

Borne the Battle

Episode # 194

Best-Selling Author G. Michael Hopf

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/74621/borne-battle-194-best-selling-author-g-michael-hopf/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Oh, let's get it. Monday May 11, 2020. Borne the Battle, brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our veterans. I am your host, Marine Corps veteran, Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a great week outside of podcast land and if you're still sheltering in place, and if you haven't shaved or gotten a haircut, I salute you.

Couple ratings, one review this week. This review comes from doc8400, 8404, 8406. We in the Marine Corps love our docs. It says, "Five stars, great timely info. This podcast gives a lot of great information and is very entertaining, professional podcast for veterans by veterans." Doc, thank you for your feedback and thank you for helping push us up in the algorithms because as you know, those ratings and reviews and subs go a long way to pushing up this info in the Apple podcast algorithms so that this podcast and info and the stories in it can get in front of even more veterans. And, if you're playing this from the blog on [blogs.va.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/) [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>]. Your preferred podcasting app of choice is right on the player. You can click on the subscribe button right on the player, and it will give you a list of choices to subscribe from.

Okay, news release time. Alright. Again, in the interest of time management, I'm just gonna run through the titles and maybe a sentence for each one, and then if I've teased enough and you want to know more, I'll give you the website where you can go to find more info on it.

Alright, first one says for immediate release, VA joined XPRIZE Pandemic Alliance to combat COVID-19 and future outbreaks. So, the VA has, partnered with this alliance and in the immediate term, the XPRIZE Pandemic Alliance will focus on accelerating solutions for remote care and telehealth, provisioning personal protective equipment, and

increasing COVID-19 test access and availability. VHA's National Center for Collaborative Health Care Innovation, or NCCHI, will provide thought leadership, public health expertise, and insight on feasibility and scalability of ideas to the XPRIZE Pandemic Alliance. Alright, second news release says for immediate release, VA works with communities nationwide to meet critical need for blood. The US Department of Veterans Affairs and its participating medical centers across the country kicked off blood drives in late April. Partnering with the American Red Cross and community organizations in response to the ongoing need for blood during the coronavirus 2019 public health emergency. If you want to know how to join the effort, visit [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org/) [Link: <https://www.redcross.org/>] to schedule an appointment.

Okay, news release three says for immediate release, veteran trust in VA healthcare rises above 90% for the first time. So, the VA has received over 4 million surveys since 2017 via their veterans' signals customer feedback program, and on April 30th, the VA released survey results showing veteran trust in VA health care outpatient services has increased by more than 5% since 2017 reaching 90.1% as of April 12th. Okay, next news release. Number four, it says for immediate release, VA expands access to virtual hearings. We reported on this in a- in one of our COVID episodes when Cheryl Mason sent us an exclusive message here on Borne the Battle. However, the- the press release says the US Department of Veterans Affairs Board of Veterans Appeals today announced its expanding access to virtual hearings to all veterans awaiting their board hearing after successfully testing the capabilities during the last year. For more information on virtual hearings, you can go to vba.va.gov [Link: <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/>] , and they have a click here for more information on virtual hearings. If you click on that, there's an entire fact sheet.

Alright, news release number five. Says for immediate release, VA participating in drug plasma trials in fight against COVID-19. The US Department of Veterans Affairs announced participation in a series of clinical trials and investigations across the nation aimed at finding ways to mitigate or potentially prevent symptoms of COVID-19 in patients. One of which, is in cooperation with the Mayo Clinic, which is studying whether blood transfusions from people who recovered from COVID-19 can help those who are still suffering from symptoms. Plasma from COVID-19 survivors contains antibodies that may help current patients. For more information on the expanded program and how you can participate, visit uscovidplasma.org [Link: <https://www.uscovidplasma.org/>]. Alright, onto news release six. Says, the US Department of Veterans Affairs today announced it is helping 38

states and territories with the response to the coronavirus disease 2019, otherwise known as COVID-19. In coordination with FEMA, VA has deployed doctors, nurses, and nurses' aides to state run nursing homes in several states where COVID-19 has emerged among vulnerable populations. Basically, the entire news release is an update to where and how VA has responded to requests from FEMA and states for assistance.

Alright, almost home. News release seven. Says, for immediate release, VA enhances national COVID-19 reporting summary tool. The US Department of Veterans Affairs announced today that it has enhanced its national COVID-19 report summary website that provides a real time look at the status of COVID-19 patients who have been tested or treated at VA facilities. I've looked at this website. It's a pretty cool site that gives you data in real time as it gets submitted. You can filter COVID data by state or by facility so you can know how COVID-19 has impacted either the entire VA system or you can even filter it down to your local area. To get to this website, just go to [va.gov/coronavirus](https://www.va.gov/coronavirus) [Link:

https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/?utm_source=Homepage&utm_campaign=Coronavirus], scroll down to the VA COVID-19 cases, and just click on the link. And it'll take you right to it. It's a really cool website. Check it out. Finally, news release eight. VA airborne hazards and open burn pit registry reaches major milestone. The US Department of Veterans Affairs today announced that the airborne hazards and open burn pit registry, which was started in June of 2014, now exceeds 200,000 registrants. The best way to find the registry is to go to [publichealth.va.gov](https://www.publichealth.va.gov) [Link:

https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/?utm_source=Homepage&utm_campaign=Coronavirus], scroll down to the military exposures and click burn pits. In addition, if you want more information on the burn pit itself, we here at Borne the Battle did a recent episode with veterans who serve in VA and manage the burn pit registry program. It's a- it's Borne the Battle, episode 185. And for all VA press releases, you can always go to [va.gov/OPA/pressrel/](https://www.va.gov/OPA/pressrel/) [Link: <https://www.va.gov/OPA/pressrel/>], that's P-R-E-S-S-R-E-L. All one word.

Alright, so I figured that there are many people out there who are using this- this unique time in history, to start writing a book. Or- or finish a book that they started a long time ago. And. Well, I figured that it's a good time to feature an Amazon bestselling author on the show. Today's guest is a Marine Gulf War veteran, turned commercial diver, turned best-selling post apocalipt— I don't even know how to say that word post-apocalyptic. There it is, author. He's a bestselling post-apocalyptic author who eventually was signed by the largest publisher in the world.

It's one of those intros that kind of writes itself if, you know, you can pronounce the words. He is a Marine Corps veteran, Geoff Michael Hopf. Enjoy.

[00:08:08] Music

[00:08:12] Interview:

(TI): How do you pronounce your last name, Geoff? Is- is it Hopf?

Geoff Hopf (GH): Hopf. Yeah. You pronounce the P and the F.

(TI): Hopf. Okay, good, good. Uhm, so looking through your website, I jus- or, and you know, and I just googled your name to find it. I saw that you got a picture with George RR Martin.

(GH): [Laughter] Yeah, yeah. I met him at the Penguin Random House, uh, Comic Con party a few years back. Yeah.

(TI): Got you. Did you ask him when, uh, *Winds of Winter* is gonna be finished?

(GH): No, that was- god, that was a few years ago. I actually, mainly, selfishly, I sat down in front of him, and I go- I asked him, "What's the best advice you can give a new writer?" And, you know, he just pretty- pretty much give me that advice. That was it. And then we kinda chatted about some stuff, and then there was a line of people that had gathered. And I had, uh, like a Marine, bullishly just moved my way up to the front and just sat down next to him. And it was- it was a good conversation. He's a good- he's a good guy, very talented author, of course.

(TI): Absolutely. Absolutely. So, Jeff, just like we ask every guest here on *Borne the Battle*, what compelled you to join the Marine Corps in the first place?

(GH): I joined the Marine Corps out of a sense of adventure in a lot of ways. I would say that's pri - primarily what I wanted to do, I really wanted to be part of an expeditionary force, travel- travel the world, see exciting lands, that kind of stuff. That's the really the- the main crux behind why I joined.

(TI): I always like interviewing Marines because it feels like we all share that same story of like, you know what? We're just going to join like, the hardest one possible.

(GH): It's like, you know, I had really good - I did really good in school and you know, I took the ASVAB. I did really well on that. And I remember my recruiter telling me, you know, you can do anything you want. Like—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): You can do any MOS, anything you want. I was like, "I want to be infantry." Like, you know, maybe you might want to reconsider that. I was like, "No, I want to be infantry." He was like, "Okay, that's easy."
[Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(GH): And it was just because I just wanted to, again, I wanted to travel the world. I wanted to see things I had - I was always a big reader growing up and always reading or about these adventures of other Marines or soldiers or whatever, people around the world fighting. And I was just, that was just - I really romanticized that at that time in my young age, and, uh, that's why- that's why I did. And I joined specifically to get infantry.

(TI): Outstanding. So, either while you were in, either give me a best friend or your greatest mentor.

(GH): You mean like a name?

(TI): Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

(GH): Oh, yeah. He and I are still best friends today. Travis Ransdale. We were in together. We were in the Gulf War together. He and I still communicate 'til this day. I just text him yesterday.

(TI): Oh, that's awesome.

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): That's awesome. I mean, was he just a fellow Marine that just helped you get out, stay out of trouble, or -

(GH): Well, we actually got into trouble sometimes, but, we just- we just really connected on a lot of- lot of things. He's a, you know, I'm a big fan of like history. He as well. So, we would just have these, you know, long drawn out conversations, solving the world's problems. He was just a guy that I could have a conversation with and go deep. And, I don't know, we just, our friendship really, you know, started then and just continued over the

years. And we- we always stayed in contact. We have our families now. We get together, our kids hang out and know each other. It's- it's- he's- I can say he's the one man that actually has known me the longest and kind of understands me.

(TI): Very good. You, you talked about deploying to Kuwait. In your bio, you described it as, "Overall, my combat experience was something less than I- than what I expected as it seemed like a massive EPW exercise versus that epic combat that I imagined or seen in movies." Talk to me about your time in Desert Storm and what- what you meant by that.

(GH): Well, I, you know, at that time it was, you know, the 80s, you had all these kinds of war movies from the 80s and most of the stuff was kind of focused around Vietnam and just, you know, we were watching the *Platoon* or *Hamburger Hill* and all these other, you know, *Full Metal Jacket* and whatnot.

(TI): Classics.

(GH): Yeah. And- and so I'm imagining like, if we're going to go to war, if I ever go to war, it's gonna be something like that. Just totally hardcore. And I'm not trying in any way at all to diminish, you know, anyone's experience that was over in the Gulf War and Desert Storm and so forth. I just imagined it would be something- just different? And you know, I was with the Task Force Taro when we went in, and it just, I mean, we had engagements and here and there, but it just wasn't this kind of, again- but then- but then again, here, I'm using a movie as a reference for how things should be, when in reality, that, more than likely is a lot of people's experience when they go into combat. You know, the stuff's coming at you. You're- you're throwing Ram rounds back at them and you know, and just- but without a doubt, the- I just don't know if the Iraqis had their heart in it, you know. I mean, they were the invaders, I think, of Kuwait. And we were, you know, truly the liberators of Kuwait and we just crushed them. And then it, you know, before we went into, you know, they had suffered the, you know, extended, you know, air war.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And so, then when we come, you know, when we come barreling across those minefields, they're like, "Oh my God." So, I, it just- it just- they just, you know, surrendered en masse. It was, it was amazing. It was very surreal. The whole thing was very, very surreal.

(TI): Got you. Got you. You mentioned some of your- some of the movies from the 80s. Dale Dye was recently on the podcast, and you can catch him in the archives. He had pretty, pretty big influence on *Platoon* and other films of that era. Now you got out in late 1994, right? After about five years?

(GH): Yeah. I got out in- I took terminal leave, 60 days terminal leave, and got out, and it was in November of '94 and my- I was supposed to EAS though in January of '95 so—

(TI): What was the impetus behind getting out?

(GH): All the guys I had served with had gotten out. And, because what I had done, I'd gotten one of those six-year enlistments. And so, I go in with all these people I know and we're in the same units together, we go through all these experiences together. And then, everybody else, you know, 99.9% of everybody had four-year enlistments. And most of them, you know, actually, all the guys I hung out with just got out. So, that was just kind of, I felt kind of like by myself. And then it was like, that was- that was it. That really wasn't the main crux of it. I remember them- they were- they offered me, I really only had two options of doing some B billets, and I just, I didn't really want to do that. I didn't want to. I didn't really want to go to recruiter school. I didn't really have this, you know, flame inside of me to be a drill instructor. And so, I just decided I still wanted- I still had that kind of adventure bug in me. And—

(TI): What about M- what about MSG? Do you ever just- Marine Security Guard.

(GH): I think that was out there. I just, I was just, I think I was just feeling at the time, I just wanted to stay in the kind of the line units. And I was, my memory was, I was just, they were telling me I needed to kind of progress in order to get, you know, to staff NCO, I needed to do some of these B-billets or something like that. And there was another guy that was in my unit. He was getting out and he had- he offered me or introduced me to commercial diving.

(TI): Uh huh.

(GH): You know, underwater welding and that kind of stuff—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And it looked just really cool. Look like adventure, you know, again, another job that was like, that was an adventure job, and so I decided, I

made the- made the decision and got out and then went to Houston, Texas and went to The Ocean Corporation for commercial diving school.

(TI): So that was that like within a matter of months of getting out?

(GH): Yeah. Yup. I started, yeah, I started commercial diving school in January of '95.

(TI): Did you use any, like a GI bill? Was that- did that help pay for that?

(GH): No, I didn't. Nope. Nope. I did not. And they did offer it, but I- all I had was, what is it, veteran education assistance program - VEAP?

(TI): Okay.

(GH): I did have that. And it was funny. I never even used that either [Laughter].

(TI): That was completely out of pocket then.

(GH): Yeah. Oh, yeah. It cost me like six grand or \$6,500 to go to that school.

(TI): Oh, man. So, you started working in underwater oil fields. What was that like?

(GH): That was a very hard job and didn't pay what I imagined it did. So, I did the school. I graduated in about six months, and what I didn't realize is upon graduation, they do set you up with a job. But they don't tell you is you're not going to start diving. What you do is you kind- you operate as a tender and essentially it's kind of like a squire to a knight. So, tenders go out, they set up the dive station, they do all the grunt work, and they help the divers. So the divers do all the underwater work, and so you- you- you get all the education in the school, but then you- you spend the next a year to 18 months getting on the job training so you can actually what they call breakout as a diver. It took me around 18 months, and I broke out as a diver and then they were putting me into water as they were saying, I was able to get wet. You know, that's the kind of terminology. And then, I did that for about two plus years. I almost was killed, and I was like, I—

(TI): Really?

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): How?

(GH): I almost got sucked into a 36-inch pipe. There was an old natural gas pipeline that had been abandoned and they'd already cut it and they'd capped either end on either side of a river. This- this is when I was working in their inland division. We had to go down, remove the kind of makeshift cap, put in a- put in a- a permanent cap, and the pipe was supposed to have been filled, not be void. Right? So, whenever they abandon a pipeline, they typically will- they will- it'll drain it. And then they put like an inert gas in it, right? And then they- that's how they leave it. And I went down, and I was- I was excavating around it so the- the- the senior diver could come down and place the cap on it and weld it on.

(TI): Okay.

(GH): So, I was doing all the excavation and when, as I was removing this plug that was in there, all sudden- and I was laying in front of it. That was a big no, no, and I heard all the sucking sound. Well, apparently, they hadn't filled the pipe with water. So, imagine you're 30 some feet down. You've got this pipe that's 36 inches in diameter. That goes for about a half a mile in. That's completely just- that's got all this w—

(TI): Dry.

(GH): Yeah, exactly. So, the minute I'm cracking it, all the water, where's this water want to go? Into that space.

(TI): Wow.

(GH): And so, I almost get sucked into that pipe. I mean, it pulls me in. I- it hits my shoulder. I mean, it was just a bad situation. And fortunately, we're working on surface supplied air. They're having umbilical. Anyway, I got- I got pulled to the surface, they saved me. Had I been like on scuba, I probably would've been dead. It would have sucked me into the pipe.

(TI): Wow, wow. So, at that point, you were like, eh, enough of this?

(GH): Yeah, I remember- I remember getting on the phone with my dad after that, and I was only making like 12 bucks an hour as a- as a breakout diver.

(TI): Oh my God.

(GH): Oh yeah. They don't- it doesn't- this whole talk about commercial divers make a lot of money. It's not true. [Laughter]

(TI): Yeah. Maybe. Maybe at the top, top 5% or something, maybe?

(GH): Yeah, well, you've got these guys like sat divers, saturation divers. Those guys make some money. Those are the guys who are like living down in an atmosphere for periods of time. Those guys make some really, really good money, but it's just the money's just really not there. Now, by the way, it may have changed now, but I know when I was doing it, it just didn't, I mean, I was making 12 bucks an hour as a breakout diver. But—

(TI): The juice- the juice- the juice was not worth the squeeze.

(GH): No, especially after that situation. There had been some other little situations, like I'd actually, I'd gotten hurt more than I'd ever gotten in the Marine Corps. Their policies for safety probably weren't the best. But yeah, it's just that company is no longer around that I used to work for either. But, yeah, there were- we were kind of like, cowboys out there.

(TI): Got you.

(GH): Anyway, so I got on the phone, I mentioned to my dad, and, he goes, well, you know, "I met this one guy up in Washington, DC." My- my dad was a lobbyist for the NRA. And he ended up meeting a gentleman at this party in DC. And the guy worked for a company called Vance International, this executive protection company. And my dad mentioned it to me, he goes, "I'll put a- you know, I'll put up a- I'll get you guys exchanged contact information," something along that line. And lo and behold, I sent him my resume. Then I go out and interview and I get hired to be an EP agent. So, I go from being, a Marine to commercial diver to, next thing I know, I'm- now I'm a bodyguard.

(TI): It sounded like a quick, consecutive sequence of events there. Like, it wasn't much time between these things.

(GH): Well, yeah, I- I went to executive protection school and that was in 1997-'98? '98 somewhere around that- right around there.

(TI): Wow. Wow. So, what- what- what were some of the details that you did while you were a bodyguard?

(GH): Well, the first one I worked for, the Saudi Royal family.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(GH): And that was an interesting job. And I did that off and on. And then I- then, besides that, I worked for Sony Corporation. I've worked for mainly corporate executives. Archer Daniel, like ADM, Archer Daniels Midland, and so just a ton, a ton.

(TI): So basically, basically you were Liam Neeson in *Taken*.

(GH): [Laughter] First I started out as just the guy standing next to a door for 12-hour shifts.

(TI): Oh, gotcha [Laughter]

(GH): And then- and then- and then again, it's just the same thing, like you start as a- as a- as a bodyguard or EP agent for a lot of these companies. You're- you start out working kind of the low-level stuff. You start out working, what they call, residents posts. You're literally standing next to a door, you know, and for 12 hours and until again, you- you kind of prove yourself and then they start putting you on the actual protectee. And then—

(TI): Gotcha.

(GH): And or, you start working in the command post. So—

(TI): Gotcha, gotcha. So, you did this for how long?

(GH): I did- I was a bodyguard for going- I was in and out of it for about 10 years.

(TI): So, during all this, you- share- share with the audience how you met your wife while you're leading this whimsical life of- of being a bodyguard.

(GH): [Laughter] I- yeah, I was- I was actually, I was, at that time, I was working for Sony Corporation down in Mexico and I was taking- I was going to take a little sabbatical from it and go travel to Ireland with my friend Travis. So it was, you know, who I mentioned earlier. He'd- he like, "Hey, let's go- let's go to Ireland." I'm like, yeah, sounds awesome. Let's do So, we planned this trip and I- I knew some of these- these Irish girls and they're like- like, meet us at the pub, and this is in San Diego, and we'll, tell you all the places you should go. Like, I'm in. So, I roll into this pub called *The Old Sod*, and I see w- Tahnee, her name, who would eventually become my wife, is in there and the longest order that we're exchanging glances and sh- and she then, before she leaves, she walks up to me and gives me her card and she hands me her card. And on it I see her- I see her name is Tahnee Land, her last name is Land. And then she goes, "If you're ever- if you're ever interested in a piece of land, give me a call." And I was like, "Yeah, okay." But—

(TI): Was she a realtor?

(GH): Yeah, yeah, she was in real estate. Yeah.

(TI): Oh, that's hilarious

(GH): I think it's the best. She- she does- she remembers it differently. That's how I remember it. But—

(TI): [Laughter]

(GH): Because it is funny cause they said Tahnee Land and I swear to this day, she said that. She goes, "If you're ever interested in a piece of land, give me a call." And I'm like "Well your last name is Land. Yes, I am interested in a piece of land." But uhm, yeah.

(TI): That is hilarious. That is hilarious. I- I had a- the way I met my wife was at McDonald's. And I saw that she ordered a number one. My literal response was, and this is what made me laugh about your story, is I was literally walking behind my wife and I said, "So, I see you like number one, like I see you like big macs, I like big macs, too." Like, that's all I said at the Quantico, McDonald's on base. 15 years later. We're married, been married for 10 years.

(GH): [Laughter] Nice, nice.

(TI): So, I always like- I always like, uh, how you met. So, now through this entire first part of your adult life, were you writing? Like in the Marine Corps in the oil field—

(GH): Yeah, I was. I'd been dabbling at it. I had, yeah.

(TI): Okay.

(GH): I'd written a journal when I was in Desert Storm. I kept a journal and then, I would dabble in like little short stories and things like that, but again, just kept it at dabbling and I was still kind of this, you know, action guy, you know, always trying to find these action jobs. And it wasn't until after- after I get married and we have, Tahnee and I have our girls that I- one, I like to read. And so, then it's natural. Then we have the kids, I'm reading them, you know, out of the two parents, I was the one, they primarily would jump into with them at night and read books. And, on top of it, I'd read. And then sometimes they're like, tell us a story. So, I would come up with these outlandish stories about a dog or this, or a cat or whatever. And the kids just loved it and then, so I remember one time I came out and told my wife that, I said, what would you think if I took one of the stories -there's just one specific story the girls loved. Said,

“What if I were to make that into like a children's book, you know? I mean, I've seen the books. They're not complicated. I mean, 600 words, maybe at best, and I could find an illustrator, blah, blah, blah.” So. She's like, sure, go do it. So, I- I- I wrote that stor- the one story that I ha- I had told them repeatedly. I wrote it, I wrote it down. I did find an illustrator and eventually I had it- I published it. It came out and I was like, I remember looking at that book and I was like, wow, that's, that was an interesting process. It was a fun process by the way, too. And I, you know, something that was an idea is now manifested in my hand. I was like, I wonder if I would ever write a novel. And that was kind of the- that was definitely kind of the—

(TI): That first story, was that through a publisher or—

(GH): No, I self-published that. And I'll tell you though, I hustled to get all my money back cause the - well, you know, like the illustrator is what cost the money, right? I think it cost me around three grand or something for the illustrator. And I was just, I hustled to make sure I got all that- all my money. I was- I was- I was reading that book and selling the book at every preschool you can imagine in the area.

(TI): [Laughter]

(GH): Yeah. But- but yeah, self-published it and again, it was, I- I it-it, and I probably- the fact that I also turned around and did hustle to go sell it, those were things that ultimately set me up for, and today. There's no doubt about it. The thing is, I didn't really know what I was doing. I didn't. I just had an idea, and again, just being that Marine, I just like, I'm just going to go do it. And I don't- I don't- I don't spend too much time over analyzing stuff. I've noticed that about my myself. Because I feel like if I overanalyze it, or try to research it too much, I can talk myself out of it. And so, if I really want to do something, I'll do just enough research and then just go do it and I'll make some mistakes along the way.

(TI): I'm the same exact way. I, if I overthink something, I won't do it.

(GH): Yeah, yeah. That's where all the self-doubt kind of comes in. So, once the children's book was done, then I had the idea for my first novel and I was like, I'm just going to go do this thing. And I knew my wife would probably not agree with me taking the time and so sort of presenting to her as just an idea. I went ahead and wrote two chapters and then I mentioned it to her. Then she was like, “Oh, here's another idea,” ‘cause I'm that guy. I always have ideas. And—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): I said, wait a minute though, I've got two chapters. I want you to read them so she's "Oh." So, she was kind of impressed by that. She sat down and she read them, and she was like, "Wow, this is really good." You should, please continue this. This is a good story. And, but- do it at night. You're not going to quit your job. So. And that's what I did. I spent, you know, after the kids were in bed, after it was, I went back, I was back to diving again. And I- so after diving and after the kids were in bed, I'd- I spend, you know, three, four hours, you know, writing this novel. And the mindset shift I had is, I stopped being a dabbler and it made the writing my job. And I- I remember I had that mind shift. I was like, this is just going to be a second job for me. If I considered it a hobby or, if I was gonna dabble at it, I was never going to complete it.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And so, when I made that- that- that- and dedicated it or dedicated to myself- myself to make it a job, I got it done.

(TI): So, you were doing three or four hours every night. How long did it take for that first- first novel?

(GH): Oh, that took me- to get the actual rough draft done, around nine months.

(TI): Okay.

(GH): And I was a lot slower. I'm a lot quicker now when I write. A lot slower. And then- and that process was amazing. Is- I was doing some research. I did it. I did end up securing an agent, which was just unbelievable for someone who's never published a book before.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And it was working with her. And then I got the book done. I mean, as far as done and edited, and then she was wanting to make some- some changes to it and changes that I didn't- I wasn't comfortable with. And at this time also, I've had a bunch of beta readers. These are people that I know that had read the book—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And it gave me an honest assessment of it and they all loved it. They actually didn't think anything was wrong with the story at all. And so, I

had her over here saying, “No, you need to make these substantial changes because it needs to be more of a- the book just needs to flow differently.” And the- and then the- and then the- the readers who would eventually, and these beta readers were people that would- would ultimately be kind of like, the, like they're- they're my customer. They're- they are the people that would actually buy the book—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): The people that are actually interested in the genre itself. And I was like, they're the consumer, really.

(TI): Like your test bed, a little bit.

(GH): Exactly. Yeah, that's a- that's a good way to put it. And so, I was like, I said, “My gut feeling was like, I'm just going to side with these people.” And so, I fired her.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(GH): I remember everybody else I knew was like, “You're crazy. You don't fire an agent. You can barely get one and you fired one.” And so, I fired her and then I hit self-publish on my first book.

(TI): You went with, uh, you went with your gut. So, in 2013 you self-published your first book. This- this is the book we're talking about, right?

(GH): Yes, *The End*.

(TI): In your- in your bio, you talked about questioning that decision. Like- like, you know, going on your own, firing your- your- your agent. Take me through that entire decision from then to landing a deal with the largest publisher in the world.

(GH): That decision was, I mean, and I was torn. I was like, ah, you know, Margaret's like, she's- and she's good. She is. There's nothing wrong with her.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): This wasn't- this wasn't like a thing that was professional. She was doing a good job. I just, my beta readers were telling me don't change a thing. She was wanting to make some really some big substantial changes that I just wasn't comfortable with. And I, it's because of that. I said, I- I looked at the book, and this is early on, and I wasn't even really kind of, again, I

was just such- I was such a newbie at this. It just felt right. Like, I said, my beta readers and there's a bunch of 'em I'd end up getting, and so my friends would have friends and like I wanted everyone to read it. And you know, to see what they thought. And I just knew that these would be the end consumers. Like, if my book is a product. Shouldn't I- I want the end consumer to like it, you know? And these are the people that are in the demographic that are going to read it. And then, not nothing against Margaret. She really wasn't, she just, she saw the potential for the book, but then wanted to make changes that she thought that people in the ivory towers in New York would want to see.

(TI): Sure. Who was your- who was your- test bed? Who were your beta readers like what- what was the type of consumer that you were looking for?

(GH): Well, it was, you know, if you read the book, it's got Marines in it and it's about the end of the world. And so, I had fellow Marines, people I knew had them share with other Marines. And then there were people that I had known that were in the prepper community and survival community. They had had copies they had spread it around and those- and by the way, still to the day that- that- that's a pretty decent size of the demographic that do read my books. And they were all coming back with very, very positive, you know, responses to- to beta reading 'em. Of course, little issues here and there, but the overall response is overwhelming, like, "This book is great." And so, that's why I just decided, again, I sided with them, fired her, hit self-publish, and wow, the first 10 days it kind of languished, you know? It was like. Selling about 10-20, you know, books a day and I was like, "Wow, I guess it's just going to pay for dinner," you know? Out with my wife once a month. This is it. Maybe I shouldn't have fired Margaret. You know? I was like, really like wringing my hands, and I just remember waking up one day. And the sales had spiked dramatically. And I was like, wow, you can ask my wife this. I literally jumped out of bed like, what is going on? And 'cause it, I'm not sure if you've ever seen like the Kindle direct publishing dashboard where you can like see books as they're sold. I'm not sure, have you published a book?

(TI): I've never published a book, no, no.

(GH): Okay. So, it's- it's not the- the dashboard itself is almost in real time. Like every time you click refresh, it can show you your sales.

(TI): Okay.

(GH): It's- it's interesting how Amazon has that set up. And it can be really bad if you're a compulsive person, cause you're all constantly on there, refresh, refresh, refresh. And I just was doing that and there was, you know, every time I was hitting refresh, like 25 sales, 10 sales. Like it- it just wouldn't stop selling. And I was thinking, I was telling my wife, I was like, maybe this is a fluke, maybe the Amazon's doing some promotional thing on the book. I'm not seeing it- I don't know what's going on. I couldn't figure it out. I hadn't done any marketing on it really, and it was just selling. And so that's, I said, well, maybe I'll just give it to 'til tomorrow and then it'll probably go back to doing 10 units a day. And then- but it didn't stop. And then a week like that and just, it just wouldn't stop selling.

(TI): What are we talking about? Hundreds? Thousands in a day?

(GH): So, at the time I was doing- I was doing hundreds of units a day

(TI): Compare it- compared to the 10 you were doing that first week.

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): Did you ever- did you ever find out what the spike was attributed to?

(GH): I still to this day, I don't know. I know it frustrates, cause I- I coach writers today and to mentor people and they always want to- "What's the- how- so how did the first book do it?" I'm like, I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know. I really don't know what- what- what did it.

(TI): That's interesting.

(GH): Yeah, it's the craziest thing. But what I- all I know is when I saw that happening, I saw that the door of opportunity was wide open.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And so, I went down to my wife and I said, "Listen, I need to- I need to quit my job." And she goes, "What?" And, I was like, "I need to quit my job, so I can get the second book out right away." I can't wait 18 months. I can't wait a year. I can't. I was like- I understood the market enough that when you've got something that's hot, you've got to come right on the heels with the sequel of it. You can't wait that long. You get too much time in between.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): It can be- it can be- it can be a problem. And there's so much competition out there as far as the amount of content that's out there. I could- I could get lost again and I could come up with a sequel too far too late, and then people are like, who's this guy?

(TI): They've already moved on.

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): Unless you're George RR Martin

(GH): Yes, exactly. I'm not him.

(TI): Exactly.

(GH): And- and so, by the way, I got a good story on that though, they said, I'll tell you, it'll connect right after when I talk about this. I then, I show her the spreadsheet where- what I was going to make that month and it was like triple what I was making for the year. And she's like, "Okay. You can quit your job." And, so I did, I quit. And then I went to writing just full time to get the sequel out. I get that done in like three weeks and so- I mean three months. And in between that three months of me quitting the job and getting the- the- the second book completed, I was getting a bunch of inquiries from publisher- smaller publishing houses. Other agents were contacting me—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): Wanting to sign me, and then Amazon was even contacting me. Amazon was like, listen, "We see that you're doing really well. We're really proud of you and we want to offer you some these beta programs that we have on- for publishing." And so, they were offering me stuff and one was to pre- set my second book up for preorder, and I was like, "Yeah, I'll totally do it." And I put the second book up for preorder it. On pre- for pre-ordered and instantly became a best seller.

(TI): Wow.

(GH): And—

(TI): Like New York- New York Times bestseller?

(GH): No, not New York Times, like Amazon bestseller. Now see this is where it- had I been with a publishing house—

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): I think I would have hit New York - I would've- would've hit the New York Times.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): It's just because I didn't have the distribution, when you self-publish through Amazon, you're exclusive to Amazon.

(TI): But at same time, yeah, you're there. It's a bestseller on Amazon as soon as you hit preorder. That's amazing. That's amazing

(GH): Yeah. And what's interesting, so the- and this'll tell you something, when I released the second book, when the book actually released, I was outselling George R.R. Martin on Amazon.

(TI): Wow.

(GH): I have a snapshot of it. It's crazy. I was like the number two selling science fiction and fantasy, 'cause they have like the- the categories on Amazon.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And I remember, yeah, my- I was outselling him. I was like, oh, I can- I feel pretty good now [Laughter].

(TI): Wow. So, how did- how did your relationship with the *Penguin/Random House* come about?

(GH): I was getting all those inquiries and one was an inquiry from *Plume*, which is an imprint of *Penguin*.

(TI): Okay.

(GH): It was from the editorial director and he sent me an email and I was- I had already kind of been blowing off everybody else cause it's like I'm thinking to myself, what do I need you guys for?

(TI): Yeah, yeah.

(GH): And, but when- when *Penguin* comes knocking though, I was like, wow, this is- this is- this is- this is the real deal here. And they were really, really excited and they had read the book and they had- they had gotten the

sec - anyway - so when they- they offered me a pretty attractive four book deal.

(TI): Wow.

(GH): And I was just like, really, just, you know, it was very attractive. Very-really big deal financially, too. And I was like, I should probably take it. They're the biggest publishing house in the world.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And it also gave me- my ego really got kicked in at the time. And from an ego standpoint, I was thinking, well, this- this gives me validation as an author, too. It, you know, I don't think it's - now that I've been writing all these years I don't think it's fair, but there's a stigma out there and it's in the general population, elsewhere, some writers have it that if you're not with a main or traditional publishing house, you're not a real writer. That being self-published doesn't really make you an author.

(TI): Do you agree with that?

(GH): No, I do not.

(TI): Mmkay.

(GH): No, I don't. I think that I- I think a lot of that is because there's been some people that self-publish books and the quality isn't there. And they think, "The only ones that have quality are actually not just from a technical standpoint, but just from the overall storytelling, are people that can go through the vetting process and be, you know, with one of these big publishing houses". And again, this is not, this is not true.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And what's interesting is, I had bypassed that traditional route to get there. And when I asked him, like, "How did you even find me?" He goes, "Well, it's kind of a secret, but we scan the Amazon product pages looking for people that are selling really well—"

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): "And that aren't represented."

(TI): Interesting.

(GH): So, it was all, it was a financial thing for them. So, it was a win-win. And as far as they were like able to bring me under the *Penguin* umbrella, and they didn't have- they weren't taking a chance on me. I was already coming in with a built-in fan base and built-in sales.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): Connected to a series that was going to have seven books. Had I gone with Margaret, initially, had I- if I had gotten a deal, the deal would not been as attractive as what I just would- what I secured after the fact, because now was proven commodity. The problem with just going as an unproven commodity to the publishing houses, they would have been taken a chance on me.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): They- they- they wouldn't have known whether I was going to be successful or not. Now they did. They're like, this guy's, he's got books, he's got fans, and people are buying it. Let's lock this guy down.

(TI): Let's strike while the iron's hot.

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): So, they got a built-in fan base, they got built-in sales. What did you get other than a guaranteed money deal?

(GH): Well, like I said, like, the first thing was, I tell you, my ego was really kicked in at the time and I was really feeling like I had made it. And now I know people can respect me, quote unquote, as a real author, you know? And, I have a different view on that nowadays, but I was really feeling that.

(TI): Gotcha. So, you- you wanted that validation.

(GH): Yeah. Yep, yep. And- and, but with the big thing though, and from a practical standpoint and a business standpoint with being with a main public- big publisher like that is, what they give you is distribution.

(TI): Mmhmm.

(GH): For the print copies. Now, distribution for electronic copies, any- any self-publish person can get the same distribution for electronic digital books that mainstream publisher can.

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): What- what self-published people can't get is distribution to the brick and mortar stores. It just doesn't exist. It's just incredibly difficult. You might be able to go down to your local Barnes and Noble and get put onto the local shelf. That's it. But if you want your distribution to the thousands of brick and mortar stores around, you know, the United States and the world, you've got to go through them. And so that's the big, big advantage I got. They also, you know, they have- they have a really good editorial team. And that was great to work with those people. But, outside of that, that was it.

(TI): Outside of that four-book deal, did you continue with them?

(GH): I didn't, no. I looked at it- well, as I was going through the experience. You know, there's a big, again, they're a great company. They're a great company. It's just that they're just a really big company. And to me, it's like the bigger the company gets us, like government agencies, the bigger they become, the slower they move. They're like, these big leviathans, right? And I did- yeah, there was just a couple of things that occurred and just it- just trying to fix some stuff like, "Oh, we're just going to take about six months to fix." I'm like, what? And I was just, there was this something else that happened was I'm a prolific writer. I wanted to continue to write, and they told me, I can't write. And that was the main thing. I was like, well, no, I'm not touching anything in my series. I was going to write something different, like, "Nope." I said, "That's not how I read it in the contract." Like, nope, nothing that's even- even remotely related.

(TI): Wow.

(GH): So, I couldn't- 'cause I was thinking about starting another apocalyptic series and they were like, absolutely—

(TI): Not.

(GH): And in fact- yep. I can't do it. They kind of slowed me down.

(TI): I guess we could say there hasn't been as- as an attractive offer, like the- like the first one to continue that relationship.

(GH): Yeah, like w- yes. And I also had started - this now - that contract lasted a few years, two and a half, three years. And during that time period, I'm also learning a lot more. I'm abou-, I was writing, I just wasn't putting anything out. I was just creating a catalog of books during that time

frame, and I started thinking to myself, why can't I just duplicate what they do?

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And so, I was making, I mean, this is all I was doing at the time. Same as now. I was just, I'm a full-time writer. This is how I make my living. And I was doing really good at it, financially. And, I was like, why- why don't I just assemble my own team? Why don't I just assemble my own team of editors and proofers and formatters and graphic design people? And, but I then keep the lion's share of my royalties. Why? Why only make 25% for the e-book, when I can make 70%?

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): And so that's kind of what I did. I said, well, I'll just duplicate what they do, and that's what it is. When the contract came up and we parted ways, I then had a backlog of all these books I'd written, and sort of just put them out. That's why I have 32 books out now.

(TI): Since 2013. You have 32 books out since 2013?

(GH): Yeah.

(TI): Geoff you've been at work, man. You've been at work. Is that how *Phalanx Press* came into the picture?

(GH): Well yeah, well Phalanx is a, it's just there's- a guy, a group of, you know, like-minded writers. We get together and that- that publishing outfit is how- how do I put it? It's a little different. Well, they provide all the services, but they provide just kind of a network as well. And they're just a bunch of- a group of great authors in there, and we're like, you know, like we're- we're like brothers, a lot of, vets in there too. And some guys are still active duty that are in Phalanx. But I just, I want- I liked- I liked the concept. You know, I- I submitted to be a part of them. And, after, you know, I got brought in. It's just a nice little brotherhood. And so—

(TI): Gotcha.

(GH): So, I'm going to put out, I'm going to put out some books under- under their banner, which will be kind of cool. But, I'm still also, got my, I'm still operating as what they call a hybrid. Meaning I've got- I've got books under contract still with *Penguin*. I have gotten another deal with Blackstone for some story, I just- I just signed a six-book audio deal with

Tantor, so I'm still contracting out with publishing houses. I'm just not entering into them like I did back then.

(TI): You're like a more of a freelancer. Kind of just doing freelance.

(GH): Yeah, free agent.

(TI): Very good. Very good. Geoff, you know from what I've seen, you've written a lot of- in it a lot of different genres. Post-apocalyptic like we've talked about, horror, westerns - what's your favorite genre to write in? Or does that change depending on the story that you're writing?

(GH): That's a great question. You know, I've- I like apocalyptic fiction. I love the kind of human element about it. And kind of the what if? But there's- there's- there's been a couple of westerns I've written. I've really enjoyed the story. I love- I love westerns. I love that whole time period in American history. And it's, I think it's uniquely Americana. And so, I do love westerns and then horror just as something I've just, that's, I just like, I like horror movies. I like that from the genre, too. But I think apocalyptic fiction. If I had to choose one, it would be apocalyptic fiction.

(TI): Gotcha. Now, I've had other writers on this podcast, Dale Dye and Jeff Struecker, and you- and the listeners can listen to those in our archives. But it's been in addition to the other things that they did at the same time. Now you've written dozens of novels since 2013 and you've had them even translated into other languages, you've had over one million books sold across your titles, for that airmen, soldier, Marine, sailor, coastie or maybe even a civilian that's listening to this right now, and they have that aspiration of becoming a full-time novelist. What would you say would be that first step for them?

(GH): Just write. Hemingway was interviewed years ago. I'm sure everyone's, all the listeners know who Ernest Hemingway is.

(TI): I hope so.

(GH): I hope so, too. If he- I've read a ton of his books when I was in the Marine Corps. Anyway, he was being interviewed a long time ago, and the reporter asked him, what's the best advice you can give an aspiring writer? And it was very simple. He just said, "Just write." So, if you go out there and you have a story, and I think almo- everyone has a story, by the way. Just to sit down in front of your computer, open up Word and just start writing it. Don't worry about all the details. Don't worry about can I get it published? Like, you don't worry about publishing. You don't worry about editing. You don't worry about any of those things 'til you actually

have something to edit. To publish. Just write the story. Sometimes people get- they put themselves- they get too far down the road in their head that they have to find these things and then it stops them. I think worrying about how you're going to get it published and who are you going to find as an editor? Who's going to do my cover? Those are- those are distractions and they can be obstacles from the creative process. I had to say to sit down in front of your computer and just start hammering away and then don't stop until you're done.

(TI): I think that piece of advice can apply to not only writing, but filmmaking. I came from a video producer background, editing. Anything. Any kind of artistic, creative aspect that you have if you want to get out and you want to start working in an artistic field. Is just do it.

(GH): Yeah, yeah. And this is, again, I find people like, well, maybe I'll take the next six months and go to creative writing class, and I just tell him, no.

(TI): Mmm.

(GH): I- and again, I think with what happens, I- I- I think people are, if people are putting these things in front of them, like I can't be a writer until I go to creative writing class. And so then, then what happens, it puts that dream of writing your first book that much further away.

(TI): Then you go to creative writing class, then you're gonna come up with another obstacle.

(GH): Yes, and people typically do, I think these are ways of- ways for people to like, stall themselves. Cause I think what's happening probably is there's a little bit of fear there. There's fear, can I actually do this? Those fears, will anyone like this? And- and I understand those fears. You know, we all have them, but we have to blast through that. And if you, if someone's listening w-wants to write, just sit down and start writing. That's- that's literally all I did. Cause I remember that quote from Hemingway always burning in my head. And so, I didn't, like I said, I didn't- I didn't overanalyze anything. I just sat down in front of the computer and just started writing the story that alrea - had been playing in my head like a movie for years. And I just sat down and just started- just started writing it. I didn't stop, go back and reread it to edit it. That's a death knell to a lot of new writers. Cause what happens is then they snap out of the creative space to go back and then they become analytical. Like they're too- they switch from one side of the brain to the other. And when you're editing, it's not your- you're not in the creative space at all. You're in more of a technical, analytical space and you're looking at your words

differently and as you're reading them, and people try to make the rough draft perfect. It's a- it's called a rough draft for a reason. It's supposed to be rough, and the rough draft is created in this. at times, in that time span when you're creating a rough draft is when you're supposed to be in that creative space 100%

(TI): Yeah.

(GH): So- so if someone's out there, and they're- and they're- and they want to write, just start writing and don't- and when I mean don't stop, don't stop. Like don't go back. Don't write for an hour, and then read what you just written. Self-doubt typically comes and hits those people in the face, and they go, "Oh, this isn't good." They start editing what they've done, and they start becoming frustrated. Like, this isn't read right. I can't do this. And it stops so many new writers when they go back and then they- they read what they just written. So, I just say, write your story out until it's done. Because there's plenty of time to do the editing and rewrites.

(TI): Very good.

(GH): But get the rough draft done. And, then what happens too, there's also a psychological component to that. Once you put the end at your rough draft, you've written a book. Congratulations. I always tell people, once you've done that, like save it, close your computer and go celebrate. You've just done something that's- that's tremendous, go celebrate. And then tomorrow, the next day, come back, open it up, and then begin to have your process of rewrites.

(TI): Ah. Very good. What's is a- what's a future goal of yours? Is it like maybe getting a movie deal ala George Martin or like HBO deal or anything like that?

(GH): Yes. Yes. That's it. I think the natural organic progression for me now is to have a movie.

(TI): Very good.

(GH): And I've even contemplated making my own.

(TI): Do you have a favorite of one of yours?

(GH): *The End*. I think it's just- it's just a good- it's just a solid story. It sets the series up really well and it's, and it can be adapted to television or movie, I think - better for television, I think, cause you can get through, you'll get a lot of all the flesh off, you know, off the bone on that.

(TI): I think a lot of writers would agree with you in that I think, you know, like I keep going back to the *Game of Thrones* since it's a recent example, you couldn't do that in a- in a two hour movie.

(GH): No.

(TI): You know, you couldn't get- even- even a three- three movie series. You couldn't get all that out. There's not enough time to flesh out all the characters.

(GH): Yeah, it's difficult. You know, I know a lot of people, you know, well, they blame, you know, movie directors and screenwriters? It's not their fault though. I mean, I'm- I've- I've now- know a few movie producers and directors and screenwriters and that was- in fact, I was- just had lunch a couple weeks ago with this one screenwriter. And- and it's- it's not their fault. I mean, their job is to take something, a three- or 400-page book and they have to try to fit that into an hour and a half to two hours. And so, it's difficult. It's not, you know, it's, I know a lot of readers are like, I can't believe it. They took this person out, but the screenwriter's caught in a rock- between a rock and a hard place. Some char- some characters have to get cut. They have to kind of slash and cut in order to fit within those time constraints. So—

(TI): But if you have 10 hours.

(GH): Yes. Yeah. That's it. And that's how you do it. Yeah.

(TI): Geoff, what is one thing that you learned in service in the Marine Corps that you apply to what you're doing today?

(GH): Never quit. Yeah. I, and that's, I, that's something I now really drill into my girls. I really- my kids. I really tell 'em just don't quit.

(TI): Outstanding.

(GH): So, you know, we all- we all fail. You know, like there's failure's- failure's just a part of life. It allows you to grow, allows you to like, whatever I'm doing is not- this isn't working for this, but the- what you do is you adjust your action steps because you still, you have a goal as you're on- you're on your way to your goal, you have a failure. It doesn't mean it's over. This means you have to change your action steps to continue to your goal. So, I just tell them to accept failure. It's okay and I'm totally fine with them to do it, but never quit.

(TI): There's a lot to learn in failure.

(GH): Totally. Yep.

(TI): Geoff, is there anything else that I might've missed or didn't ask that you think it's- our audience should know about?

(GH): I would just say this, if there's anybody- there is anybody out there that- that has an idea for a book that- that is a storyteller. They just haven't taken that step. Just do it. If you want any, you want any advice at all? I'm- my door's always open. So, you- please, please send me an email, at geoff@gmichaelhopf.com And- or find me on Facebook at [facebook.com/GMichaelHopf](https://www.facebook.com/GMichaelHopf/) [Link: <https://www.facebook.com/GMichaelHopf/>]. Just send me a direct message. So again, I'm always open to give advice to- to writers across the board. From- from the writing part of it, to the- to the editing part or the publishing part or the marketing part. I just give away information because I want everyone to be successful out there.

[00:53:40] Music

[00:53:47] PSA:

Man 1: Getting out of the military, I was missing this camaraderie.

Man 2: It's frustrating when you try and talk to people that don't understand.

Man 3: I still had the anger, I still had the addictions, but we didn't talk about that.

Woman 1: Came to the point where it's like, okay, I really need to talk to somebody about this.

Man 4: Family more or less encouraged me to, you know, go to the VA.

Man 5: It's okay to go get help. It's okay to talk to people, because it takes true strength to ask for help.

Narrator: Hear veterans' real stories of strength and recovery at maketheconnection.net [<https://maketheconnection.net/>]

[00:54:16] Music

[00:54:21] Closing Monologue:

(TI):

I want to thank Geoff for coming on the show and sharing his very unique story. For more information on Geoffrey Michael Hopf, you can find it at G. Michael Hopf, all one word that's gmichaelhopf.com [Link: <https://www.gmichaelhopf.com/>].

This week, our Borne the Battle veteran the week is Marine Corps veteran Benjamin Palmer, who was my former XO when I was with Marine Air Ground Tactical Squadron-28 back in 2006, 2007 timeframe. Right when I got back from Iraq, I was working in an S-1, so I interacted with Major Palmer daily. Major Palmer was, if you had a picture of what a Marine was supposed to look like, tall, screaming flat top, square jaw, big chest, little legs. That was a Major Palmer. I also remember that he could run for days. He got into running in the- in the previous deployment and see, during that deployment I was at- I was attached to the group. At the group level, so I didn't see this transformation in Major Palmer until we got back, from deployment. He got into running like- like hardcore during that time. So, when I got back, man, he could - I - he could just run circles around the entire unit during squadron PT sessions. One distinct memory that I have of Major Palmer is on a self-paced flak jacket run, - was that nobody could catch up to him, at all. He just left everybody in the dust, and I remember- I also remembered that he may have looked hard - you know, like I said, like I said, screaming flat top, square job, big dude, big bulldog looking dude. But I remember him as a very, very even keeled leader. Who had a huge smile that would come out frequently when- when something funny happened in front of him, or when he was able to mentor or take care of one of the Marines in his unit. I left that unit and that MOS and completely changed the trajectory of my career and Major Palmer went on to become Lieutenant Colonel Palmer, and he became the CO of another squadron in the group, Second Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion. Second LAAD. After his stint as CO, he was then assigned to- to the staff for Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron Two, which ironically was the first unit I had ever served in. And was deployed to Camp Dwyer, Helmand province in Afghanistan to serve on a mentoring team for the Afghan National Civil Order Police. Sadly, three weeks into that deployment, on May 12th, 2011, exactly nine years and one day ago from the drop of this episode, Lieutenant Colonel Palmer and another Marine Sergeant, Kevin Baldruf, were shot and killed in the police compound as they were preparing to eat lunch, by a gunman who was dressed in the Afghan police uniform. Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Palmer is survived by a wife and three children. I'm sure as his family, the Marines that he served with miss him dearly. And we honor his service.

That's it for this week's episode. If you yourself would like to nominate a Borne the Battle veteran of the week, you can. Just send us an email to podcast@va.gov , include a short writeup and let us know why you'd like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle veteran of the week. And if you like this podcast episode, hit the subscribe button. We're on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, iHeartRadio, pretty much any pod catching app known to phone, tablet, computer or man. For more stories on veterans and veteran benefits, check out our website blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>] and follow the VA on social media, Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>], RallyPoint [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/56052/question-rallypoint-great-place-start/>]. Deptvetaffairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs, no matter where you find us on social media, you will always find us with that blue check. And as always, I am reminded by people smarter than me to remind you that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not endorse or officially sanction any entities that may be discussed in this podcast, nor any media products or services they may provide. Thank you again for listening. We'll see you again right here next week. Take care.

[00:58:42] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)