

# **John Mikos Oral History Interview**

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Interviewed by Nicholas Marrapode  
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Marrapode: I'm here with retired Lieutenant Colonel John Mikos. It's April 20th, we're at the Pritzker Military Library, so just to get started can you tell me when and where you were born?

Mikos: Nick, I was born on March 12th, 1964, in Staten Island, New York.

Marrapode: Did you grow up in Staten Island?

Mikos: Not entirely, my family was from Staten Island, and my grandparents, of both my mother and father's parents lived in Staten Island so I spent a lot of time there as a kid. My Dad was in the Air Force, my mother was a social worker, they both separated and divorced when I was fairly young, so I moved around a bit, and Staten Island was really the one place that was always constant in my early childhood because both grandparents were there so I spent summers there, so although I didn't grow up there I think of myself as being from there, in a sense having grown up there.

Marrapode: Where did you spend most of your time growing up then?

Mikos: [M]ost of my time I lived in Washington, D.C. area as a kid. I lived in Pennsylvania, Southern Pennsylvania for a while. [I] ultimately graduated

from high school in Tampa, Florida, and then went to college in Poughkeepsie, New York just a little bit North about 75 miles North of New York City. And it was in Poughkeepsie that I first joined the Army Reserves and then transferred to the Army National Guard while I was in college and also got involved in the ROTC program. [I]t was in that period when I was about 20-years-old, 21-years-old, that I began my association with the military, with the Army, in specific while I was going to college.

Marrapode: What made you decide to get involved with the Army while you were in college?

Mikos: [A]t first it was a bit of wanting to have a little extra cash by being in the reserves, and it was also a sense that I needed some discipline. I wasn't very focused, particularly my first two years of college, my grades weren't very good and so I took a little time off after my sophomore year and during that time off I enlisted in the reserves and went to basic training and then advanced individual training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. I went to boot camp in Fort McClellan, Alabama in January 1985 and enlisted in the Army, into the Army Reserve, and I was in the Military Police Corps, so when I graduated from basic training and AIT in the spring of 1985, I was an MP.

Marrapode: Can you actually tell me a little about the ROTC program?

Mikos: I got involved in the ROTC in the spring of 1985, graduated from basic training and AIT, so I was now an enlisted member of the Army Reserve,

and I went back to college that fall. [W]hen I went back to college I continued to stay active in the Army Reserve, transferred to the National Guard and then became involved in the ROTC program. I had a very positive experience in basic training. I want to say in a lot of ways it changed my life, it gave me a lot of direction, a lot of focus and I began to think about having a longer term career association with the military and I realized that if I was going to do that, that there were a lot of advantages and I might get a lot of personal satisfaction out of doing it through the officer core route. [W]hen I went back to college that fall I got involved in the Army ROTC program. The school that I was going to was a college called Vassar College it was in Poughkeepsie, New York. It didn't have an ROTC program, so I took ROTC through Fordham University's ROTC program; they actually ran an extension, satellite program up in Poughkeepsie. Fordham was located in the Bronx in New York, so I had to do a lot of travelling to get to ROTC, and stay involved in it. In addition to that I was involved in the Army Reserve [and] then eventually transferred to the National Guard so my last two years of college I was pretty actively involved in both ROTC and the Reserves. Then when I graduated from college I applied, or as I was approaching graduation, I applied for appointment to the active duty and so when at the time I graduated which was in the Summer/Spring of 1987 I was both graduated and I was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the active Army appointed to active duty at that time.

Marrapode: So after you received your commission what was your first assignment and what training did you receive?

MIKOS: My very first assignment, I came in active duty September 4th, 1987, and I was, my very first assignment was actually working in the ROTC program for a while, while I waited for a school slot to open up at the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course which was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I was appointed active duty in the Ordnance Corps but then detailed to the Field Artillery so what that meant was I going into the Ordnance branch, which was a logistical branch of the Army, but I would spend the first few years of my military service in the Artillery. So the first training I had was at Fort Sill, Fort Sill Oklahoma, which is the home of the Field Artillery School. I reported there in February of 1988 and I stayed at Fort Sill until the Summer of 1988, and graduated from the Officer Basic Course, I did a couple of small, or one small follow up course up after that and then from there in late summer 1988 my first regular assignment or first field assignment was in Germany. Specifically it was in a little town called Dünsen, Germany, which is in the northern part of Germany outside of the larger city of Bremen, and it was a US Army Field Artillery detachment. And the US Army Field Artillery detachments were a, US units that worked closely other NATO units; in this case I was working as part of the German 11th Division in their Division Artillery. And what the US Field Artillery detachments did was we handled the, at the time we called the special weapons, they were nuclear weapons, they were small, nuclear

projectiles that went into 1-5-5 millimeter and 8 inch cannons and that would so we would get to fire, the control, the custody, of those nuclear weapons, which in the event of a general war could potentially be used and delivered by these German, by these German Artillery Battalions, so it was a great opportunity. I was, this was at the end of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall was still up so if you know the time of what was going on in Europe that time. Europe was very much divided between the Warsaw Pact and between NATO and the prospect of the US military having to defend Western Europe from Soviet aggression was still very, very real. And the US units were there to strengthen NATO and support that and what I did in the 5th US Army Field Artillery detachment was very much part of that. It was part of establishing nuclear deterrents using what was called tactical nuclear weapons to deter Soviet aggression into Western Europe. So that was my first assignment in Europe and it was really a good one, I learned a lot about the world I got a perspective on other cultures. I got a perspective on what was going on in Europe at the time and really felt that I was involved in something that was giving me much broader understanding of the world around me. So my first assignment in the military was [my] first real assignment in the military was a real eye opening, great experience.

Marrapode: Let's dive into that perspective a little bit. Can you tell me what your role in your unit was like?

Mikos: I was a Platoon Leader, and then also I was the Executive Officer for a while, the number two officer in the detachment and then for a brief period at the end I was the acting Detachment Commander. [T]his was a small unit there were about maybe 45/50 people in the entire unit, so very small, two small platoons of 16-to-18 people and then a small Headquarters Staff embedded onto an Army base. We had, we operated under, although it was a great assignment, had some opportunities to travel, had opportunities to meet and work with young people from Germany and the German Military and the Bundeswehr, at the time. There also was, it was pretty hard work and a lot of pressure. The military puts just a very, very tight controls over what they call the "Shorty", or the safety and security of nuclear weapons and so they were very, very demanding inspections, very rigorous inspections, a lot of, our Headquarters was constantly watching us, we had to have our paperwork perfect, we had to have our procedures perfect we had to really be very disciplined about the security and the custody of the soldiers. When we weren't training, we're guarding these bunkers that were storing these weapons, and it was a bit stressful, it was, everyone was conscious that this was dangerous business. We were something like 150 miles from the inner German border. We as part of our training went to, did reconnaissance of our what was called the GDP, our General Defensive Positions which were the positions, the places that in the event of an attack by the Warsaw Pact into Western Europe our units would deploy to these fighting positions, and we had to, so it was very

real, and very present and very serious. And there was a degree of levity that in terms of how everyone in the unit thought about the work they do but at the same time it was really for me as a young, young guy just out of school just a wonderful time, I got travel a lot, I got to do, see a fair amount of the world in retrospect I wish I'd taken some time to travel some more, but it was it was a good experience, a real good growing up experience for me in many ways.

Marrapode: Can you describe some of the interactions with the German culture that you had there?

Mikos: Yes, I got involved, it was very interesting working with a number of German Lieutenants that were my age, they were very educated young people they had a lot of seriousness of purpose. They were very politically in tuned and it was, and so I got into great conversations at German pubs about (coughs) politics, about policy, about world events. That was an interesting time because as we were living there the Berlin Wall came down in November of 1989, and so and the events were very, very rapidly (coughs) and so it was one part, it was one time in my life where not only was I aware and studying and doing as much reading as I could about the political and military events that were going on in Europe in the late '90s around the collapse of the Berlin Wall and around the reunification of Germany, but I also was gaining a personal perspective on it because I was close to those events so things that I was reading about in the newspaper, things that were in many cases the whole world was looking at, I was

fairly close to. One event that I will never forget is in early December of 1989 I went to Berlin and I was in West Berlin (coughs) and travelled across Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin. Now this was a time when the Berlin Wall had started to come down but was not completely down. By that I mean the East German border guards were still manning their positions, but they were not shooting and it became well known that they weren't. And the wall is being knocked down by the citizens of Eastern, of Western Berlin so there were big gaping holes, yet the semblance of East German control still existed. So there was just this unique period between late-November to I think the middle to maybe the end of December of 1989 when that existed so there was façade as if the border, as if the border was still there, but the people of Berlin were beginning to unify, so as I was going through Checkpoint Charlie, and there were, that Checkpoint Charlie was one of the crossing places where the soldiers from the Allied powers could cross from one sector to another sector. We went through a very formal process where the Russian border guards would check our papers and allow us to pass and they were still going through all those motions as if this was still that, but literally, literally 15 feet from me, there were crowds of young people just passing back and forth, so it just was this absurd situation, the world has turned upside down, but people haven't quite recognized it yet. So that was a very, very impressionable event in my life, and then a little further, so I was with another Captain that was with me and we walked into, finally we passed



Checkpoint Charlie and we were walking into East Berlin and we were walking through some streets to East Berlin. And a young man approached us who was my age and he, I believe, was East German, but he may have been of another East German, European descent, but he stopped me in a very guarded way and he was trying to find the Wall, he was trying to cross through the Wall. But because they don't give people very good maps in East Germany at the time, he wasn't quite sure, he was only a few blocks away, but he wasn't quite sure of the direction, and he wasn't positive, he had heard, that he could pass and that the guards weren't shooting but he wasn't, he wanted to confirm that. So he asked us really two questions. One, "Which is the way to the Wall, through the Wall, where can I pass?" And then, "Is it true that the East German guards are not shooting?" And I pointed him in the direction a few blocks down, make a turn, and then you'll see, a big place where you can pass, and I assured him that in fact I just passed through and that the East German guards weren't passing. I pointed him in the direction and he headed out, and then it was really just a few, a little bit later that it dawned on me that I had just pointed this guy to his freedom and had showed him the way in a very small way, don't want to make much of it, but it had a lasting impression on me, and it's something that I will never, never forget.

Marrapode: When you were speaking with your German counterparts or maybe even East Germans, what were the similarities and differences of opinions?

Mikos: I always come to, I've come to learn in I think the military, my experiences in the Army reinforced that people have more in common than they have apart. [P]eople are affected by the same kinds of hopes and dreams and desires they want the same kinds of, they all have basic desires to live in free societies, they have basic desires to have opportunity, I think, and so there was a lot similarities in that respect. [T]here are certain cultural norms that are different in Germany, and it was helpful for me to be exposed to that. It was helpful for me because it gave me a little different, it helped me to learn to interact and learn to be more culturally aware of norms, of attitudes. So as a result of that experience I think that is something that has helped me throughout my entire life the rest of my military career, now, in a management consulting profession. I do a lot of travel and a fair amount of international travel so those early experiences at a very formative part of my life of having to work closely with people, came from a different culture, came from a different society, grew up very somewhat differently than when I grew up, has helped me to become more tolerant, more understanding, more sensitive to unique cultural differences, and I think just all around a more effective person. I think that's probably the one thing that I got out of those early experiences in Germany.

Marrapode: So you were pretty aware of the deterioration of Soviet power during that time?

Mikos: Yes, absolutely.

Marrapode: Can you give me maybe a few more examples of what you would have associated that deterioration with at the time, some specific events or things you'd read?

Mikos: Yes, I think a lot of it is perspective of time but when I reflect upon the period of say 1989 to 1991 I think it's a, in terms of Western civilization, I think it's a, it was a watershed series of events. [I]n a lot of respects, looking at the arc of history we had a 20<sup>th</sup> Century that was shaped by the events of World War I and then radically changed again by the end of by the fall of the Wall, by the demise of Soviet Hegemony in Europe. In a lot of ways you can say the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is, can be marked by the beginning of the Russian Revolution and the end of the Russian Revolution as two bookends and we're really in a different historical period post that time. I think that, I think that, the influences of that obviously I think the main thing was Communism fell out of its own failure to meet the needs of its people, its failures to meet the aspirations of its people. It really was a shallow ideology that was not in tune with I think the great course of human development and it was a, unfortunate detour for people. But I think it was also aided by the communications becoming more available, phone systems, this is still pre-Internet, and even things like fax machines were beginning to exist, so I think, I think that globally, it was the beginning of global connectivity that added to that. I think people were able to connect a little more, travel became easier, so people were able to travel and talk and learn about the outside

world a little more, and so I think it really fell of its own weight.

Although I have to say that I do believe that US policies and the United States resolve during the Cold War was something that clearly was the right thing to do and in the end resulted in a recognition by Gorbachev and the others that were leading the Soviet Union at this time, that the Western, free Western societies were united. That they couldn't be separated, that they were committed to a free Europe a free Western civilization, and that the United States in particular was prepared to put its wealth and its energies and its resolve to tearing down that Wall. I think it was I think it's a very important positive thing that came out of the post-World War II, the commitment to Europe over those generations. I would have also say just in my perspective I thought that President Bush, the elder Bush, did an excellent job as the President during that period when Europe was coming together, and there were a lot of unknowns, and it really could've gone in a lot of ways. One of the things that I was directly involved was, was the President made a decision very early on unilaterally to withdraw battlefield, tactical nuclear weapons, so the weapons we were involved in, the ones we were manning were brought out of Europe in 1992 by unilateral announcement by the President. That was a bold move, it was an important gesture to deescalate tensions and to send a very strong signal to the Soviets that the United States was not going to use this as an opportunity to say invade the East, but that the United States was committed to an orderly reunification of Europe. That was one example,

and again that was something that was happening on in a global way. Unfortunately I think around that time because there was recession going on in the United States in 1992, a lot of Americans here in the States weren't as focused on these events as those of us who were serving in the military in Germany were, and as Europeans were, but they were very important events. The point I was making I thought that in particular that was one example of something that helped to deescalate tensions. Another example of course I wasn't directly involved in this, but was there when it was happening, was the insistence that the President Bush made that that there be a final and definitive settlement to a number of outstanding issues that were still lingering from World War II. One of these, in example, was the border between Germany and Poland. After World War II there was a movement of the border, the Soviet Union took some land that had been part of far Eastern Germany, far Eastern Poland, and then compensated Poland with some land which had previously part of far Eastern Germany. That was always in the period from '45 to '90 something that didn't sit well with the Germans particularly the small group of Germans either had land or claims to these Polish lands. So Germany, West Germany never recognized the new line between East Germany and Poland which was known as the Oder-Neisse Line that was the river is separated Poland from Germany. And during that period the, there was a view that many of the European leaders didn't want to resolve that issues, or they didn't have the resolve to resolve that issue for political reasons,

although the Germans weren't claiming they were going to invade Poland they'd rather kick the can down and not have to deal with that directory, and I think that President Bush recognized that, that was too important of an issue not to let resolve and got personally involved in resolving it. So that was just another example where I thought American leadership at the end of the Cold War was just pivotal in this transition to free and democratic Europe and it was just a great to be part of that, it was interesting to be a part of it.

Marrapode: There's a lot going on during this time period.

Mikos: Yes.

Marrapode: I want to bring it back a little bit and talk about your personal experiences when you first heard about the Soviet dissipating and this period of change like what were some of your personal experiences with that?

Mikos: [A]t first it was almost amazing, [I]f you'd had asked me even just a view months prior to that I, what do I think the prospects are for a reunified Germany? I would have said maybe in the next 25 to 50 years.

Marrapode: Maybe.

Mikos: [T]he events just moved so so rapidly, and I don't think that anyone or, much of anyone, anyone that was close to those events really saw them coming. So to me it was just an amazing rapidness of a turn of events and how things in the entire existing order just changing quickly. And I guess

that's something that was very illustrative to me and it's made me recognize that things don't always the past is not always a predictor of the future we as human tendency have a way of thinking of it that way we think that we can look to the past and see or if you look to the recent past you have pretty good understanding of what's going to happen. You're reminded that most of our lives and events that bears true, but I think that we have to recognize this illustrated, me, my personal experiences living through that, was this was not always true, and that things can just be one way one day and entirely different another day, in a geopolitical sense in a cultural sense, there are these major shifts that happen, there are these major breaks that happen. And so thinking about things flexibly is something that I think personally came out of that experience for me.

Marrapode: [I]n 1992 the nuclear weapons that your unit is handling get pulled out. Do you follow them out of Germany?

Mikos: No, well, in a sense. I actually went to our, I was reassigned to our Headquarters, and I was working as part of a team that was coordinating the logistics and the movement of those battlefield tactical nuclear weapons out of Germany. Now I don't want to talk about the details of how we got them out and those kinds of things because I think that some of that is still somewhat sensitive, but let me just say that it was publically announced that was happening, so I think it's, that there's no problem with me telling you that it happened it was widely reported in the news. But I was involved in that period and was involved in that, the name of that

operation was referred to as “Silent Echo” and it went remarkably well. It went on time, and without serious incident, and was I think, managed very effectively and from a career perspective it, I think I benefited from that, also, being part of that. The, it was in a lot of ways it was done very well, and through a lot of team effort, so I learned a lot from it, and it was a lot of satisfaction out of that. So yes, in a sense I did follow that because just about the time when the last of those weapons were moved out I had moved to, came out of Germany. Now in the interim, the Gulf War was going on, and happened, so we were in Germany pulling out and just coming off of the reunification, the next big event was the Gulf War, and the, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August of 1991, I believe, could be off on that date.

Marrapode: I think you’re right.

Mikos: [S]o we were just in the midst of that retrograde while the, that Gulf War was going on and I didn’t play any role in that Gulf War, I stayed in Germany. Many of my colleagues though did go directly from Germany to the Persian Gulf to be part of the first Persian Gulf War. In a lot of ways that also marked a period in the United States military from the focus on Europe to now the focus on the Middle East, which we’ve still been involved in because in a lot of ways the most recent Iraq War was an extension of events that really began in that first Gulf War.

Marrapode: Another historical paradigm shift from Europe and the Middle East.



Mikos: Yes, exactly.

Marrapode: During the 1990's like we say a relative time of peace and stability for the US, but there was a lot going on in the military and lots of operations, peace keeping, and humanitarian thing.

Mikos: Right.

Marrapode: Where were you in the mid-to-late 1990's and what were you involved with?

Mikos: Yes, in, I came back from Germany, I went to the Officer Advance Course, the Ordnance Officer Advance Course, and then I was assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, so I was a new Captain and I had a number of assignments at Fort Bragg. I was assigned to the Army's 82<sup>nd</sup> Division and I was initially in the 782<sup>nd</sup> Maintenance Battalion for a short period of time, and then I was on the Division Staff working in the G4 which was logistics, maintenance, supply, that thing. And then I was a Company Commander of Bravo Company, 307th Forward Support Battalion, so this was the Maintenance Company, the maintenance and supply and repair parts and Supply Company for the 504<sup>th</sup>, which was the first brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division. I was in the basically a Company Commander in the Logistics Battalion that supported the 1st Brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. When I was there the first commander of that brigade was a guy named John Abizaid, who went on to become a Four-Star General, and I mentioned CENTCOM Commander, and his successor was David

Petraeus, who was then also succeeded General Abizaid as CENTCOM Commander and then eventually, is currently, I think the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, so those are two pretty prominent people. I got to know them a bit; I didn't work very closely with them. They were both Brigade Commanders, I was a Company Commander, but [I] got to meet and work a bit around those two individuals at that point in their career. I was not deployed at all during the time of other than training, deployments to training activities. The closest I came to deploying during that period with the 82<sup>nd</sup> was the Haiti Operation which was I think in 1993, and the Haiti Operation, basically there was a dictator that was in Haiti who had dislodged the democratically elected President, the United States was promoting the restoration of that democratically elected President in Haiti and there were two plans that were written up. One was a permissive plan, in other words, if the dictator were to stand down a one force, it was actually the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division would come in and provide stabilization and support. If that dictator was not to stand down then the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division was going to enter under non-permissive, aggressive terms, so we were very, very close to that. We were loading up on the aircraft ready to go to Haiti when the dictator stood down, I think, former President Carter had flown to Haiti along with Colin Powell and convinced him to sit down. So that was the closest in that period that I came to deploying. There were conflicts that were going on at that time, the Balkans most prominently, and also the operation in Somalia, the first

sets of operations in Somalia were going on. So it was a period of a lot of low intensity conflicts for the United States Army. In 1995, late '95, I think December of '95 maybe early '96 I was assigned to Alexandria, Virginia, which was where the Army's Personnel Command was located, and I worked in the Adjutant General's Office within the Army PERSCOM. I was really working on just one special project for that time, and it was a, the Army was in the process of revamping its officer evaluation system, so I was involved in really the internal education of preparing collateral education material to go out. It was really just a staff job. It was a good assignment, and I did that for about two years, maybe a little less than two years, and then in 1998 was assigned to the Pentagon. I was promoted to Major and on the very day I got promoted to Major reported at the Pentagon, I was working in the Army's G3. I was an Executive Officer or an administrative officer in one of the divisions which within the G3 and this particular division was called "Modeling and Simulation." They did a lot of planning in and around modeling and operations for research and these kinds of things. That assignment was a very good assignment in the sense that I got to understand how the Pentagon worked, I got to understand how Washington worked a little bit. I did that for two years, and then in the summer of 2000 I went to the Army's Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I spent a year at Fort Leavenworth, and then from Fort Leavenworth went back to Germany. [N]ow it is the fall of 2001, or late

summer 2001. Get to Germany and was assigned to the First Armored Division of in the Forward Support Battalion, again a logistics battalion, in this case it's supporting the First Brigade of the 1st Armored Division, working as the Support Operations Officer, so the logistical planning officer of that brigade, and that's when the 9/11 events happened.

Marrapode: Right.

Mikos: And so at that point on the military went into hyper drive. [W]e began just intensive training. We were in the field in Grafenwöhr, in Vilseck, in Hohnfels; these are large training centers in Germany, almost constantly. I think from 2000, late 2001 to the end of 2002 in that year I spent something like 290, 300 days out of the year in a training environment. In 2002 I was assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Headquarters and worked in the G4 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, this is in Heidelberg, Germany, and it was there that 5<sup>th</sup> Corps deployed, and I deployed with 5<sup>th</sup> Corps to Operation Iraqi Freedom. I went to Iraq, to Kuwait, in October of 2002 and I was working in Kuwait as we were doing the operational-level plans for what had been an operational plan at that point called "Cobra 2" and Cobra 2 was the plan for the invasion of Iraq. [F]rom what October 2002 until March of 2003 I was by in large in Kuwait. I think I was able to return for the Christmas holidays and then went back to Kuwait during the planning for Kuwait for the invasion of Iraq, and then from 2003, March of 2003 to about April of 2004, so for about 13 months, I was in Iraq as part of that 5<sup>th</sup> Corps working first as the Maintenance Planning Officer and then as

the Logistical Plans Officer for the Corps staff. That event in Iraq is probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> time of my life, the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in the military that I was also very close to events that were happening that were happening worldwide with focus on it and I was following those events both what was going on in the media as well as I was close to them. So there [were] a lot of parallels to what was my experiences in Germany.

Marrapode: Right.

Mikos But unfortunately, I have to say, that I did not think that the in my perspective on having lived those events in early 2003 in Iraq, where they thought that American policy was very well thought out, very well executed in Germany in 1991- '92, I thought that our political leadership really failed us pretty badly in Iraq early on. In particular the I don't think that the recognition of how difficult it would be to both once this removed regime was removed, in order to stabilize a country the size of Iraq in an environment as volatile as that was going to be insurmountable and I had a pretty good sense of this time, at that time that we were going to be here for a very, very long time. I really if you asked me in 2003 how long, do you think the American Army will be in Iraq; I would have said a decade at least. And I thought that there was a lot of fanciful thinking and short-minded thinking by the political leadership, and in particular I'll say by President Bush with respect to what this undertaking would amount to, and I think that led to a lot of bad decisions about Iraq. So having said that

it was again personally a time when I was close to something and was able to see it both upfront as well as get, be following in the larger media.

Marrapode: Can you give me some examples of personal experiences that led you to make those conclusions and led you to those opinions about the difference between the leadership situation in Germany and in Iraq?

Mikos: I think that the, as we were working through the planning stages leading up, and we were now, in working in the plan cell in Kuwait in the fall of 2002/early 2003, we had fresh set of eyes because we hadn't been part of the strategic planning, now were doing the operation-level planning, and we were getting perspective on things like for instance, and this really dawned on me. There was this confidence that there were these weapons of mass destruction that were out there, that Iraq owned. I remember seeing the plan cell and some of the intelligence officers and operations officers who were working the planning really to that were asking a lot of hard questions about well where are these things because now if they're there we're about, we need to get them and the answers were not very conclusive, and they weren't very precise about well where are these weapons? I remember someone saying, I'm not sure if he was the first person to say, I think it may have been said by someone else, but I remember someone saying to me, "How can we be 100% sure that these weapons of mass destruction are there, but 0% aware of where any of them are?" [H]ow can we be sure they're there in main quantity, but not know or have any idea where any of them are?

Marrapode: From an operational planning perspective.

Mikos: Right, from an operational planning perspective, and it was that moment when I recognized that there may have been some wishful thinking. [T]here may have been, and I don't think anyone, I don't believe that the President lied. I don't think that he went into anything in a way that was deceitful, but I believe that the senior leadership, political leadership of the country at the time had certain previous predispositions about Saddam Hussein, about Iraq. Those predispositions were without, with merit he was a horrible guy he was doing bad things, but then that led to wanting to not be objective about other things. [I]f you see the world as just black or white it is sometimes hard to recognize that there are areas of gray. And I think that's what happened we instantly cast the situation in Iraq as very clearly black or white. And I'm not taking anything away from the evilness of that regime, but in that we failed to lose, we lost perspective on a lot of the nuance and a lot of the complexity of Iraqi society, a lot of the complexity of the geopolitical position that Iraq stood in the region, And how difficult this undertaking would be from a resources and from a time perspective. So wanting it to be so, wanting it to be easy doesn't make it easy, and I think it's that failure that strategic-level fuzziness in thinking led to really, I think, something that was a big mistake for our country and got us involved in an endeavor that took a lot of our treasure and a lot our resources away from not just the effort in Afghanistan where it could have been better, but also things other important domestic priorities that got

underfunded or really just basically added to the debt that we have now kicked to the next generation. So in a lot of respects it was that that led me to believe that particular war was not very well perceived.

Marrapode: Given your concerns at the time and given the problems that you perceived with that operation, do you think that your unit and both the planning unit you were with and the larger unit accomplished their mission?

Mikos: Yes, absolutely I think the United States military at large accomplished the missions they were asked to do, and from that perspective, the operations in Iraq were successful. I think that there was a lot of consciousness on not only being successful but there was an awareness of recognizing that we had to do this in a way that also didn't undermine limited limit the negative impact on the civilians, that it set the right conditions for restoration of civil society in Iraq. And I think that actually it was a lot of people, and I don't take any responsibility, I don't take any claim for credit here myself, but I think the successes that happened in Iraq and there were many are, not just the period I was there, but even afterwards, were really in due of great credit between a lot of very talented, committed soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, that made it work despite I think what was some poor strategic political decisions that had been made.

Marrapode: On that note was there anybody served with personally that you particularly admired or enjoyed serving with?



Mikos: Yes, I did. I thought that the Deputy Commanding General of the 5<sup>th</sup> US Corps, his name was General Wojdakowski. I thought that General Wojdakowski, a quiet, unassuming man, someone that actually, you don't read about in a lot of these books, other the Division Commanders that were there at the time, the Corps Commander that was there at the time featured very prominently, but his judgment with respect to ensuring that the forces that were there in that early 2000 period were logistically supported was, and the things that he focused on were critical. We came very, very close to having what I recall a logistical meltdown. We had a large force in Iraq by the summer of 2003 something like 100 maybe thousand soldiers on the ground with very, very weak lines of communication, very weak lines of supply, and the systems that were in place were not put, the planning for that because the strategic assumptions were that the forces would be out more quickly the ramp up logistically was not set for those number of forces for there at that time and equipment was breaking and not being repaired. There were real concerns about being able to get even basic supplies in and I don't think the American military was used to that environment, we really are so heavy. And it was in that period that he became directly involved and I think he did a fabulous job at almost making that invisible. [T]he fact that that's a nonstory that we don't hear about the US military not being able to logistically support itself in 2003, it's a nonstory, but it's a nonstory that could have been a very tragic story if not for his leadership. I would think

that that's one unsung hero that I personally worked with, and that I was always impressed with, one of many, but just one that comes to mind. I'm really grateful for your time, but I'm a little conscious. Thank you for your time. It's, for me, it's, some things that I haven't talked about in a long time, it's just interesting to get the perspective. I really appreciate the opportunity to get it documented, and get it on tape so.

Marrapode: I really appreciate you coming in and sharing your story. If you decide that there's more you'd like to share, more you'd like to talk about since were pressed for time.

Mikos: Sure.

Marrapode: Feel free to contact us.

Mikos: I will do so. So thanks very much for your time, Nick.

Marrapode: Thank you.