

## **PREFACE**

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**Sizemore Residence, Springfield, Oregon**

**Interview Duration: 1 hour, 59 minutes, 34 seconds**

**Interviewee: Ray Sizemore**

**Interviewer: Gavin Hahn:** University of Oregon student, History major, non-veteran. Was primary questioner and transcriber of this interview.

## **TRANSCRIPT**

**Ray Sizemore:**

Okay, I'll fast track it all the way through. So I joined the Army to piss off my old man who was a Marine. Old man joined the Marine Corps to piss grandpa who was Army Air Corps. I'm sure my kids will someday join the Coast Guard or something I don't know [Laughter]. Yeah, so anyways, seventeen years old, joined the Army out of Dallas High School [Dallas, Oregon]. Joined the Army because I just didn't have a lot of other options basically that would get me out of small town Oregon. Enlisted in the 1249th Engineers Battalion which is the Oregon Army National Guard out of Salem. That's the main one, that's Alpha. I enlisted in Charlie which is

over out of Dallas, Oregon. Bravo is somewhere in Keizer, I can't really remember. Didn't really plan on being an engineer. Somebody said something about twisting wires together, pushing buttons, making stuff go boom, and it sounded kind of cool so I'm like: what seventeen-year-old kid wouldn't be interested in that? Did the early enlistment program. The old man wouldn't let me sign up with the Marine Corps. We had a whole falling out with that situation. So I talked my mom into letting me join the Army. Shipped out for Basic in June of 1992, where I did Basic Training between my junior and senior years of high school and then came back and finished my senior year in high school. Did Weekend Warrior stuff a lot during senior year. After that I went and did my AIT (Advanced Individual Training). For me that was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Fort Leonard Wood is where you go as a combat engineer; it is the most muddiest and miserable fuckin' place anybody could ever go, just next to the swamps of Fort Benning.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*You called it lost in the woods earlier.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, Fort Lost in the Woods, Missouri. It was cool and I enjoyed it, but I think one of my biggest reasons for going Active afterwards was ... When you are a National Guard guy going through the Army ... Well let me back track to where we left off before the recording issues. There is just this whole hierarchy in the Army that I want to explain. Now the Marine Corps, when you go through Basic, first and foremost, every Marine is a rifleman first; it doesn't

matter if you're a cleric, a cameraman, or a medical Marine, you are a rifleman first. That is something that is engrained, that is instilled from the ground up, period. It's not really the same in the Army. If you want to go intelligence, for instance, you're going to go to Fort Huachuca, Arizona: amazing gymnasium, phenomenal spa, REC room, probably the best goddamn military golf course I have ever golfed on in my life is at Wachuka. It is a plush and pomp kind of base, and that's where you're gonna go through your AIT because that's the largest military intelligence base stateside here in CONUS (Continental United States). If you're gonna go to tanker school you're gonna go through Fort Knox; you're gonna go through Basic at Fort Knox and the weapons that you will learn on will be that of tanker guns. For instance, a lot of people don't realize that there's a 240 Bravo, that's an infantry laden machine gun with a tripod, you mount it, you usually have an A gunner that carries extra ammo and barrels, and it's a two-man deployed weapon system for an infantry unit. That same 240 comes in about twenty-six different variations. So there's a paratrooper version. For example, there's a 249 SAW and there's a 249 Para for instance. There's one for that of an airborne assault, which is much smaller and you don't have a 200-round box, you have fifty-round nut sack (a little canvas sack). It's a collapsible stock, it's very small and compacted, and much lighter in weight because when you're jumping out of airplanes shit like that matters. When you are a ground and pound, knuckle dragging, rock eating grunt who gives a shit, get an A-gunner who can carry all your extra stuff. When you're a tanker, most of those weapon systems only have a trigger, they're a mounted system, so you don't have to worry about the recoil and there is no butt stock because the gun extends to the exterior of a tank or armored system; therefore, there is not enough mobility or room within for that gun to move about. The barrels are usually much shorter as well, much like that of a Para barrel, just

because you don't want them hanging out there as one more thing to get caught up and hung up on something.

So you kind of get the idea? So there are different weapon systems for each and every vehicle or MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) that you're gonna go into. If you want to be a logistician, a 92 something, logistics, you want to be a supply guy, you're probably gonna go through New Jersey, and that's where their Basic and their overall AIT is at. So what the Army, and this is why I try and explain it to some people, because many will just start off by saying "Oh, well you're Army ..." because you always hear in the news somebody in the Army did something stupid. Well, no shit. The Army is so fucking big, the Green Machine is just monstrous, but it's the machine that fuels all the other military fighting forces. If you're airborne or infantry, you're gonna go through AIT and Basic at Benning and you're going to finish there; you go through all your jump schools at Fort Benning. Dives schools have now been given over to the Navy; Army still has a dive school but it's pretty weak, but most of your amphibious dive schools go there. A lot of your amphibious assault schools are still very much that of Marine and Naval Special Warfare if your gonna go to the tip of the spear. But even Navy Seal Team Medics are 18 Delta Medics (18D is the US Army Special Forces code MOS for being a Special Forces) - anything 18 series is Special Forces - so like your 18B is a Special Forces Infantry Man. You get the idea. A comparison would be your 11B (basic infantry) to your 18B which is Special Forces Infantry. That's where it all plays into this hierarchy because most Special Forces Medics can do open-heart surgery on you in the middle of the most disease infested jungle, and you're probably gonna come out being a better human being because of it. They are just truly amazing at the skills and craft and the things they can do. Naval Special Warfare goes through their own in-house Corpsman program, up to a certain level, and then they also attend the Army 18D

school. Just about everything airborne and air assault is Army schooling. Just about everything sniper, well except Marine snipers and I would never discount that schooling, but the fundamentals of those particular schools are all still at some point and time based upon Army schooling. But the Green Machine is so big that they can't do it all and with some MOS there is a centralized location of training which corresponds with their area of specialty depending on what that MOS is. For me it was Fort Leonard Wood. One of my best friends was in Benning. Another guy I know invented the STAR program (Steal Trade Acquire Requisition), it's an underground mafia-like way of getting shit some supply, and that's what we called it the STAR program; whatever it took to get it, he is still known in the Army, especially out of Benning, as that guy. If you ever needed something: bottles, chicks, porn, whatever, that guy could get it. I'm sorry if that was convoluted but that was the overall, very long, version of explaining why the Army is so jacked up.

So coming back to me and this whole hierarchy. When you go through Boot you don't want anyone to know you're a National Guard, it's like the lowest of the low. The Army already has so many diverse groups of who goes through what training where and what the jobs are and all that. For the Army being Active is like varsity, Army Reserve is like junior varsity, at least you're still Army, but then you have National Guard and you're considered like freshman, like junior high school. I hated that atmosphere when I went through Basic. I got picked on all the time, I was the guy who was always "voluntold" because you never actually volunteered for shit, you were always told to do it. I was always that guy because I was one of only three National Guardsmen there, but I was also the one keeping up with the rest and because of that it put me in the spot light more and so it became much worse for me.

So that was my experience in Basic and after that I went back and completed my senior year of high school. During that time I was hanging out at the local armory a lot. Danny Bobo, who was a former Marine, a flight medic and really knew his stuff inside and out, a really cool guy, really took me under his wing, kept me from doing a lot stupid shit like the new guys always do. He was always like, "Yeah don't be an idiot." Really trained me up on a lot of different stuff, helped me get through other stuff, while I was just hanging out there after school as this senior in high school. I wasn't like ... I don't want to sound like I was the lonely nerdy kid in the corner that didn't have any friends and I don't mean any disrespect to those who are. For me it was more like this: when you have two brothers who are varsity lettermen and college athletes, these guys were both NCCAA Division II athletes. Then there's me Ray with a rusty ass old truck, who wore wranglers, and dirty ass white T-shirts everywhere, and old cowboy boots or old tennis shoes. I was working on farms, stretching fences, and if I wasn't doing that I was the kid with the cowboy hat going surfing over in Lincoln City, and everyone thought I was the weirdest son of a bitch in the world because I surfed in Oregon.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So did you have a better experience in AIT than in Basic? Like relationship wise with other recruits?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yes and no. You're still living under that same hierarchy of consideration, unless you have shown yourself. It was different in AIT in that in Boot when you stood out, you were a target. In AIT when you stood out you got not some much respected; that's not the right word.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*More like recognition?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I think so because it felt like, "Well, okay, this kid is not going to be National Guard all the time." A lot of the guys that I was with were different than I had imagined as well. I thought all the guys that went through Basic and AIT were around my age (18-19) but there was one dude in my unit that was thirty-eight years old. Right now in college with you [referencing interviewer], I feel like the creepy old guy. But that guy, man, thirty-eight years old keeping up with a bunch of eighteen year olds. I wish at thirty-eight I could run and keep up with a bunch of eighteen year olds, and this guy was actually doing it. I remember that he told me his reasoning for joining was that he had had a small business that had failed, two kids and a wife, and they needed medical insurance. So he quit looking for jobs and went into the military to get the care they offered.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Military is a great opportunity for such things.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, I hear that now and it's frustrating in different ways. I am proud of what I have done but back then when I was eighteen and this guy is thirty-eight and he's just joining the Army and I'm wondering at the time, what's gonna happen to me when I'm thirty-eight? Am I gonna be that big of a loser? I kind of felt like that. I look at the guy now and I'm like, "Good for you." Especially back then, we're talking early '90s, health insurance is stupidly expensive. If my mother didn't have the job she had had, she wouldn't have had the money to raise us like she did or she would have been on welfare just so we could have the life we did. So I look back at that, before Obamacare and stuff like that, and consider that situation with a wife and two kids at home, and wonder if I could have swallowed my ego enough to be a thirty-eight or thirty-nine year old PFC (Private First Class) starting life all over again just to keep going, to keep living. That guy must have really loved his family to do that for them.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Had to swallow some pride.*

**Ray Sizemore:**



I don't know that I could. So that was one of my experiences in AIT. AIT was different, where you had finally come up to a level where you could talk to your instructors. You could look them in the eye and see that they wanted to teach you, that they wanted you to learn. But the hierarchy was still there and that always still bugged me and when I got back to my unit in Dallas I was itching to go active. I didn't want anybody to look at me that way anymore, like I was just half-assed playing GI-Joe. I think that's what bugged me the most; people thinking I was half-assed, not really in it to stay or commit.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So you did your AIT then you went back to the Oregon National Guard?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

For the rest of that year yeah.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*When did you get your Option 40?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Option 40 was about two months after I had returned from AIT. I got home, eighteen years old, running around, making bad decisions. This is where Lee Ingram, Sergeant Lee Ingram of the Dallas Police Department, came into the picture. He was a local cop, six foot monster of a man, with a big old Fu Manchu mustache. He gave me my first speeding ticket, gave me my first minor possession ticket when I was seventeen, right before my junior year, all that stupid kid stuff. I got home from AIT and somebody mouthed-off to me, said something, I don't really remember and I had always had a hot temper, we're downtown hanging out around the court house on a Friday. Some kid mouthed-off and I hit him pretty good. He goes down, I hit him right in the nose and that was that, but sure as shit there was a cop right across the street who just also happened to be Lee Ingram, of course having saw the whole thing. And here I am eighteen years old now and I just assaulted someone in public.

So Lee pulled me in and hooked me up in the car and went to check on my car, put me in handcuffs in front of everybody I knew, and took me home. When he got me out in the driveway he looked at me and smacked me right upside my damn head and said, "You need to knock your shit off. You got a lot of good things going on. I have followed you and your brothers your whole lives. I'm proud that you chose your own path. I talk to the guys from the Army all the time. I know a lot of those guys and their telling me how great you are. How you're gonna do a lot of great things. How you've talked about going active duty. You need to knock your shit off. Get the hell out of this town because shit like that is gonna end you up in jail, gonna get you kicked out of the Army, dishonorably discharged, which is worse than a felony. Get the hell out of here. What are you doing? You're gonna get your ass in trouble trying to be the tough guy on a Friday night downtown. Who you impressing?"

It was really that little coming to Jesus meeting that I needed and so I went to my NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge] and started talking with him about going active. He put me in touch with people in Salem, talked to different recruiters, and started to get some options and information. It was weird because I had already gone through basic and AIT, I was officially part of the unit, but it was me that had to start the ball rolling and find out about Option 40. Recruiters weren't really willing to tell you about it because, as I found out later, when you're assigned to a recruiting station, you get different quotas on different areas of the military that need filling. "Quotas" isn't really the right word but you get what I'm saying. That really bugged me that Option 40 had been hidden from me. Option 40 is basically a one-and-done dream. That's always the way it has been explained to me and that's always the way I read into it. I'm sure there's more to it than that but I understood it as a one-and-done dream. You go Option 40, you have your chance, and if you fuck it up then you're sitting in some satellite station in Nome, Alaska, for the next four years of your life.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So what exactly goes into the process of being considered for Option 40?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

You got to make sure all your scores are up. So my ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test] was at a 105, my PFTs [Physical Fitness Test] were 100% all the way through, and then you have to make sure those PFTs and academic scores are credible and

significant. You still have to apply for the opportunity, it's not just handed to you. You have to have two letters from senior staff endorsing you, that say they feel you are not a waste of the Army's time or money, that you are worthy of the opportunity and or chance. It was really a long time ago, that's really all I can remember about the specifics of applying for Option 40.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*What options does Option 40 give within the Army?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Within the Army, and specifically for me, it offered me the opportunity to become a Ranger. I wanted a chance at Ranger School. A prerequisite of Ranger school was having your jump schooling. So say you want to go into Foreign Intelligence, a prerequisite for that is language school, and before going to actual intelligence school they will authorize school for that prerequisite or any prereqs you'll need. So after I applied for Ranger School through Option 40, I went through jump school first. Then I got to Fort Benning and RASP [Ranger Application Selection Process].

**Gavin Hahn:**

*What was RASP like?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

RASP was a fucking nightmare. Every aspect of your life was turned inside out. It was the first time I had to ever fill out an SF86 (a security clearance form), it's something you have to fill out before becoming a Ranger. I already knew some security information without having to sign anything but when you get to that high of a level, you start getting specific forms and stuff. Doesn't mean you'll actually be party to such information but you have to fill it out because Rangers are at that kind of level. The hardest part of RASP was swamp.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Was it a simulated experience or were you actually put in swamp?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Oh no, you're actually in a swamp. Open land navigation wasn't too bad; I had always had a knack for navigating in the middle of nowhere. The sleep deprivation sucks, you work through it, but it's like being drunk and driving around [laughter]. You know you're lethargic, you know you're mentally compromised, but you just close one eye and focus on the very next thing in front of you; I call it pirate walking. Sometimes when you're that tired, that food deprived, whatever, you got to learn to clear your head. That was the hardest part, keeping the focus. When people ask me about what Ranger School was like I can almost compare it to Marine School; Marines will physically beat you, just physically destroy you and run you into the ground. Physically you have to be the toughest son of a bitch to do anything Marine Special

Operations. You don't have to be the smartest guy out there but you definitely need to be the toughest. With the Army it's more about wits and mental focus and that's the hardest part. Physically it's exhausting, I'm not gonna downplay that aspect, but mentally it's just excruciating, just utterly excruciating. So that's the two sides of most Special Forces training, usually leaning towards one or the other and sometimes equally excruciating on both aspects. That's the gist of it, that's what Ranger school was for me. I actually blew my knee out at one point, about two weeks prior to graduation.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Ouch.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

My knee was just swelling and swelling. I had been running on it for about three days. We were just doing formation runs but when you're out there for that long your instructors start noticing. It hurt, it hurt bad, and my knee had swollen up like a football. All the instructors started coming up to me and asking what was wrong, but they also knew that I was an Option kid; there were only three of us in the whole unit. So if you were worth your weight, they would look after you, but there is always that guy who has an excuse for everything and if that's what you seem like to them, you're gonna be the first one to wash. Ranger School is also a rite of passage for a majority of applicants, having a far longer and tougher road than an Option 40 guy did. Us Option guys started from somewhere else and just showed up, took a test, ran a lot, and

we met the minimum requirements for RASP. Other guys in my unit had done four, eight, even ten years of service waiting to get the opportunity to come to Ranger School. So if you didn't measure up or show your backbone, those guys would wash you out in heartbeat because you were like that fat kid at Disneyland that had the special pass to cut to the front of the line. Option 40 is cool but also not so cool because once those other guys find out who you are and how you got to RASP and you're not pulling your weight, and 10% of everybody else's, you're gonna get cut because you didn't pay your dues.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So in Ranger school did you stay a combat engineer?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yes. In order to get into any school like Ranger school you need to have a combat MOS. You can't just have any old MOS. Though mine was frowned upon [laughter]. If you're a 19D, which is an armored cavalry scout, or an 11B, which is the hard charging grunt of all grunts, you're fine, but if you're a 12B like me, it's more like, "Hey, go fill my sandbags little man." That's what I was. 19Ds were better than 12Bs but the 11Bs were the ones who felt like the real Rangers. That was the hardest part, knowing your place. Not everyone was the same in the Rangers and once I got to that level of knowing my role, knowing where I fit in and not letting my ego get the best of me, things got easier. One of the guys in my unit, Shane, really helped me see that aspect of being a Ranger as a new guy to the regiment. One of things he used to always

say was, "If you don't know the answer, GOYAKOD." That meant, "get off your ass and knock on doors." Don't be stupid, ask. If you don't know the answer, don't assume it because when you assume it, everyone else is gonna get hurt and be in trouble. Go ask someone. If you don't know, be man enough to say you didn't ask. GOYAKOD has always stuck with me. Pursuit of no ego is the biggest hurdle, realizing that you made it, you're already a Ranger, you're already in the 75th: you are the tip of goddamn spear. Stop trying to be a tough guy, quit trying to prove yourself to guys that went through the same training as you did to get here. With Shane it was a big help to have that big brother figure take you under their wing and teach you those things. A part of my problem was also that I wanted to go somewhere, I wanted to get out there and do something. When you're done with RASP you get sent down to the Regiment and you are a HQ bitch boy: "Welcome to the Regiment! You get your patch! Yeah!" [Said in a pretty sarcastic tone].

**Gavin Hahn:**

*A bit of a clarification here. So you did RASP?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah

**Gavin Hahn:**

*And then you got assigned to the 75th?*



**Ray Sizemore:**

Right.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*And that's what you're referencing here?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

So, yeah, after RASP and the selection process you get sent down to the actual unit and become part of the 75th. There are a lot of guys who go through Ranger School that aren't part of the 75th. Many of those guys just want the tab; the tab that says, "I'm Ranger certified." Marines bust their ass to get the prequalifications/minimum requirements to get their ass to Ranger School. You always hear about this conflict between the Army and the Marines, but a lot of Marines want to go to certain Army schools and a lot of Army guys, they want to go to certain Marine schools. The Ranger tab itself is ... man your gonna think I am an arrogant prick for saying this but for me the Ranger tab says, "You have arrived. You've made it. You're a fucking Ranger." There a lot of other cool things in the world but once you have that tab in the military, it's like having a college degree. It's like having that big piece of paper that says I have graduated. It opens up doors like you wouldn't believe. It's such a fraternity, it really is. There are a lot of guys that are not part of the Regiment but part of a number of different military units across the board. But being a true Ranger is about being part of a community and not the tab

itself. It offers up a lot of opportunity in the military and that's why a lot of guys are just in it for the tab because once you have it, it helps getting to even higher levels of the military like MARSOC [Marine Special Operations Command]. Or It can help Navy guys get from combat corpsman to advanced combat corpsman easier. But that's not what I was there for. I was there to be a Ranger and being a part of the Rangers really separated you from the rest of the pack. Back in those days, we were old-school black hatters. Everyone in the Army has a black beret now but back then Rangers were the only ones to have those. It gave us a real sense of pride.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So you're in the 75th now and before you had mentioned something about "bitch duties?"  
What exactly did you mean by that?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

"Do you need your trash taken out? May I?" [Laughter]. You're lucky to just be a Ranger and assigned to the 75th. That was how it was back when I went through it. I understand it's lightened up a bit but that was my experience. This was back in the 90s when hazing wasn't really a big deal, it was another rite of passage. It was a lot like what I mentioned before about learning your place. You can make it through Ranger school but being part of the Regiment is a whole other learning experience. Before they actually put you into one of the battalions, before you're sent off to where real shit is happening and lives matter, the regiment needs to know you're in this for the long haul. I get that whole aspect of it now but back then I hated them all

for making me go through that process [laughter]. I was pissed off at everybody. Clembrick, whatever his name was, what an asshole. This guy brought back a lot of the racial problems I had to deal with in my home town as a Hispanic kid in Dallas, Oregon, northwest capital of the KKK [Klu Klux Klan] from the '20s to the 1960s. The Lynching Tree was still part of the court house lawn and named a historical landmark back when I was growing up. I grew up with that shit my whole life. I had this one experience where I was dating this girl and when her dad found out he wouldn't let us date anymore because I wasn't white. That was my first real kick in the gut with racism. It's a long story. Anyways, back to Clembrick. Man, I had forgotten about this guy until just now, I haven't talked about this in forever [laughter]. So I was doing something, fucking around really, and I was still only nineteen: chasing nurses and screwing around, doing something stupid. One night we rolled in pretty late, in fact, I was driving back on base as my unit was getting ready to go out for their morning run, and we drove by all of them with me sitting there as a passenger in her car, still drunk from partying. So I show up like that and later Clembrick comes up to me and says, "Oh Sizemore, I heard your just fucking special! I heard you this and, oh, I heard you got that! Oh, I heard you're a special motherfucker!" Blah blah blah. And like a dumbass I respond by saying, "Yeah dude, what the fuck ever, bro," and went back to doing what I was doing. And Clemrick says, "Bro!?! I'm your fucken bro now?" which makes me turn around and go, "What?" And he goes, "What, sir! Motherfuck..." he gets up in my face and starts going off, talking to me in Spanish. This is a fucking white boy, blond hair, blue eyes from Nebraska or somewhere who starts trying to talk to me in Spanish. It took everything I had to not lose my shit. This made me realize that I had to stop, this was my final test. It was the higher ups seeing how much shit I could put up with and wondering: does he know when to fall in line. And that's the point of bitch duties. They push everybody to that line, to that level of

awareness of how much shit you're willing to put up with and can you still fall in line with everybody else?

Hindsight being 20/20 and going through different schools and later becoming a senior instructor, I see the same method used over and over again. I came to understand that when instructors start to see that they're about to lose a guy to some dumb shit, you wait and you wait and you wait and see guys pushing the limits over and over again, like I had been doing. You have to finally say, "That's enough," and push that guy a little bit further and see what happens. For me that was what happened with Clemrick and three days later some guys come into living quarters and tell me I have been assigned to 2nd Battalion and that they're sending you off to Fort Lewis, your gonna be attached to ODA 716, you're going to South America. My first reaction was: "What the fuck did I do? Fuck, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to call him bro. I was joking, I know he's the major and stuff, but I take it all back!" They were like, "No, you made it. It's time."

**Gavin Hahn:**

*What year is this do you remember?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Oh man, this is probably around early '94. I got to Fort Lewis around February 20th or 22nd. Got there, got assigned, and all that.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So that was your new home base?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, Fort Lewis, Washington. I was able to make it back home before I was officially reassigned. It was the first time I had been back home in about two and a half years. It was really different, really weird experience. So, yeah, I got to go back to Dallas and saw the family a bit. I really couldn't get out of there fast enough. Pre-deployment at Fort Lewis took about four months. Once you go through all the schools, all the this and that, all the steadies [?], the RED ops [?].

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So you had to get retrained a bit?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

It was just your usual pre-op: telling you where you're going to, specific medical shit, start taking your malaria pills. Malaria pills really fuck with you, don't ever take them if you have choice. Well, unless you're going someplace really bad you need to take that stuff, but Jesus do those things mess you up. Malaria pills, from the military at least, will mess you up inside and out. You might just as well do LSD at night, it just fucks with you that much.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Then you were actually deployed to Columbia?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, Bogotá.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*What exactly was your duty assignment there?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I want to tell you some kind of tough guy story about how we cleaned up Pablo Escobar's mess, and we fought the war on drugs and tell you, "We saved America from cocaine and evilness! RAW!" In reality, I had never drank so much in my life over the next four years [laughter]. That was about it, it really was. Man, I was a Ranger and I'm supposed to be doing Ranger stuff. But, no, all I did was sit in a plywood hut, with a half-assed hair conditioner, sweating my guts out in Bogotá, Columbia. That's about it. Cleaning guns. SF were the ones who went out did a lot of their usual stuff; ODA 716 is a Special Forces unit.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So you were in more of a support role down in Columbia?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, we were. Wherever group goes, there is always ... well, not wherever but for the most part, wherever group goes. Sorry, teams is Naval Seals, groups is Special Forces. So, wherever group goes, there's always some kind of Ranger element with them, there just is. They bring attachments because it's like this: if you need the best fucking armor in the world, well then you find whoever that it is and say we need some of your guys. In the Army there are two different patches; one patch, the left one, is the unit you are with, for me it was my scroll (2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 75<sup>th</sup> Regiment), the other patch was an SF patch because I was attached to SF. So that's where you get a lot of this re-invention bullshit where guys try to pass off that second patch as their unit patch. But I always say, "Well, what sleeve is it on, asshole? Were you attached? What did you do? Clean their toilets?" Because the guys that cooked SF meals also got that patch. In the Army you're always attached to various units, especially if you have a specialty MOS. The 101<sup>st</sup> is probably one of the biggest regiments in the Army. So you can have your Screaming Eagle 101<sup>st</sup> patch your sleeve but it doesn't mean you're actually a part of the official 101<sup>st</sup>. You might be a 409<sup>th</sup> Transportation guy, you may have driven a truck for the 101<sup>st</sup>, but the 101<sup>st</sup> is so big that at one point in time if you were ever north of, say, Baghdad, Iraq you were attached to the 101<sup>st</sup>, that's just how big the 101st is. It's huge. So if you were part of the convoys that resupplied Baghdad to, I want to say, Mosul from '06 or whatever, you had your Screaming Eagle patch. A lot of those guys coming home probably flaunted that patch. A lot of guys look at

me because I still have my SF patch and think I'm SF but I'm really not. I'm also wearing a black beret, not a green one. Unfortunately, you get those other guys that say they were officially a part of whatever unit they were actually only attached to. But that's just how the Army works.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*What was your group's overall mission?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

We were there to run perimeter for the most part. The mission details we got, you have to understand that back then it was very different from what popular culture and the media say it was, but that was after my time in Columbia. Back then it was a super fucking scary job, the way Pablo was portrayed made him seem like the Bin Laden of my youth. When you were growing up I bet you saw Bin Laden portrayed as the Devil himself. "This motherfucker Pablo, blah blah blah, doing this doing that. Shoots half his soccer team because they didn't win a game. And does this, does that." He was a mean motherfucker, that was the way he was portrayed. For others people say he was a hero, someone out of folklore, and whatever. But we actually got the intel on what he did to people that were captured, what he did to two CIA agents he captured back in '70s or '80s, it was brutal stuff. We got all those pre-ops and we swore that if we ever went down in a fight, the guy next to us knew what to do. So we went down there to clean up Pablo's mess. Pablo might have been taken down already, but he still had thirty-five or so generals, and they all took off doing their own drug cartel bullshit. I'm probably exaggerating the



number but that was the situation. It was freaky. I'm not gonna sit here and blow smoke up your ass and tell you I wasn't scared. I'm glad we didn't [he cuts himself off here]. It sucked in between because of the wait. We first got down there and had to acclimatize and do all that basic stuff but we acted so high and mighty and arrogant. Half of us about passed out on the first goddamn run; it was so humid. Jungle warfare sucks, it just sucks. The humidity would just kill you and if that didn't get you the thirty-five different bugs and diseases sure as hell would. The guys that were there and a lot of the guys transitioning out were looking at us just shaking their heads. They looked at our upbeat and energetic attitudes and just said, "You guys are idiots. And whenever you guys are done fucking around, there are guns over there that need cleaning. That's your job. Get it done." It sucked. You have to understand that we were part of 2<sup>nd</sup> fucking Battalion; we missed all the action the other battalions had gotten involved in. 3<sup>rd</sup> was in Somalia, 1<sup>st</sup> was in the Eastern European block (Bosnia-Herzegovina and all that).

**Gavin Hahn:**

*And you also missed the Haiti deployment, right?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yep, I knew at the time I didn't have a chance to get in on that ride. Then here I am in South America thinking, "We're gonna go and free the fucking world of drugs and narcotics. We're fighting the war on drugs man!" The reality of that assignment really sucked. It sucked because I filled myself up with all these expectations of what the boys from 3<sup>rd</sup> had done, what

the boys from 1<sup>st</sup> had done, what was going on in Somalia, Eastern Europe, and Haiti. And then I got to South America in 1994 when there wasn't really anything happening. But even during that period you were expect to perform your duties, perform at a certain level, and you had to rise to that occasion. It's hard to keep your happy meter going when you've got senior NCOs and officers, especially the young ones - the older ones got it but the younger ones, the "hard chargers," really put me down. I was bored out of my mind cleaning guns and get told, "Hey, you guys, get ready! We're going on a mission! We're gonna go kick in a lab!" or "We found a hold up." Well, we would go out, surround the whole area, 7<sup>th</sup> would come in and do their part, and we're basically sweating our asses of out there six hours prior to surrounding the goddamn place and doing nothing really. And we went back to base having done nothing, I was embarrassed to come home. I was embarrassed without a CAB [Combat Action Badge] and a lot of guys were embarrassed to come home without their CIB [Combat Infantry Badge]. I spent four years in South America and I didn't get my kill. That's my father speaking right now, it's a Marine thing. It's very much a Marine mindset because a lot of other guys were like, "Thank God we didn't have to shoot at nobody!" But for me it was something else. I was there for a purpose. When I graduated Basic, marching across that DCG (Drill Ceremony Ground), I will never forget seeing my father out of the corner of my eye standing out at the end. He was that very distinct man, tall, just like the old school men of the '50s and '60s, pants half way up around his torso, hand on his hip, Marlboro Red in his mouth smoking, hair slicked back perfectly with the cleanest goddam shave you could imagine, the creases and all that. I'm pretty sure his pajamas were that prefect the day he died, just creased and proper. I thought he was gonna whoop my ass, and all he said was, "You made it this far, do something with it. Don't let me down." And I knew what he meant that day. That is what fueled my direction in the Army, that's why I went through Option 40 and

Ranger School. And here I was coming home in '98, having finished with the Army, and I had to look him in the eye with no CAB. I showed up on his doorstep in my greens and he looked over my ribbons and then looked at me, shrugged and said, "Sometimes you just don't get the chance." That's all he had to say. With that sentence, he made me feel barely two inches tall. You have to understand that the Sizemore family goes back eight generations of US military service, all of which have served down range in some sort of conflict, a tip of the spear action. What my father said to me that day was a real kick in the gut, a huge one. He was prouder of me when I later worked for Blackwater than when I was an Army Ranger. I felt anger about how my father seemed to disregard all I went through to get into the Rangers and all that I did that got me to Blackwater. That was the family chemistry we had.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Was it that experience in Columbia that made you want to leave the Army?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I felt like I was spinning my wheels. I think that I tried so hard for so long to impress one man that I wasn't doing anything to live my own life. I knew I couldn't excel at sports the way my brothers; athletics were just never my strong suit. Like academics it's something you're good at or you just aren't and for a lot of us, we're stuck in between. There are really smart guys out there, great athletes, and some really smart athletes, but then there's just us, the other 80%, straddling that in-between area. In the Army I felt like I was doing my part and it would make

my dad as proud of me as he was with my brothers. It took me a long time to realize the difference of pride and "happy for," if that makes any sense. I realize now, looking back, that my old man was proud of me since day one. My old man loved the fact that I followed in the family footsteps and because of that he rode my ass as hard as he could to push me to higher levels. If it wasn't for him, I would have washed out of RASP within the first week of being there. I damn near washed out of jump school too and that wasn't even that hard. If it wasn't for him in the back of my head the whole way through, I would have just been done with the whole thing. I understand now how proud of me my old man was. Me and him had that talk prior to his passing a few years back. He was really happy for my brothers as well. He was happy that they had found a different path in life, that they had excelled in their own aspects of life to break the mold. The fact that I didn't break that mold wasn't ever a problem for him though. My dad's old colleagues from the military told me that every time there was a picture or newspaper article, he would have to bring it in briefings and read it to the whole group. My old man was quite the bragger about me. I hear this now and puff my chest out but back then, God, did I want to punch that old man in the throat. That's the way his dad was on him and what made him excel the way he did.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So after getting out of the Rangers you went into law enforcement?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I did. I came back to small town Oregon and Lee Ingram was there again to help me out. I went back home and to the old farm and not much had changed. The racial shit was still there. I

would really like people just to have been direct about their feelings rather than trying to dance around the more overt racism even though that's what they feel. Rye Harwood was a guy who had a daughter I used to date back in the day, owned a thoroughbred ranch. I still go back up there, once a month usually, and converse with his wife Jo, who sometimes was more of a mother to me than my own mother. Rye is a great man. He actually avoided the draft back in the day. He had a ranch, which I used to visit a lot when I was a kid. He was that old-school cowboy type guy. He was a dentist but his true passion was raising thoroughbred race horses. He thrived on that. He had this one liner for everything in life: "Those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak." He's still philosophical like that, even today. So I come back to town, not wanting to move back in with my mom, and Rye had this basement in his house that had been reconstructed into a jockey's quarters, where jockeys down on their luck could stay and get their shit together. Life as a jockey isn't all it's crapped up to be, I can tell you that. So Rye would every now and then take someone under his wing and give them a job breaking in new horses. The basic proposition was, "I can offer you a break from everyday jockey life if you ride my horses for free and stay at my place for a bit."

Well, that year I came back he didn't have anyone living down stairs and so he rented it out to me for the cost of labor on his ranch. It wasn't hard for me because I had been doing stuff around the ranch for years as a kid. Through that I got back into doing rodeo. I had done some rodeo before as a kid and actually won the 1991 Northwest Wild Horse Racing Association All-Around Cowboy award. It sounds so weird. I was a surfer then I was a cowboy but for me it wasn't weird. It was more like: where can I find the next adventure? The guy who first taught me how to horse ride is still alive today, Jack Flynn. I was so surprised to find him still alive and kicking when I came back up here to attend college at UO. Now at one point when I had been

away from the Rangers and staying at Rye's place, I was heading back to visit my mom and stepdad when I caught a hoof to the face over in Tillamook. Caught it real bad, gave me a real good scar on my face, you can see right here. The horse I was riding bucked me off and I'm tumbling and flipping through the air and his back legs get me in the chest and right on the nose. That's all I really remember until I woke up as they were loading me into the back of an ambulance. I start grabbing the doors saying, "Hell no! I can't afford this! I don't have insurance!" I was still only recently out of the Rangers and didn't have official anything really. I had to sign waivers and shit before they let me go and I'm sitting there all messed up driving home with one good eye. When I got home, I went out to the farm but no one was there and I didn't want to be by myself that night, so I drove back over to my parents' apartment and I hear the sounds of some old guy beating the shit out of his wife next door, really giving it to her. So I grabbed the phone and called it in and Lee Ingram was the responding officer. He was now a senior supervisor and he and a few other cops showed up. Sure as hell, this guy had been beating up his wife pretty good. She needed to go to the hospital, and he needed to go to jail. The other officers took care of things and I gave them my name. I'm not the kind of guy who's gonna hide from some guy like that. Old Lee Ingram comes over and gives my door a knock and when I opened the door he and says, "Ray Sizemore, what the hell happened to your face!?! I thought you were in the Army. I thought you were conquering the free world. Gonna save us all! What are you doing back home?" He came in and we sat down and talked for a bit and he asks me, "What you gonna do now?" And I'm like, "I don't know. I'm working out of Harwood's." And he invites me to come down and apply to the Police Department. Back at that time me and my dad had had a big falling out and I really didn't want to follow in yet another family tradition, again another eight generations of cops. I still wanted to make my own path but I didn't know where to start. So he

decides to try and introduce me to law enforcement work and takes me out on a ride along a few days later and I'll never forget that experience. Lee really grilled me that night asking me all about what I wanted to do and how I was gonna get there. I knew he was right about much of what he was pointing out but I still didn't really want to be a cop.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Did you miss not really having to worry about those kinds of specifics when in the Army?  
Like how they were the ones who told you where to go and what to do?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

No, not really. I hated the structure of the Army. Hated it. Being told what I'm gonna do and how I'm gonna do it is something I actually don't like. I don't like deadlines. I have never liked them. I like well-designed plans with sufficient time to execute them. Whereas the Army likes haphazardly designed plans with partial time to execute them and hopes for a percentage of opportunistic victory, and that's the Army. That's the best way of explaining it, truly. You're a in what year of right now?

**Gavin Hahn:**

*My third year.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Okay. So from a college perspective it's like when you have a paper, or an assignment due, they tell you thesis, thesis, thesis. Nine times out of ten the thesis will develop itself as you continue to write the paper, but start with a solid thesis so you have a foundation to go off of because you can always come back and change it before you finalize it. That process has always made so much sense to me, but the Army wants a thesis made before the idea is fully thought out and acted out and once you've completed the actions. They're happy if you only cover the first part of the thesis. That has always driven me nuts and not just in the Army but anywhere else I come across that mentality. Like at my job. I have a tech in the back that really likes to cut corners and I say to him, "Man, you're putting this guy on a motorcycle with only 2 sq. in. of rubber contact to the road at 100 mph, and you're gonna half-ass that? What are you doing?" He usually responds by saying, "Well, the job doesn't pay so well that I really care and I'm just looking to pad my resume." Anyways, moral of the story is: half-assing anything really gets to me and it was one of my major problems with the Army. Even when I was just sitting in South America cleaning guns: those guns are gonna be the cleanest guns you have ever seen. When I put in a request for parts and you only send me half of what I want? Then I have to go back the customer and tell them I'm sorry but Big Brother only sent me half, that customer isn't gonna be mad at the guy who half-assed the order, they're gonna be mad at me. I hated putting my name on a product that was done so haphazardly. That kind of got off topic but what's the next question?

**Gavin Hahn:**



*So you went into law enforcement and didn't particularly like it and moved on to government contracts, right? What caused you to head back to government jobs?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I think I left off talking about law enforcement at the "finger gun point." So sure as hell Lee is going into this dope house he had taken me to on the ride along. By dope I basically mean using heroin. I could hear Lee and a couple other cops making their way in and they're yelling, the usual police-bust jargon, and I see these three guys come running out onto the side walk. Here I am a civilian sitting in the passenger seat of a police car and I get out of the car real fast and pull out my finger gun [laughter] and start shouting, "Get on the ground! Get on the ground now!" And these guys just stopped and dropped to the ground, which surprised the hell out of me. Meanwhile the real cops were still in the house and I start wondering what exactly I do now. These guys I had on the ground kept looking up at me and I kept shouting to not move, but two of the guys decide to test me so they bolt up and start running away [laughter] and I really couldn't do anything about it. Even though that experience was such a weird one, I thought it was one of the coolest things I had ever done. That little jump in adrenaline I got that night was something I had been looking for, and I also thought that whole night spelled out exactly what being a cop entailed. Come to find out later that Lee had been sitting on that house for six months waiting for that one night, whereas I thought such things happened every night as a cop.

So I take up Lee's offer, go through reserve paper work, and became a street cop, which I did enjoy for awhile. It was another learning experience for me because I thought I knew all the ins and outs of being a cop, but I really didn't. My old man was so proud when I became a cop.

When he traveled back down from Ohio to congratulate me, so did my uncle, who was a Marine and retired cop, as well as one of his friends, retired Sergeant Major Ernesto Salgado. So here's these guys full uniforms on with their SWAT wings, and here I am just some kid trying to fill those shoes, and everybody instantly had these expectations. Once again, I felt like I had with my brothers' high school, the "Oh, well your brothers are varsity athletes so you must also be a varsity athlete" mentality. So all these people in Dallas saw my family history on the police force and thought that same thing: well damn, this kid has got so many relatives who did a lot of big stuff on the police force during their time that this kid has to be that good too. Even though I had the resume to needed to get onto SWAT pretty easily, it still felt like I was being forced to go in that direction, and SWAT in Dallas, Oregon, also felt really boring. A city of only 8,000 people with maybe one SWAT call every once in a blue moon. The SWAT team also consisted of only eight men with a commander who had been an Air Force load master in Vietnam, and I bet the last time that guy heard a hostile round fired was at the bottom of his airplane while flying 10,000 ft. over South Vietnam. One of the guys on the team was a former Force Recon Marine, Kevin Estrada, and him, me, and Jimmy Rodriguez were the only three Mexicans on the SWAT team. Jimmy and I are still pretty close; he in fact just retired from law enforcement work. Lee was also on the SWAT team. He in fact helped me get on it. I enjoyed it for the most part; I enjoyed our trainings every two weeks, where we would have our eight hours of training, so sixteen hours a month, which was required to stay on the SWAT team. I also enjoyed the renewed sense of comradery. I loved having that back. It's one of things I had missed most from the Regiment. A lot of guys I kept in touch with in the Regiment also got out and joined law enforcement. It really is the stereotypical thing for a lot of military guys to do: go home and be a

cop. It's just a transition that makes sense, it's a good fit. But again after awhile I felt like I was spinning my wheels, and then 9/11 happened and that really turned my gut inside-out.

I was on what was supposed to be a SWAT team mission the morning of 9/11. I was really pissed after it happened and not just because of 9/11. On SWAT I was a sniper, which sounds really cool, but in my experience as a SWAT team sniper, it was really boring. I could snipe pretty well, could hit a target at 800 meters away, but that was all I really got to do. I mean, a lot of guys failed to qualify for the job but it isn't all it's cracked up to be. Kevin really helped me ignore that aspect of the job and really helped with my transition back into civilian life. He had a wife and two kids who really helped keep him grounded. Not having a family, a reason to stay in one place, makes things harder when you get out. I was so restless even having a job and being with SWAT, so when I was on this mission and we were actually going to make entry the next day (9/11) I was really excited. So, I had been up in this tree with my M1-A1 (a bolt-action with 762 rifle optics, a military-issue weapon) watching this house, more of a dope trailer really, in the middle of nowhere in the pouring rain. September 9<sup>th</sup> was when I was put into position. We had intelligence that there was possibly twenty-five plus pounds of meth at this place. It was a pretty well hidden and equipped chemical lab up in the mountains. It was supposed to be a pretty big bust, we had EPA, FBI, and DEA ready to assist. So I'm up there just strapped to this tree watching this place, calling back license plates I see, and mostly waiting for the go order on the 11<sup>th</sup>. I'm just soaked through and through, even with all the waterproof gear you could imagine on me. I was in a pretty foul mood by the time the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> rolled up, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> I got called out of that tree right before the time we're supposed to get the go order and kick in that door, around 6 a.m.. I got called out of the tree and told the mission was to be put on hold for now. I was told to evac the position without blowing my cover and would get picked up

by the road. I was fucking livid. I had been living in that tree for two days and had been waiting for something exciting to finally happen while on SWAT, was really gearing to take down that place, and then it's all called off just like that. I had been practicing my job on that mission over and over. I had been tasked with shooting these two guard dogs that we didn't want to deal with and possibly a third if it came from around back. And in the end when I had practiced over and over in my head, shooting those dogs, the raid was called off. That just pissed me right off. I was picked up by a patrol car who was suppose to take me back to the station but I just said, "Take me home. I just want to go home." He tried to argue but I wasn't having it and was just done with it all. I didn't want to talk to anybody back at the station because I knew I would say something stupid and get myself in trouble. So I get home, undress, clean myself off, and try to cool down. Sat down on the couch and turned on the T.V. and fell asleep. When I wake up the news is on and 9/11 has happened. I was really confused. I didn't believe it first; thought it was some weird new movie. So I turned to a different channel and try to go back to sleep but I couldn't. My 9/11 was a weird experience of half-awake snippets, but even so, when I realized what was really happening, it lit a fire in me. A lot of things made sense to me at that moment: it wasn't the boredom of South America, it wasn't the boredom of being a street cop, it was being stuck doing nothing. So I started looking for my out at that point, and that's how I got into government contracts.

The next year after 9/11 I got into training the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry out of Fort Louis in an Army civilian contract position. I went up there and learned about the whole civilian contracting process, went through what was I believe called Train Corps, which was a really weak program.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So you stayed a civilian and worked for the Army/government?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

I was still a cop at the time but had a lot of vacation time built up because I didn't take overtime pay. So I walk up to my chief and told him I'm taking eight weeks off. He was pretty pissed off. I basically told him that I'm taking the time off I have saved up, if you want to fire me fire me, and I'll just cash out my remaining pay, but either way I'm taking that time off. So in those two months off I got a job as a civilian contractor training guys on how to do MOUNT [Military Operations Urban Training], how to clear buildings, how to do CQB (Close Quarters Battle), how to clear block to block, all the stuff that went into working in urban environments. I really just wanted to do my part: a lot of me was like I'm too old, man, I can't re-enlist, and being a cop, while boring, is still a pretty good job, you're making good money and have pretty good benefits. I respect the job and the badge. Even with all this Black Lives Matter stuff going on I'll never blame a cop on the street. I'll blame administrative cops for not properly training those cops, but I won't blame the guy on the street. I'll never blame the soldiers with their boots on the ground for the same reasons. The problem lies in the administrative and policy parts of the structure, not the guy who's just trying to do his job and go home to his family every day. If you want him to do different the train him accordingly.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So back to your job at Lewis.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, went to Fort Lewis and I'm training these recruits, these kids, the guys who are going to be the aforementioned boots on the ground. I got to tell you, I saw a lot of scared faces because of what just happened and the uncertainty of it all. I call them "kids" but in truth I really wasn't that much older than them. But I could see they were scared shitless, never seen combat. The weird thing was I hadn't either. That was really my biggest antagonist during that time. I can teach somebody all the stuff I got taught in the world but that doesn't really amount to much when I haven't seen the real thing. I equate it to the feeling I have when learning from some professor talking about some situation somewhere else, and regardless of how smart or intelligent they are, how are you, who hasn't actually experienced such things, going to get across to me how those people or that situation actually felt or was really like. That was what I felt like when I was going to these young men and I'm telling them, "My name is Ray. I'm a Ranger. I'm gonna tell you what's what. I'm gonna tell you how to stay alive." This goes back to what I was talking about earlier when I came back from South America ashamed that I didn't have a CAB; I came home without ever really knowing combat or war. I hadn't had anyone shoot at me. I had never shot at anyone either. I'm ashamed that I put on that facade of having been that war fighter everyone thinks you are after having been deployed and becoming a veteran. I do believe that what I taught these guys might have helped keep a few of them alive. I had taught

them what I felt were some really good lessons I had learned, or I thought I had learned, and I look back now having been through being a soldier and then being an instructor just how much that simple stuff and that repetition kept me alive. I really ground those lessons into those guys because it had been ground into to me so hard: repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition and if you're still not sure, do it again five more times just because it's that important. However, I'm still not sure I said or taught it the right way, and I wonder sometimes if those young men who got out there that first push in March, if those guys got hurt because I said or taught something the wrong way.

We trained a lot of guys but they went out there while I was up in my khakis and my black polo shirt as a civilian contractor with my cup of coffee trying to be the tough guy, the guy who knew all his shit. I really hope that none of them got hurt, I'm sure some of them did, but I hope all of them survived. My biggest failure as an instructor was that I just repeated shit; regurgitated stuff that I didn't know whether it was truly accurate to the situation that they would be facing. Going forward, if after college I become a teacher, I will take that lesson to heart and not just regurgitate useless shit. I really despise myself looking back. Being that guy who preached all the stuff that had been taught to me and taught to those guys who taught me and so on. I know a lot of that stuff helped me but a lot of it was also bullshit [laughter]. A lot of it would just have me saying, "Why the fuck am I doing this?" For instance, something as stupid as counting your rounds. Counting your rounds is epic [said sarcastically]. You have an M4, you got thirty rounds in the magazine, one round in the chamber. You got thirty-one rounds if you reload properly. Count your rounds.

That whole process just reminds me of how rare it is to find a species that actively kills its own kind. Other species can be violent for sure but they won't kill each other without reason.

Humans are just about the only species in the world that actively kill each other. I got paid some pretty good money as a civilian contractor, but really only because of the picture my resume and my assumed experience painted for me. But what was my actual pedigree? I was some kid getting into trouble and cleaning guns in Columbia for a few years. This gets back to the whole attachment system within the Army. I might have been attached to some pretty badass guys but my job wasn't their job. But I still took the instructor job and at the time it felt like a good decision but from where I'm sitting now I'm not so sure. At the time I was just so wrapped up in the atmosphere surrounding that time period. Everyone wanted to get behind the push after 9/11 and the fact that we were going to war. Veterans and guys with military experience had it real good during that time. I took the money and it felt good, not just to be paid for my experience but to feel like I was doing something to help the cause.

There was this one kid though who pulled me off to the side during training and says, "Senior Instructor Sizemore. I got to ask you a question." And I say, "Yeah, sure. What's up?" And he says, "What's it like?" I respond a bit confused "What do you mean?" and he says "The first time you put one down. What's it like?" I say, "Put what down?" And at that he kind of stopped and looked at me a bit bewildered, "You know, when you got to do it." I'll never forget that conversation because I straight up lied through my teeth to this kid after that, he was shipping out soon, so I knew I had to say something. I couldn't tell the truth to that kid, and so I told him, "You just do. You do what you have been trained to do. You can think about it when you come home. Quit thinking about it so much now. You do that now and it's just going to get you in trouble. You have plenty of time to think about it the rest of your life." That conversation was my trigger, that was my big moment when I realized how full of shit I had been acting when training these guys. I had been railing on the guys who I had thought were full of shit all my life



but now I had become one of those guys. I hated myself for becoming that guy. That's when I decided to go get a real government contract and get out there and put my money where my mouth is. I needed to go redeem myself somehow someday.

So I sent out some emails and at this point Kevin Estrada, my former SWAT team member, had gotten himself in a little bit of trouble. Kevin had been having an affair with someone he really shouldn't have, the wife of some guy he had locked up. Kevin had a beautiful wife, a son who was doing well in life, and a daughter who was around fourteen. Kevin was a local deputy who worked corrections and he got involved with this other young wife whose husband conveniently was serving his prison time on weekends. He started having a relationship with this girl, a pretty idiotic decision really. It lasted for about two months until the husband finds out and calls up Kevin's family and Kevin gets pissed off and threatens the guy when he arrives at the station that day. It was all caught on camera and it basically cost Kevin his job, though he got off the hook by resigning so the sheriff didn't put anything on his record. From there Kevin got into government contracting and was tasked with head of security of some place in the Middle East. This was at the time when I was having that crisis of conscience I mentioned before and I needed to figure my life out. I got out of the instructor position and headed back to San Diego. At that point I started emailing back and forth with Kevin. This was probably around 2003 I want to say. Kevin had been stationed in Mosul at the time with KBR (Kellogg Brown & Root) because of his military background. At one point during our conversing Kevin told me to get my ass over there. Kevin was at a pretty low point in his life and career because of that whole affair and so I decided to join him out there. I got out to Mosul initially with the same contractor as Kevin, KBR, for about 3 months.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Where exactly were you when you worked for KBR?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

We first landed in Kuwait and then took a military flight over to Ali Al Salem [?],<sup>1</sup> from there I flew to Baghdad. We landed using a combat landing where you take a sharp spiral dive to the runway and right before you land you pull up and slam down onto the runway but keep your momentum. During the landing I see these young load masters in the plane with us and they're telling everybody how to buckle up. I had been through the same thing in South America so I thought I had it all figured out, and so I pretty much ignored what they had to say. But as we land I realize why those guys were giving us instructions; the plane wasn't stopping for us to get off, and I had my body armor off. I get on to the tarmac and I run into these big Fijian guys who guide me towards the terminal, and we're sprinting across this airport which is surrounded by hostiles taking pot-shots at us and while it was just long-range AK fire some of those rounds were goddamn close. Those guys were good. I'll admit that I peed my pants a little bit on that tarmac. Now this was just a stopping point on our way to Mosul, so our next plane does the same thing but we have to board while its rolling to take off, and if you don't make it, well, tough luck, you have to run back and wait for the next one. After that we were down at the airfield in Mosul; FOB [Forward Operating Base] Marez. I got there and believe it or not it was pouring rain. It reminded me a lot of Willamette Valley weather. Iraq got that way especially in November to

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<sup>1</sup> An airbase owned by the government of Kuwait but used extensively by the US around at this time. [Editor's note]

January. So I finally get to see Kevin in person after for who knows how long and we catch up. Kevin was senior director of security for the base and was making around \$15,000 a month, which helped pay for alimony to his now ex-wife. I was making good money too. The moment I touched down at base I was making about \$10,000 a month and I didn't really know the full scope of my job there either. All they had said was security but I didn't really know what that meant. As private contractors were sitting in the Middle East not attached to the military at all, really doing our own thing. Kevin had his own private single white trailer, which doesn't sound like much here but over there you have your own space, your own living room, bedroom, hot water shower, washer and dryer, and so on.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*Did that garner any animosity between you guys and the Army?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Kevin didn't care. He was king on the base. He didn't give a shit. Now every military group you talk to will probably tell you that they wanted to stab each and every one of us in the throat because we were private security contractors. All of us, though, at sometime had been former military. I say give it ten years and in the next big war all those guys that were pissed off at us will be contracting during that war and so on. That's just the way it works. I'll never forget this one aspect of my time in Mosul though, which centered around the north end of the base, where the north gate was that led out to probably the biggest mosque in Mosul and every Friday

afternoon or throughout the week, sometimes at night, people would come out and start taking pop-shots at the base. We couldn't engage them because it was a religious place. During one of those nights Kevin's got these Cuban cigars and cold beer and we start wondering how the fuck we got here all the way from South America to now. I think that's when I realized how lucky us military guys had it at the beginning of this Global War on Terror. For military guys who didn't have a family or a job and were down on their luck, this new war on terror was a money train and a lot of guys like me and Kevin jumped on it. For me it was such a great opportunity because I didn't have any attachments I didn't have to worry about anybody but myself. The only reason I'm in college right now and finishing up a degree is because I promised my parents I would and if my experience and that degree doesn't get me anywhere, I would still be as open and willing to do contract work as I was back then. In fact, with that degree I could get paid even more if I wanted. One year as a contractor with that resume and a degree allowing me to get administrative and other higher-end work, I would be making around \$250,000. Even high-end surgeons don't get paid that much in a year. I know that sounds really arrogant but that's the job and I don't really have a problem with that. If you're paying me that much money, I'll go fight whoever. For that kind of money, who wouldn't you kill?

**Gavin Hahn:**

*I guess this would be the right time to ask my closing question.*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yeah, go for it.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*So knowing and having all those experiences. Would you do it again? Would you enlist in the Army again? If you could go back would you make that decision again?*

**Ray Sizemore:**

Yes. I probably would have forced the Marine Corps a little bit more. At the end of my career, I was the senior screening officer (GS15) with the Department of Defense for Naval Special Warfare and MARSOC Marines. At the end of my career I felt a closer attachment with Marines than the Army, not only because of my family history. Even though I was Army through and through I always felt that same war fighter mentality that you usually find more in Marines. That sounds so cheesy but that's the only way I can describe it. That mentality is just instilled and I find it in almost every Marine that I have met and I love it. You meet Army people and some of them are hard chargers, some are nice guys, some are funny guys, some just don't give a shit. You get a pretty wide variety. In the Marine Corps everyone of those guys are hard charging sons of bitches and I love that type of soldier, that type of mentality. I associate with that mentality a lot. It helps me appreciate them even though I joined the Army. So going back I would have forced the Marine Corps issue with my old man a bit more than I did. That being said, it was pretty fucking cool being a Ranger. There are a lot of guys that can say that they're a Marine, or a soldier, or a sailor, or an airman, a lot of guys can say they have a Ranger tab, but

there are not a lot of us who can say they're a true Ranger. I know I'm getting all choked up here ... and even though I never got a CIB or a CAB, I get choked up, not from the memories of what I have done, but because I am so proud and sometimes I also feel like I haven't done shit. And there are so many young men right now with their tan Ranger berets (changed in '06), man do those guys make the 75th look fucking hard charging, going through what they have over these past ten years. They really impress me. They have taken the 75<sup>th</sup> to a whole new level. When I puff my chest at having been part of the 75<sup>th</sup> I feel proud but also know that I can't measure up to the level those guys have raised the 75<sup>th</sup> to. I'm proud of them and what they've done, but I had no part of that. That is their accomplishment and I don't want to piggyback on their legacy and their success. These young men taking part in the Global War on Terror, these hard chargers, their battles are their own and they will live in infamy; they'll be documented in the history books. But I'm not that Ranger. I may be that contractor but I'm not that Ranger. Some people look at me in confusion because I make it such a point to draw such a distinction between me and those guys. I know what contractors are, just like you and I know what advisors were in Vietnam. Even back then contractors were hired to do the job indigenous security forces weren't able to do. So when I sold my soul to the Devil and I went contractor and worked for KBR and Blackwater, I have no illusions as to what I was really doing there. I was no longer fighting for operational glory. I was at that moment fighting for "Operation Raise Paycheck." What I did from that moment on was for my own gain. There was a war, a capitalistic opportunity, and I and many other can beat our chests and wave the flag about it but there's not a one of us who one on one, like we're sitting right now, who would ever tell you what we did was for something greater than ourselves. When I joined Blackwater, I was with Raven 1-5. Another team, Raven 22, is currently incarcerated, which gives you an idea about what Raven teams did and we knew what

we were doing quite well ourselves, but that was the world we were given. It was after I went Raven teams and I got home and went to see my father that I looked him in the eye and got all teary-eyed. My Dad hugs me and said, "I know it hurts. But you got keep your head about you. You got to keep your rifle down ranger." What he meant was: keep charging, stay forward, and get your ass home safe. But I wasn't crying for that reason, I was crying because I had taken the flag off my sleeve and I was no longer doing those things for country for but corporate America.

**Gavin Hahn:**

*I think that's a good place to end things. So since this got deleted earlier I'm just gonna document that this is: Gavin Hahn conducting the interview for the University of Oregon Veterans Oral History Project and I was interviewing Ray Sizemore.*