

Borne the Battle

Episode # 135

Rick Robinson—Marine Corps Veteran, Emmy Award Winning Director of Photography,
Cinematographer

https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/57434/btb_rickrobinson/

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI):

What's up everyone-it is March 13th, 2019. *Borne the Battle*, brought to you by the Department of Veteran Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. So, if you didn't listen to the last episode or if you're new to the podcast or if you haven't listened in a while-yes, this is a new voice, that is new music. Uh, Tim has moved on to Arlington National Cemetery.

[00:00:38] Music

You know, for the past one hundred thirty-three episodes, he was the voice of *Borne the Battle* and you can still to all of his episodes in our archives. We're excited about the things he's going to do over there. So, Tim, if you're listening, we thank you for everything you did on this podcast. We wish you luck in your future endeavors and we're looking forward to seeing what you're gonna be doing over at Arlington National Cemetery.

[00:01:10]

Alright, so, with that, we've been off for the past couple of weeks and in that time, a couple of news releases have broken out. One of note was the implementation of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act-that is a mouthful. It's one of the most significant changes in veteran benefits in decades. Under the old process-uh-decisions averaged three to seven years when it came to appeals. This new process will give veterans three decision review options: a higher level review, a supplemental claim review, and an appeal to the Board of Veteran Appeals. Supplemental and higher level claims are to average about hundred twenty five days and the decision's appeal to the board for direct review are to average about a year. For more information on Appeals and Modernization, visit www.VA.gov/decision-reviews [Link to page on VA decision reviews and appeals]. That's

www.VA.gov/decision-reviews and we hope to get somebody on the show sooner rather than later to talk about this new process. So, I've been wanting to do a podcast for a while. This is my first episode ever and with that, I knew exactly who would be my first guest. He is Marine Corps Veteran Rick Robinson and personally, one of my biggest mentors during my time in the Marine Corps. He's an old school combat videographer. He filmed Marines in Grenada. He was one of the first to film Marines landing in Beirut. He then went to Hollywood after his service and became an Emmy-award winning cinematographer and was involved with movies like *Back to the Future Part II*, *Coming to America*, and *Harlem Nights*. He toured with the likes of Whitney Houston, Paul McCartney, and Michael Jackson. He taught at some of the most prestigious film schools in the LA area and then after all of that, he came back to the Marine Corps where he currently mentors the future generation of visual communicators. So, without further ado, I give to you-Mr. Rick Robinson.

[00:03:11] Music

[00:03:20] PSA:

Man 1: I served in Vietnam.

Man 2: I served in World War II.

Woman: I served in Afghanistan.

Man 1: And VA serves us all.

Man 2: No matter when you served.

Woman: No matter if you saw combat or not.

Man 1: There are benefits for Veterans of every generation.

Woman: See what VA can do for you.

Narrator: To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit www.va.gov [Link to VA's website]. That's www.va.gov.

[00:03:46] Music

[00:03:51] INTERVIEW:

(TI): When I took over this podcast from Timothy Lawson, um-I knew exactly who I wanted to interview first and it was you.

(Rick Robinson): Well, thank you, I'm-I'm honored.

(TI): Tell me about your decision to join the Marine Corps. And when-when did that decision happen?

(RR): I decided-I think-I always knew from the time I was-you know-maybe, nine or ten that I wanted to spend time-that I wanted to serve. I didn't-I didn't think I was going to do it for-for a lifetime, but I knew that I would serve. And then later-

(TI): Why-what was the-what was the impetus behind that?

(RR): You know what, um, I grew up. Uh, I have a twin sister and I have, um-also-uh, two other sisters. Uh, and I was the only boy. I grew up and-and I never met my father. So, I grew up in a household-

(TI): Gotcha

(RR): -with-with no male influence. So, I had my grandfather who was, uh-he was my grandfather. You know, so, I saw him that way. He worked all the time. He worked all day. So, I didn't seem him a lot. At some point, I just felt, you know-I had this thing where when it came time to make the decision on what branch I wanted to join-you know, I had always heard that the toughest branch was the Marine Corps. It's not that I doubted who I was or what my capability was. But I-but I-I went into the Marine Corps with the mindset that, you know what, I am going to-I have to-I have to make it. I have to prove something to myself.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): And I remember the night-uh-I went into boot camp.

(TI): Alright.

(RR): When I got off the bus and finally, I think the two days they make you stay awake-uh-but finally, the night that we were able to go to sleep, I remember, before we went to sleep, before we adjusted ourselves, uh-I

had one guy-uh-we're laying in a bunk and I said, "You know what, I'm going to be the Honor Man in this platoon."

(TI): Like out loud? You said that out loud?

(RR): I said that to one of the other marines-you know-to one of the other recruits.

(TI): Oh wow-

(RR): I said-

(TI): -challenge accepted.

(RR): -I said, I'm going to be the honor man, you know. And they said, "Okay, Mr. Honor Man." So-uh-and-you know-there was a little rift between us. And eventually, um-you know-he would-he would-a couple of weeks later, he said-"How's it going, Mr. Honor Man?" It was a joke, you know? But the day I graduated, I was the Honor Man.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): You know, so...I was determined.

(TI): You showed him.

(RR): I was determined.

(TI): You showed him. It was a-was a joke no more. It was more of a handshaking, okay.

(RR): Yeah, yeah, it was something that I had-I had-I had to prove to myself.

(TI): Gotcha.

(RR): And-and I was always kinda that way. In-in-in high school, I was the-I was the king of my high school.

(TI): Oh, yeah?

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): The king of the high school, where was that? Where did you grow up?

(RR): Washington, DC

(TI): You grew up in DC? In the city that we're in right now?

(RR): Cardozo, yeah.

(TI): Got you. Is it-is it like the high school-Cardozo?

(RR): Cardozo, yup.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): Yup.

(TL): Tell me about either a good friend-

(RR): Mmhm

(TI): -or a great leader that you learned from during your service.

(RR): You know, I guess I had the opportunity to meet and to be exposed to a lot of great leaders. But I think one that stands out-the one who right off the bat-uh-when I came out of boot camp, initially, I was in supply. Uh-

(TI): Got you.

(RR): So, I-I got Meritorious PFC out of boot camp and then-

(TI): For being the Honor Grad?

(RR): For being Honor Grad, yeah. And then I went to my first duty's station and-um-when I checked in, I remember-uh, there was-there was a Marine. I think he was a Gunnery Sergeant or a Staff Sergeant who-when I first met-you know-he was kinda-um-he was a salty individual.

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): And maybe two weeks later from the time that I checked in, this guy was-was-uh, one night he was-he was drinking and he drove. He ran into and killed-uh-uh-someone head on. He survived-

(TI): This was your Staff Sergeant at the time?

(RR): Yeah...yeah.

(TI): That's heavy stuff.

(RR): So-and so, I learned at that point-it was a big-a big lesson. I came into the Marine Corps in '74, which was really, really a bad time- a transition for-for me coming into the Marine Corps. Uh, it was, they were-at the tail end of Vietnam.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): And so, there were a lot of issues with race relations in the Marine Corps.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): Really bad. Uh, and-and-uh-even, you know, recently, I-I brought it up... The Commandant, the current Commandant of the Marine Corps. Yeah, that came up-that came up in a conversation and-and we talked about that. He-we reminisced about that period.

(TI): Got you. Um, so-now, you used to tell me-Now, you went to Beirut, right?

(RR): Mhm.

(TI): Um, was that before or after the bombing?

(RR): I was there before the bombing. Uh, I was the first-well, one of the first. I was myself and one of the persons-we were the first-uh-persons to-uh-We went ashore and I was actually attached to the French-uh-UN, so that the multinational forces-I was attached to them to document the landing of the Marines at Beirut. And they were there-

(TI): Before the bombing?

(RR): Before-before the bombing

(TI): When the authorization-when the authorization was first given?

(RR): Yes, and-

(TI): Got it.

(RR): And that was-that was for the evacuation of the PLO, which was the-uh-uh-Yassir Arafat and...

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): So, that's when Beirut was really-it was really, really bad. So, the French Multinational Forces were their force first. And then, when Ronald Reagan was president, uh, there was-uh-a campaign to assist-uh, the Israelis who were-were there. So, the United States was to-was to go in as part of the French-as part of the Multinational Force. So, I was there-uh, and so, I was able to be there to document and I thought that was-I was excited about that because, I said, you know, this is something I get to document history and-

(TI): Absolutely.

(RR): And, so, I was there-

(TI): As a-as a combat photographer.

(RR): Yes.

(TI): As a combat videographer-that's what you do-that's what-that's the reason you show up for work every day, correct?

(RR): Yeah, so, I was actually flown back. At the time, I was on leave. I was called off leave-uh-and I actually-this was when I was at Lejeune...no excuse me, I was at Quantico at the time.

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): So, I came-I was called off leave and I was-uh, summoned to the Pentagon and I was given-I was-uh-we were able to use the Commandant's plane to fly me down to Lejeune, so that-uh-

(TL): Oh, man.

(RR): Yeah, I was briefed here and-and then, I was flown down to be able to join up with the-uh-with the-with the Marine Corps. I think it was the 22nd MAL or the 32nd MAL back then. I was -it was exciting because, you know, because it was like a ten-passenger jet or something. Also, I thought, you know, this is pretty cool.

(TI): In a Lear jet

(RR): I was just trying to-

(TI): Riding in style!

(RR): I was just a staff sergeant, you know. So, I said, okay, this is kinda cool-um-you know so-but I helicoptered into the-into the-uh, ship. I reported to-uh-the-uh, the-the commander of the 32nd-I think it was the 22nd or the 32nd MAL. Uh-and-uh-back then, it was Colonel-Colonel Mead-James Mead. And, so, yeah-and, so, I-

(TI): And off you guys were-

(RR): I was there via the Commandant Marine Corps to document, you know, what was-what I needed to do there. So, I had special orders and so, I-I kinda was-not a celebrity, but I was, you know, there-

(TI): You were there on a very specific mission.

(RR): Correct.

(TI): From the Commandant-so, you fly in, you get on the MAL Uh-you get-you get-basically, what is now today a MEU? Right?

(RR): Mhm, correct.

(TL): And you are-you link up with the French Multinational Force-

(RR): Correct.

(TI): -and you guys land.

(RR): Correct.

(TI): Um, so, you were there before the bombings. Now, were you-so you said you were one of the first after the bombings?

(RR): Yeah, this is what happened. Once the occupation started-uh-then Beirut-uh-became-uh, I can't remember. I was-They were there for like six months at a time-initially, I think. And then, um, we rotated our-our units, so the combat camera folks-we rotated. We were on rotational bases.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): So, I rotated back to the States. And then, so, um-so, we were gonna be rotating back and forth. And-and, well, then the time that-uh-before-just before the bombing, uh, they had another issue-another incident in Grenada and Grenada happened. When Grenada happened-

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): -I-I-I was-I went to Grenada.

(TI): You did go to Grenada!

(RR): I went to Grenada.

(TI): I did not know that.

(RR): Yes, so, I was in-I was in Grenada. And so, when I went-when I went there-then-so, I would have rotated back to Beirut. So, some of those same Marines-uh-when I was-when I was in-in Beirut and in Grenada, you know. So, at the 22nd-uh, excuse me, the-uh-I think it was with the 2/8 2nd Battalion Marines.

(RR): So, you get to-so, I had a little bit of-I felt like-

(TI): I did not know you went to Grenada. My father, he went to-so, quick story, I'm currently living in my in-law's basement during my transition back up to D.C. His neighbor went to Grenada and retired as Lieutenant Colonel. So, it's quite-there weren't that many Marines who went to Grenada.

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): So, it is pretty possible you might know him.

(RR): Correct...correct.

(TI): He was an officer-he was a-I think-a Logistics Officer at the time.

(RR): Yeah?

(TI): Um, so, I will make sure-definitely-that he-I'll see if he remembers, you know, if you guys crossed paths or something.

(RR): Yeah, because last-last year we had the Medal of Honor recipient-uh-uh-Major Canley?

(TI): Yes.

(RR): John Canley-uh-

(TI): That's a hard man.

(RR): Yeah, he is. But one of the-I think-the generals that was one of his-one of his commanders was at Beirut and I didn't realize until-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): - we read his bio that we were there together.

(TI): Wow.

(RR): So, yeah.

(TI): Small Marine Corps-

(RR): Yeah

(TI): Small Marine Corps. So, after Grenada, you went straight from Grenada to Beirut?

(RR): After-No, I rotated back to the States.

(TI): Okay.

(RR): Uh, and then-and then-uh-Beirut happened, you know.

(TI): Mmhm.

(RR): The bombing

happened and things changed drastically from that. And it was interesting because I had friends who thought that I was rotated back and-and we also had friends-I had a friend that was-uh-had rotated there to Beirut, who we didn't hear right after the bombing for, uh, maybe a week and a half. We-we thought he was dead, you know-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -because we didn't have- we couldn't get the-uh-we-we-there was no way of being able to contact some of the folks and so-

(TI): Before cell phones

(RR): One day-one day out of the blue, we get an email-excuse me, not an email back then. It was a phone call from him that he was alive, so-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): Wow. That's pretty incredible stuff. So, a lot-a lot of the footage you see today-when it comes to Beirut in the aftermath-that's a lot of some of your footage, right?

(RR): Yeah-well, you know what, I don't know. I-I-I did-I did have footage because when we were in Grenada-uh-we were-because that was closed to the-uh-press. I think it was pretty limited in terms of-our footage was the only one that was coming out of there. Uh, Beirut-um-a lot of that stuff-uh- was the same, but real quick. Beirut-on the day that I thought I was going to be the only person that was-I thought-I thought that it was going to be a spectacular event.

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): Because I thought, you know, I'm going to be the only one there.

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): At the point where-at 0400 Zulu when they were scheduled to come ashore-

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): I'm standing there on the- on the- on the beach. And there was really, literally nobody else there, right? And as I-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -started to see the vessels come ashore,

(TI): Mmhm.

(RR): I hear all this commotion behind me and you know, I'm saying, "What the heck is that?" I hear screaming-

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): -and-and vehicles and all this noise and all of sudden, I turn around and there is a whole hoard of press.

(TI): [Laughter] Here you are, you think-I got the shot-

(RR): I got the shot.

(TI): -I'm gonna be seen around the world-

(RR): That's right.

(TI): -and everyone else comes behind you.

(RR): I got this shot.

(TI): [Laughter] So, really, you were the first person on the beach to get a placement?

(RR): Right, right.

(TI): Got you. [Laughter] So, Rick, you were a Staff Sergeant-you were in for over ten years, correct?

(RR): Twelve years.

(TI): Twelve years.

(RR): Mhm.

(TI): Uh, what prompted you to leave the service?

(RR): Well, I was lucky to-I wanted to-I wanted to do more after I had, you know, an opportunity to do a lot when I was on- on active duty. I was very fortunate to be able to- to- uh, to get selected to go to film school at University of Southern California-at USC.

(TI): Now, I went to the Syracuse Program through the same thing. Was that before Syracuse?

(RR): Before Syracuse-

(TI): Or was it like-like a same type of program?

(RR): Correct.

(TI): Got you. Very cool.

(RR): So, I was selected for that and then, after that, a part of the program-one of things that-the beauty of that program-you know-is that I had to reenlist before I left to accept it. And I did, uh, exactly the amount that I was-that I have to give back to the Marine Corps, then I got out. It sounds-

(TI): So, what did you have to give back? Three years? One year of school for three years?

(RR): Yes.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): I had to give back- I think I had to give back-uh, was it six years? Or was it three years? Uh...it may have been six years...no, it was three years I had to extend-

(TI): Okay.

(RR): -to do that. And so, I did that. And, um, but while I was there, one of the things-one of the beauties of being in California for one and being at University of Southern California, you were right in the middle of everything, you know.

(TI): Yeah-

(RR): So, one of my-one of my-one of my studies-one of my classes that I had was to-was to go to the Burbank Studios, which is Warner Brothers now-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -Warner Brothers Studios and hang out on the lot. And that was my-that was school, that's what I did. So-

(TI): You lucky man.

(RR): So, I had one person who-uh, was even better because the one person that was the contact person at Warner Brothers Studio was a gentleman named Dick Barlow, who was the Head of Camera Department for Burbank Studios. He was a former Navy Chief and-

(TI): Oh.

(RR): -and so, he was, you know-he- he hosted us. We were a part of a class of three people-uh- excuse me, eleven people-uh- and the eleven people consisted of-I think we had four Marines and everybody else was Navy. So-

(TI): Oh, wow.

(RR): He was a former Navy Chief, so he loved-

(TI): He's excited.

(RR): He loved it.

(TI): He's excited. He's got Marines and Sailors on the lot of-

(RR): He let us-he let us just hang out with-uh-back then, I think, the big-the big- the big film on the lot back then was *Blade Runner*. But I got to hang out-

(TI): So, you saw *Blade Runner* actually being filmed?

(RR): Yeah, so we could hang out on the set. We hung out on set. We-back then, they had shows, like television show-like-uh, *Hotel*, and-and-*Fantasy Island*, and-uh- *The Waltons*, you know, stuff that the millennials here-I love them, but they probably don't even know what the hell I'm talking about.

(TI): [Laughter] Those are some-I mean- those are some of the-the-the classics, you know. Uh, so you just-your job was to go to school and watch *The Waltons*-

(RR): Well-

(TI): -production live.

(RR): Well, that was one class-

(TI): -and *Blade Runner*.

(RR): -that was one class.

(TI): Oh, that was one class.

(RR): Yeah, so we also had, you know, thea-

(TI): I'm just salty right now-I just gotta be honest with you. I get a bunch of snow at Syracuse-

(RR): Right. [laughter]

(TI): And I get Mr. Rick Robison here that gets to go to USC, go to Warner Brothers and hang out with like Harrison Ford in *Blade Runner*.

(RR): Mmhm [Laughter]

(TI): So, excuse me if I'm a little salty.

(RR): [Laughter] It was-you know what, I was-I was blessed.

(TI): I could see where that would say, maybe life is better on the other side. So, you left after twelve years and, you know, I'm looking at your IMDb and you started working as a camera operator or assistant camera operator? I see things like-things that I remember as a kid, like, *Hard Copy* and *Coming to America* and *Back to the Future Part II* and *Ice Cubes: the Player's Club*. Uh, it's pretty safe to say you worked on some pretty big films?

(RR): I was fortunate, you know, I was very fortunate. When I left-when I left the Marine Corps, I was determined that I wanted to go to Hollywood and be a-you know, and work in film and television industry. I wanted to be able to work in the highest level that I could. I didn't know anybody, so it was really hard because I didn't-I didn't know a soul. Uh, and one of the things that I- that I love and even to this day, uh-classic cars and-

(TI): Sure.

(RR): When I was a Sergeant, I had a 1957-uh- Corvette. I had a 1961 Corvette.

(TI): Solid.

(RR): I had a Brooklyn Gold Wing SV1 Car. Uh, but these were-this was what I love. I had a '55 Chevy Bel Air. People look at me and say, "You're a Sergeant. How are you driving those kinds of cars?" Well, I didn't drink, you know-

(TI): [Laughter] That's like half your budget. [Laughter]

(RR): Yeah, so-

(TI): Half of a Marine's budget.

(RR): So, so, that's what I loved. And that is what I used-uh- in thinking back, because I'm at a crossroads now. Um, thinking back, I looked at how-

what I needed to do to strategically get into the film and television industry. If you don't know anybody-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): So, I had my-my Corvette that I used-that I would drive my Corvette and I'd-and I'd park. I'll never forget. I went to LA and I said, "How do I find people who work in the film and television industry?", "As a camera man, how do I get in?" Although, while I was at USC-you know, I knew Dick Barlow and- and Dick always said, "Let me know, Gunny, when you're ready to get out of the Marine Corps-let me know and I'll-I'll get you into a union." And I said, "Getting into a union would be great"-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): So, when I came-when I got out of the Marine Corps, I kept in touch with him. And when I got out of the Marine Corps, I said-I remember the day I drove on. I was able to get onto to the lot of Warner Brothers-

(TI): How?

(RR): Uh-

(TI): You can't just say I drove onto Warner Brothers.

(RR): Yeah, yeah-

(TI): How?

(RR): -back then, it was before- pre-9/11, so there were a lot of things that you could do.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): So, now, it's a little bit different. Um, but back then I could go on, because there were-there were guards. You know, you learn people. There were guards that- they remember me. So, when I was- I used to be able to get on Paramount or Warner Bros because I knew the guards, you know? So, they- they knew me, so that- that was- and my car stood out. So, my- my car, because it was-you know, it was a '56 Corvette. Uh, it stood out, you know. So, one of the things that-uh, that

I was able to do was to go to Panavision and places where I knew that camera people would-would-

(TI): Congregate

(RR): -congregate and so, um, I drove my car and I remember one day, I parked my car- my Corvette in a parking lot and, um. So, I walked in and someone told me- "You gotta meet the guys there." So, I met one of the guys that worked at Panavision and so, he- he took me in the back and showed me all the-showed me where the board was-where all of the assistant cameraman came there to prep their camera gear. And he said-he said to me-he said, "Listen." He said, "You're able-I'll let you come in any day you want. You just come- you can come back to the board and look and see who's prepping and who's-who's there. And, um, you know-and this is a good place that you need to meet all of the top assistants, because these are the guys that work for all the big directors of photography who works for the big directors-

(TI): And who did this for you?

(RR): Uh, this is-this is another guy from Panavision. I just happened to walk into Panavision. And so, I was there and in the middle of that-

(TI): I love this. "I just happened to walk into-"

(RR): Yeah and some guy says-I hear some guy said, "Oh man, did you see that Corvette in the parking lot? Did you see the '63 Corvette?" And I said, "It's a '56." And-and he says, "Is that your Corvette?" And I said, "Yeah, it's mine." That-that-that kinda got us started.

(TI): That's-that's the conversation starter.

(RR): And-and the person happened to be John Shiner, who was prepping for *Coming to America*, right? And so I-and so I-and that was-it turned out it was a good thing that I-you know, the tip that I had on knowing who the people, all these top assistants-they were all there. Whether it was someone prepping for a television show or whether it's a music video- whatever it was, that's where they went to prep. And so, I met John and I said, "John, you know, um" and he said-he said, "Is that your Corvette?" and I said, "Yeah, it is." He said, "That's really cool-so, what's going on?" So, I explained to him that I just got out of the Marine Corps and, you know, and they thought that was cool and-and-uh- I said, I'd like to help you prep, you know. I mean, I'm not in a

Union, but whatever I can do-He said-I told him that I was-that I was accepted into this training program which Dick Barlow set that up and he said-he came through and said that he'd help me get into a Union. He-it turns out he did and he got me into a training program that was-that would legally allow me to join a union. So-

(TI): Oh, wow.

(RR): So, I've just been going through that training.

(TI): That's a big help.

(RR): It was a huge help. It was at the end of the training of that piece, so I told John Shine, "You know what, I'm on the training program, but I'd like to be able to help you. I know you can't pay me and he said, "Give me your name and- and I'll call you and see what- what happens." And so, he called me. I-I forgot about it and I thought he wasn't ever going to do that. But a week later, he called and this is why I learned right off the bat how to negotiate, how to talk, how to communicate with these guys. So, he says, "I'm calling to check your availability." Uh- and I went, "Um...who is this?" He said, "This is John-John Shiner. I'm just checking to see your availability to come work with us on *Coming to America*." And I said, "Uhh, you know what, can you hold on for a second, John? Let me check." [Laughter] And I went, "Uh, you know, I just happen to be available-

(TI): [Laughter] This is an audio show, but when he paused-he did a very like grin. Like, oh my gosh, this is my moment. Um, that's a really cool story. I mean, so you were off and running. You're just making films with John Shinner as an assistant camera from then on and getting into the union and-and getting those hours, because that's-that's kinda- part of it is- is that you have to get the hours to get into the union, correct?

(RR): It's a Catch-22 with the- with the- in Hollywood, it's a Catch-22. In order for you to work on a- on a show that's a union show, you have to be a member of the Union. And in order for you to-to be a member of the union, you have to have the qualifying hours-at least three hundred hours on a show before you can join the union. So, it's a Catch-22.

(TI): It's a "who you know".

(RR): It's a "who you know". It's a lot of nepotism and that's why everybody's name when you talk to someone-you find this person who has been

working forever and his- his- his son is Junior and his- his grandson- it's just a whole family of people. They're all-they're all related.

(TI): It's like the mafia.

(RR): It is.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): But I will say that I met my wife on a- on a show.

(TI): Which one?

(RR): I met her on a show called, uh-I saw her on *Coming to America*, but I met her on *Harlem Nights*, which was another Eddie Murphy movie.

(TI): Gotcha. And how did that go down?

(RR): Uh- that was- that was based on a relationship that I met with the first film that I worked on- *Coming to America*. Uh, the same Director of Photography. Uh- uh- He liked me and he actually, uh- was- he invited me to come work for him on- on the other show and I happened to meet my wife. She wasn't checking me out-[laughter]-in the beginning, you know.

(TI): She didn't see the car and say whose car is that?

(RR): No, no-she actually- she didn't see the car. She actually-she actually, uh, she actually thought the guy that was the camera-the A camera operator on the show-you know, he's- he's pretty-he's one of my mentors, but he's got a lot of swag. He's-he's a good looking guy. So, I didn't exist. She didn't even see me. I remind her of that- how she didn't even pay me attention.

(TI): [Laughter] To this day, you remind her.

(RR): Not till the second show-she- she- recognized me.

(TI): What was she doing on the show?

(RR): She used to work for Eddie Murphy. She was actually one of Eddie's-uh- assistants-that's how I met her.

(TI): [laughter] Did you-I mean-how close were you to Eddie- Eddie Murphy?

(RR): Um, well-

(TI): I mean, you-you know-

(RR): One of the things that I-

(TI): -dating his assistant here.

(RR): Well, I'll-I'll be honest with you. I mean- I- I wanted to be- this story to be believable news and- and I pinched myself a lot. A lot of things I experienced in my life, I pinched myself, because Eddie Murphy-um, you know-I used to go to his house. A lot of celebrities-they have their own-in their homes, they have-they can't just go to the movies. So, they have movies coming to them, you know.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): So I-so I had-you know-so we met Eddie-*Coming to America* and *Harlem Nights* were two shows that, um, no matter who I-I talked to, they've heard of that, they remember that. And so, the crew was really tight. We met so many people that I still keep in touch with. I was- one night I was at-at- at the news stand and I ran into one of Eddie's guys. He says, "Hey, what are you doing?" I said, "Well, hey, I'm just- you know- news stand-and-" He's like, "Well, come over to the house!" and I'm like, "Uh, to the-to the house?" "Yeah, come over to the house."

(TI): To the house?

(RR): To Eddie's- Eddie's house.

(TI): Ah, so, the house.

(RR): Yeah, so, that's what-so, that was one of the benefits. It didn't always happen that way. It didn't always turn out that way. But that was-that was-

(TI): It was fun when it did!

(RR): It was cool.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): Plus, I had the Cor- the Corvette. So, that was-

(TI): The talking point.

(RR): [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(TI): So, in addition to some films, you also did-you traveled with the who's who music at the time. I mean, you were a videographer for Whitney Houston and you were on the Bad tour with Michael Jackson.

(RR): I was on the-not the- not the Bad tour with Michael Jackson. I was on the, uh, the Dangerous.

(TI): The Dangerous tour.

(RR): The Dangerous World Tour.

(TI): Uh, what was that like? Uh, I mean-[Laughter]

(RR): Well, you know what-

(TI): [Laughter] And how did you get there?

(RR): Well-

(TI): Was it the Corvette?

(RR): Well-

(TI): I bet it was the Corvette, wasn't it?

(RR): The Corvette was related to it, because I used that-that's a common thread that I used.

(TI): I gotta feeling that our listeners are forever going to be like "Check one: get a Corvette."

(RR): Get a Corvette or something. You have to have a gimmick and the gimmick that you-that would get you in a door. And you-but you also have to have- it's more than just a gimmick, though.

(TI): Sure. It has to have substance behind it.

(RR): But, yeah-and that my gimmick. So, um, the-the Michael Jackson piece-uh, turned out that- before actually I had an opportunity to work with Michael Jackson-I had a-I got a call-I missed a call once for a Michael Jackson video, because I was working on something else. And I beat myself up because I missed that call-

(TI): Sure.

(RR): And-and-and-

(TI): What year was it at that time?

(RR): Oh, that would have been like 1990, 1991.

(TI): So, he was hot at the time.

(RR): Yeah.

(TI) He's coming on-yeah.

(RR): Yeah, and so, the thing is that-you know, it was- it was a- it was a bummer that I missed that, you know? But I- but I was working, uh, so it turns out that the person who-this little production company I was working with at the time-um -had an in with one of the persons with Michael Jackson and Director of Photography by the name of Joe Wilcox. And Joe Wilcox-uh -uh- was- was- the person who would hire- he's the person that eventually hired me.

(TI): Got you.

(RR): And I went out and I was called. I asked this person to talk to Joe and see if there is any possibility he could maybe-you know, he could get me in to work with him. I'd love to work with him.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): And, um, I don't know, maybe a month went by. And one day, I got a call from-uh -Joe Wilcox and he says he wanted to check my availability. Now, I've learned the lingo now. So, I said-

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): So, I said I didn't- I didn't pause on that one. I jumped on that one right away.

(TI): [Laughter] Now, I'm available right now.

(RR): I'm available right now.

(TI): [Laughter] I'm available yesterday.

(RR): I can push some other things away and-and-but, yeah, yeah, yes. So, I took it and it was for a one day call. It was for one day and I stayed and I worked with him for almost two years.

(TI): Was it one day contracts all the time? Like, hey, maybe I'll see you tomorrow or-

(RR): Well, you have to understand-at- at- at certain gigs-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): -you know-they- it's like-it's a who you know and- and- and how, you know, how- when you take the job-it's one of those things that you never know. You know, uh, you could take someone- somebody that you can't- you can't mesh with, someone-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): - that has a bad personality. So, it's very, very political-

(TI): And relationship driven.

(RR): It is. So, I was able to make a good impression and so, I was asked to stay and then, that one day turned into him- Joe saying, "Listen, this was a test. We've got an opportunity, if you're interested. Michael Jackson has been invited to Africa and we want you to go as one of the

documenting camera men-uh- to document that, if- if you want to do it. And I said, "Well, let me think about it."

(TI): [Laughter]. He's doing the same grin again. Where he's like-oh my god- is this really happening?

(RR): But yeah-so, that turned into-so, that turned into-uh- that experience worked out really well and then, I was invited to the- to the World Tour. So and then, once you do one- one world tour- it made it a little bit easier to meet- for me to get to the other one. I actually-before Michael Jackson- I had done Whitney Houston's "I'm Your Baby Tonight" World Tour. And I did that for the North American and- and Europe and-yeah. It was North America and Europe. I did that tour- that leg and after that, was the Michael Jackson opportunity and after Michael Jackson was Paul McCartney. And, you know, so I've been- I've been fortunate. I've been very, very blessed.

(TI): I would say so.

(RR): Well, you know, people-because-you know when you transition and you look back-when you look at this, people-people look back to me and say, "Well, how in the-how in the heck did you end up going back to the government? I don't get it. You know-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): -doing all this." And I said, "You know, things-you know, I did things in reverse, you know. I bought my house when I was-when things were-when things were rolling, because I was- I was doing well, you know."

(TI): Sure.

(RR): Um, I bought my house when it was-when the-when the, uh, value of the properties were high and I sold it when it was low, so I lost money.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): [Laughter] So, I learned-so, I had-that-that was the first time-

(TI): Rick Robinson-life in reverse.

(RR): Exactly.

(TI): That's-that's your bio, right there.

(RR): Yeah, so- so- my whole family thinks I did everything coming out. People talk about: you go to college, you learn the craft, you go out and get a job, and you make a lot of money. Well, that's not what I did. So, I did the opposite. So, I made a lot of money and then- then I ended up coming back to the government, but I love it. I came back to where I started and-

(TI): Got you.

(RR): There was a reason why they let me.

(TI): In between that time, you had like-like a Russian oligarch-like-

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -little detour, right? So, like, you left Hollywood and you went to the South Pacific for a while?

(RR): Yeah, I was in Southeast Asia. I also taught. I had a- I had a- I had one day where I was-

(TI): That's right.

(RR): I was in the-I used to be a member of the Fuji Film Club and so, with that, um, I met someone there that was-she ended up being-uh-uh-she ended up being a very big influence and mentor for me. Her name-um, is Brianne Murphy. Brian was a-she was the first female cinematographer to join the Union-um-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -and so, she was the-she influenced me. We met and for some reason, she liked me, I don't know why. And-and all of the sudden-

(TI): It was the car.

(RR): [Laughter] No, I think I had-I think I had-I didn't have the car at that point. Uh, but she- she- she called me a couple of days later after we met. She said- she said, "How would you like to teach?" And I said, "Teach? I've never-uh...It's not my thing. She said, "Well, I think you'd be a great teacher."

(TI): Well, what were you doing at this time?

(RR): I was still working, so I could still work-you know, work during the day and- and- and- uh, teach in the evenings, if that was the opportunity. Uh, she was the person that-she, you know-she had been there and done that. You know, she had all of the oppor- She's the first woman to-uh- be-uh-part of an all-man's club-you know, to be a cinematographer.

(TI): Got you, got you. She broke the mold.

(RR): She broke the mold and when she said to me that night-she said, "I think you'd be good at it" and she asked me to come visit her. I went and visited her. She said, "I think you'd be great to do that." And-and-and I went into her office and in her office, she had an Academy Award-a Technical Academy Award on her desk and she had an Emmy. I said, "Wow." I said, "You know what, can I hold it?" She said, "Sure, that's why it's there." So, I held her Emmy and-and-and I held her Academy Award, but I held her Emmy for the longest. And I said, "Wow, this is cool." And I mean, one day, I'd like to be able to do that myself.

(TI): And you did! You-you eventually, so-

(RR): Like a year and a half later.

(TI): Yeah-oh, really? So, it was that quick?

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): Your IMDb says, uh, *Aladdin on Ice*.

(RR): *Aladdin on Ice*.

(TI): *Aladdin on Ice*.

(RR): No-it's-it's actually-no, it's *Beauty and the Beast*.

(TI): Oh, you're going to have to get the editor to change that on IMDb-because-

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -but-so, you did- you did both-was that ABC? Was that-

(RR): Nope, it was CBS.

(TI): It was CBS. So, like out of all- out of everything-you have this whole resume of all these great movies and then, it's like the one you actually got the award for was-uh- was, like, an ice skating

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -that's just-

(RR): Yeah, but you know what-there's a story behind that. A lot of what I think I attribute to some of the successes and some of the things I've had-good or bad-were things that came from being a Marine. Uh, and learning that, uh-and-and dealing with things-the adversity-where you can make- make excuses for-for being black-for whatever reason. There are no reasons. There are-there are people who have issue with you are, who don't agree with who you are-

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): -but a lot of times it's because they don't know who you are. Uh, I was, you know-the person I met-I was-for a film that I did. I met a director who- we both came into this-into a show that had been started and it kinda- they had problems with the crew and-he-he came in as a replacement director and I came in as a replacement director of photography. He, to this day, is still a good friend of mine. Uh, but he was the person who invited me to Egypt to do another Disney *Aladdin on Ice*. That's what we did.

(TI): [Laughter] You guys did it in Egypt?

(RR): We did it in Egypt and-and he invited me there and, uh-

(TI): Wow. It wasn't like the hockey rink here in DC?

(RR): No, no.

(TI): You were like, "Oh, we're doing *Aladdin on Ice*-"

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -in Egypt.

(RR): Because-because the Aladdin part was supposed to be where-where-it's actually-uh-uh-it's a flying carpet piece. So, what they wanted to do with that flying carpet piece was supposed to be-so, one of the coolest things I did was to be able to shoot-uh-uh-in a helicopter down the Nile River, so that we could get subjective perspectives of-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -flying through the Nile River on a helicopter, you know. So, that was-so, we went through Khartoum which is the City of the Dead-of the Gods-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): and-and-it-was very interesting, uh, but-

(TI): I can see where you got the Emmy now-

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -because it is so unique.

(RR): Yeah, but the big deal is there were people on that crew who had problems with the fact that I didn't belong. I wasn't part of the crew. It was such a clique. The challenge that they gave me-some of them were really-not-not kind. They gave me-they also had a six hundred millimeter lens, right. So, guess who got the six hundred millimeter lens to use? Me, right?

(TI): That's a big lens.

(RR): That's a huge, huge lens and it's really, really hard to operate. So, what they did is-they would-uh-like, during the day when we're shooting out in the rink, you know, with the actors and stuff-they said, "You know what, let's-why don't you go out, just get some stuff-just go out and get some B-roll."

(TI): Get some scenics.

(RR): "Get some scenics and-and take the six hundred." So, I went.

(TI): [Laughter].

(RR): What can I get with a six hundred millimeter? But then I stopped and thought about it-I said, you know what, alright, good. So, what I did is-I went- I went downtown Cairo and there were-there was one scene that I shot where it was long lens. When you have a long lens camera, you get the heat vi-uh-uh-

(TI): The wavy heat.

(RR): The wavy heat-heat-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): -effect.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): And, so, I had that. It was a-like a street car where you see the street car coming at you and- and you see the wave-the heat waves-and then, they keep-they stop. When it stopped, you saw people get out of the street car and then, so you had people in turbans and you had all of this livestock and it was-it was an amazing shot.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): Right? So, I said-okay, cool, I can work with this. So, I got a whole bunch of those type of shots. So, I went back and they went, "So how'd it go?" I went, "Uh, you know, I think it went okay." And I showed them the footage. They, man-they freaked-they couldn't believe it. So, then they said-okay, okay-

(TI): Guy knows his stuff.

(RR): So-so, the next day, you know, they said, "Go back out, but leave the six hundred."

(TI): [Laughter].

(RR): [Laughter]

(TI): I want that shot.

(RR): Right.

(TI): Wow, so they got you off the six hundred.

(RR): Yeah, so the next day, they put me back inside with them on the ice. They said, "Use the six hundred on the ice." And I went, "Six hundred on the ice?" We're talking about US Olympic skaters going skating, you know, sixty-seventy miles an hour and-and-I gotta keep them in focus. So, the shots-they said-"Yeah, well, you're a cameraman, that's what you're supposed to be able to do." So, you know, they want me to shoot the-the tips-

(TI): [Laughter] Long lens shots?

(RR): -long lens shots of the tips of the blades when they're doing pirouettes and stuff like that. And- and those are the shots they wanted-crystal clear, crispy shots that-that they could use and, you know, it was tough. But I was able to pull it off again. They just-they couldn't-they couldn't stop me, you know. I just-I was determined that I was not going to let them do that. So, my whole thing was that was the Marine in me-that decided-

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): -I'm not going to let you just-you know-I'm going to outsmart you.

(TI): Got you. No quit. Persevere.

(RR): Correct.

(TI): Got you. Very well. So, you went to-after the-after the *Aladdin on Ice*, you went with a Russian oligarch, right? What was the-what was this guy who created Big Foot Media out of the Southeast that you did films for?

(RR): Well, you know, I came back to LA. Uh, and then, um, there was-there was a period where the film and television industry was in a-was in a change. A period where there was-uh-what they had was runaway

production. They had issues with keeping productions in LA-uh-and so, they had-

(TI): Got you.

(RR): -So, they had people shooting in Canada and-and-and in the South-the South-

(TI): Was that where you started seeing Vancouver-

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -New Orleans?

(RR): Yeah, you start seeing that and what ended up happening is-uh-was that-um-I had friends, including me-it was tough to get work, you know, and-

(TI): Got you.

(RR): Producers were taking stuff out of town. If you didn't have a show that was-um-you know, where you had a family-like a series that you had been working on, I mean-

(TI): Like *Friends* or-

(RR): Right.

(TI): Because this is the mid-90s, right?

(RR): Right.

(TI): Like *Friends* or *Seinfeld*.

(RR): Right.

(TI): If there wasn't something like that, then-

(RR): -then you had to-you had to find work and if you wanted to keep working-so I had to-so I had to be a little bit diverse. So, I looked in the- in the Hollywood trades and there was an ad in there for-because-

because I did teach-when-when-uh-when-uh, Brianne Murphy offered me to work at the-at the Columbia College teaching film-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): I did that and that primed me, you know. It was a really rewarding experience. So, I worked there. I did that and I did UCLA. I worked at the UCLA extension. Uh, I taught there. I taught cinematography and videography and, so-

(TI): Got you.

(RR): I-I-I-and so, when I saw this ad for Big Foot and they were looking to start a film school. Um, and so I went there, but they were looking for experienced people who worked in the industry.

(TI): Uh huh.

(RR): And they wanted me to be able to utilize that opportunity to-to teach and to bring that-that skillset with them. Um, so-

(TI): And this is located in Southeast Asia?

(RR): This was-

(TI): Was it like on the flyer?

(RR): Yeah, this was a flyer. It was a place I had never heard of. It's called Cebu. This was in the Philippines, right.

(TI): Huh.

(RR): So, this person who actually-uh-started all this-uh-Michael Gleissner, was-uh-he used to be a-he was initially-was a-um-part owner in Amazon. And he sold his shares-

(TI): Interesting.

(RR): He sold his shares for-I mean, I was told-I can't confirm it, but something like five hundred million dollars. And, so he took that and reinvested that-

(TI): How much do you think that is now?

(RR): Yeah, no. I don't even want to think about it.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): But he bought Big Foot-uh-and-

(TI): He bought the company.

(RR): Yes, he bought the company, but he-and-and-so, that was initially in New York City. Uh, and a building I can't-I think it was next to the Trade Center. When he bought it, he decided, you know, he was gonna go on a little-he was going to treat himself to a-uh-sailing around the world. So, he-he-I think he went and he was somewhere in Southeast Asia and 9/11 happened. So, when 9/11 happened, um, he couldn't get back to the States. And,so, what ended up happening was, he-um-

(TI): He couldn't-couldn't get back to the States.

(RR): He couldn't get back to the States and he felt he decided he was going to enjoy his time that he was there. Um-

(TI): With five hundred million, you can do that.

(RR): Yeah, but at the same time, he had this idea that he wanted to now maybe decide to move his company because now he has no more company in New York. Everything shut down in New York City.

(TI): Wow. And so his company got shut down because of the Tower?

(RR): Correct, correct.

(TI): Wow.

(RR): So, he moved everything. So, he moved-he started looking for land and purchased in-in the Philippines and other places in Asia. Um, that he bought-

(TI): Interesting.

(RR): He bought land. He decided he was going to build his own oasis. So, he decided to build-uh-a film school. Well, he wasn't-between you and I- this guy was not a photographer. This guy wanted to be a photographer.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): But he-but he was a young guy that had a lot of money and he wanted to meet chicks.

(TI): Money to burn.

(RR): [Laughter] So, his whole thing was-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): So, he said, "If I don't have an education in-in-in video or film or photography-"

(TI): I'll buy it!

(RR): So, I'll just buy it. I'll start my own film school.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): So, he did. He had money to invest in-in-in creating a complete studio. So, he bought his studio on the sands, you know, right on the sand. It's a little bit of oasis where he was, in-in-in a resort area. And so he built his school in the sands and that attracted people. So, he went to LA. He advertised for professionals that would be willing to come and teach in-in-

(TI): In the Philippines.

(RR): In the Philippines-in Cebu. With the understanding that part of the teaching thing, you would teach and also donate your services because he wanted to be a filmmaker. He wanted to shoot his own movies, make his own movies. So, he would be able to take advantage of-

(TI): Interesting.

(RR): -of professionals who were, you know, and they-they could come there. He could come there and get his films done. And they could also be basically like artists in residence and they could also teach. So, I had a contract to teach, but I also had a production agreement for production which they were are all funded, because he paid-he paid the bucks.

(TI): He's financing his own films.

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): He's-he's financing the school.

(RR): Yeah. So, I was on the ground level.

(TI): Amazing.

(RR): I was on the ground level. To be involved with creating-uh-you know, uh-uh-the gear that we needed and, you know, all the kinds of things that we needed-he needed to be able to do what he wanted to do on a large scale. So, he-he-but he built his whole thing. He built sound stages. He built-uh-uh, sound studios. Uh, I mean, it was a big deal.

(TI): It was just straight Hollywood in the middle of the Philippines.

(RR): It was.

(TI): Wow. So, you were out there for-

(RR): For seven years.

(TI): -for seven years and then, you came back and you became my boss.

(RR): This was unaccompanied. So, my wife was-was back in the States.

(TI): The whole time-the whole seven years?

(RR): Well, we-we had a deal. In my contract, I had a deal to-to hook up with her. I had the family come out or I came out. For us to rotate at least, you know, a month-a month in a half, like, uh-every ninety days or something-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): We'd be able to do something like that. Right so um, that-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -was the agreement my wife-my wife agreed to. So...but, around the seven-year mark, you know, my wife is saying, "You know what, this is getting tough." She says, "You need to come home. You got kids ready to go to college now. So, I had to come back and when I came back-back to DC-to LA now-um, you know, the industry keeps moving.

(TI): Had probably totally changed by that point.

(RR): Totally changed and people-all of your contacts. Things are different. So, I come back-I had mortgages. I had-

(TI): You had life to attend to.

(RR): Yeah, so even though things were-things were good. Um, I still needed to be able to survive. So, the only thing I knew when I went back to LA because there wasn't anything else. So, I said, you know what, I remember-I-I only spent twelve years active duty. I came back to DC just to visit a friend of mine.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): I was driving up and just past Quantico. I'm saying-I thought to myself, "This is kinda crazy, but-you know-I wonder if there's anybody at Quantico that would remember me." So I-so I-

(TI): This is how many years later?

(RR): This was...almost thirty years later.

(TI): Wow.

(RR): Right? So, I said, "Um, let me stop and see if, you know, just for S&G." You know?

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): So, I didn't think I was gonna be able to get in the gate, but they let me in.

(TI): Because you had a car, I'm sure. [Laughter]

(RR): Yeah, but then I had the-

(TI): It's always going to come back to, "Oh, I had a car."

(RR): This time, I had a regular car-this time.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): I had a rental car, as a matter of fact.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): So, I was able to get into the building and I walked-I went into the building. There was a guy there-that-we were staff sergeants together. That was-I couldn't believe it.

(TI): And where did you find this guy?

(RR): In-in the same building where I used to work-

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): -at Quantico. Right? So, it was the same building.

(TI): [Laughter] What are the odds?

(RR): Yeah, so I walk in-so, the guy says, "Um" and I said, "I'm surprised that you're still here." He said, "Yeah, yeah-blah, blah, blah" So, we shot the-shot the-shot the breeze for a little bit. And then he said-then I said, "So, who else is still around? I mean, everybody I know-they probably-well, you're still alive-so, I figure either they're dead or who knows." So, he says, "You know, Mr.-Mr. Anderson is still here." And I said, "Mr. Anderson?"

(TI): Old Mr. Anderson.

(RR): He-uh-I remember the day he-he was a civilian, but I remember the day he started.

(TI): Wow.

(RR): And so-and so-that was like thirty years ago!

(TI): That's amazing.

(RR): So, he said, "Yeah, you should go see him before you leave." So, I went-so, he said-

(TI): I can't believe you and-you and me worked for the same person.

(RR): Isn't that amazing?

(TI): Because I came in 2003.

(RR): That's amazing, that's amazing.

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): So, I walked up-so, he-this was across the hall. It was across the street from where I used to work. So, I walked up to where Mr. Anderson's office is and he was-he's about-maybe about 3:30 in the afternoon, almost 4:00. Uh and I bang on the-on the door-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): -and he says, "Who is it?" And I said, "It's Robinson." So, I stuck my head around and he went, "Robbie!"-

(TI): [Laughter]

(RR): -"Where the hell have you been?" You know-

(TI): [Laughter] Where've you been the past thirty years?

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): Like he's been waiting for you the whole time.

(RR): Yeah, so he says-so, we-you know-we and-it was great, man. I sat and talked to him. We talked about forty-five-maybe-maybe-maybe an hour or two.

(TI): That's so cool.

(RR): I can't remember now. But we talked and talked and reminisced. So, he said-in the conversation, he said, "So, what are you doing? What are you doing here?" I went, "Well, my wife-I was-I was doing well in Southeast Asia, and my wife said- "You need to come home."

(TI): You're having too much fun.

(RR): Yeah, "you need to come home." So, I said, you know, I-I-I did what she told me to do.

(TI): God bless it.

(RR): She told me- quote unquote: "You need to get a real job." [Laughter] So, I said-so, I came back. I stopped to see-you know, I'm just shaking the trees. I said, "You wouldn't happen to have a job, would you?" And I was joking. And he says, "Well, uh"-he says, "I know-I know someone who's looking for a deputy up at the Pentagon." And I said, "Doing what?" He said, "Doing, you know, film and television." I said, "No way." He says, "Yeah. I mean, I can give him a call, you know, if you're interested." And I said, "Heck yeah."

(TI): That's something. Come back to the Marine Corps.

(RR): Yeah, so, that was my door back to the Marine Corps. So, I said-but here's the thing. Um, and this is where I say I'm blessed, because-uh- Ralph Anderson-this was, I remember, a Friday and then he said, "Get back with them in the next couple of days-in the next week." So, I said, "Yeah, okay I'll do that." Monday morning, I get a call and it's the guy Rick- who we were staff sergeants together. He says, "Hey, man, what's going on?" I said, "Not much." He said, "Did you ever talk to Ralph Anderson?" And I said, "Yeah, I talked to him. We talked a good old time." He said, "You know, he passed over the weekend."

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): And I said, "Are you kidding me?"

(TI): Yeah...

(RR): Um, but-you know what-he made the call to the guy that-uh-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): -that-that-

(TI): That eventually hired-

(RR): -that eventually hired me, you know? And so-

(TI): That's amazing.

(RR): It is, it is. But I am blessed, you know?

(TI): No kidding. God bless Mr. Anderson. He really did look out for his people.

(RR): Yeah, yeah-he did.

(TI): One question we always ask on this show: What trait or lesson did you learn in your service that you carried through on this entire-on this entire, incredible journey?

(RR): Well, you learn about-it doesn't matter how long you stay in the Marine Corps or how long you were a Marine. You start as a Marine, you learn the things that are embedded in you as a Marine, and I think that until the day I die-um-uh-I have branded in my heart, you know, the ethos of being a Marine-uh-the traditions of and what we represent as a Marine Corps. No matter what, when you hear the Marine Corps hymn, you still lock your body. Uh, you still-uh-remember the-uh-principles of leadership-

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): -in being able to remember all those things that, you know, as you go through your-your turn in the Marine Corps-your time in the Marine Corps. The things that instilled in you, that-that you are supposed to-

that you never leave your guy-another Marine on the battlefield. You don't-uh-you-you take care of your Marines.

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): You-you learn them and you take-whether they're Marines or whether they're people that you work with or people that you've shared time with-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): -in your business or in business. Uh, those principles and-and things all-uh-stay the same. And you never forget and-um-and-and-

(TI): Absolutely.

(RR): Every time I see a-a-an old guy at the grocery store with that hat, you know?

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): You know? It doesn't matter where you've-uh-where you've spent one day or-or-

(TI): Or thirty years.

(RR): Or forty years. You have a common interest only because of that-that eagle, globe, and anchor that's-that's on his-on his collar or on his hat or somewhere-

(TI): Or in his heart.

(RR): Or in his heart. You know? Does that make sense?

(TI): Absolutely, that totally makes sense. And-and I think you carried that even after your service. You carried that-you carried those leadership principles-those leadership traits-the honor, courage, and commitment-that's something instilled in every Marine. I totally get that. So, you utilize those with your determination of always-always getting it done. Uh-

(RR): Semper fidelis is something you never-you never forget the meaning of what always faithful means and you try to stay that way.

(TI): Absolutely. Um. I always say, when- when I talk to people about Rick Robinson-that-uh-you don't understand, he paints with light. He's an artist with light and so, I learned a lot from you. Uh, but that first year-that first year and a half-uh- you did have an issue. You had an issue where you were out for a while?

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): Do you- do you feel comfortable sharing that?

(RR): Yeah, I don't have a problem.

(TI): Okay.

(RR): So, here's what happened. I started in 2010.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): Now, it's 2019, so almost nine years-going on nine years. Uh-

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): But six months into my getting hired-uh-I had a stroke. And the stroke-uh-was a game changer for me, because it took. Initially, when it happened, I remember the night before. I was talking with my wife and family and I felt something-I felt a slur. But-um-everybody-nobody saw it or felt it or recognized it. Then the next day, I woke up and I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't move.

(TI): Mhm.

(RR): So, I ended up going to-to the-my wife took me to the hospital. I found out I had a stroke. So, I had-probably, seventy-five to eighty-five percent of my right side-um-I couldn't-I couldn't function. And, um-

(TI): Wow.

(RR): So, I went through that period. I was determined in my head. Like the day I went to boot camp, I was determined that I was going to have to be able to use that because I was still going to be a cameraman. So, you learn about the difference between your cognitive side and you're-and you're a creative side. I was determined that I would-that I would-if I had to lose anything-I would-you know-I would be gambling with the fact if I lose my creative side, I'm down for the count. But I was fortunately-god willing, I was able to still keep my creative side and work on my creative side, which was the weak side. I had to build all of that up. So, now-today, I can-I have all of my functions-

(TI): Yeah, it looks like-

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): -you look like you've been-I remember right after. It was really rough going.

(RR): Yeah.

(TI): Nowadays, you're going.

(RR): Well, I know my deficiencies and-and people, you know, a lot of times-most people won't know talking to me or looking at me what my deficiencies are. But I-but I can recognize them and I know what they are. I know what I can't do anymore. So, I learned that-the lesson I get out of this was coming back to the Marine Corps, doing what I do, I've had the opportunity to meet people that have inspired me beyond anything. I've met Medal of Honor recipients that are now my friends, that I keep in touch with.

(TI): Wow.

(RR): Uh, I talked to Major Canley a couple of nights ago, you know? Kyle Carpenter, I talked to him and his mom and his-you know? But Kyle Carpenter-

(TI): Because you worked on those productions with them-

(RR): Those productions-

(TI): now that you're back with the Marine Corps.

(RR): -and-and-Kyle Carpenter was a story where this is a kid who was not supposed to be alive today. So, I learned from him and-and-and was able to take what I learned from and what I learned a new normal is. When you talk about the Wounded Warriors and-

(TI): Absolutely.

(RR): And, so, all of those things-you-you know, you can-you can't do anything but want to-one of the hardest things for me when I see Kyle is to not give him a hug.

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): I love him like my son, you know? And-uh-but it helped me understand that what I had and even the scars that I have right now that I share from my stroke-

(TI): Yeah.

(RR): I had an opportunity to correct them. I could have had the surgery to-uh-correct it, but my thing was, "No. I-I keep that scar visible because every day in the mirror- when I look in the mirror- It reminds me of what the path that I've come and so I-

(TI): You had a pretty scary surgery, I remember. It was-it was-the scar is very deep on the back of your neck, right?

(RR): Yeah, that's-that's one. That's-I've got that one. That's-that's a whole another- different from this one that I have. That's the one- that's the scar-because I have a piece of bone missing that-that I never had replaced from-from the- After-after-after I had the-uh-stroke-I had-uh-five brain operations. So, I had one- two of them that were pretty serious. The biggest one was a brain bypass, which is an eleven-hour surgery where they had to take and redirect the-the-uh-blood flow of my cranial-the blood that went to my brain.

(TI): That's heavy stuff. Where can people follow your work on? Where can they follow Rick Robinson-cinematographer extraordinaire?

(RR): Well, I have-uh- I have-uh, something call Industry Jump.

(TI): Interesting.

(RR): industry.jump-excuse me, industryjump.com [Link to Rick Robinson's work: <https://www.industryjump.com/profile/rickrobinson/overview>]

(TI): industryjump.com?

(RR): Yes, yes, then I have my Instagram and I have-uh-IMDb-

(TI): Where can people see some of the work you're doing now with the Marine Corps?

(RR): Uh...

(TI): Because you're doing the Birthday message every year, correct?

(RR): Birthday message every year.

(TI): So, every Marine will see your video at least once a year.

(RR): Yes. This last year, right now, currently the-uh-the last year's birthday message is-uh-we're nominated for an Emmy.

(TI): Congratulations.

(RR): So-uh-thank you. One of the things I wanted to prove-again-is that coming back to the Marine Corps-the day I got hired-you know what-I don't feel my job's done until I leave here and-and create an opportunity for the Marine Corps and the guys that I work with to have an opportunity to win an Emmy.

(TI): I remember you saying that.

(RR): Yup. And so, I-and so, whether we win or not-at least I-I-I put in a gallon of-

(TI): If you win the Emmy this year with your Marines, which one are you going to be more proud of? The one on ice or the one with the Marines?

(RR): Oh, the one with the Marines!

(TI): That's awesome.

(RR): It's-it's-these-I had to-I had to convince them. Well, let's put it this way. When I even told them I listed them on the entry form, so they would receive a statuette as well, so-that blew-that blew their minds. My whole thing is that like no, it's something that you worked on and it's something that you should-uh-be the recipient if it-if it comes through. So, you should-you know you should-I want you to feel the way I felt the first time I had an opportunity.

(TI): I love that you pay that back to the Marine Corps. You pay that down to the Marines who work for you-that's-that's amazing. So, uh, Rick, thank you for taking the time for this. I look forward to now that I'm back in DC many more times where you and I can get together before you, uh-before your retirement comes and I hope it's not soon at all. So, thank you.

(RR): Well, I appreciate it.

[01:09:30] Music

[01:09:37] PSA:

Man: My grandfather served in World War II. Spending time with him were the best memories of my life. I became a physician at VA because of my grandfather, so I can help others like him. I can't imagine working with better doctors or a more dedicated staff. I'm fulfilling my life's mission with the help of my team and thanks to these Veterans. I'm proud to be a doctor at VA and proud to honor my grandfather every day. Search VA careers to find out more.

[01:10:07] Music

[01:10:12] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

(TI): Well, I hope you had as much fun listening to Rick Robinson as I did, sitting in that room. Uh, it's always a great time to reconnect with an old mentor. Tim used to have a Medal of Honor citation reading after

every episode-um, I'm gonna expand on that a little bit. This week's Veteran of the Week is Navy Reserve Journalist, 3rd Class, Raul A. Guerra. I came across him as I was scrolling through the Defense School Facebook page. I quote-this came from the Commandant of the Defense School-I quote, "We are deeply gratified to note that Petty Officer Guerra's remains have been accounted for. We hope that this chapter will bring peace to his widow and family. We will continue to hold his name in honor in our Hall of Heroes at the Defense Information School, along with his fellow Military Public Affairs and Visual Information Professionals, who made the ultimate sacrifice to their nation. Upon some further research I went to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. That's www.dpaa.mil and I found out that Navy Reserve Journalist, 3rd Class, Raul A. Guerra -who was killed during the Vietnam War-was recovered and accounted for on February 20th, 2019. On October 8th, 1967, Guerra was a passenger on board an E-1 Bravo. Tracer en route from Chu Lai Air Base to the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany approximately ten miles northwest of Da Nang, South Vietnam. Radar contact with the aircraft was lost and the adverse weather hampered subsequent search efforts. Several days later, aircraft records were spotted along a mountain side approximately eleven miles northwest of Da Nang. Because of the location, type of terrain, and presence of hostile forces, a ground recovery could not be conducted. Guerra, as well as the four other servicemen on board were declared killed in action. Guerra's name is recorded on the National Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C. and in the Court of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate that he has been accounted for. We here at the Department of Veteran Affairs honor his service. If you'd like to nominate a veteran for Borne the Battle's Veteran of the Week, please email me at podcast@va.gov and we will nominate one and read them on the air every week here on *Borne the Battle*. That's it for this week! Please follow us on social media: at Twitter,

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-wherever there is social media, there is a Department of Veteran Affairs with a blue check mark. So, please follow us for more news and

information about the VA. In addition, if you have any suggestions for this show, please email me at podcast@va.gov and let me know what I can do to help improve your show. Thank you very much for listening and see you next week.

[01:13:18] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)