Paul Yost
Commandant US Coast Guard

Sam: It's the 26th of October, 1990, and I'm visiting with Paul Yost in his new office in Washington DC. Paul, it's yours, go with it ...

Paul: Well I think what you've asked me to do is go over some of my own personal history as regards the US Coast Guard and I'm pleased to do that.

Of course I graduated from the US Coast Guard Academy in the class of 1951. That was a great decision, probably the most important one in my life, to attempt to go to the US Coast Guard Academy. I took the exam in 1946, passed the eaglet part of the exam and did not qualify in the mathematics part, which was kind of odd, because I've always been better at mathematics than English. That was my first major failure in my life and I viewed it as a major setback. At the time of taking those exams, I wasn't completely set on going to the academy, once I failed, then I really got set on going there.

My parents were very gracious to send me to school for a year to prep for the US Coast Guard Academy. I went to Hilder School here in Washington DC on Dupont Circle and for a year and I prepped for those exams. During that time I also applied to take the exams for the Naval Academy and West Point. I also started to apply to take them for Kings Point, but my father had a major problem with that. So I took the exams for West Point, Annapolis and New London and I passed all three that year, 1947. Came out number four in the country on the exam for the Coast Guard Academy. Once I passed that, I had no thought of going to those lesser schools.

Sam: Had you visited the academy?

Paul: I had never visited the academy, but because that was the site of my first major failure in life and having spent a year prepping for it, I was going to go there. I had been to Annapolis, but not to the other two.

I went to the Coast Guard Academy and for the first summer I lived in fear that somehow I wouldn't make the grade there. I left home with the words of my father in my ears- Paul your temper is going to get the best of you and you're not going to make it at the academy. Nothing could have made me lose my temper that first three months. I remember thinking to myself- thank the Lord for letting me get to this wonderful place. If I get thrown it, it's not my fault because I'm going to give it everything I have. I did struggle through the academy and had a very good academic record, which was not at all in keeping with my record in high school which was very mediocre. I wasn't motivated in high school. The high point of my life was graduating from the US Coast Guard Academy.

I married a wonderful girl that I went with that last year- Jan Worth- who lived over in Groton and we proceeded to make a life together and raise five children in the service. Our first duty station was Hawaii, the second was Guam. The third was back to Hawaii. At that time, I made another major decision in my life and that was to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints, which is known as the Mormon church and many of my classmates, friends and acquaintances were a little surprised at the change that made in our life, hopefully for the better. We raised our kids in the service and in the church and both of those things became a major part of what Paul Yost did and does, and my family as well.

We had a great series of tours of duty. We spent a year and a half on a honeymoon in Hawaii, then went to Guam, which was also a honeymoon, really. My first daughter was born in Guam and then back to Hawaii and then to a wonderful assignment as a mathematics instructor at the US Coast Guard Academy. When Stan Smith at the Academy asked me to come back to teach mathematics he had no idea that I had flunked it on the exam the first time, but I had become a little better mathematician through Hilder School and four years at the academy and then went to MITT for a summer to study undergraduate calculus and engineering mechanics and then taught engineering

mechanics at the academy for four years and also double headed as a company officer.

Sam: Who was commandant of cadets at the time?

Paul: When I went there as a company officer, the commandant of cadets was Willard Smith. We looked at ourselves as his boys. During that two years, there were five company officers, but a couple of them came in and out. Charlie Blaha, one of the finest officers the coast guard's ever produced and was a role model of mine and was a couple classes ahead of me. Red Star- another fine officer and a couple years senior to me. Wayne Caldwell- a super individual and my battalion commander when I was a cadet. Wayne and I were office mates over at the mathematics department when I first came back to the academy and I owe a lot to Wayne for calming me down and setting me on the right track a number of times. So those three senior guys were company officers when I was there. Then I was a company officer. Jack Costello, who was junior to me, was a company officer as well. Rick Coroni was a company officer at the same time. I'm missing a couple I know, all under Willard Smith. After four years at the academy, I got the perfect assignment: commanding officer of the coast guard cutter Agasi- 125 feet of sudden death, out of Cape May, New Jersey, on search and rescue duty in the north Atlantic. I was a lieutenant at that time, and I don't think any lieutenant ever had a better tour of duty at sea. A lieutenant JG as an XO. A warrant officer as an engineer. And about ten or twelve enlisted personnel. I loved that ship and that duty. The rescues that we did may not be important to anybody else, but they're etched in my heart as high accomplishments. Higher than anything I've ever done before or since.

When the last navy lighter than air crashed right off of Atlantic City. New Jersey, Agasi was the first ship on the scene, Lieutenant Yost, tactical officer and on scene commander with navy ships reporting to us for the search. I guess the high point of that search, if there is one with 21 people dead in seventy feet of water, is as we searched to try to find exactly where she went down, I saw bubbles coming up and dropped my starboard anchor right down on top of the bubbles. When one of the

navy divers got on the scene, I said- just go down my anchor chain. And though there were navy sonar ships all over the place who found it but the Coast Guard cutter Agasi; we had our anchor down right on top of it. The divers went down and pulled out 21 bodies, which we lined up on the fantail and took them in. That was the end of the Navy's lighter than air program and a sad day. I often say I presided over the end of the navy lighter than air program and that's not necessarily a position of honor but of some moment.

We were the second ship on the scene when the Texas Tower went in off of Hudson Canyon. I was sound asleep at Cape May in my house when the phone call came about 3 a.m. that Texas Tower was having a lot of trouble, vibrating, and would I proceed out there. Pushed that ship out there between the break waters and Cape May, white water all the way across. I thought to myself- Lord. be with this ship and crew because this is going to be a miserable night and it was as we drove that little ship from Cape May all the way up to Hudson Canyon off New York City. About two hours before we got there, the leg broke on the Tower and she went in and there were 21 men buried in that wreckage. We got on the scene just after the Navy tug arrived. They arrived before the Tower went in, but were unable to save anybody. As I came up in the dark of the night and called the skipper of the Navy tug on the radio- I asked where the Texas Tower was in relation to him, because I didn't want to run over it. The broken leg was about six feet under the surface and the waves were running about fifteen feet and that light was very close to the top of the water. He gave me a bearing from him to Texas Tower and just as I got on the other side, he came up on the radio and screamed that he'd given me a reciprocal bearing and that meant he put me right on top of the Texas Tower. Fortunately, we missed it somehow- I think providence was on our side that night. We moved out of there and waited until the next day for things to calm down a bit. Put divers down and sooner or later got all the bodies out of the Texas Tower and brought them in.

There were many other exciting rescues, picking up tugs and barges and they were the highlight of this young officers life. Then I left the coast guard cutter Agasi, came back to Coast Guard headquarters at Washington DC, and spent some time in the readiness branch in nuclear

affairs under Captain Buxton. He was chief of the division and I was chief of the branch. I may have some of the chronology wrong but the experiences are there.

From there I went to San Francisco as chief of the readiness branch. Captain Cowser was chief of ops and he seemed very old to me at that time. Gus Land was chief of staff and Chris Knapp was district and area commander. I loved that job- I felt I was ready for it and it was right up my alley. Spent some time there under those folks. I think I had just graduated from the Naval War College before I went there. Again that was a grand tour. At that time they were only sending one officer a year to the junior course of the Naval War College, and I was selected. I found at the war college, although I had done fairly well as a coast guard officer and thought I had good fitness reports, everybody there had a good record and had been selected to go. I found that I had to work at the top of my capacity just to keep my head above water because everybody there was an outstanding officer and I was the only coast guard officer there and I had to protect the reputation of my service. So I worked very hard, burned the midnight oil and did well. I came out as one of the distinguished students, but that was just because I had to, didn't have any choice.What did they make me in the war game but the group commander in charge of all patrol boats, not the submarines, carriers, destroyers or cruisers- I had the patrol boats. But that was okay. I understood them better and used that to good advantage for the rest of my career- how to deploy patrol boats- so it was not a loss.

Went from the war college to head of readiness at San Francisco. As I went in to report to Chris Cowser, I was a recent graduate of the war college. I knew how to fight a war, I knew what readiness was, I knew how to write war plans, and I knew how to run the thing and as I presented myself, Chris Cowser asked me a question that absolutely blew my mind. As I stood at rigid attention in front of him, brass buttons shining, ready to lead the twelfth district into the best set of war plans you ever saw and if we ever went to war, to devastate the enemy- he said to me- what do you know about small arms- Rifle and pistol competition? I thought this guy was pulling my leg. What I later learned was that Chris Cowser was a crack pistol shot and felt that readiness should start and end with small arms. And my view was how do we take

on the Russians. So we had a little bit of a gap that we never did fully bridge, but we put up with each other and it worked out all right. And Gus Land was a piece of work in himself- a wonderful guy- and his view of how to run the district was pretty aggressive, and sometimes he got a little out of sorts with Chris for not moving ahead the way he wanted to. Chris was a polished officer, I knew him when he was skipper of the Kakuleat in Hawaii. Chris had vision.

From that job I did go to pick up Resolute in the coast guard yard. Resolute was in building and I put together a crew to bring the ship into a full commission status. Sailed Resolute out of the coast guard yard with the new crew and brought her to San Francisco. I had served there one tour of duty so when I brought the Resolute there for another tour of duty, I felt very at home.

Helicopter ops were exciting, search and rescue off the Pacific coast was exciting. I learned quickly the difference between the Pacific and the Atlantic . In Agasi, if nothing was going on and the wind was blowing, I could always get up close to the beach and sink in a lea, because the lea was always off shore on the east coast. On the west coast there was no lea, the wind was always onshore. No place to hide. The Resolute was not noted for its stability in any kind of sea. We did a lot of fisheries patrol there, played hide and seek with the Russian fleet trying to seize one of them and never caught them. I knew they were fishing in our water. The tour of duty there matured this young officer in command considerably.

As I got close to the end of that tour, I got a very odd call from coast guard headquarters that I'll never forget. They said I had military readiness experience, naval war college experience, two commands under my belt and they needed a guy like me to run the job in Viet Nam and wanted to know what I thought of it. I thought it would be a great job, and they said they'd like me to volunteer to be the group commander over there. I said they had to be kidding- I had a wife and five kids and they expected me to volunteer! They said they did. I said they couldn't do that to me. I thought it would be a wonderful job and I thought I could do it, but I wouldn't volunteer. They'd have to send me a set of orders. The next morning, I had a set of dispatch orders to Viet Nam. My wife cried, but she was a good soldier. She stayed home with five kids,

two of which were teenagers when I left, three by the time I got back, and held down the fort for over thirteen months while I played war in Viet Nam.

That was probably the best tour of my entire service. I tried to run five combat operations every week. I tried to personally lead one or two out of every five I ran and I did that so that it wouldn't get sloppy. As long as I was leading twenty per cent of those combat operations, it gave me a great incentive not to get sloppy in the planning.

Sam: Where was your headquarters then?

Paul: In two places- first in Fukwak, I was commander of task group 115.4. Halfway through, I turned FuKwak over to the Vietnamese and moved my headquarters to 115.3 in Van Tow. FuKwak was definitely the combat oriented area; the Viet Cong were not pacified. I had the whole canal peninsula in my AOR (area of responsibility.) We planned about five amphibious operations a week. I never planned a combat operation on Sunday, and if that gave the Viet Cong an advantage, so be it. The other six days I ran five. Those five were always run with a number of Navy swift boats and one or two companies of troops wherever I could get them. Usually regional provisional forces who were not good soldiers, or for a month or two I had two companies of Cambodian mercenaries and they were good troops. And for one operation, I had two companies Vietnamese marines, and they were good troops. But for the most part my troops were pretty mediocre, Not well armed, not well trained, not well disciplined.

The operation was to move into one of the rivers that the Vietcong controlled, put troops ashore and let them sweep up both banks of the river, while the boats followed them up with 81mm mortar support for the troops.We'd soften up the area as we moved up, and in the bad areas, I would ask for helicopter support or black pony support. I had scramble authority on the aircraft so that even if I didn't have them, I could scramble them off an airfield. Sometimes I was assigned a navy sea wolf squadron of two Huey helicopters, and I would keep them on my command ship which was LST until I needed them and I would bring them off the command ship and put them overhead as we went through

bad areas. Most of the operations I planned without air cover. If intelligence told me it was a tough Vietcong controlled area, I always liked air cover because a swift boat was a quarter of an inch of aluminum between you and damnation and didn't give you much protection.

We did a lot of damage and I'm not necessarily proud of it. I told my boss it was task group 115.4, commander Hoffman, that I didn't agree with the way we were running that war, which was to go into the Vietcong held territories and just devastate them. Wipe out the farms, the livestock, the sampans, break all the water jars, poison the wells, do whatever we had to do to make the area uninhabitable because the families and the farms were supporting the guerrillas- that's how guerrilla warfare works. I said if that's the way you want to run the war, you can't find an officer in any service in the US who can do it better than I can do it- so get out of my way and watch me. I'm not necessarily proud of the way we ran the war, but we ran it and we had a lot of body count, a lot of sampans destroyed, a lot of chickens and hogs killed, a lot of farms burned, a lot of water jugs broken. Big ceramic water jugs. Those water jugs were passed down from generation to generation and once you've destroyed water jugs on a farm, you've wiped out that farm until they can get more, which are not easy to come by. These are desolated areas in the Mekong Delta.

I only blew the planning on a couple of occasions. One in particular, I was not central in the planning, it was done above me. My boss, Roy Hoffman came down. I brought in all of my boats and we had a battalion of Vietnamese marines and we went into one of the worst areas in the Boday River. Hoffman took over my flagship and he and I didn't get along all that well, so I felt it would be better for me to lead that raid rather than stay on the flagship and argue with him on how it would be run. So he stayed and ran the operation and I led the boats in. I was in the third of nine boats. We went in and I had on board my boat the two American advisors, U.S. marines, captains. We got to the embarkation point where the troops were supposed to get ashore and the senior American Marine came up to me and said since we hadn't seen anything and it would be hot and miserable walking, let's move up a few more clicks before we put the troops ashore. I said my job was to put

him where he wanted to be, so I picked up the mike and called the ship and told them to scramble the sea wolf helicopters because I was not going where I was scheduled to go and it was bad country and I wanted sea wolf helicopter support on top when I went through there. I got a roger willco from the ship and moved on in at maximum speed.We made a heck of a wake as we moved up the Boday River. We got up about half way to our next destination where we wanted to go in and the world came apart all around me. We had run into an ambush on both sides of the river, B40 rockets, and it looked to me like I had just walked through the gates of hell. My gunner, a super guy wearing a flak jacket, no shirt, came sliding out of that gun truck and he was bleeding from multiple gunshot wounds in his belly. We took a few more rounds. We returned fire, but my machine gunner was gone.The other nine boats were returning fire as well. The ambush was dug in, well-prepared. I picked up the mike and yelled for gunships to come in and strike. The ship said the gunships are scrambling. I said they're on top and he said they didn't send them. So I had gunships twenty minutes away, which was wonderful except it didn't do any good because in five minutes it was all going to be gone. I had lost one boat, ten percent of troops on deck were dead. One boat had slid onto beach at high speed with the young lieutenant in charge dead and his helmsman dead. We got through the ambush and I beached the boats on the other side. Got the troops ashore and ordered the them to sweep down the beach into the ambush area. The troops refused to go. They said they were up against a battalion. I said they weren't, they had a platoon on either bank, dug in, and I wanted them down there. They wouldn't go. It was getting dark and they wanted to dig in and stay there for the night.

About this time I got a report that I had only eight boats, the last one didn't get through. I then ordered two of my boats on the other beach to go back into the ambush area to get the other boat out. They said they couldn't go because they had casualties. and then it occurred to me that I couldn't send people into the ambush area, I had to lead them in. I ordered the second boat to follow me into the ambush area and we went back in. Our boat was out on the beach, our people were down behind the boat in knee deep water, under fire by the Viet Cong who were in bunkers, and they were about to be overrun. We went in

and with machine gun fire, we suppressed the Viet Cong. We kept their heads down in the bunkers. I told the boat with me to stay in the middle of the stream, keep their heads down, and we beached right alongside the beached boat. I ordered the crew to get aboard my boat. They wouldn't come and the reason was they thought I was going to leave their dead skipper. I told them I wasn't; I'd take him with. I went up on the bow, and they handed to me their skipper. On the bow of our boat we had an M60 machine gun and it was red hot and they laid him on top and all I could think was he was going to be burnt. I reached over and moved the M60 and got a burn on my hand that lasted a long time. The only wound I got in Viet Nam was moving a machine gun away from a dead man. We had them all aboard and slipped out of there without any more casualties, leaving the boat there.

Got back into our area and I again tried to get my troops to move and they wouldn't. When it gets dark and you have experienced military people, including two US Marines say no- we're up against a battalion- you're confidence begins to waver as well. That was a miserable night. Every now and then all night long I dropped a couple of mortars into the area just to get the Viet Cong's attention and we swept on through the next morning. They were long gone. We captured one Viet Cong. He was the biggest Vietnamese I ever saw, very close to six feet. I turned him over to the commander of the Vietnamese troops who were with me for interrogation and told them when they were through I wanted my people to interrogate him as well. This operation lasted about three days and about day three I remembered the prisoner. I asked the troop commander and he said they found he had a communicable disease and they had to kill him.

I had 20-30 dead and lost a boat and when I got up to the area I found the Viet Cong had gone aboard and taken the 50 caliber machine gun, which struck fear into my heart, because that's the first knowledge we had that they had 50 caliber's and I didn't want to go up against that with aluminum boats. I finally got the helicopters over me and they wanted to know where I wanted the ammunition. I didn't care. They put it in the bunker area and went back home. I never did get any intelligence about where those platoons came from, how they were backed, where their infrastructure was, etc, so it was a total loss. That

was the worst situation we had in the ones I led in planning. And for the helicopters not to be on top, that was Roy Hoffman's fault and he knows it and he doesn't agree. He's a great officer and now is retired. He was port director at one of the great lakes and I don't know what he's doing now.

Sam: Is Hoffman Coast Guard?

Paul: No, he's US Navy. He was in the senior class at the war college when I was a junior. A real warrior, a real tough guy, an enemy to the Vietcong and I was proud to serve for him, but he and I didn't always agree on how to run the war. But I wasn't getting paid to disagree with my boss. I did what he wanted me to do and did a good job at that. Not always proud of the methods, but in wartime, not everybody can make the strategic decisions. I was getting paid to make the tactical decisions not the strategic decisions. I'm proud of that war experience and I think it made a lasting impression on me in a number of ways, as far as military readiness goes. I had a lot of experience, a lot of training when I graduated from the war college, but to spend a year in combat gives a person a little different view and maybe that's why for the rest of my career, I was very concerned about the coast guard's military readiness role. I've always said that the commandant has a sacred obligation to be sure that the US Coast Guard could execute its war plans. I think I did that. If we're going to be warriors, we better be sure we can do it and not say that we were the hard corps in times of war- that was never true. We were not as professional as the US Navy in those years after world war two up to eight or nine years ago. We said we were, but we weren't. We were too busy with aids to navigation, merchant marine safety, search and rescue- we needed to be good in those- but we didn't need to say that we were better than we were in military readiness. It wasn't until Jack Costello, Jack Hayes, Jim Gracey, and others began to upgrade our military readiness capability that set the stage for me to grow on what they'd done and I think we had a very credible military readiness operation during my years as commandant.

Skipping ahead- left Viet Nam, came back to San Francisco, picked up my family after six years in San Francisco, three tours of duty, and

came back to Washington DC for a tour of duty here in the bridge branch and then I found out what real combat was in the political arena. What I didn't understand when I was assigned to chief of the bridge branch, later the bridge division, is this got me involved in the political aspect of Washington. I began to understand the political pressure on congressmen and governors. It was a great opportunity working with local, city and state officials and when things didn't go right, congressmen and their letters and their pressure on the Secretary and the commandant to make the decisions they wanted in the bridge division. I was really in combat there in a way that was just as real as Viet Nam and it enlarged my understanding of those kinds of things manifold. During my last year of my tour of duty in Washington. Harold Muthe was my boss in the bridge branch under aids of navigation division. There was a fine officer and I learned a lot of practical common sense from him.

My last year in Washington, I went over to the legal department, and became the chief of the negotiating team for the coast guard in law of the sea. As special assistant to the chief consul for law of the sea matters, I worked for Admiral Bill Morrison, and there was a guy that you could support and he supported you. I learned a lot there. Now I was in the international arena, working with the state department and other countries, and it enlarged my horizons so much. I can't believe that the high point of my life had been to get accepted to the Coast Guard Academy, just to stay there through that swab summer, not to get thrown out and then to graduate and now I was in the international arena, and beginning to understand it and it was due to growth that I'd gotten through the Coast Guard and I am so thankful for the opportunities that I had.

I became very close friends with a Russian, Sasha. He was their environmental guy and one day at the UN he came over to me and said in good English that he would like all of the publications I could get him on the maritime environment in the US. So, the next time I went to Washington, I gathered together all of the publications I could get and gave them to Sasha. A couple days later he thanked me for the publications and said he was going to mention my name in the dispatches back to Moscow. I thanked him. He had a dry sense of humor, and I'm told I have an odd sense of humor, and we worked together.A

couple days later, I told him I was disturbed- we'd broken his code and I'd read all of his messages to Moscow and he still hadn't mentioned my name. He didn't think that was funny, and from that point on, Sasha didn't speak to me. I thought to myself: maybe we have broken the code and they're going to change it and ruin five years of work.

Then I had an opportunity, under Mike Bakert, to become the captain of the port of Seattle. Mike was chief of merchant marine safety and it was expanding and bringing people in and he was willing to give me a chance. So I went from operational experience, no captain of port or merchant marine safety experience to becoming captain of a major port on the west coast. Again, a great tour of duty. I only spend a year and a half there, but I learned a lot. Cleaned up a couple of oil spills and really got involved.

I was in the field on Whidbey Island in a command post trailer that I'd set up with phone systems that I brought in, trying to control what looked like would be a million gallon spill from a barge beached on Whidbey Island when Admiral Hayes called and said he wanted to talk to me about my next assignment. I asked if he knew where I was. He said he understood I was working with some spill some place. Obviously, he wasn't interested that I was under tremendous pressure with newspaper people and everybody on my back. He said he'd been told he would be the next district commander in Alaska and asked it I would like to be his chief of operations. I thought that would be a great opportunity and asked to call him back in a day because I needed to talk to my wife. We'd owned a house for about a year, just landscaped it, had a fortune into it and he was asking me to move. Jan liked this house better than any place we'd ever been. Hayes said he was involved in putting his staff together- did I want it or not? I said I wanted it.

I gave Jan a call that night and that was the second time she'd cried, but again, she was a good soldier. I then went to my boss the district commander in Seattle, Chet Richmond and he said if you want to do that I'll support you. I thought it sounded real exciting, Jan hadn't threatened to divorce me, so I went with it. I relieved Bernie Thompson who went to chief of staff and I served as chief of ops for a few years under Jack Hayes and then when Bernie left was chief of staff for the last year. Hayes was a wonderful district commander and flag officer. Very

innovative, bright and quick, a lot of ideas and it took a lot for me to try to keep up with him, but I did my best to serve him. Jack gave the direction and then expected to see it happen.

Any time of the day or night, with fifteen minutes notice, Jan could have been packed and out of there. I enjoyed it, owned a boat and set of skies. In the wintertime I went skiing, in the summer fishing, time in between I flipped a coin which to do. I often say the only reason I got transferred is the fish and game people went to the commandant and said as a fisheries conservation measure, will you get Yost out of here? That's not exactly true, but I had a good time.

I served three of my most exciting years in Alaska, and the last year was selected to be a flag officer. There were two selection boards, the first one did not select me to be an admiral, but selected some of my great classmates: Hank Bell, Dick Knapp, Al Manning. I wasn't selected. Then the next board met and they picked up two more of us in that class and I was awfully glad to be selected. I know what the devastation is for all those captains out there who've done a good job , everything that they've been asked to do, and then they don't make flag and they don't know why. It's very easy to become bitter and say its skullduggery. I don't know what the answer is to that, but I have a lot of empathy for those who haven't made it.

Jack Hayes assigned me to New Orleans and there I became a district commander very young, very inexperienced, and very anxious to be a success as commander in a district that had a lot of merchant marine safety programs and it was learning experience. I didn't always do as well as I should have, but I learned a lot.

After three years, I came back to Washington as chief of staff, again very young, and I was assigned that one by Admiral Hayes and his excellent vice commandant, Admiral Scarborough. He was very frank with me, they had just bought a house for the chief of staff, I asked him why and he said the reason they had the house was its very easy to move a chief a staff into it and just as easy to move him out if he doesn't do a good job. So I was put on notice that they expected high performance. I'm not sure they got it that first year, it was a very steep learning curve for me. Jack Hayes and Admiral Scarborough gave me a lot of guidance, but I'm not sure I transitioned into that chief of staff job

as well as could have been expected. It was a numbers game and I worked very hard at it. Spent two years as Jack Hayes chief of staff and then Jim Gracey became the commandant and he kept me on. I'll always respect and thank him for doing that. He didn't have to, there were plenty of other officers who would have done as good a job as I did. I tried to do the job and Jim was a very different manager than Jack Hayes and I'm different than both. It took a while to learn his different management style and I thank him for keeping me on and teaching me.

After three years as chief of staff I then was promoted by Jim Gracey to three stars and that was a real vote of confidence. There's never been a bigger promotion, except maybe my last one. He sent me to Governors Island as the area commander- what a great assignment. I had in my hands, as commander of the Atlantic area, all the forces of the US Coast Guard in the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. I had the whole drug interdiction operation, because it was in the Caribbean, as well as search and rescue, fisheries enforcement, merchant marine inspection, and safety. All of those programs for sixty per cent of the Coast Guard and it was operation. Probably the best job in the Coast Guard and I didn't realize it at the time. The living quarters aren't too shabby either and Jan settled in like she was born to the manor and we had a great two years there.

During those two years I feel I was able to form the basic drug interdiction strategy and policy that carried me through my whole time as commandant, and a key guy in that formation was Rick Coroni as the district commander in the seventh Coast Guard district. I asked Admiral Gracey if he'd assign Rick down to the seventh. There was a fighter, a warrior, an aggressive guy, a thinker, an innovator. Rick went down and did a super job as the district commander and a lot of the ideas that I took as my own were Rick's ideas. We put together a new strategy that carried me through my whole time as commandant. We kept pulling things out of the whole Atlantic area, ships and aircraft and aids to navigation tenders and patrol boats, and pushing those things to Florida until the center of gravity of the area went further and further south and it almost tipped over. The Congressional delegation up in New England were screaming bloody murder that everything came out of the harbor in New England, turned right and headed for Florida. I

probed the edges of what was possible before I got murdered by Congress for what I was doing, but I felt that the priority in this country as set by the President and Congress, and in my own view, was drug interdiction. It was devastating this country and our allies. I had a responsibility to all the other programs, but my priority was drug interdiction and that's the way I ran it. Jim Gracey supported me on that, although he was very concerned that I was going to throw too much down there and I probably came close to doing that. He put up with me with some concern along the way.

Becoming commandant is like a hole in one, nothing you can count on. There are all kinds of factors that you've got no way of knowing, and no way of positioning yourself to be commandant. If a senior admiral is thinking of politicking for it- and I wasn't above it- but it won't work. The only way to become commandant is to do the best job you can from the time you're an ensign, have providence with you, and in the final hours of selection have your name come up and a few people who think you might do a good job and when they weigh it maybe you'll be considered. I don't know whether they always pick the best guy. When I was picked, I thought there were a number of officers who could do just as good a job and some I said that to. I said it to Deece Thompson and Jack Costello and Rick Coroni- at least those three officers and maybe a couple of others. And each one said they'd support me all the way- and that's the beauty of the Coast Guard. You won't have that when you leave the Coast Guard and your time there is so precious because of those associations.

When I became the commandant I took with me two desires that I hoped weren't overpowering to some people. One was to see if the Coast Guard could perform its role in the war plans and for that reason I emphasized military readiness, the maritime defense zone and I restructured the Coast Guard to accommodate the maritime defense zone because I thought that was a primary duty and we could do our other duties from that organization. We made the biggest restructuring of the Coast Guard since 1790. I had a lot of worries about that. The second think was a desire to shut down the smuggling of drugs through the maritime area into this country. If we could stabilize and continue the expertise we had in boating and marine safety, aids to navigation,

search and rescue and yet increase effectiveness in military readiness and drug interdiction- that's the legacy I wanted to leave and that's where I drove the Coast Guard.

I started out by shaving off everybody's beards for three reasons: I wanted to get everybody's attention- let them know something major had changed and other things would change. I thought they didn't look good and I personally didn't like them. The second message was that I was now the commandant. And the third was we're going to have a different Coast Guard so they'd better get used to it. I don't know if it worked or not, but I think we're a better outfit for it. I think we're recognized as being more military.

Shortly after becoming commandant Bill Crowe the chairman of the joint chiefs, held a military review where all the joint chiefs and commandant of the coast guard were on the reviewing stand and a company of troops of each service passed review. Our troops looked good- the honor platoon from Washington. At the end of the review, Bill Crowe came up to me and said he'd like me to come over and brief the joint chiefs regarding drug interdiction. I said I'd love to, but even more, I'd love to him ask me into the tank any time something was being talked about that was of vital interest to the Coast Guard. He looked at me, then put a finger into the middle of my chest and said- you've got it. From that time I was always invited into the tank when issues of Coast Guard interest were discussed and we moved very close to the chiefs. Bill Crowe became my tennis partner. We had a very good relationship- always a junior/senior relationship- I respected him as the elder statesman.

Colin Powell was a personal friend and junior to me before he became chairman of the joint chiefs. I knew him when he was in the White House, and I said to him the day he became chairman that Bill Crowe always invited me in, but I wasn't sure he understood. A while later I said it again and he said you don't need an invitation, any time you want to come, just walk in and sit down. I hope that future commandants continue that and I'm proud of that association. We were professional and we could do the job and we ought to be careful to maintain ourselves as one of the five services.We also became very good at drug interdiction. The E2Cs were a big help in doing that, the nine

Falcons with the intercept radar helped and the battles I had in Congress in getting those things were a part of it. During my time as commandant, we got four E2C aircraft, one of the most sophisticated war machines in the American arsenal and we flew them against the drug smugglers and not only shut down marijuana in the Caribbean, we moved cocaine out and I take great pride in that. All the experience I had in Viet Nam and the bridge business, in the international arena, everything came together and those were the things I drew on in doing what I did as commandant of the Coast Guard. It worked out, at least for me, and I think it did for the Coast Guard. As I leave as commandant, I'm pleased with where we are in military readiness and drug interdiction.

The new commandant has as many challenges as I ever had, and more. Bill Keyme is one of the finest officers the Coast Guard has ever produced. He has a mind like steel trap and is diplomatic. He's recognized in the Pentagon and in the White House as a fine officer and we're awfully lucky to have him. I hope I've left him the same kind of a legacy that Jack Hayes and Jim Gracey left me to build on so that he can take the Coast Guard into this new decade of the nineties and take us to far higher pinnacles of performance and dedication and service to our country.

Not only Bill Keyme, but all of the officers of the Coast Guard, you're not a free agent. When you look back over your shoulder, you see a line of officers all the way back to Hopely Eton. You've got a responsibility to and for. You can't let those officers down, whether you're an ensign or a commander or a captain or an admiral. This isn't just any government agency, this is the Coast Guard, one of the finest armed services of this country with a history back to 1790 and everybody else that went before you.

Sam: I want to ask you a question or two that you may not want to answer. First of all, during your tenancy as commandant, women were coming into the academy in greater numbers- how does that effect the service?

Paul: Women came into the academy in great numbers under Jack Hayes and that was a decision whose time had come. If Jack Hayes had not done it, it would have been done for him. The Secretary would have imposed it on us and we had no choice. The fact that we were in the vanguard of that in the armed services is good.

I'm not comfortable with women in combat and never have been, but again, it's just like when I served in Viet Nam, I was in charge of the tactics and I followed the strategy of my leaders. As the commandant, I was in charge of utilizing women in the best way we could and I felt that was to open to them every job that we had. The strategy of whether we ought to have women and whether they ought to be in combat was not my decision to make. I probably wouldn't have made it in that way. I was probably closed to Al Gray, the commandant of the marine corps, than I am to other service heads in that regard.

Women have done a superb job. They have in many cases done a better job than our men have in equal jobs, but that doesn't mean that it comes without problems. Men have problems too. Women have done a fine job, they've built a place in our service, they'll be there and we're thankful to have them.

Sam: I've talked to some of the women in some of the first classes, and started with Dorothy Stratton.

Paul: Nobody has been a better supporter of women in the Coast Guard than Admiral Paul Yost. I have done that because that was my job.

Sam: I think you have done a marvelous job of explaining a very active and fulfilling career and some of the problems of being the commandant and I want to thank you very much for being so forthright and forthcoming.

Paul: Thank you and I think this will be very valuable some day.