

Specialist Monica Beltran
1173rd Transportation Company
Virginia Army National Guard
Operation Iraq Freedom, 2004-2006

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Background: On 23 October 2004 the 1173rd Transportation Company (Martinsville and Rocky Mount) was mobilized in support of Operation Iraq Freedom. The unit, consisting of 165 soldiers, contained a large number of members drawn from other units across the state used to bring it to wartime strength. Among these was Private First Class (promoted to Specialist in January 2005 prior to arriving in Iraq) Monica Beltran from Woodbridge, VA, who had been a member of the 1710th Transportation Company (Manassas and Bowling Green). She, along with a number of other 1710th soldiers, were called to active duty and incorporated into the 1173rd. Initially an M998 gun truck driver, once in Iraq she volunteered as a .50 caliber machine gunner situated in the turret of the truck. While serving in this capacity on 26 October 2005 she earned a Bronze Star Medal with "V" for Valor and a Purple Heart for a combat wound when her convoy came under a combined arms attack. Beltran laid down effective suppression fire allowing the vehicles to exit the area and regroup. While one soldier was killed and five others (besides Beltran) were wounded, without her undeterred and continuous fire many others may have been killed. Her wound to her left hand was relatively minor and she was soon returned to duty. She returned home with the unit in December 2005 and was released from active duty in January 2006. Two months later, in March 2006 she returned to the Martinsville Armory where she received the Bronze Star w/V she earned in Iraq. She remained in the Virginia Guard, again as a member of the 1710th Transportation Company, now station in the Dove Street Armory where this interview took place.

NOTE: She is the first female soldier in the history of the VA National Guard (Army or Air) to receive a combat award for valor and also the Purple Heart for a combat wound.

(Note: Beltran and SFC Thomas Camp both contributed photos of Beltran in OIF. Hard copies are in her folder in the 1173rd TC, Box I, in the OIF records group and also digital)

Numbers in parenthesis are counter numbers for transcription machine for quick reference

Q: Interview with...and I am going to give your rank at the time, Specialist Monica Beltran, 1173rd Transportation Company, Operation Iraqi Freedom 2004-2006. Thank you for joining me today. I want to start...what I told you I was going to do, I took the questionnaire you filled out and I went through and I picked some of the questions to get you to elaborate on things. Some things will be real short and some of them, you may be talking for a few minutes. What is an 88M MOS, I am not familiar with that?

A: It's a transportation unit.

Q: Transportation unit, or driver?

A: Driver.

Q: At the time that you actually ended up serving with the 1173rd, you actually were not in the 1173rd...you were in the 1710th (Transportation Company home stationed in Fort A.P. Hill).

A: Correct.

Q: How did you get picked to go with the 1173rd?

A: We just got attached to the 1173rd?

Q: We...being...?

A: The whole unit, well the majority of the unit.

Q: The majority of the unit. How far in advanced before you got mobilized, were you told that you were going to go?

A: Well, we got alerted in June, I believe and then finally we got our orders in... I want to say, August or September.

Q: Did you at any time between say, June and August when you got mobilized, did you train with the 1173rd? Did you go to Martinsville?

A: We did, we went in September. September is when we start going over the Martinsville.

Q: All right, but that's about the time you were mobilized, so...

A: Right.

Q: Did you just stay at the Armory? How did they work that...like, you were mobilized, but you still had a couple days at the Armory before you went to Fort Dix.

A: Yeah, they made us stay in hotels around there.

Q: Okay, so you stayed in hotels around there. How did you get from...now, your station when you were in the 1710th was at A.P. Hill.

A: Correct.

Q: So, how did you get from A.P. Hill, did they bus you?

A: They bussed us.

Q: I mean some of this might sounds kind of dumb, but it's filling in gaps with things if you are sitting down to write a book. When asked about your strongest memory at home station, you said packing and marking boxes. Was that at the Martinsville Armory?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why are you laughing?

A: Because there was a lot of stuff we brought over there.

Q: Now, was that stuff you brought from A.P. Hill or was that stuff that you had in Martinsville?

A: That was stuff we had in Martinsville.

Q: Just...you were packing it to ship?

A: Yes.

Q: When you were in Martinsville for those few days, did any of your family and friends come down to visit?

A: My mom did, and my stepfather.

Q: Did you have much time to visit with them?

A: Not that much, I mean...they had a goodbye ceremony and that was good.

Q: Okay. You indicated that you trained on...now this is at Fort Dix, you indicated that you trained on new equipment at the MOB station, but you didn't say what. Can you elaborate a little bit, on what new equipment...new to you, stuff that you had never trained on before?

A: At Fort Dix?

Q: Yeah, you just said yes. The question was "did you train on new equipment that you have never trained on before?" and you answered... said yes, but you didn't elaborate.

A: (no answer)

Q: Okay, there's no right or wrong here. When asked if you had any heavy weapons training at MOB station, you said others did, but you didn't. So, where did you learn how to fire a .50-caliber?

A: When I was in country (Iraq).

Q: In country, okay. How were you selected...now this is one of my questions too, and it's not on here. This is kind of a general questionnaire, it goes out to all kinds of troops doing all kinds of different jobs, so this kind of narrows it down, but how did you become a gunner?

A: My TC (truck commander) recognized that I would have been a better gunner than the one we had assigned.

Q: Okay. Did they ask you? Did you volunteer?

A: I volunteered for it.

Q: And then they trained you in country, how long did that take?

A: Not that much, maybe a week.

Q: A week. Was that just on the .50-caliber machine gun?

A: Yes.

Q: So, you didn't train on an M240 (machine gun)?

A: I mean we had training at Fort Dix, but more on the 50-caliber when we got there because that's what we were using.

Q: Okay. I asked if you had any Iraqi orientation when you were at Dix, and you said yes. What did it consist... do you remember looking back on it what it consisted of?

A: It was more about learning the language over there.

Q: Did they teach you anything about customs?

A: Their customs...I mean, they might have mentioned it, but I don't remember.

Q: So, language. Who taught it? Were the people who taught it Iraqi war veterans?

A: They were, I guess Fort Dix instructors.

Q: Okay. Your strongest memory of the time at Dix, was training at the FOB (mock up of Forward Operating Base). What was remarkable about that?

A: We were out there for 15 days.

Q: Okay. Was it...

A: It was cold.

Q: All right. That's what everyone else has been saying too. Anything special about what happened when you were out there, or was it just because it was 15 days in the cold.

A: It was 15 days in the cold, training on how to evacuate buildings...that was fun, police security on the FOB, nights...

Q: Did you have vision goggles, night vision goggles?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, night security. Was that stationary security, like a guard point?

A: Yes.

Q: When I asked how you felt when you left Dix, you said you were nervous and depressed. Do you want to elaborate at all on that?

A: Well, I was nervous because I didn't know what I was getting myself into. I mean, it was my first time being deployed and I was depressed because I was going to be away from my family.

Q: That's pretty normal. Like I said, I went to Vietnam and I was nervous and depressed about other things too. Under the section of Iraq, when you actually arrived, I asked about your first impression of Iraq and you wrote the word "bad." Can you elaborate on what, what you mean by "bad?"

A: Mostly just because I saw a lot of Iraqi's working inside the FOB. I mean, I didn't know who to trust or why they were there. Mortar attacks, alarms going off, I see everybody running to their bunker...and they told us while we were in Kuwait that the DEFAC ONE where we were stationed at, barracks were closed to DEFAC ONE always got hit and we of course got stationed right next to DEFAC ONE, and so I was like, "okay."

Q: D-E-F-A-C? DEFAC?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you know what that stands for? (DEFAC means Dining Facility)

A: No I don't.

Q: Okay, anything else that was bad?

A: I mean, that was about it...that was just my first impression.

Q: Where in Iraq was the 1173rd base? Where did you operate out of?

A: LSA Anaconda.

Q: Okay, and you ran missions all over the country right? You were running north and south...

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A: Correct...all the way up to the Turkish border and all the way down to Kuwait.

Q: How long...and this is something I haven't thought to ask anybody else. From Anaconda, if you were escorting a convoy...say to the Kuwaiti border, how long would that take?

A: Just to get to Kuwait? Probably two days.

Q: Two days, now do you stop anywhere along the way?

A: We had to stop at...there's a checkpoint on (Main Supply Route, MSR) Tampa, the main route and there's a checkpoint called Camp Scania and we stopped there and rest and then continue on our mission.

Q: So, it was like a FOB kind of a thing...some kind of a base?

A: It was really small. You can call it like a truck stop basically, because it was really nothing out there.

Q: But, I mean...it was a security...

A: It was secure. It was...we had military out there, surrounding security. We also had four different national militaries in there too.

Q: How long did it take to run to the Turkish border?

A: That probably took about maybe...two to three days because again, we had to stop at checkpoints. There were certain areas where we were only allowed to drive at night or drive in the morning, so we had to deal with that.

Q: (SFC Thomas) Camp was telling me last week when I interviewed him, you could drive north at daytime and south at nighttime or vice versa, but I mean there were restrictions given.

A: Right.

Q: And that's the first time I had heard that was from him last week. You said that the equipment that you used over there was picked up in country was "workable, and somewhat good." Do you recall any serious problems?

A: The equipment that we used, were like the HUMMWV's...we brought 5-tons over there, which they were no good...which, they were no good, we had to ship them back. They were not up-armored. We got their...the unit that we replaced, we got their vehicles, the HUMMWV's. We had MTS (Movement Tracking System) systems, we had ICE (IED Countermeasure Equipment).

Q: What was the first system?

A: MTS, Mobile Track...I can't remember the name of it, I can ask somebody. It's more like a GPS sort of thing. You can see your truck and go...

Q: Okay, good. I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt.

A: The ICE, the ICE box is what they call it. It is something to block off the IEDs around. If we had ICE, it can block up to maybe about 50 meters or so, depending on what kind of system we had. And sometimes those weren't any good. And if you had it on, sometimes you radio transmission wouldn't go through to the other vehicles. Say you are the last gun-truck and you're trying to radio up to the first gun-truck, I mean they won't hear you.

Q: That's the first I've heard of that. Were your HUMMWV's, they were up-armored?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were they by kit, or were they like "Hill Billy" armor, just kind of steel stuck on them, or a combination?

A: Combination, I guess.

Q: Did you...as you, the longer you were there, do you recall, were you getting more of the up-armored? You know, the professional kit up-armored as opposed to the "Hill Billy" armor?

A: No.

Q: No? Okay. Who were your... did you basically use the same truck, were you assigned to a truck.

A: Every team had an assigned truck.

Q: Okay, who were the other members of your truck?

A: It was SGT Gary Smith...

Q: What kind of Sergeant?

A: E5.

Q: Gary Smith, okay...

A: And my truck commander was SGT Puffinburger, I can't remember his first name. (His first name is Brian).

Q: Okay, and you were the gunner?

A: Right.

Q: And at one point you did write, that you were sometimes the driver too.

A: In the beginning, when we first got there, I was definitely the driver and then once we started...once the unit, well the platoons started putting their teams together by who was a great fit, and we finally got us three. My truck commander designated me as the gunner, and put SGT Gary Smith as the driver.

Q: Thinking back to the 1173rd, how many other women were gunners?

A: I can't say for the other platoons because I never rolled with them, I always rolled with my platoon and...actually the majority of our females in my platoon, we weren't always gunners, but sometimes...

Q: They were trained as gunners, so at least they could be gunners.

A: Correct. Every once in a while though...

Q: Which platoon were you in?

A: I was in 3rd platoon.

Q: About how many women do you recall that were in your platoon?

A: About five or six.

Q: Did you all, like by platoon...did you bunk together? Like all the women of your platoon, were they all in the same bunkhouse?

A: We had trailers over there. They had three rooms to a trailer and they were just putting, say 2 females in one room and 2 males, I mean...we were all mixed around.

Q: Oh really? It wasn't segregated, like males in one area and females...

A: No.

Q: Okay, that's another first...that I've learned that. Did everyone pretty much get along through that?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: I'm not saying you have to name any names, but if there was any kind of problems, like what kind of problems?

A: I mean there were some issues, you know everybody has their days.

Q: But, there wasn't anything that was like an on-going situation to cause a real problem?

A: No.

Q: Okay, I asked... and again this is a generic questionnaire, so...please explain the first time that you were under fire, and you wrote that it was in route to FOB Taji. Can you explain a little bit about it?

A: It was supposed to be a one-night mission, to go there and turn around and we caught small arm fires, and Sergeant (Gerald) Powers was the commander, convoy commander at that time. And I guess we were waiting on QRF (Quick Reaction Force) to come to check out the area, none of us got hit...none of the trucks got hit. We returned fire and that was it. And after that, once they cleared out the road, we went back to Taji.

Q: You did return fire?

A: I didn't return fire because I didn't see where the...

Q: Did anybody from the convoy return fire?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: As far as you know, nobody got hit?

A: Right, it as nighttime.

Q: Did they hit any of your vehicles?

A: No.

Q: I would like you to explain, as much as your comfortable with, the actions on the 26th (October 2005) starting, I guess at the beginning, starting with the convoy, what you did, what you saw, what you thought about...all that stuff.

A: Okay.

Q: And I will try to shut up, so just tell it as you want to tell it. As you want history to remember it.

A: The way I remember it...before a convoy, we always have our four-hours prep-time where we get all of our ammunition and get our truck ready and gun stuff calibrating and while we did all that we also do briefings which tells us what's going on outside, if its on amber alert or red alert and if it's to go or not to go, they told us the route that we're going. We always practiced our...in case one of us gets hurt, what to do, how to call medevac...we always go through all that. And, we took it as another mission going on. It was to FOB Suzy, we were going to FOB Suzy that day. We had never been to that site, it was our first site...first FOB to go, never been to that route. And I remember, we were all hanging out, chillin' waiting for our time to start and I was talking to SGT Witkowski, who was a good friend, he was from the 729th (Transportation Company, a California member of a USAR unit from Arizona). And we were joking around and they told our team, our gun-truck team to go to the gate and make sure all of our gun stuff was ready and they were going to meet us there. Usually, we always did a prayer before we left and I was kind of pissed off because we weren't involved in that prayer, and anyways we drove on. Going by the gate, I remember seeing him, and he saw me and he said "I'll meet you at the end", and I said "Will do." And we all left, I remember we stopped...they had to tie their loads...it was the 729th we were escorting to FOB Suzy. We stopped to tie our loads, but every time we stopped, one of us would get out of the truck and use the restroom. And as soon as they were ready to drive on, we hopped back in the truck and we were on our way. I remember, I saw black smoke, it was the first bomb to hit and it hit the first gun truck and my truck commander was trying to get in touch with someone on the radio and the next thing I know, I hear two other bombs go off. It was actually a "daisy chain" of IED's and as we're driving by there was no radio communication, there were fire arms...they were shooting from the left. And I told my TC... I said, "I see fire arms...small arm fire coming at me, I'm going to return the fire! So, I did." I said I'd return fire. My truck got hit by two RPG's (rocket propelled grenades), it was either two or three. The first one hit the hood of the HUMMWV and the second one hit on the driver side door. My driver got hit by the glass, when the RPG hit, it kind of shattered the glass and it hit him on the back of his...on his back on the left side and I saw him slowing down as I am suppressing fire to the left hand side...

Q: That's Smith?

A: Yes. I saw him slowing down from the convoy, and the convoy just kept going and to tell you the truth, all I remember is, me kicking him on the back of his head and telling him "step on it, we got to get out of here." And as soon as I looked up, and nobody believed me on this...I saw a round coming to me. The HUMMWV is set up where there is only a shield covering the 50-caliber. There's two openings on the sides and as soon as I see something coming at me, I just let go of the 50-caliber and that's how I got shot, in my thumb. I didn't realize I got shot, I just kept down suppressing fire trying to get the convoy out, trying to do my job. And when we found... when we got out of the kill zone, we were out of the fight and I saw blood all over my hand and coming down on me and I saw my driver... he was down and I was in total shock. That never happened to me, it was my first time being attacked like that and they said that there was a grenades being thrown...and I can't remember if it was or not, but I know we were getting IED's, RPG's, small arm fires, name it...they had it. I remember Sergeant (Eric) Bopp, he came running to me and he said, "Beltran get down from the 50-cal, you are bleeding." I came down and he did first aid.

Q: Sergeant...?

A: Bopp. Eric Bopp.

Q: B-O-P-P.

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A: Yeah. He did first aid on me, first aid on the driver and of course all of us were in shock. I was crying because I was scared, I didn't know what else was going to happen. Next thing you know, a sergeant from the 729th, I can't recall his name...but he was going around to every gun truck to ask if we had a body bag. I didn't know what was going on up front and when I asked him to elaborate on that, "Who's dead?" Because in my mind, a body bag, that means somebody is dead. And he said, "Sergeant (James) Witkowski". Now, we had two Witkowski's in the company, one was a female Witkowski and a guy Witkowski. And when he told me "guy Witkowski," I went running up to the 3rd gun truck, I was in the 4th gun truck that day and he was in the 3rd. And when I went over there, they put him in the body bag, and there was blood all over the HUMMWV, the inside. My...the driver for that gun truck, Sergeant (Jeffery) Gantt, he was badly injured in his arm, he had shrapnel in his right side arm and the convoy commander, which was SGT (Michael) Mulcahy, not (2LT Keith) McCluskey, SGT Mulcahy, he had shrapnel all over his arm as well and they had a passenger on the backseat and he had shrapnel as well, so we all did first aid. Our assistant convoy commander, who was a female...first female who was for us, from our unit to take charge because our convoy commander was...well he needed first aid. She's the one that called the medevac and I remember her grabbing me and hugging me and telling me everything was going to be all right. And she stayed strong, she was a really strong person, Sergeant (Rebecca) Bumgarner was her name.

Q: I've heard that name before.

A: She called medevac, medivac came and picked us up and back we went to LSA Anaconda.

Q: Did they take you to the hospital? Did they take all of the injured to a medical facility?

A: Right, it was the Air Force side on Anaconda.

Q: Now, how badly were you actually hurt?

A: Not that bad, it just kind of grazed into it.

Q: Did you have to have stitches?

A: No.

Q: How long were you off duty...any period of time?

A: As soon as I went back to Anaconda, my platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Michael Kohrt...he came there, along with my First Sergeant, Captain...well, Major (Michael) Waterman now, they were there and I told SGT Kohrt, my platoon sergeant, I said, "I don't care what you do to me, I am not going back out there. We are too close to going home; if you want to write me up or reduced my rank I don't care, but I am not going back there. I want to go home." And he hugged me...and SGT Kohrt, he's a real hard person, but he's a real good person too... I mean, he had a strong heart. He was always tough on us and I never heard him say anything good out of his mouth, but that day when we hugged me, he said "Beltran, you did a hell of a good job, and you aren't going back out there." And he hugged me.

Q: And you cried...

A: Yeah.

Q: You can cry now if you want. It's a little different in the civilian world when you do something good, isn't it?

A: Yeah, it is.

Q: When did you know that they put you in for a Bronze Star?

A: When we got back from overseas and we took our three months off...

Q: Do you know who from the convoy recommended you? Because somebody... it has to start with probably a NCO and then go up the chain from there. Do you know who would have put you in?

A: I don't know, I remember Sergeant (K.) Hubbard (worked in TOC, Operations) interviewed me and asked me...I guess he was doing his report and he was asking me all kinds of questions and...

Q: I'd love to have a copy of that. Do you have the narrative?

A: I do have it; it's in my house, but I can...

Q: I'm going to ask you to send me a copy of the narrative and a copy of your certificate, and if you have a copy of the order...you know, like the folder that they give you with the certificate in it.

A: Yeah.

Q: A copy of the order, a copy of the certificate, and a copy of the narrative...

A: Okay.

Q: And I am waiting to get (Specialist Ryan) Totten's too. I got some others from the other units, but...I saw it from yourself, how many other people were wounded?

A: It was five of us wounded...

Q: Five, counting you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, this Sergeant Witkowski, he was from Arizona...

A: Correct.

Q: Was he an Arizona Guardsmen?

A: I think he was, I think he was from Cali...he was from Arizona, but I think he was in the Guard or the Reserve... (Note: he was actually from California but serving in a USAR unit from Arizona)

Q: Because he got a Silver Star.

A: Right.

Q: And I have always wondered, did he get out of the vehicle and do something before he got killed?

A: They say that there was a grenade thrown at the HUMM WV and it was... I guess tumbling on-top of the HUMM WV and I guess he laid on it.

Q: Oh is that... that was never clear to me. Because to get a Silver Star, you have to really save somebody...you either have to take out a lot of the enemy or you have to save a lot of Americans.

A: Right.

Q: You are credited in the report, the *Washington Post* report as saving 54 persons. That's pretty remarkable, for a 19-year old kid. Let the record show, she's got a big smile.

A: I just did what I was trained to do.

Q: Getting back to your wound for a second, do you have any disability in your thumb?

A: No, I don't have disability in my thumb, but every now and then I can't feel it on this side of it.

Q: Like, on the...okay. Do you get any...have you seen the VA (Veterans Administration hospital)?

A: I have seen the VA.

Q: And have they, are they going to give you any disability for you wound?

A: Not for the wound, they say it's too small.

Q: All right, now I want to ask you and you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but I've told you that you are the first woman in the history of the Virginia Guard to receive both the Bronze Star with a "V" (for Valor) and a Purple Heart, much less in the same action. How does that make you feel?

A: I mean, it makes me feel good because I am the first female, and I never knew about it until I get a phone call from the Lieutenant (1LT Jennifer McGhee, G-staff of 276th Engineer Battalion who was working at NGB in Arlington at time she called Beltran in June 2008), but at the same time...I just felt like I did my job...what I was trained to do.

Q: But, here are Medal of Honor recipients....just doing their job. I've met a number of them....I've been lucky enough to meet, probably four. And they all to a man say that they were just doing their job and the Medal is not really for them, it is for all of the other guys who didn't come back.

A: Yeah.

Q: And I guess that's what heroes and you know, maybe you are not comfortable with that word, but you are for the Virginia Guard, to an extent. I'm not saying that they are going to build it up big time, but it is going to be something that....you are somebody that they can hold up to other young people as an example. I mean, we are at war...we're in two wars right now and the country's getting tired of wars and they're getting tired...and we need heroes to be quite honest. That what the EEO thing...the fact that your Hispanic. You're a Hispanic woman and you went out and now you are the highest decorated soldier in the Virginia Guard...the highest decorated soldier in the Virginia Guard since 1945. That's something that they can kind of use; they will not abuse it...but I mean it is something that...I hope you are proud of it. Is your mom proud?

A: She is very proud of me.

Q: I just really...did you ever think you would be a role model for people?

A: No, I never thought that.

Q: All right, now let's get off the serious here...what was so funny about your little cookout? I asked in the questionnaire, what's the funniest stuff...because everybody has funny stories from their deployments as well as the serious stuff, and you wrote: "your little cookouts." And what was, was that the picture that Camp sent me...was that from one of your cookouts, you're sitting

on top of a HUMMWW, you've got your little pirate thing on and you've got a cigarette in your hand with a big smile...

A: No, that was us getting ready to go on another mission. The cookout, I mean...we just, it was kind of like a little click. We had a little click here and we had steaks and of course they used to always make fun of my and my roommate because we were Hispanic and we like our steak well-done. They used to get on us about that. I mean, we just had good times...

Q: Who was your roommate?

A: SGT Garcia. She got out, Sergeant (Susana Del Carmen) Garcia.

Q: Garcia?

A: Yeah.

Q: But she got out?

A: Yeah, actually she just got out.

Q: Okay, now coming back and whatever...when you speak of kids holding up banners to welcome the unit home, was that Martinsville?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or did...did they split you up at (Fort) Dix, and send the people from the 1710th to A.P. Hill and send the others...or did you all have to go to Martinsville first?

A: Well, when we left Dix...they...I guess they bussed us or flew people who came farther and we went to the closest armory to our home address and we had family members out there and we had the police escort the bus to the armory.

Q: Now, this was...

A: This was when we just got back from Dix, out of Dix.

Q: So which armory? The Martinsville or A.P Hill one?

A: Well, I got bussed to Manassas Armory.

Q: Manassas, okay.

A: And then we took our three-months off and then when we went back to Martinsville, and they bussed us over there, we had kids with their banners, you know "Welcome Home Soldiers."

Q: Did you have a Freedom Salute?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that in Martinsville?

A: Correct, and that is where I received my Bronze Star.

Q: Okay, that wasn't in the article. I didn't catch that in the article, that was one of my questions...received the Bronze Star...there were several other people that got decorations that day, I did read that. You mentioned memorial service is March after the unit returned home?

A: What?

Q: The memorial service. I asked if there was a memorial service...let me look for it.

A: We had a memorial service in Iraq for him.

Q: "If your unit lost men in combat, did you have memorial service upon arrival at home? Did you have one at a later date?" And then you wrote, "...we had a service in March after we got home and did mention our fellow friend SGT James Witkowski."

A: Right, that was at the Freedom Salute.

Q: So, that was at Martinsville?

A: Correct.

Q: But, it really wasn't a memorial service...it was just like a moment of silence kind of thing, maybe or something? It wasn't a memorial service for him.

A: Yes, right.

Q: And you got your Bronze Star at the Martinsville Freedom Salute. How did your comrades treat you after that? Was there any difference?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: After the incident, they all...because I was the first one that got back from the hospital because I wasn't that much injured. I had a couple of the soldiers, who are now...some of them are here in the 1710th came to my room to hug and support me. They were very supportive.

Q: I will tell you, I told your first sergeant (of 1710th) that you are the first woman in Virginia Guard to receive these awards, he thought that was pretty cool. I don't know if he is going to say anything to the formation or whatever.

A: First Sergeant Cramer

Q: He thought that was pretty cool.

A: He also deployed with us.

(515)

Q: Yeah, I know I am going to send him one of my questionnaires. I snag everybody I can. I guess we can wrap this up; what you would like to say for posterity? What would you like to...20 years, 30 years from now somebody who doesn't know you, doesn't know me is sitting here going through these records and they find your transcript. What would you like them to know about what you did in Iraq? This is your time. You don't have to say anything, it's not mandatory. This is a chance for you to say whatever...if you want to thank somebody, if you want to honor somebody, if you want to bitch about somebody...as far as your time in Iraq...how they made it better for you, worse for you?

A: I mean, the only thing I can say... I think a lot of SGT Kohrt, I mean SGT Kohrt was really strong over there. I think with him being so hard on us, and making us strong and believed that every mission, we might not come back. I always kept that in my mind. And another thing is...I didn't have the privilege to at least spend a lot of time to with my family before I left, and that's why I was more depressed. And then, having to have that kind of attack...I mean, it probably only took like maybe 10-minutes of that attack, but I felt like my whole life was gone and all I kept remembering was my little sister, never saying goodbye to my mom properly, never spending a lot of time with my family. I regretted it so much because I didn't know if I was going to make it home or not. And I mean, the only thing I can say is that I am very thankful for coming back home.

Q: Welcome home. As a Vietnam vet, trust me...welcome home. It is good to have you back.

A: Thank you.

Q: Anything else you want to say?

A: I don't think so.