

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

WAYNE LANDIS

An interview conducted on

October 10, 2015

Interviewer: Mikayla Mullen

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Wayne Landis are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 10, 2015.

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MULLEN: When and where were you born?

LANDIS: I was born in Middleburg, Pennsylvania, March 27th, 1980.

MULLEN: Did you grow up there? Did you live there all your life?

LANDIS: Until I was eighteen.

MULLEN: When and where did you enter into the armed forces?

LANDIS: I entered into the armed forces on 11 February of 1999 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

MULLEN: Leonard Wood? How would you spell that?

LANDIS: L-E-O-N-A-R-D.

MULLEN: Wood. OK.

LANDIS: And Wood.

MULLEN: I just wanted to clarify that.

LANDIS: And I think there's a space between "Leonard" and "Wood." It's like many of our military bases named after . . .

MULLEN: What branch did you serve in?

LANDIS: The Army.

MULLEN: What were your years of service?

LANDIS: From 11 February 1999 until April 17th of 2007.

MULLEN: During your years of service were you primarily in the enlisted ranks, a noncommissioned officer, just an officer?

LANDIS: Enlisted and noncommissioned officer

MULLEN: In which military conflict did you take part?

LANDIS: Operation Iraqi Freedom.

MULLEN: Why did you enlist in the army?

LANDIS: Recruiter asked me. I always felt a great respect for our nation's service members and had a grandfather that served in World War II and just realized that that was something I would like to contribute back to my country.

MULLEN: Cool.

LANDIS: Grew up watching G.I. Joe.

MULLEN: What was your training like?

LANDIS: Well it started out in intelligence. It was challenging intellectually and when I transferred into infantry it was a little challenging physically

MULLEN: What were race relations like when you were enlisted?

LANDIS: I think the race relations were pretty good. I mean we went through different training: equal opportunity training, consideration of others training, certainly any racist mentalities or ideations would not be accepted.

MULLEN: Did you find your service challenging at all?

LANDIS: Not until 2005.

MULLEN: What happened in 2005?

LANDIS: I deployed to Iraq. It was challenging because war is not easy. If it was that easy than France would still be doing it.

MULLEN: What conception of the U.S did you have at the time of your enlistment?

LANDIS: Great pride and honor.

MULLEN: What did America symbolize to you?

LANDIS: It symbolized freedom, opportunity to be able to rise above the situation life may have put you in, that you may have been born into, whereas we don't see that in other countries.

MULLEN: I have a question to ask 'were you deployed overseas?' but yes you were.

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: Did you understand what mission you were asked to complete? Did you understand what it was about?

LANDIS: Yes, during Operation Iraqi Freedom our mission was to, beyond the standard infantry mission to kill or destroy, kill and/or capture all enemies of the United States. We were specifically going to kill or capture insurgent terrorist cells, or personnel that were not just trying to kill Americans or coalition members but also trying to intervene against democracy in Iraq.

MULLEN: What unit or units did you serve in during your deployment?

LANDIS: 172nd Striker Brigade. 2-1 Infantry Regiment.

MULLEN: 201?

LANDIS: 2-dash-1 Infantry.

MULLEN: Just those two?

LANDIS: That's the same unit. 172nd's a brigade, 2-1's a battalion.

MULLEN: Oh, gotcha, gotcha.

MULLEN: Did you serve in direct combat during your deployment?

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: Were you wounded in action?

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: How?

LANDIS: Multiple gunshot wounds incurred during a firefight during a raid.

MULLEN: Did you ever have any other wounds besides being shot?

LANDIS: Nothing I would seek advanced medical treatment for, scratches and things like that.

MULLEN: Did you ever become a prisoner of war?

LANDIS: No.

MULLEN: What did you think of the local inhabitants you encountered?

LANDIS: The locals I loved and they loved us. Everywhere we went and the kids were out, and they would give us a thumbs-up or wave [unintelligible]. Actually, foreigners to Iraq, I mean other than the United States military and coalition forces but, like generally those people from Iran, Syria, men that come into Iraq to cause instability and hinder democracy.

MULLEN: OK. When you interacted with local inhabitants, what do you think their conceptions were of the United States?

LANDIS: They loved us.

MULLEN: Did you ever engage them in conversation about what America meant to you?

LANDIS: No, we didn't go into that depth of conversation, with the exception of, like when we entered homes, we would let the person or whoever was in charge of the home know why we were coming in there, because the dictator we deposed had entered the homes in that area and all throughout Iraq and just basically did whatever he want.

MULLEN: Did you have any normal conversations with the inhabitants?

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: How did your service influence or affect your family at home?

LANDIS: Well, at the time I was recently married. I had only been married for about a year when I deployed, and I know it was more so after I got wounded, it was harder on my wife. I mean really my brothers and sisters supported me and parents loved me. Really until I was wounded, it didn't negatively affect them too much other than put them into a situation where they felt they had to pray for me more regularly

MULLEN: What are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

LANDIS: Just seeing the children in Iraq run around so happy to see us. They run out and they run up to our vehicles, ask for chocolate or footballs. Of course it would be the European style of football as opposed to our style of football.

MULLEN: What sorts of technologies did you use in the service?

LANDIS: All sorts, everything from knives and bullets to advanced frequency hype radios with frequency hype capabilities, thermal imaging devices.

MULLEN: Did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: What kind of challenges?

LANDIS: Just realizing that they would have no idea, of what I experienced or what service members experience over there, and just adapting from something where you are constantly on the go and you have a set schedule, set tasks that you need to perform in a certain amount of time, and having to get them done, as opposed to civilian world there is more leeway or excuses made of that not happening.

MULLEN: After your time in the military, has your concept of the United States change?

LANDIS: No.

MULLEN: How do you feel about your military service looking back?

LANDIS: I'm honored to have served with the great men and women that I served with.

MULLEN: Do you have any advice for the young men and women who are just entering the service?

LANDIS: Stand strong and do the right things.

MULLEN: Would you like to share anything else about your service?

LANDIS: I can't think of anything particular to my service that . . .

MULLEN: Would you mind telling me the story about how you were wounded?

LANDIS: I certainly can. It happened on 19 November 2005. We were in my platoon, got the day off from doing our normal patrols and were put on duty that entire evening as a quick reaction force. During that time, or late that evening, got a call from the Iraqi army that they had a high level target they were pursuing that they attempted to raid there, that target's facility, and they were mainly all killed, a couple of them got out and were able to call us. So, being the quick reaction force, we had to grab our gear and be rolling outside of the gates within five minutes. We did so and, going toward the objective, we started getting more of the background information over the radio. It was actually the top Al Qaeda operative in Iraq at the time that we were going after. We arrived at the objective and I was leading the 2nd squad. First squad had already dismounted their vehicle, approached the gate. They were setting up their breaching charge up, which is just an explosive we used to open doors, gates, and anything else that might get in the way of us completing our mission and I had my squad dismount and led them towards the gate. As I was moving . . . approaching first squad and then . . . that breaching charge went off, we also engaged with . . . It went off simultaneously with a 82 millimeter mortar used as a grenade and basically just unscrewed the tail section and screwed in a grenade fuse making it a really large hand grenade. Two people were wounded at that point. I'd assumed that they were just because I couldn't see any blood, thought they were just sprained their ankles on the rubble during from the breaching charge. I could hear the heavy small arms fire coming from inside the building and knew that we had an entire squad in there and that they needed support. I led my squad passed the two injured into the house where first squad was already under heavy small arms fire. I setup my squad to support first squad. The enemy had holes already knocked out of

the walls and floor, from which they were engaging us from. I was directing fire and communicating with first squad, get apprised of the situation of what was really going on. In a fire fight there for at least half hour or forty -five minutes before a round hit me but I kept feeling something falling and hitting me in the back of the neck. It was the plaster from the wall behind me, from bullets hitting behind me. A little after that, a round hit me in the chest just above my sappy plate—it's a Kevlar coated ceramic plate we wore for body armor, covers mainly your vital organs. That knocked me to the ground. I tried to get back up. Couldn't really feel my arm. My right arm was just burning and I switched my weapon to my left hand and both to direct fire and engage the enemy. Made it up to my . . . Made it up to my knee when I was shot in the right hip. Went down after that. I recall yelling for a medic and sometime after that I passed out.

MULLEN: Wow. I didn't know that.

LANDIS: Yes. Well, it could've been from loss of blood and it also could've been that's right the time a round struck me in the temple. Got my plate.

MULLEN: I know that. Wow. OK.

LANDIS: OK, but don't cry. Don't make me cry.

MULLEN: I didn't know. I know um . . . Ms. Michelle, at the Christmas was telling . . . When she did her talk she told the story of being up at the hospital and um . . . over the holidays and um . . . A Christian band prayed over you or something like that.

LANDIS: MercyMe.

MULLEN: MercyMe.

LANDIS: . . . and POD. I know POD crossed over and did some mainstream stuff but they started as a Christian band. Although, I gotta admit, it probably threw my mom off a little bit because you've got these just large Hispanic guys with dreadlocks. And there's my mom bleach

blonde gal from small town Pennsylvania, and these guys just approach her, “Can we pray for . . . pray over your son?” So, that probably threw her off because I know that wasn’t something that she’d be accustomed to seeing. Not that having your son shot is something that any parent is really accustomed to seeing.

MULLEN: What hospital were you sent to when you were wounded?

LANDIS: Several. I went from a combat area support hospital in Mosul to one in Baghdad. At each stage they just made sure they could stabilize me long enough to get me where I was capable of traveling to more advanced medical care. And from Baghdad I went to Ramstein Air Force Base.

MULLEN: What was that? Ram . . .

LANDIS: Ramstein. Ramstein, Ramstein, I’m not certain. I’m not fluent in German. Grandpa made sure of that. From Ramstein I went to Bethesda Naval Medical Center. And from there to Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Last but not least, James A Haley Veteran’s Hospital in Tampa, Florida. It’s a traumatic brain injury clinic and . . . and spent a couple months in the D.C. area in winter. It’s kinda gloomy. Thought I could use some sunshine, so I chose the one in Florida.

MULLEN: Cool. When did you and Ms. Michelle move to San Angelo, and why?

LANDIS: Well, my wife moved to San Angelo in [pause] July of 2004, I believe. And just ‘cause she was . . . did a permanent change of station from Fort Gordon, Georgia to there. But as I did a permanent change of station to Fort Wainwright, Alaska, she came back from her deployment to Qatar. I took leave, we got married, I went back to Alaska, she PCSd here to Goodfellow Air Force Base. And then I moved here, because well, after my injuries, that’s where my wife was stationed and thought being married for about a year and a half at the time that it’d

be nice to live with my wife and receive some of the perks of being married. More so than just a basic allowance for quarters.

MULLEN: So, you have two daughters, right?

LANDIS: Yes.

MULLEN: What do you do now? Like I know you're obviously not active duty anymore. So, what do you do now that you're not?

LANDIS: Umm . . . I [unclear] part time. I went back to school and got a degree and teaching certificate. I'm fairly active in the veterans community in San Angelo. Currently looking for employment. I have several applications out there just waiting to see what happens there. Praying to make sure it's where God wants me.

MULLEN: Are you active in any other parts of the community . . . um . . . in San Angelo?

LANDIS: Just my church and the veterans community. The gym.

MULLEN: [Laughs] The gym. I know you're a part of the Chrysalis Community.¹ Is that something that you just love to do? How did you get involved in that?

LANDIS: I got involved in that during a walk to a mass. It just touched me and inspired me and like so many things in my life I felt a closeness to it that I wanted to get back to.

MULLEN: OK. So, that is all the questions I have for you.

LANDIS: That's it?

MULLEN: Yep, that's it. Thank you.

LANDIS: That's good.

¹ The Concho County Chrysalis group.