

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
GILDA MALTES
Medic, Army, Operation Iraqi Freedom
2013

**OH
1853**

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Maltes, Gilda,. Oral History Interview, 2013.

Approximate length: 1 hour 36 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Gilda Maltes discusses her military career which spanned the course of twenty-one years. During her time in service, she served first as an Army medic in the 3rd ID stationed at Kitzingen, Germany. Her next assignment was at Fort Stewart, Georgia with the 92nd Engineer Battalion, through which she was deployed to Operation Distant Haven in Suriname in 1994. Maltes subsequently went into the National Guard, and in 1999 served in the Joint Task Force mission Caribbean Castle in the Dominican Republic. She acquired her Expert Field Medical Badge while at Fort McCoy in 2000. Subsequently, Maltes became a US Army Drill Sergeant, and was stationed at Fort Benning, 2002-2005. From 2007-2008, Maltes was a US Army Reserves Chaplain Assistant, through which she assisted with the Strong Bonds Program, Midwest Series. Maltes then served in Operation Iraqi Freedom in a Corps of Engineers. After returning to the 416th Theater Engineer Command, she was assigned to be a SHARP leader for the unit. The interview concludes with discussion about her thoughts on sexual assault in the military, and her experiences working to raise awareness of sexual assault and harassment, and ways to combat them.

Biographical Sketch:

Maltes served as a US Army medic, or drill sergeant in multiple military operations including, Operation Distant Haven, Caribbean Castle, and Iraqi Freedom. She was involved in the Chaplain Corps, as well as the Corps of Engineers later in her career. She retired in 2012.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Rick Berry, 2013.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016.

Reviewed by Robert Brito, 2017.

Abstract written by Robert Brito, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Maltes.OH1853]

Berry: This is an interview with Gilda Maltes who served with the United States Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom. This interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum at the following address: 30 West Mifflin Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53703 on the following date: May 17, 2013. The interviewer is Rick Berry. Gilda, we thank you for agreeing to do this oral history interview. Can you tell me something about your background and life circumstances before entering the military service?

Maltes: Yes. I was born in Philadelphia. I grew up most of my life on the east coast. New York, New Jersey, Delaware, mostly New York. I ended up spending most of my school years in New York. Graduated from high school in Yonkers, New York. From there, went and spent a year with family down in Puerto Rico just to help my family out after I graduated high school.

Berry: When did you graduate from high school?

Maltes: I'm sorry, 1991.1990, sorry. Spent a year down in Puerto Rico. From there, times were tough. I needed money for college. My family wasn't very--we didn't have a lot of money. So, I was looking around for jobs and I saw the recruiters for all the services and I was interested in the Air Force. The Air Force recruiter wasn't in that day. I ended up talking to the Army recruiter and a couple weeks later I was on my way to basic training.

Berry: Where did you go for basic?

Maltes: Fort Sam, Houston. I signed up to be a medic. I'm sorry, let me back up. Basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, but I signed up to be a medic so my advanced individual training was at Fort Sam, Houston.

Berry: Let's talk a little bit about basic. Did you enjoy that experience?

Maltes: I did. I'd never been physically active before so I was surprised at what my body was capable of. The things that the drill sergeants pushed us to do, I never thought I'd be capable to do. Handling weapons was new. It was a little scary, but once they literally broke it down and explained how the weapons worked, I just grew a comfort with them. The other interesting piece that I didn't realize until after I graduated was that I was one of the few females that was at an all-female basic training for the Army. They tried it for about a year. I don't know the reasons why and why it didn't last, but yeah. That summer I was one of the few all-female basic trainings.

Berry: What sort of weapons did you qualify with?

Maltes: A nine millimeter pistol. The M16, and I think in the nineties it was still the A1. The squad automatic weapon, the SAW. I forget the technical term for the Bazooka. [laughs] That was our nickname for it. Oh my gosh, what was it called?

Berry: Maybe a LAW?

Maltes: A LAW, yes.

Berry: Light antitank weapon.

Maltes: That was it.

Berry: How about living conditions there? Was the food good?

Maltes: Yeah, it was. Again, something new for me because my family growing up, we just ate. We were all over the place and we never had a set schedule, so we'd eat dinner all hours and then breakfast at all hours. So to have this set schedule and eat all my meals within a thirteen-hour period, that was new. But it was good food, lots of potatoes. I'd never eaten that many potatoes before and in so many different ways. Yeah, it was good food. The weather there was, I don't know.

Berry: Did you make any lasting friendships while you were there?

Maltes: I did. We lost touch over the years but definitely some impactful friendships. That was another thing that was new to me was just in such a short time to have this profound connection and this deep connection and, I think, because of this unique experience. I think we were all learning some incredible things about each other, ourselves, and so to be thrown in this situation together, yeah. I was surprised, a little overwhelmed too about how deep and connected we were just after nine weeks of training.

Berry: What about your family? How did they feel about your decision to join?

[00:04:57]

Maltes: They weren't too happy. My parents were dead set on me going to college and I even had a couple scholarships. But like I said, I followed them to Puerto Rico to help them out and just to get the family situated, but I ended up losing my scholarships. I still wanted to go to college, but now I needed the money so this was the next best thing. To earn a paycheck for a couple years while building up savings and then to know that I was going to walk away with the college fund and the GI Bill, I thought it was a pretty good deal.

Berry: How did you come to go to advanced individual training as a medic? Did you volunteer for that?

Maltes: No, I actually wanted to study being an engineer, but at the time just because of the situation my family was in the recruiter had said, I can't get you into any engineering schools until--it was a couple months out. I'm like, you know what? I need to go now. I got to help my family now, so what do you got? That's how I ended up being a medic. I had a high enough GT score for a couple other interesting jobs but medic was the most appealing and it was the one I could get away to quickest. That ended up being interesting. I was surprised that we walked away from that training with not only the military training that we needed, but the civilian equivalent of being an EMT. We even took the National Registry test at the end of our training.

Berry: Did any of the other individuals in your unit in basic go to Fort Sam, Houston with you?

Maltes: Yeah, there were a few of us. Probably six of us, but then when we got there we ended up being split up into different platoons and companies. So learning to make friends all over again, that was something new again that I learned. No matter where you go you got to make that same, deep connection with other people just because of this unique and interesting situation we're thrown into.

Berry: Tell us about Fort Sam, Houston. Little bit less in the way of discipline there?

Maltes: Yes. [laughs] I've come to learn later that I think it was just the medical branch compared to infantry, or field artillery, you name it. I was surprised. It was a little more lax. We earned merits a lot easier, but being outside of San Antonio was neat and interesting

Berry: Did you have opportunities for recreation?

Maltes: We did towards the end of the training. I think that training was about ten weeks and I think at eight or nine we earned some time off post and got to see San Antonio a little bit.

Berry: How about the living conditions?

Maltes: Pretty good at Fort Sam, Houston. It was like living in a dorm, a college dorm. Very good, same with the food.

Berry: And the mess hall that you all took meals together and so forth?

Maltes: Yes sir.

Berry: How about lasting friendships there?

Maltes: A few. I ended up befriending Emily Estes. We ended up going to Germany

together for a duty assignment.

Berry: So you've completed your medic training at Fort Sam, Houston. Where was your first actual duty assignment for active duty?

Maltes: Kitzingen, Germany outside of Würzburg.

Berry: What sort of unit were you assigned to?

Maltes: Foxtrot Company 703rd. So Foxtrot company was a medical company in this main support battalion. We support the Third ID back when the Third ID was in Germany. Again, medical company. It had an ambulance platoon, a medical equipment maintenance platoon, a treatment platoon which contained all your doctors, and dentists, and optometrists, and a headquarters platoon, so you had your admin folks that supported us.

Berry: What part of that were you assigned to?

Maltes: I was in the ambulance platoon. So I was assigned to a wheeled ambulance team. There are two of us medics and either a nurse or a doctor at times depending on the mission. We went out and set up battalion aid stations, and just supported the infantry and field artillery on their missions, and just provided that medical support. For a while I worked on the track ambulances for maybe six months during my two years there, but most of my time I spent on wheeled ambulance teams.

Berry: How about living conditions in Germany? Were you on a kaserne?

[00:09:51]

Maltes: Yeah, we were on a kaserne. For the first year there were still some German soldiers on the kaserne, but then they moved off post. Again, there it was like living in a dorm. So we'd work hard all day but at night it was just goofing around and doing what we did. We went out a lot on the economy--on the German population and just went to a lot of different restaurants and clubs. Good food. Good, incredible food. Small mom and pop restaurants.

Berry: Yeah, I'll bet the beer wasn't too shabby!

Maltes: Oh, let me tell you! [laughs] The beer was pretty good. It was neat. I got to meet this one family. I wish I remembered the name of the restaurant, but they were Italian and I speak Spanish. It was neat to be able to have a conversation with them, me speaking Spanish, them speaking Italian, and it was just a neat restaurant to go to. They had good wine. Good food. Yeah, a lot of good food. Good beer. German fests all over the place all the time. That first year was just a lot of fieldwork. I was out in the field training probably eight months out of that

first year, that's how I earned my driver's badge. We were out on the road so much just back and forth to the two training areas. Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels were the two training areas. Spent a lot of time on the road getting there and then once we were there, part of our job was re-conning evacuation routes. So we spent a lot of the time running around re-conning routes, setting up Italian aid stations, jumping around., breaking them down, setting them up in another place. Yeah.

Berry: Can you tell us what a typical duty day was like when you were in the field?

Maltes: In the field, you know, it depended on what the unit was doing that we were supporting, but usually it was just tailing. And infantry either dismounted march or a mounted march, we would tail some of their convoys, but most of the time we tailed some of their foot marches and just supported them medically if anybody got hurt.

Berry: You would follow them in an ambulance?

Maltes: Yeah, follow them in an ambulance. Yes, sorry. So unfortunately a lot of the time as a medic you're just waiting for somebody to get hurt. So it's kind of good if we weren't busy. It meant nobody was getting hurt. But some interesting injuries. I remember this one infantry guy just thought it would be interesting to handle concertina wire without his gloves and there we were extracting--I don't even know how he got it all caught up. His hand was so mangled, so we spent a great deal of time dissecting that. Spent a lot of time at TMC, Troop Medical Clinics, we would do rotations out of the field and do week rotations at a clinic where you just did your standard vital signs, and EKGs, and just standard medical tests to keep us trained because out in the field you don't do a lot of that stuff.

Berry: What was your rank at this time?

Maltes: When I got to Germany I was an E2, so a private E2. About a year in I made private first class and by the time I left I was specialist promotable. So I made it to promotable list.

Berry: So you spent two years then in Germany?

Maltes: Yup, from December of ninety-one to December of ninety-three.

Berry: How long was your enlistment obligation initially?

Maltes: My initial one was two years on active duty plus the six years off the books that you spend for eight years total. While I was there, I reenlisted. I liked what I was doing, I was excited for the career path that the medical field could provide. So yeah, I reenlisted, got a bit of a money bonus, but just more excited for the training opportunities that were available. That was something else that surprised me about the military was just this sense of professional development. There was

just so much opportunity to move around and try different things and do different things.

Berry: So when you reenlisted did you do that for some sort of specific training?

Maltes: No, not at the time.

Berry: You were there for two years and then you were reassigned obviously.

[00:14:47]

Maltes: Yeah, my next duty assignment was at Fort Stewart, Georgia with the 92nd Engineer Battalion, "Black Diamonds." There, I was a medic in their battalion aid station. There were ten of us and we supported the entire battalion, which was I want to say about four hundred soldiers. They weren't combat engineers. They were more the heavy equipment, so they did more civil construction, civil operations. So we supported them on different construction job sites, rail heads if they had to load equipment onto the railroad to take them to different sites around the country. So we supported those operations, then we would support other units on Fort Stewart. I remember in particular we supported this EOD team. They had to go out and clear an impact area. So we just tailed behind this team, me and another medic, just in case there were any explosives or any injuries. But yeah, it was just a real quiet, eerie day just because of the nature of what they were doing. I'm almost embarrassed to share this, but it's funny. I inhaled poison ivy while I was out there. I didn't know you could inhale poison ivy. By the time we got back I was miserable. They had to put me down for a couple of days with some serious narcotics. But yeah, it was an interesting day. It was just interesting to see what they did and just how seriously they took it.

Berry: Did you deploy in an ambulance for those field visits also?

Maltes: Yes, this was all supported by ambulance. We used the M998 and the M997.

Berry: Again, how about sleeping, living area, food and so forth?

Maltes: Again, dorms. All military barracks, that's the best way I can think of equating them for the civilian population. They're like dorms. These were pretty decent too. I can't complain. Then for a time period while I was down there, I got married so then my husband and I moved off post and we just lived in that small town of Hinesville outside of Fort Stewart, Georgia.

Berry: Was your husband a soldier also?

Maltes: Yes, he was. We met in Germany and we ended up both getting stationed down in Georgia. Yeah, that's where we got married. He was at Fort Birmingham, Alabama for a while before he got stationed to Georgia. He was a soldier as well.

Berry: How long were you stationed there?

Maltes: I was there a year and a half. During my time there, we did deploy to Suriname, South America. We were tasked to support--I'm trying to remember--Operation Distant Haven. It was during the Haitian refugee crisis. This was 1994. There was just this overflow of Haitian refugees so they tasked us to go down to South America and build the refugee camp for them.

Berry: Your Spanish, I suspect, came in handy in that assignment.

Maltes: It did a little bit. I was surprised. There were some others too that could speak it. It was helpful.

Berry: Did you enjoy your stay there in Georgia?

Maltes: I did. We weren't that far from Savannah, so that was just a great town to get off post and just go hang out and, you know, hit the clubs, and drink, and eat good food. Museums. It's a big art area. Yeah, it was just a nice town. Good seafood. Loved the seafood down there.

Berry: Did you have any training opportunities there?

Maltes: What did I do there? Yes. There I went to my first leadership development course and at the time it was called PLDC, Primary Leadership Development Course, so it's the first level of professional development that you attend as an enlisted. So yeah, did that and that was a four week training event out in the middle of nowhere. You just get dropped off and you do your thing for four weeks. Again, there I made some deep connections, just that profound, instant connection with some people just because you're thrown into this unique training environment. There was this one guy in particular, a ranger, and he was just surprised that a female could hold her ground [laughs] just like all the others could, all the guys could. So yeah, I think we grew a mutual respect because rangers and some infantry guys never work with females, but here we are thrown in this professional development course together. Yeah, I think it was mutual learning and earning of respect for one another.

Berry: It was male and female both taking the same training?

[00:20:00]

Maltes: Yes sir.

Berry: Okay, your reenlistment was for what period of time?

Maltes: That was for another four years. So, I still had a couple more years left in the

enlistment but my husband and I decided to just come off active duty and move back to his home state, which is Wisconsin. That's how I ended up here. He wanted to get out of the military, but I knew I wanted to continue on. When we moved back here, I transferred into the Wisconsin National Guard. I transferred to medical company out in Milwaukee. So it's with the 32nd Brigade, but this was Charlie Company, the medical company out of the 132nd support battalion for the brigade.

Berry: Did you live in the Milwaukee area?

Maltes: No, we lived up by Mayville, off the Horicon Marsh, and I would commute every month for my training down in Milwaukee. Richards Street Armory.

Berry: What were your duties then in the National Guard?

Maltes: There I really changed my focus and what I wanted to do. I grew an interest in just becoming a leader and developing that. So when I got there, I vied for the platoon sergeant position and got it. I was in charge of a platoon. This medical company was kind of the same as the Foxtrot company over in Germany, it was just on a smaller scale. We had an ambulance platoon, a treatment platoon, and then a medical equipment maintenance platoon. I was the platoon sergeant for the treatment platoon and the treatment platoon had all your doctors, your nurses, all your optometrists, all the medical staff, and some medics, and some nurses. So my job was to make sure everybody was doing their training, keeping up on their certifications, scheduling us for the different missions we had throughout the year that supported the Wisconsin National Guard, like the brigade. Discipline, making sure we were all getting enrolled in our platoon professional developing courses. Yeah, platoon sergeant.

Berry: There was a two week period each summer that you would serve as a unit?

Maltes: Yeah, usually it ended up being more than two weeks. There is so much opportunity. There is so much work to get done that more often than not people did more than two weeks, but for the most part the entire company went on a two week training up at Fort McCoy. But there was always more training opportunities whether it was supporting the 632nd med evac unit out of West Bend, we did that a lot, the different infantry units and engineer platoons throughout the state. We would support them on their rifle ranges, their different training events providing that medical support. Yeah, there was a two week period each summer where we'd go up as an entire company up to Fort McCoy and just infiltrate with all the other training units up there and just support them medically. Provide medical support.

Berry: The other deployments, is that something you could essentially volunteer for then?

Maltes: Yup, sometimes it was mandatory depending on what your job was but for the

most part it was voluntary. People were looking for opportunities. We had a lot of people in the National Guard in this medical field who happened to do that in their civilian lives as well, so they were doctors and nurses, or nursing students, or what have you. They jumped on the opportunity to do these medical training events just to beef up their experience. Then there were the few like me who discovered, you know what? The medical field is not for me. I really want to go back to engineering, but I like what I do in the National Guard. So I'm going to stay in the medical field in the National Guard, but I was studying to be an engineer on the civilian workforce.

Berry: You were studying to be an engineer in college then?

Maltes: Yup.

Berry: So you returned to college or you started college?

Maltes: Yeah, I did. When I came off active duty, moved here and started college.

Berry: Where?

Maltes: Marian College for a semester up at Fond du Lac. Then my husband and I ended up moving to the Madison area, so I went to Madison College for a while, or MATC, and a couple semesters at UW. All the while I was being this platoon sergeant for the National Guard.

Berry: You maintained your involvement with the National Guard through?

Maltes: Yes, all through college and all through my first job in corporate America and throughout the rest of my career. Yeah.

[00:24:57]

Berry: Tell us about your additional experiences with the National Guard then. Were you with that same unit your entire career with the National Guard?

Maltes: Yeah. So I spent six years with the National Guard, the Wisconsin National Guard in particular. During that time--in the medical field there's this badge, it's called Expert Field Medical Badge, and I--this is something I forgot to share about my time in Germany. I earned that badge. This badge, to earn it, there's twelve events and I think it has like a seventeen percent pass rate because these events--I mean, it covers everything in the medical field from CPR, to trauma triage lane, to an evacuation lane. There's a communications events, there's a med evac event, there's a test, and there's a twelve mile road march at the end. So anybody in the medical field can go after this badge. I happened to earn it when I was in Germany. So fast forward to Wisconsin National Guard, the company commander of my medical unit, she wanted to host Expert Field Medical Badge at Fort

McCoy and we did that in the year 2000, it was. I have an album here, I think it was 2000. It was a big deal. There were only three of us in the unit who had the badge, which, you know, you just needed a few of them to be able to get us certified to host it. It took a whole slew of people to put this event on and not just the medical staff in our unit but we needed support from infantry units and med evac units. It was just a big, joint effort to put on this badge at Fort McCoy. So that was one of the experiences that I would say was a highlight of my career with the National Guard that ended up being very successful. We got certified by Fort Sam, Houston, which is the proponent for the medical field. They came on up, saw what we were putting on, they gave us the okay and we were able to host a very successful event. I don't remember the numbers, but I want to say at least a hundred participants. Not just from the National Guard, we opened it up to the Reserve and active duty as well, invited them to send participants. So yeah, I think it was over one hundred folks that came and participated. So that was one highlight. The other was after Hurricane Mitch in 2002? Or 2001? I can't remember. We got deployed to the Dominican Republic to help rebuild schools and roads and bridges down there. So we went as a medical--we picked the equivalent of a medical platoon. We sent that number, about thirty of us, down to support a couple of engineering companies that were down there.

Berry: Would you travel down there with all your equipment and so forth also?

Maltes: Yup. We did. We packed up a couple connexes of stuff we needed, vehicles and stuff we would need. Yeah, that was a quick undertaking. Got down there, off loaded. We were split off into teams of three and four and just went to all the different engineering sites and provided medical support.

Berry: So the medical support you were providing there was really for other US military as opposed to the civilians, or was it both?

Maltes: Yes, I'm sorry. US military in particular on their job sites.

Berry: Did you enjoy that experience?

Maltes: I did, there's a lot of interesting--the Dominican Republic is very interesting. At a moment's notice, these roads would just wash out and next thing you know we're spending the day re-conning a different route to get to the job site. Our base camp was in this cow pasture and it rained. We were there during the rainy season. It was just a constant mudfest to get anywhere to do anything. You just stayed muddy and you just accepted that after day three. We had a pool going on who could guess exactly when the rain was going to hit the next day. It was always between like 2:30 and 3:30, so we had a pool going and people would pick a minute within that hour. So that was kind of fun. What was fun was watching the different engineering units do their thing, whether it was masonry work or carpentry work. They would let us medics participate around some of it. For the most of it, a medic's job is boring which is a good thing. Nobody's getting hurt. In

the evenings we were allowed to go to the local town outside our base camp and we got to just hang out with some locals and eat good food, drink good beer. We were there, I think, three weeks and during that three weeks we got a twenty-four hour period off and we went to a resort on the coast. For \$50, we got twenty-four hours at this resort on the coast. We just hung out, soaked up the sun. Yeah, and then back to work in the rain and the mud supporting these engineers.

[00:30:18]

Berry: It sounds like you found that to be a worthwhile experience though.

Maltes: Absolutely. There, I started developing my leadership skills. Even though I was on a team, I wasn't in charge of the whole platoon. I was just on a smaller team. Just really started gaining an interest for small team dynamics and just really wanted to hone in on that skill. So much so that when I got back and between that experience and the EFMB that we hosted, people just kept telling me, you need to go be a drill sergeant. I was like, okay, and I was kind of getting bored. I'd been there six years and just kind of doing the same thing every year. I was ready to move on and do something different.

Berry: Was that drill sergeant school?

Maltes: Yup, it was, but to do that I had to transfer out of the National Guard. You can only serve as a drill sergeant either on active duty army or in the Army Reserve. I knew I didn't want to go back active duty. By then I was working in corporate America, I was an engineer for the Placon corporation, but I still wanted to serve in the military. So yeah, I transferred to the Army Reserve with the intent of going to drill sergeant school. I transferred right into this drill sergeant unit here in Madison, to the 339th Infantry Regiment. I did my drill sergeant school. It was a two phase school, so we did the first couple weeks at--where was it at? Fort Leonard Wood. A couple months of getting together once a month to do some more training and then the last two weeks we graduated out of Fort Knox. Then I was a certified drill sergeant. Drill sergeant school was like going to basic training all over again. [laughs] Oh my, except as you're going through these training events you're learning how to train the new recruits to do it. So we did everything the new recruits do, we were just learning how to train, and learning the doctrine, and learning the Army values. Just learning how to present the material. So yeah.

Berry: Did you enjoy that experience also?

Maltes: I did, I met some incredible guys there. One of them in particular, Sgt. First Class Brick, who it turns out about ten years later ended up in the same unit as my brother out of Milwaukee. Just a great, great friend to our family, not just to me. A few others that I've kept in touch with. Connie Sharp, she's up in Minnesota now. Jackson, who's down in Georgia now. Yeah, just some really good friends.

Berry: Drill sergeant school was also male and female?

Maltes: Yes, the school was male and female.

Berry: How about living quarters and food and so forth? How did that work?

Maltes: Oh gosh, okay. This is where I learned Army funding. Army funding for active duty versus Reserve, versus National Guard, is so different. Depending on where at, the term is what you get. So our first bit of training at Fort Leonard Wood was great. There were dorm-like barracks again. Couldn't complain about the food or the accommodations. But when we got to Fort Knox, it was a different story. These buildings were scary. They were a little scary, yeah. I'm surprised there wasn't a "condemned" sticker on some of them, but we made it work, you know? You were there to do a job, but it was just so surprising to see. I thought, this was the same Army, we're all thinking, but it's not.

Berry: Probably buildings left from World War II.

Maltes: Oh yeah, and it was a part of Fort Knox--I think with Brack and knowing now that the Combined Arms Center--the Armor Center moved from Fort Knox to Fort Benning just a couple years ago--knowing that that was going to happen is probably why we ended up in these barracks. They weren't injecting any more money into this post. But it was interesting. We made it happen. It was a good school. A lot of fun considering all the work we had to do. I can't believe I'm calling some of this training fun. We would mess up things sometimes. This one time in particular, I can't even remember what we did, but our drill sergeant instructor was so furious with us and frustrated. He made us carry around a rock for the rest of our training and this rock--he would just, at a whim, at random, ask us where the rock was and we had to take it all our training events and it had to do what we were doing. We didn't mess up after that.

[00:35:17]

Berry: You don't think that rock was a scripted sort of thing that had been done in the past?

Maltes: I don't know. No, in this case just knowing this drill sergeant instructor, I really don't. He was just standing there looking at us, just thinking, and then he just picked up this rock. He was like, here you go, knuckleheads, you're going to carry this around. But we made fun with it. We had fun with it. We had this one guy who could sing like there was no tomorrow and before we would formation, he would jump out of the building and he would sing a line from that song by the Police, *Roxanne*, and the whole platoon, all of us, would answer back, "Roxanne!" We had fun with it.

Berry: What about recreational sorts of things? What opportunity did you have?

Maltes: During drill sergeant school not a whole lot. It was enough to stay awake and get the training done just because we were doing so much all day. So yeah, I didn't get to see much around Fort Knox, which I hear there isn't much. The same when we were at Fort Leonard Wood, there wasn't much time for any of that, which I was okay with. I wanted to get the training done and move on. Then my assignment once I became a drill sergeant was we would infiltrate. Even though we're a reserve unit, each summer our mission was to go down to an active duty installation, active duty basic training, and just infiltrate with the active duty drill sergeant and just become part of the team. Our unit in particular went down to Fort Benning, Georgia and the reason I mention that is because Fort Benning, Georgia, the basic training there is all male recruits. We were the first to bring down female drill sergeants there. They did not even know what to do when they saw the female drill sergeant hat. We got--it was just me and three other females along with all our male counterparts.

Berry: Were you welcomed and well accepted?

Maltes: Hmm. [laughs]

Berry: Tell us about that.

Maltes: Let me tell you. No. There was a few who understood, like the guys we came with. They knew. They knew us, they knew we could do the job. Some of them I had gone to drill sergeant school with, but the active-duty guys? No. They fought it tooth and nail. It wasn't overt, like there was nothing I could ever say, you know? This guy did this because I'm a female. It was very subtle, but you could just tell they just didn't want us there. I just had to work that much harder. I ran. Oh my gosh, I ran. I just ran harder, I just worked out harder. I just made sure I knew my stuff, was able to present anything they wanted to, which they would do to me all the time. We would have this set schedule of who was going to teach what each day, you know, which drill sergeant is going to do what, because basic training is cookie cutter. It's the same training every nine weeks, you're just getting new recruits and plugging them into the same training schedule. Very cookie cutter. So for us as drill sergeants, it was very cookie cutter. You knew who you could assign, what people's strengths and weaknesses were, and you just assigned them accordingly, you know? But being a female and these guys didn't like it, our schedule got switched up so many times and I think they were purposely trying to trip me up and see if I could really do it all.

Berry: And this is coming from your fellow drill sergeants?

Maltes: Active-duty mainly. Then at one point--and you know, I love my military, I love serving, but I'm going to shed some negative light on it. I ran into a battalion commander once who said, you know what? One summer he said, "I don't want your female drill sergeants to come down here." By that time, I was the senior

drill sergeant for my unit here in Madison, so I was the ranking senior drill sergeant and I helped assign people where they needed to go, I was responsible for their training.

Berry: What rank were you at this time?

[00:39:19]

Maltes: Sergeant First Class. So when that battalion commander from Georgia, from Fort Benning, said that, two things. One, I was thinking, where does he get off saying that? Show me the regulation. And two, [laughs] he obviously doesn't know me! He doesn't recognize that I'm sitting in this leadership position and he's undermining my authority by saying, you know what? I'll take your troops but I'm not going to take your leader. You know what I'm saying? So there was a battle there. Unfortunately I felt I needed to file an IG complaint, an Inspector General complaint, which I did. I had the documentation to back it up. I had three obscure regulations I didn't even know existed, but they were specifically about the assignment of females in the Army and I looked up what the assignment codes were for that unit down in Fort Benning. It was very clear that I was allowed to go there, whether he wanted me to or not. So the IGA investigation was--they investigated it and they found that, yup, I can go down there. I don't know what ever happened to that commander. I didn't stick around to find out because by then I was livid. I was livid with my own chain of command, that they didn't back me up. The only person that did was my first sergeant, First Sgt. Joseph Cagg. Incredible guy. Incredible mentor. Incredible leader. He was the only one and everybody else up the chain just said hey, whatever that battalion commander wants we'll give him, which is unfortunate. By that time I had been a drill sergeant three years and in line with my character, I was ready for something new. I was ready for something different. Like I said, being a drill sergeant is pretty cookie cutter and it gets boring after a while. So I was ready to move on. It was challenging. It was a great experience, but I was ready to move on. With me being ready to move on anyway and with this incident I was like, you know what? This is not a unit I want to be a part of. I don't want to be a part of a unit with leadership that's not going to support me this way.

Berry: And you're speaking now of your reserve unit back home?

Maltes: Yes. So around that time I had some personal changes in my personal life, I came into a relationship with Christ and I thought oh man, I can take this and apply it to my military career too. So I looked into becoming a chaplain assistant for the military and joining the Chaplain Corps. So I did that and all around the time that that IG investigation was going on and still trying to lead the other drill sergeants in my unit, and still trying to do my civilian job, which I think I did well. I looked into becoming a drill--making another career change. Going to more training, learning a new job. I did it in that year. That's why I said I don't know whatever happened to that commander because I didn't stick around to find out. As long as I

got the investigative results in my favor, which I did, and it turned out all the other females in the unit could go down there and train, I was like, I'm happy with that. Which they did, they were able to go as far as I know. I've kept in touch with some of them over the years. Sgt. First Class Edwards, she's one of them. The females continued to go train down there at Fort Benning, but I moved on again. I didn't want to be part of a unit whose leadership treated men different than women.

Berry: Did you have a training situation there with a chaplain assignment?

Maltes: Yeah, I went and did reclassification training and that was down at Grand Prairie, Texas. It's south of Dallas, I didn't even know this Army post was there. It was a four week school to retrain as a chaplain assistant. When I got done with that training, there were slots open for my rank at Fort Snelling, Minnesota with the 88th RSC, Regional Support Command, so I served as a chaplain assistant there with a team of chaplains and chaplain assistants. We supported the regional support command and its staff. In particular, they had a component of the chaplain team there that administered the Strong Bonds program--

Berry: Can you explain that please?

Maltes: Yeah, the Army Strong Bonds program is marriage enrichment retreats, single soldier retreats, and family retreats for all the troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. So I spent my first year with the Chaplain Corps at the 88th with the Strong Bonds program. So it was me and my chaplain. By the way, in the Chaplain Corps, you have what's called a Unit Ministry Team, a UMT, and it consists of a chaplain and a chaplain assistant. A pair of people together. So here we are, this team of chaplains and chaplain assistants, different UMTs, you know, we're all paired up. So me and my chaplain, that's what we were assigned was the Strong Bonds program. That was incredible! One of the highlights of my career. We covered the six states in the Midwest: Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio. We just jumped all over the place and supported. We would look at the manning for those six states and see the troops that were coming back and plan our retreats accordingly.

Berry: Now were you full time in the Reserve at this time?

[00:44:56]

Maltes: No, on the first couple months of that assignment I was still just a weekend a month, two weeks in the summer, but because there was such a need for the program and we had the funding for it, they were able to hire me on full time. So I got an active-duty assignment for a year with the Reserve to support this program. My chaplain did as well. The two of us, that's what we did full time. That's all we concentrated on was these retreats. So we would go out and do site visits for hotels and pick hotels, then send out the invites to the units. Register all the

soldiers and their spouses, whichever kind of retreat it was. Whether it was a marriage retreat or a single soldier retreat. Then go in and put on these three-day retreats that were Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Part of that though, to do that, we also needed to become certified in what's called PREP, P-R-E-P. I forget what it stands for but it's basically we got certified as counselors for this program. It just helped teach relational communications, like the Speaker-Listener Technique, how to constructively argue and stuff. Just tools that these families needed when they got back from Iraq and Afghanistan to help them reintegrate. So yeah, that's what these retreats were. They were incredible! They were incredible. Just to see these spouses and their soldiers connect with other couples and to say, I'm not alone. Because again, we serviced the Army Reserve and National Guard. The Army Reserve and National Guard has a very different experience from active duty. When active-duty comes back from Iraq and Afghanistan, they are on an installation and they have all that support. Reserve and National Guard don't have that. We were here to provide that support and connect. So it's just really neat to see all these different couples and single soldiers connect with other people who are like, oh, you're like me and you're having the same experiences I am. Because they weren't on an installation where they were surrounded by active-duty people, they were out in Mayville, Wisconsin or out in the middle of nowhere with no other support around them. That was incredible to see, to be able to provide that support to these soldiers and their spouses and families and to have fun while we were doing it. We went to some great cities. Cleveland, and Grand Rapids, and I got to see a different side of the Midwest. It was pretty neat. In particular though, while we were there doing this assignment, we had a command sergeant major who lost a son in Iraq, Command Sgt. Major Vaco. He came and sat down and talked to me and my chaplain one day and he said, "You know what? I'm having a hard time and if I'm having a hard time, there are other families who are having hard times. What do you think about a retreat for the families of fallen soldiers?" I'm like, okay. Let me tell you, two months later we had a retreat going. The first ever gold star retreat that the military has put on. There's civilian organizations that put them on like TAPS, and what have you, but this was the first one that the Army has supported for the families of fallen soldiers. At the time, there happened to be fifty-eight Army Reserve fallen soldiers and so we opened up the invitation to those fifty-eight families.

Berry: Thank you for doing that.

Maltes: Thank you, you're welcome. It was an honor. Again, that experience still gives me goosebumps. One of the highlights of my career. That weekend was incredible to see. Every single family said to us thank you, it just feels good to be around somebody in uniform. Again, these are Army Reserve, they're out in the middle of nowhere. They don't have installations, they don't have a VA. They feel like they're on their own and we were able to bring them together and give them this. We couldn't solve all their hurts and their heartache, but to be able to make those connections for them. It was incredible that weekend.

Berry: Now has that program continued?

Maltes: It has. Because we were so--me and my chaplain were emotionally spent after that weekend. It was incredible. It was so draining. You were in there with these families and they wanted to tell their soldier's story. It was just so, so draining. We couldn't do it again anytime soon. We were getting debriefed by so many different agencies that wanted to know how did you do this, how did it come about, what worked, what didn't work, which was great, but we just didn't have the logistics to do it again. But it did happen again with another RSC the following year out in California. Beyond that, I lost connection with the program, so I don't know if it kept going. Hopefully it did. The funding was there, the need was there. It was just an incredible weekend just to see these families start ministering to themselves. We picked this really great lodge outside of Chicago and it had all these little nooks in the hallways, all these neat furniture places, and so as the families were arriving that Friday for the weekend, they just naturally started gravitating towards each other and just started telling each other's story and just helping each other out. Throughout the weekend we had grief retreat sessions set up for them, specifically like for parents of the fallen soldiers, and children of the fallen soldiers, and spouses. So you have these breakouts but in between that and during meals just to see them all ministering to each other was pretty incredible.

[00:50:47]

Berry: How did your corporation feel about your going back on active duty for a year? Did you get a sabbatical?

Maltes: No, but that time I had worked with Placon for about six years. Again, [laughs] I've always wanted to learn, striving for new and different things, and I had discovered by then you know what? I've reached my potential as an engineer. I really like the project management side of it, so I'm going to go find that. Around that time is when this opportunity came to be a part of the Strong Bonds program, which I could see required some project managing experience which I had gained from my years as an engineer. So to me, it was divine providence that it all happened together at that time. Yeah, I ended up resigning from that position and took on this year with the Army Reserve to do this program, not knowing what I was going to come back to when I was done with that year, but it worked out. When I got back I finished that year of active duty for the Reserve and went back to my reserve status, which was a weekend a month, two weekends in the summer. I found a chaplain assistant position out of Chicago with the 416th Theater Engineer Command. So I'm still living in the Madison area, but nature of the guard and reserve now is you got to travel to your units the higher up in rank you get. There's fewer positions.

Berry: How does that travel work? Do you get a voucher that allows you to travel?

Maltes: No, it's for God and country. It really is, but in recent years they've provided what

is called Lodging-in-Kind. So if you happen to live over a hundred miles, they'll provide you with a hotel for the Saturday night in there at the government rate and they'll pay for it as long as they get the funding every year. There were some months when the funding wasn't there and we'd have to find a place to stay, but most of the time we had the Lodging-in-Kind where they give us a place to stay so we didn't have to do that drive every day for the two days. So that was nice, that worked out. Yeah, my next assignment was the 416th Theater Engineer Command. I was a senior chaplain assistant there. My job there was providing counsel and supporting the chaplain, and providing counsel to the commanding general staff, but then also mentoring the unit ministry teams in our lower echelons.

Berry: That was your last assignment?

Maltes: No, I had two more assignments after that before I retired. So while I was there, there was a chunk of that Theater Engineer Command that was deploying to Iraq. They were going to infiltrate with a Corps of Engineer Unit in Iraq and provide infrastructure, like large infrastructure, project management support in Iraq. I got tapped to be the human resources manager for the group, which I had no--

Berry: Were you pleased with that?

Maltes: No, I was not. Oh my gosh, but they picked me. I remember my sergeant major's words to this day. He's like, "Sgt. Maltes, you have the drill sergeant badge. You can do this." That is solely why they picked me. They didn't have somebody filling in the slot and they needed somebody that could manage the team. They saw that I used to be a drill sergeant, they knew about my experience up at Fort Snelling. We had professional connections, you know? That's how I got that assignment. So they knew of my work. My sergeant major said, you're going. You know, I didn't need the experience in the human resources field, they just needed somebody to manage the team. Fortunately, I had a team of people who were in the human resources field so I just had to manage the workload. That's all I had to do. I shouldn't say that's all I had to do. [laughs] It was long hours, mentoring some of the--it was a young team too--some specialists. I did have a chief warrant officer, but yeah. [laughs] You know, he was my first experience with a warrant officer, and it opened my eyes to that field, that branch.

[00:55:17]

Berry: There was someone asking me what the difference is between a warrant officer and a commissioned officer and the difference is the warrant officers know what they're doing.

Maltes: [laughs] You know, I laugh because I kind of agree. Chief Burnham, that was his name. He was incredible. He knew the human resources systems like just off the top of his head. Again, he just needed help managing the team, small team dynamics. Between his and my sergeant major, that's why they picked me. It

worked, we had such a great working relationship. It was tough with their long hours. We were on a commanding general's staff and there's politics.

Berry: Where were you stationed in Iraq?

Maltes: The Green Zone. Baghdad. We were in this little compound right across the street from the CASH, the Combat Support Hospital. This CASH was one of the two bigger ones in Iraq. So we were right in downtown Baghdad, there were embassies all around us and behind us on the other side was President Maliki's home. Just beyond that was the river. All these embassies and what have you.

Berry: Tell us about life in Green Zone.

Maltes: Oh my gosh, I'm ashamed to because compared to what guys and gals went through over there, yeah. We dodged mortars, that's what we did just because we were in a target rich environment with the embassies around us and the CASH. They weren't after the Corps of Engineers in particular, but because of where we were, there were bunkers everywhere and you just never knew when mortars were going to come across the river. So yeah, I became a good sprinter. [laughs] And then cloudy days. If it was cloudy or if there was a dust storm, it interfered with the C-RAM, which was kind of the electronic protection system that would detect mortars coming over and sounding off the alarm. That's how we knew to run for the bunkers. Dusty days interfered with it, so we just knew on those days--the enemy figures it out--you know what? There's going to be more mortar attacks, just be mindful of where you're at. Then we were pretty close to a checkpoint to get into the Green Zone. It was probably like four blocks away from where we sat and IEDs at that checkpoint went off all the time. I remember one shook me out of my bed. It was that powerful. Yeah other than that, I can't complain. It was just long office hours. Just reports that we had to prepare, casualty documents, casualty reporting, you know, the human resources stuff.

Berry: What year was this that you were sent to Iraq?

Maltes: This was 2009. From the end of 2008 to the end of 2009. We were there for the move out of troops out of the cities that summer. So we had to move all our stuff out to--what is it called? VBC, Victory Base Complex, which is that huge military complex outside of Baghdad. Oh, and we worked with civilians. Can I say that's a low light, not a highlight? That was the low point of my career.

Berry: When you say civilians you mean American civilians or Iraqi civilians?

Maltes: All of the above. We were part of a unit. So we were at the Corps of Engineers, but this unit wasn't on the books, on the Army books. It was just this unique unit. It was made up of Army, Navy, Air Force, and DOD civilians. Yeah, working with civilians, no fun. It's just not something I would want to do again. I'm sure they bring their skills, you know, and they did. I met some interesting Department of

Defense civilians, but for the most part that's just not a place for civilians. I don't know who allowed that.

Berry: What sort of jobs did the civilians have?

[00:59:40]

Maltes: They did the civilian counterpart of what we did. There was a civilian counterpart of a human resources manager like me, there was a civilian counterpart of the finance department, all the different areas, operations, you name it. I guess it was a necessary evil for the Corps of Engineers. But you know, the people that I did meet, the civilians that I did meet that I thought were great, they had very unique jobs. Like we had this one hydraulics engineer. The Army doesn't have an MOS for that, so I can understand why there's a Department of Defense civilian to fill that position. So there was just those unique jobs that the civilians held. But then there were the others, oh gosh. Just the complaining and the expectations. It's like, I don't know how many times I said this statement while I was there, "You do realize you're in a war zone?" You know? So, that's why I don't like to talk about my deployment that much. Compared to what--my entire family's in the military now, by the way--so compared to what my sister and my two brothers have been through in Iraq and Afghanistan and all throughout the Mid-East, I'm like, yeah. I had it pretty easy. I can't complain.

Berry: Did you spend that whole tour inside the Green Zone?

Maltes: I did.

Berry: Did you get an opportunity to go out?

Maltes: No, there was no reason for me to travel anywhere. They really didn't want to risk--I could have made a case for going to visit because we were a division headquarters and we had three districts throughout Iraq that reported up to us on their projects that they were managing. So with that was the human resources side of that. So, I could have made a case to go do a staff visit to the human resource offices in those districts, but once one my buddies, Sgt. First Class Carter, came back from a convoy and got hit and I was like, yeah, no. I'm not going to push it. I'm not going to put people at risk when I don't need to really go there when these guys were going out every day to all these project sites and risking their lives. I didn't need to add that risk to the unit, especially after we lost two soldiers. We lost Commander Wolf, who was the Navy commander, and a DA civilian engineer. They were just doing a routine check on a project site. The enemy doesn't care, they just see a military convoy, you know? And they go after it. These guys were just engineers going to check a job site. So really, I did not need to push going to do a staff visit to another human resources office. I like to say that's out of respect for everybody and I hope that's what everybody sees. Yeah, it was just sad. It was unfortunate. I can't complain about my deployment especially

compared to what my brothers and my sister went through.

Berry: What about recreational opportunities? Did they have theaters available and so forth?

Maltes: Yeah, you know the MWR over there was incredible. So MWR is the Morale Welfare and Recreation, I guess, department, in the Army.

Berry: Yeah, thank you for indicating what the acronyms mean. Someone listening to this in the future will appreciate that.

Maltes: Well, let me tell you I have enough friends who don't know anything about the military and I forget how much we use acronyms, so I find myself explaining them a lot. It's a habit. Yeah, MWR was great over there The USO, United Services Organization, was great. They had all these little recreation centers set up all over the compounds. They would bring in movies that were donated and TVs. It was just somewhere where you could sit. It wasn't extravagant. Sometimes it was a small room made out of plywood on a safe corner somewhere, but it was just somewhere where you could get away. Away from the stress, away from the politics, and just sit and read, or do nothing, or take a nap for a half hour. It was great. They provided a lot. When we were there we got our R&R in the middle of our tour typically, but then we also got a four day pass if our mission allowed it. So they would provide opportunities for us to go travel for the MWR four day pass. I was able to go to Qatar for my four day pass.

Berry: What about your R&R? Where did you go?

Maltes: My R&R, unfortunately like--most people took advantage that we were halfway around the world and so they didn't come home to the states for their R&R. They would travel from there to Europe. I had my friend Johnson who went to Australia, but I went to go see my parents in Puerto Rico. There's just something about, for me, there was just this sense of mortality and purpose. I thought, you know what? My parents aren't getting any younger and I haven't seen them in a while, even before I deployed, let me take this opportunity. Uncle Sam is paying for it. I'll just spend my two weeks with them in Puerto Rico. It was a real relaxing and rejuvenating time. It was a nice time to reconnect with my parents. Yeah, that's where I went.

[01:05:25]

Berry: How did your parents feel about your decision to essentially stay in the service?

Maltes: My mom has never liked it and she still doesn't forgive me. She supports it, you know, she just doesn't understand it and we've tried. I'm the oldest and my two brothers and my sister are younger me and they've all, quote end quote, followed in my footsteps. They've all joined the military and she just doesn't understand it.

She doesn't understand camaraderie, she doesn't understand the professional development opportunities, she doesn't understand all these great, different careers that I've been able to experience being in the military. All the places I've traveled. The same for my brothers and my sister. All she sees is that we were taken away from her and we're in danger a lot. We're put in harm's way a lot. But my dad? He's all for it. He could be walking down the street and see some random stranger and if that stranger makes eye contact with him and they say hello or something, he starts telling them about us not even knowing what their name is. So yeah, dad's a different story. He's very supportive. He's so proud, which is encouraging. It helps deal with my mom. My mom, she's just a worrywart, which I guess that's what happens when you're a parent. It's been hard for her over the years especially while we're deployed. Oh gosh, that was the last thing I wanted to do when I deployed was tell her that I was getting deployed. And the same with all my brothers and sister. I mean, every time we deployed.

Berry: Are your siblings career military also?

Maltes: Yes, they are. My sister is active-duty Navy. She's got, I think, another three years before she retires. She's on her last assignment. She just got reassigned to an EOD team. She's a welder and she does nondestructive testing of welds. So she's assigned to this EOD team to just follow them around and do inspections and stuff. That's her last assignment, hopefully, before she retires. Then my next brother, he's got eleven years in. He's been deployed twice, once in Iraq, once in Afghanistan. He's an engineer. He's looking to become an officer now. He's actually going through that process this year. He's hoping to join the EOD branch, which I don't know why. He's just always looking for something exciting to do. Crazy exciting. He was an Army Reserve Best Warrior candidate last year. Then my last brother, he's got about six in. So we're all about five years apart from when we joined. He's a mechanic. He's a--I think it's a Bradley? Whatever the tank is we have now--mechanic. He's a wheel mechanic. This guy can fix a car with his eyes closed, so we weren't surprised when he signed up to be a mechanic. Right now he's down in Fort Benning, Georgia, my old stomping grounds with his wife and two kids. Yeah, he's actually looking to reenlist. He's thinking about going warrant officer too. He has a really good--he's a motor sergeant and he works with a really good warrant officer. I can totally see his warrant officer talking him into going to warrant officer school. I think my brother, since he's such a good mechanic and just knows systems and stuff, I could see him being a good warrant officer. So hopefully that works out for him. Yeah, that's the family. We're all in, we all keep in touch, we all joke. There are three people I can talk to and just joke about stuff that makes no sense [laughs] to people outside the military, and it's mutual all the way around. Back to my career and this, I guess, got back from Iraq. Went back to my chaplain assistant position with the 416th.

Berry: Did you have any choice in that assignment?

Maltes: When I got back? No, I even had less of a choice when I got back and to find out

they did some reorganization while I was gone and they got rid of my position. [laughs] I couldn't believe it! So I had to go looking for a home, or I could have left myself at their mercy and they could have put you in this 999 slot. It's some obscure slot in the unit and you just hang on there until somebody thinks of something to do with you. Knowing me, I'm like, no. I'm going to take charge of this and go find something I want to do. After my time in Iraq, I did a lot of-- because everybody there knew that I was a chaplain assistant, that I just ended up doing a lot of mentoring and counseling while I was over there too. And while I was there, I took on the additional--this was involuntary--took on the additional duty of the SHARP leader for the unit. SHARP is the Sexual Harassment and Assault Response and Prevention program.

[01:10:33]

Berry: Were there many problems in that regard?

Maltes: Oh yes, that's a whole 'nother discussion. So because I had that additional duty, and I had to give that training, and I injected some of my own personal experiences into the training to grab people's attention, out of that usually after a training people would come up to me for private, one-on-one conversations whether it was to express something they've been through or to ask a question for somebody else. I found myself doing a lot of that while I was there. Then obviously coaching and mentoring my own team to make sure they were taking care of themselves while we were deployed. You didn't want anybody to get burned out or anything. So coming back from that and knowing I had to find a new home and having all that experience, I thought, you know what? Let me look for an instructor slot where I can do some training, and teaching, and coaching. That's when I found my next and my last unit which was with the 75th Division, the Third Brigade. They were still outside of Chicago so I still had to commute, which I was used to by now. My entire Reserve and National Guard career was commuting. I became an OCT, which is an Observer Controller Trainer. I actually became a trainer of OCTs. So new people coming to our unit, I was part of a group, there were six of us, so we would train them all on how to be OCTs. Then what they would go out and do--

Berry: Explain what that job involves.

Maltes: First I'll explain what this unit in particular did. We did mission command. What that was, we would go in and work with battalion and brigade commanders and their staff right before they were deployed. So we would run them through situational exercises and just watch them and coach them and mentor them in just basic military doctrine like MDMP, Military Decision Making Process, Army problem solving, operations, mission command, just that strategic level kind of stuff. Just reinforce doctrine. We weren't training them on anything new. These are battalion commanders and their staff, so these are all people who have been in a while and they know the story. They know what they need to do, it's just re-

grounding them and doctrine. We're dealing with a lot of high ranking officers, E7 and above and majors and above. What our unit would do is go in as coaches and mentors and just observe them during these exercises and coach them. So you'd break up into teams, so you'd have a couple of people that would observe a human resources team in particular, an operations team, the commander and his sergeant major, all the different parts of the staff we would have counterparts that go in and coach and mentor. But before our folks could go and coach and mentor, you needed some of us to train those coaches, so train the trainer. I had an interview for this job and they picked me and they're like, yeah. We want you on our team not to go out and coach or mentor these units, but we actually want you to help coach and mentor our coaches and mentors before they go out. So for this unit, you don't have to have a specific job. It's MOS material, MOS meaning Military Occupational Specialty. So we had people that were in the medical field, chaplain assistants, infantry, artillery, you name it. But what they brought was experience, operational experience. In particular, you had to have been deployed to be an OCT in this unit. It was a great team. I learned a lot. I thought I brought some skills to the table, our entire team, my boss in particular, my supervisor. He was the team lead for us, Lt. Colonel Moore, he's a public defender out of Milwaukee actually. He led us and he's just a great orator, he really knew how to break down the doctrine. Even though we all had skills in facilitating the discussion with the classes that we had, I just learned a lot from him. How to draw out people's experiences to help teach the doctrine. Again, we're not teaching anybody anything they don't already know, it's just helping these coaches and mentors learn how to apply their experience to the doctrine.

[01:15:24]

Because the important thing when we would go out with these client units, these battalion commanders and their staff, you didn't want to go in there and say, yeah, "You're doing this wrong." What you wanted to say was, "you know what, sir? How about you try this? By the way, where I'm coming from is based on this experience that I had in a similar situation." Again, because it's high ranking people you're dealing with. It's just a different dynamic. It's not new recruits, it's not a professional development course where you're just telling people what to do and teaching the material, this is more coaching and mentoring. You did that by having a discussion. So that was a great team to be a part of, a great experience. I did that for the last three years of my career. There were times when I wasn't teaching a class that I would actually go out with a client unit and go out with the other OCTs and actually be a part of an exercise with a unit. Those were good experiences too. Then an additional duty there too because they knew when I came to the unit that I had done the SHARP training in my other units, so that ended up being an additional duty for me in that unit too. That's where I got my eyes opened further to just sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Now, I'll touch on your question.

Berry: Well, are you comfortable talking about that a little bit?

Maltes: Absolutely. Absolutely, and because there are so many people who aren't comfortable with it. This is actually fitting. I don't know if you're familiar with the documentary that just came out this week on PBS, it's called *The Invisible War* and it's a documentary about sexual assault in the military. But we're talking about sexual assault and sexual harassment which people think, what's the difference? You know, sexual assault, you're talking about a very few number of predators that continually assault men and women in the military. Harassment-- you know, neither is acceptable--harassment is more like telling crude jokes, or having a raunchy poster up in your office, or inappropriate touch or something, inappropriate hug. That, I've run into my entire career, but that was so much easier to correct with just a simple conversation with a guy or a gal. You know what? Please don't tell those kinds of jokes around me. Or, you know what? Take down that poster. Or, you know what? No, you can't touch me that way, even though it's friendly to you, it's not to me and oh by the way, I'm a female and people are going to automatically think that because you touched me that I'm easy. There goes all my credibility as a soldier because of that. So sexual harassment was easier to address over the years. Sexual assault, fortunately for me personally, I have not been assaulted in the military but I know men and women who have. As a SHARP, I also was a certified victim advocate, which means when there was an assault in our unit, I would get assigned as an advocate for that victim and just make sure that they got the care that they needed. Not necessarily provide the care, but make sure they got to their appointments, just kind of act like a liaison for them. So because of that experience in the few cases that I was assigned as a victim advocate, just to see firsthand, the devastation that it does to not only the victim but the entire unit. I think that's the piece that people are missing. It's not just the fact that this person got assaulted, but it destroyed the team that they're a part of. Whether that team lost respect for that victim because they have the irrational reasoning that it was their fault or whether the team wants to know who the perpetrator is and they can't do anything about it because the victim won't say anything because they're scared. So yeah, it just wreaks havoc on a unit. For the victim in particular, which is the reason it enrages me. It goes against everything we stand for. Duty, loyalty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage. The seven Army values. What about sexual assault has anything to do with that? Nothing, and so it just destroys these victims and their sense of humanity, their sense of just being a part of this team that they thought was always going to take care of them. There's that trust that you build and it just gets destroyed.

[01:20:13]

Berry: Was your work in that field supported by the Army?

Maltes: Yeah, this was all with the Army. So I started as a victim advocate for a military unit, every unit in the Army has to have a SHARP keeper.

Berry: What I'm asking is did higher command support what you were doing?

Maltes: Oh, some units yes and some no. My last unit, yes. My commander was very supportive. He entertained my--we had to give training about it every quarter, but I liked to present different training from what Army on high would dictate to us. They would send us training slides and talking points and stuff. I would use some of them, but I liked to grab a lot of stuff from other sources just to make it more real for all of us. So my commander was supportive to that. Then I would inject my own personal experience. I was sexually abused when I was a child by a male relative, so I understand the psyche behind that trust that's undermined. Here you're around these people that are supposed to protect you and they take advantage of that and instead, they assault you or abuse you. So I would inject that into my training, again just to get people's attention and say, hey. This is real. Then I would draw on the numbers. One in four females and one in seven males are assaulted every year. So one exercise in particular, I would make everybody stand up and count off in fours and make all the ones, twos, and threes sit down and the fours that were standing like, "Hey, this is how many people in the Army get assaulted every year." So that commander was very supportive of the training. Again, there, every time I gave the training there was always somebody afterwards that wanted to talk further about it or had a personal experience to share. It just, to me, solidified that I'm making an impact. Hopefully people take away something and learn what's right, what's wrong, what to do if they do come across a victim. There was one commander who was not supportive at all. In fact, there was some survey results that I wanted to get back. They were anonymous results that all the soldiers turned in and some of the questions on the survey were about harassment and assault. These were anonymous answers that were given. Some of these numbers, it was surprising, in our own unit people have been harassed and assaulted and they just weren't reporting it. I wanted to share those numbers as part of the training and the commander would not allow it. He would not allow it. We bumped heads, we had this argument. I just said, "Why? You're giving the impression that you want to sweep it under the rug. You think I'm not going to share this piece of information? You don't want to share this? I'm going to tell everybody you don't want to share it! I don't care about reprisal, please!" We just went back and forth, back and forth. Finally we understood one another. I understood what he was saying. I don't understand what he's saying, but I heard what he was saying. He didn't want it to reflect badly on the unit. He didn't want to discourage anybody and mainly, I think, he didn't want it to look bad on his career. But I said, "how else are you going to make it real to everybody? This is happening. It's not just rhetoric coming from on high, a big army, it's happening in our own unit. Look at the results of this anonymous survey." You can't make it any more real than that. Eventually I got some of the numbers. He wouldn't share the comments--you could write in comments or whatever--but he shared some of the numbers and I was able to share that in training. But again, that's where there isn't the support. Then again, that's just my little bit of success--I can't imagine in other units. I've heard worse stories, yeah. Commanders just don't like reports of sexual assault, they think it reflects badly on their tenure. Yeah. That's a low. A

low point of my career, but it's real, you know? I'm just grateful that we can talk about it, that there's training about it, that we can say the words *sexual assault* and not feel weird about it, some people are going to, but yeah. Again, I'm just passionate about it because of everything else I've shared in this interview. [laughs] That is what I'm passionate about. That is what I've enjoyed about the military, all the people, all the different things I've got to see and do, and sexual assault doesn't belong.

Berry: What has your life, your experience, in the military, what has that meant to you as part of your life?

[01:25:04]

Maltes: It's a huge part of my life. It's helped develop my communication skills. It's helped develop my leadership skills in that I've been able to hold civilian team leader positions. Yeah, countless. I've discovered that veterans want to give back. I'm one of those veterans and you don't have a greater resource than a veteran because they bring all this experience. In particular, I'm a mentor--I'm a match--for Big Brothers Big Sisters program. To me, that's just a great way to give back. I have all this experience and I want to share it and I want to empower somebody else. I think there's so many more veterans who want to do that. I mean, look at what you do here. So that's how it has impacted my life. I can turn around and yeah, my community's supported me over the years throughout my career, I want to turn around and give that back. So that's how it's impacted my life. Then with my family and friends, again, the communication piece, the relational experience, just the gratitude and appreciation for the life that I do have. It's not an extravagant life, but I'm just more grateful for the people in my life and the life that I do life, the civilian job that I do have, the opportunity I have to sit here and talk. So yeah, it's made a huge impact on my character. I can't tell you how many times somebody says, whether it's at my church because I'm really involved in my church too, whether it's at my church, or my job, or wherever, I hear the words, "Oh, you can count on Gilda. She's a woman of integrity. You can count on her to get that done," or "You can trust her to do this or to say that." I couldn't have that reputation without my experience in the military.

Berry: You've retired now from the military?

Maltes: I did last October. September first was my official retirement date, but we had--

Berry: Tell us about that experience.

Maltes: We had a ceremony in October. That took a year and a half in the making. In April of 2011, I'd just got to a point in my life where there was so much going on. I had that mentoring coaching job in the military, I'm involved in my church. I was on the church board. Just friends, family, you know, life. And my civilian job, which is a good job. I'm an office manager, but I was just dropping the ball in a lot of

different places and it was just too much. I thought, okay. Something's got to give. So I sought a lot of advice both from elders in my church, from mentors in the military that I've kept in touch with over the years, my friends, my family just because they're in the military too and I know they're going to weigh heavily on it. I thought, okay. Something needs to give. Help me out here. After a couple of months of some soul searching and meditation, I went away to visit my sister out in California. It was a reenlistment ceremony for her. She wanted me to be there for it. So I'm just there as part of the ceremony and I'm holding this plaque for her and stuff. The ceremony's over and we're about to walk off the stage and her commander says to me, "No, stop. We have something for you." I'm like, oh okay. I'm standing there and they have this certificate for me. It's your standard certificate of appreciation from the military, right? But there's a particular line in it that said, "Thank you for your years of service and support to your sister's career," and in that moment I knew. I just knew that's what I needed to do. I needed to retire. Thank you for your years of service! By then I had twenty years and I was deciding do I--oh, the other part of this whole thing was that I was up for a promotion and I either put in my promotion packet or I get out. Because if I put in my promotion packet and I get selected for a promotion, which I was pretty confident I would, I'd have to do another four year minimum because of that rank. It was a big decision point. Do I stay in and do more time for this rank or do I get out? So yeah, in that moment I knew. Thank you for your years of service, when I read that on that certificate standing on that stage in my sister's Navy unit, I knew it was time to retire. Then just the paperwork and that whole process, it took like another year, so September of last year.

Berry: You're pleased with that decision?

[01:29:58]

Maltes: I am. God has made it very apparent what I am to do with my life. That's the thing I think you'll get from veterans too is like there's a sense of purpose. They want to be doing something with their lives, you know? So I knew in this one mentor in particular, Freedlander, who I still get with. He lives here in the area. We get together once in a while. He said in particular, "You know what? If you do retire, find something to do." [laughs] And I have. It's purposeful, it's meaningful, it's rewarding. So yeah.

Berry: Have you joined any veteran's organizations?

Maltes: I have. I'm part of a startup group called the New Veteran's Network. It kind of jumped out of the VA, just other veterans like myself coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan and just seeing some of our comrades just falling through the cracks. Just wanting to create this network to make sure nobody gets lost. And to help each other navigate the VA system and other community resources that there are for everybody.

Berry: Are you active in that program?

Maltes: Yeah, it's a small group. We're trying to get more active. We just did a habitat build, the six of us. I think this was three weeks ago now. We just did a veteran's build. It was just us for the day working on these habitat houses. We're looking to do more outings like that to get more interest from more veterans and just to start making those connections through resources.

Berry: Were you injured at all in your military career?

Maltes: No, unless twenty years of pounding the pavement on my knees and the havoc that that has wreaked counts. No.

Berry: How about lasting friendships? Are you still in contact with some of the individuals? It sounds like you are.

Maltes: Oh yes. Freedlander here in the area, MSgt. Powell. He was a senior chaplain assistant when I was at the 88th up at Fort Snelling. He introduced me to the world of politics and diplomacy and I learned a great deal from him. He lives down outside Atlanta, Georgia now. He's retired there with his wife. We still keep in touch every couple of months. He checks in on me. Sgt. First Class Edwards, she's a fellow female drill sergeant. She's actually on an assignment down at Fort Jackson. She stayed in active duty, or I should say Reserve, but she's full time for the Reserve. We keep in touch. Oh gosh, yeah. There's a handful. A couple guys I went to Iraq with, we still keep in touch.

Berry: Have you arranged reunions at all with these people?

Maltes: No, a lot of one-on-one stuff. I have a friend, Sgt. First Class Johnson, outside the Chicago area. Her and I get together one-on-one. I talk on the phone a lot with people. Freedlander here in the area, we get together for lunch. So a lot of one-on-one stuff, no big reunions.

Berry: Is there anything else you'd like to talk to us about?

Maltes: You know, I probably should talk about women in the military. [laughs]

Berry: Please do so.

Maltes: And just the unique way of thinking that we bring to the table. This is going to sound odd but I kind of disagree with opening combat roles to women right now, only because of my experience just bumping heads with male counterparts over the years. Our culture is not ready for it. I wholly believe females are fully capable of doing anything a male can in the military. I've done some of those things myself, but our culture's just not ready for it. Especially with sexual assault in the military and just until that gets under control and commanders take that

more seriously, I find it hard to believe that women aren't going to be targeted more in some of these combat roles in combat units.

Berry: When you talk about combat, are you talking about ground combat?

Maltes: Yes, because I know, we obviously know, there's no front line to combat now and a female truck driver convoy can engage the enemy, but to purposely funnel females to ground combat units, we're just not ready for it logistically, culturally, mentally. We're not ready for it. I'd really like to see my military get a handle on sexual assault. You take that seriously, then you're going to take everything else seriously. Taking care of everybody, male and female. I think that will trickle down and ease the culture and help ease women into these combat roles a lot easier. Does that make sense? So yeah, women in the military. Let me tell you, we're doing it. I remember a female, we were acquaintances at Fort Stewart, Georgia but she ended up being the soldier of the year of that entire post. At the time, Fort Stewart was a rapid deployment post. The Third ID had just moved to Fort Stewart from Germany and so it was just a staging point for a lot of deployments. We're talking really elite, far charging soldier. She was soldier of the year of that entire post. Come on! How does that not speak to how we can work? Just as well as a male counterpart.

[01:35:29]

Berry: Probably speaks something to the commander of the post also.

Maltes: Yeah, because you know there's politics in all of this stuff too. [laughs] So yeah, my constant prayer for our leadership and my hope is that they'll take things like sexual assault seriously so that we can ease females into these ground combat roles. I hope. I'm sure I'm not going to get my way.

Berry: Well on behalf of the museum, we certainly thank you for taking time out of your day to come and do this interview. It's a wonderful addition to our archives.

Maltes: Thank you, I appreciate it. Thank you for your time.

[End of Maltes.OH1853][End of interview]