

Jeffrey M. Woodward

May 18, 2018

Interviewed by Teri Embrey

Transcribed by Leah Cohen

Edited by Leah Cohen

Embrey: Today we're here with Jeffrey M. Woodward who will be telling us about his experiences at The US Army Soldier during the Cold War. He is the author of the book, **Last of the Glow Worms**, published in 2017, by McFarlane & Co. So let's start with a little bit about where you grew up, how you grew up, what growing up was like?

Woodward: I grew up in Brookfield, Illinois, um, which is wonderful because it's a suburb but it was close enough to the city. We had the amenities or, you know, being able to go downtown rather quickly and stuff like that. My father was a Vietnam War vet and we grew up with that military mentality. You know, our whole lives, and even in grade school, I knew I was going to sign up, that was my calling in life so...

Embrey: So what academic subjects interested you as you were growing up?

Woodward: It was definitely history but more specifically European history, always studied the Roman Empire, the Germanic tribes at the time, and that caused me when I enlisted to pick Germany as my first station of choice.

Embrey: Did you take German as a language in high school, then? Or--

Woodward: I took German for two years in high school that helped me when I got to Germany. We also had relatives in Germany, um, our family is from Croatia and a lot of 'em are, you know, diaspora, living in Germany, also.

Embrey: Did you participate in any of the, your school sports teams?

Woodward: Sports, no, I mostly read and wrote short stories and poetry and stuff and when I turned sixteen, I started working after school and then junior and senior year, I was in the work program. You know, going to work at 12:00 o'clock and work until 6:00.

Embrey: And, where did you work?

Woodward: It was a company called Jimmy Diesel which was in diesel engine rebuilder for Pace bus, for Metra, for CTA.

Embrey: Okay. What was your parents' response to your talking with the Army recruiters?

Woodward: My father was ecstatic. We had four, I have three brothers. Um, money was always a little tight and, I knew that was for me, my father knew it was for me, my mother was on the fence about it.

Embrey: Okay. You took the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] test and scored really well. How did doing so well on the ASVAB influence your choice of your first military occupation specialty?

Woodward: After I took the ASVAB, they gave me choices. I knew I did not want to do a combat arms MOS which was 13 Bravo and 11 Bravo. Artillery or Infantry. I wanted to get more in the technical side of it, like electronic warfare was new at that time. After I scored on the test, I met with the recruiter. He had an officer in the room with him and offered me this opportunity as a nuclear weapons technician. So they came from the Army themselves.

Embrey: Okay. Tell us a little bit about nuclear weapons technicians 'cause it is a very specialized MOS and most people don't know about it.

Woodward: Up until 1992, the Army had four nuclear weapons systems. We had two artillery shells which were the 155 mm and the 203 mm in two missile systems which were the Pershing II and the Lance. It's very specialized at that time due to....the detente we had with the Soviet Union at that time, the Pershing II's in the early 80's were deployed to western Europe and that was in response to Soviet deployment of their SS-20 Raptors, I believe they're called, which they station in Ukraine and had a range that they could hit Paris, they could hit Brussels, Belgium, The United States deployed the Pershing II's, to much protest of the Germans there, in response to this. Um, at the time that was on everybody's mind, you know, the arms race. Everybody was building up [their weapon supplies] but in retrospect, I believe that's what caused it to collapse. Everybody knew, both sides knew what would happen.

Embrey: Ok. Well, let's jump back a little bit to your basic training at Fort Dix. What was it like to go to Fort Dix, compared to suburban Chicago?

Woodward: I was seventeen year's old when I got there. I was never around so many different people from all walks of life, in my whole life. So when we got off the bus in New Jersey, there was people there who were thirty years old. They're some eighteen, you know, and the mid-twenties. I was a little afraid because I was never away from this life, this is all I knew was living in this area. So when we got to New Jersey, I noticed first the humidity and a lot of sand. It was, I think, just right outside Trenton so most of the training took place in sandy areas and, we'd go one our twelve mile marches and your teeth would be black, after walking a mile, just from the grit in the sand, getting into it... I mean as far as Fort Dix, I mean those are the memories that stick out. It was the people and sand [laughs].

Embrey: So which aspects of basic training did you find the most challenging?

Woodward: For me, the most challenging was map reading -- at that time, you, there was not GPS, we didn't have the electronics available so we're using compasses to shoot azimuths to look at elevation on a map and, for me, that was the toughest part to get through, especially during the final test that we're given.

Embrey: After basic, you went to...

Woodward: Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. That was with the 832nd Ordnance Battalion. Redstone Arsenal was where they first developed missile systems after World War II, that's where the Army electronic warfare schools also located, um. There we had a thirteen week course in electronics and maintenance of nuclear warheads.

Embrey: Okay, um ... was the content of the material that you were being taught easy to comprehend? Or did you find it difficult?

Woodward: Most of it -- it was in-between. The electronic part for me, that was, the toughest aspect of it and ...we had to learn how to use ohmmeters, multimeters, and voltage and ohms and so on. The basic maintenance of the weapons, that was pretty cut and dry. We had the trainers with us, at all times, and -- they would walk us through with hands-on training instead of just straight book training.

Embrey: And what was your training class like?

Woodward: We would get to the train about 8 o'clock in the morning...we would have the system set up, they're called trainer systems, so they would have a, for example, a Pershing II warhead, they would have a Lance warhead and on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, we would do the missile systems and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, we would do the artillery. So it was basically removing and installing components, various components on the warheads, and marking them, which was very important. They had to be correctly marked which modification [laughs] modification was installed in each warhead and so on.

Embrey: So what were your impressions of the Deep South and the people you encountered at Redstone 'cause it was very different from Chicago and Fort Dix?

Woodward: Yeah, when we were in Redstone, we would go out to eat when we had the chance after being there for a little while, we got weekend passes and I noticed the people were very friendly. Life's a little slower, it wasn't the hustle and bustle and, I made a lot of great friends down there.

Embrey: In your book, you talk about your father coming to visit during a holiday training break. Did you notice changes with your interactions with your father as you followed into the military...?

Woodward: Yeah, I could identify more, even though...he was in during the Vietnam era which was a lot different than, you know, when we were in, but when he spoke of his basic training or his AIT, I could identify with some of that. When he spoke, you know, about his M-16 and taking it apart and this and we'd done that all so, we had that connection.

Embrey: Where did you first hear of the nickname glow worm?

Woodward: Oh that was, when we were stationed in Fischbach, Germany, ah, there's all different types MOS's, there to support the mission and, ah, we had an MOS called 55Bravo which was ammunition handler and they would nickname us glow worms. They would transport weapon systems but they weren't allowed, you know, allowed inside of the system, itself, ah, so they used that name just as a nickname for us [laughs]

Embrey: Okay, when did you, actually, finish your Advanced Individual Training at Redstone?

Woodward: That was in January of 1990 and that was after thirteen weeks of being there.

Embrey: So you then went directly to Germany?

Woodward: I went directly to Germany.

Embrey: What was it like in Germany at that time because the wall had just come down?

Woodward: When I, when we first arrived, I was so excited. I mean, I was sweating bullets on that plane 'cause I couldn't wait to land. When we landed there, we had to go to a training battalion for a few days and they give you, a, it's called "German Head Start", like a refresher course, if you knew some of the language or, you know, a beginner's course. After spending a few days, there, we've got on the bus and there, actually, was another nuclear weapons tec who was going to the same depot I was going to. He was already a staff sergeant so he's been around. So we get, you know, we hooked up right away on the bus and he was giving me, you know, the low down, he knew some of the people who were stationed there since the MOS only had 500 people in the whole Army. So everybody kind of knew everybody else of they knew somebody who knew somebody, um, but travelling from Frankfurt to Fischbach and going through the hills -- that's Palatinate Forest -- and it was just mind boggling, it was just beautiful. It reminded me of Appalachia, Virginia, Kentucky and so on. It's scene landscape, beautiful.

Embrey: [Pause] How many people were actually assigned to Fischbach?

Woodward: I would, I believe there's around 250-300. There was twenty nuclear weapons tec's, the rest were ammunition handlers, cooks, communications, all the other support MOS'es for a stationer.

Embrey: So it was a really small installation?

Woodward: Very small. It was over 1300 acres, the nearest town was about three miles away which was Fischbach and we also had a company of military police, there who did site security, you know, for the nuclear site and there was also a company, the 41st Ordnance detachment and they worked on the propulsion systems for the missiles.

Embrey: Um, you mention the platoon sergeant being a little bit older and he had served in Vietnam with the 25th Infantry Division. Did he tell a little of those stories while...

Woodward: At the time, there was no conflicts in between Vietnam and when I was in, except for a small, I think, they had a Panama happened in '89, also at the end of '89, um, so we had a lot of respect, you know, for the Vietnam vets. They were, you know, they had, the battle patch, you know on their shoulder. They had, a kind of tyzome?? you know, with his ribbons on his uniform, he used to call it his fruit salad, you know, 'cause he wouldn't be stacked full of ribbons if we had one or two at that time 'cause there was no wars going, you know, but I had immense respect for the, for this sergeant

Embrey: Okay. Eventually, you've been there for a while, you started travel a little bit. Talk about some of those travels.

Woodward: The first place we wanted to see was Paris, so a friend of mine, we jumped in the car, I had a, um, a 1977, green BMW, at the time and we jumped in it. On the way to Paris, we saw signs for Verdun which was, it was site of a large battle in World War I, where over 100,000 people died over, I think, it was a four month period. We stopped there, um, looked at the monuments, ran into a couple of French soldiers, had conversations with them, jumped right back in the car, went to Paris. As an American in Paris, we didn't speak French, you know, German was the minimal at this time and, but I fell in love with Paris, also, just [sighs] the culture and how old the city is, I mean it was known to the Romans at that time under a different name, of course, but ... simply beautiful!

Embrey: How did you stretch your paycheck and still do all this sightseeing in--?

Woodward: I would try to save as much as possible. I was sending money home every month at the time we were using savings bonds, you know, we saw the paper ones. So I was sending that money home, I had an account, here, in order to have money when I got out. Ah, you'd eat mostly in the mess hall to save money and we were living in the barracks, there was not rent so whatever money we had, I tried to save, whatever money we spent was mostly on, you know, alcohol and drinking [laughs] and, you know, having a good time, when you're young and free.

Embrey: Did you have ration cards for--

Woodward: We had ration cards, yes, that was for cigarettes and hard liquor but, yeah, they would mark every time we we'd buy a carton or, you know, a bottle of Jack Daniels, they would put a little cross on the rationing card.

Embrey: Okay. ... Your unit provided direct support for the nuclear capable artillery unit and your ultimate mission was to provide starte? support for special weapons -- how did the transition, to, with the European peace movement change your mission?

Woodward: During de-nuclearization? Okay, we got the orders, I believe that was in the beginning of 1991, they started coming down the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty going into effect, this is what we're going to be doing. So we started first in Fischbach, we would have the site secured, we would go into each individual bunker, um, pull the weapon systems out, they were in olive drab containers. Before we pulled them out, we'd have to get a window, it was called and that was when a Soviets satellite would pass over, we'd have to wait, we'd get a message from, the MPs saying, "Okay, we're clear, we have a window". We would wheel the containers into our MNA building, it was called, Maintenance and Assembly. There, we'd take out certain components rendering the warhead inoperable and then they would be shipped out of Fischbach on chinook helicopters. The chinooks, they had the 55 Bravo, the ammunition handlers, who would take it after it was loaded. It would be flown to either Hahn or Ramstein airforce bases. And, that's where they would be unloaded by the 55 Bravos and the military police.

Embrey: Okay. Terrorism began to be a concern in the '80s, how did that affect--

Woodward: That was also something, us being stationed in Germany it's in the back of your mind. There's the Red Army faction, they were called, the Baader Meinhof Gang, they committed a few murders at the time, I believe the head of the German bank was murdered and also the explosion at the Ramstein Airforce base, at the front gate. You know, there's always rumors going around in the neighboring towns that they were there. You know, you're always being watched, you know, especially as us, nuke techs, um, just be careful what you say and who you say it to. There was no official policy of not say... of not saying what was there but it was more prudence not to say something about it.

Embrey: Okay, The artillery shells and the missiles you worked with emitted low levels of radiation. How did you protect yourself from absorbing--?

Woodward: We would have a wet suits, they were called, um, it was, like a white overalls, sometimes, you would wear the gas masks. We always had latex gloves on and the rubber gloves over which we would duct tape on both sides. Same with our feet, we'd have the, you know, the web gear, chemical boots on, which we also had to wrap the pants legs with duct tape around 'em. Um, you know, the radiation level emitted, it was just mostly alpha radiation which isn't that powerful but we had a one meter rule, it was called, where if you weren't actively working on the warheads, you'd have to stay at least, one meter away. That's what they considered safe distance from, you know, alpha radiation exposure.

Embrey: Did you ever worry about that?

Woodward: [Sighs]

Embrey: Or...

Woodward: At the time, we'd, I didn't worry, I was eighteen. You know, and you know, you're on top of the world and nothing can hurt you. I was reading, you know, as I got older and I was researching for the book, also, there's gentlemen who are claiming, you know, cancer, is caused by, you know, this occupation but there's no solid foundation, you know, for these claims, according to the Army. You know, so, I have no fear of that, that, no.

Embrey: Okay [pause]. So, in Germany, you were in southern Germany and you had a great relationship with the locals and...Who was Georg and were the locals friendly toward American military personnel?

Woodward: Georg, he was my best friend, when I was there. Georg was German, they had a German war museum and also a small guest house or pub which was, basically, a like a bar with a bed and breakfast, um. When my family came to visit, my grandparents, my mother, they stayed at his guest house. He was, he, Georg liked the American culture, especially Western. When I came back on leave one time, I believe that was in 1991, summer of 1991, he asked me to bring him a cowboy hat so I got one for my father, brought one back for him and chewing tobacco. You know and he loved the culture but they, a lot of them resented the fact that we were still there, right? This is forty years after the 2nd World War. Why are we still there? You know, why do we ask people if they speak

English when we're living in Germany? We should be speaking German. That's why I did as much as -- I tried to learn as much as possible, I tried to pass myself off, you know, in some situations, as German, not only for security -- for being, you know, an American -- but I found that was a proper thing to do living in somebody else's country.

Embrey: Okay. [Pause] Did you have a lot of contact with NATO personnel?

Woodward: Every once in a while, we would have British and German soldiers come to Fischbach to train, we had a small range there. We also had, we had unused bunkers where, I think, they would practice breaching on those. The British, you know, they stuck out in my mind. I wrote about that also. We had a small enlisted club, you know, and it's the same people, every day 'cause we're so small and we get this group of British soldiers in there and all of a sudden, all heck broke loose [laughs] and there's a ruckus and it was just a good time. I'll never forget. You know, we had a slot machines, basically, you know, you could gamble. So, you know, they're putting quarters in and they would lose and grab the handle and tried to break it off the machine or tip it over on the floor. Now, I was like, "Those British are crazy!" But no other people, soldiers I'd rather have next to me than the British, at that time.

Embrey: Okay. You took a thirty day leave in 1990 and returned home to Illinois. What was it like coming back?

Woodward: When I came back, I'd noticed everything was the same. I found, I felt more mature than everybody else. After high school, a lot of my friends, they were, you know, still moping around or they're working at some job and I was like, okay, I had, I had a nuke in my hand or I was , you know, I was in New Jersey on a gunnery in and I was in Alabama and so on. So I was worried when I was gone that, you know, people, they'd change or situations change and you come back, after a year, and you see, [laughs] nothing really changes.

Embrey: Okay, Saddam Hussein's Iraq military invaded Kuwait in August, 1990 and 7th Corps units began preparing to deploy Saudi Arabia. How did you feel about that period of time?

Woodward: We were, I have to start on the beginning of this one. We had something called staff duty and that's where you would be in control of the depot. It would be one enlisted, one commo person for the tec's headlight, it was called and one officer. The nuke tec's, we would do the staff duty with the officer and the commo guys were there to take messages ... I'll explain that later. Anyways, so I was, I wished that I was on duty, right, when that alarm went off but we got an alarm on that day. Everybody had to assemble and form up, it was called, and they let us know that the conflict started. They wanted people to go down there so 64th Ordnance, we sent some truck drivers down there. I tried to volunteer and they declined it. There was no reason, you know, for a nuke tec to go to the Gulf, they have no job there, no mission but I wanted to, really bad but there, it just wasn't possible [laughs].

Embrey: Okay. When were you promoted to Specialist E-4?

Woodward: I can't remember the exact date. It was in '90-, late, mid or late '91, I believe but that was exciting.

Embrey: Operation Silent Echo began in 1991. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the operation and your role with it?

Woodward: Okay, when we got the orders to start to dismantling, we started with our depot and that's what I was explaining earlier. We would take components out of the nukes. They would be shipped out of Fischbach. At the time, the Soviets weren't there with us, at the time. The inspectors but we had, gentlemen American inspectors. Once Fischbach was cleared out, we went to Ramstein. I have to backtrack, we went to Hahn Airforce base, um, where the missiles or where the warheads are being flown in from other nuke sites around Germany. There we would take them apart also and they would be shipped out and after Hahn was finished, that's when we went to Ramstein Air Force Base and continued the mission. That lasted, I believe until March of '92. We got back to Fischbach, there's like three nuke tecs, left, everybody else either ETSed or they had to change their MOS'es 'cause they were phasing us out. A lot of the ammunition handlers were gone 'cause there was nothing there, anymore. It was just a skeleton depot, at that time.

Embrey: So, [pause] what did you decide to do now that they were phasing out the MOS and--

Woodward: Well, I wanted to reenlist, but...I wanted to go to Korea, that was next, that was my next station I wanted to go to. During that time, we had something called promotion points. You'd have so many points, first to be promoted to sergeant, and then to have a station of choice. As a nuke tec, since it was so small, our promotion points were high so we, I think it was 950 at that time just to get promoted the E-5. We had E-4's who were E-4's for four-five years 'cause they couldn't get promoted. They'd have to wait for somebody to retire ETS [Expiration of Term of Service] and then they could, you know, fill that slot. Since I couldn't go to Korea, I was like, ah you know what? I think I'm just going to get out and go to school, you know, and so that's when I ETS was in July of '92.

Embrey: Okay. And you went to school and what did you study?

Woodward: I went to school for a bit here. I was just doing general courses, at that time and I joined the Army Reserve and that was at the 8-22nd MP Company and that was on Manheim and Higgins, over at O'Hare Airport. I stayed there for a couple of years and then I flew to Germany to go live with my wife.

Embrey: And was this the same girl that you met in Germany?

Woodward: Yes, yes.

Embrey: Okay, tell us a little bit about meeting and then her coming to the US and -- that being a military spouse.

Woodward: Well, we met at a dance club and it was frequented by mostly Americans but there, you know, there's a mix in there and how we started talking and after that, you know, we started dating and so on. I was getting ready to ETS out of the military, I promise, you

know, I'll come back, or you can come and see me. I got out in July of '92 and in October of '92, she flew over to here, to Brookfield. She stayed for about three weeks, you know, kind of liked it and stuff, went back home; I went back there in '93 for two weeks, and then she came back to the United States, we were married in '94, here, downtown.

Embrey: Okay [pause] When did you return to Germany? How does that fit in your timeline?

Woodward: I returned in '96. My wife's father had a construction company. They were doing rebar and I went to work with him and my brother-in-law and my wife's uncle. I think he had about ten employees at that time. You know, I was the odd man out, basically. I was forced to become fluent in German 'cause nobody spoke English. So I'd be on the construction site, they'd ask me, you know, hand 'ed this, you know, this tool or this bar and I had no idea what they're talking about, at the beginning, and, yeah, it was kind of forced upon me.

Embrey: Okay, and then how long were you both there before you returned back to the US?

Woodward: We were there until 1999. I came back here and went to work for the same company I was working at, before I went to the military which was Jimmy Diesel. I stayed there until 2009 when they closed. Then I went to JX Peterbilt, where I'm at right now.

Embrey: When did you join the American Legion?

Woodward: The American Legion, I just joined, I believe, last year.

Embrey: Okay.

Woodward: Mmhm.

Embrey: What made you decide to join the Legion?

Woodward: [Sighs] I wanted to get more involved, especially now with the younger kids, coming back from Iraq, from Afghanistan, the problems, the challenges that they're facing, now. I wanted to throw my head into this also, you know and help. When I went to the Legion Hall, I would see it's mostly older gentlemen, a lot of the younger guys, I don't know if they're wanting to become members, or if they think it's just for, you know, old [laughs], old guys or whatever but I don't see a lot of the younger guys, at least, not in our area.

Embrey: One of the things we do here at the Museum & Library, is preserving, sharing the stories of citizen soldiers like yourself. What does the term Citizen Soldier mean to you?

Woodward: [Pause] Even before I enlisted, after speaking with my father for years about the, you know, the whole military career, I always felt it was the man's duty, not only as a citizen but if, you know, if the call came, that they would enlist, like our grandfathers did during World War II and their grandfathers, you know, World War I. For me, the Citizen Soldier, is -- you're ready to defend what is yours, regardless of age.

Embrey: So you see it as a civic responsibility?

Woodward: Absolutely.

Embrey: Okay. What fills you with pride when reflecting upon your military service?

Woodward: That would be, being part of something as historic as the removal of nuclear weapons from Europe. You know, that part it's the Cold War and history, in general, is generally overlooked. [Pause] When you're at a depot, a nuke site, and you have hundreds and hundreds of warheads there and you're eighteen years old and, you know, you believe you're holding something in your hand, right? An artillery shell that can destroy half of the city. When you look at it, in retrospect, when you look back on that, you have an appreciation for life, in general, and that, you know, the Soviet Union, at the time, and the US had the sense to remove these, you know, these destructive items out of Europe.

Embrey: Well, thank you for sharing your story with us, today. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Woodward: No. [quietly]

Embrey: Okay. Well, thank-you.

