

David Patrick Benamati
Narrator

Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke
Interviewers

Interviewed on 29 June 2007
NYNG HQ, Latham, NY

David Patrick Benamati entered the Army in 84' and is on active duty to this day.

David P. Benamati (interviewed)

Mike R (interviewer)

Wayne C (interviewer)

WC- What was your educational background prior to entering service?

DB- I have an associates' degree in civil technology from Hudson Valley Community College

WC- Why did you decide to enlist?

DB- I realized that with an associate's degree I wasn't getting very far. I didn't have the money to go back to college, and the army was offering money for college at the time. And I thought I would get familiar with computers because that was the big thing in the 80's.

WC- Why did you pick the Army?

DB- actually I went to the air force first, but they wouldn't take me because I was married and had a small child. They said for the rank I would be coming in at I wouldn't be able to support my family. But the army said, "sure well take you".

WC- When did you enlist?

DB- I enlisted on August 5, 1983.

WC- Where did you go for basic training?

DB- I went for basic training at Fort Leonard wood in Missouri.

WC- What were your training courses like?

DB- Well basic training was the same; in combat engineer we learned how to build bridges. We also learned some basic infantry tactics.

WC- Did your associate's degree helps you in this area?

DB- It helped me calculate the amount of C4 and the formulas when working with explosives.

WC- How long were you at the fort?

DB- I was there for six months. I graduated from AIT on June of 1984. Then I was assigned to Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

WC- What was that like did you use your raining there much?

DB- It was a little disappointing. At the time nothing was going on in the world per say in regards to the military. I felt like senior people just spent their time thinking of ways to harass new recruits. We went to the field which was a mundane thing but an annoyance as well it was brutal since it was summer and very dry.

WC- Was your wife able to join you there?

DB- When I was first assigned there, I reported for duty. The army then helped my find an apartment for the family. They arranged for me to go home and get my wife and kids.

WC- How did your wife adapt to that type of living environment?

DB- She adapted fairly well to the military life. It had its ups and down with time but she dealt with it.

WC- How long were you in Oklahoma?

DB- I was there for 15 months.

WC- A lot of training exercises?

DB- We went on the field on a regular basis, but after a while it became an annoyance. I began to work in the motor pool room. It was a wreck at first, the guy in charge before was being discharged and had an attitude of not caring. The tools were everywhere, but with some time I arranged and cleaned up the mess he left. After supervisors saw the change they were very pleased and I received an army achievement medal for the work I had done.

WC- Where did you go from there?

DB- I was then deployed to Germany. For three years I went to Johnson Barracks. There they had a mission, to defend the eastern part of West Germany from soviet troops.

WC- What was it like in Germany?

DB- In Germany I was with six engineers at a place nicknamed “The Academy”. It was a much regimented environment.

WC- What things did you work on there?

DB- We did a lot of field duty, and we worked on our engineering tactics. Things of that nature we also worked on our vehicles a lot.

WC- Did you get much free time for touring?

DB- We did have down time, everyone toured locally. Being married and having three kids, I didn't have much money so we didn't take part in the travelling much. But every once in a while we did get away, in 87' my parents did come over to visit while I was there. We traveled to Austria and northern Italy to the village where my grandfather was born; it was nice we spend a few days there with the family.

WC- How did the local people welcome you?

DB- The older generation was more open and accepting. A man at a stop sign tipped his hat at us as a sign of appreciation of our presence as we passed by the Northern part of Germany. The army held little folk festivals where they brought together the locals and shared some food and rides for the kids. At the festival an elder couple told me that they were grateful and appreciative of our work and they wanted to thank us. It was a heartwarming experience.

WC- After the three years there where did you go?

DB- That was my DTS and following I decided to get out of active duty in the Army. I liked the military; I just didn't like being away from home for so long. I wanted to be a part of the military but stay home as well, so I joined the Guard. I left and came back home.

WC- When was that?

DB- My wife came back on August of 88' to get the kids into school, but I didn't leave until October of 88'.

WC- What kind of Guard unit did you join?

DB- I came right here, this is where the recruiter told me to come. There was a spot for an engineering supervisor so they put me in the engineering section.

WC- How did that work out?

DB- It was a cultural shock for me. The National Guard was more laid back at the time. Much different from the army I was able to call the officers by their first names instead of “Sir”. I came in trying to get promoted to six. Every time I asked about my promotion, they said they were working on it. It turned out that they couldn't promote me to six.

WC-Did you get promoted?

DB- No there was any E6 positions. I talked to the career counselor; I was frustrated not able to be promoted. They said we can make you a general's aid. I left the division in 92". Then I came to headquarters start, I got a job as a technician signing order and putting them into the computer system. I got an opportunity to work for a private company. It turned out to be a bad decision because private companies can fire and hire whenever they want. The guy that hired me a month later realized that the position he had hired me for, he didn't need it. I came to the Guard and asked if they had any part time jobs. Meanwhile I worked there I hope to get promoted joined the aviation battalion. I transferred from the aviation to the public affairs in 2001.

WC- You got your E7?

DB- Yes

WC- You were in Iraq, can you tell us about that?

DB- We got our alert notice in April of 2005. We got our order in July of 2005. We were short-handed in equipment. In September of 2005 we mobilized to Fort Dix. We left in November, and then headed to Iraq.

WC- Do you think your training at Dix prepared you for Iraq?

DB- It felt to me like it was focused on convoy operations. We trained on being more focused on the people on the streets as well as cars and buildings. All bases in Iraq were referred to as FOBs (Fort Operation Base). The FOB at fort Dix did not compare at all to the one in Iraq. Our FOB life at Iraq was ten times better than the one at Fort Dix. We spent six months in the northern part of Iraq.

WC- Were you under fire at any time?

DB- The FOB came under fire many times. We got hit twice a week but it would vary. One week it would be daily then it was once a week but nobody was killed only injured.

WC- Did you contact family there?

DB- Yeah I emailed a lot. Regularly twice a day and I had a cellphone. They were hard to get since they had to be bought with the locals and everybody wanted one.

WC- When did you get back?

DB- We got back on late October of 2006. Everyone was anxious to get home.

WC- Do you think the same of the mission?

DB- Iraq needs to get to a point to where they can defend themselves and not rely on us. They think we are going to be there for a long time but we won't be there for long so they have to learn to sustain themselves.

WC- Well Thank You so much for the interview.