

The Chicken Coop
Leroy Petry

Okay, you or here? Interviewer: I want you to look at me, and donâ€™t look at your colleagues here, because thatâ€™ll throw everything off, soâ€”and donâ€™t look at the camera either. Weâ€™ll be fine just like this. SFC L. Petry: Okay. Todd Brewster: So Sergeant, spell your name in its entirety for the transcriber, please. SFC L. Petry: Sergeant First Class Leroy, L-E-R-O-Y, A. Petry, P-E-T-R-Y.

Interviewer

And today is September 9, 2011, and weâ€™re at the studios of the West Point Center for Oral History. I thank you very much for coming and being a part of this archive that weâ€™re building here. You are a winner of the Medal of Honor.

SFC L. Petry

Itâ€™s awarded, not won, sir.

Interviewer

Youâ€™re awarded the Medal of Honor.

SFC L. Petry

Yes, sir.

Interviewer

Good catch. Can you tell me the story through which you were awarded that?

SFC L. Petry

We were executing a daylight raid inâ€”

Interviewer

Who is â€œweâ€ when you say this?

SFC L. Petry

Second Ranger Battalion, Delta Company. We were executing a daylight raid, and during the raid I was shot through both my legs. A couple of my wounded junior Rangers were next to me.

Interviewer

Interviewer: Letâ€™s back you up a little bit, actually, before we even start on that. You wereâ€”the raidâ€”how much anticipation did you have of the raid?

SFC L. Petry

Iâ€™m sorry?

Interviewer

How much anticipation did you have of the raid? How much planning was there for the raid?

SFC L. Petry

It wasn't—it wasn't a whole lot. I mean we kind of knew we were going, but it was an immediate kind of reaction, quick reaction to the assault, so

Interviewer

What was the mission of the raid, of this particular raid?

SFC L. Petry

It was to capture or kill a high-value target, sir.

Interviewer

And did you know who that high-value target was before you went to this—on the raid?

SFC L. Petry

Yes.

Interviewer

You did. And you're not able to admit that today, who that high-value target was?

SFC L. Petry

No.

Interviewer

Okay. So how large a group were you with at this point, then?

SFC L. Petry

Approximately about 60-plus, sir.

Interviewer

And what was the nature of the mission? Can you tell me the outline of the mission?

SFC L. Petry

It was—we were going into a compound, assaulting a compound. And then capture and kill, basically, capture if possible. I mean that's always the best scenario. But

Interviewer

And you anticipated this time?

SFC L. Petry

Normally with a high-value target, you—they're expected to have a personal security detail with them that's armed and, you know, protect them to the end of their life, so.

Interviewer

That's what I say, so how many did you expect were going to be there around this high-value target?

SFC L. Petry

I can't remember exactly what the number that was told to us, but it was "I want to say it was about 25 or so, sir.

Interviewer

And why during the daytime? I would think most of a raid like this would've been during the nighttime.

SFC L. Petry

Because the high-value target we were going for at the time bounced around, I guess, a lot. And when he popped up, we had to take the opportunity to go and try and snatch him up, sir.

Interviewer

I see.

SFC L. Petry

So to speak.

Interviewer

I see. So then take me back to the story. So you arrive at the compound. Roughly, what time of day was this, then?

SFC L. Petry

It was I want to say about 10

Interviewer

Was the contact coming from the compound?

SFC L. Petry

No. It was out in the "a field right next to the compound. There was multiple little compounds out there "remote kind of rural area. But I noticed one of our younger squad leaders, his squad moving into the building, I immediately went with him. I was the last person to enter the courtyard. At that point, they were clearing a building in the corner of the courtyard. I had waited at the door and asked for more support from another Ranger to come back, clear the courtyard. And soon as I got a tap on my shoulder that I had PFC Robinson by me, we started to move.

Leroy Petry

And immediately, once we crossed into one of the corners, two enemy combatants with AK-47s at their hips are just spraying sporadically. I caught one round in my left thigh, and PFC Robinson had caught one in his left ribcage, right below his armpit, and "

Interviewer

Were you felled by these? Did youâ€

SFC L. Petry

No, it was a kind of â€“kind of did a little buck, like a deer getting shot, and immediately moved to cover behind what they called a chicken coopâ€“a smaller building inside the walled compound.

Interviewer

Was it really a chicken coop?

SFC L. Petry

It wasâ€“I donâ€™t think it was a chicken coop. I thinkâ€“

Interviewer

Just what they call it, you mean. Yeah.

SFC L. Petry

Yeah, thatâ€™s just what they call it, because it wasnâ€™tâ€“didnâ€™t look like really big enough to house a lot of people. But the name stuckâ€“once they went with â€œchicken coop,â€ it stuck, so thatâ€™s what we call it from now on, I guess. And PFC Robinson followed right behind me. We ran behind cover, still taking a high volume of fire from our right flank, and I start telling him, â€œHey, start doing self-aid and let me know how hurt you are,â€ andâ€“

Interviewer

What is self-aid?

SFC L. Petry

Basically, if youâ€™re conscious and coherent and you see that youâ€™re wounded, itâ€™s easier for you to take care of yourself than taking another person out of the fight to come take care of you. So when youâ€™re behind cover, you have the opportunity to self-treat yourself, and we get extensive treatingâ€“extensive training in treatment, medical treatment in the Range regiments, so most holes, weâ€™re able to plug, so to speak. And Iâ€™m calling up on the radio at this point, talking to my command, giving them situational awareness of whatâ€™s going onâ€“that we have wounded personnel and weâ€™re still in heavy contact.

Leroy Petry

I prepped a thermo baric grenade. I threw it over the chicken coop toward the enemy that was back there. It went off. At the same time that went off, Sergeant Higgins, another Ranger, moved to our position, and I told him immediately, â€œStart working with Robinson, security, and start doing buddy aid,â€ which is once you get the time and youâ€™re affordedâ€“the buddies start coming doing your aid for you. At that point, Iâ€“

Interviewer

How close is the enemy at this point, when youâ€™re throwing this grenade? This is how far?

SFC L. Petry

Oh, probably about within 15 feet.

Interviewer

Really?

SFC L. Petry

And so weâ€™re sittingâ€“weâ€™reâ€“at this point, I sit down, because my legs are just sore, and Iâ€™m kind of wanting to look at how bad the wound is on my left leg. And Iâ€™m pulling security with my rifle to my left, to make sure nobody comes around the left side of the building. Well, as Iâ€™m sitting there we hear a huge blast, which knocks the two next to me kind of to the ground and gives them a little bit of shrapnel. It was a grenade.

Leroy Petry

They turned to me right away and said, â€œWhat the was that?â€

Leroy Petry

And I say, â€œWell, theyâ€™reâ€“keep your heads down. Theyâ€™re throwing grenades. Keep security.â€ And then weâ€™re still taking high volumes of small arms fire.

Leroy Petry

What kind of grenades are these that theyâ€™re throwing?

SFC L. Petry

Well, the one I picked up later on, it was aâ€“it looked like a pineapple grenade.

Interviewer

Old-fashioned, then, forâ€“

SFC L. Petry

Yes.

Fix These Guys First

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

And so Iâ€™m sitting there, and telling them to keep security and stuff. I turn to my left to watch my corner, and as I turn back to my right to look at my guys, thereâ€™s aâ€“one of the pineapple grenades sitting there on the ground, and immediately I realized it was a threat to their lives and to mine, and I reached over and grabbed it. And as I was throwing it away, I opened my hand, and as soon as my hand opened it just exploded and took the

hand with it. And I sat up, and I looked at the explosion, what damage it had done.

Leroy Petry

And it was completely severed at the wrist, like a circular saw had taken it across it and left nothing of the hand. I knewâ€”I grabbed it. Kind of strange, but the first thought that went into my mind was, â€œWhy isnâ€™t this thing spraying after it hit arteries?â€”Itâ€™sâ€”but immediately, remember a vivid picture in my mind where I can almost smell the burnt flesh and the powder, and I could see rock and debris and the color, the bright, bright and dark. It was bright and dark red blood all over the place, oozing prettyâ€”pretty fast.

Leroy Petry

And lack of better words, a skirt of meat where the skin had folded back around the wrist, and the radius and the ulna poking up about a quarter-inch each, just broken off, sheared. And I sat thereâ€”I soaked it all up, and it seemed like a while, but it was seconds. And itâ€™s almost like it goes in slow motion, where youâ€™re like, â€œWow,â€”and you realize it, and then all of a sudden it starts going back into high speed, and like, â€œOh, man, now I know what I got to do.â€”Grabbed a tourniquet off my kit, which we keep on our outside for fast access, and immediately applied a tourniquet with my left hand. Got back on the radio, started giving my command situational update.

Leroy Petry

â€œHey, weâ€™re still in contact,â€”what-not. And it felt kind of weirdâ€”at the end of the transmission on the radio, the last thing I remember telling my platoon sergeant was, â€œAnd I also lost my right hand.â€”And I let go of the mic and then it hit, dawned on me, that probably sounded crazy on the other end of the radio. â€œWhat do you mean, you lost your hand?â€”But the other guys are still? At this point, Iâ€™m concerned about them. Iâ€™m surprised Iâ€™m so conscious and calm about it. Iâ€™m concerned about them, where I could only imagine what theyâ€™re going through in their minds after they saw me blow my hand off. They got a little bit of shrapnel all over them. Andâ€”

Interviewer

It sounds like you did not go into any shock, though, right? You were?

SFC L. Petry

No. No, I didnâ€™t go into any shock at all.

Interviewer

Yeah.

SFC L. Petry

I donâ€™t know why. I mean one of our First Sergeants had come up to us shortly thereafter. He reached down and he grabbed me by the kit on my left side in an attempt to pick me up and say, â€œHey, come on, weâ€™re going to get you out of here.â€”

Leroy Petry

And I kind of pushed his hand away and said, â€œYouâ€™re not taking me anywhere till you get those two SOBs behind the chicken coop.â€”And he said, â€œWell, where are

they at?â€ And I said, â€Well, theyâ€™re right back there in that back corner.â€ He realized that I was coherent and that we always fight the fight and come back for casualties. And so he made the decision, hey, weâ€™re coming back for you. He said, â€Weâ€™ll be right back for you.â€ At that point, he left.

Leroy Petry

I ended up waiting a few more minutes. I ended up grabbing onto Sergeant Higgins and my Platoon Sergeant, Sergeant Stile, and weâ€we ended up running over to our casualty collection point, where thatâ€™sâ€and I started noticing how many casualties we had, and our medics were working on them.

Leroy Petry

And our medic came up and ran to me and said, â€Hey, sit down. We need to start working on you.â€

Leroy Petry

And I said, â€Hey, Iâ€™m good.â€ I said, â€Fix these guys first. Iâ€™m still coherent. Iâ€™m fine.â€ Theyâ€™re like, â€Well, have a seat, at least.â€ At that point, I sat down. The mind wanted to keep going, but the body was losing a lot of juice. They immediately started cutting off my boots, and I was like, â€Well, that decisionâ€™s made for me.â€ And they cut off my pants, and thatâ€™s when I noticed, when they were putting on the tourniquets on my legs, that the bullet that I had gotten shot in my left thigh had not onlyâ€I thought it was only lodged my left thigh.

Leroy Petry

It had gone through my entire left thigh into my right thigh and out the other side. And I couldnâ€™tâ€I still to this day canâ€™t believe that that bulletâ€it was a 762, AK-47, big bulletâ€did not pierce or nick any of my arteries, did not touch the bone, and it was through-and-through, all muscle and tissue. And so knowing how big the arteries in the thigh are that run down there, itâ€™s amazing. And Iâ€™m thankful for that every day. At the same point, we had Sergeant Roberts and Specialist Gaithercole that had come out of that same building that we were in inside that compound, where the casualty collection point was.

Leroy Petry

They had come out to support us. I didnâ€™t know about this till afterwards, but whileâ€while they were coming out to support us, they were on the corner and they started taking fire from the two combatants behind the building. And then I guess there was a third on the forward side of the building that had shot and hit Specialist Gaithercole just below his helmet. And he succumbed to his wounds later that day and paid the ultimate sacrifice, and one of the true heroes on that missionâ€still think about it a lot. When we were getting medevacâ€™d, first time ever getting shot, first time, I guess, being traumatically injured.

Leroy Petry

They got me in a stretcher and I remember holding it up. They had it wrapped in a bunch of gauze, tourniquet still on there, theyâ€™re telling me to hold it up, keep the blood flow. And the guys were carrying me out to the HLZ, and asâ€on the way to the HLZ, other Rangers were running up and saying, â€Hey, youâ€™re going to be all right. Youâ€™re going to be all right.â€ And I remember my thoughts at that point were, â€Get away from me. Go

pullâ€“go do your job and pull security,â€ and thatâ€™s actually what I told them was, â€œHey, keep pulling security,â€ â€™cause at that point I knew the fight wasnâ€™t over.

Leroy Petry

I mean the fightâ€™s never over until everyoneâ€™s back at the forward operating base. So I said, â€œHey, keep pulling security. Get away from me. Iâ€™ll see you later.â€ And we got up there, and I remember Sergeant Higgins coming up to me and saying, â€œYou saved us. You saved us.â€ And I was like, â€œOh, hey, men, weâ€™re all in it together. Letâ€™s just get out of here.â€ And I wanted to stay so bad, â€™cause I knew that they were still going to have quite a fight ahead of them that afternoon. When weâ€“they flew us back in the helicopter to a dirt airfield where they kind of took us off the airfield and they sat us down on these stretchers.

Leroy Petry

And I remember them saying that the helicopter had to go back and support the mission, and a fixed-wing, meaning the medevac airplane, was about 30 minutes out. And right away I was like, â€œOh, man. I just survived all that to sit here for 30 minutes and probably die on this airfield.â€ But then rebuilt my confidence seeing my two unit PAs, which I knew very wellâ€“Major Slevin and Captain Domingusâ€“there working on the casualties. So they were coming over and treating us, and I was like, â€œOh, Iâ€™m goodâ€“Iâ€™m with these guys. Theyâ€™re going to take care of me.â€

Leroy Petry

They had given me a couple fentanyl pops. Well, Iâ€™d always heard about fentanyl pops, and Iâ€™m thinking Iâ€™d never seen them. Just one of those things docs always talk about. You joke with the doc, â€œHey, let me get one of them fentanyl pops.â€ Iâ€™m thinking itâ€™s either â€“some kind of sucker that theyâ€™ve put drugs in, so when they gave them to me, they were these two little white sticks that had like a candy kind of dipping stick, the little dipsticks with the powdered sugar. Theyâ€™re like that on the end, and so they hand them to me and he turns around, and I take them and I bite off the ends and I throw the plastic container away.

Leroy Petry

And he turns around and he looks at me, and Iâ€™m done chewing on them, and heâ€™s like, â€œWhatâ€™d you do with the fentanyl pops I gave you?â€ And I was like, â€œI took them already.â€ And, â€œWhatâ€™d you do with them?â€ â€œI threw them away.â€ And he saidâ€“he kind of smacked me, and he said, â€œYou idiot. Youâ€™re supposed to suck on them. Thatâ€™s the only way you get the medication out of them.â€ So I guess it comes out of the bottom through the candy portion.

My Ranger Family
Interviewer

Let me back you up, because you were in a moment of extraordinary challenge, and you behaved in a way that academies like this teach soldiers to behave, but you donâ€™t know until youâ€™re under those circumstances whether you will. Will you risk your own life for those who are next to you? Will you stay focused on the mission? Will you stay loyal to your comrades there? Did you surprise yourself for what you did in that moment?

Leroy Petry

SFC L. Petry: Not at all. I look at all my Ranger family as my brothers. I look at it like my wife or one of my children being there, and I wouldn't do anything for them. It's the same thing I would hope that you would have done for yourself. I mean you do everything for each other, and when it's out there, it's all or nothing.

Interviewer

What about the mission itself? How did it end? Was your high-value target there?

Leroy Petry

SFC L. Petry: I don't know the whole outcomes to it. I know that they definitely got a lot of good feedback from it, and I didn't dig too much into the details of the follow-on, because at that point it was another eight, nine months for my rehab before I started really getting back with the guys and hearing stories. I had done a lot of my rehab down in San Antonio, which was away from the base, and there was a lot of shifting of personnel at that point. And I got little bits and stories from different people here and there about how they said the mission was great. They still had a lot more contact that day, and they got a lot of good intel off the target as well.

Interviewer

How many deployments did you have in Iraq and Afghanistan?

SFC L. Petry

Up to that point?

Interviewer

And since then. Tell me about that.

SFC L. Petry

Well, a total of eight—two to Iraq and six to Afghanistan. That was my fifth to Afghanistan at the point where I got injured, sir.

Interviewer

And your first deployment to Afghanistan was when, then? 2002?

SFC L. Petry

2002.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm. Where were you on 9/11?

SFC L. Petry

I was Pre-Ranger, down at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 75th Ranger Regiment's Pre-Ranger, now called CRT, where I was—I was out in the field. I remember Cole Range is where they do a lot of that. And we were training. It was hot, and they were—a lot of the instructors were watching it on television. They had a television out there, and they're kind of telling us about what's going on with New York, the Twin Towers, World Trade Center.

Leroy Petry

And we all expressed concern and interest, and we were asking if we could go watch, and they tell us, "No, you need to get your butts back out there and keep training. You might be going to war soon." Little did they know, and us, how right they were, "cause not more than a year later, we were back out there.

Interviewer

What was your personal reaction to 911?

SFC L. Petry

It was grief, sadness for the families and friends of all those who lost someone that day, and a little bit of anger at who could do something like this to us. And it kind of put in perspective a little bit about "911 kind of put in perspective what it must've been like for those people who lived through Pearl Harbor times. And just it was a sucker punch to the United States, and I felt it, too. It was "I couldn't believe that something like that would happen, and just a lot of sorrow for the loss of life.

Interviewer

Now, when you first enlisted, it was a peacetime Army, correct?

SFC L. Petry

Yes sir.

Interviewer

When was that? What year?

SFC L. Petry

1999, September, sir.

Interviewer

What motivated you to want to go into the Army?

SFC L. Petry

I wanted to be in the Army since I was a little kid, playing with my brothers, playing Army, watching Desert Storm, Desert Shield, develop. Seeing pictures on the wall of family members that had served, in their uniforms, and I thought it was the most honorable thing you could do is go out there and fight for your country and our way of life.

Interviewer

So service has been?

SFC L. Petry

Even if there is no fight.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

I mean just to stand up and say, "Hey, if something pops up during my time while I'm in uniform, I will go."

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

And so getting out of high school, I wanted to do that so much. My grandfather kind of told me, "Hey, go try college," and I love my grandfather, and he had served in the Air Force. And I kind of tried his route for a little bit, and I had? I knew that it didn't have my full interest.

Leroy Petry

So I said, "I got to get into the military first," and immediately enlisted, and now I'm continuing my education and saying, "Yeah, it's still an important thing," even though that didn't come first at the time. I've had a lot of fun and great experiences in the military, and I've been continuing my education even while serving in the military, so.

Interviewer

Why the Army, and not the Air Force or the Marines? What attracted you to the Army?

SFC L. Petry

Well, the Rangers.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

They're the ones that are in the dirt, kicking down doors and doing all this stuff that I wanted to do. I didn't want to "I didn't want to" I hate to say it, but shoot artillery from far away. I wanted to be there, kicking down the doors and training to do the up-close-and-personal stuff, "cause I think that's one of the most challenging things for a person is to be there.

Interviewer

How much up-close-and-personal combat did you see before this episode?

SFC L. Petry

Four other deployments. Hundreds of missions.

Interviewer

Really?

SFC L. Petry

Yes.

Interviewer

But nothing quite like this one, I think, in terms of the risk of life and violence.

SFC L. Petry

Every time you're overseas it's a risk of life. Every time you leave the base it's a risk of life overseas. I mean it's "if" countless times where bullet fire, standing by a wall and bullet fire just shoots dust all about six inches away from your head. I mean that's "you tuck away and run behind cover, because you realize they could see you. That's when it realizes that hey, there's threats out there. Any time that I come overseas, I know that my life can be ended.

Interviewer

Do you remember the first time you felt that? The first deployment where you actually felt yourself to be a target?

SFC L. Petry

I put that in my head my very first deployment, and I knew that the worst could come as soon as "before I even landed in-country, on the plane, I knew our plane could be shot down, so I knew the threat was there as soon as I set foot on that airplane. And I accepted any fate that laid before me. I'd give it my best, but if I couldn't "if there was something that happened to me I couldn't control, or one of my guys, then I would accept that. And it would be hard to live with, but it was something I'd signed up for, and I was willing to do.

Throw a Mean Right Hook

Interviewer

Show me your hand "show me what the prosthetic device does here.

SFC L. Petry

Now, yeah. It's "it's got that cool feature. It's designed to "it's called the "Limb Pulse," and it's actually a really nice prosthetic. I, when I lost my hand, I thought I was going to get a hook, and I was fine with a hook, "cause I'd lost it in an honorable way, so I didn't care. But they gave me one of these, and I was like, "Man, that's like a new hand." It does "I mean it works off the same muscles. I don't have to think about trying to manipulate craziness.

Interviewer

Could you move individual fingers with it?

SFC L. Petry

It does not have individual articulation, but it does have "when each finger meets resistance, it stops, so you have more dexterity to grab different shapes. So you have to move the thumb. They're getting programmable, where you could hold different muscle

sensors. So I could do a two-finger pinch, I could do a three-finger pinch.

Interviewer

Could you hold weight between the fingers? I mean, ifâ€“could you pick up a bag and hold that?

SFC L. Petry

Yeah, I meanâ€“

Interviewer

With it?

SFC L. Petry

Well, for this, this is more for your little, tinyâ€“

Interviewer

No, I mean is it weight-bearing, the whole hand, though, with it?

SFC L. Petry

Oh, the whole hand? I could probably carry about two gallons of milk on there.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

So whatever that weightsâ€“about 12 pounds, I guess.

Interviewer

So you can do a 360-degree turn on it, tooâ€“is that right?

SFC L. Petry

Oh, yeah. Play a nasty game of â€œmercy.â€ [Laughter]

Interviewer

You have a young son, right?

SFC L. Petry

I have fourâ€“four children.

Interviewer

Four children.

SFC L. Petry

Yes.

Interviewer

How many boys, how many girls?

SFC L. Petry

Two boys, two girls.

Interviewer

Yeah.

SFC L. Petry

Girl, boy, girl, boy. Oldest is 20â€“sheâ€™ll be 21 here in a couple daysâ€“and 17-year-old boy whoâ€™s hoping on going to West Point, and Iâ€™m hoping heâ€™s going to West Point; a 13-year-old daughter, and a 7-year-old son, whoâ€™s the 7-year-oldâ€™s going to be a Ranger. Iâ€™m already convinced.

Interviewer

And you were telling me before we started on-camera that one of your kids loves to play with your hand at night. Is that right?

Leroy Petry

Yes. My 7-year-old. He thought it was the greatest thing, and when his friends would come over, he figured out how to manipulate the muscle sensors, and heâ€™d tap them with his finger, â€œCheck out my dadâ€™s hand,â€ and make it open and close, and they loved it. But the other thing is with this is the hand actually is just one of the attachments you can put on there. Thereâ€™s a easyâ€“same rotationâ€“you just add and take off.

Interviewer

What else would you put on there? What do you mean?

SFC L. Petry

Well, the prosthesis and the doctorsâ€“well, mostly theâ€“I think prosthesiologist?

Leroy Petry

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

Iâ€™

Interviewer

Itâ€™s a good term even if itâ€™s not the right one. [Laughs]

SFC L. Petry

Yeah. They try to develop it for you. They say, â€œWe want you to do anything you did before that you want to do. Weâ€™ll try to adapt it for you.â€ So I have a full set of cutlery knives, golf attachments, wrenches, sockets. Thereâ€™s a thing to hold nails for nailing. A

lot of tools, and I mean I've seen guys that have bow-release attachments. They're still able to fire a bow.

Interviewer

Can they throw a knuckle curve?

SFC L. Petry

No.

Interviewer

[Laughs]

SFC L. Petry

Throw a mean right hook. [Laughter] But no, it's a

Interviewer

Now, were you right-handed?

SFC L. Petry

I was, sir.

Interviewer

Yeah. So now you're learning to do more with your left hand, also?

Leroy Petry

Yes. Well, we had always trained to shoot ambidextrous for around corners and stuff, and I used to always dislike it. I said, "Why would I want to shoot with my off-hand when I'm so much better with my right hand?" I was like, "I'll lean out a little further." And that day when I lost my hand, I was running out of there with my gun in my left hand, saying, "Thank goodness we were training to shoot left-handed."

Interviewer

Yeah.

SFC L. Petry

"Cause that's what it came down to. But

Interviewer

Have you had any dreams about the hand you lost?

SFC L. Petry

No, not really.

Interviewer

Any dreams about that episode?

SFC L. Petry

Not really. I mean I've always in my mind, because seems like that's all I really talk about these days, but

Interviewer

Yeah.

SFC L. Petry

But I don't "I don't"

My Heroes

Interviewer

Is there something that you wish you'd done in that moment that you didn't do?

SFC L. Petry

I joke around. I say I wish I would've grabbed it with my left hand, so I can still use my right hand. I have to learn how to re-write and do everything with my left hand, which yeah, I thought about it. Tried throwing a baseball with my left hand, and I'm so glad I didn't use my left hand. It's not pretty, and it doesn't go far. [Laughs] But no, I don't regret anything, and I don't think I would've changed anything else.

Interviewer

And what about anything else that happened in the mission in that? You lost men, right?

SFC L. Petry

Yeah.

Interviewer

Yeah. Do you think back on any decision you made during that time that could've saved more lives?

SFC L. Petry

I don't try to look at it too much as to "I don't want to live with any regrets of hey, this was his fault, or she could've done this, or I could've done this.

Leroy Petry

I look at it as the success of the "that who we do still have here, and I kind of tell a lot of people I honor those who pay the ultimate sacrifice and are the true heroes that gave their lives. But I embrace the ones that are still here, so "so I try to look at the positive thing. I don't want to ever try to look back.

Leroy Petry

I try to learn from it and teach other people, "Hey, when you do this, you might not want

to do this or that.â€ But I donâ€™t want to ever try to regret any decisions that are made.

Interviewer

Let me ask you this as a last bit of questioning, then, because I think itâ€™s central to the story that cadets and instructors here will want to hear from you. How can you teach and how can you learn this kind of leadership? I mean you demonstrated extraordinary leadership in this moment. How can instructors here teach cadets how you did that, and so they will do it?

Leroy Petry

Wow. I think itâ€™sâ€“I donâ€™t think itâ€™s something you can teach. Itâ€™s something thatâ€™s I want to say earned from each service member to another. When you get into your teams and you have such high respect for one another, both as leaders and as junior enlisted underneath you, or officers, whatever. And when youâ€™re in that position and youâ€™re out there in combat, youâ€™re taking orders from your chain of command, but at the same time, Iâ€™m always looking out for the younger guys.

Leroy Petry

But the younger guys, in their hearts, are really looking out for all of us as well. And Iâ€™m sure the youngest guy would throw himself in front of that threat for that captain, that sergeant, that whatever rank. Rank doesnâ€™t come to mind when thereâ€™s a threat. Itâ€™s, â€œHey, do the right thing, and do whatâ€™s best for everyone.â€

Interviewer

Let me try to extend that a little bitâ€“

SFC L. Petry

Not to be selfish in anything.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm. Letâ€™s see if this works out. Youâ€™re saying in a sense, then, that leadership is about relationship. Itâ€™s really about the degree to which you have?

SFC L. Petry

I think theyâ€™re tied into one.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

SFC L. Petry

Theyâ€™re tied into one. I was telling a lot of people a lot of men will follow you because of the rank you wear, but theyâ€™ll respect you twice as much and work twice as hard for you if they respect you as a person. And respect your leadership, and you set the example for them.

Interviewer

Who did you respect most? Who are your heroes?

SFC L. Petry

I got too many, sir.

Interviewer

Give me two.

SFC L. Petry

Wow.

Interviewer

You mentioned your grandfather before.

SFC L. Petry

Yeah, my grandfather, who passed about a year before the ceremony at the White Houseâ€”wouldâ€™ve loved to have seen him there. Him, and anyone that stays in the military 20-plus, 30-plus years.

Leroy Petry

I mean those people have sacrificed their lives, pretty much, â€™cause I know you donâ€™t get a whole lot of time, being in the military, and to sacrifice that muchâ€”I mean how could you not call that a hero? I mean a lot of the generals, sergeant majors that spend their entire livesâ€”and they have families during these lives, too.

Leroy Petry

Itâ€™s truly amazingâ€”so the families as well. I mean itâ€™s the hardest life I think that is out there. Theyâ€™re constantly moving to different bases. Itâ€™sâ€”those are my heroes. These professional athletes, they do three or four years and make millions of dollars, and then theyâ€™re off doing whateverâ€”commercials or whatever. But the ones that dedicate their lives, almost in entirety, to the military, â€™cause theyâ€™re the ones that usually put in that many years get out and still have their arm in the militaryâ€™s side pocket, so to speak, and still working with the soldiers for the rest of their lives. And they look at it as the greatest time of their lives.

Interviewer

Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming by today.

SFC L. Petry

Yeah. Thank you.