

Face of Defense: Analyst Warms Hearts With Magic

Office of the Secretary of War Public Affairs

Courtesy Story

Date: 10.29.2009

Posted: 10.29.2009 11:28

News ID: 40815

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MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. - The ability to mislead an audience and make them believe the impossible is a skill few possess. A good magician leaves the audience with a sense of awe and mystery and the lingering question, "How did he do that?"

For Bill Frost, the site lead simulations analyst with the School of Infantry East at Camp Geiger, part of the Camp Lejeune complex, his road to becoming a magician started in an unusual manner.

A martial arts practitioner since the age of 3, Frost met a man 20 years ago who would introduce him to a new love.

"I met Bill in Nashville, Tenn., in 1989," said Special Agent Gary Thomas, with the FBI office in Houston. "At the time, we were both training under the same [martial arts] master. I showed him a coin trick, then a card trick." One trick changed Frost's perception of magic and made him hungry to learn more.

"He showed me a magic trick that blew my mind," Frost said with grandiose gestures, smiling as he began to recall the beginning of his magic career. "I had seen tricks before, but I couldn't figure out how he was ripping and repairing things."

Thomas agreed to teach Frost magic if he, in turn, taught him martial arts. This sparked an unusual partnership that led to them starting the "Magic and Martial Arts Show."

"We started part of the time doing close-up magic tricks," Thomas said. "We would come out in our martial arts uniforms and perform Kung Fu forms and techniques. Afterward, we did the magic show. It was great. Everyone loved it, and it was just a lot of fun."

As a beginning magician, Thomas said, Frost had a natural talent and a rapport with the audiences that made the shows a success.

"From the beginning, it was definitely there," he said. "It was just amazing for someone who had never done it before. It's all about presence, dexterity and showmanship. You have to have these things to mislead the audience and not make it look lame."

From the first magic trick Thomas taught him, Frost immediately began making the tricks his own.

"After he sees something, he electrifies it and charges it up," Thomas said. "He was always wanting to innovate."

If I taught him a trick, he would always have to put his own spin on it. He was always thinking of ways to add the martial arts into the magic for more flair, like using the martial arts to cut somebody in half. That's just his personality as a whole."

But when Frost turned 18, the two would part ways, as Thomas joined the FBI and Frost joined the Marine Corps. But they remained in touch.

"My guidance counselor was very disappointed I enlisted in the Marine Corps," Frost said with a sly look as he recalled the disappointment on his counselor's face. "I had a choice to go to [the U.S. Naval Academy], but I chose to enlist and join the grunts. I knew I wanted to serve my country. I wanted the hardest thing to do. I guess being into full-contact fighting, I was looking for the most aggressive thing to do."

During his time as a Marine, Frost was attached to the 2nd Marine Division's Company L, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment. There, he was able to do training missions with the South Korean marines.

"We were training in the mountains, and it was very tough," Frost recalled. "It is just so different to see how other people live with so little, but are so rich in spirit."

Later in his 10-year career, Frost took a position as a combat instructor at Marine Combat Training Battalion East, and he re-ignited his passion for performing magic. He'd never lost his love for magic, and he revitalized that love by raising money for a ball.

"I really got back into magic when I told the colonel I wanted to do a magic show as a fundraiser for [Marine Combat Training Battalion]," he said. "I told him I would do everything. We sold out and made enough money to donate the extra to the USO. Afterward, I really got to thinking, 'That was really fun.' I got to raise money for a good cause, and I really enjoyed doing it."

Around that time, Frost decided to leave the Marine Corps.

"I am glad I left the Marines," he said, pausing to reflect on a difficult, but necessary choice. "I got to go have more fun and choose how I use my talents. Every time I tried to leave the Marine Corps, there was a connection. I had to get out. It was holding me back from pursuing my talents. But I didn't want to leave the Marines, so I stayed in the area and eventually got a job on base."

This allowed Frost to be close to the Marines and continue serving as a civilian.

"Everything I do is centered around some type of service, whether it is teaching people, training people or putting a smile on their faces," he said.

However, Frost knows that he will someday have a tough choice on whether he wants to stay here or continue on with his magic on a larger scale.

"I know one of these days I will have to make a decision to stay with my job on base or leave to pursue something else," he said. "I have connections with magicians in Las Vegas and around the [country]. I am working slowly to get to the national level."