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How I Did It

24 CEOs on their ride to the top

I've been a member of the Reserve Special Forces since 1984. On 9/11, I was on duty in Argentina. Some Argentinean soldiers grabbed me, pulled me into an office, and pointed at a monitor. I saw the second plane hit the tower, and from that time I was on active duty. I went from Argentina to Africa and then to Afghanistan.

I knew I was going to be gone for a long time. I was working in IT at Merck in civilian life. Your employer is required by law to keep your job open, but the reality is it's not very difficult for them to replace you. So I thought, I may as well start a tech consultancy. I incorporated in 2002.

I became disabled in late 2003, when we were in Afghanistan. We were in a gunfight, and I was running across a wall. A round hit my breastplate from the side, and I was knocked down. I fell an entire floor and landed on my head. I broke a vertebra in the middle of my back and some bones in my neck.

I was stretching at Bowling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. A guy walked up to me and said, "I understand you're a Special Forces soldier," and I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Would you be interested in establishing security for the Veterans' Presidential Ball?" It was our first contract. The President didn't show up, but General Powell and a few other high-level folks did.

Our next contract was to recruit, hire, and deploy linguists in Iraq and Afghanistan. When we started, there were 20 other small companies on that contract, which was worth \$3 billion. From our reputation on that contract, we got

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a phone call from the Department of State, which issued us a contract to provide 40 linguists to the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. When the President, the Vice President, or any senior diplomats go to Baghdad, we're the ones who serve as interpreters.

Our people have been hit by IEDs and mortar rounds. People have had their bodies burned. In February, two of our employees

had their trailer hit by rockets. They weren't there at the time, which was just amazing luck.

We've had one death. Charles Allen was killed in a helicopter crash in 2006. I remember coming up the driveway of his mother's

house. She was getting out of her car, and she had groceries in her arms. She looked at me, took a step back, and dropped her groceries. Then she fell to the ground and started to cry. The mother and father were divorced, so I flew to Denver and told him. It was the worst thing in the world.

I was not a big fan of the war in Iraq. But five years of occupation does things. The infrastructure needs rebuilding. There are potholes in the roads and sewage systems that are backed up. In Sadr City, people start shooting each other every summer in part because they don't have water. Our company's presence is going to be important in helping them to rebuild.

JERRY TORRES TORRES ADVANCED ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

“Our people have been hit by IEDs and mortar rounds.”

Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions is based in Arlington, Virginia, but two-thirds of the company's 400 employees are in Iraq and Afghanistan. Founder Jerry Torres, a longtime Special Forces soldier, landed his first contract while nursing a war injury. The company booked \$66.2 million in revenue last year, mostly through contracts to provide IT consulting services and supply Arabic-speaking linguists to the departments of State and Defense.

