

## **PREFACE**

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Interviewee: James Stegall

Interviewers: Robert Collver and Erin Noble

Transcriber: Robert Collver

Biographical details:

Robert Collver - Junior, undergraduate at the University of Oregon, History Major

Erin Noble - Sophomore, undergraduate at the University of Oregon, Journalism Major

## **TRANSCRIPT**

**Erin Noble:**

This is Erin Noble here with ...

**Robert Collver:**

Robert Collver.

**Erin Noble:**

... Doing an interview of James Stegall for prof. Dracolby's Veteran's Oral History Class. So why don't you start off by telling us a little bit about yourself and why you joined the military?

**James Stegall:**

Um, sure... This is James, I guess I'm taking part in this program. I enlisted... I was in the Army reserve until. Well not long after enlisting I learned about the ROTC [The Reserve Trainer's Officer Core] program. And in fact it was something that my reserve unit that told me about it. I went back to my high school, which is Cottage Grove High School just south of Eugene. And asked my guidance counselor about [ROTC]. And it turns out that I was a strong candidate for [ROTC]. So I applied for that. But what that meant is that I was going to continue in the Army reserve and I went to basic training in AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. I ended up spending about two years in the Army Reserve and then simultaneously going through [ROTC] or joining [ROTC] at the University of Oregon.

I enlisted as ... I initially wanted to enlist as a Combat Medic, a 91-Bravo [91-B]. But I ended up enlisting in as a Psychiatric Specialist, 91-Foxtrot [91-F]. And that was kind of a combined MOS, a Military Occupational Specialty, which — if I could say an acronym. So that was ... We went through a kind of a pre-course that was basic EMT [Emergency Medical Technician] kind of course, and then ... 91-F was in-patient psyche, and, at the time, the Army had two parts of this job. There was an external component 91-Golf [91-G] that would be out at the brigade-level, kind of, interacting with soldiers and be providing triage for soldiers that were having a mental crisis, and then the 91-F was the more in-patient component. I was more interested in 91-G, but that wasn't available. So I ended up with 91-F.

And so I went to Basic Training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I left in November of '93. And I had to ... So Basic Training was its own crazy thing, but I had to go through the interview for [ROTC] while I was at Basic Training. And I didn't get a lot of communication or anything about when I supposed to go to the interview and I was really worried — cause the whole point, the whole point of me doing all this was because I wanted to go to college. And I was really feeling that if I didn't get this interview, I was afraid that if I wasn't going to get into [ROTC], then I wasn't going to go to college, and I would be stuck in the Army ...

And at one point, when I knew that my mom ... My mom was sending me letters, and so I knew that interview had been scheduled, and they were going to have to get me to the University of Missouri at Rolla, [MO]. I had no idea how was going to get there or how I was going to prepare, or anything. So finally in the middle of training, one day, I stood up asked the Drill Sergeant — and at the time Fort Leonard Wood, it was what they called "Sergeant Sandwich" — so you'd stand up, parade to rest and say, "Sergeant! Yes, Sergeant! Sergeant! Private Stegall requests permission to speak, Sergeant." And you know it was like asking a tiger to come talk to you that's going to bite your head off. And so I asked them, and he basically told me — you know, I won't curse on the recording — but ... [general laughter] They, you know, basically told me to sit down, shut up, we know about you, and told me that I needed to focus on basic training.

And then, probably about two weeks later, I was at the range and this E-5 Sergeant is running down the line looking at people. And finally he points at me. You know, "Stehgall!" And that's ... they always mispronounced my name. But he picks me up throws me in the back of a flatbed truck and takes me back to the barracks. And I had no idea what this was about. I assumed it was for the scholarship. Well then the executive officer from the training company who was an engineer, First Lieutenant helps me put my Class A uniform together. So we had all this stuff but we hadn't spent time putting in together. Eventually we spent a week putting these together, you know, and going through inspections and everything making sure you knew how to put your uniform together. Well this Lieutenant was just sticking stuff on my Class As and one of the big no-nos — I don't know if I told you this — but you don't ever put anything on your dress uniform with your fingers, because you'll get fingernails, or fingerprints all over it. Well, he's doing that. Everything's, you know, messed up.

And so they take, they take me to their [ROTC] department at the University of Rolla, or at Missouri, and I walk into a room, and the highest rank ... I mean, one thing about Basic Training, at least back then, it was all about breaking you down. You are doing what you're told at the lowest level possible. You're an E-1 Private. If an E-2 tells you to something, you do what they tell you. You know they ... and so walking into a room where there was a Lieutenant Colonel, a Major, two Captains, and a Sergeant Major, I just about had a heart attack. I didn't even know how to talk to them. They ...

It was funny to watch because I think they were used to dealing with college students, they had never had someone walk in, out from the middle of basic training, they just ... I could tell that they were ready to be nice to me, and then in the middle of it, it sort of just switched [he snaps his fingers] because I didn't... You know, I was staying at attention while I was talking to them, and everything was, "Sir! Yes, sir!" And I was having a really difficult time remembering a lot of things that were ... In the interview, they were asking me about the things I'd done in high school, you know. "Tell us about this. Tell us about that." And finally the Colonel looks at me and he says, "Private, I'm having a hard time believing that you did any of these things." And I go, "Sir, you have to understand, due to the nature of my training it's very difficult for me to remember anything right now." [general laughter] And he smiles at me, and, you know ... I

don't know. They were pointing out all the different things wrong with my uniform. Looking back on this, I probably know that they were just getting a real kick out of this whole thing. But at the time I had thought that I had completely blown it. I had blown my future. I wasn't going to go to college. I was going to be stuck in the Army reserve. You know, it was terrible. And they didn't give me any feedback. So, I ... You know, they put me back on a truck, they take me back to Basic Training, and that's it. I had no idea what the outcome was.

It wasn't until I got to [AIT] at San Houston that a Drill Sergeant comes up — and he was from Puerto Rico — I think it was Natal, and were all standing in formation, and he's like, "Stegall, come here!" And he pulls out this letter and he's like, "I need to tell you something." And basically he made something. I won't try to imitate him. But, you know, basically, "If you ever try to make me salute you, I will destroy you," and he's like, "You got accepted into the scholarship program." And that was ... So that was a light at the end of the tunnel for that.

And that was ... so I went through basic training and that ended up being six weeks out in Fort Leavenworth, er ... Fort Leonard Worth, sorry, which was kind of miserable being out in the cold and the snow. And it was one of the first times that ... You know, I grew up in a very ... Cottage Grove was just not a diverse place. And getting thrown into the complete mix of people, backgrounds, um, everything. And people, you know, just from L.A., Chicago, New York. It was just a complete ... That experience was really informative for me. I guess I'm just getting to meet to a lot of different kind of people, and, you know, viewpoints, and also people that...

I was thinking about this. This one of the first places I ran into people who had decided that they couldn't take it anymore. We had two people in the platoon who basically decided that they wanted to quit. And at this time there was no quitting. Like once you were in basic training you were either there the whole way and you're gonna stand and just follow everybody around, and then they would kick you out. But they wouldn't let you go home in the middle of it.

We had a guy from Saint Thomas, that was a rapper, and he was demonstrating that he could rap, and he was ... I mean, great voice. I loved to listen to him talk. You know, he would say crazy stuff. "Don't give me a grenade or I'm gonna kill all of you. Don't give me a weapon cause I'll shoot you." And so he would just stand there like in the range while the rest of us were walking past with weapons. Now that people have done things like that. But at the time it was just like, "Here's this crazy person." But at the time there were people like that. A couple times in my career people said things like that, "I just can't take this anymore." And you used to always think to yourself, well, I wish I could say that, but I can't.

**Collver:**

What do you think was the difference between to you and them that allowed you succeed?

**Stegall:**

As I look back on it, I don't know. My family, my father, my, um ... I kind of come from people where you just can't quit. You don't quit. It didn't. And even now, that I am like ten years out of it. Being in the Army is such a denial of self.

**Collver:**

So was basic training and the Army more mentality thing?

**Stegall:**

I would say, and this is even. I've had this conversation. And this is from people who are still in. They tell me it's so different now. That I couldn't tell you. I could tell you what it's like during a specific period of time. But yeah. You learn to basically if you hurting to shut up. And take motrin ds and keep going. And if you're feeling psychic you know. Or anything like that. It's like Shut up do what you're told. You know and if you're hurt about something. Like I don't want to hear it. And I think that is why the Army is struggling a lot now with a lot of the mental health things their having. Um. When I went on. Back it on as a lieutenant. Really the only mental health services the Army had were chaplains. At that point if I had a soldier that was in a mental crisis. I could either have them hospitalized or send them to the chaplain. And if you are a Wiccan or you are a Buddhist. Or even then if you had a chaplain. There's no guarantee that there protestant chaplain or catholic chaplain. It could be, Who knows what kind of Christian faith depending on what your background is. I mean I don't want to go talk to that person. And so that was a real shortfall. So I guess I can get into this later when I talk about my command, but I had a lot of soldiers that I didn't find out until after there was some kind of crisis that they were on medication, that they were in therapy back home. That there had been big indicators.

**Collver:**

Oh wow, and there was no communication?

**Stegall:**

No, it was kind of like those rules still apply. There was no kind of list with the medications my soldiers were on. So you might do a room inspection, and even that would, you'd find all this expired medication. "Oh, wait a second. Why are you taking this?" And even that's weird territory. I mean, I can't tell you of the legality of looking back on that. Like actually how legal it would be for me to stand in front of Specialist So-and-so. And say, "Tell me about your medications." Which was a huge ...

One of the things that happened in my command, I had two soldiers that flipped a five-ton truck on the Autobahn and stopped traffic for, like, eight hours. But there are a number of things that led up to that, but one of the things that came out of it was that we had two soldiers who were both on medications. And there was no ... We didn't know about it. We trusted them to basically ... I mean, imagine, I guess, a five-ton is similar to those EWEB trucks with a crane on the back. Yeah, I mean, it's a huge truck, and we just had two of them on the Autobahn. And somebody cut 'em off, and they flipped. And I'm so glad that they weren't seriously injured. But I think we're off on a tangent here. That is just one of those things that ... It feels like the military, or at least the Army, in a way did that. Like, it ... I can definitely see how you learn ...

**Collver:**

Do you think they have improved upon ...?

**Stegall:**

Well, I couldn't tell you. I see a lot of things coming out ... At least we acknowledge that PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] [exists] and we acknowledge that traumatic brain injury, and that traumatic brain injury can be a spectrum that starts with smaller injuries. It's not just you got blown up. It's that people who are out there putting small explosives on breaches and things like that, you know. Cumulative effects definitely have an impact. I mean, I spent most of my time, when I was a Platoon Leader and a Commander, dealing with social issues, like, more like,

you know ... And we could, you know, get into that. But a lot of young families with not the greatest home situations. And then try and recreate these situations with no support system, dealing with all the stresses of the military. And it just leads to mental health issues. I mean people are violent. It's like just ...

**Collver:**

It's almost like the Army is like a correctional facility or something.

**Stegall:**

Well, in a way. I mean, you have to keep in mind that everyone that's at basic training, everyone joins the military for a reasons. I mean some people that want to go to college, and there are some that are escaping a bad home life. There are people where a judge said, "I recommend you do this or I am not going take you off probation." And so nobody ever, or at least very few people I would say are like, "I really want to serve my country." And those ... I take that back. I think that everyone that does it, eventually, they do want to serve their country. But there is no good mechanism for an eighteen-year-old American to serve their country. I mean, you can do Teach For America, and there are some real good programs, but you have to take on significant debt when you do those things. There is just no real way to sign up and say, "I'm here to help. What can I do?"

So the military ... You know, I had soldiers that were homeless and that's why they joined the Army. I mean, you would never really find these things out until you talk to them. But I don't know. I guess what really speaks to that is ... I went through [AIT] at Fort Sam Houston. I was pretty fortunate that they divided our class, and half went to Lackland AFB [Air Force Base] to do group therapy with the air force basic trainees. And then half of us went to the San Antonio VA [Veterans Administration] Hospital and I got to do that. The upside of that is that we did real group therapy. We did real group therapy sessions. We were working with people who had real mental health issues, from the whole spectrum: from psychotic schizophrenia to Alzheimer's, dementia, PTSD, grand depression, too. I don't know, [it was] the whole spectrum of things. And it was a teaching hospital, so we had a specialist that was leading residences through and medicated. And so that was another thing that was kind of unique. And we also did [AIT], which was muscle therapy. So I also go to help with some of those things. So that was all really interesting.

But then probably about May, two of the guys that were ... Well, they had actually been ... We were at the teaching hospital. One of those things was shooting people up. And this hospital used a lot of Ativan that we would — Ativan is a mood modifier. It's not like Prozac — but the guys that were Lackland, they were always sort of jealous of us over at the [VA] hospital, that we were the ones doing real things, and they were just with people who were going through Air Force Basic complained, which we thought was being weak, anyway.

But anyway, these two guys were going down to the [U.S.-]Mexican Border and getting steroids and coming back up because San Antonio was pretty close, and, so, they were doing that, and we didn't really know about it. I mean these two guys were jerks. I didn't like them.

**Collver:**

What the hell, why would they do that?

**Stegall:**

Well they wanted to get big. I don't know. They were eighteen, and they wanted to work out and, I guess, since they could get steroids they did it. And a week before we graduated, they wanted to take some home with them because we were all reservists. So they were all out of steroids so they ended up buying Ativan. So they come back and they have this Ativan. And I actually had guard duty the night that they did this. So I was going back and forth to this thing they call laundry guard. Where you guard washing machines. To make sure people didn't steal laundry. [general laughter] They ... Basically we didn't find out until later, [that] the guys came back with Ativan and ended up giving it to a bunch of people. They were all in the barracks and they all took twelve times the recommended dosage. And we kind of thought they were drunk. There was one guy that was running around with a sheet. They were throwing mattresses all over the place.

But finally when it had come about — what they had done — it was just like ... as far as command was concerned ... the two guys ... We tried to go to work, and the two guys that were in my group didn't even show up on the Buzz. They sort of just wandered around San Antonio. So I guess one of the things that Ativan does. I mean we would use it, if somebody ... The thing that I observed at the hospital, they would come in completely psychotic. You would shoot them up with it, and they would go down or they would do maintenance on it. Well, these guys were really acting drunk, but then they got super depressed at the end of the night. While everyone was dining, they were in the showers staring, and there wasn't much we could do. And we couldn't really do anything about it. Our instructors of course knew how to recognize all of this. So, basically, all those guys, they got rounded up together and I never saw them again. And they got ... And I heard later that they got court-martialed.

**Collver:**

What do you mean by court-martialed?

**Stegall:**

There are various levels of it. Basically, a court-martial would be a judicial proceeding, if you are at a felony level. Actually these guys were pretty lucky. At one point they can imprison you. They can recycle you into a different [MOS], a different job. One of the guys that was active ... but that was just a big lesson, people aren't going to make good decisions. And you can't trust people 'cause one of the guys I really looked up to, he got caught up in this. And that was the other thing about being in Sam Houston. A lot of the people that were in with us, a lot of them couldn't do anything while they were going through basic, or [AIT].

I remember specifically one guy, one of the things we could do was volunteer to go up the medical school, the university school. As a patient quote on quote for their training and this kid comes back and he pulls all of these pills out of his pocket. And I go, "No, what are they? Do you even know, what they are?" He said, "No, I don't care." And this was sort of the mentality of those that came in. So that kind of mentality was very ...

I think if you were mixing up with all these people from these backgrounds, it was hard to not get caught up in that sort of thing, and my goal was not to [do] anything that was going to keep me, keep me in trouble. One of the things that my dad's friends said to me is "You can stand on your head or you can do it, get out, don't get caught up in that stuff". And that is one of those things when you get caught up in basic. At one point if it hadn't been for the [ROTC] thing, the drill sergeant wouldn't have even known me because I always did my best to keep a low profile. Never stand out.

I mean, I had a friend of mine that we actually met at the airport in Portland. Something about him for whatever reason. They were always just railing in on him. He couldn't do anything. We all learned to stay away from my friend, because they used to do this thing called "Smoke list." And they, and whatever you did during the day they would call out on a list. And then there was a room at the end of the barracks. They had all of these stupid, you know, dumbbells, and twenty-five pound weights of various things. And you would have to go in there for an hour and do exercises. It's based on a certain training. It's so much worse when you don't get to choose what you want to do.

I don't know that was about the end of my time in [AIT]. I went from that to the 396th support Hospital, because I had done a couple of drills with them. And I was part of the mobile hospital. And while I was in [ROTC] as well. And I never got to anything related to my [MOS] while I was there. Basically I was on a team to move things around. We would clean equipment, there was a lot of direct commission, nurses and doctors, who had never really had training with anything having to do with the Army. So we cleaned a lot of weapons. We basically. Just go to the weekend on Friday we would check there M16's and clean them all weekend. I definitely wasn't super excited about the Army reserve, but I never got to do anything cool aside from the va hospital.

**Collver:**

Did you guys get much free time and if so...?

**Stegall:**

Well the reserves is really compact because they only have so much training. You might go on a Friday night and work until Sunday. Yeah but you would go home at night. Basically you would show up and go information kind of like an accountability thing. Everybody checks in. And then you would go do something. But this unit was different, because it was so full of people that would actually professionals in the medical industry. You might be RN [Registered nurse], but also a KEA in the Army. You were more focused on, what am I going to do for my career development. What about my retirement. This was a time when one of the first Iraq things was happening. When they were giving people early retirement. I remember a ton of things about "How retirement works". And this is what to look at. And hey if you're taking an early retirement this is what you need to do. You know and I was more focused on that at that time than [ROTC]. And I kind of wanted to go talk to them about you know. Let people know, I tried telling one of my lieutenants once that I was just in [ROTC]. And he was like "Get out". Or whatever <Group Laughter> He didn't really care. But it made [ROTC] kind of strange. And for a lot of people [ROTC] was where they were sort of taking it as a class. And I had already gone through basic training and everything. So it was kind of like this stuff isn't as really cool as you think it all is. And [ROTC], I think, for the first couple of years is more about recruitment. I mean in a way it's a little bit better. I mean the people who are self-selecting [ROTC] choose to be there. And so you do probably get a higher quality person... It kind of depends.

**Collver:**

What were some of the differences?

**Stegall:**

Well at [ROTC] they are nice to you! I mean if you are at [ROTC] and your uniform is messed up or your boots aren't shined, they might give you a hard time about it. But they would give me a hard time because they knew I knew better. But if you just show up there and your collar is all messed up or whatever. They're not going to have two people glom onto you and starting telling you all the reasons of why you are terrible. Whereas in the Army they would definitely.

Well before I was in the Army I had never been in that situation before. I mean my family wasn't like that, my family didn't yell. There was no negative reinforcement, and the Army was about that negative reinforcement. If you did something wrong somebody was just going to make sure you didn't make that mistake again. Which was, is a very effective way of learning if you are person who has never been through that. But for some people they realize "Oh you're not going to hit me." So you aren't going to do anything to me. And I remember in Basic specifically there were fights. This was before cell phones. It was right around Thanksgiving Holiday and everyone was in line for this payphone. You were supposed to get two minutes to call home. And there was a guy at the front of the line and he was one of those guys you tried to stay away from. But he had decided that he had waited too long and he went up and grabbed the phone and hit the guy in the back of the head. And he started a fight right there and we decided to stop them from doing it. And that is one of the ways the Army was different in that way. You never quite know who you are dealing with. And what's going to be their point.

Whereas in [ROTC], we're all college students. It's not the same kind of thing. And [ROTC] is focused on ... they basically take the infantry manual and use that as the basis for all of that as a metaphor for everything else that they do, so you learn how to do small unit tactics. You lead a squad and doing basic things that haven't changed since the Vietnam era and WWII. We are going to take our ten people and set up an ambush on this thing. And how are we going to do that? And a lot of those things haven't changed very much. And a lot of it was to take that ability to process that information and lead people if you know. If So-and-so isn't getting it. What am I going to do to mentor that person to get them going the right path? And [ROTC] you kind of, you start with some very basic things. It's kind of like basic training but stretched out over the course of two years. I guess so. How to wear the uniform, how to march, how to sing cadence, these kind of things to get people, normalized with how the military does things. And I think that is one of the reasons why enlisted don't like officers very much.

Officers get so much more time, officers are encouraged to think about things, whereas soldiers, it's like, "Did I tell you to think? Why were you thinking about that? You don't get paid to worry about that?" You don't get paid to worry about this task. And that is a big difference to go from enlisted to being an officer. An officer is paid to think. And if the officer spends too much time in the house worrying about how something is going to get done. They are not spending their time effectively. And if they're not doing what you want them to do. Then I need to find out how to make that thing happen. One of the big things is you can't fire people. You can move them to a different job, but you can't fire them like you can in the private sector. That was one thing that [ROTC] spent a lot of time on was performance management. And when I actually got to active duty ... now I know the best performance management and in the real world it would be having someone on a spectrum of how to leave the company. And in the military you can't do that.

So what is our training program? We used have these counseling statements that we would do. Every week a soldier would get a counseling statement, then as lieutenant I have do this for x amount of hours as well. What are the things that I am not doing so well, and what am I



doing to fix it. Nobody ever gives you training on how to actually effectively do that. And if they are not doing what they want you to do, how to actually work through that. So you usually see a lot of the same. "I'm gonna yell at you until you do what I want you to do. I'm just going to call you an idiot." I mean we ... and some people that certainly weren't [like that], and that is something certainly. [They] weren't in the Patriot [System]. I'm jumping ahead. [ROTC] certainly didn't focus on that. It really made it seem like the Army was this really fun place and we were going to use cool technology and all these cool things we'd get to do. We got to focus on repelling. I mean running was fine and doing physical training stuff. PT [Physical Training] was fine. I've never been crazy about it. I don't know if it was because basic training made me do it. So I was like yeah. If I don't have to do pushups, then I don't want to.

**Collver:**

So then did you prefer [ROTC]? Or did you prefer Basic Training?

**Stegall:**

Oh you know, that's a really good question, because [ROTC] frustrated me in how long it took, because I already knew how to do all that. If I could have just done that and not wasted time on those first two years of [ROTC]. It would have been better. But once I got to advanced camp, it was great. That was actually leading small teams, actually doing all of the things that I wanted to be able to do when I was enlisted.

**Collver:**

So that was just like the tactical and the ...?

**Stegall:**

Yeah the tactical and the ... you know. And definitely locked crawl, walk, run phase. And advanced camp was run phase as much as [ROTC] can make it. One of the things that I love about being enlisted is that competency. You always knew exactly what you were supposed to do. Everything is fairly clearly laid out as long as you understand how to do this your job is very clear. As an officer you're not always sure what the right answer is and you have to take responsibility. Or what the right answer was. Especially when it came to personal problems people were having.

**Collver:**

More pressure probably

**Stegall:**

Yeah more pressure definitely. It's kind of ridiculous looking back the amount of responsibility we were handing twenty-two-year-olds in the Army. But I really enjoyed the job when I was enlisted. I look back, I was just so focused on going to college and I couldn't see any other path in front of me except going to college. That at that time, if I could have gotten that, I think it would have been a really neat thing to do. You know if I could have gone somewhere like Germany or Korea, and I could have actually been there working with soldiers who need help. I still think it's an important role that's not in the military, that so. I don't know.

So I guess I spent most of time being an officer. So I guess I enjoyed that more. But it's hard you're an eighteen year old as an enlisted. I think if I had been thirty and an E7 I would

have been frustrated about a lot of things in the Army. Active Duty is definitely better as an officer, I can say that. You know that system that's in place as far as only an officer can command. I don't know if that's shifting. I read a lot of stuff about soldiers have a very difficult time now with being told what to do. But when it comes down to it. It's like saying, "I'm Dad, and you're going to do what I tell you. I'm a lieutenant. I'm telling you what you need to do and you better go do it." And I'm not sure if this a societal shift that we are going through, but that's been the function of the military for so long. For strong enlisted and especially enlisted officers are so important. It makes our military more effective. You can't have just leaders and soldiers. It doesn't work that way. If all you have is a soldier that all they do is what their told then you end up with something where every officer gets killed they have no idea what to do.

**Collver:**

So you think it's a positive shift?

**Stegall:**

It's a positive, but there's a balance there.

**Collver:**

It could decrease efficiency?

**Stegall:**

Yeah. If I know this is the best way to do this from experience that this is the way you need to go it. So I worked the Patriot Defense System and I spent a long time ... Actually we were testing it for two years, with a new version of the Patriot called Advanced Capability Three which is in fielded now. It's a kinetic kill missile. Basically, how it works is it's a giant shotgun shell. For the majority for its deployment and then it gets up in the air near a plane and fills it with shrapnel. So you don't need as ... the radar does not need to be as good to make it work. This is actually the same concept as the SA7 that shot down the Dutch airliner over Ukraine.

**Collver:**

A little bit of a tangent, how precise is you radar and all that? Because I have heard of instances where people say they will bomb say this building, but then they bomb the complete wrong building.

**Stegall:**

Well, it's two things. The Patriot is like, have you ever seen those toys that are like two sheets of plastic with metal pins in between, and if you stick your hands on it shows your hand imprint on the other side?

**Collver:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Stegall:**

Well Patriot basically does that exact same thing, but using radio energy looking at into the sky. It's got a forty-five degree search sector that it's looking out about a hundred and twenty miles. And what you can set, and what patriot does is like basically it used to be designed for

aircraft, where you can set certain areas for it to search more for others, or it can search the whole sector. And as soon as it picks up something — and this is not for aircraft, this is for the ground — if it picks something up, it will start directing more energy at that and it will follow it. And you can tell it to stop following it, because you have identified the aircraft and you have figure out that's an airliner I'm not going to follow that any more. Or if you got an aircraft that meets a certain specific criteria. You know it looks like a fighter jet or it looks like a missile. The system will give me certain indicators and that is what it will focus on.

So as far as that it's very accurate. The missile themselves, the initial ones, didn't have to be as accurate because they were designed to take out hordes of Russian bombers coming into Germany. But as that mission changed and the radar got better ... what it does it will paint the target and then guide the missile into the target. There were some system shortcomings at least while I was there, where the radar itself could only guide six missiles at a time to a given target. So this was an issue in Korea where the whole concept was that they would attack Seoul with as many missiles as possible, to over-flood all the Patriot Systems. And your average Patriot Battalion would have four or five. Each Battery has eight launchers. Each launcher has four missiles. So thirty-two missiles per ... So, but if you look at across five, you got thirty missiles in flight across your battalion at any given time. So it's very easy to overrun that.

So Advanced Capability Three was designed specifically for Korea. They wanted to fit ... it was a new kind of missile, four missile per canister, that could fit four of each kind of missile per launching station. And these missiles were basically what we would call "fire-forget." ... You paint your target. But once that seeker head sees the target it finds it and then connects with the target. And this designed specifically for going against incoming missiles. A lot of it was designed for Gulf War number one, for going against Scuds and what they saw as the Iranian-North Korean threat. So in Advanced Capability Three you could have as many missiles in flight as you want and then it's a kinetic kill or what they call a "Kill Enhancer," which is like a small C4 charge, the idea being that if you got the missile fast enough or hard enough it would be good enough to destroy it. And for an aircraft it would actually blow right through an aircraft, because it's going so fast as. At the time it used to sit in the canister at Mach 2. I never actually got to do any firings with it. Only the standard Patriot missiles. And yeah you can't see them going out they move so fast.

But, so, Patriot ... where did we start with our question? The Patriot is like playing a videogame with incredibly complex rules, but you're doing that while crawling in mud and you're having somebody else tell you. What you are doing isn't actually that important. And that you are not in the real Army, 'cause your guys are focused on playing this videogame and all this technology. The real Army is like focused on tanks and drones and stuff. And it gets kind of frustrating because that real Army is the one with a lot of stuff. And the government is telling you, "Yeah, what you are doing is really important, but you don't get to any of this stuff that makes people think your real Army." We used to call Air Defense. ADA, "A Different Army." You know because often times we were co-located with air force, so everything in the style of the air force, the patriot was always designed, it was fully mobile. And there were times, Patriot is designed to be able to follow a mobile unit as they go up through some place. And when that unit sits down to do something, that Patriot can get behind them and provide air defense, to whatever that key asset.

For instance, we did have a battalion. That follow 3rd ID [Infantry Division] up through Kuwait into Baghdad. Whenever they had to cross the Tigris or the Euphrates, one of the two rivers, that was like a key area that they might cover. If I was to do anything that might mask ...

The doctrine is that you would mass fire, at this key point, to stop people from moving through. Really, the only thing they did was they fired missiles as some of the preposition points, and Qatar and other places.

I mean Patriot works. The problem is that it is very expensive and takes a lot of training, it takes a high level of expertise. And it takes a soldier that: A, likes to do these things, and, B, is smart enough to do these things. But then their constantly getting beat up, because hey you're not in the real Army. Hey, 'cause I want to get smart on how missiles work, on how trajectories work, and on how radars work. 'Cause that is all the stuff that I like, that's the stuff that I think is cool. I spent a lot of time cleaning weapons and tents, and working on trucks. And none of that stuff is really as fun as the stuff that I would really like to be doing. So I don't know.

Getting into ... I think if I was an E-7, especially since Patriot is one of those things where the lower rank you are, you are the one that actually operates the system. So as a lieutenant you're more of the manager. Versus the person who actually gets to do the thing you want to do. So lieutenant was a lot of fun. The training you do is very competitive it's high level training. You know just when you think you're good, you have to do what we call Mach 4 exercises. Basically that's where you put on the protective vest, the rubber gloves, and gas masks and you're trying to work a keyboard with your rubber gloves and make that work. And we actually had some great training, we actually would have a plane that would fly over and crop dust us. So it was like you had gotten slimed by whatever chemical event, and you would have to do all of these things, provide air defense, and then pack everything up, move to another locations and de-commit the equipment — which became a real important thing to do — to try and do that while playing Halo and winning is difficult.<sup>1</sup> It's frustrating. I shouldn't say frustrating, but you know Air Defense it's really important, but we are in a time now where most militaries can't afford the kind of aircraft that we can definitely protect people against. The other thing about Patriot is that Patriot was a battalion asset. So when I got to Germany and they started pulling units.

**Collver:**

When did you get to Germany?

**Stegall:**

I went to Germany in 2002. Right at the end of November two thousand and two. And it was 03 March when the invasion kicked off.

**Collver:**

Wait. So, when did you find out about 911?

**Stegall:**

Oh, so I guess we have jumped ahead. So I went into active duty in September of '98 and I left Eugene to Fort Bliss Texas. And I ended up being at Fort Bliss for four years. On the first day, I was 6th Brigade, which was a training brigade and a basic course. And they do the officer basic course, and they teach how to do that, but mostly it was for the Patriot System. And they got these kind of like vaults that are full of the consoles and you would train with the consoles.

One thing I will say about Air Defense that I've always appreciated. For all the controversy with women in combat roles. The Patriot has been very integrated. It is integrated.

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<sup>1</sup> The Microsoft videogame Halo, a sci-fi first-person shooting game based on group assault engagements.

You know, I had a combat arms, a combat deployable unit. You make sure that they could do everything. You change in your sleeping bag. It's not a big deal. But that was something that I always appreciated Air Defense is that we were integrated that way from the beginning. But anyway so 6th Brigade was a training brigade. I'm trying to remember how long it was. I think it was six months to make sure you actually knew how to operate the equipment. And then you get to the unit and they want to retrain you, because they have their way of doing things. So I got ... I went to Alpha Battery 2188, which is 2nd Battalion 1st Air Defense Artillery, and they're in Korea now. At the time they were in Fort Bliss for the training for the testing battalion. So they were tied up for the Pac Three Test. Which basically meant they weren't deployable. At the time deployable meant, Southern Watch, it meant Korea. That was kind of the main places that people were focused on. We still had the Southern Watch over flags of Iraq. So if there was ever a buildup or a show of force in any of these different places in Qatar. They would send Patriot units up there.

**Collver:**

Sorry, I'm really curious: 9/11 was kind of a big deal [jokingly]? Did that have any sort of an impact on your group and everything?

**Stegall:**

Yeah, so when between '98 and 2001. We were on, we came off of being a test unit and we were deployed over to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. When did we leave? It was December, it was right after Christmas, because it was in New Years. New years of 2001. So I spent seven months there. And most of my time at Al Salam, Kuwait. Which is what like twenty miles south of the Iraqi border. Most people know it now as Udari. It was near Udari Range. But we deployed and we did training with Kuwaitis and Saudis. And we were spread between the two countries, to basically provide ... there were two air bases in Kuwait. And then the Prince Sultan Airbase for the Saudis.

So we did that for seven months came back, and 9/11 ... basically I had transitioned. I was the executive officer. I went to PT that day and at like 5:30 in the morning, got home at like 6:30, and I remember seeing a report that a plane had flown into the ... whichever tower it was. It didn't seem like a big deal. They were like, "Go back to work". And when I got into work somebody had set up a TV in the orbiting room and we started watching the News. And the biggest thing that we were focused on as we saw things progress was we were. Fort Bliss was right next El Paso International Airport and Biggs Army Airfield. And Biggs could receive commercial traffic and also El Paso. They could take commercial flights, and they were thinking if they needed to divert traffics in order to receive refugees. We would need to be ready to accept refugees. So I spent a good part of that day arguing with the head cook at the dining facility, I wanted my cooks back. Because I was going to need to set them up. We were being told to get out all of the equipment, to get the tents ready. To get everything ready, so people had a place to stay if they got off their airplanes.

And then that didn't end up happening. They shut down the whole post down. Because they didn't know what was going to happen. Or most of the base I should say. And, my wife at the time was working at the El Paso Times and she was trying to get back on a post. And she waited for three hours trying to get back in. And that was actually the most difficult thing about 9/11 afterwards. Is that they shut the post down and trying to get in and out at any given time

was just terrible. And we were living at a post, so it was ok for me. To go to work. But for her it became this huge issue.

**Collver:**

It seems like to me that 9/11 was almost more of a logistical or a practical problem rather than an emotional one, even though there was probably that too. It seems like it was more about concrete things you guys had to...

**Stegall:**

I think that's one of things that the Army is really good at. And that is one of the things that I loved about the military. Give us a problem and we'll figure it out. Like when I was in Germany one of the things we did was provide security at the 60th Anniversary of D-Day. We provided security to the National Cemetery that is there in Normandy. And that wasn't completely outside, I mean that wasn't completely outside of our wheelhouse. But it was about providing physical security, work with Gendarme and the Secret Service and that kind of thing. And we made it happen which was always one of the things that was kind of great about the Army.

I like that, that piece of it and so yeah we were. I don't remember it being, I mean the emotional piece of it was definitely. I mean being in the Army do remember having memorial ceremony after memorial ceremony and not being quite sure what was going to happen. And the thing was though I mean that they immediately started talking about Iraq. And I was Executive Officer. And I was getting ready to go to the Officer Advanced Course. And even then when I was in the Advanced Course. No there had to be another year in there because this was in 2002. No because ... and this was in 2002 in Germany. There was a time with like I don't know in May of '02 ... I guess. When I went to a lunch with a bunch of Colonels in Fort Bliss. And we were getting ready to go to the advanced course. And there was this Colonel who said, "You better be decode which one you are going to be in because that's the one you're going to Iraq. In like" It was totally debated, Colin Powell hadn't made his speech about the mobile chemical factories and all this. And you know they were just like ... you know the task force had been stood up this is what is called this is where we are going, be ready to show up. Ok.

At the time my wife and I were having a real hard time. She had not wanted to stay in the Army at all. And things had kind of lined up where I was going to have to stay in the Army for at least another two years. And I was trying to figure out where ... where I could go, basically so that we ... [laughs] we would have the least impact on our family. Which was something that just wasn't going to work at that time. If I had stayed at Fort Bliss I was going to go to Iraq, and I didn't know how long that was going to last. The units at Bliss. In fact my Unit 21 actually took off the month after I left. Went to Kuwait and they sat there for fourteen months just to provide air defense at one of the air bases there, because they needed an infill. And if I had moved to Korea, I would be away from my son for a year, if I went to Germany we would be together at the extent. For four years in Germany.

So Germany seemed like the best choice, but ultimately I learned it's kind of. I can't make the other person happy, which is what I learned from that. And that experience, but that was the thing at the time that we were trying, 9/11 didn't help. And that was the more frustrating thing. Watching all the ways that this was playing out and we didn't have much control over any of it. And also at that time feeling. I wish ... I just wish that I had been able to get out when the time had presented itself. Actually the time that I had to submit the paperwork to leave the Army,

I was in Kuwait. And we already went. I can't blame other people for this, because I should have been tracking it more closely. I was deployed at the time I would have had to put in a request to leave active duty. So, I got back to Fort Bliss. I was like, "Oh man. I guess we are going to have to stay another year." And then I got promoted and the Army is really good at that, at stretching you out. As soon as you are ready to go they bring you something nice. It's like, I mean, I even did all the hard stuff, you know, went to Germany. I went to Command. Typically when you leave command that's when you get your ... get your masters or go do something. My wife and I had split up actually ... in October of that that year. We signed the paperwork. I had already been away from my son for year. And I didn't want to be away from him. So I came back here without any idea of what I was going to do. I just knew that I wanted to be there.

But anyway that was ... that was the thing that was difficult about 9/11. I guess, it was nice to have a plan at the time that it was actually happening, but after that it was all kind of up in the air as far as what we were going to do. You know, people went to Afghanistan. And that was fine. That wasn't necessarily part of our mission. We still had training that was planned. So we continued training and you know pretty much every month we were going to the field for a certain amount of time, and, you know, there is stuff to keep you busy.

**Collver:**

So was there already talk about Iraq before like the media was talking about it?

**Stegall:**

Yeah, you know, I can't remember the exact timeline. I remember definitely that that meeting. And you this could have been just some colonel trying to get ... And that's one thing that is always hard to tell. I mean you got. When you are in charge and you've got people that you know are worried. Sometimes you just need to give them concrete. You know this is what is going to happen even if you know maybe not. But people always assume better a plan. And that was the worst thing for families too. I remember when we got to Germany. We spent a lot of time off back and forth. Because we were tied. When we got to Germany at 5th Battalion and 7th Battalion Artillery. They were in the middle of kind of fort deployment. Where they were going to send half. Their prime mission was Israel. So they were going to send half the battalion to Israel and half the Battalion to Turkey. My ID was supposed to go through Turkey to Northern Iraq. And that and that piece was um was waffling the whole time, because we didn't know if turkey was going to let the US do that. Um. Forth IDs sent up boats north side. I don't know off Turkey off boats forever. And we finally got pulled. So at the time we got there, half the battalion went to Israel.

I ended up being S3 for the Battalion for planning and assisting with things, while the XO, the Executive Office and the major, we worked on the whole plan for Turkey. And the whole time, every single day, we didn't know if they were going to send us or not send us and every day. Are we going, are we not going? My wife wasn't happy to be in Germany. She didn't know if she wanted to go back to the States. And even if we did deploy we didn't know how long it was going to be. Everybody was thinking it was going to be at least six months to a year. But we had no idea, just, you know, it was all difficult, very stressful. And getting to Germany, and, you know. And not having anything, you're in transition housing the first month. And we get there and were on this. One of the things about Germany is what they call "Kosurns" which are old kind of military installations that used to belong to the Germans and the Americans took

them over. And in a lot of ways that hadn't changed in some forty years. A lot of the buildings were still the same, and you know.

**Collver:**

Yeah, what kind of details?

**Stegall:**

You know like cobblestone streets, a lot of things like that were still the same. Also you could tell us Americans never spent as much as maybe we could have in making them nice. You know the architecture is different. You know there is a lot of things about Germany that throw you off. Like you look at a window and it's the wrong shape where the doors are too big. And the doors are made of metal. Or you know the traffic size. So many things about the place was like being in, um ... you know. I don't know some weird alternate universe sometimes.

You know the thing is to deal with that transition. In the middle of all this stress. You know. Can we go out? We just want to go out to a grocery store, we just want to buy medicine. You know, my son is sick and we need to find a pedicure or something. And trying to find those things it becomes you know an extra challenge. And to have all of those things happening you know where she needed to um kind of handle a lot of these things, because I was pulled into work. And probably some of the most stressful stuff that I was ever going to deal with in my time as an officer. And she didn't want to ... It was just, it was very difficult for her to deal with that. So sorry, we got to Germany. We got to housing, we found a place to live and basically a month later I left for Turkey. And Turkey only ended up being sixty days. We went to Incirlik, the American Air Base has only been there for fifty years. I mean, The U.S. doesn't play up that we have a base in Turkey that much. But it's a hugely important AO [Area of Operations]. Turkey really is a huge ally to the United States. It just gets downplayed all the time. So we spent a lot of time there. We actually ended up scouting various locations to set up an air defense of Incirlik. And if not Incirlik we had had three different cities that we were going to provide air defense of. And we did actually put all of Fort Sifdas equipment on rail and move it to a staging area. Um and basically in Northern Iraq and Afghanistan. And we were playing for that getting things ready. We had people in a battalion that we had moved forward and that we were sending back for information so that we could prepare for that.

And that was ... And that was great. A number of, you got all of these people in this place who just want to make this thing happen. But the Turks were really interesting to work with. We were all. It was just all that experience. Was some of the most fun I had professionally I knew what I was doing. I was doing something important. And I was not beating my head against a wall to make something happen. You would ask for something and it came, which was amazing.

When I look back now, the amount of money that was being spent was kind of criminal. And it has continued all throughout. Yeah. And that was our piece of it. And the weird thing was is that I was at a point where I was working for this colonel. Where he was the commander of post when we were in a barracks. A bunch of soldiers. And we were pushing, pushing, pushing 'cause, like, we need this. We need it tomorrow. Where can we put people? And he was like "Uh you know that's where I keep all these other stuff. And I can't just uproot these people." And so he was ... We were actually getting this worked out and I was asked to draft contracts between us and this commander. I really want to come through with that. Let's try and contact this Army lawyer back in Germany. To find out what I could and couldn't do. And that was all really interesting and then we reached the point where it looked like, "Okay, it's not going to happen."



And then they didn't want us to tell them — straight up — that this wasn't going to happen because it still might happen. So at one point he was like, "I am thinking this is not going to happen." And he reminded me of like George Costanza from "Seinfeld."<sup>2</sup> And he was great. And he was on point. And a lot of the militaries we worked with, "It will be fine". And he was the kind of guy that was like, "Do you have my number? Let me make sure you have my number. I will call you." And you know at just that level of, and you that if I call you, I better be able to get a hold of you. And he would get mad because the major didn't want to deal with him anymore. So they sent me, they are sending this captain. This is not as important as it used to be.

**Collver:**

What was different about say the culture of Germany and say turkey?

**Stegall:**

Well with Turkey we were consigned to the Airbase. We didn't get to go out Adonna. But I got to go out a couple of times, but it wasn't really the same at all. When you are deployed you are very much there to do a job. You are not there to be hanging out. When we got Israel. We had gone to Israel enough that we had a relationship. We had built in time to, you know, for recreation, for the soldiers. We always kind of do our best with opportunities to let the soldiers go do something to experience it. For Turkey, we had no idea what was going to happen we could have been a soft target. Some kind of terrorist attack. Even though that base had excellent defense. If somebody had wanted to get in and attack and completely or something of that nature. That was always a concern.

**Collver:**

So interesting. How did the terrorist threat change your operations?

**Stegall:**

We had to rely on, we already had a built intelligence mechanism there. The other things is one time I was coming back from the Turkish small installation where the colonel was just standing there. We were driving back to the airbase. We realized that there was this little truck that was following us and recording us. And that's kind of weird so we took different turns to see if it's actually them. And yeah they are following us. And so they, you know we didn't have any weapons or anything. This is not, whatever, James Bond.<sup>3</sup> So we were back. So we go back, um, to the airbase and we make a report. And it turns out that it was just the news media that was following us. And that was actually the closest. Actually that was one of the frustrating things we didn't. We carried weapons on the base, but when we went out to Adonna we didn't.

**Collver:**

That must have been scary.

**Stegall:**

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<sup>2</sup> Sienfield was a popular comedy television program from 1989-1998, and George Costanza, played by actor Jason Alexander, was one of four tragically-human friends living in New York City.

<sup>3</sup> The fictional character James Bond was an international spy working for the British Secret Service, created by author Ian Fleming and later introduced, in various iterations, as a television, radio, comic strip, video games and film character to world-renown status.

Yeah, it was kind of a wakeup call. We are going out without any weapons and you know and if this had been. And that changed our posture with how we were doing that. Most of the issues we were having was with Gulf War number one. The Dutch had been. The Dutch have Patriot as well. And Patriot used to have a setting where if a missile was coming in. It wasn't the matter of it having a setting. It had no way of dealing with this. The Patriot missile would actually follow the Scud into the ground. So if you had a scud coming down on an apartment complex. The patriot missile would follow it in. You know the damage there, it did, and it came down on a housing unit. And only one person died. But we remembered that so they didn't want the Patriot. You know the people of Adonna were not excited to have the Patriot back in their area. So that was the most of that that was going to be an issue and we were really focused on we were there for a short amount of time and then we were going to leave.

But then it just ended up stretching out, stretching out. So But as far as it being different in Germany. We lived in Germany. I really feel like going through all, Germans had a better sense of what we were going through as a military. Then the American did. Frankfurt you could sit in the Frankfurt Airport and Americans were coming through there constantly you always saw somebody in a uniform. You always saw families coming in. The Germans at least in the area I was in, around the Frankfurt are and around southern Germany. They see Americans all the time. So for them to actually come in and guard our Kosurns. So they had a sense of what we were dealing with so all the time with meeting family members. The kind of stuff we were dealing with there. They...One of my Battalion Commanders used to say, "You're more likely to know somebody who worked at McDonald's than somebody who served in the Military". And I felt in Germany definitely was not the case. The Germans knew the American Military. They had feelings about us and you know they stopped several times while pushing my son on a stroller. Some little old lady would come walk up to us and give us an earful in German about what she thought about the war. But Ok, ok. You do your best.

**Collver:**

So what were their thoughts exactly?

**Stegall:**

Well of course they were against it. But looking back on it, it's not our job to have an opinion. It was to do the orders I was given and to take care of my soldiers. You want air defense at this location. I'm going to go do that. I'm going to make sure I get my soldiers there safely back. And take care of their families while their gone. You don't have time to think about what's right or wrong. My wife actually had a problem with that. We had a couple of arguments about that. She said, "You don't even believe in this war." And you know we came back and it wasn't helpful to have that thing between the two of us. But that wasn't. And that's the hard part with the Army you don't get to debate the ethics of what you are doing, you have to take care of people, you have to trust what ... You have to trust the leadership to put you in a place where you know is the right use of that tool. And that is one of the things that I have gotten very frustrated with as it has gone on.

This is my personal opinion. We don't have leadership, values, or the resources to provide. We have people who are the prime of their lives where all they want to do is serve their country to the best of their abilities. And they are giving everything from their families to their bodies, and minds. And we just don't value that, necessarily ...

**Collver:**

Is it the politician disconnect?

**Stegall:**

I mean, yeah. How many politicians do we have that has had family that has served in the military? That were in the military, John McCain, John Kerry? How many, if you really look at it? This is completely off the thing.

**Collver:**

Oh no it's fine.

**Stegall:**

You've got millionaires who are running, who are doing things. Not anybody who has come up through the ranks. I was pretty excited about Colin Powell when he was thinking about running for president. But even he got kind of blown out of the water, because he. I don't know kind of the whole thing with him selling his soul to George Bush. I don't know, he hasn't been in the lime-light since then. Those are just some of the ... I don't those are some of the military. I wish that there were other ways you could serve your country.

**Collver:**

There is one interesting thing, I've always heard... is like my dad used to tell me this story when he was younger apparently he had a relative that went to a military base or something and they were shocked. Because what they found there was a giant pile of like spoons or something, plastic spoons. You know buy a ton of stuff that you don't need. You know what I mean did you guys really have that sort of problem?

**Stegall:**

Well I guess it depends.

**Collver:**

A lot of waste or ...

**Stegall:**

Procurement or fraud? Fraud, waste, and abuse is always a problem. Patriot for instance have you ever heard about the Navy buying million dollar toilets or something. I mean, Dell doesn't make Patriot firing cards. For instance we had a card, a launcher control card. Or something. I don't remember what they called it. If you didn't fire up the launcher in the correct sequence it blow that card and that card cost twenty thousand dollars. So if you come in and say "Hey, Sir, I made a mistake." You didn't fire the launcher correctly. And you didn't run the power up sequence correctly, you blew that card. And now we have to buy another card. And now that launcher is deadlined. We can't use it until this is fixed. So you have to go to a card manufacture for this purpose that. So that's where a lot of that cost comes in. And it's hard with Patriot where you have a very specific weapons system that does a very specific thing. To kind of balance that out. We wish it could have all the things we wanted it to have. I mean there were times where you would go places, especially when the war was kicking off.

And all of a sudden it did become clear that there was a lot of money. If that's available at some places. We all need new uniforms. Guess what you all get new protective vest, or all these things that it had been such a long time since we had. Fuel, for example we used to have to ration fuel carefully. And then it's like whatever, go gets some more. It's not an issue. And I don't know sometimes. Like spoons, maybe they upgraded to the new spoon and there's some reason and, you know, you have to turn in all the old spoons. And here's the thing. If you as a soldier are assigned to you this spoon. And this spoon has an assigned value of ten thousand dollars. "Soldier you lost that spoon well then guess what soldier, you're paying for it." And then we get, you know, the new spoon. And that's whenever something was lost on a personal level you had to pay for it.

Units ... you're allowed ... as a commander I was assigned millions of dollars worth of things. If you had a problem for stuff like computers. Where computers had data for whatever like a laptop. Whatever Dell series one, and now we have Dell series three. Well what happened to one? I don't know we turned it in. What do you mean you turned it in? Do you have the paperwork saying you turned it in? No. Well guess what you are paying for it. Well I had a hundred laptops in my unit trying to sort out that stuff. Yeah, I mean when I came into Command. We had this communications. We had a Humvee. That had been used for something else and there was this control box that was supposed to go on the back of this Humvee but they had taken it off because it was some cold war technology that we didn't use anymore for some radio system. We didn't use. And the Humvee was counted for the inventory of the Humvee. But it was also counted for the system. So depending on how you read the inventory you could either look at it as a Humvee, or as a system. And that system is worth 4 million dollars.

And you're trying to come into an inventory trying to figure out what that is. And you're assigned responsibility for it. And that became a real problem especially when nobody could tell what the equipment was or what this system was. We trading out every eighteen months so if somebody didn't know what something was. And plus soldiers are always ... If you ever laid out something such as a tool chest. And it would have a tool chest with seven hundred pieces in it. And you had to lay them all out at once, because if you tried to lay them out individually they would just try and borrow pieces amongst each other and you would never know who had what. Same thing with like parts to launchers or parts to Humvees or whatever. That kind of stuff was always difficult. It was hugely expensive.

We always did our best. Say those cards for instance that was a real problem. We spent a lot of time training the right way to do that. To the point where article fifteen it became a punishment for somebody if they blew the card. Because that was a lot of money and it didn't, it wasn't clicking in people's heads how much they were spending when they didn't do the sequence correctly.

**Collver:**

Damn.

**Stegall:**

It was a training issue. Um I wasn't part of the base, I wasn't part of the command that was dealing with a lot of stuff like that. So I couldn't tell you a lot of detail on things of that nature. There are definitely supply units that have mountains of stuff coming through them and then, And how they account for all of that. It's entirely possible. So. Interesting.

**Noble:**

So I guess on a more personal note, do you still communicate or talk to the guys that you served with?

**Stegall:**

Yeah, that's one of thing is that Facebook has been really interesting for that. Because the platoon, I was Platoon Leader with ... over in Alpha Battery. I am actually more in contact with them and a lot closer that the unit than even when I was in Germany. But I think as a Commander I was very separated from my soldiers. I mean my one Sergeant I had, we're still friends on Facebook. And we have back and forth and what not. My first Sergeant I notified him, but what's kind of funny ... the things ... the day to day things that we we're dealing with have kind of faded away. And like, I've never been good at yelling at people, I don't enjoy it very much.

But with some people, that was the only thing that would get through to their heads. We had one guy specifically. I don't know what his issues are, but he wrote up at a bunch of hot checks to hobby shops in El Paso and he ended up in Jail for almost a month. And he was on our books. And he friended me on Facebook. And I don't want to say, I mean, I use Facebook as more of a directory of people versus ... I don't really post anything personal on there. You know, I'm glad to see that the guy is alive. I mean he seems to have gotten through the things he was going through.

One thing, another soldier, we had this whole thing when we were in the field. When I was a Platoon Leader we had thirteen radios. And some of those radios have secret codes in them basically that they use with to communicate with each other. So it was extremely important that you knew where all your radios were. And I had a soldier who took a radio home. We got home from the field with them. And I thought I had all my radios. And then like a month later another Lieutenant is coming through and he can't find one of these radios. We got locked down for like two days trying to find this radio and then it turns out it's in his closet. And looking back, I was so fortunate I didn't get an Article Fifteen for that. I got a reprimand. But, now we're Facebook friends, we're actually pretty close on Facebook now.

As far as I ... It's just sort of interesting. People post a lot of photos. And more photos are sort of appearing from that time and even with my unit in Germany. Somebody just did a whole gallery of stuff from the barracks which is things I've forgotten about. And the concern has actually reverted to the Germans. The unit moved back to the States. And it's kind of interesting to watch how things are changing on google maps. You know things go back to the way it was. And so I've got a lot of my peers, I've done my best to keep in contact with them. But most of them are Lieutenant Colonels now. One of them is in Battalion Command, which it blows my mind, because I always think of the Lieutenant Colonel as being the old man. But you know ten years have passed and my life has become hugely ...

After the Army I came here and worked at the University for sixth months in Admissions, and I ended up working in Target for almost five years as a store manager for them. And the things that I have learned from that style of management, now I am here on campus working with students and, just, I've learned that you know it's so different than the Army. Target, for instance. When I first got to Target everything is serious. It's serious we're going to set up this sain cap you know about a port system, ABCs. I didn't realize it until my store manager came up to me and said, "James you made So-and-so cry." "What she wasn't upset when I was talking to her?" [general laughter] Um like, and I'm getting a lot and Target is really big about it, they were

like, "I've got some feedback to give you, I want you to walk around the store and smile. You are being so intense that people think that you are angry all the time." And so I had to stop doing that. I had to choose my demeanor since then. 'Cause the Army, I just don't think you think about that while you are there. Everything you're doing ... If I don't do this right somebody can get killed.

Something ... we were up in Texas and we had a communications platoon. That was out We had these mobile tasks set ups. For the tent and they didn't hook their stove up correctly and they burnt their tent down. Luckily nobody was in the tent but these tents have a real proclivity to catch on fire and burn, because they collapse on them. And so it was so fortunate that didn't happen and that no one got hurt. And like the vehicles something as simple as driving from point A to point B. you know that could have killed us all doin' that. Very little of what I am doing now has the same level of seriousness about it.

**Collver:**

Like Target.

**Stegall:**

Yeah that's something we are always joking about if someone tries to steal all this stuff it's not worth. Well that's one of the things. If you mess things up at Target you get fired. While in the Army you could never get fired, necessarily. But, yeah that's been a very interesting transition.

**Noble:**

Do you like your current job?

**Stegall:**

Yeah, very much so. I like campus a lot. One thing about the police department is that it is highly scrutinized which is one of the things that is very different. I mean the Army was not that way. Target was not that way. And, everything I do. I can potentially end up on websites or on the news. And we get requests all the time with hiring the right people. And getting them when you don't have a huge budget and in fact you know. Well it's just hard to pay people for retirement and pay people the amount you need. And we are fortunate for what we do. But for the level of just working with students. Being that open person who can take things seriously, but still is there before they act. That's a challenge. Even with police officers. But we are getting to the point where we are fully staffed. Getting somebody who can be a police officer on campus is not the same person as somewhere else they are two totally different, well you are still enforcing state laws. It's a very different kind of demeanor I guess. So, yeah.

What I miss about the Army is the big things we used to do. When we got to go to Normandy for the 65th Anniversary of D-Day that was just one of those things like we got, we had veterans. The First Sergeant that limbed Pointe Du Hoc, blew up German Artillery emplacements was there. And I got to shake his hand and I got to meet so many people. We took a trip through Belgium and there were so many people who remembered the invasion and remembered what those things were like and were actually grateful to have you there. Or at least smile and be nice to you. And it's so weird to watch with all these things happening with Iraq and right now. Things are just so much more complex now than I think they were. And that's seems to be the biggest frustration that I hear from a lot of people. The complexity, and you are

dealing with so much more. What you have to do, and how you have to do it. And the things you have to be thinking about in these various roles. When you're in it you don't actually think about it that much, but when you're out and you actually get the chance. Oh wait they trusted me! I was twenty seven and they trusted me with that. That was crazy. Myself. That was just the thing. And it was just amazing.

**Noble:**

Do you think the higher-ups were transparent with what you guys had to be deployed where you never really knew? Like you were saying with Turkey where you never really knew, or were they transparent?

**Stegall:**

I couldn't tell you. What they are ... what Patriot is a national animal so it can be political if they want to send in somewhere, or something. Um, at least with Turkey that was all a matter of negotiations between the US government and the Turkish government. And Turkey had their own things as far as the Kurds that they worried about. I mean the Colonel I was working with was in active conflict with Kurdish forces at the time that I was working with them. So it's just that they had their own issues that they were dealing with and we pushed our way into the party expecting them to drop everything for us. You know. Maybe it's good that things went the way they did. Maybe we would've had more control of Mosul in different areas. In the war things change so much by the time of the Surge that it's hard to compare those two things.

And even now for instance. I mean, I didn't go through that. When I got out in '05. That's what's amazing to me. There used to be various people that on Facebook and we would talk about things in the Army and I used to weigh in with my opinion. And now I don't even, the military now is not the same as.

Actually around 2008 I was looking at joining the National Guard. And I got really close to doing that. I found out that I had hearing loss in my right ear which I never knew I had. I never equated it to firing a weapon. And we had a lot of generators as well. But specifically to this ear. I guess it's unique to lose hearing in just this one ear. Uh and that was actually one of the first times that my age starting catching up with me. I couldn't go back and do what I could do before. And that was going to be a big. And I was thinking maybe I was going to join and go to Afghanistan for a year. It was just finally a wakeup call. I'm not going back to that.

I am really glad I got out when I did, because if I had gone in for at least a year and I would have missed that time in my son's life. And I don't know if we would have the same relationship that we do now if I had chosen to do that. I mean the biggest thing with me leaving at the time I did is my marriage was falling apart at the same time. So I was feeling a lot of things. I didn't feel good about the time I was in the Army. And now I look back and I feel much better now. I think that I did the best I could do with the things that I had. [I] was dealing with soldier issues and family issues. And a lot of the things that I was talking about. Families you know that, back here, you'd get social services or child protective services involved, but in Germany you don't have those resources, necessarily. What are you going to do to make sure that those kids are taken care of? Making sure that a spouse isn't locked out of their apartment because their spouse takes their id card. Recognizing things like this and those are, especially when the Army doesn't give you resources to deal with a lot of those things. And that's where I spent a lot of my energy outside of the deployments we were doing so. I was really fortunate to have four sergeants that knew the units well. Whoops. Knew the soldiers. And like I said I had a

few soldiers who came into my office. And said, "Sir my wife is leaving me, I can't take this. I don't know what to do. I want out of the Army." And my wife was leaving me at the same time. So it was just, "Well then I hear you, but we've got a job to do. And you keep your best to keep people successful and one thing about is that we have job that we need to do."

We had soldiers that it was right for them to get out and I assisted them. I put out one soldier that was terrible he shouldn't have been able to stay in as long as he did. There's actually something called a congressional inquiry where you have congressman's office write to me and I had to send them all the background information and why we kicked this guy out of the Army. So I made a lot of those things. In the midst of what you are doing training wise, you're into these people's lives way much more than you know you'd ever get into. At target if so and so is not here, you'd be like, "Oh, So-and-so's not here. I guess we're letting him go." Otherwise in the Army it's like, "You go find them and don't come back until you do!" Oh no they slept in, or oh they got drunk. Oh they got drunk. Or oh I'm pretty sure that their on drugs. Ok it's time for a drug test, you go take him down. And the things you know that we dealt with, stuff like that. It's a totally different level of being involved kind of babysitting.

**Noble:**

I guess as sort of a final question do you have any words of advice to anyone who is thinking about joining the Army?

**Stegall:**

The thing I tell everyone is that when I enlisted I thought I was going to get into some kind of medical field. At the time. And as I observed people, I always. We always told people be a dental hygienist or a dental tech. It's the only job in the Army that directly translates into the real world. And if you are deployed you will be in a dental clinic. But I don't know even that has changed.

The Army has changed. I would say go in and go in for reason that are right and personal for you. Have a plan. There was a soldier at Fort Bliss, when I first got there, who wanted to be a politician. And he joined Patriot, which was one of the few MOSs where you could go for a however months and then be gone. And the benefits when you think about as retirement, then you will get half your base pay until you retire. Otherwise, everything you get, it takes to be a veteran. You can get after those first eighteen months of training. So I did twelve years and I didn't have to do that. The only real benefit is used the [VA], loan just this last year. He knew exactly what he wanted to do. He could always say he was a veteran, that he served honorably, and get all the same benefits. They try and entice you with the GI Bill loaner payment. But in the scheme of things wasn't actually that great of a benefit.

So just have a plan, go in and find a job that is interesting to you. Hopefully isn't going to get you killed and isn't going to tear up your body as well. Cause that's the thing a lot of the people I know have knee problems and back problems. Um, when you are denying myself, it's really hard to say, "Oh, my knee hurts. I need go something done about this." No you just suck in some Motrin and go to work and do what you do every day. And that's, emotionally and physically that wears on you over time. I mean when you are twenty. You can deal with it, but when you are forty. You are like I wish I had made different decisions back then.

So have that plan and be okay with leaving when the time comes. The Army is all about keeping you in. And unless there is strong motivator to get you out. The Army is like cooking a frog everything is lined up perfectly. "I'm eighteen and I don't know what I want to do. Oh,



that's cool. I guess I will join the military. Ok, now I'm twenty four. I'm a Sergeant. I like leading people. Oh this is ok." Or, "oh, I'm married, I have kids what am I going to do as far as money. Oh I'll stay in. Oh I'm forty. I just got three more years to retirement. I'll just stick those out." They just kind of bank on people not having a plan for their lives. Kind of the water gets warmer and warmer the longer you stay.

I think if you join the military now, you have to expect to deploy. Your relationships need to be shaped around the fact that you are going to be gone. And I think that there are a lot more tools to communicate now, if you're good, but it's hard. It's really difficult if you don't have a spouse that fully supports what you are doing and you don't have great communication it's going to be hard it's going to be difficult. Especially if one spouse is dealing with kids or you being gone or whatever. And you are off in this place as far as they are concerned playing soldier. That can put a lot of strain on a relationship. And that's the other piece of it that the Army never focuses on. The job stuff is tons of fun, you know repelling, crawling through the dirt, is tons of fun. But coming home and having a life becomes challenging. Well yeah, I guess that's all I would say.

[End of interview]