

**Luis E. Barsallo
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
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Interviewer**

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LB: Luis Barsallo. 10-27-71. I was born in Manhattan, New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

LB: High School.

MR: You obviously volunteered for the Army. Why did you decide to go in the Army? Why did you decide to volunteer?

LB: I think I was intrigued like a lot of kids watching movies – old John Wayne movies and things like that. It sparked an interest, and I think what really caught my attention at the end was when they were prepping to deploy for Panama at the [unclear] which they actually had interviewed on tv I believe on the channels of broadcasting. And I remember it just kind of caught my attention and I said "Hey, that looks like a good place to go." Got out of high school. Enlisted. Went to 25th R.D. for a while. About two years and went to the 82nd.

WC: Did you go to jump school right after basic training? Right after EMT?

LB: No. When I enlisted, they put me as an 11-Bravo. Didn't really know much of anything else of the service. I was really quite ignorant of anything the service had to offer other than the Army. So I didn't know about the special units they had, the Ranger battalions, the 82nd Airborne, that kind of stuff. I just wanted to be in the service. So I did my first tour in 25th I.D.[Infantry Division] in Hawaii for about three and a half years. By that time I started to understand different units, what they were about. Better understanding of the whole picture. Re-enlisted to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Had jump school *en route*. I was PCS [Permanent Change of Station]. From there I went to 82nd from about [19]94-[19]98. Then I got out and joined the Guard.

WC: How many jumps did you make?

LB: On record, probably sixty. Sixty jumps. There was a low period where – I think funding was becoming an issue – and the Army works funny that way because when I first came into the service it seemed like we were doing a lot more training, a lot more time out in the field. Six, seven months out in the field. I don't want to blame it on a President or on any political party but I think

throughout my years, there was a lull where the cutback to the service, the funding for the service, so our training was less and less every year. Same thing happened once I got to North Carolina. We jumped quite frequently and then as time went on we started jumping less and less. Enough to make our jump status and our pay but not as frequent as when I first initially went in. Got out '98. Immediately joined the Guard. I knew I wanted to stay connected to the service.

MR: So in '98 you went right into the Guard?

LB: Yes, I had been almost five years at 82nd and the only way I think you could have gotten out was going in Korea. That was one choice you had, but you would return back to North Carolina to Bragg.

WC: What rank were you at that point?

LB: I was an E5 [Rank of Sergeant]. They weren't allowing any soldiers to go beyond Korea and back to the 82nd so if you wanted to go to another post, they weren't doing it. So at that time I made the choice – I needed a change of pace. Joined the Guard as an E5, left the 82nd, went to Delta Company, 1st of the 105th, which was in Troy. That's where I met Sgt. 1st Class Ross.

MR: How did you end up up here?

LB: My wife. My wife is from Saratoga County. So we chose to be between my family in Florida or her family in Saratoga.

WC: Was she in the military too?

LB: No. No she wasn't. So, we decided to come up here. [pause] Delta Company 105th was an 11-Hotel unit. It was the only one that New York had for my MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] so that's the one I chose. I didn't feel like changing my MOS so I was there from '98 to September 11, 2001 when everything started to change. Obviously we went down to the city in support of the airport missions and anything else they had requested from us to do. Power plants, to include the tour...

MR: So basically you were at JFK and then you were at Albany Airport also...

LB: Albany Airport, Indian Point, [unclear], Fishkill I believe. All the way up until the time that they requested for volunteers for the deployment to Iraq in [unclear] of '02. There was a little, I won't say confusion but it was pretty difficult the way they did the selection process for soldiers that wanted to go. They selected – they requested one platoon from our Company, volunteers first. They parred their full platoon then they would take the excess and tell them "They're not going." And then the larger unit that was going afterwards, they selected individuals that did not get selected the first time round to go with other units. So Sgt. Ross, myself, and one other NCO got placed in Charlie Company [unclear]. So we went from Delta Company to not deploying to Charlie Company, second on the wait, in the line – which is, typically it's infantry 2 just different

invoices [unclear] it's an anti-tank and then the other is an 11-Bravo on the front. So we had to change our tactics a little and get Savi on the 11-Bravo side. It had been quite a while since any of us had done any of the grunt work on the ground so it was a little bit of a shock. A good wake up call. A good learning experience. Deployed...

MB: Do you think in retrospect after doing your training that you were prepared?

LB: It's funny because when we returned from B-Nod we did an interview with Fox News – this was just before the deployments happened – and they were asking us the same type of questions. They were looking at the Guard units because they were deploying and asking us "Do you think you're ready? Do you think you're trained?" And I put it out there, I believe that, yes, it's not so much the training but the initiative and the leadership that you had on how much they wanted to train to standards. But if you can't implement the training, obviously you're not going to learn for your soldiers.

I think the leadership was put together well. Good group of individuals. Obviously like every unit for every Company they have their bumps and bruises that they have to go through in order to get to that high. Was it an extensive six months prior to deployment? Yes. Did I agree with it at the time? I think I did. I think six months did us well. Maybe not all the training but at least at a minimum being with the same group of guys for six months to build a team whether they believed it or not. I believed it helped because everyone was coming from different parts of the state. So you're talking about different types of personalities, backgrounds. No different than active duty. But at least in active duty, you stay with the platoon or a unit for a while. Then you PCS you go into [unclear]. You're talking almost a full two and a half of new individuals coming in – two unit to deploy with others that they've never worked with. Different leadership styles, talking from E7 all the way down so, it was quite a change.

But I think it was worth it. Did I ever have a squad for a long enough period? Probably not. I think I changed in that six month period I had [counts for himself] probably four different squads. Four different individuals. To be consistent with training, trying to get to know soldiers was a little difficult if you're changing squads all the time. Which seemed to be an issue, we couldn't get the right combination for some reason of people where they wanted them, and it continued throughout the deployment, and then even during the deployment we changed the Company organization. We had quite a few changes 'til we got it right.

October of 2004 is when we actually started the move. I believe we got to country in March or April of '05. Couldn't have been April. March. March of '05.

The typical active duty feelings for the Guard you can see when you got there. I was on active duty and I knew what I thought of the Guard at the time and you can see it. You pretty much just had to prove your capabilities as a force before they would accept you and allow you to do what you needed to do without micromanaging or without scrutinizing what you do. A little disappointing as far as what the Joe's outlook was for active duty, for those that were on active duty prior to going in the Guard. They would always preach "Active duty standards are this. This is how we conduct business." And then when you get there it's a little different. Obviously it's not as stringent as you probably remembered it when you left because every generation it seems like it was harder for them than it was for the new generation. World War II vets say that, "It was harder for them." If you ask them, they did a lot of things that were just a little out there. Vietnam vets, same thing. As the generations go on it just seems like it seems easier for some reason. So when I left, the service was a certain way. Six years later, the discipline and everything else, they were a little disappointed. But the unit that they linked us up with, the 126, very good unit, very disciplined, a lot of good NCOs and leaders that they had there. They had some changes also during the period we were there.

The first month in country, very quiet. The right seat, left seat ride wasn't there so the information flowed. Wasn't enough of it to explain to us what was going on with it working that city, what to expect. So the first month I would say very calm. Nothing going on. Peaceful really, it just seemed like we were walking in the park like we were training. We didn't see much of anything. I think after the first month we had one or two specific situations like the April 11 ambush. They kind of woke everybody up. Sometimes they would say good things came out of bad situations and I think that was it for us.

MR: Do you want to talk about the April 11 in a little more detail?

LB: I think during that time they allowed the city of Samara through political channels seven days of their holiday, which meant for us we weren't allowed in the city for those seven days. No military forces were allowed within city limits. So we did the next best thing. We re-conned and patrolled outside the city, outside the skirts. We found the large cache of ammunitions within the five days that we were out there, set up an ambush site there. We were up for getting twenty-four hours before we got called back in to go back to the file.

The planning and organization wasn't done exactly the way it should have been. All leaders make mistakes. We ended up moving out with half the company. Our mission *en route* was to re-con and go through a sector of the city prior to coming back into Grassfield Moor going back to home station. As we were entering the city, first couple vehicles made it through. They waited for the five ton. Five ton got hit by the mosque. We were right behind them in the other five ton. The selection for that, to see what vehicles you were going in, seemed kind of ironic

because before we actually moved out we were all looking at each other trying to figure out what vehicles we wanted to go in. Two Srgts., Sgt. Mac and the other soldiers, we were sitting there going "Do you want to go in this five ton? Well it's got the sides on it, how many can you fit?" "Well you take this. You know what, we'll just hop on this one, you guys got that vehicle." Just back and forth conversation trying to get everything organized. Not really thinking much about it, just trying to get guys on the vehicle.

WC: Was everyone kind of exhausted at that point? Because you were up for twenty-four hours?

JB: Yes. Last mission we had been out for five or seven days. We had done a tactical checkpoints in that heat for days. By that time we were pretty exhausted. We tried to do the best we can trying to organize the vehicles, trying to get everything on. I can recall looking at the Lt. asking him for more time to organize things. Him telling me that the commander needed to move out in accordance with what the battalion commander wanted at the time. Really not much information given.

As we moved out, everybody did the right thing, did what they had to. We asked for a situation report – enemy situation report – after seven days we assumed that something has to come down the pipe. The answer we received from battalion was something like "Enemy situation was zero to 5,000 at the time." That was our enemy's situation for the section. So this is *en route*, I had taken the second five ton with no protection whatsoever. My guys were sitting in the back, I was T.C-ing [tank commander], driver, gunner. They were sitting on rucksacks. They didn't even have the typical five ton sides they normally do to keep everything in, it was just open. The vehicle in front of me, which was a five ton with the quarter-inch steel plates that were welded had about a squad full of soldiers in it. Platoon sergeant, squad leader, the R.T.O [radio telephone operator], some other individuals. [unclear]

So as we're moving along, we come into the city. I can honestly say that that was probably one of best executed ambushes, whether it be American forces or enemy, that I have seen executed. Whether it be Hollywood style or not, it was, by far, by the book, tactically sound. Everything was checked off from the end of that building by the enemy. Surprise, directions, execution, initiation, everything. They initiated the ambush with an I.E.D. to the five ton, on the right side I believe. Two R.P.G.s from the mosque in front of us to our right, 1:00 by that time. The five ton was to their twelve. And then, mortar rounds to our left linear across the road. And then obviously small arms fire. All at once. They had seven days to prepare for it. They executed it well. Luckily they received I'm sure as many casualties as they would have liked to see for that type of ambush. All I saw was a dust cloud. Couldn't believe it. Looking at it, couldn't even see the truck. Just one big puff of black smoke. Thought they were done. So much

firing that I told my driver – we'd known the area so we knew certain parts where you can drive down – I told my driver to cut a hard right into that street, and by that time I told my guys to dismount. They dismounted. They probably dismounted before I even said the word. I'm sure, obviously I couldn't see, but they were on the ground with what they needed to do.

On ground, we got out, guys out, laying down, spread fire, security, trying to find out where everybody is. Trying to get combig fire. There was no communication. Just kept on calling out, direction of enemy fire, which was basically twelve, one, six, three, nine. Opened at [unclear] Trep was in the middle of the road, hid, but not hidden behind the mosque. Trying to communicate with another squad, cuppy commander, whoever was on, I didn't care at that time, just someone get me some feedback. We'll let you know where we're at and what it's looking like here. Didn't hear any response. Spread my guys out on both sides of the road. Tried to get a good 360 security. Tried to get the five ton pushed out into a safe location because the R.P.G.s did come from the mosque. Luckily we had the truck pushed up as close to the mosque as possible which did not allow the two individuals up top to fire the R.P.G.s because of the way it was obscured. That took care of the truck. The driver gunner, they kept their security, but we couldn't really leave the position, we had to fire through. I wasn't going to leave the vehicle. Wasn't going to leave the two guys with the equipment on the five ton...

WC: The wounded were on the five ton too?

LB: We had no wounded. Unlike the first truck we had no wounded. To this day we tried to figure out how, with something that was so open and uncovered as our vehicle was. I think they just laid everything into that one five ton right in front of us. It was no more from me to that wall. They took their opportunity, they knew their target of operation. Their target of opportunity. And that was one of the five tons. They didn't hit the gun trucks. They wanted to hit the two five tons, or the five ton in front of me.

Laid out. Got the squad out. Totaled like eight personnel. Tried the best to get security out, light suppressing fire down the roads. Fire just seemed to be raining from everywhere. You had guys yelling at you, asking you what they wanted you to do, giving their suggestions, and then you had the other half asking what you wanted them to do. "What are we doing? What are we doing?" It seemed like *Saving Private Ryan* for everybody who's ever watched the movie. In the beginning, opening of the picture where everything slows down. It's really not, but it is. In your brain everything's slowing down and you're taking it all in, but I'm sure to other people everything's just moving at its natural course, and I guess your brain slows down to take it in and analyze to make a decision. What may seem like a second to someone else in your brain may seem like a few minutes. That's what I felt like. Everything just slowed down. You take a good

picture of everything that's going on, and then you just come out with whatever decision your brain decides to make at the time. Mine was, cover any avenues that we can, hunker down three-sixty around the vehicle – we weren't going to leave the vehicle. It was very difficult to take any of the buildings because that was where most of the fire was coming from.

A couple of Iraqis were trotting down the road with R.P.Gs going from building to building. The guys opened up. Finally got a hold of one of the gun trucks at the end of the convoy that did not leave with the rest of the convoy. So basically as we stopped the vehicle, it was probably a hundred meters that was taking on a lot of fire also, and they stopped to engage, and then the rest of convoy pushed out with the wounded to the safe house for the special forces.

I think at that point it was rare that they were ever being counterattacked on an ambush. Usually you hit them, people suppress through the gun ships, but nobody actually gets out and tries to counterattack the ambush site which I think threw them off at that time. Just for that area, I'm not saying it's never been done before or other units didn't do it but I think at that time, at that moment, for our unit in that area of operation it just wasn't happening. So, broke contact. You could see them trying to break contact, coming down from the rooftops, coming down into the street with their R.P.G.s, trying to get a better position so that they could create more casualties on our side. Run around, R.P.G.s, AK-47s. The road side with which they had linear targets for the mortar rounds was an open field. And it was a lot of open field with a lot of hills with small bumps, like they were man-made fighting positions all over. There were quite a few rounds coming from that direction. Finally got a hold of someone, which was a truck, the last gun truck. Tried to pinpoint his location, he tried to pinpoint my location. Found out that we were within a hundred meters. As my guys are returning fire doing what they had to, I pulled away, went down a little bit. Tried to find and identify the vehicle so that we could pack up, consolidate, reorganize.

And they were just – it worked out really quite well. They were actually cutting off the individuals we were pushing out down the road without even knowing. Without even communicating. They were cutting them off one side of the street and we were pushing them out of the other side. Still kind of hard with the communication factor because of the radios we had. As far as equipment, we had all the gadgets. Brand new, right out of the box. We probably mirrored the S.F.[special forces] units other than eight radios that we ordered but just never got to us in time. So communication was definitely an issue at that time but at least there was some type of contact between the two elements left in the kill zone.

At that time, another vehicle came back up, which was a commander, Captain Rodriguez, with a Mark .19, comes up from the direction the convoy had left and

passes us because we're on foot – five ton's on the side, kind of hard to see. Identifies the vehicle, goes to the vehicle, consolidates with the vehicle. I gave them our location. They moved up to our location. We consolidated, tried to reorganize a little bit. Make a final plan to get out. "How are we getting out? Where are we going?" Only problem is that the vehicles, the gun trucks had expended so much rounds they were black with ammo. The Mark .19 and .50 Cal. I believe they had two [hundred] forty at the time. As far as ammo, to get back to where we needed to go we were pretty limited. Target of opportunity, it was still there for the Iraqis, the insurgents. Commander said to get back on the truck, the five ton. I didn't really agree with it after what just happened so I just let him know that I think a better plan would be to just walk out. So we just started street from street, fired, covered, allowed the vehicles to push up, push the next team up because at that time we only had a squad – which is about nine, but I think we were down to eight. I think for one, two [pauses], could have been for maybe five blocks we were covering and firing for the vehicle to push out. I tried to communicate with the tankers to come down and give some support at the location. They couldn't find us for some reason. Popped smoke. Still couldn't find us. So we had to go to them. Made it down to the location. Finally got on the five ton. Went back to the safe house, the S.F. safe house, where dismounted and did a good consolidation, reorganization of equipment, personnel, ammo.

First thing we wanted to do was go find out how our buddies were doing. Got the good and bad news. Watched the truck filled with blood just getting washed and smelled fresh meat on that truck. It was bad. For the younger soldiers that didn't care about much – and this is why I say good things come out of bad – this was a turning point. At this time, they saw exactly what could happen if you didn't do the right thing and listen. If you wanted to be an individual, if you didn't want to be a team player, this was the outcome. So I think this was a turning point for the company – for the younger soldiers and some of the older ones – to change a little, to take it seriously. We had a month of nothing and I think some of us believed it was going to be like for nine months, ten months. So the tuning stone was, someone died, get some guys injured going back, this is what it's like. This is what it's going to be like. Have to change your attitude. I think we all definitely saw a difference in the attention span of individuals that you wouldn't have seen before, which was great. Just now you knew they were paying attention and you didn't have to worry about that aspect. Life comes into perspective real quick when things like that happen.

MR: Do you think if you went in with a larger force this wouldn't have happened, it wouldn't have been as severe?

LB: Larger force? [Pauses]. No, I honestly think that with seven days of prepping they still would have taken their opportunity to hit. They weren't there to fight, they were there to disrupt. That's why they nitpick, that's why they select certain targets. That's why they hit you with an R.P.G. and then move out. They

don't stay to fight. They tried to disrupt – discredit – the U.S. for being there. I was never in 'Nam but I can only imagine trying to fight people that you really can't even see. That's why they integrated into everyday population, they pop up here, and it's frustrating. So they knew their job. Larger force? I think the only time things calmed down is when they see that you capped down on it. When things like that happened for a long period, the force was more aggressive, we spent longer in the city, so that changed the outcome of their direction. They change just as quick as we do. In fact we changed I think because of what they do. They are proactive, they are very intelligent. Larger force? I think they still would have had us. They had seven days. I don't there was anything our chain of command could have changed as politics. Eventually I think a larger force did help but it took a lot – quite a bit – it took the 25th, some of the Cav, the 1st I.D., include us, you're talking three or four units capped down around a city of 250,000. Eventually I think that would have helped but at the time, with having that many days, I think they were just going to try their luck, especially being that we were only country only thirty days. Even if we [?] in company size, it's a new patch. They have no idea what our capabilities are.

WC: Did you ever find out how many casualties the enemy took?

LB: I believe the record showed that it was sixty-five and that was just during our time, our twenty minutes and then I think it was somewhere up to ninety-eight once everyone came in and did their thing.

MR: So this ambush was only about a twenty minute duration?

LB: Initially, yes, the ambush was maybe twenty minutes. During that time it's hard to keep track of time.

WC: So that was a pretty good sized opposing force?

LB: That force? Absolutely. Like I said, I had never seen, whether it be Hollywood style or [Tali]'Ban, something that well executed, even in training. It was just, "You know, they got that one." That's fine, I mean, it happens.

MR: Now you mentioned papers had been submitted for the Bronze Star with a V for Valor?

LB: Yes.

MR: Is that for this action?

LB: That and another action. When you're doing things you really don't think about them until you see on writing what someone else wrote. And you look at it and think "OK, maybe I did, maybe I didn't." Because you can't really see yourself doing things. Documents have been in for two, three years. What's become, I don't know. I think there were other events, but I think the most memorable events that changed that company for that duration for that

deployment was that one. Everything else was just what we were supposed to do at the time.

MR: Brokaw had a special about that. Were you in that at all?

LB: No, that was the individuals that were hurt on the five ton...

MR: Right, I didn't know if he wanted to include...

LB: They had asked, but that story had to do with soldiers that he interviewed. The injured soldiers, how they adapted before, during, and after.

WC: Were they civilians at that point? Were they on to the Guard?

LB: Some of them were. Some of them were on med hold. Some of them were going through the medical process, to be clear, from service. So they were still soldiers at the time. I think one might have been out depending on what his injury was. The platoon sergeant, Sgt. Abrams, he was interviewed. But other than that, most of them were that one group. Great guys. I've been on active duty, and I would definitely compare the company that I went with at the time up against a lot of defcons that I've went with. Professional, great leaders. It's like sports teams. At certain times, you just have the team that clicks well and makes everything happen. Like the Yankees, they won three in a row, three World Series. And eventually it has to change. I think for us that time was then where everything just worked well. People meshed together. They did what they have to. Great combination of leadership and personalities to make things happen. [unclear] of other events that happened while we were there and realistically if you look at the numbers our platoon – 2nd platoon – sent home twelve individuals. That's a lot of people for one platoon. I believe we went in with thirty-two, thirty-three individuals. Did we take the brunt? Absolutely. But overall if you look at some of the other companies through other locations or past wars, we did well, losing only one. Or two, with your line attached to us, during the attack taking the city back over.

And that was another unfortunate – one of those things that happens that you just can't explain. You've seen people shot a thousand times and survive. During this operation, Baton Rouge, on the rooftop, takes a piece of shrap metal into the chest, side of the plate, couldn't find the entrance, bounced around inside his vest, and there's nothing you can do. You turn around, you see people getting shot all the time and they survive. Things where you look at it and go "This guy will never live." Those are the two biggest events and again, only because you have captains like that who make you always remember and leave an impression – an imprint in your mind. Specific things like that, you know. I remember a lot, but the only thing I could ever remember out of that specifically in detail would be when he was shot or when he was injured, and then over the radio when they were requesting for Medivac or medical assistant and E.L.T. [Emergency Locator Transmitter] telling them "We'll be there in three minutes." You got the special

force medic coming down and the guy on the other line, he doesn't have to. So you get him now or he's done. After that, we'll be there in three mikes, he doesn't have three mikes. And the radio went silent. And that was it. Not everybody just [unclear] was, obviously. Definitely you remember things like that, more than any other actions that you do throughout the time that you're there.

MR: When did you return home from Iraq?

LB: December 31st – I think it was around New Year's. January, we were back by January.

WC: Were you assigned to the border at all?

LB: I was assigned to the border through the Inspector General's Office. When I got back, I returned, I found myself being selected to go to the IG's office as an assistant IG. I went to the Inspector General's Office, I went to school and during that time when they were deploying troops to the border, they assigned me and an Inspector General to do inspections on the facilities in which they were going to, just to ensure that everything was going right to support the soldiers down in Arizona. That was the only way I was involved was tagging along to see if any issues that may have not been handled so that the next batch that goes through doesn't have the same problems. Or if it's even worth going to.

MR: Could you tell us about each one of these photographs?

LB: Yes. That's Lt. Zoll and Sgt. Borr. Lt. Zoll by far has been one of the best lieutenants I've even worked with. Anyone who knows him can tell you the same thing. He's an older lieutenant but tactically sound. He listens and in uniform it's very difficult to try to replace a lieutenant like that. Sgt. Borr was one of the squad leaders. He started as a team leader. I came to the platoon – the one I was talking about earlier – in the reorganization throughout the company. Even in country, part of it was changing the squads in the platoon. So I became their four squad and throughout the time his squad leader was injured and they made him a squad leader. Very smart. Good person.

WC: Who's that other individual in the photo?

LB: That's me.

WC: Oh, that's you. Let me zero in on that.

LB: I believe we were in this picture going to do a convoy with about ninety-five oil tankers from Turkey's border all the way down to Anaconda. That was us waiting for the tankards. [Another photograph is found.] This picture is of me and Sgt. Moore on rooftop. At the time we were doing overwatch of one of the roads near the patrol base. I can't remember who took the picture because it did actually catch us by surprise, that's why we were both looking back because we were the only two who were supposed to be on that rooftop.

MR: What kind of gun is that in Sgt. Moore's hand?

LB: 10-21. I believe they had them back in 'Nam.

WC: It's a sniper's rifle?

LB: Yes.

MR: What was Sgt. Moore's first name?

LB: Sgt. Moore's first name was [long pause]...

MR: It's ok. You don't know your Lt.'s first name too?

LB: No, I don't know their first names. [Another picture is found] This picture was taken during the last patrol in Samarra. This was the very last walk we took, and we returned and decided to do a group picture. This was almost what was left of our platoon after the year was done. I believe there were some individuals that were at one of the patrol bases. There weren't many, I think this was what was truly left of the platoon.

MR: Where are you in that photograph?

LB: I'm right.

MR: Is Sgt. Ross in there?

LB: Sgt. Ross was in a different platoon at the time. Like I said, there was a lot of re-organization going on within the company. Did we see each other? Yes we did. Was it frequent? Not really. By the last three or four months they put our platoon in Bob Yervanny, which, obviously, was named after the soldier that died *en route* and we spent the last couple months in the city trying to clean it up. The patrol base was the center of the city, very accessible to the enemy. We would get mortared constantly. So much that after a while it was almost like an everyday thing. You're getting shelled? Ok, everybody back in. Come back out. Even until the last three months we were sending people home, which was kind of difficult because we were so close at this point. Three, two, one month prior to leaving you don't want to see any more.

We took a lot of hits during the last three months at the patrol base [unclear]. A lot more full patrols. A lot more – I wouldn't say action but a lot more activity – obviously because you had us in the center of the city. And we were less people than what we actually started with so it made it even more stringent on the platoon to accomplish a lot of the tasks, a lot of the missions. You're talking almost twelve guys at the end of the ten months to continue doing what a normal platoon does all the time.

They pulled us out, obviously that picture is of the last patrol. We did our right seat left seat ride. Tried to explain to the individuals, soldiers coming in, their leadership, what to expect, how to be, how to walk, which was something that

wasn't done for us. We probably would have been a little bit better prepared. But they can take the information however. Like every new unit they want to test the waters out first and then they'll step back to what the original people tried to explain to them at first. It always happens that way. New faces, new leaders. This is the way we're doing it. And then they realize that, "Hey, people who left actually are telling us something that we need to know."

I would see Sgt. Ross periodically coming through. He worked on the trucks. He was in the platoon with the truck company that we had developed within the company and went through quite a bit in the city. Lot of patrols. Lot more mortar attacks, lot more shooting, a lot more defensive. I think the stress level went up, which is odd for it being near the end of your tour. Normally the stress level is in the very beginning. You'll have some high points and then low points. But for us I think it was higher for us prior to. I think we were more comfortable with everything. We knew the people. We knew what to expect. We knew what to look for. But I think the stress level, as far as looking at we see in the last year, the V-Beds the I.E.D.s – and I'll give you an actual situation.

We were doing a patrol. They'd give us good periods of time to do patrols in the sector. Walking down, doing a patrol, garbage everywhere. If you've ever seen pictures of Iraq, one of the things they always tell you to do is look for anything that's odd or out of the ordinary. It's kind of difficult with occasions like that, everything looks odd. If anything looks odd, out of place, there's a mound, wire sticking out, just a black wire. No one thought anything of it. Sgt. Kleins actually picked it up and pulled it out, and at the end of it was a timer, and it was actually still going. So he yelled out I.E.D., and it creates a bunch of chickens with no heads. Everybody just runs for the hills. Dispersed like someone just dropped the A-bomb. We all fan out, just run out of our squads, as fast and as far as we can go. Call the O.D. The O.D. comes. Sends out the robot. Digs it up, and he finds his first .105 shell. Continues to dig, and I believe he found six linked together, daisy chained together. Six or eight daisy chained together. I think the only thing he said that stopped the timer was the electrical tape, around the actual timer, which actually stopped it from going off. Or the remote didn't accept the information coming through because of the way they had it set.

Someone asked him "If this thing went off, what would be the rate of our casualties for our platoon at this time?" He said "Well, let's just put it this way. The only thing that would have survived this would be the truck that's way down here about three-four hundred meters." So at that time, even the non-smokers had a cigarette break. Because we came real close – not that we didn't before – but this was a larger scale. To find out that three-quarters, one truck would have survived this. We were already down eight, nine people. I don't think we could have taken a loss like that. That would have just been the end of the morale, period. So the stress of, every time you took a step out, knowing that you just go

back to the center of this city, elevated. Every time you pulled out the wire, squad leaders or point men.. [unclear]

By far the most stressful job is a leader. It doesn't have to be a squad leader just a leader. Someone who's responsible for soldiers and their lives based on their decisions. Every time you walked the street it was the same thing. It was on edge, making sure that where you walked, where you brought this platoon into was a safe place. Things like that stick out in your mind. Events I should say. And it's human nature. The only way people change is when events happen. Dramatic events that leave an impact. Everything in between, it's vague after a while. You talk to older veterans, they'll give you specific events. Everything in between, good or bad, it's kind of vague. And those events that stick out are usually the ones that change that person in some way. So for us it was many.

Other than that one incident, being in the middle of the city, on edge all the time for the last three months knowing that we were leaving soon and we might stay a little longer because it's a 126. Requested for us to stay for an additional three. Was it a good learning experience? Absolutely. Would I change it for anything? Other than the casualties, I would never want to change it. Because I believe those events, situations, decisions, is what makes you a veteran, a combat veteran. You can bring something back and hopefully help future soldiers, and without it, there's really not much you can – I mean you can read out of a book so much – but without the experience, you have nothing really.

Other than that, I'm sure there's a lot of events – Sgt. Ross always comes up with events that he talks about when we talk to other people. He tells me about the situations or events. And I always ask him "What role were you in? Was I there? Because I don't remember." And he says "Don't you remember?" And I do. I remember quite a few.

I know taking up blocking positions trying to find a – tanks are hard to lose. They're big objects. They tell us these tanks are going to be at the four corners of this large area on the street. OK. It's pretty simple. Meet up with your tank. Pull security, and let the operation go through what they need to. You're securing an area, three sixty. Sounds like an easy task. Find out that your driver gets you lost, you're in a 113 and if you've even been in a 113, you can't see out of it if you're in the back. Only the driver, and a T.C. Drop the ramp. "You're good." Get out. And it's not even close to where you should be. Try to flank up with some individuals. See some friendlies, 126s. We'll accompany you, we'll platoon. A bit of them I know, this platoon is working in this area, this area of operation. Alright, I got it. We're supposed to link up with snipers. Can't see them right now. Linked up with them. No tank to be found. That was my target, that was my guide. Call it back up. They give the message, "Well you're going to have to take that area by yourself." I think we had a little shy of a squad at that time, and

then two snipers. So to go from a tank and some troops to just some troops was a little stressful.

Eventually we linked – we kind of hollered at a tank as it was driving by and snatched it up and just said, "This was where you belong." You can help us by sitting here and looking through your thermals. So it worked out, but a lot proceeded throughout that night, just trying to get into the city. R.P.G.s, small arms. They wanted those tanks. That was their big prize. Tanks, 113s, anything with a track. It seemed like the Fourth of July. They were dropping grenades off rooftops.

There were a lot of little stories in between there. Like anything, I'll probably remember them down the line. I'll tell one or two here or there but if anybody ever asks me I just tell them I'm a cook. I was a cook, N.C.O. in the chow hall. I used to hear the stories from guys coming in and that's how I know so much. Ross, great guy, he remembers a lot more than I do, so I just always confirm with him. Were we in the same one? Because I don't remember that. Yeah, now I remember. So I guess it's selective what you want to remember and what you may not want to remember.

MR: Well, thank you very much for your interview.

LB: Alright. No problem [end of tape cuts off word]