

Universal Service
Interviewer

Today is August 4, 2011. We are in Far Hills, New Jersey, at the home of Jack Jacobs, and we are pleased to have you here, Jackâ€™thank you.

Jack Jacobs

Itâ€™s my pleasure.

Interviewer

Yeah. Tell me, how didâ€™when you grew up, have any idea you wanted to be an Army officer?

Jack Jacobs

No. My expectation was that Iâ€™d serve in the Army, only because my father had been in the Army in the Second World War. He fought in New Guinea in the Philippines. And I just thought that I had an obligation to serve, and I was going to serve two, three years, whateverâ€™s required, and then get out and go do something elseâ€™go to law school, become a businessman, become a professor. But military service was something that I wasâ€™I had expected myself to do, but certainly not as a career.

Interviewer

You expected it because of your fatherâ€™s service, or becauseâ€™

Jack Jacobs

Yeah.

Interviewer

Of your attitude towards the Army?

Jack Jacobs

Well, a little bit of both. I mean Iâ€™youâ€™re looking at somebody who believes in universal service. And so, I think that everybody whoâ€™s lucky enough to live in a country thatâ€™s free owes it something in the form of service to keep it free. You donâ€™t have to fix bayonets and charge the bad guys, but we doâ€™we do owe something of service and sacrifice to the country. Today, we love the troops. Everybody loves the troops. We love the troops because they donâ€™t have to be the troops. Weâ€™re fighting two and a quarter unpopular wars at the moment.

Jack Jacobs

Let me tell you, itâ€™sâ€™we donâ€™t have any riots in the streets. We did, years ago. When I was in Vietnam there were riots in the streets. You know whyâ€™â€™cause there was a draft. If we had a draft today, trust me, there would be riots in the streets.

Interviewer

Is it important for a free society to have the expectation of service? You alluded to there being riots in the streets, which no one would say is a good thing. But the participation in

the decision-making that that represents would strike me as important.

Jack Jacobs

There are a lot of people who argue that we need universal service because we would be less likely to use the military instrument of power if everybody's sons and daughters had to go. I think that's part of it. I'm not a fan of single-factor analysis. I think there are lots of things that have an impact on the outcomes. That's one of them. Full participation does have some impact on decision-makers' use of the military instrument of power. Right now, it's a default instrument. You got some problem? Well, we know that the military works, so like send in the Marines. So it turns out to be the default instrument of power—a bad idea, for a wide variety of reasons.

Jack Jacobs

The average person doesn't have any skin in the game now. They would, if there were universal service. I think it's important for people to feel part of the decision-making process. We have a republican form of democracy, in which the people are widely separated from the decision-making apparatus. I think universal service would fix that a little bit. And finally, I think there is no "you don't feel part of anything at all. We have nothing in common. We don't have anything in common in this country. Not even voting—a greater percentage of people vote in Iraq, where you get shot if you vote, than vote in the United States of America.

Jack Jacobs

Consider universal service—and there are ways to do it logistically which would make it not unpleasant, either for the person who served or for the military establishment who's got to figure out what they're going to do with all these people who are 18 years old. Trust me—there are ways to do it. It's not that difficult to do, logistically. It takes leadership in order for it to make—to make it happen. But consider the notion that a guy who brings you your FedEx, has you sign for your FedEx stuff, the guy who's making your martini. The girl you're trying to pick up next to you, the guy who picks up your garbage, the person who's the professor trying to teach you constitutional law. Every single one of those, you have something in common with, and what is it? You've all served. That's a completely different notion that I'm looking for and one that can't be reached. Can be reached if you get the logistics right, which is trivial—but can't be reached unless you have leadership to make it happen. I am fearful that the independent variable that will cause that to happen is some catastrophe in the United States.

Jack Jacobs

Trust me—if we can have 3,000 people killed in New York City and can't motivate the populous to coalesce around the notion of service—if we can't do it when 3,000 Americans were killed in New York City—more people than were killed on Pearl Harbor, at Pearl Harbor—then it's unfortunately going to take either great, great leadership, with an enormous amount of logic behind it, or a huge catastrophe in the United States to motivate people to focus on service and sacrifice.

Interviewer

So are you "would you like to see the return of the draft, then?"

Jack Jacobs

No, I don't like the draft. Selective Service? Hate it "bad idea. "You're going. You don't have to go. You're definitely going, and so are you, but not you." I don't like that. I want universal service. I want everybody to serve in some fashion.

Interviewer

Peacetime and wartime.

Jack Jacobs

Yes, yes, oh, yes. I want us all to have had some common experience. We do not have any common experience at all, and I think being in uniform for a while is a good way to do it. You want to know how to do it? You want Jacobs' way to do it right now? It's a way to do it. College starts in January. When you're 18 or you're graduated from university, off you go. You're in uniform. You go to Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training, and after two and a half or three months, we say, "Thank you very much. Thanks for your service. As a memento of your service to your country, take this one uniform and this pair of boots and put it in your closet or put it under glass or do whatever you want with it. That's your memento for serving your country. Thank you very much."

Jack Jacobs

And let me tell you, we would have to convene boards at the end of Advanced Individual Training to decide who among the multitude of people who wanted to continue and go on active duty we wanted to have. Right now, we're spending two billion, three billion in advertising, paying advertising firms to advertise service. Join the Marines, join the Army, join the Navy. We wouldn't have to do any of that. We would have our pick of people who would be motivated by the kinds of things that occur in basic and in AIT boot camp "who are motivated to continue their service to three" beyond these three months it takes to get people.

Jack Jacobs

Everybody else would go home, and then everybody you meet "everybody you meet "the guy who's in the checkout line, the person stocking the shelves of the supermarkets, the lawyer who is "that you hire to go divorce your wife "your wife, your ex-wife "everybody's got a common experience. It was only three months, but you've all had it.

Jack Jacobs

Now, logistically possible, but it's easy to do "but it requires leadership to make it happen. That's my solution to the problem of not having any common experience in this country.

Interviewer

Military professionals are saying we have the most professional Army we've ever had now.

Jack Jacobs

Best-trained, best-equipped, best-educated, smartest, best-looking force we've ever had. But there are like only three of them. There's nobody in service. Less than 1/2 of

1% of the American public is in uniform. During the Second World Warâ€”letâ€™s makeâ€”I donâ€™t want to go back to the Second World War. I donâ€™t want to fight a world war. But during the Second World War, every single household had somebody who was in uniform. Today, we have about 1/2 of 1% of the American public isâ€”is in uniform.

Jack Jacobs

Most people have never met somebodyâ€”most people do not know anybody who are in uniform. Donâ€™t knowâ€”have never metâ€”a badâ€”notâ€”for me, not a good circumstance. Donâ€™t like it.

The Makings of a Soldier
Interviewer

Your father served in the Second World War in the Army?

Jack Jacobs

In the Army.

Interviewer

Was he enlisted?

Jack Jacobs

He was an enlisted man.

Interviewer

And did heâ€”how long did he stay in the Army?

Jack Jacobs

He stayed for theâ€”heâ€”

Interviewer

The duration of the war.

Jack Jacobs

He tried toâ€”he wasnâ€™t a draft-dodger, but he tried to stay out of it. You could stay out of it for a while, like we did during the draft in Vietnam, if you were married, going to college, and all the rest of that stuff. Was an electrical engineerâ€”was in the University of Minnesotaâ€”was going through ROTâ€”to ROTC, which kept you out for a while. I mean they needed officers and they needed smart guys. They needed people with degrees.

Jack Jacobs

But you know, as we got closer and closer in â€™43 and at the time that we decided that theâ€”our objective would be the unconditional surrender of the Axis, our appetite for people to be in the military grew dramatically, â€™cause we knew we needed lots of them to go kick the bad guys butts. And so we started really dragooning guys into the military at a rapid rate. My father was in ROTC. He and his guys were going to graduate. They came to him and says, â€œOkay, youâ€™re in the Army now.â€ He said, â€œWeâ€™re tooâ€”you know, weâ€™re in ROTC. Weâ€™re going to be officers here pretty soon. Weâ€™re going

to get our degrees.â€

Jack Jacobs

â€œYeah, but like, youâ€™re in the Army now. Thatâ€™weâ€™re not waiting for that.â€ But weâ€™ve gone through all this and weâ€™re really educated guys.â€ They said, â€œYeah, okay. When you get out of Basic and Advanced Individual Training, youâ€™re going to be in Signal, I guess, â€™cause youâ€™re electrical engineers. And so weâ€™re going to make you, I donâ€™t know, corporals, then. Howâ€™s that sound? Youâ€™re in.â€ So they gave them a little dispensation, you know. They gave them a little higherâ€™higher rank, but everybody went in.

Interviewer

Did he talk about his experiences in the war when you were growing up?

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, sureâ€™had nothing butâ€™had great stories, and as he got older, told more of them, many I had never heard. And then told the ones I had heard over and over and over again.

Jack Jacobs

Do you remember any of them?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, sure. Itâ€™sâ€™youâ€™I remember one in particular, when they were trying to lay WD-1 out, forward inâ€™in the Philippines, in Manila.

Jack Jacobs

WD-1 wasâ€™

Jack Jacobs

Wire, from oneâ€™he was a Signal guy, up forward, and they wereâ€™they were hooking up all the companies and the battalions, all the battalions together, back to brigade, back to regiment, during the Battle of Manila. And of course, you were going to lay it forward, you were subject to sniper fire. And so youâ€™d climbâ€™you lay the wire on the ground. Mortar round, any exploding projectilesâ€™a lot of artillery taking placeâ€™itâ€™d blow up the wire. You canâ€™t have it. Youâ€™ve got to have it up in the air. So youâ€™d have to go up in the trees, or existing telephone poles.

Jack Jacobs

Donâ€™t forget thereâ€™s a bâ€™Manilaâ€™s a built-up area. But there were snipers all around. Theyâ€™d send a guy upâ€™pyew!â€™bang! Thatâ€™s not good. So what weâ€™re going to do is the following. Weâ€™re going to use the Japanese prisoners we collected, and told them theyâ€™re going to go up and string WD-1. They said, â€œWeâ€™re going to get shot.â€ â€œWell, weâ€™ll keep sending you guys up there getting shot by your own guys until we run out of you, or we get the wire laid.â€ And thatâ€™s what they did. And after a while, the snipers quit shooting their own guys, and quit. Of course, when they saw where the snipers were, theyâ€™d pop the snipers with another sniper. Or fire a lot of artillery in their direction, or direct fire.

Jack Jacobs

He told that story over and over again. It mustâ€™ve been true, â€™cause he told it in the same detail every time.

Interviewer

And you mustâ€™ve just soaked this up, I imagine.

Jack Jacobs

Sure. I was a young kid. I was very proud of my father for his service. We had survived the Second World War because of the service of him and his cohorts, and Iâ€™m very proud of my father, that he served. He had a lot of bad things to say about service. The officers didnâ€™t know a damn thing about what they were doing. They were complete idiots, and so on. Didnâ€™t eatâ€™rations were lousy, all the rest. Couldâ€™ve made faster headway had people gone left instead of right.

And of course, all that stuffâ€™s easy to say, easy to talk about, you know, five and ten years after the fact.

Interviewer

You grew up in Brooklyn.

Jack Jacobs

Brooklyn, New York.

Interviewer

And your father did what for his work?

Jack Jacobs

He was an electrical engineer. Donâ€™t forget he had gone to college before the war.

Interviewer

Right.

Jack Jacobs

So he was a little bit older than the average kid, was already married, had a son, butâ€™knew he had a son, but had not seen me. I was the last thing he did before he left.

Interviewer

Really.

Jack Jacobs

He was about eightâ€™I was about eight months old when heâ€™when he came back.

Interviewer

First laid eyes on you? Really.

Jack Jacobs

First laid eyes on me. Eight months old, and I cried, you know.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Heâ€”and soâ€”he was a little bit older, so in his unit, he was known as the â€œold man.â€ He wasnâ€™t the company commander, who was the â€œOld Man.â€ He was theâ€”he was older than the company commander. He was the â€œold man.â€ He was 26. Of course, doesnâ€™t sound very old to me now, but he was, among the 19-year-olds. He was 26 years old, he was the old man. And when they talked about going to talk to the old man, find out what he was supposed to do, they werenâ€™t talking about the company commander. They were talking about Dave Jacobs.

Jack Jacobs

Heâ€”after the war, he went to work for AT&T. Western Electric, which was part of the Bell System owned by AT&T, and he was a microwave engineer and was part of the digitization of the telephone system, way back in the â€™50s, when they erected microwave towers all over the country. Spent a lot of time with Western States Bell and Pacific Bell, erecting microwave towers and going to digital. And most people didnâ€™t realize that the digitization of the phone system started to take place 50 years ago. And thatâ€™sâ€”he was involved in that. He was a microwave engineer, actually, by training.

Interviewer

So you went to high school in Brooklyn?

Jack Jacobs

No, actually went toâ€”went to kindergarten in Brooklyn, lived in a variety of places in Brooklynâ€”Hart Street near Tompkins Avenue during the war. There was a trolley that ran down Hart Street. You could ride for a nickel, go anywhere. Then we movedâ€”in 1949 and â€™50, the city built city housingâ€”low-cost, subsidizedâ€”mostly for returning veterans, â€™cause nobody had any moneyâ€”in Queens, in what is now Ravenswood, in Long Island City. And I went toâ€”I went to school in Long Island City. I went to P.S. 83, which now is probably a retirement home or a rehab center or something like that.

And in the mid-â€™50s, we got thrown out of subsidized housing. You had toâ€”if you made more than \$2,500 or \$2,750 a year, you made too much money to be in subsidized housing, and you were out. So my parents bought a house in New Jersey, for \$16,000â€”\$15,990.

Interviewer

In what town in Jersey?

Jack Jacobs

In Woodbridge Township. I went to high school and college. I went to Woodbridge High School. I went to college in New Jersey.

Interviewer

At Rutgers.

Jack Jacobs

At Rutgers University, â€™causeâ€”I went to Rutgers so thatâ€”it was \$200 a semester. Thatâ€™s what we paid. It was cheap as hell. I knew that college was an expensive proposition. And when I was graduated from the University, I had a tuition bill alone that I had taken out of about \$1,800â€”\$1,760â€”which took me ten years to pay off.

Interviewer

What was your major in?

Jack Jacobs

I majored in political science. I found itâ€”I didnâ€™t know what the heck I would do with it, but I found it interesting. I wanted to be an engineer, but engineering wasâ€”I got married when I was extremely young. I had a wife and daughter to support, and I didnâ€™t haveâ€”I couldâ€”I had two choices. I could spend the time studying and be a chemical engineer, which is what I really wanted to be, or I could do something which actually required less input from me, but gave me the opportunity to have a full-time job and a part-time job simultaneously.

Jack Jacobs

And go to college, all at the same time. I had no idea what I was going to do with this degree, but I could get a degree and go to have a part-time job and a full-time job.

Interviewer

What kind of jobs did youâ€”

Jack Jacobs

I was â€”I worked in a restaurant as a busboy, and I worked in a slaughterhouse, taking calves, lambs, andâ€”and cows apart.

Interviewer

Really.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah. Slaughtering them and taking them apart. I can tellâ€”I mean like if I close my eyes right now, I am haunted by the anatomy of four-legged animals. I can take itâ€”you put a hunk of meat in front of me right now, Iâ€™d take it, â€œWhat do you want, steaks or chops? Roast? Do you want a little bit of all of it?â€”Iâ€™d take it apart for you in five minutes. Iâ€™d have it in pieces and wrapped.

Interviewer

How did you end up doing that?

Jack Jacobs

A guy I knew was delivering meat to a restaurant where I worked. And I said, "Listen, let's—we struck up a conversation because I was in the back. By the way, I'm not a bad chef. And I said, "I told him I needed another job on weekends and nights. He says, "Well, we're looking for more guys in the slaughterhouse." I said, "Really. I want to—" so I went down there and I talked to the guy whose family owned the slaughterhouse. And he said, "What do you know about taking animals apart?"

Jack Jacobs

I said, "Nothing, but I know what they look like at the other end, and what they're supposed to look like." He says, "Well, you know, you're a halfway bright kid. You'll probably pick it up on no time. Okay." I made \$1.75 an hour, before there were minimum wages.

Interviewer

And what did it look like—what did the slaughterhouse look like? How did they slaughter animals then?

Jack Jacobs

Slaughtered animals, handled them kosher.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Stun them, hold them up, and slit their throats. Take them apart.

Interviewer

You did this yourself.

Jack Jacobs

I did that. I learned how to do it with everybody else. It was owned by an Italian family, by the way. And of course, the stuff was—

Interviewer

But it was a kosher slaughter.

Jack Jacobs

Kosher slaughter. And the rabbi there certified, supervised everything, inspected it, stamped it, watched the slaughter. And of course, only the front half of the animal was used. The back half, now, all prime stuff—prime-rated prime by the government, USDA inspector, kosher-slaughtered and all the rest of it—went to restaurants—very expensive stuff. And all the sirloins, so I'd be watching all this sirloin and filet mignon and round and all the hind quarters, hind halves, all going out the door to somebody else. And they weren't going—they were slaughtered kosher, but they were not kosher—you couldn't use them—so they went to restaurants. Good—I'm not a very observant Jew, and so—from time to time, I'd take a hunk and feed my family. I had two—I had one child and a wife to feed. Let me tell you, a prime hind quarter is very tasty.

Interviewer

So when youâ€™re at Rutgers, ROTC?

Jack Jacobs

ROTCâ€™went through ROTC.

Interviewer

And weâ€™re talkingâ€™what year did you graduate?

Jack Jacobs

1966.

Interviewer

Yeah. And had you any sense, as a political science major, of what was going on in Vietnam?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, yeah, sure. We knew exactly what was going on.

Interviewer

Tell me what your perspective was while you were in college.

Jack Jacobs

Well, youâ€™re paying attention to the news. And perception was that we were fighting a load of bad guys, whose success meant imminent death for our influence in Southeast Asia, and maybe East Asia, too. Donâ€™t forget we had a very superficial view of the world. By â€œweâ€ I meant not just young kids like me, who sat in the basement of our dormitory during the Cuban Missile Crisis, watching theâ€™I was a sophomore. What was I? Freshmanâ€™and the Cuban Missile Crisisâ€™convinced weâ€™re all going to war. Watching the President on the sole television in the basement of Demarest Hall at Rutgers convinced that we were going to war over the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Jack Jacobs

A very superficial view of what life was like using the military instrument of power, and the majority of us convinced that were we not to prevail in Southeast Asia, weâ€™re going to have a hard time with China. No real perception that the Chinese and the Vietnamese hated each other and that subsequent to that, the Chinese and the Vietnamese would fight a war against each other, which war would be won by the Vietnamese.

Jack Jacobs

We had a very monolithic view of communism, and to a greater or lesser extent, that was for some good reason. The communists writ large provided mostly the training, and the large majority of the weapons that were used in Southeast Asiaâ€™aside from that, nothing. And our government had a sort of monolithic view of it. It was a holdover from, you know, Allen Dulles and the years before that. But weâ€™when you got into the Army and you started fighting, well, your monolithic view of what the use of military instrument of power

was very much changed.

Jack Jacobs

By the time I graduatedâ€”by the time I got to be a senior I had made the decision I was going to come into the Army, and I knew I was going to fight. It was clear that the war in Vietnam was not going to end before I got there.

Interviewer

But you were motivated not only by yourâ€”it sounds like you were motivated not only by your fatherâ€™s experience in the Army, but also by some sense of wanting to join the fight, right?

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, there was part of that. It was my obligation to be in the military, so that started when I was very young.

Interviewer

Obligation meaning once youâ€™d grown up?

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, I was going to serve my three years and get out. I was going to go to law school.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

My objective was to become a big-time lawyer of some kind. I had no idea what kind, but I wanted to get a law degree. I thought it was an intellectual challenge, and I thought I was up to it, and I thought it was kind of an interesting thing to do. It was probably a satisfying thing to do. I studied some constitutional law as an undergraduate. I thought it wasâ€”it was cool. I mean it was an interesting thing to do. I liked it. I didnâ€™t much like the paper chase very much, but the end of it was intellectually satisfyingâ€”satisfying to me.

â€œAh, I seeâ€”these guys are right and those guys are right, and maybe theyâ€™re both right, but youâ€™ve got to cut the baby in half at some juncture.â€” Making those decisions was interesting. But I also knew I was going to come in the Army. I was going to come in the Army.

Interviewer

Now, you say it was your beholden public duty because of your fatherâ€™s experience, or because of what the ethos of the time was?

Jack Jacobs

Both.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Donâ€™t forget I had a carryover from the war. There were still guys in my neighborhood in Brooklyn who had lost their legs and were scooting around onâ€”

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

On skateboards. No prosthetic devices, folksâ€”a skateboard and a couple of flatirons and all of that. Yeah, a little bit of both. And I grew up in a neighborhood that was veryâ€”patrioticâ€”not the right word, because the perceptionâ€”it gives the implication that you were either patriotic and you went off and fought, or you were not patriotic and you opposed the war. Plenty of patriotic people opposed the war, you know. Iâ€™m opposed to our environment in Libya. I think itâ€™s a completeâ€”you know, unalterably opposed to it.

Jack Jacobs

But I consider myself to be a patriot. But weâ€™re in Libya, not in Syria, whichâ€”well, weâ€™re choosing bad guysâ€”what? Whatâ€™s the logic there? A lot of patriotic Americans opposed the war in Vietnam, and for perfectly good reasons. Some of them opposed it for ratty reasons, and Iâ€”so I know I came from a very patriotic background in myâ€”so there was a little bit of that, too.

Interviewer

So in â€™65, though, the anti-war movement hadnâ€™t really coalesced yet.

Jack Jacobs

No.

Jack Jacobs

So basically, you were with the tide in believing that the war in Vietnam was the right thing to do.

Jack Jacobs

I thought that the use of the military instrument in Southeast Asia was a useful thing to do at the time. Iâ€™I did not think then, and I still do not think today, that it was properly used. I mean I was not ignorant of the fact that we had supportedâ€”with actual people and advisorsâ€”Ho Chi Minh during the Second World War. I was not ignorant of the fact that when the war was over, Ho Chi Minh asked us if we would continue supporting him so he could kick the French out. This was â€”at the time that de Gaulle said, â€œYeah, we kind of like NATO, but weâ€™re not going to have our forces, our French forces in NATOâ€™s forces. You have no call on them.â€ I was not ignorant of that, either, saying to myself, â€œWait a minute, what kind of organization is this, and what kind of guys are France when they say, â€”Okay, weâ€™d like you to support us, but you canâ€™t use our own forcesâ€™?â€

Jack Jacobs

It sounds likeâ€”it sounds like World War II redux. The Jews in the Warsaw Ghettoâ€”and Iâ€™m not saying this because Iâ€™m partial to Jews, but I am. The Jews in theâ€”but this is fact. The Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, armed with lousy rifles, some pistols with not enough ammo, and rocks, held off the Wehrmacht longer than did the entire French Army, and its Maginot Line and secondary and supplementary positions and all the rest didnâ€™t do it. They gave up. They quit. So I was not ignorant of that. But my perception was that the military instrument of power could be used, but we were doing a lousy job of it, and I knew that in â€™65 when I went through basic at Fort Devens, soâ€”

Interviewer

How were we doing a lousy job of it at that point?

Jack Jacobs

We wereâ€”at the time, we had decided that we were now going to send some people to Vietnam. The decision was made to send some conventional forces and some unconventional forces to Vietnam. And that we were going to do it in a piecemeal fashion. I mean we knew already that it was notâ€”I mean the people whoâ€™d studied warfare knew that you could not do that on an incremental basis. Especially when the job was to support a government which then could make its own decisions without your concurrence on what it was going to do with its own forces.

Jack Jacobs

Weâ€™d study that in political science at Rutgers University in, you know, 1963. When we startedâ€”but at the time, then we started to build up unconventional, our own unconventional forces.

Compartmentalizing the Mind

Interviewer

When you thought of yourself in the Army, the branch you were imagining was what?

Jack Jacobs

Infantry.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

I was never going to be anything else. Iâ€™m an extremist to that extent. Iâ€™m an extremist about a lot of things. But Iâ€™m also a realist. But Iâ€™for me, if youâ€™re going to be in the Army, youâ€™re going to be in the Infantry. When I was graduating, one of my friends went into the Armored. He says, â€œWhy donâ€™t you be in Armor?â€ Why would I be in Armor? â€œWell, you get into a tank. Now youâ€™re big and strong.â€ I said, â€œTheâ€”see how big I am? The instant I get into a tank, Iâ€™m a target the size of a tank. No, sirâ€”I will take my chances armed with a thin piece of fabric.â€

Jack Jacobs

If youâ€™re going to be in the Army, I thought I want to be in the combat arm. Iâ€™m not going to be in something thatâ€™sâ€”in the engineers, what, they digs holes and stuff like

that? Not for me. I'm going to carry a rifle and kill bad guys. It was—I'm a pure—an extremist is not the right word. I'm a purist. And I think being in the—I know, I've been. Being in the Infantry, at the cutting edge, where you face toe-to-toe an enemy who's trying to kill you, is a distillation of the military instrument of power. Not very sophisticated, but that's what I wanted. I was always going to be in the Infantry.

And as a matter of fact, when we applied for our branches, I put the Infantry, Armor, Artillery, in that order.

Interviewer

But Infantry, since time immemorial, is kill or be killed.

Jack Jacobs

Yes. That was what I wanted to do.

Interviewer

Wow—"what—I mean did that scare you?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, sure. Anybody who says he wasn't scared in combat's a lying dog. I mean he's either a liar or a psychotic. He could be a lying psycho, too—they're not mutually exclusive. No, I've been—I was scared all the time I was in combat, and everybody I know who was ever in combat was also scared. So if you run across somebody who says, "Oh, I was in combat, but I wasn't scared," he's either lost his marbles or was never in combat. It's just, you know, he's—but I'm—sure. There's nothing—I think—I think difficult situations are meant to—you're meant to be scared in difficult situations, and surmount the fear.

Jack Jacobs

There's a Medal of Honor recipient named Bud Hawk who says—he says, "Heroism is not the absence of fear. The absence of fear would be the absence of intelligence. It's knowing that you're scared and surmounting that fear." No, I knew I would be scared. Everybody who was going into combat knew he was going to be scared. You always have this perception that you're not going to be able to do it. I get asked all the time by cadets who are going to graduate—I got asked all the time by soldiers when I was in units and kids were going to combat—"Do you think, sir, I'll be able to do it?"

Jack Jacobs

It's, statistically, absolutely. A very, very small number of people decide that they're not going to be able to get it done. Sure, you'll be able to do it.

Interviewer

And what about the prospect of killing? Killing not from behind—as "inside a tank, or a bomber, but—

Jack Jacobs

Killing people face to face. It's you learn to compartmentalize your life. It's easy to get upset about killing other people, but you do it after the fact. I remember time after time we would take the contents of a guy's an enemy's a dead enemy's uniform out for intelligence purposes. Take out their wallets, their money, their notes, maps, pictures of their loved ones. And realize after the fact that this was a human being who had hopes and dreams, had families. These are his kids, same as we have back, and he was—he's not here anymore.

That's the end for him. He doesn't exist as a human being anymore. He's now a logistical problem. Before, he was a personal—he was a person, and part of a personnel problem for his command.

Interviewer

Well, you've not only—you've not only—he's dead because of what

Jack Jacobs

Of me.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

Oh, yeah, sure. That's right.

Interviewer

And did you think about that, I'm thinking abstractly, back here where you're in New Jersey, and you're in ROTC, and you're thinking about the war in Vietnam, and you're thinking about branching Infantry.

Jack Jacobs

I didn't think about it then. I didn't think about what it actually meant to kill people.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

I knew that I was in the business of killing people.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

And teaching other people to kill people—that's what I would do for a living, at least for the few years I would be in the Army. But what that meant in the personal level, face to face with somebody else

Interviewer

That didn't

Jack Jacobs

No, that didn't cross my mind. I hadn't been through it. I certainly got upset, after the fact. In combat, having killed other people, it didn't concern me as an act. But as you know, it's only, it's all about you, you know? Why do we go to funerals? We go to funerals for that dead person? The dead person isn't there anymore. Life-cycle events are for the living, even funerals. We go to funerals for the other people who are there, who are going to funerals for the other people who are there. I don't know the dead person doesn't exist anymore.

We go for the living. We're concerned about things like that for the living. I have lots and lots of friends who were killed in action. Lots of them. And I think about them, and I feel bad. Why? I feel bad for me, because I don't have them anymore. That's why. If I stop and think about it, and I want to be dishonest, that's too pejorative. But I want to be dishonest about it, this is, Oh, you miss you miss Joe, don't you? You know, he was killed 43 years ago today.

Jack Jacobs

Why do I miss him? It's for me. I miss him. I don't have him anymore. My father died two years ago. He would've been what is this this is 01 he would've been 92 now, going on 93. I miss him. Sometimes I really, really I get upset. I think about him, and I miss him. He was 93 he'll be 93. He's not here anymore. I miss him because I'm sad for me. I don't have him anymore.

Interviewer

When you think about

Interviewer

Okay. We're going to just have to pause here for a moment.

Interviewer

Yeah we need the

Interviewer

So we were talking about killing.

Jack Jacobs

Mm.

Interviewer

Being an Infantry officer.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah.

Interviewer

How you had compartmentalized, not really thought about it, and that you think about it retrospectively in depth, itâ€™s thought about retrospectively. And you talked about your father, and you talked about people you know, but what about people that you actually killed?

Jack Jacobs

Well, the same. I mean you have to be able to compartmentalize your mind. Otherwiseâ€™

Interviewer

But you said this isâ€™

Jack Jacobs

Youâ€™re haunted forever.

Interviewer

This continues to haunt you.

Jack Jacobs

Well, it doesnâ€™t haunt me, but if I sit down and think about itâ€™ itâ€™sâ€™itâ€™s not haunting, but I feel a certain sadness. I lost a lot of friends. I feel a certain sadness there, too. The trouble with feeling sadness is that itâ€™sâ€™I realize that itâ€™s all about me, then, and I donâ€™t want it to be all about me.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm, I see.

Jack Jacobs

Run out of tape?

Jack Jacobs

Iâ€™I think that may be one reason why itâ€™s relatively easy for me to come to grips with the notion that I think Iâ€™m an honorable person, and I spent a lot, the majority of my life killing people and teaching other people to kill people. Itâ€™sâ€™it canâ€™t be all about me. It is about other people.

Interviewer

Well, you say sadness, but what about guilt? How do you deal with guilt?

Jack Jacobs

No guilt. I donâ€™t have any guilt.

Interviewer

You donâ€™t feel any guilt.

Jack Jacobs

No.

Interviewer

Never felt any guilt.

Jack Jacobs

No, never did. Noâ€”just sadness.

Interviewer

Because it was you were an instrument of state.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah. I made the decision that I was going to be. And I was doingâ€”I was carrying out orders that were not illegal or immoral. You know, we have a responsibility once weâ€™re in the structure to make sure that the commander understands exactly what we think. We canâ€™t keep quiet if we think things are really, really good, or really, really bad, or anything in between. Indeed, the whole idea of a commanderâ€™s making a decision includes asking what other people think, subordinate leaders think. And youâ€™re honor-bound to tell a boss what you think about it.

Once the decision is made, unless the orders are immoral or illegal, you got to carry them out.

Jack Jacobs

Itâ€™sâ€”sometimes itâ€™s all relative. It looks like a lousy idea because itâ€™s happening to you, but thatâ€™s the way it is. But youâ€™re not required toâ€”as a matter of fact youâ€™re explicitly required to refuse to carry out orders that are immoral or illegal. What I was doing was neither.

Interviewer

You never felt in that position.

Jack Jacobs

No.

Interviewer

Did you see others in that position?

Jack Jacobs

No. I saw others from a distance. I was never in units where people thought they were doing immoral or illegal things. I certainly read about and saw on television people who thought they were doing immoral or illegal things, and there were certain people, certainly people who did do that, and thatâ€™s reprehensible.

Interviewer

Do you think war inevitably leads to some of that?

Jack Jacobs

The law of large numbers says that it's going to happen at some juncture, but you're looking at somebody who believes that it's really easy to distinguish between things that are immoral or illegal on the one hand and those that are not. I don't think it's difficult to make that decision. That's simple. And I think that people who tell you that they have a hard time distinguishing between right and wrong are either lying or psychos.

Interviewer

So you don't see you think war doesn't contain gray area, in terms of decision-making?

Jack Jacobs

No.

Interviewer

Really. That's a

Jack Jacobs

Not at all. I don't. I think it's at the very highest levels of abstraction, it does, but certainly not at the level of, you know, the division commander and below.

Jack Jacobs

I'll give you an example of a tough decision, and that one, one that skirts the where you would have a hard time distinguishing between right and wrong. Well, let me start with the one that doesn't. Yes? You go into a village, people come out, and their hands are up. What do you do? I mean you've received fire from this place. You take them prisoner is what you do that's what you do.

Jack Jacobs

You take them prisoner. I'm sorry it's a logistical pain in the backside. You've got to process them. You've got to send them to the rear. What are you going to do with them? You've got to feed them. You're responsible for treating their wounds and all the rest of that stuff.

Interviewer

But what if you have a suspicion, even a tiny suspicion, they may be armed with explosives they may be strapped, they might be

Jack Jacobs

We have procedures to deal with that, and they don't include just blowing people away willy-nilly. No, no, no, you don't kill unarmed people. It's very simple. You don't kill unarmed people the end.

Interviewer

What if it's Osama bin Laden, unarmed in the compound?

Jack Jacobs

Ah, that's a different--now--now we're getting to the strategic decision. You got to understand also, by the way, that conducting a raid in an environment like that makes split-second decisions extremely difficult. But there, the decision was made in advance by a high authority to kill a combatant whose lack of armament at the time was irrelevant. And I come down on the side of what the government did. But let's take something that's really difficult. I mean killing bin Laden, that's an easy one--I don't care. I can convince myself that's the right thing to do. Take a tough one.

Take World War II. We've just decided that we're going to--the objective is unconditional surrender of the Axis.

Jack Jacobs

Go or no go. Kill civilians or not to kill civilians? Yes, well, we're killing civilians, because the objective is unconditional surrender. And you could argue that having an objective of unconditional surrender is not a moral--that's immoral. Well, you don't belong in the national security business, then. But to kill unarmed people in large quantities in order to end the war and prevent--yeah, I can make that decision.

Interviewer

So Hiroshima, to you, is it--an act you would--

Jack Jacobs

That's the right--that was the right thing to do. In retrospect, it turns out we probably wouldn't have used--killed--had a million casualties in invading Japan. Maybe we would've had a quarter of a million, or a hundred thousand, or three.

Interviewer

What about the second--what about Nagasaki?

Jack Jacobs

It was for the purpose of getting the unconditional surrender of the Japanese.

Interviewer

So it's consistent.

Jack Jacobs

Because we perceived that they were not listening the first time, and indeed, they were not listening the first time. They--now it turns out, our studies indicate that they were--they didn't see the atomic bomb as any different than any other attack on the homeland that we had done before. My Medal of Honor was made during the Second World War. It was made at the tail end of the Second World War, and we ordered a lot--lots and lots of Medals of Honor, because we thought that we'd have to issue a lot of them, award a lot of them in the invasion of Japan. You know, I'm an idealist, but I'm also a realist.

Vietnam Through a Filmic Lens

Interviewer

So you were deployed to Vietnam when?

Jack Jacobs

I went in September of 1967.

Interviewer

And what were your first reactions as you stepped off the plane?

Jack Jacobs

You know, it's kind of interesting. If you've never seen someplace, your vision of it, your expectation of it, is skewed by the way in which it was presented to you. If you really look at—I mean I like old movies, and you know, old Bogart movies and the like. If you look at *The Maltese Falcon*, you get a view of San Francisco that doesn't exist—that didn't exist even then. It was on a set. If you go to the—go to Studio 1A, where *The Today Show* is shot, it's about as small—it's about the size—it's not a whole lot bigger than this room.

Jack Jacobs

But people, when they view it, have a completely different view of what the environment is. Where it doesn't look like—the photographer wanted us to see, it doesn't look like that at all. It's not as romantic at all, as a matter of fact. But when I went to Vietnam, when I landed, when I actually looked out the window of a rented 707, with three hundred troops, and it had six-across seating with an aisle you could probably get a piece of paper in, but nothing more. Three hundred guys—and saw through the window, dropping through the cotton-candy clouds to land at Bien Hoa, it looked exactly like I expected it to look.

And when I stepped off the plane and it was, you know, 90 degrees, 90% humidity, it felt exactly as I had expected it to feel.

Interviewer

Which was what, though? What had you expected of Vietnam?

Jack Jacobs

There was a bit of—there was a bit of romanticism.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Romanticism about it. It was a hot, sultry climate. It was all green. It—I expected it to look like that, and that's what it looked like.

Interviewer

Lush.

Jack Jacobs

Very lushâ€”good word. It was very lush. It was no different than I anticipated it to look. And so it reinforced my view of what it was going to be. It was going to be into the heart of darkness. The first place to which I was deployed was toâ€”was with my Infantry battalion, 2nd Battalion, 16th Regiment, of the Vietnamese 9th Infantry Division, on a canal with all this lush foliage, overgrown and so on. And it looked exactly like what Coppola produced later on inâ€”I mean his movie was nonsense.

Jack Jacobs

It was all complete nonsense from start to finish. It was some drug-addled view of what he thought war was like in Southeast Asia. Butâ€”

Interviewer

Youâ€™re talking about Apocalypse Now.

Jack Jacobs

Apocalypse Nowâ€”it wasnâ€™t like that at all. It was total and complete nonsense. But the picture, the visual image of what that looked like, and felt like, was just like that.

Interviewer

Is there a movieâ€”since youâ€™re a fan of moviesâ€”that you think does capture the Vietnam experience?

Jack Jacobs

None of them does. I mean the one that comes the closest to combat, real combat, had nothing to do with Vietnam. And that was Saving Private Ryan, the opening combat scene. Thatâ€™s what combatâ€™s like. No idea where you are, where everybody else is, and everybodyâ€™s killed or wounded, and you donâ€™tâ€”itâ€™sâ€”and youâ€™re scared out of your pants. Thatâ€™s what combatâ€”that came the closest to actual combat. But not Vietnam. There was Platoon was a fairly good representation, butâ€”and all of those things happened in Vietnam.

Jack Jacobs

But all of those things did not happen to one unit, and certainly didnâ€™t happen to one unit during one tour, during a short period of time. That was a distillation of his experience and what he thought happened to other people, and he put it in a movie, in one movie, and one unit it happened to. No, it didnâ€™t happen to one unit.

Interviewer

Soldiers, when theyâ€™re, before theyâ€™re in combat, sense of combat probably comes, particularly in our time, from the moviesâ€”or today, from video games, right? What was your sense of what combat looked like when you were arriving in Vietnam?

Jack Jacobs

I was not prepared for combat. This was back in the days when we didnâ€™t have much money except for the war and Great Society programs. Weâ€™ bullets went to Vietnam. We trainedâ€”instead of training extensively in live-fire exercises, we did not. The late â€™70s were like that as well. The troops would go into exercises and yell, Bang! Bang! â€™Cause we had no blanks. Weâ€™re headed that way now, by the way. Soâ€”

Interviewer

Because of our economy, you're saying.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, the economy stinks, and we're gonna get to cut 200 to 400 billion off the budget. And it's not going to happen without forcing the bureaucracy to cough it up. You know how many people work in the Pentagon—something like 25,000 people work in the Pentagon. I mean it's outrageous. And you know bureaucracies are self-fulfilling, self—they are not self-abdicating institutions. In any case, we didn't—I didn't have a lot of live-fire exercises. My first exposure to live fire was in combat. We don't do that anymore. We try not to do that anymore.

Interviewer

But when you were imagined with your mind's eye, did it come from the movies? Were you thinking John Wayne? Were you thinking of—

Jack Jacobs

No, I wasn't thinking of John Wayne.

Interviewer

The heroic sense of what combat was like?

Jack Jacobs

No. I wasn't the smartest guy in the world, but I was smart enough to realize that I would be scared out of my pants, and there was nothing heroic—there was nothing heroic about getting shot at, and nothing heroic about other guys trying desperately to kill you. No, no—I was a realist about that. What I didn't realize was how absolutely petrified I would be. What I didn't realize was the narrowing of your field of vision—the glaucoma that you get in combat. The—I didn't have the exposure to the sights and the sounds of combat.

Jack Jacobs

I didn't realize that it was so noisy. It was so noisy that it overloaded your aural sensory apparatus, and you couldn't hear anything. Remember the piece in, the part at the very beginning of Private Ryan, when the kids were underwater, and everything was muffled? That's what it sounded like. When a mortar round landed two meters from me and blew me up, and my buddies and my NCO, and killed a bunch of guys and wounded a bunch of other guys, I didn't hear the damn thing at all.

Jack Jacobs

In retrospect, I remember hearing a slight whoosh as the mortar round is probably between zero and ten feet high, and is coming in to—and there were lots of other mortar rounds coming in, too, nearby—I didn't hear them—I didn't hear any of them. My ears were overloaded with the sound of the crack of small arms, and automatic weapons fire was coming in very, very large numbers. And my fear—my fear reduced my vision. It was my fear that reduced my listening capability. I wasn't prepared for that.

Interviewer

What was your mission thereâ€”as you arrivedâ€”

Jack Jacobs

Our missionâ€”

Interviewer

As you arrived there.

Jack Jacobs

Oh, our mission was to locate and establish contact with an enemy unit, with whom weâ€™d been in contact for a long time and had lost contact, which intelligence told us was at a specific six-digit grid coordinate in Cao Lanh district in Kien Phong province.

Interviewer

And you were with Vietnameseâ€”

Jack Jacobs

I was with the 2nd Battalion, 16th Regiment, 9th Vietnamese Infantry Division. I was the Deputy Senior Advisor to that battalion. There was a Major, I was a First Lieutenant, and there were two E-6s, two NCOs staff sergeants. The major and theâ€”and one E-6 were, stayed with the battalion headquarters. I and my NCO, the other E-6, were forward with the two lead companies. The scout platoon was supposed to be ahead of us. I mean you donâ€™t take two companies and march around in the middle of nowhere trying to establish contact.

Jack Jacobs

You try to establish contact with the smallest number of troops you can. This permits you the abilityâ€”it gives you the ability to maneuver your large, the largest number of your troops in an efficient way to get the enemy, once theyâ€™re contacted. But thatâ€™s not what took place.

Interviewer

What was your sense of theâ€”these Vietnamese troops, as you arrived? Well-trainedâ€”

Jack Jacobs

No, not well-trained. Been through the Tet Offensiveâ€”not decimated, but very much weakened because of combat losses over a period of six weeks.

Interviewer

Morale?

Jack Jacobs

Adequate only. But not very good, generally speaking, at morale. Kids were scared. A lot of new troops, not combat-seasonedâ€”the combat-seasoned troops had been killed or wounded. So a unit that, while not combat-ineffective, was operating at a distinct

disadvantage, and in combat, you want to have some advantage—advantage of surprise, advantage of numbers—some advantage. We had none. We didn't have the advantage of size—the enemy was as big as—the enemy—size of the enemy force facing us that was dug in in bunkers, I discovered after the fact, was as big or bigger than our force.

Jack Jacobs

And they had the advantage of surprise, —cause they had known that we were coming for three days, and were in well-reinforced, well-thought-out, mutually-supporting defensive positions.

Interviewer

How did they know you were coming?

Jack Jacobs

They had a spy in the province chief's headquarters, and they knew exactly what we were doing. And we were, again, at a disadvantage, because our scout platoon, which was supposed to be moving to the front and to the flanks to contact the enemy first, so that we could maneuver around, destroy the enemy, was nowhere to be seen—no idea where they were.

Interviewer

Where were they?

Jack Jacobs

They were—I still to this day, 43 years later, I have no idea where they were. They were not to—let me tell you this—they were not to—I know where they were not. To the front and flanks, they were not. The first engagement that we had with the enemy was when Staff Sergeant Ramirez, Jack Jacobs, and two companies of the 2nd of the 16th were out, caught out in the open, about 50 meters from the enemy positions.

—Memories Are In Semi-Tones—

Interviewer

Tell me about it. Is this your first combat experience when you went there?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, no, I—d been in combat since—

Interviewer

You had been.

Jack Jacobs

This was March —68.

Interviewer

Right.

Jack Jacobs

I've been in combat since September of '67.

Interviewer

But let's focus on this one. This is the one for which you won the Medal of Honor.

Jack Jacobs

Yes, but I'm not going to talk at any great self-aggrandizing length

Interviewer

No, I know you won't.

Jack Jacobs

About it.

Interviewer

Yeah. So you and Ramirez.

Jack Jacobs

Ramirez and I and about half of the two companies were killed or wounded—we were wounded obviously—in the first few seconds of the engagement, all out in the open. Ramirez had three sucking chest wounds. I was hit in the head. I knew it was a very difficult situation. We had a lot of guys out in the open. The—we were a company, two companies, one company commander, the headquarters company commander, was not wounded, and he was actually in some cover.

But the first company commander and the S-3 who was with us were both wounded—turned out to be mortally wounded, in the end. So there was no leadership, actually, among the two companies.

Interviewer

You were wounded in the head.

Jack Jacobs

In the head.

Interviewer

Which meant what—a graze, what?

Jack Jacobs

Oh no, I had a lot—I had fragments. I had a fragment in my eye. I had a hole here. I had pieces of shrapnel, not very big, but going at some high rate of speed and jagged. They hit me over here and traveled around and

Interviewer

It was all shrapnel that hit you.

Jack Jacobs

Oh, it was all shrapnel. You know when you conduct a raidâ€”not a raidâ€”an ambush like that, what you want to do is have all of the, all of your weapons bear down on the enemy in the kill zone all at the same time. So your mortars, you try to launch them from a greater distance, so that theâ€”your enemy whoâ€™s coming into the kill zone canâ€™t hear the rounds sliding down the tube, and being detonated and arching towards you. You want the roundsâ€”at the time that the rounds, the explosive projectiles, hit, you want them to hit, and then you start your small arms and automatic weapons all at the same time.

Jack Jacobs

You donâ€™t want to give the enemy in the kill zone an opportunity to scramble around, attack you in your position before you have an opportunity to open up. Run away, go hide, go to the tree line thatâ€™s not far awayâ€”no, no. You want them out in the middle, in the kill zone, getting devastated all at the same time. So you got to launch your mortar rounds at the same time. The round that hit me landed just after they started opening up with machine guns and small arms, so I knew it was an ambush right away. But not long after that, mortar rounds landed, and the one landed two meters away and wounded me and so on.

Interviewer

So youâ€™re wounded. Are you incapacitated or not?

Jack Jacobs

I think I am not. I feel around, and I find a hole in my head here, so I take my first aid pack and I put it around here, but that wasnâ€™t where I was really, really, really badly wounded. I had a piece stuck in my eye. Didnâ€™t lose the eye, but the bad wound was hereâ€”that was the bad wound, and thatâ€™s where I was losing lots and lots of blood, and had this head injury, really bad head injury, opened up. I thought I wasâ€”look, you know youâ€™reâ€”itâ€™s like cancer. Your initial response is disbelief. Itâ€™s not happening to me.

Jack Jacobs

Everybodyâ€™s been in bad situations. Your first response is, â€œRun the tape back. This is not really happening, right?â€ Then the next response is, â€œHoly crap, itâ€™s really happening, but Iâ€™m okay.â€ And then after a while, you realize it is happening, itâ€™s happening to you, and youâ€™re not okay. All this happens in quick succession. If itâ€™s cancer, it takes place over a period of time. When youâ€™re in combat, it happens in rapid succession. The people who get to â€œthis is really happening, itâ€™s happening to me. Something has to be done, and it has to be done right away. And if itâ€™s not done right away, weâ€™re all going down the toilet.â€

Jack Jacobs

Thoseâ€”the people who do that, whose thought process drives them to think in that kind of way, are people who usually do things that are worthwhile in situations like that.

Interviewer

And this is how you reacted.

Jack Jacobs

No, I reacted much more slowly, to be honest with you. But I eventually did get to the notion that I've got to do something. The first response is, "Well, somebody better do something over here." And then you realize that the somebody better be you. Whether or not it's true whether or not you are the only person who can do something. Don't forget we're getting raked over the coals over a fairly wide kill zone. There are plenty of people who were heroic on that day, most of whom were never recognized.

Interviewer

Tell me about a few of them.

Jack Jacobs

Well, one of the soldiers, well, he wasn't a private soldier, he was a corporal. He wasn't a corporal, he was a corporal, ran out into the kill zone to try to get some of the guys who were closest back into the covering area where I'd brought Ramirez in, just got cut down. I mean just cut down. I mean he knew what he was going to do. He was very, very close.

Interviewer

Killed.

Jack Jacobs

Killed, oh, yeah, dead, absolutely dead, which did not stop, a few minutes later, another soldier trying the same thing.

Interviewer

This is also what you did.

Jack Jacobs

Well, yes, but I wasn't the only one who did that. I saw a Vietnamese NCO run out into the kill zone, throw one of the wounded troops onto a fireman's carry, more or less, and brought him back to where we were, and the wounded troop was killed coming back, and the guy, the NCO, it was just a sergeant, young kid, actually. But a little bit bigger than the average Vietnamese. He was badly wounded, but survived, badly wounded in the action himself, so there were lots and lots of people.

Jack Jacobs

There were people I didn't see who were brave that day. And I think anybody who has been in combat will tell you that there are lots of people who are brave in every action. People saw it, and they were killed. Nobody left to report it. Nobody saw it. You don't do things because people are going to see it. I forget who it was, and he's probably a reprehensible person, because sometimes good observations come from people who are not particularly the best, who said that real courage and real conscience is in people who do things even when they know nobody's looking. You do it because it's the right thing to do.

I was scared, and I really thought that if somebody didn't do anything I was there was a bit of personal focus and self-interest here.

Interviewer

What did you do, though? Tell me what you did.

Jack Jacobs

Well, I brought a lot of guys back to this small, wooded, overgrown canal area, 'cause it was the only place that was really at least partially safe.

Interviewer

Vietnamese.

Jack Jacobs

All Vietnamese except for my NCO, Ramirez, who survived—we were in the hospital together. It was a very difficult situation. I don't know how many people were killed and wounded—you know, 75 people killed and wounded then? That's a lot.

Interviewer

Did you have developed relationships with these Vietnamese soldiers?

Jack Jacobs

Lived with them—lived with them. Spoke Vietnamese with them—lived with their families. Vietnamese units had their families in their base camps, so I knew them. I knew their families.

Interviewer

So you were

Jack Jacobs

We were very close to them.

Interviewer

You were not saving strangers—you were saving people you knew.

Jack Jacobs

No, these were people who were my comrades I had spent lots of time—now, some of them had been replacements, but I knew them and lived with them. When we went back to base camp, we all lived together.

Interviewer

So you didn't feel any difference between saving a Vietnamese soldier and saving an American soldier.

Jack Jacobs

No, they were all in it together. And I'm telling you, those people who'd been in mixed units—that includes particularly Special Forces troops—who live with indigenous populations, trying to train them and so on, they can't make any distinction. I was on an operation with Special Forces in Vietnam, before this. We were on an ambush. It was—it got detected. We get into a big firefight, and contact the enemy. We have guys out in the open who are killed and wounded. An American non-commissioned officer runs out in the middle of a firefight to go rescue one of his Vietnamese Special Forces guys.

Jack Jacobs

Guy he lived with—Vietnamese guy—ran out and got him, brought him back. He was really big. I mean he could bench-press a Buick. And it was a good thing he was, 'cause this guy was—this guy was in pretty bad shape.

Interviewer

What happened to these colleagues you saved and that you fought with?

Jack Jacobs

Half of them died and half of them made it.

Interviewer

Are you still in contact with any of them?

Jack Jacobs

No, none of them.

Interviewer

Were you in contact with any of them after the war?

Jack Jacobs

No, and my guess is a lot of them died. Don't forget the war continued to be fought, and then when the North took over, they all were sent to reeducation camps, which were not like summer camp. My guess is the majority of them, if not all of them, did not survive.

Interviewer

Do you recall any of them by name and personality that you could describe?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, sure, yeah.

Interviewer

Tell me a couple of them.

Jack Jacobs

Well, they're all—there was a guy named Chu, a big, tall, lanky guy—looked like a Vietnamese basketball player. Had a very wry sense of humor, and was very disapproving when I would say, do, or suggest something which was not 100% grown-up or tactically

perfect. Heâ€™d look at me and heâ€™d sayâ€™weâ€™d speak in Vietnamese. My Vietnamese was very good back then. He says, â€œYou know better than that, Lieutenant.â€ And he was a lieutenant, tooâ€™he says, â€œYou know better than that.â€ He was a little bit older than I wasâ€™he was 32 years old.

Jack Jacobs

Great guyâ€™he was killed that day. Wounded in the legs by a mortar roundâ€™wounded in the legs, and it didnâ€™t look like he had life-threatening wounds. There was no arterialâ€™there was a lot of bleeding, but no arterial bleeding, and he diedâ€™died of shock. He was a good guy. He was a veryâ€™he was a great friend. There were lots of people like that.

Interviewer

Howâ€™d you learn Vietnamese?

Jack Jacobs

The Army sent me to school to learn Vietnamese. When they sent me to the Military Assistance Training Advisor course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where I already was anyway, â€™cause I was in the 82nd Airborne Division. They decided I was going to become an advisor, sent me to this course which taught you all about Vietnam, Vietnamese, being an advisor, what it was like to be an advisor, what you could expect, what you were supposed to do, what the objectives were, and so onâ€™all in the morning. In the afternoon, all these people, including me, would go to Vietnamese Language School.

Jack Jacobs

The large majority of them, after this five-week course, then went on leave for one month, and then went to Vietnam. A few of us were then selected to go to Vietnamese Language School for eight weeks, all day long, but we were shipped to a field, an airfield, on the outskirts of Fort Bliss, Texas, in the middle of the desert for eight weeks, where we would be in full-immersion Vietnamese language for eight weeks. And we do that then we take a proficiency test. We were expected to get the proficiency level 2, which meant somebody who knew how to speak pretty well, and read and write, toâ€™speaking, easy, listening, harder, reading and writing, very difficult.

Jack Jacobs

But we got to that level, and we were fully immersed in that, and then went on leave for a month, and then went to Vietnam. So I spoke pretty good Vietnamese after a while.

Interviewer

You went back to Vietnam fairly recently, isnâ€™t that right?

Jack Jacobs

No, well, I went back to visit. I went back to fight, â€™72â€™

Interviewer

Uh-huh.

Jack Jacobs

And I went back to visit aboutâ€”in February, actually.

Interviewer

Of this year.

Jack Jacobs

This year.

Interviewer

Weâ€™ll come back to â€™72, but tell me what it was like to be in Vietnam in February of this year.

Jack Jacobs

We went back to the same place where I fought, just about the same time of year. Donâ€™t forget that thisâ€”

Jack Jacobs

On this first deployment, you meanâ€”

Jack Jacobs

First deployment, yeah.

Jack Jacobs

Where you had thisâ€”

Jack Jacobs

Yeah. So we were thereâ€”

Jack Jacobs

Ambush.

Jack Jacobs

In February, and I was there beginning of March, so like four weeksâ€™ difference. And what startled me about being there is that it looked the same. Hadnâ€™t changed, really, physically, very much, but it didnâ€™t feel the same. Now, it didnâ€™t feel the same for a wide variety of reasons. The first and most significant one is that nobody was shooting at me, trying to kill me. The second is that memories are like this in any case, but particularly because this is what it really looked like. Memories are in semi-tones. It was all black and white, or sepia.

Jack Jacobs

Think about itâ€”I donâ€™t think people dream or think in color. Maybe theyâ€”maybe some do, but I certainly donâ€™t. Everything was all black and white. When I think about it, it was all kind of brown. The rice fields, which are hugely productiveâ€”I think they get like three crops of rice a year out of thereâ€”were all brown and fallow, â€™cause there was noâ€”the war was going on. There was nobody there to tend them. Everything there

now is green. The path to the left of my battlefield, which was just a path, is now paved with macadam. There's some motorbike traffic. There are stalls and grass houses all along there now.

Jack Jacobs

People are buying bananas and they're living there and they're eating and "I mean it's a lively, thriving place. Looked the same, physical proportions are the same. Don't forget I was already grown up when I went there. You go to someplace when you were a child, and then you go back to visit, like your schoolyard, looks really small. But if you go to someplace when you're an adult and then go back when you're an adult, ah, it still looks pretty much the same proportions. But it didn't feel the same. That was the shocking part of it.

Looking Back to Vietnam: A Return Trip and Retrospection
Interviewer

Why were you there?

Jack Jacobs

I went there just to visit "literally, just to visit. I was with a friend of mine who was making a trip around Asia, asked me if I wanted to go. He had the relationship with the government of Vietnam "a business relationship. And he said, "You can come. We can find out "we can go down to where you fought, if you want. We'll find the enemy commander if he's still alive."

Interviewer

Did you?

Jack Jacobs

Did "they did. They knew who he was.

Interviewer

Now, the enemy commander of the ambush.

Jack Jacobs

Of the ambush.

Interviewer

Wow. And you met him.

Jack Jacobs

Met him, and spent a couple hours with him, as a matter of fact, talking about it "and his wife.

Interviewer

What's his name?

Jack Jacobs

His name is Hung”Hung.

Interviewer

H-U”

Jack Jacobs

H-U-N-G, with an accent going down. His wife is there.

Interviewer

You sat in a home?

Jack Jacobs

Sat in his house, which is next door to a bicycle repair shop, not far from where we fought. He”s a retired brigadier general, survived the war. He was just a district commander. Showed me pictures of him in black pajamas, with one of his guy in black pajamas, going over a map, and so on, and we talked about it at great length.

Interviewer

He remembers the ambush.

Jack Jacobs

Oh, yeah, very well indeed. I asked him where he was and he pointed to a place at the apex of this L-shaped ambush. And I said, ”That”s where I would”ve put myself, too.” He gave me the”you know, there”s a lot of propaganda value in this, you know, big round-eye coming back and all that kind of stuff. But we spent our time talking about the battle. He”they dressed him up in a uniform, and believe it or not, I”m really short. I mean I used to be 5”4. I had to get a waiver to get a commission in the Army, and I”m, of course, now that I”m old and decrepit and falling apart, I”m much shorter than that.

Jack Jacobs

This guy”s shorter than I am. He”s like 5”1 or something like that, but they dressed him up in a uniform, and they”ve got these flashy epaulettes, and they”re hard, and they”re rimmed in this hard metal wire trimming. And he gave me this big hug”Vietnamese are very affectionate people, hold hands, a lot of hugging, and so on. Gave me this hug and cut my lip”I cut my lip on the epaulette. And I told him”in Vietnamese actually, it came back to me”so that his wife wouldn”t hear. It turns out that she”s deaf and she”s got cataracts anyway. Said, ”You wounded me again, you son of a bitch.”

Jack Jacobs

He laughed and laughed and laughed. And I meant it to be funny in any case. Well, we talked”I asked him how long had he known and he said, ”Three days,” we were coming. I said, ”How”d you know?” He said, ”We had a spy.” He said, ”We had two spies in the province chief headquarters.” I said, ”Did you have any non-NVA, North Vietnamese Army, advisors with you?” He said, ”Yes, we had two.” And everybody always said, ”Well, they might or might not have them.” Sometimes

weâ€™when we got into combat, we would kill, in the firefight, kill people who were Chinese.

Jack Jacobs

They had some Chinese advisors. But these guys were mostly for logistical purposes. But he said he had two North Vietnamese advisors, and didnâ€™t listen to what his advisors told him, ever. Part of that was for bravado, but being an advisor myself and not having been listened to very much, I told him thatâ€™s the job of advisors is not to be listened to, I guess, to which he laughed. We spent a lot of time talking about how we used to shoot at each other, but now we have peace and weâ€™re friends. He said that a number of times.

Jack Jacobs

What the Vietnamese word for â€œfriendâ€ sounds a lot to the untrained ear like the Vietnamese word for â€œshoot,â€ so it was something of a pun for him. And he laughed, but, you know, he was genuine with that.

Interviewer

And what did you feel? Did you feel any residual resentment?

Jack Jacobs

No.

Interviewer

Any sense ofâ€™no? No enemy feeling?

Jack Jacobs

He was the bad guy, and I was the good guy, and I was the bad guy, and he was the good guy, and he tried hardâ€™he tried hard to kill us, and we tried hard to kill him. He had some of his troops thereâ€™about a dozen guys he said fought in the battle, but I donâ€™t believeâ€™either none of them did, or maybe one or two of them did. And one of them had had one or two fingers shot off, and waved it at me. I mean these guys are like my age, but because of poor medical careâ€™because their socialized medicineâ€™had no teeth and so on.

But he waved his hand around and said, â€œYou shot my fingers off,â€ to me.

Interviewer

In retrospect, what is your opinion about the war in Vietnam in a kind of broad sense?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, well, there are lots of broad strokes here. The first is that maybe the thing to do wouldâ€™ve been to try to convince the French to stay the heck out. Just to leaveâ€™to pack up and go.

Interviewer

You mean way back in the â€™50s.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, in the â€™50s.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Donâ€™t forget we had Colonel Edward Lansdale with Ho Chi Minh during the war. I mean weâ€™

Interviewer

Didnâ€™t we actuallyâ€™didnâ€™t the Eisenhower administration, really notâ€™want nothing to do with this, initially, I mean that they wantedâ€™

Jack Jacobs

No, no, noâ€™no, they didnâ€™t want anything to do with it.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

I mean they said, â€œLook, you know, itâ€™s got nothing to do with us, man.â€

â€œThe Military Instrument of Powerâ€

Interviewer

So didnâ€™t we try thisâ€™we tried this and it ended up being the Cold War sort of intervened, andâ€™

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, we did. And donâ€™t forget that Kennedy wasâ€™the whole idea of the Cold War, youâ€™re absolutely right, the Cold War intervened. Then everything became easy. It became easy to distinguish between good guys and bad guys. If you were a communist, you were a bad guy. I still think communist are bad guys. But theyâ€™re sort of stupid, misguided bad guys. I mean theyâ€™re just idiots. Sometimes the really, really bad guys happen to be communists, and bad guys, and Stalin and all the rest of that stuff.

Jack Jacobs

But by and large, if youâ€™re talking about communism as a political and economic philosophy, itâ€™s bankrupt. I mean you can fix that. You can probably fix that, probably with a couple of shots of Scotch and so on, and convince the guy he doesnâ€™t know what the hell heâ€™s talking about. But yes, the world became black and white, or red and blue, for us. That intervened. We also had something, a problem that we still have, and that is considering the military instrument of power as the default instrument of powerâ€™bad idea. â€œWell, we got this problem with X.â€ â€œSend in the Marines.â€

Jack Jacobs

â€œNo, wait a minute, wait a minuteâ€™why do you do that?â€ We do that because the

military establishment knows that it can do stuff. It's very good at doing what it does. Economists are lousy at doing what they do. People who are involved in statecraft are lousy at doing what they do. They were then, they are today"people who are supposed to integrate all instruments of foreign policy"economic instruments, statecraft, the military instrument of power, everything else"are lousy at what they do. They're not professionals. They're terrible.

Jack Jacobs

And so what do you do when you're in that situation? You're confronted with a problem and you got to solve it. Well, you going to turn to the State Department to go fix it? They can't find their way out of a phone booth without assistance, and if you ask them, they'll tell you that. They'll say, "Well, we study that, but you want me to do that? We can't do that." You going to turn to an economist? He'll say, "Well, what we can do is we can sort of prevent a lot of money. We can stop the money, but that's not going to stop them getting the money through other channels."

Jack Jacobs

Where do you turn? You turn to the military establishment. "Can you blow these guys up?" "Sure, that's what we do. You want a country built? Not for"you want to blow people up? I'm your man." So we turn to the people who can do it. Now, what happens, unfortunately, is that when you make the break between being like a two and three-star general, when you salute and carry out orders that are not illegal or immoral, you say, "Sure. I'm going to take my guys" I'm going to take 17,000 or 170,000 guys, and just blow them to smithereens. We can do that. Sure, take that objective, I'm your man."

But when you get to be a four-star general, and you're at the top of the military food chain, you're required not only to not do things that are immoral or illegal, you're required to make sure that we don't do things that are stupid, too.

Interviewer

By that you mean the civilian military leadership, as in"

Jack Jacobs

Yes, civilian leadership and the military leadership. When you go to a guy who's a four-star general, and he says, "I need 100,000 people to go do X," and the civilian establishment says, "Well, we're going to give you 50,000," and the military guy says, "Well, I'll take them," knowing that either 100,000's right or 50,000's right. Either 500,000 or right, a million is right, or nobody's right"it can't be something in the middle. You don't settle for it. When the president of the United States, George H.W. Bush, says, "I've spoken to my generals and they've all said they've got enough people," he's a lying dog.

Interviewer

You mean George W. Bush"you said "George H."

Jack Jacobs

George W. Bush"

Interviewer

Yes. Yes.

Jack Jacobs

Iâ€™m sorryâ€”I apologize.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

I was thinking of the aircraft carrier and the previousâ€”and his father. When George W. Bush says publicly, â€œIâ€™ve spoken to my generals and theyâ€™ve all said that they have enough troops,â€”either heâ€™s lying or the generals are lying. Thereâ€™s no such thing as enough troops. And certainly not in that configuration when weâ€™re scrambling around sending guys back and forth a hundred timesâ€”thatâ€™s bullâ€”accessing Guard and Reserve. Theyâ€™re lying. Theyâ€™re lying.

Interviewer

But back to Vietnam, though, from whatâ€”so did Westmoreland fail us?

Jack Jacobs

Correct. Westmoreland failed us miserably. Looked good in a uniform, great guyâ€”heâ€™s wonderful. Heâ€™s a great hero of the Second World War, did great, wonderfully in Korea, 173rd Airborne Brigade, Airborne soldier and so on. And you had to love the man, but he was several levels above his pay grade. He had no business trying to deal with the White House and trying to formulate a solution to a war which he didnâ€™t understand.

Interviewer

What didnâ€™t he understand about it?

Jack Jacobs

He didnâ€™t understand that the use of the military instrument of power alone, and particularly the way we were using it, would fail.

Interviewer

Did Abrams repair that?

Jack Jacobs

Well, itâ€™s very interesting you should bring up Abrams. Abrams came down to the Department of Social Sciences not long before he died.

Interviewer

Which wouldâ€™ve been when, late â€™70s?

Jack Jacobs

Late '70s. It had to be "it had to be before '70" it had to be '76.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

Because that's the year I left. And he came down to talk to us in the Soc Department because we had put together an international relations text, and he was coming to give the Gray Hog speech or something like that. And he was nominally there to tell us what a great job we did on our international relations text. He was not there to do that at all "he was down there to meet us, to meet young captains and majors, to talk to the Soc Department, which he knew was thinking about stuff all the time, and which had at least as good an impact on developing officers as any other department there.

Jack Jacobs

And he talked about how frustrating it was to be the Chief of Staff of the entire United States Army. He said, "I can't get a thing done. I felt when I got to be Chief of Staff I could get everything" "I can't." He said, "It's very frustrating to me. It's a disappointment." His heart and head was in the right place, and I think to the extent that he could prevail over the stupidity of the bureaucracy that had become entrenched and overcome with inertia, and overpopulated with morons, I think he did, to the best extent, what he could do. In the end, I don't think he did what he maybe should have done. But I "

Interviewer

What should he have done?

Jack Jacobs

Oh, you go to the President of the United States, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you say, "I'm not doing it anymore. I'm not doing it. It's all wrong." And "

Interviewer

Wrong because it's un-winnable?

Jack Jacobs

It's un-winnable. I'm not talking about morality.

Interviewer

Un-winnable because of the nature of the conflict? I mean "

Jack Jacobs

Nature of the conflict. "We're not doing it right. We're going to have to be there for 25 years, and it's not going to be going around killing bad guys. I mean that's not working. We're doing the body-count bit, still "it's not working. It won't work "won't ever work. And this is not World War II. I'll tell you what will work. " This is what McChrystal said, basically. "It's going to take 10-20 years. We're

going to have to send lots more advisors over there, and so on.

Jack Jacobs

“And, by the way, if the government doesn’t change, if the government isn’t right in on this, we should just come home altogether, ‘cause it’s not going to work, period, no matter what we’re doing out in the field. Government’s got to be bought in on this. They’re not. And if they’re not going to do it, can you get these guys to change? Are they going to change? Are different people going to be there? And if the answer to that’s no, let’s all go home.” He knew that, but it takes—it takes somebody who isn’t certainly not.

Jack Jacobs

I think—I like to think I am, and people I know, I think, like to think that they are, but at the point of the decision, maybe it’s too tough a thing to do, to say you’re either—you’re not doing it anymore. He says to the President of the United States, “I’m not doing it, and I’m not letting you do it. I’m calling a press conference. Sitting on the Pentagon steps right now is the Press Corps, the entire Press Corps. They’re waiting for me to tell them something. I’m going to tell them something. The question is whether or not it’s the resignation that’s in my pocket right now. “The resignation that’s in my pocket right now is part of the briefing. You’re doing it my way.”

Jack Jacobs

Now, you could—he felt very bad about this. He knew that we were going down the wrong road. He knew it was not going to work, particularly because of the people he was working for. But the same situation obtained after we took Baghdad. Anybody who’s listening to this knows what an op-plan looks like, knows that they have to be verified at the combatant commander level back to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff every year. That they’ve been looked at, and this is what they now—we sign off on that. This is what this is supposed to look like, that every single one of them has a phase in which you consolidate on the objective and you satisfy whatever requirements are needed in that country afterwards and so on. Every one of them does, whether we’re invading Iraq or we’re counterattacking into Russia, because they’ve invaded Western Europe. I mean there are plans for all that. But if you’re the Secretary of Defense, and you cross out—let’s say there are 10 divisions on the troop time-phased troop deployment list, and you personally cross them out, say, “Well, they’re not going.”

Jack Jacobs

On an op-plan which the combatant commander, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff already says, “Okay,” well, if you’re the combatant commander and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you got to say something to the Secretary of Defense. And that says, “I’m not doing it, and I’m not letting you do it, either.” Either the plan was right when it went up there, or it’s right now—can’t be both.

Interviewer

So this is problem, really, though, I mean ‘cause the combatant commander, the chiefs, they’ve been in a position—they’ve been told since day one when they entered the Army that the civilian leadership directs the uniform leadership, right?

Jack Jacobs

Yes.

Interviewer

And it would seem out of character for someone who bought into and signed onto that dynamic to then turn when in a position at that level of power.

Jack Jacobs

Yes.

Interviewer

And say to the Secretary of Defenseâ€”itâ€™s almost like that sounds like a banana republic coup, in a way. You have the uniform guy saying to the Secretary of Defense, â€œYouâ€™re notâ€”youâ€™re not going to be able to do this.â€

Jack Jacobs

Correct. Andâ€”well, I mean, whenâ€”

Interviewer

Itâ€™s hard, is what Iâ€™m sayingâ€”must beâ€”

Jack Jacobs

Languageâ€”it ainâ€™t easy.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

And it takes somebodyâ€”you raise the question of character.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

But in the Army, youâ€™re also taught to be a conformist from day one.

Jack Jacobs

But thatâ€™sâ€”

Jack Jacobs

And suddenly youâ€™re in a position of strategic importance, and you have to make something thatâ€™s a true decision of character that may be out of conformity.

Jack Jacobs

If you're in a crisis—it takes a lot of stuff. It takes the leadership ability and the intelligence to be able to distinguish this situation as a crisis, and distinguish it from other difficult situations which were not crises. I think one of the essences of leadership is the ability to distinguish between crises and situations that are not crises. If you can't make that distinction, then you'll probably be a pretty good, you know, major General or three-star admiral, but I don't want to see you up there at the nexus of decision.

Interviewer

But Eric Shinseki stood up to the Secretary, and he was fired for it.

Jack Jacobs

And? I think that Eric—and Eric Shinseki's one of my heroes—he still didn't go far enough, did he? It's not enough to get fired. It's not enough to be right. “Oh, I'm right and they're wrong. Well, I quit. I'm not going to be a part of this thing. I quit.” No, no—you got to go—if it is a genuine crisis—and this takes some strength of intellect as well as character—you then have to go the extra step to demonstrate the strength of character to say, “Not only am I not—I'm not doing it—I'm not going to—I'm going to try my best to make sure you don't do it.”

Jack Jacobs

“And the way I'm going to do it is I'm not taking over your job. You can have—you can be Secretary of Defense all you want. But I'm going to tell all the people out there that you have no idea what you're doing. And the reason I'm going to do that is—cause I know I'm right.” Now, it takes a tough guy, it takes a smart guy to know he's right about something that's extreme as that, but it takes somebody of genuine character to be able to express it. And you're right, there's something different required of people who are at the top of the food chain, whether they're politicians or military people. It's something different required.

Jack Jacobs

So young cadets ought not be asking me whether or not I think they're going to perform well in combat. You'll perform fine—don't worry about it. You'll do well. You'll do well or die—I mean it's all—you're going to do it, because when you do it, you're going to be doing it—you're not going to be thinking of accomplishing the mission and what people think about you. You're going to think about your comrades. That's who you're going to—and that's why you're going to perform properly.

Jack Jacobs

But young kids ought to be asking, not just of me, but of everybody, “Do I have what it takes to operate where there's some ambiguity, and I've got to make not just a life-and-death decision—they're easy to make. But I've got to make a—I've got to make a life-and-death decision for the country.” Much tougher—where the stakes are really, really, really high. And I don't think that they—to go back to your question about Vietnam—they didn't measure up.

Jack Jacobs

And the guy who came closest, of the high-ranking—the guy who came closest was Creighton Abrams. And he's still—it sounds like one long sentence that's

connected withâ€”connected with â€œandâ€ and â€œor,â€ and â€œbut.â€ But we haveâ€”we sawâ€”we have a lot of the same problem todayâ€”we certainly had it back in â€™02-â€™03 and so on, so forthâ€”â€™05.

Interviewer

Is there a leader, an Army leader, that you feel has it today? Is someone to step up and make those difficult decisions?

Jack Jacobs

Yes, thereâ€™s a number of them. I think thatâ€”I think that McChrystal obviously knows what heâ€™s talking about.

Interviewer

But heâ€™s no longer in the Army.

Jack Jacobs

No, heâ€™s not. Well, heâ€™s doing a lot of good work outside, but heâ€™s no longer in the Army. He handled it wrong. I mean I wouldâ€™ve fired him after he made the first speech in London. â€œYou got a problem? Come to me.â€ The President handled it wrong. Youâ€™re not supposed to reach down five levels in the chain of command to fire him. Youâ€™re supposed to just call down to [Robert] Gates and have someâ€”tell Gates to â€œget rid of the guy and get me a replacement within 48 hours,â€ and quietly get rid of him. â€œI donâ€™t like him talking, saying that my policies stink in public.

Jack Jacobs

â€œHe can say that. He can say that to meâ€”not in a speech in London.â€ So I wouldâ€™ve gotâ€”and I certainly wouldâ€”theâ€”Obama did that as a political, as political grandstanding. â€œI am in charge. The military reports to me. All other levels of chain of command between me and McChrystal, step out of the way. Iâ€™m going to do this publicly, and demonstrate to everybody that I am in charge and these guys are not.â€ See, you never heard anything from Petraeus, did you, when he was told to step aside.

Jack Jacobs

Questionable whether or not I wouldâ€”I think I wouldâ€™ve, if I were Petraeus, I wouldâ€™ve toldâ€”I wouldâ€™ve told the president, â€œI agree with you that you got to fire him, but he works for me. Iâ€™m firing him, not you. And if youâ€™re going to do it, and youâ€™re going to do it because itâ€™s purely a political ploy, Iâ€™m not going to let you do that. It sends aâ€”reaching down through the levels of chain of command sends a very bad message to other general officers and to senior NCOs, who are trying to tell other people that the chain of command is supposed to workâ€”and youâ€™re demonstrating that it doesnâ€™t work. You fire me, too.â€

I mean thatâ€™s what I wouldâ€™ve done. But then, you know, Iâ€™m me, and I donâ€™t care. I mean I literally donâ€™t care what people think about me. Yes, I think McChrystalâ€”and all that notwithstanding, I think Petraeus knows what heâ€™s doing. Heâ€™s well-schooled in how heâ€™s supposed to act and what you do. Heâ€™s an intelligent guy, and I think he, among other peopleâ€”there are lots of other guys. Marty Dempseyâ€™s a great guy atâ€”Ray Odierno was a cadet of mine at West Point. Heâ€™ll say, â€œWow, Iâ€™m just a dumb guy. I finished 673rd in my class and I donâ€™t know anything.â€

Jack Jacobs

And then you go back, if you still have them, and you show him his grades in my class. You say, "You're not such a dumb guy. I don't care where you finished." We have a good—we have some good people now, who are going to have to steer the military establishments through some very difficult times. We'll see what their mettle is now.

Interviewer

Thank you. We've run out of time. Hope we can pick up again at some point.

Jack Jacobs

Any time.

Interviewer

Good.

Applying the Principles of War

Interviewer

Jack, when did you leave the Army?

Jack Jacobs

I retired from the Army on the 1st of February, 1987.

Interviewer

And you retired as a

Jack Jacobs

A colonel.

Interviewer

A colonel.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah.

Interviewer

And did you then realize your dream of going into the private sector and having a different life?

Jack Jacobs

Well, I always wanted to be a lawyer, but I never became a lawyer. As a matter of fact, when the Army sent me to graduate school to study political science, or I went to graduate school at Rutgers, you had to major in one discipline of political science, and minor in two. And one of my minors was constitutional law, as I really liked it. Matter of fact, it was the Army that whetted my appetite for it, because I came to the Army before Miranda, and

therefore was at trial counsel and defense counsel just as often as I can, and the number of cans of beans in the commissary came up on duty. But learned a lot about the law and I really enjoyed it.

Jack Jacobs

But I didn't become a lawyer. I didn't come out to become a lawyer. I came out. I got out of the Army almost reluctantly, even though I wanted to get out. I had wanted to get out 17 years earlier. I ran across a guy at a cocktail party who had been a Marine and was an A-4 pilot, and came out of being in the Marines. He was my age, a little bit older, and went to Wall Street, like all of his forbearers in his whole family had done. Had an institutional bond firm and told me at this cocktail party. I was dressed up in my uniform. A buddy of mine, Bob Kerrey, who used to be Governor of Nebraska, who I'd known, dragged me out to this cocktail party.

Jack Jacobs

So I had to wear my uniform. I had all my stuff on. I had very little acreage. You'd put a few awards and decorations on there, you know, I looked like a doorman at the Plaza Hotel. This guy, Tom Kane, came up to me and says, he said, "I want you. Can you retire from the Army?" "Why, yes, I can."

Jack Jacobs

This is Tom Kean came up?

Jack Jacobs

Not Tom Kean the governor.

Interviewer

You're talking about. You're not talking about the governor of New Jersey, Tom Kean. Okay.

Jack Jacobs

Governor of New Jersey. Tom Kane. Thomas Francis Aloysius Kane. Oh, he's.

Interviewer

K-E-A-N. No E?

Jack Jacobs

No, K-A-N-E.

Interviewer

K-A-N-E, okay.

Jack Jacobs

He went to whatever it is in New York. I can't remember. Went to Fordham and so on.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

And said, "When can you retire from the Army?" I said, "Well, I guess I've been in 20 years, I can retire now." He said, "You need to retire from the Army. I'll give you a big sack of money to learn the bond business." Well, okay. I came home, my wife asked about that cocktail party, and I told her the story, and she said, "What's the bond business?" "I have no damn idea, but it's three times what I'm making as a colonel in the Army," and I put in my retirement papers. This was October of '86. The Army tried to keep me on.

Jack Jacobs

They called me up, said, "You shouldn't retire. You're eventually going to get promoted, you're going to get promoted now, you're going to get promoted soon, you really have a lot to offer," and so on, and I actually got a call from the Chief of Staff of the Army in January, and he was saying

Interviewer

Who was that "who was he?"

Jack Jacobs

John Wickham. He said, "My son" "he was very" "I don't mean paternalistic in a nasty sense. He was a very paternal" "he was an avuncular sort of guy. I didn't have to work for him, so maybe a lot of people said, "Hey," that the guy was really an overbearing jerk. But he was Chief of Staff of the Army, and he was a very calm, smooth-talking guy, very nice and relaxing. "Why are you getting out of the Army, son?" And I says, "Well, sir, I've already put a child through college" "that was my daughter" "I've got a son in college, and I've got another son I'm going to have to put through college. Sir, I can't afford to be in the Army anymore."

Jack Jacobs

I was 42 years old, and I was making about \$40,000 a year. I just couldn't afford to do it anymore. And I retired" reluctantly retired. When people ask me today what do I miss most about the Army, it's the people. It's the reason I stayed in in the first place. It wasn't a "go skewer the bad guys," to be honest, although that was part of the deal. The deal was you had to go skewer the bad guys. For me, it was the people. I couldn't stand the idea of being away from these people. And today, I work really hard to get as close to the military people as I possibly can.

Jack Jacobs

I never turn down a chance "if I can" "if I can not avoid being with them, I've got to be with military people" "don't care what the branch is."

Interviewer

Now, why was Tom Kane particularly interested in you in the bond business because you were someone with Army experience?

Jack Jacobs

I think so. Well, I know so.

Interviewer

What did he think you could take from the Army experience?

Jack Jacobs

His view is that military people, a priori, know more about stuff, whatever it happens to be, and/or can learn more about stuff, whatever it happens to be, if they don't know it, faster, more efficiently, better than anybody else. Because he was in the Marines, he knows that young people get responsibility and authority out of proportion to their age in the military. That nobody gets authority and responsibility younger, earlier, and with greater consequences than military people.

Jack Jacobs

This whole business about—that we have now and say, “All you have to do is put a uniform on people, send them out, and they’ve got post-traumatic stress. And don’t hire them, because, you know, there’s something wrong with them.” It’s complete nonsense. No, it’s not nonsense that there’s some lingering effects—long-term lingering effects—of getting your bell rung all the time. That’s not the point.

Jack Jacobs

You’ve got 19, 20, 23-year-old people who know more about life, more about how to determine what the objective is, know more about how to allocate resources, know more about how to keep stuff in reserve, know more about how to distinguish between situations that are crises and that are not crises, know more about how to get stuff done, than people who are running organizations with 200,000 employees. [1:39:09] Why? Cause they’ve done it, and employers don’t realize it, and military people themselves sometimes don’t realize it. No, Tom Kane figured that out. He could throw stuff at me, and I’d get it done, as would any military people.

Jack Jacobs

And when I did retire and I went to work as an institutional bond salesman, I discovered that he’d hired—75 percent of the people he’d hired had had military experience at one point or another. Guy next to me, Tommy O’Grady, who called while we were doing this to leave a message, had been one of only about 200 people who’d been drafted into the Marine Corps during the War in Vietnam, and was fought up at Khe Sanh. He had dozens and dozens of people working for him, and almost all of them had had military experience at one point. He knew they could get it done. That’s why he hired me.

Interviewer

What’s the bond business like?

Jack Jacobs

Today, it’s very much different, of course, than it was when I came in. I entered just before the equity market crashed in the fall of ’87, where there was an inverse relationship between what happened in the bond market, what happened in the equities

market. Now they're inextricably linked. There were huge spreads that we could make between—even in government bonds. You could make a quarter of a point in a government bond. Did a lot of sinker, sinking bonds—of course which issues had to be repurchased by the issuer.

Jack Jacobs

And so we went around to find the insurance companies, the reinsurance companies that purchased these bonds at issue. We'd buy big bunches of them. We'd have what needed to be put into the sinking fund by the issuer, and so, you know, we had made a lot of money. All that stuff is gone now. The bond, the fixed-income business, as it existed even when I came out of the Army, doesn't exist anymore. Everything's all done online now. There are no anomalies in the marketplace to say arbitrages.

Jack Jacobs

And so institutions are driven to think of new, different, exciting, interesting, and sometimes dangerous ways in which to capture value in a market.

Interviewer

So that drives these risky ventures you're

Jack Jacobs

Yes. And you should get involved—you should have some risk. You're not going to make any money with no risk. But one thing I learned when I was at Bankers Trust, when I was in the—I was a partner in the institutional hedge fund business, and I ran the foreign exchange options business for them worldwide. As an aside, you can ask me what did I know about those things? Nothing. But it didn't matter—I was in the Army. You know, you learn pretty quickly.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

Discovered then that we could construct not necessarily complex structures, but certainly structures that were innovative. That were fine, and produced decent income and return, but on a risk-adjusted basis, also produced good returns. That as we looked at the risk and never took extraordinary risk in order to get some absolute return. You're nuts if you do that. And of course, a decade later, a lot of these institutions, that's exactly what they did. They said, "Look, if I'm making \$5 with this much risk, I can make \$25 if I take this much risk."

Jack Jacobs

Okay, but don't take this much risk. You know, it's a bit like the old Groucho Marx routine. I went to the doctor, and I said, "Doc, it hurts when I do this." He said, "Don't do that. That'll be a hundred bucks." We forgot about the risk-adjusted return, and that's what happened.

Interviewer

What is it about the Army that—is it the conditioning and adaptability—the sense that no

task is unachievable? What makes people who've been in the Army, particularly officers who've been in the Army, succeed in the private sector?

Jack Jacobs

And NCOs, too, because they have their charges what they're charged with is just as complex, in many respects. Well, I think it's a number of factors. Like I told you, I'm not a fan of single-factor analysis. We have an all-volunteer Army, and to a greater or lesser extent, you've got self-selection. By the time somebody gets to be in a position of leaving the service after honorable service, I mean he's at that point because he was a guy who could do that when he came in. And all the military has done is burnished that capability and improved its applicability, expanded its capability, and put more tools in this guy's toolbox.

So there's a certain amount of self-selection that takes place here.

Interviewer

You don't teach them about the bond business.

Jack Jacobs

No, but they do teach you to use the about the principles of war, for example. I'm always thinking about the principles of war. We're taught that you shouldn't do anything until you've considered all the principles of war. Well, what are they? Well, think about it a little bit. I think the most important principle of war is the principle of the objective. You can't tell any troop to go do something until you first tell them what it is you're trying to accomplish. How are we going to know it's over? What is the mission?

And yet now sometimes, in the military and certainly in the civilian world, in business and government, we throw assets out without any idea of articulating what it is we're trying to accomplish. Military when you're a 19-year-old kid, the military teaches you not to do that.

Interviewer

Managing risk, what you just said before.

Jack Jacobs

It's all

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

This is all the same stuff you do

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

In the bond business, in the business of constructing residential housing, in the business of developing a manufacturing technique, in writing software—it's all the same. These are the same thought processes. What you do when you hire somebody who's been in the military is hire somebody whose thought process is conducive to achieving objectives in an efficient kind of way. You're hiring somebody who's done that all before. So

Interviewer

And they do it where there's life-and-death consequences, concentrating the mind, right? I mean that's part of it.

Jack Jacobs

You're also—so that's a third thing

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

With it—you're finding somebody who has succeeded in an environment which asks people to operate effectively and efficiently when everybody in the world's trying to kill them. In a situation in which most people's brains would fall out and say, "You know what—I think I've had too much. I think I'll procrastinate and wait until I think let's do this tomorrow. I'll go home and have a couple of martinis, work on this tomorrow." You're—These are people who can go have a martini and wait until tomorrow.

These are people who understand the notion that when today's gone, it's gone forever, and you can't get it back. They don't have the luxury of saying, "Well, we'll do this tomorrow." There is no—the SEALs have an expression which is worth—everybody should remember. Military people know this, but civilian people don't know this. "The only hard day was yesterday." Today's today.

Jack Jacobs

Also—and there are other things as well. Like I said, I'm not a fan of single-factor analysis. A military person will ask exactly the same thing as somebody who's about ready to write a big check for an investment, whether he's doing proprietary training or he's doing it for his own account. The question that he asks before he signs the check—military people do this all the time—or if there's a niche in the market, nobody else can get their element, there are restrictions on entry—all these reasons why we shouldn't be in the market. Big spread, little risk, we've already got the assets for it, and all of it, right?

All the same questions that you ask in the military before you sign the check for the investment—before they give you 20 million or 200 million.

Jack Jacobs

And even if it does happen, this is what you should do in reserve to make sure that the deleterious results of this Six Sigma event is not devastating. For Eisenhower, he had already prepared the message to send back to [George C.] Marshall that said, "Invasion's a failure. Disengaging. Sending everybody back to the boats." That

was his plan, and it was a reasonable plan under the circumstances. If he didn't get ashore by like D Plus 2, it was over. So even he had a "What can go wrong?" plan. He had a "What can go wrong?" plan, too, and that was to conserve the force and send them back on the boats. Where do you learn these things? You like learn them in the military. That's where you learn them.

Interviewer

Thank you very much.

Political Decision-Making, Post-9/11

Interviewer

Colonel Jacobs, where were you on 9/11?

Jack Jacobs

I was home, in the house I occupied previously.

Interviewer

You were in New Jersey.

Jack Jacobs

In New Jersey. My house was 7.4 miles due east of where we are right now.

Interviewer

Mm-hmm.

Jack Jacobs

I was sitting at my desk in the morning. Turned on the television, and there was the image of the towers burning. I had been on a conference call with London before that, so I hadn't been looking at the television, had no idea what was going on. Looked at the screen, and my first response was, "I wonder why they're rerunning the tape of the attack on the World Trade Center in '03," not even realizing that the

Interviewer

You mean '93.

Jack Jacobs

'93"not even"you know you're getting old when you miss it by a whole decade. Not realizing that there were no"there was no tape like that for then. There was an explosion in the parking garage in the basement and so on. And then I realized what had happened.

Interviewer

What was your reaction? Did you think immediately that it"being a national security expert, did you think immediately that

Jack Jacobs

It was a terrorist attack. As a matter of fact, I alreadyâ€”I started getting phone calls from people I knew telling me exactly what had happened and what they suspect was going on and all the rest of it.

Interviewer

Did you know anything about al-Qaeda to that point?

Jack Jacobs

Yes. Oh, yes.

Interviewer

You did?

Jack Jacobs

Yeah.

Interviewer

And did you immediately suspect al-Qaeda was responsible?

Jack Jacobs

Yes. Yeah. It wasâ€”they were foremost among, in the minds of everybody who was studying. And I was not a big student, and still am not a big student, of terrorism. But if youâ€™re on theâ€”even on the periphery of studying the military instrument of power and national security, you knew who al-Qaeda was. Donâ€™t forget they were behind all the attacks previous to that. And we, by the way, paid no attention to it.

Interviewer

Do you see it as a turning pointâ€”how could you not I guessâ€”in American history? What is your feeling about pre-9/11, post-9/11, and defining America?

Jack Jacobs

I thought that the event defined America, but not in ways that one would normally expect from an event that was as catastrophic as it was. I mentioned this earlier. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was. Very few people knew where Hawaii was. Hawaii didnâ€™t become a state till I was in high school. Pearl Harbor was bombed, and then everybody ran off the very next day, on the Sundayâ€”on the Monday, on the 8th of December, 1941â€”ran off to reception stations everywhere to try to figure out how they could defend the Republic.

Now, I know that this is a bad contrast, because the situation was different then, the enemy was different then, than it is today.

Interviewer

Even more, he said, â€œGo to your malls and start spending.â€

Jack Jacobs

â€œGo to the malls and start spending.â€

Interviewer

Yeah.

Jack Jacobs

That's clearly not the right response. Either this is a turning point in how we feel about and deal with enemies of the Republic, or it's not. But if it's not, then you better have something to say about it. And there was very poor response from the government—just inexcusable.

Jack Jacobs

That the problem is that we really didn't know what's going on, and so we need a Director of National Intelligence. And I think that's absolute nonsense. We had a Director of National Intelligence on 9/11. He was the Director of Central Intelligence. His job was to be the Director of National Intelligence. If what you're saying is that we can get better intelligence by inserting yet another inept, hide-bound, inertia-ridden, expensive bureaucracy in the intelligence chain of command that we're going to get better as a result, you don't know what you're doing. You have no idea what you're doing.

Interviewer

Do you think that since then we have done the right things to protect the country going forward?

Jack Jacobs

Yes, but not enough. I mean like anything else, we've done a lot. We've wised up a great deal. We've prevented a fairly substantial number of attacks because our intelligence has improved. We've done some things which have actually made it more difficult to protect ourselves, and I point to the finding of the 9/11 Commission. And I've had conversation with some of the people on the Commission, and told them they're idiots. Finding of the 9/11 Commission embraced by both the executive branch and the legislative branch of this government, that what we need is yet another intervening headquarters in the intelligence apparatus.

Interviewer

Isn't the argument there to have some coordination between domestic and international intelligence?

Jack Jacobs

That's what the Director of the CIA is charged to do by law. If what you're saying is he can't do it because he had trouble taking off his DCIA hat, you got the wrong guy. You got the wrong guy. Get somebody else, then. Get somebody who can do that. He's got to do that. That's what he's charged to do. If you're saying that you've got a great guy in uniform to be the Chief of Staff of the United States Army. Looks good, did a good job before.

By the way, there's another thing you learn in the Army that you've got to put to work when you're in the banking business and anything else

Don't surround yourself—surround yourself with good people, and don't promote

somebody because of the job that he did. [1

Jack Jacobs

And if he can't do it "if he" because he can't both be Chief of Staff of the Army and also represent national interests as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then get rid of him. You don't insinuate yet another bureaucracy to make sure that the Army's doing what it's supposed to do at the national level.

Interviewer

Where were you on that Sunday night when President Obama announced that we had killed Osama bin Laden?

Jack Jacobs

I was at the studio, 'cause we knew that was coming.

Interviewer

At NBC.

Jack Jacobs

At NBC "at 30 Rock.

Interviewer

You got a call earlier in the day that it was happening?

Jack Jacobs

Well, I knew that "most people knew that something was going on, and that that was it.

Interviewer

Code went up, I think, isn't that right?

Jack Jacobs

A lot of people knew it was happening.

Interviewer

Yeah. What was your reaction to that, vis-à-vis 9/11? A closure of some sort or

Jack Jacobs

Oh, well, that's an interesting question. You know, I've "I'm an equal opportunity castigator, and I think that all people who are elected officials and who are professional politicians have a lot to answer for. And this President has a lot to answer for as well. He's "like most other people who are in his position, is a self-centered, narrow-minded, self-aggrandizing jackass. I mean there that he's no different than anybody else. And he made an extremely gutsy decision, and I'm trying to think about whether or not I would've had the guts to make the same decision myself.

Jack Jacobs

Defense Department says, "Look, what we can do, we've got it, we've got 80 percent degree of confidence that he's there. We can flatten it, absolute. This is our plan. Here's how we're going to bomb it. This is what these are the weapons that we're going to use. This is the time on target that we're going to and so on—we can do it. We'll absolutely flatten it. There'll be collateral damage. Collateral damage is estimated to be this, and so on. And the CIA is saying, "We don't want you to—I mean please don't bomb it. We want you to send a team in there and raid it, because Osama bin Laden, so what?"

Jack Jacobs

We made a big deal out of him, and that's our problem. We shouldn't have done that, shouldn't have personalized it in the first place. George H.W. Bush made a big mistake doing that.

Interviewer

George W.

Jack Jacobs

I mean—George W. Bush made a big mistake doing that. But now that we're going to do it, we have the opportunity to gain enormous amounts of information, which we will be able to process into first-class finished intelligence—the best opportunity we've ever had to do something like that. But in order to do that, we have to send people on the ground. What can go wrong is the question, and what can go wrong is something of a combination of—this is the Defense Department is saying this—is a combination of Black Hawk Down and Desert One. You know—it's

Interviewer

Black Hawk Down being the Somalia episode, Desert One being the failed attempt to rescue the hostages in Tehran.

Jack Jacobs

Correct, in Tehran. So four helicopters—as many as four or more helicopters destroyed on the ground in Abbottabad. SEALs and CIA agents of some numbers getting killed and/or being captured, being paraded and dragged through the streets, so on, and other losses as well. That's your downside, boss. "We recommend," let's say the State Department, "that the risk-adjusted return on that stinks. Great intelligence, too much risk."

Jack Jacobs

And the President took an enormous risk, and decided that the outcome—the positive outcome was so extraordinary as to outweigh the risk that would've been taken—that was taken. But we lost a helicopter there.

Interviewer

Well, but you also can look at it another way. It succeeded, so we look back and say, "How terrific." But when you were talking to me a few minutes ago about business, and why go for the big risk, he went for the big risk.

Jack Jacobs

It is a veryâ€”it was a very ballsy decision. In his mindâ€”I donâ€™t think you can quantify that risk like you can, for example, in capturing interest rate differentials among European currencies, or trading the basket of equities against the index using the same bet, same environment. I mean you can doâ€”you can quantify that. Thereâ€™s a certain degree of risk there, and thatâ€™s also quantifiable. You canâ€™t quantify this risk. But if it fails, it fails catastrophically.

Interviewer

Finished his Presidency in many ways, right? I mean it justâ€”

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, and to his great creditâ€”I donâ€™t know what was going on in his mind, and I canâ€™t tell you what the conversation was in the tank, but my guess is the DOD said, â€œBig risk, wouldnâ€™t do itâ€”out of your mind if you do it.â€ And the CIA or somebody else saying, or maybe some other people inside DOD who were there, saying, â€œI disagree. I think big risk, yeah, but itâ€™s important we get this information. Weâ€™re going toâ€”this isâ€”we need this info. Even if heâ€™s not there, we needâ€”this info is there. We need that.â€

Interviewer

Whatâ€™s very interesting about that is if you talk to the Bush administration veterans, theyâ€™ll say that their focus was on preventing the next attack. And if you talk to those who feel like we neglected Osama bin Laden, the point wouldâ€™ve been we didnâ€™t punish for the attacks that happened. Then here we have an act that actually was a combination of both.

Jack Jacobs

Yeah, although the punishing part, the make it look good part, I would like to think isâ€”was one of the objectives, but a very, and almost insignificant portion of the objective. We didnâ€™t have to get Osama bin Laden, to be honest with you. You could argue from a public relations standpoint itâ€™s a huge coup. But at the end of the day, in terms of prosecuting a War on Terror against bad guys, in theâ€”withâ€”if you have the objective of making life difficult for al-Qaeda to strike again anywhere, even among our friends, I think it was just theâ€”

Interviewer

The intelligence?

Jack Jacobs

Yeah. The intelligence was really very, very important. And, by the way, it has been. The guys who said that we really need that information and we turn it into great successes was absolutely right. If somebody told me as President of the United States that I had to take big risk in order to capitalize on getting Osama bin Laden, from aâ€”from a domestic political, and international political consumption standpoint, but that there was no ancillary value to it, I wouldnâ€™t do that.

And I think thisâ€”I would like to think that this president would not do that. And that no president would do it, just to be able to say, â€œLook, I got a 90% chance that I canâ€”you

can kill this bad guy.

Jack Jacobs

“We know what’s inside there. There’s no intelligence there.” I like to think that nobody would take that risk. But I think it’s a ballsy decision, very gutsy decision to take the substantial amount of risk in order to get the intelligence that we got. There were a hundred thumb drives, and that’s not all of them. We had to go back the next couple of days, under the aegis of the Pakistanis. Say, “Hey, we’re coming back. Don’t mess with us. We’re coming back, and you stay away. We’re going to clean the place out of the rest of the stuff that’s there.”

And we didn’t—and not all of it, either, by the way. No, no, no—a tough decision.

Interviewer

Thank you.