**14758, Brian Yarolem**

(As you land and gather your parachute)

Wow! What a rush! Hello Everybody! Well, how is everyone today? I don’t know about any of you but I love this part of my job. There is nothing better than jumping from an airplane, freefalling for a while, then opening my chute and gliding down to a spot I picked out ahead of time. Of course during my years in the Marines I was usually landing in the middle of danger zone instead of a crowd of unsuspecting people like you. That may give a guy a feeling of power and control but this is a whole lot more fun.

Thinking back to when I first joined the Marines in 1985 I never thought forward to my retirement. I was so consumed with learning my role, first as a regular Marine and later as a Reconnaissance Marine. I can promise you that if you haven’t lived the life of a Recon Marine then you have no idea of all the things we learn to do. We are the Special Forces Division of the Marine Corp. We do recon work in any part of the world, in any environment, on short notice. That general definition means that our training is wide and varied and the requirements for this position some of the strongest in the military. As a Recon Marine I did some of the most challenging jobs I can imagine and I loved every minute of it.

For those of you here who may not know the types of work we did let me give you a broad overview. As a SARC, or Special Amphibious Reconnaissance Corpsman, I was trained in advanced combat medicine through various Special Operation Medical Courses. In this position I fought side by side with our Reconnaissance Marines. As a Reconnaissance Marines I was trained to be proficient in ground reconnaissance, amphibious reconnaissance, battlespace shaping, specialized raid skills, scouting, and long-range communication skills. In addition, Reconnaissance Marines are proficient in the placement of remote sensors, foreign weapons and equipment identification, and directing supporting arms such as artillery, mortars, naval gun fire, and close air support. Not exactly a weekend warrior type of job.

To accomplish these tasks we were required to special insertion and extraction skills. To have these skills we had to know how to do static line and military freefall parachute operations, helicopter rope suspension operations, helocast, small boat operations, and combat diver operations. The Reconnaissance Man is also qualified as a small boat coxswain for crafts used throughout the various amphibious operations. In order to learn and keep these skills sharp, Reconnaissance Marines attend a variety of advanced follow-on special operations schools and courses. We are either in an active duty operation or in active training for future active duty operations. That’s the only way to keep our skills sharp for short notice duty calls.

Now that I’ve overwhelmed you with everything a Reconnaissance Marine has to learn here are a few examples of how we use those skills. There are some things that a mission commander must know about his operational area which can be unique and constantly changing. That means the only way to obtain that information is to put Marines on the ground to observe and report. In order to do this Recon Marines must be able to think and act independently to support the larger Marine unit’s mission. Our responsibility is for direct action, much like the Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, and Air Force Combat Controllers. Our job is to complement the other Special Forces, not replace or compete with them. Because of our skills and the missions we fulfilled requires that we are constantly forward-deployed to help defend the United States.

This is quite a huge job if you think about it. Luckily the Marines don’t tell you everything before you sign up. They lead you into it one step at a time. I started out life in Terre Haute, IN and joined the Marine Corps in December 1985. After Recruit Training I transferred to Infantry Training followed by Military Occupational Specialty Training for Infantryman. My career as a Marine has had me moving from one base to another, rarely staying in any one place for very long. It can be a challenge for a single person, but it was an even bigger challenge for me once I married and had a family.

Over my career as a Marine I have been assigned to Security Forces in Annapolis, MD where I was on the US Marine Corps Wrestling Team. Later I attended the selection and screening at 2nd Force Reconnaissance Company, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. After two years there, I was reported to 1st Reconnaissance Battalion for duty in 1988, where I remained through the transition of the Battalion to 1st Reconnaissance Company working in multiple billets. I served in the Gulf War on a variety of reconnaissance missions, completed three UDP deployments, and three deployments to Honduras and South America.

After leaving the 1st Recon Battalion, I transferred to 3rd Force Reconnaissance Company in Mobile, Alabama where I served as the training/operations chief (I&I). I was in charge of the operations and training department, and trained all the Reserve personnel in all aspects of the Reconnaissance Mission, Special Patrol Insert and Extract operations. After that, I transferred to 5th Force Reconnaissance Company, Okinawa, Japan for duty as a Platoon Sergeant. In late 1998, I was immediately reassigned as the Detachment Operations Chief for the 31st MEU Reconnaissance Platoon. Upon completion of 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), Special Operations Capable (SOC) deployments I was reassigned as 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion training chief. I served throughout this three-year tour as Platoon Commander and Platoon Sergeant deploying throughout the pacific theater including Okinawa, Kuwait, East Timor, Korea, Philippines, Malaysia Thailand, Australia and Russia.

In June 2000, I was realigned to Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific, Basic Reconnaissance Course as an instructor. While there, I was the senior instructor for the patrolling phase. Concurrent with my duties, I served as the test director for all dive related equipment being fielded by Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM). My remaining duties at the Basic Reconnaissance Course included requesting air support for the courses, class schedules for each course, curriculum development, fiscal matters, dive locker SNCOIC, perstempo and facilitating orders. In October 2003, I transferred to 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Camp Pendleton, CA for duty as a Platoon Sergeant and deployed with 11th MEU in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Upon return from the 11th MEU I was assigned as the operations chief for Alpha Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion.

In August 2006, I was transferred to Expeditionary Warfare Training Group, Amphibious Reconnaissance School house as the Staff Non Commissioned Officer. My remaining duties at the schoolhouse once again included all administrative functions, course scheduling, program of instruction re-write and curriculum development. In September 2007, I was transferred to 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Camp Pendleton, CA for duty as the Battalion Operations Chief where I conducted multiple deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 8.2 and Operation Enduring Freedom 10.1. I am currently assigned to Reconnaissance Training Company, Advanced Infantry Training Battalion, School of Infantry – West, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California.

I realize all this may sound like I just moved around from place to place and one assignment to another. But, if you look at the places I served and the jobs I did, I have led and been led by others. I have been mentored and then mentored other Marines and Sailors in multiple combat operations from 2004 - 2010. The biggest achievement to date was bringing everyone home alive, which was never easy or a sure thing. But, I am happy to report today, I did just that!

I have enjoyed great success in my career in the United States Marine Corps. But, that success is only partly because of my hard work. Much of my success is because of the training and leadership the Marine Corps has provided to me. I have been trained and mentored by some of the finest teachers, trainers and officers within the Marines. I am a Marine first, then a Reconnaissance Marine. There are approximately 185K Marines today but only about 1,000 Reconnaissance Marines, or less than 1%, so you can see why it’s such a tight knit community. I think you can see that because of the bond we have and the way we have each other’s back, it isn't about me, it’s all about the Marines I am surrounded by. I owe each of them a debt of gratitude because I know it is because of their friendship and guidance that put me where I am today. Marines have a unique bond. We will come to the aid of one another whether it’s in combat or at home. It’s that bond that makes us succeed. I am honored to have been affiliated with the United States Marine Corps for most of my life.

I am grateful to my trainers and commanders over the years who had faith in me to continue challenging me. They never let me take the easy way out or give up when the going got tough. You taught me how to survive and thrive no matter what situation I was in. I am also grateful to the men who served beside me, my peers. You stood by my side as I stood by your side. We were a unified group of men who watched each other’s back. You always made me see things as they were, not as I wanted them to be. We faced the same challenges in deployment and at home and we helped each other to face them head on and succeed. Not many careers can offer a person this kind of community.

I’ve left the best for last. I want to thank my beautiful wife Lisa. She has stood by my side and followed me wherever I was sent without a complaint, at least not a serious complaint. She has worked hard and kept a loving home for me to return to from each and every deployment. I always knew that she was there loving me and keeping the home fires burning for me. She has been patient and kind and the best thing that ever happened to me. Even after 25 years honey you are the love of my life. Lisa has been the best wife but also the best mother I could imagine, raising our two wonderful children, Amber who is 17 and Johnathon who is 21. She had to act as a single parent much of the time when I was deployed, but she raised our children and made sure they knew what their Dad was doing and taught them to be proud of me. I love my family and now that I’m retiring I plan on spending a lot more time with them, enjoying the gift that they are to me.

It’s been an honor and a privilege to serve in the United States Marine Corps and I will miss it. But seasons change and I am happy now to exit military life and become a civilian and enjoy my family more than ever.

Thank you Everyone