

PREFACE

February 4, 2014

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: 54 minutes, 29 seconds (54:29)

Interviewee: Joshua Hunsley

Interviewers: Ethan Bays and Ross Beam

Ross Beam: My name is Ross Beam. It's Tuesday, February 4.

Ethan Bays: Ethan Bays.

Beam: And we're here interviewing Joshua Hunsley about his service. So what was your branch of service?

Joshua Hunsley: Army National Guard.

Beam: Well what day did you join the guard?

Hunsley: My entry of service date into the Army was June 22, 2006.

Beam: Did you actually ask for a certain MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] or any ... any certain jobs in mind when you joined or was it just a spur of the moment thing?

Hunsley: I uh ... this is actually a funny story. Prior to my enlisting in the Army I had no knowledge of any military whatsoever despite the fact that I come from a pretty strong based military family. So I met with the Army National Guard recruiter and I asked him what I could do in the Army and he said that based on my scores on the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] test they would tell me what I can and can't do and there's no sense in asking for a job that my scores wouldn't qualify me for so he filled out my packet for me and sent me to MEPS and upon completion of the ASVAB, which I scored very well on. My scores pretty much allowed me to do anything I wanted in the military. They start my packet for enlistment and along the way I noticed my job was something called the 74D ... No idea what that is. So I asked the recruiter. I said, "What is that 74D?" He goes, "That's a chemical weapons specialist." And I said, "How many weeks of training is that?" And he says, "It's nineteen or more." I can't remember the exact date now and I remember thinking that's a long time to train and I go, "So I noticed my secondary MOS is 11B." So being ignorant I asked, "What's this 11B?" And the recruiter puffs up his chest, he says, "That's Eleven Bravo, that's for men ... " Something along those lines. And I go, "How long is that training. He says fourteen weeks. So I'm thinking fourteen weeks how bad can it be? So I chose Eleven Bravo infantryman and I signed the enlistment and headed off to Fort Benning [Georgia] a couple months later.

Beam: I was going to ask if that uh ... that 74B would've ... would've made you think a little bit because that was during the whole Iraq and ... chemical warfare and Saddam Hussein ... I'd be a bit worried.

Hunsley: It also had one of the lower ASVAB qualifications, whereas infantry has a really low one; but chemical weapons actually has a lower one than infantry I believe.

Beam: Wow

Hunsley: Which is surprising.

Bays: What more did they do to make you sign up? I think you mentioned your girlfriend did at the same time with you.

Hunsley: So my ... my girlfriend at the time, she's my wife now, she had met with an active Army recruiter and she was going to enlist in the active Army and I'd met with the National Guard recruiter and decided it wasn't for me ... and when she was ready to sign up ... told me as active Army. We'd discussed that maybe you know um ... it's not going to work out long distance, five years as an enlistment is a long time, which is what she was looking at ... and she was really interested in military police. She wanted to be a police officer for civilian side so military police would help ... help with that. So I had talked to a recruiter so I gave him her number and asked if the National Guard has military police. Me being completely ignorant of the National Guard not knowing a thing ... thinking it was an Army thing that does it just one weekend a month. So she meets with him and she says, "Well there's got to be something to hold me back from not going active." So ... I kind of round about came to the decision that maybe I was ready to take

the next step in the relationship, so we both joined the National Guard together. On June 22, 2006 we took the oath together and things worked out like that.

Beam: Was there a certain... Marker during your military career that made you take the next step to marry her or was that something that was always coming?

Hunsley: When I was sitting downrange in Fort Benning, Georgia in the worst environment of my life. I guess you start ... I guess I started to realize how much of a part of my life she was. We'd been dating for ... about a year at that point and there was, you know there was some older guys, I was twenty-one when I was in Fort Benning and there's some older guys and they're talking about their wives and how they missed their kids ... and it seemed like a good fit, you know, back in Oregon when I was in Fort Benning. I proposed marriage on our Christmas exodus and we each had to go back to basic training after that and I'd actually considered proposing before I went off to Fort Benning and she went off to Fort Leonard Wood but it just seemed cruel to propose marriage the day before she goes to Fort Leonard Wood and then have that whole like ... she was gone for like twenty-something weeks, I think hers was twenty-four total. So she'd been gone for twenty-one weeks thinking about what had just transpired, but it also gave me ... she left a month before I did, so it gave me a month to have my own time, obviously not running around but I lived with her parents at that time ... um, I got rid of my apartment when I enlisted in the Army and so I was living with her parents and it gave me some time for me with some time for my friends and I realized that uh ... my

friends were just not looking for the same things I was looking for at that time so when I went off to Fort Benning it pretty much clarified things in my life I guess ...

Beam: So some time apart just gave you some perspective.

Hunsley: Yeah

Bays: You mentioned there were really poor conditions in Fort Benning, do you want to elaborate on that at all?

Hunsley: So prior to living in Oregon, I lived in Alaska where it's humid in Alaska but it's also seventy degrees and you get to Oregon and it's a really dry place and it's like eighty, ninety, a hundred degrees sometimes. I got to Fort Benning at the end of September and it's like a hundred percent humidity and ninety degrees. So it's basically like doing jumping jacks in a sauna ... and then in the mornings it's really cold and the Army has these certain stupid guidelines where only certain uniforms are authorized for certain times so they ... when I first got to Fort Benning, I got there at about six o'clock at night after ... I had to fly to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] first thing in the morning from Oregon, and from Medford to Portland, and then I just stopped there and they flew me all the way to Atlanta, GA ... and you know I'd never really flown that much before and I get there and I'm tired and you know at the same time you're trying to look at "you know I've never been to another state," so I'm trying to look out and see what Georgia is like and I get to Fort Benning and here comes all these drill sergeants

with their, with that famous hat and I get there at about six o'clock at night and they're just like, "You guys are going to do a few things and then you guys are going to get to bed." We never went to bed that night or the next night as far as I remember and it was ... like I said it was freezing and they, as soon as they got there, they took us out of our civilian clothes and put us into these Army PTs [Physical Training] cause we didn't have any of the uniforms yet. So they put us in these standard issue PTs and it's freezing outside and then the first drill sergeant gives us our sweat pants and says, "Put these on, it looks cold out here," and the next guy comes out right behind him and makes us take them off and just makes us start doing push-ups for him for wearing an unauthorized uniform, because those sweat pants aren't authorized until the first of October and I got there on like the twenty-third of September or something like that. So there was about a week or so and every morning we'd come out and we'd go to the chow hall and you're sitting in this building and it's called 30thAG and it's in Fort Benning, it's reception battalion, so you're going there just to process in Fort Benning and you're sitting there in these big lines for chow and it's like a wind tunnel and you've got these tiny PT shorts on - you know they come barely to halfway down my thigh - and short sleeve shirts and it's just blowing at you and you're freezing. So for starters there was the weather and then uh ... there's a lot of sand in Fort Benning along with that red clay, um ... the mosquitos and then the weather is just getting colder and colder to the point to where one time it was like six degrees outside and we're doing road marches and we did a field training drill that night, so we went out they're like, "Oh, it's too cold to march," and then ... they kind of start forming us up and then it turns out, like it's starting to look an awful lot like a six-mile road march. It goes from two miles, four miles, six miles, eight miles to a final

twelve miles. So we were hoping to blow off the six-mile one and then next thing you know you're marching for six miles and a bunch of guys got in trouble for wearing cold weather gear under their ACU's [Army Combat Uniform] and stuff like that. So it was just total culture shock as far as um ... going from Oregon, which is a pretty lovely place to Fort Benning, which is the worst place on earth.

Beam: Very, very different climate. Speaking of different climates Uhm ... Did you ever deploy overseas? Go to entirely different climates?

Hunsley: Right. So I got back from Fort Benning in 2007 and the first thing that came up was that our battalion and actually our whole brigade had been tasked to deploy to tentatively Iraq in 2009 and that was around the whole time of the presidential election [fall 2008] and we were told, "Don't worry about it, it's not going to happen," and then they started doing company reformations and a new battalion commander came in. He told us, you know, "Don't worry, we're probably not going anywhere." And then fast forward to ... May of 2009, my brigade is gearing up and I leave for Fort Benning - actually Fort Stewart, Georgia, which is basically Fort Benning a couple miles north, the second worst place on earth - and I'm headed to Iraq, July of 2009 with the 41st Brigade out of Oregon. And so, you know, you go from a bunch of humidity in Georgia and we hit Kuwait at seven o'clock in the morning and it's like a hundred degrees outside and there's so much wind in Kuwait it's liking standing in a bathroom with a heat lamp on with a hair dryer blowing in your face throwing sand in the air and just like pelting you with sand. And then we spent about a week there and then we get to Iraq and we're in

southern Iraq in Tallil, near the whole Iraqi city of Ur - it's famous, it's in the Bible, it's like the home of Abraham and all of that stuff, that famous Ziggurat¹ that's there, we seen that - and it's even more, it's more dry than Kuwait but you don't notice that at first cause it's all just hot, and we get there at about late July, early August, and it's especially hot. I remember looking at a thermometer and I'm pretty sure it read up close to one hundred and forty in the shade and I'm in full gear ACU's, boots, eighty pounds of body armor, and ammo, you know. Gloves are required, you got to wear sunglasses or else you go blind. Just sitting in the sun doing traffic control on these interior gates and so that's my first part of Iraq right there, just trying to get you know ... trying not to dehydrate and dealing with hot water where you go take some water out and it you know you go get ice to try and keep your water cold and you put it down and you pick it up like a minute later and it's near boiling temperature.

Bays: Not that the whole experience wasn't interesting but did you have any particularly interesting experiences doing traffic control?

Hunsley: We had, for the most part it was pretty boring. We did an interior gate where, at this point they were doing a lot of ... they were outsourcing the work to keep soldiers from doing it, so when we first go there, there was another company doing the traffic control, and then another company came in with a different group, so they wanted some soldiers to help so ... I don't know exactly who tasked us to do it, probably the active Army commander of the base, you know, or whatever ... and when I first got there I was

¹ A famous reconstructed building in Ur [editor's note].

talking to these guys and it was all these Ugandan guys who were talking in English and it was more than I expected but then I'd get around other guys and they would only speak in their tribal dialects, so I found out that as standard all Ugandans learn English because tribal dialects are so hard to understand between villages that it's like broken English, so I spent a week doing English lessons with a Ugandan guy who signed up to learn English, and then I got swindled out of a fairly large amount of money by another one, another Ugandan guy. I was collecting world currency for my son, it sounded like a cool thing to do and I asked him if he had any Ugandan currency and he told me he had some that he could get more and I asked him how much he wanted he said he'd take twenty dollars and give me some back. I handed him a twenty dollar bill and he gave me some; I believe pocket change at this point, I think it was, and then he'd bring me back the paper money the next day to equal to twenty dollars and it turned out that night he got caught taking the plates out of his body armor and he got sent home and I never saw him again. Only he contacted me on Facebook some months later asking me to buy him a digital camera and send it to him in Uganda, so he was a bit of a, kind of a con artist a little bit, but other than that the gate guard was pretty boring. It was an interior gate and it was just to help them, I guess their pay was staged on how dangerous the gate they were working on was and an interior gate like that ... so there's a gate to keep people from the outside of the base, so there was another gate just inside of that that let them in that the Army worked, and then there was another gate that separated that Army from the Air Force, so those interior gates, like that they weren't as dangerous so you had people who were new at their job who didn't really know what they were doing. They were basically like privates and then the higher command guys who'd been doing it longer had more experience in,

you know, they were the farther out gates and were outright upper leadership. So it was a pretty overall pretty boring gate.

Beam: I heard a couple countries from the coalition named and a couple of branches of the American forces named. Did you ever have any issues with people from other countries or from your own country just because of the difference in service.

Hunsley: There was a bunch of problems with the Ugandans while we were there. Some attacks, some violent attacks, some stuff that you know you probably shouldn't air on the camera involving a brick. It was ... we were told not to ... not to, just not trust them, but don't ever, the general rule is you never travel by yourself in the military, you always carry a battle buddy, and you generally avoided large groupings of people with the, that whole mob mentality and we never ... we just avoided that stuff in general. We want to ... you know you never want to find yourself on the wrong end of being on a dark alley in the back roads of Iraq with, you know, a group of anybody, let alone people from a foreign country who don't share your ideals on life. So, yes, there were times in short.

Beam: I know for myself in the Navy we got a lot of flack from Marines. I was just wondering if Army and National Guard had some of the same issues.

Hunsley: Well like I said the Air Force was generally grouped away from the Army, there was a gate there that we weren't allowed in and if I went towards it one time and I was turned away pretty quickly. There was no Marine station in Tallil that I know of. I

dealt with some later when I was leaving Iraq and they were pretty smug being Marines and I was pretty quick with the finger and of course I got a lot of flack for being National Guard ... the Military Police would give us a hard time, but you know when you're in Iraq, what's the big deal? Who cares who's National Guard and who's not, you know? We're all in Iraq. As a whole we weren't the guys trapped on the FOB. At first we were, you know, our company had tasked outside the gates and we did our job and just another thing.

Bays: So this is a little off topic but while you were in Iraq what were your feelings about our participation in the war.

Hunsley: Before we deployed, when we were forced to, which was the mobilization part we met with some Iraqis and he told us his story about why he supported it and when you see that and you see that there are people there who did need the U.S. help and there were guys who wanted it, then it's hard not to feel like you're doing something good. I supported it. Obviously I joined the military so I kind of lost the right to not feel ... who cares what my opinion is? I signed a paper. You get told that everyday. Have a conscience? Who cares? You've got your name on a piece of paper. In general I felt I was there at a later part of the war so the violence had gone down a lot. America had drawn back quite a bit. We weren't allowed to go through Baghdad anymore. Baghdad was owned by the Iraqis, the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police had stepped up their game a bit. They were actually holding patrols, holding checkpoints, they were doing their job. So at that point it wasn't just, you know, come save us while we wallow in it. They were

stepping up; they were doing their part as well. It was a lot better to see then as opposed to somebody who was there in 2004 like some of my friends, who it was just everybody against everybody in a full on brawl. Nobody knows what's right or wrong. Cause nobody was doing their part, it's just America in there flexing guns but who are they flexing against? Because the same guys they helped yesterday are planting bombs today. So when I was there it was more clear cut there was sides and there was ... at that point America was actually like, "We're leaving, we're just stepping out slowly." It was a different war than it was at the beginning.

Beam: Being at the latter stages of the war ... what was it like being married and deployed at the same time. I mean you ... what was your wife doing while you were there and what were your thoughts on being in combat?

Hunsley: So she was in the Army also and she ... first thing I had to do was sign what they call ... basically I had to sign this paperwork to say if my wife got deployed, there's somebody to take care of my kids, so I was kind of frustrated that ... you know, according to the Army my wife was a soldier first and a wife second ... a mother and wife second. So I had to sign away all this paperwork that basically said that if something happened to my wife she got deployed that I wouldn't get to come home, so that was kind of ... I didn't agree with that altogether and when I told them I wasn't going to sign it, the Army didn't like that very much and they threatened legal action against me, which was all fluff, and when I was over there ... when I first got there my wife went and she did a class. She was an MP out of Salem and she didn't like driving from Medford up to Salem

which was about a three hour drive so she ... she did a reclassification into supply so she could drill right there at home about five minutes from where we lived. So for the first month I was there she was doing that in, I think, Fort Know [?] or something like that and then after that you know she ... she didn't understand that there was ... during the convoy phase of my deployment, there were days on end I couldn't talk. I obviously couldn't call her and tell her, "Hey I'm driving from Tallil up to Baghdad, I'm going to be gone for up to three days I might ... I can't call you on there, I might be able to so."

Beam: Operational Security

Hunsley: Yeah, so ... I think she understood a little bit better. She never really voiced too much frustration with it except for when I was coming back on leave. I'd been in America and I stumbled back and I was in Kuwait and my flight in Kuwait kept getting stuck because when I first went on leave to come home, there was just so much inclement weather in Iraq, it was too hot for the Air Force to fly. So my leave day kept getting pushed back farther and farther, so everyday they weren't flying, the guys were just stacking up at Ali Al Saleem Air Base [Kuwait] trying to come in or out of country. So by the time I came back fifteen days later they were still so stacked up, behind the eight ball basically, that I was in Ali Al Saleem for ... I think six days sitting in Kuwait, doing less than nothing cause at that point you get up in the morning, you check the manifest, they do a roll call, and if your name's on the manifest and you're not there for roll call, you get pushed back and you're looking at a UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] for missing your flight. So you can't just blow off these meetings - there was two a day. I

had to go through two-a-day for two weeks, for like six days or something and Kuwait's beyond boring, and then you get back to Iraq and she's like, "Well, now I gotta worry again," and at this point I'm off convoys and I'm working in an air-conditioned office building doing ... various reports and pretty ... I guess a paper cut was my biggest threat at that point. So she was pretty understanding of it all.

Beam: It always ... it was always intriguing to me ... wondering what it was like for families during deployments, because, I mean, I could kind of see it but I just wanted to hear something about it from someone who had been there and done it.

Hunsley: On that I'd say the hardest part wasn't so much talking to my wife. The hard part was I had a son about six months old before I deployed so ... he was daddy's little boy and we had Skype when I got there and when I finally got in my housing, and when I got the internet in my room, which was beyond over-priced I think it was ... way more expensive than it should have been. I was able to get my son on Skype and he's sitting with his uncle, my wife's younger brother, and he keeps reaching at the screen trying to figure out why he can't reach out and grab me ... so that was ... that was probably the hardest part watching my son stare at me while he fell asleep on my brother-in-law's lap, that was probably the hardest part ... but other than that, you know, kids are the hard part; wives, they should understand you know.

Beam: I'm not familiar with the, exactly what benefits you received but since you were ... you were in the service and your wife was as well does your son get great college benefits and all or ...?

Hunsley: That's something I'm actually not sure about. I've used my G.I. Bill for my own education so far. So my plan is that even if the Army or the VA isn't there to bail him out later in college, I can use these benefits myself to get an education I can afford to get a good job to send him through college myself. I do know that I qualify for a house loan and all this stuff. Going through the VA I do have some healthcare options from various Iraq War ailments. So being National Guard there isn't just that, that advisor just right on site, I'd have to actually put up some leg work to find out the benefits and that's something I'm not great about doing, kind of a ... going through the smaller channels right now mostly just getting my education right now taking care of the smaller health issues.

Bays: When you did transition from your service to your education was there like a middle period when you worked.

Hunsley: Prior to my deployment I was working at a pretty dead end job at a Taco Bell² and it just wasn't adding up to what I wanted to do. I was, I kept putting off school to work and then about January, 2009, I decided that Taco Bell just wasn't in my long term plans and I quit Taco Bell on New Year's Eve actually, as a manager, I handed the boss

² Fast-food chain restaurant.

my keys and said for various reasons I'm quitting, have a good life and I started taking about ... as many classes as I could handle and I got my associate degree right when I got back. I got back in 2010, midway through a term, so I started out spring term I think ... yeah. So spring term I started taking about sixteen-to-eighteen credits a term and I finished up my associate at the end of 2011, I think, and then I came here to U of Oregon after that, and then you know it's different taking twelve credits at a university as compared to eighteen credits at a junior college, so here I'm at about twelve credits because it was easier then ... You know I was getting so many benefits at first. I was getting unemployment, so it was easier then than it is now.

Beam: So you did college before you deployed and after?

Hunsley: Well with the National Guard you get the tuition assistance. So they changed it now so it's not as fruitful but basically what happened is, if you signed up for six years, you got tuition assistance and then, if you got above a fifty on your ASVAB score and signed a six-year contract, you'd get \$300 GI Bill prior to deployment and then you'd get an extra two hundred if you got above fifty, so I was getting all my classes paid for because you get I think \$4500 a year tuition assistance, it used to be. So prior to deployment I could just ... the Army would pay for all my classes outright and I'd get about \$500 dollars a month of cash in my pocket and that was like that up until just this summer, they took it away and with the budget crisis they took away the tuition assistance and when that happened, I had to start using my other forms of GI Bill I had accrued and you can't just transition back and forth. So I was having \$4,500 a year to

sixty percent of my college paid for by the GI Bill, so I ended up floating about forty-five percent to financial aid and student loans and then they actually refined the student tuition assistance to various ... more rigorous standards so it was less fruitful even if I hadn't done this, so it was easier during a time of war. Now it's ... you know the war is officially over, they're not trying to trap people, and there's no need to ... you know that whole bait and switch thing.

Beam: Yeah, bait and switch ... they got me.

Bays: Is your service complete at this point?

Hunsley: Actually my initial contract ended in June 21, 2012. Which you know had been the six years that I had been counting down on my fingers since the day I joined and I told myself I wasn't going to re-enlist and, every contract in the military is an eight-year contract by default and there was that two years of inactive ready reserve that, you know, they do have that stipulation you can be called up by the needs of the Army and being an 11B with a security clearance and all this stuff there's chances that I could be called up because everybody needs a ride from them and I knew Afghanistan was heating up. So when my six years was completed, I had those two years left. I talked to my chain of command and then I told them I would do two additional years of drilling status to be placed in with my guys so I couldn't be deployed except for with them unless I wanted to and I was willing to go through the channels to get that done. So I signed that about eighteen months ago, so my contract ends this time on June 21 of this year [2014] and at

this point they are looking at an Afghanistan deployment in July of 2014. The day after I would get out basically they're putting their boots back on and heading back over to Afghanistan. So I'd talked with my wife about it, maybe that could be something that I want to do. Go see another country, take all the different avenues, a different mission. But it's not something I'm obligated to do and it's not something I have to do.

It's kind of weird being my choice because I remember when I was deploying there was all the guys, they separate what they called the forward and the rear. The forward guys are the guys leaving home to go do the combat tour and the rears are the guys staying back and seeing the guys staying back talking about, are they going to go or not deciding? It was such a strange concept to actually choose to go on a deployment.

Obviously I chose to go by enlisting but it wasn't something I sat there and begged to go on. They pulled me in their offices and the commander asked me if I'm going to go and I at that point the best answer I could give him was that I didn't know, because I'd been back and forth on it so many times. You don't want to see your guys, I've been training with these guys for four years at this point. I think we got back to the tents about four years I've been with these same guys and now they - my whole team - got out at one time and the team leader and the two guys next to me all re-enlisted at the same time for a year and I was one out of four to say that I wasn't going to go and at the same time with these guys. I'd been through a lot I'd actually been their team leader for several months, some pretty intense training, and these two guys were actually the best soldiers that I know: they made me look so good I actually got an impact award in front of my entire company where a sergeant major gave me the old Marine Ka-Bar [Military knife] inscribed with

my battalion's crest and our company motto and stuff like that, which is a pretty exclusive honor, you only give out about three in a whole year and I was one of three at company level. So I love these guys. But do I love them more than I love my family? It's like who needs me more: These guys who are going to a foreign country? Or my kids who are hanging out at home going through the perils of kindergarten and diaper training. It's a pretty intense decision and it's a decision I make about twenty-five times an hour. I literally picked up my phone to call my commander more than once to tell him I'm willing to go. So I don't know where I'm going to go with that, I'll let you know when I make that decision. I've made it three times during this conversation alone. It's something I've really struggled with.

Bays: And with college would it pay off all your loans if you re-enlisted?

Hunsley: As far as the college thing, I would be, I'm scheduled to graduate with my bachelors [degree] after the fall term of 2014, so leaving July of 2014, I'd have to push back my college for a year. It would be nice to have all that money in hand provided I could not buy every trinket overseas as a memento of what I've came and saw, like I did last time. The college adds a different aspect to it. Am I willing to push back graduation for a year? Then I'd have to push back graduate school for a whole year and it all, it all adds up kind of differently. The money aspect is obviously pretty good. Going from unemployed to having a job ... just being a student to being a soldier, it's just two totally different aspects of my life that don't always agree and this is one case where they really, really butt heads where I want to just push through and I get my bachelors done so I can

start graduate school, but pushing back a year for this deployment wouldn't be the end of the world. So it's just a real tough decision you know there is no real clear cut choice on ...

Bays: So getting back to your service a little bit, what did you feel like your reception was coming home and how was ... getting re-oriented with the United States as a ... you know just living back here after you returned from Iraq?

Hunsley: When we got back to America we flew all the way from ... to Fort Lewis,³ which is up in Tacoma, Washington, and we had to be up there for, I think ten to fourteen to fifteen days. Which is the longest fifteen days of your life when you're so close to being home but you can't go and ... you can't have your wives come in but of course this is the Army so the rules don't apply for everyone. The upper command, their wives are coming and going, even some lower guys who had been stationed up in Fort Lewis as a part of the National Guard, their wives are coming and going. So we had to do a bunch of out processing stuff there and we were told we're coming home on this day and we were going to fly home and then at about ten o'clock the night before we were supposed to come home ... we all gather up and they said, "You need to get your stuff ready we're leaving right now," the chain of command at the battalion level decided that it's not worth the cost to fly you home, we're just going to drive because the rest of the brigade is stationed up in northern Oregon and they're going to drive home, so we're going to drive home. Well, they're driving to Portland and driving to Medford is about four to five

³ Now Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

hours or longer because you're taking these big Greyhound buses basically. So instead of flying home at noon the next day we drove home for a twelve-hour drive from Fort Lewis, so by the time you get there, you know, we drove overnight, I'm tired, and I got stuck on the bus behind this sergeant major who ... he took up his own area and he kept reclining, and he's a short guy, but he kept reclining his seat right into my knees. How do you look forward and say, "Hey, Sergeant Major, you're crushing my fucking legs," you know? He doesn't care. Big moustache way out of regulation, wearing sunglasses indoors, guy does what he wants. So after having my legs crushed all day I had to march from the Medford Armory to the parade field, which is about two miles through the city square and you're ... there's just reporters everywhere and it's a big deal. The battalion coming back was a big deal for them and then you've got to sit there in this formation while you're looking ... you know, you're at attention so you can't move your head but your looking left and right with your eyes to see if you can see your wife or your kids or somebody you know, because you haven't seen them in a year and then every guy who's ever did anything in the Oregon National Guard is there to tell you how proud he is of you. We met with, I think, the Senator ... again; the Governor ... again; the Lieutenant General ... again. And I'm just thinking, "Shut the fuck up, I want to go home," and I just marched two miles. I just did a deployment. I just want to go home and eat some food that hasn't been cooked by god knows who.

Beam: Everyone you didn't know wants to congratulate you and you don't get to talk to the ones you know.

Hunsley: In looking back I see why the parade was a big deal. It was hard for Oregon to shed 4500 soldiers. Those are guys ... husbands, wives, employees, bosses. It was hard for the state to lose those guys too but at the same time you know, the parade isn't for the soldiers, it's for the families, and in retrospect you're glad the parade was there and I've got pictures of it now where everybody's so proud and, you know, my wife's grandfather, he's a Navy veteran, he's sitting there waving an American flag on the side. All the veterans lining the streets. I wasn't too happy about it at the time. I was thirsty, I just got off a bus, I'm pretty sure my kneecap is broken cause the sergeant major crushed it ... and I just wanted to go home ... and then I had to go get back in line where ... they had all these coins they give out to commemorate your service and there's just, quote unquote, so important for them to give it to you, but they don't even give it to you on their own, they give you just a bag, which is some private handing me a bag of coins from a commander. I don't know who the private is, I think he's from my company but I'm not quite sure. I don't care who he is but I try to get out of the line and my commander is like, "You've got to get back in line there Specialist Hunsley," and I'm like, "I can see my family from here and you're holding me back. I'm about to choke you." So that was my first like six hours home was all just this parade and it was the same thing with us leaving. There was this parade for us to go; they gave us one in Medford, Central Point, and they gave us one in Georgia for the same thing. It was like these are the last hours with my family and I've got to listen to the commander of the 4th Infantry Division talk about what it's like watching the National Guard on his post. I don't care what it's like for you. This isn't your deployment, you know; you're some two-star general whose idea of a deployment is, you know, sitting in this air-conditioned building

knowing his troops are deployed in Iraq and he's sitting somewhere else ... at that point I'm glad to be home and I'm glad they're all glad I'm back but I'm not back, yet I'm still on orders until you stop talking and that speech probably lasted twelve years, I think. He never shut up, being where we were at, they had the microphones set up in the position where ... the microphones were giving feedback on one side and there were six microphones and between being in the paradigm between the two microphones and the speakers it was just hitting with a reverb back and forth to the soldiers, so we had no idea what they were saying, at least I didn't, and I've asked several other guys in that formation, we had no idea what they were saying. There would be applause and I'm like I have no idea what you're saying and every clap that I'm thinking this speech is over and then they started out introducing a colonel, and then a one-star general, and then the old commander, and then the governor and it lasted forever.

Beam: One of the things I felt in the military it's always terrible at the time when you get out, get back and then it doesn't seem so bad.

Hunsley: Yeah, and that's really where, you know, coming out of Iraq I knew I was going to be done after six years. I didn't have any fun in Iraq and now you get around a bunch of veterans, they've all got these crazy stories and everything is so combat, deployment. They think, "Oh bombs going off, people getting shot, limbs ..." but in reality you're thinking like the time you're with your buddies and the dude seized and shit his pants or something, you know, and those are the stories that stick with you, those are the stories you want to share but nobody wants to hear that stuff, you know. Or the

time I threw a Seven-Up [soda] and it spilled all over and he stole my clothes in the shower. Those are what stick with you but nobody wants to hear that.

Bays: Is there anything you would want to share about any of your experiences in Iraq?

Hunsley: Iraq for me was pretty low ... it was pretty low speed, low drag. I showed up, I just did what I was told, I wasn't looking to get a Medal of Honor [the highest possible military award]. I didn't go over to Iraq looking for the awards, I didn't want a Purple Heart [wounded in combat], I didn't want ... you know I sure as hell didn't want a Medal of Honor, and a lot of my guys they were over there hoping they would get the Combat Infantry Badge, which you get for taking fire and returning fire in a combat environment, and that's the issues I think everybody had as an 11B or 11C any eleven series basically, that was a big aspiration and I went over there hoping, I just hoped everybody we bring over there comes back with us. We were pretty lucky. We lost a pretty minimal amount to war casualties, lost a couple to complacency. Couple guys would turn an ankle here, you know, we had a guy jump off the back of a vehicle hit at a garrison on base and just turned his knee and blew out his knee. Some stuff like that happened, now that's unavoidable, those are just accidents, but the mission itself was pretty ... if you stay focused and not complacent, you're going to suffer a lot less loss and we were pretty lucky. I'd say we were more trained in that we trained pretty well for, we had pretty good leadership. You go on over and then that was my first half and then we lost some guys, so they noticed my qualifications and I got stuck in an office building about twelve-to-fourteen hours a day seven days a week for the last five months of the deployment, which

was probably the worst part about it because at that point you're running on Rip-It's [Energy Drink in the Persian Gulf], you know, those little six ounce cans of fury. And you're drinking about twelve of those a night and then trying to sleep at the end of the day, because you can't sleep you get back to your barracks and your eyes just can't stay closed. So at that point as far as Iraq itself ... had a lot of low ... basically boring stuff. You've got to go tell the first sergeant about something that happened so the highlight of my evening was just, I had to go tell my first sergeant about any little thing that happened, you know, "Hey, third squad's got a flat tire out on Route 10." And you've got to go bang on his door and here comes this half naked first sergeant. And the funniest thing was my commander went on leave so the company's executive officer takes over as acting commander, so I had to go knock on his door and ask him questions and give him what's going on and he knew what was going on and he knew this was going to happen, it happened every night and he opens the door and the dudes buck naked, like, "Sir, did you know I was coming by"? He was like, "I hoped you wouldn't," and I was like, "So you didn't put on pants before you went to bed?" So he actually had to have his roommate help him open the door because he was laying in bed completely naked and I'm like, "Well, you've got to come with me," so he was like, "You've got to shut the door first." He was totally embarrassed so I'm like, "What's wrong, sir?" He goes, "I'm not wearing pants."

Iraq was basically pretty low speed it wasn't what ... what people hoped for. Trained as 11B's, the whole brigade of 11B's, what we trained for was ... you know, kicking in doors, the original invasion stuff, and as far as being National Guard I trained in basic

training with active Army guys, and we were all held to the same standard, and then you get to National Guard and it's a little bit lower speed. You know I'm a civilian twenty-nine days out of the month of thirty days out of the month. Depending on how long the drill was. Then as we started getting more and more ramped up I started spending so much time in uniform, four- or five-day drills so like three-week annual training five-day drills, another annual training. We had two three-week annual trainings in a six-month period or something like that. So at that point ... you know, I spent almost half my time in uniform as opposed to like the twelfth that I was supposed to spend or something like that. Iraq was ... it came and it went and then at the end of it you were like, "Well, that wasn't so bad," you know. Never mind the ... anything that went on after that. You come back and I'm looking back and I'm like, "Well, maybe Iraq wasn't so bad. Do I want to stay now?" And some people stayed back and some people came home with us and we had a few, we had actually one guy, he stayed and did a final three tours of Iraq consecutively. He was there when Iraq opened, he came in with the Oregon Guard with 1st Cav [Cavalry] on the invasion, and then he actually closed Iraq twelve years later or something.

Bays: Pretty weird.

Beam: You're talking about the heat and the time and just all that ... I remember you saying that with eighty pounds of gear and one hundred forty degree weather, how much weight did you lose during that year?

Hunsley: A lot of what mobilization is, is getting us fat National Guard guys in shape. Obviously, I don't hold the highest PT standard.⁴ So when I got out of Fort Benning, Georgia, I was like 190 pounds; when I started my deployment I was 225 pounds or so, and the muscle mass did not disperse the same. My squad leader had this big thing about PT, he's active duty guy out of Korea and Fort Lewis, big, big PT guy. He's a big PT stud. So we spent all our time running and everyone else they'd be like, a PT for the day, and then meet back at noon or whatever for classes. Second Platoon Third Squad they'd go stretch. Second squad would go do push-ups, sit-ups improvement. We'd go get our IOTV [Improved Outer Tactical Vest] body armor on and do a twelve-mile run, three miles to the active Army base and back, and when you're running the active Army knows you're there, and they see these idiots running in PT's with body armor on, they're like, "Idiot", but in reality we were pretty well prepared for ... what we were coming into. Obviously, they run everyday and we don't so we get there and we're actually in shape and it kind of showed as the deployment went on. So when I came home on leave from Iraq I was at 211 pounds, which is the thinnest I'd been since basic training four years earlier. Then after they put me in the office ... the original stipulation was that I would go from First Platoon or Second Platoon to Headquarters Platoon as long as I was still available for my squad leader to work out, but after working for twelve hours everyday I was basically like this is basically not feasible for me to lose this much sleep to go work out, I'll get to the gym on my own time, and then as the months started going by the ... the tempo started ramping up a little bit where it got to the point where contact was expected, it went from a convoy there and back where the worst that could happen was a

⁴ Josh is generously sized [editor's note].

flat tire to ... a convoy there and back was this small engagement, there was mortar fire at the base where we've got guys at, so my job started to get a little more intense. So I was able to go to the gym a little less, so I came back at about the same weight I left at, which, you know, it's a one-for-one exchange. Obviously the leadership was like, "We'd like to see you coming back in better shape," and I'm like, "I'd like a six-hour shift with time to go to the gym," but you know I'm working twelve to fourteens, you know, or we could use another guy and you could work ten hours a day, five days a week or something, and I'll go to the gym, I'll kill myself in the gym. It wasn't in their plans so you take what you can get.

Beam: Probably just happy coming back.

Hunsley: Yeah.

Bays: I think that covers it.

Beam: Well we covered all the bases. Anything else you want to add?

Hunsley: You know, the point of this project for a lot of people, I guess, is that everybody thinks that a war is all about bombs and guts and everything. As far as the National Guard has made a giant impact in my life, like I said I came from a military family without really knowing it, so once I got back I got to meet some of my uncles and

my sisters didn't know it, they started showing me this film called We Were Soldiers⁵ and it felt like ... So at the end of it, it had taken place in Fort Benning because the story starts in Fort Benning with the 1st Cav and 7th Cav is coming out of, and they're like, "Oh, do you recognize this place?" Well, it turns out that my great uncles were actually a part of that 7th Cavalry that deployed out of Fort Benning and whatever. So I got to meet that guy later. Him and his brother are actually closer than Vietnam and just something as small as serving one weekend of the month part time opened up all these different doors in my life. I got to meet my, I got to really meet my ... him this last summer after our annual training and in like thirty-five years or whatever, he hasn't talked about what happened in Vietnam, and I just come out of annual training covered in the moon dust from downfield, I'm pretty sure I still smelled, I hadn't got to shower, I got back from it, and went straight to the family reunion and this guy starts telling me about Vietnam. He hadn't talked about it in thirty-five years, as far as I know some minor stuff here and there, but he's telling me the difference between, you know, engagements with the Vietcong and I just realized, I don't hold a candle to what this guy has to share and his brother is Special Forces who did five total years in Vietnam and ... it's just weird how big of an impact one weekend of a month can have on your life and it's not always glamorous. It seems like every, every time the snow falls they're like, "Let's get in the mountains and have drill." My current admin. [administration] guy, he's from 10th Mountain in Fort Drum, New York, where it snows a lot, so they love snow and every time the weather's nice and I want to go camping, I've got drill. So it can be a bit of a sacrifice and sometimes it also can be ... it's not the biggest sacrifice but, you know,

⁵ A movie (2002) that depicts the Battle of Ia Drang in Vietnam, 1965.

sometimes when you want to go swimming and you're in that full-body armor, you're like, "Man this sucks," and then next thing you know you're part of a parade where the whole city is screaming your name ... theoretically, and it's a big difference just in life in general. Obviously, I joined in a time of war so I should have expected to be deployed but I really had no concept of what was going on. I knew once I signed that contract I was like, "I'm probably going to end up in Iraq about this," and guys are telling me, "Oh, you're part of the National Guard? Those guys, they never deploy. The National Guard is all ice chests and beer and barbecues," and I'm like, "This doesn't sound so bad, you know." And I get to Fort Benning and you train with the National Guard, the active Army, and the reserves and they're all asking you, "Where you going?" And I'm like National Guard and they call us all nasty girls and I'm like, "Whatever," you know, and the senior drill sergeant who's sort of a first class E-7 [Enlisted Rank] is like, "You need to leave those guys alone because it's all fun and games until the guy who shows up to rescue your ass from the ditch is National Guard." So there's that nasty girl who's Mr. Nasty Girl, so it's kind of nice to have a guy with that many combat tours, pretty sure he has more medals than Jesus sticking up for me, and it all comes around because we got to go to the PX [Military Exchange] for the first time on our own we got to march down there, we're finally less than nothing, we're almost at the point of being privates at that point, and we got to walk down to the PX, and we're supposed to be in line getting haircuts, so naturally we're making phone calls and downing sodas and eating candy like we're going to die and these guys come back with an Army Times and it's got all the units that are deploying and it's got Fort Carson and Fort Drum, which deploys like every other day and Fort Lewis, and it's a big mystery about where you're going unless you get

it in your contract in the active Army you don't know where you're going, so these guys are all finding out where they're going and there these guys know on the spot they're going to Iraq. Like you're going to go home, get to your unit, then you're going to go meet them and go straight over. So when they got to me the guy kind of just gets to me, snickers, and walks off and asks, "Where are you going?" And I'm like, "I'm going home." The armory guys who have been razzing me for like fourteen weeks are like, "That's so lucky," and I'm like, "Yeah, well, yay me!" I didn't really keep up to much with those guys but we did see a few of the guys we went to basic training with in Iraq. Ironically they were the other National Guard guys from other states' National Guard. That made Fort Benning a lot of fun ... actually I wouldn't describe Fort Benning as fun ever. It was one of those things were you go over and think I could probably do that again and I looked probably the best I've looked since high school, just all that running. Of course I got in more trouble than most in Fort Benning. I was kind of a victim of my own mouth at times, I had a problem with calling drill sergeants, "Sir." In Oregon, you say, "Yes sir; no sir," to every person and you get to the Army and each term has this specific meaning. You can't just call somebody dude after that.

Beam: You get that whole, "Don't call me Sir. I work for a living."

Hunsley: Yeah, I got that a lot actually. I didn't understand that community. I watched a lot of movies and the Marines, everybody called you, "Sir," and everybody called you "Sir yes Sir." "Where did you learn that," you know? "What are you retarded?" and I'm like, "What did I do wrong"? It was one of those only so much running you can do before

you learn your lesson and the funniest thing that happened in Fort Benning was, we were doing these marching movements, and we went down and did some training and when we went back marching movements and we went down and did some training and on the way back we were supposed to form up and we start marching and to this day I swear the guy called a half left face ... or a column left march, so which is everybody turns left and starts marching, so I went left, the guy beside me went straight and the two guys beside him went to the right. So between four guys we all went four different directions and I turn around to these guys and I'm like, "Are you guy's stupid or something?" In the full battle rattle, plates, hat, we didn't have magazines full of ammo, so he was like, "I want you to start running in place." So he gets the company all formed back up and he starts running around the platoon. So I'm running circles around the platoon the whole way back to the barracks. I think it was over three and a half miles and it's not all just clear road we're going through trails and stuff, you know the little private trails were you sneak through stuff and I'm running around the whole way and he gets back and says, "Did you learn your lesson?" And I was like, "I don't know what lesson I was supposed to learn but I absolutely learned a lesson: I would never do it again." And that actually wasn't the truth. I did it again at some other point. I'm not sure what I did but I had the same punishment. That's Fort Benning.

Beam: Thinking about the link between past service and present service. We were all in the defense of our country, so we all get along. I think that's pretty cool. It's always been special to me. Think that about wraps it up for us.