**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. But, since we’re all family here I don’t have to tell you everything I’ve done as a Marine. We are either on active duty or in active training for future duty. That’s the only way we stay sharp. As a Recon Marine I did some of the most challenging jobs I can imagine and I loved every minute of it.

I joined the Marine Corps in December 1985 Terre Haute, IN. 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. 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. 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 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.

In just about any setting in today’s world you hear a lot about teamwork. Employers want their people to put the team and the company ahead of their personal desires for promotion. But, when you are in a life and death situation that military people live in on a daily basis, teamwork becomes more than a slogan or a policy that your boss wants you to follow. Teamwork is the most important thing you will learn because it can save your life. During all of our training we learned teamwork so that we could all finish and finish strong. But, then all those lessons of teamwork were put to the test when we found ourselves in a danger zone with only each other to depend upon. It no longer mattered what differences there might be between you and the others in your unit. All that mattered was that every one of you survived and got home safe. We didn’t just believe that we shouldn’t leave anyone behind. We didn’t leave anyone behind. The safety of all of us meant the safety of each one of us. I have been truly proud to serve with each and every Marine that I’ve known.

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.

I know you expect to hear this from every dad but my children, Amber and Johnathon, are exceptional people. They work hard and strive to be the best they can be and I am very proud of them. There is nothing average about them and in my eyes they are perfect. They don’t just work hard to get good grades for the purpose of getting good grades, or even so they can earn scholarships. They do that, but their reason is much nobler. I can honestly say that my kids already have a highly developed sense of right and wrong and a strong work ethic. They work hard because it’s the right thing to do. They are honest and trustworthy because that is the right way to be. Even though I know they will be spreading their wings and going to college before too much longer, I am excited to be able to be home now and watch them continue to grow into the successful adults that I know they will become.

I also want to offer my greatest thanks to my mother-in-law and father-in-law. All the times when I was deployed they were right there at the ready to help my wife and kids in my absence. Not everyone can say that about their spouse’s parents. I know we’ve all heard every in law joke that’s ever been written, but I have to say that none of those fit mine. I have been blessed to have the support of my in laws throughout my career. They have not only been there to help Lisa with Amber and Johnathon, but they have encouraged and supported me over the years. It’s hard for a man to be gone as much as a career military man. We worry about our families while we’re gone and sometimes feel bad that we can’t be there for our wives and kids. But, my in laws have always supported my life’s work as a Marine and let me know that they didn’t consider it a sacrifice to step in when I couldn’t be home. I have always been thankful for that because I’ve known other Marines who didn’t have that kind of support back home. I just want to let them know that it made a world of difference in my ability to concentrate and do my job at the highest level. (You might want to give their names at least once rather than just call them the in laws)

It’s been a wild ride living as a Marine Recon. I could never have imagined when I signed up as a young man all the things I would experience and all the lessons I would learn. I wouldn’t have missed it for anything in the world. It’s truly 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.

I’m ready for some lazy weekends putting steaks on the grill and playing some “friendly” games of football, basketball, and baseball with my buddies. I don’t expect you all to forget about me now that I’m just a civilian. After all, you’ll be following me into retirement at some time in the future. When you do come talk to me and I’ll tell you how to do it up right because by then I’ll have figured out the mistakes I made and how to do things better. Eventually, I’ll probably come up with some project or business to keep me busy but for a while I just want to enjoy my family and my life.

Thank you Everyone for being here to celebrate this day with me.