

**Oral Memoirs**  
**of**  
**Dr. William “Bill” Blank**

An Interview Conducted by

Gabrielle Hanke

November 21, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

*University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Gabrielle Hanke

Transcriber: Gabrielle Hanke

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Gabrielle Hanke was an undergraduate anthropology and history double major at the University of Central Florida.

Dr. William "Bill" Blank served in the U.S. Army from 1971 until 1974. He reached the rank of Specialist 4.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Dr. William "Bill" Blank is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 28, 2014.

## **Abstract**

An oral history of Dr. William "Bill" Blank, who served in the United States Army from 1971 until 1974. Dr. Blank ultimately reached the rank of Specialist 4 and was stationed in Mannheim, Germany. Now Director of Career Development at the University of Central Florida, Dr. Blank discusses his experiences during and after his military service. Some of the topics include the Yom Kippur War and the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, benefits of being in the military, personal experiences in Europe, the evolution of the military and public opinion of veterans, working with international students, and opinions of the military today

and modern conflicts.

## **Dr. William “Bill” Blank**

Oral History Memoir  
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Gabrielle Hanke  
November 21, 2014  
Orlando, Florida

00:00:01

### **Introduction**

**Hanke** Okay. Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 2014. My name is Gabrielle Hanke and I am here interviewing Dr. William [“Bill”] Blank. He served in the Army from 1971 until 1974. He ultimately reached the rank of Specialist 4 and was stationed in Mannheim, [Baden-Württemberg,] Germany. I am interviewing him as part of the University of Central Florida’s [Community] Veterans History Project and this interview is being conducted in Orlando, Florida.

Alright. So let’s start off with your early years.

00:00:32

### **Entering the Military**

**Blank** Okay. Um, well as with most military vets, I would guess they would say a couple of words that might define their experience would be “conflict” and “adventure.” I think, you know, traditionally, that the military definitely offered both of those, and when I think of the conflict, I actually think of conflict here at home rather than abroad. Um, that was a – a pretty tumultuous time, um, in our society regarding world events, world affairs, and the military’s involvement in those events, um, specifically looking at the Vietnam War. And uh – it – it really began after I had already begun college.

I was a – a college student. I’d been going to school for several months and, uh, back in 1971. In the fall of 1971, they had the lottery, and it’s not like you think of the lottery today where you can win a million dollars, but rather, the lottery was determining who was going to be getting a draft notice. And, uh, my number happened to be 31. And up until about 100, those individuals could be expecting to get a draft notice. And so, uh, we – we had a – an opportunity – I guess I’m going to call it, uh – if you knew you that you were going to be getting a draft notice, you had several months typically to enlist as a – a prelude to getting that draft

notice or – or in lieu of getting that draft notice. What were the advantages of that? One was that we – we had – we were actually kind of transitioning into what they called the “all-volunteer Army,” which began a year later. So this was really a year to sort of field test some of the constructs of that all-volunteer Army. And by enlisting prior to getting the draft notice, we were able to go in under something they called the “buddy system.”

And so my best friend from high school – who was coincidentally my college roommate – who also had a very low number for that lottery, we decided together to go ahead and enlist in the Army and that would give us the opportunity of going in under the buddy system. And what that really meant is that we were able to go through basic training together. And if you can imagine a couple of kids from a small industrial town, uh, in North Central Wisconsin, who had not previously ventured far from their backyard, were going to be going somewhere around the world, um, experiencing this major adventure. And so by at least starting off by having that kind of security blanket, that – that familiar face going through basic was really important and, um – and it actually meant a lot, I think, to many people, um, who had that opportunity.

00:03:32

### **Training and Assignment**

**Blank**

So we went in, we volunteered, uh – enlisted. Uh, we – we went to basic training together. And then the second benefit of enlisting rather than actually getting the draft notice was we had the ability to have input in terms of what we would be doing in the military. And since I had taken electronics classes in high school, uh, they had determined to send me to a – a communications technician program – electronics training basically – which worked well for me.

And then the third benefit of enlisting was that – although it was not a guarantee – it – it really came down to the demand of the military at that time, but, um, you could at least give preferences for where you wanted to be stationed. um, and one of mine was to – to be able to go to Germany and, uh – actually, when we finished our training, I – I started off with orders for Vietnam, but because they were starting to pull back on the numbers of people they were sending to Vietnam, uh – they backed down on the Vietnam, uh, orders and transitioned them to Germany, and so I did get to go to Germany for three years. So I thought that was going to be a pretty positive experience for me.

00:04:59

### **Feelings on the Vietnam War**

**Blank**

And – and, um, to – to maybe give just a little bit more background, it was – it was a really difficult time actually, um, for young men primarily – although there were some women that were also going in – but men were the ones that were getting drafted, because of the societal views on the Vietnam War.

It was not a righteous war. Um, America had not been threatened. Our interests abroad had not been threatened. And so for many people in the country, um, there was resistance to the war and – and that was especially evident, um, on college campuses. Uh, having been a college student, you know, we all – we all had kind of a common perception of the war and, um, and that probably peaked in 1970, when at Kent State [University], the [Ohio] National Guard killed – I believe it was four or five students and then many others were injured as well, when the Ohio National Guard opened up on – on a group of protesters at that institution.

Um, and so, going into the military, going from student to – to soldier literally in a couple of short months created, I guess, a great deal of, um, cognitive dissonance, or at least it made me really question my values and philosophies about living and learning versus, um, you know, doing my duty and, um, you know, agreeing to uh, protect, and pr – um, protect society, uh, which – which was something that, um – in my family, you know – it was pretty conservative. That was kind of a – a passed down value, um, or – or philosophy, I guess, on life.

You do what you're told to do by the authorities and – and you do it gladly. And uh, my grandfather had been in World War I and I – I remembered talking to him frequently and seeing all of his photographs. And so there was kind of that sense that, um, I need to pick up the torch in my family system and – and do my job for the military. So, two – two conflicting, um, life views really. Um – and – and I was not alone. That was pretty common I think for many young people at that time.

00:07:17

### **First experience in Germany**

**Blank**

But nevertheless, I ended up going to Germany. And, um, one of my very first experiences in Germany, ironically, was being the point person, um, in a riot squad. When you think of a riot squad as a “V” and – and they ask for somebody, or they told somebody, “You’re going to be the point

person.” And that was developed because of some of the international protests to the Vietnam War. Uh, [President Richard Milhous] Nixon had been doing quite a lot of carpet-bombing, where he would just saturate the country with explosives and – and so European students were protesting, as well. So I’m a student one day and a few months later, I’m actually wearing a uniform with an M-16, with a bayonet on it, and I’m the point person with students from Germany, um, attempting to infiltrate our base or – or surge our fences – and – and that put me in a really awkward position as well. Fortunately, um, nothing happened to the extent that we had to make contact with them, um, but – but nevertheless, it – it really made me question what I was doing and – and whether or not it was a valid, um, experience. Uh, so – so that was my introduction to Germany.

00:08:41

### **1972 Summer Olympics**

**Blank**

And then, um, just about a year later, I was actually going to teletype school, which was just outside of Munich[, Bavaria, Germany] in a small town called Bad Tölz [, Bavaria, Germany]. Teletype was sort of the prelude or the precursor to, um, e-mail. And, uh, just a – a few weeks into that training, uh, there was an attack at Olympic Village.<sup>1</sup> the – the 1972 Summer Olympics were going in Munich, by, um, a group of, um – uh, I guess for a lack of a better word, I would call them “terrorists” – the Black September [Organization] group – the – they were known as, attacked Israeli athletes and ended up – they kidnapped them initially in exchange for, um, over 200 prisoners that were in Israeli jails, uh – Arab prisoners. And, um, when Israel did not negotiate with them, they – they actually ended up killing all of the athletes, along with a German police officer. And, being in Munich at that time, all of the American soldiers were put on alert and, um, it was a pretty tense few days not knowing if that terror would – would, um, transition into some of the American facilities. Um, Mark Spitz was a – a – like a five – I think he won five golds that year for swimming. Uh, they – they rushed him out of Germany and – and flew him back to the United States being a – a Jewish athlete. So again, political, um, unrest and violence across the world, um, was starting to really boil. I think that was probably a, uh, maybe a – an omen of what was to come for America up the road, um, with the Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> Munich Massacre.



00:10:28

### **The Yom Kippur War**

**Blank**

And – and we got through it and things seemed to settle down a bit and then, literally a year later, um, my armor unit, we had about 30 to 40 tanks in – in the unit that I was stationed with in Germany, um – 80-ton tanks – 60-ton tanks, I guess they were. And each year, we would go up to Northern Germany to qualify those tank crews on the firing ranges. And in 1973 – in the fall of '73 – we were up there doing just that, when, um, a number of Arab countries, um, attacked Israel, um, and – and that that was led, um, primarily by, um, let me see. I need to – to – to kind of just refresh my memory. The coalition of Arab states<sup>2</sup> was led by Syria. Egypt and Syria were the two countries that were really kind of spearheading that attack. Um, they were trying to win back, uh, land that was lost years earlier in the Three Day War. This was called the Yom Kippur Wer[sic] – Wer[sic] – War, because it was occurring during that holiday – that Jewish holiday<sup>3</sup> – um, and also the Arab<sup>4</sup> holiday of Ramadan. And so, um, it was kind of ironic that we're celebrating these two religious holidays, and in the midst of them, they – they create another war.

At any rate, um, literally overnight, all of our tanks were, um, repainted in desert camouflage to – to make us ready to, um, be transported to the Middle East to intervene. Both Russia and the U.S., uh, really mustered their forces in terms of supplies and armament to their respective allies in the Middle East. And – and – and we came this close to, um, a world war with Russia at this point – the two superpowers colliding. Um, fortunately after three weeks, a – a ceasefire though occurred and, uh, that was, uh, the beginning of, um, a series of peace talks that helped to create a little bit more harmony in the Middle East.

00:12:42

### **Personal benefits of being in the Military**

**Blank**

Uh, so at any rate, I – I had a number of conflicts that were right on the edge of reality, in terms of drawing my unit into all of them. And so, probably not unlike with most soldiers, there's always that, um, impending war or that impending, um, "police action" – as Vietnam and Korea were called – uh, on the cusp of – of every morning.

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<sup>2</sup> The coalition also included Iraq, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, as well as Cuba.

<sup>3</sup> Yom Kippur.

<sup>4</sup> Correction: Muslim holiday.

Um, but—but in spite of all of that, I would say that I—I got a great deal out of the experience that I had in the military. I think when—when I look at, um, what that did for me, in terms of just the confidence and the self-responsibility, um, just the—the, um, I—I think ability to—to live my life more independently and autonomously. Um, the military was truly responsible for that. I think, in addition to that, there were relationships that were forged while in the military that were like no other relationships since, in terms of being very authentic and—and really, um, having that sense of cohesion that common bond or shared reality with other soldiers. Um, those relationships really truly turned out to be lifelong relationships.

00:14:06

### **Post-Military experiences**

**Blank**

And then, in addition to, um, being able to benefit from the GI Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944], as a first generation college student, I was able to—to get my education—undergraduate and graduate education—um, at least partially funded by the military. um, gave me the opportunity to really get back to the, uh, goal of—of living and learning life, helping other people, uh, develop academically as a—an educational counselor and—and educational teacher. I think ultimately, all of that cumulatively allowed me to give back to the military in that, after getting my—my graduate degree in counseling, I was able to, um, develop a course for chronically unemployed Vietnam vet[eran]s, and—and, um, administer that six-week course throughout the state of Wisconsin, resulting in a national award with an over 80 percent placement rate at the end of that year for—for these, uh, participants.

And then, beyond that at other institutions, um, at Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne[, Wyoming], I—I taught ongoing workshops for military, who are retiring after 20 or 30 years, to help them more easily transition into civilian life and the civilian workforce. And then even here at—at UCF [University of Central Florida], I have the opportunity to work closely with veterans.

When we had the war with Iraq, and many of our UCF students were called out who were National Guard or Reservists, I actually created a—a long distance career counseling service for those veterans and extended it to all of their cohorts. um, and—and helped them to really, um, evaluate their life experiences in—in the face of being a warrior and how that was

influencing changing career goals and helping them to adjust their academic programs, and then also to help assist them with the transition once they came back to college. Um, so, and – and then more recently, with the – the veterans academic resource grant that we got, I’m one of the committee members for that grant, and I’ve been able to really help infuse some professional development programming for veterans with job fairs and things of that nature.

So ultimately, you know, I – I can go back 40 years and I can see how the military really shaped me and – and how that military thread has consistently woven through my life, um, to, you know, my – my early 60s, where I am now, and – and how that’s been such a – a, I guess a pivotal experience in my life. It shaped me truly more than any other experience I’ve had thus far. So, that’s – that’s the summary of my story and, um, I stand by it.

00:17:13

**Preparation and thought process in the Army**

**Hanke**

Well, that was very good. Um, if we could go into some more details such as, uh, how were you trained during this time of there was conflict, but then there wasn’t almost. Like, it was a very iffy time. Could you tell me a little more about that?

**Blank**

Well, I – I think with – with anyone in the military at any time, you’re – you’re on constant alert and you’re involved in continuous training and we were always prepared for the worst. Um, we were ready to be mobilized as with, uh, the war, uh, in the Middle East. Literally in a few days, our entire, uh, battalion would be ready to transition over to the Middle East from Germany. Um, constant training. And I think, uh, there was also, um, quite a lot of educational programming, um, helping us to – I – I think, understand where we fit with all of the world events that were going on. Um, I don’t think we were discouraged from challenging ideas and beliefs, but I think because we were the military, there was always that, um, underlying focus on it’s our job to – to go in the event that we’re called out and do what we’ve been trained to do. It was our duty – our responsibility. So no matter where one might have been, um, in terms of their political ideologies, they were ready to do their job. And I am absolutely confident that – that we all would have done what we would have been asked to do as – as were soldiers in every war before ours.

00:18:52

### **Personal time in Germany**

**Hanke** Okay. And then, um, I know there was, um, the issue of the Warsaw Pact<sup>5</sup> coming around. Um, what was it like uh – I mean like the air? The aura almost of being in Germany – being so close?

**Blank** Well I – I did, because I was in Germany and – and because I so much enjoy and appreciate history, I did spend a – a great deal of my personal time while there learning about the history of, um, all of the events of World War II and how Europe had transformed as a result of the war.

And then with the Berlin Wall going up around, um, the time of my birth, uh, it was interesting to learn more about that and – and experience what it was like behind the Curtain – the Iron Curtain. And while I was there, I spent all of my – my vacation time, uh, travelling throughout Europe, um, going actually to Southern Europe to, um, the – the Third Reich headquarters, um, and Bavaria[, Germany], and seeing some of the – the facilities – the Eagle's Nest<sup>6</sup> that [Martin] Bormann had built for [Adolf] Hitler.

And, um, and then also going to some of the countries that had been, um, uh, freed as a result of American intervention in the war. Um, France, and going up to Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, seeing where the Battle of the Bulge occurred in Bastogne[, Belgium]. Um, and talking to people up there and actually living with a German family for the three years. I was there and hearing their stories. They were terrified of the Nazis,<sup>7</sup> I think, as any European may have been at that time. Um, it – it was really interesting to get that personal perspective from people and – and talk to people who had actually been there during those wars – during that war – and, uh, hearing their, um, personal life histories.

00:20:58

### **Destruction of the Berlin Wall**

**Hanke** Yeah. That's very interesting. And then, um, let's see. How did you feel – I know you weren't there at the time – but when the Berlin Wall finally came down?

**Blank** Um, it – it was amazing to me. and – and I – I guess what – what I guess the personal connection for me – it went up the year I was born and it

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<sup>5</sup> Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance.

<sup>6</sup> Kehlsteinhaus.

<sup>7</sup> National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP).

was torn down the year my sons were born.<sup>8</sup> And – and so I look at, within that lifetime, what a dramatic change. And that was certainly an indication of, uh, what was to come with some of the, um, eastern countries, and now the Middle Eastern countries as well, um, as far as that goes – in terms of democracy and in terms of people having freedom of choice.

So when I thought about that, it helped to legitimize my involvement during the Vietnam period, again which was pretty tumultuous, um, politically- and society-wise, um, especially as a – an 18 year old not very knowledgeable about much in life at that point. Um, every experience I had, uh, was sort of a first time exposure for me. I didn't have the – I guess the cognitive ability to – to maybe put it all in perspective early on, it really evolved over time.

00:22:17

#### **Evolution of the Military and public opinion of veterans**

**Hanke** And then, um – how do you feel? Has the military changed in its attitudes? As you were saying, um, your generation – you did your duty. Do you feel that that has carried over to this generation?

**Blank** It – it – it has, um, to my amazement and to my pleasure. I have seen amazing, amazing, changes. Colonel [Richard] Toliver talked about that even from, uh, pre-Vietnam era and World War II era – how things have changed. And I think for veterans, in particular – during the Vietnam era, we were either openly discriminated against, um, chastised, or we were politely tolerated at best, but we were never, never celebrated. I can honestly say that in 40 years, not one person ever even acknowledged my time in the service, much less thank me for it, until a couple years ago, um, here at UCF when – when the veterans' memorial was – was opened up, about two years ago, I guess it was.

And now, it's totally amazing, is that anytime people realize that – that I had been a veteran, if I have my – my flag on or if I go to a – a veteran program here, um, they all say "Bill, thank you for your service." I came into work on Veterans' Day and – and there was a – a card taped to my door and all my staff had signed it, uh, thanking me for my service. And that's like something I never ever would have expected to happen. I mean, you can't imagine, unless you lived through it, um, you know, returning war veterans being spit upon and – and criticized and – and

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<sup>8</sup> 1961.

yelled at – to – to being thanked. I mean, that is a true, positive transition. I think it speaks volumes about how the American military is viewed in this country, at least today. Um, I had an opportunity to go to the, um, the Marine officer training school in [Marine Corps Base] Quantico[, Triangle, Virginia], and, uh, it was amazing how – how they were so excited about the opportunity to – to put themselves in harm's way to protect their country. Um, a real different attitude, not just by society, but by soldiers as well.

**Hanke** Do you have an opinion on what caused this?

**Blank** Well, you know the concept of nationalism. During World War II, there was this wave of nationalism. We were attacked and we were going to defend our country. We were going to do what we needed to – to protect our families and our way of life. And, um, now again, with the attack on the World Trade Centers[sic] and – and the terrorist attacks coming from the Middle East, we have been threatened. And, um, our – our interests abroad have been threatened. Um, our – our homeland has been threatened and, indeed, attacked. And so, that's what it requires, I think, for that wave of nationalism to occur.

During Vietnam, again as – as I said earlier, none of that was threatened, and there were so many questions about why are we there, what we were doing. Um, are we causing more harm than good? And so, when – when the war's not a righteous war, you're not going to get that support. When the war is righteous, that support will be there. Hopefully, um, our s – our government, our politicians, you know, learn something from that and they – they won't be too eager to go to war un – unless there's just cause.

00:26:09

#### **Issues with government**

**Hanke** Yeah, and, um, speaking of politicians, I know it was around the Vietnam War where things were really – people were starting to question it and especially with Watergate [Scandal] – what do you remember of that?

**Blank** Yeah. Watergate actually happened when I was still in Germany, but I remember coming back and, um, you know – how that – that was the – I guess you could call it the – the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak for Nixon. Um, as early as the – the late 60s, he was – Nixon was – was being viewed as the person who was escalating the Vietnam War.

Um, I think already there was a – a tide of resistance about him and then Watergate pretty much cinched it for him.

Um, but it – it – it didn't help to sort of regain confidence in government. I think it helped to further, um, support the concept that the government doesn't always make good decisions and – and they're not always, um, principled and ethical people who are running government. And so I think for – for Vietnam era veterans, you know, it – it sort of justified the views that they may have held about government. And – and we were separating military from government. A lot of people in the military didn't necessarily support what heads of government – heads of state were – were doing and – and the kinds of decisions that they were making.

00:27:43

### **Homecoming**

**Hanke** And then, um, what was your homecoming like? Did people distinguish between you were in Vietnam or you were in Germany? Or did they...

**Blank** No. If you had a uniform on, you weren't seen in in a positive light. And so veterans quickly learned to not present themselves as returning veterans. Um, as soon as we got back, um, I can vividly recall my duffel bag with all my uniforms and gear went into a Goodwill bin. Um, the first thing I did was grow my hair out so I wouldn't look like a veteran. Um, I didn't want to be, um, targeted and – and truly they – they were. We were.

00:28:22

### **Family Feelings on Enlistment and War**

**Hanke** And, um, how did your family feel about you going into the military at this time and...

**Blank** They didn't really want me to, quite honestly. But again with – with the draft, there wasn't really an option. I – I think they were probably ambivalent about the war as well. and when literally every single night for a – at least a full hour on the national news, we were seeing clips of Vietnam with – with people's sons and husbands and fathers being killed left and right and in large numbers. Um, there – there wasn't a lot of support from family members for their sons to go into that situation.

00:29:07

**Feelings on Assignment**

**Hanke** So, now you said you were initially, um, listed as going to Vietnam, correct? How did...

**Blank** Right. Right.

**Hanke** How did you feel about that?

**Blank** I—I was concerned about it, but, you know, if—if that's where they needed me to be, uh—just like every other individual who went through basic training or advanced individual training, you went where they told you to go. The military was very effective at, um, kind of creating that—that cohesion and that common bond where you go and support your fellow veteran—your fellow, um, soldiers, rather.

00:29:47

**Relationships in the Army**

**Hanke** And then, um, you said uh, it was thr—through the military you made these very unique relationships. Do you still keep in contact with people?

**Blank** Um, not—not so much anymore at this point in in my life, um, but for the first decade or so after getting out, um, there—there was ongoing contact. Unfortunately, um, probably of the—the two or three people that I really bonded tightly with in my unit, uh, one of them was killed, um, in Germany, um, through—through an accident. And, uh, the other one relocated back to Pennsylvania, which was on the other side of the country as me. I was, um, in Wisconsin and then ultimately Colorado. So we—we sort of lost touch as well.

But, um, one of my coworkers picked up grandparents the other day from the airport, and took them to Lakeland, where her grandfather was reconnecting with a—a military cohort from his time during World War II. And she was sharing with me how rewarding it was when she saw them, um, connect, um, for the first time. and—and they embraced each other and literally, uh, began crying because, I—I think when—when you see those people after so many years, it's that whole flood of emotions that that come to the surface. Colonel [Richard] Toliver talked about that when he wrote his book,<sup>9</sup> um—how it's a bit difficult, because so many of the emotions from wartime resurface. But—but I think they can be positive emotions too. It's not just all negative memory. It's—it's the

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<sup>9</sup> *An Uncaged Eagle: True Freedom.*



relationships that were so crucial, I think, to that lifelong, I guess, association with the military.

**00:31:39**                    **Fun in the Army**

**Hanke**                    And, um, I know it was a very serious time, but what did you guys do for fun?

**Blank**                    Well, that's the, uh, the other side I talked about, you know, for everybody going in the military. It's conflict and adventure. And – and it's kind of a strange combination, because sometimes they may be one and the same. But, um, being in an armored unit, um, as an 18 year old kid and we have these 60-ton tanks, uh, it was pretty amazing to be able to play with them. We – we had some areas where we would practice, um, driving them. And – and Americans would discard cars in that area that they couldn't take back to the States, because they didn't have seatbelts, safety glass, all of that. So imagine a Volkswagen with – with 60-ton tanks driving over it, one after another. Um, those – that was the kind of activity that made it pretty exciting.

But then beyond what we did in the military, um, uh, you know, beyond when – when we'd go on maneuvers, I would be driving our operations major, scouting a place to camp out with – with you know 30 tanks and all the crews and support peoples. So I had a four-wheel drive Jeep and we'd – we would be going through the hillsides and having quite an adventure of it.

**00:33:00**                    **Travel experiences and relationship with host family**

**Blank**                    But, in addition to all of that, when I wasn't working, um, I traveled a lot. I got my international driver's license as soon as I could, bought a car, and every single weekend I was gone. I was visiting all parts of Western Europe. In a weekend, you could go just about anywhere, because Europe is such a small landmass. Took all my vacations over there. Um, my parents came over, um, for a couple weeks to – to visit, and we traveled all over Western Europe to – to help them experience it, as well.

Um, and then the German family I lived with, they – they sort of adopted me as a – a[sic] international, um, son – I guess for lack of a better term. And they – they took me everywhere with them when they would go off on weekends. They helped me to really experience the culture and the diversity of Germany and really learn to appreciate what Germany is

today. And I think as a result of that, um, you know, knowing what it felt like to be a stranger in a foreign land and then to have people befriend me and kind of help me. Whether it was, you know, teaching me how to, um—say “vergaser,” which is German for carburetor, which I needed to know when I went to the auto-mechanic to tell him I needed a—a “neu vergaser.” Um, to—to, you know, teaching me how they celebrated, um, the holidays and—and what Christmas meant to them, taking me to church with them on Christmas Eve. Uh, all of that was really eye opening.

**00:34:43 Working with international students**

**Blank** As a result of that, I became an international student mentor here, um, for our international students, where each year I take one on and, um, have that mentor-mentee relationship to help them adapt and adjust to the United States and to UCF, and just guide them through the everyday issues that—that one faces when—when one is in a foreign land.

**Hanke** That’s very good.

**00:35:12 Summary of international experience**

**Blank** So a lot of adventure, um, and—and again, I think it’s that combination of coming into adulthood and experiencing, um, all of those new challenges and—and adventures that, um, people in the military never ever, ever forget.

**00:35:32 Stand-out memories**

**Hanke** Is there, uh, any specific moments that stand out to you? That you can still see?

**Blank** Um, well, one time, when—when we were on a maneuver—in terms of a memorable experience—the German forests are pretty dense and—and pretty rugged still. They have wild boars which—which have large, razor-like teeth, and—and—and, um, horns, and they can be literally deadly, if you’re caught out in the open with them—if they do attack you. And I recall one night—this may seem a bit bizarre—but having to relieve myself, I left the safety of the 60-ton tank and walked out into the woods, and I heard something snorting. And it didn’t take me but about two and a half seconds to get back on top of that tank. And sure enough, a herd of

razorback came running by me, and, um, I felt fortunate I wasn't out there.

Um, and – and then – and then maybe, um, another time I – I guess I remember well – was actually a trip to Paris[, France] to do some sight-seeing. And – and I was able to really experience Paris and [the Palace of] Versailles and all the history, and – and I didn't fully appreciate what I was witness to until I got back to the States and began college. And I was in a world history class where the professor was talking about the French Revolution, and, um, Queen [Marie] Antoinette, and – and the guil – guillotines, and Versailles and – and all the other students had kind of a blank look on their face. And I'm thinking *Oh, yeah, I – I know that, I was actually there*. When he talked about the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, I was there.

Um, when they got into the World War II history and – and talked about some of the early meetings between, um, the different diplomats at, uh, the Eagle's Nest, or Hitler's tea house, I was there. Um, everything that was being discussed, I had actually been there in person and had experienced personally. Um, and so, it, I think it made me fully, at that point, understand what a treasure that was for me to have had that opportunity for travel and just seeing parts of the world unknown that I never would have been able to experience had I not been in the military.

00:37:13

### **Opinion of Entering Military Today**

**Hanke** So, what would you say to someone who is considering enlisting in the military today?

**Blank** It – it's a – it's a dangerous time to go in the military right now, uh, but I would never discourage it. Um, I actually teach a course – a graduate career counseling course – for, uh, graduate students who are preparing to go into school counseling. And every semester, I bring in, uh, representatives from the military to teach them about opportunities in the military, so that they at least are aware of them when they work with their high school students up the road. And – and I share with them, you know – it's a personal decision for individuals, but we need to be letting young people know this is an opportunity.

Um, war – war can certainly be dangerous, but there are so many benefits in the military and – and especially in terms of helping to, um, complete one's education. The military is so supportive of that financially and

otherwise. Um, and so, I wouldn't discourage anyone. um, it – it's awkward though, because I – I know there's a good chance today that people could absolutely be, um, in a combat situation and, um, knowing what can happen in combat it – it creates a bit of dissonance with me. But I – I regret that young people today don't have the same opportunity I did. They – they – young men, in particular – we – we needed that kind of safe haven to – to mature and develop.

At 18, most young men are not ready for college and they're not ready for life. And so to have that three year period where they – they have the protection of the military. Someone to feed and clothe and house you, but yet challenge you to mature and become responsible. I – I regret that young men don't have that today. I regret that my own sons, who are 25, have never had that experience.

Ironically, I've got a 29 year old, young man who works for me now – a new staff member – and, um, he's never ironed his shirt. And in the military, we learn to press and starch all of our uniforms to great precision. And, um, this is probably my experience of the year – for me this year. He brought his ironing board, his iron, and a can of starch along with a shirt and a pair of pants and he asked me to teach him how to iron based on my knowledge of how to do that from the military. We – we took pride in our appearance and we were called on it if we weren't attentive to it. And I – I try to encourage young men today to do the same. One – one of many, many, um, benefits or – or attributes to being in the military.

00:41:16

### **Opinion of Recent Wars**

**Hanke** Yeah. Um, uh, speaking of the recent conflicts in the Middle East, you said the conflicts that you experienced personally – you feel they were ominous almost?

**Blank** Absolutely.

**Hanke** So, um, how did you feel about first [Operation] Desert Storm<sup>10</sup> and then the recent [Iraq] War?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is only one Operation Desert Storm.

<sup>11</sup> Operation Iraqi Freedom.

**Blank** Supportive of it, because their sovereign country had been attacked – Kuwait had been attacked. And – and, uh, I – I – I think, as – as, I believe, every past veteran would have seen, that was a – a just action.

And, um, I think the difference though there versus in Vietnam, um – they put the full military behind it. In Vietnam, uh, there – there were so many restrictions about how that war was approached. And – and as a result of that, it went on. It actually started in in 1954 with [President Dwight David] Eisenhower, when – when he showed political and financial support for South Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Um, but then, as it continued, uh, into the 60s – with the advisors and over war, and then escalated numbers of U.S. soldiers going there, um, it was never looked at as, “Here’s a war. Let’s put the full force of the military behind it.” But it was rather a trickle of U.S. soldiers going, um, for an extended period of time, not getting the kind of support that that they needed to – to do it right. And – and I was proud – proud of – of the military for the way they handled the first Iraq War.

**Hanke** Now with, um, these most recent wars, they’ve been going on for quite a while.

**Blank** Yeah, the – the face of war has really changed. Starting with Vietnam, you didn’t know who your enemy was and – and same today with terrorism. But, because terrorism directly threatens the United States and all of us who live here, um, it has to be addressed. You know, I – I don’t see other options than to continue to be involved in in what we’re doing.

**Hanke** And then, um – I think you’ve answered almost everything. Um, so, is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

00:43:37

### **Admiration for evolution of Military and public opinion**

**Blank** Um, I – I think just my – my delight at how things have changed with the military. Um, when we – we saw, um – we hosted the film *Red Tails* in our office. The Tuskegee Airmen, and – and it was during [National] Veterans [Awareness] Week. Um, it was really amazing to see the pioneers for, um, bringing equality into the military, which, in my era, then continued with women coming into the military.

And then I think the second major thing that I’m really pleased to see is that not only has the military, um, really come to a point where they

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<sup>12</sup> Republic of Vietnam.

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honor diversity and recruit for diversity, but I think they – they also now are being valued more. All – all veterans of every war are being so much more highly valued than was ever the case, from my perspective. And that brings me great joy to – to just know, even after having waited four decades to – to see that, finally, you know, people are supportive. The – the general public is supportive of what the military is doing and – and honoring those past veterans as well.

**Hanke** We're good? Time is good? Okay. Alright. Well, that concludes the interview, and I would like to personally thank you for both your time and your service.

**Blank** You're welcome.

**Hanke** Thank you very much.

**Blank** Thank you.

*End of Interview*