

**Vincent Antoniotti Oral History Interview by \_\_\_\_Sam Errico\_\_\_\_**

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**Veteran Voices**

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I had the honor of interviewing Vincent Antoniotti about his experience in the Military and West Point Academy. In 1998, Vincent fulfilled a lifelong dream by entering the prestigious West Point Academy on the coast of the Hudson River.

“I have many memories from West Point and my early military deployment, including the initial days at the Academy as a Cadet. As part of our initiation, the officers would blast music ‘Guns and Roses’ in our ears as we got used to the expectations of intense structure and an environment of extreme authority. “

Vincent's Determination and discipline propelled him through the rigorous training to become an artillery officer. Throughout his training he learned the intricacies of security and military strategy.

“Keeping in touch with fellow service members has been an honor and provided me with a nice level of emotional support. Many of my comrades transitioned after their service into starting nonprofits for Veterans. They understand the importance firsthand of the complex needs many Veterans have once they return to civilian life. Many veterans come back and struggle, so it is important to help out as much as you can. If people

would do more for Veterans that come back traumatized, injured or emotionally unstable with PTSD. Getting that help is hard for many of these Veterans. Initially, we sometimes do not realize the internal struggles they are experiencing and latent PTSD become apparent. It is up to us to support them with continued therapeutic services and make sure their basic needs are met. That is why Veteran non-profits are a great supplement to the VA services.”

When asked about his memories, Vincent recalled, “I do have some not so good memories. A lot of friends did many deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan. I only had two deployments. We check-in with each other and make sure we are all ‘ok’. It is a big part of our duty to be there for each other emotionally. As I saw my friends go on to do eight or nine deployments, I could see the toll it took on them emotionally and physically. That is why I decided that two deployments were sufficient for me.”

His first deployment was to the tense DMZ at the border of North Korea and South Korea. “Each day we were always training and shooting artillery.” He explained that he had basic training, “but once we were on the ground we really learned how to succeed. We had to figure out how to maintain peace in this volatile region through our knowledge of military strategy.” As an officer, everything about Vincent's Job responsibilities was different. He explained that as a Cadet, the daily schedule was standard, but as he ascended through the ranks he was more focused on training the new cadets rather than performing his routine tasks. “We had a list of our expectations

and rotated through them throughout the day. The days were long and hard, lasting many hours.”

Vincent continued, “I received many awards and promotions” For example, he was promoted from 01 to Captain. He explained that they all received awards for time and service. He was awarded the Bronze Star for combat service. He also explained that, “once I was promoted, I was not doing the same sort of job as that I had initially. The more you move up in the ranks, the more your job description changes. It took me farther away from the artillery action, to become more involved in administrative and training responsibilities.”

Travel was not easy and the days were long. “When I was in Korea and Iraq, it was hard to be away from family and friends for so long. Being away from everything that is familiar to you, it is not easy. When I had a break or a vacation I would go on break every 30 days. When I was in Korea, I was able to go to Beijing for a few days. I was also able to explore Thailand and learn to scuba dive. When I was deployed, I had a nice break in Germany to see a friend and explore Europe together. It was great to have the opportunity to travel and explore the world on my breaks and vacations.”

Vincent described his experience in the middle east. “I was in Iraq for about a year and I did multiple jobs while I was stationed in the desert. One of the jobs was to be in charge of security for high level assets that had to be moved. We had to plan out the routes and patrol in some pretty rough areas. Then I was moved to become a fire support inside

the prison of Abu Ghraib and help plan the security of the whole prison.” Each deployment left its mark, shaping him into who he is today.

“My time in the military gives you a different perspective on things. I always try to understand both sides and perspectives of war. When you have seen casualties first hand and experience combat it gives you a new perspective on war. I was lucky and not injured, but many friends were injured. Seeing human casualty changes you forever. Before I was deployed, my brother gave me a shirt, and I would sometimes sleep with the shirt to remember home. Many people had lucky charms or objects of meaning to provide comfort.”

“I decided to retire because my unit was going to deploy again. I did not want to have multiple deployments like my comrades. Two deployments were sufficient for me. I moved to Tennessee when I got out of the service. I had a good group of friends and family around me, and I was not injured so my adjustment was a good one. When I got out of the army, I worked in a manufacturing facility as an engineer.”

“As the years passed, we moved to Florida, and there were not very many engineering opportunities, so I became a math teacher. I have always liked math so why not teach math which affords me more time at home with the family. A better work life balance for me and my wife.” Vincent has become a respected figure in the school community. His impact goes beyond equations and math theories. He is a mentor to many students. With his training and discipline, he found a new purpose in the classroom. He has found

fulfillment in nurturing young minds by teaching them the principles of mathematics and instilling in them the lessons about discipline, teamwork, and perseverance to learn new things.

“I would say the comradery and appreciation you gain for all the veterans before me are one of the best parts of the experience for me as an individual in the military. It is important to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made by many people during their service for our country. I am able to imagine more what it would have been like back in the days of the historical wars. I realize my deployment was not as bad, as some of the eye opening historically significant deployments in other wars like WWI and WWII. In summary, I am a different person after my experience in the military. I have much empathy and compassion for those who have served. I feel I am one of the lucky ones who came home without intense trauma or injury. The sacrifice the soldiers make for our country affords us our freedoms and liberties that we must not take for granted.”