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James Flessa is known locally for his years of service as a deputy with the Cole County Sheriff Department, but I recently visited with him regarding the decade he spent as a soldier in the U.S. Army.

A 1985 graduate of Russellville High School, Flessa enlisted in the U.S. Army early the following year. He received his initial training at Fort Benning, Georgia, becoming a heavy anti-armor weapons infantryman and completing Airborne School. From there, he received assignment to the Third Infantry Division in Germany and went on to perform guard duty on the border between East and West Germany. While stationed overseas, he was granted leave to return home in 1987 and married his fiancée, Becky Crain.

He was transferred to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in 1988, serving as a squad leader in a light infantry company. While there, he not only trained in locations such as Panama, but deployed to the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War. Initially staging in Saudi Arabia, his company was soon sent to an area known as "FOB Cobra" to establish an operating base and observe Iraqi troop movements.

He explained, "We were essentially out in the middle of nowhere. Eventually, we were sent to an area 40 miles west of Basra in the oil fields—everything was burning and it was cloudy and black."

In 1992, following his return from the Middle East, Flessa was transferred to Korea for a one-year assignment and trained with a light infantry unit. Finally, in 1993, he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with whom he remained until receiving his discharge in early 1996. In the years following his service, he worked for the Cole County Sheriff Department, from where he retired earlier this year.

As always, there are many fascinating details to Flessa's experiences, which I look forward to sharing in the coming weeks. Stay tuned!

