



# LIFERS

**A Cultural Glimpse of Today's Marine Corps  
Through The Stories of Three Career Officers**

## ABSTRACT

*"I am just fortunate to have been able to serve for this long in a profession that I love," emailed one of the Lifers profiled in this manuscript reflecting upon his 25 years in the Marine Corps. Lifers is the term for Marines who dedicate their working lives to its service and this project highlights the stories of three. Storytelling is powerful. It emotionally connects the reader to subject matter in ways the cold statistics of quantitative analysis cannot. When used as a vehicle to explore complex social issues, stories provide information on a human scale and in an impactful way. Lifers is a collection of stories about the experiences and observations of three career Marine officers, all from the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1990. Their humanity, intellect and depth of character clearly emerge through the recollection of their personal experiences, which in turn tell an important story about today's Marine Corps. Using a method dubbed reciprocal storytelling by the author, Lifers is a hybrid of oral history and creative nonfiction written collaboratively with the participants. Their detailed feedback to the earliest drafts were incorporated into the final collection and added immeasurably to the authority and authenticity of the work.*

**Brian J. Fitzell**

CSP 675 - Capstone Project

Goucher College

Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

May 27, 2016

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## **PROLOGUE**

### **“Go Navy – Go Ninety!”**

I glanced over my shoulder as I pulled the minivan away from the neatly painted curb. The floodlights reflecting off of the marble green patina of the copper dome of the U.S. Naval Academy Chapel made the structure appear even more imposing than it did in the day. I shook my head as the recollection of my own wedding, held in the chapel 20 years before, and other fragments of memory flooded my thoughts.

I spent the last few hours at the Commandant of Midshipmen’s Quarters for a party celebrating my 25th reunion of the Naval Academy class of 1990. The position of Commandant of Midshipmen (or the ‘Dant in Mid-speak) is a post roughly equivalent to the Dean of Students at civilian colleges and universities. Subordinate only to the Superintendent of the Naval Academy, a position held by a two-star Navy Admiral, the ‘Dant is a critical leadership figure who not only impacted all aspects of daily life for of the Brigade of Midshipmen but also directed efforts towards their professional development. For Midshipmen, the Commandant assumed a mythical stature. The last time I had been in the place, as a graduating senior, I attended a reception hosted by then-Commandant of Midshipmen, Captain Joseph Prueher. It seemed more a museum than a home on that occasion and I did not think it likely that I would ever have occasion to step within its walls again. However, as circumstances dictated, the residence was now occupied by my classmate and friend, and I was an invited guest to a party with a group of alum and their families.

Twenty-five was the *BIG ONE*. For the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1990 (or simply, ‘90), the 25th Reunion was celebrated over the homecoming weekend in October, 2015. Amazing things had happened for the class. Most notably was ‘90’s own, Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, assuming the role of ‘Dant in time for the class reunion. Steve’s selection was significant for the class of ‘90 for

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

personal reasons, but was also a historically rare feat. Founded in 1845, the Naval Academy was an institution primarily dedicated to upholding the traditions of the U.S. Navy and was historically dominated by naval officers. Liszewski was only the second Marine officer to hold the post; Retired Marine Corps General John R. Allen, USNA Class of 1976, was the first. As Commandant of Midshipmen, Liszewski and his family occupied the furnished mansion on the academy grounds in the shadow of the chapel's dome. It was a two-sided perk. Though living in one of the Academy's mansions along "Captain's Row" was a common Midshipman fantasy harbored during the four-year ass-kicker that is Navy, the fulfillment of the fantasy also meant Steve and his family were constantly on display to the public and the Mids themselves. It was a challenge to relax when one resided in a fishbowl. As '90 kicked off its 25th reunion, Steve Liszewski was clearly the most visible member of the class.

Though significantly less visible to the public than the 'Dant, other members of '90 remained in uniform and on active duty in various billets around the Navy and Marine Corps. They were the *Lifers*, as those career men and women who dedicated their working lives to the sea services were known. As the long weekend of receptions, memorials, and a football game began, the *Lifers* stood on the cusp of either full retirement or promotion to the prestigious flag ranks of Navy Admiral or Marine Corps General. Twenty-five was, indeed, the *BIG ONE*. In this group were Marine Colonels, Timothy Winand and Christian Cabaniss. Both were infantry officers and had commanded Marines at increasingly higher levels of responsibility and in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively. Both were married, with children, and in attendance at '90's October bacchanalia.

Other classmates had gotten out of the military along the way. A large clump bailed at the completion of their mandated payback service obligations which, for '90, was a term of five or more years depending upon the graduate's service selection and follow-on graduate programs. Others staggered their exits after paying back their mandated service to pursue other careers or to address health or family issues. I left after serving 6 ½ years in the Marine Corps following graduation from the Academy.

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

I had attained a sense of peace with my decision to get out of the Marines, but my sense of internal harmony was a fairly recently achieved state. Earlier class reunions had inevitably filled me with feelings of regret at having left the Marines when I did; particularly when I spoke with peers who had deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and led units in combat in the intervening years. While still in the Corps, I deployed to Somalia in 1992 during Operation Restore Hope and commanded a weapons platoon in the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines. But my experiences in the “low-intensity” conflict of Mogadishu and Baidoa did not rate a comparison to the experiences of those who served in the post-9/11 Marine Corps and deployed overseas multiple times during a decade of continuous combat operations.

In the past, my self-reflection led to second-guessing some of my life’s choices. By the 25th reunion, though, I was comfortable in my own skin and proud of my own path. I left the Corps to become a Special Agent in the FBI and; in the Bureau, I found a culture similar to the one I had left and I was doing meaningful work with capable colleagues. I was married and had four children aged 18, 15, 13, and 10. Over the intervening years, I had kept in touch with very few of my classmates and friends from the Marine Corps, as the inevitable chaos of modern family life dominated my time. It was always good to re-connect with Academy classmates despite the lack of communication in between reunions, though, and the culture of the military made huge allowances for the large gaps in contact without guilt nor penalty. Separated by the geography of assignments and timing, *shipmates* might not speak for years only to pick up a conversation left unfinished when a chance encounter put them together again.

At the 25th, I hoped to connect with classmates Steve Liszewski, Chris Cabaniss and Tim Winand. Not only was I friends with the career Marines, and looking forward to swapping stories, but I also hoped to include them in a project I envisioned for my capstone for the Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability (MACS) I was completing at Goucher College. My return to academia after two decades was a fluke in its own right. The FBI had a continuing education program which included several sabbatical programs, and the University Education Program, which afforded FBI employees the opportunity to obtain advanced degrees while continuing to work full time. Given the brutal schedule of

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

most Agents in the field, and the competing demands of an active family, getting to capstone was a testament to my own endurance and my family's support and patience.

The arc of my experiences at Goucher and my 19 years as an investigator organically shaped the direction and form of my capstone project. Looking back, it is best described as an evolutionary process, one influenced by my exposure to the concepts and techniques of ethnography, oral history, and creative nonfiction. In January 2015, I read an essay about the state of the U.S. military in *The Atlantic*<sup>1</sup> and it evoked a visceral reaction in me as I contemplated its voice, authority and accessibility. It would not be an exaggeration to credit the piece with significantly altering the path of my work at Goucher College and this capstone project. Though I easily acknowledged the brilliant writing in the essay, I took serious issue with many of the author's points. More significantly, I was irked by the author's assumption of expertise for a culture to which he was both alien and discreetly antagonistic. Two mouse clicks later, I understood why; the author was an unashamed draft-dodger. *The Atlantic* writer had chronicled his decision to purposely evade military service in a 1975 *Washington Monthly*<sup>2</sup> article. The older piece struck me as a massive, public rationalization for the author's skirting of military service at a time in our nation's history when those in uniform hailed mostly from the margins of privilege. The author was a true outsider from the military and its people and I found his pontification about its culture and path ahead distasteful.

I looked at *The Atlantic* article again and wondered if I could write a counter piece. A bestselling, celebrity writer had the same idea and wrote an eloquent response to the original essay in a February 23, 2015 article also published by *The Atlantic*<sup>3</sup>. My positions aligned closer to the celebrity's,

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<sup>1</sup> James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2015 Issue, accessed May 8, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516>.

<sup>2</sup> James Fallows, "What Did You Do In The Class War, Daddy?," *Washington Monthly*, October 1975, accessed May 8, 2016, <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2009/0911.fallows.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Sebastian Junger, "What's the Matter With the American Military?," *The Atlantic*, February 23, 2015, accessed May 8, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/whats-the-matter-with-the-american-military/385735>.

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

but it still troubled me that neither journalist had served in the military. The celebrity served as an embedded journalist on the front lines, which is impressive in its own right, but certainly not the same as wearing the uniform. Despite their separateness from the military itself, both writers dissected it on the pages of *The Atlantic* and opined on its cultural aspects with an authority I did not think they rated.

I focused my work at Goucher on the culture of the Marine Corps because I thought it was valuable, unique, and in a state of crisis following a decade of war. My Marine Corps service spanned from May 1990 – November 1996 after graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy. All told, I spent 10 ½ years in uniform during the formative years of my young adulthood and this service formed a pillar of my core identity. The expression, “Once A Marine, Always A Marine” resonated with me and though I was no longer in its ranks, I retained an unspoken kinship with its current and former members. I valued this culture, recognized its richness and the high caliber of people who dedicated their lives to its service, and I wanted to share the stories of this world with a wide audience.

As I embarked on my own mission to explore the culture of today’s Marine Corps through the stories of my interviewees, I maintained the self-awareness that I, too, was now an outsider to the Marine Corps, but hoped my sensibilities and perspective as a student of culture would dovetail with my insider knowledge of the Institution and its people to create something meaningful and unique. I am not an essayist, so I wanted to present a different perspective of the military by employing the ethnographic tools I learned at Goucher, including deep-interviewing, close observation, and a cultural sensitivity to the larger contextual clues afforded me in my field experiences. I hoped to parse out larger cultural themes through my telling of the stories of a few career Marine officers I knew to be representative of my generation of servicemen. I had not the gravitas nor the celebrity of either writer; but I brought sincerity, perspective and incredible access to the table. Any *authority* I hoped to convey to a reader of my project would be earned through my telling and framing of the stories of the *Lifers*. My task would be to not only write the stories in a compelling manner in order to reach a broader audience but also to highlight important cultural themes from within the stories themselves. I was careful not to craft voyeuristic or sensational snippets of *war porn* in telling the stories of the modern

Marine Corps through the experiences of my participants. I also did not want my final product to be written off as a *puff piece* or a sentimental homage to the Corps and I guarded against the tendency to self-censor some unflattering episodes brought to light during the writing process.

I am an experienced interviewer, as my 19 years in law enforcement provided me the opportunity to conduct thousands of interviews of varying length and significance, and my writing naturally tended towards a narrative style. However, I did not have the words to describe what I was doing on this project until a student peer (who read a portion of an early draft) directed me to Joanne B. Mulcahy's *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz*, a book she had studied at Goucher. She said my writing reminded her of Mulcahy's. I found *Remedios* and read a section she titled "A Note on Methods." I was thrilled to read her description, as it mirrored my own in many ways.

*This book blends creative nonfiction with ethnography – the portraits that anthropologists, folklorists, and other social scientists write. Ethnographic fieldwork relies on interviews and participant observation – observing, recording, and taking part in cultural life. Many creative nonfiction writers, particularly "immersion journalists" who spend extended periods with a person or a group, use similar methods. Writers in both realms employ dialogue, scene, and other fictional techniques to engage readers.*<sup>4</sup>

I was indebted to my classmate, as Mulcahy's description provided me the words to finally articulate what I was doing. On the sliding scale between *pure* ethnography and *total* fiction, my work was different than Mulcahy's; especially because I added an element of oral history to my collection and presentation of interview material. Nevertheless, I realized that I had independently come to stand on a piece of literary ground touched by others before me. The eureka moment had arrived for me and I realized the works which most impressed and resonated with me during my Goucher experience were written by ethnographers, folklorists, memoirists, journalists and historians with whom I shared this space. Eugene B. Sledge's *With The Old Breed*, Elaine Lawless's *Women Escaping Violence*, Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days*, Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Alessandro Portelli's *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism*, Mike Sager's *Wounded*

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<sup>4</sup> Joanne Mulcahy, *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanos* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 2010), xii.



Brian J. Fitzell  
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Goucher College

*Warriors*, and Phil Klay's 2014 National Book Award-winning, *Redeployment* formed my canon as I employed the tools of creative nonfiction to tell the cultural story of the Marine Corps through the stories of the *Lifers*.

The three career Marine officers who generously participated in this project are Christian Gold Cabaniss, Timothy Eugene Winand, and Stephen Liszewski. All are my comrades from the Naval Academy and the Marine Corps. Chris and Steve were my company mates during the crucible of our first, known as Plebe Year, at Navy. When we changed companies at year's end, Steve and I stayed together and moved to a company where we first met Tim. Chris was scrambled to another company entirely, but we remained friends. All of us attended the Marine Corps Officer Candidates School (OCS) in the Summer of 1989 and The Basic School following our graduation from Navy. Chris, Tim and I are infantry officers; Steve is an artillery officer. I maintained only sporadic contact with each of them in the years following graduation and my departure from the Corps in 1996. Chris became the Commanding Officer of the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. and participated in an earlier project I completed at Goucher on the Barracks and its cultural significance. I pitched my project to the three over the course of the 25th reunion and received their commitments to participate.

I recorded several long interviews with the three between December 2015 and January 2016. Direct quotes taken from these interviews, with slight edits to remove the ah's and um's, grammatical failings, and repeated words of natural human speech, are presented in single-spaced, italics when it is most appropriate to let their words stand on their own. In other passages, where I modified the direct quotes to tell a more coherent story than the original audio provided, the attributed words are single-spaced, but not presented in italics. In these cases, I took the liberty of modifying what the interviewee actually *said* in order to better articulate what I thought they were *trying to say*. This is potentially dangerous stuff for a writer; particularly one grounded in ethnographic principles and conditioned by one's profession to report only the words as stated.

To ensure I was not taking their words and thoughts out of context, I shared my initial versions of their stories with the interviewees and solicited their direct input. This reciprocation was an important element to me, as I was deriving my authority as a storyteller through their words and experiences. If I got it wrong, I would be doing my interviewees a tremendous disservice. In addition, the interaction between my interviewees and me also unearthed additional cultural themes which were not as detectable during the interview process. A great example of this phenomenon was the fact that all three interviewees expressed discomfort with being the focus of several individual pieces and wanted to ensure I spread the credit to the other Marines involved and did not attribute any heroic actions or battlefield successes to them individually. Significantly, all three emphasized this team orientation independently from each other. From the distance of my writerly post, I was able to detect and incorporate this cultural piece into the story I was telling. When I shared this observation with the three, they seemed to derive some mutual support from the news and were less self-conscious moving forward.

While Elaine Lawless termed the exchange of various drafts and analysis between author and subject during the progress of her work as “reciprocal ethnography,”<sup>5</sup> I used the term *reciprocal storytelling* for what I was doing. Not hailing from an academic background in anthropology or folklore, I was free of many of the constraints of disciplinary orthodoxy and developed my own method in an organic way. The moniker of *reciprocal storytelling* seemed a perfect fit for what I was doing in the pursuit of cultural themes embedded within the stories of the interviewees. By declaring my role as a storyteller and not an ethnographer, I freed myself from the rigor of the deep qualitative research associated with ethnography, but sacrificed some of its implied authority. To compensate, I planned to use storytelling to connect with the reader on an emotional level in order to humanize the Marine Corps for those unfamiliar with the organization and its culture. I was not a purist in employing any of the narrative forms I touched in writing this manuscript; and each story varies in its influence and use of ethnography, creative nonfiction, and oral history. When I articulated my early progress to my capstone

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Lawless, “Women’s Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January – April 1991), 35-60.

Brian J. Fitzell  
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Goucher College

advisor, I used the metaphor of “quilt squares” in describing the short, stand-alone vignettes I wrote. I had no idea what form the overall “quilt” would eventually take from these individual pieces, but I was confident it would be a coherent and singular work. As my collection of “squares” amassed, I laid them down in an episodic and not chronological fashion to group cultural themes together from different stories. It seemed to work effectively and I received peer and committee feedback to the first draft which validated my methodology and the order of the assembled stories.

As originally written and submitted to my faculty committee for my defense of the project, I purposefully made no references to the specific cultural themes I felt the stories addressed, preferring to leave the reader with no guideposts along the way to alter their own independent conclusions. However, during my defense, Professor Thomas Walker shared the themes he detected in his own reading of the stories and articulated convincing reasons to provide the reader some of them in the prologue to set the stage for the pages ahead. Adding some thematic references up front he advised, would best prepare the reader to seek out the cultural meanings behind the stories and not just react to them on a superficial level. I agreed with his astute observations and recommendation. Among the themes held within the stories of *Lifers*, Professor Walker highlighted:

*Contingency and Planning;*  
*Confusion and Sense-making;*  
*Leadership and Obedience;*  
*Bravery and Self-effacement;*  
*Identification with the Corps, not the self;*  
*Attribution to others;*  
*Constant self-evaluation;*  
*Second guessing;*  
*Thinking Marine vs. automaton; and,*  
*Preparation, training and sudden intuition.*

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

Whereas I anticipated readers detecting and commenting on the more general principles of leadership, self-sacrifice and commitment, Professor Walker's thoughtful analysis illustrated a much deeper and nuanced view of the material. I hope the reader will be encouraged by Professor Walker's insightfulness to search for their own deeper meanings within the stories of these Marines.

Any success I am able to achieve in this project is the product of my intellectual development at Goucher College and my interactions with the incredible students and faculty of the Cultural Sustainability and Creative Nonfiction programs. Professor Lisa Rathje, my Capstone advisor, deserves special praise for working closely with me on this project and also for inspiring me from the very beginning of my time at Goucher College. Capstone Committee members Professor Thomas Walker and Professor Mike Sager, provided original and important feedback throughout the project and focused on issues of craftsmanship and imbedded meaning within the text. I am also deeply indebted and grateful to all who have aided me along the way; the friends and peers who read early drafts and provided valuable feedback, and to Chris, Tim, and Steve for sharing their personal experiences and wisdom. Lastly, I am especially thankful for my family's support during this incredible journey.

Brian J. Fitzell  
May 2016

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College



Commandant of Midshipmen, Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, Annapolis, Maryland  
(Cover of *Shipmate*, November-December 2015)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Dant heads into Bancroft Hall," photo by Debbie Latta, Shipmate, U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association, 2015.

Cover Photo: Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos congratulating Colonel Christian Cabaniss at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., June 30, 2014 (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Samantha K. Draughon/Released).

### **“The Chicanery That Is War”**

*Is this for real?* Lieutenant Colonel Christian Gold Cabaniss, USMC, gritted his teeth and shook his sleep deprived head in disbelief as the staff meeting droned on about him. He hadn't rested in weeks and the strain of commanding a battalion of Marines engaged in 24/7 combat operations put him on edge. Though exhausted, he remained hypervigilant. *I need to get back to my battalion*, Chris anxiously thought, as yet another staff officer began speaking and segued into a surreal presentation about WI-FI availability at Camp Leatherneck. *I can't believe I'm sitting here for this*; Chris glanced at the Brigade Commander and mused about the MEB's insistence on holding regular command meetings as if they were all still stateside at Camp Lejeune, instead of where they really were in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

The entire meeting had very little relevance for the commander of 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines (2/8 in Marine shorthand) and the combat Marines in his charge. It was July 2009 and 2/8 was engaged in 7-10 combat engagements per day during what turned out to be the most kinetic phase of the unit's deployment. In stark contrast to the other Marines at the table, Chris looked like the field Marine he was; he sported a bad mustache, his hair was long by Marine Corps standards and his utility uniform was filthy. His blood pressure rising, his right leg bouncing in unconscious agitation, Chris was on the verge of just standing up and walking out on this group of senior Marine officers and their attendants as the meeting continued.

During a short break when he attempted to get an update from his battalion, Chris heard the distant sound of rocket explosions in his battalion's AO (area of operations) and realized instantly his Marines were in another heavy engagement. *Oh my God, we're in some big "slug it out" and I'm up here*. As the radio nets crackled with bits of information, the officers not directly associated with the Marines engaged in the fighting listened along to the situation reports with ghoulis detachment. Chris knew the Marines *out there* personally and flushed with rage when he learned two of his Marines were severely wounded in the fighting. The Marines needed Emergency CASEVAC (casualty evacuation,

usually conducted by helicopter) for their life-threatening wounds. Though helpless to personally aid the Marines in the fight and frustrated by his unavoidable absence from his battalion's CP during the engagement, Chris quickly realized it was fortuitous he was there. In a strange quirk of fate, the CASEVAC helicopters bearing the wounded Marines were inbound to his location because it had better medical facilities than the more isolated combat outposts. As it turned out, Chris was the only representative from 2/8 at the base when the wounded Marines arrived.

Over 8 years later, Chris still recalled the event with amazing clarity.

*They both died on the helicopter flight. They had barely kept them alive...but the flight, you know, they were bleeding from too many places and they died. It's just me, I am the only guy from the Battalion there, standing there on the ramp ceremony. The General and the Brigade Sergeant Major have this little choreography...they walk up and salute the remains and then they kind of kneel down...And I'm dirty and all that and I just leaned over [the dead Marines] and kissed them both on the foreheads. And you can see the other people from the brigade looking at me, not knowing what to think of it all.*

*The reality of what's going on and how lost everybody is...it gnawed at me that there were people who didn't understand what fighting was. That was very, very, very frustrating to me and it stayed with me my whole life.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

### **“The 1/2 Oath”**

*Sometimes, you make your own luck.* The 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment (1/2) was becoming known as a hard luck outfit. In the Autumn of 2007, the gathering clouds of several tragic occurrences, which had occurred in a relatively short timeframe, were darkening 1/2's reputation.

While engaged in *Mojave Viper* (a realistic, 30-day pre-deployment live-fire training exercise conducted at the massive Twenty-nine Palms Marine Corps Base in the high desert of California), a Marine accidentally fired a HUMVEE-mounted MK-19 Grenade launcher into a column of vehicles. The *negligent discharge* (there are no *accidental discharges* in the Corps), instantly took the head off of a Marine in a nearby vehicle. Two Marines drowned in a non-combat, boating accident on the Euphrates River while deployed to Al Anbar Province, Iraq in 2007. Encumbered by their heavy load of combat gear (which included a helmet, body armor, water and ammunition), and without any personal flotation devices, they sank straight to the bottom when their craft capsized. While on the same deployment, several allegations of *mild* detainee abuse surface involving a few of the battalion's Marines, as did incidents of hazing. *Was it bad luck or something deeper?*

In the Marine Corps, a unit reeling from a string of such misfortune can only be transformed into a top notch outfit by a commanding officer (CO) following a straightforward recipe: *leadership*. Boom. No magic formula. It sounds simple, but is extraordinarily difficult to accomplish without a CO who has the will to do what is right regardless of the circumstances. For the Marines of 1/2, a new Battalion Commander helped change their luck by tightening things up and refocusing their attention to the basics.

By September 2007, the Marines of 1/2 needed to break their streak of bad fortune. Returning from its fourth combat deployment to Iraq since 2003, it was a threadbare and battle-weary unit when Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Eugene Winand, USMC, assumed command of the battalion and got to work. More than half of the Marines in the battalion had served in one or more combat deployments



Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

before Tim took charge, and a large segment had been on 1/2's last deployment to Iraq. There was no short cut or easy fix at hand for the new CO as he recalled his assessment of the situation and the steps he took to change the situation.

*The battalion I inherited had been to Iraq in early '07 and had had a number of very unfortunate incidents: detainee abuse, some disobedience of orders, some run-ins with the local population that I think really harmed the mentality of the battalion. I spent hours personally crafting a course on battlefield ethics, to include sitting down and doing my own power-points and pulling videos into the presentation and all that. Then I personally, maybe this is an extension of my time as an instructor at The Basic School, but I personally taught the battalion in company-sized increments my personal view on battlefield ethics.*

*They had had so many issues. The Marines were, in my mind, acting undisciplined, running amok throughout the battlefield and things like that. And I said, well nobody's going to fix this except for me. So, I fixed it and we didn't have a single problem. Not one.<sup>8</sup>*

His power-point presentations and discussions of battlefield ethics were only an extension of the message Tim communicated to his Marines. Since many of the Marines had been on the battalion's 2007 deployment to Iraq, he used real examples from their prior shared experiences to illustrate his major points and to calibrate the ethical and mental state of the unit. The discussions of ethics and conduct were based on a foundation Tim had laid when he first took command. But, at the very beginning, Tim needed something more; something stronger and more spiritually-binding than a power-point or lecture. He wrote the 1/2 Oath. And it stuck.

*Within a couple of weeks of taking over the battalion, I wrote and published a battalion oath. So I wrote this thing called "The 1/2 Oath," for the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines. I wrote it myself. A lot of this was me sitting on the outside understanding what the battalion had been through and I had picked all this stuff up. I said, "I need something. I need something – I need like a mindset calibrator, you know, that everybody can rally around." So, I wrote The 1/2 Oath.*

*If you were in 1/2 and you read this oath, this thing was on one sheet of paper, and it would basically tell you how you're supposed to act. You know, how you're supposed to act with your fellow Marines and sailors. You know, the sort of expectations that I, as Battalion Commander, had of Marines. And this, that and the other.*

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 30, 2016.

*That was my first stab at basically setting the philosophical mindset of the command. What I didn't do – is I didn't just publish it...I briefed it personally to the whole battalion.*

*I remember the very first day, I asked them (almost like swearing in as a witness in a court trial or something like that), I asked them all to raise their hands as I raised my hand and I read sentence by sentence and asked them to repeat it.*

*When Marines came in front of my desk for battalion NJP [NJP stands for non-judicial punishment, which is used for minor infractions, such as showing up late to muster], I would pull a copy of The 1/2 Oath out of my desk, turn it around, slide it across the desk and then ask them to articulate, in their own words, how they had failed The 1/2 Oath.*

*By the time we got to Iraq, the end of our Iraq tour, this would have been December '08 or January '09, I remember going to a position in Bravo Company. And this Corporal came up to me and he's like "Sir, I gotta tell you something." This Marine came up to me inside of a HESCO position in Saqlawiyah, Iraq, – he had memorized The Oath. And inside this HESCO position, he rattled The Oath off to me, by memory – no cards, no aids, no nothing. And I was pretty impressed by that.<sup>9</sup>*

The 1/2 Oath, a potent combination of performance culture and easily understood standards of conduct, was a game-changer for 1/2's Marines and its commander. It was elegant in its simplicity and relevance. Many Marines used it to guide their actions well beyond their service in Iraq under the command of Tim Winand. For the Marines, the 1/2 Oath all boiled down to personal accountability. It reads:

I am a proud member of 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines – it is my battalion. The other members of this battalion, both officer and enlisted, are my family – I value them and will take care of them just as I would my own family. They will do the same for me – I don't even have to ask.

I will do nothing to soil the reputation of 1/2 just as I would do nothing to soil my own family's good name. I will always pay due respect to those senior to me. I will follow all orders and regulations, and I will do nothing to bring discredit to this battalion – or my team, squad, platoon and company.

I want all who know me to trust in me to do the right thing – the honorable thing. Doing drugs is not honorable; drinking and driving shows lack of regard for human life and is

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 30, 2016.

not honorable. I pledge to my fellow Marines – I give them my word – that I want no part of that type of behavior. I know they are all counting on me to keep my word. I must build trust now – for combat awaits me – and my brothers must have trust in me on the field of battle or we will fail.

I am now and always will be totally committed to my fellow Marines and Sailors just as I am totally committed to my own flesh and blood – they are the brothers that I will fight with – they are the brothers that I will turn to in times of turmoil and distress, they are the brothers who always have my back – and I always have theirs.

I am a man – a grown man – and I will act like a man always – because that’s what Marines and Sailors of 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines do.<sup>10</sup>

*I have received emails from people as recently as my time in Hawaii as a Regimental Commander, you know, guys that I had run NJP on, who were still in the Marine Corps thanking me for The Oath, thanking me for instilling the right kind of mindset into them.*

*How did I approach getting guys calibrated in terms of battlefield ethics, or getting guys calibrated just as Marines? Leadership and force of personality. My view is, it all starts with me. The whole thing starts with me. If the battalion or the regiment or whoever is all screwed up, you should just come blame me – right? Because I’m the one that has not done what I need to do.*

*Now, if whatever unit is effective and functioning well and is disciplined and all that, I won’t take all the credit, because I believe it starts with me I will certainly take some of the credit. You do nothing, somebody will fill the void and they’ll fill it with something that you won’t like. So you got to get out there, you got to be the voice, you got to be the guy providing the vector for where the unit needs to go.<sup>11</sup>*

Like a CEO marketing his message, Tim articulated his vision to his subordinate leaders who further reinforced and instilled its essence into the Battalion.

*I’m fairly extroverted when it comes to doing my Marine things – I love being around Marines. At this stage, 25 plus years in, my thought process is pretty refined. All those things together just made it fairly simple, I think, for me to figure out what I wanted people to do and then tell them. And, of course, none of it is “one shot – one kill.” You can’t just show up day one and expect*

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Winand, e-mail sent to the author, February 25, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 30, 2016.

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*people to be understanding who you are and what you believe and acting on it a week, or two weeks or a month in. It took many, many months and lots of repetition and lots of personal involvement by me. But once I got personally involved, I found that my Company Commanders, my Battalion Commanders (when I was a Regimental Commander), the Sergeant Major, the First Sergeants, you know, everybody kind of rallied around the themes – rallied around the message. So I ended up having a huge chunk of people out there articulating the vision that I was the first one to articulate.<sup>12</sup>*



Colonel Timothy Winand and his wife, Lisa, at Regimental Change of Command Ceremony

July 17, 2015<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 30, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> USMC Photo by LCPI Aaron S. Patterson, MCBH Combat Camera, July 17, 2015, accessed May 8, 2016, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2073973/3d-marine-regiment-change-command-ceremony-2015#.Vy5SbPkrLIU>.

### “Casualties”

Three Marines and one sailor were killed in action during 1/12’s 2007 deployment to Iraq. All were killed during an escort mission assigned to their battery for the purpose of transporting Iraqi soldiers from their units and bases in Al Anbar to their hometowns outside of Baghdad and to the South. The same battery from which the four dead had been assigned had an additional four Marines seriously wounded in action. As its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, was ultimately responsible for all of the Marines assigned to 1/12. As he recalled the number of Marines killed and wounded during the deployment it was obvious he remained troubled by each of them.

*That particular battery, they had another four Marines that sustained pretty significant injuries, I mean, we’re talking sort of life-changing, debilitating injuries. And then there were probably another half dozen injuries across the battalion where, again, life-changing, debilitating injuries – either head, most of them were head injuries as a result of IEDs and there was a handful of smaller, less traumatic injuries that we sustained.<sup>14</sup>*

Marine Corps custom dictates that a Marine’s commander make some effort at communicating with a Marine’s family in the event that the Marine is severely wounded or killed. The traditional written letter, made famous to a wider audience by Steven Spielberg’s World War Two epic, *Saving Private Ryan*, has been nearly replaced by the modern technology which now allows direct and instantaneous communications with families back in the U.S. from the battlefield. It is a two-edged proposition for both parties.

*Because of technology and the connectivity that was available after those happened, I was actually able to get on and actually speak with each of the families just after it had occurred and um, [long pause] - Yeah. And then, you know, obviously we wrote the letters that we’re required and supposed to write.<sup>15</sup>*

When a Marine Corps unit returns to the States from overseas, memorial services for those killed and severely wounded are usually held shortly after its return. This practice helps the returning

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

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Marines and the families devastated by the loss or maiming of a loved one. Due to the unintended consequence of a geographic reality, (1/12 is stationed in Hawaii, and two of the batteries attached to it during the deployment were from the 11th Marines stationed in California), Steve was unable to meet with the families of the dead for some time. He eventually hosted some of the gold star families from California, but was troubled by not being among the first Marines to interact with the fractured families of the battalion's fallen.

*My connection with the families has not been, certainly has not been extensive after that. I remain very uncomfortable with it because, ah... You know there is a sense, I think probably on my part, the reason I don't particularly like it is there's a feeling of guilt. You know, the fact that, hey, I was charged with leading their sons and working to accomplish the mission, but also to bring their sons back.*

*And in those instances, I absolutely, without a doubt, failed. It's a hard thing that I still struggle to reconcile myself.<sup>16</sup>*

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As Battalion Commander of 2/8, Lieutenant Colonel Christian Cabaniss had 14 Marines killed in action (KIA) or later succumb to wounds sustained during operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in the Summer and Fall of 2009. He can recite their names and recall the personal details of their lives and the circumstances surrounding their deaths fluently. He is reverential of their sacrifice and the severe price their family's incurred losing their Marine. While in command of the Marine Barracks, Washington D.C., following his command of 2/8, Chris made it his practice to invoke the names of the 14 at every Barracks' Tuesday and Friday Evening Parades. The Evening Parades held in the summer months are ritualistic performance art which showcase the military precision of the Marine Corps to a wide audience in the nation's capital.

*I lost 14 Marines. So, I regret every moment of every day – was there something more that I could've done to prepare them to avoid what happened? 'Cause it's a tragedy - even if you accomplish the most important things in our nation – it is a tragedy to those families. That they will never recover from.*

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

*So, I consciously think about that often – it drives me today. The way we honor them now is to lead honorable, morally-courageous, and committed lives if you're in the Corps or out. They honored our nation by their service, we honor them by continuing to serve – in whatever capacity. Being morally-courageous is important – do what needs to be done to do what's right.*

*That's what I wrestle with, at the rifleman's level, risk is not theoretical – it's real. People bleed – they die. There is no inherent right to self-defense, it is not unlimited – it is limited. You don't have the right to kill a bunch of people just to protect yourself. My fear is the way we fought – the way we had to fight...Uh, in Vietnam we would have shot that tree line full of artillery before we moved across the field. We would've. You can't do that anymore. If you didn't have a clear target, you couldn't do it.*

*So, those are the ones that frustrate me, is – we won't have that discussion. I would have that discussion with the Marines, but our nation won't have that discussion. When somebody agrees to serve, they do sign the 'blank check,' but we'll always say, 'nothing gets in the way of their inherent right to self-defense' – Yeah, it does! The rules of engagement, how we want them to fight, that can get in the way.*

*I thought we took a lot of risks; and I say it 'theoretically' – those young Marines took a lot of risk. And I think to take that risk, they had to believe what they were doing was actually the 'right thing.' But they took a lot of risks and a lot of 'em got wounded and 14 of 'em died. So, that's something that I'll never shake. Ever.<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

### **“Mr. Meehan”**

Plebe Summer, the first hurdle for all U.S Naval Academy Midshipmen, is the academy’s version of boot camp held in July and August before the commencement of the Fall academic term. It is a challenge designed to begin the transformative process of turning high school honor students and varsity athletes, former enlisted sailors and Marines, and a few college transfers into junior naval officers. It is a rite of passage which entailed a blurring pace of physical training, classroom and practical instruction (in subjects as diverse as shipboard damage control and rudimentary boxing skills), and military indoctrination. For the Plebes of the Naval Academy class slated to graduate in the seemingly impossible distance of 1990, the Annapolis summer of 1986 also brought record-breaking temperatures and humidity. Covered in patches of heat rash and in their reeking white *sailor suit* uniforms constantly soaked in sweat, the Plebes of Mr. Duane Walters’ squad listened intently as he spoke at the start of the noon meal.

Mr. Walters was universally admired by the Plebes of his squad. In an environment dominated by *flamers*, Mid-speak for those bullying martinets who grooved on the lopsided power of their appointed and lordly positions over their charges, he was a calm and big brotherly figure. Portly by the strict Naval Academy standards and destined for a career in the surface fleet, Walters stood in stark contrast to most of the other upperclassmen running the Plebe Summer Detail. While many of his peers dominated the Plebes with their physical abilities and sadistic tendencies, Walters seemed to care deeply for his squad from the very first day and instinctively assumed the role of their teacher. He was a genuine and likable leader.

Walters imparted his squad with practical advice and shared his hard earned wisdom of the peculiar aspects and obstacles of life at the U.S. Naval Academy. Many of his lessons were unofficial and unscripted. He spoke of the culture of alcohol abuse and the pitfalls of intra-Academy romances during an era when males still outnumbered females by 9:1 in the Brigade of Midshipmen. He regaled and lectured on the lessons learned from the mistakes made by others which had resulted in their dismissal



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from the Academy. For Mr. Walters, the Naval Academy was a *four-year marathon* and he told his charges to pace themselves accordingly.

“Squad, I am pleased to announce that I will be replaced by Mr. Bill Muscha for the second set of Plebe Summer,” Walters said in earnest tones. He went on to explain that Mr. Meehan had originally been slated to take over his squad, but Walters had interceded on its behalf. Walters felt Meehan’s experience as an enlisted Marine and reputation in the 7th Company as a strict disciplinarian would *not be good for his squad’s morale*. Muscha, it turned out, bore more than a slight resemblance to Don Knotts and was not considered a flamer by anyone’s standard. Exhaling with relief, Walters’ Plebes felt they had dodged a potential bullet. Meehan’s reputation had preceded the changing of the guard on the Plebe Summer Detail and he had been described as a lethal combination of no-nonsense Marine Corps and superhuman physical strength and endurance. To most of the Plebes, he was a Boogey Man to be avoided entirely.

Across the cavernous dining facility of King Hall, at a different table serving another Squad of 7th Company’s Plebes, Midshipman 4th Class Stephen Liszewski first learned he would be under Mr. Meehan’s command for the rest of the Summer. Unlike the Plebes on Walters’ squad, Liszewski was excited by the news and secretly proud he had been handed the challenge. He looked forward to meeting Mr. Meehan and having his first glimpse of the United States Marines. Almost thirty years later, Liszewski recalled his impressions of Meehan and explained the effect he ultimately had on shaping his career.

*I came to the Academy thinking that joining the Marines was what I wanted to do. And to be honest, the experience that we had during Plebe Summer, specifically with George Meehan, that absolutely solidified it. You know, that guy was physically tough, he was challenging, but he was also inspirational. He was authoritative, but he wasn’t overbearing and he knew how to motivate and challenge us. The impression that guy made on me was huge. He was a prior enlisted Marine. I think he had gone to VMI [the Virginia Military Institute] for a year before eventually getting admitted here. He had that Marine Corps background and knowing that, it helped me make the connection to the Marine Corps and it drew even more of my interest.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

### **“The Accidental Marine”**

*“Callin’ on in transit, callin’ on in transit, Radio Free Europe, radio...”*<sup>19</sup> The stereo blasted into the hallway from an upperclassmen’s room down at the end of the passageway. The Plebes sped up their pace in time to the song’s tempo, as they cleaned and scrubbed their rooms in preparation for the Saturday morning inspection. The results of the inspection would play a large role in determining how much enjoyment the Plebes might actually wrest from the weekend, their only opportunity to get a few hours away from their fishbowl existence in Bancroft Hall. Midshipman 4th Class Christian Cabaniss shook his head in amusement as he listened to the music in the hallway; Plebes were not allowed to have stereos in their own rooms and so relied on the upperclassman’s tendency to blast music into the hallway to get their own fixes. The song was by REM and Chris, hailing from Tucker, Georgia, was familiar with the Athens-based band, while many of his classmates were not. He chuckled at the thought of a fellow Plebe, a New Yorker, who occupied the room directly across from his own. The New York Plebe seemed only to have listened to Led Zeppelin before arriving at the Academy and was completely unaware of REM and all the other bands making great music in the 1980’s.

Though up on popular music, Chris came to the Naval Academy fairly ignorant of the military, in general, and the academy, in particular. His was not a military family. But he was a Southerner (his family tree was rooted exclusively in North Carolina) and he joked the last time his family served in the military was when they wore the gray uniform of Stonewall Jackson’s Corps in Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. His father was a Southern Baptist minister who transitioned into a second career as a psychotherapist and his mother was a school teacher turned school administrator. He freely admitted he had no idea why he went to the Naval Academy in the first place. He was not really interested in attending college anywhere, but the Navy football recruiters were relentless and Chris finally relented.

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<sup>19</sup> REM, *Radio Free Europe*, audio recording, Hib-Tone, 1981.

Ironically, a serious leg injury right before the first game ended Chris' Plebe football season and started him on the path to the Marine Corps. Drugged up and forced to limit any strain on his injured limb, Chris spent afternoons with his leg propped up on his desk. While recuperating and without the crushing burden of college football dominating his schedule, he found himself with a little extra time at his disposal which he used to consider what he wanted to do after graduation. He hadn't given much serious thought to it before and never thought about the Marine Corps at all.

Chris had surgery over the winter and practiced football again in the spring. He suffered a broken leg over the summer before the start of Youngster (Mid-speak for Sophomore) year at the Academy. Fearful of an injury that might force him into a support job after graduation, such as the Navy Supply Corps (a fate he considered worse than most), Chris left the football team permanently.

*It is kind of funny that I went to Navy to play football and ended up really not playing football. I didn't know anything about the Marine Corps, but ultimately, I wanted to be a Marine Officer... I can actually tell you the moment that it actually crossed my mind. It was at football practice at the end of Plebe Summer. I remember sitting there with Greg Schildmeyer, he was an '86 grad, and was a graduate assistant coach. He was going into the Marine Corps. I remember I looked at him and said, "I'm gonna be a Marine." And he looked at me and he laughed and said, "Talk to me in three years."*

*I remember Top Gun, everybody wanted to be a Naval Aviator, and then you'd look at the Navy officers who were all overweight and uninspiring. And I finally figured out who the Marine officers were and so I transitioned to "hey, I want to be a Marine aviator." Then it was, "Nah, I don't want to do that; I just want to be a Marine."<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.

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Midshipman Fourth Class Christian Cabaniss (first on the left) and the author (second from right)  
Plebe Year 1987 (from the author's personal collection)

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### **“X-Laxman”**

The muffled sounds of the players’ voices and coaches’ whistles drew the Youngster, a term for a Sophomore at the Naval Academy, into a room overlooking the athletic field where Navy’s varsity lacrosse team was practicing in the late afternoon. From his perch on the 3rd Deck of the 7th Wing of Bancroft Hall, Timothy Winand, could see far more than the lacrosse scrimmage below. Next to the practice field, moored in the basin of a state of the art sailing center, were sloops and yachts of various sizes and classes (one was rumored to have belonged to Walter Cronkite before donation to the academy’s fleet). Beyond them was the dark waters of the Severn River. The black silhouettes of the academy’s Yard Patrol (YP) crafts, manned and crewed by Midshipmen who hoped to be surface warfare officers after graduation, cut precise formations into the shimmering waters. The river lapped against the academy’s seawall to the Chesapeake Bay and beyond. Directly across the water and on the opposite riverbank from the room Tim currently occupied, were a half-dozen tall towers (each equipped with red, blinking warning lights for low-flying aircraft) which were used for naval communications. Everywhere he looked, Tim was reminded that the academy was much more than a college, it was a preparatory school for service in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Tim peered down at the activity on the field below. He unconsciously twirled the lacrosse stick in his own hand as he picked out friends and teammates below. Lacrosse had been his ticket to the academy, Tim mused, but he had left the team a few days earlier after careful consideration. He was set in his decision, but Tim’s gut tightened as the realization took hold that he would never play collegiate lacrosse again. He recalled vividly the 45-minute car ride in his parent’s station wagon from his home in Loch Raven, Maryland to Annapolis for Induction Day (or *I-Day* as the first day of Plebe Year was known at the academy) and getting in line with other plebes holding his lacrosse stick and gear along with a few items of his luggage. He really hadn’t considered other colleges too seriously after being pitched on the idea of Navy by two high school lacrosse teammates who graduated two years ahead of him and had gone on to the academy. Ironically, despite its reputation for turning away very qualified applicants, Navy was one of the only schools which offered him admission.

Tim had come to the academy to play lacrosse and to get an excellent college education. The fact that his degree would be paid for by the U.S. government was also very attractive to Tim and his parents. He was from a working class neighborhood outside of Baltimore and grew up in a tight community of row-houses in an era when everyone still knew each other by name. He had two sisters, one a twin, and considered his childhood a happy one. Unlike some at the academy, Tim was not from a military family. A few distant uncles had served in various capacities, but Tim admittedly was very ignorant to the Navy and Marine Corps when he arrived on I-Day, lacrosse stick in hand. He really hadn't given much thought to what he would do now, without the time-dominating and merciless demands of the lacrosse team controlling his days. He had given even less thought to what he would do after graduation. Being a career naval or Marine officer was not a childhood ambition of his and he hadn't formed a clear picture of what he wanted to do after graduation.

Having graduated High School in 1986 on the heels of the release of Tom Cruise's megahit, *Top Gun*, Tim entered the academy at a time when it seemed everyone wanted to fly F-14 Tomcats. He chuckled to himself recalling those early mornings during Plebe Summer when he and his squad mates jogged in the pre-dawn haze to the artificial turf field where calisthenics were conducted. On most mornings, Kenny Loggins' *Danger Zone*, from the *Top Gun* soundtrack, blared from some upperclassmen's dorm room as the weary plebes began another day at Navy. Tim didn't have any preconceptions about serving in the military and came to Navy with an open mind. More importantly for Tim, he also came with *open eyes*. He was a keen observer and from his very first day at the academy, he had unconsciously noted the subtle differences between the representatives of the various warfare communities: aviation, surface warfare, submarines; and, of course, the Marines.

Tim looked down at the activity on the field below and realized he hadn't really made close friends with his teammates. It was not like he was antagonistic to the other *laxmen*, as the lacrosse players were known, but he had naturally grown closer to his roommates and classmates in the 18th Company with whom he shared the daily hardships of academy life over those Mids he only saw during

lacrosse. He had also emerged as a natural leader among his peers in the 18th Company. He heard the coach blow his whistle and grinned at the team's Pavlovian response as they formed for another set of passing drills; drills he had completed himself thousands of times before. He remembered his conversation he had with the lacrosse coach and was proud of the way he had addressed the issue when he had finally made up his mind to leave the team. For the 19 year-old, whose entire teenage life had been dominated by playing sports; soccer and lacrosse, it was a serious and life-altering conversation. Tim looked beyond the lacrosse team at the water and the boats on the horizon. He knew he was done with lacrosse and had reached a personal crossroads. Tim's future was out there, beyond the academy and the Chesapeake Bay, but he didn't know where it would be.

The door slammed open behind him and two of his classmates entered the room laughing. Tim had been in their room, as it afforded him an unobstructed view of the lacrosse practice below whereas his room did not. His two classmates were covered in mud and wearing the blue and gold mesh jerseys of the Naval Academy's intramural program. At Navy, participation in athletics was mandatory, and if Tim left the varsity lacrosse team, he would have to choose an intramural sport in its place. The shorter of the two, the team's goalie it turned out, clapped Tim on the back and began explaining some of the basic concepts and extolling the virtues of an academy intramural known simply as *fieldball*. Rumored to be played only at Navy and in the New York State Penitentiary System, fieldball was a bizarre combination of rugby, soccer and team handball. It was also full contact and, as a point of pride to its most rabid enthusiasts, caused more injuries than any other sport at the academy. After a few minutes of the recruiter's pitch, Tim was sold on the idea on playing fieldball for his Company. The goalie/recruiter smiled, getting an athlete of Tim's caliber and size was quite a coup for the team, and he extended his muddy hand warmly. Tim shook his hand – he was now an intramural fieldballer.

It was also the last time Tim bothered to look down at lacrosse practice.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 22, 2015.

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Goucher College



18th Company Marines, U.S. Naval Academy, Spring 1990 (Front: Matthew Guterrez; Middle: Stephen Liszewski, Robert Gillette, and Timothy Winand; Back: the author) from the author's collection

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Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

### **“Philosopher”**

*“A bar room brawler with a PHD is what the Marine Corps is looking for,”* said Colonel Christian Cabaniss, USMC, paraphrasing a snippet from an article he read in the *Wall Street Journal*. He was articulating his thoughts about the intellectual depth of today’s Marines and comfortably quoted Jefferson, Madison and Franklin while making his points. An engaging speaker with a pleasing Georgian accent, Chris communicated his complex thoughts through storytelling and historical examples with amazing clarity. In his 25th year of service as an officer of Marines, he presented a study in self-reflection. A deep thinker by training and temperament, Chris is also a *PK*, that is a pastor’s kid, and the spiritual influence of his father’s trade is also indelibly marked upon his concept of the modern warrior and the modern battlefield. His talking points about the philosophical underpinnings of his understanding of the Marine Corps is clearly at the doctoral level, but communicated at various levels of complexity based upon his audience. Marketing his message, Chris masterfully delivered his central themes in a way they could best be understood.

Tellingly, he began the deconstruction of his own beliefs by relaying a *sea story*, a term to describe a form of narrative commonly used by Marines to relay personal (and often co-opted) stories to teach and to entertain. In this case, Chris recalled an event from the summer of 1989, while he was still a Naval Academy Midshipman and an Officer Candidate at the Marine Corps’ grueling Officer Candidates School (OCS). Chris recalled a story about his OCS Platoon Sergeant, an Enlisted Marine Drill Instructor, and a humorous moment he has repeatedly recounted to many varied audiences over the years to illustrate his thoughts about leadership and false confidence.

*Gunnery Sergeant Nelson was my Platoon Sergeant and when he got lost during our final Small Unit Leadership Exercise (SULE), I found it very humorous. He was standing around and yelling, “Where the hell is checkpoint 12? I’m so damned lost!” And us laughing, sitting up on the checkpoint waiting for him, not saying a thing. Eventually, we said, “We’re up here, Platoon Sergeant!” And he’s lost. Which was funny, but very humbling to remember that we don’t always have the answer.*

*I have thought about that and have used that through my 25 years. You know, as soon as you think that your shit doesn’t stink and that you have it all in one, you know, you have everything*

*in the bag and you're cookin' with gas, that's when something bad is going to happen to you because you're not as smart as you think you are. It was kinda funny when I was younger, and as I've gotten older, that experience – it reminds me to be humble and not to make assumptions about what I think I know.*

*What I've learned in combat is you can do everything right and bad things can still happen. So, the question is, did we really do everything right? Willing to be honest with ourselves when we look in the mirror and decide, "Was I really as good as I thought I was?" Or, "What can I learn from this experience?" I would tell my guys in Afghanistan, "We are never as good as we think we are – but we're also never as bad." The question is to be honest and to really understand the existing state. Where are we really at? Where are we really trying to go and are the things that we're doing going to help us get there?*

*Again, it's very "science-cy," you know, we have a hypothesis and like a scientist would know, I test my hypothesis. And I'm willing to make changes when I recognize that it's wrong. And, I think, that sometimes we don't do that. My objective that my father beat into my head was the first part of a liberal arts degree was to learn how to think – not what to think – but how to think. So, he always thought that having a Liberal Arts education was the underlying foundation to everything else. As I've seen more as I've grown older is we do not spend enough time with that Liberal Arts foundation with everyone.*

*How much more do we have to educate them as a younger officer to think. Teach them how to think – teach them to think deeply.*

*We have very bright, hardworking, intelligent people in the Marine Corps, but they don't necessarily think as deeply about themselves as they should. You know, a good foundation in philosophy, I think, is absolutely critical to effectiveness in combat.<sup>22</sup>*

Chris enjoys discussing the major schools of philosophy which impact his profession. Borrowing from those whom he admires, and even from some he does not, he crafted his own conceptual framework for the honorable warrior - the U.S. Marine. He also understands the generational divide he encounters while interacting with junior Marines and junior officers. Unlike many of his contemporaries who bitched about the millennials, he embraced their youthfulness and differences and; most significantly, tailored his central message accordingly when addressing them. His acceptance and adaptability to the generational divide faced is based upon a sincere respect for different viewpoints and his own self-confidence, but also from his reality-based pragmatism.

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<sup>22</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.

Brian J. Fitzell  
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*So I think it's important for us to remember the greatest ideas that we come up with are still going to be implemented by 19 year olds for the most part. So how do you translate what you are saying into something that has meaning to them?*

*One of my old Marines from 2/8, who was at Georgetown, brought some of his students over and we were talking about leadership. And I started quoting Plato, Socrates, Epictetus, the Stoics, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustin, Thomas Aquinas, and he says, "Well you never said that stuff to us before!" I'm like, "Ya'll were 18, 19 year-old Marines gettin' ready to go into the Valley of the Death." So – it was translating that message into something that they would understand. 'Cause now as a junior in college, intellectually he had a lot of the background to be able to understand where it came from to study it himself – to read those things himself.*

*I couldn't get up and give a Stoic speech based on some Roman theorist and say that's where it came from to a young Marine. You have to translate the message into something that makes sense to them.*

*I can have a single message, but I must speak differently if I'm talking to a group full of young Marines, young officers or even more senior officers.<sup>23</sup>*



Colonel Christian Cabaniss, USMC, (in uniform), at the Marine Corps Memorial, Arlington, Virginia  
June 13, 2013<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.

### **“Leaders Eat Last”**

*Bancroft Hall is a ship.* No one is credited with the quote, but the maxim was applied literally to the massive dormitory buildings which housed the entire Brigade of Midshipman. Treating the living space as a naval vessel allowed the Naval Academy Midshipmen to honor shipboard traditions and practice naval etiquette while in its passageways and rooms, though the more sarcastic noted the brigade had little chance of weighing anchor and getting underway on the Severn River while embarked on her. The stats on the place were impressive and mandatory knowledge for the Plebes who were required to memorize such facts from *Reef Points* (a pocket-sized guide containing professional knowledge and trivia). From page 261 of the 1986-1987 edition issued to the Plebes of the Class of 1990: “Bancroft Hall is named in honor of George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy from 1845-1846, and founder of the Naval Academy. This mammoth complex is the heart of the Naval Academy. It encompasses thirty-three acres of floor space and 4.8 miles of corridors.”

First and foremost a school dedicated to the history and traditions of the Navy, the Naval Academy has always been dominated by naval officers and their specific culture. *Rank has its privileges* is an adage which dictated many aspects of life on an actual Navy vessel, where the Captain of the ship is accorded the status of absolute monarch. Senior officers are served their meals first, they are the first ashore during liberty, and receive head of line privileges on every shipboard queue. In the Marine Corps, it is the exact opposite: leaders eat last.

Marines, though in a separate service, actually serve within the Department of the Navy. When reminded of this fact by a wise-cracking sailor, many Marines reply, “Yeah, the men’s department.” Even in the humorous exchange, cultural differences between the services emerge. The differences between Marine and naval officers serving at the Naval Academy is not extreme, but

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<sup>24</sup> USMC photo by Cpl Tia Dufour, June 13, 2013, accessed May 8, 2016, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Commanding\\_Officer\\_of\\_Marine\\_Barracks\\_Washington,\\_Col.\\_Christian\\_G.\\_Cabaniss,\\_right,\\_presents\\_a\\_pewter\\_cup\\_to\\_honorary\\_Marine\\_Daran\\_Wankum\\_following\\_a\\_wreath\\_laying\\_ceremony\\_at\\_the\\_Marine\\_Corps\\_War\\_Memorial\\_130613-M-KS211-017.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Commanding_Officer_of_Marine_Barracks_Washington,_Col._Christian_G._Cabaniss,_right,_presents_a_pewter_cup_to_honorary_Marine_Daran_Wankum_following_a_wreath_laying_ceremony_at_the_Marine_Corps_War_Memorial_130613-M-KS211-017.jpg).

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noticeable to careful observers and the Midshipmen themselves. While a Midshipman, Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, presently serving at the Naval Academy as the Commandant of Midshipmen, certainly took note of the cultural differences between the two sea services.

*Some of the stuff that I got from George Meehan are as simple as, you know, leaders eat last which was completely unheard of in King Hall at the time. The system there was much more like a traditional wardroom on a ship where, based on seniority, the senior guy was served first and kind of took care of himself and then everybody else followed by rank order from senior down to junior. You know, George instantly kind of set that upside down during Plebe Summer. And it was probably little things like that that made an impression on me.<sup>25</sup>*

Midshipmen frequently interacted with officers from the Navy and Marine Corps during the course of their day. An active duty Navy or Marine officer oversaw each Midshipmen Company, and uniformed officer instructors taught many courses. Midshipmen tended to gravitate to the officers who appealed to them on a personal level or represented a warfare community which the Mid was considering after graduation and commissioning.

The Marine officers assigned to the Naval Academy were very visible to all. Their distinctive olive uniforms and khaki shirts contrasted sharply with the Navy's dress blue and summer white uniforms, which were the same uniforms worn by the Midshipmen themselves. To many Midshipmen, particularly those flirting with the idea of joining the Corps, the Marine officers also seemed to have more dash and military bearing than their Navy counterparts. Several had outsized personalities which made them legendary within the monastic rooms of Bancroft Hall. Even decades later, the names of Marine officers John W. Ripley, Fred T. Fagan, Jr., Richard H. Kunkel, Jr., and Michael Shupp generated strong memories from the Mids from the class of 1990.

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.



Commandant of Midshipmen, Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, Army – Navy Game 2015<sup>26</sup>

*The idea of organizational discipline and, maybe, mental toughness and the adherence to higher standards did appeal to me. Clearly, the Marines who were here at the Academy; those Company Officers, Battalion Officers, those guys definitely lived by a set of standards that seemed to be higher than the other Company Officers. And I found that appealing. I thought the toughness and the discipline was, I don't know, it drew me to that particular branch.*

*Some of them, obviously Captain Shupp when he was here, had that huge persona of being a very hard guy and a taskmaster. But I was able to, at one point, have almost a normal conversation with him. And it wasn't particularly long or anything but I also saw a sort of human side of him. And I got a little glimpse into the idea that the Marine Corps is different...he didn't make any apologies for it. I also think it was the idea that the culture of the Marine Corps is different than the culture of the other services. The two co-exist side by side and are intertwined by history and traditions, but the Marines definitely have a different mindset.*

*Every time that you saw a Marine, not only did they physically stand out obviously by how they looked, how they carried themselves and how they wore their uniforms, but there was also this*

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<sup>26</sup> Photo taken December 12, 2015 (unknown photographer), accessed May 8, 2016  
[http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/6Mw6YEP8\\_TO/Army+v+Navy/M8Swm0\\_KyPC](http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/6Mw6YEP8_TO/Army+v+Navy/M8Swm0_KyPC).

*idea: those guys hold people to a higher standard. And again, I was always proud to be associated with whatever group that had those higher standards. You know, I wanted to be a part of that. Not that I necessarily thought I was better than the rest of the group, but, if I can actually be a part of this thing that holds itself accountable to a greater degree or follows a more rigorous set of standards, I always – I mean, I thought that was a pretty neat thing. I was kind of drawn to that.*

*We've got a Marine Battalion Officer; therefore, our battalion probably runs a little bit tighter than the other battalions in the brigade – I thought that was a good thing. Hey, my squad leader is the only prior enlisted Marine here; therefore, you know, people know that what we're doing is a little bit different and to a higher standard. I thought that was cool. The companies that had Marine Company Officers, they were different and they were held to higher standards and they followed all the rules. I thought that was a good thing.<sup>27</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

### **“Don’t Fall In Love With Your Marines”**

The shared hardships and privations of Marine Corps life forge close bonds between individual Marines which consequently fosters unit cohesion. The Marine officer, by virtue of rank and the role he or she plays in maintaining military good order and discipline, is required to be separate from his or her enlisted Marine counterparts. This separation, maintained by both tradition and regulation, is designed to ensure a Marine officer does not get too close to his or her Marines, thereby hampering the officer’s ability to function in combat efficiently. The adage, *Don’t fall in love with your Marines*, is drilled into the most junior officer’s consciousness from the very beginning of training and inculcation of the Corps’ expectations.

However, it also commonly known, that *Lieutenants love all of their Marines*. The Lieutenant shares all of the hardships of the Marines, shoulders the same physical burdens, and faces the same risks. In combat, a Lieutenant literally shares a fighting hole with the Marines. The same forces which form the strong bonds between individual enlisted Marines, the closeness and common experiences of the platoon, cannot help but impact the Lieutenant, as well. This inevitably places the junior officer into the paradox of loving his Marines, but not wanting to get too close. Like falling in love with one’s brother’s wife, a Marine Lieutenant’s love for the Marines of his platoon must be unrequited. Tim Winand reflected on this phenomenon as he discussed the relationship between Marine officers and their subordinates.

*One thing I do remember, and I don’t think this unique to me, I remember as a young Platoon Commander, like we all do – we love our Marines. The common refrain is, ‘Don’t fall in love with your Marines.’ Well, I mean, I remember as a Platoon Commander, I loved my Marines – I loved my platoon.*

*Looking back on it, I recall maybe a couple recommendations that I made or a couple positions that I took relative to a Marine or two, was perhaps because I had gotten, maybe too close to them. You know what I mean? Maybe I was violating the “Don’t fall in love with your Marines.” I know now and have known for years why people say that because it will potentially destroy your objectivity about how to proceed with ‘this that or the other.’ I remember that.*



*You can fast forward 20 years after that to when I was a Battalion Commander at Lejeune. My number one Company Commander at 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, I remember telling him, 'Don't get too close to your Marines – don't get too close.' I had remembered myself all those years earlier, finding myself getting perhaps too close to the men. I'm not talking about dancing on a bar with a lampshade on my head, or something – but, I just felt myself – I almost loved them too much, you know what I mean? And I just found myself being drawn so close to them that there were a couple of times as a Lieutenant where maybe my objectivity was skewed a little bit. It was a lesson I didn't forget and even used it to guide a couple of my own junior officers through what I observed was potentially the same failing.*

*I think it's the amount of time you spend with them and it's how well you get to know those Marines. So if you're in a rifle platoon of some 42 folks or whatever the number is that you have – I mean, you're spending an awful lot of time with them. Your desk is around them, you can see their ups and downs a little bit better - you are just drawn closer to those men because you are with them more often than a Company Commander or Battalion Commander or Regimental Commander would be. And, I also think it takes more than the first few years for folks to truly understand what it means to enforce good order and discipline.*

*The enforcement of good and discipline is a hard thing to do - it's harder to do with somebody that you are close or too close to.<sup>28</sup>*

As a Lieutenant, Tim took a huge risk on behalf of one of his Marines. At the time, he made the decision to withhold some damaging information about the Marine from his Company Commander. With the wisdom of hindsight and many intervening years, Tim explained how he failed to make the proper ethical decision as a Lieutenant and what he learned from the experience.

*We had a Marine get in trouble in Oceanside; he may have solicited a prostitute or something out on Oceanside Boulevard. The information got back to me and I remember this vividly, I didn't do anything with that – I just kept that to myself.*

*Obviously, the Squad Leader or Section Leader made me aware of it and I had two options - either keep it to myself and work the issue or let the Company Commander know. And I DIDN'T let the Company Commander know. And he found out and, man, I'll tell you what, I got my rear end handed to me like I don't think has happened to me in my whole career. That might have been the worst one of all time.*

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 22, 2015.

*That's colored me for the rest of my career, as a Battalion Commander - as a Regimental Commander. In the Marine Corps these days, there's a lot of 'you must report this' type of scenarios, whether it's an alleged hazing incident or an alleged sexual assault or an alleged 'something or other.' All of those alleged incidents that come to the notification of the commander are supposed to be reported all the way to Headquarters, Marine Corps. And, again, these are just allegations.*

*So, if somebody walks into your office and says, hey look, I'm going to make an allegation against 'Lance Corporal Fitzell,' I'm alleging he sexually assaulted me – based on that information, and maybe a little bit of digging, but not much – I'm supposed to let the Marine Corps know. THE MARINE CORPS – THE INSTITUTION, I'm supposed to let them know that there's been this allegation of sexual assault. I'll tell you, as a Battalion Commander and a Regimental Commander, that one incident – where I didn't tell my Company Commander something that I should have told him and came back to really bite me in the rear end – colored my whole approach to things, to those institutional reporting things as a senior Commander.*

*[As a Lieutenant] I don't know if I was protecting myself; certainly, I think I was trying to protect the Marine. And in the end, I didn't do anything. I didn't protect myself nor did I protect the Marine. I was a First Lieutenant, 23 years old maybe 24 years old at the most – back to my previous discussion about judgement. If you were to present that scenario to me now, or even five, ten years ago, I mean I guarantee you if you gave me a multiple choice test – or even if you didn't, I guarantee you I wouldn't say, 'shield the information from the Company Commander.'*

*I would have done something completely different from that and probably in every case, every variation of answer would've included 'notify the Company Commander – it's something he should know about.' Why back then I decided that I, First Lieutenant Tim Winand, was the only one that should know about that and that I could handle that – God, Lord knows?*

*There was an element of trying to protect the Marine in there, but in retrospect, I could still have briefed the boss and protected the Marine – if he deserved to be protected. I screwed that one up and it's kinda funny at this point, but the interesting thing is - those experiences that end up weaving their way all the way throughout your entire career. I am telling you, like I told you a minute ago, that single incident impacted me as recently as my Regimental Command tour in Hawaii some six, eight months ago. You're talking about an incident separating actions by 24 or 25 years - that's pretty interesting!*

*I'll give myself a little bit of credit for seeing the error of my ways and making sure I didn't do that same thing again. That was a powerful lesson learned for me.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 22, 2015.

### **“Tell It To The Marines”**

Contrary to a frequent depiction in popular culture, Marines are not automatons. Today’s Marine Corps has embraced the culture of the *thinking Marine*. Commander’s intent is a concept which acknowledges and embraces the inevitable chaos of combat described by military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz famously as *the fog of war*. The Marine Corps adopted commander’s intent as a best practice several decades ago. It is a way to ensure that even in the absence of formal, follow-on orders and instructions, every individual Marine understands the overall tactical goal and objectives of the commander and his unit. Individual initiative and originality in achieving the commander’s intent, while incurring the minimal cost in effort and casualties, is fostered in the Marine Corps culture. It is still a large dichotomy. Marines are America’s shock troops and many Marines want a fight, explained Colonel Christian Cabaniss, USMC. However, Chris astutely observed; in a larger sense, *warfighting* can get in the way of *war-winning*.

*Is the fight getting me anywhere? And if not fighting is helping me more - than I shouldn't fight. And that's a hard thing, I think, for the way Marines are trained culturally to do, is to take a step back; outthink them. There's times when you gotta fight and then you do, but I would say arguably in our today's very complex world, that thinking is far more important. I don't think many people necessarily think of Marines as thinkers. You know, we're the 800-pound gorilla in the room that's gonna slug it out – yeah, we can do that, but I'll tell you that we have a generation of kids that it's 'let's outthink them.' Hit'em as hard as we can, where it hurts the most, when they're not lookin'. But I want to win. Winning is not killing somebody. Winning is where there is no terrorist threat emanating from that part of the world and basic civil society is functioning...chaos without guns.<sup>30</sup>*

Inculcating Marines to be *free thinkers* in combat poses a challenge because they are taught instant obedience to orders from day one at boot camp. Chris reflected on the contrast between the extremes and the tremendous work required to achieve an effective transformation between the two end states.

*Instant obedience to orders is useful for about 0.001 percent of the time because that's like an immediate action drill. The immediate action drill is going to get you through the first ten to*

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<sup>30</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

*fifteen seconds, after that, you gotta start thinking. So, I think culturally; and this is the hard one; and some don't like to do it (many do, but some don't) it requires you to talk to the Marines often.<sup>31</sup>*

Chris paraphrased the words of another Marine officer when he explained commander's intent as "the targeted imposition of will." An individual commander can't do it all. In putting the concept into practice, Chris picked a couple of issues which were really important to him and then put all of his emotional energy into explaining and achieving progress on his priority topics. Chris' now famous *Summer of Decision* pre-battle speech which featured prominently in two documentary films: *Hell and Back Again* and *The Hornet's Nest* was not a spontaneous or singular event but rather emblematic of the hard work he put into communicating his intent to all of his Marines prior to taking them to Afghanistan.

*One of my chiefs, he's a corporate recruiter now, copied my pre-battle speech and commented, 'This wasn't the only time the Marines heard this from him – that was like the 500<sup>th</sup> time they had heard this from him over the preceding 7 months.'*

*I mean, I sat down and did small group discussions with the squad leaders. We spent an hour and a half on commander's intent – what was important to me. You know, I couldn't tell you exactly what we were gonna do, but I could tell you how we were going to approach it. I had a one-page power-point slide that we blew up and it was posted all around the headquarters. And I talked about it everywhere I went. Everywhere I went.<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

### **“Sea Stories”**

Throughout its history, the Marine Corps has fostered a rich oral history tradition through the telling of sea stories. These stories, jokingly said to be loosely based on the truth, serve both to entertain and to instruct. Many deal with humorous events and misadventure, while others deal with life-threatening and life-altering events. Self-deprecation is a common element incorporated into the delivery of many of these tales; when relayed by the protagonist him or herself. Compelling storytellers are admired and often asked to re-tell their best ones repeatedly. During this project, Chris Cabaniss was asked to tell one his favorites humorous sea stories. With little hesitation, and in the clearly well-worn cadence and timing of a stand-up comedian, he told an anecdote about 2/8's Sergeant Major, the senior-ranking enlisted Marine in the battalion.

The Sergeant Major of my Battalion was the self-proclaimed, “First Appalachian-American Sergeant Major in the Marine Corps.” He was *famous*. Sergeant Majors are supposed to keep their Battalion Commanders calm – but mostly, I spent my time keeping him calm!

Once during my command, the battalion deployed from the Marine Corps Base at Camp Lejeune to train for three weeks up at the Army's Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia. Often times, to get to the training sites for the scattered elements of the battalion, the Sergeant Major and I had to cut through some other ranges being used by the Army.

Stationed at the entry point to one of the ranges we needed to cross, were two female Army National Guardsmen, who were supposed to guard the range. They were cute – young – *who knew how old they were?* And the Sergeant Major leans out of the van and asks them, without any forethought, “Are you hot?”

Now remember, a “hot range” is one where the live firing of weapons or detonation of ordnance is taking place – so entry to a “hot range” is not allowed for safety reasons. *That* was what the Sergeant Major was inquiring, when one of the soldiers demurred and replied, “No...” So, not comprehending the miscommunication, we drove out on to the range and *it was hot as shit!*

You know, we ran into all this stuff firing! We came around a corner and almost drove right into the impact area of long range machine gun fire! They shut the range down immediately when they saw our vehicle ride out on to the range. No one got hurt - but the Sergeant Major *never*

lived that one down. Shaking my head, I told him he needed to be a little bit clearer when he asked them if they were hot!<sup>33</sup>

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The Second Lieutenant was alone and scared - really scared. *This is ridiculous. You're a god damn Marine officer, pull yourself together.* He certainly didn't feel like a Marine officer at the moment. He felt like a lost kid. He was soaking wet and disoriented after stumbling blindly off the steep riverbank and into the waist deep water of Beaver Dam Run while negotiating the night land navigation course of The Basic School. He didn't see it coming because his eyes had been glued to the glowing tritium of his compass as he robotically marched along the azimuth regardless of the obstacles in his path. Before falling into the creek, he had pushed through thick patches of brush and pricker bushes while painfully banging his shins against the unseen deadfall on the ground. If he wasn't so scared, this maddening attempt to walk a straight line through the opaque woods would be humorous.

The pitch black of the Quantico forest on this moonless night was suffocating and the Lieutenant felt totally and hopelessly alone. Despite the knowledge that several dozen friends and fellow Lieutenants were all around him in the woods, negotiating their own adventures on the course, it seemed he was totally alone. Rational thought was alluding him as his frustration mounted and fear returned when he heard it. A sound.

*There it was again.* The sound of something quite close to him. The Lieutenant pulled himself out of the muck and strained his eyes to see what was making that noise. 25 years later, Colonel Tim Winand recalled what happened next.

*I swear that I was standing literally right next to a, no kidding, beaver. You know, all I could hear was the [makes clapping sounds] you know, like he was banging his tail on something – you*

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<sup>33</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

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*know how they bang their tails to make their little, whatever they do, their little beaver obstacles they make and all that.*

*When I finally wrestled myself out of the muck, you know, I could hear this beaver – I mean, I swear he was right next to me. It negatively impacted my – my psychological state of mind.<sup>34</sup>*



Midshipman First Class Timothy Winand (left) and the author, U.S. Naval Academy, Spring 1990  
(from the author's personal collection)

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<sup>34</sup> Timothy Winand, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 30, 2016.

### **“The Summer Of Decision”**

The lunar landscape of Afghanistan’s Helmand Province was disorienting. The dust-colored and sun baked uniformity of the ground, the distant hills and even the mud-walled compounds and homes added to the other worldly appearance of the place. The summer time temperatures regularly soared to over 120 degrees and shade was a rare luxury for the Marines of 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (2/8). Clad in the Corps’ latest digital camouflage utility uniforms, covered in the unescapable dust, with faces striped in clean streaks formed by rivulets of constant sweat cutting through the layers of dust, the Marines quickly blended into the alien environment, too.

2/8, self-proclaimed *America’s Battalion*, was in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009 (a season the unit had deemed *The Summer of Decision*) to change history. On the eve of its first major engagement, its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Christian Gold Cabaniss, USMC, addressed the Marines of Echo Company who he had given the toughest assignment in the operation. Standing in the middle of a circle of Marines, wearing the Corps’ distinctive 8-sided utility cap and opaque ballistic sunglasses against the severe sun, Chris delivered his pitch without notes and without a stumble. The son of a Southern Baptist minister turned psychotherapist, Chris had a slight and pleasing Georgian accent and a verbal cadence more appropriate to a sermon than to a Knute Rockne locker room pep talk. Chris was a compelling orator. He invoked the legacy of the Marine Corps and employed a heady mix of quotes and concepts lifted from Mao Zedong, George Patton and Douglas Macarthur, when he addressed the Marines.

*I believe in each and every one of you. And I love each and every one of you. You’re the most precious resource that America has. Trust in your brothers. Dedicate yourself to America’s Battalion and our mission. These people have suffered for too long, change the course of history in Afghanistan.*<sup>35</sup>

*It’s time to change the game in Afghanistan; to force the Taliban to react to us instead of us reacting to them. I want you to understand, I picked you specifically to be the company that goes the farthest south in the battalion’s AO. I know you’ll be able to overcome any challenge*

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<sup>35</sup> *The Hornet’s Nest*. Directed by David Salzberg and Christian Tureaud (Woodinville, WA: HighRoad Entertainment, 2014); theatrical release: May 9, 2014.



*that you'll face. Some days you'll have good days and some days you'll have bad days, but the same question I posed months ago is what should really drive your action: Is what I'm doing gonna move the Afghan people closer to their government or further away?*

*We are attacking to seize control of the population from the Taliban 'cause once we've secured the population, they no longer have a sea to swim in and the insurgents are going to die on the vine. Every interaction we have with the people is critical to our success. They have to develop a trust in us, we have to develop trust in them. But make no mistake, we're experts in the application of violence. When you move, move with a sense of purpose and aggression intent on finishing the enemy.*

*Your conscious should be clear and your honor should be clean. Your measure is not found in how much time you have on this earth, it's what you do with the time that you have. 40 or 50 years from now when you're sitting around with your grandchildren, they are going to ask you what you did in the Summer of Decision in Afghanistan. The world will remember what you do here this summer. And believe me, Echo Company is gonna change history starting early tomorrow morning.<sup>36</sup>*

The next day, 2/8, initiated its push against the Taliban and entered the most kinetic phase of its deployment. The shared hardships in this unforgiving combat environment inexorably linked the personal histories and fates of the battalion's Marines and sailors who endured. Chris Cabaniss, their former commander, remains their strongest advocate and clearest voice.

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<sup>36</sup> *Hell And Back Again*. Directed by Danfung Dennis (London: Roast Beef Productions, 2011); theatrical release: January 1, 2011.

### **“Every Marine A Rifleman”**

For Steve Liszewski, and most of the other Marines from the Class of 1990, the time between throwing his white Midshipman cap up in the air in Annapolis on graduation day and exchanging fire with another human being intent on killing him and his Marines was an interim of many years. The ‘90 Marines just missed out on *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, their collective timing placed them in the training pipelines of TBS (The Basic School, a six-month course for all newly commissioned Marine Lieutenants) and their follow-on warfare schools, such as infantry, artillery and flight school, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1991. The shooting war most were desperate to join started *and* ended without them. Most were disappointed at having missed the opportunity. For the last USNA class of the Cold War, a class that had spent four years prepping for an epic showdown with the Soviets only to see its collapse and the Berlin Wall torn down six months before graduation, it appeared the call to arms which motivated them through the academy might allude them entirely.

A few Marines, who were considered lucky by their peers who were without any combat or operational experience, participated in the small, brushfire conflicts of *Desert Fox* in Kuwait, *Restore Hope* in Somalia and other small operations related to Kosovo and Libya. Most remained untested in actual combat operations for the interim between *Desert Storm* and the commencement of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11. Steve Liszewski spoke to this general feeling of disappointment for some of the Marines of his vintage.

*I can remember being a Battery Commander and talking to other guys and being like, like, ok, when is our time gonna come? You know, we’ve been in this thing for 10 years now, or whatever, and, you know, it doesn’t look particularly promising. The Cold War had ended. Small stuff was going on, but it was like, ‘Damn.’*

*Having joined an organization that prides itself on its record in conflicts like the Second World War, it was, like, when is our time gonna come? Little did I know that, that time, it eventually did come.<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

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Summer 2007. Al Anbar Province in Iraq. The 1st Battalion of the 12th Marine Regiment (1/12) was deployed as part of the ground combat element (GCE in Marine-speak) and worked directly for the GCE Commander, a Marine General. 1/12 is an artillery battalion, but given the nature of the conflict in 2007 Iraq, large artillery operations were not required for the counterinsurgency and nation-building tasks assigned to the U.S. military forces.

Faced with the reality on the ground, 1/12 was given the provisional mission of forming a Military Police Task Force. It was a massive undertaking and required flexibility for the artillerymen to work a wide variety of missions. The 1/12 Marines found themselves assigned tasks totally outside of their primary skill sets (which for an artillery battalion usually entailed the deployment and employment of medium and heavy artillery weapon systems) and mastering convoy and route security, manning police training teams, running border control points and conducting detainee operations. Their mission was incredibly diverse for any unit, but the battalion was motivated to achieve the standards and expectations of the Marine Corps - no matter the particular assignment.

The Marines assigned to conduct the detainee operations mission, in the wake of the notoriety of the problems exposed in the Army's handling of the Abu Ghraib prison, were particularly motivated to *do it right*. In Al Anbar, 1/12 lived up to the expectations of the Marine Corps while completing detainee operations because the Marines were aware if they conducted themselves the way the Army had at Abu Ghraib, they would undoubtedly inflame the insurgency in a way which would ultimately make the fight harder and cost other Marines their lives. Many aspects of the task force's mission were not particularly glamorous, but 1/12 embraced the endeavor and went after it with the passion and dedication that epitomize how Marines work – *ALL IN* - to ensure the success of the larger mission.

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Liszewski was its commander. 1/12 was comprised of three artillery batteries and had been augmented by two additional batteries in Iraq from the 11th Marines. Three of

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

the batteries were committed to conducting convoy and route security operations, one to detainee operations, and one to security operations along the Iraq-Jordan border. Approximately 100 of 1/12's Marines were scattered all over Iraq as members of training teams working directly with the Iraqi Army and police. It was a daunting task for the Marine officer who once wondered If he would ever be tested in combat.

*My role was to try and lead 'that thing' that was literally 'all over the place,' and working a fairly diverse mission set. So I spent lots of time on the road with my Sergeant Major, constantly traveling around to these units that were spread out all over Al Anbar Province at the time.*

*Some of the strange stuff that we would do, some of those convoy missions, we would wind up securing convoys full of Iraqi soldiers. And we would take them home from where their units were fighting or based in western Iraq and, a lot of these guys, they had been either recruited from north of Baghdad or from down South, down towards Najaf and An Nasiriyah.*

*My personal role in that was literally trying to keep that organization with all those folks, spread out all over the place accomplishing all of the missions that they had assigned to us.<sup>38</sup>*

*Every Marine a Rifleman and every Marine officer a Rifle Platoon Commander* is not just a tag line for the Marine Corps. Enlisted Marines at boot camp and Marine officers at The Basic School master the rudimentary skills and basic tactics associated with Marine infantry before going on to specialized training within their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). It is a point of extreme pride within the Corps, for the other service branches simply do not do this, and it has served the Corps well over its history during those desperate moments of combat when all hands were pressed into infantry service to stave off defeat. Stories of Marine cooks leaving their kitchens to fill gaps in the frontlines caused by casualties, were a staple of Marine Corps legend and folklore. For the Marines of Liszewski's battalion, trained in the intricacies of employing medium and heavy artillery against conventional targets, their provisional role forced them to hone their formative, if rusty, infantry skills. Their effectiveness on the battlefield and their lives depended on it.

*The idea, hey, every Marine a Rifleman – there was a common level of training. Once we got the mission, there was a baseline that we all had. The baseline that the Lieutenants all had, you know, particularly those, because they had all recently come from TBS, and they were pretty*

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

*good and spun up on platoon-level operations and Platoon Commander type skills. They were well prepared and they kinda had the mindset to be able to go after that, you know, that particular mission set.*

*So the idea, hey, we're Marines first, certainly wasn't challenging and I'm sure it made the, you know, if we didn't have that mindset I could see where making a leap from doing standard artillery operations to doing what we did, ah, I guess it could have been problematic.*

*But, you know, there was never really a fundamental shift in culture, if you will, that we had to make because, hey, we were Marines and we were gonna go forward and we were going to do our job.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

### **“Manhood Can Get In The Way”**

*Leaders lead from the front.* The mantra is drilled into the heads of all Marine leaders at their earliest exposure to the culture of leadership in the Corps. It’s virtually a commandment. Physical courage in the face of personal peril is also a highly touted virtue in the Marines. It is the ability to perform one’s duty in combat in spite of one’s fear and to subjugate one’s instinct for self-preservation for the greater benefit of the larger unit. It is not reckless or stupid. In the Marines, leaders do lead from the front – but not every leader needs to be dodging bullets when more important service is rendered from spots other than the very point of the spear. This is critical for Marine leaders to understand – sometimes manhood issues can get in the way. Colonel Christian G. Cabaniss, USMC, thoughtfully articulated the nuances of combat leadership on the modern battlefield.

*July 2, 2009 – about 1500 local time. Like most combat leaders it’s a manhood issue - I gotta be out there getting shot at with the Marines. And, like most combat leaders in a distributed fight, you guess wrong and you’re in the wrong place. I launched out with one of the ground movements, we pushed out immediately up the road to link up with ‘em, to open up the road to them because that’s how we were going to sustain them. So we go up there and nothing happens – the big fight is down south – can’t talk to a soul – you know, typical stuff. So, I turned around with my security detachment, my little squad of Marines, and we pushed back down the road to get back to the Battalion.*

*I walked into the COC [Combat Operations Center – where the battalion’s command and operations personnel direct the battle and coordinate supporting artillery and air support], and my ‘XO’ [Executive Officer – the second in command of a unit; in this case, an XO of a Marine Battalion would be filled by a Major] is standing there ashen-faced and everybody’s lookin’ at me. The XO looked at me and said, ‘LCpl Seth Sharp’s been killed.’*

*So we’re in Nob a coupla’ hours and the first Marine is dead. He’s from Adairsville, Georgia. Seth’s dead. And I remember everyone lookin’ at me and I said, ‘Well our obligations are to the living, let’s get back to work – the Adjutant will take care of Seth.’ And then everybody kinda’ shook, and then they went back to it. ‘Cause we got two companies that are heavily engaged. It stuck with me and it made me think a lot.*

*[Later] I sat and had a long talk with the Company Commander who was doing what I did and I said, ‘I know you wanna’ go out. I know you wanna’ be there with ‘em, but you can’t help ‘em from there. That’s not what they need from you. They’re better riflemen than you are, they’re better mortarmen, better machine gunners than you – you’ll never guess and you’ll never be able to be at the point of friction.’ He had seven different fire fights going on with squads – all around*

*his AO [Area of Operations] – none of them close to each other and I told him something I learned myself on the second of July, 'Put yourself in a place where you can coach 'em – think about it as coaching.'*

*The football coach is not on the field with the players, he's on the sideline watching them; he's setting them up for success. So where should the Company Commander be? Where he could best talk to everybody. Where he could best talk to the squad in contact. So, it's in the COC on the radio – he can help 'em. He can bring fires, he can move people around, he can get a sense.*

*So, that's what Seth Sharp told me. When something was getting ready to happen, I would go sit in that Company's COC. One, it's a calming force to keep people focused but where I could still talk to the rest of the Battalion because I could never guess where stuff was gonna' happen. The Marines needed me to be somewhere where I could talk with 'em. On numerous occasions, I couldn't talk with the Company Commander, I couldn't talk to the Platoon Commander, but I could talk to the squad in contact.*

*But, again, that's balancing the manhood issue of the Lieutenant – who the Marines need to see in contact. But the things that necessarily make you a good Lieutenant, don't help you necessarily as a Company Commander or as a Battalion Commander because the manhood issue gets in the way. I can get shot at with the best of 'em – but the Marines don't need me to get shot at.*

*One of the Marines talked to me years later, a couple of months back, he was standing next to me in a firefight and I'm trying to work harrier strikes into the fight. And he's just like, 'I remember you mad – yelling, trying to talk to these guys to work it out and losing comms because we're getting shot at.' He was laughing about it, but I was like, 'You know, I wasn't very helpful to you that day because I couldn't get you what you wanted because I was not in a position to do it. I was in the position to be the rifleman next to you.' And I'm an ok shot, but, in my forties not nearly as agile as the 19-year old Marine. So, we're all looking at the same problem, but we all have a different role in the solution. So the more we recognize that, I think we get better results.<sup>40</sup>*

Today's Marines are incredibly smart and when they are measured against the standardized tests of their forbearers, they collectively outperform in every category of aptitude. In stark contrast to many of their civilian peers, they are given tremendous responsibility for making split-second decisions which have tremendous and potentially life-altering consequences. The task to prepare young Marines for this challenge lies squarely on the shoulders of the Corps leaders. It is their obligation to train their Marines in the tactical employment of their weapons systems, but more importantly, to foster an

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<sup>40</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.

atmosphere of trust. The best leaders create an environment where even the most junior ranking Marine has a voice in shaping a solution to the complexities encountered in combat. Colonel Cabaniss addressed this phenomenon when he described his experiences with the Marines of 2/8.

*The young Marines are talented; they're bright. The Squad Leaders get asked to do more than we were ever allowed to do as Lieutenants. Our time with them is during training. That's where we have to invest. At 29 Palms, the Commanding General got mad at me because I didn't want to sit in the Fire Support Center while we were doing fires drills – I wanted to go to Range 410A with the squads and platoons. My response was, 'I will be in the FSC with the fires guys when it's really happening – I won't be with the squads and the platoons.' So this is my chance to invest with them; to put my stamp on them early in the process.*

*I even stopped a range to get in the Squad Leader's face about being a crazy American target and warned 'You're standing up, walking around, you're gonna' get dead and therefore not be useful to anyone.'*

*Because, again, immediate action drills are interesting – they get you through the first 10 or 15 seconds of the firefight, but after that, you need somebody who can think. And, invariably, it's the weird PFC on the far right who sees everything – the question is: did you prepare him? Did the Squad Leader prepare him to be able to contribute? Not to be a mindless automaton, to just to respond to directions, but to tell the Squad Leader what he sees and to offer solutions. And the really effective squads that I had, they could do that. The Squad Leaders invested. But again, it was asking them to step outside the molds which was: 'go here, go there, go there, do this.'*

*That's what combat was like – it's a complex, adaptive system. There is no one answer; in fact, the question isn't even clear, but you have to break it down into parts and so it requires everybody to participate. The more you invested up front, the better return you got on your investment. Again, at the rifleman level, risk is not theoretical. The kid who has to execute it, he's talking about risk because it's his life and the life of the Marine on his left and right. So you have to set him up for success.<sup>41</sup>*

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<sup>41</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.



### “IEDs”

The snaking column of military vehicles was almost a mile long as it sped along the road in the accordion fashion of such road marches. It halted suddenly and the clouds of whitish dust kicked up in its wake settled to the earth quickly in the heavy and humid air of the late morning outside of Al Anbar and north of Baghdad. The din and vibration of the speeding vehicles was replaced by a moment of eerie stillness. When stopped, the up-armored Humvees, MRAPS (some with mine-rollers attached) and heavy trucks were most vulnerable. Marines and the Iraqi troops who they were tasked to transport from the front lines to their hometowns south of Baghdad, dismounted quickly (except for those manning the medium and heavy machine guns mounted on many of the vehicles). Executing this *battle drill* reflexively, hasty perimeters were established around the column. Junior officers and experienced SNCOs focused everyone’s attention outboard, in the direction of likely ambush, and NCOs assigned sectors of fire to the Marines in their charge.

As the defensive perimeter took shape along the column, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Liszewski, USMC, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines (1/12) got on the radio to get a handle on what had caused this dangerous delay. He learned the lead elements had spotted an IED in their path and needed to address it before proceeding. After acknowledging the reports of those up ahead, he quickly turned his attention to the security situation around his vehicle and the others bunched up on the road near him and scanned the alien surroundings.

*It was kind of an agrarian area. There were a bunch of houses that were separated from us by some fields and some marshes. We could not get over to those houses without having to cross kind of a marsh area and some no-go terrain. But we could see that people were looking at us and then we came to realize that, hey, we were actually sitting on top of a culvert.*

*And then we wound up figuring out that, hey, actually, that culvert was rigged with a, there was an IED inside of the culvert. So we knew we were halted by an IED, we realized people were watching us, we realized we were actually sitting on top of one, so we had to do a fairly hasty reorganization, if you will, I guess of how we were laid out.*

*Neither the IED at the front of the convoy or the one that we were sitting on were detonated while we were there and EOD wound up coming in and getting both of them. The one that we*

*were sitting on was command-detonated, there was a wire that they found that they ran off. And the one up on the front end, we just detonated it in place and then we got reorganized and got out of there.*

*I guess it was the realization that hey, we're actually halted and we're sitting on top of an IED that was one of the more harrowing moments.<sup>42</sup>*

Marines are fighters; they are much more accustomed and trained to be on the attack than in other roles. They become antsy and uncomfortable when forced to man static defensive positions. And they hate IEDs. IEDs cause a type of random death and maiming that has nothing to do with a Marine's individual level of tactical proficiency, physical fitness or battlefield experience. It is simply: wrong place, wrong time. Good commanders combat the natural tendency for fatalism or despondency to corrode the morale of a unit encountering the faceless, Russian-roulette enemy of IEDs by tapping into the aggressiveness of the Marines.

*I don't think you would ever want to get your Marines into a situation where they felt completely helpless. So the way the Marine Corps approaches something like that is by a couple of elements. There were ways you could develop TTPs where you could work to identify the threat before you got to it. You know, you have equipment that would attempt to detonate the stuff before you got to it; mine rollers or electronic gear that would jam people who were trying to detonate using electronic means.*

*We never wanted to and nor do I think the Marine Corps would ever let Marines believe that they're merely gonna be sheep taken to the slaughter, so we focused on those things that we could control. And then you would also just instill in the minds of the Marines that, hey, we absolutely got to do this mission, but, you know, should the time and the place present itself, where we can shift over from being hunted by these guys to hunting them, we would change and we would go after whoever was out there on the roads.*

*We would take dog teams with us. We would set up observation over areas on roads where we thought they would be laying IEDs all in an attempt to kind of change the dynamic from being merely victims to actually going and hunting those that were trying to hunt for us. But there is the mental challenge of kind of that randomness or that component that, hey, I could still do everything right and do everything well and, um, someone could absolutely have emplaced something that would kill somebody.*

*The mindset of the Marines there was, hey, we're going to focus on the mission, we're going to do everything that we can to make sure that we get this right. There is an acknowledgement of*

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

*the element of risk there, and the Marines never let themselves take on this sort of victim mentality or the idea that, hey, we're just going to be led to the slaughter out there. It was how you take that natural aggressiveness and the desire to take the fight to the enemy as best you can inside that weird mission set and against that threat.*<sup>43</sup>

The wire from the IED under the culvert led from their position in the general direction of the houses across the marshy area. Liszewski and his Marines wanted to see where it terminated and hold those accountable for emplacing it, but they faced a serious *time hack* and this stop had already put them behind schedule. Security concerns on the delivery end of this mission precluded any follow-up actions at the time other than blowing the IEDs in place and moving on. The Marines and Iraqi soldiers re-mounted their vehicles. Engines started and exhaust belched into the air as the snake came back to life. When the convoy took shape on the road again, dust and noise replaced the eerie stillness of a few moments ago. Despite the physical closeness of hundreds of bodies packed into the speeding vehicles, the noise and movement made regular conversation impossible. Convoy ops were basically a solitary affair and the Marines were mostly left to their own thoughts and reflections as the column picked up speed. Some Marines looked backed across the marshy area at the dark silhouettes of people by their houses. They wondered who over there had placed the IED under the culvert and who had the detonator. They pondered their unknown foe who literally held their lives in his hand; however briefly.

Post-script: In recounting the events of the convoy to the author, Liszewski highlighted and praised the performance of his junior leaders while minimizing his own. He stressed the actions taken by the Marines in this life-threatening situation were led by the Lieutenants, SNCOs and NCOs on scene – *they were the ones who made things happen*. They were well rehearsed and well drilled and, as the situation unfolded, they relied on their training and did what needed to be done. The Marines used the battle skills which had been built during months of training prior to deployment and honed during earlier combat patrols on this deployment to Iraq. After his first read of a draft of this story, he wrote the author, “*The vignette is too focused on me and not the Marines and that is simply not accurate.*” His self-deprecation is a testament to his feelings about the other Marines with whom he shared this harrowing moment and the esteem he maintains for the Corps’ junior leaders.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen Liszewski, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 31, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Liszewski, e-mail to the author, February 23, 2016.

### **“Commander For Life”**

The box full of mementos always stirred up his strongest emotions - feelings of nostalgia and melancholy, mostly. He hadn't touched it in a few years, but lately he had been thinking about his time in the Corps, so he took the box out of the closet. He picked through its contents and made a mental inventory: a set of ID tags, the *eagle, globe and anchor* given him by his Drill Instructor after completing *The Crucible* at Parris Island, a good conduct medal which he never actually wore on a dress uniform, and a handful of thumb drives containing the shared pics and shared memories of the Summer of 2009 when, as a young rifleman, he served in the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (2/8) in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

So many things had happened since he left the Marines. But nothing he had done since ever gave him the same feeling of pride or purpose as the few years he spent in the Corps. After being so anxious to get out and begin a life outside of the Marines, he now thought he should have re-enlisted. He second guessed his decision to leave many, many times. On the occasion of his declination to re-enlist for another four years, his Company First Sergeant told him he would probably regret his choice. Shaking his head sagely, the *First Shirt* counseled, “You won't miss the circus, Marine, but you'll miss the clowns you served with.”

He smiled thinking about it - sometimes it was easy to idealize the years spent in uniform and only remember the good times. He plucked a random thumb drive from the box and put it in the lap top he had on his bed. Holy shit – Golf Company, the day before they pushed deep into the Valley. In one pic, 2/8's Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Christian Cabaniss, is shaking his hand. The CO looked serious in the image - the Marine hardly recognized himself. He looked like a boy dressed up in a Marine uniform. *Damn, was I ever that young?*

*Cabaniss* – that name wouldn't be hard to find, he thought as he googled it and soon located a Facebook page dedicated to 2/8 named *2nd Battalion Eighth Marines – Front Toward Hero*. He looked

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

at the postings from other Marines, some he knew personally – most he did not, and was amazed that his CO responded to each question addressed to him. He didn't *know* the CO, but admired his leadership and approachability at Camp Lejeune and especially in Afghanistan. For some reason, it was important for the Marine to reach out to the man who had led him during the most dangerous and most meaningful episode of his life. He began typing, *Sir, you probably don't remember me, but I was a rifleman in Golf Company....*

For most Marines, their initial assignment to the Fleet is also their *only* assignment to the Fleet. Only 1 in 5 Marines re-enlist at the expiration of their first term, so for the vast majority of Marines, their experiences in their Fleet assignment at the squad, platoon, company and battalion levels become their *entire Marine Corps experience*. Unlike the *Lifers*, those career Marines who move on to other assignments and Fleet units on their way up the ladder of career development and promotions, for the one-enlistment Marines and their junior officer counterparts (who leave the Corps after their commitment is paid back), their Fleet experience is frozen in time. The memories of their peers and leaders are recounted to their friends and family countless times thereafter in the same manner one relives the glory days of high school. In the retold stories, the Marines of one's memory also escape the ravages of time and remain as they were remembered. The characters in sea stories never age; nor do their positions relative to the Marine. Chris Cabaniss explained most Marines have a *platoon commander for life*. In their personal Marine Corps story, *Lieutenant Smith* will always be *Lieutenant Smith* to the Marine recounting his service regardless of the passage of years and ultimate destiny of *Lieutenant Smith*.

With the knowledge of this dynamic at play, and the emotional depth to accept his responsibility of *Commander for Life*, Chris articulated how this has played out in his own life.

*I think that many senior leaders have no concept; talking about trying to get after the Post-Traumatic Stress, the things that are going on in that community and the 'Platoon Commander, Company Commander for life.' Those are always your Marines – I mean I've been in a bunch of units – but to those kids, their entire enlistment was spent in the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines. 2/8 is the Marine Corps to them.*

*So we owe it to 'em and even though I was told by a well-meaning General, 'I can't ask you all to do that.' I looked at him and said, 'Sir, I sent those kids into the Valley of Death – I owe them everything. If I have to work for them for the rest of my life, then I owe them that.'*

*They put my words into action – we owe 'em – we're the ones who sent them in, we're the ones who told them what to do – where to do it – how to do it. And so we owe them everything.*

*The political side – which kills me – is that when you make the determination to send kids into harm's way you better mean it. Because there is going to be personal tragedy for all involved in it – there's going to be. And that's the way it works. You can do everything right and bad things can still happen.<sup>45</sup>*

Many Marines replay the events of their service over in their minds many times, particularly those who deployed into combat. The bonds formed with those who shared their hardships and risks are among the strongest known, but the operational tempo and manpower issues associated with the Marines engagement in over 10 years of continuous combat operations eventually took its toll. After the intensity and clarity of purpose of a combat deployment, returning Marines (many of who depart the Marine Corps altogether), find their sustaining network of peers splintered and scattered in short order.

*I think we had a poor manpower policy. The unit fell apart 60 days after we got back. I left, the Sergeant Major left - my XO was gone two weeks after we got back, my Sergeant Major left two weeks after that, I left, the Company Commanders all left. I think it took the Marine Corps another year to figure out we got to keep units together for a while so they can spend time talking about it.*

*I spent all this time on Facebook talking to these kids over time, but I wonder – if we could have spent more time with them AFTER – the problem is it's a trust network. The people in the unit at the time, trusted each other. We could have done it together. If the unit essentially 'de-mobed' together that probably would have helped more.*

*Because what I see – the biggest frustration point is – a sense of purpose. In a unit with a very clear mission, although very difficult, a very clear mission, people knew what they were doing. They understood their purpose, their organizational purpose. And when they left and they went out into the world, the ones that struggle the most, struggle with finding that new purpose.*

*Some have found other ways to serve – fire departments, police departments, different things that give them that sense that they're doing something bigger than just getting a paycheck. 'Cause that's the frustration that I see a lot. What I would like to see is that sense of organizational purpose – that sense of continuing to serve. You know, just because you go work*

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<sup>45</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

*somewhere, doesn't mean you can't take pride in what you do. You can go work somewhere and volunteer your time.*

*Some of the guys have transitioned really well and they continue to make a difference and they're enjoying their lives. And some are stuck. They probably should have stayed in the Marine Corps, they could have stayed in the Marine Corps, they just wanted to go home because they thought when they went home everything was going to be wonderful. How do you address that when they go home that everyone treats them like 'normal'? So that's a big frustrating point for many, is they don't know what to do.*

*One of the NPR guys who was embedded with us, he and I were talking a couple of years later, and he was trying to put in perspective: 'How do you convince a kid to move on when the most important thing he's ever going to do in his life he did when he was 19 years old?' I didn't believe that – that was the most important thing that they did at the time, but there's many other things that they can do. They can come home and make our country a better place. I mean getting out, having families, raising their children, making a contribution in whatever community they live in – both at work and during their free time. I think those things are all possible.*

*We have an obligation to send the people getting out of the Marine Corps on to their next mission – giving society something back better than what we got – somebody who feels an obligation to their fellow man.*

*We got to turn the Marine Corps into an organization full of Democrats.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, January 27, 2016.

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

## **“Q & A”**

*[Author’s note: Sometimes, an interview generates an unexpected moment so profound and powerful, a reader is best served by a writer who presents the episode in its unvarnished entirety. I knew this was the case during my interview with Chris as he recounted an important moment which touched on many of the overall cultural themes of my project in an unscripted and natural way.]*

Question: Can you describe the most memorable act of physical courage demonstrated by the Marines of 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines during the battalion’s 2009 deployment to Helmand Province, Afghanistan?

Answer: Actually, I didn’t even find out about it for about 4 years. The story got lost. It really got lost. I originally heard about it from some of the Marines involved in the incident - so I started asking around and I started getting statements from a bunch of the Marines. The whole picture became clear. It had been referenced in some of the other awards processed by the battalion after the deployment, but never clearly stood out on its own.

After figuring out what had happened, I wrote up all the awards personally, but it was well after the normal timeframe for submitting nominees for medals and citations. So, I tracked down the former Regimental Commander, who had since retired, and got him to agree to them. Next, I got the MEB Commander, who is now a Lieutenant General, to sign off on my recommendations, and then I got a member of Congress to submit them to the Navy. Awards must be sponsored by a member of Congress if it’s for a military action which occurred more than three years ago.

So, the awards are all being adjudicated now, but the event I’m describing occurred in early September 2009. The 3rd Squad of the 3rd Platoon is pinned down along a canal. The Doc grabs a kid who’s wounded right off the bat. The Doc grabs the kid, lays on top him, and yanks him into the canal to get him out of the line of fire. Meanwhile, the rest of the squad starts maneuvering to try and suppress what’s going on around them as the Squad Leader and the company are trying to evacuate the wounded Marine by helicopter. They get the CASEVAC helicopter coordinated while they’re still in this ongoing firefight.

Four of the Marines pick up the litter with the wounded Marine. Man, you can’t carry a kid anymore - the old firemen’s carry is over, you know, with body armor and all that stuff on – it’s just too heavy and takes multiple Marines to carry somebody now. So, the four Marines are carrying the litter with the wounded Marine. They have their weapons slung over their shoulders and have to run across



Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

an open field in the mud – and they're gettin' shot at the whole way - to put their brother on a helicopter.

A few Marines are on the side trying to suppress the tree line, you know, shoot back at the enemy, as the four run across the open field, getting shot at the whole time, to put the kid on the helicopter. Once the Marine is aboard, the helicopter takes off and it's getting shot at the whole way out, too. Then the four Marines have to run back across the field through the gunfire!

To me, I mean, it is just pure 'selfless.' None of 'em want to do it – they think it's the dumbest thing they're ever gonna' do – and yet they did it anyway. It's hard to put in perspective.

Based on everything I learned happened that day, I put the four Marines in for a medal. I put 'em in for COM "V's" – which is the Navy-Marine Corps Commendation Medal with a combat "V." The "V" device on the medal stands for valor in combat. I have read citations of similar actions where the Marines involved receive much higher awards like the Silver Star or Navy Cross, but I asked the Marines themselves what they thought was appropriate. They all said, 'it's a COM "V."' So that's what I put 'em in for. The COM "V" meant the most to them because they knew the higher awards often involve politics. A COM "V" is a big deal to a young Marine. That's their 'big deal.' Everything other than that just depends on the timing and the decision of a very senior leader who wants to give a big award to somebody for other reasons.

Those guys talked to each other about it. One of the guys, he ended up losing a leg on a later deployment, recalled the events I just described and told me, "I don't know how we got back. We were just runnin', cussin' the whole way, bitchin' that they had to take him to the helicopter the whole way, the whole way back." When they got back across the field and into the cover of the canal, they all kinda looked at each other, like, "well – somehow we made it – oh well," and then they just moved on. It reminded me of a quote - if you've ever read *The Gates of Fire*- "the opposite of fear is love."

They were takin' care of their brother and that trumped everything. They loved 'em and so they were gonna' help him. And that was it. That was their calculus. They didn't really think about anything else until it was over. Then they sat there and thought about it, you know, when they got back, and they're like, "Man, that was the dumbest thing we ever did – hope he's ok." And he was.

It's funny – mentally, I don't think it hits you 'til much later. I regularly talk to two of the guys involved and it is notable how long that event has stayed with 'em. They had friends killed, other friends wounded – but on that day, they ran through a hail of gunfire and nobody got hit! And they don't know how to put that in perspective.

'Cause I think for most of them, and for myself included, I think at some point we all emotionally became comfortable with the fact that we would've much rather died than have to live through it. Because you can't square that the people who were taken from us – you know 'one foot this way, one foot that way and it's you,' and for all your brothers, you'd much rather trade places with them.

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Goucher College

I rethink it all the time. I rethink individual things – could I’ve done this, could I’ve done that – maybe that would have stopped that, if I could have saved a kid. I mean, if I could have saved one more Marine, can you imagine the family torment that would have been avoided? ‘Cause no matter how important it is - to our nation and to our Corps - for the family and for the really close friends who’ve lost their son, husband, brother or friend – it’s a tragedy. It’s a tragedy that they’ll never recover from.

That hole will never be replaced. Ever.

So, that’s my point to the political leadership - you better make sure it counts because you’re gonna’ destroy family’s lives.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Christian Cabaniss, interview with the author, digital audio recording, December 23, 2015.

## EPILOGUE

### **“Semper Fidelis”**

*Why are you writing about the Marines, anyway?* A classmate in my Theory of Cultural Sustainability class asked me the question with more than a trace of skepticism. At first, I was put off by her apparent lack of sensitivity to the topic, and I lashed back angrily in a response which basically accused her of a double standard of conduct. While invariably supportive of all the other students’ exploration of a variety of communities such as artists, neighborhoods and ethnic groups, she seemed quick to attack my exploration of the culture of the Marine Corps. Her criticism rankled on a personal level, too. I served in the Marines, was close friends with those who still wore the uniform, and I felt the Marine Corps was entitled to the same level of respect as any other culture examined in the Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability (MACS) program. After more than a decade of continuous combat operations, I also knew the Marine Corps was a frayed and battle-weary institution. Individual Marines suffering through the trauma of physical and psychological wounds deserved the support of their nation, I thought, but not the shallow and tokenistic tips of the hat at the 7th inning stretch of a major league baseball game or other sporting event. Bumper stickers declaring, “We salute our veterans,” surely seemed meaningless to veterans struggling to make meaning of their combat experiences or to receive the medical care promised them but rarely delivered by an underfunded and chronically short-staffed Veterans Administration.

When I stepped back and reassessed the exchange I had with my peer, taking it less as a personal attack, but rather as a fair question, I realized I had not explained the purpose of my cultural work very well at all. I failed to convey the reasons why I was examining the Marine Corps in the first place and what I hoped to achieve in my final capstone project at MACS. I do not want anyone who reads this manuscript to guess my intentions. I knew true sympathy and respect for the Marines could only be achieved by exposing its culture to the well-meaning, but largely ignorant audience of outsiders. I felt a thoughtful understanding of the institution and its individuals could best be achieved, or at least

Brian J. Fitzell  
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Goucher College

initiated, by providing a reader with stories that educated, entertained and humanized the virtually unknown *Lifers* within our midst.

At MACS, I began the process of self-reflection which led me to consider the community of military veterans generally, and the Marines specifically, as worthy of deep ethnographic study and in desperate need of community support. With the rising rates of suicide, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other medical conditions ravaging the veteran community, coupled with a chronic shortage of veteran-related treatment services, I committed my MACS experience to the examination and support of this unique culture and community. The strength of the Marine Corps is held within its institutional identity. It is a potent combination of tradition, history and legacy. In attempting to highlight this community, I embraced the tenets of cultural sustainability and employed a methodology which allowed the participating Marine officers a unique perspective of themselves as they contemplated a most uncertain future for the Corps. Against this backdrop of institutional turmoil and personal experiences, my initiative also served as an important measure for healing. Two of the *Lifers* told me they had not spoken of several of the events explored in our interviews until I asked questions which allowed them the opportunity to process their suppressed memories. All appreciated the stories I crafted using the details they provided in their interviews and offered additional information when we engaged in our *reciprocal storytelling*.<sup>1</sup>

Oral history<sup>2</sup> and by extension, ethnography<sup>3</sup> allows for a deep understanding of individuals and community. Personal storytelling is a powerful way to highlight global cultural themes through individual narratives. The strength of the deep, qualitative methods of ethnography to reach people in ways unavailable to the cold statistics of quantitative methods and data is undeniable. Cold, hard numbers regarding TBI, PTSD or suicide rates for veterans do not capture one's imagination or consciousness; the numbers are simply too mind-numbing. Conversely, the emotional and cognitive impact of reading or hearing a compelling personal narrative dealing with the same topics often moves one and can be the catalyst for real action or change. Depending on the nature of the story and its

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presentation to the public, one Marine's tale could literally affect the whole Marine Corps. It is an important reality.

In order to reach the widest range of people, I utilized the powerful tools of creative nonfiction, the so-called New Journalism,<sup>4</sup> to create a manuscript which is more compelling and accessible to readers than an academic paper or standard oral history project. Telling the stories of individual Marines using my method could further bridge the connection between today's Marines and the American people. At a time in our nation's history where an ever decreasing percentage of the population serves in the "all volunteer" military, a cross-cultural exposure is critical to prevent an increasingly remote, professional Marine Corps from being viewed as a "foreign legion." Education of the community outside the Marine Corps, and empowerment of the individual Marine begins one story at a time.

World War II combat Marine turned author, Eugene B. Sledge, achieved singular success as the raconteur for the 1st Marine Division in his memoir *With The Old Breed At Peleliu And Okinawa*. Originally written not for publication, but rather to come to grips with his combat experiences and exorcise his own demons of PTSD, Sledge crafted a work of uncompromising reality. When his peers heard of Sledge's powerful work, they pushed him to publish it for them, as they did not have the abilities to convey what they had seen and knew Sledge's memoir would speak for all of them.

War is brutish, inglorious, and a terrible waster. Combat leaves an indelible mark on those who are forced to endure it. The only redeeming factors were my comrades' incredible bravery and their devotion to each other. Marine Corps training taught us to kill efficiently and to try to survive. But it also taught us loyalty to each other – and love. That esprit de corps sustained us.<sup>5</sup>

I do not speak for the entire Corps, nor even for the three Marine officers who assisted me on this project, but this manuscript serves as a proof of concept for the method of *reciprocal storytelling* I employed to document and share their experiences with others.

At the macro level, I wanted to expose some important aspects of the Marines to readers who had little knowledge of this insular world or whose preconceptions of the Corps were based on mostly on one-dimensional, stereotypical depictions in popular culture. In short, I wanted to craft a project of cultural significance for an audience like the students and faculty I worked with at Goucher College; an audience who otherwise might not recognize the Marine Corps as a valuable and unique institution. The *Lifers* in this study, I knew firsthand, were nuanced, thoughtful and intelligent men who could hold their own in any gathering of intelligentsia. If exposed to the depth of their character and hard earned wisdom, I was sure the students and faculty of Goucher College would not only be impressed with them as individuals, but have a greater understanding and appreciation of the Marine Corps, as well. However, this was not intended to be a puff piece, either, and several negative aspects of today's Marine Corps, as an institution, naturally emerged alongside the positives. Any concluding judgements regarding the balance of these opposing traits are left to the reader.

In designing this project, one of my prime objectives was to utilize the tools of creative nonfiction to present a narrative version of the material covered in my interviews. After reviewing the recorded interviews, I identified the richest moments which touched upon cultural topics I hoped to highlight. I employed storytelling techniques to create compelling and readable vignettes from details recorded in the interviews which I hoped would be more successful in reaching a wider audience or readership than a traditional oral history project might. I was confident in my ability to record deep and meaningful interviews and I had incredible access to three prominent Marine officers. As I began to record my interviews, I was sure important cultural themes would emerge organically in the process of first gathering their stories and then retelling them. From the inception of my conceptual framework, I knew creative nonfiction was a key component, but not until I spent a summer term working one on one with immersive journalist and author, Mike Sager, did I have a rudimentary grasp of this form. In addition, I used creative nonfiction techniques and passages to set up some of the most powerful direct quotes from the interviewees themselves and to highlight the cultural themes I felt the Marines were touching in their interviews.

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Steve, Tim, and Chris are *Lifers* in the best sense of the word. While most of their peers from '90 separated from the military years many years ago, they continue to serve in the Marine Corps at a senior leadership level. All three are on the very cusp of being selected for the rank of Brigadier General. Despite their individual successes in the highly competitive world of the Marine Corps, they remained humble, and voiced their gratitude for being able to do something they love for the past 25 years, though their passion and commitment to the Corps has come with a high price for each.

As an institution, the Marine Corps has been at war on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan following the events of September 11, 2001. Though the Corps has requited itself well in battle, it is showing the fault lines of tremendous institutional stress and is frayed from over 10 years of continuous combat operations. Individual Marines and their families are coping with multiple deployments, combat experiences, injuries and readjustment. In our interviews, all three *Lifers* touched upon systemic problems with the way the Corps demobilized units returning from combat deployments and wondered openly if the deficiencies in the process added to the suffering of veterans and their families. The Corps will continue to recover from the institutional trauma of a decade of war. While considering its future, it will undoubtedly look to its past. If the Marine Corps is to remain relevant and capable, it must continue to stay connected to an American mainstream which often seems to be drifting away from the Marines' own ideals and values. Finding an appropriate way to make this connection is a challenge for each Marine, regardless of the length of the Marine's time in uniform.

Chris spoke eloquently of returning a Marine to society a better citizen than they had been when they arrived at Boot Camp. He hoped each Marine would channel the best parts of their Marine Corps experience into their lives after the Corps and find a meaningful way to connect with their communities as fathers, teachers, coaches and policemen. Steve and Chris both articulated their self-imposed debt to those Marines killed and maimed while under their command to honor their sacrifice by living honorably and unselfishly. Tim came the closest to describing his emotional connection to his fellow Marines as *love* and explained the difficult dynamic of wanting to be close to them without becoming *too close*.

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Cultural sustainability begins with educating others about the unique and valuable aspects of the culture examined. In turn, understanding breeds empathy and support for individual members of the community. As the Marines recover from devastating individual and institutional wounds sustained in a decade of combat, they rely greatly on the genuine support of their countrymen. The individual Marine benefits not from superficial bumper sticker slogans or seventh inning stretch salutes at ball games, but by receiving the recognition from their civilian contemporaries that their service is honorable, valuable and appreciated.

In conducting detailed interviews of deeply emotional and personal topics and experiences, human connections are inevitably formed. Storytelling as a vehicle for this connection seems almost hardwired in the human brain. The strength of new journalism lies in its ability to convey personal narratives in a much more compelling way than traditional academic writing usually achieves. My storytelling, while hopefully entertaining, should not serve to merely entertain. A classmate paid me the ultimate compliment after reading an early draft of my manuscript when she wrote, “It is a wonderful tribute at the very least...to the sacrifice, fears, brotherhood, leadership, hope, and perseverance it takes to be a Marine.” Based upon the tenets of cultural sustainability and social justice, I will continue to work on behalf of those who have earned the title *Marine*, many of whom paid a heavy personal price in the service of their country, and to educate the general public about this extraordinary group of ordinary Americans. Semper Fidelis.

Brian J. Fitzell, May 2016



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The author as a Marine Lieutenant in Mogadishu, Somalia – December 9, 1992  
(from the author's collection)

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine J. Lawless described “reciprocal ethnography” in her 1991 article, “Women’s Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent.” For Lawless, comfortable in dismantling the separation between writer/observer and community of study, many of the most informative moments of her work occurred when she shared her ideas with her participants and sought their input while forming her conclusions. This inclusive give and take between the writer and the participant was something I incorporated into my project. However, as my limited work was more storytelling than ethnography, I co-opted Lawless’ term and fashioned my writing as “reciprocal storytelling.”

<sup>2</sup> I was introduced to the concept of *oral history* as a specific methodology and examined the dynamics involved during the conduct of the *in-depth interview* when I completed an Oral History elective in the summer of 2014. Valerie Raleigh Yow’s 2005 *Recording Oral History* served as the primary text. Her book is much more than a *how to* manual for fledgling historians; it is a nuanced examination of the collection of oral history through deep

interviews and the subsequent *telling* of the story of the interviewee. As I took this course midway through my MACS course of study, it served as an important touchstone for me in the evolution of my personal interpretation of ethnography, history and storytelling.

The shift in the relationship between historian/interviewer and participant/narrator is monumental. In many ways, the concept of shared authority revolutionized ethnography and the inter-related disciplines of history, anthropology and folklore. Having come to oral history with no personal experience in the discipline meant I had no orthodoxy to shed while considering how I would engage in the field with my subjects.

The authority of the interviewer, once absolute, is still formidable and the power of the *meaning maker* resides in packaging the results of the interview and ultimately *telling the story the interviewer wishes to tell*. With this power comes responsibility and the interviewer is faced with many ethical decisions in presenting the narrative and *creating* the story. I had mistakenly believed oral history to be mere *collection* and *reproduction* of the interviewee's exact quotes. I assumed the power of the author lay in the framing of questions and the follow-up inquiries made in response to questions (like the interviewing and interrogation techniques I learned and employed in criminal investigations) and was surprised to learn the true craft of oral history resided in the historian's interpretation and re-presentation of the interviewees words and recollections *after* the interviews were completed.

<sup>3</sup> I was introduced to the concept of ethnography at MACS and was immediately impressed with the depth and scope of this qualitative research methodology. I also recognized many similarities to the type of deep interviewing and investigative writing I routinely conducted in my capacity as a law enforcement officer. Among the works which most inspired me and informed my understanding of ethnography as a craft were Elaine J. Lawless' 2001 book *Women Escaping Violence*, Elizabeth Barret's 2000 documentary film *Stranger With A Camera*, and *Writing Culture: The Poetics And Politics Of Ethnography* (a seminal collection of ethnographic scholarship edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus).

When I consider the books I have read in MACS, I most admire the ethnographies which most closely approach the literary style of creative non-fiction. Lawless' *Women Escaping Violence*, Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down* and Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* blur the line between compellingly written ethnography and creative non-fiction. The key to both genres is the author's effective use of narrative to deliver *fact-based* stories.

<sup>4</sup> New Journalism is a term to describe a type of creative non-fiction pioneered by such journalists and authors as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, and Michael Herr, among many others. As I searched for an appropriate vehicle to deliver my intended message in this project, I was introduced to the concept of creative non-fiction and I spent a summer exploring the craft under the mentorship of Mike Sager, an author and current practitioner. I learned how the tools of creative non-fiction utilized literary techniques and craftsmanship to produce compelling narratives based on deep, ethnographic research. As a form of journalism, creative non-fiction, by definition, is *factual*, and the author's responsibility in delivering the narrative is to maintain its authenticity and legitimacy. I realized creative non-fiction might provide the best hope of realizing my goal of reaching the widest range of people while remaining grounded in factual research and representation.

<sup>5</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With The Old Breed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, reprinted 2010), xxiii-xxiv.

## APPENDIX I

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Author's note: This bibliography is an expansive listing of works which not only includes the works cited in this specific capstone project (those works are highlighted in bold type), but also informed the evolution of my work in cultural sustainability, creative non-fiction and reciprocal storytelling. I have relied heavily on works of military and oral history and memoirs in creating this bibliography, as they are among the most authentic and informative sources available on the Marine Corps and its unique culture. I also included the most influential sources which informed my understanding of ethnography, oral history, and creative non-fiction. Several works of fiction, feature and documentary films, articles, and audio selections have also been included because they provide unique and worthy perspectives to the topic.]

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## **APPENDIX II**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Interviewer: Brian J. Fitzell

Narrator: Colonel XXXX, USMC

**Abstract:** This oral history interview is being conducted in order to explore the themes of Marine Corps identity, Marine culture and inculcation and the cultural sustainability of the Marine Corps. Within these broad themes, the specific military service of the narrator will be discussed and documented. No more than two hours is anticipated for this interview.

**Preamble/Introduction:** It is XX/XX/2016, and this is Brian J. Fitzell, a graduate student at Goucher College, participating in the Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability Program. I am in Windsor Mill, Maryland, and I am recording an interview with Colonel XXXX, USMC. Colonel XXXX was commissioned a 2ndLt in the Marines on 05/29/1990 after graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy. Colonel XXXX's career spanned many varied assignments and commands, but the purpose of this interview today is to discuss certain cultural aspects of the Marine Corps against the backdrop of his own career and experiences.

Before I begin, for the record, Colonel XXXX, do you acknowledge your consent to participate in this interview and allow me to audio/video record it? Obviously, you are free to end this interview when you wish and NOT to answer any questions you do not wish to. Thank you for your time today, let's begin:

#### **Biographical/Context Information:**

- Tell me about your family and background.
  - Would you consider it a happy childhood?
- Describe your family's history in basic terms, as you know it.
- Tell me about your hometown.
  - Did you attend K-12 in the same town or move around/re-locate?
  - What was your High School like?
- Describe your earliest recollections of the Marine Corps.
- Do you recall any family members' sea stories which are particularly memorable for you?
- Tell me about your decision to join the Marines.
  - Did any events or experiences influence your decision?
  - Do you recall any movies or popular culture that influenced your childhood thoughts about the Marine Corps?

### **Why USNA?**

- What other colleges/options did you consider when you were graduating from High School?
- Why did you choose to attend USNA over your other options?
- Tell me about your experiences at USNA.
  - What is your most vivid recollection?
  - What aspect of USNA do you think was most significant to your life's path?
- What was the most challenging aspect of USNA for you?
- Based upon your own experience, how did USNA begin the process of instilling a Marine identity in you while you were within the Brigade of Midshipmen?
- How are Mids inculcated in the ideals of the Marine Corps?
  - Can you provide an example from your personal experiences?
- Describe an experience at USNA that you have carried through your career.

### **Officer Candidates School (OCS)/The Basic School (TBS)**

- Based upon your own experience, how did OCS differ from USNA for you?
- Tell me if there are any distinctions between the identities of "Marine" vs. the identity of "Officer of Marines."
- How do you rate the importance of OCS and TBS to the cultural sustainability of the Marine Corps?
- Since you graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, can you briefly tell me your opinion of this institution on the culture of the military?
  - Do you think the service academies are necessary or worthwhile to preserve?

### **The Fleet Marine Force (FMF) and Operating Forces**

- Tell me about your first FMF tour as an officer of Marines.
- How did the FMF differ from the "schoolhouse" Marine Corps for you?
- Tell me about an experience you had as a Lieutenant that you felt was important to shaping your career.
- Tell me about your first command.
- Tell me about your experiences in the FMF as a Captain and Company/Battery Commander.
- Upon reflection, how did experiencing combat operations change your view of what it meant to be a Marine? Did it alter your self-identity in some way, too?
- Tell me about your personal experience on 9/11.
  - How did this event affect you?
- Tell me about your experiences in the FMF as a LtCol and Battalion Commander.
  - Provide personal experiences from combat in Iraq that you feel are significant.

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- Provide personal experience in dealing with Wounded/KIA Marines under your command. Did these experiences alter your perceptions of the Marine Corps?
  - Strategy vs. Operations. Provide some experiences where you felt particularly effective in combat. Provide some examples where you felt particularly misused in combat.
- Tell me about your Regimental Command.
  - Units deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan? How did you prepare them?
  - Personal deployments/experiences?

### **Deployments/Combat Tours**

- Outline your deployments for me.
- Which of your tours involved combat operations or combat support operations?
- Did you have a command engaged in combat operations – and if so, please describe your most vivid recollections of your experience?
- How would you assess your performance in combat operations?
  - Any regrets, mistakes?
  - How did you react to your Marines being injured/killed under your command?

### **Command and Staff Positions**

- How do staff assignments contrast with command assignments for you?
- Tell me about your experiences in shaping policy or decisions.
- Tell me about the culture of the Pentagon; particularly as a Marine.
- Having served in multiple joint assignments with other branches of the US military, has your view of the Marine Corps changed? What were some differences/similarities?
- Recall an instance where you felt your efforts were particularly important and relevant.
- Recall an instance where you felt your efforts were particularly futile/frustrating.

### **Sea Stories**

- Recall a humorous sea story from your Marine service.
- Recall a sea story about a serious moment from your Marine service.
- Looking at your favorite, most often repeated anecdotes, can you comment on their evolution or refinement in the retelling of them over the years?

### **Twilight and Personal Reflections**

- Describe your philosophy of leadership.
  - Can you provide an example from your personal experience?
- From your personal experiences and observations, how do you think today's Marine stack up against earlier generations?

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- What does being a Marine mean to you? A Marine officer? How is being a Marine part of your core identity?
- How would you view your sons/daughter serving in the Marines? In the military? Why/Why not?
- Tell me how your Marine identity affected your family life and decisions?
- What are the biggest challenges facing our nation's veterans from Iraq/Afghanistan?
  - PTSD
  - TBI
  - Substance Abuse
  - Family disruption
  - Suicide
- How do you view conscientious objectors? Have you had experience in dealing with subordinates who contemplated CO status or applied for it?
- What are your thoughts about the policies that led to the U.S. intervention in Iraq? WMD?
- What are your thoughts about the current state of affairs in Iraq re: ISIS?
- How is the culture of the Marine Corps valuable to the US?
- How is the culture of the Marines damaging to the US?
- How do you think the culture of the Marine Corps remains sustainable?
- What are your thoughts about the Marine Corps (and US military, in general) becoming a "foreign legion" and out of touch with America?
- Do you have any regrets about your Marine Corps service?
- Would you like to add anything to the record?

### **APPENDIX III**

#### **FIELD NOTES/INTERVIEW LOGS/CONTEXTUAL TRANSCRIPTS**

[Author's note: some transcribed passages are provided within the Field Notes Appendix so that an interested reader may compare the *raw take* to the *finished* version used within the stories presented.]

##### **I. Preface to the Field**

U.S. Naval Academy Homecoming Weekend – 25th Reunion for the Class of 1990

October 23 – 26, 2015, Annapolis, Maryland

Notes: Amid the festivities of the 25th reunion weekend, I connected with Marine Colonels Stephen Liszewski, Timothy Winand, and Christian Cabaniss, who I knew would be in attendance, and pitched my project idea. This was a casual, conversational approach – no notebook, and all three agreed to participate after I described the scope and intention of the capstone project.

Highlights included Friday evening reception at Annapolis Westin Hotel; Saturday football game/tailgater and party at Commandant's Quarters.

##### **II. Interview - Timothy Winand - 12/22/2015**

Notes: This telephone interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder. It was 1:29:16 in duration. I was in Woodlawn, Maryland and Tim was home in Virginia.

00:00 – 01:06 Introductions. Confirm consent to participation and recording of interview.

01:06 – 03:34 Family/Background

- Towson, Maryland (2 sisters, 1 twin)
- Loch Raven High School (Soccer and Lacrosse)
- 2 athletes from HS class of 1984 went to USNA and pitched Tim on it
- No military heritage in family; not at all

03:35 – 04:15 Earliest memories of USMC?

- When I was at USNA
- Don't remember much about USMC before USNA

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- Young Mids/role models (Funderburke, Buckley, Shupp)
- 04:36 Pop Culture – *Full Metal Jacket*?
- 04:58 Applied to Villanova, Ivy League; Navy was one of the few schools I got into
- 06:00 Plebe year memories
  - Dropped off for Plebe Summer/Start of adulthood
  - Station wagon, 45-minute drive from home to Annapolis
  - Most vivid memory; lacrosse stick/gear in hand
  - Recruited to play lacrosse at Navy, not considered start of career
  - Took years to come to grips with military as a profession
- 08:00 Plebe Year
  - Theme song from *Top Gun* out of windows
  - Line up for PEP
  - Running PT on field next to Severn River
  - Chopping in hallways, yelling at upperclassmen, real character
- 09:18 Most challenging aspect of USNA?
  - Academics, worked pretty hard
  - Pursued engineering because of strength in math, but did better in non-math courses
- 12:25 Story about wanting to leave USNA?
  - Never thought seriously about quitting
- 14:00 – 20:30 **[X-LAXMAN story details]**
- 20:57 – 21:41 Plebe Summer Detail
- 22:40 – 27:00 USNA/USMC culture; role-modeling by Company Grade USMC officers at Navy
- 29:15 – 34:05 OCS memories
  - USMC is a human enterprise
  - OCS validated decision to choose Marines as career path
- 36:48 – 44:40 Value of USNA to USMC
  - Not every grad a General
  - Shared experience of USNA paid dividends interacting with other grads

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- OCS important, transformative experience to bridge USNA to USMC

45:15 – 52:30 1st Command, Platoon Commander, Lieutenant memories

- Leadership a reflection of personality
- Very well prepared as 2ndLt, not nervous taking command
- I liked being around the Marines, it felt natural
- Challenged at UDP, Camp Schwab, Okinawa, Marines requested mast
- Meritocracy, “earned, never given”
- First time negotiating interpersonal conflicts

52:30 – 1:05:00 [DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH YOUR MARINES story details]

- Platoon Commanders love their Marines
- Too close to the Marines, loved them too much
- Amount of time you spend with them
- Ethical decision, risked whole career
- Marine got in trouble in Oceanside, California
- Kept it to myself
- Colored me for the rest of my career

**Transcription:** *One thing I do remember, and I don't think this unique to me, I remember as a young Platoon Commander, like we all do – we love our Marines. The common refrain is, 'Don't fall in love with your Marines.' Well, I mean, I remember as a Platoon Commander, I loved my Marines – I loved my Platoon.*

*Looking back on it, I recall maybe a couple recommendations that I made or a couple positions that I took relative to a Marine or two, was perhaps because I had gotten, maybe too close to them. You know what I mean? Maybe I was violating the “Don't fall in love with your Marines.” I know now and have known for years why people say that ‘cause it will potentially destroy your objectivity about how to proceed with ‘this that or the other.’ I remember that.*

*You can fast forward 20 years after that to when I was a Battalion Commander at Lejeune. My number one Company Commander at 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines, I remember telling him, ‘Don't get too close to your Marines – don't get too close.’ I had remembered myself all those years earlier, finding myself getting perhaps too close to the men. I'm not talking about dancin' on a bar with a lampshade on my head, or something – but, I just felt myself – I almost loved them too much, you know what I mean? And I just found myself being drawn so close to them that there were a couple of times as a Lieutenant where maybe my objectivity was skewered a little*

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*bit. It was a lesson I didn't forget and even used it to guide a couple of my own junior officer through what I observed was potentially the same failing.*

*I think it's the amount of time you spend with them and it's how well you get to know those Marines. So if you're in a Rifle Platoon of some 42 folks or whatever the number is that you have – I mean, you're spending an awful lot of time with them, your desk is in and around them, you can see their ups and downs a little bit better you are just drawn closer to those men because you are with them more often than a Company Commander or Battalion Commander or Regimental Commander would be. And, I also think it takes more than the first few years for folks to truly understand what it means to enforce 'good order and discipline.'*

*The enforcement of good and discipline is a hard thing to do - it's harder to do with somebody that you are close or too close to.*

*We had a Marine get in trouble in Oceanside; he may have solicited a prostitute or something out on Oceanside Boulevard. The information got back to me and I remember this vividly, I didn't do anything with that – I just kept that to myself.*

*Obviously, the Squad Leader or Section Leader made me aware of it and I had two options - either keep it to myself and work the issue or let the Company Commander know. And I DIDN'T let the Company Commander know. And he found out and, man, I'll tell you what, I got my rear end handed to me like I don't think has happened to me in my whole career. That might have been the worst one of all time.*

*That's colored me for the rest of my career, as a Battalion Commander - as a Regimental Commander. In the Marine Corps these days, there's a lot of "you must report this" type of scenarios, whether it's an alleged hazing incident or an alleged sexual assault or an alleged 'something or other.' All of those alleged incidents that come to the notification of the commander are supposed to be reported all the way to Headquarters, Marine Corps. And, again, these are just allegations.*

*So, if somebody walks into your office and says, hey look, I'm going to make an allegation against 'Lance Corporal Fitzell,' I'm alleging he sexually assaulted me – based on that information, and maybe a little bit of digging, but not much – I'm supposed to let the Marine Corps know. THE MARINE CORPS – THE INSTITUTION, I'm supposed to let them know that there's been this allegation of sexual assault. I'll tell you, as a Battalion Commander and a Regimental Commander, that one incident – where I didn't tell my Company Commander something that I should have told him and it came back to really bite me in the rear end – colored my whole approach to things, to those institutional reporting things as a senior Commander.*

*[As a Lieutenant] I don't know if I was protecting myself; certainly, I think I was trying to protect the Marine. And in the end, I didn't do anything. I didn't protect myself nor did I protect the Marine. I was a First Lieutenant, 23 years old maybe 24 years old at the most – back to my*



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*previous discussion about judgement. If you were to present that scenario to me now, or even five, ten years ago, I mean I guarantee you if you gave me a multiple choice test – or even if you didn't, I guarantee you I wouldn't say, 'shield the information from the Company Commander.'*

*I would have done something completely different from that and probably in every case, every variation of answer would've included 'notify the Company Commander – it's something he should know about.' Why back then I decided that I, First Lieutenant Tim Winand was the only one that should know about that and that I could handle that – God, Lord knows?*

*There was an element of trying to protect the Marine in there, but in retrospect, I could still have briefed the boss and protected the Marine – if he deserved to be protected. I screwed that one up and it's kinda funny at this point, but the interesting thing is - those experiences that end up weaving their way all the way throughout your entire career. I am telling you, like I told you a minute ago, that single incident impacted me as recently as my Regimental Command tour in Hawaii some six, eight months ago. You're talking about an incident separating actions by 24 or 25 years - that's pretty interesting!*

*I'll give myself a little bit of credit for seeing the error of my ways and making sure I didn't do that same thing again. That was a powerful lesson learned for me.*

1:05:00 – 1:11:00 Communication with subordinates as a Regimental Commander

1:18:00 – 1:20:00 Somalia memories, Operation Restore Hope

- Chewed out by Company Commander, bizarre incident

1:20:00 – 1:29:16 Conclusions and career perspectives

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### **III. Interview – Christian Cabaniss - 12/23/2015**

Notes: This telephone interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder. It was 1:39:05 in duration. I was in Woodlawn, Maryland and Chris was in Virginia.

#### **00:00 – 03:30 [THE ACCIDENTAL MARINE story details]**

- Grew up in Tucker, GA (outside of Atlanta)
- Family all native North Carolinians
- Joke – last time family served was in the Civil War in the Army of N. Virginia
- I don't know why I went to USNA
- Went to play football
- Never thought about the USMC at all; first exposure was at USNA

**Transcription:** *Which is kinda funny that I went there to play football and ended up really not playing football. Didn't know anything about the Marine Corps, but ultimately, it was the beginning of, you know, I wanted to be a Marine Officer and I didn't want anything to get in the way of that.*

*I can actually tell you the moment that it actually crossed my mind. At football practice at the end of Plebe Summer when we stopped doing Plebe Summer stuff and started going to football practice, right at the beginning of the year. Sitting there with Greg Schildmeyer, he was an '86 grad, graduate assistant coach and he was going into the Marine Corps. I remember I looked at him and said, "I'm gonna be a Marine." And he looked at me and he laughed and he goes, "Talk to me in three years."*

*I remember Top Gun, everybody wanted to be a Naval Aviator and then you'd look at the Navy officers who were all overweight and uninspiring. And I finally figured out who the Marine officers were and so, transitioned to, hey, I want to be a Marine aviator and then you're like, "Nah, I don't wanna do that; I just wanna be a Marine."*

#### **03:39 – 11:28 Culture and legacy, Marine Barracks and 2/8**

- First real exposure to the cultural cult was as the Operations Officer at Marine Barracks, WDC (2000-2003)
- Victor Krulak's quote: America wants a Marine Corps
- Link in the chain, legacy. 2/8 was same unit that landed at Tarawa

- Marines understand their obligation to future generations of Marines, regardless of serving 4 years or 40.
  - Southerners/Northern Irish Catholics are a natural fit for USMC
  - Football injuries
- 11:28      Officer Candidates School (OCS)
- Parked his white BMW convertible (NAVY90 license plate) in the XO of OCS parking spot on first day.
- 13:16      Dad's pickup truck story
- 13:45      Marines assigned to USNA at our time there stood out
- It is a USMC recruitment tool by role modeling
  - Charlie Neimeyer was a role model and mentor
  - Last few Commandants have given a lot more thought to USMC assigns to USNA
  - The process is better now, the USMC gets all of the people it needs from Navy
  - The better people USMC places at USNA, the better Mids they'll get out of it
  - The Navy knows nothing about the Marine Corps
- 17:30      Cultural Differences between Navy and Marine Corps
- The Navy did not go to war after 9/11 (except some small units, SEALs, etc)
  - Navy still speaks of warfighting as conceptual; they haven't done real warfighting in the modern era
  - The Marine Corps has something valuable to offer the Navy since it has been engaged in warfighting for over a decade
  - The Marines coming up the middle ranks now, Majors, have 10 years of combat experience
  - Navy doesn't like to learn lessons from the Marine Corps
- 22:00      **[PHILOSOPHER story details]**
- Gunny Nelson, OCS, lost at checkpoint
  - Remain humble
  - You can do everything right and bad things still happen
  - Self-reflection and honesty

- Learn to think/Liberal Arts education
- Bar room brawler with a PHD is what the Marines are looking for
- Philosophy is important to succeed in combat

**Transcription:** *Gunnery Sergeant Nelson, my Platoon Sergeant – being lost on SULE 2 - very humorous. When he was standing around, “Where the hell is checkpoint 12? I’m so damned lost!” And us laughing, sittin’ up on the checkpoint waiting for him, not saying a thing. Eventually, you know, “We’re up here, Platoon Sergeant!” And he’s lost. Which was funny, but very humbling to remember that we don’t always have the answer.*

*I have thought about that and have used that through my 25 years. You know, as soon as you think that your shit doesn’t stink and that you have it all in one, you know, you have everything in the bag and you’re cookin’ with gas, that’s when something bad is going to happen to you because you’re not as smart as you think you are. It was kinda funny when I was younger, and as I’ve gotten older, that experience – it reminds me to be humble and not to make assumptions about what I think I know.*

*What I’ve learned in combat is you can do everything right and bad things can still happen. So, the question is, did we really do everything right? Willing to be honest with ourselves when we look in the mirror and decide, “Was I really as good as I thought I was?” Or, “What can I learn from this experience?” I would tell my guys in Afghanistan, “We are never as good as we think we are – but we’re also never as bad.” The question is to be honest and to really understand the existing state. Where are we really at? Where are we really trying to go and are the things that we’re doing going to help us get there?*

*Again, it’s very “science-cy,” you know, we have a hypothesis and like a scientist would know, I test my hypothesis. And I’m willing to make changes when I recognize that it’s wrong. And, I think, that sometimes we don’t do that. My objective that my father beat into my head was the first part of a liberal arts degree was to learn how to think – not what to think – but how to think. So, he always thought that having a Liberal Arts education was the underlying foundation to everything else. As I’ve seen more as I’ve grown older is we do not spend enough time with that Liberal Arts foundation with everyone.*

*How much more do we have to educate them as a younger officer to think. Teach them how to think – teach them to think deeply.*

*We have very bright, hardworking, intelligent people in the Marine Corps, but they don’t necessarily think as deeply about themselves as they should. You know, a good foundation in philosophy, I think, is absolutely critical to effectiveness in combat.*

28:45                      Communication

- Best ideas still have to be implemented by 19 year olds
- Translate what you’re doing into something that has meaning to them

- Georgetown visitor (former Marine) spoke about philosophy, leadership, stoics
- I can have a single message but can communicate it in different ways based upon audience
- Best Marine leaders translate their message

**Transcription:** *So I think it's important for us to remember is, because the greatest ideas that we come up are still going to be implemented by 19 year olds for the most part. So, how do you translate what you are saying into something that has meaning to them?*

*One of my old Marines from 2/8, who was at Georgetown, brought some of his students over and we were talking about leadership. And I started quoting Plato, Socrates, Epictetus, the Stoics, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustin, Thomas Aquinas, and he goes, "Well you never said that stuff to us before!" I'm like, "ya'll were 18, 19 year-old Marines gettin' ready to go into the Valley of the Death." So – it was translating that message into something that they would understand. 'Cause now as a junior in college, intellectually he had a lot of the background to be able to understand where it came from to study it himself – to read those things himself.*

*I couldn't get up and give a Stoic speech based on some Roman theorist and say that's where it came from to a young Marine. You have to translate the message into something that makes sense to them.*

*I can have a single message, but I must speak differently if I'm talking to a group full of young Marines, young officers or even more senior officers.*

31:40 First combat experiences

- Managed combat ops in Iraq/Afghanistan, but just because you deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan doesn't mean you were in combat
- I count my Battalion Commander tour as my first combat tour

32:15 Battalion Commander 2/8

- Ultimate responsibility to prepare Marines for combat
- Some officers and SNCOs had real combat experience, but most in unit did not
- Found out in Jan 2009 that 2/8 going to Afghanistan, not Iraq
- Spent a lot of time preparing Marines for combat and the concept of killing and made them think about it before we got there
- Decisions made in combat are with a Marine the rest of his life
- Conscious clear and honor clean; remain whole after the fight

- Father passed away before 2/8 deployed to Afghanistan; he laughed when I spoke of moral warfare and just war theory
  - Suicides after coming home; one unit has had 7 Marines kill themselves.
- 37:10 Just War Theory – St. Augustine
- Some people just need killing
  - Killing is performance art – right person with right application of force
  - Messaging with lethal force
- 38:50 It Mattered – Organizational Purpose
- Most important thing in their lives at 19? NPR interviewer
- 42:30 Moral Hardening
- Faith-based, ethical
- 44:15 Transitions
- Not good, if only a paycheck job
  - Marines are a foundational experience for rest of one's life
  - We didn't do it well – USING CONTRACTORS?
  - Forget Troop to Teachers, need Troop to Counselors
  - Peer counselors best, most well-adjusted serve as role models
  - Can tell a Marine he's been there done that and shut up
  - Failure to adjust is often a self-fulfilling prophecy
- 49:07 Still Serving in the Community
- Nobody owes you anything, apply yourself
  - Balancing obligations (Marine, husband, father)
  - It's about being there, in the moment
  - Stoic idea: you're an actor, you don't pick the role, but you play the part
- 50:52 **[MANHOOD CAN GET IN THE WAY, story details]**
- July 7, 2009 1500 local time, manhood issue
  - LCpl killed, let's get back to work
  - It stuck with me
  - Put yourself in a place where you can coach them

- Company COC – provide calming presence; communicate with resources
- LTs need to share the danger, but senior officers do not – manhood gets in the way

58:17      Training/thinking

- Our time to prepare is in training
- Immediate action drills
- Combat is a complex adaptive system, break it down
- Risk is not theoretical to the rifleman

**Transcription:** *July 2, 2009 – about 1500 local time. Like most combat leaders it's a manhood issue - I gotta be out there getting shot at with the Marines. And, like most combat leaders in a distributed fight, you guess wrong and you're in the wrong place. I launched out with one of the ground movements, we pushed out immediately up the road to link up with 'em, to open up the road to them because that's how we were going to sustain them. So we go up there and nothing happens – the big fight is down south – can't talk to a soul – you know, typical stuff. So, I turned around with my security detachment, my little squad of Marines, and we pushed back down the road to get back to the Battalion.*

*Walk into the COC, my XO is standing there ashen-faced, everybody's lookin' at me. And the XO looked at me and goes, 'LCpl Seth Sharp's been killed.' So we're in Nob a coupla' hours and the first Marine is dead. He's from Adairsville, Georgia. Seth's dead. And I remember everyone lookin' at me and I said, 'Well our obligations are to the living, let's get back to work – the Adj will take care of Seth.' And then everybody kinda' shook, and then they went back to it. 'Cause we got two companies that are heavily engaged. It stuck with me and it made me think a lot.*

*[Later] I sat and had a long talk with the Company Commander who was doing what I did and I said, 'I know you wanna' go out. I know you wanna' be there with 'em, but you can't help 'em from there. That's not what they need from you. They're better riflemen than you are, they're better mortarmen, better machine gunners than you – you'll never guess and you'll never be able to be at the point of friction. He had seven different fire fights going on with squads – all around his AO – none of them close to each other and I did something I learned myself on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 'Put yourself in a place where you can coach 'em – think about it as coaching.'*

*The football coach is not on the field with the players, he's on the sideline watchin' 'em; he's setting them up for success. So where should the Company Commander be? Where he could best talk to everybody. Where he could best talk to the squad in contact. So, it's in the COC on the radio – he can help 'em. He can bring fires, he can move people around, he can get a sense.*

*So, that's what Seth Sharp told me. Somethin' was getting' ready to happen, I would go sit in that Company's COC. One, it's a calming force to keep people focused but where I could still talk to the rest of the Battalion because I could never guess where stuff was gonna' happen. The Marines needed me to be somewhere where I could talk with 'em. On numerous occasions, I*

*couldn't talk with the Company Commander, I couldn't talk to the Platoon Commander, but I could talk to the squad in contact.*

*But, again, that's balancing the manhood issue of the Lieutenant – who the Marines need to see in contact. But the things that necessarily make you a good Lieutenant, don't help you necessarily as a Company Commander or as a Battalion Commander because the manhood issue gets in the way. I can get shot at with the best of 'em – but the Marines don't need me to get shot at.*

*One of the Marines talked to me years later, a couple months back, he was standing next to me in a firefight and I'm tryin' to work harrier strikes into this. And he's just like, 'I remember you mad – yellin' tryin' to talk to these guys to work it out and losing comms because we're getting' shot at.' He was laughin' about it, but I was like, 'You know, I wasn't very helpful to you that day because I couldn't get you what you wanted because I was not in a position to do it. I was in the position to be the rifleman next to you. And I'm an ok shot, but, in my forties not nearly as agile as the 19 year-old Marine. So, we're all lookin' at the same problem, but we all have a different role in the solution. So the more we recognize that, I think we get better results.*

*The young Marines are talented; they're bright. The Squad Leaders get asked to do more than we were ever allowed to do as Lieutenants. Our time with them is during training. That's where we have to invest. At 29 Palms, the CG got mad at me because I didn't want to sit in the FSC while we were doing fires drills – that I wanted to go to Range 410A with the squads and platoons. My response was, 'I will be in the FSCC with the fires guys when it's really happening – I won't be with the squads and the platoons.' So this is my chance to invest with them; to put my stamp on them early in the process.*

*Even stopping a range to get in the Squad Leader's face about being a crazy American target. You're standing up, walking around, you're gonna' get dead and therefore not be useful to anyone. Moving from cover to concealed positions. Using your brain, using all the other people.*

*Because, again, immediate action drills are interesting – they get you through the first 10 or 15 seconds of the firefight, but after that, you need somebody who can think. And, invariably, it's the weird PFC on the far right who sees everything – the question is: did you prepare him? Did the Squad Leader prepare him to be able to contribute? Not to be a mindless automaton, to just to respond to direction, but to tell the Squad Leader what he sees and to offer solutions. And the really effective Squads that I had, they could do that. The Squad Leaders invested. But again, it was asking them to step outside the molds which was: 'go here, go there, go there, do this.'*

*That's what combat was like – it's a complex, adaptive system. There is no one answer; in fact, the question isn't even clear, but you have to break it down into parts and so it requires everybody to participate. The more you invested up front, the better return you got on your investment. Again, at the rifleman level, risk is not theoretical. The kid who has to execute it, he's talkin' about risk because it's his life and the life of the Marine on his left and right. So you have to set him up for success.*



- Urban patrolling skills used in other applications
- Snipers
- Tactical adjustments by Marines and Talibs

1:12:00 [Q & A story details]

- Most memorable act of physical courage
- It's a tragedy they'll never recover from
- To politicians: You better make sure it counts

**Transcription:** *Actually, I didn't even find out about it for about 4 years. The story got lost. It really got lost. I picked a Marine who was havin' trouble, Storm Scrogg, they told me about it – he was one of the Marines – and I didn't know. So, I knew his Squad Leader who was still on active duty – who was over with MARSOC – so I started asking around and I started gettin' statements from a bunch of Marines. The whole picture became clear. It had been referenced in some of the other awards, but never clearly stood out. The Squad Leader, Liam Flynn, was one of the MARSOC Marines that was killed down in Florida in that helicopter accident. I actually wrote up all the awards after the timeline is over. So, I wrote up all the awards myself, found the Regimental Commander who had retired, got him to agree to 'em, got the MEB Commander, who is now a Lieutenant General to sign 'em off, and then recently got a member of Congress to submit 'em to the Navy ('cause it has to come from a member of Congress if it's after three years).*

*So, they're all being adjudicated now, but it's from September – early September 2009 – one of those events, the Squad (3<sup>rd</sup> Squad, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon), is pinned down. They get pinned down along a canal. The Doc grabs a kid who's wounded right off the bat. The Doc grabs the kid - lays on top of the kid - grabs the kid, yanks him into a canal to get him out of the line of fire and the rest of the Squad starts maneuvering. Tryin' to suppress what's goin' on as the Squad Leader and the Company start trying to do the CASEVAC for the kid. They get the CASEVAC – they haven't been able to – they still in this ongoing firefight. So, four of the Marines pick up the litter – man, you can't carry a kid anymore, firemen's carry is over, you know with body armor and all that stuff on – it takes multiple Marines to carry anybody now. So, four Marines with their weapons slung and a litter run across an open field in the mud – gettin' shot at the whole way - to put their brother on a helicopter.*

*A few Marines are on the side tryin' to suppress the treeline, you know, shoot back, as they run across – put the kid under fire on the helicopter – the helicopter takes off gettin' shot at the whole way out and then they run back. To me, I mean, just pure 'selfless.' That none of 'em want to do it – they think it's the dumbest thing they're ever gonna' do – and yet they did it anyway. It's hard to put in perspective.*

*Based on everything else, these young kids, I put 'em in for COM "V's" – a Navy Com with a combat "V." And I have read citations where similar situations are Silver Star, you know, Navy Cross. And as I've learned in the process, and I talked to the kids about what they thought, and*

*they all said, 'it's COM "V."' So that's what I put 'em in for. But you can see other ones, and it's like the politics of the Silver Star and the Navy Cross, as I'm sure you're aware – a COM "V" is a big deal to a young Marine. That's their 'big deal.' Everything other than that just depends on the timing - some very senior leader decides that we want to give a big award to somebody.*

*Those guys talked to each other about it. One of the guys lost a leg the next deployment, and he just thought about it, "I don't know how we got back. We were just runnin', cussin' the whole way, bitchin' that they had to take him to the helicopter the whole way, the whole way back. And then they got back to the canal and they all kinda looked at each other, like, "well – somehow we made it – oh well," and then they just moved on. It was like in the moment – that's why if you've ever read "The Gates of Fire"- the opposite of fear is love. They were takin' care of their brother and that trumped everything – they loved 'em – and so they were gonna' help him. And that was it. That was their calculus. They didn't really think about anything else until it was over and then they sit there and think about it, you know, when they get back and they're like 'man, that was the dumbest thing we ever did – hope he's ok.' And he was.*

*It's funny – mentally, I don't think it hits ya 'til much later, but, talkin' to Scrogg, Rory Hammel, two of the guys (I talk to them fairly regularly); you know, how long that event has stayed with 'em. They had friends killed, friends wounded – they ran through a hail of gunfire and nobody got hit. And they don't know how to put that in perspective. 'Cause I think for most of them, for myself included, I think at some point we all emotionally became comfortable with the fact that we would've much rather died than have to live through it. Because you can't square that the people who were taken from us – you know 'one foot this way, one foot that way and it's you,' and for all your brothers, you'd much rather trade places with them.*

*I rethink it all the time. I rethink individual things – could I've done this, could I've done that – maybe that would have stopped that, if I could have saved a kid. I mean, imagine, if you could have saved one, the family torment that you could have avoided. 'Cause no matter how important it is, to our nation, to our Corps, for the family and for the really close friends who lost – it's a tragedy. It's a tragedy that they'll never recover from. That hole will never be replaced. Ever.*

*So, that's my point to the political leadership, you better make sure it counts because you're gonna' destroy family's lives.*

1:23:00      Condolences to families

- Letters, I did a poor job
- Memorial service, face to face
- Looked the families in the eye, I don't expect to be forgiven
- I'll blame myself forever
- I'm an asshole, I carry the obligation every day
- 2 stand out

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- I recite all their names
- We have to be better people to truly honor them

1:35:00

We do windows

- Culture of the Corps
- Fire, ready, aim
- Marines - forced on the Navy over the protests of the Army

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#### **IV. Interview – Christian Cabaniss - 01/27/2016**

Notes: This telephone interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder. It was 1:07:05 in duration.  
I was in Woodlawn, Maryland and Chris was driving home from the Pentagon in Virginia.

00:00 – 01:45 Introduction

01:45 – 05:17 September 11th, 2001

- Serving as Operations Officer, Marine Barracks, WDC
- Did not notice historical significance at the time
- Daughter at pre-K, YMCA, at U.S. Capitol
- Non-parade things taken more seriously
- Viewed as a Homeland issue, USMC deploys
- Not that much changed

06:00 – 07:45 Post-9/11 Marines different?

- Thought 9/11 was an FBI/LE issue
- First saw kids who enlisted because of 9/11 in 2003 and 2004
- Marines in 2006 – 2010 almost all point to 9/11 as the reason they enlisted

08:00 – 10:00 Great Patriotic War/WW SWA

- 2003/2004, if we don't get over there, we'll miss it
- Not prepared for "long war"
- Reality vs. idea of war

10:00 – 11:49 Iraq with 2 MEB-Forward – 2007

- Does warfighting get in the way of war winning?
- More akin to law enforcement than military ops

11:49 – 16:25 Killing is Performance Art

- Killed 2 guys with cobra gunships
- Hunt in cornfield to send a message
- Shura councils; talk or fight, we can do either
- Ambush site vignette, let them pray
- Remains turned over to locals for burial; respect for the dead

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16:25 – 19:50 Long War, deployment cycles

- Messaging
- “Summer of Decision” do the right thing and it will continue
- We are the first of many, turnover, this will not end
- Coordinated with 2/2 closely for turnover
- 2 or 3 deployments after mine, Afghanistan was fundamentally different

19:50 – 22:30 Marines did everything they were asked to do

- Normal civil life after security is addressed
- Improving local governance is a war-winning activity
- We buy ice cream, 2009

22:30 – 28:19 **[TELL IT TO THE MARINES, story details]**

- Marines are thinkers
- Culture of Marines, win smartly
- Cultural challenge; transformation from instant obedience to orders to thinking
- Immediate action drills
- Commander’s intent
- Talked about it everywhere I went

**Transcription:** *Is the fight getting me anywhere? And if not fighting is helping me more than I shouldn't fight. And that's a hard thing, you know, I think, for the way Marines are trained culturally to do, is to take a step back outthink them. There's times when you gotta fight and then you do, but I would say arguably in our today's very complex world, is thinking is far more important. I don't think many people necessarily think of Marines as thinkers. You know, we're the 800-pound gorilla in the room that's gonna slug it out – yeah, we can do that, but I'll tell you is we've a generation of kids that it's "let's outthink them." Hit'em as hard as we can, where it hurts the most, when they're not lookin'. But I want to win. Winning's not killing somebody. Winning's where there is no terrorist threat emanating from that part of the world and basic civil society is functioning...chaos without guns.*

*Instant obedience to orders is useful for about 0.001 percent of the time because that's like an immediate action drill. The immediate action drill is going to get you through the first ten to fifteen seconds, after that, you gotta start thinking. So, I think culturally; and this is the hard one; and some don't like to do it (many do, but some don't) it requires you to talk to the Marines often.*

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*One of my chiefs, he's a corporate recruiter now, he copied my pre-battle speech and his comment was, "This wasn't like this was the only time the Marines heard this from him – that was like the 500<sup>th</sup> time they had heard this from him over the preceding 7 months." I mean, I sat down and did small group discussions with the squad leaders. You know, we spent an hour and a half on commander's intent – what was important to me. You know, I couldn't tell you exactly what we were gonna do, but I could tell you how we were going to approach it. I had a one-page power point slide that we blew up and it was posted all around the headquarters. And I talked about it everywhere I went. Everywhere I went.*

28:30 – 31:15 Legacy

- Not for self, but for country
- Lejeune's Birthday message, not living up to legacy
- It's not brainwashing

32:06 – 35:15 Conscious clear and honor clean

- Vietnam was operational conditioning
- Individuals in combat must know why and make their own decisions
- PTSD comes from those who can't look at themselves in the mirror – can't hide from themselves

35:41 – 38:20 **[CASUALTIES, story details]**

- I loss 14 Marines
- Tragedy for families, never recover
- It drives me today
- At the rifleman level, risk is not theoretical
- Way we fought put Marines at risk
- 14 died, never get over it

**Transcription:** *I lost 14 Marines. So, I regret every moment of every day – was there something more that I could've done to prepare them to avoid what happened. 'Cause it's a tragedy - even if you accomplish the most important things in our nation – it is a tragedy to those families. That they will never recover from.*

*So, I consciously think about that often – it drives me today. The way we honor them now is to lead honorable, morally-courageous, and committed lives if you're in the Corps or out. They honored our nation by their service, we honor them by continuing to serve – in whatever capacity. Being morally-courageous is important – do what needs to be done to do what's right.*

*That's what I wrestle with, at the Rifleman's level, risk is not theoretical – it's real. People bleed – they die. There is no inherent right to self-defense, it is not unlimited – it is limited. You don't have the right to kill a bunch of people just to protect yourself. My fear is the way we fought – the way we had to fight...Uh, in Vietnam we would have shot that tree line full of artillery before we moved across the field. We would've. You can't do that anymore. If you didn't have a clear target, you couldn't do it.*

*So, those are the ones that frustrate me, is – we won't have that discussion. I would have that discussion with the Marines, but our nation won't have that discussion. When somebody agrees to serve, they do sign the 'blank check,' but we'll always say, 'nothing gets in the way of their inherent right to self-defense – Yeah, it does! The rules of engagement, how we want them to fight, that can get in the way.*

*I thought we took a lot of risks; and I say it 'theoretically' – those young Marines took a lot of risk. And I think to take that risk, they had to believe what they were doing was actually the 'right thing.' But they took a lot of risks and a lot of 'em got wounded and 14 of 'em died. So, that's something that I'll never shake. Ever.*

38:40 – 47:59 **[PLATOON COMMANDER FOR LIFE, story details]**

**Transcription:** *I think that many senior leaders have no concept; talking about trying to get after the Post-Traumatic Stress, the things that are going on in that community and the 'Platoon Commander, Company Commander for life.' Those are always your Marines – I mean I've been in a bunch of units – to those kids, their entire enlistment was spent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Eighth Marines. 2/8 is the Marine Corps to them.*

*So we owe it to 'em and even though I was told by a well-meaning General, "I can't ask you all to do that." I looked at him and said, "Sir, I sent those kids into the Valley of Death – I owe them everything. If I have to work for them for the rest of my life, then I owe them that. They put my words into action – we owe 'em – we're the ones who sent them in, we're the ones who told them what to do – where to do it – how to do it. And so we owe them everything."*

*The political side – which kills me – is that when you make the determination to send kids into harm's way you better mean it. Because there is going to be personal tragedy for all involved in it – there's going to be. And that's the way it works. You can do everything right and bad things can still happen.*

*I think we had poor manpower policy. The unit fell apart 60 days after we got back. I left, the Sergeant Major left - my XO was gone two weeks after we got back, my Sergeant Major left two weeks after that, I left, the Company Commanders all left. I think it took the Marine Corps another year to figure out we got to keep units together for a while so they can spend time talking about it.*

*I spent all this time on Facebook talking to these kids over time, but I wonder – if we could have spent more time with them AFTER – the problem is it's a trust network. The people in the unit at the time, trusted each other. We could have done it together. If the unit essentially 'de-mobed' together that probably would have helped more.*

*Because what I see – the biggest frustration point is – a sense of purpose. In a unit with a very clear mission, although very difficult, a very clear mission, people knew what they were doing. They understood their purpose, their organizational purpose. And when they left and they went out into the world, the ones that struggle the most, struggle with finding that new purpose. Some have found other ways to serve – fire departments, police departments, different things that give them that sense that they're doing something bigger than just getting a paycheck. 'Cause that's the frustration that I see a lot. What I would like to see is that sense of organizational purpose – that sense of continuing to serve. You know, just because you go work somewhere, doesn't mean you can't take pride in what you do. You can go work somewhere and volunteer your time.*

*Some of the guys have transitioned really well and they continue to make a difference and they're enjoying their lives. And some are stuck. They probably shoulda' stayed in the Marine Corps, they coulda' stayed in the Marine Corps, they just wanted to go home 'cause they thought when they went home everything was gonna be wonderful. How do you address that when they go home that everyone treats them like 'normal'? So that's a big frustrating point for many, is they don't know what to do.*

*One of the NPR guys who was embedded with us, he and I were talking a coupla' years later, and he was trying to put in perspective: 'How do you convince a kid to move on when the most important thing he's ever going to do in his life he did when he was 19 years old?' I didn't believe that – that was the most important thing that they did at the time, but there's many other things that they can do. They can come home and make our country a better place. I mean gettin' out, having families, raising their children, making a contribution in whatever community they have to live in – both at work and during their free time. I think those things are all possible.*

*We have an obligation to send the people getting out of the Marine Corps on to their next mission – giving society something back better than what we got – somebody who feels an obligation to their fellow man. We got to turn the Marine Corps into an organization full of Democrats.*

48:36 [HUMOROUS SEA STORY, story details]

50:45 – 55:40 [THE CHICANERY THAT IS WAR, story details]

**Transcription:** *They both died on the helicopter flight. They had barely kept them alive...but the flight, you know, they were bleeding from too many places and they died. It's just me, I am the only guy from the Battalion there, standing there on the ramp ceremony. The General and the Brigade Sergeant Major have this little choreography...they walk up and salute the remains and then they kind of kneel down...And I'm dirty and all that and I just leaned over [the dead Marines] and kissed them both on the foreheads. And you can see the other people from the brigade looking at me, not knowing what to think of it all.*

*The reality of what's going on and how lost everybody is...it gnawed at me that there were people who didn't understand what fighting was. That was very, very, very frustrating to me and it stayed with me my whole life.*



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58:10 – 1:04:00 Storytelling as narrative communication

1:04:00 – 1:07:05 Performance Culture

1:15:45 Marine Corps Core Identity

- Navy Yard shooting

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## **V. Interview – Timothy Winand - 01/30/2016**

Notes: This interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder and Apple Facetime application. It was 44:51 in duration. I was in Millersville, Maryland and Tim was in the United Kingdom.

00:00 – 00:41 Introduction

01:40 What did the 18th Company ‘mutiny’ mean to you?

- People brought it up at reunion – didn’t mean much to me
- Right way/wrong way
- We were punks who didn’t know how to work within the system

04:40 OCS/TBS humorous story

- Night land navigation course at TBS – Beaver Dam Run

**Transcription:** *I swear that I was standing literally right next to a, no kidding, beaver. You know, all I could hear was the [makes clapping sounds] you know, like he was banging his tail on something – you know how they bang their tails to make their little, whatever they do, their little beaver obstacles they make and all that.*

*When I finally wrestled myself out of the muck, you know, I could hear this beaver – I mean, I swear he was right next to me. It negatively impacted my – my psychological state of mind.*

07:30 Infantry Officers Course (IOC)

- Coldest night of my life
- Tested, coming of age
- Fear, suffering

11:17 September 11, 2001

- In Montgomery, Alabama, student at Air Command & Staff College
- Pearl Harbor moment
- 2007 as Battalion Commander, saw 9/11 enlistees in FMF for first time

16:33 Combat Tours

- 2006, I MEF (Forward), Fallujah, Iraq
- RCT-5, Operations Officer, 2006-2007

18:04 Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines

- July 2008 – February 2009

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- Al Anbar Province (Fallujah, Ramadi)
- North to Kurdish region

18:19 Somalia, Operation Restore Hope, December 1992 – January 1993

20:25 Decisions as Battalion Commander bear fruit?

- Campaign plan
- 2008, here is my opportunity, resources from security into other things
- Battalion lawyer did a lot of 'rule of law' stuff with locals

26:00 [The 1/2 Oath, story details]

**Transcription:** *They had had so many issues; the Marines were, in my mind, just too many cases of Marines acting undisciplined, running amok throughout the battlefield and things like that. And I said well nobody's gonna fix this except for me. So, I fixed it and we didn't have a single problem. Not one.*

*The Battalion that I inherited had been to Iraq in early '07 and had had a number of very unfortunate incidents: detainee abuse, some disobedience of orders, some run-ins with the local population that I think really harmed the mentality of the Battalion. I spent hours personally crafting a course on battlefield ethics, to include sitting down and doing my own powerpoints and pulling videos into the presentation and all that. Then I personally, maybe this is an extension of my time as an instructor at The Basic School, but I personally taught the Battalion in Company-sized increments my personal view on battlefield ethics. Part of it was a realization that '08-'09 Iraq was not '06-'07 Iraq, but '08-'09 was not even like the Battalion's last deployment to Iraq which was in '07.*

*Within a couple weeks of taking over the Battalion I wrote and published a Battalion oath. So I wrote this thing called "The 1/2 Oath," for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines. I wrote it myself. A lot of this was me sitting on the outside understanding what the battalion had been through and I had picked all this stuff up. I can't remember if it was before I took the Battalion or within the first little bit of time of taking the Battalion. I said, "I need something. I need something – I need like a mindset calibrator, you know, that everybody can rally around." So, you know, I wrote The 1/2 Oath.*

*If you were in 1/2 and you read this oath, this thing was on one sheet of paper, and it would basically tell you how you're supposed to act. You know, how you're supposed to act with your fellow Marines and sailors. You know, the sort of expectations that I, as Battalion Commander, had of Marines. And this, that and the other.*

*That was my first stab at basically setting the philosophical mindset of the command. What I didn't do – is I didn't just publish it (eventually it appeared on Platoon Commander's bulletin boards and all over the Battalion area, next to the OD's office), I briefed it personally to the whole Battalion.*

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*I remember the very first day, I asked them (almost like you were, like swearing in as a witness in a court trial or something like that), I asked them all to raise to raise their hand and I raised my hand and I read sentence by sentence and asked them to repeat it.*

*When Marines came in front of my desk for Battalion NJP, I would pull a copy of The 1/2 Oath out of my desk, turn it around, slide it across the desk and then ask them to articulate, in their own words, how they had failed The 1/2 Oath. You know, those specific areas where what they did ran counter to what the expectation of The 1/2 Oath had for them.*

*By the time we got to Iraq, the end of our Iraq tour, this would have been December '08 or January '09, I remember going to a position in Bravo Company. And this Corporal came up to me and he's like "Sir, I gotta tell you something." This Marine came up to me inside of a HESCO position in Shaqlawa, Iraq, and he proceeded (and this is, so I took the Battalion in September of '07, instituted the oath then and this is now maybe as much as fourteen months later, fifteen months later) – he had memorized The Oath. And inside this HESCO position, he rattled The Oath off to me, by memory – no cards, no aids, no nothing. And I was pretty impressed by that.*

*I have received emails from people as recently as my time in Hawaii as a Regimental Commander, you know, guys that I had run NJP on, who were still in the Marine Corps thanking me for The Oath, thanking me for instilling the right kind of mindset into them.*

*How did I approach getting guys calibrated in terms of battlefield ethics, or getting guys calibrated just as Marines? Leadership and force of personality. My view is, it all starts with me. The whole thing starts with me. If the Battalion or the Regiment or whoever is all screwed up, you should just come blame me – right? Because I'm the one that has not done what I need to do.*

*Now, if whatever unit is effective and functioning well and is disciplined and all that, I won't take all the credit, because I believe it starts with me I will certainly take some of the credit. You do nothing, somebody will fill the void and they'll fill it with something that you won't like. So you gotta get out there, you gotta be the voice, you gotta be the guy providing the vector for where the unit needs to go.*

*I'm fairly extroverted when it comes to doing my Marine things – I love being around Marines. At this stage, 25 plus years in, my thought process is pretty refined. All those things together just made it fairly simple, I think, for me to figure out what I wanted people to do and then tell them. And, of course, none of it is "one shot – one kill." You can't just show up day one and expect people to be understanding who you are and what you believe and actin' on it a week, or two weeks or a month in. It took many, many months and lotsa repetition and lotsa personal involvement by me. But once I got personally involved, I found that my Company Commanders, my Battalion Commanders (when I was a Regimental Commander), the Sergeant Major, the First Sergeants, you know, everybody kinda rallied around the themes – rallied around the message.*

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CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

*So I ended up havin' a huge chunk of people out there articulating the vision that I was the first one to articulate.*

40:00          Return to US

- Not good
- Leadership turnover pretty quick
- That's not the way the Marine Corps does it
- Not ideal

42:00          Best job in the Marine Corps

- Regimental Commander

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

## **VI. Interview – Stephen Liszewski - 01/31/2016**

Notes: This telephone interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder. It was 1:16:39 in duration. I was in Millersville, Maryland and Steve was home in Annapolis, Maryland.

00:00 – 02:15 Family/Background

- Grew up in Gaithersburg, Maryland
- Not a military family
- Oldest child, younger sister and brother
- Stable family life, did not move K-12

02:15 – 06:30 Earliest recollections of USMC

- Late 70's read an article (Parade magazine?) with a photospread about USMC OCS; found a 05/25/1980 Washington Post magazine article about OCS
- 1983 Beirut bombing
- Marines started to make an impression on me

06:30 – 08:04 **[MR. MEEHAN, story details]**

**Transcription:** *I came to the Academy thinking that the Marines was what I wanted to do. And to be honest, the experience that we had during Plebe Summer, specifically with George Meehan (you know, he was my squad leader for the second set of the Summer), that absolutely solidified it. You know, that guy was kind of, he was physically tough, he was challenging, but he was also inspirational. He was authoritative, but he wasn't overbearing and he knew how to kind of motivate us and challenge us. You know, the impression that guy made on me was huge. He was a prior enlisted Marine, he had gone to VMI I think for a year and eventually got admitted here. He had that Marine Corps background and knowing that, that kind of helped make the connection that, okay, this Marine Corps thing here, that drew even more of my interest.*

10:00 – 16:00 **[LEADERS EAT LAST, story details]**

**Transcription:** *Some of the stuff that I got from George Meehan and things as simple as, you know, leaders eat last which was completely unheard of in King Hall at the time. The system there was much more like a traditional wardroom on a ship where, based on seniority, the senior guy was served and served first and kind of took care of himself and then everybody else followed by rank order from senior down to junior. You know, George instantly kind of set that upside down during Plebe Summer. And it was probably little things like that that made an impression on me.*

*The idea of organizational discipline and, maybe, mental toughness and the adherence to higher standards did appeal to me. Clearly, the Marines who were here at the Academy; those Company Officers, Battalion Officers, those guys definitely lived by a set of standards that seemed to be higher than the other Company Officers. And I found that appealing. I thought the toughness and the discipline was, I don't know, it drew me to that particular branch.*

*Some of 'em, obviously Captain Shupp when he was here, you know he sort of had that huge persona of just being a, a kind of very hard guy and kind of a taskmaster. But I was able to, at one point, have almost a normal conversation with him. And it wasn't particularly long or anything but you also saw a sort of human side of it. And you got a little glimpse into, you know, the idea that hey, the Marine Corps is different...he didn't make any apologies for it, but he absolutely said, you know, I think it was the idea that the culture of the Marine Corps is different than the culture of the other services. The two exist, co-exist side by side and are intertwined by history and traditions, but the Marines definitely have a different mindset.*

*So Shupp was one of 'em and obviously, Kunkel. Every time that you saw a Marine, not only did they physically stand out obviously by how they looked, how they carried themselves and how they wore their uniforms, but there was also this idea, hey, those guys kinda hold people to a higher standard, those who kinda worked for them. And again, I was always, I was proud to be associated with whatever group that was – that had those higher standards. You know, I kinda wanted to be a part of that. Not that I necessarily thought I was better than the rest of the group, but, like hey, if you can actually be a part of this thing that's ah, you know, that holds itself accountable to a greater degree or follows a more rigorous set of standards, I always – I mean, I thought that was a pretty neat thing. I was kind of drawn to that.*

*We've got a Marine Battalion Officer; therefore, our battalion probably runs a little bit tighter than the other battalions in the brigade – I thought that was a good thing. Hey, my squad leader is the only prior enlisted Marine here; therefore, you know, people know that what we're doing is a little bit different and to a higher standard. I thought that was cool. The companies that had Marine Company Officers, they were different and they were held to higher standards and they followed all the rules. I thought that was a good thing.*

16:00 – 24:00 OCS

24:00 – 28:00 TBS

28:00 1st Command

41:15 **[EVERY MARINE A RIFLEMAN story details]**

**Transcription:** *I can remember being a Battery Commander and talking to other guys and being like, like, ok, when is our time gonna come? You know, we've been in this thing for 10 years now, or whatever, and, you know, it doesn't look particularly promising. The Cold War had ended. Small stuff was going on, but it was like, "Damn." Having joined an organization that kind of prides itself on its record in conflicts like the Second World War, it was, like, when is our time gonna come? Little did I know that, you know, that that time, it eventually did come.*

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*My role was to try and lead “that thing” that was literally “all over the place,” and working a fairly diverse mission set. So I spent lotsa time on the road with my Sergeant Major, constantly traveling around to these units that were spread out all over Al Anbar Province at the time.*

*Some of the strange stuff that we would do, some of those convoy missions, we would wind up securing convoys full of Iraqi soldiers. And we would take them home from where their units were fighting or based in western Iraq and, a lot of these guys, they had been either recruited from north of Baghdad or from down South, down towards Najaf and An Nasiriyah.*

*My personal role in that was literally trying to keep that organization with all those folks, um, spread out all over the place accomplishing all of the missions that they had assigned to us.*

*The idea, hey, every Marine a Rifleman – there was a common level of training. Once we got the mission, there was a baseline that we all had. The baseline that the Lieutenants all had, you know, particularly those, because they had all recently come from TBS, and they were pretty good and spun up on platoon-level operations and Platoon Commander type skills. They were well prepared and they kinda had the mindset to be able to go after that, you know, that particular mission set.*

*So the idea, hey, you know, we’re Marines first, um, that certainly wasn’t challenging and I’m sure it made the, you know, if we didn’t have that mindset I could see where making a leap from doing standard artillery operations to doing what we did, ah, I guess it could have been problematic.*

*But, you know, there was never really a fundamental shift in culture, if you will, that we had to make because, hey, we were, you know, we were Marines and we were goinna go forward and we were going to do our job.*

48:15      **[CASUALTIES story details]**

**Transcription:** *That particular battery, they had another four Marines that sustained pretty significant, ah, injuries, you know I mean, we’re talking sort of life-changing, debilitating injuries. And then there were probably another half dozen injuries across the Battalion where, again, life-changing, debilitating injuries – either head, most of them were head injuries as a result of IEDs and then, ah, there was a handful, kinda smaller, ah, smaller or I guess, you know, less traumatic injuries that we sustained.*

*Because of technology and the connectivity that was available, um, after those happened, I was actually able to, uh, to get on and actually speak, uh, with each of the families, um, ah, just after it, ah, just after it had occurred and um, [long pause] yeah. And then, you know, obviously we wrote the letters that we’re required and supposed to write.*

*My connection with the families has not been, certainly has not been extensive after that. I remain very uncomfortable with it because, ah... You know there is a sense, I think probably on*



*my part the reason I don't particularly like it is there's a feeling of guilt. You know, the fact that, hey, I was, uh, charged with leading their sons and working to, you know, accomplish the mission but also to bring their sons back.*

*And in those instances, I absolutely, um, you know without a doubt, failed. It's a hard thing that I still struggle to reconcile myself.*

54:22      **[IEDS story details]**

**Transcription:** *It was kind of an agrarian area. There were a bunch of houses that were separated from us by some fields and some marshes. We could not get over to those houses without having to cross kind of a marsh area and some no-go terrain. But we could see that people were looking at us and then we came to realize that, hey, we were actually sitting on top of a culvert.*

*And then we wound up figuring out that, hey, actually, that culvert was rigged with a, there was an IED inside of the culvert. So we knew we were halted by an IED, we realized people were watching us, we realized we were actually sittin' on top of one, so we had to do a fairly hasty reorganization, if you will, I guess of how we were laid out.*

*Neither the IED at the front of the convoy or the one that we were sittin' on were detonated while we were there and EOD wound up comin' in and gettin' both of them. The one that we were sitting on was command-detonated, there was a wire that they found that they ran off. And the one up on the front end, we wound up just, we just detonated, kind of detonated in place and then we got reorganized and got out of there.*

*I guess it was the realization that hey, we're actually halted and we're sittin' on top of an IED that was one of the more harrowing moments.*

*I don't think you would ever want to get your Marines into a situation where they felt completely helpless. So the way the Marine Corps approaches something like that is a, um, a couple of elements. There were ways and you could develop TTPs where you could work to identify the threat before you got to it. You know, you have equipment that would attempt to detonate the stuff before you got to it; you know, mine rollers, or electronic gear that would jam people who were trying to detonate using electronic means.*

*We never wanted to and nor do I think the Marine Corps would ever let Marines believe that they're merely gonna be sheep get takin' to the slaughter, so we focused on those things that we could control. And then you would also just instill in the minds of the Marines that, hey, we absolutely gotta do this mission, but, you know, should the time and the place present itself, where we can shift over from being hunted by these guys to hunting them, we would change and we would go after whoever was out there on the roads.*

*We would take dog teams with us. We would set up observation over areas on roads where we thought they would be laying IEDs all in an attempt to kinda, I guess, change the dynamic from being merely victims to actually going and hunting those that were, ah, trying to hunt for us. But there is the mental challenge of kinda that randomness or that component that, hey, I could still*

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*do everything right and do everything well and, um, someone could absolutely have emplaced something that would kill somebody.*

*The mindset of the Marines there it was, hey, we're going to focus on the mission, we're going to do everything that we can to make sure that we get this right. There is an acknowledgement of the element of risk there, and the Marines never let themselves take on this sort of victim mentality or the idea that, hey, we're just going to be led to the slaughter out there. It was how you take, kinda take that natural aggressiveness and the desire to take the fight to the enemy as best you can inside that weird mission set and against that threat.*

1:05:00      Marine Identity

#### APPENDIX IV

##### ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

[Author's note: Several vignettes were attempted, but ultimately not included in the final submission for a variety of reasons. Most significantly for me, as a novice writer of creative non-fiction, was the inability to achieve a suitable entry point and tone for several of the stories not included. Given an unlimited amount of time, I would revisit these stories, as they are on important cultural topics and the participants provided excellent details to incorporate into them. However, since time is limited, they ultimately ended up *on the cutting room floor*.]

I. "Reunion" is a lengthy piece I wrote about the Naval Academy's Class of 1990 25th Reunion. It always struck me as self-indulgent and too clever for submission. I lifted some of the best parts from it and incorporated them into the prologue and epilogue. An excerpt:

Other classmates had gotten out of the military along the way. A large clump bailed at the completion of their mandated payback service obligations, as others staggered their exits to pursue other careers or to address health or family issues. One who left after serving 6 ½ years in the Marine Corps following graduation from the Academy, was parking his car on Annapolis' West Street on an unseasonably warm and pleasant Friday evening. Brian Fitzell chuckled at his good fortune as he pulled into the unmetered space directly across from the Westin Hotel which was serving as mission control for '90's reunion. For Fitzell, an advantage to living only 12 miles from the Academy's Gate 8 and spending more time in Annapolis than most of his out-of-state classmates, was developing an expert knowledge of the city's hodgepodge of public parking spaces and quirky regulations and enforcement. Saving a few bucks parking in a free spot over the Westin's pricy valet service made Fitzell smile as he locked the car and headed into the crowded hotel lobby. It was a good omen.

II. "Bulldog" is a piece I began about the class of 1990's requirement to complete Marine Corps Officer Candidates School (OCS) as a prerequisite to be commissioned a Marine Second Lieutenant from the Naval Academy. It is a distinction that only the Naval Academy classes of 1989, 1990, and 1991 hold, as the requirement was lifted after then-Secretary of the Navy James Webb left office. OCS is an important

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
Goucher College

cultural aspect of the Marine Corps and the Marines from Navy's class of 1990 view their completion of the rigorous course as a matter of pride. An excerpt:

The sun had not yet burned through the darkness and haze of the already brutally hot Quantico morning. Marine Officer Candidates from the summer of 1989 *Bulldog* Program, clad in their stinking and stained yellow t-shirts, each shirt emblazoned with a large eagle, globe and anchor emblem of the Corps and stenciled with the candidate's name, and ridiculously short red nylon *P.T. shorts* struggled to keep up with the cadence of the British Colour Sergeant who was leading them in calisthenics. The Cockney bastard, an exchange instructor from the Royal Marines, never seemed to tire as he taunted and tormented the sleep-deprived candidates during another set of squat-thrusts. Scattered throughout the platoons of Officer Candidates assembled around the Colour Sergeant's raised, wooden platform, were Midshipmen from the U.S. Naval Academy's class of 1990.

The Naval Academy classes of 1989, 1990, and 1991 are noteworthy for the fact that they are the only Annapolis classes who were required to complete Marine Officer Candidate School (OCS), as a prerequisite for obtaining a commission in the Marine Corps following graduation. Prior to the implementation of this requirement, Midshipmen from the Naval Academy could choose a Marine Corps commission at the very last minute on their service selection night. Service selection is an annual event held early in the second semester of a Mid's senior year and is the point when the graduating seniors choose their post-graduation, military career path. The selection process is conducted in the order of the class' *order of merit* (class rankings), so those Mids highly placed in a class have an amazing variety of options (Naval Aviation, Nuclear Submarines, Surface Warfare and Marine Corps among them) from which to choose. Mids hovering in those precarious positions at the bottom of their class have very limited choices from among those left behind by their higher-ranked classmates. In the past, prior to the implementation of the OCS prerequisite, the Marine Corps was the unlucky recipient of some bottom-feeder Mids whose interest in the Marine Corps mysteriously appeared on service selection night just after all the Aviation slots were filled. Many in this category chose the Marines simply to avoid duty as a Surface Warfare Officer following graduation and their general attitude towards the Corps could best be characterized as ambivalent.

III. "Honorable Warriors" is a piece I started from Chris' discussion of the *moral hardening* required for the preparation of Marines for combat. It is a dense piece that I felt duplicated the points I achieved with more economy in "Philosopher," so I cut it from the collection. It would be a very good nucleus to a stand-alone piece on the post-combat Marine Corps dynamic and the challenges for veterans. An excerpt:

Brian J. Fitzell  
CSP 675 – CAPSTONE  
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Some were still in uniform; their medals and ribbons added a splash of color to their distinctive Dress Blues. Most wore ill-fitting sports coats and ties. In sharp contrast to their uniformed counterparts, the faces of the men in civilian suits were lined and paunchy, telegraphing their chronological place on the far side of middle age. But all the men in the room swelled with pride and stood as tall as they were able as they sung the words of the Marines' Hymn together. They were not self-conscious as they finished the first verse in their collective and throaty voice: *First to fight for right and freedom, And to keep our honor clean; We are proud to claim the title, Of United States Marine.*

Inevitably, the Marines who are the most successful in the chaos of battle are the Marines who were best prepared to face the experience through realistic training and; perhaps more importantly, through moral hardening and ethical self-examination prior to firing their first shot.

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