

Paul Duros interview

Veteran Voices

Co-authored by Jordan Feder and Lexie Ruth

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Elizabeth Ruth and Jordan Feder had the honor of interviewing Paul Duros about his time in the US Army. He had a long career lasting 32 years in the service of the United States. He served during and saw many days filled with combat. Paul volunteered to join the Army in August of 1990. Paul decided to go into the military because at the time the job market was good and there were very few jobs. He had a desire to go into law enforcement and there were not a lot of opportunities and openings in the area. However, the military was offering minimal commitments to go, they would train you and send you to school. Paul was initially going to join the Air Force to be a pilot so he went to homestead Florida to do an interview. Paul passed the evaluation but was not accepted by the Air Force because of his age. Paul decided to go into the army and this was the best available choice for him.

Paul shared a first day memory when he went to basic training. He arrived at Fort McClellan Alabama at 2am due to a delayed flight coming out of Atlanta, Georgia. Paul arrived via bus and as soon as he got off the bus they marched him into an auditorium to give him the basic information. Paul explained after this they went into an amnesty room where if they had drugs or alcohol you could leave it here with no questions asked. As people filled the auditorium drill sergeants started yelling and screaming while explaining what would happen. Once that was done they went to their rooms to sleep. Soon enough they heard a trash can fly across the room, that was the wake up call. The day begins with the barbershop, then he went to pick out his uniform and get dressed, lastly he was put in a group for the medical process.

Paul explained to us that everyone got a rifle at training and “it is like your baby, you can not lose it.” Everyone was trained to do a 15 mile road march and as the harder it got the more pounds was added to your backpack. By the end of the 15

mile march there was 40 pounds in Paul's backpack. After finishing basic training Paul learned how to do law enforcement functions, patrol in the field of direct traffic, and prisoner war operations. Paul explained how strict they were with uniforms, to the point that they would check it with a ruler. He had to know how to specify to hang it in a locker, how to take it off, and wear it. The second week of the Army was learning how to shoot pistols, rifles, and submachine guns. Daytime or nighttime it did not matter, under any weather conditions you would push through and shoot the guns. In the military there was consistent education and "it is like going to a college course that is a year long."

Paul explained the time in training when someone lost a life. At Fort Benning Georgia he did the PRDC class out in the field. One day he was sleeping outside. On the second day, there was a lightning strike that hit one of the tents. There were two people per tent and the two people struck got severely hurt. In addition, a different group of people in a struck tent had one of their partners die.

After basic training, Paul was assigned to an Alpha Company in Germany. He was rerouted to do physical security and guard installation. Paul explained active duty was basically a Monday through Friday job assignment depending on the squad you're in. Paul was in patrol ops. First, the day started at 4:30am when he met the squad, then physical training for an hour with a 45 minute breakfast that followed, and finally he was told his job assignment. On the other hand, combat operations were a 24 hour day. There was a 12 hour day rotation either night or day depending on the assignment. When Paul went to Iraq the first time there were no days off. His job was to go out and patrol different areas of assignment at night. If he found people he detained them to take back to the units. The only people that were usually night ops that were going out were either infantry or special forces. Each one got a map and a grid and each team was responsible for a certain area. Everyone had a long gun with them at all moments. The guns were loaded, and the soldiers slept with them. Everything ran 24 hours a day, the radio, phones, computers, maps, e.t.c.

Paul explained what he felt was the hardest part of the military. Getting adjusted to a very strict structure was intense. Rules included: sleeping in barracks with white sheets and wool blankets, blank walls, posters were not permitted, having highly

shined tile floors, scuff-free shoes, and keeping your room spotless with everything lined up perfectly. If one roommate failed the inspection, everyone in that room did.

When serving in Iraq his job was to do patrol. During the desert storm, his unit slowly had to transition to detention operations. Before the war broke out, Paul was on patrol one day and the Iraqis were putting explosives on their bodies. They were coming up to marine patrol and detonating themselves. Paul spotted people going across foot that were not from the US military. His group was the ones that would go through with contact. Once they made contact they saw five Iraqis. The first one he went to search he was feeling something about a cell phone size in the pocket. It was an explosive that was going to detonate and kill them. Paul took his sidearm out and put it up to the temple of the man. Paul states, "I told the interpreter, you tell this guy if he moves, I'm going to shoot him in the head. This guy stripped his clothes off so fast, and was naked and peed on himself." Five Iraqis were captured and their weapons. Paul states, "the guy kept running his mouth and my interpreter says this guy won't let it go and wants to kill me." Paul had enough of the guy's disrespect and "took a cigarette, stuck it in my mouth that aggravated him because I wouldn't share it with him." Paul's team got recognition for capturing prisoners of war during the Gulf War and ended up capturing 5500 people.

Paul then told us about his 3 good luck charms, explaining that everyone has a chaplain in the military. The first time he went into service, he got a trinket of one of the protector saints, from a chaplain. He still carries it till this day. The second trinket he carries is a plastic cross from a Catholic priest. The third is a small medallion that he carries in his computer bag. He has kept all of them for over 3 decades. This inspired Paul to give away the stuff that was going to be discarded or not used from the prior priests he met. He took it and gave it to a priest in Missouri, who he met at Fort Leonard Wood that was the same denomination as Paul. This priest had nothing. This priest did Orthodox liturgy in a Catholic church, but he only had a few items.

Paul expressed, "the best part of service was the ability to travel all over the world. That was one of the best things and you get to meet different people. Just to have discussions." He explained that when he was in Texas he would go out and

volunteer to mentor in grade school. Additionally, he participated in TED talks that the military did.

Vacations for Pauls consisted of visiting Boca Raton, seeing his parents and brother, going to the lake in Columbia, South Carolina, going downtown, football games, or visiting Myrtle Beach. Paul served in several locations across the country including: Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Fort Benning, Georgia, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Fort McClellan, Alabama, Fort Knox, Kentucky, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Fort Sill Oklahoma, Fort Ord, California, The Presidio and California camp hunter Liggett, Camp Robert, California, Fort Bliss, Texas, and Camp Blanding, Florida. Paul served in Germany, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and in and out of Uzbekistan.

One of the harder parts of being in service for Paul was the adjustment when returning home. Paul stated, "Sometimes I would wake up at night thinking I was still over there and that I had a meeting. I could hear stuff. I would wake up in the middle of the night and run and my wife would say Where are you going? I thought I had to get up to go to a meeting. I would recur what happened in October of 2012 and would play back over." Paul additionally stated, "sometimes you come home and you're angry. People are over there and things happen to them, a lot of people lost their lives."

Once Paul got close to mandatory retirement, he left the service. His main reason was due to the change in administrations and certain things were going in a direction he didn't like and "saw the writing on the wall." He was not happy the way the army was progressing.

Paul expressed "as you're going through the service, you see that people get hurt, and people die. You can be here today and you're gone tomorrow in the military, you can be replaced at any second regardless of what position you have, whether you're boss or not. You learn to appreciate that you make friends, regardless of where you came from, regardless of what you look like, regardless of what language you speak in the service." Paul explains when he is not in uniform in his home, he learned to appreciate life in general; "I missed the clowns. I do not miss the clown show."

One message that Paul wanted to leave for future generations was, “People don’t realize the toll it takes when you serve. In today's age, less than 1% of the population serve. It’s not always nice. But overall, I had a great experience. I encourage people if they are willing to serve to do it, but when you go to serve, have an understanding of what you’re getting yourself into and get something out of it.”