



# **The Case of Cadet Webster Smith, The Last Word: Unrestricted Coast Guard Chronicles Vol 02 Nr 01**

*Judge London Steverson USALJ*

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We, as Americans, cherish fairness. We like to believe that people are not punished or unjustly rewarded without justifiable cause. We like to dwell on parables of white virtue and black advancement culminating in the flowering of goodwill all around. Events sometimes force us to widen our gaze and focus on terrain we would rather not see. The 2006 court-martial of Cadet Webster Smith at the United States Coast Guard Academy did just that. The Webster Smith case was a litmus test for justice in America. Every once in a while a case comes along that puts our humanity as a people, and as Americans, on trial. Everything that we profess to stand for as Americans was on trial. Our sense of justice in America and particularly in the U.S. Military was on trial. This was no ordinary trial. Our humanity was on trial. Our system of justice was on trial. This case dissolved the deceptive façade and exposed certain moral deficiencies in our system of justice. This case alone puts the legitimacy of the entire military justice system at risk. We now see that there is little or no justice in military justice. Any reasonable person who looks at this case or any other high profile military justice case would have to conclude that the Military Justice System is not designed to render justice. It is a system designed to punish. The entire courts-martial system, from Summary Court-martial to General Court-martial, has one specific purpose; that is to punish anyone who commits an offense against the Uniform Code of Military Justice. This is intended to be the definitive word on the first and only court-martial of a United States Coast Guard Academy cadet. This Case is unique in that this has never happened before. No other Coast Guard Academy Cadet has ever been punished at a General Courts-martial. That is saying a lot for an institution that has been around since 1876. Also, it has been ten years since the trial and conviction. An entire decade has passed. The sentence has been served. The Supreme Court Petition for A Writ of Certiorari has been denied. The Record is complete. Cadet Smith was a senior when the trial began. He was within months of graduating from the Academy, but he was expelled. No Clemency was granted. His career was ruined. His life was irreparably harmed. For ten years he was required to register in the State of Texas as a Sexual offender. He married, had children, and for ten years he was not allowed to attend the birthday parties of his children. What distinguishes this book from other books on the Case is that this book distinguishes how the Coast Guard Legal Officers and the senior Academy officers disposed of this case as opposed to other cases with similar fact patterns. This Case will serve as a witness to an era in the United States Military and its Service Academies that was ripe with cultural and ethical upheavals, proceedings with plenty of due process and little justice, sexual assaults in the military, retaliation against whistleblowers, mind blowing results, aggravation and frustration.

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