

TNN Interview: Gun Safety Hero or Terrorist

The following is transcript of an interview conducted by Pierce Moran on Tuesday December 17th 2013. The subject is former Army Sgt. Matthew Tanner, who along with his co-conspirators were charged with terrorism for a short time. All charges have been subsequently been dropped. The news of his release came just days before an unprecedented wide sweeping gun safety law passed both houses and was signed by the president on December 14th, exactly one year from the Sandy Hook tragedy.

Mr. Moran: Well Sgt. Tanner, I must say, as one who has been advocating for some kind of gun control for what seems like an eternity, I welcome you to the show.

Tanner: Please I am no longer in the army, just call me Matt.

Mr. Moran: Very well Matt. For those who are not up on this case, which I must say, you would have had to have been in a cave not to have heard about it, this probably couldn't even be accepted as a feasible plot for a movie script... please tell us in your own words, what led to, what most experts are calling, the most radical form of social disobedience since Dr. King or Gandhi. Especially when everyone thought the whole gun control debate died after the Senates April debacle... and please feel free to call me Pierce.

Tanner: Well...Pierce that's the precise event that led my friends and I to plan our original demonstration. When we realized that Congress was not going to do a damn thing even though ninety percent of Americans wanted extended background checks, we couldn't stand idle and let the NRA executives win. Remember... eighty percent of members wanted common sense laws. When Laprima wins, we all lose. He will do anything to try to protect the big money he gets from the manufactures.

Mr. Moran: Your group Vets Advocating Gun Safety were all members of the NRA, were you not?

Tanner: Yes. At first anyway...later we got support from all walks of life. Only half of our membership today is made up of vets. One of the most under reported aspects of the NRAs propaganda during those first few months when they were claiming the incredible membership increases, they failed to mention how many memberships they lost. That is where it all started. When I first was discharged I found a paintball club near my house as a way to keep in shape. I also belonged to a local firing range but I don't like to shoot alone so I was spending a lot of spare time at PaintballScrimden. That's where I met Zack , Wiley, Darnell and Ernesto. They are all ex grunts like me just looking for some fun. As we got to know each other better we also found out that we all growing increasingly embarrassed to be members of the NRA.

Mr. Moran: The right calls you terrorist while the left is praising you as heroes. We know that the political parties are divided but why do you think so many on the right have called you un-American and have called for you to renounce your citizenship?

Tanner: This was never about politics, hell most of my friends and colleagues are Republican. It just so happened that one side was, for the most part, preventing the will of the people. My friends and family have gotten a kick out of the whole circus. On one channel they call us terrorist and thought we should have been tried as enemy combatants while on another channel they are erecting monuments to us.

Mr. Moran: Well you did bring about the most comprehensive gun control safety law in the history of this nation. I'm sure everyone wants to hear how it all came about.

Tanner: Lets see...oh yea, I started to tell you about a few of the original guys that helped me hatch the plan. Although I can't mention everyone in the group by name, there are four that need just as much recognition as I'm getting. Like I started to say...I met them at the PaintballScrimden. We had just finished a very competitive match, when someone on the losing side said that the next time they would use extended magazines on their paintball guns and they would wipe us out. That's when my friend Zack said that all extended magazines should be outlawed. At that point someone got in his face and started spouting second amendment rights. That's when Darnell, who looks like a larger version of Denzel Washington, jumped in. The next we knew Wiley, Ernesto and I were standing beside them and the losers backed down. That's what started it all. Afterword's we went to a local bar and got to know one another. What started as four guys swapping war stories became ultimately, the gun safety group we are today.

Mr. Moran: So tell us a little about this band of brothers
(as Matt answers a montage of pictures and video begins to play)

Tanner: Well I grew up like most guys from a small town in Texas. Snyder is a West Texas town probably best known for being the home of the "Land of the White Buffalo," about a hundred miles south of Lubbock. Other than a dream of playing quarterback for the Cowboys, I always knew I'd end up in the army. As a member of the Seventy Fifth Ranger Regiment I completed nine tours in Afghanistan. I got an honorable discharge last year. I am married to my high school sweetheart Angie and have two Kids, Jason and Keri. We live in Columbus, Georgia. My wife is a nurse and I'm studying Business Management when I'm not working at the VAGS office.

Mr. Moran: You're being too modest Matt. For our listeners benefit, the Seventy Fifth Ranger Regiment is one of the most decorated units in the history of the Afghan war. The tours are shorter than the average year-long army or marine deployment, because

they are acknowledged as unusually intense tours averaging one operation every single night.

Tanner: We lost a lot of terrific men, a lot of great friends.

Mr. Moran: So tell us how VAGS, Vets Advocating Gun Safety,... that's quite a interesting acronym, how did you come up with that one?

Tanner: That would be Wiley. (As Matt speaks the montage changes to a montage of the life of Russell Wiles) He hates politicians but loves politics. He knew that the right was going to be the biggest obstructionist to what we were trying accomplish, so why not really piss them off. Also whenever the folks at Fix News talk about our bill we have forced them into having to say the full name of our group, because they just can't bring themselves to say VAGS. Yea, Wiley is our elder statesman. I never even knew his real name until our arraignment. After countless tours in Iraq, he did a stint for a few years with the state department. He now works for a private security group. His knowledge of how security works was vital in planning our operation. Both Zack and Ernesto were crack shots so we knew we had the makings of great team. (As Matt talks the montage changes to portray the life of Zachery Robinson) Yea, Zack is our resident lawyer. He won't talk about his military service to much. All we know is that he used his GI Bill to get a law degree and lives in Columbus because his wife is a civilian worker at Ft. Benning. Ernesto... (The montage changes to show Ernesto Sanchez) don't call him Ernie, was also stationed out of Benning. He was a top sharp shooter and also has, as we were soon to discover, a remarkable skill with darts. He can throw 'em, and even shoot 'em like an aborigine. He is the perfect poster boy for the Dream Act. Now I've already mentioned Darnell (Darnell Mosier's montage begins. There are not many pictures of him to show) he can't talk about his military service, and no buddy knows how a Navy Seal ended up in Columbus. He has been kicking around mostly as a bouncer for local clubs. He will cop to this however,... that VAGS probably kept him out of jail or worse.

Mr. Moran: So what happened, one day you were sitting around drinking a few beers and decided to attack some senators?

Tanner: (as he tries holding back the laughter) Actually, you're not far off. It first started with our bill.

Mr. Moran: That would be the bill that you brought before Congress in August, limiting extended magazines over fifteen bullets to be only available for shooting at a range.

(Looks into camera)

We'll learn more about this progressive idea when we return after these messages.

(Off camera)

(To Matt)

You'll have to cut the details short because we want to leave plenty of time for the planning and execution of your unbelievable plot.

Tanner: Alright, just cut me off whenever I go over. This is all new to me.... So you want me to go into the bill that my group lobbied for?

Mr. Moran: Yes by all means. But tie it into the shooting. That's the thing that everyone is waiting to hear about. I'm getting word that we are back in five. (Four, three, two..to the camera) We are back with the head of VAGS, Vets Advocating Gun Safety, former Army Sgt. Matthew Tanner.(to Matt) So tell us Matt, one day you come up with an idea to form a lobbying group, and in less than six months you have tens of thousands of veterans and put together a bill and present it to Congress. How on earth did you pull that off?

Tanner: Well Mr... Pierce...this is the era of social networking. If you put it out there, and it's a worthy cause, they will find you. When my friends and me came up with a general consensus that not all gun owners were in agreement with the mouthpieces of the NRA, we began to seek out people who felt the same about the gun debate. By the way more than half of our membership is non-military...and remember, back in March when we were putting it all together we were sure that Congress would, at the very least, pass a law extending background checks and closing loopholes. The plan was to show them that most gun owners want to limit the magazine size, and if that can't be done, limit the places you can use them in. When I heard Laprima say that a person can change a magazine in just a second, I almost threw the clicker at the TV. You know I blame a lot of this propaganda on the media. It seems that most of the so called journalists are nothing more than interviewers, they never probe anybody anymore. That's what you do on a show like this now, but not on the so-called news shows. I was dying for the news person to say, "very well Mr. Laprima can you show us how that can be done. We will get ten volunteer gun owners who use extended clips to take a time test. How many do think, Mr. Laprima will be able to change a thirty or hundred magazine clip in a second." Laprima would then have had to walk his lie back. And then you have a news story.

Mr. Moran: That's a very astute observation, Matt. So tell us what was your idea, and how was your bill different from all the other ones that were kicking around?

Tanner: It wasn't. It wasn't even our original idea. Zack said he had heard it somewhere but no one had even considered it. The whole second amendment talking point is that a small percentage of gun enthusiasts should be able to shoot multiple rounds at one time at the shooting range. It is widely accepted that hunters don't need multiple clips, so let's address that small few. Our bill, The Extended Clip Limited to Ranges Act, is really a compromise to those few that just have to have their big clips. It is quite simple really.

All magazines with over fifteen rounds shall only be leased and used at the firing range. No exceptions. No more would you be able to buy extended clips at any store, gun-show, and most importantly the internet. You rent it and use at the range period. A perfect free market proposal. The only exemption, gun owners who want to use extended mags on their own property will have to agree to sign for them when they buy them, to be admitted into a database that yes, will keep track of how many you are stockpiling. If you're not planning anything illegal you shouldn't have a problem. Remember...we are only talking realistically of a small percentage of gun owners.

Mr. Moran: Did you really think that any gun lover would go for this obvious restriction on their constitutional rights?

Tanner: We were surprised of how many agreed with us. Remember we are not preventing anyone from shooting as much as they want to. We only went with what all of there talking points, and that's all. For those knuckleheads who said that they needed to have extended mags for protection. Well...a fifteen round clip can do a lot of damage. And...we now know that with all of the mass shootings, lives would have been saved if they had only fifteen round clips...despite what the buffoons at the NRA say. James Holmes at Aurora was stopped when he tried to change his clip...we know that ten or eleven kids escaped at Sandy Hook when Adam Lanza had to change is thirty round clip . We finally got them to agree that this small percentage of gun nuts were doing the bulk of their big mag shooting at the range. So why not limit it to the range. We almost passed. As you know the vote was fifty eight this time. Of course the tipping point was the Halloween Massacre in St. Louis...where they still haven't found the two shooters because they were in costume....they used the big hundred clip magazines so they never did have to reload.

Mr. Moran: You are of course referring to the October twenty fourth shooting where forty seven teens and seven adults were gunned down at a high school masquerade ball. The perpetrators dressed liked Ninja Turtles... also wounded sixty two then sped off on motorcycles.

Tanner: Yea that's right, hundreds of lives were affected. After our bill was filibustered in late August we swore we wouldn't give up. We knew when we started that almost sixty percent of the public wanted to ban extended magazines, so our idea would be even more popular. And it was. Even with all the bashing from the right, when we presented our bill, we were at seventy two percent. Almost fifty percent of gun owners in the red states were behind us. When the Halloween Massacre didn't change anything we decided to conduct our own massacre.

Mr. Moran:(to the camera) And we will learn all about Operation Paintball after these important messages. (Turning to Matt) It's going very well, you're doing great.

Tanner: Are you sure? I feel I should have gone into more detail of the bill. Also how this movement that started with just handful of vets became a million membership in just a few months. I think that's pretty important, don't you?

Mr. Moran: Yes of course. Most people know all that. For heaven's sake, your bill was added as an amendment and became part of the law they passed last week. Now what the public wants to know is how did you come up with the idea to attack the NRA Thanksgiving Party. The camera's outside the Hyatt Fairfax where able to capture the incredible event plus we have footage of the helmet cams that you all wore. So as we show each frame you can tell us in your own words what's happening, ok?...and I'm getting word that we are back in five, (four, three, two).. (to the camera) We are back with former Army Sgt. Matthew Tanner.(to Matt) Please tell our viewers what on earth possessed your group to go from a peaceful march on Washington, to shooting up some senators at the NRA bash? First of all, who came up with such a brilliant and outlandish plan?

Tanner: I think we all came up with some form of the idea, but it was me who actually came up with the final plan for Operation Paintball. We kept hearing people say that if this or that affected Congress they would act immediately. Look what happened with the Sequester. As soon as the FAA cuts started to effect business people and even the Congresses flight plans, they passed an amendment to aid the FAA in record time. Well we thought if there was a way to make them experience even a fraction of what the survivors and family members of all the mass shootings have gone through, we were sure they would act....and they did. After the Halloween Massacre, we knew that we were going to do something but we didn't know how or where. That was until I received an email from the NRA inviting me to their grand ball Thanksgiving Gala on November twenty fourth....even though I was no longer a member I was still receiving their emails. We knew that they were throwing this last minute event to make a statement about gun control. They were gloating and had invited all the Senators that had once again voted no on the November eighth bill. As our luck would have it seven Senators obliged. It was their invitations that put everything into motion. There were many key components to the plan so if you don't mind I'll break them down as we addressed them.

Mr. Moran: By all means, please continue.

Tanner: Before I go any further I have to acknowledge Wiley for all that he did. Without him none of this would have ever been possible. He is the one who should be here today.

Mr. Moran: (to the camera) We invited all of heroes involved in the operation, including Randall Wiles, but the Sargent here was the only one who responded.

Tanner: Mr. Moran you must understand...we're not proud of what we did...we just know that it had to be done. I was picked as the spokesman for all of us. By the way we keep talking about the guys...that's kind of a generic term. There were a number of woman vets that helped as well.

The first thing we needed was funds to finance the operation. Besides material we needed to buy tickets...which by the way were outlandish! Also we put quite a number of guest up at the hotel prior to the event. Although it's just us five who did the actual shooting, there were over thirty needed to pull off the operation. Wiley knew some big donor liberals because of his security connections. Of course we couldn't tell them what we were planning, but as soon as they heard that we were going after the NRA, the money poured in. Wiley was so instrumental in the planning. We knew that security would be tight and of course everyone would be packing. He pretty much nailed it as far as how many guards and where they would be stationed. So to start we put him up at the Hyatt so he could reconnoiter. The fact that he had planned the security for events like these many times made our success more probable.

We decided that it would be best if woman were, for the most part, charged with taking out the outer guards and drivers, so that's where Ernesto came in. His knowledge of darts, dart guns and even blow darts would be the key to the whole operation. Surprisingly it only took a few days to find qualified volunteers, and they immediately started an intensive three week training. We knew that woman would have a better chance of getting close to the targets...and as it turned out we were right. By the way they have never been discovered, they got away undetected in all the commotion that followed. To this day no one knows how the darts got stuck to the necks and faces of the guards. Of course the guards assigned to LaPrima and the four senators we shot, were taken out with dart guns by the five of us, during the actual attack.

Mr. Moran: Tell us about the ingenious device that the woman used as a blow dart.

Tanner: We knew that everyone would be searched, and contrary to popular belief, only the big shots and guards were allowed to carry concealed firearms. So Ernesto devised a blowgun that screwed together from ballpoint pens with the NRA insignia on them, just sitting neatly in their clutches. Once by the checkpoint the ladies would, at different times during the course of the event, go to the ladies room and assemble the blowguns. Indecently, I want to acknowledge the woman that also helped take out the various drivers. That was no easy task, and a critical part of the plan. Wiley knew that in order for his plan to succeed the instant the guards went down we had to drive up in one of the senators SUV...and to do that all of the drivers had to be unconscious.

Mr. Moran: Before we get to ahead of ourselves I must inform our viewers that...(to the camera) what you are about to see are excerpts from the hotels security tapes as well as tiny cameras that were mounted on helmets of the VAGS members.

(The hotel security tape is shown first)

Tanner: Well...as you can see, the Hyatt Fairfax has a very long entrance way, kind of like a long corridor, which we used to our advantage. Everything was being carefully orchestrated by our best computer geek, who shall forever remain nameless. He hacked into the hotel security and was monitoring everything from a van close by. Because we had commandeered the principles rides, the plan was to wait until enough senators were gathered at the curb and then put the final part of the operation into motion. He told us later that he couldn't believe that several senators had already gathered, but were so engulfed in their conversation that they didn't even realize that their cars were late. When Laprima walked up talking with Senator Cortez, he just couldn't believe our luck and gave us the go. You can't see everything here but if you look closely you'll begin to see guards from one end of the corridor to the other, start to topple.

Now if you look towards the front where the targets were you will see us speeding into view in one the senator's cars... and jump out. The first to be targeted were of course the guards protecting the principles. Now you can see why anyone with a gun can't always stop a surprise attack. We had to make sure we got them first because after all they would have shot us, for real. If you look closely you will see that there is no threat coming from any part of the rest of the corridor. With the help of our driver and two more vets we took out the remaining guards without any confrontations.

(The tape now switches to the helmet cam footage)

Now switching to the helmet cams you see how any person, in this case Senator Grammar, reacts when they think they are going to die. By this time we have all tossed the dart guns and have started pelting each of them with paint. For those who know paintball... they can leave welts if you are not wearing protective gear. We had the tension specially set at just enough to fire without causing pain or causing injuries. We used 120 round clips and purposely had a different color for each. That way we could give a very colorful account of how many times they were hit. It was really quite spectacular! As you can see from the Wiley cam he had the undesirable problem of shooting Senator Alott. Although you can see from the other colors that Darnell had no problem pelting her. The next to fall was...

Mr. Moran: Were you aware that several senators have boasted that they have carry permits for concealed weapons? Weren't you afraid of actually getting shot for real?

Tanner: I understand that there were a couple of them that did have their firearms with them. In fact we hoping that they would draw on us, because we were dying to show all those misguided teachers and others that just because you have passed all the right courses to shoot a gun, you will never know how you will act in a real situation until you're there. Especially when you see five guys dressed in full combat armor coming at you. Please show the other helmet cam footage. As you can see Ernesto took out Senator Cortez, something he was hoping for, and Darnell started spaying Senator Pauly. The

other two were just doing a mass shooting of anyone and everyone in sight. As we later found out, and what their helmet cams are showing, among the casualties were a CEO and his spouse, and a couple of lobbyist as well. I went after Laprima.

(They show the footage)

As you can see he actually drew his piece on me. I don't know if it's because he is being saturated with paint or he was so scared he was about to shit himself, but he fired at me point blank and missed. Look, you can see him cowardly jutting backwards as he unloads his gun. He ended up hitting the back of the SUV...and it's a good thing that it was bulletproof, otherwise he might have shot the driver who was passed out in the back.

Mr. Moran: How long did the whole operation take?

Tanner: We were in and out about a...oh a couple of minutes. We drove over to the planned NRA protest across from the hotel entrance and sat and waited a few minutes for the police to arrive. (Several shots of police dash cams showing their arrest from different angles)

Mr. Moran: So after all of that you could have conceivably gotten away scott free but you decided to give yourselves up. Why?

Tanner: Just the five of us, yes. The others slipped away undetected and that is how it will always remain. As for us we knew that in order to make a real statement we needed to be heard. That's why we recorded everything. We picked the protest to get arrested at for two reasons. First to draw attention to the protest itself. They were protesting for gun safety and against the Fascist heads of the NRA and the media would never have reported it unless they were given a reason. The other reason is one of survival. What could the cops book us under...aggravated assault, reckless endangerment something like that. The feds would have had us up on attempted murder, and we may well have been on our way to Gitmo! By the time they got their hands on us...thank God we had Zack. Public opinion was already on our side for the most part. We did face treason charges for a short time though because of the outcry of the senators, as well as that no taxes conman Gomer Newquest, who was one the lobbyist that was hit...and of course Laprima.

Mr. Moran: As it turns out they were a lot closer to conviction than you could have ever have imagined. (To the camera) When we return we will finish with the charges of terrorism, the massive movement of everyday citizens, and finally the law that came about after all the dust settled. Don't go away.

(To Matt)

That was quite a story. You know that there are bloggers on the right that are saying you are all actually government agents and this was a plot perpetrated by the administration. I don't like to give nut job conspiracy theorist a platform so I didn't ask it on air, but is

there anything to it?

Tanner: That's a great question to ask on air. You know no matter what I say they will believe whatever gets a rise out of their followers. Hell, there are those on the right that still want us deported and stripped of our citizenship.

Mr. Moran: Well when we come back on I'll ask you about those allegations, but make your answers short. We still have to cover your reaction to millions that came to your defense. So take a minute to compose yourself, you're doing just fine. This is the last break so just take it easy....now we are almost back in five, (four, three, two)...(to the camera)We are back with one the heroes of the recent gun safety law, former Army Sgt. Matthew Tanner. Not all the critiques have been positive though; (he turns to Matt) have they. Some have called for you and your co-conspirators to be tried as enemy combatants, even called you un-American. For a short time you were charged with terrorism. Did you know going in that there would be such blow back?

Tanner: Yes! We were counting on it. I can't stop the right from spouting their nonsense. What we did was a nonviolent violent-like demonstration that could have ended in us being locked a way for a long time...and by the way we were all prepared to serve time. We just didn't know how amazing Americans can be when push comes to shove. Almost overnight people on all sides, right, left, independents, North and South, started openly protesting our incarceration and demanding our release. At the same time calling for sweeping gun control. We have to thank, with all our hearts, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, the Brady Campaign, American Hunters and Shooters Association, and many more. Who without their dedication,...the money they poured into ads, we would still be rotting in some prison. It was awesome...just in first week thousands of people hit the streets... the pressure was to great even for the NRA and their stooges, and by early December there were millions on the street calling for Congress to act.

(To the camera)

Mr. Moran: And act they did. Under immense corporate pressure all charges were dropped on December tenth. On December fourteenth, which by now everyone knows was the one year anniversary of Sandy Hook, both houses passed, within hours of each other, the most comprehensive gun safety law in the history of this nation. Let me go over just some of the key measures that are covered. Besides a compromised version of the VAGS bill, there are now no more loopholes on background checks of any kind. Even personal sales are subject to checks. As far as selling or giving a gun to relatives, the owner must sign a release of ownership similar to a vehicle transfer. First offense Strawman conviction, five years. Second fifteen, and after that the three strike rule that some states already have. No more online purchases of any kind. You can see the complete law in its entirety at our website TNNow.com.

Before I thank my guest, I have one final question. (Back to Matt) What's next for you

and your patriots?

Tanner: Well...the immigration act has passed and an equal rights for marriage is not far off... now that we know that we can get millions of people to make real changes, I am working very hard with a new group Veterans Administration Makeover...VAM, working to get all vets files computerized and make sure they all get fast and efficient treatment no matter if the illness is physical or mental. Maybe we can build on this victory and get money out of politics as well. Whatever my future holds I now have the motivation to make real change. Thank you Pierce for giving me this opportunity to tell my story.

Mr. Moran: It was my pleasure Matt. I wish you all the best, and when you get close to getting some of these new ventures accomplished your welcome back anytime.(he turns to camera)

Now if you liked this story, don't forget to tune in tomorrow, when we will have two of the senators who were the victims of Operation Paintball. Senators Grammar and Cortez swear the incident had no effect on their yes votes for the new gun law. Tune in to find out why. Until tomorrow this is Pierce Moran, Goodnight.

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