

[Rob Martin] I was in the army

[Speaker 1] Ok

[Rob Martin] not the Marines, don't confuse the two. You can only do something for so long before it becomes a part of who you are, so I don't have a problem going to work because that's who I am, its part of what I do.

[Nick Marantz] It is like an automatic brotherhood. A hero one minute and now your back to you know the garbage man. The whole thing was so surreal.

[Rob Martin] Officially I'm a [giggle] tank operator but when I went over there I had a specialized job position where I did psd work, which is basically a higher – it's a bodyguard for high ranking officers and diplomats and any body that they think is important. So we uh our job was to basically take them around the city and watch their back if we're travelling through the cities. And uh every once in a while they would task us out to do the performers because they had performers come for the soldiers and our job was to protect the performers from the other soldiers.

[Nick Marantz] I was in the marines. I was a sergeant and its called our fire control team its like a four man team.

[Rob Martin] Before I was sent over there my biggest fear was uh having to or or accidentally hurting innocent people. That was my my biggest fear going over there and it was a very short lived fear because after about I don't know 3 months over there I just I didn't care because anyone of them can be an insurgent at any point they could be not an insurgent one second and the very next second they'll just decide to shoot you.

[Nick Marantz] Well I was there with my brother, my twin brother, he was in different unit. My feelings were that we were doing something good you know that we were protecting our country. Fears were that friends getting hurt, my brother getting hurt it was just more it was a lot of anxiety about what it was going to be like and yeah how I am going to react more the unknown.

[Rob Martin] The reason I went over there, and this my logic behind all of it, is that there are some genuine bad people there. Like people you see in the movies the bad guys you think oh its just a movie, no there are really people who are over there that are, that are sick and twisted and are hell-bent on killing anybody that's not Muslim and prefer to pick on Americans. They hate Amer a lot of these people hate Americans, some of them like us some of them don't. But my my thought behind it is if me being over there keeps one guy too busy dealing with me to plan on blowing something up here like my sister's school or your work then it you know then it makes it worth it. I have no problem laying it down to do to protect people, I have no problem with that.

[Speaker 1] Do you regret joining the Marines?

[Nick Marantz] No. No actually it was the best decision I made in my life. You know it was more about our buddies and our friends and making sure that everyone was ok as oppose to like you know trying to kill someone like an enemy guy or you know its just more trying to take care of ourselves so that we can make it home, that's like what you know that was like our driving force just more protecting ourselves then it is to hurt you know to be a combat. I don't regret it.

[Rob Martin] I think the hardest part about being overseas is giving up your family life because its not just laying your life on the line, its your social life. You know it gets destroyed for that long of a period I believe that that they deploy us for too long of a period in a time. A whole year, a year is standard for the army the other services go for less time. Um its just its hard because a lot of guys have never met their kids, they're children are born while they're gone. Um I knew one guy that was there he got extended twice so he spent two solid years there and uh his wife left him, his kids hate him, his finances were jacked up, it was a nightmare for this poor guy. So that's the hardest part about being overseas. The hardest part about being in Iraq is the weather, its so hot oh god is it hot.

[Speaker 1] How hot?

[Rob Martin] I think the hottest we saw was like 135 [Speaker 1: Oh my god] but then you got to think your inside in an armor vehicle with no air conditioner and your wearing 90 pounds of body armor and in some cases your running around dodging bullets.

[Nick Marantz] The toughest part you know it was hard its funny how big a big deal was like mail and just like hearing from home because it would take you know you send them a package or something from here and it takes 3 weeks to get there and I think I was one of the last guys to receive my first piece of mail and I was good for a while I'm like oh yeah that's ok something will be coming whatever and it just took forever for my first piece of mail to get there and that was like that was tough.

[Speaker 1] Do you feel like the returning soldiers are kind of their own culture just because

[Rob Martin] Oh absolutely

[Speaker 1] Ok

[Rob Martin] Absolutely because I could meet a guy that uh that was overseas even if he was in a different area, never worked with him and never met him before and his job was totally different I could sit down and have a 4 hour conversation with that guy and totally understand everything that he is talking about and other people in the room will just look at us like we are nuts like we're speaking a different

language. And we get it, I understand everything that he's talking about. I've met people I saw one guy when I came home at the airport actually um that I knew in basic training like years and years prior I hadn't talk to the guy in like 5 years and I sat down and we hung out had a good beer and talked like we've been best friends forever and uh other people just look at us like we're nuts and like we army language there are so many acronyms and this and that and uh slang terms that people don't understand so it is it's a total different language and uh I think that irritates some of the people I hang out with at home because they're like well how come he gets along with that guy he doesn't even know him and that's just how it is because you can relate. You know when something blows up in your face and I mean, I mean that in the most literal sense its an experience that you just cannot convey to anybody so when we talk about you know I'll talk to a friends of mine from overseas about oh yeah remember when that Hagi blew up the IED right next to the humV and 19-11's were going off and blah blah and people are like what are they talking about, but I'll understand them perfectly. And its just a bond that is unspoken that even if you don't like that guy you still understand them.

[Speaker 1] Do you think that anybody here could even begin

[Rob Martin] No [giggle]. Begin to understand?

[Speaker 1] Yeah

[Rob Martin] No. There's no way, I mean Hollywood is getting pretty good at conveying the story and experiences, I'll give them that but unless your there you really don't get it you just you don't understand the you know the instant adrenaline rush whats going on around you, you know what happens to your senses and you know some guys go through a big emotional thing about it and you can't convey that to a person that hasn't been there. You can depict it in a movie but its just not the same as actually being there.

[Nick Marantz] Its like uh it is like an automatic brotherhood type thing like hey

[Speaker 1] a bond

[Nick Marantz] yeah

[Speaker 1] I couldn't imagine just being shot at, just dodging bullets

[Rob Martin] You know what there was a couple of times cuz we did convoys most of the time and and the Iraqis have this thing where its like hit and run. They'll shoot at you a couple rounds and then they'll run away because they know if they stand and fight they're going to die. So uh there have been a couple of times when we were driving back and we get close to the base so we'd relax a little bit thinking we're home and uh all of a sudden hear [gun shot sounds] in the distance and you hear this real real fainting sound like real close to your ear and if you hear that sound that

mans that bullet is within 3 feet of your head and its just woo is it an adrenaline rush. There's no rollercoaster that could give you that.... I wake up sweating every once in a while so I, I don't really remember what I dreamt about.... There was a guy, I didn't know him personally but I worked with his unit often, and uh they were getting ready to go home they were leaving before we were and uh he waited his wife it was like two weeks before they were going to come home and his wife sent him a Dear John letter basically left him while he was you know two week two weeks before he was going to come home and he uh he wait until the very his units very last mission so he made sure all of his boys came home in one piece and uh when they parked their vehicle he put a shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Two week, two weeks before he was going home. I you know what I blame his death on his wife, she's a uh I won't say that word never mind.

[Nick Marantz] Those mental type illnesses are so hard to pinpoint and so hard to solve and you know by the time they're able to diagnose it it's almost like it's too late... I remember getting off the exit to go back home and I was just looking at some like 18-year-old girls just driving in their cars like having a good time and I'm like that's a thing that so many people take for granted... I mean you go from doing something that you feel is so meaningful to going back to like your normal everyday job and for me that was working for an ambulance shipping people from con homes to hospitals and its sucked and a lot of people got depressed and it's a very tough thing to like swallow. You know feeling like you're on top you know like a hero one minute and now your back to like the, you know the garbage man.

[Speaker 1] Did you feel that, that was a big adjustment or did you jump right back into just normal life?

[Rob Martin] I think coming is harder for the reserve soldiers than it is for the active regular active duty guys because

[Speaker 1] What's the difference?

[Rob Martin] Well the reserve, reserve soldiers which is army reserve and national guard they have normal lives they are plumbers and teachers and they're normal people um and then all of a sudden they're soldier for a year and then they come back. I think they have a hard time adjusting than the active duty guys um because active duty army is a whole other culture into itself, so when I came home um I had my regular active duty friends around me all the time and we'd talk about stuff and hang out and it was a good buffer to getting out of the military which I did about 3 months later... I didn't have any fears about like a professional adjustment or I wasn't afraid I was going to come and go crazy and kill people, I didn't think that was going to happen. I was mostly afraid of dealing with social issues with specific people when I came home and that, that was really hard actually.

[Speaker 1] What was like frustrating about coming home and seeing your friends and your fam you know

[Rob Martin] The frustrating part at first was that people just don't get it . You can tell all the stories in the world and you can be descriptive as possible and they just don't get it and that was somewhat irritating but I got over it because I understand that they don't, they don't understand... Another story is uh you know when you get when a roadside bomb goes off next to your convoy the first time uh it's, it's nerve wrecking after the aftermath is nerve wrecking because your checking all your friends to see if they're hurt or if anybody's bleeding and you feel the concussion blast but your adrenaline is pumping so hard that you aren't sure if you're hit or not. So you're checking your own face for blood, you know you're fine but you're checking to see if you're bleeding and you ask you're friends am I bleeding, am I ok. And its just this insane like 5 minutes afterward where you're just checking and rechecking and making sure everything, and its frantic but uh you know 6 months later you get blown up and the first thing goes through your mind is damn-it now I got to change tires. And you know it's, it's stupid.

[Speaker 1] Does it change from beginning to end?

[Rob Martin] Oh yeah but uh you know the once you get once you get used to getting blown up I know that sounds like a very strange thing to say but once you get used to it you kind of have fun with it as long as nobody gets hurt. Um there were several times when we would get blown up and normal people would be going to the doctor and going to a shrink and talking about their, their near death experience and here we are 10 minutes later having lunch, talking about whatever were talking about. And I remember taking a step back in my mind and thinking we're all kind of crazy and uh I brought up the point that uh normal people would be going to a shrink right now and uh my friend looked at me and said your head's so big you'd need to shrink. Uh and we would just talk all kinds of crap because every explosion is different because I'll give the Iraqis this one is that they are creative with their bombs. We got blown up by a donkey one time [What?] not, not by the saddle bags on the donkey, a bare back, no saddle bags, no saddle, a donkey that had a mortar setup as a bomb shoved in its backside, so this donkey comes out in the middle of the street and we kind of stop because there's a donkey in the street that's not something you see everyday and uh the donkey looks at us and gives this horrible cry and then [splatter sound] we have donkey all over the tracks and we made so many jokes about that it's, it's kind of sadistic a little bit but it's how you it's making jokes and sick humor is kind of how you deal with, with it being so hard. And I didn't figure that out until I got back and I was like oh ok I guess where that's all the sick humor came from.

[Speaker 1] If there's like one thing that you would want the American public about returning soldiers, could there be like one thing?

[Rob Martin] Ugh there's a couple things [ok, go on]. One, if you meet a combat veteran like in a class or on the street, it is not OK to ask them "did you shoot anybody?" because its like you know, no I went over there to do tidily-winks what

do you think and that's not an OK question to ask, don't ask that. Um also remember that soldiers when they go out and do their thing the government pays us nothing we get paid squat and so try and understand that we don't get paid very much. That's a big thing a matter of fact if you're class could start a petition to pay the soldiers more go for it

[Speaker 1] Was like learning the language and communicating with other Iraqis difficult?

[Nick Marantz] You know they get you like those little books to learn the little catch phrases and um the people were great. They freakin' loved us. There was a I mean the towns that we were like living in became like our little hometowns and you know everyone was waving.

[Rob Martin] You know if a doctor decides to stop working at a hospital and works at Subway, is he still a doctor? Yeah he's still a doctor, so I still very much consider myself soldier even, even in normal life.