

Jonas Wolfe Interview

Q: Can you please tell us your full name Interview date: Nov. 20th 2009

A: My full name is Jonas Anders Wolfe. Interview by: Jeff Outinen

Q: What is your birthday? Hs 495

A: My birthday is March 16th, 1984

Q: You are a Iraq war veteran correct?

A: Yes sir.

Q: What part of the military did you serve in?

A: I served in the Michigan Army National Guard from August 26th, 2003, until August 15th, 2009.

Q: How did you get involved in the Military?

A: Well my original intention was to join the Coast Guard with another friend of mine, and the Coast Guard enlistment process had taken several months and at the point and time it was August and another friend of mine was joining the National Guard and he talked me into doing the guard because it was a much faster enlistment process. I was off to basic before I would have even gotten into the Coast Guard.

Q: What incentives enticed you into joining the National Guard?

A: Initially, the enlistment bonus was \$8,000 and the GI bill kicker too. Then they bumped it up to \$8,000 enlistment bonus, and the educational benefits were such a incentive for me because I didn't intend on attending school. But up to date they have been quite helpful.

Q: When were you sent off to basic training?

A: I was sent off to basic training in January of 2004 and I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Q: How long was basic training?

A: Basic training itself was 8 weeks and an extra three days of what they called reception where you get ready, you get your shots, you get your clothing, that sort of stuff.

Q: After basic, how long was it before you got activated.

A: Well I think I went about a year and a half after basic training. I was activated 2005, January of 2005 we first got our orders and we didn't leave until July 2005. So it was about a year and a half until we left for deployment. Actually we were on active duty at that time.

Q: How did it feel to be activated?

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Q: How did it feel to be activated?

A: I really didn't like the idea. But once we got rolling and things got situated and got a little different lifestyle going on I guess my outlook changed and I was a little more positive about it. Your there, you volunteered for it, alright your going, everybody's moving, you make friends pretty quick.

Q: How long did your activation take?

A: Well they first notified us in January or February of 2005, and we didn't get on a plane to fly overseas until October of 2005. We joined the new unit and we weekend drilled there, for several months and then in July we were actually on active duty.

Q: What kind of activities did you partake in before you left?

A: Before I left, when I was still on what they call Title 32, which is National Guard drilling status in a different unit, because the unit was deploying, we really partied a lot. I just turned 21 that year too, so you can imagine the events that took place; barrel parties, all sorts of activities, we were having a good time before, because I didn't know what was going to happen, I didn't know if I was going to get killed, maimed, injured, so I wanted to get my partying out of my system.

Q: So when your activated what series of event took place? What did you have to do before you left?

A: About the 20th of July, we were sent to Detroit to start with, because the unit I was recently pulled into was based out of Detroit and we went down there, spent a weekend, got on a bus and they bused us from Detroit to Fort McCoy Wisconsin, thru Chicago. When we got to Fort McCoy we were put into army barracks, and then the deployment began from there. We were issued a lot of equipment; they took some of our old equipment and gave us new, so we were up to date on equipment. We got shots, vaccinations, we got our eyes checked, our teeth checked, our hearing checked, another physical, we were run through a series of medical examinations and psychological examinations, and then training began. When we were in training we did a lot of vehicular activities; driving, shooting from the vehicle, mounting the vehicle, dismounting the vehicle, the proper way to treat a casualty come into you know, if one of your buddies gets injured you got to know how to treat them. We did a lot of on foot training, a lot of infantry training, we did a lot of building infiltration, modern urban warfare training, common military task force training so you can conduct yourself in a military manner, be disciplined, and be a everyday hard working soldier.

Q: Where did they fly you out of?

A: We flew out of Volk Airfield, it's in southern Wisconsin, we bused there from Fort McCoy, it was in October of 2005. We took a bunch of old school buses down from Fort McCoy and went to Volk Airfield and waited around for about 8 hours before our plane was ready and we got on the airplane and piled

all of our stuff on there and off we went. We flew from Volk field, and we first landed in Gander Air force base in Newfoundland, Canada. Once we landed in Newfoundland, Canada, we stayed there for roughly two to three hours and then we flew across the Atlantic, and we landed in Shannon, Ireland. We were there for another two to three hours. Then flew from Shannon to Budapest and from Budapest we flew to Kuwait City.

Q: Where were you stationed when you got to the Iraq area?

A: The first area I was stationed was on the Iraq/Kuwait border. We were at a place called Navistar, but I'm not a 100% sure, I don't remember the name. We were stationed there, we were all living in not armored trailers, but they were somewhat bomb proof shelters, we had four men to a room, and there was a lot of and involved and a lot of getting used to one another. You're put up in buildings that you're not really used to the troops you're living with. So, there was sometimes conflict there, unpacking, people getting used to the desert heat, there were a lot of temper flares, and that sort of thing going on too.

Q: Were you stationed at Navistar for the whole time?

A: No, for the first four months, after that we were moved down to a place called Camp Airifjab or Airifjon, something like that. Our main mission was while we were there, and I was a mechanic, because I was in a maintenance unit. The unit got kind of broken apart, we did different things, I was attached to a unit from Fort Hood, Texas, a transportation unit. What we did was maintenance on their vehicles, on their trucks and trailers; making sure everything was working right. We did all sorts of stuff, the whole deployment; we did everything from rebuilding diesel engines, to up armoring vehicles, to even driving vehicles on convoys. I wound up going on four convoys up into Iraq.

Q: Did you see any conflict while you were there?

A: I was never personally engaged, fortunately I guess, but I knew people that were, a couple of people from our unit was engaged, a couple of people from our unit were injured, but I wasn't an everyday occurrence. We were engaged indirectly at times as well, meaning indirect fire, mortar fire, artillery fire, or bombs, that sort of things, and our chow hall was blown up too.

Q: What was Iraq/Kuwait like?

A: Like I said earlier; there was a lot of sand, a lot of heat, becoming used to that sort of thing was kind of big. Me, I'm from the U.P. up where and we don't talk like everybody else, they don't talk like us so another big thing was growing accustomed to listening and trying to take orders from people you really can't necessarily understand, you know one accent or another. I wound up meeting a lot of people from a lot of different places. The work wasn't that hard but the heat was pretty difficult to get used to.

Q: What kind of fun activities did you participate in while you were over there?

A: Well, we really didn't have too much fun. You weren't allowed to drink, some people partook in alcohol though. I did a lot of weight lifting, lot of weight lifting, lifted weights the whole time I was there.

We also would occasionally, if things weren't too busy we would play a game of foot ball or maybe soccer, or working out or running, just trying to keep busy and keep your mind off the fact of where you were and what you were doing. We did a lot of stress relief activities; sports, that kind of thing more than anything, trying to stay active.

Q: Did you meet any Iraqis' while you were over there? And how did they treat you?

A: I personally didn't meet any Iraqis', I did meet people from Pakistan, from India, they were very interesting. I did come in contact with Iraqis' some Kuwaiti nationals, but people from the middle east to me seemed very expressive about their feelings, they are close and they don't share the American attribute about a lot of personal space, they don't necessarily mind sharing a couch with somebody, their closer as a culture than we are. I met people from Italy, I met a guy from Latvia, I met couple guys from Britain, Canada, so I did meet quite a different number of people from quite a different number of places, they were all interesting to talk to. Foreigner wise I probably got closer to the Brits, probably because I lifted weights with them, I spent time with them, talked to them, hung out with them, they were pretty good guys, and we got a long pretty well. Probably for cultural reasons, its easier to connect with somebody who you already kind of like.

Q: What did you think when you saw the Iraq war start?

A: Well I'll tell you honestly, I was 18-19 years old, I don't recall how old I was when the whole thing started. I was excited about it started, I wanted to join, intent was to join the military at a younger age, 17-18, all my grandma's brothers had done it, both my grandpas did it, it was kind of a family thing, and I kind of wanted to do it. I was watching this certain invasion of Iraq, I was watching all this stuff go on, on TV, tanks rolling across the desert, doors getting kicked in, and I kind of wanted to take part in that, I wanted to become part of the history. I guess I was idealistic and somewhat narrow in some of my views, and I wanted to take part in it and fight for the country and whatever else. I ended up joining the Guard and doing that, I didn't do active duty, well I did do active duty but it was on deployment. Initially I was excited about it and once I got it and got rolling, I realized the implications of my actions, I began to think a little bit differently about it and I wasn't quite as gung ho as I was initially.

Q: Did any one try to persuade you away from joining the military?

A: I had several people question my intents, they were saying you're not the military type, you're a little bit more of a free spirited guy, an open minded individual. But I was a good soldier none the less, I was able to take orders, and give orders when necessary. I enjoyed doing it, in enjoyed the job it's just that the whole thing got a little old, I guess I got other career aspirations other than the military that I wanted to take part in.

Q: Did you meet any interesting people while you were there?

A: the most rewarding relationship when I was there was with a British guy. He was a master sergeant, we lifted weights a lot together, I was lower enlisted, he was higher enlisted. We compared our experiences in the military, we compared the British military to the American military, shared opinions,

shared ideas, we never really argued as much but kind of joking around we talked about it and worked out a lot together. He was a pretty got guy and we got a long pretty good. He was probably the most interesting person. Also some the Indians and Pakistanis, because I never been exposed to their culture, first hand. We did do some work with them, what they called TCN's, third country nationals. They were blue collar, semi-skilled professional, who came in and worked beside us. It was interesting getting to meet them, they had this chewing tobacco they gave me that. I've chewed American tobacco and whatever you become immune to it, but the Indian method of chewing tobacco, would for some reason, every single time you chew it you felt like you were going to get drunk. So I think that's part of the reason why I keep doing it.

Q: Any other interesting people that you have met?

A: My best friend, he was in the American military and he was in my unit. He was my best friend while I was over there, he was a black fellow from Wyoming, Michigan. Up to that point, I really haven't met and black people, so I did not know that much about them. They are different than whites, there's a little bit different culture going on there. He was probably my best friend during the deployment, so I gained a little bit of culture there and we got a long pretty good. We worked out together and worked together as well, we were pretty good friends throughout the deployment.

Q: So what kind of training activities did you receive while you were in combat?

A: While we were in theater, we did quite a bit of realistic training, just to keep up on it, just in case things happen. We did fire drills in vehicles, in case the vehicle gets hit with an improvised explosive device. First aid training, we did that too. We did all sorts of things; we did shooting. Probably the most interesting story, we did some chemical warfare training, in country as well as at home. We did some at basic training. We got tear gas canisters, and we had to go into a room and you would have to take your mask off and answer questions, put your mask back on, seal it up, and then walk out. By the time you got done with this process; you're drooling, your salivating, every mucous membrane in your body is oozing gallons as much as it can and by the time you're walking out the door; your vomiting, rolling in the sand, getting all dirty and sweaty and nasty. It was entertaining once you got done, watching other troops go through the training. It was rather entertaining because you'd had just gone through it so it was entertaining to laugh at some other poor sap that was doing the same thing you just did.

Q: Can you elaborate on what the first aid training was like?

A: There were these 7 step casualty evaluations; you'd check for burns, blood, broken bones, hemorrhaging, head wounds, and there were all sorts of things. We trained for medivac, were ready to call in a helicopter, how you signal a helicopter, how you get it to land properly, how you load making sure that you don't jar your wounded comrade, kind of like EMS training I'd suppose. It was pretty thorough, we even did injections, we did sodium nitrate, I think it's a regular IV, kind of like rehydration for people who are dehydrated. We got to do live injections on our fellow poor soldiers because some people with come over with a shaky hand.

Q: Can you tell us more about the fire training?

A: The first drill we did was a roll over drill. It's pretty simplistic, the Hum-V is a big hunk of metal, pretty much you grab on to something you can and the first thing you do is grab the gunner and pull him down, and try to hold him down so the rollover doesn't get him. We did some fire drill training where you evacuate the vehicles and put the fire out. It depends too whether you are under fire or not under fire, what you do then, obviously you exit the vehicle on the opposite side of the contact and how you park the vehicles is important to so that you don't cause unnecessary damage or unnecessary harm to anything your working with.

Q: Were there any other training activities you had to run through? Any bombing raids training?

A: We'd do some of that, that was more back at the mobe site that was more in case of an attack. Pretty much it was grab your weapon, grab your IBA, grab your individual body armor, and run to a bunker and then wait in the bunker until the "all clear" call. The all clear call would make sure that there is no more attack going on, then your safe and then you can come out, go find all your stuff scattered all over the place, after all the rummaging and the motaring what whatever else was going on.

Q: Did you see any interesting places?

A: When we were over there we had one day where the whole company got to go down to a Kuwaiti naval base. It was right on the Persian Gulf, we got to down there and hang out, there was a little bit of a picnic going on, and it was beautiful. It was beautiful greens, sea water, it was about 70 degrees, and there was a nice breeze all day long and it was a nice day. It was quite a break from being in middle of the desert, from all the heat and rocks and other b.s. Me and a couple friends of mine, were down at the beach walking down wading in the water, I wish I could have gone fishing but we really couldn't. We were all from Michigan, and some of us were from the U.P. and it just so happens in the U.P. on a real clear day, looking across the lake at times certain individuals claim that they can see Canada. Well I don't know I can never see Canada, in that spirit jokingly when we were down on the beach, I called out to some of my fellow comrades "oh look, Canada", across the Persian gulf, and of course you couldn't see Canada, but it was an entertaining moment none the less.

Q: Did you see any other interesting places, towns?

A: They were really like towns they were more like villages, people over there are very tribal. They reminded me of traveling across the south west with rudimentary dwellings and settlements, their kind of still in a little bit of a tribal mode. They kind of stick to themselves, their not with the swing of things, they're not on Wall Street selling stocks and bonds, they're living with their cattle, chicken, and goats.

Q: Did you get a chance to come back home when you were overseas?

A: Two week R&R some people call it, it was leave. Before we left, we all signed up for it. We had to wait for a month before people could start taking it, and it couldn't be a month before you got there or a month before you left. So I signed up for it, I think I came home in may because I was hoping to do some fishing and I wanted to come right before the hot summer came, because I didn't want to deal with any extra heat. I wanted a nice cool vacation when I came home because that's what I missed the most. I

came home, for I think 15 days before you had to fly back and I had a good time. I met up with a lot of my old friends and we went fishing, we partied a lot, we basically caught up for two weeks. Caused some mayhem and it was fun though.

Q: What the furthest distance you got into Iraq?

A: We went up near a city north of Baghdad, I think it was Mosul, through the night, we did a lot of activity at night because judged safer, not always was, and it was cooler too. But we did go quite a ways up and we did come back, I was fortunate enough to go up there when it was safe and no one got injured or killed on my shift.