

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**WILLIAM SCHUTH**

Tactical Data Network Administrator, Marines, Operation Iraqi Freedom

2008

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**Schuth, William.** Oral History Interview, 2008.

Approximate length: 55 minutes

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

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, William Schuth, a University of Wisconsin alumni, discusses his Operation Iraqi Freedom service as part of Echo Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Marines from February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004, where he served in a counter-battery fire artillery unit, a provisional rifle company, and an international border security force near the Al-Anbar Governorate, including Al-Asad Airbase, Camp MEK, Haditha, FOB Trebil, and FOB Waleed. Schuth discusses the impact of deploying on short notice from the Marine Corps and his limited special training before shipping to Iraq. He comments on the working relationship the Marines in his company had with the Iraqis, and explains the challenges of adjusting to the desert climate. Schuth reflects on the support he received from home and comments on the anti-war criticism the war was receiving during his deployment. Finally, he discusses the unpreparedness of the Marines for the war, and provides his thoughts on the war as a whole.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Schuth served with Echo Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Marines during Operation Iraqi Freedom from February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004. While in theater, he worked in a counter-battery fire artillery unit, a provisional rifle company, and an international border security force near the Al-Anbar Governorate, including Al-Asad Airbase, Camp MEK, the Haditha Dam, FOB Trebil, and FOB Waleed. Schuth left the Marines in 2007 to continue his education at the University of Wisconsin in American civil-military relations.

**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 two parts.

Interviewed by Bill Brewster, 2008.

Transcribed by Helen Gibb, 2016.

Reviewed by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

Abstract written by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

## **Interview Transcript:**

### **[Beginning of Interview]**

#### **[PART I]**

BREWSTER: Let's start out with your name, and your rank, and your reason for joining the military.

SCHUTH: My name is William Schuth. When I exited my active duty service I was a corporal in the United States Marine Corps. And I joined the service for a variety of reasons but it was right in that year after 9/11 and it seemed like the right thing to do.

BREWSTER: You were motivated by 9/11 then?

SCHUTH: Partially. I was also at a stage in my life where joining the military seemed to be a good idea as far as opening up other opportunities to me.

BREWSTER: How old were you?

SCHUTH: I was twenty—yeah, going on twenty. It was about a month before I turned twenty.

BREWSTER: What's your current status?

SCHUTH: I'm a student at the University of Wisconsin. And I'm still on inactive reserve duty.

BREWSTER: How long were you active?

SCHUTH: I was active from December 2, 2002 to December 1, 2006—stationed primarily out of Camp Pendleton.

BREWSTER: And what was your MOS [Military Occupation Specialty]?

SCHUTH: O656, which is a tactical data network administrator.

BREWSTER: So you worked primarily—

SCHUTH: Primarily in communications. I was with 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, which is an artillery unit.

BREWSTER: When was it that you deployed to Iraq?

SCHUTH: I deployed to Iraq in late February of 2004 and I was there until late September of the same year.

BREWSTER: What were the circumstances of the deployment?

SCHUTH: It was rather sudden. I was with the Headquarters battery of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Marines. Our comm chief told a bunch of us that we were getting augmented to Echo battery, which is one of the active firing batteries, and that they were going to be making a deployment to Iraq. I was one of those individuals. So we made the transition over to Echo and we had about two weeks before we deployed—I think the date was February twenty-sixth. We left the southern California area and flew over via Maine, and then via Frankfurt, and we landed in Kuwait. And we were in Kuwait for some time before we went up because we had to unload our gear off of ships and stuff like that. Or have it unloaded and trucked up to us and calibrated.

BREWSTER: For two weeks?

SCHUTH: Yeah, probably be about two weeks in Kuwait. I'm told that the base is no longer there—it was called Camp New York. It's in the Udairi [Training] range. That's where we were test firing our howitzers before we drove up north.

BREWSTER: So there really wasn't much preparation for your deployment then?

SCHUTH: Not really, no. It was quite sudden. About a few days before we actually deployed—we had already gone to BZO [Battle Sight Zero] our rifles, we had M-16 A2s, and all of a sudden they said, Oh we've got a bunch of M-16 A4s in. And we actually spent a night—probably until like midnight—unpacking them from cosmoline and cleaning them, and everything. Then the next day we went out at like four o'clock in the morning and BZO'd those rifles again. I mean, it was extremely short timeline, for spinning up, before we left.

BREWSTER: Is part of your regular training—prior to deployment—was there some component that would be directed toward desert warfare?

SCHUTH: No, not toward desert warfare. I hadn't been with the unit long enough to go up to Twentynine Palms. Generally every year they go on combined arms exercise up to Twentynine Palms and that's where you get the majority of your desert training. I had done my comm school training there—that's where the Marines have their MOS academy for the communications field—but I hadn't been up there as part of an active unit or anything like that. What's ironic though is that we had been involved in stability and security operations—they call them SASO—and that was going on at March Air Force Base [March Air Reserve Base] in like their old, sort of like, base housing area. It was supposedly about to be condemned and so we were one of the units that was training other infantry units to go over and basically how to operate in an urban terrain environment with people—each of us were assigned roles and we were supposed to act like what our concept of Iraqis were, basically.

[00:04:41]

So I was involved in that on the training side of it, and came down on a seventy-two—seventy-two hours off from that training exercise and that's when I found out that I was going over. Someone came and knocked on my door on like a Friday or a Saturday morning, you know, that I had off and said, "You have to go report to the first sergeant because you're getting deployed." I didn't believe it at first. It was a friend of mine who was on duty in the barracks that came and got me and I thought he was pulling my leg. I yelled at him for it and he said, "No, I'm serious. You have to go see the first sergeant. So shave and get changed, and go." And that was a pretty rude awakening that morning.

BREWSTER: So you got assigned to Echo battery?

SCHUTH: From Headquarters, yes.

BREWSTER: From Headquarters. And so did they have the same short notice for deployment or were they—

SCHUTH: We knew that something was going on, that one of the firing batteries in the battalion was going to go. And the rationale given by our commanding officer at the time—his name was Colonel Frasier—said that he—I remember the words he said, "I went out on a run and it came to me. Echo battery should be the one that goes." He decided it while he was PT'ing one day, apparently. [Laughs] I don't know if the officers called him but everyone else called him—his first name was Mike and a lot of people called him Money Mike. That was his nickname in the battalion. He was a really, really good CO that pretty much everyone expected, but for him to say, "I decided this when I was on a PT run." A lot of guys didn't take that too well.

BREWSTER: So there was some negative reaction because of the short notice.

SCHUTH: Yeah, I think that was primarily—at this point, this was probably what, less than a year after the invasion still so there wasn't a whole lot of hesitation or anything like that in terms of what the mission was going to be but in terms of the short notice, guys were definitely feeling that deadline. Especially in terms of telling your family like all of a sudden this is out of the blue, "I'm going." Everyone expects to go at some point but for it to be that short of a notice, you know, doesn't really give you time to go see your family or anything like that if you live out of state, or if you're not from California.

BREWSTER: So you were involved in training infantry for urban combat. The—we'd moved into the different phase of the war by this point in time.

SCHUTH: Yeah. From my understanding most of the area the Marines had occupied after the invasion had been turned over to the Army. At least, that's what we were told

at the time. So when we were going back—this was after already there were starting to be problems in Fallujah—this was right before—we deployed basically right before the entire scenario in Fallujah just completely disintegrated and we started having to really step up operations there. So I guess the individuals in command were saying, We really need to have this kind of training for units that are going over there. From what I understand, it continued well after I left that program to deploy. I don't know if it's still going on in that form or in that location, but it went on for quite some time.

**BREWSTER:** Typically artillery batteries aren't going to be involved in counter insurgency operations?

**SCHUTH:** Generally, yeah. Our mission when we went over was counter battery fire which basically—we were going to be stationed—when we initially arrived there we were going to be stationed in Fallujah and we stayed in Fallujah for a few weeks and then we moved up to an air based called [Ayn] al-Asad. Essentially what we were doing was working with a counter battery radar unit so that when the base would get mortared or rocketed the counter battery radar could pinpoint where the location of the mortars originated—you know, where the mortars originated from. Then they would send us the coordinates and we'd do a fire mission—if we were authorized to do so.

**BREWSTER:** And so that—when you left Kuwait, your move was right up to the Fallujah area?

**SCHUTH:** Yeah. We drove straight from Camp New York right up to a staging area just on the Kuwaiti side of Safwan Hill [Jabal Sanam]. We stayed there for a few hours at night and then we drove up, and generally via the main roads. It was an extremely large convoy—we weren't the only unit, there were a bunch of other units that went. I don't remember seeing any tracks but there were some seven ton—basically the Marine version of the five ton, it's a seven ton, six wheel vehicle that were pulling really, really long powerboats, like speedboats. Of course, seeing this in the desert you're thinking, What are these guys doing here? And we actually caught up to those guys later—they were going up to an area north of Haditha, north of that dam there and so they were using those boats for patrolling the really big reservoir right north of that dam. It was a huge convoy, we stopped once it was like a sixteen hour drive we stopped at a refueling point—it was called CSC Scania—and then we went up north and hit Fallujah the second day. This was about sixteen hours of driving both days at about forty five miles an hour. It took a long time.

**[00:10:25]**

**BREWSTER:** That's a really long day.

SCHUTH: Yeah, makes for an extremely long day. When we got there all the trucks that we got we had to quality control check them and all of this kind of stuff. They weren't our trucks—we didn't know them very well. We had a few break downs and it was an interesting experience, it was not a very pleasant one.

BREWSTER: What were your guns?

SCHUTH: We had 155s [mm howitzer].

BREWSTER: So you get up and then you're at Fallujah and then you move to the other base?

SCHUTH: It was al-Asad.

BREWSTER: Air base.

SCHUTH: The air base. We were in Fallujah for quite some time and we wound up going back there. There was a huge operation at one point when we were stationed in al-Asad that we got tasked on as part of 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. It was called Operation Ripper Sweep. Ripper is the call sign for 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, or it was in-country. It was called Operation Ripper Sweep and on that operation we went from al-Asad and actually traversed back through I think it was [Al] Taqaddum [Air Base] to Fallujah and we stayed in Fallujah again for a short period of time before we went back.

BREWSTER: Can you--did you have much interaction with Iraqis while you were there?

SCHUTH: Not while I was in Fallujah or al-Asad. A while after we were in al-Asad we actually got de-tasked from counter battery fire operations. The CO of 7<sup>th</sup> Marines apparently was uncomfortable with artillery units, for whatever reason, and didn't feel comfortable with us shooting when he had other units operating in the area. I didn't understand it either. So we were activated as a provisional rifle company. We got sent to Haditha first and then we were split—our battery was split. We had about 140 men including all the augments, and we got split between a place called FOB [Forward Operating Base] Walid, which is on the Syrian and Iraqi border and the FOB Tribil which is on the Jordanian and Iraqi border. We were doing border control there, and that's where we got to interact a lot more with Iraqis because not only were we supervising Iraqi border security, but we were also checking vehicles and stuff like that were coming through—Jordanians, Iraqis, Syrians, whoever was coming through those checkpoints. We were basically checking for smuggling gasoline, smuggling whatever they happened to have that was on a list of contraband. And then checking up on the border security and making sure they were doing whatever it was that the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] wanted them to do.

BREWSTER: How far into the tour, then, did this occur?

SCHUTH: This was probably in the last three months of the tour. We got shifted around a lot while we were in-country and basically we were the jack of all trades for 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. They had us doing all kinds of different jobs.

BREWSTER: So you were working with the Iraqis pretty closely then in that last three month period?

SCHUTH: Yeah, we had essentially daily contact. Not so much with what you'd call the general populace but with state functions of—like I said, the border security individuals and then people that would be passing through those areas.

BREWSTER: How was that working relationship then?

SCHUTH: The working relationship was interesting. You know, most of the time the enlisted men including the platoon sergeant generally felt like the border security wasn't all that efficient in performing their mission. And I remember having to go on at least one foot patrol where our platoon commander, who was a first lieutenant, went over to see whoever was in charge of the border security for the Iraqis. And this is a long ordeal where it takes an hour to two hours and they sit down and have the tea, the chai and basically they talk over everything and nothing gets done. Meanwhile everyone that's on the foot patrol is holding security outside absolutely sweating in the August heat. I remember at least going on one of those patrols and just thinking there has to be a better way to get this stuff done.

**[00:14:56]**

But we had a few what were claimed to be Iraqi Special Forces guys that were there with us and then two interpreters—one was a civilian, and one was dressed up in some kind of camouflage and he carried a machine pistol—like a Swedish machine pistol or something like that—it was a nine millimeter. So we had those guys there and then there was a very small Army contingent—they were like a logistics team—and they were coordinating contractors that would come through like defense contractors, particularly ones doing convoy security. We'd have a lot of convoys come through there and the Army was primarily in charge of that and they had one dog that was there for sniffing for explosives or drugs. I don't remember which the dog was doing. They had one canine guy there. It was a very small, very, very small FOB. I don't think we had more than like thirty-five or forty people there but it was a good time.

BREWSTER: Did you ever end up in any combat situations?

SCHUTH: Not where we returned fire—particularly not with small arms fire. We were in several situations where we were mortared, especially when we were in Fallujah. There were a few rocket attacks in al-Asad but definitely the primary attacks were in Fallujah. At one point we had just handed off with an Army Airborne

unit that had some 105 [mm] artillery pieces there and they had a position set up on one side of—it was called Camp MEK [Mujahedin-E Khalq]—it's right outside Fallujah, it's the main base there and that's where the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division headquarters was. This was very, very early in our time in Iraq and so we'd handed off with these Army guys, and we had set up our artillery position just maybe a hundred meters from where they were. And the night after they pulled out, their artillery position was mortared and we had a small group of men in our position with the guns.

And I was on the communications team that was there and so after the mortaring was over, the Comm chief and I drove my Humvee back to the area where we were bunked on that base to make sure that everyone was over there, to give a situation report from everything that had happened on our side of the camp. It was pretty interesting. They rocketed the chow hall the same night. So they had—it seemed like they had really good intelligence of where things were on that base. I mean, they knew where the chow hall was. They either had a lucky guess or they knew there was an artillery position in some spot. So it was pretty sobering. It was a wakeup call to say, We might be inside these really tall walls, and this might be the headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, but somebody knows where our stuff is. We got rocketed at chow time, so the mess hall was full. I'm sure there were a few people that were probably hurt in the attack but we didn't return fire for whatever reason but later that night we heard an [Lockheed] AC-130 flying around so—

BREWSTER: A gunship?

SCHUTH: Yeah, a gunship. I don't know if they found anything or if they made any fire. I wasn't in a position there where I was returning small arms fire, particularly an artillery unit. Unless you're in an actual invasion you don't have much opportunity to do that—you shouldn't be doing it as an artillery unit. After we were split up into three different groups, a portion of the battery was sent to another base and they were still doing counter battery fire. There a bunch of them got combat action ribbons for, for returning fire but it wasn't everybody that was in the unit. It was case by case basis that these guys got that ribbon.

BREWSTER: When you were in that position when you drew the rocket fire and there were—did you have Iraqis who were working in that 1<sup>st</sup> Division?

SCHUTH: I don't know if they had—presumably there were, they called them TCNs—third country nationals—and so in the mess facilities there wouldn't have been. Most everyone that was there was like Pakistani or Indian or something like that, that was working inside the chow halls. But then they would have trash men that were coming in or stuff like that. I assume that they were local people that were contracted to do trash removal or to pump port-a-potties or whatever. It's quite possible that that's where they were getting their information I guess.

BREWSTER: Presumably somebody was pacing off, right?

SCHUTH: Whoever was doing it was doing it right under our noses. And so, like I said, that was really sobering.

[00:19:58]

BREWSTER: Could you characterize the feeling within the unit about the Iraqis or at least about the insurgents?

SCHUTH: Well the insurgents were—it was pretty much an us versus them mentality for the most part. There wasn't a whole lot of sympathy for them, at least in terms of being opposed to us and trying to get us while we were over there, essentially. Nobody would have hesitated to defend themselves or anything like that—there wouldn't have been any moral quandary there. But in terms of just everyday individuals, it was more on a case by case basis how people felt about it. Some people were pretty friendly, particularly with the interpreter. When we had an interpreter with our unit there were quite a few of us that we hung out with him and we'd drink tea. He was a young guy, couldn't have been too much older than us. He had been studying music in Baghdad before the war, and he and his father both took interpreting gigs. And he was with us on the Jordanian border and his father was on the Syrian border with the other half of our unit so they knew each other—they were pretty good guys. But a lot of the other guys were like, well, they couldn't make the distinction between people that were working with us and people that were working against us, and that was kind of a hard thing for them. I think they tended to view everyone with a lot more suspicion, you know.

BREWSTER: What did you do for recreation while you were there?

SCHUTH: [Laughs] On the bigger bases by that point they had, they called them MWR [Morale, Welfare, Recreation] tents which were, moral and recreation. They had some gyms that were there. I remember a bunch of the guys being excited when they started doing different music nights at the MWR tents and so if we were on one of the big bases they'd request permission to go down there for a few hours or something like that. They'd listen to hip hop or whatever was going on. On the smaller bases there was a lot less to do. The unit before us that we had relieved, which was a light armored reconnaissance unit—a Marine light armored reconnaissance unit—had a satellite dish and so we were able to get, funnily enough, Al Jazeera but then we could get a lot of European television stations and so a lot of guys wound up watching the Olympics that way while we were there 'cause it was relatively same time zone and if you weren't on post or something like that you could go and hang out. It was in the same area as our—where we were bunking and everything was set up kind of like a barracks. We had bunk beds and stuff like that. It was basically like a rec room there and it had air conditioning.

Some guys would do weightlifting with whatever was available, if it was jerry cans, or boxes of MREs [Meals, Ready to Eat] or whatever they could—sandbags, whatever they could get their hands on until some dumbbells started showing up eventually. I think the mobile PX came to us once the whole time we were in this place and at that point everybody buys out all the cigarettes that they have. And other than that for entertainment, I guess the most entertainment that we'd have was there was a truck stop near this FOB and so we'd drive over there—ostensibly on a patrol—and we'd pull into the truck stop and we'd go in and they had the cheapest stuff that you could possibly think of. You could get a bottle of orange soda that was made in Syria for like twenty-five cents or something like that. Guys would go over there and they'd buy soda or cigarettes, and then they had a diner that was attached to it. We'd buy food there. I don't know who made the decision that that was okay but we'd been eating T-rations [B-rations] for so long that anything was preferable. I wasn't out on that first patrol when guys came back with the food and I didn't get any of the food cause I was on a shift in the command center. And I remember the next day a lot of the guys had the runs. It took a while—I never got sick from the food but some of the guys—either the food wasn't handled properly or it didn't agree with them or something. And I remember a few guys after a while said, I'm not going to eat there anymore. But I never had any problems and it was pretty good stuff—the flatbread was excellent, they had chicken—dujaj, I think, in Arabic—or mutton—sheep. It was pretty good stuff.

BREWSTER: A definite break from your rations.

[00:24:55]

SCHUTH: A very welcome break from the rations. That was the worst part of being there—same food basically, day after day. We'd get like a cycle of five or six meals that were sent to us so you could pretty much predict that one day you were going to have the vegetable lasagna which was atrocious, or the same kind of eggs every day—just depending if it had little bits of sausage or little bits of ham in it. That wasn't too great.

BREWSTER: What kind of adjustments did you have to make living in a desert climate?

SCHUTH: Well, I'm from Minnesota so I remember—when I was looking at the emails when I sent my parents this morning, before I came here—at one point I wrote to my mom, It's about a hundred and twenty degrees here, it's the middle of the summer, and I'm already acclimatized to the point where it feels like it's eighty or eighty-five degrees. When I come home in the fall—come home to Minnesota—I'm worried that I'm going to turn into a Popsicle. It was really hot. A lot of times the asphalt would get so soft that not even if you drove over it with a Humvee but if you walked across it, you could see impressions where your boots had left, where you were walking. Handling the heat was something

where you just had to drink as much water as you absolutely could and stay in the shade when you could.

We put camouflage netting over all of our—even over elevated positions for like guard towers and stuff like that, just to try to get guys a little bit of shade because even that small amount when you're wearing a flak jacket and a Kevlar, even that little bit is just a huge help. We had a gravity fed shower at this FOB—it was just a huge tin tank on the roof that we'd get the local fire department to drive over and fill up occasionally and it had a downspout pipe and then at the very end it had a little—like you would have a garden house faucet handle on there and then someone had stuck a shower head on it and built a little plywood enclosure around it. So we'd go out there and take our showers, but in the temperature between the day when it was so hot and even if it was a thirty degree drop, or something, to where it got down and maybe in the nineties in the evening, would be enough that you didn't want to take a shower when it got closer to sundown because it wouldn't retain any heat. You'd wait until about ten-thirty or eleven in the morning to go take a shower, if it was your day to go take a shower. You wouldn't do it much beyond three or four in the afternoon.

**BREWSTER:** Interesting. So the sand didn't really affect any of your equipment then—it functioned well for you?

**SCHUTH:** The trucks did really well in the sand, for the most part. And you know, as far as weapons or anything like that, it's just you have to clean it every day. They would clean the howitzers every day when we still had our howitzers. They'd have a team of guys working on the [inaudible] or whatever to get 'em cleaned. Other than that communications equipment worked pretty well. Everything more or less worked as it was intended to even though there was sand—you just had to be really careful about preventative maintenance and for the most part that worked. People didn't handle it so well though—guys would tear up green skivvy shirts and tie bandannas around their mouths just to try to get some of the sand out. You get a lot of gunk in your nose and stuff like that from the sand. And so it's harder on the people, I think, than on the equipment, overall.

**BREWSTER:** Do you have any particular stories dealing with your MOS or anything that occurred?

**SCHUTH:** I didn't get to do much in the way of what my actual MOS is. That was one of the reasons where I was kind of surprised that I was going because generally guys with my MOS don't get attached to a firing battery—we stay with the headquarters battery because that's where all our equipment is. So I kind of became this go-to guy between doing IT for—we had brought over ten laptops or something like that so making sure all those worked. They were just regular Dell laptops and I guess that was a case where our equipment would break down on us because they would get so clogged with sand and dust that they would overheat and we had a couple of those that we had to send back to the States to

get basically warranty work done by Dell. Or they would send us a part over and then we'd have to replace it or something like that.

**[00:29:57]**

So I was doing IT work and then I was basically a radio operator like all the rest of the guys that were in the battery but I got to use more of the satellite radios and Iridium phones which are like satellite phones and stuff like that—HF radios. Not so much the regular patrol radios or something like that I got to work on some of the nicer stuff. Then towards the end of the deployment I wound up becoming the company clerk, or the battery clerk, and working for the first sergeant and coordinating everyone's leave time and all that kinda stuff. I stayed with the battery for about a year after that period of time, basically doing that as my primary job. I had my own computer when I was over there so that's one of the ways that made doing that kind of work easy. And other than that there wasn't much to do over there as a data network supervisor if you're in a unit that doesn't really have a data network to speak of.

CREW: Let's change--

**[BREAK IN RECORDING]**

**[PART II]**

BREWSTER: Alrighty. Okay, so we went through that. When you were there how did you feel about the support that was coming from the Stateside, for the mission?

SCHUTH: Well, we were—for myself, in particular, personally I got a ton of support from friends and family, parents of friends. All kinds of care packages, stuff like that, stuff I didn't even know was coming that would show up, so that was really nice—even just anonymous stuff or USO stuff that got sent to us. It was pretty good once we started getting mail over there. It took a very, very long time for us to get mail initially and I think it was because our CO was holding it up—was basically what was going on. Once we got mail and we started getting a lot of care packages and people would just send over random assortment of toiletries. Baby wipes were huge—everyone wants baby wipes when they're over there. And magazines, primarily geared to guys that are of service age, like ESPN had a magazine or Sports Illustrated and then stuff like Maxim and stuff—they couldn't send anything racier than that, but you would see a lot of that.

BREWSTER: Really, there was a restriction on what they could send?

SCHUTH: They don't want pornography, clearly.

BREWSTER: Oh, because of the cultural—

SCHUTH: Exactly. Yeah, there was a list of things that you weren't allowed to bring over there. Along with stuff like—obviously they don't want you bringing drugs in-country, or alcohol. Alcohol was forbidden because it's a Muslim culture and so you're not supposed to be consuming alcohol. Pornography, because it's offensive to just about everyone over there. They had a General [James N.] Mattis who was the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at the time, had a series of mottos and the first one was "First, do no harm." 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, "don't do any harm." That included, "Don't make any PR gaffes with the local population. That means leave your Playboy and Penthouse at home. Which was hard on some guys—some guys took that pretty hard. They'd get whatever magazines were sent over and you'd probably read 'em eight or nine times and then the next batch would come in and everyone—they'd just get passed around from guy to guy and you'd read it and hand it over to the next guy. That was pretty nice.

I remember getting a care package one time from, I don't know who sent it, if it was a USO one or what, but they had put in hair gel. And everyone thought that was hilarious because most of the guys shaved their heads over there just to try to keep clean. Then everyone else, most everyone else had really short haircuts. I pushed the limit most of the time that I was in the military and wore my hair longer. And so I thought it would be really hilarious if I did as much as I could to Mohawk my hair with the gel—as sort of a celebration of getting these care packages. I had it done and I walked around the barracks for a few minutes, some guys were laughing, and then I happened to step into the room where the guys were watching the Olympics on the satellite uplink and the platoon sergeant was in there. And he was not amused. He was a staff sergeant, he was a career guy—I think he was on his third enlistment—and so he thought that was just—I had better wash my hair before the lieutenant saw me. So I spent some time washing my hair and eating crow for that. It was a good morale thing 'cause everyone else got a laugh out of it. Just getting hair gel when you're in the desert, what are you going to use it for? It was pretty funny.

**[00:34:52]**

BREWSTER: I gotta ask then, just as aside, would even your tattoos there be considered offensive?

SCHUTH: I didn't have these when I deployed.

BREWSTER: Oh, you didn't, okay.

SCHUTH: No. I got these probably in the last ten months that I was in the military. The only visible tattoo that I would have had at this point was I think this one, and maybe not even that, I don't remember for sure when I would have gotten it in relation to when I deployed.

BREWSTER: Sure. How did you feel about the broader support—well, the anti-war sentiment at home? How did that factor? Did it even register?

SCHUTH: At that point it wasn't really—it didn't really register because it was so early. I would have to check the dates if this was before or after "Mission Accomplished." I would assume it was probably shortly after, something like that. But at that point you didn't hear a lot of people being too critical about the war. It was mostly, especially a lot of pride in the military for everything it had done up to that point. But there were some critical things that were starting to be said around the time that we left. I remember writing an email to my mother shortly before I came back, this was probably twenty days before I made it back to the states, and it was just one line. And I wrote, "Did Pat Buchanan really say that the Iraq war is the worst American foreign policy mistake since Vietnam?" That's all it said because I couldn't believe that someone like Pat Buchanan would have said it. If it had come from Ralph Nader or something like that I would have believed it but it started making me think more critically about the war. There were even some things like in Stars and Stripes where if you looked at it a certain way you could tell that some people were pretty upset already with what was going on. Pictures that were in Stars and Stripes or sort of something like the editorial slant of a few of the articles or, you know, every once in a while a little feature and editorial written by somebody that were a little bit more critical than I would have thought a paper like Stars and Stripes would have printed.

But for the most part the guys that were over there, I would say it was an overwhelming majority, thought that we're bang on with the mission, doing the right thing. Very few people asked questions or felt in any way like this was messed up. There was a lot more displeasure with the way that the CPA—Coalition Provisional Authority—was handling things, and a lot of people were upset that the State Department was the one that was sort of dictating what our mission was. Because in the military you feel like you should be getting your orders from the military when you could basically tell that the military was being told what to do by the State Department and a lot of guys felt that there were mistakes that were being made and that the military probably would have handled things differently. And maybe more effectively, but with less use of kid gloves or something like that. So there was a lot of tension with that.

BREWSTER: So Bremer was in charge—

SCHUTH: Paul Bremer. Paul Bremer's name was dirt basically around—you talked to anyone who had any kind of opinion, and no one liked Paul Bremer. No one had a favorable impression of him even though I'm sure very few people over there had met him or something like that.

BREWSTER: So there was scuttlebutt—

SCHUTH: Presumably, yeah. Guys saying, "We're being told to do this." Or I knew guys that were in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Headquarters and things get passed down. The military is a surprisingly small community when you get down to it. Particularly the longer that you've been in, the more people that you know, the more things that you hear, and the more things get passed around. When you're over there complaining about the situation is sort of a form of catharsis and so everyone complains, it's just being part of the military. It's actually one of the things that I miss the most because if I complain about something now, I feel like I'm just whining about it. Whereas, that's actually sort of part of the culture, you know—you complain about your lot because that's how you get through with it and that's how you do your job, and that's how you're able to get through doing your job is by complaining about it. Guys would complain about being told to do certain things and who was telling them to do it.

BREWSTER: It was along those lines, it was later, I guess '04 when Rumsfeld made that famous statement about going to the war with the military you have and not the one you might want.

**[00:39:42]**

SCHUTH: Yeah. And I don't remember hearing that when I was over there but as soon as I heard it when I got back—when we drove into Iraq there were units that were driving out. Army units that were driving out with hillbilly armor and I mean clearly hillbilly armor. We would pass them on the highway and we were thinking, What the hell is on the back of that five ton? Because it was scrap metal—it was rusty scrap metal with a guy that had a fifty cal [caliber] in the middle of it. A fifty cal like on a tripod or something. At that point they had just started giving out sort of like these add-on armored panels, and so you'd basically bolt it on the side of a truck, instead of the truck being armored essentially when it was already delivered. Guys would joke because there wasn't any bullet proof glass or anything. It was basically just a little bump in the armory that came up to like maybe the top of your head level so you could still get shot in the head if someone had an RPG—it would go right through the truck and hit somebody on the other side. There was a lot of joking and gallows humor about how stupid it was that they were even bothering or that this was their solution.

I remember right when we left I got my flak jacket—my SAPI [Small Arms Protective Insert] plate inserts for my flak jacket, I should be more clear—the only ones that they had were larges and I wore a small flak jacket. And they said, "Well, you're just going to have to cut the inside of the flak jacket out to make it fit." And I thought, "If you guys know that we're going, or if somebody knows that some unit is going, somebody should be ordering the right equipment." That was pretty much indicative of the way that the war was being run at that point. It was: Well, we'll give them some equipment to accomplish the mission. But whether that equipment is useful or not, is certainly up to

debate. Right at the end we got one of the first really up-armored Humvees where it had armored doors from the manufacturer—it had armor all over it. They were putting turbo chargers on 'em by that point. It had air conditioning and it had some pretty impressive electronic gizmos inside that I got to play around with.

Ones called like a Blue Force tracker—it's an Army piece of equipment that the Marines don't usually have, but the way that we had gotten it was that someone had pulled it out of the Green Zone—it was on an Air Force base inside the Green Zone, basically just being driven around by somebody and they were like, Why do you have an up-armored Humvee in the Green Zone? Guys need this out in Al Anbar or Fallujah or somewhere like that. We finally got this thing and guys would laugh, they'd called it the armadillo because we hadn't had it the whole time that we were there and the last month before we leave we get this thing and it's like, Thanks for nothing. We made it this far. People weren't very pleased with the equipment we had, but we didn't hear Rumsfeld say that when we were over there.

**BREWSTER:** I guess I'm surprised, in my own head I was just attributing a lot of those issues with shortages of equipment to guard units but you were suffering the same—

**SCHUTH:** Basically, yeah. When we went over there the trucks that we pulled off of the MPF [Maritime Prepositioning Force] ships were stuff that had been in storage for years and years. I know that we had some Humvees that were made in the eighties, and just reconditioned and then trotted out for the war. It wasn't the kind of equipment that we would have thought we were going to get if we were going into a war—particularly one that was supposedly the forefront, maybe the first leading spear, the leading edge of the War on Terror. You wouldn't think that you'd be getting such shoddy equipment, but that was the case.

**BREWSTER:** What about the media? How did you feel about the media or even now what do you think about—

**SCHUTH:** I don't think the war gets enough coverage in the media. I'm really surprised with how many different issues are allowed to take more precedence over the war when most everyone thinks that the war is probably the worst thing that has been done in the last eight years of administration or of this administration. And so it's frustrating and—well, it's more than frustrating. It really pisses me off that the war is handled basically as a secondary story to the economy or to whatever political scandal happens to come up, or just ridiculous things that pass through the news cycle. Some places handle it better than others—some networks handle it better than others. But on the whole I think everyone doesn't report enough about the war and I don't know that more opinions would change, but I think more people would have more information and maybe they wouldn't believe what they're just being told by people in charge or something. They'd be able to make a better assessment for themselves based on what the coverage is showing.

**[00:45:13]**

**BREWSTER:** Common refrain is that they only cover the negative side of the war in the press—you hear people say that.

**SCHUTH:** Well, maybe the negatives outweigh the positives. There are certainly good stories that—you don't hear about the schools that are built or the hospitals that are built but it's quite possible that for the majority of the people over there—and I'm not talking just about American service personnel, but for Iraqis—maybe the negatives are outweighing the positives. And so maybe the negatives should be reported more just because there are more of them. Bad news always sells but if there's more bad news.

**BREWSTER:** How was the feeling as you guys prepared to leave? Was everyone pretty confident that you had managed to pull your mission off and that you potentially made some difference or--?

**SCHUTH:** I don't think so. I don't think a lot of people felt—particularly guys were upset because we didn't get to do an artillery mission the whole time that we were over there. We were piecemealed out for different things and so that made quite a few guys upset because they wanted to go over there and do what they had been trained to do. And not do extraneous things for units that we wouldn't usually have worked with. They felt somewhat taken advantage of and I think that even for the missions that we were supposed to be doing over there, it was the kind of thing where you don't get that sense of closure or feeling that you've contributed to something. More that you've just stemmed a tide or filled a role for a certain amount of time. There wasn't a lot of quantifiable progress that we could say, We accomplished this. We were just over there for a certain period of time doing a certain mission and when it was done, the next guys came in and we trucked out. And so, I don't want to speak for everyone else in my unit but I certainly don't have a sense of accomplishment from what we did over there. Not one bit.

**BREWSTER:** I guess that kind of reflects your feelings about the conflict too, then?

**SCHUTH:** Yeah, well, my feelings about the conflict are pretty negative. But that isn't just from my personal experience. I think it was a mistake on a lot of different levels and my experience was just participation in a mistake. And if I could have done something to make a difference over there or feel like I had made a difference, maybe I would feel a little bit more positive about it. But even on the whole when I step back and I try to view it through a wider lens than just my two eyes when I was over there, I don't really have much positive to say about it.

**BREWSTER:** Were there any occurrences while you were there that come to mind? Anything that-- stories, or anything that you—

SCHUTH: Well, a funny story first. When we first got to Kuwait, we were on the Udairi range and we were supposed to be calibrating our howitzers, so we went out. And I was one of the Humvee drivers and they put one of the forward observers, a second lieutenant, and a team of radio operator and one of the fire direction control guys in the vehicle with me. And we drove out and we were supposed to stay in radio contact and basically relay in measurements to adjust their fire to make sure they were shooting where they were supposed to. We were told by range control before we went out that if we saw any Bedouins out there or any camels, or anything like that, we had to ceasefire until they had cleared the impact area. And we hadn't seen anything really. We'd seen some Bedouins driving a couple of camels in a direction that we weren't shooting. Other than that we hadn't seen anything.

[00:49:36]

And then probably a few hours into our calibrations, we saw this really early 1980s Ford Ranger driving across the desert at really high speed. And it was coming towards us and so we didn't know what to make of this. It stopped maybe a hundred feet from where we were parked and the two guys got out. We could tell that they were Bedouins or natives of the area, or something like that. They started coming up to us and I went down to talk to them with the lieutenant and I had brought with me like an Arabic to English dictionary. It was just like a phrase book that you would take like if you were going on a cruise to like Abu Dhabi or something like that—it didn't really have anything that was military oriented in it. But they were really upset about something. And we couldn't tell what they were upset with—we didn't have a translator with us or anything. We hadn't been given any courses in the language because it was a two week spin up to a deployment. They were just really upset and so the lieutenant went back to the truck to contact range control and tell them what was going on to see if they could get somebody to come out.

I was left down there standing with them and I pulled out a pack of cigarettes—at the time I smoked Camels. And they got even more upset. I offered them one and they took one but they grabbed the pack and they pointed at the camel on the pack. They were pointing at its leg. And so I thought, What are they trying to tell me? I pulled out the dictionary and one of the guys started flipping through and he was—you could tell he was sounding out the words, so probably couldn't read all that well. And I looked at the translation and it said, "Is hurt." Like, something is hurt. They were pointing at the camel and they were pointing at the leg and I thought, Oh no. We shot one of the camels. It turned out that there had been-- one of their camels in the impact area had gotten fragged by one of our artillery shells. Once we had this all figured out the lieutenant called range control and they said, "Well, you can't keep shooting until you get that camel out of there."

So we had to follow those guys to where the camel was and get that camel and put it in the back of their truck and so there were six of us there—five of us lifted it and one of the guys that I was with kept his weapon on him. And I couldn't tell you which end of that camel smelled worse, but one guy grabbed the tail and that was really bad. The tail was slick with camel droppings and so when we went to pick it up, his hands slipped right up the tail. That was probably the funniest thing that happened over there. And then later on, on the fourth of July after we'd been in Iraq for quite some time we actually went out and wound up buying some camel ribs from somebody locally and we grilled those as part of our Fourth of July observances. Those were easily the two funniest things that happened to me when I was over there. It was a pretty amusing experience.

BREWSTER: Is there anything else you want to add? Or anything else that you can--

SCHUTH: We did lose one of our Marines when we were over there. We lost him in al-Asad in an accident which I'm still not satisfied has been investigated fully. We were living in—they were basically like quad cons, like a Conex box that you would see on a railcar or something like that. They had been cut up and equipped with like a really small air conditioner and one window and then a door on one side. We'd just been assigned these as our housing when we were on this base. We had just convoyed in and our battery gunny [gunnery sergeant] was getting everyone settled in, and he was one Conex box away from me and my buddy and I heard a popping sound and when we ran over to the next hooch over, he'd been shot in the head. And I don't know what happened, but I'm not particularly satisfied with the way the investigation was handled. If I ever knew one of his family members was going to come here, I'd just want to say that I'm not going to ever forget—his name was James Casper and he was from Texas. I'm not going to ever forget him and that was the experience that made me realize that I had to keep my eyes open when I was over there all the time. Not just because I was worried about my safety or anything like that, but because it sort of impressed upon me that this was dangerous and this wasn't something we just feel gung-ho about and consider that we're doing the right thing without thinking about it. You really have to think about what you're doing over there all the time. I feel really bad that something had to happen to him for me to realize it, but that's the way it worked out. Other than that, no, I don't have anything.

BREWSTER: Okay. Well, thanks Will.

SCHUTH: Thank you.

BREWSTER: I appreciate it.

**[00:55:00]**

**[End of Interview]**