying that we needed to get out gear together, we were going to Iraq. We were going to Kuwait. We didn't know we were going to Iraq at the time. Well, that got our butts in gear and before we knew it, things were turning. We were spending probably fourteen hours a day at work, fourteen hours

a day getting gear together. Luckily for us, we had a lot of our stuff already situated because we were getting ready to leave that unit. So we were ahead of the ball game.

John: Oh, sure.

Shawn: First Battalion, Tenth Marines. The First Battalion was getting ready to go. Before it was just Bravo Battery, my unit, was going to go. Now, Alpha Battery and Charlie Battery was also going, and Headquarters Battery, and they were going to form out of LeJeune called the Task Force Tarawa. Okay, that was the task force that was being assembled out of LeJeune to attach on to the unit out of the First Marine Division, coming out of Camp Pendleton. We aborted. In January, we ended up boarding ships in Norfolk. There was a ship that were actually getting ready to comprise the 22nd MEU. That 22nd MEU, Marine Expeditionary Unit, got shut down. No MEU any longer. The whole MEU was going over to Iraq. Or Kuwait. We boarded ship out of Norfolk and floated through the Atlantic, went down probably just south of the midway point of Africa, because we had to avoid some storms in the Atlantic. Ships were just, you could just hear those waves beating. We hit a bad storm getting there. Coming back up, and coming in through the Straits of Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean. Through the Mediterranean, into the Straits of Hormuz. No, it wasn't the Straits of Hormuz.

John: Suez?

Shawn: Suez Canal. Sure was. Right into the Red Sea. Thank you. Went through the Red Sea and then coming up around, coming into the Persian Gulf. Went through the Straits of Hormuz, past that. Tensions were tight, then. We had units on the bridges, now. Coming through the Suez, because at the time, you know, the Egyptians weren't happy with us, either. I think we had snipers on the ships. What we were in was the USS *Bataan*. It was an LSD. It held Marines and their equipment, hovercraft, our equipment, artillery pieces, things of that nature. And we had snipers on the roof, vehicles on the roof with machine guns and grenade launchers, just in case. I remember going up on the top deck and looking out over the Suez, and I was just amazed that we were going through this canal, in the first place. Never been through the Suez before. You know, a marvelous feat. To say the least. And I remember seeing some Egyptian soldiers, because they had a lot of military outposts on the Suez, either waving at us or giving us the finger, the bird.

John: Trying to figure out which?

Shawn: Yea. Yea, enough to piss you off. You know. But, I guess, they had their feelings, too. But I remember that, and I remember seeing remnants of the Seven Day War.

Tanks and memorials. You know, a big memorial to the war, through there. And we ended up going back down, I couldn't believe how long it was taking us to get to Kuwait, you know. Because we were getting ready to go on thirty days, by the time we got into Kuwait. I was just surprised. But, you know, modern convenience on ships, tell you a little bit about on ships. We had internet access, so we could get on the internet, on computers. We had phone service. We could call home from the ships. The food wasn't too bad. Long lines because they packed in a lot of Marines in these ships. The sailors weren't too happy with us. I remember hearing some words like, I can't wait until these ass holes are off the ship. Marines didn't have a lot to do. You know, we had classes to do on ship. Either that or we hung out at the library, for the computers, use the phones, go the weight room. There is not much else. We had satellite TV on ship. It was a pretty good living on those ships. So, it wasn't too bad, but it gets, you get kind of stir crazy being on ship for quite a while. Probably go four or five days without seeing outside. Unless you walk outside or if it is bad weather. They would shut down the computers from time to time and the telephone access, because of operational security, especially when we were coming in to the Suez Canal, because they didn't want people calling back home, you know. And telling people where we were at. We ended up coming into Kuwait in February. And I remember that. And we off-loaded the ship with the hovercraft. And staged for the next stage, the drive to Camp Shoup, which was about twenty minutes outside of Iraq. In Kuwait. And Camp Shoup was one of many camps that the U. S. military set up, with permission from the Kuwaiti government. In an effort to stage U. S. forces for what eventually became the invasion of Iraq. So we ended up going to this place, Camp Shoup. No tents. No chow hall facilities. No showers. Some Porta-a-Johns, porta-potties. And that was it. We lived there for about two weeks, eating MREs. Meals Ready To Eat. And those aren't too bad. Some guys hated them, but, you know, you have to learn how to eat them. Just like C-rations were in the past. But it does get taxing because there are only so many varieties. We found out the desert gets real cold at night, you know. Just like here in the States. I remember the porta-johns were overflowing because they hadn't really set the logistics with the locals to come in and clean them. And when they did clean them, they wouldn't clean them out. They'd clean them and if they got something stuck in the tube, they'd just shake it out inside there. So you can imagine all the mess in the porta-johns. So the wind would blow and blow the porta-johns over.

John: Okay.

Shawn: So you had to pick the right time to go use them. And if you used them, look inside them first. You know, I never had to get on the detail having to push them things back over. But we ended up being there for a while. They started getting some more conveniences in. I remember there was a big flack with mail. Mail wasn't going out. We were getting mail in but we were getting mail in about why

haven't you written? Like that. The mail was leaving our area at Camp Shoup but it was getting stuck like in the port of Dubai. There was something going on there. I don't know what the whole story was. That was a big point of contention with the Marines. Marines get pissed off when they don't get their mail.

John: Yea. Sure.

Shawn: We did a lot of training out there, but it got kind of tiring, like, God damn, is this ever going to, are we going to go? We thought, before long, they were just going to tell us to go back home. You got little snippets of news every so often of what was going on. So we had those short-wave radios we brought with us. I remember I brought a short-wave radio but I stuck the damned batteries in there, and I stuck that in my pack before getting off ship. The power button on the short-wave radio was pushed on the whole time and burned out the circuitry by the time we got in.

John: Oh, man.

Shawn: You know, it was just one of those things after another. But there was a lot of modern conveniences. We couldn't have cell phones. A lot of guys had the Game Boys, you know those hand-held devices. Walkman CD players. Big thing was MP3 players at the time, those little storage devices which were the rave at the time. A lot of guys had them. So we sat there and we trained, and we trained. I can't tell you how we trained out there quite a bit. We entertained ourselves by catching these desert lizards. I don't know what they were but they looked like big monitor lizards. Catch them and put them on little 550 cord, like military string, and we would carry those around like a little dog. You know. We'd have those on their leashes. We did things like that just to pass time. Security, things like that. Once we got the chow hall, if we ate in the chow hall once, you never wanted to eat in the chow hall again because it was so bad. Yea, it was bad. We were begging for MREs after that. But mail started coming through. And I remember going on an exercise, an exercise to learn how to decontaminate ourselves in the event they launched nerve agents. That was a big concern at the time. We thought that he was going to launch Scuds and use chemical agents. And we were out there learning how to survive in an environment like that, how to change out our mac suits, and the mac suit was the chemical suit that you would wear to protect your skin from blistering agents. We learned more stuff about our gas masks, how to operate with all that stuff on. How to clean off our vehicles. Basically, decontamination site is what we learned. How to operate with all that gear on. And halfway through what was our last training exercise, we were told to stop everything and get out gear together. They had just gotten the word that we were to pull back to our base camp at Camp Shoup and get ready to leave for our line of departure, which was the berm that basically was the DMZ that Kuwait had set up with Iraq, which they had been working at clearing because they had mines and

tank traps and concertina wire and this thing was pretty vast. So we ended up getting out gear together. And we knew when we were told to haul off our gear that something was coming. We ended up going back to Shoup, staging in our combat formations. All the vehicles lined up, we had all our gear together. We packed up all our gear in our sea bags that we weren't taking with us in the event, one, that we came back and here it was, or two, if we were killed, they would know where to get it. What Conex box it was in at the storage facility, and what exactly was in the bag. Because we had to write a detailed list. A lot of us wrote some letters home. I think I got two letters home. I wrote, you know, at first, I wasn't too concerned because, again, the immortality thing was still there, even though I was older now. It was still there. Nothing had happened to me this far. Been a couple of places, and still okay. Never experienced any close buddies dying, or anything like that. So it wasn't really, it was just another thing. And now, what was happening was, now we were writing some letters to get some final letters home. I wanted to let my sister know, because I didn't write as often, hey, I love you. And this is what is happening, and I'll write you when I can. You know, and saying to my kids, and my dad, and my mom, and so on and so forth. My girl friend at the time, since I was divorced. We ended up leaving the next morning. And I remember sitting, we were, we staged right outside the DMZ. Right outside this line. We were like a mile away from it. And in the morning, we were staged that night. We were going to go across first thing the next morning.

John: You were on vehicles?

Shawn: We were all in vehicles. It was a huge convoy. These MRS's kicked off. MRS is the Multiple-launch Rocket System that the Army used. We saw them coming from our rear. So we were kind of, they were launching these things. We didn't know what they were at the time because they were just, you just heard this loud rocket noise. We thought we were receiving in-coming. You couldn't dig into this soil, it was so hard. We were bitching about how hard it was. How were we supposed to dig? Well, after those rockets went off, I tell you, everyone was digging into that soil like it was butter. But what happened, we later were to find out, was that the Iraqi artillery units were moving out of Basra, getting ready to range us, because they knew where we were. And they can shoot their artillery pieces, they can shoot further than ours. They can shoot, I think, twenty-two miles. So they were getting close. What happened was, some Special Operations units, already in Iraq, spied them on their way down there. Our multiple-launch rocket systems used what they call DPMS, Dual Purpose Munitions, which one shell carried like eighty bomblets. It virtually obliterated those units coming down to range us. So, luckily for us, I don't recall the artillery unit, I did at one time, the Iraqi artillery unit, but they were pretty much decimated. There was nothing left of them. The next morning we went across the border, expecting guns a-blazing and, hell, nothing happened. Barren, quiet. I saw some peasants, some Bedouins, I

guess, out there. I think my first real interaction with any of them was, I guess, there was a man and, maybe, his son out doing something in a field. Barren land. I ended up waving out the window at them. You know, as we were passing in the vehicle. They ended up waving to me. I don't know if they were waving to me to be friendly or if they were afraid. I don't know. But I wanted to show them that we weren't there to harm them, either. They looked pretty nervous, seeing these big vehicles driving through. So we ended up driving through the night and setting up the next morning, thinking nothing is going to happen. And the next morning we get a fire mission. We were with the other three batteries. The two batteries didn't get the fire mission. Or the other two batteries got the fire mission. Bravo probably couldn't range it because of where they were sitting. They didn't get to shoot at all.

John: What were your weapons?

Shawn: They were 155 artillery, they were howitzers. Which are now being replaced by new, light weight ones. But those are still 155s. They were pretty old. They broke down a lot while we were there. But that is what we were using, 155s. The next morning we picked up and we got on this road, highway. I don't recall the name of the highway but it was the main thoroughfare going through a city named An Nasiriyah. But we didn't know that is where we were going. I remember seeing signs for An Nasiriyah which didn't ring a bell with me, but I remember seeing signs for Basra. But that is actually where we were supposed to go, at first. Then we got our situation reports that we were going to go meet up with the British and take on the city of Basra. But things changed in the interim and we were sent up to a place called An Nasiriyah. You know, we were told we were, the Marines, were going to the fertile middle portion, to take cities and secure them, and the bridges, and the Army was going to go up through the desert, the outskirts, going for Bagdad, trying for a pincer movement, essentially. Our job was to fight our way through the middle and open up those cities, and the highways and byways, as much as possible. And we thought that the Iraqis were tired of Saddam, especially in the South and be willing to help us. Well, coming into that city, I remember, it was day time and we were moving quite quickly. And in a situation like that, if you have never been there, you don't know exactly what is going on. You are on your own. All you know, the world could be falling apart, but all you know is where you are at. The war could be falling to hell in a hand basket or it could be going real well. All you know is what is happening at your very moment, and word doesn't spread very quickly. What happened was, as we were coming into the city, there were vehicles pointing south, but they were Army vehicles. I am trying to compute this in my brain that, okay, American vehicles point south. We are the only ones here in Desert Storm. I know that is not right, but I am trying to make sense of it. I remember this was all within seconds. You are trying to compute in your brain. And it's like these semis pull off, American semis, pull off

to the side of the road, big Army semis. But they've all been ravaged and burning. I am thinking, what the hell. It turns out, now that I know, it was the Jessica Lynch convoy. You know, that is a big deal.

John: Okay.

Shawn: Big deal at the time. It was just an Army convoy, the 507th, that was lost and ended up, why, with all this technology today, but they end up getting lost and going through, into this city and realizing they are not supposed to be there. Turned around and headed back south on that highway, and were ambushed. And soldiers were killed, and some captured. The other ones, the remnants, were still fighting off some of the Fedayeen fighters when we arrived. What happened in that city was, from intelligence reports, that we found out after we were back in the States, was that the city, about fifty percent of the soldiers were willing to capitulate. The word that we learned going there.

John: The Iraqis.

Shawn: They weren't going to throw their weapons away. What they were going to do was, we are not going to fight you, continue on. Which I thought was kind of silly. But we were told if they want to capitulate, let them go. I never thought that was good, to leave the enemy behind you now, with weapons. But, that was the decision when we weren't there. Going into Iraq, our job was not to destroy the infrastructure of the country, it was just to remove the government. And that was something we were told. We were not there to blow the bridges and the buildings, and then cause mass destruction. We were just there to overthrow the government. Take the government out of power and let the people rule. Well, it come out what really happened was that the Iraqis figured well, hell, these are Marines that just came in. And reading stuff, I read quite a bit since I got back, they couldn't figure out why the Marines were coming back after turning around and running the other way. So it was confusing to them, too. But that fight they had with that 507th reinvigorated them into thinking they could take on the Americans and beat them back. So what happened, An Nasiriyah turned into a larger battle than anyone ever expected. In fact, when An Nasiriyah kicked off, as I understand, the war stopped. All air assets turned to An Nasiriyah because we were heavily engaged with the enemy. The enemy that was able to resupply themselves quite easily. And put a hurt into us. You know, we lost quite a few Marines that first day. I think it was eighteen. I think it was one of the largest losses of life in this operation Iraqi Freedom I or II, up to Fallujah. When Fallujah kicked off, it was a pretty big battle. That was one of the largest losses of life. These Iraqis were, actually, a lot of them had shed their uniforms and were dressed in civilian garb now. They knew that, you know, we were pretty young, dumb Americans, thinking that maybe they aren't as intelligent as we are. But they are human beings. And they

think just as quick as we do. Just a different culture. And I think sometimes we think that. You know, modern technology, we're an advanced civilization, a society. You know, those people are intelligent, too. They have the intelligence gathering capabilities, as we do. Maybe not as advanced as ours are, but they did. And they quickly learned that we were to allow them to surrender, or to capitulate. So what they were doing, they were, it happened once. They used the white flag to draw in a patrol of a few Marines and they opened fire on them when they got close enough. That is all. They were not fighting to the rules, you know. As Americans, and Marines, and as a society, we were taught to abide by the rules. Unfortunately, we find that war is war. And there is not a lot of rules involved. And there should be. It is just not always adhered to. So we learned quickly that it just didn't work that way. But it was a slap in the face to us. At that point, they still weren't using artillery as they should have been, because they did not want to start bombing, shelling the cities, you know. For no apparent reason. So we were still, I think the commanders were still in the mind set that, no, we weren't going to use heavy guns like that until, well, that was about the time we lost a good friend, a Lieutenant Pokorny, Frederick Pokorny. He was what we called a mustang. A former enlisted, got out and went to college. Arizona State. Came back and he was a forward observer with Charlie Battery, 1/2. First Battalion, Second Marines. And they were part of the Second Marines that were to go into the city and clear these bridges. That was their main mission, okay? What happened was they had gotten side-tracked with the Jessica Lynch convoy. They didn't want to be stuck at night trying to take these bridges. That was their mission. So they were sent in. Well, the Iraqis knew that if they flooded areas, they flooded a lot of areas that bogged down a lot of the ADs that couldn't get through. There was lost communications. Communications wasn't working for them in the cities. It's a city, as all cities are. And Charlie Company ended up getting all the to their objective, on the other side of the bridge. On the other side of the bridge, they were ambushed.

John: Oh, wow.

Shawn: Here to find out, they couldn't get communications and they were being shelled. The Iraqis had artillery all over that city. They had mortars and Fedayeen fighters. They are pretty ruthless. They had Republican Guards and regular army. Not only that, we were to find out also that the Republican Guards were forcing men to fight. With the threat of death. They ended up shelling them on the other side of the bridge. They were stuck, and Lieutenant Pokorny amongst other Marines were killed on that day. Either due to fratricide, that came from an A10 Thunderbolt that actually was called in to aid these Marines. But they tend to move quite quickly and he called clear to fire. And they had a ground controller call back, and the ground controller didn't know that we had friendlies in the area. Because they didn't realize that Marines could advance so far. In the cities, they declared them

hot so when he came down he actually shot up the wrong side of the bridge. I think Lieutenant Pokorny was killed by an Iraqi rocket or artillery piece. He was actually looking for higher ground to make communications for artillery support. So I was pretty hard hit and I remember, I remember hearing over the radios that our colonel was yelling back at the radios and telling the commanders to use artillery. We're here and we need artillery. He was pretty pissed off about it. What they ended up doing. And I remember when I first found out that Lieutenant Pokorny, we had come into our defensive positions. And a guy I knew, a gunnery sergeant, I don't remember his name. I probably have it. He was in a vehicle and I walked up to say hello to him, and he said, "Who'd you lose?" And I said, "What do you mean?" "You lost somebody. One of the FOs." I knew them pretty well, and I started naming off names. I named off Lieutenant Pokorny. So, "Was Pokorny one of the names?" It was like, and this was when he had come back the second time. He had walked away from me, talking to somebody else. Here, I found out, when he was talking to somebody else, they said, don't tell these guys anything about losing one of their own. I don't know how they knew how we would react. And I remember, there were a couple of guys I was real close to. Lieutenant Pokorny, and there was a couple of other young ones, and I didn't know at the time, I didn't find out until later. And I remember finding out, and it was pretty heart-wrenching.

John: Sure. Sure.

Shawn: It was pretty tough. That was one pretty powerful moment for me in Iraq. I had another powerful moment.

John: Let me switch this tape.

[End of Side B of Tape 1.]

John: Okay, there we are. We are back in business. You had just lost Lieutenant Pokorny.

Shawn: Yea. Lieutenant Pokorny. That was pretty heart-wrenching for me. This probably isn't all in chronological order but I remember even coming in when we ended up fighting the Fedayeen and whoever they were, Fedayeen or Republican Guards. I remember coming on, we had some children and an old man brought these kids up to the side of the road, and it looked like a corpsman had already got to them and provided some medical assistance. And this kid's head was in bandages. And our first sergeant telling them, go away. You know, keep away from us. Stay away. And he kept on coming, kept up staying on the road. The first sergeant said, at the time I was a sergeant, "Sergeant Corcoran, take a patrol up there and see." I took a translator. They wanted help. So they escorted us to their, they lived up there. It is

almost African-like. They lived in adobe-style huts, a lot of them, homes. And a lot of them are peasants, Bedouins. And imagining, it is like a four land highway, it is divided. Kind of what you would see going up on 151, there. So much of that, but it is all barren. There is not a lot of grass. It's not really desert like the Sahara, but it is just dirt. It's just dirt. A lot of aqueducts. Yea, aqueducts, so they can feed the water into the fields. And there are some green areas, but this area was, they like a little old area they can set water in, where they got the water for it. I remember seeing like a little boat. Why they had a boat there, I don't remember. Just a little pond. But ended up walking in there and I remember tripping over, what I thought at first was a trip wire. And it turned out being a TOW wire. When a TOW missile gets shot off the back of a Hummer, it's wire guided to its target. So it's a small thin copper wire. I'm thinking of a battle, where you see a bunch of shell casings laying around. Especially next to roads when you are going up. And they end up bringing us into this room. And there is a lot of people sitting around outside. We didn't go directly into this, well, it was almost like, I don't want to say a village. It was like five or six different homes, but it must have just been their family. You know, like maybe he was their old man, a couple people lived there, a couple wives. But I remember we went around the outside and we wanted to make sure we weren't being led into an ambush. And I remember we were going to, there was a couple standing out in the field when we came up on the backside. It turned out to be a man and a woman. Two women and a man, rather. I remember getting ready to shoot them. They kept popping up and jumping down, jumping down in the distance. And I don't know if they were scared of us, or if they thought they should just stay down. I figured that was going through their minds. And it ended up, getting close enough to make sure they weren't a threat. You know, I wanted to be sure they didn't have anything around their feet that maybe, and when they weren't a threat. I could have killed them. I remember thinking that, walking back. I wanted to get close enough. In retrospect, maybe if we would have gotten close enough, I think, these days, maybe they had a weapon. And they would have killed us. But what if I would have killed them? And that is always going through your mind.

John: Sure.

Shawn: Anyway, we ended up going in, and we ended up going to the center of their little huts are. And there is a bunch of people sitting outside. I remember that. And we walked towards the room and when I started walking into this room, it was like someone's living room, but it was like a hut. And inside the hut as you walked through, it had an entrance on one side and the exit on the other. And the exit led you into an open air area, but with other adjoining rooms. They wouldn't let you off the outside of that complex. Fairly small. It was like a one-story home, with bedrooms. But it was open air. Except for the rooms, they had roofs. We were walking into that structure and I know it seemed like, what I now know is a scalp.

A bloody scalp. I thought, maybe a dead cat. I didn't know. How the hell if I knew. You know. And I walked in, and I didn't pay any attention when I was in the room. I walked in, checked out the rooms. One room we couldn't get into because, what they were saying was, that Iraqi mortars had come down on that portion of their house, and one of the rooms had a hole going through it, in one side and out the other. And I remember thinking of that TOW wire. Mortars come straight down, they don't come in the side. But, you know, when you are engaged in combat, and the enemy was using that facility, what do you do? If I had to put things in retrospect, me and a guy, Brian Smith. He is still in at Camp LeJeune. I keep in contact with him by e-mail. There was just me and him. I have pictures of this. We took pictures of each other in this room. And on the way out, the translator is talking to the guy. We want to make sure it is clear. In that main room I talked about, walking out, there was a blanket on the floor, which I hadn't noticed. Like a carpet or a Persian rug. Underneath it was a man with his head ripped off.

John: Oh, Jesus.

Shawn: His head next to his body. I remember looking at the head, and the head was, it reminded me like a shredded piece of meat. That is what it was, shredded meat. If you had taken that head and stripped it apart, raw. You'd have this stringy, and that was the first thing that came to my mind, was that. Then next to him was a child, a baby. You know I am a dad at this time. And the baby's frontal part of its head above the eye was, the skull was missing. And the brain matter was in there. The brain was intact. The brain matter. And there were flies. The baby's eyes were open, I remember that, and the man's arm was twisted. Contorted in ways it shouldn't have been. Came to find out these bodies were left in that room that the mortar, or the shell, whichever it was, and whether it was Iraqi or ours. To all intents and purposes, was in there. And I remember looking at that. The weirdest thought, should I take a picture of that? For some reason, as odd as it sounds, you want to document this, you want to show it. You know, I don't know why it was that way, and it's not because I am a morbid person, or into grotesque things. It was just that you don't believe what you are seeing. It's hard to really, and I think at that moment I realized that this is real, we are in for something. This is real business. I remember thinking that. And the guys upset, trying to talk, and when you learn to talk to the translator, you talk to the person you are talking to, not the translator. And the translator is just there as a voice. He's not there to be seen, essentially. Remember the old man wanting us to help him bury those two. And we didn't have time. No, we aren't going to do that. I wasn't cold to him, wasn't rude, but I wasn't overly friendly, either. We wanted to make sure if they needed some assistance, and we pretty much tied everyone together, and left. People were crying outside. I remember that. I remember seeing a girl with blue, beautiful eyes walk by when I was in that room with the hole in it. Because she scared me, she

came around the corner. You know, she was on the outside of the building. She was probably in another hut. We didn't end up clearing the rest of the rooms. Just it was time to leave. It was not a good scene. I didn't want them to get more upset than was necessary. We didn't bury the dead, left them there. We went back and reported what happened. I remember telling the Marines, hey, this is serious business, guys. Because they were kind of, at the time there was a lull. There wasn't a whole lot going on at that very moment.

John: Okay.

Shawn: For some reason, it was weird. It was quiet, and I ended up telling them, half in seriousness. I just remember talking to them, a little bit. Here is what we got to do. We got to be ever vigilant. Because at the time, we were still in that mode. For some off reason, this may have been before we got closer to the city, I suspect. We may have been on the outskirts. After we had just bopped some Fedayeen. I remember thinking that was pretty tough. That was pretty tough to deal with. I ended up writing some letters, I think that evening, or whenever I had a chance next, writing some letters. I had to get some letters out because for my psychological state, if I got these letters out, then I would feel a lot better.

John: Okay.

Shawn: I feel that I had to get things on paper to my boys, at least, and that was pretty much the only ones I wrote to. I wanted to get some things out. Nothing about daddy's not here. Nothing like that. I wanted to let them know that what I was doing, I thought was important. And I loved them. You know, the things that I think a father wanted to let their kids know. And I ended up getting that in the mail. And I felt better. I felt a lot better. I think I even wrote to my parents, maybe telling them the times I was probably not the best child in the world, I wanted them to know that. That I apologized. You want to do those things.

John: Oh, yea.

Shawn: So I ended up, we ended up, down in , I remember there was a really bad sand storm, thereafter, where our air wasn't working at all. You could only depend on artillery. But the Iraqis were reinforcing themselves. I remember sitting on like an ammo crate, and thinking, man, this is bad. It was bad. We were here to find out, when you find out you are the western defenses of this defensive line, or offensive line, whichever way you want to look at it, and to watch out because they were picking up on errant mortars off to the left. Off our western end. Get to that point, the errant mortars turned out to be a Fedayeen training camp at this railroad station. They were training themselves how to use these 82 mm. mortars. And we could not find out what was going on because the sand storm was kicking up so

badly. Special forces had actually stopped like a hundred or two hundred people convoy coming down from Bagdad, to resupply Anazarea. with troops and equipment. They were bringing tanks in. I remember hearing tanks at night. They didn't have the night vision facilities we do. But came to find out after the war, coming back down, there was actually a tank base that no one knew about, about five, not even five miles, about three miles from our far west.

John: Oh, oh.

Shawn: Yep. That was, when we came back, that was a live support area, where you could keep back and not have to worry about something happening to you. But that was a base, that was still in operation. They ended up finding out, from intelligence, that there were probably five or six hundred Iraqis massing themselves at the railroad station getting ready for an attack. Maybe more. If you know artillery, they had a British artillery unit come down, too. There were Bravo, Charlie, and Alpha were there, from 1/10. There was one from California that was attached onto that unit. And there was that British, too, that came. That is how deep the battle was going. They were doing what is called red rain missions, we'd actually get incoming from artillery pieces. I remember coming in and setting up, with artillery coming in, from the Iraqis. I remember that. At first, we didn't know. You know, get in there, fire, you know. We couldn't fire anything because you have to wait for what they call the FDC, the Fire Direction Control, to tell you where to fire. And we were actually receiving incoming fire, coming toward us. I remember stuff like mortar rounds going off, fifty feet from us. Stuff like that. But they were up on the highway, like they had zeroed in the highway, but we were down lower in the field area. I think the shrapnel went up above us. It didn't come out toward us. Kind of weird. It was only fifty feet. Maybe a little more than fifty feet from us. Probably about fifty yards from where we were. And we didn't know what it was, at first. We just heard, whoomp! And you look over, and it is a big pile of smoke. And you know it is a damned mortar. I know what an artillery piece is. You know what an artillery piece sounds like.

John: Yea.

Shawn: Mortar. I remember a lot of that happening. Then a lot of my recollections of Iraq were just around the battle of An Nasiriyah, that things just weren't going as planned. I knew things weren't well. You could tell at the command post, there was a lot of stress. There was one night when we actually lowered the guns to fire direct. And they hadn't done that since Vietnam. They were firing what they call Three. Three Green, which is the smallest charge you can put in a 155. We could actually see the shells impacting. They were, they probed our lines at night, the Iraqis did. There was even a time when our headquarters element, because we were starting to become enveloped by the Iraqis, they started burning sensitive

material.

John: Oh, yea? That close?

Shawn: They weren't sure. And things progressed from there. We ended up, that was Ambush Alley. They had an alley that they shelled quite often, so we used it to get through there. That city was taken apart. That railroad station was shot up. I was telling you about those artillery batteries before. There was a, I can't remember what the mission they call it, but every battery, every gun, shot six shells on this mission. Every gun. So, six guns per battery, four or five batteries, thirty guns shooting six shells apiece. Do the math. They were shooting those DPI, which shoots a little grenade. So eighty shells, they shot them at this railroad station and killed probably four or five hundred Iraqis. That were amassing for a strike. And this is how they were supplying themselves, through the railroad station. Not probably using railroad cars. They were using that route to get in the city. We had the bridges secured. Saw a lot of that go on. I remember I saw a lot of Med Evac choppers come in. We were hearing on the radios that Marines were dying, you know. "Get your ass in gear! Marines are dying out here!" You know. Me, like, man, this is pretty spooky. That went on for a while and I am sure a lot of things I am trying to think of. All of the stuff that went on. Some of the things that went on. Some of the raw emotions. But I remember just the rain and it being muddy. I mean, just muddy. When you literally, your boots were fifteen, twenty pounds. And it felt like you were carrying that around on your feet. And you were just miserable the next morning. Because after the rain, after the sandstorm came through, the rain would come through. And everything that was dirty and muddy and dusty, well, dirty and dusty, was now muddy. Sitting up at night, in the middle of the night, with the guns, I remember getting attacked, from that sandstorm. Some of our weapons wouldn't work. Our Mark 19s, after that sandstorm went through, if your weapons weren't covered up.

John: Oh, okay. Sure.

Shawn: Some of the .50 caliber on top of the vehicles wouldn't fire up. Da-doop, and they would jam. Then they would break out the COP in there, trying to get the gun to work. And that becomes an issue, too. You are thinking, man, we could, I remember they had just set up a camp where they put some of the prisoners. They were catching from the south. Just temporarily, until they could move them. And when we were attacked that night, they were all screaming and yelling. You know, I don't know what they were saying, but maybe they were telling them, "Hey, we're over here." I wanted to shoot over there. I really did, for some reason. To shut them up. It was such an eery, their language, it sounds goofy to you. But I knew there were soldiers and Marines over there. But, just because, you know, if they were giving away our positions, or what. We set up trip flares, you know.

Stuff that I have seen in movies for years. I never had to worry about before. And they were going off at night. Sometimes it was a dog. They have a lot of dogs around that country. After that, we were told we were going on, we were going to go on a mission to secure another bridge. With recon, 1st Recon. And we went and took this bridge, and ended up killing a couple of Iraqis that walked up on the bridge. Some of our friends had been killed. You get up and close and personal with those guys. Here to find out a tank had gone over the bridge right before we got there and flipped upside down in the water, in the Euphrates River. And killed all four tankers on there. And they pulled the tank out of there. It took about three or four wreckers. I remember them pulling the bodies out. Man, what a hell of a way to go, you know.

John: Yea.

Shawn: I thought, I kind of hoped they had got knocked out before they hit the water. They went off the side of the bridge and then the tank ended up upside down. And I am thinking, man, that would be a hell of a way to go. And I remember we ended up securing that bridge because we didn't want anyone coming across and blowing those bridges. We needed those bridges. I remember getting, that is when we got up real close and personal with a lot of Iraqis that had to use that bridge with their vehicles. And I remember there was a couple huts on either side of this foot bridge. One of them got bull dozed down. The other one we had to look inside. It was like a candy store. Yea, stuff like that. There were some Bedouins nearby and we ended up giving the kids the pop and the candy. They didn't really come close enough for me to touch. They would come close enough to grab what they wanted, and then they took off. Everybody was scared. I don't know if they were abused by Iraqis, or scared by us. Who knows? You know. I got some pictures of that. We ended up giving them as much food as we could, our MREs. And then we started to resent them, after a while. Because something that was going on with the battles, I remember that. A lot of the trickery that was going on. Got to the point where it was the thought that, if they looked between the ages of sixteen and sixty, don't ask questions. Just shoot, because they'd shoot you on the street, anyway. Especially during the battle of An Nasiriyah, because what was happening, a lot of them would sit up on the balconies, and when you walked by, they would have an AK down there, and they'd shoot at you. And they would put the AK away. Or they had mortars that you could watch. I had a buddy of mine say, his FO couldn't see in his binos. Well, what was happening, people would walk by and pick up a mortar shell, and walk by the tube as if they were walking, and drop it in the tube and keep walking. It was that kind of stuff that was going on. Just confusing stuff. Clothes, uniforms, even after the battle, you could tell, a lot of young men with short cut hair, no boots or shoes on, or they cut the boots down to look like shoes. We ended up trying to stop a lot of them. As much as

possible. We ended up doing that bridge, the bridge operation. That lasted a couple of days. The CBs came in. I think they had to repair the damage, and damage control the bridge. They ended up relieving us in place and we ended up moving on to a place called Al-Kut. We were chasing down this Iraqi armored division. They were probably now at about forty-five, fifty percent of strength with what air power had taken down. But we ended up chasing them almost to Iran. I think we were fifteen miles outside of Iran. Fifteen or twenty miles. We ended up staging, they had a lot of armor, too. They were pretty powerful and we weren't sure what they were going to do. The whole task force didn't go after them. Only a select group. One artillery unit and then a bunch of, you know, some infantry, LADs - Light Armored Vehicles - and they ended up stopping. So we stopped, and dug in. But I dug in deep that night. I knew they had stuff that could range us, too. I remember digging in real deep. I dug in so deep it was above my head. I had to put a step in there to get out. And I didn't know. And the next morning they were still sitting in place. So they sent out some LADs to find out what was going on. It was pretty funny because you could hear the engagement. You know, you could hear the LADs shooting with their twenty millimeter cannon, dip-dip-dip. You know, and an explosions. And hear the radio conference. "What is going on? Some of the vehicles are abandoned. Locals said the Iraqis were here yesterday. Whatever. And they took off, and left the vehicles out here." "What is going on? Ah, the boys, they are just having a little bit of fun, sir. Cut that shit out!" You know. That was a good ice-breaker, you know. Just going out there and doing those things, shooting up the vehicles. I know going through a lot of that, whoever got a chance out there, pictures, or anything of Saddam, they would shoot. Paintings, they'd end up shooting. Murals. There was a lot of that shit all over the country. We ended up getting digs in and shooting the stuff up. The, as Al-Kut, we were pretty concerned with that, being sent out there, not a full force. Seemed to be after that, things started to slow down a little bit for us. We weren't really running into as much, every so often we would have some issue. Someone setting up a mortar somewhere, and we'd take them out. After a while, it got to a point where you were engaged in too much combat that you were actually looking for combat. And if we were in a town, we would actually hang our weapons outside the vehicle, you know, like we were driving through the city. A lot of people would come up to greet us, piling into the streets. Wave to us like we were the victors. Like we were their saviors. It was really kind of an eerie thing. After a while, you felt like you didn't want to hang your weapon out because somebody might try to pull it. And as weird as that sounds, the things that kind of go through your head, we weren't going around pointing weapons at people. At children, or anything. But you were hoping that some of them would show their true colors. You know, something like that. I don't think we really believed that it was over. You know, at that point in time. There was fun times there, too. They had a lot of women. Women didn't really get a lot, wearing the veil. So we would always go by and get their attention, and wave and whistle. And

they would kind of cover up the face, sort of laugh, however they did. Like a proper woman from Japan, you know, didn't really look at you. Kind of bowed down. That is kind of, well, that is what it was like. You know. And they had really beautiful eyes. It seemed like the Iraqis were really big into eyes. You know, whenever you would see a painting or see a bus and there would be an eye painted on it. Seeing those eyes was really weird. You know, you'd wave. And we'd pull over after going through the city, and talking, "Did you see that woman, she was eye-balling us." Really beautiful, green emerald eyes. Some of them you really couldn't really tell. Their faces would be covered up. You could tell there was a lot of wear. Maybe just from abuse and the sun, or that their lives were. And their feet, and the kids running around. Washing in the streams. And they had water buffalo. I am thinking, it that a water buffalo. Vietnam water buffalos, but not Iraq. But, sure enough, water buffalos. Kids riding on the back of donkeys. And you know, bare foot. We tried to hand out as much food as we could but then it got to the point where some bad things were still happening and, you know, you do as you might. We did. We really went over there with the best intentions, you know. Do all this, look back down, and think that is why we went over there with the right reasons. Well, maybe not. Did we have good intentions? I think we did. But we knew we were over there and we knew we were doing good, because you see how the people were living. And it is just horrible. And you knew going into the cities who had power, who was part of the party and who wasn't. Because the way they lived. You know, people have lived like peasants like, literally, with string light wiring that they could hook together, and that is how they would hook up the power to their house. And it is literally like spliced pieces of wire. A piece of copper here and a piece of something else there, and another piece of copper, spliced together, for power to the house. And it was just, odd, you know. And how they lived in their homes. And then you get in to see like the Baath Party headquarters, some that we would take out, and you would see how those people lived, too. And it was high on the hog. And there was no middle. It was like one way or the other. After Al-Kut, we were told to hold the rear. Bagdad didn't turn out to be the big battle of that operation. It turned out to be Alnazerea. Bagdad was a big deal because we ended up taking the capital, but I remember looking back on that. And they wanted us to stay back, and I felt that we kind of got cheated. We were there, but I think that we were like the bastard step-child, you know.

John: Okay.

Shawn: First Marine Division was going in and we were going to sit back, but I guess, their intentions were, hey, just in case anyone came from the rear. I think they kind of knew that there were still some issues. You know, that we didn't get a chance to get cleaned up. So there was a reason for it, and we ended up calling back to An Nasiriyah. And I remember driving back to the city and how it was

almost like ants. They had rebuilt some of the place, the homes that had been hit, they had rebuilt them. Like some of the windows had been blown out, they rebuilt them with brick. It was more like a stucco-looking. You could see where they replaced it with the brick. And we ended up taking over an oil refinery. And I remember watching that burning during the war. And it just burned day and night, all this oil. And now we are in this oil fire. And we set up the street patrols. And this oil refinery had these DPICMs laying everywhere. These little shells. And these shells are about the size of a, boy, about the size of, this is it, right here. But maybe three inches by an inch. You know. Three inches high by an inch wide. And these things are designed to penetrate three inches of armor.

John: Oh, Jesus.

Shawn: Yea. But they laid everywhere. You know, out of eighty shells, eighty canisters in a shell, you know, they had a one percent dud rate. Well, they hit a lot of mud. See, in the flooded areas, to keep our tracks from not going through. So we had those things laying everywhere. And they operate on a floating pin, and they will go off and kill you. So we were real careful with that, and we ended up taking patrols into the local area, which turned out to be the ghetto. Of An Nasiriyah. And I think, I don't really think I had sour grapes toward the people. I wanted to be as friendly as I could. But still be cautious because of my Marines' welfare. That was paramount to me, no matter what happened. And, as I say, with the children, too. I couldn't look a child in the face or a mother or wife, and tell them that, well, it was a child. Because we were told that children, too, were being used possibly for suicide bombs. And I remember thinking that. And we went on patrol. And we were the first patrol to go out into this area. Our commanding officer sent us out to see what their attitude was. How they would react with us being out there. We went out there, with no helmets. Just flak jackets, soft cover. We didn't take any heavy machine guns. I think we had a SAW, a Squad Automatic Weapon. M16s. I think we had a 203 grenade launcher, radio. And we went out. I saw the map they drew. Checkpoints. Checkpoint 1 was good for radio contact but after that we didn't have radio contact. We didn't have the range. Go figure. But we identified areas. People came out. Wanted to sit down, wanted to have tea with us. We had a lot of kids around us. A lot of kids. And after a while, you figured out, if you had a lot of kids with you, you would probably be okay.

John: Oh, yea?

Shawn: Because they really didn't aggress you with the children around. You know, they love their children, too. Well, so we thought. Here, months later, we find out, you know, suicide bombs, they don't really care. They don't discriminate.

[End of Side A of Tape 2.]

John: Okay. Go ahead.

Shawn: And I think we felt, maybe, secure at the time. Everyone was so friendly. I remember taking pictures at the time, of as many of them as I could, because it was a big deal for them. Pictures were only for the rich. For them. So I could take pictures, and I remember taking a picture. We found a lot of artillery pieces that had been taken out. They had a lot of artillery barrages. Or a lot of artillery batteries that had been sitting. And they set up next to people's homes and inside building complexes. They didn't care. They didn't really care. And I look at it both ways. One, it was pretty crappy. And the same time, what they were concerned with was the defense of their country. I don't know what it was. I don't know if they thought we were going to shoot at them, or not. But we did, and we took out a lot of them. But I took a picture of a man and his family and I remember them telling me through my translator, we had a translator at the time, he called me a gentleman at that time. Big deal. And you know, they didn't get the picture. Just, I think, getting a picture taken of them was a big deal. And, well, they wanted to come out and talk to us. They led us to a school. And this was pretty poignant for me, they led us to the school because they said there were weapons in the school. And I went in the school. I found a guy who opened up. It was locked. We didn't want to cause any more damage than was necessary. So like the janitor came, and opened up the school. And I walked in, off to the right, there was a picture of Jesus on the wall. Yea, well, what I consider to be Jesus. I don't think he looked like Allah, or anything. But it looked what Jesus would be with his hands outstretched and it kind of blew me away because I knew the majority of them were Muslims. And I went looking, just looking through this school. But I didn't want to get, it was a pretty small group of us. I think there was only about nine of us. And I didn't want to get stuck inside a building, you know, in the middle of the city. I heard some shooting on the outside. Just didn't get a good feeling. You know, you get that feeling and you go with it these days. As I have gotten older, I learned you usually go with your gut, for the most part. We ended up leaving and I told the Marines to keep the kids at bay. Don't let them get too close to you. You got grenades on you and, who knows? We don't need an incident. You just never know. And we ran into some other people. A guy wanted me to take a picture of his bus, and their donkeys, and that. And they want to touch you. That is what they want to do. They just want to touch you. Feel you, talk to you. And a lot of kids spoke English.

John: Oh, yea?

Shawn: "Hello, mister. How are you?" You know, that kind of thing. Again, that goes back to us thinking that this is just a country that, a lot of intelligent people. A lot of intelligent people. Our translator had been going to college. Not that he was

going to college, but he wanted to pursue something. I don't know. It was different for us. We ended up doing that patrol and getting back, and sure enough, one of the guys, our RTO - I don't remember his name - our radioman. Didn't keep the kids away and they knew when we were about to cross the road to get into the oil refinery where we had our defensive position set up. Grabbed all his pens. Out of his flak jacket. Took off running. "I told you!" The kids kept on pointing at my watch. "Hey, mister, gimme! Gimme!" That is what they would say. "Gimme! Gimme! Mister!" And you start learning words like *imchee*. *Imchee* meant to go away, or *ista*. That meant go the f-away. That was like the rude way of saying it. And they responded to that. Because you say something like *imchee* and they would laugh at you because you were speaking the language. But tell them *ista*, they... We did stuff like that. We did vehicle check points. And I remember stopping, we drew over so many vehicles. I remember a lot of families bringing back coffins. They would carry coffins on top of the cars. And we would pull a vehicle over. So many vehicles we'd count, pull over. Form in an area. Search the vehicle. A lot of vehicles pulling over. It was like they had robbed banks, you know. Pulled over one guy, he had a Biretta, a 9 mm. pistol. U. S. issue, U. S. government. He had an ID card but he was trashy. And I think that he was somebody who was in a taxi coming back from seeing his family in An Nasiriyah. We ended up calling a Head Team in. What they are is like the human intelligence division. They came out there and took the guy. But, I think what it was, I think he was like someone who was sent in, prior to the war.

John: Oh, okay.

Shawn: And so it was kind of interesting getting into that. A lot of people were upset. And, we were concerned that they were bringing a lot of weapons into the city. But I wasn't really, well, I guess that is one of the signs, you try to be more of a human being and not open up the coffins, and that. So we kind of took that approach. I remember I had a spat with a major when we were at that one bridge that we secured where that tank fell over. And the major criticized me because I was searching through all these Bedouins. They would come through in these trucks with huge, like everything they owned was on this truck. I don't know. With all this stuff, I got up on top of the vehicle. These things were probably semi in the air. A rickety, I would pull up blankets and the kids and people sitting in the back, and they were deathly scared of me. But I tried to hand them Tootsie-Pops. Whatever. And I wanted to look through their stuff. One, I don't want them going across the bridge, and two, I don't want them going any further and killing any Marines that I have down the line. You know, we were the first line of defense there. And I remember getting into him. I said, "Sir, you know. This is our job." And I just remember getting into it. We had a spat. I don't know if he ever walked, or if we ever come to an agreement. I kept doing my job, and my job was to protect Marines. And to protect our mission. I remember I almost shot a deaf

man because he was walking away from our position and didn't stop. I remember calling halt, and trying to get his attention. I think I used some Iraq, some Arabic. And I knew the word for stop. I don't recall it today. But he still didn't stop and I remember drawing the weapon out. And I think at that time just caught something out of the side of his eye coming from our defensive position. And he turned around and he ended up pointing to his ears. But you don't know. God damn, that came close! You know. And those are the things that I still do think of. The things that come to my mind. There were so many close calls that happened. I remember us being told there was ambulances being commandeered and being packed with explosives, and watch out for these. And you put some days, you put in some pretty good days, and I remember one of those vehicles coming to our position. And we had a former police officer, and I remember him getting those guys out of the vehicle and throwing them on the ground. I remember a guy crying on the ground, an Arab guy. You know, I think he was in fear that he was going to be killed. And I remember that moment.

John: Was there anything in the vehicle?

Shawn: No, there wasn't anything in any of them. But, you know, we don't really know that. And I am sure he was just as scared as we were. This ambulance came up pretty quick even though we had set up barriers with what we could find to make the vehicles make an S. Make turns to come into our area. But I remember that. But then you feel sorry, but then you think, that can get you killed, too. You know. And that is the hardest thing for someone to overcome. Is feeling sorry for someone else who is actually getting killed. And I am sure many men have died that way, by second guessing. And I think that is part of warfare, that you really have to come to terms with. After that, though, we ended up going back to, I don't remember the place we went back to. An old air force, an Iraqi Air Force base, and we got together as a whole unit. Whole unit got back together. Headquarters, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie. Set up our guns just in case. And you know, we were able to get showers, because we hadn't had showers for a long time. We had shower bags we carried with us, the modern conveniences that in years past you didn't have. You get camping bags where you distilled water from the sun. That was great. I remember we had to use, when we were at that oil refinery, we had to use a bathroom somewhere. You had sanitary reasons, you know. We had a lot of flies. So we ended up removing the man hole covers, had a bunch of cables. I remember we used that. We set up these poopers, you know, with the toilet seats and everything. And I am thinking to myself, God damn, someone is going to have to go down and clean that out. No shit. I remember thinking that. I thought, you know, it is going to happen. And we all ended up getting a bug. That made you vomit, and had it coming out both ends, there. Everyone got it. Everyone. It was something that was spreading through the whole theater, because we ended up talking to other guys. Oh, yea, we got that, too. Real funny, how that works.

Then going back to this air force base, and things seemed to quiet down. And we ended up meeting up with some of our, we didn't know it was coming to the end. We were still kind of lost at that point. You know, you get some information here and there, but I don't think anyone really knew what was going on at the time. Meeting up with some buddies and finding out who got hit, and didn't. And talked about Lieutenant Pokorny a little bit. Seeing that these guys were okay, some of your buddies. Which felt pretty good. Turns out while we were at this old base, there was a unit shooting off a bunch of Iraqi ordnance, and they were using RPGs. And a couple of our warrant officers went over there. Warrant Officer Schnell and Warrant Officer Arnold. And a couple of other young Marines went out there to shoot these RPGs. And I remember they had hot chow. Great, bringing hot food, bringing it all over to headquarters. We were spaced out. We'd go over there to get showers and eat hot chow. It would be great. And then I remember seeing them pop smoke. You hear an RPG and it makes kind of a snap and boom. And so you hear a little boom and didn't think anything. Well, one of these RPGs didn't launch out of the tube. I don't know if it was sabotage, or if it was just faulty. And what happened is, once you shoot it, it is supposed to pop out of the tube and the fins come out. And it locked in the tube, and exploded inside the tube. And it killed a couple of Marines. I think it killed one Marine instantaneously. Blew off another one's fingers. And the two warrant officers were mortally wounded as well.

John: Oh, Jesus.

Shawn: They popped smoke for a medevac chopper. I remember, that was after everything had gone on. It was at the end. And we didn't know. What the hell, why are they bringing choppers in? And the showers, the hot chow is done. And here we find out this is what happened. Yea, it was tough. And I have since been to Arlington and seen Warrant Officer Arnold. Pretty close to Lieutenant Pokorny at Arlington. So that is kind of nice. So, I remember doing that. And they, what else? That was a pretty poignant moment right there. That was something. I will never forget that. Because everything happened, and then that at the end. I remember Lieutenant Pokorny's wife, here finding out, she found out the way her husband died, was on CNN. She saw it on the news.

John: No kidding? Oh, Jesus. Oh, my God.

Shawn: What was happening, they kept our family informed through newsletters, and, well, as they would say, there ain't nothing going on. And everything is good. And so on. Here to find out at the time, the news, that was the first time we dealt with the news like that. Desert Storm was one thing, but this CNN news was instantaneous. They'd get stuff out with the least delay. The name was released and she saw it on the news. The custody officer didn't get to her first. She was

basically telling people, hey, don't believe it. They are telling us about our Marines and, so that was something I dealt with for a while. And he had a young daughter, three years old. Was a nice guy, though. I remember him coming to the armory to get his pistol. Come to get his issue weapons when we were getting ready to leave. Get him some shit that day. He was always the kind of guy that you could call on the phone. And say, he would always be in the office, and we used the term Office Bitch. You're the guy doing the phone watch. And for some reason, every time I would call around lunch time, he would answer. Not one of the young lance corporals. And he said, "Sir, what is it? Are you, they got you for the Office Bitch there?" He was such a good guy. And he would joke around. Yea, you know. Always one of those guys. Always. Real tall. Football player type. He played football at Arizona State. One of the nicest, nicest guys. I had a lot of respect for him. Lot of respect. But the warrant offices were pretty good Marines, too. They were former enlisted, too. One of them, I know, Warrant Officer Schnell, I think he had been in an almost fatal crash years earlier and had reconstruction surgery on his face. Yea, one of the two of them ended up dying on the helicopter on the way to get medevacked. So all that passed away, but we did some good things. I remember going on patrol. I don't remember where this was and the whole chronological order, but we ended up doing a patrol and a family stopped us. And wanted us to come to their home. And we found this huge warehouse, and their home was filled with munitions. Mortars, and rifle grenades, and regular grenades, and rockets. And all sorts, I mean, rockets, they must have been fifteen, twenty feet long. The Republican Guard had been there and had set guns and rocket launchers, and they had been bombed a week and a half earlier. And they left documents and uniforms. And you name it, they left it. These people's home, even their kitchen, was full of munitions. Their animal pens were full of munitions. It took, seven tons are pretty big vehicles, with trailers. They pull quite a bit. As the old five tons. They were bigger than that. It took about six of those vehicles. They took out so much munitions that EOD couldn't blow it up in one area. They had to blow it up in different areas. And we left a lot of rockets out there. So much stuff. You couldn't believe how much munitions they had stashed there, that they forced those people. Got some pictures of that. This is actually the family. That was their home. I got pictures of their home, but not the munitions. We were concerned moving those munitions, they had me go in there because I worked with explosives. You know, to make sure they didn't booby-trap, because you remove one case and you find a grenade underneath. I remember sweating a lot in there and I don't know if it was from the heat or just nervousness.

John: Yea. Sure.

Shawn: Jeff Anderson, a good friend of mine who is on MSG duty, was another one. There was only two assigned to the unit. We worked together. I was thinking, me

and you. If something happens. Hey, I remember looking at the stuff. Stuff from Jordan, stuff from Vietnam, you know. You look at all that. You know, it is funny to see where all these things come from. A lot of French-made armaments. I don't want to point fingers. People are free to buy and sell. We went through that and saw all that. After that incident that I talked about at the air base there, we ended up going, we were told we were heading back to Shoup. I remember that. And getting into the vehicles and heading back. I know there is stuff that I am leaving out and will think of later. But doing the best I can here.

John: Hey, this is great. This is great.

Shawn: We ended up going down to Shoup, and I remember on our way out watching a kid, there was a settlement behind us, and they must have had civilians come in there behind us. The kid jumped into his side of the semi when it slowed down. Stole whatever they could from that side. The passenger side. Took off running. That is how they were. I remember a kid running up the back of a vehicle and I didn't want him grabbing the radios back there. And I gave him *imshi, imshi*. Ya, he kept on yelling, or screaming. *Ishta, ishta*. And he started speaking a little English."American Number 1! Why *ishta?* Why *ishta?*" And I think I was burned out then, and I pulled a pistol out and pointed it at the kid. To get him away. You know, hey, because he wasn't anything else. I think we were in a traffic jam at that point.

John: It doesn't take them long to pick up skills like that.

Shawn: No, no, it really doesn't. They knew, they were pretty good. They knew food, they would put their fingers up to their mouth. Water was a big thing with them. You do things that Americans do. I remember graffiti. We did a lot of graffiti on their military areas because, I remember we were doing a patrol and we went into a room that was a classroom. But it was off the beaten path and we wanted to check out this building. And inside were a bunch of Iraqi graffiti. And I took pictures of all that. One was one of women's breasts, you know. Things that you know, are not supposed to be the Iraqi way, which is funny, but you would find, like still to this day, "Choro was here," "First Marines," or "USMC." It is kind of funny how that happens. Those are some of the things that you do. I can't say that we ever went and militiaed the destroyed property or stole from the people. We never did anything like that.

John: When did you come out?

Shawn: We came out, I think, it was June.

John: You were there...?

Shawn: We were there from, we crossed in March, March 20, I think it was. March to April, April to May. May or June, I can't remember. I think it was May. May we came across it. Yea. You know, I suppose the war was, we came across the border and went down into Kuwait. Staged outside, we went back to Shoup. Everything was torn down again. It was like going there the first time again. But we lived off our vehicles because we weren't going to be there long. Marines were still sick. Being sick reminded me that before we went into Iraq, we had to take malaria pills. Malaria pills made you very, very sick. And gave you, again, from both ends. I stopped taking it that day. There was no way I was going to go riding in a vehicle taking these pills.

John: Yea.

Shawn: So I never was taking the malaria, not because I didn't want to get malaria but because there was no way I was going to fight, feeling like this. Sick. You are nauseous. Come to find out you are supposed to eat when you take the pills. You won't be as sick. I'm thinking, if I eat more, I'm going to sit on the pot more. That's not a good combination. But we ended up going back there. Half of us left, the other half of them left to meet up with them. Went in different stages. Went down to Kuwait. And we had to wash our vehicles. I never went through so much, I would rather have gone back to Iraq. Wash the vehicle. There couldn't be a speck of dirt because the FDA, or not the FDA, the agricultural, whoever deals with the agricultural in the United States. You are not supposed to bring foreign soils. They could contaminate our food source. They are pretty particular about that. These things were washed. I've never been through an inspection like that before. Ended up doing that and boarding the ship, the U. S. S. *Bataan*. I remember coming on ship. I never get seasick but I got seasick going back on the hovercraft. And I remember coming back into this Kuwait naval base. You know, they had a swimming pool. I was still kind of shell-shocked. You know, everything. I couldn't believe I was here. You know, after we had been fighting up there, they got all this shit back there. They got Burger King, and Pizza Hut, and they got, what the hell? Kind of a culture shock for us. The short time we were there. I just think of, day and day, we were washing and we weren't really cutting our hair. You know, a Marine not cutting his hair. Not shaving at times. I mean, we were just getting into that. But we ended up going back down to Kuwait and enjoying that for a day or so. Getting back up on the ships, going back to the *Bataan*. On the way back is when Liberia kicked off. Our two ships were taken to Liberia, so we could help support the embassy there, if need be. And then we ended up going to Lisbon, luckily. Port call in Lisbon, Portugal. Lived the high life for about three or four days. In the Hilton. Spent some money, but it was enjoyable. Worth it. And then boarded our ship and ended up coming back to Camp LeJeune. They dropped us off right off the coast and we came in on ships.

No big fanfare. Didn't have a parade or anything. But our families were there to greet us when we came back.

John: That's great. That's a remarkable story. Jesus. That is something.

Shawn: Yea, and it still goes on today. But a lot of us still want to go back. I am hoping that I will get a chance to go back.

John: How much longer will you be on recruiting duty?

Shawn: About a year and a half. And they asked me to stay out here, but staying out here means I won't deploy, and that is what Marines do. And I told them. That was my drawback. If you could tell me I could stay out here and still deploy, I'd be more than happy to. But, you know, in Afghanistan, Marines aren't rotating there any longer. Turned it over to NATO and the Army. I'd like to get back to Iraq and see what has changed. That is what Marines do. That's what we do.

John: What a remarkable story. Jesus, this is great.

Shawn: I hope that helps.

John: It does. It really does, because, well, this is the first. Of course, I've been doing World War II veterans.

Shawn: Yea, there is a lot of stories. I remember, this could go on forever. You just remember stuff. You remember shooting, weapon on bursts. It's a three round burst. You don't do that on the rifle range. But you do there here now. And you hear rockets go over, and people shooting at you. And you realize people are trying to kill you. You know, that gets to you. You can't realize, you realize that someone is out there trying to kill you. And I think that, more so than ever before in my life, that hit home. Wow. There is actually someone trying to kill me. Someone that wants to kill me. You know, I remember shooting a dog because they were following us on patrol. Dogs bark, bark. And every time you turn into an alleyway, that dog is giving away your position. You are thinking, my God, man. It is amazing stuff, it really is. But, you know what, albeit to everything that went on, there was a lot of positive things that went on there. I had a lot of good experiences. I got to see things. Where the Euphrates and the Tigris meet. The Garden of Eden. You know, Babylon. To get to see Babylon. Beautiful country, and great people. And I still believe to this day, you can put this on tape. They wanted to. They may not ever be a society as we are, because it's not that kind of a culture. But I still believe that they want some sort of life. And outside of someone who is murdering them. And like I said, I am not going to say that all Marines are proper fellows. May not always agree on why we went there. By no

means, but we were there and the least we could do was make sure that they are left in decent hands. And not because of the government, I think, but the people, the young children. And some of those poor people. I think that is what is most important.

John: Sure. Why shouldn't I have a chance?

Shawn: Give them a chance. And I think we did, and they proved to us. We don't need them to come out and pat us on the back every day. But when they go out to vote in the threat of being murdered. That is remarkable to me.

John: You wish our turnout would be like that.

Shawn: Exactly. And I want people to realize that is the big deal.

John: Okay.

Shawn: Well, thank you, for giving me this opportunity.

[End of Interview.]