

**Daniel P. Dichiera  
Veteran  
Desert Storm  
Operation Enduring Freedom  
Operation Iraqi Freedom**

**Jordan McNamara  
Jay Olney  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on January 5, 2005  
Rome Free Academy, Rome, NY**

Daniel P. Dichiera **DD**  
Interviewer **I**

**I:** Today is January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, we're at Rome Free Academy, and my name is Jordan McNamara with the assistance of Jay Olney; we'll be interviewing Major Daniel P. Dichiera.

**I:** You enlisted in the military on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1985. What were your motives for entering into the military?

**DD:** Just something I've wanted to do for a long time. Had the opportunity of possibly getting appointed to West Point, and I kind of decided against that but the military was always in the back of my mind so it was just something I wanted to do.

**I:** Why did you decide against going to West Point?

**DD:** Because I was 18 at the time, and not knowing everything, I wasn't sure if I wanted to put back a whole lot of time after I got done with school, not realizing that here I am twenty years later still in the military.

**I:** Where did you go for your basic training?

**DD:** Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

**I:** And what was the training like?

**DD:** It was basically familiarization to the military, the wear and care of the uniform, protocols, weapons familiarization, and a lot of basic stuff.

**I:** Now, you became a major. How did that happen? How did you become a major ... just over time, or did you have to take any school?

**DD:** Yes, there's schools you have to take, officer basic course, officer advanced course, there's just a progression of military courses. Right now, I'm enrolled in Command and General staff school.

**I:** What was the first unit you were assigned to?

**DD:** 331<sup>st</sup> General Hospital out of Utica, New York.

**I:** What type of jobs were entailed with that?

**DD:** Initially, I was a junior officer, first lieutenant, physical therapist, and over time became the Officer in Charge of the physical therapy section.

**I:** What was your duty during Operation Desert Storm?

**DD:** Desert Storm, I was activated just prior to the ground war starting. I was deployed to Walter Reed Medical Center with a group of other therapists. We started out there for a few days. I determined I needed to be kept busier so I talked to the commander there, and volunteered to go overseas if I was needed for that. And he got me to ... well, he told me I'd have the opportunity to either go into the Pentagon PT [Physical Therapy] department, which I thought would be kind of awesome, or Fort Myers, [Florida] of course I lived in Fort Myers, my first patient there was the Rottweiler we talked about earlier, and then from there I went to Fort Belvoir in Virginia and was there for about three months.

**I:** Now, where's Walter Reed?

**DD:** Walter Reed is in Washington D.C.

**I:** What were your special memories while ... do you have any special memories of the people that you took care of during Desert Storm?

**DD:** The first one, well obviously the Rottweiler was a unique patient of mine. I never did any veterinary physical therapy, but I did mostly ... it was mostly ... now, the war was a relatively short war, so the amount of injuries coming back from that war was better than expected, obviously. So, I was basically working in the outpatient area, seeing injured soldiers, their family members, or retirees. I instituted a true medical clinic, with the permission of the department chief, where I was seeing soldiers closer to their exercise site and then kind of freeing up the in-hospital PT section, so that if someone needed an x-ray, they didn't have to come back to the PT section. I would do a referral for an x-ray or whatever might be closer to their exercise area.

**I:** You said you went to the Dominican Republic in 2000. What were your duties there?

**DD:** I went there as Preventative Medicine Officer and assisted with some security stuff, which wasn't really an issue because the host nation provided more of the security that was needed. I was just kind of overseeing our own internal type security. But we saw ... it was like a level-one medical clinic staffed with a variety of physicians, nurse practitioners, and some ancillary departments like pharmacy. I think a small lab area. We just kind of did level-one medical screenings, made recommendations, provided preventative medicine,

toothbrush, toothpaste, how to wash, bathe, and don't drink out of the same water other's [unintelligible] before you might being doing toiletry stuff, you know, all stuff like that.

**I:** How did the people there treat you?

**DD:** People were great! Love seeing the kids. Kids are just cute no matter where you go. But a few people appreciated what we were doing there. They would line up from six in the morning and the line would never deplete all day long. And, I mean they would come back with their coffee brew and ... I mean, one little lady, and she was ancient, she would ... she came with this coffee and she says, "From my field to my grinder to you." And that kind of thing. It was kind of neat.

**I:** When did you leave the Dominican Republic? How long were you there?

**DD:** I was there for two weeks. So, we just provided the service and then we flied back home.

**I:** Now, when were you sent to the middle for Operation Iraqi Freedom?

**DD:** We left the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 2002 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, at the time, and deployed to Camp Doha, Kuwait. We were there through the early part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and we were there in July of '03.

**I:** Were you just stationed at that base, or did you have to move up farther ...

**DD:** It was my primary site. From there I went forward and worked on battalion aid stations on any given day to try to, kind of, help with the commanders and their assets at forward deployed units ... forward staging units. I would work battalion aid stations wanted on any different day, and try and to see any non-emergent musculoskeletal injury instead of having the commanders transport them all down to Camp Doha. The PA's or the nurse practitioners that worked at those battalion aid stations would know I'd be coming up, so anything non-emergent they would try to hang on to until they knew the day I was coming in, and I would screen them there, and give them whatever care that I could at that site and then move on the next day to a different one.

**I:** Okay, so what's a battalion eight?

**DD:** Battalion *aid* station.

**I:** Oh, okay.

**DD:** It's like a ... I guess ... just a small emergency triage area.

**I:** Okay, alright. What was your equipment like while you were over there? The medical equipment.

**DD:** The hospital itself, my 865<sup>th</sup> combat support hospital, we worked out of ... majority of the unit worked out of the Kuwait armed forced hospital, which was

in Kuwait city, so the equipment we had there was fairly modern, fairly up-to-date, to our standard. I worked out of a small clinic at Camp Doha itself, we had some durable medical equipment, some splints, some braces, rubber tubing for exercise, that kind of thing. A lot of it was manual therapy, at the time we had very little electrical modalities to go with it.

**I:** What were the feelings of the soldiers during the time leading up to the fighting?

**DD:** Everybody seemed to be pretty gung-ho. The soldiers I saw at the clinic wanted to get their problem taken care of so they could get back to their unit. There was a lot of comradery. If they were taken out of their position for any extent of time, somebody else would have to fill it. So, it just would tax a unit to some amount. The majority of the soldiers I saw wanted to get back to their unit; get back to their brothers, and do what they had to do.

**I:** So, the soldiers were close-knit.

**DD:** Yes, within a unit they're pretty close-knit.

**I:** You said you came under fire on March 21, 2003. Can you describe that experience?

**DD:** It was in the early stages of ... alarm would go off on a firing of a Scud missile from Iraq, and whenever they went off an alarm would sound because you wouldn't, necessarily, be sure of exactly where it was going. So, we would have to put on our JSLIST [Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology], which is our chemical suits and our mask, and just wait for the all clear, which in some cases ... initially, was an extended period, and as things progressed, the all clear was given in a somewhat shorter amount of time based on previous experience.

**I:** How were the Patriot missiles? Were they accurate? Did they work?

**DD:** Yes, they worked. They were an awesome sight to see when they would go off. We were adjacent ... at Camp Doha, we had a Patriot battery adjacent to us, and it was pretty awesome knowing they were right there. They were pretty much taking care of business for us.

**I:** Did you ever see one go off?

**DD:** Not right from the launcher, but I saw a couple screaming across the sky.

**I:** Did they go real fast?

**DD:** Yes, they move along pretty quick.

**I:** They're accurate too?

**DD:** The technology has improved from the first Gulf War, where they are more accurate.

**I:** Throughout the invasion were you in Kuwait, did you end up moving into Iraq?

**DD:** No, I ended up staying in Kuwait ... to go into Iraq during the push forward.

**I:** Do you have any ... did you meet any special people while you were there? Any special stories?

**DD:** Other than the wounded who came through ... the first wounded soldier was more concerned about being able to run with his son. He needed to have one of his legs saved so he could do that. That was a pretty impressive show. He was more concerned about his family and his fellow soldiers than he was about his own limb. It's pretty impressive seeing what the soldiers go through and where their thoughts are. Less about themselves, and more upon family and friends.

**I:** That's a common thing that takes place over there?

**DD:** Yes, from what I saw.

**I:** What was the food supply like?

**DD:** We had catered meals at the dining facility. Initially, when Iraqi Freedom kicked off, we were on the MRE's [Meal, Ready-To-Eat], which were the rehydrated military ready-to-eat packets, which ... you, know what? I could survive on them. I had no problem with them. Some people will tell you differently, but you have to eat what you have to eat. Like I said, I drank more water in those eight months than I think I had in my entire life.

**I:** Was it just water? Did you drink Gatorade?

**DD:** Yes, people from home would send packets of Kool-Aid, and iced tea, and that kind of stuff, because as much as "non-taste" that water has, you can only drink so much of it. It would be good to have something else to put into it.

**I:** Any side-effects from the food?

**DD:** No.

**I:** Just the water?

**DD:** Just the water. I ended up with a kidney stone that ran its course.

**I:** Alright. Now, what did you do while you were not treating patients? What did you do in your free time?

**DD:** Down time? They would have activities, MWR [Morale, Welfare and Recreation], which is more-or-less recreation. They had facilities there. An extensive gym. They had a little place where you could get a hamburger, or a hot dog and play board games; cards. Just hung out and did what we had to do.

**I:** Did the military ever have any guests come in?

**DD:** Yes, the USO [United Service Organizations] came in a few times. Got to meet some pretty impressive people. Met Roger Clemens; got a picture with him. Got a picture with General [Richard] Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs [of Staff], so that was kind of a neat thing. Yes, the USO were pretty good at taking care of the troops.

**I:** During Operation Iraqi Freedom, Saddam Hussein set fire to the oil fields in Iraq. Did you ever see this happen?

**DD:** I saw a glimpse of one oil field, or one oil burning that went on north of Kuwait City. Nothing major, like what was depicted during the first Gulf War.

**I:** Did you smell it?

**DD:** [Shook head]. No.

**I:** No side effects or anything?

**DD:** [Shook head again, indicating no].

**I:** Where were you when Saddam Hussein was captured?

**DD:** I was back home.

**I:** You were back home?

**DD:** I was back home, yes.

**I:** What were your feelings?

**DD:** It was about time. Soldiers did their job. From what I came to understand, a soldier from my home town was ... I don't know if he was directly involved, but his unit was involved in his capture. That was kind of a neat thing.

**I:** That's a pretty major event in the war. Would you think that's something the soldiers looked forward to?

**DD:** I think that, and hopefully the eventual capture of Osama Bin Laden is the ultimate [objective] in this whole ordeal.

**I:** Operation Iraqi Freedom moved pretty fast to Baghdad. That was reached rather quickly. Do you feel this is a cause of some of the problems that have arisen in Iraq, now?

**DD:** I don't think so. I think the insurgents would have just hunkered down somewhere else, come up on another time. I don't think it really influenced anything as far as the insurgent activity going on now.

**I:** Now, [President] George W. Bush said that justified the war in Iraq ... that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Did you ever fear that

during your time in Kuwait and Iraq that weapons of mass destruction would be used?

**DD:** Well, that was the reason for wearing our JSLIST's for two weeks in the initial onset of the war. We didn't know what might or might not happen so, all soldiers prepared and were ready for whatever might come our way.

**I:** Do you feel that they're actually there?

**DD:** My personal opinion is; at one time I think they were, but they're now buried somewhere, or moved out. I believe that we had to go do what we had to do.

**I:** Were you ever wounded besides your kidney stones?

**DD:** [Smiles] No, just my kidney stones.

**I:** Did you ever receive any special honors or medals?

**DD:** I received the Army Achievement Medal at the close of our time there.

**I:** That's for fighting?

**DD:** No, that was for my performance in my job.

**I:** Do you have any advice to those going into the military today.

**DD:** [Pause] Well, like I said earlier in your classroom; I enjoy the military aspect of what I do. I think the soldiers that are now involved feel a sense of pride in what they're doing. I have my son's best friend who joined about two years ago and went on to Afghanistan, was going in and out of caves, and to my surprise, came back and reenlisted. That just tells me that these kids going over there are coming back with a sense of pride and a sense of job-well-done and [pause] it takes a special person to go into harm's way, and luckily we have those kinds of people here.

**I:** Do you ever stay in contact with people that you were ...

**DD:** Yes, I made some good friends. Our unit, based here in Utica, has a section out of Niagara Falls, and made some good friends of people that were really, at very most, I was just acquainted with, and have spent time with since we've been home.

**I:** Do you have any other special stories that you'd like to share?

**DD:** When I came back from overseas, from Kuwait, our unit was tasked with a [unintelligible] exercise down in Belize, and I went down for a pre-site visit and met with a NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge] from South Com [United States Southern Command] and come to find out, his son was one the soldiers that we successfully treated, and he's back on his feet and walking again. He was very appreciative of what we did. That was kind of a neat feeling.

**I:** You said in the classroom that you treated those who were in the convoy that was ambushed in Iraq. What was that experience like? How did they, how ...

**DD:** There wasn't a whole lot of treatment. They were the American POW's [Prisoners of War] who were repatriated. They were kind of segregated and we just kind of helped keep their location low key so we didn't have to deal with a lot of press, and they were just repatriated from us back into Germany.

**I:** How was their morale?

**DD:** They were good. They were happy to be home, or on their way back home [smiles].

**I:** Were they ... did they have any side-effects from being captured?

**DD:** Not that I'm aware of. We didn't do any psych-assessment there. All that stuff, and their debriefings were handled by people other than ourselves.

**I:** Okay, anything else?

**DD:** I think we pretty much covered it all. I'm nearing twenty years, so I'm getting to the end of my career. I'm not sure if it will happen soon, or if I'm going to hang out a little longer, but I appreciate my time in and about what I did. If I were called to go again, like I think, about 95% of those that are serving, [matter-of-factly] we'd go.

**I:** Alright, sounds good.

**END**

Transcribed by: Todd Demers, Hudson Valley Community College. November 2016.