The best-trained weapon really is the best-trained operator. You could have the best equipment in the world, but if you don’t know what it can do and fight to its full potential, and your mechanics and supply people to also support it, it’s no good to you.

I’m Glenn Miller. I was born in Brantford, Ontario. I served with the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery in the Royal Canadian Artillery.

I ended up going to Germany because my stepfather was in the military. He was posted to Europe as a part of NATO’s [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] commitment. An attack on any one of those partners is an attack on all - that’s the premise of NATO. That was primarily against the Warsaw Pact and Russia. So, it was a form of détente. That’s why we ended up in Europe.

Our family went over, I was 12 years old, starting high school in grade nine. I did all my high school there. Certainly, as a student in Canada you hear about European history, you read about it. Well, I had the opportunity to live it as well. Our high school itself was an old SS [Nazi paramilitary] barracks. We actually had wooden gun racks in the halls, which we try to sit in as a cubby hole because there’s not a lot happening there. It was quite an adventure not knowing what to expect. I found out just by going to the play park, there’s about six other families in our small village. That was during the summer time-frame. Come September when we went to school, that’s where you kind of got a better sense that you were not the only Canadian in Germany. It was the largest Canadian population outside Canada. It was about 15,000 Canadians between Lahr and Baden. You got to see a lot of green buildings, hangars, tanks, helicopters, planes that you don’t normally see. You got a better sense of the bigger picture of why you were there, and the equipment used. I do remember as part of the equipment of NATO in the Cold War, they would have on occasion equipment land in to show kids what the tools were. We had an American Cobra attack helicopter. I’d seen this, but to actually see it firsthand — you know it’s very long, but it was so very narrow, which I thought was kind of pretty cool. For any young students, seeing the helicopter land and takeoff from 40 feet away is all always fascinating.

When joining the Canadian Forces my biggest decision was being influenced by the Cold War. Only because I had an opportunity to join the Royal Canadian Dragoon Cadet Corps. I spent four years doing that and that had shaped my reason to really join, because I thought it was exciting and I wanted to drive a tank. I wanted to be involved with tanks because that’s what that particular unit was involved in. However, when we went to join, that wasn’t available at the time, so I ended up in the artillery.

This is a training aid to help us understand the control panel inside the radar. During my initial training we had a couple of American A-10 planes providing support for artillery — airplanes that do their fire with bombs or rockets or guns. So, it was about two o’clock and we see a blip on the radar — I said, “This is too easy.” Obviously, I think I had very good equipment. A very humbling experience for me was, as the blip got closer, then in theory I could push the button and engage it with my guns, but just before I started to track that blip, I heard the turbofan of the plane. It didn’t make sense to me because he’s ten kilometers away. Well, he was the sacrificial lame duck to fool me, the operator. His wing man went in low and it would have pulled the trigger 10,000 yards away. So, I was already dead. That was a very humbling experience, but one you never forgot.

My first course was on a forty-millimetre anti-aircraft gun. It was actually made during World War Two. It wasn’t exactly state of the art at the time. Primarily a larger machine gun. The range at that time was two kilometres for anti-aircraft. As part of Canada’s commitment, we trained as if we’re going to war. TAM was a Tactical Air Meet of different NATO countries and they just happen to use that base as a staging area. So, there was a variety of different NATO countries with their various different aircraft using the base. Our specific role there was the protection of the airfield from attack. We had 128 Airfield Air Defense Battery at that time consisting of roughly thirty people protecting the entire airfield. NATO is a defensive measure, but if they were to attack first — we’re talking minutes of air time from their base in East Russia or, correction, East Germany, to West Germany, where I was stationed. So, there might be thirty aircraft that would take off all at once to swarm us. Some would get picked off along the way at different levels, but at the end of the day you could have twenty aircraft swarming the base.

At that time, we had forty-millimetre Boffins and Blowpipe missiles and that was it. And it wasn’t quite what was required to do the job. Some of my most memorable experiences include having the ability to brief the Minister of National Defence on my role and what we could or couldn’t do, primarily. I gave him no illusions that I didn’t expect to survive the first air attack and it’s because of the equipment. He was a little shocked at that. I do remember one time we got our new anti-aircraft guns, which were designed for an airfield. But Canada’s trying to maximize its role — so, now we’re trying to drag it all over the countryside, which isn’t what it was designed for. We got these brand-new guns, but the trucks using them couldn’t tow them properly. We’d even get them stuck on the airfield because they didn’t have the towing capacity.

We were in a farmer’s field and this German lady and a nice wooden pitchfork came out and said, “Get out, get out, get out.” She was threatening me with the pitchfork, which I kind of laughed, but she was pretty serious. It was kind of funny.

The morale during my tour in Germany was quite high because you’re Canadian, and you’re working and living with Canadians and their families. You’re a very tight-knit group. Actually, a lot of the gate guards for the base were wives and that was just one of the jobs that was available. A lot of the wives were employed on the base. You got to see them at both the work function and also social functions.

Our particular trade — there’s so few of us — it was an expectation, a reasonable expectation that we’d spend two-thirds of our entire career in Germany because that’s our job. During the Cold War, as the tensions got better and the Berlin Wall came down, the Canadian government decided to close Lahr and Baden. I had done one tour and I was expected to do many, many, more tours, and that opportunity was gone.

The medals I was presented during my career, starting over here on the right is the Canadian Forces decoration, that’s after 12 years of continuous good service. After another 10 years, you get this bar. If you did another 10 years you get a second bar or additional bars. This one here is the Canadian Diamond Jubilee medal. This one here is the NATO medal, for the former Yugoslavia. Now I had I stayed three more days — we were in transition — I would have been entitled to another medal that followed this one, but I was sent home three days prior.

Remembrance means a lot to me as a soldier, and as a father, and as a person who’s involved, going to schools and trying to impress that to other youth. There are now mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and parents who join the military who ultimately could make that sacrifice. To be able to impress upon Canadian students and the education system that, although Canada has not really been to war in any great extent since, Korea, really, when Canada goes in the future and we go somewhere else, wherever that might be, you never know who’s impacted. So, have some empathy, compassion and care.