

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:00:00 The Hidden Forces podcast features long form conversations, broken into two parts. The second hour of which is made available to our premium subscribers, along with transcripts and notes to each conversation. For more information about how to access the episode overtimes, transcripts and rundowns, head over to patreon.com/hiddenforces. You can also sign up to our mailing list at hiddenforces.io. Follow us on Twitter @HiddenForcesPod, and leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. And with that, please enjoy this week's episode.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:00:54 What's up, everybody? My guest on this episode of Hidden Forces is someone who many of you will be introduced to today for the first time. His name is Radigan Carter, and he is an investor who has spent the last two decades of his life working across five continents as a member of the US Military, as a private contractor, and as a special agent for the United States Government. He has extensive experience leading large, multinational teams, including a 350 person security force in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:01:30 I discovered Radigan's work, his beautiful and thoughtful writings, on life markets and global affairs while on my own journey, trying to sort through the various thoughts and feelings that I've been wrestling with and that I've talked about on previous episodes, related to this moment in Western society, concerning our politics, national security and the health of our financial markets. His perspective and firsthand experiences, combined with his deep knowledge and understanding of geopolitics and foreign affairs, make him one of the most unique and insightful thinkers that I've come across in a very long time.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:11 This was without question one of the best conversations I've ever had. We recorded for four hours and spent the first two discussing Radigan's experience overseas, participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom, working as a private contractor in Qatar and as a special agent for the United States government in Afghanistan and North Africa. The stories that he shares are inspirational and at times unnerving, but they are always delivered with a wisdom, reflection and authenticity that I have come to realize is one of the most unique qualities and gifts that Radigan has to offer. His capacity to reflect thoughtfully and empathically on whatever it is that captures his attention.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:02:59 The second half of our conversation is absolutely fascinating and should be in and of itself its own episode, because Radigan shares, not only his remarkable insights into geopolitics and foreign affairs, including a long discussion about the security and politics of the Middle East, Europe and Asia, but also has perspective on what's happening within the United States, the radicalization of the citizenry, and the potential for an escalation in political violence over the next few years.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:32 We also discuss his views on financial markets and the macro economy, including a conversation about cryptocurrency, it's place in his own portfolio, and how it fits into his larger investing philosophy. In last week's episode, I said that going forward, you are going to hear more episodes from me dealing with these issues, and that I would rely on the depth and breadth of research and analysis that I've done on this podcast to begin to put together the pieces of a story that has not been properly understood, and which sits at the heart of what is driving markets, politics and the stability of the global economy. This is precisely the kind of episode that I had in mind, and whether you are an

investor, a policymaker or anyone else, really, who has a stake in the future of Western civilization and democracy, then you absolutely need to hear it. And with that, please enjoy this incredible conversation with my guest, Radigan Carter.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:41 Radigan Carter, welcome to Hidden Forces.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:04:44 Thank you. It's good to be here.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:46 It's exciting having you on, man. So, I discovered your work, I don't know, like a week ago, and I was hooked. I read through everything you've written and it really resonated with me. I mean, all sorts of things. I mean, your writing is absolutely beautiful and you have such an interesting background.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:05:04 Thank you.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:04 Yeah, sure. I mean, it's extremely unusual for me to invite someone on the program who isn't already known, or who hasn't published a book, or have some sort of larger body of work. But I think given what I've been going through and where I've been at, mentally, and I should actually also mentioned the reason that I actually discovered your work was as a result of the fact that I had been doing a lot of research into Tether, USDt, the stablecoin, that I mentioned in last week's monologue, and that's actually how I came across your work. And you've also recently gotten to know Mike Green and Grant Williams as well. So, I should start by asking you, how did you get interested in all of this stuff that brought us together? And then I'd really like to begin to get to understand better your background and how you went from growing up in Oregon, is where I think you grew up, to serving in the military, to having so many interesting takes on investing, and to focus on building generational wealth.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:06:12 Sure. So, probably the recent threads, as far as on stablecoins, and then talking a little bit about Tether and Bitcoin, and then even getting to know Mike Green, honestly, he's been incredibly kind and generous with his time and I don't know him that well, we've had one conversation and text a little bit online, but just to have someone like that reach out to me and take the time to do that, that meant a lot. And the reason I started looking into those things was, it probably goes back to time overseas, when I just like to be able to make decisions for myself, and be able to weigh the risks of what I'm doing with my own investments, to be able to make an informed decision.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:07:01 And a lot of that is based on time overseas, as far as when you'd get a brief or someone to tell you, "Hey, this is what we're looking at it, this is what we're expecting." It was still your responsibility to go and check that for yourself, to do your own homework, to go out and talk to people, to make your own determination on what the risk you were seeing and taking were, because frankly, we were playing for keeps there. People's lives depended on me, and when you're in charge and taking those kinds of risks, I mean, I guess everybody has a different take on this, but if I had 300 guys with me, I wasn't responsible for 300 lives, I was responsible for 300 families. The decisions I made there had major ramifications for, what, 1200, 1500 people. So, I take that same framework and apply it to the risk I'm taking with my money.

Radigan Carter: 00:08:01 So that's how, when people were saying, "Hey, this isn't a big deal." Mike Green was saying, "Hey, this is a big deal. You need to look at it." I just wanted to be able to look at the information for myself and come to my own decisions.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:17 How popular are cryptocurrencies among people in the military?

Radigan Carter: 00:08:22 Well, so for the guys that I'm with, that I was with overseas, I would say they were majorly popular. So-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:28 What do you think accounts for that?

Radigan Carter: 00:08:32 I would say that when you're out there overseas in the far reaches away from everything, it isn't what you're expecting when you go over there. So, you get over there and you're in the middle of the violence and the chaos, and you have someone trying to tell you about the strategy of what you're doing in Afghanistan, and you're there and you're thinking, "Hey, I'm just trying to keep my guys alive and do what's right here, and I don't really think there is a larger strategy in play." And so, in a way, you just start looking for truth. You sort of looking for something that's real, just to hold on to, to keep the faith.

Radigan Carter: 00:09:18 And, so I think a lot of guys that were over there, Bitcoin just made sense to them because it was something real, it was a promise couldn't get broke to them, and we'd all had promises be broken to us. And so it was just, in a way, it kind of felt like you were a bunch of orphans and you found an adopted home that wasn't going to treat you poorly. And so, in 2016, it was when I stumbled on it and started talking to other guys that were there with me, and we were laughing because it felt like we were taking ransom photos of each other, for trading crypto purposes only, on our phone and then send them to these exchanges.

Radigan Carter: 00:10:02 And it was just a completely new thing. That, "Hey, I'm going to do a wire transfer." And my banks told me like, "Hey sir, this is very risky." And we're laughing saying, "Man, you don't know what risk is. This is us having fun." And the running joke was, it felt like you were sending a wire transfer to Tron and he's standing there with his face mask on, on his light cycle, and you're saying, "Hey, Tron, I'm giving you this money, is this going to be safe in the matrix with you?" And he just doesn't say anything. It takes your money and writes into the matrix, and all of a sudden you have Bitcoin 15 minutes later. And I think the first time that happens for us overseas and you see that and you say, "Wow, that just transferred in 15 minutes."

Radigan Carter: 00:10:44 You automatically appreciate what that is, what that means, because when you're overseas and you have that time difference, you find yourself standing on a lawn chair by the pool while there's gunfire in the distance, trying to get a signal on your Nokia phone to try to talk to your USAA rep at your bank to do a wire transfer. And she's like, "Sir, why are you calling me from a local African number? What's your phone password, and doing wire transfers and dealing with all that overseas is just a major pain for us." And so, the first time you buy Bitcoin and you see that clear in 15 minutes and there's no hurdles on it and then you can send it wherever you want, you just get it. You're like, "Wow, this is actually a game changer." As far as that technology goes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:35 How important is custody for you? The fact that you can self-custody your own assets.

Radigan Carter: 00:11:42 So, I probably have a different view of this than people that are traditionally in Bitcoin, I would say in the first world, I think it's actually of a limited use currently, based on, if you're talking about places that are decentralized societies, right? So, places where there's actual, real violence, real insurgencies happening, I think it's of limited use as far as being able to self-custody because they prefer either the blue \$100 bills or small gold coins, and there's a reason for that. But being able to self-custody assets for, I think the first world, especially in, if you want to say, the direction the future is going with how the financial system is something that's built on debt and the trend towards higher taxation, I think that's actually very incredibly important for people in the first world that do want to be able to have a place that they can store their wealth and be able to transfer that with them.

Radigan Carter: 00:12:46 Because, for the first time, you can actually put dollars on a flash drive and just get on an airplane with that. You can't even do that with gold. So, I think it's more of a solution for people in the first world than it is for people in decentralized societies already. Does that make sense?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:10 I think so. Is that because the first world is more civilized and less violent, and there's less risk associated with actually having that in your physical possession?

Radigan Carter: 00:13:21 Correct. I think there's less risk associated with having that. And I think it also depends on what people are trying to do with it. So, as far as being able to just have assets that you carry on your person, and not draw attention, I think that's important.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:43 I see, I see. So, we're going to revisit all of this, and delve into it in great detail and people should make sure to check out your work, which I've linked to in the episode summary. We're also going to discuss geopolitics, because you have so many fascinating insights there. You're such a well-read guy and you've also had real-world experience, which makes you unique. Before we do that, I'd love to actually, I mean, you and I have spoken at length on one call about three hours long, and you've given me a great background on your life, which I find absolutely fascinating and worth delving into, but I feel like we just scratched the surface. So, I'm curious, not just for my audience, but for me as well. Tell me a little bit about your life. First of all, where were you born? Where did you grow up? What was your life like before you got into the military?

Radigan Carter: 00:14:34 So I actually grew up in Eastern Oregon, high desert country out there. And I would say that I had everything I needed and most of what I wanted growing up and, yeah, we shopped at Goodwill growing up, so we didn't have a lot of money, but that was okay. Cut firewood in the summertime to heat the house in the winter, hunted elk in the fall so we had meat in the freezer, and I was probably the only... No, I was probably the only the white kid that was doing field work out there a lot of the times, in the field. And then I would say that it impressed me early on that, first off, wherever you're at, people that don't have much, they're going to be very kind to you if you're there sharing the same hardship as them. And you know, when I was, it's always stuck in my mind, but I'd say maybe about 15, I didn't even have a water jug when I was out there doing field work, and it was like 106 one August. And I was out there throwing

potatoes behind the harvester, and it was so hot that I couldn't drink my water, because I just washed out a milk jug to use as a water jug. And this older Mexican gentleman who couldn't speak English, I couldn't speak Spanish, and he shared his water with me. And that always stuck in my mind that people try to do the right thing or are kind, even if they don't really have anything themselves, or even if you don't really have anything in common, if you're sharing hardship with them. And, growing up like that, it also taught me that I wasn't naturally athletic or I don't even think I'm that smart, really, but if I was going to accomplish anything in life, I just had to have the attitude that I wasn't going to let anyone outwork me.

Radigan Carter: 00:16:32 That if I was going to show up, I was going to work as hard as I possibly could. And the other thing was, I just keep volunteering for things. If you just keep stepping forward and keep having the attitude that, "Okay, hey, I'm just going to work as hard as I can. And if I fail, I'm going to reassess, take a lesson learned and just step forward again." Eventually, you find yourself in an ever increasingly smaller groups, because a lot of people just don't take that step, and that's fine, maybe they don't have to.

Radigan Carter: 00:17:03 But, for me, it was very much a thing of, I never felt like I had a choice. If I wanted to be anything more than doing that kind of work, I just had to work really hard and keep stepping forward. And so that's what I did, and it actually led to joining the Navy at 19 because graduating high school, and then when you're working on the reframing crew, tearing down concrete forms, \$12 an hour, you're thinks you're on top looking down, until a year later, and you're working in the mud, all kinds of weather. And you're looking at your future all around you, you're looking at guys that are 25 that already have one back surgery behind them, and they're just happy if they can get a couple days of overtime on the weekends, so they can buy school clothes for their kid and their wife doesn't have to put it on the credit card. So, that's same thing, took another step, joined the Navy and went overseas. And that was really my first time overseas and really living overseas and really enjoying it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:03 So, did you always have that work ethic, and did you always have that attitude towards opportunity? The always say yes, step into the opportunity. Where did that develop as you were growing up?

Radigan Carter: 00:18:15 That was something I was taught by my father and the older I get, the more lucky I realize I was to have had him as a father, because I learned to work for my dad. I still haven't met the man yet today that works harder than my dad did. My dad really didn't grow up with anything. So, my dad grew up in Tennessee, out there in Appalachia. And I think he put his first... They didn't have running water until he was in high school. He actually put in the first septic system for the house. And so, in a way, he was a generation behind America, so I learned that really hard work ethic from him.

Radigan Carter: 00:18:59 And I remember this one time, we were getting firewood in the mountains and it was summertime, and there was snow, we got caught in an early snow and dad, he'd built this trailer himself actually, and it held three cords of firewood. And for anyone who doesn't know cords of firewood, that thing was probably eight feet wide by 12 feet long and stacked four or five feet high, just a lot of firewood we'd cut and stacked that day. And I remember it was getting dark and dad was trying to pull the truck up onto the road and it snowed, so he couldn't

get the loaded trailer out of the woods and he didn't say anything, he didn't complain. I was still a kid. I was probably 10 or 11 at that time.

- Radigan Carter:** 00:19:43 And he let me sleep in the cab of the truck, and he went out there in the dark, threw all that firewood off of the trailer, pulled the truck up onto the road, and then he walked back and restocked all that firewood on the trailer and did that until probably 3:00 AM.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:57 Wow.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:19:57 And then we drove out of the mountains, so that's just how hard he works. And that's where I learned that, and growing up, he'd always tell me, he said, "Hey, you just need to find a gap and then you need to stand in it." And what that meant was, it really didn't matter if life wasn't fair, or anything like that. It was, if you saw something that needed to be done, it was your responsibility to do it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:27 Yeah, that's powerful. So, when you decided to leave home and go to the military, this was actually before 9/11. You said that-
- Radigan Carter:** 00:20:37 It was before 9/11.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:20:39 Yeah, you said that part of the reason was because you looked around you and you didn't really see much in the way of opportunity in the life that you were living and in the path that you were on, and so you went to the military. My question is, why did you choose the military? And then why did you choose the Navy?
- Radigan Carter:** 00:21:01 Why the military? I would say probably because all the men I was surrounded with growing up, they had all served in the military. So, the guys that I really respected, they had all done military time. So, everyone from my dad and my uncles to grandparents, Korea, World War II. Growing up, I had a great uncle that he would get a new car every few years, and the reason he did that was because his leg bothered him when he got shot jumping in with a 101st, before D-Day, and he was the only man in his stick to hit the ground alive and he bandaged up his leg and then he crawled over and he killed the Germans in the machine gun nest that killed his buddies.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:21:52 So, but I just remember him as my great uncle, that he'd always get a new Cadillac every few years, because that was the reason, it just bothered his leg. And so that's why the military. And then why the Navy specifically, was I was never popular in high school, I would say even probably socially awkward. And I got bullied by this one kid pretty bad, and it actually probably turned into be the best thing that ever happened to me, because it totally changed the trajectory of my life. And so, I would say a lot of the history and a lot of the knowledge I have actually goes back, because in high school I didn't even want to eat lunch out on the hill with all the other kids because this one kid would bother me.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:22:37 So, I's take my sandwich and I'd go to the library and I would read everything I possibly could in the library on my lunch hour in high school. And I stumbled into these-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:48 Do you remember what you used to read about?

Radigan Carter: 00:22:50 It was everything. I had a fascination with history, I read the entire series on World War II, read about World War I, ancient history, mythology, anything I could get my hands on. And then I fell into reading about westerns, and specifically Louis L'Amour. I started reading Louis L'Amour westerns, and I remember on the back flap of these westerns, it always have a section about the life that Louis L'Amour led. And this guy led the life that he wrote about, he was a mule skinner, sailed across the South China Sea on a tramp steamer, and just lived this life of adventure himself before he became a writer. And I remember sitting there in the library and I'd think, "Man, I want to live that kind of a life. I want to have that life of adventure." And that's what started all that. So, why the Navy, because hey, Louis L'Amour sailed across the South China Sea and I wanted to sail across the South China Sea too. So, that's what I did.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:56 Brilliant. So, you served in the Navy for the next four years. Do I have that right?

Radigan Carter: 00:24:01 Correct.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:03 So what was that experience like? I know that you were involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom on those initial deployments. What was your role, and what were some of the more memorable moments of that period?

Radigan Carter: 00:24:16 So I was a gunner's mate on a cruiser that was actually for deployed out of Yokosuka, Japan. So, Yokosuka Japan was our home port and part of Southern Fleet. And so basically, any time something happened in that area of the world, we're one of the first ones to pull out and be on station for what was going on. And some of the most memorable times, I remember we pulled in Indonesia this one time, and I would say this was my first experience with how far a currency could devalue. And at the time, I mean, I was maybe 19 or 20 and this was my first experience really being overseas and actually seeing how the rest of the world lived. And I remember being in Indonesia and I was going back to the ship and I remember this soldier, this Indonesian soldier, stop at me and asking me if I wanted to buy his AK-47 for a hundred dollars.

Radigan Carter: 00:25:22 And I just said, "No, I can't do that." But it just shocked me that here was this guy said, "Hey, do you want to buy an automatic weapon? I'll sell it to you for a hundred bucks. I just need a hundred dollars for being here in Indonesia." And that always just stuck in my mind, and in Singapore, Singapore was a working port for us, so we'd always work before in Singapore, and then deploy out of there if there's something had broken. And I remember working really hard, as far as sweat pouring off of us and being on the ship and just working. I just remember it being, guys would complain and we all did it, right? But I'd always tell them, be like, "Hey, if home was that great, none of us would be here. This is still better than what we came from."

Radigan Carter: 00:26:13 And it was just, I think for a lot of people, the military is really just, if you don't have a shot at something that's going on at home, that's a way to really get out, see the world, realize what an opportunity you have even just being an American. And then being able to go on and do other things with your life if you want to. It's really a great opportunity, but I remember being thankful for it after that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:46 Did you have that quiet professionalism at that time?

Radigan Carter: 00:26:51 No, no. No, that's something that really developed later.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:55 You were a happy grinder at that time it sounds like.

Radigan Carter: 00:26:59 Yeah, I mean, I didn't have a five-year plan there. I was just 20 years old, sailing across the South China Sea, just happy not to be breaking concrete forms. That was a whole new experience.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:14 So, if there was anything else from that period that sticks out to you, like I said, I know you were participated in an Operation Iraqi Freedom, which is a kind of a seminal campaign in American history, I think it will turn out to be. But certainly, there aren't many instances like that. That's a generation's war, the Iraq War. If there are any other interesting experiences or parts of those four years that you want to touch on, feel free. And then I wanted to ask you, what caused you to then leave and seek to get an engineering degree, which you ended up getting for the next four years? Because I think that's also an interesting experience.

Radigan Carter: 00:27:57 So, I reckon freedom and guys were in Afghanistan then too, but I didn't do that at that time. I mean, we launched probably over 30 tomahawks in Iraq when we were there, and then part of that was actually boarding ships and then looking for high value guys that might be trying to sneak out. But I would say for probably us that were there during the invasion and in the early years, it was probably a different experience than what guys had later on. And I remember, what really sticks out to me about that time, was actually coming back and realizing that there... It was a jarring experience to come back and realize everyone that I was around, that we were over there and doing that, and all part of the mission of what we were doing, and then coming back to America and realizing most people were just going about their normal life and really not even paying attention about it. It really didn't even affect most people unless you were either there or had a family member that was there.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:07 What did that feel like to come back, and to realize that the people really weren't that particularly invested in or aware of what was going on in that part of the world?

Radigan Carter: 00:29:18 It made me want to go back, to be honest, it made me want to stay among guys that were invested, that knew what was going on in the wider world and I wanted to stay on the team. And that's actually why I went to military college after the Navy, was because I really realized that, while I might not like the discipline that they made me live my life by, I accomplished more than left to my own devices, being under that kind of military discipline. And maybe not everybody's like that, but I know for me and my personality, I do much better with that kind of discipline in my life. So, that's why I went to military college, because that way... I couldn't have handled going to a civilian college and having someone tell me that we shouldn't be there, or they didn't agree with what we were doing, you know? That wouldn't have been a good environment for me. So, when I came back and saw how jarring that was, that's why I was just like, "Hey, another four years at a military college? Sounds great. Let's go." And so that's what I did.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:31 So why did you choose to get an engineering degree, and what did you learn in those four years? And what did that experience teach you, and how did it change you? How did it change you?

Radigan Carter: 00:30:43 Man, I really should put more thought into what I'm doing, because when I showed up at school, you show up on the first day, they're like, "Hey, great, glad you're here. What do you want your major to be?" And I just got out of the Navy and it was... I said, "I have no idea what I want to do." And I remember the guy asking me, and he says, "Well, what do you have experienced in?" And I said, "Well, I did rough construction before I joined the Navy." And he says, "Hey, that's great. We have civil engineering. It's a lot like construction." And I said, "Okay, I'll do that then." And that's literally how I became a civil engineer.

Radigan Carter: 00:31:22 And I realized very quickly that civil engineering was nothing like swinging a hammer on a job site, because it required a lot of math. And not just a lot of math, but like a lot of advanced math. And I was not good at advanced math, because the last math class I'd taken was in 1995, and it was algebra. And I only took that one because I had to have, that was back in the days where you could do two credits in high school and graduate with two credits of math. So, here I am, and this is like 2003.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:53 So you hadn't even taken geometry?

Radigan Carter: 00:31:55 Oh no, I didn't even take any geometry. I knew geometry from the job site. Oh, when I say I just kept stepping forward and just kept, well, I'm just-

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:32:04]

Radigan Carter: 00:32:03 Oh, when I say I just kept stepping forward and just kept ... I'm here so I'm just going to work, that's literally what I did. And so here I am in 2003, and I'm surrounded by all these kids that are five years younger than me and they're coming out of prep academies or doing high school calculus and college credits. And here I am coming back from war at 23, with my last math class being eight years ago, as a civil engineer.

Radigan Carter: 00:32:31 And I remember one professor just laughed at me. He says, "Why are you here?" And I said, "Well, I signed up for it." And he says, "Well, why don't you quit?" And I said, "I can't do that." And so, I was so bad at college, and just academics in general, that I actually failed, I think between math classes and engineering classes, I think I failed 19 classes over the next four years.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:00 That's wild.

Radigan Carter: 00:33:02 Oh, I literally went to every session of school from fall spring and even two summer semesters. So, I took a full load from the fall of '03, all the way up to spring of '07. I just kept going. And I'll never forget this. The fall semester of my senior year, the department head pulls me into his office because this was the first time ... I was taking his principles of engineering course. It was the final class, it was a capstone level course. He pulls me into his office as a senior.

Radigan Carter: 00:33:39 And I mean, I failed like 17 classes by this point, and just keep marching forward. And he pulls him into his office and he says, "Hey, civil engineering might not be for you." And I just remember telling him, I'm like, "Sir, if you got to kick me out of the program, I understand, but I'm just not going to quit." And we never had another conversation after that. He just left me alone and I ended up graduating half a semester behind my class because I failed another class spring of senior

year. So, I was a super senior, four and a half semesters. And I graduated and went on to work, but I just wouldn't quit. I just kept going.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:34:20 Why did you have that attitude towards it? I mean, well, I can understand if something aligns with what you want to do, that you don't want to quit. And actually this reminds me of a really great episode we did with David Epstein, where we talked about this in the context of a conversation around sampling and how people find what it is that they love to do. What made you so resistant to quitting, so to speak, and maybe taking on a different major?
- Radigan Carter:** 00:34:47 It was the fact that people kept telling me to quit, and I just didn't want to do that. And the other thing was, is I knew I could make a good living as a civil engineer. So, coming from how I grew up to being a civil engineer, I knew I could make a living that way. I knew that I would never have to shop at the clearance rack at JC Penny's for school clothes. I could walk into the grocery store and I could buy whatever I wanted to without looking at the price of it. If I wanted to buy a Heinz ketchup, I could buy a Heinz ketchup and I didn't have to have Great Value. And so a lot of the reason why I didn't quit was I just didn't feel like I had a choice.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:35:28 I just kept going because I knew at least that way I could make a living as a civil engineer and I could go back overseas and do overseas construction. So, between knowing I can make a living and knowing I could get back overseas, that's why I just kept trying to force my way through it. And I also knew that if I just kept working, then I would eventually figure it out. And the more I did that, the more confidence I had at it to where, even if I wasn't good at it, that was okay. I could figure it out and I could do the job.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:35:59 I'd love a bit later to revisit that, this idea that you can somehow build up a confidence in being able to solve new problems and overcome challenges. The more you work at it, there's almost a skill that you develop that isn't contingent, that isn't specific to any particular trade, but simply is about finding a way to make it work, to make it through. I don't know how much that is about breaking limitations that you have in your head around what's possible. I mean, it feels like that's what it is, but I'd love to revisit that a bit later.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:36:32 So you go back to work overseas, you actually go to Qatar. And now I know Qatar and Dubai, the Emirates, these countries have had huge ongoing construction projects and there were great opportunities for civil engineers. They were importing them the way that other countries like the United States import farm workers.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:36:50 Absolutely.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:36:50 Why did you choose to ... was it that simple, was that you wanted to go abroad and Qatar was offering to hire civil engineers, and so those two things came together and you went to Qatar?
- Radigan Carter:** 00:37:02 It was actually pure happenstance, to be honest. And that's something that I would really just encourage people ... The attitude I had about going overseas after college was, the way I look at it is, I don't care how many no's I get. Nothing is 100%, including being told no. So, if you just keep taking shots at something you want to do, eventually you're going to get a yes. And so when I

was getting ready to graduate, I think I did something like 28, 29 interviews. And the engineering firms I was interviewing with, none of them would send me directly overseas. And they all wanted me to do three years or five years in a domestic office and then they would send me on an overseas project.

Radigan Carter: 00:37:50 And I got to the point after about the first 10 of them, as soon as they said, "Hey, we're not going to send you directly overseas," I would just politely say, "Hey, I think it's best that we just stop the interview here. This isn't what I want to do, and I certainly don't want to waste your time, sir." And I'm sure at the time they took that as being arrogant, being told that by a 23-year old, or I guess I was 27 at the time. But that was just my view. I knew what I wanted to do, and if the answer was no, then that's fine. The answer is no, but I need to go find a yes.

Radigan Carter: 00:38:23 And so pure happenstance, I was the only guy in the entire civil engineering program that emailed this professor back. Because this professor emailed the group of graduating seniors and said, "Hey, there's going to be a gentleman here from this Fortune 500 international construction firm. If any of you guys want to meet and talk with him after the football game." And I was the only guy that emailed and said, "Yeah, I'd love to talk to him." Because I looked up the company, I saw they had projects overseas, and I said, "Yes, I'll talk to him."

Radigan Carter: 00:38:54 And I waited for him, and he didn't show up. So, I actually went down, was getting ready to go lift weights, got in gym gear. And a runner comes and gets me in and says, "Hey, the guy is waiting for you." So I come up and to this day, I can't remember what we even talked about. It was like a 15 minute conversation. And he apologized, he said, "Hey, I'm sorry I was late. It started raining and my wife just got her hair done and had to go back to the car." And I just said, "Hey sir, no worries. I get it. If she's not happy, no one's happy."

Radigan Carter: 00:39:25 It was something really ridiculous that, looking back on, it was probably not the best way to open the conversation. But he just laughed and we just had a good conversation, and he said, "Hey, what do you want to do?" And I said, "I want to go back overseas." And he says, "Okay ... I think our company is going to be doing interviews next week. Would you be willing to interview?" And I said, "Absolutely." And the next week I'm sitting in this interview with the company and its two people from out West. So, I do the interview, they hand business cards across the table, and one of them is from the West Coast office and the other one's from the Denver office.

Radigan Carter: 00:39:59 And I said, "Wow, you guys really came a long ways." And they said ... I don't want to say his name. But they said, "Well, when he calls and tells you to get on a plane, you get on a plane." And I said, "Oh, really? I met him last week after the football game, he was a really nice guy. What does he do for the company?" And they looked at me, the guys behind the table interviewing me, and they said, "You don't know? He's the president of the company."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:23 Wow.

Radigan Carter: 00:40:24 And so, just pure happenstance. But I think those opportunities happen when you just don't take no for an answer and you just keep showing up. And I even think the guys at that level, they're looking for those guys, right? I'm not smart. I

didn't really ... I had a good childhood, but I think when guys are at that level, they're looking for guys with heart.

- Radigan Carter:** 00:40:48 Because I don't know if you can teach it, I don't know if you got to learn it when you're young, I don't know what the case is. But my life has been nothing but a constant story of guys higher up than me, just looking out for me, just because. And I think a lot of that's just because of, I just keep going forward and taking shots.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:41:06 And so he sent me directly overseas. And I showed up on the job site, didn't know what I was doing, and I just ran with it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:17 Yeah. I love that mentality. It's an interesting question about how and where that develops. I mean, for me, I feel like there was a moment in my life where after that point, that became conditioned inside of me. It wasn't always a part of me. And I don't know how much of that has to do with ... You've talked about this in your writing, about choosing with your head versus choosing with your heart. And sometimes, many times, you need to choose with your head.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:47 But I think that when it comes to the really deep questions that align your long-term trajectory, your path, you have to go with your heart. And I think that's a really big part of it, and people can feel that. They can feel when your passions are aligned with your words. And I think that gives them a sense of confidence that you're going to be there. You're not going to fall back. You're not going to leave them hanging.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:42:08 Absolutely. I think that's absolutely right. And that's something I even think about. I'm not married, don't have kids right now, but as far as wanting to build wealth the right way and pass it onto the next generation, when that happens, I don't know how ... That's something I think about, when I have children, how am I going to help them learn the lessons that I did, but without ... I don't want to say with the desperation, but without knowing that, if I take a step back, I'm always going to have to worry about money. If I take a step back, I'm always going to have to worry about money.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:42:48 And I don't know ... that's something I think about. Because I think you're right, at some point, you have to learn it. But then I think at some point, you can't learn it, or it's very hard to learn once you get older. Because once you understand that, "Hey, if I just keep going forward, and if I'm bad at something, that's okay, I'll learn the lesson and I just try again and I get better," that's where that quiet confidence and that that professionalism comes from. Because, like you said, it becomes a way of life.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:43:15 And not just that, but becomes a very enjoyable way of life. It becomes a very rich way to live because the journey itself is the fun part. It becomes something to look forward to. Even doing this podcast with you, you called me, we had a great conversation. Hey, do you want to do this podcast on Hidden Forces, with all my heroes that are already on the website?" "Absolutely. I would love to. This is going to be crazy. Let's do it."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:43:43 Yeah. I think also what that speaks to, Radigan, is a sense of gratitude. And again, this is just my experience. When I began to really appreciate the rarity of

each opportunity ... an opportunity can come around and never come around again. And I think, for me, it took some time in my life to really appreciate that.

- Radigan Carter:** 00:44:06 Absolutely.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:07 And I think that also speaks to what we're describing here. So, we were moving on to discuss your transition to Qatar, I mean, it sounds like you kept in touch with the president of this company, or it wasn't the last time you guys interfaced. What was that experience? You spent the next four years in Qatar. We're now around the time of the great financial crisis when you leave to go to Qatar.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:32 We haven't been following dates around here, but you got into the Navy right before 9/11 ... Actually, sufficiently before 9/11, because you were in Indonesia during the Asian financial crisis, as you hinted at, because the rupiah had collapsed. You were in Iraq, you were with the Navy during the initial invasion of Iraq. You returned, you did a college degree and now you're back in Qatar and you're there for, I guess what would have been the first half of the Obama administration.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:45:01 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:45:02 What was that experience like? And tell me about that.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:45:06 So I was very well insulated from that. And you know what I mean by that is, by going to Qatar and being an engineer there, I was actually ... So, here I am, barely graduated with a civil engineering degree, I think I graduated like a 2.2 GPA. They gave me, like a mercy degree, the professors were just tired of seeing me repeat classes. And I get to Qatar, and I'm actually the highest paid kid in my class. So, everyone else has graduated into a bad job market in the US with the great financial crisis really happening, I guess that would have been later that year in '08. And here I am in Qatar being angry because the company is sending me a letter saying that they're reducing my 401k match because they're paying me so much money.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:45:57 And meanwhile, I have a villa that's completely paid for by the company. I get a car that I drive to work every day, don't even have to pay for the gas. And I don't even have to clean my own villa, there's literally a guy that cleans my villa and that's his job.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:46:15 Wild.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:46:17 I mean, for a guy like me, I mean, it was absolutely a crazy way to live. And I would say that that's something that I took to Qatar with me was, ever since that guy gave me a drink of water, picking potatoes in that field since I was 15, I've never forgotten those guys. So, those guys that are just out there holding it down and trying to do the best they can to feed their family, who maybe got Delta two seven unsuited hand for life, if I can be in a better position and help them, then that's always what I want to do.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:46:49 So even the guy that cleaned our villa, I remember ... I mean, the guy did an amazing job. I mean, he took it serious, that was his craft. And I just started giving him a tip and then he started actually cooking dinner for us because he

felt like he had to earn that tip. And I was like, "No, no, you don't understand. This is just thank you for doing the work you do." But I mean, Qatar was just a wild place to where, basically, if you wanted to work, you could really work.

Radigan Carter: 00:47:24 And I would say that's the first time where the years of just showing up and working finally paid off. Because it would be 130 degrees in the summertime. I mean, I'd be sweating through one pair of coveralls by lunch, and a pair of boots. Change coveralls and a new pair of boots and I'd go back to work the rest of the afternoon. And that was the first time too, where it really set in to me for just how rare Americans were overseas.

Radigan Carter: 00:47:55 Because on this particular job site, I was working, 250,000 men went to work every day, building these natural gas plants in Qatar. I mean, each of these natural gas plants were a mile long, it looks like a forest of overhead cranes. A quarter million of a men going to work in buses every day. And here I am, one of two Americans on this job site, with, I don't know how many nationalities, at least 30 nationalities working on this job site. And that was my real first experience of just how rare it was of what Americans believe. Because here in America, we have a common thing that holds us together that, hey, we're all equal, we're all free. And everybody should be able to pursue what they want to do to make them happy in life. And when you get on a job site like that, to where ... I remember the first time ... we didn't have to drive through these because we were in our car. But the buses went through these massive x-ray machines that they had built. And I remember asking, "Why are they driving through x-ray machines?"

Radigan Carter: 00:49:01 And the other American that was with me, who became a mentor to me and a very good friend, he says, "Well, they're driving through x-ray machines because there's companies on the sub-continent in different places that will say, 'hey, your family's live in a tent. We'll give them rice if you come work for us for free over here in Qatar building natural gas plants in subhuman conditions.' And those x-rays are looking for stowaways on those buses for companies that are using modern day slaves."

Radigan Carter: 00:49:32 And that was very real. That was my first experience with actually seeing that modern day slavery still existed, and that not everyone lived the way we did in the US. Because even in the military, you're surrounded by other Americans. And yeah, you interact with locals the more you travel, but living in an economy in the Middle East, and then surrounded by people who ... I mean, these guys were more desperate than I was. If I thought I couldn't take a step back and not have to worry about money, these guys couldn't take a step back because they would actually die. I mean, it was a whole different level. So, for me to be over there-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:16 And their families were at risk as well.

Radigan Carter: 00:50:18 Absolutely. And for their American supervisor to be over there, who is me, and here I am, thinking about the guy that gave me water when I was 15, and I'm treating them like they're my equal. And they had never had that before. They had literally never had a supervisor that asked them what they thought or, Hey, you're a pipe fitter? What do you think about us doing this, running pipe in a different way?" They had never had that in their entire life. They had never had anyone promote them just because they worked hard and they did a good job.

Radigan Carter: 00:50:51 Like meritocracy, I mean, even the idea of meritocracy that Americans believe in, man, that is such a rare thing. And so to me, that was really ... and for being one of two Americans on that entire job site amidst thousands of guys, that's where to me, I just really took it as my responsibility to, if I was going to be the only American these guys ever met in their life, then I was going to be the best of us. To where, when they thought of America, they thought, "Man, you know what, that's a place where anybody can be anything. And the one American I met, he was the best person I ever worked for."

Radigan Carter: 00:51:31 So that's what I did, and that served me very well. I went from managing one crew ... So, they even put me in charge of an electrical crew, and I knew nothing about electricity. And here I am ... I'm dealing with electricity that can kill me. And I remember talking to an electrical engineer and he was showing me these bus bars. And I said, "Hey, what's a bus bar?" And he says, "Man, I keep forgetting you're a civil engineer. Hey, don't touch that. It'll kill you." I said, "Okay, I got that. I won't touch that one."

Radigan Carter: 00:51:58 And I went from running one electrical crew ... knew nothing about electricity. I went from running one electrical crew with 10 guys to, by the time I left, they'd given me an employee of the year award for the entire division. I mean, it came with like a \$30,000 bonus, it was the biggest bonus I'd ever made at that point. And I had 10 supervisors reporting to me, and was in charge of 120 guys by the time I left that project.

Radigan Carter: 00:52:24 And I mean, I just had the time of my life over there. It was just, it was a fantastic opportunity. And I really, really enjoyed being able to help other guys go further in their career too, because that was the first time that I was in a position to where I could mentor other guys and help them out too. And I just started to really love that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:52:48 You began to explain or give an answer to a question I was going to ask, because when you, subsequently, a few years later, were back in Afghanistan, you were in charge of, I think roughly 300 private military contractors. And I was going to ask you, how did you get from where ... I was like, when are we going to get to the point where that makes sense, that you gained that experience?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:12 Now the next few years, I mean, I don't know how much you can talk about your experience. I know you've done some work that you can and cannot talk about, but walk me through that. And then walk me through to the time that you were in Afghanistan, because this is where we get to, I think, one of the more remarkable stories of your life.

Radigan Carter: 00:53:30 So when I was being an engineer in Qatar, I enjoyed the work and I was making more money than I'd ever thought I'd make my life up to that point. And I really enjoyed working with guys and trying to help guys that came from an even harder place than I did. If you don't mind, I'd like to tell this just one story in Qatar as a-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:59 Of course. Please.

Radigan Carter: 00:54:02 I remember it was Thanksgiving and all the other Americans that were in that area were frying turkeys and having a big party at one of the villas. And I couldn't go because I had to be on the job site because we were replacing a

seven ton transformer because there had been a problem with it. And so I was kind of kicking rocks about it. I didn't want to be there. And I had a heavy lift crew that was on site that I was having to go out and check on, they were running a 120 ton crane to pull this transformer out of the Bay.

Radigan Carter: 00:54:33 And I go out there to check on this crew, and this must have been in 2008, it was right after President Obama was elected. Or maybe it might've been 2009. But it was a mixed crew. Like it was run by a Thai foreman, and then he had a couple of Filipinos working for him, and then a couple of guys that were from Africa. And what I always thought was funny about these ... you get all these different nationalities together, none of them speak each other's language so they all speak English to each other.

Radigan Carter: 00:55:06 And they all give each other nicknames, and it's almost like they pick their nicknames just by how they like the sound of the words. Or sometimes they'll pick their hero and that'll be who they want to be called. So, this one guy from Africa, everyone called him Obama, because he just loved the fact that the first black president had been elected president of the United States. And he took that to mean that he could do anything too, which is awesome.

Radigan Carter: 00:55:35 And I remember going out to check on this crew and I'm kicking rocks because it's Thanksgiving. And I'm checking in with Thai foreman and they have the rig tangled and they're sending someone up there, standing on the ball of another crane. And I look up there and there's this guy doing a high wire circus act trying to untangle the rigging on this 120 ton crane, probably ... I don't know. He must have been 60 or 80 feet in the air.

Radigan Carter: 00:56:00 And I looked at the Thai foreman and I'm like, "Hey man, what's this guy doing?" And I didn't want to shout at him because I didn't want him to slip and lose his balance. But it just freaked me out, seeing what he was doing. And I looked at the Thai foreman and I said, "Hey man, what are you doing? Get that guy down. What happens if he falls?" And the Thai foreman looks confused for a second and he almost looks relieved when I just seem concerned that he'll fall. And he says, "Oh sir, don't worry. If he falls, I get another." And I'm like, "No, absolutely not. Get him down."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:31 Wow. Wow.

Radigan Carter: 00:56:31 Yeah. I mean, life was very, very cheap in some of those places. And so we get him down and get him a safety belt and everything, get that rig untangled. And I look around and I asked the Thai foreman, I said, "Hey, where's Obama, where's your other guy?" And the Thai foreman hadn't even thought to tell me. He looks at me, he's like, "Oh sir, he'll be right back. He's in the truck talking to his family. The rebels are going through his village, so he's on the phone with his wife and doesn't know if he'll ever see her again."

Radigan Carter: 00:57:01 And I'm like, "What?" And we turn around and here's this guy walking back up to the crew. He's just got tears streaming down his face, just because he literally just got off the phone with his wife who's frightened for her life somewhere in Africa. And there's nothing to say to that. There's nothing to say to that. And he comes up and the Thai foreman just gives him a hug and says, "Hey man, hopefully it'll be okay." And here's this guy who doesn't know if his family is even going to be alive in the next 15 minutes. And all he does is just go back to

work because he just says, "Hey, I got to trust that it'll be okay. And I'm just going to go back to work so I can keep providing for my family."

- Radigan Carter:** 00:57:51 And that's always stuck in my mind, I think about that every Thanksgiving. But after that, I just didn't even care about going and eating turkey. And here I was feeling sorry for myself about missing out Thanksgiving with the other Americans, and here's this guy, what's he doing when his family's in trouble? "Hey, I'm going to go back to work and just keep holding down this job."
- Radigan Carter:** 00:58:12 And so ... I'm sorry, I forgot your original question. That one kind of got off on a tangent.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:17 I think I did too. I think I did also.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:58:20 So, but after that-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:22 Wait, I want to ask you though, I'm curious ... One, I mean, I can imagine how that impacts your perspective and your sense of gratitude, for sure, that I can understand. But I wonder, again, you've seen things ... these are some of the things you've seen. We'll talk about some of the other things that have happened to you. But you've seen things that most of us living in the West, certainly those of us who haven't served in the military, don't really have any way to viscerally understand.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:51 And you've seen human beings operating in environments and under conditions that for most of us are totally alien. I wonder what does a situation like that teach you or tell you, and what do you come away from feeling and knowing about us, about human beings? About our resiliency, our capacity for suffering, our capacity for violence, our capacity for love. What have you learned about that, that you didn't know before, or that, let's say those of us who haven't been in those conditions, fail to grasp?
- Radigan Carter:** 00:59:28 I would say that it's made me a believer in Carl Jung's views about psychology. Because if anything, it's taught me that all of us as people, we're just people. We're capable of great good, and we're capable of great evil. And life isn't fair, sometimes things fall on you that it's your responsibility and it doesn't seem right.
- Radigan Carter:** 00:59:56 And I think we all go through a phase to where you either get stuck in resentment, or you're able to push through and realize that, hey, you know what, this might be rough, but I'm not going to be a rough individual. I'm not going to let all this hardship I'm going through harden me to other people. I'm not going to be cruel or calloused, that I'm still going to be trying to do the right thing.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:00:21 And I think we all got a different path, we all got different abilities. But I think that the key is just to realize that we're all in this together, and that pain isn't a competition. That there's no way to compare what I grew up doing to what maybe you went through, but we all went through similar circumstances.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:00:45 And I think you either just got to make a choice that, hey, I'm going to let this get to me and I'm going to be resentful and make it about me, or you know

what, I'm going to take it and try to use it and try to just help other people as best I can. And I think that's a choice that we all have to make.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:03 Yeah. It's an interesting perspective that you have, right? Because it's so weird that we've been going through ... I don't know if we're still going through it in America. But we've been through a number of years now where there has been this kind of inverted pyramid of values where people get more credit the more, supposedly, difficult their circumstances are.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:27 In other words, the idea is not so much around resilience and just putting your head down and getting through the difficulty, but getting credit for the fact that it's difficult and wanting somehow to be elevated as a result of it, a kind of handicap system. I'm kind of touching on the whole culture of victimization or celebrity victimhood phenomenon. I don't even know how to really express it. But does that make sense though?

Radigan Carter: 01:01:56 Yeah. The way I look at it is, hey, there's no nobility in poverty, right? And for people that grew up like that, and they worked their way out of it, they have nothing but my respect. But the people I know that that overcame where they came from, most of the ones that I look up to they're just out there moving forward. Why really talk about what was in the past, you can't change that.

Radigan Carter: 01:02:34 And if you're busy trying to get awards for what you did, then you're actually missing out on the best opportunities that are still ahead of you, is the way I look at it.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:47 It's a culture that I think teaches people to see themselves as victims, as opposed to heroes of their own story. And it's disempowering. And it's an odd turn of circumstance that we've been going through. So, I'm happy to let you comment, I just wanted to ... Go ahead, sorry.

Radigan Carter: 01:03:07 Oh, no. I was just going to say that I actually think it's almost a little bit deeper than that, to where if you make someone think they're a victim, then it's easier to control them. Whereas if you help build people up and make them stronger, then they're able to take responsibility for their own life and help others.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:27 Yeah. I think you actually have written something, I'm looking through my rundown right now to see where I have this in your rundown, where you mentioned something like this. You say, this is what they want, basically. Just given the amount of time we have ... I presume this is going to be the longest interview I've ever done, actually. Unless you have something that you want to mention between Qatar and Afghanistan, let's move to Afghanistan.

Radigan Carter: 01:03:51 Okay.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:52 And maybe you can bridge that gap for us for how you got there. But what made you go to Afghanistan, what were the conditions of you going there? Let's talk about that first, and then we'll get into a conversation about what happened there.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [01:04:04]

Demetri Kofinas: 01:04:03 Let's talk about that first and then we'll get into a conversation about what happened there.

Radigan Carter: 01:04:05 Just to kind of bridge the gap real quick is, when I was in Qatar as an engineer, just working construction, someone who had a pretty significant impact on my life, that was a mentor to me at the military college. They were actually killed in Afghanistan. He was killed by an IED. He was high enough up in his command structure that he didn't have to be out there on patrol, but he always led from the front. So, he was actually killed in an attack, because he was just out there with his guys. That made me take a look at what I was doing, I realized, I was in OIF wondering, during the initial invasion I was in the Navy. But at this point, this was, I don't know, seven years in, maybe even eight years in, and the war was still raging.

Radigan Carter: 01:05:05 Once word traveled that this mentor had been killed, because he was close to a lot of us that were there. I just wanted to get back on the team. I miss being part of a larger mission than just working and getting a paycheck. And there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with doing that. After what happened to him, I just wanted to kind of do what I could to make a little bit more of a difference. So, I applied, became a special agent and went back overseas. Why did I choose Afghanistan is that's where they needed the most guys. It was hard to fill, they needed volunteers.

Radigan Carter: 01:05:45 So, just keep stepping forward, I step forward one more time and then I got to Afghanistan and everyone was there in Kabul having a good time. Most people didn't want to miss Friday dance-off nights or be dry and not be drinking alcohol. No one wanted to go out to outlying camps where the danger was significantly higher, and you were having to deal with a lot of Afghans and locals and just being out there by yourself. Because if you got into something, no one was coming. It was you and your guys that were there that had to deal with the problem. So, when I got there, I just said, "Hey, no one wants to go, I'll go," and step forward one more time and went out there. I got out there and just did the best I could.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:36 You were in a severe attack. Your team came under attack. Your camp came under attack. I'd love for you to walk me through that story, because it's one of the more remarkable experiences that you've shared to me about your life. What happened there?

Radigan Carter: 01:06:57 Basically the Taliban just drove a large truck filled with about 5,000 pounds of explosives directly in our wall and blew... I think it utterly destroyed about nine acres of my camp. Every structure on the camp was damaged. And about out of 300 guys I had, 54 were injured in that attack. It knocked out power for miles around. It just took all the power down. So, we were out there basically firing in the dark. The damage that was done to a lot of the locals as well, was even more severe than us, because just the way the blast wave dynamics are. So, even though when the initial blast goes off, it bounces around. When an explosion happens, it actually moves a lot like almost like fluid dynamics, it just flows like water, the blast wave does.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:07:52 What does it feel like being in that explosion? And how far were you from the actual car bomb?

Radigan Carter: 01:08:00 I was maybe 75, a hundred feet from it. Maybe a little bit further than that. There were definitely guys that were a lot closer than me. I thought I was dying, so I can't imagine what those guys felt like. To put that blast into perspective, it was bigger than the Oklahoma city blast, just so people have a reference point.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:22 That's crazy.

Radigan Carter: 01:08:23 It was a massive bomb. I don't even remember hearing it. To this day, I don't ever remember hearing it. I just remember a flash, the world turned red and it felt like someone was beating me all over my body with baseball bats and then it was black. I don't know if I lost consciousness or not. I just remember... It was flash red pain, and then everything was black. I was trying to figure out where this blood was coming from on my face. And I was crawling around in glass and yelling for my buddy that was down the hall to make sure he was okay.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:09:03 Wow.

Radigan Carter: 01:09:03 Then he was, I remember I yelled from about three times. It's pitch black, smoke and everything. And about that time, the sound started to come back. I could hear guys yelling for help around me and other guys in pain, because they'd taken shrapnel or whatever the case was, secondary. I remember my buddy that was down the hall, about the third time I'm hollering for him and I'm trying to find my rifle in the pitch black, because it had blown the wall out. So, I'm trying to find my fighting kit and my rifle so I can go to work. And my buddy finally answers about the third time, he's like, hang on, man. I'm just trying to put my pants on.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:09:44 [Laughter] Jesus. Priorities.

Radigan Carter: 01:09:44 I was like, hey, are you good? And he says, "yeah, I'm good." All right. I was like, Hey, you good? He's like, yeah, I'm good. I said, "all right, Hey, I'm going outside to get to work." And he says, "okay, I'll be out there in a minute." Then we just started solving problems, but I just remember being relieved. I remember just laying there and trying to breathe again and just trying to laugh at the same time, even in the middle of all that.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:10:11 Again, there are so many things that are not related to your experience, your direct experience overseas that I want to ask you about, that are so exciting and interesting to me, geopolitical things, especially. But I don't want to rush through this part, because of all the things that you've talked to me about, this is the story that whose repercussions I've felt were the most consequential. Not just for your own life, but also in terms of... I think for someone listening, who wants to know what... I guess, how would I even describe it. The way that you dealt with this tragedy, I thought, conveyed a lot about your character. And also I think how you dealt with the aftereffects on yourself, because this experience did not leave you unscarred. So, I'd like to really understand a bit... First of all, your buddy said he went out to go to work. You were there for the next six months, what happened? What were the after effects of that bombing? And what did you feel that your responsibilities were and how did you go about trying to fulfill them?

Radigan Carter: 01:11:17 All right. Initially, as soon as it happened, it was... We take drilling and skills very seriously. This is something I try to talk about in my writing as far as, when you

start looking at what the risks are of what you're doing, you need to look out ahead of time at different possibilities. Because the way I think about brains and the way that we were taught about how our brains function under stress is, if you give your brain a pattern to follow, it's just going to follow that pattern. So, we drilled so hard out of that camp, that even when that happened, and by far the worst attack I've ever been through, it just felt normal. Our brains had a pattern of follow, and so even though, the world had kind of been blown apart, we just knew what we needed to do.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:12:08 Help me understand that, I don't fully follow that it felt normal. What do you mean it felt normal? Clearly it wasn't normal, so how do you square that?

Radigan Carter: 01:12:18 It absolutely wasn't normal, but as far as drilling under stress... When you're overseas, you drill constantly. So, once or twice a week, you're putting the teams through drills, reaction drills, if an attack happens this is what we need to do. And to me, a lot of that is really just risk management. It's getting everybody in the groove. So, when something goes wrong, you know what you're doing and you already know what your buddy's supposed to be doing. The most important thing for us was always getting that next person to where they could start their first minute. And what I mean by that is, as soon as something went bad like what happened, it was up to me to get going as fast as I could to where we all did the same thing. And everyone knew-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:05 I see.

Radigan Carter: 01:13:05 ... exactly what they needed to do. We would even take it so far as to... If we were doing drills out there, we use blanks, we use flash bangs. We really upped up the stress. We did sprints, we did everything. We upped up the stress to where, to our brain, that drill felt as real as a real attack did. That when a real attack happened and all of a sudden our heart rate's 180, we can't feel our face and we just want to throw up, it still feels normal. Our brains aren't panicked. It's like, okay, I know exactly what I need to do next.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:38 Exactly.

Radigan Carter: 01:13:39 And your brain is kind of just going through a checklist. Am I explaining that okay?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:45 It absolutely does. What did you proceed to do? And what did you discover before you?

Radigan Carter: 01:13:51 The first thing we had to do was just get security set, just to make sure that they weren't going to use that blast to actually put attackers or suicide vests to hit us with those. Because if they got inside our perimeter, then our job got 10 times harder trying to actually then try to fight inside our camp. So, we set security and even that was kind of a funny story with... So, we set security and here we are just in the breach. There was so much rubble that my gun trucks couldn't get through the rebels. The teams had to dismount from their gun trucks.

Radigan Carter: 01:14:33 We're kind of on this embankment and I'm looking at my team leader, like half his face is covered in blood from a cutout underneath his helmet to where he looks like the last of the Mohicans. I'm looking at him in the dark, and I said, "Hey man, are you okay?" And he says, "Oh yes." And he's just very dry. He is a

very dry guy. He just says, "Oh yes, sir. I'm fine. My air conditioner flew off the wall and hit me in the face, but I'm fine now." And I'm like, okay. His machine gunner hits the berm next to me and he starts loading up the bipod, because...

- Radigan Carter:** 01:15:07 We actually timed all this to where we would all watch attacks happening around us and go back and actually watch that stuff like game film. We would time from the time of a blast to when the attackers would come in, we'd have that time down. We'd know how many seconds we had to be to beat that. When we drilled, we would actually take guys out and say... If I had a team that was responding, I'd all of a sudden told the team leader, "okay, Hey, you're dead. You didn't survive the initial blast." And I would expect the next guy to step up and take charge. So, that way... Because you never knew what was going to happen, so you had to plan to be not there when it did happen.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:15:48 To be clear, you were functioning on the assumption that the initial blast was simply the opening salvo in a larger attack.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:15:56 Absolutely. You had to assume that it was always going to get worse, it was the assumption. The first thing I did after I got out of my shoe and was trying to understand exactly how bad it was, was I actually called the airwing to let them know to start spinning birds that we'd been hit. And I didn't know how bad it was yet, but I knew I would need medevac and a gunship overhead to help me out. And that was all about them starting their first minute. I started my response and then the first thing I did was I called the airwing, so they knew that they needed to start spending birds to where they could come get my guys.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:16:35 Then my next thing after that was setting security. You always assume it's going to get worse, that it's not over and you're just trying to solve problems as you go. We set security and then we started receiving small arms fire. You can see the muzzle flashes AK, so we knew guys were out there and it's all pitch black. So, all you're seeing is the muzzle flashes AK and incoming rounds. The machine gunner that's next to me, he's loading the bipod and we actually set a... You always want to have offset on your machine guns of at least about 90 degrees. So, we set a L style ambush. I pushed a gun truck down to the left to where they could fire parallel with where the breach was.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:17:20 Then we were perpendicular to the breach. So, that way, as soon as attackers came in, we would actually catch them in a crossfire and just basically keep shooting until the threat was stopped. We started seeing small arms fire coming in through the breach. I knew the birds were inbound. All of a sudden, one of my guys next to me starts yelling. The gunfire stops and all of a sudden another guy yells back in the dark. What it turned out was that the camp across the street from us, their wall had been blown out too. They were shooting at us, moving in the dark, thinking that we were attackers getting ready to come in on them. And it was actually friendly fire.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:18:08 Wow.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:18:10 We did a quick link up on... They started shooting at us, We did a verbal link up and it was the thing where we basically just did a quick verbal that, Hey, we're not going to fire directly to you guys since you guys' wall is down. We'll just fire perpendicular as well if there are attackers. And it made the situation much more complex, because then all of a sudden you couldn't actually engage them

head on. Because then you would actually be shooting friendlies across the street. But luckily that bomb was so big that they didn't even follow it up with a follow on attack. Personally, I think that there was a follow on attack and I think that bomb was so big it actually killed the follow on attackers. I think they actually got caught in the blast themselves. But after security was set, then it was medical.

Radigan Carter: 01:18:56 Then I had to get accountability for everybody. I left the team leader in charge there at the breach, I started working my way back through camp trying not to impale myself on all the rebar and concrete that was blown all over the place. It took me a second to realize where I was in the camp, because everything had been blown up. Nothing looked the same. At first I realized that I was walking on shoes that my guys had lived in, and I was just walking on rubble. That was all that was left of those shoes. I immediately thought that I had lost probably somewhere between 50 to 100 guys that night, and there was nothing I could do for them. So, I just had to get accountability. The thing with that is, is that when you start getting accountability in that situation, you don't want to leave anybody behind.

Radigan Carter: 01:19:46 In a stressful situation, guys can do a miscount, things can happen. You can double count guys. I just wanted to make sure that count was correct. So, that way, if I was missing somebody... I didn't want to leave anybody buried in that rubble. We started getting the count going. I went over to the CCP to see how it was with the casualties. Casualties were streaming in by that point, guys were carrying their buddies in. We started getting the count going. And the count came back that we had everybody. By looking at the damage, I just thought there was no way that everybody survived that blast, absolutely no way. So, I made him run the count three times, and on the third time when they came back and they said, "Hey, sir, we got everybody. Everybody's out of the rubble." I don't know how to explain that, other than it was literally just the hand of God. There's no other way to explain... To this day, I have no idea why I didn't lose any man that night. There were a couple that were seriously injured, and luckily we had done a live air medevac drill with the airwing seven days before, running almost the exact same scenario. Those guys on those birds, they were in there within, I want to say 15 minutes. Those guys were dusting down on the LZ within 15 minutes, coming out, helping us and got the casualties loaded up. They were back off and taking those guys to higher level of care.

Radigan Carter: 01:21:17 Those two guys that were urgent surgical, they made it. All the guys made it. My favorite story that night was, there was this one guy, he took a piece of shrapnel punched through the wall of his CHU and stabbed in his left chest. He had a collapsing lung and a piece of shrapnel sticking out of his chest. He can't get out through his door, because the door CHU been worked from the blast. So, He actually crawls out through a seam in his roof and calls out and his best buddies yelling for help next to him. So, he goes next door, kicks down that door with a piece of shrapnel still in his chest and his lung collapsing. He had tension pneumothorax is what it was and pulls that guy out, carries into the CCP, which was probably. That was probably about at least a hundred feet, maybe further than that carry for him.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:22:07 All of this with a collapsed lung.

Radigan Carter: 01:22:09 Carries that guy to the CCP, and he makes three trips back into the rubble, pulling guys out with a piece of shrapnel sticking out of his chest. Until finally on, I think on his fourth trip, he took four guys ,into that CCP on his fourth trip back. He can't breathe, because it's been about a half hour. It takes about a half hour for your lung to really collapse. And he can't breathe and he just starts sliding down the wall. He tells the doc, he says, "Hey doc, I'm sorry. I just can't make another trip." And the doc looks at him, and he'd actually put his... He'd gotten a piece of shrapnel in his chest and then he'd actually put his fighting kit over it, so the doc couldn't even see that he had a piece of shrapnel in his chest.

Radigan Carter: 01:22:45 He was just making trips back and forth to pull guys out. Doc comes over, takes his kid off and sees this piece of shrapnel sticking out of his chest. And he says, "Hey man, you've done enough. It's okay, we'll get you on a bird. And stabbed him with a needle decompression to where he can breathe again. As soon as the guy can breathe again, it gets that lung re-inflated.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:23:03 He must've...he wanted to go right back.

Radigan Carter: 01:23:04 He tries to get up and actually go back to work, and doc is like no, major, you're getting on another bird. Just sit there, you've done enough tonight. But that's probably my favorite story about that guy. And there was a lot of guys like that. Everybody there I was with, they just did a phenomenal job. They did a phenomenal job and that's probably been a highlight of my life, just being out there with those guys.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:23:30 The highlight of your life was serving with those people. What do you think those situations, a situation like that brings out in people? What was it that you were responding to that made that a story that you remember? What was it about his commitment to going back, to rescuing people to spite his own circumstance?

Radigan Carter: 01:23:50 Just the heart that he had. He didn't quit, he just kept going. That's what sticks out in my mind.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:24:03 This obviously wasn't the end of this part of the story, you were in Afghanistan for another six months, basically from this attack.

Radigan Carter: 01:24:10 Correct.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:24:10 What else had to happen while you were there? And what were the knock-on consequences to surrounding areas and some of the people who were actually locals in the area?

Radigan Carter: 01:24:24 What I told other guys that were either coming out to relieve me or were looking at going and doing the job that I was doing is, I told them that actually winning the fight is probably the easiest part about this job. Because after security was set, your guys evacuated and you're dealing with that. You've got to deal with all the aftermath of this. I don't mean just aftermath. You have guys that are going to be struggling with what happened. You got to do TBI screenings. We had dead attackers that were out on the street that we had to deal with. The locals that... You're in a four to five position there, but all the locals there, they had their windows blown out for hundreds of yards around us.

Radigan Carter: 01:25:15 Kids were killed. Kids were blinded from the glass. And the locals are justifiably angry that, Hey, we... This was just a regular weekday night and all of a sudden now my kid's dead or my kid is permanently blinded for life. We're having to use the money that we had saved to feed our family through the winter, to put plastic up over the windows because the Americans were here. That was very real. That was very hard to deal with, because justifiably so. That was a lot of pain for those people. And what the Taliban would do is, they would actually target us, hit us with an attack. And then they would use that anger, justifiable anger by the locals for being caught in the middle.

Radigan Carter: 01:26:08 They would actually come in there and give micro loans to the community to try to help them get back on their feet and show them how they were the good guys, because the US government doesn't help them. That was the biggest thing that I had to really.... So, I had to focus on that in the coming months. Then I also had to actually go through the entire process of upgrading security, rebuilding services at the camp and dealing with DC and headquarters, as far as getting all the funding approved and getting vendors vetted and just getting everything put back to normal.

Radigan Carter: 01:26:48 I just worked hundred hour plus weeks, just as long as I had to get everything on track. And I think I did that for about six months. I just did that. I just worked as hard as I could to get everything going. Then things don't stop either. So, you still have other attacks happening, car bombs going off nearby, small arms fire. Just everyday stuff. So, you're dealing with probably one of the worst days of people's lives and the consequences of it. But then you're still having to deal with all the chaos that surrounds you on a daily basis as well.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:27:27 Besides the ongoing levels of stress that I imagine you must have been dealing with as a result of the fact that you are operating in an environment of constant uncertainty around your own security. On top of the fact that you were dealing with the fallout from this awful attack. What type of symptoms were you dealing with? Were you aware at this time that you had been impacted health-wise, as a result of this attack?

Radigan Carter: 01:27:52 Yeah. I knew ahead of TBI. There were, I would say the-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:27:56 TBI, what's that?

Radigan Carter: 01:27:59 Traumatic brain injury. Several of us, I would say probably a couple dozen all had TBIs from that event. Because that blast was just so large. So, probably for the first few days, maybe the first week after the blast, there'd be several times where things would just kind of start going white. And I'd have a high pitch noise in my ears and I'd have to stop what I was doing to just hold onto something just so I won't pass out. Then you know it would pass and I could go back to work. Then once that happened, once that cleared up after maybe about a week or two, that's when I started noticing that my short-term memory wasn't what it was.

Radigan Carter: 01:28:47 I'd be forgetting words or there would be something I knew I wanted to say or something I knew I remembered. And it was like I could put my hand on the box of the information I needed in my mind, but I just couldn't open that box. And it probably sounds weird, but in a way it's actually pretty terrified when you start having that happen to you. The I had really bad light sensitivity too. I started

getting these just splitting headaches from any kind of light. I had to start wearing a hat really low. And if I went outside, I had to have sunglasses on. I couldn't take direct sunlight anymore. Or even for us in lights, I started to turn the lights off in my office. Even my website, it has a black screen on it and a white text. Just that way I can type on it and I don't get headaches. Because if I stare at a white screen, I'll still get headaches. In a way, when that starts happening, it takes a while to realize that that's probably just going to be your new normal. And you need to find a way to adapt to it and just keep going. I was dealing with that personally. And my thing that was very important to me was, if I ever got bad enough to where I thought I was a danger in that job, and putting men's lives at risk, that I was going to tap in and say, "I needed to go get help."

- Radigan Carter:** 01:30:14 But while I was there, I just didn't want to leave my guys. I just wanted to keep working as hard as I could, because... When something like that happens, it's natural for everybody to be angry. And I didn't want my guys that were there at the camp, taken out that anger at what had happened to us against just everyday people that were living around us. I didn't want the 25,000 Afghans that lived around us to then start providing cover for the enemies. So, they could attack us even more because of resentment that built up. Because of what happened to them when they were just caught in the middle. It was something that I...
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:30:55 Emotional control. You had to exercise an enormous amount of emotional control.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:31:00 Absolutely, right. So, what I did there was... Something I noticed that... Americans, we're very efficient. And I think a lot of that's because of the environment we operate in, where we have the first... The first world is, we're used to the laws working, when we turn on the tap, we have clean drinking water. Everything's very efficient in the first world. We even take that into our meetings. It's like, Hey, here's your bottle of Aquafina water, and we're going to hit these bullet points and have a nice 15 to 20 minutes. Then we're out and everyone's going about their day. Well, I noticed that we did that in Afghanistan and you can't do that with... There's like 10 village elders that represented the 25,000 Afghans that lived around my camp.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:31:50 You can't do that with these guys who live in a decentralized world, because for them, the only thing that matters is relationships. Because there isn't a court out there that's going to hear their grievance. They have to be able to trust the person that they're working with. Honor is a cornerstone of what makes a decentralized society work. So, to them, they were being... And I noticed that we only called them in the camp when we had a problem. My predecessor, what he would do is he'd call these 10 village elders into camp, tell them what the problem was. Hey, we're the United States of America. You need to fix this. We don't like what's happening here. Here's your bottle of Aquafina water. We hit all the bullet points and okay, 20 minutes later, thanks guys, see you later. And --
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:32:40 There was no relationship building.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:32:44 Zero, or it's just a very American way of doing things, because we automatically think that everyone believes in win-win and can see things from our point of view and is going to automatically buy into what we're trying to do. What I did

after that blast is, I started having a weekly meeting with these 10 village elders. And the first time I did it, it was just silence. They were like, Hey, we've seen 15 of you before you, you've been here for 15 years and we're just going to wait you out. We know you really don't care about us. And it was really awkward that first time. What was funny though was, the first time they came into the office and I made sandwiches and had sandwiches cut up into little triangles with the crust off. I even had a couple guys there to serve them tea and coffee from the mess hall, because that was a big thing.

- Radigan Carter:** 01:33:42 These guys fought the Soviets, they're grey-beard elders. They don't get their own coffee. There's someone else that gets their coffee for them. And just showing them that level of respect that I knew that they had. I knew the level of standing they had in their community and the level of trust their community had in them was extremely important. You know what I mean. People like to be treated the way that they think that they're viewed. So, that first meeting, I had oranges-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:34:11 Everyone, for sure, wants to be treated with respect.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:34:13 Everyone. It's just a human thing. We all like that. So, I had oranges and Kit-Kat bars. I made the excuse of, Hey guys, can you please take this with you? I can't keep this in my office. I'm trying to go to the gym, they keep bringing me candy. Do you mind taking these with you, home to your kids? You'd be doing me a huge favor. They were never going to ask, but... And the kids loved it. The first time I did that, it was awkward silence except for the one senior village elder. And the only thing he said at the beginning of the meeting through the interpreter, which all the other elders laughed at was, "finally an American that's not a heathen that understands basic hospitality."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:34:57 Wow.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:34:58 That's how he opened up that first meeting.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:35:00 That is incredible.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:35:01 Finally an American that understands basic hospitality.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:35:04 Wow. Talk about a miscommunication. For so many years that these individuals were having-
- Radigan Carter:** 01:35:12 For 15 years.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:35:14 Wow. Because your predecessors, and in general, we, as Americans and occupiers, don't... It's generally true of Americans abroad, but this presumption that somehow, because we check certain boxes that we can all get on the same page.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:35:31 Correct.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:35:32 But in fact, values matter. Culture matters.
- Radigan Carter:** 01:35:37 Absolutely. So, probably for the first month, those guys didn't ask me for anything. And they actually asked me when... The only thing they asked me in

that first meeting was, "why did you call us in here?" And I said, "gentlemen, what I would like to do is just have a meeting once a week, and we can talk about whatever you want to talk about. I don't really have an agenda for this meeting. This is just an open forum-"

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:36:04]

Radigan Carter: 01:36:03 ...An agenda for this meeting. This is just an open forum for us to discuss anything you would like to talk about. And so that was in January, and I actually asked him, I said, "So when does the snow usually melt for your... And you get the snow melt in the irrigation ditches to start watering crops in the spring." And that blew their mind. They didn't realize that an American actually knew about agriculture. And so since I grew up out West just working on farms, we actually started talking about farming, and probably the first thing I did where they actually believed that I was actually trying to do what I said was a very old irrigation ditch had been blown to rubble in that blast when the Taliban hit us and they had no way to rebuild this irrigation ditch. This irrigation ditch was probably 200 years old. It was laid by hand out of rock.

Radigan Carter: 01:36:59 And so I included that irrigation ditch in my scope of work to rebuild when I rebuilt the camp. And I rebuilt that irrigation ditch for them. And I had that irrigation ditch redone before the snow melt started to run off to where the farmers around my camp needed the water to start watering crops in the spring. And it didn't matter if they liked Americans or they didn't like Americans. It was just finding something that they needed and doing it for them because it was the right thing to do. And what that meeting grew into, it's kind of interesting. So, that started out with just ten village elders and for probably about the first month, nothing really came of it. They didn't trust me. They didn't really... It was just awkward small talk between an interpreter. And as soon as that irrigation ditch got done, then it was kind of, "Hey, we really appreciated that."

Radigan Carter: 01:37:52 And so after that, then it was this one elder, he came in one meeting and he started complaining that his wife was just given the third degree because the helicopters that were coming into my camp. Because where we were, it was actually dangerous enough to where it was safer to fly in and out than actually run ground missions. So, most everything moved by air force. And this one village elder was saying that he was getting the third degree from his wife every night because our helos when they were coming in over the village, they were blowing her laundry off the line and blowing it into the dirt and basically undoing her whole day of house housework. And I guess this had been going on for 15 years. This had just been... I couldn't imagine living this way. But they had just been dealing with this, this helo path for 15 years like this. And I told him, I said, "Hey, let me get the air wing guys out, and I'll see if I can change the flight path to where we can come in over the fields instead. If it works for them, let me try to see if I can do that." You would have thought I had made the sun rise in the West when I had that helo flight path changed. That changed the whole fabric of the relationship with those guys.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:39:03 Wow. Wow.

Radigan Carter: 01:39:05 So as soon as I had that flight path changed and their wives were happy, anything I needed, I could just call the lead elder and he would just answer the

phone and say, "What can I do for you?" And that meeting, that weekly meeting, actually turned into be almost a strategic level meeting that I was having just out there. And I started getting calls from Kabul like, "Hey, who are you?" And I'd just say, "Hey, I'm Radigan. I'm out here in charge of this camp." And they'd be like, "Hey, why is, why is the commander of all police forces in Kabul talking about you and saying that you have a very good idea out there and that we should do it here in the Capitol?" And I'd just be like, "Hey sir, I'm sorry. I have no idea." And they'd be like, "Whatever you're doing out there, stop it."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:39:51

What?

Radigan Carter: 01:39:51

"You're interfering with..." Yeah. Because by that point, that meeting had grown from ten village elders to where they started bringing the police district commander with them to the meeting. So, he'd come over and have a cup of tea and eat some sandwiches and take an orange home to his kid. And then the next... He liked that meeting enough that he brought his buddy who they went to the military academy together and he happened to be the Afghan commander of forces over the airport. And then he'd show up at the meeting. And pretty soon I just had... I had 10 or 15 guys sitting my office, drinking tea and eating sandwiches with the crust cut off every Monday morning. And I didn't really have an agenda. It was just us talking about whatever came up. And if there was a problem, we just kind of worked it out before it became a problem.

Radigan Carter: 01:40:36

And they liked it because it kept... The main problem that I would say we all had there was the age gap of young men that were being radicalized. Because the main problem that we all had was there was nothing for young men to do between graduating high school and then where they could really get a good job working at a military base, which was 23. So, there was a five-year window there where the local economy was horrible. And that's where the Taliban would actually recruit most of those guys was in that five-year window. And so for me to be having that kind of a meeting with these guys where we just talked about things of what we could do to just try to make things better for the community, in a lot of ways that weekly meeting did more for our safety out there, then all of our guns did.

Radigan Carter: 01:41:36

And I think in a way that's where I started being told "Hey, are you going native out there? What are you doing? Why are you eating sandwiches with the crusts off with these guys? And why am I hearing about you here in Kabul? Why is he saying that you have a good idea and that I should call you to ask you about it?" Because the level of trust I had... After several months of that, the police commander just stopped showing up to the meeting. And so anything that I needed to do out there in my area, I would literally just call the police commander. I had his number in my Nokia phone and we'd just talk direct. I'd call him up and he'd answer the phone, and he'd be like, "Habibi. Tell me." And I'd say, "Hey, I talked with the elders and we kind of want to do this." And he says, "Hey, if you've already worked it out with the elders, that's fine. I don't need to be there. Just, yeah, roll with it. That's okay. Thank you for telling me."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:42:28

Wow.

Radigan Carter: 01:42:29

And that's what we'd do. And that was purely just based off of developing a relationship and trying to help them. And I would say the... Because they didn't

even like Americans. I'd sit there and I'd listen to them tell me about how America had funded the Taliban. And that wasn't really my place. I didn't really think that that was important. That wasn't important to the mission of what I was trying to do. We didn't have to agree about things like that. I just needed them to trust me that I was never going to break my word to them and that I would always tell them the truth and that I was an honorable man. That's the only thing. That's the only thing I needed. And that's the only thing I needed to in return.

Radigan Carter: 01:43:12 And that paid huge dividends actually, because I took it very, very seriously that anytime... Because we all had our stamp. So, anytime we came to agreement, we'd all have a stamp that we had to stamp the document. That way it would be distributed among the village. And the village knew it was an official agreement. And anytime I stamped a document and said I was going to do something, I made sure that that's exactly what we did to where that entire community knew that they could depend on... Maybe not... They didn't like the strategy. They may not like policy. That wasn't really the case, but there was one American there that they knew would never lie to them.

Radigan Carter: 01:43:53 And I think that's... When I saw the benefits of that, when I saw how the community responded to that, to me, that was almost kind of like unlocking the next level of realizing that no matter where you are in the world, everyone is just dying of thirst for just someone to tell them the truth. It doesn't even matter if they don't like them. It doesn't even matter if they like the truth. They just want it. They just want to know that you're not lying to them.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:44:22 There are two things that I thought of while you were telling the story. One of them had to do with how our effort in both Iraq and Afghanistan would have gone if everyone had either been trained or simply naturally prone to thinking the way that you did around this issue. I'm curious what you think about that. And then the other one was reflecting on something you said at the very beginning of this recording, when we were talking about cryptocurrency and why the appeal among people in the military. And you mentioned something having to do with community.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:45:06 And, I wonder, my second question is how much do you think... I have this sense, this sense that human beings are meant to live in a specific way. And that in certain things we've strayed far from that. And that this is a sort of affliction. This is a sort of... It's a drag on our society. It's causing us problems that we maybe can't even begin to wrap our arms around simply because we don't communicate. We don't have a community. And because we rely on these increasingly complex things like contracts to coordinate behavior, instead of simply relying on relationships because of how we've scaled society. I wonder what you think about both of those.

Radigan Carter: 01:45:56 So I'll take the last thing you said first is I tend to think of myself... You can call that a little bit of stoicism or traditionalism, but that's how I try to live my life. And a lot of that is based on my experience overseas and specifically because I like that kind of trust and relationship and community that that builds. I don't want to know that, "Hey, we have a signed contract and if things go completely wrong and we hate each other, and we're saying mean things about each other on social media that I can take you to court and win." There's no winner there. I still lose.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:46:39 Yeah.

Radigan Carter: 01:46:40 I want to be dealing with someone who is honorable that I know is going to move heaven and earth to do exactly what they said they would do. I want to be dealing with someone who doesn't tell me what I think I want to know. That tells me the truth that they know it and what they need. Because the other thing with those elders that was incredibly important is there was a lot of times... We had a lot of hard conversations because there was a lot of things that I would say that they didn't like. And I would tell them, I said, "Gentlemen, I have to tell you the truth, even though you don't like hearing it. Because until we can both say the truth in this room, neither one of us is going to know what's important to the other one. And we won't be able to have a lasting agreement."

Radigan Carter: 01:47:25 And, to me, that is absolutely critical. You have to be able to tell the truth and deal with someone who's honorable because if you don't, you're feeling yourself around in a dark room and there's nothing concrete. You think you know what's important for the other person in the agreement, but you're not really sure because are they telling me the truth? I just don't know. So, I think you're absolutely right on, on that is something that specifically when I finally had enough after Africa and came back, that has probably been the hardest thing to adapt to is all of a sudden I'm back in an environment where I'm not really sure if what someone's telling me is real or are they just telling me what I want to hear.

Radigan Carter: 01:48:15 And in a way I kind of miss living by the old ways like that. Because to me that that is actually a very real way to live in the everyday that means something to me. So, even what I try to do now with building long-term wealth and living well, that part about living well, to me, that is doing the right thing every day and trying to be someone that other people want to deal with that they can depend on. And I think that's just a very rich way to live.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:48:51 Agreed. And I think that we've increasingly lost that. I've mentioned this once before on a different podcast. I don't remember which one it was. That out of college, I worked briefly for a man who had fought in the Korean War. He was of that generation. He built a business, small business, successful small business, family business. And he was one of those my word is my bond handshake kind of guy with a very firm handshake. And if he said that he was going to do something, he did it. There was no getting around it. It didn't matter what he was legally obligated to do.

Radigan Carter: 01:49:29 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:49:30 And I think there's something lost in how we manage our relationships today. I remember growing up my grandfather... This is not a great translation because it was in Greek, but he would always say it was a common expression that better to lose... And he would say... My grandparents' generation was very much into saying this, but he would always say, "Better to lose your sight, to lose your vision than to lose your name," is effectively rather than to have your name besmirched. Because your reputation was more important than your vision. Even if you were blind and you had a good reputation, you could feed yourself. But if your reputation was damaged, nothing else really mattered because people couldn't trust you.

Radigan Carter: 01:50:11 100 percent. And that's really the important thing is... I guess that's part of why I started writing as well is I just wanted to start writing and put that out on the internet that, "Hey, you know what? The old ways aren't lost. Be an honorable person. Do the right thing." Those shouldn't be punchlines in a modern society.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:50:31 No. And this also speaks of something else, Radigan, which is that I do think that we elevate in many ways the wrong people. We worship the wrong people in our society. And it's not about them. I'm not trying to make it about any one particular person. It's about the values that that person carries with them. And I don't quite understand it to be perfectly honest. The people whose stories I like to read about or who I admire are people who have certain values, certain characteristics around courage, honor, integrity, kindness. And I don't know how much this has changed. You know what I mean? Obviously our grandparents' generation would have... I can't even imagine. I don't know if you ever think about this.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:51:20 I wonder sometimes what my grandparents would think, my grandfather in particular, would think if he were alive today to see the world we live in. I genuinely think that he wouldn't be able to understand it. I don't know if he could even accept it as a reality. Even I have a hard time accepting certain things as a reality. I know this is a little bit off topic in a way, the recent thing that happened with GameStop with WallStreetBets crowd that bid it up using call options and basically forced the hedge fund that was shorted to reach for a lifeline, for a credit line. Because you had a bunch of people just raiding the stock to make it go up based entirely on the fact that it was perceived to be fun to do so. Yeah, the world changes over our lifetimes. And one of the challenges that I've had is to try and find a place to belong in it. And I think that's why I reached out to you, man, to be quite honest.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:52:18 And it's what really makes this podcast so valuable for me on a spiritual level is that I get to interact with my tribe. I find people who share something important with me who... What was that movie, The Road? Have you seen that movie, The Road?

Radigan Carter: 01:52:36 No, I haven't.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:52:36 Oh, man, it's this...

Radigan Carter: 01:52:39 Do I need to watch that?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:52:40 Yeah, look, it's tough. It's not a...

Radigan Carter: 01:52:41 Let me write that down.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:52:42 Yeah. It's The Road. I can share it with you afterwards. It's a tough movie to watch, you know what I mean? But it's basically a post-apocalyptic world and it's mainly a father and his son.

Radigan Carter: 01:52:52 Okay.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:52:53 And I won't give away the movie, but towards the end, the son encounters a certain group of people. And I think he had asked them, "Do you have the light with you or do you have the light in..." Just beautiful. His father taught him to

look for the people that carried the light, that had the light in them. Sometimes the world can feel very dark. There are a lot of dark things that happen in the world. And there's certain types of people who they have a light. They carry the light in them. And that's how I feel about you. Reading your writing, I see that. You've been through so many difficult experiences, but yet you have that light. You haven't allowed it to... And it's not a knock against people that become depressed or fall down.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:53:37 In a sense, that's... We all... I mean, I've certainly dealt with depression. I've dealt with sadness, with heartbreak, with distress, with suffering. Ultimately these have proven to be transient emotional states that I've worked through. But even if these are states that bring you down over a very long period of time or for your whole life, I don't mean in any way to be critical about it. And it isn't so much about that. It's just more that there's something beautiful. And if you can hold onto it, if you can hold it tight to you, I feel like you can always find your way. And not to let the darkness around you become you, which I think happens a lot. I don't want to talk too much here. And we've already hit the two hour mark. We're not even done with your experience getting medevacked out and going back to DC.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:54:27 I want to just touch on that. Touch on it is maybe the wrong word, but I want to make sure we cover that because I think it's such an important part of your biography. And then we can begin what I guess will be the second half of our conversation, dealing with your perspective on so many of the subjects that we cover on this podcast, but primarily geopolitics, financial markets, and crypto. So, how did this end? So, you were in Afghanistan I said for six months after this attack. When did you get medevacked out? What were the circumstances of that, and what was the significance of it?

Radigan Carter: 01:55:06 So I got medevacked out about six months after the attack once everything was really settled down at the camp, things were running smoothly with the village elders and the locals. And basically, I just thought it was at a point where I could take a step back. And maybe I had too much ownership of it. I really, I kind of look back on that time now and I think maybe is it possible that I stayed too long or I was just too emotionally invested in it? I don't know. I couldn't have been any other way with it. I don't think I could have been any other way and it turned out the way it did. But I did finally tell my leadership that, "Hey, I need to get checked out. I want to go see what I'm dealing with."

Radigan Carter: 01:55:54 And I guess the reason I want to talk about this is the tenor of that relationship from the work I was doing out there from how they trusted me. And it was nothing but pats on the backs and atta boys. They gave me a heroism award for what my team and I did out there. Nothing but congratulations at the congressional hearing they had on it. And it was very much my guys were the ones that did all the hard work out there. But it was an immediate shift from, "Hey, you're doing phenomenal work out there. Please keep it up," to being treated like a leper for just saying that I had a brain injury and I wanted to go take care of myself for a second. And so they immediately kicked me out of the country, put me on a plane, took my med clearance from me. And your med clearance is very important because if you lose that, then you basically can't... You don't have a career overseas anymore in those places.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:57:01 What does a medical clearance mean? It means that you were temporarily discharged because of a medical issue and so you can return?

Radigan Carter: 01:57:08 No, I was still in the organization, but basically it just meant I couldn't go to work. So, until they clear you medically, you can't go back to work. And the organization I worked for, what they did was they said, "Oh, well, you stayed in Afghanistan for six months. And you only had so many weeks to say that you were injured on the job." They treated me being injured in a Taliban attack in Afghanistan...

Demetri Kofinas: 01:57:34 They doubted your story?

Radigan Carter: 01:57:36 No, they treated it like I fell down a flight of stairs. So, when I said, "Hey, I was, I was injured in a Taliban attack and it's been six months, but I'm having symptoms and I want to get it checked out," they said, "Hey, that's fine. We're going to pull your medical clearance. Thank you for telling us. And all the expenses are on your own dime and you can try to be reimbursed by the government. But we're not paying for it because you waited too long to come out of the fight."

Radigan Carter: 01:58:02 And so I ended up sitting on the end of a bed in a Marriott in D.C. listening to the air conditioner, going and not knowing if I was ever going to be able to go back overseas to work again with my med clearance pulled. And having to burn my own sick leave for that medevac. Not having anyone tell me what the process was, not being able to talk to anyone. It was all by email. And no one from my leadership checked on me. It literally felt like after years of service and sacrifice, it felt like, "Hey, he's a broken toy now. Just put him on the Island of Misfit Toys and let's get on with the mission."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:58:43 Is that what it felt like for you like that you were a broken toy?

Radigan Carter: 01:58:47 Absolutely. Absolutely. That was a very harsh reality. Because, we talked about this before, but it wasn't just the fact that I was trying to adapt to a new normal with a brain injury. It was the fact that I was scared I had lost my profession and that no one even cared enough to even call and check on me to see if I got there okay. Thank God I had a really good friend that lived there in D.C. And she was aware of what had happened and called me and said, "Hey, what are you doing?" And I said, "I'm sitting here in a Marriott, having to pay for this every day by myself." And she says, "Hey, just come stay with me. I'm not going to leave you there alone by yourself."

Radigan Carter: 01:59:40 And she let me sleep on her couch. I slept on her couch for six weeks trying to get my medical clearance back. Having to go to a neurologist and all kinds of doctor's appointments. And every time a doctor cleared me, I had to pay the medical bill for it and get an MRI. I had to pay all that out of pocket. And every time I got cleared...

Demetri Kofinas: 02:00:01 And that's really expensive.

Radigan Carter: 02:00:02 Oh, I had \$15,000.00 in medical bills by the end of this. And every time I got cleared by a doctor, I just had to basically scan it and send it to an email address and hope that the person that was adjudicating my medical clearance wasn't going to just clip the line on the sword of Damocles and kill my career. So, every

time I got cleared by a doctor, I'd send it in and they'd say, "Hey, that's great. We need this other doctor now. Go do that." And it was six weeks of just jumping in through hoops.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 02:00:34 Wow.
- Radigan Carter:** 02:00:35 Hoping that I could keep the life I'd built for myself. And that was... You just go through all the stages. You're angry, you're depressed, you're resentful. You're scared. It was very, very intense. In some ways it was actually worse than being in Afghanistan, in a lot of ways. Just because you were just alone. And I missed being with my team out there. It was just very, very hard. And that was really the start of just, I just started reevaluating everything in my life. Just what was important to me. I actually felt silly and just a little bit... I felt more than a little bit foolish that I had.... I felt very foolish being... How can I phrase this? I felt very foolish that I thought that the organization was going to be as loyal to me as I was to the job. And I think that that can lead you to a very resentful place.
- Radigan Carter:** 02:01:49 It's like being a saber-toothed tiger stuck in the La Brea Tar Pit. You can just get sucked down into resentment if you let yourself. And for me, it was realizing... And this wasn't immediate. This probably took at least another year to really come to terms with that, "Hey, you know what? I signed on the line and I went over there and I did that job, and I knew the risk I was taking and the world doesn't owe me anything." It doesn't matter that I feel like the organization wasn't as loyal to me as I was to the job. It's just a bureaucracy. I was asking too much of it. And I think that was really the start of kind of my views changing on what did I want to do. And that's where the start of building wealth and living well. And not really depending on anyone else to help me do that, or I guess not depending on the system to make that possible. I knew I had all the tools that I could do that on my own because of everything else I had done.
- Radigan Carter:** 02:03:00 Yeah. Was this completely, was this completely new? And does it even sound ridiculous saying that, "Hey, you have a brain injury and you're mid-career and you're in your late thirties, and now you're going to shift and start paying attention to finances"? Yes. That sounds absolutely ridiculous. But I've never let that stop me before, so I'm not going to let it stop me now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 02:03:22 I don't think it sounds ridiculous at all. I actually don't think... Reflecting, honestly, I don't think there's anything ridiculous about it. It makes absolute sense. Finances, money, is another way of talking about freedom.
- Radigan Carter:** 02:03:36 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 02:03:36 Money can't buy you happiness. It can't buy you love, but it can buy you freedom. And that's really, really important, especially if you know what to do with that freedom. And it can buy you optionality as someone like Chris Cole, who I know his work, you follow, it can buy you. So, I just want to wrap this up this long journey. You went back to Afghanistan, which I think is in itself sort of wild because you had this traumatic brain injury. Rather than thinking about putting yourself first and treating it immediately on the off chance that you needed to. Actually, what off chance? You were already dealing with symptoms. You were aware that you were having some issues. You didn't ask to be medevacked out until six months and two days afterwards, which meant that you lost your clearance. You didn't know that.

Demetri Kofinas: 02:04:24 But you had to come back to the States. You had to pay for your own medical bills. You racked up at least it sounds like \$ 15,000.00 in debt or in payments doing it. And then you decided to go back. And you ended up going back, and then you spent 2017, 2018, or rather 2016, 2017 in Afghanistan. And then you spend another year in Sudan dealing with riots and protests that led up to the coup that happened after you left.

Radigan Carter: 02:04:52 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 02:04:53 And you came back to the States in the summer of 2018. So, I'd like to pick up there in the second half of our conversation and use it as a jumping off point for what you've been writing about. And, again, these areas of common interest between you, me, and our audience on all these different subjects that we talk about. For anyone who is new to the program, Hidden Forces is listener supported. We don't accept advertisers or commercial sponsors. The entire show is funded from top to bottom by listeners like you. If you want access to the second half of my conversation with Radigan, as well as to the transcripts and rundowns, the rundowns are elaborate educational documents that I create as companions for every episode, head over to [Patreon.com/hidden forces](https://Patreon.com/hiddenforces). There's also a link in the summary page to this episode with instructions on how to connect the overtime feed through your phone so that you can listen to these extra discussions, just like you listen to the regular podcast. Radigan stick around. We're going to move the second half of our conversation into the subscriber overtime.

Radigan Carter: 02:06:07 Sounds great.

Demetri Kofinas: 02:06:09 Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded in New York City. For more information about this week's episode, or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at HiddenForces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the hidden forces website or through our Patreon page at Patreon.com/hiddenforces. Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at HiddenForces.io. Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at Hidden Forces Pod or send me an email at dk@hiddenforces.io. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:07:15]