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- 1) What branch and unit were you in? *Marines 1971-74 at Camp Lejeune, Reserves 1974-2001. Served with 3rd Air-Naval Gunfire Unit at Long Beach, CA; West Coast Public Affairs Unit in LA; School of Infantry as an instructor and later as a 1st Sgt Light Armored Vehicle Company there at Camp Pendleton; as a Squadron Sergeant-Major to CH-53 helicopter unit at El Toro (until the base closed) then moved to Edwards AFB for last two years (30 years total).*
- 2) What was your highest rank? *Sergeant-Major (which is the highest Marine enlisted rank).*
- 3) Are you still enlisted as a reservist or National Guard? *No.*
- 4) Why did you join the service? *Our family had a strong sense of patriotism, and, as a young man, I had a sense of adventure, a longing to see the world, to travel, and I wanted to be challenged to the utmost of my ability, so I felt the title of United States Marine was my noble calling.*
- 5) What did you like the most about being in? *Camaraderie, the brotherhood that all Marines have with each other, the esprit de corps, and of course having the title of United States Marine. The Marines teach you core values like honor, courage, and commitment, and that's instilled in all of us, to be true to yourself, to the man on your left and the man on your right.*
- 6) What did you like the least? *For someone who stayed in the Marines for 30 years, being away from family is a negative thing, but the experience you acquire by being away from home makes you into a man who is responsible for his actions, no slacking off, you're toeing the line and you're accepting a reaction for every action. It's a benefit for you.*
- 7) What moment most defined your military experience? *My retirement ceremony in September 1st 2001. I was overwhelmed by the huge turnout of co-workers from the fire department, Marine Corps families, active-duty, reserves, and retired of all ranks from privates to sergeant-majors to lieutenant colonels, even a retired brigadier general who was my commander when I was a young corporal. All of these (officers and non-coms) had influenced me at one point to make me the leader I became. Sgt-Major is the senior advisor to the commanding officer and is a mentor to younger Marines as well as counsel to junior and even senior officers, and what I say in the absence of the commanding officer is his word. Part of my job description as the senior enlisted advisor is to put a Marine in his place, if necessary, and that includes Majors, Colonels, etc, and I've done that. Some of the stories shared with me at my retirement showed the positive influence I had on the lives of both Marines and firefighters. One fireman who couldn't attend the ceremony wrote me a letter about how much of an influence I was to him in the locker room at the fire station, something we had never discussed. He went on about how, over the past ten years, he had watched how I conducted myself as a man, the integrity he saw, which speaks volumes about who you are, and, as part of the ceremony, I had about ten minutes to speak. I didn't really know what I was going to say, but ended up reading part of this letter, which almost brought tears to my eyes. I realized that someone was watching me and, for every action, was making a judgment of me. To sum it up, my Marine Corps training and leadership skills were a very big influence for younger firemen, rookies, and other fire officers I worked with. I never promoted within the fire department but put most of my energy into the Marine Corps. I enjoyed being in the midst of the action, and sometimes fire officers would pull me aside and ask for my advice on how to handle a situation, which was almost unheard of. But as a Sgt Major, I was in charge of a couple of hundred people and was involved in many, many conference sessions, so having had that experience I always enjoyed sharing my vision with my peers, especially about leadership techniques and leadership style. Growing up, I was always looking for articles and books about leadership. I collected quite a reading list in my career and also learned from observing people who had poor leadership skills, knowing not to do what they were doing. I think, on the way home from the ceremony that night, that I was trembling and shaking because I realized that I had influenced so many people. One thing that I miss is not having the interaction with*

- young men to help bring them around. Somebody needs to bring them under their wing, give them a few minutes of their time, because I didn't become a Sgt-Major all by myself and I want to give back.*
- 8) *What made you choose firefighting as a career? While I was serving with an Airborne unit (Anglico) in Long Beach, a fellow Marine suggested going out for the fire department. I'd always been pretty physically fit, scored high on physical fitness exams (I'd graduated with a Physical Fitness degree from Cal State Northridge), so I signed an interest card at an LAFD station, while I had a station tour, and I felt an instant bond of fellowship with the firemen there. I felt I needed something more than being a Phys Ed teacher, so I joined in 1980 and will have 27 years of service in LAFD, so I'll be a 30/30 Marine/firefighter. Both careers involve service to mankind.*
- 9) *What do you like the most about firefighting? I get to work with great men and women. Without going into the details of strategy and tactics, when the bell goes off and we head out the door, when we arrive at the incident, we're turning chaos back into a stable condition, whether it be a medical or fire incident. You're there to make it better. And when I complete my shift and go home, I still feel that I've made a difference, whether it was a medical emergency or a fire incident. This also applies to my service in the Marine Corps.*
- 10) *What do you like least about firefighting? There are moments when not much is happening, then there are moments of complete chaos when you're out there slaying the dragon, slaying the beast, but mainly it's being away from family. But I have my fire family here at work, and I will do anything for the man or woman to my left or to my right. Even though I have ten or eleven 24-hour shifts at work, each month I have 20-21 24-hour shifts at home, which is more time than the average man will have at home if he works 9-5, so I'm able to take the family on more trips, vacation trips, camping, and fishing. I can trade off with another firefighter to get a bunch of times off. I love my job!*

Last Words – Semper Fi! Ooh-rah, Leathernecks!