

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**JOHN PETERS**

Infantry, Army, Persian Gulf War

2015

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2011

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**2011**

**Peters, John. (b. 1969).** Oral History Interview, 2015.

Approximate length: 2 hours 4 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, John Peters discusses his service with the Army beginning in 1988 and ending in 1997, including his basic training and initial station, service and combat in the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War, reenlistments, and serving as a recruiter. Peters enlisted during his last year of high school, and discusses leaving for training before his high school graduation ceremony. He then describes his basic training and his advanced training to become a mechanized infantryman, both at Fort Benning (Georgia). Peters' first duty assignment was in October of 1988 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. He talks about his real desire to go to jump school, and discusses his chance to join jump school in 1991, after a reenlistment. Peters returns to discussing Fort Hood in 1988, and talks about the daily life there and the culture shock of living in Texas. Peters got his first chance for reenlistment in 1990, and after some deliberation decided to reenlist shortly before the start of the Gulf War. He describes getting deployment orders, and the month and a half of preparation and training before his unit went overseas. He discusses his assignments in the Middle East, including guarding the border in Saudi Arabia and clearing out bunkers in Iraq. Peters then talks about the post-combat capture of several Iraqi soldiers, and trying to save the life of one who had been shot.

Peters describes coming home to parades and warm welcomes, and feeling guilty that they were being treated so well when Vietnam soldiers were not. He discusses an awards ceremony and receiving his bronze star. He talks about his reassignments and being assigned as a recruiter in Wisconsin. Peters describes his two years of being a recruiter as the worst of his life. He talks about the leadership structure of the recruiting station at the time, and his decision to leave the Army. He discusses his son being in the Army at the time of the interview and how the Army has changed since he was in.

Other topics of note in the interview include: R&R in Saudi Arabia, his time with the Airborne in Fort Bragg, finding a job after the Army.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Peters (b.1969) served with the Army in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry division. After being discharged he worked for various companies, and at the time of the interview works as an Employment and Training Specialist.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks and Helen Gibb, 2015.

Edited by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract written by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

## Interview Transcript

Brooks: Today is October 21, 2015. This is an interview with John Peters, who served with the Army in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division from 1988 through 1997 and he served during the Persian Gulf War. The interview is being conducted at Mid-State Technical College in Marshfield, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. Also in the room is Helen Gibb, another WVM staff member. Let's start at the beginning if you can tell me when and where you were born.

Peters: I was born October 24, 1969 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Brooks: Did you grow up in Oshkosh?

Peters: Part of my childhood. Grew up there until about sixth grade then moved to Merrill, Wisconsin. Then basically finished out the rest of my childhood there—went to high school, graduated from Merrill.

Brooks: Tell me a little bit about your family—siblings, parents.

Peters: Pretty much raised by my mother—single parent. I've got two siblings, both brothers - actually a twin brother, about as opposite as we come. Then an older brother—he's three years older. Actually, he had served in the Army as well for four years. That was kind of one of the reasons why I looked at the military and decided to go into the Army.

Brooks: Tell us a little bit more about that decision.

Peters: I guess, I had thought about it for quite a while. When I was growing up, as a teenager, I just really wasn't decided on what branch. I was one of those kids where it's like, "What do I do?" I wanted to go to college but I don't know if I'm really ready for it. I was one of those where I just wanted to get out of Merrill and not to speak badly about that small town but it was a culture shock moving from Oshkosh to a much smaller town and so I figured, well the Army—the military in general—that's a quick avenue to do that and I wanted the excitement. I wanted to go shoot weapons, blow things up, have fun, travel, that kind of thing. That was my main reason why I wanted to go in.

Brooks: And your brother went in before you then?

Peters: Yeah, he graduated—my brother Roger—in '85 and he went in right away into the Army, he was in air defense artillery. He was stationed in Germany and then Fort Carson, Colorado and then got out after about four years. Our service overlapped about a year and a half, two years.

Brooks: Immediately before you went into the Army, what were you doing?

Peters: I was basically in high school. I was workin' a part-time job here and there. My situation was kind of interesting because I signed up between my junior and senior year on a delayed entry program. Of course, you can do that a year in advance. I did that, picked

out my job, and I was supposed to ship out. Unfortunately for the slots for infantrymen—which is what I wanted—the counselor at the entrance processing station down in Milwaukee says, "Well, I could ship you out June third or we can wait until September. Everything's filled up for the summer. When do you graduate?" I said, "I really don't know. I'll get back to you on that but June third—I'm taking it." I actually was forced to graduate a couple of days early—took all my finals early because I shipped out—I think our graduation was on the fifth or sixth of June and so I never walked across the stage. I've got my diploma but I was already in basic training. I wanted to get it over and done with—I didn't want to wait around all summer just being bored.

Brooks: What were the reactions of people around you, like your family and friends, to you enlisting?

Peters: I don't think that they were surprised. I'd always talked about it. Obviously with my brother being in there, of course, he always told me, "Don't be an idiot, don't go Army—go Air Force." He was stationed at an air base in Germany and he's like, "They've got it made—the best facilities, the best everything." I didn't listen. I guess no one was really surprised because I'd talked about it. Of course, my mother had to sign on the dotted line for me 'cause when I enlisted, at the time, I was still seventeen. She had the typical reservations of a mom but she signed. They weren't shocked or surprised or anything. They were encouraging and supportive.

Brooks: Tell me a little about basic training.

Peters: [00:05:04] Basic training. I shipped out June 3, 1988. Fort Benning, Georgia in the middle of summer—that was quite the adventure. I don't think I'd felt heat like that ever before. My basic training and advanced individual training—AIT they call it, where you learn your job that you join the Army for—they combined that for certain military occupation specialties. My basic and my advanced training—learning to be an infantryman was all combined into one. It was like over three months—I think I was done in mid-September. Kind of a culture shock—probably like most kids that go in at that age, the first couple of days you're like "What the hell am I doing here?" After a few days adjusting I was like, "Okay I can get into this." I think just getting acclimated to the heat and the humidity—that took a little bit.

It was interesting when I went in—Fort Benning is such a huge base and they had the old World War II barracks, or training areas, and all the wooden structures that they used for World War II training troops. And then they had the brand new—Sand Hill they called it—they looked like a dormitory for a college. Brand new buildings, several stories tall, air conditioning. We were one of the last units to get stuck into Harmony Church—that was the old barracks. They were actually getting ready to tear them down so our first three weeks there we were living in—we called it splinter city because there was all of these old dilapidated wood buildings—no hot water, cockroaches everywhere. The one good thing is the drill sergeants really didn't make us clean anything 'cause they were going to tear the things down anyway. After that, after about three weeks we moved into a similar building—they were still World War II era buildings but they were refurbished

so they were livable. That was interesting seeing the open bay concept. I guess kind of like what traditional soldiers—guys in World War II, Korea and Vietnam—would have experienced. It was kind of cool.

Brooks: Can you tell me more about the culture shock and what you were expecting versus what basic training and AIT was really like?

Peters: I guess I really wasn't kind of ready for it—I think I was more surprised at the shock. It's like, "I want to do this, I want to do this." And then one can never really prepare themselves—when you get to the reception station and they're yelling, screaming at you. That first couple of days—again, I think everybody probably does this - they're thinking "What the hell am I doing? Do I really want to do this?" I always tell myself "This is just temporary. Just deal with it." The first couple of days was a little rough but after that, and especially once you're out of the reception station, you've got issued everything - your shots, your physical—and you're in a basic training unit then I guess it was more tolerable, where you're always busy obviously. I guess you don't have time to sit there and think, "Jeez, what am I doing here? Did I make the right decision?"

My basic training experience was probably much better than most. I was one of those where my philosophy was "Shut up. Don't get noticed. Don't be the class clown because you'll be singled out by the drill sergeant and they will—what they call—smoke you. You'll be the push up king." You never want to put a bull's eye on your forehead. I never really was the target of a drill sergeant. One of the most memorable moments in basic training was halfway through it, in-ranks inspection the big drill sergeant is going from guy to guy, you know, inspecting, looking at your uniform. He gets to me and he's like—looks me over: "Who the hell are you private?" "Private Peters, drill sergeant." Looking me over. "I don't remember you. You must be doing something right but I got your name." That got followed up with a threat. That was the biggest compliment you could probably get in basic training. You never volunteer. Some guys they thrived on being the class clowns and cracking a joke or laughing in formation. Maybe they enjoyed doing pushups or feeling the wrath of the drill sergeant but I stayed quiet.

Brooks: [00:10:25] Within your training unit, did you know anybody when you went in?

Peters: No. There were a number of - I think about four of us that shipped out from the Milwaukee—the MEPS station, the Military Entrance Processing Station, where we all got on the flight and went to Fort Benning so it was kind of nice, I wasn't by myself. I didn't know the guys—they were all from Wisconsin, of course. I didn't know really anybody. There were a few guys from Wisconsin there but nobody that I recognized, or knew or anything like that.

Brooks: Tell me what your AIT was for? What were you being trained for?

Peters: I joined to be an infantryman. Once we were done the first, roughly month and a half—six weeks or so—is your basic training. Everybody learns your basic skills to be a soldier. You advanced into your AIT—your advanced training, to learn whatever you're going to

do. What's nice is that instead of having to go to another Army base to go to your AIT, everything was right at Fort Benning because that's where all infantrymen are trained. You wouldn't even know from when basic training ended, to AIT started. I think we got an off-base pass for like half a day or something like that, let off some steam. Basically AIT, some of it was what basic training was—we had basic rifle marksmanship in basic, and as an infantryman you have advanced rifle marksmanship where you're shooting at moving targets—a little bit more difficult, small unit tactics, that kind of stuff.

The AIT lasted about six, seven weeks, which was nice because some MOSs, some jobs in the Army, their AIT can last six months or more. I found out later in AIT because when you sign up you're what they call 11X—that's the designation. 11 series is infantry and X is what they call uncommitted. Once you're in AIT then they decide what kind of infantryman are you going to be? Are you going to be a mortar man—just a regular infantryman carrying a rifle? At that time they had 11H—for hotel—that was the Tow missile gunner and then—it was kind of a new MOS—was 11 mike—11M—and that's mechanized on the Bradley fighting vehicle. I don't know what the rhyme or reason, I was selected for mechanized, which I'm glad I was. Once we were done with AIT I had to spend additional—all the guys going to mechanized infantry, they had to go an extra two weeks to basically get familiarized with the Bradley fighting vehicle. We ended up having to stick around there for the two weeks and then once we were done with that you got your assignment—your first duty station. Of course, I went home on leave for about seven or ten days.

Brooks: Do you remember what you felt when you learned you were going to be a mechanized infantryman?

Peters: I guess at that time I don't really know. You just hear mechanized infantry—I first thought, "What the hell is that? I don't want to be a mechanic." They told you what it is. All I knew was I didn't want to be a mortar man. I didn't want to sit there and lob rounds in. To me that just seemed boring. I just wanted to be a regular rifleman and mechanized seemed kind of cool. I was happy with it. Part of me, I guess was a little worried because one of the things I always wanted to do was get an airborne option and go to jump school—parachute school—and get assigned to an active jump unit, like the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. Unfortunately, I couldn't get that in my contract when I first enlisted because I only enlisted for two years. I figured, "This is a try-out basis but then after two years I can get out and do whatever. I can always re-enlist." They always tell you, "You can't get it when you first enlist but they'll ask for volunteers when you're at basic training." Right, well, 'course you believe that and once you're in, you know, drill sergeants are like, "Ha, yeah." Seems like every recruiter tells that story. Very hard to get it and then I figured being mechanized it's going to be difficult to get that school because you just don't have paratroopers being mechanized infantry—they can't drop those things out of an aircraft. I did end up getting jump school but I had to wait and re-enlist my first re-enlistment. I did get it—just took a while.

Brooks: [00:15:39] Did you say you did two extra weeks of training after your—

Peters: Yeah, after our regular AIT. We had the graduation ceremony, which I didn't have to sit through—which was nice. I was recognized as the top marksman for basic and advanced training marksmanship. They singled us out—you get a goofy plaque. Once that's done go off to the bleachers and the others do the parade past the commander. We got an overnight pass and then we had to report for the two week mechanized school.

Brooks: And had you done shooting before - in your civilian life?

Peters: I had. I shot firearms—not a lot. I did go deer hunting twice. I ended up shooting a deer, I think when I was sixteen—fifteen or sixteen. Yeah, I was familiar with firearms and, I don't know, I seemed to be good at it—especially with the advanced marksmanship. That was interesting because it's one thing to hit a pop-up target that's two hundred meters away but when it's on a rail and it's moving and you don't know if it's coming towards you or sideways, that takes some practice. It was kind of fun being able to do that and have that skill.

Brooks: And what happened after graduation?

Peters: After graduation, went back home on leave. I think I was home about seven days and then I had orders to report to my first duty assignment which was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, Texas.

Brooks: Did you have a concept of what you'd be doing there?

Peters: I figured obviously it would be a heavy mechanized unit or armored unit. A lot of the—I guess to this day, they still do it—they have these heavy combined armor units, or mechanized units, where you've got a battalion of heavy M1 Abrams tanks, and then intermixed in them, you've got, say, a battalion of Bradley fighting vehicles. The idea is that you've got combined arms—infantry and armor—I guess, working together. A tank can be taken out by an infantry man with an anti-tank weapon. The idea is we'd be working with the tankers. I did a little research on the unit. I was happy I got assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Division because they had such a—they were so well known with their history in Vietnam because they were there pretty much from the get-go from 1965. They're pretty much made famous, the Air Cav, back in Vietnam and they—actually in World War II they were cavalry before that, became regular infantry. For Vietnam they traded in horses for helicopters and then I think right around the early eighties they turned in helicopters for tanks and Bradleys. They're still there.

Brooks: How long were you at Fort Hood?

Peters: I was there from October of '88 and I finally left there, June of '91—pretty much right after I got back from the Gulf War. I got back and right away I got orders to leave and so I think I had a couple of months left at Fort Hood and then I was due up for re-enlistment. Your first re-enlistment, if you decide to re-enlist, they give you all these incentives—the fun stuff, "You can get a bonus." All kinds of things—you can sometimes reclassify and do a different MOS—kind of rare, or "You want to go to jump school? Re-enlist for three years and we'll give it to you." So, I'm like "Okay. I always wanted that —I'm going to



jump school. I'll re-enlist for three years." I got that and so right away they put you on orders. When I left Fort Hood that summer of '91, I had to report to Fort Benning—back to Benning—to go to jump school for three weeks and learn to be a parachutist. Do your five jumps to get your wings, then I was en-route to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Bragg.

[00:20:22] I'm like, "Ah cool, I'm getting what I wanted." All I'm thinking is 82<sup>nd</sup>, Fort Bragg. And it didn't work out that way. When I got there—they just say "You're going to Fort Bragg." - 18th Airborne Corps and I think everybody gets routed there. It didn't dawn on me until I got there and started in-processing, and I think what happened was they looked at me and they said, "What the hell are we going to do with a mechanized infantryman in Fort Bragg?" Because Fort Bragg is all special ops, Special Forces—elite units like the 82nd Airborne Division. They're all on jump status. "What do we do with this guy? He's infantry." I'm 11 bravo infantryman qualified. They didn't know what to do with me. They do have scouts that used to drop their shared and armored vehicles on to planes, I'm like "Maybe I can get on to that." But it was a different MOS—it was a cav scout MOS.

Unfortunately, it was kind of a let-down because when I was in-processing then I got orders: "You're going to the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps at Headquarters Company." I'm like, "What am I going to do there? This doesn't look right." Basically what happened was, they didn't know what to do with me so I was assigned to a unit outside of my MOS—I wasn't working as an infantryman, which is kind of a real let-down. I was in charge of headquarters for the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps. They had eighteen large five-ton expando trucks or vans so when the headquarters goes out in the field or gets deployed, these vehicles are what the colonels, and the generals, and the officers are using as their tactical headquarters. I was there for a year and half, not even two years and I was in charge of twenty-four privates and they were fresh out of basic, all infantrymen, that pretty much got the shaft—"You're going to 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps." Which I think was pretty rotten, especially someone right out of basic.

It was okay. One good thing you didn't have to go in the field much so it was kind of laid back duty. One good thing I was on jump status so I got the jump pay. As long as you did a jump—I think it was one jump every three months—you kept your jump pay. And we were so low priority it would get to the point where it's like "Oh, I haven't done a jump in two and a half months. When is our next one coming up?" I had to be begging other units "Hey, can I jump with you guys?" Just to get credit. I think I did five in jump school and then I think I did seven in Bragg—total of eleven or twelve jumps. That was fun just being able to stay current on that and jump out of airplanes.

Brooks: What was appealing about jumping out of airplanes for you?

Peters: I think it was just the adrenaline thing—I thrived on that. When I was in jump school that was one of those things where first week is ground week—you learn how to do a parachute fall and land properly. Week two is the tower week—they got these two hundred and fifty foot towers, they pull you on up and you fall down and parachute. The

last week you do your five jumps to qualify and that was another one of those where you're in the airplane, the doors open and you're all hooked up ready to go out - this is your first one and again you get "What the hell am I doing here?" I didn't want to freeze up in the door because they'll pull you right out if you freeze up. After that first one I'm like, "This is awesome. I love this."

After I got to Bragg it was kind of nice because I bummed a couple of jumps from the 82<sup>nd</sup> actually and so I'd just get added to the manifest. I would do my jump and I'm jumping with like no gear, I mean I had to have a weapon, sometimes I'd check a pistol out of the arms room because I didn't want to carry a rifle. A lot of these guys, the 82<sup>nd</sup> they would jump into the drop zone, and then they're scattering like cockroaches to go out in the woods and they're going to do a two or three week field exercise. I'm just tagging along for the ride and so I hit the drop zone, I'm collecting up my chute and I'm like, "Where's the rally point? I want to turn my chute in so I can go home and grab a beer." They're like, "Who the hell's this guy?" That was one good thing because I was never crazy on field maneuvers or roughing it out in the woods or that kind of stuff. It was easy duty.

Brooks: [00:25:16] Let me back you up a little to Fort Hood—you got there in October '88, and tell me a little bit about daily life. I feel like a lot of people know combat and they know training but that those stations and that in between duty is, I think sometimes, a bit of a mystery to folks.

Peters: Actually it wasn't bad. The best way to describe it—it's kind of like a regular job. Unfortunately there are times when you're putting in the twelve hour day. Typically you got the weekends off. Every morning you do PT—physical training. Usually around 5:30 we'd have formation, do PT for about an hour, get released, go eat breakfast, take a shower. We'd usually have a nine o'clock formation then, and then do whatever you're going to do—maintain, clean weapons, maybe small unit training. When I was mechanized we'd spend a lot of time in the motor pool working on the Bradleys and then usually released about four thirty, maybe five o'clock. Rarely, if we were back in garrison not in the field, rarely did we have to work a weekend. It was like a regular job. Now, when things came up like servicing vehicles, after so many months or time frame, how many hours you have on the engines, on the vehicles, they got to be serviced, pulled out. They don't like a vehicle being down so you might spend a twelve hour day working with the mechanics getting that thing up and ready to go. If you're in the field, doing a training exercise for a week or two weeks obviously you don't get any time off. That's pretty much constant. It wasn't bad—I kind of enjoyed it.

Brooks: Were you living on base?

Peters: Yes, I was living in the barracks—I was single at the time. Typically all single soldiers live on the base in barracks. The area in Fort Hood was all modern. The barracks are not your stereotypical World War II bay area stuff. They look like a college dorm. We had three man barracks—or rooms—they had four rooms on each floor and I think three floors. Usually you didn't have a full three guys—it was you and a roommate. Nowadays

it's even better, basically you've got a room, two guys and then you've got a common area. It wasn't bad.

Brooks: And how did you find Texas, coming from Wisconsin?

Peters: I guess I wasn't too crazy about Texas - it's the heat. I don't like the heat, the humidity. Central Texas was more dry heat, which was good, I could tolerate that more. I think it was just—how should I put it? Culture shock. It got a little irritating after the umpteenth million time hearing: "Don't mess with Texas. The South's gonna rise up again." It's like "Give me a break guys, come on." There's always that rivalry between "You're from this state, you're from the south, from the north." Unfortunately in the south there are a lot of people still fighting the Civil War. I think it was just more the culture shock because there's a lot of guys—I don't know if it's a tradition but a lot of guys from the south seem to join the military. It may be more of a family tradition. Just the culture shock was the biggest thing.

Brooks: Did you re-enlist for the first time while you were there?

Peters: Yes. Got back from the Gulf and then—actually my enlistment was ready to expire just after, actually it was going to be that fall when we were deployed, and so they extended my enlistment. How they define that: "Convenience of the government." Basically, "You're getting deployed so you're not getting out." When I got back then I had to either re-enlist or get out. I look back at fate or how things play out—I was a two year enlistment and that spring or that summer—I think it was right around June of 1990—I had planned on getting out. My girlfriend at the time, she was going to UW-Oshkosh, she was graduating the year after me. I had planned on getting out, using my GI Bill, go to Oshkosh too. She wanted to be a teacher, "Hey, I'll do that." Went to the orientation, paid my hundred bucks, picked out my classes, because I was home on leave at the time.

[00:30:41] When I got back just something kept nagging me in the back of my mind—"Do you really want to do that or would you rather stay in?" After a couple of weeks I called them on up, cancelled the classes, got my refund back. "I'm going to re-enlist." Turns out I didn't get a chance to right away because then we got the deployment orders in August. I look back at that and it's probably a good decision that I made because I knew of folks that had gotten out—the rule of thumb was if a person got out of the Army six months before Desert Shield—deployment—a lot of those guys were getting called back in. I guess you'd call it a draft because you're on the IRR—Individual Rating Reserve—because when you join the military, they don't tell you this, but you're kind of signing up for I think it's six or eight, I think it's eight years.

You do your active duty and then you're basically on the list. Something happens—World War III, whatever—you're going to be the first one they're going to call back. If I had done that and I had decided to start college, I would have gotten called back in and I would have had to drop out of school. And this happened to a number of guys where they're in college said "Pack your stuff. You're coming back in." "I just started school, I just paid for this." "Sorry." A lot of these colleges didn't want to refund it. Unfortunately,

for a lot of those folks when they got called back in, they weren't doing their job - they're handing out MREs in Germany, or some support role, which they hated. I look back at that I'm like, "Wow, I dodged a bullet here." I'm glad I made the right decision.

Brooks: Tell me about being deployed. Did you have a sense of what was going on in the Middle East?

Peters: Yeah. Obviously looking at the news, we had no clue until Saddam invaded Kuwait—when was it? Second of August, something like that, of 1990. I had just finished up PLDC—Primary Leadership Development Course. In order to get promoted to sergeant you've got to complete this four week course. I was already promotable—I'd gone to the board and I'd begged to get a slot to get this school taken care of. Once you meet the promotion points, you get promoted. They kept telling me, "We don't have slots." I begged and begged and finally I think they got tired of hearing me. They finally let me go and thankfully I got in because I just finished that, got back to my unit—the school's right on Fort Hood—and within like two weeks we got the deployment, "You're getting deployed." The class right after me, they were over halfway through it, they all had to get pulled back into their units and they all had to go back through the school from day one when they came back, so I dodged another bullet there.

It was kind of shock, we were the second division to get deployment orders. I think the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry out of Fort Stewart—they're heavy mech—they got the first orders, we got the second one. I guess I was in denial. I kept thinking "pfft, yeah, okay, whatever. We're on orders to deploy. I'll believe it when see it." I actually had a running bet with one of the guys in my unit: "I'll bet you money something's going to happen. It's the Army. Hurry up and wait, something's always going to change." Part of that was because it took forever to get us over. We got the deployment orders that first week of August and they send you over, they stagger it in waves, but I went over the September twenty-eighth. It took that long. During that roughly month and half, two months, it was non-stop training. What they wanted to do was, "All right, let's do as much training as we can before we get on the plane and go over there."

[00:35:13] A lot of that was prepping the vehicles. When you're shipping a heavy mech unit, it's not just got your weapon and you go on a plane. We have to prep all the vehicles, we had to paint them sand color—they're all in camouflage. Get them on the rail head - on the trains - get them to Galveston, outside of Houston, lower them on the ships. They had a special detail for that—I didn't have to mess with that. It was funny too, the buildup of getting ready to deploy, I'd never seen a flak vest before and nowadays you see these guys, that's standard issue equipment. I remember I was like "You guys are getting issued." We only got issued two desert camo uniforms because they were so short of these things, they didn't have enough. They said, "You'll take two woodland camouflages and then bring your two brand new desert camouflage" Call them chocolate chip camo because they look like chocolate chip.

Then they issued us flak vests—"What the hell is this? I've seen these, I've never worn one." It was almost like they opened the flood gates. They had all this stuff but "We don't

want you guys to get issued it." Same thing with the train up with ammo—we would go to the range, "You only a hundred rounds to shoot through this machine gun." The rare time we would get the grenade range—"Two grenades, that's it." They're so stingy. Now the train up, they just, "We're going to out and fire an eighty-four rocket." "Wow. I've never fired a real one." Some anti-tank gunners got to fire an actual live missile, not a training one. Went to the gunnery range—you're not firing the practice rounds. These are the ones that explode, the ones that are supposed to do what they're supposed to do. That was pretty cool. "Okay, that's how that works."

The grenade launcher that I carried underneath my M-16—we got to fire a real explosive once, before that the paint ones that get lobbed in you see where it hits. "Oh, okay, that's what that sounds like." Real explosion. That was interesting, kind of cool because I'd never experienced that. People always ask "Going over there were you scared or anything like that." One of the things that I always tell folks is, I actually was excited and I looked forward to it. The best analogy I like to use is compare being in the Army to being a firefighter. Let's say you're a firefighter and you get all this training to fight fires but you never get to fight a fire. That's basically what the Army is when you're in a combat arms unit—you train, train, train. You may go to the weapons range, practice, practice, practice but you never get to really put those skills to use. "Is this going to work? How are we going to do?"

Now some might say that you never want to do that. I was kind of excited and I was looking forward—this is going to be cool. I was happy to finally get over there. They flew us over on civilian air craft. Once we got into the port of Dammam in Saudi Arabia we had to wait two weeks in tents, waiting for the ship to arrive, cargo ship, with all our vehicles. That was quite a culture shock, finally getting over there. Not just the heat, of course you had the humidity being on the port around the coast, but the environment. Every person that went over there, for the first two, three weeks—dysentery, diarrhea, and we're drinking bottled water and MREs. We're not eating local food and they just said it's the environment and that was a real shock because I mean, you can't do anything without, "Where's nearest latrine?" That was a real eye-opener.

Brooks: You said you were kind of in denial—was there a moment when you realized: "This is real."?

Peters: Once we shipped the vehicles out on the railhead and painted them. "This might actually happen." Then when the first advance units—to ship a whole division can take weeks so once the first guys started going over there I'm like "Oh, okay, I think this is going to happen." Whether or not we'd do anything while we're over there because the whole thing is our job is to make sure he doesn't invade Saudi Arabia and take over the oil fields. "We're going to sit out in the desert and do nothing." Call me a pessimist but it finally did sink in when the vehicles went. "Okay, I think we're going."

Brooks: [00:40:27] Besides the weather and the food, was there anything else about Saudi Arabia that—your initial reactions?

Peters: Probably the biggest thing, believe it or not, was flies—the insects. When we were done getting our vehicles, they moved us out, I don't know how many a hundred miles, basically out in the middle of the desert, the middle of nowhere. This is the best description is what you'd see in a movie picture with the Sahara Desert—the dunes and it's like, "What a god-forsaken place this is. Who could live here?" It blew me away. Again, it was still very hot at that time—September, October—then the drop in temperatures, they would plummet at night. I was exposed to that because I had done rotations in California in the desert with training at the National Training Center but the flies were just horrendous. It got to the point where we were having fly strips shipped in in care packages. You had the fly nets. You couldn't even eat food without—it was kind of a running joke that after a while you just get to the point where, it sounds mean but you feel like you're the stereotypical starving person in Africa. Where the flies are buzzing around them and they don't even swat at them because, why bother? It's a pointless effort. You got used to them. That was probably the biggest shock.

Brooks: You said your assignment there was basically you were kind of on guard duty?

Peters: The whole point at that time early on in Desert Shield was to build up the U.S presence to make sure Saddam didn't come across the border and start taking over the oil fields in Saudi Arabia. I think obviously the overall end game—once we had enough forces—was get him out of Kuwait. They tried to just scatter units all over. It was interesting because at night, especially, you would get on a sand dune and you'd look out and you'd see these areas, these lights, and basically every area is like a company sized area with maybe a hundred guys and they're just dotted all over place. There were so many troops they had to do that, they had nowhere to put them. That was kind of boring because you're sitting around doing nothing.

Brooks: Did you have any communication with home at that point?

Peters: At that point, no. Obviously, letters—I'd try to do that as much as possible. My family was really good on sending care packages: "What do you need?" We did get to call home, I think, probably maybe three times, four times. I think the first one was in November and they had a satellite hookup and it was back at division I think and they rotated the units through—bring the guys over, probably an hour drive in the truck. And then they had this tent with literally phone booths and just a pole with four different phones on there and there's a line, just huge line, and you wait in line for an hour. They said, "You've got ten minutes. We can fit thirty guys in here. Grab a phone. Call whoever you want to call. If you can't get through, try somebody else. You got ten minutes so make it count." I would call either my mother, or usually my girlfriend at the time. We had been dating in high school.

[00:44:30] It was frustrating because sometimes I would call and she wouldn't be home, she'd be working. "This sucks. All right, I'll call my mom." Usually I would get one or the other. It's frustrating because you haven't talked to them—especially my girlfriend—and I would call and you only got ten minutes so, "I got to make this count." My wife—we're married now—and at the time she's yapping on about her parents and some other

issue with her family and college, which is fine, I guess just mundane, "This is how my week went." I just so bad want to interrupt and say "I don't want to hear that, I just want to—Do you miss me? You don't have to talk dirty. I got to make this count here." She got better at it. What was it? Two bucks a minute because satellite communication back in those days.

Brooks: And you had to pay for it?

Peters: Oh yeah. But it was worth it.

Brooks: How long were you stationed there then?

Peters: Got over there September twenty-eighth and ended up coming back April 14, 1991. Basically during the entire Desert Shield there was build up. Right in December, we ended up going back to the port to pick up brand new vehicles. What they did is they opened up the warehouses in Germany and all the upgraded M-2A2 Bradley fighting vehicles—they had these in storage for the Cold War, World War III—they decided to ship those. Painted them, shipped them over and so we turned in our old ones that we brought from Fort Hood, Texas and swapped them out for these brand new ones. "This is cool." They had much heavier armor—they had spall linings on the inside to protect the guys and just heavier, more robust, fit more stuff on them. That was cool, we picked those on up in December, went to a gunnery range, they set up in the middle of the desert for tanks and Bradleys' to bore sight zero on the weapons, get familiar—it's kind of the same weapons system.

We were there over Christmas. I do remember my Christmas there very well—Christmas Eve I spent it on guard duty at the gunnery range out in the middle of nowhere, on guard duty that night and it was probably about thirty-eight degrees—windy—and I was so cold and miserable I was running up and down the sand dune just to get the heart rate going because this is just. I was just miserable. "Okay I'm having a fun Christmas here." Once we got done with that they moved us up to the border with Iraq. They were kind of worried at that time—right before the air war kicked off with Desert Storm—Saddam had tried to move in some of his armor units into one of the Saudi border towns—Khafji. They were kind of worried so they started moving up more units onto the border, just in case.

You're in the middle of nowhere. The only thing to differentiate between Iraq and Saudi Arabia is just a big sand berm that the probably put in there decades ago. Otherwise, you wouldn't know where you were. A little bit different desert environment. There it wasn't sand dunes, it was just kind of gravel—yeah there's sand there but it was weird. Basically, where we were at was an ancient dry riverbed, kind of a valley riverbed, nothing growing really. Little bit different than inside of Saudi Arabia per se. We were sitting on the border the whole time while they did the air campaign. We were in defensive positions. Engineers would dig a berm where we could bring the Bradley in and the only thing showing is the turret, the entire hull of the vehicle is in the berm, the dugout. Just in case they tried to come over the border.

It was interesting because we would watch the B-52 bombers coming in, we could see them up there—thirty thousand feet—you can't even hear them but you can see the three plane formation and some of these are flying out of Louisiana. They're coming from the U.S. doing three refuelings, there and back. It's kind of cool because you wouldn't hear the airplanes, you'd see them "Here comes another one." After about ten minutes you'd just hear this thumping, this loud thud and it was just one right after another. You couldn't see it, still far off in the distance. You see the planes coming back and it's like "They're getting carpet bombed." You'd see attack helicopters, the Warthog ground attack aircraft coming in. We were on the border but we weren't so close as to see things getting shot up by aircraft—that was pretty far inward into Iraq.

Brooks: [00:50:39] Being removed from the actual combat, what was the vibe where you guys were stationed?

Peters: I think at that point we were getting frustrated. You're bored. Because you're on the border you're not doing any kind of training so that was kind of one good thing. I'm tired of training. You're just sitting on the border and you've always got a guy in the turret, scanning with the thermal sight—twenty-four seven. You're sitting around, doing nothing. It gets old. I think I was like, "What's going to happen here?" It got to the point where it's like "Hey, let's get this over and done with." We were sitting around and supposedly they were going to invade Kuwait much earlier on, start that air campaign, but they wanted to bring in more troops. They brought in these divisions out of Germany. "Jeez, how many troops do you need here? My God, you got what—over a million? I know Iraq has got a lot but their equipment sucks." It was just frustration, "How long is this going to take?" We figured, "Air war, two weeks. They'll wipe them out and we'll just come in there and clean up the mess. Mop it up." It went longer than expected—so just frustration.

Brooks: How long were you sitting there, waiting?

Peters: Got there, right after the New Year. Air war kicked off January fifteenth, and we were basically there up until ground war kicked off and pretty much in the same spot. We moved a little bit. What was interesting is before the ground war kicked off, February twenty-fourth, we actually did for a couple of nights before that, we were like the first unit into Iraq. To my knowledge, we never even got into Kuwait. We went up where the border of Kuwait and Iraq meet and we went from Saudi Arabia and we stayed on the Iraq side. For the first two nights we—they called it berm busters, I think it was Operation Night Strike—we actually went in across the berm and went into Iraq and our job was to fool the Iraqis into thinking "Hey, this is the main allied assault, it's coming." It was a feint because what was happening is eventually once the ground war did kick off, everybody was coming around to the north and going to flank them. We were the bait.

We did that two different nights. We actually did take some casualties because some of our units did engage the Iraqis. But that was cool. "All right—finally we're going to do something." The most frustrating thing is, they don't give you any information so you don't know what is going on. By the time it gets down to you it's useless and all they said,



"You guys are going to do a mission, we're probably going to go over into Iraq." But they never said for sure. Probably the most hilarious thing I saw over there is you're in the back of the Bradley because I was in the back with the dismounted crew because you've got a rank that goes down. We're at night and we're supposed to be in Iraq but this is lasting for hours and it's probably one in the morning and you can hear explosions going off so you know something's, way off in the distance.

[00:54:38] You're dead tired because you get no sleep. All the guys in the back were sitting there, all their gear off, Kevlar helmets off and we're all sleeping because we're all thinking: "This wasn't supposed to take this long. We're back in Saudi Arabia. Wait for them to get back to our hole and then lower the ramps so we can get some proper sleep." Our vehicle commander didn't say anything, they don't keep us informed. Next thing you know the vehicle stops, everybody's just lying in there—vehicle ramp goes down, no warning, of course. They're supposed to give you a head's up. Bunch of guys coming out of the ramp, stretching. "Hey where's our hole? Want to lay out my sleeping bag." And you can hear our company commander over the radio, the intercom, "Tell those a-holes to get their shit on and check out those bunkers."

You never saw guys run so fast in your life. I look back at it now and it was just hilarious because we're like "Whoa, we're still in Iraq? Bunkers?" Grabbing helmets, grabbing weapons and it's pitch black—you can't see a thing. We did have night vision devices but even those don't work the best if there's no starlight. We're checking these holes and they're bunker in the loosest sense of the word. Just like a hole in the ground. We don't find anything but it's like "Holy crap." You can hear explosions going on in the distance. That was kind of a shock. One of our guys—my dismounted guys—he's kind of walking real careful, watching each step, going up to a hole. "What the hell are you doing?" "Making sure there's no trip wires." They always scare you all these landmines they've laid. "Man, if you step on it you're not going to know it." You look back at it and you got to laugh. It was serious stuff but deep down inside you got to chuckle because you know you're stressed that's probably the best way to handle it—just laugh a minute. That was kind of interesting, experiencing that before the actual groundwork kicked off.

Brooks: How many people can fit in a Bradley?

Peters: The Bradley is like a small tank. It's got a turret, twenty-five millimeter cannon - it's a chain gun so it's a small cannon. It's got about that size of a round. It's a chain gun so instead of a tank fire one, fifteen seconds later fire another one, this one it—boom, boom, boom, boom—it's about that rate of fire. We've got a Tow missile launcher to take out tanks on the side of the vehicle. You've got three crew members—the vehicle commander and the gunner in the turret and then the driver upfront. In the back of the vehicle and again it's got a back ramp that lowers so it's like a personnel carrier/tank combination. You can fit up to six guys in. We typically didn't have a full six—I think we had five, so a little more room but it's cramped with all the gear. A lot of the gear, like our duffel bags, was all on the side of the vehicle, because you didn't have room for it. Everything on the inside was ammo.

With me being short—five [foot] six, I had a much easier than these guys who were going on six foot—they were just miserable. You're sitting on the seat and you've got a guy next to you and another guy next to you. You're in that vehicle when the ground war kicked off it was like four days and nothing but go, go, go, go, go. You're in that vehicle and that was torture because you don't know where you are, what's going on. You've got five guys in the back and none of them have showered in two months. You always get used to your own smell but you can't stand the guy next to you. "You stink." He's thinking the same thing of you. That was probably the hardest part—the vehicle it's a track vehicle so it looks just like a tank just with a smaller gun—unfortunately, not as heavily protected as the tank. The hulls got aluminum alloy of all things so if you got hit with anything more than a twenty-five millimeter which was what we had, it's probably going to go right through you.

Brooks: Did you travel with a lot of cover?

Peters: [00:59:37] Usually when we moved, we were moving in formation. Obviously as a group, you'd never be one vehicle. Usually you'd have two teams—you'd have a wingman. A lot of the movements we did during the ground war though were not a V formation where you're going out. Maybe the lead elements of a division would do that—the scouts. We were single file, it was weird. The best description is you're looking out in the desert and it looks like a herd of elephants. All these vehicles, wheeled-vehicles, tanks, track vehicles, and the reason they do that is they were so scared of landmines and mine fields. Usually the engineers would come through with one of these mine clearing plows on the front of their tank. If there was a mine, clear it out or explode it.

You stayed in that path and you'd have multiple paths, just going into Iraq. It was just single file and unfortunately it was just so slow. You're inching along. The problem with our unit is because we were used as bait to fool the Iraqis, once we did that and we got back across the border to Saudi Arabia, we were playing catch up to try and catch up to all the other units that had swung around and were coming in from the north. We were passing--we saw some British units, Desert Rat I think it was—one of their armored units. But again, you've periscopes in the back of the vehicle but you can only see so much. They really didn't want people to get out and they're always so scared someone's going to get injured, step on a landmine. You're always moving. "Hey I got to take a piss." They weren't stopping—use a water bottle. That was rough, that was almost three days, going on four days just in the back of a vehicle.

Brooks: What else about the ground war?

Peters: It was kind of a letdown. We were in pursuit of one of the Republican Guard Divisions. They're the cream of the crop supposedly. Other units in Kuwait were the cannon fodder. After about the fourth day we got orders to ceasefire, hold in place. We were disappointed "Why are we doing that? We're still pursuing the remnants. And unfortunately Saddam Hussein did get a lot of his elite units reconstituted—he got them out of there. Because we had completed—United Nations had completed their mission of getting Saddam out of Kuwait. We were sitting there with a ceasefire—we were still

doing indirect fire, artillery and mortars. When our vehicle stopped we stopped right next to a personnel carrier that has a mortar in the back and lowered the ramp. "Jeez, finally I can just lay out." All of a sudden—boom. And it's right next to you. It sounds like an artillery round coming in and exploding. Everybody just hit the deck. "They're hitting us."

Then we realize, it's outgoing fire in vehicle next to us and the mortars are loud. We were just like, "Why are we sitting here? This is just stupid." We're watching the fireworks—the artillery, the mortar—there are still aircraft engaging. The whole time while we're moving, we didn't count our prisoners and we didn't have time to stop. We're just basically telling "Keep walking to the rear." Maybe throwing a water bottle or MRE "We don't have time for you guys—so long as you don't have weapons." We sat there, ceasefire. That night still dark—it was late—we got a call that there's movement up front. We were told, "Send up two Bradleys." Our vehicle and another went up and this experience is probably the most memorable—probably because it's the most graphic. We didn't know: "Who is this?" Thermal sight you can only see so much in the desert with night vision. It looked like a bunch of ground troops and probably enemy.

We're moving up in these Bradleys and we don't know nothing. We were told "Hey, there's movement up front. Go find out what it is, what's going on—probably prisoners, guys wanting to give up." Hop in the vehicle, more people to abuse. So we're riding and the commander was supposed to have an intercom with the guys in the back, of course we didn't, supposed to tell you what's going on—nothing. We're moving slowly inching on up -we stop, move on up a little bit more, stop. All of a sudden I can hear on the vehicle commanders yell "Keif. Keif. Keif." Which in Arabic is "Halt." Inch up a little bit more. All of a sudden—brrrrraaa. We hear the machine gun go off in our vehicle, in the turret. Again, you never saw guys move so fast in your life. Grab the stuff, lock and load weapons.

[01:05:26] We're banging on the turret—there's a door to the turret and we're banging on this thing—"Hey, what the hell's going on. Are we getting engaged?" Nothing. We're inching up slowly more, "What's going on?" You hear more shouting from the vehicle next to us, my lieutenant, platoon leader and another blast from his co-ax machine gun, because there's a machine gun in the turret next to the main gun. Then right after that, no warning—they're supposed to give you a warning when the vehicle ramp goes down—nothing. Ramp goes down. We're like "What's going on?" We come on out, of course we got loaded weapons. We got our night vision, we don't even have the head straps, we're trying to hold our weapon and night vision in another hand.

It's pitch black so we're staring up at our vehicle commander looking up at him. "What the hell's going on?" He's like, "Go pick up those enemy - prisoners." "Okay, we're getting engaged. Where are they at so we can return fire?" We don't know, are they a hundred meters away, ten meters away because it's pitch black. We're slowly walking up because we don't know if these guys are armed or what—they obviously shot at him. We finally make out this group of guys and there was probably about ten or twelve in a

group. We're yelling "Get down. Keif. Keif. Keif." On the ground and they were Iraqi soldiers. They were giving up, they were scared. We started getting 'em down—searching them real quick and we had the zip ties to tie their hands, just so we could get them in a vehicle and get them more properly searched.

While they were doing that I noticed off to the side there was movement. Right away I'm like, "Uh-oh. What's this? Is this guy a trap or what?" I told one of the other guys in my dismount team, "Come with me." We went over and there's a guy laying on the ground. We're looking at him and obviously he's hurt, he's been shot. We were shooting at somebody, this guy got it. It's dark, you can't see a thing and we're trying to quick search him so they're not pulling out something. None of them had weapons—rifles. He's trying to talk a little bit. I'm trying to get his equipment off and I can't get the thing off. Iraqis had goofy equipment with the way their web gear is. I'm trying to figure out where this guy's wounded because he's talking in Arabic. And I look at him and I roll him on over and I can see blood on the ground—"Okay, let's try and render first aid."

I roll him on over to his side and he's got an entrance wound from the 762 machine gun in his upper left hip, up by the buttock, and it's just the size of the bullet, little drop of blood dripping out—"That's nothing." Turn him on over and the exit wound was the size of a grapefruit. It had come out on the side of that left thigh, right underneath the scrotum. It hit the femoral artery and so blood's just squirting out with every pump of his heart. Right away we're trying to get the field dressings and get pressure on there but it's frustrating because you try to get in there—we had a red filter flashlight, "I don't want to use that out here, you don't know who else is out here." And so I'm trying to pinch what I think is the artery and probably doing more harm than good and finally we're just, let's get the pressure on, get the radio man, call the medics up here. We want to do a tourniquet but it's like, "Where do you put a tourniquet on that high up on the leg?" You just can't.

You've got two guys trying to get pressure on this because he's losing blood like crazy. It's squirting all over you. Took the medics forever, took them like fifteen minutes, twenty minutes to get up there finally in their vehicle. He was still alive—turns out he was a first lieutenant, he was an officer. They hauled him away and shortly after that, died, just from blood loss. The medics, later on, they said he was so dehydrated they couldn't even get an IV in him. It turns out, we found out from some of the other POWs in the group, because they questioned, "Why did you shoot him?" We told them, we said, "We didn't know if you were armed." We didn't know—what happened was these guys were so scared—they'd been walking for days and they only had a little bit of water on them. They hadn't eaten in a couple of days and so they just wanted to give up.

[01:10:44] They heard, they saw vehicles and so they're walking in a group towards us in the dark and when we rolled on up, that scared them because all they hear, it's pitch black and you hear armored track vehicles, that's going to scare you and that officer, he bolted. They brainwash these guys: "You're going to get killed. You give up—they're going to execute you." He ran and when that happened, the vehicle commander said "Take him out." Again, it was so hard—we didn't know if these guys had weapons, you couldn't see

well. That was kind of sad that the guy, he died from something like that. Turns out they'd been walking for days and they pretty much had a big can—a plastic canister almost like a gasoline canister and that was just about empty of water in there.

That experience really affected me because I sat there when the medics, they got the guy in the body bag and I'm just sitting there, I'm trying to get the blood off. I'm looking at this—I guess you feel sorry for them but all I can think of is, "Is his family even going to know what happened to him?" With us, one of our guys gets killed, bring the body home, you're notified. I was like "I'll bet you they never know what happened." Just the way Iraq was in Saddam Hussein. That was kind of hard. After the ceasefire and everything is done we spent another two weeks in Iraq while they were negotiating out the truce with the Iraqis. We were doing bunker clearing operations. The whole goal while we were in Iraq was to destroy as much equipment as possible before we were forced to come back into Saudi Arabia.

We spent two weeks, we came across vehicles that hadn't been taken out by air craft and there was very few, or bunkers, we'd check them out, go in there, of course check for booby-traps, come across crates of AK47s and burn them. Run them over with the vehicle. If a vehicle was intact, stick a thermite grenade, melt the engine block. We did come across - it wasn't our company—a battalion came across Iraqi BMP vehicle— a personnel carrier. It was their version of a Bradley—fully intact, operating, working, the only it had a dead battery. We jumped it, brought it back to our lines and that's actually sitting in the Fort Hood 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division museum, on base. That was kind of cool seeing what one looked like. Doing the bunker clearance, seeing some of the destroyed vehicles and, "Man, how in the hell did anybody survive this." The ones that were smart, that were attacked by the air, once they saw what was happening, the safest place was away from your vehicle.

We saw plenty of dead Iraqis laying outside the bunkers and out in the middle of nowhere. That was something that sticks with you is the smell of decaying corpse. Luckily, being in that environment, I guess it wasn't as bad as what you would have seen because that air is so dry they almost mummify, for lack of a better word—they dry out. They're not bloating up and just rotting. Usually you bring in the graves registration units and they mark where the guy is and bury him there and mark it if the Iraqis want to come and dig him on up, which I'm sure they didn't. That was kind of an eye opener. Just seeing how the guys lived. We think we had it bad—these guys had ten times worse.

Brooks: [01:15:00] Did you interact with any civilians at all?

Peters: Very few. When we got our vehicles and went from the port to out in the desert in Saudi Arabia, we stopped—I guess you could call it a gas station, convenience store, Saudi Arabia style. We could get advance on our paycheck—American money or Saudi Riyals—and so we always had some of both. That was one of the few times we went in and we'd pick up something that was prepackaged. Some of the guys were dumb enough where they had chicken that was cooked locally—"You're going to regret that." Eat it and then you're in the latrine for the next two days. The only other time I can think with the

locals, they did hire the locals to do bus rides when we were getting our new vehicles, exchanging them—they drive like maniacs.

The one I can remember when we're out in the middle of the Saudi desert, out in the middle of nowhere, two local guys—Saudis—come out of nowhere on top of the berm and they're talking with our lieutenant and basically they wanted our help—their car got stuck. There must have been a road somewhere. They wanted us to help get them out. Course right away, "This doesn't sound kosher, here. Something's not right. Is this an ambush?" It ended up being true but we had guys—it was funny because we're following them to this car that needs to get out of the ditch and the lieutenants following them but we got guys walking on the berms on either side. They ask, "Why are they doing that?" "Oh, it's just something we do." It was—it was just security. "Is there an ambush? Where are they taking us?"

Otherwise, you're out in the middle of nowhere, there's no-one to interact with. We did see some Bedouins. During the bunker clearing operation we saw, it was two camels and looked like a husband and wife, walking past the vehicle—just kind of wave. Other than that when we got back into Saudi Arabia and we're cleaning out the vehicles, we were in Khobar Towers—it was a large, almost like a housing project that the Saudi government did for the Bedouins. Kind of like, "We got to get them out of the desert and get them into proper housing." The Bedouins—"We don't want that." These things sat empty and they were like a large housing unit. Khobar Towers is the one that was bombed back in 1998. They had a car bomb that took out—a bunch of Americans died. Basically we were housed there while we cleaned out the vehicles and prepped everything. There we could see more locals, some of the Bedouins. But we really didn't get a chance to interact with them—they kept us separate from the locals.

Brooks: [01:18:19] Then at that point you were getting ready to go back to the States?

Peters: We got back into Saudi Arabia. I think we were in Khobar Towers for two or three weeks. We had to clean the vehicle cause the vehicles that we got while over there—the ones from Germany—we were going to take back to Fort Hood. Apparently the old ones were going to be warehoused in Saudi Arabia. We had something there in case this all happened again. We had to sanitize the vehicles—the EPA guys they had there they were so worried about invasive species or something getting in. So you clean it—"Not good enough. Do this and that." It's like, "Jeez, want me to get out the rubbing alcohol make sure of anything else?" Luckily I wasn't part of the crew so I didn't have to do much of that but just cleaning vehicles, inventorying equipment, turning ammo back in—that kind of stuff. We flew back April fourteenth—again, civilian airliners. We stopped over in Ireland, Cork Ireland. They actually got off the plane for an hour or two and they said, "All right, one beer limit." Because they serve beer, it's Ireland, right in the airport. I remember the guy selling me beer trying to gypping me out of not giving me my change. They didn't want guys having any more and having problems. Then we flew right in to Fort Hood.

Brooks: We have some notes from some of the things that you donated to the museum. It says here something about a pet dog named "Saddam"? Was that while you guys were over?

Peters: I'm trying to think. I don't know if they got him, I think they got him during the bunker clearing operation they found him. I didn't find him—one of the other guys did. He was the mascot. We didn't have him long because when we came back into Saudi Arabia and staged by Khobar Towers they couldn't take the dog with them. I don't know what they did with him. Obviously, he was kind of scared and hungry little puppy. He had steady diet of MREs so for that three weeks he led a pretty good life. I think I donated a picture of me holding the dog.

Brooks: Whose idea was it to name him Saddam?

Peters: One of the guys on one of the other vehicles. I wasn't crazy about the name—"Jeez, couldn't you name it something else?"

Brooks: Not super original.

Peters: He was a cute thing. I'm more of a cat person but I like all animals.

Brooks: Was there anything else that you did over there that—it seems like you spent a lot of time a little bit bored, a little bit sitting around. Was there anything you guys did to entertain yourselves?

Peters: It depends on, when we were in Saudi Arabia we were actually in tents, these were Bedouin tents— you had a sandstorm you'd have them collapse on you. I would have care packages mailed in—I didn't ask for it but they included things like football. We would try to do PT while we were over there. We had a volleyball net set up—this is early on before we were on the border. We had the shower stalls where a water truck would come and fill up the tank, and so you got at least to take a semi-normal shower, as long as the water lasted. We tried out football. You'd always have someone on guard duty of course. I remember they sent me a little plastic model kit—"Oh cool, this'll waste some time." A lot of books—just reading. Early on the training would be at night so during the day it would be kind of a downtime.

Washing your own clothes—we didn't trust the laundry service to send our uniforms out to have them washed by the units because they'd never come back or if they came back it'd be two months later. After that a lot of guys said, "We'll wash it ourselves." It was just a lot of it just smoking and joking. Even up on the border we had a little diesel heater, made in China somewhere, one of the guys picked it up from one of the locals, and it was the best investment ever because you could fuel it on diesel fuel which is what the Bradleys used. It got cold there in the winter, January and February. During the day they'd fire it up it was like a little campfire, you got stove and of course you're heating up your hot chocolate or maybe got some soup or something like that, sit around it like a campfire just BS'ing. After a while it got old with some of the characters in your unit and unique personalities.

Brooks: That's a lot of time to spend with the same people. Especially the same people cramped in.

Peters: There were times where people would blow their top because it's like you're doing hard time. I always like to put it that way. You can't get out of this and you're just sitting around. You don't know how long is this going to last and you're dealing with some of these guys that you really don't like to interact with. Guys are going to blow their top—I remember a couple of fights. Early on, I think the first month in, the guys that smoked, their cigarette stash was drying up and then they were pretty angry. You do what you can just to pass the time.

Brooks: Then you get back—was there an adjustment period? Was there anything that was different for you for transitioning?

Peters: Not really. Came back, they got civilians lined up all the way from the airport, right on the base, which was cool. I actually, and a lot of guys felt guilty. It's like, "You're kind of overdoing it here." Because we're thinking back, you know we're all thinking, "Look at the Vietnam veterans, they got treated like garbage and they didn't get any parades homecoming, no 'Thank you. Congratulations.' And they're overdoing it." We didn't deserve it. I was actually a bit uncomfortable. When we got back, then they actually assigned, they had some guys, just a couple, that were assigned to go to Washington, D.C for the homecoming parade. I was tasked—because I got my sergeants stripes pinned on in Iraq of all things, orders finally came through—I was charged to take six guys to a parade in Duncanville, Texas which is just outside Dallas. They wanted representatives from the Gulf. Got a government vehicle, rode up there and of course this small town they put us up in a hotel and took us out in Dallas - wined and dined us. It was a nice gig. But again, I just kind of felt uncomfortable.

I found it funny that the whole time we were deployed we were wearing jungle boots—these were Vietnam issue, they're green canvas and they got the leather bottoms. They're for hot weather. Those nice suede, tan desert boots—we didn't get those until we got back, just in time for the parades so we could look sharp. Which we thought was funny. Shortly after that then too we did an awards ceremony. The infantry guys out of our battalion—three companies were tanks, only one of us was infantry—we qualified for the combat infantryman badge. Any infantryman that's in combat engages in enemy fire qualifies. We got that awarded and then after that they did individual awards. Most of the guys got an Army commendation medal which for war time personal decoration that's kind of the lowest. I was kind of shocked in that I wasn't in the ceremony, I'm like "Well what, they forget me? What's going on here?" Then it kind of dawned on me "Hmm, maybe I'm getting something a little bit better."

They had one after that and they gave out bronze star medals which is strictly a war time award—I think it's right above the purple heart as far as the order. It was strange because all the guys getting a bronze star in the battalion—they're all the officers, all the senior non-commissioned officers, first sergeants, command sergeant major, and just a handful of us. You're talking out of eight hundred guys, nine hundred guys, there was only one



staff sergeant, and two E5 sergeants—myself and another guy—and that was it. I'm like, "Why am I getting this?" I never really got a solid answer from my platoon leader but I attributed it to he knew how to write a board recommendation and he detailed the issue with the POW and getting shot and trying to render first aid. I think that's what—normally for a sergeant E5, "Bronze star—you got to be a higher rank to get that." They approved mine—that was a pleasant surprise.

Then after that it was surprising—it was kind of like they did a block leave where basically they shut down the entire unit and guys are sent home. I think we got three weeks, something like that, and if you wanted to stay back, you could. We got married when I came home on leave—we eloped. We got tired of family interfering with our wedding plans so we decided to do a Justice of the Peace at a bed and breakfast and we're still married. That was back in '91. Then right back to Fort Hood, I think what was surprising is—"Hey, this is kind of nice. No training, no field time." Right after getting back from leave: "Right, we got our long range and short-term training plan. We're getting ready to go to California for another month out in the desert." "Can't you kind of just wean us into the peacetime Army?" I didn't stay there long, I re-enlisted and then I was on orders to go to Bragg and jump school.

Brooks: [01:30:14] Did your now-wife have an opinion about you re-enlisting? Is it something you talked about together?

Peters: We talked about it. She really didn't have any concern one way or another. She just said, "You need to do what you need to do." She never admitted to it but she looked deep down, maybe if he stays in"—obviously we were married at the time—"our new assignment, I'll just switch colleges." That's what she did. I went to Fort Bragg, we were already married, got married that spring—went to Fort Bragg, she switched from UW-Oshkosh to Fayetteville University outside of Bragg and then I was only there for a year and a half. I see guys that get assigned to a unit for three years, four years, not me. Year and a half, two years tops: "You're on orders again." Then went to the Big Red One—1st Infantry Division out of Fort Riley, Kansas—a year and half later and then she had to switch to Kansas State University, out of Manhattan. It took her six years to get her bachelor's degree because you're losing credits the whole time you're transferring. Thankfully, when I got orders for my next assignment and I'm recruiting duty, she just was finishing up her bachelors so it worked out perfect. She got that.

I got put on orders to go to recruiting duty, against my will. No-one volunteers for that because it's such a lousy assignment. I got assigned back to Wisconsin, shockingly. And did that for two years and absolutely hated it—worst two years of my life. I liked the job but you get treated like garbage when you're not making your quota. And at that time—'95, '97—it was a documented fact that Wisconsin, parts of Minnesota, and Upper Michigan were the worst areas in the United States to recruit because in this area you either are going to college or you're getting a job—military? No way. That was tough because I went to recruiting school, got done and when you're in recruiting school "You

got your wish list. Where do you want to be assigned at?" "I'm from Wisconsin, I'll have an edge. I know how people think around here. Milwaukee. Minneapolis. Chicago."

When you're in the Army, you never get anything on your wish list. I think they just do it to make people feel better, like you have some say-so in it. Boom—Milwaukee. "Whoa, something's not kosher here because nobody gets their first choice." Report here and got started. I actually recruited at Steven's Point, one in Wausau but Milwaukee covers a good chunk of the state. "Where do you want to go?" "Wausau." "That's full but we'll give you Point." "That'll work." At that time, right outside the UW Point campus they were turning a two man recruiting station and they put like six guys in there. The logic is: "More recruiters, more contracts—enlist more people." It doesn't work like that. I enjoyed the assignment - going out, talking to kids, going to schools, talking with counselors. Because this is a good opportunity, especially if kids don't want to go to school right away—college—don't know how to pay for it.

There was such a toxic leadership environment in recruiting command at that time that if you didn't make your quota and it was usually two people per month, they made your life miserable. Unfortunately the Army at that time was one of those institutions where they could get away with things where any other company in the civilian world, people would be going to jail: threats of physical violence, just constant belittling, taking all your free time away from you—working Saturdays, twelve hour days. It was ridiculous—"If you're not going to make that, we'll take your time. You're not going to go home until eight o'clock tonight." "Give me a break." It was just ridiculous. I had made sergeant first class in '96—first chance I got to get promoted, got it. I only know of one other guy that got it quicker than I did. I got it in eight years. Some guys do twenty and don't even get it.

[01:35:03] Never had a bad counseling statement, I mean I was a model soldier. I got back from advanced Non-Commissioned Officer training in Benning—that was about two and half months—and I got back and my greeting back to the recruiting station was not: "Welcome back." It was "All right. So-and-so, this is how things are going to roll now. These are the new rules and you're going to make X amount of appointments. You're going to make X amount of calls. You will not go home before eight p.m. each night and before you do, you're going to call the first sergeant in Fort McCoy and ask for permission to go home, based on what you've done for that day." I looked at my station commander and I'm like "You can stick that where the sun don't shine." I didn't use those words. "No. I am not doing this." When you're on recruiting duty, it's a three year assignment. They take you out of your MOS and put you in that and then if you survive for three years they send you back to infantry. And the Army likes to see a well-rounded NCO that does staff time and line time.

I did two years and finally when I got back from that school I'm like, "No, I'm not" and I basically told them "No. I'll do my job but I'm not playing these games." That's pretty much when my career came to an end. They actually sent me down to Fort Knox, Kentucky for psych eval—they're like "Something's wrong with this guy. He's a model soldier, he's lost it." Nothing wrong with me—the psych guy said, "We see a lot of

recruiters in here." Yeah, I bet. He said, "Look, there's nothing wrong with you. We see it all the time. Do you want out of recruiting back in the regular Army, or do you just want out of the Army? It's your choice." I said, "I got nine years in, I'm not over that hump." I had planned on doing twenty years. I said "Most mechanized guys were going to Korea at that time."

So I'm like, jeez if I go from recruiting to Korea and that's a year away from your family because that was rough on our marriage and I got two little kids. They didn't know who Dad was 'cause I was never home. I'm like, "I'm already back home in Wisconsin, this is an easy transition, it's time to get out." So I decided let's transition and get out. Took a while because you had to go back and write a counseling statements on what a lousy recruiter I was. I'm like, "Go for it. I don't care—as long as I get an honorable discharge." Which I did. I think as miserable as that was it worked out for the best because it made for an easy transition and I wasn't subjecting my family to moving every year and a half and two years. My kids could finally stay in one place and stay in the same school. Looking back, it worked out. I'm glad it worked out the way it did.

Brooks: How did you end up recruiting? Was it just luck of the draw?

Peters: Luck of the draw, yes. Department of the Army, they figure they need X amount of recruiters because you've got people that are done with their assignment. If you become a recruiter, temporarily, and you want to convert to an actual full-time recruiter, you can. People rarely do that. It's luck of the draw. What they tend to do though they take guys from combat arms units—infantry, tanks, combat engineers—because there's a lot of those guys. You're not going to see too many people on recruiting duty that's pharmacy technician or geo-spatial whatever specialist or a medic because they don't want to take those because there's so few of them. At that time three other guys in my company got nailed on recruiting and you just—"Hey, Sergeant Peters, you got PCS orders." Permanent Change of Station. "Oh, God. Now where am I going?" "You're going to recruiting school." "Jeez."

And you can get out of it—you can deny, you can say "I refuse to go." But then you're getting out, you're not re-enlisting—you just finish out your term of service. I'm like, "I don't want to get out. I want to make a career of this." They kind of do the same thing with drill sergeant's school too. There really was, you've got no say-so in the matter. Thankfully I've got a son now who's in the Army, he's been there for three years, and I talk with his recruiter and I asked, "Is it as bad now as it was when I was in?" He said, "No. Now we get our butts treated if we're there after five p.m." He said "What happened was, I've heard of the horror stories from the eighties and nineties. What happened was so many recruiters were committing suicide and killing themselves, it was that bad that they couldn't ignore the problem any longer and they pretty much came in and cleaned house and set some ground rules where you're not going to be torturing these guys."

[01:40:24] You can't control, and I'm one of these where I'm not going to lie to a kid. "I'm from Wisconsin—I plan on living here one day. You don't want to join? That's fine. Here's my card. Change your mind—give me a call." It was just tough doing the job. You

have no say-so. That was just one more incentive to, "Maybe it's time to get out." It just got so tired of leaving your life up to the Army to decide where you're going, where you're going to live. If I was single it'd be different but when you've got a family, you've got to think of them.

Brooks: Did you have a plan for when you got discharged?

Peters: No, I didn't. I was at the point where I'm like, "I'll flip burgers at McDonalds if I have to." I was so disgusted with recruiting and the Army—getting treated so lousy. I just wanted to get out - I figured "I can do anything. I'll go work anywhere if I have to just to pay the bills." The adjustment was a little bit shocking. I did adjust well. I think I was surprised at how long it took for me to find something suitable. At least at that time—employers are different I think—at that time employers are like, "You don't have any managerial experience. All you've got is you were in the Army." "Yeah, I've got years of managerial experience." They couldn't compare the two. That was kind of tough. This is common sense here. I finally got a job after about—I drew unemployment which was nice. Then got a job.

And actually we ended up living in Marshfield and I actually recruited at Marshfield and one of the reasons I decided to move here is because of all the schools I covered on recruiting duty, I knew if I had a kid interested and they were from Marshfield, I did not have to worry about them passing the ASVAB—the test, the vocational aptitude test—not only did they pass it, they could be a quality applicant which they got fifty or higher on it because the schools here have such high standards. They were always rated one of the best in the state. When I got out I was like, "Okay, I love this town. I think we should move here." Then my wife, hopefully get in the school district, and she did eventually. She actually teaches fourth grade here in Marshfield, loves it. We love the town. Pretty much raised our kids here. That was one good thing that came out of it.

Brooks: Was that first job—was it here at the college?

Peters: No, I first worked in a—I was like a production supervisor in a manufacturing facility. Then after about a year and half of that I worked, it was like a start-up—they called it Green Glass, it was in Stratford for a while. It went out of business right away—they went bankrupt. Worked for the Marshfield Clinic on men's health study for about a year and half. Then started this job, working with the dislocated worker program in 2001 and have been doing that ever since. The program I work with, it's a federal job re-training program. I'm not even employed by Mid-State, they're just nice enough to let me work on site here and have my office located here. Most of my co-workers are out at the job centers in Wausau, [Wisconsin] Rapids and what have you. I'm very fortunate to work here because a lot of the folks that we bring into the program, we're paying for their schooling to go back to the tech college to re-train for whatever because they lost their job through no fault of their own. It's a great job—I love it. I get to interact with people, been doing that ever since.

Brooks: Now your son's in the Army. Did you guys have a conversation before he enlisted?

Peters: [01:44:52] We did. He was one of those where he didn't know what he wanted to do. My son Andrew—he's my younger son—he went in real early. In fact, he had to wait to ship out because he shipped out three weeks after his eighteenth birthday. He was probably the youngest guy in his basic training unit. He wanted infantry too and I'm assuming he wanted to do what I did. I just told him, "This is what you can expect." Andrew, I never worried about because he was always so easy going, always had real high confidence. His IQ is just through the roof. I always joke, "Who's his father? Because he didn't get it from me." Kind of surprised me because he never had to study at school—"Are you sure you don't want to go to college? Because I know you'd never have a problem with that." He's like, "Yeah, I do want to do that. I want to have fun. I want to travel. I want to shoot machine guns, blow things up." I totally understood that. "Yeah, that sounds like that me. Okay." He enlisted and of course we had to sign. My wife, she knew what it was like, the Army life—being a military spouse. He adjusted really well. Fort Campbell, Kentucky with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. He went to Afghanistan, a year and a half ago, did a nine month tour there. He's still in—he's got another year left. Not sure if he's going to stay in or not. I told him, "Wait, whatever way you go, that's fine." He's single so he doesn't have to worry about baggage—worrying about kids or a spouse. He seems to enjoy it.

Brooks: What's it like being a parent and having to sit at home.

Peters: I never had a problem with it. My wife on the other hand—it's the mother thing. When he was in Afghanistan you could tell she was a little nervous. I always tell her, "He's got a better chance of getting killed by a drunk driver in Wisconsin than getting killed over there." They were winding down operations—a lot of the foreign UN troops were taking over. NATO troops were taking over a lot of the convoy duties or patrols. "He's probably just sitting there bored out of his mind." He did enjoy it. He's like, "Finally I got a deployment." I just tried to reassure—"There's nothing to worry about." I never worried about something happening to him. Thankfully everything's gone smooth.

Brooks: Besides your son being in the Army, how present do you think the Army is and your service is in your life today?

Peters: When I talk to Andrew on the phone, he'll tell me about something that's going on and I'm like "Dude, you have tell me"—he'll rattle off military acronym, they're notorious for it. "Oh we did this and that." "You got to refresh my memory. I don't remember that, what does that stand for?" Some of them I remember but others—"That's new." Just the equipment they wear. He brought a bunch of stuff home after his deployment. Tried on his armored vest—like a flak vest but they got the plate to actually stop a bullet in the front. I was just shocked at the weight. If I had to carry that, oh man. I give the guys credit they got to carry a lot more and he's regular infantry, he's not on a vehicle. I'm just shocked about how much has changed. Lot of ways things are still the same—silly games. I'm proud of my service and what I did and the nine years I spent in. I wouldn't change it for anything.

[01:49:38] It was a good learning experience and I think every kid should go through that or something similar—some kind of service. Because it makes you grow up quick—some kids need that and the discipline. I don't really do a lot with veterans organizations. I've done stuff on the side. I'll do military displays for veterans like co-workers. I've done a lot of shadow boxes for some of the people here at the tech college. They had a person of World War II and I've got one in my office and they see that—"Oh. I'd love to have that. My uncle was in World War II. I'd be happy to do—I won't charge you anything. Just the cost of the materials." I've done a number of those. I did a World War I one, I've never done that before. Enjoy doing that kind of stuff. I've done some historical research on certain people, came across an old cabinet card of a Civil War soldier from Wisconsin—did some research on it—took about two years and finally got a name and what he did and where he's from.

I enjoyed that, I'm a history buff. I love old things - antiques - my wife and I own a historical home in town, it's like hundred and twenty-two years old. I always love the history aspect. Even when I was working for the clinic, travelling all over the state of Wisconsin on the men's health study, when I would interview these guys and sometimes they'd bring in "I served in World War II." or "I served in Korea." I'd stop the interview. We weren't tape recording it but, "Who'd you serve with? What did you do? Where were you at?" I always found it fascinating. I always put off trying to do something like this, the oral history, because I always felt sad because I would talk with some of these older gentlemen—they're getting up there in years and for the most part they didn't talk about their service.

I would ask them simple questions, not real detailed, not trying to pry, but for a lot of them they're so up there in age, they had a hard time remembering. "When were you in?" "Well, um, oh." "What did you do?" And they really struggled because they'd forgotten so much. I'm like, "Maybe it's probably not a bad idea to get this down—oral or written." I don't want to be in that position. As my kids got older, they got into junior high age, they kept asking me questions: "What did you do? Where were you at?" It got old trying to remember this. I don't know if you saw but I wrote a book. I went through a self-publishing thing but it was just to document it. I'm like, I'm not getting any younger and it's probably not a bad idea just to get this in writing. That way when I'm seventy, it's there. My grandkids, great-grandkids, they'll know. I'm glad I did that because I got a lot of pictures in there. In fact I was going to give you guys two copies here. Again, I didn't want to be one of those where I was struggling at an older age just to remember the details.

Brooks: Of all the things your kids would ask, or people have asked you about your service, what's the most common question that you get?

Peters: That's changed. Now it's the thing to: "You were in the Army? Thank you for your service." Which is fine and I think it's great that it's so different from the Vietnam era. People look up to and respect someone who serves their country. That took a little getting used to because people said, "Thank you for your service." And at first I was like, "Oh,

okay. Thanks, I guess." Maybe it goes back to the guilt thing. "You're a hero." "No I'm not. Just doing my thing." I always looked at it as a regular job. That was the hardest thing—you're here at some kind of veterans event and, "Our heroes this and our warriors that." I kind of cringe. "No, just a soldier, service member, that's fine." I don't correct people when they say that. As far as the most common question is, "When were you in? What did you do?"

[01:55:01] That's pretty much it. They don't usually get in to too great a detail. Usually because I've got the shadow box in my office and a couple of pictures, I'll have a client in there—"Cool. When were you in and what did you do?" I'll tell them. Every now and then you'll get someone "Did you kill anybody?" "No, I'm sorry to disappoint you. Not that I know of." Otherwise I don't, unless someone's in my office and sees the display, or they see my two tattoos on my forearms, they wouldn't think that I was in the service, or had been.

Brooks: I was going to ask about the tattoos. Did you get those while you were in?

Peters: I actually have four—shoulders and then the two eagles. One I got right after I got back from the Gulf and the other one I think that was in either Fort Bragg or Fort Riley—a couple of years later. I tried to keep mine clean, two eagles. Saw way too many guys with skulls and daggers through them. I always used to joke with them saying, "Hey that's a nice tattoo. But that might get a little uncomfortable twenty years from now when you're applying for that nice office job, office manager position. Not going to look good." To this day, I tell my clients that because I work with people trying to get them jobs and training, "You got a tattoo, cover it. Even to this day if I have to go look for a job, if I go in an interview, those eagles are covered, long sleeve."

Although it's much more acceptable nowadays—very common—there are employers out there that equate a tattoo to "Criminal, bad news. Don't hire them." I wear them with pride. Sometimes people ask - "Were you in the military?" "Yeah." Maybe that and then I do more of the military haircut. Got to get one here just because my hair is kind of thinning out it looks better with the shorter. Otherwise, people wouldn't know unless I told them.

Brooks: Is there anything you wish people would ask or you wish you had an opportunity to talk about more?

Peters: Not really. I think that people that haven't been in the service or maybe don't have family members. You always hear, "People that served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Gulf, Vietnam"—obviously, yes they're service to their country, that's great. But what I tell people is, if they ask, "What was the most difficult thing? What did you like the best or the least about your service?" I tell them, there are many ways—being deployed or serving in a combat zone, yeah that can be tough—but in many ways just being in the service, peacetime. Even my son has said this "Dad, when I was deployed, I loved it." Because the rules are a bit lax and it just it's a different environment. I was the same way. Then you get back and do a peacetime routine and training and field exercises, that to me was harder than

actually getting deployed and serving over there. It was just constant and again, you had no control over anything.

People that haven't served in a war or conflict, a combat zone, I guess some civilians marginalize that. "Yeah, you served but you didn't go anywhere, do anything." "You know, depending on that person's job and what they did, that could be just as bad, if not worse than being in a combat zone." That's for any branch. Being a Navy guy on a destroyer, on a six month sea duty—that's like a deployment. That was probably the biggest thing is people made comments over the years. "I got an uncle that was in but he didn't go anywhere, didn't do anything." "I'm sure he did. He'd disagree with you."

Brooks: I run into that a lot with trying to interview folks and if they didn't see combat a lot of times they're really hesitant because they think their story isn't important or their service wasn't interesting enough. It's nice to try to break down that stereotype. I'm just going to look and see if there's anything else. Helen do you have anything, any pressing questions that you felt like—not to put you on the spot, I just wanted to give you an opportunity.

Gibb: I did read about your cruise that you went on?

Peters: I totally forgot about that.

Gibb: I was waiting for it.

Peters: Probably one of the good things—our unit, our company when we were in Saudi Arabia—everybody in the company except for our platoon got to go on R&R for like two or three days. It was off on the coast wherever. Just relax. We get the shaft, we're the only ones that stay behind and watch everything. Right after Christmas, after that gunnery range, word came down, "We got slots to send people to the coast to go on a cruise ship—the Cunard Princess, actual cruise ship. It's not going to go anywhere, it's just docked." Each company had three people. It was like, "All right." I don't know how they came to who went but I was the corporal—"Corporal Peters can you take these two guys and you're going. You got ten minutes to pack your stuff." "Okay. That sounds cool." All day truck ride to the port.

Basically spent New Year's—three days but New Year's Eve—on a cruise ship. That was a shock because we're like "Oh my god." You're filthy and you've got all this gear and you're walking on this. You've got waiters in tuxedos and it's just like "Oh, wow. A toilet—this is nice, take a shower." "Dinner's being served." People waiting on you. You could just see the glassed over look on guys "Is this real?" That was interesting because I think they had three bars on the ship and they said, "After New Year's, all the alcohol is gone." Because guys were having a fun time. Alcohol was forbidden but because it was on that ship, being docked there, that was different. We had fun. We got to go water skiing on the gulf—they had a little area there. Just relax, take it easy. Unfortunately I was nursing a hangover for about a day and a half after that. Brooke Shields greeted everybody as they came onboard the ship. That was fun. Surprised no-one got alcohol poisoning.



Brooks: Was it just Army on the ship?

Peters: That I'm aware of. There might have been other services but most everyone I saw appeared to be Army but they were from every unit you could think of.

Brooks: Nice little treat. Anything else? Anything that I forgot to ask about?

Peters: I think you probably saw one of the things that I prided the most while I was over there was the Wisconsin flag that I donated to the museum. I had my mother ship that to me, October, November and that thing flew Saudi Arabia, Iraq. Everywhere our vehicle stopped it went on the antenna pole. Part of it was Wisconsin pride but also you got twelve Bradley fighting vehicles, which ones—unless you look at the bumper, look at the number, you don't know which one is which. "Oh yeah, Wisconsin flag." If you're sitting in a tent it went on a pole so I've got a million pictures of me with it. When I got back I was like, "Okay, let's donate this. It has a proper home." That's in there.

Brooks: That's great. Alright well I don't have any other questions. If it's okay we'll go ahead and turn off the recorder. Thank you so much for doing this for us.

[End of interview]