

**Donald A. Baranowski
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

**Free Academy H.S., Rome, N.Y.
Rome, Oneida County, New York
October 27, 2004**

**Donald A. Baranowski DB
Interviewer I**

[Beginning of the interview is cut off]

DB: How to get along with other people and how to act as one within the group.

I: What unit were you in?

DB: In basic training, you know, the number of the unit escapes me at this time. We were all a number of units down there but I can't recall. We're going back quite a ways now – heh.

I: Active training what unit did you join?

DB: I joined the KC-135 tanker refueling wing in Grissom AFB in Peru, Indiana.

I: What was the highest rank that you held? And how did you earn that?

DB: Tech Sargent and by taking standardized tests that the Air Force gives and you also have to wait a certain amount of time to increase your grade.

I: You were also in a unit in Syracuse, what unit was this? Was there anything unique about this unit?

DB: 174th tact. Fighter wing. One of the, well I watched this unit grow because when I first joined it they had what they call A37 aircraft, and then they went to A10 tact. Airplanes, they were basically tank killers and then they involved in the F16 fighter which was still flying at that unit. I was with all 3 of those airplanes.

I: How did you get along with the people in your unit?

DB: Oh the National Guard people were pretty easy going. You got to remember a lot of people are part timers so they were civilians from vary walks of life and so we had a lot of interesting stories to tell and backgrounds. We had a quite a bit of comradery.

I: You had to go to Saudi Arabia, when did you leave for there?

DB: I believe it was December 27th 1990.

I: How did you feel about this?

DB: Scared, sad, and uncertain. But we were called and that's what you do.

I: How did your family feel?

DB: They were worried. But they buckled up and just waited till I came home.

I: What did you think of the country itself?

DB: Well, when you're flying over the country all you see is sand. When you saw green you knew that area was irrigated, I'd say 95% of Saudi Arabia is desert. So you kind of knew what you were flying into.

I: How did the civilians of Saudi Arabia treat you?

DB: We had very little interaction with the Saudi Arabians, the ones that were at the base there, we had dealings with them as far as catering for food and laundry facilities. But overall they seemed to be happy that we were there.

I: What was the daily life like when you were there?

DB: Pretty regimented, you knew you were going to be on duty for 12 hours at a time. So after that it was either get your rest or try to occupy yourself with some activities. A lot of guys went to the gym, a lot of guys went to church, and a lot of guys did a lot of running over there just to keep occupied.

I: Did you have any special activities that you liked to do?

DB: Ya I learned to go to the gym and work out my frustrations in the gym.

I: What were your main duties while you were there?

DB: I was a radio aircraft dispatcher with the 174th and I basically handled the crypto materials that the pilots used and also kept radio contact with pilots on the ground and in the air.

I: What does Crypto mean?

DB: They're code signs pilots use to identify themselves and identify the area they're in. Without those code signs they could be mistaken for an enemy and actually fired upon. So its very important to have that crypto available.

I: Do you think your training prepared you for these duties?

DB: Well without a doubt, that's pretty much what the guard does every weekend. 1 weekend a month there's training involved and that's pretty much the reason that's done so if there's a war we'll be ready.

I: Were you ever in any combat?

DB: Not direct combat, no. I imagine if it came down to it they would've broke out the M16's and issued them all to us but then we'd know we were in big trouble. But being an aircraft wing, we weren't in the direct line of fire.

I: What were the dangers of a chemical weapons attack?

DB: Very high, that was probably the biggest concern for all the troops over there. It was to make sure the troops were safe as far as from chemical weapons attack, that's why the chemical warfare gear that you had was probably one of the most important things to keep track of and never leave your side.

I: Was there a lot of gear that you had to wear for it?

DB: Yes in fact it was pretty heavy and you had to get used to it and the weather wasn't conducive to it so you had to stay hydrated.

I: You mentioned something about color coded?

DB: Right, There were different color codes for different attacks. Green meant it was all clear. If there was a yellow message put out it meant that there's a possibility for an attack. Red meant that there was an actual attack in progress. Black meant there was nerve agents present. If the condition was black, it happened twice by us, you were fully suited in your chemical warfare with your mask on.

I: Were you ever wounded or ill while you were there?

DB: Yeah, I wasn't wounded. Everybody got sick at one point or another over there. I don't know if it was the food or what not but basically flu like symptoms.

I: What was the food like? What did you have to eat?

DB: The food was pretty sparse. They did bring us fresh fruit. Powdered eggs run the manual, type of toast, I'm not sure it was the toast we ate at home. They had chicken once in a while, but it was pretty basic fair over there.

I: What happened if someone got hit by the nerve agents?

DB: If you were experiencing a nerve agent attack you had an atropine pen with you, your pen. And it was an antidote for nerve agents. Basically you would plunge it in your outer thigh and hit the button and it would inject you with an antidote. Once you've used that pen you'd hang it from your suit so they would know that you used it and then try to care for you from there.

I: What about scud missiles?

DB: They were a missile that was Iraq's primary weapon over there. I believe they got a lot of them from Russia and their range was anywhere between 3-600 miles. They are very fast and before we were stationed we had maybe 30 minutes notice that one was in the air.

I: Were there a lot of them used against you?

DB: Not our particular base but he fired a lot of them, in fact he fired them in all directions, in fact six of them landed in Israel. The Israelis wanted to retaliate but we told them no we were taking care of things. They sent a lot of patriot missiles to Israel to try to knock those missiles out of the sky.

I: Did you receive any medals or awards for your service?

DB: Well our whole unit was awarded the south west Asia ribbon for being over there.

I: Were you allowed to keep in touch with your family?

DB: Well there were sparse phone calls. I did have the fortunate experience of being stationed near a MARS tent which is people in radio communications that has a radio that's like a hand radio operator. They go by the airwaves and I could call home on that at certain times of the morning and a lot of times I'd use that to make a call home at 4 or 5 in the morning, if the conditions were right. If the atmosphere conditions weren't right you couldn't get a call through but other than that there is a lot of letter writing.

I: Where did you live?

DB: In a ten man tent. You got to know those people pretty well over there.

I: Did you get along with them?

DB: You had to, there was no choice in the matter

I: How are your relations with your officer's and your other American airman?

DB: With the officers it was pretty much a professional relationship cause you knew everyday somebody could get killed so you pretty much kept the joking to a minimum. As far as the comrades that you lived with it was a little more loose and easy.

I: Is there one person or a couple people that you remember most?

DB: There was one guy his name was sergeant (unclear). He was the one that pretty much helped me work out my frustrations at the end of the day. Either he'd take me into the gym or jogging or we do a lot of activities together.

I: Do you believe American involvement was justified in that war?

DB: Oh ya at that particular time in history if we hadn't gone in there to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait there was a good possibility he would've just kept on going. And Saudi Arabia was especially fearful and they had no problem with us setting up airbases in their country to repel them.

I: What do you remember as being the most interesting or inspiring event in your military experience?

DB: Now I had quite a few of them over there to be honest with ya. Obviously one was when we were told the war was over, that was very nice. And we had a gathering of the whole unit to be given congratulations by the wing commander of what good a job we did and that made everyone feel proud to be an American at the time.

I: When did you return to the United States?

DB: In May of 91'

I: How did you feel about coming home?

DB: Well I was wondering if they were going to recognize me, I was brown as the desert and I lost about 15 pounds so I wasn't sure they were going to recognize me when I came home.

I: What did you do first when you got home?

DB: Let's see, well when I got home it was 4 in the morning. So I pretty much hugged everybody in the family and went to bed.

I: How did the people feel about you coming home? How did the civilians treat you?

DB: We had a unique experience, when we came back we flew into Maine as our first port of entry, in Bangor, Maine in fact. Then when we got off the airplane the whole town had turned out and they set up a big buffet for us and were all patting us on the back when we came out and these were total strangers. Everybody was stunned by that reaction, these weren't our families. These were just normal every day civilians. So we knew we had the whole support of the country behind us in this particular conflict.

I: After you came back what occupations did you have?

DB: I worked at Griffith AFB as an aircraft controller until 1995 until the base was told they were closing. Now I work for the U.S. postal service in Utica

I: Do you attend any veteran's organizations or reunions?

DB: Yes I always attend a reunion in Syracuse once a year with the 174th tact. Fighter wing and I also belong to the American legion in Camden.

I: Do you still maintain contact with any friends you've made?

DB: Oh yes I still visit some of the, some of the original people are still over there at Hancock field and I still go and visit. Also since my son is a member of the unit now I get to visit more often.

I: How do you feel your military experience influenced your life?

DB: I just think it gives you a center of gravity and self-discipline that probably no other occupation can give you. You pretty much learn how to be self-sufficient. I think that's what the service really instills in ya, how to take care of yourself, which I appreciate a lot.

I: Do you have anything you wanted to show us?

DB: Yes, in a class earlier I forgot that we had these masks that kept the sand out. So we would put these on a lot of the times when there were sandstorms. I didn't mention it but there were a lot of sandstorms over there. And these things punch right to your face. Now if you wore glasses we had little inserts that you could put in these. Those were prescription so you could see. But a lot of times we were filling sand bags and there were dust storms or sand storms and we'd be wearing these. Or put their helmets over them, so they came in pretty handy.

I: Other than sand storms how was the weather like there?

DB: Hot ha and dry and you had to stay hydrated with water. One thing I didn't talk about earlier was 6 units over there, 3 were active duty, 3 were reserve. And they're on the back of my shirt and you can see them there. And if you look in the center of this shirt we all formed what we called the 4th tact. Fighter wing. So all those little individual units were melded into one. There were 3 f15 fighter units and 2 f16 fighter units and 1 C-130 cargo unit. We were all formed into one wing, some of them were active duty some of them were reserve and in the National Guard. We all melded into one unit which was kind of a first for a major conflict. Anything else? Ha-ha.

I: Not that I know of.

DB: Okay, well I appreciate you inviting me over here.

I: Thank you very much for doing this interview.

DB: This is my favorite picture from when I was over there. I've always been fascinated by camels and as soon as I saw one on the base I said well I got to get a picture of this. I didn't ride him, but I saw them in the wild there. It was quite an experience. I got to pet one with (unclear) family over there. Those are people that are like nomads, they move from place to place. But this is kind of my favorite picture from when I was over there. Ok I should've showed this, see I was going to show this in class and I forgot about it.