

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
John Morgan  
Field Artillery, Army, Persian Gulf.

1995

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**Morgan, John** (b. 1971). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy : 2 sound cassettes (ca. 65 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy : 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract**

Morgan, a St. Louis, Missouri native, discusses his Army service in the Persian Gulf War. Coming from a military family and needing money for college, Morgan entered military service while at LaFollette High School in Madison (Wisconsin) on a delayed entry program; choosing the field artillery because it offered a higher college fund. Morgan tells that his plans were to get in and get out with college money. Basic training was at Fort Sill (Oklahoma) in 1989 and Morgan discusses in some detail his D & C (drill and ceremony) training. Combat training was refined at Fort Bragg, which Morgan calls the “German doctrine;” combat approach geared towards the Soviets or Eastern block. He details a typical day for him at Fort Bragg where he was assigned to the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps, a unit in which everybody must be ready to deploy within eighteen hours. As part of a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) artillery unit, Morgan describes the operation of the large system and the Invasion of Panama, 1989, where his unit was in line to offer support to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. Morgan describes the events following August 2, 1992; including chaos and hurry of preparing for departure to the Persian Gulf while simultaneously waiting for the unit’s orders. He identifies his feelings; “What am I doing? I joined for college and now I’m going to war.” Upon arriving at Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), Morgan illustrates acclimating to life in the desert, preparing for the imminent invasion of Iraq, and the effects on the ground troops of the long wait. He knew little of the political situation; gleaning information from the BBC radio and his family. Morgan expresses appreciation for the troop support from the States. He discusses relief felt by many when the air war began after waiting and drilling for six months. Morgan tells the story of picking up a Humvee, left for repairs, and finding their unit had moved out once the ground invasion began. Taking two days to locate the rapidly moving front, he portrays the scene as “tons of units just flowing through the LD” (Line of Departure) and his realization that there were other nations involved. Without the capability or manpower to take them, he tells of receiving a lot of Iraqi prisoners early on and comments that the Americans initially thought the light Iraqi artillery, which was quickly controlled, was a trick. He describes the Iraqi soldiers as poorly trained, “terribly equipped,” and with men as old as sixty in their ranks. He tells of driving through an area of Iraqi equipment in very poor shape through rust or poor maintenance. He comments that they did not seem to be well organized, opining that perhaps the air war did cut off Iraqi communications. Morgan describes his unit’s role in combat in both supporting and being supported by an armored battalion of A1 Abrams and their support Bradley’s. If the battalion received incoming artillery, Morgan’s unit took care of it for them. They

got incoming fire when they got to Basra and his battalion took only one casualty, an accident. He again describes his unit's role, "We would just cover whoever was near us," but also relates his combat experience in the one direct fire fight he was involved in. He describes the tank battle as interesting in seeing different combat units work together. Later in the interview, Morgan addresses day-to-day life in the desert including sleeping in big white Saudi tents; acquiring floor boards to keep the sand out; beginning to accumulate stuff like televisions and DVD players; and eating T-rats, MREs, and occasionally Class As. He comments that Christmas was a "good time" and some people starting making their own "hooch" (alcohol) as the Saudis weren't allowing it into the country. He discusses communications with family, saying that he started using a tape recorder because he got tired of writing. Once they started moving, they slept in their vehicles and ate MREs. With the ground war lasting only one hundred hours, Morgan tells that he was kept busy going back and forth with parts and arrived to hear, "Hey! Cease Fire!" He says he didn't believe until he had the commander's verification. It took a few days for the word to get around to all Iraqi Republican Guard and then Morgan's unit went back the way it came arriving at Dhahran in mid-March and then at Cobar Towers. He explains that the vehicles needed to be thoroughly cleaned both to contain disease and because the Saudis were adamant no war artifacts of theirs would leave the country. Exactly seven months after he left, Morgan arrived in the States on March 28<sup>th</sup> and explains that homecoming was quiet, but nice as his mother was there. Back at Fort Bragg, he says that their vehicles arrived about a month and a half later and there was much work to do with them including painting them green again. He also comments that the Army went back to the "good old German doctrine" with little incorporation of desert warfare. Morgan details his adjustment to civilian life, going from active service to inactive Reserves in September, but finding it too late to attend college and needing to go to active Reserves for the additional pay as it was difficult to find good work in Madison (Wisconsin). He used the Montgomery GI Bill to start college in fall 1992, yet still experiences financial difficulties. Morgan also mentions that "nobody really helps you" in civilian life and found that employers were not willing to give him a chance. Although he was not in heavy combat, Morgan explains that he did see a lot of dead Iraqi bodies, burned and charred. He explains that he and his buddies used humor to diffuse their emotions. Morgan examines the frequency by which people ask him if he killed anybody, claiming that is often the first question asked and that they don't understand. He sensed some lack of acceptance on the part of members of both the American Legion or VFW, but felt that the "older guys know a lot of names and stuff like that and they can help you as far as if you're looking for something." Morgan mentions being involved for Vets for Vets at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Vet's Center in Madison, and speaking to children's school groups. Morgan says that he's had no effects of Persian Gulf War Syndrome, but he did take the medicine, use the sun-screen, and briefly outlines two gas alerts while in Iraq.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995

Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, WDVA staff, ca. 1997

Transcription edited by TJ Weinaug, 2008

**Transcribed Interview:**

Mark: Today's date is May 24, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Morgan, a veteran of the Persian Gulf War.

Mark: Good morning and thanks for coming in.

John: Good morning. How are you doing?

Mark: I'm okay. Please don't be conscious of this microphone thing. Don't worry about it.

John: OK. Will try.

Mark: I like to start the interviews by having - I'd like to have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the time you entered the service.

John: I was born and raised in St. Louis, MO. Moved up to Madison in '87, finished high school, graduated in '89 and then straight after high school, went into the service.

Mark: What part of Madison did you grow up in?

John: East Side. I went to Madison LaFollette. I grew up on the East Side and lived with my dad for those two years; big military background. I have my mom was a reservist, she was a Chief Warrant Officer and my dad was in during Vietnam. My dad was in during the Vietnam era but was stationed in Germany and got out at the end of '71 or the beginning of '72. That's when I was born, '71.

Mark: So when it came to the decision to join the military, this was when you were in high school? How long after you graduated did you enter the service?

John: I graduated in mid-June and I was gone two weeks later. But I made the decision a year earlier. I was in the delayed entry program. So I was in for about nine months.

Mark: What attracted you to the military? You mentioned your parents' military

John: Part of it was my family's military. My Mom's side of the family is very military oriented. That was a big part of it. The other part of it was college education, to build up a college fund at that time and for a short term amount of duty. Then I could reenlist if I liked it and enjoyed active duty.

- Mark: Did you have any expectations of what jobs you wanted to do in the military? Did you want to go into the infantry or be a paratrooper, Green Beret or?
- John: No. I was just kind of open to whatever they had. Due to the college fund that I wanted which was \$18,000 or something like that, I got limited to being a field artillery crewmember, either in howitzers or MLRS or a cook. So I chose field artillery to get a little more action and it was dealing with computers and stuff.
- Mark: Did you have any expectation that you might end up in a war?
- John: No. My idea was to get in, get my college money and get out. Go to college and maybe go back in- see how it went from there. I didn't expect that. As soon as I got in, it was in 1989, had training at Ft. Sill and then from there went to Ft. Bragg and that was December. Usually after AIT you go on leave. I decided not to go on leave because I wanted to be home for Christmas. I got to Ft. Bragg and found out we were 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps and what that really meant.
- Mark: What does that mean?
- John: It means anybody on that post under the 18<sup>th</sup> is to be ready to be deployed within 18 hours. We'd be going wherever a conflict would be. I then realized that every battalion has a battery that's on alert for that call to get them out on the field out to the airports and gone. I got down there in December and that happened to be our month and during that same month was Panama, so it was like a big surprise.
- Mark: Did you go to Panama?
- John: No I did not go to Panama.
- Mark: We're kind of getting ahead of ourselves. If you would describe for me your entry into the military. You had to get on a bus and go somewhere and get a physical and start your basic training. Just walk me through those steps as best you can.
- John: I had the recruiter call me up and give me the big pitch. I'm like, OK, then we went to Milwaukee which is where the DEB station is. Got there the first night, spent the night. The next morning, got up, went through the physical all day, civilian physicians, there was a big group of us, they run us through about thirty at a time. It was interesting. Actually, the first time I failed because I said I wore braces for football so the civilian doctor failed me.
- Mark: You mean like leg braces?

John: No. Like the slip on ankle braces that I wore for support, she thought I meant braces-braces. So I had to go through a big hoopla with the doctors. Went back for a second time a month later, went through the process of poking and prodding all over again, which is not a great process. It's picking you, prodding you, bending over and grabbing your ankles literally and all the fun stuff. That was OK. Then just came back and just waited to finish high school.

Mark: And then you were told where to go?

John: Yup. I got my orders going to Ft. Sill for basic training and then AIT and then from there that's all that you would know. Then they let us pick a dream sheet where we wanted to go.

Mark: So describe your first day of basic training. I remember mine very clearly, getting off a plane, then getting off a bus to the base, some guy started yelling at us, called us names and stuff. Your first --

John: The first day of basic training, it was kind of funny. I left Milwaukee, going to Dallas-Fort Worth and missed my plane going to Oklahoma. It wasn't my fault, it was the airline's fault, but then I had to stay overnight so I went back the next day. So I ended up at Ft. Sill and I got there and nobody was there. So, finally I took a taxi into Ft. Sill from Lawton and got in there and everybody's gone. It's lunchtime. Finally, I was at the reception station and they just came up to you, they're yelling at you, get on the- we used to call them cattle cars and piles everybody, I think there were probably 200 of us all, but the battery I ended up with was only about twenty of us and we ended up being at zero week for about a week. There was about fifteen of us so all we did was KP everyday and clean up and do all the police calls and all the little garbage work that the drill sergeant gives you. They got up in our face and yelling and cursing and screaming, just like you see in the movies. They didn't hit anybody though. They were putting you down and making you feel like shit. You know, kind of break you down and build you back up.

Mark: Basic training lasts how long these days?

John: Eight weeks.

Mark: Army basic training is about eight weeks. And, what sort of training is involved? I mean, how much of it was classroom, how much was actually training in weapons and military courtesy and all that sort of stuff?

John: As far as in a classroom, not much. Most of it is hands-on. You got D&C

Mark: What's D&C?

- John: Drill and Ceremony, marching, how to salute correctly, how to march, how to stand at parade rest for NCO to an officer to, everything else was hands-on out in the field. Like map reading, NBC, they did as much as they could hands-on. Hand to hand combat with bayonets, grenades, road marches, just getting you into shape a lot of times, obviously. You're always out. They're running you, they're dropping you all the time.
- Mark: To jump ahead a little bit, when you were actually in a war, did you find that this training was helpful? Did you feel you were well trained?
- John: Oh, yes. Basic training, you got used to it. But, due to my military background, I knew a lot of what was going to happen. I had a lot of exposure as a younger teenager from my parents and my uncles and my grandpa and stuff. But for the war, at Ft. Bragg is where we did most of our training as to what we were going to do during a war.
- Mark: And that was much different from basic training?
- John: It was to a point where basic training was literally basic. Just enough to get you started and then once you got into your home station they, you knew how to setup a tent, dig a foxhole, setup a NSP or OP or a firing range card.
- Mark: SP and OP escape me.
- John: Observation Point and SP is like the control point, I can't think of it exactly. It's the control area.
- Mark: So you found the training you got once you were actually in the service, that was much more valuable to you?
- John: Yes. Basic training showed you basic NBC, what's a gas mask, how to put it on, but you refined all your skills and you sharpened them once you got to post because you did a CTT and we were out in the field probably two weeks a month.
- Mark: I want to come back to more basic training questions. I'm interested in the sort of training you did after you were in the real Army so to speak. How often were you doing this sort of training and what were you told to expect? Like, who did you think you were going to be fighting? Who were you preparing to fight against? The Soviets at that time? A Panama type situation? What were you training for?
- John: We were still training for a Germany doctrine, so it could be the Soviets or the Eastern Block, even though, in 1989, the wall came down and the Cold War was over, the feeling in the military was, "Well, maybe that's a symbol for the

politicians but that doesn't affect us." The Germany doctrine, we trained as if we were still, the old doctrines from World War II that were worked up and sharpened as we kind of progressed. The training was more focused toward that. What's going to happen? What do we expect? No one ever actually said "You're going to be fighting the Soviets." It's just "You're going to be protecting whoever" but the scenario was always in Germany or in Europe somewhere. It never occurred to anybody, I don't think, at least not at my level as a private it would be overseas or in the Middle East. The training was just as far as maneuvers, hiding positions, how to use the camouflage and cover, so much more toward green.

Mark: At Ft. Bragg is this pretty much what you did all day?

John: Yeah.

Mark: A typical day at Ft. Bragg for you was?

John: Get up. Do PT. Go to the motor pool. Do PMCS. Inspect our vehicles and make sure they're ready and then usually we'd do CTT training of some sort, classes. Either we'd switch from maybe the 60 to the 16 to NBC during different days. We always had class, almost everyday on something. There would be some days they would actually focus on what you need to do when you are out in the field, how to better read a map. Not just at Ft. Bragg but any map they would give us at random. How to interpret it much better than in basic training, they would just set you right and tell you now go away.

Mark: Did you train with any of the other services, for example it's Pope Air Force Base right next to there?

John: Yes.

Mark: In the Gulf War there is what they call the air-land battle. Did you train with like the Air Force for example?

John: No. Never at Ft. Bragg. We never trained with the Air Force that that I recall. We would use, no, we never trained with the Air Force whatsoever, or even with Army helicopters. We never really trained with them. As field artillery we're not really worried about air and even in the Germany doctrine and in the Persian Gulf doctrine we changed slightly. Like my battalion is three batteries. Each battery was assigned to whomever needed protection, i.e., maybe a tank battalion which is who I ended up being with in the Gulf War. So they protect us within a two or three mile range. We protect them anything greater than that. The only way the air ever helped us was if another unit not far, within maybe 30 miles, was having trouble, they would call us in for fire cause we're the closest. They would just give us some grids and we would just fire it up.



Mark: We're starting to get ahead of ourselves.

John: I'm sorry about that.

Mark: That's OK. Basic training again, were there many washouts? Did many people not make it through training?

John: Yeah. There were quite a few, but really they try not to. They never kick anybody out, they just recycle them. Recycles were starting to cut down as far as, and usually it was just physical, mentally it was tough, they're telling you that you're worthless and some people have a hard time understanding that that is their job and that's what they have to do. If you take it personal you become either a troublemaker and you don't make it or you don't listen to them anymore and you decide not to make it yourself and you just want to get out. Basic training is the best way to get out.

Mark: What were your impressions of the other guys that you were training with? Where did they come from? What sorts of backgrounds did they have?

John: They were all pretty good. Every background from Puerto Ricans to inner city guys who grew up in Chicago and had one guy from Lawton, which is right there at Ft. Sill. So, we had country and he was very country, wore a cowboy hat off-duty. Not during basic. We had me as the Midwesterner and a couple of guys from New York and a couple of guys from out in California.

Mark: Sounds like a pretty good mix. How did all these people from all different parts of the country get along?

John: There were quite a few conflicts. Mainly the inner city guys who either had it tough or just thought they were tough. So they would challenge the drill sergeant's authority and the drill sergeant would have to take them privately and break them down and then come back. I was a squad leader for the last four weeks of basic, so they had to follow my authority as the same rank, so there were problems at times but everybody finally learned that we were all in there together and somebody has to give the order. It all worked out eventually. Some guys had a lot of problem with it.

Mark: Did they last or did they get it?

John: They all lasted. They just came to understand. Part of that was, I think they switched some authority to those guys, so they see what it's like and they didn't like it so it came back to other people.

- Mark: Broke them down and got them into the military way of thinking. So AID is where you learned to use the artillery. Why don't you tell me a little bit more about the weapons you were trained to use. They all look the same to me. Big guns. Some are bigger than others. Tell me a little bit about the weapons.
- John: MLRS is a Multiple Launch Rocket System. It's on a track, turret, I couldn't give you the nomenclature anymore.
- Mark: That's OK, I wouldn't understand it anyway.
- John: But it's a box basically on a track and it lifts itself up and turns to the left or right and fires perpendicular to the track. Holds two pods, each pod contains six rockets, each rocket can be fired at a minimum interval of 1.5 seconds, so you can literally get a 12-pack off in about 30 seconds. A 12-pack is one spill. A spill is just the name of the vehicle with the whole package there. One spill, it's a computer system that generates the programs, the grid coordinates and where the rocket is going to land. It's called a Mark-four, might be higher now. Then what happens is you get grids coming in from the FTC, the FTC comes in the spill and then the spill just programs it in there where they want it. They can do dispersions so that each rocket lands in a space, one spill has the potential to take out an entire grid square, saturating the grid.
- Mark: Sounds like a sophisticated weapon.
- John: Yeah. This artillery is most sophisticated.
- Mark: Was it difficult to use?
- John: It was at first. There are a lot of safety procedures to make sure that your spill lines up with, you have to have alignment for the spill so that you know exactly where you're at for the angle and degree and where you're going to be firing at, cause if you're off, you're going to be missing. The training was, there was a lot of class time, a lot of time on the computer, just learning the system and learning to say no to a command if the grids are off.
- Mark: Does this happen a lot?
- John: It happens sometimes. I only caught it a couple of times during training that somebody actually shot out and then it's the fault of the officer who OK's the grid or the NCO who doesn't, usually it's a private using the fire commands. The NCO is the TC.
- Mark: So when you got to the Gulf this is what you did?
- John: Right. This is, well what I did, I was actually in ammo. There were two parts, the spill, which is firing and the ammo. I drove a hammet which is a 40-foot

long straight bed truck with eight three-foot wheels. It had a crane on it and each truck would hold four pods so you could set the pods right next to each other so the spill could come pick them up, drop it's empties and pickup new ones and fire them. What MLRS's did, it was, you wouldn't fire like round like you think of artillery it hits the ground then explodes. MLRS fires above the ground and then spreads 644, basically hand grenades. Once they hit on impact then they explode.

Mark: A big dispersion pattern.

John: Right.

Mark: So, you mentioned briefly you were at Ft. Bragg when the Panama thing happened. Just briefly describe the activities on the base and what was going on, what people were talking about, thinking and that sort of thing.

John: Activities were, this has been the first thing in a good many years, since Grenada, that the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division has been called out. So, everybody scrambled around, this was new for me. I'm just, I'm scared. I had no clue what was going on. They said to just do what they told me and so I did.

Mark: How long was this before the actual invasion?

John: I got there in November and then in December they're right there. So, it was during the invasion or right before the invasion, it was all clustered and they were gone and my unit was sitting at the airport on call. Just in case something goes wrong, being an artillery, the only problem is MLRS has a big problem with that. When they can't drop us from C-130's like you can howitzers and Panama was so small, we were going to have a problem shooting cause we'd have to arc it so high. I didn't see much because we weren't allowed to go anywhere unless we had to go cause they wanted to make sure they could get a hold of us right away.

Mark: So, August two, 1990. Do you remember where you were and what you were thinking when you finally heard it? Did you think "Geez, I might be taking a trip to the Middle East?"

John: No. Actually, I was on leave July 31<sup>st</sup>. Came back August 1, August 2 when everything hit the fan, I had come back and I was sleeping in my barracks and everybody else was still on leave. I came back early and NCOIC of the day was coming up waking everybody up to get downstairs and start the alert. I thought he was fucking with me 'cause when I'm on leave I don't pay attention to the news, though my mom had mentioned it. I wasn't worried about it I figured they'd call me if something goes wrong. So he's waking me up and I thought "Oh, he's bullshitting". He wasn't. So we had to call everybody back off of

leave and then as soon as everybody got back, you have 18 hours. Everybody was back the next day and we were already ready with our equipment so we just grabbed it, went out to the airport and sat out there and then we would just- “what’s going on?” ‘cause you get over there and you’re going to start fighting. During drill they let us know what our life expectancy is statistically.

Mark: What was yours supposed to be?

John: About 30 seconds. Just long enough to hold them off until a big contingency could come over. We really didn’t have a lot of time to think at first, because we had to get everything to the airport, get everything to the docks, we had to drive everything down to the ports we used.

Mark: Which for you was Charleston?

John: I really can’t remember. Part of it was loaded up onto trucks and taken down there and part of it we just drove it all ourselves and then we hauled it back on buses. So, you didn’t have time to think, you just thought “We got a shit load to do.” We had to get it done. Then afterwards, we could sit at the airport we kept getting bumped by MI, 8two<sup>nd</sup> was over there August 2<sup>nd</sup>, but then MI started bumping us back and then...

Mark: What’s MI?

John: Military Intelligence. From the post. They just kept bumping us back. I didn’t end up leaving Bragg until the 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> of August.

Mark: Did you fly over or take the ship?

John: We flew over on a 747, commercial, it was very nice.

Mark: Did you have time to call your ma or something?

John: Yeah, by the time the call- although off-post people were called in, they couldn’t leave at first and then they let them go home after about a week. Like “OK, go home but you can’t go anywhere. Stay by your phone.” Eventually they’re like fine. This is the day you’re going to be leaving. Get down there and just wait. So, we waited for two days. But yeah I got to call my mom and say “OK. I’m OK. I’m still here, but we’re leaving but I can’t say anymore than that.” You couldn’t say when or anything. Security reasons.

Mark: So what’s going through your head?

- John: “Holy shit! What am I doing? I joined for college and now I’m going to war.” They really pumped it in that we were just drilling, all our basic drills again, NBC, rifle and what we’re going to do. Camouflage and NBC was the biggest thing. Getting out shots, we went through the will and power of attorney stuff on August 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Mark: So what did you know about the Iraqis? You’d been trained to fight in a European theater and you just mentioned the NBC training which is expected. You had no notion of what to expect?
- John: I had no idea where this was, my geography wasn’t really sharp at the time. Didn’t know who he was, why we were going over there, it was like my commander saying “You’re going” and my saying “OK sir, I’m going.” So I thought about what I needed to do then I got over there. That’s all I thought about. I wasn’t married. I didn’t really think about my family because my family was mainly military so they were supportive and stuff.
- Mark: So your plane trip lasted how long?
- John: 18 hours.
- Mark: You landed where?
- John: Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. We had two layovers, one in Bangor, Maine and the other in Brussels. Then we landed in Dhahran and as soon as we got there we went to a compound, which later became an R&R compound. It was a compound with a big cement wall around it and open rooms and you just went in there and dumped our stuff, went back to the port to see if our trucks and stuff were in yet. They weren’t, but we ended up off-loading whatever was coming in. Other artillery units had got their stuff there first.
- Mark: Now it’s August in Saudi Arabia. Describe the climate for me.
- John: Sunny, hot, very hot compared to what we were used to. The people were really friendly, the Saudis that we met. We met a lot of people from Pakistan and Indonesia.
- Mark: Workers or something?
- John: Workers on the port. Not just for the shipping yards, but there was a little restaurant on the port. You didn’t know what to expect and we’re wearing greens, plus all of our equipment so we were dying. They were telling us to drink lots of water, lots of water. We were concentrating on trying to get adapted to it. The first few days wasn’t really that bad. It was hot, but then a

couple of days later it got really hot. Started plugging up in the 120's and stuff like that.

Mark: So how long until your weapons and trucks arrived? How long until you got to go?

John: Our trucks and weapons arrived probably three or four days later than we did. We finally got everything together about a week later, put it in a motor pool that was about a half-hour away from the port, stayed in those barracks for about another week and then we were gone.

Mark: Where?

John: To the desert.

Mark: Up north. Up to the Kuwaiti border.

John: No. Not that far. We went out of Dhahran a couple of hours. I would have to look at my diary, my maps. Our first position we stayed at for a couple of weeks and then what would happen is more units were coming in, this was really stupid but, as more units would come in like the 5838, the rest of the corps, they would bump us higher and they would just fill in our positions. That happened for the first two or three months and then we got this one position where we hooked up with the 212<sup>th</sup> Brigade out of Ft. Sill and ended up staying in that position for three or four months just in that area. That area was about 25 clicks [kilometers] south of the border, maybe a little farther.

Mark: That's fairly close,

John: Yeah, it's pretty close.

Mark: It's within shooting distance,

John: Yeah. I really can't remember exactly where that was. From there we just kept moving up and moving up and finally once the air war started we were about seven clicks from the border. I remember that clearly.

Mark: I want to come back to that but I'm interested in what your activities were during Operation Desert Shield. What sort of things were you doing? Were you expecting an attack?

John: We were expecting an attack as soon as we got off the airplane. As soon as we got our equipment. We were thinking our equipment was going to be there, that we were going to grab our equipment and head straight out and start fighting. Well that didn't happen. So, then they kept pumping "It could happen any

minute.” We were just drilling all the time. Really high stress and high anxieties. After the first month, they’re pumping all this into you, we’re still training, we’re still moving around, we’re still doing drills and drinking, a lot of guard duty. Security was really high, at least in my battery. After that it was kind of like “Let’s go. Let’s just start ‘cause we can’t take this waiting anymore.” It was really bothering a lot of us.

Mark: What sort of idea did you, what did you know about what was going on in the United States at the time? Political events, support for the war or at the time it was, what did you know about that was going on at the time?

John: At the time, through August, didn’t know very much. I think I got my first letter at the end of August or maybe September but it was dated a couple of weeks before I got it. Most people would just think “What’s going on? How are you? How you doing?” We did get some radio, mainly BBC and hear stuff going on but really we didn’t have the time. The commanders pumping you with things that you really want to hear like “You’re going to kick ass, don’t worry about what they’re saying.” Then as September and October started rolling along, you hear from the BBC what was going on politically, but at the time I was still 19 and wasn’t sure what the hell was going on. So I just listened to my family and my mom telling me stuff about “Did you hear this? Or that?” I’m like “No I didn’t hear anything.”

Mark: A little busy then.

John: Yeah.

Mark: So when the yellow ribbons start appearing, were you aware of this? Did you know of this? The support for the war? You were aware of this before the war started.

John: I was aware of it before the war started. I was aware of it through mail and friends and family. It meant a lot that everybody’s behind us. We only had, my unit didn’t have a lot, maybe two Vietnam era soldiers left. Just from school history and some older NCO’s in their 30’s or 40’s you know. Everybody was giving us a lot of doubts at first. We heard that from here, stateside. Can they fight? What can they do? Nothing has been going on since 1975 or so, 20 years can they do anything? It was nice that people supported us like, alright this isn’t going to be another Vietnam. People are behind us. Maybe not the cause, ‘cause we were doing a lot of stuff that protesters started to come up in October and November. None of us want to hear that crap really. We don’t want to hear that shit. Everybody’s support really helped us. We started thinking let’s get this going and let’s get the hell out of here so we can go home.

Mark: So it sounds like morale was fairly high.

- John: Yeah it was pretty high. There were ups and downs depending on the person, depending on the family life, a lot of marriages were tested and torn apart. Some couples strengthened. I saw a lot of marriages go straight to hell. It was a key opportunity for them to cheat on their husbands or whatever. Tell them in letters. What are you going to do about it now?
- Mark: So the air war starts. You seem to have a very strong recollection of this. Why don't you just tell me the story.
- John: I remember we were seven clicks back from the border and two days earlier or three days earlier we got our second immunization shot. The big one you get in your butt. Everybody is thinking this has got to mean something if you're going to do this right now. Then what they did is, I worked in the area where the radio messages came down from battalion and then were distributed to the Captain, so I was working with my NCO and so he actually told me what was the plan. He let me know like a day in advance. It was kind of obvious because when they finished they issued out MOPP gear like one per person. They issued out two more packages per person and then they issued out the nerve agent pills and then like the day before, so the 16<sup>th</sup> they were starting to make us take the pills at four hour intervals, so it was like "OK. This has got to be happening." At night we could see the planes 'cause we could see the lights on so we could see a lot of them going and it's like "OK. This is it. What's going to happen next?" One, it was a relief- like it's finally starting, we can get this over with. No one had any clue how long it was going to last. We all thought, "Alright, no one even thought about that, point is that we were starting" We'd been sitting there for six months, waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. So now it's like "Let's go kick some ass and see how things go."
- Mark: So when you first got official word that there were bombs falling, was there a particular reaction among you and your cohorts there?
- John: It was like excitement. I don't think it was, it was a little bit of fear, "Now we're really in reality, now we are going to actually start fighting a war." Like I said, it was a relief. We weren't just going to sit there idly anymore. We were tired of doing drills. We wanted, 'cause we would just sit there. It's not like we could do anything.
- Mark: Of course the air war lasted six weeks and it was a little while yet before you got to do what you were trained to do. What happened during the air war phase? What were your activities then?
- John: Security really beefed up. The perimeters were tightened down so that we were in the middle of nowhere but the point was that at night anybody could come walking though because at night over there if the moon wasn't out you couldn't



see your hand in front of your face. It was really dark, but when the moon was out it was like this, bright as day. Then the training just kept going, then we kept hearing reports, we were still getting BBC coming through the short wave radios that one of my NCO's had. They were saying "They're bombing the hell out of this." We could hear them. Some of them close by the border. But, they were mainly talking about Baghdad and some of the other, another major city I can't really recall. So it was just the same thing, but the point was that we were getting going and...

Mark: But you could hear like their softening the front line positions, you were close enough to hear.

John: You could hear them in the distance. Every once in a while we could hear a barrage of bombs just landing. Very slightly. Sometimes you could feel the ground shake slightly, but nothing significant to rock you out of your bed.

Mark: You weren't shooting yet.

John: No. We weren't shooting yet. We were just sitting on guard duty, waiting. It's like "Now it's just a matter of time before we're going." Then about in the beginning of February they were talking like maybe we won't have to use ground forces. Most of us were like, "Oh that's bullshit, you can't have a war without ground forces. You can only get so much through the air."

Mark: When the actual invasion occurred, had you moved from where you were when the air war started?

John: We moved to a position, well it was kind of funny, my situation is very unusual. By the time the war started, I had switched from an ammo driver to LT. and platoon SGT. Driver. So I was driving a humvee now. What happened was, so I was doing all the ammo runs and the fuel runs and the parts runs because my LT. was the maintenance officer too. So, what happened was the plan was to move two clicks from the border, wait for orders, wait for the main invasion to go, 'cause I was part of the spearhead that went up and around the country.

Mark: Into Iraq.

John: Into Iraq. Correct. I wasn't in Kuwait at all in cause you thought I was talking about Kuwait. I'm sorry. So what happened is I went back for a humvee we'd left at maintenance battalion to get fixed, came back to where they were supposed to be and they were gone because the front wave moved so quickly they moved the timeframe up twelve hours from when we were supposed to leave. We were back on time but everyone else was gone. We knew which direction they went and we knew where the LD was. Line of Departure, across the border. We knew where that was so we just went there and they were just, it

was really strange, it was the middle of the night and there was a big sign “Welcome to Hell” or something. It was just kind of funny. Then the engineers had, there was berms and the engineers had plowed through the berms and there was lights. There was just a ton of units just flowing through here. We had to stop and get fuel because we were about out, but then eventually we ran into somebody who had seen our unit and we just kept tagging and tagging for about two more days to catch them. Finally we caught them. It was quite interesting. But it was more anxiety than anything. We’re by ourselves, there’s me and another vehicle and four guys and my LT. so it was like, “What do we do, Sir? You’re in charge.”

Mark: When the invasion occurred you were separated and it took you awhile to catch up. You seem to be impressed by the size of the invasion force.

John: Yeah I was.

Mark: What sort of things were moving past you or along side you? How much armor? How much infantry, ect. ?

John: The armor was kind of light until I got near my unit at the front line. There were Bradley’s and a couple of small armored personnel carriers, a lot of trucks, [END SIDE ONE]. I never really envisioned how big it was. Then you start seeing all these people and you start thinking, “There’s other nations”. There was some French to our west and some British toward our east and just the massive amount. It was hard for me to comprehend until I started driving up, past all these units and their line of departure. On, man, they just kept going. You’d look up the road for miles and they were just so full. Stuff would break down on the side and it was more than I had pictured. You’re so micro oriented when you’re on your own, ‘cause they are the only people you ever see or deal with is your own battery and battalion.

Mark: Did you run across any Iraqis? You had to cross what had been their position.

John: Not at that time. When we finally caught up with our unit, they were firing at the time and we caught up to them and then we would fire and move. So we fired, we moved. We got to this next position where we were supposed to fire but it ended up being a bunker relays throughout on the ground and a lot of POWs were coming out and surrendering. Well at the time we didn’t have the capability nor the manpower to start taking prisoners, so we took the prisoners and we searched their bunkers and destroyed their weapons and then we would give them food and water and then send them in the direction where the MP’s were supposed to be so they could be picked up.

Mark: What sort of impression did you get of their conditions and their training, ect.?

- John: Very poor. They were terribly equipped, their weapons were just old AK-47's. They had a couple of new ones. There were some older men. Men probably in their 60's. We could distinguish the men who were volunteers compared to some of the guys who were more trained and they usually had 20's and sometimes 30's. They were better clothed, had better weapons, they had 9 millimeters on them. They just looked a lot more healthier and they understood what was going on. Those were the guys who refused to do anything. They wouldn't cooperate.
- Mark: I was going to ask you did they put up any resistance at all?
- John: At first, we didn't get any trouble out of those guys. We thought they were Republican Guards. Everybody that they were with just gave up and we didn't know if it was a trick at first, to try to either get close to us or get us into their bunkers or whatever, but they didn't want to talk to us or give up their weapons. We just fire a couple of shots in the air, I recall, I can't really remember, and then they just set all their weapons down because no one knew Arabic so we had to try to communicate. They all put their weapons down when we fired into the air. It was fine. But the Republican Guards didn't want to take our food or water, everybody else did. So I think that was just in spite.
- Mark: And so you moved on from there. So, you caught up with your unit and you're in an actual combat situation. I think you mentioned before you were supporting an armored unit?
- John: Armored unit out of 101.
- Mark: I'm interested in your role in the combat. You were supporting the armor and just describe how you were doing that.
- John: Our duties were pretty simple as far as we were supporting. I believe it was a battalion of A1 Abrams and with their support Bradley's. The Bradley's mainly protected us while the A1's a kind of dispersed themselves out, along a couple of clicks out and about. What kind of patten, I'm sure that they're more familiar with. We used a main secure road once we were in Iraq. One of the major highways, I can't tell you what the name is. The basic idea was to support them over to two to three mile things that they couldn't really get an accurate reading on, or get an accurate shot on. Or, they would support us or protect us mainly within a two mile or three mile radius. Because if they started incoming artillery we would take care of it for them.
- Mark: Did they get some incoming artillery? I'm interested in Iraqi resistance. The impression you get watching the news back in the States said it was a cakewalk, that there wasn't much combat, that it was a fairly simple, dare I say, surgical operation. I'm interested in as I'm hearing it from someone who was in there in

a combat situation. How much resistance did they put up, how much shooting did they do?

John: At first we would get in positions and they would just tell us to saturate an area. We would do that. Then we would ride through it and there would really be nothing there. One time that we got some artillery back, it was light, very light, probably a 98 or 105, and they always fell short and then once we got their grid, we would saturate the area. One time we drove right through that area and we found 155's, 105's, some 98's regular Howitzer, a Russian Howitzer and they weren't really hidden. Either we fell short or they just finally gave them up. They were in good shape for the most part. The 155's were in the best shape as far as mechanically. The rest of the equipment was in really poor shape, not working correctly or just poor maintenance, either rusted or very hard to, cause we tried, we eventually took them with us. They didn't seem very well organized. I don't know if the air did that to cut off communication, which is what we were told, but the only fighting that we really started getting was once we got up the Tigris River and near Basra and Iraq. That's where we started hitting parts of the Republican Guard or a heavy force because they were in a city and we were told that they were cut off from communication. That's where we got most of the incoming from. We never really got any within 300 meters.

Mark: So your unit didn't really take any casualties so to speak.

John: My battalion took one casualty, but it was just an accident. He picked up an ordinance of MLRS and it had gone off and he jarred it and it exploded. That was the only death that we had. We would just cover whoever was near us. We were in one firefight directly, small arms. There were supposed to be MP's just in front of us and they were supposed to be securing the road and then screening. By this time you've got tons and tons of EPW's just walking past the road, they all have white flags or white something and you would always keep an eye on them just in case, but one time a van was coming down the road and my battery is on the side of the road, just sitting there. Earlier we had been watching a tank battle with some T-72's which was kind of cool. They came down and started to open fire on the beginning of the battery. We were all in line and it started at the beginning for some reason. I don't know if he was just trying to take out the commander or it wasn't, once it started doing that, we were in our secure positions on both sides of the vehicle. Everybody kind of went to one side and started firing out on this truck, one guy ended up hitting the 203. Do you know what that is?

Mark: No.

John: It's like the hand helds that you see on the 16's. They're just little grenade launchers. Hit with a 203 and end up being flipped and landing on it's side. So we went there to try to secure it and pulled one guy out. Everybody else had

been shot out. Our medic tried saving the one guy and he had to cut his foot off because it was caught. But he ended up dying anyway, because he had multiple gunshot wounds.

Mark: That was the only real firefight you were in?

John: yes.

Mark: Describe this tank battle to me.

John: The tank battle was really cool. This is the same position, we were waiting because we had run out of fuel and we had fired and ran out of fuel so we were stuck on this point until I could come back and I had just come back so we were refueling. Off to our left, was a small tank battle of A1's and it was kind of down in the valley but it was a flat valley. The A1's were firing on the move and you could see these other tanks, these little puffs of smoke and later you would hear the sounds. Saw the A1's blow up a couple of turrets. It was almost unreal, just like kind of sitting back and watching a movie or something. It was surreal to me.

Mark: It was a fairly one sided battle?

John: Yeah. It was. I didn't see, the one time I actually saw an A1 in trouble was with two T-72's moving in on it from a side position. It was at a distance but it looked like the turret was facing one way but they were coming in from the other side and from the rear. I'm not sure he knew it but it was just really strange because all of a sudden two Cobras or two Apaches came out, I'm not sure where they came from they came from behind me so I didn't see them until they passed over me and blew up the two 72's. It was very interesting to see multiple things going on. There were some Hogs going onto the A-10's. Some of those were driving by and shooting, but I didn't see them hit any tanks. It was nice to see all the different things work together.

Mark: So the ground war only lasted about 100 hours. Do you remember where you were when you stopped?

John: What's kind of strange is that because of the parts stuff, we were always going back looking for parts and going back and forth. What our guys would do is they would kind of play a joke on us almost every time we came back. They would try to get us to do something stupid. One time this last time we came back to that fore position where I had the firefight and that ended up being our last position that we held. We had gone and come back with some parts and they were like "Hey! Cease fire!" We told them we weren't going to fall for that one. We got stuff to do. Eventually they said they were serious and teletyped out

commander and he verified it. We were ecstatic and the next question was, "When do we go home?"

Mark: I was wondering, before the invasion started were you aware of what the plans were going to be or it's my impression that a lot of guys thought they were going to be going all the way to Baghdad. You apparently weren't under that impression at all.

John: It had come down the pipe, because I worked with the control center like I said earlier with the radios and my NCO told me what the plan was before the air was had even started. He told me positions and stuff like that and he was only telling a couple of us and he told us not to tell everybody because things could change. But he explained to us what was going on and when I came back I saw a briefing by Gen. Schwarzkopf.

Mark: The famous TV briefing.

John: The famous TV briefing. I saw the beginning of it but didn't pay a lot of attention to it. That's what had happened. The idea was to use the French way west as a diversion going straight to Baghdad and make it appear this was to draw the Iraqi troops and then our spearhead would come up after the French to cut them off. I didn't really know about the Marines on the shoreline. That I never really paid attention to. But the idea still was to come around and circle them and engulf them and get them either trapped, one side trapped off, caught between two lines and it worked.

Mark: So your first thought is "When the hell are we going home?" How long did it take for you to get back?

John: After the cease fire, the cease fire didn't really take effect until two or three more days because the communication was cutoff from the city that some of the troops were fighting with so they kept us there until the Republican Guard from Baghdad could come down and tell them that it's over. You could still hear artillery going off in the background and some small arms fire too. So they kept us around there until that was done.

Mark: You weren't on the move anymore.

John: No. We weren't on the move anymore. Once that was done the big thing for us was we wanted to go straight south. We wanted to go through Kuwait and we figured it would be quicker and this is what we came for, we at least wanted to be in the country. But generals or whomever made the decisions and we went back the same way we came. Back and around Kuwait and through Saudi. We got back to the cities probably mid-March, I'd have to look at my diary.

Mark: You got back to the States then?

John: No, no I got back to Dhahran mid-March and Cobart Towers and then from there we just had to clean our vehicles inside and out and they, inspectors, were very picky about dirt out from under places you never knew your vehicle had.

Mark: What was the concern? Was this military crap or disease concern?

John: Disease concern, they didn't know what the dirt held and at first, the Saudis were having a big hoopla about the religious sand leaving the country. They didn't want any war artifacts leaving the country. They didn't want anything that was theirs to leave the country. Then there was disease, they wouldn't allow bringing in fruits because of fruit flies or any disease that might spread into, mainly that was what the dirt was too, they didn't want it to affect any crops.

Mark: So you finally got to leave.

John: We left March 28<sup>th</sup> so it was exactly seven months for me.

Mark: Did you fly?

John: We flew back again on a 747 again.

Mark: Ft. Bragg?

John: Yep. Flew into Pope and then went back to work.

Mark: In the news media there was a big deal made of parades and all this kind of thing. Did you get to participate in that sort of thing? Did you want to?

John: I think it would have been nice. It really hooped up 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne since they were the first over there, first back. They got a big parade and all. It would have been nice but the only people who were there for us when we came back were our families. Flew into Polk and my mom had driven down from D.C. and she was there. It was nice, it was small, it was no big deal. We flew back at night, it I remember right.

Mark: Did you get a little leave?

John: Yes. Some of us, I stayed a little while, a week for so and then went on leave for a month and came back. Our vehicles weren't supposed to be in until we finally drove them down at the dock. And load them up and it took a good month for them to come back, maybe a month and a half.

Mark: then back to work. Back to training?

- John: Back to training. When we were over there we had painted our vehicles a tan, sand color so that was the main thing when we first came back as to make sure everything worked, made sure the seawater hadn't eroded any of the computer equipment and then we painted a battery, we left a battery sand and we had to paint the rest back to green. The new went straight back to the good old Germany doctrine.
- Mark: So after having been in a war and then going through the training thing, how did that seem to you? Did you train with more seriousness or less seriousness or did it affect anything at all?
- John: It didn't affect anything at all. It was the same seriousness. They made us take back a lot of things that we would be able to keep as far as changes in the doctrine, as far as field services, humvee's, a lot of us added on to our humvees using plywood and 2x4's and stuff like that. We added boxes and things like that to carry ammunition or goods or whatever because the canvases weren't, the sand got everywhere and it was so much easier to secure everything. You had people whose job during the war was to go hock, go around and see what they could find of other people's stuff. Because parts were a real pain in the butt to find.
- Mark: This brings up something I meant to ask earlier, so we're going backwards in time. If you would describe sort of your accommodations in the field, in the desert, what was it like to live in a camp in the desert? Where did you sleep, how did you sleep, what did you do all day if you weren't training or did you spend all your day training? Social life of the community?
- John: Usually in the morning we did PT, almost every day.
- Mark: Get up at six in the morning?
- John: We got up at five or six. Same kind of thing for the most part. We either had to do it earlier in the morning for heat measures or late at night. Early in the morning was the best time to do it. So we would do PT maybe every other day, then the other days, during our time off if we weren't training they eventually started letting us, we would write letters or we'd play volleyball. After you've been there awhile you start accumulating your, people started sending stuff to us like we finally ended up with a TV and a VCR.
- Mark: Someone sent you one?
- John: Yes. Or we would requisition one from somewhere. People would finally start sending us tapes and we would just watch movies, or play sand volleyball or play cards or talk about our personal lives or what we were going to do with the



money that we're saving now when we get back. Guard duty and training took up time.

Mark: What sort of sleeping accommodations did you have? Big tents? Did you have to sleep...

John: It depends on the person. No, we all slept in tents. Since we were the first there we got to acquire white Saudi tents, they're all over the place. A lot of goat farmers used them, they're just a white 10x10 sometimes larger 12x12 or 16x16 and what we would do is set those up and sand out and it's much easier to stay sanitary but mostly we slept on cots or we would dig into the sand and sand bag it up so that way in case stuff started coming in we would have some protection, like a bunker. The food was OK. We got T-rats.

Mark: I don't know what a T-rat is.

John: It's like a big Dinty Moore kind of thing. A big aluminum can with all turkey or beef or whatever and you could heat those up. Those were normal. Plus we had MRE's for lunch. After awhile we actually got some Class A's which were real food.

Mark: A cook coming in to cook it for you?

John: We had our own cooks. We would get soda but nobody would drink it because the carbonation was hot and you never had any ice. Occasionally, some of the cooks gave us ice but it was pretty rare.

Mark: Did you get a special Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner or something?

John: We got a special Thanksgiving dinner. We had some turkey and T-rat turkey, I ended up getting sick on Thanksgiving. I had to go to the medic. I probably caught food poisoning just from sitting around. Christmas was a good time and people started making their own hooch.

Mark: Is that right? Just like on MASH?

John: Yeah. Not to the same extent. We didn't have a still but just a simple time yeast and a kind of fruit water and sugar and let it ferment and it worked. You get used to it.

Mark: The Saudis weren't going to let any alcohol in.

John: No. It was kind of strange because some alcohol didn't make it overseas through the mail. At first they were screening big time, but after awhile there was just so much coming through, I think a mail run once and we had a hammet full. A

hammet bed is probably 25 feet long or so and it was full of boxes, plus the letters. The mail was so enormous after awhile that...

Mark: Did you really get to sit down and read your letters?

John: Oh, yeah. After awhile classes would send us from anywhere. They would just kind of randomly, back in the cities. We'd have to drive like three hours to get the mail and stuff. We just ran and got that stuff or sometimes people knew a teacher in class and the classroom would send something to that soldier and he would pass them around. We had plenty of time to write. You never wrote on guard duty, you just sat there and talked but you had a lot of free time eventually to write letters home and I started using the tape recorder to send stuff because I got tired of writing.

Mark: You were on the move then when the ground war started. How did you sleep and what did you eat during that?

John: Mainly MRE's. Pretty much all MRE's once you started moving. Believe it or not you get used to MRE's and I enjoy them, even now I'm still a reservist. Once we started moving we just slept in our vehicles or we slept, we never setup tents. Once we started moving the tents and all that wood stuff was gone. We just threw it out and left it for the indigents. You'd leave it alone for 30 seconds and it was gone.

Mark: Bedouins?

John: Yeah. Bedouins.

Mark: Did you have much contact with them? Were they around the desert?

John: We ran into a couple of farms that seemed to be in the middle of nowhere and they would get quite upset when we would cut through their farms. They'd come out with their wooden sticks and start beating on the vehicles and stuff like that. We'd apologize the best we could but kept moving.

Mark: This is in Iraq somewhere?

John: Yeah this is in Iraq. A lot of these people didn't seem, I think they knew what was going on but they didn't really care. They just cared about their farms and making their living and no one ever gave us a hassle or anything like that.

Mark: So you got out later that year.

John: Yes. I got out in September. I was supposed to get out in October but I took terminal leave.

Mark: You decided not to reenlist. When you talk about your Reserve status is this the inactive reserve?

John: I'm an active reservist.

Mark: So you had to go sign up for this again.

John: No. The deal with my contract was I was in for two years plus training so two and a half active and then I could go either inactive or active Reserve. When I got out of the service, I went inactive, but had a hard time finding a job at first so I went active to get the extra \$200 a week. I needed the money.

Mark: When you got out what were your plans? What did you want to do?

John: I wanted to come back and go to school right away, but I came out in September and I hadn't had time to make enrollment, I didn't have a chance to try to enroll in school because I was in the war. We got back in March, but by then if you don't enroll like a year before you're not going to get in. So I lived with a friend of mine in Madison until I could, I was just looking around for jobs and had a hard time finding a job and a lot of people were like, either the pay wasn't enough to support me, \$5 is just not enough to support anybody really. That or a lot of good jobs required college education. So, I eventually started driving a school bus that paid enough if I worked a lot of hours I could make it living with my friend and the Reserve pay.

Mark: But you did eventually start school.

John: Yes. I started school in the fall of '92. As soon as I got back I sent my transcripts in and enrolled and they accepted me so I've been going to school ever since.

Mark: So you got the new Montgomery GI Bill. Does it cover your expenses?

John: No. Not really. I've got a lot of toys. I had a lot of expenses when I got out. I had a car payment and stuff like that, plus the insurance that goes with it and rent and food and when I first got out I got health insurance because the Army covers you but only to an extent, or veterans VA benefits. When you got out I didn't think Ft. Bragg was good at explaining everything to you. You had 90 days to get this done. A lot of people were out processing at the time. Expenses were high so that's why I had a hard time adjusting. My government GI Bill wasn't enough for me, but I had the college fun on top of that and still wasn't enough. I only get \$550 a month from them. Tuition is \$1,300-1,400 a semester plus books plus any other normal rent and utilities and car payments and so on.

Mark: That's in-state tuition?

John: Yes. That's in-state tuition.

Mark: If I'm interviewing a World War II vet I'll ask if they used a home loan or any of that sort of thing. You haven't probably got to that point yet.

John: No I haven't got to that point yet.

Mark: I'll skip the home loan business here. In general, readjustment problems after the war, you talked about trouble getting a job and one thing about college. Do you think that without your Montgomery GI Bill you'd have still gone on to college?

John: No. My parents couldn't afford it so I wouldn't have gone. Initially that was the main reason I wanted to go. I wanted to go to college and I wanted to do it on a low loan basis, I didn't want to have to owe any money and I felt that was the best way to get it done.

Mark: Other sort of readjustment problems. You mention trouble finding work and paying for school. Some of the World War II vets and Vietnam vets describe nightmares or feelings that the civilian population didn't understand what it was they were doing. Just in the short, brief time you've been back, do you have any sort of problems like that?

John: I had problems adjusting to the civilian world again. The military is, you know what you gotta do, you know when you have to do it and how to do it. Here it's just like, nobody really helps you. You kind of have to help yourself. As far as getting a bad reaction, a lot of people didn't understand how hard it was to adjust. That was the thing. Civilians don't understand what it's like in the military. The Persian Gulf really helped us, especially when I was still coming out because you mentioned that you were in the Army and you mentioned the Persian Gulf and a lot of sympathy came to you and they'd try to help you a little bit more. That was nice. Some people said it was the mentality of like, Vietnam era veterans because it was more that we were stupid, that we really didn't understand what was going on, I mean, a lot of people that think of "Alright, they were drafted or they were convicts." A lot of that was true. They'd be a prisoner during Vietnam so they were just like, I think they were thinking we were the same way and they still think it's like it used to be in the military. Not that it's changed at all. A lot of people are now very well educated, have to be educated if you want to stay in the military.

Mark: It's very competitive these days. Do you think a lot of people view veterans with some sort of disdain?

- John: Some do, I think. When I was job interviewing a lot of people said “OK, that’s good, good leadership and good work experience” but they were afraid to take the chance, as opposed to somebody coming out of high school. I thought I offered more than a kid coming out of high school, but a lot of them used education as an excuse. They were like, “We’ll train you”, but they wanted me to go to college anyway. At the time I was kind of upset about it.
- Mark: That’s interesting. Nightmares or that sort of thing? You didn’t see a lot of heavy combat...
- John: No I didn’t see a lot of heavy combat, I saw a lot of dead bodies, Iraqis burnt and charred and things like that. The thing that we used to get over it, at least the guys that I was with, we would start to name them kind of humorous names so that “There’s fried Fred” just kind of funny names so that we’d you know, cause we’d pass the same points and these bodies would stay there for days. I actually ran over a body once. It was just an easier way to deal with it. To think of them as not real, I suppose. We stopped and we looked at them and we were told not to take any pictures of EPW’s or dead bodies and I never did. I was up close to them and would smell burnt tire and burnt flesh combination, one of the most unusual smells I wont forget, or disgusting smell.
- Mark: So you seem to reflect back on this once in a while. Does it give you any problems?
- John: It doesn’t give me nightmares or problems. I reflect back on it because people always ask me if I’ve killed anyone and I usually answer “Yes.”
- Mark: Do people ask you that?
- John: Yes, That’s probably the first question out of people’s mouths when they find out I’ve been in a war. It depends on who it is. Sometimes I’ll answer truthfully, which is “Yes.” I do assume responsibility for some of the deaths, maybe not by my own hand. Other times I’ll answer “No” because people are either too fanatical about it or...
- Mark: You mean blood-thirsty?
- John: Yes. Either blood thirsty for military people or I don’t think they’d understand. It’s hard to explain to people why. “How could you do that?” Well it was my job and it was their life or my life and I wanted to come home too. I didn’t want to be there as much as he didn’t but I’m not going to sit there and...
- Mark: That’s interesting. A lot of World War II guys I talked to say the people never ask anything. It’s interesting that people question you.

John: They ask me all the time. A lot of kids ask too. Little kids. I've done a couple of Veterans Day stuff and I've talked to a couple of elementary school classes and that's the main thing. But a lot of adults ask me that too. Twenty and Thirty year olds. Seems like it's a fear or something.

Mark: That sort of leads into my next and last area. Veterans activities and veterans groups and that sort of thing. First of all, since you've been back have you joined any groups like the VFW or the Legion or this sort of thing? Veterans groups?

John: No I didn't join the VFW or the American Legion mainly because my first thing I got from those people when I first came back was a hard time, so to speak. You didn't really fight. You're not a real, they would never come out and say it per se. They were implying that I'm just like, that's fine. Now a couple of years later now they're trying to recruit a lot of us because a lot of them are getting older and their membership is dwindling substantially. I don't associate with them. I do keep in contact with some of the people because they have a lot of pull and power and money. They know a lot of people so it's kind of nice to...

Mark: Which people are you talking about?

John: VFW and American Legion. Those older guys know a lot of names and stuff like that and they can help you as far as if you're looking for something.

Mark: What about lesser known groups. I know that there is, I'm told but I haven't actually talked to them, there's some organization of Gulf War vets supposedly being organized in town here. Are you involved in Vets for Vets thing on campus here?

John: Yes. I'm involved in the Vets for Vets on campus. I go to the meetings and that's the one thing that really helped me out when I came back. Once I got into the school I had a few high school friends left but the majority of my friends now are just people I meet from Vets for Vets and getting started as far as readjusting. I was only a 21 year old freshman which isn't that old but compared to 17 and 18 year olds coming in, it was really nice to talk to people, there aren't many Persian Gulf war veterans. I think there are two or three. A lot of them were in during but not many were over there. Mike Zintek was with 826 here in Madison so he was over there but there aren't a lot and as far as I know I'm the only combat veteran who actually saw any front line. That really helped me out a lot.

Mark: To go back a little, do you feel like an oddity on campus? Older and having seen a little of the world so to speak?

John: No. Not really. Sometimes it's funny but the military really grew me up. I learned a lot. It makes me, it doesn't really help my studies, it does to a point that I take it in and if it's a good lecture I don't mind really arguing with the

professor, which some of the other kids seem intimidated by him. I don't really get intimidated very easily by somebody who thinks they know. usually I just make him explain it a little more so that I can understand. I don't stress out as much as they do. Like at exams. I don't stress out as much I used to. I just let everything is going to happen and there is nothing I can do. I just deal with it when its here and not try and plan it.

Mark: The last thing I want to talk about. Your Veterans Day activities. Is this through vets for vets or did you get involved separately?

John: You mean for the children?

Mark: Just to have you explain what you do on Veterans Day.

John: That's vets for vets. The campus usually has a Veterans Day thing over at the museum or the library and we go to that every year and sometimes I'll talk to kids about why we have a military, what war's all about and why did we go to war.

Mark: How did you get started?

John: I also work for the vets center which is the counseling center here in Madison for Vietnam and Persian Gulf veterans. Mainly deals with Vietnam, but now we're getting into the Persian Gulf veterans and the Persian Gulf Syndrome and things like that. I have done a couple of talks to individuals. When I first came back from the war too, I talked to a lot of my younger cousins' classes who were interested in knowing what it was like and learning more about veterans. I'm more than happy to do that because a lot of people, I like people to know.

Mark: Gulf War Syndrome is something I forgot to mention actually. You apparently haven't gone through any of that.

John: I don't have the symptoms. I still haven't gone through the physical, the register, I'm still waiting to get in, but I haven't had any side effects or anything.

Mark: You took the pills?

John: I took the pills.

Mark: Another one of the culprits they suspect might have been the suntan lotion, sun block.

John: They issued sun block and I used it for the most part. After awhile I stopped using it because I was so busy. But starting in January we were in MOPP 2 gear, the tops and bottoms until, I didn't get out of those until March. After while it wasn't necessary because of the hats. I wasn't exposed to the sun.

Mark: Did you have any sort of chemical alert or any indication that chemical weapons were nearby?

John: There were two incidents that I remember. One is I was driving back to get some parts and I was coming up on an area. I was driving down the road and a guy was giving a signal for gas so I pulled over and put a gas on. Then we drove up farther and he said that everything is clear. I asked if he was sure and he assured me that all was fine. The other time was when we went to MOPP 4 because I happened to be on duty at the time so I went in MOPP 4 and told everybody else too so people come out nonchalantly asking "What's going on?" I'm yelling at them MOPP 4 and then we'd test it with the 257 and nothing came up positive and so the commander gave the all clear. We kind of have to hope. But it was really light and we tested again later in the day and there was nothing there.

Mark: Instruments do malfunction I suppose.

John: Yeah. They do malfunction and the wind constantly blows over there so you don't know if it just traced over that one area and was gone of if it came through or not. None of the other meters went off in the other parts of the camp.

Mark: In your work at the vets center, do you know of veterans in town here who suffer from that? Is it fairly common? Uncommon?

John: It seems to be uncommon in my personal experience. I've talked to people on the phone in this area and a couple from out of state who are coming to this area and asking what they can do to get going. A lot of them, I've talked to some people who say they have cancer and talked to a woman whose husband was there and now she has cancer and I honestly have no real opinion as to whether or not this is true. Whose to say it's just not one particular area or a combination of things. It bothers me at times and I think "Tomorrow I could just be sick or next year I could be sick". Do I relate that back to the war or do I say that's just something that happens.

Mark: Ever been in contact with people your served with?

John: No. There's one guy in Minneapolis that when I'm up there I'll call him, but no.

Mark: You've exhausted my questions. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

John: No.

Mark: Well, thanks for taking the time.



**[End of Interview]**