

SOS#23: DEA Secrets: Lies, Corruption and the Future of Crime-Fighting with Angus Forbes

Angus Forbes: 0:00

I would rather die trying to finish my mission with what I got at the worst possible moment with the very slim chance of being successful, than turning around and saying, well, we can't continue with the mission, so I'm going to go back to headquarters, and the next platoon that was relying on us completely got wiped out. I cannot live with myself for that, and I think the civilians don't understand that.

Marcus Arredondo: 0:26

Today's guest is my friend, Gus Forbes, a Marine, retired DEA agent and entrepreneur whose journey is rooted in service. Born abroad, he became a naturalized US citizen in 1988, and instead of simply pursuing opportunity, he chose to give back through the military. From the Naval Academy to the Marines, from DEA operations in Thailand to leading a tech company, every chapter of his life has been about accountability, strategic thinking and action in support of his mission. Gus shares the moral complexities of law enforcement, what most people misunderstand about the DEA and why his time in the Marines shaped his approach to leadership and problem solving. He also dives into his company ethos and how it's revolutionizing the way law enforcement gathers intelligence through AI-driven technology. With a perspective shaped by combat, outside-the-box solutions and leadership, Gus's story is one of resilience, discipline and patriotism in its truest sense. Let's start the show. Gus Forbes, thanks for being on. I'm so excited to have you on. Welcome, yeah you're welcome.

Angus Forbes: 1:20

Thanks for having me on. It's good to see you after all these years.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:28

Likewise. So there's a lot of different directions that I want to go here, but you've got a wide ranging, illustrious career, a lot of service, including in the Marines. You've started an AI company that is super fascinating, that I want to get to. Some personal bobs and weaves that I think are going to be super interesting. But I really want to dive into the DEA, your time in the DEA. I think there's a lot of juicy conversations there that we can dive into, but I just want to kick it off. Can you share maybe the juiciest story of a DEA raid? That would be interesting, because I have a bunch of questions about the DEA in general and what you've been able to do after your years of service. But I want to start there.

Angus Forbes: 2:10

Well, when you come up with the juiciest story, there's just a wide ranging one of them. So it could either be, you know, a funny one, kind of a sad one, or an excitement, you know, like if there's a shooting or whatever. So what's your, what's your?

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Marcus Arredondo: 2:29

Let's go, exciting. We'll dive into the other two over time.

Angus Forbes: 2:32

Here Go with what Exciting Exciting, okay, uh, so I will give you one example in Thailand, actually, when I was stationed there with DEA. So, very quickly, we carry guns but we have no arresting authority or anything in that country. However, in a country like Thailand, dea calls it one of the countries where you can run and gun right. Dea calls it one of the countries where you can run and gun right. So you actually participate in cases and the Thais actually like us being very active in cases as well as arrest, just because we're sort of bigger than most Thais. And so when they go after certain suspects, you know like Western Africa or the Europeans or whatever, then they're like, hey, yeah, you want to go tackle him and arrest him, or whatever the case may be.

Angus Forbes: 3:29

But I remember we went to an area called Maasai, which is up near Chiang Mai, up in the northeast part, and that's a huge part of the Golden Triangle, and we were waiting on these two German fellows that were up there for quite a few months and they were just waiting to get some heroin coming across the border from Burma.

Angus Forbes: 3:58

And so you know, we were there for a couple of days and then we got wind through an informant that, hey, the delivery is going to be occurring tonight or very early in the morning.

Angus Forbes: 4:09

So, you know, we went up to the mountains and we set up and we're just waiting for the delivery. And sure enough there was a truck that was coming in and we kind of very few places that you can actually cross with the river in the Thai-Burmese border and so we saw a couple of boats and of course we saw a couple of trucks that come across the river, but most likely we figured, okay, it'll be boats, because obviously the trucks will have checkpoints and such. And so we kind of pinpointed and we kind of knew, okay, this might be the boat, and sure enough it was, and we followed it all the way up to the mountains. They took delivery of it. Next thing, you know, there was also a Thai guy that was with these Germans and they took possession of the heroin and it was probably about 200 units, which ended up being about 100 kilos.

Marcus Arredondo: 4:55

And you're triangulating this from afar. You're witnessing this from binoculars or you got cameras. What's your involvement at this point?

Angus Forbes: 5:03

We had binoculars as well, but we also had our informant that was there. He was a worker right, and so we gave him.

Marcus Arredondo: 5:08

And was he mic'd up?

Angus Forbes: 5:09

Yes, yes, so that's the other thing, right, the Thais don't have the some of the equipments that we had, so he was definitely mic'd up and since I was a fluent Thai speaker, I was listening as well as the Thai, so I can convey it to all the other agents that were with me. So, gosh, if any of the Thai guys ever hear this, they might get a little upset. But you know the corruption. We had to worry about the corruption here in Thailand considerably. And when we have an SIU unit, which is the Special Investigative Units, and they get polygraphed every year to make sure that they're not on the take or whatever, and you have to pass a polygraph to be able to be on this team so of course we only have very few we had to get other TIEs involved, other RTP, royal TIE police involved and, to make a long story short, everything was going well.

Angus Forbes: 6:04

We raided the place, ended up getting the dope. We arrested the two Germans and the Germans knew immediately that they wanted to be arrested by us and be placed in the car by us. This is one of the sad parts, but they were up there for several months and they bought a couple of girls from the farms and stuff for entertainment purposes. I won't go any further than that. The ties if you go after the young kids. I mean, who knows if you're going to live or come off that mountain walking or in a body bag. But there was a Thai guy that we were also trying to arrest, as well as the Burmese guy. So when everyone was loaded up in our cars and we're going back and I had a new agent that just came on into the country, I said, hey, we got to go now because the Thai guys, the Thai police, wanted to get their hands on the Germans because of the kids. So as we're going down, all of a sudden you hear these gunshots go off. And I'm sitting there going what the heck, right? So we turned the car around and went back up and the Colonel uh, who was in charge of his guys that we got from the locals, uh, came out to us and we he just oh, I don't know how they did they, they they got out of their get out of, they got out of their bindings and they ran down the tree line, right. So they escaped.

Angus Forbes: 7:28

But we knew exactly what happened, the simple fact that you know. The guys probably said hey, you. Let me go right now. I'll tell you a stash where there's money or I'll pay you, whatever the case may be. So he got bought off, but obviously we couldn't prove it or anything like that. Off, but obviously we couldn't prove it or anything like that.

Angus Forbes: 7:47

But the funny part about that whole thing was, uh, because we turned around, we're looking and he says, well, which direction did he go to? And we're like down that direction. And so I'm walking down, I see the trees and I'm like you know there's and there was a lot of gunshots right. So you figure you might want to, you could see some bullet holes or whatever in the trees and nothing. Also, I look way down there and, sure enough, you know that the tree was all covered up.

Angus Forbes: 8:11

But the ironic part was when I went to the right side, it seems like the guys who escaped started going down the river and I was like, hey, there they are. And so I was like, hey, we should go after them. And the Thai guys like, oh, they're already in the. You know, that's probably not them or whatever. And so obviously the Thai informant that we had that was all mic'd up or killed, I should say, because it was all recorded.

Angus Forbes: 8:36

He finally confessed too that he was also bought out but he didn't want to go to jail and that the colonel was on the take. And of course the only two guys that were punished were the two guys that were monitoring the prisoners and they got thrown in jail or they call it the brig it's like the Navy for like three days on bread and water. But you know they all came out rich. But you know that was one of the kind of eye-opening gosh. Some of the DEA guys might uh, might might not like how I say this, but you know I always hated the term war on drugs, because if there's a war then you go and win that war as best you can. But it's really not. I mean, if we ever won the war on drugs, you'd probably bankrupt about 20, you know, 20 countries around the world and it'll cause a global recession type thing. So it's one of those necessity evils.

Marcus Arredondo: 9:30

That's super interesting that you say that it's a necessity of evil, so sort of. On that point, what do you think you've identified about human nature in a lot of these encounters? Because you're you're encountering different walks of life, different cultures. Uh, I think most people think of DEA as just raiding us, based um homes or the like, but you're talking about invading, uh, an opportunity in Thailand, so you're doing this abroad as well. So I, broadly speaking, and you can take this in any direction, but what have you taken away from how humans behave in incentives?

Angus Forbes: 10:13

You know that's a really good question, Mainly because I don't think there's any one right answer. There's probably a million of them and not one of them is right or one of them is wrong. But my take on it is being with DEA you learn more about the world. I mean, if you extrapolate the drug world into how the whole world works, it's pretty much everything that we do um the trade wars that's going on right now.

Marcus Arredondo: 10:48

the sure, or the pharmaceuticals.

Angus Forbes: 10:50

It's a business yeah, the the legal drugs that we, we sell around the world and and buy as well as consume. Um, I think it can all be compared to the drug world in that nothing is black and white, but most is black and white. But if you start and the way I say this is, yeah, you don't want to give drugs to somebody knowing full well that it's too much, and it's a new guy or a new user, and then they're going to OD and die. That's a black and white thing, right, so you don't want to do that.

Angus Forbes: 11:30

But in general, when you look at the drug use, I can defend every single person that I've arrested, whether he's the biggest dirtbag in the world or whether he's just a regular mule. Right, I can defend their actions to a degree where I can probably convince the probably most ardent anti-drug person in the world and say, hey, you know, they do this because of this and so on and so forth. And, of course, being stationed in Thailand, it's a completely different world on the drug usage and the drug sales and the drug running there than it is here in the US. Right Over there it's a necessity for life. Over here it's just a greed aspect at some point for life.

Marcus Arredondo: 12:26

Over here it's just a greed aspect at some point. So the necessity of life is it fair to assume that it's out of, uh, the need to survive in some way, either being born into an area where that's their only means of survival or it's their mean, it's out of a bad situation, or am I? Am I dumbing it down too much there?

Angus Forbes: 12:40

no, it's, I mean's right. I'll give you a very here's another story. A really quick example is uh, there was this guy in Thailand and he would come, uh, uh, from Pakistan actually into Thailand. And you know, when you take air flights we can determine, okay, was the flight purchased by credit card or cash? And how long does it stay? So no one comes from Pakistan, afghanistan or whatever just to come to Bangkok for only a day or two, and he's been doing this for months. So we knew he was carrying, we just didn't know. And he had no luggage too. He would just come in and leave, and the guy is pretty hairy, right. So I mean black hair and everything, luggage too. He would just come in and leave, um, and the guy is pretty hairy, right. So I mean black hair and everything. And of course, when he comes in, they do the strip shirt search and and it's one of those things where you're looking at a guy in your head you're thinking, man, this guy's a bear, right, like. Just hair everywhere. Uh, and that point come into, uh, into the story.

Angus Forbes: 13:40

But about six months later, and I got to know the guy, I mean, the guy was just a simple farmer, he had a few kids or like six of them, um, and he's broke, you know, he can hardly feed them, uh, but all these runs. And I kind of talked to him. I said, hey, man, you know you're gonna get caught sooner or later. You might want to quit while you're ahead. And he was like, well, you know, maybe a couple more runs. I mean, he's literally talking like this because we have no proof. Next thing, you know, uh, throughout the whole ordeal, uh, the routine of him getting off the plane, taking the the into the back room, we checked the x-rays, nothing. And one day I'm just sitting there, I'm just probably reading the paper or something, and all of a sudden one of the thai guys go huh, this is interesting, which is like Groundhog Day right, Like wait, this is not normal. And sure enough.

Angus Forbes: 14:31

What happened was they cut his nutsack, removed his gonads and then filled his gonads up with pure, high-grade Afghan heroin, which goes for a pretty penny right, because it was very hard to get dope coming across from Burma at the time, because Afghanistan really bankrupted Burma. But I digress, it's another political aspect, but anyway, and how we found out was whoever, I guess, put the heroin in his nutsack, sewed him up. But they ran out of black sutures and so they used white sutures and of course this guy is just dark, hairy guy and it's just stood out Right. So next thing, you know he said, well, you got me. And sure enough, you know, they found him.

Angus Forbes: 15:19

And unfortunately, with all that being said, now remember I got to know this guy. And unfortunately, with all that being said, now remember, I got to know this guy. And as it continued, I'm like man, I think you made enough money, man, it's time to go home and just make sure your kids are good. But obviously, with that much heroin, of course they did a historical on him and counted how many grams they actually got and then how many trips he came in, whether it was legitimate trip or not, they include they, you know, doing a historical uh case on somebody you can say, well, I caught him with x amount and you extrapolate that out, he made 26 trips. It comes out to be like, say, five kilos and so definitely got the death penalty.

Marcus Arredondo: 15:59

I didn't keep track on whether he's still alive or not, but um, did you ever find yourself conflicted abouted about maybe having sympathy for some of these people that you were pursuing?

Angus Forbes: 16:12

Yeah, I tried to ask. I tried to say, hey look, I think we could use this guy. Let's send him back. We have an office in Pakistan. Maybe you can start identifying people in Pakistan, maybe he can start identifying people. He tried to work it off and the Thais wouldn't release him, obviously because they just care about their borders and with DEA. That's why we're in other countries to stem the flow into the United States, but at the same time, if we can stem the flow into Thailand or Australia or whatever, then we do, or Australia or whatever you know we do.

Angus Forbes: 16:45

But just to go back to your original question, was that's the perfect example of some guy who is down on his luck, has no job, is just a simple farmer. I mean, he can, you know, he can grow peanuts and he'll make I don't know a dollar a day, right, and that's barely enough to survive, or whatever the case may be. And so that's where the necessity of evil comes in, and I could see both sides of it and I feel bad for the guy. But it is what it is. There's nothing else I can do.

Marcus Arredondo: 17:22

Have you encountered a time where you had to operate on instinct over protocol, where a protocol ended up having to go out the window? Uh, there had to be some papers filed as a result, but there was no alternative. There was no other option besides doing it in a different way. Um, and I'll give you, I give you some time to think about this. I'm also curious you know if any of naval grad, you had a lot of time in the Marines, and I'm curious what that background had, how that informed how you pursued some of these investigations.

Angus Forbes: 18:07

Yeah, I won't go into too much detail because these cases are still ongoing, a case I did 15 years ago. Somebody can take this podcast the wrong way and says I want the case opened up, or whatever the case may be. But just to go back to the Marine Corps days yes, the simple answer is that there are times where you know what you need to do and do it correctly, but to follow those protocols will either be too late in using it for actionable good or how do I say this? You kind of try and circumvent as much as you

can that old adage of ask for forgiveness later, not for permission. Yeah, to actually do what you're set out, that you're set out to do now, not for permission, yeah, objective.

Angus Forbes: 19:24

So when the dust settled, they're like well, wait a minute, how'd you get this information or whatever to get to this point? And then you say, well, you know I did this, this, this, and they can kind of read between the lines you know any prosecutors and you know it's. I wouldn't say it's a it's, it's not unknown, but we call it like okay, not unknown, but we call it like okay, we backdoor that information. So we got the information this way and when the dust settled, you were like you know what? Because you saw the path, you saw where the information came from.

Angus Forbes: 20:02

Now, all of a sudden, you're enlightened. You're enlightened and you see, okay, there's three other avenues that I could have taken, that could have gotten me that information a lot sooner. But I, you know, you just don't know at the time. And so then you pick one of those, and then that you know, you, you kind of backdoor that information and then now it's legal Right. So all those gray areas, I don't. I mean I'm not, I'm retired now and I don't know it is. I mean I'm not, I'm retired now and I don't know it is. I mean it's just the way life goes. I mean it's not just.

Marcus Arredondo: 20:33

Well, I mean a simple way to resummairize this, and I could be wrong, but I would imagine it's like pulling somebody over because their brake light may have appeared out for a moment, and that's just a means to sort of start having a conversation with them.

Angus Forbes: 20:46

Yeah.

Marcus Arredondo: 20:47

Is that a fair analogy?

Angus Forbes: 20:50

That's a really, really good analogy and it has happened. You know they're looking for a kid that got kidnapped and all of a sudden, you know his report says, well, I stopped him because his taillight was out. And then when you checked it and were like, hey, his taillight's fine, I'm like, oh, I'm sorry it was out. You know it could have been a court or whatever, but you sure, Right?

Marcus Arredondo: 21:13

So what do you think most people I mean most people have no encounter Well, I would imagine have any encounters with the DEA. What do you think is the biggest misconception to a civilian about what the DEA does, about the officers themselves, about the training involved, about the risk that's entailed?

Angus Forbes: 21:30

I think the number one misconception is that we have the authority to pick and choose what laws we're going to enforce.

Marcus Arredondo: 21:44

Right.

Angus Forbes: 21:46

That's just crazy, right? Um, that's just crazy. Uh, if a law is out there to enforce it, and I think they equate this to like say, we'll go back to that speeding, right? You, you were going 60 on a 55 and you get upset because you're getting a 50 ticket and you're like, dude, you couldn't go after criminals and I'm just doing five miles.

Angus Forbes: 22:06

Well, when, when we started making arrests, especially back in the day when California was one of the first states to make marijuana legal and all these medicinal dispensaries popped up, what people don't realize is LAPD and the LA sheriffs used to call DEA and says, hey, we can't enforce this because now it's legal in the state of California but to this very day still, marijuana is a federal offense, it's it's illegal. So they would ask us to go and do these raids. And so when you end up doing the raids, all these guys come out and say you're, you're taken away from poor guys that are in pain or whatever the case may be, and I get it, but then I don't get it. You know, when we raided this one dispensary, every single one of them was looking fine.

Angus Forbes: 22:56

I felt really bad because there was this one guy literally in a wheelchair. You knew he was a cancer patient or something. I mean he was not doing well and he was crying because I need this. I was like I'm sorry man, you know. I mean he was not doing well and he was crying because I need this and I was like I'm sorry man, I mean there's nothing I could do. But we took his information and he went on his merry little way. But to go back to your original question, is that I think the misconception is that we can pick and choose what laws we want to enforce. If something is being broken in front of us and we don't do it, especially in today's society with cell phones and this and that. And let's just say, this guy was doing coke and I don't do anything about it. And he gets in a car and he drives and he kills a family now they can say hey, I was a DEA, why didn't you stop them?

Angus Forbes: 23:47

or law enforcement, and so on and so forth. So the blame always comes on us, whether we do our jobs or we don't do our jobs. We can do everything and anything, and nothing can hurt us, and so we should put our bodies in front of everybody. And the bottom line is we became cops to give up our lives for the civilians. Right? For the right. No, that's not how it goes. Now, if it's our choice to give up our life for a certain thing because we were doing our job, that's on us, right, but we're not required to give up our lives.

Marcus Arredondo: 24:35

So that's another misconception and local law are in some form of opposition, whether it's, I mean, to some degree, it's sort of you know state. Just using California as the example. State and local municipalities seem to suggest you turn away. I mean you can't really walk anywhere in Los Angeles where you don't get a whiff of weed somewhere, but it is in complete opposition to federal law. So there's a contradiction here. So there's a lot of mixed messages and you only operate under federal law, right, I mean, you have to. That is what governs your actions. But from a, in a practical component, certainly as a civilian, how is that reconciled? I mean, do you have any perspective on that in terms of how to navigate that? Obviously, the clear answer is never to be engaged in it. But from your side, from the LAPD side, there's got to be some lines that need to be discussed in terms of how that gets pursued. I mean, are you being called in for dispensaries, because it was like an avalanche of dispensaries that came about a few years ago?

Angus Forbes: 25:54

Before, like I just retired, maybe a year and a half ago, and things have definitely changed. Right Back back in the day when I was with you in LA, it just started and just got out of hand. So then we were called DEA, definitely not going to get into the politics of it. But Attorney General Holder kind of started that whole I wouldn't say downhill, but that different path that we took. I mean, as soon as he took office he wrote a memo and literally stated that the U S DOJ will not go after, actively go after or prosecute any marijuana cases again. Right, so that started, um, uh, this whole path.

Angus Forbes: 26:42

And again, it pissed a lot of people off. It all depends. It didn't piss me off as much as some of the reasons why a lot of the guys were like oh, marijuana, an oath to enforce Title 21, which is a substance control act, and telling me that you can now pick and choose what I can or cannot go after. After I took the oath of saying that this is my job, right, so that annoyed me the most. My job Right, so that annoyed me the most. Um, and then, of course, soon as the next administration came in, uh, the attorney general reversed that, but it never took um it, it never went back on the track that it was before. Yeah, whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, all I'm going to say is that, based on that, in my opinion, that break in that track on how the federal government is going towards marijuana legalization now probably stemmed from that one act that Holder did, holder did, so here we are right.

Angus Forbes: 28:11

So whether you agree with it or not, that's entirely up to you and your audience, but for me, I could care less.

Marcus Arredondo: 28:17

Well, we can move on from the DEA, because I think there's a lot of stuff that we can continue digging in on. But with sort of one last question, you've seen firsthand the consequences of this drug use and it's everything from weed to heroin and you know a number of other narcotics. I'm sure, um, and I'm sure you engage in, you've seen the effects on, on sort of the lower rung people. You're obviously chasing kingpins, but I'm wondering if you have any comment on. You know, are there specific drugs you think are, uh, more problematic that have caused more devastation in your opinion? Are they all problematic? Are they all something that should be avoided? Do you think the Schedule I delineation is accurate now since it was put together 40, 50 years ago, put together 40, 50 years ago? I'm just curious if you have a

take on, if there's any evolution on our views as a society on drug use in general, whether it's pharmacological or illegal.

Angus Forbes: 29:21

Well, it's kind of interesting. I'll give you a quick stat that we are dependent on drugs, especially the United States. Out of all the painkillers around the world, and the United States is what? 310 million in population, compared to the 6 billion in the world over 95% of all painkillers ever made. At any given year we consume over 95% of it.

Marcus Arredondo: 29:52

Then the rest of the world gets whatever painkillers right, so it's not just to clarify the painkillers you're referring to are the legal prescribed-

Angus Forbes: 29:59

Yeah, legally prescribed pharmaceuticals and stuff. Yeah, I'm not going to get too much into marijuana, mainly because it's a very polarizing political debate, but in my opinion, anything that has to do with meth, heroin, fentanyl, those are drugs that you. I've never, ever, seen a heroin or a meth user or what they call a recovering meth user or a recovering heroin user I've never. I think that's an oxymoron. Now people can come up and say, well, what about Robert Downey Jr, you know when he was on this? Or Nicole Richie, and I'm sitting there going.

Angus Forbes: 30:44

It's interesting that you mentioned those two who have millions and millions and millions of dollars at their disposal that can hire people to watch them 24-7, have access to any rehabs, top-notch rehabs. Get the bodies off of it and remind them. I'm pretty sure they're still going to go see shrinks and say, hey, man, I had an urge today or whatever. Sure, didn't do it, sure didn't do it. Um, so, yeah, I guess if you had 100 million dollars at your disposal, then you want to do heroin and go have. You know, right, recover. But for the normal, for the normal people, I mean, it's just it. It not just, it just doesn't destroy that individual, it destroys the entire family.

Angus Forbes: 31:23

It just totally everybody that's associated with that user and that's probably the hardest thing that I have to encounter and witness. That's the part I did not like about DEA at all.

Marcus Arredondo: 31:38

Yeah. So let's pivot something, and we're going to talk about your entrepreneurial endeavors in a little bit, but something that's been relatively pervasive among a number of the guests on the show are immigration status, in that, not their status per se, but that they are either first, second or third generation immigrants. And I was reading you were naturalized in 1988, is that correct? And then went on to attend the Naval Academy, which I became a huge fan of because I was a David Robinson worshiper, being from San Antonio, and I'm just curious sort of what your take is being an immigrant coming to this country, what your experience was like and what informed you to have the drive to join, to apply to a very

prestigious, hard-to-get-into university that also has a very high bar of discipline, physical acumen, mental resilience I mean the list goes on and on and commitment beyond the term of college.

Angus Forbes: 32:48

Right, commitment beyond the the term of of college, right, um, but I don't want to sound all uh, sappy, patriotic or anything like that, but uh, when I I was, I was living in china with my father at the time and there was no schools there. I I actually did a home study, a homeschooling, and if you ever met my father, you knew that that didn't go over so well, because if I didn't do the work he didn't care. So he knew that was going to happen, and so I was supposed to go to a boarding school in Japan, his old boarding school.

Marcus Arredondo: 33:25

How old are you at this point and where in China are you located?

Angus Forbes: 33:29

I was in a town called Zanjia, which is that little peninsula right above Hainan Island, so that huge island right off of Vietnam and China. Right above that you'll see a little peninsula called Zanjia. And so when I was living there, I was supposed to go to Japan to my father's old boarding school. And then, all of a sudden, somebody we lived in a compound where all the oil workers lived, and there was one American there that says, hey, I'm from Texas and there's this boarding school in Texas called the Marine Military Academy. I mean, you know, might be something that you look into, and sure enough, that's where I ended up going. Now I've lived in the U S in the U S before prior as well, and I had my green card at the time and, uh, but you know it's it's more of a visiting, and the longest I ever lived in in the U S prior to that was about a year and a half, um, but when I ended up attended the Marine military Academy, you know, I mean it was a Marine boarding school and and so I started learning about the Marine Corps. And then, you know, I started learning about the United States a little bit more. And how again? Uh, when you're 13, 14 years old, you really didn't care anything about superpowers or politics or anything like that. But as I attended that school it just got more and more and more and I realized that being in the United States and probably going to school here was probably the best for my career. We were traveling around all over the world and there was nothing stable. It's kind of weird to say, but at 14, 15 years old I was thinking I was like man, if I don't do something soon, I'm going to be this, you know, wanderer and with no direction in life, and and I didn't want that. And this boarding school actually had a lot of smart kids, you know. I mean, it was a boarding school and they sent a lot of kids to these top-notch schools. I had really good grades and everyone would say, hey, man, you can go here here. Here I said, okay, that's cool. But then all of a sudden I'm thinking, well, how am I going to pay for this? Because we weren't rich at the time and that's why we were traveling around all over the place.

Angus Forbes: 35:49

Long story short, the Marine Military Academy was a preparatory school for the Naval Academy, so we had a lot of people that went there as a prep school to hold their places while they went to the Naval Academy. And I got to talking to a lot of these guys. And next thing, I know, I was like, well, I kind of wanted to go to the Naval Academy too, then, and for me to be able to do that, I had to become a US citizen. And when I turned like, well, I kind of wanted to go to the Naval Academy too, then, and for me to be able to do that I had to become a US citizen. And when I turned 18, I decided on my own that I'm going to be a US citizen. And I went ahead and applied. And next thing I know here's a really quick, funny

story I had to get. I couldn't wait for the ceremony where a bunch of these guys were going to get sworn in, ceremony where a bunch of these guys were going to get sworn in. So I petitioned to get sworn in as a US citizen before everyone else, so I can apply to the Naval Academy, so I can make that deadline.

Angus Forbes: 36:40

So I didn't realize this, but I had to make a court date. I had to go to court and it was in Brownsville, Texas. I was driven there by the drill instructor at the marine military academy and I'm in my you know, my, my uniform, and then the judge goes uh, the case of Angus T Forbes. And he goes. Well, this is really nice. This is a break from all the things I have to do today. And today we're going to swear this young gentleman in to become a US citizen and this and that. So I got up there and the whole courtroom was there because of crime, drugs, et cetera, and they were all in shackles and stuff. I raised my hand, gave my oath and all of a sudden I became a US citizen. As I was walking out, all these out, all these people like, hey, man, congratulations, this is a great country, and this and that, and I'm sitting there going. Okay, man, good luck to you, you know. So I thought that was kind of funny and so, anyway, long story, I, I became a USS and because I wanted to attend the Naval Academy and I got into Harvard and all that too, and I'm sitting there going. Well, I went through all this trouble with the Naval Academy and it's free, I'm going to go and do that. So that you know, and I tell you it's probably the best thing. I'm glad I didn't go to any of those other schools and stuff like that.

Angus Forbes: 38:00

So it was more. It was more along my line why do you say that? Where I could literally be who I want, do what I want, if you put the effort into it. I know that's such a cliché thing to say, but unless you lived in China or Thailand or whatever, you just don't have that opportunity. And so I knew what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to give back. Now, I'm not going to say that that was the entire case. That was definitely a large part of me trying to return the favor to the United States. However, it was also a security blanket for me, right, because I was a security blanket and I had a steady income and a great job, a fun job.

Marcus Arredondo: 39:00

Yeah, why were you moving around so much? Your mom was Thai. Your dad was my mother's Vietnamese.

Angus Forbes: 39:06

Okay. But they got divorced and my mom lived in Washington DC and then my, my dad remarried to a Thai woman and uh, my dad got out of uh, you know, like import export business and then he ended up being a marine biologist opening up uh, shrimp farms right, that was a huge thing back in the 80s to grow food and sell and stuff like that, rather than just going out and do the forest gump, you know, get all kinds of shrimp, because if the shrimps aren't there then you don't get the money. So if you actually grow the shrimp from baby shrimps to big shrimps to sell, then great, then you can control the supply. Shrimps to sell, then great, then you can control the supply. So my dad, you know, did all the studies, got his PhD and then went in that field and so we, you know, we went to China, then we moved to the Seychelles, then we went to Mindanao, Philippines, and you know he's went to all these places to open up the shrimp farms.

Marcus Arredondo: 40:08

So I do want to take a moment here to talk about this, because I think there's so many and this is going to dovetail with sort of a topical moment that we're going through politically in our own country, which is that there's a lot of division.

Marcus Arredondo: 40:24

I was having a conversation with a former congressman about this particular issue and one thing that sort of kept creeping up in my mind so I go back to, like my grandfather, who also served in the Navy there was a sentiment, at least sort of through the great generation, of service, of duty of country, of at least some obligation to your fellow neighbor.

Marcus Arredondo: 40:47

And the reason I bring this up in relation to your having lived in multiple locations is how do you think that informed you? Because I sometimes feel that the generations, let's say, sub I'll include my own generation here, but sub 55, maybe sub 50, here, but sub-55, maybe sub-50, who seem to have lost a lot of connection with what it means to be an American. In that, while I personally don't think it's perfect, I don't think it's great. In many respects it's the least bad opportunity we have. There is no better alternative out there in terms of democracy generally speaking. And I guess if you I wonder if you have any comment, because you have a unique perspective, having lived in so many different locations, especially in Asia, especially having been in China. I'll open it up, but I'm just curious if you have any take on that.

Angus Forbes: 41:48

Uh, I'll, I'll open it up and I'm just curious if you have any take on that. I mean, you kind of, you kind of hit it on the nose, especially, uh, the younger generation today, um, I just don't think they know what they have. Um, a lot of immigrants that come here actually realize how good they have it. Okay, uh, young guys, um, then it's part of my own family too. Uh, they left Vietnam, um, and they were actually born here in the U S, except for one of my cousins I'm. Actually he was born here in the U S, um, and actually he was born here in the US and he grew up here and he is so down on America, like everything about America is so bad and all I can. It's kind of hard to have a discussion with him when he doesn't know any different.

Angus Forbes: 42:43

So, using what you stated. Getting into this topic is depends on how you look at things. If you come from here, you're always looking up and it's great, but if you're from here, you're always looking down because, just like you said, america is not perfect. No one in the face of this earth is perfect, right? What's that old adage If you try to attain for perfection, you're going to fail, right? Nothing ever is perfect, so it all depends on the views. I think everybody in the United States are trying to be at this level, looking down and seeing the flaws, whereas if you're from another country, that has none of the opportunities that the United States have and they're always looking up. And when you look up from the bottom, you see all the good. But then if you're looking from the bottom or the top down, you're starting to look at the bad before you get to the good.

Marcus Arredondo: 43:49

Right. Well, if you look at some of the prior generations, though, I think there is something sort of common in that, you know, there was World War I, there was World War II, there was the Korean War, there was Vietnam War, even the Gulf War to some degree. I'm just sort of thinking, sort of thinking those who are in

their 20s don't remember 9-11, and that wasn't a war, but that was certainly an attack on our soil. Do you think? You know we're speaking crystal ball here, but do you think that America can ever get back to a place where there is some fellowship among its citizens without some conflict that draws the need to be more united?

Angus Forbes: 44:49

think the last time that the united states actually on both sides of the aisles, like literally, uh you know, on the steps of the capitol saying god bless america, right after the attacks on, um, the twin towers of 9-11, right? So, yeah, your question. I hate to say this who knows with everything that's going on now?

Angus Forbes: 45:02

I mean, I I'm not an alarmist or or any conspiracy theorist, but you know, if it was another major all-out war, um, I think that would, uh, have people understand, um, what we have and that we could possibly lose it.

Angus Forbes: 45:22

And if you lose, you don't want to, you don't want to give it up. It's just human nature, right? Everyone for sure right now says, oh, we have so much, we should just give it away, you know, and and and bring as many people in from the outside, and so on, so forth. But ultimately you're going to hit a saturation point where now, instead of everybody at the table having a nice slice of roast beef, now you're having two slices of roast beef for a family of four and you have to cut it in half. Now you can have the most pro-immigration person in the world and they're going to be like well, wait a minute, totally, I want a whole slice of roast beef. We can't, it's impossible. We've just had too many people come in and I'm an immigrant myself. I have people in Vietnam and Thailand I would love to bring over here, but I can't legally at this point in time, right?

Marcus Arredondo: 46:19

So that's where I'm at, we can talk about roast beef for a long time, so I want to move on to another topic. You've had an illustrious career, and something that I do find fascinating is because I'm sure you get hit up, like I do about, with younger people saying what should I do with my life? How do I achieve this? How do I get to somewhere? There's this concept of I want to do something that I'm passionate about, something that I want to find this new concept, this new idea, but what I have found most reliable. Anybody can get strong, anybody can get intelligent.

Marcus Arredondo: 46:58

In my mind, some get there faster, some get there easier, but it's reps, and with reps come information about what comes next and the people who create companies that have been through some iteration preceding it. That logically leads them to mastery. Within a specific silo makes a lot more sense to me, and I want to give you an opportunity to talk about Ethos, because I think it's a super exciting company and what you're doing can cross-pollinate into a number of different areas, not just in law enforcement. So I want to give you some room to run with that. But I also want to ask if you can incorporate where you were in your life, when that started to make sense, when that ideation came to fruition and you started to develop the purpose, the motivation to do this. You recently retired, so that sort of dovetails into it. But I'll

stop talking. I want to just frame the picture for those who are listening and how it came about. Okay, and how it came about, okay.

Angus Forbes: 48:10

So, first off, you're talking at the beginning of this particular topic. You hear all these successful people saying, hey, do what you're passionate about and the rest will follow. Well, okay, that's fine. But say, if you're a dance theory major and you're you're passionate about dance, well, maybe one out of 100 graduates might be successful. I say, follow your passion, yes, but to be able to follow your passion, you should have something back it up. If you don't make that kind of money, if you like potato chips and you want to eat potato chips a lot, we'll work out so that you can have a whole bag of potato chips. You can't just have a bag of potato chips and get unhealthy. That's the best analogy I can give.

Angus Forbes: 48:55

So how Ethos came about was all STEM, was when I was in the Marine Corps or, I'm sorry, with DEA, and I was a group supervisor and I remember doing wiretaps and the amount of manpower to sit and transcribe, translate and get everything ready for court was just insurmountable. And this was, you know, we did wiretaps when I was in LA. It was 20 years ago. But in today's technology, today's day and age, our data consumption, where do we store all this stuff? Because if it's, if it falls in another certain case, you have to either retain that data for the rest of your life or the rest of the. You know, as long as the United States is around, you have to keep that Um. And then there's, you know, if there's a drug, uh, the statute of limitations is 10 years. After 10 years you can purge all this stuff. Right, murders? Nope, that stays with you forever.

Angus Forbes: 50:06

So I started losing and I was a group supervisor for a task force group, and so my group was made up of local law enforcement that was deputized within DEA, and sometimes I would lose those detectives back to their PDs because there was an officer involved shooting or whatever the case may be, and they had to go out and conduct an investigation. And very quick example is this is how Ethos stemmed was I lost one of my top case makers to an officer involved shooting, to an officer that involved shooting, and a crazy guy was looking for his wife, went into the office, shot a couple of people up, was chased through three different counties, ended up in a park, three different agencies went in there, he drew a gun, they shot him. He died, right, that's so straightforward. Like I'm sitting there going.

Angus Forbes: 51:02

I don't understand why there's an investigation. This is a good shoot. But the world doesn't work that way. It took him about three months to conduct this shooting and then submit the paperwork to the prosecutor, and the prosecutor would review the investigation and say, okay, this is a good shoot, even though everybody knew it was a good shoot.

Angus Forbes: 51:23

I had to go through the investigation anyway. So as a DEA supervisor, I'm like and coming from the Marine Corps especially when I was in the Marine Corps ended up as an intel officer. So my last assignment before the war of 9-11 was at NSA and we had a budget of billions of dollars and I just never understood why the federal government, especially DOD, had all this technology and the local law

enforcement that uses this every single day in every single city, in every single state. We have nothing you literally had to get. If you have three videos, you literally had to get three different laptops and have three different guys push play at one time so you can review the different angles that are uh archaic that the, the technology is.

Angus Forbes: 52:13

so that's when ethos started developing in my mind and about a year prior to me getting um or retiring, I met a. A friend of mine introduced me to his friend and he ended up having a software company that was based. It was an AI based and it was for software education. And when he was telling me about his software I was like you know what, if I get rid of all the education part of it and put in the law enforcement and military aspects of what we're looking for? I think your software you already built it would work. So think of a 747. The plane's flying, it's got engines. Just take all the seats out that had anything to do with education and put all military or law enforcement seats in there, and now you've got a platform that can be used. Um and so what ethos does is that we ingest the enormous amount of data from audio video, whatever the case may be, um and compress that, have AI go through it. It's a little bit more complex, but I'm giving you the 80,000-foot version here and you can start extracting evidentiary pieces from hundreds of hours, if not thousands, of audio calls and so on and so forth in a matter of minutes. And right now a lot of the law enforcement, especially the DA's office, love it because instead of them sitting there listening to audio calls from jailhouse I mean Atlanta being a perfect example, fulton County 15 million calls last year, 15 million Even if you took 1% of that, it would take almost a year to listen to all those right, whereas Ethos, within 10 minutes, can get the information you need.

Angus Forbes: 54:08

Um, we like to say you know finding a needle in haystack? Well, forget about finding the needle. Why don't you manage haystack? And then, and so that's the best uh analogy I can give you. But uh, but my motivation for ethos? To be honest with you, I'd like to think that I can't sit still. I need to do this and this. No, my pension is more than enough for me to retire and I don't mind just going back to Thailand and just retiring. My money goes a long way. My dad always said the dream in life is cold green bottles and warm brown bodies. Right, so I'm sitting there going. That's a perfect saying. But I have twin boys who turn 18 this Saturday and they're growing up to be fine young men, but they do have some learning delays and disabilities. They do have some learning delays and disabilities I knew about two years ago or three years ago when I first started with coming up with the concept of Ethos, that this might be a good platform to generate some money, obviously to do good, right, to help my agents and just put bad people behind bars and save some lives, but in the meantime I could also take care of my boys for the rest of it, um, cause they're going to, obviously, they're not going to have full-time jobs or anything like that.

Angus Forbes: 55:35

So the motivation I don't know if, if it was professional motivation or personal motivation, I don't know what outweighs the other, but I would say, from a personal, a professional standpoint, I'm a, I'm a DEA agent through and through and I want to. I want to save lives, I want to help my fellow agents, but also, on a personal level, I want to take care of my boys. And so you know, when Ethos is successful and I I get out, they'll be well taken care of and I can live my life knowing that everything's good in the world.

Marcus Arredondo: 56:10

That's super exciting. What do you think from your military days? Carries through and I'm sort of referring to the obvious one is discipline, drive, accountability, those types of things. But do you still have some of the same habits that you did from the military in terms of waking up? I see you got it high and tight on your hair. What's stuck with you? What's the most resonant takeaways from your time in the Naval Academy and the Marines?

Angus Forbes: 56:43

Hands down. Is the perseverance right? It's, you have no choice, right? This is my first time interacting with civilians, with this company, ethos. Sure, I love the guys that I'm with my partners and everything, the guys that I'm with my partners and everything.

Angus Forbes: 57:08

But when the chips are down, I find that in the civilian world, the finger pointing, pointing, begins, uh, and and saying, well, if you had done this, maybe this would have happened, or whatever the case may be, I, I don't care about that. Right, like in the marine corps, if, if the shit hits the fan, you're not gonna be, like, well, we wouldn't be in this position. No, there's people shooting at you. You take, you take the situation and you fight through it. Right, yes, whatever you're at you, you say, okay, where are we at now? You know? Okay, you know, we had three choppers and one went down. Well, instead of saying, well, why did the chopper go down? Why, you know, somebody didn't, you know, crank the nut on one of the blades and the blades fell off. No, that's the civilian world. I would take it from the military aspect. It would be okay, get all the equipment from that down.

Angus Forbes: 58:05

Uh, helo, consolidate, and how? What do we have left? Can we go on with it right? And even that question is not can we go on with the mission? You will go on with the mission, right, right you? You consolidate what you got, you find the positives and you move forward. And I would rather die trying to finish my mission with what I got at the worst possible moment, with the very slim chance of being successful, than turning around and saying, well, we can't continue with the mission, so I'm going to go back to headquarters and the next platoon that was relying on us completely got wiped out. I cannot live with myself that and I don't. I think the civilians don't understand that. They, the concept of that is like, well, shoot, this sucks, I'm running out of money, you know, I don't know how we're going to continue, you know. And that part I have to keep quiet Because my military part wants to come out and says can you shut up please, and let's focus on what we need to do to move forward.

Marcus Arredondo: 59:12

So that's my biggest, biggest take from the military civilian perspective, but I can relate to that, even though I'm not a military background, and I'm just curious how you're reconciling that, how are you assimilating into?

Angus Forbes: 59:34

civilian society without erupting in rage. Well, I know full well that if I erupted and I get in a rage, then I put myself in their situation and I don't want the situation any better. So what I do is I suppress my rage, I keep quiet, I extract myself from that situation. And let's say I have an hour drive, or I have a five minute drive and I'm home. If I have a five minute drive and I'm home and I'm still raging, well, I'll take a dram

whiskey and calm down. And then, once I calm down which is, you know, say, an hour and an hour is a long time.

Angus Forbes: 1:00:11

I mean, I, I would be, really upset at that time, once everything settles. Then I said, okay, in the marine corps I know there's people like me that are thinking of a solution, and I can get that person and say, okay, what are you thinking? This is what I'm thinking, and then you're going to find one or two nuggets from all these Marines.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:00:33

Absolutely.

Angus Forbes: 1:00:35

You get one or two nuggets from three other lieutenants. Now you've got seven nuggets. Boom, we've got enough nuggets, let's accomplish. Boom, let's go. We, we got enough nuggets, let's accomplish. With the civilian side of the house, I kind of take I. I. I looked the problem and I said, okay, this is on me now. So then I start making calls, I start doing this to alleviate the problems that the civilians are complaining about right it would be a lot.

Angus Forbes: 1:01:02

We all just sat down and said, okay, what do we need to do? Who can we call what? You know, this, this, this, this, this um, because the the amount of energy you waste on just complaining and saying woe is me, I can't do this anymore. I'm like, okay, you have one or two choices.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:01:20

We either go on and, if you go on, shut up if you don't want to go on, then just just say so and then I will find another person and I'll track forward. So that's where we're at, and there's a greater sense of that community that I think is seldom found in civilian life, which is a little bit what I was alluding to before, but I know we got to bring this into a close. I want to end with a couple of good questions, hopefully here. How, right now, are you measuring success?

Angus Forbes: 1:02:08

Not just in the ethos but in general across the board. Right now I'm for me, at this stage of my life, I'm measuring success on my boys happiness, right? Yeah? Um, I actually have to take a step back and realize that what I want from them to make me happy is not necessarily what they want. So a lot of right. You know, I tell people I have a number, um, for boys. Once I get that number for each of them, I know they're going to be well taken care of for the rest of their lives.

Angus Forbes: 1:02:31

And one of them looked at me and he goes. I told him what my number was and he looked at me. He goes dude, I took your son to a candy store and I gave him 20 bucks and I said you can buy anything you want. And he looks at this one can, goes I want that. And literally, my friend, he's a really good guy. Um,

he's actually going to be helping with the boys. But he was like well, here's \$20. He goes well, I don't want the \$20. I just want that candy. And he was like I'm buying, you know, a 25 cent candy. And that was it. He was a you know, he was in heaven.

Angus Forbes: 1:03:06

But that's my thing is that if the boys are happy, then it is only me that I have to contend with and realize that if I don't reach that number, there'll be just fine. And I think I think once I get to that point, I'll be, I'll be, I'll be at peace with myself. But up until then, you know, I still struggle a little bit because I want them to have a better life then. But again, that's, that's me talking, because I know, I know what's good and I know what's bad, or at least I think so. But they wouldn't care.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:03:49

Well, any closing thoughts or things you think I may have missed?

Angus Forbes: 1:03:54

No, I think we covered the majority of it. I reviewed some of your podcasts and I found them interesting. I enjoy doing this and I'm very thankful that you invited me on, so I appreciate it.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:04:10

Me too, man. I really love talking to you and I think there's a lot of areas I'd love to explore more, maybe on another one, but thanks for coming on. I really appreciate it.

Angus Forbes: 1:04:19

Yeah, let me know if there's a part two, all right.

Marcus Arredondo: 1:04:25

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