Transcription: Guy Tinnirello

Today is Thursday, September 3rd, 2009. My name is James Crabtree and I'll be interviewing Mr. Guy Tinnirello. This interview is taking place in person at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board's Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. And sir, thanks for coming to talk to us today and let us interview you. Usually the first question we always start off with is just tell us and the listeners a little bit about yourself, maybe a little bit about your background and yoru life before you entered the military.

Guy Tinnirello: I grew up in Ohio, went to school in Indiana, joined ROTC, got my commissioned and got stationed at Fort Hood and I found out why so many people love it here. We went around, got to see all of the state. I went out there on my initial tour from '94, I got here in March of '94. I was assigned to 1st Cab Division. When I was assigned to 1st Cab Division, I think worked for then Colonel Hodierno, and a number of people who went on to do bigger and better things. I was deployed twice to the Gulf on ___ deployments. I was deployed once to Montana to do a forest firefighting bit. I did everything from fire direction, platoon leader to actually brigade adjutant, just kind of interesting and different. I decided to leave the Army, but when I went in the Salina workforce, I loved it so much down here I decided to stay, and I've been down here since '94, and I got into medical sales, was doing that, and then I got my letter in the mail in July of 2005. I was still in the IRR, come back, I came back, did two weeks at Fort Bennet, three weeks at Fort Sill, went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, was assigned to the 1st Brigade 34th Infantry Division, primarily a Minnesota National Guard, there were some fellows from Iowa, and there were probably 200 or 300 IRR guys maybe more, maybe less. So predominantly National Guard, but there were a lot of us from all over the spectrum.

Yeah, that's a lot of IRR folks in one unit. For people listening, IRR is the Individual Ready Reserve which is basically like an inactive reserve. When you got that notification, you didn't expect that at all, did you?

Guy Tinnirello: No, I literally got the mailgram, pulled it out, and you know, you get mailers all the time, somebody trying to sell you something and make it look important, and it's a good marketing ploy, like OK, I better open this one, for whatever reason. The President of the United States in accordance with…OK. And then it started the process.

And then what were your thoughts about it, because you had been at that point how long had you been out?

Guy Tinnirello: I left in August '97, so 8 years.

8 years, yeah. So did you even still have your uniforms or any of that stuff?

Guy Tinnirello: No. A lot of it had been, I mean turned into hunting gear, thrown in a closet. Ironically I had the same dog tags I was first issued in 1989. I threw them in a corner and just kept 'em, so I wore those all the way throughout. By then all the uniforms had changed, and the interesting thing is I came back and I was like well sir, you're an officer, you're going to have to buy all your uniforms. And I'm like you guys asked me. And then I remember, I went and picked everything up, and everybody was like boy, that looks good. I'm like well, that's $500 I'll never see again, all in jest, but here's the irony of the situation. I've always held the greatest

generation in the highest esteem for what they did and how they lived their lives, and I had just gotten done watching the Band of Brothers DVD, and I read the book, and as corny as this sounds, these guys put their lives on hold, went overseas, did their job, and came home. Who is I to sit on my butt back here? I mean at the end of the day I could not, I couldn't not go.

Yeah right, absolutely.

Guy Tinnirello: I mean and this is just my own personal belief, when your country calls you, your name is still on the rolls, you show up. Now understand, too, that I had just had ankle surgery in January where I destroyed one ligament. I had basically had to get one repaired and one replaced, and I did put in for a medical exemption because I didn't know if I could do the job, and I didn't want to go there and not be able to perform and get somebody else hurt. I went to the board, they cleared me, and I went in in November.

So tell us about how long were you in the workup process, training process, before you finally got to Iraq?

Guy Tinnirello: 6th of November I flew into Fort Benning, Georgia, and that's their combat readiness command, and that's where they basically reintegrate you. They take a lot of the IRR folks. I was the only non-retired officer. There were a colonel and two majors that were retired and they were going back. There were two or three retired NCO's, and probably six or seven soldiers. And they just went over this is what you do, this is IMT, individual movement technique, sorry, and we had, I had a really, really good sergeant there who the first day we were going over high crawl, low crawl, everything else like that. And everybody was holding their weapon, but they weren't holding it the right way, and he basically let us know that you are going to a place where people are trying to kill you. You better either get serious right now because being stupid over there will get you killed, and if there is one guy, I'm not saying the man saved my life, I'm just telling you that, and I knew it was serious business anyway, but after that I had no doubts that I was in for a ride. I'd better take it serious or bad things will happen.

Yeah. So how long was it, when you got to Benning, you weren't assigned to a unit yet though. How long did it take before you got to your unit?

Guy Tinnirello: Well I did two weeks there and I did three weeks at Fort Sill, where we practiced fighting the Cold War all over again, and then basically the second half of the reserve officers advanced course. Or basically they have a correspondence course and then they go to Fort Sill for three weeks. So two weeks, but I was there for three. And I went there for that, and then I arrived December 11th or December 12th in Hattiesburg to Camp Shelby, and that was right before the Christmas block leave. I was originally assigned to the liaison officer detachment, and that's basically where they put everybody who came late, and they hadn't started any train up or anything else like that. The majority of the unit had been there since July and parts of August, so they had done a majority of their common task training, learned how to shoot again, all that other first aid, everything else like that. And January when I got back from block leave for the holidays, we started training, and it was basically rifle qualification, basic first aid, using your NBC nuclear biological chemical gear, things like that, and we did a train up, a deployment readiness exercise at Fort Polk, which in February is very interesting.

Yeah, I've been to Fort Polk for training, not a fun place.

Guy Tinnirello: I had a friend who was stationed there, and I laughed and she said how come everybody laughs when I say that? I mean the funny thing is, we got there and they were running around the first three days and we got there early. I was about four hours from the house, if that. We had the rental car with maps, so I go that's where I live. And the deployment readiness exercise was interesting because it always is. It was interesting because a lot of the National Guardsmen weren't full time soldiers per se, it's not that they weren't very good at their jobs, just different mentalities and a different way of looking at things. They had basically grown up with each other, knew each other and operated with each other all the time -

Which is very different from active duty, yeah.

Guy Tinnirello: In active duty they take a guy from Nebraska, a guy from Hawaii, a guy from Alaska, you may like the Indians, you may like the Lakers, guess what, this is the job. There, everybody was a Vikings fan. I mean it was just different, not bad, just different. I got to work with interpreters. I was in charge of managing interpreters when I was there, both Shia and Suni and some Kurd.

At Fort Polk?

Guy Tinnirello: Yeah, at Fort Polk. And that was a fascinating experience.

Were those interpreters there going to go with you to Iraq?

Guy Tinnirello: They were hired to help train.

OK, yeah.

Guy Tinnirello: Most of the Shia's were from Michigan. Some of the Sunni, it was like 2 Sunni to every 10 Shia, and we only had about 20, and we had like 6 or 7 Kurds. The Kurds loved us and the Kurds were nice people. The other interpreters were good, you could still see even then some of the ethnic differences. Nobody hated each other, everybody got along, but you kind of hah, OK.

I always found that fascinating when we were in Iraq, the division between the Sunni and the Shia and how we really couldn't tell the difference between the two, but those groups, they definitely knew. And the analogy I ever heard that it was kind of like if you're in the United States, you know when somebody is from the deep South or if they are from New England or New York by their accent or certain mannerisms that the foreigner just wouldn't pick up on, and as foreigners, we had no clue.

Guy Tinnirello: What was even more weird is we are in the South was basically Shia, and that was all, and I'm not being deleterious when I say this, it was all tribal. Their societies are tribal, a society, and I am not trying to denigrate it.

I know it's tribal.

Guy Tinnirello: And that's what I belonged to this tribe. I belonged to this, my family and this family live over here, and even then they could tell who was who, and it's like just a different way. You're not used to it. Conceptually it's different from how we live here.

Exactly. So when did you finally arrive in Iraq?

Guy Tinnirello: March 12. We were wheels down in Kuwait March 20.

2006?

Guy Tinnirello: 2006. And I went north April 15th. I flew into Anaconda which is north of Baghdad, which was different, and have you ever been?

No, I never made it for Baghdad.

Guy Tinnirello: Anaconda is huge, and it's the old Soviet style architecture, one-story buildings, maybe two, flat, not very fancy.

Yeah, Asad was similar, I'm sure it was the same style of architecture.

Guy Tinnirello: And it was huge. And we'd heard about Anaconda, but I expected Fort Hood, you know, two- or three-story buildings, everything else like that, and they had a couple but a lot of it was just flat and wide. They pull it, all the new guys when they shut it down, but initially you are right by the air field, so you could see 1F-16's and the combat air patrol would take off and they would take off in pairs, and when they get enough altitude, they kick after burn, and when the sun is going down -

Yeah, you'd see the purple glow.

Guy Tinnirello: It looks like a torch. It looks like one of those lighters, a torch basically, which is neat. And I remember seeing a convoy pull by, and I remember the first time, it was looking like Mad Max because a lot of the contractors, especially the guys who drive fuel, were American. And there's no more ingenious a person or fighting man, fighting woman, than an American, because they gotta, you know, some of those guys are welders, other guys had hammers and nails, and they would bolt on. It got more and more complex and more and more, less and less on the fly, and more and more fabricated, but these guys would, and it looked like something, it reminded me of the convoys in Mad Max. I remember when we got there, they actually had a Bradley on a flatbed that caught something. It was just a reminder why we were there, and it was funny because it was, I mean this is just my one week there, but it's pretty. There are palm trees up there, because you are right almost where, you're right in the middle of the Fertile Crescent, sun is going down, 75, it's April, so it's not too hot yet, and pretty, for lack of a better word, pretty.

Yeah, did you guys, what was your mission when you got there? Did you already know what your unit was going to do?

Guy Tinnirello: My job, I was going to be a liaison officer. They had what they called sheriff's nets, and they were stationed throughout the main supply route, and we helped coordinate recovery QRF, air support and things like that.

QRF is quick reaction force.

Guy Tinnirello: Sorry. For our area. And I was gonna be in charge of the sheriff station in Taji, and Taji is halfway between Baghdad and halfway between Anaconda, and it's about 2

miles away from the hottest checkpoint in the country, so we were always busy. It was interesting because you'd have stuff happen. I mean the first night we had an issue go down where they needed the QRF, close air support, and recovery, and they were able to take care of business but you were just – so, and I was there for about three weeks, and we got to take a chopper down from Anaconda to Taji. Probably straight line, probably a 20-minute ride of that. But they did their thing, and you see why it's called the Fertile Crescent, because we probably flew at 200 or 300 feet. We weren't that high. And they terrace farm their land, and they will cut in lines one way, and it almost reminds me of my wife's on a farm now. I wish I could get her off, but there's some lines this way, and there will be a line vertically, and then there will be another square perpendicular to it, and it was spring so it was the planting season. It was freshly cultivated, and the earth was almost orange. I mean it was that brown, kind of that not necessarily burnt orange, but between almost dark orange or that type of thing, and you had that, you had the green of the palm trees, and it really was beautiful. You'd drive across a lot of, we drove across roads that looked like Florida, once you get out of the cities, you're driving through the Glades where you have a road, you have basically flora and fauna, and you have the mountain ___ bay chop or the geese or the gas station, and you'd see those and I mean it was other than people trying to shoot at us, I mean nothing happened on the flight, but other than there being a war on, it was really, really pretty.

You said you were a liaison officer to the Iraqis then?

Guy Tinnirello: To basically we had the brigade that owned where we were at, and we would help coordinate their recovery, QRF and everything else like that. The convoys would call us or we would call them, we'd notify 'em of rock status or something was happening. We'd also take in recovery reports, EUD, if any EUD out there, things like that.

Did you work much at all with the Iraqi National Guard?

Guy Tinnirello: We did not. Now Taji was pretty much split, and one side of it was the Iraqi side, another side was ours. The thing was, I was only up there for three weeks, but it was just a different environment because stuff was blown up. A lot of the rock polishing and the pencil sharpening just didn't happen because there were bigger fish to fry. I mean somebody's dropping, OK, or you just didn't worry. People still conducted themselves in a military manner. People still behaved very disciplined, in a disciplined fashion, but they tended not to get too crazy about all the stuff that wasn't going to save somebody's life.

Yeah, the minutia. So you got there in April of '06, were you there all the way until April of '07?

Guy Tinnirello: I went down actually about a month later they shuffled some personnel, and that's when I went down to Tallil, southern part of the country, and we were akin to Memphis probably, and what I mean by that is we were like the, we weren't the central shipping hub, but we were the shipping hub for the country. We would get everything from Kuwait, and we were in charge of escorting. We had a brigade in charge of escorting all the food and all the fuel throughout theater, and we'd get it there and we'd portion it out, but our headquarters was down there, but we had a battalion in Asad, we had a battalion in Anaconda, we had elements in, and not very big, squad level elements in Victory Base Camp in Baghdad, not the green zone, but Taji, and we didn't have anybody out in Asad, but we ran Asad. And also before we went they took two companies and cut 'em the Marines in Taqaddum. So we had about 5,000 people, give or take, spread all over the country, and we ran pretty much what would be from just north of Dallas probably between San Antonio and Corpus as far as distance. I guess the best way to put

it is if you were based just south of San Antonio and you had to get stuff to Houston, you had to get stuff to Austin, all the way out to El Paso, and you had to run that, El Paso being a little bit longer, but -

Yeah, that's a big area.

Guy Tinnirello: It was just very, very interesting because no two days were alike.

While you were there, I know the Army does it a little different than the Marine Corps, you do a year in theater, right, and you have a two-week R&R period?

Guy Tinnirello: Yes.

How is that determined when you get those two weeks and how do they stagger that so you have continuity with your unit?

Guy Tinnirello: When I got there, we got there and I'd moved down to finally down to leave, I said look, I want Christmas. And I'd been in deployed before, I'd been overseas before, so I understood that I'm gonna get bored, I'm gonna get lonely, I'm gonna miss home, but it's going to end. A lot of these folks had never been deployed before and you've been there, it can be a challenging environment, no trees, far away from home, you might as well be on the other side of the moon in a lot of respects because it is so antithetical to what we have. We have running water everywhere, paved roads, you're going somewhere you can find, if it's not air conditioned you can get a cold drink. You go there and you're lucky if somebody might speak English, and even then you don't know where, you don't know if they want to kill you. And I'm not trying to be too ___.

Yeah, I know.

Guy Tinnirello: And so and the funny thing was, nobody wanted to think that far out. So I ended up -

People wanted to come back sooner.

Guy Tinnirello: Oh yeah, and I ended up leaving on December 3rd and I came back, actually my first day back to work was Christmas Day, but that's why I went and picked it. Some units, they told you you are going here, that's when you're going. A lot of times they had pref___ lowest run up to highest. So if two guys picked Christmas, one was a major and one was a captain, the captain went. Or one was a captain and the other was a private, the private would go, which was fair.

What was that like leaving a war zone environment like that and coming home and then knowing you got to go back? Did you think that was beneficial to you to have those two weeks at home, or do you think in some ways that kind of was more difficult?

Guy Tinnirello: Well, the good thing is I took it towards the end because had we not been extended, I would've been home in March, and I took mine in December. Even when I got back in December, the other unit that was replacing us, their advance party had already been over to give the look see, see what they were gonna do, and then so it was while our deployment wasn't over, we were ramping up to go home, so I would do that over again as far as going back. The

job I eventually moved into, I was what they called the brigade battle captain, and basically it's akin to a shift manager but there's a little bit more to it, and you understand what I mean, other people I've tried to explain to it's like you run stuff, you answer to your boss, but you're the one, you make all the decisions, you clear it, and I didn't necessarily worry about combat because I knew I had to come back and I was very fortunate and lucky to be in a place where the risk wasn't nearly as great as somebody in Sadr City. So perspective-wise, I could afford not necessarily to look back, but not have as much trepidation. I'm not denigrating anybody, I'd go back to a hot zone.

While you were there, I guess the difference now between this conflict and others in the past, you have the access to being able to contact home, were you able to call home pretty regularly or email and that sort of thing? Tell us what that was like for you.

Guy Tinnirello: Well the funny thing was, where we were at, I mean the old Army, if I didn't get the memo, it didn't happen. Now it's if I didn't get the email. And I couldn't, everything we did was classified secret, not that it was James Bond or I was sitting there, I was not on my belly trying to find some Al-Qaida cell, it's just what we were doing we couldn't talk about. And I told people, people would ask on email, you know, everything's fine, I'm OK. It was hard because I couldn't talk about what I was doing but I knew why, and the main thing was, the hardest thing was when people would hear soldier from Texas hurt. Are you OK? And my brother called my mother, and I'm like dude, don't do that. You'll hear before anything else, and I'll let you know. One time there was, here's what's funny, one time there was a convoy that got hit and they collapsed a bridge, and there was AP reported with that convoy, and I was done, and by the time I got to go check email, it was on their AP wire, and that happened three hours before, and but that was only because a reporter was there.

But even then though, they didn't have the names -

Guy Tinnirello: Oh no, it was, I'll be honest, it was hard sometimes when those two soldiers were kidnapped from the 101st, that was not a good night, and I remember seeing somebody's uncle, one of their uncles on TV saying I wish the Army could've, I think they should've done more. I understand he's hurting, he's his relative, and I understand all that. We had 4,000 people looking for those guys, and everybody and their brother wanted to grab their stuff and go look, but we have a job, everybody had jobs to do. I'm not saying that to be John Wayne, but if we stopped to look for them, nobody gets their fuel, nobody gets their food, and I mean that's one of the brutal ironies of what we have to do, and I'm not saying that to sound like I'm Mr. Tough Guy, but -

When you guys had soldiers wounded or killed, did you guys shut down all of your stuff so I imagine exactly the same as us, anybody who was wounded or something like that happened, you shut off all the phones, all the emails back home, and then people start worrying but that's the only way you can do it.

Guy Tinnirello: You have to. I mean in fact when that guy was on TV, I emailed my brother and I said look, anything happened to me, you keep quiet, because trust me there are people here, and I'm not mad at the guy because it's his family, but at the same time I'm like dude, do you have any idea?

Yeah, I think that's a big difference between the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that any __ forwards commanders had to worry about shutting down the phones and the emails, cafes, so

that guys weren't writing home saying I'm OK when something happened because then the families start playing the games of who did you hear from, who didn't you hear from, and it's completely foreign to whatever happened in Vietnam, Korea, World War II, there wasn't any of those sort of things.

Guy Tinnirello: Well what amazes me between '97 and 2005, we used to have war fighters at Fort Hood which were big computer war games, for lack of a better thing, but they set headquarters, you'd set up your tack of operation center and everything and be wired together, and then you'd fight this battle, and it used to take us 45 minutes to send one email. Now I mean communications are unbelievable. Secured Internet, and secured phone, radio, the whole bit. It amazes me how far forward we are as far, I mean the communication piece of it has grown exponentially.

Speaking of family, how did your family, were you married when you were over there?

Guy Tinnirello: No, I was not.

But you had I guess your folks back home, that sort of thing. How did they deal with your being over there?

Guy Tinnirello: That's interesting because most of my family is still up in the northeast, and it was contentious, it was contentious. My mother didn't think I should have to go. Well, you know, it's all a war for oil, and all this other, and the thing about it is, the die was cast, I was going. And the good thing and I don't know if it's living down here, I don't know if it's the people, but I had friends like they had mixed opinions, like what do you need, whatever you want, because it's like I tell people it's like jumping out of an airplane, I'm hooked up, I'm going. Either get behind me or leave me alone because if there's one time in your life you have to concentrate on yourself, because you know, you try to explain to people you have 30 days to get your affairs in order, and plan your own funeral, and you don't, I'm not being dramatic, but I had to do those things.

I don't think many people in regular civilian life have ever had to sit down and fill out a will and think about if I die, this is where I want to be buried, this is where I want my stuff to go to. I mean that's standard for anyone going over there. I don't think most people can relate to that, but it puts you in a different mindset though. Do you think, I think you probably agree with this, after having been over there, there's a lot of things you don't take for granted anymore when you're back home in the United States.

Guy Tinnirello: I remember listening to the, something on Iwo Jima, and I asked a Marine veteran did you get any medals? He's like I got 5. Two arms, two legs, and my head. And just a simple, when I was walking up here today for the interview and I remember seeing the sun come up and a shadow on a building and everything else, and it was just good to be here, it's good to be breathing. I was visiting friends in Fredericksburg and I'd been home probably a little over a month, and I was just sitting there grinning ear to ear, and she asked my buddies why are you smiling? I'm like you want to know? So yeah. Like you really want to know? Like sure. Nothing's blowing up, nobody's getting killed, I'm not responsible. It's just, you just appreciate, I appreciate the little things and I don't worry about the small stuff because everything comes out in the wash.

Yeah, that's good. So tell us a little bit what it was like, you mentioned when your replacement unit got there and they started doing the changeover with you, how long were they there before your unit went back home?

Guy Tinnirello: They were there probably about a month. They had elements coming in as early as three months, but as far as the transition, it was well, I want to say it might have been two months, or no it was probably like six weeks they got there, they moved in, we showed them how to do it for I believe two weeks, and then we sat and watched them do it for two weeks.

Were they another primarily National Guard unit that was replacing you?

Guy Tinnirello: They were a brigade from the 82nd Airborne, which is very, very fascinating because we had been, we were supposed to go home in March but we got extended because of the search, so we ended up being there 16 months, and it got to the point where we were very, very efficient at what we did.

Yeah, that's a long time to be there.

Guy Tinnirello: And we knew our jobs as far as doing from, as far as my job, everything, there was a report I had to get done to the boss that used to take forever, and I could do that think in 15 minutes. It's like any other transition. They wanted to do things their way, which is fine, and we knew what was expected of us. We had an outpost that had been mortared. Everybody was fine but a couple hit kind of close, and we needed to get reports in on certain deadline times, and I'm a common sense guy, you got people hurt, you got stuff doing, ba-ba-ba, everything's OK because they had the second and third to flush it out, and I'm like OK guys, we need it, we need to concentrate, we need to concentrate, I understand that fellas, I'm not askin', but trust me. This is only get painful from people who aren't where you're at if you don't come forth. They weren't hiding anything, they weren't trying to be disingenuous or deceive us, it was just a matter of a guy thought what he had was busier and I agree, it's just you have to make the headquarters happy.

Yeah, so tell us, I guess take us through I know you said no day was the same, but take us through kind of a typical day in general what your duties were like, try to put the listener in your shoes a little bit for what a normal day was like for you in Iraq.

Guy Tinnirello: We would, I'd come in at 2:00 and I would have 2:00 to 10:00 when I was in the chair, and come in after lunch, I would get the change of shift brief and tell me what was going on, and then we would have what we call our incident report, executive summary, and you'd have a blurb of everything that happened the night before – IE here, what happened there, and you would have to take it, edit it, and put it together, send it up to the boss so he could send it up to the old man so he could send it up to the basically support command headquarters. That's one of the things we had to do. Also all the convoys left on my shift, so we had to schedule can they leave here, they leave here, they leave here -

Was there a reason why the convoys left in the afternoon/evening hours, instead of mornings?

Guy Tinnirello: They had a curfew on the roads at night and you had all these tractor/trailer convoys, hundreds of vehicles on the road. It was just easier. And because of certain tactical considerations, time of day -

So your shift was from 2:00 in the morning until 10:00 in the morning -?

Guy Tinnirello: 2:00 pm to, 1400 to 2200.

OK, that's when they would send the convoys out, they wouldn't send them out early in the morning.

Guy Tinnirello: Yeah, nope, they would be returning early in the morning, and they actually had blackout times, they had hard times for when convoys weren't supposed to be on the road. Traffic problems, issues, easier targets, things like that. And we'd get them basically out the door. If anybody had problems, we'd switch from A to B because fuel was a priority, so we'd make sure, and these are just fictitious names, Hammerhead 44 had a broken vehicle, so Jackhammer 66 would pick it up. That convoy escort team would pick it up and go and then we had to deal with weather, the monsoons, not so much, dust storms more than anything. And about 4:00-ish they were out and about at the road, give or take. And then things would get interesting about 7:00 or 8:00-ish because that's when they'd get closer to Baghdad and that's when the roads were hotter, that's where they had people, all the bad guys usually out and about a little bit more, and then we'd start to take reports.

How big was a normal convoy that you would send out?

Guy Tinnirello: It was usually 20 to 30 vehicles, 20 to 30 tractor/trailers.

OK, and then you'd have 7-ton trucks or Hum-Vee's and stuff that were part of that as well?

Guy Tinnirello: These were all tractor/trailers. And either tractor/trailers or fuelers, and they had an escort with them. Our guys got hit every night ___, and every convoy got hit every night except three. We were very, very fortunate that a lot of them were just no injureds, no damage, continue mission, but it was just -

What was usually the type of contact? IED's or small arms fire?

Guy Tinnirello: IED's usually. Every now and again you'd get small arms fire, and every now and again you'd get a combined attack, it just would all depend. More than likely it was IED's.

What was the standard operating procedure in those cases? Were you guys told just to continue to push on through or were they supposed to get out and take a defensive perimeter and fight it?

Guy Tinnirello: Continue mission.

Yeah, just continue through. What would, in case the vehicle was disabled or something along those lines, how would you handle it at that point?

Guy Tinnirello: If they could self recover, they would self recover, if not they would call recovery to come and get it.

But they would just leave the vehicle?

Guy Tinnirello: Oh no.

The convoy would stop?

Guy Tinnirello: Yeah, because the enemy had a nasty way of putting things on there if you left it.

Exactly.

Guy Tinnirello: And then the new shift would come in and then we'd do the change of shift brief, and then we'd go. You go back and then you'd come back the next day.

And what were your living conditions like? Did you live in one of the tin can type?

Guy Tinnirello: Yep, we had a can.

Tell us a little bit about what those are and what that was like, especially for 16 months.

Guy Tinnirello: Can, basically it's almost like a dorm, for lack of a better, I mean granted, all of the facilities are your shower and your latrine are in a row in the middle of the living area, but you had two beds, and actually where we were at, it was attached to the Air Force, so they had an AFN tower so we could get AFN in the room, and we had some Internet, somebody got the bright idea to buy an Internet satellite and we all pitched in, so it was like $30 a month and we were able to get Internet.

In your can, wow.

Guy Tinnirello: And that's why, I mean it was one of those things, I mean we had our problems and our issues, and it was like $5,000 a month, but we were all split up between 200 people, and we were all more than willing to do it, and it was all right. I look at pictures of the room and I'm like I can't believe I lived there.

Yeah, because a can is basically what, like 12x8 or something like that, 20x8?

Guy Tinnirello: I think ours was maybe from the door over and to about halfway between the table and the wall.

Yeah, so 25 feet.

Guy Tinnirello: If that.

And so there were you and you had a roommate?

Guy Tinnirello: Yes, I had a roommate.

For 16 months.

Guy Tinnirello: Well he actually got a command and they moved him out, so I had my own little hooch, but even then I was just so used to living on my part of it, and it was less I had to clean. So it was just, and it all depended, too because sometimes guys would, they would hook up deals where one guy had a couch, because he had one big trailer all to himself, the officers had actually plumbing, the senior officer – colonel and above had plumbing inside their hooches,

and phone actually, but the phone was more for business only. I can live anywhere, and I think it's just a thing in the service, there's my bed. So you adjust, and I did little things. I met a guy, I talked to a guy online, and he had, because they are all metal walls, he sold magnets with hooks on them and they could hold up to like 20 pounds, so I had those all over my wall, so if I just wanted to hang something up or whatever, and I remember talking to a chaplain and he's like, you know, said sir, I'm feeling it. And actually he lived in Minnesota but he was from Beldo. He was over by Eagle Lake. He got a ranch, and we just started to talk. It's like I had a buddy send me a Texas flag, and I had a bunch of posters on the wall, and you know, and I got the most provocative posters you could legally have in country just because. I learned to make it a home away from home.

Yeah, I know those cans if people haven't seen them, there must be millions of them over there, and I imagine yours probably had an AC unit on the back of the window or something like that, and it's just a strange way to live I think, basically living in a box.

Guy Tinnirello: It's just different, you just get used to it. I used to get up and run every other morning, and you just, I have a friend that might be going over and I told her it's like watch the movie Ground Hog Day, because I had watched it and I've been deployed before.

That's funny you mention that, yeah.

Guy Tinnirello: I mean when I was deployed in '95 and '96, we were in a desert, we were on cots, first time we were on our camonets and next time we had a tent, but no electricity, nothing. It's not oh, poor me, but so, having running water and everything else -

Yeah, that's good.

Guy Tinnirello: And I learned along, I wanted to read every book I ever read, I always wanted to read, and I made the most of my time, and that's what I told her. Because you get there and oh my God, it's 10 months, 12 months, I just worried about the next 5 minutes, and I exercised all the time, and I read my book, and I tried not to let the place get to me.

Yeah, that's probably the best way you can do it, exactly. When you finally got to come home, was there any bit of nostalgia, or did you feel kind of sad about actually finally leaving? Tell us about the last day or days that you were there, what was that like?

Guy Tinnirello: I really wanted to get home. I really did. It just was a matter of it was time to go, and I remember, but you leave so much of your life there because you've experienced so much, and I can't believe I lived there for so long, and it just didn't bother me, and the turn-on of the air field, the hop over that little wire when I was running how I used to do that every day like it was nothing, or every Monday they had this little pizza shack run by locals over by the air field and when people would go on leave, they'd stop there and like every Monday morning at 11:00 when it opened, I'd go. They also had Internet there if you wanted to get on, and I'd go just so I could, and I remember when we were piling on to the C-130, and I remember taking my last step for that time on Iraqi soil, and I'm just, I'm a little bit older so I can allow myself to reflect I guess, and when we landed in Kuwait, it was weird because all of a sudden it's over and you're going home and you don't believe you're home, and too, I'm sure you know, you run at such a pace. You just go 90 miles an hour plus because you can't, you've got to get stuff done. Even with the reports, we got 'em done because if something happened, you threw that aside and you did, you took care of what was ever going on. It was good, but let down might be different, but

first night I got home, I went to visit friends, everything else like that, I remember that Monday morning, I got like three hours of sleep because I just needed to be doing something. I got up at 5:00 in the morning, ran, and that Monday I got done everything I wanted to do for the week. I wanted to get my tags renewed, I wanted to get my oil changed, I wanted to stop by the liquor store, I wanted to check in the VFW, and I was done on day one. Because overseas, you got to get what you got to get done because if something happens, you don't have time to do it. You've got to shift targets and go.

When you flew from Iraq on a C-130 and you went to Kuwait, did you land at Ali-Al Salam?

Guy Tinnirello: Yup.

And so you went there and you were at Camp Victory there in Kuwait, I guess?

Guy Tinnirello: Virginia.

Camp Virginia. How long did they have you there before you got to come back to the States?

Guy Tinnirello: I think a week.

Wow, that's a while.

Guy Tinnirello: We flew out on 14 July, and I think we got out on 10 or 11, and it was like three or four days, it was like wait, go, wait, go, but we were in Kuwait and nothing was blowing up.

Yeah sure, by that time you can relax, but –

Guy Tinnirello: In fact we got off the bus and they were doing an indirect fire attack drill. Dude, that's not funny. But we got there, you were going home, you were getting everything together, and I knew enough about military transport just to be patient because they'll get you there, and not to get upset with it. I was fully prepared to have our flight be delayed, re-delayed, and delayed again, so as long as you don't give me orders sending me back up north, OK.

And then you finally got back. Where did you come to back in the States?

Guy Tinnirello: We went up to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. We went through Maine first.

Yeah, Bangor, Maine. I think everybody goes through Bangor.

Guy Tinnirello: Those plane greeters are special people.

They are, they're nice folks, yeah. We saw them, too, and it doesn't matter what time, they are out there shaking hands.

Guy Tinnirello: They are special people. They are really, really nice.

Yeah, they are.

Guy Tinnirello: And I actually had an IRR patch on me, and one of the guys was like what is that? What's IRR? He's like can I have that for the wall? I was like here. And when my buddy followed on a second flight, he saw it.

That's cool.

Guy Tinnirello: And the thing about it is, all the IRR guys, we all had something had gone, and it was just nice because we were all, you all felt the same because you're doing your job. They gave some of us the opportunity to go home and we stayed because that's what you signed up for, and you're not going to run from your commitment. And one of the other maintenance warrant officers, he had a guy who was an IRR guy was a lawyer, was a mechanic, got out and went to law school and they called him back, and he told, and one thing this warrant said, he said I'll say something about you IRR guys, you guys do your jobs. You just want to do your jobs and go home, because everyone I talk to you say I just want to do my job and go back. It was different. Maine was very nice. I remember when we left Iraqi air space, and that was just funny, because they could still turn the plane around, and I remember putting Ode to Joy on my IPod and listening to it when we left Iraqi air space, and then we landed in Ireland, and that was amazing because you go from all the different shades of tan to all the different shades of green. Truly, you do see God's hand in the world when you see two such diverse types of geography. And we were travelling against the clock because we left about 2:00 in the morning, we got to Ireland as the sun was coming up, and then when we flew over the ocean, we got to Maine at like 6:30 -

Yeah, it's really strange.

Guy Tinnirello: So we were basically I was on three continents in one day. So it was just, there was the overt temptation just to rent a car in Maine and head home. No, I couldn't do that. But we went to Fort McCoy, we went through our out processing process, and it was just interesting because you're so used to running under speed, all of a sudden I'm home, what am I gonna do? And I had already planned to go back to my job and everything else like that, and you know, I'm still trying to calm down from some of the stuff over there and the further I get away from it, but every now and again when Ike hit, I was in Conroe, and we lost power, it was fine. I had my Palm chill whiner, opened up the windows, and I'm sleeping on the living room floor, put the dogs outside, and I wake up at 3:00 in the morning and all I hear is generators and I'm sleeping under on a poncho. Last time I did that I was overseas, and I'd always heard people say, veterans say, a sound or a smell or something or a feel will bring me back there. I was shocked. I was woah, because even though I wasn't in a line company commander fighting every day, you live under a certain level of anxiety in what you do, and just to feel that and wake up, you just automatically are just at heightened level of tension.

That's great. Well I tell you what, I really appreciate you coming in today to share some of your experiences with us. You are just the second Iraq war veteran we've actually interviewed, so it's definitely something we plan on doing more of. We focus a lot on World War II vets, Korean War vets, because we're losing so many of them, but it's great for us to be able to interview you, especially since you were there not all that long ago and these memories are still fresh and our hope is that we can keep this, preserve it for posterity. We've got stuff in this Land Office that goes back to David Crockett, Stephen F. Austin. We have the original documents and things down in our archives downstairs. My hope is that maybe one day a couple hundred years from now, somebody can listen to these interviews, too, and get a taste for what you've gone through and other vets have gone through, and I mentioned earlier before we started the interview,

Commissioner Patterson is a veteran, I'm a vet, a lot of folks who work here are veterans, but everybody at the Land Office appreciates your service and what you've done for our country and it's an honor for us to be able to interview you, and so I guess kind of the last thing we always try to ask is thinking about posterity, if there's one thing you'd want to say to somebody listening to this years from now that may never meet you, 100 years from now, what's one thing you'd want them to know about your time in the service or just anything in general?

Guy Tinnirello: Next to raising my daughter, it will be the greatest thing I ever do. I got to work with some of the best people you'll ever meet. I joined in over at this point a 200-year tradition that nobody can ever take away from me, and if anybody were ever to ask me if it was worth it, yes it was worth it and would I do it again? I'd go now.

That's awesome. Again, thank you very much and that concludes our interview.

[End of recording]