

PREFACE

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City, State: Beaverton, Oregon

Interview Duration: 00:57:59

Interviewee: Jonathan Abels

Primary Interviewer: Sam Zwingli

Secondary Interviewer: Cole Mankey

Transcriber: Sam Zwingli

Sam Zwingli is a junior at the University of Oregon. She majors in History and hopes for a career in the US government after graduation.

Cole Mankey is a veteran of the United States Marine. He is currently a senior at the University of Oregon and studies sociology.

Sam Zwingli: My name is Sam Zwingli and I'll be the primary interviewer today. It's February 13, 2015.

Cole Mankey: My name is Cole Mankey, I'll be helping her out.

Jonathan Abels: My name is Jonathan Abels and, yeah. *[Laughs]*

Sam: So, tell me how you came to join the Army.

Jonathan: Um ... well, my grandpa was in the Air force, the Air National Guard, and so, I kinda wanted to join something. Then, my roommate at the time who was about to be my brother-in-law, he was in the Army ... so I wanted to join. The Army is what he told me to do and he said, "If you're going to do anything, you better go into infantry or you better not join at all." And I was like, "Really?" And he said "Yeah, if you're not gonna be infantry, you might as well just like go join the 'Chair Force' or something." So, I said "Alright," and he's like, "I can't mess with the Marines because they do their job ..." *[Laughs]*

Sam: Do you remember walking to the recruiting office?

Jonathan: Yup.

Sam: And? What was it like?

Jonathan: Um ... I walked in and there was a guy who knew Mike at the time.

Sam: Mike Eschete? [Retired Marine Master Sergeant Michael Eschete]

Jonathan: No, Mike my brother-in-law, Michael Collins. But yeah, he [Mike] walked up to him [the recruiter] and it wasn't the same guy who recruited him, but he [Mike] knew him somehow. Small world.

Sam: Did you ever have any conflicts about going into the Army? Did you consider being part of what your brother in law called the Chair force [referring to the United States Air Force]?

Jonathan: Um, I considered being part of it, doing PSYOPS [Psychological Operations] for a very short period of time. But they weren't pursuing me. The Army, I mean, they came to my house multiple times and asked if I, *begged* if I ... they wanted a signature, so it was easier to go with them.

Sam: Yeah.

Cole: Did you ever think about going into the Marines or was it just Army all the way?

Jonathan: Um, I didn't think about the Marines ... never really. I thought about it, and the way I had it described to me is they said, uh, they [Marines] had "different ways," and one guy tried to tell me if you want to walk in and maybe even think about taking the puff off of a cigarette, you'll be alright [in the Army]. But in the Marines, you better be walking somewhere with a purpose, and you can't be doing anything or else you'll get yelled at and all this stuff. So, it just seemed like a lot more discipline in the Marines. *[Laughs]*

Sam: So, you have a family of nine kids, how did your parents and your siblings react to your decision to enlist?

Jonathan: Uh, they were really happy about it. My dad ... my dad and I talked about schooling and he said he could pay for some classes, but he couldn't really afford to pay for the whole schooling. So he said, "You wanna get a job?" at this one company downtown, and I was like, "Nah, I don't really wanna work there anymore." So I, uh, joined the Army instead.

Sam: And where were you living at this time?

Jonathan: Uh ... I was living at that time at my brother's house, it was a transition into the real world. I didn't have to pay real rent and he'd never kick me out. I lived there for a while and then I went and signed up for the Army and they said months enlistment and then a couple weeks later they said, "In twenty-one days we can get you into a Basics [Basic Training]" and I was like "Sure, let's do it."

Sam: And was this in Texas?

Jonathan: Yep. Austin, Texas.

Sam: Do you think that being in Texas has a certain culture that fosters getting into the military?

Jonathan: I think it's encouraged.

Sam: Yeah? Strongly encouraged?

Jonathan: Yup. It's one of the best things you can do, join the Army, join the military, serve your country.

Sam: How was that talked about to the youth? Like, when you were in high school did you have Army men coming to your high school or anything?

Jonathan: No, I went to a private school and we didn't have any Army guys coming and talking to us really. I don't think Army guys ever came into my school really ... I don't know but I can't remember any Army guys coming to talk.

Sam: So, it was just more of a culture that you just grew up around?

Jonathan: Yeah. And [there were] a lot of the Army guys at church, a lot of Army guys in my family and my great-grandfather Jonathan was in the Army in World War II. He was an E5 sergeant and I actually still have his tomato seeds, I grow them every year. The Jonathan Tomato Seeds.

Sam: Carrying on that legacy. How did your siblings feel?

Jonathan: Uh, how'd they feel?

Sam: Happy, scared, excited?

Jonathan: They were happy, yeah. Good to go!

Sam: So, tell me about what happened, what the process was after you decided to enlist. They said they could put you in in twenty-one days - that's really, really fast. What did you do the day you left?

Jonathan: The day I left, I went to MEPs [Military Entrance Processing Station] and I had a good time in MEPs and left. *[Laughs]* Went to Basic. Yeah, I don't know.

Sam: Tell me about Basic.

Jonathan: Basic, oh Basic was fun! We pulled up -

Sam: It was fun? That's not usually the word to describe it.

Jonathan: We'd pull up and all of a sudden they're yelling and banging on the side of the bus! Just like, "You have ten seconds to get off of my bus!" Not *the* bus, *my* bus. And I'm just sitting there like, "Oh no ... I'm in their world now. It was cool. *[Laughs]* Ten seconds... you can't do anything! It's not possible to get a bus full of people off! So, they're setting you up to fail from

the get go! *[Laughs]* We get out and they're yelling at us, and they're just trying to mess with us - this isn't even the real Basic Training. This is just thirty AGs [Adjunct Generals], we're getting ready to do into it. And just that, people were freaking out. So that stops. You know ... they walk us in, sit us down, and they start telling us how they're going to search our bags ... how they got dogs, and start putting the fear of God in you. *(Raises voice)* "If you have anything, put it in the box!" All these guys are getting up and throwing stuff way ...

Sam: What did they expect people to have?

Jonathan: Oh, you know, all sorts of stuff. People were throwing stuff away so they obviously weren't supposed to have it. They ended up not searching us at all! *[Laughs]* They made us go into this one room and the guy in the room was like, "If you got anything ... cool, I'll take it. But you don't have to give it to me." And that's all. That was the search.

Sam: That was it?

Jonathan: But they scared the ... they had maybe one third of the guys go throw either magazines or like, tobacco, or chew, and they went and threw it away! Alcohol, threw it away!

Sam: They brought their alcohol to Basic?

Jonathan: Oh yeah!

Cole: What year was this?

Jonathan: Uh ... it '04. [2004]

Sam: So, you enlisted in '04?

Jonathan: Yeah.

Cole: And what was the camp called?

Jonathan: Fort Benning, Georgia. Yeah. In the infantry.

Cole: I thought you said this was Texas?

Jonathan: Uh, no. I enlisted in Texas.

Sam: In what year?

Jonathan: And then they flew me out, or drove, I don't even remember how I got there. I just remember I got there quick. They put me on a plane and I was there!

Cole: You're from Texas?

Jonathan: Yeah I'm from Texas.

Cole: That makes sense.

Sam: So, then they made you throw out everything you weren't supposed to have, scared you a little bit ...

Jonathan: Scared us a little bit, and then, uh, the best part came: haircuts.

Sam: Why is that the best?

Jonathan: That's when you lose who you think you are. Because everybody's hair ... Some guys have long hair and they think they're, you know, a long-hair music person. And some people have short hair and they're real tough. All have different haircuts, and they cut everybody's, and everybody looks the same. And you look, and there's like fifty, all the same dude. The only thing you see is, "You're a little tanner than me ... a little darker," or "You're small." There's no difference, everybody looks the same.

Sam: Do you think that promoted team cohesion at all?

Jonathan: Definitely. I think it made everybody more uniform and together. Nobody was different, we're just all the same ... It's all gone.

Sam: Tell me about the guys there.

Jonathan: Umm ... We had some of the craziest ... We had this one kid, we had this tall kid from Oregon, and I'll never forget this kid. You have to write this one down. There was this meth head from Oregon with no teeth, and he's like, "I'm just here to get me a new set of teeth and I'm gonna get out!" [*Laughs*] He was like 6'8" or 6'9" and he couldn't even do a push up. He was just there to get dental. He was out in the first ten weeks. After he got his teeth fixed he was gone. Teeth fixed and a bunch of OxyContin and he was out.

Sam: How does that work? I thought when you sign up you have to stay. We were talking to a Marine that said they keep you on base.

Jonathan: And then, I don't know ... I had a kid Bennett ... they made Bennett... he was for some reason ... (*Mumbles indistinguishably*) ... they didn't put that. They put me and this kid Bennett as buddies, but they didn't put me and Chief together. Chief's this big 6'6 Indian dude in Basic. [*Laughs*] He was legit. He was Indian, he could track. He was like, from Washington.

Sam: So, he was a Native American?

Jonathan: Native American. Chief. Yeah, his name was Chief. From Washington.

Sam: So, it's a bunch of different guys.

Jonathan: And, uh, yeah. So, like, he ended up being my Battle Buddy later on. And him and I were unstoppable together, it was great.

Sam: What's a Battle Buddy?

Jonathan: It's your guy. Everything they assign you, you have to have a Battle Buddy. You can't be alone and so you have to be with him. You gotta go to the bathroom with him, you're supposed to be there and know where you are ... Wash your rifle and stuff with you, if you have to do a heavy job, drive somewhere, [do it] with your Battle Buddy.

Sam: Is this out in a combat situation too or just the base?

Jonathan: No. They teach you in the beginning, and then everyone becomes your battle buddy after a while. It just starts to spread and everyone's your battle buddy.

Cole: As time went on, were you regretting joining or were you happy that you did join?

Jonathan: Um, it [Basic training] started to make me Embrace more. Uh, yeah I really enjoyed it. [*Laughs*] I loved it, it was really good.

Sam: My dad's described boot camp as being like a big game.

Jonathan: It's such a mental game! My buddy told me "It's a reindeer game. They're gonna try and get into your head, but don't get them. Let them get right here [*points an inch away from his head*] and let them think they're in, but always have that idea of self." My church prayed for me. I went from a church as big as Solid Rock, I'd say bigger probably five times the size of Solid

Rock, and they prayed in front of me.¹ Or prayed for me. They brought me down and everyone prayed over me and then I went to Basic. But yeah. And when I was there, they'd try to mess with me a little bit, but out of the whole company I was in, I was picked to be promoted and picked to transfer from E1 to E2 because I was high speed. I was just kinda in the middle, quiet, with my glasses on for the first six weeks and then I took them off ... and they were like *[raises voice]* "HEY! HEY! Wait a second! Where'd you come from?" It was funny because with the glasses on I snuck through Basic.

Sam: Do you have any specific boot camp instructors or sergeants that you remember?

Jonathan: Uh, Drill Sergeant Ulem. He had a short Napoleon complex. He'd always step on boxes ... Anything around, he'd step on. If there was like a three inch stool, he'd get it, just to be a little taller! *[Laughs]* And then there was, um, Drill Sergeant Perez. He was the head guy. He looks like Yosemite Sam, but he was a Hispanic dude from Texas and he drank nothing. He'd just drink, uh, RCA and come to work and just flip his head up like he'd got two six shooters and, "Ahhhh" and bark or, "Get out and blah, blah ... Make the room sweat!" He'd just coming in drunk. *[Laughs]*

Cole: Did you guys have access ... did you have stress cards?

Jonathan: Oh no ... No, we had a kid get kicked in the chest, knocked out, we had ... *[Laughs]* we'd have our lockers thrown out the windows and broken ... We were told to police our own unit. I mean there was a kid's head that'd go through shower stalls. You know the bathroom stalls where the seated things are? Those would be broken with kids' faces many times in my platoon ... many times. The big guys, the first end of the alphabet and the last name, the front door and the back door.

Cole: Do you, uh, with the head, do you guys, uh, have doors on your stalls? We didn't have doors. It's awkward when you're trying to take a crap and you're just looking at the guy across Locking eyes ... *[Laughs]*

Jonathan: No, we had doors! *[Laughs]* Just hanging out! Like, "Hold on, buddy!"

¹ Solid Rock, also called A Jesus Church, is an Evangelical Christian Church located in Beaverton, Oregon. It has approximately 2,500-4,000 attendees.

Cole: You share magazines and stuff. I mean its comradery. We didn't have magazines, but letters ... let's focus on you.

Sam: So, did you make a lot of friendships in Basic?

Jonathan: A couple. I haven't talked to a single ... while I was in Basic, Drill Sergeant Spalding was the best one! He was this dude who was a good Christian guy, really tough at Basic, but afterwards I saw him at the mall with my family and he was legit. But, uh, I met a kid in Basic who was a Ranger [Army Ranger], just got out of Ranger school. We went to church together in high school and he was like, "Abels come here!" I saw him walk through and I was like, "No way! I know that kid!" And then the Drill Sergeant said, "Abels, you're in trouble! Get over here! Mountain climbers, go!" And I'm like, "Oh crap." Thinking I'm in trouble, I run over and start doing mountain climbers and he shuts the door and says, "Alright, get up. You and this kid go out and talk. Don't worry about standing in parade rest. Relax, talk to the guy." And so we went out and talked for like an hour. He was my good friend from high school.

Sam: Did any of the guys get homesick?

Jonathan: Yeah probably. A lot of kids ran. Not ran, but like ... So, the platoon next to us were sent in PX from the midnight. We'd do bootleg haircuts. They were just running all sorts of PX runs at night and you're not supposed to leave your room. You're in lock down. But they'd take one kid, throw him out the window or out the fire escape - because you couldn't go out the door really, you had to go out the window and they were on the second floor - So, they could jump down, and he'd take a duffle bag and go fill it up with tobacco, booze, cigarettes, everything for the night. Just for that night! And everything would be gone by the next morning. That's how people would be with their canteens the next day with a little bit of booze in them. Water, they'd be walking around just drinking out of their canteens and that's how my unit got ...

Sam: Acquainted?

Jonathan: Yeah. There were four different platoons and that one ... they were bringing in all the ... contraband.

Cole: Did you guys end up getting caught?

Jonathan: Umm, we got caught one time and had one of our passes revoked. It was a twelve-hour day pass, on the post, off the barracks. To go to the bowling alley, get some ice cream, just leave but stay on post.

Cole: Is this during boot camp?

Jonathan: Yeah, during boot camp!

Sam: [To Cole] You seem shocked?

Cole: We never had days off!

Jonathan: Well, after the first sixteen weeks or whatever, you had your nine week AIT - infantry training for me - [Advanced Individual Training] and towards the end of that, we started getting four or five days where we had twelve hour days after we'd done everything, clean our weapons, clean their boots ... We were the best platoon out of the company and he'd [the sergeant] be like, "Alright, you have twelve hours to come back. Go get ice cream." And we'd just go eat so much food that they'd get sick. Eat hot dogs ... I mean, they'd go to town because they have like time.

Cole: So, this is not during Basic, this is at ...?

Jonathan: This is at AIT.

Cole: Okay.

Jonathan: Same unit, same company, same barracks, same platoon leaders and everything all the way through.

Cole: Oh, wow.

Jonathan: That way, it's real structured

Sam: Do you think your experience in boot camp was really different than any other branch?

Jonathan: Yeah, I think the Leather Army is a lot different than the Suede Army.

Sam: What does that mean?

Jonathan: Leather boots compared to suede boots? That's when you set the polish [of] your boots, iron your uniforms, and really work hard to be a truly clean soldier. Like all those little stuff the barracks teach you to be that much more precise out in the field. Now you don't have to do any of that stuff and I feel like a lot of that's lost. A lot of that hard work, making you spit-shine, cleaning everything down, has [been] lost. And like, now in the military it's just all gone out the window.

Sam: How do they regulate cell phone usage?

Jonathan: In our unit you can't have a cell phone on or if it's seen, you can't pull it out unless we're on cigarette breaks. That's the only time a phone can come out, on cigarette breaks. So, everybody smokes in the unit.

Sam: Everyone?

Cole: And this is during AIT?

Jonathan: Oh no ... In AIT you can't have any phones, they lock all our phones. But in my unit I went to, you could. But in AIT you can't have a single ... no, all our phones, watches, pictures ... everything was locked up. Nothing we had. I had a watch because I was the very first number of the alphabet and the last guy in the alphabet had a watch. So, it's like a full unit. Like we know the time, nobody else does. You're in a no zone; no time, you're just doing stuff. Sleep when you're told, eat when you can.

Sam: So, when you went to AIT you had a lot more freedom in terms of going places but you couldn't have any outside communication?

Jonathan: Yeah. There's phones downstairs you can use. Payphones. When I was in, there were no cell phones, nothing like that. You weren't allowed.

Sam: So, what'd you do after AIT?

Jonathan: After AIT, I went from there to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Sam: And what was your rank at this point?

Jonathan: I was E2, 'cuz I got promoted in Basic Training. They picked one guy out of my platoon and they picked me to go E2 and I made another \$150 bucks, it was nice.

Cole: What is an E2?

Jonathan: Private, second class. It's a private, then private second class, then private first class is E3, and then E4 is a specialist. I got out as a specialist.

Cole: What's different between a specialist and a corporal?

Jonathan: A corporal is a leadership position that you're about to become a sergeant. You're in the process of paperwork, it's already been submitted, and they want to make you take on the responsibilities, but not pay you yet, to see how well you'll do in the responsibility position. So, if you just wanna be that little speck like I was, just slide right through and nobody will tell you what to do. You're not a sergeant so you can't be told, "Go grab those guys." They might suggest, "Would you come with us," "Would you mind ...". It's a lot different as an E4. You don't get yelled at because you've been around for at least a year and a half and you've probably been to combat. So, a lot of time you also can't tell a specialist what to do. I liked being a specialist.

Cole: In the Army, how does rank ... Is it to be respected or do you just go up to random guys like, "What's up man?"

Jonathan: No, rank's totally respected. Like, it's so respected if I'm an E3, still a private first class, and an E1 comes to the unit and he's forty years old and I'm nineteen, I can't tell him to do pushups, but I can tell him what to do and if he has a problem with that, I'll just get a corporal to come over and make him do pushups. So, my friend was twenty-one years old, that's how much the rank matters, age doesn't matter. It's about rank, time in service, and what you know. It's not about what you've done in the past, they wanna know what you know about the military.

Cole: So, an E2 can boss around an E2?

Jonathan: No, an E3 or an E4 can boss around an E1 but E2 that's still ... yeah.

Sam: So, at what point did you become an E4?

Jonathan: Uh, after Iraq.

Sam: So, you went from Georgia to Kentucky. What'd you do in Kentucky?

Jonathan: In Kentucky, as soon as I got there we started doing MOUT [Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain] training which is ... It's like modern urban warfare training or something ... Modern something ... modernize something ... urban war training and it's like M-O-U-T... whatever. Clearing houses, kicking doors and shooting bullets.

Sam: So, they were preparing you to go to Iraq?

Jonathan: Yeah. You start shooting balloons and balloons don't look like people. So, you start shooting balloons with towels and they're colorful ... anyways ...

Sam: Did they give you any training on how to deal with insurgents?

Jonathan: Yeah, they gave us training on how to deal with any threat that the U.S. deals with. They have insurgents ... We actually went down to this place in Louisiana, the biggest ... uh, it's not the Sandbox ... In Louisiana there's a base and they send you down there. JRTC or JR2C and it's a Joint Readiness Training Center, and what they do is they send all the people down there and it's the desert: swampy, sandy, hot, kinda like Iraq. And so, we go down there and we trained with these Filipinos that speak Arabic. So, we'd go down and actually interact with Filipinos. I mean they're dressed in full garb, AK-47, towels wrapped around their heads, speaking Arabic to us. And we have to go disarm them, treat them like ... And, yeah, that's how they trained people. They send people to the Joint Readiness places and train them on whatever they're going to go do.

Sam: Are these Army men you're practicing on?

Jonathan: Uh, no, contractors. Government contractors. That's what we got in the Philippines when we tried to help out. We pulled a lot of people from the Philippines. A lot of the chow halls - Filipino contractors. And so, they're over there and in Louisiana they fight us, do hand-to-hand combat stuff. Some kind of, like, light stuff to get us going and make sure we knew our job and that we weren't hurting them and were trained to handle them correctly and how to properly do handcuffs, if you are you're doing them right. And just all the tactical, politically correct stuff on how to deal with insurgents and the regular Iraqi people. Because not everyone's an insurgent. A lot of times its families you wanna have tea with. And they'll tell you, "Somebody killed my uncle. My cousin, they chopped his head off ..." So you have to learn how to deal with people

normally and a lot of the time that's having tea with someone you don't know. Could they be the person shooting at you the next day or not? It's kind of weird environment.

Sam: So, what'd you do after you left?

Jonathan: After Louisiana, we came back and then went to Iraq.

Sam: How were you selected for deployment?

Jonathan: Um, I don't know how that works. They just said that, it was so weird, two months before we were going, "We're going to go! We're not gonna go! We're about to leave! No we're not." Wheels up, wheels down, wheels up, wheels down. Every time you get ready to go, you can't tell your family, can't contact them for seventy-two hours. Then, "Okay, you can talk to them ... we're not going to leave yet." They did that five or six times to make sure. And finally when we were ready to go, nobody knew it, and all of a sudden it was like, "We're leaving tomorrow." And we left.

Sam: So, there was a seventy-two hour wait limit to contact your families once they informed you that you could be leaving?

Jonathan: They were doing a lot of that before we left. Oh yeah, they're not gonna go without ... one leader goes out and drinks the night before and gets arrested. Guess what? He won't be held in that jail, he'll go on deployment. They don't want that to happen. So, they get people all on the same base and say, "You can't leave the base, stay in the barracks and sleep." And they do that like, they know that even some of the lowers NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer] they keep on base about that time. They don't want you causing a ruckus on the town when you're getting ready to leave.

Sam: Were you excited to learn you're leaving for Iraq?

Jonathan: Uh, I actually broke up with my fiancé and then told her I knew I was either goin' to die or get injured. I told my dad, "I'm gonna get so messed up over there, but it's cool."

[Laughs] We had code words. So, we'd talk on the phone, while I was there. Code words like how I was doing so I didn't sound like, you know ... yeah. Anyways. It was cool, it was nice.

Sam: How did you know you were going to get hurt?

Jonathan: I just felt it. I don't know if I had a dream or what it was, but I didn't write down. I shoulda wrote down what it was ... But I just had this intense feeling that I was either gonna get shot, or blown up, or really messed up. Yeah ...

Cole: By this time what year is it?

Jonathan: Uh, '05. I'd been in for about a year, and we were about to deploy. It is July when we're deploying. When you're getting ready for Iraq, do you carry a lot of stuff? You do. You have a seventy pound vest that has your plates and your ammo, a helmet that weighs ten pounds, a gun, a backpack ... By the end of it, you're walking around Iraq as a 235 pound man regularly, without clothes on, but with this on, you're like, no problem, 300-325 pounds walking around ten kilometers plus a day!

Sam: In terms of physical ability, did you notice that there was an equal proportionate to the number of women in the Army was there an equal number of women that were sent to Iraq?

Jonathan: I ... I have a really funny story about women in the Army. So, there's the infantry side of the base, and there's the non-infantry side of the base. We were running down the middle of it one time and our platoon sergeant's getting us ready for combat and this kid's falling out of the run. So, he [the sergeant] starts yelling at the kid, motivating him with choice verbal combos, really just motivational. I mean, it was ... *[Laughs]* He's digging deep, and this officer lady, she goes, "You can't yell at him like that. You're gonna hurt him. He's not gonna recover." And he says, "Lady, we're going to Iraq in less than a month! Get the *[pauses for expletive]* out of my way! These are my men and I don't want them to die! I will not put ... death on these hands." And he's like "Get the *[pauses for expletive]* out of my Army." And he told the lady to get out of his Army because she was trying to coddle this kid.

Sam: Was she a commanding officer?

Jonathan: Oh yeah! She was like a full bird Colonel, and he was an E6 telling her to get the *[pauses for expletive]* out of his way.

Sam: Interesting. So, is there a prominent feeling that women shouldn't be in the service?

Jonathan: When I was in the infantry ... I'm gonna be honest, I don't really want you to write this part too much, yeah. We were told not to listen to females. If they tell you to do something,

unless they're a full bird or above, just walk away. We were told just go to a commanding officer because you shouldn't be talking to them anyways because you're off mission. You shouldn't ever talk to them. That's what they told infantry guys. You won't interact with them unless you're on your off time. Because if you're doing that, you're in the wrong place.

Sam: And this is women in the Army.

Jonathan: Yeah. I never interacted with them. Ever. I never interacted them in the Army except ... In a holding company once.

Sam: Did you, when you were in combat, were there female soldiers that were with you?

Jonathan: Never. It would distract me so bad. *[Laughs]*

Sam: Really?

Jonathan: Oh my goodness. When there's a girl in the room, it distracts. It changes the entire ... Everybody's focused on the mission and getting the job done and then there's a female and everybody's like, "Ooh" and there's that mission. And I guess it just throws off the whole game of getting the mission done. At least for combat stuff. Regulars. There's a lot of other jobs that you can do, but when it comes down to combat stuff ... that's how I feel ... that's probably really sexist sounding.

Sam: It's really interesting to hear because we have a female Marine in one of our classes, and she's very gung-ho about being a female Marine, but she interviewed someone who was not a big believer in women in the military.

Jonathan: I have a really good friend who was a female in the Marines. She was a truck driver. Hard core, real bad PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] ... and I don't think that she should have been put in those situations.

Sam: Because she's a female?

Jonathan: Because I don't believe females should ever ... I think warriors should be able to protect women. I think women should be protected and if you don't have enough men to do the job then, you know ... I think there are other jobs, but combat? Combat, front-line jobs, I don't think are best suited for women.

Sam: Because of ability? Or pure physical qualities? Guys are bigger, stronger.

Jonathan: If I got shot, I'd rather have Cole carry me out of the fire fight than you carry me out. Simply because he has more muscle and the way his body is built to tug my big ass - sorry, my 250 pound body - out of a fire fight. I'd much rather have a dude do it. That's when it comes down to combat.

Sam: Just because guys are more physical adept.

Jonathan: Yeah, just naturally. Even if a female was very physically fit and is higher physically fit than I am, she can run better and farther, she might not have the sheer muscle mass to pick another guy up and pull him out. I shouldn't say it like that. We got off topic.

Cole: Do you think, by the way, your view, and most of the guys' view ... if your friend is shot, you react differently than a woman being shot because ...?

Jonathan: My first thought is where's my .45 and I'm going into the action. And ... I'd block the woman. Step between the firefight and I'd go into it and end it. That's my first thought is to move, get the woman out of the way, communicate, and go into it. Not run, or hide, just go into it and make sure they're safe. And I don't think most women would think that way, some might. I know a lot of women at church that pack and they're pretty tough. *(Laugh)*

Sam: Do you think your view is shared by a lot of guys in the service?

Jonathan: I don't know. I can't speak for them. I know what I feel, but yeah.

Sam: Interesting. Okay, so, when you were sent to Iraq, what did you do?

Jonathan: Um ... I was sent on Operation Friendly Skies, and our job was to go from door to door and ask politely for them not to have more than one AK-47 per household. And, if they had any RPGs [Rocket-Propelled Grenades], we'd like them. And if they had any terrorists, that we'd like to talk to them.

Sam: And how'd that work out?

Jonathan: Um, we'd come in, and knock on their doors and talk to them. A lot of times we'd have tea, I ate so many dates, I wanted to throw up. We met a lot of kids that needed help, hospitals, but their parents were afraid to take them in. So, we had to tell their parents to, "Take

their kid in by tomorrow, if not, we'll arrest you." A lot of burn victims. We escorted a couple school buses, cleaned some roads out, took over a couple Forward Operating Bases, set those up. Did, um, tactical missions from searches to, you know, shaking hands, drinking tea. We met a lot of head guys around there, a lot of intel [intelligence] collecting.

I took pictures for days. I got so annoyed for a while of doing PowerPoints for my lieutenant because I had a computer and we'd just take pictures. I kinda liked it too, it was kinda fun to be that guy who helped him out. But we'd take pictures, grid location, name, and what was they were doing and we'd put it into a PowerPoint with a timeline of what we did throughout the day and that mission. As the time was going and as the map was moving, you see what we're doing. That was kinda like what I did.

And yeah, there was a lot of missions we did, a lot ... One time, we were ... this is just funny. It sounds like I made this up. I had a grenade. I bite it and I rolled it under this truck, thinking it's gonna explode the truck up. Nothing. Just boom. It just makes a boom with a little bit of smoke. And then there was this door we wanted to knock down. We took two or three, you know, shoot it. Just to see what happens. And it thumps, it doesn't even knock it off its hinges. We shoot it a second time, it doesn't do anything. We go kick it. Kicking it did more than two or three rounds and that was when I decided that grenades aren't like what they're like in the movies. Good times.

Sam: So, was your interactions with the Iraqi population largely positive?

Jonathan: Yeah! Um. I had a lot of good interactions, I think I treated them with respect and so

...

Sam: They reciprocated?

Jonathan: I had a lot of Iraqis who maybe didn't like Americans as much, but normally they'd offer you a cigarette, or they'd offer whatever they were eating. Some bread. They just offered it. They were very friendly people and if you were in their area, they kept you safe. I don't know how to describe it, but they'd try to protect you a little bit if you're in their village. We got a lot of ambushes but ...

Sam: Do you have any especially fond memories of Iraqi culture, any songs that come to mind? Any food?

Jonathan: Dates and flat bread. I love their flat bread. They make these fifty gallons of flat bread and they make flat bread and bring it out in a tray with dates and date jams and fruits and veggies and lamb on it, or goat. And if you're really cool, they'll bring out some meat, but if you're not, they bring out the veggies. And then they'll set it up. I forgot the name of the guy ... the dude in charge ... The mayor, the governor? He's like a town leader? Older guy, the uncle, the grandpa, the chief guy ... it starts with an "I ..." Not an imam ...

Sam: An imam is a religious leader.

Jonathan: But he's not a religious leader, he's a tribal leader of the area.

Sam: A sheikh?

Jonathan: Yeah, the sheikh. We'd eat with the sheikhs and that was cool! They had food, and music, and I mean, they had like these houses had satellite TV, Mercedes Benz, decked out. Old money, regime money. And then there was the house next to it who wasn't. Fire pit, you know, still pulling a horse to do their fields, not good money. No oil money, and then there's the oil money people who ... *[Laughs]*

Sam: You used an interesting phrase - "regime money." What do you mean by that?

Jonathan: I shouldn't say it like that. But old money, from the old government. A lot of them have old cash, old connections, old something. All those people that had it when the government was a big deal, yeah. There's a lot of people that were with Saddam. Saddam gave them more money. They had bigger houses, more cars, more bullets. The guys that fought him were ... they had barely enough to eat. They have to farm, they have to work a lot harder. You can tell the different houses. One house will be 4-8,000 square feet - in Iraq that's huge - and then the next house will be 500 maybe 700 square feet or maybe 200. A shack, a tiny shack. And the next is a 4,000 square foot ranch new house with a Mercedes out front. And you're like, "Whoa, okay." That's what I noticed a lot. Depending on where you were at, some people were like ... They had it very good.

Sam: What did you notice about the relationship between the people who gave from old money, you called it, and their neighbors that didn't? Was there any animosity?

Jonathan: Not really. Everyone's pretty cool. And I think the tribes, I don't know how the tribe systems work over there, but there's definitely the chief guy and he's probably got a really nice place, and there's cousins and it branches out from there and the further you are out, I don't think you have as much.

Cole: Earlier you mentioned dates, can you explain more about that?

Sam: The fruit.

Jonathan: There's so many fruit dates out there! In the trees, they have date trees everywhere and these little date fruits, they turn them into jams and jellies and you will get sick from eating these dates! They will give you bags of them and packs of cigarettes and you're like, "I don't even smoke but now I'm going to!" I started smoking over there, it was crazy. I was so nervous.

Cole: I was thinking dates like the daughters ...

Jonathan: Oh, yeah man (*sarcastic*)! You just look in her eyes and you're like, "Maybe, yeah ... She's tall." You know, maybe 5'9. That's all you can tell! You can't know!

Sam: So, did you interact mostly with men?

Jonathan: Yeah. Never talk to the women. That's the core rule.

Sam: Were they timid approaching you?

Cole: Did they wear the burka?

Jonathan: Burka, and they never talked.

Sam: Even children?

Jonathan: Never talked. Never said a word to a female the whole time I was there except, for twice when the men were far away and I got a glimpse of this one lady's eyes. I saw a greenish purple, blew me away. And I was like, "Those are the most beautiful Middle-Eastern eyes I've ever seen. Wow." And I was like, "Wow, I bet she's beautiful." But just the eyes alone ... It took

my breath away. Maybe I hadn't seen a woman in a long time, in Iraq, you know, infantry dude, but I just remember her eyes were purplish green and, whoa ...

Sam: Did you say something to her?

Jonathan: No, not at all. I didn't want to be disrespectful.

Sam: Were you guy instructed specifically not to speak with females?

Jonathan: Yeah. I mean, I was looking pretty mean over there. We had like big old police shades on, Oakley's on, M-4, looking big and mean and trying to be intimidating. I don't know.

Sam: So, did you go to Iraq twice or once?

Jonathan: Just once.

Sam: Okay. And you were injured, correct? Tell me about that

Jonathan: Um, so, the day before Thanksgiving ...

Sam: What year?

Jonathan: Uh, 2005. We were instructed to go on a mission. We'd been on a mission already for seven days, time to go home. We already sent back half of our squad. So, we were down to thirteen guys and they said, "We want you to take five of those guys, an interpreter and go check out this place." And we denied it three or four times and said, "No we're not gonna do it." And they finally told us we had to do it. And we said alright. So, we went on this mission and on that mission ... I mean, it was messed up, from Jones Street. We were all tired. We brought night vision goggles, it was 2:30 PM - it'd be dark soon. We didn't bring enough water or enough ammo. We brought all we can carry, but we didn't bring enough.

Sam: What did you expect to find?

Jonathan: Um, we were told to check out a graveyard, a weapons cache. We got there, there was nothing there. So, it was a bogus call that someone called in on a hotline with false information. Normally when that happens, an ambush happens right after. You go to this spot and nothing's there and you get ambushed at that spot, they're waiting. They just know when to say, "Hey, meet us here for your ambush!" And we go and we're expecting partial ambush, not

all the way. But we went in there, nothing happened. So, we decided to get out. And on the way out, nothing happened.

So, I'm feeling weird. I'm in the six position in the rear, I'm normally in the front. Something's weird, you know, I'm starting to feel all the hairs on my neck stand up and I know something's wrong. This isn't good ... So, I look up and I start singing "*Lord I lift your name on high, Lord I love to sing your praises. I'm glad you're in my life, I'm glad you came to save us. Heaven and Earth show the way, from the Earth to the cross, my debt you paid. From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky, Lord I lift your name on high.*" And I sung it quietly 'cuz I didn't want to scare the other troops. Then I started talking to God, and telling him I wanted to be real close to him. Six, seven minutes later, we started getting ambushed from three sides.

Sam: So, just shots fired?

Jonathan: Shots fired. First, we're walking down this road, this way, and I'm back here, and my lieutenant's up here, Sergeant Bass, and the medic and the interpreter. And the interpreter and I are talking and I'm just walking and all of a sudden rounds start coming in. Bam, bam, bam, and my lieutenant just dropped. It hits him here, same injuries here, here, and his lung. He got lung, shoulder and ring finger blown off. And I think he got a couple in the chest, but it [his vest] blocked it. So, he fell down and we hit the ground, start returning fire and we started getting fired at from the hill top, over here, and no fire from the river and no fire over here, but there's a three story house. So, we're going this way and my lieutenant says. "Let's go this way over these hills, defend from up there and get better radio coverage." And I said, "Sir, they're shooting at us." And he's like, "Oh." Blood's going everywhere. And he's like, "Alright we'll go back there," and I said, "Sir, they're shooting from back there." "Well Abels, make the call. I'm losing a lot of blood." And I said, "Sir, let's go to this three story house. I'm going to go clear it with Sergeant Musten, and we're going to call you in once we're up top." And he says, "Sounds good." So, me and the sergeant go clear the house. Don't know who kicked the door, the door flew open, we cleared that house with just pure ... just went through it.

Sam: What does it mean to clear a house?

Jonathan: When you clear a house, you clear it for any threats, what we did was we checked all the closets, all the hiding places, and, uh, behind the doors and got there. Once it's officially

cleared house, there's nobody else in it, you call in your men and they know they can go in the house and feel safe in a way. That you've cleared that house, when you can trust someone's cleared a house, it's a good feeling. You're go in from outside to safety. So, they all come in, you say, "Come on in."

Sam: So, they're coming in as you're still getting shot at?

Jonathan: No, we're on the roof. Yeah, we're taking fire from three angles. Three different directions. We're up on top waving at men, saying come on, come in the house. We get everybody up to the top roof, lock the doors, block the stuff, locking it from bottom, loading and taking beds, couches, anything and putting it against the windows and the doors. We go to the top. I'm trying to raise communications on my radio, because there was a bad call, well not bad ... there was a call made earlier about going past the limit of the radio. It wasn't my call, but we went there. And we didn't have good communications at the time.

So, I went to the top and I'm doing field expedient antennas, trying to get radio com, just sending out distress calls. I guess somebody heard our stress calls because a platoon of ours started coming towards the gunfire. We were up in that three-story house for forty minutes, shooting. I started shooting three rounds bursts, four or five times at 12-15 rounds. My sergeant hit me on the shoulder and said, "One shot, one target. Don't mess up. You're going to run out of ammo too quick and you can't handle that." And I said, "Alright, cool." He said, "Switch it down to single fire." Then one target would come up, we'd shoot it with one bullet, and then go to the next target. We did that for a while. And that was it ... after that, we needed to get out. We didn't get radio, the radio didn't work. And my medic wasn't doing much, just hanging out. So, there was four of us shooting, since the medic and the interpreter ... We're hanging out on the roof, running low on ammo, and we decided to get out of there. And my lieutenant didn't know what we were gonna do and he points at my sergeant, and my sergeant's like, "I'll go get a truck!" And I'm like, "A truck? Alright." He goes and he takes a truck, comes back. Comes back with a truck! He's got a pick-up truck!

Sam: So, he hot wires a truck, in theory?

Jonathan: Yeah! He did! You can read that in the Library of Congress, he hot-wired a truck. I went down there and I helped him a little bit, but I did not even have any idea about hot wiring

situation. I went downstairs, he comes out of the garage with a truck. *[Laughs]*. Like, okay! And I thought I was gonna help you find some keys ... like I remember looking like, "You're not looking for keys are you?" *(makes revving engine noise)* He pulls it out of the front. And he's like, "Come on in!" So, everyone, we all go out and get in, and I get in the front seat and then in the front right seat. And then Sergeant Bass pulls me out and says, "No, I'm gonna sit there." And puts me in the back seat. And so, we hauled down the road, and we were going like forty or fifty kilometers an hour and then we got ambushed again.

Sam: By another group or the same one?

Jonathan: Yeah. And the guys in the front seat both got killed. So, I would have been in the front seat, but he told me to get in the back. And I had survivor's guilt for a long time on that ... But I think God puts everybody in a time and a place. So, I'm cool with that now. But it's pretty hard because he just got married ... yeah ... I'm gonna go see his grave this year sometime. It's in DC ...

Sam: So, were you in the car when you got shot?

Jonathan: I was in the back of the truck and we were all hauling down the road and then we got back on the road that we were walking down because we weren't going own ... We made it three kilometers down the road and got ambushed again.

Sam: So, this is the third time you were ambushed in one night

Jonathan: Well, on the ground, and then we stayed in the house, then got in the car, then took off. So, yeah. So, maybe kind of two or maybe three interactions. And then down there when we got hit again they were on the side, there was two guys over here and when I saw the two guy stand up, I actually dropped ... I shot both those guys but I didn't see the other dudes and they had a weapon mounted machine gun and that one tore into the truck and by that time, the other platoon was getting close and a couple minutes later they showed up. But after I first got shot, the rounds came and hit my arm here, my shoulder, this, this, and this, they hit all this, pulled my head down, two off of my helmet - I still have my helmet, two rounds docked it.

Sam: So, you had four shots hit your right arm.

Jonathan: Yeah, four 7.62 rounds hit my right arm.

Sam: From the shoulder all the way down to your wrist?

Jonathan: Yeah and it took off my middle finger, not took it off but it damaged it. Went through my wrist. So, that happened. And, um, I'm lying on my back thinking, "*I'm going to die in this foreign country ... no I'm not. My job is not to lay here.*" I tried to snap out, *My job is to find my men, my lieutenant and keep fighting, wherever he's at, I'll be next.*" And it was a cool feeling, trying to stand up with this hand and it didn't work. I'm like grabbing my right hand to stand up and hold on and I end up getting over to him, and we're back to back kinda hanging out, doing turns on each other. And then, by that time I heard a friend saying stuff and the other medics, it'd been like five or ten minutes. And they showed up and they were like, "You can relax, we got you, we got you you're secure."

Sam: It's that safety you were talking about, you can trust your soldiers.

Jonathan: And then I checked to make sure I had all my appendages. I had everything. I was pretty happy about that. And then I asked if they could get me any morphine. They said I'd lost too much blood and they can't get me anything. So, I uh ... And then they ... I'm waiting there and all of a sudden I feel this ... I went from literally thinking I was gonna die in this country to feeling like I could hear the helicopter, feel the rotor wash on me. Again, all my hair stood up and at that point I knew I wasn't going to die in a foreign country, which is pretty cool. I knew I'd see my family again, all this stuff, it all came at once. And then, yeah, I stood up, go to the bird, and my lieutenant's like, "They made me spit out my chew and I need it!" And so I was like, "Alright, I think I got some Levi Garrett's. And I pull out a big bag of Redman and gave it to him and he put the whole thing in and started passing out. I kept having to wake him up in and out of consciousness with my good arm. He lost a lot of blood too. And that was a fun ride on the helicopter.

Sam: Yeah! From there did you go straight to Germany.

Jonathan: We went to the biop ... uhh ... not hotel, the hospital.

Sam: And so, how long were you there before you left for Germany

Jonathan: Eighteen to thirty-six hours. We got some stale turkey sandwiches for Thanksgiving, because that was Thanksgiving Day '05.

Sam: Did you get medical treatment there?

Jonathan: Yeah, I don't know. No, they just did stabilization. And then we got actual treatment when we went ... They might have washed out some stuff but probably just bandaged it, pulled out some big chunks. And then when we got up there, to uh ... Landstuhl, Germany, I actually got to hang out there for seventy-two hours and they did little bit of stuff, but never real surgeries until I got to Washington DC. And I met Ron White while I was over in Landstuhl. He came in with a little sippy cup and sucking on a cigar.

Cole: You know that's not water!

Jonathan: *[Laughs]* He asked me about my pain meds, and I was like, "No ... No!" *[Laughs]*
(Indistinguishable)

Jonathan: Oh yeah, I loved him. He just came in and started dropping jokes. I'm cracking up, I got a catheter and I'm almost peeing my pants but I can't! *[Laughs]*

Cole: You know who Ron White is?

Sam: No. Who is he?

Cole: He's a comedian. Southern comedian ... He's great. He's pro, you know, soldiers. He loves 'em. But his jokes are priceless. But he's a hit. He smokes, he drinks whiskey, on air! He's a man's man kind of thing.

Sam: You were in DC for a month getting treatment, and then, I remember you saying you had about a one and a half years left

Jonathan: Yeah, just one second. *[texting on his phone]* Sorry, what was that?

Sam: You were in DC for about a month and then I remember you saying you had about a one and a half years left.

Jonathan: After they did the DC tree lighting, they wanted to send all the soldiers who could walk, wheelchair, anything, home to their family by Christmas morning. They loaded like thirty of us onto this C-17, the most rag-tag group of soldiers you've ever seen, everybody's dripping blood. But it was good because when we all got on the bird, they took us to all, we made stops everywhere. All the big cities, drop people off at their homes. I got home at midnight, or 12:30

Christmas morning, that morning, and my dad came own to San Antonio home and picked me up and drove me to Austin and I was home for Christmas. And I woke up and it was funny, my baby sister Joline, she'd just broken her same arm and she had a pink cast and I had a big Army cast on, and she had a little bean bag pillow she got for me just so, I could have it sit there and not hurt. Yeah. She was ... I think five or six at the time and now she's like twelve, but yeah.

Sam: I bet your mom was freaking out.

Jonathan: Yeah, my mom's freaking out. She really freaked out, she pulled the pin out of my middle finger, but I said, "It didn't hurt mom, you're good." But she hugged me and I had a pin, a pin this long (three or four inches) all the way in there. What happened is I hug her, and she's got a knit sweater on and the pin got hooked on it and it just grab sit and pulls it right out! And it's just hanging there and I pull it off her sweater, and I just do this *[mimics pushes it back in]*.

Sam: You put the pin back in your finger?

Jonathan: It stopped about half way. So, I had to bend it around and stick it back in the rest of the way. That's how much morphine I was on! *[Laughs]* I was on like 300 milligrams a day. Just drooling in my soup. *(Indistinguishable)*

Sam: What was that Christmas like?

Jonathan: You should have seen the next Thanksgiving. *[Laughs]* it was a good Christmas, good family Christmas.

Sam: Good. So, what did you do after that? You had a year left.

Jonathan: I had my twenty-first birthday right after that, turned twenty one. I wasn't even twenty-one yet in Iraq ... I wasn't even twenty-one yet when I went to Iraq. So, I had my twenty-first birthday. I went out and had one drink with my brother and that was it. Just one drink and I felt sick and was like, "I can't drink."

Cole: You were still on morphine?

Jonathan: Yeah I just had one drink and felt sick. I hung out with him for a while. My fiancé, got back with her, got married, fell in love. And then got divorced seven months later. She found

out about BAH [Basic Allowance for Housing Rates] and I wasn't giving it to her, wasn't giving her that money and got mad at me and divorced me for it and cheated on me multiple times.

Cole: And you knew her before you joined the military?

Jonathan: No, I met her at church while I was in the military. *[Laughs]* Exactly, she was ... uh, anyways. So, after that divorce, I did my therapy. I got the therapy, then November started getting ready to get out of the military of '07, they kept me in a long time because of my arm. I did like seven major surgeries and four or five small surgeries like washouts and so, I've had twelve or thirteen surgeries ... No, like eleven. And a couple small wash outs in between. And, uh, yeah I did the surgeries then got out of the military.

They retired me out of the military, medically retired because of my gun-shot wounds and before PTSD they didn't talk about that. So, I was out, you know. And I got just for my injuries along, they hooked me up with school, and money, and now I'm yeah. And then I moved, got off my morphine, moved up to Oregon and that was one of the conditions. Texas doctors just wanna give you morphine but up here has natural doctors. You should go exercise, they give you back massages, you can go get all these other things that're natural as opposed to Texas where you can't and they just want give you morphine and OxyContin and Xanax and I don't need to be on that stuff. I was 315 pounds in Texas, I weigh 245 right now and I go to the gym every other day. I never did that in Texas. Comparatively, I'm a lot healthier up there and now than when I first got out of the military

Sam: And now, you're going to school at George Fox.

Jonathan: Yep, George Fox.

Sam: On the GI Bill?

Jonathan: Yeah, just last semester.

Sam: What're you majoring in?

Jonathan: I'm majoring in Biblical Studies and counseling.

Sam: What do you want to do after you graduate?

Jonathan: Work with veterans with PTSD and if I can't work with the VA straight up, then I want to be either on-call chaplain at a hospital or something. Or I can be just the guy you call and I'll be on the other line saying, "Hi, how's it going." Or you can come into my office and talk to me. I want to be able to put my Purple Heart on the wall and my combat record and just say, "Hey, I may not have been there for a long time, but you can come talk to me about what you saw."

Sam: Well, thank you so much for your time, and your willingness to share your story, we really appreciate it. And thank you so much for your service.

Cole: Yeah, thank you.

Jonathan: You're welcome.