

Rangers, Hank Whitman continues to thrive

By [Joel Searls](#) Updated on **Jan 2, 2022**

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SUMMARY

Former Marine Sergeant, retired Texas Ranger and film producer, Hank Whitman, spent time with the We Are The Mighty and...

Former Marine Sergeant, retired Texas Ranger and film producer, Hank Whitman, spent time with the We Are The Mighty and discussed how his time in the Corps was foundational in his success in multiple career fields.

He shared, “I am very fond of all our servicemen and women...as Marines, we are at a higher level. I can pick a Marine out in a room any day just by their demeanor and how they carry themselves. I don’t quite see that with other military branches and I certainly don’t mean that disrespectfully. Marines carry themselves differently. They have a distinctive lingo...it is a brotherhood and sisterhood that I have never seen replicated anywhere.”

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highly decorated. Whitman's father served in the 102nd Infantry Division and was part of Patton's team that did some heavy fighting in Europe. His father worked from sunup to sundown as a mechanic, a skill set he learned in the Army. His mother, at times, worked two jobs as a waitress and at a dry cleaner. They didn't take vacations or have a lot of money to do things like that. His father did drink a lot with many of Whitman's friends having lived in similar households where their fathers drank a lot after fighting in World War II. He shared, "This was before PTSD was ever coined...I finally came to discover my father had severe PTSD and there was nowhere for World War II veterans to go for help." He discovered this during his sophomore year in high school. He came home from school and saw his dad watching a TV report about soldiers dying in Vietnam. The news was reporting the daily body count. He said of his father while watching the news report, "I was looking at him and he was actually tearing up..."

Whitman decided to join the service near the end of high school, and he told his father about his decision. His father responded, "That would probably be a good thing for you to do." His parents could not afford to send him to college nor was he ready for it. He shared of his time in high school, "I never really applied myself in the classroom, but I was active in rodeoing (bull riding) and playing high school football." He saw a Marine recruiter, a gunnery sergeant, carrying posters in the local mall close to a trophy shop where he worked part-time. He approached the Marine and asked, "How do I join the Marine Corps?" This caught the gunny off guard as it was at the end of the Vietnam

his business card with Whitman and said, “I am not going to take you until you graduate from high school.” That gunny later retired as the sergeant major of recruiting for the USMC. Whitman managed to stay in touch with him and Whitman has a photo of him with the gunny after graduating boot camp and then a photo with him from about 24 years ago in Washington, DC.

Whitman requested permission from his high school football coaches to miss practice to swear into the Corps on the delayed entry program. His coaches permitted him to do so. The recruiter then purchased a roundtrip bus ticket for Whitman to San Antonio to which he swore in and returned to his home in Corpus Christi in time for the team’s football game the next day. By July 1, 1974 he was in boot camp and graduated on October 3. He graduated as the Platoon Honor Man. When he arrived home, his recruiter, GySgt. Hellums met him at the airport and joined Whitman’s family for dinner. He shared, “From that day on my father treated me so much differently and I think I knew it was me that had caused him grief at times. Like most teenagers, you think you know it all... We became very, very close.” Whitman stated, “...the minute I got off that bus and stepped on those yellow footprints and all those drill instructors started running up, I thought, ‘Oh my God, I just walked into my dad’s house again,’ as they all reminded me of my dad.” His relationships with his father improved remarkably. Whitman shared, “From then on we really had a wonderful relationship until the day he died.” Whitman details, “...those Marine drill instructors shaped my life the first day I got off the bus.... I have never been the same since I left MCRD San Diego as it has opened up a

Whitman said, "I have been successful in life and I attribute it all to the Marine Corps. I have testified numerous times before Texas Senate and House hearings which they ask me about my past and I always say, "the Marine Corps shaped my life more than my college education." It truly has and it's driven me from the time I stepped on those yellow footprints. I always say that. Friends have asked, 'What is your most profound memory of boot camp?' I say, "Getting off that bus and standing on those yellow footprints and then going through a living hell for about two days until they quit yelling. I remember that vividly and that was 46 years ago. What I love about the Marine Corps is they have never changed the way they do things because it has always worked. They've never changed their uniforms, the way they train ... they get the job done!"

Whitman earned the rank of sergeant at the age of 20 only after a couple of months of being a corporal. Some of his fellow platoon mates were five or six years older than him, he had to grow up quickly. He had a lot of fun in the Corps during his enlistment. He served in the communications branch of the Corps as a Field Wireman MOS.

His initial dream was to be a drill instructor after serving in the Corps a while. His first set of orders were to 29 Palms, then to Camp Pendleton, and finally, he rotated to 7th Communication Battalion, Camp Hansen, Okinawa. He had transitioned over to being an armorer when he made corporal because his unit was short of armorers. Whitman had served on the 1st MARDIV rifle team for six months since he was requested by his OIC, Major James Sanders, to run the armory.

He stayed in the armory from Camp Pendleton through his time in Okinawa and he went to armorer school to obtain his secondary MOS. While in Okinawa, Whitman was assigned to the armory, was the battalion guard chief, and in charge of protecting the battalions crypto, which is secret level communications data. He spent the first part of the day in the communications vault and then the last part of the day in the armory. He delivered daily communications updates to the battalion commander, LtCol. Peterson, as the CO requested to see Whitman before he got out of the Corps.

The CO wanted Whitman to stay in the Corps although Whitman's goal was to become a police officer. The CO wanted Whitman to reenlist and join the Enlisted Commissioning Program to attend college. Whitman was in the zone to be promoted to staff sergeant while in Okinawa. Whitman replied to the CO with, "Sir, I barely made it out of high school I am not that 'book smart'... I don't think I can make it. Had I known now that I would later obtain a master's degree...things may have been different with my decision. I didn't have the forethought then..." Whitman turned down the ECP offer from the CO, "...I regret that to this day." The CO gave Whitman his phone number before he got out of the Corps and shared this with Whitman, "I understand and wish you the best of luck. Jobs are hard to find and I want you to keep my phone number. If you can't find a job back home, you call me, and I will get you back in."

Whitman stated, "I never envisioned I would be a Texas Ranger." He spent time as a big city police officer in Corpus Christi after his time in the Corps before going back to college. He

position with the board. Over 300 people are in the process to compete for a small number of slots where he was recruited into the program. He did not make the cut the first time, but he did make it the second time. His first duty station was in El Paso and he was the only Ranger there at the time. The closest Ranger was 240 miles away from him. He covered three counties at the time as well. There was a lot of criminal activity out there in Texas and lots of bodies would get dumped by criminals out in the austere parts of the state. He stated, "Rangers work independently and make their own decisions in the field. They do, at times, call another ranger for assistance when needed. But when the Sheriff calls you, you know it is bad and you have to respond immediately." He credits the Marine Corps with his success in the Rangers with, "Being a Marine really helped me maneuver through those difficult decision-making processes. It just made it a lot easier for me."

He was promoted to lieutenant after a process of boards and he had eight Rangers working for him on cold cases. He said, "We did a great job. That team just really excelled." He was promoted to captain of Company D in San Antonio where he commanded 26-30 Rangers and two Ranger lieutenants. He shared, "It was nonstop. There were times we would have so many cases going on. It wasn't unusual to see me, the captain, suited up in the middle of a crime scene helping my field Rangers with the lieutenants because we had a lot of cases." While commanding his company in San Antonio he was made interim inspector general on top of his command duties. This involved more responsibility, travel and managing the internal affairs of the agency, which is what the inspector general

designated to create a new team of young Rangers to patrol the border and support Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). The team was much like the Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols from the US Army in Vietnam.

He gained assistance from some Special Forces operators out of a local military base to train them for about three weeks in desert training. Most of the Rangers selected had backgrounds in the military such as the Marines, Army and Air Force. Whitman and fellow Marine and Texas Ranger Captain Bob Bullock, who designed the course, put themselves through the training which was indescribably tough. The purpose of the team was to collect criminal intelligence on the Rio Grande river and return undetected. He stated, "...it was a huge success. The commitment to the team was for one year." The team is now called the Ranger Recon Team and it is still phenomenally successful. He said, "We came up with a lot of tactical training. Many of them implemented by the Marine Corps and we implemented them in the Texas Rangers, and it worked.... very proud of those accomplishments...all attributed to former Marines bringing it up to modern times." Whitman is appreciative of all the work his fellow Rangers did on behalf of the program.

The Rangers sent him to Police Staff and Command school; a high-level executive leadership program that was 10 weeks long. The program was taught by Northwestern University professors flown into Texas to teach Texas Department of Public Safety executives. He went into the program with fellow department executive leaders, some of

Whitman and his schoolmate ranger friend, Lt. Skylar Hearn, decided to start making tests based off the daily lectures. The next time they took a test the entire class almost aced it. The instructors wondered how they were doing so well and noticed the practice tests Whitman and Hearn had been creating. Initially chastised for creating the practice tests, every one of the classmates eventually passed the challenging curriculum.

He then retired and worked as a consultant for four years and does security consulting for big companies. He has 10 veterans that work for him at his firm. He got a call from Colonel Steve McGraw, the current Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety and close friend. The Texas Rangers fall under Director McCraw's command. Through Colonel McCraw, the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, requested Whitman consider returning from retirement and command the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). DFPS covers a multitude of services to include 12,750 employees and has a 3-billion-dollar budget. The governor personally called Whitman to request his services as well. In the conversation, Whitman questioned why he was being asked, especially since being a retired law enforcement officer did not necessarily qualify him to oversee critical statewide social work needs. The governor replied, "I am just looking for a different direction." Whitman has now been followed by other fellow retired Rangers that have taken over other state agencies and turned them around. He stated, "It changed my life. In any given day there are approximately 30,000 children in the States' care or supervision. Many of these children have been removed from their parents for obvious legal and safety

adopt them...it is just despicable and it still leaves me with many sleepless nights.”

With the help of his friend, Steve McCraw, his agency was able to pursue and find children who had run away from foster home placements, ensuring many had not fallen into the hands of sex traffickers. Aside from running a huge agency, working with the State’s lawmaker proved more challenging than Whitman had anticipated. He shared, “...I got to see the ugly side of some lawmakers when it came to budget allocations. Many say they want to help with proper funding of the agency but fall short. My response to them was, “Then don’t yell at my people if you don’t properly fund their efforts to keep our elderly and children safe”” He does credit working with some great lawmakers that understood what needed to be done. He described the turning point in his agency, “Getting the right executive team together was a must and it turned for the best!” According to Whitman, learning the social worker’s world was like “drinking out of a fire hose for the first six months as commissioner.”

Whitman was introduced to the legendary Hollywood actor and director Robert Duvall through veteran film actor Todd Allen. They initially began speaking on the phone 15 years ago and the friendship blossomed and is going strong. Duvall introduced Whitman to fellow Marine and former CEO of Colt Lt. Gen William Keys. He stated, “Bobby is not just my friend, he is my family.” Duvall has become a surrogate grandfather to my grandsons that live nearby in Virginia and spend a lot of time at Duvall’s fishing on his huge pond at the farm. My grandsons didn’t realize who Mr. Duvall was until they saw “Secondhand Lions”

We take time to fly up there and go do things with him.... literally, he is not one of those who must be surrounded by people of fame, he doesn't care about things like that. We have a great time with him and Luciana. She is truly his soulmate and makes sure he stays healthy. I love seeing them together...true happiness!" Whitman stated of Duvall, "...he has a very profound respect for the military where if he sees anyone in a military uniform, he will walk up and start talking to them."

Duvall wanted Whitman to work with him on the film *Wild Horses* which is about the Texas Rangers. Duvall allowed Whitman to rewrite parts of the script and add scenes that were true. Initially, the wardrobes for the film needed work so Whitman brought a lot of his own Texas Ranger equipment along to support the production. Luciana, Duvall's wife, played the role of a female Texas Ranger that was based on a real Ranger with her belts and a .45 caliber pistol being custom made. *Wild Horses* was his first time working in the movie industry and he gained a lot of respect for the workers in the industry. Duvall directed the film where initially Whitman had difficulty saying his lines. He shared of speaking to Duvall about the lines, "Bobby, I can't say these lines like this.... this is not the way I would say it." Duvall replied, "Say it however you want to say it." This initially surprised Whitman when he was working with Duvall, "...he made it so much fun!" The film was shot in 24 days while he worked with Josh Hartnett and James Franco on the shoot as well.

After finishing "Wild Horses" he was contacted by a documentary producer out of Houston about doing a project for the Texas Rangers. The project is a weekly show with

makes will go to scholarships funds, foster children or other worthy causes. There are thousands of cases to go through and only the best are being selected.

Whitman is most proud of his service in the Corps, “They instilled in me the leadership qualities I have today. Those lessons and qualities have helped me get through some of the most difficult times in my life.” He is most proud of his children and his grandchildren as his son-in-law, a former Marine gunnery sergeant and daughter, a former USAF Captain, reside outside Washington, D.C. He said his supportive wife of 30 years has helped him through some very tough times. She understands the Corps very well. Her father, MGySgt. James White retired from the Corps after serving in both Korea and Viet Nam. Whitman said, “He was one tough man!” MGySgt. White passed away in 2015. He also said, “That I was able to serve alongside and be led by some of the greatest leaders in the Marine Corps...it is all because of them. GySgt. Charles “Chuck” Baber, LtCol. Peterson, Lt. Caldwell. All those fine leaders instilled in me what I am today. Whitman considers himself, “blessed. Very blessed.”

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