

## Cantigny First Division Oral Histories II

### Ohio University Libraries

---

#### Interview with Roy Ramey

Video at <http://media.library.ohiou.edu/u/?cantigny,39> (Part 1)  
<http://media.library.ohiou.edu/u/?cantigny,40> (Part 2) - Jump to *part 2 in transcript*

**Givens:** It is September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009. My name is Seth Givens and we are here at the Charleston Army National Guard Armory in Charleston, West Virginia, and we're interviewing Major Roy L. Ramey II. Major Ramey, could you please spell your name for the record?

**Ramey:** Yes. It's Ramey: R-A-M-E-Y; Roy: R-O-Y.

**Givens:** Thank you. Okay, we'll start off, initially, with some background information. Just basic stuff such as where and when were you born?

**Ramey:** I was born in 1969, October 8 in Huntington West Virginia.

**Givens:** Did you also grow up there?

**Ramey:** I did not. I was raised in Minnesota for a few years, most of my life in Indiana, and I came back to Huntington, West Virginia to go to college where I've remained in or near since.

**Givens:** What was your family and upbringing like?

**Ramey:** It was a conservative upbringing. I was raised by my step-dad, and he had been raised with very conservative values and he raised us the same way in central Indiana. We grew up in a farming and working environment and family. My dad worked construction and we lived that life as well as somewhat of an agriculture life.

**Givens:** Was there a history of military service in your family?

**Ramey:** Yes, my step-dad was in the Navy, he served in Vietnam. My natural father was also in Vietnam, where he was killed in action. Several of my uncles have served in Vietnam, Korea, World War II in both the Pacific and Europe, as well as World War I; my grandfather was in World War I with [pauses] General Pershing; so, a lot of military background.

**Givens:** Where did you go to school when you were growing up?

**Ramey:** I went to school in a place called New Palestine, Indiana. It was just outside of Indianapolis about twenty to thirty miles in a little farming community between two cornfields.

**Givens:** So, small-town America upbringing?

**Ramey:** It wasn't even small town [laughs]. It was, it was totally outside of town. But, yes, generally speaking, small town.

**Givens:** And when did you graduate high school?

**Ramey:** I graduated in May of 1988.

**Givens:** And what did you do right after you graduated high school?

**Ramey:** I spent that summer working construction to save up some money before I went to college, and then I moved to Huntington, West Virginia and attended Marshall University for four years, along with ROTC where when I finished in '92 I received a commission as a second lieutenant.

**Givens:** And what did you study when you were at Marshall?

**Ramey:** I studied geography and military science.

**Givens:** So when did you first think about joining the military?

**Ramey:** I was probably about six or seven years old when I started developing that desire. I basically, basically confided in my step-dad who raised me with what I had a desire to do at that time, and that led to military service, at least for a portion of my life, and as I got older and developed my goals and dreams and adult life desires then it led to full-military service.

**Givens:** What specifically drove you to the Army of all services?

**Ramey:** A woman, actually [laughs]. I had an appointment to Annapolis Naval Academy out of high school, but I couldn't go the year immediately after high school, so I came to Marshall intent on only going for a year, and while I was at Marshall I met the lady that became my wife and decided to stay here and give up my appointment to the Academy. So, because Marshall had an Army ROTC and I had participated in that program during my first year at Marshall I decided just to stay with the Army and continue my career there.

**Givens:** What drew you to go to Marshall?

**Ramey:** I had family, well, I was born in Huntington and had family here, so when I came down to visit my family in the summer I had some freedom from my parents and I liked that. It seemed like a great thing after growing up, I didn't grow up in a bad life, but it was a conservative life and there was a lot of strict rules and I thought if I could get away from that, and going to Marshall allowed me [laughs] that freedom, then I was going to try to do that. That's what brought me to Huntington.

**Givens:** So, why did you initially choose to go to Annapolis?

**Ramey:** My step-dad was in the Navy, and I grew up just with that influence, I guess. My natural father had been in the Army and was killed. My step-dad was in the Navy and lived. Both of them had fought in Vietnam, so there seemed to be a false logic there that in the Navy I got a better chance of serving without dying. I had, you know, as a youth I had bitter feelings towards the Army, which later I didn't dispel until I joined ROTC and then realized, well, the Army's maybe not so bad after all, there might be a place here [laughs]. So, Annapolis, though, was gonna allow me to be commissioned as an officer, and at that time I had a desire to be a fighter pilot in the Navy, and later I found out that based on my eyes, not being 20/20 they weren't giving any waivers at that time, I wasn't going to be able to be a fighter pilot anyway, so if I couldn't be a fighter pilot I might as well serve on the ground.

**Givens:** So why did you choose the Guard, then?

**Ramey:** At the time several of my peers in ROTC had joined the National Guard in order to get training simultaneous to being in ROTC. So, you could do your ROTC training during the week in a classroom environment, and we also did some field training, in addition to that you could join the National Guard and get your weekend training; as well as the Guard offered several benefits, such as you could get paid for your drill weekend, so it became a part-time job, in effect, and they also gave you some school funds.[pauses] A couple of the semesters here and there, depending on the budget of the given year, we could get tuition assistance. Usually we got some portion of tuition assistance just about every year after I joined the Guard. Sometimes it was a full amount, sometimes it was only a partial amount, but there was a huge benefit to students in college, and I've stayed with the Guard ever since.

**Givens:** Did you enlist right into ROTC once you went to Marshall?

**Ramey:** I did; my very first semester I signed up for some academic classes and I signed up for military classes. The reason I signed up for those classes, I knew I was going to, or I had *planned* to go to Annapolis, and I knew I was going to need physical fitness and marksmanship and leadership just in general. Those things apply whether you're in the Navy, Army, Marines, Air Force. So I took those classes as a foundation that would carry on at Annapolis. Fortunately, they've served me well in the Army, but I didn't need them at Annapolis.

**Givens:** So what did your family think about when you enlisted into ROTC?

**Ramey:** My dad particularly was very disappointed; he did not think it was a wise decision. My mom was very quiet about it. Of course, she had lost her first husband in Vietnam, so in her mind the Army was a bad evil place and she didn't want me involved in anything to do with the Army; really didn't want me involved in the military at all, but it was alright if I was going to fly planes and be 10,000 foot above the ground and not interact with anybody that could shoot me directly. But, with the Army there was a greater chance of that, so I could tell she didn't care for it. But, my dad especially was disappointed.

**Givens:** Did you have to convince them or did they just let you do what you wanted to do?

**Ramey:** [sighs] I had to convince them. They didn't really let me, they tried discouraging me from going that path, but at that point I had moved out. One of the lessons that dad taught me growing up was if you want to live under my roof you'll abide by my rules. I didn't like the rules, so I moved out. I realized as I grew up and got older I started living by those same rules, I just wasn't under his roof [laughs]. But, nevertheless, I felt like I was under my roof now, so I'll abide by my rules, and my rules allowed me to join the Army where his rules didn't. So, I followed the path that I felt led. I believe in God and I believe that God brought me to the Army, brought me to all of my military service, and I just followed the path that I felt He was leading me. My parents guided me, taught me, brought me up to that point, gave me some good values, but I, but I felt those were contradictory at that point to what God was leading me towards, so I followed my conscience.

**Givens:** Aside from ROTC, did you go through basic training?

**Ramey:** I did. I went to basic at Fort Bliss, Texas in 1989. At that point I had been in ROTC for a year and enlisted in the West Virginia National Guard and completed my basic training out there, finished, and then came back to integrate in as just a enlisted member and cadet in the 254<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company in Huntington, West Virginia, and then also simultaneously finished my ROTC years as well.

**Givens:** And what was basic training like back then?

**Ramey:** It was in a transition. The drill sergeants, of course, explained to us how things were different than when they went through. It was, it was, easier now, and of course, now we look back and say things are easier now than when we went through, and probably every generation has done that, I suspect. The transition was that it wasn't exactly friendly, but it was more friendly than it had been. I didn't think it was extremely difficult, although it was challenging enough to teach the materials that we needed to learn as new recruit and allow us to go to our future unit wherever that may be and have those basic skills. I believe it was relevant, it just wasn't as hard as I had heard or imagined from earlier years.

**Givens:** And how many weeks was basic training?

**Ramey:** Nine weeks.

**Givens:** Do you have any vivid memory of anything, of basic, your experiences there?

**Ramey:** I have several vivid memories [laughs]. I particularly remember we went to the field for two weeks straight, and most units, most basic training units did not do that; they broke their field training up into several portions – or at least two portions -- but we went for two weeks straight. And the first day we got to the field, of course, at Fort Bliss, Texas is the middle of the desert -- middle of the Chihuahua Desert -- and they don't get a whole lot of rain, and it decided to be a rainy time when we went. So, the first three days we were in the desert it stormed something awful and we had water holes all over the place, and I would have never thought that it would have rained like that in the desert. That happened to be the time.

**Givens:** So what was your Military Occupational Specialty eventually, or when you signed up?

**Ramey:** At that time I enlisted as a truck driver, knowing that I had planned to become an officer and that MOS would not necessarily be relevant. So, I took that as just a stepping stone, learn a, learn an enlisted skill and integrate in my unit in the National Guard, was a Transportation Company, so that helped me to be a productive member in that unit and learn transportation operations. My first job as a commissioned officer when I was commissioned as a second lieutenant was infantry and then later armor.

**Givens:** Did you have to go through Advanced Individual Training for your truck driver . . .

**Ramey:** I did not. I went to split-option basic training and would have went to the AIT, or advanced individual training at the following summer, but because I was an SMP in the, which is simultaneous membership program, in ROTC, I did not go to the AIT. I just went straight into becoming a cadet in our unit and worked similar to an officer. Essentially, I was like an assistant officer in that unit.

**Givens:** And when did you receive your commission?

**Ramey:** In February of 1992.

**Givens:** And what did you do right after you received your commission?

**Ramey:** Well, I still had three months of school remaining. I was commissioned in the middle of the term and became an infantry officer in a Headquarters unit here in West Virginia, and shortly after was transferred to the Special Forces Battalion, also here in West Virginia. When I finished school in May I ended up going to the Infantry Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. That was a sixteen week course and learned all the skills that I needed to become an infantry officer.

**Givens:** At Fort Benning, what was that experience like?

**Ramey:** It was a wonderful experience. It was challenging; certainly, certainly among the toughest courses that I've done. We spent eight weeks in the field, eight weeks in the classroom. Basically it was a balance – we would spend a week in the classroom and then go to the field for a week and practice what we had learned in the classroom. Then go back to a week in the classroom and another week in the field. It went back and forth in that for the sixteen week period, and while it was extremely challenging, I loved it. It was probably one of the best and toughest schools that I had went to.

**Givens:** What did they stress in the classroom?

**Ramey:** It was all small-unit tactics at the company level and below. Keeping in mind that we were going to be infantry platoon leaders and then hopefully, shortly after that infantry XO [executive officer], and most everything was on platoon-level operations and learning squad, since we were going to be supervising commanding squad leaders we had to know what their job

was as well. So, we learned their role as well as just being a infantryman, and then we also go the opportunity to be company commanders, company XOs, and work at that company level. Most of it was platoon, and then we learned some on the squad and some on the company level.

**Givens:** So when you were done with the school at Fort Benning, where did you go from there?

**Ramey:** I returned to the West Virginia National Guard and ended up transferring to the Armor Battalion, which is the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 150<sup>th</sup> Armor [1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 150<sup>th</sup> Armor Regiment], and I worked for a little over a year as the mortar platoon leader. I was selected as mortar platoon leader because of my infantry background. Since it was an Armor unit, not too many of the officers had infantry and mortar experience. I received that job on that basis and that was a really good opportunity as well. The mortar platoon was the only one of its kind in our battalion and in the state and it allowed me to go to another school, and the skills that I learned there I was actually able to apply to my civilian career, which later became a surveyor and then did engineering work. The skills I learned as a mortar-man helped me towards those civilian skills, as well.

**Givens:** As far as being a mortar platoon leader, how often do you train your men?

**Ramey:** Well, being in the National Guard we train every month in some way or another. Most of the training that we did was in and around the armory, but we tried to get out to the field as often as we could. We certainly went to the field for our two week annual training, and typically twice a year, outside of that we would get to some type of field training environment. If it was just for weapons qualification, sometimes we just did a field exercise to practice maneuvers; but, typically twice a year outside of annual training.

**Givens:** And when did you serve with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 19<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group?

**Ramey:** That was in about June of '92 until I went to the Armor Battalion in [pauses], oh, May of '94. I believe that was the dates. So, approximately two years total.

**Givens:** What was the Special Force Group's mission or purpose?

**Ramey:** Well they're a, and I wasn't actively participating in the unit, I was in the unit while I went to Infantry school. I came back and I went inactive for a period of time, so I didn't actually get to train with them, but I was informed that their role was to basically train indigenous people in a country that needed training to resist in some way or another, and various other special operations that I didn't get into that level of training.

**Givens:** And like you said, after the Special Forces Group you went to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 150<sup>th</sup> Armor?

**Ramey:** Correct.

**Givens:** And they were attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, the Keystone Division?

**Ramey:** They were. They were part of them [pauses], and I stayed there until [pauses] about July of '99. At that time I left the Armor Battalion and went to the Regional Training Institute and became a Staff Officer at the, formerly known as the Military Academy for West Virginia, but the Regional training Institute trains officer candidates, various combat arms, and NCO [non-commissioned officer] training courses.

**Givens:** As far as being attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> how did, what was the 150<sup>th</sup>'s mission?

**Ramey:** They were one of the Armor Battalion within the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, so their role was a more of a rear, reserve force, if I understood their mission correctly. Primarily there were infantry brigades and battalions that would form the front lines of a, of a movement, and as the Armor Battalion we would have been in a reserve to react or reinforce where we were needed if the lines were broken or if an opportunity presented itself at another location because we were more of a heavy force and had the more punch power, I guess you would say, with the Abrams tank, we could [pauses] we could react and reinforce where we were needed.

**Givens:** How does the West Virginia National Guard unit come to be attached to a nationwide National Guard division like the 28<sup>th</sup>?

**Ramey:** We have worked for an organization, the divisions of the National Guard have subordinate brigades. Some of them are within their state and some of them are not within their state, and within those brigades they have subordinate battalions; again, some within their own state, some in other states. Because we have that tier of organization that's the same as an active component, the difference is how often do they get together to train. You know, the division/brigade/battalion concept is still there, they just don't get to train as often as their active component.

**Givens:** And it also comes down to necessity, the 28<sup>th</sup> would need an Armor regiment, so?

**Ramey:** Correct. Most of the, most of the divisions to my knowledge are task-organized so a infantry division is going to be predominately infantry with a little bit of armor, and an armor division will be predominately armor with a little bit of infantry, understanding that we all have to integrate with the combined arms tactic, so we cross-level those different entities into a division. Same is done at the brigade and at the battalion level; a armor brigade typically would have two armor battalions and one infantry battalion. An infantry brigade would have two [pauses] infantry battalions and one armor battalion. And battalions do the same thing. Typically a battalion keeps its fixed organization, so if it's an armor battalion it will be all armor, until they're going to a training event or to a mobilization. You know, based on their mission as a armor battalion you'll have two armored companies and one infantry company. And they can even task-organize lower than that depending on the mission. Typically we have to depend on infantry and armor working together. It's just a matter of do we need more armor at this spot or more infantry at this spot, and commanders evaluate that based on their mission.

**Givens:** And after the 150<sup>th</sup> you went to the 197<sup>th</sup> regional training Institute?

**Ramey:** I did. I spent three and a half years there as a staff officer and we trained the officer candidates from West Virginia as well as other states. We trained combat arms enlisted soldiers in Armor and Cav Scout and Artillery MOSs. We also had the non-commissioned officer education schools of the, what we call BNCOC and ANCOC. Those are the Basic NCO Course, and the Advanced NCO Course. We had various other schools that we taught as needed.

**Givens:** And where is the 197<sup>th</sup> located?

**Ramey:** They're at Camp Dawson, West Virginia, which is just outside of Kingwood. As far as its location in the state, it's about a half hour south into the mountains from Morgantown.

**Givens:** So what was your duty while you were at the RTI?

**Ramey:** I was the personnel officer for a couple of years. My role with that was just in-processing the students, out-processing them, maintaining their records while they were with us, as well as maintaining all the personnel records for the staff. The other portion of my tour was the assistant operations officer, and I assisted him in keeping track of the training schedules, managing the funds for the various schools and making sure that all of our staff had the proper training that they needed to stay proficient as instructors and as soldiers.

**Givens:** So that was the first point in your career where you were on the administrative side?

**Ramey:** It was, and that was a new experience for me. I had not really worked on-staff before. Prior to that I had been down at the level dealing directly with soldiers and really didn't understand the staff concept at that point [laughs]. I kind of knew there was a puzzle palace up at the headquarters and that was the first experience I had to understand how to work on a staff. Matter of fact, my first experience, first drill being the S1 [staff personnel officer], I was the first one to brief at our staff meeting, and I was expecting to get some kind of great wisdom and guidance from my supervisor as to, 'here's what we're going to expect from you in the staff meeting,' and I didn't get that. I was allowed to flop around, and I briefed my boss, 'Sir, I'll take a back-seat on this and see how the others do' [laughs]. And that wasn't the right answer for that time, and I was told that I would get one shot at that and the next time I better have something to brief [laughs]. That was my first experience as a staff officer.

**Givens:** Was that integral for your later career?

**Ramey:** I believe it was. I learned a lot of the skills, I've been staff most of my career, unfortunately. It's great to work with soldiers but somebody has to work on staff. Fortunately I've learned a lot of those skills and done pretty well at it, but those first days, I guess, really set the standard for the rest of my staff career. Now I've learned I better learn my job and I'm not necessarily going to get guidance, direct guidance, from my supervisor. Of course, the difference between being a young soldier and growing up and being a more senior soldier is you figure things out on your own as you get older, you don't have to be told everything direct. So that was kind of a wake-up experience, so to speak, as to advancing into the upper level part of my career that you're not going to be told everything what to do, you're going to have to learn how to come

up with your own information, so that was an interesting experience and that's served me to this day.

**Givens:** You just mentioned skills. What makes, what qualities make a good staff officer?

**Ramey:** Well, like any soldier, you have to be flexible. If you're not flexible it may not be good on the battlefield, but it definitely won't be good in staff. You have to, you have to be able to work with people. If you're not a people person, you can't be a staff officer. If you're an infantryman in a line platoon, you're dealing with all other infantryman. If you're a staff officer, you're dealing not only with other infantry officers and enlisted soldiers, but you're dealing with logistics folks, medical folks, personnel folks, legal folks, chaplains. You've got a whole variety of other folks you're going to work with and if you, if you don't get along with people then you're not going to be able to work together with all those other folks. Not everybody has the same skill set. You have to be able to also study on your own; you have to, you have to be able to pull information for your commander. Your commander is expecting you to be a subject-matter expert in your particular area, even though you may have never worked in that area before. SO, you have to be able to quickly figure out where to get answers for that commander. You have to know how to develop a plan, sometimes with very limited guidance. You'll have to come up with an annex for the Op Order [Operations Order], for instance, and you may have never done that before. You better figure out how to come up with the complete plan to support that annex.

**Givens:** Did your prior experience before becoming a staff officer assist you as well?

**Ramey:** All of my experiences assisted me at some point. I mean, it all builds on itself to the point where I am now, and I'm hoping to the point where I'll be in the future. I don't think that my experience as a line officer or line soldier *really* prepared me. I knew how to work with other people, but that experience was limited. When I went to Staff, probably the working with people was the biggest part that helped me; but beyond that I had nothing to prepare me. I had a big learning curve when I went into staff.

**Givens:** So, following the RTI, where did you go?

**Ramey:** I went back to the 150<sup>th</sup>. They were, they were still an Armor Battalion at that point, and I came back to them as a Staff office, or as the S3 AIR, or the Assistant Operations Officer. I served there through our, halfway through our deployment. At that point they had transitioned to the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade, from the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. So we still had a lot of transitions to do with having a different headquarters.

**Givens:** What all does that involve when you transition?

**Ramey:** Well, we had a different METL, or Mission Essential Task List. Which that, it's a list of tasks that we have to do to be able to perform our mission, or what we believed our mission would be if we were deployed. At that point we didn't have an alert to go to Iraq, but we were training on a certain skill-set that all armor battalions would train for. Even so we had a different headquarters, so they had a different mission and a different task list for us. We had to transition several of our soldiers. We had a different number of tanks from one to another. I'm not sure

why that changed, but there's different models out there for armored battalions, and apparently our model had changed so that changed the equipment set we had. So we went through that transition. We had a lot of training requirements that were new in the Army. I particularly remember Combat Lifesaver was becoming more prominent. Prior to that all soldiers got basic first aid, but we didn't have anybody if, maybe just a few, that were Combat Lifesaver certified, so the Army started requiring other units as well as us to have Combat Lifesavers in the unit. So, I know that was one of the bigger pushes that we had, to get folks qualified in that. And various other small things that just all adds up to a big picture, but there were differences from changing from the one command to the other.

**Givens:** And the 30<sup>th</sup>, where were they headquartered?

**Ramey:** They're in North Carolina; Clinton, North Carolina, as a matter of fact. They have most of the brigade down in that vicinity, but we were an outside-of-state unit, and worked independently in a lot of cases.

**Givens:** And the 30<sup>th</sup> is designated a HSB, or Heavy Separate Brigade. Could you define what that means?

**Ramey:** That basically meant that they were armor-heavy and mechanized. You have Light Brigades, which is basically on-foot. They don't have as much equipment; they don't have as much armor. We had a lot of heavy equipment to include tanks and Bradleys. Our Engineer units had lots of Armored Personnel Carriers so that they could maneuver across the battlefield with us. They had breaching assets, such as bridges and so forth, that we could get our tanks across with the Light unit you don't have to have that, but since we were Heavy we had a lot more requirements to move those heavy assets across the battlefield. We also had heavy equipment, as far as trucks [clears throat] to move tanks and Bradleys and Engineer assets. Our artillery was mechanized; they had the Paladins, so everything was set for mechanized type of force.

**Givens:** And when did you get your orders to deploy?

**Ramey:** Well, we had a couple of different orders. We had a pre-alert in [pauses] early 2003. I don't remember the month now. But several of the forces of the United States were getting ready to mobilize and we got a notice that we were going to be part of that. They were getting ready for the attack in Iraq. Afghanistan had already been going on for several months, and we believed we were going to be part of that first force into Iraq. That changed and we relaxed a little bit; didn't believe we were going to get called up and then about a month later then we got our official alert. That would have been in July, I believe, of 2003. At that point then we went on a full-alert process, like all units would when they're going to mobilize.

**Givens:** And when those orders come out, where do they originate from?

**Ramey:** I'm not sure. I can't answer that [laughs].

**Givens:** You guys were then attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division?

**Ramey:** We were not. We were designated to go to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division by that action. At that point we, the 150<sup>th</sup> was part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade was a separate brigade, and when the divisions, those active component divisions, knew they needed additional assets and they were short of their own assets in order to go to war, we were designated by some process, I'm assuming a Department of Army or National Guard Bureau-level, to say, 'here's the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade, they're available to help out.' We were the first Brigade to mobilize as a Brigade and deploy to combat since World War II. So it was a pretty historical action.

**Givens:** What does a National Guard unit do initially right after they get the orders to be called up?

**Ramey:** Well, we had, we had until October 1<sup>st</sup> to get to Fort Bragg; Fort Bragg was our MOB station [mobilization station]. So we had a lot of training to pack into those few months prior to that. Myself, as one of the primary staff officers was called in, along with probably two dozen other part-time Guardsmen, we were brought in to facilitate all that preparation. You know, we're always preparing for war, but there's a lot of things that don't get done until you get an alert order, or a mobilization order. During that period of time our role was to make sure that all of our load plans were done, any last-minute training that we needed, such as the Combat Lifesaver. We were still short several soldiers for Combat Lifesaver is one of the things that I remember. So, we had several classes to get our soldiers trained in that. We had to pack our equipment, get it loaded on trucks and trains and any other method that we had to get our equipment to Fort Bragg. Once we got there then we had about four months-worth of what we call Post-MOB training. That was more collective training. We had several individual things to do, such as getting soldiers' ID cards upgraded and making sure they got some of the supplies that they were short on that they didn't get prior to that. But a lot of the Post-MOB effort went toward collective training. We were training in platoons and company-size operations. We did a few battalion-level exercises as well.

**Givens:** You mentioned you were short a few soldiers for the Combat Lifesaver. Could you explain what the Combat Lifesaver was?

**Ramey:** Combat Lifesaver, while all soldiers get basic first aid, you know, we know how to stop bleeding, and we can do, just do some basic stuff, the Combat Lifesaver takes it a step further. We have one Combat Lifesaver per crew, was the requirement at the time. A Combat Lifesaver learns all those basic skills as well as specialized extraction techniques to get a soldier out of a vehicle, for instance; to get them out of the line of fire, if they're on the battlefield. They learn how to immobilize them with other, other methods than a soldier learns for their basic first aid. They learn how to stick a soldier with a needle for doing chest-decompression. They learn how to stick a soldier with a needle for [pauses], what do they call it, saline bag [pauses]. Basically, start an IV. And soldiers that are doing basic first aid don't get those skills. That's a certification that they have to keep up every year, initially when they've been certified each year they have to be re-certified to show they have those skills. Now the requirement is, that's been such a valuable program that every soldier is required to take the Combat Lifesaver training.

**Givens:** You mentioned some of your duties about what you had to do when the Guard unit is called up, but as far as day-to-day is it just a bunch of paperwork, or are you out with the unit in the field of sorts trying to get everything moving along?

**Ramey:** My role as the Assistant Operations Officer, or S3 AIR, was mostly administrative. I worked in the Battalion Tactical Operations Center. I prepared their Op Orders; I prepared different mission plans, made sure that subordinate units were doing what they were supposed to do and prepared several reports for the commander. As far as actually going out into the field and checking the units physically, I did not have much of a role in that; that was primarily my supervisor, the S3 himself, would go out and do those things. My role mostly was in the Command Post.

**Givens:** And what about things like Op Orders? Did you just get orders from above and you make sure that everybody in the unit knows what their, what their duty is then?

**Ramey:** Well, we would receive an Op Order from a higher level unit, and my role in that, along with the other staff, was to analyze that for our specific missions and requirements, and several of us was part of that. We call that the Military Decision-Making Process, or MDMP. After we had been in combat that got to be a reduced process because we didn't have as big of taskings, but the initial large taskings that we had, as a whole staff we would come together and analyze that and prepare our subordinate, or our own unit's Operations Order, and that would assign the tasks to our subordinate companies. Later on we could do an abbreviated MDMP, sometimes as few as myself to analyze that higher-headquarters mission, and task it out to the right people. Typically I would just brief a potential plan to the commander. He would approve it and then I would process the written order to the subordinate units. Several times if it was an abbreviated process like that, I could give a verbal order to the subordinate commander that it applied to and then later follow it up with a written order. The written order was merely, it was a legal document from one commander to a subordinate commander of, 'here's what I task you to do, and it's written on paper,' but the verbal order actually committed him to doing it, to getting started on it in the first place.

**Givens:** When the unit moved down to Fort Bragg, did the entire unit move as one, or was it in stages?

**Ramey:** It was as one but it was over the course of a few days. We did have an advance party that moved down, and I was part of that advance party. There was probably two dozen of us from our battalion as a whole that went to Fort Bragg, then three days later the rest of the unit followed down. We had a few stragglers, folks that for various reasons came at a later time during the MOB training. Some of them were in school; some of them had family emergencies or medical issues that they had to clear up before they could join us with the unit. But, those were case by case basis.

**Givens:** An advance party, what specifically do they do?

**Ramey:** Essentially, an advance party is a small element of your force that goes ahead to make sure that the area you're going to has all of the billeting for all of the soldiers that are coming

down; make sure that you have food laid on, that there's a place to eat, that there's a motor pool for all the vehicles, a supply area for equipment -- anything that the unit needs logistically to get the unit there. Typically we don't get a whole lot into the operations and the training portion, although we did some early discussion during the ADVON [Advanced Echelon], the majority of that was not done until later. It was mostly the logistics for the main body of the unit.

**Givens:** How long was the unit at Fort Bragg before it fully deployed to Iraq?

**Ramey:** Approximately four months.

**Givens:** And for the majority of that it was training and such?

**Ramey:** It was all training. The training was various levels, some of it was individual. And essentially, because we were the first Guard brigade to deploy since World War II, I think there were probably more requirements, several of these soldiers hadn't deployed before, ever. Some of them were veterans of the first Gulf War or various other wars. Some of them were Vietnam veterans, for that matter. But as a unit we hadn't deployed before, so there was a lot individual requirements just to verify we could do our job as a soldier as well as any active-duty soldier. Once a lot of those individual requirements were done then we started moving into crew-level and platoon-level training and just worked at those smaller level units where we get some opportunity to do it in the National Guard, typically through our two week annual training, but we don't get a lot of opportunity compared to an active component unit. So that was really our time, our opportunity to start working together at small unit level. After we got more proficient at the company level then we started working as a battalion and doing battalion field exercises, and we even did a couple brigade exercises. One part of our training included going to [pauses then sighs] Louisiana [pauses] Fort Polk, Louisiana, for a mission readiness exercise. Essentially that was a field exercise where we were put in a scenario like we would expect to be in, in combat and evaluate whether we were ready to do our mission as a battalion and as a brigade. And there were several scenarios that we were put through to verify if we could do that job. Then we moved back to Fort Bragg and basically just did final preparations before actually going to Iraq.

**Givens:** Did that training in Louisiana go smoothly?

**Ramey:** Oh, it did not. It was probably one of the toughest exercises we've ever been through. Several folks weren't even sure if it was specific enough to our mission, 'cause after all, we were going to a swampy woodland area to train for a mission in the desert. But the scenarios that we were put through were probably tougher than realistic, and as I recall I was even critical of some of those training exercises that we went through as not being relevant. The more we did it the more I realized, you know what, this is probably pretty relevant. But it was extremely challenging. It put us through some of the harsh conditions, although they weren't the same environmental conditions as the desert, put us through harsh conditions to stress our body, stress our mind, and then at the same time go through our, our tactical scenarios. It made it tougher to think about what were you were doing because your body is freezing and you're wet and tired. It overly emphasized what we need to do in our combat mission, and when we got to Iraq we could look back after we had been there for a time and say, 'you know what? That training we did was a lot harder and I'm glad we did it. It, it made me more capable to do my job here, and now this

is easy' [laughs]. Not that it was easy, but it seemed that way after going through our training scenarios.

**Givens:** Is there any one situation in Louisiana that sticks out in your mind?

**Ramey:** [pauses and sighs] Yeah, I was the nighttime battle captain because I was the assistant, the operations officer worked during the day when a lot of the activities were going on, so I covered the nighttime; but that didn't mean we didn't have a lot of activities going on at night.

We had a contract for heat in our tents -- at that time it was the middle of winter. I never thought it would get cold in Louisiana but it was actually sub freezing. Along with the training scenarios we were going through, those harsh environmental things we went through, it was very cold and I was freezing. Went in and then had to do our job during the course of our shift, we couldn't sleep during the daytime because it was so cold, and then at night it was also cold, and still didn't have all the heat that we thought we should get in our tents [laughs]. And then going through the training scenarios *and* it was wet. And I remember that about that same time we got a tasking to harden our tent. It wasn't good enough that we were in a hardened compound with a fence around our perimeter and we protected it, we had to have sandbags around our tent. So, after going through all those hard conditions now we've got to fill sandbags, and even as an officer I was out loading sandbags along with the other soldiers in my section. To get sandbags up around our tent for additional protection. That was to simulate the protection we would need against the artillery attacks, the mortar attacks that were pretty prevalent we were hearing a lot about, so they incorporated that into our training. I remember all that came at one time and it seemed overwhelming when we were going through it, so. I don't remember all the details just because I was so tired during that portion of our training but what stands out as the big things that we went through and that prepared me for what was to come later. I felt real confident after we went through our experiences in Iraq that that training is what contributed to it.

## —Part 2 of the video—

**Givens:** Did those training scenarios originate from the 30<sup>th</sup> or was it from a higher authority?

**Ramey:** No, those scenarios were from whoever the training unit was at Fort Polk, Louisiana. They're a combat training center and they're used to doing scenarios for various units that rotate through there. Somebody at a higher level there put that scenario together on the basis of what we needed. I believe that the 1<sup>st</sup> ID [1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division] had an influence on the scenarios that we needed to be trained on because they were the combat and commander, and they had to validate that we were ready to go or not ready to go when it was time to deploy. So, I know they had an influence on it; I'm just not sure how much of an influence -- if they wrote the whole scenario or they just put some guidelines in on it.

**Givens:** Was your unit's mission clearly defined of what you were to do in Iraq before you left?

**Ramey:** [pauses and sighs] I don't know if you could say it was clearly defined [laughs]. It was clearly written. I think we were all confused somewhat, not in a bad thing, there was just so

much unknown. We weren't going to fight a conventional war like we had trained for the last fifty years during the Cold War. We were fighting something that was unknown, the scenarios were being developed. We had soldiers that were coming back, particularly senior NCOs that were coming back telling us tactics and techniques that worked and didn't work. I, I think that were all somewhat uncertain as to what we were going to be expected to do, because it wasn't something that you could open a book that you could say, 'here's what you do in this scenario.' We had a good plan, but during our train-up our location actually changed several times. We went through a complete MDMP for the first area that we were assigned to, and we came up with a complete plan on that. After we had a complete plan we were informed by our higher headquarters that we were going to be in a totally different part of the country of Iraq. So we went through the MDMP again, and came up with another plan for that area, and we had to do that scenario several times. I think we did it no less than five times before we actually settled on the area that we eventually went to, and that was changed just a matter of a few weeks before we went in, so. There was a lot of change, I think we had a good idea of what we were going to do, but never knowing what was going to be changed, it was really hard to lock that in.

**Givens:** What does MDMP mean?

**Ramey:** The military decision making process. That's the process when a staff comes together to analyze their commander's mission and their tasking requirements, to come up with their own complete Op Order which will, is the order used to task their subordinate units and define what their mission is.

**Givens:** Did you get a sense that the Army was either up on trying to redefine how they fought, or was it something that it was trial and error at first? Because, as you said, conventional warfare is how they trained, but . . .

**Ramey:** Well, trial and error almost sounds like a negative term. I wouldn't exactly term it that way. We certainly did try new techniques. You know, we had an enemy that wasn't a well-defined enemy; we weren't fighting an army of a country in a conventional fight, so. You know, we had insurgency tactics manuals, but Army-wide I don't think we had been -- at last not at my level -- we hadn't been training for that. I think that was more of a special operations-type mission and role and we had to learn at our level. And just across the broad spectrum everybody start learning what the special operations community does and is about and incorporated a lot of their tactics and techniques. It was new to us, I don't think it was new to the army; it just was new to us.

**Givens:** When did the 30<sup>th</sup> HSB move out from Fort Bragg and deploy to Iraq?

**Ramey:** [pauses and sighs] They started coming in, in February. Matter of fact it was [pauses] it was right about the middle of February that I went over on the advance party. I was party of the Brigade's advance party, as well. About two weeks later the rest of the unit caught up with us, started moving in and they came in, in waves. We would get a plane load at a time and get them brought up and incorporated in as a whole and start getting our equipment from Kuwait City at the docks, and picked up other equipment from other units and so forth and got ready for our road march north. So all together that probably took about a month to actually get in the country,

but we started in the middle of February, and it was the middle of March when we actually moved into Iraq.

**Givens:** So that, was that 2003?

**Ramey:** That was 2004. We started our MOB training at Fort Bragg in October, so I told you four months earlier, but it was actually longer than that [pauses]. What, about five months? Five months worth of training [laughs] before we actually went into country.

**Givens:** And where were you initially stationed in Iraq?

**Ramey:** We were at a little town called Mandali, and our base camp was called Rough Rider; that was on the eastern, east-central portion of Iraq, along the Iranian border.

**Givens:** And that base, was it already there when you showed up?

**Ramey:** There was a small base camp there. It was a, it was a remote camp that a company, actually a battery, artillery battery, had been there conducting some of their missions; and we brought an entire battalion to that camp. It was a little bit undersized for a battalion so we expanded the borders, made it more suitable for a battalion to live there and operated out of that camp for about half of our tour.

**Givens:** Did you have all the necessities and supplies that it took to expand the camp right away?

**Ramey:** Oh, no. We did have an engineer company that was assigned to our battalion, so they were a working element to help us build that camp. It took; actually, we were still building the place at the point that we left it [laughs]. So we probably spent five months there building it up, up to the point that we left. It wasn't that it took that long necessarily to build it, but we built it as we had supplies such as HESCO baskets and gates and other necessities. Some of the housing, tents, restroom facilities, anything that we needed, pretty much we had to build it after we got there. Keeping in mind that it was a small camp when we got there, there was only a couple of tents, which was enough for everybody in that company that was there before us, but it wasn't enough for us. They had started the building process. There was a water well that had been started to be drilled and it got finished probably a month or two after we had occupied, so we had fresh water ourselves from a local source. At that point, prior to that, we had to ship all of our water in that we needed to drink or cook with. We got bathing water from a local source, but it wasn't considered sanitary water. We had it brought in by a truck and essentially it was just water for washing clothes and taking showers with; couldn't drink or cook with it. [pauses] Barb wire, and sandbags, and all that good stuff, we just had to get it in pieces as we could get it and build our camp little by little. We got some large cooling, air conditioner units for our tents so the soldiers would have air conditioning of some sort. You know, all we had was a tent there. In one case, one of the tents was shredded. We got a bad storm, they were old tents that had been there quite awhile and I remember after that storm it left a big opening in it and we just had to kind of piece it back together best we could and get another tent for the soldiers until we got hardened facilities for them to sleep in. We had some Conexes and we were just continuing to get more Conexes as we were there; but until then, soldiers had to sleep in tents. The air

conditioner units, while several of the units at other base camps didn't have anybody to hook those up, we took our own soldiers who, certain soldiers had civilian skill sets and they were able to hook them up because they were electricians and they were heating and air conditioning specialists, and they were carpenters, so they built those facilities to, to hold the air conditioner units and other things we needed for our living conditions.

**Givens:** As far as supplies, did you have to beg, borrow, and steal, or does it go through all the proper channels to get that barbed wire and Conex?

**Ramey:** We did both, and typically the beg, borrow and steal method was more productive [laughs]. It's not the method that's preferred in the military system but you try to go through the right channels with your supply folks and usually you've got another fellow over here that knows somebody that has wretched excess of what they need, and they don't need it. And they work their trade deals or just find somebody that's got more than they need that's willing to give it up, and lot of cases that's how we got what we needed.

**Givens:** And how long did it take between Camp Rough Rider, you arriving there, and before you began operations?

**Ramey:** We went through a, what we called a right-seat, left-seat ride scenario, and that was the integration process of the old unit incorporating us into their operations. Essentially it was our leadership riding along with their unit, and then later, after a few days of that transition, then it was our unit doing the mission with their leader riding along as an advisor. That whole process probably took a week. A week to a week and a half, probably, from the time we got on-site until their leadership left all-together.

**Givens:** So, you began operations almost immediately and while you were expanding your camp.

**Ramey:** Yes, we did. We had to do everything simultaneous. The challenge was we were learning our mission after the leaders that turned it over to us had left. So, we still had documentation, we had nobody necessarily to consult with, just go through some of the old reports and figure it out. At the same time we were expanding the mission from the previous unit. The previous unit that was there was only a company-sized element. They were only able to do so much in the area that they had. We took that over as a battalion and were expected to expand the operation to conduct more patrols, to get engaged with more local leaders, to find out what their needs were in the communities, 'cause we wanted to try to win their hearts, win their hearts and their minds. And, the building of the camp had to go right alongside of that, and sometimes we had to make decisions: do we want to pull Private Billy and Tommy and Sergeant Johnny off of a mission, patrol mission, in order to improve our living conditions on our base-camp? Those were just as important for the commander as going out and conducting the mission. If the soldiers don't have good living conditions then they can't necessarily do their mission as well, so we needed a safe, productive environment for them to live in, in the meantime when they weren't actually on a mission.

**Givens:** Is that, is this situation where you have one unit leaving and another one coming in, is that a shortfall? Because this kind of vague definition of what you should be doing, you have to rewrite the book sometimes?

**Ramey:** The transition isn't necessarily a shortfall, it's definitely a dangerous time. If your enemy is trying to capitalize on it, then they've found a weakness. I don't know that it's necessarily a shortfall 'cause we've got a lot of controls that the Army has incorporated into a transition like that. We had a, particularly when we left, we had a very detailed plan to hand that over to the next unit. It's called a 'Relief in Place.' We've been doing it for a long time, just not necessarily for that type of mission. [pauses] Anytime you transition a unit you leave yourself open for a potential attack and because you've got two different commands on the field at a time, you may have the unit that's in charge that doesn't have as many of their soldiers there and the other unit that is not in charge that has a majority of their soldiers there already, and they haven't made that official transition yet. So, it certainly makes it dangerous but I don't think it's a shortfall because we do have controls. Implementing that, that action is just a challenge that all leaders have to make sure it goes smooth. The more time we put into planning the more effective it turns out to be. Since we were OIF2 [Operation Iraqi Freedom-2], we had the benefit of learning from the first group that was there, and they didn't get the benefit of all that – they had to learn it as they went. We learned it as we went too, but we got to learn a lot of their lessons, so. When we transitioned to OIF3, we had the benefit of some of those areas that didn't go so well during, during our transition and during the first OIF, to be able to hand that over to the unit that replaced us.

**Givens:** In your own words, could you explain or define the boots-on-the-ground mission of your unit?

**Ramey:** We were there to defeat an insurgency and to provide support and stability to the local community. The idea was if we could, if we could take away their desire to resist us, then we won a friend. They wanted a stable environment. They wanted work, and we had to figure out how to facilitate that, and if we could facilitate that and give them a nice, safe environment to live in and to work in, then we would not have the insurgency fighting against us. The insurgency in most cases came from outside of Iraq but they needed the support of the people in our local communities where we were doing patrols and working with local leaders. So, if we could win the hearts of those folks in our community that we were responsible for, then we could make the environment safer and reduce the effects of the insurgency.

**Givens:** And how did you do that on a day-to-day basis?

**Ramey:** We did a lot of patrols. Everything from route-reconnaissance patrols prior to a combat patrol. We had specialized scouts going out and patrolling the roadways, and later we would do combat patrols throughout the day, some of them were during the night. It varied during the time of year and what was happening within their local communities whether we did more night patrols or more day patrols. We also did aerial reconnaissance -- we had the little small unmanned remote-control aircraft. We'd do patrols with those. We also met with local leaders at the city-levels, regional levels, police officials, military officials, civilian, it didn't matter. If they were a local official then we tried to meet with them, find out what their needs were, let them

know what we expected as a end-result that we weren't there to, to take over their country and dictate them. We wanted to create an environment to where they could run their own country. But these conditions had to be met in order for that to happen. So, we were just there to interact with them and hopefully facilitate that to happen. We also did training for the Iraqi Army. At that time we had defeated the old Iraqi Army, it had been basically disbanded, and there was a transition to a 'New Iraqi Army,' was the term of the time. There was another "ICDC" [pauses] - - can't remember what that stands for [Iraq Civil Defense Corps], but essentially they were a military force that was transitioning to take over and secure their country instead of us doing all the patrolling, we would train them to do the patrolling and attack the insurgency as needed and let them secure their own country. And we would move more out of that role and into an advisory role, a training role, in order to allow that to happen.

**Givens:** As far as what the officials told you, what were they requesting from the United States Army?

**Ramey:** Many of them wanted, wanted work for their people. They hadn't worked for a long time, they were given subsidies under the Saddam administration; kind of keep them passive, it was essentially a welfare system in the region that we worked in. There wasn't a lot of work opportunities, so they were looking for those opportunities to feed their families. Especially since that system no longer existed. Saddam had been captured at that point and was in custody. We were working on transitioning the country to take care of itself. There was a new government being formed, so we were trying to facilitate them to, to run their own, but from us they needed the assurance that they were going to be able to feed their families. You know, those basic essentials that every human needs -- they need a roof over their head and food on their table. [pauses] They wanted a way to protect their borders, they wanted a way to train their soldiers and their police officers to do the jobs that we were doing for them. That was actually a later desire, but that became a desire the more they transitioned into doing the operations the more they understood they needed proper training for that. That's not something that happens quick, it's something that takes quite a while. You don't run an Iraqi soldier through nine weeks of boot camp and expect him to go out and start doing missions, especially in the environment that they had. They had been under a strict dictator for so long they didn't necessarily know how to operate in a free-thinking environment. You know, with little guidance and go do a mission. That was, that was an idea that was new to them. Our commanders and even our junior leaders are taught that at a early stage in their training, but those were things that we had to develop over a long time. Some of the Iraqi leaders understood that and, of course, worked with us to try to get that level of training.

**Givens:** As far as work for Iraqi citizens and civilians, how did the United States Army facilitate that?

**Ramey:** Well, one thing we did was we formed the police forces -- or reformed it in some cases - - some cases it was there already. But, they weren't getting paid regular, so we reformed those organizations, be it in a city, be it in a border patrol, and get those units established. That created work for a lot of people. We created the Iraqi Army; some of them were soldiers during Saddam's Iraqi Army, some of them were not, but that certainly created new jobs. Those that were out of work because the Army had been destroyed were now needing a job, so that created

a work opportunity. We, we had a lot of work on our base camps that needed to be done, from cleaning up trash, to cooking, to various trades -- welding, putting in water pumps, running water lines -- all those various things that we as soldiers didn't necessarily have time to do if we were going to do all the combat missions that we needed to. So we engaged those Iraqi citizens, paid them a wage in exchange for some work. So that helped them to get on their feet. There were various contracts that we would offer to a local, a 'local contractor' in our terms, but essentially somebody that had a work force available if we needed a certain project done. Then we could contract to that individual to provide it, and then he would hire those in-turn Iraqis to do the job. Bottom line was we were creating jobs. Some of it was building schools. We built other government buildings. There were projects that were on the board such as dams, spillways, various public works projects that needed to be built and the idea was to get the Iraqi people involved. There was also a pipeline that went through our area that needed a lot of repairs and upgrades. We were able to hire an Iraqi company to do that work as well. Anything that we could do to, to hire the Iraqis to do the work in their country was a help to them. In turn it kept them busy and they weren't contributing to the insurgency that we were trying to destroy.

**Givens:** Let's talk about your duties and roles in Iraq. For half your tour you were S3 AIR. Can you define what that was?

**Ramey:** The S3 AIR is the assistant operations officer and also air specialist. Essentially I would assist the operations officer in any of his duties that he saw fit, which included preparing operations orders, preparing training plans. While we were in Iraq we still had training to conduct such as individual weapons qualification, drivers training, all those various things we do in peace time, we still had to do those requirements in war-time, as well. I was also the air specialists, where I would coordinate with the Brigade. I had a counterpart like me as well. If we needed an aerial mission, be it close air-support or aerial reconnaissance or anything to do with the airspace, I could coordinate with that S3 AIR at the Brigade level, or in some cases directly with Air Force personnel -- forward air controllers. If we were doing our own aerial reconnaissance with the Raven remote controlled aircraft, I would have to coordinate clearing that airspace to make sure that somebody at a higher level was not performing an air mission in the same airspace. If there was fires I could end up coordinating with naval gunfire. It didn't come into play because we were so far inland, but that was certainly some of the training that I received for that potential scenario if we needed naval gunfire or Naval, Marine, Air aircraft, as well as Army aircraft. That would also include air transportation. The logistics guys got involved in that, but then I also was part of the planning process on the, anything to do with air.

**Givens:** What was your average day as an S3?

**Ramey:** Average day involved going to a couple of planning meetings where we would all integrate as staff and share information that we had collected and needed to disseminate to each other; needed to disseminate to the commander and use that time also to prepare Operations Orders or Fragmentary Orders to our subordinate units. And it also involved working in the Battalion Tactical Operations Center, or TOC. I was on the night-shift for most of that, but I also worked parts of day-shifts as well. The operations center essentially is the nerve center, information center, of the battalion. Everything from collecting information to keep the commander informed to sharing that information with the brigade commander and our

subordinate company commanders, and anybody that was out on a mission. If a unit had a small element out on a mission doing a patrol, then the TOC had to know about it and had to know everything else that was going on in our battle-space, because we were responsible for it. If another unit needed to travel through our space we had to know about it and make sure that didn't affect adversely our own operations. If it would affect our operations then it was our responsibility in the TOC and specifically mine as the Battle Captain to de-conflict that problem with the other unit that either needed our space or needed to coordinate close proximity to our space, to include the airspace.

**Givens:** Is there any one experience that sticks out in your mind as you time as S3?

**Ramey:** [sighs] Oh, there was several. [pauses] I can remember [laughs] we had three mortar attacks on our base camp and while, while the training said to do certain things, if you're not awake you can't do certain things [laughs]. One of those particular experiences I slept through a whole mortar attack. It was a, I had been up quite a bit, gotten very little sleep and I was in my quarters by myself and there was another fellow that shared that quarters with me; well he was at his duty station and there was nobody there to wake me up and I was so tired I slept through that mortar attack [laughs]. I found out about it that evening, checked back into the command post and everybody was talking about the mortar attack. Early on, before we had our formal command post set up, we had an old police station that had been a headquarters for a region, and we took that over as part of our base camp and had a basement area underneath that was a reinforced room for our command post -- gave us a lot of security. If we could have taken a mortar attack it probably wouldn't have done much damage, if any, because we were down underground inside a concrete area -- made it nice and secure. Prior to that we were in a tent, and it was early on during our deployment and I was spending about thirty-six hours at a time up and on duty before I would get to go get a little sleep, then back on duty again [laughs]. The whole get sleep every day [laughs] didn't necessarily apply. And people would tell you to go to sleep, go get some rest, but you knew there was too much to do, you know, trying, trying to get integrated into you new job. You know, everything from learning the country to learning really what our mission is; we had talked about it for months, but now we were actually doing it. And there's a lot of things as a new combat veteran on the ground that you've never learned until you actually do it; well now we were doing it, so I was learning things as I went, even though we'd talked about it for months. But, those thirty six hour days stand out in my mind. I don't remember a whole lot about the specifics of those days but, but I do remember those kinds of times. I remember, I remember a time that when we were going in we were on our road march, it took us about four days to road march in, in vehicles; and we were south of Baghdad and stopped over at a way station they had set up for us. Essentially it was a site for us to refuel and take a chow break. If we needed to do any maintenance on our vehicles, we could do that. Clean windshields, it was a 1 ID standard that you clean your windshields every chance you go so you didn't have road spray, mud or anything else on it; dust, whatever, so. All those things were done at these way stations. And then the cases where we were there for several hours, then you could sleep. Well we had a particular night where we were going to be there about five hours, or so, so we pulled our cots out of our vehicles -- we just had them strapped on the back of our Humvee where it was easy to get to in the event we did get to sleep -- a little more comfortable than sleeping in the seat of the Humvee. And we were all laid out there. Of course, this was during the winter in Iraq, so it was quite cold, and it was also part of their rainy season. So, we were racked

out on cots and I remember waking up the next morning in my sleeping bag and there was frost on my sleeping bag as I went to shaking it off. Step off and the water puddle that had been there the night before was now covered over with a glaze of ice. I never thought I'd experience that in the desert. And a few months later we experienced temperatures that was in the 130 degrees, plus. And I actually saw it on the thermometer with the wet-bulb. Our medics in our unit had to keep a wet-bulb temperature reading at all times, particularly when it got into the hazardous heat of the day. I'd go check on it periodically and, as part of the operations center we were supposed to record that down in our reports, and I remember when it got over 130 degrees, I never thought I'd be in temperatures like that either [laughs]. So it went from both extremes. Circled back later on into the winter again and went through that cycle all over again, so. Probably a thousand more; if we sat here for ten hours I could rattle off bunches of individual experiences [laughs].

**Givens:** After you were S3 what was your duty for the rest of your tour?

**Ramey:** I left the job as the S3 AIR to become the headquarters commander for the Armor Battalion. That was a certainly unique position, a unique opportunity, and probably the highlight of my military career so far. There's only a handful of officers that ever get to be a company commander in combat and I was privileged to have that opportunity. My job was pretty easy because I had a lot of subordinate NCOs in the various sections of that Headquarters that made things operate according to their specialty and they made it real easy for me. As challenging as the job is of being a commander, I mean, that was the best opportunity that I could ask for to have all the quality NCOs that I had.

**Givens:** What was your average day as company commander?

**Ramey:** A lot of it was administrative. I did get the opportunity to go out on several patrols. The scout platoon was part of my company, so them doing the route reconnaissance patrols was part of the responsibility of my company, and I did several with them. We also did the logistics piece for our battalion. We had to make sure they had all their supplies from ammunition to food to cleaning supplies. Mail run was part of our operation. Restocking the PX -- we had a small PX on our first base camp -- and those required combat logistics patrols to go from our base to Camp Anaconda to pick up those supplies and bring them back to our base camp. Also when we moved from one base camp to the other we started off at Rough Rider and when we moved to Caldwell, which was twenty or twenty-five miles from Rough Rider, our responsibility was to move most of the Battalion's assets from the one camp to the other camp and close down Rough Rider for the purpose of American forces. We were turning that over to an Iraqi Army unit, and we left a small force there from the armored battalion, but most of those assets that we had had to go to the new camp, and then just close down anything that was American in nature. The average day included counseling of soldiers. You know, you still have soldiers that end up with debts that they're not paying. They end up having family problems back home. Some of it wasn't counseling adversely, some of it was just talking with a soldier that was having a family problem that couldn't get back there. They may or may not want to talk to the chaplain, and in some cases they just wanted to talk with me. So I tried to help them through those problems. Some of it was inspecting our equipment. We had the maintenance facility under my command and I would go out and just check our vehicles, do some inspections on those. Inspecting our facilities, the lodging of the troops, and make sure they kept everything in good order. Check their weapons,

make sure they stayed in good working order – certainly that was important -- both individual weapons and crew-served weapons. We had quite a few crew-served weapons for our Humvees. Humvees was the majority of what we patrolled in. We did have some Armored Personnel Carriers, but didn't have a whole lot of those. We did have the reaction force which included some personnel carriers. And it was just basically inspecting all that equipment and making sure it was ready to go at any given time. On the patrols that I didn't attend or participate in, typically I would go out and listen to the pre-mission brief that the patrol leader was briefing to his soldiers, make sure they did it to standard, that they didn't, didn't leave out something critical; that they had all the information they needed -- information is a key thing on a combat patrol. If there's a critical piece of information somebody doesn't have that could mean their life, or somebody else's life. Make sure that they got all that shared and just make sure that they met all the standards that all of us as commanders and senior commanders would expect from them.

**Givens:** Aside from dealing with the local authorities, what type of civilian interaction did you and your soldiers have with the local population?

**Ramey:** We had several of the populace that came to our camp and worked. Some of them were there to just pick up trash, some of them were there to fill sandbags or put up barb wire or concertina, or whatever. Some of that we did ourselves, but we had opportunities sometimes to interact with them if they spoke English. Some of the soldiers did. We had shops that we allowed them to set up on our camp to sell little trinkets. We had a barber on our camp – we still needed haircuts -- make that standard. Most of the soldiers would go through that barbershop to get their haircuts. We had a little restaurant, make-shift restaurant set up in one of our tents, and we allowed an Iraqi to come in with his crew and cook certain meals for us according to our sanitary standards, they did have to meet that. We got to interact with those folks, or just talk and visit if we were just Joe Soldier going in for lunch or something, we'd get the opportunity to talk to those soldiers and find out about their – not soldiers, civilians rather – and find out about their family and their life and what they'd been through. Some of them had been soldiers during the Iran/Iraq wars, so they actually had some military experiences. Some of them had been beaten or tormented by Saddam and his police forces or military forces. Some of them didn't have any interaction with that, they just lived their own little life and stayed away from it all, so there was an interesting interaction. We weren't really supposed to talk about religion, but certain individuals that were comfortable with that did have that rapport to talk with Iraqis about their religious beliefs and find out about Islam and how they believe, how they practice, and how they believe toward the rest of the world. I think as long as it stayed on a friendly level there really wasn't a discouragement, we just weren't supposed to get into a competitive discussion that may lead to anger and aggression and escalate that into something that wasn't appropriate. We had other vendors that came in and would sell watches and televisions and other electronic items that soldiers would want to improve their living conditions where they were. And it was just interesting to get to visit with these people and find out about their lives and how in several ways they're similar to our lives and other ways they're completely different [laughs].

**Givens:** What were your preconceived notions, if you had any, about Iraq before you shipped out?

**Ramey:** I had a lot of preconceived notions. One was that most Iraqis were probably going to be bad; bad people in general. That their religion was not going to be compatible with my beliefs. I'm professed to be a Christian and didn't think that there was enough similarities or [pauses] beliefs amongst us that we could integrate together as two people within this world. Particularly as a military force that we were coming to occupy their country, whether we were there for right reasons or not, I didn't believe that they would accept that we were there for the right reasons. [pauses] I, I think I underestimated the living conditions we would live in. When we were at Rough Rider, it was called Rough Rider for a reason, it was quite rough. Of course, we improved on that. As soldiers we're used to living in rough conditions, but I think I expected that we would probably have had better conditions. You know, a hard stand facility that was already there and established that we would kind of move in and take over as opposed to all the tent facilities that we had, that in some cases were shredding. [pauses] That's it for that, I guess [laughs].

**Givens:** What was the reality of Iraq that you found?

**Ramey:** I found that in a lot of cases, my experience with the Iraqis were in a lot of ways they're not too different from us. They want a life that they can feed their family, put a roof over their head. They want the American dream, so to speak [laughs], they're just not in America. You know, they want a safe place. I think that the majority of the Iraqis think in similar terms of a safe living environment that we do here in America. Those that wished us harm, that wanted harm on their fellow Iraqis, I think that was just a few of them, in my experience. They were going to cause as much harm as they could for their own personal benefit or the illusion of the Islam calling that maybe they didn't quite understand their own religion. The majority of the Iraqis that I interacted with and got to have religious discussions about what is Islam about, what is their beliefs and faiths and how to interact with other people, I don't believe they wished us harm. They didn't wish each other harm. I think it was only a small, a small group of people that did. The Kurds were a interesting group of people. They're very industrious people. They reminded me, other than their skin was darker and they spoke a different language, they were Islam the way they lived their daily life you'd almost think you were in America. They wanted to build things and improve their life and work toward what they wanted. They knew what they wanted, they wanted to be left alone from the rest of Iraq, for sure; although that doesn't facilitate a united Iraq. I remember particular an IED had went off in a town up in what's known as Kurdistan, which was north of us, and the day before I had went up there on a particular patrol that I was allowed to go on. An IED had went off near a build and it blew part of the building up and destroyed some vehicles around there and caused a decent amount of damage. I expected to get up there and see a lot of rubble around, and debris and a big hole in the ground, and people walking around in fear and desperation and wondering, 'oh my, what are we going to do about this?' In fact what I saw was heavy equipment out there and laborers out there and trucks cleaning up the mess and trying to get ready to rebuild what had been damaged. So, they just got right to fixing what had been damaged. They didn't want to let it fester and wonder what they were going to do, they just got to it. In most of the cases in that area of Iraq that was what I saw and I was very, very impressed with the Kurds and the level that they were willing to rebuild the life that was destroyed, so to speak, in their area.

**Givens:** How do you view what you did over there now?

**Ramey:** [sighs] That's a loaded question [laughs]. I think what we did was necessary and relevant and I can say that from the standpoint that whatever we're doing abroad is to protect the American people right here in our homeland. I think it's admirable to help somebody else get their freedom, but I don't think that should be the primary reason that we're there, or the primary focus of what we're doing. As long as we keep the focus of protecting American citizens right here in our homeland, then we'll be doing the right thing and I think that's, I think what we did was the right thing for the right reason in that regard. There were some other reason that maybe weren't so right, but in that regard I think we were right in what we did and I maintain that. What I want to make sure of and what I can sleep well at night is knowing I went over there to make sure that a terrorist is not coming to our mother or homeland, the United States of America, and me have to turn on my radio someday and here that at the mall, local mall down the road, there was a terrorist attack and me know that my wife and daughter was there, and potentially doesn't make it. And I can stand strong that what we're doing is preventing that.

**Givens:** Was there a particularly close camaraderie between the NCOs and officers you served with?

**Ramey:** I believe there was. You know, a lot of us particularly came from a community where we knew each other as Bob and Joe back at home because we're National Guardsmen. In the regular army people come from all over the country and even some other countries to get their citizenship, so they don't necessarily come from the same background, they just all come from America, in most cases. In our case since we were citizens of the same community that went as the same unit we'd known each other for sometimes twenty years, and so I think we had a little closer camaraderie. And the fact that my wife knows Sergeant Thompson's wife and they're still having lunches together and our kids are playing together back home, that makes us a little closer in that regard. So, I believe we did have a pretty close camaraderie; especially compared to non-reserve component units, simply because we come from the same community.

**Givens:** What was your interaction with the regular Big Red One soldiers?

**Ramey:** I didn't have a lot of interaction with them. Us being a battalion within a brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, occasionally the Headquarters commanders and a few of the Headquarters staff came to our base camp to inspect us, to talk with us, share their ideas and make sure we understood the big picture within the 1<sup>st</sup> ID scope. On occasion we had those folks come to visit us, but overall we didn't interact that much with them.

**Givens:** When you returned from Iraq, I should say, to what unit were you assigned?

**Ramey:** I was still with the Headquarters Company of the 150<sup>th</sup>, and I was still the company commander. However, shortly after we came back we transitioned from a armor battalion to the 150<sup>th</sup> Armored Reconnaissance Squadron, which is essentially a cavalry squadron. Our mission went from being a primary armor unit to doing reconnaissance for the 30<sup>th</sup> brigade. I was still the Headquarters commander, but rather than the Headquarters Company, it was not a Headquarters Troop.

**Givens:** Do you think that the Guard trains its soldiers adequately for war?

**Ramey:** I didn't used to believe so but after the last several years the training that I've received and the experience that I've had in combat and some of the other operations that I've been involved in, I think that the Guard does a fantastic job of training its soldiers. The fact that we don't get to do a lot of collective training during drill weekends and only a limited amount during our annual training certainly in the past set us back. But we've got several soldiers and several units, certainly I believe every unit in the West Virginia Guard has been deployed at least once; some of them are on multiple deployments. The soldiers within those units, some of them have deployed four and five times. We've got a huge background of knowledge and training there. The fact that we do quite extensive collective training after we mobilize helps tremendously. The fact that our past experiences contribute to that, we can train now at a faster rate than we did before. I think because of the multiple mobilizations we know what training to target rather than training on everything because we don't know what we're going to encounter. We can limit our training to more specific tasks to better prepare us for combat. We also have soldiers who have civilian skill-sets and that's a very admirable and impressive part of the National Guard of which I am very proud of being, being a part of some of those soldiers. We have guys and gals that are mechanics that are truck drivers in the civilian side that are carpenters, electricians. You name it, every skill and trade that the United States has, we have soldiers in our units that have those skills. And some of those individual soldiers have many of those skills based on their civilian jobs and experiences. Some of them have had prior deployments and prior combat tours when they were on active duty, when they were younger soldiers, for instance. Some of them go as far back as Vietnam veterans, and we do still have Vietnam veterans in our units right now. So there's a lot of experiences there that helps in some ways, in many ways, makes the Guard just as if not better suited for combat than a regular army unit. Regular army units certainly are better at doing collective training for major military operations because that's what they get to do day in and day out in the peace time, but the Guard offers so much more with all those civilian skill-sets that we bring to the table.

**Givens:** And what's your current assignment with the West Virginia National Guard?

**Ramey:** I'm doing two different jobs now. On the weekend I work as part of the logistics section in Buchanan, West Virginia; I work as part of the G4. And on the full-time side I am a training officer in Charleston, West Virginia as part of the G3 shop.

**Givens:** What other, [clears throat] excuse me. What other Guard assignments have you been part of, such as, did your unit deploy for Hurricane Katrina, or anything like that?

**Ramey:** Actually I went as a part of our state contingent that went down to Hurricane Katrina, and I was a Staff Officer in the joint operations center for that. Spent six weeks down there and actually that was just after I got married. Story behind that is we had started the operation here in Charleston and we were preparing to send soldiers, a lot of the officer staff, down to assist Louisiana in that and I was preparing to get married [laughs] at that same time. The plan didn't include taking me down there, I was going to be working back here as part of our force that stayed in West Virginia, but I wasn't sure if I was going to get the day off to get married, let alone do my honeymoon. So I found out two days before the wedding, my boss finally said, 'yep, you can take the day off to go get married.' [laughs] And it was the next day finally, he

said, 'yeah, you can have your week off to go on your honeymoon, as well.' So, I got the wedding, did the honeymoon, and at the end of the honeymoon I had drill weekend. So, I went straight from our honeymoon in Tennessee to Bluefield for our drill. When the drill was over I got back -- and by the way, I had my wife with me at drill [laughs], so she's a dedicated Army wife already -- came back here to report in to the joint operations center and found out that first morning that I got back that I was going to Katrina for however long they needed me for, which turned out to be six weeks, so. For six weeks after I got married I got to spend that period of time away from my wife on a operation. Later on I went to Santa Teresa for the border patrol operation, which was labeled Operation Jump Start. Had a few different names, but Jump Start was what we went over, mainly. Spent six months on that tour, and that was outside of El Paso, Texas, into New Mexico, guarding the border and assisting the Border Patrol in that effort. At the same time we actually helped the New Mexico National Guard in one of the worst floods they had had in the last fifty years in the Rio Grande Valley.

**Givens:** What did serving in the Big Red One mean to you, if anything?

**Ramey:** [sighs] It did mean a lot. The Big Red One has had a big long history that's very decorated. They started back in the twentieth century, I guess, and they've been part of every major war or major battle, I think, the United States has been part of during that period of time. They've got a lot of experience. I mean, heck, they participated in D-Day [laughs]. How much better can that be for a history? I just felt like I was something a whole lot bigger than just me or just our small unit or just our National Guard. You know, we were a National Guard unit but we were participating in combat with one of the most decorated units in American history.

**Givens:** Probably more importantly to you, after a twenty year career in the National Guard, what has the Army meant to you?

**Ramey:** [sighs] The Army [pauses then sighs], the Army has meant to me that I've had a way to serve God. I believe that God gave me a calling to serve my country and to serve Him through my country, and the Army has been the vessel, so to speak, that allowed me to perform that service. Of course, we say 'serve our country,' what it means more than that is serving the people of this country, because the people is what matter. The country is a notion or a concept that will go on as the specific people are gone, but there's nothing I can do to help people fifty years before me and nothing I can do to help people a hundred years after I'm gone other than the legacy that I leave behind for them. But I can help the people that are here right now and I believe that's what I've been called to do and the Army has been the outlet that I believe I was called to serve through in order to help the people of this country.

**Givens:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to point out, bring up?

**Ramey:** [sighs] Boy, I've got all kinds of stories that I could tell, they just come to my head, but my memory doesn't work as well coming up with it. I can say that based on my experience in Iraq, the story -- the real story that's there -- doesn't necessarily get portrayed back here to the American people. And we, we can't all appreciate what soldiers are going through, and it's not all misery and drudgery. Certainly we are away from our families during that time, but [pauses] it's, it's probably not all as bad as we make it out to be. You know, we think that when we go to

war that it's nothing but shooting and fighting constantly, but it's not. There's a lot of down time in between patrols, in between missions. A soldier wants to be able to relax the same as a citizen wants to be able to relax. But they want something to do as well, and they're probably happiest when they're on a mission [laughs]. But there is a lot of downtime in a combat theater. Soldiers like having the internet available so they can write emails and do chatting and so forth to their families back home, people that they love – be able to talk on the telephone to those people. They just like to hear that people care also about what they're doing. If you hear all of the negative that people aren't behind you, then you start to wonder and doubt, 'am I doing the right thing?' Of course, we all as human nature want to believe that whatever we're doing is the right thing, and to hear that reinforcement is a good thing [laughs]. I have heard from a lot of people, 'you did a good job, we're glad you've done what you've done, thank you for protecting the country,' and it's good to hear; but, you know, we're also glad to serve the people of this country, and they're the whole reason that we do what we do.

**Givens:** Well, thank you, Major, for your time and for your service to the country.

**Ramey:** Thank you, it's my pleasure.