

Transcript of Interview with Peter Bain by Josua Farrar

Interviewee: Peter Bain

Interviewer: Joshua Farrar

Date: 11/03/2020

Location (Interviewee): San Antonio, Texas

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: An interview of Texas Army National Guardsman Peter Bain who served on both the COVID-19 Relief Mission and the Civil Unrest Mission during the summer of 2020.

Joshua Farrar 0:05

All right, we're here with Peter Bain, who is a soldier in the Texas Army National Guard, and a student at Texas A&M University, who is from the San Antonio area and has some connections through family, friends, friends who he went to high school with, with St. Mary's University in San Antonio. And he's going to talk a little bit about his experience serving on the COVID-19 relief mission. And on...what was the exact name they used for the riots?

Peter Bain 0:43

We just call the crowd control. I don't know what the exact name of the orders was.

Joshua Farrar 0:48

The crowd control mission. All right. So Peter, tell me a little bit about getting called up on the COVID-19 orders, did this affect your studies as a student? And where exactly were you called to go, or how did this go down?

Peter Bain 1:04

So luckily, it didn't really affect my studies too much. I just finished my semester, they waited to call me up until I'd finished my semester. And so they only used me during the summer. It was, um, I was called to Killeen. And I worked basically, as a driver to deliver troops and supplies to where they were needed. So...

Joshua Farrar 1:32

So what dates were on orders? It was this year, right?

Peter Bain 1:36

It was, uh, June 2020 to August 2020.

Joshua Farrar 1:43

Awesome. So you drove supplies, what type of supplies? Just speaking as much as you can speak.

Peter Bain 1:53

So I know that one thing we drove, so I mostly drove troops, but I know that one thing that my unit as a whole drove was, actually kind of surprisingly, water bottles and field test kits for it. But other than that, I don't know exactly what our unit delivered as a whole.

Joshua Farrar 2:11

So were you personally impacted by COVID on that mission, transporting troops around who may have been in contact with people who had COVID-19, as through talking to other people, the many people on the COVID-19 mission, were actually out in the communities around Texas, doing nasal swabs up people's noses into their sinus cavity. People were in pretty close contact, so did that affect you at all transporting people?

Peter Bain 2:42

So among my unit, we had several teams go out as well. And these people sanitized like, hotel rooms and other staging areas for people who were positive for COVID. Of the 80 people who were on COVID missions this summer, I believe only two got it. And I was in direct contact with both of them... basically, day in and day out. So I never got it, but it did affect, it did affect us because after they tested positive, we had to quarantine everyone basically for two weeks or a week until we got our results back. And we just continued on.

Joshua Farrar 3:31

Awesome. Well, what did quarantine look like?

Peter Bain 3:36

So they had us staged in hotels. So quarantine for me... actually, I ended up sharing a hotel room with another soldier. Quarantine for me... I mean basically was a lot of Doordash and a lot of sitting in waiting so...

Joshua Farrar 3:53

So two weeks of just sitting in a hotel room getting Doordash delivered three meals a day?

Peter Bain 3:59

Yes, sir. That's- that's pretty... [laughter]

Joshua Farrar 4:02

Did the military pay for the Doordash?

Peter Bain 4:05

Um, no, they did not. However, they would at dinnertime bring us a meal, so the Doordash was mostly on me.

Joshua Farrar 4:16

Gotcha. So you said this was up in Killeen, where you were stationed during this activation. Where were you driving to transport these troops? Was it between Austin and Dallas area or where exactly?

Peter Bain 4:31

We went to Camp Mabry a couple times and, I forgot the other camp up there is, we just went to other National Guard areas outposts so brought them there. We, as a whole, transported also vehicles...

Joshua Farrar 4:55

And like drove the vehicles in order to drop them off or downed vehicles with a wrecker?

Peter Bain 5:00

So it wasn't, they weren't downed vehicles, however, of the unit that we were moving the vehicles for, we ended up transporting them on the back of trailers. The unit that we were transporting them for was on safety stand down. So they were unable to drive at the time.

Joshua Farrar 5:22

Okay. They, they weren't licensed. Interesting. So you said that your unit waited until after school for you to get put on the orders. When did other people get put on the orders? Were you kind of like a newcomer late in the game?

Peter Bain 5:40

So, so I joined very late. I believe that we had people on as early as April, maybe early May. But I wasn't in the first wave as I was still finishing college, my semester.

Joshua Farrar 5:59

Okay. And then did people go past when you came off in August? Why did you come off in August, for school or what?

Peter Bain 6:07

So my unit allowed me to come off so I could go back to school. Several people had their orders extended to October. And from that, I don't know if they're still on orders... if the orders got renewed again. However, they were extended to October.

Joshua Farrar 6:28

So obviously, I know you a little bit, so I know you were at Blinn College during the spring and then transferred over to A&M in the fall, that Texas A&M College Station in the fall, did that create any difficulties while on orders trying to complete that transfer process?

Peter Bain 6:47

Yeah, I would, I would definitely it did. For me, it was, it was a little bit hard to manage my applications while finding the paperwork that I need. And, you know, signing up for classes. I had a huge problem with getting my immunization records, ironically enough. But I mean, in the end, it ended up working out. So I guess I can't really complain too hard.

Joshua Farrar 7:18

So you said you were also on crowd control orders during this time? How did that intermix with the COVID orders?

Peter Bain 7:26

So when I first got on for our AT, we were on standby for riot control. Luckily, Texas was one of the less riotous wild states. So we did about a week of prepping for that, picking up riot shields. We did weapons training specifically for riots. So we knew basically a de-escalation of force.

And from there, from there, we didn't end up getting sent anywhere, we stayed in Killeen. But I believe military police did most of the riot control, if I'm not mistaken. So...

Joshua Farrar 8:15

Alright, so you're in Killeen near Fort Hood during this time, transporting troops between Camp Mabry, which is a National Guard facility in Austin to other areas around the state. And then you get put on orders for AT, also known as Annual Training, so a two-week annual training period that every National Guardsman does and your unit says use that time to or probably is ordered to use that time to prepare for possible protests, which were breaking out in other states. And Texas didn't get as bad as some other states like Minnesota. And so y'all didn't end up getting called up to that, but then continued on orders for the COVID-19 mission. Is that kind of a good summary?

Peter Bain 9:01

So that's right. So I came off of AT orders, we had about a week break for the people who were on AT for the riot control. And then we went straight back to COVID. So...

Joshua Farrar 9:15

So how does pay work for these things? Were you getting paid while you're on these orders special amounts of money or were they- what- how's that go down?

Peter Bain 9:25

So for the AT orders, that's a state- comes out of the state fund, state funding. So we didn't get as many of the benefits as we did for the COVID missions, which were federal. You know, we didn't get our hotel room for AT; we had to, you know, sleep on cots and cots and sleeping bags. However, once COVID, the COVID mission started for me we got, I forgot. Josh you know, you know what the pay is called? I'm blanking on it. But...

Joshua Farrar 10:06

Oh Title 32...

Peter Bain 10:06

For food, for food and housing.

Joshua Farrar 10:09

Oh BAH?

Peter Bain 10:11

Sorry, not BAH.

Joshua Farrar 10:13

Oh, per diem.

Peter Bain 10:14

Yeah, per diem. There we go. We got per diem which I guess is- falls under special pay. Thank you. Which gave us a couple, a couple hundred more for food each month. So...

Joshua Farrar 10:29

Nice. So how did this affect, in your opinion, your family life and friend life being gone during this time?

Peter Bain 10:39

So basically, I lost my entire summer, which, you know, it's unfortunate. But I mean, I had a couple friends come up to visit me in Killean. I went, I went on one of our weekends to go visit a friend. Went to visit my family once. So, um, I would just say that, you know, it's, it's not like any out of state training or anything like, I still had opportunities to see people, stay in contact with everyone.

Joshua Farrar 11:18

So people visiting you and you visiting people, that seems different than how other states dealt with these lockdowns, even though you're on COVID-19 relief orders. Was that typical?

Peter Bain 11:34

So there was, there was a period where we weren't allowed to leave the area. And there was a period where we weren't allowed to have guests. However, you know, I may have just screwed over my unit huh?

Joshua Farrar 11:52

No, I'm assuming that as the picture became clearer, right?

Peter Bain 11:58

Yeah, sorry. When nobody, nobody was really getting COVID. Like I said earlier, you know, we were tested enough. So I deemed it safe to have visitors, and...

Joshua Farrar 12:07

Yeah, and I remember from being on the mission myself that as time went on, and the science got stronger on the death rates and transmission and things like that, as long as you were wearing a mask and social distancing, then it was okay to visit people. I had people visit me while I was on orders, too. So that was something that was maybe unique to our state experience. I don't think your unit did anything out of sorts with state or federal mandates at that point. So, in closing, in your opinion, and this, you don't have to answer. Do you think that the COVID-19 relief mission was useful? Do you think it was worth it? Or do you think the response could have been used differently in terms of funds and manpower?

Peter Bain 13:00

I believe, at least for my unit, we had too many people. We had a lot of people sitting around, a lot of people who didn't have to go out every day. So I think, I think manpower could have been used differently for sure. Funding, I think, I mean, I don't know exactly how it works from, you know, the government standpoint, but funding seemed fine for me. I was happy with the pay. But I think, I think, I think that they did put too many people on orders for what we did. And I genuinely believe that time could have been managed a little bit better. And that's about it. I think it was a little bit of an over- over-exaggerated response, in my opinion.

Joshua Farrar 13:53

All right, perfect. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me and share your experiences. Peter Bain, thank you once again.

Peter Bain 14:02

Thank you for having me.