

**Arthur Gilchrist
Veteran**

**Megan Ten Eyck
Matt Kaczorowski
Interviewers**

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Rome Free High School
Rome N.Y.**

Q: Hi, I'm Megan Ten Eyck and my partner is Matt Kaczorowski and we're here from Rome Free Academy on November 5th, 2004, in Rome New York, and we're working on the New York State oral history project. We're here to interview a veteran Arthur Gilchrist about his experiences in Desert Storm and his military life. Where did you go to high school?

AG: I went to high school in Syracuse. Fowler high school. I was right on the west side of Syracuse.

Q: What year did you graduate?

AG: 1982

Q: did you go to college?

AG: Yeah, I went from Fowler, then spent a little time at Syracuse University then to the University of Maryland which had a detachment in Europe, the University of Maryland through the European courses which we took while on base there.

Q: What made you decide to enlist in the military?

AG: I was trying to find a job in all areas, and the military offered some college funds that gave me an opportunity I thought, and then I decided to join the guard. They had a program that gave you so much if you stayed in for six years. That's why my initial commitment was for six years. I decided to go active duty from there, and didn't take the college money but went to college under a consistent program.

Q: When you provided information for us and said you enlisted in July of 1982, did you have any previous military experience?

AG: I had the guard. I joined that May 81, my senior year. Going from my junior to senior year. I joined the guard and did my weekend drills, and did a boot camp that summer, the beginning of June to almost September. And basic training the Fort Benning Georgia, and came back from Fort Benning, went back to high school. Finished up that January, where I had enough credits I could finish up at the half year point.

Q: So, you're 17 when you went into the guard?

AG: Correct, yeah

Q: And how old were you when you enlisted into active duty?

AG: 19

Q: Did you have any special training Before you wet in?

AG: No special training before I went in. When I went in though, I became what they call a love hotel, and it was an anti-tank. I would fire missiles at tanks. So I had a big introduction to electronics and mathematics, figuring distances, ranges, and electrical currencies. That was my only experience with the guard. Then I went out into the Air Force I went into a computer background. An administrative support arena with all computers.

Q: Have you been able to use that outside of here? I became a system administrator throughout my career field and converted it from administrator to more of a computer-based support, and became a system administrator and then I took that and worked for the government afterwards doing some similar things with that and worked a person. So yeah, a lot of the skills I learned in the military apply.

Q: Why did you choose to transfer from the Army National Guard to the active-duty Air Force?

AG: I love the guard, I just it wasn't what I thought was going to be. I used to tell people, it was a bunch of old guys, and there was one of the young guys there. They were Vietnam vets, and their ideals of what the military should be was a lot different than what I thought was going to be and I didn't think they treated us well; us younger guys. When I left the guard, I just wanted to further my commitment involuntarily. It wasn't a 20-year career kind of thing. At that point I didn't think it would be.

Q: What kind of benefits did you feel that the Air Force opened up to you than the army didn't?

AG: The Air Force gave me a skill you know. I didn't think I'd be able to shoot tanks once I got out of the army. They gave me some skills that I could use. The computer background; there weren't even memory typewriters then, so when I first went in I got I was introduced to the computer day one and when you learned some electronic word processing and just evolved from there. It was from the birth, almost from the cradle, of computers in offices. Right from the birth, we had big mainframes that would fill this room. I got to see it at its biggest point, now to a laptop where you can sit at a desk and do what we were doing in one big room. It was pretty neat.

Q: When you were stationed at Gurkhas Air Force Base in Rome New York for the first time, what were some of your responsibilities on the base?

AG: I got assigned to Rome labs, and at that point we're developing cruise missiles and testing its reliability, we were testing some electronic interference, it was a real neat. The

cruise missile was almost a smart bomb. You could guide it. Drop it from plane, and it guided to the target. Now it got much more advanced, but I got chance to meet the vice president George Bush then. He came and actually looked at it when Ronald Reagan was president, and George Bush was the Vice President. He was the vice president, so I got a chance to meet him, and it was really impressive as the 19 year old being part of that.

Q: When you were in Italy what type of responsibilities did you have on the base?

AG: When I was in Naples Italy I went to the NATO headquarters, I was the base commander and I had top-secret clearance, so I would brief everyone. I've met everyone who came on base, I gave them briefing, I assigned them, they call it pulse officer. I was the commander's representative in staff meetings, almost like an executive officer. I was a real airman, you know, the lowest ranking guy on base but I had one of the most privileged job my base, and they trusted me. Neat experiences I didn't think I'd get right out of high school.

Q: When you were in Europe did you travel on assignment a lot?

AG: Yeah, I played football for the Air Force while I was there. I did that as part of NATO inspection team and we traveled from Naples Italy, and we visited on the NATO countries that had bases and inspect their sites make sure they were following the headquarters rules and guidance. It was interesting, got to meet people or 19 years old in different services there were British or Greeks and seeing how they were becoming part of their army and services and serving their country with their ideals of service. It was totally different, you know some were draft, and we weren't drafted so that was all different.

Q: Did most of the different countries, the younger kids, so they get along most of the time, or are there conflicts?

AG: I think because they were drafted someone didn't want to be there, so where we all the United States services were volunteer and we wanted to be there we volunteered to be there so you could see the difference in commitment but for the most part, NATO was a good assignment, all the troops that were there were usually selected to be there even for the foreign countries. But there was some more that were drafted, so we had to deal with that a little bit.

Q: What made working for NATO different than working for any other military installation?

AG: I think all the different countries, all the different languages, all the different cultures. So, you would one night be eating with your Italian friends the next night you might go to a party that were just Greeks. And you would have different cuisines like baklava it was actually different. You got exposed to things that you've never seen when you're in America some people have never even heard of Greek baklava, a type of pastry. Just the food, the culture, what people think about certain things. It was all different, you had a different spice or flavor for your ideals.

Q: How do you think that people broadened your view of the world? Did they help you have a better outlook on America or another country?

AG: A lot of them really thought America was still the streets for paper goat I mean they really love the ideals of Americans some of them didn't like how Americans behaved in their country, but for most part, yeah, they really envied us for our freedoms.

Q: How do you feel when you found out you're going to Iraq?

AG: I was scared because I didn't know. It's a war and I didn't know what would happen. I know the reasons we were going there were good, but I just didn't know if we were ready to go. There's a lot of young people and we've had all these exercises, but we've never had any experience. We had all these Vietnam vets who were there, and they could tell us you "gotta be ready" "this is what we're gonna do when we get there." They seemed to have a plan, we didn't have that same base where I could draw and say, "hey we've done this before."

Q: How did the war affect your family?

AG: The first time I went, my daughter was just born so I didn't get a chance to see her walk or start walking. She didn't recognize me when he came home that was a little bit... she was just born I think three months old, so I was like a stranger when I came back to her. I think it made us closer. Some goodbyes, you know, are real important I guess as I'm getting ready to leave. I make sure I said goodbye properly. I think we had been apart for a while but that tightened us up, my brothers especially. I had been in the service; I've been away from home. So, when I had to leave, it was a really important concern.

Q: How long were you away from your wife and children?

AG: We couldn't go over for more than... at the time they were sending people for more than 6 months. 120 days was a normal assignment, so 4 months each time I went.

Q: Did you have any special training when you went to war, or before you went to war? In preparation?

AG: All the time we had exercises for, you know, war plans. How we were going to do certain things. But when we got into the area of operation, they did set up how we were going to react... They reinforced all the training we had chem gear, you know, you put on a gas mask, they went through all that again. They went to certain facilities, call signs, first weeks were really structured you just you had continuity you're relieving someone who had been there they were telling you every day what to do and it became part of your everyday activities and if you didn't do it, it was noticeable, so people were watching. People were expecting you to do it, so you made sure you had everything done because you've got people relying on the safety. Everything was safety oriented.

Q: Was everyone on base trained, or was it just some people who knew they're going?

AG: Back in the states just really started preparing the people who were going. If they

knew they were going, they would give them all the chem training. They were the first priority. Then those who were gonna follow afterward were secondary trainers. They would get them after all the people who were tagged to go for training they would get the other people afterwards.

Q: What's chem training?

AG: It's chemical biological warfare where they actually make you put on a gas mask because there's a bomb, or there's an agent that will create problems for you. A gas that could kill you by choking to death. So, they had these special masks used as a breathing apparatus so you could breathe with no effect. They had to teach how to give yourself a shot if you had a nerve agent to save your life or give your buddy a shot to save his.

Q: What was the difference between Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm?

AG: Both were part of the Gulf War there were just different points in the campaign. Desert Storm as part of the war when the first went in, then Desert Shield was afterwards when we put up the sanctions and that was part of Desert Shield. And then after that I think came Desert Fox. They're just names given to different phases during the war.

Q: Like code names?

AG: Operation Names. Like code names.

Q: Did you have any particular operation in connection with Desert Storm or Desert Shield that you'd like to tell us about?

AG: I was part of the operation group while I was there, and that's pretty unique. We actually got to sit down with the pilots who were running and flying the missions over the bomb targets and over the no-fly zones, so I got to see what they were doing, I would give them read files that they need to read for intelligence, so it was pretty neat. I got to see the war actually being carried out. Either on video when it came back and showed how they hit the targets, or by briefing, you know, hey we hit this target, and this is what we thought the damage was.

Q: Did you find out as a whole, or need to go "step one is complete, so we can move on and develop step two" or was it all planned to begin with?

AG: There was a group of officers who sat down every day and planned out those days. There was a grand plan that was being created somewhere else, but our portion we planned out how we were going to do it.

Q: What was your mission when you were in Saudi Arabia?

AG: Saudi Arabia was the executive officer admin support. I was an executive officer because we had no executive officer for like two months while I was there, so I did that for the first two months. I did both duties, and then while doing that I was also the Saudi VI sign official. I was the American representative who would call these passes and have

to get them approved by the Saudi officials so when you travel in and around the country. I also took care of the mail customs because there's certain things that could be mailed, and certain things that couldn't be mailed. There are certain things that we weren't allowed to receive in the mail, so I was part of that sign-off. I made sure that we adhere to their customs.

Q: What were you not allowed to receive in the mail?

AG: No alcohol, no pornography, and some religious materials they didn't want in the country. They were pretty tight on that.

Q: Did you have any experiences that you considered life altering in the war?

AG: You seen things happen here, people get killed, and one of the towers in Duran had gone down, and some of my friends were there. That was a life altering thought about them often. About what changes were happening and their families at home. They were there serving and not complaining. They had a job. I was ready to go when it was time to go.

Q: Did you have any specific people that you served with who had a personal impact on you?

AG: Yeah, we had Colonel John Barry who was the commander at the time the operation group commander and general Short, general Wilde, general Skart. Went on to command in the Bosnia Kosovo operations Colonel Barry Levy went on to investigate the last shuttle crash, so they had a quite an impact. I knew they were generals who worked hard and Colonels who worked hard, and I really gained a lot of respect for the officers there because they were really working every day, long hours, and committed to doing everything they're asked to do and even more. They really kept everyone informed everyone underneath them you've seen leadership that its finest. To say they would tell us what was going on and what did happen, did we lose anyone, what can we do to prevent it? It was a really open door. He didn't send out an email and say "hey this is..." he went around and told you. Both those generals were really good.

Q: When you came back from the Middle East, do you feel that you're the same person as before you left?

AG: No. I knew because I have seen some stuff that happened in Kuwait, I seen some of the stuff on the highway of doom in Iraq, I've seen how we united as a force, and how powerful the military was, how decisive it could be. So yeah, it changed me as a person. I kind of thought we could have been out of there sooner, but definitely proud to be part of the American force. I just thought it was an amazing operation. It was swift.

Q: Did you win any important metals, ribbons, or coins?

AG: We got the Kuwait service medal, we got the national service medals, we each got some coins from the Kuwaiti government. Some silver coins. Got a command kudos as a first for myself for my job that I did. I got a nice letter of recommendation, and a good

LOE. And I was looking forward to it because it was a job well done, and it was. and that's what all our certificates had "a job well done"

Q: What's an LOE?

AG: A letter of evaluation, that actually they wrote in the command if they thought you did a good job, they wrote it and sent it back. They were optional form. They didn't have to, but they actually wrote up many of us for our participation and the achievements we did while we were there. Kind of recognition for our local committee and our local commanders to see.

Q: How did the death of some of your fellow service members affect your outlook on the war?

AG: It was serious. It wasn't what you've seen on TV, you know. You're watching on CNN, a bomb hit a target, or planes being shot at. There's people on the ground, and they were putting them up there. They're risking their lives even though they're not branding the front lines. Then they lose their lives. Everyone had to come home watch after September 11th, you see planes coming in with caskets. You know that's someone's brother, someone's sister. It just changes you, and it makes you really realize the sacrifice you're making for being there. The chance you're taking and how much is the cost of freedom. You think about it when you're in those positions. You're over there and someone's shooting at you.

Q: It's a whole different story when someone's shooting at you.

Q: You mentioned in your information that you had to develop and execute a war plan. Can you describe your responsibilities and the use for the operation?

AG: Like we talked about earlier, we would sit down in the staff meeting with all the pilots or the captains or majors who were flying that day. They were sitting, and the daily war plan would be going out to them. And there's our objectives for the day. So, we had to compile that information to give to them, and then they would decide how they were gonna engage. So that was pretty neat. We got to be... you knew what's gonna happen that day. What was supposed to happen.

Q: Since you were given so many more responsibilities than the average enlisted soldier, did you end up having clashes with your officers over the right way to go by the mission or any projects that you worked on?

AG: We have some heated debates, and that took me. But some of the enlisted we're able to voice their opinions you know, "Hey this is what we saw" "we read this is" "you need to look at this" you know. Sometimes they knew something we didn't know, or we had information they didn't have, so you needed those exchanges. But it was always a give and take, and that was neat. I don't know if that was the same... for the Air Force it was that way, I don't know how it worked in the other services much. But the operations

were almost all Air Force. There were a couple of Navy pilots. They were really... we had an input, and if we were in a position to give that input, they took it.

Q: You also mentioned that you have different communities to recover from natural disasters around your role, or the military's role?

AG: There was some natural disasters that we helped locally with. Somalia, Rwanda. We were supplying cargo planes over there with medical supplies, food supplies, and that was a humanitarian effort that also changed how you thought about America. When you go you see all these areas, and they're getting packages from the US, and we're giving all this food away. Some people didn't get it. You know, they had guards there guarding the food because it'd just be pure chaos if you let them at it. Sometimes you came in with food... or they thought you were coming in with food, but you were just coming in with medical supplies. And you could just see the disappointment, or sense of helplessness you know because you weren't there for what they thought. That was a little different.

Q: How did seeing the victims of the famine in Somalia affect you?

AG: Rwanda... Probably more so with Rwanda. It was a... For me personally, I couldn't understand why they weren't having the access to what they needed; the food. It seemed like the nations were there for no reason. Because we would read stuff, you know, "Warlord taking food and supplies." It was just a sad situation to see.

Q: When you were stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington State what kind of tests did you perform?

AG: I worked for... again, I worked for the chief of safety who worked with base matters. I had a real good job. I was also the NCIC of the command post, what they called a crisis active team. It's one of the shift supervisors and we would set up, again, briefing for the commanders, we'd gather intel slides, put together a presentation. So, he would get a daily... or they call it a daily situation report, and they would make decisions based upon that information that we gathered. We'd have to send out certain information, and that would create more information back to us. We would also give a daily accountability... like during like September 11. The no-fly order, we had a cap on that. No civilian airplanes could be in the air, only military airplanes. So that was one of the things we did. So again, I got a chance to be part of the process that we're making decisions, and affecting how the operation was going to work. Big responsibility.

Q: Can you describe the events of your day on September 11, 2001?

AG: Yeah. The 9th of September was my birthday, the 10th was my brother's, and then on the 11th I woke up and my son was telling me that a plane had flew into the tower; a 747. I looked at the... I was watching it on the television, and I said, "Had to be a small plane, or the building would've come down." And as we're sitting there, you know, starting to get ready for work, didn't think anything of it, and then another plane flies in. And right from then I knew. Put on my pager, got my BDUs on; our battle dress

uniform, and got ready for work. I went right to the command post. I didn't even go to my normal job because I knew that we were gonna be engaged, and we had a job. I went 24/7 there for a long time afterwards. It was a scary feeling, I can remember being consumed by it. Coming home and thinking about it worried that it was gonna happen again that day or the next day. When it would happen again.

Q: What were some of the precautions taken in order to ensure the safety of the base after 9/11?

AG: The base went down on a complete lockdown. I remember the kids at school. They went to school outside the base, and they we're told they had to come home. They came home on the bus and the guard came on the bus. It became real heightened. Every car being checked coming on base, the kids were scared. Our operation was 24/7, all the active-duty leaves were cancelled, and TDYs were cancelled. If you were on TDY, TDY meaning you left to go to another base, or went to another location temporarily. That's called a TDY. They would call... they called everyone that was on that status back to prepare to start sending troops wherever we needed to. To the towers, the Pentagon or to the port operating location. If we were gonna bring the battle to them, we had to bring all those people back and prepare them. It was a busy time.

Q: How did the attacks on September 11th change your life?

AG: Well, I was ready to get out and couldn't get out, but it gave me a nerve. Gave me some personal resolve that "Hey we need to be ready to protect our freedom" and I was ready. I was willing to stay, and I didn't know anyone who was complaining about staying. Life was going to be at home for a little bit, but we were all willing to stay there, and make sure we did the right thing.

Q: When you say "ready to get out" you mean ready to retire?

AG: I was ready to retire yeah. I was retirement eligible... close retirement eligible.

Q: How did you help to prevent future attacks on American ground?

AG: Not just in the military, as an American... in the military we started enforcing some of our... going after the terrorists. We started going to, we started going to Iraq, and we prepared our troops to get there. But as an American we started looking at some of the things that we thought were freedoms, and willing to sacrifice those for the good of all. You can't go to a sporting event, to a concert, or anything now without some check, some security check. We've become more security conscious. I think this part of what we did in the military is become more security conscious around the world. Not letting terrorists take a hold of us. You know, get people back on planes and make it where people felt safe to get back on a plane. There for about a month or two, we didn't let any planes up in the air without... we had them grounded. For about a month or two we were flying all over the place watching all these planes. This wasn't gonna happen again. Not on our watch. I really believed it, and it didn't.

Q: If you were reactivated and ordered to go back into the military, would you be willing to go serve the war on terror we are now fighting in Iraq?

AG: Every day I think about it still. If the call came, I'd get out... shave the beard off and get ready to go. I'd lose a few pounds, but I'd be ready to go. No hesitation if it's something we need to do.

Q: Thank you.

AG: Thank you.