

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

SEAN GODFREY

An interview conducted on

October 31, 2016

Interviewer: Matthew Eddins

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 Sean Godfrey are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 31, 2016.

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EDDINS: What is your name?

GODFREY: My name is Sean Godfrey.

EDDINS: When and where were you born?

GODFREY: I was actually born in Jersey City, New Jersey. I was a military brat. My dad joined the Air Force not too long after I was born. I grew up not really having a home. The majority of my childhood, I would say, was probably spent in California. Ironically, I claim Alabama as my home.

EDDINS: And how long have you been here in Texas?

GODFREY: Officially, I've been here about a year. Unofficially, maybe three or four. I say unofficially because my wife lives here and, while I was still active duty, I was coming back and forth. I guess I had two residences while I was still active duty. I was going to my place of duty and back here to visit family. So, maybe three or four years total.

EDDINS: How would you compare your other residencies to Texas?

GODFREY: I love Texas. I can't really compare it to any other state. It is a state unto itself. I love it here. I could see myself spending the rest of my days. Especially West Texas. It's small, it's not too large. It's in between that big city and small town feel in terms of San Angelo. I love it here.

EDDINS: When and where did you enter the armed forces?

GODFREY: I entered in Montgomery, Alabama in 1993. I was 19-years-old and I joined the Marine Corps Reserve.

EDDINS: And what made you want to join the Marine Corps?

GODFREY: Kind of rebellion against my dad because he was Air Force and needing college money. They had the reserve G.I Bill at the time. It was a great program. You do your reserve duty and pay for college.

EDDINS: And what was your duty in the Marine Corps?

GODFREY: Infantry.

EDDINS: And did you ever deploy overseas?

GODFREY: Not while I was in the Marine Corps, I was only in two years. In the Air Force I had many deployments but not the Marine Corps.

EDDINS: And what was your duty in the Air Force?

GODFREY: I was an intelligence officer.

EDDINS: And where did you deploy?

GODFREY: Total I had six deployments. Once to Bosnia, three times to Qatar, and twice to Iraq.

EDDINS: Did you have a favorite assignment?

GODFREY: I had good experiences with all of them. I can't really say I favored one more than the others. I mean, they were all good experiences.

EDDINS: And what made you want to transition over from the Marine Corps to the Air Force?

GODFREY: I wanted to get commissioned, for one, and the school that I was going to had a good ROTC program, and I just saw my future more in the Air Force than in the Marine Corps.

EDDINS: And where did you earn your commission from?

GODFREY: I graduated from Auburn in Montgomery but I was in an across-town program so my commissioned detachment was at Alabama State University, Det. 19.

EDDINS: And how would you compare the training of the Marine Corps and the Air Force?

GODFREY: Night and day. It's not even apples and oranges. And it's not a good or bad or this is better and this is worse. It's just the missions are completely different, so the training is completely different than you would find. I can give you examples. I don't know how much time you got. So, you're an Air Force cadet, so you're aware of how the Air Force trains, at least in a basic training sense. Well, in the Marine Corps, I remember in one of my training environments, I was the guide, which in the Air Force is the person that holds the guide on. In the Marine Corps it was a leadership position. I was a platoon guy and I remember one day to get my marines, motivated the guide would carry the guide on around. We would travel in these vehicles called cattle carts, which is exactly like they sound. They're trucks with trailers that people just . . . I don't know if they do that anymore because it doesn't really sound too safe but this was back in the 90s. Well, in any case, my marines weren't moving fast enough as I would like so, to motivate them, I took my guide on and I started jabbing them with it to get them to move faster into the cattle cart. Well, my superiors—my NCOs—they liked my leadership style so much they meritoriously promoted me from—I was a private first class at the time—they meritoriously promoted me to lance corporal. The Air Force's equivalent of below the zone promotion, on the spot promotion. So, to contrast to the Air Force, if I had done that in the Air Force I'd probably be looking at an Article 15 or jail time. So that's just to give you an example of the different training. It's not that one's better than the other but the Marine Corps has a totally different mission, so that's acceptable. At least it was. I don't know about today in the Marine Corps. Whereas in the Air Force, you wouldn't dream of doing something like that if you wanted to keep your career.

EDDINS: Did you find any part of your service challenging?

GODFREY: I embrace challenges so I couldn't say that it was challenging in a bad sense that I couldn't overcome. I would say as an Air Force officer, initially I had some challenges because I still thought like a marine and I still . . . I had to water some of that. I would always try to turn my airman into marines and I just had to realize "Hey, if they wanted to join the Marine Corps they would've joined the Marine Corps. You can't turn your airmen into marines." I would say that's probably one of the most challenging. Being away from family during deployments, that's challenging.

EDDINS: What conception did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment or your commissioning?

GODFREY: Well, I had a good sense of the military and what the military was about, because my father was enlisted in the Air Force for 20 years. I joined the military in the early 90s so, comparing now and then, I look at the United States as post 9/11 and pre 9/11. Pre-9/11 United States, I guess it was a lot different than what it is now. I don't know if I can really explain in terms for you to understand but there certainly wasn't a focus on security like there is now. We're talking pre-cyber . . . When I joined the military, I don't think the Internet had even been invented yet or it was in its infant stages. People didn't even own personal computers back then. Cell phones and laptops were unheard of inventions. I think they had the cell phone but they were big as bricks and only doctors and drug dealers had them. So, the United States was a very different feel than what we have today. It was still a great country to be apart of. Everyone's proud to be American, at least most folks were. It was just a very different United States than today.

EDDINS: When you were deployed overseas did you understand the mission the United States was trying to accomplish while you were there?

GODFREY: Yes, definitely. Different missions at different times. When I was in Bosnia, that was to support allied forces, Operation Allied Force, and that was the air campaign to free Kosovo from Serbia. I understood exactly why we were there and what we were going to do. The first time . . . Actually, the first few times I was in Iraq—this was post-invasion so Saddam Hussein had been removed from power. My first four deployments to support Iraq, it was really trying to build the country of Iraq to be a stable nation and at the same time eliminate a terrorist insurgence. I won't say terrorist, an insurgent threat, because there was an insurgency going on. My last time going to Iraq, we were in an "Advise and Assist" role. So, this was all about making an increased emphasis on making Iraq a stable nation and in training our Iraqi counterparts in various missions.

EDDINS: When you were deployed I'm sure you had lots of contact with the local inhabitants of those countries. What were your thoughts of those local inhabitants?

GODFREY: Well I'll start with Bosnia. Bosnia they had just come out of a brutal civil war and the locals there seemed very appreciative that the Americans were there. They were glad to have us there. It seemed like they were glad to have us there. The UN was there as well, the United Nations, and they were glad to have some type of peacekeeping force that would prevent a revert back to civil war. So, they seemed very appreciative and thankful of our presence. In Iraq, I can't

say the same thing. Population was very divided. I would say the majority, especially by my last deployment, it seemed like they were ready for us to leave. There were some portions of the population that were appreciative of us being there, didn't want us to leave, because they need . . . While we were there, we provided a sense of stability and that stability would probably leave when American forces left. Certainly that was the feeling of my last deployment there, which was in 2010.

EDDINS: Comparing Bosnia to Iraq, what do you think the inhabitants' concepts of the United States was at the time you were there?

GODFREY: Bosnia, very positive. They're western even though they're part of Eastern Europe. They're more westernized in terms of how the rest of Europe operates and how western nations function. Whereas Iraq, being an Islamic nation, I can't . . . We've always had a positive image in the Middle East in general, so there's definitely some hostility towards American troops over there. Certainly at the time, probably still is.

EDDINS: You mentioned how your deployment affected your family life at home, can you go more into depth of how that affected you specifically being in the military?

GODFREY: Well, you're gone. Particularly with your kids, you're missing significant parts of their life. They're growing. Kids grow so fast and they grow so rapidly so, when you miss a piece of their life, it's gone, you're not gonna get that back. So, that was particularly tough to deal with. Certainly the spouse being at home, spouses have to shoulder the load, they're being mom and dad whether they're male or female, they're being mom or dad. They're filling roles that you normally fill when you're there and you're not there so, it's tough relationship wise and then stability of the family wise.

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

GODFREY: I would say helping other nations, the impact that we have from the missions that we do, and then I would say, most importantly, the people you deploy with. The camaraderie you build with those people in accomplishment of a mission.

EDDINS: We all know it's tough for veterans to come back from deployment and come back to civilian life, can you elaborate what it was like transitioning back into the civilian world?

GODFREY: My transition to civilian life was more gradual because I did do . . . I think I was in the military 23 years total. So, I had time to plan. All branches put considerable effort into—at least they do nowadays—and to transitioning at the end of your career. I don't think I had it as rough as maybe someone that was in the guard or reserve. They were civilian and did a year combat tour and then came back and had some adjustment issues. I think I had a pretty smooth transition. I had time to plan. I'm still actually in my . . . I've only been retired for not even a year, maybe ten months. Me being here at ASU is part of my transition. I'm transitioning to a new career field in nursing. So, I'm still undergoing the transition but it's been enjoyable. I've got a good support network, even here on campus, the Vet Center here, we support each other but the VA here in town, the Veteran's Administration, has been pretty supportive. I've got a

good family support network so I would have to say my transition personally has actually been pretty good.

EDDINS: Before coming to Texas, what were your thoughts of Texas in general?

GODFREY: I came to Texas pretty early. I came here for intel training in 1996, so even my first time coming here was a positive experience. Here I am, 20 years later. I'm back here. And I'm back here because of my wife. By the way, she's from Coleman, Texas. That's ultimately why I settled here but I really didn't know what to expect. I had an open mind because I was a military brat and I was accustomed to living different places and different states, so I had a pretty open mind. But when I did come here in '96, into San Angelo, I had a positive experience. I enjoyed San Angelo very much. I made a lot of friends here. I enjoyed traveling to the bigger cities of Texas like Dallas, Austin, San Antonio. So, I've always had a positive image of Texas.

EDDINS: What would you say your favorite aspect of Texas would be?

GODFREY: I guess I appreciate the wide-open spaces and the landscape, especially in West Texas. It's not a crowded area. If you want to get close to nature, I'd say this is probably the place to do it because it's wide open. There's large portions that are not developed. So, I would say that's probably my favorite aspect. No tax helps, too.

EDDINS: Looking back on your time in the military how do you feel about it?

GODFREY: I have a very positive experience. Over 23 years I had a great career, start to finish. A lot of great experiences. I don't think I would have changed anything about it.

EDDINS: I'll be joining in a year. Do you have any advice for me or any other young men or women who might be considering joining the military?

GODFREY: I would say, first and foremost understand the political ramifications of what you're getting yourself into. I don't mean that in a bad way but, from your presidential politics to congressional politics to world politics, what's going on in the world and some of the conflicts that you may be involved in and also that our leadership may involve us in. I would just understand that and keep an eye on what's going on in the world because you'll be involved in it faster than you may realize. The other thing I would tell you is, be adaptable and be ready for change, rapid change. It's happening at light speed in all facets. I'll give you an example. The way we fight warfare now is a lot different than the way we fought 20 years ago. When I came in, we were still in a Cold War US versus Russia-type mindset even though the wall had just come down a few years earlier. The military was still geared to fight that. Now, we're geared to fight asymmetrical battles as well as symmetrical battles but also cyber and space are a big part of our warfare doctrine, which 20 years ago, unless you were on the edge of forthinking, that was an unheard of thing. Military has also changed a lot in terms of culture and still changing. When I came in, if you were of a different sexual orientation, like you were homosexual or transition, you could not openly serve in the military. As a matter of fact, the year I came in, in 1993 was the year that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was adopted. And then, in 2010, literally overnight, like a light switch, there was repeal and it change. I think this year or the next—I don't keep up as

much as I did—but I think transgender troops are allowed too. Not that any of that is good or bad but it's just changed the nature of who we are as the military. Even women . . . When I came in, women were just being allowed to perform combat flying jobs and that was a big deal. Whereas over the past 20 years, not only have they deployed to combat and performed in combat, now in 2016 they can . . . I think every job in the military is open to them. To include being Special Forces and SEALs. So, the culture of the military has changed in just that 20-year period, as well as the way we fight. So, my advice to you is be very adaptable and embrace change because it's coming. It's going to come fast, whether you like it or not. You don't wanna be a dinosaur stuck in your thinking cause you're gonna get rolled over very quickly. Be adaptable, be ready for change.

EDDINS: Thank you for sharing. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your service or anything about Texas that's on your mind?

GODFREY: No. I love Texas. I enjoyed my career. I'm looking forward to my new life and career here in Texas.