

PREFACE

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Outside The Buzz coffee shop, University of Oregon campus

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: 52 minutes

Interviewee: Thomas [Tadhg] Simmons

Interviewers: John Shadell and Ross Beam

John: My name is John Shadell.

Ross: And I'm Ross Beam.

John: And could you say your name?

Tom: My name is Thomas Simmons.

John: And we are interviewing Thomas Simmons today, at the EMU next to The Buzz.

Tom: I do prefer, however, that you call me Tadhg. Because Thomas is my Dad's name, it just always feels weird being called Thomas.

Ross: Alright.

John: So you want to be called Tadhg.

Ross: Tadhg it is.

Tadhg: Just to make this easier, because every time you call me Thomas I'll wince.

[All Laugh]

John: So I'm understanding that you were in the Marine Corps?

Tadhg: I was in the Marine Corps, from 1987 to 1991.

John: That's one year, you joined the Marines one year after I was born. I was born in '86.

Tadhg: Sweet. Well, you know ...

Ross: That makes him feel awesome [ha ha].

John: You don't look that old, though.

Tadhg: Well thank you, thank you. You should see, actually, what's weird is so many of the, some of the kids in the classes, I look around and I'm literally old enough to be their dad and its like, 'Awww God,' and in consequence a lot of them don't talk to me [ha ha].

John: So did you have a family history in the military?

Tadhg: Yes we did, my father was an Air Force officer, his father was an Air Force officer, his brother and his wife, so my aunt and uncle they're Army officers. My aunt is an Army dietitian, so she's an officer. And my maternal grandfather, he was also an Air Force officer. So I had to do something different so I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

John: Okay. What did you do, what was your job in the Marines?

Tadhg: I was a sixty-fourty-six, aviation maintenance administration clerk, which really disappointed me because like a lot of young men I joined the Marine Corps to blow shit up.

John: [Ha ha] Yup.

Tadhg: Being frank here, I joined for adventure, because I saw the ad with the dude who would go across the super-obstacle course of fire and climb the bridge and fight some lava monster with the sword. I wanted to do *that*. I did not want to paint rocks, I didn't want to pick up cigarette butts, and swab decks, and play a whole bunch of stupid games, and end up typing all the time. But that's what I got to do. I had fun mind you, but yeah, I kept aircraft maintenance records. Occasionally I got to go out, when there was nothing to do in the shop, I would say to my friends in avionics, "Hey guys can I go help you?" So they'd let me go out there and show me how to do some of their stuff, so I got to wire batteries, safety wire batteries into OV-10's.¹ A couple of times I got to actually go sit in the cockpit and help them troubleshoot. In fact one time the officer had said, [with sarcastic and kidding tone] "The FLIR," the Forward Looking Infrared, "The FLIR system, it's not responding." And they had just shown me how to operate the thing, and I said, "OHHH, it's just the sensitivity, right? Well, it's turned all the way down." And so they laughed and said, "Yeah ... Okay, you just solved it. You should write that you're the one who solved it on this..." Thing called the VIDSMAP [?], which was the paperwork that the pilots would fill out say, "This is broken." And underneath that there'd be the corrective action. And we would write, "Well, we removed and replaced this part." [Laughing] We just said, "Switched sensitivity knob." And I got to sign off as doing it, so the officer would feel really stupid that a guy in maintenance admin had figured it out whereas he'd been trained and hadn't figured it out.

[Laughing]

Ross: So where did you spend your time while in the Marine Corps?

Tadhg: Well I had my A-School at Meridian, Mississippi, at the Naval Air station there. I was there for about a month. God, Mississippi sucked. [All Laugh] Then I got sent to the Grunt Air Wing, as we referred to it. Marine Air Group 39 at Camp Pendleton, where I was with that air group the entire time, the rest of my enlistment. I swapped around through units. I was with the VMO-2, Marine Observation Squadron 2. I got shifted to Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron

¹ North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco, a turboprop light attack and observation aircraft.

39, also known as group level maintenance. I worked there and then right before the Gulf War, I mean like right before, in December I came back off of leave and they said, "Hey, this reserve unit just got activated and they need you." So they transferred me to the reserve unit, Marine Attack Helicopter Squadron 775, and that's who I went to the Gulf with, and that's where I got out.

John: So you were working with Cobras [attack helicopter]?

Tadhg: Yeah.

John: That's awesome.

Tadhg: They were Vietnam-era Cobras too, they were the old ones. So were the OV-10's, with my first unit, I was with them for about two and a half years. You'd go through the maintenance records. Each aircraft has a logbook. So you go through the logbook and you can flip in back and you can see the ones that had been in Vietnam, because they had injuries dated to 1969 or '68. And there were ones that would say like, "Took small arms fire, bullet penetrated bottom part of crew compartment." Actually a couple of them were kind of freaky cause I wondered like, "Did somebody get hit?" It didn't say whether the observer got tagged or not but it said that some like, you know, .50 cal rounds came through the bottom. I'm like, "Dude, did that hit somebody?"

John: Knock his leg off.

Tadhg: Yeah, I hope not. So we had, the Cobras, they were old enough they weren't able to hold the newer, I think it was the Whiskey, the AH-1 Whiskey,² those Cobras had the modifications where they could take the TOW missiles. Ours were old enough we didn't have the Whiskeys, we didn't have the TOW missiles, we had the nice nose gun.

John: And that's it, just the gun?

² The Bell AH-1 SuperCobra.

Tadhg: They had the nose gun, they had the rockets, they could take rocket pods and some other things. We just didn't have the fancier more up-to-date as of 1991 anti-tank missiles. They chewed the hell out of the old Iraqi armor though, because they were using 1950s ...

Ross: Yeah.

Tadhg: ...1960s Soviet tanks. So what we had worked just fine against that. But I think some of the newer tanks had to be hit by newer stuff.

Ross: You were over in Iraq during the original Gulf War, the first Gulf War.

Tadhg: Yeah, Gulf War I.

Ross: How long did you sit there, waiting on word on what was going to happen?

Tadhg: Well, that was weird because they had said ... Actually I don't know how old you guys were, how that whole thing worked out was President Bush the 1st had set a deadline. He said, "Okay, if you guys don't pull out of Kuwait by," I think it was the 15th of January, "face the consequences." So we shipped over on like the 9th or 10th of January. So we'd been in country maybe a week or so and then, I don't recall the actual date the stuff, the shooting started. I'd have to look that up somewhere, but I think we'd been in country for like a week and had guard duty a time or two. There was already an airfield going on because we were kind of latecomers, the rest of the wing, the air group was already there. So we were there maybe a week and then the fireworks started. We were wondering, were we gonna hit 'em that day? Or the next? And I'm pretty sure we started hitting them first because we didn't have CNN, we didn't have internet, we had Armed Forces, "Forced Entertainment Network."

[Laughing]

Tadhg: So we had that and what we could get on the BBC radio.

Ross: Alright.

Tadhg: So we suddenly found out, “Yeah, hey guys, the shooting started last night.”

John: Can you give us a little insight on like how you were feeling on your way over there , were you exited, were you scared?

Tadhg: Oh, definitely. I had originally volunteered to go. I knew our CO [commanding officer], the CO had a MALS-39 [3rd Marine Aircraft Wing], at that unit, he had been the XO [executive officer] of VMO-2 [Marine Observation Squadron 2]. So I knew him. And I went to him. I requested, “Sir, can I go with one of the units that’s shipping out. I’m a Marine, we’ve trained for this. I want to go.” And I had actually requested to go with one of the units that had, we had CH-46’s, or Hueys [a transport helicopter], because a lot of the time people in my MOS, they’d end up being the door gun. They’d be like, “Well, we don’t need you as mechanic. You want to go shoot stuff, go for it.” So I wanted to go do *that*.

John: That’s what you signed up for.

Tadhg: Yeah, that’s what I signed up for, I wanted to go be the door gunner. He said, “Hey, you know, you’re a hard charger, devil dog. But we need you here. If a spot opens up somewhere we’ll let you know.” So I think that’s how I ended up in the other unit where, “Yeah, they’re Cobras, you don’t get to do anything.”

[All Laughing]

Ross: The one that’s designed to fight.

Tadhg: Yeah, so I was really excited, but at the same time, by the time I actually got set I’m like, “I’m not going to go. Oh man, this is all about oil, this is kind of bullshit.” We’d been stuck on base, they didn’t let us leave base for like three months. Like September through October, November we were working twelve [hours] on twelve off seven days a week, not going

anywhere just, “Hey, you're on base. Have fun. Yeah, San Diego is just down there but you can't go.” So I was less enthusiastic about it, so when they told me I was both excited to get what I wanted, but at the same time I was like, “Awe man, this might suck.” Especially to go with a bunch of guys I'd never met. It wasn't like, I wasn't going with my friends, I wasn't going with people I'd served with, it was, “Hey, here's a bunch of reservists. These guys are from Colorado, some are from New Orleans, there's some dudes who where uh” - I don't remember the term for it - the guys who were the cadre, the dudes who were always there holding down the fort during the week. But I wasn't part of that. I think I joined the unit a week to two weeks before we went out. So it was kind of like, “Well, hey, this is awkward.” But I was looking forward to it. We were well trained. Marine indoctrination is probably second to none. I'd say I have the programming still. They joke, “The change is forever.” And it really is.

John: Did you ever have any moments in boot camp where you thought you wouldn't be able to make it through boot camp? Nowadays people *can* quit.

Tadhg: Oh yeah, *oh no you couldn't*, because people had told me. I'm a relatively slender guy now. I was positively scrawny. I had to drink a whole bunch of water and eat like three bananas to make the minimum weight requirement the day I shipped out. So had people tell me, “*Your not going to make it, your gonna fail.*” So I was determined, “Oh yeah, *fuck* you, I'm going to do this.” [All laughing] So, there was only one time in boot camp, because I was only seventeen, and I was a small kid, so the first week or two they worked on me, *hard*. The first week or two of boot camp they try to weed out the people they can, real fast. And so they were bending me, doing bends and thrusts and mountain climbers [physical exercises], they'd usually just call it “bending you.” They'd just randomly, “YOU, YOU! Hey, you look tense, why don't you get some relaxation come over here.” [Laughing] And they would drag just one, two, ten people off to the side, and they'd start doing, “BEND AND THRUST! UP DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN!” And, “NO, TOO SLOW. MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS! LEFT RIGHT LEFT RIGHT LEFT RIGHT PUSH UUPPPS!! SIT UPS!!” And they'd just switch back and forth, while on your back, “LEG LIFTS SIX!” “For six inches,” “NINETY ... ‘ninety degrees, SIX, NINETY ... , BEND AND THRUST BEND!” So you'd just be flopping around, and it was getting to me. So the, all the sit-ups, I was a really good runner back then so I had no problem with the cardio, I

could do the pull-ups fairly well, but the sit-ups were really hard on me. And so there was one time, I think we were a week-and-a-half, two weeks in, and they were bending a group of us. They had settled in like the first week on like maybe a dozen or so of us that they were riding hard. I think probably of those dozen of us about half ended up being either dropped back or taken out completely. The rest of us made it but they were having me do, they were having us do the stuff and this one particular drill instructor, Sergeant Ramirez, he had us doing a bunch of the stomach stuff. And I was trying and was starting to fail; I just couldn't do the shit. And I was sore, I was frustrated and tears started to well up in my eyes and I was like, "Awe shit, I can't." I was like, "Uh, I'm about to give up." And then one of the dudes, one of the guys said, "No man, don't give them the satisfaction, don't cry." And I was like, "Yeah, fuck yeah." And, like that was it, it was just one other dude saying, "Don't give 'em the satisfaction," and I was like "Yeah, fuck these guys, I'm not going to let them see." And then this other dude starts making like, old school 80's break-dancing noises. [All laughing] So were sitting there like, "BEND AND THRUST, NO PUSH UPS!" And he starts going "Vwooop tip a tip a vwoop," and we start actually laughing, and the drill instructor started, "No. No. Stop that, stop that!" And he actually stopped it. So that was probably my worst point of boot camp and after that, it was still like eleven weeks but the rest of the time, it wasn't a cake walk, but that was my personal low point in boot camp.

John: When was your personal high point in boot camp?

Tadhg: My personal *high* point in boot camp?

John: If you can give one.

Tadhg: My personal high point ...

John: Graduation? [Laughing]

Tadhg: Yeah, the day that they said, "Yeah, *you're* Marines." You weren't allowed to look 'em in the eye, "Look at the, look at the emblem on my head, you haven't *earned* the right. You

havn't earned the right to wear this, you haven't earned the right to call yourself a Marine. You're a private, you're the recruit." And then the day they said, "You know, you're a Marine, you've done this." That was probably one of the proudest moments of my life, strange, but it really ranks up there with seeing my son being born, my first-born son. It was like, "No, I'm a Marine now. I went through hell and I've got thing and you can never take this from me." So that was quite a moment.

Ross: Was it, it has always been in Parris Island, boot camp, right?

Tadhg: Ah, well no, there's two of them.

Ross: There's two of them?

Tadhg: I was a *Hollywood* Marine. If you enlisted east of the Mississippi River you go to Parris Island. The problems with Parris Island, it's in the middle of the swamp, you see nothing, you are just completely isolated and you get sand fleas.

Ross: Yeah.

Tadhg: The problems with Marine recruit F.O. San Diego, where I went, you were right next to San Diego Airport. You could see the city. So *everyday* as your marching around, you see, there's people, there's cars driving by the highway. You could sometimes even, you'll see like, "*Hey, those are girls.*" [All laughing] You see all the things that you can't have right now. So I think that was the hard part of that too, was just like, "Oh man, I wonder what those people are doing, and where are they going in that plane?" But they're not here.

John: Did you ever have a moment in boot camp where it just seemed like, it's only, like you said, eleven weeks.

Tadhg: Yeah.

John: But it just seemed like forever, like you would never get to the end, like it's just years and years?

Tadhg: Definitely first phase, definitely first phase. At the time it was broken down to three phases. They just had a new Comedone [?], while we were in boot camp they changed what was going to happen to everybody after us. Like everybody after us was going to go to Infantry School regardless of their MOS. But when we had it in three phases, phase one was just ... they break you down, they teach you stuff, lot of conditioning, lot of class-work stuff, then we went to the range for a couple of weeks, and that was, second phase was the range. God this was over twenty years ago, I think I may be messing some of this up. Then we went to the field for two weeks. Which actually I knew I was going to make it after I hit second phase but the field sucked. I was actually really glad at that point like, "Oh man, I kind of hope I don't get to become a grunt now." I did not enjoy humping, even though I could hike just fine. It's a peculiarity. I've heard other Marines talk about it so I assume its just Marine Corps wide. When you go on a hump, you have all your gear and your supposed to keep like five meters between you and the guy in front of you, so it should be simple. You're just going to march, 'da da da,' with five meters. No, somehow, somewhere in there they always, they said, "Oh, the gap isn't right you have to hurry, you've got to run." I don't know whether they're screwing with us, or whatever unit that's in front just can't manage to keep the gap right, but I suspect that, "No, the Marines are evil and we just like to do this." But for whatever reason, no, it was never walking, it was like a five-mile jog with a pack. Like, "Oh shit, we get to walk for a little bit. No we're running again." So I ended up respecting, lot of props to the grunts cause those dudes must have had to do that *all* the time.

John: Do you know how much weight you were carrying?

Tadhg: I'd guess fifty to seventy-five pounds. At the time since I weighed like 130, I was probably carrying like a third of my weight, close to half my weight.

John: What type of rifles were you guys using?

Tadhg: M-16 A2.

John: Is that the type that has fully automatic on it?

Tadhg: No, no, that's the M-16 A1, we had the three-round burst. I'm sure that what you guys, what they're using now? What is it? The M-4 or something?

Ross: Yeah, the M-4 is, a lot of them.

Tadhg: Longer barrel, really accurate. I love that weapon. I'd love to own one but to get even the civilian version, it's like twelve-hundred bucks. Beautiful rifle, bonded with it, very very comfortable around them.

John: Do you remember your serial number today?

Tadhg: Pheww, no I don't. I could tell you the serial number on my Glock pistol. I still own that.

Ross: The M-16 A2 is still what the Navy uses for security on a lot of their boats.

Tadhg: Really?

Ross: But in the field it's the M-4.

Tom: They're using the shorter ones?

Ross: Yeah.

Tadhg: Yeah, back in my day we didn't have the fancy optics.

Ross: Yeah. For kicking down doors and stuff.

Tadhg: Yeah, we didn't have the fancy optics either, just the iron sights.

John: Have you seen the new ACOGs [rifle scope] that they have?

Tadhg: Yes, I'm really jealous, I'm like, "*Dude.*" Those look really fun, I sort of wonder how does that, that's gotta make it a lot easier to fire, to hit expert.

John: Oh, it's nice yeah.

Tadhg: Although, God I hate firing from the off hand position. Oh, let me fire prone all day, I will hit, at five-hundred meters, I can hit the bullseye all the time, but standing up it's just, "Oh look, the figure eight, chasing the bull."

John: Do you keep up with anybody that you were in boot camp with?

Tadhg: No, after boot camp I ran into a couple of guys I had been in boot camp with throughout my time. Just random, see the guy on base, "Hey, what's up?" And we'd go grab a couple drinks. My senior drill instructor, his name was Sergeant Hitchens. The dude, I liken him to, he was "Black Zeus." The guy was fricken' gigantic. [All laughing] He had like a voice of doom. And I liken him to Zeus because he *was God* to us. What he said he had complete power over us, or at least that's how we felt. About like four years ago we had to have, this apartment I was living in had some plumbing problems, and this guy comes over and he's got a Marine Corps hat on, so we start shooting the shit and talking about things and he said that he'd been in corrections. Well I knew, I was, "Oh, hey, my senior drill instructor, yeah, I think he was in corrections. I was always afraid to get sent to the brig." I said the name and he was like "Dude, yeah, it was Gunny Hitchens. I know the guy." [Laughing] So some random dude in Eugene actually knew who my drill instructor was but I haven't actually seen anyone from boot camp.

Ross: Do you keep track with anybody from your time in the service?

Tadhg: Yes.

Ross: Maybe Kuwait or ...

Tadhg: Oh, yes.

Ross: Pendleton.

Tadhg: Yeah, no, that's the weird thing. I never really bonded with any of the guys who I went to the Gulf with. Gotta little bit of conflicts there, not personal conflicts just, I found afterwards I didn't want to think about it, but guys I was with before that, I'm really close with guys that I was in VMO-2 with. I went to Okinawa and the Philippines with these guys, these are people I basically grew up with. I was with VMO-2 from the time I was like eighteen to the time I was twenty. So you know, some people have their fraternity, I had VMO-2.

Ross: I was going to ask you about that, if you went anywhere, Okinawa and the Philippines, I bet you had a great time there.

Tadhg: Oh, yeah.

[All laughing]

Tadhg: Uh, yes, yes that was, this is going in the record I'll just ...

[All laughing]

Tadhg: ... I had amazing times. Now Okinawa, we call it The Rock. I don't know if it's an affectionate term or not. Okinawa was one of the costliest battles of the Second World War. The Marines took a lot of casualties, so did the Army taking that place. The natives don't *like* us. They did not make a big secret of the fact we were not popular there. And it seemed the Okinawans are different, just part of Japan, the ethnic Okinawans are not ethnic Japanese. I don't know that I could see two people and say "*Oh that guy is from Japan and that guy is from Okinawa.*" But there was a difference. I think Okinawans did not like us. They'd, uh, you'd get

dirty looks sometimes, and this was before all the scandals things, like people raping locals. Those things happened after I'd been there. There was just a lot of tension. It was explained to us that the Okinawans had been independent for a little while. For a couple hundred or three hundred years before the Japanese invaded and conquered them, and then we came, and conquered them, so they just, they were tired of being conquered and they weren't very happy about it. Kind of a *pretty* place. The water was a nice warm, kind of light blue, they had these turtle tombs is what we called them, there's probably a different name for them but the Okinawans, they cremate their dead. And they put them in these kind of like turtle back shaped tombs, at the house.

John: Hmm.

Tadhg: So the ancestors *were at their house*. So there would be these places where families had lived for generation after generation, and you know grandma, grandpa, great grandma, your whole - all your ancestors were right there. Which I thought was kind of cool, walking by and you can see all these tombs. And Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, it was at the top of a hill known as, well I don't know what the Japanese, or the Okinawans called it, but we called it Sobriety Hill. Because if you went out in town, as I did, and you had a bunch to drink, then you'd have this hill to walk up. And I knew dudes who couldn't make it up the hill and passed out in the ditch by the side. I think it was right after I went there and I turned 19, right before we shipped to Okinawa, so I was 19 went out to town one night with a friend of mine. We were gona just look around. Well, we ended up in a bar they told us about called The Black Out, and I had a black out. About the last thing I remembered was the third full bottle, the third full fifth of this stuff called MoJo, and I was starting to get obnoxious. We'd already had some dudes come over and say like, "Hey I'm with 3-1," or some artillery unit, "if some shit goes down are you with us!?" "Hell, yeah!"

[All laughing]

And I had started talking some shit to this Air Force dude [laughing] and my buddy's like, "I gotta get you out of here before you start a fight, man." Walking back, this hazy walk back

where I picked up some, like some dachshund, “*Oh doggy!*” And carried that dog all the way back to base. I woke up feeling like death the next day. I was supposed to be on duty and just have to answer the phones at the barracks. I get a phone call at like eight in the morning, still completely trashed, I’d had gotten back to base and passed out by like 9:30, but it’s like, how I didn’t die of alcohol poisoning, I don’t know. And they’re like, “*No, you have to come to work. We have changed the schedule.*” And I had to go type a Naval Message, an official document going to - we didn’t have computers, we had typewriters. The thing about typewriters is if you screw up it’s a lot harder to fix the mistake. I couldn’t feel my fingers, I had to like, I kept typing this thing, they’d go back to the office, “*Hey, this is wrong do it again.*” The third time I finally got it right and they’re like, “*You look like shit, if you ever come to work like that again we’re gonna write you up. Go home and sleep it off.*” [All laughing] I’m like, “*Thank you, thank you.*” [All laughing]

John: That’s awesome; I had a couple days like that. Where we wouldn’t have much to do the next day so we would stay up all night drinking. You show up drunk the next day and it’s fun until about lunchtime. You just wanna go home and sleep.

Tadhg: Now the Philippines, I don’t know if they closed Subic Bay Naval Station, so I don’t know if people still go there. That place was Disneyland for young men.

John: How so?

Tadhg: Ah hell, I’ll put it in the records: let the records show. Wisdom passed on to me by my NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge], Sergeant Darra, he was like my big brother. He was directly in charge of me, he tells me, I’m nineteen, he was talking and was like, “Yeah, guys go out and they’ll sleep with hookers.” ‘Oh man, no way.’ I was *shocked*. I was like, “*How could anybody do that?*” And he says to me, “Simmons, Simmons there’s some facts in this world, Marines fuck hookers.” [All Laughing]

John: [Joking] [Laughing] That’s a fact.

Tadhg: “That’s just the way it is.” And I’m like, “*Oh*, oh ok.” [All laughing] And *I* was a Marine. [All laughing] So coming back stateside I got some looks from people when I told the escapades we got up to. As a young man I said, “Look, it only costs five bucks. If you were nineteen and you were somewhere and you could have sex for five bucks, what would you have done?” And most of them are like, “Yeah, I’d have blown a lot of money,” “*Yes*, yes you would.” [All laughing]

John: [Joking] I probably would be five bucks lighter. [All laughing] So, when you were overseas in the Gulf, how did you feel toward your enemy? Did you hate 'em, was it just sort of like a rooster fight? Like you get in the ring and that’s just who you're fighting?

Tadhg: My feelings for 'em was, I would almost call them professionals, a sense. Because where we were, we had the Scud attacks.³ That stuff was the stuff that actually messed me up, mainly because at the time because we were told, “These things have chemical warheads, or they *might*.” So for about two weeks we’d be woken up several times a night with this alarm going off. You’d have to jump out of your tent, put your - I was sleeping in boots and everything - I would just wrap on my flak jacket with all the gear on it and put the mask on, and go out in the fighting hole, this hole we dug. All like twelve of us had to go sit in that. It's just sitting in there and a bunch of time to think things like, “I hope we dug this deep enough,” “I hope this is right,” “Shit, are the Patriot⁴ batteries gonna hit this,” “Does it have nerve gas.” Nerve gas was scary, I had been on the NBC [Nuclear Biological Chemical] team in every unit I had been on, so I had learned how to decontaminate people, vehicles, been monitor survey. And knew exactly what all the chemicals would do to you. Nerve gas to this day, that shit scares me. That seems to me to be a horrible, horrible way to die. So I was afraid of that, and I really didn’t like that they were lobbing that stuff at us. But I didn’t have anything personally against them, the way I figured it was like, “Look, chances are it's some other twenty-one year old guy who signed up to serve his country, and they told him, “HEY, YOU BE HERE, SHOOT THIS!” And, look, I didn’t have anything against him. If one of them tried to kill me, I was going to do my damndest to kill him first, but I didn’t *hate* them. In fact at one point they moved us from the airfield at Jubail, [Saudi

³ Soviet-produced tactical ballistic missiles employed by the Iraqi Army.

⁴ U.S. guided missile used to intercept scud missiles in the 1991 Gulf War.

Arabia], up to a place called Lonesome Dove. Don't know exactly where it was, it was a several hours drive through the weird backlands of Saudi Arabia. They told us it was in this notch in the border, so it was like seven miles away from Kuwait in one direction, and like seven miles from Iraq in the other. So we were just in the middle of nowhere, the forward air base, and close enough, the artillery guys were in front of us, I would say they were only about a mile or two in front of us because the outgoing was really fricken' loud. And every night we'd see this light show, we'd hear the boom, we'd see the light show. I remember one night in particular, we were working twelve-hour shifts, middle of the night, and everybody in our tent wakes up because there's an earthquake. We wake up like, "What the hell is that!?" The whole tent is shaking, and somebody was like "Oh, that must be the B-52s, man." Cause they were dropping some serious stuff, and it was either me who said it or somebody else, but it doesn't really matter, but we're like, "Man, I'm starting to feel *sorry* for these guys." Because if it was waking *us* up, I don't even want to think about the dudes who were anywhere near that, they were probably a mile away getting internal organs ruptured. So I ended up feeling bad for them actually. We kicked their asses so badly, it was such an overwhelming show of, they were so severely outclassed, and the coalition was huge. So it was just like, "Awe man ...". At this point it's just like punching some dude, "Would you say uncle already? Damn it, would you just quit!"

Ross: Yeah, millions of pounds of JDAMs⁵ being dropped on them.

Tadhg: Yeah, so no I didn't hate them. I felt bad for them. It was all because the guy in charge of them was a douche.

Ross: It's always amazing to me, speaking to any veteran from any era of combat, we all have the same thing. All being told by someone to do something. All being told to fight someone who is being told by someone to do something. *Its just what we do, five dollar hookers, it's what we do.*

Tadhg: Yeah.

⁵ Joint Direct Attack Munitions, which were widely employed by the U.S. in the 1991 Gulf War .

Ross: It's a generational thing.

Tadhg: I think it is. There was a poem from World War One that I remember reading in English class as a senior. I don't remember the poem but the gist of it was, "Well, you seem like you might have been to be a nice enough guy. If I met you in a bar and you were short a couple of pounds, I probably would have bought you a drink, but as it was you were charging at me so I shot you dead." [All laughing] It's like, "Well, eh," that's the stuff that I feel bad about. It really is, it's just politics. Its, there are people who tell you to go do stuff, and we're the guys who do the stuff. And I'm pretty sure the politicians or whoever sends people there sleeps well enough, in their mansions, their palaces in Saddam Hussein's case. They probably sleep well enough but the other dudes, I don't know.

John: That's what gets me, people get mad at soldiers and it's like, "Look, it's the politicians you should be mad at."

Tadhg: Yeah, we live in a democracy, get pissed at the voters. I've told people that before and I'm like, "I'm not pro-war, definitely not, but I told someone who was like, "You think you're not responsible for every atrocity that happens in the war?" "It's a democracy, you vote. Our government, they're the ones doing it, we are the government so if you don't like what our soldiers are doing, it's your fault."

Ross: Well said.

Tadhg: We are the legionnaires. We serve the will of the state.

John: Public servants.

Tadhg: Yeah, we are guardians of the republic and if we do bad things its because we've been told to do it.

Ross: Which is like I said earlier, it transcends generations, we've all been doing this forever and we'll be doing it for a lot longer.

Tadhg: That was a funny thing, overseas, I was writing letters home and was like, "Yeah, this place, Okinawa is humid as shit, oh God." And then Saudi Arabia was not humid, it was a beautiful dry heat but aww shit, the heat, and the flies, so your writing letters home like. "Yes please send me this." And I had actually read a letter from Roman, they found letters from some Roman legionnaire's letters home, same stuff, the guys are writing about. "I don't like it here the food is horrible, the natives lame, I just want to come home, *will you send me stuff?*" [All laughing] That's like two thousand years ago and the soldiers are saying the same thing.

Ross: Instead of Crystal Light [powdered beverage mix] and beef jerky it's something else.

Tadhg: Yeah, I want [garro?].

John: What did you end up doing for the flies? I actually got pretty good at like snatching them out of the air. Did you get to a point where they were all over you and you just didn't care.

Tadhg: "Fuck it, fuck it, get away. Oh good, I didn't eat it. I'm glad." Aww I don't know why the flies ... the worst thing I have ever done in my life happened there in the Gulf. One day they're like, "Yeah, so there's this detail, you're the first person to do it, so you're going to have to, you're going to be taught how to do this, and then your going to have to teach the next person and people are going to have to take turns doing it." So the shitters consisted of fifty gallon oil drums cut in half ...

John: Oh yes.

Tadhg: So I got to be the first guy in our unit to fill those with kerosene and take an engineer stake and burn flaming human waste. It was pretty bad but, the only saving grace that day was the wind blew it right toward the maintenance where I would have been working so I started

going [making stirring motion and looking mischevious], “Ha ha ha.” [All laughing] I just stayed upwind and watched it *blow*.

Ross: *"Feel my pain."*

Tadhg: But yeah, that’s the yardstick I have used to measure like, “Man, this job sucks. It's not stirring a flaming pile of shit suck, but it sucks.”

John: Everything gets all black, your clothes get all black.

Tadhg: Ughh, that *smell*, but yeah, field sanitation, that’s good stuff.

John: We ended up having a guy who volunteered to do that, I guess, he said it would give him time to think. So we were *all* very grateful.

Tadhg: Oh, smoking cigarettes. I smoked cigarettes beforehand, but I can remember, I never ever in my life smoked so much, ever ever. I can remember, during the day I’d smoke a pack of smokes. In between the twelve hours I was working I’d probably smoke a pack and the three or four hours I had before I went to sleep at night, I would smoke another pack to *relax*. We’d be sitting there playing spades or shooting the shit or doing whatever because ... a lot of card games. And just chain-smoking. There was no alcohol so it was like what are you going to do? *Chain-smoke*.

John: What type of cigarettes did you guys have over there?

Tadhg: Oh, well we had a little tiny, through this tent, maybe the size of this area, so not *that* little, it was a G.P. Medium. And it had some stuff. Camels, Marlboros, there were generics, there was no tax on it. I didn’t realize how cheap cigarettes were without the taxes. But one time, just to be excessively cheap, I’m like, “I’m going to try these cigarettes,” that were white. They were in like a white package that said, “*Ultra Light* Cigarettes.” That’s all it said: “Ultra Light Cigarettes.” “Oh, I’ll try that.” They were so horrible, they were so horrible they were like

smoking rolled up toilet paper or something. We ended up having like a cigarette fight one night. We were just like, “Hey, these suck.” So we just started throwing the packs at each other in the tent. Like a food fight, just chucking smokes cause like, “Dude these are not worth smoking.” They cost like \$3.50 for a whole carton so ...

[Laughing]

John: Dang ...

Tadhg: Yeah, no, there was a reason for it. That was one of the better moments. And then there was, Bible study happened. I’m not what you’d call a traditionally religious man, in fact I’m not Christian, but there were these guys in the unit, they kept talking about Bible study and every night they were talking about this Bible study and I was getting kind of nervous. I was like, “Oh no, I’m in the tent with these guys. They’re going to get all converty on me.” Well, then one day I find out, I don’t know how it came about, I just said something, I think it was just a shitty day, and I’m like, “I don’t know man, this sucks, hell things suck so bad I’d probably smoke marijuana,” which I’d never done before. “I’d probably smoke some marijuana if there was some.” [All laughing] The guy, “Oh really?” “Well, yeah.” Then he’s like, “You should come to Bible study with us.” Like, “What?” [All laughing] “We don’t study the Bible.” Turns out, these good ol’ boys from the south, the reservists, they’d smuggled a bunch of weed over in a Bible, so every night for about a week or two, they were going out to the shitter and smoking, and smoking a joint, with the rationale with, “What are they going to do, shave our heads and send us to a war zone?” [All laughing] And you know, *that worked*. Like, “Hey, okay, that’s true. I really don’t think they’re going to do a urine analysis. I’ve never done this before, and, what is the worst thing they’re going to do?” “*Hey, you have to go to the Gulf.*” I was already there. [All laughing] So we did that, went back, kind of paranoid like, “Oh no, wait,” and my grandmother had sent a bunch of cookies.

John: Ohh man ...

Tadhg: In a care package, like, “Oh God, I got this care package!” And me and these guys just devoured it. [All laughing] Go to bed, and in about maybe forty-five minutes after bed time, *SCUD alarms*. We’re getting up, climbing into the hole, the only time of the climbing in the hole - “Oh God, is it nerve gas?” - I wasn’t scared. It was also the only time instead of like twelve people sitting quietly; it was more like eight people sitting quietly and four dudes cracking jokes through the gas masks. So say what people will about it, it sure as hell made us a lot less anxious.

John: I think this is probably going to be one of the better stories that this project has. [All laughing].

Tadhg: Well, it’s probably just because I’m telling the truth. I’ve got friends who were in Somalia and other places, apparently people find things. I was told the Pakistanis would, in some units, dudes would get them hash. I had some friends in the 1st CEB, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion. They said they were buying hash off the Pakistani laborers, also in the Combat Engineers I was told guys had worked up a still. I also heard something that really kind of made me mad when I found out about it. Around Christmas these guys were saying, there were these Highlanders next to them, the Scottish ...

Ross: Yeah.

Tadhg: They were next to them. Well, it was apparently only the U.S. that had said, “Oh we will respect you Saudi Arabia. We will not have alcohol.” Because the Highlanders were like, “*You guys want some whiskey?*” We’re like, “You guys have alcohol?” “Hell, we’re not going to fight for them and not have whiskey.”

Ross: I ferried a couple of Marine expeditionary units overseas and on the ships we always had the guys down in the boiler rooms making bilge wine. [All laughing] They would just get grape juice, put a balloon around the bottle, put it under the bilge plates, and once the balloon blew up ...

Tadhg: It's ready to drink. [Making uncorking sound. All laughing] That amazes me, that the ingenuity of the common troop, its like, okay we'll find a way to keep ... we would stay occupied. We would find a way to do the things we wanted to do, and is probably the reason why they try to fill your time with some God awful other task. "Here, paint these rocks, pick up these butts, make this shiny," because if you're busy, you don't have time to find interesting things to amuse yourself with. [All laughing]

John: You'll get in trouble.

Tadhg: I never got in trouble, I stayed clean. Other than that one little, hey, smoking a joint in a war zone, I was really good. I was a good kid.

John: So when you guys were gearing up to leave and go back to the states, how did you feel at that point? I would assume that you were really excited?

Tadhg: I was stoked, that's another possible amusing story. Since we had gotten there so late people were rotating back in the order they got there. Well this other unit had decided that they were gonna ... we all got war souvenirs. This one day, right after, it was like obvious that it was over, this huge pile of gear shows up at our camp. And they pass us out playing cards. And they say, "Okay, we're gonna hold a piece of gear and we're gonna draw a card and whoever's got it, if you've got that card, you can have this piece of war booty." I ended up with some weird bag, I don't know what was supposed to have originally been in it, it looked like probably somebody's mechanic tools but there weren't tools anymore. And I think I got something else, I think I got a gas mask with some writing on it. I figured it was somebody's name. I felt kind of weird about that, I thought it might be bad luck actually. I was thinking like, "I think the dude who owned this might be dead." So other units had plunder, booty, whatever you want to call it. So these guys had decided to be clever and they had removed the panels off of their birds and stashed AKs and a bunch of weapons and other contraband in there. Well the MPs weren't as dumb as they thought because they pulled the panels and found all these things so that unit got punished by being said, "No, you guys get to stay in country for a few more weeks, and we got jumped

ahead by like a month. We all went home. So we're all, "Oh that sucks. Well we're not doing that."

John: When you got back how long were you still in the military before you just got out?

Tadhg: I got back, I had like three or four more months to go. So I was already getting short, before the, or actually right after the fireworks had started there were rumors that, "*Yeah, if this goes on for awhile ...*" cause nobody knew how long it was going to be, "if this goes on for awhile, their extend your enlistment, you won't be able to go home." "No, no, that sucks." I was getting pretty short. So when I got back I was super short-timer, and the unit was incredibly cool. A lot of the reservists were going home, back to where they came from. I was still there so my last month or two was like, show up at 07:00, do my stuff. And there were days like, I'd be like, "Yeah, I got those reports done." And it would be like 11:00. "Oh, you got those reports done already? You can secure for the day." So I was only having to work half days and they let me secure early. And one of the nicest treats, my NCOIC, in the unit I was with, he was a reservist. He had been an inspector for COMNAVAIRPAC, Commander Naval Air Pacific ... He'd been an inspector before when he had been on active duty. So he knew the maintenance book from an earlier version. It was the 47.90-.2c, he knew. We were on the .2 echo. So he knew the way of doing things but he didn't know how we were supposed to do it now. I was a bit of a rules lawyer, had been that way when I was a kid. I knew that fricken' book. I got commendations for how well I knew those things. So we'd get in arguments and the staff sergeant would be a total dick and be like, "Well, no, you're wrong, you have to do it this way." "But I can't do it that way, that's not how it says." And we'd sit there and get the book and "No. No, it says right here." And we'd be like quoting sections that I'd point like, "No you're wrong, see, right there!" And he'd get pissed. So he was a total dick and would ride me all the time. Luckily everybody else seemed to think he was a dick too, so some people did some bad things to him. One night somebody had climbed into the tent he was sleeping in and dumped his cot and they were on concrete pads at this place. So he was in his mummy bag and went face and knee first into the concrete. And then he ended up getting horribly sick and had to be sent home. Before that he got locked in the shitter. [All laughing] He said, "Did you do that?" I looked at him and said, "No, but I think it's funny."

Ross: Um, we are ...

Tadhg: Almost out?

Ross: Yeah, were running low on battery life here so I think we'll try to ...

Tadhg: Okay, I'll quickly tell what happened to that guy. They gave me, when we got back to stateside, they allowed me to type the fitness reports. I got to type his fitness report. It was not a positive fitness report so I got to see basically his career-ending fitness report. "Did not adjust well from transition from reserves." It was like, "Oh, thank you, I'm loving typing all this."

[All laughing]

Ross: And you win.

Tadhg: Yeah.

John: Um, so I'm going to start wrapping this up a little bit. So now that you've been out for awhile, are you glad you, despite all the controversy that the war was for oil and things like that, are you glad and satisfied, and would you do it again?

Tadhg: I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't been a Marine, and I hadn't done that. There's some good and bad to that. I'll be frank, I'm rated seventy percent for PTSD cause those freaking Scuds freaked me out pretty bad. I'm occasionally prone to, as they say, violent outbursts, which I do my very best to moderate. But I'm a decent person, I actually care about people. I have a deep compassion for our service people because unlike your typical civilian I know what they've gone through, I know what they're doing and they aren't heartless bastards, like some of the anti-war people would paint them. It's like, "No, war sucks, but it's not the soldier's fault." So yeah, I'd do it again. If I had to do it again though I'd love to somehow compel [President George H.W.] Bush to finish the war, the first time. We were so close to Baghdad, I'm convinced in my

heart, if we had taken Baghdad and deposed him then, there would not have been an Iraq War, it would not have occurred, and we had the means to do it because when we invaded for the Iraq War his army got to disappear. He didn't *have* one left by the time, in the first Gulf War. So it really bugs me every time I see Marines and people getting killed in that war, thinking "Damn it, we had a chance to do it right and none of these guys needed to die."

John: Okay. Well, do you have anything else that you would like to add before we finish, just anything?

Tadhg: Semper Fi, always faithful. I'm a Marine still. Yeah, I've got facial hair, I had long hair, but I will be a Marine till the day I die. Whether I like it or not, it's just how it is. And that's my gang, whenever I meet a Marine, it's just this weird thing, I've run into random people in bars, "Oh, were you a Marine?" We end up drinking together. It's like, it's like we're buddies, just by virtue of that.

Ross: Thank you very much for your story. I agree with John, its one of the more entertaining, better stories I had the privilege of listening to, so thank you very much.

Tadhg: Well I'm glad you guys enjoyed it.