

*Editors Note: Below is a story about Robert Jordan, Public Affairs
Leadership Department instructor at DINFOS by a Basic Public Affairs
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Ashes made ghosts. Buildings exploded, heated, burned, demolished, and pulverized like volcanic ash. Bodies engulfed and blinded emerged. They looked like ghosts.

For 24 years, images of grey ghosts in the shadows haunt over piles of bombed buildings on our televisions. Every day the television delivers new horrific images, some domestic, some foreign, yet they all affect us. Some images erode us subtly like landscapes while others change us with the force of fire.

There is no question that our lives are shaped and will continue to be shaped by unforeseeable circumstances. We become who we are, what we stand for and what we die for, fated or not, it is ultimately significant.

One of the most significant things that shaped retired Marine Corps Major Robert T. Jordan's life and career was the terrorist attack in Beirut, Lebanon on the Marine Corps barracks Oct. 23, 1983. The bombing killed 241 service members.

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Jordan kept a detailed journal during the months he lived in Beirut. Seated in his office here at the Defense Information School he gazed down at the faded, green journal that is barely bigger than his hands. It helps him recall more accurately the past. He wears black: a black shirt with a gold-embroidered Marine Corp insignia, black slacks with a well-polished belt buckle bearing the same eagle, globe and anchor as his shirt, and finally black polished boots.

His eyes methodically scanned the pages of dates and names, times and locations, until he found the notes that coincided with the story he told.

“Aug. 28 we had taken my team down to Martyr Square to get a team picture,” said Jordan now a contract instructor in the Public Affairs Leadership Department at DINFOS.

He added that after returning around 2 p.m., the team while relaxing was attacked by small arms fire from the surrounding area.

The Marines were in a position that inhibited them from fully engaging the enemy, he said.

“It became very much like World War I. We were dug into trenches with bunkers. Sandbags became a valued resource,” added the Vietnam veteran.

Unfortunately, the violence continued to escalate months later into the largest post-Vietnam casualties for the Marine Corps.

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On the morning of Oct. 23, suicide bombers hijacked a truck at Beirut International Airport and loaded it with nearly 12,000 pounds of explosives. They rammed the truck through the security gates into the four-story barracks. The explosion leveled the 1st Battalion, 8th Marine headquarters.

The Director of the Beirut Joint Public Affairs Bureau, Jordan, was ripped from sleep that morning.

“I was 100 yards from where the truck bomb went off. It blew in all the windows in our building and imploded the doors. There was glass and mortar everywhere,” he said.

Jordan’s team responded immediately to help the victims. Not only would he be one of the first on-scene but he would be the first to tell the world what had happened.

“I knew that every word I spoke was being measured all around the world. I was doing live interviews to Canada and Australia and sometimes they'd be interviewing people like Arafat, live just before or right after me,” said Jordan.

It was not until November that the Marine Corps relieved its public affairs team with a new one. Retired Col. Keith Oliver, department chair of the PALD here, was one of the public affairs officers assigned to Lebanon after the 1983 terrorist attack.

The unforeseeable circumstances of the bombing crossed Oliver and Jordan's paths again. In 1973, when Oliver began his career in

public affairs Jordan interviewed him as part of the Marine Corps' requirements to lateral career fields.

“It was still a dangerous place for sure,” said Oliver referring to the situation when he arrived in January 1984 to begin work as Deputy of Public Affairs. They still had Marines killed in action despite the amount of time passed since the attack, he said.

“I knew I was going into an area of the world that was volatile,” he added. Like Jordan, Oliver carried away from Beirut a new worldview.

The two friends through the Beirut Veterans of America, an association founded by Jordan, continue to honor the service members that lost their lives. The BVA will hold their 24th annual ceremony Oct. 23 at the Beirut Memorial in Jacksonville, N.C.

Jordan replaced his faded, green journal to the shelf. His keen memory recalled a haunting story that never seems to conclude.

“Everything was covered by a very fine, pulverized, grey-cement, which made everybody look like ghosts,” said Jordan recalling the victims struggling helplessly to emerge from the bombed barracks.