

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL ORESKOVIC
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WALTER REED

CONNIE DOEBELE, C-SPAN: How long have you been here?

MICHAEL ORESKOVICH: Since October. I got here about October 16th, that's when I came to the hospital.

DOEBELE: How long you're going to be here?

ORESKOVICH: Probably another six months. That's what they say.

DOEBELE: That's a long time.

ORESKOVICH: It takes about six months to a year for amputees to recover. Oh, depends on the amputee.

DOEBELE: Where are you from?

ORESKOVICH: Eugene, Oregon, is where I was from.

DOEBELE: When did you sign up – did you sign up for the Army or are you reserves?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes. I signed up for active army. It's all I wanted to do since I was a kid. I think it was the beginning on May is when I went in and talked to the recruiter and I signed up. Like two days later, and shipped out in two weeks after that.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICPANT: How old are you?

ORESKOVICH: I'm 23.

DOEBELE: So, what were your first day – where you spent the first period of your army training?

ORESKOVICH: Fort Benning, that's on I – yeah, actually, kind of messed up by signing up in springs and I spent the summer down south and been (INAUDIBLE) and you know, big shop – so I went through that infantry and airborne training all that on Fort Benning is when I – I actually kind of messed up signing open springs. It means I spend the summer down south. And being Pacific Northwest, it's a big shock, the humidity and stuff. So went through infantry and air-borne training down at Fort Benning. It lasted till like mid and end of September was when I get back up after that. Then, I was stationed up in Fort Louis.

DOEBELE: In Fort Louis?

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: And tell me what your unit is?

ORESKOVICH: Bravo Trope, 114 Cav, 3rd brigade, 2nd patrol division. We were the first stryker brigade to go into Iraq. The first activated one – one army switching to, as part of the – call it a – our unit's considered a RISTA (ph) squadrons. It stands for reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisitions. We were eyes and ears of the brigade. We basically do the lead reconnaissance for our brigade when we were in Iraq.

DOEBELE: So, is this the time when people watching this will go, "Hey, come here. It's the guy from the cavalry or it's the guy from the infantry."

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: What's the camaraderie like? For people we don't understand the Army.

ORESKOVICH: Yes, and even some people who are in the Army, because combat arms is different from the regular army – you know, how to say, a little bit more disciplined, more focused on our job. We stick together a lot easier because – you may have friends in high school and stuff but it's nothing like you're out there freezing when it's snowing outside and you're hugging somebody on the ground, a little poncho over you. You get a little close, and tough situations make you closer. So, I always thought of them like family. In fact, I miss them more sometimes than I miss my family. And my Dad left, so it's OK.

DOEBELE: Yes, I did notice that your father is here today.

ORESKOVICH: Yes, he's staying with me. My Mom and Dad, you know, after hearing what happened, came out to see me because I lost my arm in my last mission, the second time I was here. They were hoping that it was over and I got a phone call, they flew out here as soon as they could, took them a while to get out of here but.

DOEBELE: And they stayed here.

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: Where do they stay?

ORESKOVICH: At the Malone House with me. I was in the hospital, so about mid to late November till I was finally discharged. And I think it was 15 months before I was able to actually go home on leave for the first time because I spent a whole year in Iraq without taking leave. And I went home after – I was finally able to get discharged from the hospital and pull all the tubes out of me and all of the other stuff. So, it was nice. And my Dad came back with me; my Mom was with me the whole time. She doesn't do too well in cold weather. Yes, the temperature out here would've killed her.

DOEBELE: And this house, is it just a house that you share with other people?

ORESKOVICH: It's called a Malone House. It's part of the official house for an organization. It is actually a converted hotel they have for outpatients. It's like 50 to 100 rooms per floor; there's like four floors. And they housekeeping that comes in at night, you know, clean up and stuff like that. So, it's a place for the outpatients to stay and recover and also for their family members to stay with them for a while.

DOEBELE: Do you remember when you found out that you were going to Iraq?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes, long time ago, just couldn't tell anybody, you know, security. I think it was – we knew we were going as soon as we invaded. We knew we were the first stryker brigade and we were finishing up training. And they wanted to use us as guinea pigs because we're the new thing the Army was going to switch to. We had all the latest equipment, everything the Army will be using for the next five to ten years. They gave us first, so we knew that we'll be used. And we left in November.

DOEBELE: And where did you go first?

ORESKOVICH: Somara, after spending two weeks in Kuwait, you know, prepping and getting used to the climate, put slide armor on our vehicles and packed up and we rolled across the border on December 7th.

DOEBELE: Do you remember your first battle? Or did you have an actual battle?

ORESKOVICH: I was in a motor platoon to start with, you know, we provided fire support for the scout units that were actually doing courting off and searching the outskirts of the town, where the infantry would go in and sweep through, looking for insurgents and terrorists and stuff like that.

DOEBELE: Help me to understand that a little bit. You're job is to protect other members of the military?

ORESKOVICH: I'm providing an indirect fire support. Things getting too heavy for them in a fire fight, they call on us and we drop mortars on the enemy. I did that for about two months and then I was transferred into the scout platoons.

DOEBELE: What kind of new equipment did you use?

ORESKOVICH: Stryker for ones, the new piece of equipment.

DOEBELE: What is it?

ORESKOVICH: Eight wheeled armored vehicle. It's kind of like the marine corps LAV except it's a little bit bigger. It's the fastest vehicle in the Army that will outrun Humvees

DOEBELE: What's it look like?

ORESKOVICH: Eight wheels, it's got a pointy nose, it's got a remote weapon system on top, system (ph) by the gunners down below, its all done by – it's like a video game actually. It's usually a (INAUDIBLE) or Mark 19 (ph) on top. It's got two rear air guard hatches for troop standup, provides security, highly mobile. It took a lot hits, you know, from IEDs and RPGs and kept rolling in a lot of times. It was great. We also used thermals, you know, the new thermal equipment that's coming out for the soldier's to use.

DOEBELE: The thermal – they're guard. Is it what you wear?

ORESKOVICH: No, no. Thermal scopes.

DOEBELE: Thermal scopes. What does that do?

ORESKOVICH: Let's me see somebody out in the dessert, you know, miles away. It picks up the heat signature. So, like 30 outside and somebody's 98.6 degrees, it's easy to pick them out.

DOEBELE: Did you play video games when you're younger?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, all the time.

DOEBELE: So, it that helped you?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes. It helps you with hand-eye coordinating, you know, actually more than playing video games, I did target shooting as a kid. I grew up around guns. That's where my family is and we always like going hunting and going shooting, you know, it's something I still do to this day. I'm actually better at it because I have a permanent rest in my mechanical arm but I've always loved doing that

DOEBELE: How did you lose your arm?

ORESKOVICH: Last mission In Iraq.

DOEBELE: Last one.

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: You were on – you're going to come back.

ORESKOVICH: Yes. About two weeks or so, we were coming back to the States. October 5th, we were doing a court on a search in Mosul and it was going OK. We came back and a car bomb went off. I don't know exactly the distance of it but I barely caught a glimpse of it. It gave me shrapnel on my left forearm and my right hip. I was able to return fire along with the majority of everybody. And a few of my friends ended up getting wounded.

We came back and we're all pretty much OK, returned to duty except for one of my friends. And then, you know, we're doing OK. We got our Purple Hearts a few days later. I called my parents and said, "I got to hit. It's OK. I'm getting my Purple Heart; you'll probably see it on the news. Someone will probably call you, don't worry about it. I got three missions to go, you know, and then I'm coming home."

Our replacement was the second stryker brigade; it came over and we spent that morning after the Purple Heart, turning our equipment over to them. Spent the whole week pretty much doing it, it's a long process. And they give us one last mission, to cordon off a large section of the town and sweep it. And then, we come back, and my platoon was in the lead. We were leading a few companies of the infantry, you know, behind us on our way back to the base. We were lined up on Route Tampa (ph) which is a heavily hit road in Mosul and in Iraq.

After thirty or forty minutes, we started driving away. We knew going to get hit. We were stationary. If you stay stationary, you're going to get hit; it's bound to happen, it's guaranteed to happen actually. We were rolling back, we heard there's supposed to be a car bomb, you know, along the road somewhere and looking for it but it's two lanes of traffic. There're cars parked in the median and on the side of the road, and there's traffic all around us. You're never going to see a car bomb until it goes off – detonated between two strykers.

DOEBELE: Between the two vehicles?

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: Where were you?

ORESKOVICH: On the 11th. I was in the gunner's position that time.

DOEBELE: Front or back?

ORESKOVICH: It's towards the front. All the other stryker vehicles, pretty much, they have a remote weapon system where the gunner just has to sit inside, looks through a computer screen. But up top of our reconnaissance vehicle that I was in, you have to stand up and we're called free gun kind of, you know, sit down and you hold the trigger on it, because we have an Elras (ph) which is big, huge thermal camera siding laser range finding piece of equipment we're using. You have to be able to switch back and forth between the two. So, the gunners on reconnaissance vehicle stand up and I was about waist high when it went off. My gun was to the left which means I had a big open space to my front and detonated in front of my truck and behind, another one and took my arm off incidentally and then temporarily blinded me at the time.

DOEBELE: What's the next thing you remember?

ORESKOVICH: My hand was numb; my arm was sort of robotic (ph). I couldn't see because pieces of shrapnel hit me in the face and made my (INAUDIBLE) which are sunglass-type goggles that I was wearing at the time exploded on my face. I knew to keep my eyes closed in case I had something in my eyes, I just don't want to move it around and do further damage to my eye in case there was something in it. There was blood pouring down on my face and felt warm fluid pouring down in my arm and soaking through my clothes in my left side.

My head was hurting really bad because the shrapnel, you know, tore through to my CVC and cutting it up pretty bad. I had cuts all over my flank vest from shrapnel. The Mark 19 was all messed up because I had my left hand on it and shrapnel hit it at the same time. Elras (ph) was about the size of a TV or a normal 17-inch computer screen, you know, exploded. Big, huge parts of metal around the vehicle all turned up.

I remember yelling back to the platoon leader, he was in the track. He was asking for status. I don't know if I said we were OK. He asked how bad. I'm like, "Real bad." They helped me down inside. I was lying on the ground of the vehicle, one of my friends through a tourniquet around my arm. I just remember sipping water, telling them that my eye was hit badly; I needed a bandage on my face.

DOEBELE: Did you know at that time you'd lost your arm?

ORESKOVICH: No, I was trying to feel for it. I had my eyes closed the entire time, so I didn't see any blood whatsoever. I opened it for a split second to see who was getting back into the gunner's hole. One of the guys that was sitting down below, one of my friends, climbed up, took my position but couldn't operate the weapon because it's too destroyed. So he used his rifle to return fire in the area.

Just took sips of water because I was real thirsty. I was conscious the whole time. The actual platoon sergeant that I was taking over – his platoon that I was taking over, he was hit at the same. He was in the back screaming a little bit because he had wounds to his face.

DOEBELE: He was just coming into Iraq.

ORESKOVICH: Yes, this was actually his first time out.

DOEBELE: First time out and last time out.

ORESKOVICH: Yes. He's doing OK. I was actually told he died while I was in Germany. It shocked me but then I found out later on that he's OK.

DOEBELE: Anybody else hurt?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, my squadron leader died instantly. He was in the right rear gun, actually the truck in front of me. He's was pretty bad. He's barely recognizable at all. Other gunner who was his gunner at the time, massive shrapnel wounds all over his body, punctured him a few times. He's lost part of a skull, he now has a titanium plate in his head, you know, and a few other shrapnel wounds to certain people. Actually, blew the driver's hatch clean open from a locked position on the vehicle, which surprising. I give the drivers a lot of credit. They're just privates who just came to our unit a few months since we went to Iraq and they became experts at driving these vehicles. They knew to get it back, go to the cache (ph) as soon as possible.

And so, I just laying in back, telling how bad it hurts. It was, like, they didn't tell me that I lost my arm. I didn't ask; I tried to feel for it a few times. I figured it was probably broken and bent over somewhere, and it was hurt really bad, that it had a piece of metal sticking in it. I just took sips of water because I was real thirsty until we got there. I remember them dragging me on the vehicle and telling me I was OK, and turning me on a gurney and them cutting all my clothes off, which kind of pissed me off because we actually were issued to sets to the ACUs. We were prototypes that the Army will be changing into soon.

DOEBELE: The new army?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, issued uniforms that we all got. So, I was a little upset that they were cutting all that off of me. I was like, "I want to keep those. No one else in the world was going to have those except for us." And, yes, they put me under. The next thing I know, I wake up and I look over and said, "Oh man." That was my exact terminology which was say I was cussing to God a few times a day. And then, I

woke up a few minutes later, puking. I wasn't used to having morphine in my system. Never done drugs in my entire life, so having narcotics in my system kind of messed me up. I'm told that they were going to fly me out in a few hours and a lot of people from my unit came in and wanted to see how I was doing. It's was kind of emotional seeing them. That's when I found out that my squad leader died and people were injured.

DOEBELE: What do you guys do when you lose a squad leader like that?

ORESKOVICH: Move on, next.

DOEBELE: Do you talk about him, do you pray, what did you – what is there...

ORESKOVICH: Yes, we have a memorial service. There was a – I think it was a month or so, before our 3rd platoon was on a dismounted patrol in the northern part of Mosul. A car came around the corner; they're getting to load back into their trucks but their trucks were around the corner from them and the stryker recalled the truck, which is not a track, it's got wheels not tracks. They saw our dismount team down in Alley (ph) way and they pulled out RPK out of the window, armor-piercing am ammunition in it and they shot the whole dismount team. Only one person didn't get hit. One of the team leaders died. He ended up getting shot in the femoral artery and in the wrist. He's able to return fire, you know, until he died and a lot of people were wounded, and there's no way to help. So, a few days after that we had a memorial service for them. It's kind of hard to deal with. We have no choice.

DOEBELE: Do you know them quite well?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes, All the time. We know where they grew up and their family members, their wives, their kids, their Moms, their Dads, few some other things I won't talk about on TV because it's embarrassing. But you know them more than you know your family. I know more about certain guys that I know about, you know, my Dad's history, stuff like that. So, you get really close but you have to move on. Same that you're going to forget about them but you have to put the mission first because if you don't more people are going to get hurt and killed and it's just going to get harder and harder.

DOEBELE: How long was it after you got hit that you got your prosthesis?

ORESKOVICH: It took awhile. I actually had 11 surgeries on my arm.

DOEBELE: Eleven surgeries?

ORESKOVICH: Yes. When I got blown off, it was disintegrated, there was nothing left of my arm. There's no hand flopping around on the decks somewhere. It was all gone; I looked like chewed-up hamburger. They had to clean it out and pack it up. And then, when I flew here, they actually closed me up because if they leave you open, they fly you over here.

DOEBELE: So, from Iraq to...

ORESKOVICH: Yes, to Germany, to here.

DOEBELE: To Germany.

ORESKOVICH: Yes, because the professionals are over here who actually deal with amputees. They're the ones that close you up properly and repack your muscles you're your nerve endings and see what's left of your body, just to take it from there.

DOEBELE: How long was it between the time that you got hit and the time you arrived here?

ORESKOVICH: I hit on the 11th and came here about 16th or 17th something like that.

DOEBELE: So, five or six days you have an open wound.

ORESKOVICH: Pretty much, you know, I was in surgery pretty much every week, maybe a few times a week. They were taking me and cleaning me out, getting rid of all the infections and stuff like that. And I've grown new infections and they go in and clean me out.

DOEBELE: What was the pain like?

ORESKOVICH: Excruciating. When it happened it did not hurt that bad, to tell you the truth. It could have been adrenaline. I remember feeling, you know, warm fluid; my hand was numb, like if you sit on it for a few hours and get that tingly sensation. But for the forearm and elbow hurting real bad, like somebody beat it senselessly with a baseball bat. Other than that, it didn't hurt too bad until the surgeries and stuff like that. The phantom pain was the worst, external pain.

DOEBELE: Phantom pain?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, amputees lose a limb, you still feel that limb. Like right now, I can still feel my hand and my fingers, my forearm, my elbow and others. It doesn't hurt as bad as it used to. Back then, it felt like it's on fire or that it's freezing, that your fingers are broken or your pinky's folded over a few times over into your elbow. It's a hard thing to deal with.

DOEBELE: Is that going to go away?

ORESKOVICH: It depends on the person. You know, people who've had it in Vietnam still have it. Some guys who've been here have lost it within a few days. It depends on the person the last (INAUDIBLE).

DOEBELE: Can you tell me a little bit about your arm?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, it's a bioelectric arm made by the Utah Arm Company. It's myoelectric (ph). There're two sensors in here, one which feeds off my biceps, one that feeds off my triceps. Tricep makes the hand open. The bicep, when it works, makes it close. I'm feeling the beginning phases of it, so it takes time to do stuff.

DOEBELE: About how far down is your own body?

ORESKOVICH: Half way between my biceps and tricep, pretty much where my shirt length is in my arm, that much I have left. They'd to shorten it up a little bit for the prosthesis to fit.

DOEBELE: Is this state of the art?

ORESKOVICH: It is by now, but not compared to leg.

DOEBELE: Not compared to what?

ORESKOVICH: Leg prosthetics. I figure more people have lost their legs to mines and stuff over history. So, prosthetics for legs are a little bit more advanced. This is more advanced, you know, than anything in the past. But like I said, I can only open and close it and rotate it, you know, clockwise and counter clockwise. But to move the elbow back and forth like this is – I can do it manually.

DOEBELE: Rotate – you can do this?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, I can even bring the arm up sometimes. There's actually a cord that's on my back shoulder blade, that when you pull it, rolling your shoulders forward, makes it pull up.

DOEBELE: So, you're doing that – I see. That's not any kind of use of the sensor.

ORESKOVICH: No, no, that's my shoulder, which is a string pulling on a little motor. When I give some attention, it moves up and if I hold it in a position long enough, it locks and it stays there no matter what I do until I – the only way to unlock it is to pop your shoulders forward real quick, give that a quick tug and release, and that releases the pin. I can move it to a position that will click and it locks. And then, it stays in that position. I pop my shoulders again and it can move.

DOEBELE: So what kind of things do you do in this room?

ORESKOVICH: Every thing. They teach you from pretty much in the beginning where we were taught when we were kids growing up, they re-teach you. I'd to learn to tie my shoes all over again. Tying your shoes and using a zipper is the hardest thing for a person who's lost an arm.

DOEBELE: Even though you have your right hand. You have your right hand but it's just – you need two.

ORESKOVICH: Next time, put on a jacket and try to feed that zipper in and then try to pull it up, it has took me a month to do, along with tying shoes. Tying shoes one hand is extremely hard, folding clothes, taking the shower. I've a little scrub brush that has little suction cups going on the walls so I can wash my arm because I can't do it myself

DOEBELE: What do you do when you get frustrated?

ORESKOVICH: Go work out. As a reason I had 11 surgeries is because I'd over do it working out. They try to get you out of bed as soon as possible and get you walking around again – atrophy legs and start losing legs and so on. In the infantry and (INAUDIBLE) prove that to be better than everybody else. So, you always got to try harder than what they say to do. I'll just walk a little bit for like 10, 15 minutes. I'm going to do it for an hour, I'm going to jog it to prove that I can do it. Then, I get more fluid draining in my arm and then I'd get more infection, I had to have more surgeries.

So, I had to stop for a while. So, there was a lot of time it was frustrating, you're in bed all the time, you get woken up because they want to take blood for testing. The doctors coming in, poking and prodding you, stuff like that. You don't get a lot of sleep in the hospitals.

DOEBELE: How much pain medication have you been on since you got your prosthesis?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, since I got the prosthesis? I've been on medication since I got – since this happened. I was taking about 10 pills a day, four times a day for different kinds of pain and stuff like that. I've actually been able to lower it a little bit, since having this. The arm doesn't make it better. In fact, sometimes it makes it worse. I don't have much muscle left in my arm, muscle tissue that left. So, you're constantly firing your bicep and tricep and after awhile it's going to get fatigued and it's going to hurt and you're going to get a lot of pain. So, the pain medication helps you kind of fight through it, but also you don't always want to overdo it because then you can't use this at all.

DOEBELE: I was watching you put the arm on, that's some procedure you have to go.

ORESKOVICH: It's kind of annoying, you know, it's a little – it takes some practice to get used to. There's a little sock that's actually – it's made out of nylon fiber that parachutes. It's got a little bit of cord on it that you slide over your arm. There's a little hole right here – this thing on screws. Just stick the cord down into it and slide your arm down into it and you pull that cord. It pulls your arm into it because without it you just (INAUDIBLE) and push it. It's kind of silicone-based substance, so it's going to be kind of hard. You don't want to tear your arm or put lot of strain and tear out open and stuff. So, it helps suck your arm into it and you just kind of add a little bit pressure down into it and screwed it in. This is a

little air valve where I can push down into it a little harder and I can feel more suction into my arm. I can press it and it releases it a little bit, puts a little more air into it now. Seats your arm in a it. Also, this a little cross-harness that keeps it there because I don't have much of an arm left, so gravity eventually it going to rip it off and make it fall of. So, the harness keeps it all on, just keeps your arm sucked into it and (INAUDIBLE) make it work. I already used it for a few hours to dance but hard time using it now because I'm passed my tolerance level.

DOEBELE: You get fatigued with your muscles...

ORESKOVICH: With this, yes.

DOEBELE: So, you're 23 years old.

ORESKOVICH: Yes.

DOEBELE: How is this, if it all, going to change, what you want to do with the rest of your life?

ORESKOVICH: I wanted to go back to my unit but everyone says no.

DOEBELE: Who decides that?

ORESKOVICH: The military.

DOEBELE: Do you have a part in that decision?

ORESKOVICH: I could fight it. I'll end up going a board, a medical board to see my status. You lost a limb; he's pretty much to unfit for duty. You can contest it. Since President Bush said that amputees can go back in the service and they do. There're a lot of cases that do. But once you're SF, you're not going to get back to your unit.

DOEBELE: SF?

ORESKOVICH: Special Forces. For them, they've invested millions and millions of dollars in training you, so they're not going to toss you out the window. I'm saying if they're going to toss me out, they'll let me let me stay in the Army; but carrying a riffle in the infantry platoon or scout infantry, that wouldn't happen.

DOEBELE: So you are going to stay in the Army?

ORESKOVICH: I don't know, I haven't made up my mind yet. I'm talking with the Army guys in VA and there's also an option for me to go back to school and get an education.

DOEBELE: You think you'd be frustrated thing in the Army with a desk job?

ORESKOVICH: Yes, because that's all I ever wanted to do. I was one of the better shooters in my unit, so I loved it. I've loved everything about it. That's all I ever wanted to do. Any book report I ever did as a kid was on the military.

DOEBELE: Where did you get that from?

ORESKOVICH: From me.

DOEBELE: I mean, there wasn't anybody in your family?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes. My family's been in the Navy and stuff like that. That's probably where it started, you know. A grandfather was on a Lexington in World War II and I just started learning about the marines and World War II was a big topic for me. Military history is my favorite subject. And I learned about World War II, not just from Americans' aspects but from the Germans and the Russians and the Japanese. You get kind of prejudiced in those sorts of things, and they kind of keep you close minded. You got to learn how other people fight, not just the way you in your history of doing things.

That was a big proponent of, you know, learn from your history, you going to repeat it. I've never made any mistake of it. The other guys in the history I've ever done. I also love learning about ancient Greek, Roman history and their ways of warfare and "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu one of my favorite books, I still read it constantly. And that's all I ever wanted to do. Now, that's kind of taken away from me. I got to learn something else.

DOEBELE: That thing that I noticed was your T-shirt, the back of your T-shirt.

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes. Peace through superior fire power. That's true.

DOEBELE: Well, of course, you only see the peace.

ORESKOVICH: Probably see it. It's probably covered up a harness.

DOEBELE: Then you see the fire power.

ORESKOVICH: Yes, that's true.

DOEBELE: What's your statement?

ORESKOVICH: What's my statement?

DOEBELE: Yes.

ORESKOVICH: About what? I've a lot. I mean pick a subject and give me one.

DOEBELE: By that, I mean, you know, what do you say to the people who think that we should not be in this war and that we should be able to negotiate our way out and that there is possibility for peace.

ORESKOVICH: You're dealing with people who don't care if they live or die. They believe that God would reward them for killing themselves, for killing a lot of people. I still remember planes flying into buildings in the Pentagon; a lot of people kind of forgotten about that. They don't care, they will kill you. They will kill your wife; they will kill your kids. They don't care about you. You are their enemy, as all they care about. As much as kids love candies, these people like to kill Americans. It's the way they are.

And they don't like us to the way we live, the way we woman's rights, the music that we listen to, you know, the religion that we follow, whatever it maybe for people. They don't like freedom of choice like those press people. And I don't go for that. I'm proud of the fact that I actually gave people a right to choose. If they want to go with democracy or monarchy or whatever they want to go with, that's fine. But I gave them the right to choose of what they want to do in life. And that all any human should have is the right to choose. You shouldn't somebody tell you what you're going to do for the rest of your life. It's not what being human is.

DOEBELE: Did you have much interaction with the Iraqis while you were there?

ORESKOVICH: All the time. Yes, I worked on the border of Syria for, I think, three or four months, and we do village assessments all the time and see what we can do to help villagers out.

DOEBELE: Is there an anti-Americans feeling there?

ORESKOVICH: Sometimes. Some of them...

DOEBELE: How they express?

ORESKOVICH: Let's see, it depends on the situation. Kurdish towns, they love us because we got to rid of Saddam, who used to torture and pretty much almost kind of genocide on those people, so they loved us up there. It also gets to the point where you don't help them out too much, they start to, "Well, what good are you?"

You haven't totally reformed everything. They kind of expect a little bit too much from us and we should have a miracle over there by now. Why don't we? Why isn't there a Starbucks on our corner? Why don't we have paved roads? Why don't we have running water all over the place?

It's also a matter of the way they think. You got to understand there's a reason they call it a third-world country, is because we're thinking the way it was, back in the dark ages, where religion rules the way they think. There're a lot of people over there that don't know how to read or write. So, the people who do use their influence to speak to them, whether it be religious leaders or sheiks or whatever, are going to give their ideas on the way people should live their live. And they really believe in Mohammed and the word of Allah, and stuff like that. (INAUDIBLE) wipe his butt without toilet paper in his left hand and wash it with a bottle of water, then it's good enough for you. There's no reason to advance.

A lot of them kind of feel that way. They still live in mud huts out there. They've trenched – you know, go to the bathroom. They've raised their farm animals or grow crops, and some of them make their home clothes out of old scraps and material. Some of them don't care to advance, some do. It's hard to make everybody happy. And we do the best we can.

DOEBELE: Well, first of all, do you have any contact with your unit while you're here?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes.

DOEBELE: How do you have contact with them?

ORESKOVICH: I talk to them on the phone, mostly e-mail once in a while. My unit got separated since we got back since we flew a stryker brigade. Everyone who knew anything about it was sent to training areas or to different units. So, they were considered the experts. Now, they've got to go train the rest of the Army how to fight, how to operate in desert in highly mobile vehicle.

DOEBELE: How do you keep up with the war now?

ORESKOVICH: I watch it on TV, you know, on the news.

DOEBELE: What do you think of the coverage?

ORESKOVICH: I don't know. I've always – it's been hard for me to watch the news, you know (INAUDIBLE) to more towards the liberal side, like you're more about Michael Jackson trials than in soldiers dying. You know, same way with Monica Lewinsky, president getting head. The table was more important – that's what really set me off, was – that really convinced me to go in the military was seeing American soldiers dragged through the streets of Somalia.

That was the turning point in my life. It was like, OK, get your ass in gear, you're going to join the Army. You're going to make sure that doesn't happen to anybody ever again. And it was wrong to leave after that.

DOEBELE: That visual impact of that.

ORESKOVICH: Can you imagine if that happened today? Drag, you know, a few sergeants through the street pretty much naked in middle Baghdad. George Bush said, “Hey, get all your stuff. We’re going home.”

I would be outraged in the country and we’d look pretty much like wooses to the rest of the world. No one would ever take us seriously. It took us a long time to get back our feeling of being a superpower and that people would take us seriously and take our threat seriously. And I know a lot of the rangers who have fought in that were very pissed off if they had to leave. They don’t to leave a man behind. That’s hard for them to deal with. It’s hard for me to deal with, even when I was a kid. That was a long time ago, like, what – 12 years ago, something like that.

DOEBELE: You were 11 or something at the time.

ORESKOVICH: Yes. I read the book when it first came out.

DOEBELE: The Mark Bowden book?

ORESKOVICH: Oh, yes. I still read it constantly. You got to keep that in your mind. Like I said, you know, follow history and learn about it reading and repeat it. Right now, I mean, although the American public is very supportive of the troops and I noticed that it’s a lot different than we first invaded Afghanistan than what it is now, in that everyone starting to get a little bit more relaxed. “OK, we don’t need to be in the Middle East anymore. We kicked their butts a little bit. Let’s go home.”

Osama bin Laden’s still out there running around in the hills. He’s got his contact with outside terrorist groups, especially the ones in the Philippines, which are now getting to be the largest, Indonesia and the Philippines.

DOEBELE: Do you find that when that happened there is a drop in morale in terms of you and your colleagues?

ORESKOVICH: Losing a friend?

DOEBELE: Not losing a friend. But when you hear that the American – or when you get a feel that the American people aren’t supporting you the way they might have at the beginning.

ORESKOVICH: Yes. I had a lot of friends come back from leave. A few of them came back early because they didn’t like the mentality of people over in the States, they couldn’t deal with it. First they felt bad that they were pretty much abandoning their friends for going on leave, same time with their families who are over here getting shot at, getting blown up, you know, in the desert, during the summer, during the winter. But just seeing the way people act towards, like, “Yes, you know, you should be in Iraq.”

I’m not saying it’s getting fun when people are spitting on you and calling you baby killer, the way our veterans in the Vietnam war, but it’s getting to that point sometimes, especially (INAUDIBLE) is based in Washington, Oregon, in California, you know, it’s very left-wing, very liberal. I’m fine with that.

People have the right to believe what they want. But it’s hard for me and my friends to understand why some think we should be when someone’s being oppressed, being put down and being beaten. I guess that happened in Idaho. You know, the whole country will be up in arms, “Invade, invade. Get rid of them. Kill them, lynch (ph) and crucify them on the White House lawn.” Because it’s over there and they’re not Americans (INAUDIBLE).

A lot of people still believe in that isolationism that we had beginning in World War II, before we were actually were in the war. “The Europeans will then deal with this (ph). Oh, you know, Japanese and China

that. Let them deal with it. That's their problem; they've been doing it for hundreds of years, they continue doing it and it'll be up to them." So, they brought it from (ph) us. It's everyone's responsibility.

I still think we should go over to Rwanda, in certain parts of Africa. That's just as bad, if not worse.

DOEBELE: Some people watching this might say that you are very articulate for a 23-year-old. Do you feel that any of these experiences have made you grown up faster than you would have?

ORESKOVICH: Yes. I mean for one aspect, getting blown up twice makes you love the people you love more, you grasp how short life is. I understand the way the world works and the way other people think besides people who live down my street. How the real people think of the way things are and how they view life.

Yes, I don't know like one sentence and know how to put it. But, yes, I've learned from a lot of people.

DOEBELE: Thank you.

ORESKOVICH: You're welcome.