The Falls History Project

The 20th Anniversary of 9-11

19th Edition
1920-21

Acknowledgements

In July of 2001, roughly two months prior to 9-11, I attended a Gilder-Lehrman Seminar in Amherst, Massachusetts under the direction of historian David Blight. It was Blight that clearly reinforced to me the difference between “history” and “memory,” an important dichotomy for those of us that spend time foraging through the past. As we explored the complex memory of the Civil War, I became intrigued with how communities engage with the past and the role public memory plays in our lives. While driving home from that experience, the idea for the Falls History Project crystalized in my mind. History colleague John Pellowski and I sketched out the basic parameters of doing local history and launched the program in 2001-02. Beginning with an exploration of the story of Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. in 2001 and continuing for two decades, we have completed 19 projects, conducted more than 80 interviews on a variety of subjects, compiled more than 1000 pages of archival material, and had a hand in developing local displays of the shared history of our region.

From the start, the Falls History Project has been driven by a single premise, that authentic history is driven by the stories of individuals, both famous and not so famous. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the great professors who guided me both as an undergrad and graduate student. Martin Lutter, Herman Larson, Peter Hovde, David Sandgren, and Kenneth Smemo stand out, and all were excellent historians who applied their skills to great teaching, as well as research. My passion for oral history was launched in 1978 while completing my senior thesis in history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Dr. Hiram Drache, an outstanding historian and writer, proved to be a tough task master. He impressed on us the central importance of “story” and the power of the interview, while demanding a thorough approach to our work.

Our 19th project will be my last in the capacity as director of the Falls History Project. For 41 years I taught history and politics related classes at the high school level in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. The last 30 of those years were at Black River Falls High School. In June of 2020, I retired from full-time teaching and am now teaching part-time as an Associate Lecturer in First Nations Studies with UW-Green Bay’s Virtual Academy. Beginning in the fall of 2021, history colleague Eli Youngthunder will take the lead on the annual project working with a senior intern. Eli and I will continue to collaborate, and I will continue contributing to the Falls History Project website with smaller projects. We also will continue working together in First Nations history.

To all that have been part of this process over these many years, I cannot thank you enough. The project interns have been outstanding from the start and deserve high praise! To all who have contributed to our oral history archive in some fashion, what a tremendous gift you have been. Many elder residents who we interviewed along the way are no longer with us, making me more keenly aware of the value of oral history! Thanks also to Jackson County History Room Director Mary Woods who has been with us from the start and assisted with multiple projects! Her passion for local history continues to be a gift to our community.

A special thanks to Maddie Diehn, this year's senior intern. Maddie is a veteran of our AP History program and an outstanding student of history. I realized during our collaboration that Maddie is the last student of mine who took every class I taught – US and Global Politics, Law and Society, AP US History, First Nations Studies, and the Falls History Project. She will be attending UM-Duluth in the fall of 2021 with the goal of becoming a medical doctor. I have no doubt that she will rise to that challenge! Carpe Diem, Maddie!

Finally, due to the nature of this project, we plan to remain open to the submission of further stories of BRFHS graduates who deployed to the Middle East during the 9-11 Wars and will simply add to the archive as needed. We have a good representation thus far, but we are aware there are many more!

Paul S.T. Rykken
Falls History Project Director
June 2021

Introduction and Context
(by Paul Rykken)

"All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood."
--- Historian David Blight

From time to time, our day-to-day experience surprisingly and dramatically connects us to our national story and, over time, private memories fuse with the collective public memory. In such moments, we may experience what psychologists refer to as the "flash-bulb" effect and dramatic events remain etched in our brain in living color and seemingly for the rest of our lives.[1] For people of my generation (born in 1957), for example, November 22nd, 1963 had that effect. John Kennedy's assassination sparks memories of where we were, what we were wearing, how people around us reacted when we heard the news. December 7th, 1941 had the same effect for my parent's generation (born 1924). Though more than 70 years past, my father recalled for me on numerous occasions the moment he heard about the deadly attack on Pearl Harbor as if it was a recent event.

For millions of American citizens who are old enough, the events of Tuesday, September 11th, 2001 provide a vivid example of this phenomenon. "9-11," as it will be forever known, pierced the American psyche in numerous ways. The timing of the events and where they occurred maximized the impact – the so-called "theater of terrorism."[2] On that clear-blue and peaceful morning, the New York skyline suddenly turned to smoke as we watched those planes ram the Twin Towers, powerful symbols of American economic strength, implode and crumble to the ground. In turn, we gasped as the Pentagon, symbol of our military strength, fell victim to another suicidal flight. And we held our breath following the tense drama of Flight 93, headed for the nation's capital, symbol of U.S. political strength, as it crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside. When the carnage ended on that fateful day, 2,977 innocent people were dead

[1] Bridget Murray Law, American Psychological Association Website, September 2011, Vol 42, No. 8. First proposed in 1977 by psychologists Roger Brown and James Kulik, the idea of "flashbulb memory" suggests that certain events have an emotional impact that causes them to be as vivid as a photograph in our memory. There are ongoing debates concerning the accuracy of such memories.

[2] A significant aspect of terrorism is to spread fear throughout societies and the role of media in that process is critical. New York City and the prevalence of major news outlets provides a great example of this phenomenon. The following article provides a fuller discussion of this dynamic: Spencer, Alexander. *Lessons Learnt: Terrorism and the Media*. Mar. 2012, ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/ahrc-public-policy-series/terrorism-and-the-media/.

and more than 6,000 were wounded. Tens of thousands of American citizens and foreign visitors, family members of those on the front edge of the events, also became victims that day.

Among our now nineteen projects, this year's is the most recent in focus and that presents unique challenges. From a historical perspective, twenty years beyond 9-11 remains too soon to fully understand the complexities surrounding the attacks and aftermath.[3] Though seemingly in the comfort or our rear-view mirror, the searing heat of politics hovers over the events of that day and especially how the United States Government chose to respond. The United States launched two wars in response, often referred to simply as the 9-11 Wars. The invasions of Afghanistan in February of 2002 and Iraq in March of 2003 signaled the start of long, drawn-out conflicts that still impact the country in 2021. Like any contentious history, debates will rumble ad infinitum until long after those with a living memory of the period are gone.

Rather than focusing on the political debates surrounding 9-11 and its aftermath, we have chosen a different tack. We wanted to explore how 9-11 impacted the lives of BRFHS graduates, particularly those that experienced the event while sitting in our classrooms. Further, we chose to focus on those that were either serving in the military or were prompted to do so in response. How did 9-11 change the trajectory of their young lives? How were they interpreting it at the time, and did those interpretations change over time? What do they believe students should learn about 9-11 in 2021 and beyond? These questions guided our exchanges and remain at the center of our research.[4] Beyond these voices, we included others for context, including teachers that experienced 9-11 with students. My recollections are included the introduction to the Project, along with an interview with history colleague Tony Boerger. In addition, 1975 BRFHS graduate, Chris (Manuel) Zacher who was teaching on Long Island, New York at the time of the attacks, submitted her memories. Including these perspectives seemed fitting, in part, as a reminder of the powerful role teachers play in the lives of their students, especially during unexpected and dramatic moments. My memory of that day blends the professional with a personal angle. 9-11 was our son Jake's 17th birthday, and his subsequent

[3] My assertion that we are too close to the events for a fuller historical understanding relates to the long-term consequences of 9-11 and the wars that followed. The most complete account of 9-11 was issued in July of 2004 as a result of the Congressionally appointed 9-11 Commission. Access it here: *The 9-11 Commission Report,* The 9-11 Commission 22 July 2004, www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf.

[4] More than with any other project we have undertaken, this one will remain "open," hence my use of use of present tense here. We reached out to many individuals, but fully expect that there may be additions going forward due to the nature of the information.

experiences cemented 9-11 into our family's story as will become clearer with further reading. And on a professional level, the traumatic events of 9-11 and especially what came after, changed my work as a history and government teacher dramatically and illustrates the challenges we face in our various curricula due to unexpected episodes impacting the nation.

Initial Memories

It was "business as usual" Tuesday morning, September 11th of 2001. My AP European History students attempted to show interest as I lectured on Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, a topic of great interest to me, but perhaps not so for them. Shortly before 10:00, history colleague Jason Janke burst into my room and exclaimed that something was happening in New York City and I could tell by the look on his face, this was a grave situation. The Social Studies staff quickly huddled in the hallway to discuss the circumstances and whether we should turn on our TV sets.[5] We were not yet in the era of smartphones and news was not quite as instantaneous as today, making this hallway discussion significant. Based on the initial news reports, we needed to decide whether to have our students seeing the events in New York in real time. Ultimately, we made the choice, with Administrative guidance, to allow students to experience this, our rationale being that it would be good for them to be with a teacher who could help them process what was happening.[6] There were districts around us who chose to turn the TVs off on 9-11 and I pass no judgement on them, but in hindsight, I believe we did the right thing.[7] We returned to our classrooms and began the process of interpreting a set of

[5]Along with Jason Janke, the History and Social Studies Department at the time included John Pellowski, Tony Boerger, and Mike Shepard. We each had televisions in our room and access to cable channels, something that changed as our technology evolved more and more into the world of the Internet.

[6] School districts across the nation handled the day in a variety of ways, and it is a good example of the difficult decisions authorities must make, often quickly and under duress.

[7] Elementary schools had a unique challenge on 9-11 and, of course, different calculations to make based on the age of the children. Dr. Shelly Severson, District Superintendent in Black River Falls, was serving

surreal moments in our national memory. The stunned silence of my students spoke louder than words. By day's end, having been immersed in the unfolding real-time drama for several hours, I went to Cross Country practiced emotionally drained.

Beyond the "flash-bulb" memory of that jarring moment on that day now twenty years past, a 9-11 narrative began forming in my mind. In a recent *Atlantic* article, Melissa Fay Greene, professor at Agnes State College and the University of Georgia, surmises that "the imprinting of dramatic story lines," what she calls the "narrative effect," pin an episode in our minds to be easily retrieved throughout our lifetime. In other words, the story becomes part of "our story" in some way.[8] When discussing the Great Depression with my parents (born in 1924), for example, the story was filled with stark memories that framed a narrative of struggle and resilience within their families. My sense is that many that we interviewed for this project, when they reach their elder years, will have well-formed narratives of these events and how their lives intersected with the meta-narrative. If that narrative involves any sort of trauma – certainly likely with 9-11 – the memory will run deeper and revisiting it may be painful.[9]

Beyond the primary memories of that day, 9-11 quickly devolved into a "front-and-center" and ongoing news story that dominated the 21st Century, 24/7 news environment to which we have become accustomed. Within a week, students were fatigued by the constant coverage and discussions surrounding the events, creating a challenging situation for those of us dealing with current events as part of our various classes. My teaching career coincided with the earliest years of CNN and 24-hour cable news and I had a front-row seat to the evolution of how Americans experienced the news of the day. Further, my first 15 years of teaching were in the pre-internet era when news was less instantaneous. The advent of the accessible World-Wide-Web in 1994 changed how we operated in our schools more than any other single event in my 42 years of teaching. While exponentially improving our access to resources seemingly overnight, a negative aspect of this change has been the proliferation of conspiracy theories that

---

as an Assistant Elementary Principal in Sparta in 2001 and recounted that TV sets were turned off there allowing both parents and teachers to appropriately filter the fast-moving events. Jon Warmke, Principal of Forrest Street Elementary in Black River Falls, recalled a similar approach in his building that day.

[8] Greene, Melissa F. *How Will We Remember the Pandemic*? Atlantic Magazine, May 2021, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/05/how-will-we-remember-covid-19-pandemic/618397/. As I write these words, we are emerging from the COVID pandemic of 2020-21 and Greene's article deftly explores how our memories work in these kinds of circumstances.

[9] Multiple studies have been conducted regarding the long-term impact of 9-11, particularly regarding children in New York who felt the events more immediately. Caffrey, Mary. "Study of Children of 9/11 Reveals Long-Term Effects of Childhood Trauma." *AJMC*, American Journal of Managed Care, May 2019, www.ajmc.com/view/study-of-children-of-911-reveals-longterm-effects-of-childhood-trauma.

explode from time to time. Indeed, I frequently had students enter my classrooms in the post-9-11 world who had been exposed to outrageous theories concerning the U.S. Government's role in 9-11, theories that were difficult to dislodge.[10]

The Curricular Impact of 9-11

On September 12, 2001, a New York Times editorial described the horrific attacks of the previous day as "one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as before and after." Yet as all of us know, history never rips in two. Before and after are never entirely severed, even in the moment of greatest historical rupture. The discontinuities of the past always remain within the whole cloth of the longue durée (the long-term). In fact, historians devote entire careers to placing the seemingly new in historical contexts."[11]

--- Historian Joanne Meyerowitz

In more than 7,000 days of teaching, there were four days in which students in my room were stunned, even bringing some to tears: January 28th, 1986 as we watched the Challenger explode shortly after take-off; October 2nd, 1995 as we listened to the reading of the verdict in the OJ Simpson Trial; April 20th, 1999 as we watched the news concerning the school shooting in Columbine, Colorado; and September 11th, 2001 while watching events unfold in New York City and Washington, D.C. I mention this because juniors and seniors in high school are generally blasé in response to news events, and not prone to overt reactions.

Central to our work as history educators is the task of helping our students frame current events in the context of broader trends. 9-11 presented special challenges in that regard. The initial events, of course, were jarring and frightening for many students and those in the broader community.[12] Many voiced uncertainty as to what would happen next, for example, and there was a real sense that death and destruction on the east coast might be replicated elsewhere in the country. To complicate matters, American citizens, in general, had minimal knowledge of the context of the events – the roots of terrorism in the modern world. Soon enough, 9-11 was

[10] Conspiracy theories surrounding 9-11 started immediately and have had a "life of their own" in the first quarter of the 21st Century and will, no doubt, be with us forever. "9/11 Conspiracy Theories Debunked." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Sept. 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/05/9-11-conspiracy-theories-debunked.

[11] Meyerowitz, Joanne, editor. *History and September 11th*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003. Meyerowitz' compelling introduction to this compendium highlights the difficulties facing educators in the post-9-11 period.

[12] An example of how this played in the community is the fact that our central office started receiving phone calls shortly after the attacks began, and several parents picked up their children. In addition, in ensuing years, many students recalled their parents picking them up from day-care on 9-11 – one of their first political memories.

reduced to a simplistic narrative, typical of what often happens with international stories. The upsurge in patriotism was palpable and I recall thinking that for the students in front of me (born in 1983-85), this may have been their first experience with that. President Bush's approval ratings, for example, held between 80 and 90% for several months beyond the attacks – what is known as the "rally-around-the-flag" effect.[13]

Teachers, of course, bring their formative experiences into their professional practice in a myriad of ways. As one who came of age during the Vietnam War, I witnessed first-hand the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" – a fear of becoming mired in seemingly endless foreign conflicts.[14] This spurred a period of neo-isolationism, a desire by the American people to withdraw from the world. Not surprisingly, it was in this atmosphere that the counter-push for Global Education was launched in schools and colleges across the country.[15] As a first-year teacher in Appleton, Minnesota in the fall of 1979, I got my first taste of how news of the world would impact the classroom. In November, as Iran plunged into revolution and Americans were held hostage for more than a year, it became clear that the nature of Islamic Fundamentalism was beyond the ken of average Americans. The coincidental Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December starkly reminded us that the complicated Cold War world remained. The challenge of interpreting such events for my students became central to my work as a history educator, and no doubt, it was a steep climb.[16]

As a graduate student in the early 1980s, my history thesis focused on the movement for internationalism in our schools in the early years of the 20th Century, causing me to plunge into the topic of global education more fully during the tumultuous and waning years of the Cold War under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In 1988 I instituted an Honors History course at

---

[13]Lindsay, James M. "Rally 'Round the Flag." Brookings, Brookings, 28 July 2016. www.brookings.edu/opinions/rallyround-the-flag/.

[14] The Vietnam War was a dominant news story from my second-grade year 1964) through my senior year of high school (1975). The prolonged nature of the War bore similarities to the 9-11 Wars, something I often shared with my students in the post-9-11 phase of my career.

[15] My undergraduate years at Concordia College (1975-1979) coincided with the rise of the Global Education Movement. In 1979 I became involved with an organization called Global Education of Minnesota under the direction of Jack Edie, an incredible educator. As a young man in the late 1940s, Edie had flown over Hiroshima and seen the destruction visited upon the city by the atomic bombings in August of 1945. He vowed to do whatever he could during his career to promote peace and international understanding within our schools.

[16] It is intriguing to me that those two events of 1979-80 – the hostage crisis and the invasion of Afghanistan – had consequences that impacted US foreign policy for my entire career. Arguably, once could draw a line from both events to what happened in September of 2001 and beyond.

West Fargo High School focusing on US foreign policy since World War II. When I arrived at Black River Falls High School in 1990, I developed a class in International Relations as a senior elective, a course that lasted for a few years before falling victim to low enrollments. These kinds of courses were a heavy lift, in part, because of the complexity of the international political environment, and students shied away from them, in my estimation, because "they did not know what they did not know." History teachers continually confront this challenge.

My sense, from the very start, was that exploring 9-11 would be a long-term task impacting the remainder of my career.[17] As mentioned earlier, students experienced 9-11 fatigue within several days of the attacks owing to the non-stop news coverage. The US reaction to the attacks, of course, set off a chain of events that required "real-time" analysis and much class time was turned over to news coverage – more than usual. This was especially true in my Government and AP United States History classes. As was often the case during my career, I was in a constant battle to read and stay abreast of what was happening, and clearly understanding 9-11 and the wars that followed was hard work, particularly after the initial shock of 2001 left the headlines. It soon became clear to me that an adequate approach 9-11 and aftermath was going to involve more than simply tinkering with my classes. We needed a more systemic and deliberate strategy.

History courses at the secondary level, in my estimation, should always help students frame their own lives within the context of historical events – in other words, past and present need to continually be in conversation with each other. Without that, students struggle to find relevancy. During the 2002-03 schoolyear, spurred by the events of 9-11, I began developing a new semester course called "21st Century World" that would specifically focus on foreign policy with a special emphasis on the Wars of 9-11. We launched this elective in the fall of 2003 and had solid successes with it for roughly 10 years. We offered it as a junior-senior elective. Again, my formative school experiences in the 1960s and early 1970s motivated me at this point. My high school history courses typically offered minimal understanding of the Vietnam War, something that always frustrated me. Ultimately, my ongoing attempts to find a niche for international studies within the elective curriculum, though well-intentioned and necessary from my point of view, lost steam, and 21st Century World did not survive due to low enrollment. It was as if students proved the assertion I had been making throughout the early years of the 9-

[17] Indeed, during my final month of teaching during the opening phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I was walking students through the 9-11 Wars and an analysis of the public disengagement from the two conflicts. Nearly 20 years – almost half of my career, therefore, was spent "chasing 9-11" with my students. It was a complex task from the very start and never got easier.

11 wars, that maintaining societal support for long-term foreign engagements is deeply problematic in democratic societies. Eventually, people simply lose interest.

The loss of 21st Century World – the second time a foreign policy related course had crashed during my tenure at BRFHS – caused discussions within our department as to WHERE students should be exposed to the globe in this manner. Public attitudes and growing disengagement with the 9-11 Wars, coupled with the realization that our students increasingly evidenced very little understanding as to WHY the nation was in the Middle East, pushed me to dramatically revise our REQUIRED civics-related course, renaming it US and Global Politics. Frankly, I was angry that a more broadly global view of important events did not seem to take hold within my classes. Principal Tom Chambers, long an advocate for greater internationalism in our curricula, strongly supported the change. We believed this would ensure that all students were learning about the wars of their lifetime, the root causes, and significant consequences. In addition, such a course would provide an opportune venue for tracking global events while students explored the origins and operation of their government. One of the themes I included in the Global Politics portion of the course was the so-called "military-civilian divide," an important feature of our present environment, as illustrated by the general disengagement of the population from the Afghan and Iraq Wars. The disengagement became especially acute to me, in part, due to the experiences of my son Jake, but also because of the number of our former students who deployed to the Middle East during these years, as evidenced by our work with this project. It seemed unconscionable to me that the emerging citizens I was teaching day in and day out would leave school without understanding the nature of these wars. I remain convinced, as I was in my college years, that we are doing our students a grave injustice if we do not provide them with a global perspective within our classes.[18]

Explanation of our Methodology

We set out initially to focus on students who were in school on 9-11 and then went on to military service, but as we got into the project, we realized that we had many BRFHS graduates

[18] My reassessment of much of this was spurred by study programs I participated in throughout the process. During an exploration of the Vietnam War at UW-Eau Claire in the summer of 2004, I was introduced to the work of Andrew Bacevich, West Point graduate, Vietnam veteran, retired Colonel, and historian at Boston University. His 2005 book, The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War, was an eye-opener on the role of the military in our society and the divide between the general population and those that are serving. Bacevich was an ongoing critic of the Iraq War and, ironically, his son Andrew was killed while serving there in 2007. I had the opportunity to exchange letters with Dr. Bacevich during this period and this coincided with our son's graduate from West Point in 2007.

who were already in the military at the time of 9-11, so we broadened our reach. Because we wanted to include many stories with the project, and due to the restrictions imposed on us by the Pandemic, we reached out via e-mail or social media to more than twenty graduates with a series of questions. Maddie was able to do a “sit-down” interview with Tony Boerger, history teacher at BRFHS, concerning his memories of the day. I conducted two interviews via Zoom, one with Jim Babcock and the other with my son Jake. Those are somewhat longer, as you will note, and Maddie skillfully transcribed the three more standard interviews we conducted. I am often asked why we do not post video recordings of our interviews, but instead offer only the transcriptions. Clearly, technology has evolved dramatically since our first project in 2002, but we have not had the resources to manage the recordings for public consumption. We do have a good share of them and perhaps at some point, that will become possible. Transcriptions of the kind we offer, in my estimation, will stand the test of time and provide the type of archive we set out to establish.

We decided to order the interviews based on graduation years. The oldest participant graduated in 1992, and the youngest in 2004. Nine of the fifteen veterans were out of high school before 9-11, while five had the experience of sitting in classrooms on that day. Four young men – Joey Williams, Luke Koran, Dan Helland, and Jake Rykken – attended one of the nation’s military academies after graduation. Joey (USMA 2005) and Luke (USNA 2005) were in their second year at their respective schools on 9-11, while Dan (USAFA 2007) and Jake (USMA 2007) were both juniors in high school on 9-11 and started the application process in the summer between their junior and senior years. I mention their involvement at the Academies due to the unique nature of that experience. In my 30 years at BRFHS, five young men – those heretofore mentioned, along with Ben Simonson (USMA 2012) completed their education at one of the service academies.

Our questions are straight-forward, and we did not edit the transcripts, other than clerical errors. As mentioned previously, we chose not to ask explicitly political questions, but you will note a variety of opinions coming from the service members as they reflected on their deployments and the nature of these wars. Again, our goal is to create an archive that will be utilized by students and the broader community well into the future.

Final Thoughts

Since 1973, the United States military has relied on an "All-Volunteer Force" (AVF) to sustain its military. The decision to eliminate the draft in 1973 came in the latter stages of an unpopular war. One consequence of this change has been an increasing military-civilian gap in our nation. According to a 2011 Pew Research Center Survey, for example, only 33% of 18–29-year-olds had an immediate family member who served in the military, compared to 79% of adults aged 50-64.[19] In 2021, less than 1% of the US population serves in the military (roughly 1.4 million men and women), and it is reasonable to assume that knowledge about the military within the civilian population will continue to decline in the years ahead. The growing divide comes at a time when US global commitments, both military and non-military, are considerable and I suspect will continue to be an important topic for discussion within the military, as well as the broader society.

As one who came of age during a contentious time, particularly amidst debates over a "far-off" war in Vietnam, I have thought about these issues for much of my lifetime. Our Vietnam project in 2019 brought much about that earlier war back into my consciousness, especially while conducting the interviews with veterans of that generation. It is striking how societal attitudes toward the military seem different in 2021 – we often see much deference to service members at public events and hear those words, "thanks for your service" quite often. And that, arguably, is a great thing. It is interesting to me, however, that this change in attitude coincides with the growing military-civilian divide, and I am not quite sure what to make of that.

For more than four decades, I have pitched the importance of "public service" in my classrooms, whether it be through voting, volunteering, seeking public office, teaching, joining the military, or any other type of service to others. I must admit, working on this project and tracking so many of my former students in their military journeys since 9-11, has been somewhat overwhelming. Their call to service, their authentic sense of duty, their courage – these are admirable beyond measure. I am not surprised, however, because many of those traits were present as they sat in my classrooms, and always gave me a sense of hope for the future of this great country.

[19] "The Military-Civilian Gap: Fewer Family Connections." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-family-connections/.

Timeline of 9/11 and Resulting Events

September 11, 2001:

7:59 am – Flight 11 takes off from Boston to L.A. There are 11 crew members, 76 passengers, and 5 hijackers on board.

8:15 am – Flight 175 takes off from Boston to L.A. There are 9 crew members, 51 passengers, and 5 hijackers on board.

8:20 am – Flight 77 takes off from Washington D.C towards L.A. There are 6 crew members, 53 passengers, and 5 hijackers on board.

8:42 am – Flight 93 takes off at Newark. There are 7 crew members, 33 passengers, and 5 hijackers on board.

8:46 am – Flight 11 crashes into floors 93 through 99 of the North Tower.

8:59 am – Port Authority orders the evacuation of the entire World Trade Center complex.

9:03 am – Flight 175 crashes into floors 77 through 85 of the South Tower.

9:05 am – President Bush is alerted of the second crash and 25 minutes later, addresses Americans saying, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand.”

9:37 am – Flight 77 crashes into the Pentagon resulting in 59 deaths from the plane and 125 on the ground.

9:59 am – The South tower collapses after burning for 56 minutes. More than 800 people are killed.

10:03 am – Flight 93 crashes outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers and crew storm the cockpit. 40 passengers and crew are killed.

10:28 am – The North Tower collapses after burning for 102 minutes. More than 1600 people are killed.

8:30 pm – President Bush addresses the nation again, assuring Americans that a search is underway for, “Those who are behind these evil acts.”

September 13th, 2001: The white house announces that there is, “overwhelming evidence” that Osama Bin Laden is behind the attacks of 9/11. Prior to these attacks, he had claimed numerous other attacks aimed towards the United States.

September 14th, 2001: Congress authorizes President Bush to use "all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."

September 20th, 2001: President Bush establishes new Cabinet position for Office of Homeland Security

October 5th, 2001: 1,000 U.S. troops from the 10th mountain division are sent to Uzbekistan, which borders Afghanistan.

October 7th, 2001: The U.S begins bombing Taliban training camps and military installments in Afghanistan under President Bush's order.

October 26th, 2001: President Bush signs the Patriot Act into law, which gives the U.S unprecedented tools and abilities to track and limit terrorism.

November 2001 – September 2002: Bush administration conducts massive amounts of investigations into Iraq to determine their nuclear capabilities, the relative danger of Saddam Hussein, and their ties to Al Qaeda. The government determines that there is enough evidence to expect a nuclear weapon to be in the process of being made, that Saddam Hussein is a danger to the U.S and allies in Europe, and that the ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda are strong.[20]

December 9th, 2001: In Afghanistan, the Taliban collapses with the surrender of Kandahar. Despite the end of a threatening Taliban regime, Al Qaeda continues to hide in the mountains.

March 2002: Operation Anaconda begins in Afghanistan, which is the first major ground assault on Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. Nearly 2000 U.S troops are committed to this operation and despite its size, the Pentagon plans to utilize more military strength in Iraq, which allegedly houses the chief threat of terror.

September 17th, 2002: A new defense and National Security Strategy which uses the "Bush Doctrine," is brought into play. It relies on preemptive force and military action the primary policy.

[20] It's important to note that there was much uncertainty in the USA and around the world in regard to how concrete the evidence against Iraq was. Allegations of forged documents and the withholding of critical information regarding the search for weapons in Iraq were big items in the news. The nation was divided on what to do about Iraq.

September 19th, 2002: Iraqi foreign minister tells the U.N. that Iraq is “totally clear of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons." The same day, the White House delivers a strongly worded draft for a resolution that would allow the President to, “use all means that he determines to be appropriate, including force, in order to… defend the national security interests of the United States against the threat posed by Iraq, and restore international peace and security in the region.”[21]

October 11th, 2002: Congress passes legislation that allows President Bush to use military force in Iraq.

March 18th, 2003: President Bush gives Hussein a 48-hour period to leave Iraq or the U.S will begin military action.

March 20th, 2003: An hour and a half after the 48 hours are up, explosions are heard in Baghdad. Bush submits a letter to congress stating that diplomacy will not secure peace and that further military action will be taken in Iraq to end the power of those who assisted in the 9/11 attacks.

April 19th, 2003: U.S officials in Iraq seize 2 trailers claimed to be biological weapons labs.

May 1, 2003: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announces that major combat in Afghanistan is over and will begin with the transitional period of returning strength and stability to the country.

June 15th, 2003: The U.S. Military begins operation Desert Scorpion, which was a series of raids across Iraq in search of resistance bands and weapons.

December 14th, 2003: Saddam Hussein is captured near his boyhood home. It is heralded as a possible turning point in the war towards less violence.

January 2004: Bush abandons the search for weapons of mass destruction, revealing that they were, “Almost all wrong.”[22]

October 29th, 2004: Days before the election in which Bush is reelected, Bin Laden releases a videotaped messages again claiming responsibility for the September 11th attacks and emphasizes his goal to return “freedom” to Afghanistan.

April 2004: Horrific treatment of detainees inside Abu Ghraib prison is publicized and brings about the conviction of 7 soldiers for the torture of the inmates. Critics claim that higher officials are spared in the ordeal although having had a hand in it.

July 2006: Violence in Afghanistan rises with intense fighting in the southern part of the country. Experts blame a failing central government for the rising number of attacks.

[21] (Flashpoints USA, 2004).
[22] (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021)

January 2007: Bush commits another 20 thousand soldiers to Iraq to help bring stability in and around Bagdad and back to a troubled country after Saddam Hussein's hanging.

September 1st, 2008: In a step towards American removal from Iraq, Bush hands over military power in Anbar, one of the country's provinces, to the Iraqis. Later that year, voting rights are awarded to Iraqi citizens in many of the provinces.

February 1st, 2009: Newly elected President Obama announces plans to remove combat brigades from Iraq by 2010. His plan includes leaving 25,000-50,000 soldiers temporarily to train security forces and make the transition smooth.

February 17th, 2009: President Obama recommits to Afghanistan, claiming that it is the more pressing front against threats of terrorism.

March 27, 2009: A new American strategy in Afghanistan calls for the deployment of 4000 soldiers with the mission to train Afghan armies and police forces. The aim for this plan is to strengthen stability and return a strong government to the country.

December 1, 2009: Obama announces a surge in deployments to Afghanistan that will, "increase our ability to train competent Afghan Security Forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans."[23]He also sets July 2011 as the drawdown date for those troops, promising withdrawals of troops.

August 31st, 2010: After 7 years of war, 4400 U.S casualties, and tens of thousands of Iraqi civilian deaths, the U.S officially ends its combat mission in Iraq. Obama promised to continue providing support for Iraq by leaving roughly 50,000 soldiers to train security forces during the transition. However, increasing violence in Iraq threatens the timeline of soldier withdrawal.

May 1, 2011: Osama Bin Laden is killed by U.S forces in Pakistan after a 10-year

[23] (Counsel on Foreign Relations, 2021)

involvement in Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11 attacks. Obama prepares to announce drawbacks of the 30,000 troops in Afghanistan.

December 18th, 2011: The last soldiers leave Iraq after nearly 9 years of occupation. The U.S military presence in Iraq was replaced with a diplomatic one, vowing to continue to support and guide a still troubled nation.

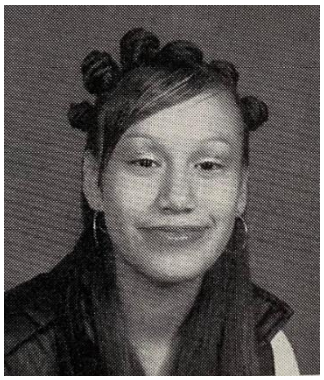
May 2014: Obama announces a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S troops from Afghanistan to take place before the end of 2016. The first phase of his plan calls to leave 9800 troops there to train Afghan forces and to conduct operations against the remnants of Al-Qaeda.

November 2020: The U.S announces to halve the number of troops remaining in Afghanistan to 2,500 by January. This comes amid warnings from experts that withdrawing too quickly from Afghanistan will allow it to become a haven for terrorists.

April 14th, 2021: President Biden announces that the U.S will be completely withdrawn from Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of 9/11. The remaining 3,500 troops will be removed regardless of the progress made in peace talks around Afghanistan.

"I was emotionally moved because of all the lives that were taken; September 11,2001 will be a day I'll never forget… It was a sad day for America. I kind of got mad when…people from different parts of the world celebrated…

-Bianca Whitecloud, September 12, 2001



Teacher Participant: Chris Manuel Zacher: BRFHS Class of 1975

1. Identify yourself, where you live, and your connection to Black River Falls.

My name is Christine Manuel Zacher. I moved to Black River Falls in the 4th grade and graduated from BRF High School in 1975. In 1981 I moved to Northport, Long Island, New York to marry my husband, Paul, a life-long Long Island resident. I started teaching music (elementary and middle school band) in the Northport-East Northport Schools in September 1981 and retired from the same district in June 2019.

2. What is your memory of the actual "day" of 9-11? I note that you were teaching in the New York area and this must have been surreal. Did you feel vulnerable as this was happening and in the days beyond?

September 11, 2001 was indeed a surreal day; I remember it as though it happened just yesterday. The year had just begun (we start after Labor Day) and I had just finished my first 6th grade band rehearsal when another teacher burst in to say that a plane had just hit one of the Twin Towers in the city (what we call Manhattan). It took a full minute to absorb this news, then I and my colleagues quickly tuned in to a local NYC tv station. Sure enough, the first tower was in flames. We just stood transfixed; no one said a word.

I thought next of my own family. My husband worked on Long Island, thankfully, so that wasn't a worry, but I was really concerned about how my daughters, grades 8 and 3 at the time, would receive and respond to the news. I knew that many students in each of their grades had parents who worked at the WTC. (My oldest daughter was in 8th grade social studies 1st period that day; the students stayed for several periods and watched the 2nd place crash in real time. She has never gotten over that.)

Strange to say, we did not feel particularly vulnerable after 9/11, I think mostly because we were so numbed by the human loss. Almost every community in the NY Metro area lost someone that day; we lost 6 men, all employees of either Aon or Cantor Fitzgerald, from Northport. Several colleagues lost spouses and children, as well. Many NYC firefighters and police from Long Island perished that day, including Capt. Kathy Mazza of the Port Authority Police, who ordered her people out of the building then went back in herself as it collapsed. She was the sister of Paul's best friend; her badge and picture are part of the 9/11 Museum. We spent the better part of the next 6 weeks going to memorial services; it felt like it would never end.

The one thing that was completely eerie: the day after the attacks, a huge black and blue cloud passed over our house. It smelled like burned building material, jet fuel and some other things I did not care to think about.

3. What connections did you have with students/families that lost family members in the attacks?

I taught, and met, members of 5 of the 6 families mentioned above. Despite being situated in a vast suburban area, Northport feels like a small town; everyone knows everyone else. There were two families that I knew better than the others, having taught multiple kids in each family in both elementary and middle school. My daughters attended the same schools, so I had worked with the adults on school events, etc.

On the day of the attacks our principal got on the loudspeaker to announce what had happened and how classes would run for the day. He then said that any student having a parent who worked at the WTC should report to the office, and that faculty members who were free should accompany them. I went to the main hallway and happened upon my two students I knew rather well, who were on their way to the office. They looked completely bewildered (they were only 10 and 11 at the time). When we got to the office it was crowded with students calling their parents, parents who had run to pick up their children, and staff members who looked scared to death. The mom of one of my students was there; she was sobbing and saying over and over how her husband's last words were "I'll call you back". I sat with her for a few minutes while she gripped my hand. (The other student's mother came a few minutes later so I was spared having to make the phone call with him.) Across the hall, one of the guidance counselors was sitting in complete shock; her husband was a trader at Cantor Fitzgerald, and she couldn't reach him. That scene played out several more times over the course of the morning; we just couldn't wrap our heads around what had happened.

4. Were you able to talk with people who survived the attacks?

Yes, though most didn't want to talk about it. My neighbor, who escaped from the 2nd tower, walked with many others from lower Manhattan north on the FDR drive (the highway that lines the east side of Manhattan) up to the 59th Street bridge and over into Queens (that's a long walk). He was covered in the grayish dust that was all over lower Manhattan. He only said he will never go back to the city, and to my knowledge, he hasn't. I also knew families of several of the police and firefighters who worked on "the pile" for days and weeks following the attacks.

Most of them refuse to describe their experiences. (And many of them became ill with cancer from breathing in the debris.

5. Can you comment on what you may have seen in terms of the long-term impact this had on students and families?

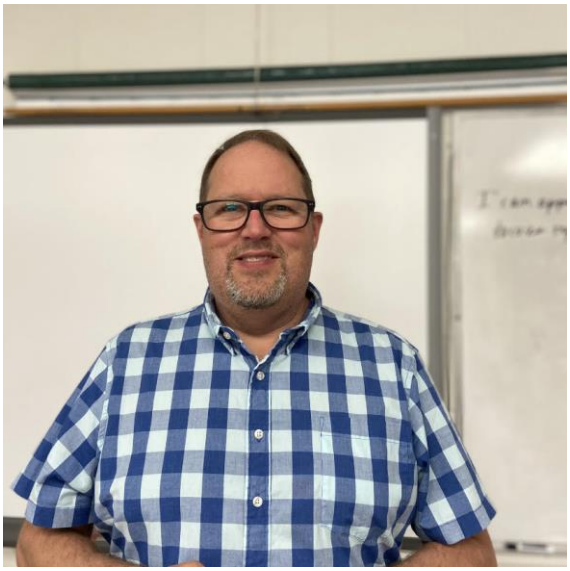
As you can imagine, these families were never the same. The two kids I had ushered to the office that day both dropped out of many of their activities afterward. Some of the families moved away. The counselors in our district formed a support group for these kids; I'm not sure how long it ran.

Hope this helps; apologies if it ran a bit too long. I have to say that writing this is bringing it all back up; I think we all have PTSD from that day.

I finally got up the courage to visit the 9/11 memorial and museum 2 years ago; had to leave halfway through the museum, it was still too difficult nearly 20 years later. (They did a fantastic job; hope you've gotten there.)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your project. Can't wait to see the finished product.

Teacher Participant: Tony Boerger



Tony Boerger has been a social studies teacher at Black River Falls High school since 1994. He was in his classroom teaching on the day of 9/11 and has seen firsthand over the last 20 years how the impact of those events created a lasting effect on the students and country.

Interview and transcription by Maddie Diehn

Diehn: Can you run me through the morning of 9/11 as you remember it?

Boerger: I was teaching AP Psychology and it was like my second year teaching it, so my class sizes weren't real big. It was a small group, probably like 8 students. I can even remember 5 of them who were sitting there. At about 8:45 or 8:50 another social studies teacher, Jason Janke, came into my room and said, "You need to turn your TV on." We used to have a TV up there. And I turned it on right after the second plane hit. So, I'm still trying to figure out what happened with the first one and then the second one hits. I think as soon as I figured it out, I turned to the students and said, "You're never going to forget where you were when this happened." I knew right away when it happened that it was that kind of moment.

Diehn: Yeah, absolutely.

Boerger: It just had that feeling to me, like things are never going to be the same again in that instant. And then of course, the social studies teachers, the four of us, got together after that class had ended and talked about what should we do? Should we just go ahead with what we had planned today, or should we stop and watch this stuff and talk about it? And that's what we decided to do. As the day goes on, we found out about the Pentagon and after that, we hear about the 4th plane in Shanksville, Pennsylvania that was forced to the ground.

Diehn: Right.

Boerger: It seemed like it was going to target Washington D.C. And it became really clear right away that this was an attack on our infrastructure. You know, the world trade center represented the financial center. The Pentagon representing our Military, and then Washington D.C. representing our laws. So, it was obvious right away that this was a very calculated thing. And as the day went on, we found out that Al Qaeda took responsibility for it and then that night, I remember watching President Bush and how he had said that anyone who was involved in this, or harbored people involved with this were enemies of the United States. There was this impending feeling of, are we going to war? What's going to happen?

Diehn: Sure. And no one really knew.

Boerger: Yeah. I remember, I didn't go to bed all night long. I stayed up and watched the news all night and then came in and taught again the next day. I think it was a Tuesday. There was just this feeling of shock. Just to know that there were no planes flying. For like 4 days, no planes flew. Just that feeling like, there are no planes out here. Thinking about things like, what's going to happen? How are they going to find out who did this when they're all dead?

Diehn: Lots of questions.

Boerger: It was a very surreal feeling.

Diehn: Definitely.

Boerger: I've had that feeling other times too, a little bit with Columbine to a lesser degree.

Diehn: Oh, sure.

Boerger: I knew that schools would never be the same again. I had even less that feeling with the Capital Riot, but I did have it a little bit. I think it's too bad we didn't have school that day. Because I think it could have been one of those moments if we had all heard about it at the same time and watched it together and discussed.

Diehn: That makes sense. We all missed it when we were at home.

Boerger: Yeah.

Diehn: What about the reactions of your students? Were there any that stuck out to you?

Boerger: So, I had juniors and seniors. They were very quiet. I think in a lot of ways they were feeling how I was feeling. It's interesting, my wife came home, she teaches 6th grade, she came

home that night, and she was really just dismayed with her class because a couple kids laughed.

Diehn: Really?

Boerger: Yes. And she said, “I don’t know if they laughed because they were nervous or they didn’t know how to feel or what.” It makes you realize that there are just so many reactions for people to have to this. And you can’t tell somebody else how to feel. I don’t know. Even thinking about it now, I go right back there. Whenever I talk to a class about it, I go right back to that day.

Diehn: I’ve heard that everyone has a flashbulb memory of the day. They can all tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing.

Boerger: Yeah, it’s like when your kids are born. I can tell you every detail about it. And I will always remember the capital riot because I was standing around a cell phone with 5 other teachers watching it because our internet was out that day. It was a virtual day, and the internet was out, so we couldn’t get it on the computer. We were all watching it on Mr. Shepard’s phone like, Oh my God! What’s happening at the capital?

Diehn: I bet that was a new experience. What kinds of discussions did you have with other staff? The day of and the day after?

Boerger: One of the things we decided right away, and I remember Paul Rykken and I in particular, talking about having kids write some stuff down. So, in our classes, we didn’t make anybody, but we asked if anyone wanted to write, and we had quite a few kids that wrote. Then we sat down together and went through them. We decided to keep 13 or 14 of them and we still have them in an archive.

Diehn: I’ve been looking through them for the project.

Boerger: Good, yes. One of the things that really stuck out was Jake Rykken, Paul’s son. It was his 17th birthday. I can just remember reading his and thinking, Oh my gosh, and it’s this kid’s birthday. Another thing, we didn’t know everything right away so it wasn’t like we could just look and see this was happening. The days following, we were just putting everything together and understanding the full extent of what happened. It was an end of an era of innocence. You know, you used to go to the airport 20 minutes before a flight. You didn’t have to worry about going through security if you were going to a Packer game or something. It changed all that stuff. Now, when people go to big events, there’s always that feeling like, this would be a good target for a terrorist attack. We didn’t think that way before.

Diehn: No people didn’t. I always think of that for shootings because I’ve lived through so many school shootings. I associate it with that more.

Boerger: And that’s the thing with Columbine too. To me, that was an end of innocence too. Before that, you didn’t even think about that. We would have bomb threats once and awhile, but they were never going to happen. All the sudden you thought, anybody could come in here.

Now, we've taken steps and I think we're safer, but we shouldn't even have to be thinking of that. We should be here to learn and not feel afraid.

Diehn: I agree. Did you notice a change in the students after the attacks? Or a change in the subject matters that you or other teachers taught? Or how did you personally change what you taught?

Boerger: There was almost immediately a resurgence of patriotism. Especially in social studies, everybody wanted us to do the God Bless America everyday talk of presidents and how America is so great. And you wanted to do that, but you had to temper some of it too. It was kind of a natural backlash to what had happened. We had lots of flag days where people would wear red, white, and blue. We had stuff like that all the time. I don't think we all had flags in our rooms until September 11th, and shortly after that is when the pledge mandate came.

Diehn: Really?

Boerger: Yes. It said that you had to have the pledge, or the Star-Spangled Banner played or said in your school every day.

Diehn: I didn't know that.

Boerger: It was a reaction to this as well. So, it did change. And it's hard to talk about current events in social studies because you don't have the perspective of history. You need some years. So, everybody wants to talk about it, everybody has questions. You don't want to give disinformation. It's just liked the capital riots.

Diehn: Right, we don't know everything yet.

Boerger: Everyone wants to talk about it and it's like, well we can talk about it, but we have to be careful because how much of this is real verses how much are we going to find out later was something else? We still don't know everything from that day, and we aren't going to know everything for years.

Diehn: Very true. So, prior to the attacks, I know there was some buildup between our countries, did you anticipate any sort of attack? Maybe not to that extent.

Boerger: After the first Gulf War, which would have been like 1990 or '91, I just felt like, why are we so involved in the Middle East? Is this really about sending the rewards of freedom or finding weapons of mass destruction? Or is it trying to protect our oil interests? You know that sort of thing. And when September 11th happened, a lot of people said, you know, this is a chapter in a book of American involvement in the Middle East. But is it an end chapter, a middle chapter, a beginning chapter? It was looking like it was a middle chapter. We had been in Lebanon for years and Iraq for years. We gave Saddam Hussein the weapons to fight Iran. We gave Mu'ammar Al-Qadhdhāfī and Osama Bin Laden weapons.

Diehn: Right.

Boerger: We gave weapons to them to fight the Russians in Afghanistan, so, I would never say that anybody invites violence, however, I think a lot of people had been saying for years that our involvement in the Middle East at some point would have some repercussions. I don't think anybody saw September 11th happening, but I think that there were a lot of people that expected some repercussions for the involvement.

Diehn: That's interesting. I feel like people don't really see it as the middle chapter. Especially my age group as much. We learned it was almost like the start of why we went into Iraq and Afghanistan, but it really wasn't. Like you said, there is a lot that leads up to it.

Boerger: Well, if you want to start at the beginning, I would go back to 1948. 1948 is when the nation of Israel was created as a home for the Jews. That area used to belong to King David and King Solomon, great Jewish kings and they built temples. Then at some point, the Turks took it over and then there were the crusades, but that was the country of Palestine and it had been for years. But they carved that area out all the sudden like, this isn't yours anymore, this belongs to the nation of Israel. We were such a strong supporter of Israel and that created the conflict. I think that was the start, in many ways, of those hard feelings.

Diehn: That's interesting how far it can be traced back. After the attacks on September 11th, do you feel that there was ever a return to normalcy?

Boerger: No.

Diehn: No?

Boerger: Your whole life we have been in a state of war.

Diehn: That's true.

Boerger: I mean, when do you declare victory? We never left Iraq. We built the largest marine base in the world in Iraq, and we will never fully leave Afghanistan. This won't ever end. War has changed. It's not two armies meeting on a battlefield. It's precision night strikes and you're fighting a terrorist group that doesn't come out and fight, either. I don't think that life will ever go back to normal. Did it go back to relative or new normal? Sure, quickly actually. It didn't take long, and people were on planes again. But I don' t think it would ever be the same. I think it's the same on how our two major political parties will never be the same after 4 years of divisiveness.

Diehn: I can't say I think it will either. Did many of your students change? I use the example of students being motivated to join the military right away.

Boerger: Yep. There were those, certainly. You know, kids and teenagers are much more adaptive than adults are. They were able to get back much quicker than most adults. It certainly affected a lot of people, the military. All the sudden families being broke up because dad is deployed. It changed all those things. But students are resourceful. They bounced back quicker than most people did.

Diehn: That dynamic of things changed things for sure.

Boerger: I wouldn't say there's not a day that I don't think about something connected to it, but I recognize on a regular basis just how different life is. It's kind of weird teaching it too nowadays because in some ways, it's like teaching Vietnam. There's no institutional memory of it.

Diehn: None.

Boerger: I think everybody in high school was born after it.

Diehn: I think the year before us was the last class.

Boerger: So, there's no memory. The first few years when I taught it, it was like, oh my gosh. But then it got to be like, well I was in third grade, so I sort of remember it. And now it's just another historical event.

Diehn: And it's like Vietnam since we were there for so long and there's a big question of why after so long.

Boerger: They say that it takes 50 years. That you need 50 years of perspective to judge a historical event. So, you know, we're coming up on the 20th anniversary, so we need another 30 years and all the people who were in power to sort of die off before we can do that. But I can't imagine it wouldn't be viewed any differently than these other huge events in American History: Boston Tea Party, Pearl Harbor, etc. I don't see how it would be different.

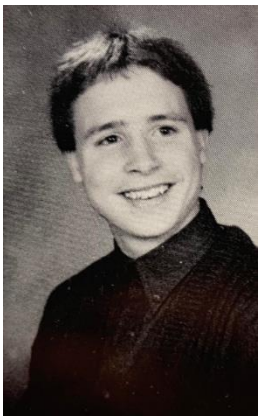
Diehn: Well, it was a big event. It changed our course of history. It'll remain significant.

Boerger: Yes, it will.

Veterans Interviewed for the 9-11 Project

Name	BRFHS Grad Year	Branch of Service	Deployments
The following veterans graduated prior to 9-11.			
Eric Ramey	1992	Army National Guard	Iraq '03
Michelle Embretson-Green	1994	Army National Guard	Iraq '03 and '05
Kyle Nosbisch	1996	Army Reserves	Afghanistan '04
Kari Stetzer Porter	1997	Army National Guard	Kuwait '04 Iraq '09- '10
Rebecca Bjerke Ayers	1999	US Navy Diego Garcia B.I.O.T. and Gaeta, Italy	Supporting Role for Mideast Operations '01 and '02
Dane Gabrielson	1999	Army National Guard	Iraq '05
Ryan Simonis	1999	Marines	Afghanistan '02, '07, '11, '17; Iraq '03, '04
Brandon Winneshiek	1999	Marines	Iraq '04
Joey Williams	2001	US Army	Iraq '06, '09 Afghanistan '13
Luke Koran	2001	US Navy	Afghanistan '11 and '12
The following veterans experienced the events of 9-11 while still in high school.			
Dan Helland	2003	US Air Force	Afghanistan '12 (and supporting roles)
Ken Roberts	2003	Army National Guard	Iraq '09
Jim Babcock	2003	US Army	Iraq '10 Afghanistan '12
Jake Rykken	2003	US Army	Iraq '10
Alex Koch	2004	US Army	Iraq '05 and '07

Eric Ramey: BRFHS Class of 1992



1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

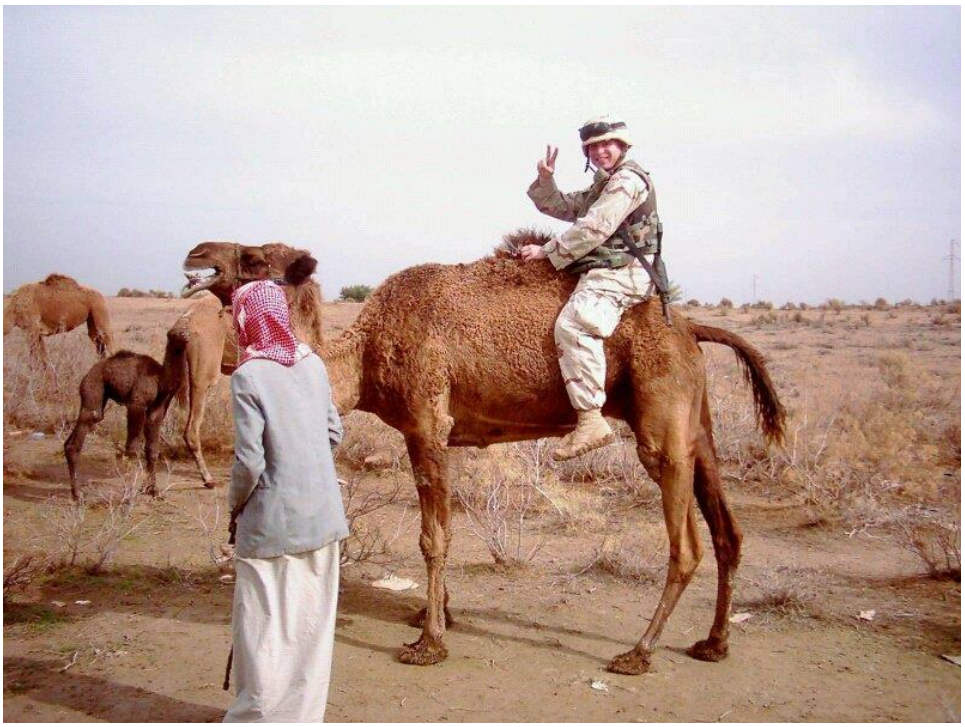
I was 27 years old at the time of 9/11. I was a chemical dependency treatment social worker at a prison in WI and I was working "late" that day, starting at 1100. I thought it was weird that my alarm clock went off and was full of "static" instead of the music from the radio. I got up and turned on the TV just as the second plane hit. The whole day was a blur, yet I can remember it vividly. We canceled group that day for the inmates and watched the news and processed what was happening. Never realized at the time the effect that day would eventually have on me. Personally, I was shocked, felt violated and was pissed off that someone had the audacity to invade my country with that level of violence. This is where my "soldier" persona was triggered, and I wanted to be a part of taking back our freedom that had been violated.

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway? Or were you already in service?

Growing up, I was never the military "type", and the absolute LAST thing I thought I would do was join the military. I joined the WI Army National Guard in 1997 after I had already completed five years of college, admittedly joining to help re-paying back my student loans. This perspective changed, however, once 9/11 happened as I came to see what my role in the military could and would eventually be. I realized that my true purpose would be realized, and it was much deeper than receiving money to pay back college. After 9/11, I became prouder, and it became a much more "professional' duty even thought it was "just" the National Guard. My attitude about being in the military was greatly affected by 9/11. I went from "I'm just doing this to get college paid for" to, "all right motherfuckers, you messed with the wrong country and we're coming to get you and I'm going to be part of it." My pride and patriotism were affected positively because of 9/11 and I wanted to do something about it instead of just sitting back and watching others do so.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank and some commentary on what you were doing during deployment. If you were not deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq, what was your assignment during your time in service?

Funny story about my deployment. My commitment to the NG was up on February 19, 2003. During our weekend drill at the beginning of February, I turned in all my military gear and I was



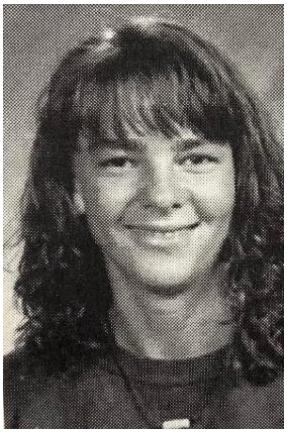
ALL DONE. Except on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2003 the Stop Loss was enacted. This prevented anyone still enlisted from getting out of the military. So, my time froze, and I not allowed to expire and was back to being a regular member of our unit. My unit, A-724th Engineer Battalion, deployed March 15, 2003 to active Army to serve under Operation Iraqi Freedom. In May of 2003, I was deployed to Kuwait for a month to "climatize", then to Iraq on Friday the 13th of June. Man was it ever Friday the 13th!!!!!!. We arrived to excruciating heat, sandstorms and resistance entering Iraq from Kuwait. We made it safely to our base, however. Because we went over early in the conflict, we had to build our basecamp and start from scratch. We slept in tents, had no air conditioning or showers initially. My rank was Staff Sergeant, or E6, and a squad leader. I was a 12B, or a Combat Engineer, so we did a little bit of everything. After arriving to Iraq after the Marines had taken Baghdad, our job was essentially the "rebuilding" and peacekeeping phase of the conflict. This included peacekeeping with the locals, or nationals. We helped rebuild roads, schools, provided security along Main Supply Routes (MSR) between Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and conducted Civil Affairs missions in local villages. We were all over the map in Iraq. Our home base was Tallil Air Base, but we had numerous bases where we worked and resided. My favorite missions were conducting Civil Affairs missions We would go to local villages and build positive relations with the village members. At times, we would bring them gifts like soccer balls or school supplies and anything else they might be able to utilize in their community. This was very rewarding because we would get to know the locals as people, humanizing them instead of seeing them as the "opposition." It took a while, but the locals began to trust us and our presence after a while.

4. What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the wars, etc.

I think it's important for young people to never take their freedom for granted and that it took years and years for the US to gain our freedom. We can lose our sense of freedom instantly, as demonstrated by the acts of 9/11. Maintaining our freedom also requires a lot of work and is by no means free. I think it's important to see how 9/11 brought not only the citizens of the US

together, but the whole world. When I was deployed to Iraq, we collaborated with several different nations, including South Korea and the UK. One of the most stressful things about being deployed so early in OIF was the fact that nobody seemed to know the reason or motivation for being over there. At the time, we did not believe in or know the "mission" at hand. There were no WMD's and the public perception and confusion as to the reason we were over there were very much in our thoughts. I can tell you on a personal level and speaking for my peers that at that time, in 2003, early in the OIF, it was a daily challenge to motivate ourselves and we became very resentful towards each other, leadership, government, etc. Our resentments trickled up the chain of command, which brought a lot of unrest within the unit and units. Morale was very poor at first because, again, we saw no reason to be over there. We had no problem, PHYSICALLY BEING in Iraq, but the NOT KNOWING for sure WHY we were there was a catalyst for unrest, rumor and just not a very healthy environment. Though some resentments were underlying, there was a brotherhood like no other while being deployed. As miserable as it was in Iraq, there are days I wish I could go back to experience that level of camaraderie and brotherhood again. The whole experience really made me a patriot and appreciate the history of our nation and what has happened in our history to get us to where we are today. I did not have that same level of patriotism before 9/11 as I do today.

Michelle Embretson Green: BRFHS Class of 1994



1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

I was 25 years old and was at home getting ready for work when I heard the news and was in shock. I did not think it was even real at the time. I then drove to work and thought it was the longest ride ever and another attack hit. I was working at the Black River Falls Clinic Pharmacy. I remember my coworker had brought a small 13-inch TV with her that day, so we watched the news all day. That kind of thing would normally not happen in the workplace but that day we were all worried.

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway? Or were you already in service?

I was already in the service. I had signed up in 1993 between my Junior and senior year of high school. I remember going to bed the night of the attack wondering not if I was going to be deployed but WHEN. When I signed the dotted line, I never thought I would be deployed for war. I only thought I would be here to help in case of a state or federal disaster (like the flood we had in BRF). Times were changing.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank and some commentary on what you were doing during deployment.

I deployed with the 1158th Transportation Unit out of Black River Falls.

Green and her unit in Iraq, 2003.

1st deployment - March 2003 to April 2004 - I was a Staff Sergeant (E-6). We trained at Fort McCoy for 3 months and then our mission ended up getting cancelled, so we stayed state side. Half our unit went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and the other half, which I was part of, went to Fort Irwin, CA. We hauled equipment at the National Training Center for units to do their training prior to deployment in the "sand box".

2nd deployment – Oct 2004 to Dec 2005 Staff Sergeant (E-6) We trained this time at Fort Benning, Georgia for 2 months and deployed to Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. I was an 88M and we hauled equipment with HET's (Heavy Equipment Transporters) from Kuwait to Iraq.

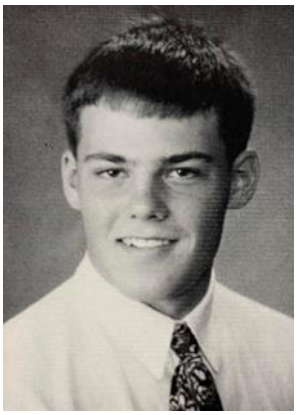
4. Did you face special challenges with your service due to gender?

We had a very strong unit that supported each other. It always felt like my extended family. We all had spent a lot of time together and it felt like I was there with my brothers and sisters. I am grateful for the people I deployed with. Since I had grown up in Hixton and went to school in BRF I had known quite a few of the soldiers for many years before I deployed. It made the deployment much easier and comforting.

5. What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the wars, etc.

9-11 does not define us. We need to remember those that were lost but look forward to each and every day as we are not guaranteed tomorrow.

Kyle Nosbisch: BRFHS Class of 1996



1. I was 23 years old on 9-11-2001. I was in Winona, MN at Winona State University. I had fallen asleep in my apartment the night before with the TV on and woke up to the news talking about the first tower being struck. I followed the news the rest of that day, and was shocked, along with everyone else. I remember the quiet during the days following the attacks.

2. I had already joined the U.S. Army Reserve, enlisting December of 1996. I tried to pay attention to the developing war in Afghanistan, and later in Iraq, realizing that I would likely be deploying to one or the other at some point.

3. I deployed in the Spring of 2004, starting pre-deployment training in February at Ft. Mccoy. I was a recently promoted Sergeant (E-5) when deployed. I was deployed with an Engineer Company (B Company, 367th Engineer Battalion, from Mankato, MN) as the Recovery team leader within the Maintenance Platoon and spent the beginning of my deployment at Bagram Airfield. I later had the opportunity to be assigned to a Route

Clearance Team as their vehicle maintenance support. The team I was assigned to was initially operating out of Kandahar Airfield, and later moved to Forward Operating Base Lagman in Qalat. We provided route clearance for the infantry battalion (2nd Battalion 35th Infantry Regiment, from the 25th Infantry Division) in the Qalat area. This means we drove out in front of them and ensured the route was clear of landmines or IEDs. We were lucky and no one was injured on any of the missions I was part of.

4. I believe that the stories of sacrifice and heroism on 9-11 are very important. Stories like Flight 91, or stories of the NYPD/FDNY personnel who gave their lives saving others, as well as heroic actions of other citizens on that day. I also think that it is important to focus on some of what occurred in this country following the attack, both good and bad. The country came together in a way that we had not in a long time. We also showed our darker side with displays of racism or hatred towards Muslim Americans. I also think it is important to look at the reactions of our government, some of which drastically changed our country from that point forward.

I am completely in support of questioning the reasons for going into the war in Iraq, as long as we recognize that the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines sent to fight this war were not responsible for the mistakes of their leadership. When it came to reports of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, we were lied to right along with everyone else.

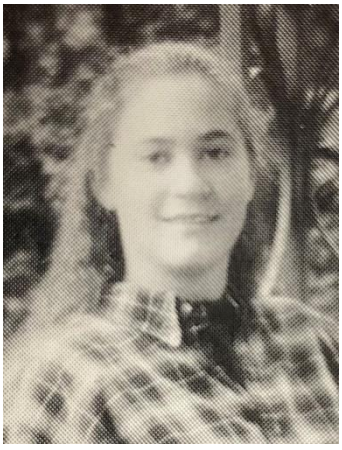
Thank you for your interest in this recent period of American history. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to help.

Kyle Nosbisch

Staff Sergeant (Retired), United States Army Reserve

Deputy Sheriff / School Resource Deputy, Jackson County Sheriff's Office

Kari Stetzer Porter: BRFHS Class of 1997



1. I was 23 years on September 11, 2001; in my last semester of college before graduating that December. At the time of the news reports, I was working at Wis-Pak (a Pepsi distribution center), and I remember exactly what equipment I was working on. We had been listening to the radio when the news came on. I don't recall my exact thoughts, but I knew my life was about to change.
2. I enlisted into the Wisconsin National Guard in December 1995. My initial contract of six years would have expired in December 2001 (three months after the attacks). After the initial six years of service, Soldiers are required to complete two additional years of IRR (Individual Ready Reserve) which meant I would no longer have to attend drills or military courses for two years. However, if needed any unit would be able to request my services. Fearing I would be called up by a unit I didn't know, I extended my contract.

3. In 2003, the 1158th unit was activated to Ft. McCoy and was told we were most likely going to be deployed to Iraq. We spent three months on stand-by until part of the unit was sent to Ft. Knox; KY, part to Ft. Erwin, CA; and the rest were sent home. I was mobilized to Ft. Knox for six months, returning in December 2003. The unit was then activated again in October 2004 and deployed to Kuwait from December 2004-2005. I was part of a Transportation unit as 92F (Refueler). The fuel distribution had been contracted out to civilians, so I became part of the Maintenance Section and assisted with maintenance operations while on convoys throughout Iraq. My rank during my first deployment was Sergeant. My second deployment to Iraq was with the 732nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion from April 2009-2010. We were stationed at Camp Tallil, Iraq. My rank during the second deployment was Sergeant First Class and I was responsible for logistical operations out of the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) as the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge).

4. I believe there have been challenges regarding gender, especially when you are higher ranking and have more responsibility. I retired as the First Sergeant (highest ranking Non-Commissioned Officer of my unit/company) of a transportation company consisting of 169 Soldiers. Although, I do not believe my gender impacted my ability to successfully lead, I do believe made it more difficult at times. I believe there were a variety of gender related challenges throughout my military career but that strengthened my resolve and built character.
5. I think it is important for young people to understand that not everyone in the world shares the same values that most Americans embrace. Because of that, three-thousand people lost their lives, and the world was changed forever. As a mental health counselor working with combat veterans and their readjustment into civilian life, I am thankful for the public's acceptance of returning troops and not ostracizing as Vietnam veterans encountered.

Rebecca Bjerke Ayers: BRFHS Class of 1999

1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

On 9-11 I was 20 years old. I remember being at a going away party for some people I worked with and one of the PC2s came out of the room saying there was a crazy trailer for what looked like a movie about planes hitting the Twin Towers in NYC. Then we heard sirens and were all told to go to our rooms until further notice. I did not know what was going on for another day.

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway? Or were you already in service?

I was already enlisted in the US Navy when 9-11 happened. I joined in April of 2001.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank and some commentary on what you were doing during deployment.

I was stationed in Diego Garcia B.I.O.T. I was a PCSN (Postal Clerk Seaman) and had been stationed there in late August of 2001. I was a postal clerk at the local post office on island and continued my day-to-day job. In August of 2002 I was on the USS LaSalle AGF 3, a forward deployed ship in Gaeta Italy, where we continued to help the war effort.

4.What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the wars, etc.

I feel that young people need to know that even though the country suffered a great tragedy, the entire country came together as one.

Dane Gabrielson: BRFHS Class of 1999

1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

I was 20 years old, and it was a day before my 21rst birthday, I was going to college in Ely Minnesota and was outside in a dendrology lab and when we all got back in the van and the instructor had the radio on and he said to all of us that something was going on in New York. When we got back on the Vermilion campus, they had TVs out there was lots of crying then I looked and seen the towers on fire then I sat down with some fellow students and watched. The next day in Minnesota History class the instructor pulled a chair up and we all discussed the events of the day prior.

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway? Or were you already in service?

No, I had always wanted to join as I grew up in a military family environment, my great grandma was awarded three bronze stars in WWII. My father and stepfather served. I was living in Green Bay going to school when I finally decided to go in and sign the biggest contract in my life. I didn't tell anyone in my family until after I enlisted. I just celebrated my 18th year combined in the Wisconsin Army National Guard and currently serving in the United States Army Reserves.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank and some commentary on what you were doing during deployment.

I have been deployed twice in my career:

a. 2005-2006-Stationed at Camp Navistar Kuwait My unit's responsibility was doing convoy security all over Iraq we did daily missions and missions where we gone for a week or two week at a time depending on the length of a mission. I was a PFC-SPC on this deployment. I was deployed with Bravo Company 2-127 Infantry out of Green Bay.

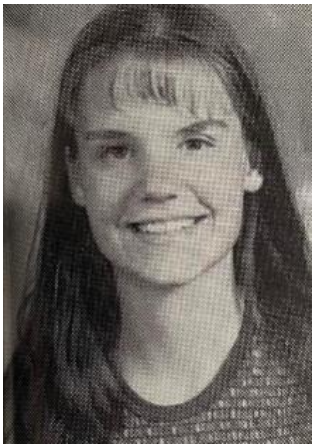
b. 2009-2010- Stationed at Camp Cropper Iraq, my units' mission was prison guard of the detainees of our units two assigned compounds on the prison. We ran the security of the school on the prison and ran the special needs compound. I was deployed with the 1158th Transportation Black River Falls Wisconsin.

4. What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the

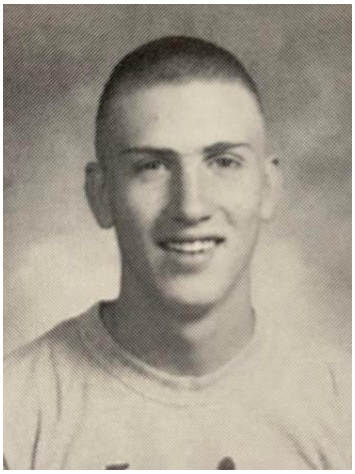
I feel the young people should know what led up to the events like prior attacks and threats. I also think the youth needs to know that everyone is different we all have different beliefs and religions of the world and the religions all have different beliefs. If you look at the map of Iraq there is many different factions of the Islam religion and different varieties of other religions, there too. If you look at the many different looking of the history of the area it is near the holy land, During the 2005-2006 deployment we visited the temple of Ur a religious site.

"I'm not really surprised that we were attacked, because it had been predicted for a long time. I didn't think it would be this destructive though. I am sad for the victims and families, but I am also angry that it happened. We need to react and defend as soon as we know who did this. Our country needs to realize that we are not indestructible.

- Carly Chenoweth, September 12, 2002



Ryan Simonis: BRFHS Class of 1999



1. Current age 39, Rank: First Sergeant (E8), and Billet: Company First Sergeant, Headquarters Company, Combat Logistics Regiment 4. I enlisted on December 21, 1999.

2. On September 11, 2001, I was 19 years old. I was training for an already scheduled deployment at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I would say that the events of 9/11 did eventually dramatically change my sense of what I was doing because it changed our deployment schedule, rotation, method of warfare and eventually defined why and where I would serve for the next decade plus.

3. Deployments

2002 - Afghanistan - partnering with and training the Northern Alliance, pursuit of Al-Qaeda

2003 - Iraq - initial invasion, rapid advancement and seizure of key terrain and strategic strongholds/cities

2007 - Afghanistan - Embedding with local militia/freedom fighters, hunting Taliban and Al-Qaeda

2009/10 - Iraq - a lot of convoy security and retrograde of equipment and personnel, miles and miles of patrolling too.

2011 - Afghanistan - infantry operations, infrastructure building

2017/18 - Afghanistan - airfield security, embedded with Georgian light infantry battalion.

4. Transition back to the states differed each time.

2002 - Straight forward.

2003 - Rough as I was injured and was a different atmosphere after the kickoff of Iraq.

2007 - Straight forward.

2009/10 - Straight forward.

2011 -Straight forward.

2017/18 - Straight forward.

5. This is a difficult question in that I could talk at length about the good, bad, and in between for both. These wars were different even that the unorthodox warfare seen in Vietnam and counter-insurgency operations have never stopped evolving. I would honestly say I believed, then and now, that we were at least trying to do the right thing on the larger scale, albeit misguided at times and of course, several examples of soldiers that didn't uphold that same virtue.

6. Again, might need a decent amount of time to talk about this aspect. Bottom line, there was a legitimate reason to go to Afghanistan and arguably Pakistan after 9/11. This was proven when Osama Bin Laden was later caught and killed. Iraq was a little less clear although justified. What they really need to understand is that President Bush went off the intelligence and information he had at the time. Weapons of Mass Destruction got a bad rap because they weren't not found, but not found in near the quantities initially believed and the plans for more etc. At some point, international law and accountability must be enforced. Honestly, I would be curious as to how you taught and what the discussion is now regarding the US going to war in our history and how the military industrial complex plays a role and steers our diplomacy and foreign policy.

Brandon Winneshiek: BRFHS Class of 1999

1. Your age on 9-11-2001?

I was 19 years old. I was in the School of Infantry at Camp Pendleton. The base went on lock down and from that day on I knew I was going to war.

2. What do you remember about the actual "day" and the events that occurred on the morning of 9-11?

I knew I was going to join the Marine Corps when I was just a young boy. 9-11 just made me pay attention to detail and make sure I try to retain as much knowledge as possible before I deployed.

3. Did the events of 9-11 impact your thinking regarding your own future and military service?

I deployed to Okinawa for a year (approximately 2002-2003). We returned to California and prepared for Iraq. I deployed to Ramadi, Iraq, in March of 2004, with the 2nd Battalion 4th Marines. We were in Iraq from March - September. My battalion took more casualties than any other unit during the Iraq War. During our seven-month deployment, we took thirty-four KIAs and over two hundred and seventy were wounded.

Joey Williams: BRFHS Class of 2001

1. Your current age, rank, and current assignment. 37. Major (USA). Educator and Curriculum Developer at USMC Expeditionary Warfare School (captains-level course), Quantico, VA.

2. What prompted you to seek an appointment to USMA? I was intrigued by the complexity of the Civil War in Mr. Rykken's (civics? or history?) class in high school. We discussed how the classes at West Point graduated early, so that classmates could go home to lead military operations among their state militias or within Union or secessionist militaries. Specifically, I desired to explore the tensions of friends and family knowingly and willingly fighting each other for reasons that only become less clear as time passed. Shortly after we discussed that in class, I sent my standardized testing scores to USMA and submitted an application soon after.

3. Your age on 9-11 and where you were that day. Any memories that stand out. Did the events of 9-11 dramatically change your sense of what you were doing, in terms of the West Point experience? I was 18 years old. I had just started my first semester at USMA. Soon after returning to my barracks room after breakfast, a few upperclassmen started pounding on the doors and screaming for us to turn on the news. One plane, UAL 175, had flown almost directly over the Academy grounds. The graduating class would be commissioned eight months from that day, and they understood the magnitude and implications of what was happening much more fully than I did.

4. When and where were you deployed during the 9-11 Wars? A brief description of the deployment(s). I deployed as an infantry platoon leader to Baghdad, Iraq in 2006 conducting frequent, usually multiple daily, combat patrols in the dense urban terrain west and north of the city center. As a reconnaissance platoon leader, I deployed north of Baghdad to Diyala Province in 2009 to conduct intelligence-driven targeting missions. I finished the deployment as a battalion assistant operations officer. Then in 2013 I deployed as an infantry company commander to Paktika Province, Afghanistan. For the first part of that deployment, I was responsible for securing a large base by employing a combined 250-member that included my own company, an Afghan security company, and an infantry company

of the Jordan Armed Forces. I also supported multi-day base closure and retrograde missions from eastern Paktika as the drawdown neared. I transitioned mid-deployment to lead a Security Force Advise and Assist Team (SFAAT) and serve in eastern Paktika as the US advisor to a partnered Afghan infantry battalion commander (who was an officer during the Soviet War in Afghanistan). Finally, in 2017, I deployed as a staff planner as the Deputy Chief of Future Operations (D/J-35) for Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJFLCC-OIR) in Baghdad, Iraq. The 13-member DJ-35 shop had representation from nine partnered countries.

5. Your transition back to the states after deployment -- how did that go? In a short understatement, not well. I am still trying to get my feet back under me. Not realizing the severity of the impacts of PTSD was having on me, I lost the ability to interact constructively with those around me and have suffered immensely from depression. Thankfully, my wife is faithful, and my closest friends remained supportive.

6. Obviously you were aware of the debates concerning the Afghan and Iraq Wars. What was your sense of what the Bush and Obama Administrations were doing? The right approach? I agree with the Clausewitzian description of war as an extension of political action "by other means." In foreign interventions, political actions are driven primarily by domestic considerations. Even in a "normal" war, this creates a natural tension between the executive and legislative branches and their constituents. Likewise, the primary drivers of the economy are also key focal points for foreign "political action." In a war of ideas (Global War on Terrorism and the Axis of Evil), these tensions are skewed in a way that primarily favors a domestic ideology over a "foreign constituency." One result of this disconnect is that servicemembers at the low tactical level often gave the impression of having little to do with strategic narrative.

While my liberty to speak publicly on this topic is a bit limited as I am still in uniform, I can share that my perspective on this topic has developed over the years. I now know that there are no "answers" to these types of problems. Those who assert any binary or non-nuanced perspectives on war are not only irresponsibly incomplete but also diminishing the experiences of everyone involved -- civilian and military, domestic or foreign, hawk or dove. Employing a Socratic method, I would encourage others to explore this topic in three questions: 1.) Did the US's decision to act in large scale in ___ meet the tenets of just war theory and the standards of law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law? 2.) Once engaged in _____, were the US's tactical and operational objectives linked to clearly stated strategic objectives with a published endstate that included a transfer to civilian authorities? 3.) While engaged in ____, what interventions did the US either under-prioritize or not employ at all...In other words, rather than assessing what WAS done, what WAS NOT done (and why)?

7. What would you want young people to know about the 9-11 Wars?

1. Above all, war is a human endeavor and has unpredictable, unquantifiable, multi-order, chaotic, and irrevocable consequences. To the nations involved, to the cultures engaged, to the individuals waging conflict, to the families and residents at home and abroad...nothing ever again will be as it was. War is not a news bite. It is not a social media post. It is not water cooler talk. It is not a Hollywood movie. It is an ever-changing competition of equally and violently

opposed people, who may or may not have immediately consented to a contest that is scored in lives and deaths. As technology and warfighting techniques advance, and as war becomes increasingly decentralized with non-state actors, war continues to become more lethal and persistent and less predictable and decisive. Since 9-11, homes, artifacts, people, and towns that once thrived in some of the oldest establishments in the world no longer exist. War is, in a word, heartbreaking.

If we accept that we, as individuals, understand some things in ways that no one else does, we should be able to accept that the same is true of others' perspectives. The point is that there are as many ways to determine what is "right" as there are unique people in the world. What is "right" for one person may be problematic for another. What is "right" for one group may be in tension with another group. What is "right" for one nation may be in conflict with another nation. The assertion of rightness is an assertion of perspective, not of universal truth. To the same degree that you believe what is right, people on "the other side" feel equally as strongly. Yet, US hegemonic war asserts a de facto framework of rightness over other countries' social, political, religious, and anthropological norms. The point here is not to be anti-American or anti-GWOT; the point here is to say that there are no "answers" when it comes to international competition, conflict, and war... There is only perspective. For every answer, there are many more questions.

Conflict and war negatively impact women and children more significantly than men. Of note, women are severely underrepresented in global political structures and militaries, and children are not directly represented at all. In other words, those most negatively impacted by war have the quietest and least influential voices in deciding "what happens" in war.

"We watched as the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, stood helplessly as planes crashed and buildings crumbled. As Americans, we had always believed we were safe and undefeatable, but yesterday, we learned this was not true.

- Jenny Warmke, September 12, 2001

Luke Koran: BRFHS Class of 2001

1. Your current age, rank, and current assignment.

38, CDR (O-5), PMA-265 Integrated Product Team (IPT) Lead. PMA-265 is the F/A-18 and EA-18G program office, which is an acquisitions command. We are tasked with weapons system development, procurement, and sustainment for the F/A-18 and EA-18G aircraft. I lateral transferred into the Aerospace Engineering Duty Officer (AEDO) community in February 2018. I'm responsible for managing acquisition programs related to Electro-Optical and Infrared Systems on the F/A-18.

2. What prompted you to seek an appointment to USMA?

I actually attended the US Naval Academy (USNA), which is the service academy that predominantly commissions officers into the Navy and Marine Corps. In my college search I was initially motivated by a strong desire to find a way to separate myself from my peers and achieve something remarkable (very non-specific and probably typical for a high schooler :)). At my core, there was a strong inner confidence and a competitive nature combined with a lack of satisfaction with what I had done until that point (I was unable to break out athletically the way I wanted to which quite frankly was frustrating for me). During my college search I was influenced by my brother, Matt (3 years older than me, who you taught as well) who suggested I look into the service academies. We had grown up in a rural area and played "army" in the woods behind our house throughout our childhood. He had looked into the military as a way of paying for college, but ultimately decided not to go on that path. During the summer prior to my senior year, I attended a program called Naval Academy Summer Seminar (a one-week exposure to life at the Naval Academy in Annapolis) which gave me a feel for what life at a service academy would be like. I was forever changed by the experience—it was exactly what I was looking for. I came away with a clear understanding of what awaited me—intense mental, physical, and moral challenge, adventure, camaraderie, and a wide array of opportunities to serve the country. After my week in Annapolis, I was most impressed by the cadre of current students that facilitated the event. The level of maturity and focus was unlike anything that I had seen or experienced back at home witnessing high school alumni return after

a semester of college. I knew by accepting this challenge I would be signing up for an intense period of accelerated personal growth which was exciting to me.

3. Your age on 9-11 and where you were that day. Any memories that stand out. Did the events of 9-11 dramatically change your sense of what you were doing, in terms of the West Point experience?

I was 18, on my way back from class as a plebe (freshman) at the Naval Academy. I remember "chopping" (customary high knees for a plebe at the Naval Academy) through the hallways of Bancroft Hall (the dormitory that everyone lives in) when I was stopped by an upper classman and told to get in my room and turn on my computer (which had a TV cable connection and tuner that we were typically not authorized to use). I watched the second airplane impact the south tower live. It was a horrifying experience which brought sadness, disbelief, intense anger, motivation, and uncertainty. But it also brought gravity and new purpose to the word service. We quickly transitioned from a country at relative peace, to a country at war with an unknown (and severely underestimated) enemy. This realization occurred almost immediately, and it changed the ballgame in a big way. I remember watching the first classmen (seniors) reaction and feeding off of it. In a few short weeks they received their service selection assignments (what career field they would enter), and it became all about preparation to lead in a suddenly new environment. I felt that same challenge (and pressure), even as a plebe, to ensure I was prepared to lead others in a new and uncertain fight.

4. When and where were you deployed during the 9-11 Wars? A brief description of the deployment(s).

I deployed twice in support of Operation Enduring Freedom on board the USS Carl Vinson in 2011 and 2012. I flew 39 combat missions over Afghanistan as an F/A-18 pilot. We launched from the Arabian Sea and flew into Afghanistan for (mostly) pre-planned support to Army, Navy and Marine Corps units on the ground who in most cases relied on our presence overhead as a deterrent. But, in other cases we were re-tasked to support troops in contact with the enemy by either employing ordnance or providing a show of force to quell hostilities. We carried a standard combat load out of GPS and laser guided weapons and 20mm cannon rounds. Most combat missions were 6 to 8 hours in length and concluded with a night landing on the aircraft carrier. This was often the most stressful part of the mission. On my first deployment, I was onboard USS Carl Vinson for Osama Bin Laden's burial at sea which was particularly notable in that it brought some sense of closure to the events of 9-11. As an operational F/A-18 pilot, I deployed a third time to the Western Pacific / South China Sea on board USS John C. Stennis. Our role was largely to provide a presence in that area to preserve sea lanes and reinforce the International Law of the Sea. I only mention this because the general consensus preference for the air wing during my final deployment (2016) would have been to play a more direct role in supporting Operation Inherent Resolve. This might seem odd, but we spend an incredible amount of time and energy creating readiness for combat in training and it can be disappointing when you're not employed in that way. This is admittedly a self-centered viewpoint as our mission in the Pacific was also important, even if our platform's role wasn't more connected to the overall strategy.

5. Your transition back to the states after deployment -- how did that go?

My transition was probably better than most. As a pilot I was more physically separated from the violence happening on the ground. In most cases, we were operating from a relative sanctuary compared to our counterparts we were supporting. Nevertheless, there was still risk and a significant burden that we bore in responsibly employing weapons when and if they were being called for. Upon our return, I remember being happy to be off the ship for what ended up being two nearly eight-month deployments separated by only about 4 months at home. Nonetheless, I found it difficult to communicate with my loved ones (wife and parents) what I had gone through. There is a strong sense of comfort that comes with feeling understood that only others who have done what you have done can provide.

6. Obviously you were aware of the debates concerning the Afghan and Iraq Wars. What was your sense of what the Bush and Obama Administrations were doing? The right approach?

I believe the Bush and Obama administrations were trying to establish a clear precedent that the United States would not tolerate regimes that provided safe haven to terrorist groups that were actively targeting the US. In Iraq it appears this was more presumptuous than it was in Afghanistan. It's not clear to me whether we had exit strategies matched to the response options that were considered before we reacted. I'm confident there were probably a lot of diverse visions for what we would achieve in our approach. I'm also confident that it was not intended to produce an extended counter insurgency. In fact, both wars quickly devolved into extended counter insurgencies after the regimes were toppled that we were late to recognize and adapt to. It was frustrating to see how fragile our military strategy was because we were the most technically advanced force in the world fighting perhaps one of the most ill-equipped forces in the world. This was a clear miscalculation and I think there is a general consensus on that. The ideal state where we win over the local population and are greeted as a liberating force was an impossible chinning bar, but probably something a lot of people envisioned or hoped to achieve. We lacked the capability and capacity to secure that type of victory on a large scale. That fight is essentially a recruiting battle and those seeking to secure trust are inherently disadvantaged as outsiders. We achieved some degree of a symbolic victory by proving that figureheads of terrorist organizations will meet a certain fate. I also believe there is a strong feeling we kept terrorist organizations at bay by preventing them from organizing more elaborate attacks—a feeling of safety and security is counter to the goals of a terrorist's mission. The initial military approach was rightfully re-evaluated when it wasn't working and has evolved into the counter insurgency strategy that we know today. I'm still not certain we've arrived at the right approach. I am becoming more certain there is not a logical stopping point. I am also certain it will continue to be debated—which is good. I think in retrospective when looking at the war on terrorism, we need to appreciate the need at the time to react and consider that nearly all reactions could have arguably resulted in the same terrorist counter insurgency we're in today.

7. What would you want young people to know about the 9-11 Wars?

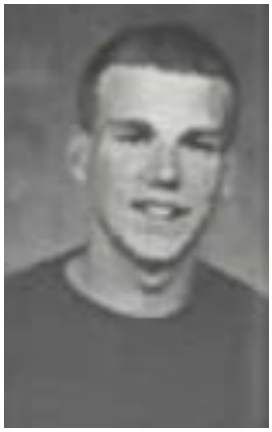
I would want them to view war as more than just open conflict where victory can be achieved by delivering traditional effects on a target more precisely and faster than an

adversary. I would want them to understand that inventive conceptual thought, ingenuity, and cultural understanding were sometimes better tools than brute force in securing progress toward solving our most difficult problems. I would want them to appreciate and understand the intense learning that took place by our nation's best military minds in developing our current counter-insurgency strategy. I would want them to understand the importance that different forms of diversity (experience, background, thought, age, culture etc.) played in developing that strategy. I would also want them to appreciate that each conflict is different and nuanced because we're a constantly evolving and rapidly changing world. As a result, we probably will not be able to wait to enter future conflicts (particularly with non-state actors) until we have a perfectly crafted strategy that will achieve a predictable conclusion.

"Some kids behind me were fooling around and I told them, 'Be quiet, this will change our lives.'"

- Shawn Danzinger, 2002

Dan Helland: BRFHS Class of 2003



1. Current Age, Rank, and Assignment

a. I am currently 35 years old

b. Major in the United States Air Force Reserve

c. Assigned to 5th Air Force Headquarters – A3 Staff as "Individual Mobilized Augmentee to the Combined Coordination Cell-Air Exercises"

2. What prompted you to seek an appointment to the Air Force Academy?

a. I always had an interest in airplanes and flight, but never really knew how to go about actually becoming a pilot. I knew that pilot training was expensive and therefore something that I would not be able to afford on my own. I always had a strong interest in the STEM studies so about the time of my freshman year I decided since I wouldn't be able to afford going to civilian pilot training, the next best thing would be to shoot to go to school for aeronautical engineering and hopefully one day be able to design and work on airplanes. Up until my freshman/sophomore years of high school I honestly had no idea the military academies existed and then there were 3 individuals from the BRFHS class of 2001 appointed to USMA, USNA, and USAFA. It was then that I decided to do some research to learn about the benefits and career opportunities afforded by attending any one of the academies. It wasn't long before I learned that attending the Air Force Academy or Naval Academy could lead me to pursuing both of my desires of becoming an aeronautical engineer and pilot. Therefore, I set out to obtain

appointments to both USAFA and USNA, with USAFA being my primary choice. In January of 2007 I received and accepted my appointment to USAFA.

3. Your age on 9-11 and where you were that day. Any memories that stand out. Did the events of 9-11 dramatically change your sense of what you were doing, in terms of plans for military service?

a. I was 16 years old.

b. I remember walking into Mr. Volkmann's chemistry class for 2nd period and everyone was silent and looking at the TV. By this time both towers had been struck and it was clear that the events happening that day were a purposeful attack on America. What was unclear at the time was who was responsible. I remember feeling extremely sad for the individuals on board the airplanes, but also angry at whoever the individuals were that were responsible for the attacks. I remember there was debate as to whether we should play our football game that week against West Salem and when it was decided we would play the game, Corwin Brown and I wore yellow ribbons on our shoes in memory of those who had lost their lives in the attacks. As time went on and it became clear who was behind the attacks, I felt a sense of duty and responsibility to help correct the wrong in some way.

c. I can't say that the events of 9-11 dramatically changed my plans for the military, but it definitely solidified my desire to go into the military and serve my country. Prior to 9-11, I was really only wanting to join the military for personal reasons, to pay for college and pursue my desire to be an aeronautical engineer and hopefully a pilot one day.

4. What involvement did you have in either the Afghan or Iraq Wars?

a. I graduated from USAFA in May of 2007 and then went to pilot training and graduated from pilot training in November of 2008. I didn't qualify in my first aircraft, the C-21A Learjet, until May of 2009 and was stationed at Ramstein AB, Germany from 2009-2012. During that time, I didn't deploy or have a direct part perse in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; however, the mission of the aircraft I flew during that time was to fly high level US military and civilian leaders

throughout the European and Mid-East theaters, so I was involved more on the diplomacy aspect of the wars as opposed to the direct fighting/support missions during that time. I also had the opportunity to transport Georgian soldiers who had been wounded in Afghanistan back to Georgia from the Landstuhl medical facilities which made the wars a little more personal and real for me. In 2012, I switched to the KC-10A refueler and flew that until early 2016. During my time in the KC-10, I deployed 3 times directly in support of Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF), Freedom's Sentinel (OFS), and Inherent Resolve (OIR). We deployed to an undisclosed location in the Middle East from where we flew refueling missions into Iraq and Afghanistan. Our primary mission was to refuel the allied combat aircraft providing close air support for ground troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of my most memorable missions was leading a 15 aircraft formation of KC-10 refueling tankers, USAF F-22s, USAF F-15s, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force F-16s on the first night of campaign operations against ISIS in Syria. This was a very interesting mission since it was the first time the F-22s ever deployed munitions against enemy forces and the first time the UAE had a female F-16 pilot as a mission commander. Having a Muslim female F-16 pilot attack ISIS fighters was a huge statement to the world that the practices of ISIS would not be tolerated.

5. Obviously, you were aware of the debates concerning the Afghan and Iraq wars. What was your sense of what the Bush and Obama administrations were doing? The right approach?

a. With hindsight being 20/20 I have learned that the Iraq and Afghan wars were two completely different wars fought for completely different reasons.

b. I felt the Afghan war was justified and unfortunately needed to happen to stop Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda from future attacks. Clinton's policy of minimal retaliation to previous attacks against the Khobar Towers and USS Cole emboldened Middle Eastern terrorists to plan and execute future attacks against the US on American soil. However, as we've seen countless times throughout history, having civilians in charge of the military is both a blessing and a curse. It is important to have civilians making the decision of when and where US forces are put into harm's way, but it is also important to let the military commanders make the decisions in how the war is fought to achieve the desired outcomes. Unfortunately, early in the Afghan war the military commander's hands were many times tied and what many believe could and should have been a quick and easy victory against Al Qaeda has been drawn out into an almost 20-year war. I believe there have been times where both the Bush and Obama administration put political needs/desires before the best interest of the warfighters and therefore allowed the war to continue to be drawn out. Examples of this are when troops were drawn down at the incorrect times which resulted in a need for an influx of troops to regain control of the country.

c. I felt the post-9-11 Iraq wars have always been fought under incorrect premises, but it is more complicated than simply saying it was right or wrong. Iraq was led by a ruthless dictator who by some estimates had murdered over 250,000 of his own people. By any western standard it would be a good thing if his government would be taken out. However, what was miscalculated by the Bush administration is how difficult it would be to install a new government in its place due to the deeply divided sects of the population; taking out the one government created the instability necessary to allow terrorism and extremist ideology to thrive. Where the

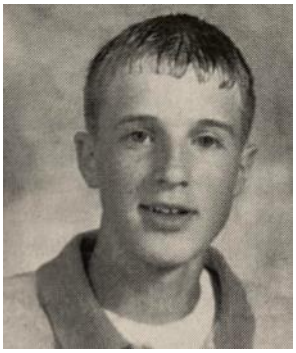
Obama administration failed was withdrawing from Iraq too quickly before a new stable government was formed allowing for the rise of ISIS. Thankfully, Obama was able to see the value of bringing American troops back to Iraq in 2014 at the request of the Iraqi government to help squash ISIS.

6. What would you want people to know about the 9-11 wars?

a. I think the most important thing to know about the 9-11 wars is that there is a lot more to them than simply, Osama Bin Laden attacked the Twin Towers, and we went to war with both Afghanistan and Iraq. Also, additionally there are consequences to every military action decision taken or not taken. By going to war with the government of Iraq and against the Taliban in Afghanistan without truly understanding their culture and values has created many unintended consequences. While our military is great at busting down doors, tearing down walls, and killing bad guys, our military wasn't meant to build up governments. Therefore, it is important for our world political leaders to have a solid plan in place for the future government of a country before they decide that the best course of action is to take out the current government. Another thing that I think is important to remember about the 9-11 wars is that they weren't simply US wars. We had the support of a host of other nations both politically and militarily which is why many of the military decisions made were more complicated than needed and sometimes hampered the overall success of the military mission. This leads me to my last thought, and that is once a decision is made to use military force, it is important to give the military commanders the desired outcome and let them achieve that outcome with whatever means they have within a morally correct construct.

"I thought it was just unbelievable that something that catastrophic could happen to America. It's the worst thing that has and probably ever will happen in my lifetime. It's just unbelievable to think thousands of people were killed by terrorists. I truly believe Bin Laden had something to do with this and that the U.S. better figure something out and go find who did this. I can't imagine what it was like for the people in the planes or somebody having no chance and jumping from the World trade center.

-Mike Lindahl, September 2, 2001



Ken Roberts: BRFHS Class of 2003

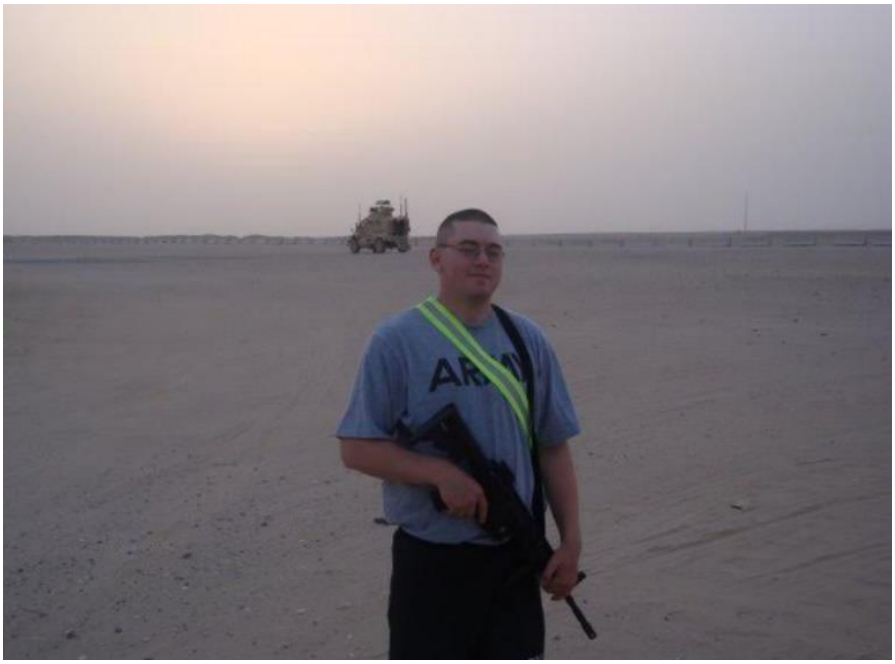
1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

I was 17, I was sitting in algebra 2 at BRFHS. I remember watching the news after the first tower was hit, seeing the second plane flying towards the second tower.

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway?

9-11 didn't really impact my decision to join the guards, I just knew there'd be a possibility of deploying. I hadn't really given a thought about joining the Army National Guard until maybe a month before joining. It was a blessing in disguise, helped me mature and gave me values to live by.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank/branch and some commentary on what you were doing during deployment.



2009-2010 and I was in Iraq. I was a E-4/specialist with the 732d CSSB in Tomah WI. We did maintenance, I personally worked with communications equipment.

4. What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the wars, etc.

I believe young people should realize how 9-11 changed how we think as Americans because we were attacked on our own soil. Being in Iraq really changed my view on the media, I talked to some awesome people that were from the middle east that were in support of us being there and at least to me, the media made it seem like every middle eastern person hates us and that's just not true.

"My initial reaction to the news was shock and horror… I immediately began to think of what our counter actions would be. Would this escalate into a depression? Or even worse, a war? As the day drug on I just wanted to go to sleep and wake up and have everything back to normal. "

- Lindsey Ahl, September 12, 2001

Jim Babcock: BRFHS Class of 2003

A junior on September 11th, 2001, Jim Babcock felt his world shift in the aftermath. After graduating high school from Black River Falls in 2003 and attending college for a year, Jim switched courses and chose to join the army as a combat medic to help advance his skills and protect our nation. Jim is now retired from the army and lives in Texas.

Interviewed by Paul Rykken

Transcription by Maddie Diehn

Rykken: Can you just start off by giving us your full name, date of birth, and how old you were on 9/11?

Babcock: My full name is James Babcock, or Jim, as most people would call me. I was born on January 24th of 1985. So that would've made me 16 on 9/11.

Rykken: Happened in the early part of your junior year?

Babcock: Yep, early in my junior year.

Rykken: Sure. What do you remember about the actual day of 9/11? Do you have any memories of that?

Babcock: The memories I have honestly are that I remember, I actually had your civics class 2nd period. I remember coming out of the first period and I remember there were kids in the hall. And I can't remember what my first-period class was, but the TV wasn't on, and I hadn't heard anything about it before 2nd block. And I remember hearing kids in the hallway saying, and I remember specifically there was one kid that said, "it's the start of World War III." You know, I can't remember who it was, but I was walking through the hallway and hearing this, and I walked into your classroom, and you had the TV on. And I just remember seeing the towers on fire and then I think we watched that second tower fall when we were in your civics class actually.

Rykken: Yeah. It was a surreal day as a teacher for sure.

Babcock: I don't think the magnitude, being that young, hit me at that time. Do you know what I mean?

Rykken: Right.

Babcock: It took a few years to become a little bit more in touch with everything that's going on around the world to really understand what the magnitude of that day was.

Rykken: Absolutely. We live with 24/7 cable news, and we have events that happen and then they just consume for several days. I think that happened with 9/11. One of the things that happened with students was that three or four days into it, kids were tired of it. They had heard it too much.

Babcock: Yes, absolutely. I remember playing football that fall, it was my first year as a varsity football player, and by the end of the week like you said, I was kind of more like, are we going to have a game Friday than we were really anything. It was that mentality I think for lots of us.

Rykken: That's an interesting thing. I had forgotten it impacted sports. Because we were doing moments of silence and we were doing announcements and all this stuff that really carried on for several months.

Babcock: Yes.

Rykken: You kind of alluded to this Jim, but did the events of 9/11 impact your thinking regarding your own future in the military or was that something you already determined beforehand?

Babcock: I kind of had an interesting journey to that. So, my first year after I graduated, I went to Platteville for a year. I went to college for a year. And after the first year, it wasn't for me, at the time anyway. It wasn't something I was ready to do. I kind of bummed around and took some meaningless dead-end jobs for a little bit for about a year and then in 2006, there was the surge into Iraq that President Bush ordered, and my whole family had been in the military and that gave me some direction. My great grandpa was a marine in WWI1, my grandpa was in the tail end of WWII, my dad was in the army for 4 years right after he graduated high school. The thing that they said was that it will help you get some direction, some purpose, some self-discipline:

things that I was lacking at that point in my life. And realistically I was thinking about it, and I was like, “Well this is my generation’s war, and I didn’t want to look back and say that I should’ve done something when I could have and so I was able. And it was something, like I said, that my family had always done, and I decided, in 2006, that it was the right time for me to go.

Rykken: It’s interesting. We talked in Jake’s interview. My father was a WWII vet, and he was 17 at the time of pearl Harbor and you mentioned your grandfather being a part of WWII. I know that those discussions between Jake and my father had informed some of his thinking. Which is interesting that you guys are the right age for your grandfathers to have that pearl harbor event which many have compared 9/11 to pearl harbor. So, you went in at ‘06, then?

Babcock: ‘06 I would have enlisted, August of ‘06.

Rykken: By the time you would have graduated high school the nation was embroiled in two wars, Afghanistan, and Iraq. So, I guess give us the story of your service, especially the part when you just went in. What were the steps and how long was it before you were deployed, that sort of thing?

Babcock: Okay. So, I enlisted in August of ‘06 and it was kind of funny, well not funny but, it was just like I woke up one morning and decided that’s what I was going to do. I went to the recruiter and took the ASVAB and two weeks later I was in basic training.

Rykken: Oh wow.

Babcock: It wasn’t a big, long-drawn-out thing. I went from one step to another. But I did my basic training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I enlisted as a medic, 68 Whiskey, so I was a combat medic. Did my basic at Fort Sill went to Fort Sam Houston here in San Antonio for my AIT, individual training and then my first duty station was in May of 2007, I went to Fort Wainwright in Alaska, first brigade of the 25th infantry division. They had just gotten back from deployment, so I came in on the tail end of that and I didn’t deploy at that time I was just there when they got back. The way that they were cycling at that time was about every 12-18 months units would go back to Iraq or Afghanistan. So, it was 2009 before I had my first deployment. I spent that three years in Alaska and when I was in Iraq I actually re-enlisted to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to be a member of the 82nd Airborne division.

Rykken. Okay.

Babcock: When I got back from Iraq, I stayed in Alaska fora little bit and then I went to the 4th brigade of the 82nd Airborne division and I was there for about 18 months again because I kind of caught that tail end of deployment and after that I went to Afghanistan for, I think we had a 7 or 8-month deployment.

Rykken: What year would that have been?

Babcock: That was 2012, I left in February 2012 and got back in August of 2012. Then I had decided I'd had enough and wanted to pursue other things and that's when I left the army in January.

Rykken: Were you in Iraq in 2010?

Babcock: Yes.

Rykken: That's when Jake was there. He was there for about a year, and you would've been there at the same time.

Babcock: Oh yeah.

Rykken: And you ran into Joe Williams in Alaska?

Babcock: Yeah, I was there about 3 months or 4 months maybe and then we had this new lieutenant come in and I look up and was like, I know that guy! That's Joe Williams.

Rykken: That's amazing.

Babcock: It's just funny how small the world is. You know, two guys from a town of 3500. And Joe and I ran track together. It's crazy when someone you know just happens to pop up at your duty station.

Rykken: On that line, were you ever with anyone else from Black River during your time of service?

Babcock: So, Ian Golliday.

Rykken: I remember Ian.

Babcock: He was in the National Guard, and we were in AIT, and I got moved to a different company because something weird happened where they overbooked out MOS and they had too many medics and if you were in active duty, they held you there a little bit longer. But the army didn't care if you were at Fort Wainwright or Fort Sam Houston. I had to stay there a few months longer in San Antonio. And I walked into my new bay to put my things away and put my gear down on the new bed and I walk into the bathroom and there's Ian Golliday. What are the odds!

Rykken: You just looked at each other and weren't even sure what to say!

Babcock: That's kind of how it was too. I was like, "Ian?" and he's like "Jim?" Like, yeah!

Rykken: That's always a funny experience. With the army, I've noticed with Jakes experience, he's been in 9 different places it's kind of a fraternity and he's been with this guy in one place and then they bump into each other four years later.

Babcock: Yep. It's a small army. You don't realize how small it is until you start into it a bit. Even the other day with my wife I ran into a guy that I was in AIT with 12 years ago. He's an instructor here now. Small world.

Rykken: So, when you went in in 2006, try and go back in your mind, I know it a few years ago, but did you go in fully aware and thinking in your mind like, "Hey, I'm going to end up in the middle east."?

Babcock: Yes, absolutely 100%.

Rykken: Because that's a common thing that I'm hearing. That anybody who went in it was an 80-90% chance you were going to go over there. And you knew that going in?
Babcock: Yeah. I knew going in and I knew that the odds were very good that I would be ending up in the middle east.

Rykken: And what made you go in as a medic?

Babcock: That one is kind of a funny story, I was talking to my dad and my grandpa, mostly my dad because it didn't really matter to my grandpa what I did. I was originally going to go in as an infantryman, but my dad, who spent four years as an infantryman with the 82nd Airborne, comes to me and said, "No, do something you can use when you're out of the military." Not that infantrymen don't have skills, but a lot of them that they had are just not applicable in civilian life.

Rykken: Sure.

Babcock: And so, I went back to the recruiter, and I asked him what the closest thing he had to being in the infantry that I would be able to use as a civilian and he said a medic. So, I said, "Ok. Put me as a medic." That's kind of how that ended up.

Rykken: Are you doing something in your work now that is related?
Babcock: No. I'm not actually. A couple of years ago I graduated with my bachelors, I got a biology degree. I'm working on my masters currently but right now I'm a fisheries biologist.

Rykken: Good for you.

Babcock: Yeah, for the state of Texas.

Rykken: That's great. So, let's talk about the experience a little bit. What was the most challenging thing in your deployment? I know you were there twice so think about either one of them.

Babcock: Yeah. I think it's the same for both. I think the hardest part of being deployed or my deployments, in general, is that your life stops when you're deployed. It's like Groundhog Day, doing the same thing day in and day out. In the meantime, all the other life around you is going on. All the friends you used to have or have back home, their lives just continue. For that moment of time, you're just frozen. Just hearing, you know guys graduating college, or getting married and having kids and you're just stuck there. It's just being away from what you know.

Rykken: What was your actual physical route to Iraq, where did you fly out of and where did you fly to?
Babcock: We had a direct flight to Iraq from Fairbanks, Alaska to Kuwait. And then we spent two weeks in Kuwait before taking a military flight to Balad airbase in northern Iraq and from there we took our strikers, no we took helicopters, from Balad to our base over by Baquba, Iraq. Then for Afghanistan, we flew out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina to Ireland and then to Kyrgyzstan, I think.

Rykken: That sounds familiar, I think it was Kyrgyzstan. There's a staging base there.

Babcock: Yeah. From Kyrgyzstan, we went to our base, which was in northern Afghanistan. The name escapes me right now but I'm sure I'll think of it.

Rykken: You know, Jake spent some time in Kyrgyzstan when he was in school. He did an exchange thing and spent time at their military academy.

Babcock: Oh really!

Rykken: Yeah, so I've learned about Kyrgyzstan a bit that way and then we also had a foreign exchange student from Kyrgyzstan a few years back. Anyway, Jim, once you were there, how quickly were you in action? I know you were in Kuwait for 2 weeks, but other than that was it a quick entry?

Babcock: Yeah, so for me being the medic basically, as soon as I got there, I started doing left seat right seat rides where one guy from the outgoing platoon and one guy from the incoming platoon ride around. And the outgoing guy shows you around, you know, "this is the spot to watch, here's what you should be looking for." As a medic, I got going right away. Within the first two to three days, I was there I was going on patrol and when I went to Afghanistan, I was a clinic NCIOC, so I was in charge of an aid station. So that was like the minute I landed, very shortly after the clinic was turned over to me to look after with my company.

Rykken: That's a ton of responsibility.

Babcock: It is.

Rykken: At a young age. I don't think you were very old.

Babcock: Yeah no, I think when I was running the clinic I was 26, 25?

Rykken: I think about that a lot and these interviews are hitting that home for me. These are young people. They're doing serious things. When you were there, this might seem like a silly question, but did you have a sense of mission? Or were you just getting the job done day-to-day?

Babcock: It's a tough question because I think it's a bit of both. I think I had this sense of a greater good, especially when I was in Afghanistan more than Iraq. A lot of the time though, like for me as a medic, my sense of mission came from making sure the 55 guys that deployed with me got to come home. You know, to do my best to make sure all 55 got home. It came more

from taking care of the guys with me. Then once I started running a clinic it was bigger than that. We treated almost 8000 people. Not just casualties, more of a variety of things with different patients. It was about 8000 people out of that clinic when I was there.

Rykken: So, you were busy?

Babcock: Yeah, but that was more how I saw my mission.

Rykken: Sure. What was the most, when you look back on it years later now, what was the most gratifying thing you did? What was the thing that gives you the most satisfaction looking back?

Local soldier awarded Purple Heart

Specialist James Babcock, 24, was decorated for combat action in Iraq. Babcock, a combat medic assigned to the 1-5 Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, has been stationed in Iraq since September of 2008.

A report Babcock's family received from the U.S. Army and Department of Defense stated, "The Purple Heart is awarded to Specialist James Babcock for wounds received from direct combat action with the enemy March 7, 2009, while on patrol in Baquaba, Iraq. Specialist Babcock's patrol was attacked with a hand-thrown explosive device, resulting in injuries to his upper torso and face."

He was also awarded the Combat Medical Badge in recognition of his treatment of his fellow soldiers. With complete disregard for his own injuries, Babcock continued treatment to the injured soldiers until arriving at the Troop Medical Center.

In addition, Babcock was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for actions taken in the treatment of the wounded soldiers after he himself had been injured and while still being exposed to the enemy. Babcock's medical treatment that evening resulted in the survival of his fellow soldiers.

"Babcock's actions bring great credit upon himself, the 5th Infantry Regiment, the 25th Infantry Division and the United States Army," the report concluded.

Babcock is currently stationed in Iraq, and according to his father, Kevin, James has recovered from his injuries and is back on duty. He is a 2003 Black River Falls High School graduate.

Contributed photo

Specialist James Babcock, a combat medic assigned to the 1-5 Infantry, 25th Infantry Division in Baquaba, Iraq, was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds he received following direct combat action in March 2009. He also received the Combat Medical Badge and Army Commendation Medal following the treatment he provided his fellow soldiers after he himself was injured. Babcock is a 2003 graduate of Black River Falls High School.

Babcock: The fact that all my guys came home, honestly. Like I say as a medic my trip to Iraq, my time there was different because I went later. I went in 2009 so it wasn't as kinetic and severe as what it was before. We still had casualties, but all my guys got to come home. That's my greatest accomplishment.

Rykken: Now, did you receive special recognition during or after your deployment?

Babcock: I did.

Rykken: Could you comment on that?

Babcock: Sure. So, in March of 2010 were on patrol and I was actually wounded so I received a purple heart for that night. Very minor wounds, but our vehicle got hit with a grenade that night. And then I also, for that deployment, I received the army commendation medal for basically being wounded and treating the other three guys who were wounded. But that's about it.

Rykken: How did those, just walk me through and remember that people who are reading this might not have any knowledge of the army, most people don't. But how did that process go? When were you awarded them and was it through a formal process?

Babcock: Yeah, so the purple heart is signed off by the commanding general, I believe, I would have to look at the orders. But that's not something that's given out at the company level. There was a formal formation and the whole company got together with the battalion commander and he brings you up in front of the entire battalion and he awards you. The three other men who were wounded that night also received theirs at the same time. So, they have us all in formation.

Rykken: That had to be a very sobering experience.

Babcock: Sobering, to say the least.

Rykken: I can only imagine.

Babcock: What was actually kind of weird about it was that I reenlisted in Iraq and on March 6th and was and was wounded on March 7th. So, it was a very weird couple of hours there.

Rykken: Were you ever in jeopardy with the wounds?

Babcock: No, no. Mine were very minor. It was just some shrapnel, and I was never in serious danger. One guy who was in our vehicle that night was evacuated to Landstuhl Airbase in Germany, going back to Alaska. He served for a few years after that though before getting out of the army, although he may have retired because he was close to 20 when we were there.

Rykken: By the time you went to Iraq in 2006, you were aware of course about the great debates that were going on in the country, especially about Iraq and not so much Afghanistan. Did you think about that very much? Or was it sidebar noise? When you were in service or over there did the boys all talk about it or was it mostly a discussion that happened here?

Babcock: It was more of an over here thing. Like I said I went to college for a year before all this and I can actually remember getting into a debate with a young lady when I was taking a law class.

Rykken: I can hardly believe you got into a debate, Jim.

Babcock: It happens sometimes!

Rykken: You were a good student that way, a thinking student.

Babcock: I was good in some ways and not so much in other ways. Anyway, yeah we were having that debate in a constitutional law class about Iraq. There were differing sides obviously but once you get into it and in the military it all becomes background noise. I don't think once in the military did it come up in conversation where someone was like, "We shouldn't be here." or questioned what we were doing. We all volunteered.

Rykken: Yeah, absolutely.

Babcock: We all knew we were going to end up in the middle east. Regardless of our personal opinions on it, we had a job to do. At the end of the day, we did it for the guy to the right and left of us. For most people, I think it starts out just for the greater good, you know fighting for your country.

Rykken: Sure.

Babcock: But at the end of the day when you're overseas, it turns into just fighting for the guys you're with on your left and right.

Rykken: You know, it's interesting. In the last 20 years of my full-time teaching career, I revised the curriculum a lot. One of my driving passions was to make sure the kids understood the 9/11 wars because one of the things that bothered me from the get-go was that the public became completely disengaged with the wars.

Babcock: Absolutely.

Rykken: And I know that only a small percent of Americans are in the military and all of that but the kids in school were just oblivious to it. It just as well could have been a video game. And it was very frustrating so we worked hard to make sure they understood it and I think we did a decent job at that. We weren't trying to teach a perspective: pro-war or anti-war, we were just trying to say, "Here's what's happening, people. You need to understand this. It's a pretty important thing that's going on in the country." I used lots of former students as examples in the process of that. Anyway, I've got another question for you, sort of on that vein.

Babcock: Sure.

Rykken: When you came back, did you have trouble adjusting or trouble with some of the regular things. We hear a lot about that with people returning.

Babcock: Yeah, it's a different element for sure. Suddenly, you're back. I got back from Afghanistan either late August or early September and by December I was ETS. (Expiration-Term of Service). You know, 90 days after I had just been back from Afghanistan. So, in that short time, I went from being in charge of a clinic and 65 people to nothing. Like I was just a student at UW Eau Claire like an average guy. I worked at a few sand mines for a while, I worked at Badger Mining at WP operations up there in Merrillan for a little bit before I moved to Texas.

Rykken: Sure.

Babcock: But yeah, all of a sudden you're just another person. So, it's a big adjustment. You go from being very structured to no structure and that sense of purpose in the army. There, you always know what to do, especially being a medic there was always something for me to be doing, people to take care of, there were always sick people. Just having nothing to do was a big adjustment for me.

Rykken: Do you find yourself missing that?

Babcock: I do. I mostly miss the camaraderie. You know, hanging out with the guys. Especially when my wife comes home and talks about her day and I'm like, you know, I wouldn't have done it that way. So maybe it's different for me too because I still have a connection with the military though her.

Rykken: That leads me to my next question. Do you maintain contact with people you served with?

Babcock: There are a couple guys that I correspond with pretty frequently and then like I said, my wife is still in.

Rykken: Sure. So, we're 20 years away from 9/11. You had a unique experience but also one that thousands of others had in terms of deploying over to the middle east and being a part of these conflicts. I'm going to ask you to make a judgement call.

Babcock: Ok.

Rykken: Do you think the response of the United States through three administrations: Bush, Obama, and into Trump, did the right thing overall?

Babcock: I think so. I really do. Especially in Afghanistan I think that was one where we were attacked. There was a paramilitary element, and they may have used a different type of weapon, but they attacked us and killed over 3000 innocent civilians who all had lives. I think there needed to be a retaliation for it. Iraq, I can see it both ways especially stepping back from it. I still think we were justified in our action as well because regardless of personal opinions on it, Saddam Hussein was a vicious dictator who was doing mass genocide on a group of people. One way or another he had to be taken out of power. Now, how that was handled is what bugs people. But I think that was also justified.

"I don't really know how to feel. I don't think that the whole thing has sunk in yet. But I do agree with President Bush that we should use military action against those who are responsible."

- Jim Babcock, September 12th, 2001

Rykken: I always remind kids when I'm teaching kids that there's only one war that wasn't debated afterwards, and that was WWII. Every other war there's a debate that ensues for at least a generation. It happened with these wars also.

Babcock: Yes.

Rykken: Last question then. If you could speak to yourself, well I guess I have a couple questions, if you could speak to yourself, Jim Babcock from 2021 to talk to Jim from 2001, what would you want that guy to know?

Babcock: Man, a lot.

Rykken: It's a hard question, I know.

Babcock: It is a hard question. I guess if you're talking about the military, that, don't change anything. I'll never in my entire life regret my decision.

Rykken: Excellent. That's great.

Babcock: I gained purpose, I gained my family out of it, direction. You know, I gained so much from it, and I wouldn't trade that.

Rykken: That's great. I got one more. What do you think students who are sitting in high school today should know about these conflicts? What kind of rises to the top?

Babcock: That's probably more difficult than the last few rounds.

Rykken: I know; I was getting you warmed up for this one.

Babcock: But uh, I think what I said before is that the biggest thing is that before you go with someone else's opinion, do the research. Find out why we started the wars, find out why we fought these wars. Then formulate your opinion as to why those wars were right or justified, whatever you want to do. But I think with the younger generation and even my generation, to be honest, we have so much group thinking that goes on with social media. No one takes the time to form their own opinions anymore. That would be a thing that I would tell the students. Don't take my opinion and don't take anyone else's opinion on those wars. Do the research and find out about it, the reasoning on it. You have to go back and look at the raw emotion from people during that time period. I didn't even realize it, like I said, until much later. Just the hurt that was going on in the country at that time. The pain that people were in was unbelievable.

Rykken: That was a great answer. I think you easily could have become a teacher.

Babcock: There was a time I thought about it.

Rykken: There's still time.

Babcock: Yeah, still time.

Rykken: It's interesting. Well Jim, I appreciate this very much. It was a great interview and we will have fun transcribing it.

"I think it's crazy and really weird. It still doesn't seem real, doesn't seem like this could happen. It's strange to think that the next history books made will have yesterday in them. Right now, I have a lot of questions, like: how many survivors? Will we find the terrorists? Is it a small group or a country- American, non-American? How is America going to react? Are people going to blame the government for weal security?

- Jessica Ebert, September 12, 2001

Jake Rykken: BRFHS Class of 2003

Jake Rykken (junior on 9-11), ultimately attended USMA at West Point from 2003-2007 and served in Iraq in 2010. Jake is a helicopter pilot and flew roughly 600 hours during his deployment in Iraq. He remains on active duty in 2021.

Interviewed by Paul Rykken

Transcription by Maddie Diehn

Jake Rykken (left) and his Co-Pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Hodge (right)

P. Rykken: It's February 5th of 2021 and we are conducting an interview this morning with Jake Rykken and we're going to use these questions as a guide. Some of them we can get through quickly but some of the others we may dig into a little farther.

J. Rykken: Ok.

P. Rykken: Can you just start by giving your full name, date of birth, and how old you were on 9/11?

J. Rykken: My full name is Jake Rykken. Jacob Thorwald Rykken would be the full name. Born on September 11 and I was turning 17 on that day. So, there's some significance there.

P. Rykken: That's an easy one for us all to remember because of the birthdate. So, I didn't bring up the material that you wrote that day. I purposely left that out because I don't want to put that in your brain before you start.

J. Rykken: Yeah.

P. Rykken: But we do have some things you wrote that day and we will be utilizing them in the paper. What can you tell me about the actual day? What do you remember now, 20 years later that occurred on the morning of 9/11?

J. Rykken: I guess the flashbulb memory is at work there. When I sat down to think about it, I really remember the energy of that day. I know it's a strange thing to bring up but there was a sudden shift in energy and mood, I would say. It all started with teachers kind of coming in and

out of the room, advising everyone to turn on the TV. I do remember that we stayed in class, but that there, from that point on, we were watching updates of it. I don't think we kept it on the whole time.

P. Rykken: Do you remember what class you were in?

J. Rykken: I was in your classroom; it must have been. I forget which class in particular. If it was AP.

P. Rykken: It was. It was AP European History, which we were still teaching at that time. I'll tell you, it's just a little detail, that I was in the middle of giving a lecture on Martin Luther and the Reformation.

J. Rykken: Yeah.

P. Rykken: That's what I remember. It was just sort of another day in class and then of course that happened. The other thing, I'll just mention one other quick thing on that to jog your memory a bit. You talk about teachers coming into the room, Jason Janke is the one who came into the room.

J. Rykken: Right.

P. Rykken: He said, there's something strange going on in New York and you need to turn the TV on. So, yeah. There was a lot of energy. That's a good way to describe it.

J. Rykken: Pretty scary. Coach Janke, as I knew him, had a significant presence in my high school career. Being the basketball coach and football coach as well.

P. Rykken: And for him to show up at that moment was interesting. We're going to get some impressions from teachers, although there aren't many left who were there at that time. Tony Boerger is still there, and we will get his impression of that too. But most of the staff has come since 9/11. Here's more of the nuts and bolts of your own situation. Did the events of 9/11 impact your thinking regarding your own future of military service? Can you remember where you were at that time about your own future going into the military? I'm assuming you had thought about it before already.

J. Rykken: I had, that's a great question. I was reflecting some and I think I was first introduced to the military academies from you. I think you had a teacher colleague or a coaching colleague in North Dakota whose son went to Annapolis. Then I had my own close teammates that went when I was a sophomore. They had kind of introduced me to the military but even before that, I had been thinking that that was an option. Then the events of 9/11, I think they gave me the seriousness. I think that's a way to characterize it, that changed some. There were things in motion already, but the events heightened everything.

P. Rykken: Did the events at any point cause you to think about not going into the military?

J. Rykken: Yeah. I think back to how you think as a high-schooler and one of the memorable conversations would be what I'm putting my family through. So even at that point I know it was

hard for my mom and you to know that I was going to be going in and going through some hard things. Even with the training aspect not even to talk about the war aspect.

P. Rykken: Sure. So, to piece in some of the information here, on the 20th of September, 9 days after 9/11, Congress gave President Bush essentially full authority to initiate an attack against those who had caused 9/11. That is what we call, technically, the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF). From September 20, 2001, that AUMF is still actually still in effect and it was a broad range of authority to the president. So, within a week and a half of those events, the president had all the authority. We went to war in Afghanistan in February of '02 so you were still a junior in high school. But going into the fall of '02, your senior year, Congress gave the second authorization of force for Iraq. And then in March of '03, the spring of your senior year, we were going into Iraq.

J. Rykken: Ok.

P Rykken: So, by the time you graduated high school, we had launched two wars that would become the longest wars in American history. Now, do you remember being aware of that as a senior in high school?

J. Rykken: I think I was aware. I think I was aware and then I would become much more aware as I graduated. But I think it kind of plays to the significance of the time. There was 100% approval of that first AUMF, I believe.

P. Rykken: Right.

J. Rykken: There was a great sense of needing to do something.

P Rykken: The Iraq war, which we'll talk about more later of course because you're involved there, but there was more controversy there. It's just interesting that within a matter of months, those things had happened. The response by the United States was fast. Things were really rolling. I want to ask you another thing, and this is maybe on a bit of a personal note, but do you remember learning about or talking about the Middle East while you were in high school? Not trying to set you up on that, but do you remember being aware of all the conflict in that area of the world? Or was this something that was completely off your radar screen?

J. Rykken: It was pretty off the radar screen. I don't recall much, and I think we touched on it the most probably in AP. I would imagine because of the WWI ties to the middle east and whatnot.

P. Rykken: Ok.

J. Rykken: Not generally. Some of the current events that had been going on.

P Rykken: Ok. Let's talk about the early phase of your military career. In other words? How did this all start off for you? Let's hear part of that story.

J. Rykken: I think, to go to a military academy, there's three major ones and four total. But for each of the services. Sophomore year to junior year, I had to make a pretty serious commitment to applying. That included interviewing with Representative Ron Kind. He was the one who

ultimately gave me a nomination. Then the school also has to accept you. Of the four academies, I was only able to get into West Point. That was a good choice. I started there about four weeks after graduation. We drove out to New York to get dropped off and at that point, what they call the Plebe Year and Cadet Summer started in full. That was quite a shock, being immersed in West Point training.

P. Rykken: Did you, I want to go back just a second. When you found out that you had been accepted there, was it an automatic yes decision for you, or were you still in decision-making mode?

J. Rykken: I think I was weighing it still at that point. There was a pretty big pull to go after having gone through all the steps. I don't know if I've shared this with you but one of the more significant conversations I had was with John Lindahl.

P. Rykken: Oh ok.

J. Rykken: I believe he had done some service himself and had given me some very matter-of-fact type reflections of his own experiences. Not in an encouraging or discouraging way, just a meaningful way of knowing what I was getting into. Eyes wide open.

P. Rykken: One of the things that I think happens to people in the military, particularly in a small community, definitely in the case of military academies, but once it was known that you were going there, several people started to become invested in that. Your experience becomes a talking point. I experienced that a lot as a parent, of course. I thought a lot about that and if it's good or bad. I knew that the pressure on you had been heightened because of that choice and I was always a little bit concerned about that. There is always obvious when you're going there. I want to ask you about that.

J. Rykken: Sure.

P. Rykken: What was your greatest fear or concern going in? Do you remember?

J. Rykken: I think I knew what I was getting into would be hard. That was part of it. As you asked the question though, I think that's one of the benefits of being in high school is that you're a little fearless and ready to jump in. I had done sports that were hard. The physical nature of it wasn't very daunting to me, but the other aspects were.

P. Rykken: Interesting point. What I was getting at, was that when someone goes to the academy, there is the palpable reality that you may fail.

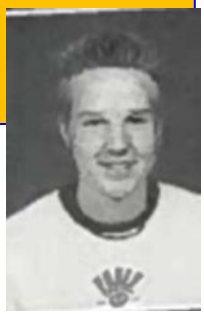
J Rykken: Right. Right.

P. Rykken: You may not go through with the experience. There are many that don't that go there.

J. Rykken: Some people even quit the first day. I don't know if you call that a failure. But yeah, failure would have been well-publicized because of how many people knew I was going and how many folks had an interest in that. It's an interesting point.

"I couldn't believe that something like that would ever happen here. You hear about it in other lands and countries, but when it happens to the U.S it is a reminder of how bad it is in the world and how awful people can be. And it leaves you a little nervous because you wonder if and when this could happen again. Too many innocent people's lives were taken and it's not right, it shouldn't happen here or anywhere on earth, it doesn't solve anything. All it accomplishes is death, pain, hurt, and more problems.

- Jake Scholze, September 12, 2002



P. Rykken: I'm sure you saw that. I remember you talking about how young folks had left very quickly. Now, were you aware from the beginning of your training that you would end up in the middle east at some point?

J. Rykken: It was. I think they did a good job with us. Thinking back now, we were the first class to go there and start as a class after the start of the war. So that was a significant year mark that is associated with that West Point class of mine. We were made very aware and then the nature of the school, you were being introduced to the veterans and senior leaders who had experience in the middle east.

P. Rykken: Sure. Now, do you recall in the period before you were deployed, which comes much later of course, now in 2003, 7 years later roughly? Do you recall being aware of some of the controversy of some of the US actions in the middle east? Particularly Iraq more than Afghanistan? Were you aware of that and was it something that was discussed at West Point?

J. Rykken: It was. A more powerful example that was used to facilitate border discussions was relied on from Vietnam, another time when soldiers had done bad things. But yeah, that was a vehicle to talk about morals and army ethics and views. Some of the things that were controversial of course were against what we were learning in our professional education.

P. Rykken: Sure. Abu Ghraib comes to mind.

J. Rykken: Yes.

P. Rykken: Talking to you about that at the time, I remember having that conversation with you out there while we were visiting. How did you or your classmates or professors react to that? This was the abuse of prisoners by American servicemen and women.

J. Rykken: I would characterize it as appalling. It stood in the face of everything we were learning at the academy. In the black and white world there, the honor code is one of the most

basic building blocks. To see it play out on the large scale, we definitely had discussions in classes across different venues.

P. Rykken: You brought up the honor code. What is the West Point honor code?

J. Rykken: The West Point honor code is part of the moral and ethical development of cadets. More specifically it's: The cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal. Or tolerate those who do. And that last clause of course carries weight because it brings broader awareness even in the instance of Abu Ghraib. If you imagine there were people, there who knew better who were there and maybe didn't act. So that of course was meaningful for us juniors.

P. Rykken: As a little bit of a side reference, did you ever see violations of the honor code when you were in cadet school? And what happened as a result?

J. Rykken: I guess I was aware of people that had to go through a process. There was a cadet advisory board who would actually weigh violations. Depending on what they were. Many were very cut and dry and those led to expulsion. There were some that were greyer and that would lead to punishment of sorts.

P. Rykken: Re-education? That sort of thing.

J. Rykken: Yeah.

P. Rykken: Were the folks you were with at West Point eager to be involved in the conflicts? Was that something you guys talked about much or was it more just going day to day with your training?

J. Rykken: A lot of it was day to day with the training but there was definitely a cohort, a group of friends, who were very serious and took what they were preparing for very seriously. On the whole, that would characterize every cadet from best to worst. They come in all shapes and sizes, but they knew what they were getting into and were motivated to do their part.

P. Rykken: When you were starting in your first year, your plebe year, were there West Pointers that had been deployed that were killed?

J. Rykken: There were, yes.

P. Rykken: So how did that come across to you? What did they do to acknowledge that?

J. Rykken: There was a great awareness because there was an announcement and other traditions that were done. Most notably the whole core of cadets go and honor who had fallen at Taps.

P. Rykken: When you say, 'core of cadets', how many are we talking about there?

J. Rykken: About 4400.

P. Rykken: So, all going out onto the Plain, which was the big space in front of Washington Hall there?

J Rykken: Yes, and it was typically a rendition of Amazing Grace with, maybe bagpipes I think I remember.

P. Rykken: I'm assuming for a young man, you would have been 18, 19? That had to have been sobering.

J. Rykken: It was. These were very young graduates who had been out of the academy for not long. It was sobering.

P. Rykken: That was the reality of war. It wasn't just the glamour or whatever, it was the sadness that is so much a part of that.

J. Rykken: Yeah, absolutely.

P. Rykken: Let's jump into your deployment. There's a lot that happens between there. You graduated from the Academy in '07.

J. Rykken: Yes.

P. Rykken: Tell us a little bit about what happened after that.

J. Rykken: So, I was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant and went to Fort Rucker in Alabama to study flight training. That took about a year and a half in total because there was also some additional education for officership happening at the same time.

P. Rykken: If I remember correctly in all of this, you initially would have liked to go to the Air Force Academy?

J. Rykken: I think Naval Academy was my first choice. Their test scores were a little bit higher threshold.

P. Rykken: Yes, it was a math score or something?

J. Rykken: My math score would have led to a different route at a junior college.

P. Rykken: We should say that you ended up at West Point, which is essentially receiving a bachelor's degree. Your degree, I believe, was in International History and Russian Language? A double major.

J. Rykken: Yeah, a double major.

P. Rykken: So, there's a lot of rigorous education you did. But you had a desire to fly, which was what I was getting around to. Didn't you want to get into flight school?

J. Rykken: Yeah.

P. Rykken: How soon was that in your head?

J. Rykken: It was present from the get-go. I think I attribute my love of flying to my uncle, who introduced me to it when I was growing up on the private pilot side.

P. Rykken: You're talking about Larry Lunda?

J. Rykken: Yes, so I had that in the back of my mind the whole time. It fit my skillsets.

P. Rykken: Obviously, my father had been in WWII, and I know that we could talk a lot about the influence he might have had on you at that point too.

J. Rykken: He was also a member of the Army Air Corps.

P. Rykken: Correct. Was that on your mind at all? Or was that a coincidence?

J. Rykken: I think it was on my mind. It wasn't lost on me that he had been in the service, in the Army Air Corps as well.

P. Rykken: I'm sure that you and he had conversations about that. So, flight school. You had flight training at Fort Rucker. Tell us about the Army and what it does concerning flight. Because that's different than the Air Force.

"I feel like I should do something to help. I think a lot of people feel helpless. We as a nation don't know who to pinpoint and that fact puts us in a corner. The death and destruction are so great now with huge estimates… I agree with President Bush on the statement that he made about this being a cowardly act.; I think the person who did this was a coward. What went through the minds of the passengers on the planes?

- Kristen Boehm, September 12, 2001

** Note: Jake and Kristen got married in 2009.

J. Rykken: The biggest thing the army does with flight is that it's almost all helicopters. There's a significant portion that's fixed-wing but primarily is rotary-wing. So everyone learns on, at the time, Bell 203 single-engine helicopter to learn the basics of flight. We learn that that way. At the time, all the instructors were Vietnam veterans almost universally. We all got that experience, and it was a pretty unique time in army aviation because they were getting older but still teaching and had that connection to the initial army flight of helicopters.

P. Rykken: How did you end up flying the… tell us about the helicopter you ended up working with.

J. Rykken: I got to choose the helicopter when I was in class and in a position where I choose any of them and I picked what they called the Lift side of army aviation. I chose the CH47 Chinook helicopter for several reasons.

P. Rykken: Why did you choose that?

J. Rykken: I think I have always liked the support role it had. At the time the Chinook was gaining notoriety for how much in the war course it was, especially in Afghanistan. There were a few different factors going into it and also how it supported the infantry forces was unique. It remains unique today.

P. Rykken: Were there classmates of yours from West Point that ended up in flight school with you?

J. Rykken: Yep. So that was kind of a unique time because we were in extended time together, but I also met new classmates from New York that I had never met before.

P. Rykken: What was the most challenging thing about flight school?

J. Rykken: The unique thing is their philosophy at the time started with rote memorization and how to correlate it. That was kind of a different experience to respond verbatim to different types of questions.

P. Rykken: And this was to ensure that you were clear on your knowledge on what you're doing?

J. Rykken: Yeah. I guess the airplanes you want to fly beat the helicopters into submission so there were certain emergency procedures in a helicopter that have to be immediately taken. That was the most important part about the rote memorization.

P. Rykken: I remember, again back to the thing about people being invested in what you were doing, I can't tell you the number of times that people had said something to me about their own service or something they know that you're doing. One guy in town, Steve Rake, sought me at the grocery store one time and he had flown helicopters. He had said that they're a wonderful machine, but if you lose control of them, they're really bad.

J. Rykken: That's true.

P. Rykken: He was really reliving his own experience. So you have this training and it takes you through, a year and a half?

J. Rykken: Yep.

P. Rykken: So now you're in 2008 or 2009. What's the step between that and you finally being deployed?

J. Rykken: I reported to Fort Riley, in Kansas, and joined the Aviation Brigade there. That was the unit I did the training with and would deploy with.

P. Rykken: Okay. So, let's talk about the deployment. What was the most challenging aspect of the deployment? How long were you in Iraq?

J. Rykken: Just under 12 months. The reason why it was just under 12 months and probably the hardest thing about it was that I had married Kristin Boehm in-between graduation from flight school and being stationed at Fort Riley. Right about the year mark of being in Kansas, we had our first daughter, she was actually born in Black River and then about two weeks after was when I deployed to Iraq. Leaving those two, even though I knew they were in good hands having both sets of grandparents in town, that was the hard part.

Jake Rykken and his daughter Ramona after coming home after his second deployment.

P. Rykken: I'm sure that was tough. That puts us in 2010?

J. Rykken: Yeah.

P. Rykken: So, you spent roughly a year, not quite a year in Iraq. Did you feel well prepared for what you were doing?

J. Rykken: I did. Part of the great structures of the army, in army aviation specifically is the team that you're with. In my flight company, there were three or four officers in leadership positions and then there were officers who didn't have leadership responsibilities but were more focused on flying. Non-commissioned officers have leadership responsibilities but have lots of technical and mechanical responsibilities as well. There was a lot of experience in the group that I joined. They had deployed a number of times and had a tremendous level of flight experience where they were able to bring me along and in the nature of how we paired up crews, was intentional. It was a good mix of experience.

P. Rykken: Did you fly quite quickly after arriving?

J. Rykken: Yep. I think we were averaging, by our crew management, up to 90 or 100 hours a month when we got there. So, there was lots of flying and lots of maintenance on helicopters.

P. Rykken: Tell us your first impressions of Iraq when you landed. Where did you land and where were you stationed?

J. Rykken: I landed in Kuwait, and I can't think of the name here, but a lot of the deployments go through Kuwait. I think it was unique because I flew through, I want to say Ireland, which was a place I hadn't been to. We didn't get off the plane really, but we ultimately got to Kuwait. Stepping off the airplane was like getting hit by a blow-dryer. It was a new kind of hot that I hadn't experienced. Even in the dead of night, it was still hot.

P. Rykken: And you remember that?

J. Rykken: Yep. Then we took a few days to get through Kuwait and get through for rotators to go up into the country of Iraq, which was more north. That's when I went to Camp Taji, which was just north of Baghdad. We did a lot of flying in the Baghdad airspace. We were in a transition time, so I started in what would be known as Operation Iraqi Freedom and throughout the year, probably 8 months in or so, it transitioned to Operation New Dawn. This was significant in the political level. Our duties, what it looked like for us, was that we would just fly more throughout the country. As units left, we became the primary Chinook unit basically.

P. Rykken: Operation New Dawn would have been the beginning of a significant drawdown in Iraq. This was under the Obama administration. And just to put some broad strokes on that, the Obama administration wanted to put more emphasis on Afghanistan and less on Iraq, which led to some controversy soon thereafter with the rise of Isis and that sort of thing. There's a lot of history surrounding that sort of thing, but I don't want to get too far into those weeds.

J. Rykken: Post surge, which is something I was in flight school for. That was when they had tons of troops in Iraq. I think that played into some of the processes because it meant they could put more emphasis on Afghanistan.

P. Rykken: Sure. During the flying, and this may be a silly question, did you feel each time that you went up that you were in harm's way?

J. Rykken: A little bit. There was certainly a threat from the enemy, but at the time, the air threat was mostly small arms. Which is different from other threats that would be more complex air defense systems like that. There was a time of flying where small arms were the most significant threat to aviators. The thought about the nature of army aviation is a significant setup. Every flight takes on some level of risk. For example, this week in 2021, there had been two notable national guard crashes that happened stateside on routine training missions. I remember in 2010, that our battalion commander at the time would say, 'the only thing different about flying in Iraq vs. the states, was that there might be bullets flying at you.' But a lot of the risks weren't that different.

P. Rykken: What about the desert climate for helicopters? What was that like?

J. Rykken: Desert climates are one of the most difficult climates because it's a big no visual reference environment and when we fly, we fly a lot of times during the night. So not having any visual reference points in the desert is dangerous for crews.

P. Rykken: Sure. How many hours do you think you flew in total?

J. Rykken: I think it was in the 600-700 range.

P. Rykken: Were you all over the country?

J. Rykken: All over the country.

P. Rykken: And what were you mostly doing? What was your main job?

J. Rykken: Most of it was helping to do troop transport and supply transport. The big threat at the time especially was the improvised explosive devices on the ground. So being able to serve that purpose for the ground force, the infantry folks on the ground, felt good because we could get people off the roads.

P. Rykken: Sure. How many soldiers could you take at one time in a Chinook?

J. Rykken: About 30.

P. Rykken: So, you would be essentially transporting soldiers from one place to the next that were tied into a certain mission? Were there any incidents that didn't go well? Or did it go smoothly?

J. Rykken: It went pretty smooth. When I was still relatively junior, there was one incident where my copilot had a head event, where he was practically fainting. That was pretty memorable because he was the more senior of the two of us.

P. Rykken: How did you get through that?

J. Rykken: Fortunately, it was a long mission, about as long as we could fly in our regulations, but it happened near the end. It could have been worse. He ended up being just fine and we continued flying.

P. Rykken: How many hours could you fly at one time?

J. Rykken: The max on a typical day would be 8 hours. Which is what we were doing that day.

P. Rykken: Sure. When you went up in the Chinook, was there a group of you or were there other helicopters in an escort? How did that work?

J. Rykken: We normally flew in a group of two aircraft. Depending on where we flew, we would get an escort and that would come from an apache helicopter.

P. Rykken: How many Apaches would be with you?

J. Rykken: Normally there would be teams, which is a flight of two.

P. Rykken: So, I'm assuming that from camp Taji there were flights going continually throughout the day.

J. Rykken: Yep.

P. Rykken: So you were either flying or preparing to fly?

J. Rykken: Yes. The maintenance piece took a good piece of time to keep the aircraft healthy.

P. Rykken: Sure. What was the most gratifying aspect of your deployment?

J. Rykken: I think it's the team that I was with and keeping in touch with them still today. I was learning when they took me. Some of those relationships are very meaningful.

P. Rykken: Are those folks still in service?

J. Rykken: Some of them are. Others have now retired but there are some still in different corners of the service.

P. Rykken: When you were over there, did you receive any special honors, awards, or promotions?

J. Rykken: I did do a time in service more than anything. Meeting certain gates, I was promoted to Captain. From First Lieutenant to Captain. And then, which is pretty routine, I received an air medal so that was a pretty standard thing.

P. Rykken: Sure. I'm going to make a bounce back to 9/11 a bit. When you were there, was there a feeling among the group of a sense of mission or was it more the day-to-day survival?

J. Rykken: I think there were times where we thought a lot about the mission but the day to day and the amount of work that went into one flight took a lot of the time. Not a lot of time to think about other things.

P. Rykken: We have about 10 minutes left, we can wind it down a bit. What was the period like when you returned to the states? How did that feel?

J. Rykken: It felt pretty great. Homecomings have become pretty significant. Ramona was one year old at that time. Kristin met us in Kansas and actually had set up the house again because she had moved back for that deployment. The homecoming was pretty memorable.

P. Rykken: Sure. Different for you in a way because of your background in the military academy, but I suppose there's this sense that you were staying in the military. It wasn't the end of anything and a phase of your journey, whatever that would be.

J. Rykken: Right.

P. Rykken: You've always been living on military bases. Did you talk a lot about your deployment with other people or was it just something you put in the rearview mirror?

J. Rykken: Certain aspects. I think the flying was unique so that's probably where I learned the most experience that would help me progress as an aviator. Not a terrible amount of the other aspects, I guess.

P. Rykken: Okay. Did you have any trouble adjusting back or did it go smoothly?

J. Rykken: I think it went smoothly. I was fortunate that way.

P. Rykken: You already said you maintain contact with some of the people you served with. Is that because you've been on the same bases or are you communicating with them?

J. Rykken: A bit of both. Because of the nature of the army, we run into one another every so often.

P. Rykken: Sure.

J. Rykken: We always try to pick up where we left off.

P. Rykken: Here's a question. Now I'm going to get you to put your philosophical hat on here. From the period 20 years later, now we're looking back at this phase of our life, and it's been these two wars that have been very long and very costly. Do you believe that the response of the administrations, two of them or three if you count the Trump years, do you believe it was correct? Do you believe we did what we needed to do?

J. Rykken: I think that's a question we will largely continue to wrestle with. Going back to 9/11 in 2001 was unprecedented. The analogy of course was pearl harbor. I think at the time it seemed like the national leadership was doing the best they could with what they knew. And as we sit here, I've been in the military as long as it took to grow up. Either in the academy or in the service, learning about different global threats. I guess it's something that the leadership always must weigh.

P. Rykken: Sure. As a soldier coming up the ranks as a young person, obviously that world hasn't unfolded to you yet. It's what they're dealing with. You got more feel for that while you were at the pentagon.

J. Rykken: Yeah I saw a fuller picture of all of it. It's hard to definitively say yes or no on that one. There were forces that, not forces, but different dynamics at that time who made those decisions.

P. Rykken: You're saying that like somebody who's had history training, which of course you have. You can't really put an answer to it as these things are going to be reinterpreted and we will wrestle with them for some time. We do that with most wars in our history. The only exception to that is WWII. There always seems to be a unanimous opinion on WWII but any other war in American history, and I know this from my teaching, we tend to debate on for at least a generation, if not more. We're still debating the civil war, after all.

J. Rykken: Right. There are different ways to study history instead. But on a personal level, there's always a lot of costs. Just as a fuller picture of it, to get the personal pictures from Black River Falls graduates who can give a different sense of how the wars impacted the community.

P. Rykken: For sure. If you could speak to yourself as a student, your 17-year-old self now in 2021, what would you tell them about the military experience that you've had? What advice would you give that guy?

J. Rykken: I guess, get ready, would be one thing. On a lighter note, I've had tremendous opportunities going through the military and I know going to the academy that it would teach me in a different way about leadership than anything else. That was a feeling that I had at the time. It has certainly let me travel and get do staff rides worldwide. Getting to travel around the world was an initial appeal at least, so that's been meaningful. Then the years in service as well.

P. Rykken: It's a very interesting story and we're trying to pull together many pieces of the story. Your experience and the others that went to the academy, we're going to try to draw that out a bit. But we're also going to be talking to those who were in the national guard. We've got a few contacts and it's a little bit complicated and challenging to do what we're trying to do here, but we think it's important because of the significance in that particular day in history,

J. Rykken: I studied the intersection of civil and military society some more than others; I think it will be phenomenal to get those different perspectives. One thing I think will come up for sure is the amount of the population that has served in the military. The figure that's most cited is that less than 1% of the male population serves or is even eligible. To get a cross-section of the military is great.

P. Rykken: Yeah, and we've got this kind of a military-civilian divide that seems to be going on after the end of the draft days. I guess that's maybe a question I didn't get at with you, but why do you think the public became somewhat disengaged from these conflicts? Have you ever thought about that? Why did the public seem to let the conflicts happen over here while not understanding them very well?

J. Rykken: That's a good question. I think it's a little different with the all-volunteer force, which started after Vietnam. It allowed for some disengagement in some ways. I think people were busy with their day-to-day lives and if they didn't know somebody in the military, the wars became just another aspect of the news and really the decision to support or not kind of rotated around and interacted with the representatives and who voted. There are harsher characterizations of civil society at this time. The treatment of troops has evolved from that, of course, because people do have a sincere affection for troops and service that comes out in different ways. Different than just getting a percentage off while shopping or anything else. People would routinely come up to me in airports and thank me, which is unique. It comes from a sincere place when they do that. On the other hand, they're just busy with their own lives.

P. Rykken: Alright. Well, thank you very much. We're right at our endpoint here. Lots of good information here.

"I was shocked, literally. That is very bizarre. A few years ago I was at NYC and looked up at the two colossal towers that have now plummeted. It also showed how vulnerable the pentagon is.

- Jake Rykken, September 12, 2001

Alex Koch: BRFHS Class of 2004

1. What was your age on 9-11? And do you have memories of that day and your reaction to the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania?

I was 15 on September 11th, and remember the day fairly vividly, as many that experienced it often do. A “snapshot” memory, they like to call it. I was a sophomore at BRFHS, and I distinctly remember being in Mr. Meyer’s tech ed. class. We all heard snippets of the news as we entered the building that a plane had struck one of the WTC buildings. I remembered hearing a story of a plane inadvertently hitting the Empire State Building sometime in the 30s or 40s, so I dismissed it as a tragedy resulting from pilot error.

We had been tasked that morning with assembling new desks for the main area. Unpaid, ungraded labor for Mr. Meyer, but he made the concession to allow the television to remain on to follow the news while we worked. It wasn’t long after we’d begun construction that another plane struck the tower, and we were left speechless and motionless. Whether to distract us or having not understood the gravity of what just occurred, our teacher attempted to corral us back to work. Needless to say, no work was finished. 2nd hour was our social studies class, with Mr. Janke, and he was more focused on the news as we were. We all watched as the news unfolded, the speculation began, and the other attacks were carried out. I remember hearing about Afghanistan early on, and I knew that retaliation was going to take place and was likely to be imminent.

My next memory is of making my way home, still glued to the television as was the rest of my household. I remember seeing congressmen and senators on the steps of the capitol, hand in hand, both parties, singing “God Bless America.”

2. Did 9-11 impact your decision to enter military service? Or was this something you planned anyway?

Entering the military had always been a plan of mine, but the events of 9-11 altered my course in terms of my role in the military. My plan had initially been to enlist as a Military Police officer, as my father had, and parlay that into a career in law enforcement, as my father had. The GI Bill at that time and the time of my enlistment was only 30k, so I figured an associate’s degree would be adequate. Following the events of 9-11 and understanding there was going to be an armed conflict, something within me felt the need or desire to serve an active role in the war effort and in combat. So, at the end of my junior year, shortly after my 17th birthday, I

enlisted in the infantry, much to the disappointment of my recruiter, who said that I could do literally anything else in the army. I was adamant.

3. When and where were you deployed? Also, if you could include your rank and some commentary on what you actually were doing during deployment.

From January 2005 to January 2006, I was deployed to Baqubah, Iraq, the capital of the Diyala Province. I was a PFC for the entirety of the deployment. My duties oscillated between Humvee driver, gunner, and rifleman. Most of the operations were security details for the capitol building and the politicians therein, dismounted and mounted patrols, IED sweeps, QRF (Quick Reaction Force), and occasional large-scale operations/MOUT (Mobile Operations in Urban Terrain).

The second tour was a stark contrast to my first. We were initially intended to deploy from June 2007 to June 2008 but, during our training rotation at Fort Irwin, we heard President Bush give his address in which he announced a troop “Surge.” Our deployment was abruptly moved up to late February, and we immediately had to commence pre-deployment activities upon our return to Fort Benning.

The second deployment started out horribly. “Bad Juju" is the term we use to describe the general feeling of malaise we experienced at that place and time. In three short months, I experienced a hunt for missing soldiers, casualties from sniper fire, and more coordinated attacks than I’d experienced in the entirety of my first 12-month tour. As an army, we were spread thinner and wider to subdue the pockets of insurrection that permeated the country. As a result, we lived in more dire conditions, moving from an abandoned power plant, a dilapidated house, and a vacant elementary school over the course of several months. All as merely a company sized unit. The intent was to keep us closer and more embedded in the local communities. Ultimately and in retrospect, I would say it was a success, in that we coordinated with local partisans as opposed to Iraq Army components to complete our mission. We did occasional high value target acquisition, air mobile operations, and search and rescue following a catastrophic attack in May of 2007. Beyond combat, we helped establish a school and provided presence patrols in conjunction with locals. I was a team leader (corporal) at this time, and once it was determined I wasn’t going to re-enlist, I was moved to the gunner position of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. It should be noted that I was also “stop-lossed” in February of 2008, before our deployment had concluded, and it was felt that other soldiers with more longevity

should be given the opportunity to serve as team leader. In June of 2008, we finally returned to the United States after 15 months, and I was discharged later that August.

4. What do you believe young people should know about 9-11? Feel free here to comment on the various debates that ensued regarding the wars, particularly in Iraq, the public's response to the wars, etc.

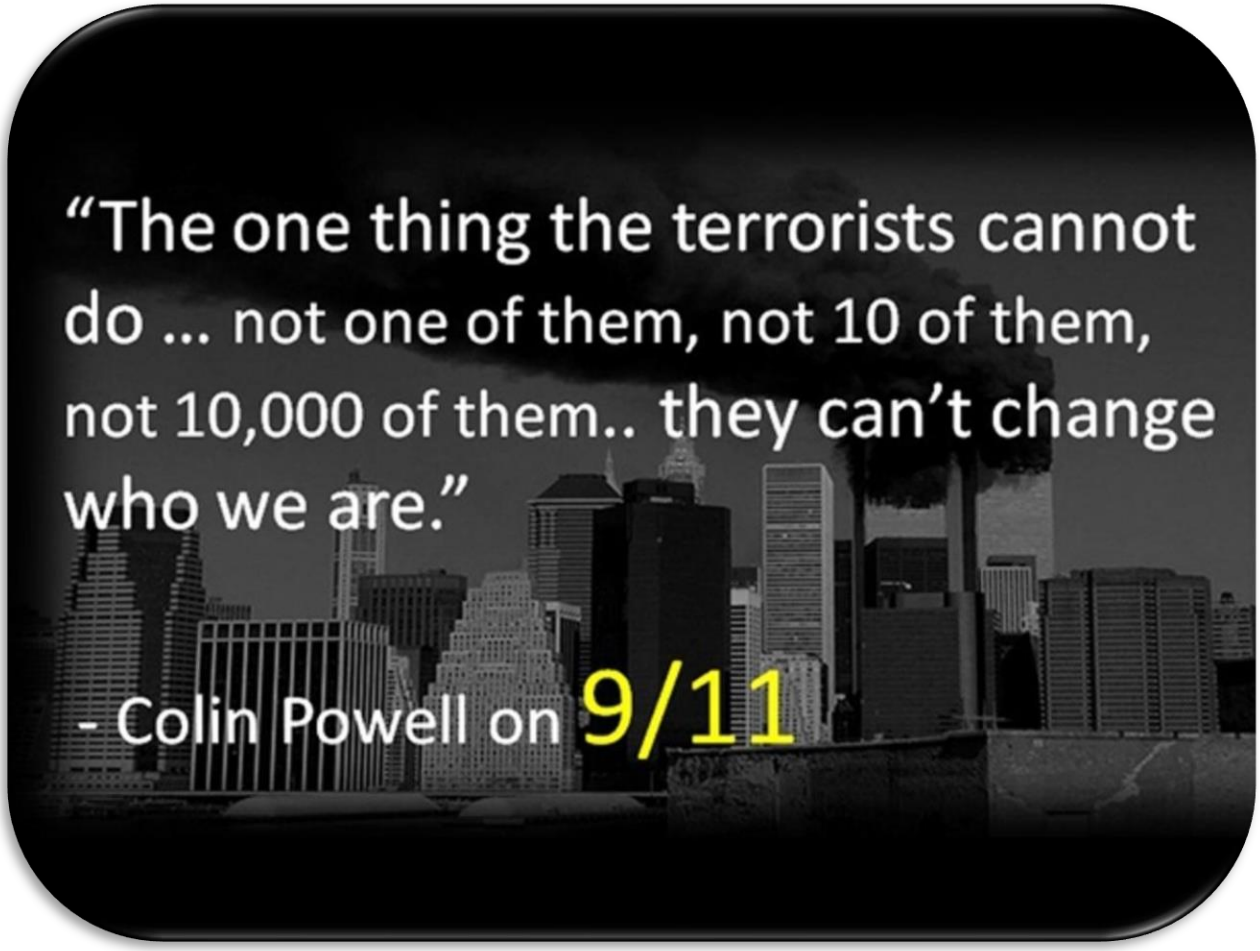
Being an English teacher, I often find myself reflective and pensive when it comes to my role in a relatively unpopular and muddled conflict. 9/11 was something someone could barely conceive outside of Hollywood as we entered this century. Being such an unprecedented attack, and until that point we had hardly, as a country, felt to be truly in the global realm. This brought the Middle East, in all its tumultuousness, right to our front door. The terrorist attacks on September 11th fundamentally changed the world stage and the United States, led by George W. Bush, was now firmly established in the role of "World Police," all in pursuit of security and prevention. The very fact that we can divide American history into pre- and post-9/11 is all one really needs to know. Much like the current coronavirus, life became different, language shifted, and much like terms like "social distancing" have entered the lexicon with immediacy and severity, we had terms like Patriot Act and Taliban become the novel terms of that era.

The public's response to the war was two-fold, because it really felt like a war on two fronts. Though it all existed under the umbrella of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), Afghanistan felt like a justified, retaliatory operation, with a loose understanding that Osama Bin Laden could be there among the Taliban. Conversely, Iraq was a more contentious endeavor. I remember extended news events and coverage, replete with UN inspections, Hans Blix, and a protracted effort to convince the senate and the world that Iraq needed liberation and its dictator Saddam Hussein was in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The public response was divisive. The majority, however, seemed to support the troops regardless of the negative public opinion on the invasion and protracted occupation. I remember every time we'd fly back from Iraq there would always be a small contingent of supporters in most airports to applaud us as we disembarked, often giving us little gift baskets to keep morale up on our connecting flights.

Nevertheless, Iraq still feels like yet another stain on an already filthy garment when it comes to regarding the United State's global military presence. That may be hyperbole and a tired metaphor, but to fathom two decades of occupation in the Middle East was beyond hyperbole at the time, yet we remained in Afghanistan well into the Trump administration. Further, a recent airstrike in Syria has now baptized the Biden administration into the fold of Middle East military interdiction. Having discharged in 2008, I've become somewhat removed, or even indifferent to the complicated nature of the wars that continue to rage.

Ultimately, I believe I've come to neither condone nor condemn, but simply accept, human nature, and its proclivity for violence and self-destruction. In preparing a lecture of my war experience to my Honors Literature students, I fell upon a quote from President Obama as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009: "To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason." There is a difference between apathy and acceptance and knowing mankind to be the

force of nature that he has become is to look upon the world as it is. This is to understand the full width and breadth of civilization's capacity for both good and evil, and how conflict has shaped our history for millennia, and will no doubt continue to shape it for millennia to come…



Reflections on the 9-11 Anniversary Project

Maddie Diehn, FHP Intern 2021

Following one of the most tragic events on American soil, lives all over the world changed. Brought together in a time of pain and suffering, Americans bonded together to get our country through the September 11 attacks.

With the start of this project, we set out to learn how our relatively small community joined into the efforts to help rebuild our nation. In transcribing the interviews conducted to answer this question, I realized that there seemed to be a common conclusion among people affected by the event and who risked everything to be a force in history- they had to personally be involved with efforts to return the country to normalcy and fight for the democracy that had come under attack.

As students, the people we spoke with sat in classrooms across the country, their attention glued to the television. Many of them made decisions that day to join a branch of military, understanding that they would likely be deployed and see action. Others let the decision come to them over weeks, months, or years, with the same understanding that their lives would change. For each of them, the bottom line was that they had to be a part of protecting the lives of other Americans so that another event as tragic wouldn't happen again. While vastly different, their stories ring in that same tune and underlying motivation.

As a senior myself, I find myself in complete awe at the thought of students my age being so determined to leave this country and enter a war to protect it. In archived writings saved by Mr. Rykken and Mr. Boerger over the last 19 years, I've come across candid thoughts of the students from September 11th, 2001, and from their memories on the 1-year anniversary in 2002. The raw emotion displayed between paper and pencil is enough to make one truly understand the emotional trauma the students went through. It proved to be enough to send many of them to war.

For having a modest population of only 3,628 people in 2001, our community saw great leadership and sacrifice among its members. Families learned to say goodbye to one another as relatives were deployed. Remaining members demonstrated patriotism and service to the country by hosting parades, fundraising events, and by working hard to communicate their support and gratitude to our area's military division. The September 11 attacks and the resulting events played a huge part in the shaping of our country and Black River Falls, but I like to think that Black River Falls played an influential part in shaping the efforts of the fight against terrorism in countless ways.

The September 11 Memorial opened in New York City on the 10th Anniversary of 9-11. Located on eight acres of the 16-acre World Trade Center complex, the 9/11 Memorial is a place of remembrance and contemplation.