

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOSEPH NAYLOR
Medic, Army, Operation Iraqi Freedom
2008

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Naylor, Joseph, Oral History Interview, 2008.

Approximate length: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Joseph Naylor, a Waupaca, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a medic in the Army and his deployment to Iraq from 2003 to 2004 with the 34th Armored Regiment (1st infantry Division) supporting the 82nd Airborne in Ramadi. The majority of the interview focuses on Naylor's deployment to Iraq in 2003. Naylor describes receiving orders that his unit was deploying from Fort Riley to Iraq. Naylor provides anecdotes and descriptions of patrolling, policing activities in Ramadi, his role as a medic in his platoon, being in fire fights, a mortar attack, Geraldo Rivera joining their platoon for a week, seeing his sister in Baghdad and going on mission with her. He explains and describes equipment that was used including improvising vehicle modifications to defend against IEDs. Naylor discusses working with different aspects of the civilian population in Iraq, working with Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army, interpreters, and providing medical treatment to Iraqi children. There is a short discussion on tactical changes that were made that helped their unit be more effective and how the insurgency countered their tactics. Naylor outlines living conditions at his camp and at the Green Zone in Baghdad, the construction of camp, recreational activities and the stress associated with susceptibility to mortar and rocket attacks. He reflects on the frustration of fighting the insurgency, not knowing who the enemy was and the ambiguity of the mission. Naylor addresses the difficulties of readjustment and the importance of support systems. The interview ends with a question from Kollath about Naylor's opinion on the future of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other: Sheiks, tribes in Iraq, building schools, medevac, triage, stop-loss, media coverage and representation of the Iraq War, care packages, Faces in the Sand

Biographical Sketch:

Naylor served with the 34th Armored Regiment (1st infantry Division) supporting the 82nd Airborne Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom from September 2003-2004.

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.

Timestamps reflect the entire length of the interview, which was filmed in three parts.

Interviewed by Jeff Kollath 2008.
Transcribed by Ellen Brooks, 2016.
Reviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.
Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Interview]

[Part I]

Kollath: Why don't we just start out with give us your name, hometown, branch of service, unit you served with, years of service. That kinda thing.

Naylor: Sure. Well I grew up in Waupaca, Wisconsin. That's where I enlisted. Originally. I enlisted in the Army in 2001 and I was Army medic, I was combat medic. And went to—immediately deployed to Korea. At Camp Casey, Tongduchŏn, Korea. And then we went to Fort Riley, Kansas, from there I was deployed to Iraq for a year. And then I went back to Kansas and then I got out of the service from there.

Kollath: What was the highest rank you achieved?

Naylor: I was a Specialist promotable. I was goin' up for promotion before we were deployed and that kinda got put on the back burner for a year.

Kollath: Mm-hm. Why did you join the military?

Naylor: I originally joined the military—went to school for a year, went to college for a year, decided that's not what I wanted to do. Came home, basically sat down with my dad and talked about some options and he basically pointed to his honorable discharge on the wall that he had mounted and he said that's the thing, out of all his degrees and his certificates of achievement and everything, that's the one thing that's got him the furthest in life. So I decided to sign-up in the service. Get some direction, some focus. And the rest is history after that.

Kollath: Um, your dad being in the military, your sister being in the military, what's it been like? I mean, you guys are a military family. So what's that like?

Naylor: People say we're a military family but we rarely talk about it. Military's not usually the topic of conversation. My dad was in for two years, you know, it's not like we were life time enlisted. But it just gives us some common ground. You know, we can all share our experiences together and what each one of us is talking about. You know, and it's something that we can hold special to ourselves. So.

Kollath: What were your parents' reactions to having two kids in Iraq at the same time?

Naylor: Well Laura was deployed three months before I was. And, you know, Laura, she signed up National Guard and she was going in, I assume, for college money. I know she wasn't going in for anything combat related at the outset. But, um, basically my reaction was, when Laura was deployed I was just—surreal, you know. She was activated and then I was kinda of embarrassed because that's

what I signed up to do and I was down in Kansas, you know, regular Army. So, three months after she was deployed then I got the call up. We were supposed to go to a training at NTC and we thought we were marching up the hill for a briefing on the training and we got our orders that we were gonna be deployed to Iraq. And so then I had to call my parents and say that I was gettin' deployed as well. So it was kind of a shock. It didn't feel real, I just remember telling myself, I said, "I'm going to war." I kept repeating it in my mind. And it was an interesting time.

Kollath: Yeah, talk a little bit about finding out that you're going to Iraq and the emotions behind that and how you prepare yourself for going to war.

Naylor: We had basically a month to prepare all of our equipment, and train. When we initially found out I think there was a unit, about 800 of us, down in Kansas 1-34, 1-16, I was part of an Armor unit there and we were a part of the Big Red 1 [1st Infantry Division] on the stateside. And when we found out some people cheered, you know, some people just put their heads down. I can't remember my initial reaction. I think I just was—I didn't cheer, I know that. Just kinda took a step back and—then we marched back down the hill and we got in our platoon formations and we kinda had a little circle discussion about it and I just remember just looking at my buddies, sayin', "This is happening now." We kinda—we thought we would be deployed but it just happened so quickly, it probably was less than a month that we actually, you know, boots off the ground, in the air, over to Kuwait. And I think I got home from that night and I bought a thirty-pack of beer and I sat down by myself and I watched ESPN and I drank that thirty-pack a beer, and then I was ready. And I think we had a couple—just a couple days of training before we were deployed. You know, it wasn't a lot of—not a lot of prep time, so.

Kollath: So you only trained for a couple days stateside, what did you do when you got to Kuwait?

Naylor: Kuwait, we were in Kuwait for nine days. We got over there, we got our trucks and I think we went up to Camp Victory [Baghdad]. And basically waited for all of our equipment to get up there. Didn't do much training 'cause it was so hot. It was middle of the desert, you know, so.

[00:04:58]

We were part of an Army unit [armor unit??] but we were—my Company was attached to an Infantry unit. So the rest of my unit was in Khalidiya, Iraq and I was attached to an Infantry unit just outside of Ramadi. I think it was called Camp JC when we were there. And we didn't have much prep time, like I said, so we—they took our tanks away, we didn't have tanks, they gave us scout Humvees with no armor whatsoever. And that's what we traveled around in. In a platoon, four trucks. And that was—that's who we rode with.

Kollath: Um, obviously I don't know how—talk about your unit a little bit. And their background. I assume none of them had ever been in combat before.

Naylor: No, if anything some of the senior enlisted were in the Gulf War. A couple of the guys, maybe two out of the twenty-five of us had combat experience. So, you know, not a lot of us knew what to expect. Riding into the country from the first time, crossing the berm, you know, we were—we went up there with probably sixty vehicles in our convoy. And basically we had a two day trip to Ramadi in which we got lost a couple times. Got turned around in a couple big cities. We didn't know how to react, people don't know how to react to us. It was kinda, we stared at them, they stared at us. And—yeah, we got lost and there was gunshots and flares going up and each flare was supposed to mean something different. We didn't know what it was for. We finally made it to camp though, without incident basically. A couple accidents but made it up to camp and that's when everything started.

Kollath: Did you feel like you were ready for what you were about to see and do?

Naylor: I don't think we—we--none of us had expectations. We didn't know—we just saw what we saw on TV heading over, and what little training we had. We really didn't know what our mission was gonna be when we got up there. So I think we were up there for probably two or three weeks before we started actively going on missions, waited for all of our equipment and everything. And then we got up there and then we started our patrols and then, that's a whole 'nother story.

Kollath: And when did you first set foot in Iraq?

Naylor: I think it was September 6th was my—was it my 21st—no, 23rd birthday, is the day we left for Iraq. And I think a month later, early October, is when we first got into Iraq.

Kollath: September 6th, 2003?

Naylor: Yep, yes. That would make sense.

Kollath: Um, so, do you have—talk about your first—the first patrol you went out on.

Naylor: The first patrol was unbelievable. We just—basically what it came down to was we were gonna be doing presence patrols, we were gonna recon the area. Ramadi hadn't had much activity previous to us being there, you know. It's a very large city, over 200,000 people at least, at minimum. Um, so we had to go out basically and learn the town, learn the Sheiks, the tribal leaders, learn who they were, create relationships with them. But also just to tell everybody, "Hey we're here. And things are gonna change." So our first patrol we went out, I think, at eleven o'clock at night and we had our—we were designated a certain part of the city and we had the northwest side of the city. Rural farmlands, suburbs, if you will. And basically we went out and, um, we drew some fire right away. And, you know, convoy came to a halt, there was four trucks, you know. And everybody was sweatin', everybody was excited. And for the—basically we didn't come in for

about twelve hours we were out that night. And we didn't even make one ten mile loop in the suburbs 'cause we drew fire, returned fire. We thought someone was settin' up IEDs. We just didn't know what to expect. So it was a long night. But no injuries. So.

Kollath: Do you [coughs]--talk a little bit about the reception of the—that you guys received from the Iraqi people.

Naylor: Sure.

Kollath: And then maybe take that into how that changed over the course of your time there.

Naylor: Well, a lot of that, I always watch the kids reaction. 'Cause you know the parents, the adults kind of skeptical of us. They were always hesitant to approach us. In the beginning, the kids, you know I still remember hearing, "Mister, Mister, Mister, Mister!" You know, this and that. The kids were very receptive towards us. They didn't—they welcomed us. And it was exciting to see that, you know, and it felt good. The adults, you know that was back before a lot of the influence from the insurgency so, you know, they weren't—they were hesitant but they were more welcoming early on in the war. Um.

[00:10:05]

You don't—and I remember half way through, I remember—I noticed change, a little bit. And the kids, they were throwin' rocks and stuff. And, um, you know, we really didn't know who to trust at that point. You know, we would work with the police during the day, the Iraqi police, training 'em. And then we'd be arresting them at night. So we really—it changed in the year that I was there. The outlook towards us and the reception towards us.

Kollath: Any particular events that have solidified those feelings that you saw, I mean, as far as how the Iraqis felt about you and your unit? Anything that stands out?

Naylor: Well, there were certain cases where later on in the year that I was there, I'd say later on in the summer of 2004, um, we'd work with families, we'd work with houses, you know, 'cause we'd set up OPs on houses so we'd basically be living with them. And if the insurgency caught wind that we were working along with a family basically they would execute the whole family. So that was hard and we didn't wanna put people in that position to have to take us in. And you know—so people didn't want to work with us. They didn't wanna have anything to do with us. I remember them telling us that we brought the enemy to them. You know, if we patrolled in their neighborhood that would bring the insurgents into their neighborhood. They didn't have any problems with it before we got there. So, you

know, obviously we have a job to do but at the same point you have to listen to what they're saying too.

Kollath: What was it like working in those—with those conditions?

Naylor: It was hell-ish. I mean, as far as the temperature?

Kollath: No, as far as, you know not knowing [inaudible]--

Naylor: Who to trust?

Kollath: Yeah, the Iraqis, the folks you're trying to help not necessary—they think that you're bringing the war to them.

Naylor: Yeah. Well that's when we questioned our purpose a lot. You know, that really brought that questions into focus, it's how much good are we doing? That was the hardest part for me, you know, is do I believe in what we are doing as a country and narrow it down all the way to a platoon level. I mean, are we doing the right thing? You know guys are dyin', they're dying', we're dyin' and I'm not seeing any—we're not seeing any results of it. When we got there the roads were properly maintained, the guard rails were up and we left. If we had bulldozed everything alongside of the road, basically the town was in a lot worse shape after we left than what it was when we got there. So it, we—that questioned our purpose. But now I can look back four years later and you're starting to see some results. But, you know, was it worth that effort? That's something that I'll hopefully have an answer to at some point.

Kollath: Why don't we go back to talking about the weather and heat and that kinda stuff.

[break in recording]

Naylor: As far as the weather and the heat and everything, um, the extremes were unbelievable. Dry heat, felt like a hair blower. You know, just the dry sand and I remember one night we were out on an OP, 'cause we'd sit on top of the bridges along the highway from Ramadi to Fallujah, we'd patrol those bridges so we'd sit out on OPs for three days at a time. And I remember one night, we're just laying on the back of the truck, someone was pulling guard, and it started raining and we were just so excited that it was actually coolin' down a little bit. We woke up the next morning, we got up—when the sun came up the next morning our truck was just all speckled with brown. It was just—there was a lot of sand in the rain, so, it was tough. But the conditions were—it was tough with all the gear we had. You know, none of the trucks had air conditioning or anything like that. But we made the best of it, you know. I don't remember it being the worst part of our trip. I just

remember getting off the plane in Topeka and feeling humidity for the first time, and that almost knocked me to the floor. But the heat was pretty bad. Yeah.

Kollath: Um, did it cold—

Naylor: It got cold. The wintertime—you know, obviously the same seasons—but the winter sixty degrees felt like thirty degrees. A lotta guys had problems with the cold and it wasn't really even that cold. But it did get cold.

Kollath: Talk about your gear that you had when you were over there, did you feel well-equipped to go into combat?

Naylor: As far as my person, I did, with our body-armor. You know, I really didn't know what the alternative was, there was no real alternative at that time for our body gear. The trucks on the other hand, that was a different story. I don't know if it was poor planning, what have you, or if they wanted us to be more mobile but we went over there with Scout Humvees when we were tankers, basically. Um, our--the Abrams tanks were back in Kansas and we went over there with four Scout Humvees with no armor whatsoever. So, with that said, you know, two months into it we realized we didn't have the right equipment so we basically had to purchase equipment, we had to purchase armor, steel, steel plates from the Iraqis and we soldered that onto our vehicles. So in that way we weren't equipped properly. But I don't know if they knew what they were getting into or what. But.

[00:15:35]

Kollath: Can you talk a little bit more about having to alter your vehicles [inaudible]--

Naylor: Yeah. Yeah, I think we lost a specialist; we lost a driver in a Humvee in an IED accident. Basically blew the door off of it, it was just a fiberglass door and we just had to buy the metal, cut the metal, we had to create the circular part of the—where the gunner's at on the trucks, we built those. The mechanics were busy 24/7 up-armor-ing our vehicles. So, um, besides that, that's basically all we could do, you know, structurally. I mean, if we got hit with an IED under the truck there's really nothing you can do as far as armor wise.

Kollath: Was that all something that was—was it approved by the higher ups? Did you guys ever get any [inaudible]--

Naylor: To do the ad-libbing?

Kollath: —the adding, yeah.

Naylor: Uh, no. Just get it done. Just get it done. Do what you can do because there's nothin' on the way. When we got there we had two up-armored Humvees out of

around sixteen. And when I left we still had two up-armored Humvees out of sixteen. So. It didn't improve in the year that I was there. And that was thirteen months after the war started.

Kollath: What did—does that effect the attitude of the guys in your unit—

Naylor: When guys are dyin', I mean, when—we lost a sergeant and a specialist, both IED attacks and, um, that was horrible. And could that have been prevented? That's a horrible question to have to ask yourself. You know, and then also we had a platoon of sixteen where fourteen of them had Purple Hearts. Sometimes multiple Purple Hearts. And I know I strongly think that that could have been prevented with just a up-armored Humvee. So.

Kollath: Can you talk a little bit about the IEDs and what you saw, what it was like to—and then the psychological impact of those—

Naylor: Well the IEDs were one thing, you know, but to basically break it down, you could never relax. You could never let your guard down. In the year that we were there, mortars were probably the worst thing, because we could go back to our base and we'd liked to have felt comfortable there and safe but you couldn't go to the Porta Potty without having to worry about getting hit by an IED—or with a mortar. You know, we had guys that were going to the bathroom and the mortar landed and it cut right through those Porta Potties and one of my best friends, a lieutenant over there, got shrapnel in his arm and his leg and he was just going to the bathroom.

The IEDs were—that was difficult. That was pretty much what we focused on, focused a lot of our time on. 'Cause what we did was we patrolled basically night and day for six months straight. And then the second six months we sat on OPs on the highway, securing the highway. Because it was a main supply route from, basically, Bagdad to Syria, that whole highway there. And, uh, you know, it's a scary thing, you know when you're driving and you see the mushroom cloud or you hear the mushroom cloud, or you hear the explosion and you see the mushroom cloud and you just hope for the best. But it was—and it still affects—as far as me, it still affects me today drivin'. Seein' a tire on the road or anything. I don't swerve but you still think about it, so.

Kollath: What was the level of sophistication with the IEDs?

Naylor: Oh, it was amazing what they were doing with them. When we were over there they started basically with, you know, a 155 round artillery shell. And they'd wire it underground to maybe a tree or a wall and they'd hook it up to maybe a garage door opener or a cell phone. And it was—I don't know how much it takes to do

that but it did the trick. I mean, they knew what they were doin'. And when we figured out one way, they'd come up with another way, so.

Kollath: Did you ever catch the IED button pushers or builders or—

Naylor: We did. I think it was three months in and we had a couple guys set up on an OP, it was what we called the Milk Station. It was basically a gutted out three-story building next to a residential neighborhood and, uh, we dropped off a couple soldiers and they set up with their night-vision. And we just basically patrolled the neighborhood a couple miles away and they radioed us and they said that there's guys diggin' a hole right by the road, stand by. And so we did. And we waited and then they said once they saw the IED they were gonna basically open fire or go down to try to apprehend the insurgents. Basically, once we saw gun fire we drove—we were basically driving right into the fire. And they shot one of the insurgents and the other one hopped the fence, we got there in time, we pulled them down and we caught both of them. And they happened to be fifteen or sixteen year old kids that said it was their science project. And that they were paid a hundred dollars to do this, by someone else, so. And we later saw them back out on the street after we had sent them to prison. So.

[00:20:45]

Kollath: Let's talk about that.

Naylor: Sure.

Kollath: That's one of the things that we talked about before is, apprehending these, you know, IED builder or insurgents or whatever—

Naylor: Sure.

Kollath: And then what happened after that?

Naylor: We spent basically the first six months just, uh, arresting people. Not just arresting people but apprehending who we thought might be someone of interest. You know, we talked to a lot of people in the neighborhoods, who's good, who's bad, who's doing what. If we confiscated weapons or if we caught fire, you know, we'd do the best we can to catch those guys. And about six months in our role kinda changed and, like I said, we went back out on the OPs, and Abu-Ghraib, the prison scandal happened. And, you know, we started seein' guys we had arrested blatantly trying to hurt us. We saw these guys back out on the streets and we really—at that point wondered what our purpose was, like I said before. We didn't know what was happening, what we were doing. We—we lost guys tryin' to catch these individuals. People died tryin' to catch these individuals and then we saw

'em back out on the street. That was difficult, we really questioned what we were doin' at that time.

Kollath: Could you do anything when you saw 'em back out on the street or are they—

Naylor: No, we couldn't. We might give 'em a little hell, you know. We might, you know, let 'em know we're watchin' 'em again but you really can't. And they taunted us, they knew we couldn't do anything. They would taunt us.

Kollath: Can you talk a little bit about when you're making these arrests, the weapons and the other things that you're capturing as well, talk about—

Naylor: Oh, we basically saw everything. From knives to a lotta AK-47s. We set up traffic stops and we'd catch guys with rockets in the back of their cars. Lotta mortars. And people—it was hard to know who was tellin' the truth because they would set—basically, before we were even there they'd have these tribal conflicts so they would stockpile all these weapons. And so we'd catch them with them in the truck and they'd say they're coming to turn them into us. But a lot of them we'd catch, they were going out to the desert to bury them, add to their stockpile most likely. So, we saw basically everything over there. We'd catch guys with 155 rounds in their truck to, you know, pistols. Everything.

Kollath: What's the best explanation that you heard as to why somebody had 155 rounds in the truck?

Naylor: [laughing] They didn't have an explanation. They couldn't tell us anything.

Kollath: Did anybody ever—well, did anybody ever try to convince you that what they had, no matter what it was, was for, you know—

Naylor: Yeah, we had a guy that was--we--one of the funnier things that I saw was a guy in a little Isuzu truck driving through the desert and he didn't see our tank out there and it was obviously at night and we got the Abrams goin' and he was chasin' the little Isuzu truck down. Little four-cylinder truck goin' through the desert gettin' chased by an Abrams about twenty feet behind him. And he stopped and we got him out. And the back of his truck was filled with mortars and he said he was bringin' 'em to turn into us. So. That was pretty comical to watch that.

Kollath: Can you talk a little bit about, you know, the enemy—we talked a little about IEDs—but talk about the enemy themselves. You know, how adequate were they as fighters? You know, you're interactions with them, that kinda thing.

Naylor: Boy, you know, we didn't know who was and who wasn't an insurgent. We had no idea. Like I said, we worked with Iraqis during the day and then we'd catch 'em at

night. You know. Basically—oh, I was gonna—I lost my train of thought. I had a story too. As far as their skill level, go back to like, February 19th when we were basically attacked, we were handing out flyers for the upcoming election and we caught fire from a house. And the Iraqi ran out of the house, we ran around the backside—a couple guys ran around the backside with their M-4s and they drew fire from a guy shootin' with a pistol. And there was a guy shootin' a machine gun and then they got shot at by the guy with the pistol, and the guy with the pistol was running about thirty yards away and shot one of sergeants in the face. And—which is—that takes some skill, I mean, that's a piece of junk pistol and he shot him right in the face. And then we ended up shooting him back but not after he shot a couple of our guys.

So, their skill level—they're just—we didn't know where to look for 'em. We knew where to look for 'em but they just—they were everywhere. You know, we'd think we had one area of the town suppressed and under control but it wasn't the case, you know. Every time we thought we had a place under control another place would pop-up. Basically we just moved them around the city. Basically moved around the country. You know. We'd go into Ramadi and we'd sweep the town and it'd be fine for a couple weeks and then Fallujah would kick-up. And back and forth. So.

[00:25:52]

Kollath: How do you—how do you try to keep--how do you deal with that—how did you—

Naylor: What I think we did is we'd work with certain tribes. We'd say, "All right, now if you're tribe—" you know, if we didn't have any problems with your tribe for, let's say, a month we would reward that tribe with money for a new school or money for a new mosque. Or, you know, a lotta cases we gave money to the tribes and we'd see the Sheik building an addition to his house. So that's--I mean, there's really not much we can do. We were very small scale, you know. But we tried to reward the areas with maybe money for building a new school basically.

Kollath: Were the insurgents that you saw, that you fought against were they predominately Iraqi? Were they from other—

Naylor: From what we saw, yes. We really didn't have enough time to sit down and break it down. We saw a lot of weapons from Russia but they were already there. You know, a lot of the weapons that we confiscated, the materials, but. You know, I would say yes, they were from the area for the most part, when we were there. Lotta school age kids - teenagers. That were just getting paid just to do the little jobs here and there.

Kollath: How do you—I'll come back to that. As far as the cultural differences between yourself and [recording malfunction] the Iraqis, how did you handle those?

Naylor: Mm. Well, we tried our—the best we could to try to fit in with their culture. We tried, you know—we wanted to be friends with these people but we didn't want to be too good of friends with them, you know. We played soccer with 'em. We respected their culture, with the Koran, and their religion and their faith, as best as we could. A lotta things came up when we'd go and raid a house and, you know, the religious material and they would just get so upset. But we tried our best to respect their religion and their beliefs. You know, we did the best we could as far as that, but there were differences, you know. But we really didn't have time to care too much about what was goin' on in their lives. We had a job to do.

Kollath: Did you work with the Iraqi Military in cooperative efforts at all—or

Naylor: Later on in our tour we did. You know, we worked—not so much, it was mainly we tried to work with the local police. But, you know, every police chief that we worked with was assassinated within a month or two. I mean, there was a lot of turn over. A lotta corrupt police chiefs, a lotta corrupt police. You know, the same thing like I said with the Iraqi soldiers and the Iraqi police, we'd work with them and then we'd end up arresting a few of them. We'd find—I can only remember a couple joint missions really. And they really didn't—they were unorganized and it was more of a hassle to have them with us than anything.

Kollath: Did they w—I mean, did they want to make things better? Did they want to improve things?

Naylor: I—

Kollath: Or is it more self-interest then--

Naylor: —think—we worked with a couple—we worked with interpreters too. And the interpreters were in such a tough position. I just remember having a conversation with one of the interpreters one night and we were just—I think it was after an assault and we were sitting there after everything was getting cleaned up and we were talking and he was just so emotional. He's like, "I love my country, I love my country." I just remember him saying that. And I felt so bad for him, you know. Because he didn't have anywhere to go after this. He couldn't go back to his home, you know, because—and he lived in Baghdad and the insurgents knew all about who he was, they'd see him out on missions and we tried our best to have him concealed but they knew who he was and so—you know, who knows if he's still alive at this point. But, you know, he cared. The interpreters cared. I'm sure

some of the soldiers did but it was just so early on and it was going against the grain to work with us at that point. Definitely.

[00:29:54]

Kollath: The war that you saw in 2003, 2004 how is that different then the war that's going on now? From either people that are still in or news media or—

Naylor: From the veterans that I see now, and I try not to pay too much attention to the media, you know, you hear more good—more positive things about the war now. It's also on the—kind of on the back burner now as far—with everything that's going on with our country, as far as the economy and everything. So it's not getting enough attention in the press. But from soldiers that I hear now, you know, they're more optimistic than they were. They're still angry [laughs]. They're still comin' back angry but they're more optimistic. There's more collaboration with the police and with the Iraqi troops now then there was when we were there. Um, and for instance, the city that I live in now, you can actually walk—the city where I was at in Ramadi—I've heard that people are actually walking the streets now and going to market and everything. And when I was there it was all fenced up and, you know, you really didn't dare walk out in public. So.

Kollath: How we doin' on the tape?

Crew: Actually we--

[break in recording]

[Part II]

Crew: We're back.

Kollath: Talk a little about your MOS, your specialty as a medic.

Naylor: Ah, technically it was Healthcare Specialist. We would learn some nursing, combat medic skills. Trained in Fort Sam Houston for that. Basically what it came down to was I asked my recruiter, "Where are the girls at?" and he said, "Fort Sam Houston." I said, "What job is that?" He said, "It's a medic." So I said I'll do that. So that's kinda what dictated my MOS. But anyways, I went to Korea immediately after Fort Sam and I was there for a year and I really enjoyed it. Worked in a troop medical clinic, worked in--worked with a field artillery unit. Spent about two months in the field in Korea. And then I had a choice of duty station comin' back to the States and I had--I could either go to Fort Lewis and work in a hospital for the remainder of my active duty or I could go to Fort Riley,

Kansas , because I had a girlfriend in Wisconsin at the time. So I chose Fort Riley, Kansas 'cause it was closer to Wisconsin.

A year later I was deployed and the relationship was over but that was kinda how my MOS dictated my—basically where the girls were at. It's pretty simple, but—

Kollath: You talk about training to become a combat medic. How much training was there? Was it more learn on the fly or—

Naylor: We had about three months training at Fort Sam. And we continually trained. We're always training for our job. Yeah, that's pretty much that.

Kollath: Talk about your equipment that you had and what you carried on a daily basis—

Naylor: We had basically a forty-pound rucksack medical aid bag. And then we had a vest that we wore over top of our body armor. You know, the stuff that I had right on me was scissors, tape, IV bags, restrictive bands and needles and what have you. Gloves. For the most part that's what I carried on my body. And then I had my medic bag too that had, uh, a lotta the basics. A lotta wraps, bandages, tourniquets, that type of thing.

Kollath: [coughs] Um, the equipment that you had, how much actual—you know, your unit takes fire, how much can you actually do to save the life of your fellow soldiers—

Naylor: Basically, it was—you know, we have our assessment and that's airway, breathing, circulation and that's what we could basically control. Or you know, that's basically what we could help. We could assess the airway, make sure they were breathing. And then assess circulation, so. Basically what was in our bag was to aid the ABCs, so it was pretty basic stuff. And then we'd always revert back to our training of course.

[00:34:03]

Kollath: How much—why don't we talk about—is there any particular event that stands out as you—during your time as a medic?

Naylor: There's a couple. As far as being—there's, I'd say three. Three different times when the training really kicked in and the first was when, like I said before, we were attacked from a house when we were handing out election flyers. And we weren't expecting much, but again it was new territory where we hadn't been before, we were kinda going outside of our usual AO [area of operation]. So, we were attacked from the house, we returned fire at the house, a couple NCOs ran around the back of the house, they drew fire in the back. We saw four or five

individuals run out of the house. And Sergeant was shot in the face, or through the jaw, basically here to here. And I was in the back truck and I remember them calling over the radio that Sarge was shot in the face and get the medic up here quick, "Get Joe up here quick." And so basically while we were in the fight, I ran from the back of the truck to the front of the truck. I got up there and he was conscious and everything. He was kinda holding his face like this. And you know, we were still drawing fire at that time so it was just a quick reaction, bandage it up. We were in a pretty rural area so we had to call in a medevac 'copter and we couldn't get the one from our base so we had to call the Khalidiya. And they wouldn't come if we were drawing fire, so basically I had to tell them that we weren't drawing fire to get the bird in the air.

So the bird landed, we got him in the air, took off his vest and everything, got him in the bird, he flew away, that night he ended up in Germany. He lived, everything was fine. But he was my Spades partner, a lotta what we did is play cards in the downtime and he was my first Spades partner. And so we had a pretty good relationship so it was kinda hard to see him go. And he took off his vest and he had pictures of his kids in his vest. And we took that back to the base. But that was the first instance.

The second instance was very difficult. This was around April '04, when it was pretty tough over there. It was one of the worst months, still, of the war. And we were sitting on a bridge and our base was hit with mortars and we had to go recon the area where we think the mortars came from. So, a lotta times what they'd do is they'd shoot mortars and then they'd set up a trap, 'cause they knew that we'd always recon the area. And, so, we sent two trucks down to the area by the river and heard an explosion, saw the smoke. And then we heard the commotion on the radio, truck flipped over, people were screaming. And so, you know, at that point in time, you're kinda just like, as a medic—it was just me out there with my platoon, the guys I'd spent already seven months with. And so just gettin' prepared in my mind for what I was gonna see. Okay, I'm gonna need this, this, and this. Get these out, get this ready. Got up there and they were draggin' one of the guys up on the road. The one—both trucks were hit but one was hit and flipped over and went down about ten feet into the ditch on the left hand side of the road. And some guys were shootin' in the woods, you know, we were shooting into the woods, thinking that maybe the trigger man was around. And got up there and Sargent Craig, who was also my second Spades partner, had—was unconscious and he had shrapnel wounds through his face and his chest and basically he was gasping for air. Another NCO was—took shrapnel in the face and all you could see was his eyes, you know, it was pretty freaky looking.

So in all I think five guys in the truck were all wounded pretty severely. Sargent Craig was the only one that was unconscious. And I just triaged as best I could. You know, we could only fit four back in the truck and the rest would have to ride back in the tank. The one guy had to ride back in the tank but the one guy that I left behind ended up being in almost the worst shape, you know. He had a chest wound that I didn't identify, didn't have time to identify. But luckily he made it. Sergeant Craig, that was tough because he was one of my best friends. I knew his family. And basically he's—half of his face was—his lip was hanging off. He needed CPR, you know, basically gasping for breath. Agonal breathing and that was just one of his wounds. And so riding back in the truck I remember one of the guys praying and just tellin' 'em to go as fast as you can. We were about twelve miles out of town. Out of--away from our camp. And just giving him CPR with my hand over his mouth. And hopin' and prayin' and I didn't think there was any chance in hell he was gonna make it at all.

And so we got back, they air lifted him out. I think later on that night, I think I sat in the same spot on the roof that whole night, you know, just wondering what the heck was gonna happen. And they said, "He's gonna make it." That's the last thing I expected. I expected him to be—he was barely breathing when we got back. It was just kinda funny 'cause the colonel—when we got back I had a bandana on my head. He said, "Soldier, remove that bandana." [laughs] I looked at him like, 'Are you kidding me?' So it was an interesting time. And that was one of the most difficult times. That was the most difficult day, over there. And so I didn't play Spades after that.

[00:39:37]

And then another time was when we shot—we shot a—there's a whole buncha stories actually now, that are poppin' up but—we were called out to recon an area where there was just an assault with another platoon. And these parents came out, these Iraqi parents, and they told our interpreter that their little girl was shot. And they wanted a medic. So I was basically the only one that was around. The other medic was tending to the soldiers that were in the altercation. And the girl had been shot with a 50 cal round while she was sleeping in her bed. And she was dead. She was rigid and she was dead, and you know, her parents kinda wanted to hear from—I wouldn't say expert, but they wanted to hear from someone with medical experience, you know. And so we had to tell her that their daughter was dead. And you know, so they brought her down to the living room and all the women were crying and wailing. It was horrible, it was a horrible sound. And then, I'll never forget, the parents of the child, brought me out—brought us out tea. And they asked if they could get anything for us. And we just killed their

daughter. And I thought that was just the strangest thing. And it was hard to deal with that.

And the kids you know, like I said, that was the hardest thing when we had to work on the kids. Kids were always in the middle of it, you know. I remember bandaging up kids with bullet holes in their feet and there's really not a lot you can do at the time. But those were the experiences that stand out. Just the one with the parents bringing out the tea was amazing. I mean, it just struck me. So.

Kollath: When you get the call that, you know, there's men in your platoon that are down, describe that feeling.

Naylor: Well, like I said, it's—you revert back to your training. It's almost surreal, it's almost like you're going through a casualty triage when you're back at base. And that's good. You rely on your training, you go through it. When you finally see it in real life it doesn't feel real. Especially—and then when it's someone you care about still, you know, and then it becomes real. But you just go back to your training, you do the best you can, you know. In that case where Sergeant—can I say the names, is that okay?

Kollath: Yeah.

Naylor: In the case where Sergeant Craig was injured he was flown to Germany and then after three weeks he was flown to Walter Reed. And he was there, his family was there and my dad was actually there for business, for work, around the same time that Sergeant Craig was there. So I—he called me, or I talked to him in Iraq and he asked if anybody I knew was at Walter Reed and I said, you know, maybe he's there. So I think real soon after he came out of—he was in an induced coma for three month—or three weeks. And right after he woke up he said he saw my dad. Or my dad was telling the story, he said he saw Sergeant Craig and Sergeant Craig told my dad that I saved his life and that was pretty real for my dad. That kinda—it was a wonderful thing for him to hear, it was just also very tough. So, that's one thing that always sticks out.

Kollath: What's it like for you to hear somebody say that you saved their life?

Naylor: Um, it feels good. I mean, you're just doing your job. We heard it a couple times over there but I always question, did I do the right thing? Did I do it the right way? You know, and the doctor tells you did the right thing. And it feels good but you just feel so bad, you know, for the individual. But it's a pretty neat feeling.

Kollath: How do you—going back to that first instance you were talking about where there was the five guys that were wounded. How do you—do you have help with any of that stuff but then also how do you decide who to treat first and the hierarchy of care.

Naylor: Well—yeah, the triage of the whole thing, you kinda go back to what you were trained on. Obviously facial wounds, chest, the breathing, you go back to that. I

made a mistake 'cause I couldn't strip everybody down and look at everybody 'cause we had to get back 'cause Sergeant Craig wasn't breathing, you know, barely. So, you know, I made a mistake because one of the guys had a shrapnel wound to his face and he looked like he needed to get back but there was also another NCO that had a chest wound at the time. And he was in about the second to worst shape and I—you know, just a quick judgement call. And we do have help, you know, everybody's doing their best to help out and treat these guys. We have first responders, basically. You know, first responder training for a lotta the soldiers so they're able to help out and try to get IVs started and everything. But that's basically all you have. You just have to go on your gut feeling.

[00:44:51]

Kollath: Any other—when you were talking, any other stories or instances that popped up while you've been going along that you'd like to share?

Naylor: [laughs] As far as medically, as far as dealing—there were a few but I can't really remember them too well so—[laughs] if they come to me I'll let you know.

Kollath: Alright. Talk a little bit about the actual, you know, combat. We've talked before and you've shown me some little movies and things like that. So give us a sense of what it was like to be in a fire fight.

Naylor: Holy crap, I'm in a fire fight. I mean, holy smokes this is actually happening. We didn't have it as bad as some people did. I know that. But we did have instance where we were—I thought we were gonna for surely die. I mean, going into—when we were spear-heading a mission into Fallujah where we had to clear these roads for the Marines. And we had to clear these roads that we knew there was insurgents on. And we kinda leap frogged each other, one platoon would go so far and then another one would come back. And we were pulling security at an intersection when a platoon up front was catching all kinds of fire. And we were called upon, our four trucks were called upon to go up there and assist. And I remember just driving up there—like, you could see the tracers going up in the air, you could hear the explosions and you know you're just about to get in the middle of this. And, you know, soldiers died that night. And people were injured. We didn't know who was shooting at us. We didn't know if it was friendly fire, we didn't know where it was coming from, it was in the middle of these fields and there's berms and ditches. And it was difficult. I mean, it was horrible.

Getting shot at, like I talked about when Sargent Craig or Sargent Boyer was shot in the face, and I had to run from the back to the front and you just kinda, "Okay. Let's do it, let's go." You know, if I don't get there what's gonna happen. Lose my job? Pray that nothing happens. But it's very surreal. And it's very real, you know. It's a horrible thing and I'll never forget it. I can still hear it, you know.

Kollath: Now as a medic you're not technically supposed to be carrying a weapon. Can you talk a little bit about, you know, that blurry line, I guess, between medic and soldier?

Naylor: Well, you know, we had our 9 millimeters, our standard issue 9 millimeters. And that's what we were supposed to carry. I felt—I didn't wanna be put in a position where that was my only means to defense. There'd be times when we'd go out and we'd have to peel off the platoon to go down a different road and who knows what's gonna happen at that point in time. There's guys that, obviously everybody's heard, there's guys that are out on their own and they got taken hostage. They were assaulted and they couldn't put up any type of defense whatsoever so I always made sure that if I needed more fire power I had it with me. So. I'll leave it at that.

Kollath: Is there—what's the--there's an obvious difference, but the difference between going into a fire fight during the day time and during the night time—do you have a—what's the difference not only in operations but also psychologically too?

Naylor: During the day time—I don't know, I almost prefer the night. I don't know why. You know, as a medic I wasn't the one who was on top of the truck firing, I was kinda more in a reactive situation. For a medic, from my standpoint, it was the same night or day. It was just, you know, wait out. Okay, hopefully nothing happens, no one gets hurt. If someone does then I'm ready for it. But day or night I don't think there's much of a difference. Tactically-wise, you know, we have more element of surprise at night obviously. We definitely used that to our advantage, with the equipment that we had, definitely gave us an advantage on that. But, you know, the same point, you can't always trust your equipment. Because it could easily be an American soldier just as easily as an insurgent and you can't always identify that.

[00:49:20]

Kollath: Did they—when you're going into Ramadi or Fallujah or wherever, do you have to change—did you find that you had to change your tactics because you became predictable in your operations and formations and that kinda thing?

Naylor: Well, that was kinda the point. We almost aimed to be predictable at some point because we had to draw out the insurgents. As horrible as it sounds that was our job. Combat patrol draw fire. You know. And because a lot of times they would just sit and wait for us. And that—yeah, it's tough. That's a tough subject. You hate to just put yourself out there but that was—we tried to change our tactics but they knew if they fired mortars that we would come. They knew that. And there's only so many roads you can travel down. There's only so many ways to get from point A to point B so, um—and that left us very susceptible to attack. And we knew that, though. So, we did change our tactics but we couldn't change our routes very much.

Kollath: Is there one thing that you changed during your time there that you thought really worked?

Naylor: Um. I think what we did for the second—for the last half of our tour over there was we sat on OPs for night and day, night and day, night and day. Sometimes

two or three days at a time. And we'd monitor hot spots and we'd catch a lotta people off guard. We'd set up random check points. We did the best we could with what we had. But we did change out tactics a little bit and sometimes we did stay off those roads that we knew, just don't go down those roads. You know. We left places alone. Yeah. But not one thing that I can remember that gave us more of an advantage.

Kollath: Is there one thing that just never worked at all? Period.

Naylor: Um. There was no way to defend ourselves against the mortar attacks, rocket attacks. There was really no way. We had our systems that could read the projectory and tell us where it was coming from but at the same time we hired Iraqis to work on our post, work on our camp, 'cause we had nothing when we got there. We had gutted out schools and we had to build a lot. We built our post up tremendously while we were there. It was—from where we started to where we left it when we finished it was amazing how much work we got done. But letting those Iraqis into our camp, basically, they could tell the outside, or if they were the ones firing themselves, they knew right where our Headquarters were, they knew right where we gathered to eat. So we kinda gave our positions up as well. So. The mortars were the worst. They still are, for me. Personally.

Kollath: Can you—is there a particular mortar attack or rocket attack—

Naylor: Yeah. There's a horrible, horrible experience we had on camp. Really not much going on, it was kind of a quiet day. By that time we had internet set up so we had an internet tent and we had all of our Headquarters buildings set up. And there was quite a few troops on our camp. At that time we had Navy Seabees on our camp, we had Marines, we had regular Army, National Guard, we had some Special Forces. We had Army Rangers with us as well. And it was just a quiet day. And I think there was four or five mortars that landed within two minutes of each other. And I had just walked past the bathroom, past our Headquarters, into our internet tent, sat down. And I was actually chatting with my parents online. And we had the camera all set up so they could see me and everything. Heard the explosions and lotta times we didn't know if it was outgoing or incoming because we had artillery right on post too. So we heard a couple explosions and we looked at each but we heard sand and stuff hitting our tin shed that we were in. And my parents saw my face, you know, they saw my face and I said, "Okay, I gotta go."

And then our colonel, our commander, came running in the internet tent and he said, "We need a medic, we need a medic." You know, one of our captain's was hit, one of our Headquarters' captains was hit. And, you know, he was about twenty feet away from me. The only thing that stopped the mortars from coming into the internet tent was a truck that was positioned there with some generators on it. And that took four or five different hits itself. But the captain was hit at his desk, in a concrete building. One piece of shrapnel went through the window and

hit him in the back of the head. And basically I get in there and he's lying on his back, he's not breathing and he's got a hole in the back of his head and it's brain matter and blood everywhere on the floor. And it was the captain that we just did the Ranger Challenge with. He was on my five man team two weeks before. You know, heck of a nice guy and I couldn't—just, what just happened? You know, it's horrible.

And we got him loaded up on the truck, got him over to the aid station. By the time we got over there, there was already twenty, thirty people over there. The Seabees were also hit but they were in a circular formation and the mortar near landed right in the middle of their formation. And I don't remember how many casualties we had. I kinda remember forty, fifty injured. Seven or eight fatalities from that day. And I get over to the aid station and there's just people lying everywhere. You know, there's—and we loaded up I think five or six helicopters full that day. And it was horrible. It was horrible, horrible day. And that's they day that my lieutenant got hit, in the forearm, going to the bathroom. And three or four guys were hit and they turned our Porta Potties into Swiss cheese. It was very difficult.

[00:55:10]

Kollath: What's it like not—I mean, not knowing that there's no safe place or no safe haven?

Naylor: That's the—that mostly affects me to this day. 'Cause you can never relax. I mean, I suppose you could kinda feel comfortable while you're sleeping, laying in bed. But if you step out of your building, I mean, you're—you could be in trouble. You try to not let it affect you, you try to be as normal—lead a normal life, as normal life as you can, being at war, I mean, we go out, we play football, we run, and we exercise and try to spend a little bit of time outdoors, relaxing. But it was—that's the hardest part, just walking down the street coming here today, you never ever, can—and I don't know if that will ever change. You can never let your guard down. And you never really feel safe. So. After a year of that it's gonna—I assume it's gonna stick with me forever. So. It's a long time to worry, have it ingrained. So.

Kollath: You kinda just touched on it but talk a little bit about recreation and what you guys did to keep things a little bit light.

Naylor: Well, when we first got over there we didn't—obviously we had to build up our camp, you know, put up a perimeter. Make it secure. So that's what we focused a lot of our initial time there. After about two months we kinda settled in a little bit. I bought some concrete and some rebar and some paint cans from the construction

workers and I made some weights. Put some bricks together. And so we had a little weight room set up on top of our building. Got a little further on in our tour and we got some more weight lifting equipment. Our colonel was big into weight lifting so that helped out, so we spent a lot of our money on buying that stuff from the Iraqis. And we did PT every day, you know, we set up some horseshoe pits, but we just basically set up some polls, 'cause really it was all sand anyways. But, um, played horseshoes, we built a softball field. We had engineers with us, which helped. So we built a softball field, we played a lotta football. We stayed active as much as we could. It was still really hot but we had a good time. I'm not gonna say it was all horrible, but we had fun.

Kollath: Played cards and stuff too?

Naylor: A lotta cards, a lotta Spades and dominos. Still played, taught everybody in my hometown how to play Spades and now they play Spades, and we play Spades every Thursday night now. I wish my Spades partner better luck this time around. But, yeah, we had a good time. We played a lotta cards. A lotta cards. And some of us had video games but they didn't last very long in the sand, the PlayStations and the Xboxes and everything. So.

Kollath: Yeah, can you talk a little about your living conditions?

Naylor: Sure, when we got there—we lived on an old, it was an old—it looked like a school, it was almost like a prison camp. I think that's what we heard it was. Gutted out buildings, everything had been looted so it was basically just the skeletal, basically just a gutted out two story building. And there's feces on the floor and there's--we really didn't want to sleep in there but we didn't have a choice. So we cleaned it out. Eventually, while they worked on the building we stayed in a tent for three months. Ninety-five guys in a tent. You basically had a foot to your left and a foot to your right and that was your living space. And that's ninety-five guys in one room. So it was interesting, we made the best of it. I just remember being really hot. And by the end of it our living quarters were pretty nice. You know, we had some air conditioning units put in. We had windows, doors. So by the end of it we had bunk beds and we bought mattresses from the Iraqis. So we had it pretty good when we left, the guys that came in had it pretty good. But they weren't bad. They were nice.

Kollath: Did it feel any remote resemblance to home?

Naylor: Yeah [laughs], yeah, we made the best of it. Hung up posters and stuff. And hung up our, you know, our teams we cheer for back home, we had sporting equipment. And we made the best of it, it felt good, we made our personal areas feel like home as best we could.

Kollath: Were you able to—with the technology of the era, were you able to pay attention to the Packers and the Badgers and all that stuff.

Naylor: That's funny st—yes, we did, we actually got satellite. I think eight months in we finally got a satellite TV. And I, being a Packer fan, was looking forward to watching the Packers very much. They were doing well. And the first Packer game I got to watch, I think it was on at two or three in the morning. And we had a projector so it was pretty—projected it on the wall in our barracks room there.

Everybody was sleeping, I stayed up and watching Brett Favre play against the Oakland Raiders. The day after his father died. And I swear I was laying in my bed, I was crying, it was pretty neat to see that, and to know the story. And two days later our cable went out and we didn't have it again for three months but it was cool to see that, and watch that game.

You know, that—the baseball playoffs they posted on the wall, someone with the internet. We eventually had the internet there. But early on we just got our news by—we had a wall that we posted information, that's how we got our updates and everything.

[01:00:35]

Kollath: How often did you communicate with your parents and your friends and other family members?

Naylor: Uh, I don't think I talked to my parents for a couple months after we left, initially. Um, I'd say probably once a month. You know. When we had the internet it was more frequent. We were able to—but obviously it was in high demand, we had six or seven computers and a lotta people that wanted to talk to their family. So, towards the end, more than once a month, but that's about the standard. Once a month.

Kollath: What were your conversations like with your parents? As far as a lotta--what did you tell them about what you were seeing and doing and that kinda thing?

Naylor: I think I told my parents—I told my family the real deal. I don't think I held too much back. I held a little bit back, you have to. But I kept them pretty up on what we were doing, what the conditions were like, what we were seeing as far as activity. You know, I don't even think they knew quite where we were at. I have 'em an idea. But, you know, I just wanted to know what was goin' on at home. Just picture it and you build it up so much in your mind, what home is like, you know. Such high expectations [laughs]. But it was—it was neat to see them. We had the webcam set up so I could see them. That was special. Yeah.

Kollath: Was it like—

Crew: We should change tapes.

Kollath: Okay.

[Break in Recording - 01:02:04]

[Part III]

Crew: We're back.

Kollath: Um, in our initial conversations, you know, we talked—you shared some videos and things with us. Why don't we talk—and we talked about the media. So why don't you talk about how accurate you thought the media was and then also your interactions with the media too.

Naylor: Well, as far as being accurate, you know, I--before we left, the initial war--when the war started that's what I saw. And then what I lived in, was pretty accurate. They had a lot of reporters on location. So that was pretty accurate. You know, they did a good job; there was a lotta coverage, which was good. Over there I can't tell how accurate it was, you know, I didn't see a lot of the coverage being that we were there. But we did have one instance when Geraldo [Geraldo Rivera] was supposed to attach himself and his crew with our platoon and ride with us for a week. And lucky for him, that day, he got some good footage 'cause we were attacked and he was right along with us. I give him credit 'cause he came out on some of the most dangerous roads that we wouldn't even go on. And the one time we did go on we were attacked and he was with us. And he got some good footage that day. He picked up a suicide vest on accident and we all took off running. 'Cause he didn't know what he was grabbing and it still had a trigger on it, but. You know, he was with us for about a week and you could tell that he cared. You know. And I give him credit for putting himself in that position. To get the story out. So, it was interesting. He's a pretty interesting character.

Kollath: Can you expand on that at all?

Naylor: [laughing] It's just—you know, he wanted to get the real story. But he also put sort of a flamboyant touch on everything, you know. It was everyday life for us, but for him and the people back at home it was very interesting. So he wanted to get in and get the real story. There's not much else I can really say. He just was an interesting guy and we give him credit for coming along with us.

Kollath: Did he interview some of your NCOs and COs?

Naylor: Yeah, he interviewed the colonel that was with us. You know, obviously after we got in the fire fight, the whole unit came out 'cause they wanted to get some press time. But he interviewed the soldier, the specialist, that basically was one of the ones responsible for capturing the insurgents that day. We caught some higher level officers in the Iraqi Army that day. So it was a pretty big catch for us, you know, we arrested four or five individuals that were responsible for suicide bombings in Baghdad, that's what we were told. They had some gutted out ambulances there and that's what they were using in Baghdad around those times. So we can only speculate but that's what we were told. So, basically it was one of our bigger catches, that day. A truck load of sodium chloride, yeah. And we confiscated that, and a lotta weapons. And he was there for the whole ride.

[01:05:14]

Kollath: Is that the instance with the other guy wearing the dress?

Naylor: [laughs] Yeah, yes.

Kollath: Can you talk about that?

Naylor: Sure, sure. Well, like I said earlier, when we came upon this house and we drew fire, four or five individuals ran out. So after we had suppressed the situation we searched the surrounding buildings and there was one building in particular where it was filled with people. Women, children and we didn't think there was any men in there but we had to—we had everybody come out. And there were some individuals in there, men putting on women's dresses trying to camouflage themselves. So we had to have all the women take down their veils and their hoods so we could identify who was a suspect and who was not. And basically one of the individuals tried to stab one of our guys with a knife and it escalated and we took him out. And he ended up being a general in the Iraqi Army. And so Sergeant Boyer, who was shot in the face, we sent the general's uniform home to him from that day. But that was tough. Something you'd see out of the movies, all the women screaming, the kids crying and guys are gettin' thrown around. And—but it was a big catch for us that day. It was a big deal.

Kollath: Now that you've been home for a while and—do you think that the media's been fair with how they looked at the war?

Naylor: Um. Well, the troop support has been tremendous obviously. With everything that's going on now in the world it's not so up front and up center anymore. They have--I think they have been fair. You know, I wish there was more coverage on the soldiers who are coming back injured or that didn't make it back alive. I mean, you hardly ever see any coverage on that besides the local media. You know, obviously they're not allowed to show the funerals on TV, for whatever reason. But I think there needs to be much more attention placed on that. And much more attention placed on the troops that are coming back wounded and not just wounded, but are coming back with all types of mental health issues. And there needs to be a lotta support. A lot more than there is.

Kollath: Did you feel—did you feel that you were supported and your men were supported when you were over there by, you know, your families but—

Naylor: Very much so.

Kollath: —also, the country in general.

Naylor: Very much so. When we were--when I left for Christmas on a four day leave, I came back and my hold bed was filled with boxes and cards and everything. School kids would write us and there was never a shortage of goodies. We always had just random boxes sent to us, churches, schools, senior citizens, senior centers. So yeah, we had a lotta support, a lotta support.

Kollath: Can you talk about care packages? And some of the stuff you received and some of the favorite things and—

Naylor: Sure, favorite things was gettin' some beef jerky. Getting the beef jerky, getting sports magazines, newspapers from your home town. Chewing tobacco for me was a big thing. But just anything from home was fantastic. Just I remember always asking my friends and family for pictures. Just getting updated photos, and letters were fine too. But just some things I like were just the beef jerky and the peanuts, just little goodies that you missed.

Kollath: Anything that you received in one of your packages that you kinda were taken aback by?

Naylor: One of my friends thought it would be funny to send some magazines over, you know. And I got in trouble for that, but I appreciated the effort.

[both laugh]

Kollath: The strict regulations--

Naylor: Yes.

Kollath: —that they have now.

Naylor: Yep.

[01:09:08]

Kollath: One of the thing—you know we interviewed Laura, your sister last week and you had told us before too. Can you talk about the time that you and Laura met in Iraq? Kinda explain how that came to pass and what it was like?

Naylor: From what I remember, when we set it up she was in Baghdad, in the Green Zone, and I was at Ramadi. So about an hour and a half away. And we thought it might be possible to see each other but I was never granted the leave time while I was there. I was never granted a four day furlough. You know, in the whole year that I was there. So I kinda took it upon myself to tell my first sergeant that I wanted to go see my sister in Baghdad. So, I asked him, I kinda got a non-answer so I said,

"Okay, well I'm gonna head out." [laughs] So basically I talked with Laura, I can't remember if we, I think we talked on the phone. And we set up that she would be doing a mail run or something to the Baghdad airport. And [inaudible]. So it was on a hope, you know, and I caught a convoy that was going back to Baghdad from Ramadi. Well I caught one convoy that was going to a post and then I caught another convoy. So I kinda hitchhiked my way to Baghdad. Ended up on the post, ended up by the airport, and then I ended up kinda where the main gathering area was for recreational. They had some shopping, restaurants and stuff so I was hoping that I was in the right place.

And I think I waited four or five hours. I had a whopper for the first time, that was pretty neat. And then I—then four, five trucks pulled up and Laura got out and it was pretty emotional, you know, I hadn't seen her in a long time. And that was pretty neat, pretty good deal. And we hugged of course. And just couldn't believe that we were standing there in Baghdad, lookin' at each other. And we got in her truck. We made it about a mile out of the Baghdad airport and then her truck ran outta gas so we were stuck there on the side of the rode, in Baghdad. And we ran outta gas, so that kinda dampened the mood a little bit. But we got the gas in the car, got gas in the truck and we went back to her camp and I couldn't imagine—I couldn't believe how she was living, it was amazing. Green grass, and she was living in a palace. But it was a bombed out palace but it was still nice. And she had ESPN and she had food and dining halls.

And it was just great, it was fantastic. And the four days we spent together was well worth the trip. You know, it was just great. I went on a couple missions with her, out in Baghdad. And I didn't wanna ever see that again. A lotta people, a lot goin' on. And I give her and her unit a lotta credit. For just being college kids, and then they're stuck in the middle of that. I couldn't believe it. Um, you know, and she had definitely changed, she was strong. She was driving that lead truck and she was plowing through intersections and she wasn't gonna have any of it. You know. I was very proud of her. I was very, very proud of her and what she was doing. But I hated that she was there too, you know, at the same point. I saw it—I heard she was gettin' mortared just like we were. And she was going through a lot of the same things. And, so, but it was a fantastic time, it's something I'll never forget. It's not some—not a lot of families go through something that strong. You know, and we still talk about—we don't talk about it as much. But, you know, it's something we did and we're proud of it. But to spend that five days, to sum up the five days, basically we played ping pong, we ate, we did a little exercising, watched a lotta TV 'cause I hadn't seen it in about seven months. So it was pretty special.

Kollath: What was is it like going on operations with a unit that's not your own?

Naylor: I was—

Kollath: As an observer?

Naylor: Well, you know, they offered a chance to me. And I figured I felt pretty safe about it. But, then again, you're going out with people you don't know. Honestly half the platoon, at least, was women and I didn't know how I felt about that. I know my sister and I know she can handle it fine. But I just wasn't used to that, I hadn't seen a female soldier in seven months. And last time I saw them they were in the dentist office, they weren't out doing combat tours, so. But, that aside, I felt pretty good about it. And then we got out in the markets and I saw how many people there were. You know, there's people just right alongside their vehicles the whole time. Wall to wall people. And I couldn't imagine that. I couldn't deal with it. So I went on one mission with her and that was it. They went out a couple more times but I stuck around the camp.

Kollath: And watched ESPN?

Naylor: Yep, yep.

[01:14:04]

Kollath: Um, can you talk about the readjustment to life at home and what's that been like for you?

Naylor: Boy, that was almost goin' on four years now. Getting home, I—now that I look back, I had a lotta pent up aggression. I was—I didn't feel angry. I didn't feel like I was an angry—I'm very much an optimistic person and I feel like I was just mad. For whatever reason. I did have a good support system, I had a good family. I knew where to go if I needed help. So I knew that knowing the right people helped out a lot. I can't imagine not having that support system and coming back. And not having anything, it's gotta be one of the most difficult things. A month after I returned I met my wife. And she had to put up with a lot. A lotta nights where I couldn't sleep. Night sweats, nightmares, it was horrible. And she was there the whole time, so I give her a lotta credit. I'm lucky, I'm fortunate that I had her at that time.

But like I said, I spent time at the Vets Center, speaking with counselors. I—my dad being a vet, I could always have someone to talk to with him being there. The anxiety was intense, you know. I got in fights. I never really had gotten into too many fights and I found myself getting into scuffles here and there. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Just—that wasn't me, not at all. So we dealt with that. And slowly getting back to the way it should be, getting back to normalcy. Yeah.

Kollath: Um, I lost my question. Oh, did—what was it—did you find it difficult to try to explain what you saw and what you did to civilians? To folks who have never been through something like that?

Naylor: Uh, when I didn't feel totally comfortable I did. You know, sometimes you get tired of talking about it. But then there's other times where you just get on a role, and you just start talking and you talk and you talk. For me at least. And my fri—I had a lotta great friends that were interested in what we did over there.

That were very proud of us for what we did over there and they wanted to know what it was like, so I didn't have any problem really talking about it.

Kollath: Did you rely on your fellow veterans to kind of help you, but also you helping them too—

Naylor: Yeah. When we got back—I mean, I was involuntarily extended in Iraq for six months, so I was about a month away from coming home after spending six months there, I was about a month away. And I was getting prepared to come home and then we got the orders that we were gonna be there for six more months. So by the time I got home my active duty contract was up. So as soon as I got home I was done. So I really didn't have a lotta interaction with other vets, with my fellow soldiers when I got back. It was kinda, get back, get your awards, pack up my stuff, and get out of town. You know, we had our demobilizations, you know, our briefings. And I guess they want us to retain some of that but I didn't—I wasn't exactly a sponge when I got home. I don't remember a lot of what they told us. But luckily when I got home I had good support.

Kollath: I forgot about the stop-loss thing, can you talk about being stop-loss and that whole—

Naylor: That was a trying time. You know, the stop loss basically, we just worked til-- we weren't allowed to go home until our unit was going home. Being that we were short on personnel. You know, there's a few of us, six or seven of us out of the 110, 112 guys that were in our company. And we had heard rumors, it's all rumors, you know, you hear rumblings all the time. Are we gonna be goin' home, are we gonna be extended, are we gonna be extended longer than a year? Every day was a different rumor, when we were gonna leave. And, uh, about a month away from going home and we were told that we were gonna be staying for the remainder. And that was pretty hard but we kinda expected it. So, just had to suck it up at that point, definitely.

Kollath: I'll end with the—well two things-

Naylor: Sure.

Kollath: —if there's anything else we haven't talked about that you'd like to share?

Naylor: No, I wanna talk about the—what we talked about as far as the combat-type stuff. That was cool.

Kollath: And then I'll end with the question we always end with, which is should we stay or should we go?

Naylor: [laughs] In Iraq or Afghanistan?

Kollath: Uh, let's talk about both.

Naylor: [laughs] Well, the way it looks right now, in Iraq, the way things have been going, I'm more optimistic now than I was when I got home. When I was there I felt it was unnecessary. I didn't feel we had a purpose, and that was very difficult. I didn't believe in—I didn't totally believe in what we were doing. I didn't know what the plan was. You know, now obviously things have changed for the better. What we hear. So, I think we're on the right track. With the elections coming up here in the fall, who knows. But it sounds like things are gonna be changing more for the better. You know, what we set out to do originally was catch Osama Bin Laden. So I'm all for staying in Afghanistan but contributing more effort there. More troops, I'd say. I can't believe I'm saying this now but, you know, four years ago I woulda said, "Let's just come home." That's where I was, but now I've changed my tune a little bit.

Kollath: Great.

Naylor: All right?

Kollath: I think we're good.

Naylor: Thank you.

Kollath: Thank you.

[End of Interview]