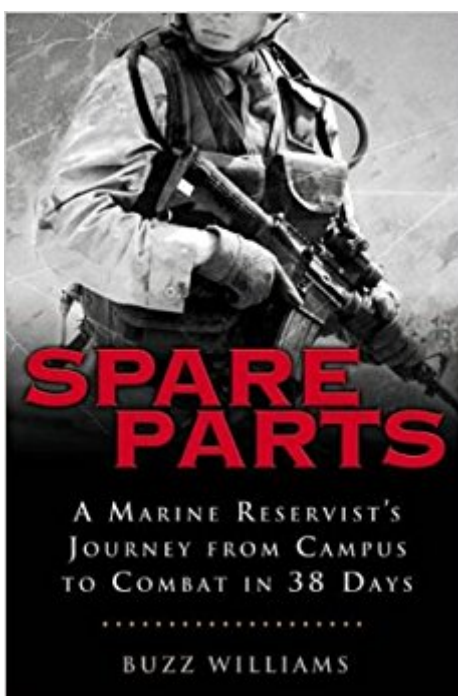


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# Spare Parts: A Marine Reservist's Journey From Campus To Combat In 38 Days



## Synopsis

A compelling look into the world of reservists--more than just the "spare parts" of our nation's military--as seen through one man's transformation from weekend warrior to combat marine. In 1989, Buzz Williams walked into a marine recruiting office to follow in the footsteps of the deceased older brother he grew up idolizing by signing up to join the Marine Reserves. Over the course of the next year, he would earn money to pay his college tuition by devoting one weekend a month and two full weeks in the summer to the grueling and often dangerous rigors of military training, while enduring the jarring readjustment that occurred each time he returned to civilian life. But Williams had no idea that even the newest reservists could find themselves on the frontlines of a battlefield in a matter of weeks. On August 2, 1990--the day that he graduated from Light Armored Vehicle School--Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait, and Williams' life would change forever. *Spare Parts* tells the story of Williams' harrowing deployment to the Persian Gulf, where he would be thrust into battle only 38 days after being called up. Enduring both the condescension of full-time Marines and the danger of his limited training, he managed to form a core group that struggles to gain respect from a military machine that viewed them as mere "spare parts." In gripping, you-are-there detail, Williams brings to life the physical and emotional trials he would face on the killing fields of Kuwait--where some of the woefully underprepared Marines are able to rise to the challenge and others are broken by the horrors of battle. A powerful portrait of one man's experience in battle--and of the reservists who stand ready to leave civilian life to defend our nation at a moment's notice--*SPARE PARTS* adds a moving new perspective to the literature of war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Long the stuff of historical, literary, and cinematic legend, the United States Marine Corps maintains arguably the most fervent cult of devotion of any branch of the Armed Services. Yet despite the colorful Corps traditions and clichés that have long since become a part of American culture, the crucial human dimensions of what drives a man to become a Marine have remained largely unexplored. Buzz Williams bravely stakes out his turf in this insightful memoir of his years as a Marine reservist and tour of duty in the first Gulf War of 1991. Inspired by the USMC service of an older brother who died a tragic, early death, Williams' initial attraction to the Corps is almost cult-like in its intensity (his adopted nickname stems from the close-cropped military haircut he'd worn since childhood). As a way to balance his drive for service with the desire for a college education, Williams joined the USMC Reserves, and quickly found himself a second-class citizen in his cherished institution--when the Marines' "Green Machine" breaks down, they call for "Spare Parts," the Corps' derogatory term for reservists. But, when Iraq invaded Kuwait on the eve of his graduation from armor training at Camp Pendleton, new warrior Williams quickly found himself headed inexorably towards desert warfare in which American forces were often their own worst enemy. What is striking about Williams' tale is its attentive, persistent psychoanalyses of both his fellow warriors and himself--an examination that finds many a conflicted hero with feet of clay. His unflinching observations about a venerable institution hobbled by bureaucracy, recruitment compromises, woefully inadequate training, and a chronic shortage of supplies seem especially timely in light of the contemporary military quagmire in Iraq. Yet through all his doubts and travails, Williams' dedication to the Corps emerges stubbornly *Semper Fi*. --Jerry McCulley

This clear and useful autobiography gives a valuable picture of those American fighting men and women drawn from the reserves. Following in his revered older brother's footsteps, the author joined the Marine reserves by way of the full ordeal at Parris Island, described with great and occasionally nauseating vividness. He then spent six years as crew in a light armored vehicle, an armored car with a crew of four, in which he saw combat in Operation Desert Storm only 38 days after being called up. After the war, he continued as a Marine reservist while making a career as a professional educator, where he drew on his Marine training for dealing with problem students. He served his reserve time with a happy-go-sloppy Sergeant Moss and the gung-ho Sergeant Krause, filled in gaps when nobody showed up for drills and learned the vices and virtues of both his personal equipment and his vehicles. He survived not only combat but the none-too-friendly rivalry between regular and reserve Marines, and worked through a postwar bout of post-traumatic stress

disorder while keeping his marriage intact and raising a son. He has written this book with the same care and attention to detail that he exhibited as a Marine. Through him, we have more knowledge about the situation of the reservists on whom this country's military effectiveness increasingly depends. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. I thought the author's writing style was excellent and I was never bored at any point. I really thought it gave a complete picture . . . from Buzz's childhood fantasies of being a marine to his reflecting on the experience as a veteran of the '91 gulf war (while watching the recent Iraq war unfold). I thought Buzz did a good job telling the good, the bad and the ugly of his entire experience. I love that he gave praise where it seems to have been deserved, and chastised the nimrods he met.

I was unprepared for how smoothly this book read and how I didn't ever want to put it down! It was a combination of Buzz's writing style and my eagerness to hear more about the significant events that took place during his Marine years (both in training, during war, and on the home front) that made this book a page-turner. One nice aspect about the writing--Buzz moves quickly, he never gets bogged down in too much detail. He writes succinctly and concisely. Great writing and editing.

I just finished reading "Spare Parts" and highly recommend it to anyone who knows someone in the Marine Corps Reserves, knows someone thinking of joining, or just wants a better appreciation of what our service men and women go through. "Spare Parts" provides two views of the Marine Corps: the more well-known comradery side (i.e., "once a Marine, always a Marine,") and toughness of the Corps, as well as the less glamorous side (i.e., training, drilling, and combat). Further, it provides an interesting perspective on the unique mental aspects of reserve service. As a father with a son in the Marine Corps Reserves, this book really hit home. After graduating from Parris Island and subsequent training at Camp Legune, NC, and Twentynine Palms, CA, my son returned home to go back to school, attend monthly drills, and await his call-up to active duty. While as gung-ho as John Wayne after leaving Parris Island (the more common view of a Marine), he has since also become aware of the other, less heralded side of military reserve life such as the lack of resources, inefficiency, etc. While specific instances of these conditions are detailed in "Spare Parts," Mr. Williams doesn't stop there but also continues to describe how he overcame many of the human (i.e., personalities and attitudes) and resource (i.e., training and equipment) impediments that he

and others routinely experience; invaluable lessons for any Marine. Finally, this book helped me to appreciate the monthly mental roller coaster that Marine Reservists go through. The difficult transition in "mind set" from a civilian to a Marine back to a civilian each month is something that I really didn't have an appreciation for; however, since reading the book, I can recognize as a reality in my son. As the father of a young Marine that has a better-than-average chance of being called to active duty during his enlistment, many of the experiences described in this book scared the hell out of me, but it also provided a much needed perspective that I, and others, need to understand, especially if one is considering joining the Marine Corps Reserves. In conclusion, to all those individuals who have made and lived that commitment to "Corps and country," all I can say is thank you and Semper Fi.

I was intrigued by Williams' book on several levels - it appealed to me because of my general interest in things historical and military; it was timely, given that the Gulf War II is in many ways a continuation of Gulf War I; it was also written by someone who is currently a teacher; finally, it gets into an arena that I could look at and say, 'That was almost me!' I seriously contemplated the military for a time while in college as a reservist (one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer, and I'd get experience and scholarship money for college) - had I followed that path, it would have been something akin to the call of the yellow footprints. Williams talks about 'the call of the yellow footprints' in his own life. In a physical sense, this refers to the painted formation figures on the street of Parris Island, South Carolina, home of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot for the eastern United States. Men (and women, at Parris Island) are scrambled off the bus upon their first arrival and receive their first true 'Marine' experience by being lined up in formation on top of the yellow footprints, and from that moment until the end of boot camp, there is nothing that they do (or is done to them) that is not heavy-laden with Marine Corps training principles. The call of the yellow footprints is a call to a way of life, a way deliberately different from civilian life, as well as different from even the other branches of the military. His own primary influence of going into the Marine Corps was most likely his much-admired older brother, who was a Marine, killed rather young in an accident. Williams takes the narrative through his early influence of deciding upon the Corps (including his brother's influence, both in person and through letters Williams saved and treasured), through his boot camp experience, reservist weekends and MOS training, activation as active-duty Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm participant, and finally reintegration into the civilian world. While most people will probably read this book for the boot camp and the deployment/combat stories, it is actually the final part of the book that is most profound. In this part, Williams has

returned to being a 'weekend warrior', someone whose Marine Corps existence is only officially present two days per month; yet he is a veteran of the Gulf War, having experienced all the terrors and struggles of combat, including losing friends to injury and death, finding a blurry line between allies and enemies, and seeing first-hand the atrocities of war and occupation. How does a combat veteran revert back to the amateur hour that made up reserve duty? Perhaps more importantly, how does a combat veteran with ongoing military obligations re-enter society? Williams is painfully honest about the nightmares and post-traumatic stress he endured, as well as the problems of personality adjustment. 'Emotions like embarrassment, grief, sadness, and vulnerability are all converted into anger - the omniemotion that helps recruits survive.' Williams, in pursuing his education beyond the bachelor's degree to get a counseling credential, discovered that he had not-always-latent Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder - not necessarily a bad thing in the Marine Corps. Williams channeled both his Marine Corps experience and his OCD into working with special needs children (autistic, etc.), who needed high structure and discipline. He turned his physical education class at the school into a voluntary boot camp, and the kids thrived on the structure and reveled in the imagery. Williams adapted this programme, which ended up being so successful in the class parts were adapted for the rest of the school, into a full-fledged Young Marines programme, for which he was named National Teacher of the Year. Kids previously unreachable and unmanageable were learning internal discipline, and thrived on the attention given to them to motivate them to always do their best. Williams suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome, like many veterans of many wars. Williams viewed this as weakness in some respects (as indeed many, military and non-military, tend to do), but also wanted to maintain his connection to the Corps; his teaching style and Young Marine Corps programmes were keeping him from making a closure he desperately needed. While post-traumatic stress never completely goes away, it can be better managed. Williams writes about the countless nights filled with terrifying nightmares, and his own vigils of watching war movies and crying into the night at the images that caused him to relive his own bad experiences. Williams final break with the special-needs school is part of his process of disengagement; one gets the feeling that Williams' process of writing this book is also part of this process, perhaps a cathartic exercise designed to help name and lay to rest at least some of the inner demons. The title, 'Spare Parts', comes from the derisive name active-duty (full-time) Marines would use toward reservists; it is a rather unfair moniker in several respects, not the least of which being the strange policy of the U.S. military to activate and deploy reservists, those one would think lesser trained than the active-duty forces, to forward and combat positions before the active-duty troops. This seems to be happening in today's combat situation, too. This is an interesting look into

the soul of someone trained for fighting, yet really in search of peace; someone still struggling to make the world a better place in an admirable profession, drawing from the strong values of his training and identity as Marine, while honestly confronting the down-side. Williams is a good writer, and he pulls you along as relentlessly as the Green Machine will do. He writes about his own, personal issues with the current Iraqi conflict, not in terms of politics and economics, but in intensely personal ways that are worth reading.

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