PREFACE

February 12, 2014

6:00 p.m.

Eugene, Oregon

Interview duration: 1 hour, 20 minutes, 49 seconds (1:20:49)

Interviewee: Kevin Bourgault

Interviewers: Henry Turner and Isaac Wiggins

Henry Turner: Alright, let's get this going.

Kevin Bourgault: Alright.

Henry: It's about six o'clock on February 12, of 2014. My name is Henry Turner and this evening I'll be interviewing Kevin Bourgault with my interview partner, who will now introduce himself.

Isaac Wiggins: My name's Isaac Wiggins, and, Mr. Bourgault, it's all you.

Henry: Alright Kevin, so let's start with some of the basics. Where are you from?

Kevin: I was born and raised in the Skokomish Indian Reservation up in Washington. I lived there up until the point I went to the Army, so, I ended up joining at, ummm, seventeen.

Isaac: That's a little early from the standard eighteen. Did you join the Delayed Entry Program first or ... ?

Kevin: No, well, I don't remember if it was Delayed Entry but I remember they had to come to our house, to my mother, and then the Army became, I think, my charge or I became their charge up until I was eighteen. I left probably just after I was about seventeen and a half, is when I went to basic training.

Henry: So you were pretty young. Can you tell us about some of your motivations as to why you enlisted?

Kevin: I, at that time, being where I was from both geographically and economically, there just weren't any other options. My parents, they couldn't pay for me to go to college, I knew that. And I just didn't have any real direction or hope in that area, so it was kind of aimless. So the military, that was as good of option as I had at the time, so I took it.

Henry: So you grew up on a Native American reservation, as you said, and so just building off of that, how did your family - and you may have had a lot of family on the reservation -

Kevin: Yeah.

Henry: How did they feel? Additionally does your family have any military history?

Kevin: There's a lot of military history in the tribe and in my family. My, I don't know, my family, they don't really talk about that in terms of encouragement,] but that was kind of an expectation of, "Okay, well you don't have anything going on here, so, umm, go there," I think. I was kind of a troubled kid at that age too. A lot of drinking and partying and drugs and getting in trouble. And so my mother, I think she told the recruiter, I remember her saying, well, 'cause he asked her like, "What is your opinion about Kevin going away?" And I think she said, "Well, at least he's not going to jail." And that was it and so about two months later I was owned, so they packed me up and away I went.

Henry: So you're seventeen and you get shipped off to basic [training]. Can you tell us where you went to basic and maybe tell us about your experience there?

Kevin: I went to Fort Benning, Georgia.

Henry: And excuse me, sorry to interrupt you, what year was this?

Kevin: That was 1991, August of 1991. August 13th. I left, there was nobody to, you know, see me away or nothing, I went alone to the Army. I think my mother was away at some conference for the tribe. I packed up my junk and away I went. I went with another kid I went to high school with, Johnny Healey, he's an E8 now.[1] I think he's over in Spokane or something; he does like ROTC. But he and I went in - I can't remember what they called it - it was going in together. It was a weird deal with him. He was kind of a different kid, and when I went to MEPS I really didn't want to go where he went, and I thought he was gonna go like ahead of me and choose where he was gonna go and I could just passive aggressively choose where I wanted to go. But I went to MEPS and then I got,

Henry: MEPS is what?

Kevin: Military Enlistment Processing [Station], it's the place where you go to get checked out medically, physically, and do criminal checks and things like that. And then you choose what kind of MOS, or Military Occupational Specialties, are open at that time. Because even though there's like two-hundred jobs in the Army, there might not be openings for two hundred of those or there might not be openings in each of those jobs. So you kind of go there and you choose. I was a different candidate in that I was probably a lot smarter than anyone else in the infantry group that I was in but at that time there was no where else to put me. And so there was this new infantry thing that the recruiters were pushing and it was like, "Oh, go to the 10th Mountain," we're hearing everything about the 10th Mountain. I didn't have anybody along, like my parents weren't there. I didn't have anybody there to say, "You know, well maybe he needs a job where he uses his brain more." And, so it was like, "He's infantry. Okay, congratulations." And so I remember I came out, and I don't know how we got to this, but I came out with orders and I remember that, that guy, Johnny Healey, he grabbed them and like took them in to the recruiter to do his

[1] A Master or First Sergeant.

thing. And he was like, “I want this.” And I was like, “Awww shit!” And it turned out it was an infantry training and I can’t remember what they call it. It was a cohort in that there was a group of us who did all our basic together, all our AIT [Advanced Individual Training] together, and then would spend the next three years all together. There was nobody came in, well, there was like NCO’s would come in. But we went through the whole process together, there was like one hundred twenty of us. So, those guys at the time, at the time you're like, "God, I can’t wait to get rid of you people." But they actually turned out to be closer than most of my family just because we went through so much together.

Henry: Shifting back a little bit, back to my original question. Basic training. So I’m told every former servicemen has a great story about basic training, or a terrible story.

Kevin: I’ve, okay, I’ve got probably one of the most unusual ones, I would think. I got there, you know you get a haircut, they give you the gear. You're kind of in this holding battalion until they give you to a training battalion. So we were there like eight or nine days. It was a long time because ordinarily they get you and get you out. It was because of that cohort that everybody had to come there and we had to collect everybody, then we went over as a group. I was, you know, just another Joe in the group but I went in and I had in my personal gear, I had books, I was the only person who brought books. And they poured them out and they're like, “Who brought the damn books?!!!!” And you know, I'm like, “Ehhhh, me.” Get over, here he needs to be in charge. So I’m like, “Okay.” And then about three weeks after that, oh no, well, hold on. Let me back earlier in that day because, we had just got there and the drill sergeant, I can never remember his name, he’s the only one I can’t remember, he was only there for like a couple days. He comes up to me and he’s like, “What do you want to be in the army?” I don’t know, I said, you know, “I’m here to do my part blah blah blah.” And, for some reason at the time I didn’t know what he was doing but now I do. He’s like, “Yo, we got a badass here.” I’m like, “Wha ... what? No, nope. What do you mean badass?” And he’s like, “Drill sergeant!” Calls over this other guy. “Make this guy do PT [physical training] till he throws up!” I'm like, “What's going on here? What did I do?” And they're like, "Yeah, get in that room." So they had me do PT, like pushups and all these exercises, and I did it for like an hour and a half. I was pretty well prepared physically when I got there. I remember them, they were like, “God, hurry and puke.” And so I just kept going and going. I just remember how hot it was and just dripping. And then he was like, “Okay, well, that's it for him.” I never had to do anything like that ever again. I never got hollered at and after I come out and I’m just drenched and they're like, “Who's got the books?” And I was like, "Me." And they were like, "Okay, put that guy in charge."

Then, about ten days after that, there was some, the drill sergeants had to make a PT chart, like of everybody and who did this and the pushups, the run and that. And, they were not very, they weren't very good at making charts, and, and I had this awesome penmanship and I remember there was one guy named Calvin, he goes, “Hey, why don’t you get Bourgault to do it? He’s got excellent penmanship.” And they're like, “Okay, get over here!” And they had me do this chart or a board and then after that, that's all I did, was like hang out and do all their clerical junk while everybody was outside. I was eating ice cream week two. They would drive me out to the ranges and things, I didn’t have the basic that everyone, I mean, I was totally crazy. And so, I quit doing like pushups, I quit being tortured like week three. And I never got it again. And they were like, “Yeah, you don’t need to do that. That's more for those guys.” And after that there was language testing and a couple other things. So they were trying to get me, kind of out of that infantry unit. But I was of the opinion, I was like, I don’t know how I told them,

but I was like, “Yeah, I made my choice. I’m here so I’m gonna continue on.” And they're like, “Okay.” That was how basic went.

Henry: After basic, I know that you were stationed at Fort Durm?

Kevin: Drum.

Henry: Drum, sorry. One, can you walk us through how you ended up there? And, two, can you tell us a little bit about what it’s like to live in the middle of nowhere?

Kevin: [Chuckles] It’s a character builder. Ummm, how did I get there? Well, our group our entire group was an infantry cohort that was going to Drum. And that was just our place that we all had chosen at MEPS, that we were all gonna be infantry, we were all gonna be 10th Mountain, and then we were in this group that was all gonna go up. It was all pre-ordained. So, I went there. I had a different mental image of what I thought Fort Drum would be and I had a different image about the 10th Mountain Division. Because I grew up in the Olympic Mountains so like peaks and stuff. We were always in the mountains. My Dad was a logger, my Grandfather was a logger. We were always in the woods. You know, big hills and peaks and rivers and chasms. You know very mountainous. Well, when you get to the 10th Mountain, there’s no mountains. It’s totally, it’s like a big swamp, it’s like a big cold swamp. There’s nothing.

Isaac: That’s very accurate. [Isaac had also served in the 10th mountain in his time in the service].

Kevin: Yeah and I was like what the hell! This isn’t what they told me. And I remember I got there in November. And then, let’s see, I got there in the evening and then the next day we had to get our gear, but I didn’t have an alarm clock. And so everybody else got up but no one woke up me and the guy that I was with. So they're like, “Where are these two guys at?” We're like [snoring noises], sleeping and dreaming and stuff. And they're beating on our door, “Get out there!” So we put on our gear and I go out there and it was probably below ten [degrees], and the hairs in my nose like clung together, and I was like, Holy shit, this is cold! And then we went and got our gear, and then I remember the day after it was the first day we had to go do PT in the morning, and I remember I put on my sweat pants and my top and I go out and it's like a blizzard. It's probably thirty-mile-an-hour blowing wind, maybe ten degrees, ice everywhere, it's fucking miserable. I'm thinking, Wow, you know this is what I’m in for everyday! And we went for a two-mile or three-mile run, and my lungs were just burning, and I thought, Jesus Christ, I’m not gonna make this. This is like inhumane. Anyhow, it’s like Alcoholics Anonymous, one day at a time thing. But the cold, it really it can totally demoralize you. And it’s definitely an eye opener that I was not prepared for. I'd been in cold before but not for that amount of time and not with that, just carrying that much gear. We carried a lot of gear, like everywhere we went.

Isaac: Did you ever hear of the expression, 10th Mountain Division, to light to fight to heavy to run?

Kevin: Yeah. No our, I remember our packs in the wintertime, it was ... it would come down below my knees and I couldn’t touch it on top. And our average packs were weighing like 110-125 pounds. I was 150 [pounds] maybe. And so, it’s like carrying another person. Like everywhere you go, but in the ice. Oh boy.

Isaac: What did you think of Watertown?

Kevin: I didn't really get there until probably a month in, and then I was like, huh, this is like Shelton [WA]. Kind of like my hometown, like a mill town. There was nothing there but an SRM, Salmon Run Mall. That was it, that was it, I mean there was nothing on post, that was it. That was it, so anyhow.

Isaac: This mall would shut down when units would get deployed, parts of it, because they would lose money if they stayed open. That was how much they depended on Fort Drum.

Henry: And just to clarify, Isaac was also in the 10th Mountain and was also stationed at Fort Drum.

Isaac: Were in the same unit, just seven years apart.

Kevin: Yeah his - I was in building 10124 and he was in 10122, like it was the building right across the pad from each other.

Henry: So, umm, transitioning a bit, kind of the polar opposite from Fort Drum, you were stationed in Somalia.

Kevin: No, I got deployed there.

Henry: Or you got deployed there. What were your initial impressions. Or, I'm sorry, when were you first deployed to Somalia?

Kevin: 199 ... what was it ... 1992 I got a heads up that we were gonna go there, because it was on TV. It was on CNN which meant that we were gonna go. It was ... I remember thinking like, "Okay, I always wanted to go to Africa but probably not like this." And they ended up deploying us Christmas Eve 1992. So, I remember on pad, oh, and then here was, there was a couple really very screwed up parts about like how our deployment was prepared for and how it was kinda ironed out. They didn't have enough clothes for us. They didn't have any boots for us. We had two pairs of - they are not BDU's they're the chocolate chip ones.

Isaac: Desperate Camouflage.

Kevin: DCU's. They only gave us two pairs for the entire time. And then we had our black boots over there, which black boots at 130 degrees, you just cook all day long. And they were these heavy DCU's, they were the very - it was the wrong gear, like all the way around. And they're like, "Okay, go." And you basically had to pack everything that you owned except for the pro mask or the gas masks. We didn't have to take those but everything else we had to take. And they wouldn't let me take a knife. They didn't want me carrying a knife over there, which I was like, "Well, yes sir," and so I put one in anyways. So, and then we got deployed and we left Christmas Eve from Rome, New York. It was thirteen degrees and we flew at least like seventeen or eighteen hours on a C141, which that was not so bad. But there was no place to lay down, there was a hundred of us, like a hundred and twenty of us in this plane, arm-to-arm,

crammed in this place for that whole time. We get over the Atlantic and they have an air refueling and it was like being on a roller coaster for about an hour and a half. And so there was a guy in my platoon, Young, he starts [sick noises]. We're like, “Please don’t barf, don’t barf!” He lets go and then it was like right down the line [barf noises], and they're like - imagine being in a tube with like a hundred people throwing up on this tube. And it smells, like it was miserable. I remember just putting my head between my knees and I'm like, goddamnit, taking me out of the air right now would be like merciful. It was just this horrible smell for the whole way. I don’t know how I got past it all but came out of it, we hit and air, or umm, a landing place in Cairo. We could see the pyramids but it was like off in it’s little place there. I remember it was very gray and overcast. So I was like, Well, geez, I made it to Egypt. How 'bout that? So they kept us there for about twelve hours to kind of recoup and hydrate and eat and rest up a little bit and they put us on the planes again. Then we went to Kismayo [Somalia]. And so, Christmas we dropped into the Kismayo Airport. The place was completely unsecure, there was nobody there that’s us. And I remember the back of the plane dropping down and it was like a person took a hairdryer and jammed it like right in my mouth cause it was 130 degrees, I think, that day or something. So it went from 13 to that and like a day and a half. And, oh my God, it was like, you were like [gasp], and carrying ammo and then you had to haul ass off the plane, get to your position, do a perimeter, then the plane gets in the air and takes off. And there, that us, there's no one there. It’s us. There's like mortars all around, there's no tents, there's an airplane hanger that has to be cleared out and then there's like off buildings where everybody just kind of went there and we used that as our command post. There were some connexes there that had rotten camel hides in [them] that we had to clear. It was like the smelliest, grossest thing, so 130 degrees and there's like rotten camel hides. So we had to clean those out so we could have a place to put our gear. And I think we put our ammo in there or something. So anyhow, I remember that night I was very jetlagged, cause ya know, you don’t know what time, so everybody gets up at like three in the morning, two in the morning, and we're like, What do we do? And so we’d go out and we’d kind of organize up a perimeter and keep pushing outwards and things like that.

Henry: So after, after you’d been there for a little while and things had started to get a little more settled, more troops came in?

Kevin: No.

Henry: Oh, no?

Kevin: Just us.

Henry: Just you.

Kevin: Yeah. It was okay, actually. I got a couple good tales to tell of that. Actually on Christmas I did get an orange pop from Egypt, that was my Christmas present that year. And, ahh ...

Henry: Was it good?

Kevin: No, it was warm, it was like piss-warm orange pop, and you're like, "Eh, Merry Christmas. What the hell did I do?" And they gave out two cartons of water, these tiny little pint cartons that had a

Kilimanjaro picture on them. And that was it. "Okay, so try not to pass out from dehydration, men." And I remember I had an aid bag and it had IV's in it. And people in my platoon were starting to pass out and get queasy, so I was cutting open IV bags and putting in drink powder and having them drink IV bags. That was it, just to keep alive and keep going. And that was how it went for probably three weeks of like not having anything. And sleeping on the dirt and there were no tents, there was no power, there wasn't anything. And then we began to push out into Kismayo, then we went to, operations was like Kismayo, Jilib, Jamaame, and other places in the Jubba River Valley. But for probably the first month, two months, it was pretty much just trying to keep people alive around the airport. Just to hold that because there was only two airports in the whole, in all of Somalia, that could take in cargo planes, so for like millet and corn and things like that, they were coming into there. What we were worried about is the tribes coming in and running us off, and then they would loot everything. But that didn't happen cause we built all these barricades. Cause there was one main drag to the airport and so we built a lot of roadblocks. I built every goddamn roadblock personally for the whole place, swinging a pick all day long. It wasn't, everyday was at least a twenty-hour day. Every day. Because, umm ...

Henry: Could you walk us through a typical day?

Kevin: Yeah. You would each, each platoon, or each company had its own area, each platoon had its own area in that area, each squad deal. But there was platoons that were on QRF, which is Quick Reactionary Force, which is you have to have all your gear on just in case anything happens, anybody, then you go out and you take care of it. There was no typical day other than you got up, well for me I got up, I was eating like five MRE's a day. Which is probably ...

Henry: MRE's?

Kevin: Yeah, Meals, Ready-to-Eat. And so it was probably pushing twelve thousand plus calories a day, easy. And, just, I was still dropping pounds like you wouldn't believe. And we did a lot of patrolling, like out into the areas, and when you weren't on patrol you were fortifying your roadblocks or your obstacles or your buildings or whatever else they had you doing. Then if you weren't on that then you were off but you were only off for half of that time, half for that eight hours because the other half you had to be in your gear just in case anything happened. And the couple hours that you were off, that was when you ate and you cleaned your gear and you cleaned, cleaned like my clothes cause I had the one I wore that day and the other one I didn't wore. And I used to have to clean it on a big piece of concrete. I would have to dunk my clothes in a bucket and smack it on the concrete. That's how I cleaned my clothes everyday. So you had to do that everyday. We didn't really get any place to clean up, like take a shower for probably a month or two. So we were all pretty well dirty by then. But I just remember digging a lot. I dug everyday. I dug deep everyday. There was like these odd little occurrences that would happen during the courses of those that would change everything. Like there was, umm, we were digging a roadblock at Checkpoint Tiger, which was about two miles north of the airfield. And a guy comes and he's like throwing up his hands, "Ahhh, there's a bunch of people over on this hill side." We're like, "Okay, we go over, and it was just over the crest of this hill right by where we were. And you come over the crest, there's like three hundred people who are all hacked to pieces. Like right next to us, and we're like, "Woah, okay." So I had to spend about ten days there; no, probably wasn't ten days; probably a week there waiting for the U.N. people to come with their cameras to take pictures of it. So you're eating next to

these dead bodies and so that was a little tough to take. And then on the other part of the checkpoint there was this place called the boneyard. I'd never seen anything like it in my life. It was bones piled probably eight-to-ten foot high for probably ten acres. Just bones, like a whole pile of bones. Animal bones, people bones, just bones. In the middle of the weeds, and we're like, I remember I was like, "I gotta get a picture of this shit." So I did get a picture of that so, that's kinda cool.

Henry: While you were in Somalia, did you see or face any combat situations?

Kevin: Yes I did. Now we were there probably two or three days when the first time I got, I was in a gun battle. I remember I'd taken off my gear at night and I hear this smack on the wall. And everybody else they'd taken off their gear and they're like, "I'm gonna crash out." So I'm like the last person, we were at a Red Cross thing, so I took off my gear and smack in the wall. I'm like, "Goddamnit!" So I put on my thing and went up and they would shoot at you all night pretty much, cause everybody was armed, kids the elderly, the grandmothers. Everybody had a gun. And you know they would smile at you all day long and then try to you know, plug you at night. So that was kind of a regular occurrence.

The only thing I ever did like the hairiest of the hairiest when it comes to combat is we were at one of those checkpoints and a Toyota truck came up and it had a tube welded in the back for a machine gun. And there was probably twenty-five people on this truck. It was crazy over there. We once pulled two hundred people off of an old deuce and a half, like two hundred people hanging at one time. It was like a big ball of people coming down the road. Anybody had a car, everybody jumped on and the car went a mile an hour, but like everybody road on it. But anyhow this Toyota comes with these bad looking people. And we pull them out at gunpoint and then, cause it had this tube on the truck, there was this big deal about, "Well they're going to go home and arm up, like a crew-served machine gun on this thing." So I was like, "Well, that's bad." My platoon sergeant, he says something like, "Hey, ahh, I got a job opportunity for ya." And I'm like, "Alright, whatever, sure, let's go do this job." So he wants me and this guy, Kenny, to drive the Toyota truck - the beat up Somali Toyota truck - unescorted through town, to get to the Belgians at the port, which is about a twenty-mile trip, maybe fifteen-mile trip. But we're going like downtown, through the place where everybody tries to kill you everyday. And I don't know why but we were like, "Yeah, okay, that sounds like a good trip. Get in." And so Kenny is driving the truck, the owner of the truck is in the passenger side, I'm in the back, and I've got an M16 and M9 handgun. And I, just before we pull out, I'm like, "Okay, what happens if I get there?" And they're like, "Oh we'll call in a helicopter and we'll come pick you up." And so I'm like, "Okay, you know, that sounds perfectly okay." At the time, well now that I think about it, I'm like, "Fuck that!" I mean that was dangerous as hell. But at the time you're like, "Yeah, alright, let's do this." Kenny and I take off with this guy. And we're driving and the guy is quiet, he's a big dude too. And we get to downtown Kismayo where I think the guy had some peeps cause all of a sudden he's in the chair and he starts rocking back and forth and it's really making me like uneasy: "Okay, what's going down with this guy?" And he starts rocking back and forth and then he angles his hand on his knee like he's gonna reach down into the door console. So I'm like all my attention is on him. The minute he's goes down to it, I kicked him in the jaw really hard and so he kind of goes over into Kenny, he reaches over to the door again and he's gonna hop out. We're driving like 35MPH so I kick the door closed and he turns around and I kicked him again right in the jaw as hard as I could. So he kind of went down, these people are like coming out, hundreds of people. So here we're downtown, we've got no escort, no air, we've got nothing, and I turn to Kenny and I'm like, "Just punch

it, dude, we're getting out of here now." And so we fucking hauled ass through town. I'd never seen anybody drive as good as he did that. I mean it was just like curves, corners, just up and over, it was fucking beautiful. Get there, I'm like holding my gun on this guy, the Belgians are coming out, I'm like, you know, "Get out of the car, hands up, put 'em over your head, interlock them." So I'm holding on to this guy and I'm taking him over to the Belgians, like this guy you know, I think he was up to something. And the Belgian goes over to the truck door and he pulls out this huge knife, big pop metal one, that he was gonna grab and probably Kenny with. Anyhow so I'm like, "Phew! That was close," and the Belgian comes over and he's like, "Here, keep this." So I was holding onto that and they bring over this crane and they grab that Toyota, and this other Belgian comes over and puts his arm around the owner, they like take him around the corner. They grab this truck by this crane and they pull it up in the air about twenty-five foot and they drop it down - bang! bang! bang! - 'til it pulls this tube off the back, but the truck is totally like all f'ed up now. So I'm like, "Jesus Christ, that's bad!" And the owner of the truck comes around the corner and he's like, "Ahh my truck!" We're like, "Well, too bad for you buddy." I turn to the Belgian guy I'm like, "Okay, can I get the radio cause I'm gonna call in air, cause I'm getting out of here." And he's like, "Yeah, we don't have anything for you. You're gonna have to drive that car that we just broke through town again, with the guy." And so I'm like, "Oh fuck ..." You know, there's like no other options so you're like, "Alright, fuck it." So I got the guy in the back of the car, and I've got my gun to the back of his head, and so he's all like spread eagle. So I'm like, "Kenny, we don't need to take the scenic tour, just, let's get back." So we fucking haul ass through town, alone again. Unescorted, again. With a guy who pulled a knife, or was trying to. So we come pulling up to my people and I'm like, "Hey, here's the knife. You know this guy was going crazy, truck's all f'ed up. Where's my air? I didn't enjoy that." They're like, "Yeah, well, we don't have anyplace to put him for prisoner, so, we're just going to give him his keys and let him go." So he drives off with his busted ass truck with the other ten, eight, or nine bad guys in the car. I keep the knife, it isn't any big deal, I don't get an award for it ever. I don't get anything, no "atta boys," it was just another, like terrible day in the heat.

But the coolest part is when I came home to the Indian Tribe, my great uncle he was like, "Hey, let's go out to the garden, you can tell me all about this and that." And so, I told him that tale and he went really quiet and then he got this big old grin and he's like, "Ha, you're a war chief now." And I'm like, "what are you talking about?" He goes, "You met the enemy in combat, you took his horse, you took his weapon, and you counted coup on him. That's it, that's all you need to do". That's how I ended up getting my Indian name, is off of that afternoon, that day of total craziness.

Isaac: That's really something.

Henry: Yeah. That's a great story.

Isaac: My goodness.

Kevin: But I never got any awards for it, never got anything.

Henry: You got your Indian name.

Kevin: That's all I wanted. [Said facetiously]

Henry: Which is what by the way?

Kevin: *Shasaholly*, it means to carry far.

Henry: So how long total were you deployed in Somalia?

Kevin: Somalia, I think five and half months, something like that. And then we came home, and then I think another cohort went and took over at that point.

Henry: So when you came back it was 1993?

Kevin: Yeah.

Henry: What was it like initially when you came back? How did it feel to go from Somalia to being back in the United States?

Kevin: Okay, to be honest, it's never really gone away. Like I dreamt about that deals that I experienced over there every week for twenty years. I still have dreams about it like all the time. It just doesn't go away. I don't know, when I immediately came back, I was, I don't know, I wasn't demoralized, I was more, I was kind of broken. I mean honestly just physically beat up, emotionally beat up, and just had a lot of, turned out after I got out of there like, "Yeah, you got PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)." And so I'm like, "Well, I know where I got it, I know how I got it, just from being up and like having these crazy things happen to you all the time, and you never really know like what's going to happen next." That's kind of what being in combat is all about, it's like never knowing, the minute that you drive out the gate, if you're coming back, and having to be okay with that. But in a lot of ways it was really liberating in terms of you can only get so scared and then you're never get it again, like never again. Like nothing I do will ever be that hard, ever. Like I remember I have dreams about this, where there was a time when I was digging a ditch in the middle of the night. The nights over there were fucking beautiful. It was the most amazing, everything was just so bright, and there was, it was just so pretty. And you couldn't believe you could be in such a shitty place and have such pretty constellations and all that stuff. It was very cosmic. But I remember digging a ditch in the middle of the night and we're talking about comic books, me and my team. And I went to sleep with a pick in my hand. Being that tired, to where you're digging a ditch and two hours later, it looked like I was in a grave. And there was just like this big, it was as bright as the moon almost, this big piece of the galaxy, and you'r in this grave and you're looking up and you're just like, "Wow, this is totally amazing." Anyhow.

Isaac: You took that in a little different direction that I was originally thinking. I mean it's interesting to hear others talk about their experiences, and well even being able to admit to having PTSD. I was kind of thinking more of the after my deployments I come back to the states and it's like, "Ahh shit, I can't eat fast food for three weeks."

Kevin: Oh yeah, yeah.

Isaac: I mean, did you any ... well, the culture shock, just coming back after dealing with Somalia to the U.S.? How?

Kevin: I really didn't talk to many people. I mean I was, I really turned inward. I mean I spent, it was at that point where I did a lot more introspection in terms of what I wanted to be. Just in terms of like I have this, the life that I have at home here, and how privileged it is, but, how much I can earn it now. Like how much opportunities do I have to inject meaning into it, grow into it personally? And that, it was at that point, I mean, I don't know, I was through being an enlisted infantryman, I knew there was more. And, ummm, it was at that point where I knew that the onus for having the life that I wanted was up to me. And to take those opportunities. So coming back, I don't know, it was, I can't remember anything other than sleepless nights and I had ended up getting malaria over there, I've had malaria five times. It was because they gave us the wrong pills there. And so I had a lot of health problems coming home. But it really took honestly, I was kind broken, so it took me, jeez, ten years probably to kind of rebuild anywhere close to the person that I was hoping to be.

Henry: When you were - or in comparing your life now to being in the ditch looking at the stars, and saying that nothing scares you. I imagine that especially applies to finals week. And I'm going to use that little joke as a transition to your time in college. So if you could maybe briefly walk us through your time when you ended your active duty to your time beginning your university education?

Kevin: I was teaching hand grenades and explosive and individual movements techniques at West Point Military Academy right before I got out. They had told me that if I wanted to become an officer I could go to West Point at that point but I was, I really wanted to get out, to do my own thing, take off the uniform again and just be able to take a little more charge of the education that I wanted. So I applied for an early out. I applied like half a dozen times and they kept saying, "No, we need you. Denied."

Henry: And what year was this?

Kevin: This was 1994. And so I kept applying for this early out because I wanted to get out so I could go back to college. So I had to do all these essays about what I'm going to be when I grow up and things like that. My commanders, "No, no, you're too important. We want to keep you here, keep you here, keep you here." And then finally I was getting kind of pissed off so I go, "Well, I'm gonna go to college because I want to be an officer." Approved, approved, approved, approved. It was like two days later, "He's out. Approved. Go!" And then I was out. I went from having like the cannon going off every morning - you like, Baboom! - and hearing choppers all the time to being in the reservation, totally quiet, totally, totally quiet. And it was at that point, it was like, You're own your own now. Now you get to do this education. I ended up - I took off a year, I went traveling to Sweden, things like that. There was couple girls that I had hooked up with when I was at, in West Point. So went over there and got drunk and debauchery. Actually I came out, I was a really bad alcoholic for about, for that year after I got out, it was really touch-and-go. And, ummm, I moved probably half a dozen times in that year, just I couldn't, everywhere I went was not very comfortable. It was in August of that year that I quit drinking. I just said this is it, and so I quit drinking for twenty years.

Henry: What made you realize that you had a problem?

Kevin: Waking up in other people's houses not knowing how you got there. Just, you know, blackout drunk, waking up in your car in the morning. Cause I had chronic insomnia, so I would get in my car and I would drive. I'd drive all night long. Just driving.

Henry: Where you running from something psychologically?

Kevin: No, I just, how do you explain it? Your brain goes a thousand miles an hour. You're thinking about everything and you're smelling things. And like you remember every little itty bitty detail. And, well, let's see, to be honest, it's like talking about this, it hits home how much my entire experience there in combat and all that stuff like that, it seemed like about three days, because everything was so smashed together. I can remember other people's social security numbers, their birthdays, their favorite kind of ice cream, all the way to like kindergarten. I know all that stuff. This is the only period of time where I don't really remember everything. I get little pieces. And so I would drive around and I would try and pull out the pieces: "Oh, yeah, I remember that guy was doing this that one time. I remember being there, I remember the smells," and you kind of everything that I didn't come, I kind of pieced it, it takes like ten years to kind of piece it together. It's an odd thing, I don't know. So I wasn't running from anything, I was just trying to put it all back together, I guess. But I ended up going to community college. And I gravitated towards, he was a colonel, he was teaching government.

Henry: Where did you go to community college?

Kevin: South Puget Sound Community College [Olympia, Washington].

Henry: And it was what year at this point?

Kevin: 1995 I think it was. I had, I didn't know what I wanted to do in college because no one I'd known had ever gone to college. I mean there was no one I could ask. Like what ought I'd do, what kind of possibilities are out there for an education? So I just went to get an AA [Associate of Arts degree] just kind of to get an idea of it. I did really good in college. I graduated high school with like a 1.5 G.P.A., it was horrible. Because I didn't go, I didn't do homework, it was pointless. But I got to college and I did really good and so I've always had like a 3.9 G.P.A., all the way up until here. Like even here I've got a 3.96 G.P.A. in a PHD program, which I did while I was doing all these other things. I was just good at it, at college, because I could remember everything. Which is a trait when you're in the infantry, in combat, you have to remember frequencies, map coordinates, nomenclatures, everything. So everything has to be organized. So I've been able to use that a lot when I go in my own kind of scholastic aptitudes. But what was really important, and that was the one thing that I wanted to get across to other people kind of beginning this journey, is that it's very important to get a mentor. I've had some really, really, really important people along the way say, "You know, here's the possibilities. Here's what you can do. Here's this. Here's that." And if I didn't have those people I wouldn't know what the possibilities are. So I would attribute a lot of what I've been able to do in terms of my academic and professional lives to mentors. Just, I don't know, I'm just kind of the person who can act independently but it really helps to have that person that you can kind of bounce ideas off of. And who will keep an eye out for you. Which actually my platoon leader when I was in the 10th, he's the E-8 in the SFic Brag [?] and he keeps track of me today.

So he's been keeping track of me for twenty years now. He's the one that me gave the early out. So that's how it goes.

Henry: So you got your graduate degree. Where? And in what?

Kevin: I got two undergraduate degrees at Central Washington University. Undergraduates in Public Policy and Political Science, and minors in Economics, Geography, Anthropology. There's another one too, anyhow. Double majored and quadruple minored and did it in two years.

Henry: How many credits is that a term?

Kevin: Ahh, it's nineteen plus all the way. Which I can do that no, that's not a problem.

Henry: I'm right there with ya. I take twenty-one a term.

Kevin: Just keep punching them out. Because I treat it as like that's my job. So and then part of that job is coming to class everyday. That will absolutely open a lot more doors. So I ended up getting a McNair Scholars program deal. And then I went from there to Indiana University. I was in a PHD program there in environmental policy [that] I didn't care for. So I transferred to Duke and I got a masters in public policy and that was in 2002. After that I came back to the Northwest and worked for Indian Tribes and also for a military training company in Butte, Montana. Did a lot of mountaineering, cold weather operations, things like that that I knew.

Henry: And when did you come to the University of Oregon?

Kevin: I got in 2011. I was the second cohort in the Critical and Sociocultural Studies in Education. I was the College of Education's most promising scholar for 2011-2012, so they paid for everything. So I completed my program and did my comprehensive exams in the last eighteen months and so now I'm doing my proposal, which I ought to be done with by the end of the quarter or by the end of spring quarter. So I'll be done with the Ph.D. probably in three years.

Isaac: That's fantastic.

Henry: What do you intend to do after you get your Ph.D.?

Kevin: Well they haven't treated me real well over in the College of Education. They won't allow me to teach. There's also a problem because one of their people I won't name a name but I found out, well he was being totally bizarre to me, like I was in class and I was gonna do a presentation, and so I asked to get up to go to the restroom, and he's screaming at me, "Sit down. I said, sit down." I'm like, "Look motherfucker, it didn't work when I was three and it ain't gonna work when I'm forty. I'm going." Then he started coming to my house and then drunk calling me, so I had to go to the dean and put an end to it. And, so, there's been a lot of bad blood there. That's another thing that I got from being in the military is I'm an idealist. Like there's the way things ought to run. My idealism, people they admire it, but they don't have a lot of, I don't know, it puts people in an awkward position in terms of I don't take crap from

anybody, just because there's a lot of people who laid a lot on the line for me to be here and so I know that everyday. So everyday when I come here, you're carrying like everybody who didn't get here. Anyhow, I don't know where else that's going.

Henry: What across your college experience has been your experience of being a Vet on campus? How do you think it makes you different from a civilian?

Kevin: Honestly, up until my experience at the College of Education it was people treated me professionally. They didn't have to do a lot of micro-managing. They were helpful just in terms of giving me direction but not trying to take control. At the College of Education here, it's a detriment. Honestly, every, I have to go to classes where people talk about how horrible the Army is to people in Iraq and Afghanistan, and how terrible these people are. And then I have to be the one to argue against it, like twenty-five people beating me up everyday. And just in terms of me being recognized as a combat vet here, only the person in charge the scholarships here, Drea Olsen, she's the only one who's ever sent me an email about that my entire time here. They all know, every Veterans Day comes and goes. They don't care, not even don't care, they I don't know. It's very hostile towards me everyday.

Isaac: That's very unfortunate.

Kevin: That's kind of how they operate there.

Henry: That leads me to just a question of interest for myself. I'm wondering as someone who served and as someone who spent a significant amount time out of the Army. What is your opinion of the armed forces?

Kevin: Oh that's a very big question. I don't, I think these are, these are people who are exploited on the one hand. They're just like me, they're poor kids who don't know what's out there. This is it; they don't have a lot of options; they don't have a lot of opportunities. They get used to do a lot of deals that I wish they wouldn't get used for it. So as I've grown older and had time to look back, there's a lot of angst that I have in that you really, I really adore the soldier, but I don't the mission. Anyhow, if it was up to me there would be lot more people home a lot quicker.

Henry: Just kind of wrapping up,

Kevin: Oh, oh, hold on, I do want to add. Now I've been kind of pigeon holed into this Ph.D. program in terms of, okay, I'm the expert in Indian education. My original goal here was to do veterans education. They don't want me to do that there because there's no one who can speak to it, which is code for there's no one who can critique it. But if it was up to me, I would teach everybody, every damn enlisted person that I, that was in the boots that I was in, the goddamn game plan that I have used to get my education paid for. To get business, to get my house, to get everything that I've got, like all my wealth, that's the only thing that I can really give back. But they don't allow me to do it here so I have to do my other project, at that point like probably going to abandon that and just do veterans education. Because the University of Oregon treats the goddamn G.I. bill like an ATM machine. They get you in the door and they take your money but they don't get you out the door. It's honestly, it's like under, what is it? Eighty,

it in like eighty-eight percent of veterans who come to the University of Oregon, they never get their degree, eighty-eight percent. But they're paying like tuition, they are taking that G.I. bill that they like sweat for and bled for and did all that horrible junk for. They take that but they don't give them a degree and I just think that's terrible and that's like what I'm trying to build. Some kind of a consciousness about that here and trying to be that, but the College of Education, they want none of it.

Henry: That's very unfortunate.

Isaac: That fucking sucks.

Henry: Go Ducks. So anyway, kind of wrapping up,

Kevin: Wrap it up.

Henry: Wrap it up a little bit. So looking back on your time in the service, you had your initial motivations to join. And I assume that you had things that you wanted to get out of it when you joined. How ultimately did what your initial motivations for what you wanted, how did those end up differing from what you actually got out of it? And, in congruence with that looking back are you happy you joined the Army and if you could do it all over again, would you?

Kevin: Oh, yes, I would. I wouldn't have done the infantry, I just don't, I just think if there is any tragedy of the arch that I went was I would have probably been in today had a recruiter not try to just say, "Ahh 10th Mountain Infantry, go hooah." The Army could of, I could've been in a lot of other deals in the Army. I've got a lot more aptitudes that I think were, were not capitalized on. But if I had to do it over again I'd do it in a heartbeat. I mean I would go back today if I could. It's ah, it's a different place and for a person that has never been in, you just don't get how not, everything that I've, all the organizations that I've been in after being in the Army. They don't have the camaraderie, they don't have the trust, they don't have the professionalism, they don't have the esprit de corps, they don't have the mission to know what we're doing. We know, I know what he's doing, I know how to help him, he knows what I need, he knows how to help me. Once again my own program, I pinched them on, I'm like, "What's our mission here?" Not one single fucking person in the office could tell me the mission. They could say, "Oh, it's on the internet." I go and look. It's not even on the internet. So I'm like what do you do here, like who are you helping? How are you helping them? When are you helping them? These are like basic deals that I expect, that are directly attributed to my time in the military. To know who, the what, the when, the why, and the how and you don't get that here and other places. It's like, oh yeah, whatever. It's - there's a lot of trust that I don't have with these places. They're not here to help people, they're here to keep that organization going, alive, to give those people employment, and I just totally am completely antithetical to that. We need, everyone needs a mission to help, and they have to be beyond the individual. And so that's what I try to do in all my projects, that's what I try to do in all my activities here on campus is to get beyond me the individual. That's why I'm here. With the breath that I give you, if that can help one person, then that's good, that's what I mean, that's great. That's the whole purpose. That's not what I come across in the organizations that aren't part of the military. There's a lot of ambiguity, not a lot of trust. Things like that.

Henry: Terrific, well that was fantastic.

Isaac: I've just got a couple of quick questions. Kind of the ones that we emailed you. One thing that surprised you the most about your military service?

Kevin: How boring. There was, I mean some times where it was really like cool, it was better than any movie you would ever be in, cause you're like a fucking part of it. But then there were long periods of boredom where I learned to play cards, I learned to play pool. And, umm, I just was in like a perpetual holding pattern, you know waiting on orders.

Isaac: Hurry up and wait.

Kevin: That I would really have to carry that out and that really tempered the experience that I had because I'm more the person, "Let's get this done today, let's do more, keep going, keep going." And I had to spend a lot of time with a lot of people like, "Well, well wait here for orders." And it's like, "Shit, let's go. Let's do things." That was the one thing that I wasn't quite prepared for.

Isaac: Alright, and I suppose that would probably surprise someone that wasn't in the military and had no experience with it. That I know how you mean that boredom. Is their anything that you think that would surprise someone that was in the military about the military?

Kevin: Just how much, how much flexibility it has. Like you can be anything, you can do anything, but you have to get, you have to ask. That was part of my problem in the military, I was always waiting for another person to tell me. Like "Okay, it's okay. You want to do this class now? Well it's open." As opposed to me saying, "No, goddamnit, this is what I need to do. I need to do this and this and this." So for a person that is in the military, what I would tell them is there is, there was a lack of professional development in terms of like, How do we create these people into more? Because they'll get you to where they want you to be but they can be more, but you can't develop anybody without professional development and I just, there wasn't a lot of personal professional development at that time. Which I think if I could interject that into people today, I think that would change a lot. Just in terms of like they're own educational arc. Or they're own professional arc. Just that being able to say, "This is what I want to be? How do I do it? How can I help?" Things like that.

Isaac: Then if you could pass one thing on to society, fifty-to-one-hundred years from now about your military experience?

Kevin: One thing? I would really, I would hope that society could find a better way of transitioning and including people. I'll be honest with you, my life after being in the military, I am in this big place, there are, there's no place for a guy like me. I mean I've been unemployed for years on end. I have a genius IQ and I can do all these deals, but there just isn't any place to put me. And that was kind of an eye opener and I always, I always wanted to do more beyond that, but there was no place to transition into that place, so that's even today, that's been my constant hurdle is to try to include me into other parts. Because as a veteran and, I just don't think we're, well, we're either viewed as being broken or crazy. Like you can't be anything other than a dependent or like some psycho. But there is a lot of great people in between that get,

that drop through the cracks because there's nowhere to put us, there isn't anywhere to house us. I think that's partially why I ended up in the university because I could keep going and I had a place here and I had a kind of a venue. Cause I don't have anywhere else.

Isaac: Really good answer, that's, ahh, that's what I was wanting to know.

Kevin: I don't have any other answers. I mean I can, there is, there just isn't a lot of place that you're going to get through the government or any of these other programs because I'm eligible for all of them and they all don't do anything to help me. Like I went down to behavioral health there because I've been having a lot of insomnia the last two years. They're not giving you any help. They'll give you pills all damn day long but they won't give you like a person to talk to. A lot of craziness comes out in like the things that I write. I have a very good poison keyboard. Anyhow.

Isaac: Well thank you very much for your time. That was just fantastic.

Henry: Yeah, thank you so much.

Kevin: No problem, glad I can help. Good to meet you guys.

Isaac: Good to meet you to.

Henry: Yeah, nice to meet you.