

Rough Transcript
Mr Michael Hornburg, Father of Cpl Nathan Hornburg KOCR (30 August 2016)

Deployment(s): Afghanistan

Interviewer & Transcriber: LCol M.C. Vernon

Note: Quotations are not 100% verbatim

Timecode	Content
0:30	His impressions of the military growing up? He was born in 1950 in middle America, within days of the Korean War starting. As part of TV generation, he saw propagandistic, nationalistic movies in support of the US Army and he grew up embracing those stereotypes until he graduated from high school and realized he might have to go to Vietnam. Four years in university coloured his impressions of the military at that time. He was able to fulfil his obligation to the draft through some vague bureaucratic manoeuvres. That ended his potential ties to the military, though he continued to follow the Vietnam War in the media.
2:45	He even made a trek to Washington to participate in an anti-war protest. In 1973 he met a Canadian in Europe. She was from a ranching family near Nanton. They fell in love and spent a year together in Europe. He returned with her to Canada in the spring of 1974. The family he married into were multigenerational ranchers with no military involvement. The Forces weren't an issue in their lives.
4:30	Were you anti-military? No, he was anti-political involvement in it. "I was very frightened by the concept of going to Vietnam. Challenged by the American image of boot camp. Being locked up with strangers and put through extreme physical challenges I didn't feel capable at the time... It was more boot camp that frightened me."
6:10	His number came up during the draft lottery, a number in the bottom 10%. He'd considered several options and discarded them. He knew one fellow who went to Canada. But he didn't know anyone in Canada and was used to his extended family in the US. His father is still alive. He's the oldest of six children, all of whom are still alive. "I never was going to abandon the United States, but meeting a beautiful Canadian woman in love with me gave me a new option..."
7:45	He was prepared to go into the army, but had other options too. One friend volunteered for three years, instead of serving two years as part of the draft. He was stationed in Germany, working at an office job. "No one was shooting at him, that's for sure. Vietnam wasn't the only option. They didn't have the whole army in Vietnam."
9:15	Nathan's on the scene, what kind of young man was he before military? Very sensitive. Fairness was a big consideration for him. He attended the Calgary Waldorf School, an alternative private school. His family

	<p>was very involved. He had long term friends and was a good athlete. He was selected as Calgary's junior high school athlete of the year after grade nine. They attended various sports events together. "We were great friends. He was really interested in sports." Nathan followed his sister to Bishop Carroll High School, with its alternative program. But he wasn't as driven and disciplined as she was. Enjoyed sports, but not getting up early. "We weren't much of a military family. We read politics and history and knew about situations around the world, but didn't have strong relations with the military here or in the US."</p>
12:10	<p>Nathan began talking to a family friend in the KOCR about the part-time job opportunities and what the regiment was able to do. Nathan got background info when he was 17. "The week after his 18th birthday he surprised us by making the first independent decision of his adult life by joining the KOCR in June 2001. Looking back, that was one of the worst times to volunteer to be a soldier, sort of like being 18 and volunteering for Vietnam, because in September 2001 there were the attacks in NYC on 9/11." Nathan hadn't started school that morning. He ran upstairs. Father, son and daughter watched the events unfold. "Having my American background, I was very distraught. At first upset by potential for large loss of life. But I also new that in the days following the United States was going to be very, very mad and there was going to be some big payback. And I had the terrible premonition that it was going to be something bad for our family. All this eventually came down the road years later on the battlefield in Afghanistan. I began to feel that particular kind of energy right there. Even though he was still in school, on the football team, with the Reserve. It was always his intention. I followed it every day on the news, the CF involvement, the accidental tragedies." It was sort of like going back to the 1960s and always having Vietnam around, the same sort of energy, before Nathan decided to go on his mission.</p>
16:10	<p>Did he share this premonition with Nathan, family? He shared it with his wife and close friends a month or two later. Not to Nathan.</p>
16:40	<p>Nathan's reaction? He was very upset. They were all stressed out. Watching the first few moments, commentators said there were 50,000 people working in the towers. So the first fear was for such huge numbers of casualties, like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Bad enough it was 300. Witnessing it with daughter and son was very stressful for all three of them. "A lot of very upset energy between us. " Both children are also dual citizens, American and Canadian.</p>
18:30	<p>How did you see Nathan changing through his involvement with the military? "He grew up 18-24 from a big boy to a young man." Had jobs, took a two-year program at Mount Royal College. After his death, several professors said he was best student they'd ever had. He was interested in politics, geography. "We had a sense of the world community. He changed into the type of young man who thought... a</p>

	big strong man like him, with his opportunities, should be willing to put his life on the line to defend others. This was the attitude he took on his mission.”
20:35	“We have Nathan’s diaries when he articulated this, his comments to the media before he left because it was a news story that four reservists from KOCR were going over with the Strathconas.” Nathan was first Canadian reservist since the Korean War to operate a main battle tank, to provide more firepower against the Taliban.
21:55	Nathan’s decision? Nathan had moved out, called him on a work night and said he an opportunity to volunteer on the tanks in Afghanistan. They’d talked about a mission before, but not Afghanistan. He didn’t want to make a decision for him or to prejudice his decision. “Why don’t you sleep on it one night.” But Nathan called back in 10 minutes after speaking with a peer in the regiment, and said that if he didn’t take it quickly, someone else would snap it up. So that was that. The family was right behind him. “I never personally said anything negative about Canadians deploying to Afghanistan.” This was part of belonging to NATO and following its treaty. One member had been attacked. It was also a UN mission, so he had no grievance with the deployment. However, he thought “naively, in hindsight, that the Canadians were more secure than they were. Especially operating a Leopard tank.” He couldn’t visualize a forward operating base and the frequency of engagements with the Taliban.
25:50	What about the premonition? Did it come into play? No. The thoughts came up “but I refused to engage them. As a father, I was not going to envision anything that meant harm to my son. Maybe it was superstition. I just wanted to send him all the good loving energy that I could. I never wanted him to worry about me. If I articulated worries about him, that would distract him from his task. Wanted him to focus. That was the best way to ensure he would come back alive.”
27:15	Did you have a family send-off for him? Yes. The family has a ranch in the Porcupine Hills west of Nanton. The property belongs to his daughter. Her mother died of breast cancer two years ago. There was an extended party, an early Thanksgiving in August 2007 for Nathan. This morning, he opened a folder that said “Nathan” with a portion of his diary that said he departed 28 August for Valcartier. Nine years and two days ago.
29:00	What kind of contact did they have once Nathan was overseas? From the beginning of his training in Gagetown, on the American base outside El Paso—“He said it was like being on the moon, in the desert there”, they trained in Germany with the manufacturers, but based out of Edmonton with the Lord Strathcona’s Horse. He became good friends with them. Thought they were the best people to be around. “He was like the kid in the regiment. Always spoke highly favourably about his fellow soldiers.” He would phone from Afghanistan. “It was

	as clear as if he was calling from his condo in Calgary. The last phone call we had was for half an hour, a 12-hour time difference, I was in bed reading and he was finishing his coffee in Afghanistan. Talked for half an hour, then phone cut out. He called right back because he didn't want me worried. Technical problem. Said he had to go off and do a task. 'I said I love you, son. He said I love you too, Dad.' That was Sunday night. Next day was a beautiful day in Calgary, September 24 th , a Monday evening. I came home and was going to have a glass of wine, and my doorbell rang."
33:00	"Not that unusual in suburbia, but for whatever reason, maybe that premonition, I didn't want to answer the door. But I did. There were three Canadian Forces in dress uniforms and I knew in an instant. I talked to my son not even 24 hours before that. That glass of wine sat untasted on my counter for days until I headed to Toronto, to the air force base to escort Nathan back. Nathan was the 71 st soldier to lose his life in Afghanistan and he was the first one to come down the Highway of Heroes after they put up the signs."
34:45	There was so much traffic coming out of Toronto. People got out of their vehicles, lined up behind the barriers. It was an incredible display. Very classy. "It changed a lot of my Albertan views about Ontarian people. It was very powerful." In Calgary, he was on the runway when Nathan's coffin was brought home. Lined up with soldiers and policemen. Very powerful. Felt a hand on his shoulder. It was a friend, a baggage handler, there on his day off to support him. Saw windows of the airport filled with people watching. He gets this memory every time he travels through the airport.
36:45	There was a parade to the funeral home. The city was "so classy, it gave us the Roundup Centre for Nathan's funeral. So inspiring. It's a classy place we live in. To this day, I've never heard a bad word about the CF from anyone." To help with his legacy, he speaks wherever and whenever he can to promote the legacy and actions of the CF. "I'm just so proud my son served in that kind of organization with those kind of people. Soldiers he served with come down every year to help out on the ranch in Nanton. Remarkable people. They fly in, even after they're retired." Nathan was made an honorary electrical mechanical engineer due to the circumstances of his death. He and his wife Linda flew to Kelowna when Nathan was made the first honorary member of EME/REME.
39:30	They were allowed a next of kin visit to Afghanistan. October 2009. And on the EME base at Kandahar is "Hornburg's Corner", a sign that now hangs at the base in Edmonton.
40:00	What happened that day to Nathan? Nathan was on an operation that began early on September 24 th . In English, it was Operation Honest Soldier. They were going to reopen a police outpost in a remote location. Abandoned or overrun. Canadians were deployed in two

	<p>streams: a decoy force and those heading to the police station. Nathan was part of the decoy force. They came under small arms fire 15 minutes after leaving their base. People have to be desperate to attack Leopards with small arms. They proceeded along the Argandahb River. It was shallow. They stopped across from a small village. One tank lost its track. Nathan drove the armoured recovery vehicle. The ARV. With a crane instead of a gun. He'd already pulled some LAVs out. He went to pull out the Leopard, when his own ARV threw a track. The other tanks surrounded them in "a ring of iron". They were taking RPG and machine gun fire.</p>
44:00	<p>Nathan worked outside on the tracks. They got the track back on his vehicle after several hours under fire. The commanding officer found out the insurgents (Taliban? Chechnyans?) were using a Russian-made shoulder-fired anti tank weapon. Nathan was back in his tank when the shot came in. The second round struck the front of Nathan's. It backed up and stopped. Other soldiers were injured by shrapnel. The medic was ordered to check on Nathan. "The medic came back at a moment. The CO yelled, 'What are you doing? I told you to check on Nathan.' The soldier said, 'He's gone.'" "Apparently against all odds, they'd put extra armour on the tanks to deflect RPGs, but this shot had come in on a crazy angle and sheered off one of the bolts that attaches this type of equipment and one of the bolts went through and hit Nathan in the heart. He died instantly from a single wound."</p>
46:55	<p>They called in the US air force to transport Nathan and the wounded to Kandahar. Fighter jets came in too to drop some large bombs where the shots had come from, from "the mortar". Apaches and Blackhawks too. The whole battle escalated quickly, but "too late for Nathan." After several more hours, the situation stabilized and the other force re-established the police station and they returned to Masum Ghar.</p>
48:45	<p>Was it a mortar or a rocket propelled grenade? A mortar. An 81 or 82 mm anti-tank weapons. Russian-made. Recoilless rifle. "Heard it called a mortar, but it's a shoulder-fired recoilless thing." [His description is confusing. A recoilless rifle is not shoulder-fired. They would normally be mounted on a tripod. And mortars are not used in an anti-tank role.] "I'm not sure."</p>
49:20	<p>There was some confusion at the time? He was certainly confused at the time. He was told Nathan was killed by "a mortar." Other soldiers explained it to him, but said it was shoulder-fired mortar.</p>
50:30	<p>Don't know what to ask you. Are there other impressions from that time? An incredible amount of images. Trenton. The pilot when they landed in Toronto mentioned to everyone why they were there. Everyone else remained seated when they got off. He met General Hillier and the Governor-General Michaëlle Jean. "I thought I was in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi in that situation. Felt such incredible sympathy, empathy and grace. She was the right person. It was very</p>

	powerful. I'll always have that memory." That began the process of meeting so many people he never would have met, through Nathan's legacy. "Thank you, son, this is another gift from you. 'Nathan' means 'gift' in Hebrew, and he was born on Fathers' Day. He's given me so many gifts, he's with me all the time."
53:00	This is different from past situations, very different from Vietnam and how soldiers were brought home. Because it was unpopular with the American population. In Canada, every loss was taken so personally by our entire population. Politicians. "So many people recognize me from various public events, telling me about their losses, not just from CF. Grief is such an incredibly human connector in the world. I'm really humbled by that. I wish I could be a better person to recall this all the time. To be kinder. Nicer to people. I see the CF as representing that around the world." Perhaps we make mistakes, but try to represent what's best about being human.
55:15	Grateful? "I've been very fortunate in my misfortune. The CF have embraced me wholeheartedly, said I'm a member of their family. An incredible privilege. Humbled. Never expected to be in the Forces. Not brave enough or disciplined enough. But if anyone asks me to speak to or about the CF, I will do it as long as I'm physically capable."
56:50	When did you start thinking about Nathan's legacy? Two things come to mind. He was made aware of Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan a few weeks after Nathan's death. He went to a dinner and they asked him to speak, something he'd never done before. He had no idea he could talk about something so emotional. He saw everyone else was weeping. This helped him overcome his fear of public speaking. Then a friend from the Running Room came up with the idea of organizing a run in Nathan's name. He used to run cross country at the Calgary Waldorf School. Both mother and father were also long-time runners and racers. Decided on "Loops for the Troops" and held it Father's Day 2008 at Currie Barracks, then moved it to North Glenmore Park. This was the largest public think he did to support the CF and Nathan's legacy.
1:00:00	It didn't happen in 2016, however. He was a bit worn out by the responsibility. But he thinks 41 CBG might be interested in taking over its management, using the name and taking responsibility. He's willing to assist if that happens.
1:01:30	Effect of Nathan's death on his family? He's never heard anyone say anything negative. When he told daughter, she screamed and cried on the phone. Linda, mother, spoke at events. Daughter, Rachel, has a silver cross. "We talk about Nathan all the time to Rachel's two children, who never met him." They're people who "go forward". But he thinks it might have contributed in some way to Linda's breast cancer six months after Nathan's death. She didn't drink or smoke, did yoga, and her parents lived to their 90s. After treatment, the cancer

	came back several years later. She died at age 67. "I think perhaps grief had a lot to do with that. Can't know. Shouldn't perhaps speculate. But something caused it."
1:04:30	Why is it so important to speak through the tears? It's part of being human. He'll go to do something at a grocery stores and the teller will say, 'I know you. And tell some vignette about their loss.' They'll share their stories. He's touched by that. He came from an American family that was very literate with magazines and newspapers. To this day, he picks up literature and people's deaths become numbers. He thinks talking about Nathan personalizes the situation. "I'm not embarrassed by my tears or my emotions. I'm human... I'm a conservative earthling, parent, writer and artist."
1:07:00	How concerned are you that Nathan's story might be forgotten over time? Not concerned. That's the nature of humanity. Perhaps a year ago I told it a different way. "Trying to tell the truth, but my emotions change and it might change how I tell it." There are CF members in harm's way now. If he's asked to stand and speak for them, he'll do that too. "It's not just about Nathan. It's about the best and bravest in our society who have allowed me to have such a life of privilege. And sometimes I forget and it becomes a sense of entitlement. And I don't want to be entitled. I want to do the best for the planet and all people if I can."
1:09:20	When you speak, what's the one thing you want people to take away from Nathan's example, his story? "In one word—peace. I close every talk with 'peace', emails and notes too. " To work together, the most ingredient is peace. That's what he hopes Nathan's legacy will inspire. He lost his life in a battle as a soldier, but he was least-armed. He drove a tank without a gun, it had a crane. He was out working without a weapon. Wasn't out to engage anyone in any way. He embodied the concept of peace. When there's a job to do, it's all part of the concept of peace."
1:11:15	It sounds like you had a very strong relationship... "We did. We had an incredible relationship. It was not trivial."
1:11:30	Any final thought? "I might keep us talking forever... You've got a lot to edit to get me down to 30 seconds."
	Additional details? --Trenton footage with Hillier and GG? --Highway of Heroes? --funeral at Round Up Centre --Nathan's diary excerpts or media interviews before deploying