Soldiers are soldiers no matter where you go in the world. You have an immediate camaraderie with them whether or not you've worked with them in the past or you will work with them again you just kind of see each other and you go okay let's get the job done.

My name is Captain Corey Anhorn. Born in Edmonton, Alberta, May 12, 1985 and I'm part of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, Reserve Unit in Montreal, in the Canadian Army. An infantry officer is the backbone of the Canadian Forces really. They identify, close with, and destroy the enemy, is what the infantry does and my job as an infantry officer is to lead these men to be able to do their job. So, all the administration, all the planning of training that we do, all comes from the infantry officer side. So, we tend to leave as a small group of 40 people, and then we lead them into training and into combat, if you do get deployed in those situations.

My tour in Afghanistan was one of the final tours that was a full-length tour. Afghanistan had been going on for almost 10 years already at this point. The Taliban had already been pushed back in certain areas and our job was to make sure that the Afghans now could control those areas themselves with their own solidified, professional army. This is an Afghan recruitment and morale poster. This poster was created for the Afghans to build a sense of pride amongst themselves and to show that their army is now professional. In Afghanistan, they're trying to build a sense of Afghan soldiers for Afghanistan. So, they had these all over the place and it shows, you know, different groups like you have Hazara people, Tajik people, Pashtun people in here. Different units represented, and they look professional they look like they're ready to go. Be proud of who you are, you're a real military now fighting for a real cause. It's written in Farsi with the Afghan National Army symbol and all different units represented throughout and you can see proudly they have the Afghan flag. It's one of my favorite things I own, and it makes me very proud to be part of it.

We worked in Camp Black Horse which was called the Consolidated Fielding Center. And the Consolidated Fielding Center basically took the Afghan soldiers after they've done their basic [training] and we gave them all the equipment and all the extra training they need to know to be able to use this equipment. So, sometimes we go out into the training area which is basically just a desert in the middle of nowhere and we basically take their equipment, show them how to drive a truck for 48 hours, 72 hours, and then you're going to war. These guys have never ridden anything beside a donkey or a horse. Now we're giving them these trucks to go to war with and you have 48 hours to kind of learn how to learn this and all the how to do all the maintenance yourself and how to park and drive and mount the machine gun and all this stuff, and every minute is ticking.

I was involved in mentoring the HHC, the Higher Headquarters Company, Captain. So, it was a Captain who had served in the Afghan National Army or different types of militia groups for 30 years or so. And I'd been in the Army for three and a half years at this point. And I was then supposed to mentor him about how to do his job administratively and how to do his job in kind of a Western military sense. He had his own way of doing things that were very effective but in order to work within the kind of administrative bubble that Afghanistan was now working in, we had to teach him how to kind of move into this next step of operations. And to be honest, I learned just as much from him as he did from me and it was a really great experience. Beyond that I also mentored a lieutenant who was in charge of the base security portion, an Afghan, and a sergeant who was in charge of the DFAC, the dining facility. So, each day I'd go, and I'd meet these guys with my interpreter, we'd kind of tackle an issue of the day, and we'd try to get through it, each day a different kind of issue. Sometimes the same issue would take weeks, but in Afghanistan a lot of the things

take a little bit of time to get through and get to know people before you jump directly into the business. That's what we did every day.

Every soldier has a patch they wear usually, so this one is the NATO training mission Afghanistan which was Canada's contribution to the NATO mission. This patch kind of brings back the elements of why we were there and what we're fighting for. So, the Afghan flag colours are in the back, NATO in the top with the Afghanistan country silhouette, and then the Afghan unit within our area had the same patch on their shoulders at all time. We wore this all the time just on our shoulder to show that we're on the same team and the Afghans kind of had a similar patch. And the idea is that we always want to be on the same page, we don't want to keep a sense of us being superior, we want to show that we're here for Afghanistan and it's your country we're just here to help you out how we can.

Afghan soldiers are very similar in a lot of ways to Canadian soldiers but very different obviously in a lot of ways from Canadian soldiers. A lot of them were illiterate, a lot of them had never left their hometown, and in the mountain in the middle of nowhere. So, a lot of these people had a brand-new life to live and it may be in a second language. So, whereas we had French-Canadian soldiers trying to work in English, the Afghan soldiers were speaking Pashto and were trying to work in Dari. So, a lot of the similar issues that we had. But the big thing about the Afghan soldiers that we found was a lot of them really cared about the job. They cared about making their place safer, cared about making Afghanistan safer, and specifically their family safer. Whereas in Canada we talk a lot about pride of country and nationalism and things like this, Afghanistan was still really working to get that sense of nationalism. What they cared about was their family was safe and that their friends were safe and that they had a way to pay for their families to go to school or to have food for that day. It was much more of a smaller family unit and a home unit as opposed to a big nationalistic kind of identity.

While Kabul was not nearly as dangerous for the soldiers as, you know, Kandahar was, or the guys in Helmand province, in places like this, where your soldiers talk about, you know, people getting shot at daily or having to do some pretty rough stuff, we were training. We were mentors. We had rockets fired at us every once in a while, but it was nothing like we expected to be put in like the guys were in 2010 or 2006 or whatever. But the Afghans still had to deal with a lot of the issues that we didn’t, so we were safe and cozy in our base for the most part, but the Afghan soldiers who had to work every day still had to deal with Taliban attacks, Haqqani kidnappings and things like this. And one of the big things was there was a sergeant who ran the dining facility. I'd go see him all time I'd eat the Afghan food and kind of just hang out with these guys every day and this guy was this massive 6-foot 3 soldier he was big for an Afghan - he looked like a wrestler, everyone called him "the wrestler". And we'd show up every day and he gives us extra food and all the good stuff. And then one day we go in there he's a little bit different and I talked to my interpreter and I say "What's wrong with the wrestler there?" and he goes "Oh, let me find out" and he asks him and the sergeant goes explains the whole situation and it turns out that his daughter was killed on the way to school so I asked him, "Why are you at work if your daughter died that week?" and he says "Well, if I don't come to work nothing will get fixed. Nothing will get better, and then other people's daughters will die, and other people's sons will die."

It's a weird situation for a lot of the interpreters and a lot of the soldiers in general. I went over there in my mid-20s, a pretty standard age for a troop to go over, or an officer in my case. And the thing about the interpreters is they've worked as interpreters for the same length that I've been in the military almost. So, these guys join at 18, 19 years old with some English skills, and they've worked with the Marines or they've worked with the British military, they work with the Canadians. Because they've worked with them their entire adult life, all their formative years really, they're in a weird situation where they, they're not fully Afghan anymore. They're not really trusted by the Afghan local community always. They're not fully American or Canadian or Western, they kind of occupy this weird grey zone where they're interpreters. So, everything they have is through this kind of strange cultural lens that's a mixture of their experiences through war, because that's all they've ever known. The coalition side, that we bring in stuff, all the music, all their clothes, are all really Western. And Afghan, which is their kind of traditional roots or their historical roots or where they're from. And my interpreter and the interpreters in the interpreter village had a lot of difficulties navigating this and my interpreter now lives in California and I'm super proud of him. He's an amazing guy with a great family and he said when he first got to California, one of the big issues was that he didn't know where he belongs. It's very, very hard for interpreters and when we leave many of these interpreters are still there and they still have to deal with all these issues and when there's no one to protect them anymore, when there's no coalition forces, people like the Taliban or the Haqqani target these interpreters and they know that they've worked for us and their families might be in danger or they may be in danger.

I adjusted, I thought very easily right at the beginning. I went straight into it and I, unfortunately, probably for not a great idea I went right back into work. I was an Afghan veteran now, you know, I was good to go I was looked up to by other junior officers and I felt very, very proud but I never gave myself the breathing time. I never really gave myself a break from work because I felt I needed to keep that sense of purpose going. But then I started getting Facebook messages from my Afghan friends back in Afghanistan and they were saying, you know, "Well you know this guy? Well he's gone now. He's dead,” or “This guy here he left the Forces,” or “We had another attack in Kabul,” we had that type of stuff. For me, it wasn’t hard to readjust, but it was hard to get over the fact that I could have done more, and that we could have done more. If I would have been [there] an extra six months or an extra year or an extra two years, it would have been better off if I would have been able to stay. So, there's a sense of guilt, kind of, that comes there, because you come home, and you go watch movies and you know the cinema and you go to watch TV or get Netflix on but Afghans are still fighting out there. The guys you're training are still at war and now you're home safe and that was really hard to think about and really hard to get over the fact that there's nothing else I can do. No matter what I do I can never give more. I'm not I'm not there anymore.

Afghanistan for me was life-changing, even if it wasn't, you know, the big battle group tour that you hope for, as an infantry officer - and everyone does. If you're in the infantry, you want to be in the fight. But I was a small, tiny, percentage of Canada's longest engagement. I was a part of history that very few people get to take part in. For all the good and the bad, for myself it was a huge learning experience to see what I can actually do. It’s no longer training. It's no longer, you know, fake bullets, you've got a real magazine in. It's no longer fake rocket attacks, it's real rocket attacks. It's Afghan soldiers who are putting their life on the line for their own country and for their families and you're able to help them get to that point. For me it was a sense that I've kind of checked a box in my life that says I can do this for real and I got the opportunity, I took advantage of the opportunity, and now I can do pretty much whatever I put my mind to, genuinely. It's really, it's a big “gut check”, we say. You sign your name, you're over there, no matter what job you did over there, you did something. You can come back proud of that and it's something I carry with me every day. And I use it now to embolden junior officers and new troops to say look you've got an opportunity if you want to serve and you want to go overseas something will pop up just keep your head in and you'll get there as well.

I learned patience, I guess would be the first thing I learned from the Afghans. And not in the sense that they tried my patience, but the fact that when I got in there I wanted to solve every one of Afghanistan's issues within the first 48 hours. I was like "We'll hit this first, we'll do these, just simple problems we can fix," and it was really naive in a sense and I think a lot of soldiers going over are naive their first time. But my "mentees", if you can say, but it was more honestly homologues - we were working together, really. They taught me you've got six months here, or in my case, in nine months let's go slow let's get to know each other here let's figure out what we can do and what we can't, and it'll be a lot easier if we get to understand the culture first and then try and solve problems together as opposed to try and solve the problems without getting to know what Afghanistan is and who the Afghans are. And so, patience was really the biggest thing they taught me.

This here was my name tape, so you always have a name tape no matter where you go in in the military. Small things like this go a long way to show that you're invested in Afghanistan, you're invested in mentoring these guys and working with these guys. I still keep this and when I went to work with refugees in Greece we I took one of these name tapes and I sewed it on my work vest to show that I was still with Afghanistan and always be with Afghanistan. It’s one of my favourite countries in the world and the Afghans are one of my people. So, there’s a small piece of my heart there forever.