

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

CARL McCOY

An interview conducted on

October 26, 2016

Interviewer: Hannah Jordan

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 Carl McCoy are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 26, 2016.

This interview was conducted as a course assignment for a class in the Department of History at Angelo State University in collaboration with the *War Stories* Project.

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The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

JORDAN: This is Hannah Jordan and this is my West Texas *War Stories* Interview. Okay . . . so, we'll start by giving your name, where you were born, and where did you grow up.

McCOY: My name is Carl Allen McCoy. I was born in Amarillo, Texas and I grew up in the Northwest Panhandle, uh, around Fritch and Wheeler, Texas.

JORDAN: How do you define West Texas and where does it begin?

McCOY: For me, San Angelo, west. I've been all over El Paso, Big Spring, uh, Cochran County on the New Mexico line, North Texas. So, that's West Texas for me; about San Angelo, west.

JORDAN: What do you think the difference is between West Texans and Texans from other regions of the state?

McCOY: Liberalism. We have a lot of people moving in here from uh California and other liberal states, specifically, to the major metropolitan areas like Houston, Dallas, uh, Austin. That's why they say "keep it weird" when you go to Austin because you never know what you're going to run into down there. Uh, those people are just not West Texas people. They're a totally different breed that have come in here and populated. And that's fine; we're in free America, but . . . it is what it is.

JORDAN: How would you characterize West Texans' relationship to the military?

McCOY: For the most part, all of the ones that I know—my friends, what not that I went to school with, graduated with—um, we're kind of a select breed. And not saying anything about any other region in Texas. There . . . there's some good guys there also. But what I found is the majority of West Texans are about the military, our country, where it's headed, what we can do to fix problems and take care of business.

JORDAN: When and where did you enter in the armed forces and what branch did you serve?

McCOY: Um initially, I served in the United States Marine Corps from 1989 to 1996, and then I had a break in service. And then, while I was going to college after that, I served in the Oklahoma Army National Guard for two years, um, in an infantry unit. And then I had another break in service while I was in law enforcement full-time, while I had graduated from college in Kansas, and that's what brought me back to Texas to Fort Hood, where I served in the United States Army, active duty.

JORDAN: During your first years of service, were you primarily in the enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, a warrant officer?

McCOY: Enlisted, non-commissioned officer.

JORDAN: In which military conflict did you take part in?

McCOY: The Iraq War, Operation Iraqi Freedom.

JORDAN: Why did you enlist in the armed forces and what motivated you to do so?

McCOY: Initially, um . . . my dad, my uncles, my grandfathers, they all served in previous wars. So, I felt like that needed to be my duty, number one. Number two, I didn't have any problem with the educational benefits because that's how I wound up getting my degree, was uh the military paid for it. So . . .

JORDAN: What was your training like?

McCOY: Um, it varied depending on which branch I was in. Um, initially, Marine Corps boot camp is not really a party, so it was tough. But, I was kind of a tough individual, had my mind made up. This is what I wanted to do, so I was gung ho marine. And after that, that just kind of played into everything else that I did. So, um, I played football in high school, did a lot of tough activities and this, that, and the other. So, the physical part of it wasn't that much of a problem. The mental part of it . . . I hadn't been really used to the exact extremes that things used to go to when they . . . when uh you were in the military because this—mind you, this was twenty uh . . . twenty-six years ago, and so the training has changed now compared to what it was then. Um, back when I was in, we considered ourselves the old-school Marine Corps—or Army when it was tough; I mean, really tough. And you were cut no slack, so it . . . you know, like I said, it's changed a little bit, but it was great . . . great training.

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

McCOY: Um, some of my best friends—of course I'm a white uh . . . a white male—some of my best friends were black. Some of them were, uh, Mexican or Hispanic. Um had Asian friends, this, that, the other. And then on the flip side of that coin, I had some black, Asian, Mexican uh people that I served with that we just really didn't get along, so we . . . we fought, and that's just what we do.

JORDAN: Did you find your service challenging?

McCOY: It was, because any given day, there was no guarantee what you were going to be doing. There was no normalcy to anything um because when you're in the military, things change. Um, also the . . . the tempo, the new training that's coming out, this and that . . . it was constantly a new progression of learning and adaptation.

JORDAN: What conception did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment, and what did America symbolize to you?

McCOY: I loved it other than Bill Clinton was in office. Um, I did not respect him as commander-in-chief. Um I'm a . . . I'm a big fan of Eisenhower, Truman, uh, Kennedy, all the presidents that had served in the military before. Because I was like, "How can you lead a military if you've never served in it at all?" Um, you do not have that understanding of the boots on the ground, the guys. So, I was a big fan of those guys, all the way back to Roosevelt and what not. So, uh for me, serving under Bill Clinton . . . and initially, the things that he did in the

first, uh, initial enlistment that I had in the Marine Corps, I had to just kind of take it for a grain of salt and go, “Well, this guy really knows . . . does not know what he’s talking about or what he’s doing, but my job is this. And I’ve signed up. I’m under a contract. I’m under oath, and I’m going to fulfill what was asked of me.” So, that’s what I did.

JORDAN: Were you ever deployed overseas? And if so, what did you understand about the mission you were being asked to complete?

McCOY: Um, initially, yes. Um I was deployed overseas in Iraq—Operation Iraqi Freedom—from March of ’03 to April of ’04. And the mission was fairly clear-cut because we were the invasion force—part of the invasion force—going into Iraq to take that country. Um, as far as the mission, we had no idea how it was going to turn out. As it happened, uh . . . you know, past is the past. We wound up taking it . . . um, this and that, but the complications that we had when we were over there were astronomical. It was just constant dynamics uh on a daily basis, and so, uh the mission . . . I really can’t define it because it changed every day. Um I did . . . I was an ammunition explosives guy, so even though I was technically not, like, infantry, I was out with the infantry. I was out with the military police. I was out with intelligence. I was out with special forces. I was out with guys that, you know, that was their job to go kick doors. And I went from what I thought my mission was going to be in this war to, now, I’m out here with a bunch of door-kickers, raiding houses and taking bad guys down. That’s just what we did. So . . .

JORDAN: What units did you serve in during your deployment?

McCOY: Um I initially started out with uh Fort Infantry Battalion out of Fort Hood, Texas, 166 Task Force um comprised of infantry, uh artillery, tanks. We had our own intelligence. We had our own information guys, military intelligence information. We had uh our own special forces detachment. We had just various groups of guys that they threw into this task force and made us a big ball, and said, “Go out here, find Saddam Hussein, catch him, kill him. Do whatever you got to do, but that’s your mission.” This was after the actual invasion kicked off. Um, I spent time from Kuwait, leaving the line of departure to Iraq. I saw Kuwait, the southern part of Iraq, all the way to the northernmost city, which was Mosul, Iraq. While I was up there, I spent uh about a month and a half on a detachment to the 101st Airborne, supporting them. Uh, we also supported the Marine Corps a little bit in between that with our tank battalions and what not, going through the cities, um, taking those. And then I wound up moving back down to the middle part of Iraq, which was Samarra . . . was the name of the town, uh about forty miles south of Tikrit, where Saddam Hussein was born, actually. Um, just saw the whole country, basically, from top to bottom.

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

McCOY: Yes.

JORDAN: Were you ever wounded in action?

McCOY: Not particularly wounded in action, but I had some events happen during combat. I had a tank round dropped on me one time; tore my uh rotator cuff in my shoulder, crushed a disk in

my back. Um got some problems with my knees just from humping heavy loads and what not. So, I didn't get shot directly by the enemy, but yeah, I got wounded.

JORDAN: Did you ever become a prisoner of war?

McCOY: No.

JORDAN: What did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered?

McCOY: Um . . . sneak thieves . . . sneak thieves, liars. I'm not a big fan of the Islamic relation or religion. Um they will say one thing, and tomorrow, they'll adapt a new idea and use it against you to try and kill you or any of your other people. Um there was none of them that I trusted at all. And nine times out of ten, the ones that our upper chain of command said, "These guys can be trusted. They're going to be the mediators. They're going to do this, they're going to do that" and what not, they turned on us. So, I have no respect for any of them.

JORDAN: When you interacted with them, what did you think their conceptions of the U.S. were, and did you ever engage them in conversation about what America meant to you?

McCOY: Mm . . . maybe a few times. There were some of them, "We love America. We this and that." And then they were the ones that we caught a week later, um—and I . . . it's kind of hard . . . this is kind of a hard term, but—pacing off distances between buildings so they could get the . . . the proper coordinates to shoot artillery and mortars on our camp. So, no . . .

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

McCOY: Oh, uh . . . well, my son was born a few months before I left. My daughters were three and four . . . or five. Um . . . my wife didn't really have . . . the proper skills to cope with me, like, leaving for a year to go fight a war. She had some issues with the kids. Um of course, I can't deal with that; all I'm doing is talking to her on a uh about five-minute phone call every maybe two weeks or three weeks. Um, so it was very hard to communicate with my family and keep them on track. She had to make some choices that, probably, I wouldn't have made, but I wasn't in her shoes. Um my girls, they . . . even being three and five, they didn't understand um really what was going on. They just knew daddy was gone. So, with that said, um coming back was the challenge, to get them straight and to get them back on track, and explain to them what just happened.

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

McCOY: Say it again?

JORDAN: What were your most vivid memories of your time in service?

McCOY: . . . I'll leave it at this: um . . . some of the best times of my life . . . and some of the worst times of my life. Uh those of us that made it back . . . I still have a life long bond with them. But then, there's those that didn't.

JORDAN: What sorts of technology did you use in service?

McCOY: We had . . . we were the first um so-called “digital division.” Uh we used what was called FBCB2¹. It’s all changed now because it’s been upgraded, but we trained extensively on that. And when I was in my humvee out in the middle of the desert, I could see every vehicle of our unit on . . . on a map on this computer screen, and I could see every enemy element on the screen and where they were located. Um we were able to text amongst ourselves, so we weren’t breaking uh radio silence or communications. Um we could text on that. It was kind of like a . . . the best way I can describe it to you is like a tablet that you have now, or your cell phone. We had that back then, only it was a bigger mediator system that had to be mounted in a vehicle. Um you could call in airstrikes, artillery strikes, this and that, off of that system by just a touch of a button. And so, we had some pretty super technology um back then compared to what we got now with these super phones, and tablets, and all that stuff. I mean, it’s everyday now. Well, that was like blowing us away because we weren’t the computer or phone generation. I didn’t have a cell phone until two thousand and, like, one or two, and it was a flip phone that did nothing but just call people and I answered calls. So, to have something like that was just un . . . yeah, mind-blowing.

JORDAN: Did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life? And if yes, what were they?

McCOY: The main one that I had was, number one, my family. But number two, um I knew I was going to be getting out when I got home and so, I had to find a job. I had to have a place to live, had to this, had to that. It was tough.

JORDAN: Did being from or being in Texas shape your years in service in anyway?

McCOY: It did um because we’re just . . . we’re kind of rough people as it is. Well, I think of West Texans of being a little more tougher people than the normal, average what not because of the things we do with farming and agriculture, and working and what not. And I mean, this is just my opinion and my mind. Um like I said, I ran across all walks of life in the military, from New York to California, to this, to that. And those guys just had a totally different concept of . . . of mentality, of what the mission was. And it was like . . . it was kind of like, “Well, this is going to get kind of hard. I don’t know if we can do this.” And us Texas boys were over here, “Shut the hell up. Let’s go do this,” you know. “This is nothing new. This is just another day.” So, I guess maybe if that answers it, yeah, that was . . .

JORDAN: After your time in the military, did your conception of Texas change at all?

McCOY: No, no.

JORDAN: What about the U.S.?

¹ Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below

McCOY: Yeah . . . um, as far as our country is now, . . . and I guess it began, you know, possibly as far back as Clinton—Bill Clinton’s term—when I started in the military, and the way that the country is headed, the United States, we have become weak as a nation, and we are inviting terrorism. We are inviting an attack. And I’m afraid that 9/11 is probably going to—if we don’t change the way we’re headed—9/11 is going to be a drop in the bucket compared to what we’re fixing to face. We have threats in North Korea. We have threats in Iran. We have threats in Russia; we have threats all over the place. These terrorists are running buck wild over in the Middle East. And I’m not saying we need to gear up and just go back to war, but we need to do something about it, and what’s being done isn’t handling the problem.

JORDAN: How do you feel about your military service looking back on it now?

McCOY: Wouldn’t trade it for nothing . . . I’d do it again and still be doing it if I could physically do it.

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

McCOY: Keep your head up, keep the spirit. Things are going to get better.

JORDAN: Do you have any items, objects you would like to share with the project? Like pictures or anything? I mean, you don’t have to, but . . .

McCOY: Yeah.

JORDAN: But I could take up there, and they can get a copy of . . .

McCOY: If you have . . . if you can take pictures, yeah, we can go grab that deal. I’ll give you some pictures.

JORDAN: Okay, awesome.

McCOY: Yeah, and I’m also going to give you something else. It’s a surprise, but that’s at the end.

JORDAN: Okay, and last question: would you like to share anything else about your service?

McCOY: I think that’s about it. I just . . . I was glad to be able to go and do what I did.