

- Intro: [00:04](#) This is Force for Hire, a deep dive into private military contracting and how it's transforming the battlefield. I'm Michelle Harven and I'm Desmon Farris.
- Desmon Farris: [00:10](#) On January 15th, 2016 Russell Frost Amr Mohamed and Waiel el-Maadawy were surrounded by men with heavy weaponry and kidnapped. They were detained and tortured for 31 days. They were the first US citizens kidnapped in Iraq since 2011
- Michelle Harven: [00:28](#) Three three were working on a subcontract for General Dynamics in Baghdad where they were helping train Iraqi forces. Mohamed and el-Maadawy are cousins and both served in the U.S. Army. Frost didn't have a military background, but he had been working as a contractor for nine years prior. The jobs increasingly got more dangerous as troops and support staff were drawn down. This contract was the first time he was armed and the first time he wasn't living on a U.S. Base
- Desmon Farris: [01:02](#) On January 15th the three of them went to meet an interpreter who they later learned had set them up. I talked with Amr who described what had happened that day.
- Amr Mohamed: [01:22](#) So you'll have people sitting with AK 47 on the top of the buildings and the area. So you have one entrance, one exit, and it was brought by a truck with a DShK - with a .50 cal on it. And from the look at least 42 guys was AK 47 or whatever. And you've got three guys, one of them civilian has never been called back, which Russell and Waiel and I, and we have Walter with 10 rounds in it. So I ended up handing my gun after 15 minutes of arguments . It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I never, ever handed a weapon down to anybody
- Amr Mohamed: [01:58](#) After than they took us in the van, to their leader compounds, we entered the leader compound, tad government vehicles, black armored SUV, creates of weapons. They start telling us take everything off. Your jewelry, your shoes, and just get us in our clothes, this is our clothes, you know, and they took our shoes and everything and would be barefoot and then they put rags in our eyes. And they did it with scotch tape and then handcuffed our hands behind our back. They couldn't do that because Russell's so big. They did like two flex cuffs together to be able to put his arms behind his back. They bought each one of us in different areas. They would also in what they call, that quarry that they call the, that, that the, the hole that they put you in is a quarry. It is like a concrete floor with two concrete walls, was a concrete wall on top of your heads, maybe four, four feet tall. So you cannot actually stand straight and the lift also for four, four feet by five feet. So you cannot lay down, you

have to be in a fetal position. If you lay down and if you stand your head, we're going to be hitting. So you're going to be standing like this all the time. Yeah, bunched over. So you have no ability to fight. The fact that I knew that were taken by Saraya al-Salam, which is the, it morphed out of [inaudible] special group. I knew right there. And then that's I am in a safer hand than being in the hand of [inaudible] who is the head of a complete different militia that will ask for ransom and then kill you because that's the way they do it.

Amr Mohamed: [04:04](#)

But the fact of the matter, it relieved me because I knew I was not going to get killed anytime soon. I'll be used as a bargaining chip. Russell surprised me with how calm he was, how quiet he was. They ended up falling in love. Was Russell respecting him and like they were fond of him? How like that big gentle giant. So blight. So quiet doesn't request anything. Doesn't ask them for anything. If they give him he would take it. If it doesn't, if they don't give him, it would be hungry. We didn't even ask for food. They would come as like, tell Russell what he would like to eat tonight. We're going to bring him kebab and to so terrific about it. They thought that in their head he's the American because he's a CIA because he was so quiet. He was so polite. He would answer quick, ask the question, who would answer the question with the least amount of words.

Amr Mohamed: [04:59](#)

He was so professional. I swear to God like I couldn't. I was like doubting him that he is truly, really at SF guy or or or a special force for the way he handled himself. Oh my God. He handled himself with grace, with honor with dignity and a true American. He was top notch. Waiel panicked. I will tell you at some point I panicked it like there was one day when they electrocuted me and all of that shit and they telling me Russell's CIA. Waiel is Mossad? You are fucking, see, I told them how I am. CIA. If you have my passport my, my, my credit cards, you have my accounts. You have all of my shit is if the CIA of America worked that way, they are fucking bunch of idiots.

Desmon Farris: [05:50](#)

Can you tell me what was the hardest day?

Amr Mohamed: [05:57](#)

The first day. Always the first day because you are in this belief is this fucking happened to me after 12 or 13 mission. This happened to me. I always thought I might get killed one day, but being taken hostage, that never crossed my mind. That's the hardest day, the first day because you are in the unknown. You don't know what you going to happen you don't know what they're going to do to you. After the the, the, the third day you start using what you have been trained for after this, that, that the first week you start thinking like, okay, this is getting the

routine now I can fucking cope with that shit. I can fucking take that shit all day long. Six days before our release, he came and told me, you getting released guys, and you told me, don't tell. Well or Russell, you guys getting released and in five days, five, six days, you'll get you going to home. Please don't I tell you, I tried to get a present and kiss it so he take my hand and kiss my hand and says, I am so sorry for everything that happened to you. And then he kiss my hand. It's like, you know what? I wish if I can and they start crying. I wish of you. I can take the blindfold of your, of your face. You're a good man and give me a hug or whatever and said, guys, you're going to be going home.

Amr Mohamed: [07:19](#) I stayed two days not saying anything to the guys, but I couldn't take it anymore. So I went in the middle of the night. I whispered in Russell's ears. I told them we're going go home in three or four days. And I told, Wael, I told them, don't tell anything. Double Marina. And we kept it to ourselves until he came and announce it like two days prior and say, guys, you're going home. But at that time we're relaxed. We're laughing, joking because we're knowing we're going home.

Desmon Farris: [07:46](#) How did it feel when those embassy guys actually came and got you?

Amr Mohamed: [07:50](#) It was surreal. It was amazing. It was amazing. You know, to see the familiar faces, a servicemember like you, you know, coming and taking you. They give me that American flag, they give Russell the American flag. But truly what surprised me cross of his reaction of being a civilian who has never been in combat. He operated with so much dignity as civilian contractor and with professionalism than I would have ever imagined. I was so worried about him like a week into it, I was like, oh my God, I have to learn from this fucking guy.

Amr Mohamed: [08:39](#) There is nothing I would have never done for him. When his wife called me, I was driving back from Las Vegas. I answered it was Tammi. And she was crying and in shock like, what's going? She said, Amara Russell passed away. I told joke with me, don't fuck with me. Please don't lie. You lying to me. She said Amr, please. I'm, I'm not joking. He passed away now he died. Then I put the car in park and those just for 15 minutes, the whole scenario of the kidnapping and the torture and everything, just all of that got into me at that moment when I heard that Russell died, I broke down. There's two times that happened to me in my whole entire life. When my mother passed away. And when I heard that Russell died, that's it.

- Michelle Harven: [09:29](#) The voice on the other line that day with Tammie Frost, Russell's wife, I sat down with Tammy and she told me that when Russell started out as a civilian contractor, this was completely new territory for the family.
- Tammie Frost: [09:46](#) Quite honestly. I'd never heard of military contracting, uh, for the civilian. Um, I thought it was strictly either retired military or, um, sub contracting of military. Uh, when Russ first told me that he was looking into it, I said, absolutely not. Um, as we did further investigation, he said he would be in a safe place. It wasn't going to be where I thought it was going to be. And I wanted him to follow his dream. He wanted to provide for the family. And so I supported my husband. The worry, you can't even measure. Um, I knew at that time we were still within a war. Um, there was absolutely too much conflict for me to be comfortable with. Uh, he was, his initial contract was in Kuwait. I wasn't in the military zone. However, he provided that support to them. Uh, he would be located on a military base at that time and uh, so I felt a little bit more comfortable knowing that he would be protected by our forces there.
- Tammie Frost: [10:58](#) Fast forwarding to his last contract where he wasn't on a military base, quite apprehensive at that contract. I stayed in regular contact with my husband. I spoke to him on the daily, um, as I was getting ready for work each morning, he would call, he would say have a good day. We would discuss his day because we were on opposite sides of the clock. Um, I had texted him when I had not heard from him. Uh, the following hit, the last time I heard from him was Thursday. He had mentioned that he may be going on a trip to Egypt, but that he would let me know.
- Tammie Frost: [11:35](#) Friday came around and I did not hear anything from my husband. And so I started texting, hey, did you get there? Okay. Are you, are you in Egypt? I had no response. Friday evening was when he was kidnapped. Saturday passed again. I'm texting, I'm emailing. Um, I'm trying to ping his phone, uh, trying to locate him. There was no response. Sunday came. I said, listen, honey, I'm getting a little worried. I need to know that you're okay. Because it was totally out of character for him not to be letting me know that he had arrived somewhere. Okay.
- Tammie Frost: [12:16](#) Or that he was checking on us here at home Sunday came, still hadn't heard from my husband. Not shortly after I had texted, I got a call from the owner of the company, excuse me. He said, Mrs. Frost, this is Mr Parkman. I hate to meet you like this, but your husband has gone missing. I said, what do you mean my husband went missing? He said, ma'am, your husband didn't

report back to base. I said, where is my husband? He said he had gone into the city of Baghdad and that he did not return to base. He then asked if there was anyone he could get for me to be with me, a friend, a best friend. I said, sir, my best friend's missing him back debt to spring him off. There was other calls that followed. FBI was called to my home. They sent out a team to help us deal with the crisis. There was conversation back and forth between the company and then all conversations ceased. I lived 31 days knowing that my husband was there somewhere and they needed to bring them home.

- Michelle Harven: [14:09](#) Amanda is the Frost's oldest daughter. They both described what it was like dealing with the government agencies and the company during this time.
- Frost family: [14:17](#) They would answer your questions with questions. It was classified. Yeah, it was all classified. We don't know that right now, which in expect them to tell us exactly where he was. Um, but it was just you fly the State Department to someone's home, you know, you've got all these suits that are sitting in your living room and not, I mean, for them to travel so far and not one of them have a real answer. Um, for any of your questions. It got a bit frustrating and it really, it really, it didn't put us at ease at all. There was just no good communication anywhere.
- Frost family: [14:59](#) Truly. Once he was, once he was kidnapped, the Fusion Cell is who kept us in the loop other than family members of the other two captives. The Fusion Cell is a cell is a group of individuals that are under the FBI umbrella. They are expedited to the homes to help with hostage situations. They provide whatever is necessary for you to cope with the crisis. Um, in essence it's a hostage situation. They are there to monitor telephone conversation or anything else that we might need in order to bring your loved one home safely. Russ was not from a military background or where we, uh, I was contacted by Waiel brother Tamar and Tamar, um, was able to, uh, communicate with some individuals that had more information about what was happening over there as far as communications and chatter. After that first couple of days, there wasn't any contact with the company.
- Frost family: [16:16](#) They had washed their hands and they were bound legally. Um, so, uh, the conversations with them would be nothing more other than, um, having some kind of insurance and making sure that the family was covered with health insurance so that, um, there wouldn't be any break in that. However, I, I feel personally, I feel like they had already given up hope that my

husband wasn't coming home, nor were the other two captives. Honestly, I had all the faith in the world that my husband would be home. I felt in my heart that he was still alive. He, there would've been some way that he would have got the message to me if something was, was dire. Um, obviously it was dire. However, I did fill on my heart. I had the faith that my husband was still alive. My kids, they are my rock. Uh, we relied heavily on one another while he was gone and we just had to hold out hope, that he would be home to us.

Michelle Harven: [17:26](#)

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Tammie Frost: [18:18](#)

I work in the school district and I had arrived at work. I had a calendar on my desk where I had days that I pulled off of a calendar so that I'd know how many days had passed. As I was reaching to pool day 32 I received a phone call and it was an agent who was on her way to work. She said, Tammy, we have them. They're on the wait to the embassy. I'll let you know more when I know more, but she said she wanted to let me know as soon as she found out. So, um, I left work of course I went home, I waited for the phone call just to know that he was okay.

Speaker 7: [19:14](#)

I got the phone call probably just a couple hours later. He was on his way to Landstuhl to be checked out medically, but at least I got to hear his voice and he says, I'm okay Hun. He says, I'm coming home. I love you. I can't talk anymore right now, but I'll talk to you more in a bit. Those words were the most precious words ever. I talked to him more later after his, actually couple of days later after he had arrived in Landstuhl and they had gone through debriefing. You hang on to every word, every word. I didn't know the half of it until after he had gotten home. But I knew I was getting him home. Happiest day of my life.

Michelle Harven: [20:22](#)

I read that he fell asleep in, um, an airport.

- Tammie Frost: [20:28](#) He was scheduled to arrive in, um, day prior before you actually got here. He, uh, had a FBI escort because of course he had no identification, no money, uh, nothing on him. It had all been stripped from him. Uh, so I am at the airport expecting him and from Chicago, I'm setting there patiently waiting and I get a phone call, honey, I'm sorry, I fell asleep in the lounge. I'll be on tomorrow, but could you do me a favor? Can you fax your credit card number to the hotel so I'll have some place to sleep tonight.
- Tammie Frost: [21:19](#) So I did. So, uh, he did arrived safely the next day, but he was exhausted and the agent that was escorting him thought that he would be okay from there since he didn't have to go through any other checkpoints. So, um, he made it home just a day later. The FBI agent here, uh, in Wichita, he was able to, um, make arrangements so that we can meet Russ on the tarmac. Uh, so we were able to meet him as he came off the skywalk there at the aircraft. And it was a sight to behold once a large man and full of life, he was much slider and quite honestly, he had a hollow look in his eye.
- Tammie Frost: [22:17](#) Oh, as soon as he came off though, um, it was hugs there was wincing on his part because he was still sure from the treatment that he had received. Uh, so I scooted him down the skywalk and into the vehicle where our children awaited for us. And uh, then we were off to home. He had to make mention to the girls that they had to be careful with him. We didn't during the 31 day period, uh, know of any injuries. It wasn't until after, uh, they had arrived in Landstuhl and I was able to speak to Russ at length that he had made mention of any injury. It wasn't until he got home that I seen the extent of the injuries.
- Amanda Frost: [23:13](#) We went from having a dad, that he was the one that would put bandaids on the boobos and you know, teach us to walk and teach us to do things. And we kind of jumped into all of my sisters really, uh, jumped into caretaker mode because mom had to be at work and we were able to be with him during the day cause we didn't want to leave him alone. Um, by a lot of that time was spent taking him to doctor's appointments. I'm just talking, he talked a lot. Uh, and not just about what happened. I mean we tried to avoid that because we could tell he would visibly and physically get upset, you know. Um, so when you were talking about everything and I think he was just so happy to be able to have those conversations and to go to the, you know, football games to watch his daughter cheer, you know, go participate in something that was going on in my career at my sister's college.

- Amanda Frost: [24:16](#) You know, just be around his grandson. He was just so happy to be able to do those things. It was, it was like he was trying really hard not to take those things for granted and he was catching up and it was, it was nice to be able to care for him and it was nice that he would allow us to in some capacity to take care of him. Um, I mean those are going to be low. The lasting memories that we have of him. Um, but yeah, he, he just required a lot of attention. He needed the company and the, the security of having his family with him. I can take you to an instance. It was a Thanksgiving. It was a week almost to the day of his passing, and he was carving the Turkey and he couldn't even stand, he had to kneel on the ground because his back hurts so bad. And a lot of his injuries weren't something that you see, they were invisible injuries. My Dad had issues with sleep. He had issues with his muscles. Um, his PTSD was horrific. Um, so it was the injuries that you couldn't see that were really the most debilitating his kidneys. Um, he had, because of the dehydration, he had horrible kidney stones and that led to a severe infection in his kidneys, which is what was the catalyst for everything else.
- Tammie Frost: [25:46](#) I was probably one of the most patriotic person you'd ever meet. Um, however, I, if I were to be honest, I question some of the government agencies and DBA is run by the government, which is the defense base act. A longshoreman, Workman's comp DBA is filed and therefore the company has nothing more to do with it. A DBA then takes over and they work as a workman's comp, uh, for workman's injury and they tend to drag their toes in the deepest sand that could possibly find those issues. Began at day one. We were paying for everything out of pocket, uh, because DBA refused to pay anything until they reviewed the claim.
- Tammie Frost: [26:42](#) So therefore some of the medical necessities, we're forgone because there was no money left. Uh, they weren't receiving a check for disability to begin with. Um, and then those checks slowly started coming in. However, there was medical attention that he needed prior to those. And, uh, being that his income was what we relied on, it was no longer there to take care of the medical. So we were forced to take out loans to pay for medical bills. And then Russ passed because he was still waiting a surgery that he needed and they refuse to pay.
- Michelle Harven: [27:31](#) What was the idea for contractor appreciation day?
- Amanda Frost: [27:46](#) Uh, it actually started when my dad was kidnapped. Um, it was sort of the catalyst because we would see some of the comments that would pop up on social media and, uh, it was

very ignorant to say the least. Um, they, they view contractors or at least what it seemed like the general population of, you know, social media, um, thinks that these guys are hired guns, that, that all they do is, you know, they wear guns and they, you know, protect people, whatever. And you know, we would get a lot of the, they knew what they were getting into. Yes and no. Um, no one goes into a job expecting to be kidnapped. Just like you don't go into the military expecting to be sent overseas into a war. I mean it, it was just very hateful, very, um, ill informed. Um, and that, that's what started it.

Amanda Frost:

[28:40](#)

And then when my dad got home and we were, we were seeing how he was being treated, um, through DBA and the insurance company, um, we, we just knew something had to change. And it wasn't, unfortunately, it wasn't until he passed that we were, we had that fuel to do something and it starts with an appreciation day. But the end game is to get some legislation changed. Um, have the law show appreciation and that, that's the big part because if we're going to utilize these men and women, um, overseas and in war zones, then we need to treat them as such. We need to offer them, you know, the insurance we need to make it to where certain things need to happen for protection for them as well. Um, so when I approached our state, uh, representative, uh, Joe Seibert, um, we kinda got the ball rolling here in the state of Kansas.

Amanda Frost:

[29:44](#)

So we were able to get my dad recognized on the Kansas legislative floor. Um, from there we got ahold of Senator Moran and a defense fellow, Kelly McManus and I, I kind of pitched it out there, thought it was a shot in the dark, um, just basically said what had happened and what we're trying to do. And I get a phone call. She said, you know, I'm very interested in your initiative. I'm gonna, you know, talk to Senator Moran and we're going to see about getting this ball rolling. And, and it's been a slow process. Um, but we, we've stayed in contact and she's been very helpful and very kind and you can tell she, she really cares. And, um, so I, I'm hoping that that leads to getting some appreciation for these guys to say, hey, we know you exist. We appreciate the job that you do.

Amanda Frost:

[30:40](#)

Without you, we wouldn't be as great. I think there's been such a stigma of contractors there. They're hidden. Um, and that's what's strange to me is that, I mean, before my dad had done this, we had no idea that this was even a job you could do. It's just a weird, it's just a weird dichotomy I guess, that we will utilize them up to, you know, 50% of our actual force that's overseas, but we're not going to let other people know that. Why you should be proud of that. You should be proud that you

have these civilian patriots, if you will, that are willing to risk their lives in order to help their military. And a lot of these guys are ex-military, but then there's other guys that maybe later on in life wanted to show their appreciation and wanted to be involved and that's why they do what they do.

Amanda Frost:

[31:33](#)

That was kind of my dad's thing. My Dad was always a patriotic person. He was always a proud American. He just missed the boat to do the military side of it. And then he looked at this as a second chance and that's why he took it and he was very proud of it. Very, very proud of his job and he was anxious to get back to work. So these guys deserve like that recognition. It's just recognizing that they exist. And I've had so many contractors approached me on through Twitter and through Facebook saying, this is amazing. You know, it's about time we got some kind of recognition and the emails just flooded in, you know, I'm going through the same thing your dad went through, or I've been a contractor for 1520 plus years and I agree with you. We should be, you know, more appreciated or at least recognize. So it's there, the interest is there. It's a strong arm that's trying to push those voices down a little bit I think. And we don't understand why, but we're pushing back and I think with the private Patriots Foundation, our voices getting a little bit louder and our reach is getting a little bit whiter and that's where we're at right now. And that's where we are going to continue to push forward from.

Tammie Frost:

[32:53](#)

I just think that the public needs to know that these are not mercenaries. These are husbands, fathers, there are aircraft workers, they're painters, they're mechanics. These are not mercenaries. They are not there to harm anyone. They're there to protect our military and to help out each and every one of them in any way possible that they can. We need to blow the cloud away so that that dark cloud isn't hanging over their heads any longer and they need to be given the acknowledgement that they are doing a job as well as the military. They just didn't sign up for it like the military.

Michelle Harven:

[33:45](#)

August 13th, Russell Frost's birthday is recognized in Kansas as Contractor Appreciation Day. The Frost family along with the Private Patriots Foundation are working toward making the day nationally recognized.

Desmon Farris:

[34:00](#)

Thank you to Amr Mohammad for talking with us about his experience and thanks to Tammie and Amanda Frost for sharing their story. Also a special thanks to John-Austin diamond who runs the private Patriots Foundation. You can learn more about

the push for Contractor Appreciation Day and the
organization@privatepatriot.org

- Michelle Harven: [34:19](#) In the next episode, we'll be moving from land to sea where we'll try to answer the question, what makes maritime security so challenging?
- Peter Cook: [34:28](#) So if it's a Panamanian flagship or Marshland flagship or Iberian flagship, you're then under the affectively the jurisdiction of the country of the flag. And if the country that you'll work into, so let's say for instance United Arab Emirates, they will not allow weapons to be in their territorial waters, which is why when many ships are going to the Middle East, they have to have a floating armory so that men can be disembarked and embarked in international waters.
- Desmon Farris: [35:08](#) Don't forget to subscribe and while you're there, leave us a review. You can also let us know your thoughts at podcast@stripes.com also, follow us on Twitter for updates @starsandstripes.
- Michelle Harven: [35:19](#) Force for Hire's supervising editors are Bob Reed and Terry Leonard. Digital Team lead and editor is Michael Darnell.
- Outro: [35:26](#) Thanks for listening. This is Force for Hire.