

Cantigny First Division Oral Histories II

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Interview with Daniel Eakins

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DeRubertis: My name is Tony DeRubertis. It July 29th 2009 and I'm here with Daniel Eakins.

Eakins: E-A-K-I-N-S

DeRubertis: Where were you born?

Eakins: I was born in Columbus, Ohio

DeRubertis: And when?

Eakins: August 20th 1976.

DeRubertis: Where did you attend High School?

Eakins: I attended West Jefferson High School, which is just west of Columbus.

DeRubertis: And did you attend college?

Eakins: I did. I attended Miami University in Oxford Ohio, class of '98.

DeRubertis: What was your family like, your upbringing?

Eakins: Mom and dad. Dad was a machinist. He worked at t..... when I was a small kid. When the plant in Columbus closed he ended up working a couple different jobs; the Franklin Country Authority down at the south end, and then by the time I was in the military he was working for a mom and pop machine shop down in Whitehall – Groveport, Groveport sorry. And mom, stay at home mom, until dad lost his job initially back in the 80's and she started working a couple different jobs. Now she's at Check Free or Fiserv or whatever that company is now for about 15 years, but pretty normal. Started out in a couple years of Catholic School then started going to public schools and played football in high school; pretty standard stuff.

DeRubertis: Was there something in your upbringing that lead you to want to be – to join the military?

Eakins: Well uh my dad was a Vietnam Veteran. He was an airframe mechanic. He actually served in Qui Nhon after the Tet Offensive; fixing helicopters and things like that. So early on he always had slides and pictures from his experiences and slide shows when he was – he was

stationed in Korea, he was stationed in Texas and then from Texas he was deployed to Vietnam. He always had a lot of cool pictures from that era. My um – his brother, Scott, was in the 101st Airborne in Vietnam. His older brother was in the Navy; I think served in the South China Sea. My uncle Bill who was his brother in law he was a Navy Construction Battalion guy, a CB, in Vietnam. My dad's best friend was a Green Beret in Vietnam, so I was around a lot of kind of – not career military people, but you know the kind of folks that join the military, do their job, and then go home to their civilian lives. My one cousin, Sean, was actually in the Marine Corps, served in the Persian Gulf War and then got out of the Marine Corps shortly their after. Traditionally there had always been a strong sense in my own mind, now once I thought that I graduated college and no major war seemed on the horizon, the Soviet Union was long gone that that would never happen, but after 9/11 I kind of reevaluated that and decided to join the military and do my part.

DeRubertis: And when did you, uh, join?

Eakins: I officially joined the Army in the late entry point in March of 2002 – is when I signed up. I shipped out for basic training in June of 2002. Like I said at the time I was – at the time of 9/11 I was actually working for the State of Ohio doing human resources stuff and after – was downtown during 9/11 and they evacuated downtown and so I went to the bar that night. And my dad's birthday just happened to be the very next day and told my dad, I was like well – and only him what I was thinking about at the time. I was like, “Well dad if this turns out to be a real war then I'm going to join up, if it's just a bunch of cruise missiles I'm not going to bother.” So after Oct 7th that's when they started bombing Afghanistan that's when it seemed serious enough to join up and do my part. I got in contact with the recruiter and was convinced OCS might be the way to go, but I already had a college degree. I enlisted with OCS options and stuff.

DeRubertis: OCS? I'm sorry.

Eakins: Officer Candidate School, which is kind of the Army commissioning source for prior service soldiers with they already have some college background or for folks off the streets can enlist if you have a college degree and enlist with the OCS option. You go to basic training then Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning Georgia.

DeRubertis: Was there a reason that you chose the Army over the Navy or the Air Force?

Eakins: Well, actually yeah – I thought it kind of gave me the best opportunity to perhaps fight. My dad was in the Army; it seemed to just make the most sense. I'd had kind of grown up around Army folks. My cousin had been in the Marine Corps and I didn't know quite sure if I wanted to be in the Marine Corps. I didn't want to do the Air Force or the Navy because I had a pretty good idea that I kind of wanted to be on the ground service. I initially thought I might want to do infantry, but I realized at basic training that might be – I mean I did join at the age of 25, so that might be a little beyond me at the time, I kind of got – at Officer Candidate School kind of got introduced to some armor folks and was kind of convinced that's what I wanted to do. But very early on I had decided to do Army, just uh partly family tradition, but also it was the most attractive service to me, just in general.

DeRubertis: What was your basic training like?

Eakins: Basic training, I got to be honest with you, when I look back on it was fairly enjoyable. It seems kind of weird to say that, but it was at Fort Sill Oklahoma. We shipped out in June of 2002. It was very hot; it was 9 weeks. You do first couple weeks – they call week zero so you don't actually make any progress. You sit at reception battalion, change your socks everyday and learn how to make a bed three times and they give you a lot of inoculations and paperwork. Then you go into your basic training, which to be honest, I remember thinking was a lot of fun. I can remember when we would march to our basic rifle marksmanship by week four or five, whenever we were doing that, and I can remember you would have on your rucksack, you would have your rifle, you would have a helmet on and I remember – you'd always be walking in the sun; it was always really hot. The trail that the Drill Sergeant would take us on would have us walking across creeks and stuff; I just remember looking at my shadow one time I can't believe that's me doing this stuff. You know when you're a kid you kind of play war or whatever and you go out into the woods with your toy guns and stuff, but here I was an actually recruit training to do something I used to play at as a kid so it was always kind of enjoyable. I always remember I always enjoyed that time after were kind of done drilling for the day and we'd get a chance to shine our boots and the drill sergeants were by and large gone and you'd write letters and things like that. Like the lack of distraction seemed to really set my mind at ease really, so basic training was a fairly enjoyable experience.

DeRubertis: What was your drill instructor like?

Eakins: Well I had two of them. You have your kind of primary drill instructor, who was an E-7 the Sergeant First class, then he had an assistant drill sergeant, who was – actually I guess they were both Staff Sergeant E-6s, I'm sorry, both Staff Sergeants. The head Staff Sergeant for our platoon, very tall, very menacing, and without a sense of humor that any of us were aware of. The other drill sergeant, Drill Sergeant Roberts, he was the assistant drill sergeant, very emotional he was the kind of guy that would come in and throw the garbage can around and it was 2002 we were fighting in Afghanistan, we weren't in Iraq yet, but he would come in and say, "Saddam's misbehaving again, we're going to be in Iraq tomorrow, you'd better get with your training. You know get your minds right." But they were very good at teaching us what we needed to know. I had a lot – I had a lot of appreciation and respect for them because I understood that there when you wake up and there when you go to bed, which means they got a lot less sleep than you did and they were with you all day, so I can't imagine what that must do to someone's home life, so I always had a lot of respect for them.

DeRubertis: You mentioned that you decided to do armor. What was your major – specialization?

Eakins: Uh well armor essentially that actually came about at Officer Candidate School. I was initially assigned to the Quartermaster Branch and when I learned that I wasn't thrilled because I was like, "that's not combat branch." At OCS though it turns out you can actually swap branches with other students who may not like theirs and actually ran into a guy – people would actually put it on a chalkboard, "branch this looking to do this," and I actually – one of the ways I decided to do armor was that I was looking at all the things people wanted to get rid of. And typically

what happens is guys want to get rid of the combat arms one because they want to become a Quartermaster or something, they don't want to go to war. So I saw that a guy had put up an armor one and I ripped it off and said, "hey let's do this," and so we did and that's how I became armor. But essentially they train you and send you off to Fort Knox Kentucky and as an armor officer they don't train you to be an expert on the tank, but they do train you to be knowledgeable about all the stations: driver, loader, gunner, and tank commander. And they also make you very familiar with how to maneuver an individual tank and then how to maneuver a platoon of tanks. It usually – at armor school you basically act as a tank crew. You do field exercises and gunnery where you have a lieutenant on the gun, a lieutenant driving, and a lieutenant driving and typically a noncommissioned officer instructor to make sure that you don't wreck the tank or kill anybody. At the end you do a 14 day field problem, go out and you do small maneuvers where you just maneuver the platoon by itself and then we did some force on force where you have one platoon fighting another platoon. And you try to maneuver your tanks to a position where you can inflict damage on your op 4 as it were. Not making you necessarily making you an expert in everything, but making you generally knowledgeable about stuff so that you can step in and lead a platoon without looking like a complete moron.

DeRubertis: So uh, after you finished your training you served as an assist S-2? Could you elaborate on that a little?

Eakins: Sure. When I first arrived at – graduated in July of 2003 from armor school at Fort Knox Kentucky – took a few weeks of to go on vacation, get married – got a ride to Fort Riley in late August – uh Fort Riley Kansas. At the time the rest of 1st Brigade 1st ID [*Infantry Division*] was actually being – getting prepared to ship out to Al Anbar Province [*Iraq*] and our battalion was being left behind as the rear detachment. And when I arrived I learned that rather than be assigned to a platoon right away I was going to be assigned to the battalion S-2 office, which is the intelligence chop – provides intelligence support. I was going to serve as the assistant S-2 or the word – term they used was “Tactical Intelligence Officer.” Essentially in that role – essentially it's a fairly small shop, there was a Captain, myself, an E-4, and an E-6 when I first arrived. And I think by the time I arrived the E-4 was running the shop, but we managed the security clearances for the battalion, getting those done. The S-2 is responsible for providing weather reports for gunneries and things like that, but also providing the battalion commander kind of wanted a real world picture of real world threats. When the brigade was deployed and we were at rear detachment he would want updates on what the brigade was doing. Particularly significant events they may have participated in, we would provide those. One of the first things I did as the Tactical Intelligence Officer was two week after we arrived at Fort Riley we got sent as a battalion to the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California to participate in a maneuver exercise and the battalion was attached to a larger brigade. And there I really had a chance to see what the job of an S – particularly an assist S-2 in the field was – it was a maneuver exercise. I had a chance to do military decision making process, intelligence preparations of the battlefield, uh develop enemy situations for the battalion commander. It was very informative and to be honest, I remember when I first got the – I remember in armor school they taught us how to do situational templates and how to develop an enemy course of action. I remember thinking to myself, “why are they teaching us this because this is the intel guys do this stuff?” And I remember when I got to Fort Irwin, “I'm glad they taught us that at armor school because I'm vaguely familiar and thanks to some significant guidance from our XO, [*Executive*

Officer] Major Broadwater, and the OCs [*Officers Commanding*] at Fort Irwin. I ended up performing very well in that slot as the assistant S-2. I actually won “A Warrior of the Cycle” commendation from the OCs there at the National Training Center and so I was very pleased and very happy and it was a lot of fun too.

DeRubertis: Alright you guys were detached from the rest of the unit. When did you officially join up with them? When did you get shipped out?

Eakins: Well the 1st Brigade ended up coming back in the summer of – err actually the fall of 2004. We had learned at some – I can’t remember in 2004 we actually learned that we were going to deploy, but I think somewhere around March ’04 the battalion commander reorganized the entire battalion. I got moved out of the S-2 shop and got moved into the – as platoon leader, 1st platoon Alpha Company and it was at that time we started getting word that we would probably get deployed that fall. And we obviously wouldn’t be attached to 1st Brigade, they were coming back. We found out we’d be attached to probably 3rd Brigade 3rd Infantry Division. So basically the battalion commander got all the officers and senior NCOs into one room and said, “alright these are positions you’re going to train in and we are going to deploy some point in the near future and uh you’re going to stay in these jobs until you either do a terrible job, you get killed, or have – get to go home, but otherwise you’re going to stay in these positions.” We initially thought we’d be deployed that summer around July of 2004. Later we learned that it would get pushed back to being deployed in maybe November-December then it got pushed back to January. But we ended up deploying – we left on January 19th 2005 – is when we left Topeka, got dropped off by Margo that morning at the company, at what we called an S and A. Met the unit there and jumped – went through what they call SRP [*Soldier Readiness Processing*] at Fort Riley where they Check your ID card, see what you weigh, make sure you got all your gear, just last kind of minute stuff then you do a lot of waiting around until transportation comes and takes you to the big plane. And then the big ride over to uh, to Kuwait.

DeRubertis: Where did you – you landed in Kuwait City?

Eakins: Yeah we landed in Kuwait City and from there everybody gets off. We were very fortunate actually. It was January and we were like, “O man we’re going to Kuwait,” then we stepped off and it was like 60 something degrees and we were like it’s not that much colder – it’s not that much warmer than it is in Kansas right now! From there we jumped on buses and they shipped us up to Camp Bering, which was a sort of assembly area like I said a Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration Base in northern Kuwait. That’s where we actually linked up with our vehicles. We had to send crews down to the Doha port in Kuwait City and they brought all the vehicles up and that’s where essentially – it was at Camp Bering that we staged our equipment, screened our tanks, and got issued our ammunition and all that stuff in preparation. I’d say we were there about two to two and half weeks, getting prepared to move the battalion into sector

DeRubertis: And what was your main sector?

Eakins: Our main sector was actually centered around the – I would say the surrounding environments of the city of Baquba. Baquba is the provincial capital of Diyala province about

forty miles east of Baghdad. We were – the 3rd Brigade’s sector basically included the entire Diyala River Valley, east of Tigris River, and northeast of the city of Baghdad. We shared a FOB [*Forward Operating Base*] FOB Gabe, on the east side of Baquba with the 1st Battalion 10th Field Artillery and they were largely responsible for the city of Baquba and the 2nd Battalion 34th Armor was responsible largely for the areas north, south, and southeast of Baquba. Alpha Company’s sector was on the West side of the Diyala River including the town of Khan Bani Saad. That was kind of the focus of most of our effort were that first part of the year.

DeRubertis: Could you spell Baquba or –

Eakins: Yeah. Baquba is – you’ll see it a couple different ways. I think by in large I spell it B-A-Q-U-B-A. You may some people add an H to the end. And they may call it Ba-coo-ba, but I always heard the Arabs call it Ba-cu-ba.

DeRubertis: And uh, the other Ba-?

Eakins: Khan Bani Saad. That’s K-H-A-N then it’s another word, B-A-N-I, then another word, S-A-A-D.

DeRubertis: Ok, thank you. You were stationed there. Were you stationed out of a FOB and then you moved out?

Eakins: Yeah we were stationed out of Forward Operating Base Gabriel. They called it FOB Gabe for short. It was named after – I think a member of the 4th Infantry Division that had been in the Baquba area during the invasion and who had been killed that’s who the FOB was named after. We operated out of that FOB and typically when we had that sector, we typically operated I think on a seven day rotation where Alpha Company’s platoon what we would do is one platoon would be responsible for manning the Joint Coordination Center that was actually a post located inside Kahn Bani Saad in the middle of town and right next to the Iraqi Police Station. It was a defended position and basically the intent there was you would go there for seven days, work with the Iraqi Police, you would work with local Iraqi intelligence, local Iraqi Army, and the idea was to maintain a constant presence in town to help protect the JCC [*Joint Coordination Center*], but also to help gather intelligence information and help be aware of what’s going on in town because Kahn Bani Saad was about a 20 to 30 minute drive from FOB Gabe, so it gave us the ability to kind of keep eyes the area kind of 24/7. So typically you’d do that for seven days, you’d come back maybe do seven days of what we called, “Escort Platoon,” and the escort platoon’s job was essentially that if the company commander had meetings that he had to go you were kind of on call to do that. We could also be used to kind of do combat patrols and route reconnaissance – patrol roads looking for IEDs [*Improvised Explosive Devices*] and things of that nature. If the company was assigned, “Quick Reaction Force,” the battalion always had a Quick Reaction Force, a QRF, on station and the QRF had to be able to role out of the FOB within about seven minutes. If our company happened to have that duty, we might have a platoon staying on the FOB with weapons mounted ready to go and everybody near their radios and stuff like that ready to go. And another responsibility we had was each company in the battalion was responsible for a tower along the perimeter, and so typically you’d do what we called, “FOB security.” During that time your enlisted guys would be manning the tower and then myself, the

platoon sergeant, and section sergeants would be performing commander of the guard or we'd have some sergeants of the guard, so you would be responsible for those duties during that week and that's typically how our rotations went.

DeRubertis: What would a typical day be like if you were being the commander while you were patrol – in charge of the FOB. What would a typical day –

Eakins: Uh FOB security?

DeRubertis: Yes.

Eakins: Well if I had commander of the guard duties, essentially what that would mean was – we would conduct the guard mounts. What that means is that for every shift that goes into the towers you conducted guard mount where the commander of the guard briefs the guards from all the guard units who have a tower or the front gate or what have you – their responsibilities and anything, if there's problems make sure everybody shows up, makes sure everybody has proper uniforms. The sergeant of the guard actually conducts the guard mount, but the commander of the guard oversees it and makes sure it goes off correctly and works out any problems if people don't show up. And then typically what I would do – I always liked to do my commander of the guard stint – would always stay awake. I guess you could sleep, but I would always wither go to the Company CP or the Battalion Headquarters just to kind of listen to the radio, make sure I was around so if anything happened, either somebody at the company or somebody at the battalion could get a hold of me very quickly. I would drive around to the towers from time to time and make sure the guys in the towers had everything they needed, just kind of talk to them a little bit. They'd be on a four hour shift and depending on the – well our guys would be on a four shift. Other companies had different shifts worked out, so you just made sure they had water and food and anything they needed and make sure they were doing their jobs. Typically you were on a 24 hour shift, if you were commander of the guard, so you were very pleased to hand over the radio at the end of your 24 hours.

DeRubertis: So you had that shift and then when you were working with the police the – what was that like?

Eakins: That was one of the more enjoyable experiences because when we would call that you'd be on the JCC platoon, the Joint Coordination Center platoon, so you'd go down to the JCC for a week and that was very interesting because you'd be living down there. Our guys would kind of be racked out in the barracks that we'd established in a small house that was in front of the structure that included their JCC. Within the JCC there were offices and internet drops for kind of local Iraqi – I've got to be honest I'm not sure who they worked for, but they were basically local Iraqi intelligence guys. And they would collect information from locals. The leader was a guy named Col. Abbas who was a former Iraqi Air Force pilot who had served some time, in I think Pakistan, and that's how he knew English. His name was Abbas Al-Amri; he was from a prominent Shiite family there in the area. He was a wonderful person. He was a lot of fun – I mean he great sense of humor. He was uh what's the word? I don't know; he liked to laugh a lot. He's the kind of guy his whole body would shake when he laughed and he would always make jokes in his broken English and try to use American slang and stuff. It usually created some

really humorous situations, but you ended up getting very close kind of – I mean a lot of times the Iraqis would sleep there and by the end of our time there in Kahn Bani Saad, before we had to give up the JCC we actually had Iraqi police living with us in the barracks and Iraqi soldiers in the barracks, so our guys had a chance to live with them a little bit, which you know kind of touchy here and there, but for the most – for me a lot of positive relationships with the locals. We'd have a chance to – we would send out two vehicles to do patrols right around town or we'd send small dismounted patrols of maybe six guys with radios; they would have to stay within handheld radio range and visual range of our towers to make sure we could provide – just in case anything happened, but when we'd do that we'd have a chance to walk through the markets a little bit and uh you really get the chance to shake people's hands, hand out candy to kids, I think one of our soldiers – you're not supposed to do this – but he bought a pair of sandals off one of the local nationals. You never bought food off of them directly, but we would have – like if we were at the JCC and we got tired of eating MREs [*meals ready to eat*] or whatever the Army had for us. We would have one of the Iraqi workers go and buy 10 chickens or something like that because they would always have these chickens on these roasters. They sell in the markets right in the street and they would go buy chickens and get – they'd always serve them with cucumbers and tomatoes and kabobs and stuff like that and so we'd have some pita bread and stuff. And that was – I always found that to be very fascinating and I always would talk with my translators at that time. And you get some down time because our primary responsibility was to guard the JCC but we kick out the patrols, but we were later advised not to do that because we didn't have the man power. Then also what we would do is – we were the primary response force that if something went down in town like I think one day we got attacked by mortars or the Iraqi Army Base did, so we were there in town. We were able to do some quick triage and the fire station got hit, so we were able to help people at the fire station with my medic. We were able to provide some situational awareness so when other units came from FOB Gabe we were able to say, "This is what we're looking at, this is what happened here" and try to help clean up the situation. I found that duty to be incredible fascinating. I mean being amongst them in their communities and – once we had to give that up to the Iraqis when we pulled out of there, I just don't think we had quite the same ability to integrate ourselves into the community like the way we did when we were down there all the time.

DeRubertis: So do you feel like the police was very helpful in - ?

Eakins: The police – I got to be honest, at the time especially, the police were probably less affective than the Army. We had – we were right next to the police station, but there was also an Iraqi Army Company, but even that would depend on where we would go. There was another town called Jedidah, it was a Shiite town, an ancient town, right on the banks of the Tigris, right on the edge of our sector.

DeRubertis: Could you spell that if possible?

Eakins: Jedidah? Yeah it was J-E-D-I-D-A-H. And it's an ancient Shiite town just – it's one of the pictures I had, just really small roads, very overgrown as far as trees and palm groves. And the police chief out there ran an Iraqi police unit that was incredibly effective, kept that highway clear. I mean just really seemed to know what he was doing. Kahn Bani Saad Police generally tried to always do a good job, but they were the kind of guys that you necessarily wouldn't want

– they might accidentally shoot you in the leg or something. So you – we were always right next to them and we would always ask them to put their own guards on their own roof and so we were always looking over there to see if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing or if they were racked out over there. And if they didn't have people over there I would typically go over to the police station and be like, "hey you need to get some maldunes up on the roof there buddy." The Iraqi Army, I thought tended to be as professional and soldierly as you could expect a group of guys wearing tennis shoes and driving Nissans around could be. I always admired their bravery because, especially around Americans. They would always try to impress us and I got to be honest, the Police and – the checkpoints around Kahn Bani Saad would get hit constantly from insurgents and these guys would be stuck out here for hours because the Iraqis never seemed to quite the idea that you never shouldn't have guys on checkpoints for you know 12 hours at a time. They probably – they wouldn't rotate them so guys would be out there for hours. Sometimes the insurgents would come through and I know one time the Mohammad Sacran – there were 3 check points around Kahn Bani Saad: one at the north end of town, one at the south end of town, and there was one out west near a village called Mohammad Sacran that had its own police force actually, locally. At different times during the year those checkpoints would get hit. I remember the Mohammad Sacran one getting hit fairly hard one time, but you can tell the way it got hit was because they drove up and nobody shot at them because everybody at the checkpoint was probably racked out. So um, but around us if we went out on a company raid or something – we always did joint raids we never did anything by ourselves. We always had the Iraqis with us. They were always very brave in terms of – I don't know if it was because they wanted to impress us, some of their officers were highly effective – I remember thinking at the time that too many of their senior officers weren't nearly as affective as some of their junior leaders. There was on particular lieutenant, Lieutenant Adell. I have a couple pictures of him and I think he was a former Iraqi Army guy that had been in the professional Iraqi Army before the war, was a Second Lieutenant, and seemed to be one of the more effective leaders they had as a platoon leader, company commander. And I remember thinking to myself why isn't this guy a company commander or an even a battalion commander because this guy seems really bright. Whereas some of the other commanders we were always kind of half wondering, "Hmm not quite sure about these guys. What their professional training was – were they really working toward improving the army?" There were always these rivalries between the army and the police in town and who was really running the show but uh for the most part the rank and file soldiers and a lot of their junior leaders I was very impressed with. At the company level their leaders tended to be very good, in terms of at least, 1 taking care of their soldiers and trying to the best that they could with the limited resources that they had. I saw Iraqi soldiers do things that frankly – I mean that really blew your mind in terms of like "wow that was brave, stupid, but brave that was really impressive."

DeRubertis: Do you remember anything off the top of your head, any specific event?

Eakins: Well there was one particular time doing an early – it was May, I want to say it was May 29th. We were doing an operation called Operation Orphan Clone and we had reconed the mission about a week – a couple days prior. And we remember thinking it was kind of going to be typical raid of this type. We stopped doing cordon and search and started doing cordon and knock, so instead of going into a village and targeting a house and going in and kicking in the doors and raising hell. What we started to do was cordon off a neighborhood and start knocking

on doors and once we had a pretty good idea that no one was shooting at us. And we would just ask them, “declare your weapons, everybody come outside and just let us know what’s going on and just sure what you tell us you have is what you have in the house.” But by in large just try and look for contraband and things that may have been hidden on their property. We did this joint operation, it was my platoon – It was lead by our company, so it was my company commander and our platoon and then we were attached a group of infantry, and infantry platoon from another battalion, but I can’t remember what unit it was from; I’d have to look it up. We were down in a village called Sayyid Awwad, which is a small village along the Diyala River only 5 or 10 clicks [*5 or 10 kilometers*] northeast of Kahn Bani Saad. Operation started out pretty normal. You get there before the crack of dawn. The Americans, we’d typically set up the cordons around the villages and then the Iraqis would come in and do the cordon and knocks that way there was an Iraqi face in the operation. You could always tell when the Iraqis would show up because they would be in this really long convoy of pickup trucks with their lights on with tons of guys piled in the back and every time they’d jump out they’d fire their weapon because they don’t – an AK47 fully loaded carrying it around on full auto and so they would jump out of the truck and you knew they were here because all of the sudden you’d start to hear “poom” up they’re here and you never worried about them shooting at you because knew – you could just picture every guy jumping out of the truck and his weapon going off. So we started doing that operation and we had 2 Apaches doing cover. We were searching the village along the river, the infantry unit that was attached was actually with the Iraqi forces in a small palm grove about 5 clicks to our well actually about 3 clicks to our west. We had two apaches providing close air support when all of the sudden rockets were being fired at the Apaches. What eventually what happened we all – we figured our village didn’t have much going on and there was a fight going on in the palm grove so we load everybody up on the trucks. Instead of just following down into the palm grove where we already know this Bravo Company unit from this Infantry unit is, we decided to actually drive around to this flank to see if we can cut anybody trying to escape. We get to a point where the canal road we’ve taken is getting, kind of falling off. Now the Iraqis are in their fighting or at least they were. We ended up coming to this position where they are kind of coming back on our flank and then a bunch of Iraqis got shot up because basically when the shooting happened they just ran right at it and they were going to take them on. And so 3 or 4 guys got shot up, just because when the shooting started, like instead of hitting the ground they just started running where the guns were shooting at them from, and now eventually they got some of the guys. Lieutenant Addell in the legendary story in that particular fight was that he was actually been hiding behind a canal and an insurgent came out of the canal and that Addell had grabbed him from behind, shot him, and threw him back into the canal, and then took a grenade and threw it on him. We ended up treating the wounded Iraqi causality, but I just remember thinking that, “wow here these guys are, they don’t have any body armor on to speak of really.” We were getting shot at a level that I – we were ducked into our armored Humvees thinking ah we’re good and these guys just charge right at where they are shooting from and I just remember being really impressed by their by the level of their bravery. Perhaps there would have been a better way to react to it, but it was just pure adrenaline and showing no fear what so ever. I was usually impressed by what they did.

DeRubertis: You mentioned doing cordon and knocks, what did you see as your units overall mission?

Eakins: That was always a difficult one because we kind of given overall missions and we always knew that during the year we knew that the two major elections were going to occur during our time there. One was going to be the Constitutional Referendum and the other was going to be the first Parliamentary selections based on the new constitution. So we had this overarching goal that we would provide a level of security within our sector so that when the elections were to round they would be successful. In terms of our immediate mission, we really saw it – I would say it would be hard for us to define that we went out everyday knowing what we were supposed to do today – like what is the end state how many and all that garbage. We kind of got that our primary mission, and there were several of them. One was to kind of just secure the local population as best you could, you know try to with our limited man power try to get out in the villages and find out who bad guys are and try to cut them off before they do bad things. Try to find out who the networks are, try to find out who the financiers are, find out where they are getting their weapon systems and try to intercept that stuff before it becomes something that blows up in the street. We weren't as successful I don't think as we could have been. Just simply because we – I don't think we had the man power. We had a tank battalion – I think Brigade would look at us and say, “o we've got a platoon in Kahn Bani Saad,” but they're think infantry platoon, they're probably thinking we got 30 guys there. Whereas the reality was that we had a tank platoon with 3 or 4 guys on leave so I might have 13 guys. So I don't think we were able to develop those connections as well as we could have, but I think, as I saw it, was to help keep the roads clear, destroy any enemy we could identify, either kill or capture them. So when an IED goes off, you can identify who did it, you go get them. If you can capture somebody and develop the intelligence or find out from the Iraqi Army like where did this come from, who do we know? Encourage informants to come into the JCC, or whatever it was, we would try to do that. In the end it was all - the idea was to get it to a point where violence was at a relatively low level so as not to affect in a dramatic fashion the turnouts for the elections and to ensure that the elections themselves were relatively violence free. I think in terms of that measure in Diyala Province at least we were very effective. I know that our battalion was very aggressive in terms of patrolling roads; some highways that were only patrolled once a day by the previous unit were patrolled 3 or 4 times a day by our battalion. I think we did reduce significantly the number of IED and roadside bomb type offensives that occurred in the sector. There's a lot of feeling afterward that maybe a lot of what we did, basically had driven any kind of surface insurgency underground just because we were very aggressive in getting the trucks out and getting the people out there and to try to make sure it was the kind of thing that if bad guys knew that if they did launch a significant attack they would have a significant immediate blow back from US forces. From that stand point I think we did well, I remember the constitution and parliamentary elections particularly in – by that time our company had been transferred from the west of the Diyala to the east side, so we went from being responsible for Kahn Bani Saad to being responsible for town like Kanaan, which is K-A-N-A-A-N, and another town that was a Shiite slum in eastern Baghdad Province that was called Nahrwan, which was N-A-H-R-W-A-N. So for the elections our platoon and company commander, we were up in Kanaan. 3rd platoon and I think 2nd platoon was down in Nahrwan and I have to be honest with you, our – Kanaan always seemed to be fairly peaceful anyway it was actually 1/3 Kurd, 1/3 Shiite, and 1/3 Sunni. Shiites and the Sunnis worshipped at the same mosque and the Kurds had their own little part of town, but it was very neat, but everybody seemed to kind of get along well. And for our particular sector for both elections I was responsible for Kanaan like collecting the ballots and stuff like that – well supporting the Iraqis while the collected ballots. And to be honest in our

particular sector for our platoon and our company we had no real significant events during either election. And I think battalion wide I think both elections, I think there were only 2 or 3 events. So I think by in large we felt that we were very successful in terms of kind of keeping the level of violence in the sectors to a very low level that allowed for a very high turn out for those elections in those sector, so I think uh – we didn't know it would turn out that way, but once we did go out on election day and see the lines at the election polls because we would patrol during the day. We were out in sector all day during those days. Those were very long days, very long nights, as we went around to every small village and collected ballot boxes and stuff, but in each one we went to everyone reported that everyone that can to vote and wanted to vote got to vote. People were walking around with their purple fingers all day and I think we really felt, at least in our sector that we had been really successful in making sure that Iraqis that wanted to, had a chance to really speak for the first time on the form that their government would take. So it was really exciting – I was a Poly Sci major in college so I had a deep appreciation for the historic nature of the events that were taking place in front of me in terms of – you know if you think about the first time people established our constitution and you think that's what they were doing that they were voting for their leaders for the very first for what would be a permanent government. It seemed really significant to me, so I felt really good personally. I know I talked to my unit err my platoon about it that they should really feel proud of what they'd accomplished as far as giving the Iraqi people the opportunity to have the space and relatively violence free - to be able to step and have their voice heard.

DeRubertis: This is a little bit of a step back and a clarification.

Eakins: Sure.

DeRubertis: You had mentioned that you might have been attached to the 3rd Infantry Division along with the 1st?

Eakins: Well we were – it gets pretty complicated because the Army operations in a very modular fashion where we 1st Brigade Battalion when we were in garrison, when we were deployed we were attached to a brigade from the 3rd Infantry Division, #rd Brigade 3rd ID, but that brigade had been detached from 3rd ID and attached to the 42nd Infantry Division which was a National Guard Division Headquarters out of New York. And our division headquarters was in Tikrit. Our brigade headquarters was in Camp Warhorse on the north side of Baquba and then obviously us, and 110th Field Artillery were stationed on the east side of Baquba at FOB Gabe. So it kind of created a convoluted – and actually as I recall during that rotation, 2005, that was the first instance – that was a major National Guard rotation. A lot of division commands at the time were National Guard. We shared a bordered with the 278th Regimental Combat Team out of Tennessee. That was the first instance since at least the Second World War, I think, where regular Army Units had fallen under National Guard command because our division commander was a National Guardsmen from, General Taludo, from New York who I think is actually going to become the next Chief of the National Guard Bureau. So yeah it was a very interesting set up and I think for the last two or three months of our deployment, I think our division command was actually the 101st Airborne because they had come in a replaced the 42nd. Now what it creates – just kind of a small thing that only really soldiers really care about is we – obviously when you deploy as the Big Red One you were your Big Red One shoulder patch. We're the only unit in

the Army that wears a full color combat patch when they – full color unit patch when they go to deployment. It's kind of the big deal behind being part of the Big Red One. Well because of our set up and who we were deployed with we could – you could wear either the Big Red One patch, you could wear a 3rd Infantry Division patch because it was a brigade from the 3rd ID, you could wear a 42nd Infantry patch because that was our division command, and then obviously you could wear the because we were there for the second part of the year you could wear the 101st Airborne patch. I just remember our battalion commander making a big deal, I think uh Col Hall that he better be seeing Big Red One patches when you put on your combat patch if you're serving in country – in theater for a couple of months. You want to see Big Red One patches on the shoulder sleeves “and I only better see those Rainbow 42nd patches if you guys are from New York, in which case it ok.” So it's just one of those things that probably only soldiers cared about everybody else is like, “uh what?” While we were over there attached to the 3rd Brigade, they called it the Sledgehammer Brigade” from 3rd ID out of – I want to say their headquarters was out of Fort Benning, Georgia.

DeRubertis: How would you – How effective would you say the National Guard command and units were?

Eakins: I got to be honest from my view point as a platoon leader to tell aside from the unit patches, going from one sector to another whether the guys I was talking to were Guardsmen or not. I'd say that the National Guard did a fine job. I mean, I think there was a little bit of questions about whether or not – I don't know if it was necessarily the fact that they were National Guard, but I know there was one time were we wanted to go into Baquba and Baritz and clean up that town a little bit. Not necessarily Fallujah style, but a brigade operation that would have been a little messy and from what I understand their division but the kabash on it because they didn't want a big mess, prior to the elections or something like that. So their there were times like that that we felt that, “maybe they didn't have the stomach for it,” but for the most part I would say that they Guardsmen and stuff, we had reservists that were assigned to us as part of civil affairs team and there was a – they really didn't seem any different from regular units. I actually had an opportunity to visit an armor school friend of mine; Joe Alexander was a lieutenant up in Bayji, Iraq. Uh B-A-Y-J-I, he was stationed at FOB Summerall. He started out as an XO and he ended up taking over the command of a company up there. His first day as company commander, he lost three guys. I went up there escorting Iraqi soldiers with my platoon to – for forward movement and I had an opportunity to visit him and I remember thinking – he we came on the base and he was a Pennsylvania National Guardsmen and I got a chance to meet him and some of his soldiers and really the type of duties they were doing – I mean they were a tank battalion from a National Guard unit but really consummate pros, knew what they were doing. I remember the only kind of unusual anecdote I have from that was the beginning of that mission we had to go pick up these Iraqi soldiers. I think it was 5 buses worth of Iraqi soldiers who had graduate from basic training near Baladruz, which is B-A-L-A-D-R-U-Z. There was a FOB out there that did; I want to say it was FOB Caldwell did basic training there, so we had to take them up to Bayji. Well the unit that was up there was from the 278th Regimental Combat Team, which was a Tennessee National Guard unit and I – we arrived at the front gate and I'm like, “Hi I'm Lieutenant Eakins, I'm from 2/34 Armor for FOB Gabe. We're here to pick up Iraqi soldiers to take to Bayji.” And there's kind of an older NCO at the gate and he was like, “ok cool, cool. Come on in here and we'll get you guys figured out.” He goes let me call captain so

and so. And he calls captain so and so over and captain so and so comes over and says, “Hey dad what’s up,” because his dad was the NCO. I was just like what? That’s the National Guard for you; you’ve got the father and son serving right there. So it was different that way, but by in large their professionalism on the battlefield I’d say was almost seamless between reserve and active component from what I could see.

DeRubertis: Did you ever feel like there was a rivalry or did the units view each other differently?

Eakins: Um not really. I mean within our sector we were active duty brigade attached to a National Guard Unit, kind of in our little area of the world the only time we really interacted with them is when we’d cross through other sectors. I think – seem to remember one time, there was a logistics convoy coming through our sector on Route Detroit, which was east of the Diyala river. Route Detroit was a bypass route between Baquba and – err an eastern bypass for Baghdad between Salman polk and Baquba. We would patrol that road quite a bit. I think a logistics convoy or some sort of convoy moving through got hit and we went out as part of the battalion QRF to help secure them and get them on their way. I saw soldiers running out wearing their body armor and T-shirts and we were very strict about keeping your blouse on because – it may seem like you might be cooler if you take your blouse off and just wear your T-Shirt, but your blouse holds moisture on you skin and keeps you cooler and keeps the Sun from directly toughing you skin. And uh I remember thinking as soon as I saw them jump out, “ah probably reservists.” And I jumped out and sure enough they were. I seemed to – I’m a lieutenant and talking to a sergeant E-5 on location. I was like, “so where’s your patrol leader – your platoon leader? Is he going to come out talk to me or am I just going to talk to you the whole time? You seem to be the guy in charge.” There were just little things like that we would tease each other about, but for the most part it was just like little service rivalry type things, but nothing really major.

DeRubertis: I’d like to go back a little bit and talk about combat patrols. Could you do a walk through of what a normal one might be? And maybe one that stuck out in your mind?

Eakins: Well typically, what I considered a combat patrol was you know we might get assigned – typically if you were the escort platoon that week, the company commander we would simply say, hey I’d like to have a patrol in this area, I’d like to have a patrol in this area. You weren’t typically given specific objectives. You were basically given a time and a general area that they wanted us to go to and sometimes we would throw some of our own in for own personal interests. Typically those would basically be largely mounted. We’d drive around the sector. We might go to a town; we might go to a village, “hey we haven’t been to this village in a while.” And basically we’re driving – typically when we would drive along roads, depending on the size of the road and if it was located in the city or not, we tended to drive in very wide kind of gaps between each vehicle. We typically went 20 meters in the cities and stuff like that and once we got out in the country then like 50. If we were on Route Detroit, which was a very long straight road then we’d be 100 meters between vehicles, which decreased the likelihood that one IED could get more than one vehicle. We typically go out for a couple hours, drive around try to – we’d intentionally kind of drive fast hoping they would blow stuff up on us because we were in 4 ton armored Humvees and we were reasonably probably over confident of the fact that they

could deflect and blast that they had, but the fast we went and the more spaced out we were the – it was better to have them expend the munitions on us then try to hit an Iraqi convoy or civilian or something like that. So typically we'd drive fast kind of looking at the road; everybody kind of scanning doing their thing. Our gunners would always ride low so that way they'd kind of have the protection of their armored couplers around them. We might stop in a village and I'd have my guide set up a short cordon just with the vehicles. Maybe have 5s, 10s, 20s – you do a 5 meter check from your vehicle to make sure there's nothing around. Get out of the vehicle you do a 10 meters kind of check that there's nothing around and then do a 20 and then you are kind of free to do your patrols. We might do dismounted into the village, talk to a couple of the elders. I'd always have a translator with me; every platoon leader had a translator with them at all times when they went out in sector. And so you could have conversations with them. You know am activities? Anybody come to you? Is anybody threatening this village? Things like that and just try and gather intelligence and information for the S-2 then they can build a picture for ya. And it also gave you an opportunity to – you'd go to towns and you'd learn, the same kids would always come to you and you'd stop by a guy in the market place so you'd always stop by. You always want to be careful. You don't want to be seem as too friendly with them because that might make them a target for insurgents or something like that, but for the most part in my platoon and I know by in large in the company we always tried to make it less of a menacing American presence and more of a “O great the Americans are here.” So typically when we would go, the kids would come out to the village to meet us and we would have balloons or stickers or – it's amazing how excited Iraqi kids can get over a pencil or a piece of paper or something. I mean they would get really excited. We would always encourage our family member to send us candy because more in care packages because we would always hand out candy to the kids and stiff.

DeRubertis: So you gave them personal, well not necessarily personal items but things that weren't Army issued at all.

Eakins: O no, no, no. Typically we never gave them anything Army issued. We would – it's kind of funny. You'd always be standing there with a pen. You know you always had a pen or a pencil and they'd always want your pencil or pen or something. They always thought it was better than what they had. And if we had – now we would have some kind of – we would always do civil affairs missions, not necessarily combat patrol missions where we would take a convoy out and for the, I think, for the first part of the year, they had each platoon kind of adopt a local school. So I asked and Aunt of mine who was a school teacher and they sent notebooks and some pieces – pencils and things like that. So supplies like that we would take to the school and hand out the supplies. Simple things like notebooks and notepads and pens and pencils and thing like that and they were always – it was always amazing how appreciative they were. We'd hand out little, you know, little stickers that say “I love Iraq” in Arabic. And we'd always had those stickers out and they always seemed to appreciate that, but the combat patrols I always saw as we were either trying to gather intelligence, find bad guys – O remember the word they would always use was “Presents Patrol. We want you to do a Presents Patrol.” And I was always like “presents” is not a doctrinal act you know. You are either doing a combat patrol, reconnaissance, or route clearance, something like that because I didn't want my guys getting shot just because. Just to be there. We would always try to couch them in those terms. We were going to this town; we were going to talk to these people and while we're doing it we're going to clear this route.

You know because if you're driving down the route you are clearing it. So that's typically what they would involve. I would say – contact with the enemy in terms of small arms fire was very limited all year. I'd say the largest one was the Sayyid Awwad action that I told you about that earlier.

DeRubertis: Would you mind telling that again?

Eakins: The Sayyid Awwad that operation was – it was called operation Orphan Clone it was on May 29th 2005. The intent was to find what we thought was an IED building cell near Kahn Bani Saad. There is a town called Sayyid Awwad which is S-A-Y-Y-I-D-A-W-W-D or something like that. It basically it involved the headquarters section of our platoon from the company. I want to say it was Bravo 1/36 infantry, I think a platoon from them and then the local, I think it was Alpha company of the I want to say the 4th Iraqi Army battalion that we had locally with us. We had reconed the mission a couple days prior and I had actually conducted the recon with my commander. I actually have pictures of the meeting we had. I actually have a lot of picture because we actually had an Air Force Combat crew with us that day. It was kind of funny because I remember before the mission started; we were doing the mission brief. We've got the whole company there and the Iraqis, and the Bravo 1/36 guys. I'll have to check that unit number, but I remember turning to the Air Force combat crew and it was just a couple of Air Force personnel and I remember telling them, “ well you guys probably aren't going to see much because we do these all the time and we never get shot at.” And sure enough that's the one we end up getting shot at. Like I said, we started out where our platoon and our company commander and our part of the Iraqi Army was basically clearing a small village along the Diyala River nothing real major. We didn't even do a cordon and search for that one it was cordon and knock the whole way where we basically just secure a perimeter around the whole village and then we would just go house to house and knock on the door and ask what was up and obviously its early in the morning so they are just stirring, but kind of very low key. Bravo 1/36 was searching homes in a sector that kind of included a rectangular sized palm grove about 5 clicks, no I guess 2 clicks by 3 clicks, uh 2 kilometers by 2 kilometers We had two Apache's on station providing close air support because we did think there would be some contact perhaps. The first indication that there was a lot of bad guys was apparently when one of the Apaches came real close to this one house that was in the palm grove and all of the sudden we heard a rocket being fired at the Apache. And the Apache pulled back and started firing its machine gun at the – wherever it was getting shot at from. So we were all like wow. Like man that's loud. Our trucks were all up on this road and were down in the village and so we ran to our trucks and started driving in the direction of the noise where we could see the Apaches flying around, you could begin to here small arms fire and more rockets and uh so the commander quickly decided that instead of drive into the middle of the palm grove where we knew the other American unit and the Iraqis were already shooting things up, and actually where the choppers were doing gun runs I think at that point, we would try to go to the western edge of the palm grove and anybody trying to escape we would hopefully try to intercept. I got to be honest I don't think it was maybe more than 5 or 6 people that were occupying this house that were shooting at us and here we are with close to one hundred, probably about 50 Americans and about 100 Iraqi soldiers kind of giving them the business. What happened was essentially we were trying to go down these canal road were we know the Iraqis are and we've been told through an Iraqi radio that they are actually fighting. And so we are trying to get there with our Humvees cause we are tankers;

we're not quite as comfortable as just dismounting and going without our heavy weapons on the trucks. So we do go down this canal road eventually get to a point where it kind of dead ends into a house and a fence. At the time there wasn't any shooting going on so we were like alright we are going to go ahead and try to get turned around here to see if there's a way to get to this other side of this canal and move further down the flank of this palm grove. As we all got out and started to turn our vehicles around all of the sudden we started to get small arms fire over our head and that's when we kind of realized they were shooting at us. And it's at that point the Iraqi Army that was a little further south of us that we didn't have visibility on right away that they attempted to move in an tack – eliminate the people that we shooting at us and that's when they got hit. So what we did was – the call came down that they were going to do some gun runs so we kind of needed to get out of that area because they were also probably going to shot some rockets at this house. We kind – apparently we were too close to the point where the Apache pilot was sitting. So we decided to pull out and we also got word on the Iraqi radio that they had casualties, so we said just pull your casualties out to the main hardball road and we'll get them in the ambulance with me. And so we bring – we get out to the man hardball road and there's a very kind of a tall cinder block wall along it so we kind of used that to shield the vehicles and we were kind of able to look over it from the road and able to provide over fire and the choppers came in and started to do gun runs and nail the crap out of that house that bad guys had apparently been shooting from. And the Iraqis brought their casualties to us and our medic kind of treated them in the back of that pick-up truck and there ended up being a picture of me in a newspaper because I didn't know that the Air Force combat crew was snapping away of me holding this Iraqi soldier's hand. It ended up on the cover of the Multinational Forces Newspaper in Baghdad, which I never lived down the rest of the year. My platoon sergeant then took the ambulance and escorted those guys back to the Kahn Bani Saad medical center and got that soldier evacuated once the Apache came through that kind of ended the fight pretty – pretty quickly.

DeRubertis: When you were doing combat patrols did you ever find IEDs or anything like that?

Eakins: Yeah I think our platoon ended up being hit where an IED was actually targeted at us. I would say at least 8 times. The first one was on March 3rd and that one went off between my lead vehicle and me and that – there was a secondary attached to it. That ended up taking hours because we brand new at it. So we were like, “well we're going to sit here and secure it until the engineers come,” which was a good thing, but it took us a while to figure out that we'd actually have to call the engineers to come do it. There was actually a secondary device. The bad guys always like to put a primary and then hook it up to a secondary, but the secondary didn't always go off, so we'd have to call the engineers to take care of it. We only had one major event where a vehicle was disabled and that was on July 23rd. And our platoon had gone down with our company commander because by this time we had given up the JCC in Kahn Bani Saad, so we weren't operating 7 days a week there. We were just actually operating from FOB. We'd go down and patrol the town and stuff like that. There started to be a lot more violence when we move out, 2 reasons. One the Iraqi Army had transferred the checkpoints over to the police and the police weren't nearly as affective as manning them as the Army was and 2, we weren't there all the time, as kind of this, the guys with the radios that can call in choppers. So we get a report, we're at FOB Gabe – we get a report that the checkpoints all around Kahn Bani Saad are being nailed, at least two of the checkpoints were getting crushed. So we deploy our company. I went

out with the company commander because we were the most immediately ready. We went down there to see what was going on. By the time we get down there, I think the insurgents knew we were coming and by in large had cleared out. So we basically come in and start cleaning up bodies and stuff from the checkpoints and also trying to secure the town to make sure that there are no insurgents left. So we do a quick once over of the JCC and make sure everybody there is safe, make sure the building is alright. We go back to the checkpoints to see what damages had been done and start cleaning those up. By the time we all get done doing this other folks have come in. 2nd platoon on their way down, 3rd platoon has come down even the battalion commander's QRF, which was a platoon sized element for the battalion commander so he could go where ever he wanted, even they were on their way down. We kind of decided that everything has kind of settled down we've reinforced the checkpoints, we're relatively certain. We've cleaned them up; we've got all the bodies kind of squared away and stuff like that. So we decide we are going to go ahead and move out to back to base. As we're moving back we've this huge American convoy because you've got three platoons of Americans plus a Headquarters, plus another platoon from the battalion. We're a making out turn off one of the bypass highways to go right toward Baquba and there is an Iraqi Army convoy heading the other way, going down to reinforce Kahn Bani Saad for the night. As a pickup truck begins to make turn it throws the two guys out of the back of the pickup truck and onto the road and into a field. So we decide to stop to render aid because I've got an ambulance. We stop, we render aid, we get them in my ambulance. I'm going to take them to Camp Warhorse, which is on the north side of Baquba to the brigade aid station. The rest of the battalion err the rest of the company is back there, I'm not quite sure what they were doing, but we decided we'd just take off. We've got the casualties with us. I get about kilometer away from where that giant gaggle is and an IED goes off right on my vehicle. It blew all the tires out, my driver, Sergeant Runyon, did a terrific job of pushing the vehicle through it. It cut our fuel lines so you could hear the vehicle slowing down as less and less fuel was getting to the engine. It blew the crap out of the engine. We were just draining fuel, oil, everything and he just, God bless him, he just kept that 4 ton thing rolling about probably another 20 meters and got it to – I don't know if he drove it over the median into the other lane. It was like a 4 lane highway or if the IED blew us over there, but I just remember it all filled up with smoke. You start getting that smell that smells like burnt black powder or whatever - you know twisted metal. The armor on our Humvee held up. There were kind of shrapnel marks in the glass next to my face. There was about a 4 inch glass front windshield and it was bulged out where a piece of shrapnel had kind of just formed this bubble right on the inside. And God bless him, my gunner; he was behind the .50 cal and he had armor around him and the .50 cal had caught anything that had tried to come through the small space. The .50 cal probably saved his life. So the vehicle kind of rolled to a stop and at first you're just like, "wow." And almost immediately we just looked down and check my crew and everybody's ok and so I started doing my 5 and 20 and just like o wow is there and of course I can hear on the radio that people are just like, "Holy crap, what was" and my platoon sergeant is constantly going "red one this is red four" and I'm trying to break in because he probably thinks I'm dead, but I'm just trying to key the mike here. So I finally get it out and go, "this is red one. We are all good." And I put it out over the company net too because the rest of the company was back there when it goes off and apparently my company commander was like, "Holy cow!" because apparently this thing was huge from their perspective. All I saw was what was right here. So all of the sudden 2nd platoon pulls up. The ambulance actually pulled forward with us and pulled up right behind us. They were undamaged. 2nd platoon all of a sudden pulls up behind us and I kind of do a quick 5 and 20

and I'm just like, "holy cow" because my ears are still ringing a little bit. My gunner's ok. His hands are a little bit burn and 2nd platoon goes, "what do you need" and I was like, "just take the ambulance and take it to Warhorse because you've still got two casualties in that in the ambulance." So we just stopped – we immediately go into, "we've got to recover the vehicle and it out of here" phase. The rest of the company behind us goes into we are going to search for the trigger guy. Actually it was our battalion commander's QRF that found him. They found – he was a 15 year old boy that had been paid 10 dollars to pull the trigger on us. What we typically found in an IED cell. You always had – the guy that set it off was typically the last guy in the chain, it was always a young person that was probably paid to do it and they - somebody comes to them and says here's 20 dollars to pull this trigger. The next time you see an American Humvee come around push this button and they'd be like alright and then run. Then you probably had somebody that was responsible for acquiring the munitions, someone who was responsible for digging the hole, somebody responsible for putting the detonation device, and someone who's responsible for actually hooking the detonation device up to the munition and then you had someone who was financing it all. So I think that later that week they had interrogated the 15 year old, so we went through this town of Al Hadid, which is right near where we got hit and basically he would just point at a house and we'd be like "alright let's find out who's in there." Just anybody that we thought he knew that had been involved with him ending up with the remote control in his hand. We never really knew what would always come of those. We would detain people and then collect evidence and then send it up to brigade. Typically we wouldn't see anything after that. Those are the most significant ones that occurred. A lot of times they would go off between us. We would stop, scan for secondaries. WE had one where my lead truck had driven over a crater in the middle of the road, which we had always told them not to do. So he drives over this crater and I think there might have been an IED in there. And so pull up there and I've got the binos [*binoculars*] out and I can see just out of the top of the crater I can see the top smooth edge of a 152mm round. I'm like, "back up, back up, back up!" Sure enough, I don't think it had been attached to a detonation device yet, but it was in that phase where someone had dug the whole, someone had come up and dropped the munition in and someone else would come in and prime it to be detonated. So we had caught it in an early stage of being set up. So we would call in the engineers and they'd come in with their little robot that would come up with the C4 charge and place it on there and they would just blow it up. Those were the most typical ones. The ones that always blew up near you were always the most kind of like, "wow" because it's a really loud noise and blows across the road. If they blew up behind you they were always kind of bothersome because you didn't know who it had it or anything like that, but yeah that – they were – it was interesting, certainly I'm glad most of them missed.

DeRubertis: Who or what did you feel was the biggest threat to the people or...?

Eakins: The biggest threat – the most active and people operating against us were Sunni insurgents. I don't think they were necessarily Al-Qaeda types. Now we did have intelligence if you remember in 2006, early 2006 they did end up kill Zarqawi who was the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq in the Baquba area. There were three times during the year that we actually got deployed to look for him. Based on the same technology they eventually got him with. Where all of the sudden we'd be sitting down – we would basically have some preliminary knowledge that they were tracking a significant high value target and that the entire battalion was to be kind of ready

to deploy if they get a positive hit on the – whoever they were searching for. So I think it was 2 or 3 – at least twice maybe three times that we got deployed in the middle of the night where we would do what we called “hands across the palm grove” where basically soldiers are only about 2 meters apart walking through the palm grove and you’ve got a cordon around the whole thing and you’re just walking through the palm grove going if anybody’s hiding in here there is no way he is getting out between us and the Iraqis and stuff. We never found him obviously. During – particularly during the second part of the elections there were significant amount of violence against Shiite civilians and that when we first started to see the targeting of Shiite shrines. There would always be these little Shiite shrines. I don’t know if they prophets or Imams or who ever it was. There would be these little shrines all along the roads and they weren’t huge or anything grandiose, but there was one period of time where I think the Sunnis went through and systematically and blew up every shrine along Route Detroit. We did have in our sector groups like Madi militia and things like that from the Shiite side, but they tended and we had thing like Peshmerda from the Kurds and stuff like that, local militia, but they tended to remain relatively low key and we never had what we thought was a significant threat from them because they were by and large seeking to maintain local control and basically our opinion at the time was as long as they are maintain the piece then we are going to let them continue.

DeRubertis: A little change of gears here. In terms of leadership, what – do did you have a favorite – I don’t want to say favorite office, but someone that you thought was really good leader?

Eakins: Yeah I mean, I was very impression with my platoon sergeant. The NCO Corps in the United States Armed is generally considered to be the best NCO Corps in the world. And historically the United States Armed Forces has always leaned heavily on NCOs as the primary professionals in their field and I was massively impressed. Not only at his level of technical expertise, but also as a tanker, the way he took to the task – his name was Sergeant Scott Galindo from Nebraska. He took to the task of learning more about how to do Humvee patrols and dismounted patrols and how to clear a house and things like that. And really took the task of learning that and training his soldiers how to do it very seriously. And once we got deployed he took very seriously his role as the primary NCO of making sure the section sergeants and his E-5s were doing the right things and taking care of their soldier. I never had any worry in my own mind. I trusted him implicitly in terms of making sure that soldiers were always – like if I called on the radio and said we’ve got to be ready to go if we’re on QRF. Like I remember the standard for QRF, you had to be out the door in about less than 9 minutes. We would typically be out in 5 or 6 because he had that platoon kind of ready to go. I was hugely impressed with out battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Oscar J. Hall. He was a tremendous leader. I would – you hear the cliché of I’d follow him to the gates of hell, but with this cat you literally would. I mean he would get you very excited about what you were doing. He always awarded folks for doing very well. He was stern and corrected you if you screwed up not in a way that made you feel like you were a complete moron. He would do it in a way that trained you and in the end I don’t think it’s too far to say that a lot of the officers and Senior NCOs that served under him, you know, developed at great deal of affection for the man. He was a very gung ho type. He was good at what he did; he was a good tanker. He was tremendous that we were taking care of our soldiers. He would actually host, he would actually have a breakfast with maybe his company commanders and captains. Then he would have a breakfast with all his lieutenants and he wanted

you to speak very frankly to him about how you felt. After the IED went off on my truck and he invited me to his quarters and just had a non-alcoholic beer and he would just talk to you about how you were feeling, when was the last time you called your wife? He would do a lot of that kind of stuff, where he was – he really was the guy that you really felt good being there knowing that he was the guy in charge of the battalion. You really felt like you were never in a position where you were given a raw deal or being told something that would lead you astray. I had nothing but the complete confidence in him, when I think about battalion commanders today – like it's one of those things you always compare every commander you have to your first one and he would definitely be it. My company commander was Captain Andy Turner, I think he's a major now at – Kansas at a reception battalion I think. He was a great company commander, real easy going, knew what he was doing, was very personable, loved his lieutenants. We literally were the best of friends, I mean the platoon leaders, him, the platoon sergeants, the 1st Sergeant got along famously. Alpha Company was a wonderful company to belong to, great team, but those of the kind of people that stand out in my mind.

DeRubertis: So you've had this experience in Iraq, what's it like now that you are back? What has your civilian life been like?

Eakins: It was different, it was hard at first. I got to be honest with you it was kind of different for me to because I – we redeployed from Iraq, we arrived – we got to Kuwait and we landed in Kansas on January 19th 2006, which was very unusually to have it be exactly 365 days. I remember we got back to Fort Riley and I remember thinking how unusual it was, it seemed like after Kuwait and waiting around for a couple of weeks to come home and the long bus ride and the long plane ride that I got home and wasn't nearly as emotional about it as I thought I would be. Like I was happy to be home, like I think I even wrote it in the journal, where it's kind of strange being here. Again, we left Kuwait and this time when we landed, Kansas wasn't nearly as cold as we thought it would have been. Like it was January so we thought it was going to be in the 30s and we land and it's in the 50s or 60s and where like "hmm this isn't too bad," we were getting like 50s and 60s at night in Kuwait. So we were like ahs it's not too bad, but you begin to look at the things just around you, like the colors of the roads and the trees and stuff like that that you haven't seen for a long time. You know you don't have that persistent smell of garbage burning and sewage that you get used to overseas. I remember being very happy to see Margo, but it just felt weird to be home and the idea that we weren't going to be doing what we were doing over there anymore and that particular unit, which had really been together for three years and for two years we had really trained on our positions and been in the same positions and deployed in those same positions, been in that platoon, and kind of all that was coming to an end for me anyway was kind of sad. Like I know my buddy Nick in 2nd Platoon, he had had that platoon for three years. Captain Turner had been the company commander of Alpha Company for four years. Our class of OCS guys, Lieutenant Clementi, myself, Lieutenant Nate Finny, we had all showed up at the unit at the same time and were in the same armor school class and it was at the same time that Colonel Hall had taken over the battalion. So we had – our first commander we had always been very close to him. We had developed a close affinity for him and he was leaving and a new battalion commander came in. I was actually getting out of the Army and going into civilian life. So I remember as happy as I was to be home that I was sad knowing that this incredible collection of soldier, NCOs and officers was going to be essentially breaking up and all going on to do other things. So there's a touch of sadness knowing that this wonder team

was not going to be doing its job anymore. And for me it was kind of a rapid transition. We came back in January, went on a 30 day black leave and went to Ireland and went home, had a great time. Me and Margo, my wife, and then by 1 May I was out of the Army completely and I was back in Columbus. Margo and I got our house here in Bexley near Columbus and here I was looking for a job. And it took me about 3 months to find a job once I came back and I remember being very stressed out about that, but you look back on it and you go o 3 months to find a job that's not bad. But at the time we had just bought a new house and everything, I guess I thought it would all be easier coming back. You know you always get these pictures of veterans and you get the parades and stuff like that. People just throwing job offers at you and stuff. And so it was kind of hard at first and I think I felt that when I first came back I lost a lot of self confidence and I really felt that I was a good soldier and a good officer and that we had done very well overseas and that now I'm kind of navigating this unsure water; I didn't really know what I wanted to do. It was easy in the Army. Your career's right in front of you. It's just a matter of marching forward and doing your job and you'll get promoted and the Army will reward you and it's easy to see your career field. Whereas in the civilian life I had no idea really where I wanted to go or start or do. And it was very difficult for both me and Margo at first. I mean we had been a terrific military couple and I think though it became very difficult at first because I was at – I was stationed – assigned to Fort Riley for 48 months essentially about 3 years. Between gunneries, and deployment to places like Fort Polk, Fort Irwin and of course our deployment overseas I may have been home for 10 total months, where I was actually living with Margo at Fort Riley. Other times were doing field exercises and other things. And we really did have to learn how to kind of – you know, live together in a nonmilitary environment and it was a difficult transition for me. I think we finally did figure it out and that's actually one thing that encouraged me – I did join the Ohio Army National Guard last year. In part it was to kind of put my foot back in a little bit because I did think I had some lingering desire to do that Army job. I don't know if I'll do it for a career, but it's definitely nice to have one foot back in it for a while, but I think I'll be cured of that in a couple years. One thing that I was always very cognizant and aware of though was how deeply appreciative everyone we ever met. My parents threw a big welcome home party at our American Legion Post in West Jefferson when I came home. And it was wonderful to see the number of people that came out to that. Even like family members of friends who came, who had written me letters while I was overseas because for some many people they don't know anyone in the service. I mean it's this war being fought for a very large country with a very small military. And it was interesting how people would try to reach out and make that connection with someone who they know was over there. This one particular case, a real close friend of my family's, actually my dad's friend who was a Green Beret in Vietnam, one of his nephews, he had two small children and they wanted my address and they would write me letters and I'd write them letter back and stuff. Two kids that before I deployed I had never even met. I'd only met the dad; I had never even met the mom, yet here they were at my welcome home part and I felt like I kind of knew these boys now because they and written me letters and I had written them letters. [1:19:17] It was really kind of – really heartwarming to see the level of appreciation just by rank and file, ordinary Americans. You know coming home from the airport for leave and you would be wearing your desert uniform and people were very respectful and always interested to see how you were doing and how much time you had left and if you were going home, which I imagine if you were a Vietnam Vet it would have seemed like a very different environment to the one they may have come home to. So I was always really impressed by that kind of outpouring of support for our countrymen.

DeRubertis: I don't have anymore questions for you. Is this anything that you would like to add or say?

Eakins: Uh no just that I greatly appreciate the opportunity to do this. I think it's hugely important and if there's any follow up or anything like that just let me know. I will say that I tend – I often look back at what we did and I really do miss like I said that team and when I reflect on that deployment, it's really one of those that you don't really want to do again, but it's one of the best things I ever did in my life. I don't – as hard as it is when you do come home and as difficult as the transition may seem it's something that you don't know how – I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't done it and to have done it as part of the Big Red One, I can't tell you how proud I am to have that – the BRO card in my pocket and to be part of the 1st Division and even - I was just in Phoenix this past weekend and ran into a Vietnam Veteran of the Big Red One. He was with the 1st Battalion 7th Artillery in Vietnam and never met man the in my life and he said, “uh what division were you in?” and I said, “Well I was in the Big Red One.” He goes, “So was I!” And it's an instant connection with people even though it's across generations and stuff like that. And you – my combat patch I wear is still by Big Red One patch because “Duty First.” It's something you never forget being part of that really esteemed and historic unit and I'm really proud to have been apart of the 2/34 Armor and I really hope – if I could ever find in the military a team like we had in the 2/34 Armor team that deployed to Baquba in 2005 I would be a very lucky man, but I don't think I ever will though.

DeRubertis: Thanks for helping us out with the interview and thanks for your service.

Eakins: Thank you.