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Wilson Reynolds, Charleston, IL

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Wilson Reynolds

Age: 45

Branch of Military:
U.S. Army

Rank: Sergeant E-5

Dates of Service:
August 1990-June 1995

Deployments: Ayers Kaserne, Germany, 1990-1992



Wilson Reynolds

Charleston, IL



“There’s a brotherhood there that nobody else knows anything about. I gained a lot of friends that I didn’t even know I had.”

“I enlisted in August 1990. My primary MOS was 19 kilo, which is armored crewman. I trained on the M1 Abrams (tank) and the M1A1 also. My initial deployment was to Germany to train with a unit for Saudi Arabia for Desert Storm, but it was over with before I got done.



“I enlisted before I graduated. I had to have a waiver because I was underweight, which was funny until you get to basic training. Then your drill sergeant makes you eat mashed potatoes for every meal so you’ll gain weight. You get tired of mashed potatoes after a while. So, I graduated high school at 108 pounds. The day I signed in at Fort Knox I weighed 109. I graduated basic training 18 1/2 weeks later, I weighed 150 pounds.”

Reynolds got his military tattoo in January 1991 in Rheinberg, Germany. *“That’s an MD, it stands for Mad Dog, which is my nickname in high school and it just kinda transferred over. And this is a tank with cross sabers. That’s the armor, the MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) identifier.*

“I was a tanker. They are called the gods of the battlefield for a reason. And we’re No. 1 in armor. We have been since the invention of the Abrams.

“Part of the reason I got this tattoo was, the first three days we were in Germany, we wrote out our last will and testament, and drew all our battle gear. None of us ever figured to see 19 or 20, let alone 25. I’m coming up on 46 years old and I never figured to live this long, because of what was going on when I went in. So part of it was a celebration of the fact that I made it through basic training and knew I was combat ready, but I didn’t actually have to go prove it.”



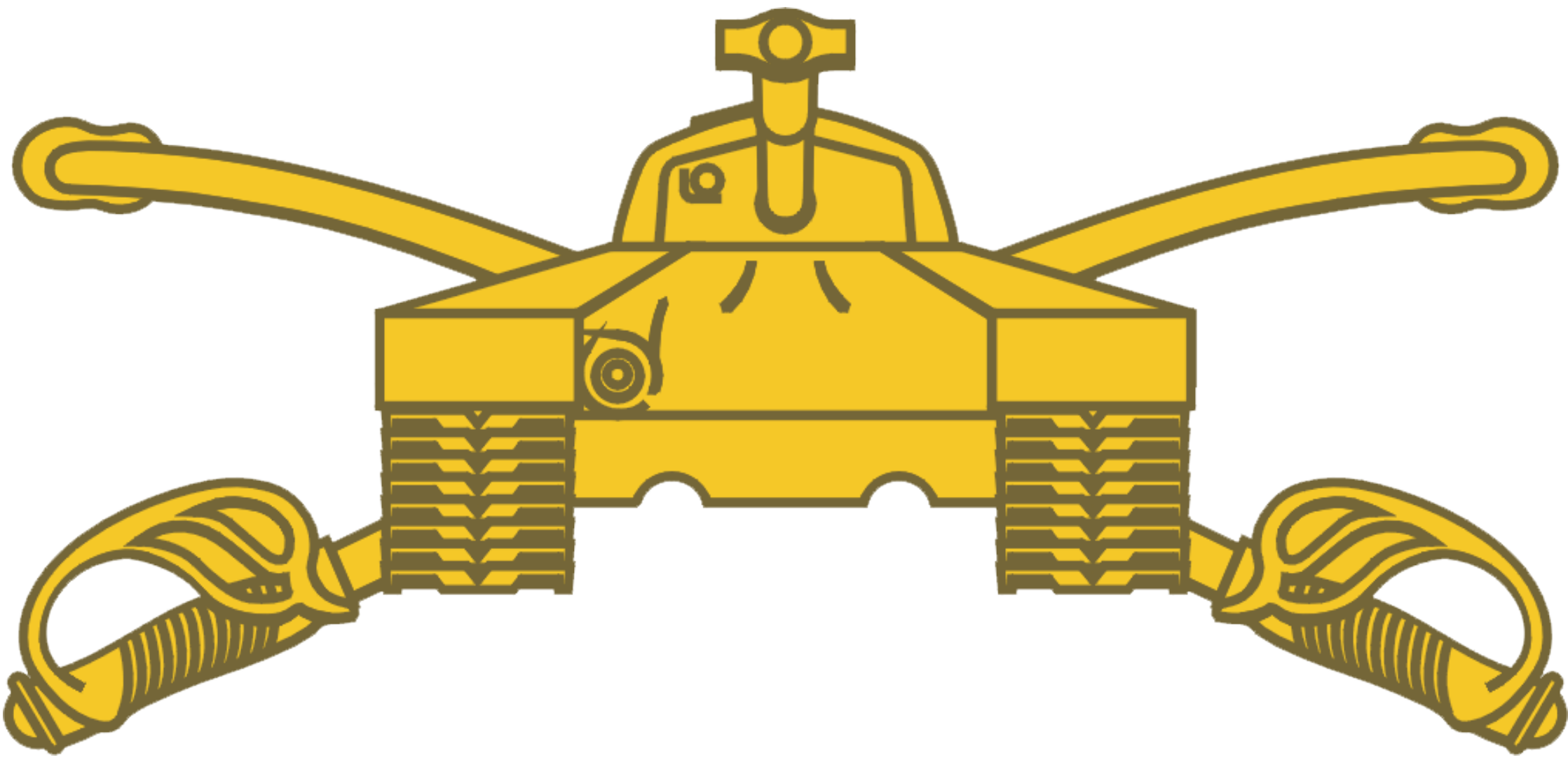
“I’ve been to every state in the connected United States to different veteran functions, and I’m the only one that’s got the armored symbol on my arm, of everybody I’ve ever met.”



Reynolds was in the middle tank during this live fire exercise at Fort Irwin, California.

“Initially I thought I was gonna make a career out of it, but I was injured early in ‘94 and then due to partial hearing loss, they let me ETS with a general discharge under honorable conditions.”

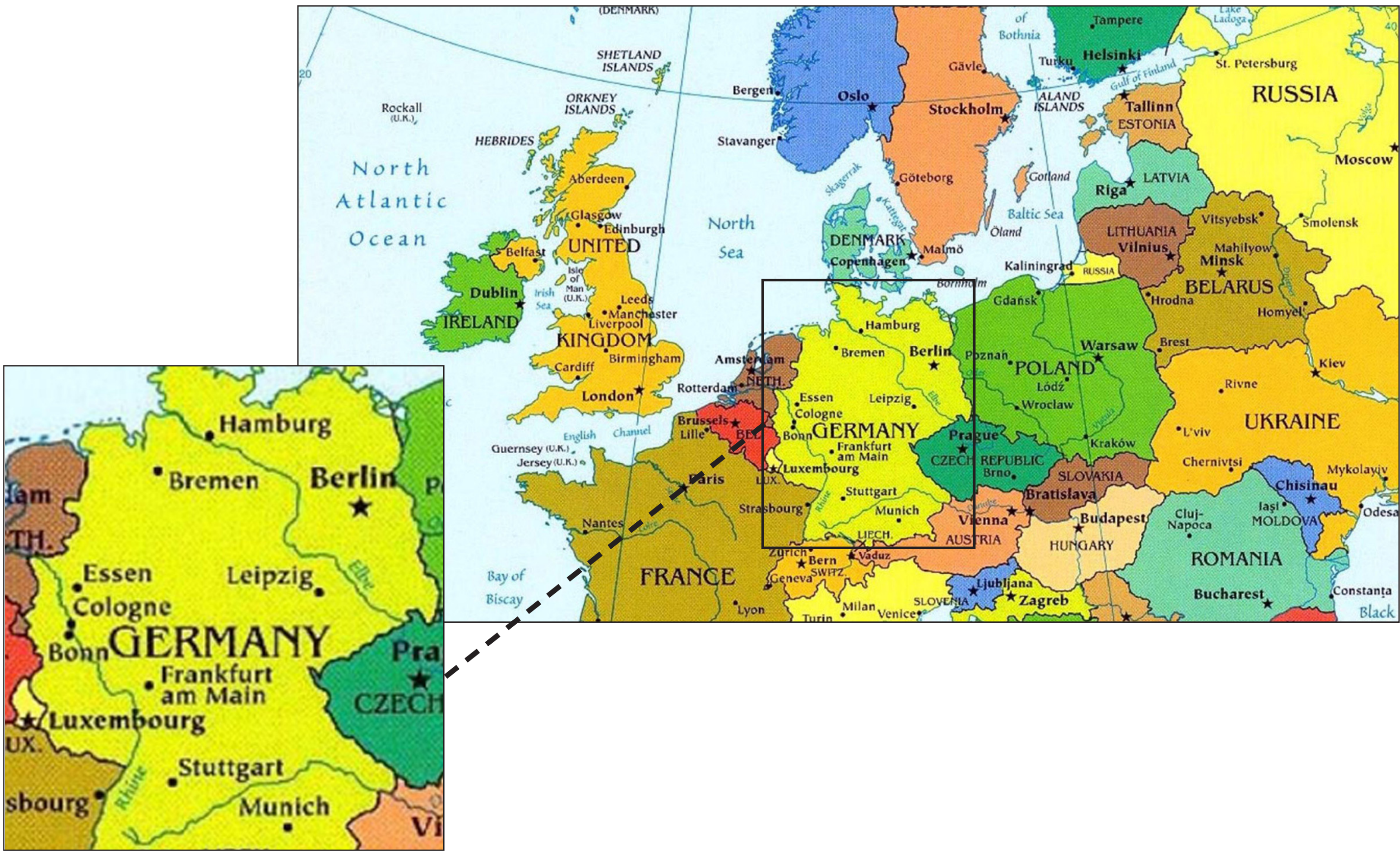
Reynolds has 70 percent hearing loss in one ear. *“It was during a live fire training exercise at Fort Riley, Kansas. I was in the gunner’s position. The tank commander suffered third-degree burns and the loader, it got him mostly on his upper body. Where I was located and where the minor explosion was, it just, all I lost was hearing.”*



U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry

The official armor badge for the U.S. Army, as reflected in Reynolds’ tattoo.

“Both my grandpas had been in. Most of my uncles had. My dad was Vietnam era and he waited for the draft and didn’t get called. He talked about wishing, maybe, he would’ve went.”



“There’s a lot of (veterans) out there that think nobody cares. I got a whole group of guys on Facebook, and every month, one of us calls out for buddy check. Everybody has check-in, and if anybody doesn’t check in somebody’s got their phone number. You call and check on them.”



Veterans groups offer a way for former military to connect with and support each other.

Photo: ptsdchat.org

“My wife took a major interest in it, and I met some of her friends and they talked about their service, and from there that led into buying one hat. Now I’ve got like 60 T-shirts and all kinds of stuff. I wear the hat and I’ve got this shirt, which is for all veterans.



Reynolds’ tank conducting training in Grafenwoehr, Germany.

“You know, for a long time I didn’t care. To me, seeing all this stuff was showing off. It was like you were bragging, like you did something special. I didn’t join the military to be special. I done it out of a sense of duty and honor and patriotism for the country. All I did was go play soldier for a little while. To me and to a lot of my friends, it’s just a thing. It’s just something we did.”

But then Reynolds had a long conversation with a Vietnam vet who didn’t know he had served. *“I said, ‘I don’t brag about it.’ But he said it’s not really bragging, and even if nobody else respected it, I should respect myself enough to admit to the fact.*

“Now you see people in a hat, it doesn’t matter -- World War II, Korea, any of ‘em -- you shake hands. You don’t even have to say anything. You see somebody, and you just give that nod. ‘Cause they know what you’ve done. You know. They’ve lived that. You’ve lived the same life.”