

Terry Anderson

Veteran Marine Went "Boot" to Endure Seven Years as Hostage



In June 1992, with his wife, Madeleine, at his side, Terry Anderson arrives in Batavia, N.Y., where he was raised. It was his first visit there after his release from almost seven years of captivity by Hezbollah Shiite Muslims.

Story by CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)
Photos courtesy of Terry Anderson

Marine Corps drill instructors teach recruits that the training they receive in boot camp is ultimately geared to enable them to fight and survive on the battlefield and in life.

Marine veteran Terry Anderson learned that lesson well; in fact, he attributes it in large part as the reason for his survival of nearly seven years as a hostage of Islamic extremists in Lebanon.

"I quite consciously and strongly relied on my Marine Corps experience because they [captors] were pretty vicious at the beginning," recounted the 65-year-old Lorain, Ohio, native who was raised in Batavia, N.Y. During his captivity, from 1985 to 1991, Anderson drew on his experience in the first weeks of boot camp, when drill instructors push recruits to their limits and beyond to test their mettle.

"I had a couple choices; I could either fight back, or I could play boot, which is

what I did," he said, as he recalled putting himself into the mindset that got him through boot camp 20 years earlier, in 1965.

On March 16, 1985, Anderson made a seemingly innocuous decision that turned out to be life changing; on that day he got

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up early to play tennis with Associated Press (AP) photographer Don Mell in Beirut. It was an errant decision, in hindsight.

As he stopped to drop Mell off at his apartment after tennis, three armed, young Middle Eastern men pulled him from the car, threw him in the back of a green Mercedes and drove away, starting what

would become a defining experience in his life and that of his pregnant fiancee and unborn daughter.

As a seasoned reporter covering the Lebanese civil war since 1982 and the AP Middle Eastern bureau chief as of a few months before his capture, he was in a position to know the dangers of being an American in Beirut.

"I'd gotten arrogant. I got to feeling like I was just there to watch, not to be a participant, and for years we got away with that," he said, the "we" referring to Western journalists. "We could go anywhere to report, and everyone respected the fact that we were just trying to tell their story."

The environment changed after February 1984, when the United States and other members of the multinational peacekeeping force pulled out of Beirut.

The U.N. peacekeeping force, consisting of U.S., French, Italian and British troops, had been there since 1982 attempting to allow myriad opposing forces in Beirut to reconcile their long-standing differences. However, the United States suffered total losses of 270 men, 241 of them in the Islamic terrorist suicide bombing of a Marine barracks at the Beirut airport on Oct. 23, 1983, and hundreds wounded. The French contingent lost 89 soldiers in a simultaneous attack. In April 1983, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut had been similarly bombed, killing 63 people.

The bombings were orchestrated by the newly formed Iranian-proxy group, Hezbollah, as a deliberate test of Western will to remain in the Middle East in the face of that new threat. The West failed the test—all forces pulled out by February 1984, and Islamic terrorists determined that the new massive-bombing, mass-casualty tactic worked.

Right up until the day before he was kidnapped, there were warnings; in fact, Anderson said he had thwarted an attempt to kidnap him just the day before. "We knew they were hunting foreigners, but I told everyone, including my fiancee, that they wouldn't kidnap me. I was spending most of my time covering the

Israeli occupation of south Lebanon. I was reporting the bad things the Israelis were doing," he said during a recent *Leatherneck* interview.

Anderson's captors mistakenly thought he was a CIA spy because, as part of his AP job, he traveled in many circles and had been at the embassy on more than one occasion. They knew he was a veteran Marine.

"They were impressed by the Marines. It got me an extra padlock and more chains," he said, now able to joke tenuously about seven years of hideous existence.

The self-discipline learned from boot camp and six years in the Marine Corps from 1965 to 1971, which included a Vietnam tour, was the basis of his dogged determination to survive. Anderson said his captors stopped picking on him because it was no fun; he didn't react as they expected.

"In my mind I told them, 'I'm just a piece of rock, and you can pound on me all you want, and you ain't gonna get s--- out of me,'" he recounted.

He studied his captors and learned to push their buttons. He noted that they were mostly young, poorly educated Shiites, who had little experience in the world.

"I determined that my job was to survive, and if I could make things better for myself and the other hostages, that was what I was going to try and do," noted Anderson, who had been a staff sergeant eligible for the gunnery sergeant board when he was honorably discharged from the Corps after a final tour as a recruiter in Des Moines, Iowa.

Several other American citizens were being held by the same terrorists at the same time, some who had been taken before him, some after. Sometimes the hostages would see each other, even be put in the same cells. Anderson said he spent about a year in solitary confinement under deplorable conditions.

"That's where having been a Marine played in strongly. You know a lot more about what you are capable of and how to handle extreme circumstances than the average person," he postulated.

Anderson was still in high school when he joined the Marine Corps in March 1965 at age 17. He originally had planned to attend West Point, but they wouldn't take him due to partial color blindness.

"So I was talking with recruiters, and Marine recruiters being who they are, they got hold of me and told me I could probably enlist and later go to officers' school, so off I went," he noted, adding that about 10 weeks into boot camp he was nominated for an accelerated officer program, but he didn't meet the physical requirements.

"They sent me back to the same recruit



Terry Anderson's tours as a Marine included the Da Nang Press Center, Vietnam, as a combat correspondent (below) and recruiting duty in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1970 (above), just prior to his release from active duty.



platoon, which the drill instructors determined was worthy of retaliation," he reflected, but he endured the remaining three weeks of training to earn the title "Marine."

"I had never heard of Vietnam," he revealed, not knowing that American military advisors already had been killed there and that the Third Marine Division was landing in Da Nang, Republic of

South Vietnam, about the same time.

"Only when I got to boot camp on Parris Island did anyone mention Vietnam," he remembered, also recalling that all but one of the 72 Marines in his graduating recruit platoon were assigned to Vietnam, including him. He was destined for the First Marine Aircraft Wing, but because he was still only 17, he was held at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., for a

couple months while the wing deployed to Japan, where he joined them in December 1965.

He started as an administrative clerk at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan. He said he kept asking for orders to Vietnam, but was denied. He was helping a friend at the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) on the air station during weekends and evenings and became interested in broadcasting.

At the time he was a 19-year-old sergeant, having received two meritorious promotions after boot camp. After a couple of years, he reenlisted, chose an option to change his occupation to public affairs and to serve a three-year tour as a military broadcaster at the Far East Network station at Iwakuni.

Little did he know that by reenlisting he became "career designated." He recalled getting a call one day from his sergeant major telling him he had orders to Vietnam.

"I told the sergeant major that couldn't be because I reenlisted for a three-year tour, and he said, 'Sergeant Anderson, have you ever heard of the exigencies of the Corps?'" Anderson found out afterward that his assignments monitor in Washington, D.C., at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, noticed that he was in line to be a staff sergeant, but didn't have a combat tour and needed one.

After attending school to become a print journalist, he reported to the Da Nang Press Center in Vietnam as a combat correspondent.

"It was a really wild and crazy bunch, led by Mr. Dale," he noted, referring to retired Marine Captain Dale Dye, subject of an "Alumni Marine" article in the June 2013 *Leatherneck*. Anderson would serve under and be influenced by Dye and years later meet him again in Beirut in early 1983, when Anderson was an AP reporter



Terry Anderson, his wife, Madeleine, and daughter, Sulome, relax on the Caribbean island of Antigua in December 1991, after his release from captivity earlier that month.

a hot LZ [landing zone], and they wanted you off that helicopter and out of the way so they could load the wounded. Then you'd find whatever unit you were covering, and you became part of that unit ... just another Marine. Somebody would hand you a couple mortar rounds that you'd strap to your a-- or whatever they needed carrying, and off you'd go, going

tween my experience with the Far East Network and as a combat correspondent in Vietnam, it convinced me I wanted to be a journalist," he remembered.

He decided to leave the Marine Corps after leaving Vietnam in 1971. "There were all kinds of protests and burning flags. Nobody bought you a drink in a bar, that's for sure," he said. "So I went to work at a radio/TV station and attended school for journalism and political science."

He later worked as a newspaper editor and then joined the AP full time in 1975. He took assignments in Kentucky, New York, Tokyo and South Africa.

"In the course of five years in Tokyo, I covered a lot of stuff in Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, and they discovered I could do what we called 'bang-bang.' Not every journalist can do that because not every journalist is crazy," he said with a nonchalant laugh. "They discovered I could cover violent situations and get a story and, more importantly, get back because if you get killed you can't file," he quipped, noting that he later continued reporting on wars in Africa.

In 1982, when the Israelis invaded Beirut, he went there to help out and got caught up in the complicated Middle Eastern scene. "I'd found a home," he explained. "It was an incredible story. I liked the Middle East and learned to understand it pretty quickly. ... I found it exciting—and scary. ... There's something about battle that makes you operate at your full capacity."

His experience in the Marines and his understanding of the Middle East eventually led him to the conclusion that the Marine mission in Beirut was fatally flawed and suffered from "mission creep."

"Somebody in Washington made a really bad decision out of lack of knowledge," he said of Marine involvement in the 1982-84 peacekeeping initiative in Beirut. "We were doing fine there as peacekeepers. Everybody liked us, but then somebody in Washington got the bright idea that we should be supporting the legitimate government there. ... Unfortunately, the legitimate government was only one of several sides in a civil war, and nobody considered them legitimate; in fact, they only had power over about two square miles."

Anderson recounted the numerous political and policy decisions that placed the multinational force, and especially Marines, in untenable positions amidst warring factions that eventually led to Marines being drawn into combat.

"The Marines were at the airport in the middle of Shiite slums, a half mile from Palestinian refugee camps that had been razed by the Israelis and the Phalange

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and Dye was in charge of the public affairs detachment on shore.

Anderson cut his teeth as a radio and print war correspondent in Vietnam, a trial-by-fire that would permeate his approach as an AP reporter.

"You always kept your pack ready. ... The way it would work is the master gunnery sergeant or Dale Dye would come by and say, 'Anderson, get out to 2/26 or 'Delta' 2/5 or whatever. They're in s---; catch a medevac and get out there,'" he recalled. "Frequently, you were going into

out on patrols, doing your stories."

He said he would spend days or weeks with units, doing what they did, doing whatever it took to get the story, from combined action platoons living in Vietnamese villages ("That was the scariest. I didn't know if they were going to sell me or what.") to tunnel rats searching out underground complexes ("I did a series on that which appeared on ABC's "Vietnam Update".")

With that experience, he transitioned from military to civilian reporting. "Be-

(political faction mainly supported by Maronite Christians). ... When Marines took part in the fight, nobody liked them anymore," he emphasized. "It was a bad place to be. It was the wrong thing to place them in the middle of a multisided fight that they had no chance to win."

In the wake of the multinational peacekeeping force pullout in early 1984, Beirut descended into chaos.

"After the Marine bombing Oct. 23, 1983, Lebanon just seemed to fall apart," Anderson wrote in a book detailing his captivity entitled "Den of Lions." After U.N. forces departed in 1984, numerous incidents continued to occur: kidnappings, attacks, bombings. The American Embassy annex in Beirut was bombed in September 1984, killing 24 people.

It was in this climate of anti-Western—and especially anti-American—hatred that Anderson continued to work for the AP among the various factions, trying to piece together the Middle East puzzle.

It is hard to imagine surviving seven years as a hostage of Islamic extremists. In "Den of Lions" Anderson describes the mistreatment, beatings, moving from one prison to another, false rumors of release, never knowing from one minute to the next what his fate would be.

Anderson outlined the campaign he and other hostages undertook to change their captors' minds about them.

"We embarked on a campaign to convince them that we were hostages, not criminals. We told them we didn't do anything wrong, and they had no reason to punish us," he said. "Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn't. Over the years, it eliminated most of the really bad treatment, but not all. These were not normal people; these were terrorists.



Terry Anderson visits Vietnam for the dedication of new classrooms funded by the Vietnam Children's Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building children's schools in Vietnam.

Some of them were vicious. Some of them were psychotic."

Anderson has been many things since his release: business owner, college professor, talk-show host and guest, columnist and political candidate. He also has been involved in charitable organizations, such as the Vietnam Children's Fund that has built 48 of a planned 50 schools in Vietnam.

Thinking back to survival as a hostage, he still credits the intrinsic values he learned as a Marine. He said, "My daily approach was, 'OK, here I am. How can I do the best I can here?' I attribute much of that attitude to the Marine Corps—accomplish the mission, field expedient, just get it done."

Editor's note: Readers may recall Terry Anderson's April 2012 Leatherneck magazine article "The Vietnam Children's Fund." You may access it in our archives via our website at www.mca-marines.org.

The author, CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret), was a combat correspondent as an enlisted Marine and later a public affairs officer. He retired from active duty in 1996 and now is a contributing editor for Leatherneck as well as the Marine Corps Association & Foundation area representative for the MCAS Beaufort and MCRD Parris Island, S.C., region.



As a co-director of the Vietnam Children's Fund, Anderson continues his dedication to building schools in Vietnam. The goal is one school seat for every name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, "The Wall," in Washington, D.C.