

## Cantigny First Division Oral Histories II

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### Interview with Sergeant Major James Champagne

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**GOODWIN:** Hello, my name is Gerald F. Goodwin. The date is August 8<sup>th</sup> [2009], and I'm here in Dearborn, Michigan interviewing Jim Champagne for the First Division Oral History Project. For the record could you please spell your name?

**CHAMPAGNE:** (Laughs) You want my last name or my full name?

**GOODWIN:** Uh, you can give us your full name and then spell your last name.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ok. It's James uh, B. for Bruno. Uh, spell my last name... its c-h-a-m-p-a-g-n-e.

**GOODWIN:** Good. What unit or units of the Big Red One have you served with?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I was uh, the Command Sergeant Major for the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team and I'm currently serving as the Division Command Sergeant Major for Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

**GOODWIN:** When did you serve or when did you begin serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, it was November of 2005 is when I reported to Fort Riley and assumed the responsibility as the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Command Sergeant Major.

**GOODWIN:** Just too back up a little bit why don't you tell us a little bit about your life before entering the military? Where you were born?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I grew up uh, in Chicopee, Massachusetts uh, although I was born in Holyoke, which is the town right next to it. Um, both my parents were immigrants from Canada. Um, had the normal childhood where uh, sports was a big uh, part of our life. Uh, went to high school. Uh, my parents were blue collar workers and uh, at the age of 17 when I graduated high school, I entered the Army. Two weeks after I graduated I came into the Army.

**GOODWIN:** You mention that your parents had moved from Canada, why did they move?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Better job opportunities uh, you know my dad and my mom met, he was uh, he got in a uh, car wreck when he was serving with the uh Canadian Air Force. Uh was medically evacuated from Germany uh, to Montreal uh, because that's where the VA Center was uh, at the

time. Uh he met my mother and they got married and it was just better job opportunities down in the Massachusetts area, so they moved down there.

**GOODWIN:** How did they react to you joining the military?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, well you know my dad being a Vet uh with the Canadian Air Force you know, they were excited. Um, there wasn't very many job opportunities uh, they couldn't afford to send me to college um, and so they were excited that I was just going to go ahead and serve my country. I had something to do when I graduated.

**GOODWIN:** Was he at all disappointed that you didn't join the Air Force for example?

**CHAMPAGNE:** No, no he uh, you know actually my older sister went into the Air Force. Uh, she spent uh a term in the Air Force but uh, they were fine with me joining the Army.

**GOODWIN:** What were some of your motivations, you mentioned some of them uh, in joining the military?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I had a great recruiter. There was a great recruiter that uh, came to school. He had served with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division um, and he turned me on to wanting to be a Paratrooper. Uh, so that's what I did, I signed up uh, my contract was with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

**GOODWIN:** How did your friends or peers react to you joining the military?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, Chicopee, Massachusetts is a town that's right outside of Westover Air Force Base, so the majority of the families and retirees uh, come out of Westover Air Force Base. So there was a strong military connection there already, I grew up with a lot of kids uh, whose families uh, you know were all part of the military. So it almost seemed natural, that's one of the things mostly kids you know did, they went into the military.

**GOODWIN:** What level of education did you obtain; did you say you graduated from high school?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I graduated high school. Um, I have undergraduate work in General Studies uh, and I also have a Masters in uh Business with a concentration in Human Resource.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Where did you attend school for those degrees?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, Excelsior College was the, my undergraduate work and Columbia Southern University was for my graduate program.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. So you enter the military, where did you complete Basic Training?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Went to Basic Training in uh, June of 1982 at Fort Benning, Georgia. Um, immediately after graduating Basic Training and Advance Individual uh, Infantry Training I attended the uh Basic Air Born Course and my first assignment was with uh, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 504<sup>th</sup> uh, Parachute Infantry Regiment at Fort Bragg.

**GOODWIN:** Just to back up a little bit um... what sort of experiences did you have in Basic Training?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I tell you it was pretty incredible you know, being 17 years old uh and you know first time being really away from home um, and uh, everyone would say that uh, your Drill Sergeants were you know, Satan himself. You know, you never forget the names of your Drill Sergeants. Uh, I had Sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class Persinger and uh, Staff Sergeant Giles was the other Drill Sergeant. And uh, you know the early 80s still uh, the stigma of you know Drill Sergeants that uh, you know were in your face type of Drill Sergeants. So uh, it was a great maturing process for me to uh, you know to go through Basic Training and I think it set me and prepared me to go on to the unit afterwards.

**GOODWIN:** Were you surprised by any of the training you endured?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um, ya 'cause I was never been exposed to any of it you know, besides you know I grew up I did a little hunting when I grew up, so I was familiar with ruffles uh, to a certain extent. Um, but you know to throw a grenades, to road march, to wear at rucksack, to wake up every morning at 3:30 uh, you know that was probably the hardest thing in Basic Training was uh, just to get use to waking up so early in the morning. And uh, then working a full day uh, and then getting a hour to yourself at night and then you know it started all over again. So um, there was uh, some great experiences I mean uh, I think there's still six uh, guys that I went to Basic Training and they're still in the Army right now, so.

**GOODWIN:** You meant you mention growing up in Massachusetts and then moving to Georgia, was there any sort of culture shock that occurred?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Absolutely, um, you know uh, the people from uh, New England have their certain aura that they have uh, probably a little more rough around the edges, you know a little more arrogant. Um, and then you go down to somewhere in Georgia and people are more laid back. Absolutely laid back, more friendly uh, more outgoing to ya uh, and you know just to uh give you a helping hand.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. What were some of the greatest challenges you experienced in Basic Training?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um...well, it wasn't the physical part because I played sports the whole time I was in high school and growing up, so I think uh, it was really more the uh, the psychological uh, thing. I had never you know, you first get an experience of that type of pressure uh, where you have someone yelling at ya and there's expectations. Uh, so I think uh, you know that's when I say it helped me maturate it absolutely did um, because mentally it did you know you grew up, had to grow up fast or you know you got pushed off to the side.

**GOODWIN:** Just to clarify, after um, Fort Benning where did you go after that?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Went to uh, I attended the Basic Air Born Course, right there at Fort Benning.

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** It's a three weeks course uh, you know and uh, back in 1982 uh, you still ran in boots uh, when you did the uh, physical fitness test and you know your uniform um, and it was uh, it was a great school uh, to set the tone for my whole career as uh, you know Airborne Paratrooper guys you know are always uh, we have inflated egos and at 17 to be exposed to that, you know you being part of one of the uh, you know the elite uh, forces in the United States Army uh, you know just helps ya.

**GOODWIN:** Was there a lot of camaraderie?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Absolutely and that's what it really does to ya. It brings you in to this uh, elite Airborne community that uh, you know you're singing and everything all Airborne. Uh, you know you're wearing the high end tie, you're proud to wear your beret, you know you're wearing your silver jump wings on your chest and you know you're walking chest out uh, you're very proud of what you...what you accomplished.

**GOODWIN:** Now after that was done, what happened next? Where did you go?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I went up to; I was assigned to Fort Bragg um, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, Charlie Company. Um, spent uh, approximately 14 months that was my first assignment there uh, and again being exposed to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at such an early age um, was interesting because I was 17 years old when I reported and now I'm getting exposed to men. So there's 24, 26, 30 year old men and uh, you know when you're coming right out of high school you're use to hanging out with your friends, 17 years old, 16 year old friends that you know maybe somebody was 18 but uh, when you start dealing with you know 26, 27 year old men who are mature um, there was a learning experience there. So I mean there was no you know grab ass, you know you didn't uh, do those things you did with your friends back home because you know you're likely to get swatted by a 27 year old uh, you know if you weren't in line, so uh, it was interesting.

**GOODWIN:** (Laughs) You mention friends, what did your friends think about you joining the military?

**CHAMPAGNE:** It was uh, they were very supportive um, I had two friends that actually went into the military uh, with me. Uh, they weren't stationed at uh, one became a Pilot and uh, the other was a uh, Administrative Assistant who was uh, then assigned to Germany. Uh, but um, to come home uh, for the first football game that fall you know in your dress green, you got your

beret, you have your jump boots on you know and everyone seems to kind of gravitate towards you and say what's all this about? You know this is, you know you've got a beret on, you got these big shiny boots, you know got all these ribbons and uh, badges on your chest, so it was kind of, you become a center of attention for a short period of time. So it was pretty neat.

**GOODWIN:** During your first assignment what type of responsibilities did you have?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well uh, there was three uh, soldiers, Paratroopers that uh, that reported in with me. I was the tallest of all the three, so uh, when I reported in they said uh, hey Champagne your gonna be the uh, Radio-Telephone Operator that way we have better reception with the antennas. So I uh, my first job in the Army I was uh, the Platoon Radio-Telephone Operator.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Now you know it's fairly interesting because you were in the military while the Cold War was still going on. Can you kind of describe the environment?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya, we're still uh, there's still a lot of residual in the early 80s uh, from Vietnam and the culture in the Army. Uh, they I think about 1982 we just about shaken off that hangover from you know the Vietnam, Vietnam type era but there were time um, that you know you still had drugs was prevalent. Uh, the um, reputation of the 82<sup>nd</sup> their nickname was the jumping junkies uh, because there's still a lot uh, you know still a lot of drugs during that time. I was fortunate enough that um, my first Team Leader and Squad Leader uh, you know who I still keep in touch with uh, Art Vehill and Michael Stack was killed as a CSM when he uh, a couple of years ago in Iraq. But um, they took me under their wing, 17 year old kid and they said you know you're going to walk a straight line. You're not gonna get in with the bad people and they you know they helped me and pointed me in the right direction, stay away from this guy, these are you know the folks you need to emulate, and so I was fortunate enough.

**GOODWIN:** Did you witness a lot of drug use?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, absolutely. Ya, there was quite a bit of uh, drug use in the early 80s. Um (pause) in a way there was a technique, definitely can't do it nowadays but uh, what they did was uh, if you were identified or caught with drugs uh, they would take the door off the your room, so there was no way that you know you could hide uh, and smoke you know dope or do whatever drugs you wanted to do. So you always know who the dopers were uh, in the unit because they didn't have any doors on their rooms.

**GOODWIN:** Was it mostly marijuana or harder drugs?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, I mean uh, in when I was in 82<sup>nd</sup> it was mostly marijuana is what I saw. Uh, and then later on uh, the year after when I got assigned to Germany uh, I saw a lot of LSD and um, hashish; which was more common uh, in you know for soldiers to get in Germany.

**GOODWIN:** So you mention, so your assignment ends and then you're stationed in Germany?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, uh, well um, no. I was at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and uh, I spent uh 14 months there and then I got at that point on what they call Levy, which is permanent change

in station uh, and I had an assignment to Germany. So my next assignment about 14 months after Fort Bragg was to Germany.

**GOODWIN:** What did that assignment entail?

**CHAMPAGNE:** That was an interesting one. Uh, you know being an Airborne Infantry guy, first of all was mad at the Army uh, for taking me out of Fort Bragg and being a Paratrooper uh, and sending me to Germany. And when I reported to Germany they said uh, you're going to the 56<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade. And I said, Field Artillery? I says, I'm an Infantry guy. I'm an Airborne Infantry guy. They say, well there's an Infantry Battalion uh, in the Stuttgart, Germany that provides security for the Persian uh, 2 Missiles. So, I reported in 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry uh, and are basic job was to provide security on the missile site, the nuke missile site, uh for the maintainers and uh, the actual you know people that uh, shot the uh, Persian 2 Missiles.

**GOODWIN:** How long were you in Germany for?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I was there for two and a half years. Uh, so it was interesting because our whole life uh, revolved around time on the missile site. You know we do 30 day uh, shifts out there, come back do training and then go for two weeks then we go right back out on the missile site. And uh, that seemed to have a uh, huge effect on uh, a lot of soldiers uh, you know their psyche. That's where I saw the drug prevalence. When I first reported into Alpha Company 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> they had about 35 guys who were getting thrown out of the Army uh, for drug use. They had a whole Platoon's worth of guys uh, so you know you come in there and see all these and they were uh, blatant about the drug use 'cause they knew they were getting thrown out of the Army. Um, so uh, it was interesting uh, you know it was two hours on guard duty in the towers uh, and four off. So and you do that for a cycle of 30 days, you know it really wears on you.

**GOODWIN:** So what would you do on your time off?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Read, you know play board games. Uh, played a lot of Spades; that's where I learned to play Spades. Uh...um, we were in uh, a room the uh, we had a Platoon of about 45 soldiers uh, it was probably about um, three times the size of the room were doing this interview in here. You know we'd stack the bunks four high and we're uh, right on top of each other; you know and all you cared about was you went out on guard duty, came off guard duty, you ate uh, you might have played a couple hands of card and then you went to bed because you know you were just tired, two on and four off for three days.

**GOODWIN:** You mentioned you know some of the problems, drug use um, was there a lot of tension between the troops? Did the boredom and kind of tough schedule cause any problems?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um no, I mean uh, you know we stayed pretty close. Um, you know even though uh, you know when you're on site you didn't uh, you didn't really have the drug use. It was all when you got back off the uh, the site back in Garrison and in the barracks is where you saw at it, so um, we were pretty close. You know there's always cliques uh, no matter where you go. You have them in college; you have them in the Army also. So you know certain cliques just seem to stay with each other and those are the folks that you bonded with.

**GOODWIN:** Um, now what was it like living in Germany?

**CHAMPAGNE:** 18 years old, single, Germany uh, beer you know there was no drinking age so I mean uh, it was a lot of fun. Um, they uh, you know your life revolved about how you partied uh, at 18 years old in a country that allowed you to drink as much as you want and you know you're single so you're you know meeting young Germany ladies, you're meeting French-German ladies, you're meeting Austrians so uh, it was a lot of fun.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Did you have a lot of interaction then with the Germans?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, absolutely I mean uh, you know as soon as you got off uh, duty you where downtown. We would spend, we would get paid and then because the market rate was so uh, good at that time uh, we would get paid and spend uh, go to the bank and get nothing but German marks. You know we didn't even have American dollars, you know we spent all our money on the German economy.

**GOODWIN:** Hmm, and so you stayed there for two and a half years...

**CHAMPAGNE:** Two and a half years.

**GOODWIN:** Ok, how did that come to an end?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I re-enlisted to go back to Fort Bragg in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Air Born Division...

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ...you know I felt cheated. I only got to spend it, my first year uh, with the 82<sup>nd</sup> so I went back uh, to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Air Born Division and um, I uh reported into 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 508<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry uh, which was then reflagged to uh, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry uh, Regiment and I was a young Sergeant. Um, and I had the opportunity to immediately uh, go into a leadership position. Uh, spent a little time as a Team Leader, and then I became a Squad Leader soon afterwards.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. What were some of the specialties you were trained in?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, I mean I was still young in my career so Airborne, my I was certified as a Paratrooper. Um, had the opportunity um, at the time my Company Commander was a guy named John Campbell, Captain John Campbell uh, who is now uh, Major General John Campbell the Commander of the 101<sup>st</sup>. When I reported in uh, he said uh Sergeant Champagne you have the uh, opportunity to go the Ranger School and I was excited. You know I had this opportunity to go to Ranger School, so I volunteered to go to Ranger School and uh, that's how this kind of snowballed after that you know. Now I went to Ranger School and came back as one of the first Sergeants within the whole Battalion uh, enlisted to be Ranger qualified. Um, I went to, I got promoted to Staff Sergeant right afterwards um, and then I got moved into a Platoon Sergeant, I became the Scout Platoon Sergeant for 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 505<sup>th</sup> uh, you know a short time

afterwards and then so now I went to Sniper School. You know, then I went to uh, Jump Master School, then I went to Pathfinder School, so uh, it just opened up a lot of doors and I started uh, you know having the ability to go to all these uh, these schools.

**GOODWIN:** So once you Sergeant and you were in a leadership position um, what types of things did you take from people who had lead you before?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya, I told you um, that Art Vehill and Mike Stack had a huge impact on me. Um, and as a young 17 year old you're watching these guys, so I emulated them. I emulated their leadership style uh, until I kind of figured it out. I tell a lot of folks that um, you just don't...you know, leadership is natural to a certain point but uh, how you become a uh, a very good leader is that you take a little bit of this guy, you take a little bit of this guy and you make it your own. And then you add your personality to it you know and uh, so they had a huge impact so I developed my leadership style initially from Art Vehill and Michael Stack.

**GOODWIN:** What sort of challenges did you face?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um, building a team, you know at that time I was 21 years old. Um, and I was a Weapons Squad Leader, which meant I had two machine guns with the two three man cruiser. I had six soldiers under me and uh, you know uh, coming in and uh, you know leading them in such a manner so that they'll follow what you want them to do; and you know being uh, a tight team. That was challengeable at that young age that was tough.

**GOODWIN:** So you leave Germany and go to Fort Bragg...?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Back to Fort Bragg.

**GOODWIN:** Ok and so what happened then?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, uh I mean I had the opportunity uh, to you know go to Ranger School like I told you.

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** That's what I was just telling about before I came the, I had the opportunity to be a Weapons Squad Leader and then later on a Platoon Sergeant there. And I spent four years uh, during that time frame. We um, that was a time where at the um, the back end of uh, my tour at Fort Bragg, Panama came along and uh, you know even though um, I didn't participate in uh, Panama uh, you know the majority of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division was there.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Um, then after, after that?

**CHAMPAGNE:** After that I had the opportunity since I was Ranger qualified, I had the opportunity to go be a Ranger Instructor and I was selected to go up the uh, Mountain Ranger

Camp uh, in Dahlonega, Georgia; which focused on mountain operations. So we taught mountaineering and uh, basic patrolling, ambushes, and raids uh, to students in a mountainous environment. Uh, which was incredible 'cause it was just a small community. It was only 300 active duty uh, soldiers on this little camp called Camp Merrill in Dahlonega, Georgia and you know every uh, two or three weeks you had a new set of students coming in and uh, you know it was just uh, it was an incredible experience.

**GOODWIN:** Good...and after you finished there?

**CHAMPAGNE:** After I spent three years as a Ranger Instructor in Dahlonega um, I uh, volunteered to go to Italy um, and they have an Airborne Battalion in Italy. And I went back to Europe, to Italy and I served I was at, by that time I was a Sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class and I served as a uh, Rifle Platoon Sergeant in Alpha Company uh, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion uh, 325.

**GOODWIN:** What were some of your experiences in Italy?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, I mean uh, I already was kind of familiar with Europe already but uh, you know the Italian experience is was like nothing I ever uh, experienced. Um, they have probably uh...the, you know the best wine. That's where I got really introduced drinking wine uh, and enjoying good wine. Uh, we had the opportunity when I was in Alpha Company to deploy to uh, Uganda. And we actually staged uh, at Entebbe that's when they had the crisis of uh, Goma, you know Zaire in Rwanda where they're having the uh, ethnic cleansing down there in Rwanda. Uh, so we staged out of Entebbe, Uganda uh, and we were the reaction force, to pull the forces out of uh, Entebbe, Goma -Zaire, and Kigali, Rwanda. So if there was anything, any crisis uh, for the forces that, you know the relief forces down there; we were the reaction forces to help pull them out.

**GOODWIN:** Hmm. Well, you've obviously travelled around a lot. What was it like being in Africa?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, uh I mean it was incredible. That was probably any experience of a lifetime in Africa. We actually, we flew into Entebbe and uh, what a lot of people don't understand is that Entebbe Airport uh, is still the same way uh, the day that the Israeli uh, raided it in um, and rescued those hostages. I mean they still have the MiG airplanes uh, blown in place. Uh, the actual terminal is still there. It's still not, it's not functional anymore 'cause the Ugandans built uh, another terminal uh, on the other side. But uh, you know we were living on a piece of uh, of world history ...

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ... you know and uh, it was kind of neat to talk to some of the older Ugandans uh, that were there to tell us uh, you know what Idi Amin was like and uh, living under that uh, you know regime.

**GOODWIN:** What did they say about him?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, uh, he was a psychopath as we all know. Um uh, they were uh, this is at a time where Uganda was you know the economy of Uganda was getting better and uh, they were enjoying some tourism you know so uh, they said uh, every you know everybody was living in fear. Just you know kind of under, like the same uh, regime under uh, Saddam Hussein.

**GOODWIN:** Did you find in all these places Germany, Italy, Uganda; that you were welcomed?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um, ya you know, Ugandans you know it's kind of funny uh, we were just a Company uh, stationed in uh, in Entebbe and uh, obviously wherever you go you pick up local nationals.

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** And uh, we had this local uh Ugandan man and you know he was our driver. So he was driving us around uh, to certain areas that we had to go and um, so being grateful Americans you know, we were giving him MRE's and you know we're giving him you know toilet paper and all the kind of stuff and uh, what he was doing was taking that back to his village and all of a sudden his status in his village uh, rose. So we kind of made a uh, you know I won't say a king but he was a very well respected man in his village because of his interactions with the Americans. Um, but uh ya, we were well received by the Ugandans. Um, you know Rwanda was still under the um, the charge of the, that young um...you know terrorist is what I'll call him, that was you know doing all the ethnic cleansing so, we only we were only in the Kigali Airport. There was uh, no operations outside of the Kigali Airport because the Rwandan Army you know had secured that and uh, they weren't giving us access into, into the country side.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. So you just were stationed at the airport?

**CHAMPAGNE:** At Entebbe but we would fly, we'd do...

**GOODWIN:** Ok, oh.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ..we'd fly into Kigali, Rwanda uh; you know do some uh, um, rehearsals...

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ...and then we'd fly back to Entebbe we'd go through Goma-Zaire and uh, same thing.

**GOODWIN:** What kind of information did you have about the situation in Rwanda at that time?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, you know to much. Basically we're uh, in a defensive mode in Rwanda you know. We had our Charlie Company was in Kigali, so they had set up at the airport there. Uh, a lot more tensions in Rwanda uh, so uh, we basically you know put the plan together that if something happened to Charlie Company that we would get on a C1-30 uh, take the 30 minute

flight to uh, Kigali uh, pull Charlie Company out and uh, then bring them back to Uganda. Now Goma we had um, trying to remember what Company was in uh, Goma, I think it was uh, Bravo Company was in Goma -Zaire and they uh, you know they were working all the relief operations so, they had more interaction and it was uh, you know a U.N. operation also. Uh, but Goma - Zaire on a volcanic plain...

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ...so uh, it was probably one of the most dustiest and dirtiest uh, places that I had the opportunity to experience. Um, but um, we did get to see a lot of the uh, refugees that were coming out of Rwanda, that was the hub for uh, you know was the Hutu's and uh, Tutsis I think is uh, what were the two uh, two factions that were fighting, so.

**GOODWIN:** So how long were you in that area?

**CHAMPAGNE:** That was only 35, that was 35 days. We spent 35 days out there and that's uh, you know once we, it was stabilized enough that uh, the organizations you know the uh, organizations the aide organizations uh, had a good control of it and then we left.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. What did you do after?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Um, after that um, we um, you know that's when the Balkans was getting uh, pretty hot so we were doing a lot of mission rehearsals. Uh, again to go in and uh, help relieve or uh, bring uh, you know some of the NATO Forces that were down there. I think the Dutch and the Danish uh, were down in that area and one of our missions was to uh, you know have to go in and help extract them and the equipment and get them out of there if it got worse. Um, after um, that I met my wife in Italy; she's also..she's in the Army and uh, we uh, decided what wanted to try something different. So we uh, asked for an assignments to uh, Fort Campbell, Kentucky in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. What sort of difficulties did you guys face as being two people married in the Army?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, we were very fortunate they have something called the Married Army, Married Army uh, Couples Program, which uh, they try very hard to align uh, put you in joint domiciles. So that you know if you move as a couple or family, they'll try to get jobs that align together so that uh, you can do that. Doesn't always work out that way, in the uh, we been married 14 years now and uh, of the 14 years there was only one time where uh, we were separated for a period of about ten months that we weren't together. Um, but we were very fortunate because her job skill was Counter Intelligence and mine was uh, Infantry, so it wasn't too hard to uh, marry up the assignments because there was always a need for her uh, special skill set and obviously there's always a need for Infantry guys, so.

**GOODWIN:** Good. So then you go to Fort Campbell.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Went to Fort Campbell uh, and I was assigned to uh, Bravo Company uh, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 187<sup>th</sup> uh, Infantry; the Rakkasans which is the uh, Japanese word for falling down umbrella. They got that nickname uh, during the Korean War uh, when the 187<sup>th</sup> was a Parachuting Airborne Unit and uh, they didn't the Japanese didn't have a word uh, for Paratrooper, so they called them Rakkasans, which meant falling down uh, umbrella. Uh, had the opportunity to be a uh, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant there in both Bravo Company and in Headquarters Company. Um, I think really the uh, the main event uh, during that tour was we had the opportunity to go to Saudi Arabia and again we were the security force uh, for the uh, Patriot Missile Systems that were stationed in uh, SWA, Southwest Asia, and uh, we spent four months pulling security there you know and just doing training you know regular uh, infantry training that uh, you do. So and that's where I had the opportunity to go to Air Assault and be an Air Assault Qualified.

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya.

**GOODWIN:** What were your experiences like in Saudi Arabia? I mean we think of obviously that part of the world now as you know...

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya, I mean that's, that's becoming...

**GOODWIN:** ...a lot of conflict.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ...uh, you know uh, a common picture for uh, for soldiers nowadays but back then um, in the uh, it was about the mid-90s uh, when I was there um, it was my first experience of you know, the Arabic Culture and uh, just hot. You know we didn't have too much uh, interaction with the locals because uh, we were just stationed in three sites. We were split up into Company, uh in three sites. So really the only interaction I had was when the local nationals would come onto the uh, Escon Village was one in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Um, that was really all the interaction we had with the locals at that time.

**GOODWIN:** But you said they came on t-?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya, they would you know uh...the Army, the Air Force, Navy you always whatever county you go, you always have local nationals that hire and do you know work uh, on base. You know whether they're cooking food or they're uh, pulling maintenance jobs or stuff like that, so uh, that you know had a little bit of interaction with the uh, the folks for Saudi then.

**GOODWIN:** Was there you know at that time, obviously it's after the first Gulf War, was there still a lot of sort of fear about Saddam Hussein, that sort of stuff?

**CHAMPAGNE:** You know, I didn't get the opportunity to you know discuss any of that. First of all I didn't speak Arabic and uh, majority of them didn't speak English. So they would come on post you know, they knew what they had to do um, you know you'd say hello, you know asslam alykom ...

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ... and uh, that's about the gist of it.

**GOODWIN:** Among the American troops I meant.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, I'm sorry um...

**GOODWIN:** It's ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ...ya, I think so um, there um, you always knew that threat was there, ok. Uh, what I did uh, experience when I was there is went through Kuwait was uh, the uh, how open armed and uh, appreciative the Kuwaiti people were uh, while we were over there. They still have a big celebration every way, every year in Kuwait thanking the American soldiers. You know where they bring all the Americans downtown Kuwait City and uh, they have this big you know big festival that they celebrate the uh, their liberation.

**GOODWIN:** When you came across Kuwait, you said they were appreciative, what did it mean to you?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, it made you feel good to be a soldier. I mean uh, you uh, liberated a country that was uh, attacked and oppressed and uh, you know they were being slaughtered. You know the Iraqis were in Kuwait and they were uh, you know absolutely uh, you know oppressive to uh, the Kuwaiti people. And you know to have the opportunity to be part of a force that uh, liberated; now I didn't fight in Desert Steel, uh Desert Shield or Desert Storm but just being part of the Army and feeling that appreciation from uh, a country uh, that you know you're responsible for.

**GOODWIN:** Sure. So what happened after Saudi Arabia?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, went back to Fort uh, Campbell um, uh, we took an assignment at Fort Polk, uh, Louisiana. Um, my wife was um, a Observer Controller. I continued to be a 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant uh, at the U.S. Army Garrison. Um, there I was selected for Sergeant Major at that time um, that here comes the ten month uh, separation. Uh, because it was only a ten month assignment to go to the Sergeant's Major Academy um, my wife stayed at uh, Fort Polk during that, 'cause they wouldn't PCS here. They wouldn't move her permanent change of station, so that was our separation. I attend the Sergeant's Major Academy for ten months and then I had my next assignment uh, to Fort Bragg again, where I had the opportunity to go back to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 505<sup>th</sup> and become the Command Sergeant Major there.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. And then?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, that's uh, that's while during while were at the academy was when 9/11 happened. Uh, you know I remember that morning very vividly. Um, I just finished doing uh, PT that morning. Uh, I was in my quarters and I was turning on the TV and uh, you know the initial

stages of where uh, you know the first airplane had just gone into the World Trade Center and your watching it and all a sudden you see the second one come in and then you know...you know about 30 minutes later you hear a plane went into the uh, Pentagon. You know that was uh, huge to me. Things at the Sergeant Major's Academy stopped that morning you know.... because everybody was you know talking about what just happened. And...and then uh, you know uh, just everybody was just in shock.

**GOODWIN:** What was your sort of first reaction? What did you think would happen as a result of this?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, you were angry, absolutely angry. You knew that uh, you know uh, President Bush was not gonna to tolerate uh, this type of terrorist action uh, you know on American soil. And then to see the devastation not only at the World Trade Center uh, at the Pentagon and then hearing about the jet that uh, you know that went into the Pennsylvania farm field. Uh, you knew that was going to happen, so. We're all senior non-commissioned officers here you know were saying "We're getting ready to get into the fight." Then we found out uh, later on that year we went into Afghanistan and everybody's itching, everybody's saying, "Are you going to take us out of school early?" "Are we going to graduate early?" You know everybody wanted to get into the fight. Uh, but they didn't let anybody go. Uh, we didn't even get to graduate anybody early. So, we finished through May um, and at that time...uh...uh everybody, you know, a lot of my classmates went directly into the fight in Afghanistan. Um, we were assigned to uh, Fort Bragg. Um, I spent a short stint with uh...the uh, 325 as an Operation Sergeant Major and then I got a phone call, I was out on a training exercise. And they said "Hey, Division Command Sergeant Major Thorpe wants to see you up in his office." And I had uh, been a Command Sergeant Major Designee; I am saying well my something's coming open. So I went up there, stole all full camouflage and all my gear. You know Sergeant Major goes "Alright you ready to be a Command Sergeant Major?" And I go "Roger that Sergeant Major" and he says, "Your gonna go down and take uh... 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment." He says, "Oh, by the way they are in Afghanistan, so you are gonna fly over to Afghanistan and...and you gonna assume the Command Sergeant Major position and they are already three months into combat." Uh, so I said, "Roger that." And he says, "When can you go?" I says, "When do you want me?" And he says, "I wanted you there yesterday." So I had about a week uh, to prepare. You know not only uh... to get all the gear, get all my shots, and all everything in order, but uh, you know I had a week to prepare my family, you know.

**GOODWIN:** Uh, huh.

**CHAMPAGNE:** You know...

**GOODWIN:** At this time did you have children?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ya, I had one son. Uh, Matthew, he was uh, I think he was around six years old at the time. Um, and you know he was still a little bit young to understand what was going on. Uh, he just knew, he just thought Dad was going on another training exercise. Um, and then uh, I went to Afghanistan linked up with uh, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 505<sup>th</sup> uh, finished the three months with them in combat in Afghanistan. Um...it was uh, it was pretty quiet. It was a quiet time at

that, at that time in Afghanistan. You know there were a few rockets every once in a while and uh, there were some fire fights out at the outlying bases. But uh, you know that's following right after the initial invasion of Afghanistan, so things were pretty quiet. The Taliban was in hiding. Al Qaeda was in hiding. And uh, you know we were in the process of uh, trying to stand up the Afghan National Army.

**GOODWIN:** Where were you stationed in Afghanistan?

**CHAMPAGNE:** While the uh, our headquarters uh, was first uh, in a place a called Salerno, Camp Salerno. We built this uh; this was when we started getting into the Ford operating base concept. Um, we were at Camp Salerno and then uh, we pushed companies out to different locations afterwards. Uh, you know we had a company in uh, Kandahar. We had a company and our headquarters eventually moved to Bagram. Uh...and then we had uh, some platoons that were scattered uh, at some of the Ford Operating Bases. Urzgani was one. We had one in Shkin and then we had another uh, company up in Asadabad.

**GOODWIN:** You mentioned combat. Were you involved in combat yourself?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Uh, no...uh, you know even though they considered it a uh, combat tour in Afghanistan. I did not uh, for the three months, the last three months, uh; I didn't see any, any contact whatsoever uh, while I was in Afghanistan.

**GOODWIN:** Did you have much um....interaction with Afghans at all?

**CHAMPAGNE:** We did. I mean you know now this was a little different uh, this was when we were trying...You know at this time there was still a lot of tribal leaders in Afghanistan 'cause that's their culture. And um, you know we were definitely interacting with the uh, the heavy hitters. You know the Afghan at that time, who carried the big stick, was the boss. You know and uh, I had a commander named Lieutenant Colonel Martin Switcher, who was my Battalion Commander at the time and us, he definitely had an effect on the local Afghans as far as getting them to get organized and you know uh...you know start putting their country back together. So we spent three months there came back. Uh, you know my wife was still in the Army at the time and she was uh...on call for the initial Iraqi War, so OF1. So I'm just coming back, three months later she tells me she's going to Iraq for the initial invasion there. She deploys, she does the initial invasion. Uh, and then uh, about three months into that OAF uh, 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 505<sup>th</sup> gets alerted and now were going over there. So uh, so we get deployed together, were both in Iraq at the same time. Um, I didn't see her until about three months into...We organized a uh, link up so you know I got to spend a couple days with her in Iraq um, but um, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 505<sup>th</sup>. And uh, there we saw again, it was after the uh, initial invasion; we did get in some fire fights. Um, we had we sustained one killed in action the nine months we were there. But again it was a quiet time in Iraq. The insurgents were still trying to figure everything out at that time.

**GOODWIN:** Where were you stationed?

**CHAMPAGNE:** We were uh, just south of Baghdad uh, in a town called Mahmudiyah and uh, we built up another FOB and we called it FOB St. Michael, who is the Patron Saint of the uh,

Paratroopers. And um, we uh, stayed there for almost all the nine months we were there. Now we did do some missions out in Ramadi and Fallujah uh, just before uh, Fallujah really exploded uh, um.... You know and then we were uh, redeployed back to Fort Bragg after that.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Did you have any interactions with Iraqis?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, all the time. I mean it was a daily interaction. Um, I don't think the Iraqis; I think they were still uh, in shock all that time, you know in that early uh, 2003-2004 time. I think uh, they were still trying... There was a lot of looting during that time. You know City government wasn't really established, you know really there was no government. So who was the government? It was you know the United States Army trying to figure out how we would put all these pieces together.

**GOODWIN:** Did you, did you witness a lot of the looting?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh yeah. As soon as you, I mean you couldn't help it because uh, you had uh, Route Jackson which was right outside of our FOB uh, and it was one of the major arteries going into Baghdad. You know anytime you drove down there you saw uh...you know just hundreds you know coppers, tiles, they took everything. I mean there wasn't a building that wasn't gutted. It was uh, everything was up for grabs. Everything was for sale, you know.

**GOODWIN:** Did you feel like the U.S Military had any kind of responsibility to do anything about this?

**CHAMPAGNE:** We did. Uh, you know we did discourage it. We did detain uh, looters when we found them looting. Um, our big concern at the time was uh, you know them going in and looting all the arms and uh, artillery rounds and you know, you know and were still looking for uh, WMD at the time.

**GOODWIN:** Um, so how long were you in Iraq then at that time?

**CHAMPAGNE:** That time it was nine months.

**GOODWIN:** Ok, ok. And you came back and...?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Came back and uh, my wife deployed again. So uh, and then uh...um, I was down at JRTC for a training event down there. I was in the mess hall and I got a phone call uh, from Colonel Gibbs. Uh, he said uh, "I am Colonel Gibbs. I would like for you to come out to Fort Riley, Kansas in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division to help me build this new Brigade", uh, which was then 4<sup>th</sup> uh, ended up being 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade you know, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. Um, Lisa was still in uh, in Iraq. I said, "Sir I gotta call my wife, she's in Iraq, see if she's willing to go to uh, to Fort Riley." Uh, so I called her in Iraq that night and said, "Hey I just got a job opportunity to go out and be a Brigade Sergeant Major with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Fort Riley" and she goes "Yeah let's go" 'cause that was her first assignment when she was a Private in the Army...

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** ... at Fort Riley, Kansas. And I had never experienced. I had never been assigned west of the Mississippi...

**GOODWIN:** Ok.

**CHAMPAGNE:** And uh, so it was a new experience at Fort Riley, Kansas.

**GOODWIN:** So obviously, because of your wife you were quite aware of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and their reputation. How did you feel when you found out you were going to be apart of it?

**CHAMPAGNE:** While I was excited. I mean they have a storied history. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division you know uh, established back in 1917 and you know the First Expeditionary Force. Um, I had a little interaction uh, you know earlier in my career, when I was in Germany. I did see some 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Soldiers and uh, you know they were always STRAC soldiers, you know always getting the job done. Uh, so to be part of the 1st Infantry Division uh, I was excited. And uh, you know then to build a whole you know brand new uh, light infantry unit uh, from the ground up you know that's a challenging, challenging piece.

**GOODWIN:** How do you, how did you face the challenge?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, it was great uh, we had a great program. Uh, the Commanders and the Sergeant Majors. The Army put the leaders there first. Uh, to establish you know, how are we going to build this uh, what are the standards and disciplines are we going to establish within our unit. So we sat down as a senior leadership and we said this is how we are going to conduct business so everybody was on the same sheet of music. All the Battalion Commanders were on the ground. All the Battalion Sergeant Majors were on the ground and we went through a uh, series of training called, we named it Omega training. Uh, where we trained all the leaders on how we expected the soldiers to act. All the standards. How we were going to dress in our uniforms. How we were going to conduct battle drills. So everybody was all on the same sheet music. So when we started getting all the Privates and Junior Leaders uh, everybody knew what the standard was.

**GOODWIN:** Uh, huh.

**CHAMPAGNE:** And um, so uh, you know we had uh... We started it up, we reflagged or we unfurled our colors on 15<sup>th</sup>, January 2006. Uh, we had about 500 soldiers uh, in Kingfield House at Fort Riley, because it was the middle of January so it was very cold at the time. Uh, we had about 500 soldiers uh, available for that ceremony. And within, by the time we hit June uh, we were at 3,000. So you're looking at a growth in six months from 500 to 3,000. Uh, we trained uh... We had a opportunity to go out to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. We did a rotation uh, you know that tested our systems and uh, you know tested the units in uh, full spectrum operations. While at the National Training Center, we were notified that in January we were going to be second Brigade into the surge of 2007. So you gotta think 500 soldiers at 2006 on January 15<sup>th</sup> and the following January we were at 3,500 plus and we're going into

combat. So within just about a years timeframe uh, we built this team, trained this team, and now we were deploying as part of the surge into Baghdad

**GOODWIN:** Can you talk a little more about your experiences once the surge happened?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Yeah, it was, it was an incredible time in Iraq at that time. We were um, assigned the uh, the Rasheed district, which is just the southern part of Baghdad. Um, and we had uh, you know, again Route Jackson the main artery going into Baghdad. You had uh, East Rasheed and West Rasheed, and our Brigade was responsible for the, you know, that entire section, uh, two different uh, populations. On the West side of Rasheed you had uh, mostly uh, the Shia and uh, you know the, the police force was mostly Shia uh, oriented. On the right side uh, Al Qaeda and Sunni. You know so we had two different fights going on and we were right in the middle of it. You know and uh, so it made, made for some really interesting dynamics of how we were gonna you know uh, bring in the infrastructure, bring in the uh, you know the markets and uh, the electricity, and the sewage and how we were gonna get you know uh, these two factions uh, uh, together as one so that uh, you know they could build up uh, you know their communities.

**GOODWIN:** How effective a job did you feel you ...?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I think uh, we had a huge impact. I mean it was a, was a big, big fight. There wasn't a time where uh, you know in February and March timeframe and all the way through the summer uh, that when you left the uh, the forward Operating Base you were getting in a fire fight. Everyday everybody, if somebody was in contact. Uh, and by the way you know they're rocketing the uh, forward Operating boys; they're shooting mortars forward Operating boys. I think uh, our second week there we had a 107mm rocket come right through the mess hall.

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Fortunately, enough it was eight o'clock at night and it was just the end, the end of uh, meal time and uh, we only had about uh, a dozen soldiers uh, in the mess hall at the time the rocket exploded. Uh, fortunately enough we didn't have anybody seriously injured uh, during that attack. But the um, uh, it was, it was a fight from the get go you know um... and there was different dynamics with uh, Al Qaeda being on the right side and you know the Shia uh, extremist on the right side you know with the uh, Jaish al Mahdi uh, you know group. Uh, and that would be uh, you know uh al-Sadr's group, the Jaish al Mahdi group and uh, you know uh, Colonel Gibbs, the Brigade Commander at the time uh, you know had to fight basically two different fronts.

**GOODWIN:** Hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** You know uh, but you had to bring counter insurgency you know concept in there; how were we gonna fight this counter insurgency.

**GOODWIN:** What, how did you fight it?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, I mean uh, you know General Petraeus in uh, you know had uh, this, this concept well we were gonna push. We weren't gonna stay on these big uh, fort operation bases now. He wanted everybody in uh, coalition outpost. So uh, we pushed into the, right into the uh, into neighborhoods. You know and companies lived by themselves right in the middle of the neighborhood and they sustained themselves in the neighborhood. They fought in the neighborhood uh; you know they were interacting everyday uh, with the, the locals. And uh, you know as locals, the locals really wanted security.

**GOODWIN:** Uh, hmm.

**CHAMPAGNE:** You know as long, if they felt secure in the fight uh, then they, then you saw the markets come up and then you saw people coming in the streets and everybody wasn't uh, fearful you know whether it was the Jaish al Mahdi you were fighting or the uh, the you know the Al Qaeda insurgents on the uh, the East side.

**GOODWIN:** So, were you personally involved in a lot of this interaction with people?...

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, I was everyday. I mean uh, you know uh, Colonel Gibbs would go on the West side and uh, you know we had uh, a 128 Black Lions were uh, fighting on the uh, on the left side uh, under Pat Frank, Lieutenant Colonel Pat Frank and uh, Command Sergeant Major Cliff Docker. Uh, we had uh, 118 um... Infantry from the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division uh, whose not uh, organic to us 'cause they were with 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade that was in Germany. They were fighting with us side also. Um, on the right side we had Quarter Cav and uh, 216 Infantry was actually detached from our Brigade and fought on the other side of the river in Rustamiyah.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Now um, you know the Iraq War has brought on quite a lot of controversy in the United States um... what's your perception of sort of people protesting the war and things like that?

**CHAMPAGNE:** I'll be honest with you that's why I'm a soldier, to give them the right to do what they do. You know I think there's enough Americans out there that are in support of the soldiers. You know they might not necessarily believe uh, what the political uh, you know mindset is of, of our government um, but uh, they're supporting the soldiers and that's important to us as soldiers. I mean, I think a lot of the um, for the most part anybody who is against the war uh, will still go up to a soldier and shake their hand and say thanks for what you do. I support you and the way of living and the freedoms that you provide us. Uh, you know but in turn they might not uh, you know the uh, support the, the presidents uh you know political uh, way ahead.

**GOODWIN:** Good. Um, the other thing I would say is that you know by your background of course you were there very early on um, 2003 and then again in 2007; is there anything you saw um, between those two points or even more present um, with American Strategy that you would have changed if you had the ability to do so?

**CHAMPAGNE:** (Laugh) Um, I think upfront what uh, if we would have done anything in 2003 that probably... we disbanded the uh, Iraqi military so I mean uh, you know when we came in 2003 there was no Iraqi military. If you were Iraqi military you were still considered you know part of the enemy. We were still uh, arresting and detaining uh, Iraqi Generals as we were finding them, as they were in hiding. Um, if we could've somehow kept this a semblance of the Iraqi military uh, you know and got them on board uh, you know it wouldn't have been such a hard stepping stone to get all the security forces back into play, you know the police and so on and so forth. You know we could've you know uh, you know consolidated with the Iraqi leaders, the Generals and the Majors and all that and then uh, you know helped them bring the peace and the stability into Iraq. I think that's uh, if I had anyway of changing it that's probably, if I had an effect I probably would have probably kept the Iraqi forces together and not uh, you know split them up.

**GOODWIN:** Ok. Now what about your own future? At this point you know we're now in the present?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Well, we're excited uh, you know, we're taking the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Infantry Headquarters in combat again, it's been a while; I think it was 2002 uh, the last time the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Headquarters was uh, was deployed as a fighting division Headquarters. Um, you know we're at uh, a very interesting time uh, 'cause we're gonna uh, assume responsibility of what they're calling uh, Multinational Division South; which is uh, nine provinces all South of Baghdad, all the way down to Basra. Um, I think uh, we're part of the plan of uh, you know President Obama uh, to shrink the amount of forces in Iraq. So uh, you know, not only do we have to continue the uh, you know the support of the Iraqi uh, people and government and helping them you now build stability in Iraq but we're gonna now have to start talking about Retrograde Operations. How are we gonna get the forces out of Iraq and how are we going to get all this equipment. So I think uh, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division will have uh, a play in uh, how forces similar to what they did in Vietnam, maybe not as chaotic um, but uh, you know similar to uh, what they did in Vietnam. And um, it's gonna, it's gonna be an interesting uh, you know the enemy's still gonna have the ability to have some type of catastrophic or uh, you know, spectacular attack, that's always going to be out there because you're always gonna have, I think there's always gonna be those extremists out there, so we have to remain uh, vigilant in uh, the fight but in, on the same thing we have to turn the responsibility to the Iraqi security forces and their government and at the same time retrograde you know soldiers and equipment out of Iraq.

**GOODWIN:** So you agree with that?

**CHAMPAGNE:** Oh, absolutely. I think uh, I think we're ready. I think the Iraqi people are ready. You know the upcoming elections in January is gonna be the tale tell sign whether they're gonna be uh, you know successful and uh, with all these trials and tribulations over last year this election in January is gonna be the pivotal point in Iraqi history.

**GOODWIN:** Good. I think I'm finished...

**CHAMPAGNE:** Ok.

**GOODWIN:** Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

**CHAMPAGNE:** No. I want to thank you. I mean it's a great division and to be the Command Sergeant Major of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division uh, is a huge honor. You know we have great soldiers, we have great leaders and uh, you know the legacy continues every time a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division goes into combat, so you know American people should be proud of the soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

**GOODWIN:** Thank you for the interview...

**CHAMPAGNE:** Thank you.

**GOODWIN:** ...and thank you for your service to the country as well.

**CHAMPAGNE:** Alright thank you. Alright guys, thanks.