

# ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Captain James H. Webb Jr.  
U.S. Marine Corps (Ret)



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Interviewer

HISTORY DIVISION  
U.S. Marine Corps  
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*Official U.S. government photo*

James H. Webb, following the first session.



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*Captain James H. Webb, “Roles and Missions: Time for a Change,” Marine Corps Gazette, vol. 56 (March 1972): 19–26*

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## Captain James H. Webb Jr., USMC (Ret)

### BIOGRAPHY

James Webb, former U.S. Senator from Virginia, has been a combat Marine, a counsel in the Congress, an assistant secretary of defense and Secretary of the Navy, an Emmy-award winning journalist, a filmmaker, a professor of literature, a resident fellow at two of America's most prestigious universities, and is the author of 10 books.

Webb graduated from the Naval Academy in 1968, one of 18 midshipmen to receive the superintendent's commendation for outstanding leadership. First in his class of 243 at the Marine Corps Officer's Basic School, he served as a rifle platoon and company commander in Vietnam and was awarded the Navy Cross, the Silver Star Medal, two Bronze Star Medals and two Purple Hearts. He graduated from the Georgetown University Law Center in 1975, having received the Horan Award for excellence in legal writing.

Webb served Congress as counsel to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs from 1977 to 1981. In 1982, he led the fight to include an African-American soldier in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall. In 1984, he was appointed assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, and in 1987 became the first Naval Academy graduate to serve in the military and then become secretary of the Navy. He was a fall 1992 fellow at Harvard University's Institute of Politics and currently serves as the inaugural distinguished fellow at Notre Dame's International Security Center. In 2014, he was awarded the University of Virginia's Thomas Jefferson award for citizen leadership, its highest recognition for public service.

While in the Senate in 2007, Webb was selected to deliver the response to the president's State of the Union address, and served on the Foreign Relations, Armed Services, Veterans Affairs,



and the Joint Economic committees. He wrote, introduced, and guided to passage the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the most significant veterans legislation since World War II, and coauthored legislation that exposed \$60 billion of waste, fraud and abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan wartime-support contracts. A long-time advocate of fixing America's broken criminal justice system, Webb was spotlighted in *The Atlantic Magazine* as one of the world's "Brave Thinkers" for tackling prison reform and possessing "two things vanishingly rare in Congress: a conscience and a spine."

Having widely traveled in Asia for decades, as chair of the Foreign Relations Committee's Asia-Pacific Subcommittee Webb was a leading voice in calling for the U.S. to reengage in East Asia, meeting frequently with key national leaders throughout the region. He conceived and carried out the process that resulted in opening up Burma (Myanmar) to the outside world. In 2009, he led a historic visit to Burma, becoming the first American leader to visit that country in 10 years, and opening a dialogue that resulted in the reestablishment of relations between our two countries.

In addition to his public service, Webb has enjoyed a varied career as a writer. His commentaries on national security, foreign relations and domestic issues have been published in a wide range of major magazines and newspapers. He taught literature at the Naval Academy. Traveling widely as a journalist, he received an Emmy Award for his PBS coverage of the U.S. Marines in Beirut in 1983, and in 2004 was embedded with the U.S. military in Afghanistan. He wrote the original story and was executive producer of the film *Rules of Engagement*, which held the top slot in U.S. box offices for two weeks in April 2000. Webb's books include *Fields of Fire*, widely recognized as the classic novel of the Vietnam War, and *Born Fighting*, a sweeping history of the Scots-Irish culture that Tom Wolfe called the most important ethnography in recent American history.

Webb has six children and lives in Northern Virginia with his wife, Hong Le Webb, who was born in Vietnam and is a graduate of Cornell Law School. He speaks Vietnamese and has done extensive pro bono work with the Vietnamese community dating from the late 1970s.

U.S. MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION  
Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Senator James H. Webb Jr.  
Date: 14 September 2017  
Length: 2:50:53  
Interviewers: Dr. Fred H. Allison and Dr. Edward T. Nevglowski

SESSION I

Allison: This is an oral history interview with Senator James H. Webb by Dr. Fred Allison and Historian Ed Nevglowski on the 14th of September 2017. The interview is done in the interview room at the History Division at Quantico. Sir, thank you for coming in for the interview. We sincerely appreciate your time devoted to this. Okay, to start, can you give us some information on your family and growing up?

Webb: I grew up in the military. My dad had enlisted the day after the Pearl Harbor attack and served initially in World War II. He was an electrician working at the Townsend and Wall Department Store in St. Joseph, Missouri, and living in the YMCA. He was later commissioned and became a bomber pilot, flying B-17s and B-29s. Then, like so many people who didn't have any college, he got RIFd [reduction in force] at the end of World War II even though he was a pretty fine pilot. He went back to his job in St. Joe, where I was born, and in 1947 they asked him to come back on active duty. It was an interesting time if you look at that post-war period. They stopped the draft, drew down the size of the military, and then the Cold War began, so they were building up the military again and they wanted people like my dad to come back. He jumped at the chance and served 26 years, finishing college by going to night school and graduating just before I graduated from high school.

So, he went back on active duty in 1947 and for more than three years was either deployed or stationed in places where they didn't have military housing. He was deployed for I think six months to a remote base in Alaska on the bomber watch up there. He was sent to England. He flew in the Berlin Airlift. He was sent unaccompanied to Bliss Air Force Base in Texas and then to Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, where after a year or so they finally had built enough family housing that we could live with him although he was still gone a lot, flying. The point being that we knew what it was like as a family when you'd have to get your things together, and keep going when your dad was gone. And there were no family programs like you see today, as I think you quite probably know just even from your time periods.

Allison: Right.

Webb: After my dad went back into the military, my grandmother moved in with us. She was a widow and brought my Aunt Carolyn, who was in her early teens, along with her. I don't know what we would have done without them. Granny lived with us from the time I was two until the time I was eight. By the time my mother was 24-years old, she was raising four kids in a town where she knew relatively few people. My dad came home when he could. When he was stationed in Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and we were up in St. Joe, he was driving 380 miles one way every weekend. No interstate. He'd leave at five o'clock in the afternoon when he got off work, get to St. Joe in the early morning, stay for a day and a half and then turn around on Sunday after lunch and drive back. So, we learned what duty is and what sacrifice is, and all those sorts of things. That was a big part of why I respected him so much and why we all endured. And I knew when I was a kid that I wanted to serve my country in the military. It was

all such a big part of me when I was growing up. And I was sure by the time I got into high school. And it was all a part of that period—post-World War II, pre-Vietnam, you’d turn on the TV every weekend and there were documentaries particularly about World War II.

Allison: Right, like *Victory at Sea*.

Webb: *Victory at Sea*, *Air Power*, yes, all that stuff.

We were an outdoors family. We hunted. We fished. My dad took me into the woods from the time I was a little guy. I was his retriever when he hunted red squirrels. He taught me how to build an Indian fire and how to lay and follow a trail through the woods. I got my first rifle when I was eight years old. This was just what we did. I loved camping. I loved fishing, especially for bass. I loved shooting; there was a tradition to it and I got good at an early age. I loved being outdoors. And so, I knew I wanted to be an infantry guy. At that time, it could have been the Army or it could have been the Marine Corps.

I also learned how to work from the time I was 12. No matter what else I did, my dad expected it from me. So, I kept a job all through high school.

Allison: What kind of job?

Webb: I mowed lawns. I sold five different newspapers, actually beginning on a street corner before I started seventh grade. I was a cleanup boy in a movie theater. And I worked in two different grocery stores, including almost three years at the base commissary in Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

I really didn’t know much about college. No one in my family had ever gone straight to college before. And my high school education was basically hit or miss. We

moved around so much when I was growing up. I went to nine different schools in five years at one point. Education was chaotic to say the least. Within just a few years, we moved from England (three houses in two years) to Missouri, to Texas (three houses in one year), to Alabama, to California; (three different schools in the eighth grade alone), and then to Nebraska (three houses in three years).

My grades weren't bad, but they weren't great. I was not your National Honor Society kind of guy. So, I did not apply to the Naval Academy out of high school. But I could take a standardized test and max it out. In my senior year of high school, I scored 99th percentile on the Iowa State Educational Tests even though I was taking Algebra II for the second time and had been put into second-track English. My high school counselor told me that my scores on this test could qualify for any college in the country, and she told me about the Navy ROTC scholarship program. The Army did not have a scholarship program at that time. You had to go two years in an Army ROTC program before you could get a full scholarship. So, I started looking more at the Navy side and reading more and more about the Marine Corps and I finally said, "This is what I'd like to do."

I was very lucky. The way that they selected the recipients of the NROTC scholarship at that point was that anyone could take a standardized test and if you scored above a certain point on the standardized test you could get into the interviews. My high school counselor gave me a strong recommendation but the interview process was the key. And I could not have been luckier with the two officers who interviewed me. The first interviewer was a Mustang commander with extensive enlisted time who loved the fact that I had worked all through high school. And he had actually seen me

fight. I fought all through high school; local smokers, junior gloves, golden gloves, and military boxing.

Allison: So, you were fighting in high school; boxing?

Webb: I played baseball in the summer and fought during the winter because I could do that and still keep my jobs.

The second guy that interviewed me was a Navy captain who had graduated in the bottom third of his class at the Naval Academy academically but was looking above all for leaders. He threw impossible scenarios at me to see how I would go about fixing problems. And he kept saying, "Our Navy needs leaders. We want leaders." He asked me what I was going to do if I didn't get the scholarship. I told him he'd probably be seeing me next year, because this was what I wanted to do. So, there were 12 guys from my high school who got into the interviews, including our valedictorian, salutatorian, and an all-state basketball player, and I was the only one who got the scholarship. So, I decided, "I'm not going to blow this. Nobody will ever work harder than me. Somebody Up There is giving me a real chance here."

So, I went to Southern Cal, full boat, on an NROTC scholarship. What a wonderful year.

Allison: A pretty prestigious school. Now did you graduate from Vandenberg? Were you based at Vandenberg when you graduated?

Webb: No, I graduated from high school in Nebraska. I went to two different high schools in Nebraska and graduated from Bellevue High School in Nebraska. My dad was stationed at SAC headquarters the last three years. He was a missile guy. He got grounded from flying after an aircraft cockpit accident and became a true pioneer in the country's

missile program. He didn't even have a college degree yet, but he could fix anything. I've never met anyone who had a better engineering mind, even though he wasn't one. He actually put in the first Atlas site for the Air Force. He was the officer who did all the coordination out there.

A week after I graduated from high school, we returned to Vandenberg. He commanded a composite squadron that shot Thor, Atlas and Scout Junior missiles; the only composite squadron in the Air Force. I mean he was terrific, as a brain and as a leader. He was my greatest role model. When he took over that squadron, they had an 11 percent success rate on the Atlas. He brought it to 100 percent, 11 of 11 perfect launches. He had airmen writing him asking to serve in his squadron, even though Vandenberg was a remote base. They were doing almost exactly the same mission that we're seeing right now; shooting from Vandenberg into Kwajalein to test antimissile defenses. I didn't know what he was doing at the time. Even during his first tour at Vandenberg, he was gone before I got up and came back after I was in bed, out there somewhere in that 85,000 acres of wilderness, doing something that we knew was important. And in those early days it seemed like half the time the Thor or Atlas missiles would go up in the air and then blow up, particularly the Thors. But he was really, really, great at what he did. And he held a pretty high standard for me to meet. So, I went to Southern Cal.

Allison: That's a prestigious school.

Webb: It was a very good school. It was very expensive school. And I had the tuition paid for, books bought, and a monthly stipend. It was great. Sometimes I had to pinch myself to believe that they would really pay me to do this. I did very well in the military side. I



was first in my NROTC unit on the leadership evaluations. So, it was a very hard decision to leave Southern Cal. And again, my dad weighed heavily on it. I was costing him \$95 a month to help with my room and board. That was not small change back then, particularly for the military. I hadn't taken any spending money from my folks since I was 12. It was never far from my mind that my dad didn't graduate from college until my senior in high school after going to night school for 26 years; the first guy in the family to ever do that. And he was a big believer in the service academies, what he called the Trade Schools. He was really a motivator on that. He said, "If you look at the promotion boards, the Naval Academy graduates who were going into the Air Force before the Air Force Academy was established, were at the top level," and these sorts of things.

I'm going to digress for few minutes here, because this was one of my dad's major motivators. One of the people my dad thought most highly of was a guy named Stu Sherman, who served with my dad as a young officer when he was a major and Stu had just been commissioned out of the Naval Academy. Stu later became the youngest general officer in the Air Force. As fate and good fortune would have it, when I was assistant secretary of defense, I made Major General Stu Sherman my deputy assistant secretary for Manpower. Stu was the most brilliant manpower guy I've ever known. He liked to say, "I started my career with one Jim Webb and I ended it up with this other Jim Webb."

Stu personified the Naval Academy to my dad, and I guess that kind of pushed me over. But there were many a lonely night in Bancroft Hall when I was thinking about what my fraternity brothers were doing back at Southern Cal.

Allison: A lot of good times there.

Webb: Back to basics, another part of being at the program in Southern Cal was that we had some really good Marines assigned to oversee that NROTC program. The Marine Corps tradition, I think, is to put good people into recruiting and training.

Colonel Joseph Renner, a Navy Cross recipient from Guadalcanal, headed up the NROTC program. Major John Unterkofler, who later retired as a colonel, was the senior Marine with daily contact. I kept up with him over the years. He was a former enlisted World War II Marine who'd been commissioned. And our senior staff NCO [noncommissioned officer] was Gunnery Sergeant Cassidy who had made the Inchon landing. Being 17 years old and having looked at the TV shows, here these guys were. They inspired me and I really fell in love with the Marine Corps.

Allison: Well, you'd said you began to fall in love with it even back in high school though.

Webb: I wanted to be an infantry guy, and I'd been reading the history of the Marine Corps. There were very fine Army units in World War II also, but now I was with the Marines. So, in 1964, I reported to the Naval Academy; June 30th. This was the beginning of a very interesting period in our country's history. And 1964 was certainly the high point of respect for the military. Our class was filled with achievers. We were basically tied for the highest SAT scores in the history of the Naval Academy.

Allison: Really? Wow!

Webb: I'm told the class of 1969 averaged seven points higher but we were about the same on that point. This was a highly talented group, with more than 100 high school valedictorians or salutatorians, more than 500 members of the National Honor Society,

and more than 1,000 varsity athletes. It eventually produced 23 admirals and 6 general officers.

Allison: Out of 1968?

Webb: Out of the class of 1968. At the same time the plebe indoctrination system had swung as far over as it was going to swing to the harsh side of things. There were a couple of congressional investigations during my plebe year trying to figure out a way to bring it back. But the end result was that we had 1,350 highly screened people showing up and during that first couple weeks they added, I think, 100 to 150 more when people immediately dropped out. And we eventually graduated 842. This was the highest attrition rate in the post-World War II period—nearly 40 percent. So, we had the highest SATs but also the highest attrition rate. The plebe system at that time was really severe although it varied company by company. There were 36 companies and each company kind of had its own tribal traditions when it came to the indoctrination systems. Two companies in the brigade ran out more than half of their plebes. Can you image? The 4th Company and 11th Company ran out more than half their plebes just during Plebe Year.

The overall system at the Naval Academy during this period was rigid. You couldn't date for a year and you couldn't listen to a radio or drink coffee for a year. It was against the law in Maryland to serve a midshipman (Mids) alcohol unless he was 25 years old. You couldn't ride in a car for three years unless you were going on an out-of-bounds chit. Your second year, you got one 36-hour pass a semester, your third year you got two. And if you were on your way out of what they call the "seven-mile limit," then you were authorized to ride in a car. So basically, you walked around

Annapolis. You stayed inside the “seven-mile limit.” You didn’t watch TV until your fourth year, and then you watched it in a company wardroom with at least a dozen classmates arguing over which channel. Part of this was to test how you could act under pressure, to take everything away and then give it back to you a little bit at a time. We used to cynically call it “building character.” If you’re one second late to a meal formation, you’re down—you’re on report. One second late to formation and you’re doing extra duty or spending the next weekend in your room, “restricting.” All of this was designed to teach you to do without, because when you went to sea, you had to do without. They were kind of replicating what it was going to look like when you joined the fleet and went to sea.

And this was a big navy. When I graduated in 1968, there were 930 combatants in the United States Navy.

Allison: Huge.

Webb: And it did shrink, unfortunately. In the post-Vietnam we were down to 479 and then when I was in the Pentagon we were trying to get up to 600. We made 568 when I was Secretary of the Navy.

But the other thing about starting the Naval Academy in 1964; that summer was the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I can remember the day we knew. I was coming back from boxing practice. We were responsible for the top three newspaper stories every day, 24 hours a day—and I thought, “Oh my God, I didn’t read the *Washington Post* this morning.” I picked it up and there was the report of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. And so, for the four years that I was there, the Vietnam War became the focal point of what we were doing. It also brought tremendous oscillations in the country, and the splitting

up of our age group over the war. There were dramatic changes in the way a lot of people viewed what we were doing, but for us this war got real very fast. We all knew people who were serving there and also people who were becoming casualties.

The country was going through a really unstable period in other areas. About a week after I got to the Naval Academy they signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Over the next few years, there were a lot of protests, some about the war, others involving civil rights.

Allison: Right.

Webb: During the year we graduated, 1968, we saw the Tet Offensive; the high point in terms of American casualties in the War; and a turning point for many in terms of how they looked at the war. Martin Luther King [Jr.] was assassinated in April. Bobby Kennedy was killed the night before we graduated. When I arrived at the Naval Academy, pretty much everybody loved the military. By the time I graduated the whole country was in chaos but those of us who went into the Marine Corps knew where we were going. And that was our focus.

During those years the Marine Corps went through a huge, dramatic expansion. I don't think this has gotten enough attention from our military historians. Because of Vietnam, the Corps went from 190,000 to 307,000 people in about 27 months. They were activating whole regiments; 26th Marines, 27th Marines. Part of that was an enlisted commissioning program where they took a lot of their top staff NCOs and made them temporary officers. This later on caused a lot of problems, not only from the bitterness among other staff NCO's who were not selected, but also for the

embarrassment of some of these temporary officers when they later were reverted back to the Staff NCO ranks. I observed a lot of this bitterness as a young officer.

Allison: Toward the staff NCOs that had gotten commissioned.

Webb: That's part of it. I went through a lot of platoon sergeants in Vietnam. I remember one—a really fine Marine—who ended up getting out and going into the Army as a warrant officer. We were sitting down one day and he pointed to a temporary officer. “Look at that guy. He used to go to the Staff NCO Club with me and now I've got to call him Sir.” Then, when the reversions occurred in 1970 they only kept a small percentage of these temporaries as permanent officers. Think about that. One day this is First Lieutenant Smith, living in officer country. The next day he's reverted to a master gunnery sergeant. And think about the impact on his family. Now he has to move, and walk back into the Staff NCO Club, and they're going, “Oh hey Mother-bleeper, welcome back.”

Allison: Well, it would hurt the staff NCO ranks too. While they were moved up into being officers, you don't have them leading troops.

Webb: Yes, and also the esteem. The Marine Corps has always revered its staff NCO's, and rightly so.

Allison: Plus, there was the stigma that if you weren't picked.

Nevgloski: But you also have the issue, in conjunction with that, Sir, is with McNamara's idea of bringing in more and more of the general population, if you will, and lowering of standards, you have a lot of vacancies in the staff NCO ranks. And there are a lot of very young enlisted Marines who normally would not have gotten in the Marine Corps that not only come in but get promoted to fill vacancies. And you have that hangover

in the 1970s because those young enlisted Marines who probably never would have made it, standards are lowered, they move in to fill vacancies, continue to get promoted, come the mid-1970s the war is over. There is not anywhere for them to go so they stay in. I came in the Marine Corps in 1989. I would see those guys at a very senior rank; first sergeants, master sergeants, master guns—not too many of them made sergeant major—that really couldn't read. One of my first first sergeants told us—our company, that he was a draftee. Nothing else going on. He was a high school dropout. He stayed in the Marine Corps. Had a big heart; loved the Marines, loved being in the Marine Corps. But you could see the effect that that had.

Webb: Well to discuss your point, in general, I would just say my experience was that the CAT-4s were not allowed to reenlist. And I'll tell you—we're jumping around here but there's no harm in it—leading a rifle platoon with constant turnover from casualties was probably the most challenging leadership experience I've ever had because you've got to keep people going. You can't lose your temper. You can't be negative. You don't want to be negative if you want to do it right. One of the great lessons of my dad in the area of leadership, was, "there's two different kinds of leaders. There's a leader who is going to make you do something and there's a leader who's going to make you want to do something, and which one do you want to be?"

We had quite a mix in the rifle companies. I had three draftees in my platoon. Two were killed and the other lost both his legs. People like to talk about Project 100,000. We did have CAT-4 enlistees. I found that if you were very specific with them, they were fine. You know, "We're at point A. We're going to go to point B. You're going to clean your weapon. You're going to listen to your squad leader." They,

by in large, were not allowed to reenlist. In fact, I had one individual; a Mexican-American born in Mexico; who came here when he was 12 years old. His English was not great so he did not score well on his tests but he was a terrific Marine. I wanted him to reenlist and they wouldn't allow him because of his scores.

And on the other hand, some of our finest Marines, people who became successes later on, were high school dropouts who found their way in the Marine Corps. I had a lot of high school dropouts. Some of my really good friends today were people who hadn't finished high school and went on to do amazing things. Carlton Sherwood, what a great person—he passed away like almost two years ago now—who became a Pulitzer Prize winning investigative reporter. Walter Anderson; high school dropout, became editor-in-chief of *Parade Magazine*. These are smart folks who weren't quite on the right track when they were growing up and the Marine Corps always had a place for them. And there were a lot of Marines with the background you're talking about who were already in the Marine Corps before Project 100,000. I had one gunnery sergeant who had a seventh grade education. He was not a smart guy. But he'd been at the "Frozen Chosin" in the "Freezin' Season." He used to show us his frostbitten toe when anybody was complaining.

I've always been in favor of finding intelligent, motivated, loyal people and enabling their success. And that's why I'm a little frustrated with this high school dropout firewall that we see today. Particularly people who go get a GED and then are still on a second-tier enlisted category. Give me a GED with a solid ASVAB score, who has held a job and is motivated, and I will make him a good Marine. What are we thinking when we freeze them out?



Allison: We're getting a little ahead, so we'll talk about that in the context of Vietnam.

I wanted to ask more about the . . . well one question I wanted to ask; your father was an aviator?

Webb: Right.

Allison: And did you not have any desire to fly when you were growing up?

Webb: You know my dad and my brother were both pilots. My brother became a Marine pilot.

Allison: Oh, he did?

Webb: A Huey pilot. But they both loved the idea of flying so much, I could watch them talk with their hands and all that stuff. I always used to say to them, "I love the ground. I like my rifle. And with my attention to detail, I'd be dead as a pilot anyway." *[laughter]*

Allison: So, when you showed up at the Naval Academy that first year what were some of the memories that stand out at you today when you think about first arriving, getting off the bus or whatever. I mean what kind of a culture shock was it for you coming from USC?

Webb: I had never even visited the Naval Academy before. But I grew up in the military. I understood the rhythms of the operational military, that side of it, and the Naval Academy was just a different place. I had a rebellious streak and that made my first year harder than it needed to be. I always did well, particularly in leadership. But I really hated the program. I adjusted to it and I overcame it. But it was not the military that I grew up in. And I particularly did not want to be an engineer. Back then we had mandatory engineering degrees. You don't want me as your engineer! *[laughter]*

We were the first class that was allowed to pick a minor. It was lock-step program before then. I got as far away from engineering as I could, which was a

literature minor with an engineering major. Classes, if I liked them, I did really well. Otherwise, I'd just sit there and go, "The thermodynamic properties of steam. Really? Let's see. How is this going to help me be a better officer?"

Allison: *[Laughter]* Right.

Webb: There was a saying on a lot of people's walls; "The only way out of the Naval Academy is through it," *[laughter]* and being around the operational military was always the release for me. When we went on youngster cruise at the end of the first year, you basically cruised as an enlisted Sailor. You lived with them in their spaces. And they knew The Mids were coming and someday we were going to be the officers. So, they saved up all the cruddy jobs for you. I finished plebe year and I cruised on the West Coast out of Long Beach. I started off on the [USS] *Hornet* which was a CVS. They had a whole bunch of Essex Class World War II carriers that they had converted rather than decommissioning; a program called FRAM. They put an angled deck on the [USS] *Hornet* and made it an anti-submarine carrier. I cruised on the [USS] *Hornet* and then the [USS] *Princeton*, which was another old straight-deck Essex Class that became one of the first LPHs. But on the [USS] *Hornet* I lived with the snipes down in the engineering spaces.

Allison: That's the lowest of the low?

Webb: I'll tell you what. They're the grunts. I loved them. They are like the infantry guys. They did all the worst jobs in the old boilers. We had five or six Mids living with about 40 of them in the spaces, you know with the bunks on top of the bunks and the 4 x 4 locker with everything in it. They really busted our chops for a while. When I got there I said, "I don't care what they tell me to do, I'm going to do it and I'm going to do it as

hard as I can do it.” So, after a while they kind of sorted out the Mids who were there. And one of my great moments when we were at sea was when a first-class petty officer who was the top sailor in the spaces brought me over to a 4 x 4 locker—and I apologize to anyone who might be offended by those days—where they had their library and all their, you know *[laughter]*, “Hong Kong books,” in there.

So, they gave me the combination to the library. Then, they sent one of their “Boots,” a guy just out of boot camp, to swipe some apple juice out of the commissary or whatever it was called. They mixed it with a bottle of whiskey and gave me a shot and said, “Okay, you’re alright.” It was a great honor. I was the only Mid who had access to the library. But you learn so much by listening and working your ass off to show your respect. And at the end of the day, they’d climb out of the bilges and go up to the fantail and have a cigarette and finally see the sky. And that was it. A lot of fun with it and learned a lot. Then, we went over to the [USS] *Princeton*. It was taking a reinforced battalion of Marines—this was summer of 1965—and cross-decking them in Hawaii on their way to Vietnam. So, we had a battalion of Marines on there. We loaded them up and filled up the helicopter spaces. They stripped off all but maybe two of the ship’s helicopters. We got them over to Hawaii and away they went.

Allison: To Vietnam.

Webb: They went to Vietnam. And I’m 90 percent sure that was 1/5; the same battalion I ended up in a few years later. I can’t verify that but I’m pretty sure they were 1/5.

Allison: 1/5; Operation Starlight in 1965.

Webb: So, getting out like that invigorated the reasons that I was doing the other stuff. To sum it up, the two greatest values to me going to the Naval Academy were first of all, to

prove, maybe to myself, that I could compete at the highest level of leadership. My pathway was not like a lot of the people who went there. By first class year I made the final six interviewees for Brigade Commander despite a 2.7 grade average and a C in conduct, and I was one of 16 or 17 who got a special commendation for leadership when we graduated.

The second thing was the honor system. I was selected to be the honor representative of my company my first year and I served all four years on the brigade honor committee. The brigade honor system at the Naval Academy is an interesting concept when it's done right. The other service academies have what is called an "Honor Code." And a code is like publishing a whole set of regulations. "If you do 'this' it's an honor offense, or if you tolerate it, it's an honor offense on you." It's very black and white, clear-cut. And life is not black and white and clear-cut, particularly when you're out in the operational world and you get all kinds of different people hearing and seeing all kinds of different things. The Naval Academy concept was that you could see somebody committing an honor offense and it was on you. You could decide to go over and say, "Hey look, I saw what you just did and before I do anything, I want to hear from you on this", or you could turn them in or you could ignore it.

Allison: Or pretend you didn't see it.

Webb: Yeah, so it puts the burden on you as a leader for how to address a situation, and that's real life. But once our offenses were resolved the system was absolutely cut and dry. You didn't get probation like if you got bad grades. If you committed an honor offense and it was upheld before the honor committee you were gone. And some of those you just go, "Wow!" I remember we had one case my plebe year. A classmate from eastern

Tennessee was flunking out. On the chemistry exam he wrote a cheat sheet on a 3 x 5 card and stuck it in his white works pocket. He knew so little about chemistry there was nothing on that cheat sheet that could have helped him on this test. But when he handed in his test the professor saw the piece of paper and said, “What’s that,” and pulled it out, and turned him in for an honor offense. So, we had him in the hearing . . .

Allison: And you were on that committee.

Webb: I was on the honor committee, yeah. And one of the people asked him, “Would you have used it if you thought it would have helped you?” He said, “I’m not going to lie to you.” *[Laughter]* He’s like, “That’s why I wrote it.” *[Laughter]*

Nevgloski: *[Laughter]*

Webb: And so, he was gone. That was it, boom. The constant emphasis on doing your best to hold your integrity in all situations has always stayed with me.

Allison: You felt like you had a good background from your family though to know right and wrong—

Webb: Well, when I was there, when there were things that I hated, and there were a lot of them, particularly plebe year, I kept thinking about what my dad would have given just to be there. That put it in perspective.

Allison: Would you want to comment about some of your very prestigious classmates that you had there; Mike Mullen, Ollie North, Charlie Bolden? I don’t think he was in your class but he was there at one time.

Webb: Yes, Charlie was there.

Allison: He was in your class?

Webb: Yes.

Allison: Also, Mike Hagee, Denny Blair, others. Pete Pace.

Webb: Pete Pace was a year earlier. He was Class of 1967. But you don't really know everyone in your class. There's a lot of people in a class.

Allison: Sure.

Webb: I had a lot of great friends there. And some of them are starting to go now. Terry Murray just passed away a couple of months ago. He joined us in the 5th Marines toward the end of my tour. He was a boxer, a fantastic football player and a very close friend. Jim Treadwell, who just passed away last week, was a terrific friend who was with us out in 5th Marines. He was in 3/5. I remember I got to Vietnam like 28 days after Jimmy Treadwell. I had just reported to my battalion and I walked in the An Hoa mess hall and I see Treadwell across the mess hall. He comes running up to me. He'd just come in from the mountains. This was during Operation Taylor Common. He's a big guy and now he's got a bushy mustache. He comes running up to me and he's got a hole in his cheek [*chuckle*]. He'd been there 28 days and he'd already been shot twice [*laughter*].

Allison: [*Chuckle*] Welcome to Vietnam!

Webb: So, Jimmy Treadwell's first words were, "This place sucks!"

He was in Mike 3/5 and I was in Delta 1/5. Months later we ended up on Go Noi Island during this horrible operation and one night we converged and set up a two-company perimeter. I hadn't seen Treadwell for a couple of months. Totally by accident we were tying our lines in together. I was told okay, Mike Company's over there, to figure out a way to tie your lines. I get to the end of my line and I'm looking at Jimmy Treadwell waiting for me and he's saying the same thing, "This sucks!" [*Chuckle*] We

stood and had a bitch session in the middle of Go Noi Island where everything around us looked like the surface of the moon. It started raining. I ran back to my poncho hooch. I got under it in the rain and here comes Treadwell racing across this perimeter with his canteen. He does a roll drive under my poncho and he says, “You want to get drunk?” *[Laughter]*

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: His dad was a colonel. He had somehow gotten him a bottle of Jim Beam. So, we took a few shots together.

But you know, I had a lot of good friends and you know what a very talented bunch of people it was when you see 23 Navy admirals and 6 Marine Corps generals out of one class.

And for us in the Marine Corps, when I got to the Naval Academy, at first they took 6 percent of the class into the Marine Corps, only 6 percent. These days they take like 25 percent. As the war went on, they expanded to take 8 percent. Then with our year they took 10 percent. In the 6 percent and the 8 percent there were always more people who wanted to go into the Marine Corps than could. For “service selection” they divided the class into quadrants; top half, bottom half academically, and then aviation qualified, nonaviation qualified. As your quadrant filled up that was it. So, you could be in the top half of your class and in one of those two quadrants and once a quadrant filled, let’s say, aviation qualified, top half, it would be, sorry, you’re going to have to wait and see if the whole thing’s filled, because there’s a lot of good Marines in the bottom half of an Academy class when they’re trying to shove engineering down your throat there.

At the same time, the Marine Corps could not overtly recruit at the Naval Academy when I was there. So, the senior Marine officer at the Academy would select one highly motivated midshipman in each battalion to be the battalion Marine Corps rep. We had John McKay in the 1st Battalion, and then Ollie North in the 2d Battalion and then Jimmy Treadwell for the 3d Battalion. J. D. Jones, who was later killed in action, was in the 4th Battalion. I had 5th Battalion and Brian O'Connor, who later became an astronaut, was the 6th Battalion. As a statistical referent, among the six of us there later became nine Purple Hearts, including one KIA. Except for Brian we were all infantry officers. And in Vietnam, six of those Purple Hearts went to the 5th Marines.

So, we got the word out. We figured out who the Marines were. We did the talking. Our goal was 10 percent of the class, which would have been 84 Marines. And my battalion had 22 guys that I thought were going to go to the Marine Corps. We had service selection in the middle of Tet 1968, and for the first time the mothers of America are turning on TV and they're looking at Hue City in their living rooms at night. We lost 11 out of the 22 in my battalion, who decided not to go into the Marine Corps. Some of these people had been gung-ho from day one. One of them came down and said, "My dad told me he'd buy me a car if I didn't go in the Marine Corps." So, we got 81 Marines out of 84. We were the only class that ever-missed quota but we got some really fine Marines.

Nevgloski: Who were the ones that made general, Sir?

Webb: Mike Hagee, Jack Klimp, Terry Murray, Charlie Bolden who came back from the astronaut program, Chip Gregson who was a surprise. He was in my battalion and had



a destroyer on his desk for four years and then decided to lean into the guns. And Joe Anderson, who was an aviator.

Allison: Yes, that's interesting. There's some real noteworthies there.

Did you continue to box there? What else did you do as far as outside of academics; play other types of sports or anything like that?

Webb: Well, we were required to carry three extra-curricular activities. At that time, you had to carry 18 hours plus the military, plus extra-curricular activities. So, I boxed and did some other athletic stuff for fun when it wasn't boxing season. I spent a great deal of time reading history and literature, and, frankly, preparing to be a Marine. And I got involved in shooting.

Allison: Target shooting?

Webb: We were allowed to go to the Marine barracks across the river. And a pretty small group of us used to go over there and shoot from time to time, particularly pistols. But really there wasn't a lot of free time back then.

Allison: It doesn't sound like it.

Webb: Oh, yeah. And I was my company barber.

Allison: Oh really?

Webb: Actually, I started off when I was home on leave. It was against regulations, obviously, to cut hair and to make money. Making money on your own was considered "conduct unbecoming a midshipman." But you've got 4,000 bright minds trapped inside the marble monastery, so there were a lot of pretty fascinating schemes. Regulation haircuts were pretty bad, so during my second year I was watching our company barber and said, "I can do that. I could pick up some money doing it." When I was home on

leave, I talked to my brother, who was still in high school—he later became a Marine Huey pilot—and I said, “Gary, I’m going to cut your hair.” *[Laughter]* I had bought Wahl clippers. I got him into a chair in the bathroom and tried to figure out how I was going to do this. I worked on him for about an hour trying to talk a good game to him, like I knew what I was doing, and he started falling asleep in the chair. While I was cutting the side of his hair the plastic attachment slipped off—he had really thick hair—and it went, “Thunk” into his head. And I go “Boy, how do I explain this?” *[Laughter]*. So, I decided just to say, “Okay, Gary, you don’t want me to shave your whole head.” He looked in the mirror and said, “Just leave me alone.” *[Chuckle]* So he went to school the next week and he had a bandage over there and he told them he hit his head falling off a bicycle or something. I don’t know.

But anyway, so I ended up—I had a lot of regular customers. Twenty-five cents to do the trim and 50 cents if I took any off the top. I had people coming from all over. Like Terry Murray, who was totally on the other side of the Bancroft Hall, and on any given week at least 20 other people. Saturday noon meal inspection was always the big deal, so on Friday nights I was constantly busy. I was very meticulous. I also did watch squad inspections. You always had to have had a haircut within six days when we were at the academy. And you could go down to the third wing barbershop and get a really fast, you know [swoosh], but I could really deliver good haircuts *[chuckle]*. Friday after evening meal I’d cut sometimes till one in the morning. And then I had all of this hair in my closet and, “How do I get this out of here before I get caught?” I had to figure out perfect timing. The MOCs, a slang term for mates of the corridor, were civilian

janitors who would come in and sweep the floors after reveille. So, the timing was just right to sweep all this stuff out into the corridor before any of the officers saw it.

Allison: Yeah. They had janitors clean your room?

Webb: No, not in our room, but the hallways, the passageways. We were responsible for everything in our rooms and the restrictions back then were extremely strict. If you left even an orange or a pencil on your desk when you went to class you could be put on report. Everything was very exacting inside the rooms. But if I got caught cutting hair it was a big disciplinary offense. I know, because I got caught twice. So it was, “What do I do when I’ve just given 25 haircuts, and I’ve got all this hair in here?”

Good story, though. My own regulation barber down in the third wing barbershop was a guy who had been a prisoner of war in Korea, Jim Board. He was such a cool guy. He used to tell me stories about how he got drafted during the Korean War in the Army and had arrived in Korea never having fired a weapon. You know they had to get our soldiers over there so fast after the North Korean invasion. Which resulted in later legislation to put a 120-day restriction on anybody being deployed after they enlisted. But we started off just being friends. Then when I decided I wanted to do this and do it right, I told him, I said, “You know I’m cutting hair.” He loved it. He used to get me all my supplies [*laughter*], you know the sterilizing equipment and the flattop combs and all that. So yes, I had a pretty good little business.

Allison: Well, I wanted to ask about boxing; the famous boxing match with Ollie North. Do you have any comments on that besides what’s already been written about it?

Webb: Read *Nightingale’s Song*, with Bob Timberg. He did a great job explaining it. Ollie had a good night. What more can I say?

Allison: Okay. I wanted to ask your thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages for Marine officers that had gone through the Naval Academy. Does that give you a leg up or were there disadvantages to that back in your time, or today, or in between?

Webb: I was, as I'm sure you know, a strong believer that Naval Academy midshipmen should go through Bulldog. I think it's just fair. I had a great first-class cruise. I went to the Mediterranean on the *Saratoga* the day after the Arab-Israeli War started. They had just medevacked the USS *Liberty*. Its wounded sailors were on the hangar deck when we caught up with the ship in Souda Bay, Crete. And then that summer the Soviet fleet broke out into the Med for the first time. We didn't get very many port calls because of all that but it was a great experience. But I would have traded it in a heartbeat for being able to go down to Quantico and go through Bulldog. I think the Naval Academy people in my era would have done very well in Bulldog. But there's a social part of that too, as you know. I ran two platoons of officer candidates when I got back from Vietnam. And my brother was PLC [platoon leaders' class]. You know there's a very valuable socialization when you can say that, "I have trained under the hands of a Marine Corps drill instructor," and all the other parts of it. I mean I think four years in that rigorous program prepared people to lead better, but the Bulldog program was just getting into the routine and how you do your gear, and just all these kinds of things that back then would have been a no-brainer. And also, it really tests who wants to be a Marine when you're that age. "Are you willing to go down there and go through this?" They did it from VMI [Virginia Military Institute]; the Citadel. Why not? And as you know, when I was secretary of the Navy I put that into place.

And frankly, the dilution of plebe year also diluted the overall preparation for the military challenges writ large. When I became secretary of the Navy, I had an analysis section headed by an admiral where I could get data on just about anything called OPA, the Office of Program Analysis. I knew the question was going to come up about what had happened in the indoctrination system at the academy after women came to the academy. For me the litmus test of how prepared you are to be a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps, is The Basic School. The Basic School is the best school I've ever been to. They taught the theory, and then you went out and put your hands on it, and then you did it. My very first patrol in Vietnam was a night patrol and I used every supporting arm in the Marine Corps except for close air. So, I asked OPA, "what was the average class standing of Naval Academy graduates in Basic School from 1965 to 1986?" Because The Basic School is the test of whether you're ready, in my view—and you're competing from all different programs—to be a lieutenant. Not, "Are you ready to be a general 30 years from now?" And from 1965 to say, 1978 the Naval Academy was always top-half.

Allison: Were they?

Webb: Always averaged top-half in The Basic School. 1979 to 1986 they were always bottom-half except for one year when they were a little bit above the percentile. The Class of 1986, which was the previous class before I became secretary of the Navy, had averaged bottom 40th percentile in The Basic School [TBS]. You put somebody in the Academy for four years and they come out and they're bottom 40th percentile at TBS.

Allison: Wow! Something ain't right.

Webb: Exactly. I've taken a lot of heat for this. But the indoctrination system was harsh when we were there and a lot of the stuff may have been over the top, but something had happened that wasn't working out. So, I sent them to Bulldog.

Allison: Now before you'd mentioned they were always in the upper half previously; in earlier years. Were they going to Bulldog at that time?

Webb: No. But the plebe system was very rigorous before. I started with '65 because the Class of '65 graduated my first year there. Just give me those numbers, you know 1965 to 1986.

Allison: But something happened after that where they didn't do so well in TBS.

Webb: Yes.

Allison: Anything else on the Naval Academy that stand out to you from that time?

Webb: When I graduated, I was allowed to help bring in the class of 1972, as a drill officer. I reported to Quantico on August 28th, so it was like two months to do plebe summer. It was a great experience for a new officer. I worked for a guy named Bill Stensland who was a Marine. He had just made major. Actually, he was a captain who made major when he got there. He had been wounded, in November of '67; right when things started to heat up at Con Thien. He was a company commander, recipient of the Silver Star. Had been shot by an AK-47 and hit by an 82 mortar. He was a no-BS leader. It was a great experience [*chuckle*], I have to say, in terms of tactical leadership. He was the 5th Battalion officer in the plebe regiment and I was his drill officer. My other classmates who were drill officers were given their own offices and you know they were enjoying this idea of being a lieutenant. Stensland looks at me and he goes, "If you want an office you can have an office. But why don't you just sit in my office."

*[Chuckle]* And so it was a two-month tutorial that became a long friendship. First of all, this is a guy who's really scarred up and has just come off of the battlefield, and I'm this newbie, you know, and kept asking basic questions like, "Sir, what's it feel like to be shot at?" He goes, "Oh, come on!" He said, "You're as ready as you're ever going to be. You're not going to be thinking about that." And actually, my first patrol when I got to Vietnam when everything blew up, I started thinking about Bill Stensland and I went, "You know, he's right, just do this stuff."

But I would say, "Okay, Sir, I've got to go work out. I've got to go run my four miles and get ready for combat." And he goes, "Do you want to get ready for combat?" He said, "I'm going to tell you what it feels like to be in combat. You and I are going out tonight and we're going to get drunk and I'm going to keep you up all night and we're going to come here and go to work tomorrow, and that's what it feels like in combat." *[Laughter]* And he did; he took me out and I got just totally stiffed on scotch and then he kept, you know, "Come on, come on." And then the next day I'm like "Awww—" I can't even hold my head. And he goes, "Okay, now go do your job." *[Chuckle]* He was just really a terrific guy.

And the other thing I did there as a drill officer was like, "All right, I'm supposed to teach these people how to march and we're also supposed to win." You know they have all these drill competitions, parade competitions, etc. After four years of dress parades where they score every company every Wednesday afternoon, and I still go, "How do they really score these things?" So, I went in and I got the score sheets and find out, "Okay, five points for this, five points for that." I went through the whole thing and I said, "All right, the first thing I've got to do is get a really good guy that

holds the company guide-on. Look how many points this one guy gets.” And then I brought the whole battalion into a lecture room and I put up the chart. “People, when you walk on that field, here, this is where you’re going to get points. Pay attention here. Focus.” And we won every parade [laughter]. I got these—there were two companies—big guys to be the Guide-on bearers. And when you’re like, “Company, eyes right!” Then, “Company, ready front!” they probably counted for twenty points. I said, “Hit that guide-on pole. If you break it, I will personally buy you a can of Coke” or whatever. So, they would smack that sucker, you know.

Anyway, so it was good practical experience in terms of motivating people. Actually, I told them if they won the first parade, I’d buy them all a Coke [chuckle], and they won, and I went, “Oh geez, what am I going to do?” One night I went out to the Coca Cola distributing plant and got all these bottles and after hours I put them in the elevator and I brought them up to a company formation in the hallway and I gave them all a Coke.

Allison: You’d have a couple hundred guys there in your company.

Webb: Well, this was two plebe summer companies in the battalion out of 12 total, so you’re talking, yeah, a couple hundred.

Allison: So, you’re learning how to lead the way your father said.

Webb: Well, you know it’s practical to actually get your hands on something and also being mentored by Stensland; we stayed in touch a long time. He was kind of the role model for the character Lenahan in *Sense of Honor* when I wrote the book.

Allison: That’s something I want to ask about; your role models. Your father obviously, Stensland—



Webb: Yeah. He went back for a second tour as an advisor and bounced a helicopter really bad and screwed his back up and ended up leaving. But he was a real thinker and a smart leader.

Allison: Okay. Any other role models along this time?

Webb: I read a lot and I kept up with what was going on in the Marine Corps. You read about people who you don't even know that inspire you, whether they're historical figures or not. Look at what some of these people who were Medal of Honor recipients. Have you ever heard of a guy named Bobo?

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: When I came down here to report for Basic School he had just posthumously received the Medal of Honor. John Wayne Bobo I think his name was.

Nevgloski: John P. Bobo.

Webb: That guy, you look at what he did and you go, "This is the standard by which I am going to be measured and the standard to which I should aspire to." They got overrun and he got his leg blown off and tied a tourniquet around it and stuck it into the dirt and kept fighting; you know those kinds of people. And Major [Robert J.] Modrzejewski and [John] McGinty from Operation Hastings. Modrzejewski got assigned to the Marine barracks on the other side of the Academy my first-class year and I got to know him, and I got to know McGinty later on. He just passed away a couple years ago. Those people inspire you. One of the things I've always said is that the greatest military units hold you to the standard of their traditions. That's why traditions are so important. And no matter what happened when I was in Vietnam, as miserable as it could get, I knew that if I made it back I would be viewed by the same standards.

Allison: We're about to move into the Marine Corps. You show up at TBS. You're in Basic Class 3/69. What was it like going from the Naval Academy to TBS; to a Marine Corps culture?

Webb: Well, there was a lot of Marine Corps culture at the academy, if you sought it out. And I've grown up in the military. My dad, at that point, was stationed at Andrews. When he commanded the Thor Atlas Scout Junior Squadron, he had just finished his college degree and he got deep-selected for colonel and then he, had a couple of issues of personal honor in terms of standing up to people who were above him out there.

He got assigned to the Pentagon legislative staff in the summer of 1965. He hated McNamara [*laughter*]. He really was miserable.

Allison: He wasn't impressed, huh?

Webb: No. And I would say he was probably correct in his views. He was at the Pentagon for a while and then went over to Air Force Systems Command, so he went back into the missiles program and all that.

For me, going to Quantico was like heaven, into the Marine Corps where I'd wanted to be for all these years. And I loved Basic School.

Allison: Did you?

Webb: I did. It's so funny when people hear me say that because of the way that we did it. But I loved it. I'd been waiting to do it for so long and I was around people who thought the same way that I did. From the academy the grads break into like six different components and some of them get it and some of them don't. But everybody that I was with down there, we all knew where we were going and we all had picked the Marine Corps for one reason or another. And we were in an incredibly compressed schedule.

We worked six days a week, 16 hours or more, usually three nights a week in the field. I made some of the best friends in my life in Basic School. I think the Vietnam-era Basic School is probably misunderstood because it was shortened. But here's what they did. As I recall it had been a 32-week program, having talked to Stensland who went through in 1960. We did 21 weeks. We went six days a week. We got Christmas Day off and we were back on the tarmac at 0600 on the 26th. We got New Year's Day off and we were back on the tarmac the next morning. They cut a lot of drill and ceremonies out in order to make that 21 weeks. But, they also added the 60-millimeter mortar package. They had dropped the 60-millimeter mortar out of the infantry battalion after Korea. Then they found in the early days in Vietnam how useful that weapon was. When I was a company commander I used to shoot hundreds of rounds a day. It was the company commander's personal weapon. The 60 Mike-Mike was inside the rifle company. We wore out the base plates on two tubes in one operation, using them all the time.

So, we had all the hard stuff; the right stuff that we needed in Basic School in a very compressed period. Stensland used to tell me, "Ah, you know we had 32 weeks, but we'd have Wednesday afternoons off and we were supposed to go play golf or do something." They got a little bit more of the gentlemanly side. We had recent combat veterans on our staff, and teaching. And the thing that I loved about the Basic School was that it was theoretical and also practical. You know they're not just teaching theory. "Okay, this is a 60-millimeter mortar. You tell me all the dimensions of it. It has a max 1,800-meter range. This is how you put the charges on it. The casualty radius is this. Okay, now we're going to go out and we're going to have these 0341s go through it

and show you how to handle it and then you're going to go shoot the 60 Mike-Mike."

I shot every weapon in the infantry battalion before I went to Vietnam.

The patrolling package was good. We had [Patrick G.] "Paddy" Collins, famous. Very tied in with the . . . I'm on tape here. I don't think that I want to do this *[laughter]*.

He was terrific. I got to know him a little bit after I left the Marine Corps.

Nevgloski: If I'm correct Paddy Collins was in Reconnaissance Battalion with [Frank S.] Reasoner who gets the Medal of Honor as reconnaissance platoon leader.

Webb: He was very tied into a lot of Irish issues.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir. He had the accent and everything.

Webb: Yes, he used to give us piles of propaganda. I got to know him on that side of things later. But when he was on a night patrol with us you never knew when he would jump from behind a tree and smack you on the head. He would disappear and you'd turn to somebody and whisper, "Hey man, what the . . .!" And the next thing you knew was, "Bang! Shut the f——k up!"

So, we had a great patrolling package. We had a good tactics package. And in the leadership side they would do these, "What do you do now lieutenant?" tapes, and I don't know if they still do it or not, but they were great.

Allison: They did it when I was going through.

Webb: You'd get the platoon together and then show a little video and stop right in the middle of it and say, "Okay, now what do you do?" Then you have these debates. I was surrounded by really good people. We all knew where we were going. And we had a good program.

Allison: Right. Do you remember any other instructors, or your SPC [staff platoon commander], or anybody that stands out to you at this time?

Webb: Our company commander was Major Peterson who was a Kiowa Indian. I saw him later on. He was a good officer; very even-keeled. Captain Wydo was the XO. I saw him about two years ago. Lee Gound had 1st Platoon. He was a three Purple Heart guy from 5th Marines. I kept up with him for quite a while. He just passed away a couple years ago. My platoon commander was Tommy Saal. He had been wounded very badly, I think with 3/5 also. His legs would swell up but he did everything with us, even when we went on the eight-mile runs. Tommy Saal would do the runs with us. I know the others but I haven't kept up with them. All in all, they were a good bunch.

Allison: Did they do the three-day war at that time?

Webb: Oh yeah.

Allison: Yeah. Sort of the culminating event. Any special memories from that?

Webb: A big red-haired major who taught company tactics. I can't remember his name . . . I think it was Miller. But yeah, he was something. When we finished the three-day war he said, "Okay guys, tired? Only 130 more of these back to back once you get to Vietnam."

Nevgloski: We had the "Victory Village" there Sir; the old Vietnamese village as a training exercise.

Webb: The Vietnamese village, yeah.

Nevgloski: That's right off—if you go over to the Basic School now it's—the bamboo is still there and the well where whoever was playing the VC [Viet Cong] could sneak in and out, but it's right off application trail.

I was an SPC years ago, Sir, and I used to take my lieutenants down there and ask them because they would run the endurance course and part of the endurance course would take you right past the old Vietnam village, or at least the bamboo stalks that were there— “Does anyone know why this bamboo is here?” “No, Sir.” “Because 30-some years ago your predecessors used to roll through here and clear this. It was a Vietnamese village.” Did that prepare you, Sir? I mean was it realistic?

Webb: Kind of. It got your mind in the right spot. It wasn't really like what we saw, not where I went. I mean there was a lot of bamboo where I was but *[laughter]*. I think the best training in that respect was to reinforce that when you get into a trench or into a hooch, always go to the end and then come back. Or when you sweep a ville, clear it bunker by bunker but always sweep to the end and set up security before you search it. I mean those precepts. But people like to—we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves—but people like to criticize the individual replacement rather than the unit replacement concept.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: I think the individual replacement concept was a good concept for us because you had people out there constantly. You had continuous operation. It wasn't like when my son went to Iraq. You know they did the lock-on and then they went over as a unit and it always takes you a while to snap in when you're over there.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: The biggest difference between Basic School and getting over there was in Basic School you've got 50 lieutenants and on a tactical problem the instructor goes, “Okay, you're the platoon commander here.” And you go, “All right, we're going to go into a

V.” And 15 other lieutenants start debating. “Why go into a V? We should go into a wedge.” Then somebody else wants to go in column and another lieutenant wants to go on line. Now you’ve got 50 lieutenants arguing at each other about this because all of them are basically, in their mind, platoon commanders. In Vietnam you get on a patrol with Marines who have been doing this and say, “Hold it up.” “Boom” The column just stops. The word just goes “shunk,” right through that column. “Get on line. Okay, we’re going to sweep this ville.” Everybody knows, get on line, with guns in trace. You sweep all the way to the end of the ville. And how do you clear a bunker? Everybody knows. It’s in the unit mentality already.

I should be saying more about Basic School. We were really lucky, with the continuity of the World War II guys and the Korea guys. One of the great lectures I ever got in my life was from a lieutenant colonel stationed at TBS. I think it was McDonough. He was a Navy Cross recipient as a platoon commander in Korea. He’d fought in World War II as an enlisted Marine and had just come back from battalion command in Vietnam. At the end of Basic School, he brought the infantry lieutenants into a separate room. I think we had 72 out of our class who were heading into Vietnam within the next month. He wanted to talk to us about Vietnam. He said, “What your Marines are going through is harder than any other war the Marine Corps has ever fought. They’re out there all the time. If you get a scratch it becomes an infection. They get hookworm, ringworm, shrimp fever, malaria. They are never free from pressure. Plus, our casualty rate is underestimated by this country.” And it’s true. When you review the final numbers you look back and you go, “Whoa!” Anything a peer group goes through becomes normal. And then he said, “Now most of you are going to go out

and command rifle platoons pretty quick. Well, I'm going to tell you a story." He said, "I took over my platoon on the move in Korea. I was a World War II infantry guy. I knew combat. I fought on Iwo Jima. We were moving up against the North Koreans. Finally, we hit a ridge with a tree line off to our right. It was a perfect envelopment. I set my platoon up with a base of fire and sent my platoon sergeant with a squad into the tree line. I sent 11 Marines and 11 Marines died. You know there's not a day in my life I don't think about that." He said, "You better be ready for that."

That was a reality check. And he was right. Not only the combat but the sense of responsibility that came with command, and the obligation to take care of your Marines under difficult living conditions. Where we worked in the 5th Marines, it's almost impossible to describe the daily conditions.

I have to tell you one other Marine Corps story. This was much later. But you know the story of Colonel [William E. "Bill"] Barber from Frozen Chosin?

Allison: Yes. The gym's named for him here.

Webb: Is that right? He is from the same hometown as my grandfather.

Allison: Oh really?

Webb: I first met him in 1985. It was the 35th anniversary of the Chosin breakout and they wanted to do a big thing. I was their speaker. I hunted him down because I knew he was from West Liberty, Kentucky and I wanted to tell him about my family connection. So, we'd see each other sometimes when he'd come to DC. I'd go and have breakfast with him and that sort of thing. One day I asked him, "How did you go in the Marine Corp?" And he said, "I enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1940." And I said, "Well geez, I mean 1940. Then you must have really seen some serious war." He said, "You know



what happened? I come out of Eastern Kentucky. I can shoot a rifle like a son-of-a-b—  
—h,” and he said, “so they put me over there doing this rifle stuff and training para-  
Marines.” I think he helped create the Raider-type concept. He was a part of that. Then  
he said, “But you know I’ve only been in two battles in my life; Iwo Jima and the  
Chosin Reservoir.” *[Laughter]*

Allison: *[Laughter]* Okay.

Webb: “Only a Marine would say that.” *[Laughter]* Yeah, he was something.

Allison: Well, it sounds like TBS, you feel like it prepared you for what you faced in Vietnam  
up to a point. No doubt about it could.

Webb: No doubt about it.

I got to my unit. I reported to the bush. My company was on the move. I picked  
up my platoon on the move. We moved into a new defensive position. I got my people  
together and gave them a little talk that afternoon. I took a patrol out that night. Did all  
my on-calls. I did everything the way they tell you to. I walked into an enemy unit that  
night and used every supporting arm in the Marine Corps, except for close air, my very  
first patrol and never had a problem, and that’s a tribute to the Basic School.

Allison: That was your first day and night?

Webb: Yep.

Allison: Wow! Do you feel like you won the confidence of your platoon because you always  
hear about the seasoned enlisted Marines that sort of disdained a new second  
lieutenant? Did that win them over?

Webb: I think my platoon had been through five platoon commanders in about six months.  
And we didn’t have any staff NCOs then. We got some later, but we operated with very

fine, like second tour sergeants and other people who knew what they were doing. I gave them a talk that Bob Timberg kind of made a joke about it in his book where he called it, “My audition for a fragging.” *[Laughter]*

Allison: This first talk you had with them?

Webb: Yes.

Allison: Is that what he was referring to?

Webb: Yeah. And there’s another very important talk when I took over the company but that was a different talk. When I took over the platoon I basically said, “I’m Lieutenant Webb. You call me Lieutenant or you call me Sir. And I want to start off by saying something. Anything you tell me I will believe. If you tell me the sky is brown, I will believe you. But if you ever lie to me, you’re dead meat.” And they’re like, “What the hell is with this guy?” But I used to take like two or three hours to put my troops in their fighting holes every night. I’d go to every single position and sit down and talk. And when we would rotate through the rear, I’d get into every one of their service record books and learn about them. You can learn a lot of interesting things, like who is the recipient of their insurance, just little things, and if somebody maybe should have been promoted and wasn’t, things like that, just listen and talk. And I got very close to most of the people in my platoon, still to this day.

We had an incredible event in 2000 thanks to Jack Klimp.

Allison: He was in your class?

Webb: He was one of the six general officers in my Naval Academy class. He had an 8th & I slot and he wanted me to be guest of honor, to honor Vietnam Marines, and I said, “Jack, I want to bring guys from my platoon.” And he really helped. So we got, I think,

14 Marines from my platoon to come to that. I have the numbers written down from when I gave the speech. It was 14 Marines and like 20 Purple Hearts, something like that. But it was incredible. I brought them all up for the pass in review. That was so cool. And then we had a thing at my house.

Allison: This is when you were SecNav?

Webb: No, this is after. This is when I'm "Joe S——t the Ragman."

Allison: Ha!

Webb: One of the hardest people to find was the guy who was kind of the role model for Catman in *Fields of Fire*; Anastacio Castro who was in Brownsville, Texas. We ran him down. There's the border there, you know. That was very cool, very cool.

Nevgloski: Well, Sir, if we could take a step back. You finished The Basic School. You took some leave, I'm sure, before you made your way across the pond. Talk about your arrival to South Vietnam, your kind of acclimation process; what was going on in your mind, you're finally here. You go through the academy and you're thinking about Vietnam every day. It's in your face. It's in the news. You were talking about earlier starting to see names that you recognize, or casualties. The same thing at the Basic School. Now I'm assuming you arrived in Da Nang for in-processing. Now you're finally here. What's going through your mind?

Webb: There's something I really should say about the Academy that reminds me of this. There was a guy in the class of 1966 who was a friend of mine named Chuck Warner. Timberg wrote about this in *Nightingale's Song*. And went to Vietnam as an infantry guy and he was wounded. I thought he was in the hospital, but he went back to his unit and got killed almost immediately. I didn't know it.

When we started first class year, I was on the brigade staff. I was the brigade admin officer. One of the things I had to do was clean out all the incoming paperwork from the main office, and then distribute it to the brigade staff. And we had this “To Those Who Went Before Us” board to honor the people who were killed and I got the casualty reports and that’s how I found out.

Allison: When he got killed.

Webb: Yes. Just flipping through the paperwork. I had three that day. That one just really hit me. So anyway, we knew the drill.

Nevgloski: So, you get to DaNang, in-processing.

Webb: We came in on a night flight from Okinawa and we got in there in the morning. Several people from my Basic School class were in the plane, so people are wise-assing. Then as soon as we step off the plane, we’re in this totally different world. And a couple of my friends were like some little old lady’s over there sweeping stuff up inside the terminal. “Ambush right . . .”

Nevgloski: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: When we got to division, they briefed us in and showed us a situation map of the division AO. It had red dots where recent casualties had occurred, and there’s certain areas where it was just like a red blur. Then they assigned us to regiments. I can remember the first night we were there, feeling so dirty. When you first get into that environment and it’s just hot and messy and you’re not used to it. It takes a mental and physical adjustment, like we never wore skivvies in the bush, stuff like that. But up on the ridgeline behind us the machineguns were going all night and the illums were popping and you’re thinking, “Wow!” But by the time you’ve been out in the An Hoa

Basin for a few weeks, it was like, “What are these rear pogues doing back there in Da Nang?”

We went into An Hoa on a convoy, which covered a lot of terrain and we passed a lot of Marine outposts on the way. In An Hoa, they assigned us to our battalions, and that’s how I got assigned to 1/5. 1/5 had a “BOQ Tent” in the battalion rear area, which was about as big as this room. It was like half of a tent. I go in there and a friend of mine from Basic School, Ken Rosser, had just gotten there a day before me. Artillery rounds are firing all the time. I said, “Ken, what the hell is going on?!” and he goes, “Boom Swish is going out. Swish Boom is coming in.”

ALL: *[Laughter]*

Webb: I had a couple days in the rear. Then I talked to the company commander, Mike Wyly who also remains a very good friend; longtime friend. I talked to him on the company radio and he says, “You’re an academy graduate and the honor graduate in Basic School. Get out here!” I was supposed to have like, three more days in the rear. They got me out there the next day.

Nevgloski: There goes your acclimation process.

Webb: Yep. It was like, “Acclimatize with your platoon.”

I’ve remained close with to two of the company commanders from those days for the rest of my life. One’s Mike Wyly. I’ve never met anyone with more integrity than Mike Wyly. He was a thinker and he also always listened. I know I can be an argumentative guy. If I don’t think something’s going to work, I’m going to say, “I don’t think it’s going to work.” If you look at my whole career in and out of the military it’s been that way. And Wyly would listen, and if he says “No, it’s done,” then it’s

done. But we developed, I think, a really strong relationship and kept it up and that's very important in the kind of combat that we fought, because sustained guerilla operations require constant adaptation. And the other is Gino Castagnetti who had Bravo 1/5. I got op-conned over to him for about a week early in my tour and watched his style. He was a highly motivated, decisive troop leader. You hardly ever heard a negative word out of Gino's mouth. To this day both of them remain good friends. Gino lives in Hawaii, and ran the Punchbowl Cemetery for 23 years after he retired as a colonel. Mike went up into Maine. He continues to write and think about national security doctrine. He also became the director of a ballet company, if you know that story.

Allison: That's what I've heard. I don't know how he came about doing that.

Webb: He called me one day and said, "I'm running this ballet company and I want you to be on my board." I said, "I don't know anything about ballet but I know Mike Wyly, so if you want me to be on your board I'll be on your board."

The An Hoa combat base had no discernible tactical boundary. It kind of sprawled. It was a regimental rear area set up next to an old French airstrip. It was a big, forward-positioned artillery base with every kind of artillery imaginable, 4.2-inch mortars, 105s, 155s, 175s, and 8-inch guns. Its air strip was the helicopter resupply pickup point for all the companies in the bush, supplied by two convoys a day from Da Nang and by C-130's during monsoon. It had battalion aid stations, administrative tents and offices from company to regimental level, a mess hall, and a lot of troop tents. It even had a few community showers. There was nothing like a hot shower and a hot meal after a month or two in the bush.

An Hoa was the last barbed-wire perimeter before you'd hit the mountains that stretched all the way to Laos. Inside the mountains the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] operated a division in an area called Base Area 112. The 1st VC Regiment also operated up there, near the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So, we were the last stop. Two rivers bordered the mountains, the Song Thu Bon and the Song Vu Gia, intersecting just west of Liberty Bridge, eight miles from An Hoa. When you go across that river from Da Nang and over the bridge you're in a different world, even from the people just on the other side of the bridge. This was the An Hoa Basin. In the bush there were no tents, no barbed wire, no hot food, no clean water, no roads—pretty brutal for the Marines that were out there. And we rotated into the rear every now and then for a couple of days. The only perimeter that had barbed wire and tents, etc., was on the Liberty Bridge compound itself once you got outside the regimental rear area. We spent a lot of time walking. The Marines walked. Our entire regiment typically had two H-46s available for resupplying and medevac during the day. The Army would have like eight Hueys for a company when they operated out like that. So, we did a lot of walking. And we drank a lot of bad water [*chuckle*].

Nevgloski: Any dysentery?

Webb: A lot of it. It was easy to get sick out there. A lot of hookworm. I had hookworm. When the monsoon hit, I had ringworm in both my legs, all the way from my ankles to my crotch. I'm getting way ahead of myself. I was a company commander then. But yeah, very bad. No hygiene. You know the drill. You'd wear your utilities for weeks, and no skivvies. At one point I stopped wearing socks. The joke used to be "You need to change the oil in your utilities Lieutenant."

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Nevgloski: You could grow vegetables from your uniform.

Webb: They grew by themselves. The mushrooms grew by themselves. Not really.

Nevgloski: You're talking specifically you're in the Quang Nam Province for purposes of those that research this in the future. The misnomer is that the most violent parts of the Marine Corps' area of operations; the I Corps is up on the DMZ, and whereas fighting the NVA is significant. There were a number of casualties. The Quang Nam Province where you fought is actually where the Marine Corps took the majority of its killed and wounded during the war.

Webb: That's true.

Nevgloski: You fought the pacification war. You fought the small war and you fought the big war with the 2d NVA Division, the 1st VC Regiment, and then the guy with the black pajamas in the ville, places like Dodge City, the Alamo.

Webb: Arizona Valley.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: Que Son Mountains. Go Noi Island. I ran the numbers on all five provinces where the Marines fought and put it in one of my books. Quang Nam had the highest number of KIAs, 6,480, with another 829 dying in Quang Tin which now is a part of Quang Nam. And the difference was, always operating in the villes and along the ridgelines. The war along the DMZ was very heavily artilleried, both incoming and outgoing, and there was not very much contact with the civilian population. Quang Nam was a morally difficult place to fight.



Let's go back to the way the ARVN and Americans categorized villages— "A" through "E." "A" was completely government controlled; "E" was VC controlled. And they had another category called "Category 5," which meant, "Forget about it. They're never going to come over" and most of the villages out in the An Hoa Basin were Category 5 villages. There were a couple right around the An Hoa Combat Base that I think made it up to a "D" [*chuckle*].

But even they had their fights. This is what a lot of people don't remember, beginning in about 1958. In 1954, the country was divided and more than a million Vietnamese came down from the north to the south, including my wife's family. A very few mainly hardcore communist cadre went north and trained. And starting in '58 they came down heavily into Quang Nam Quang Ngai and Bin Dinh Provinces, and started assassination programs. Their idea, which was very efficient, was to cut off the people—and that geographical sector—from the South Vietnamese government. And the way you do that is to tell them, "You leave them alone and you're fine. You deal with the South Vietnamese officials, we're going to kill you." And by '61 they were killing 11 government officials a day. That's when John Kennedy decided that we would try something different there. So, the area that I was in had vicious fights. By '62, most of the people who were on the government side had gotten out of the way, moving to Da Nang or even Sai Gon. And these villages in Quang Nam were highly organized and highly fortified in subtle ways. You can actually see on some of the old terrain maps the stitches where they had put in trench lines and these sorts of things. You'd think you're just going through a village, but you weren't. The Viet Cong had

come in and helped build bunkers that could withstand direct artillery hits; 8-inch artillery hits out there where the people would go to at night.

So, you're right in the sense that as a platoon commander taking a patrol out I could hit anything from one idiot with a grenade to an NVA battalion. You never knew what you were going to hit. And it required a different level of preparation and continuous thought all the time, all the time. It's almost like what you'd see on a video game where everything changes every couple of minutes. But you're the platoon commander and you've got to constantly say, "All right, if something happens there I've got to get over here. I've got to know where I am every minute. I've got to call artillery over there. I've got to put my people here, here and here, my guns there." And five minutes later it all changes and you've got to do it again and again, and pretty soon it becomes like automatic.

And the other part of it is the political side with the Viet Cong still wanting to dominate the area. The media back in the States goes, "The ARVN government is so corrupt." you know and, "They get to be the village chief and they move to their villa in Da Nang." Well, they go to the villa in Da Nang because they're going to get assassinated. We understand terrorism a little better now than we did then. When we were out in a place called Henderson Hill, Mike Wyly, who was on his second Vietnam tour, wanted to get the district chief to come out and talk to the people. And so, we ran a drill. We got a hooch where they were going to have a meeting; right down the bottom of our hill. We were going to give them security. They ran two convoys a day from Da Nang to An Hoa, so the district chief and his assistant joined the convoy for part of the ride and came out for a quick meeting the day before. Then the next morning they came

back for the meeting. The locals had recruited 30 delegates from nearby villages to come in and hear him talk. My platoon was coming in from a patrol, walking toward the perimeter, and I hear this “crack, crack, crack, boom, boom, boom,” and 30 seconds later one guy comes running right straight at us through this winding trail. My point man goes, “Thunk” and gets him. They had come in and hit that hooch and killed 19 people, including the district chief and his assistant. I had to go in there and clean that out. And there’s no way I can exaggerate it so I just won’t talk about it. But that was a signal, you know that’s the way they signaled that side.

We had resettlement villages in Duc Duc. One night when I was in the Arizona Valley, we had a shoot-’em-up in one village and we came in the next day and the Mama-sans were standing there with their kids crying and screaming, holding their pans up, shot full of holes. And I said, “Well if you don’t like this, go. Go to the resettlement village. Let us fix this,” and they said, “We can’t go.” And we said, “Why not?” She said, “Because the Viet Cong are stationed at the river. We can’t get across the river.” And I said, with all the authority of my 23 years, “Come with me and I’ll get you out of here.” So, I called company CP and I said, “I’ve got a bunch of people for the resettlement village.” I come back from my patrol and this whole village is following me. And the women; they’ve got their bundles on their head and they’re holding their kid’s hands and they’re happy. We get to the bottom of the hill—you never let them get inside your perimeter—and word came back, “The resettlement village is full,” and I went down with our interpreter and had to tell them to go back to their village. But the word later came out the resettlement village wasn’t really full. The people who were

running it were saying it was and were ordering rations and selling them on the black market and making money by not filling it.

Allison: Politics.

Webb: Yeah. Or maybe corruption.

Nevgloski: That's the challenges.

There was a program, you might recall Sir, and it was going on around the time you were there, where a lot of the Marines up in 3d Marine Division on the DMZ were seeing such extensive combat that sometime during their tour had they proven themselves up North and they were given an opportunity to fill in some gaps down at 1st Marine Division, because the perception was that it might be a little bit of a break for them down there. And in normal actuality—Ollie North writes about this; about one of his Marines he had helped save from a court-martial. He fought for Ollie in 3/3 and was rewarded with a trip down to 1st Marine Division because of his performance and it would give him a little bit of a break, and he ends up getting pulled into a civilian casualty.

Webb: Well, let me tell you, I know that story . . .

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: And it wasn't the story you just told me. Because I represented Sam Green for six years . . .

Nevgloski: Okay, Sir.

Webb: . . . who was another guy in it. And what had happened was first of all, things got a lot calmer along the DMZ in late '68, and early '69. That particular battalion in Taylor Common came down to the mountains because the level of combat was so high in

Quang Nam. In addition to 3/3 in the mountains, Western Quang Nam had 3/26 in the Arizona Valley taking heavy casualties when I got there. In June, they dropped Charlie 1/26 from the SLF into Go Noi Island while we were out there on Pipestone Canyon and they had a very hard time adjusting to the combat environment we were living in. It was operational tempo, not the reverse. Then they started pulling the 3d MarDiv out of Vietnam in late '69. Some of these Marines were able to go to Okinawa, but people who didn't have enough time on their tour to go to Okinawa were reassigned down to 1st Marine Division.

Nevgloski: Okay.

Webb: It wasn't to give them a break. The ones that got the break were the ones who were short-toured into Okinawa, and you can check and see who that was. I'm just telling you the way it was. That's how Terry Murray came down to 5th Marines. He had started up there in the 3d Division. They were pulling them out regiment by regiment. In the incident that you're talking about I represented a private named Sam Green who was convicted of 15 murders because he followed the orders of Herrod, the Marine you mentioned, who was the team leader in the incident. There were five Marines involved. Two Marines who had seasoned civilian attorneys from their hometowns got off, including Herrod who was giving the orders to kill these people. One Marine turned state's evidence and he got off. The other two Marines who had military counsel got convicted. Imagine—you're right out of law school and you're trying the most complicated homicide case you can try, which is, "Was it my moral duty to disobey an order to shoot my rifle in combat?" And the two guys who got convicted were a black

kid out of Cleveland named Sam Green—I represented him pro bono for six years after his conviction—and a kid from West Virginia named Schwarz.

I started helping Green when I was in law school. When I was on the secretary of the Navy’s staff my last year I had to keep files on all these problem children; people who had been convicted of homicides and that sort of thing, due to congressional inquiries. And I looked at Sam Green’s case and I said, “This guy really got screwed.” I mean he screwed up but it wasn’t murder, it was negligence. He had 11 days in Vietnam and Herrod says, “Fire” and he fires. Herrod gets off and he’s convicted of second-degree murder of 15 people. I started representing him my first year in law school. I almost got his name cleared through what was called a “collateral attack” trying to bring his case out of the military court system, where his appeals had been denied, into the federal courts for review. The judge could not find “grave constitutional error” in the military proceedings, but he wrote a letter to the secretary of the Navy recommending that Green receive clemency. The secretary of the Navy responded with a form letter and Green killed himself. Three years later I got his name cleared through the Board for Correction of Naval Records. I finally got his discharge upgraded to a general discharge, under honorable circumstances, which was something for his family.

Bob Timberg wrote about this in his book.

Nevgloski: Well, I’m glad you cleared that up then, Sir, because that was the perception that I had had from a couple articles I have read. It was seen as a break. And my counter to that is there is no way, because as we’ve already discussed Quang Nam was the most casualty-ridden province.

Webb: Agree. The casualties in Quang Nam were so often from small engagements, particularly platoon and company fights, that didn't raise their impact to the level that even people in the Marine Corps fully understood.

Allison: A lot of boobytraps?

Webb: A lot of boobytraps. A lot of gunshot wounds. A lot of close-in shrapnel wounds from RPGs and mortars. Of my three original squad leaders, one was killed by gunshot, one was killed by a 122mm rocket, and one was shot in the stomach during a near ambush and lived.

We moved at night a lot in the 5th Marines. It was one of our trademarks. If you get into concept of operations, we did a lot of sweep and blocks—I could even do it as a platoon commander—all the way to multi-battalion sweeps and blocks. They moved at night. We would move at night and do early morning attacks and we were very successful. That operation in May of '69 they used to teach at AWS, I don't think they counted the official casualties in an accurate way on either side, but that was a big sweep and block.

How much conversation have you had about like the different adaptations that went on and the small unit concept of operating and those sorts of things? Let me give you a couple of examples here. I actually wrote a piece on this in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 1972.

Allison: About the fireteams?

Webb: Yes. First, I wrote an article about the larger roles and missions of the Marine Corps. It blew the top off the Commandant of the Marine Corps' head. But most Marines didn't want to talk to me about roles and missions when I wrote about that one, at least not

then. It really didn't affect their day-to-day. And man, everybody wanted to talk about the fireteam, because with the casualty flow in sustained combat, the three Marine rifle squads didn't work in Vietnam. You build a structure on a four-man fireteam and then you go out and you take a couple of hits and you don't have a maneuver element anymore. So, we had a thing out in the 5th Marines where we cannibalized the third rifle squad in every platoon and brought the guns into a platoon formation, so you still had three squads; two rifle squads and a gun squad. The fireteams could grow or shrink, depending on what's going on, but they remained a maneuver element the way we did it. Not all the time. At one point when we were taking a lot of casualties, I think I had 15 guys total in my rifle squads. But they would expand and contract. Sometimes I had eight people in a fireteam but most often I would not. But that's just adapting to things.

We did a lot of what we called the sweep and blocks where as I said, we moved at night, or early morning if you're doing a platoon size—I mean early morning like 3:30 or 4—target a ville, hit an area, set up an “L” or a sweep and block, and at first light get up and make some noise and see what you can scare out of the place. A lot of times they would come down and refurbish at night and leave at first light. So, we moved at night, and a lot of times we caught them at first light.

One of the things about the NVA when they would come down from the mountains is that there were three big speed trails in the Arizona Valley; speed trails meaning they're about as wide as half this room. There weren't many vehicles over there but you might have been able to get one on them. [POINTING TO A TACTICAL MAP OF THE AN HOA BASIN] One was along here, one was in the center—it shows up more on my map than yours—and one was out here. And when the NVA would



move, if they were going to make a night attack, they'd move like eight at a time and they would reach an assembly area and then they would form their attack. So, if you're setting up a night ambush you usually weren't going to get more than eight. And the other thing they knew about us was that when we saw them, we fired. You know we didn't wait. So, they would know 90 percent of the time everything behind them was okay. You know if they started getting hit you've got eight people in the kill zone and then they'd turn around and go backwards.

When Marines get fired on, they usually lay down. They try to figure out a place where they can cover and then maneuver. One thing I did when I was a company commander—and it was wet out there—instead of sending ambushes out on all these different trails here, I'd just hit those speed trails and we had really good success on that. Now this area was called the "Hot Dog." And if you look on here you see the stiches. Those are trench lines and fortifications that they built in. And again, what they would do is if they were up here like this, they wouldn't form a perimeter. They'd form a line and go one side or the other or get out. And we'd always bite off perimeters. The Hot Dog was a very hot B-40 alley. These are big target areas when you're crossing something a mile wide.

I've taken my son out here. One of the great father-son trips was when *Parade Magazine* sent me to Afghanistan in 2004 and I brought my son as my photographer. First, they called me and they said, "We'd like you to go to Iraq." I said, "You don't want to read what I will write if you send me to Iraq" and they said, "What about Afghanistan?" I said, "I'll go if you let me bring my son as my photographer and let me write the story from Vietnam," and they went, "Okay." So, we did nine places in

Afghanistan and I wrote the story from Saigon and then we came up here and walked through these villes and talked to people. As you may know, I speak pretty good Vietnamese. And basically, with my son I'd say, "All right, what are you going to do? How are you going to cross that?" All along here, these are trench lines; the big fight in May of '69.

Allison: Football Island.

Webb: [POINTING TO TACTICAL MAP] This is Football Island. Right here, yeah. But the big fight involved a large night move. We came on the afternoon convoy from An Hoa toward Da Nang. It was really smart the way it began. We took the convoy so they didn't see us move. The convoy came up and stopped for five minutes on Liberty Bridge. We all piled off so if you're out there watching it you just see a convoy going through a perimeter. It was raining off and on. We waited. And then at midnight we made the night move. We went up here, waded across the river actually onto Football Island, moved all night. Alpha 1/5 went up there. Two companies from 1/7 dropped down from the Hill 65 area. Three companies from 2/5 were over here in the central Arizona. And right before first light they started sweeping.

The NVA 90th Regiment was in the middle of its own night move. After the war I actually talked to a guy who was on the other side. Not one of these things where they arrange for you to go and shake the hand for the TV cameras. I was out there on my own in the summer of '93. I spoke Vietnamese. I'm with my partner who is Vietnamese-American and is originally from Go Noi Island. We were walking through a ville with my old map. I was trying to find a place where later on that first day we had a really bad fight; trying to find a pagoda where something happened. The guy who

was the Vietnamese Army's local officer comes out to ask us what the hell we're doing walking around his ville. We started talking about trying to find this cemetery. I showed him where it was on my old map but it wasn't there anymore. And I'm trying to find the pagoda. Finally, I said, "May 9th, 1969," and his eyes went round as doorknobs. He just started talking and talking. He didn't know me from Adam. He was talking about what it was like on the other side. His VC unit was leading the regiment down from the mountains. They were their guides. They brought the NVA through the valley onto a speed trail. They were on the move when we hit them. And he counted—this fight went on like eight days and eight nights—he said he tagged 582 dead North Vietnamese soldiers. And I think our own official count in recorded history from that battle says 200 or so.

Allison: But he said 582.

Webb: He said 582 that he tagged.

Allison: Wow!

Webb: Frankly, I believe our side's casualties were undercounted, too, due to manipulation of statistics. But that's a different story for another time.

So, they were on the move. 2/5 had tanks, at least a tank [*chuckle*]. I think we had more than one. But you could hear the noise when they were moving across this big paddy. It was still dark. And when it came up first light we had, I think my artillery FO's nature of target was like 400 NVA in the open and he was sixth in the priority list of the OV-10. There was just so much out there. And they were very smart. They made a big circle in the wide paddy, figuring out where the Marine units were and finding creases where they could break out of the encirclement. They were on the move,

running in groups of thirty or forty, probing. If they started taking fire from one tree line, they'd go somewhere else. They did a big circle around like that and then broke out to our south, where we had just come from.

We tried to seal them off. They regrouped and started to ambush our units. Our higher command threw in two companies from 3/5; Kilo and Lima. The NVA figured that one out. Both companies got chewed up really badly. We tried to bail out Kilo after they had gotten ambushed going across a wide paddy toward the south. They nailed Lima down there early the next morning when Lima crossed a paddy and headed into a nearby tree line. They were very good at a tactic they called "grab and hold," where the closer they could get you before they opened up, the better it was because you couldn't use your supporting arms. We had a big fight on Football Island the next morning just to the east of where Lima was getting hit.

Allison: Sure.

Nevgloski: Belt buckle tactics.

Webb: Yeah. They did a number on Kilo. We were bailing them out. They did a bigger number on Lima the next morning. That was a big fight.

Nevgloski: If I can ask, Sir, with respect to the An Hoa Combat Base and your abilities to sustain large fights here, how important is Liberty Bridge?

Webb: Well, when I first got there it was gone [*chuckle*] and they used a barge because the Viet Cong had blown it up.

Nevgloski: And they do that several times and that's why I asked the question why it's so important.

Webb: And then when the monsoon came it went underwater [*chuckle*].

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: It was important. When Liberty Bridge goes underwater, you're supplying only through the air. And the C-130s were in and out of there also. But while they were doing two convoys a day it was very valuable. And in fact, when the monsoon hit, our supporting arms, the amount of artillery we were able to get, dropped a lot.

Nevgloski: And that's because you couldn't use it to bring the convoys over.

Webb: Yeah, they didn't have as much resupply as they did when the convoys were running.

Allison: You probably wouldn't have any air either because of the weather during the monsoon.

Webb: There were times when you couldn't. When the monsoon hit, we were in the Arizona Valley and we had to conduct a full battalion withdrawal. It rained something like 68 inches in one week and we had nothing out there. Not even tents. The night before the real monsoon hit my company was set up in the Northern Arizona in an old, blown-out ville. Our two Kit Carson scouts, both obviously Vietnamese and from Quang Nam, looked at the clouds and moved their poncho hooches up onto a little terrace that used to be somebody's porch. It was only like six inches higher from where we were. They were pointing to the sky and saying, "Mua, Mua," which is actually two different Vietnamese words, but combined means "rainy season," like "monsoon." I go, "It's been raining for months. What are they talking about?" It started raining. I crawled under my little poncho hooch. I woke up a while later because I was breathing water through one of my nostrils *[laughter]*.

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: It rained like a son-of-a-gun. They decided to pull us out of the Arizona in a battalion retrograde, crossing the river onto the An Hoa side on boats. I'll tell you, that was hairy.

It was made worse because we were the last company to get out of there. I was the company commander and I was dealing with a full-blown, shrinking perimeter.

And then here's a good "What do you do now, Lieutenant?" moment. I had a Marine who wasn't going to go on the rope. What we were doing is we'd gotten some villagers with boats to help us string a rope from a tree on one side to a tree to a tree on the other, you know a fairly thick rope, and we hand-over-handed out of the Arizona Valley. And that current was so strong it knocked down the watchtower at Liberty Bridge and drowned two Marines who were in the tower. It was like paragliding. You could hold onto the rope and your feet were almost on top of the water behind you. And I had a Marine who wouldn't go. I finally decided, "I only have one choice. I have to make this guy more afraid of me than he is of the water." That was my only choice. And he later had some congressional inquiry because, you know, I had to intimidate him physically. So, I got him on the rope. And I went right next to him. I'd already been across. They called me and said this guy wasn't going. So, I went back across and I was right next to him all the way, yelling at him and shaming him until he got on the other side.

Allison: Was he just afraid of the water; too swift a current?

Webb: It was pretty bad water.

Allison: Yeah.

Webb: But what are you going to do, leave him over there?

Allison: Right.

Webb: *[Laughter]*

Nevgloski: He's got to know that anything on the other side will be worse.

Webb: Well, I don't know if he wanted some *deus ex machina* to come down from the sky and bring him to the other side, like this was a movie. People get scared and they do stupid things.

Nevgloski: Would you say that that operation where the Viet Cong were the guides for the NVA, was that more of an anomaly or was that fairly common to see, one: them working coordination, and two: to have that size an engagement?

Webb: Oh, they worked very closely with the NVA. The size of that was unusual and I think it's because we caught them on the move.

Allison: I see.

Webb: There were a number of big fights out there. There was another one in . . . I think August where the 7th Marines were involved up here; a pretty large-scale fight.

And when you're talking about booby traps, moving at night magnifies your casualties if you get hit by anything. We had one really bad one, making a night move out to Go Noi Island, where we got hit in an ambush and everybody's like jammed together. But basically, if you run the numbers down—this was an equal opportunity combat zone. My three original squad leaders; one was killed by a rocket, one was killed by gunshot and one was shot through the stomach; gunshot. I lost five radio operators, two in one day, gunshot and then a booby trap. And so a lot of gunshot, and mortars. But when you hit a mine it takes out a lot of people. Yeah, because you're asshole to bellybutton.

Allison: At night.

Webb: At night. The smartest thing you learn moving at night—and it's just pretty basic—but if you can't find the person in front of you, stop. Don't try to catch up. They had a

couple of friendly fire incidents out in the Arizona. The guy lost the Marine in front of him and started running trying to catch up and they saw something moving on the flank and turned around, “boom!” Big hole in the guy’s leg.

Allison: You really didn’t have any night vision devices.

Webb: No. They started experimenting with what they called a Starlight Scope.

Allison: But that’s like nothing you wear. You have to look through it or something, right?

Webb: Yeah, it wasn’t very good.

Allison: You couldn’t use it on the move.

Nevgloski: They were big and bulky.

Webb: Yeah, and you saw green and I think the scopes were pretty easy to get burned out from light like illum flares and that sort of stuff. They sent them out and they didn’t work.

At one point toward the end of my tour they sent the Super Blooper out, I guess from the development center here; you know, the 40 Mike-Mike.

Allison: Oh, okay, the Super Blooper.

Nevgloski: The original Mark 19.

Webb: Yeah. Man, that was good. I used the blooper a lot.

As a company commander here’s what I would do. We’d move constantly. You wouldn’t stay in one spot longer than three or four days unless you really had good terrain features. [POINTING AT TACTICAL MAP]. Like harem when we went back into the Arizona, I stayed for about 10 days up on the top of Razorback Ridge. I had a really nice perimeter up there. But generally, you’d move every three or four days or less, whatever it was, and I already had enough time out there that I knew the tempo of



that area better than I know anything in my life. Because you could spend 24 hours doing this stuff and it feels like years.

Allison: It's life or death.

Webb: Yeah. When I go back there, I still know the tempo of that place. But what I would do as a company commander is I'd pick a spot—even if we were stuck sometimes where you can't see the terrain all the way. Maybe I can get an OV-10 up or something and there's always a back-seater who's a Grunt—and I'd say, "Okay, look. Give me a spot where we can set up a company perimeter." But when you've got 150 Marines on the move with all that gear you're very vulnerable and you're bulked up, and if something happens you can't really maneuver. So I would send a rifle platoon on a combat patrol to go find the perimeter and set up a temporary, hasty perimeter, and get the resupply in before we got there so we're not carrying all this s——t. When I was a platoon commander, we'd carry maybe forty 60 Mike-Mikes, but we didn't use them enough. You know the 81s are good. But I said, "No, that's my personal weapon." So, I would have them drop a pallet of ammo and also sandbags for mortar pits.

Allison: Sixty Mike-Mikes?

Webb: Sixty Mike-Mikes. I'd get a pallet. I would use them for H&Is at night. I'd use them to prep when the patrols went out during the day. Our guys got really good. You know the worst thing you can do is make somebody completely bored out there. And the 60 Mike-Mike guys wanted to be used. They could outshoot just about anybody; sometimes 600 rounds a day.

Allison: In your platoon?

Webb: In my company.

Allison: Oh, when you had the company.

Webb: Yeah.

Nevgloski: You were a platoon commander for how long, Sir?

Webb: I spent my entire tour with 5th Marines. Platoon commander, a short time as a battalion S-2, company commander, and then with regimental S-3 shop. In the bush, I served under four different battalion commanders and three different regimental commanders. Five months as a rifle platoon commander. Just for reference, during that time the first platoon commander was killed, I think in his fourth month, and the second platoon commander was severely wounded after three months.

Nevgloski: Five months and then took over . . .

Webb: . . . and then company commander for almost three months. And I had a break between those two because I was wounded and then they didn't know what to do with me. I was on battalion staff doing S-2 and ops stuff for about three or four weeks before I went back to the company.

Nevgloski: And you took over Delta 1/5 because Captain Wyly was wounded?

Webb: He'd been wounded and had come back but he had six months. And so, they asked me to go take over the company.

After I was wounded the second time, I got offered a position at 3d FSR [Force Service Regiment] in Okinawa, and oh, was that tempting *[laughter]*. But I said, "I didn't come all the way out here to pass out basketballs." So I stayed and then they gave me the company. And it was great getting back to my own company. When you talk about giving the talks, like the first talk I gave when I took over my platoon, it was wet and morale was pretty down being out there as miserable as it was in the Arizona

Valley. I brought everybody fire team leader and above, into a quick school circle out there and I said, "All right, this is what I expect." And I went through everything. "This is the gear. Every fire team is going to have this gear. Each Marine is going to carry four grenades, three bandoleers of ammo, every fire team a claymore and a Willie Peter. Everybody's going to carry a LAAW [light antiarmor weapon]." You know it's been a long time so this is all off the top of my head. "And I want red star pop-ups. I want green star pop-ups. I want white star pop-ups. If you ever get cut off from the rest of your unit pop a Red Star and if the rest of your unit sees it, they're going to pop a red star back and then they know its them coming to get you." Little things like that. They had been required to send their air mattresses and transistor radios back to the rear for mobility reasons. So I said, "I'm having first sergeant send your air mattresses and radios back on the resupply tomorrow. But if one of your Marines doesn't have this gear, the radios and air mattresses are gone." *[Laughter]*

Allison: Why did they take them away in the first place; the air mattresses? Why did they not want them to carry them?

Webb: Maneuverability. But I'd be willing to carry one *[laughter]*. We were in some miserable places. We had one place up there when I was company commander after the monsoon hit that we had to dig ditch lines to drain the water away from where we put up our ponchos.

Nevgloski: Anything to get you off the ground.

Webb: Yeah.

Allison: This terrain is pretty much open though. This is really not like jungle, is it?

Webb: It's pretty thick. We worked the mountains. This wasn't canopy but the vegetation around the villes was thick. There's also a whole methodology of moving across a wide-open area, which we used to follow very carefully. You see these war movies and they're all like walking along as close as I am to you. You get out in these open paddies when you cross them and you'd have people 50–60 meters apart on a sweep, all on line, guns in trace, and move carefully. You know they can see you coming so there's a chance that you can get hit at a certain point. So, you'd set up and then move half of your people, then move the other half, always cover it, maybe recon by fire.

Nevgloski: But when you swept these areas, Sir, going through your sprint out, you know 50 meters between and then you moved to a thicketed area, would you just stay . . .

Webb: No, no, no, you cross it.

Nevgloski: . . . in the lanes or you bring them in?

Webb: When you cross a wide paddy you only want so many of your Marines to be in the span or the casualty radius of an enemy weapon, or potentially under fire.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: And then when you reach like 50–60 meters from that tree line, then you come back and set up a base of fire for your guns to cover you, so you're not that far apart. And we prepped a lot. I'm a big believer in it. You know if you're in doubt drop something on it and you'll shake them up or they're not there, or they're going to leave.

Nevgloski: It pays off, Sir, because I can tell you, previously coming here; just last year, I was the OpsO over at The Basic School, and when the captains would go out and evaluate the lieutenants, where the lieutenant is going to lose the most points, if you will, in his or her evaluation is in the assembly area.

Webb: Um hmm.

Nevgloski: You screw up in the assembly area and I'll guarantee you're going to screw up out there. So that's where the crux of the evaluation and the learning occurs.

Webb: Have you ever done anything on the *Mayaguez* operation?

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: I could see when it was happening that something was wrong. I mean from the very beginning when they had a Navy ship continuing to patrol off the coast after they said this was over, I said, "They left somebody behind."

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: I later learned that the only VR they had on that island was out a window of an F-4 with a Kodak camera. I'll tell you exactly what I would have done if I were commanding a company. I would have said, "You give me good intel and supporting arms or I'm not going in there. I'm not going to expose my troops to this."

Nevgloski: If you had to look back as a platoon commander and company commander, Sir, operating here—obviously you're familiar with the area; a lot of engagements at all levels—what was your greatest tactical success as well as what was the greatest tactical failure or an event that you learned from?

Webb: One of the greatest compliments I ever got was from a Marine who came up to me when I finally left the company and said, "Skipper, you f——ked their minds up!"

*[Laughter]*

Allison: That was good.

Webb: If you think out of the box you can always maneuver. No matter how small your unit is you can mix them up. And it's just a lot of common sense and I think I did a lot of that.

Allison: Out of the box.

Webb: It was the best thing I did, yeah. I mean I had things that I wanted to do that they wouldn't let me do, which I still think were good. Like for instance, [POINTING TO TACTICAL MAP] see this link here? That little lake fed by a stream?

Allison: Yes, Sir.

Webb: There were a lot of rockets coming from there into An Hoa. When I was company commander. I said, "I want to blow that dam because they've got all kinds of weapons and ammo wrapped in Cosmoline under the water." And so I said I was going to blow the dam with shape charges. My battalion commander said. "What are you doing?" Division says, "You can't do that." I'm like, "Hey, do you want to stop these people or not? They're killing Marines!" I mean you can always rebuild a dam.

When I was a company commander up in here [POINTING], I wanted to get closer to what was going on, get some intel. There were a lot of people working out here in the rice harvest and I knew a lot of them were VC, down from the mountains. So, I got my Kit Carson Scout and I had like seven or eight Latino, Guamanian, and Filipino Marines, I had to do this really carefully. What I did was clear an area. I didn't even tell Division what I was doing. You know recon was always seeing things and trying to blow things up basically. They had a lot of ammo. They could get ammo we couldn't get. I said, "Just do not fire into this grid during a certain period." I just said it like that. And we went down into one ville and took a bunch of clothes *[laughter]* and

came back up, and then I dressed my guys. One Marine took a PRC 25 radio, put it in two sandbags, sewed them together, and slung it over his shoulder. You couldn't tell he had a radio. I had a Latino corpsman. And I told my guys, "When you go into the ville let John talk; the Kit Carson Scout, and just form a little circle and squat, looking away from him, like good VCs." [Chuckle] One [woman] gave them a grenade she'd taken off a Marine patrol. And they told them they were having a big meeting with local VC leaders in the ville the night we got pulled out unfortunately, before we could go do that. But doing stuff like that all the time.

Nevgloski: Shake things up.

Webb: Yeah, shake things loose. Do things they don't expect you to do.

Nevgloski: How about something you really learned from, Sir? Maybe it's not a tactical failure but something that you took onboard and . . .

Webb: You learn every day. When you learn and people become casualties, or when people become casualties, period, you say, "Could I have done this better?" In that respect, something that I learned that I was unable to pass on which has always made me angry, was larger-scale continuity. In the end of May, when we were making that night move from Liberty Bridge through the Cu Bans and we got hit in there, it started off with a mine. We were the lead company for a battalion move. We actually were taking 3/5 into this operation. My platoon got point a lot at night. Castro was so good. On night moves, he would walk second, right behind the point man, and I would walk fourth. I could show him a map say, "Here is where we are, and this is where we're going." Fold up the map and away we go. He was amazing at night. This is the guy we were talking about; not being able to reenlist him.

Nevgloski: Okay, here?

Webb: So, we end up on point a lot at night and when you're on point you get hit. I had one guy; Jose Cruz who was getting ready to go home. He had extended. He was going to go home and get married and come back. I put him as the second to last guy. He had three days before he could leave. They wouldn't let him go back to the rear three days early. I said, "Okay, you're right in front of Tail End Charlie." I had a new guy, Foster, who was Tail End Charlie. All of my platoon walked over that spot where the mine went off. They detonated it right at the tail end and killed Foster, screwed up Cruz and several other Marines, killed the guy behind Foster, and we ended up taking like 19 casualties that night.

So, flash forward. My friend Terry Murray comes in and they gave him Fox Two Five. I spent time with Terry when he came in. He came down from 3d MarDiv. I was in the regimental three shop my last two months. I marked up the regiment's night acts on the big map board. I see they've got Fox 2/5 going along that same trail through the Cu Bans because they want them to cross a Phase Line into Go Noi Island by first light to start an operation. I went to the regimental three and I said, "Sir, you can't do that. Something always happens on that trail," and he goes, "Well what would you do?" I said, "Move them into the La Thaps and then have them go into Go Noi from a different direction. Don't have them go down that trail." And he just said, "I'm a major, you're a lieutenant." Frankly, I didn't know what it took on the political side to be a senior officer but I could have run the operations of the 5th Marine Regiment after nearly a year out there. I knew every ville and every trail. Anyway, like three o'clock in the morning, "Boom, boom, boom," Terry Murray lost 6 people dead and 14



wounded from a command-detonated three-chain booby trap, at the same spot within a hundred meters. So, the biggest regret when I look back is that we did not have continuity in terms of the lessons that we should have been learning.

Another good example. Something I'm kind of proud of. We would rotate through on Henderson Hill now and then. We'd set up on Henderson Hill, which is right in here, and our Marines would have outpost duty on the convoy road every third day, patrolling the other two. This was a very bad road. When I was there a major decided he was going to take a jeep in the middle of the day from An Hoa to Liberty Bridge because he wanted to bring a machinegun to Liberty Bridge and people were saying, "You can't go on that road except on convoy." And he basically said, "Yeah, watch me," and he got about halfway there and "Boom," they knocked him off. When you had the outpost duty, you also had flank security when the engineers would do a mine sweep in the morning before the convoy came down from Da Nang. Casualties were somewhere between predictable and certain. They would mine sweep the roads and somebody was usually going to step on a mine off the road providing flank security. And the other side's not stupid, you know. "You're walking out here every day and we'll just blow you up." I lost a guy early on in my tour out in the flank. So, I went to Captain Wyly and I said, "This is just not the way to do it. Doctrine says you have to have flank security when people are doing a mine sweep. I understand that. But rather than predictably losing people why don't we choose our own little roaming patrols a little further out to make sure the mine sweep isn't ambushed? Send them out there in case somebody on the mine sweep is going to come under fire rather than having them walk along the side of the road waiting to trip a booby trap." And it took two to three

months to get that through but it became battalion policy later on. So those kinds of things.

Allison: Everybody's stuck on doctrines for a main . . .

Webb: It's safe. You know to stay with doctrine is career safe.

Allison: Stick to the manual.

Webb: Yeah. You ever read *The General*?

Allison: Yes.

Webb: Ian Forester. A great book. If I'm following doctrine people die, but at least it's safe for my career. If I tried something different, I'd screw up.

Allison: You had to take responsibility.

Webb: I'd take the risk. The same in the mountains here. And like I said, when I saw my friend Jimmy Treadwell he had just come off the very end of Taylor Common—he'd just been shot—and he says, "We're walking up the hill." He says, "They just back up. We go a little more, 'Bang' they shoot that point man again." I started saying, "Why don't we start at the top of the hill and move down if you're looking for NVA base camps and those sorts of things?"

Nevgloski: In that area, that's Base Area 116 here in the Que Son, in essence mountains, and you're saying 112 was over here.

Webb: Yeah, like right up there.

Nevgloski: So essentially what you were recommending with that, when you were talking to your fellow classmate, in essence, that's what we used during Dewey Canyon. Out in the A Shau, we hit the hilltops first and we work our way down.

Webb: I was actually recommending that to my battalion commander too. Who was the regimental commander in Dewey Canyon?

Nevgloski: That's General [Robert H.] Barrow.

Webb: That's what I thought. He's one of my three all-time Marine Corps heroes. He was a great combat leader. He also saved the Marine Corps during all of the social experimentation of the post-Vietnam era. People don't really appreciate him the way they should. I was working over there on the Hill when they were doing all of the stuff in the [President James E.] Carter administration and I got to know him very well. I used to call him every year on the Marine Corps birthday, up to the year he died. What a leader.

Well, we've been going for about three hours here.

Allison: Yes, Sir. That's great stuff, good.

Webb: [DEPARTING] I just re-read *Fields of Fire* cover to cover. I hadn't read it in decades. This past summer I picked it up one day and started reading it and I'm going, "How did I write this?" It really hit me having not read it for so long.

Nevgloski: I had heard once, a long time ago, Sir, that you were trying to make it a movie.

Webb: I had it up like three times in Hollywood, but lost it every time.

Allison: *Rules of Engagement*.

Nevgloski: You couldn't get some kind of permissions. You were going to do it in the Philippines I believe is where it was.

Webb: I actually worked a deal to shoot *Fields of Fire* inside Vietnam in '93, in the An Hoa Basin with the full cooperation of the Vietnamese Army. This wasn't just a flight of fancy. I'd been working in Hollywood as a screenwriter for three years. I put a lot of

work into it and was going to produce and direct it myself. I was up at Harvard on a political fellowship and I spent the whole time studying how to direct a movie [laughter]. I didn't expect the Marine Corps to help me. There's stuff in there that I wouldn't take out but that needed to be put into an honest movie. I met with them on it and they were nervous about me but that's not what held me back. I lost the deal when Oliver Stone came up with his third Vietnam film; *Heaven and Earth*, and it bombed so bad that I lost my financing. It was a \$55 million movie and it only made \$2 million in its first week. I was financing *Fields of Fire* based on foreign presale; selling off to presale territories. And we went from \$14 million to \$4 million in one week. They said, "Oliver Stone, with two Oscars, can't do this. How can this guy do it?"

It's really too bad because we had casted this with some young actors who became big names out there. I had it up again in '98 with George Cosmatos to direct and Jim Caviezel, who later played Jesus, to be Hodges, and Makiko Esumi, the Cindy Crawford of Japan, to play Mitsuko. I had them locked in. But then the deal fell through. As they say, that's Hollywood.

Nevgloski: So now possibly a TV series?

Webb: I think the book is ideally suited for a TV series. But you can never predict.

Nevgloski: Well, if you ever need any help, Sir, I'll do it for free. Give me a call.

Webb: I appreciate it.

*End of Session I*



**JAMES HENRY WEBB, JR.**

"Spike", an Air Force Brat, has lived just about everywhere, but claims Andrews AFB as his present home. He became a Theta Chi at USC, but it only took a year for Mother B to claim his talents. An all-around athlete, he specialized in boxing and always made it to the finals in the Brigade Boxing competition.

In his spare time Jim always managed to give a few haircuts, and this resulted in little sleep on Friday nights. Friday night liberty soon broke up his business, however, as he found more time to drag his pretty fiancé. Perhaps his most valuable talents, though, were his desire and determination. These factors were always evident in his actions, and qualified him as a four striper.

There is no doubt in Jim's mind as to his choice of service. A "grunt" from way back, he was always recruiting for the Corps. Those who knew Jim will testify that his sincerity and selfless dedication will take him to the top... or farther.

*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

1968 USNA yearbook entry.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Brigade boxing.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

USNA leadership award.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

TBS military skills award.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

TBS honor graduate.

U.S. MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION  
Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Senator James H. Webb Jr.  
Date: 28 September 2017  
Length: 1:57:37  
Interviewers: Dr. Fred H. Allison and Dr. Edward T. Nevgloski

SESSION II

Allison: This is the second session of the interview of Senator James Webb, W-E-B-B, by Fred Allison and Ed Nevgloski. And today's date is the 28th of September 2017 and we're doing the interview at the History Division, Quantico.

Webb: I want to talk for a while about the An Hoa Basin and the operations that we did when I was a rifle platoon commander and then as a company commander, and some of the things that I put into place after learning this part of the war. [POINTING TO TACTICAL MAP]

Okay, Da Nang is right up here. The An Hoa Combat Base is down here, surrounded by mountains. Liberty Bridge is over here to the east along that convoy road. The Que Son Mountains are actually down here to the south. Note the steep contour lines. This mountain range circles around to the west of the An Hoa combat base. That's where Base Area 112 was. Twelve miles farther to the west is the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Laos. So, here's An Hoa, and here's Liberty Bridge. To the east of the Bridge is Go Noi Island. This piece of Go Noi that juts up north toward Dodge City on the other side of the river is what we used to call the "Horseshoe." So, Dodge City is up here. The actual An Hoa Basin begins where these rivers flow to the east through big gaps in the mountains and then converge just east of Liberty Bridge. The area east



of the mountains and inside the two rivers is the Arizona Valley, a true killing zone. Charlie Ridge is up here, farther north. Once you got onto Go Noi Island you were physically out of the An Hoa Basin, but all of this area is really what they call the An Hoa Basin. It was a very bad area, cut off by the rivers from the more peaceful areas toward Da Nang and up against the mountains, where the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] kept a lot of units.

Are you familiar with General John Chaisson?

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: His son was one of my FOs [forward observer] for about three months through some of the hard stuff that we went through. General Chaisson had served in Vietnam as [General William C.] Westmoreland's operations officer. He was quite a story in the Marine Corps. His nickname was, lovingly, Mad John. He got passed over for—I think—lieutenant colonel the first time he was up because he punched out a general officer at a mess night when he was at Command and Staff school. Maybe it was colonel. The general was an aviator. As the story goes, the general started calling infantry Marines the “Crunchies” from the podium and Chaisson finally walked up and punched him out. But he spent 29 months on Westmorland's staff and came out as a two-star and eventually retired as a three-star. He was a real smart thinker. I got to know him a little bit toward the end of my time in the Marine Corps. Anyway, General Chaisson, had done the operation plans for all of Vietnam. When he found out that his son was in the An Hoa Basin he wrote him a letter. He said, “You are in the worst place in Vietnam.” He said, “Operationally, we did not know what we were going to do out here. It has been hardcore for so long and the NVA with them from the mountains.”

They had their own fights as I kind of talked about last time; '58 to '62. Most of these villages were CAT-5s. I mentioned that last time. You know they had Cat A, completely government controlled, CAT B, C, D, then E, completely Viet Cong controlled, and then you had CAT-5s.

Allison: Worst of the worst.

Webb: When you need air, artillery, or simply to open fire you don't even have to get permission from higher authority. It doesn't mean you can shoot anything that moves but it means you don't need all these political clearances that so often forced people in other areas to wait for the kind of support they needed, like, now. His son Joe showed me the letter. He said when they were trying to figure out what to do in that area the options went from leave it completely alone; just leave it alone, to sending in, I don't know what the scale would have been but a very large number like a division to try to knock it down. And then like so many things, because of available resources, they start off with a battalion.

Out there we were always fighting three different wars, always. You could be walking on patrol and run into one VCI; Viet Cong Infrastructure, or a sniper, or main force VC units like the Q-83d Main Force Battalion that became heavily NVA after TET '68. Probably 80 percent of main force units were NVA soldiers by the time I was there. Or you could hit the straight NVA units who would usually come down for an operation and then and move back. Plus, mines and booby traps were always possible, anything from a hand grenade to a 250-pound bomb, and when they went off it was like taking a direct hit from an artillery round.

In retrospect, they were very smart about political events. We were kind of reacting about that. We were measuring military contact but a lot of the stuff they were doing was tied to political events. For instance, some of the really bad engagements that we had out here happened from March through June of 1969. May was the time made infamous in the States by the battle of Hamburger Hill. We were constantly engaged out here. We didn't know what the hell was going on at Hamburger Hill and they didn't know what we were doing. But the enemy was forcing fights that took a lot of casualties, tied into the fact that Nixon was going to go to Guam to sit down with South Vietnamese President Thieu. And out of that meeting, in June, he announced the "Vietnamization Program."

For us, the impact for us on the Vietnamization Program was almost but not completely nil. One thing: they announced that there would be no more American offensive operations, so they just stopped naming operations. We still did the same exact thing we were doing before. They just didn't name them in the same way. And frankly, something I've always felt bad about for the Marines who were out there pounding it so hard, they stopped awarding Presidential Unit Citations for the Marines. You know the president approves them. And the last presidential unit citations ended, as I recall, in October of '68, just before the election. So, the whole time after Nixon came in these guys were still out there doing it, and doing it hard. They were really hammering it out but the unit awards kind of went down, particularly at that level. But other than that, we were doing pretty much the same thing.

One positive result of the Vietnamization program in our area was that they did start sending ARVN units into places like the Arizona Valley. This started in August

or September. The first operation was an ARVN ranger or airborne battalion and they got smacked because this was a different kind of fighting for them. When I was company commander we relieved an ARVN unit in place and they were very happy to run onto the H-53s that inserted us. The second one they pretty well held their own. Later in the year the 51st ARVN regiment came out there and did a very fine job. I had a lot of respect for them. Just as an aside before we get back to when I was there, after the Marines pulled out of the An Hoa Basin in 1971 the ARVNs held the combat base for a while and then shut it down. Then the NVA and VC poured out of the mountains and took revenge on anyone who had been on our side or the ARVN side. This has never been given the proper historical attention that it deserved. But from the few reports that did come out, thousands of people were killed during that period, which was before 1975.

Back to 1969.

By the time I finished as a rifle platoon commander our company had walked, I think, every area in the An Hoa Basin. That's important to emphasize because you learn things differently when you walk. The Army was very big with heli-lift, based on large numbers of Hueys. I've seen reports that the 101 [101st Airborne Division] would have eight helicopters for an infantry company on any given day. You get up in a rear area, catch breakfast, deploy at six in the morning, fly into the LZ and hit your target and go do your thing. Sometimes we were lifted into long-term operations on H-53s but usually we were supported by H-46s and there weren't a lot of them to go around. We walked to get there, very often making night moves beginning at midnight, maybe making contact or hitting a mine on the way, typically crossed Phase Line Green at

0800 to start an operation, and were exhausted at the moment we were supposed to begin. But on the other hand, we knew every inch of the terrain where we were fighting. Every hooch, every banana tree, every bunker, every bent grass blade, even in the dark.

When you walk, you see things differently. That has stayed with me all my life. When I go to any city; when I go to Saigon or Yangon or Bangkok, I get out there and I walk for three or four hours. You feel things differently when you're walking and looking around. And that's why when it comes to the An Hoa Basin I often tell people, "I know this area as well as I know anything in my life." Even today when I go back, I know the harmonies of it. I can see what's going on in the villages. The smells are the same. I haven't been out there in a few years, but I spent a lot of time out there from the early 1990s all the way into when I ran for the Senate in 2006. When I was in the Senate, I went to Vietnam at least once every year and I got back to this area more than a couple times. And I've been back now and then since I left the Senate. In a weird way I feel at home out there.

There were different types of contacts and different things that you did depending on where you were in the An Hoa Basin. An Hoa had a lot of artillery; it was a big artillery fan. We had 105s, 155s, 175s, and 8-inchers, which were very accurate. The 175s were not quite as accurate. And we had 4.2s [mortars] that were located just a little bit outside the An Hoa Combat Base. So, we had a big artillery fan here and another big artillery fan, on Hill 65, which was right there [POINTING ON THE TACTICAL MAP]. It was just outside the An Hoa Basin but shot into it every day. And there were 105s and 155s at Liberty Bridge.

These days on top of Hill 65 they have a memorial to the Viet Cong soldiers. You've probably visited it. I took Tom Brokaw back into this area in early 2006, right before I decided to run for the Senate. We didn't really know him back then but he asked if we would go there with him. He'd never been to Vietnam but his best friend had been killed there and he wanted to go. We were in Bangkok and so we flew into Saigon where we met his flight. My wife called it, "The 12,000-mile blind date."

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: We actually became good friends. When you're spending this much time with someone you either end up liking them or wishing they would disappear at the bottom of some remote ditch. We liked him. He was genuine. We spent time with him in Saigon, then up into the An Hoa Basin, and then up into Hanoi. In the An Hoa Basin, I took him to a lot of places where I had fought, and also brought him to two of these VC memorials. There's another one over here just south of the Horseshoe, just off Go Noi Island.

I can't remember the number and I don't want to exaggerate, but there were thousands of names on the Go Noi memorial. These were Communist soldiers who had been killed, just in this small area. Brokaw's looking at all those names and he's going, "Holy s——t! This is for the entire Da Nang area?" I said, "No, it's for one district, Duy Xuyen. Mr. Brokaw, people in the states always claimed that the body count during the war was exaggerated. Out here, it was accurate. Count them. You can say whatever you want about who won or who lost the war but Hanoi finally admitted in 1995 when we normalized relations that they lost 1.4 million soldiers. Say whatever you want about what we did but we did our job. We did what they sent us to do which

was to go out and close with the enemy and destroy them. Find, fix, destroy. That's what we did." [POINTING AT TACTICAL MAP]

Okay, so you were here, south of Liberty Bridge, and of course the bridge wasn't there when I got there. They kept knocking the bridge out. When I first got to Vietnam, during the dry season they would run two convoys from Da Nang into An Hoa and back, along this road. And while the Sea Bees were rebuilding that bridge, they would run barges across every day, twice across and twice back. Liberty Bridge had a military compound right here; a J-shaped piece up here. They had an artillery fan in there on one side of it; 105s and some 155s, and battalion had 81 mortars over here. On a rotational basis it was a battalion headquarters with an H&S company people in there, along with 106 recoilless rifles out along this edge, which were very effective both close-in and at a distance. The bridge compound got smacked every now and then pretty good.

And we had that incident that I mentioned last time with the ARVN district chief.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir. [POINTING ALONG TACTICAL MAP]

Webb: At that time, we were set up in a place called Henderson Hill right off of Liberty Bridge. After that happened, because they were taking so much heat about so-called corrupt ARVN officials who were staying in some villa in Da Nang, they decided they would build a little house inside the Liberty Bridge perimeter so the district chief could come out from time to time and stay in his district. That way, he could come out there and we would protect him. The first thing that happened was when they put the plywood up before you put the sandbags around it. They put the plywood up, and at night, "Bam," a B-40 would hit the plywood and blow it down. They'd start over again. Bam,

same thing. They'd start over again. They finally built the little shack and we got him up there in it and they killed him.

Allison: Hmm.

Nevgloski: Wow!

Webb: So that idea didn't work. You know, their side was very focused. That's why, in retrospect, it was so successful. A lot of the stuff we did was very random, although we killed a lot of their soldiers. We shot a lot of H&Is into trails and populated areas. I shot a lot of H&Is as a company commander. I'm thinking tactically and I'm taking care of my people. That's my job. But the violence they used on the other side was, "You make contact with the South Vietnamese government, you support the South Vietnamese government, we're going to kill you." You know, "You stay away from them, we're going to help you build a family bunker, we're going to take care of you out here." That was their methodology.

[POINTING TO TACTIAL MAP] The convoy road ran about eight miles from the Bridge to An Hoa. The rifle companies in the regiment rotated in protecting it while at the same time patrolling through the villages that were near it, including especially the Phu Lacs, the My Locs, the La Thaps, and the Phu Nhuans. We would set up at this place in the My Locs that we called Henderson Hill. Every third day, my platoon would man a series of small outposts to defend the road. The other two days we would patrol. I mentioned the minesweeping things last time. This area out here was a high contact area and the road area was one of the most booby-trapped areas in Vietnam, which is why I put in that policy that I mentioned last time about having roving patrols to protect



the mine sweep rather than mindless flank security patrols where these guys were walking out there just waiting to get blown up.

But there was a lot of contact on our daytime patrols. And beginning in early April, in retrospect you could see the beginning of the buildup for the post-Tet 1969 offensive that took place leading up to the Nixon and Thieu meeting in Guam. You started seeing a lot of big units in here. Even as a rifle platoon commander I did a lot of indirect approach patrols, you know mortaring one place and then going to another place, day or night, making a lot of contact. If I figured things out beforehand, I knew I could go out and have a good chance to make contact. They had their own patterns. I could figure out how they watched us and basically screw up their minds

[POINTING] One period in here in April, I started a patrol going over to the east side of this road, then we walked down behind a berm and cut back on this side. I sent the other half of my platoon up toward the river at the Phu Nhuan and had them cut back into a sweep and block. I'd almost always make contact if I did something out of the ordinary in this area by the river just south of the Arizona Valley.

So, I had half of my platoon go this way [POINTING WEST] while we went this way [POINTING SOUTH]. We both cut back and caught a large enemy unit by surprise in a platoon-size sweep and block during the middle of the day. I had 60 millimeter mortars with me; and they did a lot of free-tubing while I was calling in artillery. We were a lot smaller than they were, and they finally broke out, running toward where the river crossed into the Arizona Valley. And it turned out they had a lot of other soldiers over there in that tree-line, which opened my eyes up to what was starting to happen with enemy movement into our area. I could literally see movement

everywhere, and we were taking a lot of rounds. I lost two radio operators in one day that day. One of them literally got the handset shot out of his hand. But we had hit a big North Vietnamese unit in there and you could see a lot more of them over here moving in the tree lines and whatever. So, I could tell something big was brewing and it got a lot bigger in the coming month or so.

[POINTING] The Arizona Valley. We spent a good bit of time in and out of the Arizona Valley. I spent parts of at least seven months in the Arizona Valley. Not always the full months but a lot of time out there.

I mentioned before sort of the fortifications that had been built into the villages out there. The deep ditches around the villes, the family bunkers and spider holes, and the trenches up on top of the ridgelines. Look in this area here. The brown stitches on the map were classic examples of the trenches they had built so that they could stay on top. We fought in perimeters. They would fight in straight lines, concentrate their fire on both sides, and get out of there if things got bad.

Allison: Hmm.

Webb: Football Island. In fact, we had a big sweep and block in here, which I think I mentioned last time, with 2/5 up here; two companies from 1/7 down here, and we made this crossing and had Alpha 1/5 and Delta 1/5 here and caught them on the move; caught the 90th Regiment on the move. They threw in some units from 3/5 to try to plug them up and we fought for like eight days. Lima and Kilo 3/5 really got torn up toward the end of that; Lima really badly. We were close to Lima but they pulled us out in the middle of the day. We had just swept Football Island the morning after we made heavy contact along the trails just to its north with Kilo the day before. They had gotten

clobbered moving across a wide paddy and we had to go in and bail them out. Lima moved into those tree lines and they got inside this really thick vegetation and the North Vietnamese were in spider holes all around them, and they were paralyzed in there. We were maybe 400 or 500 meters away from them and could not move, and they didn't tell us to move. There was so much stuff coming out toward us—in order to stay low you know it's bad when you take your pack of cigarettes out of your flak jacket pocket to get yourself down an inch lower.

I have a friend who was in Lima and lost half his platoon in that fight, like in a day—not quite a day. We went toward them in the morning after we swept Football Island and in the middle of that they pulled us out, in the other direction. They turned us around and moved us out of the Arizona, heading toward Go Noi. Take a look at the map. We'd been fighting for days in the scorching heat, lots of casualties, everybody was pretty exhausted, and they said, "Go back across the river and make a night move into the Cu Bans." And so, we pulled out at a time when there was a lot of contact going on, waded back across the river, got to Liberty Bridge, were treated to a sandwich and a carton of milk, and then made a night move through the Cu Bans. And we operated for about the next 10 days independently of any other rifle company in a string of villages just to the south of Go Noi Island where enemy contact was almost constant.

They put us out in the Cu Bans and from there we moved up through the Le Nam and Le Bac villages, as well as the La Thaps. This area was famous for really hard fighting. You usually had to go through the Le Bacs or Le Nams if you were heading into Go Noi. For years, this area was known as a very rough place, up close and personal. So, we were up in this area and were in contact every day and at night. We

had [*chuckle*] one incident that shows how close stuff got out there. We moved into a new position, reached there just before dusk, set up a new perimeter, dug new fighting holes, and put together our “on-call” targets in case we needed artillery or mortar support. The on-calls could get tricky. You think you know where you are—and this is one thing I want to point out more when I start talking about my time as company commander—but your map error out here could be 800 meters, even if you’ve got your terrain features right. No one had ever really walked this area and obviously we didn’t have GPS. So, when you’re calling in artillery rounds you always want to start a little bit out and then bring them in because you can be exactly right where you see it on the map and still be very wrong. So, you’re pretty sure where you are on the map but you’re not 100 percent sure of where you are in reality.

So anyway, it’s getting dark, and one of the teams from my platoon was just in front of the fighting holes, unwinding a claymore. You never put in a claymore during daylight because they could see you do it, and after dark they could turn it around on you, then probe your lines and you’d set the claymore off and blow up your own Marines. So, they set the claymore out in front and some guys walk past them on a trail and they waved to each other. They put the claymore back down and they came in and said, “Lieutenant, did they send the LP out yet?” I said, “We haven’t sent the LP out yet,” and they went, “Oh, s——t!” It was an enemy team that walked by.

Allison: They didn’t have their uniforms?

Webb: Well, you’re seeing shadows.

Allison: Oh, I see. It’s getting dusk.

Webb: You know you don't want to think that's what it is. And let me clarify something since we're putting Vietnam combat on the record, here. Out in the bush where we were, we kind of went native. We adapted. Marine Corps 782 gear frankly sucked. It was still left over from World War Two. We ditched it whenever there was an opportunity. I carried an ARVN pack for a while at one point. My belt on my jungle utilities was a strap from a LAAW rocket. An NVA pack was a prized possession—no buckles, only tie-down compartments. Army rucksacks were a laughing stock, way too huge—the old joke was “sticks and stones will break your bones but an Army pack will break your back.” At night or whenever we stopped moving, bush hats were everywhere. And Kit Carson Scouts never wore helmets.

Allison: Yeah.

Webb: And so maybe a guy's got a bush hat on. We didn't wear bush hats on the move, although our Kit Carson Scouts always did. And it was very close-in sometimes in the An Hoa Basin. In another company during this period some enemy soldiers came in and walked all the way up to the CP and the Marines thought they were Kit Carson Scouts.

Allison: Wow!

Webb: And these guys went, “I don't think we belong here,” and they turned around and walked back out. [POINTING] And then over here on these speed trails in the Arizona Alpha Company had a sniper team with some security where a Marine thought he was waking up his relief in the middle of the night but he woke up an NVA soldier.

Allison: *[Laughter]*

Nevgloski: *[Laughter]*

Webb: Nobody hit anybody, but they had all these rounds going off while both sides were breaking contact. So, stuff was pretty close out there.

So, we went down from the Le Bacs through the Le Nams into the An Tams. And on Ho Chi Minh's birthday; May 19th—I'll never forget his birthday—we were set up on a little piece of high ground. I've been back to this and done a terrain walk. It feels lower and smaller and the vegetation is thicker but I remembered every piece of it. You know it's like when you visit a place where you lived when you were a kid.

Allison: Um hmm.

Webb: It was on a V-shaped hill with a dip in the middle of it. We were set up just south of the Le Nams. When we got ready to send out our night acts there were some small fires going on around some hooches in the Le Nams. And one of my team leaders—who later became a squad leader and after that got shot in the spinal cord, but a real smart guy—he goes, “Lieutenant, right where you want us to go there's something going on over there. There's a low fire or something and that makes me nervous.” And I said, “Maybe somebody set something off when we were coming in here,” you know one of our platoons or something. About 300 meters in front of us there was a paddy dike that ran all the way across. I had two teams with me, eight Marines standing right around me. Of course, it was almost half my platoon at that time if you didn't include the remnants of my gun squad. I said, “Okay, here's what you do. Instead of going straight out there . . .” I was pointing toward the Le Nams. I said, “Walk to the nearest point on the dike, which is here. Take a look over that dike and then move along just behind the dike.”

I moved my hand, tracing where I wanted them to walk, and I think they thought I saw them because literally as I moved my hand that the whole dike lit up mostly with RPGs and AK-47s. I had eight Marines and myself and my platoon sergeant there, all scattering. They hit us from three sides. It was like, "Happy birthday Ho Chi Minh." I remembered the dip that went into the V-shape behind my "pos" and I crawled toward it. I had rounds literally, you know dust spots, impacting all around me. I think they knew I was the platoon commander from when I was pointing and were trying to take me out. At the same time our artillery FO [forward observer] was firing an emergency contact mission from Liberty Bridge. He later said that when he called for the Willie Peter spotter rounds, they'd been laid on their sides in the heat before they were loaded and the Willie Peter had melted to one side of the rounds so they weren't accurate, and he only saw one of them land on the far side of our perimeter. Whatever the reason was, we had a Battery 3 land inside our perimeter and one of them landed right behind my feet. I went there the next morning and saw the dip. It was right behind where I was lying. Luckily, when an artillery round explodes it breaks sideways. When a mortar round lands it breaks circular. Artillery rounds break sideways. If I had been on either side of that round, I would have been toast but the explosion went on either side of me. So, I'm scooting along trying to get away from all these AK rounds. I scoot to the other side of the "V," down the hill a little bit, and the rounds are coming at me just as hard from the other side. So happy birthday, Uncle Ho.

Allison: Wow!

Nevgloski: May 19th.

Webb: Captain Wyly was company commander then. I used to joke that he was the only Royal Marine who served in the Vietnam War. He was always kind of fatalistic. His uncle had been killed as a Marine at Belleau Wood. I crawl up to him and he's on the battalion radio net, speaking calmly, like "Burlap Six, this is Burlap Delta. We're going to die now." [Chuckle]

Allison: [Chuckle]

Webb: So anyway, we got through it. And then they pulled us into Liberty Bridge for like three days. I think 2/5 was taking over Liberty Bridge. Then our company led 3/5 on a night move from the bridge out into Go Noi Island to kick off Pipestone Canyon. We were the lead company. I was the lead platoon. I think I talked about that last time. It was a weird operation out there. We were all over Go Noi.

[POINTING ON TACTICAL MAP] There was an old railroad trestle here. In fact, in *Leatherneck Magazine* a month or so ago, they had an article on Operation Meade River, which took place just before I got to Vietnam. I looked at one picture in that article and I said, "I know exactly where that is. The Marines were up next to the trestle." That's where we fought in this area here—Pipestone Canyon. They arc-lighted this area over here, just across the river. We did some BDAs on some incredible, massive airstrikes out there, and that was not fun. When you talk about human and especially civilian casualties, it was a horror show walking through these villages and seeing the blown-out villages and the huge bomb craters down there. But we did that operation and then we got sent up into the Que Sons. We operated in the Que Sons Mountains. We went to the top of the Que Sons. We had contact up in there. 2/5 had done an operation up there. 3/5 was on an operation up there when I first got there. Our



company had already done a Sparrow Hawk up in those mountains in April, when a Recon team had been compromised and attacked and we were thrown in to make sure they could be extracted.

I'm not trying to do a total chronology here but I'm just talking about the different areas where we operated. We were in the Que Sons and then we were back in the An Hoa area and toward the end of June we got put back in the Arizona Valley. And that's when I think we were on Hill 11. We started over here. Anyway, that's when I was wounded in July.

Allison: You were wounded in July?

Webb: I was wounded in July, yeah, right in this finger lake here.

Allison: Is that the . . .?

Webb: So, let me give you some context. One of the things we didn't do very well was pass on intel, you know I mean ground scale intel. I have a good friend named John McKay. I don't know if you've met Colonel John McKay. He got his eye shot out.

Nevgloski: I do, Sir. I know him.

Webb: He's a real interesting guy.

He was with 2/5. He had been wounded in April. They were moving along this finger lake and his point man got shot and he went up and tried to help his point man and he got shot. You know it went in here, blew his eye out and went right down his jaw, breaking the jaw. If it had been an inch more to the center it would have been a clean head shot on him. And he overcame all of that and stayed in the Marine Corps and retired as a colonel after helping our country a great deal during the turbulence in Latin America. I have a great admiration for John McKay. He's a fearless, serious man. I was

sitting in his backyard one night and I said, “Where were you wounded?” He pulls out some map and pointed at the spot and I realized, “You know we were wounded less than 500 meters apart in the same bunker complex, and we had no intel on that.” There were big underground bunker complexes along the finger lakes in that area. Some of the bunkers were capable of firing .51 caliber antiaircraft at our jets during night close air support missions. A few months after I was wounded in there, Charlie 1/5 lost five Marines killed in one afternoon after they started crossing the finger lake in the water instead of walking around it. There were literally no landmarks that could set off a warning signal if you were patrolling through the bamboo banks. During the fight when I was wounded, we did manage to kill a high-ranking Viet Cong colonel and capture a lot of good intelligence materials. But we could have done more if we’d put this location on a continuous daytime surveillance.

By the time I became a company commander we had walked this whole area. We fought in the villes, along the ridge lines, in the mountains. We’d operated over here in Go Noi, which was a horrible place, and in the surrounding villes and terrain. Frankly Go Noi Island is my definition of hell. In every memory I have of Vietnam, it’s my definition of hell. There were no trees, blown-out villages, no good water, no place to set up a perimeter except in the complete open, just every bad thing you want to say about having to do this.

So, when I took over the company, I’d learned a lot and I’d done a lot of thinking. One of the leadership points I would give to a young lance corporal, or anybody else, is first you always take care of your people. Then you master every aspect of your job. And then you start trying to figure out what you’re going to do if you have

the next job above you because in combat you never know when that might happen. And so while I was doing this stuff as a platoon commander, I was also thinking about, “What would I do if I was company commander? What kinds of things would I do?”

One of the things I said before was I liked the 60-millimeter mortar. It was the most underused weapon in the Marine infantry battalion, because you’ve got so much artillery support, and air if you can get it or you can usually get 81s from battalion. But you can use the 60 Mike Mikes immediately. The downside is you have to carry a lot of rounds when you’re on the move. But if you think smart you don’t have to carry all the rounds on the move. That’s what I would do when I was company commander. There’s also a leadership point. You don’t want anybody in your unit to feel underutilized, bored or feel like they aren’t a big part of what’s going on. With the 60 Mike Mikes a rifle company would typically carry maybe 40 or 50 rounds on the hump. We humped with so much gear. You’d have a flak jacket, helmet, three bandoleers of ammo, four canteens, four grenades, Claymores, LAAWs, pop-up flares, C-rations, poncho, poncho liner, letter-writing material, and maybe a small transistor radio. You know you’d just keep packing it on, and we moved a lot. That’s how I dropped as much weight as I did. Everybody out there did.

I had thought about this, so when I was company commander, when we moved into a new position, I would have the resupply choppers drop in hundreds of 60 Mike Mike rounds at the new “pos.” If we had a really clean move like when we were set up on the end of what we called the Razor Back [POINTING] here, it was easy to do that. But when you were in a thick terrain that you didn’t really know as well or if you were anticipating contact when you were on the move and you had a whole rifle company

spread out you could get everybody bogged down then you've got to figure out how to maneuver and where you're going to set up. What I'd do is send one rifle platoon ahead of the company on a combat patrol so that they could maneuver if they got hit, but also to find a place for the next company perimeter. Sometimes we'd get an OV-10 up there with a grunt in the back seat if it was really thick stuff. These were blown out areas. I mean there were villes, but the foliage was thick and the populations were thin in the northern Arizona particularly.

So, I'd have a rifle platoon make a separate combat patrol, find a place for a perimeter, move in, and then secure a hasty perimeter. They could then accept resupply while we were moving in. I'd seen getting resupply go bad when Marines had to take it on the move and couldn't figure out how to carry all the new stuff. You know you'd get boxes of pop-ups for instance and the Marines would be going, "What the hell are we going to do with this stuff? Where are we going to pack it?" One time I went into a bunker just after resupply had been taken while we were on the move. All these areas would have family bunkers that could take a direct hit from an 8-inch artillery round. In one bunker, a Marine is just popping off a box of pop-ups, one at a time. They didn't want to carry this stuff. They didn't know where to put it. So, when I was company commander I would move one rifle platoon up and have them take resupply including a pallet of 60 Mike Mike ammo, along with sandbags. We usually operated with two tubes instead of three and we would build two mortar pits. So, from the get-go the company would be moving into an area that had already been secured, which is one of the concepts that I used on LPs and ambushes and other things too.

Think about security in an area where you're constantly moving. As a Marine down in the rifle squads, you don't always know exactly where you are. If you're a lance corporal, if you're a team leader even, you don't have a map. You relate to where you are by points of reference, not by grid lines on a map. "Okay, from where the H&I is, this is where the enemy movement is." So, when we're talking about mortars, the company is moving into an area that is secure. You set your people up in a broader perimeter, get your mortar pits dug and built, get your Marines dug in, figure out your night acts. And then with the 60 Mike Mikes I could start shooting immediately. I would typically do H&Is all night; our own H&Is, like three to five rounds four or five times an hour all night.

The thing about the larger enemy units out in that area was that they would move in small groups, sometimes beginning at dusk, but then they would stage and assemble the larger unit. We did a relief in place of 3/5 when I was a company commander in the Arizona Valley, and one night they had gotten hit by several hundred mortar rounds in a very short space of time. But how did the enemy get all those mortar rounds out there? They did it a few at a time, and they weren't interdicted in the process. So, I would just throw those H&Is out there in places that were likely areas for enemy movement or consolidation. You know, loosen them up before things happened. And then if your night acts are out there, they can say, "Okay, I've got movement. From the H&I go left 50 meters and add 100 meters," or whatever it is. The 60 Mike Mikes were also great for preps; for platoon patrol preps from the company perimeter or when we were moving out, particularly daylight moves. We did our own prep fires, and when the company headed out to a new "pos" [tactical position] we could fire off the rest of

our ammo, saving some for the move and for contact missions when people in patrols were hitting something. And our mortar section got really good. They could also free tube on the move.

I took that concept to other areas. You think about this. When you're out in an area like the Arizona Valley you want OP's on key terrain features during the daytime. You know they're watching us, this is their home turf, and we need to try to watch them. And at nighttime you want LP's [listening posts] and you also want to send out ambushes. And you had to rotate out your daytime units. So, when it was time for the daytime OP's to come back in, I would move them back toward us to where the nighttime LP was going to be, and then the nighttime LP would relieve them in place after dark. Because as I said, when you're a team leader, even a squad leader, you don't always know exactly where you are, but you do know that everything behind you is secure.

If you're in an area that we're just moving into, people get jittery. They're nervous about walking into an area they don't know or they haven't been in. So, I would make sure that we had what was called a day pos and then a night pos. And when my units moved into their night pos I would mortar the day pos. Because a lot of times they were followed, so that covered their rear. And it was also a good way to make sure that they were where they said they were in case they came into contact and I needed to drop more supporting arms out there. We'd send ambushes out, maybe a click and a half away; 1,500 meters, that's nearly a mile. What I would do is send my ambushes, which were usually squad-size, on patrol right when it started getting dark so they could get comfortable with the terrain. They would quietly find out where their ambush site

was going to be and then move like maybe 300 meters past it, into their day pos. And then when it got dark, they would move back into their night pos. And they'd already been there and reconned it so it was in their brains. You're more comfortable moving back to someplace you've just found than if you were just stumbling around toward it in the dark. Then I would mortar their day pos. So, you've got mortars going. First of all, it helps them, and second of all it helps us know they are where they're supposed to be. Because if something really bad happens you can't be guessing at where they said they were going to be, you know because you're going to be calling in supporting arms for them and those sorts of things. So little things like that made a very big difference in morale and in effectiveness.

And when the rains came—and I had the company during most of the rains—you had problems with mobility out there. So, I would set up a tighter company perimeter and generally I would send individual rifle platoons on 24-hour patrols because of the water obstacles. It was very effective. I could get a long-range patrol out, a reinforced ambush position in a key location at night, and then a long-range patrol back. That means two long-range patrols and a strong ambush out of one unit where otherwise a rifle platoon would just be patrolling out from the company perimeter and back on a daytime patrol, crossing high streams and waterlogged open spaces. It was very effective.

Just a quick comment on Medevacs. I'm sure you've had a lot of people talk about when you call in a medevac using different color smokes. You pop the smoke. You never say what you're popping. They'd have to identify it, like "I see your green," and you go, "Roger that." And then at night we'd use a strobe. And very important;

we'd put that strobe inside something like a helmet or a C-ration can so the light is only going upward. I have a friend who was in the Americal Division who was shot during this May/June time period down here [POINTING] because his company called in a medevac and he ran out in the middle of the LZ so the helicopter could see where to land and he held a strobe light upward in his hands, and you know, "Bingo," he got shot.

So anyway, I just wanted to give you a whole rundown on the AO there.

Allison: Yes, Sir. That's great, thank you.

Nevgloski: Sir, question on what you were talking about; the H&I fires. So those, I mean essentially are unobserved fires. So, what were the concerns about civilian casualties?

Webb: Well, that's a good question because it's an important clarification a lot of people don't understand. When it started to get dark, usually like 6:30, they went into their bunkers out where we were. They spent their nights in their family bunkers. Everybody knew the rules. Anything that moved after dark was enemy. The enemy would signal with lights and this sort of stuff, and they all knew it and we knew it. If you saw a light on in a hooch after dark, even if it was a little kerosene lantern, you shot at it. After a warning shot it usually went out and would stay out or you opened fire again, except stronger. The same concept applied in daytime and nighttime movement out there. If somebody started running away from us on a daytime patrol there was usually a very good reason. You'd say, "Dung Lai" three times—loud and fast, frankly—and if he still moved you shot at him. At night, if there's something moving on a trail you shot it. Everybody knew that. There weren't any school kids on the trails after dark.



When we would go into the villes during daytime patrols, everybody would freeze, wherever they were, particularly in places like the Arizona Valley. Sometimes they might wave when they were squatting inside their hooch or carefully walk to go get a kid but nobody moved fast and mostly they would just squat right where they were. This was kind of eerie on both sides really, but it was also a safety zone for both sides. Around Henderson Hill and An Hoa the kids might be running around during the daytime, even when you were patrolling, but not out in the Arizona or on Go Noi. And if you were starting to cross a rice paddy and it was empty, stand by, because usually there were kids out there sitting on water buffalos goofing around until they saw us coming. I've been back there in recent years, talking to the kids who are now grown up, and they're basically saying, "We were watching," you know *[laughter]*, and they were letting the other folks know. But if the paddies were empty, bad news was coming.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: And the way you swept a ville was so important. When you were on line you had to cover all the way side-to-side to the outside edges of a ville. You could have enemy soldiers down from the mountains in there or local VC, and they could work their way around the outside of the ville when you were sweeping through it. You cleared every family bunker in these bad areas as you swept. At every bunker you go, "Lai Day, Lai Day, Lai Day" and that means, "Come out of the bunkers," and then you'd say, "Fire in the hole" and throw a grenade in every bunker, all through sweeping the ville. The Marines who didn't do that very often got shot from behind. If you don't do that, they come out of the bunkers and BAM, there you are. In terms of the moral demands that

it placed on small unit leaders, there's nothing I've ever seen that compares to what we went through out there.

Allison: How do you prepare for that? How does a lieutenant get ready to face that sort of tactical environment? Is it just more or less OJT [on-the-job training]; I know you gave a good description of TBS [The Basic School] last time, but once you get in-country it's different I would think?

Webb: We all have our own moral beliefs. And then you have the reality of where you're operating, as well as the legal demands that sometimes did not fit into reality and weren't totally in line with your moral codes. We lived in a grey area that put an incredible burden on very young Marines. When we got in country and reported to division headquarters, they had every young officer read the rules of engagement and sign it. There were protections for civilians. For instance, you could not have any civilians walk point on any patrol even if you're going through their own villages. We knew there were booby traps inside populated villages. The villagers didn't know where the booby traps specifically were but they did know where not to walk, because the Viet Cong would tell them.

Many of these were very sophisticated booby traps. I'll give you an example in a minute. So you go into a village and you say, "Where are the booby traps," and they would say, "Khong Biet," which meant, "I don't know." Well, they didn't know but they did know where not to walk. And so the natural tendency would be to say, "Okay. Walk us through your village." But we couldn't make them do that. That was a war crime.

Allison: Really?

Webb: Yes. So there's a little bit of a game on both sides. Any time you hit a booby trap inside a ville the Marines would get more and more pissed off. And the villagers are scared because if they didn't help us and we hit a booby trap we might mortar their ville as a payback but if they did help us the VC would retaliate against anyone who helped us. As an example, think of the whole village that offered to leave, and then I couldn't get them out. They were in the middle. There was no good answer for them or for us.

You were responsible for an enemy soldier once he was in your custody. When I was company commander up there in northern Arizona one of my platoons had made contact with an enemy unit and an OV-10 had raked their position with its mini- guns and shot one of their soldiers in the leg. They had to leave him behind when they took off. So my guys had this soldier that they were carrying from where they captured him back to our perimeter. I could hear them on the tactical net on their way back. It was like, "I don't know, he's trying to jump off my back into that bomb crater," and I'm going after them on the radio, "You better bring that guy in." But your average Marine was 19 years old and had graduated from high school a year ago, and was confronted every day with the ambiguities of this place. They tended to get really emotional and angry. So that was a constant challenge.

Allison: Yeah, leadership challenge.

Webb: We also had a lot of accidental injuries or deaths with civilians. One of my really, really fine Marines, whose his dad was a sergeant major with the 5th Marines in Korea, and actually was in Vietnam at the time working CIA stuff. He was a really fine Marine. We were moving into a ville just at first light during some of this heavy fighting and a

woman stepped out from her family bunker. It was misty and it stank from smoke fires and he just jolted, turned around and shot her, and I don't think he ever got over it.

Allison: It really bothered him.

Webb: Yeah. I said, "Look, you did what your instincts told you to do and you can't do anymore than that." But this sort of thing was always out there, and it stays with you the rest of your life. That's one of the things I told my son when he went to Iraq because there was a lot of this kind of stuff going over there, then. I said, "Whatever happens, remember when you get out of this, for the rest of your life you're going to look at yourself in the mirror. Do not let your emotions take over."

Allison: Is that what you would tell your Marines also as a platoon commander and a company commander—talks like that?

Webb: Yeah. We had a lot of stress out there in this area. We had people whose emotions were going over and you've got to talk them back. And the other thing is when something like that happens, depending on the circumstances, when people talk to you about it as a leader you need to talk them through it. Sometimes Marines would want to relieve their own stress and we had to keep going. So, they needed to hear me say, "You've done your duty."

There was very little relief from the pressures our Marines faced in places like the An Hoa Basin. A good example is the sophistication of the mines up on a place called Hill 11 [POINTING] right here. I've been to this place many times since the war. A very bad space. It was only 11 meters high but it was a terrain feature looking over into the eastern Arizona so it was a natural tendency of the Marines to want to set up on this hill right there. You've got a clean view of the eastern Arizona. Lima Three

Five was on Hill 11 in May just before they moved into Football Island and got all torn apart. We moved up there from the central Arizona on July 1st and when we started sweeping it you could see there was crap everywhere. And this, by the way, is another point. When you make a night move it's like 2:30 in the morning when you leave your night perimeter. You've sat in fighting holes all night with grenades and all this stuff in on the parapet because you might get hit. And then you pack up and leave in the middle of night and there's always the question, "Did they get everything when we moved out?"

When I was company commander, whenever I could I'd leave like a reinforced squad behind, and at first light they would go through the perimeter. First, it was good defense in case we were being followed. But also, they could clean up the place. On one night move out of the northern Arizona Valley they found 19 grenades that our Marines had left behind in the dark.

Nevgloski: Left behind?

Webb: Yeah, left behind on the parapets of their fighting holes. And you know where those go if the enemy gets them.

Allison: Oh yeah.

Webb: So back to the point, we swept up onto Hill 11 on July 1st and there was a lot of stuff scattered on that hill. I don't know whether Lima had left it behind when they moved out in May or whether it was bait. Probably bait. The 2d Platoon swept to the end of this hill to clear it. We were the next platoon, waiting at the bottom of the hill. 2d Platoon found a mine on their sweep, and called us on the company net. I said, "That's not good." And so, I turned around to my radio operator Mac McGarvey, who

incidentally became my driver when I ran for the Senate in 2006, and to my platoon sergeant, and I said, “Just stay right here.” I was joking around to keep people calm. I put an air panel on top of McGarvey’s helmet and said, “I want to see this air panel when I get ready to call up the rest of the platoon.”

Since the perimeter had basically been secured by 2d Platoon, I took my three squad leaders up the hill and we started clearing lanes from the top down to where we were going to put in the fighting holes to secure our section of the company perimeter. Since 2d Platoon had found a mine, by clearing lanes we would make sure that our squads could set up their fighting holes without tripping any boobytraps. While we made our way down the hill to where the squad positions were going to be at the edge of the perimeter, another officer who was out there, who was our company XO at the time, ordered the column that was waiting at the bottom of the hill to move up to the top of the hill. I’m not sure why he did it. Maybe it was a concern that our company column was exposed down there. So, I’m down with my squad leaders after we’d cleared our lanes, setting up where the fighting holes are going to be, and at the top of the hill we hear this huge “Kaboom,” and I look up and there’s a body flying through the air. Somebody, I think it was a Kit Carson Scout because he got killed, stepped off the trail and a pressure-release artillery round went off between his legs and blew him up in the air. It also wounded several other Marines. McGarvey was running along the skyline and screaming and his arm was hanging, and then it fell off. We got mortared that afternoon, killing another one of my Marines, and I think we eventually found 16 booby traps on that hill, even 1 while we were set up on it.

Nevgloski: They weren’t daisy-chained or anything, Sir, just all separate?

Webb: No. Very sophisticated too. One of my good friends for many years; Mac McDowell, was our 81's FO. He slept all night that night on top of a mine. He rolled over the next morning and put his elbow down and it kept going. There was a pressure-release mortar round underneath him. All you could see on the ground was dirt. A piece of C-ration cardboard had been placed over the dirt, smoothed out like plastic surgery. If somebody had stepped on that or if Mac had rolled over while he slept, the same thing would have happened as what happened the day before. But yeah, they were very sophisticated.

Allison: Amazing.

Webb: Are we ready? Is there anything else from . . .?

Allison: I've got a couple questions.

Webb: Okay.

Allison: What about air support? Did you get effective air support out there?

Webb: Sometimes it was slow to get. But most of the time we did.

Allison: Was it generally Marine Corps; Marine aviation?

Webb: Almost always. We actually had a funny thing happen with an Air Force close air mission. When I was company commander out in the Arizona one of my platoons had a pretty good size North Vietnamese unit pinned down in a tree line up against this finger lake over in here in the Tan My's, south of the Vu Gia River [POINTING], right in here. We got an Air Force divert because we had an O-1 up and we realized that this was a pretty big unit when they started shooting at the O-1. When they had the firepower, they liked to shoot at the O-1s because the only weapon they had on the O-1s was like a survival rifle up above the pilot.

Nevgloski: [*Chuckles*] And a pistol.

Webb: The O-1 would come over a unit and the rounds would be going off and then if an OV-10 relieved the O-1 everything would go quiet now because they had 2.75 rockets and pretty deadly miniguns, although they flew faster and couldn't hover over a target like an O-1. But anyway, we were dropping airstrikes on them and we got an Air Force divert that I guess was supposed to go to Laos. They were heading for the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They came in pretty well but they dropped delayed fuses that only went off with motion detectors if people walked behind the bombs, or a timed detonation. So, all of a sudden, we've got this whole unit we were going to go in and get, but if we went in there these bombs might blow our Marines up with the motion detectors, and we had to wait for these delayed fuse bombs to go off like 12 hours later.

Allison: Oh wow!

Webb: So, we couldn't even go in there. And we were waiting. Every now and then in the middle of the night we could hear a "kaboom" going off, you know [*chuckle*].

Nevgloski: [*Chuckle*]

Webb: But we had good close air when we were in contact. We had [radar] beacon hops out there. You know the beacons; the A-6s?

Allison: Yeah.

Webb: They carried 28 500-pound bombs. They would come in high, like 1,500 feet up. But they were very effective, particularly for interdiction. When I was a company commander I would use them a lot. Like when it started getting dark you could see units starting to move in from the mountains and we could hit them on the speed trails. And the A-4s were really good.

Allison: Yeah, a good airplane.



Webb: We got ambushed in April up in the La Thaps and I had this one A-4 pilot who was so good in terms of trying to help us, that he was coming in really low to be right on target and he dropped six consecutive duds *[laughter]*.

Allison: *[Chuckle]* Very frustrating.

Webb: Yeah, I'm like, "Oh man, you're scaring the s——t out of them but there's going to be a few booby traps out there somewhere."

The F-4s, you know they're coming down at like 450 knots. They were designed as an air-to-air fighter, so close air support was kind of tricky for them. The pilot would be looking out the side of the cockpit window trying to figure out the approach path for us. We had to mark our target with Willie Peter rounds and our own pos with smoke or air panels, left to right, so they could see clearly how to approach us. They were really good. But we also got bombed by an F-4 out in the Arizona Valley when they got mixed up on the approach.

Allison: Oh really?

Webb: When they were coming in, they would do a dry run. You know we popped smoke where we were, and our 3.5 rocket launchers shot Willie Peter rounds into the tree line about 400 meters out where we had an NVA unit shooting at us. They had two F-4s up there and they did the dry run over the target. We were in a daytime perimeter and they were dropping Snake and Nape—250-pound bombs and then napalm after that. They did the dry run and then on the second run one of the F-4s dropped on us instead of the target. Luckily, he was just short of us. My platoon was actually on the rear side of our hasty perimeter, looking back the other way from where this was going on. We heard an explosion right outside the perimeter when one of the bombs went off. I looked

behind me and there's this green thing twirling through the air. I thought it was a body. It landed right in the middle of our company CP. A 250-pound bomb literally landed on the pack board of our artillery FO's radio operator's pack. I still have a picture of this. The bomb had landed outside the perimeter and bounced, and the tail broke off of the Snake, so it defused. I turn around and go, "What the hell's going on?" I started running toward the CP and all these guys from the CP are running this way because they thought that thing was going to go off.

Where we suffered really was helicopter assets. You know I've often said the H-46 was built to deck space for amphibious warfare. There was a big political fight in the late 1950s about whether the Marine Corps could retain the amphibious mission, and this was the compromise. They were relatively small. They had a hydraulic system that ran the length of the fuselage with the twin rotors so in the early versions even small arms could drop an H-46 by damaging its hydraulics. One of my friends who was a recon guy was killed out near the Que Son Mountains in May when small arms hit an H-46 and everybody in there was killed when it crashed.

Allison: Just took out the hydraulics.

Webb: They later improved that, but it was a problem at that time. Also their lift capability was low. When it got really hot you couldn't get very many Marines in it. When I got back to Quantico after Vietnam, I was running officer candidates and one of our DI's who had been in an H-46 squadron in Vietnam, I guess as a mechanic or something, refused to fly in them. When we'd go out on our tactical problems he refused to fly.

Allison: He didn't want to get in it.

Webb: Our staff company commander tried to tell him that he had to fly with the candidates. He said, “Sir, I will drive out there but I will not fly in those things.”

Allison: And he’d been a crew chief on it?

Webb: I don’t know that. I think he was more like a mechanic. But he wouldn’t fly in them.

And the way helicopters did the inserts back then was to spiral down to reduce their exposure to ground fire. So, in an H-46, you’d be sitting in there and they would be in a tight spiral and I worried more about that when I was back at OCS [Officer Candidate School] than I did in Vietnam *[laughter]*. People were like, “What does he know that we don’t?”

The Army developed the air-mobile concept and I think in terms of wear and tear on the troops that it was better. The lifelong thing that I say about that in terms of understanding what it meant to walk and walk and walk and walk and walk, that you learn to absorb things in a different way. It was hard at the time but I don’t regret the walk. But we would typically have like two H-46s for the regiment out here unless something was going on; doing the resupplies.

We had an incident up on this ridgeline in April when we were starting to hit those big units. I had some pretty badly wounded Marines. I don’t know where they were but Alpha had more emergencies than we did and so we had to sit there and wait. My platoon sergeant at the time had been hit and had pieces of his fingers blown apart, and part of his thumb blown off. And he had a piece that went through his bladder that we didn’t know about because his hands were so painful. We were trying to get the medevacs in, and he’s saying, “Give me water, give me water.” So, we were giving him water and taping his hands so he couldn’t see them, and then we turn him over and

all that the urine and everything had gone from his bladder into his intestines and we didn't know it until then. And you're waiting and you're waiting and you're waiting trying to get your people out.

The pilots were really good. This isn't a comment on the pilots. You know it's the availability of the resources. I had a medevac in the mountains one time where down the slope of the mountain was a lake. We used to call it Alligator Lake because it was shaped like an alligator, but on a really steep slope. An H-46 came in and dangled over the water to get, you know put the tail down to get our guys out.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir. Which, you know you're bringing up a valuable lesson that we've learned from Iraq and Afghanistan Sir about walking the terrain, knowing the terrain. Now up on the DMZ you've got battalions being mismatched back and forth with the regiments. You know you could be operating in the Que Son area and the next thing you know you're in the Dong Ha area which is completely different. But you're talking about getting out and walking that real estate and owning that real estate. And what we ended up doing later in Iraq and Afghanistan is when the battalions would go back, because obviously it was the units replacing units, we'd do everything we could do to get the same battalion as long as it had a chunk of veterans from the last deployment back and operating in that same area. So, they knew the people. They knew the terrain.

Now the enemy's TTPs [tactics, techniques, procedures] are going to change. We got that. But for the most part, unless there's some advance in technology or something they're still going to employ roughly the same things. So, the points you bring up are important.

Did you feel like in your area of operations that you were being, even though you knew the trail well, that you were still being reactionary or that you had the one up on the enemy forces, because you know the area just as well as they do now?

Webb: In war when an operational environment is not clear there is a tendency for a lot of leaders to fall back on prevailing orthodoxy, because even if things go wrong their decisions can be defended. That was the basic theme of Forester's book *The General*, by the way. I grew up fishing for bass. You stalk a bass, figure out where the fish is hiding, what it eats, what will make it strike at your lure, how to bring it in. That's a little bit like creative combat. If you think, if you adapt, you can be on top of the other side, even on their home turf. By the time I was a company commander I knew that area backward and forward. I was allowed to go out a lot by myself, sometimes even out of range of our battalion's 81 mortars. When I took over the company, I was serving under my fourth battalion commander and my third regimental commander. Joe Griffis was the fourth battalion commander. By the time Joe Griffis took over, I knew the whole area and I knew my tactics and I knew my people, and he just let me go. A lot of times we'd be up here in the northern Arizona when the rest of the battalion was down here. And we'd do smart things.

The other thing is I don't think they've given our young leaders enough credit for the preparation that some of them did. I prepared for this from 1964. I read about it and thought about it talked to Marines who had been there and studied the lessons learned. In terms of geography, we operated on every kind of challenging terrain. Look at the contour lines on these mountains here.

Here is a small example. At the very beginning of July, we were set up in a place out in the Arizona called Phu Phong 4. We got intel that the VC district chief lived in one particular hooch near that village. The intel came from a VC medic who was Chieu Hoi to us, surrendering to our side. And the first thing he said, by the way, was “You have to get my family out of the village by dark or they’re dead. The VC will kill them for the sake of discipline.” But he said the Viet Cong District Chief lived back there. So, I took our platoon down there and we went through the area and of course you don’t see anything, but I checked out his family hooch and I marked it on my map. For months after that, every time I was in that part of the Arizona, I would quietly watch that place. When I was company commander, whenever we were set up near there, no matter what else we were doing, I would put out an OP to watch that place. During October in the middle of the day one of my OPs called in and said, “Be advised, 20 people just moved into that hooch,” and I said, “Go get them.” We killed the district chief and some of his troops. Battalion was set up down here. Colonel Griffis called in after I gave him the spot report and said, “Jim,” he says, “I can’t believe you guys did that. Be advised you are going to receive a Six Papa of Charlie Bravo on the resupply.” And I went, “Sir, I don’t know what that is.” He said, “Just wait!” So, when the resupply helicopter came in they dropped off a six pack of cold beer *[laughter]*. So, I gave them to the guys who went out.

Allison: Just a six pack?

Nevgloski: Hey, everyone gets a sip *[chuckle]*.

Webb: You get nothing out there. We’d get muddy water really—

Nevgloski: Everybody gets a sip *[chuckle]*.

Webb: Everybody who made that attack.

One time, out in these blown-out areas when I was a platoon commander, we were going through an old ville. Nobody was even living there. But there was one pineapple. We found one pineapple. So, we had this big debate, “Who gets to eat the pineapple?” We ended up taking this one pineapple and putting it into like 20 tiny little pieces. So, “Keep the peace here.”

Nevgloski: So, you felt like you had the jump on them, and clearly did.

Webb: I mentioned the “civilian ops” last time, when I dressed some Marines up in local clothes and sent them out playing VC, doing some interesting things and getting some good intel. Those kinds of things were healthy for morale, healthy for intel, and really healthy for signaling to the other side that we knew them better than they thought we did.

And you mentioned something when we started out about pilot versus pilot; the thing you were at in San Diego.

Allison: Yes, right, right.

Webb: I don’t have any problem talking to—

Allison: Former adversaries?

Webb: No, although I think there’s been a lot of gimmickry involved, particularly from the Communist side on this. They use it for propaganda. When I first started to go back to in ’91, and when I went into the An Hoa Basin in early ’93, I think I was one of the first Vietnam combat veterans to go back out there since the war. At that time, I could go up to somebody who had fought on the other side and say, “I was a Thuy Quan Luc Chien,” I was a Marine, and you’d see stark fear in their eyes, you know like,

remembering how fierce we were. But then a lot of veterans started going back and some of them would be put into these propaganda set-ups with people from the other side and they'd get all emotional and some of them would even start crying and the veterans from the other side would be looking at each other, shrugging, like, "What the hell's wrong with them? Why are they crying? Maybe we were better than we thought we were."

Allison: Right.

Webb: But bumping into them for spontaneous discussions was different. In early '93 I met up with the Communist chief in Dai Loc District. He had fought in the big battle during May '69 as a VC. He had me over to his headquarters for dinner and we drank beer and he was telling his side and I was telling my side. It was spontaneous. There weren't any cameras there. It wasn't this arranged kind of thing.

One other thing. I've mentioned it earlier talking about Vietnamization. In our country we have overlooked the performance of many of the ARVN units when we discuss the war. The Vietnamese who fought on our side. Because there were some really fine Soldiers. I personally was impressed with the 51st ARVN Regiment when they came out to the Arizona Valley. Those guys were crackerjack. They were really good soldiers. I liked working with the 51st ARVN. And there were so many other good units. The Vietnamese Marines of course were famous for how good they were and how brave they were.

Allison: Yes.

Webb: And I mean nobody wants to talk about that. That's why I can't stand watching some of this stuff.



Nevgloski: Speaking of that, Sir, I mean it's a good segue. Have you watched the Ken Burns documentary so far?

Webb: No, not to my taste.

Allison: You're not going to?

Webb: Not going to. I have a lot of friends who feel the same way. You look at the consultants they had on that show and a disproportionate number were involved with Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I worked on this issue starting in the 1970s when I was the first Vietnam veteran to be a full committee counsel in the Congress, working on the veteran's committee, and back then I would defy the Vietnam Veterans Against the War to show me a list of even 5,000 Vietnam era veterans who belonged to the organization out of a potential pool of 9 million.

Allison: Sure.

Webb: They couldn't even do that. I just don't need to watch what Ken Burns is putting out there. And I'm not alone feeling that way. There's a large network of emails that are going back and forth right now by people who served.

Nevgloski: I read the one piece that came out a week or so ago from Bing West.

Webb: I read that one.

Nevgloski: It's definitely a slain [unintelligible word] in who's the morale equal to the veteran, you know the draft dodger and the protestor.

Webb: And in the end, what was it that we were fighting for. Did I mention Lee Kwan Yew last time? Probably not.

Nevgloski: I don't think so, Sir.

Webb: Lee Kwan Yew was minister-mentor of Singapore. He's now deceased. He was a brilliant man. He created modern Singapore. When I was younger, I kept a list of the five living people I would most want to interview. Eric Hoffer was always one of them, a self-taught intellectual who worked for years as a longshoreman. Had a great book, *True Believer*. He died before I got to him. And I always wanted to interview Lee Kwan Yew. He was a creative thinker and a great leader. When I was in the Senate, I told the Ambassador from Singapore that I had always wanted to meet him. So, I got two long meetings with him, an hour at a time. I had my wife with me. One of the things that fascinated me was Lee Kwan Yew's strong belief that what we did in Vietnam was in fact a victory, that in the end we stabilized the entire region in a way that allowed it to stabilize in the post-colonial era. Because don't forget that European colonialism had just left the region and the Japanese had just retreated back to Japan, so this whole region was undergoing an historic transformation.

He said, "Number one: you allowed former colonial governments to stabilize. Number two: you allowed most of their economies to establish new rules and to grow." I spend a lot of time in East Asia and I tend to strongly believe that. And when I am opposed on this point by Americans and others who were on the opposite side of this issue, I ask them if they can name one other time in the 2,000-year history of Vietnam that 2 million people jumped into the sea, risking death, in order to avoid a change in their government? They didn't even do it during the violence of the war. But they certainly did when it was over.

Allison: Two million.

Webb: They have a 2 million diaspora.

Allison: They're boat people.

Webb: A huge percentage were boat people and other types of refugees. My wife was a boat person. Her entire extended family got out from Vung Tau on a boat. Her dad was a fisherman. Neither of her parents ever spoke English. They bounced around the ocean for three days, not knowing if they were going to live or die. Finally, the United States Navy picked them up at sea and took them to a refugee camp on Guam. From there, they went to another refugee camp in Arkansas. They finally settled in New Orleans. She started working in a shrimp and crab factory during weekends and summer breaks, and ended up graduating from Cornell Law School. But, yes. At the peak of the boat people escapes in the late 1970s they had about a 50 percent chance of dying and then had to face the reality of refugee camps and assimilation.

Allison: Wow, and they were still doing it!

Webb: And the enemy was pretty tough during the war, lots of assassinations and that sort of stuff. These folks weren't trying to escape during the war itself. So, I think there were valid reasons why we were there. We could have done it better. We could have been smarter. We could have been politically smart. You can always play that game. But I have always believed that Vietnam is a very important country to the United States in terms of the strategic balance in that part of the world. That's why I've spent so much time, even from '91 forward, trying to develop harmony with the present government and also trying to bring the overseas Vietnamese into the formula.

Here's an interesting subtlety. When the Communists talk about the overseas Vietnamese, they call them Viet Kieu.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: That means, basically, “We still own you.”

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: And the Vietnamese people who come here usually call themselves Hai Ngoai, which means, “We’re overseas Vietnamese and we’re out here waiting.” *[laughter]*

Allison: Vietnam—still their country.

Nevgloski: If they left the country from the time of the war, when they come back into country, they still have to go through denouncing their citizenship, if you will, to get kind of pulled off the roster of citizenship.

Webb: It was really bad when I first started going back. They were not accepting that the overseas Vietnamese had full American citizenship. In early ’93 they tried to keep my Vietnamese-American business partner out of any meetings we had in Hanoi. I told them he was in, or I was out. Anyway, they’re a lot more lenient now.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: But strictly speaking, if you call yourself Viet Kieu you’re basically saying, “I’m still a Vietnamese citizen under your control.”

Nevgloski: I used to meet them all the time down in Saigon; wealthy Vietnamese businessmen who were living in America, coming back. And when I would talk to them their English was perfect like they were from America and I would say, “Were you born in America?” “No, no, I’m Viet Kieu.”

Webb: They would say Viet Kieu?

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: Then they wanted a deal *[laughter]*. If you’re inside Vietnam you’re playing the game.

Nevgloski: *[Chuckle]* Yes, Sir.

Another good segue, Sir, focused more toward the Marine Corps. Could we have fought the war differently? Put yourself in the shoes of the Commandant of the Marine Corps Sir, maybe even the III MEF CG, your position if it was earlier during this time as the secretary of the Navy, how would you have run this war?

Webb: Boy, that's just such a big what if.

Nevgloski: It is, Sir.

Webb: I know that we could have done a lot better with maneuver warfare. You know, with larger units on a much larger scale. There's no question in my mind we could have. I have my own views on that but it's fruitless at this point to even try to play this game.

In terms of bombing, it's crazy that we never used B-52s north of Vinh until late 1972.

Nevgloski: Linebacker II.

Webb: Yes. When I would go back in 91-92 all they wanted to talk about was when Hanoi was bombed for eight days by the B-52's during the Christmas bombing. Before that, they were living under the illusion that they were withstanding American airpower when our light attack aircraft and fighters were doing pretty minimal bombing runs compared to what we could have done. So, we had given them the political and emotional advantage of thinking that they were withstanding American airpower, but they were stunned by those eight days. They had never really seen the reality of what we really could have done. If we were going to bomb them, we should have done so in a way that might have even shortened the war. Just saying.

[POINTING TO TACTICAL MAP]. Think about this. We put B-52s out here on Go Noi Island. The grunts on the ground had to do the BDAs on populated areas

that got devastated right here in the South, and not only by B-52s, on the people we were supposedly trying to befriend! It was the most sickening part of the war I fought. If we were serious about it, I think we could have bombed Ho Chi Minh's house. Why not? This regime was based on a cult figure. I don't think there would have been a problem finding his house and at a minimum scaring the crap out of him.

Allison: Pull a Qaddafi.

Webb: Let me be very careful in terms of how I answer that. I could see the logic of our 1986 bombing of Qaddafi's home. He was the leader of the country and Libya was helping terrorists conduct activities against us. But I thought his assassination in 2011 was totally uncalled for and I said so at the time. That Libyan operation was foolish. We are still paying for its reverberations. But on your larger point, here's a little-discussed factoid. During the Vietnam war, a lot of the political lineup, particularly in the North, came not just from ideology but also from the lineup of extended families. It's amazing how many sons from the Communist families were protected from the war; how many men who came of age were studying in places like Romania or East Germany or Russia while the worst fighting was going on. Then they were brought back in 1974 so they could say they were part of the great final offensive of 1975.

Allison: They could say they were in the war.

Webb: Yeah.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir. Ken Burns, in one of the episodes, actually mentions that where he's talking about the draft that was taking place in North Vietnam in '68 and '69—so obviously post-Tet—the number of casualties and a number of the party members—and their

party is a very small membership—but significant people in North Vietnam; how their children were not affected.

Webb: I can name names. I'm not going to because I'm being recorded *[laughter]*.

Allison: I wanted to ask about your troops more. Like when you get replacements in or maybe your original set of Marines that you had, is there any way that you can tell who's going to be good in combat? Isn't there some sort of spiritual or emotional makeup that determines when the bullets start flying really who's going to react well?

Webb: Well, the first thing is that I'm not totally sold on the concept of unit replacements as opposed to individual replacement in a long-term war of attrition. There are competing values and detriments to both concepts. But to your question, it's often a leadership roll of the dice when you come in as I and so many other platoon commanders did and you've got people who've been out there for eight or nine months and you're the boot lieutenant. This often revolves around the question of an individual's personal leadership skills. If you were a competent and prepared leader there was an advantage in having the existing experience in terms of the terrain, you're in and things that they can remember and that sort of thing. It wasn't always the case, obviously. And when new Marines reported to my platoon it also came down to personal attributes.

I would do two things. With anyone who came in new to my platoon, I would sit down with them and draw them out through an extensive conversation to learn more about where they came from, what their motivation was, and how aware they were of what they were walking into. If we picked them up from the resupply helicopter in the middle of intense combat operations, which was frequent, I would always emphasize the reality of being out where we were. Part of it was, "You're here. This is what you

have to do. This is what we expect. Forget about back there. Put it in a box and bury it and take it out later. Someday you're going to go home. One of my jobs is to get you there. We're going to do the job they sent us to do and we're going to try to get our Marines back there. But you're here." And the second was more personal. Like, "Where are you from, and why did you decide to do this?" Like I said last time, when we rotated into the Rear at An Hoa I'd spend hours in the company office, going into the SRBs [Service Record Books] and learning more about every one of them. I'd read and read, even the smallest entry. It's amazing what you can get out of an SRB in terms of understanding your people.

Another important thing I would do is every night out in the Bush I would put my people into their fighting holes and visit each fighting hole and sit around and talk about the same kind of things. You know there's a certain amount of trust in that and there's a kind of awesome power that you feel responsible for when you're in command of Marines and you come under fire and you just say, "Go!" and they get up and go. You've got to have some humility about your people when their reaction might be to take a bullet.

Allison: You're saying it's not necessarily fear of you when you're giving these commands, it's something else.

Webb: No. You know it's like my dad used to say, "You can make somebody do something or you can make somebody want to do something."

Allison: Right.



Webb: “And which one do you want?” I never asked any of my people to do something I wouldn’t do myself, never. And sometimes I had to make that point physically to actually do it.

Allison: And you’d do it.

Webb: And do it. But you can’t always tell who’s going to be good when the s——t hits the fan. I’ll give you a good example. One of my finest Marines—he’s now a triple amputee; Dale Wilson, recipient of the Silver Star—started off as a rifleman in the platoon, became a team leader and then squad leader. When he got to the bush, we had just gone through a really bad period in May of 1969. And you have this four or five-day period in An Hoa for familiarization—except when Mike Wyly pulled me out into the Bush two days after I got there—and they’re all talking about, “Man, you don’t want to go to Delta Company. These guys are getting their asses handed to them.” His brother had just been killed in an airplane crash and his other brother had just gotten back from Vietnam after serving in the 101st, and these people are all talking about Dying Delta. He wasn’t particularly scared but I will say that he was disoriented. I’m sitting down on top of an old grave and there isn’t a tree in sight and minute by minute Wilson is turning pink from the sun. Within a day he’s sunburned like a son-of-a-gun. There was an article right then about how to avoid skin cancer and the expert wrote, rule number one: don’t be Scotch-Irish *[laughter]*.

Allison: *[Laughter]*

Nevgloski: *[Laughter]* And this guy was.

Webb: We call it the Celtic Curse. I had it. The rednecks (of which I am one) and the Irish Marines would burn until they had scabs on them when they first got out there; we

called it your initial burn. And Wilson is burnt and worried and taking everything in, looking around like, “I’m not sure about all this.” I mean it wasn’t like, “I want to go home.” It’s like, “How are we going to do all of this?” And frankly I’m going, “This is a stubborn dude. How is this guy really going to turn out?”

Nevgloski: Scotch-Irish.

Webb: Yeah, [*chuckle*] mountain boy. And then I remember five months later when I was company commander and he became a squad leader in my old platoon. It was in the Arizona Valley. I looked around just before dark one night—there was an ambush going out across a little low area up into a tree line in front of our perimeter—and I went, “Wow, these guys are really moving right.” and it was Dale’s squad. And to this day I remember that. They moved beautifully, like poetry if you cared about what it meant out there. But the bottom line is that you try to lay out your expectations when somebody new comes in, and only time will tell.

Allison: Okay, thank you. Any more on Vietnam?

Nevgloski: Last question, Sir. When we talked about action here and your time as platoon commander and company commander and then post-Vietnam, your perspectives and your thoughts on PTSD. How did you handle it? Did you even know what it was?

Webb: Not really, no, but I worked on the issue extensively when I was committee counsel on the House Veterans Committee during 1977 to 1981. Ironically, the people who were able to stay in the Marine Corps had fewer problems than the ones who got out after a short stint and had to face their transition into an often-hostile peer environment. I was talking with my friend Terry Murray about this many years ago. Terry and I were infantry officers out in the same area. But for years after the war, he and his career-

Marine peers had a built-in support group with them. They had peers who could share and empathize with similar experiences. They had Marines who looked up to them for what they had done, including young Marines who they were mentoring so that every day they could reinforce that they all were part of a continuum.

The people who had it the hardest were the ones who did their time, quite often in some of the most brutal fighting because short-term enlistees very often ended up in the infantry, and had to face the hostility of their peers who were opposing the war. This was serious stuff, coming from our own age group. I had a very hard time dealing with it myself, which actually led me to write *Fields of Fire*. But these Marines were younger, less prepared to face the political and personal issues, and often had adjustment problems forced upon them that they did not deserve. The one bad thing about going over individually was you come back individually.

This is a very minor example, but take the first few days of when I came back. I was on the regimental 3 staff during my last two months. They decided to shorten Marine Corps tours and let people go home early. All these guys I went through Basic School with left a month before I did because there was one little proviso in this that you could leave earlier unless it was decided that you were “essential to the continuation of the war against the enemy.” No kidding. Our regimental three, a major, decided that First Lieutenant Webb was essential to the successful completion of the war against the enemy. *[laughter]* So my Basic School buddies called me on a land line at my desk in the Three Shop in An Hoa from Da Nang to roast me. They were all living it up, joking, getting ready to go onboard a ship to home.

So, I came back on a cargo ship called the USS *Tulare* about a month later. I got back after my RTD by the time the ship hit San Diego because their deployment was rigged so that they were at sea on this mission for any part of two consecutive months and they could get two full months of combat pay since they spent a couple of days in port at Da Nang or deployment pay or something. I don't know, ask the Navy. It took us a pretty long time to get back from Da Nang on this ship. Whatever it was, the reality of what we had been through versus what everybody on the ship had been through really hit me. We had 50 Marines from the 5th Marines on the ship along with some other Marines, like motor transport jockeys and those kinds of units as well as the regular crew of the *Tulare*. But I was responsible for my little group of infantry Marines. They were my people. As I pointed out before, I used to be the company barber at the Naval Academy. My Marines needed haircuts but the Sailors who worked in the ship's barber shop said, "We only cut ship's crew. We don't cut these guys." So, I said, "Okay." I went to the ship's XO and I said, "Give me your barber shop from whenever they quit until midnight." I set up shop and I cut their hair every night until midnight, just short enough so the sergeant major at the Transit Office would not make them get their heads shaved when we landed in California.

But you could already see it coming, even a few days after we left Vietnam. Some of these Marines were two-year enlistees, you know at like 17 months they'd get a mandatory early out and immediately go back to the civilian world after a year of very hard combat.

We pulled into San Diego in March of '70. The Navy was worrying about whether there might be antiwar or other disruptions when they pulled into port with a

load of Marines who had just left Vietnam. The order went out to us: “Do not have any family members or friends meet you when the ship arrives.” So, we pull into the pier at San Diego. The family members and friends of the crew that’s been gone for maybe 31 days are greeted with signs and cheers and people walking along pier side as the ship maneuvers into port. Our little contingent from the 5th Marines is standing at parade rest on the main deck in our combat utilities. I had given them specific orders: “Do not move. Do not even wave.” Skip Smith, one of my best friends who was a Naval Academy classmate was stationed on the USS *Jouett*, a ship parked just around the corner. He was down there on the pier; I could see him. Skip is walking along, following the ship as it docks, and he’s waving and jumping up and down and worried that I can’t see him. So finally, I just gave him a little wave of my hand. And the 50 Marines behind me immediately go “Booooo.” *[laughter]*

They took us off the ship, down the brow, and immediately loaded us onto large troop buses that we called cattle cars, which drove us up the Interstate to the Marine base at Camp Pendleton. I mean, this was Southern California after a year in combat, sideburns on the guys in the cars and bikini tops on the women. It was absolutely eerie. You couldn’t even say hello to anybody. So welcome home, you know, but you might be toxic so don’t expose your bacteria to anybody else. At Camp Pendleton, they checked our baggage and our written orders, and then processed us out. I had orders to Quantico but for some of these Marines that meant processing them out of the Marine Corps. No “thank you,” no shaking of the hands, no “good luck out there where half of your own age group happens to hate you.” It was just a process. Everybody went in their separate directions. You’re less than a month out of combat. You’ve got all this

crap inside your head that you're trying to process by yourself. And now where do you process it? And you're hearing all this other stuff on the radio and it's a lot of stuff to process. Frankly it may take the rest of your life to process the intensity that we went through out there.

For me, it took another two years. But when I left the Marine Corps in 1972, I went from an environment where everyone had been to Vietnam to an environment where no one had been to Vietnam; Georgetown Law Center.

Allison: Right, right.

Webb: I was at Georgetown Law from '72 to '75, which was not the best time to be a Vietnam veteran attending an elite law school while South Vietnam was beginning to disappear as a separate country. I got to Georgetown Law right after the Watergate break-in and I graduated right after the fall of Saigon, and almost every day it was hell. And the way that I processed that transition was starting to write *Fields of Fire*. I actually was sitting in Constitutional Law class in my usual chosen place at the very back of the classroom and we were supposed to be debating the War Powers Act. All of a sudden, the debate shifted from a discussion about executive authority into a completely vile back and forth series of allegations about the evils of our involvement in Vietnam and the moral bankruptcy of the drug-doing baby killers who had fought there and all the rest of this stuff. And I just said to myself, "What if I could put these people into a combat unit for six months and make no judgments for them, morally or otherwise, but expose them to the moral ambiguities that we, your generational peers, had to face every single day at the same time we were trying to keep ourselves alive? What would you be saying right here if you were honest?"

And without really deciding to, I started writing this book. I didn't know where I was going. I had an engineering degree and I was studying for a law degree and this was literature. But I had to write it. It was a torturous process, but in the end it helped me enormously to sort out the whole thing; working with veterans, keeping up with the people. Luckily, I kept up with a lot of people I served with in my platoon, and still do. Some of my best friends in my life were Marines in my platoon, still to this day. Those things helped.

And in the issue of PTSD generally, I believe a lot of credit for understanding this issue goes to the Disabled American Veterans [DAV]. They were a unique organization during that period, in the late 1970s when I started working on the Hill. Their National Service Officers—the people who you want to help put together your VA claim and eventually the small group that was selected to represent the DAV at its National Headquarters—were mostly Vietnam combat wounded veterans out of the Army and Marines. At a time when few people in DC really understood what it meant to serve in combat in Vietnam, the top of the national staff of the Disabled American Veterans was filled with them. They became good friends and cohorts in a world where our generational peers had no idea of what we had been through. Rick Heilmann got his leg shot off as a Marine a recon unit just above the Arizona Valley, literally stitched off by a machine gun. Butch Joeckel was a rifleman in the 5th Marines and became a double amputee. Walt Phillips, another Marine, I think with the 7th Marines, lost a leg. Ron Drach, who served in the Army, got his leg blown off. Jesse Brown, another Marine, got shot in the Quang Nam region during Operation Starlight, and was a

hemiplegic. They got it. They understood it. And they were great allies when it came to the discussions about PTSD.

And so, before the VA even started this program the Disabled American Veterans started what they called “The Forgotten Warriors Project.” They knew something was wrong. These guys were the ground-breakers in terms of combat stress and how it affected you. And we did not limit this discussion to Vietnam. While I was a committee counsel on the Veterans Committee during this period, we did studies going all the way back to the Civil War. The World War I era was fascinating, looking at shell shock and how these things were handled. And we looked at the National Academy of Sciences study that showed about 25 percent of our World War II veterans experienced serious PTSD symptoms after the war. The Patton stories from World War II were good examples of how different approaches could provide different long-term results, like when he slapped a soldier who was experiencing shell shock and called him a coward and then the guy that he slapped went back into combat and became a recipient of the Silver Star for gallantry, our third-highest combat decoration.

Allison: Yep, exactly.

Webb: A big lesson was that if you allow someone to label themselves, they will never get away from it. The Brits had an experience in World War I where some people that had shell shock, they would send back to the front and most of them were okay. And the shell-shocked other people who they—however they discharged them at the time—for the rest of their lives they self-identified as being shell-shocked. There are ways to process this stuff. You never process the emotions. You just put them in the right place. Anyway, it’s a long answer.



Nevgloski: No, Sir.

Webb: In Quantico, I taught tactics. I taught weapons. In fact, I designed a course for the .45 at OCS. I wrote a drug package that was taught to everyone at OCS, not just to the officer candidates. It was an extension of my final lecture when I went through Instructor Training School. I'm sure you went to Instructor Training School.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: Gain attention, motivate [*chuckle*]. It was actually a good course: "Gain attention, motivate, outline and discuss your objectives, summarize, re-motivate." Something like that. I wrote a package about drugs for my final speech there, and OCS asked me to expand that to an entire drug lecture package. I ran two cycles of Officer Candidates [OCs]. One was OCs and one was PLC [Platoon Leaders' Class] seniors. Actually, it was a very interesting look at the difference in the typical lifecycles between those two groups at that time.

Allison: Between OCS and PLC candidates?

Webb: Yes. Because the draft was in place.

Allison: Oh, I see, right.

Webb: The PLCs were quite often people who had made up their minds about a lot of different things in their lives earlier. The OCs had a lot of people who got to the end of college and were like, "Oh geez, now what am I going to do?" And the PLCs were a lot livelier when you would have discussions about service and the conditions in the country at that time. In the school circles at night when we were doing tactical problems in the field, I liked to provoke my candidates and get discussions going on these kinds of issues. I'd sit there and ask open-ended Socratic questions, just to see how people

would react and what they would think. And the OCs generally were more afraid because if they got thrown out of OCS they would be on that train that whistled past Quantico at night, going down to the recruit depot at Parris Island where they would have to serve their time as enlisted Marines.

Allison: That's right.

Webb: And the PLCs were like, "Hey, I don't even have to go in the Marine Corps, even if I make it through this and you accept me." It was a total experiment for a lot of them, you know. But that was a lot of fun running both cycles. And actually the OC class; General [James T.] Conway was in our company, in the 5th Platoon.

Allison: He was OC.

Webb: Yeah. Don't get me wrong about the talent level involved. I'm just generalizing on these two groups.

Allison: Yes sir.

Webb: There were some very motivated folks in OC; a lot of athletes like General Conway who would wait until the end of college in terms of their decision cycle.

Yes, there was a course over there called the "Quigley Special." I don't know if it's still there are not.

Nevgloski: Quigley is still there, Sir.

Webb: Okay.

Nevgloski: It was nasty.

Webb: Yes. That platoon did not graduate until December 23d. It was bitter cold when they did the Quigley. It was literally freezing outside and the instructors were dropping all these smoke grenades on the candidates and shooting tons of blank rounds over them

and making them crawl through the water obstacles. I think we had 26 hypothermia cases sent to the hospital on that day. A lot of those were in the platoon that General Conway was in. He had a real hard-ass drill sergeant. As you might imagine, there were some congressional inquiries.

Allison: What do you remember about him?

Webb: I got to know General Conway later. I don't really have any memories of him there.

The DI's are an amazing group as you know.

Nevgloski: Yes, Sir.

Webb: Has there ever been a book done on the DI [drill instructor] cycle during Vietnam?

These Marines were pretty amazing.

Nevgloski: There was a video documentary that was done back in the late 1960s—and I think it was *60 Minutes*—and they interviewed quite a few drill instructors, but there's never been anything really definitive.

Webb: A lot of them were pulling full combat tours and then come back to 80 hours a week on the drill field. They were really overloaded and they did their duty. We can all tell a million stories about DIs. I liked to drop in on the squad bays without warning, sometimes coming in there at 11 at night just to see what was going on. The best way to supervise as a leader is to not have a firm schedule when you check on your troops. You know, battles don't have a schedule.

Allison: Be unpredictable.

Webb: We had a candidate who had left his M-14 on his rack and not locked-up in his wall locker. I walked into the squad bay really late one night and his DI had taken the M-14 into his desk area and completely disassembled it—I mean even the bolt—and had it

sitting on his desk all in front of him. And this candidate had his footlocker [*chuckle*] and he would carry his footlocker into the DI and the DI would give him one piece.

Nevgloski: [*Chuckle*]

Webb: . . . and he'd run it back, put it on his rack, and as soon as he got all his pieces, he had to figure out how to put it back together. And of course, reveille was going to happen at 0530.

I spent a lot of time in the field in Vietnam and I had had a bone infection that went into my left leg after I was wounded and I went back to the bush. It also turned out that a small piece of razor-like shrapnel had migrated into the joint space and I was grinding on it for months. I didn't know what was going on really. I mean I'd always been an athlete. But it basically had created a septic joint in my left leg with shrapnel that was tearing it apart. When I was running candidates, I started having serious problems with the leg. At one point I had a cylinder cast on it for like eight months. They gave me some surgeries, and put me a medical hold. They were going to separate me medically in 1971 and I said, "Give me a chance." I wanted another year to see if I could put things back together.

I had just met a really great doctor; Doctor John Pazell. This guy was a draftee. He was a brilliant orthopedist. He had been the varsity team's doctor at the University of Kansas. He'd been one of the first doctors ever to sew an arm back onto a kid who lost an arm in a wheat threshing accident. He knew the most modern surgical techniques and he was very cynical, even comical, about the military. Back then there were no real time slots for medical appointments like you have now. You go in at 0800 and you sign

in and then whenever a space opens up, even three or four hours later, they'd bring you in to a stall where you could see the doctor.

So, this was how I met Pazell. I finally got into the stall and I took my dress green jacket off and I'm waiting inside. I could hear him out there where he's checking my record book and he sees my uniform jacket and says, "Oh, look at all those ribbons. They look like Boy Scout merit badges." And then he walks in and he points at the top and goes, "Oh, what's that one? I haven't seen that one before," and I said, "Well, that's the Number Two Merit Badge." *[Laughter]* And he and I became really good friends. I mean he had something he wanted to do with me because I had lost ligaments; the ligaments inside and all. He called it the Joe Willie Namath program. He put me on it for a year; mostly a weight program. And that's what I was doing when I was in the Pentagon for that last year. I'd work on his program every day and then come down to Quantico every two weeks and see him.

He operated on me again in February 1972 and he said, "There's no way." You know he came in to see me after the surgery and he said, "You're done. You know you're going to have a straight leg by the time you're 40." So, I went ahead and did the medical board and they medicaled me out. I think it was very valuable that I was on the secretary of the Navy staff at that point, when I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no idea what I would do as a civilian. I had started writing. I was writing for my job for the first time since high school, writing all the time. I loved it. I wrote three magazine articles while I was in the job. One was on the fire team. One was on roles and missions, which got me in a hell of a lot of trouble with the Commandant of the Marine Corps. And the other was on looking at America's future role in Pacific Asia. "What is this

going to look like once the Vietnam War is over, one way or the other? How should we position ourselves?” And I started talking about Micronesia, Guam and the Northern Marianas and how we should consolidate strategically into an interior position. I was reading all the time. I just had this explosion of reading when I got back from Vietnam. And I read Liddell Hart’s *History of World War II* which was fascinating, at one point talking about Rommel in the desert and how he took advantage of the interior position; that he could stop the Brits who had a 10-1 advantage on armor, knock them down and turn around. The Americans had a 20-1 advantage and he could slow them down by occupying the interior position. And that was really my thought for Guam and the Northern Marianas, that we could consolidate into an interior position with a sea power presence forward and still maintain our strong presence in Asia. And when I did get into Law School I started writing. I just loved writing.

Allison: Had you written before that time; anything formal?

Webb: I’d written some odds and ends. I always loved literature. I had a minor in Literature at the Naval Academy. The engineering stuff, it just sucked the life out of me. So I read a lot. I’d written a lot of stuff. I had a couple small things published, like an editorial in the *Quantico Sentry* when I was at OCS. But this was the first time I really was putting big blocks of facts together into a new logic. And so I started doing that.

We probably should break right here because that’s how I got interested in Sam Green’s case. And that’s an amazing story, what happened to him, and it’s a very sad story. When I was on the secretary of the Navy’s staff I was in what used to be called the White House Liaison Section. We would do all Presidential correspondence, a lot of Secretarial correspondence, and fact sheets and point papers on all non-tactical

issues. I worked on a lot of fascinating individual cases. And then I had what we called the problem children, which were cases that received continuous congressional or media attention. There were about eight or nine Marines, most of whom had been convicted of homicide, but not all of them. There was one malcontent who was d——g off while he was up on a watch tower in Vietnam and decided he would see if he could bring an unexpended LAAW up to the tower and drop it back down to see if it would explode and instead it exploded when he was on the ladder, blowing him all to pieces, and the Marine Corps was saying, “Well that was not line of duty. It was due to your own misconduct and you’re not getting any veteran’s benefits” and the media and people in Congress were saying, how can you deny this poor guy veterans benefits when he’s blown to bits?” Stuff like that.

But there were some murder cases in Vietnam that I didn’t believe rose to the level of murder. Negligence, maybe. But if you had served out there you had to think about things like lapse of judgment, stupidity, mental exhaustion, and not necessarily murder. It can be negligent homicide or it could be reckless behavior. There was not a lot of public sentiment for these kinds of cases. And in particular, Sam Green’s case jumped to the top of the list for me. The case really bothered me. As a former company commander it bothered me. The squad leader who gave the orders had been acquitted, and Sam Green, the lowest member of the squad who obeyed his orders, was convicted.

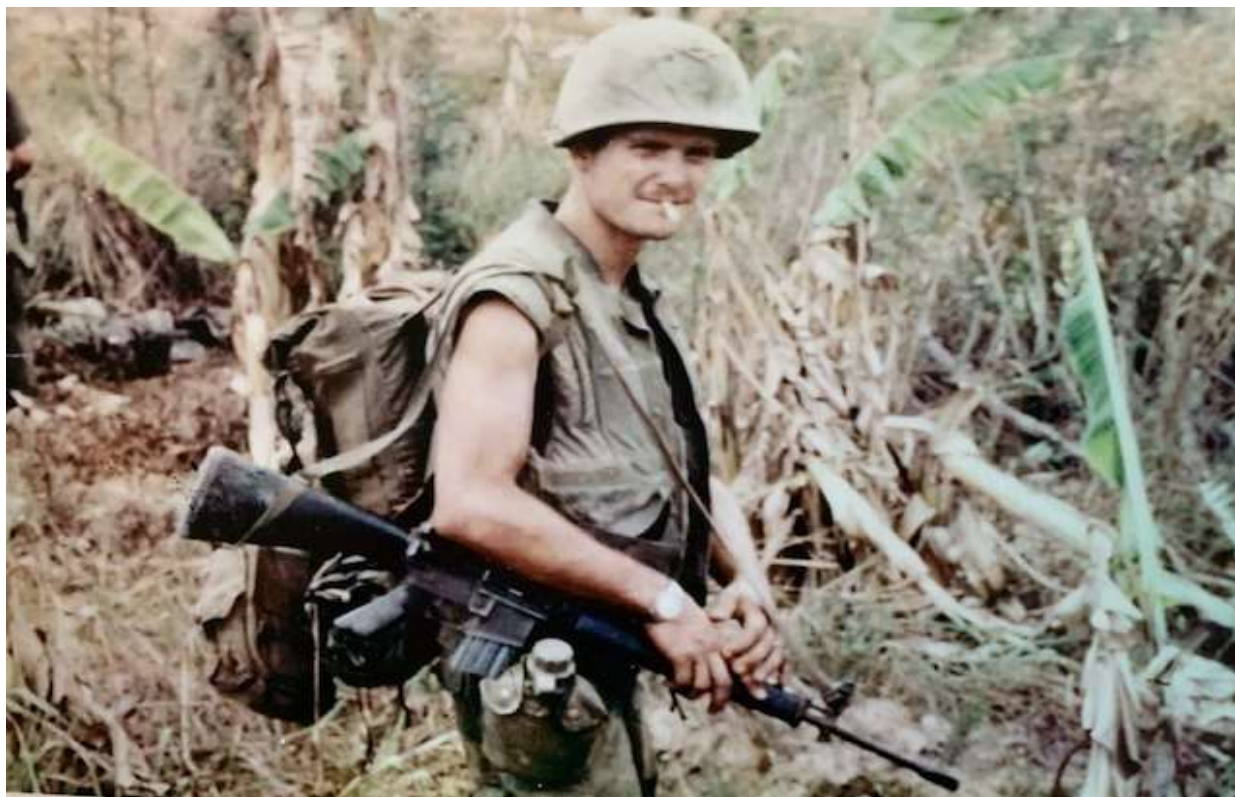
It was a case with five Marines on a killer team. I think it was Bravo 1/7. Sam Green had 11 days in Vietnam. He was a CAT-3B African American from Cleveland. He’d been on a federal narcotics farm when he was in his mid-teens. But his proficiency and conduct scores in Boot Camp were four six, and four seven on a scale of five. You

think about that. He couldn't spell his middle name; George, but he was highly motivated. And in the 11 days he'd been in Vietnam there had been three incidents with civilians where the civilians were actively helping the other side and had been taken under fire by the Company. They send this five-man killer team out in the ville at night and basically the patrol leader went crazy. He starts pulling people out of their hooches saying, "I've got orders from the Lieutenant to shoot these people."

He's shooting. Everybody's shooting. Green shoots. I think there were 16 people killed. Of the five Marines who were charged, one turned state's evidence and his charges were dropped. His best friend, who went out on the patrol with them, had a civilian lawyer from a small town in Ohio who came into Vietnam, his fees paid for by local citizens who donated to his defense. He got off. Herrod, the patrol leader who gave all the orders, got a civilian lawyer under similar circumstances, donations from people in his hometown, and he got off. Then you have Green; a black kid from Cleveland, and Schwarz, who was a kid from West Virginia. They both had military lawyer right out of law school trying the most complicated homicide case you can imagine. Because legally you have a right to shoot a weapon. The question is, do you understand when you're not supposed to shoot. So those two got convicted. Green got convicted of 15 murders, and I said, "This is not right." I represented him pro bono for six years. He killed himself halfway through it. But I did finally clear his name. So anyway, we can talk more about this later.

*End of Session II*





*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Go Noi Island, May 1969.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Enemy bunker, Go Noi Island, June 1969.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Arizona Valley 1,000-yard stare, May 1969.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

An Hoa Basin from the air.





*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Awarded the Navy Cross.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Awarded the Silver Star.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

First award, Bronze Star.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Second award, Bronze Star (as captain).

U.S. MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION  
Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Senator James H. Webb Jr.  
Date: 27 February 2018  
Interview Length: 1:51:53  
Interviewers: Dr. Fred H. Allison and Dr. Bruce Norton

SESSION III

Allison: This is a continuation of the interview with Senator James H. Webb, W-E-B-B, Jr., by Fred Allison. And today's date is the 27th of February 2018 and the interview is going to be done at his office in Arlington, Virginia. And joining me, Fred Allison, is Bruce Norton; Doc Norton, and he'll be sitting in on the interview.

Webb: We'll talk a little bit about the period leading up to when I started writing because I wrote three articles during my last year in the Marine Corps, two of them pretty controversial in terms of policy and national strategy. And it's an interesting way to discuss how the Marine Corps innovates which is one reason I wrote about something as basic as the Fire Team concept.

When I got back from Vietnam I was stationed at OCS. I ran a PLC platoon and an OC platoon. I taught tactics, weapons, and wrote the package for the .45-caliber pistol, which they were not teaching until then. I wrote the drugs package there for the whole command, not just for the officer candidates, and I taught that.

I was deep selected for Captain in 1971. I think there 16 of us who were promoted early. And while I was running my second platoon of OCs [Officer Candidates] I started having a lot of serious trouble with my leg. When I was wounded, I took a square piece of shrapnel through the knee joint and developed a deep wound

infection in it. I went back to the bush before it was all the way healed. I mean there were so many people who were more messed up than I was. I really wasn't thinking about it. But what I didn't know was that the infection had stayed and a very small piece of razor-like shrapnel had migrated there and I developed a septic joint. So, I started having surgeries on my leg and I was trying to stay in the Marine Corps.

They gave me one surgery in 1971 and the doctors offered to board me out. I said, "Look, I really like commanding troops. There's a lot of parts about the Marine Corps that are frustrating but I love commanding troops and you can't replicate that anywhere." So, they gave me another year. I had a great doctor; John Pazell, who was drafted. He'd been the surgeon for the varsity teams at the University of Kansas. He was a real pioneer in orthopedic surgery. He was one of the first people that reattached a severed limb, for a kid who lost an arm in a threshing accident. He was very smart. He put me on what they called a "Joe Willie Namath" program. I had lost a ligament down there, and he was showing me how to rebuild the joint by building up the quads. I lifted weights every day. He operated on me again in early '72 and after the surgery he came to my hospital bed and said, "This ain't going anywhere. You're actually going backwards. The joint is basically destroyed." And so, I was medically retired from the Marine Corps in 1972.

Allison: Were they not doing knee replacements in those days?

Webb: Not really, but I've since had a knee replacement. Even eight or nine years later the early ones were terribly bad. I had friends who had them early on and they were like falling all over the place.

But anyway, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. When they put me on medical hold, I was brought to secretary of the Navy staff in the White House liaison section. It was a fascinating year. There were very few Marines in the Pentagon. It was pretty ironic as a combat Marine who's been out there doing the hard stuff, and then there were so few in the Pentagon, not just in policy positions but in staff positions. And so, I started thinking about that.

In the White House liaison office, we had two Marines and four Navy officers. We did fact sheets, point papers, plus all the non-operational correspondence that went to the President regarding the Marine Corps. We did secretary of the Navy requests. So for the first time since I was in high school I was writing every day and it was great because it was now my job. And in addition to my job, I was sitting on the information capital of the world in terms of data if I wanted to write about other things. And for the first time I actually had the time to do it. For years I'd been used to working 24/7 in combat and 80-hour workweeks back home. You know you're running officer candidates you're out in the field three or four nights a week, etc., etc. Now I had a regular workday. I had interesting stuff that I was doing. And I had time to read a lot.

I'd started devouring books when I was in Quantico after coming back from Vietnam. I had read out the professional section of the Breckinridge library, such as it was. And I had found a fascinating little book in the Breckinridge Library, which got me going on what would become the *Roles and Missions* article I wrote a year later while I was on the SecNav staff. The book was called *The Air Force Plans for Peace*. And it was either a master's or a doctoral thesis by a person who was an Air Force academy professor. The Air Force had gotten temporary autonomy from the Army

during World War II and he wanted to know whether they did any planning before the end of World War II that would help them gain permanent independence as a full military Service after the war was done and if so was it directed toward their permanent independence, or was it just basic strategy? It was fascinating. You know it was not one of these page turners but there was a lot of data in there—especially because I grew up in the Air Force.

Allison: Right, your father was an Air Force pilot.

Webb: Yes. He used to argue with me about, “Why should there be a Marine Corps?” and I’d go, “Wait a minute, why should there be an Air Force? Every other Service has an air force. Why do we need you as a separate Service?” You know we used to go back and forth. And it turned out that the Air Force in 1943 had put together two top secret offices in the Pentagon. One was headed by a two-star and one by a one-star, so they were both headed by flag officers, looking at the issues of where they should strategically place their bases and their assets and what arguments they should make in terms of getting permanent autonomy. One of those arguments was to go heavily towards strategic bombing. They’d been doing this since the 1930s to get away from troops.

Allison: Sure.

Webb: You know, close air support and those sorts of things.

Allison: They were smitten by [Giulio] Douhet.

Webb: I looked at that and I said, “Okay, what did the other services do?” And he had laid out the whole thing in his book. The Army was like, “We’re busy, but we’ll get to it when the war’s over” and the Navy had said, “Well we’ve done a little bit here” and the Marine Corps was off the table. The Marine Corps had no voice at all. So, then I started



reading about the time period right after World War II when they tried to do away with the Marine Corps, and Secretary Forrestal's Key West meetings with the service chiefs to sort out roles and mission. The Key West Agreements came out of the meetings.

And the interesting thing which I wrote about in the article that I mentioned was the Marine Corps wasn't even represented in the Key West meetings. It was represented by the CNO, the same way as naval air was. So they had no voice in the Key West agreements, and then what they called "Functions Papers" that came out of this in 1948. In the end there was legislation that basically saved the Marine Corps because it codified three active divisions, which was one thing the Marine Corps was pushing. But in terms of its roles and missions it just said, "You are an amphibious force." Period. And the Army had exactly the same mission written into Function Papers. The only difference was that the Marine Corps was assigned a security role onboard ships, which they don't really do anymore like they used to. I looked at that and said, "How does that affect the ability of the Marine Corps to articulate its true functions? There's only one war that the Marine Corps has been purely amphibious and that's World War II. Look at all these other things the Marine Corps has done. How does it fully articulate its missions? How does it get funding? How does it get the right understanding about what it's doing?"

At that time the Commandant of the Marine Corps wasn't even a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had to "declare interest" on a Marine Corps matter in order to get into the discussions. I looked at the unified and joint command structure; the flags out there. There were none that were allocated to the Marine Corps. I think the Marine Corps had one but it was actually a Navy billet that the Navy let them fill.

So at 25 years old, I sat down and I said, “This is not right.” And that’s the first thing I ever wrote at full-length. I had written some editorials on Quantico and that sort of stuff but I really spent some time on this one. I sent it to the *Marine Corps Gazette*. It was called “Roles and Missions; Time for a Change,” and laid out all these arguments. Among other things I said, “If you don’t have this recognition it’s how you end up with paper structures like Strike Command, which was basically nothing more than paper matchups of Army and Air Force tactical units to do what the Marine Corps does anyway.

And so I sent it the *Gazette*, thinking that was a pretty good piece. And about three or four weeks later I get this letter saying, “Thank you very much for this well written submission. Unfortunately, we’re not going to publish it.”

Allison: [Chuckle]

Webb: And I went, “What am I doing wrong here? What do I need to fix?” So, I called the editor of the *Gazette*. I was going down to Quantico every two weeks to see Dr. Pazell and I said, “Sir, I worked really hard on this. I want to get better. What can I do that you would publish it?” And he said, “Why don’t you send that to the Naval Institute *Proceedings*.” [Laughter] And I said, “Because I want Marines to read it.” And he said, “Well let me tell you.” He said, “Our board spent a majority of the whole board time arguing about this piece.” He said, “Half of the people thought you’re a heretic and half of the people said this article really needs to get out there. And we sent it up to General [Louis H.] Wilson, [who commanded the Ed Center at the time], and he said, ‘No’.”

So I said, “Can I come and talk to you about where I need to fix it?” He said, “Captain, you’re really going after the Army. You’re talking about Strike Command,”

and some other stuff. I said, “Can I just talk to you about it and rewrite it?” [Chuckle] So I went down and saw him on one of my bi-weekly visits down there and sat down with him and he circled three or four places and he said, “This is too strong. I mean the general officers are going to get trouble on this, but also this, this, this and this.” And so I said, “Okay,” and I took it back and I rewrote those passages and I sent it up, and the second time you see something your emotions aren’t the same as the first time. And so, they agreed to publish it. I think it was March of 1972. It was a month before the article on how to fix the fireteam.

As I recall that’s the only issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette* in that era where they did not have an editor’s page [chuckle]. When the article got published, the Commandant of the Marine Corps blew his stack. It was [General Robert E.] Cushman at the time. He required General Wilson to bring in a briefing team on editorial policies on the *Gazette*. He ordered two officers at Command and Staff to write a rebuttal article which they published one month after I had been medically retired and rumored to be purged from the Marine Corps, saying, “Why trade a Cadillac for an Edsel?”

And I’m sitting there going, “Holy Toledo, I’m 25 years old. I would have to have waited another 25 years in order to make these points if I were on active duty.” And you can make people think. During that period, I met General Chaisson. Remember John Chaisson; Mad John? His son was one of my FOs in Vietnam. He was a really smart guy. He was one of my favorite generals when I was on active duty. Every now and then in the Secretary of the Navy’s office they would bring us into some other functions, you know some of the young captains that were there. I went over to say hello to General Chaisson and he immediately exploded, right in the middle of this

reception. “What the hell do you think were you doing?” I said, “Sir, this is what—” He cut me off and backed me all the way across the room into this buffet table and he’s making his argument on it. He says, “Do you know what that did to us down here in the tank?” because I think he was the chief of operations for the Marine Corps at the time. He was a three-star.

Finally, I said, “Okay, Sir, all right.” and he goes, “No, don’t stop arguing!” *[Laughter]* He said, “You’ve got to come and see me. I want to talk to you.” And I went, “Aye, aye, Sir.” And the next day I’m waking up going, “There’s no way in hell I’m going to call a three-star general and say I want to come by and have a talk.” So, I never followed up on that.

But that was that article. And actually, similar to some other stuff that I’ve written, I mean that was like they semi-buried it for a while. But later on when I was a committee counsel in the Congress, the debate came up on the Rapid Deployment Force in the late 1970s the Marine Corps liaison to the Congress, dusted that article off and used it. They said, “We are the Rapid Deployment Force.” And you know it had a long life. But that was an eye opener, not only to have it out there but to know if you put your thoughts together and make a cogent argument you can impact the way people at least talk about things, you know to get people to talk about things, and also the price you can pay *[chuckle]* if you do that.

Then there was the article on the fireteam. I had wanted, ever since I got back from Vietnam, to write a piece on how to put some flexibility into the fireteam concept. Because in the bush of Vietnam we did it. Marines are great tactical innovators and the young lieutenants and company commanders had figured this out. You know you had

a fire team that was based on a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] that didn't exist anymore, and it was supposedly the smallest maneuver element. But as you said Bruce, if you get two casualties, you're not a maneuver element anymore. I was in contact on one patrol where I ordered fire team rushes and one Marine got up and started running and I said, "What are you doing?" and the squad leader said, "that's my first fire team."

*[Laughter]*

Allison: *[Laughter]*

Webb: And so the 5th Marines, or at least our battalion, generally cannibalized the third rifle squad, just fed them into two rifle squads and got the gun squads in for the third to do the triangular concept where guns were permanently with different platoons. And it was flexible because sometimes when things are really going good, you might have seven or eight Marines in a fireteam and then when things are going bad you still pretty much had a viable option. It was kind of funny because that article came out a month after the "Role and Missions" article. And in the Pentagon when that "Roles and Missions" article came out, none of these senior Marines wanted to talk to me; on the secretary of the Navy staff or whatever. The "Flexibility and the Fire Team" article came out and Major Dabney's down there banging on my door wanting to discuss it.

Allison: He really liked it, huh?

Webb: Yeah, all the Marines wanted to talk about that.

Then the third major article I wrote during that period was about Micronesia and particularly Marianas Islands and their strategic importance. I was sitting there thinking "The Vietnam War is going to end. We can't really figure out how, right now, it's going to end, but it will, and then how are we going to position ourselves in Asia?"

I thought it was going to end kind of like the way Iraq ended, and Korea for that matter; that you did it with sort of a stale but no win on either side, stale, work it out over a longer period of time. One of the things that was good on that was the evolution of the younger ARVN leaders in my age group, because I worked with some of them—I think I mentioned it when we were talking about Vietnam when I was a company commander. They were good—and that if we could just hold on until these guys really started running things, they'd have a chance.

Allison: Yeah.

Webb: But we had to start figuring out how we were going to reposition the United States military in the Pacific. I was reading constantly during that period and I was impressed reading about Rommel in the desert and how he had assumed a strategic interior position—Liddell Hart wrote about this really well in his history of World War II. By inserting himself in the interior position he could fight the Brits on one side and the Americans on the other. At one time he was outnumbered like 10 to 1 in mobile armor and transports, and about 10 to 1 in mechanized vehicles by the Brits and like 20 to 1 by the Americans. But in the interior position he could better use his assets; switching them to concentrate his firepower.

I started reading about Guam and the Marianas Islands. There were like 202,000 Americans on Guam at the end of World War II and about, I think 75,000 on Tinian, and another—this is all off the top of my head—about 38,000 on Saipan. A lot of our positioning around the rest of Asia was just where the tanks and the ships stopped at the end of World War II. And we had the post-Korean War obligation which fixed a lot of our force structure up there. But I started thinking, “We’re going to have fiscal

drawdowns for the military after Vietnam. We're going to have probably manpower drawdowns. If you could realign these bases into an interior position, strategically Guam and the Marianas Islands, with a strong sea power presence forward, then you can do the job and you can pick where you want to fight." And at that time, we were tied up in the possibility of getting involved with local conflicts without being able to decide whether or how we should do it.

So, I wrote this piece, including an analysis of the political issues out there. It was a United Nations Strategic Trust at the time. That came out in July of 1972 in the Naval Institute *Proceedings*. I worked with a great editor over there named Clay Barrow, a former Marine. I don't know if you ever heard of Clay Barrow. He was a legend, a terrific editor.

Allison: I've heard of him.

Webb: He made me add a section in there on Pete Ellis and how Pete Ellis had predicted the importance of Micronesia in Japanese battle plans for World War II 20 years before the war.

So anyway, July was when I was retired from the Marine Corps and this article came out, and you know in the meantime I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no idea what civilians did. I had done no planning on it. All I knew is I wanted to serve and I was at a good place in the secretary of the Navy staff. His Marine Corps aide was general-to-be, Schultz. He was Colonel Richard Schultz. A terrific leader. And he really pulled me under his wing when I was going through the medical stuff. He said, "What do you want to do?" and I said, "Well I want to serve my country." And he started thinking, you know going through his own brain, he goes, "What about the

environment?” I’m like, “Yeah.” We were just starting to talk about all this environment stuff. And he had a friend, one of his contemporaries in the Marine Corps; a Navy Cross recipient in Korea named Bill Holmberg, who was working in the EPA in the Office of Federal Activities and he said he would talk to him. Then there was another guy named Howard Westwood who was a Marine DI in World War II. Howard Westwood was enormously helpful to me during that period when I decided to go to law school. He had been one of the founding partners of Covington and Burling which is a huge international law firm. He had created the Civil Aeronautics Board in his spare time when he was 27 years old. A brilliant lawyer. And then when World War II came, he was 32 years old he volunteered to be a “Dollar a Year Man” in the Marine Corps and he was such an asset they kept him at Parris Island as a DI, which he used to say was one of the great experiences of his life.

Schultz introduced me to Bill Holmberg, and they had a slot that was opening up in the Office of Federal Activities so I interviewed for it and Holmberg started championing me for it and I got the job. They transitioned me over there when I still had like six weeks left in the Marine Corps to fill the job. It was basically what I’d been doing on the secretary of the Navy staff except doing it with the Department of Transportation and the federal highways impact statements and those sorts of things. So, I got over there and my desk was already piled up with paperwork. I worked my way through it, and after four days I’m looking at this guy sitting in the corner. He was like in his 50s. I’m like, “Okay, if everything goes right for me in 30 years I’m going to be right over there.” *[chuckle]* So four days on the job, I knocked on Holmberg’s door. Holmberg was busy saving the world. He was a very interesting guy.



He said, “Yeah, yeah, what do you want?” I said, “Bill, I can’t do this.” He said, “What do you mean you can’t do this? You’ve done more in four days than the last guy did in three months.” I said, “Well I was just trying to find my desk. But you know something, I just can’t do this. I don’t want to do this.” He said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I really don’t know.” I said, “I’ve got \$8,000 in the bank. I think I’ll take a few months and kind of sort it out and then I think maybe I’ll apply to law school.” He said, “You want to go to law school?” I said, “Yeah, I think I’m going to go to law school.” He said, “I want you to meet Howard Westwood.” He made a phone call and he calls me back and he said, “Go have lunch with Howard Westwood at the Metropolitan Club.” I said, “What’s the Metropolitan Club?” He said, “It’s a club for all these people who are lawyers and stuff like that.” And he said, “He’ll meet you in the lobby at noon.” I said, “How am I going to recognize him?” He says, “He’s going to recognize you because you’re the only guy in there who’s under the age of 50.”

Allison: *[Chuckle]*

Norton: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: And Howard Westwood sat me down and peeled me back like an onion. I mean, it was an incredible conversation and he really wanted to make sure that if he was going to try to help me; I was capable of doing it and whatever. He kind of championed me because it was too late really. By this time, it was May.

Allison: 1972?

Webb: Yeah, and to apply to get accepted to law school I hadn’t even taken the LSATs yet. But Westwood picked up the phone and said, “Look, this is a guy—” He had my GCT scores and what I’d done in the Naval Academy and all this other stuff. He said, “This

guy's getting medicaled out of the Marine Corps. Talk to him." I ended up getting accepted to four law schools [*chuckle*]. I took the LSATs in July. I did really well in them. And the two that I really was torn about were Georgetown and UVA, which was the dream school of going down there.

Allison: A great reputation.

Webb: Yeah. And I'd like to say, if I'd gone to UVA Law School, I might have law clerked and someday become a senator [*laughter*]. I went to Georgetown because I'd already had a house here and I said, "I'll just go here." Georgetown Law was radicalized. It was unbelievable. And the difference for me was I had to take apart everything I ever believed in and rethink it and not yield to any of what I thought were the transitory arguments that were going on, but really understand why I believed what I believed. I've often said, "I'd rather have spent three more years in Vietnam than three years at Georgetown Law School. It was not a fun experience but it really helped me learn how to fight with my brain. So that's sort of that trajectory."

Now back up on Sam Green. I don't know how much we did. But when I was on the secretary of the Navy's staff one of the areas that I had was what we called "The Problem Children." These were Marines who'd been convicted of homicides, most of them in Vietnam. There were a couple of them that were not. One guy was a guard at a gate at a stateside base and told somebody to stop at the entrance and he kept driving on, and he pulled out his .45 and said, "Stop," and he didn't stop and he shot the guy. But most of them were Vietnam. And there were some cases where I didn't have any sympathy for people and there were cases where I went, "Whoa, I know that area. I know what the tempo was." And there's some of these people out here that said, "This

is not murder. Maybe it's negligent homicide, maybe it's nothing, but these aren't murders."

And there were three or four cases that really jumped out at me, but Sam Green's jumped out at me the most. Now here's a kid that's 18 years old, black guy from the ghetto, couldn't spell his middle name, George, a CAT-3B enlistee, and yet he'd gotten 4.6 and 4.7 scores out of boot camp, which was like making the dean's list. The guy was motivated. He had 11 days in Vietnam. At three different times, there were incidents where the civilians were involved in one way or another in encounters with their rifle company. Goes out on a night patrol. The leader of patrols has got Herrod, who then had been recommended for the Silver Star when he was up in the 3d Marine Division and came down. But he was like, he knew what was going on. And he went down there and he basically lost it; Herrod lost it. On the facts that were presented, they took some fire going into this ville at night and they were on a killer team patrol about 400 meters outside the lines, and Herrod just started pulling people out of the family bunkers and saying, "I've got orders from the lieutenant, shoot." And 16 civilians were killed. There's a book written about this. *Son Thang*; a Gary Solis book.

You know I've written about it and Bob Timberg wrote about it in his book too. And I looked at that and said, "What would I do as a company commander?" As a company commander I'd have charged Herrod with murder, and these other guys like Sam Green, maybe negligent homicide. He's obeying orders. It's the most complicated homicide case that can be litigated. You have a military person on a military mission with a weapon and he is ordered by a superior to shoot, and you've got to get inside his head. If he completely knows that that's wrong and he doesn't have the duty to obey

and he shoots, that's murder. If he kind of should have known but willingly participated, you know there's an area you call reckless homicide. And if he just plain out should have known and didn't, that's negligent homicide.

So anyway, I would brief all these cases, up to congressional staffs and those sorts of things, and when I got to law school I kept thinking about his case; Sam Green's case. And at Christmas break, my first year in law school, armed with almost a semester of criminal law [*chuckle*], I called Commander John Jenkins who was the legal assistant to the assistant secretary of the Navy for Manpower—I had worked with him a lot on a lot of different manpower issues, legal issues and whatever. He is just a terrific guy. I mean really, he was one of the reasons I got interested in law school. But I told him, "Look, I've got enough to do here but I'm wondering if maybe there's a way to help Sam Green. His case has been denied appeal by the Court of Military Appeals. He was convicted, dishonorable discharge, 15 murders as an aider and abettor, model prisoner when he was in prison. You know they convict him of 15 murders and they give him a five-year sentence. You know the system, something's wrong here. I mean they can't sort it out."

I think Green got out of prison after a year or a year and a half. But something was wrong. You've got a dishonorable discharge. You know, "What did you do in Vietnam?" "Oh, I was convicted of 15 murders." And so, I told Jenkins, "Can you get me his pretrial and his trial records?" But by the way, when he was convicted then there was a mandatory review by the Court of Military Review which is below the Court of Military Appeals. And they had a really strong dissent there but they upheld the

conviction. The Court of Military Appeals wouldn't listen to it so his case was dead in terms of trying to get it relitigated.

So, I called Jenkins and said, "I want to see if there's anything in there." And he pulled out the pretrial and the whole trial and he got me a desk and he put me right in his office and he said, "Go to it." And so that's where I spent my whole Christmas break. I read through thousands of pages of stuff and I went, "No, this guy, an 18-year-old, he screwed up but this is not murder." So, I wrote a paper on this which won a legal writing competition at Georgetown. It was called "The Sad Saga of Sam Green: Presenting the Case for the Reasonable and Honest War Criminal." *Reasonable and honest* is a term of law. And there were a few people there who nicknamed me "The Reasonable and Honest Fascist."

Norton: [Chuckle]

Webb: Go right ahead. Then I found that there was a lawyer in Cleveland—he was a real estate lawyer; Jim Chiara, was kind of semiretired—who had been trying to help Green. And so, I called him and I talked to him and I sent in what I'd written, and over the course of the next year I wrote about a 20,000, maybe longer, word document that's called a "Collateral Attack," which is a very complicated legal procedure to try to get it into the Federal court system. Chiara you know, I was still a law student—signed it and submitted it to the district court.

Allison: Chiara was a Cleveland lawyer—how had he gotten involved?

Webb: This wasn't his area. He wasn't really a criminal lawyer. He was just trying to help. This was all pro bono. Everything I did was pro bono. I called him after I'd written this first paper and started talking to him. I don't remember the timing when we submitted

the Collateral Attack, but the idea of a Collateral Attack is in order to get something out of the military court system after the appeal process is exhausted and you have to show grave Constitutional error. It's not just that they were wrong but they were not interpreting the United States Constitution correctly. That was a high bar. And so I wrote this. It had three different allegations about where this was wrong—and it's been a long, long time since I did this—but one of them was that in the military court system you don't have a jury. You have a court that is convened based on what they call "The most qualified requirement." You assemble a military court; the people on that court that are best qualified to hear this case. And I'd looked at Green's and there was not one member of that courts-martial who had ever served with an infantry battalion, or lower, in combat.

And one of the other ones was privity of command. This is, you know with his skill level and the fact that he'd been ordered to shoot and the standard that they apply in order to break that apart—they actually used it in [William] Calley too. In the Calley case, I found that if—this is the way they brief the military court—the reasonable and honest Marine in that situation would have known that that's an illegal order, then you must find that this person did know that it was an illegal order. I said, "This is just wrong." Voluntary homicide is based on *mens rea*; that this person really did know, not that if the guy standing next to him should have known.

And there was a third one and I can't remember.

But Chiara was pretty optimistic and Green was optimistic that somebody was helping him, and we submitted it to the district court and the judge found against us. I was still in law school and I had like six Federal Justice Department lawyers writing

all this stuff on the other side and I'm in law school, studying, doing this, doing that. I still think it was a really strong case. But anyway, the judge says, "I can't find grave Constitutional error but this is wrong." The judge said, "When the person who gave the orders was not convicted—" I think I probably mentioned this the last time – there were five people on the killer team. One turned state's evidence. He got off. Two had civilian attorneys from their hometown, had a lot of money, and they took collections in their hometowns, one in Ohio and one in Oklahoma, and the ones with civilian attorneys got off. And they had one kid from West Virginia and Green. Both had Marine Corps lawyers right out of law school. You go to law school, go to Basic School and then you're in Vietnam trying the most complicated murder case you can try, and they got convicted. And so, the judge wrote a letter to [J. William] Middendorf, who was secretary of the Navy, and he said, "You should really exercise your clemency power on this because I can't find grave Constitutional error, but it's not right." Middendorf's office answered with a form letter like, "Thank you for your letter and you can submit this case to the BCNR and within six months to a year and a half they'll review it." And my man went out and killed himself.

Then I finally argued that case in 1978 in front of the Correction Board and we got his discharge upgraded to honorable conditions. They still put "Misconduct" on there but I got his discharge upgraded from "Dishonorable" to a "General Under Honorable Conditions," and it meant a lot to his mom. So that's Sam Green.

Allison: In that book, *Son Thang*, one thing caught my eye. It said that Marines going into Vietnam had to sign a waiver of some sort about the ROE. Do you remember anything about that?

Webb: Okay, yeah. Gary Solis and I don't agree on Sam Green.

Allison: Oh really?

Webb: I mean I've never really had it out with him. I like him. He's a friend. But I know in his book I think he thinks that this was—whatever. But I don't think privates signed anything. I signed.

Allison: That's what I was going to ask; did you have to sign that?

Webb: Yes, but even that wasn't in any great detail. They started doing it, I think, after the Calley thing, where you come in; the division had you check in the division to get your assignment to your regiment and, "These are the rules of engagement."

One of the things that they asked in Sam Green's courts-martial was—I think they asked his battalion commander—"Do you ever know of a case of Green's who in like Parris Island are instructed on when not to obey an order?" And you know it might be clear to you and me but, you know, not really. I mean I'm not trying to exonerate what he did. I'm just saying it wasn't murder. I mean it was a screw-up and people died.

Allison: A tough thing to do. His platoon commander was Oliver North, wasn't it?

Webb: No, Herrod's former platoon commander was Ollie North.

Allison: He wasn't in command at that time though?

Webb: No. But North went over and testified in Herrod's trial.

Allison: Yeah, on his behalf?

Webb: Yeah, yeah, on Herrod's behalf, and Herrod wasn't convicted.

So anyway, Sam Green [*chuckle*].

Allison: [*Chuckle*]

Webb: Roles and Missions [*inaudible*].



Allison: Tinian and Guam.

Webb: Yes.

Allison: Any more on that?

Webb: Yes.

Allison: Okay. I thought there might be more on that.

Webb: Yes. I got out of the Marine Corps in July and I start law school and I tried to do all this law school stuff.

Allison: A real cultural shift for you.

Webb: Yes. And you know this was not the age of internet or emails or any of that stuff. And so in October, somebody sent me a front-page editorial in the *Pacific Daily News*, “Who is James Webb?” It’s like a front page and like a whole separate page inside saying, “Who is this guy? Has he ever served on Guam? Clearly somebody wrote this for him and this is the DOD’s trial balloon for gearing up the military basing system on Guam.

Allison: This is the article that was in *Proceedings*?

Webb: Well yeah. They responded to the article—and I didn’t know it—it came out and I know nothing, and all of a sudden in October they send me this front-page editorial and it was like a full page inside the *Pacific Daily News*. It was a Gannett newspaper. It was like 100,000 circulation. It wasn’t just a rag out there. And so [*chuckle*] I’m reading this and I’m going, “Holy s——t, here we go again.”

And so, I wrote the editor of the *Pacific Daily News* a letter and I basically said, “You know, I don’t think this is the DOD’s trial balloon but they should be doing what I was saying in here. And yes, I wrote it. And Pete Ellis, by the way, had never visited

most of these places that he analyzed before World War II when he was predicting World War II. He had it down to tidal currents, beach lines, etc., etc. And because I haven't served on Guam doesn't mean I can't research it and tell you the history of it and how things need to go." So, we started back and forth with this correspondence and the guy who ran the Territorial Planning Commission for the Governor of Guam was a guy named John Gilliam who had studied at the London School of Economics, real, real smart, and did not love the military. Let's just put it that way. When he was in Washington, he came in to see me. We had dinner and talked about this. He was completely on the other side in terms of whether the military should go up.

There was a fascinating phenomenon on Guam and that is that if you were a teacher in a DOD school system you were not draft eligible [*chuckle*]. So, you had a lot of these people who really were anti-war and were sitting around these military bases teaching their kids. And in Guam, some of them who got out stayed there and they had a very left-wing community on Guam. So, Gilliam and I talked about this and he said, "All right," and they invited me to come out. They had an economic conference in June of 1973 and he invited me to be the keynote speaker. It was right in the middle of my law school exams and so I couldn't make that. But [*chuckle*] Howard Westwood, the guy at Covington and Burling, really was kind of mentoring me. He wanted me to spend the summer as a clerk at Covington and Burling. And I said, "You know Mr. Westwood, I've been sitting on my ass over a year at this law school and I've got to go do something." I had my gray ID card from when I was medically retired and so I flew Space "A" to Guam [*chuckle*], you know bouncing around from military airport to

airport, no sleep, and then they get you on an extra seat on a cargo plane and away you go.

And I got out to Guam and I think I spent like a couple hundred dollars in two weeks. I stayed at the Micronesia Hotel, \$8 a night. I was the only “haole” in the hotel, you know islanders in there. The sewer backed up in my sink one morning when I was shaving.

Allison: Nice!

Webb: But I hooked up with Gilliam and he loaned me a car and so I drove all around the island looking at the military facilities. I flew up to Saipan and spent a couple of days. I had a friend from law school who was from Saipan and I slept in one of their backrooms when I was up at Saipan. I walked the battlefields.

Allison: Hmm. That must have been interesting.

Webb: In fact, I’ve got some stuff up here from those battlefields. In Saipan at the end of World War II they did one DOD ammo sweep and that was it. Then they carved off the northern part of the island and I think they were training special ops Chinese nationals up there. They had just reopened it in 1972. It was like walking into a time warp going back in these battlefields. And I found all kinds of stuff. I found one Japanese Army cave that had just opened up and was loaded with all kind of stuff. You know, there were historical treasures over there.

But anyway, I poked around and met with some of the leaders out there, just talking to them about my views on the issue and met with some of the Guamanian leaders. I met with the editor of *Pacific Daily News* and was very well treated. I came back and wrote my first book on Micronesia and America’s Pacific strategy. I was

actually going to write a follow-on article for the *Proceedings* but I just kept writing and writing and finally I had about a hundred and some pages so I said, “Hmm, maybe this is a book?”

Allison: Right.

Webb: Praeger reviewed it and they published it. I went back out there the next year and refined my strategic views. I kept in contact with Gilliam and other people and the next year I worked as a consultant for the Territorial Planning Commission, spending three months going over every square inch of Guam, Tinian, and Saipan. I went up to Okinawa and looked at the training areas, talked with people up there and gave them my view, which I’ve still got, of how you can reorient the American military into a Guam-Tinian axis with a sea power presence forward. I think everything that I said in there still holds up. When I got to the Senate in 2007 it was one of the number one issues, politically even, in Japan. Our side keeps kicking this thing down the road. I’d been out there many times long before I ran for the Senate talking to people in Guam, Okinawa, etc.

So, I wrote this study, examining military bases and retention areas facility by facility, giving my view of how you could fit a large portion of the American military into a Guam/Tinian axis. The thing that doesn’t hold up now is that we don’t have the sea power that we did then. You could only do this, I think, in a credible way with more naval forces. And that’s the big differential, although they’re making some good moves out there. That’s for another time.

So where are we now?

Allison: What was your impression of the people's view that were in Guam or Tinian—the native folk?

Webb: Well, 1974. Okay. Tinian's fascinating [*chuckle*]. I want to talk about Tinian in a minute just because it's such an amazing story. But Guam—1974 was a key year because of the left wing and the American academics that were there. There was a big push to go the other way. I went out and I spoke at this conference in '74 that I had been invited to in '73—Gilliam was part of it and so were others. People were saying that the military needed to go; that Guam could become the Singapore of Oceania, that it's centrally located, etc., etc. I was able to go out and make the case to people that, “The benefits that you're having right now economically are largely derived from your relationship with the United States and the American flag flying over this place and the stability that you get out of that and the money that comes from the United States.” 40 percent of their workforce was working for the Guam government. They had a very good ship repair facility and those sorts of things. “Do you really want to trade that so you're changing sheets for Japanese tourists?” That was the big push.

The Japanese were in there big time. And the average Guamanian, I would say, is very pro-American. I think a hundred Guamanians died in the Vietnam War. You know they really showed up and they're still very proud of that; their tradition.

Allison: They had a lot of troops that joined the U.S. military during Vietnam, you mean?

Webb: Oh yeah. Guam is an unincorporated territory of the United States so there's an ongoing discussion about what that means: are they going to become a state or should they be a commonwealth or should they actually move for independence? You're still seeing that

now with the Chamorro awakening and all this sort of thing. I've been out there several times since 2007.

Tinian is a microcosm of everything that could go wrong with colonialism in that part of the world. When the Spanish ran that area—Tinian and Saipan are about the same size; about 30 square miles—the Spanish governor cleared Tinian of people because he wanted a hunting preserve, and then when the Japanese colonized the Marianas Islands they turned, particularly Saipan and Tinian, into farming areas; a lot of pineapple, sugar. And then when we came in at the end of World War II—you know I think it was like 75,000 Americans on Tinian—we repatriated all the Japanese back to Japan and then we found out that there was nobody left on Tinian *[laughter]*.

Allison: *[Chuckle]* They were all gone.

Webb: But in Yap, which is an island south of Guam, there was a community called the Yap Chamorros. The Spanish at one point—I think it was in the 1800s—had decided that they were going to kill all the male Chamorros and so—I don't know how long it lasted—but a lot of these guys got on their boats and they ended up in Yap, hundreds of miles away, and the Yapese said, "Well you can stay on our island but you can't live with us", and so they put this one area out there they called the Yap Chamorros. And later on, there was a European ship that was on its way to Australia filled with Scottish and Germans on it and maybe some Belgians, I don't know. But anyway, the ship wrecked and these people came ashore and the Yapese said, "You go live with the Yap Chamorros. So, they're over with the Yap Chamorros. And so General [Curtis] LeMay visits Tinian and he's got all these great facilities, you know the Quonset huts and everything but he doesn't have any people. And so, he flies down to Yap and he tells

the Yap Chamorros that, “We’ve got an island for you to come live—food in the fridge.” You know you’ve got all these places built. And they brought the Yap Chamorros up and that’s who lives in Tinian now.

Allison: And that’s on Tinian?

Webb: Yeah.

Allison: And General LeMay did that?

Webb: General LeMay did the initial visit, yeah.

Allison: Huh? He’s a great bomber general.

Webb: There’s a family on Tinian; the Fleming family, I got close to, you know all the way back then and I still keep up with them. They were descended from the Scottish and German shipwreck on Yap and they intermarried with the Chamorros. But they’re really industrious. They own the hotel, not too big, and they own a little bus service. You know the Flemings kind of run a lot of the business things on Tinian although they’re not the only ones.

Allison: Interesting.

Webb: The Chinese are on Tinian right now by the way. The Chinese built a big casino. There’s no international airport on Tinian, and actually it’s very poor. I came back from a trip when I was in the Senate and I go, “Why do you think the Chinese are flying these people in, in this casino on the southern end of Tinian, when they could look right across the ocean and see all the stuff we have on Guam? Don’t you think there’s something else going on there?” But anyway, I’ve kept up with those people over the years.

Allison: That’s interesting.

I wanted to ask about sort of a continuum in that area geographically. I noticed that when you were in the Senate you were very concerned about the Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea and that you did not think that Obama was moving out fast enough on that.

Webb: Actually, I'd written about this and spoken about it for more than 20 years before I was in the Senate and I've spent a lot of time over in that part of the world as a journalist and doing some business over there and other stuff. A lot of time in Vietnam; I've got two years in Vietnam since the war and I've gone up in there every year, except for one, since 1991.

Allison: Every year?

Webb: Every year except for one since 1991. A lot of time in Thailand; in journalism in Thailand, the Philippines, Japan. and all the ASEAN countries except for Malaysia. I have a real affinity for that part of the world. And when they started talking about China and the Senkakus 20 years ago I started writing about it. Because if you look at the Senkaku Islands, they're east of Taiwan and west of the Ryukyus, and people who think this is just a bunch of rocks don't understand the Chinese strategic mind. Their eventual goal in my opinion is sovereignty of the Ryukyus because they have never recognized Japanese sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands, which means Okinawa. For hundreds of years the Japanese and the Chinese both traded in Okinawa. That's why if you go to Okinawa and you look at the Shuri Castle, the Shuri Castle was built like with two identical wings; one to pay the Japanese warlords, and the Chinese just in case they ever showed up at the same time.

Allison: *[Chuckle]*



Webb: You know the Senkaku's are not a small thing. I've spent a lot of time going in and out of Japan. Japanese moods started changing rapidly in April of 2010 in terms of why they really want us to stay because that's when the Chinese really made their overt naval moves on the Senkaku's. I was there speaking at their National Press Club when it changed.

With respect to the Spratly and those islands farther south, I was writing about that in 1996, and it's been incremental, obviously. I wrote a big piece in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2001 and then another one in 2012 about what's going on down there. In 2012 China created a new prefecture they call Sansha which includes that whole area; 2 million square kilometers in the South China Sea all the way down to the edge of Singapore. And that district reports directly to Beijing. And they've been militarizing steadily. And this is not their land. It's glaringly obvious what they're doing.

With respect to your question about Obama; when I got to the Senate, two years before Obama was elected, I fought to get on the Foreign Relations Committee. I knew I was going to be on Armed Services. And I got my staff together in my office, rather than a committee staff, and I said, "We are going to work to change the formula in Burma and we are going to strengthen relations with Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore. That's my major focus." And we sort of put into motion a so called "Pivot to Asia" before Obama was elected. And we did a lot of good when I was in the Senate on those issues.

Allison: And that was in the Foreign Relations Committee?

Webb: Yes. I used to make three trips a year over there. And I didn't have a private jet like some other people. I'd go commercial, typically 25 to 27 ins and outs from different

airports. I'd usually visit five countries in two weeks each trip, and talk to people at the very top. I didn't go on these CODELs [congressional delegation] where you've got seven or eight members, most of whom have very little foreign travel experiences or understandings of the history and culture of these countries. I took just my staff, especially after I got chairmanship of the subcommittee.

You wouldn't be able to tell this from the way Obama and Hillary Clinton make their claims but we opened up Burma right out of my office. Burma was an interesting one for me because I'd been there as a private citizen in 2001. After I'd written this piece for the *Wall Street Journal* about Chinese incrementalism, a reputable businessman in Burma who had an outdoor furniture business, probably the finest outdoor furniture business in the world, wrote me a letter. Chris Kingsley, who became a good friend, said, "If you want to see a place where Chinese incrementalism, and where American sanctions and the lack of a clear strategy are really hurting us, come to Burma and let me show you around."

I was actually on my way to Vietnam and Thailand at the time so I went over and spent eight days with him in Burma. He already had a thriving business in Indonesia and it had taken him eight years to build this incredible business in Burma. He says, "I'm out of here," with the new round of American sanctions. He says, "I'll be gone in two years, but what will that prove? I'm going to be fine," because he's a very successful businessman. But what happens here, you know, and, "Why are you making us leave when we can do so much good when we're here?" I kept up with Burma and followed things closely after that trip, and had all that in mind when I came to the Senate. So after the '08 election when I got the chairmanship of the East Asia

Subcommittee, I said, “All right, we’re going to go to Burma.” You know, “We’re going to make it work.” With a few exceptions, the State Department didn’t want me to go. It took us seven months working through intermediaries and validators over there. I was the first American leader to visit Burma in 10 years and the only one who ever met with Than Shwe; the leader of the military junta. The State Department cables on this visit were pretty ridiculous. We opened the door. You’ve got to take things a step at a time in that part of the world.

Allison: What comments do you have on the Vietnam Memorial, you worked on that.

Webb: Vietnam Veterans Memorial very quickly. I don’t want to spend a lot of time on it.

Bob Timberg did a really good job in his book . . .

Allison: *Nightingale’s Song*.

Webb: . . . *Nightingale’s Song*. And more or less I think that’s as fair as anybody’s written about that issue because it’s hugely misunderstood for a lot of complicated reasons.

They approached me when they were first beginning. I had left the Veterans Committee to go write and do journalism in early 1981, I think. I’m trying to remember now. Oh, I was in between. I took a break when I went and taught the Naval Academy and wrote the first draft of my novel *A Sense of Honor*. I had spent two years on the committee, then taught literature for a semester and started my novel, and then the Veterans Committee offered me the full Chief Counsel job on the Republican staff if I came back. So I did. I first started talking to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial people in that period in 1979 when I was getting ready to go back to the Hill, just to advise them on legislation. The idea was, get legislation passed and then you have a competition for the design and that sort of stuff.

I got John Paul Hammerschmidt, who was my boss on the committee, to be one of the principal sponsors, and the House side pushed it through. And then when the design came out it needed to be changed. I mean not changed, it needed to be fleshed out. Public art is political metaphor and the starkness of the original design was dreary. It was nothing but names. There wasn't even the word Vietnam on it. There was no flag. There was no walkway. There was no lighting. It was just supposed to be this gash in the earth. I thought it needed more and I was not alone. And it got turned into one of the ugliest arguments I have ever been involved in, and nasty. You know I don't need to *[chuckle]* go through it. You can read the Timberg book. But we succeeded. The people who wanted to see more, got a sculpture and a flag and a walkway and proper lighting. I wrote the inscription on the flagpole of the memorial. And I think there were a few people who thought that we could never really get a sculpture approved. I mean there was just too much duplicity going on when we're trying to solve something.

There were five or six things I was trying to help solve and there were a lot of other motivations on the other side. And my model in terms of how to build a memorial is the Iwo Jima Memorial. When they came back from World War II and got this spot, the Marine Corps War Memorial Association, with a bunch of people who had served in World War II, got together in a selfless, dignified way. It was led by Arthur B. Hanson, a Saipan veteran and a very successful lawyer. They got the land, they got the design, they collected the money—none of them took a penny—and they built the memorial. And then they went back to living their lives.

Allison: Right.

Webb: And what was going on over there was basically turning this into an enterprise; a financial enterprise. When I was talking to them and when we started arguing about the design, Jack Wheeler—now deceased—called me and said, “Any day you say the word Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial you get a \$500 consultant fee,” and I said, “I couldn’t take a penny to do this.” And there was a long silence. And if anybody ever wants to run the numbers on how much money people made on that you’re welcome to do it. I don’t want to get involved in this thing again. They were very wired in with the artistic community here and there had never been a sculpture approved on the Mall and there was a lot of whispering that no sculpture would ever get approved. And they thought we were going to come up with an Audie Murphy, you know Iron Mike, you know one guy, and it was going to get voted down by the Fine Arts Commission and then they would have the memorial the way that it was originally done. It wasn’t hard to see all that happening.

Actually, my dad was visiting me and we were sitting right here and he goes, “You can’t have just one soldier.” He says, “Where’s the black guy,” and I went, “You’re right.” And so, we came in with three and they flipped out, as if we were trying to make this the Iwo Jima . . . and away we went. And the other thing they thought was that we were going to have to have a full competition for the sculpture and we’d never get it done because the original competition was so controversial. And they just wanted enough time out there so that they could have the big parade and dedicate this memorial and then have everybody go away.

I spent enough time working on the Hill that I could tell when it was enough. But I said, “No, here’s what we ought to do. We’re going to honor your competition.

Let's get the sculpture that ranked the highest—it was required—and let him come up with a moquette. Give him \$25,000 and let him come up with a moquette and then we'll see whether it's working or not." And so Rick Hart, who I knew, when this thing first started he came and talked to me about how I felt the design ought to be, came up with the moquette and we pushed that through. I could go into a lot of stuff that I don't need to anymore, but it was really nasty. The whole thing was nasty. But Rick had the center guy in the sculpture wear my boots [*chuckle*] from Vietnam. These are the boots. When they saw that there was a dog tag in that boot, they had an intern go down and make sure my name wasn't on it [*laughter*].

Norton: Wow!

Webb: So anyway.

Allison: That's a great . . . very impressive, very inspirational. It's thought provoking.

Webb: This one here is not the actual sculpture if you look at it really closely. Rick Hart made two of those and this was the original. This guy, on the one that's on the Mall has more hair. You've got other inconsistencies.

Norton: Were these actual Marines or Army men and do we know who they are, or they just artist renditions?

Webb: No, he worked off of models, and the model for the center figure actually was a guy named Jim Connell who was a former Marine. He was not Vietnam. He was younger.

The flags there are from my dad's grave. This one is from a guy who was in my platoon.

Allison: You really can't tell by looking at that either if they're Soldiers or Marines, can you? They could be one or the other.

Webb: Yeah. Marines wore flak jackets. Some wore flak jackets; Army, not all the time.

So where are we here?

Allison: I want to hear about your book *Fields of Fire* and your motivation for that; the background on it, why you wanted to do it, how you set about doing it, sort of the strategic concept forward and the influence that it's had. Did it do what you intended it to do?

Webb: I had an engineering degree, mandatory back then, at the Naval Academy but we were the first class that was allowed to pick a minor. I picked a literature minor because I hated everything and anything to do with engineering. And I always loved to read. And for my first year of law school, it was culture shock, I mean going from an environment where everyone had been to Vietnam into an environment where I think I met three people in three years who'd actually been in combat in Vietnam. Now there probably was some ducking and bobbing and weaving back about the war back then and I didn't know every person in our law school, but it was not a loving environment for those who went. The three years I was at Georgetown Law started with the Watergate break-in and then I graduated right after the fall of Saigon, and those three years were unshirted hell in Washington, DC. I'm a big believer in not imposing my views on other people. I'll give you how I feel, strongly, but I don't like name-calling.

During my second year—after I'd come back from Guam—I started toying around with the idea to write something about Vietnam. I didn't know what. I was sitting over there just making notes to myself and dialog and whatever. I was sitting in Constitutional Law class and the debate got on the War Powers Act, and then immediately, “Boom!” all these people are like kind of polite to you [*chuckle*]. The

whole 125 people in that class; it got to be on the immorality of the Vietnam War and the people who were there, and you know baby killing, drugs, and all this stuff. And there was a guy sitting right in front of me who had been an A-4 pilot. I can't remember his name anymore. He had his hand up like this and then he turned around and looked at me and I went, "Don't" [*chuckle*]. I said, "Don't get into it." But I sat there and I said to myself, "Okay, here's the logic of all the stuff I'm trying to do. If I could put you in a grunt unit for six months and not make any judgements, just have you go through it, this, if you're intellectually honest what would you be saying?"

And so, I actually started writing "Goodrich Coming Home." That was the first thing I wrote in the actual novel. And there are three or four different versions of that as I wrote more. But I wrote that and then I bent around and went back to the front and wrote a full draft. I wrote the book seven times cover-to-cover kind of learning how to write. And when I was writing I decided, "All right, I don't want to go to a creative writing class where you sit there and have people rip your stuff up after a week because you had to do your homework and then kill your creative self-confidence or whatever." I said, "All right, I want to conduct a tutorial with the greats." I picked Steinbeck, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Graham Greene; the people that I thought were the greats. And instead of reading them for enjoyment I started reading them, you know like how do you structure a scene, what do they put in, what do they leave out, why, and what are they doing here. So, I wrote it and wrote it, and I guess on my third draft it really got started being a novel, I mean a real novel, not just a narrative.

I designed the book as sort of a moral drama where you have a group of people, not one of them thinking exactly the same thing, going through a series of escalating



moral events, because you have to have a through-line when you're bringing in all this other stuff. And it had to be a book that the third guy down there in the third fire team would say, "Yeah, that's not bulls—t." It had to exhaustedly deal with the environment and then I wanted something that could really communicate the larger issues and moral issues, etc., etc.

Allison: Great.

Webb: And I was impacted by my own experience by having represented Sam Green—just about everything. I mean you know.

I think I was in like my fourth rep; my first really, really good draft, and showed some pages to a very close friend of mine who'd been one my squad leaders and was shot in the spinal cord; Tom Martin, his dad was the chairman of the Chemistry Department at Vanderbilt, and he was in Vanderbilt. And he got in a debate on the war and this guy turned around and said, "Well if you think this is such a great war what are you doing in college?" and Tom went and enlisted. He got a two-year enlistment, very, very smart guy, and was in my platoon as a rifleman, a team leader and a squad leader, and then he got shot.

Allison: Was he the character . . . ?

Webb: No, none of those characters in the book are characters. You know there's observation in all of them but all are fictional characters.

Allison: Oh, they're not really modeled after someone in particular?

Webb: Well, there's certainly input from people who I observed. But no, Tom Martin is not in that book. There are a few people who have thought they were senator *[laughter]*. I had a Marine named Ron Hansel who popped out of a helicopter in the middle of some

really bad stuff in May of 1969 wearing a blue Purdue T-shirt with gold Purdue on it. You know we were in the middle of continuous sniper fire among other things and he just promised his brother he would do that.

Norton: *[Chuckle]*

Webb: And Hansel had literally ten days of actual combat time and two legitimate Purple Hearts. He got hit and then he went to the hospital. He came back and he got hit again then was sent to Okinawa, and from there he wrote me this apologetic letter about how bad he felt about that *[chuckle]*. And when the book was published, he totally thought he was Goodrich. But no, there isn't any of that.

But Tom was visiting me and he said, "What are you doing," and I said, "I'm writing this book." We used to tease each other in Vietnam, "Yeah, you're going to write the great book Martin." And he said, "Well, let me read it." And I had written on this legal pad, you know, no margins *[laughter]*.

Allison: Yeah, before the days of word processing.

Webb: Yeah. And so he started reading it. I gave him the first combat scene with Ogre bleeding outside a fighting hole and all that. And he started reading this and he said, "Holy s—t," and he said, "Put on some music." you know the Beatles or whatever the hell it was back then. And he finished that scene and he said, "That's f——king unreal!" He said, "Nobody else is going to understand it, but man!" *[Chuckle]* And he stayed up all night reading the rest of the stuff. And I was about two-thirds done when I dropped it and he said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "I don't know. I really don't know." You know I had gotten this little deal with Praeger on my Micronesia study but I didn't know how to publish a big book.

Allison: You didn't have a publisher then?

Webb: No, no.

Allison: But you just kept rewriting it knowing it could have been better.

Webb: I remember when I first started to write, I would write, "I can see it." you know, "I'm a writer. I can see it and I'm going to write it." Then I'd set it down and I'd come back a couple hours later and I had written *Stick Man* [laughter]. You know I thought I'd written something great but after I'd read it, it was like, "No, no, no!" But Tom had a friend in Nashville who was a regional writer and he was a World War II guy, and showed him those pages and this guy read it and he said, "This is like Hemingway." whatever, and he said, "I want to help you." And he knew a guy named Ted Purdy who I mentioned in the acknowledgements in the book. I mentioned Tom too by the way. But Ted Purdy was one of the great editors in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. He had freelance-edited Erich Maria Remarque. He was living in Paris. He graduated from Yale. He had a stipend from his grandfather and he wanted to be a novelist and he said, "I discovered I didn't have the catharsis to be a novelist but I knew writing." and he became a literary critic and an editor and he "discovered" Leon Uris when Uris had *Battle Cry*. And he was editor in chief of Coward, McCann and Putnam. And when I met him—I can't remember the other writer's name—but he sent the stuff to Purdy.

Purdy read it and he called me and he said, "This is the best war writing I've ever read." He said, "I want to help you." He was 74 years old. He was retired from writing. He had a talent scout deal with Putnam. But he was the chairman of the American Portuguese Society and would come down to DC from time to time. He said, "I want to help you." I met him down here and he wrote a review of the draft and it was

a very smart thing to do. I mean he said to me, “I’ll never tell you what or how to write. I will tell you what works and what doesn’t when you write.” It was a very smart, great piece of advice. And so, he wrote this review, which kind of neutralized it where it was like he wasn’t going at me. He said, “If I do a review this is where I’d say it’s strong, this is where I’d say it’s weak.” And he wore me out. He’d come here and I’d talk to him for three or four hours about writing and all this other stuff.

And so, I did another draft and he gave it to Putnam, where he had a deal, and they offered me a deal. Ted would get a like 2 percent cut if they did a book he brought in. He wasn’t in the business anymore. But they offered me a contract if I—and this is a direct quote [*chuckle*—if I would make Goodrich and Hodges into one character and if I would make the book more virulently anti-war. And I could just hear his voice and he said, “Listen.” You know I’d been writing this for, I don’t know, a couple years by then, maybe a little bit more, and he said, “Don’t do it.” He said, “I know you want to get this thing published but don’t do it. You have a piece of literature here. Don’t do it.” He introduced me to an agent called Oliver Swan, who also was in his 70s at that time and the book was rejected by 12 publishers. And finally in the summer of 1977, literally the day before I took the bar exam—I had delayed taking the bar for two years after I finished law school because I said, “I’m going to write this book, you know, and “I don’t want to wake up when I’m 55 years old and open up a drawer and see all these things and say, ‘Gee, I could have written a book’.”

Allison: Right.

Webb: So finally, the day before I [*chuckle*] took the bar I get this letter from John Kirk, who’s the editor-in-chief of Prentice Hall’s trade section, which wasn’t a big section. You

know Prentice Hall's great tradition of classroom books and the like. But Kirk was a Korean War naval aviator, a Harvard guy, who read the materials and he got it. He was the first person in publishing who got what I was doing. He said, "Great war novels go against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy." You know *Naked and Dead* was sort of antiwar at the time when everybody was like this.

Allison: Oh yeah, yeah.

Webb: And he said, "You are validating the people who served." And so, I went up to New York, met him at the Harvard Club, which is interesting given the Goodrich character in the book, and he said, "All right, I'll make a deal with you." He said, "I'll give you \$5,000." You know like four years of work here. "I'll give you \$5,000 and I'm going to put you on the cover of *Publisher's Weekly*—" which they did. The cover is framed on my wall upstairs "—and I'm going to put you on tour and you go sell your book." And he did and I did. And the book eventually sold a million copies.

Norton: That was the deal? That was it?

Webb: That was the deal. We got \$5,000, copy-first printed hardback, cover of *Publisher's Weekly* and go on tour. And the *New York Times* would not review it. They said they were on strike. But I got reliable word that the guy who was the editor-in-chief of the *New York Times* said it was a fascist book.

Allison: [Chuckle]

Webb: But we did good and got a really good paperback sale with Bantam. You know back then it was not like now. I mean you had a hardback period and they would like figure out the paperback approximately a year after the publication of hardback. And it's still selling.

Allison: It's still on the top of the Amazon charts, you know the Amazon ratings. It's doing very well. It stills does rather well.

When I interview Marines that have been in Vietnam, or general officers, what's the most authentic book that they've read about Vietnam, and often . . .

Webb: You know what's really good? I got thousands of letters. On that book and the other one; *Born Fighting*; those two books I've got so much mail on. But the letters that are really moving on *Fields of Fire* are from the sergeants.

You know all the way back from Beirut. Oh, I haven't even mentioned Beirut. In terms of connecting this to the Marine Corps, the Beirut thing is important to talk about.

Allison: Sure.

Webb: But from that period forward I'd have sergeants come up and say, "I've read this book ten times. You know it makes me think about leadership."

Allison: I think you told us last time that you still get mail from your platoon; some members of the platoon, even today?

Webb: Yeah.

Allison: What do they think about the book? Do they ever mention it?

Webb: Oh yeah, years, and years ago.

Norton: It's good to go.

Webb: Yeah.

Webb: Some of them I talk to a couple times a month.

Hard times now; our age group [*chuckle*]. Good friends passing away.

Allison: Do we have time to talk about Beirut today?

Webb: I was contacted when things started getting hot in Beirut in 1983. You know the history of the Beirut incursion in 1982; the Israelis went in and after hard hostilities the four-nation multi-national force was sent in. Bob Barrow is one of my all-time favorite Marines, you know General Bob Barros. He saved the Marine Corps. People don't realize what a leader he really was. But I used to go see him; two or three times a year go and have lunch with him. When the Marines first went into Beirut, he sent his son.

Allison: Is that right?

Webb: And what can you say?

But anyway, things started turning around early in August of 1983 when the Israelis moved back out of Beirut into the Chouf and the Marines were coming under more direct fire. One morning the MacNeill-Lehrer News Hour called me. Jim Lehrer is a former Marine. They'd had their editorial meeting and they said, "We've been thinking about this. We ought to get a different angle on this. How'd you like to go to Beirut for us?" I said, "Okay." They said, "Don't you want to talk to anybody about it?" [*chuckle*] and I said, "No. I've been trying to figure out how to get over there anyway." So, I had a producer here and we met with at Headquarters Marine Corps with the Beirut task force here. Half the people in the room I knew—I had served with them at one time or another. I said "What the f——k are you doing over there?" It was the same way when I got to Beirut; there were several people that I'd known for a long time who were over there. But we picked up a British crew in Athens; a cameraman and soundman, and they were terrific, and then took a steamer from Cypress to Beirut because the airport was closed by Druze artillery. These guys were campaigners. You know the British Army had shrunk and these were the people who would have been out there in uniform

in earlier periods. One guy; the soundman, a guy named Tom Murphy, had just spent three months in Afghanistan when the Soviets were there. He was like 6'1," 130 pounds. And then the cameraman, he'd just been in Cambodia but he had a lot of time in the Middle East. They were really, really good. And we went in and 1/8 was on the ground there and they were good Marines. That's one thing; when you grow up around the military you can smell problems and you can see good, and everybody's got their onesies and their twosies. But these were good Marines. And their mission was visibility because they were under this peacekeeping force, you know, the French, the Italians, the Brits and the Americans.

I should back up to tie this into how I ended up in the Pentagon. In '81, after Reagan was elected, I was interviewed by the White House to be the number one or the number two to the VA—I'd been working on the House Veteran's Committee for four years—and I just didn't like the feel of it. I'd spent time on the Hill—I was young—and I decided, "No, I just want to go out and write. I want to go out and do some journalism and write a book." So that's when I left the Veteran's Committee for good. And then in 1982 John Herrington, who'd been assistant secretary of the Navy and was made head of White House personnel—a great friend. A former Marine also from California—brought me in and asked me if I would work for him; if I'd be his number two guy. He'd just taken over White House personnel. He's a real sharp guy, a very clear mission on how he wanted to do the personnel system. The Reagan administration had the best personnel system of any presidential staff that I have been around in my whole lifetime. And I [*chuckle*] just told him—I really liked him and we're still good friends—but I said, "No, I just don't want to work in the White House. I've got this



book I want to do.” I did a piece on Americans in Japanese jails. I spent a month among the Japanese prison system. You know I was really doing some interesting stuff. But I said, “Well let’s just keep talking,” and he said, “Let me know.”

So anyway, I went to Beirut, and it was an incredibly difficult environment for the Marines. They had like 300 journalists covering 1,200 Marines. The rules of engagement were unbelievable. I was on the line with Alfa 1/8 one day and you could see this building several hundred meters to their front. There were three guys who walked into the building, at sling arms, walked up to like the third story and started shooting at them, and I’m sitting there with the company commander—I’m not a journalist now—and I’m like, “Shoot the mother-f——kers.” you know. And he said, “We can only shoot the same type of weapon they’re shooting at us.” Because he had a TOW. I said, “Fire the TOW and blow those guys away.” He said, “Well we can’t do that. We don’t know whose room that really is.” And so, they got permission to shoot back eventually with a machinegun and then those guys stopped and they had to stop, and they walked [*chuckle*] out of the building at sling arms again. I said, “Shoot the mother-f——kers!” And that’s the world they were living in.

Then the other part of it was what I called the “Five-Sided War.” I was out on an OP with one of their units right after I got there and they had a little sandbag machine gun position up there on top of a two-story building, right across the street from where their platoon headquarters was—and there’s a road in between. Eight Marines later were killed on top of that terrace. They finally hit it with a mortar round right in the middle of it.

Anyway, so I'm sitting there talking to this Lieutenant Pete Ferraro. He's in the documentary that I did.

Allison: I know that guy.

Webb: He was a great platoon commander. We're sitting there [*chuckle*] talking and all of a sudden, these rounds start coming from down the road and he goes, "Oh s——t." He runs across the road. And you know as a Vietnam guy when he started running across the road I said, "He's dead." I mean in Vietnam they'd have taken his ass out. Well, he goes all the way across the road and I go, "Okay, if he's going I'm going." and I go chasing after him across the road. You've got a ladder going up the back of this building up to the rooftop. He climbs up the ladder and he gets to the top and there were some mortar rounds that had landed near there, and he gets up on top and I figure, "He's dead." You know he's got to go on the top of that ladder and he's got to expose his whole body to get down into the terrace and I said, "They're going to shoot his ass." And, "boop." he gets in there and I said, "Okay, I'll go." And we get everybody up on the rooftop. And the Druze had a checkpoint. The Druze were shooting at the so-called Lebanese Army, which was below the Marines along the road, and then some Phalange group started shooting and then the Syrians came over one ridge and they were shooting a 25-millimeter something or other—I don't know—and one Marine was wounded. But the sergeant [*chuckle*] turns around to me and he goes, "Sir, never get involved in a five-sided argument." [*Chuckle*] So you couldn't figure out who was mad at who on any given day.

Allison: Right, right.

Webb: And then the rules of engagement were really crazy. And we got out of there right before the building blew up.

I got home and ran my piece and then the building blew, and they ran it again the day the building blew up, and then I sat there and I was going, “Why am I out here? Why am I out here running around doing this stuff?” I called Harrington and I said, “I’m ready to come in and do something. Let’s talk.” So, I went to the White House and he and I spent a good period looking at positions that were open in the administration. He actually asked if I was interested in being general counsel to the DOD and I said, “No, I don’t want to be counsel. I want to run something.” And so, the assistant secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, the position had just been created by the Congress—it was the deputy assistant secretary and they elevated it to assistant secretary. It had to be remade; the whole staff had to be remade. It had to be justified to the money and the people who authorized staff levels and that sort of thing—and I said, “That’s a real interesting job. I’d like to interview for that.” And I went through the interview process and met with Casper “Cap” Weinberger, who I think is a very underrated Secretary of Defense, and we had a very interesting conversation. And I told Secretary Weinberger, “I don’t want to be out just giving speeches at the National Guard Association. I really want to do something if you want me in this job.” And I knew he’d been opposed to the position being elevated. He said, “You go do it.” I said, “My model’s Guderian” *[laughter]*. “I’ll call back if I need gas. You call me if you think I’m going in the wrong direction.” *[Chuckle]* But that’s how they live in the Pentagon.

Probably a good place to stop.

Allison: Great, okay. Do you remember when Vietnam, South Vietnam fell, what you were thinking?

Webb: I was really upset on April 30th 1975. And I started walking to the Law Center and there actually was a relatively small but conspicuous crowd of students that were celebrating.

Allison: They thought the good side won.

Webb: Yeah.

Allison: And this is the way it should have been.

There's a lot of interest in the role the media played in the Tet Offensive; in the way they interpreted that. It had a lot to do with sort of the strategic picture and the strategic picture of the . . .

Webb: There was a good article a couple of weeks ago—I think it was in the *Wall Street Journal*—about Peter Braestrup's reporting. Do you know of Peter Braestrup?

Allison: No.

Webb: Peter Braestrup; he was a good friend. He wrote a book called *Big Story* which is a very detailed analysis of failed reporting during the Tet Offensive. But he was reporting from actual combat units. It was like you could read based upon the front page of the *Washington Post* and you go, "Huh, things are going pretty good." [Laughter]

Allison: [Laughter]

Norton: [Laughter]

Webb: And then you get to the editorial pages, it's the other way around.

Norton: Are you working any new books?

Webb: Yeah, I am.

Allison: Are you?

Webb: I'm working on a novel right now but it's a little too early to talk about it.

Norton: I'll share this one with you. My grandfather was with Charlie Company, 101st Field Signal Battalion, 26th Infantry Division, in France, and he was wounded. He was a wireman. That was his job. He was wounded, gassed, survived this. Towards the end of the war, he went into Purdon [phonetic], and as a keepsake he stole the key from the north gate of Purdon [phonetic]. I had that key. And I contacted the French embassy and got a guy assigned to me. My wife was from Australia. Her mother was seven years old at the Battle of Tawara . . .

Webb: Wow!

Norton: . . . because they owned a store there. So we're going back to France on Armistice Day and I'm going to present the key back to the mayor of Purdon [phonetic].

Allison: Cool.

Norton: Nice, nice.

Webb: I'll show you something.

*End of Session III*

U.S. MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION  
Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Senator James H. Webb Jr.  
Date: 29 May 2019  
Interview Length: 95:01  
Interviewers: Dr. Fred H. Allison

SESSION IV

Allison: This is an interview with Senator James Webb, W-E-B-B, by Fred Allison on the 29th of May 2019. The interview is being done in Arlington at Senator Webb's office.

Okay, sir, picking up where we left off last time—

Webb: It's been more than a year since our last session so I'm not sure exactly where we left off. I think there had been some mention of my working on Guam, and other work as counsel on the House Veterans Committee?

Allison: I think we got up to that point.

Webb: The work I did on Guam and some of these other things preceded the time I got to the House Committee. So, I will give a brief summary of things that happened to the point that I became assistant secretary of Defense in 1984.

Allison: Great.

Webb: And then spend a little bit more on the ASD and then particularly the secretary of the Navy period and the appointment of Al Gray as Commandant. So that's sort of the objective for the time the time we have to meet today.

Allison: Sounds good.

Webb: I know I talked about the period when I left the Marine Corps and went to Georgetown Law School, and some of the things that happened there, and then my representing Sam Green as well as writing *Fields of Fire*.

Allison: We did cover that.

Webb: The Sam Green representation covered a six-year period, I did it pro bono and eventually cleared his name three years after he killed himself. But that was an incredible window not only into the military justice system but into how the mood in the country was with respect to the people who were in Vietnam.

Then during my last year in the Marine Corps, I'd written a lengthy article on our strategic interests in the Pacific and the importance of Guam and Micronesia in terms of what is called a negative strategy or a strategy of denial, mostly in Micronesia. I put together a theory when I was a young captain in the Pentagon, 25 years old when I wrote it, that we could consolidate our basing system in the Pacific into what strategically is called an interior position along a Guam-Tinian Axis, reducing our land-based presence forward and having a major sea power presence in the region among other things. And during that period, I went out to Guam and I basically put meat on this theory.

The article I wrote had been given a front-page editorial in the *Pacific Daily News*, a Gannett newspaper with a circulation of more than 90,000 out in Guam and the Pacific region. The tag line was basically "Who is James Webb?" Sort of like the mysterious character in *Atlas Shrugged*, who is John Galt? "Who is the guy who wrote this piece? He's a Marine Corps captain in the Secretary of the Navy's staff. There's no way someone of that low rank could ever have written this piece. This obviously

was something put together by the higher ups in the Pentagon and put Webb's name on it to test America's reentry into Guam."

Actually, it was very flattering.

I wrote the editor of the paper back and I basically said, "Now wait a minute. Pete Ellis was the guy who predicted how a lot of World War II with the Japanese was going to happen in this same region, twenty years before it did, without ever having spent time in those islands." Major Pete Ellis, by the way, was an iconic figure of Marine Corps history. Anyway, we started some communications back and forth and I was invited to come out to Guam and put my theory into place. What would it look like on Guam, with one-third of the island in military bases or retention areas, if we consolidated a large part of our Pacific Asia forces there? What would it look like on Tinian, where I believed you could easily have put a hunk of the Marine Corps presence that was then on Okinawa on a rotational basis, not on a permanent basis?

So, I went out there and I walked or drove every square inch of Guam, Tinian, Saipan, and went up to Okinawa, evaluating the training areas there.

That's just a summary to bring us up to date. But a major parenthesis here is that by going up to Okinawa in 1974, I got a first-hand and almost anonymous look at how deeply the Marine Corps was in crisis. The average Marine out there didn't know who I was, so I could mix freely among them without their knowing. I was a law student at the time. I had my Mr. Peepers glasses on, and my afro, Reggie Jackson haircut—

Allison: Did you really?

Webb: I can remember sitting in the waiting room at Kadena Air Force Base waiting for a flight back to Guam. There were three Marines sitting behind me, I guess also waiting



for a flight. Incredibly, they were not even in full uniform. A couple of them were wearing shower shoes with their khakis. I went into the head and there was a Marine in there leaning over a sink. He had just shot up with heroin; right there in Kadena Airport.

Allison: Wow!

Webb: I walked out of the head. There were two Air Force military policemen out there. I said, “Excuse me, but somebody just shot up with heroin right inside that door.” They said, “Thank you very much.” They wouldn’t even go in there. That’s how bad the deterioration was.

I try to explain to people that this was post-Vietnam. Too many people like to attribute those types of problems to Vietnam. There was some of that in Vietnam, but what happened after Vietnam was much more serious and became a real crisis.

I had friends I’d served with in Vietnam who were then cycling back on their next overseas rotation [who were in] Okinawa. I met with some of them and talked with them and heard some real horror stories about the disciplinary problems in Okinawa and the challenges they were facing. And you know it’s a real credit to the people who stayed in and to the long-term values that the Marine Corps puts on the table that we were able to move through that. There were some very fine people who were serving at that time, too, but they had really serious discipline problems. I was kind of stunned.

My brother was in the Marine Corps during that time period. I told him, “You know something, you’ve got more difficult leadership challenges in peace time than I ever had in war time.” *[laughter]*

So, I stayed involved and concerned with all of these things even though I had left the Marine Corps, although my primary mission during that time was our strategic presence in that part of the world. And a lot of the recommendations I was making in 1974 are still operable today when we're looking at how we might rotate or move positions out of Okinawa into Guam, Tinian and elsewhere. They were very front burner issues and even in Japanese politics, when I came back into Senate in 2006, all those years later.

Allison: Still cooking. Guam was still cooking.

Webb: Yes, and Okinawa's still hot. I participated very heavily on these issues when I was in the Senate. I went to Okinawa, Okinawa and Guam and also Tokyo a number of times talking to political and military leaders in both places. Actually, I had a different formula that I was recommending for what might happen on Okinawa rather than the situation that we now have on Henoko. Moving the—

Allison: Inner bases?

Webb: Yes, the helicopter bases out from Futenma to the North. There were better ways to do that one. Anyway, so I was involved in that and as we discussed last session I started writing *Fields of Fire* while I was in law school. It just became a passion with me. I felt that I had something there, although I didn't quite know what I had. So I took a gamble when I finished law school. I did not take the bar until two years later. I said, I'm going to write *Fields of Fire*. I'm going to try and sell it. And then I'll look at this other stuff.

I wrote the book seven times, learning to write and finally accomplishing a true literary product. But as I mentioned during our last session, I couldn't sell it. It went through 12 rejections before it was accepted, during that period. And it finally was

accepted after I started working in the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs and decided to take the Bar exam just to cover my possible losses.

But yeah, it was a real gamble to sit down and write this thing. You know, you eat what you kill when you're a writer. But I found, or he found me, Ted Purdy, a retired publishing executive who had once been an editor in chief at Putnam's and Coward-McCann and who before that had worked as a freelance editor in Paris during the 1920s during the great postwar period when F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and other luminaries were there. He had freelance edited *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He had discovered Leon Uris, who wrote *Battle Cry*, the great Marine Corps book of World War II. He was the one who convinced me to stay with it, because he kept saying, "Don't worry about the rejections." He said, "You have a piece of art here, you have a true piece of art. Just stay at it."

That was all great "psychic reward." But in the meantime, I'm like, gee, okay that's great to know, but I don't have a job. *[laughter]*

Allison: How are you going to pay the bills?

Webb: So, ironically, in 1976 which was the bicentennial, Georgetown Law nominated me for an award. The Vietnam Veterans Civic Council, which was under the VA, wanted to give a distinguished Veteran—Outstanding Veteran Award, during the bicentennial celebrations. I received this award. It was totally out of the blue. I didn't even know that Georgetown of all places had nominated me. When I received this award, I scared the death out of the VA official at the ceremony and all these people who were attending.

When he handed me the award, I stopped the planned proceedings and kept the microphone and I said, “You know, I’ve just really got to say this—” I made not written remarks, but a speech about how the Vietnam Veterans were being treated in the aftermath of the war. I described them as, “They’re Invisible.” One of the lines I had in there was; *the same people who called on us to bleed are now saying we should be ashamed of our scars, but I’m not ashamed of mine.*

A lot of people came up to me afterwards and said, you’ve got to do something with that. And I went, okay. I went back home and I wrote the speech out in a proposed editorial. I typed it out on my usual borderless yellow legal paper and sent it in a blind submission to the *Washington Post*. I said, I just received this award. This was the speech that I made. Nothing. Crickets. Not even an acknowledgement that I had sent them anything. I shrugged it off and went about my business. Then a month later—and this is both spooky and ironic—the morning after my beloved granny died, I picked up the *Washington Post* and my piece was the featured op ed on the *Washington Post* with a silhouette above it of a Marine patrol, titling the piece “The Invisible Vietnam Veteran.”

After that I started getting a ton of phone calls and invitations to speak. It was right before the Carter election, Carter/Ford election. I did a TV show, here in DC, with a guy who had gone to jail for refusing the draft. It was a good show. Out of the blue, a guy named Bill Ayres, who was running Vietnam Veterans for Ford, called me at the station. He was a former congressman, a 20-year congressman, and he said, “Will you come and talk to us?” I said, “Well, I’m not a Republican, I’m not a member of any

party, if anything I'm a Democrat." He said, "I don't care, we just want to figure out how to get the Vietnam veterans."

I went down and talked with Bill Ayres, and I ended up agreeing to be the National Co-Chair for Vietnam Veterans for Gerald Ford. Frankly I loved the whole process and I trusted Bill Ayres. He was a wily and incredibly smart politician. That experience opened up my direct involvement, in politics. I went around the country making speeches, talking to people, writing press releases for other people, etc. And that's how I ended up working on the Veterans Committee after Jimmy Carter won the election. In a couple of months John Paul Hammerschmidt, who was the ranking Republican on the House Veteran's Committee, had an opening for the assistant minority counsel and they hired me to fill the job. From the Veterans Committee during this incredibly important post-Vietnam period, we did a lot of things. I'm not going to go through all of them this morning, but we did a lot of really good things.

When Reagan was elected in 1980, I was invited to interview for a top job at the VA, either the number one or the number two job. They weren't saying. I was 34 years old. I'd been on the [Veterans] Committee for four years, except for a one semester hiatus where I had taught literature at the Naval Academy and wrote the first draft of my novel *A Sense of Honor*. I'd started early in March of 1977 and this was in 1981. During the interview process I had to talk to myself about my conundrum. I love to write and I love to lead. And at the top level of both professions these are not totally compatible career paths.

I was missing writing. I had some offers to write books and I had some good journalistic offers and so finally I just said, "No, I don't want to go into the

administration right now. I don't want to go into that." I left the Veterans Committee and I went out and I wrote some really interesting journalistic efforts, including having spent a month inside the Japanese prison system. And I wrote *A Sense of Honor*, a book about the Naval Academy, which the Naval Academy tried to ban, and the Air Force Academy made mandatory reading in its leadership courses.

Allison: Wow.

Webb: *[laughter]* Which is a very long story. But that's how I got to meet Herman Wouk, the great *Caine Mutiny* novelist, and *Winds of War*, and *War and Remembrance*. He sent me a note when he saw that the Naval Academy was trying to ban my book. He'd gone through a similar experience when he wrote *Caine Mutiny*. He said, "You have sent the Navy a bittersweet Valentine that they may never understand." *[laughter]*

Allison: What was it about *Sense of Honor* that the Navy objected to?

Webb: Oh, it's a long story. It was as honest as I could get, pretty much in the same way as *Fields of Fire*. You know when *Fields of Fire* first came out, I was really worried.

Allison: Yes, it was too honest.

Webb: I guess so. When I wrote *Fields of Fire*, the judge on my shoulder was the third guy down there in the third fire team, and whether he was he going to say this was real or was this bulls——t. It had to be real. *Fields of Fire* really was—it's a very conscious moral, escalating moral drama, if you read it carefully. You can read that book on three different levels. I was representing Sam Green at the time, and I also had so many intense, direct combat experiences in Vietnam, that I did not feel in any way that I had to make the experience anything other than the truth without feeling validated for having served. I didn't have to make this Iwo Jima in order to be proud of it. You can

separate the politics from a war, but you cannot deny the people who went through such difficult times the validity of their experience. We put them out there and this is what they did. That was my literary mission.

It got great advanced reviews. General [Richard L.] Nichols, who as a colonel had commanded Task Force Yankee down in the area we were in when I was in Vietnam, has been a really good friend. Well, not a beer-drinking friend but I had really good relations with him after I had started doing the political stuff. I called him when the page proofs came out and I said, “Sir—” He was a three-star at the time. I called him and I said, “Sir, I’ve written this book and since you were in An Hoa Basin, I wonder if you’d just read it for me and give me your thoughts?” He said, “Jim, a fine American like you, let me see your book.”

So, we sent him a copy of the book, these are page proofs before the publication. He did not call me, he summoned me. I was working as counsel on the Veterans Committee. He summoned me to his personal quarters at 8th and I. I think he took a day off. I had to leave my job even though I had a bill on the House floor that day. I went over there to see him. He sat me down on the other side of his study desk. He had a sheaf of notes in front of him. He says, “Jim, this could be a primer—” And he was using his New England short ‘I’ pronunciation—of the word, “This could be a primer on Marine Corps tactics in Vietnam. *But these were not my Marines!*” He starts into it and I’m thinking, oh, s——t. I just ruined my relationship with this organization that I feel so much a part of.

After he was done, I said, “Sir, the only thing I can say is, those were my Marines and I don’t have to write something that was different than what happened in order to say that they did their job.”

I walked out of there to my car and I went, oh boy—

Allison: I bet that was a terrible feeling?

Webb: Oh, it was. After all that—I went back to my job. I had a bill on the House floor when I went over. I came back to my job and I said, “Okay, there’s nothing else I can do.” Then General Shultz, Richard Shultz, who was a great leader and who knew me from my secretary of the Navy staff days, saved my ass.

Allison: Is his nickname, Dutch Shultz?

Webb: Yes.

Allison: I’ve heard he was a great leader.

Webb: He was a Korean War veteran and had been a battalion commander in the 3d Marine regiment who had been sent down into our AO during Operation Taylor Common right when I was arriving in Vietnam. And as I mentioned in an earlier interview, he was the Marine aide during part of the period when I was on the secretary of the Navy’s staff when I was being medically retired, and had really helped me when I was trying to figure out what I would do once I left the Marine Corps.

Shultz was commanding the MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] in San Diego at this time, he was a two-star. He was in for meetings at Headquarters Marine Corps and Nichols had said, “I just don’t know what to do with Webb here.” He said, “Read this.”



Shultz read the book on a C-130 flight back to San Diego, which was like an eleven-hour flight. He called me when he landed. He loved the book. And he said, “you have just done General Nichols a great favor. And you have written the Battle Cry of the Vietnam War.”

I said, “Will you send me a letter?” *[laughter]*

Allison: Get that in writing.

Webb: He said, “I will.”

The publisher actually was able to use his letter in their ads, without using his name. They showed up as “A Marine General.” He said, “look I don’t want to get crossways with General Nichols.” But he sent the letter and signed it, and then on the ads for the book he allowed this to be said.

When the book was published, General Lou Wilson was Commandant and he was a hard a dude. I know you know his reputation. He was a hard ass.

Allison: Smiling Cobra.

Webb: Yes. He was a very tough dude. So, they arrange for me to get in to go see him. I give him a copy of the book. I’m looking at him and in the back of my mind I’m thinking, he’s going to tear my head off. *[laughter]*

“Sir, this is the book I just wrote, and this is a letter General Shultz wrote about my book.” From then on, I think everybody calmed down. The reviews and the reviews of the people who served were just sky high.

Just to summarize our earlier session, I had 12 rejections. It got published by Prentice Hall. I was so lucky, I found someone in publishing who actually had been in the military. John Kirk was a Harvard guy who had been a naval aviator in the Korean

War. He had written me this observation saying, “The great war novels go against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy.” He said, “You are the first book that’s basically saying, do not deny us the validity of what we did.” You know, forget your politics. There’s no politics in that book, no direct politics in that book.

Anyway, he said, “Look here’s the deal,” he said, “I’ll give you a \$5,000 advance—” Four years of work. “I’ll give you a \$5,000 advance. I’ll print 5,000 copies, but I’ll put you out there.” And he put the book on the cover of *Publisher Weekly*, which the cover’s up there—it’s actually up on the landing, I’ll show you when we leave, and sent me out on tour. We ended up selling a million copies.

Bantam bought it, actually another Marine, Mark Jaffe, a World War II Marine was pretty high up in Bantam and he got it immediately. Once it broke through the ice and got out where people were seeing it, it really had an impact. That’s what I came to realize that I could actually make money in my life by being independent and indulging my own curiosities in a way, as long as I could sell the idea.

So, that started this two-track career where I can get out, where you know, I want to go see something, I want to do something, I want to write about something and get it in front of people. And then I would miss running something, and I would go back and go into government. So, that’s kind of how all of that intersected. After I left the Veterans Committee, I went out and wrote a third book and I did a lot of really, really interesting journalism. I became the first American, maybe the only American, ever allowed to report from inside the Japanese prison system in 1983. That required delicate negotiations with the Japanese here. Three months of negotiations in terms of how I could get that story. It was fascinating. I spent a month in Japan doing that. Then

I was in Beirut as a journalist. I had a really good set of experiences. I did a piece in Thailand. And at the same time, I'm writing this novel.

While I was going through all this John Herrington, who had been brought into the White House to run presidential personnel, called me. He had been the assistant secretary of the Navy for a while before that. He was a longtime Reagan guy; a really super guy. He brought me in for lunch at the White House and asked if I would work with him. When he came over there to work, he said, these are my objectives—he was very clear. He was a former Marine, Marine Corps reservist. You know, what we like in the Marine Corps is the five-paragraph order. This is the situation. This is what we're going to do. This how we're going to do it. And this is the command and coordinates and stuff.

He said, "Okay, I'm the chief of personnel, these are my objectives, and this is what I want to do." He asked me, "I want you to be my Number Two. We're going to get this all straightened out. In two years, I will find you a job that fits you and is a really good job in the administration."

I said, "John, I really like you." And I still really like him. "I just don't want to work in the White House. I'm doing these other things. But let's keep talking."

We became friends. I went off doing these other things. After Beirut, I came back and did the story and right after I came out. I got out right before the building blew up. The story came out, the building blew up. The News Hour ran the story again and had me on again. I just sat there and said to myself, "You know you can be in the boat, or you can be rowing the boat."

[pause in interview]

Actually, I should say another thing since I saw that when I walked back here, another thing I was involved in during that period before I came into the Pentagon was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

I initially helped them in terms of getting letters out. We got John Paul Hammerschmidt to be a principal sponsor; I wrote the remarks, and lobbied for them pro-bono. There was a huge fight after the initial design was announced from people who wanted more than just a wall that had names on it. I was one of the people who let's just say was adamant that you needed a memorial like that. You needed to have something that showed the implements of war, had an American flag, had the word Vietnam on it, etc. It was one of the nastiest things I've ever worked on in my life for that period of time.

I ended up being one of the members of what they called the "sculpture panel" when they said okay we're going to have a sculpture. Frankly, there were a lot of Vets that believed we were being sent on a fool's errand, that there would never be a sculpture on the mall, and that we would never get an agreement after all the disagreement that they had with the initial design. I put on the table, look, let's simplify this, let's get the highest-ranking sculptor in the original competition, who was Rick Hart, who ended up doing this, and let's let him do a mock-up, let's see what it looks like and we'll move that forward from that. That's what ended up—But to this day it's still really nasty and there are lot—

Allison: Very controversial.

Webb: Yes. The battle over it was worse than anything. To me, it was just like let's just get this done. I feel strongly about it, let's get it done.

So anyway, I go into the Pentagon as the assistant secretary of Defense. The Congress had just created this position. The assistant secretary of defense for Reserve Affairs.

I called John Herrington after the building blew up. I said, “You know, I’m ready.” I’m ready to do something. You can sit in the boat and watch, or you can help row the boat. I want to help row the boat here.

So, I went over and met with him and actually he had a general counsel position that had opened up. I had been a counsel in the House and I said, “You know, John I just don’t want to be a counsel. I want a line position. I want to run something.”

So, this assistant secretary of defense for Reserve Affairs had opened up. I had talked with some people about it, with John about it and whatever. I said, all right, I’d like to do that. So, my name went over and the Guard and Reserve components thought this would be something of a lobbyist position. They definitely wanted someone who was a career National Guard or reservist. I was 38 years old and I’d never been in the Guard or the Reserve. So, there was a good deal of pushback. But when the uniform is on a soldier is a soldier—or Marine, whether active or reserve. And I knew a lot about that. So, I went in, I sat down with [Casper] Weinberger, and I told him my view.

My five-paragraph order, here was formed around the challenge of how do you go from full stop, to full-start if we have a large-scale war? In other words—The Korean War scenario. And that’s where the Guard and Reserve, the training levels need to be so that in a stop/start war they would be ready to go. I wanted to emphasize training. I wanted to emphasize being able to evaluate readiness. I wanted to look at the war plans and see how they fit in. I wanted—what are we doing for instance in terms of medical

readiness, frankly, and that was a big issue to me at that time. So, I said, these are the things I want to do. I said, I don't want to just go get on an airplane and go make speeches at National Guard conventions. Let's get out and fix problems.

I think Weinberger liked that. Weinberger was a really interesting guy to work for. I have tremendous regard for him. I think he's very underrated as a secretary of defense. He pushed really hard against people he did not want, but was very loyal to those who worked for him.

The Reagan administration was the best personnel system that I've observed starting with being way up in the bleachers during the Nixon administration when I was at the Pentagon, but all the way up to today, they were the best in terms of how to get people in. How to get their people in, first with permission from the president. You had to get a White House clearance and then you would go to, like in this case, the Department of Defense and they'd have to give you clearance. You had to go through two clearance processes. They weren't equal. I mean, they weren't the same things that separate groups of people were always looking for.

Weinberger would resist getting people that he did not believe fit what he wanted to do, but once you were there you were fully there. He was really unusual in my experience in the sense that he was not afraid of people who had a brain or had intellect. I don't want to say something that's dismissive of people, but I mean, he was not afraid of ideas. Rather than—a lot of the people come into these jobs and they just don't want to screw up, if you know what I mean. They don't want to take risks. Sometimes risks are good.

So, I took the job and it was a fascinating experience, because we had nothing at the beginning. The position had just been created. It had been a deputy assistant secretary. I think they had 14 people on their full-time staff. I worked with people on the staff, who had been doing a lot of thinking on what an ASD staff might look like. We put together a charter that had to get approval through the Pentagon.

We got a 98-person staff, designed with, I think at that time, a principal and three deputy secretaries and then a couple of directorates. I very carefully designed it so that it would fit to evaluating warfighting. The staff was made up of members of all four active services, all seven Guard and Reserve components, plus political and career civilians. It was like a microcosm of the Pentagon, all on one staff.

We were also able to bring reservists, like Individual Mobilization Augmentees, IMAs, in on temporary tours. This was very effective in bringing them in to help on things like JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] war games so that we could start wargaming. We could also bring IMAs in and get them down into the system. It took about a year to truly gel that staff, because each one of these Guard and Reserve components had their own way of doing things; their own mentalities, and obviously their own institutional loyalties.

So, we really pushed on making sure the Guard and Reserve met equal standards with the active duty force. This was, you know, quite different than today when Guard and Reserve components have been continuously mobilized. They were saying they were equal, “We’re all the same. We need the same equipment. It’s the same battlefield, etc.” But a lot of basic personnel and training standards were not the same. A lot of the command structures were not the same. I really pushed on that. I got

a lot of pushback, too, doing it. But after about a year, we had a really functioning staff. I think we truly had one of the top staffs in the Pentagon.

We ended up heavily playing on Defense Review Board (DRB) issues and in JCS wargames. I did a lot of work in NATO. A lot of work with the Germans in particular, the Germans, the Brits, the French, the Dutch. I went on a number of the mobilization exercises and wargames over there. We actually had one case very relevant to today. We were doing, National Guard was doing training—and Reserves—were doing training exercises in Central America during what became known as the Iran-Contra period. We were sending them to Honduras and different places to do real world things that matched their units. Then when the Nicaraguan thing became so controversial, people who were opposed to the Reagan policy realized that instead of having to do protests here in DC, they could go to each of the states that were sending their National Guard troops, and intimidate, or lobby, the governors not to do it.

Every morning at 8:30, I met with Weinberger. We're in a staff meeting one morning and Weinberger goes, "What is this?" He says, "Forty percent of the National Guard forces are now precluded from going down there because the governors have said as the commanders of the militia they're not going to allow them to go." The Deputy Secretary Will Taft and the General Counsel Chapman Cox, both of whom are Harvard lawyers, said, "It's the Constitution." You know, the governor's the commander of the militia." But he was really going after me, "Why haven't you let us know, Jim?"

I said, "It's not [the Constitution]. The governors don't have that power. And I will do something about it along with my staff."



My view was that when National Guard members are used, they are under one of three different laws, and each one is a different role for a governor. There's state law, state active duty, which is like go use a helicopter to go pull a cow out of the mud or something that's basically a state function. There's Title 32 for training, which is kind of hybrid, but it's federal training. And then there's activation under Title 10, which is all the way full force DOD. My position was that only under state active duty was the governor actually commander of the militia. When they're going down there into Central America, they're under Title 32 and a governor can't stop it.

I went over to testify in Congress while we pushing this, and they did not like my idea. While this was really ramped up, I had to testify in front of the House Appropriations Committee on National Guard and Reserve funding. I brought the Guard and Reserve chiefs, and the chief of the Guard—I had the chief of the Guard sitting on one side of me, and I forget who was on the other side of me.

I said to the committee, "If you think that a governor can preclude this type of training then we'll get every state where a governor is doing that and we'll put the equipment and stuff that they're asking for at the bottom of the DAMPL." Department of the Army Mobilization Priority List. "If you're not going to let them go, you're not going to get your F-15s, you're not going to get your tanks." That got everybody's attention.

Allison: Just whatever they need for a state mission.

Webb: Exactly. If you're going to say we can't use your troops, then you don't get the stuff. But I still didn't think a governor could actually say that. We actually got Sonny Montgomery who was "Mr. Guard" to work with us. I had worked closely with his

people when I was on the Veterans Committee because he was big on the Veterans Committee—Sonny Montgomery’s people said, “Okay, we need to work on this.” And we got a piece of legislation passed that basically said they couldn’t do it; the governors couldn’t do it.

The Guard took us to the Supreme Court. *Perpich vs. Weinberger*, or *Perpich vs. DOD*, and we won. I had left by the time the Supreme Court decided the case, but the Supreme Court conclusively decided that the Army clause supervenes the militia clause in the Constitution, and that a governor cannot do that. A governor cannot legally stop a deployment when you go into federal training. A governor can’t veto it if the Army says they need it. That’s active right now. You see these governors on the border and stuff, today, the governor of New Mexico, Governor California, saying they’re not going to let their troops go. Constitutionally, they can’t say that. I don’t know, politically maybe the administration doesn’t want to confront them, but that case established that precedent.

Allison: So, that’s in the Constitution?

Webb: Well, the Constitution says, the governors are commanders of the militia. But when is it actually the militia? That was the distinction. In command terms, is it still the militia when it’s doing a federal function? No. And then the gray area of course was Title 32 rather than state active duty or Title 10. So, there were no plaques on my wall from the National Guard Association when I left that job. But we got a lot of good things done over there.

Medical was big. I went over to NATO early on. I went on a mobilization thing, and I met with the Brits and the Germans on how they were preparing if we actually

had a Soviet—an engagement with the Soviets. One of the things that really struck me is when I talked to the Germans, they were better than I think they wanted anybody to know. They were so nervous about, you know, post-World War II. They were the only Army over there that had really fought the Soviets, I mean full-on fought the Soviets, you know.

Allison: Yes.

Webb: I came back from that trip, and I wrote a memo to Weinberger and I said, listen, the German casualty-rate estimates in the same scenario are four times ours and they're the ones who fought the Soviets, and the Brits are three times ours. What does that mean? That means our deployable combat medical assets are not capable of dealing with our casualties if we have to fight under this scenario. And so, I really started pushing. I started working with the assistant secretary for health affairs, Dr. Bud Maier, who was in full agreement. We started working and pushing money for combat medical.

I had a researcher, Caroline Krewson, an assistant who was like 28 years old and really smart and I said, "We need to be able to explain what happens when you don't have combat medical readiness."

I had her go over to an archive in Maryland and pull all the records regarding casualty statistics in the Korean War, month by month. She said she spent the whole summer in a refrigerator. What I wanted to know was how many killed versus how many wounded and how many medical beds were in theater to take care of people who were wounded. In the first couple of months of the Korean War, the killed-to-wounded ratio of Americans was higher than anything we'd experienced since the Civil War. I used that chart when I briefed Secretary Weinberger on where I believed the Army

needed to be fixed, and he put \$280 million into the budget for upgraded, deployable medical systems.

When we went into Desert Storm the systems they brought over there, called DEPMEDs (Deployable Medical Systems) were the systems that were funded out of the efforts that Bud Maier and I had put together on the need have these kinds of immediately deployable systems and the people to man them. Plus, the Guard and Reserve personnel who could get over there and do it. Very complicated issue, I'm probably taking too much time on this anyway.

Allison: That's okay we can meet again sometime if necessary.

Webb: Then I got to the point where I was thinking about returning to my other passion. I basically said when I went into the Pentagon that three years is probably it for me. I know I'm going to get antsy. I wanted to go back and write. I'd been in contact with so many people in the publishing world and had a number of requests to write some different books and novels. It's like the birdcage, you want in, you want out, you want in. So, I finally started thinking at the end of 1986 that I wanted to go back and write a Civil War book.

Allison: Did you find it hard to write? I mean you wanted to devote full-time to writing when you're doing that—?

Webb: Writing a novel requires every day, for me, seven days a week. You have to keep connected to your story and I need to block at least three hours. It's full-time for me. It's also how you fit it in with other things in your life. If you're really doing novels you've got to live in that world. Journalism is good, you get out and see things. But I can't match the two. So, I was ready to go.

Allison: And the time you're not actually writing, you're sort of thinking about your novel?

Webb: Oh yeah. And you've got to kind of live in the world to do it right. I can do magazine pieces those sorts of things, but to do justice to these kinds of jobs—

Allison: Oh yeah.

Webb: And to do them the way that I wanted to do them, I started saying, I think I'm going to go do something else.

I got offered some really good jobs. I was approached on some ambassadorships, including the NATO ambassador, and some other positions in the administration. I had to step up and when they put these positions on the table and I had to go over and be affirmative that I wanted to do it. There were a couple of Asia ambassadorships, at my age it was like really tempting to go do. But I said, no I just don't want to be in government right now, it's like the other thing.

I had my exit interview on February 10th/February 11th in 1987. Oh, the other thing, and this is important, Weinberger had at one time discussed my being secretary of the Army when it eventually opened up because I had done so much work when I was ASD on mobilization, readiness and force structure issues. He gave me an assignment at the end of 1985 into 1986. He said, in a staff meeting with the secretary of the Army present who was a great friend of mine by the way, like a mentor to me—but he said, "Jim, I want you to tell me how to fix the Army." He said, "I want you to break down where the points are where the Army needs to do things differently."

I had put an office together called the Readiness Directorate, it was one of the first directorates, or first areas where Pentagon staffs were actually computerizing readiness data from the services and analyzing it. This was a new concept back in the

1980s or mid-80s. We worked with LMI (Logistics Management Institute). I had a guy on my staff named Tony English who was a career civil servant. He was a brilliant Rhodes Scholar. A very quiet guy. I used to call him the Sphinx. He'd almost never say anything in staff meetings, but he was so smart. I put Tony English in charge of developing systems where we could evaluate and readiness and other research in order to evaluate how the Guard and Reserve could meet their obligations under different mobilization scenarios.

We worked on the Army report for about a year. I gave Weinberger my full report the day before my exit interview, this was my valedictory address. I'd said, "okay when I'm done with this, I'm just kind of done with the job." That's when I decided I was leaving. So, I gave Weinberger my full report on all the different areas in the Army that in my view were like the choke points in terms of how the Army should function, and was functioning. Some of them I would say, this is what you need to do to fix it and or others this is what can't be fixed under present policies.

I had this long meeting with Weinberger and staff people, including the heads of the Army and that sort of thing. That was my swan song. I was laying all this stuff out and that was it, I was done. I said goodbye.

The next morning, I had my exit call with Will Taft who was the deputy secretary. When I got there he says, "Weinberger wants to see you." John Lehman apparently had just said—he didn't give Weinberger a timeline but he was saying, I think I'm going to start looking for something else. So, I went in and Weinberger said, "Jim I want you to be Secretary of the Navy." I went, "That's an offer I can't refuse." But it was just like, Boom! it was like my last day. I was leaving. And now I wasn't.

Weinberger ran the procedural gauntlet in the Administration on that and six days later they announced my nomination. Boom! I won confirmation on April the sixth, to be secretary of the Navy.

Allison: Any rough aspects of that, the confirmation process?

Webb: It's like running for office. You get hung out there and people throw things at you. In the actual confirmation, the only thing that there was a lot of discussion about was the women in the military issue. It had been the same thing with the confirmation for ASD. That issue came up and I was put through the whole drill. When I was coming up for confirmation for secretary of the Navy there was a woman, whose name I don't remember, who ran a woman's equity action organization that was saying they were going to oppose me. And she wanted some sort of meeting.

So, what I did was, I brought in all the military women who were working for me and had worked me. There were seven on my staff. I put them in my conference room and the woman from this organization came in, and I said, "Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to leave the room. I'll be back in 45 minutes. You ask them anything you want to ask them." And I went out and left. And you know they had Air Force, Navy, Army, I had a Marine, enlisted, officer, and some former military. They gave her an earful in a positive way and that's that. Because then—I had questions during the confirmation hearing, but it was a unanimous vote.

Allison: So, she had said somebody—you had done something, is that what this woman had some allegations?

Webb: It was the article that I wrote about women at the Naval Academy in 1979.

Allison: Oh, okay.

Webb: Where I said, I do not believe women belonged in combat, etc.

Allison: You were prejudicial against women?

Webb: Not prejudicial in my view. But given my experience in Vietnam I was opposed to opening up combat positions to women in the military.

But since you raised that, let me talk about what I did as secretary of the Navy, and I will get to that issue. Before I do I need to divert from what I was going to say.

The first thing I did related to questions about whether the then current Navy leadership had abused the promotion process—that is, having practiced unnecessary intervention in the promotion process, which should be sacrosanct. The first thing Weinberger did after swearing me in was hand me the results of a Navy O-6 promotion board. There were allegations of unfairness being practiced by my predecessor. There was also a Marine Corps general officer promotion board, same thing.

I started off my tenure by saying, I'm taking over on the thirty day note here. I want the Navy to look at where it feels it's broken and needs to be fixed and to come and talk to me. I want the Marine Corps to do the same thing. In other words, this isn't a hand off by my predecessor. I'm going to take a look at everything as I come in the door. The Marine Corps had some serious issues, which I'll get into when I talk about Al Gray because the way I did the Marine Corps thing was by focusing on picking the new Commandant. When I was waiting for my confirmation hearing I was told by my predecessor that I would get to help him pick the next Commandant. I said, "No. The Commandant is happening after you leave and I'm picking the next Commandant."

Allison: Your predecessor said that?



Webb: Yes. Another thing I did right at the beginning was the vice CNO came in and told me of his concern that the person who had been the assistant secretary of the Navy for Research had been given a continuation of his black security clearances after he left the job. Hunt Hardisty, Admiral Hardisty, said this had no precedent, that when an official leaves, they do not get to keep their black clearances. So, my first day in office I cancelled the black clearances that my predecessor had given to Mr. Paisley. I'm very lucky I did that because he later was indicted by the FBI and went to jail. If I had continued his black clearances, I would have spent my whole summer talking to the FBI. But I just said nope, thank you Admiral Hardisty. *[laughter]*

But on the women's issue here's what I decided it needed. I had three years in the building. Actually, I had four years in the building, but three years as an executive in the Reagan Administration. You know, I had seen a lot of people in key positions go out and give lip service to issues of women in the military and then as soon as the door was closed they'd kind of shrug and say they needed to feed the sharks, that the DACOWITS people were coming back again. Having grown up inside the operational military where facts were a necessary part of survival, I have always had a tendency to, as an Air Force friend of my dad's used to say, "Just go ahead and blurt out the truth." *[laughter]*

So, I would say the same thing wherever I was, and I looked around at these people when the door was closed and I'd go, what is going on here? So, when I became Navy secretary I said, "Let's solve this problem instead of playing these games." You know, we're inching up on it, when we need to be all over it. It's the five-paragraph order thing again. Let's come up with a plan and clear up the problem.

I put together a 28-person group of senior NCOs and officers. Half of them men, half of them women. There was a woman who had previously briefed me, who was a JG. She was getting out of the Navy. She was an intelligence officer. I interviewed her afterwards and she really had her head screwed on right. I made her sort of like my ombudsman on this advisory group.

I sent these people, this group, to commands around the world with the mission of coming back and reporting on where you could open up billets to women. Where you can, where you maybe you shouldn't; whatever, give your opinions. I told this JG who was getting out, "Anytime you think this is going in the wrong direction in terms of bias you can walk into my office, but otherwise just go do it." Then I ordered that the military leaders would be held accountable and not just me. When you grow up in the military you never forget their necessary role. I had that group report to the warfare chiefs and warfare chiefs to the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] before they all came to me. This would be the military coming to the civilian side, not the other way around. They went through the whole process. They did their thing. They came to me and they made recommendations. The one real surprise in it was the opening up as many billets as they did for women aboard ship. That surprised me. Admiral Nyquist had the surface side at that time, the surface warfare side. After they reported their results. I said, "All right. We're going to do this." And I said, "Admiral Nyquist this one is yours."

I had Admiral Nyquist do an interview with the *Navy Times*. Go do it and explain the logic and the do-ability of it. They actually taught the way we conducted the study and implemented the results at Harvard's Kennedy School as a case study. So, I opened up more billets to women than any secretary of the Navy in history at that

point. But, we did it the right way. We did it by going out and listening to the commanders and bringing the uniformed side aboard on the issues.

Allison: Wasn't a top-down thing?

Webb: It wasn't a civilian process; waving the wand and announcing this is how it will be.

So, anyway, when it came to the Marine Corps, there had been something of a breakdown in general officer morale. I followed the Marine Corps closely for many years, well before I became secretary or ASD. But after the Beirut bombing a lot of the top warfighters in the Marine Corps had gone to General [P.X.] Kelley and advised him to tighten up. General Kelley had made a comment saying that as Commandant he wasn't in the operational chain of command when the building blew up. There had been a lot of unease over this. I am told that the next morning there were several of these what you would call warfighter generals who were saying, you've got to say something different than that, however you want to position this. Apparently, this did not go over very well. There were some really, really good warfighters who were gone by the time I became secretary of the Navy. People like Mick Trainor who I'd known for years. I remember seeing him on the front step of the Pentagon, when I was ASD.

I was, "General, how's it going?"

"Well, not too well. I'm going to retire."

I said, "General, you're going to retire?"

He said, "Well, let's just say my contract wasn't renewed." *[laughter]*

Okay, Roger that.

Some of this by many reports ran downhill, not just with the generals. If you look at the officer group that was commissioned in the early Sixties, many of whom

did a couple of hard tours in Vietnam, there were some really fine and respected combat leaders. Data shown to me indicated that in a two-year period nine Navy Cross recipients had been passed over for general officer. To put that into context, in the entire Vietnam War although the Marine Corps suffered more than 100,000 killed or wounded there were only 360 awards of the Navy Cross. Receiving the Navy Cross should not guarantee anyone a promotion but passing over nine Navy Cross recipients in two years from a very small peer group was a red flag that maybe something in the process was broken. It was not for me to directly intervene as a civilian service secretary. I had my own opinions. Finding the right new Commandant was the key.

When I was waiting for my confirmation hearing I invited in every four-star in the Navy and Marine Corps for an hour, one-on-one close the door. I brought in every locatable three-star for 45 minutes, notionally 45 minutes, close the door. Every two-star in the region for a half-hour, notionally, let's talk. Trying to get lines of thought here on where problems might be.

Then on the Marine Corps, I brought in former Commandants and respected members of the retired community. General Bob Barrow is one of my heroes from the time I was working on the Hill when I got to know him, and from his combat record before that. Barrow saved the Marine Corps in the late 70s and early 80s. I just have tremendous regard for him, and he came up. Over two days, I spent eight hours with Bob Barrow.

There were 67 general officers in the Marine Corps at that point. He brought in the list of the 67. He ranked every one of them from 1 to 10 and he explained why, on every single one of them, and he told me he didn't care if I shared his ranking with

every one of them. I didn't have to agree with him on every one of them to learn from him. This guy was a real leader and he was going to lay it all on the table.

I also brought in some of the great warfighter retirees like General [James] Day, a Medal of Honor recipient who had served at just about every rank from private to his retirement as a two-star. We spent more than an hour talking personally, one on one, about the present state of the Marine Corps.

I would tell every one of them my view of the role of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. You have to be the spiritual leader of the Marine Corps. You have to be able to inspire people by what you've done and by what you believe needs to be done. You have to develop weapon systems and manage a budget. You need to be a fair but sure leader in terms of making the hard command decisions, and have a communicable humility to the lowest Private. You have to be able to survive in the Tank. You have to be able to survive down there in the Joint Chiefs. And then I would ask them, who should that person be?

I spoke several times with P.X. Kelley. He decided to support General [Tom] Morgan who was the Assistant Commandant. Kelley first had a recommendation other than General Morgan, but he finally decided on General Morgan.

Allison: He was an aviator.

Webb: Yes, he was an aviator.

Allison: And did I understand you that, that's who General Kelley recommended?

Webb: Yes. General Morgan was a very fine Assistant Commandant. General Barrow was high on Lieutenant General Cheatham, for whom I had and continue to have a great deal of respect. But I kept coming back to Al Gray.

Allison: Why?

Webb: I had watched him when he was a two-star. I watched what he did after the bombing in Beirut. The country was reeling. The next morning at zero-dark-thirty he had the Marine replacements that were heading to Beirut out on the tarmac, in formation, ready to go, and he was there to make sure they understood how important this was. They were immediately going in there to replace the Marines who had been killed. I spent time with him when I was ASD. I watched him from a distance and as ASD we linked up in the field when I participated in a large-scale reserve landing exercise down off of Camp Lejeune, which was kind of fun to do.

When I decided to observe that exercise, I announced that I wanted to actually make the landing with the Marines. The Headquarters Marine Corps higherups got nervous. General Kelley wanted me to come and watch this landing from the bleachers on the beach, which in my view would have been both useless and demeaning.

I said, “No, I want to make the landing.”

Then they said, “Okay you can come in on a landing craft and we’ll stop the landing craft at the beach and then you can get out and sit in the bleachers.”

So, I spent the night on the ship, which I recall was the USS *Tarawa*, and came in on the landing craft. When it hit the beach there’s a Marine officer waving the landing craft over toward the bleachers to drop me off. I told the driver, “Just keep going.” *[laughter]* “You’re in a tactical exercise here, you’re in the attack. You don’t have to drop me off. Go!”

When they reached their initial tactical objective, I jumped out and I just took off, me and my military aide. Al Gray found me about three hours later. He had some

intermittent radio reports from the field about me showing up at different positions and then leaving and finally caught me at a crossroads. I was just going around talking to Marines. You know, like, “Hey, Marines. Tell me what’s going on here?”

Allison: Were you in utilities?

Webb: Oh yeah, yeah, I was in utilities.

Allison: Full combat?

Webb: No pack or weapon. But I was in my full utilities from Vietnam, including my bush hat.

Allison: Wow.

Webb: So, Al and I hung out for a while and shared views. It was great to observe him in the field and to share serious ideas afterward, without all the clutter of the Pentagon or some command headquarters. And there are a number of strong things to say about Al Gray. He had operated inside the national command authority. He had a vision and he could inspire people. When he would talk about different issues there was a harmony there in terms of how the Marine Corps needed to move forward from where it was. I had and continue to have tremendous regard for General Cheatham. General Barrow really was a great supporter of General Cheatham. It was a hard choice there. But I just kept coming back to Al Gray’s vision.

Another thing that impressed me about him was, he had walked a Marine Corps program all the way through the Congress and into the field. I think it was the LAV concept. When he was the director of the development center, he actually took a program and gained the confidence of the keepers of all the congressional wickets, and got it done on time. Which is rare. It wasn’t just like, okay I’m in this billet for a year

and then I'm going to go do something. He had been very persuasive on the Hill. He was there to do things. He's a motivator. You get around Al Gray you're motivated.

Allison: Oh yes. He is.

Webb: So, I finally said, all right I want to move Al Gray forward. General Kelley did not like this. He came to me several times with his objections and when I overrode him, he took it elsewhere. He was a good friend of the vice president and he told me he was going to voice his objections with VP Bush and I assume he did. This thing kind of exploded all over the place. There were name callings and ad hominem attacks on Al and on several other, shall we say, candidates. Finally, Cap Weinberger called me and he said, "From what I'm hearing none of these people should be Commandant." He said, "This is really a bloodbath." He said, "I'm going to have to back you up. You're new in that position and I'm not going to undermine you, I'm going to go with General Gray."

Once that was settled, General Gray and I met offline down in Florida and sat down to get his thoughts and to discuss my recommendations for his initial months as Commandant. My main comment to Al Gray was, looking at the way I put together and melded the very complex ASD staff, "To cement your leadership model you have to get your best people into place fast at the general officer level. You can't just let the normal process of retirements happen the way that they've been happening."

We looked at the 67 general officers. These would be his decisions but I said, "You've got to put your own all-star team in there."

Over a year he got 18 general officer retirements out of 67 general officer billets. He did it in a very respectful way. There were no negatives. It was just to move forward. And I believe Al Gray really energized the Marine Corps.



Allison: Yes. Almost like a watershed commandancy. Things really changed then and they changed for the better is always the feeling I get about it and what people say about it how he put the emphasis back on the warfighter, you know, combat Marines.

Webb: Yes.

Allison: And the thing about the utilities and his pictures in the utilities and the utilities portrait. But he also was a thinker.

Webb: He was very much a thinker and still is.

Allison: He brought Marine Corps University online and intellectual emphasis to the Marine Corps, which is altogether new, too, that was a big deal.

Webb: Leadership is finding the right people, trusting them, supervising—in other words supervising wouldn't be the right word for me and Al Gray, but you know work with them, and further enable their futures.

When I put together my staff in the Senate, I made sure that every member of my staff had to have a personal interview with me before they came aboard. It could be a woman running a one-person office in the mountains of Grundy, Virginia, an eight-hour drive away, but we would bring her on up, put her up overnight, have her visit with our key people and then with me. I would sit down, let her know what the five-paragraph order was, what the mission statement was, and then listen to her tell me about how she felt about working with us and I guess about her life in general. No different than setting in my platoon lines in the Arizona Valley. Listen to people. Let them know they are a part of something. Al Gray was very good about that.

Allison: He's very approachable, too. Yeah, he draws you in.

Webb: He's still going. I have lunch with him now and then and we talk on the phone.

Allison: Was there much controversy once he—once you got him through the Marine Corps network about getting him confirmed?

Webb: I don't think there was any problem there. It was just the stuff that was being thrown out there before then. He really was different than what was there before.

Allison: There were a lot of changes going on in the Marine Corps and in the National Defense at that time. The whole thing about the CINCs was being stood up. Central Command and Rapid Deployment Forces and—

Webb: I mentioned before the piece I wrote about Marine Corps roles and missions.

Allison: 1972. I read that, that's a great article.

Webb: It still holds up in its own way.

Allison: Right.

Webb: Yes, but the thing with the—the Goldwater-Nichols and the change—the empowerment of the CINCs took place during a later period. And it was a totally different concept to giving the CINCs so much leeway and direct influence on the budgeting and policy process.

Allison: Right, 1986 it was passed.

Webb: Yes, 1986-87. I sat on the Defense Resources Board the Armed Forces Policy Council and there were a number of legitimate concerns being raised about the growing policy power of the CINCs and the potential disruption of traditional requirements for promotions. There was a lot of resistance from the sea services regarding the requirement to have a joint billet before you could become a flag officer. If you were in the Air Force or the Army at that period it made at least some sense, because those services weren't coordinating in terms of things like close air support, or a number of

other things that would happen in a major combat operation. But for the Navy and Marine Corps they were doing it all the time, in peace and war.

In the Navy, there was great concern about taking the emphasis off of command at sea, which has always been the great test and the great reward of leadership. They were worried it was going to become more important to have served in a less rigorous job on a joint staff somewhere than it would be to command at sea, which is the ultimate prerequisite for long-term promotion inside the Navy at that time.

And the Marine Corps, I think justifiably, pushed against the notion of having to offer up their organic units to Special Operations Command, like their recon units and these sorts of things. An integral part of whole Marine Corps doctrine, it's not something you give away to another command that won't give it back to you when you need it.

Allison: Right.

Webb: There were two other items on the SecNav time. They're not really Marine Corps specific, but they are, indirectly. The first was the Persian Gulf situation in 1987 as a spillover of the Iran/Iraq war. And the second it the budget battle that led me to resign my position. Let's start with the Persian Gulf during that period.

Allison: Tanker War.

Webb: My experience then shaped my views about the later invasion of Iraq and the continuing operations of our military in that part of the world. This was when I started warning against a long-term direct involvement in that region. We can carry out our national security concerns without getting tangled up in a 2000-year brawl that we're not really going to stop.

In my mind this operational blundering had its roots, oddly, in the Iran-Contra revelations that came out in December of 1986, which dealt a double-whammy to American policies in the Middle East and in Central America. Part of this was what had been happening on the Contra side. But we also were providing weapons to Iran supposedly in exchange for getting hostages out in the Middle East. That revelation was a big concern in the region, because the Iran/Iraq War was going on and there were suspicions and allegations that we were tilting toward Iran by giving them weapons as opposed to Iraq.

Cap Weinberger had it right. He used to say, “That’s a war between the worst regime in the world and the second worst regime in the world and I don’t know which is which.” *[laughter]* You know, stay away.

The Iran Contra thing broke in December. In February of 1987, when I was in the interim period between assistant secretary of defense and secretary of the Navy, the Tanker Wars were suddenly announced after a Wednesday morning breakfast with secretary of state, secretary of defense, and CIA. It was decided that we were going to reflag Kuwaiti tankers as American vessels in the Persian Gulf, and defend them against Iranian attacks.

Kuwait at that time was the number one ally of Iraq in the Iran/Iraq War. I was looking at that and I was going, why are we doing this? It was a direct provocation of Iran. It seemed to me that it had something to do with sending a signal to the region that we hadn’t tilted toward Iran. Nobody seemed to notice. As soon as it was announced everybody wanted to play.

The Tanker War got pretty silly. Iran puts a mine out there and it hits a ship, which is supposedly an American ship and then we're sending minesweepers from the West Coast of the United States, Korean War minesweepers from the West Coast of the United States to go sweep. As secretary of the Navy I'm thinking, wait a minute, we're sending old minesweepers all the way from America while we just sold the Saudis thirteen brand new minesweepers.

I started sending Weinberger a series of memos, classified memos, basically expressing my reservations about what was going on. I had no operational authority as secretary of the Navy, but at least I could give him policy advice. The minesweeper journey from the United States was pretty humiliating. At one point, two of them bumped against each other while at sea. We had the Saudi minesweepers right there. I mentioned that to Weinberger, and I got pulled down to the Tank. I'm getting a briefing and somebody says, "Well, the Saudi minesweepers are there, but they don't know how to use them yet."

I said, "How about we send a crew? Why don't we just send a crew over there and advise them? We've done advising before, right?"

Then they put up a big platform out in the Persian Gulf and put special operators on it in case the Iranian gunboats attack Kuwaiti tankers that were flying American flags. As secretary of the Navy I had to sign the indemnification agreement to a Kuwaiti company that provided the barge in case it got sunk. That gave me a little room to play.

So, I write another memo to Weinberger. "What do we know about this barge? Is it double-bottomed like a Navy vessel? Is it honeycombed compartment? Why should I sign this?" I said, "I'm not signing it unless I'm comfortable." I didn't sign it,

but I got brought down and seriously counseled for that one. I just thought it was a terrible idea and I was saying over and over again, “International waterways, yes. Getting involved in that region one side or the other, no.”

In May, an Iraqi aircraft attacked the USS *Stark* inside the Persian Gulf. The ship was disabled and 37 sailors were killed. They say, oops, it was an accident. We respond by sending one of our top officials to Iraq to give them better ability to look at our stuff at sea. This is Iraq. We are defending the oil tankers of the Kuwaitis, their number one ally, against Iran, their enemy, and they shoot the hell out of one of our ships. We’re doing this in 1987-88. Then by 1990 Saddam Hussein is invading Kuwait and away we go. And here we are.

Welcome to the Middle East.

I came away from all of that with very strong feelings, and I know I offended some people in the administration. I still believe it is against our national interest to get tangled up on the ground in that part of the world. Define our national security interests, protect them. You don’t have to go over there to do this other stuff in order to do that.

The other major issue was the force structure argument. I had spoken about force structure issues and in ’84 had written a paper to the undersecretary of defense for policy outlining my views for how to reshape the military force structure beginning with a draw-down of our NATO presence. I did a lot of work on this when I was ASD. In 1986 we had 216,000 American Army soldiers in Germany alone. The entire British Army was 145,000 people. We had 50,000 more people in NATO-Europe in 1986 than we had there during the Vietnam War. It was a holding tank for force structure that was

not clearly connected to NATO requirements. This applied to the Air Force too. There were 88,000 American Air Force personnel in NATO-Europe.

My view on overall force structure looking into the future was to increase the size of the Navy and hold the structure of the Marine Corps, to recognize the growing importance of American national and military interests in Asia, to reduce the size of the Army and Air Force commitment to NATO, and to treat overall force structure questions accordingly. That would be the proper long-term solution. It was doable without affecting our national security at all.

In October, 1963, former President Eisenhower wrote a piece about reducing NATO force structure in the Saturday Evening Post, saying it was time for us to do much of the same. Unfortunately, this was the month before John Kennedy was assassinated, and his recommendations were lost in the national consciousness because of the turmoil following the assassination. But he was basically saying, hey, we put troops in there in 1949 as a temporary hold until Europe got back on its feet, and now we need to bring them out. That was more than 50 years ago.

I never argued for bringing all of them out, because I think it's a good idea to have maneuver forces that are positioned in case of large crises and are signaling to the region that we haven't dislocated from our historic connection to Europe. But in 1988 with Gorbachev in power in the Soviet Union and the Soviet withdrawals from Afghanistan we had reached a moment where we could effectively reduce our presence there without making our allies nervous or emboldening our adversaries.

When [Frank] Carlucci came in to be secretary of defense, the Gramm-Rudman legislation had just been passed. Gramm-Rudman mandated that there be a 5 percent

overall cut in a federal budget that had already been scrubbed. Half of these programs, such as Social Security, were fenced. So, that meant that in DOD we had to take a ten percent cut in a budget that had already been scrubbed.

I believed we could absorb a 10 percent hit in 1988 and still preserve the Navy's ship-building program. We were at 568 ships. We had 930 combatants when I was commissioned in 1968. We got down to 479 by 1979. We'd grown it back up to 568. I said, "I think we can ride this out and still preserve shipbuilding."

This was not pie in the sky. We brought three different budget reductions into the Defense Resources Board, showing that we could make these cuts and not affect our shipbuilding program. Carlucci knew he was going to be secretary of defense for a short period of time. I don't want to demean him by saying that. He made his own decisions. He was getting pressure from Congress on possible cuts in every service. The Army supporters were saying don't cut the Army. The Air Force supporters were saying, don't cut the Air Force. Carlucci's mantra was, everybody has to give up something. Everybody has to give up force structure. That keeps people over on the Hill happy. We don't have to fight that.

One can imagine what the brawl might have been if the Navy was not required to cut force structure while the other forces did. On the other hand, I felt very strongly that this was a moment when we could actually make the point that these force structures did indeed need to be realigned to mirror the strategic changes that were taking place in our global positioning, and I was not interested in trading my credibility to go along with a simplistic formula that was not reflecting the realities that our country was facing.



Over a period of three months, I worked up three different budgets showing how we could hit the ten percent decrement and not affect shipbuilding. Secretary Carlucci and Deputy Secretary Taft did not agree. Finally, I had to make a decision, which was that my long-term credibility was worth more than the criticism I was going to take by refusing to walk Secretary Carlucci's reductions over to the Congress.

And that's how I ended up resigning as secretary of the Navy.

Allison: He insisted on shipbuilding being cut? The number of warships?

Webb: Force structure. Ships. In a budget that had met the Gramm-Rudman mandate but did not meet Carlucci's bureaucratic demand that whenever things go well, all the services get more, and when things go bad, every service gives back. Tell me, is that strategy, or something else?

Allison: Force structure.

Webb: We lost 16 ships. And if we caved, the needle was pointing down, despite clear national security indications that it should have been otherwise.

Allison: It's been going on ever since.

Webb: When I did that, Larry Garrett, my hand-picked Under-Secretary of the Navy, came into see me and asked me "What are you doing?"

I said, "I do not choose to become the father of the 350 ship Navy."

And so ended my tenure as Secretary of the Navy. But the issues that were involved in this decision are still very much with us today.

*End of Session IV*



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Field exercise with 2d MarDiv, with General Al Gray, 1984.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Assistant Secretary of Defense Webb with the German Army, 1986.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Secretary of the Navy confirmation hearing, 1987.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Secretary Webb with Commandant General Gray.



*Courtesy of James H. Webb*

Webb with President Reagan.



## Appendix A

### Citations



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting  
the NAVY CROSS to

FIRST LIEUTENANT JAMES H. WEBB, JR.  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following citation:

For extraordinary heroism while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company D, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 10 July 1969, while participating in a company-sized search and destroy operation deep in hostile territory, First Lieutenant Webb's platoon discovered a well-camouflaged bunker complex which appeared to be unoccupied. Deploying his men into defensive positions, First Lieutenant Webb was advancing to the first bunker when three enemy soldiers armed with hand grenades jumped out. Reacting instantly, he grabbed the closest man and, brandishing his .45 caliber pistol at the others, apprehended all three of the soldiers. Accompanied by one of his men, he then approached the second bunker and called for the enemy to surrender. When the hostile soldiers failed to answer him and threw a grenade which detonated dangerously close to him, First Lieutenant Webb detonated a claymore mine in the bunker aperture, accounting for two enemy casualties and disclosing the entrance to a tunnel. Despite the smoke and debris from the explosion and the possibility of enemy soldiers hiding in the tunnel, he then conducted a thorough search which yielded several items of equipment and numerous documents containing valuable intelligence data. Continuing the assault, he approached a third bunker and was preparing to fire into it when the enemy threw another grenade. Observing the grenade land dangerously close to his companion, First Lieutenant Webb simultaneously fired his weapon at the enemy, pushed the Marine away from the grenade, and shielded him from the explosion with his own body. Although sustaining painful fragmentation wounds from the explosion, he managed to throw a grenade into the aperture and completely destroy the remaining bunker. By his courage, aggressive leadership, and selfless devotion to duty, First Lieutenant Webb upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

For the President,

*John H. Chafee*  
Secretary of the Navy



The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the  
SILVER STAR MEDAL to

FIRST LIEUTENANT JAMES H. WEBB, JR.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company D, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 9 May 1969, during Operation Muskogee Meadow, a six-man reconnaissance patrol from First Lieutenant Webb's platoon was ambushed and temporarily pinned down by a large North Vietnamese Army force concealed in a tree line four hundred meters in front of Company D's night defensive position. Immediately upon learning of the dangerous situation, First Lieutenant Webb organized a reaction force and proceeded to the point of contact to aid his beleaguered Marines. When his reaction unit came under enemy automatic weapons and rocket fire as it approached the ambush site, he executed a skillful evasive maneuver, established a base of fire, and continued to advance across the fire-swept terrain to the patrol's position. Rallying and encouraging his men, he directed his base of fire forward to a more advantageous position and led his assault team one hundred and fifty meters across an open rice paddy in a bold attempt to recover several casualties lying in an open area directly in the line of enemy fire. As his Marines delivered a heavy volume of fire at hostile positions, First Lieutenant Webb repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire as he dashed into the open and pulled the casualties, one at a time, back to friendly lines. Then, consolidating his platoon, he initiated a sudden, vigorous attack which routed the enemy soldiers from their bunkers, disorganized their fire plan, and forced them to retreat from the area. His determination and bold fighting spirit inspired all who observed him and were instrumental in saving the lives of at least two Marines and undoubtedly thwarting the enemy's plan to launch a major attack against his unit's night position. By his leadership, extraordinary courage, and unflagging devotion to duty at great personal risk, First Lieutenant Webb upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."

FOR THE PRESIDENT,

*Wm K Jones*  
WILLIAM K. JONES

LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDING GENERAL, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the  
BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

SECOND LIEUTENANT JAMES H. WEBB, JR.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For heroic achievement in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company D, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division. On 20 April 1969, Second Lieutenant Webb was leading a sixteen-man patrol along a rice paddy dike into the village of La Thap in Quang Nam Province when the Marines came under small arms and machine gun fire from a well-concealed and numerically superior hostile force. In the initial burst of fire, the Marine immediately ahead of Second Lieutenant Webb was seriously wounded and fell off the paddy dike onto the side exposed to enemy fire. Reacting instantly, Second Lieutenant Webb unhesitatingly ran across the fire-swept terrain from one man to another, shouting directions and deploying them into advantageous positions from which to return fire upon the hostile soldiers. Then fearlessly crawling over to the exposed side of the dike, he pulled the casualty back to relative safety and administered first aid until a corpsman arrived. Subsequently requesting and directing Marine artillery fire upon the enemy, he also arranged for the evacuation of the casualty. His heroic and timely actions inspired all who observed him and were responsible for saving the life of a wounded Marine. Second Lieutenant Webb's courage, bold leadership and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

FOR THE PRESIDENT,

*H. W. Buse Jr.*

H. W. BUSE, JR.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDING GENERAL, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC



The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting a gold star  
in lieu of the second BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

FIRST LIEUTENANT JAMES H. WEBB

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For meritorious service in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam while serving with the Fifth Marines, First Marine Division from 19 March 1969 to 11 February 1970. Throughout this period, First Lieutenant Webb performed his duties in an exemplary and highly professional manner. Initially assigned as a Platoon Commander with Company D, First Battalion, he worked tirelessly to expeditiously accomplish all assigned tasks and consistently provided his unit with outstanding support. Constantly concerned for the proficiency and combat readiness of his platoon, he diligently trained his men and quickly molded them into an effective fighting team fully capable of responding to all tactical situations. While participating in numerous combat operations, he repeatedly distinguished himself by his courage and composure under fire as he aggressively led his men during several successful combat engagements against enemy forces. Reassigned as the Commanding Officer of Company D, his sound application of tactics and inspiring leadership contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission. On 5 November 1969, while deployed west of An Hoa Combat Base in the Arizona Territory, First Lieutenant Webb skillfully initiated an ambush against a large hostile force, and as a result of his timely actions, eighteen enemy soldiers were killed, and no friendly casualties were suffered. Subsequently reassigned with Regimental Headquarters as a Combat Operations Center Watch Officer and Briefer, he continued to distinguish himself by the superior performance of his duties. First Lieutenant Webb's professional competence, dynamic leadership, and steadfast devotion to duty throughout his tour in the Republic of Vietnam earned the respect and admiration of all who associated with him and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

FOR THE PRESIDENT,

*Wm K Jones*

WILLIAM K JONES

LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDING GENERAL, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC





# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
HAS AWARDED THE

## PURPLE HEART

ESTABLISHED BY GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON  
AT NEWBURGH, NEW YORK, AUGUST 7, 1782  
TO

First Lieutenant James H. Webb, U.S. Marine Corps

FOR WOUNDS RECEIVED  
IN ACTION

in Vietnam on 29 May and 10 July 1969

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON  
THIS 29th DAY OF June 1971

GENERAL, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

## Appendix B

Roles & Missions: Time for A Change  
by Captain James H. Webb  
March 1972, *Marine Corps Gazette*<sup>1</sup>

Limited by law to implementing exclusively its traditional amphibious capability places the Marine Corps in a rather tenuous situation.

The past few years have produced a previously un contemplated number of changes in our society, some of them revolutionary and many long overdue. Almost every facet of American life has been affected to some extent, including the highly publicized and widely debated liberalization of much of our military. There is, however, another more crucial area of the military in which change is long overdue. That area concerns the outdated roles and missions of the Services, in particular the Marine Corps, which remain in effect. It was partially concern for this that led writer George P. Hunt, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, to muse in *Life Magazine* recently that “the U.S. military establishment is in ragged shape . . . undermined by inflation, by worn-out strategies, [and] by entrenched old ways of top direction.”

In the article that followed, LtCol Hunt unwittingly identified the basic problem facing our Corps when he optimistically described the following mission for us:

Readiness for anything that comes along, planned or unplanned, including full-scale amphibious assault.

This mission statement, which most Marines would probably agree with, holds to the tenet that the amphibious role is contained within the greater mission of providing a force in readiness for any situation. It is ironic that our history and day to day tasks substantiate that fact, while our assigned mission in both the National security Act of 1947 and the Key West Agreements ignores it. This situation has had little effect on daily FMF responsibilities; however, such a limitation of our assigned mission serves to limit the scope of the Marine Corps’ influence in Department of Defense policy, as well as among the other services.

Most Marines know that the authority for establishing the Department of Defense and its Military Departments rests with the National Security Act of 1947. However, surprisingly few have heard of the document which is the definitive source for the specific missions and functions of each of the services, or are aware of its importance as it relates to the existence of the Marine Corps. Commonly known as the Functions Papers, or the Key West Agreements, it originated in March of 1948, and has been updated through 1969 with only a few minor changes.

The Marine Corps derives its primary function of amphibious warfare from the Agreements. Indeed, as a result of this document, we are limited to the following functions:

- (1) To provide Fleet Marine Forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the Fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.
- (2) To provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, and security detachments for the protection of naval property at naval stations and bases.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was reproduced by permission of the publisher, *Marine Corps Gazette*.

(3) To develop, in coordination with the other Services, the doctrines, tactics, techniques, and equipment employed by landing forces in amphibious operations. The Marine Corps shall have primary interest in the development of those landing force doctrines, tactics techniques, and equipment which are of common interest to the Army and the Marine Corps.

(4) To train and equip, as required, Marine Forces for airborne operations, in coordination with the other Services and in accordance with doctrines established by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(5) To develop, in coordination with the other Services, doctrines, procedures, and equipment of interest to the Marine Corps for airborne operations and not provided for in Section V, paragraph Alc.<sup>2</sup>

It can be seen that, with the exception of a brief reference to airborne activities, the Marine Corps has been bound by law to a strictly amphibious role. Although our Corps has traditionally been involved with amphibious doctrine, to be limited exclusively to its implementation could place us in a rather tenuous situation, for at least two reasons.

First, the Army is assigned a similar function under the Agreements. The only real difference between the amphibious missions assigned the two services is that it is pointed out in the Agreements that “the Marine Corps shall have primary interest in the development of those landing force doctrines, tactics, techniques and equipment which are of common interest to the Army and Marine Corps.” This stated duplication of roles could ostensibly lead to the abolition of the Marine Corps.

Secondly, if limited to a primary amphibious role, in order to survive the Marine Corps must convince the “powers that be” of the absolute importance of the role, over other considerations. This has become increasingly difficult to do, especially since the Navy evidently does not hold to this belief, as evidenced by her recent de-emphasis on amphibious shipping. In 1951 there were 278 amphibious ships in the active fleet. In 1967, there were 162. By the end of this fiscal year, that figure will have dropped to only 76 ships. While it is true that the Navy has been forced to reduce most ship levels, it is interesting to note that these figures represent a 53 per cent drop in amphibious shipping since 1967, while other naval vessels have suffered a comparative drop of less than 28 per cent. (See chart #1) The amphibious Navy which has survived these cuts is for the most part old and depleted, with those ships which would be most directly involved in an amphibious effort suffering the worst cutbacks. (See chart #2) Additionally, contracts for our so-called hope for the future, the LHA, were cut from an original order of nine ships to a current contract for five.

These developments are certainly cause for grave concern, especially considering the nature of the Marine Corps roles previously outlined. As a result, the Corps could very well find itself once again fighting for existence, when by all rights it need not. In this regard, it is interesting to examine the circumstances surrounding just how the Marine Corps was assigned such a limited role in our National Defense.

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<sup>2</sup> “In addition to men at and around the bases themselves, we would have to have supporting troops in America, to provide the supplies and equipment and to train the reserves and replacements. Nor could we support or hold these bases without a great and unbeatable Navy, which could protect from air and submarine attack the necessary movement of men and supplies across the sea.”

## **The Key West Agreements**

By 1948, it had become apparent to the first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, that the guidelines set down in the National Security Act of 1947 were too general and, as a result, were causing much bickering between the different branches of the service concerning specific roles and missions. To rectify this, he assembled his Joint Chiefs of Staff at Key West, Florida in March of that year to participate in a series of secret talks. His purpose, as he related in a later statement, was to “produce an effective, economical, harmonious, and businesslike organization.” It was his desire to prevent unnecessary duplication among the Services and to fully utilize and exploit the full capabilities of each service. What resulted was an agreement which, although workable, has kept the services in a somewhat uneasy peace since its inception. Insofar as Marine Corps objectives are concerned, this Agreement has three very serious flaws:

- The American military at the time of the Agreements was still very much on the rebound from WWII. Consequently, the assigned functions for the Services contained in the Agreements ended up being little more than carbon copies of the roles and missions played by each service toward the end of that war. The Marine Corps accordingly landed its strictly amphibious role. This point caused Capt Robert P. Beebe, USN, to lament in the September 1961 Naval Institute Proceedings that “the Key West Agreement gives validity to the often heard criticism about the military always preparing to fight the next war like the last one.”
- The primary military concern in the United States in 1948 was the projection of strategic airpower loaded with nuclear bombs in the event of war. As such, the Air Force played a dominant role in the talks and subsequent Agreements. The position of the Air Force was so strong, in fact, that it was generally felt that the other Services would play mere supporting roles in future wars. This feeling led the then Secretary of the Army, Kenneth C. Royall, while speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March of 1948, to describe the other Services’ involvement in future wars thusly:

Offensive (air) bases which we would need to use in the event of war-to use, of course, with the consent of the nations involved-must be on the mainland of the oversea land mass, much nearer to the enemy than to our own country. These bases would be in locations insulated from America by sea, but reachable overland by mass armies of an enemy. Such bases cannot be held and cannot be defended without ground troops-all supplied by the Army.

In addition to men at and around the bases themselves, we would have to have supporting troops in America, to provide the supplies and equipment and to train the reserves and replacements. Nor could we support or hold these bases without a great and unbeatable Navy, which could protect from air and submarine attack the necessary movement of men and supplies across the sea.

It is significant that a Secretary of the Army would limit the role of his own Service in such a manner. It is equally significant that he did not mention the Marine Corps at all.

As it turns out, the Marine Corps was not even directly represented at Key West! The Marine Corps’ interests were represented, in the same manner as naval aviation’s, by the three

admirals present: Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, the Chief of Staff to the President, Admiral Louis E. Denfeld, Chief of Naval Operations, and Vice Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Vice CNO. The Commandant of the Marine Corps was not allowed to sit on the Joint Chiefs until 1952, even on matters concerning the Marine Corps. As such, one can but wonder what the Corps' position would have been if we could have bargained for ourselves.

As a result of these considerations, the Marine Corps came out very poorly compared to the other Services represented at Key West. In a military establishment concerned with the projection of strategic airpower during a potential conflict, the Marine Corps was not assigned a responsibility in that area. At a time when the newly formed Department of Defense sat its members down to hash out differences and assign specific tasks, the Marine Corps was not even allowed to represent its own interests. And at a time when the United States was still refighting WWII, the Corps was forced to accept a strictly amphibious mission which, although important, is limited to the point of insult when compared with proven Marine Corps capabilities.

In spite of our assigned missions, only two years later (2 Jul 50) the Marine Corps was once again called upon to plug the dike. The call for help came, and the Marines answered by sending a brigade to the Far East within three weeks. Names like Chosin Reservoir and Hagaruri, and Davis and Barber were logged into Marine Corps annals. And although there was one bitterly opposed amphibious assault at Inchon, Gen MacArthur did not ask for the Marines because he was planning to prosecute a naval campaign—he called on us because we were the ones who were ready to go. And so it took only two years for the functions assigned the Marine Corps at Key West to be proved incomplete. However, if the admirals representing our interests in 1948 had listened to history instead of the echoes of WWII, they would have known this.

The Marine Corps should be remembered for developing the amphibious concept, but the fact that we are capable of amphibious operations and continue to develop doctrine does not make us unique, nor does it justify our separate existence as a service. We have pursued other important missions throughout our history, all of which point us toward a different uniqueness, and all of which have both deeper traditional roots and more timeliness than our amphibious role.

### **Our Traditional Functions**

On 11 July 1798, the Fifth Congress passed an act “for the establishing and organizing of a Marine Corps.” Contained in this act under Section 6 was the sentence “. . . the Marine Corps, established by this Act, shall, at any time, be liable to do duty in the forts and garrisons of the United States, on the seacoast, or any other duty on shore, as the President, at his discretion, shall direct.”

This Section gave vent to one of the Marine Corps' most vital missions: preserving the peace on foreign shores, and protecting American lives abroad. The massing of an army near a foreign shore or boundary has always been tantamount to a declaration of war. In contrast, the use of the Marine Corps to perform this function has become, in political spheres, an acceptable alternative to war. During the earlier part of this century alone, Marines were called upon to perform this mission in Cuba, Panama, Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. Since the inception of the Key West Agreements we have continued in this tradition in Lebanon and once again in the Dominican Republic. Both of these latter actions bear out the contention that the Marines engaged in a political action short of war, as indicated by the quickness of the withdrawals once order was restored and by the very orders given the participating Marines, which were strictly defensive in nature.

Lebanon is a case in point. After the overthrow of the Iraqi government during July 1958, Lebanon was infiltrated with arms and men from nearby Syria, and there was a resulting threat of

“civil” war. Lebanon’s President Chamoun, realizing that his country’s home forces, which consisted of an Army of less than 9,000 soldiers and a police force of 4,000, were incapable of handling a major uprising, requested aid from the United States. Eisenhower predictably sent in the Marines, again for the dual purpose of aiding the Lebanese government and protecting American lives in that country. The President, in an address to the American people concerning the Crisis, stated:

We reacted as we did within a matter of hours because the situation was such that only prompt action would suffice . . . I believe that the presence of the United States forces now being sent to Lebanon will have a stabilizing effect which will preserve the independence and integrity of Lebanon. It will also afford an increased measure of security to the thousands of Americans who reside in Lebanon.

The emergency, again, was a political one, failing to reach anything near war proportions, and the organization which maintained the political objectives of the United States was the Marine Corps. The intention of our country not to initiate a war was reiterated by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, when he addressed the United Nations Security Council concerning the crisis as follows:

Our purpose in coming to the assistance of Lebanon is perfectly clear . . . our forces are not there to engage in hostilities of any kind; much less to start a war. Their presence is designed for the sole purpose of helping the Government of Lebanon at its request in its efforts to stabilize the situation brought on by these threats from outside.

The Marine Corps, then, has a very definite and important role in the carrying out of United States foreign policy. It is the institution which is at the President’s fingertips, designed from its beginning to answer his call for immediate service anywhere.

Another important traditional role of the Marine Corps has been its participation in extensive land campaigns, as evidenced through our involvement in WWI, Korea, and most recently the Republic of Vietnam. These periods of bitter fighting were not in any way related to the prosecution of a naval campaign, and took place merely because Marine units were ready and needed. Similarly, we have fought insurgents throughout our history.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that WWII was the only war which the Marine Corps has fought according to the principles assigned us by our Navy counterparts at Key West. This causes serious doubts concerning the validity of our assigned roles, and leads to the logical question of what would be a more accurate mission for the Corps to be assigned.

## **Readiness**

The answer, of course, is readiness. While it is realized that all Services must maintain a continual state of readiness in order that the nation remain secure, the unique feature of Marine Corps readiness is its capability of immediate reaction on a tactical level, with only internal coordination necessary to wage a fight. It might even be called “tactical readiness.” We are a package deal, the only Service which sports every tactical branch of combat arms. As such, we require a minimum of coordination in order to perform our mission. It was readiness which put us into Lebanon and the Dominican Republic. It was readiness which prompted MacArthur to ask for us in Korea, and it was again readiness which caused us to be assigned to critical tactical areas in Vietnam. All we

require from the Navy or any other Service is the transportation to put us into the fight and the logistical support to keep us there.

The Marine Corps has performed the role of the “shock force” throughout its history. It is the Service which always has provided the initial reaction in any disturbance critical to the national interest. Our former Commandant, Gen Leonard F. Chapman, Jr. indicated in many of his speeches the Corps’ intention to continue this role in the future. On 1 May 1971, while addressing the Annual Conference of the Marine Corps Reserve Officers Association, he stated:

We can and will maintain our tradition of readiness. And with such readiness, we can meet any emergency with confidence, because we know two things: First, whenever, a crisis comes, those who are ready will go. Second, such a crisis will more than likely be a surprise. So Marines will be ready. Every Marine, every piece of equipment, every unit-regular and reserve, will be ready with the Navy to mount out on short notice and at the direction of our Commander-in-Chief go anywhere, take on anybody-and win.

This statement is vitally important to the Marine Corps’ future for two reasons. First, Gen Chapman spoke of the “tradition of readiness.” And it is just that. Marines have served the readiness concept much longer than the amphibious. In fact, the development of amphibious doctrine was begun to insure our readiness to fight that particular type of conflict, and the amphibious role which we perform is actually but one of the areas where we maintain our quick-reaction posture.

Secondly, he maintained that we will “go anywhere, take on anybody-and win.” This in itself expands our role beyond those hot spots bordering the high seas, and in so doing encompasses roles which are more than amphibious or extensions of a naval campaign. In addition to being amphibious, we are, and always have been, the nation’s stopgap.

An examination of today’s world situation lends even more credibility to the cruciality of the Marine Corps’ readiness mission. Nuclear weaponry has progressed from exclusive United States ownership in 1948 to universal possession among the Big Powers. As such, it has become a tool in the preservation of power balances, and in all likelihood will not be used by anyone except in a last-gasp, utter desperation situation. The day-to-day political and military issues of the world are being handled through traditional channels, and this fact alone gives greater import to such organizations as the Marine Corps. It is entirely feasible that the Corps will be assuming a huge proportion of the Department of Defense’s workload in the coming years through the execution of its traditional mission of readiness, and as such will assume a greater posture among the services. With brushfire wars and necessities for immediate reaction possible daily, Marine Corps readiness assumes a new perspective-we are the only service which can effectively handle such requirements.

The Army is not designed to handle an immediate reaction mission, nor should it be required to do so. In order that a readiness mission of this scope be carried out, it seems logical that two conditions must be met: first, the organization must exist at a continual high state of readiness; and secondly, when a force is committed, all tactical arms must be immediately available to it, with a minimum amount of coordination.

The Army’s readiness for an immediate reaction is not good, and the expense of instituting such a state seems prohibitive. In an article in *Army* (July 1971) Lloyd Norman, a veteran Pentagon newsman who covers the Department of Defense for *Newsweek*, was openly pessimistic about the Army’s state of readiness. He wrote that “only one division (the 1st Infantry at Fort Riley, Kansas,

which backs up NATO with two brigades) was able to conduct field exercises this fiscal year.” Norman also pointed out that due to limited funds and personnel turbulence, the following other situations exist:

- The US Army in Europe is 20,000 men under its authorized strength of 185,000, with many of the actual fighting elements operating at half-strength.
- The Strategic Army Force, consisting of 4 1/3 divisions, has not carried out division-level exercises for four years in a row.
- Some major commands have had to curtail use of tactical vehicles due to fuel restrictions.
- The 82nd Airborne Division, considered by many to be the highest-priority, most elite combat-ready unit in the Army, was able to muster only two brigades for possible action during the Jordanian crisis of September 1970.

In spite of these discouraging facts, one might maintain that, with the prospect of an all volunteer Army, and the wind-down of the Vietnam War, this situation must improve. Not so, maintains Norman. He states that the “future is dimmed by coming budget reductions which may cut Army strength as much as 50,000 below planned levels for fiscal 1972, and may carve even further in future years. This scaling-down process may bring new turbulence and further erosion of combat readiness.”

The second stated requirement for the proper execution of an immediate reaction mission concerns the coordination of tactical arms. Although the Army sports considerable tactical weaponry, it must nevertheless rely on aircraft from other services, predominately those of the Air Force, for heavy close air support. At a time when minutes and hours are of utmost importance, a requirement for coordination in this regard could significantly affect performance. While the continued existence of the various unified commands has worked to simplify these coordination problems, our unique situation in the Marine Corps completely eliminates that necessity.

Again, then, the question seems to evolve: With personnel and budget difficulties, why should the Army be tasked with an immediate reaction mission which would sorely tax increasingly restricted resources, especially when this mission is a duplication of one which the Marine Corps already performs? Freeing the Army from this type of a readiness requirement could actually serve to improve her overall combat readiness, as emphasis could then be placed on other difficulties.

An additional point along these lines is worth considering. In 1961, due to the absence of a written immediate reaction mission for the Armed Forces, former Defense Secretary McNamara initiated the ill-fated “Strike Command,” with the following stated mission: “To furnish rapidly deployable, combat-ready forces in an emergency situation calling for a response on a scale less than all-out nuclear war.” The Command, consisting of the 115,000-man Strategic Army Corps, drawn from the Continental Army Command, and the 50,000 men of the Air Force Tactical Air Command, was supposedly kept in a high state of combat readiness, to be prepared for overseas deployment within 24 hours of call. Although it encountered coordination difficulties and problems resulting from the possibilities of double commitment of the same forces, Strike Command managed to exist, on paper at least, for a decade due to the considered need for such a force. One subsequently is led to wonder whether Secretary McNamara truly understood the role of the Marine Corps when he authorized Strike Command, or if he would have at all if the stated mission of the Corps in the National Security Act and Functions Papers was accurate. The mission



assigned to Strike Command was essentially that of the Marine Corps, while the Corps exists with none of the coordination or commitment difficulties which were inherent in Strike Command.

### **Recommendations**

In consideration of these points, then, we obviously should be allowed to expand our “paper mission” to include the traditional “real life” missions which we have carried out. Or is it so obvious? One might ask why this would be necessary when the Marine Corps continues to produce in spite of its stated missions.

It is admittedly doubtful that changing our mission thusly would have any great effect on the day to day operations of our FMF units, since they are already carrying out the duties included in the proposed expanded missions. However, it is felt that official sanction of the vital function we play as a Service would naturally precipitate the following major changes at higher levels:

- First, it would give us a greater measure of autonomy, since we would not be totally dependent on the needs of the Navy for our own survival. As policies now stand, a reaction requiring Air Force transportation is normally met with Army troops. Given the proper circumstances, it would make just as much sense to fly Marines into a critical area aboard Air Force transports as it would to fly Army personnel, and the difference in unit readiness is likely to be significant. Although the Navy would be used under the same circumstances as it is now, we would not be so strictly limited to that service.
- Secondly, a written statement of our readiness mission would serve notice to the civilian officials in decision-making places of this tradition which belongs to our Service. Although we in the Marine Corps are fully aware of our historic roles and missions, it becomes bad business to expect a man who has spent his life away from the military to agree with a principle which is not documented in appropriate laws and directives. Once again, Strike Command is a good example of what can easily happen.
- Thirdly, an expansion of our stated missions would give the Marine Corps greater bargaining power in higher echelon planning and decision making. The Commandant of the Marine Corps is still not a full member of the Joint Chiefs, sitting as a member only on matters concerning the Marine Corps. He must “declare interest” in order to voice his opinions. Although he currently sits on a great majority of issues through this process, a proper statement of Marine Corps missions would obviously expand those matters which concern the Corps to include those which concern the Defense of the United States, and hence give the Commandant a rightful full membership on the Joint Chiefs.

An additional point concerning our influence on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the various unified commands is worth mentioning. A Marine general officer has never headed a “J” staff on the Joint Chiefs. Furthermore, of the 41 flag rank officers currently serving on that Staff, only one is a Marine! The Air Force supplies 15 generals, the Army 12, and the Navy 13 admirals. This lack of representation is paralleled on all unified commands, as only three other Marine generals are serving in any capacity on all other unified commands; one on Pacific Command, one on European Command, and one on MAC-V. Considering the world situation today, and the vital role the Corps is playing in it, this tokenism is inexcusable. In this regard, the recent passage of a bill in the

House to allow the Marine Corps more general officers would seem to go hand in hand with this suggestion.

- And finally, it just does not make sense to assign to a Service one specific, very limited mission, and then require that same Service to perform a myriad of other functions. True, the National Security Act states that the Corps “shall perform such other duties as the President may direct.” However, most people laud that “catchall” phrase and ignore the next sentence of the Act, which states that “these additional duties may not detract from or interfere with the operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized.” This is clearly a case of the tail wagging the dog, and is misleading. The Marine Corps is primarily organized, as LtGen John R. Chaisson recently pointed out in Life Magazine, as “amphibious shock troops, emissaries, police, whatever comes up.” In short, as a force in readiness with an included amphibious mission. Since WWII, however, we have been known, on paper at least, as an amphibious force with an included mission of readiness. As our country strives to put the military back on its feet and headed in the proper direction, it would be quite unfortunate if it failed to realign the Marine Corps’ roles and missions with the policies and traditions it has always followed.

Secretary Forrestal recognized the periodic need for change when he placed the following statement in the original Key West Agreements:

Technological developments, variations in the availability of manpower and natural resources, changing economic conditions, and changes in the world politico-military situation may dictate the desirability of changes in the present assignment of specific functions and responsibilities to the individual Services. This determination and the initiation of implementing action are the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense.

Perhaps it is time that present Department of Defense officials recognize this need for change, and act accordingly.

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