

Interview with James C. Nease

Veteran-Gulf War

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Narrator: Mr. Kellen Ebert and Miss Emily Keehbauch

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Narrator: This is Kinsley High School, 716 Colony, Kinsley, Kansas. Our guest is Mr. James C. Nease who was born February 12, 1937, at Bucklin, Kansas. My name is Emily Keehbauch and I will be interviewing him along with Kellen Ebert. Mr. Nease served in the Army, Air Force, and back to the Army in the Gulf War.

Narrator: Mr. Nease, why did you decide to join the Army?

Nease: Well, I was just a typical high schooler and didn't have anything in mind. And I decided, by golly, I'd just go into the military. So I graduated on Friday the thirteenth and by Monday the seventeenth I was in the Army.

Narrator: What made you decide to choose the Army?

Nease: That's a good question. I don't really know. To be truthful, I talked with some guys. They all talked Army and why not? Besides, I wanted to be a paratrooper and the Army offered that.

Narrator: What war did you serve in?

Nease: The Gulf War.

Narrator: And what were the years you served in the Gulf War?

Nease: Well actually, I joined while the Korean War was still going on, and that was in May of 1955. It did not officially end until I think July of '55. So even though I was just in basic, I was in the military during the period of the Korean War. Of course I didn't serve in the Korean War. I was just in basic and then later on in the Vietnam War, I spent the whole Vietnam War in Alaska with the Air Force. And then the Gulf War, that's the one I actually got involved in. I was in the National Guard unit in Hays, Kansas, and they called our unit up and we went to war in Saudi Arabia.

Narrator: So how long were you in the military then?

Nease: Twenty years and nine days.

Narrator: During your time in Alaska, what did you do in the Vietnam War?

Nease: In Alaska I was in the training outfit. I taught classes and taught writing and management, a clerk, you know, office work.

Narrator: So there was a period of time that your were back out of the military then?

Nease: Yes.

Narrator: Like after the Vietnam War?

Nease: And that gets really confusing on dates in my mind. But basically I went three years army and I was out for two years. And then I joined the Air Force. And I was in for nine years in the Air Force and then I got out and I was out for over 20 years when I rejoined the National Guard.

Narrator: What made you decide to rejoin?

Nease: Oh, I was just jawing with a bunch of my friends. And they just said, "Well, you ought to go and do it." And the more I talked about it the more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. And I went down and talked to them and yeah come on the do it..you know. So we did it. And then my two kids also joined the National Guard. So my daughter and my son and myself were all three in the same unit. They took all three of us to Saudi. They were going to skip and only take one of us, you know. They debated that and then they said, "No, we will take two of you." And then they debated that (laughing). And then they finally came up with, "Well no, it doesn't matter that much. We are going to take all three of you." Because of, do you remember back in history where there was, what was it five sons were on one ship? Am I saying that right? Don't quote me on that. Something like that, five sons were on one ship were all killed simultaneously, and that set a standard in the military that there would never be a case again where a whole family was wiped out in one you know blow, and that's why they debated not taking the three of us. But they did wind up taking us all.

Narrator: Did you want to be with the rest of your family?

Nease: Yeh, I figured what the heck. If we're going to get damaged, we might as well do it together. So we all three went willingly, no problem.

Narrator: Did you partially rejoin because you felt it was your patriotic duty?

Nease: Oh, I suppose so. Yeah, in my younger years I felt patriotism pretty strongly.

Narrator: How would you define patriotism?

Nease: That's a good question. Patriotism really is if I feel a threat to this nation, I become patriotic real quick. And in terms of war threatened, in terms and war, and yet in all my life we've never had a bomb fall in America, except for the one up in Alaska when the Japanese invaded. That was Second World War in 1945. (Clears throat) But there the Japanese actually did occupy American soil, did you know that? clear out on the Aleutian Chain (laughs). We wasted something like 10,000 men to get them out of there.

Narrator: So where were you stationed at during the Gulf War?

Nease: During the Gulf War, Dammom or Al Khobar. Either way we were right in the middle in between the two towns. Dammon D A M M O M, I think Dammom. And Al Khobar. That's simplified spelling but...

Narrator: And that's in Saudi Arabia?

Nease: Saudi Arabia, right south of Kuwait. We were probably 60, 80 miles right south of the Kuwait border.

Narrator: Did you have to go back through basic training when you rejoined?

Nease: No. I went through it one time when I first joined the Army. And then the Air Force took me in as having gone through basic. And I retained my original rank and everything. And that's the only time I went through basic, just that one time. Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. Hot, (laughs) it was a hot place.

Narrator: Can you describe to us again your experience with the heat?

Nease: OK, in Saudi Arabia?

Narrator: Yeah.

Nease: That was kind of interesting. I sat down. We had a tent with an open side. I sat down on a steel chair and it burned me, and like I told you before, I know what temperatures I can take because all you got to do; you should do it yourself for kicks. Take a thermometer, put it in a pan and hold the thermometer and stir the water as the water heats and when it gets to get to hold your hand in there, jerk it out, and read the thermometer. And that will tell you what kind of temperature you can take. Well, I can take 120. That's my limit. So anything above that feels like it burns me and that chair definitely burned me. So I thought to myself, my gosh who put this out in the sun, because that's where things get so hot that you can't handle them. Well, it hadn't been the case because I had cooled it down with some water and sat down and started eating my chow again and it burned me again. It didn't take it very long either. This time I got curious so I went down to the maintenance shack and got me a thermometer, a good one, and we hung it up in our tent, head high. The average temperature was around 130. It went from about 128 to 132, everyday. Just regular clockwork, and that was a mind blower because it did not feel that hot. I mean it was 2 percent humidity and you always had a breeze, and we were in a t-shirt and regular pants and we never had a man pass out, nothing. Nobody even realized it was that kind of temperature, you know, but it was. That's the desert for you.

Narrator: What was your job in Saudi Arabia?

Nease: In Saudi Arabia, I was a mechanic. Our whole unit was a mechanic (coughs). Pardon me. The way they do that in the Guard, a unit has its specific job, like if you're going to be a military policeman. We had units here in Kansas that was nothing but handled prisoners, and they went as a unit. A Guard unit is called up, and we have everything that we need. Cooks, we have our own, you name it. Except for hospital and police, things like that, that's common. So a Guard unit is called as a unit. Everything goes and every piece of equipment we had—every tool we had, everything was shipped out with us. We got there we arrived with everything we had before—all of our equipment and the whole nine yards. That's the way a guard unit was set up

to be used. And they needed mechanics in Da-mom. Because they had a big outfit out on a pier, that's where we worked, almost in the ocean. We overhauled engines and do stuff like that, and we were also supposed to go out into the field and pick up broken vehicles and haul them in. In some cases we had a certain tool that was mobile, and we could go right out into the field and repair things right in the field. That was our job. That, of course, never materialized because that war was on the move constantly and it was up North and when they blew up a vehicle, they didn't care. They just left it. So we really didn't have a job when we got over there. It was one of those things you know when you plan logistics of war. Sometimes you make mistakes because they got us over there and didn't have a job for us (laughs).

Narrator: What was your average workday like?

Nease: Oh we started it out 12-7s. That is you see on 12 hours off 12 hours 7 days a week. And man that was a killer. You didn't have time to do anything. You would just get off, and if you didn't get to sleep, you wouldn't get eight hours of sleep you know. You didn't get your laundry done because everyone was off the same time and you only had two machines. How you going to do your laundry? So on and so forth. So they finally quit that and went back to three shifts of eight hours. But they worked seven days a week.

Narrator: What did you do during those off hours?

Nease: We did a lot of different jobs. We converted buses to transportation, prisoner transportation. We washed vehicles; we washed tanks, set up wash racks, we did a lot of stuff. We just mainly did clean up for that war. We finally did clean up from that war. When they finally stopped the war, everybody had to wash the vehicles before they were brought back. They had to be totally washed and cleaned. So we set up washracks. The guys would bring their vehicles in and we would monitor the washracks, make sure they got them washed. We stayed busy. Something was going on all the time. But the only taste of actual war was one time a SKUD missile came right over the barracks. And the engine blew off right dead over the barracks. We had guards up there so those kids saw the explosion. Just south of us about three quarters of a mile as the crow flies was a Toys-R-Us store. It was the only thing in there, otherwise, there was just desert around it. Right behind that Toys-R-Us store was a metal building where the Pennsylvania Transportation group had just arrived, and most of them were in that building. That SKUD hit dead center, right in the center of that building. It took it out totally, killed 27 guys. And then we got involved because the building we were in was called the hospital. We called it the "white elephant" because it was built to be a hospital. But in fact it had never been used as a hospital, because it didn't have a separate female entrance. And in Saudi Arabia females don't go in the same entrance as the males. So it just sat there. When we went over there the military rented it. We used it for a barracks. Didn't have anything in it, just empty rooms. It did have showers and it did have air conditioning. We lived on a cot, but still it was great life, we didn't have to live out in the desert. Anyhow everybody, all the rest of the troops around, thought it was a hospital. So when those Pennsylvanians were missing arms, missing legs, they were in terrible shape, believe me. And they put them in deuce-and-a-halfes (*Army*) trucks and brought them to our building, thinking they were coming to a hospital. But as it did happen we had one unit that was a helicopter rescue team. They were medically trained and they were up on the top floor. And there were about nine or ten people I think were in that unit. They helped out quite a bit. But otherwise, the hospital was two and a half miles south of us, the actual hospital. So anyway, our unit got a good taste of what it is like to be in war. When

you see bodies, and see guys die right there while you are trying to help them with missing arms and legs and stuff, it's a real awakening of what war is all about. So our unit got a taste of that.

Narrator: Did you have any interactions with the locals?

Nease: Yes, they finally toward the last let us go downtown. I'd get a bus and load up with guys that wanted to go downtown and shop. I'd drive them down to the middle of Dammom, park the bus and tell them to be back here at such and such a time. Everybody would go on their own walk around and look over the town. The natives there, I wouldn't call them friendly because they didn't like us very well—just the idea of us being there, this was a foreign idea. They had never had anybody come into their town and do that. But we didn't go downtown or anything at the first part because they didn't know what to expect. They thought there might be some locals who would try to do us in, you know. But they never did. There was never a case that I knew of where a local attacked the military. They always treated me nice, you know, the merchants and all that. You could just use your credit card like anywhere else and buy what you wanted—except for one time, we had to get some water. Water is scarce over there. It has to be desalinated, and they had desalinations units in the dock area where we were, but those were not complete units. That is the say, they only took out certain things, like they took the salt out. To do it and take everything out was a very expensive job. They did that down in Dubai. It was something like 800 miles south of us. But three times we had to go down and we would load up a flat bed with water and drive them back in a convoy, and bring water back up to Saudi Arabia. I got stuck on that, so I made three trips to Dubai, United Emirates and back to Saudi Arabia. That was my experience because you don't know desert until you have seen it. And all the way from Dubai up to United Emirates I could count the number of plants that were growing by the side of the road. I mean you don't know desert until you have seen that place. It's sand. Our western states are not desert. They have all kinds of plants out there, but in Saudi Arabia a camel eats on the go. He never stops walking because as he walks along, he grabs that little bit there, then grabs another little bitty plant, and that's all there is to eat. I don't know how anyone could survive in the desert, buy they do. So that was quite an experience for me being over there. I know one thing for a fact I would not want to live over there. No way, I will take Kinsley (laughs).

Narrator: How do people in Saudi Arabia differ from the people here?

Nease: Oh, well for example, I don't think they will ever accept democracy even though we try to force it on them because they truly believe in their god. They are true believers and a typical American goes to church and oh, yeah, but he goes mainly to be amongst other people and stuff. When it comes right down to a true belief in God, I don't think that there are many of them that I have ever met that really truly believe in their god. A Saudi Arabian or a Middle Easterner does. Democracy is built on atheism and a republic is built on biblical, you know. And I don't think they will ever accept democracy, because it is atheistic. There is no god, man does everything, man rules, and man makes the laws. But under a republic God makes the rules. God makes the laws and you follow it. I don't think they are ever going to get those guys converted over to democracy. It ain't going to happen.

Narrator: You said that you think they will never accept democracy even though we force it on them. Do you think, is that what we are doing is forcing it on them?

Nease: Yeah, basically. That's what we are doing. That's why we have a bad face around the world. The rest of the world hates our guts, and they do, and they have a good reason for it.

Narrator: So do you agree with the war in Iraq right now?

Nease: I don't like any war. A war that is based just on the acquisition of oil, I don't particularly agree with it, now, because that's all that war is based on. They call it a war on terrorism, but we have never had any terrorism in American except for 9/11.

Narrator: Do you carry on any of your friendships? Are you in contact with any of your friends from the war?

Nease: That I knew in the military? Not really, because I left Hays, moved down here and I'm getting to the age where half of my friends are dead. See, I'm almost 70, and the people I know, a lot of them have passed on. People I knew in high school, there are only 16 of us left in the high school class. So, when you get separated that much, then I was gone from Bucklin and traveled all over the place, all over the world. In the military I met so many guys, oh gosh, there was in the units I've been in up to 150 people you know, 200 people. Even if you're in that unit for three or four years you don't know everybody. In our guard unit half of them were from out of town, it wasn't just people from Hays. They'd travel in from Colby, from Goodland, you name it and attend meetings and drill there in Hays. A lot of those people I never got to know really well, just by name. No, if you join an association, you have a specific job and you stay with that specific job through the military. There's a guy right here in town, Fisher. You know Fisher? He was a boatswain. A boatswain is a particular job. A boatswain can literally suppose to be able to run the ship in the absence of the captain, the commander. That group of people is a very tight knit group. If you're a boatswain in the Navy you know every other boatswain, and they have get together and they have meetings and reunions afterwards. That's a different deal there. I bet Fisher could tell you the names of probably 50 guys he worked with or around or still knows, or still sees when he goes to these conventions and stuff you know. But I just didn't get involved in that. I wasn't a specific job like that or anything. So, I wish I could get together with some of the old boys, but half of them are dead and the other half are split up and gone somewhere. So comradeship, yeah, but to continue it, no, not really.

Narrator: Did your views on patriotism and war change at all during your service?

Nease: Just over the years and as I have found out more facts it has certainly changed, yeah. I started out just a typical American believing everything the government told me. As I learned I found out they weren't always telling you the truth (laughs). As a matter of fact I can find very few times that they tell you the truth.

Narrator: What was your, were you flown or did you go by ship to Saudi Arabia?

Nease: Now that's interesting. Let me tell you the whole works because when I was stationed at Fort Camel in the Eleventh Airborne. I just arrived after basic training. This was my first hitch in the Army. They shipped the entire division to Germany. So we climbed on a train, and we sat on that train for like four days I think it was. They had everything on there you needed. They put a different car on and you had all the food you needed. And they'd serve you meals in that chow car, you know. So we lived on that train for four days to get up to New York. We go to

New York and walked right off the train and right onto a ship. We spent eight days on that ship. That to me was quite an experience because I was just out of high school and I hadn't traveled anywhere, and that was traveling to me. So we got to Germany and that's the first time I had an experience like that and I really enjoyed that. Then coming back we came back on an airplane, an old three-tailed Constellation. 18 hours in the air and that was quite a chore, sitting in that airplane for 18 hours. Today they do it in what, four and a half hours in that supersonic jet (laughs). Anyway, where were we going at that point?

Narrator: Would you recruit my generation to join the services?

Nease: To join the services? Yeah, if you didn't have another job, and you needed work, you know, but you got to be prepared to be used, because that's what they do with soldiers historically right on down through the more you study about what they do with soldiers. They are used, you have got to be willing to accept that.

Narrator: What was the food like?

Nease: The food in most cases was very good; it really was. I have no gripes on it. We had one mess hall in Germany that had yucky food, and they really did. I don't know what that sergeant was up to but I think he was taking all the good stuff home. I learned to eat hot sauce. I carried hot sauce with me in my fatigues every time I went down to the chow hall and everything, I ate I just covered with it with Tabasco, you know. Didn't mind eating it. Didn't kill me. So, basically good food really; ship board was great. Other places I've been, in Alaska, had really good food up there. By in large they took care of you quite well, they really did.

Narrator: During your free time, what did you do for entertainment?

Nease: Entertainment, that changed over the years, you know. Basically when I was young, we'd go out and drink. That's all we knew because we were young and dumb. When I got older, I found other things to do. In Saudi Arabia there was nothing to do because they tried to keep you working the whole time, keep you out of town. So, we didn't even have a movie over there. There was one gal who brought a bunch of DVDs, I mean VHS movies and we had a VHS player downstairs and they'd play the movie down there. But gee whiz, you saw all of them in a matter of a couple of weeks you know (laughs), but you'd go watch them over anyways. Otherwise, it was just typical, you would work on the base and then go downtown and walk around and try to find something to get into. Do the same thing you'd do right here in town, but everybody thinks you have to go somewhere across the world to do it. For some reason that is more fascinating; it's really not. It is the same thing you do here because a person who looks for one thing here will do the same thing there. We really aren't very versatile as human beings.

Narrator: What are some pros and cons with joining the service?

Nease: Pros and cons. The pros are that our military really does take care of its people quite well. I was never mistreated except for one time, and that's a long story. You're taken care of, you're clothed, you're fed, by in large you always got the right equipment for the right climate for whatever you're in. The cons, I don't there is a lot of things that happen. Military justice is not what it is put up to be. It is not really justice; military courts do what they want to

do. They can do some pretty rotten things to people. I got kicked out of atomic weapons fusing school because of a deal that happened that I had nothing to do with, absolutely nothing. I just knew my ex-roommate was the one who was involved; he committed suicide. They blamed me; they had to blame somebody, so they blamed me. I went through a court that was literally a kangaroo court that placed that blame on me. They didn't do anything administratively, no action taken except kicking me out of school and shipping me off to South Carolina. Having had that experience, I know what military justice is like, and it is not fair. It is not realistic; it is whatever they need to do to put the face that they need to put on. There was a president involved in that deal and anytime a president gets involved, the military goes crazy. They do anything they can to save face. The lower guys are always going to pay the price. And I paid the price. That's all there is to it. But, short of that, I have always had good treatment in the military. The people I worked for were always good men. Well there were some that were kind of rotten people, but by in large, good men. I have no complaints on that, really none to speak of.

Narrator: On your way to Saudi Arabia what kind of emotions did you experience?

Nease: That is a good question because I knew I was going into a war zone. That was the first time ever in my life I had done that, and I had my two kids with me. We spent like 10 or 12 hours on a big airplane getting over there, and you had a lot of time to think. But, then again, I got to thinking, well heck the actual war isn't where we are going. We are going south of there. The actual war is 80 to 100 miles north of us, and moving northward. I didn't really worry too much about it. When I got there I kind of expected bombs going somewhere and didn't see them and was very disappointed, you know. Saw a few camels, for the first time in my life, walking around. The experience was enlightening in some ways, and in some ways it was just a big drag. I didn't get what I hoped because I wanted to see some bombs flying and boats going. I was dumb enough. I think most of us are. I didn't see it, until that SCUD came over. That was a real awakening. When you actually see those guys, see the aftermath of what happened with that one bomb. Boy, that's an eye opener.

Narrator: How would you say that the modern soldier differs from that of soldiers in your day?

Nease: The modern soldier, is more of a mercenary than we were because we went in feeling patriotism. We didn't know how to define it really. We defined it in our own way. Today they pay them. If you join the military we will give you \$20,000. So the modern soldier is more taking the job because there is no job where he lives. He can't work, and they're offering him \$20,000. Why he goes and joins. Once he's in it's too late. Of course, that is an oversimplification, and there are still the professional military people who will always going to be that. But, by in large that's my impression on what is going on today. When they pay \$20,000 to recruit a guy, he's a mercenary. He is doing it for money.

Narrator: Do you think it should be a draft or your choice to join the military?

Nease: Choice, definitely. Now, if a country came over here and started dropping bombs on Kinsley, Kansas, I'd be the first one to be running around telling guys like you to get a uniform on and here's a gun. I'd draft you in a minute. But, when you're sitting here in America and you're going to other countries just to get their oil, to form a draft for doing that kind of stuff to me is a real cardinal sin. I don't go along with the draft in a case like that at all. So, that's as simple as that, but they're going to have to go to a draft I'm afraid. They've already said that

they are going to use everybody...A law has been proposed that everybody will have to serve a certain amount of civic time, be it military or whatever. They will take you in, evaluate you for what you're good for, and if you're good for military, you'll go military. If you're not, you'll go to this. You'll do your time over here or something like that. But, you will serve civic time. Clinton proposed it, but it never went anywhere. Now Bush has proposed it, and I think it is going to go. That will be equivalent to a draft. I hate to see that happen.

Narrator: Do you think that women should be required to sign up for the draft?

Nease: That is some of that law, that will be yes. But I don't think that's right. I've seen what has happened to women in military. They spend their entire time trying to find someone to protect them. Being older, in the unit that I was in, I had women one time in Dubai, one gal wanted to stay in my room, just to protect herself from being accosted all the time. She wanted a good night's sleep, and I wouldn't pester her, and she knew it. So she stayed in my room, just because of that, just to be safe from guys trying to pester her. A woman in the military lives one hell of a life. I would not recommend it for anybody. That's just my opinion, but they need bodies and they're going to take male or female.

Narrator: Are teenagers today less patriotic than they were?

Nease: I don't really have that much contact with teenagers. I really don't. Everybody that I know is older, and I don't really know what a teenager thinks today. I wish I did; I really do. I'd really like to get together with teenagers and find out what people are really thinking. I just don't have the opportunity to, so I can't evaluate what the teenagers are thinking. I know what we thought when I was a teenager. It was a totally different world. We didn't even have a wheat auger. We shoveled it by hand off and on the trucks.

Narrator: When you joined the military during the Korean and Vietnam War what were your feelings about going to war then?

Nease: Had they'd taken me to Korea, I wouldn't have thought anything about it, until I would have gotten over there, and I probably would have hated it. I don't know. Same thing in Korea, I mean Vietnam. Had they taken me out of Alaska and taken me over there I probably would have gone and thought it would have been a grand experience until I would have gotten over there, and found out that it was so damned hot, and people shooting at you. I just never really experienced it, but I really couldn't give you a good opinion on it. I was definitely willing to go, let's put it that way. I guess that's acceptance, you know. Today, I wouldn't. But when you get to be 70 years old, you have enough experience to know what you like and don't. That's what I don't like. I would never go back and do that again.

Narrator: What was the time frame between Alaska and going to Saudi Arabia?

Nease: That's a long one, I'd have to look it up on reference. I was in three, that was in 1955 to 1958. I was out in 1958 for two years. In 1960 I rejoined for nine years. That puts me at 1969. Around 1969 or 1970 I got out and was in Washington, D.C. at the Pentagon working for Aftec (*Air Force Test & Evaluation Center*). We got out of the military and went back home. I worked and I had businesses. I had mobile home sales. I had a construction business. I did a lot of stuff, until that's a good question. I'd have to look it up on my 2-14. But, it was a good 20 years that I was not in the military. Then they talked me into joining the Guard. I always did kind of like

Army life. There are certain things I really liked being around the guys and so forth. I will join this Guard unit. We will never get called up to a war. I was in nine or ten years. In the fifth year we went to war. So I got fooled on that, but I went willingly. I didn't argue about it. I was getting kind of old for a war, in my fifties, you know. But, that was weird. I didn't just go in and stay 20 and then get out. I was in, out, in, out, and in, out, three times. So, weird situation.

Narrator: What was that like going from Alaska to a desert?

Nease: Well, in Alaska they really do have some severe cold. I've seen 55 below zero. We took a trip one time in my Studebaker, and we thought the heater quit. We really did. We thought there was something wrong with the car. I had a thermometer sitting on the outside hooked onto the window, and got the frost cleaned off. Looked at it, and it was right on the bottom of what it would do, which was 52 below. That's where that thermometer was because it sucked that mercury down that low. So, that's weird country, but I love it. If I had family up there, I would have stayed in Alaska. I really mean it. You've got your daytime and nighttime seasons. In the winter time the sun comes up on the southern horizon, rises about 10 degrees above the Earth, then going right back down into the horizon again in a matter of two hours. But, four hours before it rises, it is sitting right close to the horizon, so these long huge gorgeous colors, sunset you might say or sunrise. It lasts four hours. Everything it lit and beautiful and after it sets, it sets for four hours. So you have eight hours of gorgeous lights and reflections from the sun and clouds turning red and all kinds of stuff, you know. It's just beautiful; it really is. You don't see it here, because here 30 minutes before the sun rises you get a few pretties and maybe 30 minutes after the sun sets you get a few pretties. But there it is four hours at both ends.

Narrator: So you definitely prefer Alaska to the desert?

Nease: Oh yes, I would stay out of the desert. The deserts they're vicious. Everything has a spine; every animal you touch them, and you get stung. That's desert life. Everything is tough, and I'm must not a tough guy. In Alaska, if you can take the cold, the rewards are fantastic. In the cold season, you just dress for it. No big deal.

Narrator: Did you ever have any opportunities to receive any rewards?

Nease: I brought some in case. I didn't know what you might ask. Just to show you how they do an award, for example, here's one. You can read this if you want to. See, it's pretty fancy; it has a fancy holder. Here is the letter that makes the award, and here's the actual award. Meritorious Service Award, I got a medal for that, see.

Narrator: Was this presented to you?

Nease: The commander of the unit, but this was signed by General Ruger. He was in charge of the National Guard, Kansas National Guard.

Narrator: How did you receive this?

Nease: They have a formation. They call you up in front of the formation, and your commander would have the medal and they would have a guy reading this. They would read this to you. You want this on tape?

“Sergeant James C. Curtis Nease, Kansas Army National Guard. Meritorial service during the period of 22 September 1974 to 12 February 1997. Sergeant Nease’s professionalism, sound judgement, and technical knowledge together along with his personal insight, genuine concern and flexibility make him a true leader. Sergeant Nease’s military achievements stand recognized and applauded. Sergeant Nease’s accomplishments in his duty assignments reflect great credit upon himself and the Kansas National Guard.”

It’s as simple as that, but they would read this, and then the commander would pin the medal on you, and then you’d go back into the formation.

Narrator: What was the highest ranking you ever gained in the Kansas National Guard?

Nease: I never went through rankings. I’m a weird guy. I do not like to command people. That’s not my thing. I was very good at keeping young people out of trouble. I’d help them if they got into trouble. I’d counsel them, so on and so forth. They wanted me to go up into the higher ranks, but I said, no, leave me at an E-5. That’s my perfect rank because I don’t have the responsibilities of running the show which is what I don’t really want to do because it’s not my thing. But I am high enough in rank that I can kind of control the young guys. I’m much better at that. That’s just where I wanted to stay and I stayed as an E-5 all the way through. In the earlier I wanted rank. But in the earlier, I got stuck in frozen fields. No promotions, so I kind of gave up on having rank. I just enjoyed my job. It worked out real good. So E-5 was as high as I went, which was sergeant.

Narrator: Were you ever surrounded by others who had a tough time being in the military?

Nease: I got a lot of that because every time we had trouble, people would always kind of look at me to baby them, to momma them. That’s what I was pretty good at. I did a lot of that, and then some guys don’t have any logic or reasoning. They just can’t do it. Those guys would wind up getting kicked out of the military. So you get a lot of that. It’s just like in school, you’ve got the same thing. There are certain guys that are going to cause trouble no matter what; other guys you’d never get a bit of trouble out of them. They just do what they have got to do and go right along. You’ve seen it.

(Side one of tape ends here; side two did not get copied for library.)

Narrator: What was it like having your children with you in the military?

Nease: That I really enjoyed. Just having them around you know. That was a fantastic experience. On the other hand, had we gotten hit with a bomb, it would have wiped out all three of us. Which was not good, but it did not...it just did not occur to me that we were going to be in an actual battle until that scud came. Then that brought some reality into it you know. But it did not hit us thank God, but it did hit those Pennsylvanians.

Narrator: Were your children with you when the scud missile came in?

Nease: Oh yes. They were in the same building. Had the scud hit our building, it would have gotten all three of us. Believe me, that thing was big enough to wipe our whole building out. It would have leveled that hospital because it would have come in through the roof and it would

have gone right through the center of that building just like it did on the building it hit. Assuming, you know. That other building, there was nothing left of that building. The only thing that was left on that side, was a hole in the ground and t-shirts. Hundreds of t-shirts everywhere. 'Cause the t-shirts, every military man was issued six of them and when it blows, the t-shirt follows the explosion up rapidly, but it doesn't tear it up and it just floats down, you know just like a rag. There were t-shirts all over the place. I couldn't believe it. T-shirts and dead bodies.

Narrator: Did you enjoy it more when your kids were over there with you or did it make you more worried?

Nease: I enjoyed it a lot more, I really did. I really did not worry about them because I knew they were not going to be shot at. You know. Now, had we been under fire all the time, then I would have worried myself to death. But uh, no, as it was, I really enjoyed having them.

Narrator: Were they mechanics as well?

Nease: Yeah, well, in the same unit. Basically, we were all mechanics, in one way, shape or form, you know, but we had other MOS's too, you know. Administration and stuff like that. 'Cause like I said, a Guard unit is a total unit. They are just totally self-sustained.

Narrator: How did you stay in touch with home?

Nease: Uh, they set us up a phone, and twenty-four hours a day, there would be a line there to call home. It was a good deal for us. I do not know who footed the bill, 'cause at that time, we did not use satellite you know. Now a days, you can just pick up the phone and call Saudi Arabia just like that (snaps fingers) you know. But uh (clears throat), that was the way we conversed home. I got to talk to home several times that way.

Narrator: Did you ever feel a sense of home sickness?

Nease: No, I never had. From the time I left Bucklin, when I was, in '55, I had been in one country or another, in one state or another, you know, I lived a lot of places. I just never had the feeling of home sickness, not really.

Narrator: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Nease: Um, that is just a good question because I am just not totally clear on what your overall goal is here. Put it this way, can you think of anything, without looking at your sheet? (Laughs) I mean, is there anything you have ever wondered about?

Narrator: Whenever you came back from serving your service in the military, what did you experience? Did you feel kind of lost or what? How did people treat you after being a soldier?

Nease: You mean when I came home?

Narrator: Yeah.

Nease: Most people did not even realize you had been a soldier. I mean, you take a job working for a company or something. No one would even find out you had been a soldier. You know, because people just do not question that sort of thing. And when they do question it, and you tell them, eh, there is no real reaction. My brother was a soldier, so are you, it is really no big deal. It is just...it is really just like another job. You know, you ask a person "what do you do?" They said I drive a truck, "Well I'm a soldier." Oh, no big deal. But if there had been wars, where our land had been attacked, you know, actually bombs hitting the country into town and tearing up our property and stuff and if our soldiers had saved us from that, then it would be a different story. 'Cause then after five years later or something you would say "Well I was a soldier, you know, and boy, you would be the talk of the town. Everyone would buy you a beer, you know, that sort of thing. But no, as it is today, being a soldier is just like anything else.

Narrator: Do you feel that we should give more thanks to our soldiers?

Nease: Uh, definitely. When they take them over there, and let them breathe DU (*Depleted Uranium*) for a period of time and they come back and die, you know, they should be given better treatment. I do not like that aspect at all. It is a pretty well known fact that, the fact that I hate, that there are over 150,000 soldiers that come back from these so called 'wars' and they are living in the streets. I mean, they are homeless, you know because they have DU problems or something and they really cannot function normally, cannot get a job, so they live in the streets. 150,000 of them. That is just not right, but historically, always, always, the soldier is forgotten. He is used, and as soon as he cleans up the mess, kills a few people or gets killed himself or whatever and then he is forgotten. That is what the VFW is all about – remembering people you know. We spend a lot of time putting flags on graves, things like that. So, it is a toss-up. It is an unanswerable question. You will never come to a conclusion, everybody looks at it differently, you know. But I do think that the military is not treated properly once they have served their time. The VA is always looking for a way to stop paying a guy for something, you know. They have 1,800 lawyers that do nothing but find ways to stop paying, you know. If they would just quit hiring those lawyers for doing that and give those guys something to live on, it would help, but they will not. But that's life. When you were in the French Foreign Legion, as soon as you were out, you were forgotten.

Narrator: Did your outlook on life change after you finally came home?

Nease: Oh yeah, it changes, always, as you grow. There is no way around that, but you get to see some things that happen and you begin to wonder what this life really is all about. And that is kind of normal. It happens to everyone. You know, you go through life having experiences; you are going to see some bad stuff. That is all there is to it. But when you see some of the experiences I have seen, then you really question it. If it is around you, you have to put up with it. Things have happened right here in Kinsley that I have wondered about. Murders and so on and so forth. I was in the military. It was a part of my life and so many guys have done it. I have got so many other people that have been in the military that you have a common thing, actually it is an advantage. You have got something to talk about you know. And it is a common experience. And you can tease one guy for being Navy and another guy for being Marines, you know (laughs) and so on and so forth. (Coughs) Part of the fun.