

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
THEODORE J. SIRIANNI  
Mortar Man, U.S. Army, Persian Gulf  
1996

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**Sirianni, Theodore J.,** (1971-). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 180 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 180 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Theodore Sirianni, a native of Cumberland, Wisconsin, discusses being stationed in Aschaffenburg, Germany and serving with the 3rd Infantry Division during the Persian Gulf War. Sirianni describes enlisting in 1989 and his basic and advanced individual training in Fort Benning (Georgia) as indirect-fire infantry. He states his impressions of the diverse people in training and how the unit used intimidation to deal with troublemakers. Sirianni describes the different sorts of mortars he trained with. He discusses training in falling and parachuting at Airborne School and earning his "blood wings." He talks about being sent to the 3rd Infantry Division in Aschaffenburg (Germany), overcoming culture shock, and going through a "Head Start" program for basic language training. Sirianni describes daily life and mentions taking Nuclear, Biological, Chemical (NBC) training. He states he did not think his unit would be shipped out because they weren't that good. Sirianni describes the troops' reaction at the news of deployment and sketches the preparation involved in shipping a mechanized unit. He talks about arriving at the Initial Staging Area, a huge tent complex in the Saudi Arabian desert, and waiting for the vehicles to arrive. Sirianni describes a panicked response to a Scud alert. He recalls being issued Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear and pyridostigmine pills for resisting chemical weapons. He illustrates how reliant troops are on commanding officers for news. Sirianni speaks of practicing maneuvers, being scared by a pack of dogs while on night guard duty, and fixing the headsets to play music. Part of a flanking force, he describes driving over unoccupied berms and firing mortars in two engagements. He emphasizes losing track of the days, states no one in his platoon was hit, and says that while watching combat it felt like watching a movie. Sirianni reflects on the troops' desire to go to Baghdad. After the cease-fire, he describes exploring empty Republican Guard barracks and running check points in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. He mentions giving extra MREs to Bedouins and refugees, directing them to the aid stations, and playing a lot of cards. At King Khalid Military City, Sirianni describes being issued desert uniforms for parade and for wearing home. Back in Aschaffenburg, he describes the homecoming ceremony and states that instead of using his leave to visit home he traveled around Europe. He touches on phoning home every few weeks and feeling supported by "any service member" letters. After the unit in Aschaffenburg was deactivated, Sirianni touches on an office job at Fort Bragg (North Carolina) and reflects on military downsizing. Discharged in 1994, he talks about using the GI Bill to pay rent while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He discusses joining "Vets for Vets" on campus and the VFW post in Cumberland. Sirianni touches on Gulf War Syndrome and his greater appreciation for freedom.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Theodore “Ted” Sirianni served in the Army from 1989 until his honorable discharge at the rank of Sergeant in 1994. He currently lives in Saint Michael, Minnesota.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archivist, 1996.  
Transcribed by Michael L. Weber, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.  
Transcript edited by Jackie Mulhern, 2007.  
Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2009.

**Interview Transcript:**

- Mark: Good afternoon and thanks for coming in.
- Theodore: Good afternoon.
- Mark: I know you're getting paid for it.
- Theodore: [laughs].
- Mark: Why don't we start at the top and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military.
- Theodore: OK. I was born and raised in Cumberland, Wisconsin on a dairy farm. And, let's see here. I had two older brothers who went in the National Guard. I wasn't ready for college yet so I joined the Army.
- Mark: So, you grew up on a farm and you were actual farmers? The small family farm type of thing?
- Theodore: A dairy farm with roughly 50 Holstein cows.
- Mark: Now you had mentioned you had siblings who had entered the military. And, I happen to know that your grandfather was also in the military. So, there was that sort of tradition in your family. I'm wondering if there were any economic motives for you joining the service?
- Theodore: Actually it was more economic than it was tradition because my grandfather was drafted and my uncle was drafted. And, my brothers went in for money and so, yes. Plus, you know, you join the Army to see the world, right?
- Mark: That was my next question. Why the Army in particular? I mean, you had umpteen number of services to choose from. What attracted you to the Army?
- Theodore: Oh, those fabulous Army commercials they have and the big, all the movies they make glamorizing Army life, you know.
- Mark: Do you remember any particular commercial that influenced you?
- Theodore: No, I don't remember any commercial [laughs]. "Rambo" was a big deal back then.

- Mark: I see. So you were a gung-ho young guy wanting to go into the military. You entered in 1989. You finished high school what year?
- Theodore: 1989.
- Mark: So you went in right after. Why don't you describe your induction into the military? You had to report and get a physical and that sort of thing. And then go off to basic training, get on the plane or the bus, or whatever. Why don't you just walk me through the steps of going to basic training.
- Theodore: Well, let's see here. I went in really fast. I was sworn in October 31<sup>st</sup> I think, and then nine days later I was in Fort Benning, Ga. And, of course, they start yelling at you right away and issuing you your uniforms, giving you that first haircut, and that's always funny. I've always had shorter hair so it's not been a big deal for me. I ate well. They gave you a lot of food and I put on about 30-lbs. in basic training. I was about 140 when I went in and about 170 something when I got out. We did a lot of pushups, a lot of situps, a lot of running –
- Mark: You beefed up.
- Theodore: Yeah, I beefed up [laughs].
- Mark: You were starting to head in this direction anyway. I was going to ask what sorts of things you were doing for training. How much of it was physical training, how much of it was in the classroom, how much of it was on the rifle range? And before we get to that, how long did basic training last?
- Theodore: Standard basic training, I think, is seven or eight weeks. Ours was combined because this was infantry training. That was my job. My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was 11-C, which was indirect-fire infantry. And they combined the basic training, the throwing grenades, the learning how to fire the M-16s, spending a lot of hours, you know, balancing a nickel on your barrel and pulling the trigger so you don't make the nickel fall off when you pull the trigger. You'd have classes where you'd learn about the Geneva Convention, first aid and of course, military courtesy, a little bit of military history, but not much. Of course you had to memorize your chain-of-command and the three general orders for a guard.
- Mark: What are they? You remember any of 'em? I know I don't remember any such thing.
- Theodore: I know, 'I will guard the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved,' and those kind of things. And, let's see here, like I said,

first aid. In infantry, you take the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) to get in. Then, about halfway through basic training, they pulled aside some of us and said, 'OK you guys are going to be 11-Charley mortars,' because there's more math involved in indirect fire than there is in just regular running around with a rifle or machine gun. And so, after basic training finished, we went into mortar training.

Mark: You went to AIT (Advanced Individual Training)? Is that what it is called in the Army?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Which was where?

Theodore: That was all at Fort Benning, too; the same drill sergeants and everything.

Mark: I want to come back to AIT. When you go to basic training you often come across people from different parts of the country, from different racial, cultural, ethnic backgrounds. Was that your experience?

Theodore: Yes.

Mark: And, if so, what sort of educational experience was that?

Theodore: That was quite a deal, quite a shock coming from northwestern Wisconsin. I mean, let's see here. A lot of the people; not a lot of people, there are people in the area who are racist because they just don't know any better. I don't want to give you opinions. I'll just tell you what happened to me. That's what to know, right?

Mark: That's all I can ask.

Theodore: I was raised in an environment where there weren't any and I was curious. Of course, you'd see them on TV, you'd see them when you'd go to a bigger city like Milwaukee or Eau Claire, right? So, I went to basic training and this was my first chance to really, of course I'm talking about Black people, and my first chance to get my impression of what Black people were like. And I found out that they are mostly just like everybody else. Some of them were just the nicest, the best battle buddies you could have and some of them were, you know, bad [laughs]. They were causing trouble and of course, if one guy fucks up, right, then everybody's got to pay for it. And a lot of times you'd find yourself paying for other people's mistakes, which is that whole teamwork-building thing. It didn't turn me into a racist. It didn't really change my opinion. I still think there are good people and bad people of any race, anyway.

- Mark: Even aside from race, I mean, the east coast, west coast, southerners. Come across any rednecks still fighting the Civil War or that sort of thing? There are divisions other than just the racial mix or other identities –
- Theodore: That's true. There's a definite California mentality, I thought I noticed. And, of course, down south they speak differently, even. They have that fierce southern pride. A lot of time they'd even be more dedicated than the normal soldier because they had more of a purpose, it seems.
- Mark: So you mentioned the "battle buddies." I mean, all these people -- I gather, eventually came together – sort of molded into Army material models, I take it. I mean, there were no fights in the barracks -- that sort of thing. Everyone came together.
- Theodore: Well, we had one guy who couldn't stop smoking. He'd smoke and get us all in trouble. And eventually, he got kicked out. He didn't make it. None of us liked him because he kept making us do pushups for him smoking a cigarette. We had other guys who just couldn't keep their mouths shut and they were smart alecks. And, we paid for them. We didn't have any, what do you call it, towel parties or whatever?
- Mark: GI parties?
- Theodore: Where you put bars of soap in a towel and beat him or whatever?
- Mark: Oh, I don't know that one.
- Theodore: See, the drill sergeants came from the "old school," and maybe when they went to the Army that was something that was – somebody did something bad, you beat him up at night or whatever.
- Mark: I was going to ask you this actually. It's quite obvious that the way the training is set up you're supposed to learn how to work as a group by yourselves, amongst yourselves; by having to do pushups because one guy screws up. I was going to ask, how did you guys, as a group, handle this? There's the little soap bar thing we were talking about before.
- Theodore: [Laughs]. We didn't do that, but the funny thing is, the drill sergeants had done that kind of thing – I don't know if they had done that but they had mentioned that it sometimes is what happens.
- Mark: Now did they actually touch you physically? Now back in the old days you hear about the drill sergeants taking the recruit behind the barracks. Did any of that happen where you were?

- Theodore: Well it didn't happen to me [laughs]. As far as I know, it didn't happen to anybody else. They relied on intimidation and of course the exercise, which I liked. So it didn't bother me as much. The only time they would touch you maybe would be to correct your uniform, or if you are doing drill and ceremony – marching, to correct your hand salutes, or if you are on the range. You know, fix your arm on the stock on the barrel of the rifle, or whatever, that kind of stuff.
- Mark: Did you have any women drill instructors?
- Theodore: No. This was infantry. No women and of course we sang all of those crass songs, too [laughs].
- Mark: That soldiers are famous for. So you went off to AIT (Advanced Individual Training). How long did that last?
- Theodore: The AIT and basic training were combined. They called it O-S-U-T, One Station Unit Training. I think the whole thing was about 14 weeks – 13-and-a-half or 14 weeks.
- Mark: So what is indirect-fire mortar. What are indirect-fire mortars? I was a Medic in the Air Force. I don't know what that is.
- Theodore: Well, let's see here. You've seen those – the Vietnam War movies where they got the tube and they drop the round and it goes, 'big boom' and it shoots it. We were trained on three different kinds of mortars. There's the 107-mm mortar, which is the biggest. It has a range of 7,000 meters. So you're between, really. In a tactical situation you're between the artillery and the grunts out front. Your job is to support platoons or companies of infantry squads up front. They'll call for fire then –
- Mark: Now how far behind are you supposed to be – a couple of miles? I mean, how far do these mortars travel and how far ahead of the infantry is the enemy?
- Theodore: OK well, the infantry is directly engaging the enemy so I mean –
- Mark: Maybe 100 yards if not –
- Theodore: Yes. And, we're not always behind them. From my experience in the Army after that, we're not always behind them. A lot of times we're off to the side over here providing fire. As long as we're within range or the projected enemy movements are within our range. So, if we're on the 107-mm mortar, I think it was a 7,000-meter range, we'd probably be within 5,000 to give us some latitude that way. And the 81-mm is less range and



of course the smallest, the 60-mm was even – might as well travel right – even closer to the companies up front.

Mark: So in 14 weeks, you finished your training. I imagine you got some leave and then it was off to your first duty station.

Theodore: Well, I signed up for four years and 17 weeks, because I had just got the GI Bill. I signed up for four years and 17 weeks; the 17 weeks was the training time.

Mark: So you had to go through the training and then do the four years, -- that's what it was? Those were the terms under the GI Bill benefit that you wanted?

Theodore: Well, the GI Bill everybody gets. That was just the contract that I signed because I was young, and whatever. But, it was three weeks. The three weeks after One Station Unit Training, they sent us right over to Airborne School, which was right there at Fort Benning. And that was also my contract because I wanted to be in the 82<sup>nd</sup> because I had heard that they were all 'Rah, rah.' Remember I was watching "Rambo." I wanted to do all the 'hooah' stuff.

Mark: You were gung-ho.

Theodore: [Laughs]. So, do you want to hear about Airborne School?

Mark: Oh yeah. I want to hear all about your training.

Theodore: They feed you all of these stories throughout basic training that, 'Ah, it's going to be tougher in Airborne School. We've got to get you ready. We've got to run you more.' And it is a little bit tougher, but if you go right after basic and AIT you're in pretty good shape and you can handle it. During the first week, they're still treating you like dirt, you know, the short haircut and whatever. I was PV-1, 'Private Dirt' and all the PT [physical training] every morning, cleaning your room, having all your uniforms nice and your boots spit shined every morning for formation. And you'd go on a run with the whole – with the cadre. It was a lot more motivational there. They'd pump you up a little bit more than in basic training. And, let's see here. The first week was our ground week. You'd learn how to fall, so you would spend all of your time jumping off of a platform a couple of feet high, a couple of feet off the ground, and fall into the left and fall into the right and fall into the forward; fall in backwards, or left and back or right and back because when you're in a parachute later on, you don't know which direction you're going to hit the ground. So the first week is that so you're all bruised and sore from jumping on the ground like an idiot [laughs]. And then the second week was "tower

week.” And, that week, at the end of that – yeah, there’s mock aircraft and you jump out the doors as if you were in a real airplane. There are wires and you jump out and there’s a harness so you’re wearing an actual parachute harness and you’re hooked up to these wires. And you jump out, it’s about 30-some-feet up. It’s pretty scary the first time you jump because it’s not normal to jump from 30-feet from anything. I don’t know – you were asking me before if drill sergeants could touch you. Not – I think that every once in awhile someone would get a kick in the pants if they didn’t jump out [laughs] because there’s no real danger. You’re hooked up to a wire and a harness and everything.

Mark: But still, some people wouldn’t. They wouldn’t jump unless they got a kick in the –

Theodore: No. They would just freeze in the door. And it’s not because they were scared and they didn’t want to go. It was maybe they just kind of got scared -- stuck in the door like they couldn’t move. But they knew they had to jump and they were going to but they just needed an extra push. And at the end of that week they’d give you your first drop from a parachute. There’s a “Mighty Ungawa” they called it. It’s this tower, I don’t know, it’s a couple of hundred feet high and they would just drop you with the parachute already open and that was your first parachute down. And the last week of Airborne School is five jumps, one jump each day from aircraft. It was all C-130s and C-141s. Then when you graduate they can give you “blood wings” if you want.

Mark: What are “blood wings?”

Theodore: You know the pin that you get with the parachute on it and the wings? Those are your jump wings and if you graduate you get to put them on your uniform for the rest of your Army career.

Mark: Those are your “blood wings/”

Theodore: Well, OK they have the metal pin that you can put on your uniform, unless you sew the patch on. Well in Airborne School they give you the metal pin. And there’s a backing on it and you don’t – you leave the pin off and you just put the pin on there. Then everybody comes by and punches you in the pin, so there are like holes in your chest when you’re [laughs]. Those are “blood wings.”

Mark: Sounds lovely.

Theodore: Real macho, macho [laughs].

Mark: So, did you get your “blood wings” eventually?

- Theodore: Yeah. I only let one guy hit me and then I was like, 'OK, enough of that. I'm backing out' [laughs].
- Mark: So you finished that. Then what happened?
- Theodore: Then, when we got orders somewhere while we were in Airborne School to which duty station and I found out I was going to Germany. So they sent me home on leave –
- Mark: This was not the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne?
- Theodore: No.
- Mark: So, were you disappointed?
- Theodore: At the time I was. I wanted to go to a "rah, rah" unit, remember?
- Mark: Uhm um.
- Theodore: And also, they always try to recruit people from Airborne School to go to Ranger School. And I was losing some of my 'rah, rah' because I didn't go to Ranger School [laughs]. That's even more grueling and I never did that.
- Mark: So you went to Germany to Aschaffenburg. Now you entered service it was October, 1989?
- Theodore: November, 1989. I was sworn in on October, 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Mark: You did about 14 weeks so, according to my calculations, the Panama thing had to have been going on by the time you finished school or something. Do you recall this?
- Theodore: Panama was going on while I was in basic training. We heard about it, the drill sergeants told us about it and that's it. You know how when you're in basic training you don't get any news, really.
- Mark: Well but this is something that they're probably going to want to tell you. I mean, when it comes to like getting into a war, joining the Army and what the Army does and that sort of thing, Did you have any expectations before you entered that, 'Geez, I might really end up in a war?' Or was it just a way to get money for school? I mean, what sorts of expectations did you have? And then, with the Panama thing, did they perhaps change?

Theodore: When I signed up, OK part of it was for the adventure and I've had a good family upbringing so I know that when you sign a contract you've got to honor it. So I was aware that if it did happen, I'd have to go.

Mark: But did you think it would? Or, as an 18-year-old kid, did you even think that way?

Theodore: Well, I was sort of a philosophical kid [laughs]. I don't know what book I read to make me feel this way but I was like, 'If I want to know true peace, I have to know true chaos before I can know that. So –

Mark: That's pretty philosophical.

Theodore: Yeah [laughs]. So, did I think it would actually happen? No, I thought I'd get some neat duty stations, get some neat training, get out and go to college. I didn't think I'd actually have to go somewhere.

Mark: And, did the Panama thing change anything for you? Or was that too little of a thing to really make much of a difference?

Theodore: That happened really fast. We were in the middle of basic training. They mentioned that if it was continuing when we finished we might go there. And that added some more focus to our training for us personally because you don't want to go in. But, it didn't have a big effect from what I remember.

Mark: So, when did you finally go off to Germany?

Theodore: I had a week of leave and then I went home and told my parents that I went to Airborne School, because they probably would have never let me go into the Army if they had known that I was going to do that. And then I made it to the – and they assigned me to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, which was headquartered in Wartsburg at the time. And then there's the whole culture shock thing. I didn't know a lick of German other than "Farfegnuegen," or Volkswagen or something.

Mark: Well, you got off the plane at Frankfurt probably.

Theodore: Yup.

Mark: Aschaffenburg not that far away from there.

Theodore: No.

Mark: Ok, let's talk about the culture shock. That's something I wanted to get to anyway so and I sometimes forget it. Umm, Germany is another western

industrialized country. Why don't you describe some of the culture shock that you experienced.

Theodore: When I first got there my unit, they were in the field. They were in Graffenvier training. And they'd be gone for three weeks. So I was all by myself. The Army sent you through a program called "Head Start" and they'd give you some basic language training, how to ask where the bathroom is, where's the train station –

Mark: How close to Bonnhoff –

Theodore: Yeah. How to order a beer, say, 'she has nice legs,' [laughs]. You know, that kind of stuff [laughs]. And some basic culture and, of course, the money stuff. But the first few days walking down the Strasse [street] and looking at all the signs and the cars – the signs are all in German, of course. The German people are talking in German and of course you have that American segment of the city, which is close to the base, which is always dumpy and commercial. I mean, they had McDonalds and Burger King right there. In Germany, they sold beer at the McDonalds. And that was tough because you couldn't go out and meet people unless they spoke English; unless you were trying your pigeon German on them, or whatever. I thought when you go to Germany, it makes you closer to your comrades that are American because, hell, who else is there to talk to, you know.

Mark: But they were out in the field.

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: But they eventually came back. Did that ease your culture shock a bit? I mean, you started to get settled into your unit finally.

Theodore: Well you know how when they first introduce you to your unit, they give you a lot of razzing. I mean, not –

Mark: That's not my experience. I went into a clinic. Why don't you explain what that means.

Theodore: [Laughs]. Oh, this is infantry. They just [laughs]. My platoon sergeant took me into the TOE (Tactical Operations and Equipment) room, whatever it was called. And that was always where we had our platoon meetings and stuff. He said, he was asking me just basic questions, where I came from and they found out I was a farm boy and people always get a kick out of that.

Mark: Steers and queers –

- Theodore: Yeah, steers and queers [laughs]. As a matter of fact, he did say that so I asked him where he was from. But, I was kind of a smart aleck so I fit in OK. He asked me if I was airborne and he was too; the airborne wings or whatever. And he goes, 'Do you want to be again?' And I thought about it for a second and then this big guy was getting ready to kick me in the ass. That was how I was going to be airborne, so I answered, 'no' [laughs]. I didn't want to be airborne at the time.
- Mark: So, you went through the airborne training. You were qualified to wear the wings but yet they sent you to a regular old infantry division.
- Theodore: Mechanized infantry.
- Mark: So they produced many more airborne troops than they could have in regular airborne units with the idea being, I suspect, perhaps you could rotate in there at some future point?
- Theodore: Well, it's a part of that "rah, rah" thing. It's part of the incentive to get people to join, I think, too; offering them Airborne School. Maybe it's an incentive.
- Mark: And they'll give you the wings but you won't necessarily serve in an airborne unit.
- Theodore: Right. I was lucky. Later I did. I was lucky, at least I thought so.
- Mark: Between the time you got to Germany and the time you were called up to go to the Gulf; why don't you just describe everyday life in the Army. I mean, what did you do when you got up in the morning? Did you really do more before 8 am than most people do all day? I mean, how often were you in the field training? What did you do in garrison, etc., etc.?
- Theodore: OK, when I first got there, they were out in the field so when they came back – they were just coming back. I did the Head Start thing for a couple of weeks. I don't remember exactly how long it was. They wanted me to have that done so I could help them when they came back. And the first – we'd have 0555 hours – this was garrison. We had 0555 hours first formation. So you'd get up. I don't know, a normal person would get up at 0520 hours or something; or a quarter after five. But we all got up at 0535 hours or 0545 hours and threw on your PTs (physical training clothes) and show up in formation shivering, or whatever. You'd do the PT (physical training) for an hour, or whatever, and then run and sing cadences. Germany is really beautiful for running. I liked that part [laughs]. But, let's see here. PT would get done and everyone would shower, you'd do the common areas and that was always a sore spot for everybody because

some people didn't want clean what they were supposed to clean. I don't know if you had to do that same kind of thing, but –

Mark: Collecting cigarette butts in the parking lot on occasion.

Theodore: Cleaning the sinks, the toilets, the showers, mopping the floor or whatever. Then you got another – you'd eat breakfast and then you'd have a 9 am formation. Of course you had to show up with your uniform all ironed and starched and the shiny boots and your room --. When I first got there your room had to be "display purpose" all the time. Your boots had to be shined and under your bed, or on top of the wall locker. Your wall locker – you could lock it of course but when it was open it all had to be all nice and neat. All the uniforms with the patches showing, the Class-A (uniform) all the way at the end. Your three-drawer chest with your socks and underwear all rolled up and stuff and no dust, the usual bed made up.

Mark: You were in a very different military than I was.

Theodore: Really?

Mark: Oh, yeah. So like, what do you do all day? I mean, if you're not in the field training are just these chores keeping you busy or classes? Do you have to go to the rifle range on occasion? I mean, what do you?

Theodore: Like I said, they had just gotten back from the field and I remember this very vividly because the first thing they had me do the very first day was to clean the vehicles. And they'd been out in this muddy Graffenvier Training Area. They were caked in mud and they'd bring them back on trains, you know; railhead. They'd bring them back to the motor pool. In garrison, we would spend most of our time in the motor pool working on the vehicles or weapons systems. The very first job they had me do was to get underneath the track, the M-106 mortar carrier and chip the dried mud off the inside of the road wheels. So I was underneath this track with this heavy hammer and a screwdriver chipping my very first day of work in my new unit. I was like, 'Oh my God. This is going to suck,' [laughs]. That's incentive to get promoted, you know.

Mark: I suppose it is. So, when was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry eventually called up for the Gulf?

Theodore: It was sometime in November.

Mark: So this thing had been going on for awhile?

Theodore: Yeah.

- Mark: Because August was the Iraqi invasion and November was when you got called up then. Had you been to Graffenvier and had you trained for a combat situation before you got called up?
- Theodore: Yeah. We occasionally – well we, of course, if we weren't in the motor pool we were doing kinds of trainings. We always had gunner's exams, or gunner training, first aid – every Thursday was Marne Thursday or something. You'd do the little green book called the CTT (Common Task Training) Manual. We'd learn first aid stuff out of that.
- Mark: Marne training? M-A-R-N-E, as in the battle of -- ?
- Theodore: Yes. Rock of the Marne. That's like the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division motto.
- Mark: Oh, I see.
- Theodore: Evidently, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division was big in World War I. We had to learn the history and the chain-of-command when we got there, too and I've promptly forgotten all of that. But occasionally we'd run with our gas masks, we'd do the new NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) training and of course we did maintenance on the vehicles. We'd a – I think we went to Graffenvier for training once before I went there and maybe some more in the local training area. As soon as we found out we were going to go, they really wanted us to bone up on all of our stuff.
- Mark: As we established earlier, about two months between the Iraqi invasion and the time you were called up. Could you see it coming? I mean, what sort of signs did you see, or did you see anything leading you to believe that you were going to be called up and shipped to Saudi Arabia?
- Theodore: See? That's the funny thing. We knew the 82<sup>nd</sup> was there. They were the line in the sand. But I just thought our unit was just a shitty unit. I thought that we were not going to do well and I didn't think that they'd -- . My personal opinion was that if they were to evaluate all the units and see which ones they'd want to send into a battle like that, it wouldn't be ours. So whenever mom and dad called and said, 'Are you guys going to have to go?' I was like, 'Nah, I really don't see that happening, mom [laughs]. I don't think we're that good.'
- Mark: You did say that in all honesty?
- Theodore: Yup [laughs]. Well that was a private's point-of-view. I really didn't mean anything to anybody anyway. But I didn't see it coming.
- Mark: And so when the call came, I mean when you found out you were going, how did that transpire?



- Theodore: That was on a Friday. The final formation – evidently they found earlier that day, or something – our commanders. And they were giving us our weekend briefing, you know, ‘wear a condom, don’t drink and drive, don’t drink and boat, don’t drink and swim,’ all that. But it was at that formation. They usually say all that and they told us, ‘Oh, we’re going to deploy to Saudi within the next two months,’ or something. And we were all shocked and of course the married people are always more alarmed and we were just mostly in disbelief more than anything; not shocked. Just kind of like, ‘Oh wow. Is this happening to us?’ kind of thing.
- Mark: So this kind of unit is mechanized. You’ve got to ship all of this stuff. And there’s a lot of preparation involved in actually getting over. So why don’t you describe what you had to do to get all your stuff ready and then describe your “voyage” to Saudi Arabia.
- Theodore: We heard they had a million-man army so they were really – they got all the Bradley’s (Fighting Vehicles) and the tankers out there on the gunnery range boning up on their gunning. Everybody was – for awhile, everybody was wearing their gas mask because they were worried about terrorist threats. So everybody on post was wearing their gas mask wherever they went. They implemented like a terrorist police – There were more MPs (Military Police) guarding where the soldiers’ families were in Germany at the time.
- Mark: Were you allowed off the post anymore? Did they keep you on post after you got called up or did you still get to go out and toss down a couple at the –
- Theodore: No, we still got to go.
- Mark: You were able to get off the post?
- Theodore: Yes. And they beefed up security, I think, even at the gates a little bit. I don’t know if they had a curfew or not. I don’t remember about that. But the other kind of training we did – we did more NBC training, of course and like you said, they were trying to figure out how to get the vehicles ready because we found out we were going to transport them by ship. We had to bring them north to Bremerhaven and go out of the port up there. And so they wanted to get all the equipment that they could in our vehicles and then strap down. So we had these big inspections. Of course you had to lay out everything and make sure it was accounted for and it was all there. If you needed anything they’d get it for you. They were trying to get all the tracks fixed because these were used in the Korean War. They were old [laughs]; 1950-something. I saw the date on one of them. Then of course the mortars were probably older than that because they can use

those for a long time. They were trying to get all the vehicles into a decent state of repair before we went and that's probably part of the reason I didn't think we'd go anywhere, because these were old vehicles; M-106 A-2s. And they had A-3s with steering wheels. We still had the laterals, you know, like a skid steer? So they had all these inspections. The colonels would come down, give us these things, 'things are coming along good, you know, the deployment, you guys are --.' They were always working on morale, especially for the married people. I'm sure it's always harder on them.

Mark: What would they do about morale? I mean, what did they tell you?

Theodore: Well, my gosh. They'd just say we were doing a great job, you know, 'You're doing this for your country,' you know, ah, 'we're just going to go over there as an occupation.' As far as I know, they hadn't planned on attacking anybody yet. We had picnics, the usual, nothing extraordinary for morale. They'd give us extra time off on the weekends whenever they could. But, there was so much to get ready that it didn't happen very often.

Mark: So when did you finally ship out?

Theodore: Half of my company went on Christmas Day and I think I left the day after Christmas; the 26, 27 or 28; one of those.

Mark: So all of your stuff went by ship but you probably flew over there?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Rhein Main to –

Theodore: Rhein Main to –

Mark: To Daharahn?

Theodore: Is there an airport in Daharahn?

Mark: Yeah.

Theodore: That's probably – yeah, OK, it wasn't an airport. I just remember this airstrip. And of course, it's all desert so I don't remember an actual docking facility for a plane. You just walk off the airplane and you're assaulted by the –

Mark: And the climate is much different. Germany is pretty cold. It's not Wisconsin, but it's pretty cold at Christmas time. Saudi Arabia was different, I imagine?

- Theodore: Well, when we got to Daharahn, yeah. It was.
- Mark: Did you get the desert camouflage or did you step off the plane in your regular “greens” and did you stay in those?
- Theodore: We were in our color-greens the whole time. They didn’t have enough evidently. Actually, we were issued the desert camouflage as we were leaving at KKMC (King Kahlid Military City) on our way out to go back to Germany for the parades and stuff [laughs].
- Mark: Oh, I see. We’ll come back to that. OK, so you landed at Daharahn. What happened after that? Where’d you go?
- Theodore: Then we were bussed to, I think it was called the I-S-A, the Initial Staging Area. They had a big sign out. It was just a huge tent complex. I guess that’s where their –
- Mark: It’s out in the desert somewhere?
- Theodore: Yeah. When we get to this point I don’t know where we are, OK [laughs] because just being a private, I wasn’t told really, didn’t have a map and all that.
- Mark: I see.
- Theodore: At the Initial Staging Area, they had signs up there. They called it the Dew Drop Inn, just as a joke you know, and they had all the units or whatever that were there. And you had to lug your sailor’s bag, that big green duffel bag and then your rucksack, and of course, your M-16 and your mask; carrying all this stuff for, it seemed like miles, looking for your tent city. Half of my platoon was already there, so we just had to find them. We were living in, what are they, 20-man tents? Whatever they are. Twenty, or 30-man tents.
- Mark: I never slept in a tent in four years. I take that back. One time I did.
- Theodore: Yeah, I think we had two tents for our platoon. You get the idea, GP (General Purpose) Medium or whatever, tents. They had cots in there. So, you’d have the cot right there, you’d have space for your rucksack and your duffel bag, and then the next cot. So that was your whole personal space, right there. And there were lines where you could hang up your socks, or whatever, if it was wet laundry or –
- Mark: So we’re about two weeks from the start of the air war at least, anyway.

- Theodore: When did the air war start?
- Mark: January 17.
- Theodore: OK.
- Mark: So you were getting up there right about that time, it sounds like?
- Theodore: Yeah. We had to wait for our vehicles because they went by ship. So they didn't come in, I don't know, until like, I think, it was right about the same time the air war started. We had just got our vehicles. They came in at the port, or whatever.
- Mark: And, once you got your vehicles, what happened after that? I mean, did you move? Were you on the move then, or did you, was this the staging area you started the ground war from?
- Theodore: The staging area, while we were there that was probably the last time we had the shower setup and stuff. We did more NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) stuff. The big threat then was the Scuds (missiles). We were always worried about Scuds. And Saddam was ready to use chemical warfare at any time. Then we had a couple of Scud alerts. And there was this big berm all around the ISA (Intermediate Staging Area) and nobody knew where to go, which side of the berm to be on. If the Scuds hit inside the ISA, you'd want to be outside the berm. But if they hit outside the ISA you want to be inside the berm [laughs].
- Mark: And you don't know where it's going to hit, so what do you do?
- Theodore: So we had a Scud alert. I don't know if it was an actual attack and they fell hundreds of miles short, or what. So there I was running, panicking; somebody's gas mask broke and they were running around scared. I was running to this berm and I saw all these people and I saw a bunch of people on one side of the berm and I saw people running over to the other side [laughs]. So I ran up on top of the berm and I looked. And it looked like about half the people were outside of the berm and half the people were inside of the berm [laughs] and I didn't know where to go. And everybody was lost. It was so -- I can laugh now. I was probably laughing then because I laugh about those things, but that was kind of funny. But once we got our vehicles then it was time to move.
- Mark: Yeah. Now before we go on, I suppose umm -- You mentioned the chemical threat. Some of the vets, once they came home, had some concerns about some of the medications they took, for malaria and for anti-NBC types of things. Do you recall being issued pills and that sort of thing?

Theodore: Yeah. We had all the usual shots. I'm hoping, at least, that they were the usual shots, before we left Germany [laughs]. And then, once we got there, they issued us real MOPP (Mission Orientated Protective Posture) gear that's sealed in the plastic. Not the training MOPP gear that you wear for training purposes. They issued us that and you took that wherever you went. When I told you we had that alert? The first thing you do is put your mask on and put this uniform on and then you're about 150 degrees.

Mark: This is the green, charcoal thing?

Theodore: Right. You put it on and there's charcoal covering your whole body after you take it off. They even came out with newer ones that had the camouflage pattern, not just green. So, you would carry those around with you. We actually had two of them, one that we broke into right away and they said we could use those a couple of more times because the charcoal was still going to be OK. I don't remember exactly. But as far as the – and they also – Let me see. When did they start giving us those pills? I don't think I started giving us those pills until we moved out of the ISA. Once we got our vehicles – I think they considered the ISA just too damn many people in one spot for Saddam to hit with a missile. So they – as soon as your vehicles came, you were out of there. And we went to another place. I don't remember what it was called, and it was just our battalion area, our brigade. Do you have the specifics on our brigade and how that all was and -- ?

Mark: Uhm um.

Theodore: We were attached to them. And our brigade tried to stay together because we were from a different division originally. So our brigade – The reason I took our brigade because our brigade commander was supposed to be a real good desert fighter from NTC (National Training Center) or something. Anyway, somewhere out there they started giving us these pills. They said that if you were attacked by chemical weapons and you had these pills already in your system, the atropine injector would work quicker and better for you. And then you had the 2-Pam Chloride. You know in your gas mask carrier you have the two syringes and you punch them in your leg? You're supposed to –

Mark: I don't remember.

Theodore: {Laughs}. It's supposed to make those work better, these pills. You take them like every eight hours. Some people didn't take them. They also offered an experimental shot. You had to sign this paper saying, 'I won't hold the Army responsible, or anybody.' I didn't do that. I was really naïve but evidently I was not that naïve, thank God now, I guess.

Mark: So there were some who refused to take the pills?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: For what reason?

Theodore: You didn't know what you were taking.

Mark: Oh.

Theodore: It was like pyro-dijer-dider-dijimide or something (pyrodistigmine).

Mark: And you did though.

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: You were supposed to take these, what, every eight hours or something?

Theodore: Yeah, every eight hours, I think.

Mark: Did that continue throughout the conduct of the ground war and the whole business?

Theodore: Right. And, like your NCO (Noncommissioned Officer) in charge of you. Your sergeant, like your squad leader, was supposed to physically watch you take this pill. And of course, there was the usual put it under your tongue or you know. But I took mine and a lot of people, I don't know if it was psychosomatic or what? A lot of people had side effects from that as soon as we started taking them.

Mark: Like what?

Theodore: I mean, I did two and I was like nervous, chills, cold and fever-like symptoms, your heart's beating really fast and – I don't think it was psychosomatic for me. A lot of people had diarrhea, different kinds of things. I don't know if it maybe encouraged dehydration kind of things. The medics were putting people on IVs. I don't know if they knew what they were doing. It wasn't serious. It just was kind of an ongoing thing for awhile there.

Mark: So you got your trucks and you went on the move. The air war lasted about six weeks before the ground war started. I'd imagine that there are some preparations that you have to make before you get into combat. And I realize, as you mentioned, that you weren't the general with the map in front of you. But, from the private's point-of-view, I would imagine that

there would have to be a point where you knew things were about to happen.

Theodore: Yeah. Well, occasionally we could make phone calls. So they, you know, didn't tell us. We could, you know, call back and you didn't know anything. There was no problem. Once you got out into the desert, you were pretty much cut off from everybody and they could start telling us more stuff. And I think they – I don't know when they decided to tell us, or what, but we did a lot of maneuvers with our tracks. They just wanted to see if they could sustain a drive for a long period of time, or whatever. And I was a driver, so that was my job and I was – It was a good thing that I had duct tape and extra wire because those things were old and I was always trying to jimmy-fix things. And they wanted to see if these tracks – and so we'd go through maneuvers in a wedge. As a mortar platoon anyway, we'd be in a wedge.

Mark: So you've got trucks in a wedge and you're going forward?

Theodore: Tracks.

Mark: Tracks.

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: You're not shooting. You're just like trying to maneuver at this point?

Theodore: Yeah, we're just practicing maneuvers, maneuvering at night. They came up with a, they took our headlights off the front and put them on the back and some kind of a thermal sight so we wouldn't get shot by our own helicopters flying over. I don't know if any of that worked and we did different signals. And each platoon had a different color on the back of their track; just two little green slits. And I can remember driving at night for hours, I mean you could drive like 20-hours straight sometimes, driving at night and just watching the bouncing green lights in front of you. It gets so dark that all you are seeing are these green lights. After awhile you figure out how far you are because you have to maintain distance and, of course, the wedge. And, so you would concentrate on those lights. And every once in awhile, the lights stop bouncing and you're really sleepy and [laughs] your brain doesn't register right away that the lights stopped and you almost run into the guy that's in front of you. We did a lot of tactical driving like that and it was all MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) from then on out, too.

Mark: So you had to get to a starting point somewhere, I would imagine. I don't know. I wasn't in the infantry. Why don't you just walk me through the

start of the ground war. I mean, a couple of days before, what sort of preparation did you make and when did they wave the flag and say, 'go.'

Theodore: I think that the whole time we were practicing maneuvers, they were gradually moving us north from retro-view, you know, whatever. And a, so we were gradually moving and practicing maneuvers. At the same time, they were getting the supply lines straight; all that stuff. But, what were they doing to get us ready? Well, then they were having us dig holes every night so we had a place to jump if we got attacked for whatever reason. And then we had to man guns and maintain perimeters. You know, they'd stretch concertina if they could. And we'd man M-60 (machine gun) positions at night or, you know, yeah it was M-60 positions. So you would spend most of your time on guard duty then. I'd be on guard duty from 0200 hours to 0600 hours and then you have stand-to in the morning and everybody gets up because everybody attacks at dawn. So every morning at 0500 hours, an hour before the sun would come up everybody would have to get up and get out on their gun positions and be ready to fight.

Mark: And what were you, I mean, some rogue Iraqi unit or guerillas, or what were you – or was it just general precautions? Why were you making such um, elaborate plans?

Theodore: I guess we knew that the Republican Guards were somewhere and as far as rogue attack units, I have no idea. This is one of those PV – well, I think I was a PFC (Private 1<sup>st</sup> Class) by then. This was just one of those 'private' things where you just do what you are told.

Mark: You don't know what the heck's going on. You just go do it?

Theodore: There's nothing you can do if you – But, I mean, I'm sure that's something that we talked about like, 'What are we --.' One night I was with my squad leader in the M-60 position and we heard noise out there. It was a dark night again. Sometimes it gets so dark you can't see things? We heard movement out there and it's a big deal to break the seal on your M-16, on the magazine, because you have tape over it so that you don't accidentally start shooting. I was with my squad leader at the time and he wanted me to 'lock and load,' you know, and be ready to shoot. And it was dogs and we were getting ready to shoot at a pack of wild dogs [laughs] at 3-o'clock in the morning, or something.

Mark: So it's very, very remote out there. You can't see anything at night. I'm wondering if you could hear the air war going on? They were pounding Iraqi lines pretty heavily by this time, I would imagine. Did you get to a point where you could start to hear the thunder in the distance and that sort of thing and you knew you were getting close to the front lines?



- Theodore: Every once in awhile we'd see the bombers flying over, or whatever, the fighter planes that go with them. I don't remember – I don't remember, this is one of those things again where you just don't know if it's – I can't remember to tell you the honest truth if we – Yeah, I can't honestly say I remember hearing bombings. We had radio and we knew we were bombing, and of course, we knew when the air war started and stuff. I don't recall myself hearing any thunder in the distance.
- Mark: And so, when did you go? When did it stop being training and when did it start being actual warfare?
- Theodore: Well that's when everything got serious. When the air war started then it was like they weren't messing around.
- Mark: But still, you were moving north and you weren't going out to engage anyone right? But there came a point where they said, OK boys. Go get 'em.' When was that and what was the experience? What was your experience at that time?
- Theodore: [Laughs] Man. Well, Ok, then they had us put on our MOPP suits. I don't know, what is it, Mission Oriented Protective Posture? And right out of the plastic bags because they didn't want to take any chance with that. Your mask is always really close to your atropine injectors, your M-16, you know, not locked and loaded yet because we were mounted so M-16s aren't really a basic part of your armament, the first engagement anyway. But, and they told us that. You know, everybody had full tanks of gas and boxes of MREs and all of our tracks had 100-some rounds of mortars, mortar ammunition in there and the 50-caliber on top and everything. And that's, and then, of course, they came over the radio. The platoon sergeant, or the lieutenant, told us when we crossed over the line into Iraq. And they had the berms, of course, all along the border which – That's the only way you can tell when you've crossed the border is when you hit these berms and we were worried about mine fields and stuff. But, evidently there weren't any. I remember we figured out a way to rig up our Walkman so it played into our headphones. As a driver and whoever is in charge of the track, like the squad leader, he sits up there and he can see further and he mans the 50-caliber and he tells me where to drive. So, we have headsets on all the time and we figured out a way to hook our Walkman into the headsets. We were listening either to the "Beatles" or the "Scorpions" when we crossed the Iraqi line [laughs].
- Mark: Now I forgot to look at a map before we did this. You were still pretty far west. I mean, were there Iraqi troops out there or were you part of the force that was flanking them at this point?
- Theodore: We were part of the flanking force from what I understand.

- Mark: So you saw berms but they weren't occupied?
- Theodore: Right. So we drove. It was kind of a weird start to a war. We didn't encounter anything the first night, as far as I know. I think it started in the afternoon. Do you know? I mean I don't know when it started.
- Mark: It started in the afternoon here. It had to be in the middle of the night there, if I recall. I don't know exactly.
- Theodore: In the desert, isolated as we were, we didn't really have a good – I didn't really have a good perception of when it started or where we were. I just knew that I was driving and at some point or another I would be asked to stop the track and get out and help run the mortar system. I was the assistant gunner at the time.
- Mark: And when did that finally happen? I assume it did.
- Theodore: That was like the next morning. It looked like a castle off in the distance. Like I said, we were mortars, indirect fire. But, usually when you run a mortar system you try to hide behind a hill. I think it's called 'infallade.' You have a hill in front of you so that you can't take direct fire, just artillery and maybe planes flying over. But there wasn't anything between us and the target we were shooting at because our range was 7,000 meters, I think, and there were no hills between us and them. It looked like a castle off there, some kind of fort, and ah, they asked us to start firing at them. So, we did. We pulled up to our positions and turned the tracks around and started firing rounds and we were shooting at a vehicle over there. And with mortars, you don't really – it's not like you're pulling the trigger. It's more like you're pushing a button and it's blowing up somewhere else. So they said we hit some trucks that were trying to get away, or some vehicles in the compound.
- Mark: But, you couldn't see?
- Theodore: No. I mean, well of course, with the tanks. We were part of an armored – So the tanks did most of any engaging with other tanks. And then, of course, the helicopters and the, was it the A-10s, did a lot, I think? Yeah.
- Mark: So, you were pretty much just mopping up? Would that be a – I mean, these enemy positions had already been attacked by planes and by tanks and that sort of thing. What was your role precisely from what you can tell. I mean, was it a mopping up type of thing?
- Theodore: We were in direct support of the tanks that were engaging. The good thing about the military these days in my point of view is that they prep it with

the Air Force first and then they would have the MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket Systems) which was just outstanding. And they can shoot those from I don't know how many miles away. And so it was already saturated before we got there. So, you could say, everybody was just doing mopping up after the Air Force came through. But the tanks were dug in really good and our tanks would take them out from as long a distance as they could and that wouldn't be a problem. The only time – I don't know why they asked for our support in that case. Maybe they couldn't engage them directly with the tank, because my battalion, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup>, was the lead of our brigade. So I know that we were the mortar platoon that was basically in the front in direct support of those guys when they did that. Again, unreal – you don't have any –

Mark: Yeah. About how long was this engagement to your recollection?

Theodore: A couple hours.

Mark: And then you keep going forward again.

Theodore: Right.

Mark: Did you get a chance to look at what it was you were shooting at eventually? Or did you bypass it or –

Theodore: We drove around it. They were always worried about mine fields.

Mark: Yeah.

Theodore: And, of course, they had people come in later to take care of that. You'd drive by prisoners and, of course, you'd drive by Bedouins out there all the time.

Mark: In the middle of a war.

Theodore: [Laughs]. The whole time I don't think they had a really good idea, I don't know, the Bedouin. But, yeah, we bypassed that and then went on. It was the next day that – I think it was the next day. At this point you're driving all the time, or you're sleeping, or driving and you kind of lose track of days. You're keeping the MOPP gear on all the time, eating when you can, going to the bathroom when you can. Of course, there's nothing like a shower, or a shave. You have to try to shave because otherwise your mask doesn't fit properly. We had another engagement, but I don't remember which day it was. I think we had two engagements. I remember after the war, they said our mortar platoon fired the most mortar rounds out of any mortar platoon. I don't what that means, really. And, so we had an engagement the next day. We would pull up into a position. We were

fighting one section of the Republican Guards. I think our mission was to destroy them. It was like the Tawakan, or the Medina. I remember those two names. I don't know if we finished them off, or what? But, we pulled up into a position and they wanted us to start firing because somebody was getting shot at, artillery wise. And that's what we're good for is taking out people that are a longer distance away that they can't get to because artillery prevents them from getting close enough with their tanks and Bradley (Fighting Vehicles). So, we'd pull in and then artillery would hit close to us, so we'd pull back. Then they'd give us a move and then we'd pull in again, set up all our mortars because it takes a couple of minutes to pull the track around and get it sighted. You know, they try to be as exact as they can with this long-range weapon that there's no sight. It's just references, you know? So we'd pull in, get set up and then incoming would start coming again. So we'd quick drive out. And that happened a couple times and we heard over the radio that someone was taking, you know, fire and they needed help. And, we pulled in one more time and then we did a couple of volleys of rounds at a couple of different targets. There were six guns in our platoon. Maybe there were only four at this time, because one of the tracks quit eventually. And, I think, they claim that we were responsible for taking out the command post that was in charge of the artillery. The artillery, from what I understand, was notoriously inaccurate.

Mark: Iraqi artillery?

Theodore: Yeah, Iraqi artillery. But evidently they were coming close with this command post and their forward observers, whatever and eventually we hit their command post and wiped it out, and the artillery stopped. And they continued with their – the tanks were able to keep moving forward and everything.

Mark: Yeah. You mentioned incoming. Did anyone get hit or did you get out of the way quick enough?

Theodore: We didn't get – our platoon – Nobody in our platoon got hit by any incoming. We think that maybe – we had a short round from one of our own come close and bounce off of our tracks, the shrapnel and stuff. But, I was driving. I didn't see which way it was coming from. But, they were trying to bracket us if you know how artillery works. I think they were trying to bracket us because it would come short and that was when we were trying to pull in and then it would go back over here, behind us.

Mark: You mean the Iraqis were trying to bracket you?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Because you start getting between –

Theodore: Yeah. I don't know where exactly we were, but the support platoon got hit. Some guys got hit and it burned down a HUMVE and I think three guys were mildly wounded, but not bad, from our headquarters support company. And that was way behind us. They never even were worried about anything like that. Of course, MLRS was somewhere back there too always doing what they did. And then a part of our brigade was the 466 Armor Battalion from the same town in Germany: Aschaffenberg. And I think that they took a direct hit from a rocket launcher, an RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade), something or other. And I think one guy died from that and another guy was wounded. Maybe it was them who were yelling? Again, no idea.

Mark: So you mentioned two significant engagements that your unit was involved in. Was that pretty much it?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Now 100 hours is going to be about three-and-a-half or four days. When the cease fire was called, do you recall that?

Theodore: They told us. Again, you're out in the middle of nowhere. It doesn't really mean –

Mark: I mean, had you been engaged in the last couple of hours before they told you or did you have an idea that it was going to be over pretty soon?

Theodore: Oh, we were in position to fire on something. Maybe it was just after we had been firing on something. Nah, it wasn't just after. We were in a position to fire at something, but the tanks were doing such a good job that they didn't need our help. And we could see smoking tanks through our sights. They were close enough to see through our sights, because you keep moving forward. They'd take out the tanks here, or whatever, and then keep going. At one point in that second engagement though, after we took out their command post we knew that there wasn't any artillery coming, they weren't needing us. We were just told to hold fast and wait. And, helicopters all over the place shooting stuff up, the tanks were engaging all kinds of stuff, it was like watching "Combat" with Vic Morrow, or something. And they were dropping, I think it was the A-10s that were dropping those big 500-pound bombs. I don't remember. But from where we could feel the shock wave from these bombs when they would blow up significant things like their ammo dump, or whatever. From that point it was a spectator thing. And we were actually cheering and clapping when big things blew up. Just to give you an idea of how apart from us it was, like you've read history and you know how some

guys are right there hand-to-hand. It wasn't like that at all. At that moment I felt like I was watching a movie. And I was sitting on top of the track, eating an MRE, watching the rest of our great, grand Army blow up their stuff, take prisoners, and whatnot. That was again, unreal.

Mark: There had been a lot of speculation that and [unintelligible] talking to some troops, expectation of going to Baghdad. I mean, what did you expect when it started? You had --- obviously they didn't tell you they were going to do this loop around and [unintelligible]. I mean, what were you expecting? I mean, were you surprised that it ended as quickly as it did? I mean, did you think you were going to be in Baghdad? I mean, what sort of expectations did you have and how did you feel once it was over?

Theodore: I thought that we were going to fight until they surrendered; maybe we'd be occupying somewhere because, you know, that's again part of your training. And of course everybody wanted to go to Baghdad because, not only was it true that he was doing all these bad things, but when you're in the Army and you're contained, it's really easy for higher-ups in the Army to feed you all types of propaganda. They can tell you whatever they want to. As a matter of fact, before we went into battle, our colonel gave us a speech, our brigade commander, Riley, I think he was. And he said that we were all training really well. We were doing a great job. 'We don't need desert uniforms because we have these green uniforms and the Iraqis think that we're the worst, the toughest, because we had just come from Germany from killing Russians.' And so we felt all good about ourselves and so wearing the green uniforms wasn't a problem the rest of the time on out. And of course we were all ready to go and, not necessarily kill all of them, but at least get them to surrender and, of course, to stop Saddam Hussein. I mean that was –

Mark: So the war was over. The shooting was over, anyway. I guess it hasn't officially ended to this day. So what happened after the cease-fire?

Theodore: Well probably the first thing was we got to take off that MOPP Gear, which was do damn hot. You know, when we first got there, it was cold.

Mark: Right. It was winter. It gets cold in the desert [unintelligible].

Theodore: It was cold and we needed all of our cold-weather gear when we first got there. But, it was hot, so we got to take off our MOPP gear. And, you know, high-fives, whatever, cease-fire. I mean, we knew that we weren't losing, so we knew that the cease-fire [laughs]. We either won or they wanted to talk about that. Ah, maybe we got to take a shower after that? Of course, there's a period in there when they don't let you really do

anything. You're still in a kind of readiness, preparedness because a cease-fire really doesn't mean anything these days either.

Mark: So how long was it before they shipped you back south and shipped you home?

Theodore: Well, they wanted us to stay out there for some reason because they wanted to rotate the units back that went there first. And, since we came there at the end of December, we definitely weren't any of the first ones to be there. So we knew we were going to be there – we were there until May something; May 5, I think it was.

Mark: In Iraq?

Theodore: In Iraq, eventually Saudi and Kuwait. But, out in Iraq and we were running either Check Point Bravo or Check Point Charlie. I wasn't really a big part of that. Our vehicles were ready and we were out there. Our aid station was the big part of that.

Mark: I don't understand what you mean.

Theodore: This checkpoint evidently was on a big road. I don't know much about it. I got to visit it once –

Mark: This was the forward line, I take it. Like, here's your checkpoint and then, there would be Iraqis on the other side.

Theodore: Yeah. And they were stopping all the vehicles and taking in refugees, and of course, you saw all the lines of surrendering prisoners of war and nine times out of ten they were happy to surrender because we got to go through some of their bunkers. At this point, we were able to stand-down a little bit and explore some of the area.

Mark: And what did you find?

Theodore: Well, they had really good, the tanks were well dug in. I mean, berms on all sides. It was pretty good. They had sacks of potatoes and canteens we got to –

Mark: Now were these Republican Guards? I didn't mean to interrupt. These were Republican Guards?

Theodore: Yeah. These were Republican Guards. And so we'd go through their stuff and they didn't allow us to do a lot of keeping of souvenir kinds of things, like they had in past wars. I don't know what they had done.

- Mark: They weren't supposed to then, either. But they did [laughs].
- Theodore: So, you know, of course, everybody wants his own little souvenir and I got some manuals on Iraqi artillery. And ah, you know, everybody was getting like Iraqi gas masks and, of course, we were taking pictures with their RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades) that were burnt up from whatever tank they were in and whatever bunker they were in. And their living conditions weren't really good. I don't blame them for – they were happy to eat MREs. As a matter of fact, when we were driving through, if we had extra MREs, we'd throw -- because a lot of the Bedouins or refugees or whoever they were, they'd stand on the side of our convoys, our wedges, whatever and we'd throw out whatever we didn't want of our MREs and stuff. And, at this point, we got to do a little bit of exploring and that was when one of the guys from my company, he was a medic, was walking around and, it was a good thing he was a medic, because he was walking with the battalion surgeon at the time, and he stepped on an unexploded something or other. I don't think it was a mine. I think it was one of our own bomblets that just didn't explode. And he lost part of both of his legs. And if the surgeon hadn't been right there with him, he probably would have died from loss of blood, or whatever. That was always a big fear. I can't believe they let us do that kind of exploring like we did. But there was a lot of downtime. You'd play a lot of "Spades," you know play a lot of cards when you could, or "Dominoes."
- Mark: Now, you're exploring around the battlefield. I mean, you had to shoot at people to get that, to take that territory. Had they cleaned up the dead and wounded by this time?
- Theodore: Yeah, mostly. I didn't –
- Mark: So, these were the empty bunkers?
- Theodore: Right. I mean, you'd see some smoking corpses, or whatever, but that was not very often. Again, it was an unreal thing. I wasn't there when they died. I didn't know them. It didn't –
- Mark: I've seen a lot of snapshots of, you know, some [unintelligible] collection of some people [unintelligible] dead body snapshots and that sort of thing. You weren't disposed to that sort of thing?
- Theodore: That wasn't my part, no.
- Mark: You mentioned surrendering troops. Were these Republican Guards who were surrendering or did you see the regular Iraqi soldiers?



Theodore: I'm assuming these were Republican Guards. Again, I don't know. It's in the record somewhere, but ah, you'd see strings of them. We were taking pictures of them and they'd be walking [laughs]. And a lot of times, they were guarded. One time when we were in a stand-down area some people on horseback came through and they stopped at my vehicle. What we'd do when we were stopped at this point, after the war was over, you'd have your track vehicle and you'd have a big canvas tarp that goes over the top of it to protect it when it's in the motor pool back home, which stretched it off the side of it with a couple of aiming posts from our mortars and that would be our temporary tent. So we were hanging out in there, I don't know, cleaning our weapons or reading our CTT (Common Task Training) manual, or playing cards, or eating an MRE, whatever. And ah, some people came in on horseback.

Mark: Some Arabs?

Theodore: Yeah. And ah, they didn't speak English really, at all and there were two guys and a woman, I think it was. And, she was hurt somehow. They couldn't speak English and they wanted to show us. And, of course, we gave them some water and we gave them a little bit of water. It's kind of precious out there. You don't give anybody a lot of water. MRE food, you're sick of and you don't mind getting some of that out. They probably got sick of it, too. But, we gave them some water and the woman was hurt and they didn't know how to say it, so they just showed us what was wrong with her. So she like pulled down her shirt, and you know, exposed her chest and everything. I don't know if it was – she had some kind of burns on her chest. I don't know if it was from the chemical thing that Saddam was doing or if it was just being in a fire. I don't know what was wrong so we directed them to our aid station. We'd see a lot of that kind of stuff. They'd just come in out of the middle of the desert. Some of these people had wads of money, American money.

Mark: U.S. bills?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: They thought a couple of extra bills might help them some treatment, or something [laughs]?

Theodore: I don't know if they were trying to get out of the country, maybe? But you'd see these people coming through. And, of course, anytime you saw a woman, it was like a precious thing, because you hadn't seen one in months and months. And so they were running – I got to go look at the aid station where they were bringing in a lot more of the wounded. This was at one of the checkpoints on the highway.

- Mark: So, you left about May, you said?
- Theodore: Yeah.
- Mark: By plane again? Did you have to go back to Germany?
- Theodore: Yup. They ah – we had to clean up our vehicles as good as we could to get all of the sand. You didn't want to bring – customs kind of thing. You didn't want to bring different kinds of germs back to Germany, of course. You cleaned the vehicles the best you could, put them on a ship and somebody went with the ships and then we flew out a couple of weeks --. That's when we got to go to King Khalid Military City. That's when we were issued our desert BDUs (Battle Dress Uniform) [laughs] to go back home. We got to see movies and eat hamburgers and that was a big deal. And, of course, call home.
- Mark: No alcohol, I'm sure. Not even at King Khalid Military City.
- Theodore: No. That's the funny thing, though, because I had a cold when we first deployed over there so I brought a bottle of Nyquil with me. And I forgot about it because my cold went away. And a couple of weeks later I was looking through my stuff and said, 'anybody need any Nyquil? Thought maybe I had a cold.' And one of the guys in my platoon, a die-hard drinker, you know, he bought it off me for like \$15 [laughs]. He offered me the money. I was just going to give it to him. I was like, 'oh, OK,' because there's alcohol in Nyquil. And a couple of the guys got little bottles, you know, the sampler whatever is in them, little brandy things.
- Mark: Like off an airplane or something?
- Theodore: Yeah. They had some of those sent to them.
- Mark: Still, it had to be the driest war in American history.
- Theodore: Probably. [laughs]
- Mark: That's probably a pretty fair assessment, actually. Um, so you flew back to Germany then?
- Theodore: Yeah.
- Mark: As you mentioned, you got issued your desert BDUs for a parade. Where was – did this parade, in fact, take place and where was it?
- Theodore: Well, let's see here. We got issued them and even the nice hats. I think we got to wear them on the plane ride back so that when you showed up at the

airport, if you had someone waiting for you, they'd see you in your desert BDUs. So, like all the wives, whatever. As a matter of fact, when we got off the plane, they had all the families all ready in a gym, because, of course, they hadn't seen them –

Mark: This was in Aschauffenberg.

Theodore: Yeah, this was in Ashauffenberg. So, after all the stuff you go through, in Rhein Main, the bus ride and all that. And then they'd line us up in formation and they don't let anybody talk to you. They just keep you separated. They wanted to make it more suspenseful. It was kind of funny. I was in the front row because, for whatever reason, I think height-wise or marching order or whatever. I was in the front row and me and a buddy and everybody was wearing their uniforms pressed as best they could, and whatever, and your boots as shiny as you could get them with what you had. And in the bleachers in this gymnasium were all the families and the wives and everything. And the commander gave this wonderful little speech, 'welcome back,' you know. And of course, 'don't drink and drive, don't drink and swim,' stuff and let us go for a couple days. And then he said, 'dismissed.' He made a big deal out of saying, 'dismissed.' And at that point, all these women came out of the bleachers for their husbands and boyfriends, whatever. Me, and this other guy, we hadn't been in Germany really very long, we didn't really have a wife or a girlfriend. We got run over in their haste to get to – [laughs]. And they had free beer so that's where we went [laughs].

Mark: And so, after that? You still had some time. How long did you stay in Aschauffenberg?

Theodore: Let's see here. They let maybe a week to get everybody to back, because the flights were staggered, whatever, clean up your stuff, the basic cleaning. They were going to have the big inspections later, of course. But, the basic cleaning and then they let people take some leave, go back to the United States, or whatever.

Mark: Did you?

Theodore: The first wave, no, because I wanted – Oh, they were offering four-day weekends. And I was like, well, I called my family. They were OK, 'I'll see them when I go back.' So me and a friend just went on a couple of trips, driving around Europe, Italy, or whatever. And then I went a couple of weeks later after that. I went back home and our local paper had a big thing whenever a vet returned home. You would come in for a picture and they'd put it on the wall and [unintelligible] have an article about it.

- Mark: And yeah. I meant to ask this before, actually. Um, communications with the folks back home, you know, this is the age of telecommunications and internet and all these kinds of things. And yet you're still pretty isolated, stuck out in the middle of the desert somewhere. I'm wondering how well you were able to communicate with the people back home, how much you knew of what was going on back home, how often you were able to communicate with your family on the phone, or by letters, or whatever? Or, did you want to?
- Theodore: Well, of course you did. Actually, it was pretty good. We had really good supply the whole time we were over there. We never had a food shortage or a water shortage. I'm sure, I mean we came close a couple of times to where, 'OK, you'd better start watching it,' but the supply lines going back and forth. So mail was pretty good. I don't remember how long it took, a couple of weeks. Every few weeks, you'd get to use a phone. They'd have tents and these satellite dishes set up and you could talk for five or ten minutes, or something, free. And you'd get to call home, or back to Germany, or wherever you wanted to call. I have no idea where they were, of course; somewhere out in the desert. Before, and after, the war we had a couple of opportunities to talk and they'd say, 'Where are you?' And you're like, 'I don't know,' and 'what's going on? You know better than I do where we are.'
- Mark: Did you get newspapers?
- Theodore: No.
- Mark: I assume you had AFN (Armed Forces Radio).
- Theodore: We did have some AFN radio. Most of our information came from our lieutenant, and again, that could be all filtered so I don't know how much of that was, you know.
- Mark: Yeah. So, the yellow ribbon craze and all that sort of thing, ostensibly was to support the troops. That was a big thing in the United States, support the troops. How aware of that were you?
- Theodore: About the yellow ribbons?
- Mark: No, just in general about the country and the attitudes towards the war and that sort of thing?
- Theodore: I thought it was pretty good because we got a lot of 'any service member' mail. And that was really nice. And so, I mean, you had some downtime. You could write back to your 'any service member' people and I mean, I've heard stories of people getting married after that kind of thing, too, or

whatever. That was really nice. You'd get letters from schools, kindergarten, first grade, or whatever. So we had the impression that the United States was behind us.

Mark: And you got a lot of it?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Like, every time a mail truck would come?

Theodore: Uh huh.

Mark: Nobody would be without a letter?

Theodore: Right.

Mark: I see.

Theodore: I mean, sometimes you would get a couple, two or three 'any service members.'

Mark: Now, you're obviously too young to have been in the Vietnam War and perhaps a lot of other people were, but there are some people in the officer and upper NCO (noncommissioned officer) ranks who perhaps were. Was that the case in your unit?

Theodore: Well, the officer that I had in my platoon, a lieutenant, no. The captain, I don't think so.

Mark: So there was no one to reflect on the experience around you?

Theodore: Right.

Mark: OK, let's go back to Germany and [unintelligible] to where we were in the first place. You enlisted for four years and 17 weeks. And that was in '89. So, you had to have finished your enlistment then in '94 or something like that.

Theodore: Right.

Mark: You had to have gone somewhere after Aschaffenberg. You ended up in the airborne? Did you mention that?

Theodore: Yeah.

Mark: Eventually.

- Theodore: I got – you ah, yeah, you do the special thing. You can request a – I requested to go to the 82<sup>nd</sup> (Airborne Division) because that was still my thing. I wanted to see what that was like. And I went to the 82<sup>nd</sup> in April of '92, I think it was.
- Mark: What did you do? You had to go to Fort Benning I take it?
- Theodore: That was Fort Bragg.
- Mark: Oh, Fort Bragg.
- Theodore: Fort Bragg, and of course I had to – I was a specialist by then. Well actually, the unit I was in at Aschaffenberg deactivated. They are no longer there. So the last few months that I was in Germany, that's what we were doing was deactivating the unit after some training. And ah, let's see here. Fort Bragg, I went to the PAC (Personnel Administration Center) to in-process and they asked me if I knew how to type and I said, 'yeah.' So they said, 'Well, do you want to work in the PAC?' I was kind of tired of running around with a heavy rucksack and all that so I said, 'OK, I'll work in an office for awhile.' So I worked in an office for the first six months, or eight months, that I was at Fort Bragg. And that was nice.
- Mark: Now this is the point where we're at a disadvantage that we [unintelligible]. Now I want to ask about military downsizing.
- Theodore: OK.
- Mark: And umm, the reaction of the troops. And especially, Clinton coming into the presidency was not exactly popular among the troops, so far as I can tell. So, from someone who was in the service while the military was down-sizing. And then when this particular person became the president, how did things perhaps change or not. And sort of explain the soldiers' attitudes towards Bill Clinton?
- Theodore: Ok. Of course, soldiers loved Reagan because he did all of that great stuff for the military. So Clinton came in about the same time I was going to Fort Bragg. OK. Let me think about that. Ah, --
- Mark: Again, we've discussed this and we're familiar with each other. So, don't feel a need to talk about this too much. But I'm curious about it.
- Theodore: Well, of course, a lot of people didn't like him because of what he did. They didn't respect him. The downsizing --
- Mark: He did being to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War?

- Theodore: Yeah. And never really having been an Army, or a Navy; never having been a military person now being the commander-in-chief, our supreme commander of all the Armed Forces; ah, taking orders from ah, you know, somebody like that, or whatever. There was that. I considered that stuff to be kind of uneducated, prejudiced and I don't um --. But the downsizing, I think that started right after. I mean with the deactivation of my unit, that started with Reagan.
- Mark: Well, that started before Clinton, yeah.
- Theodore: Yeah.
- Mark: Yeah. Bush.
- Theodore: Yeah, George Bush. That's it. I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm sorry, what am I talking about [laughs]? You mean the downsizing, or about Clinton?
- Mark: Yeah. Well, I think they're both sort of intertwined.
- Theodore: OK.
- Mark: I mean, downsizing happened before Clinton even became president. So, what were the attitudes of it before Clinton came along?
- Theodore: Well, the general attitude was, 'Man, we gotta keep the Army strong. We don't need this guy. You can't vote for him.' All that, yeah, that's true. But, I told you that I always had this incentive to get promoted because I hated doing stuff like that. And so, I was trying to make the Army work for me. So, I wasn't in danger of being downsized. You know, they were cutting out the people who had been in the Army a long time without getting promoted; physical problems, too many disciplinary actions, that kind of thing. So, it wasn't really a big concern of mine, the downsizing.
- Mark: Had you thought about making the military a career or were you just in for your four years and 17 weeks and getting out? Or, had you considered – had you considered it a career, perhaps you might have viewed it differently?
- Theodore: Yeah, that's true. But either way, you know, I wasn't going to be part of the downsizing crowd. Either way, I was going to try to succeed whatever. But, originally my plan was four years and get out, but as you get into the NCO ranks, when you start getting into the decision-making, and not just taking orders, where you're starting to give orders, and feel responsible, the Army kind of changes for you. And when I got promoted to sergeant when I was at Fort Bragg, then I started liking it more because they started

treating me more like a person, you know [laughs]. So I was tempted and they offer you all these incentives. 'Oh, there's a bonus here. We'll send you to E-6 (staff sergeant) school, you know, staff sergeant, ah, give you the duty station of your choice. You know, you'll have to go to Ranger school.' And that was like, at that point I was starting to decide that maybe the Army wasn't for me because I'd been through all these different things and I didn't know anything about them. I needed education, so [laughs] that's probably what made me get out.

Mark: Um. And so you did; '94.

Theodore: January of '94.

Mark: Did you have some inactive reserve time that perhaps you're even still on at this point?

Theodore: Still on until October, 1997.

Mark: So you got out. What did you do after that?

Theodore: I went right to college.

Mark: You came to Madison to go to school. How'd you know how to get around, how'd you know where to go, who to see and that sort of thing?

Theodore: I started out moving back with my parents which –

Mark: Up north?

Theodore: Up north in Cumberland. Yeah, I went to the Rice Lake, it's a junior college really, up there, it's the Barron County Center for a year-and-a-half, three semesters. And so, living at home, and of course, they still treat you like a kid, so I had to move away. And I graduated from there, came down to Madison and I ah, I just have this great appreciation for history now.

Mark: Good boy.

Theodore: [Laughs]. Yeah, I'm sure you can appreciate that.

Mark: So, this is the point where we stall out because it's very, very soon after the conflict. So, you haven't used the housing benefits, the home loan benefits, whatever the case may be. But, you are using the GI Bill, I take it?

Theodore: Actually, the GI Bill is working for me.



- Mark: Yeah.
- Theodore: There's the tuition reimbursement thing that works pretty good. Some states, if you're a Gulf War veteran, you get free college, so I'm kind of pissed off at Wisconsin for not giving that to me [laughs]. But, you know again, they're pretty good.
- Mark: So, the GI benefits that you are utilizing to finance your education, um, they cover things fairly well?
- Theodore: No.
- Mark: They don't?
- Theodore: It covers rent. Yeah, the GI Bill just basically covers rent.
- Mark: So for tuition you still have to find loans, or work, or whatever the case may be?
- Theodore: Right. Well, of course, the tuition reimbursement helps too. But, that wasn't part of my original contract. When you originally sign up for the GI Bill, you're thinking. 'Oh, that's going to pay for a lot of college.' Naw [laughs] it just covers the rent.
- Mark: I see. I don't understand this tuition reimbursement. That must be one of the many new things that you guys get now?
- Theodore: Right now, it's 25 percent if it's –
- Mark: It's federal? It's a federal program?
- Theodore: I think it's state. Maybe it is a federal, I'm not sure to tell you the honest truth. But, uh, yeah, I don't know if you just have to prove you were in service when the Gulf War was going on or even if it has anything to do with the Gulf War or not. I really don't know.
- Mark: So, when it comes to finding out about these programs, how to use them and what they are and what --. I mean, where do you go and what do you do? Do you just sort of float around? I mean, there have to be places on campus, friends to talk to, organizations, whatever the case may be. I mean, how do you know what to do?
- Theodore: "Vets for Vets" right there on –
- Mark: That's the student group on campus?

- Theodore: Yeah, the student veterans for veterans. They're the best. That's work-study down there. There are a couple of people in charge. And, I think, their sole job is to help us get our benefits from when we were in the service. They're really helpful. I found out most of the stuff from them. They're pretty good. As far as the VA (Veterans Administration) stuff, I really – My grandpa used the VA a lot from World War II and uh, god I hope I'm never in the hospital as much as he was. I'd have no idea what my VA benefits are. I don't have the foggiest. And, of course, with health insurance –
- Mark: Being in your 20s, let's hope you don't have to worry about that for another good 50 years or so. Um, I think I know the answer to this already, but did you – have you joined any veterans' organizations? You mentioned "Vets for Vets," but that's like a – that's more of a student organization. Well technically, it's a veterans' organization. But, I'm talking about the Legion (American Legion) or the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) you know, that kind of thing like that.
- Theodore: When I was back home living in Cumberland, of course, I mean, the math teacher was, you know, a friend of the family. I mean, it's a small town, so everybody knows everybody. He knew I was in town, knew I was a veteran. The VFW, they both tried to recruit you because, of course, they're both losing numbers. So, I joined mainly, to make them happy. As far as me being an active member, not really. I've got too many other things going on.
- Mark: So you are a member of the post in Cumberland.
- Theodore: Yeah.
- Mark: You pay annual dues and that's about it? Post 99?
- Theodore: [Laughs]. No it's –
- Mark: I've had some dealings with them up there. That's why I asked. Just out of curiosity.
- Theodore: Oh, it's 1199 or 1198.
- Mark: So, that's unusual actually.
- Theodore: That I did join?
- Mark: Yeah, that you actually –

- Theodore: It's a small town. I pretty much had to [laughs]. You know small town politics [laughs].
- Mark: That's pretty much it. Anything you want to add?
- Theodore: Well, when I was – I told you I was like they did the five-year interview?
- Mark: No.
- Theodore: The anniversary of the Gulf War?
- Mark: Who did this, the VA?
- Theodore: No, Channel 15. I was at "Vets for Vets" checking out my benefits, or whatever?
- Mark: No. I don't know the story.
- Theodore: This was right before I started working here at the museum and they wanted to interview someone who was in the Gulf War just to see how they felt about it five years later. And ah, I said, 'Well, yeah, I wish we had gone on to Baghdad, all that. But now that I'm studying history more I realize their only goal was just to liberate Kuwait. You know, politics I know is infinitely more complicated than just taking Baghdad, you know, killing Saddam Hussein. And we talked a little about the Gulf War Syndrome and, you know –
- Mark: Now, there's something I thank you for reminding me. I mean, you were up there on the front lines potentially exposed to whatever. Have you experienced such symptoms or anyone you know from your unit? Has anyone experienced any sorts of symptoms?
- Theodore: Me personally, I don't know that I have. I mean, every time you get an itch, you wonder if it's from something. Or, every time you start twitching in your arm, it could be normal stuff. I have no idea – They don't have any concrete conclusions yet on their studies. I can still walk and go to school and --
- Mark: Certainly there is nothing impairing your ability to study or make a living here. What about some of those with whom you served that you know of?
- Theodore: One of the guys that was in – I don't know if he took that experimental shot that you had to sign a waiver for. I don't remember if he did that, or not? He says that his doctor told him that he could take cocaine and he wouldn't feel anything. There's something wrong with his nervous system that way. You know, I don't know if he wants to take cocaine but [laughs].

- Mark: It's probably not good advice coming from a medical doctor [laughs]. Alas, it's not our place to judge.
- Theodore: But ah, no, we were in an area where the smoke from the oil fires – I mean, at one point, this was after the war, of course, when he was still burning stuff and being an idiot and we were in an area where you couldn't see – you could look straight up and you couldn't see any of the sky because it was all smoke. But, as far as I know I don't know how much of that we were breathing in. Again, I don't know how much of an effect it's had on me. I've always been kind of a health nut so maybe it didn't effect me as much. Time will tell. Until they come up with conclusions from their studies and then I can go in and – I don't want to go in there with an imaginary problem and contribute to the problem.
- Mark: As well you shouldn't, I suppose. So, you were saying, Channel 15 came to interview you. You talked to someone on TV.
- Theodore: Yeah, Mike McKinney from Channel 15.
- Mark: Yeah, I don't watch Channel 15. I wish I had.
- Theodore: I thought that helped me get this job [laughs]. Yeah, they had their big thing. Every TV station had their Gulf War Five Years and –
- Mark: Bush is gone. You couldn't even remember his name. Saddam Hussein is still there. I mean, how do you look back at it? That's a fair question.
- Theodore: Well, see now, the more college I take, the more complicated it gets and, of course, I don't think he should be in power. I don't know how much of a right the United States has to interfere in other peoples – I don't think we should allow mass killing of any – Being a superpower, like we still are, I think we should police at least to stop mass killings, Rwanda, where ever they might be, you know. So yeah, I don't think Saddam should be in power. I thought we could have used our various devious means of eliminating people to, at least, get him out of there and not in power anymore. But, I don't know. Who knows what deals they make.
- Mark: What about the impact on your own personal side, your own life?
- Theodore: I'm just glad I'm not in the Army and that I'm not a pawn anymore. I can make more decisions for myself. How do I feel about him being in power? Well, you know how I feel about that.
- Mark: No, I mean, having gone through a war. I mean, that's a very unusual experience for anyone under the age of 40, these days. I mean, do you

look back with regret, are you glad you did it, I mean, how do you – Or do you think about it? You mentioned yourself as being philosophical. Perhaps you're still filtering the experience through, But it's a – just to throw that question out.

Theodore: It seems like it happened in a dream because it wasn't really that long ago and it just seems like it happened a long time ago. It gave me just knowing, not that I was necessarily in danger of dying all the time. But just knowing that there was that danger and I said, 'Well OK, whatever. We still gotta do what we gotta do,' you know. It kind of gives me a greater appreciation for what I have now. Like I have a lot of freedom. I can go down to MacDonaldis whenever I want. I can go to the library. I can learn all these wonderful things about what I didn't know before and where I was and it just gave me a greater appreciation.

Mark: Good place to end, I think unless you have something else.

Theodore: That's it.

Mark: Danke schoen [thank you].

**[End of Interview]**