

Robert Morris University Oral History Center
Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans Project



Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Erik Thomas Nowak
Engineer Officer, West Virginia Guard
May 26, 2017

Nowak, Erik (1980 –), Oral History Interview, May 26, 2017

Biographical Sketch: Erik Nowak joined the West Virginia Guard as enlisted man, returning from Initial Advanced Training to fill a fulltime position as a recruiters' assistant. In 2007 Erik entered Officer Candidate School where he would accept a commission as an Engineer Officer. By March of 2010 Erik would deploy to Afghanistan with the 864th Engineering Battalion, tasked with the construction of a battalion headquarters and other Combat outposts.

Topics Covered in Interview:

West Virginia Guard

OCS

864th Engineering Battalion

Afghanistan, Kandahar Province

FOB Ramrod

COP Terminator

Camp Leatherneck

COP Pain, Hellman River

IED

RCIED

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[00:00:02]

JC: This interview is part of the Iraq Afghanistan Project undertaken by the Oral History Center at Robert Morris University. I am Joshua Caskey and today is May 26th, 2017, I am joined by Erik, and can you please state your full name?

EN: Erik Thomas Nowak

JC: And do I have your consent to interview you today?

EN: You do.

JC: Alright Excellent, so we are going to start with a little bit of background about you, so let's start off with where you born, when were you born, just any details you want to give us,

EN: So I'm from the eastern part of West Virginia, the town is Martinsburg West Virginia. The closest town but I live south of there, the only reason that I say that is cause I can't admit to going to Martinsburg cause that's where my wife went. But 1980 was when I was born, grew up on a family farm with two brothers, I'm the middle son. Older brother is involved in government work, working for the NGA, My younger brother is an elementary school Phys Ed. Teacher, and my parents still run their farm which they have, I think they bought the farm in January of '83, Just scrap ground and they are still doing truck farming.

JC: Excellent, So I know you were enlisted and an officer, so we will talk about what branch of service you were in and the years you served and then you can get into what rank you were when you, both your deployments and what you are now, that's a lot of questions, so.

EN: So, yea after I was married for about six months I realized I needed some money because marriage and owning a house is not cheap, so I saw a guy at the gym and he invited me to come down and learn about the West Virginia Guard, and so I did end up enlisting as a military police man in the 157 military police company, there in Martinsburg. Did that for, following the five months of '06 for MP school down in Ft. Leonard wood. Came back, was there for about a year, I was actually working fulltime for the guard on AS, AVSW orders, as a recruiter assistant. Then got a conditional release, was released to come over to active duty in December of '07, and I reported for duty that same month down to Ft. Benning for OCS (officer candidate school). So I did that, did officer training that year, was commissioned as an engineer officer, first assignment was out of Ft. Lewis as a, in the 864th engineer battalion falls underneath the triple nickel or the 555th Engineer Brigade.

JC: And then what rank are you currently?

EN: I am currently a Captain. What we refer to as a senior captain, I'm actually looking, my promotion board meets in about a month and a half. So, I have a total of, just passed 11 years.

JC: 11 years, ok.

EN: Total in active and national guard time.

JC: Excellent, and both enlisted and officer, that's really cool. So let's talk a little bit about why you enlisted and the why you made the decision to go the officer route, and then just a little bit about the impact of 9/11.

[00:03:55]

EN: So, let's see here, I'll back, to answer your question better, I'll back up to when I was in college. So when I was going looking for a place to go to college, I was accepted into Virginia Tech. and I got some mailer in the mail basically talking about the Corpse Cadets Which is one of the two major school that have a cork that lets in the civilian population, the other one being Texas A&M, so Virginia Tech. was offering at that time a scholarship that paid for room board if you were in the core, if you are in ROTC you have to be in the core, but you would just be in the core, so I did four years at Virginia Tech. where I was in the core cadets and so was exposed to the military lifestyle, you wore a uniform the whole nine yards, I just didn't have to commission at the end. So I did that, was kind of, had borrowed some money from my parents, so I was tryn to figure that out, had paid that back in 2004 and then in 2005, I met and married my wife Kristen, Son after we got married we had bought a house and we were looking at, trying to figure out what I was going to do moving forward at that time I was working for my parents and doing some substitute teaching but didn't really want to keep working for my parents full time on the farm, and my wife was substitute teaching, we both knew we had to figure out what we were going to do with our lives we were both 25 at the time, so I ran into a gentleman at the Gold's Gym in Martinsburg and he just said hey you ever thought about the military, well I'll think about it for a week, if you call me within that week I'll say no. So, he wasn't a recruiter but he was in the unit. So, I thought about it, my wife and I thought about it, we had only been married at that time for about two months, so they were offering a twenty thousand sign on bonus at that time, so we, fact of the matter is we did need the money and were trying to figure out what to do with it, and I know I needed to do something to get things moving so I can take care of my family, I knew that if we had a child at that time that we would have been really strapped cause I had no health insurance or anything, Just kind of did it cause I needed to do something, and we did that, So I did the national guard and comeback, my wife and was talking and probably back about 6-7 months I decided to go the officer route, I started the paperwork and got the conditional release accepted, I had to forego, so I had ten thousand dollars when I came back from AIT, I had to forego the second ten thousand to go the officer route, and that was just because we decided that I enjoyed it, I was good at it I had already been at Virginia Tech., in a program, I was training officers So I knew vs the enlisted dynamic was, so I had friends, my best friend at my wedding was a naval officer, so I wasn't ignorant, you know I was knowledgeable of the lifestyle. So, it was one of things where maybe I should have done it earlier, you know and jumped in.

[00:06:55]

JC: Yea, so, did you have any family history of military service?

EN: Well, both my grandfathers served in WWII, my dad's father was in North Africa but because he was a first generation German they wouldn't let him go, I know he was allowed to go, I know he was allowed into, he may have been able to go into Italy, but he was kept, he wasn't allowed to go into Germany, at that time the army had a policy that if you were first generation German

you couldn't go into Germany. He actually met his second wife there, when he deployed he went overseas, and I didn't find this out until I was in my 30's, he had been married first, that marriage was on the rocks, had a child when he left to go overseas during WWI that marriage fell apart. He met his second wife, my grandmother in North Africa in the army corps there. Came back, their oldest son my uncle actually served as an intelligence officer in the 70's, then as I said my mom's side my great grandfather was the camp engineer for Camp Lewis, he served during WWI & WWII as an engineer officer and as a civil engineer in the Pacific Northwest. And then her father, my mom's father was a, did a lot of training but he was never sent overseas he developed tuberculosis during the war, so, that's about,

JC: Sounds like you have a lot of military family history that's really cool, did that have any bearing on your decision to join or is it just more out of necessity?

EN: Necessity, plus I would say that I already had the mindset towards service.

JC: Ok, and you were in college during 9/11, is that correct?

EN: Yes, I was in college I was senior in college actually. You know, that morning I remember very vividly, I had, I was in the core of cadets I had a job where I was commanding officer of a student group called ... and we managed and ran the obstacle course, which is very much like your marine obstacle course, it was patterned after that with the same type of obstacles, and so we would teach people how to run that, the freshmen cadets and other people how to run that course accurately, without getting hurt, and that morning a friend of mine, a civilian, wanted to, he wanted to go down the obstacle course, so I agreed to meet him that morning at like 7 or 6 in the morning, I don't know but it was early, we had been down there doing the obstacle course, came back went to breakfast, or actually I came back and when I walked in somebody, I lived in Moncrief Hall at Virginia Tech., this was on upper quad. Which was half cadet and half female, most of the guys liked living in that dorm room, by the way. And I just remember going in and someone kind of stopped me and telling me that they, that someone had run a plane into the world trade center, of course like most people I think I thought he was joking initially and then when I went upstairs and got on the computer, obviously found out that he was not joking. Shower changed went to breakfast saw another one of my friends at breakfast told him and he was shocked, that's kind of how the day went, went to class then later that day the cadets commandant made the decision to take us all out of uniform for the rest of the day, so one of the other things from that day that I remember is one of the assistant commandants kind of brought all the seniors in and talked to us and basically said that look things are different now, those of you who are commissioning you need to understand that you are now, he was basically saying that hey look there's precedence to just commission you now and forgo the last year of school and he was trying to get all the seniors the right mindset shall we say. So that was part of that day, another part of that day was the fact that I remember talking to my father, my father actually grew up in White Plains, NY., which just for geography is about an hour north of the city, his father was, like I said he, before the war WWII he was, he got a degree in electrical engineering from NYU and went to work for the telephone, at that time New York Telephone Company, when the war began he went into service as a communications officer in the army, when he came back the telephone company gave him his job back but I don't know what the job he was doing before or after but he ended up going back to school and becoming a safety

engineer, and his place of work which is now the old Verizon building/ telephone company building, is, and I was actually up there last year, they were... and you have Verizon right across the street from the World Trade Center Complex, and so my father, my grandfather was working as a safety engineer of that building when they were building the World Trade Center and so he was informed a lot of the construction because it was his... building right across the street, and so my dad had pictures of his father with these lead engineers of the World Trade Center, everybody else that had some literature from the 1970's of how that building was constructed, and so it was kind of interesting to be able to learn, when I went home later to sit down, cause you know my dad being growing up in that area was very interested in that and he was really, you know that day kind of stopped for him a little bit from that aspect, he kind of was pulled that... that he hadn't looked at for 30 years that kind of showed how the building was built and how it was new and but then how we learned, as we looked into it how that actually contributed to its structural failure.

JC: ok, wow, that's really interesting, thank you for sharing, that's really cool. We are going to fast forward just a little bit, let's talk about the build up to your first deployment, I know that's covering sometime there, but let's talk about, basically what you were, what kind of training you were doing, what kind of unit you were with and what was your billet?

[00:14:47]

EN: When I got there in January 2009 I got there right before change of command in the unit for the battalion command, it was an engineer battalion consisting of horizontal engineers and vertical engineers, to kind of understand engineering units were deployable at the company level as opposed to the rest of the army which was deployable at the battalion or brigade level, like brigade combat teams, because we had just undergone modularity, so the unit had gotten back in '08, sometime in '08, so they came back from Afghanistan in '08 that was their second deployment and I say that cause you need to understand the culture with in the unit at that time, you had guys in that unit that had already had two deployments to Afghanistan, and then they came back and then they completely reorganized the whole unit, and so you had bonds that were ripped apart, the soldiers bond, they were putting in new units and different things like that, and so you had a lot of discipline problems, the new battalion commander came in, she did 45 field grade article fifteens in six months, actually we prosecuted an E6 for running a drug ring in the barracks, it was not by any stretch of the imagination it was not a high functioning unit, in that sense we had one guy, brought two underage girls unto post and one of them died from an overdose of alcohol and ecstasy in our barracks, that happened with in the first six months, well two months, and so you had this pall of just dysfunction happening, and we were not by any means the only unit, I mean 08 to 09 at a soldier disciple level was not a high point for the army, maybe not for the Marine Corps but I know for the army it wasn't. ... you also had a lot of people who were, had medical issues it was consuming a lot of leader time, a lot of people popping hot (testing positive for illegal substances), I had one guy he had eight guys in his platoon pop hot on one piss-test, This was just prevalent through the unit, so a lot of things happened we had to do, while I was there those first six-months we went from just kind of cursory doing staff duty once every month at the brigade level, to then we had to do it at brigade, we had to do it at battalion, we were doing leader checks on the barracks five-times a night rotating them on officers at various points of the night, and then we got hit with a tasking

that took a lot of guys out to go do for warrior, it's called Warrior Forge, it was during the junior or senior year, the cadets come out for training and we had to provide a hundred or two hundred soldiers for that, well when you already have a whole lot of bad soldiers and you're trying not to send them there then you take a hundred or two hundred of your good soldiers out, it pretty much shuts the unit down,

JC: Remind us where you were stationed at this time,

EN: Fort Lewis

JC: Ok, in Washington State, ok

EN: So it was within this environment of a lot of discipline problems, cracking down on that and you have a lot of your best soldiers going out for this long two to three-month tasking that we found out in June that we were going to deploy.

JC: Ok, June of,

EN: June of 09, right before or right around my, the time my oldest child was born. So, we find out our deployment orders in June but because of this tasking we can't even start training up until September, and the that's when I got my platoon, so really and then I got the platoon in September but we were already scheduled for an MRX or mission readiness exercise at Yakima training center, the first two weeks of December, so we really only had January and October as a unit, as a cohesive unit, and so we did do some live fires, we did a little bit of training but we really didn't have, I didn't have a whole lot of opportunity to assess the competency of my soldiers on their construction skills, cause as you know, you know then you had December, the first two-weeks December in Yakama where we were doing the readiness exercise, then you have Christmas leave period which takes two months, then you came back in January and you spent the next 90 days packing everything up, and then we landed in Afghanistan in March, the very end of the month of March 2010,

JC: And where did you end up at?

EN: So my company was initially sent to FOB Ramrod, which is about, at that time it was probably an entire day's drive west of Kandahar, but it's about half way between leatherneck and Kandahar,

JC: Yea it's still in Hellman Province

EN: No you weren't quiet in Hellman Province at the time, you were still in Kandahar Province but you were out there, you were getting out there, at that time 5th Striker Brigade from Fort Lewis had been there for ten-months, and that is the general area where the platoon that was doing the kill stuff down at FOB terminator was operating, in fact I actually ended up going to FOB Terminator later, so they were, we rolled into FOB Ramrod who definitely had some cowboys, they were definitely operating to their beat, so we were sent to FOB Ramrod party because the unit we were replacing were there, so we went there first to sign for equipment and to continue doing missions that they had been doing while battalion figured out what was going to be the next step, so we were sent there another company was sent to Spin Buldack which is right on the Pakistan border and then another unit was sent to, where were they sent to, they moved

though, it wasn't... I forget but they we all moved within a month so within a month all three companies picked up and moved.

[00:20:20]

JC: and what kind of missions were you tasked with?

EN: So we were tasked with, I was vertical platoon leader so we were tasked with constructing a 30 by 120 battalion headquarters,

JC: Ok,

EN: It was our first mission,

JC: That sounds like a big undertaking,

EN: It's a platoon size mission, it takes about three-weeks,

JC: ok, three-weeks wow

EN: Three-weeks would be the typical time, you know once we get going, but I mean I expected it to take longer because this was the first time the platoon had really operated on a construction mission by themselves, and maybe seven to eight months maybe longer maybe since the last deployment, I mean I had some very experienced E-4's, I had some weaknesses in the E-5's, in the squad leader situation, in fact I had fired a squad leader or replaced him while we were at the MRX, my squad leader, I had one squad leader that the one I fired he couldn't navigate himself out the wet paper bag, I had another one that was just was to soft, and another guy who had been the acting platoon sergeant that just was he just didn't know how to handle females, he had two females fighting and he wanted me to separate them,

JC: So you were intermingled, so you were male and female?

EN: I had six females in my platoon,

JC: I'm actually curious to hear about that, how was that dynamic,

EN: So, my driver was a female, I had no problems with her she was a little predictable, but I don't have a problem with it to me, I mean when I was at Virginia Tech had females, I mean it,

JC: Was it logistical challenge at times,

EN: No, you know our platoon sergeant was, he was a typical E-7 platoon Sergeant about 6 foot 2, African-American guy, his diet consisted of Jack Daniels and cigarettes, and, but could run like the wind crank out pull ups like nobody's business, and he basically was like hey look, he had a rule that was, he didn't care if you were a female or not, he says you go around these place's and everybody's teams, because when he was at Fort Bragg he came up at a time where engineers, regardless of whether they were male or female would get jumped by the infantry or the MP's so he was like, especially at night and there were other females there, so there was a role two medical facility there, and so the Charlie Med. Company, that's the medical the Charlie Company and the BCT, underneath the BCT structure you have the BSB, Brigade Support Battalion and their Charlie Company is a medical company, so they were stationed there so

there were other females there, and weren't the only females on post by any stretch of the imagination,

JC: Ok, how big of a, is this a forward operating base, in size?

EN: Yea, so you had us there... who else was there there was a squadron headquarters there, CAT Squadron Headquarters there, there was probably seven to eight hundred people there, I mean not quiet seven-eight hundred probably four hundred people, I mean it was not, there was smaller places, much smaller places in Afghanistan, because like I said if you were going to, at that time in Afghanistan we didn't, we controlled highway one, but particular on ... we only controlled about two-hundred meters off highway one, and there was a lot of IED action and there was a lot of, it was very slow going and so very few patrols could get all the way from CAV which was the only other, which was the next major base to the east to leatherneck, so it was not uncommon for people to stop at Ramrod, logistics because they just they didn't, there was very little traveling at night and they just couldn't get all the way out there because of how long it took you due to, now later on I was able to, I could do that in four hours, but at that time when I first got there there was, it took you all day just to get from CAV to FOB Ramrod due to the IED's on the road,

JC: Ok, so you built the battalion headquarters and,

EN: well we started,

JC: you started, ok you didn't finish it,

EN: We got the roof on the walls on, we started electrical inside,

JC: Wow, that's like a, electricity and everything?

EN: Yea we run electrical because we had to put air-conditioning in it

JC: I guess that makes sense,

EN: we had, including some, we had to redesign stuff along the way because we inherited these plans from the last unit and they were just, like the bottom springer on the trustiest was a 2X4, it should have been a 2X6, they had the wiring was all jacked up they were putting, they put all the air conditioners on one phase of the generator and that will cause the generator to bog, it's just very bad, So we had done some redesigning, I had been doing it with my warren officer and then what happened was we got at a, my first mission outside the wire at that time was as, I moved, we had drove up from Kandahar I'm sorry from Ramrod to Katihar City, to do our reconnaissance of where we needed to move the company, and so we had gotten a warning order, we were basically going to move the company from FOB Ramrod, leave the work we are gonna turn it over to the Seabee's and we were gonna go up to Kandahar and the company was gonna start building some small little outpost around the city and the purpose of that was to basically ring the city and cut, so that the terrorist, the Taliban and the drugs can't get in and out of the city and that was and so that was about one to two months in, so I did that mission and then I came back and we were prepping to move and the battalion came down and told me she was moving me from vertical construction the PL position, to be her PSD platoon leader

JC: Personnel Security Detachment,

EN: So, that was a complete change, it was unexpected, I was expecting to go be the HHC XO part way through the deployment but not that early, but you know, I don't know what went on we still don't, you know I heard rumors that the field grades that suggested somebody she didn't like, him or her and so she picked me and said I'm here PSD platoon leader and so,

JC: We are going to pick right up on that, alright so tell us a little about once you became the PSD platoon leader.

EN: Yea so I took over from a prior service guy, he had, he was actually a prior service E-8 medic, he was Mike Fortune was a really good guy he really trained the guys really well, to my benefit, and so I took over about the first week of June and our mission, I had nineteen guys, they had been pulled from different parts of battalion, so they were just construction engineers, I had two mechanics, one medic and one commo guy, and that formed the nineteen, and I had an E-6 food service platoon sergeant,

JC: Wow, so you got quite a mixture of different MOS's,

EN: Yep, and so at that time, when we first got there the previous battalion relied on contractors, when I say contractors I mean local nationals, to move all the lumber and stuff around the region, and that took very slow and took a long time so my battalion commander said that was not acceptable and so, you know we call it, we had a joke that said PSD stood for postal supply and delivery, because every time I went out I took lumber, I trucks of lumber I moved equipment always took the mail had a dedicated mail truck and obviously at the battalion commander for S-3 wanted to go out I took... and then on a few other occasions I moved the, we worked for the naval construction regiment was our higher headquarters so I would take their commodore, their O-6 and even on one occasion took an O-7, General Yenter around,

JC: Ok, so this is a whole new outfit, or is

EN: It's the same battalion, so it's within the battalion

JC: But I mean as far as like your platoon, did you bring any of your, so you're completely new mission

EN: The only thing I brought with me was my ...

JC: Ok, wow, so what was your moral lie at that point, given the fact that you had trained with a platoon that you were the platoon leader and all of a sudden now you are in a completely different role?

[00:29:10]

EN: Moral, I don't think, y old company commander, Captain ..., at that time he was worried I think cause my wife was the FRG leader of the company so he knew I was coming from a, I mean it was a high enough risk here, he knew I was going to a higher risk job, because like I said at that time highway one was essentially contested, you would get fuel trucks were targeted especially local national fuel trucks, and you always the burning hulks on the road, it took a long time, at that time everyone was pretty much like it wasn't a matter of if but when you were going to

strike an IED and who it's gonna be, which proved to be true but later on, and so it just was, for me it was just, battalion commander said that you need to be over here and I was like ok and that's what I did, you know I moved, moved living in a tent to living in a CHU, so my living quarters got better but,

JC: Can you explain what that term that was used?

EN: Well, the CHU stands for containerized housing unit, the best way to explain that is it's a twenty-foot tractor trailer box that we put A/C in and that's about it, no windows,

JC: So, it's better than a tent,

EN: But we were at KAF, which KAF, Kandahar Air Force Base, which is a historical hub for years, at Ramrod we didn't deal with any IDF or anything as long as you were inside the most was sprained ankles or something, we had guys doing stupid things like taking supplements when they first got there and it was like 120 degrees when we first got there coming from Fort Lewis and they were dehydrating and you know I had to do things like nix, I actually told my platoon sergeant, said the next time someone dehydrates cause of taking supplements, we will take away the Gatorade and everyone will be drinking water for seven days, but that cleaned itself up and we were dealing just with the social dynamics I was talking about in the platoon, you know I have forty something people and just some poor leadership and quality issues, you know walls leaning, that was my life, move over to the PSD now I got, you know just moving people from point A to point B, I was the integration of the logistical element so there was a logistical commander in my, who was another PL, I was in charge of security, so between the FOB's I was in charge, but once we got to the individual bases or fob's and we went inside the Distro PL took over and he would, he was in charge there and I would just sit there and wait until he was done, and then when he said he was done we would load up and we would move out, it was very repetitive, we did the same things over and over, but it was that time between the fob's or I might have went to, I did probably seventy and a hundred different missions and went to, I went everywhere from Leatherneck in the south, I went to COP Pain on the Hellman River, all the way up to, went down to Spin Buldack a lot, everyone wanted to go there a lot because it had iced coffee, ... went up highway one and east, it was northeast to, I'll think of it later, but almost into the eastern sector, and we did, I got to see bridgework, I got to see all the projects, went on a few reconnaissance missions, it was completely different, and I was probably, at that time then I became the senior PL,

JC: Can you give us some historical context of that region in 2010,

EN: yea so, some of this I learned later after meeting some people who had been there, but, in 2009ish they'd had the Kandahar province, the Hellman Province was one regional command and shortly after I got there they split it into two, where the marines got RC southwest and the Canadians at that time were running RC south. When I was there it converted over to the United States and tenth Mountain took it over. At that time it was a two star level command, we, our focus, the Americans focus was not down there we were focusing on the east, we owned the east the north was owned by the Germans or the Italians, and then I think the west was owned by the ... other nations owns those, we assisted but that wasn't our focus, 2010, 9 or 10, it came clear that the Canadians wanted to get out of the game they were stretched thin they'd had

units that were running the city, they, you know I worked with the Canadians... but they just they were, whether they had lost the stomach or whether they had just reached the ends of their resources I don't know but they wanted to get out, and so we had to bring in more forces, so that why they brought the Strikers in because they blew the Strikers were having more, they would be able to operate down there cause it's flatter more deserty more open and they were, the problem was the Strikers, the ones that were taken in there were flat bottomed and so as we were training up, the limited training we had had, we would read these reports of, when they would send them down to us, you'd have a Striker full of people, 10 12 people and everyone would die, they would hit a roadside bomb and everyone would die and so I think they were being effective the problem was, there was two problems at that time, that O-6 that was in charge of this Striker unit had a philosophical difference with his commander, as in regard to coin, and I'm not telling you, you can go google that, that's pretty known about the army, that that unit just, it struggled also for train up and so, but and so it's unclear whether or not they were really as effective as they could have been due to that conflict that was going on between the leadership and their probably not being ready, the joke it that they were so bad that they deflagged the unit when they got back. They did deflag them, now whether or not it was because of that is a different story, like I said I was out of that unit that had the kill platoon that was down at COP Terminator, so when we roll in there, this was the environment kind of a wild-wild west, they were struggling to patrol the regions they have because they were just spread thin, and so the replaced five-two, Fifth Brigade Second ID Striker Brigade with two units, the hundred and first, Second Brigade 101st out of Campbell, and then Second SCR out of Germany, and so they basically doubled the amount of infantry there, and that was when, so we were doing a lot of construction to prepare for the 101st and later for two SCR for the headquarters and fob's that they needed, and so the 101st had a completely different attitude than the Strikers, and the other thing to understand when you, is that 2nd Brigade of 101st was Petraeus old unit, when he was a brigade commander, and Petraeus in '04 underneath, when he was a division commander of 101st he was serving under general Rodriguez I think it was in Iraq, and he took over Mosul following the invasion and so he understood coin and he understood what needed to be done and he implemented it there and it worked, and so that, those lessons were very inculcated within the 101st, and so when they came in, they started coming in in June and in July, it was completely different atmosphere when they came in, and where the Strikers of 5th Brigade Five-Two was very content to just down the road , as long as you can get through it, even if it was messy that's fine, 101st didn't have that attitude, and of course they are completely different unit Strikers vs Light Infantry, and so that was kind of, that changeover of was happening while we were there, and we worked very closely with the 101st, and then later a little bit more with 2-SCR.

JC: Thanks good, so in regards to your personal PSD missions first of all what type of vehicles were you in?

EN: So I only owned five vehicles, I owned MAX-PRO's and MAT-V's so the MAX-PRO's are MRAPS and then I hand a few of the MAT-V's that were the lighter, the Oshkosh version, where they didn't have the seats in the back they had a little cargo spot in the back, The MATV, M-A-T-V stands for Max-pro All-terrain Vehicles, leave it to the army to put an acronym inside an acronym, so it could go more off road, and actually one of those was equipped with, eventually

with a CROW system, you know a guy sits in the back and so there wasn't a gunner on top, so I had five vehicles,

JC: You didn't have, did any of the vehicle have gunners in the turnips,

EN: they all had gunners and all of mine had gunners, I had five,

JC: and what kind of weapons did you have?

EN: I had, on my vehicle I had a mk19 with a 240,

JC: Were you the front, rear truck?

EN: I was typically the second

JC: Second, ok

EN: Inculcated but yea so, I had, some vehicles had 50cal.s and some of them had 240's, so I was,

JC: ok

EN: But I had two weapon systems on mine,

JC: 240 Bravos

[00:39:08]

EN: 240 B's, but like I said I had the 50cal., but then, that was my security element, and then I owned the battalion commanders driver was in my platoon and gunner, but then what would happen is when I would be given the logistical element hey this is what we are taking out and the logistical vehicles which belonged to the FFC, the District Commander, there could be anything there, I had a combination of 916's which are lowboys, tractor-trailer's, I would get HETTS, I could have LMTV's anything could be in there and so once I would get the logistical element I would then look at how much that is and then I would go get, like I needed the S-3 vehicle or if maybe he was going out anyways, I will place him in there and then if I still didn't have the gun trucks I'd go to my commander and say hey Sir would you want to go out? Or I'd go to the FSC Commander and say hey do you want to go out? Sometimes they'd go out any way's they were planning to go out anyways, to see their soldiers, cause their soldiers were spread out, but sometimes I would actually have to draft their vehicle to make sure I had the proper ratio of gun trucks to soft vehicles and that was generally no more than two soft vehicle between two gun trucks, now if it was just non trailer vehicles, and let's just say I had three LMTV's I would put, I could put three LMTV's between two gun trucks, because what I was looking at was total distance and so three vehicles, three soft vehicles that had no trailers was close enough so that I didn't have overlapping field of fire, I didn't have to worry about bubbles for the Dukes systems, the jammers because every vehicle at that time had one

JC: That's what you had, the Dukes?

EN: Yea we all had, every vehicle had a Dukes

JC: That was your electronic jamming systems, ok

EN: So I didn't have to worry about that, so I was mainly whether or not I can handle a lot....

JC: Yea, what type of IED were they using, were they using pressure plate, RCID,

EN: So we didn't see they had stopped using the pretty much stopped using RCIED because of the jammers just wasn't working, so they were going, while we were on highway one it was all command det., with very long command lines,

JC: So, somebody way off,

[00:41:36]

EN: And down there on highway one, the part that we were traveling, you did have some sections where the trees were right up on it, but a lot of it, you know once you get out ... was completely wide open, and so there might be a house a kilometer off but the road was elevated,

JC: Wow, that was a lot of wire,

EN: Yea it's, they would run it for comers's, later on when we started doing missions off of highway one, when the 101st started pushing south, out of ... and taking back that land and taking back Sangasar, then we saw a lot more pressure plates IED's because the ground was soft,

JC: So did you change up your TTP's, then?

EN: A little bit, there wasn't a whole that you could do down there,

JC: just slow it down,

EN: You go slow, you typically let route clearance go in front of you but route clearance was, it was, they were using so much or so little metal in those IED's that it was very difficult for them to pick them up with the penetrating radar, and the GPR's didn't work on asphalt anyways so, when we were on highway one so those really didn't work, they work better on dirt roads, but like I said they were using so little metal content it just, sometimes they'd pick it up and sometimes they didn't,

JC: Were you mainly, so highway one is a hardball?

EN: It's a hardball road that the United States built in the 70's, 60's and 70's it looks just like a, it looks like an American road cause American companies built it,

JC: Did you go off road very often with you BSD,

EN: Yea so, initially we stayed pretty much to highway one, and as the mission changed we started doing some missions, off-roading in order to get to COP Terminator you had to go off the road, and it pretty much became pretty standard that we would be going onto dirt road after a while,

JC: So any situations, so your moving around you're filling people and sometimes the S-3 sometimes you have what, maybe the S-2, it changes daily,

EN: Yea if I let the S-2 go out, he was an idiot but yea, nice guy,

JC: But your, it's always a different,

EN: Yea so I never had the same thing, one day I could have a five vehicle convoy with my Wrecker, and the next day have thirty, and when you're at thirty vehicles you are stretched out over six kilometers,

JC: ok,

EN: Yea I had to rely upon my platoon sergeant, and you know it was, you had to plan ahead because you know, you don't, if you have thirty vehicles and I've moved four HETTS and 916's and all kinds of vehicles, I mean, those were some big vehicles and if you get your main route, you know, with you know works, I mean we had one time where we had to take a diversion and the driver of the HETT, the TC of the HETT actually had to get out and from the HETT, they actually had to steer each individual axel of the trailer to get through the tight corner and of course, this was in an urban area so you have people standing around everywhere,

JC: Any particular patrols or convoys that stick out to you?

EN: Yea I mean I had a lot of them, I mean, I could probably remember most of them, I mean it seems odd, but and I kept pretty good records but I would say the first one would be, so that was, we were, I took over first week of June-ish, that left right seat ride with Mike, he went up to HHC of the company I came from and the first mission without the battalion commander, we went out and, this is June 14th, and we hit an IED that was thirteen hundred lbs. of HME, it was actually buried in a culvert, so yea that, and the funny thing was I actually, that was actually the third time over that spot that day, so we had driven over it twice other times before the guy decided to wake up,

JC: Ok, so what was the outcome of that?

EN: Everyone was alive, but hurt, so it just kind of, it hit, we were doing a convoy out to ... and then 10th Mountain went through, we were building a fob called ..., and so we had stopped at ... downloaded logistical did some logistics what not-whatever... whatever, ... moved up to ..., when I got to ... he came to me and said to me they forgot to download something at ..., and my first reaction was just leave it here and he couldn't cause the company we were at, the forklift was broken, I said fine we will just take it back, and he was like well we need the space, so I said well fine, you stay here download what you got to download upload what you got to upload I will take four gun trucks and this one 916 back to ... download it and I'll be back, should take thirty minutes, cause like I said it's not far, well went back got there, they decided to train a new fork lift operator, so it took an hour to download this thing, and so we were late, we needed to get Ramrod that night, that was where we were supposed to overnight, and so now it's 5 'o clock, 1700, and we got in the vehicles and we started hauling to get up there, so we got nothing holding us back, and we get to the 16-5 easting and the, my lead truck decides to disappear in a cloud of dirt, when it cleared he was resting on the far side, best that we can understand is that as he approached the culvert he hit his breaks and which probably saved their lives because, well one he was hitting the brakes and we were going really fast, and two it was a TTP we had been using where you would adjust your speed right before you would go over it because to mess up the timing,

[00:47:09]

JC: Mess up the timing,

EN: And so he probably rode the explosion over and slammed down, the driver, might have had a sprained wrist, the TC and the Gunner had to be medevac'd, we moved, at that time they were using the TTP where they would engage your convoy and possibly shoot at the medivac helicopter, so since we had time I requested a ground evac from the Strikers to go back to ... so we could land inside the fob,

JC: So you did a ground one,

EN: well ground to ..., and then we did a ... medivac from there to KAF,

JC: Ok,

EN: So, you had the TC, Armen, he had hit his head on the BFT screen,

JC: Blue Force Tracker,

EN: Yep, I actually saw him last year he actually goes up to Kittanning, pretty close, he had one of his eyes he had lost the cartilage under his eyes but he was cognizant, he was kind of aware, we was walking, ambulatory, the gunner was the most messed up he, you know just from the movement and everything, he was pretty, he was a litter, and they transported him back, it seems so, I don't have, I see him on Facebook, so he's moving around, he's doing everything, he stayed in and Harmond got out pretty quickly, Welborn ended up getting out, the guys that knew him before and after said that mentally he really wasn't the same, but he seems to be well adjusted and doing things, it really lucky that they survived, just a few weeks after that, the same exact vehicle was traveling and Kandahar, and a five a four-hundred lb. IED went off underneath the vehicle and killed everyone, so yea, we are pretty sure it didn't go,

JC: What month was this in,

EN: This was June of 2010, and so it kind of, it was supposed to be a two-day mission ended up being a three day by the time we gathered everything and

JC: Do you remember the date,

EN: June 14th, is when we took the blast,

JC: What area were you in,

EN: Kandahar province, we were between, it was the 16-5 easting,

JC: 16-5 ok

EN: yea just west of ..., it was a big culvert, that they had packed it full, had an air force EOD tech actually come out, they had an EOD team out there at ..., came out and did the investigation, it was right before 5-2 left, so, cause they had started to get kind of, I don't know,

JC: Complacent,

EN: So we took that blast then so that was one mission I will always remember,

JC: Did the medivac go ok,

EN: yea, we got him out of there in about 40-45 minutes,

JC: Didn't take fire,

EN: Nope, didn't take any fire, there was some difficulty recovering the vehicle, and taking it back, but we got that back, and then of course it was the next day I moved up to, I moved up to ..., and it was, by the time I had got up there it was some other things going on, but once I got up there it was too late to head back that night so we stayed at ... that night and then got the convoy together again and had to move them back,

JC: ok,

EN: And drive through where he had just hit the blast,

JC: ok,

EN: So that was kind of, for the guys, kind of emotional,

JC: Absolutely,

EN: but we got back they probably took us, we probably sat back at Cav for about a week before they let us go back out again,

JC: Oh my, so you mention some other memorable times,

EN: yea, there were a couple others, few others, I mean there was a time we went out that was later, I had to go out and we had the big scrapers with the big bowls big engine, I don't know if you ever seen them, but they had, their tires are probably,

JC: They're huge

EN: yea

JC: Probably like six feet tall,

EN: Taller than that,

JC: Yea,

EN: At the edge of their height they are probably fifteen foot tall

JC: Jeesh, I'm thinking of something else,

EN: The wheels are like six feet tall,

JC: Oh the wheels, yea that's what I meant,

EN: And then the 35 tons, which we have, our trailers are rated at 40 tons, but you typically stop at 35 if you're going for a longer haul,

JC: That's 70,000 lbs.,

EN: 80,000 is 40 tons, 35 tons is 70,000 lbs.,

JC: yea,

EN: and so we had to move them around, and so we went out there to do this, I had to put the battalion commander with me, my company commander, and we had a marine lieutenant colonel who was attached to the Seabee's to make sure they did their tactics right, and so we took him out, so we went to the ... and picked up one scraper, cause we were moving one, I was moving four of them around but from different places, and so, went out there and we couldn't, one of them was completely dead it didn't work and so we were trying to get it up on the trailer and it wasn't working very well, finally I just fine I'll come out and get it another day, so I went down to ... to pick up that scraper, and so at this point I had, I guess I had moved one, I had, I was moving stuff around, so we got there and while we were at ..., at this point the 101st, was there and they were itching for action, and one of their, they had taken some fire or something and they had dropped some ordines about 400 meters off the road, remember I said they ... past 200 meters, this was, they had not done any combat patrols south yet, they were training, all they have done at this point was training the afghan soldiers, and so Lt. Col. Benchoff the battalion commander there of 2502 instructed one of his PL's to lead combat patrols south to do a battle damage assessment of this bomb drop, he got, he got, and with partnered with the ANA (Afghan National Army), well he got ... off the road started taking fire, the Afghan's decided they couldn't do it and they started to leave, and the Lt. argued with him for a little while and then he said fine get them the hell out of here, cause he was taking fire and so he tried to push south ended up, they probably put out about a company plus worth of combat power into the south, and then they put the TAC out there, and while all of this was going on while we were at ... I don't know if that was when, there might have been when some bullets had come in over the top of the wall or not, I don't remember, there was a time, I don't know if it was that time or another time we were walking around ... and bullets came in over the top of the wire, striking at our feet, but anyways, so I went to request permission to SP, and I was denied from the battalion, from the TALC, I don't know it didn't bother me I didn't care, but my battalion commander was kind of perturbed, and ended up 7 or 8 o'clock at night I was like, I just told her, I said Ma'am we are not going anywhere tonight so let's just bed down and that was when we went to the marine that we had with us and I said, and I offered him a cot, and he was super ecstatic cause he had never been given a cot before, and so when we woke up the next morning and battalion commander, I was like, I told 'em, I had been in contact with the truck I had left and the had been able to load it up, and so I was like fine I'll go up there and get it come back and we'll move out, and my battalion commander was like, she really wanted to go with me, I was like no, and my company commander was, so he was just said no Ma'am you're gonna stay here, she was kind of like, a little niffed, but we just left her there and we went up got the other scraper which was barely on the vehicle, picked up everyone and then moved back, that was just a very kind of a logistical nightmare, which was a lot of my stuff, like we had one trip where we were carrying a Conex on one of the tractor trailers and one of the chains snapped, and it almost fell off, that was fun, we had on where we, so 101st was pushing south, and they were trying to insert an element across the ... River and they had started building this new road and for a lot of reasons it was a poor choice but they were, the insurgence, because we were building the road, the dirt was really loose, and they were putting a lot of IEDS in there and so, we pushed down behind our RCP, route clearance patrol, we did our investigation, surveying the ... River and while we were there Brit's were doing some work down there, so I guess this might

have been let's see we went down there twice, so on the first time down British SAPPERS were down there doing some work, and 101st was down there and one of those squad leaders, so you had these things, these grave pots, I don't know if you are familiar with them, their just big long structures with holes, where they would drive the ... in them, and the Taliban was putting IED's around them, and when they didn't clear it, one of the squad leaders stepped on something, and we were probably 50 meter away when he stepped on it, and so they medevac'd him out but it was very, I have very clear memories of him of them loading him up on to the stretcher, and both of his legs had been blown off, and they could not get the tourniquets on high enough so he died reroute to KAF. So that was kind of, kind of one of those days that kind of reminded you, you know, I didn't really have to tell, my guys knew you walked in the tire tracks and that was it, there was no going off road and doing investigative work, I mean you just walked in the tire tracks, I had a few people who had trouble with that concept, and like I said I don't know if it was that mission or another mission cause we went to the same area a couple times, as we went to go back the RCP had hit IED's on the way back and so it had taken out two of their vehicles and they basically needed us to rescue them, and so I got a dozer to come down from a COP just up the road that we were building two kilometers away and they were able to pull this RG-31 out we loaded it up, by this time it was completely dark and as we were driving back up the dirt road I got a call from the battle space center, from the 2502, told us to turn out our headlights, we had to go black out drive, and it, I had never done that before, my guys though, like I said cause it all goes back to Mike Fortune who trained them really well, they were trained, and so after they had got back off the initial shock they were like oh yea we can do this, so they put everything, we started going, the RCP was a reserve element was not well trained at it, and they stumbled and fell into ditches and everything else, and I asked why, I asked the commander why we were doing it and she basically said it's cause they are doing an airstrike, so while we were out there two clicks away they dropped 10 or 2000 lbs. bombs, ... I guess and about 15 500lbs. and just wiped out a village, that had become just so inundated with IED's that the green berets couldn't even get in there, so that was kind of a show that night, we took fire when we were at Locker Hill ... incoming fire so that was kind of interesting,

[00:59:32]

JC: Small arms or indirect fire

EN: Small arms, just small arms fire, I almost had a chinook land on me, one night, when I was sleeping, that was interesting, I had a, one of the first times we went down to Terminator, that was with the first time I met the 2 SCR commander, he was I called him the commander with perfect hair, he always had perfect hair when he took off his hat, I don't know how that happened, very full of himself, we had, when we went to ... we were down on his road on Langley we were going back and forth and we had, we came back and when I was back they said hey did you all hear about that IED where you were at, I said no, so what had happened, we had been driving up and down this road and one of the other platoon leaders was also going back doing construction and like I said tractor work all day long and one of the times later in the day they hit an IED, so this IED had been there the entire time but this is where they had switched a pressure plate and then they were putting the minimal amount of metal in there and so you could drive over those IED's multiple times a day and just the time when it has that electrical current pass connects, cause dirt gets in it, you never know, and so that's when, you know I tell

people I say we drove over IED's all the time they just didn't always go off, it was kind of like a drawl as to when it was going to go off on you, one of the, some of the guys from when I was a concrete attachment platoon leader they drove over a vehicle and the initiator went off but it didn't set off the main charge, and so they were standing there looking at a hole in the ground, looking at the HME in the ground, this, the top had blown off where the initiator was, so there's that probably my most, I don't know if you would call it a fun mission I had to out, I took my guys out to Leatherneck we linked up with another bridge company PL, he was a new PL, and I got some of his equipment and we left in two trucks and we drove from Leatherneck down to COP Pain, ... through the dessert, and we dealt with, that was, we hadn't taken any small arms fire that trip but it was, it took us 36 hours to get down there because he got entire convoy stuck and we had to get them un, it took the seven hours to get all their vehicles unstuck,

[1:01:52]

JC: ok

EN: They were just, it was crazy, and then on the way back I let him lead, cause he needed experience and he, his lead guy didn't understand the lay concepts in the Blue Force Tracker and so they had plotted this green line to follow and they kept trying to stay on the green line, it's an open dessert if you are 500 meters off the darn green line it's an arbitrary line, but they would, because of the delay they kept doing certain U's back and forth, actually crazy, and my platoon leader had his alternator broken I guess and so he, every time they would stop the wrecker would throw a bunch of charging cables out and he would charge his vehicle real quick, and then we'd drive a little bit more, so we would do that

JC: Sounds frustrating

EN: yea, it was it was interesting, I actually tore my meniscus on one of my missions,

JC: Did you?

[1:03:28]

EN: Yea, so in February, February 2nd I think , I don't know, we were coming back we had been doing some missions now in the ... that we were building a Route Hyena and as we were coming back the lead, my lead vehicle, so like I said I would ride, what we would do was go back, if you would ask me, is we would do a double gun trucks in the front and the first gun truck would be extra, they called it the rabbit but he would be out in front and what he would do was he would navigate, I would set the speed so he didn't have to distance he would do whatever he had to do and he would rush trucks out of the way to make an opening and that's kind of how we did it, and then I didn't have to worry about doing that, and I could manage the convoy more from my position, since I didn't have very many NCO's, I actually prefer as a convoy leader to be about 1/3rd of the way back, cause from there I can control 2/3rds of the convoy and our platoon leader control the other third, but because of the fact that I had multiple VIP's all the time, I didn't feel safe putting any of them up there and then also since, I didn't, that also gave me, since the TC in that vehicle was an E-4 I only had one NCO besides the Platoon Sergeant, it gave me greater control over the lead vehicle, anyways so we were coming back and we got in to the middle of, not the middle but on the outskirts of Kandahar and the brakes locked up, and so we

had to cage the breaks, before we cage the brakes or after we cage the brakes then we had to take the mine rollers off, so we took the mine rollers off, by this time it was dark, loaded them up on the wrecker then found out we had to take the mounting plate off which was a 400 lb. beast, so we had no jacks, we had to take that off load that up and then we got it all linked up, me and the Distro platoon leader where out there supervising and helping out stopping guys from getting up under that 400lb plate, which was what they wanted to do, we were just about done when I stepped towards my vehicle and I heard a pop in my knee, my right knee, so then I couldn't get in my vehicle, so Jeff had to help me get in my vehicle which he likes to remind me of that too, got back doctor looked at it they did an x-ray, they couldn't see anything, I did five more missions before the doc said hey, he asked and I said I can't get out of my vehicle, I said once I'm in my vehicle I'm in my vehicle, I can't get out, if I walk around on the ground, cause we were doing a rock-road mission, we had rocks out there and I was like, I said I can't get out and so he recommended to the battalion commander that they send me back, by that point we were three weeks from going back anyways, so I went to Germany they processed me sent me back to Lewis where they, end of March they went in removed, they did an MRI confirmed it was a hook-buckle tear, went in removed part of my meniscus, so all healed up,

JC: Ok, you mentioned your wife, was she in the same unit?

EN: No, she wasn't in the unit,

JC: Oh I thought you said she was,

EN: She was the FRG leader for the company,

JC: Ok

EN: yea the Family Readiness Leader

JC: Oh family readiness, ok so what was it like, did you have kids at the time?

EN: We had one,

JC: one ok

EN: When I deployed, my older was about 9 months

JC: I was wondering, when you said FRG I wasn't familiar with that, so family readiness group leader, so she was talking with everybody else, spouses, family, ok,

EN: She was the point of contact that the other spouse could come to if they needed information,

JC: Ok, she wasn't in the military ever, ok, how did she deal with your deployment, she probably had more information than most of the,

EN: Yes and no, I mean there were some difficulties along the way especially after the commanders changed, the new commander did things differently I mean I think she did as well as any first time deployment spouse could do I mean it wasn't like, and be an FRG leader, you know it's not typically, you don't want the first time, when your husband deploys to be the FRG leader that time, but she, I think she did really well, and dealt with it really well,

JC: So you are obviously still in you've just recently got back from a deployment, are you allowed to say where you were at?

EN: yea, I was in Qatar, at Doha, or not there but at IUD Air force Base, which was outside of Doha, that was a number of Joint Special Operations Air Component Central, which is an enduring headquarters underneath SoCom,

JC: And are you allowed to say what you do?

EN: So I was the taskforce engineer,

JC: Task Force Engineer, ok,

EN: Taskforce Engineer or Staff Engineer, I was responsible for the facilities there at Qatar as well as the facilities of our subordinate units out in theater,

JC: You have been back how long?

EN: I got back at the end of March,

JC: Ok, so relatively, ok, I did want to ask you, obviously you are still in, but I want to talk about your readjustment coming back from Afghanistan and still today how has that process been for you?

EN: I think the hardest, so yea readjustment, I meant thinking back to when I came back as a lieutenant when I deployed I would say, so my wife and I were going through some marital issues at that time anyways, and so coming back was difficult one of the things they were doing at that time was they, soldiers were going out and doing unsafe things to get that adrenaline rush, running their motorcycles, you know a 1000 miles per hour and things like that, so what the army was doing was paying to get you that adrenaline rush in a safe way, so bungee jumping

JC: oh wow,

EN: We decided to go whitewater rafting

JC: doesn't sound very safe,

EN: It's controllable

JC: I'm... Safer

EN: Yea, I, or paintballing or something like that, anything to get that, anything to get that adrenalin rush and within a team environment, so we did whitewater rafting on the Salmon River down in Washington State, very fun, but the morning that I was supposed to go my wife and I had had a pretty significant fight and I remember showing up at work and telling my boss at that time that I don't think I, I think I should go home, I don't think I should go on this, I think I should, and I remember him just telling me no you need to go, your wife will be fine, you don't, you need to rush home to take care of her, he was right as he normally is and like I said I worked for him then for a year and then I worked for him again when I was a company commander and he was a battalion commander, and I think what it does is it goes to show that really it's not, she was going through her own things as well, trying to reintegrate, I think a bit, our ability because it was pretty rough I think looking back on it, I mean I was, obviously I was I had this surgery I had

to repair my knee, and I think that probably helped us a little bit because we kind of got to have that three or four weeks before the rest of the unit came back and I was off a bunch but having other officers, senior officers that kind of understood the scenario and kind of be there, but then also we had a very strong group of friends in Washington that, at our church, that were not in the military, I think, and she has some very close friends there, I think was good, the things that probably the lasting changes that the deployment was it increased, I don't know how I want to say it, but when it came to training and training for the skills that the soldiers would need, I had very little patience for NCO's that didn't do it right, I think would be probably accurate, my patience for stupidity and incompetency was went way down and even worse on my peers on my officers, officers that were lazy, selfish and otherwise incompetent, I just, I had no patience at all even less patience for them, so is probably the most lasting changes and those probably have stayed with me through my time,

JC: So what are you doing now, are you still, you're still active duty,

EN: So I am stationed here in Pittsburgh at the United States Army Corps of Engineers downtown,

JC: Ok,

EN: They have, there's about, they have a commander and deputy commander at ... that are active duty colonel and major and then they have, there's four of us captains there now and one lieutenant and another major and we just work in the organization alongside the 600 civilians, accomplishing that Pittsburgh District has of managing the waterways here in Pittsburgh,

JC: ok, and have you continued any education?

EN: Yes, so, I completed my master's degree, Missouri Science and Technology should be awarding me my degree next month, all my works done, I just had to wait till this semester to award my Master's in Environmental Engineering,

JC: Congratulations,

EN: Thank you

JC: As far as how you have been treated do you feel you have been treated well by your country in terms of your service?

EN: yea, I wouldn't say I have been miss treated in any way, the Pittsburgh area is particular welcoming, and of course it has a very high veteran population, I would say about, If I go out in uniform whether it be with the other guys or with my family it's about a 50/50 shot of someone's going to buy my meal, depending on where I'm at, I mean eat-n-park is pretty high possibility, downtown the Primanti Brothers Restaurant on the Strip has never let us eat, has never let us pay when we go in uniform, we have been there a couple of time, the owner, I don't know who it is, the other week I was up in Berlin, Ohio someone picked up my tab there, it just kind of, it varies, but it, you know, it's, that's probably typical are like, I get a lot of, it's very different living in a, here in Pittsburgh where you don't have a military base as opposed to around a military base, military base I mean nobody's picked up my meal around a military base someone would go broke doing that, but so that's kind of nice, on the flipside living here without having a military base is harder on my wife, cause she doesn't have that comrade of

other wives that understand she gets a lot of wives, civilian wives, they, I don't want to say they pity her but they're, they think she's a super woman some days, and somewhere between pity and superwoman and she just doesn't have patients for that, she says look this is the decision we made for our family and this is what we do and that's just the way that it is,

JC: well thanks so much for agreeing to the interview and do you have anything else that you want to add or that we didn't talk about?

EN: My last deployment I don't know, that one just for context, it was a staff position, but I did get out into, I went up to Incirlik.

JC: And Turkey?

EN: I went up to Erbil.... Trip to Erbil, Kuwait, you know it's different cause I worked with the air force, I actually worked with the air force 80% of the time, so I learned a lot about them and what not, and I would say here in Pennsylvania there's a lot, quite a few veterans here in Pennsylvania that I run across ... different time, and so I don't know if you will get the opportunity to expand oral history outside of Afghanistan but I would say,

JC: No we actually are, I mean if, we call it the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Project but it's really the global war on terror, so if there is anything else you wanted to talk about we could but if you didn't we could save that for another interview,

EN: No that pretty much sums up Afghanistan, driving around and getting blown up, is

JC: Not fun,

EN: There were days, you kind of got a morbid sense of humor after a while, but the guys were really, so one of the things I didn't touch on was following the IED blast they replaced my platoon sergeant with a combat engineer platoon sergeant and he was, that probably was one of the best decisions made by the senior NCO's that I ever seen, they were able to, they assessed that the current platoon sergeant was not going to be able to, it affected him, seeing his guys get hit, in a way that it shouldn't have, and so they gave me a 12B that had been involved in the invasion and was very experienced he knew his job inside and out, and he brought a discipline, not that the guys weren't disciplined, but he just kind of tightened the reins a little more to make sure, made my job a lot easier,

JC: absolutely

EN: Probably, I mean he's one of the best NCO's that I have ever worked with, and I have worked with some really good ones and he's right up there, ... but he was definitely, he allowed me to focus on my job and he hated it when I left cause then he had to do my job and he didn't like dealing with the battalion commander, but while I was gone on leave the unit got ambushed and so they had, it was at night up on route, it was north of the city, but actually, the ambush was so close that one fuel lines were cut on some of the vehicles from the bullets and an RPG got stuck in the battalion commanders door, the round impacted the door and it was so close, either A it was a dud, but I think it was actually too close to the proximity to not allow to det. To arm and so it got wedged underneath the door, they didn't even know it was there until they stopped miles down the road, so she probably should have played the lottery that night, should

have been dead, but that battalion, the battalion I was in we did not lose anyone, no one died, did have one guy that almost died to the quick thinking of that, of a warrant officer and he was able to, that soldier survived, so but it was partly luck partly skill that that, probable a lot of luck because I, we were operating in southern in Kandahar during the Quid Pro Surge of that time when it was really rough when we got there, so

JC: Well thanks so much for your time and thank you for your continued service and we'll end the interview now,

[01:19:09]

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