

# Victoria (West) Cobbett

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## Interview starts at 00:17

**Cohen:** [00:00:17] So today is July 28th, 2021. I'm Leah Cohen, the Oral History Manager at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library and on behalf of PMML, I am pleased to interview Sergeant Victoria Cobbett. Sergeant Cobbett served with the Woman Marine Detachment II, Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina, from 1970 to 1973. She worked in computer operations at the time that computers were, as she phrased it, "as big as double wide refrigerators". I would also like to introduce the husband of Sergeant Cobbett, also Sergeant, Sergeant Gary Cobbett who served at the Headquarters and the Headquarters Squadron 28, 2nd Marine Air Wing and also at the Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina. So thank you. Thank you both for coming in and thank you for your willingness to share your story.

**Cobbett:** [00:01:21] You're quite welcome.

**Cohen:** [00:01:23] So we'll begin at the beginning, where and when were you born?

**Cobbett:** [00:01:26] I was born in Chicago, Illinois, 1952.

**Cohen:** [00:01:30] And what was it like growing up in Chicago at the time?

**Cobbett:** [00:01:34] We actually moved from Chicago when I was quite small and we moved to a small town and then we moved to California. And then in 1957 or '58, we moved to Lemont, where I lived the remainder of my life and where we continue to live.

**Cohen:** [00:01:50] Oh, Okay, that's nice. Was it a nice community, Lemont?

**Cobbett:** [00:01:54] It was a very small community. Yeah, it was kind of a farming community, blue-collar population. I believe when we moved in was between 2000 and 4000 people, so it was quite small. I still remember when we got the first stoplight. [Laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:02:10] Where did you go to school?

**Cobbett:** [00:02:12] I went to Lemont Public Grade School and Lemont Township High School.

**Cohen:** [00:02:16] Oh, okay. And you had written that your father had been a World War II veteran? Did he talk a lot about his experience?

**Cobbett:** [00:02:30] No, he really didn't. He really didn't. He passed away when I was quite young. He passed away when I was fifteen, but he was the commander of the VFW Post 5819 in Lemont for, I think, one or two years. So that's one of my first exposures to military personnel. You know, people that had served.

**Cohen:** [00:02:49] And so both from the veterans group, but did you also have other relatives, friends, and family--?

**Cobbett:** [00:02:55] Yeah, actually. My son served in the [US] Marine Corps. My daughter served in the [US] Army. My cousin, Becky, served in the [US] Air Force. Well, my uncle was in the [US] Navy. My other uncle was in the [US] Coast Guard. But then they're going back to World War II and Korea. So a lot of people served.

**Cohen:** [00:03:14] Wow. Which subjects did you like in school growing up?

**Cobbett:** [00:03:16] I liked math and science.

**Cohen:** [00:03:24] And I think you had written that you'd been part of the Girl Scouts.

**Cobbett:** [00:03:28] Oh yeah. My mother was a Girl Scout leader. Well, I think I mentioned before camera that I have three sisters. So my mother was a Girl Scout leader, so we were all...In those days, there weren't a lot of activities for girls to participate in. There wasn't the

sports that there are now and things like that. So we did a lot of Girl Scouts, camping. What else did we do? Rock collecting, birdwatching, sewing, you name it. And in 1965, my mother, Gloria West, Arvella Moncek and Shirley Carlson took thirty-one girls and camped our way to Camp Rockwood Girl Scout Camp in Washington, D.C., for two weeks. And in those days you had shorts or you had a skirt with. There was no wash'n wear. It was all ironed with starch, so we had to iron our clothes. We had have two of everything so we could wash one set one night and wear it the next. And we camped her way around Washington, D.C. It was a wonderful experience.

**Cohen:** [00:04:26] It sounds wonderful, especially for two weeks, a stretch of time. Wow.

**Cobbett:** [00:04:29] Yes.

**Cohen:** [00:04:29] Wow. Do you think you enjoyed organized and structured activities? Like part of the Girl Scouts with the--?

**Cobbett:** [00:04:39] Yeah, I suppose I did. Yeah, yeah, I like to be involved. I like to keep busy as you can tell. [Laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:04:44] Did you like doing sports in your spare time? I don't mean a formal team.

**Cobbett:** [00:04:53] Yeah, but we didn't really have any kind of sports activities; I did some gymnastics, but I'm not really athletically inclined. I guess you would put it. I'm athletic, but I'm not. I did some gymnastics. We'll leave it at that. I really couldn't play baseball and we had some archery. There was a program called GAA, Girls Athletic Association, that met once a week on Fridays. And sometimes you'd play basketball or sometimes they'd play softball, or sometimes they'd shoot a bow and arrow. But I wasn't that skilled in it.

**Cohen:** [00:05:27] Oh yeah but you participated.

**Cobbett:** [00:05:28] Yes, I did. Yeah, that was in high school.

**Cohen:** [00:05:36] What did you do after you graduated from college?

**Cobbett:** [00:05:41] Oh, well, I was. I had gotten my degree in nursing, so I worked on a telemetry unit in a hospital. And then when I got my baccalaureate degree, I worked in the emergency room at the same hospital. So I was an ER nurse.

**Cohen:** [00:05:56] Oh, Okay. So maybe I'm little confused. Like had you been in college for one year and then you decided to enlist?

**Cobbett:** [00:06:04] Yes. Yes, that's how it was. I went a year to-- After I graduated high school, I went one year to school and that was during the protests and the riots. That was in 1969. And it just seemed to me that people didn't really appreciate our country anymore. There was just an attitude of disrespect, and I couldn't understand why. And I, you know, in my dorm floor, there was a young lady that had been rescued from Vietnam, and she was very appreciative of our country. She had some strange habits, but she was. She loved being in this country and the girl across the hall from me. Her brother had died in Vietnam, and she wasn't really appreciative of the riots either, because, you know, they were disrespecting her brother. And as you well know, a lot of Vietnam veterans, most of them were disrespected when they came home. So I decided I would join the military and see what was going on. I had always kind of leaned that way, I guess, if I thought about it, but I went and did it. So we went down to the post office in Joliet on Scott Street, and actually I hadn't selected the Marine Corps specifically, but the Air Force recruiter was out to lunch and there was a man in this wonderful uniform with the dress blue trousers. And he said, "Well, why don't you join the Marines?" And I said, "I didn't even know they had women Marines." He said, "Oh yeah!". And so a month later, I was on my way to Parris Island. [Both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:07:26] What did your parents think about your decision or your sisters?

**Cobbett:** [00:07:31] They didn't, really. They didn't really have a feeling about it either way, I don't know that they discouraged me or that they encouraged me. It was kind of something no different. I was, I think I was the first one of females in our family to go in the service. You know, my cousin Becky hadn't gone in yet.

**Cohen:** [00:07:47] But yeah, it's interesting. So would you like to talk about basic training at Parris Island?

**Cobbett:** [00:07:56] If I can remember it. It was fifty years ago. [Laughter]

**Cobbett:** [00:07:59] It was, it was one of the hardest things I ever did in my entire life. It was very hard, but it was, it was wonderful too, and it helped mold me into the person I am today. I mean, it taught you to be prompt and reliable and strong and independent and [have] respect and appreciation and pride in being a Marine.

**Cohen:** [00:08:23] They inculcated very good values?

**Cobbett:** [00:08:26] Yes, they did.

**Cohen:** [00:08:28] What was the physical fitness like in marching or other activities?

**Cobbett:** [00:08:33] Well, back in those days, women were trained differently than the men. Whenever I am with a group of Marines, we always laugh because I had a PT skirt, a physical training skirt, and it was this blue skirt that buttoned up over shorts. It was so lame. Oh my gosh. But anyway, but when we would run, we got to take off the skirt and do our running, but we didn't have to carry a pack like the men did. We never had to qualify with any weapons. My DD214 has, I believe, a program image development for the woman Marine. [Chuckles] So while they're shooting M14s, I'm learning how to hold gloves and serve tea.

**Cohen:** [00:09:11] Well, that's what I was reading about this course, in "The History of the Women Marines". Like, like the grooming, they installed a grooming center--

**Cobbett:** [00:09:18] Yeah, it was [like that]. I was issued a girdle. Yes.

**Cohen:** [00:09:24] Was there any pushback from, let's say, the drill instructors or any of the girls or--?

**Cobbett:** [00:09:32] No. In the beginning, I think a lot of us were scared to open our mouth and say anything because it was such a-- It was a completely foreign experience for me. I just, I had had never imagined anything like that. It was it was scary and it was thrilling at the same time and it was wonderful. I I don't know if I'm explaining that correctly, but it was, it was an amazing experience, something I've obviously never forgotten and something I'm very proud of. I'm proud that I'm a Marine.

**Cohen:** [00:09:57] So, so you're like, you're learning a whole new world?

**Cobbett:** [00:10:00] It is, it is. Exactly. Because you're dropped into this world that's completely different from anything you've ever experienced.

**Cohen:** [00:10:07] And what were the other girls like? And were you meeting, you know, young women from all--?

**Cobbett:** [00:10:13] All over the country, yeah. My roommate, Paula Williams, she was from South Carolina, I believe. My roommate, my bunkmate. She was, you know, we were alphabetical. I always remember Kathy Measles and Sandy Malley. Kathy Measles was the bare minimum height. I want to say, she was like four foot nine and Sandy Measles or [rather] Sandy Malley always said that she was five foot eleven and three quarters. She never wanted to say she was six foot, but because we were alphabetical Sandy Malley stood next to Kathy Measles. And so there was this big disparity of height and I was W, West. So I was across the squad bay from them. We were squad bays back then. We didn't have two-men rooms like in dorms like they have today. We had a squad bay.

**Cohen:** [00:10:56] How many women shared the squad bay?

**Cobbett:** [00:11:00] I want to say there was thirty in our platoon. We started out with thirty. I can't remember how many actually graduated, but-- I should have brought my book with. I completely forgot to bring my book with. Oh yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:11:12] That's okay. And and what was it like for you being in the, in the South? Like, did you have any leave off the base?

**Cobbett:** [00:11:22] Not during boot camp. [Cohen inserts " No, no]. Not Marines. Becky did. She was in the Air Force. [Both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:11:35] How long did the boot camp last?

**Cobbett:** [00:11:37] I believe it was either eight or ten weeks. We got out either ... I went in at the end of September and then we got out either right after Thanksgiving. I always remember eating at attention. That was something that was completely foreign, to eat at attention.

**Cohen:** [00:11:52] What does that mean?

**Cobbett:** [00:11:52] You know what I'm talking about? You had to eat at attention. You had to sit there and eat at attention... You could, you know, you weren't supposed to look around or move. Usually, it meant you were in trouble for something, but in the beginning I think they were just training us. But yeah, you had to eat attention. [Both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:12:06] Did did, were you taught to learn how to handle any ammunition like a pistol or I don't know what--?

**Cobbett:** [00:12:14] No, we did get to go to the firing range once and watch the men shoot. It was quite different back then. It wasn't the same as it was now.

**Cohen:** [00:12:23] Yeah. And it sounds like there's quite a variety of situations. Like I was surprised recently to interview a World War II veteran who is a physical therapist and there I think they taught the girls to shoot grenades and it got her a little bit worried, actually.

**Cobbett:** [00:12:38] Really?!

**Cohen:** [00:12:39] Yeah, it really surprised me. [Cobbett: Yeah] Okay, so what were the other uniforms like? Like, what were the different uniforms that you wore?

**Cobbett:** [00:12:50] Or we had basically two-- Well, we had a utility uniform. It was called utilities. That was a navy blue trousers and this neat light, light blue top and what looked like a Navy cover. It looked like we were in the Navy. Nobody liked those, but that's what we did field day with. And then we had a winter uniform and a summer uniform. And our summer uniform was a seersucker, a green and white, seersucker two piece. They had just changed over from a one piece dress, and then the winter uniform was a dark marine green wool jacket and shirt and skirt. There were no trousers for a regular uniform. [Cohen interrupts: Oh no...] Right. We weren't supposed to wear our field day uniforms off, away from the barracks.

**Cohen:** [00:13:31] Okay, I see.

**Cobbett:** [00:13:32] ...we did, we did wear the one time when we went to the [gas chamber] Quonset hut , to learn gas masks, [in the event of biological & chemical warfare] where they teach you how to survive gas, and then you have to take off your mask and sing the first verse to the Marine Corps Hymn. [Laughter]

**Cobbett:** [00:13:46] You had to run out of here like this and not touch anything, but there's mucus coming out of your eyes and your ears and your mouth. But the men they had to sing all three verses. [Chuckles]

**Cohen:** [00:13:55] Would have been a bit easier on them.

**Cobbett:** [00:13:56] Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:13:59] Was your drill instructor like a man or a woman?

**Cobbett:** [00:14:03] We had three female drill instructors, and then we had one male drill instructor for drill. So but in the barracks, we had three females. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:14:12] And were the women's barracks like separate from the men?

**Cobbett:** [00:14:16] Yeah, we were in a completely separate part of the island. We we really didn't have any communication with the men except for when we went over to use the gas



chamber. And then depending on if you went to church on Sunday, what church you went to, sometimes you would see the men. There were two basic churches that they used, but if someone had a particular religion, they were allowed to go to that service and they would see them [there, too]. Quite frankly, that was the last thing I was thinking about was men. [Cohen laughs] I mean, getting up at five in the morning, you know, and if you had long hair, you either had to get it cut or you had to wear a wig. And just by chance, my mother threw an old wig in my bag when I left because there were girls, they just took their hair and they cut it right off because you couldn't... Like now they can wear it in a bun or in a braid. But according to them, that wasn't fashionable back then. So you either had to have it short because it could touch the top of your collar, but it couldn't cover it or you had to wear a wig. So I had this funky wig that I wore all through boot camp and I had to jam on my head in the morning. And they also insisted that we put makeup on, too. I mean, there were some rules. I don't know if I can say this on camera. We would have locker box inspections where you would stand on your locker box and they would check to make sure that your legs were shaved.

**Cohen:** [00:15:30] So, so, so so.

**Cobbett:** [00:15:31] Grooming was very important.

**Cohen:** [00:15:33] Important. That's what I was reading here [points to book] that they wanted to improve the image of the women Marines, both internally, but also to the public at large. I mean, did you did you feel that? Like was there a stigma in some ways like in the public at large about women being part of the service forces?

**Cobbett:** [00:15:51] Oh yeah, women in the service were either considered lesbians or whores. So there you were. You had two options. [Both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:16:00] So they try to tidy everybody up.

**Cobbett:** [00:16:04] It was one or the other, yeah. The idea that we did it out of out of joy to serve our country or patriotism was apparently a low fourth place option.

**Cohen:** [00:16:18] I was reading about the so-called garden party. Was this something you experienced?

**Cobbett:** [00:16:23] Oh, always. Yeah, that's basically yard work. You know, the garden party is. Yeah, in fact, so the men, they got to either stencil their name and their number on their uniforms. Or [turns to her husband, Gary] Did you just did your stencil it or was it a stamp, too? We got name tags, that originally, we had to write our name on them and we had to sew 'em on everything. Well, then we when we got the printed ones, because then you had to write how exactly your full, your military signature, which was your full name, your middle initial and your last name, which is why I'm Victoria on everything. Well, that's my real name. But so when we got the new, the preprinted ones back then, we had to change over and get rid of the old ones. Well, I was in a hurry for something. I don't know. Maybe I just wanted to have a smoke break. I don't know. Anyway, I was biting the thread to pull my old nametag off and I didn't think anybody was watching. So I spit the piece of thread in the grass. [Cohen laughs] Oh my gosh! So we had to get a comb and comb the grass to get that little, teeny piece of thread out. And then anything else that was there. That was my 'garden party' that day. It was no fun. Let me tell you.

**Cohen:** [00:17:31] No, it wasn't a barbecue.

**Cobbett:** [00:17:34] Oh, no, that's not it.

**Cohen:** [00:17:38] What was the--? I was reading that there was a what do they call it, the field night or--

**Cobbett:** [00:17:43] The field day? Yeah, yeah. That's housecleaning. Cleaning the barracks. Yeah, and they had like buffers that you could plug in that they they were just sitting there so we could look at them, be tortured because we actually had a buff with sanitary products. That's what we had up off the floor with after it was washed [and waxed]. We did the waxing with those, yes. You know, they break you down to build you up again. Yeah, that's all part of a big plan. I guess! Some things were overboard, I think but I survived.

**Cohen:** [00:18:12] That's right. Took good away from it.

**Cobbett:** [00:18:13] Right, right. Yes, yes.

**Cohen:** [00:18:16] And was it part of the like? Was this prior to an inspection when you had to do field day?

**Cobbett:** [00:18:22] Oh no. Field day was every Thursday.

**Cohen:** [00:18:22] Oh, okay, I see. Okay.

**Cobbett:** [00:18:26] I mean, there usually were inspections, too. But irregardless, Field Day was every Thursday. That continued at Cherry Point, when I was at my regular base when I was out of boot camp. Field Day was every Thursday, no matter what.

**Cohen:** [00:18:37] Yes. Were there any African-Americans in your unit?

**Cobbett:** [00:18:41] Oh yeah, Paula was African-American. Yeah, we were friends. She actually went to Cherry Point with me, so we kind of remained friends. And then she was in a different unit, though I worked with computers, as I said, and Paula was with the air wing. So I was kind of with headquarters and she was with the wing. Even though we had the same barracks because of work schedules, we didn't get to see one another that often. On the Women Marines birthday on the Marine Corps birthday. And then occasionally we work our schedules so we could just go out and reminisce and see how the other one was doing.

**Cohen:** [00:19:12] Yeah. Catch up with each other.

**Cobbett:** [00:19:14] Exactly.

**Cohen:** [00:19:14] Yeah, it's nice. Well, did you did you find it being a little different having one year of college? Like where you typically one year older than most of the other girls or--?

**Cobbett:** [00:19:30] Yeah, after I got out of the Marine Corps and then I went back to school, I did notice [it] even though it was only maybe a four-year difference but because of my

experiences in the Marine Corps, they seemed so childish compared to--They didn't take things seriously. They had their parents paying for everything, and yet they were still squandering away their education. I guess that's part of being young, but at some point, you know, if you're a sophomore or a junior, you got to wake up and say, "Hey, this is a great opportunity, I'm going to take advantage of it". So I did notice that, yeah. And I also noticed the veterans kind of clumped together because there's a camaraderie regardless of the branch of service you were in, that you went to an experience that other people didn't. [Cohen affirms: Yes]. And plus the Vietnam War treated our veterans so shabbily. It wasn't their families as much as society at large. That was another bonding issue was the Vietnam War. So that's where I met my husband at Cherry Point. He had just come back from Vietnam, and he was a little rowdy. [Laughter] We'll leave it at that.

**Cohen:** [00:20:43] So going back to Parris Island were you given aptitude tests at that point to determine your MOS?

**Cobbett:** [00:20:51] I, we had something at the AFEES [Armed Forces Entrance Examination Station] Building in downtown Chicago. And then, yes, when we got there, we were given aptitude tests and I see now where they get to choose their MOS. But it didn't happen that way back then and there was no such thing as a contract. They tested you and they placed you where they wanted you and needed you. But in fact, I mean, that's why you were there. You were there to serve your country. And if that's where they wanted you, that's where you went.

**Cohen:** [00:21:17] And I guess, you know, I could see where somebody who's good in math would be, you know, they would want to work in computer operations like there's a kind of logic--

**Cobbett:** [00:21:25] Yeah, it was. It was quite interesting. I really didn't know anything about computers. My favorite anecdote is my sisters and I always played Scrabble when I was home on leave one time and I put the word byte down B-Y-T-E on the Scrabble board, and Chris challenged me and we couldn't find it in the dictionary. I mean, maybe we had an old dictionary, but they didn't believe me that it was a real word. I said, "No, it's a real word."

**Cohen:** [00:21:48] [Laughter] It's kind of cool to get a cutting-edge field at the time. Yeah. Well, I guess I couldn't tell if it was considered like hard to get into the MOS as I think it was called 4014, electric accounting machine operator then 4016 data processing equipment operator. Because I was reading in Appendix C that only I think that 3.2, three percent of the enlisted women were in data systems versus, let's say, 30.42 percent working in administration. And that was a few years later in '76. So was this considered like, I don't know [how to phrase it], an elite?

**Cobbett:** [00:22:23] Yeah, it was mostly men.

**Cohen:** [00:22:25] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Cobbett:** [00:22:26] And we worked with civilian government employees. I actually I worked on top of the Navy's supply building, and there was kind of a secret room in back of the tape room where the guys would go in every twenty-four hours and they'd always come in civilian clothes. They were Marines, but they would get locked in and locked out, and they had a special code. I never did. I never found out what that room was for, other than it was something secret. But yes, there were mostly men. There were two other girls, I think that came later that were in data processing.

**Cobbett:** [00:22:59] So yeah, but I don't want to sound [boastful]. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:23:03] Yeah, no, no, no, no, I know... Where did you, where did you go from -- Excuse me. Did you go directly from Parris Island boot camp to Cherry Point Air Station?

**Cobbett:** [00:23:18] Yes, I did. They didn't really send women to school back then. We had what's called OJT, on the job training, so I learned my skills there from actually from, I think he was a G-12. He was a retired Air Force person, this man and he kind of showed me what I was supposed to do with wiring the panels and then sorting the cards and then loading the card reader and things. He didn't like Marines because he was in the Air Force. He especially didn't like women Marines. But anyway, so yeah, we had on the job training. And then as you advanced in rank, you could apply to go to like, programming school or something, which I was thinking about. But it didn't happen. I ended up, I didn't ship-over, so I lost that option.

**Cohen:** [00:24:04] Oh, because because you were still in...

**Cobbett:** [00:24:09] Well, if I would have shipped-over, I could have gone to programing school. But they kind of, they sent the men before boot, after boot camp to school. But in order... If a woman, you know, they had to be sure I was going to stay. Because in those days, if you were to get married and have a child, it was an honorable discharge. You weren't allowed to stay in, whereas now they can have a child and still stay in. But in those days you just received an honorable discharge and you were released.

**Cohen:** [00:24:35] When you say shipped out [i.e. over], I mean like had you had a tour in Vietnam ?

**Cobbett:** [00:24:37] Oh, ship-over means reenlist, I'm sorry. That's the terminology here.

**Cohen:** [00:24:41] No, I should have got that. [Cobbett: Yeah, yeah] Okay. Because you didn't reenlist, they couldn't guarantee it so they would not--

**Cobbett:** [00:24:47] Correct. Yes.

**Cohen:** [00:24:48] --give you the option of the course. Okay, I get it. So I think you said that this man who was training you was not excited about training. Like, was he not excited about training anybody or a woman or both?

**Cobbett:** [00:25:02] I think it was a woman and a Marine. Branches of the service, you kind of have a pride in your branch of service, and some people just take it a little bit further than they should. And I don't think he appreciated it. He didn't think women belonged in the service, is what I think. That was kind of an attitude back then that I should have stayed where I belonged. I was uppity. [Cohen laughs] I don't know. [To Gary] I know, you know, whom I'm talking about? Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:25:31] In general, how did you find the attitudes of men toward toward you and other women Marines?

**Cobbett:** [00:25:37] Well, was I walking to the chow hall between the barracks or was it just at work? When I was at work, because I did my job, I was treated by the other Marines okay. But I remember walking to the chow hall between the barracks and the things that were yelled out the windows would curl your hair. I mean, I guess they're young men and they're full of testosterone, I don't know. But some of it was so vulgar. Either you didn't go to the chow hall or you took the long way around because it just wasn't worth listening to.... And it's not worth repeating.[Cohen inserts: No.] Leah, are you going to edit this, right?

**Cohen:** [00:26:15] Well, we will send it to you for review. So if you wish to edit...

**Cobbett:** [00:26:21] I gotta wipe my nose.

**Cohen:** [00:26:21] Don't worry, things that things like that are always edited out.

**Cobbett:** [00:26:22] Okay.

**Cohen:** [00:26:23] Or coughs or things like that. You know. Don't worry. I mean, had you heard of other women who had suffered sexual abuse or happily not or--?

**Cobbett:** [00:26:37] You know what? I don't even want to talk about that.

**Cohen:** [00:26:42] Sure.

**Cobbett:** [00:26:43] Okay, but what I will talk about is when my husband and I got married, we put in for base housing and we were able to get into NCO housing because he was a sergeant and then I was a corporal. And when Gary got discharged in '72, I was a corporal, which is an E-4, an NCO, we had to move out of NCO housing, though, because I didn't count. So that's just a form of, you know, prejudice. I guess you want to call it against women. And that was that's just the way it was then. And I have other anecdotal stories, but that's an actual recorded story that we had to move out of NCO housing because I wasn't qualified even though I was an NCO. So things like that happen. So you were sometimes made to feel like a second-class citizen. A lot of it depended on the personality of your C.O. [commanding officer], and most of them were

pretty fair. But every once in a while, you'd come across someone who just didn't think women belonged in the military and they weren't afraid to let you know it. But for the most part, I.. There were specific instances. Other than that, it was just fine.

**Cohen:** [00:27:45] Yeah, yeah, people--

**Cobbett:** [00:27:47] It was regular life. Yeah. And even through life afterwards, I found there's people that aren't, that just don't think women belong in any kind of business or any kind of leadership role. But the majority of people are really fair. So I mean, I've been on the fire board for twenty years. I've been president for, since 2013. That's pretty unusual. [Cohen: Yes] But and all the other[s are] men in the board, they're men on my other team, there are other four people, and they keep electing me because I do a good job. I run a good meeting, so they're pretty fair.

**Cohen:** [00:28:19] Yeah, people recognize merit. And yeah, that's that's true. That's true. So that's. So how did the two of you meet on the base?

**Cobbett:** [00:28:31] Well, this is a really funny story, but one of my friends said, "Oh, why don't you come to the parachute jump club? Let's see about jump out, you know, learn how to jump with the parachute." So I said, "Okay." And I went and this guy walked in the room, and I know it's corny, but it was love at first sight. [Cohen inserts: Ahh] And we've been married for fifty years, over fifty years. So he had just gotten back from Vietnam. He had just gotten out of the brig, as a matter of fact. [Chuckles] I told you he was a little rowdy after Vietnam. [Laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:29:00] Well, maybe you had had to get out of your system, so...

**Cobbett:** [00:29:05] It wasn't your rank over. So it was minor.

**Cohen:** [00:29:08] Yeah.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:29:09] It wasn't my fault. [Laughter]

**Cobbett:** [00:29:13] That's right. It wasn't your fault.



**Cohen:** [00:29:18] So how long were you dating? Were you? And it sounds like you're both in the service when you got married?

**Cobbett:** [00:29:24] We were. Yeah, yeah, we we got married in March of '71. Yeah, it's not too long. I don't recommend whirlwind romances like that. We were just blessed and lucky that we were very compatible and it worked out.

**Cohen:** [00:29:39] Yeah. Yeah, sounds great...As an aside did you learn how to parachute?

**Cobbett:** [00:29:47] No, we never went back to the parachute jump club. No.

**Cobbett:** [00:29:49] But I did start getting an, getting 'outstanding' on my shoes on inspections because he would shine my shoes. And oh my gosh, you could do such a better job than I did. You know, he had a mirror finish on them, you know? So he'd always shine my shoes for me. Yeah, because in those days there was no Corfam or patent leather. It was spit shine. [Cohen inserts: Oh my goodness.] Yeah, so he would do my shoes for me.

**Cohen:** [00:30:14] So where was Gary living? Where were the men's barracks?

**Cobbett:** [00:30:19] Well, I don't know. When we got married. [To Gary] Where was your barracks? His barracks wasn't near mine, I don't actually know where his barracks was because we used to meet at the NCO Club.

**Cohen:** [00:30:26] Yeah, yeah.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:30:28] It wasn't too far from yours.

**Cobbett:** [00:30:30] It wasn't too far. I took him to my first WM ball with me February 13th, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:30:41] So they had like social activities, it seems like.

**Cobbett:** [00:30:45] Oh yes. Yeah, there was a bowling alley on base. The NCO Club was there. I am trying to think. They had a nice lake to go fishing. So we used to go out on the lake and he'd go fishing and I'd read a book. I tried fishing, but I'm just not a fisherman, but it would be nice. You'd be out in the sun. It was a nice afternoon. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love Boones Farm or something. [Laughter]

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:31:11] Yeah, we got married and like ten days after, they sent me on a--

**Cobbett:** [00:31:16] --a Med cruise.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:31:18] a NATO operation of Turkey,

**Cobbett:** [00:31:20] Greece and Spain, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:31:21] Oh, so this is right after [you got married]?

**Cobbett:** [00:31:23] Yeah, we got married on a Sunday and he left the following Sunday. Yeah. During Hurricane Ginger, he was out in the Atlantic Ocean on an LST [Landing Ship Tank], was it?

**Cohen:** [00:31:34] Oh my goodness.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:31:35] Yeah, LST.

**Cobbett:** [00:31:35] And it knocked out the radar and they were adrift in the sea for a while. There was fuel oil everywhere and vomit. [Gary adds: It was bad!]

**Cohen:** [00:31:44] What, did you know that he was at sea when it was--?

**Cobbett:** [00:31:47] I knew he was at sea, but in those days there was no way to contact. So I think, [turns to Gary] were you in Spain when you got that doctor to call me? How did you contact me? I can't remember.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:31:56] I was in Greece.

**Cobbett:** [00:31:57] Greece, yeah. So it was quite a few days before I heard anything, you know, anything. But I didn't know all that was going on because it's not like it was shared. So it wasn't until after the fact that I found out all about that.

**Cohen:** [00:32:11] Yeah.

**Cobbett:** [00:32:14] But that was much better. I mean, the Hurricane Ginger did land, so I was, you know, stateside and [it] tore up quite a few things too. So. You know, it was scary.

**Cohen:** [00:32:25] How did you communicate both with each other and also with your family or sisters?

**Cobbett:** [00:32:31] You wrote letters. I still have my letters. Yeah. You used to mail back then you wrote letters. Or once in a while, you'd get a phone call.

**Cohen:** [00:32:39] Yeah, yeah. Did your, did your families come to the wedding? Were they able to?

**Cobbett:** [00:32:46] Yeah. [To Gary] Did your sister come? I can't remember.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:32:48] No.

**Cobbett:** [00:32:49] Yeah. My mother and my stepfather, my sisters came down. Yes. It was just a small wedding. We got married in the base chapel.

**Cohen:** [00:32:55] Oh, that's nice. So going back to your work as a computer operator, what was it like? I think you'd mentioned that this was a time when key punch cards were sorted and separated by a card reader panel that required programming by hand for each job. So it was this. Were you involved in programming?

**Cobbett:** [00:33:15] Yeah. So you would take this, this panel. It was a board. It was like an 80 by 80 panel. And if you think about the old telephone operators, how they'd plug the cords in the circuit board? Well, you would plug the cords in the specific slots on this board. And that would cause, I guess, the electrical impulse to read the card where the data was and to sort them. And then this machine had these different slots. There were probably twenty different slots and the cards would get sorted into those slots depending on what you were sorting them for alphabetically or numerically, which is about all it could do back then. Then you'd collect them together and you'd have to stack them in the card reader. But you had to keep the humidity low in the room because otherwise the cards would warp or stick and you had to keep it cool in the computer room so the computers wouldn't overheat. Because even though they were these giant machines, they threw off a ton of heat. So you were always freezing to death in that computer room. [Laughter]

**Cobbett:** [00:34:07] Because we had to wear a skirt, you know, and it's short sleeves, in the summer short sleeves, and there were no sweaters and things like that. So you froze.

**Cohen:** [00:34:13] You froze. What were some of your other responsibilities in this job?

**Cobbett:** [00:34:20] Well, as I advanced, I got to get away from the card sorter and card reader and got up into the computer room where I would operate the computer itself. You would have to tell the computer to read the cards in the card reader, and then you'd have to tell the computer to put that data on the tape. You'd have to tell the computer to sort that data on the tape. Then you'd have to tell the computer to print out that [sorted] data on there. Then you'd have to take that paper, which was the paper that was connected with the ridges on the side. You'd have to separate those pieces of paper and collate them into book form. So it was it was not as as people think of computers today. It was, it was almost like secretarial duties practically. Yeah. Because the programs you had, the programs were actually fed into the computer body by tape, too. The disk wasn't invented, the microchip wasn't invented. It was way before then. You think of the *Twilight Zone*, where they show the computer with the lights beeping on the console.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:35:18] About the size of this room, too.

**Cobbett:** [00:35:18] Yeah.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:35:19] Big computer.

[00:35:22] Yeah... Did you like that? Like, were you excited by being involved in new technology?

**Cobbett:** [00:35:29] Yeah, I thought it was pretty interesting. I really did. When I got out of the Marine Corps, I actually took some programming courses, but it was COBOL and Fortran and BAL, which probably no one's even heard of. I mean, it's so obsolete. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:35:43] As an undergraduate people were taking these courses.

**Cobbett:** [00:35:46] Oh, okay, all right. So I always had leaned more towards science, so I actually was studying to be a chemical engineer, and then my husband got hurt. So I took what credit hours, I had and went to nursing school and became an RN.

**Cohen:** [00:35:59] Oh, okay, okay. So did--? I mean I don't know if I should ask you this or not but did you get hurt while in service?

**Cobbett:** [00:36:08] No, no. Some of the side effects, though, of why he didn't heal, I think, are from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. But that's a whole 'nother issue. [Gentle laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:36:22] How did you move up the ranks?

**Cobbett:** [00:36:26] Well, and actually I was when I was looking at my DD214, I was put up for meritorious corporal and meritorious sergeant. But because-- I received meritorious corporal. I can't remember if that's listed on there or not. But meritorious sergeant, they didn't even list it on there because I didn't get it. I got it ahead of time because I made sergeant under three [years]. I made sergeant in two years and eight months. But I, I noticed on my, like my husband, they list all meritorious masts things like that, and I don't see any of that listed on mine. So maybe I guess it didn't count. I don't know. I moved up the ranks pretty well because usually, you can make corporal in three years. But my husband made sergeant under two years. I made

sergeant under three, which is still pretty quick. Yeah. And as you get promoted, you get more responsibility and you get less [hassle] ... Like when they would have field days at the barracks, by the time I was a corporal, I just got to watch and tell people what to do. I didn't have to do that actual raking for the 'garden party', for the 'field day', I'd say, "Okay, you clean this room and you clean that room", and I would get to help with inspections sometime. My first sergeant really liked me because my husband fixed her air conditioner, so she liked me a lot. So it was easy for me in the barracks, then. I did, though, even though I was married and lived off base, I had to maintain a rack in the barracks. I always had to have one. I had to stand my inspections there. Yes.

**Cohen:** [00:37:46] So how would you, right the word is like, manage [emphasized] the women that would have been under your authority?

**Cobbett:** [00:37:54] That was basically when I was in the barracks. So I would have duty NCO. And that's a twenty-four-hour duty where you make sure all the doors are locked. You make sure who's ever on fire watch is doing what they're supposed to [be] doing. You try to solve any problems that happen. It's more of a like a guard type of a duty. I didn't walk around with a weapon or anything, but that that was a twenty-four hour [duty] and as you advanced in rank, you would get more and more of that.

**Cohen:** [00:38:23] Umm hmm. And what was your impression just of the of the Cherry Point Air Station in general with all the different aircraft and so on?

**Cobbett:** [00:38:35] It was a beautiful air station. It really was. My one friend, Kathleen, she worked with the air wing. She was the secretary in the office. So we went there one time and we had a picture taken. I should have brought that and I didn't think of it, but mostly... To me, it was like going to work every day and doing my job and wearing a uniform and knowing military protocol and serving my country. I never really thought of it as anything out of the ordinary until I was out of the Marine Corps and in the civilian world and realized it was pretty remarkable. It was kind of cool.

**Cohen:** [00:39:14] Yeah, yeah. After that, after the fact.

**Cobbett:** [00:39:16] Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:39:22] I don't know how to put it but were you ever concerned about being deployed to Vietnam or--?

**Cobbett:** [00:39:26] They didn't really send women back then. I think in all of Vietnam, there were twenty-one for the entirety of female Marines over in Vietnam, and they were more in things like communication and that sort of thing. They didn't really, weren't put in combat situations per se. It just didn't happen.

**Cohen:** [00:39:50] Out of curiosity, after meeting your husband and hearing about Vietnam, like did your opinion stay the same? Did they change? About the Vietnam War and so on?

**Cobbett:** [00:40:02] Well, you kind of have several opinions about it, I mean, first of all, these young men, even though they were drafted, they still love their country as much as anyone else and they went over there to do a good job. But the fact that our our country is interfering in other countries' business? It was communism. So it's not the same as, say, social re-engineering someplace in the Middle East. I mean, these communists were slaughtering people and we were trying to help them. Yeah. So it's mixed feelings about it. I don't think it was managed as well as it could have been. But they're honorable people, these veterans that served in Vietnam, and they need to be recognized as such.

**Cohen:** [00:40:45] Do you think there's more recognition now than [before]?

**Cobbett:** [00:40:48] Oh, definitely. And I think part of it has to do with my generation. I know one of the reasons I'm involved in so many veterans organizations is because I never want another veteran to come home and feel unwelcome or unloved by this country like our Vietnam veterans did. And as long as I'm around, it's not going to happen when anyone's around me! [Both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:41:08] Well, I remember speaking to a Vietnam War veteran. He said that kept meeting more and more people coming from the States. He would hear more and more hostile

reactions that he actually felt concerned returning home. And it was, you know, [he was] relieved that this father hugged him right away.

**Cobbett:** [00:41:26] So, yeah, exactly. Oh, I had a friend, you know, who was walking to the airport, people threw things at him like winded up pieces of paper and stuff and calling him, "You're a baby killer!" That's terrible. Yeah. So I mean, families welcomed their individual people, but yeah, it was nasty, then. And so I noticed a lot of times when we're out now, even people will go up to my husband and say, "Thank you for your service." Of course, they don't say it to me. Not that I'm looking for it, but they just don't expect a woman to be in the Marine Corps. [States ironically]. Now, I have my Eagle, Globe, and Anchor [emblem of US Marines] earrings on. I've got my shirt on, you know, it doesn't matter. [Cohen laughs] I'm a support group. I'm kind of used to it by now. Whatever. I know what I did.

**Cohen:** [00:42:03] Yeah, right. That's right. So what happens after your, your active duty finished?

**Cobbett:** [00:42:13] Then like I said, I went to school and took some programming classes, but they really didn't click. I was still taking biology and chemistry at the same time. So then when my husband got injured, well, I had my first child then and then my husband got injured. So that's when I became an RN. And quite frankly, that was the best thing that ever happened to me. I never in my life thought about being an RN, but I love it. I loved being an RN. It was wonderful. And then I went to the ER and I found my place in life. It was just great.

**Cohen:** [00:42:40] It's great. Where did you study and where were you living?

**Cobbett:** [00:42:45] In Lemont. I got my associate's degree from Joliet Junior College of Nursing, and then I got my baccalaureate degree from Louis University, and I actually got the Academic Excellence Award from the College of Nursing, which I'm kind of proud of that. I worked at Palos Hospital for many years in telemetry and then the ER. I got my trauma nurse license at Christ Hospital, so I was licensed at the State of Illinois. I'm retired now, so a lot of my licenses are lapsed.

**Cohen:** [00:43:13] Sure, sure, you had a good, good career.



**Cobbett:** [00:43:15] Yes, I loved it. It was wonderful. I think you have that nurturing gene inside you, and when you're an RN, you get to actually use it for the public, too. Not that there weren't frustrating times-- [Laughs]

**Cohen:** [00:43:28] No, no, no.

**Cobbett:** [00:43:29] --But overall, it's wonderful.

[00:43:30] Very, very caring profession.

**Cobbett:** [00:43:31] Yeah, I love nurses. I don't know if we're supposed to be looking in the camera or not but--

**Cohen:** [00:43:36] It's all good. What was I going to say? Well, you mentioned that you had, I think you have a son and a daughter. [Cobbett affirms: Yes]. And and you mentioned, I think that your son enlisted in the Marines, your daughter in the Army as a combat medic. Your son-in-law served several tours in Afghanistan. So I guess my question is at a time when less than one percent of the population serve, how did you and your husband succeed in inspiring your children?

**Cobbett:** [00:44:09] You know, I'm not sure. I think probably we just transmitted to them that we love our country and we've always had our flags out. We've always recognized holidays, not just as a time to barbecue, but we would actually go and visit gravesites and put flags out. I mean, we joined the VFW right when we got home. So I've been on VFW Auxiliary Member for forty-five years. Gary has been a member for forty years. So Memorial Day and Veterans Day, we would go out with the ladies and the men and we would, you know, have a flag ceremony in front of the monuments. So I think our children saw that. And even when I was working, when I couldn't be as as as active, I still... those two holidays [were always important]. And, of course, the Marine Corps birthday, that never gets forgotten. That's November 10th, 1775.

**Cobbett:** [00:44:56] Wow, and [one of] the oldest ones [from the service branches]. So so what would you do on a typical commemoration of the Marine Birthday?

**Cobbett:** [00:45:02] Oh, there's always a ball somewhere. There's balls all over the place, you know? So sometimes if you can't get out, you just raise a glass and say, "Cheers." But when November 10th comes around, just check out, just type it in and you'll see all the different places. There's probably fifteen, twenty of them, from fancy balls to just casual, which is what they should be, is casual because Tun Tavern...And the rumor has it, it started in Tun Tavern and it's not actually legit. No one knows, but it started at a tavern recruiting. Yeah...

**Cohen:** [00:45:31] Would you have liked to have been in combat? Like, I think last week I was reading that a female soldier became part of the Naval Special Warfare combatant craft crewmen like the people who transport the [US Navy] SEALs [Sea Air Land] and have their own special missions. Like would you have liked to have been in combat?

**Cobbett:** [00:45:56] You know, I don't begrudge anyone going into combat, but probably because my nature is more toward nurturing, I would only have wanted to be in combat to fix people that were hurt. [Cohen affirms: Yeah] I don't know that I necessarily...I never really thought about combat per se. I know how to handle a weapon just because my father taught me. My husband taught me. But no. It's not something that I would lean to. I don't care if it's someone else's choice but no, that's not something I would lean to. If it was required, which I thought it should have been, all military should know how to handle a weapon, I wish I would have been taught in the Marine Corps. But as far as going into combat, that didn't really enter my head. I didn't carry the weight.

**Cohen:** [00:46:41] Yeah, yeah, I hear what you're saying. Which message would you like to convey to young people of today in particular, maybe young women?

**Cobbett:** [00:46:53] Be true to yourself. Be strong, do the best you can do. Don't give up. Don't let anyone tell you you can't do something if it's something you really want to do and be an honorable person.

**Cohen:** [00:47:06] So, as you know, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library is dedicated to the Citizen Soldier. We collect artifacts, stories. So what does the term Citizen Soldier mean to you?

**Cobbett:** [00:47:18] It means an ordinary regular person that loves their country and wants to give back to it in return.

**Cohen:** [00:47:26] And is there something that we didn't discuss today that you would like to address?

**Cobbett:** [00:47:32] Oh, I forgot to talk about suicide awareness. I'm the veterans and family support chairman and I, I'm very concerned about veterans' suicide. In fact, I was just in a wake last weekend, not this one past the one before this one weekend past was Korean War Veterans Memorial. A young man, thirty-five years old, took his life and it's just heartbreaking.

**Cohen:** [00:54:07] Would you like to also like show up the the pin to the camera?

**Cobbett:** [00:56:55] This is a pin that we wear on our shirts at the auxiliary when we go to meetings to make people aware and to keep suicide in the forefront of their minds. A lot of times I find in just talking to people who deal with it on a professional level that they look at it as a sign of weakness to talk about mental health problems and depression and not fitting in in society. And there's different reasons. people get depressed to the point that they think taking their life is the only option. They feel trapped in a situation they don't know how to escape. So I'm hoping that when we wear these pins that the people will become more aware of it and and try to figure out a way to actually stop the cycle, decrease this cycle. It's not going down, and it should be as important as, you know, safety car seats for babies in the seat as veteran suicide. I mean, these people gave their lives for, you know, three years, five years, twenty years, whatever it is, they signed a blank check that says, "You know, you can do with me what you will while I'm serving", and we need to remember that. We need to take care of them. So that's just was my little spiel about veteran suicide. There's a program... General is an Air Force, retired Air Force General. He has a wonderful program and I'm sorry, I can't think of the name right now, but I will email it to you because he speaks all around the country.

**Cobbett:** [00:56:24][ **Well,**] it's just that still, after all this time, we have twenty two veterans committing suicide on average a day. I'm chairman of the Veterans and Family Support Committee for the 19th District of the VFW Auxiliary. And it just breaks my heart that people are still talking about it.

**Cohen:** [00:58:25] What do you think the average person can do to help support veterans to decrease depression? Or should they? Should there be more government programs like going to, transitioning to civilian workforce and so on?

**Cobbett:** [00:58:39] Well, I know there are ways that the government is trying to help, but it's almost an individual problem. I mean, would you feel comfortable talking to a stranger about a personal issue that was bothering you? No. I think people themselves need to be aware of what's going on with their individual social group, family group, community group and and observe if someone seems a little more distant than usual or someone doesn't talk about something. Or if a subject is brought up, they seem real reluctant or they stammer and hem and haw, try to bring them out, you know, one on one. Private conversations are the best. And if you do have a clue that someone's having problems, either encourage them to get help with a professional or take them yourself. Sometimes you just have to take the bull by the horns and say, "Please let me help you, I care. I don't want you to die." You have to say it as bluntly as that. Yeah, just save that life. And everyone doesn't have the same experiences. So sometimes talking to one person might not work. But talking to someone else who went through a similar experience is a huge help.

**Cohen:** [00:59:47] Yes. Yes, that's true. That's true. Did you want to put your hat on?

**Cobbett:** [00:59:56] Put my cover on? Yeah and talk about it a little bit.

**Cobbett:** [00:59:58] All right. So this is my cover for Women Marines Association, the Blanche Ford Osborne chapter. Stephanie Kiffewitz, who is the representative for I Think, the 81st District in Illinois. She's our current president. We have because of Covid, our meetings have been kind of jacked up, so we haven't really met. We've been Zoom meeting. And actually, tonight, one of our youngest members is going to be shipped out overseas. So we're going to have a little Zoom goodbye for her, Elly? Hi Elly.

**Cobbett:** [01:00:32] So that's nice. This is my name tag for that one. This is my two page Marine's name tag. This is my VFW auxiliary name tag. This is my American Legion name tag.

And this is my Lamont Fire Protection District name tag. And this, these are my ribbons. These are my ribbons, good conduct and national defense but they're my--

**Cobbett, Gary:** [01:01:04] Devil dog?

**Cobbett:** [01:01:06] No, that's that's not a real ribbon. [Pointing to other ribbons] These are real. These are real, you know?

**Cohen:** [01:01:10] Yeah, this is my forty-five years in the Auxiliary pin and this is my favorite pin. This the American flag in the Marine flag.

**Cohen:** [01:01:20] Oh, wow. And you'll also be participating in the Honor Flight, the Women's Honor Flight, the HerStory.

**Cobbett:** [01:01:36] I'm hoping I will be I haven't gotten the date yet, actually. So I don't know if maybe I postponed till the next one.

**Cohen:** [01:01:42] I don't, I don't know the details but I'm sure that if there was a date that everybody would have been informed, I am in touch with Ginny Narsete but I don't know the details of the trip.

**Cobbett:** [01:01:52] Yeah, I was. I'm really looking forward to that. We had our 100th anniversary for the Women Marines Association in Washington, DC in 2018. But we were, it was a convention, so I was basically in the hotel the whole time going to meetings. And, you know, so I didn't get to see Washington, D.C. So I'm really looking forward to this trip because I want to go around and see the monuments and the the memorials.

#### **CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW [49:13-50:36]**

**Cohen:** [00:49:13] Yeah. Okay, so, so I mean, I think you talked about before, but maybe to sum up, would you like to say in what ways being in the Marine Corps helped you or [how it contributed to] the rest of your life, civilian life?

**Cobbett:** [00:49:31] Sure, it helped me. It helped develop my character and make me a more a more, more determined person, a person who saw responsibility as not something that was an option. It taught me to be proud of a good job and to always try to do a good job. It taught me to be proud to be a Marine. It further increased my love of my country and how wonderful it is and what wonderful opportunities we have here. Just keep trying. Sometimes things don't always work out, but you just have to keep trying to never give up. "Improvise, adapt and overcome." [Marines are trained to improvise, adapt, and overcome all obstacles in all situations]

**Cohen:** [00:50:14] Improvise, adapt and overcome. Yeah, yeah.

**Cobbett:** [00:50:17] And Semper Fidelis.<sup>1</sup>

**Cohen:** [00:50:20] Well, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I would like to thank you for your service and for sharing your story today. Here's a challenge [coin].

**Cohen:** [00:50:29] Thank you, Leah, thank you.

**Cohen:** [00:50:32] You're welcome.

**Cobbett:** [00:50:33] This is wonderful.

**Cohen:** [00:50:36] You're welcome. Thank you.

**Cobbett:** [00:51:03] ... I'll go through my little bag of goodies, I brought in. You can show me. Oh I brought my cover. I was going to put it on and I forgot. Oh,

**Cohen:** [00:51:20] Okay, so, you know, can I take a picture of you either wearing it or holding you? My phone is starting up again, I turned it off because I didn't want it to be on.

**Cobbett:** [00:51:28] I brought my ribbons.

**Cohen:** [00:51:29] Oh, okay so that's--

**Cobbett:** [00:51:31] I brought my name tags about my organization.

**Cohen:** [00:51:33] Oh, that's cool...Sorry, [my phone is] just slowly waking up. And I'll just...

**Cobbett:** [00:51:42] This is a very nice coin.

**Cohen:** [00:51:46] I think so, too. I noticed the idea of representing people of different eras of service. And, you know--

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<sup>1</sup> The US Marine motto means, "Always Faithful."

**Cobbett:** [00:51:52] And it looks like they actually have a woman in there. Wow!

**Cohen:** [00:51:53] Yes. Yes, so. It was apparently done by this artist James Dietz. You know who and and you'll see like a larger version of it on the floor at the entrance of our, right behind our desk, in front of the desk, rather.

**Cobbett:** [00:52:10] Yeah, it was very easy to find this museum... I was going to show this to Gary. Oh, I forgot. Oh, you're wired up? Yeah. I don't want to tear anything. Oh, I forgot to talk about suicide awareness. I'm the veterans of family support chairman and I, I'm very concerned about veterans suicide. In fact, I was just in a wake last weekend, not this one past the one before this one weekend test was Korean War Veterans Memorial. A young man, thirty-five years old, took his life and it's just heartbreaking. There's a wonderful, I think he's a general in the Air Force that has a wonderful program that...Shoot, I was going to talk about that.

**Cohen:** [00:53:22] I mean, do you want to? We can always edit of the in-between part.

**Cobbett:** [00:53:26] You know, I need to find my phone and make sure I pronounce his name correctly. Okay, so I'm going to-

**Cohen:** [00:53:35] Okay, so I'm going to--

**Cohen:** [00:53:36] You know, let's.

**Cobbett:** [00:53:37] I moved out of position. I don't even know what I did with the camera here, no microphone. Ok.

**Cohen:** [00:53:44] You still have the mic, and I'll just tell them that we're going to stay a bit longer.

**Cobbett:** [00:53:48] Ok. See? I.

**Cohen:** [00:54:07] Would you like to also like show up the the pin to the camera?

**Cobbett:** [00:54:12] Yes. I want to make sure I pronounce his name correctly. Ok, shoot.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:54:20] Is this [Pritzker Military Museum & Library] named after the governor?

**Cohen:** [00:54:24] This is actually the governor's cousin, Colonel Jennifer Pritzker, who served twenty seven years in the Illinois National Guard. She originally had a personal library of about 8000 books in military history and sort of turned it into a library and it grew from there and this is [now PMML] [Gary comments: Cool]

**Cobbett:** [00:54:52] And if I can't find his name, I'll butcher it and I don't want to do that. Shoot.

**Cohen:** [00:54:56] Uh, do you want to [pause]?

**Cobbett:** [00:55:03] I'm trying to think the name of the organization. I thought it was bringing too much, and I thought, 'Oh, you'll remember that you don't have to write it down again.'

**Cobbett:** [00:55:15] I know...Suicide Awareness... But I can't find it starts with a "Y"

**Cohen:** [00:56:12] So could you talk about the situation and then email me the name and at least in the transcript part, I'll put a footnote or a parenthesis with the exact name.

**Cobbett:** [00:56:24] Yeah, Okay, so here we go...Well, it's just that still, after all this time, we have twenty two veterans committing suicide on average a day. I'm chairman of the Veterans of Family Support Committee for the 19th District of the VFW Auxiliary. And it just breaks my heart that people are still talking about it. My microphone, my pin.

**Cobbett, Gary:** [00:56:51] Do you need your mic up there?

**Cohen:** [00:56:53] The mic is pretty close to you.

**Cobbett:** [00:56:55] This is a pin that we wear on our shirts at the auxiliary when we go to meetings to make people aware and to keep suicide in the forefront of their minds. A lot of times I find in just talking to people who deal with it on a professional level that they look at it as a sign of weakness to talk about mental health problems and depression and not fitting in in society. And there's different reasons. While white people get depressed to the point that they think taking their life is the only option. They feel trapped in a situation they don't know how to escape. So I'm hoping that when we wear these pins that the people will become more aware of it and and try to figure out a way to actually stop the cycle, decrease this cycle. It's not going down, and it should be as important as, you know, safety car seats for babies in the seat as veteran suicide. I mean, these people gave their lives for, you know, three years, five years, twenty years, whatever it is, they signed a blank check that says, "You know, you can do with me what you will while I'm serving", and we need to remember that. We need to take care of them. So that's just was my little spiel about veteran suicide. There's a program... General is an Air Force, retired Air Force General. He has a wonderful program and I'm sorry, I can't think of the name right now, but I will email it to you because he speaks all around the country.

**Cohen:** [00:58:25] What do you think the average person can do to help support veterans to decrease depression? Or should they? Should there be more government programs like going to, transitioning to civilian workforce and so on?

**Cobbett:** [00:58:39] Well, I know there are ways that the government is trying to help, but it's it's almost an individual problem. I mean, would you feel comfortable talking to a stranger about a personal issue that was bothering you? No. I think people themselves need to be aware



of what's going on with their individual social group, family group, community group and and observe if someone seems a little more distant than usual or someone doesn't talk about something. Or if a subject is brought up, they seem real reluctant or they stammer and hem and haw, try to bring them out, you know, one on one. Private conversations are the best. And if you do have a clue that someone's having problems, either encourage them to get help with a professional or take them yourself. Sometimes you just have to take the bull by the horns and say, "Please let me help you, I care. I don't want you to die." You have to say it as bluntly as that. Yeah, just save that life. And everyone doesn't have the same experiences. So sometimes talking to one person might not work. But talking to someone else who went through a similar experience is a huge help.

**Cohen:** [00:59:47] Yes. Yes, that's true. That's true. Did you want to put your hat on?

**Cobbett:** [00:59:56] Put my cover on? Yeah and talk about it a little bit.

**Cobbett:** [00:59:58] All right. So this is my cover for Women Marines Association, the Blanche Ford Osborne chapter. Stephanie Kiffewitz, who is the representative for I Think, the 81st District in Illinois. She's our current president. We have because of Covid, our meetings have been kind of jacked up, so we haven't really met. We've been Zoom meeting. And actually, tonight, one of our youngest members is going to be shipped out overseas. So we're going to have a little Zoom goodbye for her, Elly? Hi Elly.

**Cobbett:** [01:00:32] So that's nice. This is my name tag for that one. This is my two page Marine's name tag. This is my VFW auxiliary name tag. This is my American Legion name tag. And this is my Lamont Fire Protection District name tag. And this, these are my ribbons. These are my ribbons, good conduct and national defense but they're my--

**Cobbett, Gary:** [01:01:04] Devil dog?

**Cobbett:** [01:01:06] No, that's that's not a real ribbon. [Pointing to other ribbons] These are real. These are real, you know?

**Cohen:** [01:01:10] Yeah, this is my forty-five years in the Auxiliary pin and this is my favorite pin. This the American flag in the Marine flag.

**Cohen:** [01:01:20] Oh, wow. And you'll also be participating in the Honor Flight, the Women's Honor Flight, the HerStory.

**Cobbett:** [01:01:36] I'm hoping I will be I haven't gotten the date yet, actually. So I don't know if maybe I postponed till the next one.

**Cohen:** [01:01:42] I don't, I don't know the details but I'm sure that if there was a date that everybody would have been informed, I am in touch with Ginny Narsete but I don't know the details of the trip.

**Cobbett:** [01:01:52] Yeah, I was. I'm really looking forward to that. We had our 100th anniversary for the Women Marines Association in Washington, DC in 2018. But we were, it was a convention, so I was basically in the hotel the whole time going to meetings. And, you know, so I didn't get to see Washington, D.C. So I'm really looking forward to this trip because I want to go around and see the monuments and the the memorials. Yeah, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, yeah.

**Cobbett:** [01:02:22] This is going to be edited in. So we're technically done, right?

**Cohen:** [01:02:24] Yeah. So I mean, so I think this is this is fine. Is there anything else, though, that we want to say or.

**Cobbett:** [01:02:33] No. Other than I don't know if I can show this on camera...So after Gary and I got out, we rode in a parade together and there's a they just, you know, back in those days, they just took snapshots and stuff.

**Cobbett:** [01:02:50] So. If I can show this. Oh, here's Vietnam, it's not what I wanted to show you. There's a picture, we both are in uniform. It's one of the few photographs I have where we're both in uniform.

**Cohen:** [01:03:05] Oh, that's good, that's wonderful.

**Cobbett:** [01:03:08] So I was going to let you put that on the website. I don't know how they can see it.

**Cohen:** [01:03:11] Well, that would be great. Do you you want me to take.

**Cobbett:** [01:03:14] Well, I was going to scan some of these with you. I was going to go through with them and show you which ones you'd want.

**Cohen:** [01:03:20] Okay. Okay.

**Cobbett:** [01:03:21] I wish that the camera would be off me. I wish we could just turn so we're not going to just move to another. It's over. Please. Yeah, OK, bye everyone. Ok, so, so OK, so it's not really this is part, it's good. So this is a wonderful photo. Thank you. I thought I was going to scan these and send them to you and then this is something I thought was cute.

**Cobbett:** [01:03:54] Now this is, you know, like I said, we celebrate the Marine Corps birthday every year. So in 1971, this is a program, but here's on the bottom with the bottom, the gifts Cigarettes for the men.

**Cobbett:** [01:04:07] So here's the official fact that the government is pushing. There's the cigarettes right there. I thought that was hysterical.

**Cohen:** [01:04:13] Oh, that's funny. Yeah,

**Cobbett:** [01:04:16] And then, so this was a post graduation from boot camp photo.

**Cohen:** [01:04:23] These are. These are wonderful.

**Cobbett:** [01:04:24] And this is Gary in Vietnam. This is Da Nang,

**Cohen:** [01:04:32] So here, okay, so here will be I'll be honest. I mean, Gary, would you like to do an interview yourself? Would you be? Would you be interested in doing an interview?

**Cobbett, Gary:** [01:04:43] I'm not that talkative, so.

**Cobbett:** [01:04:45] He doesn't react like I do.

**Cohen:** [01:04:46] Well, that's okay. We have a lot of different styles. I mean, one person that goes on for three hours, another one hour, you know, whatever.