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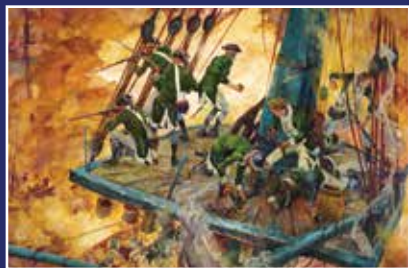
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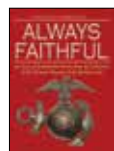
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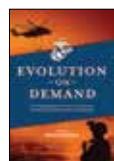
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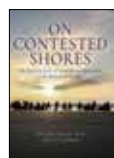
Always Faithful: 250 Years of Remarkable Stories from the Collection of the National Museum of the Marine Corps



A New Conception of War: John Boyd, the U.S. Marines, and Maneuver Warfare



Evolution on Demand: The Changing Roles of the U.S. Marine Corps in Twenty-first Century Conflicts and Beyond



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Article submissions for all three journals should be between 4,000 and 10,000 words, footnoted, and formatted according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* (18th edition). For more information about submission guidelines or to submit an article idea, please visit our website or contact MCU_Press@usmcu.edu.

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FROM THE EDITORS

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, the Marine Corps celebrates along with it. This journal provides an outlet for scholars and practitioners to contribute to that celebration by examining and exploring the Corps' history. *Marine Corps History's* editors strive to offer readers articles in every issue that not only explore that rich history but also provide valuable insights. This publication provides authors a unique venue for their research that is supported by the academic rigor they expect in a scholarly journal while maintaining the close focus on the Marine Corps itself.

In this issue, the articles offer extensive research as well as professional experience. First, Commander David A. Daigle, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel C. Goff, and Commander Peter N. Ott mark the 25th anniversary of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) with a close study of its historical development and its role in sustaining character transformation in Marines. From shipboard actions to trench warfare to urban combat, close combat training has always been a major area of focus for the Corps, and its training program has steadily evolved since World War II into the current comprehensive MCMAP system.

Next, retired Marine colonel John C. McKay reminisces on his time as a naval attaché officer. While serving at the U.S. embassy in San Salvador during the Republic of El Salvador's civil war, Colonel McKay supported the on-site investigations of the infamous El Mozote massacre in December 1981 as well as the March 1982 murder of four Dutch journalists, among

other atrocities that took place during this period. His reflections on the events and his participation in the investigations give an inside view both of a tumultuous time in El Salvador's history and into the responsibilities, challenges, and risks of serving as an embassy naval attaché.

Additionally, Naval History and Heritage Command historian Dr. John Darrell Sherwood contributes an In Memoriam piece about Lieutenant Colonel Ronald H. "Ron" Spector, who started his Marine Corps career as an enlisted historian in Vietnam before returning to service as a specialist officer in the 1980s. Spector's work as director of the Naval Historical Center, as a faculty member at several universities, and as the vice president for the Society for Military History are lasting legacies of his contributions to military and Marine Corps history.

The summer issue closes with several book reviews focusing on a variety of military history subjects to guide readers toward new and valuable resources. As always, the editors seek article submissions from those whose passion and expertise make the history of the Marine Corps available and accessible to readers, including submissions of historiographical essays examining the extant sources on the Marine Corps' history and the shape of scholarly debate on specific events or actions or on broader general history topics. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on these topics and to your future participation as an author, reviewer, or reader. Junior faculty and advanced graduate students are encouraged to submit articles and

book reviews, as well. Join the conversation and find us online on our LinkedIn page (<https://tinyurl.com/y38oxnp5>), at MC UPress on Facebook, MC_UPress on X/Twitter, and MCUPress on Instagram, or con-

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Semper fidelis!

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From Bayonets to Black Belts

THE EVOLUTION OF CLOSE COMBAT AND THE MARINE CORPS MARTIAL ARTS PROGRAM

By Commander David A. Daigle, CHC, USN; Lieutenant Colonel Daniel V. Goff, USMC (Ret); and Commander Peter N. Ott, CHC, USN

Abstract: Since 1775, the U.S. Marine Corps has continually refined its close combat training to address the ever-evolving demands of warfare. From shipboard actions to trench warfare to urban combat, close combat training has always been a major area of focus for the Corps. This progression led to the establishment of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) in 2000. Influenced by legendary figures such as Colonel Anthony J. D. Biddle, who introduced boxing and bayonet fighting, and the “China Marines,” who adopted judo and jujitsu in the 1920s–30s, MCMAP’s roots trace back to the Marine Raiders who applied all these techniques to their versatile hand-to-hand training in World War II. The Marine Corps’ close combat training has steadily evolved since World War II into the comprehensive martial arts system it is today. MCMAP is a cornerstone program that develops the warrior ethos by preparing Marines mentally, physically, and spiritually for any conflict. Despite MCMAP’s significance, no comprehensive history of its origins has been written. As MCMAP marks its 25th anniversary, this article provides a close study of its historical development and its crucial role in sustaining character transformation.

Keywords: Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, MCMAP, martial arts, China Marines, close combat, warrior ethos, character, leadership, core values, spiritual, resilience

Since its founding in 1775, the U.S. Marine Corps has continually refined its close combat training to adapt to the evolving nature of warfare, combining armed and unarmed techniques, while upholding its core ethos of aggressive adaptability. This evolution, shaped by lessons from shipboard actions, trench warfare, and urban combat, has witnessed the gradual integration of martial arts, particularly

through the influence of legendary figures such as Colonel Anthony J. D. Biddle and the “China Marines” stationed in East Asia during the interwar period. This fusion of close-quarters combat with the martial arts began in earnest after World War I, as the China Marines drew from the brutal lessons of trench warfare to introduce concepts and techniques of martial arts into new hand-to-hand systems such as Defendu. These techniques were subsequently further developed and adopted more broadly during World War II, especially by the Marine Raiders, who integrated all these techniques and lessons learned into their training. Martial arts continued to be an important part of combat training over the ensuing decades, culminating in the Marine Corps adopting the Linear In-Fighting Neural-override Engagement (LINE) system in the 1980s, followed by the implementation of MCMAP in 2000.

Cdr David A. Daigle is the command chaplain at Surface Combat Systems Training Command San Diego, CA. LtCol Daniel V. Goff (Ret) was the commanding officer of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 366 and is now a professor of naval studies with the U.S. Naval Community College. Cdr Peter N. Ott is the Naval Education and Training Command deputy force chaplain and the N4 at the Naval Chaplaincy School in Newport, RI. The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Marine Corps University, the U.S. Marine Corps, the Department of the Navy, or the U.S. government. The authors recently published “Beyond Breakfalls: MCMAP and the Will to Fight” in *JAMS*, <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.20261701009>. <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2026120101>

Despite MCMAP's examination in military journals, such as the *Marine Corps Gazette*, and in various research articles within academic institutions, including the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and Naval War College, a notable gap remains in the literature.¹ Among the published articles and research papers on MCMAP during the past 25 years, no single work offers a scholarly history of MCMAP's origins, development, and institutional impact. Existing articles and research papers address certain aspects of the program such as training methods, cultural integration, ethical development, and program effectiveness. However, none provide a comprehensive historical account tracing MCMAP's historical development and evolution from earlier combatives programs. This article fills that gap.

The authors conducted a comprehensive review of dozens of articles sourced from notable military journals and publications in the field of military studies.² Of the 32 articles reviewed, 5 touch on the program development and structure of MCMAP, including its establishment, evolution, and structure, as well as its design, training methodologies, and integration into Marine Corps culture.³ Six explore MCMAP's role in fostering ethical decision-making and character de-

velopment that fosters the cultivation of an ethical warrior mindset.⁴ Seven examine MCMAP's impact on developing mental toughness, resilience, and a warrior ethos among Marines.⁵ Six evaluate MCMAP's effectiveness, propose improvements, or critique its shortcomings.⁶ Two focus on how MCMAP enhances leadership skills, decision-making under stress, and

⁴ Research in the ethical and character development category explores MCMAP's role in fostering ethical decision-making, character development, and the cultivation of an ethical warrior mindset. LtCol Joseph C. Shusko, "The Ethical Warrior of the 21st Century," *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 2 (February 2007): 20–23; Jack E. Hoban, "The Ethical Marine Warrior: Achieving a Higher Standard," *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 9 (September 2007): 36–40; Jack E. Hoban, "Developing the Ethical Marine Warrior," *Marine Corps Gazette* 94, no. 6 (June 2010): 20–25; LtCol James S. McDonough III, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: A Model for Character Development" (conference paper, 2007 International Conference on Character and Leadership Development, West Point, NY, 2007); Jack E. Hoban and LtCol Joseph Shusko, "The Ethical Warrior and the Combat Mindset," *Marine Corps Gazette* 96, no. 5 (May 2012): 80–83; and LtCol Jeffery P. Pellegrino, "Countering Societal Norms," *Marine Corps Gazette* 97, no. 11 (November 2013): 61–63.

⁵ The category of warrior mindset and mental resilience investigates MCMAP's impact on developing mental toughness, resilience, and a warrior ethos among Marines. Harold Kennedy, "Marines Sharpen Their Skills in Hand-to-Hand Combat," *National Defense* 88, no. 600 (November 2003): 68–71; Capt Jamison Yi, "MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos," *Military Review* 84, no. 6 (November–December 2004): 17–24; 1stLt Homer M. Brett, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: One Mind, Any Weapon," *Leatherneck* 89, no. 1 (January 2006): 34–37; Capt Bryan Grayson, "Marine Corps Martial Arts: One Mind, Any Weapon" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2009); Maj Alan R. Singleton II, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: The Warrior Mindset of a Martial Culture" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2012); Maj George W. Childs III, USA, *Developing Resilience through the Modern Army Combatives Program* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2014); and Capt Roger A. Johnson, "Marine Corps Resilience" (thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2020).

⁶ The category of program evaluation and enhancement includes studies that evaluate MCMAP's effectiveness, propose improvements, or critique its shortcomings. Col Michael Flynn, "Does MCMAP Need a Facelift?," *Marine Corps Gazette* 92, no. 4 (April 2008): 12–13; Maj James C. Fuller, "The Synergy of the MCMAP Mindset" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, 2009); GySgt Samuel O. Carter, "Mixed Martial Arts," *Marine Corps Gazette* 94, no. 10 (October 2010): 94–96; Maj Art Houghtby, "MCMAP for All: Adjust the Training Schedule," *Marine Corps Gazette* 95, no. 8 (August 2011): 49–50; LtCol Philip J. Tadema, "Enhancing MCMAP," *Marine Corps Gazette* 102, no. 3 (March 2018): 60–63; and 1stLt Bryson A. Curtin, "The Problem with Semper Paratus," *Marine Corps Gazette* 106, no. 11 (November 2022): 31–35.

¹ Based on a comprehensive review of 32 reviewed articles published during the past 25 years, the research on MCMAP can be broadly organized into the six following categories: (1) program development and structure, (2) ethical and character development, (3) warrior mindset and mental resilience, (4) program evaluation and enhancement, (5) leadership and decision-making, and (6) broader applications and intangible benefits. The authors conducted their research at the Naval Postgraduate School's Dudley Knox Library and the United States Naval War College Henry E. Eccles Library. Such things as newsletter articles or articles from *Leatherneck* magazine were excluded from this article's analysis due to their narrative-driven, general-audience focus, emphasizing personal accounts and perspectives.

³ Research in the program development and structure category focuses on the establishment, evolution, and structural components of MCMAP, including its design, training methodologies, and integration into Marine Corps culture. LtCol George H. Bristol, "Integrated Fighting System: The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," *Marine Corps Gazette* 85, no. 7 (July 2001): 38–39; Maj Christian L. Nicewarner, "The Marine Martial Arts Program and the Training of One Rifle Company," *Marine Corps Gazette* 85, no. 12 (December 2001): 14–17; LtCol Kevin J. Nally, "Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Progressing to an End State," *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 12 (December 2002): 20–22; Maj Richard D. Hall, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2002); and Maj Michael J. Durant, "MCMAP: A Holistic Approach to Warrior Development" (conference paper, International Conference on Military Education and Training, Quantico, VA, 2008).

adherence to rules of engagement.⁷ The final six look at MCMAP's adaptability and practical applications beyond combat, including its scalability for in non-combat situations and other intangible benefits.⁸

This article seeks to address the research gap by providing the first comprehensive historical account of the program to preserve the institutional memory of its development and clarify its original intent as it germinated during the course of 15 years under four Commandants. The article provides the first detailed historical review of MCMAP, charting its evolution from the strategic vision of the Commandants, starting with General Alfred M. Gray, to its official implementation under General James L. Jones in 2000. Consideration is given to MCMAP's unique integration of combat proficiency with character development, a focus that distinguished it from its predecessors. As MCMAP marks its 25th anniversary, this article provides a close study of its historical development and its crucial role in sustaining character transformation.

Evolution of the MCMAP

General Alfred M. Gray Jr. and the Renewal of the Warrior Ethos

Following the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps faced significant challenges. The war had inflicted 14,000

more casualties than World War II, resulting in a deep institutional wound to the Corps.⁹ It was also a turbulent period in society, which was reflected in the Corps by the loss of good order and discipline. Thousands of Marines were involved in various conflicts and discipline issues, threatening its cohesion and institutional integrity.¹⁰ These internal conflicts, insubordination, substance abuse, and violence eroded cohesion and military readiness, endangering its elite combat reputation and the sterling reputation the Corps had gained by the blood that was shed in earlier wars.¹¹ In a January 1975 article for *Marine Corps Gazette*, Lieutenant General Samuel Jaskilka, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, acknowledged these issues and called Marines to action.¹² His remarks spurred an intense period of institutional self-reflection to restore good order and discipline and reaffirm the Corps' elite status, strength, discipline, and readiness.¹³

The Camp Lejeune race riots of July 1969 highlighted the concerns Jaskilka raised. Racial tensions were growing in American society during the 1960s, which boiled over after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968.¹⁴ The Marine Corps was in crisis. Black Marines found themselves in a highly volatile environment, where even minor disagreements could quickly escalate into major confrontations fueled by underlying racial tensions and societal unrest.¹⁵ As racial animosity intensified, troops began rioting

⁷ Research in the leadership and decision-making category focuses on how MCMAP enhances leadership skills, decision-making under stress, and adherence to rules of engagement. LtCol Brian H. Roberts, "Reflexive versus Reflective: Thinking Beyond the Rules of Engagement to 'Keep Our Honor Clean'" (thesis, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2008); and Capt John M. Gerlach, "MCMAP: Execute the Leadership Technique," *Marine Corps Gazette* 100, no. 6 (June 2016): 27–29.

⁸ The category of broader applications and intangible benefits covers research on MCMAP's applications beyond combat, including its benefits for noncombat roles, societal impact, and institutional integration. Maj Scott E. Ukeiley, "NROTC Needs the Corps' Martial Arts Program," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 128, no. 11 (November 2002): 64–66; Capt Gregory S. Rooker, "Sustaining the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2005); Maj Jon-Paul Mickle, USAF, "Every Airman a Fighter" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2008); Lt Junior C. Loral, USN, "Navy Combatives: Adjusting Course for the Future" (thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2010); Maj Brian A. Adams, "The Intangible Benefits of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2015); and Cdr David A. Daigle, USN, LtCdr William M. Schweitzer, USN, and Maj Marianne C. Sparklin, "Spiritual Readiness in the Age of EABO," *Marine Corps Gazette* 106, no. 11 (November 2022): 72–77.

⁹ Maj John J. Franklin, "Another Long March: Lessons from the Post-Vietnam Rebuild of the Marine Corps, 1969 to 1989" (thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2014), 25–26.

¹⁰ Franklin, "Another Long March: Lessons from the Post-Vietnam Rebuild of the Marine Corps, 1969 to 1989," 25–26.

¹¹ See Allan R. Millett, "The U.S. Marine Corps: Adaptation in the Post-Vietnam Era," *Armed Forces & Society* 9 no. 3 (Spring 1983): 364.

¹² LtGen Samuel Jaskilka, "Quality and Leadership," *Marine Corps Gazette* 59, no. 1 (January 1975): 43.

¹³ Jaskilka, "Quality and Leadership," 25.

¹⁴ See for example, Lorraine Boissoneault, "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Assassination Sparked Uprisings in Cities Across America," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 4 April 2018.

¹⁵ See for example, Charles P. Neimeyer, *Marines in Crisis: The Cold War Transformation of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1947–1995* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2024), 140–48, <https://doi.org/10.56686/9798986259468>.

at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in 1969.¹⁶ Corporal Edward Bankston, a White Marine and a decorated Vietnam veteran, was beaten to death by fellow Marines.¹⁷ Additionally, two other White Marines were stabbed, and numerous others were seriously injured in the ensuing melees.¹⁸ Between January and August of 1969, “there were 160 reported racial incidents at Lejeune (though numerous Marines, white and black, described the confrontations as constant).”¹⁹ The incidents were not isolated to Camp Lejeune but were widespread, impacting Marine Corps bases and stations on the East and West Coasts, leading to open confrontations, as well as more subtle forms of discrimination.

Commanders also faced disciplinary challenges beyond racial tensions, insubordination, unauthorized absences, and substance abuse, which plagued the post-Vietnam Marine Corps.²⁰ The shift to an all-volunteer force was hindered by negative public sentiment, making military service less appealing than the private sector.²¹ Already low recruitment standards were exacerbated by judges who offered offenders a choice between joining the Corps or serving jail time, which further diluted personnel quality.²² Despite efforts to remove “ineffectives,” the Corps had some of the worst discipline indices among the U.S. military

branches (table 1), raising concerns about combat readiness and the state of the warrior ethos.²³

Ultimately, this challenging period in Marine Corps history was marked by the erosion of good order and discipline, as well as poor cohesion among both units and individuals throughout the Marine Corps as a whole. It was further compounded by a failure in leadership to recognize and stave off the growing racial tensions more effectively.²⁴

The post-Vietnam era made it clear that the Corps needed to examine its combatives and its approach to physical conditioning. Unit-level conditioning in the 1980s was disorganized, often resembling pickup football, with a hodgepodge of personnel teaching varied boxing or hand-to-hand skills.²⁵ When Gray was selected as the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1987, his appointment marked a turning point in the Corps’ history, signaling a revival of the warrior ethic.²⁶ Indeed, his tenure was so pivotal that it is often referred to as the “second enlightenment of the Marine Corps,” following the first under General John A. Lejeune.²⁷

Like Lejeune, Gray’s transformational leadership profoundly shaped Marine Corps culture.²⁸ He established the Marine Corps University and launched the

¹⁶ Jay Price, “In 1969, the Military Thought It Had Eliminated Racism in Its Ranks. Then Troops Began Rioting,” *American Homefront Project* (19 July 2019).

¹⁷ Price, “In 1969, the Military Thought It Had Eliminated Racism in Its Ranks. Then Troops Began Rioting.” See also Neimeyer, *Marines in Crisis*, 140.

¹⁸ Price, “In 1969, the Military Thought It Had Eliminated Racism in Its Ranks. Then Troops Began Rioting.”

¹⁹ See Neimeyer, *Marines in Crisis*, 140.

²⁰ See Millett, “The U.S. Marine Corps: Adaptation in the Post-Vietnam Era,” 378.

²¹ LtCol Daniel L. Cuda, USAF, “The Hollow Force That Was,” *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 1 April 1994.

²² James B. Woulfe, *Into the Crucible: Making Marines for the 21st Century* (New York: Presidio Press, 1998), 6.

²³ Millett, “The U.S. Marine Corps: Adaptation in the Post-Vietnam Era,” 379. See also Franklin, “Another Long March: Lessons from the Post-Vietnam Rebuild of the Marine Corps, 1969 to 1989,” 28. For concerns about combat readiness and warrior ethos, see for example, Yi, “MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos,” 17 (defining warrior ethos as an intersection of physical, mental, and character discipline). See also Richard M. Swain and Albert C. Pierce, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2017), 9, where the authors define military ethics and ethos as: “The military ethic is a warrior ethic and the military ethos is a warrior ethos, a point made clear by the Soldier’s Creed, the Marine Hymn, the Sailor’s Creed, and the Airman’s Creed.”

²⁴ Woulfe, *Into the Crucible: Making Marines for the 21st Century*, 6.

²⁵ Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 30.

²⁶ See Yi, “MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos,” 18. See also, Maria L. LaGanga, “Gray Tours Bases: Be ‘Warriors’ Again, Top Marine Urges,” *Los Angeles Times* (Orange County edition), 15 July 1987, 3.

²⁷ Charles P. Neimeyer, “General Alfred M. Gray Jr., USMC (Ret), 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps: 22 June 1928–20 March 2024,” *Marine Corps History* 10, no. 1 (2024): 67–68.

²⁸ See LtCol James T. Dillon, “John A. Lejeune, the Marine Corps’ Greatest Strategic Leader” (thesis, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2008).

Table 1. U.S. Marine Corps indiscipline

	1971	1975
Brig population per 1,000	7.80	8.7
Unauthorized absences of more than 30 days per 1,000	5.8	99.8
Percentage of men who did not complete first enlistment	unknown	41.9
Courts-martial per 1,000	69.5	68.9

Miller, "The U.S. Marine Corps: Adaptation in the Post-Vietnam Era," 379; and Franklin, "Another Long March: Lessons from the Post-Vietnam Rebuild of the Marine Corps, 1969 to 1989," 28.

Commandant's Professional Reading List.²⁹ Most notably, he implemented significant doctrinal changes by establishing maneuver warfare through *Warfighting*, Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1.³⁰ This publication became the cornerstone of how Marines fight. Known colloquially as the "little white book," it was an immediate watershed that changed tactics and procedures throughout the Corps.³¹ Gray also addressed other hangovers from the post-Vietnam years, such as the lack of a standardized close combat system and that units relied on boxing or hand-to-hand training on an ad hoc basis, depending on the personnel serving in the unit and their skill sets.³² His concern catalyzed developing a formal martial arts program that improved fitness; restored discipline, pride, and professionalism; and renewed the Corps' warrior culture.³³

Gray determined to revitalize the Corps' warrior ethic by reintroducing bayonet training as part of the basic package for all Marine recruits, supplementing this training with physically demanding martial arts skills that simulated one-on-one combat. The purpose of this bruising, demanding training was to reempha-

size the importance of physical and competitive aggressiveness as a core element of the warrior ethos.³⁴

The Marine Corps has a long history of close-quarters combatives training, evolving continuously over time.³⁵ Over the past century, pioneers such as Biddle, Stavers, Styers, and Walker developed various close combat systems that were adopted by different Marine Corps units.³⁶ In March 1989, the Marine Corps made a historical decision by adopting the Linear In-Fighting Neural-override Engagement (LINE) system.³⁷ LINE represented a major advancement in that it standardized and institutionalized close combat training for the first time in Marine Corps history.³⁸ Its unique design was tailored to meet the specific needs of the Marine Corps.³⁹ LINE was seen as a practical and effective solution for close combat training. Its key advantages include practicality and ease of learning.⁴⁰ The techniques were organized into smaller, manageable units called "ditties," making

²⁹ Yi, "MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos," 18.

³⁰ Bristol, "Integrated Fighting System: The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," 38.

³¹ Bristol, "Integrated Fighting System: The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," 38. For insights into the evolution of martial arts within the U.S. Army, see Childs, *Developing Resilience through the Modern Army Combatives Program*, 10.

³² LINE was officially adopted by the Marine Corps in March 1989 through a course content review board at Quantico, VA. The primary official publication detailing the system is *Close Combat*, FMFM 0-7 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1993). See also Hall, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation," 31; Lorah, "Navy Combatives: Adjusting Course for the Future" 19; and Singleton, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: The Warrior Mindset of a Martial Culture," 15.

³³ See GySgt Ronald S. Donvito, "Close Combat: The LINE System," *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no. 2 (February 1995): 22.

³⁴ Hall, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation," 31. See also Lorah, "Navy Combatives: Adjusting Course for the Future," 19.

³⁵ Donvito, "Close Combat: The LINE System," 24.

²⁹ See for example, Paul Otte, comp., *Grayisms and Other Thoughts on Leadership from General Al Gray, USMC (Retired) 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2015).

³⁰ *Warfighting*, Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1989), was superseded by *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997). For more on the significance of *Warfighting*, see e.g., Neimeyer, *Marines in Crisis*, xviii–xix.

³¹ See for example, Gen David H. Berger, "33rd Anniversary of Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 1—*Warfighting*," Headquarters Marine Corps, 8 March 2022.

³² Hall, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation," 30.

³³ Yi, "MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos," 18.

Marine Corps Close Combat/Martial Arts Key Figures

Captain Samuel Nicholas

Commandant, 1775–83 (died 1790)

The first Marine Corps Commandant. He led early amphibious assaults and shipboard actions. He established practical demands of naval combat during the Revolutionary War, and martial skills of Marine boarding parties, relying on bayonet and cutlass techniques in close-quarters engagements.

Colonel Anthony J. D. Biddle Sr.

World War I through post–World War II (died 1948)

He pioneered formalized bayonet and hand-to-hand training, developed an eclectic system, and authored *Do or Die: A Manual on Individual Combat* (1944). He is considered the godfather of all China Marines, was a pioneer in Marine Corps hand-to-hand and bayonet combat training, and is known for the Biddle Method of Close-Combat.

Lieutenant Colonel Rex Applegate

Interwar through post–World War II (died 1998)

He is best known for his manual *Kill or Get Killed: A Manual of Hand-to-Hand Fighting* (1943), a foundational text for hand-to-hand combat. The Corps adopted and published an updated edition as *Kill or Get Killed*, Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-80. He also coauthored (with Kelly Yeaton and Lieutenant Colonel Samuel S. Yeaton) *The First Commando Knives* (1996). He was heavily influenced by British Commandos William E. Fairbairn and Eric A. Sykes, with an even more streamlined and brutal system. He developed the Applegate-Fairbairn fighting knife, improving on the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger.

Captain Wallace M. Greene Jr.

Interwar through post–World War II (died 2003)

A China Marine and the 23d Commandant of the Marine Corps, he served with the 4th Marine Regiment in Shanghai, China, from 1937 to 1939 and in the South Pacific during World War II. He brought kung fu techniques into the Marine Corps.

Captain Samuel B. Griffith

Interwar through post–World War II (died 1983)

A China Marine who learned and disseminated kung fu techniques within the Corps, he served as executive officer and later commander of the 1st Marine Raider Battalion on Guadalcanal.

Lieutenant Colonel William E. Fairbairn;

Major Eric A. Sykes

British Army, World War II (died 1960 and 1945, respectively)

Together, they created *Defendu*, which synthesized elements from various Asian and Western fighting styles, including judo, jujitsu, savate, boxing, and wrestling. They are renowned for de-

signing the iconic Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife, a double-edged dagger optimized for close-quarters combat. They coauthored a book on pistol shooting, *Shooting to Live* (1942).

Major Dermot Michael “Pat” O’Neill

World War II (died 1985)

A significant but often under-recognized figure in the early development of close-combat training in the Marine Corps. His methods directly influenced Linear Infighting Neural-override Engagement (LINE), used by the Marines from the 1980s to 2000. He developed the O’Neill Method of Close Combat. His teachings—alongside those of Fairbairn, Sykes, and Applegate—laid the groundwork for Marine Corps martial arts. His style emphasized “gouge-and-maim” combat.

Lieutenant Colonel Samuel G. Taxis

Interwar through post–World War II (died 1984)

A China Marine, he collaborated with Fairbairn on the evolution of Marine Corps close combat doctrine. He helped bridge Eastern martial arts (such as jujitsu) and Western military combatives. His work is cited in Biddle’s influential manual *Do or Die* for his developments in *Defendu*. He laid the groundwork for the practical hybrid approach that would eventually characterize Marine Corps martial arts training.

Colonel Anthony Walker

Interwar through post–World War II (died 1979)

A decorated Marine Raider in World War II, he led a company and earned recognition as the Corps’ knife-fighting champion. He was also instrumental in training the Raiders in close-quarters combat. He is renowned for his martial arts prowess within the Marine Corps; his expertise and legacy had a lasting impact on modern Marine Corps combat training.

Lieutenant Colonel Samuel S. Yeaton

Interwar through post–World War II (died 1979)

Another China Marine, he collaborated closely with other prominent close-combat pioneers, such as Fairbairn, Sykes, Moore, and Taxis. His work laid foundational elements that echoed in later formalized systems. He was the archetypal “scholar-warrior,” and his brother, Kelly Yeaton used their correspondence as the primary source for his influential book *The First Commando Knives* (1996), coauthored with Colonel Rex Applegate.

Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Hayward

1950s (died 1962)

He served in a pivotal role in the evolution of Marine Corps martial arts during the 1950s by tasking Gunnery Sergeant Bill Miller to develop a new lethal curriculum at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California.

Gunnery Sergeant Bill Miller

1950s

He developed a standardized, lethal hand-to-hand curriculum that integrated techniques from Okinawan karate, judo, tae kwon do, boxing, and jujitsu (Miller's Combat Curriculum) that was taught to all recruits at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. Miller's approach emphasized not only physical techniques but also the mental and character development of Marines, a philosophy that continues in the modern MCMAP. His system became the foundation for later Marine Corps martial arts programs influencing the creation of the LINE system, which later gave way to MCCCP and ultimately to MCMAP.

Master Sergeant Arcenio James Advincula

Vietnam through 1990s

He is recognized as a pioneering figure in Marine Corps close combat training. His work influenced generations of Marines and contributed to the institutionalization of martial arts training throughout the Corps. Advincula's philosophy emphasized discipline, adaptability, and the use of all available resources in combat. His teachings and innovations are foundational to the modern MCMAP.

Master Sergeant Ron Donvito

1989–98

He was the creator of LINE, the first standardized close-quarters combat system adopted by the Marine Corps. Donvito's work is a significant chapter in the evolution of martial arts in the Corps.

Lieutenant Colonel George H. Bristol

ca. 2000

Bristol is recognized as a principal founder and architect of MCMAP. He transformed close combat training from a focus on purely lethal techniques to a scalable system suitable for both lethal and nonlethal engagements.

Master Gunnery Sergeant Cardo Urso

ca. 2000

He restructured the existing MCCCTP into what became MCMAP, creating a tiered belt system and a comprehensive program that develops "ethical warriors" who embody the Marine Corps' core values. Urso was in charge of the MCCCTP from 1997 to 1999. Credited along with Bristol for transforming Marine close combat training.

them easier to remember and apply in high-pressure situations.⁴¹ In a 1995 article published in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Gunnery Sergeant Ronald S. Donvito described the significance of LINE, saying,

It is very popular today to speak of the sophistication of warfare, how we are moving ever so rapidly toward dehumanizing combat through technology. A mere moment's return to reality is all that is necessary to point out that if anything, warfare is moving in the opposite direction of dehumanization. Conflicts remain vicious and ruthless affairs, often internal and personal struggles in which the enemy has no conception of honor or mercy. . . . It is our chosen profession to be warriors. At Parris Island or San Diego we train warriors, not aviation mechanics or disbursing clerks. At The Basic School there are no pilots or supply officers, there are only leaders of warriors. If anyone has joined the Marine Corps for any other reason than to be a warrior, he has made a mistake. It is our responsibility to fight our Nation's battle, and we must be in constant preparation for this task. . . . Close combat training, when properly conducted, allows leaders and, just as important, peers to witness a Marine's actions and reactions in the climate of intense interpersonal violence. Actual combat is not the proper time for an introduction to violence at this level.⁴²

⁴¹ Donvito, "Close Combat: The LINE System," 24. See also Maj James F. Blanton, "Hand to Hand Combatives in the US Army" (thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2008), 40.

⁴² Donvito, "Close Combat: The LINE System," 22. For a historical account of the development of LINE, see Tank Todd, "Ron Donvito and the L.I.N.E. System," *Fight Times*, 22 February 2007. According to Todd, LINE was developed in the 1970s by then-civilian Ronald S. Donvito, who later enlisted. LINE is a backronym (i.e., an acronym formed from an already existing word by expanding its letters into the words of a phrase).

Donvito rightly emphasized the brutal, personal nature of close combat, asserting that every Marine must be a warrior first. This message resonated with Commandant Gray, who intended to rebuild a warrior-centric culture.

As the Marine Corps' first standardized martial arts program from 1989 to 1998, LINE was a step forward, but it soon revealed its limitations.⁴³ However, its narrow focus on aggressive combat techniques, such as the "kill stomp," lacked versatility for non-combat scenarios, including escalation-of-force or nonlethal encounters.⁴⁴ It was designed for deadly encounters that focused on techniques to dismantle an enemy's attack through joint locks, breaks, and nerve damage. Although it excelled in straight-up combat, it fell short in versatility, with no appropriately scalable response when lethal force was not the answer. Thus, its singular focus on physical techniques also came at the detriment of character development, leadership, and warrior ethos, which the Corps considered essential for properly trained Marines. As a result, the Marine Corps began to search for a more flexible system that built on this initial foundation to develop a broader program that integrated physical fighting skills, mental resilience, ethical decisionmaking, and the Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment. It just so happens that the Commandants who followed Gray were up to the task.

General Carl E. Mundy, Jr: Get an Ethics and Moral Values Effort Going!

In 1991, General Carl E. Mundy Jr., became the 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps, leading during a transitional period following the end of the Cold War that was marked by stability.⁴⁵ As a self-described "sustaining Commandant," Mundy navigated force restructuring amid expectations of a "peace dividend,"

prompting congressional downsizing debates.⁴⁶ Mundy's lasting legacy is his role in establishing honor, courage, and commitment as the core values of the Marine Corps in 1991.⁴⁷ The initiative to define the Corps' core values began with a little-known memorandum addressed to Mundy from Captain Larry H. Ellis, the chaplain of the Marine Corps. In this memorandum, Ellis wrote:

Many of the values to which the U.S. Marine Corps is committed are no longer supported by contemporary culture. The need to defend and support the values fundamental to the Corps requires a focused effort. . . . The strength of the Marine Corps is leadership within a context of honor, sustained by sacrifice. This strength has the potential to remedy the weaknesses of a culture that has forgotten that its young need to be mentored and nurtured, that a sense of honor must be taught, that for the good of all, individuals must be willing to sacrifice personal prerogatives. The Corps, therefore, has an opportunity and the obligation to protect Marines from the destructive consequences of an immoral lifestyle by teaching character and instilling a code of Honor.⁴⁸

The Commandant's reply was in "wholehearted support, penning over the memo, 'Need to investigate and get an ethics and moral values effort going!'"⁴⁹

⁴³ See for example, Blanton, "Hand to Hand Combatives in the US Army," 18; and Bristol, "Integrated Fighting System: The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," 38.

⁴⁴ Singleton, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: The Warrior Mindset of a Martial Culture," 15.

⁴⁵ LtCol Frank G. Hoffman, "The U.S. Marine Corps," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 122, no. 5 (May 1996).

⁴⁶ Hoffman, "The U.S. Marine Corps." See also, Neimeyer, *Marines in Crisis*, iv. Emphasizing "people issues," Mundy coined the Corps as the nation's "9-1-1 Force," a predecessor of today's "crisis response force."

⁴⁷ See for example, Gen Carl E. Mundy Jr., "General Carl E. Mundy's Core Values Speech," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 130, no. 4 (April 2004): 45. See also "Marine Corps Core Values," in *Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide for Discussion Leaders*, Marine Corps Training Publication (MCTP) 6-10B (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corp, 2016), app. B; SgtMaj Troy E. Black, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps memo, "Core Values, Not Just Words," July 2021; and *Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.56, Marine Corps Values Program* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 19 December 1996).

⁴⁸ See Capt Eugene E. Gomulka, USN (Ret), "Honor, Courage, Commitment," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 130, no. 4 (April 2004): 44-45.

⁴⁹ Gomulka, "Honor, Courage, Commitment," 44-45.

These core values would be key elements of the new martial arts program.

Mundy continued to build and expand on Gray's warrior-ethos initiatives and innovations.⁵⁰ In 1994, his final year as Commandant, Mundy launched the Vision 21 Project to shape the Marine Corps' twenty-first century role.⁵¹ Led by Assistant Commandant General Richard D. Hearney, the initiative tasked leaders to envision future national scenarios and the Corps' place within them.⁵² All 19 lieutenant and major generals participated, ensuring Mundy's successor (Charles C. Krulak in 1995) benefited from their collective insights.⁵³ It is significant to note that Vision 21's recommendations directly informed Krulak's 1995 *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, facilitating a seamless leadership transition as all his senior officers "would be intimately familiar with the knowledge that informed the new Commandant's thinking."⁵⁴ It is also noteworthy that Krulak drew heavily from Vision 21's final report in drafting his 1995 guidance.⁵⁵

Vision 21 featured prominent participants, including futurist John L. Petersen, science writer M. Mitchell Waldrop, and military historian Roger A. Beaumont, who introduced the concept of nonlinearity into planning discussions.⁵⁶ Among the presenters was Richard Strozzi-Heckler, who holds a doctorate in psychology and a seventh-degree black belt in aikido.⁵⁷ In his book, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, he detailed his experiences at Camp Pendleton in spring 1995 while participating in Vision 21.⁵⁸ He noted that the diverse group included political scientists, physi-

cists, technologists, defense consultants, ecologists, and futurists, as well as general officers.⁵⁹ Strozzi-Heckler emphasized that martial arts training transcends combat techniques, fostering an inner mindset and character development integral to the warrior ethos. Beyond a fighting system, it provides a value framework tied to the warrior ethos.⁶⁰

His Vision 21 presentation sparked intense debate among the generals, who discussed how a martial arts program could relate to the Marine Corps' mission, ethos, and culture.⁶¹ He noted that such was the intensity of the discussion "that we went beyond the allotted time and were finally asked to clear the room. Even then, several generals stopped him in the hallway, eager to ask questions and debate the possibility of implementing such training in their specific units."⁶² Strozzi-Heckler noted their unexpected focus on spirituality, a topic he approached cautiously, as a surprising but welcome outcome, stating, "What was more astounding, though, was how often they returned the conversation to the subject of spirit. Over the years I've learned to be circumspect about how I approach the topic of spirituality in institutions."⁶³ Strozzi-Heckler continues:

There are many interpretations on the subject, and on more than one occasion I've encountered fundamentalists who manage to unproductively dominate the conversation. But it was clear that for these men this was an essential matter that was not to be overlooked. They insisted, no, demanded, that training the spirit be first on the agenda. The concern for spirit, ethics, and morality was more in the foreground here than in any of the other institutions in which I had worked—by a landslide. What did it tell me? The senior leaders of one of the oldest

⁵⁰ Compare with Yi, "MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos," 19: "Subsequent commandants [to Gray] continued to build and expand warrior-ethos initiatives and innovations." See also Terry Terriff, "Of Romans and Dragons: Preparing the US Marine Corps for Future Warfare," *Contemporary Security Policy* 28, no. 1 (2007): 143–62.

⁵¹ Terriff, "Of Romans and Dragons," 158n5; and Marinus, "Maneuverist No. 3: The Dynamic, Nonlinear Science behind Maneuver Warfare," *Marine Corps Gazette* 104, no. 11 (November 2020): 93–98.

⁵² See Terriff, "Of Romans and Dragons," 158n5.

⁵³ Terriff, "Of Romans and Dragons," 158n6.

⁵⁴ Marinus, "Maneuverist No. 3," 94.

⁵⁵ Marinus, "Maneuverist No. 3," 94.

⁵⁶ Marinus, "Maneuverist No. 3," 94.

⁵⁷ "Richard Strozzi-Heckler, PhD," Staff, StrozziInstitute.org, accessed 6 May 2026.

⁵⁸ Richard Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit: Teaching Awareness Disciplines to the Green Berets*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books, 2007), 347.

⁵⁹ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 347.

⁶⁰ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 348.

⁶¹ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 349.

⁶² Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 349.

⁶³ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 349.

institutions in America were deeply and sincerely committed to the ethical, moral, and spiritual development of the young men and women in the Marine Corps, and by extension the United States.⁶⁴

Vision 21 provided the incoming Commandant, Krulak, with a strategic foundation for leadership. Strozzi-Heckler's speech inspired enthusiasm among the generals for a new, process-based martial arts program to replace LINE, igniting a wave of enthusiasm for a new martial arts initiative.

General Charles C. Krulak: Sustaining the Transformation

General Charles C. Krulak served as the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1 July 1995 to 30 June 1999.⁶⁵ Krulak's first order as Commandant was direct and to the point: "Continue to march."⁶⁶ His straightforward directive acknowledged that the Corps he inherited from his predecessors was strong and that he intended to build on the foundation they had established. However, this did not mean Krulak was planning to rest on his laurels. He recognized the need for "a more visionary approach, one designed to shape the institution for the long term—not just for tomorrow, but for the day after tomorrow."⁶⁷ Accordingly, his 1999 document, *Sustaining the Transformation* (originally Marine Corps Reference Publication 6-11D, now Marine Corps Tactical Publication 6-10A), serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring values of the Marine Corps.⁶⁸ Aside from the Crucible and the Strategic Corporal, Krulak was also instrumental in establishing a new martial arts program.

The LINE system is historically significant as it was the first standardized close combat training program to incorporate the martial arts, however, it had

key shortcomings. The techniques within the LINE system were too rigid and focused on lethality, resulting in a lack of scalable, nonlethal options. This made it impractical for scenarios such as peacekeeping or operations with rules of engagement. Implementation also lagged; while it was practiced with intensity at training depots, LINE remained peripheral in the Fleet Marine Force. In 1998, Commandant Krulak discontinued LINE. Lieutenant Colonel George H. Bristol, a leading Marine Corps martial arts figure at the time, observed that LINE had never been fully integrated into the Corps. He remarked, "The Corps as a whole [was never able] to integrate the close-range combat piece to other aspects of training. It always remained just outside the mainstream, practiced with zeal in entry-level training and later by a few stalwarts, but ignored by the Corps as a whole."⁶⁹

Inspired by Strozzi-Heckler's Vision 21, Krulak sought a new martial arts program effective across the range of military operations (ROMO), including low-intensity situations and noncombative engagements.⁷⁰ In spring 1996, he convened the Close Combat Review Board (CCRB) to revise the Marine Corps' close combat doctrine.⁷¹ Several subject matter experts representing diverse perspectives on close combat comprised the board, which was tasked with reviewing and revising the existing close combat program.⁷² Notable board members included subject matter experts such as Jack Hoban and Master Gunnery Sergeant Cardo Urso.⁷³ During their discussions, the board debated two approaches: one that prioritized lethal techniques in the tradition of Biddle and Walker, and another advocating versatile skills across a force continuum that developed "ethical warriors."⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Bristol, "Integrated Fighting System: The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program," 38.

⁷⁰ Hall, "The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation," 31. See also Cpl William Hawkins and LCpl Adam K. Anderson, "Marine Corps' Close Combat Undergoes Change," *The Globe* (Camp Lejeune, NC), 21 May 1999, 1A; and "Close Combat Training Program Update," *Marine Corps Gazette* 82, no. 2 (February 1998): 12.

⁷¹ See Foreword, in *U.S. Marine Close Combat Fighting Handbook* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), i, hereafter Hoban foreword.

⁷² Hoban foreword.

⁷³ Hoban foreword; and Todd, "Ron Donvito and the L.I.N.E. System."

⁷⁴ Hoban foreword; and Todd, "Ron Donvito and the L.I.N.E. System."

⁶⁴ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 349.

⁶⁵ "General Charles C. Krulak, USMC (Retired)," *Who's Who in Marine Corps History*, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁶⁶ Hoffman, "The U.S. Marine Corps."

⁶⁷ Hoffman, "The U.S. Marine Corps."

⁶⁸ *Sustaining the Transformation*, Marine Corps Tactical Publication (MCTP) 6-10A (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2024).

While the concept of honorable Marines resonated with many members of the board, some were concerned that values-based training could hinder combat effectiveness.⁷⁵ Ultimately, the issue remained unresolved, and the final outcome was the Marine Corps Close Combat Training Program (MCCCTP, officially the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program or MCMAP), which emphasized practical and decisive techniques across a force continuum.⁷⁶ It incorporated elements of combat hitting, pugil stick training, lessons from LINE, and the insights from 10 martial arts experts in karate, judo, jujitsu, and aikido.⁷⁷ Despite its intentions, the new program was short-lived, operating from 1997 to 1999. The program, therefore, fell short of fulfilling the needs of the Marine Corps and subsequently came under scrutiny from the incoming 32d Commandant, General James L. Jones Jr. (1999–2003).

General Jones drew on his 1967 Vietnam tour as a second lieutenant with Company G, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, to shape MCMAP. Observing the Republic of Korea (ROK) Marines, he noted that their tae kwon do training fostered a unified warrior ethos and intimidated the Viet Cong forces, who actively avoided combat with them.⁷⁸ Jones remarked, “Friend and foe alike knew ROK Marines were individually trained masters of close combat—black belts in tae kwon do—able to deal personally and ruthlessly with any enemy.”⁷⁹ His experience as a young officer had a profound impact on Jones, as he recognized the transformative potential of martial arts in building a warrior ethos within the military. Many years later, the discipline, lethality, and warrior spirit of the ROK Marines were the inspirations Jones drew on to develop what is now MCMAP.⁸⁰

Jones identified the shortcomings of the MCCCTP and sought to develop a new martial arts

program that would cultivate Marines who embody ethical, moral, and spiritual values with the capacity to defend, protect, and uphold those values in both word and action as warriors in the twenty-first century.⁸¹ In June 1999, the program entered a testing phase. During the following weeks, two separate programs were evaluated, with Jones selecting an enhanced version of the prior system. This revised program merged the physical aspects of martial arts with the Marine Corps’ core value program.⁸² The Commandant was committed to the new martial arts program and institutionalized it, officially launching the MCMAP on 1 October 2000 and mandating training for all Marines.⁸³ Although several differences make this system unique from its predecessors, according to Major Richard D. Hall, “One important facet of this program [was that it integrated] the previously overlooked mental and character disciplines into the physical.”⁸⁴ The resulting program integrated the best combat-tested martial arts skills and traditional close combat training techniques with proven Marine Corps core values and leadership training.⁸⁵ See table 2 for a comparison of MCCCTP with MCMAP.

Building on lessons learned from the flaws of LINE and the MCCCTP, MCMAP emerged as the Marine Corps’ long-sought comprehensive program. Unlike predecessors, MCMAP united the Fleet Marine Force through a career-long continuum. It enhanced individual combat skills, tying Marines to the warrior ethos via belt progression, while boosting unit cohesion across all ranks and military occupational specialties through shared training linked to the Corps’ legacy. An example of how MCMAP supported the Marine Corps’ legacy include guided discussions focusing on Marine Corps values and the fundamentals of leadership in two of the program’s

⁷⁵ Hoban foreword; and Todd, “Ron Donvito and the L.I.N.E. System.”

⁷⁶ Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 32.

⁷⁷ See Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 31.

⁷⁸ Yi, “MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos,” 19.

⁷⁹ Yi, “MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos,” 19.

⁸⁰ Fuller, “The Synergy of the MCMAP Mindset,” 3.

⁸¹ Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, 365.

⁸² Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 33–34.

⁸³ Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 33.

⁸⁴ Hall, “The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: Sustaining the Transformation,” 33–34. See also Rooker, “Sustaining the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program,” 4–5.

⁸⁵ *Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP)*, MCRP 3-02B (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2011), 1–2.

Table 2. MCCCTP / MCMAP comparison

System/program	MCCCTP	MCMAP
Time frame	In testing from 1997–99.	Officially adopted October 2000 by <i>MCO 1500.54A</i> , <i>Marine Corps Martial Arts Program</i> ; formally implemented in 2002 by <i>Marine Corps Martial Arts</i> , <i>MCRP 3-02B</i> (2000–present).
Purpose	Replaced LINE with new system that improved and expanded close combat skills.	Replaced MCCCTP. Integrates physical, mental, and spiritual character disciplines; builds “ethical warriors.”
Curriculum focus	Enhanced close combat physical techniques.	More comprehensive: unarmed combat, weapons, leadership, ethics, ROMO.
Development	Improved close combat and “Marine Warrior” (mind-body-team).	Combined best elements of LINE, MCCCTP, and other close combat training with character development and focus on “ethical warrior.”
Leadership support	Commandant-level backing initiated formal review and testing.	Full institutional support of Commandant. Formalized program with required training for all Marines. Commandant directed with <i>MCO 1500.54A</i> .
Ethics/character	Early integration, not yet fully developed.	Central pillar: spiritual, mental, character, leadership and physical disciplines are integrated.
Techniques	Focus on practical, combat-tested skills.	Techniques from all levels of close combat; includes martial arts; includes bayonet, weapons, and ground fighting.
Belt system	Not envisioned.	Formalized (tan, gray, green, brown, black), with advancement tied to proficiency and character.
Team/warrior ethos	Early emphasis on collective identity and warrior ethos.	Institutionalized warrior ethos, character, leadership, spiritual, and teamwork training.
Implementation	Limited to test units and pilot programs.	Corps-wide, mandatory for all Marines.

Source: compiled by authors.

training manuals.⁸⁶ To acknowledge that Marines are often tasked with completing military operations other than war (MOOTW), MCMAP included lessons such as the “Responsible Use of Force” and the “Force Continuum.”⁸⁷ *Marine Corps Order 1500.59A, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program*, also prioritizes “mental, moral, and physical resiliency” as critical to future victories, a stark contrast to earlier physical-only combatives.⁸⁸ By embedding warrior ethos studies and values-based tie-ins directly into belt advancement requirements, MCMAP ensures that the ethical and moral development of a Marine is considered just as critical as their physical proficiency.

Program architects Lieutenant Colonel Bristol and Master Gunnery Sergeant Urso understood that true combat readiness and the Marine Corps ethos demanded not just physical skills but also an ethical grounding and mental strength, woven and integrated into MCMAP. To this end, the mission of MCMAP is “to create mentally tough, morally sound, and physically capable warfighters . . . and ultimately the unit as a whole.”⁸⁹ By so doing, MCMAP seeks to “educate Marines in leadership, moral truthfulness, and warrior cultures.”⁹⁰ As a result, MCMAP is not merely about defeating an opponent; it is fundamentally about building the character of the Marine, directly linking physical training to the core values of honor, courage, and commitment—the Ethical Warrior.

⁸⁶ MCCS-TAN-1001, “Fundamentals of Marine Corps Martial Arts,” in *Tan Belt Instructor Preparation Guide* (Quantico, VA: Martial Arts Center of Excellence, The Basic School, 2015), 139–44; and *Gray Belt Instructor Preparation Guide*, MCCS-GRAY-2001, “Gray Belt” (Quantico, VA: Martial Arts Center of Excellence, The Basic School, 2015), 127–44.

⁸⁷ *Tan Belt Instructor Preparation Guide*, 119–24; and *Gray Belt Instructor Preparation Guide*, 105–12.

⁸⁸ *Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.59A, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 23 September 2019), 4.a. (2) 2.

⁸⁹ *MCO 1500.59A, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program*, 3 and 4 a. (1). Even after its implementation, MCMAP has continued to evolve, showing a commitment to refining the program based on experience and the needs of the force. Within 10 years of its establishment, Training and Education Command (TECOM), in conjunction with the Martial Arts Center of Excellence (MACE), conducted a comprehensive review of all MCMAP orders, regulations, and directives, resulting in a 2011 update. See *MARADMIN 219/11, Marine Corps Martial Arts Update* (Washington, DC: Headquarter Marine Corps, 2011). It provided course corrections to the program due to a “body hardening,” resulting in many injuries that affected operational readiness.

⁹⁰ *MCO 1500.59A, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program*, 4.a. (2) 2.

From the rocky post–Vietnam years to the rise of MCMAP’s values-driven training, the Marine Corps has demonstrated a fierce determination to establish a close combat program rooted in the martial arts, striking a balance between raw skill, leadership, and character development. General Gray set the stage, General Jones brought it home, and subsequent Commandants have kept it alive during the past 25 years, turning MCMAP into a bedrock of Marine Corps training. Its strength comes from a well-rounded approach, sharpening each Marine’s combat abilities while tightening unit bonds and breathing life into the warrior spirit across the ranks, ready to tackle the demands of the twenty-first century and beyond.

Conclusion

Since the Marine Corps’ founding in 1775, its approach to close combat training has evolved from shipboard skirmishes to the trenches of World War I and through the urban battlegrounds of modern warfare. This journey stands as a testament to the indomitable fighting spirit of Marines. The formal integration of martial arts into this tradition began in the last century with pioneers like Colonel Anthony J. D. Biddle and the China Marines. This legacy was carried forward by the Marine Raiders of World War II and continued to develop in the decades that followed, culminating in the establishment of MCMAP in 2000. As this work has detailed, although many articles have touched on the program, a comprehensive history of its origins has been missing. This article fills that gap, tracing the lineage that led to the creation of MCMAP. Now marking its 25th anniversary, MCMAP represents both a continuation of a rich fighting legacy and evolution in Marine training. It is built on the institutional understanding that lethality alone is not enough. MCMAP was designed to forge not just proficient warriors, but honorable Marines who lead with moral clarity, mental resilience, and an unwavering dedication to honor, courage, and commitment.

•1775•

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

El Pulgarcito (the Little Flea) South of the Border

A MARINE'S SKETCHES FROM A FORGOTTEN WAR,
EL SALVADOR, 1981–1982

By Colonel John C. McKay, USMC (Ret)

Marine Corps History journal is pleased to offer the following professional reminiscences of a naval attaché officer to the Republic of El Salvador during a tumultuous time in the country's history. Colonel John C. McKay was closely involved in the on-site investigations of the infamous El Mozote massacre in December 1981 as well as the March 1982 murder of four Dutch journalists, among other atrocities that took place during El Salvador's civil war.

Mise en Scène

Reared in Latin America, I enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1962 at age 17. Six years later, I was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry. In November 1977, James E. “Jimmy” Carter was elected president of the United States. Earlier that year in El Salvador, General Carlos Humberto Romero was elected president in an election fraught with

irregularities. In October 1979, junior El Salvadoran reformist military officers and a small group of civilian politicians deposed President Romero in a successful coup d'état and established the joint civilian/military Revolutionary Government Junta (*Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno*, JRG), ending 48 years of military dictatorship.¹

Late in the same year in Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN) overthrew dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. In March 1980, Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was shot dead while celebrating mass in San Salvador. In El Salvador, the killings went on unabated. According to Christian Legal Aid of San Salvador (*Socorro Jurídico Arzobispado*), 480 deaths were attributed to death squads in April 1980; in May, that rose to as many as 1,200.² In May, former National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) intelligence officer Roberto D'Aubuisson was arrested and charged with plotting an unsuccessful coup. Three days later, ow-

Col John C. McKay enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1962. He deployed with combat elements during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, received a Secretary of the Navy appointment (from the ranks) to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1964, served two tours in Vietnam as an infantry officer, and was twice wounded, losing an eye. He was a U.S. naval attaché to El Salvador during that country's civil war. An Olmsted Scholar (Spain), he holds master's degrees from Georgetown University and the National War College. Col McKay provided sworn depositions during the Iran-Contra hearings and has commanded infantry units up to a Joint Task Force. Post-retirement assignments have included time with the Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State, and Drug Enforcement Administration. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, he was an adjunct professor at California State University, Sacramento. At present, he is a key federal prosecutorial witness in an ongoing war crime trial emanating from the Salvadoran Civil War.

¹ See *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Carlos Humberto Romero,” accessed 10 November 2025.

² *Socorro Jurídico Arzobispado* began as a small human rights organization in 1975 at the outset of the Salvadoran Civil War (1979–92). “Socorro Jurídico Arzobispado San Salvador Collection,” Latin America and Latinx Studies Center, University of Colorado Boulder, accessed 6 November 2025; and *El Salvador: Del Genocidio de la Junta a la Esperanza [sic] de la Lucha Insurreccional* as cited in Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 2d ed. (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1982), 162, 245n4.

ing to military pressure, D'Aubuisson was released for "insufficient evidence."³

In November 1980, Ronald W. Reagan was elected president of the United States. In December, three U.S. Maryknoll Sisters and a lay missionary woman were tortured, raped, and murdered in El Salvador.⁴ This incident forced the outgoing Carter administration to cut off military aid to the republic. A cornerstone of the Carter administration was human rights, a laudable goal unattainable in an environment of instability such as in El Salvador. In late January, two American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) special advisors and their El Salvadoran host, Rudolf Viera, head of the controversial land reform program, were gunned down in the dining area of the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador.⁵ When the insurgents launched their "final" offensive in early January 1981, U.S. military assistance was restored. During the waning days of the Carter administration, six Bell UH-1H Iroquois helicopters were authorized for the Republic of El Salvador. Less than three months after the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan, the FSLN consolidated exclusive power in Nicaragua. In June 1981, I was accredited as the first U.S. naval attaché to the Republic of El Salvador.⁶

In addition to standard change of station orders to El Salvador, I was ordered by the office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert H. Barrow, to notify his office within 24 hours of my arrival in the continental United States, regardless of the purpose of my presence. Those orders resulted in four one-on-one meetings with the Commandant and two one-on-one meetings with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army general John W. Vessey Jr. These

debriefings were scheduled for 15 minutes; they all exceeded 30 minutes.

Early in my tenure as naval attaché, a small, unheralded team of U.S. military officers under Army brigadier general Fred F. Woerner arrived in El Salvador. The U.S. embassy's Defense Attaché Office (DAO) hosted the Woerner team, which attempted to design a winning strategy for the El Salvadoran military, known as the Woerner Report.⁷ The effect of the Woerner Report on the outcome of the war is open to debate.

Incipency

My interest in and thinking on Latin America is not perfunctory. From an early age, I self-identified more with Latin cultures, mores, and lifestyles than those of my own country. As a bilingual English/Spanish-speaker with a working familiarity of Quechua, the language of the Incas (still common in Ecuador, Perú, and Bolivia), I easily fit in. My parents were comfortable, even encouraging, of my language proficiencies. During our early years in Perú and Mexico, I became acculturated to the point of identifying more with my Peruvian and Mexican contemporaries than with Americans. As I matured, my thinking ventured into why the United States and its southern neighbors were not more closely knit. I came to appreciate poet Walt Whitman's 1883 observation:

To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts. No stock shows a grander historic retrospect—grander in religiousness and loyalty, or for patriotism, courage, decorum, gravity and honor. (It is time to dismiss utterly the illusion-compound, halfraw-head-and-bloody-bones and half Mysteries-of-Udolpho, inherited from the English writers of

³ Armstrong and Shenk, *El Salvador*, 159–61.

⁴ Stephanie M. Huez, "The Murdered Churchwomen in El Salvador," *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, December 2020. For the aftermath of the murders and trial, see George Black, "Heart of Darkness: Decades Later, the Truth behind a Grisly Mass Murder in El Salvador," *New Republic*, 21 April 2025.

⁵ See "El Salvador, Break in a Triple Murder: Arrests at Last," *Time*, 27 April 1981.

⁶ Prior to my accreditation as the first U.S. naval attaché to the Republic of El Salvador, the assistant U.S. naval attaché accredited to México, Maj Ronald J. Cruz, covered El Salvador through frequent trips to and reporting from El Salvador.

⁷ The Woerner Report was highly sensitive, classified Top Secret/Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals (NOFORN). See "Woerner Report on El Salvador," November 1981, National Security Archive, George Washington University; and Maj John W. Doucette, "US Air Force Lessons in Counterinsurgency: Exposing Voids in Doctrinal Guidance" (thesis, School of Advanced Air Power Studies, Air University, 1999), 42–43.



Official U.S. Navy photo

Chief of Naval Operations Thomas Hayward congratulating and giving guidance to the author, then a mere major, April 1981.

the past 200 years. It is time to realize—for it is certainly true—that there will not be found any more cruelty, tyranny, superstition, &c., in the resume of past Spanish history than in the corresponding resume of Anglo-Norman history. Nay, I think there will not be found so much.)⁸

Geography and Demographics

El Salvador, approximately the size of Massachusetts, is the smallest mainland nation of the Western Hemisphere, thus the affectionate Spanish sobriquet *el pulgarcito*, “little or tiny flea” in English.⁹ Similar to references to the El Salvadorans as *los alemanes de América Central* (the Germans of Central America), Salvadorans take pride of place in the region as a small yet dynamic country. El Salvador is situated on the southern shelf of the mountain chain running be-

⁸ Francisco Cruz, “A Letter by Walt Whitman: ‘The Spanish Element of Our Nationality’, July 20, 1883,” LinkedIn, accessed 17 October 2025.

⁹ Guille Masserbösch, “Julio Enrique Ávila, el escritor que acuñó la frase, El Salvador, el Pulgarcito de América” [Julio Enrique Ávila, the Writer Who Coined the Phrase “El Salvador, the Little Thumb of America”], *El Mundo* (Spain), 25 August 2025.

tween Mexico and Panama. It is the only country in Central America that lacks a Caribbean Sea coastline. The country's total area is some 8,620 square miles (13,872.5 kilometers), averaging 60 miles (96.6 kilometers) in width and 160 miles (257.5 kilometers) in length. Estimated population in 1981 was less than 4.7 million, with the greatest population density, excepting Haiti, in the Western Hemisphere at 792 people per square mile.

Historical Synopsis

Apart from modern Costa Rica, the Central American region is wracked by a history of violence and political upheaval. Today's El Salvador was subjugated by Spanish *conquistador* Pedro Alvarado in 1524–25. It became a Spanish colony in 1540. It gained independence from Spain in 1821, and in 1823 it became a part of the United Provinces of Central America. With the dissolution of the United Provinces of Central America in 1840, El Salvador gained independence. During 1859–63, the introduction of coffee cultivation and resulting infrastructure flourished, including the rise and influence of those possessing large land holdings called *latifundios*.

Antecedents to *La Matanza*

Although of distinct origin, aura, comport, and outcome, the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) had singular political influence throughout Latin America greater than that of the subsequent 1959 Castro-led revolution in Cuba.¹⁰ Some revisionist chroniclers of the Mexican Revolution would have the reader believe that it was a Communist affair; they are in error. The Mexican Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de México*, PCM) was not founded until 1919.¹¹ The Communist Party of El Salvador (*Partido Comunista de El Salvador*, PCS) was founded in 1925.

As throughout Latin America, the Great Depression (1929–34) exacerbated the socioeconomic structures of Mexico and El Salvador. The Depression of

the 1930s allowed the PCS to grow and prosper in its early years, becoming the best organized Communist movement in Central America. The PCS was a leading advocate for the 1932 uprising. Prior to the Depression, imports and exports were about 25 percent of the gross national product. The leading export was coffee, followed by cotton and sugar.¹² Coffee prices were high in 1927, with the election of Pío Romero Bosque, in “the freest municipal and then Presidential El Salvador elections in Salvadorean history.”¹³ Coffee prices plummeted in 1929.¹⁴ In 1932, Agustín Farabundo Martí led a peasant and worker uprising, the first Communist revolution in the Western Hemisphere. The response of the Salvadoran Army, under President General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, resulted in more than 30,000 deaths—a seismic, if not *the* seismic, event in twentieth-century El Salvadoran history.¹⁵ At the last minute, the PCS tried to call off the insurrection, but it was too late. *La Matanza*, as it is called in Spanish, still casts a ghostly specter over El Salvador. In 1961, the right-wing National Conciliation Party (*Partido de Conciliación Nacional*, PCN) came to power through a military coup. Border tensions increased between El Salvador and Honduras over issues of land reform in Honduras and immigration and demographic challenges in El Salvador. In July 1969, those tensions erupted in brief military

¹² Howard I. Blutstein et al., *Area Handbook for El Salvador* (Washington, DC: Foreign Area Studies, American University, 1971), 183.

¹³ Alastair White, *El Salvador* (Boulder, CO: West View Press, 1973), 96.

¹⁴ “With the Great Depression, the coffee market collapsed. In 1928, the average price of coffee was \$15.75 for a hundred kilograms. By 1929, it dropped to \$13.21; in 1930, to \$7.50; in 1931, to \$7.31; and, in 1932, \$5.97.” Ernesto Richter, *Proceso de Acumulación y Dominación en la Socio-Político Salvadoreño* (San José, Costa Rica: SCUSCA, 1976), 47, as cited in Armstrong and Shenk, *El Salvador*, 22.

¹⁵ The most systematic chronicler of the event is Thomas P. Anderson in *Matanza: The 1932 “Slaughter” that Traumatized a Nation, Shaping US-Salvadoran Policy to This Day*, 2d ed. (Austin: Curbstone Press, University of Texas, 1992). Also see Rafael Menjivar, *Formación y Lucha del Proletariado Industrial Salvadoreño* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1979); Armstrong and Shenk, *El Salvador*, chap. 1; and White, *El Salvador*, 97–103. *La matanza* literally translates into English as “the massacre.” The Spanish word is more nuanced, often connoting an intentional, catastrophic, horribly grim event.

¹⁰ Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 75.

¹¹ Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 52; and Reid, *Forgotten Continent*, 101.

conflict between the two countries.¹⁶ These two events heightened an increasing deterioration and unraveling of the fragile El Salvadoran societal fabric. Although the causes are open to discussion, the roots of the 1979 insurrection may go back to the 1932 *La Matanza*, as again, manifested in the fraudulent 1977 election of General Carlos Humberto Romero, who was ousted in October 1979 by a group of reformists resulting in a mixed military-civilian junta. The administration of President Jimmy Carter welcomed the new El Salvadoran government, but “government repression persisted and killings continued at the rate of 1000 per month” following the post-October 1979 junta’s seizure of power.¹⁷

Context and Atmosphere

Following an interview in Washington, DC, with and gaining the approval of the newly designated U.S. ambassador, Deane Hinton, and the recently accredited U.S. defense attaché (DATT) to the Republic of El Salvador, I arrived in the nation’s capital, San Salvador, in June 1981. The tour of duty was one year, unaccompanied. From that point, I embarked on a melodramatic, storm-tossed voyage through the macabre. Any semblance of morality was conspicuously absent, high ideals and illusory wishful thinking notwithstanding. Joan Didion’s short book *Salvador* gives a contemporaneous glimpse of the dark, menacing, kaleidoscopic, shape-shifting aura of horrors heralding what seemed to be calamitous scourge.¹⁸

The U.S. embassy’s Defense Attaché Office (DAO) consisted of two attachés, the DATT (a U.S. Army colonel) and a naval attaché, with a supporting staff of one U.S. Army warrant officer-3 (CWO3) administration chief and a U.S. Army enlisted clerk/typist. Additionally, a bilingual Spanish-English

El Salvadoran woman served at the entrance to the DAO as a receptionist and sometimes typist for unclassified Spanish pieces. As the U.S. naval attaché, I was a principal on the embassy’s staff, albeit the most junior. As one of two military attachés, my responsibilities encompassed much more than the small Navy of El Salvador. I was immediately immersed in reporting on the Salvadoran Air Force and Army, as well. Initially, I resided in a large, well-appointed house with the senior U.S. Navy representative on the embassy’s Military Group (USMILGRP) staff and the previously mentioned CWO3. Although both the DAO and USMILGRP were integral to the embassy’s staff, they reported through different military communication channels. The DAO reported through the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in Washington, DC, while the USMILGRP reported through then U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) in Panamá.

The embassy’s Regional Security Office (RSO) provided two armed El Salvadoran security personnel, not soldiers, for 24-hour security of the joint residence. Two live-in maids and a daytime houseboy were part of the package, all having been vetted by the RSO. Marta, the senior maid, was a diminutive, very personable individual whom I came to trust implicitly. Marta remained with me during the entire time I was in El Salvador.

The Vietnam War experience made me wary of U.S. vetting of foreign nationals. History indicates that the Vietnamese enemy were past masters at penetrating, infiltrating, and planting spies and informants amid the higher echelons of opposing military forces, first shown by the Viet Minh vis-à-vis the French and later by the Viet Cong/NVA vis-à-vis the United States. Consequently, as I spent more time in country, I came to eschew personal bodyguards. There were exceptions to be sure, for example, when detailed to escort a U.S. congressional delegation (CODEL) visiting a host country or when Ambassador Hinton designated me to escort the Dutch parliamentary investigating team after the murder of the four Dutch journalists in March 1982.

¹⁶ “Soccer War” or “100-hour war” are catchy sobriquets for a brief event that reflected deep socioeconomic divides that worsened as El Salvador descended into internal armed conflict in the late 1970s. William H. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Football War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 313. Four consecutive *juntas* governed from October 1979 to March 1982, when elections for the Constituent Assembly were held.

¹⁸ Joan Didion, *Salvador* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982).



Author's collection

Ever loyal and reliable maid Marta and the author in the garden of the new residence after the two attacks on the previous quarters.

The atmosphere in San Salvador, the capital, was fraught and tense, with noticeable El Salvadoran troop movement bustling about. Prior to my arrival, the government issued a 2200–0500 curfew. Electricity was an on-and-off affair. The insurgents were adept at blowing up and toppling electrical pylons. Moving along the early morning streets of the city inevitably showed lifeless bodies, dispatched during the night, usually with thumbs tied behind their backs and a bullet to the back of the skull, or decapitated with the severed head grotesquely or obscenely placed on the headless corpse. Inevitably many of the dead were mutilated young women. Body mutilations, usually involving the genitals or breasts, were common and clearly visible. A plausible case can be made that many of the extrajudicial killings and kidnappings

were carried out by right-wing death squads.¹⁹ The leftist insurgents were less prone to such grotesqueries, although they too committed atrocities, tortures, and kidnappings.

The various elements of the insurgency were loosely umbrellaed under the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*, FMLN).²⁰ A palpable sense of fear and trepidation had seeped into the country's social and economic fabric.

Tempest in a Teapot

Within the embassy staff, a discernable disconnect was evident. Cooperation and coordination between the DAO, USMILGRP, and chief of station were all but absent. Personalities as well as agency bias played a role. A new U.S. ambassador, a new DATT and naval attaché, a fresh chief of station, plus a soon-to-depart USMILGRP commander, facilitated remedy. The new chief of station was a former Marine Corps officer.

Making the Rounds

Among many of the El Salvadoran government officials to whom I was invited to present my credentials were the senior officers of the El Salvadoran armed forces, starting with the minister of defense and public security, General José Guillermo García, and the armed forces chief of staff, Colonel Rafeal Flórez Lima. I was also introduced to the deputy minister

¹⁹ Cynthia J. Arnson, "Window on the Past: A Declassified History of Death Squads in El Salvador," in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, eds. Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner (York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 85–124. Also see Clifford Kause, "How U.S. Actions Helped Hide Salvador Human Rights Abuses," *New York Times*, accessed 20 December 2025.

²⁰ George Fauriol, ed., *Latin American Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies and National Defense University, 1985), 31, 32, 165, 177, 180–81. *Latin American Insurgencies* lists the following complicit insurgencies: Communist Party of El Salvador (*Partido Comunista de El Salvador*, PCES); Popular Liberation Force (*Fuerzas Populares de Liberación*, FPL); Popular Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario Popular*, EPL); Armed Forces for National Resistance (*Fuerza Armada de Resistencia Nacional*, FARN); and Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (*Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores de Centro-América*, PRTC).

of defense, Colonel Francisco Adolfo Castillo.²¹ In quick succession, I met all six brigade commanders, the commanders of the Salvadoran Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea de El Salvador* or FAS), the meager Navy of El Salvador, and special units, e.g., cavalry and a light armored unit, with some of whom, both officers and rank, I became professionally close. In addition, I met the commanding officers of the six newly mustered rapid reaction infantry battalions (*Batalión de Infantería de Reacción Inmediata*, BIRI), then just coming into operational status under the U.S. aegis. I also made the rounds of the country's security forces, encompassing the National Police (*Policia Nacional*) under Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila; the National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) under Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanoa; and the Treasury Police (*Policia de Hacienda*) under Colonel Francisco Morán. Also included were the commanding officers, all colonels, of the military hospital, the National Military Academy, and the *Maestranza*.²² With few exceptions, e.g., the military hospital, the commanding officers were army officers; the head of the military hospital was an oral surgeon educated, certified, and licensed in Scotland holding the rank of colonel. All elements of the armed forces and security forces were under the jurisdiction the minister of defense and public security and numbered about 17,500. The makeup and mission-specificity of government paramilitary groups was less discernable.²³

²¹ Col Castillo was captured by the FMLN after the helicopter on which he was a passenger was shot down in Morazán Department on 17 June 1982. The other passenger, 6th Brigade commander Col Salvador Beltrán Luna, was killed. Although injured, the FAS pilot eluded capture. Col Castillo subsequently made propaganda broadcasts against the Salvadoran government on the insurgents' Radio Venceremos. "Captured Colonel Sees Demoralized Army," *United Press International*, 26 April 1983.

²² *Maestranza* is another difficult word to accurately translate. Generally, it can mean arsenal, armory, or high-end maintenance facility. For example, in El Salvador at the time, the *Maestranza* would put together the country's version of a weaponized armored vehicle.

²³ These were numerous and may or may not have some government affiliation. For example, *Organización Democrática Nacionalista* (ORDEN) was a civilian paramilitary network of 50,000–100,000 individuals under the direction of the president of the republic founded in 1968. The rural patrols (*patrullas cantonales*) consisting of former servicemembers authorized to carry weapons function as a sort of army reserve. And there were also death squads. See Cynthia Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1982), 92–93.

Certainly, fluency in Spanish and cultural assimilation were assets, as was a minor early gaffe at a welcome-aboard gathering of senior El Salvadoran officers in the officers' club at the Ministry of Defense. Having lost an eye in Vietnam, I wore/wear an eye patch. Given the problematic environment in El Salvador at the time, I scrubbed the eye patch. The prosthesis was nicely done, but it "floats" quirkily. Certainly, it was good for comment at happy hour. It also tended to gratuitously fall out of the eye socket, which is exactly what happened during the welcome-aboard gathering. The prosthesis just plonked into the drink I held. Despite the formality of the occasion, it seemed the whole gathering burst into mirthful laughter and subdued applause. A small but significant sense of camaraderie emerged from what might have been an embarrassing faux pas. Having been twice wounded in Vietnam lent a certain cachet.

In Adversity the FMLN Makes Its Mark

There was purpose to the previously noted troop movements. In January 1981, the FMLN launched the first full-scale rebel offensive of the civil war, to coincide with the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan. The purpose of the attack was to initiate a general uprising and oust the Revolutionary Government Junta (*Junta Revolucionario de Gobierno*). That same month, two U.S. AFL-CIO labor representatives and their El Salvadoran host in San Salvador were murdered.²⁴ Although the FMLN suffered a military setback, it did establish the insurgent organization as an effective fighting force and gained it further popular support. Concurrent with lax operational security in the El Salvadoran armed forces, plagued with shoddy field practices, the war was not going well for the government. In his chapter in the book *Latin American Insurgencies*, Jack Child does a credible job describing the societal, historical, and cultural footing of the ethics of the El Salvadoran officer corps in the early 1980s:

Intense personal and institutional loyalties are built up in each graduating

²⁴ See "El Salvador, Break in a Triple Murder: Arrests at Last."

class [from the Captain General Gerardo Barrios Military School]. These so-called “tandas” function as a parallel command structure, which is highly impervious to civilian control or *change* [author’s emphasis]. This results in a rigid, closed command system that protects incompetents, allows for widespread corruption, and condones attacks against civilians as an anti-guerrilla tactic. In the field, the effectiveness of Salvadoran tactical units is severely hampered by these leadership deficiencies and by a lack of effective communication, transportation, intelligence, coordination, and medical support systems. The net result is a reluctance and inability to engage in aggressive small-unit operations (especially night operations), which are considered paramount for defeat of a guerrilla adversary.²⁵

Fomented by the weight of history and excesses that have been part of the El Salvadoran military’s approach to dissension for decades if not centuries, the ethos of the El Salvadoran armed forces was not surprising. Another often overlooked and rarely considered or understood facet of many Latin societies is the strong, binding allegiance and loyalty owed to the family, above ephemeral entities such as the state or nation or constitution.

The FMLN Brings down the Puente de Oro

On the night of 15 October 1981, the second anniversary of the ouster of then President General Romero, the FMLN destroyed the Puente de Oro, one of the only two bridges spanning the Lempa River, in a clev-

erly planned and executed attack. Early the following day, I was dispatched to photograph and report on the bridge’s destruction.²⁶ The photographs and report were cabled late the same day by the U.S. embassy, San Salvador, to Washington, DC. Subsequent reporting claimed that some of the FMLN saboteurs were trained in Cuba and supported by Basque Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) separatist explosive experts.²⁷

Feeding Weakening Governance

In early November, I was directed by the DATT to coordinate and assist the El Salvadoran general staff in receiving and securing the delivery of the largest small arms and ammunition shipment thus far received from the United States. I coordinated closely with the chief of staff, Colonel Rafeal Flórez Lima, and the commander of the small Salvadoran Navy. It was agreed that I would meet the inbound ship on the high seas, about seven nautical miles out from the main port of Acajutla, brief the ship’s captain, and receive the El Salvadoran pilot on board about two nautical miles out from the port. One of the Salvadoran Navy’s patrol craft would ferry me to the ship. Armed with an M-16 and the Walther PPK (*Polizeipistole Kriminal*) automatic, I had drawn 10 concussion grenades from the Salvadoran Navy. They were to be used around the docked ship to discourage insurgent underwater mischief. Again, I was alone. On the day of the rendezvous, the weather was windy and drizzly. The patrol boat’s commanding officer and I checked in with the harbor master before boarding the patrol boat. I knew the skipper well. We were advised that in open water it was at sea state 3, winds gusting between 8 to 10 knots. We were in radio contact with the inbound ship. After requisite security clearances and coordination were completed, we drew alongside the incoming vessel. I was to board via a Jacob’s lad-

²⁵ *Tanda* is a difficult word to translate into English as it is used in El Salvador but can generally be rendered as “class.” Jack Child, “US Policies Toward Insurgencies in Latin America,” in *Latin American Insurgencies*, ed. Georges Fauriol (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies and National Defense University, 1985), 145.

²⁶ In 1981, only two bridges spanned the Lempa River: the Puente de Oro, officially the San Marcos Lempa Bridge, carrying the major east-west CA 2 highway; and the Cuscatlán Bridge, 27 kilometers upriver, carrying the east-west Pan American Highway. The Cuscatlán Bridge was destroyed by the FMLN on the night of 1 January 1984. At the time of its destruction, the Puente de Oro’s southern east-west highway bore the brunt the commercial and road traffic in El Salvador.

²⁷ See “A 40 años del golpe que marcó la antesala de la guerra y la destrucción,” *El Salvador.com*, accessed 11 September 2025.

der amidship. The last wet-net training I had had was as an enlisted Marine back in 1963. Once aboard, I was escorted to the bridge to meet the captain. The gentleman was professional but obviously nervous. In early conversation, it came out that he had lost a ship pier-side in Saigon in 1967. Arrival dockside in Acajutla was on schedule, and unloading commenced immediately. It went into the hours of darkness. The El Salvadoran security forces and navy personnel, generously popping off concussion grenades, were excellent. I bade the relieved ship's skipper farewell as the long convoy of loaded trucks departed the port area. I returned to the embassy in San Salvador, debriefed the deputy chief of mission, who waited until I had composed a lengthy cable on the operation, which he released immediately.

Welcome to El Salvador

Shortly after the Puente de Oro incident, the residence in which I lived with the two other officers was assaulted by about five armed insurgents. They wounded the two security guards and broke into the residence. Of the three occupants, only the U.S. Navy lieutenant commander and I were armed, the commander with a German MP5 submachine gun and I with an AR-15 rifle and PPK pistol. The two of us assured the safety of the CWO3, and Marta, the maid, who was wailing and crying uncontrollably out of pure fear. I also had five concussion grenades left from the earlier arms and ammunition unloading at Acajutla. The ensuing fire fight, which could not have lasted more than a few minutes, resounded thunderously off the tile floors and walls, rounds whooshing and swooshing about, ricocheting all around the room. I was lying prone behind a doorjamb, controlling my fire; short bursts on the MP5 heightened the cacophony. One of us wounded an assailant, at which point I pulled the pin on a concussion grenade and forcefully rolled it toward the location from whence the opposition fire was coming. That cleared the residence. The two wounded security men were taken to hospital and survived. Less than 10 days later, during midafternoon while I was in residence, automatic weapons fire from a fast-moving vehicle racked the front of the house

with negative effect. The embassy RSO responded immediately. The insurgent *Radio Venceremos* ("we will vanquish" or "overcome") claimed credit for both incidents in February 1982, declaring them as a warning to "meddling, imperialist gringos."²⁸ As the assailants in the first assault seemed to have a good idea of the layout of the house, I again mentally pondered the vetting process. Nevertheless, what ensued was not about vetting but rather a minor, embarrassing quibble between USSOUTHCOM and DIA over who the purported target might have been. The fallout was that DAO and USMILGRP staff would be quartered in separate residences. My Navy comrade-in-arms from the minor incident rotated back to CONUS shortly thereafter. Again, I was afforded a very nice, comfortable, well appointed, colonial style residence, but alone, apart from Marta and two appointed RSO-provided security personnel. The newly arrived U.S. Navy representative to the USMILGRP staff, Lieutenant Commander Albert A. Schaufelberger, reported during the transition. Like his very professional predecessor, Schaufelberger was a SEAL. He was quartered three houses away from my new residence in Colonia Escalón, San Salvador.

Leadup to El Mozote Massacre?

In late November 1981, I received unsubstantiated rumors from El Salvadoran military sources of a military reprisal operation in retaliation for the destruction of the Puente de Oro. A massacre of innocent peasants was alleged in the *pueblo* of Quesera, Jiquilisco District, Department of Usulután. The unit purported to perpetrate the massacre was the U.S.-trained Atlácatl Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel José Domingo Monterrosa Barrios.²⁹ Given the tempo

²⁸ *Radio Venceremos* (Creator), Henríquez Consalvi, Carlos "Santiago" (Contributor), Ponseele, Sacerdote Rogelio (Contributor), González Fuentes, José Francisco (Contributor), *Radio Venceremos*, February 1982. The author cannot recall the specific date or time of the broadcast and very few recordings of the program exist in archives for reference.

²⁹ Malcolm Boorer, "Quesera—El Salvador's Forgotten Massacre," Latin America Bureau, 19 October 2021. The Atlácatl Battalion was the first U.S.-trained rapid reaction infantry battalion (*Batallones de Infantería de Reacción Inmediata*, or BIRIs) to arrive back in El Salvador in March 1981. There were a total of six U.S.-trained battalions, five infantry, and one Air Transport Battalion attached to the Salvadoran Air Force (FAS).



Author's collection

Photograph, facing east-northeast, showing the destroyed Puente de Oro to the left. The old railroad bridge is to the right. Charges had been simultaneously placed on the latter only partially detonating, causing minor damage. The railway bridge (black arrow) was improvised to accommodate wheeled vehicles, causing a considerable reduction in traffic volume.

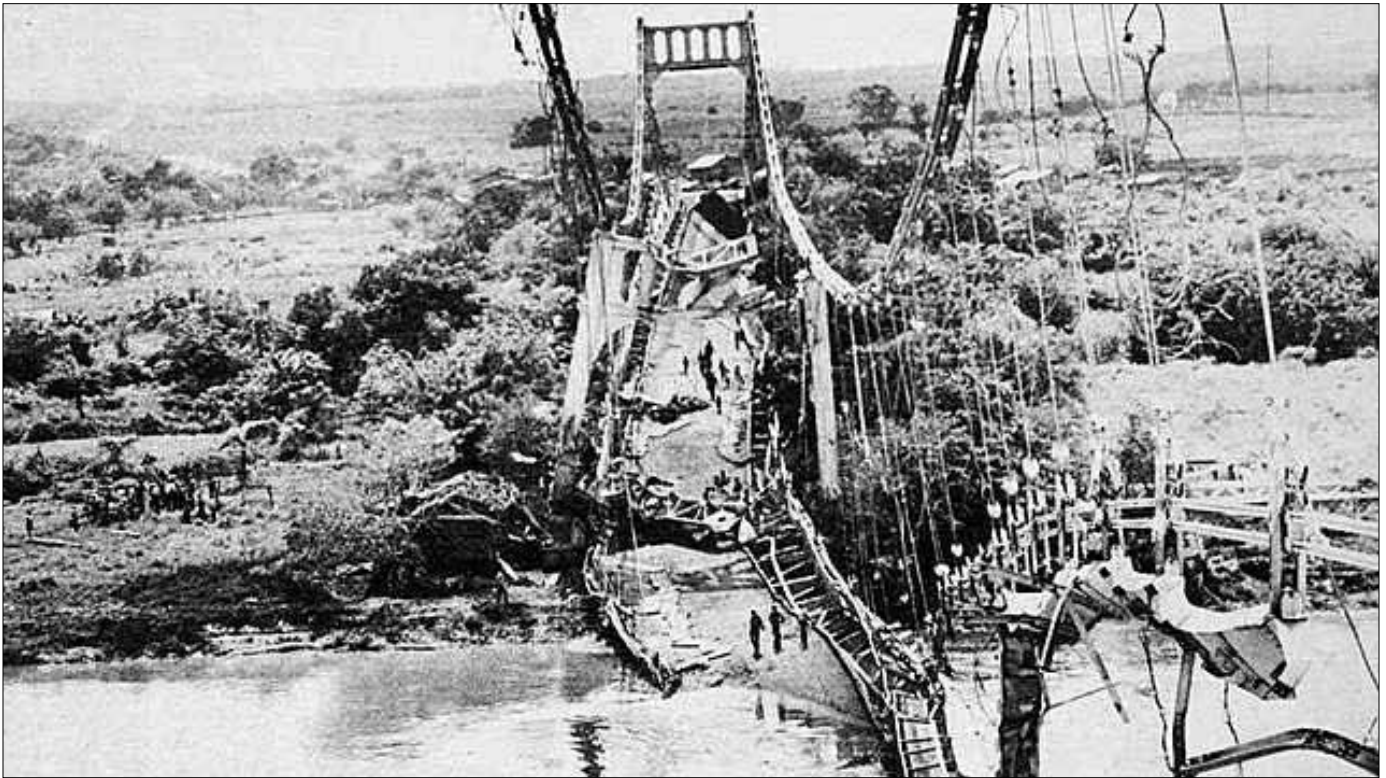
of operations and paucity of collaborating information, I did not report the incident. Hindsight suggests the Quesara was a dry run for the subsequent El Mozote massacre the following month. On the evening of 24 December 1981, the rebel radio station, *Radio Venceremos*, broadcast that a major massacre, carried out by the Salvadoran Army, specifically the Atlácatl Battalion, had occurred in and around the small *pueblo* of El Mozote, Department of Morazán, in the eastern sector of El Salvador. Per *Radio Venceremos*, the massacre occurred during 11–13 December in and around the small village of El Mozote.³⁰ It was hardly a secret that the Ministry of Defense had been preparing for a major (the largest to date) operation in the Department of Morazán. Ironically, the operation was code named *Operación Rescate* (Operation Rescue). Through previous intelligence and embassy reporting, it was known that the Atlácatl Battalion, under Lieutenant

Colonel Monterrosa, was the lead combat element in Operation Rescue. Not surprisingly, *Radio Venceremos* reports were discounted as “Christmas propaganda.” Based on what I was gleaned from some of the officers who had participated in Operation Rescue, I had my doubts. Bypassing the DATT, whose judgment I had come to question, I informed Ambassador Hinton of my reservations in a one-on-one meeting. The ambassador never shared the conversation with the DATT. Moreover, events were moving swiftly.

Attack on the Salvadoran Air Force: Operational or Tactical Smackdown?

Some State Department embassy staff were away or just returning from Christmas leave. U.S. military personnel, however, were precluded from taking Christmas leave. The embassy was just getting back into full operational mode. Very early on the morning of 27 January 1982, I was awakened by far-off, successive, muffled explosions. Scantily clad, I exited the residence into the garden. The two sentries were chatting away excitedly, pointing and gesturing toward

³⁰ *Radio Venceremos* (Creator), Henríquez Consalvi, Carlos “Santiago” (Contributor), Poncele, Sacerdote Rogelio (Contributor), González Fuentes, José Francisco (Contributor), *Radio Venceremos*, 24 December 1981.

*Author's collection*

The destroyed Puentes de Oro on the morning of 16 October 1981, looking east-southeast.

the bright red-lit night sky to the east. Instinctively, I knew the flames and explosions were emanating from the vicinity of the Salvadoran Air Forces' main base at Ilopango, approximately seven miles (11.2 kilometers) east of San Salvador. I immediately dressed, armed myself, grabbed a camera, and drove to the Air Force base alone. I felt my diplomatic status, and the possession of El Salvadoran government access and identification cards would suffice, despite the curfew. As I approached the air base, I witnessed what I assessed as a well-planned and executed operation being carried out by elements of the FMLN. Even from afar, it was evident that several aircraft were burning and exploding. The base, of course, was in lockdown. By wile and a bit of chicanery—claiming I was a close professional colleague of the commanding officer, Colonel Juan Rafeal Bustillo (perhaps hyperbolic, but not entirely untrue)—I was allowed access to the base. The scene was chaotic. Small arms fire was immediately evident and sometimes intense. Fire trucks were darting here and there. Medics were responding to cries of the wounded and dying. I concentrated on trying

to talk to those present at the beginning of the assault, especially officers. As dawn broke, I started taking photographs of as much of the damage as I could, concentrating on counting and photographing the destroyed or damaged aircraft. Small arms fire had diminished but not ceased; I gathered the assaulting force was withdrawing. Colonel Bustillo approached me, obviously not pleased. The conversation was sharp and short, Colonel Bustillo doing most of the talking. I acted humbled, affecting a false servility. I was ordered to leave the base immediately. To my relief, I was neither searched nor was any equipment confiscated. The intelligence report and photographs were dispatched to Washington, DC, that morning, summarizing that the Salvadoran Air Force had lost or had damaged 75 percent of its operable aircraft, including four of the six Bell UH-1H Iroquois helicopters.

Massacre at El Mozote in the Public Square

While composing the intelligence reports for DIA addressing the insurgent assault on the air base, a cable

arrived from Washington, DC, noting the publication that morning of front-page articles in two major U.S. newspapers on the El Mozote massacre. Through the focused efforts of journalist and photographer Alma Guillermoprieto for the *Washington Post*, and Raymond Bonner and photojournalist Susan Meiseles for the *New York Times*, the alleged massacre was now in the public square.³¹ Consternation in Washington, DC, and in El Salvador under-describes the reaction. Ambassador Hinton immediately dispatched me and Todd Greentree, the embassy's junior political officer, to the Department of Morazán to investigate. That the alleged massacre had occurred more than a month and a half prior to our arrival did not diminish the harsh dystopian environment we encountered. We were flown into northern Department of Morazán by an Salvadoran Air Force UH-1H helicopter and met on the ground by a 13-man security squad of El Salvadoran soldiers. Frankly, I was more apprehensive of the soldiers than of the insurgents. Despite the obvious security risk, Todd and I agreed to split up and interview as many individuals as possible. There were not many people around. Those we encountered understandably did not want to speak with us. When we did get answers, they were very short, vague, and ambiguous. I did encounter an elderly Catholic priest who claimed not to have been present during the killings but who had come into the area two days following them to minister to the grieving. The El Mozote massacre is undoubtedly the largest massacre in modern Latin American history. The priest spoke in parables and did not name names, but our conversation was revealing. The embassy cable with Todd's and my findings went out shortly after our return to San Salvador, released by the embassy deputy chief of mission, Kenneth W. Bleakley.³² Ambassador Hinton was

temporarily absent. Thirty-four years later in 2016, I viewed a redacted copy of the cable via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Two important, if not key, sentences I had written had been removed from the cable before its release by the embassy on 31 January 1982. As I recall, the deleted sentences read along the lines:

A major catastrophe involving the rape, torture, and wanton killing of over 500 unarmed old men, women, and children occurred in and around the village of El Mozote in mid-December 1981. It is assessed that the tragedy was likely perpetrated by members of the armed forces of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mentally, I had identified the wanton murders of unarmed women, children, and old men around and in El Mozote as the El Salvadoran replay of the March 1969 My Lai Massacre in Vietnam perpetrated by U.S. armed forces wherein up to 500 unarmed civilians, mostly women, children, and elderly males were mercilessly slaughtered.

On the afternoon of 1 February 1982, Ambassador Hinton directed me to go to the headquarters of the Atlácatl Battalion at Sito de Niño, 34 kilometers west of San Salvador, and debrief the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Monterrosa, and his staff on what might have occurred at El Mozote in December. Once back at the embassy, an intelligence report was dispatched to DIA in Washington, DC.³³ A reporting officer is discouraged from stating unsubstantiated opinions, but as I informed the ambassador, I was convinced that the Atlácatl Battalion and/or its subordinate units were in the environs of El Mozote when the massacre occurred.

A contentious issue during my tenure in El Salvador was the certification process mandated by the U.S. Congress to authorize additional funding. DAO reporting was integral to the certification process. In simplistic terms, certification was premised on prog-

³¹ Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote* (New York: Vintage Book's, 1994), 183–92. Danner prints Guillermoprieto's and Bonner's articles (pp. 183–88 and 188–92, respectively). Danner also reprints that portion of the United Nations' report *From Madness to Hope: The 12-year War in El Salvador—Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador* dealing with the El Mozote massacre (pp. 262–72). Danner's book is a comprehensive and accurate account of the El Mozote tragedy. I was not interviewed for UN Commission on the Truth for El Salvador's report, but I was interviewed for and am quoted in *The Massacre*.

³² Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, 195–201.

³³ Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, 203–6.

ress being made, especially within the Salvadoran armed forces, in the areas of human rights, professionalization of the forces, and instituting democratic governance. The embassy's weekly "grim gram," which reported violent deaths, disappearances, kidnappings, and torture and attempted to establish culpability was part and parcel of the process.³⁴ On the other hand, the U.S. Congress toiled under the apparition of who would lose El Salvador to the Communists. The "loss" of Nicaragua, and the failure of Desert One under President Jimmy Carter, were still fresh and piqued. The loss of South Vietnam in 1975 hung heavy, as did the loss of Cuba under President Eisenhower, and even of China under President Truman 30-plus years earlier. What would the loss of El Salvador under President Reagan bode for the Western Hemisphere or for the world? Stone-cold analytical fact is tempered by Washington, DC, political reality. The U.S. government certifying the Republic of El Salvador on 28 January 1982, one day after Guillermprieto's and Bonner's articles broke the story of the likely massacre at El Mozote by elements of the El Salvadoran armed forces is illustrative of how much those losses still rankled.

February was focused on sorting out the facts on both the FMLN attack on the Ilopango air base and the El Mozote butchery. The latter was aggravated by a contentious discussion between me and the DATT in early March over the amount of time that I was in the field. He threatened court martial for disobeying orders and "conduct unbecoming an officer." The conversation took place at 1000, and I strongly suspected he had been drinking. On a more upbeat though curious note, I was invited to review my first fitness report. As an embassy staff principal, Ambassador Hinton wrote the fitness report. I assumed he received input from the DATT, but apparently not. The lead sentence in the narrative portion of the report read, "Major McKay has gone completely native." I felt the statement fair and accurate but was sure the Marine Corps would view it otherwise, despite the extremely

laudatory follow-on narrative. With the most respectful and tactful means at my disposal, I was able to convince the ambassador to emend the lead sentence.

Four Dutch Journalists Murdered

In the early morning hours of 18 March 1982, I received a call from an El Salvadoran source informing me that "four gringos had been murdered by the armed forces" in the Department of Chalatenango. Without getting bogged down in drama—there were multiple, interesting challenges—I arrived at Chalatenango in a Salvadoran Air Force helicopter close to 0400. I was simply armed with a PPK. Five filthy, debris-covered bodies, still oozing body fluids, were laid out on the concrete floor of an opened-sided, roofed structure. They were four unarmed Dutch journalists and their FMLN escort. There was no electricity, as the opposition had downed key electrical pylons the previous day. A wet-behind-the-ears sublieutenant informed me there was no fuel for the auxiliary generators. He had no idea what had happened to the FMLN escort's weapon. The headlights of five roughly circled military trucks, random kerosene lamps, and wavering flashlights provided illumination. None of the brigade's senior officers were available. The senior officer present was the Salvadoran Army sublieutenant. Unassisted, I carefully probed, rolled over, and examined each rigor mortis-gripped body to determine bullet entrance and exit locations. Messy though it was, I made notes throughout. Just after sunrise, blood and gunk befouled, I returned to San Salvador. I intentionally bypassed the chain of command, going directly to the ambassador's residence. The residence's security detail knew me. As I entered the residence, the ambassador, bathrobe clad, was descending the grand stairwell, ubiquitous cigar in hand. As he approached the landing, he said, "What the fuck do you want, McKay?" "Mister Ambassador," I replied, "it's not what I want but what you need to know." I informed Ambassador Hinton of the previous hours' events. The ambassador directed me to get cleaned up and return immediately, with a civilian embassy staff member, to the site where the five victims had allegedly been murdered. I remain involved today in judicial proceedings in the United States, the

³⁴ For certification process, see "El Salvador: Certification Process," quick reference aid, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, February 1983.

*Author's collection*

LtCol Monterrosa (foreground) and the author in April 1982 at Sitio de Niño, headquarters of the Atlácatl Battalion.

Netherlands, and El Salvador against three senior El Salvadoran officers deemed accountable for gross human rights violations.

The destruction of the Puente de Oro, the El Mozote massacre, and the murder of the Dutch journalists focused world attention on El Salvador. The Netherlands did not have an embassy in El Salvador. Primarily, the ambassador and deputy chief of mission handled diplomacy at that level. One of the consequences of the murders of the Dutch journalists was that the government of the Netherlands sent a parliamentary investigative delegation to El Salvador. Kenneth Bleakely, the embassy deputy chief of mission, was a professional, a good diplomat, and a team player. I was brought in early on the planning for the Dutch parliamentarians' visit. They were to arrive in El Salvador in May. For protocol purposes, Bleakely had the lead but deferred to me on the particulars and personalities of the involved El Salvadoran of-

ficers. During the group's last trip to Chalatenango, Bleakely asked if I would be interested in extending to stay in El Salvador, as the end of my one-year tour was approaching. I told him that if the Marine Corps concurred, I would extend. The visit went well. The consequences of the journalists' murders linger still.³⁵

DATT Declared Persona Non Grata

On 23 March, in the throes of the aftermath of the Dutch journalists' murders, there was a military coup d'état in neighboring Guatemala. The DAO Guatemala cable explicitly detailed the prelude and execution, named names, etc., of the coup. It was classified top secret/NOFORN, with limited distribution. I was in the field when the cable was received in the embassy. On returning to the DAO in the early morning

³⁵ See Claire Moses, "Jury in El Salvador Convicts 3 Ex-Officers in 1982 Killings of Dutch Journalists," *New York Times*, 4 June 2025.

hours of Saturday, 27 March, to write up intelligence top secret reports on my field observations, I accessed the classified vault. I noted the receipt of the DAO Guatemala cable in the classified log-in, but there was no cable in the vault. I made a mental note to check with the CWO3 administrative chief later in the morning. After drafting the reports, I returned to my residence to clean up and sleep. Sometime before 0600 the same morning, I was awakened by a ruckus between the two security men and someone trying to gain entrance to the residence. I thought I recognized the voice of the shouting visitor, inebriated though he sounded. I roused myself and went to identify the interloper. It was a Filipino American who had come to El Salvador years before and married into a rich coffee-growing family. I was leery of him as a source, although the DATT swore by him. Mario Sulit was, indeed, quite drunk, waving around a crumpled sheaf of papers clearly showing red-stamped top secret/NOFORN. He had spent a night of drinking with the DATT. I thanked Sulit for the papers and immediately delivered them to Ambassador Hinton, in residence. That event caused an internal diplomatic brouhaha in the DAO. In the opening days of June, the DATT was declared persona non grata by Ambassador Hinton. With everything else going on, that little incident was all but overlooked by the press. The DATT's replacement, U.S. Army colonel John A. Cash Sr., was a breath of fresh air, and turned out to be splendid to work with.

FMLN Payback

In early June, the Salvadoran Army reported an FMLN atrocity in the northern reaches of the Department of Cabañas close to the border with Honduras. I was lifted to the site of the alleged attack on a Salvadoran Air Force UH-1H helicopter. The attack had occurred earlier the previous morning. There were no National Guard or civil defense units present. The air reeked of death, many of the deceased were unburied, and grieving survivors were building child-size coffins of untreated wood. Speaking with the survivors, I was informed that all the victims were unarmed women, children, and older men. None of the bodies I viewed



Official photo, U.S. Embassy El Salvador
Ambassador Deane R. Hinton and the author at the going away party (*despedida*) that the ambassador hosted at the residence before the author's departure from El Salvador in June 1984.

had been mutilated. There were numerous AK-47 and battle rifle (*Fusil Automatico Leger*, FAL) shell casings lying about. Like many of the survivors, I used a cut lemon held close to my nose to ward off the stench. By my count, at least 33 individuals had been killed. I remained three days in that tragic environment, interviewing all the survivors, sleeping on the ground, sharing the meager portions of *frijoles* with those around me. On day two of the stay, five civil defense soldiers (*patrullas contonales*) arrived from Sensuntepeque, Department of Cabañas. Sensuntepeque was the headquarters of Military Detachment 2, (*Destacamento Militar 2*) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez.

I returned on foot to Sensuntepeque, accompanied by two civil defense soldiers, then onto San Salvador via helicopter to file an intelligence report to DIA in Washington. At the behest of the DATT, I returned to Sensuntepeque two days later to further ascertain if the perpetrators had been FMLN. I reported



Adapted by MCUP

The 1982 intelligence assessment of areas of FMLN influence and military actions.

the conviction that El Salvadoran soldiers were not culpable to Washington after my return to San Salvador on a Friday afternoon.

Lieutenant Colonel Monterrosa and Lieutenant Colonel Ochoa were two of the more tactically adept officers during the time I was in El Salvador. They were both field officers in the sense that they accompanied their units to the field, led from the front, and shared the same rigors as their soldiers. Notwithstanding, neither was a stickler for the rules or the law of land warfare. I recall several occasions while dining alone with Monterrosa when we seriously debated the efficacy of taking no prisoners.³⁶ Retired Salvadoran Army major Roberto D'Aubuisson Arieta was of the same 1966 *tanda* from the military academy as Monterrosa and Ochoa. D'Aubuisson was implicated in the murder of Archbishop Óscar Romero on 24 March

1980 and a subsequent unsuccessful coup attempt. As founder of the new political party, Nationalist Republican Alliance (*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista*), he declared he would contend for the presidency in the elections of 1984. Early in the U.S. tenure in El Salvador, Ambassador Hinton was clear that within the embassy only he was authorized to interact with D'Aubuisson and the other declared presidential candidate, José Napoleón Durate.³⁷ Given the professional relationship with many officers of the 1966 *tanda*, I could not but associate with D'Aubuisson and his fellow military academy classmates. I did so very carefully. If such socializing was known in advance, I would advise the ambassador's private secretary prior to doing so. I was told to meet only twice, and those encounters were duly reported. Trickier were chance encounters. Again, those were reported directly to ei-

³⁶ LtCol Monterrosa and three other senior Salvadoran Army officers were killed when their helicopter was shot down by insurgent ground fire on 24 October 1984.

³⁷ Stephen Webre, *José Napoleón Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics 1960–1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).



Courtesy of LtCol Ochoa, author's collection

LtCol Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez (left) and LtCol Monterrosa Barrios (right). The two officers were from the same *tanda* at the Captain General Gerardo Barrios Military School. Date unknown.

ther the ambassador or to Bleakely. I was always told to be careful and very infrequently to walk away. It was an arrangement that worked well.

An Interesting Debrief

U.S. military attachés infrequently get involved in clandestine activities. When authorized to do so, it is only under very strict guidelines and multiagency coordination, cooperation, and concurrence. That I was involved in such activities was largely due to the support and concurrence of agencies outside DIA and DOD, particularly from Ambassador Hinton, Bleakely, the chief of station, and the USMILGRP commander in El Salvador. The previously mentioned Treasury Police (*Policia de Hacienda*, PH) were a small paramilitary unit very difficult to infiltrate. Familiarity with the commanding officer, Colonel Francisco

Morán, and the operations officer, Major Eduardo Morán (no relation) facilitated getting chummy with the Treasury Police (approximately 2,500 men).

Sometime in early 1982, the Treasury Police took possession of a prisoner of war from the Dominican Republic who had been fighting with the FMLN. He had been captured on the El Salvador-Honduras border in a confrontation between the Salvadoran armed forces and the insurgents. After much finagling and double talk, Colonel Morán authorized me to debrief the Dominican, an avowed Communist, with the proviso that no audio or visual recordings would be made. I was allowed to take written notes, although the latter were read by a *Policia de Hacienda* (Treasury Police) intel officer prior to my being allowed to depart. I was searched prior to each interview. Of course, I kept the



Author's collection

The author (center) with leadership elements of a civil defense unit (*patrullas cantonales*) in northern Department of Cabañas, El Salvador, June 1982.

station chief, USMILGRP commander, and the ambassador's office fully apprised.

The Dominican had been brutally tortured; legs, fingers, and arms broken, and worse. To gain any sort of trust, I ensured that all torture be ceased. I spent more than three months debriefing him three to four times a week. There was no intelligence windfall, but crumbs relating to training in Spain, the Soviet Union, and other Warsaw Pact countries did emerge. The Dominican was eventually turned over to the International Committee of the Red Cross. At the behest of the ambassador, I was present at the turnover.³⁸ The Treasury Police were formally disbanded under

the accords of the March 1993 *Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador*.

CODEL Visit

Congressional delegations (CODELs) are a necessary nuisance for all U.S. overseas embassies, particularly those in conflict zones. Other than providing a general overview of the military situation and attending some general meetings to assess a country's conditions, DAO San Salvador was not a principal player. That fell more to the USMILGRP and political section.

There was one exception during my tenure that brewed the proverbial tempest in a teapot. In July 1982, Senator Steven Douglas Symms (R-ID) visited El Salvador. Ambassador Hinton was absent, so the deputy chief of mission hosted him. Senator Symms was a former Marine Corps officer and was being es-

³⁸ See "What We Do," International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed 27 December 2025.

corted by then-colonel James L. Jones Jr., the Marine Corps' senior Senate liaison officer. Prior to arrival in country, Senator Symms's staff stated the senator would reside with the U.S. naval attaché during his visit. Consternation ensued. Although the deputy chief of mission hosted, Senator Symms and Colonel Jones were quartered in my residence. Senator Symms was a very social and sociable individual. Keeping him in residence during the hours of curfew proved an interesting but ultimately successful exercise. He was a staunch supporter of the Reagan administration's policies in Central America. In subsequent debate in the U.S. Senate, Senator Symms's testimony and support of those policies were clear.³⁹

The request for extension was approved. As noted, I made it a point to spend as much time as possible with Salvadoran military units in the field. That was fully endorsed by both Ambassador Hinton and the new DATT, U.S. Army colonel John Cash. I spent considerable time in the field with those Salvadoran military units operating on the El Salvador-Honduras border (see map 2). The purpose was to assess the operational capability and efficacy of the Salvadoran military in the field. I found that Ambassador Hinton had been correct in that first fitness report. I had very naturally and comfortably gone native, and the government of the United States, Ambassador Hinton, and the superb embassy staff in San Salvador benefited.

Postscript

Aside from the numerous intelligence reports and topic-specific papers I wrote, I kept a diary. Prior to arriving in country, I concentrated on familiarizing myself with the history and culture of El Salvador. As with the Vietnam imbroglio, I continue to think about and analyze what the United States' involvement in Central America in general and El Salvador in particular meant and means. What have the consequences of that involvement been, both in the United States and in El Salvador? Might not the consequences



Author's collection

From left to right, Maj Ricardo Cienfuegos (assassinated on 6 March 1985), Col Francisco Antonio Morán, and the author at a formal buffet dinner in October 1982.

of U.S. involvement in Central America, like that of Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and forward serve as a cautionary tale? Today, we once again appear disposed to meddling in other countries' internal affairs, countries that pose no discernable threat to the national security of the United States. Another observation worth considering is that in the United States political party loyalty does not constitute doing the right thing. As historian and author Peter Hart recently wrote in *Chain of Fire: The Siege of Khartoum and the Campaign of Egypt and the Sudan*: "Today [Sudan] is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Perhaps Gladstone had been right to try and stay out of it? Could the result be any worse had the British never set foot in Sudan?"⁴⁰

I extended the tour of duty in El Salvador twice, not departing the country until August 1984. Events after that initial year were as fraught and eventful as the first year, but it became apparent, at least to me, that what the United States had engaged in was a war of attrition that was not winnable by the government of El Salvador. Nor, as far as I could discern, was there any sort of serious forethought given to what might happen after the war wound down. One example of that which the United States would have to deal with

³⁹ See Memorandum for the Record, "Briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on El Salvador," 2 August 1982.

⁴⁰ Peter Hart, *Chain of Fire: The Siege of Khartoum and the Campaign of Egypt and the Sudan* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2025), 400.



Author's collection

On patrol along the Honduran border with elements of the Salvadoran Army's 3d Brigade out of San Miguel, Department of San Miguel, El Salvador, in July 1982. The author is the mounted individual at left. Capt Marquéz, Salvadoran Army officer, mounted at right, was killed in an ambush 10 days after this photograph was taken.

postwar is what I personally observed and ponder still: the receipt of arms and ammunition shipment I oversaw in November 1981. Of course, the shipping manifest listed all small arms by type and serial number, as well as the lot numbers for the ammunition. Copies of those documents were turned over to the Salvadorans. The subsequent issuance of weapons and ammunition was never itemized, adding to a deep pit of unaccountable weapons and ammunition with which El Salvador and the United States contend today.

During the 1980–93 Salvadoran Civil War, 22 U.S. military personnel were killed in combat-related

actions or through targeted terrorist assassinations. Of those 22 fine professionals, I knew or worked closely with two. Lieutenant Commander Albert Arthur Schaufelberger was the highest-ranking U.S. officer killed during the civil war. He was assassinated on 23 May 1983. Staff Sergeant Miles N. Kaiser, after being wounded in a clash with insurrectionists in 1985, received a tainted blood transfusion. He died in hospice of complications from AIDS on 19 June 1996. In addition, several fine, professional Salvadoran officers and enlisted personnel with whom I was close also perished in their country's civil war.

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IN MEMORIAM

Lieutenant Colonel Ronald H. Spector

17 JANUARY 1943–26 MARCH 2026

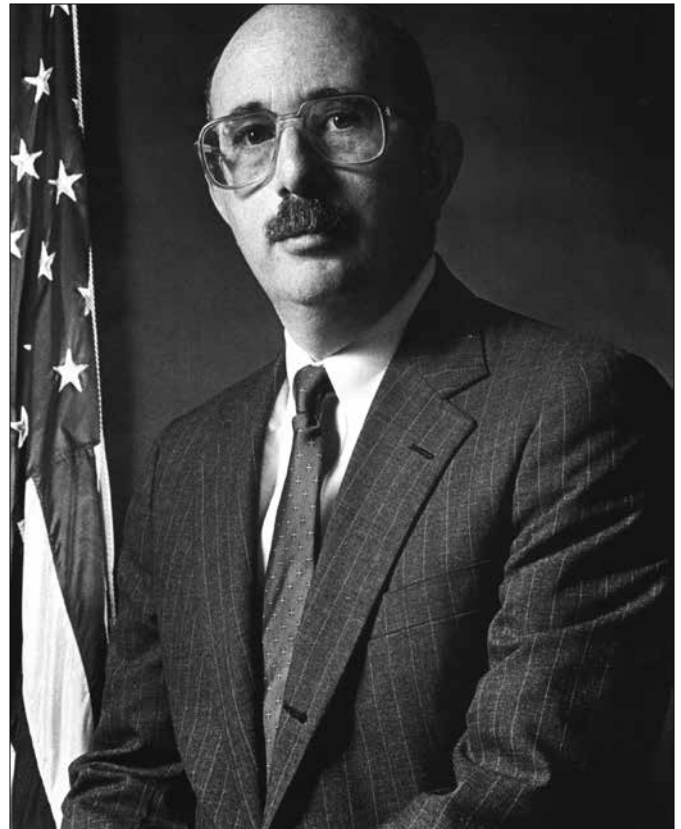
By John Darrell Sherwood, PhD

On 26 March 2026, retired lieutenant colonel Ronald H. “Ron” Spector, PhD, passed away. Spector enlisted in the Marine Corps in September 1967. Following basic and advanced training, he served as a combat historian in Vietnam from 3 April 1968 through 27 February 1969.¹ He was discharged from active duty in May 1969. In January 1980, he returned to uniformed service and was commissioned as a specialist officer in the Marine Corps Reserve.² He then served as a historian and Marine Corps Command and Staff College faculty member

Dr. John Darrell Sherwood is a historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command and the author of *A Global Force for Good: Sea Services Humanitarian Operations in the Twenty-First Century* (2023). While at the George Washington University, he worked under Ronald H. Spector to produce a doctoral thesis that would eventually become the book, *Officers in Flight Suits: The Story of American Air Force Fighter Pilots in the Korean War* (1996).

¹ LtCol Ronald H. Spector, USMC (Ret), DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, Ronald H. Spector military personnel file, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO, hereafter Spector DD-214; and Ronald H. Spector, Navy Achievement Medal (NAM) with Combat “V” citation, signed by LtGen Henry W. Buse Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Ronald H. Spector military personnel file, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO, hereafter Spector NAM with Combat “V” citation.

² Maj Ronald H. Spector, Appointment and Acceptance letter, 17 January 1980, Ronald H. Spector military personnel file, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.



Official U.S. Navy photo
Ronald H. Spector, here photographed as director of the Naval Historical Center.

from 1980 to 1998.³ In his civilian life, Spector worked as a historian for the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) from 1971 to 1984 and later as director of naval history and curator for the Department of the Navy from 1986 to 1989. He held various academic appointments in history departments at Louisiana State University, the University of Alabama, and the George Washington University from 1969 to 2020. His publications include *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (1984), winner of the Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Prize for Naval History; and *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, winner of the Society for Military History Distinguished Book Award (2002).⁴

Spector grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and attended Johns Hopkins University, graduating in 1964 with a degree in history. He then earned his PhD at Yale University in a record three years, graduating in May 1967. Eager to escape academia and work in the “real world,” he applied for positions at government history offices after graduation and soon found himself in Washington, DC, working for the historical division of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, just four months into the job, his draft board, as he put it, “decided I should see some more active service.”⁵ Consequently, he enlisted in the Marine Corps as a private on 25 September 1967.⁶ His decision to join the Marine Corps was influenced by both his draft status and his heritage. As he recalled, “All of the elders in my Pittsburgh neighborhood had served in the Marines during World War II and Korea.”⁷

After completing recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina,

Private Spector attended advanced infantry training at Camp Geiger, North Carolina, in preparation to serve as an artillery cannoneer. Reflecting on his boot camp experiences many years later, Spector wrote, “I discovered that graduate school had been an excellent preparation for Marine Corps training since I was already used to losing a lot of sleep, sitting through boring lectures, and gulping down my food while in a kind of standing crouch.”⁸

He arrived in Vietnam on 3 April 1968, during phase two of the Tet Offensive.⁹ For the next 10 months, he traveled extensively throughout northern South Vietnam (I Corps tactical zone) conducting oral histories with hundreds of Marines, soldiers, and sailors. He also collected documents and wrote historical reports. The citation for his Navy Achievement Medal with Combat “V” noted that “as a historian, he displayed outstanding professionalism and initiative despite extremely adverse conditions and the difficulties of a combat environment.”¹⁰ Major General Harold W. Chase, a legendary Marine who was wounded twice at Iwo Jima, was a colonel when he served with Spector at III Marine Amphibious Force Headquarters, and later wrote, “[Spector] exhibited strength of character and personality that were noteworthy. He has integrity, and innate leadership ability and a co-operative spirit. He takes his work seriously but not at the expense of good humor.”¹¹

Spector’s field work in Vietnam would later form part of the research for his book, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam*, which was published in 1993. This work not only provides a detailed account of the major military operations of 1968 but also examines the experiences of average troops, including significant social issues such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and racial tensions.

³ Spector alternated between these roles throughout his service as a reserve officer. See Ronald H. Spector, Chronological Record, Ronald H. Spector military personnel file, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO; Ronald H. Spector, Career Retirement Credit Record (CRCR), Ronald H. Spector military personnel file, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO, hereafter Spector CRCR.

⁴ Ronald H. Spector curriculum vitae, courtesy of the George Washington University History Department, hereafter Spector curriculum vitae.

⁵ Maj Ronald H. Spector, USMCR, “A Government Historian’s Memoir,” *Fortitudine: Newsletter of the Marine Corps Historical Program* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 13.

⁶ Spector DD-214.

⁷ Dr. Randy Papadopoulos, email to author, 21 April 2026.

⁸ Spector, “A Government Historian’s Memoir,” 13.

⁹ Spector, NAM with Combat “V” citation.

¹⁰ Spector, NAM with Combat “V” citation.

¹¹ MajGen Harold W. Chase, USMC (Ret), letter to Gen Robert Barrow, Commandant of the Marine Corps, 19 October 1979, Ronald H. Spector military personnel record, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO. Chase wrote this letter when he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs).

Following his return home from Vietnam in February 1969, Spector received an honorable discharge in May 1969.¹² In 1980, the Marine Corps Reserve offered him a direct commission as a major to return to service as a historian with Mobilization Training Unit (MTU) DC-7. As a reserve officer, he researched and wrote official history with MTU DC-7 and later with the History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps. He also taught at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.¹³ In 1983, he deployed to Grenada and later published *U.S. Marines in Grenada, 1983*, which he called “an experiment in writing contemporary military history.”¹⁴

Colonel Allan R. Millett, who wrote the definitive single-volume history of the Marine Corps and led MTU DC-7 in the late 1980s, wrote in Spector’s fitness report that he was the “star” of the unit.¹⁵ Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper, the director of the Marine Command and Staff College when Spector taught there in the late 1980s, described him as an “extremely talented officer, an accomplished writer, widely read, and an unusually effective instructor.”¹⁶ Spector retired from the Marine Corps Reserve in 1998.¹⁷

Spector’s long career as a civilian academic commenced a few months after his return from Vietnam. From 1969 to 1971, Spector taught history as an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, where he finished writing his first book, *Admiral of the New*

Empire: The Life and Career of George Dewey (1974).¹⁸ The book remains the definitive biography of Dewey and a major contribution to the history of the U.S. Navy in the Spanish-American War.

In 1971, he accepted a job offer from CMH’s Southeast Asian History Branch to work on the Army’s official history of the Vietnam War, eventually rising to acting chief of the branch. While there, he published *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960* (1983), a work that examines the early origins of America’s military involvement in Vietnam.¹⁹ Among other topics, it analyzes U.S. intelligence activities in Indochina during World War II, support to the French during the First Indochina War, and the U.S. advisory mission from 1954 to 1960. The official history examined the growing U.S. role in Vietnam during the period and is critical of U.S. policymakers for underestimating local support for the Viet Cong, the difficulty building the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and the unpopularity of Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime.

In 1984, Spector moved to the University of Alabama as an associate professor of military history. During his time there, he completed *Eagle Against the Sun*, a single-volume history of the American war in the Pacific during World War II. The book was widely acclaimed for its engaging and accessible narrative, which skillfully blended original research and accounts of large-scale military operations with the personal experiences of the service personnel involved. A reviewer for the *New York Times* hailed it as “the best work of its kind” on that complex conflict.²⁰ The product of nine years of dedicated research and writing, *Eagle Against the Sun* achieved the rare distinction of being chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club Main Selection and a *New York Times* Book Review editor’s choice.²¹

As his prominence as a military historian grew, especially after the success of *Eagle Against the Sun*, Ron Spector was hired by Secretary of the Navy John

¹² Note: he served in the Marine Corps Reserve in an inactive ready reserve status until 24 September 1973. See Spector CRCR and Spector DD-214.

¹³ Spector Chronological Record.

¹⁴ As quoted in Seth Givens, “The History Division and Change in the Marine Corps: A Historiography,” *Marine Corp History* 5, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 37. Also see LtCol Ronald H. Spector, USMCR, *U.S. Marines in Grenada, 1983* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1987), iii.

¹⁵ Ronald H. Spector, Fitness Report signed by Col Allen R. Millett, 30 June 1986, Ronald H. Spector military personnel files, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO. Millett is the author of *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1982).

¹⁶ Ronald H. Spector, Fitness Report signed by Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper, 2 February 1989, Ronald H. Spector military personnel files, Case Number C-0007254574, Official Military Personnel File, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO; and Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper, biography, Marine Corps History Division.

¹⁷ Spector CRCR.

¹⁸ Spector curriculum vitae.

¹⁹ Spector curriculum vitae.

²⁰ See Daniel M. Goldstein, “Fighting and Infighting in the Pacific,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1984.

²¹ Spector curriculum vitae.



Official U.S. Navy photo

Ronald H. Spector (right) with Oscar P. Fitzgerald (center), and Capt Edward L. Beach Jr., USN (Ret) (left), at the Navy Department Museum.

F. Lehman as the director of naval history and tasked with modernizing the Naval Historical Center (NHC) (now Naval History and Heritage Command). With additional funding from Secretary Lehman, Spector established the Contemporary History Branch, which under his leadership produced many significant naval histories, including a comprehensive account of the 1991 Gulf War, works on the Navy in Vietnam and the Cold War, and studies on the Navy's personnel. He also reinvigorated NHC's combat documentation efforts by sending a team of historians and reservists to the Middle East to conduct oral histories and collect documents related to the Tanker War.²² Reflecting

on Spector's time as director of naval history, Secretary Lehman later wrote, "He made a special effort to attract writers, scholars and journalists to the Navy Yard."²³ In so doing, he helped transform the institution into what it is today.

During his last year as director of naval history in 1989, the Society for Military History (SMH) elected Spector as its vice president after he successfully hosted the society's annual meeting at the Washington Navy Yard the year before. Since its origins in 1933, SMH has evolved from an organization closely associated with the military to one that includes a broader group of historians from a wide range of academic and nonacademic institutions. Epitomizing this shift was

²² Edward Marolda, former Naval Historical Center senior historian and acting director, interview with author, 15 April 2026; and Ronald H. Spector, Middle East Trip Report, 17 October 1988, Naval History and Heritage Command Director Files, 1986–1989.

²³ John Lehman, email to David Allen Rosenberg, 26 March 2026, hereafter Lehman email.

the decision in 1988 to change the name of its journal from *Military Affairs* to the *Journal of Military History* and the organization's name from the American Military Institute to SMH. Spector and SMH's president Richard H. Kohn, who was at the time the U.S. Air Force chief historian, were instrumental in managing this shift. Both had worked in official history offices and as professors in academia and understood implicitly how to bridge these two cultures.²⁴

Spector returned to academia in 1989, initially at the University of Alabama and then George Washington University, where he held appointments in both the history department and the Elliott School of International Affairs. In addition to *After Tet*, Spector published several other monumental works during his time at George Washington University. *At War at Sea* (2001) focuses on the evolution of naval warfare across the twentieth century. In his analysis of seagoing combat, Spector considers factors such as technology, the human experience of naval warfare, and command and control. The book's core argument is that despite dramatic technological change, the fundamental human dimensions of naval warfare—leadership, training, morale, and decisionmaking—continue to be decisive. In addition to winning the SMH book award in 2003, it was also a History Book Club main selection and included in the *Washington Post's* "Best Books of 2001" list.²⁵

During his 30 years at George Washington University, Spector supervised numerous master's and doctoral students, many of whom became official historians. Scores of his Elliott School students entered or continued government service in the Department of Defense, Department of State, and the intelligence community. One former student played a leading role in discovering the location of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and later became the inspiration for the lead character in the HBO series *Homeland*.²⁶

Spector's academic life was enriched by extensive and prestigious international research and appointments. As one of the few scholars to receive three Fulbright awards, he undertook research sabbaticals in India (1977–78), Israel (1993–94), and Singapore (2007). His global research was further broadened through his service as a U.S. Information Agency visiting lecturer, which took him to the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, New Zealand, Fiji, China, and Australia on various visits. In addition to these engagements, he served as the distinguished visiting professor of strategy at the National War College from 1995 to 1996; a visiting professor at the School of International Affairs at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, in 1998; the U.S. Army War College's Harold Keith Johnson Chair of Military History for 2005–6; and the U.S. Naval Academy's Class of 1957 Chair in Naval Heritage for the 2009–10 academic year.²⁷

These sabbaticals and appointments offered Spector unique opportunities to conduct research at numerous archival repositories, both at home and abroad, and were instrumental in the success of his subsequent publications. Two later publications benefited greatly from his far-flung research: *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (2007) and *A Continent Erupts: Decolonization, Civil War, and Massacre in Postwar Asia, 1945–55* (2022). The former examines the collapse of the Japanese Empire and the civil wars, revolutions, and decolonization conflicts that followed between 1945 and 1950. The book shows how the United States tried and mostly failed to balance its anticolonial ideals with support for its World War II European allies in the postwar Pacific. It also reveals how all the Allied powers underestimated local nationalist movements.

A Continent Erupts expanded on the scholarship of *In the Ruins of Empire* by bringing the story forward to 1955. Among other conflicts, it explores the conclusion of China's civil war and consolidation under Communism, the Indonesian war of independence, the war in Korea, and the First Indochina War in

²⁴ Dr. Sarandis Papadopoulos, email to author, 21 April 2026; and Naval History and Heritage Command Director Files, 1986–1989.

²⁵ Spector curriculum vitae.

²⁶ Ronald Spector, conversation with author, Ronald H. Spector retirement celebration, 2020, hereafter Spector conversation with author.

²⁷ Spector conversation with author.

Vietnam. In *A Continent Erupts*, Spector argues that the Japanese surrender did not usher in a period of peace but triggered a wave of postwar conflicts and a Cold War in Asia, and that for the most part, the United States and its European allies mismanaged these wars.

Spector's later years were marked by serious health challenges, including a heart transplant in 2013 and his ultimate battle with cancer. Despite these obstacles, he continued to publish and contribute to our understanding of military and naval history until his final days. As a military and naval historian, Dr. Spector possessed the rare ability to produce impeccable scholarship made accessible to the general reader by clear and vivid writing. As Secretary Lehman put it:

Ron viewed his principal job as getting out the real and exciting story of the Navy and its people, and he was perfect for the job. His scholarship was unimpeachable, but he really knew how to tell a riveting story.²⁸

In his roles as an acting branch head at CMH and director at NHC, Spector was instrumental in establishing these organizations as leading publishers of modern military and naval history. His legacy endures through the thousands of students he influenced through his teaching and scholarship. He is survived by his wife Diane and his two sons, Daniel and Jonathan.

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²⁸ Lehman email.

BOOK REVIEWS

Fred H. Allison, PhD

Leatherneck Warrior: General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. By Colonel Richard D. Camp. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2025. Pp. 194. \$34.95, cloth; \$20.95, e-book.)

Biographies often are not the most engaging or spellbinding books to read. This work is an exception. Colonel Richard D. Camp, the book's author, is a veteran of Vietnam combat and a prolific writer of military history, both nonfiction and fiction. In this short volume, he packs a lot of pertinent information and does an excellent job of laying out General Lemuel C. Shepherd's life story in a spirited, engaging, and illuminating manner. *Leatherneck Warrior* is Camp's third biographical work. As the others do, it relies to a large degree on oral history as a primary source. In particular, the career interview done by the noted Marine Corps History and Museums Division oral historian and chief historian Benis M. Frank. Frank did many of these interviews with the leading general officers of World War II and the Korean War era, and they are a tremendous resource that documents these wars and key developments of the period through the memories of some of the Marine Corps' greatest leaders. In addition to oral history material, a solid array of secondary sources gives *Leatherneck Warrior* academic veracity and context.

Lemuel Shepherd is one of the Corps' greats, truly a fighting Marine. A graduate of Virginia Military Institute, he entered the Marine Corps just in time to participate as a platoon commander in the major battles of World War I, including Belleau Wood, Saint-Mihiel, and Blanc Mont. He received two wounds during the fighting and was decorated with the Navy Cross and other medals. Assignments to China and Haiti followed during the interwar years. He led in-

fantry units throughout the battlefields of World War II. He stood up and trained the 9th Marine Regiment and took it to Guadalcanal. Promoted to brigadier, he was the 1st Marine Division's assistant division commander in the Cape Gloucester campaign. He commanded the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade during Operation Stevedore (1944), the liberation of Guam. The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was composed of the 22d Marines and the 4th Marine Regiment, units that had both operated independently and were fiercely proud of their legacy. Getting them to work together was a serious test of Shepherd's leadership. The brigade's successful combat in Guam testified to his success.

After promotion to major general, Shepherd took command of the 6th Marine Division and led it during Operation Iceberg, the battle for Okinawa. The 6th Division came ashore on 1 April 1945 as part of the massive Tenth Army assault. This battle, at the end of World War II, and overshadowed by Victory in Europe (VE) Day, and considering the battle's size and significance, has been historically diminished. It was the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific War. The Japanese fought desperately and skillfully, as Okinawa lay next to the home islands. Part of their desperation was manifested in kamikaze attacks on the Allied fleet. Casualties were astronomical during the 82-day campaign. The Japanese suffered 110,000 total casualties and the Tenth Army took about 70,000 total casualties. Kamikaze attacks inflicted almost 10,000 casualties on the U.S. Navy.

Shepherd's division's first task was clearing the northern end of Okinawa. Although the Japanese defenders here often showed a lack of preparation and professionalism, tough fighting was still to be had. The

Dr. Fred H. Allison served as the U.S. Marine Corps History Division oral historian for 19 years. He is a retired Marine Corps Reserve major, an aviator, and a native of Texas.

6th Division cleared the Japanese from Motobu and reached the north end of the island by 20 April.

The 6th Division was ordered south to join the rest of the Tenth Army in the fight to clear the Japanese from the south part of the island. Here, the fighting was decidedly vicious and deadly, with the Japanese defenders in positions that maximized the defensive potential of the terrain. Camp describes in compelling detail the 6th Division's actions and Shepherd's decisive leadership and tactical astuteness. He proposed and was given permission to make an amphibious assault on the island's west coast to seize the Oroku Peninsula instead of attacking it in the face of the Japanese defenses. The landing was a complicated maneuver, conducted at night with no rehearsal and with inadequate navigation aids. The landing and subsequent fighting to seize Oroku and other key positions were imminently successful. Indicative of Okinawa's horrific combat was that in this short 11-day campaign, 5,000 Japanese soldiers were killed while the 6th Marine Division suffered 1,600 killed or wounded.

After World War II, Shepherd was again back in command of Marines when the Korean War broke, this time as Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific, commander. In this post, Shepherd worked with General Douglas MacArthur to get the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing into the Korean War despite strong opposition from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had previously planned to cut the Marine Corps back to irrelevancy. The details of how the Marine Corps was able to field a combat division and an aircraft wing is one of the Corps' great stories. *Leatherneck Warrior* gives the reader an inside look at the challenges to make this happen at the top of the chain of command. Shepherd even had to overcome opposition from Commandant General Clifton B. Cates, who realistically could see no way how this could be done after the deep cuts made in the post-World War II years. Doing the impossible, however, is a tradition of the Marine Corps, and the division and wing were in place in time for the Incheon landings. This effort had

tremendous consequences. The division and wing's magnificent performance in Korea provided combat proof of the Corps' relevancy. This was extremely important to the passage of Public Law 416 (the "Marine Corps Bill") of 1953, which deemed the Corps a separate Service from the Navy and secured the Commandant a seat among the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This also made it law that the Marine Corps would always be composed of at least three divisions and three aircraft wings. It ensured the survival of the Marine Corps as a valuable part of the defense establishment.

After World War II, Shepherd became Assistant Commandant (1946–48) under General Alexander A. Vandegrift. In this billet, Shepherd oversaw the funding and completion of the Iwo Jima Monument and gave the keynote speech at its dedication. Deciding that the Marine Corps needed an official seal, he commissioned Felix de Weldon, the Iwo Jima statue's creator, to create the seal and had it approved. This is the seal that is on thousands of automobiles today.

While serving as Commandant (1952–56), Shepherd oversaw the passage of the aforementioned Public Law 416. In addition, he reorganized, for efficiency's sake, Headquarters Marine Corps. He also oversaw efforts to stabilize the support establishment at major bases and initiated higher standards for the security guard program, resulting in its expansion.

Camp's writing is clear and direct. He draws the most pertinent and useful material from the sea of sources available to create an informative and highly readable volume on General Shepherd. Especially important for capturing the personality of the subject is Camp's sprinkling into the narrative of interesting anecdotes.

Camp's study of Shepherd, as well as his previous books on Generals Raymond G. Davis and Edward A. Craig, are a tremendous gift to Marine Corps history that ensure these men and the challenges they faced to create the modern Marine Corps are not forgotten. These books are highly recommended for all Marines to read and learn about the Corps' uniquely powerful legacy.

Lieutenant Josh Hano, USN

The First Cold War: Anglo-Russian Relations in the 19th Century. By Barbara Emerson. (London: Hurst, 2024. Pp. 560. £35.00, cloth.)

Remarkable in both its breadth and depth, *The First Cold War: Anglo-Russian Relations in the 19th Century* is a major achievement in the historiography of nineteenth-century European diplomacy. Covering diplomatic duels, royal family rivalries, military misadventures, and domestic political pressures, one could not ask for a more comprehensive volume on this subject. The book is well organized, with each chapter set around a particular geopolitical problem, and generally flows chronologically. This helps make the book much easier to follow, as some of the events discussed have overlapping timelines but are still in separate chapters.

If anything, author Barbara Emerson has titled her book too modestly, as the first six chapters cover the earliest 200 years of Anglo-Russian relations, providing a background sketch that is essential for the narrative. This framework is important because it demonstrates two permanent features of Anglo-Russian relations. First, from their initial interactions, both sides have always held negative views of the other. British visitors returned home with tales of a brutish society governed by despots, while their Russian counterparts noted the decadence of English life and the weakness of its politicians. One British envoy remarked that “he would rather be dead in England than alive in Russia” (p. 62). Second, Emerson highlights the fact that commerce was responsible for the establishment of serious diplomatic ties between the two powers. Trade was important enough to bring Britain and Russia to the negotiation table several times throughout the period Emerson covers, but it

was never enough for them to develop enduring good relations.

The high points of Anglo-Russian relations were at times when a rival continental power in Europe threatened both empires. Emerson labels the Franco-Russian alliance during the Napoleonic Wars as “intrinsically unsustainable” due to economic and geostrategic reasons (p. 107). A coalition led by Britain and Russia brought an end to Napoléon’s rampage in Europe. The book culminates with the Anglo-Russian convention, which largely came about as a result of Germany’s rise. British and Russian diplomats were conscious not only of German militarism in Europe, as they also agreed to settle their differences in Persia to keep the Berlin-backed Baghdad Railway project out (p. 452). Thus, Britain and Russia only became allies out of utter necessity.

At times, Emerson deftly steps back and succinctly sketches the broader picture of relations among the great powers, giving valuable context to the narrative. This is particularly evident in the brief but informative chapter titled “The Tsar Peacemaker.” However, this volume is not significant due merely to its critical place in the historiography of nineteenth-century European diplomacy. By covering the Anglo-Russian relationship so completely, it helps the reader better understand one of the most consequential geopolitical relationships of the last two centuries.

The repercussions of Anglo-Russian competition are evident in nearly every corner of Eurasia and Emerson explains the roots of many of the most pressing international questions of the twentieth century. The origins of Britain’s decision to go to war over Poland in 1939 can be found in Britain’s sympathetic view of the country stretching back over a century as a result of Russia’s repeated transgressions against Poland. Emerson details the periodic pivots made by Russia

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to Asia, a phenomenon that continued into the Soviet and modern Russian eras. The fingerprints of Anglo-Russian competition can be found in Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, and even Northwest Asia. This book implicitly reframes the long nineteenth century and Pax Britannica as a genuine cold war between the British and Russian empires, with their rivalry impacting all of the major international events of the period. In this, Emerson achieves her aim with certainty.

While the book is heavy on historical detail, it feels light on analysis. The narrative ends at the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 when it seems like there should be a discussion of major themes, trends, and takeaways from the preceding 500 pages. Furthermore, a reader could reasonably expect connections drawn between what Emerson dubs the First Cold War and the traumatic events of the world wars, the Second Cold War, and even present-day geopolitical issues. This analysis is absent, with the exception of a page of commentary on the outcome of Anglo-Russian competition in Persia at the end of the book (p. 474). Indeed, despite using a twentieth-century convention for its title, the book does not compare and contrast the cold wars. However, this line of criticism is not meant to detract from the immense value of the book and the accomplishment in scholarship that it represents. Readers should simply be aware that this volume is pure history.

Furthermore, this is largely a diplomatic history. Although military leaders and incidents are mentioned, strategy and war plans are not discussed. Military officers on both sides are usually found guilty of encouraging aggressive policies, but strategic rationales or illusions are missing and could provide useful context. Emerson misses out on the opportunity to explore the impact of the emerging field of geopolitics on Anglo-Russian relations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Specifically, English strategist Halford Mackinder published his famous article,

“The Geographical Pivot of History,” that advanced his heartland thesis in 1904, which crystallized long-standing views in Britain and set the stage for another century of competition.

When thinking about differences between this cold war and its better-known twentieth-century counterpart, Emerson illuminates the far more intimate nature of Anglo-Russian relations. The length of the diplomatic ties, their commercial links, the close proximity of some of their imperial holdings, the frequency with which their emissaries met, and, perhaps most significantly, the increasingly intertwined royal families. The exceptional detail throughout the narrative adds character and personality to the tedious nature of diplomacy.

Emerson even manages to find moments of levity in the centuries of hostility and skepticism that defined Anglo-Russian relations. During negotiations in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), a British diplomat noted that their own representative, Lord Beaconsfield (Benjamin Disraeli), “can’t negotiate: he has never seen a map of Asia Minor,” while a Russian diplomat believed that their minister of foreign affairs, Aleksandr Mikhaylovich, Prince Gorchakov, “could not indicate even approximately the positions of any of these towns” (p. 292). The book comically notes that these “septuagenarians . . . inadvertently exchanged their most secret maps prepared for them by their military chiefs” (p. 292).

This book requires a serious investment from the reader, both in time and in thought. The consequences of Anglo-Russian competition are up for the audience to decide. Emerson delivers the narrative with such detail and fluidity that it would be a shame to rush and skim through this volume. In a time when many say that a new cold war has risen between the United States and China, perhaps it would be worthwhile to step back and explore the “First Cold War.” Historian and biographer Emerson has written a wonderful book enabling us all to do just that.

Colonel Christopher D. Holmes, USAF (Ret)

A Search for Strategy: British-American Military Collaboration in 1942. By John F. Shortal. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2025. Pp. 256. \$50.00, cloth; \$24.99, e-book.)

In 2025, Texas A&M University Press published John F. Shortal's *A Search for Strategy: British-American Military Collaboration in 1942*, a sequel to his 2021 book *Code Name Arcadia: The First Wartime Conference of Churchill and Roosevelt*. This book continues the story of British and American strategic collaboration, picking up from the end of the Arcadia Conference in January 1942, where Shortal's previous work leaves off, and carrying it through the tumult of the rest of that year. *A Search for Strategy* walks the reader through the many debates and vexations of the American and British senior military staffs as they worked to agree on organization and strategy while simultaneously satisfying their political leaders.

Extensively researched, the book provides the reader a terrific sense of the chaotic forces at work during 1942. At first, this reader strained a bit to keep up with, and make sense of, the rapid-fire recounting of various tensions at the book's beginning, alternating between defeats, struggles, and setbacks. But this format was a brilliant technique, essentially dropping the reader into the moment so they can begin to experience and appreciate the stress caused by the multitude of challenges during the opening months of 1942. The inclusion of maps also provided ready reference to further illustrate the turmoil.

Shortal's retelling dispels the myth of congenial collaboration between the British and Americans from the outset. He did well at portraying the patronizing attitude of the British toward their American counterparts, stemming from a perception that the

Americans were callow due to their inexperience both on the battlefield and in strategy development, particularly on a global scale. The Americans resented this attitude and harbored a belief that the British desired America's resources more for preserving their empire than defeating the Axis powers. Consequently, the Americans tended to dismiss British input, even if the advice was well-founded. This tension threatened to upend their collaboration. Such strain is even more surprising when viewed through the current lens of the "special relationship" between the United States and the United Kingdom. Shortal amply conveys this friction, which, when portrayed alongside the seemingly unending military setbacks the Allies experienced in 1942, creates an insightful view into the enormous tension endured by both countries' senior military leaders in that year.

In addition, Shortal does well at exploring the discussions surrounding the timing of opening a second front in Europe, a topic that looms large and that consumes a tremendous amount of energy and strategic thought in 1942. The British, bloodied by recent combat against the Germans and psychologically scarred by the horrendous number of casualties in World War I, advocated for strategic patience and an indirect approach. However, the Americans wanted to fight Germany sooner rather than later, undoubtedly influenced by significant domestic political pressure to take the fight to Japan since it was Japan and not Germany that attacked the United States.

Shortal provides the reader a front-row seat to this wrestling to reconcile strategic objectives. His account especially addresses the negotiations between senior military leadership and their respective political masters, Winston S. Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. In this regard, Shortal seems to give Churchill a bit more prominence than Roosevelt.

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This presents the impression that the British are more in charge than the Americans, something that later changes as the Americans gain experience and the full weight of American mobilization comes to bear. In addition, one can see in this story the British fighting to remain dominant (and arguably relevant), even as they recognize the waning of their military and political power in the face of America's ascendance. Through this depiction, the reader gains an appreciation of the relationship between the political and the military realms, something that would make a helpful case study in illustrating Carl von Clausewitz's dictum about war and politics.

The flow of *The Search for Strategy* provides the reader a tremendous sense of the chaos of 1942, when things could have as easily tilted more toward the Axis

as toward the Allies. The book does quite well at demonstrating how the Americans and British tried to get their arms around the chaos, grappling with each other as well as their adversaries. Moreover, the book offers the reader deep insight into the formulation of military strategy, reconciling differing objectives and opinions while ensuring alignment with political guidance. Shortal's unique perspective from having served as the director of the U.S. Joint History Office, reporting to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, helps him clearly convey these sorts of machinations at the senior-most level of the military. His book thus provides an intriguing sequel to *Code Name Arcadia* and whets the reader's appetite to see what happens next in 1943.

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Paul M. Kearney

The Airborne Mafia: The Paratroopers Who Shaped America's Cold War Army. By Robert F. Williams. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024. Pp. 288. \$29.95, cloth; \$20.99, e-book.)

I was 20 years old when my West Point tactical officer discovered that I was afraid of heights. A few weeks later, I learned my summer military schooling would be at the U.S. Army Airborne School. At the double-time in the heat of the Fort Benning summer, I got my first taste of “Airborne Mafia.” Still, it was not until reading Robert F. Williams’s *Airborne Mafia: The Paratroopers Who Shaped America’s Cold War Army* that I began to see how the pioneers of paratrooping shaped and molded the post–World War II Army and how they affect every aspect of Army culture, even to this day.

Williams is the right author for such a book, which is part history and part anthropology. As a historian, Williams’s credentials include studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and a doctorate in history from the Ohio State University. As an anthropologist, you could call his years of service in the Airborne community, including combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as a noncommissioned officer, an extended and intense field study into paratrooper culture. This combination of personal immersion and deep academic study gives his book tremendous credibility.

Williams’s book is chronologically organized, moving from the birth of American Airborne culture during World War II through its wartime consolidation and, ultimately, to its postwar ascendancy. With the towering figures of Matthew B. Ridgway, Maxwell

D. Taylor, and James M. Gavin at center stage, Williams traces the evolution of airborne culture from its experimental roots to its institutional dominance while also exploring the broader implications for American military doctrine and civil-military relations. The book explores how Airborne culture, especially the radical idea of decentralization, was born out of the chaotic nature of Airborne assault and grew to affect the entire Army. Airborne leaders impacted doctrine for combat on the nuclear battlefield and rapid, flexible strike options. After reading Williams’s book, you will not be surprised that Harold G. “Hal” Moore, commander of one of the first air-mobile units and hero of the Battle of Ia Drang (1965), was a paratrooper whose career included time in parachute test units.

The real strength of Williams’s work is how approachable it is. He seamlessly guides the reader through dense, scholarly arguments by maintaining an easy narrative style. Readers outside the Army can easily follow along as Williams explains nuanced aspects of Airborne culture without condescension. Readers from any Army background will recognize aspects of their own cultural upbringing and find (some with delight and others with regret) that they are a product of the Airborne Mafia’s half-century of dominance.

Williams does, at times, seem like he has not fully taken his maroon beret off. Discussions of Airborne ethos in the early chapters might strike some readers as overly generous or gushing. Williams describes Airborne units as being cohesive through shared hardship where every paratrooper knew that every officer from lieutenant to general could and would do anything that every paratrooper would be asked to do. He describes how jumpers would form Little Groups

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of Paratroopers (LGOPs) and attack their objective, whether the winds brought together a cohesive squad or an LGOP consisting of two cooks, three engineers, and a chaplain. While they are indeed the ideals and recollections of Airborne veterans, they could feel rose-tinted to a skeptical outsider. That said, it is an insight into the Airborne culture. Even years after service and the rigor of a top-tier doctoral program cannot clear all the Airborne Kool-Aid from a true paratrooper.

Ultimately, this book is superbly written, approachable, and thoroughly enjoyable. Whether you are approaching it from a historian's angle, looking for insights into the shaping of the Army's post-World War II culture, or are hungry for a nostalgic Airborne shuffle, this book is well worth the read. I owe a tactical officer for my start in the Airborne Mafia, and I owe Robert F. Williams for making more of it make sense. Airborne all the way!

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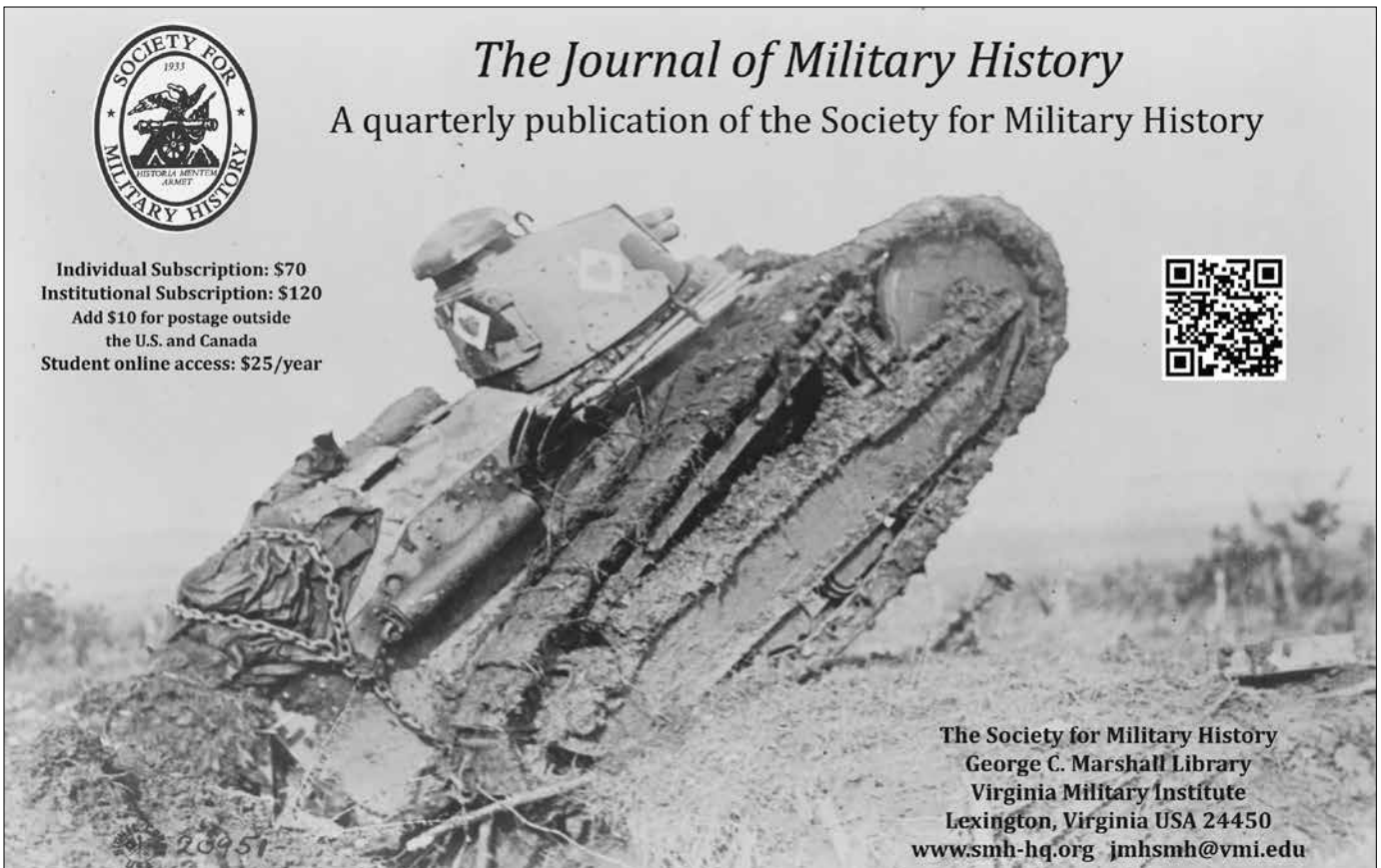
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Jessica Luepke, PhD

The Boxer Rebellion: Bluejackets and Marines in China, 1900–1901. By Emily Abdow. (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, Department of the Navy, 2023. Pp. 144. Open access, e-book.)

In this concise, digestible history of the Boxer Rebellion, Emily Abdow focuses on the actions of the U.S. contingent forces including the U.S. Navy. She pays special attention to the role of naval forces as coalition forces warred against the Chinese Boxers and Chinese military to quell the rebellion aimed at Christian influences in northern China. Abdow argues that in this conflict, the bluejackets were put into a position that they had never trained for: land war. This work is a technical retelling of the events as they happened. Tracing the routes U.S. coalition forces took through China from the Dagu port to Beijing, Abdow chronicles the unique hardships sailors experienced as they marched, rebuilt railroads, and held off siege-like attacks on their strongholds.

The Americans joined British, German, Russian, French, and Japanese forces, resulting in the first coalition war the United States had participated in. In the first two chapters, Abdow documents the history of each nation's interests and difficulties in gaining, then maintaining, influence in China. When the Boxer Rebellion first broke out, Chinese resentment of not only foreign overreach but the Christian invasion of their nation resulted in violence in northern China and an attack on the Legation Quarter in Beijing. As Abdow describes in the following chapters, at each major battle, the coalition forces underestimated the capabilities of their enemies. Adding to that, as Abdow thoroughly documents, the international forces did not understand the relationship between the Boxer rebels and the Qing administration. From the start, the coalition believed that Empress Dowager Cixi

supported repression of the rebellion and therefore expected the Chinese military to assist the international forces as they marched through to relieve the legations in Beijing.

Abdow's final chapter on lessons learned provides the backbone of her work, highlighting the ways in which the U.S. Navy used the Boxer Rebellion to re-evaluate its own training and cooperation with other nations. This lesson proved important fewer than two decades later when the United States entered the First World War. It was in China that the Americans realized that coalition warfare is not only fighting alongside other nations but also developing a central command and a command structure that maximizes each nation's capabilities. Abdow notes that it was during the Boxer Rebellion that the U.S. military began to understand the importance of interoperability between the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. At the time of the China Relief Expedition, when the U.S. Army joined the fray, the U.S. military did not have a Joint command structure. Abdow points out that one was not formed until 1903, when continued issues in the Philippines necessitated it. In China, Abdow argues, the three Service branches cooperated and worked fairly well together until it came time for the relief of the Legation Quarter and the Army commander began showing favoritism in ordering the 14th and 9th Infantry Regiments to enter the city while the Marines guarded the wagons (p. 98). Abdow acknowledges that the State Department's representatives, at times, only added to the confusion due to contradictory orders from U.S. officials in China and naval officers.

Abdow credits Army, Navy, and Marine officers for the successful end to the Boxer Rebellion. Officers, in any conflict, make the hard decisions and are often the ones who take the blame if the outcome is not as

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expected. However, Abdow notes that the Boxer Rebellion had been a first for many of these officers. They were not trained in Joint or coalition operations and had come into the conflict with a poor understanding of their enemies. Despite the fact that the Americans had been supplying the Chinese with munitions for years, officers were constantly surprised when their expectations of a primitive, superstitious foe were overturned by a fearsome, well-equipped, and well-trained force (p. 97). Regardless of all of this, Abdow notes, the officers made crucial strategic decisions that saved coalition lives and created space for luck and adaptation. This, as it is presented, is the most fascinating part of the conflict. Abdow argues that when the “U.S. Navy sailors in China had fought in the face

of seemingly impossible odds . . . luck was on their side” (p. 99). Chinese hesitations and the ingenuity of sailors like Gunner’s Mate Joseph A. Mitchell, who helped construct the “International Gun,” and others who had assisted in repairing rail lines and locomotive engines paved the way for victory.

Abdow’s use of personal, military, and government records supports her retelling of the Boxer Rebellion. Her readers will also enjoy the numerous visual aids that provide context, such as maps and diagrams, as well as the photographs taken during the conflict. For traditional military historians, educators and students alike, this work is a great addition to the historiography of U.S. military history.

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Ryan Neck

Faith and Fear: America's Relationship with War Since 1945. By Gregory A. Daddis. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. 496. \$34.99, cloth; \$23.99, e-book.)

Gregory Daddis examines the United States' relationship with war through the lens of faith and fear. Daddis argues that in its fear of conflict during the span of roughly five decades, the United States placed faith in its military to prevent larger international conflicts. Following World War II, the United States had an identity crisis—not concerning its own identity, but rather that of its biggest adversary. Exploring the necessity to be on the side of good in a black-and-white world of “good versus evil” is one of the core themes of this book (p. 322). Although the Soviet Union was framed as the new enemy of the United States, the two nations would never fight each other directly, but the relationship resulted in the ebbing and flowing of tensions with small proxy wars interspersed, with the threat of nuclear and conventional war remaining an imminent possibility. Following the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, global terrorism would take up the mantle as the ultimate enemy of the United States. In examining how the United States shifted its fearful focus from defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan to defeating the Soviet Union to fighting against terrorism, the reader sees how militarism forms the core of U.S. identity.

Daddis relies on his years of expertise—both as a U.S. Army officer and historian—to provide the reader with a vast bibliography of secondary sources to understand more about the many topics contained in this book. This is also one of the reasons this book is set apart from most military history works; it is not primarily archive driven. It is Daddis's experience,

combined with the knowledge gathered from these secondary sources, that forms the basis for the information presented in his book. Primary sources are still used, especially in the form of newspapers, which provide an insight into American opinions of events discussed throughout the chapters.

This book is broken down into six parts, with three to four chapters in each part. In the introduction, Daddis examines the viewpoint of the United States emerging as a global superpower following World War II, leading to the question: How is this status maintained? With Pearl Harbor still forming the basis of national consciousness, even at the beginning of the Cold War, Daddis argues that much of early Cold War U.S. policy revolved around the idea that the United States would never be caught militarily unprepared (p. 10). The government believed it could defeat the Soviet Union the same way it had defeated Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. The United States held faith in the belief that if one were fighting Communism, then one must be in the right. Daddis argues “that faith in and fear of war defined the cognitive framing of American foreign policy and grand strategy throughout the entirety of the Cold War era, with enormous social and cultural implications that rippled across the post-World War II decades” (p. 7).

Chapters 1 through 4 (part 1) show how the ideology of Communism took the place of fascism as America's enemy following World War II. Daddis points out that this was attributed to President Harry S. Truman taking a more hostile stance toward the Soviet Union than President Franklin D. Roosevelt's stance. This shift in approach to the Soviet Union is where the reader begins to see faith and fear intertwined. In the United States, the ideological fear of Communism led to the reinforcement of American values. Seeing Communism as a distinct religion

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anathema to Christianity provided Americans with the ideological backbone to fight the Cold War. Part 1 concludes with the rise of cultural anti-Communism in the United States, showing how sometimes being anti-Communist was not enough; one had to be more anti-Communist than one's neighbor.

Part 2 shows how cultural anti-Communism was put into practice, both in foreign and domestic policy. In chapter 5, Daddis uses the Korean War as a case study on the intersection between faith and fear, examining whether the Korean War was truly a war against Communism or a war against war itself. Given the ideological impetus of the Korean War, Daddis examines how the Korean War, building off of World War II, is made the United States into a global power, giving rise to the term "limited war" (p. 79).

With global power comes global responsibility, and along with that comes ethical considerations on the use of nuclear weapons. Religious fervor would translate into American racial animosity toward Communism. For example, in chapter 6, Daddis examines the morality of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan. He argues that in the 1950s "most U.S. citizens held little sympathy for Asian dead" (p. 102). This same feeling would carry over to the U.S. response toward the "godless communists," as, according to Daddis, most Americans did not have any moral issue with using atomic weapons against Soviet citizens (p. 97). In addition to the fear of nuclear weapons, the United States feared that smaller countries would fall under the Communist orbit, as examined in chapter 7. To keep this from happening, the United States backed some unsavory characters, such as Jacobo Arbenz and Mohammad Mosaddegh, whose commitment to democratic ideals were questionable at best: "Mosaddegh's opposition to foreign intervention exposed how easy it was for fearful Americans to conflate nationalism and anti-imperialism with communism" (p. 110). In a nod to the intersection between domestic and foreign policy, U.S. Cold War policy dictated that you were all right if you were anti-Communist.

Part 3 examines how the United States continued this practice both in the Western Hemisphere and in Southeast Asia. In chapter 8, Daddis examines

how the United States justified its opposition toward Communist governments in Latin America by placing unwarranted faith in previous U.S. policies, such as the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary. Chapters 9 and 10 examine how the United States relied on war to deter war, specifically during the John F. Kennedy administration. Anytime a nonaligned nation veered politically away from a U.S.-backed government, the United States viewed that as tantamount to agreeing with Communist ideals, posing a threat to U.S. interests. Furthermore, Daddis shows how the Soviet Union feared the same—exemplifying the roles played by faith and fear on both sides of the Iron Curtain. As an example, chapter 11 examines how Vietnam aligned itself with Communism for its anti-imperial ideology, however, the United States did not see it this way. Guided by a fear of Communism and a faith in war to prevent its influence expanding, the United States committed itself to limited interventions, although U.S. involvement did not remain limited for long.

Part 4 examines the conflicting attitudes surrounding what victory meant for the United States, in Vietnam and beyond. Chapter 12 examines how the Richard M. Nixon administration approached the Vietnam War, relying heavily on the use of airpower as it faced criticisms over mounting civilian casualties. Additionally, the administration even considered using nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union to ensure they would cease backing North Vietnam, which hurt any chances for détente. In Vietnam, prestige demanded U.S. escalation and tough rhetoric. In Eastern Europe, Daddis uses the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 as an example of the Soviet Union using prestige as a tool to show that it could intervene anywhere it pleased. Both examples showcase how fear over loss of prestige continued military conflict when it otherwise could have ended.

Chapter 13 continues to further examine the lengths to which the United States was willing to go in the pursuit of peace. During the Sino-Soviet War, Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger saw an opportunity to strengthen ties with China. However, there were some who were critical of this approach, with detractors ar-

guing that being friendly to Communism would damage U.S. prestige and credibility. Chapter 14 shows how the United States continued to place itself between conflicting powers. Following the Vietnam War, the United States involved itself in the Yom Kippur War of 1967, backing Israel, with the Soviet Union backing Egypt. However, the pursuit of finding a strategic partner in the Middle East posed a moral dilemma, as in the years prior to the war, Israel had questionably expanded into historically Palestinian territory. In chapter 15, Daddis examines how President Jimmy E. Carter faced backlash over the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II, with the Committee of Present Danger (CPD) arguing that it put the United States in an inferior nuclear position to the Soviet Union. The CPD would further argue that these talks influenced the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan, prompting the United States to fund the Mujahideen with weapons and various material assistance. However, Daddis points out that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was more out of the Soviet need to secure its own borders than a desire to expand Communism.

Part 5 examines how the United States started to rebuild its image in the wake of earlier Cold War failures. The fallout of the Iranian hostage crisis, as examined in chapter 16, demonstrated to the United States its own weakness by its inability to defend its interests. Chapter 17 builds on this, showing how the then-newly elected president, Ronald W. Reagan, believed that if the United States wanted to regain lost prestige it must reemphasize a militaristic culture. In chapter 18, the reader sees how the domestic policy of remilitarization translated into the sphere of foreign policy. To fight Communism everywhere, the United States continued to globally support right-wing groups, even if their aims were dictatorial. Nevertheless, Reagan, while talking a tough game, felt the need to bring the Cold War to a conclusion. Chapter 19 examines how, while still referring to the Soviet Union as the ultimate evil, Reagan maintained denuclearization talks with the nation through the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. Reagan, while being criticized as a dove and not a hawk, recognized that the cost of all-out war was more than the nation could bear. Daddis presents

Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev as likewise being a willing participant in ending the Cold War.

With the conclusion of the Cold War being a focal point for Part 6, chapter 20 reemphasizes how the United States held to the belief that it was fighting an ideological enemy in the Soviet Union. When the end of the Cold War left the United States without an ideological enemy, the United States saw a need to abandon the previous Cold War-based grand strategy of containment in favor of something else. In chapters 21 through 23, Daddis shows how the U.S. efforts to fill this void did not come quickly, and American faith in war became damaged. Operation Just Cause in Panama, intervention in Somalia, intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Operation Desert Storm in Iraq did not, as Daddis argues, evoke the same feelings as the anti-Communist crusade that was the Cold War. This was until events such as the 19 April 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing and the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks provided the United States with a new ideological enemy: terrorism. As Daddis writes, "Deterring states from nuclear war was one thing. Deterring non-state actors and terrorist organizations was something quite different" (p. 315). Essentially, the turn of the twentieth century challenged how the United States viewed grand strategy, as the majority of its adversaries were now nonstate actors.

In the conclusion, Daddis leaves the reader with a warning. This book traces an evolving relationship between the United States and war—a relationship that has only strengthened. Daddis writes that "such a twisted relationship between faith and fear, if left unbroken, can only pre-ordain the nation to a militarized way of life bounded by the grimness of war" (p. 344). Daddis shows how one can be interested in military history while still being critical of militarism. This factor is what turns good military history into exceptional military history. Professional military education students from all military branches, both enlisted and officer, will benefit from having their historical perspectives broadened on the global role of the U.S. military. Likewise, graduate students specializing in military history and twentieth-century U.S. history will benefit from including this book in their

comprehensive reading lists, as it situates U.S. military actions within an ideological perspective. This understanding can help the United States reframe the way it views the military in society. With the Global

War on Terrorism officially concluded, this leaves the reader with the question: Who or what is the next ideological foe?

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Charles Nathan Swope

Soldiers in the Schoolhouse: A Military History of the Junior ROTC. By Arthur T. Coumbe. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2025. Pp. 336. \$60.00, cloth; \$30.00, paperback.)

In *Soldiers in the Schoolhouse*, Arthur T. Coumbe establishes the history of a program that has become a dominant keyholder to the military establishment and society, exploring goals, purposes, and uses while addressing policy and implementation at the strategic (U.S. Congress) level. Coumbe introduces the reader to the tradition of school-based military training in North America, which started before the American Revolution, then transitions to an extensive account of the program in each era of the twentieth century to its commanding position in society today.

Many great Americans are graduates of the nation's military schools and senior and junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). Pre-indoctrination military training has played a role in numerous civilizations, from ancient times through all of modern American history. Coumbe's account traces the roots to the first European inhabitants of North America in the seventeenth century. Military schools started being established in the early nineteenth-century United States, with the most famous being the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1802. Leaders expressed that they produced young men with valuable moral qualities and character traits: manliness, honor, health, self-control, grace, good bearing, perfect posture, and vitality. Educationalists valued military training "for the order it brought to the classroom and its utility in developing character, physical prowess, and republican virtue" (p. 26).

The mid-nineteenth century war had a powerful effect on high school military training with the movement being strongest in New England, and youth military programs continued to grow into the new

century as this investment achieved new heights in popularity after 1915 due to the preparedness movement. The National Defense Act of 1916 officially established the ROTC in both senior and junior divisions. Harvard University had been among the first of the U.S. Army's ROTCs formed in January 1916, with 1,000-plus student members, according to the *Harvard Gazette*.

According to Coumbe, War Department leaders sought to increase public support, recruiting, and America's security in postwar expansion years. By June 1919, military programs operated in 191 colleges and 128 secondary schools. The 1920s economy negatively impacted the program, which regrew interest and strength in the 1930s. The situation in Europe proved to be a powerful stimulus, yet the U.S. entry into World War II prioritized institutional expansion, therefore producing more of the need to place soldiers directly into the military. Other school-based military programs saw some success, with the Victory Corps being the largest. There also were scores of other organizations of interest to young men like the Boy Scouts of America. Yet, junior ROTC (JROTC) had an average of 72,151 enrollments in 139 units from 1942 to 1949.

"Between World War II and the end of the Korean War, JROTC's institutional base remained stable" (p. 73). The Cold War produced a preoccupation with internal security, and from 1953 to 1963, enrollment in military schools increased 280 percent. A tall force of increase for the program came from U.S. secretary of defense Robert S. McNamara whose initiative elicited a sharp congressional and public response and led, paradoxically, to the greatest advancement of JROTC. The ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964 introduced the other military Services to the junior program. By 1966, there were 287 units with 96,366 students, which pro-

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pelled ROTC into what it became. Moving to Washington, DC, at the time were great political influences on policy that impacted the program, including an initiative from the war, Project 100,000.

Due to the all-volunteer force, young women joined JROTC in 1972–73. The Army's program received a big advance, rising to 115,022 in 1974–75, while thousands of women flocked to units. To rejuvenate the military Services in the early 1980s, the Department of Defense (DOD) drove a new escalation. A study group task force also advocated reform in the mid-1980s. In the five-year period following, every day grew the need to employ the military in socially constructive ways. Operation Capital, a successful partnership between Washington, DC, schools and the Army supporting urgent needs, resulted in some success in removing the prior adverse consequences of problems. Yet, the real value could not be weighed from quantitative measurements. The Air Force Awareness Presentation Teams also achieved successful results. DOD officials suddenly deliberated if JROTC should continue. A U.S. representative from Kentucky vowed to protect it and had enormous success with the support of famous politicians. President George H. W. Bush said he was going to increase the

program in a 1992 speech. By 1995, every state had a unit and enrollment grew to more than 160,000.

The recent Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts spurred the JROTC to quadruple its units to 538,000 people as of January 2025. Now career and technical focused, curriculum revision facilitated regional accreditation, with the Marines being the first. The senior program can confer scholarships that may cover full or partial tuition and fees or room and board to enable students to avoid education debt, and the junior program can qualify enlisted students for instant promotion. These programs provide employment for veterans, perform many community projects, carry on preservation and performance of tradition, and produce high-quality citizens to meet quota swift.

Coumbe aims to create greater dialogue with the book and to fill a gap in the literature on the JROTC, its evolution, and the ways it has been used by the military Services. To academics, military leaders, educators, and civilian policymakers as well as others this will be of the highest value. Coumbe received a great deal of support from numerous staff and archivists of various organizations and libraries, who provided him with assistance to publish this well-written book.

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First Lieutenant Kathryn E. Wisniewski

Superspy: Hans Tofte, Intelligence Officer for SOE, OSS, and CIA. By David A. Foy. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2025. Pp. 224. \$34.95, cloth; \$20.95, e-book.)

Superspy: Hans Tofte, Intelligence Officer for SOE, OSS, and CIA delivers a comprehensive biography of a controversial character in the American intelligence community. This title promises the hook of Hans V. Tofte's dethronement from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at the end of his career. Author David A. Foy alludes to this drama throughout the text but uses a chronological account of Tofte's life and career to paint the picture of a prominent but contentious figure of World War II and Cold War American intelligence. Foy argues that although Tofte was flawed, both in his character and—at times—in how he conducted business within the intelligence community, professionally, which saw him rise through the ranks of not only the U.S. Army but eventually the Office of Strategic Services and the CIA, is one well worth studying for those interested in the intricacies of the twentieth-century intelligence landscape. As Foy writes in his introduction,

Here then is the first English-language biography of a little-known but significant figure in the history of twentieth-century military and civilian intelligence, a foreign-born patriot who came to the assistance of several other nations in a time of need and did his best to help them. Tofte was an imperfect but accomplished role model, whose factual and nuanced story should be told and appreciated (p. viii).

Having also served in the U.S. Army and as an intelligence officer within the U.S. intelligence community,

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Foy's own experiences aid his understanding of Tofte's career. Foy is also the author of *Loyalty First: The Life and Times of Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief Intelligence Officer* (2023).

Foy begins his new biography in Tofte's boyhood years, citing Tofte's original biographer, Henrik Krüger, as he does heavily throughout the book. (Krüger's biography, *Den danske krigshelt, der kom til tops i CIA*, was published in 2005.) Tofte was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1911, son of a merchant ship captain whose seafaring legacy impacted Hans's childhood desire for travel and adventure. Chapter 2 quickly brings the reader to the commencement of the "Dynamic Dane" in World War II, giving context to the skills Tofte would later use in his long intelligence career. Foy immediately casts Tofte as the complex character he continues to portray throughout the biography, showcasing his fervor for service and adventure against the backdrop of the development of the twentieth century's intelligence agencies. As Foy dives further into Tofte's involvement in Operation Audrey in Yugoslavia from 1943 to 1944, the intricacies of the global stage create a text that is not designed for the casual reader but for those distinctly interested in how military intelligence directly influenced world events of this time period.

As Foy guides the biography through World War II and into the Korean War, he draws heavily on correspondence, newspaper articles, and other documentation to ground his account in primary source material, and it is at this point of the narrative that Foy begins to tease out the threads that eventually construct the web of controversy around Tofte as a historical figure in the twentieth-century intelligence community. Foy writes, "Something happened to Tofte between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Korean War, [as author Annie Jacobsen] savagely character-

izes Tofte as a 'liar and a thief' and ponders whether to attribute the alleged development to a forerunner of PTSD, excessive hubris, and simply too much alcohol" (p. 67). Even early in his career, Tofte began to show the behaviors that ultimately culminated in his controversial separation from the CIA.

Yet, Tofte's career was still going strong in the 1950s, and Foy traces the Dane's rise in prominence through his involvement in the CIA's covert Operation PBSuccess in Guatemala and operations in Argentina where he made numerous friends and enemies alike. Tofte's story did not climax until 1966, when, then working at the CIA's senior levels, he became caught up in what Foy terms the "apartment to let fiasco" (p. 169). Due to a convoluted series of events, a fellow CIA agent saw top secret documents stored in Tofte's study when his house was being shown to potential renters. What ensued was a very public disagreement between the CIA, which claimed Tofte had breached security protocols and wanted him removed from the agency, and Tofte, who took his case to the media. The matter was ultimately settled in 1967, but

it left its marks both on Tofte as an individual and on the very private CIA as an organization, which had been dragged into the public discourse. The "apartment to let" incident brought an end to Tofte's career, and Foy brings his story to a close with Tofte's death in 1987.

Foy reserves the final pages of the book for a retrospective on the sentiments that surrounded Tofte during his lifetime and continue to be a topic of discourse today, now that Tofte has become a historical figure and character of intrigue for anyone interested in twentieth-century intelligence. By providing the first English-language biography of Hans Tofte, Foy delivers a detailed account of the intelligence officer's career and life, both of which are lined with a streak of controversy. While *Superspy* is a bit dense for a newcomer to the topic of World War II and Cold War military intelligence, the detail and source material Foy integrates into his work make it a comprehensive text for those interested in a deep dive into this unique historical figure.

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Thomas Zacharis

Battle of Manila: Poisoned Victory in the Pacific War. By Nicolas Evans Sarantakes. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. 504. \$29.99, cloth; \$20.99, e-book.)

In *The Battle of Manila: Poisoned Victory in the Pacific War*, Nicholas Evans Sarantakes, professor of strategy at the U.S. Naval War College, analyzes the monthlong struggle fought between 2 February and 3 March 1945—the only World War II engagement in the Pacific fought in a large city. Although the first 15 days saw 80,000 American soldiers succeed in gaining control of most of the Philippine capital, desperation brought out the ferocity in the 20,000 Japanese who held it. As the Americans resorted to indirect fire, tanks, and flame throwers, the Japanese resorted to phosphorus shells. When the defenders finally quit the city, they estimated their surviving personnel at anywhere from 25 percent to as few as 10 percent withdrawing into the Sierra Madre mountain range.

The American soldiers learned a lot about urban warfare in their efforts to liberate Manila. For example, one should not abandon a building until one is sure that all the defenders are dead. Accordingly, American soldiers began shooting all the Japanese and hanging them on the city's walls, to be sure that no one was feigning death. They were, after all, facing an enemy who thought nothing of killing their own wounded so they would not give information to their captors. As the Americans discovered, an army that barbarous toward its own could not be expected to feel pity for the local populace.

As always when it comes to the liberation of the Philippines, the author tries to explain the difficult personality of General Douglas MacArthur. All came to remember him after his death as a hero in Korea, yet few mentioned the Battle of Manila as part of his

legacy. Planning documents show that MacArthur pinpointed Manila as the heart and soul of Luzon and believed that the center of gravity of the city was Malacañang Palace and the government buildings east of Luneta Park. Strategically speaking, he was right. While targeting the detention camp at the University of Santo Tomas it was understandable to regard it as offering nothing to alter the course of battle. Curiously, however, he failed to include the docks among his primary objectives. American indirect fire succeeded in destroying the dock facilities, but that was something the Japanese wanted. Fortunately for the U.S. Army, Commodore William A. Sullivan was sent to oversee the repair work on the dock. For his own part, Sullivan was impressed with MacArthur: "He was far better than any of the commanding generals I ran across in Europe. Oh, there is no comparison" (p. 316).

In the film *MacArthur*, the general quickly goes from defeat into the offensive, but the reality was much different. MacArthur actually represented a complication to America strategy. In 1942, the United States' main priority was the fight against Nazi Germany. For their Pacific strategy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff split the command, with MacArthur in charge of the Southwest Pacific, while Admiral Chester W. Nimitz commanded the Central Pacific areas. MacArthur criticized the decision, arguing that it violated the basic military principle of concentrating forces. Author Sarantakes adds that because the theater of war was secondary, the Army deployed to MacArthur was made up of secondary divisions. Of the 18 infantry divisions deployed to his command, 10 had their origins in the Army National Guard and another two had National Guard regiments. However, Sarantakes probably ignores that MacArthur had a very low opinion of the U.S. Marine Corps, which formed a part of the forces under his command. In addition, MacAr-

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thur also had the help of the Australian Army, which had proved its quality in Greece, Crete, and Africa.

Another important aspect of the campaign was the recapture of Corregidor, which cleared the Gulf of Luzon from the threat of Japanese artillery. MacArthur's commander of the Sixth Army, General Walter Krueger, gave the task of invading Corregidor to a mixed formation of the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team and the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. The invasion's commander was Colonel George M. Jones. The paratroopers suffered 10.7 percent casualties, or 222 of the 2,065 men who jumped onto the island—much lower than the 20 percent Jones had expected. Most of the

losses, 75 percent, came in the first sortie. Several hundred Japanese remained on Corregidor after 2 March 1945, the last ones surrendering on 2 January 1946 after learning of the war's end. The battle showed the value of innovation. The attack on Corregidor stands in contrast to what was happening in Manila. Had the Americans used airborne assault and amphibious assault in a similar way in the city, the Battle of Manila might have turned out quite differently.

The Battle of Manila was both a strategic and political victory for the United States, but a horrific one for the civilians it liberated, with a collateral loss of 100,000 Filipinos. Readers interested in the Pacific War will find *The Battle of Manila* a very interesting read.

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