

An Interview with LTC Christopher L. Smith  
Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Veterans' Remember* Oral History project

Interview # VRT-A-L-2011-066

Christopher L. Smith, an Illinois Army National Guard officer who worked with the Iraqi police in Baghdad in 2006, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember – War on Terror* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Nov 22, 2011 Location: Monmouth, Illinois (Warren County Public Library)

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Robert H. Deveraux, ALPL Contract employee

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview being  
processed

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 0:31 + 1:10 / 0.52 + 1.17 = 1.69 hrs

Session 1: Early military experiences through his reaction and response to 9/11

Session 2: Training in the US Army Reserve and service in Iraq with Military Police

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on July 26, 2012.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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## Abstract

Christopher L. Smith, Veterans' Remember, VRT-A-L-2011-071

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Christopher L. Smith was born in Freeport, Illinois in 1971, and grew up in Mendota, Illinois. He attended the University of Illinois, and enrolled in the ROTC program, and concurrently served in the U.S. Army Reserve and later the Illinois Army National Guard (C Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment). Upon graduation he was commissioned in the Field Artillery and trained on Paladin Self-Propelled howitzers. His first assignment was as a Fire Support Officer to an armor (tank) company in the 24th Infantry Division (later reflagged as the 3rd Infantry Division) at Fort Stewart, Georgia. After his active duty experience, Smith spent several years as a civilian sales representative, while also serving in the Ready Reserve. In 2004, he returned to full-time status as an Active Guardsman working in a unit that oversaw mobilization planning of Reserve Component units. He deployed to Iraq in 2006 as a member of an Advisory Team working with the Iraqi Federal Police, first in Sadr City and then Al Dora—both neighborhoods in metropolitan Iraq. This gave him a front line view of the ethnic dynamics of the city. He describes the dangers posed by trash in the streets and the hazards faced by interpreters. He received additional training as a strategic planner and returned to Iraq again in that capacity during the final drawdown of U.S. forces in the country.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** service in Iraq in 2006; working with the Iraqi police force during the war; Advisory Teams in Iraq; Sadr City in Baghdad; Al Dora in Baghdad; Iraqi Federal Police; Military Planner, U.S. Army Reserves; Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri; Illinois Army National Guard; Infantry Basic Training at Ft. Benning, Georgia; Company C, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment; University of Illinois ROTC; Paladin Self Propelled howitzer; 24th Infantry Division & 3rd Infantry Division at Ft. Stewart, Georgia; Field Artillery Fire Support Officer; Inactive Reserve and Ready Reserve; reactions to 9/11 attacks; Shi'a and Sunni in Iraq; working with interpreters in Iraq;

**Note to the Reader:** Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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## Table of Contents

*Note: This interview was interrupted in the middle, the first segment is Session 1. The second is Session 2. **Bold italicized clips are of particular interest***

### Session 1:

00:00:15	Introduction and background—growing up in Mendota, Illinois
00:03:35	University of Illinois and enlistment in U.S. Army Reserves
00:05:00	Joins Illinois National Guard as infantryman
00:05:30	Basic Training and Ft. Benning (including Eskimo soldiers)
00:08:45	Life in the National Guard
00:10:35	ROTC
00:11:40	Ranger Club and Ranger Challenge
00:14:25	ROTC recruiting duty (including some disparaging remarks about Ft. Knox)
00:15:30	Field Artillery officer training at Ft. Sill (Paladin commander)
00:17:00	Fire Support officer with tank (armor) company
00:18:50	Promotions
00:19:00	Inactive Reserve and civilian hiatus
00:21:50	Family life
00:23:20	Sales representative for cleaning chemical company
00:24:10	New job as sales representative for seed company
00:25:15	Reentry into military post 9/11 and service in Ready Reserve
00:27:30	Active Guard Reserve
00:28:00	Reaction to 9/11 Attacks
00:29:45	Return to full-time status after 2003 Invasion of Iraq
00:30:36	<b>End of Session 1—interview continues in session 2.</b>

*Interview was interrupted unexpectedly at this point and had to be restarted on second track*

### Session 2:

00:00:15	Assignment to unit with oversight over Reserve training and mobilization
00:03:30	Additional skill sets available in Reserve Component units.
00:09:15	Readiness transformation in Reserve Component since 9/11
00:11:00	Family's response to prospects of deployment
00:12:15	Preparations to deploy as an Advisory Team, from Ft. Bragg to Ft. Hood
00:15:45	Challenges for Iraqi Police
00:16:00	Route to Iraq
00:17:30	Description of Sadr City and Al Dora (in metropolitan Baghdad)
00:18:50	Shi'a versus Sunni conflict and differences
00:20:30	Iraqi Police in southern Baghdad
00:22:00	Characterization of Iraqi Police Brigade Commander (successful)
00:23:20	Description of Iraqi Federal Police they were there to train
<b>00:28:20</b>	<b><i>Effects of deployment on family—bombed bus incident (00:31:42 end of anecdote)</i></b>
<b>00:31:42</b>	<b><i>Feelings of threat/safety—how to deal with casualties (00:33:22 end of anecdote)</i></b>
00:33:22	Assessment of level of success ( <b>00:34:56 end of anecdote</b> )
00:34:56	Challenges of providing basic services, and countering local corruption

- 00:36:30** *Trash collection potentially lethal activity (00:38:58 end of anecdote)*
- 00:38:58** *Interpreters and the risks to them and their families (00:42:50 end of anecdote)*
- 00:43:00 Chronology of deployments
- 00:44:08 Change to unit in Seattle Washington (wife commissioned as nurse-midwife)  
Chris works as executive officer in recruiting unit
- 00:45:40 Becoming a Strategic Planner
- 00:51:15 Third Corps, Ft. Hood, and lead-up to second deployment
- 00:52:00 Return to Iraq, January 2010, improved situation
- 00:54:00 Duties during second deployment—serving as strategic planner, change in  
overall U.S. Military mission in Iraq and changes in Iraqi government
- 00:56:50 Drawdown in Iraq (50,000 by Sep 2010; zero by end of 2011) and effects on plans
- 00:58:45** *Prospects for continued democracy in Iraq (01:00:25 end of anecdote)*
- 01:00:25 Return to United States and entry into Master's Degree program
- 01:02:15 Answer to themed questions  
-religion and the War on Terror  
-feelings about Iraq and Afghanistan. Necessary wars?  
-Civilian response to returning veterans
- 01:08:05** *Level of filth and poverty in Baghdad (01:10:04 end of anecdote)*
- 01:10:28 **End of Interview**