

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Gamaliel Ortiz**

Conducted by

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**I am interviewing Gamaliel Ortiz today, March 15, 2006, which is a Wednesday. It is about 2:30 in the afternoon at the Indian Prairie Library. Gamaliel was born October 20, 1981, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. His family relocated to the States proper in 1989, initially in Boston. Currently he is a resident of Willowbrook, Illinois. Gamaliel – Gammy – enlisted in the regular Army in March, 2002, and is currently on active duty with the United States Army, holding the rank of Sergeant. And with that, we will begin our interview today.**

**Would you like to just describe, briefly, your education, what you were doing at the time you enlisted in the Army, and some of your motivation for enlisting?**

Okay. I graduated from Arlington Heights, Illinois, high school – called John Hersey High School – in 1998. I went to college for one year – I did just community college for one year, and decided I wasn't quite ready for college and took a year off. I went back to college at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, and was there for one year also. I met my wife. We ended up getting married after that year. I moved to Michigan with her to be near her family. I was working for a bank at that time. And then, after 9/11, I got laid off from that job from the bank. A need to provide for the family was one of my motivations to join the military. And I had always had been involved in – there's a program at a local church that I attended, an Assemblies of God church – and the program was called Royal Rangers. It was very military like. It was kind of like Boy Scouts within a church. And that had kind of turned me on to it – kind of a military structure. So, with those two things, just a need to provide for the family, and being comfortable with the military structure, I decided to go ahead and enlist. Initially I intended to stay in only two years – just enough to get back on our feet – and see where I'd go from there. But they got me hooked on to something.

**Was your being laid off in any way kind of related to the September 11 attacks?**

I think it was. I think the bank took – I'm not exactly sure; it was very vague when I got laid off. It may have been that it was related to the actual attacks. I know it was a week after the attacks had happened that I got laid off. So, it was just kind of very circumstantial, if anything.

**How did the attacks affect your mood? I mean, obviously, it was a major event.**

I have to admit that part of my mentality going into the military, I was fearful about being deployed right away, which I pretty much was after joining. But it was kind of, I guess, fear would pretty much sum up my emotions at the time. Uncertainty more than anything, fear of the unknown, not knowing what exactly was going to happen, if the war was going to come onto our soil, or if, indeed, I was going to be deployed and fight overseas. There was just more of a fear of uncertainty of what was going to happen from that point.

**And the events took place before your enlistment.**

Yes. Yes, they did.

**What was your initial period in the Army like, right after your enlistment, in terms of training, that sort of thing?**

What was it like. Hm. Initially, when I was in basic training, I didn't find it to be as difficult as I had imagined. I was really at peak level of physical fitness, so the physical demands that were brought on by basic training and advanced training, really just made me more confident in myself. I was really more than ready than I expected for all the training. And after all the training, I continued to be very adamant about my own physical fitness, and took pride in that. I also took the liberty to use my benefits of active duty for education, and I actually enrolled in some on-line classes to try to continue on towards a college degree, which actually I'm still kind of doing that. But it was not as much a shock as I thought it would be, joining the military. I was very open to changing my lifestyle to fit the military way of life. And I think it was very good for me and my family.

**Where did you take basic training?**

Basic training was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as well as my advanced individual training that followed basic.

**And how long was basic training? How many individuals in your barracks? What was an average day like, that sort of thing?**

There were 40 people in our barracks to start with. I think we ended with 35 – there were about five people who dropped out or were discharged for various reasons. And it was for nine weeks. Basic training took place for nine weeks. I was very fortunate. Some people got held over because it was too full. They had a class of so many people that they sent off to do the training. And some people were held over at the reception barracks because they just didn't have the room to train with our company. So they ended up waiting for another week or two. So I got there, and the next day I started basic training, which was fortunate.

**And, when you were in basic training, did you know what your designation was going to be – you mentioned going into field artillery – and with basic training, did the other fellows there have different designations that they were going into after they finished basic? And, also, what was kind of the mood? What was the discussion like – obviously it's wartime, you're in the Army – kind of walk us through that.**

Well, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, is the center of field artillery for the Army, so a lot of the guys who were there were going into field artillery units, such as myself. There were some that were ad-min, there were some that were – we didn't have infantry guys, those were all at Fort Benning. There was a wide area for also Reserve, National Guard, all combined within our group. And a lot of the conversations did revolve around the war in

Iraq, although we hadn't actually gone into official operations at that moment in Iraq, I don't think. Actually, I think they had during that month that we were there – that we started off there. Many people expected that as soon as they got back to their National Guard or Reserve units they would be deployed. Some people received notification during basic training they were going to be going. I believe their unit was actually leaving before they finished basic training. So, as soon as they finished, they were just going to go straight over there. So there was a lot of talk about that – a lot of guys who were concerned, emotional moments; again, the fear of uncertainty as to what was going to happen over there. I still keep in touch with a couple of the guys who were over there. Two of the guys did go over and came back, and we share stories of what happened over there.

**Did the drill instructors kind of use the fact that you were probably going to be seeing combat fairly quickly – was that kind of a motivational instrument that was used?**

Absolutely. Absolutely. Drill sergeants, I can't even count the number of times they told us: "It may be you next to me out there in Iraq a year from now, so I'm going to train you to the best of my ability, because I know that you're going to be at my back some day." And that was very much a motivating factor for the drill sergeants to ensure that we knew the things that they were instructing us on.

**So you felt very much connected with what was going on overseas.**

Yes. From the onset of basic training we were aware of the surrounding situations. I know every week or so they would update us on things that were going on, just to say: "Look, this is what's going on in the Army, and you need to be aware of this." So they were very open in communicating with us in such a way that we were kept abreast of what was going on.

**What sort of things were they giving you kind of a "heads up" about, if you want to call it that, in terms of what did they tell you to be aware of what was going on in Iraq?**

In terms of specifics, there was still a lot of uncertainty of exactly how the war was going to be conducted and what exactly was going to go on in Iraq. They did their best to just try to communicate the importance – it was more of a way to communicate that this is the urgency of the situation, that you need to know the stuff because in a few months you may be in a combat zone. And they did imply some of the things that weren't normally taught in basic training, but they kind of tried to implement it into our training so that we would be better prepared when we reached our units. Some of those specific things were things such as being able to clear a room, being able to clear a building – stuff that wasn't – I believe it's in the doctrine now for basic training, but it wasn't at that time. But they started to implement it at that time.

**What do you mean by clearing a room or clearing a building?**

You've got a team of four guys, five guys. You bust down the door and you're going in with the intent to neutralize any threats that are inside the house, whether it be for the purpose of searching it, or arresting individuals inside that house.

**So sort of door-to-door type of activities.**

Right.

**Now, after basic you went on to specialty training with the artillery. Now where was that, and what was ...**

That was also at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was actually not even a mile from the barracks for our basic training. And that was only four weeks long, which is relatively short. Actually, I believe it's the shortest specialty training that there is in the Army. I think the main reason for that is because, one, a lot of the things are automated with multiple launch rocket systems; and, two, it more requires on-the-job training more than classroom instruction type of learning. So a lot of the instruction we got was actually at the moment we got to our units. Those four weeks were pretty much just getting us the basics and the rundown of what the job entailed and the kind of things we would be doing. And then, later on at the unit we got further instruction.

**Now, for the civilians in the audience here, what precisely kind of weapon is this – I mean in the most basic kind of terms.**

Okay. Multiple launch rocket system is a tracked vehicle that carries aboard two pods of six rockets each. And those rockets have a range of anywhere up to 65km, at which ...

**So 30 miles.**

Yes. Which are accurate up to, my goodness, 7mils, which is less than a degree. So they are very, very accurate. And they can be used for different purposes, but highly destructive. They were very key in Desert Storm, when we were in Iraq the first time, they were very key in suppressing the enemy at that time. It was dubbed "steel rain" by the Iraqi Army at that point.

**So this would be like an anti-tank weapon or an anti-anything weapon?**

Pretty much anti-anything.

**All right. When you got to Kuwait. You shipped out of the United States – now, did you fly, take a boat; how did you get from one place to the other? What was transport like?**

First, I went down from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which is where my first duty station was as well. I flew down to Fort Bliss, Texas, where I went through a process called "SRC,"

which is just Soldier Readiness Checklist, or soldier readiness training. And they basically process you making sure you have all the right shots, make sure you have all the right paperwork in order – power of attorney, wills, all that good stuff – make sure you are ready for over there. And then we flew from Fort Bliss to Kuwait. I'm trying to remember – I believe we stopped at several places. I know we stopped in Germany on the way over. And on the way back we stopped at a couple more different places. But we flew from the United States to Germany to Kuwait, basically. And in Kuwait we had a period of climatization for about a week before – at least myself, I had a period of climatization before I went to my unit.

**How large was the plane? How many individuals? How long was the flight?**

How many individuals were on the plane? The plane was big. I remember it had two levels. But there was more than enough room – every soldier had two seats. And we had all our gear with us, so it was kind of nice to have all that room. We took our flak vests off, our Kevlar, and put it next to us. They made us take the bolts out of our weapons (chuckles) just as a precaution. We flew for about twelve hours, I believe it was, from Fort Bliss to Germany – Frankfurt, Germany. And then it took six hours from Frankfurt, Germany to Kuwait.

**Did you get off the plane in Germany?**

We did get off the plane in Germany. They were pretty much refueling. We had about two hours on the ground in Germany. And we stayed within the terminal.

**So it was basically just kind of to stretch your legs, that sort of thing.**

Right.

**Okay. Now, what were your impressions of Kuwait when you got there? How did it strike you?**

Well, like I was telling you earlier, I got off the plane and the sun was high in the sky. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. When I first stepped off the plane it was only about 95°, and I thought, "I can handle this!" Then I asked somebody what time it was, and they said it was 5:00. And I said, "Oh, it's almost dinnertime." They said, "No, it's almost breakfast time – it's 5:00 A.M. And that kind of shocked my system. About four hours later it was already 130°! So my very first impression was that it was very hot! It took some getting used to. After about 10:00 in the morning you couldn't even walk outside the shade without getting sweat on your forehead from just standing there. Sand everywhere – pretty much sand as far as the eye could see in each direction. And we were staying in tents – just large tents they were using as barracks. And we were sleeping on cots inside the tents. You couldn't prevent sand from getting everywhere, just because the sand would get inside the tents – there was no real way to seal them. So you had sand inside your gear. Even if you hadn't even opened your bag, somehow

you'd open your bag and there was sand inside it. That took some getting used to. After a little while it wasn't so bad, finding all the sand – you just kind of got used to it.

**Did you mix with the Kuwaiti population at all?**

Not at that moment. At that moment I didn't have any contact with any Kuwaiti nationals. I would later on, but when I first arrived – between that moment and the moment I flew out to Iraq, I didn't have contact with nationals.

**About how long were you in Kuwait total?**

From arrival to the moment I went to Iraq, only about a week.

**And what did life in Kuwait consist of?**

There wasn't a whole lot to it, actually. Like I said, it was just a period of climatization, so they didn't make us do anything except for accountability formations at the end of the day before we went to bed. So we would pretty much get up, eat breakfast, and, as the guys say, "smoke and joke," for a couple of hours. Then go eat lunch and come back. There was an MWR tent – morale, welfare and recreation tent – where they had setups so you could watch movies, eat some popcorn, play ping-pong – just to have some recreational activities at no charge to us. So a lot of the guys spent their time in there, playing cards or whatever.

**So it was just to ease you into the atmosphere, almost.**

Right, right. It was pretty easy going for that first week. It was just getting used to the heat pretty much and how to get used to it.

**And after about a week of that you went from Kuwait into Iraq.**

Yes.

**Did you fly, drive – what?**

Flew in a C130. That was the first time I've ever flown in any military aircraft, really, and it was quite an experience – very loud. It was not pressurized in the back, so it was pretty short. When we landed in Iraq, the crew chief warned us we were going to come down pretty fast so beware of that. So, sure enough, we went from I don't know what altitude we flew in at, but we came down reasonably fast from that altitude to what seemed like just a screeching halt on the runway. So it was kind of a shock.

**Was it explained why they did it that way?**

Sure. They said they wanted to avoid any rocket-propelled grenades, and just that they wanted to avoid contact with the enemy as much as possible. The faster we came down, the less time we would be in harm's way.

**And what part of Iraq did you fly into?**

I flew into LSA Anaconda, which is roughly I would say 40km northwest of Baghdad.

**Okay. That would be kind of in the northern region of the country. Was that in the Shia or the Sunni region?**

It was very much in the Sunni region. There is what they call the "Sunni Triangle" between Baghdad, LSA Anaconda and Taji. And Taji is actually where we ended up after landing at LSA Anaconda. And that whole area right there is very Sunni predominant. And there were a lot of terrorist attacks going on then, and even now, still, in that area.

**And once you landed, what happened between the time you landed and the time you joined your unit?**

Not much time elapsed at all, actually. I landed in LSA Anaconda, and I was met with a representative from my brigade. Our brigade headquarters – which was the 17<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade – was stationed at LSA Anaconda. And they had somebody at the airport waiting for myself, and there was a Sergeant First Class also coming from my unit – he had gone back to Fort Sill for advanced non-commissioned officer's school.

**Now, how large is a brigade?**

Our brigade was three battalions, and our battalions were roughly 400 soldiers in one battalion and there were three of them, so about 1200. And then you include the headquarters brigade, you're talking about 1300 to 1400 soldiers.

**And what were your first impressions of Iraq?**

Well, the very first observation I made was that it wasn't as hot as Kuwait. Kuwait was about 10° hotter. And, also, in Iraq – at least where we were at – there wasn't so much sand as there was dust, which I found out later was more annoying than sand. But it was much finer – a much finer powder. Instead of a grain of sand it was dust. I mean, you stepped on it and you sent up clouds. It turned out to be quite annoying after a while.

**Anything else?**

And also, at Anaconda there were tents set up everywhere except for brigade headquarters. Our brigade headquarters was actually a building. But other than that the majority of units were in tents, their headquarters. Also, Anaconda had a lot of facilities. It had a computer internet access tent which we could go in – you had to pay for the

internet access there, pay for cell phone usage there in that same tent. They let you use a satellite phone, called an iridium phone. You could also use an AT&T calling card to make calls out. There were some other amenities they had there. They had several gymnasiums. They had weights people could use. That was kind of exciting until I found out I wasn't staying there. (both chuckle)

**That was kind of the base for that region I would expect. And did you contact your family at all? How was their mood and that sort of thing?**

I contacted my family about an hour after I arrived in Kuwait. I called them, actually, it was in the middle of the night – it was probably 11:00 at night – on the computer. And I called and talked to my wife. My wife was very emotional, just worried about what was going to happen and told me to take care of myself. And I tried my best to reassure her that everything was going to be okay and I would come home in one piece, and that she should stay strong and take care of our son. Our son at that time was – actually at the time I deployed I just had a daughter and she was two months old, and my son was about a year and a half, just a year and a half old. So I told her to take care of the kids and hang on until I came back.

**At that point you're finally joining your unit.**

Yes. At that point I had to make contact with my brigade headquarters. But then they told me I was going to be leaving in another couple of hours back to Taji, Iraq, which was closer to Baghdad than where we were, to join the rest of my battalion there.

**Okay. Had this battalion, or your brigade, seen action? When were they brought in – they were deployed before you – so when were they brought into Iraq?**

Let's see. I arrived in August, 2003. They were there in April, 2003. My understanding is that when they arrived, because the major war operations had been declared over, the mission that we were going to do, which involved our rockets and our canons and that stuff, was not needed anymore. So what actually ended up happening, they ended up sitting around in Kuwait for about a month without any mission or anything – they just sat in Kuwait. It's the same thing I was doing for that week in Kuwait, they sat around doing for a month, which I was told was very, very tiresome. And then they ended up leaving all the field artillery – so all the canons, all the tracked vehicles, the fire direction control vehicles, all that stuff – they left in Kuwait in Camp Virginia, and made the trek in the Humvees, 5 ton, 2 ½ ton vehicles; convoy all the way up to LSA Anaconda. And when they arrived there they were told they could join and support 4<sup>th</sup> ID – Fourth Infantry Division – that was in that region. So that's mainly what we were tasked out to do, to support the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

**Now, what did that consist of?**

In LSA Anaconda it pretty much consisted of guard duty. People were pretty much taking shifts on the guard towers around the encampment. In Taji, which is where I went,

of course we had to stay full security for our encampment, but on top of that we had additional taskings. One of which was called – we called it the “razorback detail.” I have no idea why they called it that. But Taji, Iraq, used to be a munitions factory when it was under the control of Saddam. And there were many, many bunkers full of all kinds of munitions – rocket-propelled grenades, AK-47’s, ammunition, all types of stuff, including some other types of explosive devices that we weren’t familiar with. And one of our tasks was to empty out all these bunkers and destroy all of that stuff. So first we had to set up a guard around that perimeter as well. Taji was kind of split in half – we had Taji East and Taji West, which was split by Highway 1; I don’t know if that was the name we gave it or what it was actually called. But it was a four-lane highway that split the east and west side. We lived on the east side, and all the bunkers were on the west side. So we had to post guards in two locations in Taji. And, of course, on the side of the bunkers we had to pull in guards to make sure no insurgents had access to that stuff to use against us. And then we began the process of emptying out all the bunkers. And we would have ordnance guys attached to us, who would take all the munitions and basically detonate a charge to destroy all that. So we would take it to a remote site and basically destroy it.

**Okay. How long did this project take, and what did you do following that?**

It started before I got there and kept on going after I left, so I think it took a total of probably about seven to eight months.

**So there were a lot of stock-piled weapons.**

Oh, it was an enormous site with a lot of bunkers. Some of the other things that we were doing on the side as well as doing that, we would get intelligence on local insurgents – local terrorist groups – that were still launching attacks against us. I can’t remember a day when there wasn’t an – we called them IED’s, they were improvised explosive devices. And these were exactly as the name implies. It was just an improvised explosive that was placed mainly on the roads. And as we would drive by they would detonate it and cause damage to personnel vehicles and all that stuff. It could be in the form of Coke cans – they would stuff something in a Coke can – or it would be covered up by a plastic bag. They would use some of our own ammunition that they had found that was undetonated and use that. So, all kinds of forms of explosives, which was definitely not conventional. I mean, at the beginning we didn’t know to look for that stuff, and we kind of had to develop a standard operating procedure as we went along with those kind of attacks.

**Were there any actual sniping incidents – that sort of thing – or was it pretty much just ...**

It was mainly guerilla warfare. That type of stuff. It wasn’t like an organized – I don’t think there were ever an organized militia type of attack or anything like that.

**Okay. There wasn’t even necessarily gunfire – they would leave ...**

We encountered gunfire here and there. But it was never prolonged, and it was never very significant, I would say. It was always pretty sporadic. I mean, it might of consisted of people doing “drive-by’s” with AK-47’s and stuff like that. And there were some instances where we would do patrolling. We would patrol around in the neighborhoods around our encampment where we would get shot at and stuff, but it was hard to pinpoint where it was coming from. The times we did know where it was coming from, and we did get intelligence on where these people were at – where their various hideouts were at and stuff like that – we would actually conduct door-to-door operations, as I was explaining earlier – we had to go in and clear buildings. We would find stockpiles of weapons and things like that in people’s homes. So that was some additional duties – additional missions that we more or less took upon ourselves once we were there, as our Commander dictated and thought were necessary based on the intelligence that we got.

**Did you sustain some casualties during this period?**

They did. Before I got there, there was an incident – probably the one that would stick out with anybody who was there. It affected me, also, even though I wasn’t actually there when it happened, but once I had gotten there. Where we were stock piling some weapons to have destructed, and we went a little bit out of our region to destroy the stockpile. We did send out a team of our people to inform the locals. They had a translator with them, and they informed the locals that we were going to be blasting stuff in this area and that if they heard it not to be alarmed, that it was just us destroying stuff. And one of those teams never came back. And there was a manhunt that went on – I believe it was three days – where people just didn’t sleep. It was just going out into local villages and trying to find – there were two individuals who didn’t make it back. And they were found three days later, and both of them had been executed. And there was evidence of torture before their execution. At that point in time I didn’t know what the implications of that were. But it was something that really affected the morale of the men. Those were the first two casualties that we took out there. There were some other deaths that involved accidents, which is a bit unfortunate. I understand that accidents accounted for a lot of deaths out there in Iraq, and our unit was no exception to that.

**So it’s a dangerous mission when you’re dealing with all that unexploded ordnance.**

Even if nobody is shooting at you!

**And were you, yourself, injured in any way during your deployment there?**

I was injured. It wasn’t combat related. But I sustained an injury to my shoulder. It was kind of a combination of different things. One of the things was climbing in and out of a five-ton vehicle. We had to climb in and out of a five-ton vehicle every day for different details – that was our main transportation back and forth between the east side and the west side of Taji, as well as out to whenever we did traffic control checkpoints. And one of the days I was getting off the five-ton vehicle it pulled away before I had completely

come off, and it pulled my arm out of its socket. It was not fun. I had to be sent home and had to have total shoulder reconstructive surgery for my injuries. So I got sent back after being there only four months, so I came back in November. I don't know if that's in there.

**And have you been in Iraq since?**

Not since then. I've been put into a non-deployable status.

**When about was it that you were injured?**

When was it? About late October.

**And what were your impressions of Iraq? You were there for about four months, you were in a kind of a hostile Sunni zone.**

I think one of my perceptions before I went was that it was an all out war, all out conflict – it was going to be hard. I just expected a lot more combat, first of all. And then, after I was there, I found out the incidents where we sustained casualties were few and far between, for which I was very thankful. But also, the presumptions I had of the Iraqi people completely changed. I was under the impression before I left that all Iraqi people were completely anti-military, and that upon seeing any Iraqi natives that we would be attacked. And actually, when I got there, I had a lot more interactions with the Iraqi people, and found out that most of them really did want us there – especially in the area that we were in – because of the influence that we had on the Sunni insurgents. They had significantly gone down – the attacks. And I think, also, that they were more focused on us than they were on the other people in that area. You know, we were dealing with a significant problem that those locals had. They were very, very supportive of us. I know we had a couple of farmers around our area who would come over and talk to our commanders all the time and provide us with information. A lot of our information came from the locals as to where terrorists were hiding out and that sort of thing. So they were actually very, very helpful and essential in our mission there.

**Was your sense at the time that the terrorists were actually Iraqi, or did they seem to be coming in from elsewhere?**

To tell you the truth, I think the majority of the ones that we were in contact with, the actual terrorists, were Iraqi's. But that's not to say that they weren't coming in from other places. I'm sure they were. And just like anything else, it wasn't that we were treating them – we weren't treating Iraqi's in a certain way. It was that we had the Iraqi people we were there to protect, and we had the terrorists. It didn't matter what their nationality, they were terrorists, and that was what the war was about.

**So would you say, generally, of the guys in your unit that they were people tending to sort of get along with the general population and live by and large ...**

For the most part, yes. I know a lot of us came over with those presumptions, preconceived notions of what the Iraqi people were going to be like, and they were proved wrong. They were wrong. You almost felt kind of silly, after a while, being there and thinking, “How did I think that these people that we were now interacting with would have been our enemies?” But the one thing that remained true, one notion that we had when we went over there, was the fact that it was hard to identify your enemy from your friend. One example of that was, one of our missions as we progressed in our time there was to train local Iraqi’s to take over our job there of guarding those munitions so that we could more efficiently and more quickly destroy them. And as we were training those Iraqi’s, it was my understanding that they had completely gone under background checks and all of that whole deal. But, still, two of the Iraqi’s posing as potential guards – people that we were training in our installation – were actually insurgents from the Bathis party. They were identified by tattoos they had on their arms as actual insurgents and terrorists. And after that was found out they were questioned, and indeed they were tied back to the Bathis party. Even while we were there training other Iraqi’s, they were trying to infiltrate into those efforts.

**You said they had, you used the term “Bathis Party,” which is a term I don’t think too many Americans are familiar with. What was your impression of the Bathis Party.**

The Bathis Party was pretty much Saddam’s regime. It is the party that supported Saddam and Saddam’s reign over there, and continues to produce many of the insurgencies and many of the terrorist activities that happened even after Saddam was found.

**What was the tattoo?**

If I remember correctly it was a heart with a dart, a heart and a dart over it. It’s kind of hard to explain. That’s the best way that I can explain. I don’t know if that’s what it actually was, but ...

**It’s kind of a strange tattoo for the Bathis Party.**

I wasn’t one of the ones that actually identified the tattoo, but when somebody pointed it out to me, that’s what it looked like to me. But that’s how they were identified.

**What was your impression of being back home when you got here – relief – how did you view what was on TV, that sort of thing?**

Well, of course there was relief being back at home with my family. I would be less than honest if I said I didn’t feel any relief. But, at the same time, I did feel a little bit of guilt that I couldn’t stay out there with my unit, especially with combat arms units, which is the combat arms job. The camaraderie and the unity that you develop with your fellow soldiers is very high. And that’s essential. It really is. It’s part of what you have to be and part of what you have to develop to get yourself through a situation like that. So, to me, being pulled away from them – again, still have the relief of coming home, but at the

same time I felt guilty that I wasn't there with my fellow soldiers. And as for the things that I saw on TV and on the news, I was very confused. Because what I heard on the news and what I experienced were pretty much completely different things in that all the things they focused on in the news was all the negative things going on over there, when indeed I experienced a lot of positive from the work that we had done. And I felt kind of betrayed in the sense that the positive things weren't being portrayed as much as the negative. So that was kind of disheartening.

**You're still on active duty. Anything you'd care to follow up with or put into the record before we conclude?**

In terms of still being on active duty, I plan to do twenty years and retire. I'm currently going to school to finish my Bachelor's degree, after which I will be commissioned as a Lieutenant and continue on in the officer realm. So, very much despite the experience over in Iraq, I'm still trudging along and believe in the mission that the U. S. Military has.

**Interview ends.**