

# Sea Stories

by **Mustang Major Dick Culver,**  
**USMC (Ret.)**



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# Camel Tales

## Experiences with the Royal Saudi Marine Corps by Mustang Major Dick Culver, USMC (Ret)

These Camel tales are published in Adobe Acrobat PDF format and require Adobe Acrobat Reader to view. Click on the story title to open the document in a separate browser window. Please allow a moment for Acrobat to load and display the file.



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## **Who the Hell is Dick Culver, and where did he come from anyway?**

I recently sent the son's eulogy for Colonel Donald Conroy, USMC, *The Great Santini*, to Dick Culver, our very own Marine Corps Joustler.

Dick has now been kind enough to fill us in on his genesis and early shenanigans. The "ride" started early and, with a Daddy like Culver's, there was never a dull moment. *The Joustler* may have run off at 14 but after coming up through the ranks the Mustang found his way to the Virginia Military Institute; the Naval Post Graduate School; a Masters degree in Physics; retired a Major after a career in the USMC; and even taught high school for a while. There are too many other things to go into here – you will just have to read the *Joustler Tales* to fill in most of the blanks on marksmanship, jump school, Vietnam, Arabia, Kosovo and God knows what. Ha!

Semper Fi  
Bob Rohrer

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I got a copy of this when Pat Conroy wrote it, and it was in truth one of the most well written pieces of literature I have ever read. I was still in the Marine Corps when the book/movie came out, and while I could never get used to the idea of sitting on a blowtorch (my predilections for being a Marine aviator went down the tubes when we got out of the silk-scarf and moustache wax era), I could relate entirely to his dedication to the Corps.

I was still organizing the Marine Corps Scout Sniper School at the time, and was raising a kidlet on my own in the Corps at Quantico. I spent one too many years playing the dedicated vanquisher of the foes of our country to concentrate on raising the family in the early days. I came back from the French Indo-Chinese environs after spending perhaps a bit more time than was necessary (66, 67 and 68) to find that I was suddenly a single parent (I insisted on keeping the youngster) - I suspect that she had simply had enough, even though my wife had been born and raised in the Marine Corps herself, with a father that had served in China with John W. Thomason, and not been commissioned until he was 50-years old during the Korean fracas. I think she had been ODED on the military life and expected me to spend a lot more time at home and not volunteering for every fool thing that came along. Alas, too soon old, too late smart I suppose. My kid eventually went to High School down in Harlingen Texas to the Marine Military Academy, but enlisted in the Corps as soon as he finished... I should have spent more time "mentoring" the lil' varmint (to use the modern word), instead of figuring he had already picked up on the basics of life's unexpected turns... Alas, but it's a bit late to reminisce, but still I do have some regrets... I kept his hair cut Marine Corps Fashion even when the fashion was to let it grow, and he always kept his blue jeans properly secured with a belt, (well, you get the picture). By the time he got out of high school he already figured he had 18-years service (he was born in Bethesda Naval Hospital when I was with the 3rd Division even though I was offered the option of waiting until he was born - which unfortunately, my wife was aware of; I was convinced that the 9th Marines were in desperate need of my services). I even told my roommate on Okie that I named

the little rug-rat "Smedley D. Culver" (not true of course, but I never told the actual story nor his real name for many years). Having been raised in the Corps I was sure my Wife would understand my absence during my kid's entrance into the world, but alas, the feminine mystique is different...), and of course my extended stay in SEA didn't help things a bit... Sigh...

As a humorous aside, the Smedley D. Culver story got much wider coverage than I had intended, as it was meant to yank the chain of my roommate. My somewhat gullible roommate (a former comrade from my Force Recon Days and the current Team Commander of the Pathfinder Team/Detachment on the Rock at the time), thought I was just nutty enough to have done exactly that. Being very polite, and more of a gentleman than I, (he was a Sunday School Teacher in his stateside time when home with his family) was actually horrified, but didn't know how to tell me that perhaps it was perhaps cruel and unusual punishment to saddle a youngster with such a moniker. He looked at me a bit funny after the initial exchange, but didn't say anything for several days. Finally about three days later, he came in and politely mentioned that if I had time to reconsider, it still wasn't too late to change his name! I told 'em naw, any name good enough for a two Medal of Honor winner was good enough for my kid. The story followed me around the Corps for years, and of course made the rounds of Okinawa back in '61 unbeknownst to me. Years later when going through Staging Battalion prior to my departure for Vietnam, one of the Staging Battalion instructors was a former NCO that I had known since I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, and had been on the Rock when the naming incident took place. I saw him sorta' whispering to one of the other NCOs behind the firing line, and the second gent couldn't resist and got me aside asking me if it was true that I had named my youngster Smedley D. Culver. I looked at him a bit strange (as if anything else would have been unthinkable) and said, yep, and let it go at that!

My dad had entered the Corps at 15 in 1918, served during the Banana Wars, and had taken a job with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, on a whim taking the (then) new Civil Service Exam and doing well on the thing (although he only admitted to a 6th Grade Education). Needless to say, the pay for even a prison guard was far above a Marine NCO of the day and time.

Due to some of his construction experience between an occasional enlistment (not to mention one stint of training the Mexican Banditos in the use of the Lewis Machine Gun down along the border), he decided to try his hand at something else. Went to work at Atlanta, was transferred to Alderson, WV (Martha Stewart's future digs) to help construct the place and then went to help put the Federal Pen at Petersburg, Va together (all of this construction portion was done while also acting as "custodial officer") and he made Lieutenant at Petersburg after about 3-years working for the Prison Service.

They were opening up Alcatraz in 1933, and he was one of the first 5 Lieutenants from the entire Prison Service selected to open the place up under federal (versus Military) supervision. He hauled his new bride out there and low and behold, it turns out that I was given the dubious honor of being the first kid born on the Island several years later (under federal instead of military control). Thus my first few years were spent with the likes of Machine Gun Kelly, Alvin Karpis, Doc Barker and Al Capone (actually Alcatraz

was a rather small prison, usually having less than 500 inmates, and about half of the island was devoted to housing for the families of the guard force)... He made Captain, was sent up to West Va to build a new camp and a number of new roads through the national forests (using convict labor of course), and his "powder monkey" was a gent stuck with only one truck to haul his newly blasted rock to the road site. His powder man was a gent named George Dempster, who built several extra beds for the truck and used a crane to change truck beds that were pre-loaded with rock, awaiting the front end to return from dumping the last load. He used his idea a few years later to come up with what we came to call the "Dempster-Dumpster" (we always called it a Dempsy-Dumpster, but it was simply a mis-pronunciation). George Dempster of course retired to Atlanta some years later as a multi-millionaire!

My Dad was again promoted to what was then called an "Associate Warden" (they used to call 'em Deputy Warden) and sent down to Tallahassee, Florida, when the Japs made the mistake of bombing his battleship (the old U.S.S. Oklahoma). He made an excuse to go to D.C. to the Bureau of Prisons, and came back in a Marine Corps Uniform, much to my Mother's dismay (he didn't mention his plans when he left).

At any rate, I sorta' grew up in the Marine Corps with a father whose first love was the eagle, globe and anchor. He came home after the war to become the Warden of several federal penitentiaries, but stayed in the Marine Reserve including Korea. He didn't totally retire until about 1963 (remember he started in 1918) as I recall, and was my first CO in the Marine Corps Reserve (my mother insisted that I finish High School, although I did run off when I was 14 when the Korean War started (Summer of 1950) and the entire Marine Corps was in an administrative nightmare. Since my Dad had done the same thing in WWI at 15, it only took him about two weeks to find my fanny, and drag me home by the ear (although with a thinly disguised smile on his face!). When he got me back, he took me down to the Marine Recruiter (with whom he was well acquainted) and said something to the effect "You see him? He ain't old enough yet, but when he turns 17, I'll personally drag him down for use as you see fit".

He was as good as his word, but my Momma did insist that I only go in the reserves until I got a piece of paper that said I had finished high school. Since my Dad was the CO of the local Reserve Unit, she demurred and allowed me to start learning my trade on a once a week basis, and all the studying I could get in on the available manuals. I hit Parris Island in the summer of 1954 and never looked back... My dad (6th Grade Education or not - I always figured he might have been exaggerating a bit as he spoke like a college professor and wrote very well indeed, although much of it I suspect was self taught), finally retired as a Lt. Col. and never lost his love for the Corps.

I guess my point to this diatribe is that I understand Pat Conroy's dedication to his Daddy's Memory, and many's the day I wished I had sat my Dad down with a pad and tape recorder - what a story it would have made! I suppose he was more understated than the character Bull Meechem, but no less in love with the Corps. My mother was a registered nurse and a Virginia youngster with some considerable education he met, wooed and married when he was a Lieutenant at Petersburg before departing for the Rock. Except for his deployments, they never left each other's side, and were married over 50-years. I suppose she provided the "couth" for his adventurous nature.

I personally wouldn't have traded a minute of it, and still correspond with my recruiter who eventually retired as a Marine Gunner... I had a love affair with the Corps I owe to my Dad (and my Mother's forbearance) that I have never lost. I suppose I have continued looking for it my entire life even following retirement, heading for the Sand Dunes to "train" (using the word loosely) the Royal Saudi Marines (I lost any reticence about educating the potential enemy, after I witnessed their ingrown incompetence [like an ingrown toenail] and simply enjoyed the company of a number of like minded Marines who were still not "shet" of the adventurous mode (I can understand my Dad training the Mexican Banditos with Lewis Gun in retrospect - who would have ever thought the United States would have lost its backbone to keep its borders safe?! Dear Allah!

My only bitch with Pat's writing is that even with all of his Dad's influence, he essentially turned out to be a writer (however talented) with distinctly left-wing tendencies. Even with an education at the Citadel, he has espoused a Country that I was not raised in, nor would I have liked to be... He is not universally admired or liked by his Citadel Classmates, although somewhere underneath all of his socialist veneer, I think there may (or must) be some part of his Daddy yearning to get out... I can only hope!

Semper Fi,

Dick Culver

# **DICK CULVER'S SEA STORIES**

**THE RECOLLECTIONS, TALES,  
SLIGHT EXAGGERATIONS, AND  
MISDEEDS OF AN OLD TIME MARINE**



**KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SEA STORY AND A FAIRY TALE?**

**A FAIRY TAIL BEGINS WITH “ONCE UPON A TIME”**

**A SEA STORY BEGINS WITH “THIS IS NO \$HI ”**



## INTRODUCTION TO CULVER'S SEA STORIES

Just a few words about the efforts contained herein. This is, if nothing else, a continuing work in progress, and is not meant to be "The Great American Novel"... Instead, it is simply a set of sea stories told and retold over the years, and represent a number of years of adrenaline pumping circumstances often punctuated with long periods of boredom that would have tried the patience of a Saint (which I am most surely not, as any of my old time acquaintances can attest).

I have finally decided to at least leave some insight into the patriotic fervor that fueled our youth before it fades unceremoniously into the mists of history. I have noted on The History Channel, a number of seemingly old duffers who are finally being contacted vis-à-vis their remembrances from as far back as "The Great War" but it is pretty obvious that these folks are not going to last forever and we will lose a chance to learn from their experiences, savor some of the public attitudes and thinking that truly make up our past history. I recall listening to my Dad spin his yarns of his time in the Marines in WWI and the Banana Wars, and of course I experienced much of his service in WWII and Korea. I was absolutely sure I wanted to be a Marine by the time I had reached the advanced age of 6! I have always regretted not having sat my Pappy down with a tape recorder and a large pad and asked him some of the questions that now come to mind. He too lived during a lively period of history, and as a Lieutenant of the Guards on Alcatraz was one of those who was entrusted with the incarceration of many gangsters that now are the subject of the celluloid tabloids (movies). He (and I as a rug-rat) were on "The Rock" with Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Alvin Karpis and Doc Barker. What stories he could have told if I had only been astute enough to reduce them to hard copy. I remember many of the stories, but only as a youngster sitting on the edge of adult conversations hoping I wouldn't be discovered and sent off to bed. Alas, it is now too late.

Most of my stories center around the more humorous aspects of soldiering, as dwelling on the blood and guts phases are usually related to selling books or impressing those gathered around the bar. I have also noticed that as the days of yore fade, and the teller gets long of tooth, the stories get more unbelievable, with the teller either actually believing his fabrications, or hoping that most of those who could contradict him are now gone to Valhalla, or so far removed as to not pose a viable threat. Many become "legends in their own minds" in the words of the immortal Dirty Harry, and many



gents who served their time as Remington Raiders (typewriter-pounders), or as Disbursing Clerks (Finance/Pay Personnel) have suddenly remembered their service in Reconnaissance outfits, or as Snipers. Closet SEALS and Rangers often emerge, and the tails grow with each additional brew proffered by a fascinated but equally well lubricated audience. I like to think of myself as closely akin to the troubadour in Medieval Times, simply relating many of the incidents I remember from my misspent youth that will amuse the audience. I think Louie L'Amour had the right idea, he used much of his own experience to entertain his audience. I've read 'em all.

I have written down a few of these Sea Stories over the years, but never made any real attempt to scrape them into one pile. I have found that as I would reduce one to paper, it would tweak my memory banks and cause me to remember even more of my often hilarious misdeeds, while gallivanting across the globe on a never ending search for the great adrenaline rush! If the statute of limitations have not yet run their course, I suppose Leavenworth isn't out of the question (since Portsmouth has been closed for quite a spell), but I have no regrets for my sometimes devious circumvention from the written rule of law, and I suppose I could have "schmoozed" those who held my fitness reports (and my career advancement) in the palms of their hand, but then what fun would that have been? Naw, I'd do it all over, and probably not change a dad-gummed thing – as the old saying goes, the final approach to your entrance into Valhalla should be punctuated with the exclamation of "**damn** what a hell of a ride" rather than another glass of warm milk, and someone adjusting your blanket or deciding to pull the plugs on your life support systems.

For publishing at least one of these sea stories I have been threatened by an active duty Army Lieutenant Colonel with recall to active duty to be tried for supposed war crimes over 30-years in the past. It seems this gentleman is a Judge Advocate General sort currently assigned to teaching "The Law of Land Warfare" at West Point. A bit of searching disclosed that this most sincere gentleman has yet to experience the exhilarating whine of rapidly rotating projectiles attempting to cancel his birth certificate. While I don't recommend such conduct for the faint of heart, likewise I don't take terribly kindly being judged by those I do not consider my peers. Some of my observations may seem a bit contemptuous of regulations and the ever present rules of engagement (usually proffered by those who didn't have to go out in the blast to administer such idiocy), and indeed they are. I always used the little inner voice that told me that my real responsibility after the accomplishment of an assigned mission, was the safety and well being of those youngsters assigned to serve with and under me. They didn't really care about such high sounding phrases as "losing the moral high ground" or other such nonsense, they simply wanted to go home to their families. I knew that most were not professional soldiers, and only cared that history would treat them kindly, and note their patriotic service to their country. I, on the other hand, (being a professional [sea] soldier) operated with the knowledge that assuming I survived, would have to look myself in the mirror every morning when I shaved, and not turn away in shame for having put political correctness above the welfare of those assigned to my care. So far I have no apologies and very few regrets...

There you have the gist of the thing, enjoy the tales if you will, and rest assured that they are as correct as my aging memory banks will permit.

And to all those fine men and women who have served and will serve in my beloved Corps of Marines, I wish you well, and encourage you to put your own recollections down in print – our country will be the better for it, and most usually will be able to sort out the fact from fiction, as I hope the readers of *my* scribblings will...

And as pointed out on the cover sheet, the difference between a fairy tale and a sea-story is easily explained by the following differentiations:

A Fairy Tale always starts with “**Once upon a time**”...

**Whereas**

A Sea Story is always prefaced with the exhortation, “**This is no \$hi+!**”

And so it is with these recollections from yesteryear – “**This is no \$hi+!**”

*Semper Fidelis,*

*Dick Culver*

*Retired Major of Marines*

*Gentleman Adventurer*

*Fancier of Fine Ordnance*

*Genteel and Gracious Ladies*

*~ and ~*

*Beagle Hounds*

*(not necessarily in that order)*

*Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 2005*

OK all you old salts, (as the saying goes), pull up a seabag my clean Marines and I'll tell you the story of "Brown versus Green"...

Chesty had Chesty had five Navy Crosses or one Navy Cross Ribbon/Medal with four *bronze* stars on it, indicating repeat awards!

Chesty won two of his Navy Crosses in the Nicaragua, one on Guadalcanal, and one on Bougainville, and a final one in Korea. Of course that doesn't count the Distinguished Service Cross (the Army's equivalent of the Navy Cross) McArthur pinned on Chesty in Korea, thus giving him the equivalent of **Six** Navy Crosses!



My Dad participated in the Haitian Campaign as a member of the Marine Detachment of the USS Oklahoma, and he and his squad captured a brass Gatling Gun that sat out in front of the Navy Department for many years. Apparently (judging from the inscription General Puller wrote in my copy of "*Marine*" by Burke Davis) he and the General served together on Haiti and later during the Banana Wars. I once ate dinner with the General at his place in Saluda about 1958 when I was visiting my old friend Bill Dabney who later married Chesty's Daughter, Miss Virginia Puller (Bill was simply courting Miss Virginia at the time). I had met her when Bill brought her up to VMI for one of the "hops" - accompanied by her Dad of course!). I still have a wedding invitation to Bill and Virginia's wedding, but I was with the 3rd Division at the time, and they were a bit reticent to allow me (a mere 1st Lt.) to travel back to the States, even for Miss Virginia's wedding! Grrrrrr...

The actual quote about being surrounded by the enemy as taught to us at P.I. back in 1954 was that the incident occurred during the withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir in 1950. Chesty was holding the door open for the Division as they came south down the MSR. His radio operator is reputed to have reported to Chesty that they were now surrounded by 13 Chinese Divisions! Colonel Puller then replied, "good, now the Sons of Bitches can't get away!" Whatever the circumstances, it's the thought that counts, and it certainly characterizes his approach to war! One of my all time heroes!

GySgt Dan Daly had two Medals of Honor, the first of which he won shooting Chinese off the wall during the Boxer Rebellion using his Lee Navy 6mm Rifle. His second one of course, was in Haiti. His famous charge across the wheat field using the "*Come on you Sons of Bitches, ya' wanna' live forever*" was originally written up as a MOH, but since he already had two was downgraded to a mere Navy Cross!

As far as I know, only two Marines have received two Medals of Honor for *two distinct actions*, although five more received two MOHs during WWI (one medal from the Navy and another from the Army), but those were awarded for the same action (apparently

the Navy didn't want to be outdone by the Army or vice versa).

The two separate and distinct MOH awards were given to Smedley Butler, and Dan Daly. Butler also won a Marine Corps Brevet Medal during the Relief Expedition for the Boxer Rebellion. Although his two enlisted companions each got the MOH for crawling several miles along the railroad track to bring back the wounded, being lead by Lieutenant Butler. Butler was breveted to Captain for his actions. Seems that at the time, officers in the Naval Service were not allowed to receive the MOH. The Brevet Medal is worth doing a Google Search on as it was awarded very few times, and entitled the awardee to be advanced to higher rank although the recipients were not paid in their new rank structure, although they could be placed in command of a unit commensurate with their brevet. If the rule of no Naval Officers being awarded the MOH had not been in effect in 1900, Smedley might well have gotten three Medals of Honor (the restriction on the MOH for Marine Officers was lifted in 1915)!

Oh well, just a little history for those who weren't landed at Guantanamo Bay in '98 (Heh, heh, heh...).

Semper Fi,

## **Dick**

For a little additional USMC History, check out Louis Cukula one of the gents who was awarded two medals of Honor for the same act (one Army, one Navy) during WWI. He was (according to my old man, one of the great characters of the Corps. He was a Serbian by birth, emigrated to the United States after attending the Serbian Merchant (Marine) Academy, spent a couple of years in the Army and then joined the Corps . After winning his Medal(s) of Honor as a GySgt he was later given a battlefield promotion. It seems that he never properly learned "The Queen's English" and would often cobble his sentences up a bit. One of his most famous quotes was given when he was conducting close order drill. At the time, (we were still using the old 8-man Squad Drill of course), and instead of "to the rear march" the command was "Squads Right About March"! When it came out of Louie's mouth it was "Squads Right two times, don't fu\*k it up!" Lots of Louie Cukula stories, sometimes I may put a few to paper! One of the true old time characters of the Corps!

Check out the following URL:

[http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Historical/Whos\\_Who/Cukela\\_L.htm](http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Historical/Whos_Who/Cukela_L.htm)

## **ROC**

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## FAMOUS QUOTES FROM MARINES

When I hear of famous quotes by U. S. Marines, the one by General Cates (when he was one of the only survivors of his company in Belleau Wood comes to mind.

Lieutenant Cates sent a runner to the remnants of the Battalion Headquarters to report the status of his Company following his assault into the Wood, eventually to be renamed "The Wood of the Marine Brigade" – the absence of his runner of course, reduced the size of his own unit by one man until he could return.

"I have only two men out of my company, and 20 out of some other company. We need support, but it is almost suicide to try to get it here as we are swept by machine gun fire, and a constant barrage is on us. I have no one on my left, and only a few on my right. I will hold."

~ Signed ~ 1st Lt. Clifton B. Cates USMC 19 July 1918

The reason that I particularly remember General Cates' report is that only seven years later (1925), Captain Cates was my Daddy's OIC of the Marine Corps Recruiting Station in Spokane, Washington, about 30+ miles from my ranch in North Idaho.

Rank was a strange thing in those days, and did not come immediately or automatically from pure time in grade. Some individuals deliberately remained "career privates" retiring honorably with 20-years service and a clean record book. As late as 1961 when I was in the 9th Marines on Okinawa, there was a Marine Pfc. serving with the "RASP" (Ryukian Armed Services Police), with 20 years honorable service, retired on the ROCK. Obviously, they would not have allowed a "bandit" to have served with the RASP and have his retirement announced in the Stars and Stripes Newspaper!

My Dad told me that it wasn't unusual for the 1st Sergeant of the Marine Detachment of the Oklahoma to step down for a week, and allow a 20-year private to serve as the 1st Sergeant, and thus retire in the 5th Pay Grade (the highest available until 1926 as I recall), with enough money in retirement to survive and down a few on the Corps. Why would someone deliberately avoid rank for twenty years? Many were apparently individuals who were comfortable living in the security of an organized unit, yet preferred avoiding unnecessary responsibility. I assume this was much like the old professional cowboys who simply enjoyed punching cattle, having 3-squares available while earning enough pay to get screwed up in town on payday. He could then start another month in completely familiar surroundings with like thinking friends with similar attitudes. It was truly a different world, with different social pressures than those that apply today.

The entire Marine Corps was smaller than the New York City Police Force, and there were only 5 pay-grades. You went from Private to Corporal (no Pfc's in those days, and "Lance Corporal" was an acting-rank denoted by a pair of crossed rifles sewed on your sleeve). Assuming a clean record, and being recommended by your superiors, you

“might” be advanced to Corporal during your second enlistment. Generally speaking you could make one rank per hashmark without being considered to be a fanny-kisser. Promotions within the enlisted ranks were organizational, and if you were transferred to a new unit without an opening for say (Sergeant?) and if you were currently wearing three stripes, you had to take a bust back to the next highest rank available. Individuals being transferred (or considering transfer) were sometimes known to “shop around” for a unit having a vacancy in the rank held by the “transferee”... For those who remember the movie written by James Jones about the pre-WWII Army at Scofield Barracks, “From Here to Eternity,” 1st Sergeant Warden was speaking of looking to transfer out of his unit (he and the Company Commander were not exactly close friend, although he and the Captain’s wife were). Warden mentioned that he had located a company with a vacancy for a 1st Sergeant. Unless you were familiar with the promotional systems of both the Army and the Marine Corps of the pre-WWII Service, you might well have missed a “correct” notation on service life of the time.

Strangely enough, there were some units in the Marine Corps that still had organizational promotions even following WWII. It wasn’t until after Korea that the “paperwork Marine Corps” gradually took over, and such things as promotion exams, and promotion boards became the norm.

#### BACK TO THE STORY...

My Dad, having finished a tour with the Marine Detachment on the USS Oklahoma, and having fought in the Haitian Campaign, (his squad captured a brass Gatling Gun that sat for years outside the Navy Department Headquarters in Washington, D.C.), his first enlistment came to an end. He had studiously avoided any promotions during his first enlistment. It seems that he had enlisted under the pay provisions that had been enacted for “The Great War” which were somewhat greater than the pre-war WWI pay grades. Following the war, the old pay provisions came back into play, and if you took a promotion, you had to agree to be paid under the peacetime pay grades. My Dad was drawing an additional \$5.00/month for Expert Rifleman, \$5.00/month as a 1st Class Gun Pointer on his 5” Gun Mount, was drawing \$3.00/month as a 2nd Class Signalman (signal-flags), ...and was cutting hair in his spare time in the Ship’s Barber Shop (which would not have been allowed as an NCO). In short, he would have lost money by taking a promotion. He was also the (Ship’s) Captain’s orderly – a position only assigned to extremely squared away young Marines, so he wasn’t what they used to call a “yard-bird”. He was offered promotion to Corporal but figured that he would have lost money by doing so.

He spent a few weeks considering his future course of action, and re-enlisted. He made Corporal almost immediately, and Sergeant shortly thereafter. All of a sudden he was in the position of having made it to the 3rd pay-grade (Sergeant) with only one hashmark! Upppssss... He was (fortunately I assume), assigned to Recruiting Duty in Spokane, as I mentioned before, under Captain Clifton B. Cates.

Having finished his second hitch in the Marine Corps, with a bit of time out training of the Mexican Banditos with the Lewis Machine Gun, he and a friend went into the construction business in San Diego, only to be caught in the Depression in 1929. On his way back to Alabama (he hadn't been home in about 10-years), he stopped to see an old friend, Bob Crowder, from the Marine Detachment on the USS Oklahoma (circa 1919 who was then on the Dallas Police Force. Bob Crowder eventually retired as the Captain of B Company, Texas Rangers in the early 1970s).

When back in Alabama, my Pap was about to reenlist in the Corps, he heard about a "new" Civil Service Exam being given for the Federal Prison System (the Bureau of Prisons had been manned using the "spoils system" prior to the new exam system). He took the exam, passed with high marks, and was offered a job at considerably higher pay than Corps was willing to pay. He advanced steadily making Lieutenant of the Guards, and being assigned as one of the 1st five Lieutenants assigned to Alcatraz in 1934. He eventually became an Associate Warden (formerly called Deputy Warden) of the lockup in Tallahassee, Florida when the Japanese bombed his old Battleship the Oklahoma. He reenlisted in the Marine Corps without notifying the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and was made a "gen-u-wine" 1st Lieutenant considering his prior experience. This time he stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve following WWII, eventually advancing to Lt. Col. prior to his retirement in 1963.

FAST FORWARD TO 1952...

My Dad was then a Major in the Marine Corps Reserve, and had advanced to Warden of the Federal Facility at Petersburg, Virginia. Following the "dust-up" in Korea, they were rebuilding the Marine Corps Reserve and they had decided to establish a Reserve Marine Rifle Company at Ft. Lee, Virginia (essentially adjacent to the Federal Prison). They asked my Dad to become the Commanding Officer in 1953, which he gladly accepted.

He had to make some sort of meeting at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and it being in the Summer, I went along with him (to wander around loosely on my own in Washington, D.C. looking at the sights – try THAT now, whew!). In those days however, virtually all individuals wore suits when making conferences and similar meetings, and he was so attired when we made a stop at Quantico. While we were heading up the steps to "Little Hall" (the location of the old PX), there was a nicely dressed individual also dressed in a civilian coat and tie coming down the steps.

This gentleman and my Dad stopped and shook hands and engaged in a conversation that must have lasted about an hour or better. I listened with great interest, and it was obvious that he and my Dad were old friends. After we parted company, my Dad and I went up the steps to the Exchange. Unable to contain my curiosity, I asked him who the individual was that he was trading stories with? "Why that was General Cates," he informed me. General Cates had finished his tour as the Commandant in 1951, and apparently not being ready to hang it up as a Marine, he asked permission to step down a rank and assume Command of Quantico for a final tour. Permission was granted, and

General Cates finished his tour, was given his Commandant's stars back and finally retired from the Corps some 38-years after sending the message to his Battalion Commander in Belleau in July 1918.

A different day, a different time, and perhaps a different Corps – we used to win our wars in those days (or at least wind 'em up in a stalemate, if you count Korea).

Semper Fidelis,

Dick



# **“Arrest those Two Scoundrels ...and Bring ‘em to the Battalion Headquarters by 0800!”**

**By Dick Culver**

**I**t was fairly early in 1966 and I was the newly appointed Battalion Operations Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion. We were located in our new “digs” on Onslow Beach, having fairly recently moved from Montford Point. Our new Battalion Executive Officer was a no-nonsense, very squared away Major by the name of Dale N. Davis.

Now I had served with Major Davis previously in the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company at Camp Del Mar, (a beachfront subsidiary of Camp Pendleton) in the early 1960s and held him in extremely high regard. He was a professional soldier and adventurer having served a spell as a “slightly” under age member of the Merchant Marine during WWII, being a bit young for his true love, the United States Marines. When I first met Major Davis, he was a Captain, and having been blessed (or cursed) with prematurely gray hair, along with an impressive array of “fruit salad”<sup>1</sup> we youngsters walked softly around this font of military knowledge. Captain Davis has already done a tour in French Indochina (as it had been named prior to becoming the infamous jungle paradise of Vietnam). Although it was never widely publicized, he had served as a part of an almost unheard of military advisory group tasked with organizing and training the Vietnamese Marine Corps in the 1950s. Already having been to Airborne School prior to his arrival at 1<sup>st</sup> Force, Captain Davis was the Operations Officer of the Company, and for a spell, had been the interim Pathfinder Platoon Commander following the departure of Captain Duff Rice, and prior to the arrival of Captain Bill Weise.<sup>2</sup> I was personally convinced that Dale Davis has been quietly assigned as my personal “keeper”.

We had just begun to receive some Vietnam returnees with combat experience, one of whom was a young 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant named Seán DelGrosso<sup>3</sup> a genuine recipient of the Bronze Star for valor. Needless to say, we were impressed and regarded Seán with a certain amount of awe! Seán had served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Recon Battalion in RVN with my old *Officer's Basic School* roommate, Pat Collins as his Company Commander.<sup>4</sup> We in 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon had seen very few young individuals who had actually served in combat at that time. A veteran 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant with a legitimate combat decoration was a real standout, and treated with a certain amount of deference.

Seán was assigned as a Recon Company Commander, and his reputation and “combat aura” gave the lads assigned to his company a certain amount of bragging rights. One of Seán's buddies was Paddy Clark, a Marine Lieutenant who was a semi-professional baseball player. Unlike Seán (a professional Marine), Paddy Clark couldn't wait for his obligated service to expire so he could get back to his first love, baseball.

The Officers in the Battalion lived in Jacksonville (there being no BOQ or Officer's Quarters available on the Beach), or with their families in Government Quarters aboard the base. Onslow was “a fur piece” from town and the main base for that matter, and most took their noon chow at the Battalion Mess Hall, or married folks sometimes brought “brown bag”

lunches to satisfy their culinary urges. Except for certain training evolutions to prepare deploying Recon Platoons to either the Caribbean or the Mediterranean, or a specific training cycle (rubber boats, scuba, helicopter repelling, etc.) we often had some weeks that were somewhat slack for want of sufficient personnel. You must understand that because of the constant drain on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division manpower keeping a flow of Marines to Vietnam, many “separate” Battalion units (recon, tanks, amtracs, etc.) operated almost as a “replacement pool” for RVN bound personnel. We usually had a table in the Recon Battalion Mess Hall where the Officers congregated for a bit of humor, sea-stories, and just plain old yarnin’ during the noon break. Major Davis was often in attendance, Seán and his buddy Paddy were regulars, along with “watash”<sup>5</sup> in what could laughingly be called “The Officer’s Mess”.

One Monday morning I received a call at my quarters (I had a house in Northwoods at the time) from Major Davis who sounded just short of apoplectic!

“Dick, I want you to stop by DelGrosso’s and Clark’s apartment in Jacksonville, place ‘em under arrest and have ‘em in front of my desk by 0800!”

“Sir?” was my response, “what in the world is happening?”

“Those clowns went over the hill for a four day weekend to New England or at least somewhere up north, but definitely out of bounds, without any authorization, and the only way they’re going to get a lesson they’ll understand is a General Court! If I let this one go, half of the Battalion will disappear to Gawd knows where anytime they take a notion! Now get ‘em in here!”

“Oh my Gawd” was my reaction, uh oh, now what? I began to plot a way out of this disaster on my way to their quarters!

I pounded on the door to their apartment and informed ‘em to stick their hands in the air (in jest) that they were under arrest for “going over the hill”! A look of total disbelief came across their faces!

“You’re kidding, right?” was the response.

“Nope, I just got a call from Major Davis to put you two clowns under arrest and have you in his office no later than 0800 in preparation for Court Martial proceedings – no kidding, the Major is hotter’n hell, and is almost foaming at the mouth if I read the phone conversation right! You’d better be thinking of a damn good explanation!”

“Christ, we didn’t have anything scheduled at the end of last week on the training schedule. We didn’t think anyone would care? What in the heck are we gonna’ do?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking about this all the way over here, and I MAY have a way out! What you do when we go into the office is let me do the talking, and you two idiots simply nod your heads when I indicate, don’t say anything that could be taken for an official statement, scuff your toes in the dirt, and hang your heads when it would appear appropriate – got it?”

“Yes sir, but what are you gonna’ tell him?”

“Leave that to me and don’t get mouthy – if you’ll follow my lead, I think I can sell this one, but otherwise keep your mouths shut, it’s always easier if only one guy’s doin’ the lying! Do we understand one another?”

“Yessir!” was the dual response.

We rolled up in the parking lot of the Battalion CP about 15 minutes ahead of schedule. No smoke was emanating from Major Davis’ window... So far, so good!

All hands checked their military alignment, checked each other, and we entered the Major’s office with me in the lead. I stepped aside and allowed the two miscreants to come to a convincing halt two paces from a scowling XO! After an impressive fanny-chewing, and appropriate passages read from the UCMJ, the Major wanted to know what they had to say for themselves?

Before either of them opened their mouths, I decided it was time to make my plea. I effected an unbelieving look on my face and asked Major Davis if he had forgotten the conversation we had had the previous Tuesday at noon in the Mess Hall?

“Conversation? What conversation?”, was the comeback?

“Sir, don’t you remember these two making mention that they would like to take a long weekend the following week since the training schedule was clean, and they hadn’t been out of the area for months?”

Major Davis squinted his eyes, and looked directly into mine with what can only be called an unbelieving look on his face. The two charges I had brought into the office began to see what I had in mind. Both could be appropriately glib, and caught the drift I was attempting to take the potentially disastrous encounter.

“Yes sir”, said Seán, “I thought you had given your tacit approval” he interjected as if on cue. “If I had known you hadn’t caught our request, I’d have made sure it was OK before we left the table”, he said, his words fairly dripping with regret, slightly hanging his head.

“Yes sir”, echoed Paddy with an appropriately shamefaced countenance, indicating he would NEVER have gone if he wasn’t sure that it was OK... Both individuals were now acting appropriately cowed and very regretful that they had done something that was beyond the pale. Theirs was an act that would have done justice to a Shakespearean production.

Major Davis gave them his most malevolent stare, indicating with body language and what passed for a bit of appropriate growling that both these two scoundrels needed a good trip to the woodshed.

I breathed a huge sigh of relief, and waited for the final shoe to fall.

“Alright you two, get out of the office and don’t EVER let me hear of anything like this happening again!”

“Yes sir they said in unison”, taking one pace to the rear, executing a most proper about face and heading for the door, with me in trace doing everything I could to keep from wiping the sweat off my brow.

“Not so fast Captain, I want you to stay for a moment, the rest of you may leave!”

Uh Oh, I knew what was coming.

Once the properly chastised pair had cleared the earshot of the Major’s door, I heard a voice behind me.

“OK Culver, you and I have known each other for a long time, and if you figured you just bamboozled me, you’ve got another think coming! You and I both know that what you just produced was a first class rug-dance, but I must admit it served two purposes. First, the last thing I wanted to do is court martial DelGrosso, and second, hopefully it scared hell out of those two clowns in a manner that’ll convince ‘em never try that one again!”

What was the ultimate upshot of the dual “Lieutenant AWOL caper”? Well, certainly nothing untoward occurred while I remained in the Battalion. Paddy Clark had previously been approached by the Cincinnati Reds Baseball Team with some sort of contract, but since I never again heard his name or saw it in lights, I can only assume that he did not become the next Bobby Feller, Pete Rose, or Ty Cobb. I hope he did well, but I never heard of him again.

Seán/Carmine DelGrosso was one of the most talented linguists in the Marine Corps and eventually became their foremost Mandarin Chinese expert. After finishing the State Department School at Georgetown University, subsequently did a tour in Hong Kong as the Assistant Naval Attaché before the British Crown Colony reverted to the Chinese Communists.

Fast forward to 1986 when I was helping to train (or attempting to train) the Saudi Arabian Camelnecks<sup>6</sup>. The NCOIC of the Marine Detachment of the Consulate in Jeddah was a good friend, Staff Sergeant Tom Crawford. Tom told me that the new Battalion Commander of the Marine Security Guard Battalion<sup>7</sup> (MSG) in Quantico, was Colonel “Carmine” DelGrosso. Hummm... DelGrosso, eh? I wonder? On a trip back to the States in 1987 while on R&R, I managed a stop by Quantico and paid a visit to the MSG Battalion. Sure enough, it was young DelGrosso (now officially calling himself Carmine). We had a good (but unfortunately short) visit. Carmine was now a “gen-u-wine” bird colonel – wow, I was impressed! I couldn’t resist asking him if he had ever told “his” staff about a “slight” brush with the UCMJ some 21-years in the distant past. He gently guided me out of the office with a knowing smile, and an apology for a prearranged conference. He did mention that such a discussion on matters of the UCMJ and their relevance to the MSG would probably be best accomplished in an Officer’s Club atmosphere.

Ah well, at least I didn’t have to lock my heels in front of the CO’s desk or do a sharp about face following a lecture about never violating the UCMJ again! It would seem that some rug-dances do conjure up a cloud bank with a silver lining!

Semper Fidelis,

Dick

**End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> In Captain Davis' array of ribbons resided a Navy Commendation Medal (with Combat V) for bravery for service in Korea. It seems that he and another individual had unloaded an ammunition truck full of high explosives during a full blown (no pun intended) mortar barrage. Performing the same act under later guidelines (or guidelines emanating from a later era) would have most probably, have garnered him some something closer to a Navy Cross. Captain Davis would never have suggested such a thing himself of course, for that wasn't his style, but those of us closely associated with him, knew him and his combat mindset. He was truly a man to ride the river with!

<sup>2</sup> As an interesting side note, both Captain Duff Rice and Captain Bill Weise were eventually promoted to the rank of General Officer. While it is true the "unfeeling oafs" assigned to the Recon Platoons often referred to we Pathfinders as "*Trashfinders*" ...be that as it may, it would seem that the billet of Pathfinder Platoon Commander was at least occasionally, one rung up the step of a ladder to make General Officer! Of course it may have been the creative leadership that was necessary to keep a bunch of potential bandits in line!

<sup>3</sup> "Seán's" name was actually Carmine John DelGrosso as inscribed in his OQR (Officer's Qualification Record). The story went that his mother was of Irish extraction and preferred calling him "*Seán*" (an "*Irishafacation*" of John). Seán eventually went back to "*Carmine*" and retired from the Corps as a full Colonel. It is rumored that to become a *true* Godfather, it would be necessary for a full blown Italian "*Paisano*" to use something more "Italian sounding" than an Irish surname. You do have to plan for your future following your retirement from the Corps you know! I understand his business cards are now printed as "*Carmine J. Del Grosso*" announcing him as "*Director-Americas, Africa and Middle East of The Boeing Company*", hanging his chapeau in Seal Beach, California! Egad! Note the spelling of DelGrosso is now divided into two words in Italian fashion. If he had chosen to go the Godfather route, perhaps some more descriptive moniker like "*Concrete Over-Shoes*" Del Grosso might have been appropriately suggestive?

<sup>4</sup> Both Seán's and Pat Collin's early exploits in RVN are chronicled in a book, "*Marshalling of the Faithful*" by Charles Henderson. A truly great read, and will give you a feel for Seán's prowess and overall ability as a Sea-Soldier. "*Marshalling the Faithful*" is available through Amazon on the web, definitely a recommended read!

<sup>5</sup> "Watash" is a term often thought to have been brought back from the Far East meaning "*me*" or "*myself*".

<sup>6</sup> "Camelnecks" was simply a "bastardization" of the nickname "Leathernecks" for United States Marines, or "Bootnecks", a term utilized in the United Kingdom to refer to the British Royal Marines. The term "Camelnecks" was used in jest by members of our Marine Advisory Group attempting to raise and train a branch of the Royal Saudi Arabian Armed Forces. The *Camelnecks* of course, were to be used to launch amphibious assaults on invading enemies of "The Desert Kingdom"... Go figure?

<sup>7</sup> The MSG Battalion is the organization responsible for recruiting, training, and supplying the Marine Security Guards who man (or perhaps "*person*" in a more politically correct atmosphere) all of the United States Embassies and Consulates throughout the world. Not only do they screen the applicants, and train them in their duties, but through a series of inspections they ensure the continued excellence of the assigned individuals. As an aside, the Marine Guard Force also ensures that all classified material is properly secured with nothing unintentionally left "adrift" in the heat of the moment by State Department employees. The Marine Security Guards are responsible, not only for the security of all posts, but are also charged with "repelling boarders" in the event of local political unrest, including defending the Civilian Embassy Personnel themselves. The individual who calls the final "shot" is the Ambassador or Consul General, even though the civilians often have a different way of looking at things – it's a delicate balancing act for the Marines in times where International Politics become a bit "left leaning" if you catch my drift! It takes a special breed of individual to successfully complete the MSG School and become a representative of both the State Department, and the United States Marine Corps. Carmine was virtually the perfect choice for the MSG Battalion Commander.

# The Wings of an Angel?

## (A Study in Combat Superstition...)

By Dick Culver

**H**ave you ever wondered whether survival in combat is a thing of chance, luck or having an angel in your pocket? Does the average trooper have superstitious leanings (lucky numbers, wearing the same pair of socks, shirt or whatever?) ...much as sports figures are said to wear for luck. I certainly can't answer for anyone else, but I too had my superstitions and lucky charms. One in particular comes to mind and brings on a smile or two as I look back over the years. It had to do with a certain pair of Navy/Marine Corps Jump Wings...

### Background

By the Summer of 1963, the Marine Corps added a new set of jump wings to identify individuals with extensive (or at least more) experience than simply completing the basic airborne course. Both the Army and the Marines had their basic wings as awarded upon completion of Airborne school, and indeed we in the Marines wore the same original silver wings as those awarded at Fort Benning (or Lakehurst, N.J. or even Camp Lejeune for you really old timers) regardless of how many jumps you had made, be it 5 or 1000!



**Basic Army/USMC  
Parachute Badge**

Once the Army jumpers had completed additional jumps, along with other required training and experience, they were awarded a set of more prestigious wings, such as their "Senior Jump Wings" or "Master Jump Wings". The Senior Wings had a star above the basic wings (the basic version(s) were sometimes referred to as "blood wings" or even "lead wings" due to their silver color [although in the old days they really were made of sterling silver]). I don't remember the exact qualifications for the Army's Senior or Master Wings, but as I recall, in terms of additional jumps, the Senior Wings required at least 30 total jumps (5 at Airborne School plus an additional 25 jumps, along with some night and equipment jumps), and the Master Wings, a total of 65 jumps in addition to the other requirements including jumpmaster training<sup>1</sup>.

In the old days a Marine was only allowed to attend Airborne School if (*and ONLY if*) they were scheduled to fill a paid jump billet upon completion of the school – *no one* was allowed to go to Airborne School simply as a quota filler as they were later. Needless to say we were quite proud of our wings, and perhaps strutted a bit more than necessary to display our "gaudy ornaments" as a measure of our manly prowess! In addition to those actually filling paid jump billets, WWII Paramarines<sup>2</sup> were allowed to wear their wings, as were any who had been members of the Force Reconnaissance Companies, Air Delivery units (since the Parachute Riggers [parachute-packers] had to be qualified jumpers to pack the parachutes for the air-delivery mission), and members of ANGLCO (Air and Naval Gunfire Company folks who directed airstrikes and naval gunfire missions for the forward units – one of their methods of insertion to a hot situation was considered to be by parachute). The point being that very few individuals were allowed to wear the illusive jump wings in the old days.

The Army allowed their airborne qualified lads to wear their wings on their fatigues (dungarees or utilities for you Marines), but alas in the old days we were only allowed to wear our wings on our dress shirts or uniform blouses. We Marines were a bit jealous to say the least, and often in the field I noticed some of our old timers wore their wings on their dungaree covers just above the sweat-band, but not where they might be seen by the hierarchy of course!

## The Corps Acquires New Wings

The Corps, not to be outdone, eventually decided to come up with a pair of distinctive wings to indicate additional experience for those in the Naval Service. This became the now familiar gold Navy/Marine Corps Jump Wings looking much like the Naval Pilot's Wings with the exception of a parachute replacing the shield and the anchor worn by the pilots. When these first appeared in the



**Navy/Marine Corps  
Parachute Wings**

summer of 1963, they were hard to come by for those of us then assigned to units away from the FMF (Fleet Marine Forces). I was assigned to the Reserve Branch in the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps Reserve and Recruitment District (later to be re-designated the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District). Now the 8<sup>th</sup> District was located in New Orleans, far from a PX Facility where the newly designed wings might be purchased. I was inwardly extremely jealous of those out in the fleet who had access to such gaudy uniform adornment, but kept my frustrations to myself! We did have a Force Reconnaissance Reserve Unit located in Albuquerque, New Mexico (*5<sup>th</sup> Force by designation*) however, and I wrangled myself a set of permissive jump orders that allowed me to make jumps with the reserve unit when I was in the area inspecting their training activities. One nicety of this arrangement was that the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Company would send experienced jumpers out to assist in the Reserve Unit's parachute operations. Needless to say, I would usually work my inspection schedule around to take advantage of the chance for additional jumps, and get a chance to spin sea stories with some of my old buddies from the Company.

One of my old friends from the Force Recon Days was a gent named Jack Phillips who just happened to be one of the training group assisting with the parachute operations during one of my visits to Albuquerque. I gave Jack the appropriate amount of "jing"<sup>3</sup> to purchase me a set of the "handy-dandy" new sets of jump wings, but before we parted company on that trip, Jack took the wings off his shirt and made a present of them to watah<sup>4</sup>. I was in 7<sup>th</sup> Heaven. Sigh... Now I could go back and flash my new hardware around the office with a bit more swagger in my step. I immediately started shining the new wings which weren't really gold of course, but rather gold *anodized* (actually plated) brass which took a fine shine with a little elbow grease and a quarter inch drill motor and a buffing wheel! Shortly the shroud lines of the parachute canopy began to blur into a smear, much as had my old silver wings. I made sure that mine looked appropriately salty as if I had acquired 'em years before (an impossibility, considering they were the latest version and only lately approved of course).

Leaving the 8<sup>th</sup> District in 1965, I found myself assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion at Camp Lejeune, as the Company Commander of A Company, shortly acquiring a new executive officer, Skip Hartnett, destined (or doomed?) to serve with me over the years in a number of different guises including running firearms courses for the Idaho State POST (Police Officers Standards and Training), Academy and then for a trek to Saudi Arabia to train

the Saudi Arabian “*Camelnecks*”<sup>5</sup>, followed by a second trip to “*The Land of the Eternal Dune*” to train the Saudi Arabian Air Defense Force. Needless to say, over the years, he has become one of my closest friends, but such was not initially the case.

Skip had come back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon from the Basic Officer’s School at Quantico, but one of the most unusual things was he had left *for* OCS from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion – an almost unheard of situation. After a stint at the Citadel, Skip had decided to enlist in the Marines, and as a young Recon trooper had attended SCUBA School, but not Airborne School as there were no jump billets in the Reconnaissance Battalions in the early days. What’s worse was that it would be a few years before the Navy and Marine Corps would come up with the “Scuba Bubble” than indicated your skills as a diver. It hardly seemed fair as (in my opinion) SCUBA Diving is more hazardous than Parachute Jumping. The real pain in their fannies was however, that those of us with parachute wings considered ourselves ever so much more “qualified” than those who had no items of uniform adornment. I noticed Skip drooling over my somewhat salty jump wings from time to time.

## **A Change in Regulations**

During this time period, the regulations changed and you were allowed to attend the Army Airborne School as a quota filler, assuming you could pass the appropriate Physical Fitness Test for the school, and could find some unit with assigned quotas. In 1966, I was moved from Alpha Company of 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon, to run the Operations Shop (S-3) due to an extreme shortage of personnel. The S-3 was normally a Major’s billet, but the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division was short of personnel and except for operational commitments (Mediterranean and Caribbean Cruises for the FMF Units), we were almost treated as a replacement pool for Vietnam bound personnel. Now this had possibilities as I inherited a number of billets for jump school, and of course as honor would have it, I sent my old XO, Skip Hartnett, to Fort Benning to finally get his much sought after jump wings.

One item that underwent much arm wrestling was the authority to award the gold Navy/Marine Corps Wings, as the regulations read that in order for you to rate wearing the gold wings, you had to have been assigned to a *jump organization*, and had to have been in a jump billet drawing jump pay! Many of those who had taken advantage of the newly loosened up regulations on attending Airborne School, got in the necessary additional parachute jumps while operating on “permissive orders” but were not in truth, operational Marine Corps Jumpers. At least initially, all those who got the necessary additional jumps, “awarded *themselves*” the Navy/Marine Corps Wings without appropriate authorization. This was a big no-no, but some of those doing so were rather senior individuals and very few of the old timers were senior enough to object.

Hartnett was not so hampered however, as shortly after returning to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion from Ft. Benning, the newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Recon Company was started/relocated at Camp Geiger in the Camp Lejeune, N.C. base complex, and Skip was one of those tapped to flesh out the newly formed organization. The original 3<sup>rd</sup> Force had been a Reserve Company located in Mobile, Alabama, but the operational necessities of Vietnam changed things around a bit. Skip now had his wings, but unfortunately I also lost a fine officer! He got his necessary additional jumps in short order and finally had his much coveted gold wings.

Since the subject of this Sea Story is really about superstition and good luck charms, the plot will thicken shortly!



## Wings Approved for Wear on Utilities

In this same general time-frame, the Marine Corps finally relaxed their objection to Airborne Qualified Marines wearing jump wings on their Utility Uniform. Qualified individuals could pin their jump insignia on their dungaree jackets 1/2" above the name stamped above the left breast pocket ...this however initially became a bone of contention amongst the more senior officers who were not airborne qualified. They thought that it was not only unnecessary, but somewhat Army“esque” (not to mention that *THEY* didn't have a set to wear), and often refused to let the Airborne qualified individuals pin on their wings on their utilities. We cursed to ourselves, but bit our tongues, as enraging your skipper was not considered a good maneuver career-wise if you catch my drift.

I was initially was assigned to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in Vietnam at the request of my old Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Black Jack Westerman from 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon. I was thrilled. Alas my dreams of mighty deeds were dashed as 1/4 had just been rotated back to Okinawa to refit, participate in Raid Training, breaking in newly assigned personnel, and then form Special Landing Force (SLF) Bravo. When I arrived on the Rock<sup>6</sup> I was called into the Headquarters of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade (9<sup>th</sup> MAB was the controlling Headquarters for FMF activities and training, activities on Okinawa) ...alas, my Reconnaissance background caught up with me once again.

The Captain then serving simultaneously as the Commanding Officer of A Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, and the OIC of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade (9<sup>th</sup> MAB) Raid School had put in 6-months in the billet, and was *working his bolt* to head for South East Asia. The CO of the 9<sup>th</sup> MAB was an old time Colonel by the name of J.J. Padley, and he saw a way of solving several of his problems at once. He put the old CO of A Company/OIC of the Raid School into my billet in 1/4, and slid me into his now vacated slot in 5<sup>th</sup> Recon. From the Colonel's viewpoint, it made great sense, but I was inwardly seething! I had *NOT* volunteered to go to Vietnam only to wind up on Okie running a dadgummed school. What's worse, Colonel Padley was one of the old timers who did NOT approve of wearing wings on a utility/dungaree shirt. Now I was doubly un-amused if you catch my drift. Arrgggg...

The Spring Hill Fights on 881 and 861 changed the rules of the game, and a number of us who had been stuck on Okie were suddenly viewed as a marvelous pool of replacements for the casualties incurred at Khe Sanh.

## A Change of Assignments

I was suddenly thrown into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, and due to some immediate additional casualties on operation Hickory I became an “instant” Rifle Company Commander – my fondest wish actually, but our Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. “Pappy” De Long was an almost immediate casualty, and his XO, “Moose” Beard took over the Battalion,



**Dick Culver and Skip Hartnett in Dong Ha (June 1967) following “Operation Hickory” in front of 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Recon CP**

a job he was to keep for almost 9-months. The Moose (well named for his size) was an old timer having served as a Corporal in WWII and was said to have done a hitch as a Professional Football Player following the hostilities. While certainly competent, he too was one of those who had a real hang-up with wings on utility shirts. While initially it burned my tailfeathers, a bit of time under fire convinced me that wearing *anything* shiny on your uniform tended to attract hostile fire. Maybe the old boy had a point! ...certainly in the field.

## **A Liaison with Skip Hartnett**

Coming back from the DMZ following "Operation Hickory", brought our Battalion through Dong Ha, the new base of operations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company, recently deployed from Camp Pendleton. I had a great reunion with Skip Hartnett (my old XO from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion) and learned that he had somehow misplaced his gold wings. Since I was not allowed to wear mine, I offered to loan Skip my "sacred" and highly polished gold wings he had drooled over a couple of years before.

## **Fate Lends a Hand**

Several months later I learned that my old friend Jack Phillips had bought the farm. I had thought of Jack as being indestructible, and was most saddened to hear of his demise. I thought back to the time he had taken his personal wings off his shirt and given 'em to me when I was doing what I considered penance during my assignment to the 8<sup>th</sup> District in New Orleans. A wild thought suddenly occurred to me, and I suddenly had a "*fur-raising*" thought. What if those wings had some sort of good luck charm mystically attached, and perhaps Jack having giving them to me in some way sealed his fate? Uppsssss... Horrors! Now I know such things have no validity, but as I mentioned at the start of this story, everyone has some sort of superstitious leanings, even if you don't admit it to yourself! Big problem! Even though I wasn't allowed to *wear* the damned things, perhaps just the possession of my old wings might be the difference between life and death? Naw... But still??? The question suddenly became, how was I to get 'em back without letting my superstitious cat out of the bag? Hummm...

## **Culver Reclaims His Wings...**

Now Skip and I would occasionally cross paths between operations, and the next time, I cooked up a story of our newly expected Battalion CO not having any hang-ups about Marines wearing jump wings on their utilities. During my next liaison with Skip, I gave him my well thought out excuse and reclaimed my property, albeit with a bit of grumbling from my old buddy. I went away and wiped a mental bead of sweat off my brow.

Obviously my superstitions weren't well founded as both Skip and I survived our time in country, but it wasn't until several years later I spilled the beans as to my suspicions. Hartnett looked at me with a furrowed brow, and said something extremely ugly about some character who would rob his best friend of a means of survival. We had a good laugh about it in later years, but I have to admit at the time I breathed a sigh of relief.

Does anyone else have similar mental hang-ups? Well, ya' never know, but then it never hurts to be careful, eh what? Heh, heh, heh...

## And Now the Rest of the Story

Originally the story ended here, but sending the original version around came up with an unexpected twist... as the old commentator used to say, *“here’s the rest of the story”*.

Due to an inadvertent glitch in assigning individuals to Airborne School, an Inspector Instructor (here mercifully to remain unnamed), who later became my company commander in Golf Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment in 1961, had been serving as the Inspector Instructor of a Reserve Air Delivery Company, and under the early regulations wrangled himself a billet to Airborne School at Ft. Benning.

Andy was an old time Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant who had been commissioned at the tail end of the Korean War. He was a good officer, but had developed a penchant for an occasional over indulgence with the “grape” on occasion! Andy apparently participated in an impromptu party at Benning the night prior to having the Airborne PFT test administered the following morning. He had (shall we say) over-imbibed of the “grape” at the local Officer’s Club not realizing the all important test was to follow at o’dark thirty in the AM. I’m not too sure Andy even realized *where* he was when the test was given and let’s just say he did not perform at the peak of his abilities. Andy went home with his tail between his legs, and the Corps swore that this was an occurrence not to be repeated! Hence was formed what came to be known as *“Junior Jump School”*, a rather *“tongue-in-cheek designation”* for what came to be a relatively grueling test of one’s desire to “abuse himself” in front of his Army contemporaries to demonstrate the inherent superiority of the average Marine attending Airborne School over his/their Army counterpart(s)!

As with most courses designed to demonstrate a Marine’s superiority over his Army contemporaries, this damned course was designed to be a bit of “overkill”... We ran for hours on end on the beach in the surf, and jumped from the tailgate of rolling 6 X 6 Trucks to simulate parachute landing falls in a 25-knot ground wind. All training and physical exercises were carried to the extreme to ensure your “splash” into the Ft. Benning environs being something like a “boy scout” being plunged into a “brownie” troop. This physical abuse went on for varying periods of time depending on the sadistic tendencies of the particular NCO assigned to run “Junior Jump”... To say we were ready for Ft. Benning by the time we left for Columbus, Georgia was an understatement!

I went through the school in the early summer of 1960 following Jungle Warfare School in Panama. We had a rather salty crew in the group including an old friend and fellow 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, named Jeremey W. Coon who had attended the Marine Officer’s Basic School with me, and one of the real old time Amphibious Reconnaissance Marines, Gunnery Sergeant Bobby J. Patterson. Patterson had spent many years in the old Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoons, and had been assigned to the Amphib Recon Platoon of the then newly formed Force Reconnaissance Company upon the dissolution of the old “Test Unit 1”.

As a bit of background, as originally formed, the Force Recon Company had three platoons, (1) the Parachute Reconnaissance Platoon, (2) the Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoon (not initially to be Parachute Qualified, and thus not eligible to attend Airborne School), and (3) the Parachute Pathfinder Platoon. As the kinks were worked out of the initial Table of Organization, the powers-that-be listened to the tooth gnashing of the Amphibious Reconnaissance folks who were more than a little unhappy about not being eligible to win or wear the much desired parachute wings, nor to draw jump pay. As mentioned above, SCUBA divers were only eligible to receive deep sea divers pay (based on actual time under water), and there were no silver diving bubbles available to adorn their uniforms.

The new reorganization of the company consolidated all the reconnaissance folks under one roof, and thus allowing all the Recon People eligible to go to Airborne School and draw jump pay. The slight inner-platoon friction that had originally resulted in the company subsided, and Bobby J. Patterson finally got his chance to go to Benning! One other notable young Staff Sergeant in our Junior Jump School Class was named Shelton Eakin. Eakin, on his first night jump back from Benning, caught the suspension lines of a young jumper whose parachute had failed to fully deploy, and held his canopy until the lad could deploy his reserve. For his quick thinking and most probably saving the bacon of the young jumper, S/Sgt. Eakin was awarded the Navy-Marine Corps Medal. Eakin later became the Color Sergeant of the Marine Corps and was picked up in the commissioning program for Vietnam, alas, destined to be killed when he led his team off a helicopter insert only to step on a booby-trapped 250-lb. bomb ending a most promising career.

Jerry Coon was recently transferred from the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment to 1<sup>st</sup> Force. In the late 1950s and early 1960, all young officers had to have attained the exalted rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant to be assigned to the Force Reconnaissance Company. Jerry came highly recommended and had an excellent record as a platoon commander in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

Jerry and I had gone through Basic Officers School together, and I personally knew him to be an officer of superior abilities. The NCOIC assigned to conduct this exercise in “Marine abuse” was a Sergeant named Duane E. Crawford, who would later receive a battlefield commission in Vietnam and retire as a Major. We wound up our “Junior Jump Training” knowing we were in superior physical shape and were raring to go demonstrate our skills.

All of a sudden, things went askew. In a skull session at Division Training; the Division Hierarchy made what I considered to be a conceptual mistake. The decision came down that anyone with over a year in the Division following his graduation from Airborne School, was deemed not to be in a position to give the 1<sup>st</sup> Division a fair shake utilizing his new found skills! Huh? This put Jerry in an awkward position as he had been in the division several months prior to my arrival (I had been held over at Quantico to shoot on the Base Rifle Team and act as a OCS Platoon Commander. The final decision would allow me to go to Benning, but prevent Jerry from attending! Needless to say, Jerry was ONE dissatisfied individual, and in my opinion, rightfully so! His alternate assignment was to be sent the 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, which we of First Force considered being assigned to Kindergarten after participation in the big leagues!... In the early days (late 1950s and early 1960s) the Recon Battalion (at least on the West Coast) was considered the equivalent of being demoted to Grade School after performing satisfactorily as a High School Senior. In our juvenile minds, it was a comedown of major proportions! Many individuals so affected, decided to “hang-it-up” following this ill thought out reshuffling of highly qualified personnel.

Jerry went over to the Recon Battalion with a minimum amount of gnashing of teeth, but he was far from satisfied. Even after the original unwelcome transfer, Jerry put in for a Regular Marine Corps Commission when he was transferred to the Recon Battalion, on the advice of Captain Dale Davis (the Operations officer of 1<sup>st</sup> Force) with the probability that such a request might well get him transferred back to the Force Company, and an assignment to Airborne School. In the interim, Jerry got assigned to SCUBA School in Coronado from the 1<sup>st</sup> Recon Battalion, along with our mutual friend Jack Phillips (an ex-enlisted Marine, and Naval Academy Graduate). Jerry did extremely well at Coronado, and in fact became the Honor Man of the School, with Jack coming in a close second.

The Recon Battalion Commander along with the Division Headquarters was thrilled, as not only did Jerry come in first in the class, but his appointment to a Regular Marine Corps Commission arrived essentially simultaneously. The Commanding General planned a gala ceremony, but Jerry after much thought decided not to accept a regular commission or stay in the Marines. The General was much taken aback. "But why *NOT* Lt. Coon, you have an exemplary record – what changed your mind?" Jerry told the General that if all the decisions affecting his future career were going to be based on arbitrary and not well thought out career moves rather than meaningful decisions, he felt that perhaps his initial decision to make the Marine Corps a Career was a mistake.

Jerry had put in for graduate school at Northwestern after he had been turned down for Airborne School, and had been accepted. Jerry had made up his mind, and the fact that the Corps had changed theirs, while something of a temptation, did not deter his change in plans. The General and his staff offered Jerry virtually every temptation in the book including a change of their decision to send him to Ft. Benning. When that didn't work, they offered to make him the XO of the Marine Detachment on the Cruiser St. Paul, (Flagship of the Pacific Fleet at the time as I recall), send him to Aerial Observer's School and pay him flight pay and station him and his wife in Japan... Had I tried such a ploy, they'd have no doubt told me not to let the door knob hit me in the fanny on the way out (heh, heh, heh...).

Unfortunately for the Corps, Jerry went his own way (in my opinion, the Corp's loss), but he stayed in the reserve program and got to Airborne School through the reserves. We kept touch with each other, and when I retired, I went to work for Jerry in the Coal Fields over in Eastern Kentucky during the energy crisis of the late 1970s, but that's another story, perhaps better told later under the title of "*Hollar Tales*" (really exciting during the "coal, MOB, and union wars" – there was no "f++k, fight, or go for your gun" – they shot from ambush or simply blew your fanny away!) – Hummm...

I sent the original version of this one to Jerry, not realizing that he and Jack Phillips had attended Scuba School together, and their families had formed a rather close relationship. Jerry sent me back a rather sad ending to the entire story. I will quote (without permission) some of Jerry's letter (omitting a few "*ahem*" more explicit parts).

### **The following input is from Jerry...**

*I met Jack when I was transferred to 1st Recon. Bn. and we were both sent to SCUBA school at Coronado. He was a former Sgt., then went to the Naval Academy and all of that (here I am omitting some of Jack's "exploits" with the feminine gender). I met Jack when I was transferred to 1st Recon. Bn. We would go lobster "filching" with some of the traps in the bay, and he (Jack) would come over to Carolyn's (Jerry's wife at the time) and my house in Wire Mountain for a Friday feast. I heard later that Jack was*

*"ordered to defend the low ground in Viet Nam by a not so bright Lieutenant Colonel, who wanted the map to look pretty. Jack died as a result. I also heard that that particular officer had his clock cleaned in Quantico at the Officer's club by another officer who knew and loved Jack as anyone who knew him did. End of story. I visited Jack and Pat Duffy in DC (Arlington) last summer. I cried and my daughters let me be for awhile.*

Great input and a finality put to an old friend. Jerry's an old softie of course. Would I have cried? Naw, not a chance... Yeah, right!

One of our other old comrades in 1<sup>st</sup> Force mentioned above had been my favorite Irishman, Patrick E. Duffy, a stalwart if diminutive member of the old Pathfinder Platoon hailing from Mobile, Alabama. Pat (appropriately enough had been born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, making him the pluperfect Irishman). There are lots of Duffy stories, and since it's coming up on the 17<sup>th</sup>, I'd say I owe him at least one! Pat too had finally drawn the "*dead man's hand*" in the card deck and bought it while sitting on a sand bag revetment during an artillery barrage while serving as the S-3 of an Infantry Battalion up close to the DMZ. As luck would have it, a small splinter of metal missed the top of his vest and gone in under his helmet, ending the career of one of our more colorful Marines. So here's "*Sayonara*" to two great Marines and good friends, 'till we meet again...

Semper Fidelis,

## Dick

**End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Yes, I know there is a provision in the regulations for awarding the basic parachute wings for a single “Combat Jump”, stemming from the Normandy Jump into France when it was rumored that over 50% of the Airborne Troops had never made a single jump due to the weather conditions in England prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. The replacements for the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne had completed ground training, but had never actually jumped. I had a Marine Sergeant Major named *R. O. Jones* who legitimately wore the basic silver wings, having been pushed out of an aircraft for the first time over Burma as an armorer for the OSS. As far as I know, “*R. O.*” never made another jump. Bear in mind, this is only authorized for “**combat jumps**” and the last time I looked, this was still one of the valid reasons for awarding jump wings. Maybe someone up there knows something I don’t?

<sup>2</sup> The term “**Paramarine**” is actually something of a misnomer and was never an official USMC designation as historical “purists” will tell you. “Paramarine” however, has become a commonly used term to identify members of the WWII Parachute Units, and was quite commonly used when the Parachute Companies, Battalions, and Regiments, were operational during the War.

<sup>3</sup> “**Jing**” is simply a slang term for “coin of the Realm”

<sup>4</sup> “**Watash**” is an old “*Far East*” term meaning “me” or the guy who’s spinning the yarn, or telling the story.

<sup>5</sup> “**Camelneck**” was our bastardization of the American Terminology, “Leatherneck” for Marine – in terms of the Saudis, this was a real misnomer!

<sup>6</sup> The “**Rock**” was slang for Okinawa.

# For Carlos...

**C**arlos is gone... Somehow, it just doesn't seem possible! I think I had begun to think of him as indestructible! It seems like only yesterday that I was standing behind him in a line to get our triggers weighed prior to shooting the Division Matches at Camp Lejeune in the early 60s. I've shot with him, soldiered with him and been his OIC and Commanding Officer, and he never once failed to do his job brilliantly, or disappointed me in any way. For all of his expertise as a sniper, for all of his heroism, for all of his shooting ability, I think I will remember him most for his sense of humor and willingness to help others – his other accomplishments are a matter of history.

He was a man of great personal accomplishments, who never quite realized that he was a celebrity in his own right. Any attempt to heap praise on him resulted in his hanging his head and dragging his toe in the dirt. Not that he didn't realize that he knew his stuff with a rifle in his shoulder, he just was not comfortable in the spotlight. He was the original, All-American reluctant hero, who never quite saw anything heroic in his deeds... It took the rest of us to promote his brilliance, if left to his own devices, Carlos would have remained an unknown Marine who did his job and did it exceptionally well!

Everything in me makes me want to recount his amazing deeds and accomplishments, but that's been done before in many places, and this isn't meant to be a history, just a good by to an old friend...

Carlos is not really gone however. As long as there are those of us who keep him alive in our hearts and memories, he will never die. As long as there is a Marine Corps, Carlos' memory will always be alive. His legacy of self-sacrifice, and heroism will always serve to as an inspiration to those who follow in his footsteps. As long as there is a place in our hearts for decency and honor and bravery, Carlos will live. May it always be so...

In Norse mythology, fallen heroes were welcomed to Valhalla as a reward for valorous conduct. Those of us in the profession of arms often speak of this, the warriors' final resting-place, where no one grows old, and honor is held in high esteem. If there is an all-knowing and all-wise God, as there must surely be, we will someday meet Carlos at the gates of Valhalla... I only hope that we will be as worthy of entrance to those hallowed halls as the immortal "White Feather"...

So here's one last toast to Carlos... lift your glasses to heroism, self-sacrifice, and devotion to duty in the face of extreme adversity... to my old friend, until we meet again...

**Semper Fi,**

**Dick Culver**



**End Note:** This was written on the morning Carlos passed on to Valhalla. While we had all known that his end was inevitable, I suppose that somewhere down deep, he had become a symbol of a transition era within our sacred Corps of Marines, and that somehow Carlos would always be there when you needed him. Much like the legendary Captain Jimmy Bones who tended the gates of Hell, we have always suspected that when needed most, Carlos will take the necessary leave from his duties in Odin's Great Hall. The guides to Valhalla are known as the Valkyries who chose only the most valiant warriors and escort them to their place of honor. Certainly they could have made no better choice than Carlos. Those chosen are welcomed by Odin's son *Bragi*, the master of the spoken word, and noted for his poetic excellence. In Carlos' case, his lexicon may have been overwhelmed by a most unique individual who quite possibly may have caused *Bragi* to exceed his normal eloquence.



**The Setting Sun on a Marine Corps Legend**

# Stolen Valor

## John Kerry; His Awards and Decorations

(*Kerry's Machinations are in Italics*)

By Dick Culver

This is just a new thrust on an old, old story, and one that caused no end of heartburn in Vietnam a number of years ago. Were there abuses of the awards system? In a word, yes. Were they rampant? Well, I don't have the figures, but because of the methodology of handing out medals, the potential for abuse was certainly there. Here's how the system worked (at least in the Naval Service) back in the late 1960s.

### THE INFAMOUS TRILATERAL CONNECTION:

In order to be recommended for an award, it was necessary to have two willing witnesses who would attest to your bravery (or at least deeds). In the normal day to day actions, this was a non-problem with individuals who did not seek to abuse the system. Where the rub came was from those we used to call "career planners," and/or consisted of what might be called the "career enhancement" groups.

Those involved in such reprehensible behavior would usually divide up into three man groups and start a round-robin of award recommendations. In its simplest format, two of the three man group would write up guy # 1. He of course, would look sheepish, drag his toe in the dirt, and accept his "dangler" with appropriate modesty. When a period of time elapsed to avoid looking too obvious, guy # 1 would then team up with say, guy # 2 and write up guy # 3 for an appropriate career enhancing dangler to be added to his record book and his uniform. Then of course, guys # 1 and # 3 would write up guy # 2 and so it would go! These award "ring around the rosy" machinations were most commonly confined to individuals on appropriate staff levels to preclude having to find vast numbers of enlisted personnel to verify their heroic actions.

These awards were usually timed so that the awards would be presented AFTER the individual(s) had returned to the States to avoid close scrutiny by others of the unit who were familiar with each individual's actions in the time period(s) set forth in the awards. Needless to say, this system had the potential for abuse. Mercifully, such abuse wasn't rampant, as most officers (or for that matter, NCOs), would rather have been shot than participate in any such shenanigans. The shame would have been too great to endure.

### AN EXAMPLE OF APPROPRIATE HUMILITY:

I have seen truly deserving lads, mostly enlisted folks, actually turn down even the suggestion that he or they might have done something worthy of an award, especially when so many acts of bravery and self sacrifice went unnoticed. One such case comes to mind, that of Carlos Hathcock, the sniper of some note in later years. During his last operation, Carlos was riding on top of an Amtrac on his way to his assigned Area of Operations. The Amtrac ran over a command detonated mine setting off the fuel cells in the bottom of the craft. Hathcock was blown off the Amtrac, but was not trapped inside. While the explosion

rang Hathcock's bell, it simply threw him into the weeds and he could have simply stepped aside shaking his head and no one would have said a word. Instead, Carlos got the doors open getting burned severely, and then making several trips back into the burning vehicle to rescue the trapped Marines. Interestingly enough, most of those he rescued sustained only relatively minor injuries. Hathcock on the other hand received 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns on over 50% of his body. Some of the troops he had rescued visited him in the hospital asked him if he would like them to write him up for an award? Now the kind of Marines I am/was used to dealing with would rather take a fanny kicking than ask anybody to write them up for ANY sort of medal – it comes with being a professional who simply thinks he is or was simply doing his job. Needless to say, Carlos declined the offer, and the troops willing to accede to Carlos,' wishes never wrote him up for anything.

It was many years later when Carlos was recommended for the MOH and the recommendation ricocheted around the Congressional Halls only to be bounced back to HQMC where Krulak (the younger) was then ensconced as the Commandant. While his Daddy had been an officious prick, he was at least all Marine. Alas, the son had become a politician. Little Krulak was outraged, and several friends of mine at HQMC saw the recommendation with Krulak's personal handwriting on the "write-up" stating that in HIS Corps, this (Carlos' actions) wouldn't have even rated a Navy Commendation Medal! I noticed however that young Krulak had a Silver Star awarded for a tour in RVN that had the suspicious fingerprints of an award to schmooze his Daddy who at that time was a Lieutenant General and CG of FMF Pacific. No way to prove it of course, but sometimes when it quacks like a duck and waddles like a duck, you just have to assume that it at least has some water-proof feathers! Carlos was eventually awarded a Silver Star however even though it was almost 28-years after the fact. With all the BS boiled out of it, these sorts of self effacing folks were those who personified the Corps I knew and loved. NOT the one inhabited by a few career planners.

## **BACK TO THE CAREER PLANNERS:**

*There was an even greater evil than that of having a "ring-of-three" engaged in record book/career enhancement. That was the sometimes abused awards policy that existed in some of the small commands, who lacked daily supervision to ensure that no one was simply decorating himself with no chance of getting caught. This would of course need the collusion of at least two other people to attest to your "Ramboesque" conduct. Not that I am suggesting anything untoward of course, but if you will note the picture of Kerry on his Swift Boat standing there with his khaki shirt, wearing his decorations, flanked by two of his crew, each wearing (as best I can tell from the pictures) a Navy Commendation Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device (Combat "V"). Obviously these were two very proud young sailors, most gratified that their Skipper would have seen fit to write them up for their bravery... Hummm... Not that I see a pattern there or anything, but it certainly is suggestive.*

In similar circumstances, I know of at least one Marine (former enlisted) Captain who came home with two Navy Crosses awarded while he was on "detached duty" with a sister service. No one, to my knowledge, has ever figured out how he got them.

I personally witnessed a Navy Lieutenant in charge of a famous (but mercifully unnamed) amphibious-type unit (named for a sea-going mammal and chronicled at least once in a movie with Charlie Sheen playing in it) coming around after one of the most #\$\$%& up

attempted prisoner snatches of all times. These yahoos withdrew to the beach claiming they had been ambushed (interestingly enough, the tracers were all red – the zips normally used green, and this was in the north country, not VC territory). The wounded were loaded aboard the boats and the withdrawal was completed. On the positive side, the wounds were not serious but strangely were all appeared to be rear entrance penetrations. No way to tell of course, but it would appear that someone got trigger happy, loosed an inadvertent burst of fire thus starting what amounted to a “feeding frenzy!” The next morning the unit commander was going around with his note-pad taking recommendations decorations for acts of bravery during this idiotic display of tactical incompetence. All Marines declined (with something of a controlled snicker), but it was pretty obvious that someone was trying to justify the mission failure to his OIC as having been compromised and ambushed, with only their daring and skill allowing them to pull back! Holy Catfish Batman! This instance was more in the nature of cover your @\$\$ than true career enhancement. I would have loved to see what those guys recommended themselves for! Needless to say, no one was about to blow the whistle on this maneuver, as it would have looked bad for all hands!

## **THE PURPLE HEART:**

Purple Hearts were a whole ‘nother kettle of fish. For the most part, the purple hearts were handed out for everything from a hang-nail to having your head blown off. During one period of time, they were actually awarded for BRUISES using the excuse that it was actually “internal bleeding” and if caused by hitting your head going into a bunker during a mortar or rocket attack, this was a perfectly legitimate Purple Heart caused by enemy action (after all he wouldn’t have hit his head if someone hadn’t rocketed [or mortared] the base, right?).

When General Bruno Hochmuth arrived to take charge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, he was awarded such a Purple Heart. Upon receiving his award, he demanded to see the paperwork and authorization. He immediately stopped the awarding the Purple Heart for bruises, but some who were stationed in the Division Headquarters noted that he didn’t give his back. Payback is sometimes a bitch however, as he and many of his staff (including one good friend of mine) were killed when his chopper was struck by Arvin artillery fire. Being somewhat of a blue nose, Hochmuth had instituted a limit of two beers per man per night when he arrived. Some sacrilegious clowns wondered if his untimely demise was payback for his alcohol prohibitionist policies? Or, perhaps it was “friendly” artillery fire! Hummm...

Purple hearts as denoted above, came in all flavors, and it wasn’t unusual to have someone “find” a forgotten(?) wound tag in his medical record when he returned home or changed units! Forgotten? Dear Allah! I saw this one more than once, and many times an obliging Corpsman would “wound” an individual on paper to put the kibosh on any such “found” tags that suddenly appeared in his own (the Corpsman’s) health record. Was this rampant? Not really, as most of those guys were angles of mercy when the bullets were flying and would never have gone along with such trash! HOWEVER, some acceded to the thinly veiled suggestions by their Officer in Charge to make sure that his (the officer’s) wound was duly recorded in the paperwork! Common? Nope, but it DID happen, and I know of several such recipients myself, however none of them have ever had aspirations for public office. In the “career planners” circles however, it was considered to be necessary to have an appropriate wound to go with their highly imagined acts of bravery – made them ever so much more believable don’t ya’ know?

## ONE EXAMPLE:

An officer who shall mercifully remain unnamed, was located in a position adjacent to mine during a rather spirited firefight one night. His unit was located about 1000-yards distant across a wet rice paddy that was about waist deep in water, making it extremely difficult to send any meaningful help to the Company. I personally was heavily engaged and had my own hands full, but I kept track of the progress of his firefight via radio. He had a platoon engaged in a long wood line that was really catching hell. He left them to their own devices until the morning light when he went in and extracted what was left of the unfortunate unit. We pulled out the following morning (having subdued the enemy in fine fashion on our side of the rice paddies), and since no further radio traffic was received from my compatriot in the adjacent tree line, I could only assume that his mission had been accomplished. Following my company's final assault and mopping up we awaited his (the adjacent company) arrival the next morning by helicopter so we could he could follow (us) in trace down the infamous "*Street Without Joy*". I was with this gent all day off and on, and he didn't appear to have a single scratch! The platoon he had left stuck in the tree line all night wasn't as lucky of course, but we didn't question each other's tactical maneuvering as neither of us had been in a position to observe the other's battles. Time passed, and the entire incident would have been forgotten until some months later.

I was in the Officer's Club in Okinawa (on my way home), having a beer with the former Company Commander of the night in question. I had heard that the individual had been awarded a Bronze Star for his actions which raised my suspicions, as I had listened while he apparently left his platoon to their own devices during the firefight. We were discussing decorations, etc. and he told me that the (our) Battalion Adjutant had been awarded a Bronze Star (with Combat V) for his performance in running the administration of the Battalion. In order to understand this one, you have to remember we had been on the SLF for a period of 8+ months, and the Battalion Adjutant had performed his valorous deeds while ensconced aboard ship with three squares and hot showers! I remarked to the gentleman sharing a beer with me that I thought that such an award was unwarranted for a ship bound REMF. My friend said that yes, but the Adjutant HAD done a marvelous job. I pointed out (being as sarcastic as I dared without starting a fist fight) that yes he had, but such an award cheapened the Bronze Star for those who had *REALLY* earned them (with reference to my erstwhile buddy who had left his platoon to their own devices during a spirited firefight!). He stared off into space saying, "Yes, I suppose I DID earn mine!"

Only the possible hate and discontent of the barkeep kept me from throwing up on the bar! I made my excuses and left to regain what was left of my sanity. This clown was one of a gang of three "career planners" who had decorated each other appropriately at discrete times to avoid arousing suspicion. This gent had been the S-3 Alpha (Operations Officer's chief assistant) for most of his tour, and had taken over the rifle company when the original Company Commander had been med-evaced for a wound from a friendly [and self-thrown] grenade). The med-evaced Company Commander received a Silver Star (this one could well have been legitimate, as the gentleman in question had an excellent reputation, and was well regarded by his troops! ...since I wasn't there, I will assume the best in this case?). The S-3 (my "hero's boss") got a Bronze Star in the tri-lateral write up that resulted in my acquaintance's decoration. The S-3 (his boss) was a walking incompetent who never deliberately left the CP but was always full of gungy advice for the Company Commanders in the field. This idiot actually told Reggie Ponsford (probably the most knuckle dragging

Company Officer I knew) that he was going to have to be more aggressive! Dear Allah. The last time I heard of the former S-3, he had left the Corps (mercifully) and was selling bikini bathing suits – I'm surprised he hasn't been considered as Kerry's running mate!

## **BUT IT AIN'T OVER YET!**

I wound up at the Rifle Range at Camp Lejeune, and my career planning buddy wound up at Headquarters Marine Corps. One day I got a letter in the mail (I still have it) written on a yellow lined pad from this guy telling me he had been talking to a Colonel at HQMC about his Bronze Star, and the Colonel was convinced that it should really have been a Silver Star since he was wounded in the battle! Huh?? Wounded? I was with the clown the next day, and I never saw a scratch on the blighter. Seems it was one of those "found wound tags" in his medical records that hadn't been noticed! My Gawd, here we go again! This guy (having remembered our conversation at the bar where I told him that he really EARNED his medal – a bit sarcastically of course), now wanted me to write a letter to HQMC recommending that his award be upped to a Silver Star! I seriously considered putting a routing stamp on the damned thing (his handwritten letter) and sending it to HQMC with an explanation! Better sense prevailed (they always shoot the messenger), and I simply ignored his request. What happened? Why his Bronze Star was upped to a Silver Star of course, what did you think would happen? Happy endings are always confined to fairy tales! I later told the story to an old mustang 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant who had been with us in RVN. He said he too had received such a letter. I asked him what he did with it (bear in mind this guy was nowhere close to where the action had taken place)? He told me that, "I recommended him of course, I might want to drink a beer with him sometime!" To say that I was disappointed with the old former 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant is an understatement! I personally wouldn't drink a beer with that self decorating @\$\$hole (the Captain, not the Lieutenant) if I were dying of thirst!

And so it goes, ...and you wonder why Kerry's former associates are hesitant to criticize their former Skipper and now Senator from Massachusetts? Sometimes I am at a total loss to explain human nature!

## **AND FINIS:**

To say that I was a disillusioned individual when I got home doesn't cover it. McNamara had tried to get us killed with a weapon that hadn't been properly tested, and then tried to tell us that it was OUR fault. This was followed by watching the career planners decorate themselves while often neglecting to write up their own troops for deserved decorations, was beginning to give me a rather jaundiced take on my fellow human beings.

A call from the Commanding General's Staff Secretary about topped it off. I was called one morning and told to report to the flagpole in front of the Base Headquarters at 0800 the following Friday for an awards presentation. I was forced to ask him exactly what they had in mind? He informed me that they were planning on kissing me on both cheeks and pinning a dangler on my skuzzy fanny. Now I had heard rumblings about this before I left country, and had snuck into the Battalion Office and personally torn up the paperwork, not once but twice! Apparently a third attempt had been successful. My troops had done this one, and I felt bad about thwarting their efforts, but after what I'd seen, I wanted no reminders of the convoluted system that had awarded such dangles to individuals that wouldn't make a pimple on a good Marine's fanny. I told the Staff Secretary where to stick the thing, and forget it! He was

aghast, but told me to stay available as he had to check with the Commanding General. I got a call back telling me to BE there on Friday morning or be cited for disobeying a direct order. Seems that they had a visiting Naval Academy Class and I was scheduled as the entertainment for that particular time slot.

The Commanding General was one of God's true noblemen, and after the ceremony told me to repair to his office. We had a long discussion during which he attempted to smooth my ruffled feathers. He offered me a "fine" cigar, and told me how things really worked, and that I should take off my pack and relax. Not only that, but he would call me (personally) about once a month and have me come to his office for a chat (almost like my psychoanalyst I thought) and we'd talk on various subjects (the Base CP was about 20-miles from the Rifle Range, not just around the block). The CG (Major General Joe Butcher) finally admitted to me that he enjoyed asking my opinions on things as he felt that anyone who'd tell the CG to stuff a medal up his posterior was likely to give him honest answers! I developed a genuine fondness for that fine old gentleman, and came to think of him as a sort of father figure. We got to be friends, and I always got a first rate cigar out of my visits. My commanding officer (at the Rifle Range – a typical REMF-type) however always wondered what we talked about during our visits, and could be seen visibly sweating when the call would come in from the Commanding General. I never explained and he never had guts enough to ask... Sometimes life is good! Hee, hee, hee...

One final footnote to this came at the end of my tour with the Air Force at Hanscom AFB in Massachusetts. The Air Force was conducting tests on their (then) new computerized intelligence system, "TIPI" (Tactical Information and Processing and Intelligence), and we were working on a sister system we called "MAGIS" (Marine Air Ground Intelligence System). The entire evolution was considered a joint project. It was fun, but mainly we were simply keeping the civilian contractors honest and making sure they didn't short the Government.

When it came time to leave, my (Air Force) Colonel called me in and told me he was recommending me for an Air Force Commendation Medal. Now the Colonel was a fine gentleman, and virtually everyone who left the unit without shooting themselves in the foot, was so decorated. My tail feathers were still ruffled remembering my experiences in Vietnam, and I asked that he not write up such an award. He asked if I would explain, and I told him that the blue and yellow ribbon would clash on a Marine Corps green uniform. He laughed, agreed, and we parted good friends, but old experiences run deep!

I still look with suspicion on those who look like walking Christmas trees. Just ingrained I guess, but I can remember when I was a kid that General Officers with a reputation of great daring and deeds often had only two rows of ribbons after 30-years of service! Now they give you foreign-service ribbons, deployment ribbons, and in some services, ribbons for completing NCO Academies. Dear Allah, what have we come to? By getting a higher peak on our frame covers, we could look like South American Generals. Gawd I miss the Corps I grew up in!

Semper Fidelis,

*Dick*

**Note:** Since I wrote the original Sea Story above, the individual who sent me the letter on yellow lined notebook paper was just awarded a Navy Cross for actions that were never noted during his tenure with the Battalion. The Battalion Commander during this evolution authenticated his claims. I was in the hospital aboard the U.S.S. Tripoli with an old foot wound the Medicos informed me would result in my being able to play “Long John Silver” during Halloween with only the addition of an eye-patch and a parrot. What DID happen during this particular landing was that Reggie Ponsford (the Skipper of Foxtrot 2/3) watched his radio operator lose his hold on the landing nets coming down the sides of the U.S.S. Tripoli (they decided in true Marine Corps fashion) to conduct the landing even though we were in the middle of a Typhoon and couldn’t launch the CH-46 Helicopters. This kid was going down for the last time being anchored by his 782 gear, and Ponsford stood up on the gunwale of the Mike Boat, ditched his 782 gear into the drink (with MY binoculars I had loaned him), and saved the kid, almost drowning himself in the process. Reggie was awarded the Navy Marine Corps Medal for saving the kids life (well deserved to say the least)!

David Douglas Duncan (famous author and combat photographer) wrote a book about the operation called “*War Without Heroes*”. Reggie and his actions with his Rifle Company filled almost the entire first chapter of the book. We were all aware of Reggie’s guts (and sometimes near idiocy), and he was talk of the Battalion for months thereafter. However, nowhere in the entire book were the heroics of the aforementioned Captain who just recently (2006) received the Navy Cross mentioned. Hummm... Certainly the Battalion Commander was not in a position to witness this gentleman’s heroics, although one of the Marines wounded during the mortar barrage that pummeled the Amtracs (during the timeframe of the captain’s heroic efforts) wound up in the rack in the Hospital just under mine. Every morning this poor kid would wake up in a pool of blood on the latex sheet he was initially situated on. The Marine lost one kidney, 8’ of large intestine and had a courtesy appendectomy performed on him during surgery. Apparently the kid had a silver horseshoe inserted in his posterior and survived his extensive wounds, and I never once heard him (the wounded Marine) mention the “self-decorating” captain’s heroic efforts. Needless to say, I view almost any “long after the fact” decorations with a jaundiced eye – and in this gent’s case, I wouldn’t believe it if the recently decorated Captain claimed he made at least one “head call” a day!



## Hockaday Walker and Gil (Suicide) Holmes

A letter from a friend of mine asked me if I had ever heard about Hockaday Walker, a somewhat eccentric Marine who was famous (or perhaps infamous) when I was a shiny new Lieutenant. I had to go back into my memory banks. Here's what I answered back...

"My Gawd, it'd been forever since I'd thought about "Herr Walker" and his mentor "Suicide Holmes"! You definitely knew the lad as his dueling scar wasn't as well known as some of the rest of his antics. Walker, as you say, was rumored to be from an extremely wealthy family, (i.e. the Hiram Walker Distilleries), but alas 'twarnt so. His father was a wholesale grocer, and while the family wasn't destitute, neither were they the heirs to the whiskey fortune. It was simply that Hockaday had nothing else to spend his money on but the Marine Corps. Here's what I've been able to put together over the years. Here are his statistics as I knew them":

**Name:** Edward H. (for Hockaday, a family name he cordially hated!) Walker IV.

**Education:**

Music (Classical Music as I understand it) some of his education having taken place in Europe, hence the German Dueling Scar (Walker was an incurable romantic).

**Passion:**

The United States Marine Corps (he loved the discipline and self discipline necessary to be what he considered the perfect Officer of Marines – after all they didn't have the "Hussars" over here as you pointed out)!

**The Story (as best I was able to unravel it):**

As I stated above, Walker was the true romantic, a Teutonic Knight born in the wrong century, and quite possibly on the wrong continent. Rumor control had it that after he had gotten his dueling wound (reminds me somewhat of Kerry plotting his future course in the world), he actually would pull it apart when it was healing and pour salt into it to make it more visible for future generations.

Upon graduating from school, he applied for and was accepted to USMC OCS (about 1956 as I recall) he was sent to Quantico. Seems he wasn't in the best of shape and had some initial problems with the obstacle course. He spent every spare moment running and rerunning the course until he got into decent shape. At this point in time however he had not yet crossed the Rubicon. He was gungy of course, but not really totally unhinged. Upon finishing up Basic School, all Lieutenants were (at least in those days) asked to pick their top three choices of MOSs to which they would like to be assigned. Walker would have picked Infantry, Infantry, and Infantry, but they informed him that he **had** to select three different MOSs. Walker picked Infantry, Artillery, and Armor. As luck would have it since he had a fairly high GCT, they picked him for the Artillery. Hockaday was heartbroken, and left no ear unbent expressing his displeasure.

He was sent to the Rock (as many were in those days, this was prior to the transplacement scheme), and the tour was for 18-months. He left no opportunity unturned in telling his superiors how unhappy he was being in the Artillery. Now Artillerymen are a proud bunch themselves, and take some small offense at this "upstart" bad mouthing their particular military endeavors. Finally, they had enough and decided to transfer this miscreant to the

Infantry just to shut him up. One particularly evil character had heard of this (fellow) *madman*, Gil (Suicide) Holmes who had an infantry company with one of the infantry battalions on the Rock. The stories that were told about Holmes were really quite off the wall, though not without some basic truths in them. They figured if they could get Lt. Walker transferred to Holmes' company, they'd get their revenge. ...And so it was done. However they had not realized that there would be unintended consequences to their nefarious plan... Holmes and Walker jelled and formed a homogeneous and barely sub-critical mass – the Corps would never be quite the same. Those characters were like two peas in a pod, and the outraged Artillerymen had not succeeded in punishing Walker, but rather had fulfilled his wildest dreams and fantasies. A bond was formed (Walker and Holmes) that was legendary in the Corps in those days, and would be talked about even unto the year 2005 (ahem...).

Holmes having been on Okinawa longer than Walker, was transferred back to SDT (Schools Demonstration Troops) Quantico at the end of his tour. Walker followed him to Quantico and was once again assigned as Holmes' XO. Walker not to be outdone by Holmes, would take his platoon out for runs at high port with their M1s, while he would carry a BAR while running with them (I've watched the evolution, so this is not hearsay). To his credit, I never heard a single troop bad-mouth Hockaday, as whatever he asked them to do, he also did, usually with some sort of "one-upmanship" quirk involved (like carrying the BAR at high port). For whatever else he was, Hockaday was a damn fine troop leader.

Walker always kept his head shaved (he told me that it would save time in combat in the event of a head wound), had no steady girl friends (the old "if the Corps wanted me to have a wife, they'd have issued me one" argument), and owned no car since he considered a car to be an unnecessary encumbrance in the event of an immediate mobilization!

During this time frame (specifically 1958), Walker went with SDT to Perry, and since Holmes had been transferred, was at some sort of loose ends. He was looking for a mission. Walker remained at SDT for quite a spell, and aside from the stories that leaked out, apparently did a good job, but was viewed with some small suspicion by his contemporaries as you might imagine.

I had graduated from Basic School and was initially assigned to OCS as a platoon commander, but my shooting past caught up with me. I was assigned to the Rifle Range Detachment as a range officer, but mainly to shoot on the Quantico Rifle Team. While I love to shoot, I too was outraged, I wanted to go out to the FMF. ...I always considered myself a Marine who knew how to shoot, rather than a "range-rat" who was occasionally pried off of the range to go back to a line company... A subtle but distinct difference! I must have been as objectionable to the Rifle Range Detachment CO as Walker was with the Artillery on Okinawa. I wanted off of the range, and I wanted off NOW!

In the meantime, I met Hockaday on a more personal basis (up till then he was simply a legend of small proportion, but well known throughout the Corps). One of my first discoveries was that he liked to "direct" classical music emanating from his hi-fi (we didn't have stereos in those days), by standing in front of the mirror and using his swagger stick! – no kidding!

Entering his room was an experience in of itself. He had nothing of what could be called a personal nature (except for his hi-fi). The deck was lined with Marine Corps footlockers with many pairs of spitshined boots and shoes sitting on them, as if for some sort of inspection. The boots had all had their eyelets (jack-laces) gold plated and that sparkled in the light of the overhead bulb. His closets were filled to overflowing with extra sets of dungarees (all herringbone of course), Dress Blues, Dress Whites, several sets of Mess and Evening Dress,

and innumerable sets of starched and pressed khaki uniforms. He would go down to the “Used Uniform Shop” across the tracks and buy old sets of greens that were particularly salty, and have Tom Pochacco (the guy who owned the Cleaners) cut them down to fit him (Tom was a hell of a good tailor). He bought all the old emblems in the second hand uniform shop that were still in existence, and took delight in using the old black emblems that had been designed for the old high collared greens and placing them on the lapels of the more modern day uniforms. He got away with most of this because we were in an era of uniform changeover if you will recall, and some small amount of “era-slop-over” was allowed – not to say he “pushed it a bit” or anything, but nobody said too much.

We lived in the old “Cinder City” BOQ across the tracks (and through the underpass) and not too long a walk from town. Every Saturday morning Hockaday would put on a fresh set of dress blues and walk to town. He would then station himself on the corner next to the Rexall Drug Store and stand there until noon, saluting all the young lads who came by in uniform (lots of guys still went on liberty in uniform in those days as you’ll remember - most especially the youngsters going through OCS or PLC). Hockaday spent his whole Saturday Morning saluting and correcting the salutes of those who did not do an acceptable job of rendering the appropriate military salutation. At exactly noon (he’d check his watch), he’d turn and walk back to the BOQ. He would then take off his Blues (don’t forget, he hadn’t even sat down in them yet!), roll them up, get dressed in Greens and take his Blues back to town to give to Tom Pochacco in the cleaners. He would then stand on the corner for another two hours saluting, and then repair to the “Sportsman” watering hole across the street, have one beer, and return to the BOQ to work on lesson plans or direct classical music... And this was a weekly occurrence, not something that happened just once in a while! Dedicated? No question! Strange? Uh Huh, most assuredly! Again, we lived right next door to one another, and spoke daily. He was likable, but definitely weird!

At this point however, things began to take a different turn, and one that would not bode well for our hero. One of the senior Colonels at Quantico got picked for Brigadier General and was looking for an Aide (actually, Brigadier General’s aides are usually called “Administrative Assistants” – you don’t get to be a full blown aide until **your** general makes his second star – or so it was in that time frame). Walker’s reputation for extreme dedication to duty preceded him and the Brigadier sent for Hockaday for an interview. On the basis of their talk, Walker was selected and reported to the General’s office ready for duty.

One of Walker’s initial tasks as the General’s “Administrative Assistant” was to attend him during a reception (in this instance the uniform of the day for the reception had been officially designated to be civilian clothes). Hockaday of course showed up in Dress Blues. The General took one look, and asked Walker if he didn’t have any civilian clothes? Walker’s reply was something to the effect “of course not General, why would I want any civilian clothes when I have Marine Corps Uniforms?” The General’s reply? “**Buy** some!”

The second question was, “do you always keep your head shaved?” Walker’s answer, “why yes sir, it’s more sanitary and the shaved head makes it easier to dress a head wound in combat.” The General’s answer? “**Grow some hair!**”

Walker went to the PX and bought a very conservative mild plaid sport coat and a pair of light gray trousers. All this was worn with USMC shoes of course. Hockaday quit shaving his head all over, and simply shaved it on the sides and used about triple-ought clippers on top... He had essentially darkened the top of his head. Actually, the general came to like ol’ Hockaday, and when Ed’s tour was over, Ed asked for an assignment to airborne school (in

those days if you didn't step on your crank, you got your pick of duty assignments when your tour as an Aide [or Administrative Assistant] was completed). I lost track of Hockaday for a piece, and the next time I saw him, both the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Recon and 2<sup>nd</sup> Force Recon Companies descended on the *Pickle Meadows Cold Weather Training Facility* simultaneously (about January of '61). We had a good reunion and compared the two outfits and generally caught up on old times. I would not see him again until 1967 when he was a temporary Major serving as the CO of 1<sup>st</sup> Force in DaNang. ...But his shenanigans in the meantime, again became the things of legend!

While he was still stationed at Quantico, he finally succumbed to car ownership (horrors)! If you will remember, General Twining (**Merrill B.** Twining that is, (and just incidentally a Distinguished Pistol Shot, and brother of **Nathan B.** Twining of the Air Force), had a rather large and highly polished black limousine (I think it was a Buick) sporting a red plate with a Bronze (it could have been nickel, I disremember) Marine Corps Emblem on it. The Emblem was surrounded with three small silver stars indicating his rank. Hockaday couldn't resist, and bought Twining's old black "General Mobile"... He replaced the small silver stars with 3 small silver Marine Corps Emblems. The MPs then captured his fanny and made him take the emblems off, accusing him of impersonating a general! Heh, heh, heh... In the meantime, Hockaday and "his" (Brigadier) General were destined to meet again, next time at Guantanamo Bay during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

For whatever reason, Hockaday didn't last too long at 2<sup>nd</sup> Force (rumor control had it that he was trying to square THEM away! – needless to say that went over like the proverbial lead football, and they found something else for him to do)...

It may have been the Cuban Missile Crisis, but for whatever reason, after Walker exited recon, he was called by the same Brigadier General he had attended at Quantico, asking for him to go to Guantanamo again as his aide. Rumors abounded that Walker had set up the General's jeep with a .30 Browning M1919A4 on the hood (appropriately sandbagged of course). As I understand it, the General ate this stuff up, and I can only guess he (much as Walker) had never quite grown out of the romantic phase. Cuba fizzled out of course, and this time Hockaday talked his way into going to the Advisory Group in Korea. This should have been the perfect set up for our hero, but he had a fatal flaw – it turns out he was the original "blue-nose"!

Apparently it was an unaccompanied tour at the time, and many of his fellow advisors were "ranching" with the local young lovelies. Now while a little feminine companionship is always welcome, it seems that many of these guys were happily(?) married. Unfaithful Marine Officers? Horrors! Walker was outraged and wrote a "tell-all" letter back to his favorite General, spilling the beans and making the Advisory Group look like an episode from Payton Place. This turned out to be an exceptionally bad move, as the General showed this thing all around Headquarters Marine Corps. Now that Walker (or at least the General) had made his accusations public knowledge, a great hue and cry came from Headquarters and a major official investigation was kicked off in Korea to ascertain the facts of the case!

Big problem, Walker *KNEW* this stuff was going on, but he didn't have a shred of real proof, just suspicions. The senior officers of course linked arms and circled the wagons. No proof? Obviously Walker was guilty of making false (and unsubstantiated) charges! The Senior officer (of the group of "accusees") demanded a court martial of the upstart Captain to clear their names. Walker was found guilty and dropped a substantial bunch of numbers on the seniority list! At this point, Hockaday's career was for all intents and purposes "kaput"...

When the Corps was terribly short of experienced officer in about the 1967 time-frame, many of the old timers who would never have been promoted in the normal course of things were given “temporary promotions” to the next higher rank to fill billet vacancies. Walker fell into this bracket and was assigned as the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Recon Company in Da Nang. I made a trip down to see him when he was there, but he didn’t seem to be the same old Hockaday... The handwriting was on the wall. For those who already had their 20 in, when the temporary promotions came rolling down, were allowed to retire at the highest rank held if they served at least one satisfactory year in the higher grade. While Walker apparently did an OK job, he simply didn’t have the total time in to make him eligible for retirement, and had to revert to Captain and eventually exit the service when he was passed over on the normal promotion list.

Kinda’ sad in retrospect! It wasn’t that Walker was a bad Marine, in actual fact he was a fine Marine, but he just never allowed the ordinary guy feel comfortable in his “august” presence! He was just too good for his own damn good, and (personally) quasi-glorified in making the average guy feel ashamed of himself for not living up to the “Walker vision of Excellence”...

In a different day and age, Hockaday might have made General, but not in the touchy-feely outfit that we have allowed ourselves to become. He simply took himself way too seriously and sometimes his sense of humor wasn’t terribly highly developed. I often had to explain my somewhat sarcastic jokes to him lest he think I wasn’t taking the Corps seriously enough.

It’s truly sad that we no longer have room for the Hockaday Walkers in the Corps, I think we are poorer for it. If he just had been able to look at the World in a realistic fashion and laughed occasionally! Sigh...

As I told you earlier, the last time I heard, Hockaday had become an Episcopal Minister... I think he gravitated to the cloth for the discipline and hard work it can (self) impose on a dedicated man!

I miss him... He simply needed a keeper!

P.S. In my opinion, when he became the CO of 1<sup>st</sup> Force, he had essentially gotten himself promoted into a billet that precluded his performing heroic deeds that he needed to pull his fanny out of the fire. Being the CO of a Force Reconnaissance Unit in Combat is essentially an administrative job. You send recon teams and patrols out in “injun country” but usually man the CP while the kids are out doing the work. If you want to excel for King and Country in Recon, you have to be a recon team leader or perhaps a platoon commander. That was the final straw that broke his back. As a Captain in charge of a 14-man detached bunch of Division Recon bandits, I got to do things that no normal Captain in Recon gets to do, but that’s another story altogether... I also had a Division Recon Company for awhile, and thought I was gonna’ die of boredom. While I had lots of time in Recon, when the stuff hit the fan, being a Rifle Company Commander was the ultimate adrenaline rush!

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### **Gil (Suicide) Holmes...**

Much of Holmes’ exploits are less well chronicled, but the rumors abound. The reason I mention him is that he was Walker’s mentor in extreme Marine Corps antics.

Here's what I know (or have heard) of Holmes. Holmes was commissioned as a S/NCO about 1949, and made the Korean fracas. Holmes fellow SNCOs who were commissioned about the same time looked upon him as a quasi-kook. He had requested permission when he made S/Sgt. to be allowed to live in the barracks with the troops. It is said that the area around (and under) his rack had been "holystoned" to the extent that it turned totally white. Once commissioned he made a concerted effort to draw attention to himself. I don't think he had ever spent a penny on personal things, but when he left for Korea, Tom Pochacco (the same tailor/cleaner in Quantico) told me that Holmes stored 32-sets of officer's greens with him until he returned (to put this in perspective, even in the early 1950s a set of Officer's greens went for something over \$100 per set (a BUNCH of money when a newly minted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant drew \$222.22 per month!)).

I first heard of Holmes at Quantico in 1955 when he was stationed at SDT... It was rumored that Holmes "broke starch" (don't forget "trops" [tropical worsted uniforms] weren't that common in those days, and most people wore starched cotton khaki) five (5) times a day so he would look sharp for the troops!

He went out and bought himself a brand new Cadillac convertible (don't forget, he had nothing else to spend his money on), took his new vehicle down and had it painted Marine Corps Green, and had his convertible top made out of USMC Camouflage Shelter Halves! Needless to say, he attracted a LOT of attention.

Holmes too was filling a billet in the wrong time era... He still insisted that his Marines request his (Holmes') permission to get married, but in fact he was (much like Hockaday), i.e., well liked by his troops.

I first ran into him (in person) at the Division Matches at Camp Lejeune in 1959. He had a Company in ITR, but would take off during the day to shoot, and then go out and spend his nights in the field with the troops. He sure didn't look like I had expected him to look, he was about 5' 9" tall, and weighed in about 160 (just a guess). He didn't keep his head cut quite as short as Walker's but it seemed to be more uniform in length (if that makes sense). He wore a pair of issue GI glasses and looked almost like some sort of "military nerd"... all he needed was the obligatory white tape around the nose-piece on his GI frames.

I don't know what Holmes did during Vietnam, but I know he got passed over enough times that he was required to revert to SNCO. He was assigned to FMF Lant Hq. and for whatever reason fell madly in love with one of the local bar maids. Holmes, like something out of a John W. Thomason novel, marched into the skipper's office, cover in hand to request permission to marry the lovely young bar maid (as I understand it, this hadn't been required since before WWII, but Holmes was also a man out of his time),

He eventually retired, and according to legend, met his end in a classically romantic gesture, worthy of a hero out of a pre-20<sup>th</sup> century adventure tale. The story goes, that he was on the street in Washington D.C. and witnessed a mugging of a young couple. Rather than simply "not" get involved as most moderns do, "Suicide" rushed in where angels fear to tread. The perpetrator of the dastardly deed (a minority who was unfortunate enough not to have had proper potty training – or maybe he was from a dysfunctional family?) turned and did for our hero with some sort of handgun that he had been using as a revenue enhancement tool.

Unfortunately, I cannot supply any happy ending for this incident, as only Holmes' demise at the hands of this miscreant was reported.

My only observation is that I think Gil would have liked to have gone out trying to do the right thing and be a hero in the only way he knew!

And so I end my tale, of two romantics caught in a time that no longer has room for heroes or guys who want to do the right thing; win one for the Gipper, or charge one more machine-gun nest like John Basilone...

Alas, the World is poorer without them...

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

As a side note, both Walker and Holmes had requested (at least in the late 1950s) permission to be buried on the grounds of the Iwo Jima Memorial in Washington D.C. Many thought that it was simply a gimmick to appear super-gungy. While there is no way in this far off time to verify such, having known the infamous pair, I would bet every penny I have, (not much admittedly), that they were most sincere in their requests. I would like to know what a "talking doctor" would have as an analysis for their seeming fixation? Perhaps Cervantes was not so far off the mark with Don Quixote? May the World always have one more windmill –

## **AN ADDENDUM TO THE SAGA OF HOLMES AND WALKER**

I received an e-mail from my posting on Holmes and Walker asking if there was any truth in the story that Holmes and Walker had personally bought their entire company a set of dress blues? I had almost forgotten that one but it definitely needs to be added to the list of eccentricities of this famous (infamous?) pair of characters.

Indeed, Holmes and Walker DID buy their entire company a set of Dress Blues, and here's how it went. Since both Holmes and Walker had nothing to spend their money on except for the Corps, and since they also realized that any unit that was outfitted completely in Dress Blues would get every ceremonial detail that came down the pike ...which was exactly what they had in mind! What they did is this:

Holmes and Walker were the Commanding Officer and Executive Officer of an "SDT Company" at Quantico at the time. "SDT" stood for [Marine Corps Schools, i.e. Quantico] "Schools Demonstration Troops" which were used for instruction and demonstrations for OCS, PLC [Platoon Leaders Class] and the Officer's Basic School during their training cycles.

The two stalwart lads fell in their company and asked for a show of hand of all those would like to have a set of Dress Blues? Virtually every hand went into the air. They then asked of those, who would be willing to purchase a set of Dress Blues out of their own pocket (as I recall a full set was less than \$50 in those days). At any rate, sure enough a few hands went up. Walker following Holmes with a notebook took down all the names of those who were willing to finance their own Blues. They then asked how many would be willing to contribute "some money" towards a set of Blues. More hands went up and again, names and amounts were taken. This was followed by those who would be willing to kick in any amount towards a set of Dress Blues, and the final tally was logged into Walker's notebook.

Holmes and Walker then marched the entire company down to the Quartermaster (the main uniform supply organization at Quantico at the time) and lined 'em up inside (this was a large building). All hands in the company were fitted for Blues, and between the Holmes and Walker, the two of 'em wrote a check for the remainder! Needless to say, Holmes' and Walker's Company got every ceremonial detail that came down the pike! To them it was money well spent, and exactly what they had in mind.

Another chapter to be added to an almost unbelievable pair of characters in an era long past in a Corps resplendent with characters. It never hurts to have individual Don Quixotes with windmills to joust – may it always be so!



# Gray Rebel Foxtrot Six... – Cartographer Extraordinaire

It was the summer of 1967, and the CH-46 Helicopter was still being tweaked up at the air facility on Okinawa in an attempt to keep the tail pylon from separating from the airframe at extremely inopportune and unexpected times. The “rumor-control” had gone so far as to put out the word that any wounded individual allowing himself to be medivaced in a CH-46 became automatically eligible for the Bronze Star for Valor!

We had lost faith in the “46” much as we had lost faith in the controversial M16 Rifle, but apparently the “zoomie-union” was better connected than the “grunt-union” as immediate steps were taken to put a “fix” on the whirley-birds, but we “grunts” were simply told that keeping the M16 clean was the answer, after all, who ever heard of a rifle that wouldn’t function? ...And of course the M16s were less expensive than a helicopter. The AR-15 was originally designed by Eugene Stoner for Fairchild Aircraft, and was originally slated as an airfield perimeter defense weapon as a replacement for the .30 Carbine, by General Curtis LeMay.



**Reggie Ponsford relaxing in quarters aboard the USS Tripoli during one of our few days aboard ship during the SLF – Summer 1967**

McNamara, that brilliant military strategist who had been the brains behind the Edsel Automobile, had put his “chop” on the M16 as a weapon suitable for all services, and the deal was apparently chiseled in concrete to simplify the supply corridors, and act as an all service weapon, cutting down on the weight load to be carried in combat, in both the weight of the weapon and the weight of a larger basic load of ammunition for all troops. On paper it made a certain amount of left-handed sense, but Murphy was to take a hand. Large hardware was a different kettle of fish however, and every service taking ships to sea or aircraft into flight had their champions, and of course and if pilots won’t fly or admirals can make a case for different seagoing vessels, much political weight is taken into account due to pork barrel politics within various States, and companies who had political clout with influential politicians.

Political shenanigans much as contracts controlled by the Brown and Root Construction folks who were (according to legend) the folks who had gotten LBJ into office in Texas politics. It took several recounts, but legend has it that appropriate fiduciary shenanigans manipulating the legendary “graveyard vote” are credited with putting Johnson “over the top”

after several recounts. LBJ was not a man who ever forgot a political favor or slight. Assuming that there is any truth in such legends, the lads were repaid in spades.

While McNamara was not into the depths of the National political machinery, he did influence the acquisition of military hardware by doing away the tried and true method of small arms by essentially eliminating the Armory System of small arms weapons development and acquisition. For those not familiar with the old Armory System, many private small arms inventors had forever claimed that they were getting unfairly treated by a system that always bought “in-house”, thus screwing the little guys out of a chance to compete in major weapons development.

On surface this argument made a certain amount of sense, but what was left unsaid was that most of the systems that the “private small arms designers” had suddenly “discovered,” had already been tried by the National armories and found wanting. Much went unsaid, but the old tried and true weapons acquisition system (if somewhat seemingly slower than molasses) lost its place in the sun. Finally with the death of JFK on a November day in 1963, the protector of Springfield Armory lost their “Political Rabbi” since no National Armories were located in Texas (as opposed to Springfield Armory, who had been hanging their chapeaus in Massachusetts since the founding of our country). This would not bode well for the “gravel cruncher” and would allow gents who were more interested in making money than turning out the finest battle rifles available.

The immediate impact of having a plastic toy as opposed to a well thought out and rugged shoulder weapon seemed to be minimal, as those who stood in line to become soldiers and Marines seemed endless. With the draft in place, volunteers for the Corps didn’t noticeably decrease (if you’ve gotta’ go, better to go in the finest service, eh what? After all, who would want to be a “Doggie” if you had a choice of being a “*Sea Going Bell Hop*”? We had all been brought up watching John Wayne in “*The Sands of Iwo Jima*” so for the time being, we were getting good folks! After all who would let John Wayne’s finest down, right?

During this era, we were using the Mike Boats and Amtracs more or less exclusively with the CH-46 temporarily out of action if (for whatever reason), transfer from Ship to Shore (or vice-versa) became necessary. The biggest thrill of all was when we got to spend a night in close proximity to the shore line awaiting our withdrawal back to Naval Shipping. With the seeming whole of the U.S. Navy awaiting the dawn, it took little or no imagination on the part of the NVA or VC to figure out the approximate location of the evacuees.

In order to give ourselves a better than even break, we attempted to locate our units in such a manner as to take advantage of Naval Gun Fire Support or interlocking fire and tactical support between Rifle Companies, withdrawing Artillery Batteries, and other units that made up the composition of the Special Landing Force Units. While awaiting the dawn and resumption of the amphibious transfer, we often spent occasional sleepless nights awaiting the coming of the sea-going “Cavalry to the Rescue” come the dawn. On just such an occasion hangs the thread of our tale...

As the Battalion was setting in for the night during this occasion, we all were required to call in what we called our “night position reports” to insure any necessary artillery, mortar, or air-support would be correctly placed should we run into any trouble that we couldn’t handle locally. The position reports were given in Alphabetic Order and duly taken down by the Operations Folks (the S-3 Section) to be instantly available should the need arise.

I was blessed with a fair comprehension of military map reading, and had done a stretch in the Artillery as a youngster. That combined with an extremely competent Artillery Forward Observer named Mike Madsen who had a grasp of military map reading as good as mine. Between the two of us, we could drop a mortar or artillery round in a flea's hip pocket at virtually any observable distance. The maps of Vietnam were "iffy" at best and initially units arriving "in country" were operating using extremely out of date maps, some rumored to have come from old National Geographic Magazines. Marines are of course, adaptable, and little by little we worked things out. While it may seem incomprehensible to those used to using satellite and GPS electronics now available to all hands, most no doubt assume we always had such things at our disposal – alas, 'twas not always so. As the Corps got more ensconced in country, we established Fire Bases (such as Camp Carroll and others), extremely well located, and triangulated, making our (friendly) supporting fires pretty well on the mark.

On this occasion we were digging in and planning our night supporting fires and possible plans of action should the "unthinkable" occur. While it still wasn't dark, we were making certain that our locations were well documented, thus making certain that we would be able to do unmentionable things to his "hindquarters" should the enemy decide to attack.

Since Hotel was the last Company in line (alphabetically) to call in our night positions, I could hear Foxtrot calling his position in to the Operations Shop. While Reggie Ponsford was one of the most formidable of Company Commanders (and one of my all-time favorite friends and Marines) there were times when I simply couldn't resist "twanging" Reggie's guitar string! This of course, was one of those times.

Reggie was one of the toughest hombres I have ever known, and would trust him with anything and everything I own, including my own life. We had served together prior to this occasion, and would again following it. They just don't make 'em any more trustworthy, rugged or competent than Reg. In a dark alley or in a "testicles to the bulkhead" firefight, Reggie was the best of the best. Mercifully he also had a great sense of humor, but if you approached it right, you could screw with Reggie (within limits) and have a great time doing so. It wasn't that Reggie wasn't a competent map reader, it was just that his main thrust was "sight alignment and trigger squeeze" as opposed to carefully plotting his position prior to starting the festivities.

As Reggie was calling in his night position report, I couldn't help but notice he was calling in OUR (Hotel Company's) location! Huh? The situation was complicated by the fact that the entire beachfront perimeter was located on varying hill masses, often closely located, but at several different elevations (as opposed to horizontal dispersion). We weren't that far apart horizontally, but we (Gray Rebel Hotel) were somewhat above Foxtrot's elevation. From where we were sitting, he had misconstrued his actual location and was calling in our position. An evil thought suddenly went through my brain-housing group. Why not...??? Hummm...

On the Company net (as opposed to the Battalion net) I contacted Reggie and told him that I was keeping our relative positions plotted for mutual fire support, but having just plotted location using his night position report, it appeared that he would be in a perfect location to adjust fire on an NVA unit I was currently observing moving into a position. Since I knew where we were, I could see Reggie moving into position somewhat lower than his transcribed coordinates. This had possibilities (heh, heh, heh...).

“Hey Foxtrot, Hotel here over?” I said.

“Roger Hotel, Foxtrot here, what have you got going?, over!”

“Foxtrot, I see a rather large unit moving into a hill mass that should allow you to observe some artillery dropped on their fannies”, over...

“Roger Hotel, send the Dink Position, “ over...

“Roger Foxtrot, I see the NVA moving into the following pos, coordinates 12345678 (not the actual map coordinates of course)” over...

“Roger Hotel, wait one, over”...

A seemingly interminable delay slowed the actual radio traffic.

A sudden comeback from Foxtrot went roughly as follows; “Hotel Six, Hotel Six, *for Christ Sake, cease fire, cease fire!* Those guys you see are US! Over”...

“Roger Foxtrot, understand, NVA actually Foxtrot, is that affirmative? Over”...

The return radio traffic was not for tender ears. Needless to say, I never let Reggie totally off the hook on that little exchange, and left no opportunity to mess with him when the occasion occurred, but we both knew it was all in fun. To this day we exchange e-mails, and keep in touch. I served again with Reggie, this time back up on Okie, and again down in Phenom Phen including a short stint at NKP Thailand.

I could write a book on the legendary Reggie Ponsford including several other long time friends and Marine accomplices in a number of “High Jinx” adventures. For instance, there was the time when he threatened to “mash” a Sumo Wrestler in a Hotel Restaurant in the town of Kadena just outside the main Air Base, or the time he was a bit “upset” at the Air Force Security Police having great fun at the expense of four Marine Corps Majors getting caught out past curfew (who in hell ever thought of a curfew in a combat zone?). Reggie was intent on “punching out the blighters” who would screw with the Corps. And of course there was the time when he left his dog tags hanging on a hook in a steam house in the town of NKP (as opposed to the Base of NKP), and trying to figure out how to get some replacements.

The trip to Phenom Phen was ostensibly to talk the Cambodian Ambassador to preparing to come with the Marines on what was to be known as “Operation Eagle Pull” – the Ambassador informed us that if the U.S. Military would keep out of the equation, the State Departments of the World could handle things quite nicely. We informed him that when the time came, he’d damned well better be prepared to come with us, as I had a Staff Sergeant named Galkowski (about 6’ 5’ and 120-lbs of muscle) who was prepared to throw him over his shoulder and carry him out. We did NOT depart friends! Mercifully, “Operation Eagle Pull” didn’t come off during our watch and was delayed until 1975, but Galkowski was ready!

Then following the assignment to the Phibron intent of executing the “snatch the Ambassador” caper, Reggie was assigned to a recruiting tour in Ohio. “Rumor Control” claimed that Reggie had “inside information” that some of his recruiters were goofing off and frequenting the bars instead of out actively recruiting. Reggie was is said to have acquired a wig to frequent the same bars attempting to catch his recruiting personnel downing a quick brew instead of filling out the recruiting rolls! If true, I would have given a month’s pay to have a picture of that one!

One of his assignments (after my time) had Reggie assigned to Marines in Guantánamo Bay. I would have bet a full month's pay that Reggie was the "Role-Model" for the Marine Colonel in "A Few Good Men"...

Those were some fine men and some fine days. Along with such individuals as Reggie, Ray Findlay, Skip Hartnett, and other stalwart Marines in my relative youth, in a day and time now long gone, I would cast my lot with the entire crew and do it all over again. A number of these characters and I served together again, later even in a civilian status (some unfeeling oafs might call mercenary activities), we still hadn't had our adrenaline fix under control. If the Muslims had their feces in one bag, it might still be fun to have one more go...

Semper Fi,

**ROC**

## Colonel William A. Lee, United States Marine Corps

When I get to thinking back on some of the characters I have known during my service in the Corps, Colonel Bill Lee is always one of my favorites. Edward H. (Hockaday) Walker IV, along with Gil (Suicide) Holmes are two others but unlike Bill, while those two may well have had the *potential* of performing in the manner of John Basilone or Dan Daly, fate was not to grant them the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess. Certainly no one could doubt their dedication, but a bit of extremism essentially killed their chances to remain in the Corps long enough make their mark.

It is indeed sad that such gentlemen as Walker and Holmes faded from the scene with little or no recognition (other than a few snide remarks made behind their backs). They honestly were good guys, but alas were just too "gungy" for their own good - I think they essentially made most folks a bit nervous by being just a bit *TOO* squared away (if somewhat eccentric) and it was easier to point them out as weirdoes than emulate them. They would probably have been right at homes back before and after "The Great War"... Smedley Butler could have used 'em to good advantage, and in that day and time, probably no one would have thought them strange. But theirs is another story.

This one's about "Iron Man" Bill Lee who served as Chesty Puller's Gunnery Sergeant in Nicaragua, won THREE Navy Crosses prior to WWII, and was the heavyweight boxing champion of the fleet as a Gunnery Sergeant on a coal-burning battleship. Rumor says that he got the sobriquet of "Iron Man" from Chesty himself who remarked that Bill would have been the proverbial Iron Man during the era of wooden ships. While I was only acquainted with the Colonel during his "peaceable pursuits", his demeanor and reputation left no question in my mind that Chesty had called it right!

Colonel Bill decided he'd try competitive shooting, became Distinguished with both the Rifle and the Pistol and placed in the Wimbledon Cup. He was captured in China (steaming the Cosmoline off some machine guns in a tent) just as WWII broke out and spent 4 years in a Jap Prison Camp.

Bill was a Chief Marine Gunner in those days (they didn't have 4 or 5 rungs of warrant promotion prior to WWII), you were either a Marine Gunner (WO - non-commissioned) or a Chief Marine Gunner (CWO - commissioned). Both ranks rated Officers privileges, but only the CWO was truly a commissioned officer. Bill was no shrinking violet, when he reported in to his China Station, the Commanding Officer asked if he was the Bill Lee with the Navy Cross? Bill's Answer? NO sir, I'm the Bill Lee with THREE of 'em! Heh, heh, heh...

The Colonel once told me that he had Distinguished with both guns with both hands (technically impossible of course). What he meant was that he had fired the M1903 and the .45 left handed (no mean feat with the '03) and placed high enough in the competition to have been eligible for leg medals, even left handed!

Bill was well acquainted with Marine Gunner Calvin A. Lloyd, noted Marine Marksman, and winner of the International Matches in Buenos Aries (as I recall) in 1911. Bill (unlike Hockaday Walker and Suicide Holmes) had no hang-ups about marriage, and married Gunner Lloyd's daughter, having three daughters of his own by the union. Unfortunately his wife (Lloyd's daughter) died in an unfortunate bathtub fall while Bill was imprisoned by the Japanese.

I knew Bill when I was a young Corporal, and later after I was commissioned. To say that he was a character would have been the ultimate understatement. When Bill made it back to the States after being released from Jap confinement, he was assigned to Quantico. He was dropped off (I assume by air) in D.C. and called the OD at HQMC. He wasn't as universally well known by then of course as many of his previous exploits had been overcome/overshadowed by the horrendous events of the War - from Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima. The point being, the OD didn't have a clue as to whom he was speaking. Bill requested transportation to Quantico (he had a seabag with his new [post-POW] issue of uniforms) and of course didn't have a car. The OD promptly told Bill that they no longer HAD such a rank as Marine Gunner, and that he sure as hell wasn't gonna' dispatch a car to take a mere Warrant Officer to Quantico! Bill growled a bit, threw his seabag over his shoulder and walked to Quantico, approximately 30-miles down the railroad tracks! Not too bad after having spent 4-years as a guest of the Japanese.

What Bill DIDN'T know was that many of the surviving POWs had been steadily promoted during their imprisonment, but the promotions wouldn't catch up to 'em for quite some time (paperwork has always been on a slow boat so to speak). At any rate, Bill was suddenly receiving a promotion (or so it seemed) about once a month until he reached the exalted rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Bill too, was out of his time, and they didn't know exactly what to do with him. The war was over, the Nicaraguan Rebels had been subdued, and Korea hadn't started yet. Due to his shooting expertise he was assigned as the CO of the Rifle Range at Lejeune (20 miles from mainside as you will recall, and helicopters had not yet made their debut).

The story goes (and this one was told to me by his daughter Nancy with whom I was well acquainted), that Bill caught some young miscreant "wasting food" by throwing the leftovers in the \$hi+can in the mess hall. Not exactly armed robbery, mugging or assault, but you've gotta' remember that Bill was shortly out of a Jap POW Camp where wasting food was a matter of life and death.

Bill sentenced the young lad to be tied to the flagpole in front of the range for three days, and so he was. Even though cell phones were in the future and communication by our current standards were somewhat crude, the word got back to the Base Commanding General seemingly at the speed of light. The Chief of Staff got on the phone with Bill (the General was of the old Corps and personally acquainted with ol' Bill), and told Bill that he had spoken to the General and the General's reply was that he understood the situation, but now that he (Bill) had made his point, he should cut the lad loose. Bill was outraged that anyone would interfere in what he considered an appropriate sentence, and told the Chief of Staff that if the General wanted the little 'tool' cut loose, he'd have to come out and cut him loose himself! Even with lack of Helicopter Transportation, the General arrived at the Range in an amazingly short period of time.

Bill had anticipated this of course, and was standing in front of the flagpole with a locked and loaded M1 Rifle. The General and Bill being acquainted from years past, cooler heads eventually prevailed and a much relieved lad was released (promising to never waste any chow ever again). Subsequently Bill was hustled off to the Naval Hospital for a bit of observation (under what would now probably be termed Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome).

Bill retired about 1950 according to the records, and due to his more than stellar performance in combat (three Navy Crosses), he was advanced to the rank of full Colonel under what they used to call a "Tombstone Promotion". Until sometime in June of 1958,

holders of the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross or the Silver Star were advanced one (honorary) rank upon retirement. The "Tombstone Promotion" was aptly named as you could put it on your letterhead, your business cards, your office door, and of course your "Tombstone", but you weren't paid for the rank. The title, while honorary, was rumored to be the rank you would be recalled to active duty as, should a full scale war ever break out.

Not to be put totally out to pasture, Bill got heavily involved in Civil War reenactments (some would use the term "*Late War of Northern Aggression*" vice *Civil War* of course). He was out firing his accumulation of Muskets whenever the occasion would allow. He had a small house down in Quantico Town (prior to eventually moving to Fredericksburg), and finished raising his three daughters. In order to aid him in his familial tasks, Bill once more married (to a nurse he had met following his release from the prison camp as I recall). He eventually had a fourth daughter when he was 65-years old (it was definitely his, as there was some noticeable family resemblance). I DO know that one of his original three daughters married without asking his permission, and he disowned her, supposedly never speaking to her again (kinda' like getting permission from your commanding officer I suppose - as I said, Bill was from a different time and place, and most definitely a different era).

I would occasionally visit the Colonel in his quarters in Quantico (town). It was like going into a museum. He had a bearskin on the wall (another story all in itself), National Match Springfields, and all sorts of trophies (all with appropriate stories of course). He took to wearing a Confederate Uniform with the start of the Civil War Centennial (1961), and wore it all over Fredericksburg (until about 1965), and became a sort of tourist attraction (I still have a postcard of Bill in his uniform, beard and musket, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking over the rock fence down towards the river where the Union Forces were handily repelled by the Confederates). If nothing else, Bill was one colorful character! He often acted as an NRA Referee or Match Official at the local Quantico matches. He fired in the North South Shoots using his Whitneyville-Plymouth .69 caliber Naval Musket (one of the only rifled .69s used in the late unpleasantness). He was a champ in the "stake-cutting event" with his mini-artillery piece!

Some of the stories were told to me by Nancy Lee (his daughter, now a retired school teacher), and she wasn't given to exaggeration. I have every reason to believe they are correct.

While conversing with the old Sea Soldier, about 1965 when I was shooting with the Marine Corps Team, I mentioned to the Colonel that it was too bad that he had fathered all girls. While most charming, I was musing on what sort of potential rifle (and pistol) shooters he might have had with Calvin A. Lloyd as a Grandfather and Bill Lee as a Father? Bill had obviously had this conversation before, as he looked at me and grinned.

He said, "yep Culver, but think of what marvelous '*breeding stock*' they are!"

Holy catfish Batman ...only from Bill Lee! I didn't know whether to laugh or not, but I wisely kept my own counsel on that one! On the other hand, maybe the old boy wasn't too far off the mark!

In 1977 when I was the Operations Officer of MTU Quantico, we held our annual Marine Corps Birthday Ball in a rural restaurant (somewhat West of Quantico), known for fine cuisine. Searching for appropriate Guest Speakers, we narrowed it down to two. Colonel Walter Walsh, and Colonel Bill Lee. Since we could find nothing against such, we decided to invite both of 'em as they were great friends and both good speakers. Bill showed up in his



Evening Dress Uniform (actually quite new - ya' never know when you might be recalled to active duty!). He was wearing all of his appropriate miniature medals (3-Navy Crosses, etc.) AND both of his Distinguished Badges (against regulations to wear medals and marksmanship awards simultaneously, but who in the Hell would have had the guts to point such minor infractions to the old "Iron Man"? Certainly not moi!).

When the dinner and speeches were finished, and all hands were a departing mode, Colonel Lee sent his daughter (the youngest one) back to retrieve his "Boat Cloak" (no kidding, Bill loved the ceremony and grandeur of the Birthday Celebration). I decided to satisfy my curiosity on the "flagpole" incident of so many years before (told to me by his daughter, Nancy). The Colonel towered over me (he was a BIG man, and on a good day I might make 5' 9"), but summoning up the appropriate chutzpa, I posed the question as follows.

"Colonel," I said, "I once heard a story about you and some youngster tied to the flagpole in front of the Rifle Range at Camp Lejeune."

Dead silence prevailed and I perceived he was staring at me with a bit of amusement in his eyes. I was secretly wishing I hadn't broached the subject, as the quiet was almost overpowering.

"Culver," he said just as his daughter showed up with his boat cloak, "Do I look like the kind of 'hair-pin' [using a rather ancient colloquialism] who would tie some guy to a flagpole?"

My only reply was "Of *course* not sir!"

"Didn't think so," sez the Colonel, swirling into his boat cloak, and he and his daughter disappeared into the darkness... Alas, it was the last time I ever saw the Colonel.

A final footnote to the story is that in 1992 the Marine Corps named one of their new ranges in the Calvin A. Lloyd range complex at Quantico for Colonel Lee... Most appropriate in this case, since Calvin A. Lloyd was one his shooting companions, and his father-in-law. Bill is reputed to have taken an M16 downrange and personally christened it with a magazine of anti-rodent projectiles.

Colonel William A. Lee finally went to Valhalla to meet his final destiny on December 29<sup>th</sup> of 1998 at the tender age of 98. It would seem the old warrior was invulnerable to the Germans, the Nicaraguan Rebels and the Japs, and almost outlived the Grim Reaper!. Perhaps Odin, always on the lookout for a truly brave man, sent the Valkyries to fetch him for the fabled Hall of Heroes. It would be hard to find a better one!

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# Parris Island, 1954 "

## "UB Rifle Grenades"

### ...and a Shot on the Wrong Target at 200-yards

By Dick Culver



The picture at the left is Culver at the Snapping In Range at Parris Island following Rifle Qualification circa Aug. 1954. The 232 Chalked on the Helmet Liner indicated qualifying score on the Range (220 or better got you an expert badge). I was later told that I was the "high man" for something or another (month, day, year?), I was too happy to give a rat's rectum)! The 232 actually included a miss on my first shot! Someone told me as I went up on the line to fire for record that my Drill Instructor (Sergeant Scott) had just bet \$20 that I was going to be the high man on the range that day. Now \$20 is chicken feed in this day and time, but don't forget in those days a Private was drawing about \$78 for a whole month – to us, \$20 was over 25% of a month's pay. I had visions of Sergeant Scott accosting me in the final pay line if I screwed up. He would not have, as he was a hell of a fine NCO and a great Drill Instructor),

but the point I'm trying to make is that a \$20 bet seemed like a small fortune to bet on my lack of demonstrated shooting abilities under pressure. With my heart in my throat hoping I would not bankrupt (or much worse, *disappoint* Sergeant Scott), I got what appeared to be a good six o'clock hold on the target when it came out of the butts. I took up the slack, squeezed the trigger (nobody had thought of using the word "press" at that time), and the shot broke right where I thought it should have – well sort of anyway... It seems that in my apprehensive mode I had fired on the target to my left getting a perfect 5 (but allowing some unfeeling oaf in the butts to wave "Maggies Drawers" in front of my target (Maggies Drawers is a red flag waved (usually gleefully) in front of some idiot's target who has either gotten a total miss, or in this case, shot on the wrong target!). By now of course my posterior was so puckered that you couldn't have driven a straight pin up the appropriate orifice with a ten-pound sledge hammer! I didn't know whether to use my next shot to end it all (saving my possible ultimate disgrace) or gut it out.

Nervous and shaking like the proverbial hound passing peach seeds, I figured anything other than finishing the course would have been pure cowardice. As Odin will sometimes do, he took care of young (fledgling) Marines, idiots and puppy dogs. As you can tell from the picture I still made expert by a fairly comfortable margin, Sergeant Scott won his bet and I got my “pitchur took”. They made me close my bolt on the snapping-in range just for the photographer (made me nervous as the usual penalty for having your bolt closed behind any down range activity unless directed by the instructor resulted in a “head<sup>1</sup> scrubbing” detail while contemplating the strange new lumps on your head)!

Some of you old timers will notice the “stenciled<sup>2</sup>” Pfc. Chevron on my sleeve. That was compliments of my having joined the Reserves while in High School (my Mammy threatened kid’acide’ if I didn’t get a High School Diploma). My Dad (another old time Marine who had run away at 15 and joined the Corps in 1918) understood, but he was one of the reasons my Mammy relented, as my Dad was the CO of the local Marine Reserve Unit. It would be 7-months before I graduated so I spent all my spare time memorizing the *Marine’s Handbook* (1939 Edition, a bit different than the Guide Book, but the same idea) – I practiced the manual of arms until I could make the damned rifle and sling pop between positions, and knew the General Orders by Heart. I could tear down any weapon in the armory and knew the name of every part. I knew Close Order Drill, and could run Fire Team Tactics in my sleep! I learned to spit shine shoes, and of course being the “brown-nosing” lil’ whelp I was, I kept my Pappy’s shoes polished with a glistening shine.

All that considered however, whenever the Old Man needed a “bad example” I got called out in front of the troops to demonstrate how screwed up I was (actually my Daddy was doing me a favor to indicate that no one not even *his* kid got any preferential treatment). I busted my fanny to do things right, and at the end of the obligatory 6-months time I made the exalted rank of Pfc. along with several others. When Summer came around, and I had a diploma in hand, and finally departed for Parris Island. What I *WISH* some one had told me however, was that I would have been a lot smarter buying a couple of extra Dungaree Jackets (we still called ‘em dungarees in those days) without my ostentatious display of my exalted rank! Heh, heh, heh... Needless to say, I paid for my mistake in spades (in harassment that is).

It was pretty hard to fault my military performance (hell, I’d been practicing for it since I was 6-years old). I was allowed to wear my bracelet on the range as I considered it to be my lucky charm, and although I didn’t know it, I think Sergeant Scott was shading his bet! I had “*R. O. Culver, Jr 1349887<sup>3</sup> USMC*” engraved on the top of it! As I said before, I don’t know if Sergeant Scott was shading his bet on “qual-day<sup>4</sup>”, or looking the other way when some idiot showed up at Parris Island with a bracelet with his serial number already engraved on it! “Gungy” doesn’t quite cover my attitude when I crossed the causeway<sup>5</sup>!

This was before the day of mandatory ITR and they were still teaching weapons and tactics at Parris Island, including maneuvers at Elliot’s Beach, with a run all the way back to the Range. My first C-Rat Meal was “Sausage Paddies w/Gravy<sup>6</sup>” dated 1943, dear Allah! And these guys are complaining about MREs?

When we were in the class on Hand and Rifle Grenades, I noticed that the instructor had forgotten” to mention the “VB Rifle Grenade” covered rather extensively in my Daddy’s copy of the “*Marine’s Handbook*” of 1939 (an interesting tome that had virtually all of the instruction in the form of questions and answers). The Handbook had been published, as I recall, by the

Naval Institute, but I'd have to go back and check. At any rate, the "VB<sup>7</sup> Rifle Grenade" was a grenade (and cup-like launcher that fastened on the muzzle of the rifle) designed and fashioned by the "Frogs" in "The Great War"... Seems that the United States had either modified some of the French Grenade Launchers or copied 'em. At any rate, it was still in the Marine's Handbook in 1939. Not having a copy of the "Guide Book for Marines" I simply studied the covers off the old one. If you see one, they have a Red Cover, about the same general size as the Guide Book, but were printed in Gold on the front, but alas, the gold usually wore off – or maybe I was over-using it? Hummm...

Needless to say, the young "Rifle Grenade Instructor" had never heard of a "VB Rifle Grenade", and I sure thought some idiot was "sniping<sup>8</sup>" him (or had been put up to it by one of his buddies to screw things up). Just before the instructor had me "flayed alive" an old Master Sergeant under the roof of the outdoor classroom had been leaning against one of the poles that acted as support. About the time I figured that "Thor's Hammer" was coming down, I saw something that could have been a small smile on the face of the old time Master Sergeant.

"Hey Kid," he sez, "Get your @\$\$ over here!"

"Yes Sir," I responded, rapidly beating feet out of the enraged NCO's reach.

"Where in Hell did you learn about the "VB Rifle Grenade"?" he asked.

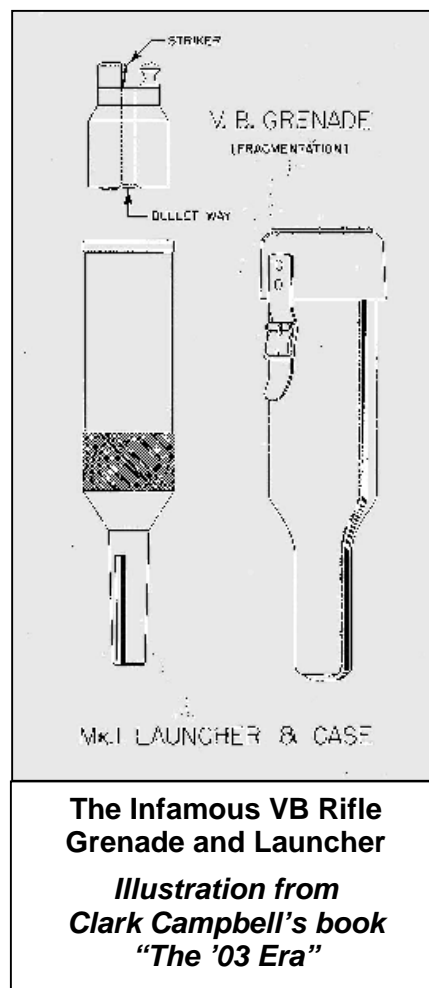
"Why, out of my Dad's *Marine's Handbook*" sir," I replied.

With something that could have been a grin, he said "The Marine's Handbook? – that thing's been out of print for years, where'in'ell did you get that?"

I explained that my Pappy had done time in "the Great War", the Banana Wars, WWII and was still in the Reserves – my Master Sergeant looked at me, smiled and said "Get back to your seat kid, and I wanna' see you after class..." I got a really good explanation on the merits of keeping your mouth shut, but I got the idea that the Master Sergeant was not totally displeased... "Hey Culver," he said as I left, "if we ever run into each other later and you need a job, come see me!" I grinned to myself and headed back to hull defilade<sup>9</sup>...

Semper Fi,

*ROC*



<sup>1</sup> "Head" is "Navy/Marine Corps -ese" for bathroom, including urinals, sinks, commodes, showers, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Following WWII, the Corps started the practice of stenciling your rank on your dungaree jacket. Prior to that, your name (and sometimes rank) were stenciled on your back between your shoulder blades. The stenciling eventually got out of hand due to reductions in rank due to various infractions. Uniformity was a problem due to the fact that not everyone had access to what they used to sell in the PX called a “MarKit” made to take care of everything from a Pfc. to a M/Sgt. If you were busted, you had to somehow cover up your earlier rank, and this took many forms, and it wasn’t always uniform. If you were commissioned, you were allowed to keep your old Dungaree Jackets but had to have a “herringbone material” patch sewn over your enlisted rank. Some of the more inventive would make sure the “patch” was large enough to cover M/Sgts. Chevrons if he had a vivid imagination, and who was about to cut the patch off to find out? Some of the saltier of the crew took full advantage of the situation of course, but most were reasonably honest. When the new 9 tiered rank structure came in, the stenciling idea had reached its logical end, and metal chevrons were issued to pin on your collar lapels. I still have some of my old jackets with the patches sewn on, Gawd, I must have had some pretty hefty chevrons/rockers, heh, heh, heh...

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the early 1970s we were given individual serial numbers instead of the current Social Security Number. The earlier/lower your number, the saltier you were, and most left no opportunity unturned to compare serial numbers to garner some sort of perceived seniority.

<sup>4</sup> Qual-day was a simple abbreviation for Qualification Day with the rifle. A common term in the Corps.

<sup>5</sup> In those far off days, most traveled to Parris Island by train to Yamasee, SC, and then took a bus trip to “The Island” Yellow footprints were something that emerged in the future, Drill Instructors wore pistol belts with holsters with their cigarette packs stuffed in the orifice normally sporting the butt of a .45 Automatic. The now familiar Field Hat (Campaign Hats to the unwashed) were not to appear until after the debacle at Parris Island following the McKeon incident in 1956. Dungaree Covers (unstarched) were the normal uniform of the day, usually the saltier the better. My Senior DI, Sergeant Scott, (my Junior’s name was Bonnett, one tough character), had his dungaree jacket neatly “tucked” and cross-laced with some sort of black cord, almost like black parachute line. Individuality was the order of the day. It was a different Corp, but one hell of a great one none the less. The trappings may have changed over the years, but the Corps is eternal.

<sup>6</sup> Decency prevents me from giving the description my buddy gave to the appearance of those sausage paddies with coagulated white gravy covering them – not the sort of thing to whet an appetite. Oh well, it sounded good when I glommed onto the can the evening before, expecting a veritable feast the following morning. We were not given any heat tabs, and I rather suspect that starting a fire on the beach to make the mess more palatable would have been highly frowned upon!

<sup>7</sup> “VB” was an abbreviation of the French Designer/Manufacturer of the Grenade and Launcher, and stood for *Viven-Bessière*.

<sup>8</sup> The term “snipe” in a class usually meant that some competing instructor, NCOIC or Officer-in-Charge would plant some clown in a class to ask embarrassing questions to see if the Instructor was “up” on the knowledge of his subject. Needless to say, such conduct was highly frowned on by the guys who ran the classes from day to day.

<sup>9</sup> Hull defilade is a “tanker’s term” meaning to get the hull of your tank behind a hill mass or a building to prevent your assailant from having a clear shot at you. Used by infantry types to describe getting off the visual skyline and preventing undue attention (or in worst case scenario, a clear shot at your fanny by the enemy).

# Francis A. McGowin and the Buckets

Dick Culver

While this one may sound a bit far fetched, it is a true story of days gone by at the Recruit Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina.

Young McGowin was selected to fill a Drill Instructor's billet at PI about 1958 and went there with what would have previously been the humble rank of Corporal. Mac however was in the new promotion system and was a Corporal in the 4<sup>th</sup> pay-grade, handling many of the same responsibilities as a Sergeant had previously. Please understand that this was just following the large rank restructuring that took place in the Armed Forces when they went from a rank structure having seven total ranks from Private to Master Sergeant in the Marines. This was done by adding the rank of Lance Corporal between Private First Class and Corporal and renaming the older ranks and adding the *actual* rank of Sergeant Major (as opposed to it being an assigned billet). This upped the ranks following L/Cpl. one pay-grade making Corporal an E-4, Sergeant went from E-4 to E-5 and Staff Sergeants became E-6s. They then brought back the much venerated rank of Gunnery Sergeant as the seventh pay-grade. From Gunnery Sergeant you could go two routes. If your expertise was technical, you usually went from Gunny to Master Sergeant, and at the top of *that* pay scale was Master Gunnery Sergeant. Conversely, if you were a line NCO (troop handler), you went from Gunnery Sergeant to First Sergeant, and thence to Sergeant Major.

A man who had made Corporal in the fourth pay-grade was usually an exceptional Non-Commissioned Officer in 1958. In this sense, Mac was indeed extraordinary, and in all the years I have known him since, he has always proven himself to be an outstanding and inspirational troop leader. His personality was such that the troops always liked and looked up to him as a role model. Much like the fabled heroes in the old song/poem, "*Abdul the Bulbul Ameer*", if you wanted anything done (like harassing the foe from the rear), Mac would have been the man you would send to get the job done. Recruit Training served to prove the point. He rapidly made his way up the promotion ladder, first making meritorious Sergeant, and then being selected as meritorious Staff Sergeant, all in the space of his first year on the drill field – a truly noteworthy accomplishment, especially when the new rank structure was just getting started!

As noted above the troops literally loved Mac, and while he was hard on 'em; he could have inflicted severe physical punishment on them, and they'd never have said a word, thinking that they deserved what they got. Mac was that kind of man! Not exactly an imposing figure physically, he probably stood about 5' 8" or possibly 5'9" on a good day, he weighed in at 150-pounds. Mac was a hard physical specimen, and an exceptional rifle shot. He would often shoot on the Parris Island Rifle Team between Platoon assignments, and was always welcomed by the team. Mac could regularly shoot 295+ out of 300 on the Marine Corps



**Sgt. McGowin  
during an  
awards  
ceremony - 1966**

Match Course, which I can tell you from hard experience was one hell of a feat considering he wasn't shooting on a regular basis.

## NOW ON TO THE STORY

Since this was 1958 and only two years since the notorious McKeon incident that turned Recruit Training in general, and Parris Island in particular, on its ear, extremely close supervision was the order of the day! The *Mothers of America* had arisen and were determined to save their little darlings from those horrid Drill Instructors.

In getting their platoons ready for inspection, the DIs were expected to have their recruits cleanly shaven, not to mention, pressed, shined and well drilled. While having your recruits closely shaved seems trivial, when you are dealing with a bunch of 17-18 year olds, it's not quite as simple as it sounds. Many of the young lads still are plagued with "peach fuzz" and the application of shaving cream simply matted the whiskers (fuzz) down, allowing the razor to often skim right over the fledgling whiskers. The resulting left-over fuzz was worth many scowls and admonitions from the inspecting officers.

Mac however, was up to the challenge. One night in the barracks just before the inspection, Mac piled two footlockers, one on top of the other, and sat his first recruit on the makeshift barber chair under the strongest light available. He then broke out a propane torch and demonstrated on his own finger that running flesh through the resultant flame was painless and removed all the offending hair from the singed digit! The troops were ready and lined up dutifully to have their peach fuzz removed by "Mac the Barber."

All was going well until an unexpected visitor showed up in the squad bay – the Officer of the Day, a much dedicated and resolute Lieutenant who had been told of the wily "recruit abusing Drill Instructors"! All of Mac's explanations fell on deaf ears and the Lieutenant wrote him up for 76 counts of "scorching a recruit with a blowtorch." Simply knowing the Company Commander was going to reward him for his diligence in the morning, the lieutenant left with a sneer on his face. Mac was in hot water and he knew it... It wasn't so much what he had done, as it was that it *sounded* like! Mac was being painted as Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan rolled into one! This did not bode well!

The next day Mac was summoned to the Commanding General's Office to answer the charges. Normally individual disciplinary action was taken care of on a lower level, but McGowin was a relatively favored and colorful Drill Instructor, having been given two meritorious promotions in a one year's period of time, and the "Scorching a Recruit with a Blowtorch" charge had the General fascinated! As noted, Mac wasn't an unknown personage in the General's office since the General had personally promoted him twice for his outstanding performance.

The General asked for an explanation, and Mac, never being at a loss for words, said something to the effect that it was actually the *General's* fault! Grasping each corner of his desk, the General barely managed to keep from falling out of his chair. Mac continued, explaining that it was against regulations to "dry shave" a recruit (the older and much less imaginative solution). Since the reorganization of recruit training, using a dry razor on unlubricated whiskers (although effective) was considered painful and thus prohibited under the current regulations. McGowin asked the General if *HE* had ever run *HIS* finger through a match flame, pointing out that it doesn't hurt a bit! There are different versions of the General's reply, but most agree that it had as its intent (if not the exact wording), "drag this @\$shole out of here!"

McGowin's dilemma was also one for the hierarchy on the field, due primarily to his previous exemplary performance with his recruit platoons, turning out several Honor Platoons on his way up the promotion ladder. While the brass was scratching their heads, and while agreeing that the "torch method" was in fact harmless if applied with caution, it did leave itself open to the possibilities of abuse. Mac went back to his platoon awaiting the decision of the legal beagles, but not yet relieved of duty. About mid-way during the week, McGowin's platoon was being closely supervised by Mac himself. He had the little scumbags holystoning the decks in the head and cleaning the cracks with a toothbrush. For those of you who have experienced the evening head cleaning details, normally the rule of thumb is that these duties are accomplished in total silence! As Mac was going past the head, he heard several of the Boots whispering back and forth. Taking immediate action to make his point on the unquestioning obedience of orders, he grabbed the first miscreant and stuffed his head down in the commode (surgically clean of course), and flushed it (this is known in the trade as giving the lad a "Whirly!"). When Mac let the kid up for air, much to his horror, he saw the unbelieving face of his nemesis, the same Lieutenant, again serving as the Officer of the Day!

The "Whirly" incident sealed Mac's fate, and he was tried by general court martial for maltreatment of recruits. Mercifully, his sterling prior performance saved him from complete ruin, and he was reduced in rank from Staff Sergeant to Lance Corporal (E-3), and relieved of his duties as a Drill Instructor. This wasn't the worst he could have gotten by a bunch, and he was retained on the field as a primary marksmanship instructor due to his skill with a rifle. Because of his personality and ability, he was assigned the duty of instructing the truly hopeless cases who as of yet had been unable to qualify on the range. As expected, he did an exemplary job and was salvaging virtually every non-qual from the ignominy of leaving Parris Island as what is known as an "Unk"...

As usual, McGowin had his own methods, many of which didn't exactly mesh with the desires of the training command. Being smarter than the average bear(s) however, they left him alone as he was achieving the desired results with no complaints from his charges!

In the old days they used to have what they called a "Bucket Issue." When you processed in as a Boot, you went through the line in the Exchange with a G.I. Bucket and put all of your purchases in the receptacle as you passed each item (tooth brush, scrub brush, tooth paste, soap, etc.). The bucket also served as a tub to wash your clothes when utilizing the wash rack. The ubiquitous bucket was also often used when attending classes as stools when turned upside down. A truly versatile item, your bucket! As I remember, everyone was terribly afraid of "losing their bucket" – an unpardonable sin for a newly minted recruit!

## **AND NOW THE ORIGINAL TALE**

It was a spring morning in the South Carolina sun and McGowin had inherited five absolutely hopeless cases, virtually guaranteed not to qualify with the rifle (a transgression very close to performing illegitimate sex with your fellow monks in a monastery). It just isn't done amongst polite society, and certainly *good* Marines can *at least* qualify, even if it is as a mere Marksman (the lowest rung on the qualification ladder). Now Mac was addicted to chewing tobacco, and being an old Alabama boy, he would often pass his time away whittling stray sticks with his ever present pocket knife. There under the shade of a couple of palm trees, sat McGowin, his Field Hat tilted jauntily forward. He was spitting and whittling, sitting on a bucket, also surrounded by four more buckets, all placed mouth down on the sand.

Now the Lieutenant assigned to watch over the range qualification details was a young lad of sizeable bulk named Dudley Thomas. While Dudley would probably not have been



expected to come up with the theory of relativity, he was an amiable guy who had considerable talent with the .45 pistol. Dudley shot for the Marine Corps Pistol Team during the summer seasons, and more to keep him out of trouble and put his singular talents to use, he was assigned to the range at Parris Island during the off season. Since he always wore his Field Hat (Campaign Hat to the “unwashed”), and because of his size, sense of humor and ability with a belt gun he became known as “*Dudley Do-Right of the Mounties*”. It just seemed to fit.

This same spring morning, Dudley came by McGowin's ring of buckets, and asked Mac how his new charges were doing, and if he thought they'd all qualify? Mac allowed as how he was sure they would, and that all was going well.

Dudley told McGowin to get his young non-quals together so he could give them a pep talk (Dudley took his job seriously). Mac drug his toe in the sand a bit, and told Lieutenant Thomas that if he'd (Thomas) go over to his office, he (Mac) would bring them right over for the lecture. Dudley seemed adamant, and told Mac that he'd rather do it out in the spring air, and to go get them. Now McGowin is beginning to sweat a bit, and repeated his suggestion that it'd probably be more effective to give the lecture in his office. Dudley again demurs and insists that Mac bring them over under the trees, and with that, Dudley sits down on one of the buckets!

Mac is about to have kittens, and the sweat is now running down the brow one of the most composed NCOs I've ever known.

Mac hangs his head a bit and says “but Sir, I can't!”

“**Can't**,” says Dudley, “why not? Now get those lil' tools over here! I don't wanna' have to tell ya' again!”

McGowin says, his voice virtually dripping with regret and apprehension...

“Sir, I can't because you're sitting on one of 'em!”

I'll give Dudley one thing, he didn't lose his composure easily (probably why he made a good pistol shooter). He stood up and said something to the effect of “I see!” ...And with that he strides off telling Mac he'll be back in about 10-minutes and he expects to have them all assembled for his lecture!

It was a somewhat sandy, but attentive group that Dudley addressed, and to put the perfect end to the story, they listened intently, and all qualified (ALL Mac's charges **always** qualified)! He was truly the best all around NCO I've ever served with.

Mac is now a retired Master Sergeant of Marines who finished off his career in the intelligence field after having served as my company Gunnery Sergeant some years later, and putting in a most illustrious tour with the grunts in RVN. He later served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company, and was the Marine intelligence officer during the S.S. Mayaguez incident (hijacked by the Khmer Rouge in 1975 ). I still call ol' Mac from time to time as he has hung his hat in Andalusia, Alabama and works in the State Veterans Affairs Office. In his spare time he teaches “hawk throwing” and wilderness cooking holding what amounts to mini-rendezvous, for the local kids.

The tale isn't quite over yet... The summer I was retiring, I was the OIC of MTU Quantico and the Reserve Rifle and Pistol Team was reporting in for duty and practice. Who should I

see but (now) Major Dudley Thomas whom I hadn't seen for years. I went over and we talked over old times. With a particularly evil sense of humor, I asked Dudley if he had sat on any recruits lately?


Dudley grinned and said "How the hell *is* McGowin anyway!"

I'd love to know what happened to Dudley, as besides being a right talented pistol shooter, he was an understanding man!

Semper Fi,

*Dick*

# A BARRACKS DISCUSSION OF LONG, LONG AGO ...WITH A SLIGHT WHIFF OF SULFUR

:  
k Ladies and Gentlemen, here's one probably more appropriately told on Halloween, but occasionally this old soldier's remembrances drift back over the time and space of some 48-years. Spooky? Well, you might say so, but it wasn't the actual conversation that raised the goose bumps, but rather the possibilities of what *MIGHT* have happened, lo those many years ago.

While I am not necessarily a believer in Ghost Stories or weird tales, every so often I get to thinking back to my youth, and of one particular Friday evening in July of 1956 and a conversation with another Marine while we shined shoes and cleaned rifles for the following morning's inspection. Not Halloween you say? Indeed 'tis true, but some things just make the hair on the back of your neck stand up regardless of the time of year. This particular evening was one of those times. Halloween, which always seems to evoke such stories, would seem to be a particularly apropos time to relay such an interesting story, but even on a July night, it was wondering what the outcome *might* have been that is the gist of the story. I'll relate it as I remember it and allow you to decide for yourselves.

## LET'S SET THE STAGE:

For you youngsters who have done time in the military, the modern day Corps (and I assume the Army), pretty well lets the troops off for weekend liberty at the cessation of military activities on Friday evening. Back in the mid-1950s, we worked five and a half days a week, normally culminating with a Saturday morning inspection. Assuming that all went well with the inspection, and if you didn't personally get your liberty card confiscated for real or imagined transgressions (dirty rifle, un-shined boots, wall locker in disarray, or a lack of appropriate military savvy when asked questions by the Platoon Commander during the inspection), you were pretty well free to "debauch" from about 1200, on Saturday until reveille on Monday morning (unless your unit imposed what was called "Cinderella Liberty" indicating that your wild nights on the town came to a screeching halt at 2400). We were not burdened with Cinderella Liberty, and as a result could do as we pleased. As a result, we pretty well busted our fannies to make sure we were squeaky clean, very shiny and extremely well informed for our weekly parade before the "brass". . .

Now during the Summer of 1956 I was assigned to the 1st Infantry Training Regiment. ITR in those days had the mission of teaching fledgling Marines (who had just completed Boot Camp), combat tactics and field work when they left Parris Island. The attendees of ITR were already well versed Marine Lore, close order drill, rifle marksmanship, first aid, physical fitness and other such, but for several years, combat techniques had not been taught at Parris Island or San Diego.

In the interest of splitting up the training cycle, they decided to concentrate on the basics in Boot Camp followed with intensive combat training at Camp Lejeune (or Camp Pendleton on the West Coast). Many of us had been through Boot Camp several years before when combat skills were still taught as a part of the basic recruit curriculum, but as an after thought, the Corps decided that all hands *MUST* attend ITR even if you were already a NCO. This was done to assure an across the board standard of training for all hands. As a sort of 'sop' to the old-timers, we were allowed to attend ITR and act as squad

leaders, platoon guides, according to our rank, and to simultaneously function as Troop Handlers, and still get our tickets punched.

The infamous McKeon debacle had just occurred at Parris Island in April, and ITR at Camp Lejeune inherited a number of McKeon's platoon who had been held over at Parris Island for the court martial. These clowns were scattered throughout the East Coast ITR that summer. Some of these survivors of McKeon's Platoon were pretty salty and had come to think of themselves as "bulletproof" from the standard "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" normally wielded by mere Marine NCOs, and they all knew that Marine Corps discipline was going to get much easier now that such evil tactics had been exposed to the world. After all, they had the "mommies of the world monitoring their progress"... Boy did they have a comeuppance coming!

The basic combat training was pretty much old hat to most of us having been out in operational units, but orders and regulations are written in stone and we attended with good grace, if not exactly waiting with baited breath for our post graduate combat training. When not out in the field, we hung our dungaree covers at Camp Geiger in the large Quonset hut complex that was to be our home for the duration of the training. If you've seen the movie, "Heartbreak Ridge" with Clint Eastwood, you have seen essentially what our quarters looked like. The "heads" (latrines for the Army folks) were separate Quonsets, and gave us a place to shine shoes, press uniforms, and clean rifles after lights out, since lights were left on in the heads all night! It was in just such a setting that the following tale was told to me.

## **A TALE WELL TOLD AT MIDNIGHT:**

It was a Friday night late, and we had been in the field all week. The entire crew was dirty, foul and dust-covered when we got back to Geiger. I spent what was left of the day making sure my squad was shined and squared away for the following day's inspection. When I was satisfied with the squad, it was getting on well towards midnight. I grabbed my boots and rifle and headed for the nearest head facility since lights in the huts had been out for a bit.

Boot shining was a bit more complicated in those days as the Marines were issued rough-out combat boots that were never meant to be shined, but rather were supposed to be treated with a concoction known as "Dubbing" that was issued in small cans when you bought your footwear (Boots and Boondockers, *not* dress shoes) from what we then called "The Quartermaster". ...Somewhere in late 1954 some unmentionably foul clown learned how to get around the rough-out leather, and had found a way to "matt-down" the small leather protuberances (knap) that are common to the "unshiny" leather surfaces NEVER meant to be shined in the first place. This idiot found that using a small glass milk container that were furnished with your coffee when you grabbed a cup of joe in the restaurant, could be used to matt down the leather by using the open neck with lots of dye and Kiwi Leather Polish.

It worked, but that SOB should have been relegated to Hell to tend the eternal fires! Unfortunately the practice spread like wildfire and soon the entire Corps was deliberately short circuiting the well intentioned issue of "non-shineable boots." If there's a will, some fool will find a way. The technique became known as "bottle shining" and was practiced until McNamara decided to take away our "Marine Corps Peculiar" uniform items in the

mid-1960s, and our comfortable "Marine Corps Last" boots were replaced by the Army (Munson) Last... Easy to shine, but the darned things simply never fit like our old originals.

Thinking the bottle shining method to be a bit artificial, I personally had worked out a more serviceable method of boot shining. I simply cleaned them up, gave 'em a good dye job and then used a 1/4" drill motor held in a vice. I buffed the polish into the boots. until all the knap was worn off or matted down, and then you could spit shine them in the normal manner. Still, spit shining a pair of rough-out boots always seemed to be the height of idiocy to me, but I digress, "boot shining techniques" wasn't why I started this yarn... Back to the story!

When I entered the head, I figured that I was the only guy there (it was late by now) until I noted another lone Marine in a more well lighted area. It's always easier to get on with your tasks if you can shoot the bull with some other poor soul. Since we were simply wearing skivvy shirts with no chevrons, we struck up a conversation with no amenities of rank. This guy appeared to be a bit older than most of our new kids and I assumed that he might also have been one of the guys being "retrofitted" into the new ITR training cycle.

After a bit, it turned out that he was a bit older than most, and had three years of Med School under his belt. His folks had sent him to some pretty high-powered "prep-schooling" as well. He had simply gotten tired of the academic routine, and decided to "play" Marine before he became intermeshed into a career pattern that would never allow him to indulge in his childhood fantasies. He had dreamed of becoming a Marine (having been exposed to the patriotic fervor of WWII and Korea) before he was old enough to join, so he had bailed out of "academia" and headed for the Marine Recruiter (a not uncommon act in those far off days) - adventure still held a bit of glamour before we (as a nation) were informed that everyone DESERVED a college education, and the government undertook to pay for such insanity. No one headed for Canada to avoid the draft, and in fact, (at least in the Marines) we usually had an overflow of volunteers when the international situations indicated some danger to our country.

We began to discuss the academic environment, and how it was often necessary to find a place to study after lights out (much as we were cleaning and shining in the head in the Corps), and he got to relating a story that caught my attention. It seems that he had attended a prep school in Pennsylvania with a bit of religious bent, and one of the only places to study late at night was the basement of the old Chapel on the campus. The study area was anything but well lit, and had a single exposed light bulb with a twist switch hanging from the overhead by a single wire as was still common in some of the older establishments. The basement held a large number of very old (and no doubt very valuable) tomes that had been brought to this country on sailing ships, many having to do with early day Catholic Religious edicts and explanations. These books were obviously not meant for the "unwashed" as the Catholic Church even in 1956 was very cagy about what they allowed the lay brethren to read without clergy supervision.

He then mentioned a practice elucidated in one of the ancient books called exorcism! **Exorcism?** What the hell was that? I had never heard of such! Don't forget, this was well before exorcism was a common word used outside the church hierarchy, and the famous book/movie, "*The Exorcist*" wasn't even thought of yet. Apparently the insiders and some of the more educated hierarchy of the church were knowledgeable of such practices, but

for me, this was a first (again, don't forget, this was in the Summer of 1956). It seems when studying in the basement of the Chapel, he had been getting stale in his interminable studies, and had began to browse some of the relatively ancient religious books on the shelves. This book on exorcism he skimmed through, recounted supposedly actual accounts of the casting out of the devil (demons, etc.), and he assured me that these were authentic occurrences, documented by the Roman Catholic Clergy. Even though I wasn't a particularly ardent religious fanatic, I still appreciated a good story, and I was fascinated! I urged him to go on. As he told his yarns, I continued to spit shine my boots, but had lost interest in the minutia of the process. I was all ears.

The keynote anecdote of his extracurricular studies, was a passage in one of these ancient manuscripts on exorcism that gave a detailed account of the technique of "the conjuring up of the Devil 'himself'!..." Hummm... Now he really had me interested! When you've just turned 20, what adventurous kid wouldn't be fascinated in bringing Lucifer up in a cloud of sulfurous smoke with perhaps a clap of thunder and lightening thrown in! Of course I had to ask the obvious question? Did you give it a try (knowing I personally would have had a hard time resisting such a challenge!)? He grinned, and went on with his tale!

It seems that the instructions in the book were extremely detailed and gave the appropriate time, dates(?) and other amenities necessary to bring about the fallen angel. This included the drawings of appropriate pentagrams, correct powders to be used (bat wing and eye of newt?). I disremember, but it's been 48 years ago, so give my aging brain a break!). At any rate, apparently it took some help to get prepared, so he enlisted the services of a couple of like minded young adventurers, and they got everything ready, even practicing the incantations just up to the point that would have consummated the ill considered deed!

On the appointed night, it seems that they repaired to the basement of the chapel (this probably wouldn't have gone over too well on the front lawn of a religious campus) where everything awaited their final incantations and machinations to bring forth "The Dark One"... By now, I'm sitting on the edge of the bench next to the showers, holding my breath and awaiting revelations from one who had really spoken to the legendary Prince of Darkness!

"Well, go on damn it," I said! (using perhaps an unfortunate choice of terminology), "What happened next?"

The young lad lit up a new smoke and took a couple of drags, letting the smoke slowly drift out of his nose while effecting a very convincing 1000-yard stare. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and looked sideways at me with a serious stare... "Nothing" was his answer!

"Nothing?..." sez I, "Did you guys get the incantations wrong? Did you even get a puff of smoke? What in Hell happened?"

"I don't think you understand," he said, sticking his cigarette back in his mouth, "nothing happened because we chickened out! We decided that we might be playing with fire (here almost literally), and we might be turning something loose on Earth that might shouldn't have been set free!"

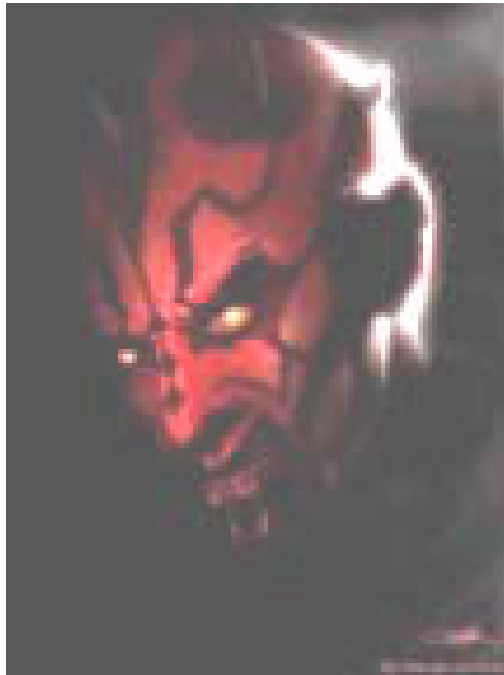
"But" I began, almost chewing the end of my cigar off, "surely you couldn't just let it go! Holy Catfish! I wouldn't have been able to live with myself without knowing what might have happened!"

"That's what worried us," he said, "we carefully considered the consequences and one of my buddies noted that while all the instructions were there for "*summoning*" the Evil One, there were absolutely **NO** instructions on how to get rid of him! My question to you lad, is what would **YOU** have done?"

With that, he picked up his gear, and left the Quonset hut to head back to the rack. As the screen door banged, I could have sworn I caught a slight whiff of sulfur gently wafting in the evening air...

Semper Fi,

**ROC**



**SOME THINGS ARE PERHAPS BETTER LEFT ALONE...**

# How I Learned to “Chaw” Tobacco

Dick Culver

You'll have to be a real old timer to remember this evolution of “rocket-scientific” thought in the hierarchy of the Corps. In all fairness, there was a bit of left handed logic in the thinking, but then it predated helicopter re-supply, and the Navy Medical folks still had sulfa powder stashed in our first aid packets (albeit with a crude typed note taped to the tin cautioning you not to use it on wounds).

Aircraft Carriers still were the more or less exclusive roosting place of fixed wing aircraft, and Bacitracin Ointment for the topical use on wounds was still in the future. We were still carrying the M1 Rifle, and the M1941 Pack with reversible camouflage patterns on the shelter-halves, and helmet covers were still the norm, often causing the somewhat heated arguments between units and individuals during the fall and spring as to whether or not an outfit should fall out with green or brown side out. We still called our utilities (made out of the traditional herringbone material) “dungarees” and wore the jackets outside the trousers until the late 1950s. While a bit archaic today, such machinations made good sense at the time and ...we still won our wars!

Now in training assignments stateside, or even when deployed in large units overseas, we usually had access to a 250-gallon water trailer of potable water, known to the troops far and wide as the “Water Buffalo” or in slang, “The Water Boo”... This was fine in static situations, but when far from chimney smoke as the old saying goes, you were on your own.

In the old days we were issued a single canteen, although on some of the Pacific Operations photographs exist showing two canteens on the cartridge or pistol belts. The problem however was that you had to plan for the worst, and with no re-supply “choppers” you often had to make long arduous patrols with the single canteen. Halazone water purification tablets existed of course, but if you had no access to an occasional stream or even stagnant pond, you might be SOL (\$hi+ outta' luck) as the old saying goes. The Hospital Corpsmen spoke knowingly about the use of a few drops of iodine in your canteen, but then who in Hades carried a bottle of iodine. Nope, there had to be a better answer, and the military hierarchy came up with something called “water discipline” based on the idea that the human body could be trained to keep going in stressful situations on a single canteen (one quart) of water per day! Dear Allah... It was almost as if the medicos and the military brass figured that much like the Camel, the human body could be trained to operate on minimal water! Hummm... I recall in OCS at Quantico on two separate occasions I am aware of, we had two Officer Candidates die of Heat Stroke (that must have been a nightmare to explain to the families)! None the less, this was in effect at least through the late 1950s. Somebody should have had better sense!

The drill was that you were not allowed to drink out of your canteen except when given permission by your squad or platoon leader (depending on the size of your operating unit at the time. Solution? Trick f++k your body into thinking it wasn't thirsty or at least cutting down on the sometimes overwhelming desire to suck on your canteen! How did we do such a thing? Well, there were several schools of thought, one of which was to put a couple of pebbles in your mouth to keep your saliva glands activated, or the easiest (and most macho)



version was to stick a “chaw” of tobacco in your mouth – THAT was guaranteed to keep your mouth moist! I bought my first pouch of Beechnut (my personal choice, although Red Man and several types of “plug” tobacco also found favor). I bought my first pouch at the small PX at Camp Geiger in the Summer of 1956 at ITR. Since I was a squad leader, I had to maintain an aura of authority and invincibility – yeah, right, if you don’t think I got as “bloody” thirsty as the next guy, I’ll eat your hat. While the “Water Boos” were fairly common in the training areas, we were not allowed to use them while we proved we could “Camelesque” our bodies (often at Quantico at OCS, no trailers were readily available on what we called “The Hill Trail” and we were usually on it at a dead run for about 7 miles. There may be hotter spots in the States than Quantico, Virginia, but I’ll be damned if I ever found one in the early days at least!

After several days of learning to live with my ever present pouch of “Beechnut” I became inured to, if not downright fond of the flavor (the fact that I was a cigar smoker even when I was a kid may have helped). My habit of keeping a pouch of the vile stuff in my ready gear stayed with me until I got used to Helicopter water re-supply in Vietnam in the mid to late 1960s. One extremely hot afternoon during ITR at Camp Geiger almost cured me of my tobacco chewing habit!

We were running continual squad assaults on a fortified position, and just generally practicing running, hitting the deck using your rifle-butt to break your fall, and rolling to one side or the other to confuse the enemy who would have been firing at you. After numerous evolutions of this more or less standard drill, we began to get a bit careless, and if possible sneaking a look at our timepieces to see when this continuing insanity was going to stop. It proved to be a tactical miscalculation!

On what should have been the end of the exercise, I was feeling “froggy” and hit the deck with a particularly energetic flop – with about a fist sized rock catching me right in the solar plexus! Upppssss... I inadvertently and quite accidentally swallowed my entire cud of Beechnut. Now I know you’ve all heard the stories of turning green when you swallow a chaw of tobacco, but I have an entirely different perspective! What actually happens is that your eyeballs glaze over green, and everything you look at has a distinctly green tint! Arrrgggg... While I managed to salvage my dignity and not overtly puke all over the simulated battlefield, it was a true act of bodily control. I couldn’t spit the damned thing out, it was all in my stomach, and it was letting me know about it in spades! I declared that it was time to take a slight swig of canteen water for the squad, and used my entire swig to wash out my mouth – I don’t think my stomach could have handled it!

For about a week after my “chaw” swallowing adventure, I became a “pebbles in the mouth” man, although I didn’t let on to the squad (how embarrassing that would have been!). After about a week of trying small pieces of Beechnut in the mouth when close to a water fountain/scuttlebutt, I finally got to where my body didn’t instantly reject/eject the stuff I was trying to get used to. Eventually I finally got back into full blown tobacco chewing, but it was an object lesson of epic proportions! You have no idea how relieved I was when the military and military medicos decided that the human body *COULDN’T* be trained to go without water, but the old concept of “Water Discipline” was without foundation and basically idiotic! Hallelujah, by Vietnam we were teaching everyone to drink all they could hold and take a couple of extra swigs – while not perfect, your body CAN hold more water than it needs at that particular period of time.

Whenever we had any casualties occurred, none left on the medivac choppers without having at least one canteen stripped off his web gear. We were also occasionally issued (or stole) one of the newer 5-quart bladder canteens that you could sling over your shoulder. I rarely went on an operation without at least 3 standard canteens on my belt and one of the 5-quart bladder canteens over my shoulder. Lessons learned as a 20-year old squad leader die hard, and I always made sure my kids never sent any of the 5-gallon water re-supply cans from our helicopter re-supply leave the zone with any moisture remaining in them. We sometimes sloshed when we initially strode off into the jungle, but old lessons die hard.

As far as I know the old 250-gallon Water Boo is still in the inventory, as well it should be, as helicopter water re-supply would be a bit of an affectation in a garrison or enclave situation, but they still bring back memories of the *Olde Corps*... Thank Gawd the brass doesn't still have the old "Camelesque" mentality, but 'twasn't always so. Kinda' like the old shout of "*The Word's Been Changed, It's Green Side Out*" – if nothing else, to this old Marine, both are a vivid reminder of our not so distant roots. Someday I may have a pouch of Beechnut bronzed and put on my shelf as a reminder of one hot afternoon at Camp Geiger in 1956.

Semper Fi,

**ROC**

# The Passing of a Legend and a Tradition

## By way of an explanation:

For all of you newcomers to the Corps, the old cry, *"it's Brown Side Out"* no longer elicits curses from an entire barracks full of troops. The practice and legend came from the early days of WWII when the M1941 Marine Corps Pack was normally carried with a blanket roll in the shape of a horseshoe that covered each side of and the top of the pack. The roll was tightly rolled (if you wanted to avoid the wrath of the Gunny) and fastened to the pack with straps provided for such a purpose attached to the pack itself. The tighter and neater your blanket roll, the more squared away it was. The roll was made by laying out your "shelter half" (a half a pup tent), laying your blanket on top of it and putting the folded tent pole at one end and the tent stakes at the other along with the guy line. Because the Marines were heading for the South Pacific, the Marine Corps obligingly made one side in a green camouflage pattern and the other side in a brown one. The helmet covers were also made so that they had matching camouflage on either side, one brown and the other green.

The idea was that in the summer you would use the green side of the shelter half, and the brown in winter. For most of the year, this worked fine. It didn't become a problem except during the transition periods between winter and summer. It seems that nobody could make up their minds when the actual transition should take place. Needless to say a properly set up blanket roll was to reflect the season. But no two units could seem to get their stuff together on the exact changeover day!

An Infantry Battalion normally had four rifle companies, but even within a Battalion, it wasn't unusual for the word to get garbled. I've seen two companies fall out using "Brown Side Out" and the other two using "Green Side Out!" Entire Platoons would be seen racing for the barracks to change the color of their blanket rolls! Inside the barracks, you could see shelter halves flying, and cursing troops re-rolling their rolls. Companies would spy on one another in the evening to see what "side" the other was using... It seemed to be a matter of honor not to get together and put out a "unified word" that would have solved the problem. The Company Commander might well put out the word to roll the packs with "Green Side Out" only to find that the word had changed by 0700 the next morning. Tempers would often flare but somehow things always worked themselves out without bloodshed. The old double sided shelter halves were phased out in the late 1960s with a single sided dark green shelter half, and a legend and a tradition died in the Corps.

...But somehow I can still hear some clown yelling into the passageway, "Hey, the word's been changed, it's *Brown Side Out!*" and the old adage "It came with a scream, it came with a shout, the words been changed, it's *Brown Side Out!*" still echo like the strains of a fading bugle of a bygone day in my mind.

Semper Fi,

Dick Culver

Originally printed in Leatherneck Magazine in the early 1950s

Now I'm not a wheel as you can see,  
I'm just a private in the Infantry.  
I've never fought the Japs or Krauts,  
But I've fought the battle of "Green Side Out".  
So pull up a seabag my clean Marine,  
And I'll tell you the story of Brown versus Green.

It started one morning at reveille,  
When the Duty came in so merrily.  
He was only a boot, a kid still growing,  
He took out his whistle and started blowing.

"OK, you guys, get out of the sack,  
Swab the decks and make up your packs."  
I could tell by the grin on his sloppy pan,  
That the stuff was about to hit the fan.  
His adam's apple wobbled, from his throat came a shout,  
"The word's been changed, it's Brown Side Out!"

"Brown side out?" cried a pi\$\$ed off Marine,  
"You said last night it was gonna' be Green!"  
Alright, knock off the bitchin' and rearrange,  
You know the word is subject to change!  
So you'd better get hot you Gawd Damn Clowns  
And change that roll so the outside's brown!

"Hey you with the ears like fenders,  
Where the hell are your belt suspenders?"  
"I washed 'em last night and they're still drying,  
Look in the head if you think I'm lying!"  
"Roll it tight and play it cool,  
And don't forget your entrenching tool!"

Well, I rolled my roll all nice and neat,  
I was sweating blood from head to feet.  
When just about then the Gunny came in  
And said, "sorry men, it's Green again!"

"Green again?" cried a voice from the rear,  
"If we roll it much more, we'll wear out our gear!"  
"Knock off that bitchin' and do what you're told,  
Get your @\$ \$ hot and make up that roll!"

Now my hair's falling out and I'm getting old,  
And all on account of that \$#@& roll!  
Now this ends my story, but without a doubt,  
There'll never be an end to "Green Side Out"!

– Unknown –

# “Lead Foot Hartnett” and the Onslow County Sheriff

By Dick Culver

For you newcomers, this one will require a bit of background and an explanation of how the MARS system worked (an antiquated concept in the current day of the cell phone, but don't forget, we still got slivers in our fingers from wooden ram-rods in those days).

By the time I had taken over Alpha Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, it was October 1965, and the Battalion (as were most of the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division) was well under their TO (Table of Organization) strength. Most of the graduates of both the Basic Officer's Course, and the enlisted alumnae of Infantry Training Regiments (a post graduate course following Boot Camp, concentrating on infantry tactics) were being scheduled as replacements for Southeast Asia. We were what would have been termed a “Casual Outfit” (individuals collected in a [replacement] “pool” to be used as cannon fodder for the rice paddies when the casualty lists came in). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division was kept in operating condition by a skeleton crew in order to satisfy our NATO commitment to keep a floating Battalion Team in both the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Those of us who were left cooling our heels were literally chomping at the bit to run the Commies back up to North Vietnam. Frustrated would have been an appropriate term to describe the mood of those stuck in the flatlands of North Carolina.

I had just come from 3 1/2 years stuck in the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District Headquarters in New Orleans. While the city was marvelous, they had me signing discharges (as a lowly Lieutenant, while Majors were sometimes seen emptying trash cans). My previous assignments had been with either the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company, or as the Executive Officer of two Rifle Companies. While I was relieved to be back from being a glorified clerk, cooling my heels in an under-strength replacement pool wasn't what I had dreamed of. I had a 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant named Martin who was a fine individual and had inherited an old friend, Sergeant Francis McGowin as my acting Company Gunnery Sergeant. Still, I was the only officer in the Company, and while the Company was almost an over strength platoon in size, things seem to go better when you have someone else to share the load – not only that, but it gives you someone to use as a sounding board when you are tempted to beat your head against the bulkhead. My prayers were about to be answered. Enter, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Stephen M. Hartnett, USMC!

I got a call from the Battalion Adjutant that he was sending me an XO – and he promptly hung up before I could ask any questions. Shortly, young 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hartnett entered the office, popped to attention in front of my desk, and reported in the best “brown-bar” fashion, with heels appropriately locked.

I don't know if you have ever met anyone who gave you an immediate sense of déjà vu, or the feeling that you have known someone before, but young Hartnett was one of those. We had a sort of instant bonding with nary a word spoken – it was spooky, to say the least. We formed a bond that would last even some 40 years later. Skip and I have followed each other around, both in the Marine Corps, and later teaching firearms in a private company following retirement. We put two tours in Saudi Arabia training the Saudi Arabian Marines and the Saudi Air Defense Force in the 1980s and '90s.

In October 1965, Skip had just finished the Basic Officer's School in Quantico, and had in fact been commissioned in the Marine Corps out of A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance

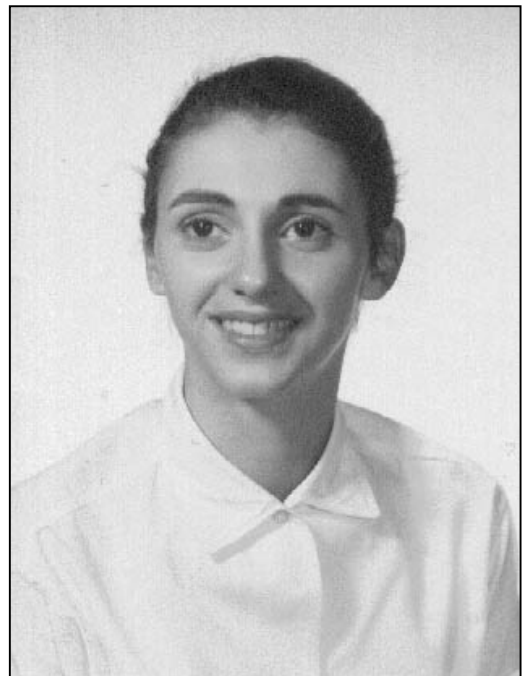
Battalion as a young corporal. He had put in some time at the Citadel in South Carolina, but his adventurous soul caused him to join the Regular Marine Corps. He wasn't exactly a newbie, having already graduated from the Navy Scuba School, put in a tour in the Marine Barracks, Naples, Italy and had accumulated a fair amount of Recon experience as a young NCO. None the less, getting assigned (reassigned?) to the Battalion and the Company you were serving with prior to commissioning was unusual, to say the least, and in normal times this just wasn't done – but as I have explained, these were not normal times. Colonel Westerman seeing his name on the roster of incoming officers into the Division had asked that he be reassigned to our Battalion.

I asked Skip if he would like to be assigned to another company, since most of our troops had served with him in enlisted status. Hartnett told me, “Naw, it's not necessary, I was a no good SOB before I left and I ain't changed a bit!” He was, of course, right, and the troops took to him like to a duck to water – he must have been a hell of an NCO...

I had yet to meet Hartnett's family (he was married and had three kidlets), but our introduction was to define Skip's and my relationship for the next 40 years! Skip's Memsahib was Kay, and the children were still rug-rats. This was her first duty station as the wife of a gen-u-wine *Ossifer* in the FMF, although her step-father was a Chief in the Navy and Skip had met her when stationed with the Marine Detachment in Naples.

One afternoon soon after Skip's arrival, Miss<sup>1</sup> Kay arrived in the Company Area to deliver some gear he needed. The stuff had just arrived with the household boxes and furnishings, and Kay had dutifully brought it to the Company Area. Skip took me out to meet her, but not before he mentioned that they were just moving into quarters in Tarawa Terrace, and the household goods shipment was awaiting unpacking. Skip was not looking forward to helping her unpack and square the quarters away. He asked if I would emphasize how busy we were and that he would be working late for a week or two until we got the company back in operating shape. The company was actually in as good a shape as could be expected considering that we were operating on about a 50% manning level.

Miss Kay was a relative youngster at the time, although throughout the subsequent years I have come to consider her my younger sister and a part of the family. Our initial meeting, however, was not designed to cement solid relations between me and my brand new Executive Officer. I was most charmed upon that first meeting, as she was most gracious, and quite a nice looking young lady. Miss Kay and my wife were to become close friends over the years. Our initial conversation went sorta' like this:



**Miss Katy circa 1965 – they would have demanded picture ID to allow her into a candy store! My goodness, were we ever that young?**

**Skip** - “Skipper, I'd like you to meet my wife, Kay.”

**Culver** - "Good afternoon Mrs. Hartnett, I'm Captain Culver, it's certainly nice to meet you!"

**Kay** - "Oh yes, and I've heard so much about you, I'm glad to finally meet you in person."

**Culver** - "Miss Kay, I know how much of a hassle it is moving into quarters, and I want you to know that we have a slack period right now, and I can spare your husband for as long as it takes to get unpacked and moved in!"

**Kay** - "Why thank you Captain, I really appreciate this, Skip was sure he'd be too busy to help. Thank goodness you can allow him to help with the move!"

**Culver** - "My pleasure Miss Kay, you make sure you keep him busy!"

**Kay** - "Oh I certainly will, and thank you again!"

**Culver** - "My pleasure my dear, and it's certainly been nice to meet you!"

Somewhere in the background, I was sure that I heard my brand new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant say something to the effect, "I'm gonna' get you for this Captain!" Heh, heh, heh... The rather evil sense of humor here manifested by the pair of us is part of the story.

As is recorded in these pages, we continued to evolve into something resembling a combat ready organization. Skip and Kay were safely ensconced in quarters in "TT"<sup>2</sup>, and I had taken my first step towards home ownership. Having used my GI Bill, I obtained a home loan and purchased a very nice centrally air-conditioned three bedroom house with attached garage. This seeming palace was located on a landscaped half-acre lot! Not only that, the entire munificent total mortgage was only \$17,500! My new quarters were located in a developing residential part of Jacksonville, North Carolina, known as Northwoods.

Now, in order to commute to our assigned "sub-camp" of the Lejeune complex, there was a newly built road going roughly from Northwoods to the front gate of Camp Lejeune, with but a single stop light on the entire road. This four-lane super-highway, called "Belfork Road", was, in those days, virtually devoid of housing or businesses. The only scenery on either side of the road was tall pines, and virtually no habitation of any type (don't forget, this was in the Fall of 1965, some 40-years ago).

Tarawa Terrace, however, wasn't too far away, and there were certainly no traffic jams to materially impede vehicular traffic to and from Northwoods. Tactically speaking, over the ensuing months, we had progressed from a somewhat confined Reconnaissance Battalion located at Montford Point, sent a Recon Company (ours), to Panama to the Jungle Operations Course, and returned. We eventually moved our entire Battalion to Onslow Beach. To cut to the chase, not too long after our session in Panama (in order to satisfy our NATO commitment), Hartnett had been dispatched with a composite reconnaissance platoon to the Mediterranean.

Kay and my Memsahib had become close friends and socialized on a daily basis. One afternoon after visiting our Northwoods abode, Kay departed and headed back to Tarawa Terrace. When she arrived home, I answered a call, from our recently departed guest, Kay Hartnett. She was quite upset, as she had been stopped on Belfork road for speeding while on her way home. Kay was not a happy camper, and wanted to know what she should do? I told her not to get too excited, as I would check around and see if we could "schmooze" the local Onslow County Sheriff's Department, run at that time by a gent named Tom Marshall.



Kay and the Memsahib yakked a bit, and Kay hung up to contemplate her fate. Hardly had she hung up when I got another call, this time from Skip from his floating base in the Mediterranean. Prior to the invention of the cell phone, the local Ham Radio aficionados ran a service connecting radio messages aboard ship (or from other widely separated locations, even Vietnam), and would place a telephone call to your loved ones and “*inter-hook*”(?) their radio connection to the military installation through their Ham Radio Set allowing you to actually have a conversation from the service member to a local (non-long distance) home telephone number via what was known as a “phone patch.” The system was called the “MARS”<sup>3</sup> system, and the only disadvantage was the fact that your conversation had to follow radio procedure, in that when you finished your transmission, you had to say “over” so that the Ham Operator would know to send the next transmission in the other direction. The tongue-in-cheek saying amongst the troops was “*I love you, over*”...

Skip’s call was almost on the tag end of Kay’s call, and indeed Skip’s initial attempt to call had been to his young wife, but alas, the line was busy. This, of course, was simply Kay talking to the Culver household, thereby preventing Skip’s call from getting through. You can probably see this one coming, heh, heh, heh... My warped sense of humor almost immediately kicked in.

I told Skip about Kay’s call only a few minutes before and mentioned that she had been picked up for speeding on her way back to TT. He (being equally evil) immediately picked up on the possibilities. After a bit of socializing, and checking on my deployed platoon’s status, we hung up and Skip immediately called Kay, being careful not to mention that he had just talked to me on the MARS hookup!

Shortly after Kay and Skip hung up, I got another (somewhat panicked) phone call from Kay.



**Katy and Skip on a more “genteel” ocean cruise in 2005! Dear Allah, where has time gone? In her more experienced mode, I suspect I’d now be speaking in high soprano along with Skip!**

**As of 2006, Katy and Skip have been married for 43 years, so I’d say it’s a pretty good bet she forgave at least Skip if not myself!**

“Dick, I just got a call from Skip in the Med, and he told me that Sheriff Tom Marshall had just called him and told him he had picked me up for speeding on Belfork Road, cautioning him to control his dependent’s driving habits for the safety of the community. Dick, what do I do now? The Sheriff doesn’t really call individuals on deployment to report driving infractions does he?”

“Kay, I’ve never heard of it before, but it sounds pretty serious to me, what else were you doing behind the wheel? I don’t have a clue as to why he would single you out, it must be a new policy to keep deployed Marines informed of their family’s performance when they’re not around to keep track of their activities. Did Skip have anything



else to say about the call, other infractions or anything? This may be more serious than you imagine!" I said laying it on as thick as I dared without arousing suspicion.

Now Kay is a savvy individual, but she was new to the game and hadn't had any experience with the two of us messing with a third party! She'd have immediately smelled a rodent in later times, but she was newly alone, not having been picked up for speeding before, and was genuinely worried. Unfortunately, the life preserver she was reaching out to was being absolutely no help and was in fact throwing gasoline on an already burning fire. I was kinda' ashamed of myself, but not enough to salve her feelings that evening.

The eventual truth came out, of course, and I'm convinced that if Kay had been a homicidally inclined individual, Skip and I would have both been speaking in high soprano, and asking to have a last smoke before they put the blindfolds in place in front of a bullet pocked wall!

We have laughed about this one many times over the years, but for one instant in time Miss Kay (who is very rarely at a loss for words) was literally speechless. She's gotten her revenge many times over, of course, but thinking back, I no doubt deserved the fallout from that one!

My best to Miss Kay, and to the fact that she has (I think) forgiven me after all these years! ...But it still evokes a smile or two.

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

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<sup>1</sup> In the South (both Skip and I were from below the Mason-Dixon Line), all young ladies, regardless of their marital status are referred to as "Miss" in deference to their youth, charm and genteel upbringing. The "Miss" has literally nothing to do with their marital status. You "Damn-Yankees" won't understand, but the Southern Ladies will know where I'm coming from.

<sup>2</sup> "TT" was the colloquial local terminology for Marine Corps junior officer's quarters in Tarawa Terrace, named for the famous island fight in November of 1943.

<sup>3</sup> The Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) is (and was) a [Department of Defense](#) (DoD) sponsored program that combines the resources and talents of military radio operators and volunteer radio operators of the US Amateur Radio Service. Under the authority of [DoD Directive 4605.2](#), each branch of the Armed Forces manages and operates individual MARS programs in joint support of the overall MARS program. Depending upon location and availability of equipment, MARS also offers service members the opportunity to place free phone calls home from overseas, from military aircraft, and from ships. This is accomplished by connecting phone lines to radio equipment with the radio link acting as the long-distance carrier, this processes is called "phone-patching." The Navy and Marine Corps became part of the MARS system in 1963, a mere 3-years prior to our infamous call from the Onslow County Sheriff's Department. While much of the telephonic traffic is currently handled by "cell phone", this wasn't always the case, and many a comforting phone call was placed by understanding MARS participants. Perhaps SOME messages were more comforting than others? Heh, heh, heh...

# Snake Charming 101

## McGowin and the Boas, Panama circa 1966

Alpha Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion had been selected to attend the U. S. Army Jungle Operations course located at Ft. Sherman in the Canal Zone. I had taken a more or less full compliment of troops to the course, many pirated from other units in the Battalion, and even some 6-Month Reservists to flesh out the unit to normal TO. This was our first attempt to deploy the fledgling Reservists outside the continental limits of the United States.

In fact it turned out to be a non-problem as many of the individuals selected to go were literally chomping at the bit. One of the things I had discovered about our reserve contingent was that often they were better educated than the regular enlistee, and when exposed to sufficiently gungy training, they often requested and were accepted for augmentation into the regular Marine Corps. This was to prove true in our jungle evolution. All of the troops were volunteers, as were the reservists selected to accompany our little band.

The curriculum of the Jungle Course was orientated towards acquainting the M1A1 "U.S. Troop" to the peculiarities of life in the jungle and the critters a youngster was liable to meet in his new environment. For instance, we were required to eat "monkey," snake, Coatimundis (a Central American cousin of the Raccoon), and other rare and wondrous taste treats. All this was done to prove to our neophyte Jungle Fighters that survival in the rain forests was not out of the question in the event you were cut off from your normal C-Ration Delights. One of the highlights in the orientation segment was what we came to call "Serpent 101."

Now the average youngster is brought up to have a rather "creepy" impression of our slinky cousins. A rather impressive case may be advanced that snakes are really an important link in the overall ecological plan in our cosmic universe, but still, snake handling 101 would not be one of my first loves. This training evolution was designed to actually have the troops handle a Boa Constrictor and discern that he (or she?) wasn't slimy and didn't bite in the sense of a Rattler, Copperhead or a Cottonmouth.

Since this was perceived to be a sort of "scary" operation, the Instructors decided that we would handle the "snake training aid" in reverse order of rank. This meant that the Commanding Officer went first, followed by the XO (Skip Hartnett), then First Sergeant Martin, followed by Sergeant McGowin, the acting Company Gunnery Sergeant. After the first four, the individuals would simply form a line (supervised by the instructors to make sure no one "finked-out" or attempted to escape!).

The "Training-Aid Boa" was actually a sort of Ft. Sherman Pet, and one of the residents in the Ft. Sherman Zoo. The Zoo animals were used to showcase the various jungle inhabitants to the new students, before they encountered them in the wild. The Boa was a



**Sgt. Francis A.  
McGowin**

special favorite of the instructors and was fed only the finest in rodents, and continually stroked and babied as if it were a pet kitty! This was one spoiled Boa Constrictor.

The constrictor family of snakes of course, devour their prey by throwing a “body-loop” (coil) around their meal of choice and squeezing the life out of their unfortunate item of interest. They would then stuff the expired remains down a very expandable mouth! Since these reptiles can devour animals many times their own size and girth, they have an extremely healthy squeeze-factor, and could probably ingest a wrung-out pig or perhaps a small ant-eater. You may rest assured that their constriction ability is much greater than that necessary to crack a walnut! No problem was anticipated with the duty Zoo Boa however, and although he was probably 12-feet long, he was considered both pampered and extremely docile – the prefect training aid for “Snake Charming 101”.

The methodology for grasping and picking up the snake was as follows. First the individual was to dangle his Utility Cover in front of the snake to attract his attraction (sorta’ like Indian Snake Charming), and while the snake was occupied with the swinging cover, the youngster selected to handle the “old slinky” was to grasp the snake behind the ears (ears? Dear Allah!). He would then pick the snake up to waist level, stroke him lovingly on top of his head, and then gently hand the snake to the Marine behind him. Sounds simple enough, right? Well yeah, but the best laid plans of mice and Marines...

I went first and all proceeded as expected and the docile serpent looked almost asleep. I turned around and handed him to Hartnett who talked to the varmint like it was a puppy dog. The snake seemed to be loving the attention. Hartnett handed old “Joe No Shoulders” off to First Sergeant Martin who gingerly took the snake, made his obligatory strokes on the Boa’s head and gently handed the snake to Sergeant McGowin. While all seemed to bode well, I should have known that there had to be a wrench in the machinery somewhere. Mac took the seemingly slumbering giant and gently stroked the snake and was almost making love to the thing – I should have seen this one coming.

Just behind McGowin was one of our new Reservists who was as black as a coal pile. A nice enough kid, but his eyes were already the size of saucers and he hadn’t even touched the serpent yet. This obviously wasn’t going to be the kid’s favorite class in the entire Jungle Ops Course curriculum. He reached for the snake with shaking hands and arms extended as far as he could reach to keep the snake at maximum distance from his body. In order to sooth the kid’s feelings, McGowin personally walked the snake over to the extremely black and shaking Marine, but just as he handed it to him, Mac shook that snake’s head like he was trying to strangle it, and shake a martini at the same time! The shaking was nothing if not spirited and was totally unexpected by both the serpent and the crowd. A large gasp went up! The outraged and astonished serpent let out a most spirited “hissss” gaining the attention of all hands. The Boa, now located right next to the receiving Marine, recoiled and then threw a full coil around the terrified Marine’s waist, and was seemingly prepared to launch coil number two. By pure instinct, the thoroughly “shaken and confused” Boa started his involuntary constriction around the object of his hate and discontent! I mean this snake obviously meant business and had absolutely no idea why these humans were mistreating him after such a genteel existence!

What did the kid do? Well, it’s kinda’ hard to say as he promptly passed out and turned as white as a sheet (no small accomplishment for this guy!). The resultant mayhem is difficult to describe. Everyone (except the encircled Marine) was in hysterics including the Instructors, and those who managed to wipe the tears out of their eyes made a project out of recapturing

the pet Boa before he actually thought of making a meal out of my now lily white Reserve Private. Order was finally restored and we received a firm lecture on not taking the class seriously enough, but even then the instructors were still wiping their eyes.

After recovering old “Joe No Shoulders” and soothing *HIS* jangled nerves (my young Reservist would be several days recovering his composure and his natural color), the class resumed where it had left off. The instructors re-demonstrated “the petting drill” personally in front of the class to give them confidence that they were not going to become a possible item on the snake’s menu. Snakes apparently have a forgiving nature, all except for the Fer-de-Lance (a smaller cousin of the Bushmaster) which has been noted for stalking a native to his village to inflict some sort of “serpent revenge.”

None the less, it was an extremely reluctant Marine Recon Company that finally finished the elementary “snake stroking” class. My completely shaken Private was given credit for having “touched” the snake, although I doubt seriously if he could have told anyone if Boa Constrictors had a slimy feel! As an aside, I never saw the rest of the company out “serpent hunting” in the bush. Boa or not, the next one could be a Bushmaster, or worse yet a Fer de Lance, and the entire Company (including yours truly) slept with our K-Bars close at hand. Shudder...

McGowin as I have previously noted, retired in LA (Lower Alabama), and as a diversion, when not working at the Alabama State Veteran’s Affairs Office, teaches “Hawk Throwing” and Wilderness Cooking to youngsters in a sort of Rendezvous Atmosphere similar to those who are “mountain man re-enactors” from the early 1800’s. If he has a class reminiscent of Snake Charming 101, I suspect that his classes do not attract many repeat students. While the wily Boa is not a resident of his part of the country, it is populated with great numbers of Rattle Snakes, Copperheads, and Cottonmouths. I would personally handle such a class with a sawed off 12-gauge! With McGowin, ya’ just never know!

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# Improvise, Adapt and Overcome

Dick Culver

While the shenanigans I am about to describe would no doubt result in a court martial in today's politically correct Marine Corps, it has not always been so. You can give all the classes on leadership and the UCMJ you want (in those days it was called "The Articles of War for the Navy," or "Rocks and Shoals"), but regardless of terminology or absolute legalities, when push finally comes to shove, there are times you simply have to take things into your own hands, or become an ineffective leader.

In the Summer of 1956 in ITR I was serving as both a squad leader and a troop handler for the youngsters coming out of Boot Camp at Parris Island. Had it not been shortly after the infamous McKeon incident at Parris Island in April of that year, there would have been no problem. Unfortunately, the hierarchy of the Corps threw themselves on the court of public opinion and went belly up for the mothers of America. While some good eventually came out of the incident, in that the Drill Instructor's School was instituted and the training of the troops became more uniform. They adopted the so called Campaign Hat which in Marine Corps parlance was actually a "Hat, comma, Field" but old terminology dies hard. The use of the NCO sword was revived and for a short time, even the ancient "swagger stick" made a comeback until the arrival of a new Commandant, David M. Shoup in January of 1960.

In the purgatorial period following McKeon's trial, there was a general relaxation of the discipline administered to the Boots at Parris Island. Many of his platoon were held over for the trial and we inherited some of those yahoos at ITR in the Summer of 1956.

We were really anticipating a problem with these scoundrels, but in the end we experienced very few, as ever of course, perception is everything. We were determined to administer that which had been neglected on the "Island"...

There was the flip side of the coin which was a group of freshly graduated Boots who had decided to keep a close watch on the individuals themselves, and administer appropriate punishment to any wayward individuals who might surface. Needless to say this had the potential for trouble! You simply don't have any room for a renegade group that has decided that the entire Corps had gone to hell in a hand-basket! Such an outfit is faintly reminiscent of the Dirty Harry movie, "Magnum Force" where a group of cops had decided to eliminate the scum of society since the courts were turning the bad guys loose on the street. Their hearts were in the right place, but such a group is generally bad ju-ju, and will tear a unit apart.

We inherited three of these self-appointed characters in Poppa Company that July and they were loaded for bear. I could see trouble brewing, as one of these clowns was one of my squad members, and his two henchmen were in the same platoon.

One of the young Boots assigned to my squad was a nice kid, but very poorly educated, and not overly quick on the uptake. As I recall, he had about an 8<sup>th</sup> Grade education. One morning at PT, this youngster fell out from the run and was immediately branded by the goon-squad as a slacker (it turns out that the poor kid actually had appendicitis, but had never been exposed to any such malady in his small hill town in Kentucky so was suffering in silence).

The chief trouble maker was a kid named Hunt who had flunked out of George Washington University, and had played football for them prior to his departure. The young Pfc. stood about 6' 1" tall and weighed in at about 210-pounds. When he left George Washington, he joined the Marines primarily to urinate-off his Daddy who happened to be an Army Bird Colonel. Since Hunt and his Old Man were at continual odds, Hunt figured that this was one way to jab a figurative stick in his Daddy's eye. Young Hunt was constantly lording it over those he considered his intellectual inferiors, and using his rather imposing bulk to bully the smaller kids. He rapidly became the most unpopular man in the platoon.

One night when we were camped on what we called "The Race Track" in those days, we formed for shelter tents, and pitched our shelter halves in the approved manner. As luck would have it, the unlettered lad from Kentucky was one of the smaller Marines, and hence was on the end of the assembled tentage. The drill manual of the time required the "odd man" to pitch a single shelter half on the end of the line.

About 2400 or so when all were grabbing some shuteye, the mighty Hunt and his two cohorts assembled and dragged the youngster out of his shelter half and literally beat hell out of him. To say this was an unfair fight is an understatement. I heard the commotion, and scrambled out to check on the ruckus. By the time I arrived, the kid was standing there with a bloody nose, not having a clue as to the cause of his unwarranted beating. His attackers of course had disappeared. I cleaned him up as best I could in the dark and told him we'd get things straightened out in the morning. I lay in my shelter half seething for the rest of the night knowing what had to have happened. Come the dawn, I went looking for Hunt.

Hunt and his two cohorts stood there with grins on their faces as if they had just saved the Marine Corps from a maggot beneath their contempt. To say I was hot didn't quite cover it! Now while nobody has ever accused me of being a skinny little kid (I stood about 5' 9" and went about 180-lbs, and was in reasonably good shape), I sure wasn't in that useless self-appointed platoon disciplinarian's league in terms of being an immediate physical threat. He had however not taken into account the adrenaline factor of one pissed-off Marine Corporal. I quietly told him that a repeat of such would wind up with him doing time in Portsmouth. He got in my face and made it clear that if I *THOUGHT* I could do anything about it, I was welcome to try. He got a bit louder than was necessary and started to draw a crowd. Since the entire platoon cordially hated this idiot, they were looking forward to a public brawl. After making my threats more pointed, he allowed as how he'd whip my fanny if I didn't have any stripes on my jacket. Letting my common sense get overridden by the heat of the moment, I took off my Dungaree Jacket and told him to give it a try.

Hunt was now in a position of having to put up or shut up, unfortunately, so was I! Being basically a cowardly lout, he demurred by saying that I'd just turn him in if he beat my fanny, and I replied that if I got my @\$\$ beat, I'd be too ashamed to turn him in! The die was cast and the platoon was getting into the spirit of things. We headed down the trail towards the obstacle course looking for a likely spot. Needless to say I was having second thoughts about the entire evolution. I looked behind me and the entire platoon was following – upppssss, too late to chicken out now!

Suddenly I felt the M-7 Grenade Launcher in my hip pocket used to launch smoke grenades and other such things. Hummm... those things weigh in at about a pound or more and have a round barrel that fits very nicely in the clenched fist! A plan began to form, Mrs.

Culver didn't raise any fools! I looked down the trail and saw a clearing coming up and figured Hunt would pick that place for our altercation. I reached casually back into my hip pocket and removed the launcher and positioned it in my right hand. By the time Hunt had started to turn, I was swinging from the deck. I hit that clown as hard as I possibly could and caught him square on the nose. Blood flew everywhere, and Hunt foolishly grabbed his ruined nose with both hands. Taking advantage of my momentary respite, I flipped the grenade launcher in such a manner as to grab it by the cylindrical barrel and hit him as hard as I could manage using the launcher as a blackjack. Hunt dropped like a rock.

Not wanting that gorilla to recover and whip my fanny, I took to kicking him smartly in the rib cage with my Boondockers attempting to break as many ribs as possible before he recovered. His two buddies came running over and attempted to pull me off of their "leader" so I simply jumped astride of the now unconscious idiot and was beating his head smartly on the deck using his ears as handles.

As sanity and reason began to return it suddenly occurred to me that I might have killed the worthless @\$\$hole! That of course would have been the ultimate disaster. We called the Corpsman and the Jeep Ambulance over and Hunt was loaded unceremoniously aboard, mercifully still breathing, albeit bubbling a bit of blood through his wrecked nose. Fortunately, it turned out that he simply had a broken nose, a concussion and some very sore ribs. The platoon was ecstatic and I breathed a sigh of relief.

Since it was Friday we caught the Cattle Cars back to Camp Geiger that afternoon. S/Sgt. Vermish, our platoon sergeant, was waiting for me! Uh Oh... Before I could say a word one of the kids (who had assembled to watch the fireworks), spoke up and said, S/Sgt. Vermish, you should have seen that idiot Hunt fall off the hand over hand bars on the obstacle course! Several more chimed in attesting to the veracity of their somewhat stretched version of the morning's activity. I got a public fanny chewing in front of the Platoon Office by Vermish telling me that if he ever heard of me taking the lads out to run the obstacle course without prior permission again, he'd PERSONALLY have my @\$\$! I could have sworn I saw the slightest hint of a smile playing around the corners of his mouth. I had been publicly chastised and that was the end of the story. Well, almost anyway. Hunt never returned to the platoon, and the young Kentucky lad had his appendicitis fixed and graduated from the course.

I made mental notes to myself to never allow my alligator mouth override my canary bird fanny again! In this day and time, I'd probably have done some serious time for my indiscretions, but those were different days and perhaps a different Corps, ...one that I sometimes miss greatly. Needless to say, I had no problems with discipline following Hunt's exhibition of his physical prowess, and the lads in the platoon were always most polite and differential to their bad@\$\$ Corporal. If they had only known!

How does the old saying go? "Improvise, adapt and overcome?" Heh, heh, heh...

## ROC

# Turning the Tables

## (An early lesson in Tactical Disinformation)

For whatever reason, my mind occasionally returns to yesteryear as they used to say on the old Lone Ranger radio program. Specifically, I am reminded of a tour at the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Training Regiment located at Camp Geiger some 48-years past.. Why? Heck, only Odin knows, but perhaps it was the lingering innocence of youth, and a last fling at having no responsibilities beyond that of a Marine Infantry Squad Leader. ...Or was it something greater?

I was a Corporal of Marines serving in a rather interesting capacity encompassing that of an ITR student, a Marine NCO, and a troop handler all rolled into one. This strange assignment was due to a change in the training policy of the Marines in 1956. Prior to this era, basic combat training had been conducted at Parris Island in conjunction with Boot Camp, and upon graduation you proceeded to your assigned unit, considered to be a fully trained Sea Soldier ready for whatever came along. Times they were a'changing however, and those at Headquarters Marine Corps decided that young Marines should spend more time on the basics at Recruit Training (drill, history, weapons, marksmanship, Uniform Code of Military Justice, and any basic military skills not covered above). Infantry Combat training was to be conducted separately at ITR following your initial introduction into the initial intricacies of becoming a fully trained "M1A1 Marine".

There were a number of old timers who had received recruit training prior to this new training edict, and in the interest of uniformity of experience and training techniques throughout the Corps, all those who had not yet achieved the rank of Staff NCO were considered fair game to be recycled through the Infantry Training Regiments on either coast, as time and assignment permitted. As a "sop" to the old timers, we were allowed to go through ITR in our current rank, and if above Pfc. (don't forget, they wouldn't have the rank of Lance Corporal for several years yet), you would be assigned as both a ranking member of the platoon (squad leader or perhaps platoon guide), and yet be used as a "troop handler" to move the younger and less experienced lads from point A to point B during the training cycle. Hopefully those who had missed any combat assault instruction in an earlier training evolution would soak up what they had missed along with any new techniques being proffered in the latest ITR Courses.

Upon reporting to ITR, I wound up as a squad leader in Poppa Company, then collocated with Foxtrot and several other Companies during our upcoming training cycle. It had been a few years since I had gone through such instruction as an assault on a fortified position, squad tactical formations, and of course we had several new rifle grenades since my earlier training. We also had courses on demolition that had not been available at Parris Island in the earlier training cycles. All in all, the instruction was a great refresher, and covered things that we had not been exposed to when the combat training was incorporated in Boot Camp.

Like all old timers (I wasn't *really* such an old timer, dating only back to 1953, but then everything is relative), we viewed the kids out of Parris Island as extremely wet behind the ears, but then I'm sure the older Marines used to look at us in the same way a couple of years before! That having been said, we got some real jewels who reported to Camp



Geiger that summer. At least one of these rocket-scientists was assigned to my squad for the July training cycle. He was more than willing, but not necessarily overly endowed with Einstein-like brain power. Simply put he was long on enthusiasm but a bit short on common sense. For purposes of identification, I'll refer to him as Private "Ding-Bat"...

The various Platoons and Companies were in a constant arm-wrestling contest for some sort of perceived tactical, military, or training supremacy. Company Guidons were stolen from the Mess Hall when no one was paying attention, and if a detected perpetrator was chased down, he would often receive an appropriate amount of (illegal) corporal punishment. It normally didn't amount to bloodshed, but it kept us on our toes. Essentially we were always trying to get "one-up" on our rivals. ...And so it was with Foxtrot Company and Poppa Company.

During the 1950s, we were working a 5 1/2 day week assuming we were not involved in a weekend training exercise or deployed. We would participate in whatever training was scheduled throughout the week, come back to Camp Geiger on Friday night, clean our gear, and fall in for Saturday Morning Inspection the next day. Assuming that you didn't fall through your grommet when answering questions, your footwear was appropriately shined, and you didn't screw up coming to "Inspection Arms" there was a very good chance that you would be given your liberty card and turned loose for weekend liberty.

Weekend liberty in Jacksonville, North Carolina in those halcyon days offered many diversions, a few of which still remain in my aging memory banks. If you wanted to go home appropriately adorned with a gungy Marine Corps Emblem, you could avail yourself of the services of the well known tattoo artist, Ace Harlan<sup>1</sup>; indulge your Italian cuisine cravings at "The Brooklyn Spaghetti House,"<sup>2</sup> or watch the latest John Wayne offering at the Iwo Jima Theater.

Those with a hankerin' for the seashore, could catch a Base Bus taking you out to Onslow Beach for a little sun and waves. Those with a desire to appear more salty than their contemporaries could take their dungarees<sup>3</sup> (most of us didn't call 'em Utilities until the 1960s), out to the beach, get them amply wet with the salt water and allow them to dry and get bleached in the sun while you frizzled your bod to get that seasoned campaigner look. Most of us youngsters still wore our uniforms on liberty and nobody thought you were strange for doing so. It was a simpler, more patriotic, more gentle, and perhaps a more gentlemanly time. I often think back on those days and smile.

After several weeks of relatively uneventful campaigning, the rivalry between the companies was seemingly calm with no overt interaction between the companies. This was just a lull in the constantly brewing squall however, and things were rapidly coming to a head. We had just come in from a constant week in the field and Private Ding-Bat came to me with an exceptionally sneaky look on his face.

"Hey Corporal," said Private Ding-Bat, "I've got a way of getting one over on Foxtrot Company!"

I was only half listening, as this clown always had something up his sleeve. Usually Ding-Bat's schemes were not well thought out, and almost always held the elements of a disaster in the making.

“Well, what’cha’ got in mind Ding-Bat,” I said, busily stowing my gear in my wall locker.

“I smuggled a smoke grenade out of the field,” he said waiting to be patted on the posterior for his clandestine work.

As a note, bringing ordnance back out of the field wasn’t the big deal it would be in this current day and age. If the “filched item” wasn’t in the nature of high explosives or live ammunition, no one kept strict track of the large stacks of ordnance staged in piles at the training sites. We had no internal terrorist threats, and a missing smoke grenade would probably never have been noticed. Unless...

My devious young trooper regaled me with his latest scheme.

“Well Corporal, I figure we can throw it over into Foxtrot Company’s area tonight and have some fun and ruffle their feathers a bit!” the little miscreant said with a conspiratorial grin!

I must admit, I was tempted as our company rivalry ran deep following Foxtrot’s last Guidon snatching episode in the mess hall! Upon further consideration, I had a brilliant flash!

“Forget it Ding-Bat I said,” with a grin on my face, “give me that thing, I’ve got a better idea!”

“What ya’ wanna’ do?” he said, “burn their barracks down?”

“No but almost as good,” I replied, “and they won’t even see it coming! ...now give me that damned grenade!”

Ding-Bat kept pestering me, but I was pretty certain that if he didn’t know what I had in mind, he wouldn’t have enough information to shoot his mouth off until after the mission was accomplished.

As darkness fell and gentle sounds of snoring were heard from our adversaries snoozing in Foxtrot’s barracks, I figured it was time to make our move! I snuck over into Foxtrot’s area, hid in the drainage ditch and waited. When all the sentries seemed to have vaporized for the moment, I got up on one knee and gave our purloined grenade an arcing trajectory over into OUR (Poppa Company’s) area. Making sure no one was watching, and noting the sentries were still nowhere to be seen, I gently but hastily slithered out of the trench and back into our own lines.

I then went to the Duty NCO and reported that I had seen a smoke grenade come flying into our area from the direction of Foxtrot’s enclave. The die (in this case, the grenade) was cast! Very shortly, MP vehicles began to appear on the scene of the dastardly deed, while the yellow smoke was still wafting on the summer air. The OD was outraged, and I took pains to explain that I hadn’t actually **seen** who threw it, but it had definitely come from Foxtrot’s area (I of course, could keep an absolutely straight face, since I had thrown the darned thing from their area!).

The OD, just knowing he had a major incident on his hands, sent MPs into the barracks to hold reveille on the sleeping Marines and then had Foxtrot Company fall out on the company street. Since no one was immediately suspected of, nor confessed to the crime, all hands from Foxtrot were required to bring their footlockers out into the street while the guard force searched the wall lockers. A personal inspection of all the footlockers lasted well into the wee hours of the morning, and it was an exhausted crew still attired in their skivvy shorts (we all wore boxer shorts in those days), who were finally allowed to return to their racks after no additional ordnance was found. An entire week in the field preceding the late night inspection had insured that everyone was dead tired... Exceedingly salty language (some might even say obscene) was the order of the day (actually **night**) and of course, a curious Poppa Company looked on the proceedings with totally innocent, if somewhat outraged, looks on our faces.

Liberty was sweet that weekend, knowing our arch rivals were in lockdown in the company area until or unless someone admitted to having perpetrated the outrage. Since nobody had asked me, I didn't feel obligated to fess up. This was much better than stealing Foxtrot's Guidon, and of course, they never caught on. Young Private Ding-Bat had been threatened with summary castration if he ran his mouth! The last I heard they were still looking for the idiotic blighter who tossed a smoke grenade into the Poppa Company area! We of course, fully agreed! What sort of scalawag would do such a thing? The guy should have been horsewhipped or worse! Heh, heh, heh...

It was that weekend long ago that I learned the technique of tactical disinformation, and later was able to use it while plying my trade in the intelligence community. Hopefully the clowns in Foxtrot had learned their lesson, as had young Private Ding-Bat who had been hell bent on throwing the thing **into** our arch rival's area.

Out of pure curiosity, I've often wondered who flew the airliners into the Twin Trade Towers back on 911? I can't be the first (or last) guy to have come up with such a scheme, or can I? Hummm... The possibilities boggle the imagination – damn, maybe I'm just getting old, cantankerous and suspicious? On the other hand...

Semper Fi,

## Dick

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Ace Harlan ran a famous (throughout the Corps at any rate) establishment called "*Ace Harlan's Gung Ho Tattoo Studio*" – many a young Marine of the era sported some of Ace's artwork.

<sup>2</sup> The Brooklyn Spaghetti House was still in business as of at least 1989.

<sup>3</sup> The salty dungaree routine did not survive the infamous changeover from the herringbone material to the dark green sateen-style worn by the Army. This changeover was mandated by Robert S. McNamara in the early 1960s in the interest of service uniformity and cost of acquisition. No matter what you did to those damned things, you still looked like a dog-face. Only a miracle prevented us from having to get rid of our khaki belts and having to go to the Army black belt. We did lose our old and very comfortable Marine Corps Last (rough-out) boots going to the Army (Munson) Last type. In defense of the Army style boots however, they were easier to shine, and it was a case of one size fits all – you could do an about face in the things and never have your boots move.

# Lance Corporal Steegle

It was late January of 1966 and A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion had just successfully finished the Army's Jungle Operations Course at Ft. Sherman in the Panama Canal Zone. We were dutifully returning to Camp Lejeune on a C-130 dispatched to remove us from the jungle environs to more northern climes of our base, laughingly referred to as "Swamp Lagoon," North Carolina. Regardless of our somewhat irreverent reference to our home port, we were glad to be getting home.

The course had been comprehensive and informative, and the troops had enjoyed themselves with a routine that wasn't strictly geared to area maintenance as often appeared to be our principal concern at Camp Lejeune. The course was structured to jungle operations, and unlike the earlier peacetime versions of the course, the current curriculum did not provide for any satisfying after hours liberty. Needless to say, the lads were beat. We had gotten one minor exposure to the civilian community just prior to departure, and the youngsters had taken full advantage of their "parole" by hitting the local shops for souvenirs to take home some reminders of their "snake eating" and jungle "escape and evasion ops". In short, they, as most young Marines, felt that they had just earned one more "swaggering right"... This mental attitude tended to influence their choice of Panamanian keepsakes. It would seem that one item available with very few restrictions, was a selection of quite "gungy" appearing, and fully operational switchblade knives, for extremely attractive prices. Needless to say, there were very few who didn't avail themselves of such a macho piece of gear.

Now the average individual that I had taken to Panama was *not* a gang oriented knife fighter, but the fact that purchasing and ownership restrictions on such items (switchblade knives) stateside, tended to make their purchases seem all the more desirable. Kids are like that, doncha' know? Ah well, it would seem that we had a very well (if somewhat illegally) armed contingent upon our return. Never having been a switch-blade aficionado, I had no idea that such items were being purveyed in the local ville, and worse yet being imported by our returning Marines. It was only through L/Cpl. Steegle's wild ride back to Camp Lejeune from his weekend liberty following our Panama adventure, that I learned of the widespread ownership of the damned things.

Now Lance Corporal Steegle was a nice enough lad, but hardly an imposing one. He was probably 5' 6" tall, and may have topped 135-lbs wearing a pack and appropriate 782 gear. He had been one of the individuals who had harangued the First Sergeant incessantly until he was one of the group selected from the Battalion to attend our snake-eating evolution. My first impression of the youngster was not one to give me great confidence in his aggressive "Marine-Like" nature, but you couldn't fault his enthusiasm. Along with Steegle's rather diminutive stature, was a slight "lisp" that made him pronounce his own name as "*Theegle*". Appearances and first impressions however, are sometimes misleading, and so it was in the case of our highly motivated, if somewhat diminutive Lance Corporal.

As related elsewhere, the customs officer who met our aircraft returning out of the Panamanian jungles on the Saturday night of our return had been through if nothing else. He had managed to delay the company's return to our battalion area in Montford Point until almost midnight. The kids, with the lone exception of a quick trip to the native "thieves market" in the Canal Zone, had been deprived of liberty for almost a full month. Needless to

say they were anxious to either quaff a few brews, go on an extended liberty, or for the married folks, to get back to their families.

I have always trusted the troops (usually with great success) to occasionally pull a liberty that exceeded the official geographical boundaries of approved “liberty limits” with the proviso that as long as they were back to the company (or battalion) area in time for reveille on Monday Morning, I wasn’t going to ask any embarrassing questions. With very few exceptions, I was never disappointed in or with the kids. I found early on, that if you treat them well, treat them like Marines instead of high school kids, and make it plain that it’s *YOUR* (in this case my) fanny on the line, they will usually take care of you and magically appear at the appointed place at the appointed time.

It is and always has been a two way street. It was using this criterion that I told my returning jungle fighters to go have a great liberty, but be prepared to work their fannies off when they got back on Monday morning. I gave the little tools my home phone number and told them to give me a call (day or night) if they were going to legitimately miss Monday morning muster. I made it plain that “I” would be the deciding factor on whether or not it *WAS* legitimate, not them. I also pointed out that I too had been a “troop” and knew all the dodges, and was very seldom bamboozled by the wily Pfc! Everybody grinned and departed for Gawd knows where. All hands, as expected, reported back on time. However...

I appeared fairly early on Monday morning to find the Company Office occupied with an entirely new contingent of individuals, many of them wearing suits and ties. Uppssss... Now what?

“First Sergeant, what do we have here, the FBI?” I said, in a joking manner.

“You’re closer than you think Skipper!, most of these gentlemen are from the ONI!”

For you newcomers, the ONI is the predecessor of the current Naval Investigative Service (NIS), and essentially amounted to the Navy’s version of the FBI. One of the ONI gentlemen, Agent Tom Stevenson, eventually became my next door neighbor in Northwoods, a housing area contingent to Camp Lejeune/Jacksonville, North Carolina. This however was my first introduction to Tom, and it was not a one that called for breaking out the coffee and cookies. First Sergeant Martin informed me that Lance Corporal Steegle was being accused of kidnapping a rather large and disheveled civilian being roughly surrounded by the ONI types.

“Oh my yeth,” the large one lisped, “it wath just horrible!”

Something had to be wrong, this guy would have made three of Steegle, and had every appearance of being a flaming faggot judging by his mannerisms and speech! While Steegle and his accuser had matching “lisps” there is where any comparison ended. Steegle was anything but limp-wristed.

“What did Steegle have to say?” I asked.

“Don’t have a clue said the First Sergeant, these guys just got here a minute ago!”

“Just a second,” I said, let *ME* go get him! “I assume he’s in the Barracks!”

"I would imagine so Captain, he signed in well before reveille, and this guy (pointing at Steegle's accuser) just showed up a couple of minutes ago with the ONI and the FBI"

"Mr. Stevenson, at the risk of "blowing" your investigation (using what could have been a horrible pun), I wanna' hear what our miniature Jungle Fighter has to say about this before he's confronted by what's gonna' be a shock to his psyche. I rather imagine that I'll get more meaningful answers before you guys start putting the thumb screws to him!"

"Captain, we don't use thumb screws anymore Tom said with a slight grin (indicating a sense of humor), but yeah, go get me a virgin explanation so we can put this thing to rest. This guy's story doesn't make too much sense he said indicating Steegle's accuser."

"Right, will do, I'll be right back," I said heading for the barracks.

I found Steegle putting away his gear from his liberty, and joking with his buddies without a seeming care in the world. Hardly the demeanor of a guy who had just kidnapped a civilian.

"Hey Steegle, what's this about you kidnapping Civilians?" I asked in a slightly humorous tone of voice.

"Thir, I didn't kidnap that SOB, he volunteered to bring me back to the base on hith own. I had him bring me back to the barracks! lth that faggot complaining to thumone?"

"Well, Steegle, I have an office full of ONI Agents and at least one FBI agent claiming you kidnapped that oversized oaf! What gives?"

"Well Thir, it wath like this. I wath running a little late and hitchhiking out on Interstate 95 juth outside of Richmond looking for a ride going thouth. Thith big Cadillac pullth over and the guy told me to get in. I did, and everything went fine for about 30-minuthets until we were not too far from Petersburg. He asth me where I was going. I told him Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and he thead he wasn't going that far, but he'd take me ath far ath he could. About 15-minutes later, he reached over and put hith hand on my knee real friendly like and indicated that I should get closer to him. Thir, I'm not into that thuff, and I told him to keep hith hands to himself and moved way over into the corner of the passenger theat right next to the door, trying to get as far away from that faggot ath I could. He continued to thlide over further, and I pulled out my thwitch-blade, backed further into the corner and told him to leave me alone. He immediately told me to thettle down and he'd take me all the way back to my basth. Since I wath running late, I decided to let him take me anywhere he wanted. But honeth Skipper, I didn't tell him I'd cut him if he didn't, he juth volunteered!," said Steegle with a totally innocent look on his face!

Uppsss... That explained a lot, and although I had my reservations about just HOW innocent Steegle really was, I honestly don't think Steegle told him to take him back to Camp Lejeune or he'd cut his gizzard out. I do think the faggot had a rather vivid imagination, fueled somewhat with some of Steegle's stories of his daring-do in the jungle. Human nature and conjured up visions of self preservation no doubt had a large hand in the ensuing trip back to Steegle's digs. It wouldn't have been a very smart maneuver on Steegle's part to have that homosexual clown take him back to the front of his very own barracks. I began to plan Steegle's defense.

I told Steegle to continue to square away his gear, but not to move two millimeters out of the area. I wanted to find him on demand when I finished my story to the ONI and FBI Agents.

I relayed Steegle's story to the awaiting Agents, perhaps embellishing the faggot's overt attempts to impose his will on an innocent and very small Marine of my command. The faggot of course looked outraged and threatened to go to the Commanding General with his story. Giving him a minute to think about his course of action, I allowed as how it was obviously going to make the front page of all the papers after I had called the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, and the Local Jacksonville fish wrapper. Since open displays of homosexual behavior were frowned upon by virtually the entire straight community in the mid 1960s, I let this guy envision his roll in kidnapping a young impressionable Marine who was simply defending himself from a sexual deviate!

"I am *NOT* a thexual deviate!" the accuser protested.

"Well maybe not, but it's sure gonna' look that way in the papers! The readers aren't that stupid and you can explain to your boss exactly **WHAT** you were trying to do to a 135-pound Marine simply trying to get back to his barracks on time! Perhaps it'll be interpreted as getting caught with your hand in the cookie jar!"

Tom Stevenson was having great difficulty suppressing his personal mirth at this sudden reversal in the overall turn of events. Suddenly the accuser was the accused, and had much more to explain to his employers and neighbors than he would have gained in the self satisfaction of taking revenge on one small Marine who had been put in a position of having to defend his sexual honor from a guy roughly three times his size. At Tom's direction, I sent for Lance Corporal Steegle who had suddenly become the hero instead of the villain!

Our oversized corksocker had mulled over his options and decided to drop the entire accusation and simply head for home. This was underlined in spades as Steegle made his appearance.

"Thath's him Skipper, heth the one who tried to thaduce me! He put hith hand on my knee and all I could do was get over as far ath I could in the theat and keep him from touching me with by pulling out my knife! I was thimply defending my thelf!"

Our accuser beat a hasty retreat vowing to forget the whole thing as long as we didn't turn in any reports or call the papers. A deal was hastily sealed and Steegle's honor was vindicated! Sometimes life is good!

Tom and I got to be good friends in the next year or so after he bought the house next to mine, and we often got a huge laugh at the look on the "kidnapper's" face when he was verbally backed up against the wall.

I held a "voluntary" shakedown of my Panamanian Raiders, and confiscated their quasi-illegal switch blade knives, allowing them to box them up and send them home if they'd promise not to bring them back to Montford Point, or threatened any deviates who offered them rides back to the barracks.

Steeple got his wish and was sent to Vietnam, and apparently survived, as for several years following the kidnapping incident, I got a personal Easter Card from the little miscreant. Steeple was a man who appreciated Commanding Officers who got his tail feathers out of a wringer. I always wondered if Steeple took his switch blade to RVN to subdue any deviant Viet Cong! Heh, heh, heh...

The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" mentality had not yet permeated the military forces in those far off times! ...Thank goodness! Still although it has been many years ago, when I am contemplating a Marine Corps now long gone, I can still hear Lance Corporal Steeple's vehement protest.

"But thir, I'm innothent!" ...And in a way, he was absolutely right.

If "Odin" has a sense of humor, Steeple is now a successful businessman who has many memories of his jungle adventures and his subsequent kidnapping in a kinder more gentle time. Today, Steeple, First Sergeant Martin, Tom Stevenson, and of course yours truly would be in a world of hurt defending our actions to the ACLU and "The United Corksockers Union" in today's screwed up world.

Semper Fi,

**Dick**



## Alright Private Figowitz, on your knees<sup>1</sup>!

It was May of 1970, and the war in Vietnam was still a marvelous way of getting yourself killed. In the Marine Corps we were taking some draftees, but only reluctantly. None the less, they were a fact of life and almost to a man these gents were attempting to find ways to avoid service in the rice paddies half way across the world. We had at least one individual who had chosen to shoot himself in the hand while involved in a familiarization course on the M16. This rocket scientist had placed his hand over the muzzle (with the butt resting on the deck) while in the kneeling position and quite “accidentally” pulling the trigger with his other hand. He knew full well that the rifle had a round in the chamber as he had placed it there himself. While on the table in the sickbay, he was complaining to the Doctor that it hurt worse than anything he had ever had happen to him. The Doctor, a combat veteran, was not amused! Exactly what did you *THINK* it was going to feel like you idiot? Shut up and hold still while I pour some more antiseptic in the wound.

“Hey Doctor, don’t you have something to kill the pain?” the clown complained.

“Somewhere around here, but for the life of me, I can’t seem to find it,” the Doc said, grinning slightly. “At any rate lad, this should be an excellent object lesson to keep your head down when you get to Vietnam!”

“Doc, you mean that this isn’t going to keep me from going to Vietnam?”

“Nope, I can virtually guarantee you that I can fix it up like new!”

“Gawd Doc, can’t you give me something to keep it from hurting so much?”

“Not until I can find my pain medication, and as busy as I am, it may be several hours,” said the Doctor smiling to himself!

As the war was winding down in Southeast Asia, the young draftees<sup>2</sup> were looking for virtually any excuse to stay out of harm’s way. Quite another approach was one that a Doctor couldn’t fix... Homosexuality! In 1970, being a sexual deviate was an iron clad guarantee to avoid service in the Marine Corps; they simply didn’t put up with such behavior! Normally the shame of admitting a predilection to doing unnatural things to a fellow Marines’ allegorical male sexual appendage, or being a “fudge packer”<sup>3</sup> was so shameful that no normal human being would willing to admit to such deviant conduct... All but a few that is!

In the Spring of 1970 I was the Operations Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Training Regiment, at that time located at Stone Bay, Camp Lejeune, not too far from the Base Rifle Range facility. Our Battalion Commander was an old time Mustang Lieutenant Colonel named Vic Deschuttyner who had come up the hard way... Vic had been a machine gunner in China following WWII, but had taken enough time off to garner a college degree along the way. He had always been known as a hard charger, and if you didn’t want to do some serious soldiering, you’d better find a different outfit. Vic had stepped on a land mine in Vietnam causing the loss of a foot. They tried to retire him, but he strenuously resisted and the Corps relented and allowed him to stay on active duty. They had put him back together, assigned him as the Commanding Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 1<sup>st</sup> ITR. Every noon time, the Colonel and his dog, Tripoli went for a 3-mile run,

peg leg and all. Vic Deschutyner was one tough hombre. Needless to say, he was not overly sympatric to those attempting to avoid duty in a combat zone.

For about a two week period, both the Colonel and the XO were on TAD<sup>4</sup>, leaving "watash"<sup>5</sup> to run the Battalion. We were blessed with good NCOs and it was not exactly an onerous task, and except for a few instances, the Battalion simply ran itself as long as someone was handy to sign papers and make a few decisions that weren't exactly earth shaking. My S-3 Shop was running well, and each company was running independently according to the training schedule. I was enjoying myself greatly.

One morning the Battalion Sergeant Major stuck his head in the door and said, "Hey Major, I think we have a problem!" A problem? Interesting, wonder what could need the attention of an acting CO this early in the morning?

"No problem Sergeant Major, what 'ya got that needs solving?" I asked jokingly.

"Sir Private Figowitz has decided that he is a homosexual!"

"Oh really? He's just *NOW* figuring this out? Wonder what took him so long?"

"Well sir, I don't know for sure, but I'd say that it's a definite case of Vietnam'itis'!"

"Hummm... well, go get the lad and bring him into the Colonel's office, I can fix this in no time!"

"Major, what in the heck do you have in mind?" He asked somewhat suspiciously.

"Don't worry, I have this one figured," I said confidently.

A worried look came across the Sergeant Major's face, but he went to fetch Figowitz.

A somewhat apprehensive Figowitz came to attention in front of the Colonel's desk.

"Well Figowitz, you've come to the conclusion that you are a homosexual, is that right?"

"Yes sir, I've been considering this for a long time and I've decided that I just have to face it!"

"I can see how that would be a hard decision to make alright, just who is your homosexual partner?"

"Partner sir?"

"Yes Figowitz, unless you are some sort of contortionist, I don't see how you could do this on an individual basis! You simply have to have a homosexual partner, now who is it?"

Figowitz hung his head and admitted that Private Schmaltz was the object of his affection.

"Sergeant Major, go get Private Schmaltz and bring him in here!"

A look of understanding was starting to cross the Sergeant Major's face.

"Aye, aye sir, I'll have Private Schmaltz in here shortly!"

Schmaltz entered the office with a definite look of apprehension on his face, but it was pretty clear from the glances that were exchanged between Figowitz and Schmaltz that this was something that they had been rehearsing.

"Schmaltz, is this your homosexual lover?" I asked with an innocent look on my face.

Schmaltz was obviously nervous and was mentally dragging his toe in the dirt.

"Ah, yes sir, I think I'm in love with Private Figowitz!"

"Ah Huh! Well never being one to interfere with true love, I won't be the one to stand in your way! OK you guys, which one of you does which, with what and to who?" I asked.

"Sir?" Figowitz said, "what do you mean?"

"I mean Figowitz, who is the *'blower'* and who is the *'blowee'*?"

"Sir, I don't believe I know what you mean," said Figowitz (obviously the 'mouthpiece of the two – no pun intended of course).

"You know exactly what I mean Figowitz, don't play stupid on me here!"

"Well sir, sometimes it's one, and sometimes the other," said Figowitz exhibiting definite signs of regret for having gotten involved in the whole situation.

"Oh, so it doesn't make any difference?" I said.

"Ah, no sir, not really," said Figowitz.

"Ok, let's get with it – on your knees Figowitz!"

"Sir?" said an unbelieving Figowitz with a look of absolute horror coming across his face.

"And you Schmaltz, unzip your fly!"

"Unzip my fly?" said Schmaltz with an unbelieving look!

"Alright you two, let's get with it, I don't have all day!"

The Sergeant Major is looking at me as if I had taken leave of my senses, and a slight bead of sweat seemed to be forming on his brow. He was attempting to convey a "oh Jesus Christ, we can't do this Major" attitude. I smiled at the Sergeant Major and continued the discussion with the two miscreants.

"Alright Figowitz, what's the holdup? I thought you were an expert on this drill?"

Figowitz appeared to be about to give birth to a litter of kittens. He was visibly sweating, and was looking for a way out of his ill considered scam. These two idiots were anything but homosexuals, but it had seemed to be an excellent method of avoiding hazardous duty with no one being the wiser. After all, you could always laugh and tell the folks back home how you had trick-f---ed the Marines into discharging you and not have to go war. Putting on a demonstration was not something either Figowitz or Schmaltz had figured on. I was giving them no slack and the Sergeant Major was beginning to relax and it was obvious than neither of these roaring @\$\$holes was about to visually demonstrate their declared perversion.

“Schmaltz, perhaps you’d rather get on *YOUR* knees and allow Figowitz to wrap HIS soup-coolers around *your* schwantz<sup>6</sup>? If that’s the case, by all means, be my guest, I really don’t give a damn who is the ‘blowee’ and who is the ‘blower’! Either way, it’ll get you two out of the Marines like a flash of light! ...*But* if you two think I’m gonna’ take your word for being corksockers<sup>7</sup>, you are sadly mistaken! Now either assume the relative positions or come to attention and admit you are some lying sacks of \$hi+! What’ll it be?”

Two obviously greatly relieved Marines came to attention, and I could detect a definite look of relief on the Sergeant Major’s countenance. He had envisioned a long term in Portsmouth<sup>8</sup> contemplating his idiocy for bringing this problem up to an obviously deranged Major of Marines. Whew...

Figowitz was the first to speak.

“Major, you’re right, we’re not homosexuals. I do have one question however, how’d you know we wouldn’t perform here in the office?”

“Call it an educated hunch Figowitz, and if you had, I’d have had you two clowns on your way home before the story got out! The Colonel would have thought it was hilarious, and all the witnesses would be taken care of. I sure as hell wouldn’t tell, nor I suspect would the Sergeant Major, and you two would be long gone! It was a win-win situation. If this story gets back to the troops, I’ll bet BIG bucks that we don’t have any repeat performances!”

Two very relieved “pseudo sexual deviates” departed the Colonel’s office post haste. I headed back to my office and I suspect if the Sergeant Major had access to a bottle of hooch, he went back to his office and took a very long swig! Who’d have thought he had a certified maniac as the acting Battalion Commander. Me? I sat back in the chair, and smiled. Sometimes life is good!

Semper Fi,

**ROC**

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> This was written before being a practicing homosexual was acceptable to the American public. Barney Frank (D-Ma) had not come out of the closet, and Sharon Stone was not yet bemoaning not being allowed to plant a Lesbian Kiss on the Cat Woman. Massachusetts was not permitting same-sex marriages, and referring to an individual’s deviant sexual predilection in a derogatory manner was not yet considered a hate crime! Disney Land was not holding “Gay Pride Day” and there was no Ellen ‘Degenerate’ Show on TV, nor A Queer Eye for the Straight Guys! Dear Allah what are we coming to?

<sup>2</sup> In all fairness, some of our draftees turned out to be excellent Marines, but if you were going to bet...? Who wants to be the last man killed in a war we were not being allowed to win, most especially when you weren’t a volunteer! The old time professionals simply took it in stride, because as the old saying goes, “it was the only war we had!”

<sup>3</sup> “Fudge Packer” is an alternative version of male homosexual perversion that has nothing to do with the use of the mouth. Common decency prevents me from giving a more graphic description.

<sup>4</sup> TAD is the Marine Corps term for “Temporary Additional Duty” The Army and Air Force calls this TDY.

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<sup>5</sup> Watash is a term taken from service in the Far East indicating an individual. Watash when used in a sentence means “I” or “me”.

<sup>6</sup> Schwantz is a German term for an item of the male anatomy.

<sup>7</sup> Corksocker is an obvious misspelling for the sake of decency.

<sup>8</sup> Portsmouth was the old Naval Prison then located in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It was eventually closed and all military prisoners are now sent to the military (not Federal) prison located in Leavenworth, Kansas. Individuals garnering long prison terms however, are often transferred to the Federal Prison system. Portsmouth was not noted for its country club atmosphere.

## **A QUICK (AND ROUGH) HISTORY OF THE MARINE CORPS PARACHUTE UNITS**

OK you clowns, grab a can of “Cs” use your sterno cans for heat, and smoke ‘em if you’ve got ‘em! I’ll try to clarify a few things for you youngsters.

While it’s true the Corps doesn’t have any “Paramarines”, they do (and have had) parachute capable units dating from the formation of “Test Unit One” back about 1954. The Parachute and Raider Battalions of WWII had been disbanded about 1944 when it became obvious that there was probably not going to be an opportunity to use any highly specialized units in the Pacific Theater of Operations. The former members of the units were disbursed into several straight-leg infantry outfits and fought with great distinction throughout the remainder of the war. Even Ira Hays of the flag raisers on Iwo Jima had been in the Parachute units (as I recall they used to call him “Chief Falling Cloud” or some such).

During the “great Armed Forces Reorganization of 1947” they tried to give the Marine Corps the mission of furnishing the parachutists, but the individuals fighting for the Corps’ very existence wisely passed on the airborne, and decided to sell Congress on their demonstrated expertise, that of conducting Amphibious Operations. In retrospect, it was a wise decision, and probably saved the Corps’ bacon in the great armed forces unification effort in the wake of a nation wishing to wash their hands of the military following what they considered to be the final great war (little did they know!).

All that having been said, the Corps suddenly wound up with a Parachute Qualified Company, “The First Force Reconnaissance Company” working directly for FMF Pac, albeit hanging their hats at Camp Del Mar (Pendleton) and administratively attached to Headquarters Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. This little evolution occurred in the 1957 time-frame. The concept seemed to be going well so they split off a fairly good chunk of 1<sup>st</sup> Force (along with Major [selectee] P.X. Kelly) and sent it back to Camp Lejeune to form the 2<sup>nd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company.

The Company(s) consisted of roughly 14 officers and 147 enlisted and had a Major for a Company Commander, a Captain for an XO, Ops Officer, and Intelligence Officer and a Captain for a Pathfinder Platoon Commander. As originally set up the Company consisted of:

- 1) A Parachute Reconnaissance Platoon (usually called Para Recon)
- 2) An Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoon (usually called Amphib Recon)
- 3) A Parachute Pathfinder Platoon

- 4) Various sections (Admin, S-3, S-2, Parachute Packing Unit [usually hanging their covers in a place called the “para-loft”], Radio Section, Medical Section and Supply)

As the situation worked out the kinks, several things sorta’ evened themselves out. Originally the Amphib Platoon was **NOT** parachute qualified, and this engendered a certain amount of natural resentment, since these Para-Recon guys were eligible for jump pay, whereas the Scuba Qualified gents didn’t even have the silver diving bubble to wear (that came later), and drew no pay for hazarding their fannies underwater in what was probably a more dangerous occupation than jumping out of airplanes. Jump pay was the munificent sum of \$55/month for enlisted members and a whopping \$110/month for officers. Don’t laugh, a fresh caught 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant (with no longevity) drew only \$222.22/month and a Private was still drawing less than \$80/month! Finally about 1959 they combined the Amphib Recon Platoon and the Para Recon Platoon (cross training all hands) to form simply “The Recon Platoons”, and they dropped the title of “Parachute” Pathfinder Platoon to simply “The Pathfinder Platoon”...

There were no officers in the company below the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, and most of the enlisted folks were NCOs with a fair amount of prior service within their MOS. The Hospital Corpsmen were Parachute Qualified, as were the Communicators and the Parachute Stuffers. As a side note, some of the Navy Hospital Corpsmen got their jump wings from the Navy at the LTA (Lighter than Air) facility at Lakehurst N.J. (same place the Hindenburg crashed and burned) – the Navy still had blimps in the early 1960s believe it or not!

In the 50s and early 60s you were **NOT** allowed to attend Airborne School (in the Marine Corps) unless you were assigned to a unit having jump billets, and were personally assigned to such a billet (an occasional exception was made for General’s Aides and political paybacks, but they were few and far between). Only “X” number of official “jump billets” were available and it often took a number of months to work your way to Ft. Benning. I (for instance) arrived in late 1959 and didn’t go to Jump School until August 1960.

Aside from the Force Recon Jump Billets, the only others within the Corps allowed to attend Jump School and draw jump pay were the Air Delivery Outfits (they got to attend as most of their job was packing parachutes for air drops). When ANGLICO was formed, they too occupied genuine jump billets.

After it became obvious that the Force Recon concept was viable, at least two Reserve Force Reconnaissance Companies were formed, 3<sup>rd</sup> Force in Mobile, Alabama and 5<sup>th</sup> Force in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Once you were parachute qualified you could request “permissive jump orders” even after you had left the company(s) to keep current, but drew no pay for your efforts, but it was a way to keep your hand in.

The Marines in the old days were **only** allowed to wear the basic silver jump wings, whereas the Army could qualify for “Senior Jump Wings” with a “Star” on top of the Parachute, after 35-jumps (don’t hold my feet to the fire on the exact amount), and “Master Jump Wings” after 65-jumps (a star with a wreath on top of the canopy). In the Corps you could have 1000-jumps and still only wear the basic wings unless you had transferred from the Army and came with the Senior or Master Jump Wings as awarded by your former service.

In 1962 (it may have been early 1963) the Corps decided to come up with their own “advanced wings” to indicate more “time in the blast” as the saying went. They came out with the now familiar Gold Jump Wings (Officially called the Navy/Marine Corps Jump Wings). Unfortunately whoever came up with the idea didn’t make ‘em truly worthwhile, as all you had to do was complete an additional 10-jumps back with your Marine Corps (or Navy) unit – hardly indicative of extreme parachute expertise! Also in the mid-60s they lifted the requirement that you had to be filling a “jump billet” to attend Airborne School. The Army turned loose a relatively large quantity of jump quotas over to the Corps and everybody with a friend in an S-3 Shop got to go to Benning.

Now that they had the coveted Parachute Wings, the newly anointed jumpers went straight back to the Division (or to whatever unit they were assigned) and immediately put in for permissive jump orders to get in their obligatory 10 additional jumps so they could trade their silver wings for gold. One big problem! The regulations specified that you had to be assigned to a jump unit and filling a jump billet to qualify for the gold wings no matter HOW many jumps you made! For a number of years, virtually the entire Corps ignored the regulations and changed their silver wings for gold. Eventually some of the old timers got tired of “joe staff-puke mope” bumming an additional 10 permissive jumps and wearing the same wings as the old time Reconnaissance or Anglico troops! Things got ugly for awhile, and eventually most of the “pseudo-tactical jumpers” had to take off their gold wings, but it took a number of years. There were a number of red faces when the “wing change” was made mandatory!

There were still a few of the old time WWII Parachute Troops on active duty when the Companies were started, and one of our Company Commanders was a Major McAllister who had been a Staff Sergeant in the Parachute Battalion when it was started in 1941 (a rather salty gentleman I might add!).

When I was the S-3 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion (as a Captain no less) in 1966 I began to get jump quotas in that I could assign almost at will. One of the gents I sent was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Skip Hartnett, my old XO who had been drooling over my gold wings since we first met. I inadvertently shot myself in the foot with that one however, as in the Spring of 1966 they decided to for an active duty 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance (to train with 2<sup>nd</sup> Force over at Geiger) and I lost a most able assistant. I volunteered to help train the new guys in their parachute operations (jumpmaster training, etc.) during my off duty hours (which usually meant I got in a bunch of night jumps). One of their new Lieutenants named John Sheeble (while training as a jumpmaster) put me out over the Camp Lejeune water tower thinking the light was supposedly on the DZ! Egad... (Sheeble is now a rather well-to-do and highly paid political lobbyist in Tallahassee, Fla.) - The entire stick wound up in the trees except for John who wound up on the road and wondered why we were all hacking our canopies out of the pines!

While in the Corps we jumped almost every imaginable aircraft! We jumped C-123s at Benning (like those in the movie Air America), R4-Ds (later redesignated C-47s, al la Army designation), C119s (Flying Box Cars), H-19 Choppers (the Army Flying Banana), HUS Helicopters (later renamed UH-34D), CH-46 Helicopters, CH-53 Helicopters, the GV (later renamed the C-130), the Beaver, and even the A3-D jet exiting through a hatch in the belly for free falls (we were doing free-falls for clandestine entry techniques before the Army was calling ‘em HALO). For tactical Pathfinder Team delivery, our usual aircraft was the TF-1 which could carrier launch and carry a fully equipped 10-man pathfinder team.



## Initially you could acquire your jump wings from:

- 1) An officially designated Army Airborne School (courses varied from 3-4 weeks and required 5 satisfactory jumps including one "mass exit"). Usually this was done at Ft. Benning, but some graduated from Ft. Bragg.
- 2) **Make ONE Combat jump!** (Supposedly over 1/2 of the troops dropped into Normandy with the 101<sup>st</sup> and the 82<sup>nd</sup> had never jumped before (\$hitty weather in England before the jump prohibited the newly trained paratroopers from finishing the jump portion of their training)! This provision is still on the books last time I looked! – I had one Sergeant Major with a set of jump wings who had parachuted into Burma as an armorer with the OSS during WWII and never made a jump before or after!
- 3) Be designated as a qualified parachutist by an Army Jump Outfit in emergency tactical circumstances for operational expediency (the Army Special Forces sometimes does this, and I have known at least one Marine Corps Officer who sweet talked 'em into designating him a qualified parachutist!).

In 1966/early1967 I was running the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade Raid School at Camp Schwab prior to heading south as a Rifle Company Commander. Officially I was the Company Commander of A Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion as a part of RLT-26. As such the Army Special Forces let me send some of my kids down to a quasi-official jump school they were running with the Army's blessing (thus making an official Army Airborne School). Once they dropped the requirement that you had to be filling a (paid) jump billet to be assigned to Airborne School, the wings became a common as rifle qualification badges, and the mystique was gone. When we were one of only 14 Officers and 147 Enlisted folks (not counting the WWII old-timers) permitted to wear the wings as a member of the only Parachute outfit in the Marine Corps we were a VERY salty bunch to say the least!

The old Force Reconnaissance outfits almost died a natural death following the Vietnam War due to the more advanced techniques for gathering strategic intelligence. Eventually they came up with parachute qualified platoons for special operations, but I remember the old days. First Force was temporarily disbanded but reconstituted and rejoined the active units of the Corps not too long ago. I had an invite to attend my old alma mater for the commissioning ceremony but alas, I was already committed. Too bad, I still make the FRA Reunions when I can (my FRA number is 213), and for the most part we still keep in touch.

Out of the old Company in the late 1950s/early 1960s almost 50% of our enlisted troops were commissioned. We had one of our officers become the Commandant (P.X. Kelly), at least one made Major General (Duff Rice), Capt. Bill Weiss made Brigadier General (and was awarded a Navy Cross), a whole bunch of Colonels including one of my old Gunnery Sergeants from the Pathfinder Platoon (Wes Fox) who was also awarded the Medal of Honor. A passel were made Warrant Officers and later made Lieutenant and Captain including Bob Happy and Levoy McVeigh (lost extracting some of his people on a "spy-rig" in the jungle). S/Sgt. Shelton Eakin later made Color Sergeant of the Marine Corps, was commissioned and sent to RVN only to step on a command detonated 500-lb bomb when he led his men from the helicopter – a good man, I went to Airborne School with him, as I did with GySgt. Bobby J. Patterson. 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Woody Hamblin was my assistant Pathfinder Team Leader, and after I left the company, he landed in the power lines at Pendleton losing his lower leg.

Refusing to be retired, he was retained on active duty, passed the PFT Test, got back on Parachute and Scuba Status and put two tours in RVN working with the special ops/SEALS.

There are more stories but the big hand and little hand are on the top part of the watch, so it's about time to hit the sack.

Any specific questions? Just ask...

Semper Fi,

Dick



**Culver with General Purpose Bag  
(abbreviated GP Bag)  
On Pendleton Airstrip  
Prior to Jump (circa 1960)**

This picture is something of a “tee-hee” as the “Parachute Stuffers” and I had a sort of unspoken joke going. In short it was that Culver never got to jump without a GP Bag. For those not familiar with the drill, a GP bag was a method of carrying a large load to the deck without having to land with it in your hip-pocket. It was attached to your harness with a 30 – 35 foot lowering line that could be activated by a pair of quick releases. The trick was to pop the quick releases once you were “out and open” with your legs wrapped securely around the GP Bag. Once you were tree-top high, you turned loose of the bag with your legs, and allowed the bag to tumble loose, take the weight off of your canopy, and allow you to land with your normal weight but not further away from your load than 35-feet.

As a sort of comic relief, the para-riggers would wait until everyone was suited up and then show up with whatever they figured would be a pain in the fanny to hook on the (my) harness. In order not to screw up the ongoing joke, I would simply smile and let

‘em hook me up with whatever they had prepared! Great joke, and got lots of chuckles from the troops. For tactical jumps however, I still got to jump with my beloved GP Bag, but then it was usually full of landing panels, explosives or whatever seemed

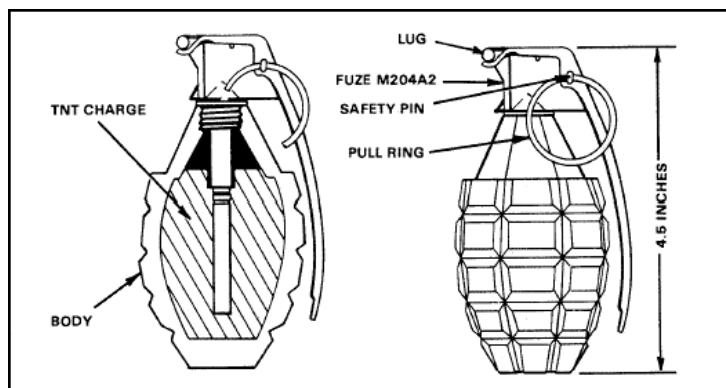
necessary to clear landing zones for the incoming initial assault waves of the landing force. A single sided bag with a similar lowering line was sometimes used for jumping heavy weapons (machine-guns, mortars, etc.). The trick was not to inadvertently (or in desperation) turn the bag loose in such a manner as to get it tangled up in the trees (nothing more embarrassing than dangling over a limb with the bag on the other side acting as a counterbalance! Heh, heh, heh...).

Just for the record, I did NOT have a tree magnet in my posterior, nor were the Pathfinders sometimes irreverently referred to as “Trashfinders” by the Recon Types!

# High Jinks and Hand Grenades

## A Study in Sea Going Explosive Ordnance Disposal

You've probably all heard the expression of "the morning after" bemoaning the activities of the night before. One November morning in 1961 this expression had a special significance for this old Marine. I was standing on the fantail of the USS George Clymer, an aging APA with the hull number of 27 bespeaking a rather ancient "attack transport" with extensive service in the island hopping campaigns in WWII and participation in the Inchon Landing. I was looking wistfully over the railing commiserating with my buddy, a Lieutenant named Harold R. Scott, and we were both thanking a merciful Odin for not blowing the boiler tubes of the aging APA the previous evening.



**The Mark II Fragmentation Hand Grenade**

### A Bit of Sea Going History

The old Clymer had been rode hard and put away wet as the saying goes, and had definitely seen her time in the blast. WWII service had varied from the invasion of North Africa, to the Island Campaigns in the Pacific. She not only carried Marines of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion, but participated in the Bougainville landings, reinforced and supplied the troops on Guadalcanal, participated in the Kwajalein and Saipan invasions, the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines, participated in the Guam invasion, and the final push in the invasion of Okinawa. This was followed by duty as the flagship for Transport Division 11 during atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. She supported the Nationalist Chinese in the Chinese Civil War in 1948, and later when the North Koreans crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, she left San Diego carrying units of the 5th Provisional Marine Brigade to Pusan. A short time later, she embarked men of the 1st Marine Division at Kobe, Japan for the amphibious invasion at Inchon on 15 September. Following the successful landings, she served as amphibious control and hospital ship before returning to Sasebo 29 September with casualties from the succeeding operations around Seoul. Continuous transport duties followed the Korean unpleasantness, she continued various transport duties in the far east. ...And as I am about to relate, transported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment back from Neumazu, Japan headed for Okinawa to occupy the then new Marine Base at Camp Hansen in the central part of the island in November 1961.

The entire discourse above is given to imbue the reader with some appreciation of a faithful, but tired Assault Transport that wasn't exactly a youngster. Twenty years of hard duty, much of it in combat, had taken its toll. In a grunt's vernacular, she was tired and probably needed a rest and time in dry dock to bring her mechanically into the 1960s. The word amongst the troops and even members of the Clymer's black gang was that the old girl's boilers were a bit "iffy" and needed some expert attention. This sets the stage for a bit

of sea going Explosive Ordnance Disposal some 43 years past. In order to understand the full scenario, we need to go back to Camp Fuji and the town of Neumazu on the coast of Japan just before 2/9 embarked for their return trip to the Rock.

## **A Quick Background of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines 1961-1962 Deployment**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had “transplaced” from Camp Pendleton in late June of 1961 on the APA 222, the USS Pickaway. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment originated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Camp Pendleton, and was magically transformed as/into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines of the Third Marine Division when we arrived at Okinawa for our thirteen month deployment in the Far East. The entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division was split between Hawaii, Japan (the Wing component and the range detachment at Camp Fuji), and Okinawa (Okinawa was still considered to be separate from Japan at that time) to act as a deterrent to enemy aggression, and to act as a holding force until more troops arrived in the event of a major war.

Okinawa was a wondrous place in those far off days, and it had only been 16 years since the island had been taken by the U.S. Forces. The natives were still sucking respectfully through their teeth, and were most solicitous to the latest arrival of U.S. Marines. They still knew we had our (invisible) foot on their necks and they were appropriately subservient (as they should have been in my opinion!). The dollar was “gold plated” and you could literally buy anything you wanted for a bit of “green”.

2/9 was initially stationed at Sukiran (later spelled Zukerian and eventually called Camp Foster by the Marines). It was a great place and allowed the youngsters of the Corps to acclimate themselves to the Far East. We got in some excellent field exercises in the surrounding countryside, were exposed to the native typhoons, and learned how to bargain and palaver with the natives.

Our local PX was abysmal when compared to their Stateside Cousins, but we could occasionally catch a bus up to Camp Buckner (the adjacent Army Base) and the PX on the Army digs was first class, and as good as any I ever experienced in the States. I learned about the local history. Being a history buff, I managed to visit many of the historical landmarks, and 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Hoaglund (our 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant in Golf Company of 2/9) was a WWII Marine participant in the Okinawa invasion, filled in the rest.

We conducted rubber boat training off of the small islands on the coast, and generally got acclimated to the climatic peculiarities of the Far Eastern environs. The only thing we were missing was a range facility suitable to exercise our mortars, recoilless rifles, 3.5” Rocket Launchers, Machine Guns, rifle grenades, and heavy ordnance. Since we were scheduled for a “float” encompassing many of the potential trouble spots of the Far East of the time, zeroing our heavy weapons and gaining experience for our new kids was a mandatory element of our projected training. We were all looking forward to our projected deployment to the firing ranges at Camp Fuji in Japan at the end of the summer. We were scheduled to leave our digs in Sukiran, and return to the newly finished camp at Hansen. We would be the first infantry Battalion to take up residence in the newly finished camp although the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion had been the first aboard.

## **Camp Fujji**

We finally arrived on the island of Japan, and took up residence in the Marine encampment at Camp Fuji. We lived in strong backed tents with stoves in the center of the digs, and took our showers in specially set up “shower tents” with the water heated by the engineers to keep us from douching off with frozen water droplets... A stove in the entrance of the “shower tent” made things bearable while drying off, and we were able to maintain a certain modicum of cleanliness, albeit with a bit of icy stiffness. Weekends were great, we hit all the centers of attraction including Tachakawa, Yokosuka, and of course, Tokyo. Shopping was incredible, with the rate of exchange in those far off times of ¥360 to the Dollar. Anything your fertile mind could imagine was there for the a little good will and green folding money. The use of the U.S. Dollar was prohibited at the time in Japan however (although legal in Okinawa), and we had to trade our “green” in for what were known as MPC or Military Payment Certificates. They were better known to the U.S. Service personnel as “Mickey Mouse Money”... These certificates are perhaps better covered in a later sea story, but they made up some of the distant memories of the time and place. I spent a couple of weekends running down a gentleman in Yokosuka who was known as the finest firearms engraver in Japan at the time, and I had brought along several items for him to practice his talent. Such things are strictly prohibited now of course, but the Japanese Government was still operating in the shadow of U.S. administration, and had not yet made their aversion to firearms a national centerpiece. Blades now of course, were a “whole ‘nother smoke to the home of the Samurai tradition.

We were still hanging our covers at Camp Fuji for the Marine Corps Birthday in 1961, and our Commanding Officer, Lt.Col. J. M. Jefferson, Jr. had decided to use the occasion to further our Far Eastern Education. Colonel Jefferson was a Japanese Linguist who had been left in Japan following WWII to assist with the administration of the new Japanese Government under the gentle hand of Douglas MacArthur. As a result of his experiences he had become well acquainted with many of the well placed Japanese families, especially those who would have been thought of as “the upper crust”. His close association with the Japanese hierarchy and their family life gave him an insight to the country far above what would be gained from normal academic research.

## **Idle Hands and Hand Grenades**

A few more days on the various ranges at Fujii allowed us to throw the old pineapple Mark II Fragmentation Hand Grenade (the Marines would not go entirely to the M26 “egg shaped grenade until the beginning of the Vietnam War). Normally unexpended ordnance was disposed of by EOD personnel, as hot rounds not still in the boxes by “lot numbers” were simply blown in place. This may sound wasteful, but the rationale is that if you discover a “bad lot” of ammunition, all of that lot is withdrawn from service prior to an investigation by ordnance to discern the cause. Loose ammunition, not absolutely identified by lot number becomes suspect, and thus it is considered to be safer to dispose of the remnants rather than risk inadvertently using an unsafe lot. This is ordinarily not a problem as nobody has a place to “stick/stash” a leftover 3.5 Rocket Round, and Mortar Rounds are too heavy and too bulky. The problem starts when we leave a grenade range. Somehow, it just seems sacrilegious to leave a perfectly good “frag grenade” laying around loose. Unfortunately, it is not terribly uncommon to have a few stuffed in field jacket pockets or other convenient spots by

individuals who were loath to leave perfectly good left over grenades to be blown up by EOD for no apparent reason!

Once I detected the tendency of a few of our youngsters attempting to save the Government money by hoarding left over Mark II frags, I knew it was time to nip this one in the bud. While gang warfare was not to start in earnest for several years, and most of our young Marines were not inherent bad@\$\$es, I could still see the formula for a potential disaster brewing. All we needed was a bit of horseplay gone horribly wrong, and I'd be filling out paperwork from my cell in Portsmouth for the next 40-years. I did what any dedicated 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant of Marines would do. I got the company together out in the field to keep from broadcasting this potentially dangerous practice to the entire world. I indicated that I understood such efforts were in the best interest of the Government in general and the Marine Corps in particular, but for the sake of security and safety, I wanted them to turn any such ill gotten gains into myself either in the field, or in my tent prior to departure for Okinawa. I was amazed at the unexpected volume of illicit ordnance that poured into my tent, and I secured them in my footlocker for safe keeping. Just prior to our departure from Fujii backload onto the George Clymer, I called in the local EOD folks and turned over my stash for proper disposal. They thanked me profusely, and departed with their next day's work cut out for them.

I was proud that our lads had responded so responsibly and breathed a sigh of relief. The following day we departed for Numazu and thence to shuttle out to the George Clymer and hoist ourselves over the traditional debarkation/embarkation nets dangling over the sides of the ship. All was going well until just before climbing aboard the Mike Boat headed for the ship, a young L/Cpl., apparently having second thoughts or having genuinely having overlooked a stray Mark II, came up to me and in a very low whisper thrust his prize in my hand and asked if I could dispose of it for him? Uppsss... Now what? I looked around, and seeing no one watching the "transaction" took the Mark II and put it in my Field Jacket pocket. I thanked the lad for his contribution to the safety of the organization and made plans to throw the damned thing over the side once we were underway. All of a sudden, still another lad with a sheepish look on his face came over and deposited grenade number two in my hand! Holy Catfish Batman! I looked carefully around to see if there was a waiting line of lads waiting to make a similar contribution to the now growing pile. Seeing no one else, I put the second grenade in my Field Jacket and climbed into a Mike Boat headed to the waiting cargo nets. Hopefully a fall from the nets would not displace any safety pins or we'd have a real blast (sorry, I couldn't resist).



**Embarkation Nets on the USS George Clymer**

Upon being assigned a cabin space, and making sure no one was watching, I broke out a roll of rigger's tape (an OD version of Duct Tape) and taped the safety levers (often called "spoons" in the vernacular) of the grenades to preclude any surprises. Now all I had to do

was to wait for the appropriate minute under cover of darkness to throw these things into Davy Jones' Locker and breathe a sigh of relief. Alas the best laid plans of mice and Marines... My somewhat evil sense of humor began to emerge and a plan to combine duty with entertainment began to hatch. All I needed was a coconspirator with a sense of adventure. The first individual who came to mind was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant by the name of Harold R. Scott (better known as Scotty) who was serving as one of my platoon commanders. Since I had every confidence of Scotty's ability to keep his mouth shut, I approached him with my scheme.

Every evening aboard ship they showed a movie in the wardroom (a sort of officers dining room, card playing space, and quasi-lounge). I suggested that during the evening movie, we adjourn to a well hidden dark spot with unimpeded access to the wash of the ship as it ploughed through the Sea of Japan. There at the appropriate moment, we would remove the pins from the grenades, and on a synchronized count, throw the things as straight down into the sea as possible. Having done this sort of exercise in water-filled gravel pits some years before, I was sure that it was safe as far as fragmentation goes, and the noise would be appropriately muffled. We should still be able to see the underwater flash from our elevated perch. Since we would be unobserved it sounded like great fun for a couple of bored lieutenants.

## **Underwater Explosive Ordnance Disposal**

Scotty and I excused ourselves at different intervals from some ancient movie being shown that evening, adjourned to my cabin, picked up the illicit Ordnance and headed for our prearranged vantage point. Everything seemed to be going perfectly. Once in place, we carefully unwrapped the "safety tape" from the grenade spoons, and threw the debris into a dark sea. The conditions were perfect, no moon, cold night discouraging other individuals from taking in the night air, and an apparently totally deserted deck. We looked at one another, grinned in the darkness, and pulled the pins on the count of one. On the count of two we threw the pins overboard to dispose of any lingering clues should things go awry. On the count of three we simultaneously cocked our arms into a throwing position, and on the count of four we threw the illicit ordnance as hard as we could down into the waiting ocean.

A careful count on our part was rewarded with the expected twin muffled "boomphs" and a visible fireball underwater. ...But, the fireball was much closer to the surface than I would have imagined! Uh Oh... I had reckoned without the effect the wash of the ship's wake keeping the grenades from reaching a comfortable depth before exploding! Horrors... We casually came down the ladderwell from our vantage point and onto the main deck as rapidly as possible without arousing suspicion, acting like we were simply getting some fresh air. We had been located well aft when we threw the things, and just as we passed an open hatch on the port side, a number of deck snipes



**The USS George Clymer APA 27**  
**An aging Veteran of three wars**

came boiling up from down below. I asked the running mob what the hell was going on, and one of the last of the black gang who came through the hatch yelled "the boiler tubes have blown!" Oh my Gawd... I had forgotten the remarks casually made that the old lady being due for some sort of overhaul, and indicating the boilers were a bit "iffy" at best. Since water is essentially incompressible, it occurred to me that the seawater had simply acted as a very efficient "tamping" of the explosive effect of the TNT in the Mark II grenades! The noise down below must have been humongous with the exploding grenades being essentially right next to the hull. I could just see the headlines; "USS George Clymer's boiler tubes blow! Ship sinks in the sea of Japan!" It was all over but the General Court and a much chastened Dick Culver breaking rocks in a New Hampshire gravel pit!

Slowly the black gang began to reenter the open hatch and cautiously head back for the engine room. Apparently the boilers were still intact, and the worst that had happened was a resounding, water tamped, boom that scared hell out of the entire watch! Whew! And these damned Navy scows were dry as a bone, compliments of Carry Nation and her Saloon Smashers around the turn of the (20<sup>th</sup>) century. I could have used a quadruple snort of something, but the relief at not having caused the greatest sea disaster since the Titanic left me with an adrenaline high that was every bit as intoxicating as Pusser's Naval Rum! I had learned a valuable lesson, mercifully without getting my fanny handed to me as it ought to have been. My personal recriminations were probably as harsh as would have been handed out at a Courts Martial. All that was missing was the powdery stuff from broken boulders from a sledge hammer with a prison chaser in the background.

## **The Aftermath...**

Apparently the George Clymer survived her attempted "boilertubectomy" by two young idiots and went on to continue to haul troop to Vietnam during the late hate and discontent in South East Asia. As far as I know she was still making trips to South East Asia as late as 1966. What was her ultimate fate? I dunno' although I have done several web searches with no results on her final decommissioning date. Whatever her final disposition to the Valhalla of old combat attack transports, I can almost see some beads of sweat on her boiler plates from a bit of high jinks in November of 1961!

Scotty changed his MOS to Rotary Wing Aircraft Driver after his tour as an '03 Platoon Commander in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines and was initially flying the old HR2S heavy choppers. I visited him while he was stationed in Pensacola, and later when he was delivering decrepit HR2S choppers back for refitting, he'd stop by the house for a bit of socializing. Scotty was a combat pilot and the squadron maintaince officer of the first CH-53 squadron deployed to Vietnam in June of 1967 on board the USS Tripoli. True to his somewhat unorthodox nature, he had one of his "metal-benders" install an M1 bayonet lug/gas cylinder on a rod protruding from the nose of his "53" to act as a surrogate barrel. Before he took off everyday, he would "fix" his 16" M1903 WWI Bayonet to his makeshift rifle muzzle. Scotty was a warrior if he was nothing else!

Following my return from my tour with 2/9 in Okinawa in 1961-1962 I was stationed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps Reserve and Recruitment District in New Orleans (later renamed simply the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District). I was assigned to such exciting duties as signing discharges for Reservists who had finished their obligated service, and among other things was designated as the Special Services Officer with custody of the 8<sup>th</sup> MCD 16' Sailboat which I kept stored in



my back yard. Being an old sail boat sailor, I often took it out on Lake Pontchartrain to keep her tiller and centerboard limbered up, and of course to keep my sailing skills sharpened.

...And then of course there was one final task, or perhaps EOD run if you will. An oversight on my part had left two suspicious round black tarred cardboard containers in the bottom of my footlocker when I departed the Rock. When I unpacked the thing in New Orleans, I was of course horrified, but knew that my duty was to finish what I had started the previous year. Another Captain also stationed at the 8<sup>th</sup> MCD Headquarters was brought into a devil's pact in the interest of community safety. One Saturday afternoon, we sallied fourth on the lake with our touchy cargo. Using a technique vaguely familiar to those southern fishermen who are known to use "Dupont Lures" we decided to use the small bombs as depth charges. Simply leaving them in a live condition would have been doubly dangerous as the average depth of Pontchartrain is only (approximately) 6'. The potential for some unfortunate fisherman to inadvertently hook one of 'em was too great, or perhaps it was simply that I couldn't resist pitching a couple of perfectly good hand grenades into the lake without pulling the pins? I have no recollection of what sort of aquatic life our efforts dredged from the lake bed, but we certainly weren't about to linger about to find out! The Good Lord is known for taking care of damn fools, puppy dogs and Marines; in this case perhaps a combination of all three!

Semper Fi,

*Dick Culver*

# Presley O'Bannon Reincarnated

By Dick Culver

In the Spring of 1962, several of us from the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment had been selected to represent the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines in the yearly Division Matches to be held at Camp Schwab on Okinawa. While there were some who enjoyed shooting in the Division Matches, in this case I was not an overly happy camper. I was the XO of Golf Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines and we were currently deployed to ensure that the bad guys didn't attempt to make the world safe for Communism. It was our job to supply a continually floating battalion (they were rotated on a continuing basis at the time from both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiments) as deterrent or holding force to allow the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division to "Land the Landing Force" to contain the latest threat from becoming a reality to impose "collectivism" on the free world. The task fell mainly to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division (with a Brigade stationed in Hawaii consisting of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment with appropriate reinforcements), and our air assets stationed in Japan consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing. While there was very little chance of our being deployed in an armed intervention, still the offhand chance offered a bit of vicarious taste of adrenaline. I was not terribly thrilled at having to shoot at paper targets when the possibility of moving "commies" danced in our heads. Ah well, you do the job assigned and as our senior representative left on the Rock, I was also the guy who took care of occurrences that called for immediate attention for those left in the rear with the gear. I was a bit jealous of those floating around in the environs of possible danger while I was stuck on Okinawa, albeit for sharpening my skills and abilities designed to cancel enemy birth certificates! I took every opportunity to vent my frustrations on the center of the targets! Grrrrr...



**1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. Presley  
O'Bannon  
USMC  
1775 – 1850  
Hero of Derne, Tripoli**

Since our permanent digs were at the newly opened Camp Hansen, we were required to drive every morning to Camp Schwab, a far piece to the North where the matches were being conducted. As usual, the first round cracks downrange, as at any rifle range, at 0'dark thirty, and the drive took about 35 minutes if you ignored the speed limits and did marginally unsafe things to shorten the time on the road, you could expect to start firing at approximately 0600. Firing usually concluded at approximately 1400, necessitating a trip back to Camp Hansen to take care of the administrative details that tend to build up in direct proportion to your readiness to get in a couple of hours of rack time. By the time all the minor crisis(s) that had accumulated since the day before. One day, a lieutenant reported back from Subic Bay where the Battalion had dropped anchor to take care of some Battalion and personal business. He had a personal message and request to me from our commanding officer, Lt. Col. J. M. Jefferson, Jr. It seems the battalion was missing one 81mm Mortar Tube, to the tune of approximately \$1100 (the price carried on the books circa 1962).

Now Colonel Jefferson was a savvy character who had a handle on the Far East, being a Japanese linguist, and having served as a translator in Japan following WWII. To cut to the chase, Colonel Jefferson in an attempt to cement cordial and a good working relationship with the Navy crew on our shipping, had acceded to a request by the white hats to learn the

lashing and lowering techniques used to put the heavier infantry gear over the side of the ship into the Mike Boats. While such actions seemed reasonable over a second or third cup of Navy Joe in the Officer's Mess, the execution phase of this ill fated exercise ended in a mini-disaster. Alas, an 81mm Mortar tube had been improperly fitted (call it incompetent knot tying) with the appropriate half hitches and in the lowering operation the subject tube simply tumbled out of the lowering line heading straight to the bottom of Subic Bay. Unfortunately the Battalion didn't have any embarked SCUBA trained individuals and calling for some from the Navy UDT folks ashore would have been a bit embarrassing for both the Navy Ship's Detachment and 2/9. Now what?

Rightly or wrongly, I had acquired a reputation for being a relatively effect scrounge(r) and could usually come up with the desired item(s) if *legalese* did not enter into the equation. This is actually military theft, usually disguised under the cloak of operational necessity. While I did not exactly seek such a reputation, it was not totally unwarranted. I set my "brain housing group" to the unauthorized acquisition mode. Uppermost in my mind was my oldest truism, all such operations must have *plausible deniability*. Now the question was, where to start looking? Obviously I couldn't go scrounging a Marine Corps 81mm tube, as capture and conviction would be highly frowned upon, with "Portsmouth Time" not out of the question. Nope, I had to get the requested item from the Army. The Corps would be much more understanding, and might even give me a little cover under the right set of circumstances. Who in the hell would have stray 81 tubes laying around that might be pilferable?

With a little brain housing exercise, I decided that the only viable source might be the vast Army Supply Facility located just south of the Marine Base at Sukiran. The Army Supply depot was located in a place known as Machinado, the supply corps dream installation! I located my able co-conspirator in our Mighty Mite (a Helicopter transportable replacement for the Jeep). After the day's firing and return to Camp Hansen, we showered, and changed into starched utilities and spit shined boots with appropriately blocked utility covers. Since it was still in the rainy season and a bit nippy outside, we wore field jackets over our utilities thus covering the mandatory name tags sewn on our jackets – this was a major facet of the operation and went along with the plausible deniability routine. External anonymity was a major facet of the operation.

We drove around the myriad of huge and unmarked warehouses identified only by numbers stenciled on the exterior of each building. By asking around, we began to narrow our search. Some gent "thought" there were some 81's in building 12345 (fictitious number of course), and we started there. The sergeant sitting behind the desk said, no he didn't have any, but he thought that some were stored in building 13572 (or some such). After hitting about 12 different buildings (Machinado was [and I assume still is] a huge installation, mostly consisting of seemingly anonymous warehouses). At last we arrived at the most likely haven for stored 81mm tubes.

We went into a rather cavernous building with huge stacks of boxes stacked on either side of an isle formed by the contents. At the extreme end of the warehouse was a desk that appeared to be about a half mile in the distance. After a fair hike, we reached a rather bored appearing sergeant who appeared to be holding down the fort. The conversation went something like this:

"Sergeant, is this where I'm supposed to pick up the 81mm Mortar Tube?"

"Huh? What mortar tube, I dunno' about any mortar tubes to be picked up?"

Turning to my partner in crime, I came off on what I hoped passed for an appropriate temper tantrum concerning those who had sent us on a wild goose chase to pick up a tube without informing the appropriate personnel in the chain of command.

“Frank, gawd damn it, those miserable SOBs have done it to us again! Now we’ve got to drive all the way back to Schwab (using the wrong Camp of course) to straighten this damned thing out! \$hi+!”

A few more foul words were thrown in for effect, and Frank was the perfect foil for my ranting and ravings. A few ill considered foul utterances noting the necessity to have to personally go back and check with Colonel Erickson (a fictitious Colonel of course) would get this mess straitened out between the Army and Marine Corps hierarchy! I feigned a particularly foul mood, and made veiled promises of heads rolling over this screw up! The poor Army Sergeant had probably never heard such language from a couple of outraged officers, and was looking for a way to pour oil on troubled waters, thus preventing himself from getting caught in some sort of inter-service feud!

The young sergeant said “but sir, I have the tubes available, if I can get a signature for one, you can take it with you!”

Ah ha! Success, a somewhat browbeaten and cowed Army Supply type had offered the ultimate solution to our problem. Now if the lad had just not been educated in Marine Corps history, we were home free!

“Sergeant, no problem at all, I’ll be happy to sign for the tube! Your NCOs should be proud of you for your initiative. What’s your name? I want to send a complimentary note back to your unit noting your efficiency and cooperation! You have our thanks! Now if you will simply give us a piece of paper with your name, unit and Commanding Officer’s name, I’ll sign off one the tube and we’ll be on our way!”

An obviously thoroughly charmed young NCO gave us his name, rank and organization and had immediately fetched a brand new 81mm Mortar tube still in the original box. Our cup ranneth over... Hummm...

The young lad produced a receipt for the new mortar tube and indicated where I should sign to acknowledge custody of this piece of transferred ordnance. I checked all the blocks and dutifully signed the name of “Prestley N. O’Bannon” 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, USMC in the designated location! The youngster never asked for any identification, nor questioned that the tube was to be delivered to 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment (safely stationed at Camp Pendleton of course). Frank and I shook the lad’s hand, thanked him for his courtesy and cooperation, loaded our contraband 81 tube in our Mighty Mite and headed back to Hansen. Hopefully Presley’s valiant efforts, as had his hand in conquering the town of Derne, Tripoli in 1805, helped secure a mortar tube that wreaked maximum havoc on the followers of Ho Chi Minh a few years in the future.

Culver’s crimes of course went undetected, although I’m sure Colonel Jefferson wondered where the pristine mortar tube had been procured. A truly successful Battalion Commander, if he is wise, does not ask questions to which he might not want precise answers. Colonel Jefferson was a wise man, and Culver’s luck held. An inquiry to HQMC would have revealed that the justly famous Presley O’Bannon had been safely buried in Pleasureville, Kentucky since 1850. His remains were later moved to Frankfort, Kentucky in 1920 by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and a monument raised in his honor,

although I suspect not for his efforts to acquire an 81mm Mortar tube for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines on Okinawa in 1962.

Any young Marine would have fallen out of his chair laughing if I had signed Presley's name to a memorandum receipt, as all Marines are taught in Boot Camp that Presley's exploits resulted in the American Flag being raised over foreign soil for the first time in 1805. O'Bannon was presented a sword with a Mameluke Hilt following the battle that has become the official Marine Officers sword. ...And then of course there are the lines from the Marine's Hymn that indicate great deeds from "The Halls of Montezuma, to the Shores of Tripoli"!

I hope Presley continues to rest well in Valhalla and realizes that in some small way, he helped arm the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment with a new Mortar Tube in the continual quest for honor and glory of the Corps while subduing a few stray Communist hoards in the environs of former French Indo China...

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# Something Lost in Translation?

By Dick Culver

Have you ever heard of the CIOR? No? Well, neither had I until the summer of 1977. I was assigned as the Operations Officer of the U.S. Marine Corps Marksmanship Training Unit at Quantico, Virginia. As a unit, MTU was tasked with (in extremely general terms) maintaining the marksmanship standards of Marine Corps Training, and researching new marksmanship concepts and techniques for the Marine Corps at the behest of the Training Branch of Headquarters Marine Corps.



CIOR Shield

Such duties included the study, experimentation and implementation of new combat marksmanship techniques and equipment. As a sort of “dipstick” to measure our success and progress in such endeavors, we also maintained a National Team of Rifle, Pistol and International Shooters to keep our shooting hand(s) in, and to butt heads with the other service teams; and to specifically to keep the U.S. Army and the Army’s Marksmanship Unit appropriately humble, heh, heh, heh... MTU would supervise the conduct of Marine Corps wide competition each year in four different geographical division matches. We had the Eastern Division Match, usually held on the East Coast (appropriate, eh what?), the Western Division Match (yep, you guessed it, on the West Coast), The Pacific Division Match held in Hawaii, and the Far Eastern Division Match normally conducted on Okinawa. Medal winners from each (geographical) Division Match then proceeded to a pre-designated location in the States (usually either Camp Lejeune, North Carolina or Quantico, Virginia), for further competition in the (All) Marine Corps Match. Winners and likely “comers” were then selected to comprise the “Summer Team” that would represent the Marine Corps at the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio.

Division Match Teams were/are required to have at least one officer and one “new shooter” to perpetuate continuing interest in service marksmanship and carry their new found skills (in the case of new shooters), and their continuing and constantly improving shooting and coaching talents back to the various Marine Corps units all over the globe.

During the summer of 1977 we were conducting our first official U.S. Marine Corps Scout Sniper School since the cessation of the Vietnam War. For our first class, generally speaking, we drew our students from the Division Match Competition from all over the Corps. Upon graduation from the (then) new course, the newly graduated snipers (also graduated from the “Sniper Instructor” segment of the instruction, returned to their respective Marine Divisions and formed a Scout Sniper School for each (tactical, not geographical) Division (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Scout Sniper School, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division Scout Sniper School, etc.). Our first school, ably conducted by Captain Jack Cuddy (now Colonel Jack Cuddy, USMC [Ret.]), and Gunnery Sergeant Carlos Hathcock set the standard for all of the subsequent Scout Sniper Schools in other services. Our original training format has been shamelessly copied by virtually every serious military and police sniping effort in the world today. While the Sniper School doesn’t enter into the sea-story being related here, it gives a bit of flavor to the sort of organization we ran at Quantico at the time.

Prior to the arrival of our “Summer Team” in 1977, we were notified that MTU was to host a military marksmanship training course for the CIOR... Huh? Now what in the heck was the CIOR? Literally translated it stood for ***Confédération Interalliée des Officiers de Réserve***

or in English, ***The Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers*** hence the CIOR designation.

The CIOR purports to be a non-political, non-governmental, non-profit-making organization dedicated to cooperation between the national Reserve Officers Associations of NATO countries, and to solidarity within the Atlantic Alliance, or to boil all the BS out of it, a loosely organized group of Reserve Officers from the NATO Allies. The outfit was founded in 1948 by the Reserve Officer Associations of Belgium, France and the Netherlands but now consists of all 18 Reserve Officer Associations in NATO countries.

These guys (in a sort of super boondoggle) assemble every summer in a prearranged, rotating NATO Country to discuss mutual “Defense Attitudes”, Security Issues, Civil/Military Cooperation, Mutual Communication. To top things off, finally, a group of athletically inclined Reserve Officers from each country get together for a sort of “Military Pentathlon Event” to include obstacle course running, orienteering and map reading, swimming, range estimation, hand grenade throwing, and shooting. The competing teams utilize the equipment and shooting irons of the host country to give each participating contingent a feel for their allies’ gear and capabilities. The shooting segment is where we fit into the equation that summer.

As pointed out above, by mutual agreement, each country competes in the marksmanship competition with the weapons of the host country (since the host country rotates on a yearly basis, the participants get to utilize such diverse fowling pieces as the M16A2 [and the Canadian version called the C7A1], the British L85, the Austrian Steyr AUG Rifle, the HK G3, the Beretta Pistol, the Glock Pistol, and of course, the ubiquitous Browning High Power). While checking the current rules as background information, I noted they no longer list “*submachine gun marksmanship*” but it was still on the agenda in the Summer of 1977. Since the Host Country was to be “Mother England” that year, the rifle was to be the FN/FAL (or the Canadian version designated the L1A1), the Pistol was to be the Browning High Power, and the Submachine Gun was the British designed Sterling L2A3.

MTU got the nod to teach marksmanship techniques, while the Marine Corps Officer’s Basic School was assigned the job of polishing up the CIOR lads in the physical, swimming and map reading pursuits.

The young lieutenants taking advantage of our instructional efforts were composed of some Americans, but the majority were Canadian Reserve Officers, of which a large group were from Quebec, i.e. what would be usually characterized as French Canuks.



**The Canadian/British L2A3**

To appreciate the story, the Canadian Government had only recently decreed that French was to be the official language of Quebec (late 1969) and not given any legal teeth until 1977<sup>1</sup>, thus making it (officially) unnecessary for Canadian Soldiers from Quebec to speak or (supposedly to understand) English. Indeed, Canada had all but granted Quebec their defacto independence from Canada proper. The French Canuks were fully aware that it was a sore spot to the rest of Canada, but being appropriately contrary, they insisted on speaking only French if for no other reason, as a matter of honor, and to urinate-off those who felt the French Canuks were essentially officious, obnoxious and objectionable pricks! The short

version is that they were attempting to rub the English speaking North American countries nose in it!

The “French only” routine was a farce of course, as these blighters had grown up in Canada when English was the official language and anyone *not* speaking English would not have survived. The Frogs, having smelled blood in the water, blackmailed the Canadian Government into this idiotic concession (see footnote 1 below). Unfortunately political correctness had taken over, but not all hands were exactly ecstatic about the situation. The “no spikada English” routine is the essence of our story. Read on...

The rifles, pistols and submachine guns had been shipped to MTU by the Canadian Government along with sufficient 9mm fodder to feed the Browning Pistol and the Sterling SMG (don't forget it would be another 10 years before the 9mm cartridge became our official pistol cartridge). Now we had lots of individuals qualified to teach the rifle and pistol, but we had virtually no volunteers to teach the sub-gun. I had an interest in short full automatic weapons and had become right clever with the old Thompson Submachine Gun, so I was elected as the submachine gun instructor almost by default. This just suited me down to a “T” and I set about learning everything I could about the “Sterling Gun”. I had been taught some years earlier by a friendly FBI Agent (mercifully using someone else's TSMG), to put a full 30-round magazine of .45 Auto rounds into the chest of an E-Silhouette Target at 25-yards with a single pull of the trigger... It wasn't hard to do, but was a bit abusive to the rifling. I set about learning what to expect from the Sterling.

The included training manual accompanying the weapons indicated that the L2A3 weighed in at just shy of 6-pounds, was selective fire, had a cyclic rate of 550-rounds per minute and had a magazine capacity of 34-rounds. It was cute (but ugly), easy to handle and in my opinion was ergonomically well designed. I repaired to the pistol range with ample ammunition to educate myself in the ways of the Sterling, and it wasn't long before I could empty an entire 34-round magazine into the chest of the E-Silhouette with a single pull of the trigger. The trick was simply grabbing the magazine well (which stuck out the left side of the receiver – see the illustration above) with the left hand (palm up), leaning forward for the initial trigger squeeze and simply use it like a fire hose. It was amazingly accurate and lots of fun to shoot. I was charmed.

Having taught the HK MP-5 for a full year (some 16-years following this training evolution), in my personal opinion, the Sterling is superior in virtually every respect (except it isn't quite a sexy looking). The Sterling is blowback operated and not overly complicated with the HK roller locking system, weighs a bit less than the standard MP5, and is the more accurate of the two (or at least easier to *shoot* accurately). While I don't have the exact figures, I rather suspect that the Sterling is much cheaper to manufacture than the current darling of the Submachine Gun world, and easier to repair on a flat rock! Ah well... If you were stuck with the miserable little 9mm cartridge, the Sterling would be my choice, but then beauty and functionality are often in the eye of the beholder.

Having familiarized myself with my L2A3 training aid, I was looking forward to the following day's instruction. ...alas I reckoned without the “*French Connection*”.

### **On to the Submachine Gun Instruction:**

The morning of the first instructional session dawned well enough, and a seemingly enthusiastic group of individuals gathered at the pistol range. My first impression was that things would go well, but the group had more or less divided itself into three distinct bunches.



The American officers had been mingling with their Canadian cousins, but the Canadians had broken up into two distinct groups. One of the Canadian officers approached me with a sort of “hat in hand” demeanor. He was seemingly apologizing for the fact that one group of the lads didn’t speak English, but only French and were from Quebec. Their English speaking spokesman relayed the Frog’s request (demand?) that they have an interpreter assigned so that they could understand the instruction. Huh? Whatin’hell were these guys talking about? I knew damned well that they understood English, but apparently they were making some sort of political (or ethnic) statement that would materially complicate their (and my) instruction. Oh well, I’d play their game for awhile and see how things worked out.

Well into the safety lecture, these pseudo-Frenchmen were skylarking and joking among themselves, knowing the interpreter would give them the safety lecture in French. After several examples of this farce, I decided to bust their “male sperm reproductive organs”. Simple instruction was one thing, but I wasn’t about to let the *safety* lecture go the French “shoulder shrug” route, ...and I of course, would receive the blame if one of these Frog-Eaters shot himself or somebody because he hadn’t understood the instruction. During our first break, I got the Gunny aside and told him to follow my lead, I was going to get rid of this scam once and for all!

“Whatcha got in mind Major?” the Gunny says.

“Just listen up and nod your head, and you’ll get the picture”

“Hey Gunny,” sez I, in a rather loud stage whisper, “have you ever seen a Frenchman who wouldn’t rather have sex with a sheep than a woman?” (using slightly more crude terminology).

The Gunny looked at me funny, but immediately caught what I was trying to accomplish.

“No sir, can’t say as I have,” he replied, “what’s more I understand that many of them prefer men!,” The Gunny was giving me just what I wanted.

About 15 heads, (all in the pseudo-French group) snapped around as one! All of those clowns had “*if looks could kill*” facial expressions! Hummm... I thought so!

“Ah ha you @\$\$holes, I caught ya’! I knew damned well you understood English, now we can knock off this phony crap and get on with the instruction!”

Fifteen appropriately chastised French Canuks hung their heads and laughed. I had caught them at their own game. The rest of the instruction went well, all taught in English. We all left friends, laughing about the put-up “no spikada English” dodge. I’m reasonably sure some of the Nuevo-French Canuks still tell the story to **their** kids now in the light of some 27-years past. I would dearly love to have sat in on the map reading and orienteering classes taught at the Basic School after they left those “ruffians” at the pistol range!

Nothing is more fun than winning and turning the tables on a bunch of jokers who had planned to show those “insolent colonials” who was really in charge. Surprising that they never figured out how **they** have remained subjects, and **we** emerged as citizens of a Republic. Even Mother England was happy to see us a time or two on the continent to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. The French still haven’t come to grips with the fact that they are no longer relevant in international affairs... And those guys wanted to speak “French” to identify their national origin?... Egad!

Semper Fi,

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The idiocy of this policy of the Canadian Government started with the Official Languages' Act of Canada issued in 1969 making French the official language of Quebec. This was followed and enforced by Bill 101, titled *Charte de la langue française*. The bill, **as it was passed in the summer of 1977**, proclaimed French as the official language in Quebec for just about every facet of life in the province: government, judicial system, education, advertising, business, contracts, etc. For example, the bill required that all advertising on billboards be done in French only and that all commercial signs in business establishments be in French alone. All public administrations and businesses had to address their employees in French. All government agencies were directed to use the Official language in their dealings with corporations and other governments in Canada. Government Ministries and Agencies, as well as professional associations in Quebec, were to be known by their French name. The laws of the province were to be enacted in French although an English translation might also be made (and indeed continued to be made after Bill 101). English education was to be restricted mostly to those already in the system, their siblings, those temporarily posted in Quebec or whose parents had themselves received an English elementary education in the province. While the bill was very prescriptive in several respects, it showed considerable flexibility in connection to businesses, especially head offices of international and national corporations centered in Quebec. While francization programs were instituted for businesses, they were limited to businesses of more than 50 employees.

**Culver's Note:** No wonder the Canadian Government is so screwed up! We must avoid this idiotic trap (sought by many Spanish speaking elements) to divide our country. In a word, either learn English, and American History, or don't vote and better yet, pack your bags and head for the southern border. Put simply, our way or the highway! A pox on multiculturalism!

# Culver and the “Fang Mechanic”<sup>1</sup>

By Dick Culver

Dental visits have never been on my top ten in terms of enjoyment. As the old saying goes, I'd rather have a “root canal” than do (whatever). Nevertheless, occasionally it's necessary to get your fangs attended to for maintenance or repair, albeit with little enjoyment.

While attending the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, academics occupied almost all of my scheduled time, leaving little buffer to attend to medical or dental tasks that did not fall under the heading of a legitimate emergency. Over a period of time however, the old amalgam fillings in your teeth tend to loosen, crack or just plain fall out. If it's not causing pain or interfering with normal eating - or perhaps the sharp edges cutting your tongue - the average individual simply puts it on the back burner until pain or inconvenience forces his (or her) hand.

Following daily classes one afternoon, I found myself without any afternoon labs, and a friend and fellow Marine classmate of mine, Mike Burns, had an appointment at the Navy Dental Clinic. He asked me if I'd like to accompany him, and while visits to the dentist have never been on my top ten (as noted above), conversely I had no idea where the Dental Clinic was located, so this provided an opportunity check out the location in the unlikely event I should have occasion to darken their doors.

Mike went in for his appointment, and I sat in the waiting room checking the place out. Sitting behind the desk was a lone 1<sup>st</sup> Class Duck<sup>2</sup> “Tooth Fairy” apparently lost in reading the local fish-wrapper. The paper hid virtually his whole persona, and I could only tell that there was a real person behind the news by the occasional appearance of a disembodied hand and arm reaching around the side to retrieve a coffee cup. Had he not been wearing a uniform blouse, I would not have been able to ascertain his gender, military specialty or rank.

Since I did have a couple of broken fillings, I decided to check with the faceless minion of dentistry to see what procedures were necessary to get the things fixed when the academic schedule would permit. Since I had given up on seeing the actual peruser of the newspaper, and it would have been considered impolite or even rude to have taken my hand and mashed it down to get a glimpse of his shining face, I simply said something to the effect of “what do you have to do to get a couple of missing fillings replaced?”

The disembodied Duck voice replied without taking the paper down, “Come back at Sick Call.”

Since these two missing fillings were hardly an emergency, it would seem to have been an unnecessary step to have waited in line with the “sick, lame and lazy” who frequent the sick bays of the Naval establishment, to simply get an appointment.

“And when might sick call go?” I enquired out of pure interest.

“O'Eight Hundred every morning” was the reply from the Duck, who had still not taken his newspaper down from his face. “Then the Dentist can take a look and see what's wrong!”

“I don't think you understand,” I said, “I *know* what's wrong, I just want to get a couple of

fillings replaced that have fallen out! I don't need a rocket scientist to tell me I'm missing a couple of fillings!"

"Come back at Sick Call," the Duck reiterated with the paper still in front of his face, although there was a distinctly nasty tone in his voice, "Don't you understand English?"

"Marine Officers don't take a ration of \$hi+ off some First Class Dental Duck!," was my reply, "Who in the hell is running this joint?"

The Duck set his coffee cup down for the first time, hurriedly put down his paper, and went running back into the bowels of the Dental Offices!<sup>3</sup>

After a few minutes, an older gentleman emerged from the inner sanctum. He was wearing a white hospital-type coat (smock?) which covered his shirt, leaving only his dark trousers showing. He could have been anything from an Admiral to an aging Chief.

The newly arrived, white coated figure demanded to know who in the office didn't know how to follow instructions? This guy obviously had been briefed by the smart-mouthed 1<sup>st</sup> Class who had fled previously.

"I'm not sure to whom I'm speaking," I said, "but I'm the one who asked how I could get an appointment to have a couple of fillings fixed that have fallen out."

"Don't you understand the concept of sick call?" this equally abrasive character asked.

"I understand, alright," I said, "and I understand the concept of sick call if I was just coming in for an assessment of my molars, but I already know what's wrong, I just want my fillings fixed!"

"Well, I'm *Captain*<sup>4</sup> Keenan," was the reply, "who in the hell are you?"

"Major R.O. Culver, USMC," was my answer, "and I meant no disrespect, but I have classes every morning at 0800, and nothing hurts badly enough to miss class to have someone tell me something I already know; that I have a couple of missing fillings – I can feel 'em with my tongue!"

"Well Major," was the reply, "what are you doing right this minute? I wouldn't want you to miss any of your classes!" The tone of voice was MOST sarcastic!

"Nothing at all Captain, what did you have in mind," was my answer.

"Get back in my office, I'll take care of *you* personally!" The tone of his voice was anything but reassuring!

"Sit down in that chair," he said, motioning to the only dental chair in the office.

I complied, loosening my tie with a certain amount of apprehension. The Captain did NOT look happy.

"You don't seem like much of a Marine to me!", the Captain said, "I was with the Marines on Guadalcanal!"

The first reply I could come up with was "Well, Captain, you certainly LOOK old enough to have been with the Marines on the 'Canal'!"

"I'm beginning to understand what kind of Marine you are," the Captain continued.

"I don't think you have a clue Captain," I replied, "but *I'm* beginning to see what kind of *dentist* you are!"

By now the Captain was approaching apoplexy! Keenan and his "tooth fairy" are close enough to touch me, but the Captain chose to cross over into the 3<sup>rd</sup> person method of communication!

"Tell him to open his mouth wider!" was the Captain's reply.

I opened wider, of course, and the Captain began his assessment.

"Tell Major he's missing two fillings," the Captain told his 'tooth fairy'.

Hummm, this guy is gonna' get the Nobel Prize in "Dental Triage"!

"Tell the Captain I suspected as much," I relayed to the 'tooth fairy' to convey to the Captain.

Captain Keenan rummaged around in his dental cabinets, coming out with an absolutely huge Syringe. He installed a small needle on the syringe and extracted the necessary amount of Novocain from a small bottle into the outsized syringe. The unnecessarily large syringe was an affectation to see if he could make the nice Marine cringe...

"Well 'Nails'," you'll want a local anesthetic I suppose," the Captain said with an evil look on his face, squirting a small amount of liquid from the end of the needle.

Knowing what was running through his mind, instead of cringing I chuckled! NOW the Captain was *really* urinated off!

I'll give the old gent his due, he was one hell of a dentist, as he was through with both teeth in less than forty-five minutes. The Captain arranged for an additional session, and gave the slip to the "low-life" Duck who had started the whole thing! I noticed the Captain had arranged for my appointment for the afternoon when it wouldn't interfere with my class schedule.

Later that afternoon I received a note to report to our academic advisor, a Navy Commander (the equivalent of a Marine Corps or Army Lieutenant Colonel). Upon entering his office, he mentioned that he had received a nasty phone call from Captain Keenan at the Dental Office. I explained what had happened in great detail, making mention that Marine Officers are not used to receiving a ration of \$hi+ from either Marine Corps or Navy enlisted personnel, and it didn't reflect well on the individual service, in my opinion. I also pointed out that I had had absolutely no idea who the older gentleman in the white medical smock had been, since no rank was evident, and I had never even been in the dental office before. As far as I was concerned, he could have been an aging Navy Chief. The Commander hemmed and hawed a bit, but I could see a look of understanding coming over his face.

"Well, Culver, I don't suppose I'll write you a fitness report stating that you are a surly SOB, but, you should know that the Captain had just finished with a *VERY* bad day. It seems that his youngster had just been picked up this very morning for drug possession, and having a student "defying" his receptionist was the final straw!"

"The Captain has my sympathy of course," I said most sincerely, "but in all honesty HE

started the altercation, not ‘moi’. He never even asked what my problem was, he just jumped in my feces with no warning after I had just taken a ration of stuff from some Tooth Fairy reading a paper, drinking coffee, and never having the courtesy of looking at me before giving me orders with a disembodied voice! Doesn’t sound like anyone is keeping track of their personnel over there!”

“Hummm,” was the reply. “Well, I know Captain Keenan personally, and he’s usually one hell of a nice guy; I’d appreciate it if you’d make a few amends for my sake. How’d you like it if your kid had just been picked up for drug possession?”

“Your point is well taken,” I replied, “I’ll see what I can do.”

Now nobody wants to be known as a “surly SOB” on his fitness report, just as John Wayne commented in *“Rooster Cogburn”*; “Nobody wants to be known as *high smellin’ and low down*” in a movie by the same name some years later. Perhaps a bit of schmoozing was indeed in order. I decided to see if I could mend a few Marine Corps and Ordnance Engineering fences. Actually not a bad move, both for my Academic Advisor’s sake, and of course for the preservation of my own molars, should I have to return to Captain Keenan’s emporium with a real dental problem!

The following afternoon I wandered over to the Dental Clinic, and arranged to palaver with the Captain. Our advisor had been correct, Captain Keenan was a nice gentleman whom I had caught during a moment when his fur was ruffled from other directions. After several cups of coffee, I managed to get him to tell me a few Guadalcanal stories, and got considerably more comfortable with having the Head Fang Mechanic working inside my mouth with drills, needles, and other implements of torture. Before I left the school, Captain Keenan and I got to be good friends and would wave at one another across the Campus when we’d occasionally pass.

While Captain Keenan turned out to be a first class Naval Officer, somebody needed to “Jap Slap” his First Class Tooth Fairy and teach him some manners. Hopefully, he wound up arranging dental appointments in Adak, Alaska! To paraphrase a curse I learned much later in the sand dunes in Saudi Arabia, “May the fleas of a thousand Camels infest his armpits, and may his arms be too short to scratch ‘em!”

Semper Fi,

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Marines have long referred to the Navy Dentists serving with Marine Corps organizations as “Fang Mechanics.” This was not meant as an insult, but rather as a way of good naturedly ribbing the Dental Corps. The Dental Corpsmen (enlisted Sailors in the Dental Field) were also referred to as *“Tooth Fairies”* with the same good natured intent. Line Hospital Corpsmen (as opposed to Dental) were jokingly called *“Chancre Mechanics”* and of course they reciprocated, often calling the Marines names that would make a civilian blush. There was, however, a close relationship between the Marines and Sailors of the Medical Corps, as they often saved our lives in times of great danger. We considered them fellow Marines and they were (and are) allowed to wear the Marine Corps Uniform when assigned to the Marines. Regardless of all the good natured ribbing, it was truly a love-love relationship.

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<sup>2</sup> “First Class” (actually the whole term is 1<sup>st</sup> Class Petty Officer) is a rank within the Naval Service equivalent to a Staff Sergeant in the Marine Corps. A Second Class Petty Officer is the equivalent of Sergeant (E-5), and a Third Class Petty Officer is the equivalent of Corporal. The next step up from 1<sup>st</sup> Class is Chief Petty Officer, usually abbreviated CPO. Third, Second, and First Class Petty Officers can be identified by what would appear to be upside down chevrons with an eagle sitting in the middle on top of the “specialty designator” (crossed anchors for Boatswain’s Mate, crossed cannons for Gunner’s Mate, etc.). Sailors below the rank of CPO still wear the “Middy Blouse” (with flap-like collar) and bell bottom trousers as a service uniform. The term “Duck” is simple “Marine-speak” for sailor, much as they often refer to the Marines as “Jarheads” or “Sea Going Bell Hops”... Nothing derogatory, simply good natured ribbing on both sides.

<sup>3</sup> As an aside, while attending the Naval Postgraduate School, all students were required to wear civilian clothes to class, to include dress trousers, a sport coat, decent civilian shoes (no tennies), and a necktie (“field scarf” for all you old time Marine Corps buffs). There was truly no way for the Navy 1<sup>st</sup> Class to have known my (or anyone else’s) rank or service. This did NOT preclude his being polite and respectful to all hands, however. Such an attitude and rudeness would have gotten him fired in short order in civilian life. Simple politeness is incumbent upon all hands as a matter of common courtesy. The Duck’s attitude and discourtesy were unfortunate, and they reflected badly upon the Dental Clinic. Unfortunately, they simply had the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time.

<sup>4</sup> The rank of Captain in the U.S. Navy is the equivalent of full Colonel in the Army or the Marine Corps or Air Force. The next step up is Rear Admiral (Lower Class), much like the next step up from Colonel is Brigadier General. Rear Admiral (*Lower Class*) is the equivalent of a Brigadier General, but the holder of the rank wears “2-Stars” instead of one – this was reportedly done to give Navy “Flag Officers” a “one-up” on any sister services who merely wore one star, albeit holding the same pay grade. The Navy DOES have a one star grade known as a *Commodore*, but it is generally used only in wartime, and is usually a “frocked” rank, good only until the cessation of hostilities. Naval officers with special small boat talents (sailing skippers, etc.) were occasionally inducted during WWII as Commodores to handle anti-submarine patrols off the coast of the United States. Some years back an attempt was made to reintroduce the rank of Commodore to replace the Rear Admiral (Lower Grade) rank but was “feces-canned” shortly afterwards, no doubt due to some resistance from the brass who didn’t want to remove a star from their epaulets. The Navy has always been extremely rank conscious...

# Devil Cults, Charlie Manson, Halloween ...and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School

By Dick Culver

While watching a documentary on the idiot box the other night, a program came on featuring some of the most infamous of our modern day murderers. While I'm sure that I could have found something else, pure boredom or perhaps apathy prevented me from surfing the current offerings on the satellite dish. I was doing a bit of reading, and while half listening to the narration, a picture of Charlie Manson suddenly appeared on the screen. Aside from being one of the most evil *looking* miscreants I can recall, he was a *truly* depraved, demented soul.



After the facts had filtered down over the course of several years, I do remember that he had been taught to play the guitar by no less a resident of the Federal Prison System than Alvin Karpis (former prisoner on Alcatraz while I was there, and a one time member of the Barker-Karpis Mob). Again, I remember that Charlie Manson was a "resident" of the Federal Prison at Petersburg, Virginia when my Dad was the warden there in 1951, although he was simply one of many others doing time. Having put in a few days with several of the principals in the unfolding scenario, I continued to watch with a small amount of interest.

As I reminisced a bit, I recalled that initially there was serious speculation that the entire Tate-LaBianca\_murders were the work of some sort of Devil Cult or the work of Satanists. The LAPD and the LA County Sheriff's office apparently made a project out of refusing to cooperate with one another, and the entire law enforcement arm wrestling contest almost became a horrific three ring circus. The true facts of the case, as later revealed, were almost beyond normal comprehension, so "off the wall" scenarios were proffered to explain multiple, extremely violent and bloody murders that could not possibly come from the mind of a simple criminal. They were, of course, correct, as Charlie Manson was no everyday criminal, and in my opinion he was most certainly not sane.

When the murders occurred I was stationed on the East Coast, and while of great interest because of the notoriety of the victims, minute details were not forthcoming. Time rolled on, and by July of 1970 I was transferred to Monterey, California to attend the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. Charlie and his minions were now in the "Dock" (using British"ese"), being tried for their crimes. Again, the details were still dribbling in. It was not out of the question that Charlie was some sort of Devil Cult figure, having his minions follow him in his worship of Satan, or worse. The entire West Coast in general, and Los Angeles in particular, was hanging on every new turn in the case. During the initial investigations of the crimes, the possibilities of mayhem to everyday families began to haunt the local citizens. Some Police Officers in the Los Angeles area actually rounded up their families and sent them to higher ground until the fact of the case could be ascertained<sup>1</sup>.



The true facts were more horrific than even what the most creative speculator could have dredged out of a highly fertile imagination. With the mindset of the “new generation”, young converts began to flock to the Manson influence without any overt recruitment. Hangers-on and wannabees flocked to the cause uninvited. This clown was a truly dangerous individual. One of the Manson Family girls had an attorney that was perceived as not doing a good job. One of these newly converted “Mansonites” actually took the attorney out and threw him over a cliff! The judge was both verbally and physically threatened by Manson, thus starting a shackling routine for Charlie in the courtroom. To a certain extent, Manson was having much more influence than the “douche-bag” should have had, and no doubt more than he ever imagined possible. Needless to say, he was luxuriating in his new found limelight.

Tensions ran high, and the entire West Coast (if not the rest of the country) waited with baited breath. The local papers were having a ball in circulation, based for the most part upon pure speculation.

## **Setting the Academic Stage**

In the Postgraduate School, our academics had started in mid-August, and it was my first time back in the halls of academic pursuits in over 12 years. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed. While I had a BS in Physics from the Virginia Military Institute, I had effectively flushed any interest in pursuing further education when I had walked away with a diploma, and more importantly a Commission in the United States Marine Corps. I was definitely ready to head back to the Corps on a full time basis. When I exited VMI with a brand new commission in the Corps, I was finished with an exile not unlike Alcatraz, with close order drills, parades and learning the whys and wherefores of the 105mm Howitzer (I opted to take Artillery to polish my mortar and map reading skills), and I went away whistling the Marine Corps Hymn.

To me, the Virginia Military Institute had been a means to an end; but alas, my past caught up with me. The Marine Corps had decided I was a qualified “quota filler” based on my previous academic qualifications, and I settled down to another academic grind.

When I arrived at the Postgraduate School, it had been over a decade since I had cracked anything more challenging than a military manual. What a comeuppance! Back to the books - and it wasn't fun, even the second time around (damn that clown who bet me that I was too stupid to make it as a Physics Major!).

Those assigned to Monterey to get a Masters Degree in Management only had a one year course and could graduate without even turning out (in?) a thesis. Those of us still attempting to prove we *weren't* too stupid to make it in Physics had a two and a half year grind, topped off with a comprehensive thesis. We had very few hours to ourselves, while the Management weenies developed a case of “duffers' elbow”...

To make matters worse, I was a single parent with a 9-year old rugrat to take care of. I would fix breakfast, send him off to school, grab my own books and head for the classroom. The afternoons were usually taken up by labs, and I would arrive home just in time to catch the young'un coming back from the local base school. I would then fix supper, make sure the squirt got his homework done, do my own (usually burning the midnight oil), and collapse in the rack awaiting another thrilling day of the same. The only bright spots were the weekends, since there were no classes on Saturdays. Friday night allowed you time to take off your pack. Entertainment for myself and the “kidlet” consisted of making a bowl of popcorn or

getting some “Munch and Crunch” and watching “Creature Features” on TV (this is the one where the host would rise up out of a coffin wearing a business suit and a pair of black horn-rimmed glasses). Great fun, and it allowed you to get your mind off the academics for an evening.

We lived in Government Quarters that were technically aboard the base (post? campus?), but not close to the actual school (the old Del Monte Railroad Hotel bought by the Navy following WWII). The housing sat up on a hill mass, unprotected by a gate, but it did have the amenity of having a Base Operated School for the youngsters.

We were divided up into academic sections (by Academic Major, i.e. Ordnance Engineering, Chemistry, Management, Computer Science, etc.). The sections were reasonably small; some numbered no more than seven to ten kindred souls. “Section Entertainment,” if it can be so characterized, usually consisted of an occasional poker game on a Saturday night, with the wives palavering, a occasional section party or two, and attending the local Little League ball games. We were not exactly in a social whirlwind, if you catch the drift.

When it came to traditional holidays or occasions, we celebrated like the average citizen as even the PG School wasn't about to put the kibosh on the Marine Corps Birthday, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, or Christmas. Halloween, now, there was a whole 'nother smoke. The kids were shepherded around by the parents, and I usually had two TV Trays out on the front lawn. One tray held traditional Halloween goodies, and the other was occupied by a 5-quart Crock Pot full of Hot Buttered Rum hooked to the house by a long extension cord. I had an adequate supply of Styrofoam Cups to ladle the hooch to the parents accompanying the youngsters. Since no one was driving, I usually attracted a large crowd and it became a traditional occasion. I also noted a considerable number of repeat “trick-or-treaters” with accompanying parents, heh, heh, heh! Lots of fun, and again - it was a break.

## **Cut to October 1970**

While most thinking individuals would not classify me as one with paranoid tendencies (not publicly at any rate), I have always been one to be prepared. I have always been what some unfeeling oafs would characterize as a “gun-nut” – I prefer to think of myself as a “gun-buff” or “firearms-aficionado” - but then guns in general, and military weaponry in particular are my stock and trade and are the implements I have always used to enforce the will of the our Country and our Corps upon the unenlightened.

As a result, prior to leaving Camp Lejeune, North Carolina (heading for California), I had acquired a “Tangent Sighted” 9mm Browning Hi-Power Pistol from a fighting Marine Aviator, Major Bob Matthews. While I'm not a great fan of the 9mm, the Browning Hi-Power was the only high capacity magazine semi-auto pistol of the time, holding 13-rounds in the magazine and one additional stuffed up the spout. The hi-capacity magazine semi-auto had one overriding advantage under some circumstances; it meant that in a bedroom situation, or a situation that would preclude carrying extra magazines, you could engage multiple targets without doing a “search and traverse” of the bedroom drawers or car pockets for extra ammunition.

The .40 caliber high capacity handguns have now rendered the 9mm Browning somewhat obsolete, but at the time it was the only game in town. I had my “Matthews acquired” *Browning Half-Power* (pun intended) stashed on the top shelf of the hall closet in

Monterey, next to the front door of my quarters, just in case – ya' just never know; sometimes even serving military types are a bit deranged (watash excluded of course).

The particular Friday night in question was in the latter part of October, and we had been hitting the books hard since the middle of August. I was enjoying “Creature Features” with the “kidlet” when the front door bell rang. Door bell at about 2100 on a Friday night? Very unusual to say the least. I hustled to the door, opened the closet door and stuck the Browning in the right hip pocket of my blue jeans. Upon opening the door, I was taken completely aback – there staring out of the darkness, illuminated by the small porch light of the house, were about seven individuals. Six of these clowns were wearing Devil costumes and one was dressed as an angel! Holy Catfish, Batman! Tales of the Satanists being responsible for the Tate-LaBianca\_murders came instantly to mind. All I could think of is Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the SOBs are here to get me!

My right hand went instantly back to my right hip pocket of my blue jeans, and my thumb automatically disengaged the manual safety! The slightest perceived hostile movement on the part of any of those standing outside my door would have resulted in more bloodshed than the entire Tate-LaBianca fiasco. One thing I have found is that hesitation on the part of the “accosted” usually results in the victim being dead on arrival. I did NOT intend that Mrs. Culver’s little boy be done in by Satan’s minions. Even though I don’t trust the 9mm, head shots make up for lots of deficiencies in cartridge performance.

What kept me from becoming Manson’s replacement in the courtroom following his eventual conviction? Wellll... the little lady in the Angel’s costume looked at me in a most convincing way and said...

“Excuse me sir, do you have a Lieutenant Commander’s calling card, or a “sippy straw”?”

Dear Allah, these poor depraved individuals were simply members of an Academic Section Party celebrating Halloween a week early (you had to schedule your entertainment around your academic schedule, tests, exams, and term papers). These folks were obviously pushing the Halloween envelop a bit, and were engaged in a “Section Scavenger Hunt”, looking for calling cards and other equally mundane items to fulfill their mission! Only the question from the young lady prevented Culver from avenging Charlie’s murders in the Los Angeles Area!

I assured the young lady that unfortunately I didn’t have any of the items, but wished them well, smiled, closed the door, re-engaged the manual safety, stuck the Browning back on the shelf, and went back to “Creature Features”! If they had only known... Only the quick request from my “Angel” prevented me from standing there ankle deep in brass with some of the Navy’s finest minds laid out on my door step. I installed a front door “peep-hole” following that, and made some mental notes not to jump to conclusions - and perhaps substituting Yogi and Boo-Boo Bear cartoons for “Creature Features”?

Semper Fi,

ROC

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria's father was a Detective Sergeant in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department at the time of the Tate-LaBianca murders, and was assigned to the case. He and a number of others took their families up to their summer cabins located at Big Bear, California for over a month to keep them out of harm's way, while the details were being sorted out.

# Human Relations...

## as Taught by the Army to the Navy

## ...and Received by the Marines

By Dick Culver

My introduction to the fine art of political correctness came as something of a surprise. It was during my final exam week, following two and a half years of study at the United States Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. We were notified that we would be required to attend a new class being presented by an Army Major to ensure that we were exposed to a new discipline being introduced to the United States Armed Forces to guarantee fair treatment of all minorities. The fact that we were going to be required to take time from our exam studies was not a welcome piece of news.

We were assembled in a large classroom. Apparently both Navy and Marine Corps Officers were to be told by an Army Major how to exhibit proper leadership within our services towards the minority personnel assigned to us. Huh? We had some Army character attempting to teach basic leadership to a Marine? Dear Allah, I was NOT amused!

Our uniform of the day at the school was civilian coat and tie, I assumed to render all students subordinate to the various Navy instructors, many of who ran from Ensign to Lieutenant Commander, with a few civilian professors thrown in. Most of us were too busy trying to get a handle on such things as Quantum Mechanics, Linear Algebra and other arcane subjects to swap rank comparisons with our professors. It was an unnecessary affectation, but not having to keep several sets of Greens ready for class was a welcome time saver. It worked well for both sides of the aisle.

The chairs for this "training evolution" were arranged in a large, more or less circular configuration, in no particular order. The students were randomly seated with the Army Major located in the same pre-formed circle of chairs (actually a sort of horseshoe shaped configuration). At the far end of the slightly incomplete circle were two black "no class" Navy "deck snipes"<sup>1</sup> dressed in their "middy-blouse and bell bottomed uniforms" – the only individuals in the classroom dressed in military garb.

The Army Major (a minority of course) introduced himself and informed us that he had recently graduated from a course designed to prepare "Class Moderators" for the new "*love your local minorities*" brain-child of some undisclosed civilian consultant group! The moderator's (or class leader's) niche in the Human Relations Programs was to encourage interaction of the students and to guide the direction of the ensuing threads of discussion. The entire effort was designed to ensure that all hands understood the plight - and extremely sensitive psyche - of the downtrodden! Egad! Gag me with a spoon!

During this first thrust of Political Correctness into the Naval Service, the Major kicked off the class by having each individual introduce him or her self to the person on their left, with the idea that the introducer would receive his/her introduction from the one to whom you had just given your life story. I simply informed my fellow "cog in the wheel" that I was a professional Marine Infantry Officer whose politics were slightly to the right of Attila the Hun. The Naval officer to my left grimaced a bit and didn't seem to be as terribly amused as I had

intended – obviously this guy’s sense of humor needed some tweaking. I got the impression that my fellow guinea pig thought I was not taking the program seriously – au contraire, I was dead serious, he just didn’t realize it yet! Our introductions were to be presented just before we gave our two cents worth to the group, when called upon by the Major. I waited with baited breath for the class to start.

The first two called on to expound upon the subject were the two deck snipes. The first one seemed bent upon using foul language to impress the group that he had a free “reign of mouth” in front of a group of officers. The second one gave a presentation more to the point.

“We demands mo black officers,” this clown expounded, “we cain’t rap wid deese Honkey Mudder F- -ks (using the full translation of ‘MFs’ of course)”.

“*Rap wid deese Honkey MFs?*” Excuse me! I could see how this was gonna’ go, and I was not amused! *You’ve GOT to be \$hi++ing me!* I was looking for a plank for these two douche-bags to walk!

While my personal experience with the Navy over the years has led me to believe that the Navy is considerably more prejudiced than the Marine Corps, the individual responses from the Navy folks in the circle made me feel like I was sitting in a NAACP meeting! These clowns seemed to be urinating down their legs to give the impression that they truly understood these two @\$sholes! Holy Catfish, Batman, had I been whisked away to the land of Oz by some unseen twister? I was both astounded and dismayed, to say the least.

Each individual seemed to be trying to outdo the previous one, only a small step away from breaking out a hankie to dry their eyes. I got more and more irritated as the charade progressed. The only thing I could do was roll my eyes and look at the overhead when it got really disgusting. But my time was approaching...

When it became obvious that it was Culver’s time in the barrel, the guy to my immediate left got up and gave the “Attila the Hun” routine that I had hoped would give him a chuckle. He did the required song and dance and sat down leaving the floor (deck?) to me. My first move was to ask the Army Major if he *REALLY* wanted to know my opinion of the proceedings?

“By all means,” the moderator said, “give us your real feelings and observations.”

Hoo boy, well he asked for it!

“Major, I think the entire group is missing the point here!” I started. “The point of the entire exercise is that what we have here is a simple leadership problem, not truly one of prejudice. If one of my troops has a problem finding proper housing for his family, I will personally go out and investigate the problem and see that it’s corrected! I do this because it’s my job to take care of my troops regardless of their skin coloration. As far as I’m concerned, they can be red, white, black, green or polka-dotted – to me they are all Marines and will be treated as such, because that’s what I’m paid to do! If I find them proper housing, or solve any personal problems related to their treatment aboard a base, or in the unit, they become ‘*Happy Marines*,’ and I’ve found that a *Happy Marine* is a much more efficient killer. We are in the business of killing or subduing the enemies of our country, and I’ll do whatever it takes to make them more efficient. To answer the ‘unasked question,’ I personally don’t CARE if the individual feels that the entire world is prejudiced, that simply ain’t my problem! I don’t CARE if it advances the ‘*Black Cause*’ or for that matter the ‘*Woman’s Cause*’ or the ‘*Hispanic*

*Cause!* I simply don't care, I want happy and contented Marines who feel that they are being well cared for by their unit and their leaders. Such well led Marines will be more than willing to kill for their country because I order it done! How does this fit in with the proffered description of my persona? Don't forget, I described myself as being slightly to the right of Attila the Hun. I kill for a living, but I leave social reform to the bleeding heart liberals! Have I made myself clear?"

Needless to say, you could have heard a pin drop! The entire gathering sat there with their mouths open waiting for some sort of lightening bolt to come down from out of the blue and smite the obnoxious Major hip and thigh! When nothing happened, they started sneaking sideways glances at one another. The Shore Patrol didn't come and pick me up, nor did the local gendarmes come to haul away the clown who had essentially spoken heresy.

The Army Major politely cleared his throat, and said, "that's a very interesting viewpoint, Mr. Culver<sup>2</sup> (reading my name from my nametag), do you have anything else to add?"

I allowed as how that pretty well summed up my personal feelings on the subject, and settled back to listen to what the guy who had introduced me had to say. It didn't happen.

The Army Major said, "Well Mr. Culver if you have nothing else to say, you are free to leave anytime you want!"

I grinned to myself and told the Army Major that it had been a very enlightening session, and I had enjoyed his presentation (lying in my teeth). I picked up my briefcase and headed to my next class. The interesting point was that absolutely no one else in the class was given permission to exit stage left! Score one for the Corps. The Army's answer to the Reverend Al Sharpton had no doubt been warned concerning his hi-powered course to get rid of potential troublemakers rather than discuss political fine points.

Strangely enough, not one word was said concerning my discourse, not from the Army or the Navy. I'm not sure whether they were in shock or simply thought I was beyond salvation! My Marine Corps compatriots grinned and left it at that. I was not subjected to any more such idiocy until I wound up in the Third Division following graduation.

I have no idea if the two deck snipes ever got "mo black officers to rap wid" or they had to continue to serve with their "Honkey Mudda F - -ks." What a ship that must have been! Dear Allah...

Shades of Archibald Henderson<sup>3</sup>, sometimes I think we are our own worse enemies!

Semper Fi,

## Dick

...And you folks wondered why I didn't make Commandant? Ha!

**End Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> A “deck snipe” is an unofficial term for an “unrated sailor,” or one who has not reached NCO status, normally this will be a Seaman 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 1<sup>st</sup> Class. In the Naval Service, a 1<sup>st</sup> Class is senior to a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, who is senior to a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class, etc. The term “*Deck Snipe*” in the Navy is roughly equivalent to the term “*Snuffy*” in the Army or Marines.

<sup>2</sup> Since we were not wearing uniforms, the title of “Mister” was an understandable assumption since it is (or was at the time) permissible to refer to Naval Officers as Mister up through the rank of Lieutenant Commander, the equivalent rank of Major in the Army or Marine Corps. It used to be great fun to refer to a “rank conscious” Naval Officer as “Mister” even though he was wearing gold oak leaves. They used to take great umbrage at such reference since you could only refer to a Marine or Army Officer as “Mister” thorough the rank of First Lieutenant.

<sup>3</sup> Archibald Henderson was the Corps’ longest serving Commandant having held the post for 39-years.



# The Start of Modern Marine Corps Scout Sniper Instructor School

By Dick Culver

I have been in on the Marine Corps Scout Sniper evolution since about 1966 when I was the S-3 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion at Camp Lejeune. I was told that the “new concept” was to establish a Sniper Platoon for each regiment (set up so each Infantry Battalion would receive a squad). This was to be supplemented with a platoon for the various Reconnaissance Battalions. Being the junior Battalion S-3 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, I was called to a conference at Division Headquarters where the entire plan was to be laid out. Dear Allah! I never heard such bitching and moaning in my entire existence! Bird Colonels (Regimental Commanders) were cursing HQMC for visiting such nonsense on a “real” combat outfit. Holy Catfish



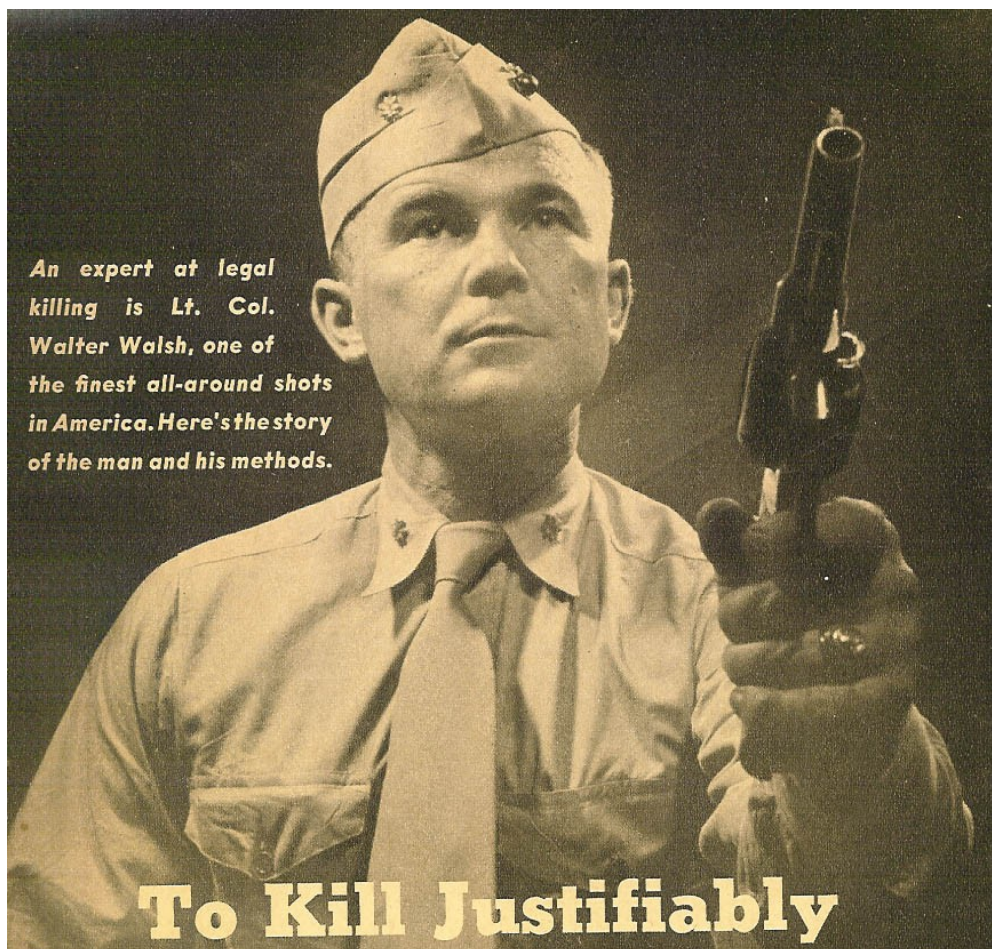
**The Setting Sun on a Marine Corps Legend,  
Gunnery Sergeant Carlos Hathcock**

Batman, in short phrase I was appalled! Being a young Captain at the time (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was almost a “casual” outfit at that time, attempting to supply a steady replacement pool for Vietnam, and both the Med and Carib cruises. Needless to say it was a madhouse. When the upper echelons of the Regiments continued their diatribes wondering who had come up with such a hair-brained scheme, I pointed out that it probably came down from Training at HQMC (Colonel Walter Walsh had the Marksmanship Desk at the time). They were bitching that Walsh had never been an Infantry Regimental Commander, and essentially derided any suggestion that he was experienced enough to saddle them with such a fool idea.

I went on to point out that Walsh was probably one of the most (personally) deadly Marines I had ever served with, and in the 1930s as a young FBI agent, those in the know pointed out that Walsh had personally killed at least 11 bandits in individual combat (one-on-one gunfights), ...some said the total was actually closer to 17! Walsh was a Reserve Marine Lieutenant and immediately resigned (or at least took a leave of absence) from the FBI and put in for active duty with the Corps. J. Edgar Hoover was outraged, and never again allowed any FBI agents to be members of any armed forces reserve organizations (true story). Walter Walsh went on to run the Marine Corps Scout Sniper School at Camp Lejeune by 1943 and held the post until he made the Okinawa invasion where eyewitnesses watched the Colonel shoot a Jap between the eyes with a .45 Automatic through a bunker aperture at 75-yards. My point is that Walsh was probably uniquely suited for the job as his training had been both in deadly marksmanship and operating as a loner (it was a different FBI in the old days). Following his WWII Service, Walter came back to the FBI only to find he had become

something of a pariah, and decided to return to the Marines, never to return to the FBI. Following his return to the Corps, Walsh became the guiding light of the Corps Marksmanship efforts until his retirement in the early 1970s. He was truly a legend in his own time.

I was not well received at the "Sniper Conference" at Lejeune, and essentially told to leave combat planning to the regimental commanders who KNEW what they were doing. Hummm...



**Lt. Col. Walter Walsh, who served as the OIC of the USMC Sniper School as a Captain when it was located at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina during WWII. The picture is taken from a magazine article by Lucian Cary in a book called "Lucian Cary on Guns" published in the early 1950s, chronicling Walsh's exploits as an FBI Agent prior to WWII. Walsh signed Captain Cuddy's Dad's Sniper Graduation Certificate in WWII.**

I wound up on Oki in 1966, assigned (on paper) to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. Because I had just come from Recon (I was an old Force Recon Marine from 1<sup>st</sup> Force back in 59-61), and had been the CO of A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion prior to getting drafted as the S-3 (1965-66) due to personnel shortages. This doomed my immediate plans to head to Vietnam (I had been putting in to go down as an observer since 1962). Instead I was "exchanged out" of 1/4 to run the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade Raid School on the Rock. Not a bad job, but not what I had gone to WesPac for... How does this fit into the sniper picture? Well,

when 1/4 arrived on the Island, they brought with them one of the first newly formed Scout Sniper Platoons. The sniper armorer was one of my old NCOs (with whom I would again serve numerous times), Sergeant Ted Hollabaugh (much later to run the ordnance shop with Gunner Neil Goddard at MTU Quantico building the M40A1s, and who went on to become the sniper armorer for the FBI and eventually the FBI's ballisticsian). Ted and I took time to reminisce old times. I asked him what they had given him to take "south" as a sniper rifle? Ted's reply was something of a surprise; they simply had been issued M14s! All the available

Model 70s (from both the Rifle Team Equipment stores, and any usable rifles from the Special Services issued for hunting purposes by Marines at the various bases – it was a different Corps in those days with a different mentality).

The Model 70s with both 8X Unertl and 12X Lyman Super TargetSpots had been sent to Vietnam in the early stages of the war, leaving the Stateside cupboards clean awaiting the (eventual) arrival of the highly vaunted M40 Remingtons. Ted was at his wit's end, but being an inventive sort, he had scrounged up a set of blueprints of the Rock Island Arsenal scope mount for the M14 Rifle. Ted went to FSR (Force Service Regiment) on Okie and asked if they could turn out some of the RIA mounts given the upcoming urgency of their assigned mission. They obliged (Ted was a hell of a scrounger), and he was busy installing the mounts on their M14s. Ted then went forth to pillage the entire PX complex on Okinawa to buy up every piece of quasi-suitable Jap glass you can imagine, producing what must have been some of the most cobbled together sniper guns on the planet (this was prior to the Army fielding the XM21, and later the M21, M14 Sniper guns). When 1/4 went south, the 14s fitted with Jap glass were their basic sniper armament (the M40s didn't start showing up in any quantity until about mid summer of 1967).

Compliments of the Hill Fights (881 and 861 north and south) at Khe Sanh in the Spring of 67, I finally broke loose from the Raid School, and became a Rifle Company Commander with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, and finishing up my tour with 2/3 in 1968. Again, let me put this in perspective. Because of a shooting background, I tended to keep track of what was going on in the newly deployed Scout Sniper Platoons. It was enough to make a grown man cry. There were two major problems. The first was one of a residual stain attached to anyone one who shot rifles at small targets. Such individuals were called "dingers" and not highly regarded by the infantry elite, although most of the shooters were twice the soldiers of their detractors (I could go on about this for ages, but that's not what this is all about). The second problem was that the commanders had absolutely NO idea of what to do with a sniper, how to deploy them or what such men could do for an operating unit! Several units I visited had the Snipers filling sandbags because the hierarchy didn't know how or where they were supposed to be deployed. This is of course a blanket indictment, and there were notable exceptions such as Jim Land and Carlos' efforts out of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division area, but as I said, these were the exception, not the rule. A number of our old time shooters acquitted themselves with great distinction (Carlos of course with 93 confirmed zips KIA, and Eric England with 98). Some new blood came on the scene with individuals like Chuck Mawhinney with 103 confirmed and a number of others with less, but none the less had an important impact on the morale of the enemy. The Scout Sniper effort in RVN had an important, but not terribly well publicized roll in the overall war effort prior to the publication of Henderson's book on Carlos.

Lest this become a Culver diatribe, let me fast forward with a few connecting strings. I came home from RVN to become the XO of the Range at Camp Lejeune where we (Ted Hollabaugh and several more of the armorers) experimented with silenced sniper rifles, and other interesting variations. I became the S-3 of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 1<sup>st</sup> ITR, and then was sent to the U.S. Naval Post Graduate School to become an ordnance engineer (I think it may have had to do with my ravings on the shortcomings of the XM16A1 rifle which cost me a bit of extra time in grade, ahem!). A letter written by my Executive Officer, Mike Chervenak, when I was the Commanding Officer of Hotel Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, wound up on the front page of the Washington Post. Wally Green, then Commandant of the Corps was not exactly ecstatic!

I went back to the FMF from the NPG School, to become the S-3 of 1/4 and a short stint in Cambodia. Wound up at Hanscom AFB as a payback tour for my postgraduate schooling. I was mercifully rescued by Jim Land who got my fanny assigned as Dave Willis' relief at MTU Quantico. My assignment was something of a mystery to many of the old timers as I had never been a professional shooter, but rather a Marine who knew how to shoot (this will come into focus shortly). While the Distinguished Badge was a worthy accomplishment, there were some that viewed it as the begin-all, and end-all often resulting in the end of a career. As I once pointed out to one of my assigned roommates during a session at the Division Matches, that I had never looked through the sights of a rifle or pistol that I hadn't seen some "Dink's" head sitting on my front sight blade. My roommate made some smart-@\$\$ed remark about my being "one sick puppy" but it was simply the way I looked at things. As I said before, I had shot between assignments, but with the exception of my assignment to MTU it had been sporadic. As a youngster I had placed in the Wimbledon Cup with an M1 Rifle and got beaten out of the *Farr Trophy* (the service rifle subset of the Wimbledon) by two points by T/Sgt. Jim Hill, an Olympic Silver Medal Winner.

To me shooting, (be it requalification, recreational, or competition), was simply practice for greasing the enemy. Once I had gotten skilled enough to reliably hit a standing man at 1000-yards with a well-tuned service rifle with iron sights, make reliable head shots at 600-yards and put 'em anywhere I damned well pleased at 200 & 300 I was satisfied. With the pistol, I practiced until it was no problem to hit a standing man at 100-yards with an issue .45 Automatic, get head shots at 50, and again, put 'em anywhere I pleased at 25 and closer. While I didn't lose interest after that, I simply didn't give a rat's fanny about Olympic or International Competition except to prove to the rest of the world that we were not the sort of outfit to screw with.

We needed the National Competition to keep us sharp, and hone our "man killing skills" against the other armed forces. Success in such National Competition helped to make sure that we got the necessary appropriations to carry on our work of passing the latest advanced shooting techniques on to the rest of the Marine Corps. That (not pure competition), was the holy grail of MTU – this didn't make me the poster boy of an outfit that often thought of themselves as some sort of sportsmen. I have always thought that perhaps that was the rationale for Jim Land putting me in MTU... Plus, he wanted to restart the Marine Corps Sniper effort, and I was more than willing!

Fast forward once more to January 1977... Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Reynolds was the CO of Weapons Training Battalion. Charlie and I had shot together as Lieutenants some years previously. He was a joy to work with, and even being an aviator, he was a true warrior. Charlie had been an enlisted lineman early in his career, and the story goes that the First Sergeant used to make the lads don their climbers and climb a practice telephone pole to retrieve their Liberty Cards from a box at the top. Charlie had gotten a commission, and decided to become an aviator. His proclivity with both rifle and pistol had gotten him assigned to the Wing Team numerous times and he eventually became Distinguished with both the rifle and the pistol. He put in two combat tours in RVN, one as a close air support A-4 driver, and a second as an early HU1E gunship pilot. Not being a silk scarf and moustache wax man, Charlie took his Huey to a suitable spot, set it on a couple of logs and with the help of his crew chief and two sizeable wrenches, tweaked each of his four forward firing M60s to converge at the range Charlie considered to be the perfect killing range for marauding communists. Charlie was a highly decorated warrior, and a damned good one. We made a



good pair for the sniper evolution that was shortly to emerge from the Training Conference at Headquarters Marine Corps in January 1977.

Charlie and I arrived at the Navy Annex, and met with Jim Land who had the Marksmanship Desk at HQMC, and the new head of the Training Branch, an Air-Arm exchange officer, Brigadier General Kuci. Now General Kuci may have been a “zoomie,” but he was intelligent, and receptive to new ideas. We went through the usual machinations about the upcoming marksmanship training for the Marine Corps for 1977 including such things as the Instructional Teams to be sent out to educate the new shooters assigned to fire in the Division Matches. Obviously having been prepped by Jim, the General asked if we had considered the formation of a sniper school at WTB? Jim was all ears of course and had his lined pad prepared for all sorts of suggestions.

I have a most annoying habit of speaking my mind and often coming up with schemes off the top of my head. Mercifully I have usually (always?) been able to pull off my ideas against all odds, and here I didn’t see any problem. I mentioned to General Kuci that we intended to start the new school this very year by using the medal winners from each Division Match as students in the school. Looks of horror came across several faces, and Charlie Reynolds looked at me like I had taken leave of my senses. The General was quick however, and allowed as how the Division Commanders wanted to personally assign personnel to any possible sniper school that would return their selectees to them and not have some of their more particularly talented competitors lost in the “competition fog” that sometimes follows a summer of shooting with the team.

Not to be outdone, I told the General that the Division Commanders were quite right, but that the prospective sniper *should* be required to fire in the division matches to assess their marksmanship skills. I further suggested (to placate the brass), the Division Commanders could pre-select their snipers, and we’d pick ‘em up for the school whether they placed in the matches or not. The students would already have a head start in honing their shooting skills, and even if they *didn’t* place WE’D (the sniper school/MTU/WTB) teach them what they needed to know, since marksmanship was our forté. While Jim didn’t have any objection to the suggestion, I’m reasonably sure he hadn’t been ready for my “fait accompli” which sounded like a well thought out plan! Jim was shaking his head, but apparently pleased the outcome of the conference. As we were walking down the steps of the Navy Annex, Charlie looked over at me and said “Culver if you F#\$%^ this up, it’s your @\$\$, but he was wearing an evil grin. Working for Charlie was always a pleasure!

On our way back to Quantico, Charlie asked me who I had in mind to run the Sniper School? I blushingly offered my services, but Charlie, with a nasty grin, said “oh no you don’t Culver, you’ve got the Rifle Team, the Pistol Team, and the International Team and I ain’t gonna’ break anyone else in! I say again, “who are you going to *appoint* as the OIC of the Sniper School.” With only a moment’s hesitation I told him Jack Cuddy, and of course the obvious answer for an NCOIC was Carlos Hathcock.

Charlie said, “but what makes you think Jack’ll want the job?”

“Want the job?” was my reply, “I hadn’t planned to give him any *choice*! He’ll love it! You aviators are all the same, you don’t *offer* ‘em a choice, you simply tell ‘em what’s going to happen!”

“Culver, you’re insane,” was Charlie’s comment but he didn’t seem unhappy.

When we walked back into the headquarters of Weapons Training Battalion, as luck would have it, Jack Cuddy was the first individual we ran into.

“Jack, congratulations on your new assignment!”

“New assignment?” Jack said, “*what* new assignment?”

I told him that he was now the OIC of the newly formed Marine Corps Scout Sniper Instructor School! A big grin came across his face and I knew I had found my man. If I had started with a two foot high stack of OQRs (Officer’s Qualification Records) and pored over them for days I couldn’t have done better. The rest is, as they say, history!



**Our First Scout Sniper Instructor School Certificate  
Compliments of Leatherneck Magazine and Herb Richardson  
A modernized copy of Jack Cuddy’s Dad’s Certificate from WWII**

The formation of the new school was chaotic as you might imagine. We had no budget, no funds allocated for such training, we had to construct our own training aids, and scrounge our match ammunition (not too hard around a marksmanship training facility). We lumped our training expenses under the Rifle Team Training and competition. People who sweat the minute’ details and worry themselves to death about “what if’s,” die with ulcers and get little done.

Prior to the arrival of the shooters from the Division Matches, we conducted a “mini-sniper school” for the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment deploying for a Med Cruise, and used the experience to work out glitches that might eventually be repeated in our first official school efforts. A number of the April graduates later returned to the official, “full-blown” school later that Summer.

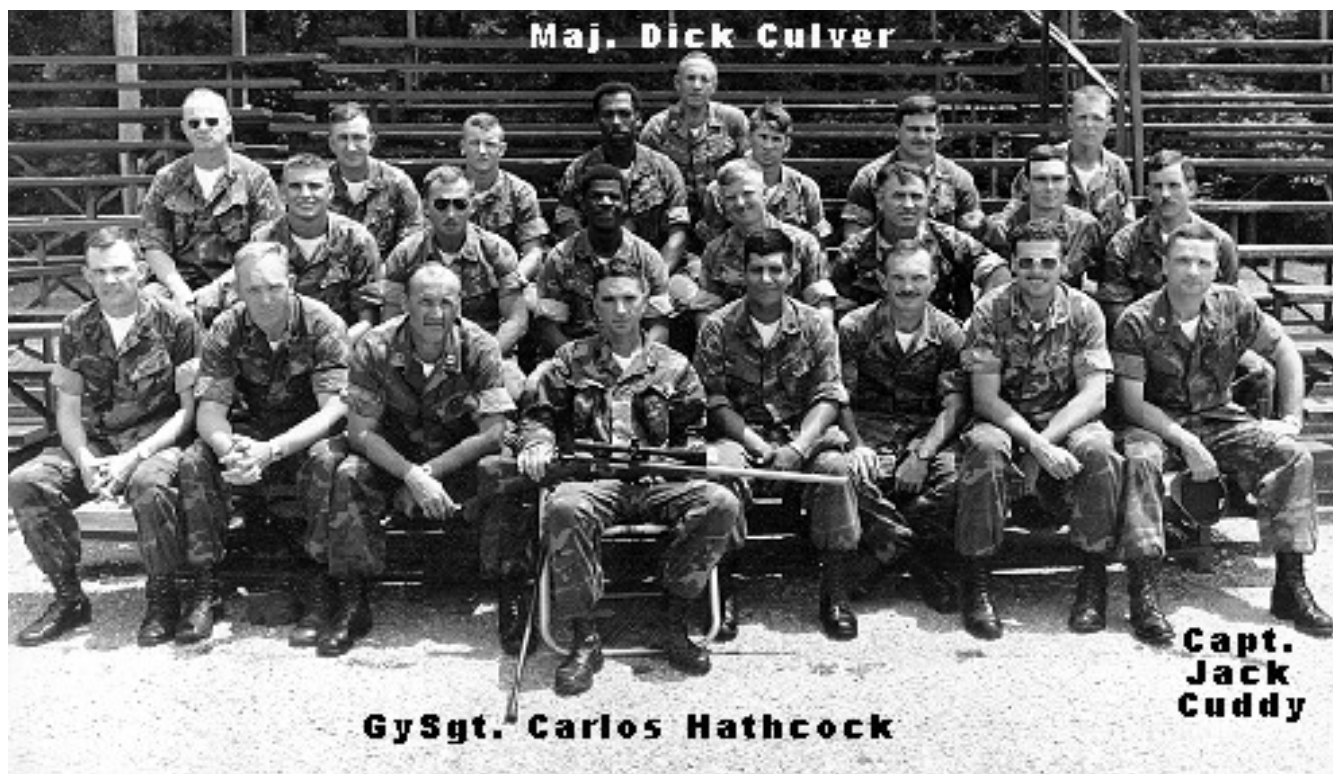
We had the students fire across the course with the summer rifle team in the morning and head for the bush or the books as appropriate following their marksmanship practice. We got additional help from Gunnery Sergeant Ron McAbee, one of our armorers but whose skills and inclinations were also attuned to the tactical execution of the use of the sniper rifle.

In the meantime I discovered that a number of pair of laser range finder binoculars were being delivered to the Development Center, and I headed for mainside. The people at the Development Center informed me that we (the Sniper School) would not be getting any of the laser range finders, as they were earmarked for the mortar teams.

*"Mortar teams?"* I exclaimed, "those guys can't keep their rounds in the same grid square!"

"Ah that Sniper School is a flash in the pan, we're giving these to the operating troops!"

My comments in reply were not for tender ears!



**Our first USMC Scout Sniper Instructor Class, August 1977**

**Captain Jack Cuddy served as our first Scout Sniper Instructor OIC.**

**Jack had a long personal sniper heritage dating back to WWII along with his father (whose sniper certificate signed by Captain Walter Walsh, we shamelessly copied).**

**Gy/Sgt. Carlos Hathcock (whose legend speaks for itself), served as the NCOIC of the School!**

**Major Dick Culver, the proud "Pappy" of the school, fended off the non-believers; those who were convinced our efforts would fail...**

**Not getting caught shuffling funds was a minor miracle! We succeeded in spite of ourselves!**

I took Jack Cuddy's Father's WWII Scout Sniper Certificate from Camp Lejeune, signed by (then) Captain Walter Walsh, down to *Leatherneck Magazine*. Herb Richardson who worked there at the time, was a fine and helpful gentleman. I asked him if he could have the Leatherneck artists massage the old certificate into a modern version with appropriate wording replacing the Sniper's helmet (WWII version) with a soft cover. Herb delivered a fine rendition, and I sent a copy to HQMC. By then Jim Land had retired, and my new certificate was returned with a thumbs down!

“What’s wrong with you guys?” I said over the phone, “why has my graduation certificate been turned down?”

“We don’t issue color certificates to school graduates,” was the reply, “even the graduates of the Officer’s Basic School get one in black and white!”

“Yeah, but those clowns are only Second Lieutenants!” was my come back.

They hung up on me! I headed back to *Leatherneck*. Finding Herb Richardson, I asked him what he’d charge me to produce the certificates.

“Who’s going to pay for ‘em?” he asked.

“I am,” I told him, and Herb agreed to produce my precious certificates at cost to help out the cause. I still have one on the originals (illustrated above) if no one out there can find an original example.

On the weekends we “allowed” our students to shoot their M40A1s in the long range matches to get a feel for the capabilities of their assigned weapons. As I recall, the M40A1 set at least one long range record that summer.

Firing across the course with the rifle team kept their marksmanship skills intact, and they were “allowed” to utilize their afternoons either in the classroom or running field problems in the brush. As training progressed, Carlos and Jack taught field expedient positions, and shooting moving targets, usually simulated by an individual carrying a cardboard “E-Silhouette Target” nailed to a long stick. Students assigned to the “butt detail” for the moving target exercise walked or ran at various speeds up and down the line in the butts. Crude, but effective method of simulating moving targets! What we lacked in sophisticated training aids, we made up for in enthusiasm, and inventiveness! As the old saying goes, improvise, adapt and overcome.

We essentially ran two classes end-on that summer of 1977 (although we called it a single class), the first six weeks was designed to make snipers out of our fledgling shooters since many (if not most) of our Vietnam era snipers were now back in civilian life (exceptions existed of course, Carlos, Eric England and a few others), while the second six weeks was designed to make them sniper instructors. The instructors were certified to go back to their various Divisions to start Division Scout Sniper Schools, and thus could feed their finest graduates back to our school in Quantico to make Scout Sniper *Instructors* out of ‘em. The concept worked well.

When we graduated our first class in August, I was extremely proud of the lads. They were essentially physical and mental noodles, but they were finished snipers. I would have had no mental reservations in farming our graduates to any (friendly) armed force as finished military assassins.

Following the graduation of our first class, Jack Cuddy and Carlos attended the Canadian Sniper School in Frederickton, in September, with myself and Ron McAbee to follow a bit later as observers. The Canadian School folks (both instructors and students) were awed by Jack’s and Carlos’ marksmanship skills. Carlos’ exploits in Vietnam had made him a bit of a celebrity, and his demonstrated skills simply added to his legend. The Canadian Weapons



School (encompassing everything from mortars and machine guns, to sniping skills) was headed by a Canadian Brigadier of sizeable breadth who was as bald as a billiard ball. He was known to one and all in the Canadian Army as "The Ball Pein Hammer"... Even more interesting was the fact that "The Hammer" was a former Canadian Rifle Champion. The Canuks had their feces in one bag, certainly at least in concept. The head of the small arms training was a Canadian Captain named Ken Nette who was one of the good guys.

I, in the meantime, was attempting to educate the young lieutenants attending the Basic Officer's School at Quantico. The idea was to influence our young lieutenants early in their careers, in the tactical advantages of the utilization of snipers in the operating forces. My experiences in Vietnam had taught me that most commanders were completely at a loss per the advantages of sniper employment. Many times trained snipers capable of dominating battle field situations were being used in the role of sandbag fillers. To say that this was maddening is an understatement. The obvious answer was education, but the "*anti-dinger mentality*" was deeply ingrained in the Marine Corps hierarchy's psyche at the time.

The exploits of the Marine Riflemen at Belleau Wood notwithstanding, the then current crop of uneducated Marine Officers had developed an anti-competitive marksmanship attitude which was carried over in a sort of undercurrent prevalent in the Instructional Staff at the Basic Officer's School. The feeling was that if you touched a rifle to increase your combat marksmanship skills, you essentially "*tubed*" your career chances. The Corp's marksmanship heritage boasting at least two Commandants who were Distinguished Shooters, seemed to have become lost in the mists of the modern battlefield. The USMC hierarchy still mouthed the platitudes of "every Marine a Rifleman" but when push came to shove, the "*anti-dinger mentality*" seemed to prevail if only subliminally...

Volume of fire seemed to have replaced the aimed rifle shot of the trained Marine Rifleman. A pox on full automatic switches on battle rifles. They do little past initial fire suppression, while instilling a "pray and spray" attitude that degrades intelligent employment of the Company, Platoon, Squad and Fire Team. Machine Guns are indispensable, but full automatic service rifles are not a viable substitute for aimed rifle fire, nor vice versa.



**Culver (left) and Hathcock (right) observing Jack Cuddy's "Sniper Hide," well concealed by the underbrush. Canadian Instructors on the right. Jack is not to be seen, indicating his excellent "hide" construction. Wet weather is indicated by the "shiny" appearance of the slickers worn by Culver and Hathcock.**

The trip to the Canadian Sniper School seemed an excellent opportunity demonstrate the advantages of the sniper to our rather reluctant Basic School Staff. With Charlie Reynold's permission, I decided to offer an open invitation to the Basic Officer's School Staff to observe our efforts at the Canadian Sniper School in Frederickton. I started on a "schmoozing campaign" designed to put our school graduates in the light of a battlefield force multiplier. A few carefully placed phone calls to the staff of the Basic School gained quite a bit of initial interest. All officers, especially senior officers, love to go on "boondoggles" to observe foreign armed forces in action. Initially several were seemingly anxious to attend, with at least one Bird Colonel who seemed exceptionally enthusiastic. I called Jack in Canada and alerted him to our possible entourage to watch the "Ball Pein Hammer" and his minions in action. Within a day, Jack got back to me to let me know the entire staff of the Canadian School was preparing to cease all instruction to welcome the United States Marine Corps! Uppss... This wasn't at all what I had in mind, but you can no doubt envision what was going through the Canadian Armed Forces mindset! Now what? It seems that the Canadians were preparing to impress their American Cousins.

I told Jack to stand by, and I would keep him posted. The following day, the ratfinks at the Basic School had "bagged-out" on the trip to Canada. I suppose the attendance by the Basic School hierarchy at something that smelled of marksmanship, was suddenly offensive to those who envisioned "anti-dingers" sitting on promotion boards, thus once again "The Anti-Dinger" mentality had reared its ugly head.

While we taught the Canuks some lessons in advanced marksmanship, their woodcraft skills were outstanding, due in at least in part, to having rifles that weren't in the same league as the M40A1 (if ya' can't hit 'em, ya' gotta' get close!).

We learned a new lexicon of terminology that was added a bit at a time to our slowly expanding Marine Corps sniping influence. We had such terms as "*Sniper Hide*" (we had just called 'em *positions*), "*Gillie Suits*" (we were using plain old camouflage with appropriate twigs – don't laugh, since Carlos "offed" at least 93 of the offending blighters using such archaic methods, good shooting positions, and "sans" the more modern terminology!). Gillie Suits had been used by Scottish Game Keepers to fend off poachers, but the name stuck and has since become one of the well recognized terms utilized in modern sniper training. Ron McAbee used the Frederickton experience to tune up his woodcraft, thus adding to his expertise in helping both Jack and Carlos in later classes. We learned as we went as the old saying goes.

A humorous side note on Culver and McAbee's return to the States occurred at the Montreal Airport. Jack and Carlos had driven to Frederickton in Jack's Jeep, while Mac and I had flown into Canada. In those days, it was common for male travelers to wear sport coats and ties, as opposed to the current garb of "tee shirts" and blue jeans. While waiting in the lobby, a nicely dressed young lady accosted Mac and I identifying herself as a Canadian Governmental employee making notes on those coming into and leaving Canada.

The young lady asked what our business was in Montreal. Mac, always having a well honed sense of humor and looking to be much the more impressive of the two of us was the first to be quizzed. What are you doing in Canada the nice looking young lady asked? Mac looked down at me (he was about 6" taller of the two of us) and said in what might well have been a Russian accent.

His answer was, “We can tell them **NOTHING** Comrad!”

Always having a quick comeback, I answered with, “***Help, I wish to defect!***”

The young lady screamed and went running off down the concourse. Mac and I went into the head and hid for almost two hours until our plane was just ready to take off. Traveling with Mac was always a thrill!

Jack later attended the British Royal Marine Sniper School in England (unfeeling oaf! I wanted to go myself, heh, heh, heh...). Here he learned much about urban sniping, much as we had been taught in Canada based on the Brits’ experiences in Northern Ireland.

We were learning, and keeping track of our new found skills. Upon his return from England, Jack told me that one of the first things he noticed was that some squared away British Royal Marine was always standing close behind him in the “Mess”, but saying nothing. Upon heading into his quarters that evening, the British Marine had apparently followed him home! After about a day or so of having his British Marine “*shadow*” follow him around, Jack asked him if there was something he (Jack) could do for him?

“On no sir,” was the reply, “I’m your ‘batman’!”

“Batman?” asked Jack, “what in the hell is a batman?”

“Sir, I’m here to make sure your uniform is pressed, your shoes are shined, and your wine glass is always filled!”

Jack laughingly told me that he wasn’t at all sure he couldn’t get used to the British way of doing things. The Brits have always had a certain sense of style!

Using our newly developed skills, we started writing the new Marine Corps Sniping Manual, always seeming to have new chapters added as things progressed.

I used my personal collection of Marine Corps Sniper Weaponry on a yellow pegboard, trimmed in red and set up in such a fashion that we could take it where ever we went to make our points, and impress our new prospective students. Heading back to the Marine Corps Basic Officer’s School, I finally got them to allow us to give the new lieutenants a rundown on the usage of snipers to control the battlefield by holding up entire units using hit and run tactics. The ability of a Marine Sniper to make the enemy “leak and squeak” (bleed and yell in pain) has a marvelous psychological effect on advancing troops. Being hit at extreme distances by unseen assailants is always distressing to the uninitiated. The “Thirteen Cent” kill is always an impressive way of making your point.

The Officer Instructors at the Basic School agreed to would give us what we asked for, but they scheduled it following *all* of the subjects in the curriculum. These kids had already finished the Basic Officer’s Course, and were to be taken into a classroom for an hour of indoctrination with the Basic School Company Commanders constantly chiding the new lieutenants that they had only a short time to return to their rooms to get dressed in their finery and get ready for having their “tassels” switched to the other side of their mortarboards.

The word had been put out that the individuals giving the indoctrination (us) were simply “team shooters” who were “pushing” competitive marksmanship. What they hadn’t figured on, was that we were combat veterans with appropriate decorations awarded for combat skills. The youngsters were much more impressed than the Basic School Company Officers had envisioned. Carlos’ skills were well documented, and I had done my time as a combat Rifle Company Commander with lots of time in the dirt. We gave ‘em what I would have considered to be an impressive lecture from combat experienced veterans.

The possibilities of, and the ability to impose our will on the enemy with a minimum amount of exposure seemed to have made its mark. The young lieutenants were almost impossible to drag out of the lecture, and their fondling of the Marine Corps Sniper arsenal was most gratifying. We (from the Sniper School) were given a lecture by the Basic School Company Officers following our indoctrination on the probability of making the youngsters late for graduation, falling on deaf ears in our case; later lectures were scheduled prior to their graduation.

Modern Sniper Classes are now the rule of the day, and even the Basic School instructional staff seemed to be properly impressed; subsequent combat experiences have made our point! Sniper utilization manifesting itself in such places as Iraq has proven the worth of Combat Marksmanship and finally made the point we had alluded to made so many years before.

Carlos was finally given a Silver Star for his exploits during his second tour in Vietnam, although recommended for the Medal of Honor! Carlos unfortunately has gone to fill his place in Odin’s Great Hall in Valhalla. Perhaps our efforts were worth while, as most modern sniper schools conducted by all the other services are essentially carbon copies of those conducted by Jack Cuddy, and Carlos those many years ago.

Semper Fi,

**ROC**

# 1902-1903 Krag Rifle Qualification Courses

OK, for Starters, let's see how our granddaddies had to qualify with the Krag Rifle!

## U .S. Army Rifle Qualification Course (circa 1902 -1903)

(prior to firing this course, each individual fired approximately 450 round of practice ammunition)

Qualifying Score was the aggregate of two runs of the KD (Known Distance) course and the two Skirmish Runs, requiring the individual to fire a grand total of 80 rounds over both courses per run. A total of 160 rounds were fired for the entire match.

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### 1st Course of fire:

Total number of rounds fired = 60

#Rounds	Range	Type of Fire	Position	Time Limit
10 Shots	200 yds.	Slow Fire	Standing	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	300 yds	Slow Fire	Sit or Kneel	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	500 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	600 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	200 yds	Rapid Fire	Standing	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 20 seconds per string
10 Shots	300 yds	Rapid Fire	Sit or Kneel	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 30seconds per string

\* No specific time limit specified during the slow fire stages. In the old days slow fire was usually understood to be "a reasonable amount of time." This usually was understood to be an average of 1 minute per shot. Match time limits were normally 1 minute per shot.

\*\*The Krag rifle was reloaded with five individual cartridges, with no "stripper clip" to assist. Hence rapid fire strings were fired in two individually timed 5 round strings

### 2nd Course of fire:

Total number of rounds fired = 20 per Skirmish Run (a total of 40 rds per individual for qualification)

Each shooter fired two Skirmish Runs utilizing the targets called in slang, the Squaw and Papoose Targets. Officially, the Squaw (the larger of the two) was called the "E Silhouette Target" and the Papoose (the smaller of the two) was called the "F Silhouette Target".

The Skirmish Run was fired in the following manner (this was a sort of individual version of the "rattle battle" or *National Trophy Infantry Trophy Match*):

1. Each shooter had one (each) Squaw and Papoose Target sitting on top of the butts in front of his firing point - any firing position was allowed at all ranges (you could shoot prone at all distances if you wished):
2. The line of shooters formed just to the rear of the 600 yd line in a skirmish line. When the line was formed, it was ordered forward ("**well dressed**" needless to say) to the 600 yd. firing point and halted. On command, each shooter fired 2 rounds at the target(s) within a time limit of 30 seconds.
3. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit the line was ordered forward to the 500 yd. line. The first half of the distance was covered in quick time and the last half at double time. At 500 yds. 2 rounds were fired at the target in a time limit of 30 seconds.
4. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 400 yd. line. Again, the distance was covered first in a quick time with the last half done at the double. At 400 yds. **3 rounds** were fired in 30 seconds (vice 2 at 500 & 600).
5. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 350 yd. line, using the combination quick and double time routine (which would be continued through the end of all courses fire during the skirmish runs). Again you were required to shoot **3 shots** in 30 seconds, just as at 400 yds.
6. Upon expiration of the 30 sec time limit, the line was ordered to the 300 yd line. Here you had a total of 10 rds. remaining. The individual shooter was allowed to distribute these in any way he wished between the 300 and 200 yd line. He had another 30 second time limit at 300 yds, but this was cut to 20 sec. at 200 yds.

Old timers were said to have favored the prone position at all ranges with a few diehards using the sitting position at 200. Total possible score was 100. An extremely accomplished shooter of the day was thought to be doing well if he scored 80 or more points on a skirmish run.

**Put into table form, it would look like this:**

**Skirmisher's Course**

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yds	2	30 sec	Any
500 yds.	2	30 sec.	Any
400 yds.	3	30 sec	Any
350 yds.	3	30 sec	Any
300 yds	10 rds. to be used at shooter's discretion	30 sec.	Any
200 yds.		20 sec.	Any
Two Targets per Shooter: Squaw = 4 points Papoose = 5 points			
Movement between yard lines = 1/2 quick time - 1/2double time			
Shooters move as a skirmish line "downrange" on command.			

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the Squaw (kneeling) target down to and including 350 yds. They then fired at the Papoose (prone) target at 300 and 200 yards. Col. Townsend Whelen said that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target

Sgt. Emmet Hawkins of the 24th Infantry (colored), is thought to be the 1st and only man to ever make a perfect (100 points) score in the Skirmish Run in competition.

The qualifications in those far off days were:

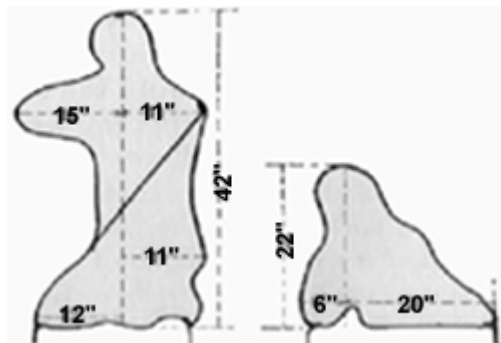
**Highest = Sharpshooter**

**2nd = Marksman**

**3rd = 1st Class**

(I haven't been able to come up with the score for each classification yet, but I'm looking)

## **Kneeling and Prone Silhouette (Skirmisher's) Targets**



Skirmish targets, the "Squaw" (left) and "Papoose" (right), used at Sea Girt and elsewhere in military shooting. These targets were also used as a part of the National Trophy Individual Rifle Match in the early days, when the "leg" course required the individual to add his Skirmish Run to his National Match Score Total.

**Hits on Squaw Target = 4 points**

**Hits on Papoose Target = 5 points**

Would you say that this is a far cry from the 40 rounds fired from the "mousegun" at the 1000 inch range that now passes for Army rifle qualification? You are now introduced to rifle marksmanship, march to the 1000 inch range, fire your rounds and head for chow all in one morning. "Poof"!! that's it! Instant "rifleman" - I'll bet you think I kidding? I would that I was! Sorry folks, that's it! End of story! A man had to be a real rifleman in those far off days of the Krag Rifle - and it would be almost 72 years until we lost our first war! It might be difficult to establish a genuine "cause and effect" between the current quality of our training, and our ability to impose our will on the enemy, but still... Of course we now understand one another so much better and of course our sensitivity training is much improved, so I suppose that has to count for something, eh what? Are we to trade political correctness for freedom? Ah well...





## **THE RATIONALE OF BUILDING A NATIONAL MATCH SERVICE RIFLE:**

Why, you might ask, did *THE* National Armory even consider building a Match version of the Nation's Service Rifle? In concept it was quite simple, it had several purposes:

- 1) It served to act as a test bed for the current issue service weapon and encouraged the shooters (both civilian and military) to work on and contribute to improvement(s) to the issue military rifle.
- 2) The availability of a truly accurate version of the service rifle tended to encourage practice and competition with the issue military service weapon.
- 3) Individuals trained on an accurate version of the issue service rifle could (and did) render invaluable service as individual soldiers and rifle coaches during wartime.
- 4) Summing up, the program took the myth of the universal excellence of the American rifleman and turned it into fact. From WWI on, the marksmanship of the American soldier in battle became legend, and in most cases, rightfully so.

Since the inception of the National Trophy Matches in 1903 and the Small Arms Firing School in 1918 the graduates of the school and the veteran competitors have rendered yeoman service in wartime and many participants in the National Trophy Matches became well known heroes in time of war. Within the Marine Corps, at least two Distinguished Marksmen became Medal of Honor winners, and two became Commandant of the Marine Corps. This doesn't include many shooters that were awarded the Navy Cross (the Navy equivalent to the Distinguished Service Cross) and a good number of Army Shooters who won the Distinguished Service Cross. Future snipers were often selected from those who had proven their skill with the rifle on the firing line at Camp Perry. In short, the entire competition-in-arms program was a huge success and returned results far in excess of the time and funds expended. Service Rifles were improved as well as coaching and shooting techniques. The rifles themselves were often improved due to the input of the military and civilian shooting community. All in all, the competition-in-arms program constituted an extremely cost effective program in relation to its contribution to the National Defense effort.

Unlike modern day shooting, great pains were taken to prevent the bastardization of the service rifle in the pursuit of accuracy during the days of the M1903 Springfield and the initial use of the M1. The name of the game was to familiarize the average soldier, sailor, Marine or civilian in the use of the service rifle, as it existed, not a stylized imitation of the real thing.

A letter from Lt. Col. Crossman of the Ordnance Corps to Col. Rau also of the Ordnance Corps discussing the possible modifications to the NM M1s was summed up pretty well by the following statement(s)<sup>1</sup>

*...Any alteration permitted, I feel, should be aimed at producing one thing only – producing a better battle weapon. Changes which will improve it only for competitive shooting I would oppose. Changes should not affect the safety features of the rifle nor should they affect the functioning. I believe we can readily defend changes made as a result of this philosophy.*

*It seems to me that changes to the sights, as reducing the diameter of the rear peep, adding ½ minute clicks for windage, using narrower front sights, etc, and (are) all designed to help scores, not to improve the combat rifle. Some of those changes, as smaller peep, I'm convinced would seriously damage the combat usefulness of the rifle. Such changes would be pretty hard to defend, I believe.*

Lt. Colonel Crossman was also quite irate at the allowing of more than one malfunction alibi per (the entire) match, as there are no alibis in combat! Obviously, Lt. Colonel Crossman was a man

of the Martial Arts bent when it came to modification(s) of the service rifle. These gentlemen had their hearts in the right place, but eventually were overruled by those who should perhaps, be termed "*The (early) Gamesmen.*" ...The Gamesmen were/are more interested in producing a high score in a sporting event, as opposed to demonstrating their ability to shoot a match winning score with a battle worthy service rifle under simulated field conditions. The "martial art" mindset that once required the rapid-fire stages of the National Trophy Matches be fired using the "battle sight" setting on the M1903 Springfield Rifle bespoke of an age dedicated to the defense of our country rather than the glory of winning a sporting event. Few individuals who today compete in the service rifle matches using a heavy barreled, heavy stocked rifle using optical aids in the rear sight apertures would truly choose to carry their *competition* service rifle to war if the country were suddenly invaded. In the early days of the NM M1 such was not the case... the National Match M1s used through the early 1970s were simply "tweaked" service guns and would have performed well on the battle field. The rifles produced by Springfield Armory through the end of production in 1963, truly fit the description of a combat ready (if somewhat more accurate) service rifle.

All would go well in the Martial Arts camp until the attempt to transition from the M1 to the M14. It was not until approximately 1965 that the various services were supplied with the new (M14) service rifles, and the issue M1s were turned in. The thrust was (and rightfully so) to ensure that all the troops in the field were supplied with the new service rifle before allowing the sale to individuals. Unlike the transition to the M1903 as *THE* service rifle at Camp Perry in 1908, sufficient NM M14s were not available for issue to the civilian competitors at the Nationals. This forced the decision to continue to allow the NM M1 to be a "legal service rifle" in the National Trophy Matches at Camp Perry. Ultimately the war in Vietnam prevented a smooth transition, and the Gun Control Act of 1968 prevented the sale of the "welded" NM M14s to civilian competitors even though the Alcohol Tobacco Tax people had previously approved the sale as soon as sufficient M14 Rifles became available to equip the Armed Forces. The demise of the Armory in Springfield, and a new policy of ignoring the training of American Civilians with the service rifle, pervaded the new Congress and eliminated the funding that had perpetuated the Nationals Matches. The (then) new M16 further added to the problem, and before it became the defacto service rifle, everyone simply hoped it was an aberration that would simply disappear into the mists of history.

The commercial firm of Springfield Armory, Inc. was not yet a reality thus leaving a dearth of available M14 clones to allow the civilian shooters to participate in the National Trophy Matches. A decision was made to allow the M1 to continue as a sort of limited standard service rifle, legal for participation in the Excellence-in-Competition Matches. It wouldn't be until about 1994 that the decision was made in the various individual services to improve the M16 Rifle to the point that it would become competitive in the Service Rifle arena. Current results with the so called "Mouse Gun" have proven extremely successful and at last we are back on track of competing with and improving *THE* service rifle and allowing the improvements to be ploughed back into the rifle we would be required to carry to war. At last we seem to be back on track of the intent of Service Rifle Competition. I sincerely doubt that Lt. Col. Crossman would be amused with the use of leather shooting jackets, ground cloths, handloaded ammunition, and heavily weighted competition service weapons, but Rome wasn't built in a day. We are at least pointed in the right direction for the first time since about 1965.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Lt. Col. E.B. Crossman, Ordnance Corps, Aberdeen Proving Grounds to Colonel Charles G. Rau discussing the philosophy of the National Trophy Matches.

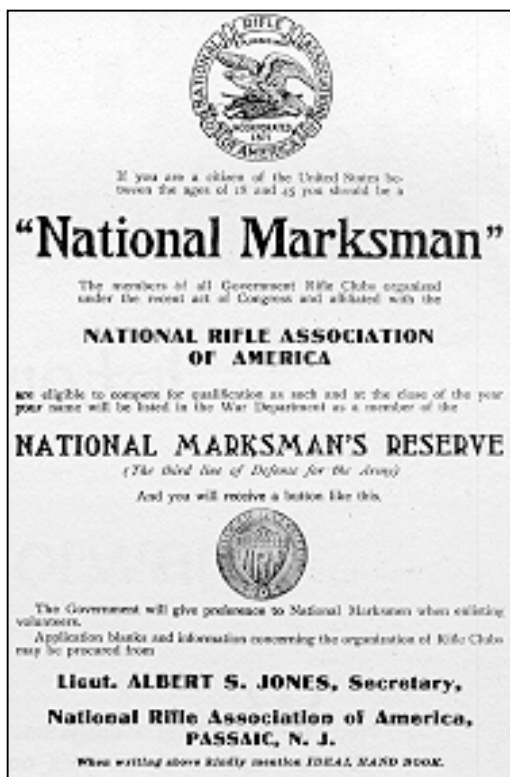


## THE ROLE OF THE CIVILIAN MARKSMANSHIP PROGRAM IN NATIONAL DEFENSE

### I. History

- A. While both Military and Civilian marksmanship prior to the 1870s was a sometimes sort of thing, the readily available supply of rifles and pistols utilizing metallic cartridges had become almost universal by 1880. The military services had been officially supplied with metallic cartridge rifles since the Allen Conversion of 1867 (eventually evolving into the so called "Trap Door Springfield" of 1873) and pistols since the adoption of the 1873 Colt Single Action. Even though consistent accuracy was now a possibility, target practice and proficiency with the issued weapons had not kept abreast of the technology. Fortunately in this case, civilians and citizen soldiers led the way. Military target practice (during Custer's time for instance) was virtually non-existent due to the perennial lack of funding common to the frontier army of the time. Depending on the unit, the allocated funds for target practice allowed for fewer than 50 rounds per year, in some units considerably less. Individual citizen soldiers who had a personal interest in developing their marksmanship skills often bought ammunition out of their own pocket and practiced on their own time.
- B. Following the Civil War by only six years, a group of National Guard Officers formed the National Rifle Association chartered in New York State in 1871. A statement by General Winfield Scott Hancock, serving as the President of the NRA in 1881, sums up the goal of the organization: "The object of the NRA is to increase the military strength of the country by making skill in the use of arms as prevalent as it was in the days of the Revolution." This worthy attitude was to guide the efforts of the NRA, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, the Director of Civilian Marksmanship and our citizen soldiers for generations to come.

The importance placed on marksmanship by the hierarchy of the United States Armed Forces of the day may be seen by some of the individuals occupying the position of President of the NRA. General Hancock had watched in awe during the battle of Gettysburg as the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Sharpshooters had been instrumental in defending "Little Round Top". Other noted soldiers moving into the job of NRA President were no less than General Ulysses S. Grant, former President of the United States, and General Philip H. Sheridan, Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Army. Theodore Roosevelt, while President of the United States, authorized the sale at government cost "...of surplus U. S. Service Rifles and ammunition to rifle clubs meeting specifications laid down by the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice". President Roosevelt, himself an ardent rifleman, was a life member of the National Rifle Association. By 1904, members of NRA affiliated clubs were entitled to compete for a "*National Marksmen's Reserve*" qualification. Those qualifying were recorded by the War Department as



members of the nation's "Second Line of Defense" and were promised "First Consideration" by the War Department in times of national emergency when volunteering for active duty. Since 1871, the NRA under the guidance of and in consonance with the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice had been primarily concerned with the promotion of marksmanship in among the reserves and militias of the several states. The *"National Marksmen's Reserve"* marked a new direction of the NRA and the National Board in the planning and preparation of the national defense by potential citizen soldiers. By 1908 a youth program had been added, but the seniors were not neglected either. The seniors usually acted as coaches for the young shooters, thus building a self-perpetuating base of instructors to be used in time of national emergency. A study conducted at the time concluded that "boys and young men taught to shoot the rifle as a means of making them fit to serve their country in time

of need are not on that account more inclined to warlike strife". While shooting is certainly a wonderful sport and a wholesome pastime it was recognized as a necessary skill in the defense of our country.

- C. As the war in Europe threatened to engulf the United States, the quotes of a number of individuals began to illustrate the intelligence and foresight of our Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice. Lord Kitchener, the Commander of the British Armed Forces, stated on 2 September 1914 (while appealing for additional volunteers): "Never mind whether they know anything about drill. It doesn't matter whether they know their right foot from their left. Teach them how to shoot and do it quickly!" General Pershing himself was later quoted as saying, "send me men who can shoot and salute!" The National Defense Act signed in June of 1916, among other things earmarked \$300,000 to promote civilian marksmanship training and authorized the distribution of appropriate arms and ammunition to civilian rifle clubs established under the rules established by the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice. Military instructors were authorized to assist civilian rifle clubs, all military rifle ranges were opened to civilian shooters and \$60,000 was provided to transport civilian teams to the National Rifle and Pistol Matches. Perhaps the most far-reaching provision of the Act was the creation of the



Office of Director of Civilian Marksmanship under the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice.

- D. The Small Arms Firing School (SAFS) was brought into being on 15 May 1918 with the task of training instructors rather than expert riflemen. Each student was selected for his ability to teach. Each student received a month of intensive instruction from some of the world's finest rifle shooters. Upon returning to his regiment/unit the graduate of the SAFS was able to pass on his newfound knowledge to members of his unit. The French officers in the Allied forces were skeptical of accurate rifle fire, viewing the rifle as a reasonably handy platform for the bayonet. General Pershing knew better and called for extensive marksmanship training to be conducted prior to sending the Doughboys to France. The Marines made their point in Belleau Wood. Captured German letters spoke of unbelievably accurate rifle fire that began to take effect at 700 yards. For that and the ferocity exhibited in the attacks on their assigned objectives, the Marines became known as "shock troops" by the Germans who gave them a name that has been proudly worn by Marines since that time – "*Teufel Hunden*" or in English, "Hounds of Hell". The Marines simply shortened it to "Devil Dog". Clearly, accurate rifle fire had made a distinct impression on the German Soldier.
- F. The SAFS continued throughout the years following W.W.I excepting a couple of years from (1932 to 1934) due to the Depression. The final National Match session prior to W.W.II was fired in 1940, thanks in no small part to the intercession of General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U. S. Army. Recognizing the value of the National Rifle Matches and the Small Arms Firing School in the training of military personnel, he personally rearranged the maneuvers being held by the National Guard Units being held in Louisiana. The National Guard Units were then able to attend the matches. The Nationals were also adjusted so that they were held during the first three weeks of September of 1940 to accommodate the National Guard. Many attendees of the SAFS were able to put their knowledge to use in the ensuing war years. The knowledge gained during the years between wars was about to pay for itself many times over. Many general officers in both the Marine Corps and the Army were generous with their praise of the skills taught in the Small Arms Firing School and carried with them into the service as new recruits. A few of the better known individuals are listed below:
1. General Marshall (Chief of Staff of the U.S.Army).
  2. General Eisenhower (Supreme Commander of the European Theater and later President of the United States).
  3. General George S. Patton, Jr. (Claimed the M1 Rifle was the " ...greatest battle implement ever devised).
  4. General Tommy Holcomb (Distinguished Marksman, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Navy Cross winner in Belleau Wood).
  5. General Rupertus (Distinguished Marksman, Marine General in charge of the Tarawa Invasion and author of "This is My Rifle" dissertation still published in the Marine Corps qualification Data Book and required to be memorized by every Marine recruit).

6. General Merritt Edson (Distinguished Marksman, winner of the Medal of Honor, Commanding Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion on Guadalcanal, and later President of the NRA).
7. General David Shoup (Distinguished Pistol Shot, Medal of Honor winner from Tarawa and future Commandant of the Marine Corps).

All were lavish with their praise of the contributions made by the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and the Director of Civilian Marksmanship in preparing the American Citizens for service in the armed forces. When Lt. General Chesty Puller (then a Col.) returned from the Pacific, he was asked how the United States might increase its national preparedness in the future. He stated that "In my opinion, every male U. S. Citizen 18 years old or older should be required to own a .30 caliber rifle and practice with it!"

- G. The Small Arms Firing School continued coincidentally with resumption of the National Matches following W.W.II. While the units assisting the conduct of the school have changed from time to time, the National Board continued to ensure that the school was conducted at every opportunity. Korea benefited from the graduates of such marksmanship training as did our graduates who were involved in the training and fighting of the Vietnam War.

## **II. The Dawn of a New Era and a New Attitude**

- A. The 1960s and the attitudes coming out of Vietnam have not been kind to the shooting programs. The word "gun" has become a dirty word in many quarters and Congress no longer seems kindly inclined towards national defense. They seem well disposed towards the building of more sophisticated aircraft or more powerful ships, but the individual soldier seems to have become a forgotten entity. Perhaps the most destructive blow was our rather easily obtained "walk through victory" in the farce known as "Desert Storm". While the victory was almost bloodless, and obtained in something approaching record time, it was unfortunately **not** obtained because of superior airpower or a lack of a need for the armed infantryman. Here we were dealing with a different culture not accustomed to fighting in a toe to toe or "setpiece" battle. While the airstrikes were certainly spectacular they were not, in my opinion, indicative of things to come. The final 100 yards of the battlefield still belongs to the infantry and always will, (barring a war utilizing strategic nuclear weapons or nerve gas). Congress, however, doesn't necessarily understand the continued need for a soldier well versed in the use of his rifle.
- B. In this time of seeming disinterest in personal marksmanship, the job of conducting the Small Arms Firing School is more important than ever. The 1960s saw the demise of known distance marksmanship in the Army. The current Army qualification course consists of 40 rounds fired at the distance of 1000 inches at ten (10) silhouette targets of greatly reduced size simulating distances from 50 to 300 meters. The rifles are "sighted in" utilizing three (3) groups fired for triangulation. Once the rifles are deemed to be sighted in, the soldier shoots his qualifying target and is finished with his formal marksmanship training during the morning of one day. Night firing (or the lack thereof) is based on the availability of funds at the time of training. Some field firing is

conducted depending on the training facility and whim of the commander, but nothing else is required past the initial qualification. The day of the superiority of the American Rifleman would seem to be a thing of the past. Only the Civilian Marksmanship Program and the training program of the U. S. Marine Corps stand between the legend of the American Rifleman and total extinction.

### **III. The Civilian Marksmanship Program and Military Preparedness**

- A. A study done by the Government Accounting Office in May of 1990 concluded that the CMP is of limited value. A summary of the statements and conclusions are as follows:
  - 1. The CMP was conceived in the early 1900s during a period in U.S. History when civilian training in marksmanship was viewed as essential to total military preparedness. Its mission and purpose were simply to train U. S. Citizens in rifle skills in the event that they might later be inducted into the military.
  - 2. If usefulness is defined as a measurement of whether this program contributes to the military preparedness of the United States today, we believe that the CMP is of limited value for the following reasons:
    - a. CMP objectives and goals are not linked to Army mobilization and training plans.
    - b. Army requirements do not exist for the CMP-trained personnel or instructors.
    - c. CMP-trained personnel are not tracked and may not be available when needed.
- B. Included in the report is a supposed statement by Army officials mainly reiterating the above concerns, but going a bit further in their concerns. They stated that there is some question about the requirements for the program during the mobilization. Part of their rationale is as follows:
  - 1. The Civilian Marksmanship Program is not included in the Army's overall mobilization plans or training strategy.
  - 2. No Army requirements exist for either civilians trained in marksmanship or for CMP instructors to augment the mobilization training base.
  - 3. No system is in place to track CMP-trained personnel.
  - 4. No program has been developed to train, certify, and track CMP instructors who could be used to augment the mobilization training base.
- B. The Army's analysis concludes that: "...while the intent of the CMP is to contribute to military preparedness, its two mobilization goals appear to have to have no direct linkage to Army mobilization, training requirements and plans. There is no system in place to track or identify CMP-trained personnel, and the program's second goal, to provide trained CMP instructors, essentially is not being accomplished. Because of the program members' volunteer status, there is no assurance that program-trained personnel will be available when needed."

### III. An Analysis of the GAO Military Preparedness Report

- A. While the above GAO and Army analysis may be somewhat upsetting to the CMP purist, a hard look at their (the Army and the GAO) complaints will indicate that they have several points that are hard to dispute. Taking a look at each point we find:
1. We are ***not*** currently included in the Army's training or mobilization plans! We must make certain that the Army realizes that we are in place and that we ***desire*** to be of assistance in time of national emergency or general mobilization.
  2. We find that indeed, ***no*** Army requirements do currently exist for either civilians trained in marksmanship or for program instructors to augment the mobilization training base. We have much to offer the Army's training program, but they cannot be expected to realize *what* we have to offer if we do not maintain close liaison with such organizations as TRADOC, or the training personnel in the Pentagon.
  3. While we do turn out instructors, *no program has been put in place to track such instructors!* Certificates issued to graduates of the Small Arms Firing School should indicate the level of training of each individual. A system must be put into place that will allow the CMP to track trained instructors and to ascertain their availability in time of national emergency and to augment the mobilization training base.
- B. If we are to be of use to the national defense effort, we must redirect our efforts and directly address the concerns the Department of Defense. This, however, must take two directions.
1. We must set up a liaison section between the CMP and DOD. They will never take advantage of our talents if 1) they don't realize they exist and 2) if they don't realize that we are both willing and able to use our experience and knowledge to further the goal of national preparedness.
  2. We must re-educate the United States Army in precise shot placement. Field firing is a necessary part of a well-rounded marksmanship program, but under no circumstances should field firing be used in place of (or instead of) sound marksmanship basics. If the Army Qualification course listed above is considered to be sufficient for a well trained soldier, it is extremely fortunate we were not pitted against a modern, determined enemy in the Gulf War. It is a sad state of circumstances that our modern, (supposedly sophisticated) army armed with complex weapons systems of much greater lethality than a common rifle, have forgotten the most basic of weapons. As I said previously, if anyone thinks the next REAL war will be won in the air as opposed to the last hundred yards with a rifle and a bayonet, they are mistaken. ***I am sorely afraid that we have learned to wage war, but we've forgotten how to fight!***

### V. A New Approach

- A. We must do several things to bring about a change in the current system.



1. We must re-educate the Armed Forces, (specifically the United States Army), in the need for sound marksmanship principles as a basis for success in combat and stand ready to assist them in any manner they request or require.
  2. We must set up what amounts to a "farm team" system of instructors, and tie the system into a coordinated marksmanship competitive system that will maintain a fine edge on the talents of the "identified instructor" staff.
  3. If possible we must bring the USAMU back into the competitive marksmanship circle, but hopefully with a redirected effort aimed at increasing combat efficiency in the Army (as opposed to a directed effort to win in International Competition). Put in plain language, we must get the "Army Area system of Marksmanship" back into place. This system encourages marksmanship throughout the entire Army as opposed to a pool of extremely talented individuals who are collected for the specific purpose of demonstrating their individual excellence. If at all possible, the Army Infantry, Artillery, Armor, Engineer, and MP teams should be brought back to spread the knowledge throughout the (entire) Army.
  4. The ultimate purpose of military marksmanship must be to win battles and wars, not to beat the Marines, Air Force and Navy. In the heyday of marksmanship, competition was fun, and encouraged participation by all hands, not just "the best and the brightest". The Army allowed their concentration on medal winning to essentially destroy their program. While the USAMU is still afloat, it is just barely afloat and desperately looking for something to tie itself to. USAMU freely admitted that no officer could even qualify to be assigned to USAMU under the current rules, and any officer who touched the program was essentially finished career-wise in the Army. Under such a system, you can hardly expect the Army hierarchy to be friendly to the program, as none of them will have any experience with it. Col. Dave Willis essentially saved the Marine Corps program a number of years ago by insisting on the competitors in the Division Matches fire the M16 Rifle as opposed to the M14, and the M9 instead of the 1911A1 .45 Auto. While there were screams of protest from the old-timers, history has proven him correct. Headquarters Marine Corps could again see a purpose in sending competitors to the Division Matches. The shooters came home with a "Marksmanship Instructor's additional MOS" and were a definite asset as coaches and marksmanship instructors in their home units. In other words, marksmanship became known (in the Marine Corps) as a "martial art" again as opposed to a sport. Cuts in budgets always can find reasons for cutting sports, but not essential military skills. This is a long-winded way of saying it would be extremely wise to keep the Civilian Marksmanship Program from becoming simply another "Midnight Basketball Program!" If we can prove the CMP program indispensable to national defense, its future will be assured.
- B. In order to furnish the requisite number of instructors in time of national emergency, and keep track of them, we will have to slightly modify and expand our current system. I recommend that we use the following vehicles to accomplish our purposes:
1. Divide the United States into Regions (or Areas) to roughly match the old U.S. Army Areas (2<sup>nd</sup> Army Area, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Area, etc.).

2. Organize CMP Excellence-in-Competition Matches in each area on an annual basis.
3. Supply a team to set up (or assist in setting up) an "Area Match" (the NRA can satellite their Regional Matches on the Area Matches if they wish). These Area Matches would conduct a "Mini-Small Arms Firing School" prior to the match. The CMP would (at least initially) furnish Mobile Training Teams to conduct the Small Arms Firing School. At the least, the firing school would require the student to fire once across the National Match Course after appropriate instruction. A certificate would be awarded the graduates and issued with an order of merit indicating his or her score on the NMC. The NMC would be fired with a lot of ammunition furnished at cost by the CMP to be used in the E-i-C (leg) match.
4. In order to participate in the E-i-C Match, the student would be required to participate in the SAFS. E-i-C (leg) medals would be awarded on the usual basis, but any leg winner would be subsidized up to say \$200 towards their transportation to the Nationals. The cost here will be minimal as there are usually less than four medal winners in each (Regional) E-i-C. The medal winners would (or could) also be subsidized to some extent on their rent for the housing (hut) at Camp Perry. Distinguished Shooters would be allowed to take advantage of the subsidized housing, but would be required to participate in the Area/Regional E-i-C Match and shoot a score at least equal to the last place leg medal awarded. Distinguished Shooters participating in the E-i-C Matches and placing as above, would be issued a distinctive certificate worthy of framing, in addition to a subsidy on their Perry Housing.
5. All leg winners from the Area Matches accepting travel subsidy and or housing subsidy would be required to act as instructors in the Small Arms Firing School at Camp Perry. Individuals completing such instructional duties would be issued an instructors rating and earmarked for use in time of national emergency.
6. The Small Arms Firing School at the National Matches would also include a more comprehensive course of instruction for the advanced students and require that they fire across the National Match Course as part of the School. All shooters desiring to shoot the Leg Match would be required to attend the SAFS as a prerequisite for entering the National Trophy Individual (Leg) Match.
7. *Ideally* each leg match (both Area and Nationals) would be fired with the current service rifle furnished by the CMP/Department of the Army. The firing of the SAFS with a lot of ammunition selected by the CMP to be used in the "leg match" would be a great incentive to participation in the school. The E-i-C ammunition would be furnished at a minimal cost to the competitor by the CMP and would ensure that each competitor. The use of "issued ammunition" would ensure that each competitor would start the match using the same lot of ammunition and without undue advantage over his or her fellow shooter(s).

8. Contrary to popular belief, the use (or required use) of the M16 in the E-i-C match would probably *not* discourage the current sale of M1 Rifles by the CMP. A comprehensive study of the firing line would indicate that only a very small percentage of competitive shooters use an M1 Rifle to fire the E-I-C Matches at the Nationals. Our current plan to have an "As Issued Service Rifle Match" will satisfy the average competitor's urge to utilize his "pappy's smoke pole" in competition.
9. Once the "Area Match" concept is in place and functioning smoothly, I suggest that we invite the Army to send teams from the appropriate Army Area(s) to participate in the E-I-C Matches and encourage the Army to issue Leg medals for those who place in the match. What I am suggesting is that we "kick-start" the Army's Shooting System back to life by encouraging competition. We can furnish instructions for the fledgling Army Shooters, and allow them to use their issue rifles in the Area Match. Slowly but surely we may be able to salvage a grand old tradition. If the idea takes hold, we might even be able to host the equivalent of the old "All Army Match" until it starts to breathe on its own. Army pride would no doubt kick in at some point and relieve the CMP of its duties of holding a match more properly hosted by the Department of the Army.
10. In order to track our newly created instructors, we would use good old-fashioned psychology and make selection for the honor very exclusive. Only those "selected" would be allowed to participate in or be called in time of National Emergency. Much like the old "Corps of Civilian Marksmen", they would receive a special lapel pin and be assured that they would be the "Third line of National Defense" (after the Regular Service and the Guard/Reserves). Once the program is well organized, each individual could be given a definite mobilization assignment. If the psychology is properly applied, the selected instructors would be ringing the telephone off the hook notifying the CMP of even temporary changes of location.
11. We must liaison with the Department of the Army and sell them on our marksmanship program. If they know we exist and have something worthwhile to offer that will be of minimum expense to the Government, they may be more than receptive to our plan for assistance in times of mobilization or National Emergency.
12. To bring the forces up to speed, we could (should) liaison with the Adjutants General of each State and give him (or her) a rundown on our instructional capabilities. The mobile training team concept could be used to institute initial marksmanship training in each State Guard and perhaps even encourage match participation by National Guard Teams from each individual State in the Nationals, or at least to the Area Matches. Like the All Army Team, the All Guard Team isn't really indicative of the state of readiness of each State's National Guard. Much like the idea of learning how to wage war and forgetting how to fight, the individual services have been placing the emphasis on beating the other service teams (by collecting the best shots from all over the services). This neglects the idea that competition on the local (State) level produces a much more healthy marksmanship climate and encourages better shooting across the board. For instance, the All Army team may well be able to beat the Marine Corps team (well, *occasionally* at any rate), but if you place the average soldier against the average

Marine, the Marine would win hands down. The Marine is exposed to hardcore marksmanship from his/her earliest training and this is continued throughout his or her career. By utilizing the same technique(s) the overall marksmanship performance in *all* services would be brought more nearly in line. We must find our way "back home" (our *roots* if you will) and never forget that the idea is to promote marksmanship among *all* members of the services, not just a select few individuals. While its always necessary to kill a few alligators, we should never forget that the original task was to drain the swamp.

## VI. Conclusions

- A. I believe that the CMP *definitely* has a place in the national defense picture. The GAO report was a wake up call and should be utilized as a guide to make ourselves useful in the overall defense and mobilization plans. This will require extensive liaison with the Army and DOD and a new look at our farm team system.
- B. The near demise of the USAMU was another wake up call and demonstrates the fate of any program tied to the Department of the Army that does not contribute in a positive manner to the National Defense. If *we* get put in the same category of "Midnight Basket Ball" we too are doomed to go the way of the Do-Do bird. Congress is not easily convinced to finance sporting events, but like God and Motherhood, National Defense is a sacred word in the hallowed halls of Congress.
- C. If we approach the problem in the manner put forth above, we will also have a chance to restore the sport of shooting to its former glory. We can put the fun and purpose back in the shooting game, by getting each State involved, encouraging the (State) National Guard(s) to participate as a State Guard Team (as opposed to an All Guard Team), getting the Army Areas (and hopefully the individual branches) involved. It would be great to compete against the *Infantry Team*, the *Artillery Team*, etc. We must get back to taking the sport back to the common individual, making it a matter of pride for each branch and as a very fortunate side effect increasing our National Defense!
- D. We must not knuckle under to the anti-gun forces, but use the CMP to demonstrate the positive aspects of marksmanship. We must demonstrate that team shooting develops teamwork, leadership, the ability to focus your mind and develops hand eye coordination. Individuals engaged in competitive marksmanship have a wonderful track record of becoming good citizens! ...unfortunately being a good citizen sometimes requires each of us to participate in the defense of our country. Because of our individual skills developed in the shooting sports, we are uniquely qualified to participate in this defense, even as our forefathers on the Lexington Green.

Respectfully submitted,

**R. O. Culver, Jr.**

# Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches

*Information Extracted From the U.S. Marine Corps Scorebook*

*–and –*

*Rifleman's Instructor For the New Springfield Rifle*

*Third Edition*

*(Revised for Use Under the 1913 Firing Regulations)*

*By Dick Culver*

Lacking a pure “uncorrected” Army Small Arms Firing Manual of 1913, I am taking my data for 1913 from the Marine Corps Rifleman's Instructor Booklet from 1913 which listed the Army Courses of Fire.

Several notes are apropos here. Note is made in the 1913 USMC Booklet that the Army Courses no longer listed a Skirmisher's Course by 1913, but the Skirmisher's course was still being used as a part of the National Match Course (leg match) fired at Camp Perry. The Army Qualification Course ***IS*** listed, and most Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches until at least 1917 were very closely related to the Army Qualification Course. Hence the course listed below as the (probable) leg match course is interpolated between the 1913 Small Arms Firing Manual, corrected to 1917 and remarks made in the 1913 Marine Corps publication.

## ***(Interpolated) Regulations for the Rifle Leg Matches (1913)***

<b><i>Course of Fire for the Department Rifle Competition</i></b>					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	D	Rapid	10	Kneeling <u>from</u> Standing	1 Minute
300	A	Slow	10	Sitting <u>or</u> Kneeling	No time limit specified
300	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone <u>from</u> Standing	70 seconds
500	B	Slow	10	Prone	No time limit specified
500	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone assumed <u>before</u> string of fire	80 seconds
600	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	No time limit specified
Drawing from past and future Army leg matches, this course would have been fired a total of twice for an aggregate score.					
Rapid fire stages were shot using the Battle Sight.					
All reloads for rapid fire strings were from the cartridge belt.					

The following course *WAS the official National Trophy Match* fired in 1913 at Camp Perry. It included two stages of fire that would never be fired again – The Surprise Fire Stage and the Skirmish Run. Neither would be missed.

***The National Match Course Listed for 1913 was:***

<b><i>National Trophy Individual Match 1913 (Camp Perry)</i></b>					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	A	Surprise	10	"Standing Ready" To any desired position.	Target exposed for 3 seconds Exercise continued for 10 shots.
600	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	1 minute per shot
1000	C	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	1 minute per shot

Surprise Fire was a new course for the 1913 National Trophy Individual Match. It was fired as follows:

The Competitor stood holding the rifle at roughly the balance of the piece in a modified "trail arms" stance. Once the targets made the first movement out of the pits, the competitor could assume any position he wished and fire as long as the target remained in the air (3 seconds). If you add the amount of time necessary to raise and lower the target from and into the pits, the shooter had just a bit over the magic 3 seconds to fire his round.

Any position was allowed for firing the round during Surprise Fire, but most competitors chose prone. This stage of fire proved very unpopular and was used as a part of the National Match Course only in 1913. The 1914 Nationals eliminated both the "Surprise Fire" and the "Skirmishers Course" stages of fire from the "leg match". It is rumored that the competitors were happy to see both stages of fire disappear in the mists of history.

### ***Skirmish Course of Fire for the National Trophy Competition Camp Perry, Ohio 1913***

Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
600	D Skirmisher's Target	Rapid	2	Choice of prone, kneeling, or sitting	30
500			2		30
400			3		30
350			3		30
300			5		30
200			5		20

Use of the Battle Sight was required at all ranges except for 600 yards where the peep sight was permitted.

D Targets were mounted on “disappearing carriages (similar to modern day target carriers). Signal to the pits that the competitors were ready to proceed was a trumpet or telephone. Thirty seconds after receiving the signal from the firing line, the Pit Officer or NCO caused the targets to appear.

The competitors started just to the rear of the 600-yard line with the rifles loaded and locked. The competitors were “advanced” to the firing line and halted. Commands to fire the requisite two rounds were given. As soon as any portion of the target appeared, the competitor commenced firing. Firing continued as long as any portion of the target was still in sight or until both rounds were fired. When the targets disappeared, the command or signal to cease-fire was given. The rifles were locked and the advance immediately resumed. Movement between firing lines was conducted with the first half of the distance covered at quick time (120 steps per minute), with the second half covered at double time (180 steps per minute). While the instructions for firing the course are not specific on this point, it is assumed that the competitor was allowed to take the preferred firing position prior to the targets being raised. All reloading was accomplished from a full five round stripper clip.

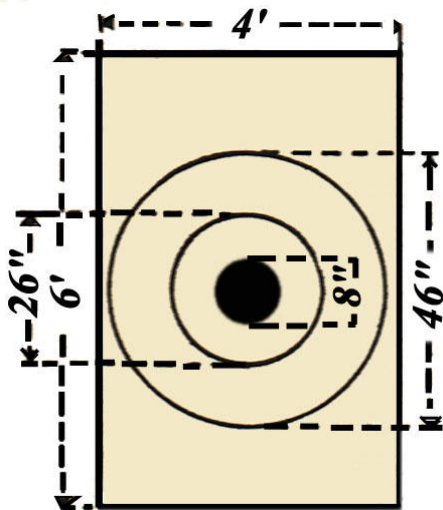
At 400-yards, there would be only one round remaining in the magazine. Once the remaining round had been fired, the magazine would be recharged with a full five round stripper clip. The shooter would then fire the additional two rounds, and put his rifle on “safe”. The remaining three rounds would be fired at 350 yards. A full five shot stripper would then be loaded into the magazine, and the advance to the 300-yard line continued as above. The final five rounds would then be fired at 200-yards in a 20-second time limit.

Any round out of the four ring of the Skirmisher's Target counted as a miss. Hits in the black counted five, and those below the black counted four. A possible over the Skirmisher's course was 100 points.

Two Skirmish Runs were required for each shooter in addition to the National Match Course and were added together for an aggregate for qualification for a rifle leg medal.

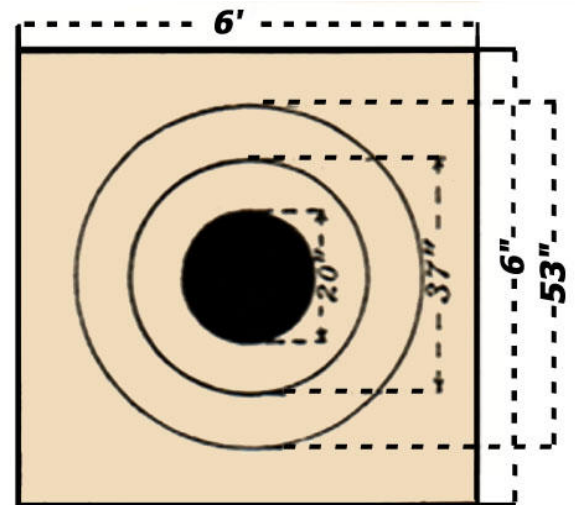
1913 Was the last year the Skirmisher's Course was a part of the National Trophy (leg) Matches.

## Targets Utilized in 1913

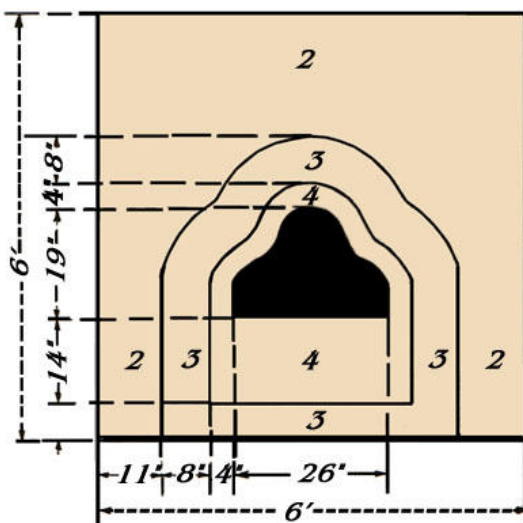


**TARGET A**

The "B" target was the traditional mid-range target utilized at both 500 and 600-yards. In 1913, 10 shots were fired slow fire on the "B" target in the prone position at 500-yards with an additional 10 shots prone slow fire fired from 600-yards using a sandbag rest. The 20" bullseye would continue to be standard for the "B" Target until the addition of a tie-breaking 12" V-Ring was added in 1922.



**TARGET B**

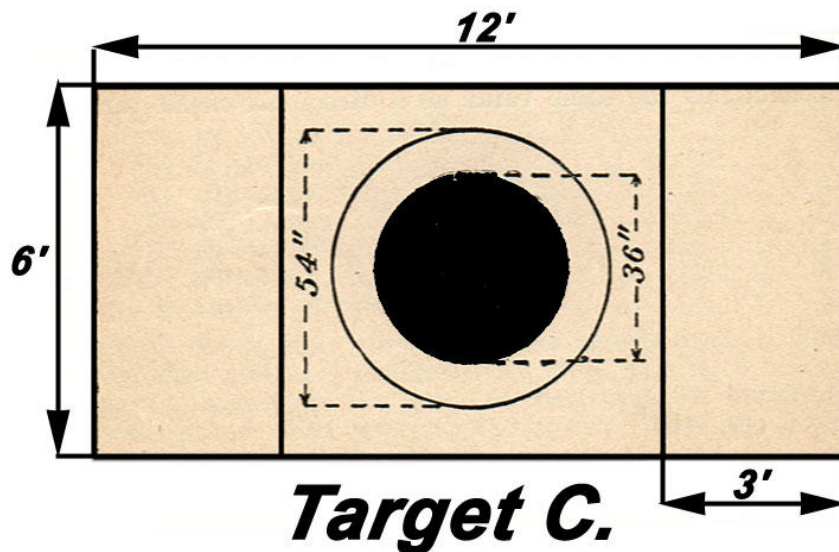


**Target D**

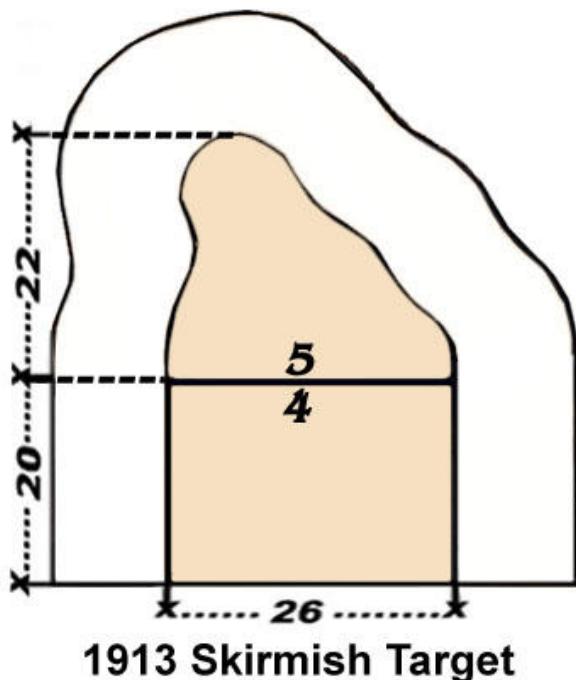
The "D" Target was changed somewhat from the one used in 1909 and has the same form still used today on the Marine Corps Qualification Course. The earlier "D" Target had been an adaptation of the original Squaw and Papoose Targets utilized to fire the Skirmisher's Course with a form vaguely reminiscent of a man's silhouette firing from the prone position. This outline made it difficult to utilize a constant aiming point on the target. The "new" version of the "D" Target utilized the same idea but was changed to give a constant silhouette of a man's body exposed from the armpits upward. This was a great aid to aiming in a day and time when the rules required the shooter to utilize his battle sights to fire the rapid fire stages.



The "C" Target was the long range target utilized for 800, 900 and 1000-yards. The additional "wings" on the targets counted 2 points and hence were called "Duce Wings". These "Duce Wings" were a great aid to shooters not having access to a 1000-yard range and had to use a scientific wild +ss guess (SWAG) when trying to get on paper at the extreme ranges. When the



extended targets were placed in the target carriers, the "Wings" were so close to each other on adjoining targets they were almost touching. The appearance of the line of targets from the firing line gave the impression of one continuous target with multiple bullseyes stretching from one side of the range to the other. This target was only changed one more time until its replacement in 1974 with the 1000-yard Decimal Target. The only addition to the target as it appeared here was the addition of a 20" tie-breaking "V-Ring" in starting with the shooting season of 1922.



While the Skirmisher's course had been eliminated from the Army (and Marine Corp's) qualification and Excellence-in-Competition Courses, it was to have one last blast as a part of the National Match Course in 1913. For the Skirmisher's Course, a reversion to a version of the Squaw/Papoose bullseye used on the older "D" Target was utilized. Since the new "D" target no longer utilized the quasi-human form of a rifleman in the prone position, a special version of the older target was concocted for the last of the Skirmisher's Courses. It essentially consisted of the 4 and 5 ring of the old "D" Target. Whether the ring formerly comprising the 3 ring was also colored in the "buff" fashion is unclear, but the rules state that nothing out of the 4 and 5 rings count as hits. The target depicted here was scanned out of one of the old scorebooks as it was published. Pages in the scorebook for practice firing show ONLY the 4 and 5 rings.



THE YOUNG MARINE WAS WEARY  
AND HE SOUGHT A LITTLE REST  
WITH HIS HELMET FOR A PILLOW  
AND HIS RIFLE ON HIS CHEST.

HE HAS SEEN THE GUNSHIPS FIRE.  
HE HAD HEARD THE CANNONS ROAR.  
HE HAD SEEN THE NAVY'S POWER  
AS HE MADE HIS WAY ASHORE.

THEN HE THOUGHT ABOUT HIS RIFLE  
AND HE FOUND IT RATHER SMALL,  
WITH THE GUNSHIPS AND THE CANNONS  
IT WAS NOTHING MUCH AT ALL.

THE EFFORTS OF A RIFLEMAN  
MEANT LITTLE, IT WOULD SEEM.  
THEN, AS HE SLIPPED TO SLUMBER,  
HE DREAMED HIMSELF A DREAM.



THE MAN WHO STOOD BESIDE HIM  
HELD A MUSKET IN HIS HAND  
AND CLOSE AROUND HIS NECK HE WORE  
A HEAVY LEATHER BAND.

“WHEN I WAS ON OLD IRONSIDES”  
THE APPARITION SAID  
“THERE WERE CANNONBALLS AND CUTLASSES  
WHEREVER DANGER LED.

THERE WERE PISTOLS TOO, AND DAGGERS  
AT EVERY FIGHTER'S SIDE  
WHEN THE SHIPS WOULD COME TOGETHER  
ON THE ROLLING, HEAVING, TIDE

BUT WHEN IT CAME TO BOARDING,  
WITH THE BATTLE FURY HOT  
IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
THAT MADE THE TELLING SHOT."

THE APPARITION FADED  
AND STANDING IN ITS PLACE  
BENEATH A SHALLOW HELMET  
HE SAW ANOTHER FACE.

"WHEN WE WERE IN THE TRENCHES  
IN THE WOOD THEY CALL MARINE  
THERE WERE MORTARS, TANKS, AND CANNONS,  
MORE THAN I HAD EVER SEEN.

BUT WHEN THE FINAL CHARGE WAS MADE  
TO PUSH THE GERMANS BACK  
IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
AT THE POINT OF THE ATTACK."



THE FACE CHANGED ONLY SLIGHTLY  
AND THE HELMET STAYED THE SAME  
BUT THE ISLAND THAT HE SPOKE OF  
HAD A MORE FAMILIAR NAME.

"THEY HIT US VERY EARLY  
ON THE DAY THE WAR BEGUN.  
ON THE WINGS OF ALL THEIR BOMBERS  
WE COULD SEE THE RISING SUN.

OUR PILOTS AND OUR GUNNERS  
WHO FOUGHT AND FELL AT WAKE  
WROTE A STORY FULL OF GLORY  
THAT TIME CAN NEVER SHAKE.

BUT WHEN THE ENEMY DREW NEAR  
TO MAKE HIS FINAL REACH  
IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
THAT MET HIM ON THE BEACH."

THERE NEXT APPEARED A SHADOW  
IN A SWIRL OF STINGING SNOW  
AND IT BREATHED A FIERCE DEFIANCE  
AND ITS EYES WERE ALL AGLOW.

"IN 'FIFTY AT THE CHOSIN  
WHEN THE BIG GUNS COULDN'T TALK  
AND THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION  
TOOK A FIGHTING, FREEZING WALK,





**WHEN ALL THE WORLD, EXCEPT THE CORPS  
HAD COUNTED US AS GONE  
IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
THAT LET US CARRY ON."**



**THE SCENE WAS CHANGED TO SUMMER  
AND THE FACE WAS HARD AND LEAN  
AND THE TIRED EYES WERE FIRED  
WITH THE LIGHT THAT SAYS "MARINE"**

**"AT KHE SAHN WHEN THEY SHELLLED US  
WE WERE WRAPPED IN ROLLING SMOKE  
AND THE THOUGHT OF OUR SURVIVAL  
WAS A GRIM AND GHASTLY JOKE.**

**BUT WHEN THE WAVES CAME SWARMING IN  
TO FINISH THE ASSAULT  
IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
THAT CALLED THE FINAL HALT."**

**THERE NEXT APPEARED A GENERAL  
AS SOLID AS A TANK  
WITH THREE STARS ON HIS COLLAR  
TO SIGNIFY HIS RANK.**

**HIS STATURE AND DEMEANOR  
WERE THE MILITARY TYPE  
AND IN HIS HAND HE CARRIED  
A STUBBY LITTLE PIPE.**

**HIS JAW WAS SQUARELY CHISELED  
HIS EYES WERE CLEAR AND KEEN  
AND HIS BEARING LEFT NO QUESTION.  
HE WAS ALL MARINE'S MARINE.**

**"THE MESSAGE THEY'RE CONVEYING"  
THE BURLY GENERAL SAID  
"IS THAT THROUGH OUR TROUBLED HISTORY  
THE RIFLES ALWAYS LED.**

**WE'VE HAD CANNONS, TANKS, AND MORTARS  
WE'VE HAD WEAPONS BY THE SCORE,  
WE'VE HAD BATTLESHIPS AND FIGHTER PLANES  
TO COMPLEMENT THE CORPS.**

**WE'VE A MOST IMPRESSIVE ARSENAL.  
THAT'S OBVIOUSLY TRUE,  
BUT THE FINAL THRUST FOR VICTORY  
HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH YOU.**





IT WAS RIFLES, ALWAYS RIFLES  
WHEN THE CORPS WAS SORELY PRESSED  
AND THE RIFLE THAT YOU CARRY  
MUST MEET THE FINAL TEST.

SO SLING THAT RIFLE PROUDLY,  
FOR EVERYTHING WE DO  
WITH MORTARS, TANKS, AND CANNONS  
IS JUST AN AID TO YOU."

THE YOUNG MARINE AWAKENED  
AND PUT THE DREAM ASIDE,  
THOUGH NOW HE CLUTCHED HIS RIFLE  
WITH A CERTAIN TOUCH OF PRIDE.

AND THEN HE CHANCED TO NOTICE  
THAT LYING NEAR HIS HAND  
WAS A STUBBY LITTLE PIPE  
AND A HEAVY LEATHER BAND.

*~ R.A. Gannon ~*

*Sergeant of Marines*

# When the "Tin Can" Changed History

By Dick Culver

How many of you have ever heard of lumpy metal fouling in the bore of a service rifle? If you came along in the decades starting in the 1950s, the answer is probably very few or none. To our predecessors however, metal fouling in the barrel of their favorite fowling piece was a very real problem. When progressively larger deposits of jacket metal fouling start accumulating in the bore of their rifle it became ruinous to the accuracy. How the metal fouling problem came about and how it was eventually solved is a fascinating piece of history.



## Cut to a typical conversation on the Rifle Range at Guantanamo Bay Cuba circa 1908

The year was 1908 and Marines on the rifle range were cleaning the new service rifle that they had just received as a replacement for the Krag. Tempers were getting a bit frayed, and the NCOs were saying unkind things about the Army Ordnance people in particular and whatever outfit had them constantly changing rifles in general. The troops however had problems of their own.

"Hey, Sergeant McCoy, when are those clowns gonna' get their stuff in one seabag?" one of the older privates asked.

"First they issue us some kind of weird 6 mm Winchester without enough cleaning equipment. The bores were so small normal cleaning rods wouldn't fit and the ammo was so corrosive that getting the bore clean was almost impossible. In China extra cleaning stuff was almost impossible to find! Then just about the time we were getting used to pulling the bolt straight to the rear, we had to turn in our Lee Navys and draw the Krags. Now THERE was a nice rifle! I really liked the Krag, it shot well and was pretty darned accurate. Now they're copying the dadgummed Germans and they send us a new rifle to get used to! Have you felt the recoil of this beast? - Geeesch!"

"Quit grouching Johnson," said Sergeant McCoy, "Just shoot what you're issued and quit beating your gums. I'm sure nobody's interested in your opinion!"

"But Sarge, I've been tryin' to clean this darned thing, and I can't get the stuff outta' the muzzle! Is there some sort of trick to cleaning this piece?"

"Johnson, you're just using the new rifles as an excuse for your lazy fanny, now get busy and put a little more elbow grease into it!"

"Sarge, honest there's some kinda' lumps or sumptin' up next to the muzzle and no matter what I use it's no go! What do I do for inspection?"

"I'll tell you birds what you'll do! You'll have those shootin' irons clean or I'll have you scouring pots for a month, right after you make sure the heads are spotless! Now quit grouching and get to cleaning!"

Scenes like this were common to all services that were completing the issue of the "New Springfield" as the U.S. Magazine Rifle, Caliber .30 M1903 was commonly called at the time. The little lumps at the muzzle were to be a pain in the side of the Soldiers, Sailors and

Marines for the next 13 years. Unknowingly, they were the victims of modern technology. The problem was not the rifle, but rather the ammunition. Private Johnson was soon to be introduced to a magic formula that became known as "Ammonia Dope".

### A Short History Of The M1903 Rifle And Its Cartridge Development



**The "New Springfield" Rifle**

To appreciate Pvt. Johnson's problem, a little history is in order. During the days of the Trapdoor Springfield, metal fouling in the bore was a minor problem since the bullets were lubricated lead. Good cleaning practices using metal bore brushes would remove any offending lead particles in the bore. It wasn't until the United States adopted the Krag Rifle in 1892 that bullet jackets were placed on the service projectile.

Greater velocities and pressures generated by smokeless powder demanded that a stiff bullet jacket material be used to keep from stripping the bullet in the rifling. As long as pressures and velocities were kept to "Krag-esque" levels (approximately 2000 feet per second for the Krag and 2200 feet per second for the new 220-grain M1903 Cartridge), no problems with the new ammunition occurred. The new bullet jacket material was made of a material called "*cupro-nickel*" which consisted of 60% copper and 40% nickel. Ammunition companies had found pure copper jackets to be too soft for bullets fired out of a modern smokeless powder rifle, and the nickel was added for stiffness. It was not until the introduction of the M1906 cartridge with its increased muzzle velocity that cupro-nickel metal fouling reared its ugly head.



**The 1903 cartridge  
with 220-grain round nosed bullet**

Just when the Armed Forces were getting comfortable with the 220-grain 1903 Cartridge at 2200 feet per second, a new development in Germany came to the attention of U.S. Ordnance. The Germans it would seem, had gone to a relatively light-weight bullet of "pointy" design. The pointy bullets were called "spitzers" and could be launched at a high muzzle velocity from their Mauser Rifles. The resulting ballistics gave the Germans a considerable advantage in range and accuracy over their competition. Since we were just getting started issuing the New Springfield (whose Mauser design we had copied from the Germans), it was deemed prudent to upgrade the new rifle's ammunition to match the capabilities of the rifle design. Since we had "borrowed" the design of the M1903 from the German Mauser, why not the ammunition?

While the original cartridge for the "New Springfield" used the heavier 220-grain round nosed bullet described above, and it became obvious that the chamber and leade of the rifling had to be changed in the existing rifles to accommodate the new .30-'06 cartridge. The newly issued M1903 service rifles were recalled and modified to take the improved round. The barrel had to be removed and cut back .20", re-threaded, re-chambered and re-installed on the receiver. The M1903 Rifle, re-chambered to .30-'06, would serve the



**The 1906 cartridge  
with 150-grain Spitzer bullet**

United States in one form or another for almost 40 years. The new load was a "ring-tailed blue whizzer" with its 150-grain projectile leaving the muzzle at 2700 feet per second. That was a truly hot load for 1906! As good as the new rifle and load were, the fast moving bullet and a contrary jacket material were at the root of Pvt. Johnson's problems.

The new cartridge became known as the Cartridge, Caliber .30 Model of 1906; hence the designation of the U.S. Service Cartridge as the "*Thirty Ought Six*". The "*Thirty*" of course was for the caliber of the round, and the "*Ought Six*" was for the year it was adopted. It's abbreviation was written; .30-'06 and for many years it was perhaps, the most well known cartridge in the world. In retrospect, the original cartridge (Model of 1903) became known as the .30-'03 to differentiate it from the newly adopted .30-'06.

### **Cupro-Nickel Metal Fouling Rears Its Ugly Head**

Almost as soon as the "*New Springfield*" with the .30-'06 ammunition hit the rifle range, a strange phenomena occurred. The 2700 feet per second was a boon to extreme range, but velocity sometimes is a double-edged sword. It seemed that strange looking lumps began to manifest themselves near the muzzle of the rifles. These lumps proved almost impossible to remove with normal cleaning methods and materials. Vigorous scrubbing with wire brushes and solvent was to no avail! The pesky stuff got worse as you continued to fire the rifle and degraded the accuracy. It was soon discovered that the lumps consisted of small particles of cupro-nickel jacket material. The intense heat and friction generated by the 150-grain .30-'06 bullet traveling at 2700 feet per second were leaving little metallic lumps that, and much like eating bear steak that seems to grow in size the more you chew, the lumps got bigger the more rounds you fired. The initial deposits in the bore continued to gouge the subsequent projectiles fired through the bore shearing off additional deposits of metal - and the problem compounded itself.

The frustration of the NCOs inspecting the troop's rifles combined with the new interest in service rifle shooting in the National Trophy Matches became a thorn in the side of the Ordnance Department. The target shooters and the folks at Springfield finally came up with a solution, but not a particularly friendly one. They developed something called "*Ordnance Department Metal Fouling Solution*", commonly known as "Ammonia Dope". The dope would dissolve the metal fouling alright, but it was tricky to use. The "dope" was poured into a rifle barrel with a "corked chamber". A piece of rubber tubing was placed over the muzzle to allow the dope to cover the muzzle and prevent any air getting to any metal exposed to the dope. Any contact with air would ruin the barrel within a few minutes. Needless to say, Ammonia Dope was not exactly a welcome solution to the problem, but came under the heading of "what price accuracy". If the chamber plug became dislodged while the solution was in the bore, the stuff would run down into the receiver and cause extreme rusting wherever it touched the metal. At best the dope was a nuisance and at worst, a disaster. The formula for the dope for those of you who are curious was:

Ammonia Persulphate	1 ounce
Ammonia Carbonate	200 grains
Stronger Ammonia Water (28%)	6 ounces
Water	4 ounces

The solution had to be made up fresh for each use. If the dope became "stale" it became corrosive to the barrel. After a 20-minute treatment, the solution had to be immediately poured from the bore. The bore was then dried and oiled. This treatment dissolved the metal



fouling and left the bore pristine for further firing. Needless to say, the troops (and competition rifle shooters) looked for alternative methods of reducing the irritating cupro-nickel fouling.

### **The Use Of Grease To Cut Down On Metal Fouling**

One seemingly logical approach to the problem was to reduce the friction in the barrel using lubricated bullets. The theory was that if friction was reduced, metal fouling would not form. In fact this simple solution DID work, but as it turns out, the cure was sometimes more disastrous than the kill.

### **Cut To The Rifle Range At Mare Island, California Circa 1919**

Johnson, now a Gunnery Sergeant after 19 years and fresh back from the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment in France, is working with some of his newly recruited rifle team members.

"Hey Gunny Johnson, why are we dipping our bullet tips in Cosmoline," asked a newly selected member of the post rifle team?

"Listen Jones, just dip the things and let me worry about it, OK," said Johnson?

"But Gunny, I just dropped my clip in the dirt and the ammo is pretty dirty," said Jones!

"Well then, wipe it off and make sure the cartridges are clean or it'll make 'em hard to extract," replied the Gunny.

"But what's the idea of greasin' the stuff," said Jones?

"Well, if you dip the bullet tips in grease, we've found that it cuts down on that darned metal fouling that collects in the muzzle, and if you want good scores, you've got to cut down on the fouling. If you let the stuff build up, it tends to screw up the accuracy, and we don't have time to use that Ammonia Dope stuff between relays. If ya' wanna' beat the Army teams, listen to what I tell ya'!"

"Hey Gunny, did you guys grease your bullets in France," asked the kid?

"Of course not," said the Gunny, "we were fighting a war, not shootin' at targets - didn't take as much precision as target shootin'!"

"When did they start greasin' the bullets," asked Jones?

"Well kid, it's sumpthin' we learned by hard experience before the war. Somebody figured that if we cut down on the friction it might cut down on the lumps that were stickin' to the bore - sure enough, it worked, been usin' it every since!"

"Gunny, where do I get one of these lil' cans to put the grease in," asked Jones?

"Easy Jones, just go make friends with the company clerk and get one of his empty typewriter ribbon cans - works just like it was made for it! Some of them civilians use some grease called Mobilubricant that's supposed to be a little better, but Cosmoline works fine and it's free. Not only that, but if the coach is sittin' close behind you callin' your shots rapid fire, he can pick up a little smoke trail as the bullet heads for the target! Works great for team shootin'!"

Johnson didn't know it but he was teaching a practice that was to cause the Ordnance Department lots of grief for reasons that hadn't occurred to the average shooter. They would

soon learn the danger of this jackleg method of circumventing the cupro-nickel fouling problem.

### **Problems with Greasing the Bullets**

The standard method of lubricating the bullets was to dip them in a can of either Cosmoline or some stuff called Mobilubricant. As long as the bullets were singly dipped, the results gave more or less satisfactory results, but when an entire five shot stripper clip was dipped into the grease, it became a bit messy. When loaded into the rifle for a string of rapid fire, the grease was deposited on the walls of the chamber, increasing chamber pressure. Usually the shooters got away with this but not always.

### **The Single Heat-Treated M1903 Receiver and How It Tied In with the Lubricated Bullet**

If all the receivers had been of equal strength, everything might have gone smoothly, but an old problem with the heat-treating of the Springfield (and Rock Island) receivers became greatly magnified by the greasy ammunition and chamber problem.

It seems that until WWI, receiver forgings produced at Springfield and Rock Island were more of an art than a science. The single heat treat method of producing receiver forgings required that the hot forged receivers be quenched in oil from a fairly high temperature (1500°). This produced an extremely hard receiver that was very strong against a slowly applied force, but was sometimes so hard that it was actually somewhat brittle. When properly head-spaced and fed excellent ammunition, relatively few problems were encountered with the rifles produced between 1903 and 1917 when using pre-war ammunition.

The exigencies of war called for increased production at Springfield and Rock Island, requiring the hiring of additional and usually inexperienced personnel. Individuals who had forged receivers using the "eyeball method" of determining the temperature of the steel billets (as opposed to utilizing pyrometers) were supplemented by new "war hires" who were essentially novices at judging forging temperatures by eye. Pyrometers were suggested, but resisted by the older artisans who feared that such new-fangled stuff would supplant their skill and put them out of a job. Increased production required by the War, along with the use of inexperienced personnel set the stage for disaster.

Ammunition was badly needed in great quantities during WWI. This demand brought a proliferation of new cartridge producing companies with little or no experience in producing small arms ammunition, sometimes resulting in a product was of questionable quality. Brass quality and hardness varied greatly, along with the quality control of annealing process on the case necks. Much of this ammunition would remain in the Depots for years after the cessation of hostilities in France. Many of these "soft case cartridges" contributed to the difficulties associated with the single heat-treated receivers.

Since no one engaged in combat was terribly worried about cupro-nickel fouling in the bore on a charge across no-man's-land, the single heat-treated receivers were more of a theoretical problem than a real one during combat use, assuming the use of quality ammunition. The combat troops were hardly interested in greasing their bullets. Springfield Armory and Rock Island Arsenal however, continued to work on the brittle receiver problem. Tests had proven that there was no reliable way to reheat-treat the older receivers, so any fix would have to be applied strictly to new production of the M1903.

The solution to the problem turned out to be a "double heat-treat" process for the newly produced receivers. The process is a bit too technical to publish in detail since this is a story of metal fouling in the rifle bore. Suffice it to say that the new receivers were forged in a manner similar to the original process, but allowed to cool in an open pan. They were then annealed at 1500° and quenched in oil. The receivers were then raised to 350° in an oil bath to reduce surface hardness and allowed to air cool. The resultant receivers had a hardness of approximately 33 to 44 Rockwell C. The problem of the brittle receiver had been solved.

Both Springfield and Rock Island arrived at essentially the same process for a double heat-treated receiver. Springfield judged that any receiver produced after serial # 800,000 produced in February 1918 would be considered to be of the double heat-treated variety. Rock Island turned out its first double heat-treated receiver, serial # 285,507, during May of 1918. Unfortunately that left over three quarters of a million Springfields with single heat-treated receivers and over one quarter of a million Rock Island Rifles still in service.

The accident statistics involving the so-called brittle receivers are a bit less intimidating if we look at the actual numbers. Recorded accidents involving the single heat-treated receivers totaled approximately 137, of which 68 had "burst receivers". At least four of these were caused by shooting a German 8mm (actually 7.92mm) in a .30 caliber bore, an act guaranteed to raise chamber pressures to a phenomenal peak. One hundred and thirty seven failures out of over a million rifles is a very small percentage indeed. Those figures taken with the fact that relatively few problems had occurred prior to 1917, would indicate that most of the later incidents can be blamed on faulty or greasy ammunition.

### **WWI Surplus Ammo with Increased Interest in Target Shooting Compounds the Problem**

Prior to WWI, an attempt was made yearly to come up with an extremely accurate lot of ammunition to shoot the National Trophy Matches. Since the ammunition was supplied gratis to the shooters by the Army, this incurred some expense to the Government. Before the war, attendance at the Nationals had been modest, consisting mainly of Regular Service personnel and the National Guard. The war changed all that of course, as literally millions of men had been introduced service rifle marksmanship and had grown to enjoy the sport of Service Rifle shooting. The loan of free service rifles and ammunition at Camp Perry made the pot even sweeter.

Unfortunately the war had left the Army with millions of rounds of 1906 150-grain Ball Ammunition of wartime manufacture. At least some of the surplus was of the questionable variety mentioned above, and most had been manufactured under the rush of wartime requirements. The selection of commercial ammunition specifically for the matches seemed an un-justifiable expense to a sharply reduced (and somewhat under-funded) peacetime Army. The service teams and the National Board were told to use up the surplus ammunition on hand for practice before any new stuff would be selected or manufactured. Needless to say, scores suffered somewhat with the sub-quality fodder for the M1903. In 1920 a decision was made to select the ammunition for the Nationals themselves by competitive excellence, although most of the teams would have to use the surplus ammo for practice during the year. Apparently this paid off as the first perfect score was fired in the 1000-yard Wimbledon Cup Match during the 1920 Nationals. The rifle aficionados at both Springfield Armory and within the shooting community were looking for better ammunition. They would not have long to wait.

Two things happened in 1921 that would change the complexion of rifle competition:

- 1) The production of the first target grade M1903 at Springfield Armory and made available to the general shooting public, (as opposed to those previously produced especially for the Military Service Teams on request) to be known as the ***M1903 National Match Rifle***.
- 2) The production of an experimental lot of ammunition at Frankford Arsenal designed to show off the new National Match Rifle and to eliminate the accuracy destroying cupro-nickel metal fouling in the bore.

While the 1920 NM Ammunition was accurate, it was still using a standard cupro-nickel jacketed bullet. The shooters of course, were solving the fouling problem with liberal applications of grease. Experiments at Springfield and Frankford disclosed that the 1920 NM Ammunition fired in a dry chamber gave approximately 51,000 psi, well within normal specifications. By carefully lubricating the bullet and case neck, the pressures rose to 59,000 psi. When the entire case was lubricated along with the chamber which was common (if unintended) when the cartridges were used in rapid-fire strings, the chamber pressure rose to a dangerous 71,000+ psi, the pressure normally attributed to a proof test load.

### Physics and the Rifle Shooter

The inadvertently lubricated cartridge case was the worst problem as its sides were tapered. Normal ammunition forms a gas seal in the chamber due to a process known as obturation. Obturation is simply the expansion of the brass case, tightly sealing the chamber when the round is fired. This case expansion forces little fingers of brass to occupy unseen microscopic irregularities in the chamber walls. This is truly a good thing as it seals the chamber until the gas pressure has subsided. Unsealed chambers allow gas to blow back into the receiver, possibly injuring the shooter. The greasy cartridge case in a tapered chamber had two disastrous consequences. First, grease is incompressible and will not allow the case to expand within the chamber as it was meant to do. Since the grease decreases the coefficient of friction and allows the cartridge case to slide in and out of the chamber more easily it precipitates what I call "*the watermelon seed effect*". This equates to the squeezing a fresh, wet watermelon seed between your fingers and having it squirt out into the grass. The greased, (and tapered) chamber has much the same effect on a brass cartridge case. Since the lack of compressibility of the grease prevents the case from expanding against the chamber walls and thus sealing the gas with normal obturation, the tapered case "squirts" to the rear with virtually all of the force of the combustion gasses being directed straight rearward against the bolt. When such rearward pressure is applied to the bolt in older single heat-treated receivers, exciting things are liable to happen.

### The 1921 National Match Ammunition - Enter "The Tin-Can"

To make it unnecessary to apply grease to the projectile and thus inadvertently greasing the entire cartridge and chamber, Frankford decided to make a bullet that wouldn't deposit cupro-nickel fouling in the bore. The famous old time shooter and ordnance expert, Major Townsend Whelen was put in charge of the project.

It turns out the United States wasn't the only country with a cupro-nickel metal deposit problem. It seems that the French had also had such a problem with their artillery pieces. They had

**The Legendary "Tin-Can Ammunition"**



**The 21-R 1921 National Match Cartridge with 180-grain flat-based tin-plated bullet**

solved the problem by putting strips of tinfoil in their powder charges. Tin was known to eliminate the lumpy metal fouling. The question was how to stuff enough tinfoil into a small arms cartridge case to solve the rifle problem.

Major Whelen solved the problem in a most ingenious way, by "tin plating" the projectile! Extensive tests demonstrated that the tin plated bullets left the bore free of fouling. The cupro-nickel metal deposits were thought to be a thing of the past.

The projectile selected for the 1921 Matches was a 170-grain, flat based bullet with a cupro-nickel jacket that was then electroplated with tin. This proved to be one of the most accurate loads ever produced for the Nationals prior to the coming of the 173-gr. boat-tailed projectile.

### **The Fly in the Ointment**

Just when the problem of the lumpy metal fouling seemed to be solved, a new problem surfaced with the tin plating. When a new lot of ammunition is produced, it is usually put under the microscope and carefully examined for any abnormalities. While checking the weight of the powder charges, it was necessary to pull a few bullets. Normal bullets pull at around 50 - 60 pounds of exerted pressure, but these puppies proved almost impossible to pull using normal methods. The effort necessary to pull the new bullets ran from between 300 to 600 pounds! Needless to say, this would raise the chamber pressure to disastrous limits.

Actual firing of the ammunition however, showed normal chamber pressures. It was finally decided that the bullets were "cold soldering" themselves into the neck of the cartridge cases. This unexpected phenomena was causing the extreme effort necessary to extract them using a bullet pulling machine. When fired however, the neck of the case would apparently expand against the neck of the chamber thus breaking the seal of the inadvertent solder job. Once broken free by case neck expansion the projectile was free to be launched without raising the chamber pressure. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Better that they should have considered the contrariness of the old time shooter.

### **If Tin is Good, Then Tin Plus Grease Must Be Better!**

Knowing the propensity of shooters to use long-standing practices, classes were held at Camp Perry to educate the 1921 competitors on the characteristics of the new National Match Ammunition. They were told not to polish the frosted tin finish on the bullets as they shot more accurately when left in the issued state, and they were told that under NO circumstances should they attempt to lubricate the tin plated bullets! Frankford and Springfield found that the incompressible grease would not allow the neck of the case to expand and release the bullet from the "cold solder job" in the neck of the case. Greasing the bullets had the potential of creating an explosive situation. Needless to say, this advice was handily ignored by many of the old time shooters. The attitude seemed to be:

"By Gawd, them high fallutin' geniuses at the Arsenal don't know nothing about shootin' - I've been greasing my bullets for years and nothing has ever happened! Who do they think they're kidding?"

### **Re-enter Gunnery Sergeant Johnson, Camp Perry 1921**

"Hey Gunny, what's this fancy fodder they're calling "Tin-Can Ammo," asks Private Jones?

"Weren't you listenin' the other day when they were givin' us the scoop on the new ammo, Jones?"

"Well yeah, but I threw a pretty wild liberty in Sandusky the night before. Guess I was dozin' off a bit... How about translatin' some of this for me Gunny!"

"Jones, all I know is what they told us, but it sounds like they may have solved all that metal fouling stuff that's been plaguing us for so long! I know it sure shoots good!"

"Right Gunny, it sure does, but why can't we dip our bullets in the grease anymore?"

"Jones, if you sleep during the lectures again, you ain't gonna' be makin' Corporal on your second enlistment like you were figurin'! As I understand it, this stuff is tin-plated and the tin kills the metal fouling! ...And if I catch you polishing the frosting off them silver "Werewolf Killers" again, I'll guarantee that you won't make Corporal. The Armory boys claim they shoot better when they're frosted! We need all the points we can get!"

"Aw Gunny, they sure do shine up good - what's the harm?"

"I dunno' Jones, but I'm gonna' take their word for it!"

"OK, but what's wrong with dippin' our bullets in the Cosmoline like we've always done?"

"Jones, damn it, when those egg-heads from the Armory come up with something, they've usually got it figured out pretty well! I'm gonna' follow orders, and so are you!"

"OK, OK Gunny, but I saw some of them civilians next to me on the line still dippin' 'em, if it's dangerous, why are they still doin' it?"

"Heck, don't ask me, you know civilians, they *NEVER* get the word, but according to Springfield, someone could get hurt by greasin' 'em. If I take you back minus an eye or with one of our fancy new rifles wrecked, it'll be my fanny. I've only got a couple of more years until I retire so if I get MY fanny in a crack, I'll promise you that yours will be in the same crack! Now all you birds hit the rack, we've got a big day tomorrow. Don't forget, we've got to go down behind the butts before the shootin' starts to put a couple of fouling shots through the rifles, so get some sleep!"

## **Old Habits, and Human Contrariness**

Human nature being what it is, many continued to lubricate the new ammunition causing several wrecked rifles. In every instance, the cause was traced to the prohibited use of grease on the ammunition. At least one projectile was found downrange with the neck of the cartridge case still firmly attached to the bullet and exhibiting rifling marks on the brass. The probable chamber pressure of that round can only be imagined.

From a positive standpoint, many new records were set using the Tin-Can Ammunition and it most certainly showed off the new National Match Springfield in a positive light. The 1000 and 600-yard scores caused the addition of a "V-Ring" to the long range targets starting in 1922. Records set using the fine "Tin-Can Ammo" recorded at least one score in the shoot offs that recorded over 70 consecutive bulls-eyes at 1000-yards. Ordnance now knew what the M1903 was capable of in the right hands, AND without the specter of cupro-nickel metal fouling.

The Tin-Can Ammunition had done its job and demonstrated the superior accuracy of the National Match Springfield, and that the lumpy metal fouling could be beaten. Ordnance decided that leaving the Tin-Can Ammunition in service was too risky given the inclination of

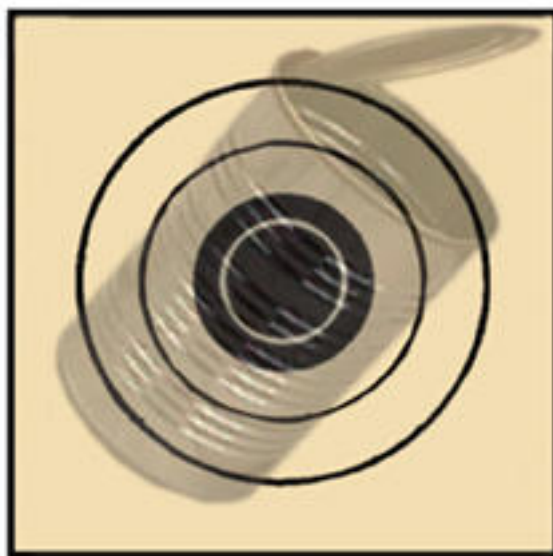
the old timers to lube their bullets against all advice to the contrary. Following the 1921 Matches, the remaining stock of the great Tin-Can Ammunition was scrapped.

The ammunition companies solved the problem of the cupro-nickel fouling by 1922 without plating the bullets. Experiments with *gilding metal* as a bullet jacket material finally began to pay off. Gilding metal is simply an alloy of copper and zinc, but in the past had been considered too soft for a military bullet. However gilding metal jacket material was soon refined by Western Cartridge Company while searching for a non-fouling jacketed bullet for their 1922 Palma Ammunition. The disadvantages of straight gilding metal were overcome by adding 2% tin to the jacket. This gilding metal/tin jacket material became the famous Lubaloy Bullet Jacket. Frankford Arsenal also came up with a gilding metal jacket made of essentially the same material as Lubaloy. Frankford Arsenal's addition of a 6° boat-tail to the 1922 National Match projectile set the stage for the well-known Frankford Arsenal M1 Ball ammunition that would rule supreme in service rifle competition for many years to come.

In the end however, it was the "*Tin-Can*" that showed them the way.

### Acknowledgements:

Much of the information in this article is drawn from many conversations with my Dad who fired with the Marines at Camp Perry in 1921 and told me exactly how the "Cosmoline" was used to lubricate the bullets, and how the lubricated bullets actually formed a vapor trail on the way to the target. The technical aspects of the "Tin-Can" Ammunition are taken from *Hatcher's Notebook*, Clark Campbell's *Book of the Springfield* and other commentary writings on the subject at the time. I am especially indebted to Major Jim Land, USMC (Ret.) for the round of **21-R** "Tin-Can" Ammunition generously donated from his extensive cartridge collection. The "Tin-Can" graphic showing the loaded round, the headbase, and the separate tin-plated projectile are taken from a scan of a real "Tin-Can" round and converted into a cut-away by my long suffering Memsahib (my favorite graphic artist) who is responsible for all the outstanding graphics in this article. My thanks also to Bob Seijas for keeping me honest with his proof reading! The tin can appearing in several places was a *REAL* Chili can opened in our kitchen, stripped of its label, and photographed on our back porch.



The "S-V Ring" on the Long Range Target  
A Legacy of the 1921 "Tin-Can" Ammunition

## M-1

DO YOU WONDER WHY THAT RIFLE  
IS HANGING IN MY DEN?  
YOU KNOW I RARELY TAKE IT DOWN  
BUT I TOUCH IT NOW AND THEN.

IT'S RATHER SLOW AND HEAVY  
BY STANDARDS OF TODAY  
BUT NOT TOO MANY YEARS AGO  
IT SWEEPED THE REST AWAY.

IT'S HELD ITS OWN IN BATTLES  
THROUGH SNOW, OR RAIN, OR SUN  
AND I HAD ONE JUST LIKE IT,  
THIS TREASURED OLD M-1.

IT WENT ASHORE AT BOUGAINVILLE  
IN NINETEEN FORTY-THREE.  
IT STORMED THE BEACH AT TARAWA  
THROUGH A BULLET-RIDDLED SEA.

SAIPAN KNEW ITS STRIDENT BARK,  
KWAJELEIN, ITS STING.  
THE ROCKY CAVES OF PELELIU  
RESOUNDED WITH ITS RING.

IT CLIMBED THE HILL ON IWO  
WITH MEN WHO WOULDN'T STOP  
AND LEFT OUR NATION'S BANNER  
FLYING ON THE TOP.

IT POKED ITS NOSE IN PUSAN,  
SCREAMED AN ANGRY ROAR  
AND TOOK THE FIRST DIVISION  
FROM CHOSIN RESERVOIR.

WELL, TIME MOVES ON  
AND THINGS IMPROVE  
WITH RIFLES AND WITH MEN,  
AND THAT IS WHY THE TWO OF US  
ARE SITTING IN MY DEN.

BUT SOMETIMES ON A WINTER NIGHT,  
WHILE THINKING OF MY CORPS,  
I KNOW THAT IF THE BUGLE BLEW  
WE'D BE A TEAM ONCE MORE.

~ *R.A. Gannon*

*Sergeant of Marines*



# 1902-1903 Krag Rifle Qualification Courses

OK, for Starters, let's see how our granddaddies had to qualify with the Krag Rifle!

## U .S. Army Rifle Qualification Course (circa 1902 -1903)

(prior to firing this course, each individual fired approximately 450 round of practice ammunition)

Qualifying Score was the aggregate of two runs of the KD (Known Distance) course and the two Skirmish Runs, requiring the individual to fire a grand total of 80 rounds over both courses per run. A total of 160 rounds were fired for the entire match.

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### 1st Course of fire:

Total number of rounds fired = 60

#Rounds	Range	Type of Fire	Position	Time Limit
10 Shots	200 yds.	Slow Fire	Standing	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	300 yds	Slow Fire	Sit or Kneel	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	500 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	600 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min/shot*
10 Shots	200 yds	Rapid Fire	Standing	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 20 seconds per string
10 Shots	300 yds	Rapid Fire	Sit or Kneel	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 30seconds per string

\* No specific time limit specified during the slow fire stages. In the old days slow fire was usually understood to be "a reasonable amount of time." This usually was understood to be an average of 1 minute per shot. Match time limits were normally 1 minute per shot.

\*\*The Krag rifle was reloaded with five individual cartridges, with no "stripper clip" to assist. Hence rapid fire strings were fired in two individually timed 5 round strings

### 2nd Course of fire:

Total number of rounds fired = 20 per Skirmish Run (a total of 40 rds per individual for qualification)

Each shooter fired two Skirmish Runs utilizing the targets called in slang, the Squaw and Papoose Targets. Officially, the Squaw (the larger of the two) was called the "E Silhouette Target" and the Papoose (the smaller of the two) was called the "F Silhouette Target".

The Skirmish Run was fired in the following manner (this was a sort of individual version of the "rattle battle" or *National Trophy Infantry Trophy Match*):

1. Each shooter had one (each) Squaw and Papoose Target sitting on top of the butts in front of his firing point - any firing position was allowed at all ranges (you could shoot prone at all distances if you wished):
2. The line of shooters formed just to the rear of the 600 yd line in a skirmish line. When the line was formed, it was ordered forward ("**well dressed**" needless to say) to the 600 yd. firing point and halted. On command, each shooter fired 2 rounds at the target(s) within a time limit of 30 seconds.
3. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit the line was ordered forward to the 500 yd. line. The first half of the distance was covered in quick time and the last half at double time. At 500 yds. 2 rounds were fired at the target in a time limit of 30 seconds.
4. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 400 yd. line. Again, the distance was covered first in a quick time with the last half done at the double. At 400 yds. **3 rounds** were fired in 30 seconds (vice 2 at 500 & 600).
5. Upon expiration of the 30 sec. time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 350 yd. line, using the combination quick and double time routine (which would be continued through the end of all courses fire during the skirmish runs). Again you were required to shoot **3 shots** in 30 seconds, just as at 400 yds.
6. Upon expiration of the 30 sec time limit, the line was ordered to the 300 yd line. Here you had a total of 10 rds. remaining. The individual shooter was allowed to distribute these in any way he wished between the 300 and 200 yd line. He had another 30 second time limit at 300 yds, but this was cut to 20 sec. at 200 yds.

Old timers were said to have favored the prone position at all ranges with a few diehards using the sitting position at 200. Total possible score was 100. An extremely accomplished shooter of the day was thought to be doing well if he scored 80 or more points on a skirmish run.

**Put into table form, it would look like this:**

**Skirmisher's Course**

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yds	2	30 sec	Any
500 yds.	2	30 sec.	Any
400 yds.	3	30 sec	Any
350 yds.	3	30 sec	Any
300 yds	10 rds. to be used at shooter's discretion	30 sec.	Any
200 yds.		20 sec.	Any
Two Targets per Shooter: Squaw = 4 points Papoose = 5 points			
Movement between yard lines = 1/2 quick time - 1/2double time			
Shooters move as a skirmish line "downrange" on command.			

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the Squaw (kneeling) target down to and including 350 yds. They then fired at the Papoose (prone) target at 300 and 200 yards. Col. Townsend Whelen said that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target

Sgt. Emmet Hawkins of the 24th Infantry (colored), is thought to be the 1st and only man to ever make a perfect (100 points) score in the Skirmish Run in competition.

The qualifications in those far off days were:

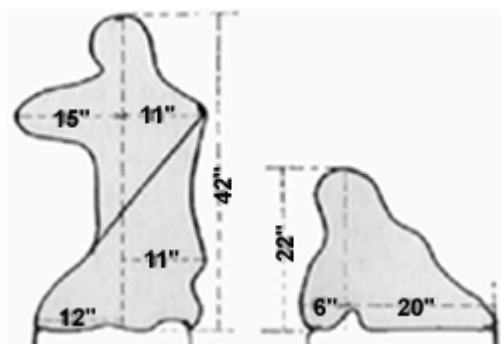
**Highest = Sharpshooter**

**2nd = Marksman**

**3rd = 1st Class**

(I haven't been able to come up with the score for each classification yet, but I'm looking)

## **Kneeling and Prone Silhouette (Skirmisher's) Targets**



Skirmish targets, the "Squaw" (left) and "Papoose" (right), used at Sea Girt and elsewhere in military shooting. These targets were also used as a part of the National Trophy Individual Rifle Match in the early days, when the "leg" course required the individual to add his Skirmish Run to his National Match Score Total.

**Hits on Squaw Target = 4 points**

**Hits on Papoose Target = 5 points**

Would you say that this is a far cry from the 40 rounds fired from the "mousegun" at the 1000 inch range that now passes for Army rifle qualification? You are now introduced to rifle marksmanship, march to the 1000 inch range, fire your rounds and head for chow all in one morning. "Poof"!! that's it! Instant "rifleman" - I'll bet you think I kidding? I would that I was! Sorry folks, that's it! End of story! A man had to be a real rifleman in those far off days of the Krag Rifle - and it would be almost 72 years until we lost our first war! It might be difficult to establish a genuine "cause and effect" between the current quality of our training, and our ability to impose our will on the enemy, but still... Of course we now understand one another so much better and of course our sensitivity training is much improved, so I suppose that has to count for something, eh what? Are we to trade political correctness for freedom? Ah well...



# Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches\*

1902 – 1906\*

\* *Rifle Courses Extracted from “Days of the Krag” by Townsend Whelen*

By Dick Culver

## Background:

The 1902 –1903 timeframe marks a turning point in military service rifle shooting. Our service rifle had been some version of the venerable Trapdoor Springfield since 1873. Undeniably it was more accurate than its predecessors, the rifled muskets and early Armory Conversions of the old front loaders, but it had several drawbacks when it came to rapid fire and long range rifle shooting:

1. It was slow to reload, making true “rapid fire” unobtainable in modern terms. The automatic extraction and ejection helped some, but not a heap!
2. While the .45-70 was an internally primed, fixed projectile cartridge, it still utilized Black Powder and fired an extremely heavy projectile that had a trajectory that can only be described as “rainbowesque”. Its velocity was low, and while instances of extreme accuracy of the old .45-70 at 1000 yards with excellent ammunition are documentable, the individuals marking targets for the shooters in the Wimbledon Cup Match described the exercise as being more nearly like pulling butts on a mortar range than marking targets for a rifle match. The “danger space” for the .45-70 at 1000-yards was almost non-existent except directly in front of the target.
3. The black powder propellant was *not* clean burning and tended to deposit powder fouling in the bore that required frequent cleaning to maintain accuracy in any sort of match shooting. Fighting Indians and Spaniards was one thing, match accuracy without continued cleaning was quite another.

A test held in 1879, firing the Trapdoor at extended ranges (1000-yards and beyond), indicated that the lack of powder charge uniformity resulted in groups that were roughly twice as long as they were wide, giving a long oval appearance to the “beaten zone” (target groups) of the military issue .45-70. Commercial ammunition (such as that produced for match shooting by the *Union Metallic Cartridge Company*) was noted for its accuracy, but sadly, this was not the case for the government-issue fodder. In true hide-bound fashion, the (military) brass looked at the results of the testing and decided on a fix to the pesky group shape. The answer? Tighten up the ammunition quality control? Nope, wrong again “*Gopher Breath*”. The *obvious* answer was to redesign the military targets to more closely match the elongated groups caused by the sub-quality military ammunition.

In 1885, the Department of the Army decreed that the targets were to be equipped with elliptical bullseyes! Holy Catfish, Batman! The old time experienced rifle shooters howled loudly, but to no avail. The new elliptical target was to remain in place when cooler heads and the general availability of the flat shooting Krag Rifle began to dominate the Service Rifle Shooting scene. Even the initial Distinguished Marksman’s Badges (first issued in 1887) sported the elliptical target face. The hated elliptical bullseye was abolished in 1903, but no exact date is given for the replacement of the “football shaped bullseye”.

## **The Coming of the Krag:**

Money was tight in the Military Establishment around the turn of the last century, and even though the *U.S. Magazine Rifle caliber .30* had been available to the regular military establishment since the mid 1890s, only the U.S. Regulars were armed with the Krag by the time of the Spanish American War in 1898. The lone exception was the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Volunteer Cavalry (The Rough Riders), who were armed with Krag Carbines. This was, no doubt, due to the fact that their Executive Officer, Teddy Roosevelt, was the former Assistant Secretary of the Navy. All of the Militia and National Guard Units took the venerable “Trapdoor” to Cuba. Spanish use of the Mauser Rifle did wonders to speed the equipping of the Guard and Militia Units with Krags after their return from the war.

It is interesting to note some of the experiences of Lt. (later Colonel) Townsend Whelen with the Krag in service. Whelen was a noted early day shooter and ordnance expert, later to be stationed at both Frankford Arsenal and Springfield Armory. By 1906, Lt. Whelen was one of the top Army Infantry Rifle Shooters, and his experiences and observations help us to better understand the mental changing of gears necessary to span the eras of the black powder Trapdoor to the flat shooting Krag.

Serving as a National Guard officer until 1902, Colonel Whelen did not have an opportunity to see, handle and test the New Springfield (Krag) until 1900. He was commissioned a Lt. in the Regular Army in 1902 and joined a Regular Army Unit (the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment) just returning from “pacification duty” in the Philippines... His statement that only a few of the older officers had any experience with the Krag would lead the reader to believe that the unit carried Trapdoors in the Philippines or never had a chance to gain any (rifle range) familiarity with the Army’s newest service rifle. There was a practice in those long ago days *not* to hold the Excellence-in-Competition Matches with a rifle not yet readily available to *both* the Regular Army and the National Guard. It is entirely possible that the Krag was not used as the standard service rifle (for service rifle competition) until at least 1900 or possibly as late as 1902.

By 1902 the standard Army Qualification Course (and by default, the Army leg match of the day) consisted of firing two separate courses of fire, a KD (**K**nown **D**istance) Course and a Skirmisher’s Course. Before firing the Army rifle qualification course (as opposed to the Match Course) each individual fired approximately 450 rounds of practice ammunition in preparation for the annual unit qualification effort. The KD course required a total of 60 rounds for a single run and the Skirmish Run an additional 20, making a total of 80 rounds for a single run. Thus firing through the course twice as required for both the Requalification Course, and the Excellence-in-Competition Course (Leg Match) required a total of 160 rounds for record.

Both the Qualification Course and the Leg Match were fired on two consecutive days.

## The Courses of fire are listed below:

### 1<sup>st</sup> Course of Fire: The “KD” Course

**Total number of rounds fired = 60**

# Rounds	Range***	Type of Fire	Position	Time Limit
10 Shots	200 yds.	Slow Fire	Standing	Average of 1 min per shot*
10 Shots	300 yds	Slow Fire	Sit or Kneel	Average of 1 min per shot*
10 Shots	500 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min per shot*
10 Shots	600 yds	Slow Fire	Prone	Average of 1 min per shot*
10 Shots	200 yds	Rapid Fire	Standing	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 20 seconds per string
10 Shots	300 yds	Rapid Fire	Sit or Kneel	2 strings of 5 shots fired** in 30 seconds per string

\* No specific time limit, was specified during the slow fire stages. In the old days slow fire was understood to be “a reasonable amount of time”, and usually averaged approximately 1 minute per shot.

\*\* The Krag Rifle was reloaded with five individual cartridges with no “stripper clip” to assist, Hence rapid fire strings were fired in two individually timed 5 round strings.

\*\*\* No specific target types (except for the skirmish targets) were mentioned by Col. Whelen in his notes.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Course of Fire: The Skirmish Run

Total number of rounds fired = 20 per Skirmish Run (a total of 40 rounds per individual for the match)

Each shooter fired two Skirmish Runs utilizing the targets called in slang, the “Squaw” and the “Papoose”. Officially, the Squaw (the larger of the two) was called the “E Silhouette Target” and the Papoose (the smaller of the two) was called the “F Silhouette Target”.

The Skirmish Run was fired in the following manner (this was a sort of individual version of the “rattle battle” or *National Trophy Infantry Trophy Match*):

### Conduct of Fire for the Skirmisher's Course:

1. Each shooter had one (each) Squaw and Papoose Target sitting on top of the butts in front of his firing point – any firing position was allowed at all ranges (you could shoot prone at all distances if you wished).
2. The line of shooters formed just to the rear of the 600 yard line in a skirmish line. When the line was formed, it was ordered forward ("**well dressed**", needless to say) to the 600 yd. firing point and halted. On command, each shooter fired 2 rounds at the target(s) within a time limit of 30 seconds.
3. Upon expiration of the 30 second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 500 yard line. The first half of the distance was covered in "quick time (120 steps/minute), and the last half at double time (180 steps/minute).
4. Upon expiration of the 30-second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 400 yard line. Again, the first half of the distance was covered in quick time, with the last half at the double. At 400 yards, **3 rounds** were fired in 30 seconds (vice 2 at 500 and 600 yards).
5. Upon expiration of the 30-second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 350 yard line using the quick and double time routine (which would be continued through the end of all courses of fire during the Skirmish Course). Again the shooter/competitor was required to shoot 3 shots in 30 seconds, just as at 400 yards.
6. Upon expiration of the 30 second time limit the line was ordered to the 300-yard line. Here you had a total of 10 rounds of ammunition remaining. The individual shooter was allowed to distribute these in any way he wished between the 300 and 200-yard line. He had another 30-second time limit at 300 yards, but was shortened to 20 seconds at 200 yards.

Old timers were said to have favored the prone position at all ranges, with a few diehards using the sitting position at 200. Total possible score was 100. An extremely accomplished shooter of the day was thought to be doing well if he scored 80 or more points on a skirmish run.

**Put into table form, the Skirmisher's Course would look like this:**

**Skirmisher's Course – total number of rounds fired = 20**

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
500 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
400 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
350 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
300 yards	10 rounds to be used at the shooter's discretion	30 Seconds	Any
200 yards		20 Seconds	Any



## Summary of Skirmisher's Course Rules

<b>Two targets per shooter located on top of the Butts at the 600 yard line</b>
<b>Movement between Yard Lines = ½ quick time, ½ double time</b>
<b>Shooters move as a “skirmish line” down range on command at each yard line</b>

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the “squaw (kneeling) target” down to and including 350 yards. They then fired at the “papoose” target at 300 and 200 yards. Colonel Whelen recounted that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target.

Sergeant Emmet Hawkins of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry is thought to be the only man to make a perfect score (100 points) on the skirmish run when it was run in competition.

**Qualification Designation(s) in that far off time, the classifications were:**

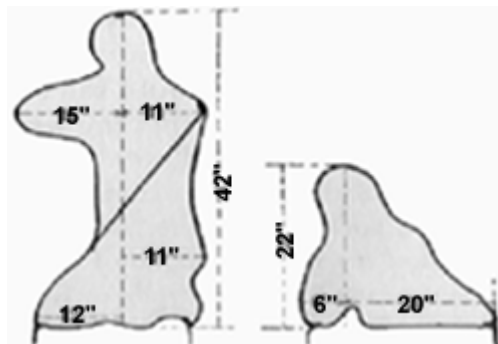
**Highest = Sharpshooter**

**2<sup>nd</sup> = Marksman**

**3<sup>rd</sup> = 1<sup>st</sup> Class**

**Actual scores necessary to attain the above qualification(s) are not listed.**

### The Skirmish Targets



*Skirmish targets, the "Squaw" (left) and "Papoose" (right), used at Sea Girt and elsewhere in military shooting. These targets were also used as a part of the National Trophy Individual Rifle Match in the early days, when the "leg" course required the individual to add his Skirmish Run to his National Match Score Total.*

**Hits on Squaw Target = 4 Points**

**Hits on Papoose Target = 5 Points**

## **The Selection of the Departmental Teams:**

As in previous years, each Army Department held annual Departmental rifle competitions (such as the Department of California, the Department of Arizona, etc.). As a matter of course, the two best rifle shots from each company of Infantry and the two best rifle shots among the officers of each Infantry Regiment were ordered to attend the Departmental Matches as competitors. All competitors fired the course(s) as described above. In keeping with the method of selecting the "Departmental Team" of the day, the top 12 shooters in the Departmental Matches represented the Department in the Army Competition (All Army Match).

Medals in the Departmental Matches were distributed as follows. The winner was awarded a gold medal, the second two individuals were awarded silver medals, and the last nine shooters were awarded bronze medals.

Each Department sent a 12-man team to the Army Competition held bi-annually in a location selected by the Army. In 1903, the All Army Competition was held at Ft. Sheridan, Illinois. The course of fire for the All Army Match was the same as for the Departmental Matches, and the 12 highest shooters were awarded medals on the same basis. These 12 medal winners became the Army Infantry Rifle Team and were ordered to Sea Girt, New Jersey in 1903 to compete in the National Matches. Army General Order # 61 established the first *National Trophy Match* to be fired annually at the Nationals starting in 1903. The winning team of the 1903 National Trophy Match would be awarded the *National Trophy* later to be called "*The Dogs of War Trophy*".

The National Match Course<sup>1</sup> fired at Sea Girt in 1903 consisted in firing once through the Army Qualification Course (including the Skirmisher's Course) plus ten shots at 800 and 1000 yards. While the Army Team did quite well, the more experienced shooters of the National Guard and hard holding civilian teams from the east coast with 1000-yard ranges available trimmed the Army Team's tail feathers at the extended ranges. Following the National Matches, the Army Teams were ordered back to their regiments to take with them the lessons learned in competitive rifle shooting to assist the individual regiments in their rifle practice instruction.

The same routine of selection of the Departmental and All Army Rifle Teams (on alternate years) was continued throughout the 1904 (no All Army Competition being held in 1904) and 1905 shooting seasons, but difficulty with shooting at 800 and 1000-yards resulted in a different method of selecting the Army Infantry Rifle Team in 1906.

While Departmental Matches were still held, 30 of the best rifle shots in the Army were ordered to Ft. Niagara, N.Y. for a two-month stint of concerted long-range rifle team training prior to the Nationals. The Army was still operating on a schedule of "every other year" for the All Army Match, and since 1906 was an "off year" for the All Army Match, this training camp scheme had much to recommend it. Ft. Niagara was chosen because of the availability of 1000-yard shooting facilities, a luxury not found on all rifle ranges. An Army team with 1000-yard experience would allow the Army to compete on a more even basis in the upcoming National Rifle Matches. The final 12 man Army Infantry Rifle Team was selected from the 30 man practice squad. Colonel Whelen speaks of "seeing" mirage at Ft. Niagara for the first time.

The Army Infantry Team won the National Matches and the National Trophy Match in 1906 as a result of their newly attained 1000-yard shooting prowess. This was a fitting end for the Krag as our Service Rifle. By the end of 1906 the entire U.S. Army and the National Guard had been armed with a new rifle, destined to become *the* rifle of legend – The U.S. Magazine Rifle, caliber .30, M1903 better known as the “Ought Three” or simply (if somewhat incorrectly) called, “*The ‘03 Springfield*”. The year of 1907 marked the beginning of a new era in rifle competition, with a new rifle to be fired at a new location for the National Matches – Camp Perry, Ohio.

## End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The course described here (the Army Qualification Course plus the Skirmisher’s Course plus 10 additional shots at 800 and 1000 yards) is taken from Col. Whelen’s writings. Conversely, Headquarters of the Army, Adjutant General’s Office, General Order No. 61 published 21 April 1903 gives a slightly different version. The General Order established a new “*National Trophy Match*” to be held annually. In calendar year 1903, the National Trophy Match was to be fired on 8 and 9 September at Sea Girt, New Jersey. Teams, each consisting of 12 men designated (by General Order No. 61) to compete were:

- An All Army Team
- One team from each military Department (Department of California, Department of Arizona, etc.).
- The U.S. Navy
- The U.S. Marine Corps
- The National Guard and uniformed militia of the several states and the District of Columbia on the basis of one team from each state or territory and the District of Columbia.

## Distances (ranges) to be fired were as follows:

- 200, 300\*, 500, 600, 800, 900 and 1000 yards. \*(The 300 yard range was not actually mentioned in the ranges to be fired, but **IS** mentioned in the positions to be utilized at each range – a bit confusing here).
- Number of shots, 10 by each competitor at each range.
- Shooting positions: Standing at 300 yards, prone with the shooter’s head toward the target at all other ranges – this would have precluded the use of the prone “*Back or Texas Grip*” positions.
- Arms to be used: United States Service Rifles and Carbines with not less than a three (3) pound trigger.
- Ammunition: The service cartridge as manufactured and issued by the Ordnance Department, U.S. Army.
- This contest was to be held on two separate days with the first day being fired at 200, 500 and 600 yards (no mention of 300 yards is made). The second day was to be fired at 800, 900, and 1000 yards. The team having the highest aggregate firing in the two days was to be the winner of the “National Trophy” (now known as “The Dogs of War” Trophy, but yet designed in 1903). Second place winner was awarded the “Hilton Trophy” and the third, “The Soldier of Marathon Trophy”.
- Recommendations for the 1904 National Trophy Match were to have the match include one run of the Skirmisher’s Course, and two (2) full scores “timed fire” at *rectangular targets*(?) and rapid fire *if possible*.

## Personal Conclusions:

Since the course(s) described in the text come directly from Col. Whelen’s personal notes and remembrances, and since General Order number 61 was issued more in the nature of guidelines, it is my personal opinion that the match was conducted as outlined by Col. Whelen, that is: The Army Excellence-in-Competition Match including the Skirmisher’s Course with the addition of a slow fire string at both 800 and 1000 yards. Many things happen “on the ground” at the match sites when the suggestions of higher ranking officers must be executed according to plan. Until an official Match *Bulletin* of the National Trophy Match of 1903 can be located, Col. Whelen’s notes are most likely best source of the way the match was actually conducted.

# Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches

1904

## *Including the 1904 National Trophy Matches*

By Dick Culver

The 1904 Army shooting season was an “off year” for the “All Army Match” but the Army Divisional Matches continued to be held annually. The Divisional Matches were designed to continue to encourage practice and competition with the Service Rifle throughout the United States and, to act as a vehicle for awarding medals signifying credit(s) towards the designation of Distinguished Marksman. Then too, the Divisional Matches gave the Army hierarchy a gage to select the Army Shooters assigned to represent the various 12-man Army Branch Teams (Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry, etc.) on years when the All Army Matches were not held. Competition was becoming heated in the newly established (1903) annual National Trophy Match and of course, to represent the Army in the yearly National Rifle Matches participated in by the finest rifle shooters, both military and civilian, in the United States.

Since the elliptical bullseye, standard since 1885, had been finally replaced by the traditional round target in 1903, the Army shooters felt that they could finally get back to pure marksmanship instead relying on a “trick bullseye” to match the beaten zone of the older Trapdoor Springfield on a typical target face. The course of fire for the 1904 Divisional Matches was identical to the 1903 matches, but the targets were of the more modern format.

### *The 1904 KD Course of Fire for Rifle Leg Matches*

Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	A	Slow	10	Standing	Average of 1 Minute per shot*
300	A	Slow	10	Sit or Kneel	Average of 1 Minute per shot*
500	B	Slow	10	Prone	Average of 1 Minute per shot*
600	B	Slow	10	Prone	Average of 1 Minute per shot*
200	D	Rapid	10	Standing	2 Strings of 5 shots fired in** 20 seconds per string
300	D	Rapid	10	Sit or Kneel	2 Strings of 5 shots fired in** 30 seconds per string

\*No specific time limit was specified during the slow fire stages. In the old days slow fire was understood to be “a reasonable amount of time” and usually averaged approximately 1 minute per shot.

\*\*Since the Krag was reloaded with 5 individual cartridges with no “stripper clip” to assist, rapid fire strings were fired in two 5 shot strings

The above course was standard for both the Army Qualification Course and the Excellence-in-Competition, and were fired along with two runs through the Skirmisher's Course. One run through the E-I-C Course took 60 rounds and the Skirmisher's Course took 20, making a total of 80 rounds to complete the entire course. Regulations specified that the course(s) would be fired twice (both the KD Course and the Skirmisher's Course). The match was conducted on two days, with one run through the KD Course and one Skirmish Run being fired each day. A competitor's total score for the E-I-C match was the aggregate of two days firing. Two runs on the course allowed for a good rifle shot to correct any mistakes or rifle trouble experienced the first day with a possible comeback on the subsequent day. Conversely, an individual who had just been extremely lucky on the first day had an opportunity to allow the "match pressure" to "psyche him out" on the second day if he was not a consistent rifle shooter. The double course tended to separate the (shooting) wheat from the chaff.

### **The 1904 Skirmish Run**

Total number of rounds fired = 20 per Skirmish Run (a total of 40 rounds per individual for the match)

Each shooter fired two Skirmish Runs utilizing the targets called in slang, the "Squaw" and the "Papoose". Officially, the Squaw (the larger of the two) was called the "E Silhouette Target" and the Papoose (the smaller of the two) was called the "F Silhouette Target".

The Skirmish Run was fired in the following manner (this was a sort of individual version of the "*rattle battle*" or *National Trophy Infantry Trophy Match*):

**Hits on Squaw Target = 4 Points**

**Hits on Papoose Target = 5 Points**

### **Conduct of Fire:**

1. Each shooter had one (each) Squaw and Papoose Target sitting on top of the butts in front of his firing point – any firing position was allowed at all ranges (you could shoot prone at all distances if you wished).
2. The line of shooters formed just to the rear of the 600 yard line in a skirmish line. When the line was formed, it was ordered forward ("***well dressed***", needless to say) to the 600 yd. firing point and halted. On command, each shooter fired 2 rounds at the target(s) within a time limit of 30 seconds.
3. Upon expiration of the 30 second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 500 yard line. The first half of the distance was covered in "quick time (120 steps/minute), and the last half at double time (180 steps/minute).
4. Upon expiration of the 30-second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 400 yard line. Again, the first half of the distance was covered in quick time, with the last half at the double. At 400 yards, **3 rounds** were fired in 30 seconds (vice 2 at 500 and 600 yards).
5. Upon expiration of the 30-second time limit, the line was ordered forward to the 350 yard line using the quick and double time routine (which would be continued through the end of all courses of fire during the Skirmish Course). Again the shooter/competitor was required to shoot 3 shots in 30 seconds, just as at 400 yards.

6. Upon expiration of the 30 second time limit the line was ordered to the 300-yard line. Here you had a total of 10 rounds of ammunition remaining. The individual shooter was allowed to distribute these in any way he wished between the 300 and 200-yard line. He had another 30-second time limit at 300 yards, but was shortened to 20 seconds at 200 yards.

Old timers were said to have favored the prone position at all ranges, with a few diehards using the sitting position at 200. Total possible score was 100. An extremely accomplished shooter of the day was thought to be doing well if he scored 80 or more points on a skirmish run.

**Put into table form, the Skirmish Run would look like this:**

**Skirmisher's Course – total number of rounds fired = 20**

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
500 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
400 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
350 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
300 yards	10 rounds to be used at the shooter's discretion	30 Seconds	Any
200 yards		20 Seconds	Any

#### **Summary of Skirmisher's Course Rules**

- Both targets ("squaw" and "papoose") were located **on top of the butts** at the 600 yard line.
- Movement of shooters between yard lines = ½ quick time, ½ double time
- All shooters move as a "skirmish line" down range on command at each yard line.

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the "squaw (kneeling) target" down to and including 350 yards. They then fired at the "papoose" target at 300 and 200 yards. Colonel Whelen recounted that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target.

#### **The Selection of the Departmental Teams:**

As in previous years, each Army Department held annual rifle competitions (such as the Department of California, the Department of Arizona, etc.). As a matter of course, the two best rifle shots from each company of Infantry (similarly from each equivalent Cavalry and Artillery Regiment) and the two best rifle shots among the officers of each Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry Regiments were ordered to attend the Departmental Matches as competitors. All competitors fired the course(s) as described above. In keeping with the method of selecting the "Departmental Team" of the day, the top 12 shooters in the Departmental Matches became the Departmental Team. Medals in the Departmental Matches were distributed as follows. The winner was awarded a gold medal, the second two individuals were awarded silver medals, and the last nine shooters were awarded bronze medals.

In a year such as 1904 where an All Army Match was not held, these Departmental Teams supplied the raw material used by each Army Branch to select a team to represent them at the National Matches.

## The 1904 National Trophy Matches:

The 1904 National Trophy Matches are not as well documented as those held in 1903, but we have the recommendations of the National Board for Rifle Practice's recommendations for the conduct of the matches:

- According to the National Board, the 1904 National Trophy Match were to have the match include one run of the Skirmisher's Course, and two (2) full scores "timed fire" at *rectangular targets(?)* and rapid fire *if possible*.

As above, the year of 1904 was an off year for the All Army Match, but the Departmental Matches were held in standard fashion utilizing two runs of the Excellence-in-Competition Match (including two skirmish runs) fired in 1903. The All Army Team (always consisting of 12 men in those days) was selected from the best shooters "making" the Departmental Teams.

If Col. Whelen's recollections are to be believed, the National Trophy Match held at the Nationals in 1903 utilized one run through the standard Army Qualification Course (Excellence-in-Competition Match) and one run through the Skirmisher's Course - plus 10 shot strings of slow fire at 800 and 1000-yards. The course set forth by the National Board differs somewhat from Colonel Whelen's notes. In 1903, the National Board called for:

- A string of slow fire to be fired at each of the following ranges; 200, 500, 600, 800, 900 and 1000 yards.

Apparently, the course of fire for the National Trophy Match in 1904 actually consisted of 60 rounds, fired in a series of slow fire strings at 200-yards, 500-yards, 600-yards, 800-yards, 900-yards, and 1000-yards, all prone with the shooters head toward the target. In chart form it would look as follows:

Course of Fire for the 1904 Nationals					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	A	Slow	10	Prone	None* Specified
500	B	Slow	10	Prone	None Specified
600	B	Slow	10	Prone	None Specified
800	C	Slow	10	Prone	None Specified
900	C	Slow	10	Prone	None Specified
1000	C	Slow	10	Prone	None Specified

\* Time limit was usually considered to be "reasonable", probably about 1 minute/shot

Apparently the recommendation of the National Board were ignored or changed, as no timed or rapid fire stages were specified or listed for the actual match. The National Board (NBPRP) approved the incorporation of two (2) Skirmish Runs during the 1904 Nationals, for both the National Trophy Individual Match and the National Trophy Team Match. While they

are not mentioned as having been fired in 1904, the “double” skirmish run became a part of the National Trophy Matches (Team and Individual) through the 1913 Shooting Season.

The 1904 National Trophy Matches included for the first time (at the National Trophy Matches) an “Individual National Trophy Match” as well as the “National Trophy Team Match”. This addition allowed the service rifle shooters an additional chance at a rifle leg medal during the National Matches.

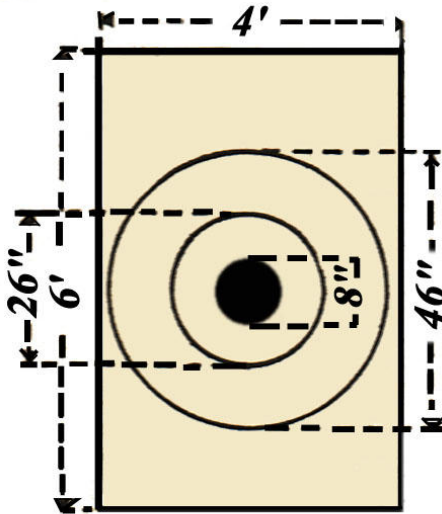
The National Trophy Matches were held on the Rifle Range at Ft. Riley Kansas and heavily exposed to hot August winds. The range was not overly “shooter friendly” and the shooters had to climb a 30-foot mound to fire at 1000-yards.

Selection of the All Army Rifle Team became a bit tricky for 1904, as the rules specified that of the (standard) 12 man National Trophy Team, 7 of the 12 competitors were not allowed to compete in the National Trophy Team Match the following year. While this may sound strange, the provision was actually included to increase competition within the Army. Requiring new blood on the All Army squad each year would require constant beating of the bushes to find new talent... The 5 individual (usually called “old shooters”) would provide the talent or anchor for the team, and the new shooters would have to be brought along by the old salts in the various branches (Infantry, Cavalry, Infantry, Artillery, etc.). ...A most ingenious scheme to keep the program healthy and not encourage inbreeding.

## **Targets Utilized in 1904 are on Pages 6 and 7**



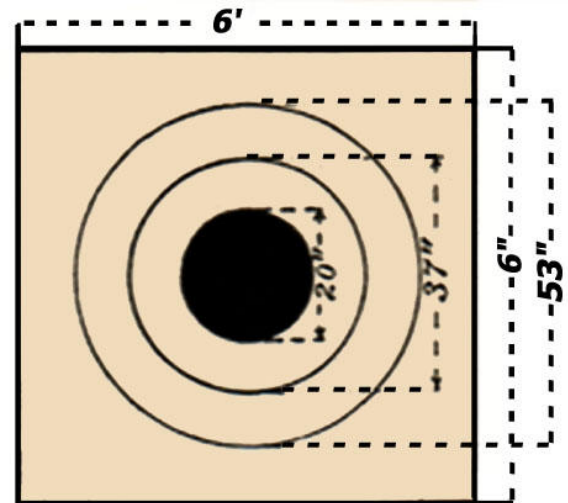
## Targets Utilized in 1904



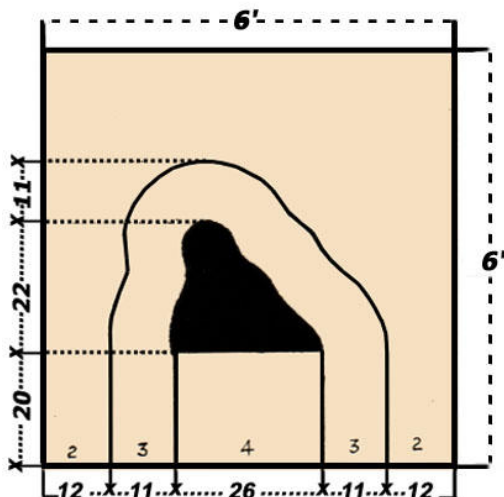
**TARGET A**

The 8 inch "A" Target had been used as far back as the Matches held in 1881 in essentially the same form. This target was to be utilized in the 8" version until 1920 when a 10" bullseye was substituted. The "A" Target has traditionally been the short range target utilized at both 200 and 300-yards for slow fire. In later years, the "10 inch A Target" and of course the later 12 inch versions (with "V-Ring") replaced the "D Targets" for the rapid fire stages until the introduction of the Decimal Target in 1967.

The "B" Target remained the medium range target essentially unchanged until 1967. The only change made was the addition of a 12" tie-breaking "V-Ring" for the 1922 Shooting Season. The "B" Target was traditionally used at the 500 and 600-yard stages of fire.



**TARGET B**

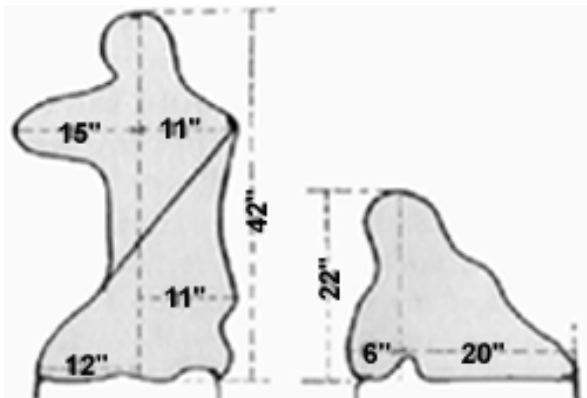
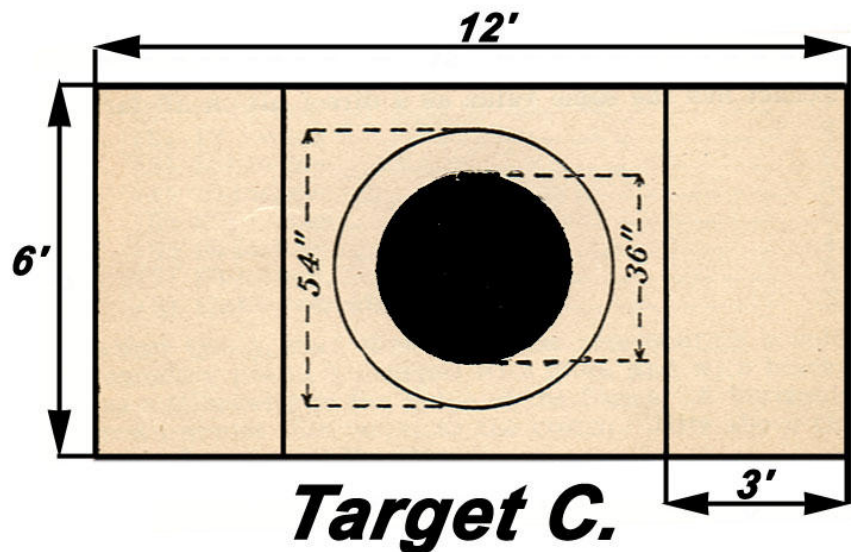


**Target D**

The "D" Target remained the rapid fire target for Qualification and E-i-C Match Firing. The initial versions of the "D" Target utilized a form very similar to the Skirmisher Target with additional scoring rings. It was obviously designed in an attempt to simulate the human form of an opposing rifleman in the prone position. This it did very well, but would have been much more effective if a "center of mass" hold had been taught at the time. Using the old six o'clock hold, it presented a challenging target. The format of the "D" Target was eventually changed to give a better 6 o'clock sight picture, but had to sacrifice the more realistic human silhouette.

The "C" Target was the traditional long range target used for ranges exceeding 600-yards. Used at 800, 900 and 1000-yards, it could and did present an illusive mark for shooters using rifles lacking the later technology necessary for pinpoint precision. Ammunition too was going to have to come a long way to make the 1000-yard line a "matter-of-fact" exercise, more often fired with a clean score than not. Even

as things progressed, the "C" Target was not replaced until 1974 with the adoption of the Long Range Decimal Target. It existed in the above format until the 1922 Shooting Season when a 20" tie-breaking "V-Ring" was added to preclude the multi-round shoot offs of 1921.



### ***The Skirmish Targets***

**Utilized for the Skirmisher's Course and placed on top of the 600-yard Butts.**

**"Squaw" (left) and "Papoose" (right),**

# Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches

## Extracted From the Provisional Small Arms Firing Manual of 1909

By Dick Culver

During each alternate year, there will be four competitions, as follows:

- 1) The Departmental Rifle Competition;
- 2) The Army Rifle Competition;
- 3) The Departmental Revolver Competition;
- 4) The Army Revolver Competition.

Competitions were to be held at such places and times as may be designated in orders from the War Department.

### Regulations for Rifle Leg Matches (1909)

<b>Course of Fire for the Departmental and Army Rifle Competition</b>					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	A	Slow	10	Standing	1 minute/shot
200	D	Rapid	10 fired in two separate strings of 5 shots	Standing <u>to</u> kneeling	20 seconds per 5 shot string
300	D	Rapid	10 fired in two separate strings of 5 shots	Choice of Kneeling <u>or</u> Sitting Position (the position was assumed <u>before</u> string of fire)	20 seconds per 5 shot string
500	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone	1 minute/shot
500	D	Rapid	10 fired in two strings of 5 shots	Prone (assumed before string of fire)	30 seconds per 5 shot string
600	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone	1 minute/shot
This course of fire was to be fired twice, on two separate days for the total aggregate score. This score plus the results of two individual runs through the Skirmish Course were added together to determine the medal (leg) winners who would receive credit toward the designation of " <i>Distinguished Marksman</i> ".					

Note: All Rapid Fire (including the skirmish course) was conducted using the M1903 Battle Sight (not adjustable, but supposedly set for 530 yards). Appropriate “hold off” (Kentucky Elevation) was used at all ranges for rapid fire!

The signal for the targets to appear from the Pits for a string of Rapid Fire was a “trumpet”, “whistle”, or “telephone”.

The Infantry and Coast Artillery troops were required to fire the 200-yard Rapid Fire stage of the qualification course with fixed bayonets! Fixed bayonets were not required at 300 or 500 yard Rapid, however, fixed bayonets were **NOT** required at any range during the “Leg Match.”

<b>Skirmish Course of Fire for Competition</b>					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
600	D	Rapid	5	Choice of prone, kneeling, or sitting	30
500			5		30
400			5		30
350			5		30
300			5		30
200			5		20

Use of the Battle Sight was required at all ranges except for 600 yards where the peep sight was permitted.

D Targets were mounted on “disappearing carriages (similar to modern day target carriers). Signal to the pits that the competitors were ready to proceed was a trumpet or telephone. Thirty seconds after receiving the signal from the firing line, the Pit Officer or NCO caused the targets to appear.

The competitors started just to the rear of the 600-yard line with the rifles loaded and locked. The competitors were “advanced” to the firing line and halted. Commands to fire the requisite five rounds were given. As soon as any portion of the target appeared, the competitor commenced firing. Firing continued as long as any portion of the target was still in sight or until all five rounds were fired. When the targets disappeared, the command or signal to cease-fire was given. The rifles were reloaded and locked and the advance immediately resumed. Movement between firing lines was conducted with the first half of the distance covered at quick time (120 steps per minute), with the second half covered at double time (180 steps per minute). While the instructions for firing the course are not specific on this point, it is assumed that the competitor was allowed to take the preferred firing position prior to the targets being raised. All reloading was accomplished from a full five round stripper clip.

## **Making the “Departmental Team”**

Individuals placing in the Leg Match made up the “Departmental Team”... The “Team” was chosen on the basis of one member of the team for every five competitors, or essentially the top 20% of those firing in the match, with fractions not being considered. For example, if there were 75 rifle competitors, a “Team” of 15 would be chosen and presented Leg Medals. As far as the fractional non-consideration, the example given was a field of 100 competitors would yield a 20 man “Team”, but competitors 101 through 104 would not increase the number of

medal winners, however competitor number 105 would increase the “Team” (medal winners) to 21.

Unlike today’s Army Competition, gold, silver and bronze medals were presented to the competitors in the following ratio:

<b>Number of medal winners (size of “Divisional Team”)</b>	<b>Gold Medals</b>	<b>Silver Medals</b>	<b>Bronze Medals</b>
6 or less	1	1	One to each remaining member of the Team (leg winners)
7 to 9 inclusive	1	2	"
10 to 12 inclusive	1	3	"
13 to 15 inclusive	2	3	"
16 to 18 inclusive	2	4	"
19 to 21 inclusive	2	5	"
22 to 24 inclusive	2	6	"
25 to 27 inclusive	3	6	"
28 to 30 inclusive	3	7	"
31 to 33 inclusive	3	8	"
34 to 36 inclusive	3	9	"
37 to 39 inclusive	4	9	"
40 to 42 inclusive	4	10	"
43 to 45 inclusive	4	11	"
46 to 48 inclusive	4	12	"
49 to 51 inclusive	5	12	"
Additional Medal Winners were calculated using the above formula if there are more than 51 men on the Divisional Team			

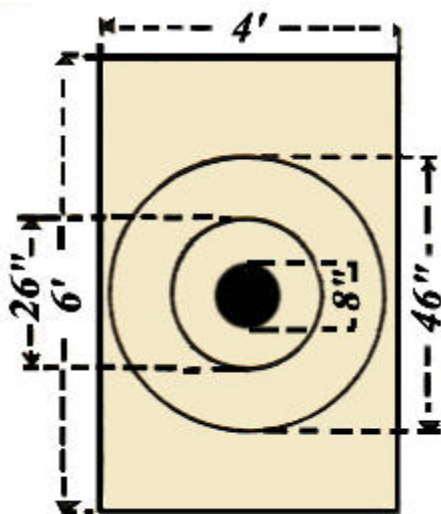
As was pointed out, the legs were awarded on the basis of 20% of the non-Distinguished Competitors, as opposed to today’s 10%. Then as now however, a “Distinguished Marksman” did not count against the non-Distinguished shooters.

In order for a previously Distinguished Shooter to “make the Departmental Team” and be eligible to fire in the Army Competition, he had to make an overall score exceeding the last “medal winner” by 5%. In order for a Commissioned Officer to win a bronze leg medal, he was required to exceed the score of the lowest scoring enlisted (bronze) leg winner by 5%. An officer could win a silver leg medal by exceeding the lowest scoring enlisted silver leg winner by 5%, etc.

The Army Match was fired with the competitors comprising the Departmental Teams from each Department. The course of fire was identical to that fired for the Departmental Match.

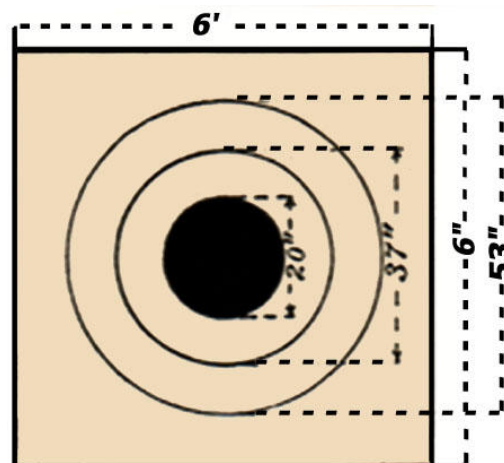
Regardless of the total number of competitors participating in the Army Match, the total Army Rifle Team (Army Competition Leg Winners) was composed of only 12 shooters. The first four members of the team (by score) received a gold medal, the remaining eight members received silver medals. Medal winners in the Army Match received credit towards the Distinguished Marksman award.

## Targets Utilized in 1909

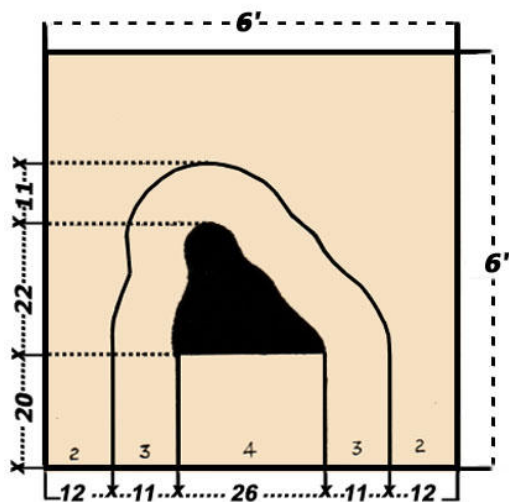


**TARGET A**

The "B" Target was used for 500 and 600 yard slow fire. The 20" bullseye without the tie-breaking "V-Ring" was replaced in 1922 with identical dimensions, but having a 12" "V-Ring" designed to break ties in the event of two individuals shooting identical scores. The version using the 12" "V-Ring" remained the standard 500 and 600-yard target until the introduction of the "Decimal Target" in 1967.



**TARGET B**



**Target D**

The "D" Target in 1909 was used for both rapid fire stages and the Skirmish Course of fire. This replaced (but was somewhat similar to) the earlier pair of Skirmish Targets commonly called the "Squaw" and "Papoose" targets. The "D Target" retained the format of the earlier "Papoose" target (the smaller of the two), but had the utility to be used on a target carrier instead of simply placed on top of the 600-yard butts. The 1909 version of the "D" Target cut down on the number of targets necessary to conduct requalification or match firing. During the conduct of the Skirmish run, only shots in the black or in the four ring immediately below the black counted as hits.

# Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches

## Regulations Extracted From the Small Arms Firing Manual of 1913

– corrected to April 1917 –

By Dick Culver

Unlike the 1909 regulations, only two competitions are listed in the 1913/1917 Manual, again to be held every “alternate” year or when directed by the Secretary of War:

1. The Department rifle competitions.
2. The Department pistol competitions.

No mention is made of the “Army” competition, but the competitions were to be held at such places and times as designated by the respective department commanders. One new change in the “corrected” 1913 Manual called for a department rifle competition for the Philippine Scouts beginning in 1916.

### Regulations for the Rifle Leg Matches (1913/1917)

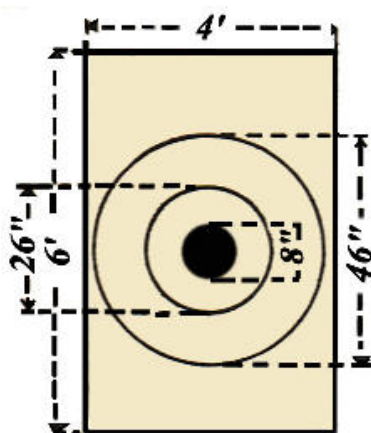
<b>Course of Fire for the Department Rifle Competition</b>					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Kneeling or Sitting <u>from</u> Standing	1 minute
300	A	Slow	10	Sitting <u>or</u> Kneeling	No time limit specified
300	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone <u>from</u> Standing	70 seconds
500	B	Slow	10	Prone	No time limit specified
500	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone assumed <u>before</u> string of fire	80 seconds
600	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	No time limit specified
1000	C	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	No time limit specified
<p>This course of fire was to be fired twice, on two separate days for the total aggregate score to determine the medal (leg) winners. The entire course (both days) took a total of 140 shots.</p> <p>Unlike former competitions, <b><i>the peep sight was legal for use in rapid fire</i></b>, although either the peep or battle sight could be used at the option of the competitor.</p> <p>When using the sandbag rest, either the rifle or the back of the hand had to touch the sandbag.</p>					

The competitors winning (leg) medals were said to have made the “Department Team”, and as in the 1909 matches the medals were awarded on the basis of 20% of the non-Distinguished enlisted shooters, with fractions not included. When carefully worked out, it amounts to the currently familiar top 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the medal winners receiving gold medals, the next 1/3<sup>rd</sup> receiving silver medals and the final 1/2 of the medal winners garnering bronze medals. The chart included in the 1913/17 Manual is reproduced below:

Total Number of Enlisted Competitors	Team (this <u>actually</u> means the number of medal winners).	Number of Gold Medals Awarded	Number of Silver Medals Awarded	Number of Bronze Medals Awarded
30 or more	6	1	2	3
35	7	1	2	4
40	8	1	2	5
45	9	1	3	5
50	10	2	3	5
55	11	2	3	6
60	12	2	4	6
65	13	2	4	7
70	14	2	4	8
75	15	2	5	8
80	16	2	5	9
85	17	2	5	10
90	18	2	6	10
95	19	3	6	10
100	20	3	6	11
105	21	3	7	11
110	22	3	7	12
115	23	3	7	13
120	24	3	8	13
125	25	3	8	14
130	26	3	8	15
135	27	3	9	15
140	28	4	9	15
145	29	4	9	16
150	30	4	10	16
155	31	4	10	17
160	32	4	10	18
165	33	4	11	18
170	34	4	11	19
175	35	4	11	20
180	36	4	12	20
Additional competitors were figured at the same ratio as the above chart.				
Non-Distinguished officer competitors did not compete directly with the enlisted shooters, but had to make a score equal to the “like medal” awarded to the enlisted men making the team. It was no longer necessary for the officers to make a score equal to the enlisted score plus an additional 5%.				



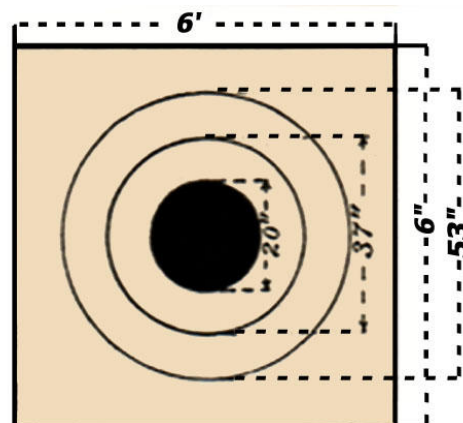
## Targets Utilized in 1917



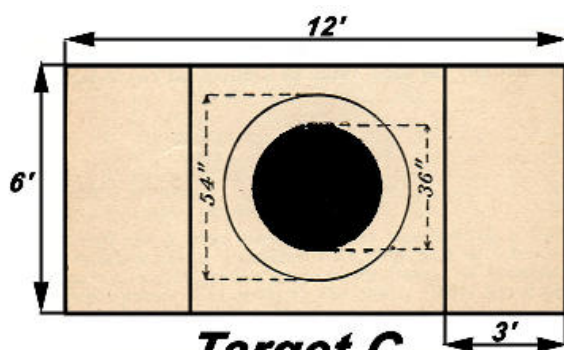
**TARGET A**

The 1917 version of the "A" Target remained unchanged from its original format. The course of fire specified for both the Requalification Course and the Excellence-in-Competition Course used the "A" Target for the 300-yard slow fire stage specifying sitting or kneeling at the competitor's option. No standing (offhand) firing was included in the course.

The familiar "B" Target was utilized for 500 and 600-yard slow fire. The 600-yard stage specified 2 sighting shots and the remaining 20 rounds fired utilizing a sandbag rest. With the exception of the addition of the 12" "V-Ring" in 1922, this target remained unchanged until the adoption of the Decimal Target in the late 1960s.



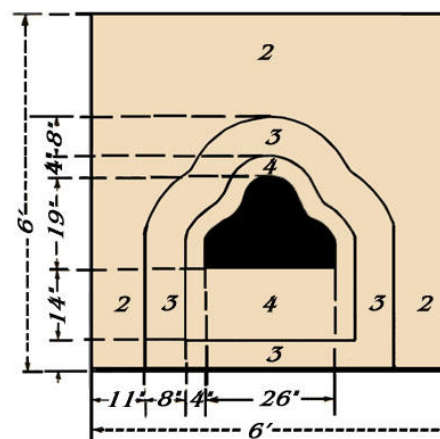
**TARGET B**



**Target C.**

The "C" Target was utilized for the 1000-yard stage of the Requalification Course and the Excellence-in-Competition Courses. Two sighting shots were allowed at the 1000-yard line prior to the 20 shots for record. A sandbag rest was permitted, specifying that either the back of the hand or the rifle had to rest on the sandbag.

The "D" Target was used for rapid fire at the 200, 300 and 500-yard stages of fire. For the first time (according to the 1917 update of the Small Arms Firing Regulations) it was no longer necessary to utilize the "battle-sight" during the rapid fire stages (although the battle-sight was allowed at the option of the shooter).



**Target D**

# The 1921 National Matches – The End of an Era...©2002

By Dick Culver

It was a September afternoon at Camp Perry in 1921 and a Gentleman by the name of George R. Farr gathered his gear and prepared to leave the firing line after posting a perfect score in the legendary Wimbledon Cup Match... What's so special about posting a possible at 1000 yards? Well, perhaps you will better understand when you realize *how* he ran his perfect string, and his subsequent performance in the "shoot-off" that would be required to determine the final winner of the de-facto long range championship of the United States.



The Farr Trophy

In order to appreciate the shooting sequence that followed, a small amount of history is in order. There were no "V-Rings" or "X-Rings" to act as tie-breakers during or before the 1921 Matches, after all no one had ever fired a perfect score in the Wimbledon until the year before, in 1920! Here's how the match winner was determined If more than one shooter fired a perfect score:

- If a shooter fired a perfect score at 500-yards or greater distance, the winner was chosen based on a continuation of firing until the competitor eventually dropped a shot out of the black. Unlike today, where the top competitors from each relay are selected to compete during a special "shoot-off relay", a shooter simply continued firing until he broke his string of fives... Needless to say, this was a time-consuming, albeit thrilling, way to decide the outcome of an individual match. The old "shoot 'till you miss system" had never been considered a problem prior to 1920, but the 1921 National Matches was destined to usher in a new standard of long range shooting excellence!
- Under the scoring system of the day, the 500/600-yard bulls-eye was 20" in diameter and the 1000-yard target had a 36" five ring! Easy to hit? Don't bet on it! You must remember that these folks were dealing with lumpy metal fouling deposited by cupro-nickel jacketed GI bullets, ammunition that did not equal the later NM issue fodder, no glass bedding, and your shooting jacket was a military blouse (identical to the one worn with the dress uniform) with a recoil pad (usually hand sewn) on the shoulder, and a pad sewn on both elbows. Crude? Well yeah, but... No fancy leather jackets, no special boots, and no shooting mats could be found on the line. The optics utilized in both glass sights and spotting scopes would be called extremely rudimentary and unsophisticated by today's standards.

While Springfield Armory had produced match quality rifles for the military service teams since 1910, there was no provision to sell these rifles to civilians or NRA members until 1921, or allow for their issued to competitors at the National Matches. Springfield was justifiably proud of the 1921 NM Springfield, and promoted their availability with appropriate information in the shooting literature of the day, giving rise to the popular (but technically incorrect) myth that the 1921 NM Rifles were the first rifles produced specifically for the National Matches. The service teams had had access to such rifles (as noted above) since 1910. The National Match Rifles produced for the 1921 Matches had been carefully assembled with star-gaged barrels, and lovingly bedded in flawless stocks, and the actions polished. They were things of beauty to aficionados of military rifles.

As fine as the new rifles were, it hadn't been the rifles that drove the competitors crazy in times past, but rather the lumpy metal fouling due to the cupro-nickel bullet jackets of the issue ammunition...

Virtually all the competitors in the National Matches utilized the GI ammunition issued on the line. The Nationals were subsidized by the U.S. Government, and extra money to buy the finest available commercial ammunition was not readily available to the average competitor. When it came to the Wimbledon Cup however, quite a few of the top ranked long-range competitors preferred to use commercial match ammunition, but those individuals were usually bankrolled by the Service Teams. Frankford Arsenal's new FA Match was about to help change history and make believers out of the 1000-yard shooters.

The National *Trophy* Matches however (National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice Matches) REQUIRED the use of issued Government Ammunition, and most shooters simply shot the government ammunition issued "gratis" on the line in all the matches. Unlike some of the ammunition issued previously, the Frankford Arsenal NM Ammunition furnished to the 1921 competitors was to gain a reputation for accuracy that became legendary. George Farr chose to shoot the new issue National Match ammunition issued on the firing line.

### **A Quick Note on the Ammunition Issued for the 1921 Matches:**

The average (military) ammunition available to the competitor until 1921, utilized a bullet jacket composed of copper and nickel. While the cupro-nickel jacket was acceptable for issue military ammunition, the jacket material tended to leave a lumpy metal fouling in the bore that adversely affected the accuracy of the rifle after just a few rounds. The deposited metal fouling made things worse and caused even more fouling to be deposited in the bore with each subsequent shot. The cupro-nickel metal fouling was the ruination of match accuracy. A formula for "ammonia dope" was readily available to dissolve the lumpy metal fouling, but if you left the "dope" in the bore too long, it could destroy your barrel. A slight slip-up, or a leaky cork in the breech and your rifle bore was history! As a result, shooters resorted to drastic measures to solve the problem. The first attempt to maintain accuracy until the bore could be cleaned with "ammonia dope," was apparently the use of Cosmoline on the tip of the bullet. For rapid fire, the entire end of the 5 round stripper clip was dipped into a small typewriter can full of lubricant (either cosmoline, or for the more affluent, a commercial grease called Mobilubricant). Now, no matter how careful you were, you were probably going to lube your chamber in the process. Since grease is incompressible, the chamber pressure rose sharply.

#### **The Legendary "Tin-Can Ammunition"**



**The 21-R 1921 National Match Cartridge  
with 180-grain flat-based tin-plated bullet**

The ammunition issued at Camp Perry and fired in the 1921 National Matches was a special lot that came to be known by its nickname "*Tin-Can Ammunition*". The Tin-Can Ammo was an effort by (then) Major Townsend Whelen of Frankford Arsenal to beat the metal fouling problem common to the government cupro-nickel bullet jackets on all U.S. Service Rifle Ammunition. The French had been experimenting with putting tin strips into their artillery shells in an attempt to solve the problem with large caliber weapons. It

was seemingly successful, and held much promise for small arms ammunition. Major Whelen, being aware of the French efforts and reported results, decided to tin plate the .30-'06 projectiles for the 1921 Matches. His experiment worked, and the cupro-nickel fouling

ceased to be a problem, but initially unconvinced competitors continued to grease their bullets. Records were destined to fall, but all was not well in Mudville...

For unrelated reasons, (and the inability of the competitors to comprehend the pressure problems created by greasing the bullets), several failures of the single heat treated Springfields were undeservedly blamed on the ammunition. Be that as it may, the so-called "*Tin-Can Ammo*" accounted for many new records, and established new accuracy standards for future National Match Ammunition. The NM 1921 ammunition demonstrated that the new National Match Springfield Rifle could shoot well, and allowed long-range rifle shooting to take a quantum leap forward.

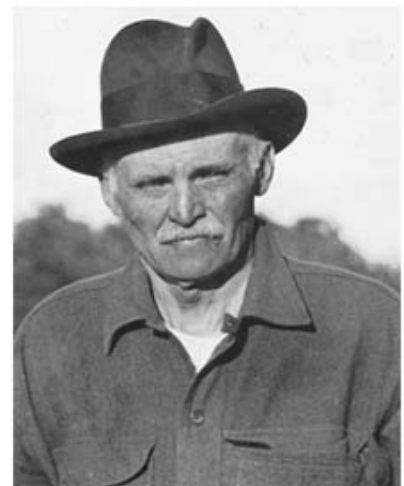


**Major Townsend Whelen (in uniform)**  
with shooting notable Colonel Brookheart  
Whelen, a Distinguished Marksman and Ordnance  
Expert was the architect of the famous "*Tin-Can*"  
Ammunition fired in the 1921 matches.

The "*Tin-Can Ammunition*" turned out to be an exceptionally accurate load in addition to its non-fouling properties. Major Whelen had conquered the lumpy metal fouling of the cupronickel bullet jacket, but he was not able to conquer human nature, but therein lays another story. After the 1921 Nationals, the excellent *Tin-Can Ammunition* was withdrawn from service due to a real or perceived pressure problem, due at least in part to the reluctance of the old time shooters to stop lubricating the new ammunition.

### **George Farr's Rendezvous With Destiny:**

George Farr, a tall resident of the State of Washington had been selected by the Washington State Rifle Team. A civil engineer by profession, he had surveyed track and bridge projects for the Santa Fe, Great Northern, and Canadian Pacific Railroads, and was a self-taught marksman of considerable skill, ...but he had never entered National Competition. He had been recalled from a hunting trip in his beloved Washington Mountains to travel east from Seattle to Camp Perry as a member of the Washington State Rifle Team. George was heading for the proving ground for American Riflemen to keep a date with destiny. On the day of the Wimbledon Cup, George reported to the firing line wearing a khaki shirt and dungarees and sporting a black slouch hat. A quick look at Farr would not have marked him as "*the*" man to beat in the legendary Wimbledon Match. If he were to be judged by the rudimentary equipment he carried,



**Future Long Range Service Rifle  
Record Holder, George Farr  
Prior to departing for Camp Perry**

he would not have even been immediately identified as a seasoned match competitor. He was however, in retrospect, an extremely gifted amateur, about to teach the Easterners a thing or two about long range rifle shooting! By most competitive match standards, George should have been over the hill. He was a lanky 6 footer, but had already reached his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday, earning him the nickname of "Dad Farr" much to his dismay... Virtually no one paid any attention when he moved his gear onto the line and prepared to fire. He was squadded on the last relay, moving to the firing line at 4:30 and the light was already showing signs of



fading. Most of the well-known “big guns” had been squadded on the earlier relays, and already headed back to their tents to stow their gear.

Not having the financial wherewithal to purchase a commercial spotting scope, he had taken one barrel of a pair of French Opera Glasses (by sawing-off the other half) to serve instead, hoping that this crude substitute would allow him to see the spotters and perhaps the mirage at 1000 yards... Having heard that he could draw a rifle at Camp Perry from the Government, and be issued the ammunition to shoot the matches including the fabled Wimbledon Cup, Dad decided to try his hand at long range shooting, a game in which he had excelled in the Northwest, although not in the rarified atmosphere of the National Rifle Matches.



Dad Farr had drawn one of the newly produced National Match M1903 Springfields from Army Ordnance prior to the matches, and could hardly wait to try it out. The day prior to the Wimbledon Cup Match however, his first rifle suddenly went sour, so he turned it in and drew his second rifle of the match. He gave it a thorough cleaning and prepared to sight it in during the shorter-ranged matches the following day. On that fateful 9<sup>th</sup> day of September 1921, Dad left the 600-yard line with a newly acquired zero and reported to the 1000-yard range prepared to fire on the final relay. The time was 4:30 PM and the light was already beginning to fade.



**Sergeant John W. Adkins USMC**

**Winner of the 1921 Wimbledon Match  
with 76 consecutive bullseyes.**

**Note: the scorekeepers in the background**

In accordance with the match procedures of the day, Dad was issued the necessary 22 rounds to fire the match by the scorer behind his firing point, (that is, 2 sighting rounds, and 20 rounds for record). Old Dad was hardly noticed when he got into position. Even if anyone had looked, they would have observed a shooter apparently rather poorly equipped to fire for the long-range championship of the United States. Unlike the current leader in the Wimbledon at that moment, “Ol’ Dad” was using the issue (iron) Springfield Sights that he had just blackened with a “Lucifer” match. The man to beat was a Marine Sergeant by the name of John Adkins. Adkins had just fired a total of 76 consecutive bull's-eyes before he lost a round out of the black. While Sergeant Adkins had fired a remarkable score, he had performed this feat of arms using a “scope sighted”

Springfield, not the issue(d) Service Rifle, and he had chosen to use Remington Match Ammunition instead of the Frankford Arsenal “Tin-Can” Ammunition. If Dad was impressed or “awed” by Adkins’ performance he didn’t convey his concern to his friends or any of those in the immediate vicinity.

Even though Farr hadn't yet had an opportunity to sight in the “borrowed rifle” at the 1000-yard line, he had talked to a number of experienced competitors, and had gotten an idea of where to start with his initial sight setting. Out of his gear, he produced a *P.J. O'Hare Sight Micrometer* (designed to make precise 1 minute click elevation changes to the Springfield leaf sight), broke out his wire-rimmed reading glasses and made his “come-up” calculated from his 600-yard dope acquired just prior to reporting for the Wimbledon. Whether or not the

sight micrometer was his or another borrowed piece of gear is not clear. Farr removed his reading glasses and prepared to start what would become one of the most fabled strings of fire in history.

Dad's first shot was a high "trey" (a shot in the 3 ring for you "Johnny-come-latelys" – see comments at the end of the article with a picture of his actual score card), but well on paper at 1000 yards. His shooting technique was unorthodox to say the least. He chose to load an entire clip of 5-rounds into the magazine instead of using the usual "single cartridge loading method" favored by most shooters. Rather than maintain a rock solid position, he tended to move around between shots, readjusting his elbows and squirming around for a more comfortable shooting position. But unorthodox or not, Dad had done the miraculous, he had hit paper with his first shot with a new rifle. As it turned out, it was all he needed! Farr proceeded to put his next sighter and the subsequent 20 rounds for record into the 36" bulls-eye! Thinking he was finished, George started to move off the firing line.

Obviously not a seasoned National Match Shooter, he was not aware of the "shoot 'till you miss the black" rule. The range officer grabbed Ol' Dad and told him that he must continue his string until he dropped out of the black... Scratching his head, Dad agreed, and the scorer produced two additional clips of the Tin-Can Ammunition. George chuckled protesting that he was sure one clip would be enough. He climbed back into position and jammed one of his additional clips into the rifle much to the astonishment of the gallery of onlookers that had begun to gather. They hadn't witnessed his first string of fire and weren't prepared for George's loading and shooting techniques. Firing as rapidly as his rather slow butt service would allow, his string of 5's continued to mount. The darkness was beginning to close in, but Dad didn't seem to notice. Apparently not all 62 year old blue eyes are equal!

Somewhere around the 50<sup>th</sup> bulls-eye, George Farr had used all the Frankford Arsenal ammunition on the line, after all, who would have figured he'd need so many rounds? The original 22 cartridges should have been more than enough for the average competitor, but George was anything but average! The additional ammunition shouldn't have been a problem, but the scorekeepers hadn't been keeping a large stash of it handy since many of the Wimbledon Competitors had chosen to shoot the very accurate Commercial 180-grain Remington Match Load. A frantic search of the line turned up additional ammunition, but the time necessary to produce the additional "fodder" combined with the slow butt service was eating up precious daylight.

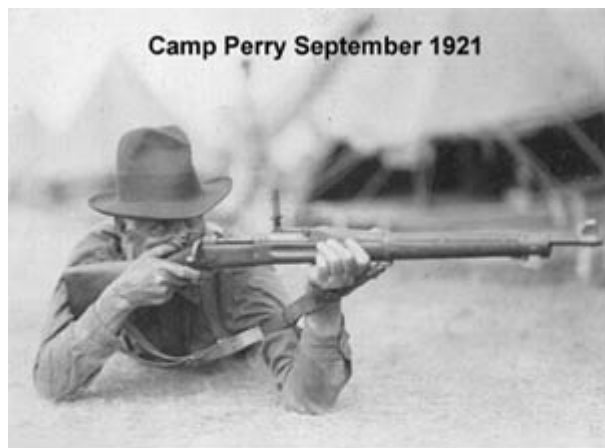


**Box Label and Packing Slip  
...for "lot" of Tin Can Ammunition  
by Dad Farr in his record setting  
performance in the Wimbledon Match**

After having been re-supplied with ammo, George rolled back into the prone position and continued to fire. Between rounds, he often rested his head on his arms awaiting the reappearance of his target. As the light continued to fade, the shots began to stray a bit but still remained in the black. On his 66<sup>th</sup> shot, the light had faded to the point that Dad began to hold at the top of the butts just below the target to give a more distinct aiming point in the rapidly fading light.

His string of 5s continued through the 70<sup>th</sup> round for record, but at last the law of averages caught up to him and darkness took its toll. His remarkable string of fire ended at 6:10 PM – he had been shooting for exactly 1 hour and 40 minutes. The time required to find the necessary additional ammunition and the slow butt service may well have cost him the coveted Wimbledon... He could no longer see the target on his 71<sup>st</sup> shot for record. As soon as he fired his last shot, he called it out of the black! This was one of the most phenomenal strings of fire in history, and had the ammunition been readily available, he might well have caught Sgt. Adkins' string of 76 bulls-eyes with an iron sighted '03. Dad had fired a total of 71 consecutive bulls-eyes if you count his second sighter. George Farr had produced one of the most remarkable strings of fire in history using a borrowed rifle, iron sights and a half a pair of binoculars, shooting issue(d) ammunition.

Although Dad didn't have the \$41.55 necessary to purchase his "borrowed" NM Springfield (as was allowed in that day and time), the awed competitors and admirers chipped in and bought it for him along with a case of ammunition. The commemorative plate screwed to the right hand side of the presentation rifle identified the Rifle as "*The Civilian Team Trophy*" and listed all the Civilian Teams that had chipped in and purchased the rifle (see the illustrations at the end of the article). A beautiful silver trophy to commemorate his performance, appropriately named "*The Farr Trophy*," was prepared in time for the 1922 Nationals. Starting the following year in 1922, the high service rifle shooter in the Wimbledon Cup was presented the new *Farr Trophy*, making it the "service rifle subset" of the Wimbledon... This practice continued until 1979 when the *Farr Trophy* attained its own status as a separate legitimate trophy match, and has become, in fact, "*The Service Rifle Wimbledon*".



Dad Farr posing for photograph following his 71 "bullseyes" in the "Wimbledon Match"  
Notice front sight cover in place and typical shooter's quarters in background

What did Dad Farr's performance have to do with ending an era? Well, Farr's shooting, when added to the phenomenal performance of Marine Sergeants Adkins, Crawley, Luyster, and the hard holding Marine Tom Jones, to name a few, had pointed out to the shooting gurus of the day, that deciding the outcome of a long range match using the "shoot 'till you miss" system was extremely time consuming. A more streamlined method was sought and one that would perhaps be a more fair method than the existing shoot-offs. Had Farr fired on an earlier relay, he might well have had enough light to keep his string of fire going long enough to win the Wimbledon with an iron sighted Springfield.

The final solution of adding of a tie-breaking 12" *V Ring* to the existing *B Target* with its 20" bulls-eye and a similar 20" *V Ring* to the existing long range *C Target* with its 36" black stands as a legacy of the 1921 Nationals, and a group of truly exceptional shooters. Starting in 1922, the matches would be awarded to the shooter who kept the majority his or her shots closest to the center of the bulls-eye during their sting of fire, assuming the total overall score was the same. The new "V Ring" set the standard measurement of excellence in high power shooting circles until the introduction of the "10X" targets for the 200, 300 and 600-yd targets in 1967, and the coming of the "10X" 1000-yard target in 1975.

If you consider the accomplishments of Dad Farr and his hard holding compatriots of the 1921 Matches to be inconsequential in light of today's shooting accomplishments, consider the following statistics:

*The new 36" bulls-eye, sporting a 20" V ring in 1922, continued to be used for 1000-yard competition through 1974, when it was finally supplanted by the "new fangled" 10X target in 1975. Allowing for the seven years that the Nationals were not fired due to a lack of funds during the great depression (1932, 1933 1935 - 1939), and including an additional 10 year period from 1941 through 1950 (due to WWII and the start of Korea), the Farr Trophy was awarded 36 more times for scores fired on the 5-V target prior to the adoption of a 10-X target. During those 36 years a perfect score won the Trophy a total of only 12 more times. By 1974, rifles and ammunition had improved materially, along with the shooting gear, differing little from those being used today. George's performance firing an '03 Springfield with iron sights makes his accomplishment even more impressive! This is truly a fitting memorial to the ability of a gimlet-eyed 62 year old gentleman who borrowed a rifle, using issue government ammunition, and a half of a pair of French Opera glasses for a spotting scope, taught a lesson to those who thought of themselves as long range champions.*

Here then is a toast to George "Dad" Farr, an ordinary man who might have gone unnoticed had it not been for an extraordinary talent. One afternoon in September of 1921 he passed into history, having helped change an era, and in doing so, left us a legacy to endure for all time...

*ROC*

### **Acknowledgements and a Chronology:**

The round of 1921 "Tin-Can" Ammunition was generously donated to the project by Major Jim Land USMC (Ret.) from his extensive cartridge collection. The picture of the cartridge is an actual scan of the 21-R Cartridge, along with its sectioned case, graphically depicted through the magic of my Memsahib's awesome talents as a graphics artist.

Photographs of Dad Farr's rifle which he used to his phenomenal score, are compliments of the Farr Family. Dad's son is still hale and hearty at 100 years old, and I owe much of Dad's history to his kind remembrances along with those of his grandson, Bill.

The story itself was originally told to me when I was about 14-years old by my Dad who fired with the Marines at Camp Perry in 1921 and regaled me with stories of the old timer who came to Perry and wiped out all of the well known professional shots of the day. I was always fascinated with the story and later read my first semi-official account of the story in the USMC "Red Book" of Marksmanship published in 1959.

When I became interested in doing a history of marksmanship during the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Farr's name again came up. Back to Jim Land again who obligingly came to the rescue by digging through the NRA files of "Arms and the Man" for the 1921 Nationals. Jim sent me some burned copies of the original records, along with an obituary of Dad Farr in the renamed NRA publication, now called the *American Rifleman* in the August 1935 edition.

Finding the Farr Family after all these years was no mean task. I searched the historical archives in Seattle, including funeral homes to find where he was finally laid to rest in hopes of finding a record of the family residence. I had even contracted with some college youngsters who made a few extra dollars researching genealogy archives. Alas to no avail. I



printed out all the names of Farr in the Seattle Phone Book, and began calling them one by one, but again I seemed to be getting nowhere. I even contacted the Seattle Rifle and Pistol organizations in hopes that they would have the records of the old Seattle Rifle and Revolver Club from 1921, but with no success. I finally put out a call for the folks posting on our web site called "*Culver's Shooting Page*." I generated a considerable amount of interest, but again I seemed to draw a blank until... one day I got an e-mail from a gentleman by the name of Todd Rea who had miraculously found the family! Wow! Bear in mind this evolution had taken well over a year and a half ...I had almost given up hope!

I contacted the Farr Family and found that they still had the rifle that had been presented to Dad Farr in 1921! My cup "ranneth" (if that's a correct word) over. Subsequent contact with Mr. Bill Farr, George's grandson has been a font of information, so much so that I have had to go back and revise the original article. I received the information on 6 September of 2001, and of course, five days later we encountered the tragedy of 9/11 which has also slowed things down a bit. The article that I had intended to produce in a normal time frame has turned out to be an almost 2-year evolution. For all of the frustrations and seeming dead-ends, things were finally coming together.

The rifle itself has changed my personal impression of the legendary 1921 NM M1903s. Since it would be very difficult to come up with an original 1921 National Match Rifle that hadn't been stroked or modified along the way, the rifle itself constitutes a veritable time capsule.

I had Mr. Farr check out the rifle for cartouches and the magical star-gage "sunburst" on the muzzle. Alas, no sunburst. Now what? Also missing on the rifle were the expected stamped serial number of the rifle on the underside of the butt-stock, and the electro-etched serial number on the bolt, things that have been assumed (at least on my part) to go part and parcel with National Match M1903 Rifles. Contact with Mr. John Beard, one of the true M1903 experts assured me that the 1921 Rifles, while possessing star-gaged barrels, did not stamp the muzzle until somewhat later. He also assured me that the electro-etched serial numbers on the bolt were not a regular feature of the National Match M1903s until 1924. Hummm...

One other humorous glitch with the Farr Trophy came to light when I was attending the 2002 Nationals at Camp Perry. I was browsing the NRA Trophies in their display case late one night. While the light was none too good, and it was a bit too late for anyone to dig the trophy out for me to personally examine, I

13

NATIONAL MATCHES  
WIMBLEDON CUP MATCH

Name *D. R. Farr* Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Tyro *Yes*

Team *Wash. Co.* Org. \_\_\_\_\_

1,000 YARDS.

Target	Shot	Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	TOTAL
2411	11	2411	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
O. R. Competitor: <i>5555555554</i> Scorer: _____ R. O. <i>George Land</i>																							

Shot at Camp Perry Ohio Sept. 24, 1921

**Dad Farr's Score Card**

would have sworn that the engraving on the silver cup said "*Fired in his 71<sup>st</sup> year!*" Now wait a minute, it should have made mention that he fired 71 bullseyes in his 62<sup>nd</sup> year! I later contacted Jim Land (the Executive Secretary of the NRA) by telephone and gave him my impressions of what I had seen. He checked it out, and sure enough, the trophy had been

“mis-engraved” for 80 years, and if anyone had caught the error, it was never publicized! While Farr’s score was based on his firing 70 consecutive bullseyes for record, the 71<sup>st</sup> shot being his 2<sup>nd</sup> sighter, the legend will be forever tied to the legendary 71 consecutive bullseyes. This is correct of course, but the extra bullseye was technically NOT a part of his score!

Note that the official score card has Dad’s first sighter marked as a 2 (duce), as opposed to the literature of the day, and noted in *Arms and the Man*. Whatever his first shot was, duce or trey, his second shot was most assuredly a five. Also note that his status on the card indicates that he was a “tyro” – a designation and impression that would be forever changed after the fateful afternoon of September the 9<sup>th</sup> of 1921.

### **Vintage Pictures of the 1921 National Rifle Matches and the Washington State Rifle Team:**



**Washington State Team prior to departing for Perry**



**First Four Tents Left to Right  
Home of Dad Farr’s Washington State  
Civilain Rifle & Pistol Team  
1921 Nationals Matches Camp Perry**



**Dad Farr On 1000 Yard Butts**  
Target #24 Where Run of 71 Straight  
Bullseyes were made by Dad Farr on:  
On Sept 9th 1921

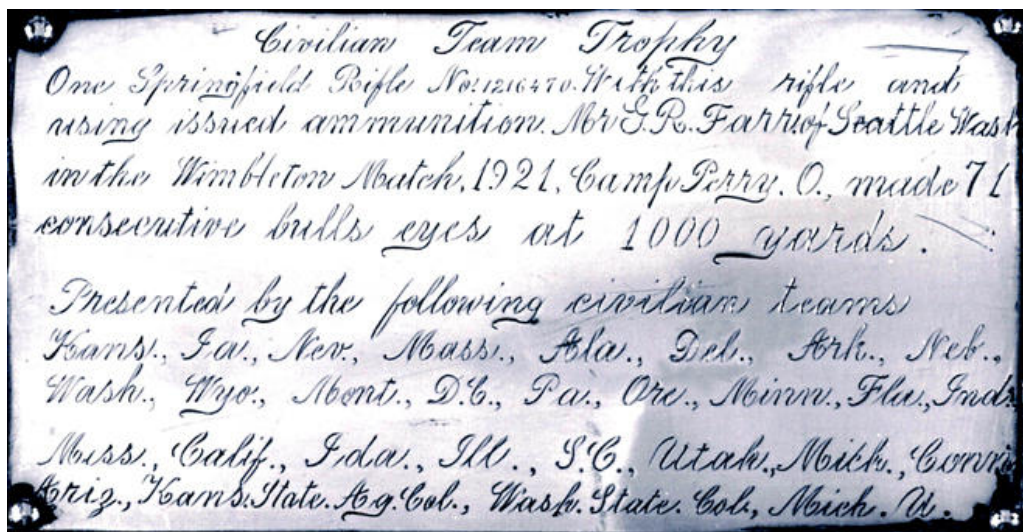


**Aggutter                  Farr**  
**Two Gentlemen attired**  
**for the awards ceremony**

*Civilian Team Trophy*  
*One Springfield Rifle No. 1216470. With this rifle and*  
*using issued ammunition Mr. G. R. Farr of Seattle, Wash.*  
*in the Wimbledon Match, 1921, Camp Perry, O. made 71*  
*consecutive bulls eyes at 1000 yards*

*Presented by the following civilian teams*  
*Kans., Ia., Nev., Mass., Ala., Del., Ark., Neb.,*  
*Wash., Wyo., Mont., D. C., Pa., Ore., Minn., Fla., Ind.,*  
*Miss., Calif., Ida., Ill., S. C., Utah., Mich., Conn.,*  
*Ariz., Kans. State. Ag. Col., Wash. State Col., Mich. U.*

Translation of the actual inscription on presentation plate  
is illustrated above



(photo compliments of Bill Farr, George Farr's grandson)

**Photo of plate on rifle presented to George R. Farr following his extraordinary string of 71 consecutive bullseyes in Sept. 1921 – Rifle and Plate were paid for by the Civilian Teams listed above.**

**Note:** The “Farr Trophy” had not yet been established, hence the designation of “Civilian Team Trophy” on the plate.

# Service Rifle Qualification Courses

~ And Target Graphics ~

Graphics By Gloria Culver

© 2000 – 2006



Original Distinguished  
Marksman's Badge  
Illustrating the "long  
oval" bullseye of 1885

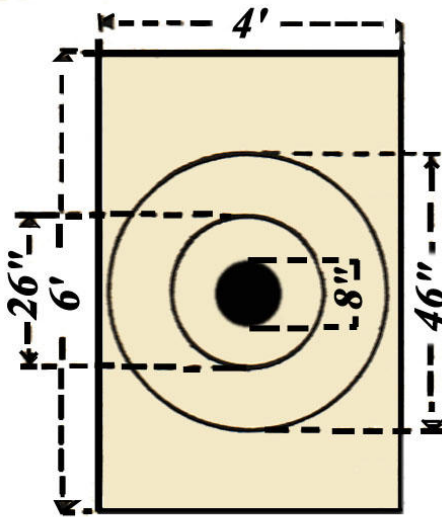


**Culver**

**By Dick**



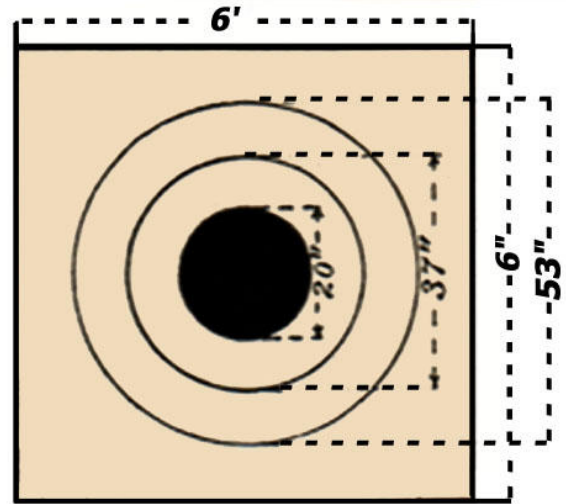
# Qualification Targets for Military Rifle Qualification (from roughly; turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century until about 1922/'59/'82)



**TARGET A**

## Slow Fire Target

Circa - 1903 to approximately 1920 the black remained 8" until 1920 when it was increased to 10". The diameter of the bullseye was increased to 12" with a 6" [tie-breaking] "V" Ring in 1960

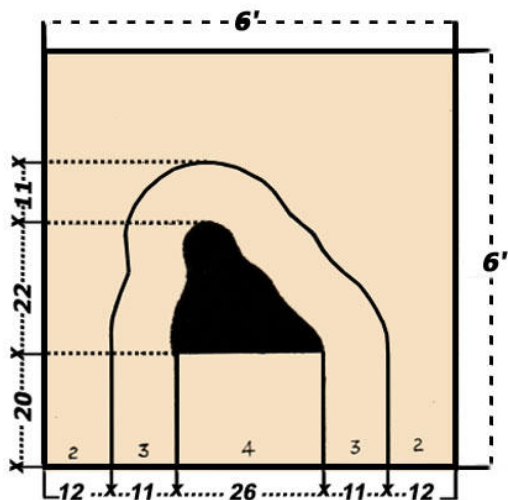


**TARGET B**

## Long Range Slow Fire Target

Circa – Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the switch to the "Anti-Rodent Rifle as the official USMC Service Rifle in the early 1980s

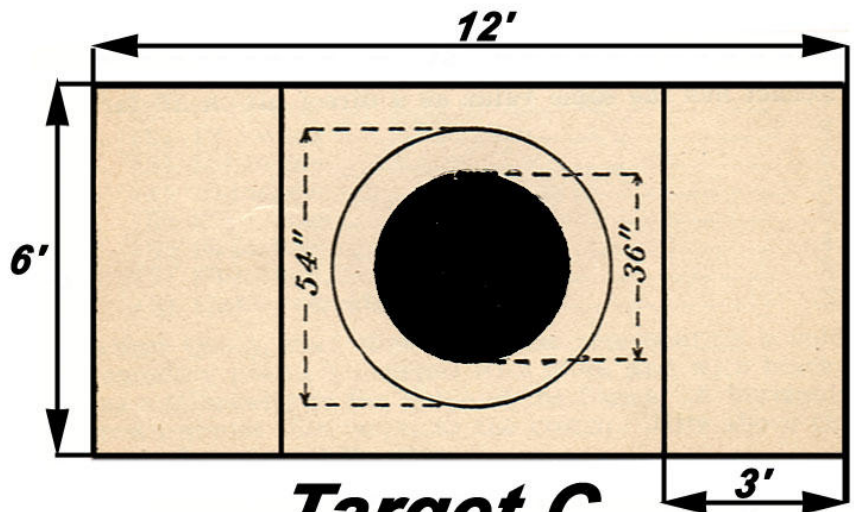
Only change was the addition of a 12" [tie-breaking] "V" Ring in 1922



**Target D**

## Early "D" Target

Used for Rapid Fire. Note the attempt to simulate a prone human form facing the shooter. This was eventually changed in 1913 to the more modern version to enable the shooter to get a "good" 6 o'clock hold when using the "battle sight"

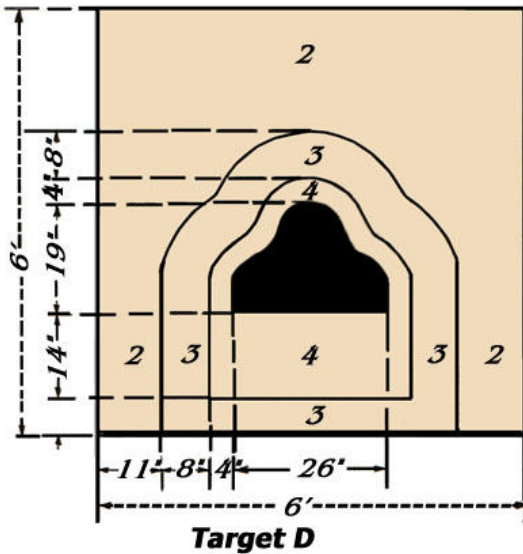


**Target C.**

## Long Range Target

Used for 800 and 1000-yard Shooting (Yep, the qualification course used to include 800 and 1000-yard shooting). My Dad said they (in the Marine Corps [and probably the Army]) were allowed to use a sandbag rest with the M1903 Springfield at 800-1000 yards. (a 20" [tie-breaking] V-Ring added in 1922)

## Target Changes as of 1913



This is the 200 and 300-yard Rapid Fire “D” Target most familiar to quasi-modern USMC (pre-“mouse gun”) Qualification Shooters.

Interesting reason for changing the shape of the target was that in the M1903 Springfield/RIA days, the shooters were required to use the “battle-sight” on the '03 for Rapid Fire (the little notch on top of the rear sight leaf, and the leaf had to be left down! and were not allowed to use the “leaf/peep sight” - this often required some pretty extreme “hold-offs” by each individual shooter. When the '03 first came out, it had a “battle sight “zero” of approximately 400-yards using the .30-'03 Cartridge. When the rifle caliber was changed to the .30-'06, the rear sight leaf was changed, but NOT the height of the little notch used for the “battle sight” - this left the .30-'06 version with a battle sight of approximately 547-yards (some sources say 530-yards, but either way, hardly practical). Still the regulations did not permit the use of the leaf for rapid fire until 1917. This meant that the average shooter had to hold “extremely” low to allow for his shots to be placed in the bullseye!

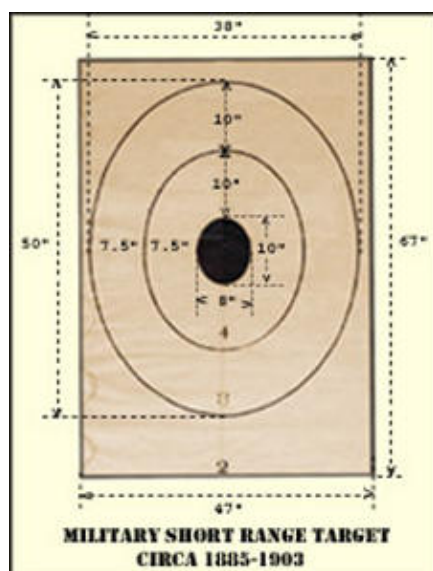
For you John W. Thomason fans who have read *“Fix Bayonets”* the Gunny is exhorting his Marines in the battle for Belleau Wood, *“OK you birds, “Battle Sight – Hold Low”!* – so now you know the rest of the story. The Gunny (and Thomason) knew their “Ought Threes”!

This little “glitch” (compliments of Springfield Armory) was responsible for the Marine Corps (independently) developing what was called *“The Marine Corps Sight”* for the '03. The front sight (initially made by Lyman Gunsight) was considerably higher, and undercut to prevent glare from the sun, and wider to make it easier for the eye to pick up. The hole in rear sight “peep” was made larger to accommodate the wider front sight. The new “higher” front sight gave the shooter an approximate battle sight zero of 200-yards. The sight wasn’t employed until about 1919, alas, not in time for “The Great War”!

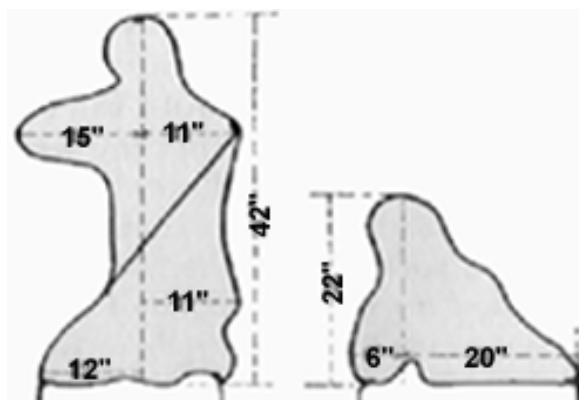
## Interesting Target Variations

A change in Army regulations in 1885 did away with the circular bullseye and went to an elliptical one to be used in Army rifle qualification. The rationale for the new bullseye was supposedly that the “beaten zone” on the target face (an incorrect but understandable description) produced by the Trapdoor Springfield shooting issue black-powder .45-70 cartridges was longer than it was wide. A long-range test conducted in 1879 confirmed that the mean windage at 1000 yards was roughly twice as long as it was wide. It held its windage well enough, but the quality control in the manufacture of the black powder cartridges gave a rather wide range of varying velocities resulting in vertical stringing of shots.

Rather than fix the ammunition problem, the typical military mind went about treating a brain tumor with an aspirin. Rather than work on tightening up the quality control on the ammunition, they simply rearranged the target shape to fit the shape of a typical group. The shooters (especially the National Guard shooters who were the vanguard of the precision target shooters of the time) protested loudly, but to no avail! The elliptical bullseye was to remain the standard Army target until 1903.



**Elliptical Bullseye Target, compliments of the collection of Col. Walter R. Walsh, early FBI Agent, OIC of the WWII USMC Sniper School and long time Marine Corps Marksmanship GURU**



### ***The Skirmish Targets***

**Utilized for the Skirmisher's Course and placed on top of the 600-yard Butts.**

**The kneeling Target was “nick-named” the “Squaw” and the prone target was called the “papoose”**

The Skirmish Course was fired as part of the normal qualification Course, and the score added to the known distance (KD) score. The Skirmish Course was fired through 1909, but eventually eliminated as it added considerably to the time necessary for qualification. The Skirmish Course continued to be fired in competition firing up through the 1913 Matches, although later (target) versions were placed on the target carriers. Notice the similarity in shape to the early versions of the “D” Rapid Fire Target.

Course was a rapid fire course, fired with all shooters on line, advancing down range abreast

# A Description of the Skirmish Course (and eventual evolutions)

## Original Version (Using the Krag Rifle)

Put into table form, the Skirmish Run would look like this:

Skirmisher's Course – total number of rounds fired = 20

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
500 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
400 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
350 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
300 yards	10 rounds to be used at the shooter's discretion	30 Seconds	Any
200 yards		20 Seconds	Any

### Summary of Skirmisher's Course Rules

- Both targets ("squaw" and "papoose") were located on top of the butts at the 600 yard line.
- Movement of shooters between yard lines = ½ quick time, ½ double time
- All shooters move as a "skirmish line" down range on command at each yard line.

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the "squaw (kneeling) target" down to and including 350 yards. They then fired at the "papoose" target at 300 and 200 yards. Colonel Whelen recounted that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target.

## 1909 Version (Using the M1903 Rifle)

Note: All Rapid Fire (including the skirmish course) was conducted using the M1903 Battle Sight (not adjustable, but supposedly set for 547 yards). Appropriate "hold off" (Kentucky Elevation) was used at all ranges for rapid fire!

The signal for the targets to appear from the Pits for a string of Rapid Fire was a "trumpet", "whistle", or "telephone".

The Infantry and Coast Artillery troops were required to fire the 200-yard Rapid Fire stage of the qualification course with fixed bayonets! Fixed bayonets were not required at 300 or 500 yard Rapid, however, fixed bayonets were NOT required at any range during the "Leg Match."

Skirmish Course of Fire for Competition					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
600	D (see version on Page 1 as opposed to Squaw and Papoose)	Rapid	5	Choice of prone, or kneeling, or sitting	30
500			5		30
400			5		30
350			5		30
300			5		30
200			5		20



Use of the Battle Sight was required at all ranges except for 600 yards where the peep sight was permitted.

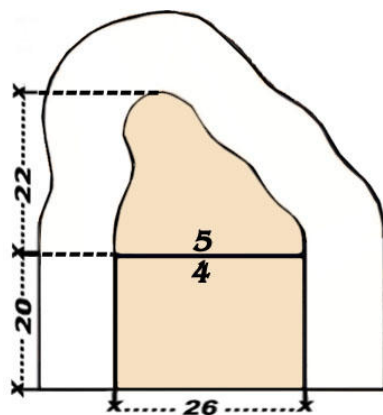
D Targets were mounted on “disappearing carriages (similar to modern day target carriers). Signal to the pits that the competitors were ready to proceed was a trumpet or telephone. Thirty seconds after receiving the signal from the firing line, the Pit Officer or NCO caused the targets to appear.

The competitors started just to the rear of the 600-yard line with the rifles loaded and locked. The competitors were “advanced” to the firing line and halted. Commands to fire the requisite five rounds were given. As soon as any portion of the target appeared, the competitor commenced firing. Firing continued as long as any portion of the target was still in sight or until all five rounds were fired. When the targets disappeared, the command or signal to cease-fire was given. The rifles were reloaded and locked and the advance immediately resumed. Movement between firing lines was conducted with the first half of the distance covered at quick time (120 steps per minute), with the second half covered at double time (180 steps per minute). While the instructions for firing the course are not specific on this point, it is assumed that the competitor was allowed to take the preferred firing position prior to the targets being raised. All reloading was accomplished from a full five round stripper clip.

For Those of You with a “Martial Bent” note that the **Infantry** and **Coast Artillery Troops** were required to fire 200-yard rapid fire with fixed bayonets!

My Dad who came in the Corps in 1918 did mention having to fire at 800 and 1000-yards for qualification, but never mentioned having to use a fixed bayonet! Apparently such insanity had been discarded due to wartime experiences, and the knowledge that hanging a bayonet on the end of a precision fowling piece without some necessity borders on insanity (I’ve run numerous test on this one at Quantico on the 300-yard machine rest and the results “ain’t” pretty! Even though the M1C (and Marine Corps version sometimes called the MC-1 or M1952) were issued with a flash hider, in practice they were never used (at least in the Corps).

The (final) 1913 Version of the Skirmish Target as used at the National Matches in 1913



1913 Skirmish Target

No points were awarded unless they were in either the 4 or 5 scoring rings. Course of fire was slightly different than earlier versions, using fewer rounds

The Skirmish Course was fired for the final time in the National Matches in 1913 as an individual match, although a “team” version still exists today (based on the pre-WWII 8-Man Infantry Rifle Squad). The current version is known as the “**National Trophy, Infantry Trophy Match**” and is fired from the 600, 500, 300 and 200-yard lines with a one-minute time limit per yard line. Teams advance to each yard line in a skirmish line. Firing commences when the targets come out of the butts. Each team consists of two 3-man fire teams, using 8 E-Silhouette Targets (F-Target used at 200 and 300) per team. The Squad Leader and assistant Squad Leader act as coaches for the two fire teams. Each team is issued a “case” of ammunition to be distributed (and redistributed) as the Squad Leader sees fit. No alibis and points are added for fire distribution. **Prior to WWII, one man (even on civilian teams) was armed with a (full automatic) BAR.** The Match is aptly nick-named “**The Rattle Battle**”. The Marine Corps “C-Course” was taken from the Rattle Battle Concept.

# In Distinguished Company

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The First Distinguished Badge  
1887 – 1903

By Dick Culver

It has now been over 121 years since the first Excellence in Competition Match was held and 118 years since the first Distinguished Marksman's Badge was issued. The story of its origins is one rich in history and worthy of recounting.

While both Military and Civilian marksmanship prior to the 1870s was a sometimes sort of thing, the readily available supply of rifles and pistols utilizing metallic cartridges had become almost universal by 1880. The military services had been officially supplied with metallic cartridge rifles since the Allen Conversion of 1866 (eventually evolving into the so called "Trap Door Springfield" of 1873) and pistols since the adoption of the 1873 Colt Single Action. Even though consistent accuracy was now a possibility, target practice and proficiency with the issued weapons had not kept abreast of the technology. Fortunately, in this case, civilians and citizen soldiers led the way. Military target practice (during Custer's time for instance) was virtually non-existent due to the perennial lack of funding common to the frontier army of the time. Depending on the unit, the allocated funds for target practice allowed for fewer than 50 rounds per year, in some units considerably less. Individual citizen soldiers who had a personal interest in developing their marksmanship skills often bought ammunition out of their own pocket and practiced on their own time.

Following the Civil War by only six years, a group of National Guard Officers formed the National Rifle Association, chartered in New York State in 1871. A statement by General Winfield Scott Hancock, serving as the President of the NRA in 1881, sums up the goal of the organization: "The object of the NRA is to increase the military strength of the country by making skill in the use of arms as prevalent as it was in the days of the Revolution." This worthy attitude was to guide the efforts of the NRA, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, the Director of Civilian Marksmanship and our citizen soldiers for generations to come.

The importance placed on marksmanship by the hierarchy of the United States Armed Forces of the day may be seen by some of the individuals occupying the position of President of the NRA. General Hancock had watched in awe during the battle of Gettysburg as the 1st U.S. Sharpshooters had been instrumental in defending "Little Round Top". Other noted soldiers moving into the job of NRA President were no less than General Ulysses S. Grant, former President of the United States, and General Philip H. Sheridan, Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Army. We are, however, getting ahead of our story.

Records of the time indicate that, due to budgetary limitations, many of Custer's men at the Little Big Horn in 1876 had fired as few as 7 rounds during the year to learn and maintain rifle proficiency. New recruits were trained by their units, since no Army wide basic training program had been established. Basically, it was a case of on the job training. If your commanding officer was an advocate of aimed rifle fire, you received more training than your counterparts in other units.

Whether the Custer massacre was responsible for building a fire under the Army hierarchy to improve the Army's marksmanship ability is open to question. However, by 1880 a new pattern of Army wide marksmanship was beginning to take place under the watchful eye General Philip Sheridan, a great believer in rifle marksmanship, who was then serving as the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Army. General Sheridan would have had great encouragement from his former associates then active in training the National Guard Units. Sheridan, perhaps more than any other active duty soldier, was responsible for the coming of a new attitude and a new era in Army marksmanship. Command guidance and patronage from the "top echelons" always assures success!

By 1880 a pattern was beginning to emerge. Local match competition in the various Army "Departments" had begun to identify some truly remarkable rifle shooters. For several years these soldiers had competed and won virtually all the marbles, and those of lesser but still talented competition had begun to get discouraged. In 1881 General Sheridan decreed that a system of competitions would be established to pick the best and brightest shooters from the entire U.S. Army.

In order to understand the system, you must get a quick overview of how the Army was set up in the early 1880s. The Army was divided into three Divisions:

- 1) Atlantic Division
- 2) Division of the Missouri
- 3) Pacific Division

These "Divisions" were subdivided according to their geographical locations into 9 identifiable Departments:

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Department of the East     | 6) Department of Dakota       |
| 2) Department of South        | 7) Department of the Columbia |
| 3) Department of Texas        | 8) Department of California   |
| 4) Department of the Missouri | 9) Department of Arizona      |
| 5) Department of the Platt    |                               |

A course of fire was devised using the then issue rifle of United States Army, the U.S. Rifle M1873 Trapdoor Springfield. The course of fire consisted of three seven round strings of slow fire at three different ranges, 200, 300 and 600 yards. These three seven round strings were to be fired at each range for three straight days. Seven rounds would be fired offhand (standing) at 200 yards, seven rounds would be fired kneeling at 300 yards and finishing up with seven rounds fired prone slow (using any approved position of the era, i.e., standard prone, Creedmoor and/or Back Position). The three-day aggregate determined the score of each individual. The top 12 individuals were designated "medal winners" and composed the "*team*" of each Department. This rang up a total of 108 medal winning shooters from the collective teams culled from the 9 departments. These Departmental medal winners were sent to their respective Division Competitions according to their geographical location.

Each Division Match chose the 12 best rifle shots from those teams competing from the Departmental teams. The 12 best Divisional shooters (picked from the competing Departmental Teams) were awarded medals and comprised the *Division Team* (i.e. The Atlantic Division Team, The Missouri Division Team and the Pacific Division Team). This Departmental and Division Competition was to be held annually, leaving a total of 36 medal winners from the total of Divisional Shooters (12 medal winners from each Division).

By 1882 the Army had decided to conduct an "All Army Match" on a bi-annual basis, that is, in 1882, 1884, 1886, 1888, etc. The match would be fired in the manner described above. The competitors would be the 12 medal winners from each Divisional Match, chosen in the same manner as the medal winners in 1881. This would leave three Divisional Teams of 12 men each along with excellent rifle shooters selected from the Army Engineers. The course of fire would be identical to the original and fired three times (on three separate days). The All Army Team (selected from the top shooters competing in the All Army Match) would consist of a total of top 12 shooters (medal winners). These individuals would be the top two shooters from the Atlantic Division, the top three shooters from the Pacific Division, the top six shooters from the Missouri and the top shooter from the Battalion of Engineers.

Awards presented to the winners in the Army Match were expensive and ornate, designed by no less a firm than Tiffany's Jewelry of New York, and fabricated (struck) by the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia. The winners were allowed to wear their medals on their uniforms when medals were authorized and were quite a welcome addition to an Army that was rather skimpy on awards. Consider that the Medal of Honor was the only medal (individual decoration) authorized in that far off day and time. Distinguished Service Crosses and Silver Stars would not be approved and authorized until WWI. The soldiers authorized to wear these ornate marksmanship awards were set apart from their less talented comrades.

The medals awarded to the Departmental and Division Competition were designed by each Department and each Division and purchased from allocated funds. The medals were apparently not of uniform design, but were the brainchild of each command. The medals were usually real gold and were designed by known jewelers such as Jens Pedersen in New York. Much like the All Army Medals, these too were authorized for uniform wear. One of these Departmental Medals was to become the basis for our current Distinguished Marksman's Badge.

The course of fire for the Departmental, Division and All Army Matches became the first “Leg Matches” and on paper, looked like this:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Course of Fire For The Departmental, Division, and Army Rifle Competition (1881)</i></p>				
Range in yards	Target	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	8" Bullseye 4 Ring of 26" 3 Ring of 46" All other hits on the 4'x6' target counted 2 points	7	Standing	Reasonable for slow fire, probably the usual 1 minute/shot
300	"	7	Kneeling	"
600	22" Bullseye 4 Ring of 38" 3 Ring of 54" All other hits on a 6'x6' target counted 2 points	7	Prone (any of the then current normally used prone positions were accepted, including the “back position”, the “Creedmoor”, etc.)	"
<p>This course of fire was fired on each of three match days after “several” days practice. Medal winners from the Departmental Matches were ordered to the Divisional Matches where the top twelve shooters would be awarded prize medals or “credits” (later to be called “leg” medals” by the shooters). These top twelve were designated the Departmental Team. Each Departmental Team was sent to compete in the Divisional Matches.</p> <p>The authorized rifle for this competition was the issue Trapdoor Springfield service rifle with a 6-pound trigger and using standard issue (.45-70) service ammunition.</p>				

Individual skill with a service arm was indeed commendable, and the Army had seen fit to authorize relatively munificent expenditures on medals to encourage young shooters to hone their skill with arms. The high-ranking brass of the U.S. Army felt that precision marksmanship would increase the Army’s overall effectiveness during times of conflict, and that the award of gold medals would encourage competition throughout the Army. While this was a worthwhile goal, there was one fly in the ointment... the same individuals seemed to be winning all the medals on a perennial basis. The young shooters and those of only slightly lesser skill than the annual medal winners were becoming discouraged.

General Sheridan, a great believer in Marksmanship (he went on to become the 9<sup>th</sup> President of the National Rifle Association), came up with an equitable solution to the problem. He noted that there were many shooters with great promise that were becoming discouraged by a number of extremely talented old timers who traditionally laid claim to the Army awards. The question was, what to do about the situation and not alienate the icons of the Army shooting community? If he could just “retire” the perennial winners to a non-shooting status to make room for the youngsters, his problem would be solved. His solution was to create “*A Distinguished Class of Marksmen*” that would henceforth no longer be eligible to compete for medals during the annual competitions.

General Order 12, issued by General Sheridan early February 1884, established a class of *Distinguished Marksmen*. To become a Distinguished Marksman, a man had to have been selected for a Departmental Team three (3) times (the term “Departmental Team” in those days indicated that he had been a “medal winner” in the Departmental Matches), or had to have won any three of the Army authorized marksmanship medals in Departmental, Division or All-Army competition. These men were transferred to a distinguished class of shooters no longer eligible to compete for such marksmanship honors without special permission from the Commanding General of the Army

The first 15 perennial Army medal winners were transferred to the Distinguished Class of Shooters by the publication of General Order 24 issued in March of 1884. These 15 individuals were our first Distinguished Marksmen (although the Distinguished Badge itself was not issued until 1887). A minor (if peaceful) revolt of these “benched” and greatly talented shooters was seething, and a considerable amount of “distinguished lobbying” resulted in the establishing of a Distinguished Shoot-Off (so to speak) on the years that the All-Army Matches were not held. These matches would be open to only those shooters who had already attained the title of Distinguished Marksman. Since the All-Army Matches had been instituted in 1882 to be held bi-annually, i.e. 1882, 1884, 1886, etc., the first “All Distinguished Match” (an unofficial but descriptive title) was held in 1887, appropriately enough the same year the Distinguished Badge itself was first issued.

The medals issued to the individuals placing in the Departmental, Divisional and All Army matches soon became known as “Leg Medals”. Why the term “Leg Medal?” No one is totally sure, but it has often been theorized that the three legs necessary to become a Distinguished Marksman represented the three “legs” on a milking stool, all of which were necessary for the stool to stand alone. True? Who knows? The origin of the terminology has been lost in the mists of history, but it certainly represents *one* explanation. Don’t forget, the milking stool was a much more familiar item to the soldiers of 1887 than it would be to today’s competitors!

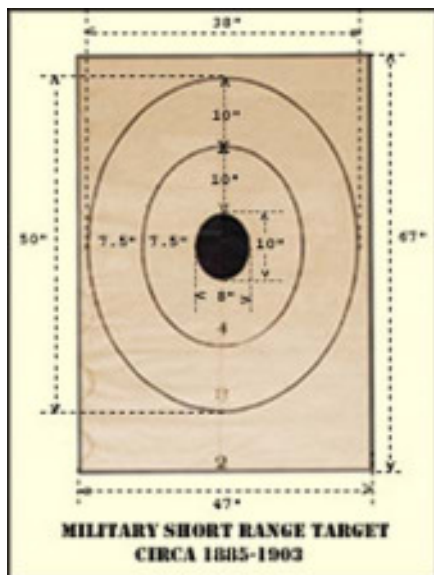


Distinguished  
Badge 1903 - 1959

Although modern shooters would certainly recognize the original Distinguished Marksman’s Badge, a change in Army regulations in 1885 did away with the circular bullseye and went to an elliptical one to be used in Army rifle qualification. The rationale for the new bullseye was supposedly that the “beaten zone” on the target face (an incorrect but understandable description) produced by the Trapdoor Springfield shooting issue black-powder .45-70 cartridges was longer than it was wide. A long-range test conducted in 1879 confirmed that the mean windage at 1000 yards was roughly twice as long as it was wide. It held its windage well enough, but the quality control in the manufacture of the black powder cartridges gave a rather wide range of varying velocities resulting in vertical stringing of shots.

Rather than fix the ammunition problem, the typical military mind went about treating a brain tumor with an aspirin. Rather than work on tightening up the quality control on the ammunition, they simply rearranged the target shape to fit the shape of a typical group. The shooters (especially the National Guard shooters who were the vanguard of the precision target shooters of the time) protested loudly, but to no avail!





Target furnished by  
Colonel Walter R. Walsh  
USMC (Ret), from his  
personal collection

The elliptical bullseye was to remain the standard Army target until 1903. Since the first Distinguished Badges weren't issued until 1887, it was only natural that the Army would use the elliptical target shape for the enameled target gracing the badge. Shortly after the re-adoption of the round bullseye in 1903, the Distinguished Badges followed suit and also went to the round bullseye once the supply of elliptical badges was exhausted.

The badge itself was apparently the design of a certain Captain Stanhope Blunt. Captain Blunt first designed a similar badge for the Department of Dakota rifle competition in 1885 while he was serving as Inspector of Rifle Practice for the Department. Capt. Blunt had it manufactured by a company called Jens Pedersen in New York. Capt. Blunt was transferred to the Ordnance Department in Washington, D.C. shortly thereafter and was assigned to rewriting the Army's Rifle and Carbine Regulations (which included the newly adopted elliptical bullseye). Apparently Capt. Blunt liked his own design and had the same Pedersen Company produce the new Distinguished Marksman's Badge in a format that closely followed his "Dakota design". The stars and stripes were added to the familiar "US" shield that still adorns the Army and Civilian versions of the badge today<sup>1</sup>.

The first 60 Distinguished Marksman's Badges were delivered by Pedersen in June 1887, and 10 additional badges in October of that year.

Military marksmanship began to catch on in the other military services around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard hopping on the bandwagon. Each service devised its own set of in-service Excellence in Competition medals, based on the "three leg rule" that had proved so successful for the Army. The Marines had their (geographic) Divisional Matches (now called Division Matches) followed by a (All) Marine Corps Match (called simply the Marine Corps Match). The competitors for the Marine Corps Match were the medal winners from the Division Matches. The first four Marines had qualified for the distinguished award by 1905 and General Elliott (the Commandant of the Marine Corps) approved the award of the Distinguished Marksman's Badge to Marines in 1908. The Navy held (geographic) Fleet Matches (Atlantic Fleet, Pacific Fleet, etc.) followed by an All Navy Match with the more or less standard rules applying.



Early USMC  
Distinguished  
Badge  
Circa 1913 Issued to  
Lt. L.W.T. Waller  
USMC



Stanhope E. Blunt  
*"Designer of the  
 Distinguished Badge"*  
 Pictured here as a  
 Colonel serving as the  
 CO of Springfield  
 Armory 1907-1912

While the award of a separate Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge would not take place until 1903, pistol competition was well underway by 1891. Individual Pistol Leg medals were awarded resplendent with a pair of revolvers until the adoption of the M1911 Government Model Pistol. Through 1902, legs awarded in pistol competition simply counted as credits toward the award of the *Distinguished Marksman's Badge*. In other words, a leg with the rifle, carbine or pistol counted as a credit toward the award of the Distinguished Marksman's Badge, regardless of which weapon was used to win the leg medal. Simply put, *Distinguished* was *Distinguished*, was *Distinguished*, and the same badge was issued regardless of weapon. Early Army Firing Regulations made mention of a *Distinguished Revolver Badge*, but no such badge has ever surfaced. By the turn of the last century the U.S. Army was looking for a new semi-automatic pistol and tested such diverse handguns as the German Luger/Parabellum in .30 caliber and the 1905 Colt .45 ACP and several others such as the Savage and the .45 ACP caliber German Luger/Parabellum. All available publications agree with the 1903 date for the first issue of a Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge, but one small fly in the ointment mars this hypothesis. A document published in 1926 lists one lone

Distinguished Pistol Shot attaining this distinction in 1894... but he is the ONLY individual so named. Research continues in this matter, and it may well be that the lone Distinguished Pistol Shot was awarded the badge retroactively, much as many of the awards of International Distinguished Badge were awarded many years after their becoming eligible for the badge. Every other Distinguished Pistol Shot in the 1926 document is listed with a date of 1903 or later for his award.



Army  
 Distinguished  
 Pistol Badge  
 1903-1959  
 DCM/CMP  
 Badge to  
 Present

It would appear that in 1903 the Army decided to issue a badge simply marked *Distinguished Pistol Shot*, (the revolver being simply a "revolving pistol"). The new badge, now to be called the *Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge* was to be similar in design to the Distinguished Marksman's Badge, but would be 5/6ths the size of the rifle badge.

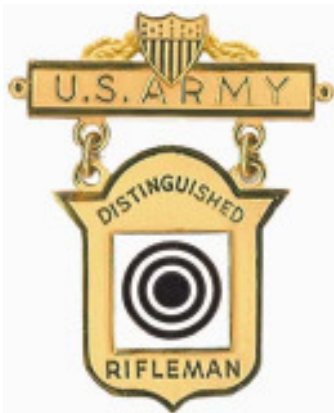


U.S. Marine  
 Corps  
 Distinguished  
 Pistol Badge  
 1920 – Present

By accepting the generic designation of "*pistol*" (as opposed to revolver or semi-automatic pistol), the Army had hedged their bet and would be covered regardless of *which* pistol was chosen as the new service side arm. In the infancy of the E-I-C Matches, the Marines had adopted the design of the Army (rifle) Leg Medals around the turn of the century. I would assume that the Marines did the same with the pistol badge design. The Army eventually abandoned the design of their early "round" rifle and pistol leg medals, and



went with a design that more closely resembles the Army badges currently issued. Conversely, the Marines continued (and still continue) to use the earlier basic round design for both their rifle and pistol legs.



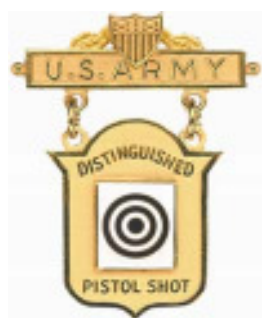
U.S. Army  
Distinguished  
Badge  
1959 - Present

While the Marines didn't approve issuing a Distinguished Pistol Badge until 1920, it is interesting to note that the Marine Pistol Leg medals (a legacy from the U.S. Army), even today depict a pair of pistols on their E-I-C Badges that more closely resemble the 1905 Colt Automatic than the M1911 (evidenced by the lack of an apparent manual/thumb safety and a more abrupt "grip-to-slide angle"). This may be simply a case of bad artwork, but on the other hand, the old badges with the stylized semi-automatic pistol may have been an attempt by the Army shooting community to second-guess the Ordnance Corps on the eventual adoption of a semi-automatic

Service Pistol. You must remember that the 1905 Colt was one of the initial contenders for consideration as the new service weapon prior to John Browning's final refinements. It is at least *possible* that the artwork for the new E-I-C badge was accomplished prior to final decision of the Ordnance Folks on which new pistol was to receive the nod. Considering the fair resemblance of the 1905 to the M1911, they may simply have decided to leave well enough alone. This is of course, simply speculation, but the pistols on the Marine Corps Leg Medals very closely resemble the 1905 Colt.



DCM/CMP  
Distinguished  
Badge  
1959 - Present



U. S. Army  
Distinguished  
Pistol Shot  
Badge  
1959 - Present

The National Trophy Rifle Match was instituted under the guidance of the newly created National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice in 1903 (fiscal 1904) to allow the teams of each service to compete against one another. While the first National Rifle Match in 1903 was only a service rifle team event, it marked the first competition for the coveted "*Dogs of War Trophy*" that has come to represent the epitome of service rifle shooting. Subsequent years saw the National Trophy Match(s) expand into team and Individual matches to include both rifle and pistol competition. The National Trophy Individual Match starting in 1904, allowed individuals to qualify for personal leg medals to count towards the designation of Distinguished Marksman. Participation was initially restricted to regular service and National Guard teams and individuals until 1923, when civilians who were already "leg medal holders" from their service days were allowed to continue to compete until they became

Distinguished Marksmen or Distinguished Pistol Shots. A wise Congress opened the National Trophy Matches to civilians in 1926 with an eye toward preparing the citizenry for service in times of national emergency, a policy that served the country well through the Vietnam War.

While the criteria for selecting Leg Medal winners has changed since the 1880s from a set number of individuals competing in a Departmental or Division Competition, the basic idea has remained the same. Medal winners are now selected by a

percentage of Non-Distinguished shooters competing in authorized “Leg” or “Excellence in Competition Matches.” Over the years the criteria for winning a Leg Medal have changed from the top 12 competitors in a Divisional or Departmental Match to the top



USMC  
Distinguished  
Marksman's Badge  
1920s - Present

20 percent of non-distinguished shooters in a match, and finally to the top 10 percent, where it remains to this day. In 1963 the individual leg medals were assigned points (a bronze leg was worth 6 points, a silver 8 and a gold 10). It now became necessary to accumulate a total of 30 points to become distinguished, but if you were of considerable talent, you could still become a distinguished shooter by attaining three gold legs. Any combination of legs that equaled 30 or more points resulted in the individual being designated a Distinguished Shooter.

In retrospect, General Sheridan's scheme to prevent talented new shooters from becoming discouraged by the perennial medal winners was a resounding success and his basic rules have guided service rifle competition every since. Since the first Excellence in Competition Badge was issued, we have fired six (7 if you count the U.S. Rifle, Model 1917 used in the National Trophy Matches in 1918) different rifles in the pursuit of being recognized as belonging to a “*Distinguished Class of Shooters*”. Distinguished Badges and Leg Medals have been issued for firing competitive scores using Trapdoor Springfields, Krag, M1903s (including the original M1903, and the M1903A1), M1917s (during the 1918 Nationals), M1s, M14s, and M16s, but the original idea has not changed. General Sheridan's dream of having an Army well qualified in the use of their basic service arms remains the goal of the Excellence in Competition Program.

The designation “*Distinguished Marksman*” originally inscribed on the badge continued until 1959, when the U.S. Army and the DCM (now the CMP) decided to change the terminology to “*Distinguished Rifleman*.” To those wearing the Distinguished Badge in the 1950s, the term “*Distinguished Marksman*” seemed a bit archaic. In the 1880s, the term “Marksman” conjured up visions of a man or woman especially skilled with a rifle. By the late 1950s the term “Marksman” usually indicated the lowest rung on the weapons qualification ladder following after Expert and Sharpshooter. When the designation was changed, the Army pushed the Adjutant's Shield up on the suspension bar slightly and added “*U.S. Army*” to the top bar. Aside from the *Army* inscription on the suspension bar, the Army and the Civilian badge remain identical. The Naval Service (Navy, Marines and Coast Guard), always a vanguard of conservatism, continued to designate their Distinguished Medal winners as “*Distinguished Marksmen*”, a term still inscribed on the badges issued by the Naval Service.



U.S. Coast Guard  
Distinguished  
Marksman's  
Badge

The Air Force entered the competitive service rifle and pistol shooting game in 1960, compliments of General Curtis LeMay. Being of a trendy bent, the Air Force of course, went with the newly established inscription of “*Distinguished Rifleman*” rather than “*Distinguished Marksman*”. To placate the somewhat traditionally “miffed” pistol shooters, the Air Force chose to make both the Distinguished Rifle and Pistol Badges of

identical size as opposed to the Pistol Badge remaining the traditional 5/6ths the size of the Distinguished Rifleman's Badge. It was rumored that the Air Force also had Hollywood design the Air Force (E-i-C) Leg medals to adorn the uniforms supposedly designed by the "tinsel city" folks. The U.S. Coast Guard has recently redesigned their Distinguished Pistol Badges so that their pistol badges are the same size as the rifle badge, but the Rifle Badge still retains the designation of *Distinguished Marksman*, as opposed to the *Distinguished Rifleman* designation used by the Army, Air Force, and the CMP.

Until well into the 1970s, some 90 + years after the adoption of the first Distinguished Badge, the Distinguished Badges were made of 14 k gold<sup>2</sup>, weighing in at almost a full ounce. Since the price of gold was set at \$20 until the 1930s, it should be no surprise that the cost of replacing a lost badge was \$20 coming out of a soldier's pay should he misplace or lose it – a sizeable sum of money for a private who only drew \$21.00 per month.

President Richard Nixon, by allowing the price of gold to "float" on the international market starting in the early 1970s, drove the price of gold steadily upward sometime exceeding \$400 per ounce. Even with gold currently hovering around \$475 per ounce, it should be no surprise that by the time the stock of the 14k gold badges was exhausted in the late 1970s, the "golden days" of the Distinguished Badge was doomed.

While the current issue of the Distinguished Badge is still attractive, and little changed from Captain Blunt's original design, it is alas, no longer made of precious metal. This perhaps says something about the seeming decline of our national character and official disregard of the desirability of a trained citizenry of modern-day yeomen ready to defend our country from the barbarians ever increasingly knocking at the gates.

#### Acknowledgements:

My personal thanks to Maj. E. J. (Jim) Land USMC (Ret.), currently serving as the Secretary of the National Rifle Association. Without Jim's invaluable assistance in acquiring pictures of the various Distinguished Marksman's Badges from the earlier eras, much of the narrative would have to have relied on the reader's imagination. Many of the Badges illustrated are currently in the collections of either the NRA or Marine Corps Museums. The pictures of the current DCM/CMP Distinguished Badges are compliments of Mr. Gary Anderson, current Director of Civilian Marksmanship and noted Olympic Rifle Gold Medal Winner. Of particular interest is the 1913 Marine Corps Distinguished Marksman's Badge awarded to Lieutenant Littleton Waller Tazewell Waller<sup>3</sup>, noted Marine Corps Shooter and later a Navy Cross Winner in Belleau Wood while serving as the Commanding Officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion. The early USMC Badge is remarkable due to slight design changes from the later badges, although the basic design has changed only in minor details. The early (paper) target with the elliptical bullseye was furnished, compliments of Colonel Walter R. Walsh USMC (Ret.), the head of the USMC Marksmanship Program for many years. The Distinguished Marksman's Badge identified as the badge issued from 1904 – 1959 once belonged to Lt. Col. Bill Brophy, noted shooter, sniper, ordnance expert and author of *"The '03 Springfield"*.

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<sup>1</sup> Captain Stanhope Blunt was later reassigned as the Commanding Officer of Rock Island Arsenal, and ultimately was the Commanding Officer of Springfield Armory as a Colonel.

<sup>2</sup> For a short period of time in the 1950s, the Marine Corps Badges were actually manufactured in 18k gold but in my opinion, they were not nearly as attractive as the traditional 14k versions. During the latter stages of the (real) Gold Army Distinguished Badges, at least some versions were manufactured of 10k Gold, although to the naked eye, they appeared little different from the 14k badges, and can only be discerned by the marking of 10k on the back of the badge.

<sup>3</sup> As a side historical note, L.W.T. Waller's father (L.W.T. Waller, Sr.) was the leader of the famous Marine Expedition across Samar in the Philippine Islands (December 1901-January 1902). L.W.T. Waller executed a number of Moro insurgents, who acting as guides, had turned on the expedition. Waller held a "drum-head court" and found the blighters guilty. The Army was outraged, demanding Waller be court martialed. Waller was acquitted and privately lionized, eventually rising to the rank of Major General. The tradition in the Marine Corps many years thereafter was to announce loudly when a survivor of the ill-fated expedition entered the mess "*Stand Gentlemen, he served on Samar!*"

# The M1 Rifle and Silver Horseshoes

## A Tale of The Wimbledon Cup and The Farr Trophy<sup>1</sup> circa 1957

By Dick Culver

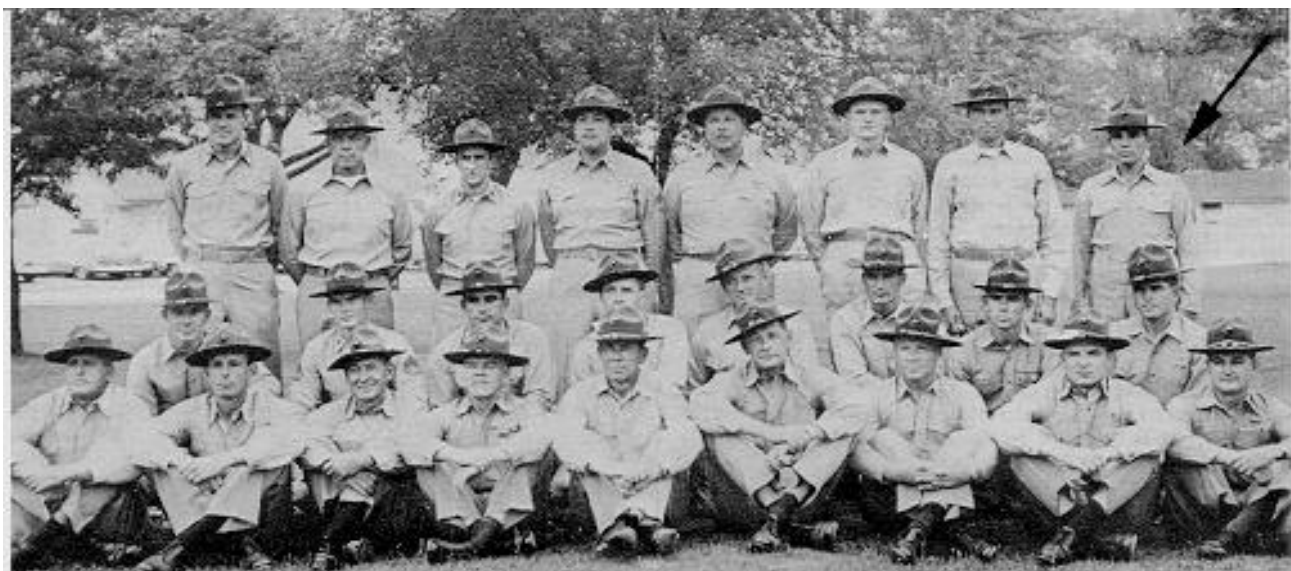
**Time frame:** August 1957

**Location:** Camp Perry, Ohio

**Range:** Vialé (then called Vaile and pronounced "Vail")

**Match:** Wimbledon Cup/Farr Trophy

I was a very young Sergeant assigned to shoot for the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Rifle Team that Summer of 1957. I had applied for, and been selected to shoot with some of the most notable shooters of the day. I lived in awe of these gentlemen, and felt more like I should be spit-shining their boots rather than shooting along side of them. But it is often said that God often looks after dogs, small children and Marines--in this instance, I'm inclined to agree!



RESERVE'S TOP SHOTS—The Marine Corps Reserve Rifle Team gathered at Camp Perry, Ohio, for this family-style photo during the National Matches. From left, top row: Cpl. Billy Sparks, WO Norman C. Studt, Cpl. James H. Rogers, SSgt. Jesus Camarillo, Jr., Cpl. Josiah C. Blackford, LtCol. Orin H. Allman, Major Richard J. Hardaway and Sgt. Richard O. Culver, Jr., Middle row: Lt. Donald M. Jacobson, SSgt. Robert D. Jacobson, Sgt. Hal C. Ehrenfeld, SSgt. Paul V. Brothers, Major Forest W. Clark, Lt. Charles P. Coleman, Lt. Robert D. Howe, and Lt. James M. Smith. Front row: LtCol. Richard Tonis, LtCol. Phil Roettinger, LtCol. Leland C. McAuley, Col. Emmet O. Swanson, LtCol. James H. Christopher, Major William H. Jordan, Major Donald Olive, Major Albert Schindler, and Capt. Joseph D. Eddlemon. (Photo by SSgt. J. Heard.)

The Reserve Team arrived at Camp Perry one at a time, and occasionally in twos and threes. I had been selected to shoot with both the Pistol and the Rifle, so I was already there when the rest of the rifle team arrived. The only other pistol shooter who stayed over with me was a Staff Sergeant named Paul Brothers. Since I already had a "hut" from the Pistol Match and my rack was made, I only had to check in with the arriving rifle team. My next stop was to draw my Match M1 from the USMCR Van. I was handed my fowling piece and told it was a good shooting rifle (just **HOW** good I was to find out later). We had absolutely NO dope on these things, and I had not fired in a rifle match since Camp Perry the year before. I had fired

for annual re-qualification, but had done no match shooting for a whole year. ...AND I had never fired at 1000-yards.

In those days, almost every one at the Nationals shot the GI-issue ammunition that was handed out on the firing line. It was, of course, required to use this ammo in the National Trophy Matches. When the long-range matches were fired with bolt guns, the shooters used commercial ammunition (Remington, Winchester, etc.), but out to about 600-yards when shooting the service rifle, issue GI Match was the ammunition of the day.

Once the USMCR Rifle Team had all reported, we were sent to a National Guard Range in Akron, Ohio to get some rudimentary zero on our new rifles. Most of the old timers only needed a round or two to get on target at 200 yards. After that, their extensive experience would allow them to use "come-ups" learned from prior experience to be zeroed for subsequent range - essentially they sighted their rifles in as they progressed from yard line to yard line. Me? I was sweating bullets (sorry for the pun), as I needed all the practice I could get, plus my wind reading wasn't up to par after a year's lay off.

We had such notables on our team as our Team Captain, Col. Emmet O. "Doc" Swanson, (Triple Distinguished and noted International Champion). Col. Swanson was a dentist in civilian life, hence the sobriquet "Doc". Doc was the most gentlemanly of individuals. Another notable shooting personality on the team was Bill Jordan, author of *No Second Place Winner*, legendary Border Patrol Inspector and fast draw expert. Bill was a Marine Corps Distinguished Marksman, and would go to Perry to shoot pistol for the Border Patrol. Bill would then stay over after the Pistol Matches to shoot rifle for the Marines every year. We also had Lt. Colonel Phil Roettinger - both Roettinger and Jordan came close to topping 6' 6" in height, I felt like a midget! Roettinger reputedly was a CIA agent when he wasn't serving as a Marine Reserve Lt. Col. Phil was said to weigh in at 157-lbs with a pocket full of rocks and his buddy, Bill Jordan, often described him as looking like a "tuning fork" when he shot offhand! Then there was Lt. Col. Dick Tonis, a Massachusetts State Police Captain and noted hard-nosed individual. If rumors were to be believed, Colonel Tonis was best avoided like the plague by the youngsters, lest they be cuffed and searched!

A quiet, good-humored Marine officer, Major Al Shindler, took me under his wing and kept me out of major trouble. Al would eventually take over the Reserve Team, a position he held for a number of years. Another disarmingly good-natured team member was Major Don Olive, who in his civilian guise, ran a CIA operation out of Florida. In retrospect, it would seem that our team was composed of old time shooting champions, spooks, law enforcement officers and one wet nosed kid, barely able to keep from shooting himself in the foot. With such a noteworthy crew, I felt extremely insignificant! I attached myself to Bill Jordan as his personal "bat-man" (to use British jargon) and followed him around making sure he wanted for nothing, so I could listen to his stories. Needless to say, I got a real education! What fine gentlemen these folks were as a role models for a fledgling young sergeant!

*In later years, Don Olive laughingly told me when we were shooting the Division Matches at Camp Lejeune in the mid-1960s, that the old timers on the team in 1957 had a bet that I would never get commissioned in the Marines after I had inadvertently shot as a team member on the 2nd Army ROTC Rifle Team, challenging the USMCR Team in the same match. How I came to shoot for the 2nd Army Rifle Team while serving as a Marine Buck Sergeant is another rather funny story, but that is best left for another occasion. It had to do with a Retired Marine General, his son (a former National Junior Rifle Champion), and*



*the General's daughter, and it was the only time I ever remember Colonel Swanson using less than gentlemanly language!*

Now that I've set the stage with some background on our team personalities, it's time to get back to the Wimbledon Cup and 1000-yard M1 shooting. Basically (since the Corps was paying our entry fees), we were required to shoot all individual matches regardless of (our) experience. Having never fired at a 1000-yard target, I was somewhat at a loss as to what to use for elevation. By now I had 600-yard dope, but that was all. I was too embarrassed to ask the old-time hard-holders for their advice. I was masquerading as a seasoned rifle shooter, but looking back, most of the old timers were humoring me and letting me make my own mistakes unless I chose to ask questions.

I stood (casually) next to every group of shooters who seemed to be discussing 1000-yard shooting techniques. By listening to about 6 or 7 pieces of advice from different groups, (like Bob Hope listening to the "gun-fighting advice" in the movie *The Paleface* - "he crouches when he shoots so stand on your toes," ~or~ "he limps to the left when he walks, so lean to the right," and other such sage pieces of information), I came away still scratching my head as to a come-up from 600 to 1000 yards. More confused than ever, I headed for the firing line leaning slightly to the right while walking on my toes.

We were fortunate in 1957 to have our first batch of "modern" National Match Ammunition, some stuff called "Frankford Arsenal T 291". This ammo was essentially the reincarnation of the M1 Match Ball load from before WWII. It used the old 172/173-grain bullet, had similar velocities to the pre-WWII match ammunition and was carefully manufactured for consistency and quality. Although FA 72 would not become a reality until the following year, the T 291 came in the familiar red, white and blue FA Ammo Box (wish I'd have saved a box of that stuff for posterity!). This T 291 shot so well that it was adopted as the standard match load for the Nationals in 1958 and was designated FA 72 which became the de-facto match .30-'06 load until FA and LC ceased production some years later. In 1956, a "Centennial Round" had been produced and small quantities were issued as souvenirs at the Nationals (some were even nickel-plated), but not in large quantities. At any rate, the T 291 issued in 1957 brought service rifle match shooting into the modern era.

I was assigned to the "small end" of Vialé Range (Remember, we called it "Vaile" Range then) to fire somewhere in the 1st five targets (I don't recall the exact target number, but Target "4" sticks in my memory). This was the greatest of good fortune for two reasons:

- 1) It is much easier to count over from the 1st target to yours on the "small end of the line" to make sure you don't shoot on the wrong target (don't laugh)! The bloody things had 2 foot "duce wings" on each side of the 6' frames in those days, to make it easier to stay on paper when the wind was really difficult. These "wings (which were hung on each end of your target carrier almost literally touched the target next to yours). From the 1000-yard line, it looked like one solid buff colored target stretching from the 1st target on the small end of the line to the last one on the far right, with only the number boards to distinguish each individual target. To add insult to injury, in those days every number board on Vialé Range was black with white numbers. There were no alternating color patterns like there are today. A shooter squadded in the center of the line really had his work cut out for him making sure he didn't put a shot on the wrong target! Mercifully, being that close to the small end of the line made the job manageable, especially for a 1000-yard novice!

- 2) Being on the small end of the line had one other important advantage. Shooters there got to fire in a so-called "wind tunnel" where their bullets were less effected by wind than the shooters in the center of the line or on the high end! The fence dividing the Erie Ordnance Depot from Camp Perry had a growth of grass and shrubs along the chain link fence that helped to block the wind. Since a nasty fishtail wind was blowing that day, the wind advantage there was pretty significant. We "non-practicing Odinists" would take every advantage we could get!

As the match began, the T 291 Ammunition was issued to each scorekeeper and the targets were run up in the air for the prep time. I was primarily worried about elevation and figured that I'd watch the strike of the bullets on targets on either side of mine to see if there was a strong wind blowing from either side. It never occurred to me to "scope" the wind; this kind of postgraduate work would come later in my somewhat "spotty and occasional shooting career." I was most literally a babe in the woods that August morning in 1957.

Finally the targets went down to end the prep period and then came back up ready for my very first 1000-yard shot. I cranked on enough elevation on the sight to make my rifle look like I was shooting a "shoulder-mortar" and my butt plate seemed to almost be in the dirt. I didn't have a shooting mat, only an M49 spotting scope, a shooting stool, a score book (we didn't call 'em data books then) and a carbide lamp.

My heart was in my mouth as I lined the sights up for my first shot. I was hoping I wouldn't hit Canada with all that elevation. I took the obligatory two breaths, let half of the last one out and took up the slack. Although it wasn't all that hot, I felt sweat breaking out on my forehead. "Bam"... the first round went down range somewhere to my right and every eye on the line looked for "the" target to go down. Yep, he caught paper and the target disappeared into the pits. It came back up and was centered, but a bit low, lulling me into thinking the wind was essentially nil. I realigned my sights and again prepared to shoot, now confident that there was nothing evil blowing downrange. My first shot cracked, but I didn't feel the recoil as I quickly looked into the scope to see what Allah had wrought. Miracle of miracles, the target went into the butts! I kept my fingers crossed that it was MY shot that knocked the target down, and not someone cross firing on my target. Nobody cursed and the target came up with a black spotter showing slightly high in the tray ring at 11 o'clock. Heck, not only had I hit my target, I hadn't even wandered onto the "duce wings!"

I corrected for the shot and reloaded. My second shot was a wart four at 3 o'clock. I came left 2 clicks and fired again for my first shot for record - **Wa-Hoo!** A center five in the 20" V-ring (the black was 36" in those days). I continued to shoot, basically ignoring everyone else. If my shots would favor one side of the bull or the other, I simply chased the spotter back to the center with what I considered to be wise and resourceful windage moves! Ha! If I had only known?

I finished fairly quickly, as those who are innocent and have the luck of the Irish running with them frequently do. When I checked with the score keeper I had leaked four rounds out of the black for a total score of 96 with 12-Vs. I didn't think that it was a particularly stellar performance, but a small crowd had begun to gather behind me. Why were they watching me? What had I done wrong? Was my fly unbuttoned? I was still looking for my "faux pas" when one of the old timers came over to me and said, "great shooting kid! - what were you using for wind?" I looked at the nice gentleman kinda' funny and said, "Wind? What wind?" This guy looked at me in total disbelief, shook his head and walked off. I gathered up my gear



and headed back in the direction of Commercial Row, while checking my fly and still not knowing what I had done.

I struck up a conversation with some other team members and they too were telling me that it was a great string. Now I was REALLY confused - my idea of a great string would have been a score of 100 with 20-Vs. They informed me that the wind was truly nasty down there and only the most astute had been able to keep up with it. Hummm--I shook my head sagely, thanked them and started to stow my gear, I was afraid to tell them that I had simply been chasing the spotter, **NOT** truly doping the wind! Gasp, I thought, what if they ever find out?

While my score was not to my satisfaction, after hearing the sad stories of the other big guns, I started nodding sagely and agreeing that the wind was really rough out there today and it really took a lot of concentration to keep up with it<sup>2</sup>!

I DID place in the Wimbledon that day. This was before the relay winners advanced to a shoot-off to make sure each group of shooters had a more or less even chance at the prize--at that time it was strictly luck of the draw! Then the high man took the marbles and I was lucky as all get out to come away with any kind of place award. In fact, placing in the Wimbledon with a service rifle was a bit trickier than it sounds, as telescopes and bolt guns were allowed in that match as well. Here, an M1 Rifle (they did not have glass bedding in those days) was shooting even against heavy-barreled Model 70 Winchesters with Lyman Super-Targetspot scopes and commercial match ammunition. After all, the Wimbledon was and is considered to be the premier long range match in the United States. It turns out that T/Sgt. Jim Hill (he went on to win an Olympic silver medal) had beaten me out for the Farr Trophy with a 98, even though he had a mere 8-Vs. With a bit morechutzpa I might have asked him why he didn't watch the wind a bit closer, I suppose, but Miz Culver didn't raise any damn fools! The Farr Trophy in that era was simply awarded to the high scoring individual who fired the Wimbledon Trophy Match with a service rifle, with no further place awards. You either won the darned thing, or you didn't.

### **Comments on the 36" Bullseye and the Farr Trophy:**

*The Farr and Wimbledon Trophy Matches were fired on the 36" 1000-yard bullseye with its 20" V-Ring until 1975. This target was first used in 1922 (coinciding with the first Farr Trophy Match), and it continued to be the long range ("C"); target for 1000-yard competition through 1974, when it was finally supplanted by the "new fangled" 10X target in 1975. Allowing for the seven years that the Nationals were not fired due to a lack of funds during the great depression (1932, 1933, 1935 - 1939), and including an additional 10 year period from 1941 through 1950 (due to WWII and the start of the Korean War), the Farr Trophy was awarded 36 times for scores fired on the 5-V "C" target prior to the adoption of a 10-X target. During those 36 years a perfect score won the Farr Trophy only 12 times. By 1974, rifles and ammunition, along with shooting gear, had improved significantly, but through most of these 36 National Match years, service rifle shooters were using "real battle rifles," not today's less-than-minute of angle, heavy-barreled service rifles. With the service rifles of the day, the 36" bulls-eye wasn't as easy a mark as it might seem.*

As an aside I have always been convinced that if I *HAD* known my exact zero on that M1 in 1957, I might not have hit paper with the thing at 1000-yards. Since I wasn't truly reading

the wind, I simply lucked onto a compromise windage setting that allowed me to get on paper, and the wind in my little "wind tunnel" was not tricky enough to throw this old "spotter-chaser" out of the black except occasionally. Ah well, those were some fine days, and lots of fun. I love shooting 1000-yards, but I'm humble enough to know Odin had a kindly spot in his heart for this wayfaring young Marine some 45-years ago!

## ROC

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<sup>1</sup> The Farr Trophy was named for the exploits of George R. (Dad) Farr, a 62-year old Washington State Team member in 1921 who drew a Springfield NM Rifle from the armory, got some 600-yard dope on his rifle and headed for the 1000-yard firing line to shoot the Wimbledon Cup Match. Using issue ammunition, Farr caught paper with his first sighting shot, fired a 5 (bullseye) on his second, and ran a total of 71 consecutive bullseyes only dropping out of the black when he ran out of daylight. When offered a chance to buy his borrowed rifle from the Army for cost (\$41.55), he did not have the money. The rest of the civilian teams chipped in and bought the rifle for him along with a case of ammunition. They also bought a beautiful silver cup to be presented to the high rifle shooter in the Wimbledon Cup Match shooting the highest score using a service rifle (as opposed to a match rifle) in subsequent years. The only man to beat him in that September day in 1921 was a Marine Sergeant, John Adkins, who fired 76 consecutive bullseyes using a heavy barreled, scope sighted, Springfield target rifle. Adkins dropped his last shot due to a pulled shot, not an absence of light. The performance of Adkins and Farr caused the shooting community to place a "V" Ring in the long range targets to avoid time consuming shoot-offs in future competition. The Farr Trophy remained the "Service Rifle Sub-Set" of the Wimbledon Cup until it eventually was set aside as a separate match in 1979, albeit still fired at the same time as the Wimbledon.

<sup>2</sup> I had been researching T/Sgt. Michael Pieterforte's perfect score of 250 with 26-Vs in the National Trophy Individual Match at Camp Perry in September of 1958. Mike fired the 1<sup>st</sup> perfect score ever recorded in match competition with the M1 Rifle that summer, and the particulars had begun to fade into history. Having been commissioned in 1958, I missed shooting that year and did not get to witness one of the world's landmarks in shooting excellence. A friend sent me some very fuzzy burned pages from the Leatherneck Magazine from a Fall Issue of 1958, chronicling Mike's accomplishment. While reading the entire article, it seems I was luckier than I had remembered! Quoted from *Leatherneck* is the following paragraph:

*"Another problem is weather. Example: During the 1000-yard Wimbledon Cup Match the year before (i.e. 1957), the wind was so strong that shooters ran out of windage and had to aim at the bull's eye three targets away to hit their own bull. Some targets were blown away during the match and others were destroyed in the target frames!"*

No wonder the guy who asked me how much wind was blowing shook his head and walked off... As the title suggests, *"The M1 Rifle and Silver Horseshoes!"*

# The Designated “Dinger”

*“Dinger” – In military parlance the term has the inference of an individual who can continually “ding” a bell in a shooting gallery (i.e., in a circus or carnival). The term is normally used to describe one who is extremely proficient in shooting skills. ...However, there is also a negative (military) connotation to the term denoting an individual who spends most of his or her time on the range instead of plying their other military skills out in the FMF<sup>1</sup> (Fleet Marine Force).*

Here’s a sea-story that while amusing, may well have stretched the regulations a bit to allow for unforeseen technical difficulties with wartime manufactured ammunition, a somewhat difficult transition period of changing to a different “fowling piece” (the M14 versus the tried and true M1), all while getting used to a new concept in marksmanship courses (the “C”-Course). If you tie the above problems in with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division having become a de-facto “casual”<sup>2</sup> organization that seemingly had the unspoken privilege of being a replacement pool for those being sent to Vietnam while simultaneously required to keep deployed expeditionary units floating around in both the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. The everyday tasks of running a bob-tailed Battalion, Regiment or Division were formidable indeed!

All of the above variables descending on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division simultaneously, had the makings of a minor disaster. Marines, being creative cusses, found ways to satisfy every requirement, albeit sometimes in rather unorthodox ways. Hopefully, the Statute of Limitations (if such would apply) has long since expired. This particular story simply points out the inventiveness and craftiness of an imaginative and dedicated NCO, and the intelligence of an assigned Officer in Charge of a detail to do a bit of creative “looking the other way” for the good of the unit. For better or worse, here’s the tale...

## Rifle Marksmanship Tradition within the Corps:

The Marine Corps has an old and time honored tradition – EVERY Marine is considered a rifleman first and a specialist second. While this may sound like a “buzz phrase”; in the case of the Corps, the concept and actuality of the “Marine Rifleman” are most definitely true. The ability of the cooks, bakers, and candle-stick makers to grab a rifle and defend the perimeter has come in extremely handy on a number of occasions. There is simply no such thing as a non-combatant in the Corps. Everyone goes to the range to keep their hand and eye in, even if they’re clerk typists, supply, motor transport troops, or disbursing (finance) folks! The only exception is when you are actively engaged in combat or stationed so far away from chimney smoke that no ranges are available (say at the North Pole...?). An old story related from the days in Korea, illustrate the “rifle-warrior” tradition. The story is told of a reporter in the field, interviewing a Marine Aviator serving his “time in the barrel” as an Infantry Battalion Forward Air Controller. Being a “FAC” means that an active duty pilot draws a tour (usually on a rotating basis) with the infantry calling in air strikes and other close air support missions often within yards of the front lines – it simply doesn’t get any more personal than that. The reporter asked the Marine FAC what his job was (having no clue of the Captain’s current assignment). The Captain looked him straight in the eye and said with utmost sincerity, “Sir, I’m a Marine Rifleman currently assigned to fly aircraft in support of an

Infantry Battalion.” The attitude prevails to this day – *Every man a Marine, and every Marine a Rifleman*. It’s a shared tradition that makes us different from the other services...

## ON TO THE STORY:

It was the Spring of 1966 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion was attempting to get all of its troops qualified on the rifle range as required by Marine Corps Regulations. Normally, this would have been a no-brainer, as virtually every Marine has gone through extensive rifle training in Boot Camp, and it is a relatively rare individual who cannot qualify as at least Marksman (the lowest rung on the rifle qualification ladder) on the rifle requalification course. Those individuals who have repeatedly gone “unc” (unqualified) are held in low esteem by their fellow Marines. An occasional “oppsss” can be excused, but repeated inability to hit what you are shooting at is viewed with a jaundiced eye. The *old* term for an “unc” was a “bolo”, and if you did not qualify you were said to have “boloed” (a verb). The inference and legend was that if you couldn’t hit anything with your rifle, you should perhaps, be issued a “Bolo Knife” (also called a Machete in other climes) as an alternative means of doing-in the enemy, or at least clearing the brush for those who could. This term may well have been taken from the Marines’ extensive service in the jungles of Cuba, the Philippines, and/or the Banana Wars, but the negative connotation is and was the same.

While nothing exists in hard copy, the *expected* qualification percentages for a unit (or range detail) was (and probably still is) that at least 90% of the personnel were/are expected to qualify. It was not unusual for the percentage to go higher than 90% if the coaches are doing their job. Several things had entered the equation in the Spring of 1966 that were to throw a temporary monkey wrench in the usually well oiled machinery.

## Some Flies in the Ointment:

First, the old reliable M1 rifle was in the process of being replaced by the M14<sup>3</sup>. The new rifle fired a 7.62mm NATO Cartridge (essentially the same as the commercial .308 Winchester Cartridge) as opposed to the more familiar .30-’06. Some of the early wartime 7.62mm ammunition production was suspect. While the operating system of the M14 was similar to the old reliable M1, it was not exactly the same and took some getting used to. The new ammunition production quality was suspect.



**The M1 Rifle**

While the operating system of the M14 was similar to the old reliable M1, it was not exactly the same and took some getting used to. The new ammunition being furnished for the new rifle system was in great demand due to the conflict in Southeast Asia and the quality control of the G.I. Ammo was not up to its usual excellence. Even some of the major brands such as Winchester were beginning to show up in the supply system without the primer hole being punched in the primer recess in the brass cases. Initially, this was causing a lack of

confidence among the troops and commanders. These glitches were to soon disappear, but then this story deals with the initial screw-ups encountered in late 1965, early 1966.

The vast number of troops being groomed for service in Vietnam was putting a strain on the system. Unfortunately, some of them had not yet been trained on the M14 (coming back to the FMF from detached or reserve duty), and some of the newer troops had never fired the older M1. In other words, not everyone was on the same page in the book. All little things you understand, but when all of them were put together, they could (and did) cause some perturbations in the system. Many of the older coaches were not yet totally familiar with the M14, and while the armorers had the basic skills to assemble and disassemble the new rifle, there were some tricks to making it shoot well that were not yet totally understood. All of this was being driven by the desire of Division Headquarters to get high requalification percentages since Headquarters Marine Corps took great interest in rifle requalification. Officer's fitness reports (OER's for the Army) for those assigned as unit commanders, depended, at least in part, on the normally expected high requalification percentages, as well as other training mileposts.

If you will add the possibility of normal growing pains that come with newly adopted rifle systems, suspect ammunition, and throw it in with a brand new (and initially unfamiliar) rifle qualification course then being tested in the Division, you have the formula for a possible debacle. And so it was, at least initially.

### **The New Course of Fire:**

The new C-Course had initially been called the X-Course (X standing for "experimental" as well as anyone could figure) as opposed to the older A and B courses fired on a bullseye target). The C-Course was to be fired on varying points of aim (they couldn't be classified as bullseyes exactly, although the purpose was the same). The course was designed to teach "center-hold" (a good thing in my opinion) as opposed to the old 6 o'clock sight picture (it made sense of course, just where in hell is 6 o'clock on a man or a game animal?).



**The M14 Rifle**

Instead of simply a single aiming point (or bullseye) at each yard line, each shooter was presented with **three** targets (3) per shooter (on each target frame) at both 2 and 3-hundred yards, and two (2) targets at 500-yards. You were required to fire all stages in a rapid fire mode, and all stages were based on the 20-round magazine capacity of the M14 Rifle. This included 20-rounds offhand (standing) **rapid** fire, 20-rounds sitting **rapid** at 200-yards, 20-rounds prone **rapid** at 300-yards, and 20-rounds prone **rapid** fire at 500-yards, for a total of 80 shots fired on the entire course. Each shot was either a hit or a miss, no 4s or 3s, etc. you either hit the damned thing or missed it!

The targets for each man's firing point were made using a sort of modified E-Silhouette Target.<sup>4</sup> The three targets at close range being (variously) cut in half at the waist, sliced at an angle from shoulder to waist, cut straight down the center of the E target, and either glued to the target straight up or at about a 45% angle all designed to keep you from finding a 6 o'clock hold to shoot your string of fire! You were required to distribute your rounds so as to get multiple hits on each of your shortened/modified silhouette. For every target with the appropriate number of hits (I think it was 4-hits minimum) you got to "square" your number of targets with qualifying hits and add that to your total score (example: 3-targets with at least 4-hits would be 3 X 3 or a total of 9 bonus points at any given yard line). The idea here was to teach fire-distribution as well as rapid fire and center-hold. This is/was essentially a sort of individual National Infantry Trophy Course (the "Rattle Battle") fired in the National Trophy Matches each year at Camp Perry Ohio. No alibis were allowed – if you could safely clear the piece, well and good, but the firing didn't stop (no alibis in combat of course). The most interesting feature of the course was that you got a different array of aiming points (at the two and three hundred yard line) each day. It certainly kept the shooter on his toes, and required that he "learn" his rifle.

Initial qualification at Boot Camp was of course on the A-Course, to be followed by three years on the new course (now called the "C-Course" vice the earlier X-Course designation). The course made a lot of sense, and as outlined above, it was decreed to be fired for three years in a row with the 4<sup>th</sup> year requiring a return to the old bullseye "A Course" to reinforce old basic marksmanship principles. While I personally thought the idea was great, you can see how it could have been a bit confusing for the newcomers! Some of the old "mossbacks" of course, were opposed to any sort of change, but that's true in virtually any new or innovative system.

The entire above scenario including a montage of experience by the coaches had thrown the Division requalification efforts into a cocked hat. Tempers were flaring and everyone was pointing the accusatory finger at different items causing unit embarrassment over the slumping requalification percentages.

### **The Scenario is set:**

The Second Reconnaissance Battalion had just walked away with the honors in the Division Intramural Rifle Competition with a four man contingent, beating all the other units in the Division including the Infantry Regiments and Separate Battalions (Tanks, Engineers, etc.). Black Jack Westerman, our Battalion Commander was having great fun lording it over his competition, and with the sagging requalification percentages then prevalent in the Division, all eyes were on Black Jack and his somewhat maverick outfit.

Lt. Col. Westerman called me into the Battalion office and presented me with an ultimatum. Produce or die trying! Hummm...

"Produce what sir?," I asked.

"Look Culver, you gave me a winning rifle team, and now I expect you to take charge of our rifle requalification efforts and prove to the rest of



**Lt.Col.  
Westerman**

these yahoos that it wasn't just a fluke. Take whoever you need and get started on our first rifle detail."

"Right Colonel, give me Sergeant McGowin and Corporal Foley and we'll do our best to prove to the rest of the Division that it's simply a matter of good coaching and determination!"

"You'd better do more than **TRY** Culver, your reputation and your fanny is on the line on this one!"

"Aye, aye Sir, I'll get started right away!"

"Ought oh," I thought, think fast Culver... "McGowin, meet me in the company office in 15 minutes," I directed at the hapless McGowin who was passing by as I walked out of the Battalion Office!

### **A Council of War:**

"Mac, what do ya' think is happening to the Division requal percentages?," I asked.

"Dunno Skipper, but give me a couple of days out on the range while you have the "S-3" make up the requalification rosters. I'll have a report for you when I get back!"

"Right Mac, something just ain't right on this one, I've never known of such a slump in requalifications scores - see what you can come up with!"

### **McGowin's assessment:**

"Skipper, I've got a plan," said Mac in my office when he came back from his orientation trip to the range.

"OK Mac, let's have it!"

"Well Skipper, the trick is going to keep our first couple of details small and composed of mostly experienced shooters! I **KNOW** they'll qualify, and we can use them for coaches on the following details."

"Makes sense Mac," I said, "what's the real problem?"

"Skipper, if I could have these kids out there for about 3-4 days by myself on the old bullseye target, I guarantee that I could have everybody qualified, with no exception unless someone's rifle blew up! Right now, if a kid goes up on the line with shaky dope on his weapon, he's screwed all the way across the course with no slow fire stages to get a really good zero or to correct his mistakes - it's all rapid fire, and you are either dead-on or not! It's a good course, but it needs at least a day to get a really good zero on each man's rifle!"



**Sergeant  
F. A.  
McGowin**

“Sounds like a plan Mac, let’s get things organized!”

A trip to the S-3 office insured that our first two requalification details would be composed of old timers with a history of firing Expert over the old A-Course. I relaxed a bit when our first details qualified with 100%. So far so good. Black Jack was happy, thinking that all the kids would have similar luck. Black Jack reckoned without Murphy...

I had enlisted an ally prior to our first “unvarnished” trip to the range. This was Corporal Ted Hollabaugh<sup>5</sup> who was a rather talented Rifle Team Armorer who would go on to run the Rifle Team Equipment Shop at MTU (USMC Marksmanship Training Unit) some years later. Now Ted had never worked on accurizing the M14 Rifle, but the collective wisdom was that the principals should be the same. Good tight bedding, no extraneous rifle parts exerting any undue pressure against the barrel, and a good tight locking up of the trigger group, thus pulling the rifle tightly down into the stock’s bedding, coupled with a decent trigger pull. The only problem was that not all the rifles were tight in their stocks, even with a trigger group that locked up tightly. Hummm... What to do? We couldn’t make any permanent modifications to the rifles, but temporary shims between the receiver and the stock might just cut down on movement once the trigger group was locked into place. We couldn’t glass-bed the things, but what could we use for shims? Answer? Shirt cardboard of course! It didn’t have to last forever, and all the shooter had to do was NOT to disassemble his rifle unless Mac, Ted or I were watching. We tried putting the cardboard in place and trimmed it with an ExActo Knife so it wouldn’t show. voilà! It worked (at least after a fashion)!

Prior to each requalification detail leaving for the range, each man’s rifle was inspected and tightened as well as the cardboard would allow. We got each group of shooters around in a circle with homemade bullseye aiming stakes using the new (simulated) “combat aiming points” used in the C-Course. Slings were inspected and tightened. Each man’s position was worked on until they appeared to be solid. Leaving for the range was almost a relief.

Scoring and marking targets was a new experience for the new course. In the old days, each shot was individually marked and spotted allowing the shooter to correct for his mistakes, and make dope changes until he (and his coach) were satisfied that the individual had a good solid “zero” on his weapon. Here’s where the rub came in. When the new shooter got down in position, his targets came up, the shooter simply blazed away until his magazine was empty or until his target went down, whichever came first. Newbies sometimes failed to distribute their 20-rounds on each of his individual silhouettes, thus losing their potential bonus points. In order to do workmanlike job on the course, the shooter (at least the most successful shooters – and again assuming they were right handed) started on the far right target and moved left into the remaining targets, thus serving to tighten the sling, and usually giving better, or at least tighter, groups.

Since “offhand” (standing) rapid fire was the most unfamiliar to the new shooters, we assumed that most, if not all, hiccups would occur during the standing stage. While sitting is a good position for an experienced shooter, from the 300-yard line on back, the prone position offered the greatest potential for tight groups. Sitting only accounted for 20-shots out of a 80-shot course. Conversely at 300-yards, if you had a good tight position but bad dope, you could blow your entire course right at the 300-yard rapid fire stage. The 500-yard line was also prone, but with only two targets, you could be a bit more leisurely and take your time.



We were just getting broken into the new course when Mac came back during noon chow and took me over behind the firing line with no one around.

“Hey Skipper, “ Mac said, “ya know something? The guys who laid this course out made a mistake! Now granted it’s not something that the average guy would think of, but do you realize you can qualify on the C-Course without firing any stage but the 300?”

“Mac, what’enhell are you talking about? That’s impossible!”

After doing a bit of clipboard work, Mac was absolutely right! You could skip the 200 and 500-yard stages and still qualify very handily! Somebody had screwed up – but then who’inhell would have even thought about that possibility? Worse yet, who in the heck would even try such a scheme? None the less, even though it didn’t occur to me at the time, this obscure fact was to become the springboard for 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon’s rubbing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division’s nose in the unspoken rivalry of each Regiment/Battalions attempt to outdo the other on the range.

We played the game straight according to the rules, but squeaked by with a measly 89% for our first unfettered go at getting the Battalion’s qualification out of the way for the year. Black Jack wasn’t homicidal, as the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Marines had an 80% and a 75% requalification respectively, but the Colonel clearly wasn’t ecstatic.

Mac and I went into a council of war, and Mac suddenly grinned and said. “go home and have a good weekend Skipper, I have a plan!” I should have known better, but went smilingly out to the Range on Monday morning. Mac was ready for the challenge, but I thought I saw a few extra Marines out there that had fired for qualification previously. Just a nagging feeling you understand, but still...

In order to understand what was about to happen, you have to picture the firing line, the scoring points, and how the migration to the firing occurred from the ready bench. It went something like this:

Shooter “A” leaves the “ready bench” and reports to his designated firing point on the line, got into position and prepared to fire the appropriate string of fire. When he fired the string, the line was cleared, and the shooter came back to the coach/score-keeper to receive his score. The targets would come into the air, and the score would be duly recorded and the shooter would return to the benches behind the ready line, with the next relay coming up and taking their place on the firing line. And so it would go until all the relays had fired, and the shooters would then repair to the next yard line for their next string of fire. During practice, this was a pretty cut and dried procedure, but on “Record Day” things got a bit more hectic. The next shooter would take their place on the firing line checking out their position, and getting ready to fire their string, while the shooter who had just fired would be standing back with his coach to catch his score as the targets came into the air. Think about the possible confusion, one shooter leaves the firing point and occupies the scorekeeper’s attention while the next shooter took his place in position before the targets come into the air with the spotters in them. If you weren’t watching closely, things could get pretty hectic.

On Record Day, the scorekeepers/coaches were shuffled so that no aspiring coach could pad his shooters scores, or give unauthorized help to a shooter who got into trouble. This would be tempting of course, because the coaches were given “kudos” for high requalification

percentages of their protégés, and the temptation might well prove too great if the “big shuffle” was not instituted on “*der-tag*”.<sup>6</sup> This shuffle also insured that the scorekeeper wouldn’t be terribly familiar with the shooter who would be firing on his particular firing point, which fit right in with McGowin’s emergency plans.

Although I was not aware of it, this particular record day would be McGowin’s “test-bed” for emergency procedures in case some kid went totally spastic over the course, or couldn’t hit the deck with his cover if he threw it straight down. Had I known what was coming, I would have had some real misgivings.

One particular youngster was willing but about as nervous as a prostitute about to receive communion from the Pope! He had been having trouble all week, and couldn’t seem to get his dope right or make meaningful “come-ups” from yard line to yard line. I was really sweating his upcoming performance. As the lad in question took his place on the firing line, we were all holding our collective breaths. Mac conversely seemed relatively unconcerned. The targets went into the butts to be scored, the lad made his weapon safe, and got out of position. When the targets came into the air, I breathed a sigh of relief as the lad had seemingly gotten his feces in one burlap sack! He had dead center groups and marvelous fire distribution. Our lad qualified quite handily. As a matter of fact, all of our somewhat questionable shooters suddenly seemed to have gotten help from an understanding “Odin” and the rifle percentage came close to 100%! Holy Catfish, Mac had come through again, and I headed back to the Battalion to give Black Jack the good news. In the next day or two, there was a council of war in the Division G-3 (Operations) shop with all the Regimental and Independent Battalion Commanders in attendance. It seems that all of the outfits with the exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion had turned in abysmal qualification percentages. The fact that Black Jack’s outfit had done well, essentially made the Infantry Regimental Commanders’ excuses that the horrible performance was due to either the faulty rifles or ammunition meaningless or at least sound like lame excuses. Black Jack of course, gave them no slack and pointed out that we simply had superior coaching and were devoting more time to this most essential of Marine Corps skills!

I was of course patted appropriately on the posterior for our extraordinary performance and I left the Battalion Office with something in the back of my mind that didn’t quite set well. I called in McGowin and we sat down to have a little talk.

“Mac, what in the hell is going on? I know you are a great coach, and your record in requalification training has always been outstanding, but something bothers me a bit! How in the heck did all of our screwed up shooters suddenly get religion and suddenly “find themselves” at the 300-yard line today?”

“Well Skipper,” Mac said, with a slight grin causing the lines around his eyes to crinkle a bit, “have you ever heard of a “*designated hitter*” in baseball?”

“*Designated hitter*? Mac, what in the heck are you talking about?” ...but something deep down in the recesses of my brain housing group was beginning to click.

“Well Skipper, I didn’t do it every time, but as a test, I came up with three *designated dingers*! One white, one black, and one Hispanic shooter each with outstanding 300-yard dope on his rifle. This was a “just in case” in the event one of our shaky shooters screwed

up on the 200, or forgot where the nut behind the butt plate was located!. I got a double handful of different shaped dungaree covers<sup>7</sup> to be used as appropriate, to give our “hitters” a different appearance, and to keep any undo attention from being drawn to any one individual. Here’s the way it works. If I had any one (shooter) I was *really* worried about, I’d have the “designated dinger” go up and take his place on the firing line, and shoot his string of fire at 300. When the line was cleared, the shooter (instead of going to the scorekeeper) went straight back to the bench, never going near the scorekeeper. The guy who had supposedly just shot, came off the bench and joined the scorekeeper to retrieve his score. The coaches/scorekeepers were so busy, they never noticed the switch! Since I wasn’t sure what color our screw-up was going to be, I simply had three different “designated dingers” of appropriate shades to take their place on the line.”

“Dear Allah Mac, do you have any idea what they’d do to us if they got wise?”

“Don’t have a clue Skipper? Send us to Vietnam? You DID say the Colonel wanted to beat the guys who’d been screwing with him didn’t you? It’s not like these guys haven’t been getting lots of rifle practice and lots of good coaching. I’d take any of ‘em to war with me, wouldn’t you?”

Mac had a point, but this was like juggling glass balls of nitroglycerine! Full Bird Colonels have very long memories, and make evil adversaries when aroused. If this ever gets out, we’d all be toast! Somehow I had visions of a Marine Captain being assigned to parachute into Hanoi to capture Ho Chi Minh with a Bolo Knife as an object lesson.

Things were beginning to come to a head. Black Jack having just come back from the G-3 meeting after rubbing the Infantry Regimental Commander’s noses in our outstanding performance on the rifle range. Black Jack was no damn fool either and smelled something slightly amiss.

“Culver, that was an outstanding performance at the range! Exactly how did you pull it off?”

Now the fat was in the fire.

“Colonel, McGowin found out that the guys who designed the C-Course overlooked the fact that in fact you can qualify if you ONLY shoot the 300-yard line without even shooting the rest of the course. We’ve taken advantage of this overlooked fact by concentrating all of our efforts on the 300!”

“No \$hit Culver? That’s amazing, am I going to get in any trouble?”

“Not if I can help it Colonel, I’d be in the same spot in the nether regions right with you! We’re just making sure we’re taking advantage of any holes in the system,” not going into great detail on HOW we were taking advantage of the slight screw-up in the course’s scoring system. “By the way, just how high a percentage do you want the Battalion to maintain anyway?” I dropped as a trailing comment...

“Just how high a percentage CAN I get Culver?”

“A full hundred percent if you want it Colonel, I can virtually guarantee it!”

Now the Colonel was beginning to smell a rat, but he was enjoying every minute of messing with the Division Staff. His grin was infectious, and indicated he was fascinated with the possibilities, and he obviously wasn't ready to hang my scalp out to dry.

“Naw, we'd better back off from a full 100%, somebody's gonna' get suspicious – make it ...say 95% plus or minus a point or two,” sitting back in his chair with a smug look on his face. Black Jack was obviously enjoying his day in the sun.

### **A Change of Command:**

Things continued to go nicely, but we were still losing personnel on a rapid basis, and our S-3 (Operations Officer) was transferred. I (as a mere Captain) was assigned as the new S-3 (Operations Officer, a billet usually calling for a Major), and senior staff NCOs were rapidly disappearing. I called on McGowin to be my new Ops Chief, a billet usually calling for a Master Sergeant. Quite frankly there wasn't a senior NCO in the entire Battalion that I'd have traded for Mac. He didn't have the exalted rank called for, but he definitely had the intelligence, savvy and drive to get the job done. Unfortunately we were also to get a change in command of the Battalion as Black Jack's talents were being sought for a command in the Republic of Vietnam. I wanted to go with him but I didn't have enough time in the Division to rate a transfer yet.

Our new Battalion CO was a gentleman named Kaiser, also a Navy Cross winner (as had been Colonel Westerman) from Korea (although I could never pin down anyone who knew what deeds of great daring garnered him the decoration).

Colonel Kaiser was as different from Colonel Westerman as night and day, and Kaiser was definitely one of the career planners. He made sure that “Kaiser's Skirts” were clean no matter what the circumstances were.

I had been assigned as the S-3 one week before Kaiser's arrival, and had been told by the departing S-3 that there were some loose ends that needed to be cleaned up. Whooo Boy, what an understatement!

It seems that during the previous “IG” inspection (2-years previously), the Battalion had not prepared a Operations Plan/Order for 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon, but skated with the IG, claiming that a plan was nearing completion. Yeah right! When the IG left, they made a note of the “pending paperwork” and called attention to the fact that it should be thoroughly perused when the next IG made their inspection. Unfortunately, Sy Gonzales<sup>8</sup> (the departing S-3) had never hit a lick on the plan after the IG cleared the door after the previous inspection. He just “casually” mentioned it to me as he departed for his new duty station! Huh? Oh good, 'cuz the IG was due two weeks hence (the IG Inspections were usually interspaced with a Commanding General's Inspection on alternate years, and the ramifications of not having completed the required Op Plan in two years was too horrible to contemplate)! “Sy,” I thought, “I think I'm gonna' kill ya'!”

Colonel Kaiser called me to task for not having a plan turned out (no matter that I had heard about it one week before), and while we were busily working on it, it was a long way

from being finished. Kaiser also wanted to know why I had not selected a senior NCO as the Operations Chief, and instead had selected some Alabama hillbilly as my Ops Chief. I was not amused, but told Kaiser that McGowin was the best NCO in the battalion regardless of rank (the Sergeant Major was usually busily spreading flower/grass seed with a plastic seed spreader – virtually as worthless as mammary glands on a male hog!). I asked the Colonel if he wanted to get things done or have some clueless S/NCO running around the S-3 office getting organized. I needed things done, and done now. Kaiser bought off on my reasoning, but still used the lack of an Operations Plan as an excuse for anything or everything that might look bad on his record. It was hard to develop any warm and fuzzy feelings for our new CO. Kaiser was obviously looking out for Kaiser, not for the Battalion.

We did get two gleaming jewels into the Battalion however who were to keep the machinery well oiled. One was a Major I had worked for before in the old 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company, Dale Davis, one of the true gentlemen to have ever worn the eagle, globe, and anchor, and a “wise-acre” young Naval Academy Lieutenant named Rocky Wirshing.

Skip Hartnett had still been my XO before I left A Company, but after the evolution in Panama had been “pirated” away to take the Recon Battalion’s platoon deployed in the Mediterranean. Upon his return I got him involved in the Designated Dinger operation, but while he thought it was hilarious, he was being groomed to go over to the newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. He had been slobbering over my Gold Parachute Wings and since we had some quotas come in, I relented and sent him to Ft. Benning, thus inadvertently shooting myself in the foot for competent help who knew how to keep their mouths shut. With Skip Hartnett back in harness, freshly back from Airborne School, and Wirshing being broken in as the new Requal-Guru, I bowed out of the equation having my hands full getting the S-3 Shop in order.

As noted above, Hartnett broke young Wirshing in on the scheme, and Rocky proved to be extremely quick on his feet in dealing with the suspicious lads on the Regimental Staffs. With Black Jack gone, the Regimental Commanders decided to gang up on the new Recon Battalion CO. They had reckoned without the verbal BS skills of Lieutenant Wirshing. He broke into the conversation at Division Headquarters, and with one of the most talented rug-dances I have ever seen, had everyone in the meeting convinced that by calculating the fire distribution, and strict attention to the concept of “center-hold” we had found that the 300-yard line could be the savior of the young shooter on the C-Course. Wirshing was correct of course, but he obviously didn’t tell the whole story.

The Regimental Commanders and their Operations folks went away scratching their heads thinking they had just had a course in advanced rifle marksmanship. They had of course, but I had to give Wirshing an A+ in MBFM (male bovine fecal matter – or in other words creative BS). I think they knew in their heart of hearts that they had been had, but weren’t really sure just how!

Strangely enough (and perhaps Odin *did* have a soft place in his heart for the Battalion), the rifle requalification percentages began to pick up throughout the Division. I have always wondered if they thought that Wirshing had come up with the magic bullet (sorry for the pun).

My personal take on the outcome? I think that the meeting called attention to the fact that everyone had been used to simply getting their obligatory 90% requalification without putting

in the requisite amount of creative and dedicated rifle coaching. In the long run, McGowin's "Designated Dinger" scheme may have simply refreshed basic marksmanship fundamentals for a bunch of characters that had come to take them for granted!

So, here's a salute and a tip of the Field Hat<sup>9</sup> to Francis A. McGowin who may have come across the solution to the Division's problem without realizing what he had done!

Semper Fidelis my good and faithful friend,

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> In the negative connotation, the individual is sometimes referred to as "one of them damned dingers" – not usually conducive to great fitness reports! Conversely, at least two Commandants have been designated as Distinguished Shooters, and many well known competitive shooters have been highly decorated including at least two Medal of Honor recipients. Numerous General Officers had become Distinguished Marksmen prior to both WWI and WWII, and the command interest generated by such officers made the Marine Corps' myth and tradition of a Corps of deadly Riflemen a reality.

<sup>2</sup> A "casual" organization is normally a loosely thrown together outfit that is utilized as a staging unit to feed other troops to operational organizations. In this case, since the main "hate and discontent" was occurring in South East Asia, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division was being used to feed required troops into Viet Nam while maintaining commitments in the Mediterranean and Caribbean areas of interest. Since the main assignment of troops out of Boot Camp and ITR were scheduled for RVN, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division got just enough bodies to keep the deployed Battalions filled. Every other available deployable individual went to the current combat zone. Those who were left at Camp Lejeune had to do double or triple duty!

<sup>3</sup> While the M14 was officially adopted as the U.S. Service Rifle in 1957, it took a while for the rifle to filter down to the troop level. The Marines, always seemingly on the bottom rung of the supply ladder didn't begin to assimilate the M14 into the FMF until about 1965, and even then it was a slow process. The M14 began to make its way to the National Rifle Competition in 1964 when the first NM M14s were supplied to the shooters at Camp Perry by TRW who produced the NM Rifles strictly for competition. By then it was obvious that the M14 could be made to shoot exceptionally well, but the improvements would be some years away from filtering down to the troop level. The Marine Corps was still using match conditioned M1s until the mid 1970s to conduct their Division Rifle Competition. Eventually all of the records set by the M1 rifles at the Nationals would be broken by the "tweaked" M14, but alas that was not yet the case in early 1966.

<sup>4</sup> The E-Silhouette Target is a "field firing target", roughly human in shape with a head and shoulders, and is called the "kneeling silhouette". It is 40" high and 20" in width and used in many field firing courses.

<sup>5</sup> When Ted retired from the Marine Corps, he went "next door" to the FBI Academy as their Sniper Armorer, and later became their "ballistician". Following his retirement from the FBI, Ted went to work for *Federal Cartridge* as their Law Enforcement sales representative. He is currently retired and living in Luray, Virginia.

<sup>6</sup> "Der-Tag" in German translates to "the day."

<sup>7</sup> Dungaree Covers are now referred to as Utility Covers, but old terminology died hard.

<sup>8</sup> I had served with Sy Gonzales years before in the First Force Reconnaissance Company – a fine field "troop" but he hated paper work with a vengeance. Sy should probably have been kept in the legendary Con-Ex Box marked "*Release in case of War!*"

<sup>9</sup> A "Field Hat" in the Marine Corps is the same piece of headgear commonly known as a "Campaign Hat" in the other services.

# Why are the Marine Corps Long Range Stocks Painted Red?

By Dick Culver

Interesting question, eh wot? And why would anyone give a rat's fanny? Well... the story has to do with a hurried "non-decision" made between one of my senior NCOs and watah in a moment of seeming good natured jibing. Alas, not everyone knows when you are "funning" 'em a bit!

I was stationed at MTU, Quantico during 1977 and as usual during our "off shooting season," we worked to bring all of our equipment up to snuff, try new barrel twists, and make sure all the rifle were properly bedded, etc.

Fiberglass stocks were not as prevalent in those days, and we were just then building our new M40A1 Sniper Rifles using a McMillan Fiberglass Stock. Now the Sniper guns were built on a stock with a built in camouflage pattern (taken off Jack Cuddy's personal Utility Shirt no less). While they were the cat's fanny for duty out in the boondocks, they didn't exude the professionalism we were trying to bring to our National Competitive Marksmanship Arena. Don't forget, the National Matches are as much a "*dawg and pony show*" as they are a contest of shooting skills.

Marine Gunner Neil Goddard was running our ordnance shop including building and maintaining all of our competitive rifles and pistols, and of course he was turning out the new M40A1s due to go out to the Fleet to replace the M40s with the walnut stocks. The accuracy our new M40A1s were exhibiting caused a council of war concerning bringing our long range (.300 Win Mag) bolt guns up to a maximum accuracy potential. We went to McMillan again since he had done an excellent job on our sniper stocks, and had him deliver a number of his best prone stocks for use in the long range matches. As an aside, the civilian shooting community had always suspected that the military was taking unfair advantage of a less well funded bunch of civilians and went around with their lower lips touching the ground.

Some years earlier, a near revolt by the competitive civilian shooters had occurred pointing out that the military had some sort of unbreakable lock on winning all the marbles at the Nationals. Some sort of compromise was called for and in order to keep peace in the competitive shooting arena, it was noted that the seemingly unlimited funds being available to the military shooters put the civilians at an unfair disadvantage. The civilians also noted that the purpose of the military was to practice shooting the service rifle to be able to kill the enemy more efficiently. Score one for the opposing team.

The military grudgingly admitted that there was a small amount of truth in the argument, but they didn't want to totally get out of bolt action rifle shooting because of the obvious application that long range marksmanship (shooting out past 600-yards) had for sniping. The civilian shooting community also grudgingly admitted to the logic in the sniping argument and a sort of devil's deal was cut. The Military would compete ONLY with the service rifle back to 600-yards, leaving the bolt gun competition essentially as a civilian enterprise at the shorter ranges. When it came to shooting such long range matches as the Wimbledon and Leech Cups (1000-yard matches) and other such long range endeavors fired from a "fur piece", it was a situation of Katy-Bar-the-Door. Now the Military wasn't exactly ecstatic over the new rules, but on the other hand they HAD been left with the long range rifles.

While we had been confined to/by the new rules for a number of years by 1977, we were still behind the power curve on the latest technology in modern stocking techniques. We had gained a fair amount of knowledge from building our new sniper rifles and logic dictated that the same techniques could materially improve our long range competitive rifles.

We decided to rebuild a few of our .300 Magnum Rifles with the new fiberglass stocks to see how well they performed. Immediate success followed, and Neil decided that all the long range guns should be rebuilt with the new stocks. I concurred and the stocks were ordered. Gunnery Sergeant Gary Gregory was in charge of the effort, and if nothing else he was meticulous to a fault. I knew that our new long range guns would be something to be reckoned with!

Time passed and we had many projects on our plate including getting our new Marine Corps Scout Sniper Instructor School off the ground. For those who have been around such an organization as MTU, you know that the so called “off season” ain’t exactly a slack period. Matches have to be planned, ammunition ordered and tested, lesson plans had to be developed for the new S/S School, and Division Match Instructional Teams, rifles and pistols tweaked and tested, and new avenues explored to translate our competitive efforts into the combat arena. We were some busy puppies!

Since we had decided that our new long range stocks wouldn’t be built with the camouflage pattern (I was *for* the camouflage pattern, but then I was a voice in the wilderness). Gregory said that the best possible finish would be a good spray job with some extremely tough (and extremely expensive) epoxy paint. I forget the exact price per gallon, but it was usurious even back in 1977! The bottom line was that you didn’t keep a few gallons around for grins, you bought what you needed and a little extra for emergencies. Now that the stage is set, on to our story.

Gary Gregory and I were always “screwing around” with each other verbally. For instance I was attempting to design a Scout Sniper Qualification Badge (alas ‘scotched’ by HQMC). Gregory being of German origin, and being possessed with an evil sense of humor suggested that the “links” suspending the badge from the bar be in the form of two German “lightening bolt ‘S’s” faintly reminiscent of the double S’s on the collar of the German “SS” Troops in WWII. Arrrrggg... “Gregory you idiot, out of my office!” I’d shout as he would flee ducking whatever I could find to throw at him. We had a lot of fun together, and a close friendship never bothered our professional relationship. Gregory however would often address me (within the office) as “*Herr May YORE*” with an emphasis on the last syllable of the “YORE” in German fashion.

At any rate this one spring morning, Gunny Gregory stuck his head in the office and said, “*Herr May YORE*, what color do you want the new long range stocks painted?”

I was involved in another project at the time, and without looking up I told Gregory, “why, Bright Red of course, I’d have told you if I wanted some other color!”

“Ja Wohl *Herr May YORE*, of course, bright red what a stupid question on my part!” and with that he let the door close and headed back to the shop. Had I only known!

Some period of time passed and I had almost forgotten my joking remarks to the Gunny when Gregory sticks his head in the door once again.

“Hey Skipper, come back in the shop and check out the stocks!”



“Stocks? What stocks? Having forgotten my joking remarks a couple of weeks previously.

I headed back toward the shop, and decided I should have brought my Ray Ban Shooting Glasses! The entire ordnance shop seemed bathed in a red glow. Those things could have been used to mark runways! Arrrgggggg...

“Gregory, what’in’ell going on?” I asked.

“Skipper, did you not specify BRIGHT RED for our new long range stocks?”

Now I was trapped. To admit I was joking would have been unthinkable! The Corps now had considerable time and money invested in my offhand remark about the stock color. I had to come up with a suitable answer. Think fast Culver, think fast!

“But of course Gunny, don’t you see how easily we’ll be able to identify our long range shooters on the 1000-yard line? They turned out better than even I had expected!” I lied.

“Ya know, I never thought of that, and since the major portion of the bright red color is under the stock, they shouldn’t bother the shooter at all!”

I was hoping Gary was right, as we now had considerable money and time invested in our new long range offerings. If it doesn’t work out, it’ll be my furry posterior! I took one of the rifles and headed for Charlie Reynolds’ office with my heart in my mouth!

“Hey Colonel, you know how hard it is to find our shooters on the 1000-yard line? Well, we’ve solved the problem!”

I was using some phraseology that would allow Gary to bask in reflected (in this case literally) glory for a triumph if Colonel Charlie liked the idea, and I could claim it was all my idea if Charlie Reynolds was planning a drawing and quartering party!

Charlie put the rifle on his desk and walked around it carefully.

“Ya know Culver, they did a really nice paint job on these, I like the idea!”

Whew... But the longer I looked at the darned things, they did kinda’ grow on me! ...And of course, scarlet is one of our sacred Marine Corps colors. ...And for sure, they were safe on the firing line, who in the hell would try to make off with a rifle that came very close to glowing in the dark?

I have never figured out if Gregory was deliberately screwing with me on the red color, or he really did think I was serious. I suppose it’s all immaterial what in the wash of many years. I don’t know if any of the long range stocks are still painted red, but for many years you could pick out the Marine Corps long range shooters on the line with a pad and pencil without even asking the scorekeepers. Kinda’ handy in retrospect, but you can bet I was a bit more careful when I answered any of Gary Gregory’s offhanded questions from there on out. Sometimes he was kidding, and obviously, sometimes he was not!

Semper Fi,

*Dick*

**Annie Beagle,  
The Commandant  
~ and ~  
The Interservice Rifle Matches  
By Dick Culver**

It was the early Summer of 1977 and the United States Marine Corps Marksmanship Training Unit was scheduled to host the annual Interservice Rifle Matches at Quantico. Now this was a yearly event and the Marines had drawn the "short straw" on hosting the Interservice Rifle Matches, much as the All National Guard Team, located in Nashville, Tennessee had gotten the nod to host the yearly Interservice Pistol Matches. Hosting the yearly matches required a fair amount of preparation, and attracted the attention of the entire military shooting community. Even the Commandant of the Marine Corps took enough of an interest to look in on the festivities each year.

I had relieved Major Dave Willis of his job at MTU, and worked directly for Lt. Col. Charlie Reynolds, the Commanding Officer of Weapons Training Battalion. Now technically, Charlie was also the OIC of MTU and the OIC of the various national teams we fielded, but the dog work fell to watash. At the time, it seemed that each Major assigned to MTU came with a dog attached. Willis had Bruno, a macho German Shepherd, and I had Annie Beagle, an ace bunny hunter. The various canines became a sort of mascot for the Battalion, and everyone made sure that no onery individual took a shot at the Range pets.

I was having a pretty good year shooting, and was looking forward to shooting the Interservice Rifle Match as a way of reducing another rifle leg to my shooting credentials. A couple of days prior to the matches, Colonel Reynolds came by and told me to be sure to have my office shipshape in the off hand chance that the Commandant might drop in to view the various office spaces when he came down to check out the matches. Needless to say the office shown like a new dime, and in consonance with Colonel Charlie's orders, I had Annie Beagle safely confined to, and locked in my office.

Jim Land held the Marksmanship Desk in the Training Branch at Headquarters Marine Corps, and as one of the former shining lights of MTU we could expect Jim to drop in, even if the Commandant got tied up refereeing some unexpected war that might suddenly take precedence.

Everything seemed to be in good order, so I took my shooting gear, and M14 down to the firing line to shoot on the 1<sup>st</sup> relay. Since all the loose ends seemed to be secure, I was in an excellent mood and prepared to see if I could acquit myself in a creditable manner in the rapidly approaching match. I have always been a fair offhand (standing) shooter, as most pistol shooters are, and managed to fire 98 in the 200-yard standing stage. Feeling better by the minute, I got down in position for the 200-yard sitting rapid stage and fired a perfect score. Hummm... Not bad, leaving the 200-yard line only 2 points down was a fair start. I moved my gear back to the 300-yard line in preparation for the prone rapid stage. Since there

were a large number of competitors, it took quite a while between stages. I looked back behind the firing line and Charlie Reynolds and Jim Land were standing there wildly gesturing for me to come back to the 600-yard line to join them. Since the looks on their faces did not indicate that all was well, I hastened to join them some 300-yards to the rear.

Both Charlie and Jim had frowns on their faces, I was wondering what if anything could have gone wrong with the conduct of the matches. Now I had known Jim Land since about 1959 and I had shot with Charlie Reynolds when we were both Lieutenants in the early 1960s. Neither one of them tended to “blow smoke” as the saying goes, but both were known for their evil senses of humor.

“Hey guys, what’s wrong?” I said.

“Culver, I thought I told you to have your area squared away in case the Commandant paid us a visit,” Charlie said!

Uh Oh... Now what?

“Well the Commandant just toured the area and when he stuck his head in your office he was absolutely astounded at how screwed up it was!,” said Charlie.

Area screwed up? How in ‘ell could that have happened? I had the office shining like a commercial hotel lobby! Now what?

“It’s that damned Beagle,” said Jim, “she’s got the office totally torn up!

“A Beagle has the office torn up? You’ve gotta’ be kidding!”

“Come with us and I’ll show you a horror story of your own making!” said Charlie.

We trudged dutifully back to my office only about 100-yards behind the 600. I broke out the key, opened the office only to find a mess that appeared to have been caused by a hand grenade! Egad! What could have caused this? The Venetian blinds were hanging loose and the couch was tipped over with all of my in and out baskets spilled off of my desk onto the deck! The place was in ruins! Only one little Beagle was cowering in the corner looking very cowed. I went over to the Beagle and attempted to pet her but all I could get out of her was a growl! Now Annie simply didn’t growl, and I began to smell a rat!

Looking around I found both Charlie and Jim Land in near hysterics with tears running down their faces. Hummm... It of course turns out that the Commandant had been much too busy to look into my small office space, but Charlie and Jim had seen an opportunity for a great joke on Culver! I was NOT amused, but on the other hand, I was totally relieved. Annie had seen this one coming and had let me know that she was innocent of any wrong doing. Seeing the humor of the situation, I made a mental note to come back at the completion of firing and square away my office. A total wash of relief came over me and I headed back to the 300-yard line to get ready for my prone rapid stage. Charlie and Jim were still in a state of mild hysterics of course and were have a great time at my expense! Having a rather warped sense of humor myself, I saw the humor in the situation, laughed and tried to calm myself down since I wouldn’t be going before the Commandant for non judicial punishment. My heart began to slow down a bit as I made my way down range.

I broke out my carbide lamp, re-blackened my front sight, and climbed into my sling and got myself a good prone position. I counted out my ammunition, made sure my magazines were loaded and checked my target through the scope. I was ready!

The commands were given and the targets appeared from the butts. I got down in a good prone position and concentrated on my front sight. Everything was going like clockwork. When the targets went down after 60-seconds I was sure I had gotten a good score. Sometimes a string of fire just feels good, and this was one of those times. When the targets finally reappeared, I had an absolutely beautiful knot of white spotter almost all touching each other, not in the center but alas in the 9-ring at 6-0'Clock out the bottom! Culver you idiot, you were so excited you did everything but put your 300-yard dope on your rifle. By now I was madder than a wet hen, but at myself since those jokers hadn't had a damned thing to do with my lack of attention to detail. Sometimes, the relief of not getting flayed on a wagon wheel, or broken on the rack by the Commandant personally, will unhinge a normally sane and careful individual and cause him to do particularly stupid things. This of course was one of those times.

Being down 12-points going back to the 600-yard line doomed my chances for placing up there with the heavy barrels. Sometimes you can be your own worse enemy, but then there was Charlie and Jim... Strangely enough I couldn't find either one of those two wharf rats! Seems they had seen my fist sized group in the 9-ring and departed for safer pastures.

I got Annie Beagle a nice "Big Mac" that night, as she had been totally innocent. Had I been in a position to offer a couple of Burgers to two other certain individuals, I might have laced theirs with arsenic! Grrrrrr...

I went home a much more humble individual that evening, and the next day I put up with the gentle kidding of the entire crew, as it was all good natured. ...And I had learned a hell of a lesson. Never trust your friends unless they stand 15" at the shoulder and have black, white and tan fur!

Semper Fi,

*Dick*

# The Making of a Legend ©2002

By Dick Culver

The following newspaper clippings tell the story of one of the greats of Marine Corps Sniping from Korea, TSgt. John Boitnott. The scenario is Korea in 1952 when the mobile war had taken on something faintly reminiscent of the trench warfare of WWI. Essentially the Chinese Reds were on one side of the hill masses, and the Marines on the other. The Panmunjom peace talks were in session, and the Marines had settled down for what amounted to a war of attrition. Trench lines, and bunkers provided



**John Boitnott-1/3/5 Korea 1952**  
**9 Shots-9-kills-900 yards**

protection from small arms fire punctuated with mortars and artillery. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment was fighting daily battles of their own against the CCF, and small arms exchanges were constant and often deadly. Finally tired of taking incoming small arms fire, the Regiment put out a call for all talented shooters in their number. One of these was SSgt. John Boitnott, who had been awarded a Distinguished Marksman's Badge in 1950. Here was a man worthy of giving the CCF better than they sent. After being called back to the Regimental Headquarters and sighting in a batch of sniping rifles recently acquired by the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, the newly formed Sniper Group/Platoons moved back into the lines.



TSgt. J. Boitnott and Pfc. Friday snipers are checking the score - nine rounds, nine dead Reds

SSgt. Boitnott shortly had a Communist bullet ricochet off of his helmet, and began to plot his revenge! He was armed with an Army M1C Sniper Rifle with an M82 scope attached using a Griffin & Howe Mount. While not in a league with our Modern M40A1s, the glass definitely gave an edge to a man who was a trained team shooter. After removing the flash hider to keep it from destroying the accuracy of the M1C by rattling around on the end of the barrel, he carefully watched the ridgeline for any sign of the pesky Commie assailant, but to no immediate avail. He was serving as a Platoon Sergeant with Item

Company 3/5 and went back to his platoon searching for a "designated decoy!" Almost immediately he had a volunteer, a certain Pfc. M. Friday who was to act as his observer/spotter. This however was not to work like a normal scout-sniper team, Boitnott, an old hunter, intended to use his man Friday as a decoy to draw enemy fire (perhaps more like a duck in a shooting gallery). Friday would walk up and down in front of Boitnott's position attempting to draw fire from their assailants. He did not have long to wait. A tell-tale puff of smoke followed by the sound of a ricocheting projectile came from across the way. The hapless Chink had given his position away. Boitnott closely watching Friday, caught a glimpse of muzzle smoke across the hill mass. Carefully lining up the scope of his new sniper rifle, Boitnott squeezed the trigger and the shooter from the opposing hill mass went down. A pair of dividers from the S-2 Shop measured the distance on the map as approximately 900-yards! Hummm... Now this was beginning to be fun! John continued to utilize his shooting gallery technique over the next few days until a couple of reporters caught wind of his success and came down for a photo-op. In true "one shot, one kill" tradition, John bagged nine Commies with nine shots at 900+-yards with no casualties. We have superior equipment now, but nine first shot kills at 900-yards is mighty fine shooting with ANY rifle. The brass at Division Headquarters soon heard of their modern day Alvin York and came out to see for themselves. Upon witnessing the use of a live decoy, they visibly blanched, thinking no doubt of the letter that they might have to write home to the decoy's family. "Dear Mrs. Friday, today your son bravely gave his life for his Country and his Corps while acting as a shooting gallery decoy for our ace sniper, SSgt. John Boitnott!" Uppsss... While they had to smile at Boitnott's somewhat unorthodox technique, they decided that Pfc. Friday was stretching his luck as far as anyone should be allowed. John's prowess with the M-1 Rifle hit the front pages all over the country. A photo taken by the magazine covering the story resulted in one of the most famous of Marine Corps Sniper images ever taken, and secured SSgt. Boitnott a permanent place in the gallery of Marine Corps Snipers.

SSgt. Boitnott was meritoriously promoted to TSgt. (the equivalent of Gunnery Sergeant prior to the service-wide reorganization of the rank structure from seven pay grades to nine in 1958/1959). SSgt. Boitnott was transferred back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division as chief investigator with the Provost Marshal's office. He continued his career until retirement as a MGySgt. in the 1969 holding the billet as Head of Security for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon.

## Korea Hero Makes TSgt. Meritoriously

A sharpshooting marine who played for keeps with the Chinese Peds while using an old hunting bluff was meritoriously promoted to technical sergeant at 2nd Division Hq. Bn. last week.

TSgt. John E. Boitnott, now serving as chief investigator with the Division Provost Marshal's office, was a platoon sergeant with the Fifth Marines in Korea when his exploits with an M-1 hit front pages all over the country.

Using a volunteer from his platoon as a decoy, Boitnott used his shooting eye to pick off Red snipers who fell prey to the old turkey hunting trick and raised above their parapets for pot shots at the running TSgt. BOITNOTT marine.



This deadly little game progressed for several days before authorities put a damper on things. By that time, however, Boitnott and his decoy had made news.

His meritorious promotion came as a result of outstanding service since being assigned to his present duties with the Division provost marshal.

MGySgt. John Boitnett (USMC Ret.) is living in the Jacksonville, Florida area with his wife, hale and hearty at 80-years old. He is still very sharp mentally and enjoys talking about his willing decoy's heroism and the satisfaction of reducing the number of pesky Red Chinese along the demarcation line. The peace talks seemed destined to linger through eternity at Panmunjom. Even small victories made life more worthwhile for the Marines, and kept the Chinks in a constant state of anticipation awaiting the inevitable magic bullet to cancel their birth certificates. Life is sometimes good!

## **ROC**

# *A Matter of Honor*

By Dick Culver

This is one that could pass for a tall tale, but alas 'tis true... The following machinations essentially destroyed my personal belief in the behavior of senior officers of Marines as a genre, but in the cold light of dawn, I should have realized that even senior officers are but members of the human race, and so I should have expected neither more nor less from them than any other group of humankind. I had been raised to believe that Marines serving as field grade officers of our Corps<sup>1</sup>, put their trousers on both legs



**Lieutenant Dick Culver and Sergeant Duane E. Crawford in an R4Q Aircraft (C-119) preparing for a Parachute Jump into Pickle Meadows, circa January 1961**

simultaneously, could leap over tall buildings at a single bound, and were saviors and defenders of truth, justice and the American way. The ultimate realization is that all men, even those serving in the higher ranks of our officer Corps, were but human beings with all the frailties and failings that go therewith.

This sea story had its origins in the latter part of 1960, through the early part of 1961, and began for this old Marine as a summons into the Pathfinder Platoon Commander's Office of the old First Force Reconnaissance Company.

Our Pathfinder Platoon Commander at the time was a very savvy old time Marine, a veteran of an underage enlistment in the Merchant Marine during WWII and upon coming of legal age, an enlistment in the U.S. Marine Corps. Our Skipper was a Captain named Dale Davis, one of the true gentlemen of our Corps. His greeting upon my entrance into his inner sanctum was roughly as follows:

"Lieutenant, I want you to go up to the Headquarters Battalion Office tomorrow to represent Sergeant Crawford for his office hours."

"Really Captain, what on earth is Crawford<sup>2</sup> getting Office Hours for?"



"Culver, do you remember when Sergeant Crawford ran into the ditch up on Wire Mountain Hill some time back?"

"Yes sir I do, but that was cleared up by Lt. Simmon's *Naval Supplement Investigation*<sup>3</sup>, totally clearing Crawford of any wrong doing, and giving him a clean bill of health as I recall!"

"You're right Culver, but for some reason, Lt. Col. Tyrant<sup>4</sup>, the Headquarters Battalion CO<sup>5</sup> doesn't seem to think so! He wants to personally talk to Sergeant Crawford about it! It's probably just some misunderstanding, but at any rate you and Crawford are to be up at the Battalion Headquarters at 0800 tomorrow morning in the Uniform of the Day."

"Aye-aye sir, it's probably just some legal glitch, but we'll be there at the appointed hour!"

I called Crawford in and told him of the impending visit to see Lt. Col. Tyrant, and to make sure he looked especially spiffy (this wasn't a problem with Crawford, as he *always* looked especially spiffy). Crawford didn't say anything at that particular moment, but gave me a strange look, as if he had some inkling of what was about to happen. Little did I know!

Sergeant Crawford and I appeared at the appointed hour and checked in with the Battalion Adjutant, an old time Captain named Lee who had been commissioned 3 separate times in the Corps. His first was during the Korean War as a temporary officer. Following Korea, he reverted to Warrant Officer, but he was finally selected as a Limited Duty Officer and was due to retire in about 30-days. Captain Lee, was known throughout the Corps as "*Light Horse Harry Lee*" due to the fact that when not undergoing inspection he was known to wear Cordovan<sup>6</sup> Colored Wellington Style Boots (as opposed to the standard low cut dress shoes) with his uniform. Needless to say, Light Horse Harry Lee was a real character, and a legend in his own time. Captain Lee, like Captain Davis was a savvy old salt with lots of experience under his belt. He was to give me some sage advice that very morning, although I didn't fully appreciate until the weeks that followed.

We went into Col. Tyrant's office and came to the obligatory two paces in front of his desk at attention. The Colonel greeted Crawford as if the two had served together during some previous tour. The two potential protagonists seemed to get along well, and spoke of a couple of previous mutual experiences. I began to figure that this was simply "an old home week" gathering and began to relax.

Suddenly the Colonel's demeanor changed and he took on a serious tone.

"Sergeant Crawford, I see here that you crashed your automobile into the ditch on the way down Wire Mountain Hill at 0200 upon returning from leave."

Crawford attempted to explain that his family out in Iowa had requested his assistance, and after he had taken care of the family problems he had driven straight through to get back to Pendleton to save as much leave as possible. Sergeant Crawford (as a Sergeant E-5) was billeted in Staff NCO Quarters on the enlisted side of the Wire Mountain Hill, the other side being occupied by junior officers.

“Sergeant Crawford said, “yes sir, it was late when I got home, and the wife and I went down and had a cup of coffee, came home, and hit the rack. I got a bit of sleep and suddenly woke up realizing that since my Company Headquarters was located at Camp Del Mar (just a couple of miles from the Wire Mountain housing), and that it being Friday night, if I got my leave orders back to the Company prior to 0600 I could save a day’s leave. I jumped in the car, started down the hill, but still suffering from lack of sleep, I fell asleep and went into the ditch, and hit my head on the windshield.”

“Crawford, that shows extremely poor judgment, and you should have realized you were in no shape to drive! Therefore, I am reducing you to the rank of Corporal, and you will have your base driving privileges taken away from you! That’s all! Sergeant Major march Corporal Crawford out of here!”

Whew! Had I judged wrong! The entire conversation had gone from friendly to ugly with a seeming snap of the fingers. Colonel Tyrant obviously had some sort of ax to grind! I stood in front of the Colonel’s desk in a state of total shock – I can only imagine how Crawford felt! I continued to stand at attention in front of Colonel Tyrant’s desk, probably with my mouth hanging open.

Colonel Tyrant looked at me and asked what the trouble seemed to be?

Once the realities of Crawford’s sentence dawned on me, I couldn’t resist pointing out that in my opinion Sergeant Crawford had been given a military punishment for what I viewed as a civilian offense at best. Colonel Tyrant began to heat up a bit and attempted to justify his decision.

“Lieutenant, what Corporal Crawford did (correcting my reference to Sergeant Crawford) was extremely dangerous and ill-considered. He needs a lesson in conduct and judgment! My decision stands! Dismissed!” Almost as an afterthought, he added “what if your children had been playing out there when this happened?”

“Colonel, first of all, I don’t have any children, and if I did, I’ll guarantee they wouldn’t be playing on the hill at 0200 in the morning!”

“Culver, you’ve missed my point, dismissed!”

I took two paces to the rear, did an about face and headed for the Adjutant’s Office with the observation (in language that was quite possibly a bit loud), “Crawford, we’re gonna’ appeal this!”

As I went into Captain Lee’s office, he motioned me over with a head nod.

“Culver, I really appreciate a young officer who takes care of his troops, but take my advice and let this one drop! There’s lots more going on here than you can imagine! I only have 30-days left to retire, and if you screw that up with legal appeals that will require my presence, I’ll hunt you down and make you an extremely unhappy individual!”

“Captain Lee, Crawford just got royally screwed in there, I intend to take this all the way to the Commanding General if necessary!”

Captain Lee covered his eyes with one hand with his elbow on the desk, shaking his head in disbelief that I hadn't heard him properly, or didn't understand that I was playing with dynamite here! How right he was, but when the facts finally came out, he obviously couldn't have verbalized it within earshot of Colonel Tyrant!

Camp Pendleton is located on many "mini-hill masses" with different headquarters on each one. When I left the Colonel's office I took Corporal Crawford back to the Recon Company area. During his entire ride back, Crawford told me that when he was recovering from the crash into the ditch, he had several visitors to his hospital ward that informed him that "they" were out to get him (Crawford). I mentioned that I had no idea who "they" were, nor why anyone would be out to "get" a Sergeant of Marines?... Crawford apparently thought that I knew the entire story, but at that moment in time I didn't have a clue! The thought or inference that a Lt. Colonel would be out to "get" a Sergeant was incomprehensible! As it turned out, Sergeant (now Corporal) Crawford was right, and I was the one who was clueless... That was to change in the days to come. But Colonel Tyrant had made one fatal mistake, he had made it a "*matter of honor*"...

Subsequently I made a visit to the Division Legal Officer, a Bird Colonel who acted as the Commanding General's advisor on legal matters. I had met this gentleman before when I received an award for coming in first place during the Platoon Leader's Class, and the Colonel had apparently been stationed at Quantico at the time. The legal offices weren't overwhelmed with business in those days (things have changed a bit nowadays I understand, but then...) <sup>7</sup> The Division Legal Officer made me feel right at home, enquired as to my family and current assignment, and finally asked what he could do for me?

I explained what had happened in the Headquarters Battalion Commander's Office and asked what his personal opinion was on the matter. He smiled slightly, but noted that the Commanding General would make the final decision if we wished to appeal the punishment. He personally demurred and noted that it wouldn't be his personal decision. I schmoozed him a bit and said something to the effect that while what he said was of course true, didn't the Division Commander usually take the Division Legal Officer's advice on the disposition of such matters? The Colonel puffed up his chest slightly and stated that yes, quite often the Division Commander could be swayed a bit by the Division Legal Officer's advice. I thanked him for his time and advice and headed back to the Company Headquarters.

I sent for Crawford and noted that he was still wearing sergeant's chevrons. I didn't immediately chide him for his oversight, rationalizing that normally an individual's punishment didn't take place until the appeal process was finished (that isn't how it's done in the military of course, but I too was for not rushing the cadence until I could get what I considered to be a great wrong, righted). I did mention to Crawford that it would probably be well to have at least one shirt with the appropriate chevrons in the event of a visit by visiting and interested brass.

Sergeant (Corporal) Crawford continued to maintain that "they" were out to get him, and for the life of me I couldn't imagine who in the hell (of any great rank) would be out to "get" a young Buck Sergeant... After about a week of this sparring around, I finally got an almost unbelievable story out of Crawford, that was so "off the wall" I had trouble believing that such could be true in my sacred Marine Corps.

## THE STORY UNFOLDS:

It seems that the whole thing started with a young Staff Sergeant (serving in the earlier E-5 pay grade) assigned as one of the photographers for the *Camp Pendleton Scout Base Paper*. As I have pointed out earlier, pay scales weren't exactly exorbitant in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and every penny counted. Enlisted and even many junior officer's wives washed and pressed the cotton uniforms to save a few pennies<sup>8</sup>. The two income family hadn't become widespread at the time, and if anyone got an extra job, it was usually the young enlisted troop himself who had some sort of fill-in job of after duty hours employment. In a detachment this was a possibility, but in a working, and potentially deployable Infantry Division, it was neither practical nor common. In this case however, the Camp Pendleton Scout's photographer's wife got herself a job as a waitress in the Staff NCO Club aboard the Base.

It wasn't too unusual to have an occasional "Bosses Night" at the Staff Club and it seems that our story had its start at just such a party. Apparently the Staff Sergeant's wife was decent looking, and was something of a charmer as are many who make a living as a waitress. While waiting upon, the Division Chief of Staff (a full bird Colonel and the Division Commander's right hand man) was somewhat charmed by the attention the Staff Sergeant's wife was paying to him. The story goes that he (the Chief) patted the young lady on the posterior a couple of time in fun and it went downhill from there. The young wife was also charmed that a senior officer would notice her, and my guess is that the Chief of Staff (a Colonel we'll call Gigolowitz – not his real name) was in what has become known as a "mid-life crisis." He was apparently equally charmed that a comely young lady was paying attention to a middle aged guy whose lusty life as a young officer was still within his memory banks. For whatever reason, a very spirited physical relationship ensued and the Colonel was apparently "*intercourseing* (a verb) *his brains out*", aided and willingly abetted by a very charmed and apparently equally horny young wife.

Colonel Gigolowitz started showing up at noon time in his Marine Corps staff car at the Staff Sergeant's. Quarters in Wire Mountain. The Colonel would then leave his personal (Marine) driver to watch the lady's children, while he and the young lady went out to sew their wild oats! Big problem as someone found out about their rather public dalliances and tipped off the Staff Sergeant. The Staff Sergeant obtained the services of the best lawyer in the Oceanside Area, a certain former Marine Officer named Dobney, (who himself had been the Division Legal Officer during the Korean War). The word was, whoever employed Dobney first, usually won his or her case. The Staff Sergeant won the race, filed for divorce and asked for custody of the children. Much to the surprise of many at the time, the Staff Sergeant was successful in his bid for the rug rats, and the outraged wife (outraged wife? Holy Catfish Batman!) went running to Colonel Gigolowitz and informed him that if she didn't get custody of the kids, she was going to tell the whole world that the Chief of Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division had been screwing her brains out.

At this point, Colonel Gigolowitz panicked and had his driver transferred to the Marine Detachment in Adak, Alaska on one day's notice, and went looking for any other witnesses who might blow the whistle on his noontime trysts.

Here's where Sergeant Crawford got roped into the three-ring circus. The outraged Staff Sergeant (being well acquainted with the troops in the Force Reconnaissance Company

since they made great photographic subjects when no other late breaking news was on the griddle), remembered that Sergeant Crawford lived directly across the street from his (the Staff Sergeant's) quarters, and often went home for lunch to save a few pennies. A conference with Crawford gleaned the fact that our hero often watched the Colonel leaving his driver as the baby sitter when he took off with the Staff Sergeant's wife! The die was cast. Crawford was apparently approached by lawyer Dobney, who secured confirmation that Colonel Gigolowitz was actually (or certainly apparently) having an affair with the Staff Sergeant's wife.

The Colonel's driver was a no sweat proposition as it wasn't likely that he would be called back from Adak for a child custody hearing, but Crawford was an exemplary Marine whose testimony could well be a deciding factor. A close scrutiny of Crawford's record brought forth the infamous crash into the ditch, for which he had hitherto received no punishment! Hummm... Well, if the Battalion Commander (Lt. Colonel Tyrant) who was technically Crawford's boss in terms of legal actions, didn't go along with the results of the Naval Supplement Investigation held by Lt. Simmons, Crawford could still be punished for his actions, thus sully his hitherto unblemished record, thus casting some doubt as to Crawford's veracity in testifying against the Colonel. Since Colonel Tyrant and Colonel Gigolowitz were in the same car pool, a plot was hatched to make Crawford into a disciplinary case, and hence not a reliable witness!

In the meantime, the Staff Sergeant had gotten two sympathetic NCOs from the First Force Recon Company to do a night time surveillance on the Staff Sergeant's wife's after hours activities. These two stalwart NCOs, both trained reconnaissance Marines, were a certain Sergeant Roy Fryman, and a Sergeant Sam Moyer<sup>9</sup>. It would seem that the thoroughness of the two well regarded Reconnaissance NCOs drove the final nail in Colonel Gigolowitz's figurative coffin, and cast grave aspersions on the fitness of the Staff Sergeant's wife as a fit mother.

Rumor control at the time said that Colonel Gigolowitz had either been selected for promotion to the rank of General, or was at least being considered for such. Needless to say, the Colonel was one worried puppy at this time, and was no doubt, considering the error of his ways. Sometimes a robust sexual relationship with a younger woman will come back and bite you on the fanny.

## **BACK TO THE SAGA OF SERGEANT/CORPORAL CRAWFORD:**

The story had gotten out by now, and to say I was outraged by the conduct of a senior officer (or officers) towards one of my best NCOs would have been an understatement. I went to see Captain Davis for guidance and advice. A young disillusioned First Lieutenant simply didn't have a clue as to how to proceed other than to go directly to the Division Legal Officer; after all, such conduct was not expected from your senior officers. When I laid the story out for Captain Davis, he alternately grabbed his midsection as if in pain, and then put his hand on his head. He reminded me that Colonel Gigolowitz was a decorated Artillery Officer from Korea, and he (Captain Davis) almost couldn't grasp the enormity of what I was saying. After just a few moments of consideration, Captain Davis leaned back in his chair and said "Culver, go see the Division Legal Officer and tell him what's happened! If I didn't think Captain Davis was one of the all time great officers before this encounter, his advice cemented a respect for him that lasts to this day!

My second meeting with the Division Legal Officer was considerably less cordial than my first. The Colonel looked at me in disbelief, and couldn't seem to grasp that I was accusing the Chief of Staff of dishonorable conduct. My conversation after the explanation was as follows:

"Culver, exactly what do you want me to do about this?"

What did I want him to do about this? I thought I must be hearing wrong. I wanted him to do what any outraged senior officer in a position of authority should do! What did I want him to do? Holy Catfish Batman!

"Sir, quite frankly I don't care if Colonel Gigolowitz wants to amuse himself sexually with goats! All I want is for Crawford to get his chevrons back! I am NOT after the Chief of Staff, all I want is justice!"

"Culver, if I were to recommend giving Crawford his stripes back, it would be very embarrassing for Colonel Gigolowitz!"

"Sir, it's not going to be nearly as embarrassing as it will be if Crawford *doesn't* get 'em back!"

"Culver, are you telling me that you would side with an enlisted man against a senior member of our Officer Corps?"

"Sir, my Dad who served as a Marine in both World Wars, told me when I was a kid that if a young officer doesn't take care of his troops, no one else will! Sir *it's a matter of honor!*"

"Very well Culver, have Crawford up here in the uniform of the day tomorrow morning at 0800!," the Colonel said with thinly disguised displeasure evidenced in both his voice and attitude.

"Aye aye sir, Crawford will be at the appointed place of duty in the uniform of the day!"

With that I took two paces to the rear, executed an about face and left the Colonel's office, now a totally disillusioned individual who had been raised in and around the Corps!

Upon my return to Captain Davis' Office, I gave him a rundown of the proceedings and received a look that somewhat salvaged my destroyed image of my chosen profession. His sage advice let me know that not everyone is John Wayne, John Basilone, or Chesty Puller. I was raised by a damn fine Marine Officer and was obviously currently serving with some of the best.

## **THE DISPOSITION OF THE CASE:**

Crawford was indeed restored to his previous rank, but the chicken *\$hi+* bastard's personal attempt to salvage some face, by simply "suspending the bust" as opposed to an outright vacating of the previous sentence, thus correcting an obvious miscarriage of justice.

Once the facts became known by the Commanding General, Colonel Gigolowitz retired on one day's notice and did not make General Officer.

Sergeant Crawford's mood improved materially and he continued to serve as one of our most effective NCOs.

Colonel Tyrant, Colonel Gigolowitz's partner in crime, was never disciplined as far as I know, since it would have been very difficult to prove that he was a co-conspirator in the case. However as I was to find out, there is something that comes very close to being a "*Colonel's Cabal*" in which they take care of their own. Outraged Colonels have very long memories and make evil enemies.

Not too long after these proceedings, the Company was preparing for the Commanding General's Inspection. Due to the large proportion of Lieutenants in relation to the number of troops (14 officers for 147 enlisted), the back rank of the formation was made up of highly polished and pressed junior officers attempting to make a good impression on the inspecting officer, who in this case happened to be the now infamous Colonel Tryant. As he came in front of each Lieutenant, he did a left face, inspected our foot wear, and correctness of our uniforms. He would use one finger to poke your web magazine pouch (to ensure that they contained the obligatory magazines), ask some pertinent military questions, and usually smiling would go to the next officer in line. When he did his left face in front of me, he already had his finger poised to poke my magazine pouch. He looked up, saw who it was, and abruptly turned without a word or a "magazine pouch poke", and went to the next Lieutenant in line. By now I knew that I was in deep doo-doo.

My punishment? I was short toured in the Force Recon Company, sent to a "transplacing battalion"<sup>10</sup> in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, and subsequently sent to Okinawa for my indiscretions. My transfer was not instantaneous making it very difficult to prove it hadn't happened in the normal course of military assignments. The transfer had its chilling effect however, on anyone who would "diddle" with those in positions of power. If I had *hated* it in the old Recon Company, the punishment might well have been to have left me there indefinitely. We in the old First Force Reconnaissance Company, considered ourselves to be the ultimate warriors, and I personally had no desire to leave (in my opinion) the primo company of the Corps.

The Company Commanding Officer at the time of the "Crawford incident", was a certain Major "Blunt" that most considered to be a functioning (if well meaning) tool. He was a Naval Academy Graduate and football player who had been assigned a primary Motor Transport MOS out of his graduating Academy class. In those days, only the least capable of officers were assigned to Motor Transport (unless you were an LDO with much MT experience).

Major Blunt's father had apparently been a Bird Colonel who had been close friends with Colonel Gigolowitz, and in fact had acted as Gigolowitz's "*Rabbi*" (Marine slang for "*mentor*") during his early career. Rumor control had it that his familial ties had secured Blunt's appointment to one of the real plums of command within the Corps in those days. The appointment had apparently been in the nature of a returned favor to Colonel Hunt's father who had taken care of Gigolowitz in his youth.

Our previous CO was Major John D. Counselman, a fine officer and Navy Cross winner in the battle for Seoul, Korea following the Inchon landing. His replacement was a klutz of the first order, and we all wondered how he got there. Major Counselman is reputed to have visited Major Blunt's Commanding Officer at the 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion. Upon asking

what sort of officer we were getting, Major Counselman was told *“our loss is your loss”*. Hummm... The fact that Major Blunt was replaced soon after Colonel Gigolowitz’s retirement was certainly suggestive. His replacement was a veteran of the Paramarines in WWII, a Major named McAllister. Blunt’s replacement was a winner. I never heard of, or saw Colonel Gigolowitz’s favorite klutz again.

Captain Davis, a fine officer, was rather suddenly transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing in Japan to perform tasks that could have been taken care of by someone much less capable. As I said, Colonels make evil enemies and have long memories. Much to my delight, I had occasion to serve with Captain Davis (then Major Davis) again in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion some years later when he was serving as our Executive Officer and I had the Operations Shop.

Would I do anything differently if I had it to do over again? Not a chance, taking care of your troops is a sacred trust, and if you were willing to prostitute your values for personal gain, you were not worthy of being a Marine Officer. I have no regrets.

### **AND A FINAL POSTSCRIPT:**

When assigned to Vietnam, Crawford performed brilliantly as I had always suspected he would. He received a battlefield commission and indeed the next time I saw him, he was being used in some of the TV Recruiting Ads wearing his Dress Blues as a Marine Lieutenant... Crawford went on to retire as a Major, a well deserved kudo for a fine Marine. I last saw Duane E. Crawford as a retired Major at the Force Reconnaissance Association Reunion in Washington D.C. in 1987 when I was returning from training the Saudi Arabian “Camelnecks” as a civilian contractor.

Odin sometimes has a strange sense of humor, and often takes care of puppies and old time Marines... I’ve always wondered what happened to Colonel Gigolowitz?

Semper Fi,

## **Dick**

### **End Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> In Military Terminology, most especially the Army and the Marine Corps, various rank equivalents are divided into 1) Company Grade Officers CWO-2 through Captain, 2) Field Grade Officers, Majors through Colonel, and General Officers (self explanatory). There are some small disagreements as to whether Company Grade Officers actually start with WO-1, but actually a WO is not technically a commissioned officer although they are afforded all the privileges of a commissioned officer. Most, but not all Warrant Officers are specialists, although some do in fact carry Infantry Military Occupational Specialty designators. Full Colonels however carry an MOS that is peculiar to the rank of Colonel, which essentially allows them to serve in any military branch regardless of prior experience, much like the rank of Sergeant Major in the enlisted grades. For instance, a Full Colonel (sometimes referred to as a “Bird Colonel” due to the eagle representing his rank), can technically be assigned as an Infantry Regimental Commander, even if his prior experience is in the Artillery (this is not usually done however), but individuals filling such billets as the “Division Chief of Staff” might well have served as a “Cannon-Cocker” (Artilleryman), as was the case in this particular Sea Story.



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<sup>2</sup> Sergeant Crawford was one of my most squared away NCOs. He was a Sergeant (E-5) in a day and time when they were phasing in the (then) new 9-tiered rank system. Formerly, the rank of Sergeant had been in the 4<sup>th</sup> Pay Grade, but had been upgraded to the 5<sup>th</sup> Pay Grade when the rank of Lance Corporal had been inserted between Private First Class and Corporal. Most of the old time Sergeants were still serving in the 4<sup>th</sup> Pay Grade, and it was unusual to have an (E-5) Sergeant in the organization. The older (E-4) Sergeants were allowed to continue to serve as Sergeants, but there was a built in time limit for retaining your rank if you were not reselected for Sergeant in the new 5<sup>th</sup> Pay Grade. Sergeant Crawford had been serving in the supply MOS previously, but had wanted to get back into the Infantry MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), so essentially took what amounted to an extra year in grade to change back into the Infantry field. He was selected for the rank of Sergeant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Pay Grade, essentially identifying him as an exceptional NCO. The rank system continued to operate in a quasi-chaotic fashion for several years, with the new (E-5) Sergeants rating the same housing as the older (E-5) Staff Sergeants, and having the same club privileges. To say that things were a bit crazy in the rank system for a couple of years would have been an understatement. Sergeant Crawford had also been the individual assigned as our (Company) instructor during what was termed “Junior Jump School” – a program designed to test human endurance and make the actual Airborne School at Fort Benning seem like a Sunday School Picnic. Sergeant Crawford did his job very well indeed (although strangling him a time or two came to mind), making Ft. Benning a breeze!

<sup>3</sup> The “*Naval Supplement Investigation*” was short for *Naval Supplement Investigation for the Articles of War for the Navy*, commonly known as “*The Rocks and Shoals*” in the vernacular. It was changed to a “JAG” (Judge Advocate General) Investigation a short time later when the services consolidated their legal proceedings under what has become known as the JAG Manual.

<sup>4</sup> Lt.Col. “Tyrant” and Colonel “Gigolowitz” (central to our story) are not their real names of course, but have a similarity in sound if you knew the individuals involved. The same proviso holds for Major “Blunt”, apparently one of Colonel Gigolowitz’s favorites, stemming from Gigolowitz’s association with Major Blunt’s father some years previously.

<sup>5</sup> The arrangement for the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company in the Marine Corps Table of Organization was a bit convoluted at the time. Technically, the Force Recon Company belonged to Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMF Pac) that hung its hat in Hawaii at the time, since 1<sup>st</sup> Force did virtually all of its tactical operating in support of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. The Company’s physical location had been at Camp Del Mar in the Camp Pendleton Complex of outlying camps. To manage our (local) administrative (and legal) functions, we were assigned to operate under Headquarters Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division which was also the holder of all the record books for the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Staff (including the Commanding General, the Chief of Staff and all the G-Sections that technically ran the Division) – Headquarters Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. was for all intents and purposes an administrative organization utilized to juggle the paperwork for the Division Headquarters, and such attachments as the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company that technically belonged to FMF Pacific.

<sup>6</sup> Marine Corps dress shoes were cordovan colored as were our combat boots until the reign of Robert S. McNamara as the Secretary of Defense. In a move designed to standardize the uniform requirements for all services, he decreed that all shoes and boots WOULD be black, along with the belts, and the Marine Corps peculiar design of our Utility Uniform (the old timers still called ‘em dungarees from our long association with the Navy), but they [officially] became designated “*Utilities*” in the early 1960s. McNamara did away with our Utility design and required that we (both the Army and Marine Corps) wear the same field uniform. We fought him on changing our belts to black, and finally won that one keeping our khaki colored belts, although we had to go to the Army belt width. We also managed to keep the Marine Corps belt buckle design, and our own design of Utility Covers for the field uniforms. We counted ourselves lucky to salvage anything from the designer of the Edsel Automobile and the individual who decreed that we would adopt the M16 Rifle. I would personally have bitten the bullet on the belt color to keep the M14 Rifle however.

<sup>7</sup> In the day and time prior to the establishment of a permanent and professional JAG organization within the Marine Corps, lawyers admitted to the Bar were not legal necessities, and many a court’s martial was conducted utilizing “appointed” junior officers from a/the battalion acting as trial and defense council. Today’s “legal beagles” would have a hemorrhage if they could have witnessed some of our earlier proceedings. Generally speaking, the system worked well, but occasionally things went to \$hi+, and this was one of those times. Justice however, usually prevailed in the end, as it eventually did in this misbegotten mess.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, at that time a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant with no prior service drew the munificent sum of \$222.22 per month (plus a housing allowance which was sacrificed if you lived in government quarters), in addition each individual drew \$47.88 per month subsistence for groceries. Saving money was a very realistic endeavor for the youngsters of the day.

<sup>9</sup> Sergeant Fryman later won the Navy Cross in Vietnam, and was killed on his second tour in-country. Sam Moyer later retired after a long career, culminating as a Sergeant Major of Marines. I am still dusting the ashes of my occasional (some say permanent) cigar in a brass ashtray Sam had acquired during one of his assignments to the Korea. He got in return, a “Monkey-Pod” set of Jump Wings I acquired when doing a tour in the Philippines.

<sup>10</sup> In those days, the Battalions on Okinawa were replaced by Battalions in the States by a method referred to as “transplacement”. An existing Battalion would be sent to the Third Division taking up a new Regimental Designation. In this case, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment went to Okinawa to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Unit integrity was maintained, and only the names were changed to protect the innocent (as they used to say in the TV series, “Dragnet”).

# The Unintended Consequences of Ill Considered Statements...

*"Be careful what you say"* is most probably the ugly sister to the old saw of *"be careful what you wish for, you might just get it"*... I was reminded of this while watching an interesting, if somewhat fanciful movie called the *Wishmaster*. While the story line was a bit far out, it was indeed interesting to watch the results of an ill thought out wish granted by a demon with an evil sense of humor. As I sat there musing over some of my own past misdeeds and experiences, I was reminded of two different instances during my misspent youth when an innocent utterance resulted in unexpected consequences. The results were quite amusing in retrospect, but were not terribly funny at the time. Consider the following two, absolutely true tales. As the old saying goes, the primary difference between a sea story and a fairy tale is that a fairy tale begins with *"Once upon a time"* and a sea story begins with the exhortation, *"This is no \$hi+!"*... the following two instances rightfully belong in the latter category.

## **Sea Story Number 1:**

The time frame? Late Spring of 1961. Circumstances? I was the Executive Officer of Golf Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment located at Camp Pendleton. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was scheduled to "transplace" to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division on Okinawa in June of that year. I was newly assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines having just been transferred from the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. Disciplinary problem simply didn't exist in the old Force Company as it was considered to be an honor to be selected to serve in that organization. The slightest transgression by anyone (officer or enlisted) resulted in a transfer to the far reaches of the planet. The Recon Troops may have gained a small dollop of arrogance, but they were so squared away they "squeaked!" My point being, that I wasn't used to being involved with a bunch of bandits who were constantly scheming to beat the system.

It's not that I was totally inexperienced in the wily ways of the "M1A1 Enlisted Man" (as I had 5 years enlisted service myself), but my recent exposure to a bunch of totally dedicated professionals had lulled me into a false sense of security. I was soon to be reeducated in the ways of calculating youngsters. We had one such clown that was a real contradiction in terms. While on duty or in the field, his conduct was faultless, and he performed in a manner that would have made his NCOs and Officers proud. On liberty, however, this guy was a wild man. One of his favorite tricks was to throw a wild liberty starting in Oceanside and wind up below the border in Tia Juana, Mexico, usually better known as "T-Town." While T-Town wasn't usually off limits, it wasn't unusual for a young lad to throw a wild liberty and wake up in the Tia Juana Jail (immortalized in the song sung by the Kingston Trio a few years back). Young dusky maidens (well... maidens MIGHT be stretching it a bit, ahem...). Coming back late to your unit a bit late wasn't something that normally called for a public beheading, but it was usually good for a few extra hours of EPD and perhaps a weekend's restriction to remind the lads that promptitude was a military virtue.

The problem with the lad in question was that disappearing over the border wasn't an occasional transgression with him. In fact, about once a month he would come back several days late, just enough to require him to be run on the unit diary as a deserter. This required that his platoon sergeant inventory the entire contents of his foot locker and wall locker, type out the inventory sheet, and store the lad's stuff in the unit property room for safe keeping. This is a tremendous pain in the posterior! Invariably the kid would show up, all apologies and

excuses swearing that it would never happen again. The First Sergeant and I saw a bit of potential in him and would usually give him a good healthy slap on the wrist and hope that the upcoming move to Okinawa might just square him away – after all, where in the hell can he go on the island? Or at least that was our reasoning.

A couple of weeks before departure, I called the lad in and read him the riot act. I explained what a stupendous pain in the fanny it was to inventory his gear and explain away his misconduct on the unit diary and basically cover for him with the Skipper. He nodded appreciatively and indicated that any misconduct was a thing of the past. I wanted to believe him, so to punctuate my admonition, I explained that the First Sergeant, his Platoon Sergeant, and I were up to our ears in having to inventory his gear every time he decided to go on liberty below the border, and if he EVER did this again, he was to inventory and pack his own gear, and leave the inventory slip on top of the seabag, or I was gonna' make sure that he spent the next year in the Portsmouth Naval Prison. He looked at me and seemed to blanch almost a white as a sheet of paper. He gulped a couple of times and assured me that I would never have to inventory his seabag or lockers again. I, of course, took this to mean that his unauthorized mini-leaves to Tia Juana were a thing of the past.

The following Monday, First Sergeant Hoaglund came into my office with a scarcely disguised smirk on his face. "Lieutenant," he said, "I think we have a problem!" Uh Oh... the First Sergeant was a smooth old character that was unruffled by virtually any occurrence. He handed me a hand written piece of paper that read approximately as follows:

*"Dear Lieutenant Culver,*

*I have inventoried my gear and gone over the hill as instructed!"*

*– signed –*

*Pvt. Zlotch"* (not his real name of course)

I learned a real lesson that day, and once I thought about it, I didn't know whether to roll on the deck in hilarious laughter or consider killing the little SOB when he showed up again. Obviously he had me on this one as no (intelligent) Courts Martial would convict the little snot, and besides which he had taught me a heck of a lesson. I never again mixed tongue-in-cheek admonitions with what I considered legitimate fanny chewings.

The rest of the story? Pvt. Zlotch never again went UA in T-Town, he transplanted to Okinawa with the Battalion and went on to serve an honorable enlistment, making Lance Corporal before he went home to terrorize his home town folk. I wish I had kept closer track of Pvt. Zlotch, with a mind like that he had the potential for a real career in government.

## **Sea Story Number 2:**

The time frame? Late April of 1967. Circumstances? I was assigned as the investigating officer for a man accused of cowardice during the "Hill Fights" near Khe Sanh in RVN. I had just been transferred from A Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment due to the heavy casualties taken in the battles for Hill 881 (North and South) and Hill 861 (North and South). These were the muvvas of all firefights and when

the flag was finally raised, the NVA had been awarded their own fannies and sent packing north to explain their lack of success to Ho Chi Minh personally. We had won, and won in a most glorious fashion, but winning a pitched battle is never without its “butcher bill” as the Brits used to call it. It took several days to sort out the casualties, vacancies, awards, and administrative requirements. As a relative newbie, I was called in by the Battalion Executive Officer and told that I had been chosen to be the investigating officer for charges filed against one of the troops judged to have exhibited cowardly conduct during the battle for Hill 881.

Now handling military investigations has never been one of my favorite pastimes, but the new guy on the block always draws his share of the onerous tasks that become necessary from time to time. This one did not promise to be a pleasurable experience. I was absolutely sure that all Marines are (by definition certainly) NOT capable of cowardly behavior and I certainly wasn't looking forward to proving the rule by coming up with the legendary exception. I was handed a large stack of statements that had been collected by the previously assigned investigator. My predecessor had weaseled out of the job claiming that he was personally acquainted with the accused, and therefore should be excused, lest he possibly interject some personal prejudice into the proceedings. I carefully read through the stack of statements and the story (according to the statements) shook out as follows:

- 1) Pfc. Figowitz (not his real name of course) had several times pleaded with his fireteam leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant and platoon leader to be allowed to go to the rear to keep a dentist's appointment.
- 2) Pfc. Figowitz was turned down on each occasion due to the ongoing nature of a desperate battle occurring at the time, making Pfc. Figowitz's request seem trivial.
- 3) After being repeatedly turned down, Pfc. Figowitz then on his own recognizance, ran to and jumped aboard a medivac helicopter loaded with wounded, returning to the LPH (Landing Platform, Helicopter – basically a helicopter “aircraft carrier”) Princeton.
- 4) These actions were observed by many individuals who witnessed Pfc. Figowitz deserting his unit under fire and thereby exhibiting cowardice in the face of the enemy.

If these statements were to be believed, Pfc. Figowitz was in deep doo-doo! I wasn't quite ready to wind up the proceedings for a couple of reasons. First, no one had actually ASKED Pfc. Figowitz what had happened, and maybe (in the heat of a major dust-up) something may have been left out of the story. Worst case, Pfc. Figowitz certainly deserved to have his story heard first hand. I called him in. Pfc. Figowitz entered the cabin with a couple of his own witnesses. From the look on his face, Pfc. Figowitz was in a great amount of mental distress (understandably so in my opinion – this kid had the potential of being drawn and quartered!). I asked Figowitz to give me his version of the tale. While it wasn't anything to be particularly proud of, nor did it smack of the actions of John Basilone or Dan Daly, the kid DID have a point... Here's the way his version of the story went:

*“Sir, I wasn't running from the fight, I had an absolutely horrible toothache and needed to get at least a pain shot so I could concentrate on shooting back!” Well, I went to my fireteam leader and told him my jaw was killing me and I needed to see the dentist! The fireteam leader was busy directing the other riflemen and told me to ask the squad leader. The squad leader told me that I must be out of my mind and the answer was NO I couldn't*

*go back to the ship to see the dentist. I told him that this hurt as much as being shot and I needed to at least get some Novocain to dull the pain... the toothache hurt so bad I could hardly see and tears were coming out of my eyes. The squad leader refused to talk to me anymore and sent me to the platoon sergeant. The platoon sergeant had several wounded and was extremely busy directing the firefight. I told him that I couldn't return fire if I couldn't see the enemy and I'd come right back as soon as I got a shot. The platoon sergeant told me that if I didn't get out of his hair, HE'D shoot me, but I was welcome to talk to the platoon commander. I crawled about 50-yards up to see the platoon commander and told him my story and he told me to go back to the ship!"*

Hummm... Something didn't mesh here! What was I missing? Obviously time to call in the fireteam leader, the squad leader, the platoon sergeant and the platoon commander and try to pin this thing down. Turns out that the kid's story was closer to the truth than they had given him credit for, albeit not in the tradition of Sergeant York. An in-depth study of the statements made to and about Pfc. Figowitz come closer to the following:

*Sure enough, Pfc. Figowitz had gone through the chain of command attempting to gain permission to leave his comrades to return to the ship because of a roaring toothache. In each case, the answers given to Pfc. Figowitz were much as reported in Figowitz's narrative above – HOWEVER the final instructions given to Figowitz by the platoon commander hadn't EXACTLY been to go back to the ship and see the dentist! It was finally agreed by both Pfc. Figowitz and his platoon commander that the Lieutenant's final words to Figowitz had not been, "Yes Pfc. Figowitz, I understand your problem, certainly you should go back to the ship and get your dental problem resolved!" – the Lieutenant's actual last words were "Figowitz, get the F++K out of here!" Figowitz of course, took the meaning to "get the F++K back to the ship," whereas, the Lieutenant swore that he left no doubt that Figowitz was an idiot and his statement REALLY meant get out of my face and get to fighting.*

I went to the Battalion Commander with my recommendations, one of which was to drop the entire thing. It was pretty apparent that Figowitz had taken advantage of the situation, and Figowitz's interpretation of the somewhat cryptic statement by the Lieutenant was taken by him to mean exactly what he (Figowitz) had been hoping for. Several things were against ever getting a conviction of cowardice for Figowitz, the least of which was that Figowitz had been with the battalion for a number of months and in prior firefights had never exhibited any cowardly tendencies... If I had been the trial counsel (plain old vanilla officers, i.e. without legal education could act as trial and defense counsels in those days), I'd have gotten the little miscreant sprung. Was Figowitz truly a coward? Maybe, or at least in this particular instance. ...But conversely he had conducted himself well in previous firefights.

And then there was the "unintended consequence" of the Lieutenant's rather forceful direction for Figowitz to "get the F++K out of there!" I rather suspect that the Lieutenant more carefully considered the consequences of a misinterpretation of his hastily made statement(s) after this little incident. I know that after having personally directed a young lad "to go over the hill after inventorying his seabag and lockers" and later listened to the consequence of a statement that was interpreted as an order to flee a bullet swept battlefield taught me an important lesson – If an order or a statement CAN be misinterpreted, believe me it WILL be misinterpreted.

As to what eventually happened to Pfc. Figowitz? I don't have a clue – I inherited a rifle company of my own shortly after this incident and the Battalion took a total of over 800 casualties before our stint on the Special Landing Force ended. Given the excitement experienced during the following 9 months, I CAN guarantee that I never yelled “GET THE F++K OUT OF HERE!” during any of my major firefights – ya’ just never know who may have a toothache!

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# The Marines and the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade...

By Dick Culver

There are times when two units with equal legos and bragging rights are co-located in time and space. When this happens, the normal expected friction will usually manifest itself with predictable consequences, but every so often the inter-unit competition will get out of hand, and so it was with a regiment of Marines and a Brigade of Airborne Soldiers.

The story takes place a number of years prior to the unpleasantness in Vietnam. About 1961 I was the Executive Officer of Golf Company, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, stationed on Okinawa. At that particular time, the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines were co-located with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade at Camp Sukiran (later sometimes spelled Zukiran) on the "Rock" as "Okie" was generally called. Bear in mind, during the timeframe of this story, it had only been 16 years since the actual battle for Okinawa.



Culver suiting up for a Joint Jump with the 173<sup>rd</sup>, July 1961, Yomatan Air Strip Okinawa

Now the Marines have always been a proud organization, and had a reputation of taking virtually no verbal or physical abuse from anyone short of *Allah* himself. The 173<sup>rd</sup> was an Airborne Outfit, and were a bit salty themselves. The Marines often made reference to the Airborne's badge of honor (their jump wings), somewhat irreverently calling them "flying ice cream cones"... if the truth were known, the Marines were a bit jealous of the Airborne being able to sport such a symbol of macho bravado... Since I was an old Force Reconnaissance Marine, I already had my parachute wings, but I was one of only two such in our entire battalion. The Commanding Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment and I were the only ones with such elegant symbols of our manly prowess...

The 173<sup>rd</sup> was a really great outfit, and gave us a run for our money. The Marines of course simply sat around and grumbled a bit over our lack of such an ostentatious symbol (the jump wings) of our ability to impose our will on the enemy. The 173<sup>rd</sup> of course, sensed this, and took every opportunity to display a sense of quiet arrogance and superiority towards their brothers in arms. The stage was set for disaster...

The Army Airborne troops, during that particular time frame, had a rather maddening tradition of saying "*Airborne*" (rather loudly) as they passed their Airborne officers, while rendering a snappy salute. The closer to any observing Marines they happened to be, the snappier the salute and the louder the verbal exchange of course! The Airborne Officer was expected to answer "*All the Way*" as they returned the salute.



Now this gimmick was *MEANT* to be exchanged only between Airborne Troops and their Officers as a means of instilling morale and unit pride. The Marines felt that they needed no such artificial morale boost – after all, they *WERE* Marines, right? As long as we maintained our distance during day to day contact, everything went well – after all, we didn't care what these upstart “sky troopers” (or “Garri-troopers” as the Marines sometimes called them) had to do to convince themselves that they were worthy of respect – So far, no sweat, just a little healthy rivalry between two excellent units...

As the competition between the two outfits grew more intense, the 173<sup>rd</sup> lads, decided to rub in their self-perceived superiority over the Marines! As a result, they started giving the “Airborne” verbal greeting whenever they passed ANY officer (most especially Marines). Most of our Lieutenants simply looked at them as if they had two heads, returned the salute and continued on their way. The Airborne symbol of camaraderie seemed somewhat contrived to the conquerors of Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima and the survivors of the march out of the “Frozen Chosin”... The Leathernecks were convinced that there were *Marines*, and then there were “*all others*”. The Marines (with their own brand of arrogance), saw the Army, Navy and Air Force serving as “bad examples” against which to gauge the inherent excellence of the Sea Soldiers!

One morning after PT (Physical Training), all this changed! A bunch of young Marine Lieutenants were returning to their quarters following their morning run. By pure chance, they happened to pass a group of young 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne troops also returning from their morning workout.

One of the young paratroopers saluted one of our Marine Lieutenants (rather smartly), giving the Paratrooper verbal greeting of “*Airborne*”. The Marine Lieutenant, happened to be one of the largest most aggressive Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants on the island. The young (if somewhat oversized) Lieutenant had been chafing a bit under the irreverent Airborne display of arrogance”, and snapped back (with a bit of obviously prepared rhetoric) – “*So's Bird \$++t*”... and the fight was on! It took two Regimental Commanders (one Army and one Marine) and all sorts of lesser beings, to get the diplomacy back on track... Since the ensuing melee was in the spirit of unit pride, cooler heads prevailed and things went back to normal.

I have always had a warm feeling for the 173<sup>rd</sup> and will always buy such a man a drink if we are in a local watering hole... There's just *something* about a man who's crazy enough to jump out of a perfectly good airplane.... I have more rather funny stories about the Marines and the 173<sup>rd</sup> – and with the right incentive, I'll reach back into the recesses of my memory banks...

Good troops, those “silk supported bird men!”...

**ROC**

# A Kiss for a Habu

First, a definition of “Habu” is in order:

**HABU:** (pronounced "hah-BOO"): A poisonous snake found in southeast Asia (Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, southeast China). Habus are pit vipers, more closely related to the adder than to any species of North American snake. The actual "habu" (*Trimeresurus flavoviridis*) is relatively small, not usually getting longer than 5 feet. They are not typically aggressive but will bite if provoked. They are not as deadly as cobras or mambas, but are much more dangerous than most North American venomous snakes.



Quasi-Official SR-71 Patch



SR-71 Blackbird aka Habu

By way of explanation:

When the A-12s (later called the SR-71s) were first flown to their new remote base at **Kadena AFB** in Okinawa, the local people thought that this strange and somewhat wicked-looking airplane was shaped like the Habu snake. They started calling it the Habu airplane, and later just **Habu**. Crews who flew the airplane were also called Habu, and the name came to be recognized as synonymous with the blackbird program and was even incorporated into the insignia worn by the crews on their uniforms (see the patch above).

Now on to the story:

I had just come from 2 ½ years in a graduate program in Ordnance Engineering at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey, California, and had thus been away from the FMF (Fleet Marine Force) and any updates to our supporting aircraft. I had never been closely associated with the air arm, except for troop haulers and jump aircraft. The aircraft I had been most familiar with at the time were, “Puff the Magic Dragon” (a much modified C-47 [the AC-47] packing multiple mini-guns in 7.62 mm), the C-130 transport (and later converted to a more powerful version of Puff the Magic Dragon, usually nicknamed “Spooky”), the F-4 Phantom, the A-4 Skyhawk, , the CH-53 Helicopter and of course the ubiquitous CH-46 troop hauler. The H-34 Helicopter was on its last legs and would soon disappear from the tactical scene. Of course, virtually everyone knew of the capabilities of the Huey (HU1E and improvements), and the Huey Gunships. Rumor had it that a more sleek version of the Huey Gunship had come on the scene and was now known as the Cobra.

Spy planes were not in my lexicon of expertise, nor since they were not a close support aircraft, had they been of any personal interest. The U-2 was well known of course, most especially since Francis Gary Powers had been shot down in one during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was not aware that the U-2 had been since overshadowed by an aircraft that flew over 2000-mph and had a service ceiling that put it out of sight and detection of any but the most sophisticated gear. Little did I know that one of these squadrons was then based out of Kadena on "The Rock" (Okinawa).

I had been kissed on both cheeks by the Navy Postgraduate School, and given a piece of paper that indicated that I was now a part of the "Star Wars Crowd" (a term that wouldn't come into its own for several years). Mercifully, I was sent back to the Fleet to renew my acquaintance with the M1A1 Mud Marine. Quite frankly I was thrilled. While I have always had a predilection for ordnance of all kinds, I am much more at home employing such gear than sitting behind a desk designing such.

I came to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division with high hopes of being assigned to an Infantry Battalion, but alas, my first assignment was as the Company Commander of Headquarters Company of the Division. This meant that from a practical standpoint, I was the Company Commander of the Division Commander himself (in that I had custody of his record book), but it was not the sort of job that warmed the cockles of a good Infantryman's heart. Basically, I was a paper pusher and I was NOT a happy camper. Every moment of every day was occupied in searching out a good infantry assignment for a wayfaring Marine Major with an aptitude for mayhem!

To add insult to injury, this was during our first gas crisis (early 1973), and to save fuel, the Marine Corps had placed virtually every organizational vehicle on what was known as "organizational (administrative) deadline" and only to be used in the event of extreme emergency. We had a single vehicle assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division Headquarters be used for administrative purposes. Only the Headquarters Battalion Commander had a legally functioning staff car, and he kept tight control over his wheels. Our Battalion Commander (of Headquarters Battalion of the Division) was a character known as "Hot Dog Pat" Carothers who had been in the old 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company back in the late 1950s/early 1960s. We were pretty well acquainted, but Colonel Carothers was not overly sympathetic to my preference for the Infantry since he too was stuck at Division Headquarters. To say that I was bored to tears was an understatement.

Coming back to the office following noon chow one day, I happened on one of my young L/Cpl. clerk typists who was engaged in what appeared to be donning a pair of panty hose! What in the hell was this? Panty hose? Dear Allah? "Say it ain't so Joe" to paraphrase the old story of the kid accosting *Shoeless Joe Jackson* after the notorious Black Sox Scandal in Chicago in 1919! A MALE Marine putting on "Panty Hose?"... Arrrggggg... Here we're speaking of the elements of a court martial for homosexual behavior – don't forget, this was well before the "*Don't Ask, Don't Tell*" evolution in the U.S. Military.

I got hold of the legal section at Division Headquarters, and we decided to process this clown for a semi-immediate court martial, or at the very least an unsuitability discharge for homosexual tendencies. We simply didn't put up with such behavior in those days. Normally, we would have put this idiot in the Bastille<sup>1</sup> (buzz word for Brig) awaiting trial both for his own safety (lest he be physically pummeled by his fellow Marines), or to keep him from molesting the lads who were of the "straight bent"... The only fly in the ointment was our lack of available fuel dead-lining our unit vehicles. The brig<sup>2</sup> was some miles from the Division

Headquarters, so we worked out a compromise. Since the lad hadn't (yet) attempted to foist his attentions onto any of his barracks mates, and *seemed* harmless, we decided to restrict him to quarters awaiting the results of our investigation. Murphy of course had other plans...

It seems that our suspected sexual deviate managed to slip past the gate security and headed to the town of Kadena, Okinawa for a little weekend liberty.

For those who haven't spent any time on Okinawa, I will give a short course on Kadena. The "ville" of Kadena (as opposed to the Air Force Base) had a number of hotels that had been home to the stewardesses flying in and out of "The Rock"<sup>3</sup> on the "Freedom Birds"<sup>4</sup> hauling the fortunate escapees from Vietnam back to the Land of the Big PX. By 1973, the commercial Airline Traffic had begun to slack off, but there were still many meeting rooms available in the various hotels, and they tended to attract parties and social gatherings.

### **Back to the Habus:**

As mentioned before, the SR-71 aka Habu was a super secret aircraft assigned to fly spy mission over the territory of our perceived enemies. Personnel of the Habu Squadron had been subjected to so many security checks, that they were considered squeaky clean, and the slightest suspicion of any wrong doing was grounds for transfer if not incarceration in Leavenworth. Well, squeaky clean or not, even Habu Squadrons get the urge to let off a little steam occasionally, and so it was that weekend in the early spring of 1973. The SR-71 Squadron had decided to throw an unannounced "bash" in one of the Kadena Hotels. Needless to say, this was not a highly publicized party, and no signs adorned the doors announcing the identity of the attendees. Since everyone was wearing civilian clothes, and no one was wearing identifying patches, this outfit was not clearly not identifiable as a gathering of spooks!

As luck would have it, our suspected deviate Marine was wandering through the Hotel when he detected the sounds of mirth and merry-making, punctuated with the clink of glasses. ...and out of pure curiosity he stuck his head in the door. There standing in the center of the room talking to some of his buddies, was the most handsome male-being our apprentice "corksocker"<sup>5</sup> had ever seen. Apparently overcome by his hormones, he simply couldn't resist, and proceeded over to the perceived object of his affections and planted a big sloppy kiss on the unfortunate lad's mouth, complete with a far-reaching tongue! Yetch... It turns out that the "kissee" was one of the most experienced SR-71 Pilots in the squadron, and was absolutely flabbergasted by this unsolicited show of affection by a Marine who had apparently decided to emerge from the closet!

This idiot couldn't have stirred up any more trouble if he had thrown a live hand grenade into the party. The pilot didn't know what to say or do, and of course all of his buddies began eyeballing him like he had the plague! Both individuals were immediately restrained, and the Pilot was under immediate suspicion for being a closet homosexual – which as mentioned before would have exposed him to the immediate threat of blackmail. We got a tremendous amount of command attention at Headquarters Company for allowing this deviate out of our sight, and an immediate investigation ensued both from the Marine Corps community, and both the Air Force and Spook community. Some idiot came into the company office yelling that our "wayward-one" had just kissed a Habu pilot. My first question was "What the hell is a Habu Pilot?" as I had never even heard of a Habu at that point except as the descriptive term of an Okinawan Snake. It would be several months before I actually got a gander at a "genuine Habu" taking off from the Kadena runway.

It had become a damned if you do, and damned if you don't situation. Had we decided to waste precious fuel taking a guy to the brig for doing nothing more evil than donning a pair of panty hose, the Colonel would have been outraged. In retrospect of course, the Colonel was outraged that we had *NOT* wasted the gas and thus prevented the little deviate from initiating an investigation that damn near shook the entire SR-71 Program.

While this comes close to being hilariously funny in retrospect, it was anything *but* funny at the time. I continued looking for a deploying Infantry Battalion, except at a much increased pace hoping to exit Okinawa in general, and the Kadena area in particular.

My wish was granted, and I was assigned as the Operations Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. In our wanderings Ray Findlay (the XO of 1/4) and I got into even more hilarious situations in such places as the Philippines, Cambodia and NKP Thailand, but those will have to wait for another time, and other sea-stories. I have always wondered if they turned every nut in the entire Marine Corps loose in the Far East in the 1973-74 time frame...? Of course there was the time that we kept the Air America plane waiting on the runway attempting to escape from Phnom Phen Airstrip while it was loaded with BUFES, MUFES, and LUFES - (Big Ugly F++king Elephants – you fill in the letters on the others, but they have to do with size). The Air America types were more than just a little nervous since the airstrip was being shelled! And of course that was the same evolution when Ray got “a-head” from the Cambodian National Museum (heh, heh, heh...), and then Reggie Ponsford left his dog tags in an NKP steam house and then threatened to punch out the Air Force Security Cops on the gate at NKP for attempting to incarcerate a few wayward Marine Officers for being out past Curfew (who in hell had ever heard of a curfew in a combat zone?). As I said, I think they had emptied the entire Marine Corps “nuthatch” into the Far East in those long ago days! Sigh...

Semper Fi,

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Bastille was the notorious prison in France during the French Revolution. Often used as an alternative term for Brig in the Naval Service.

<sup>2</sup> Brig is a naval term for “slam” or military lockup. This is derived from the old term Brigantine (a type of ship) often used to confine prisoners during the days of sailing ships.

<sup>3</sup> The Rock is a slang term for Okinawa.

<sup>4</sup> Freedom Birds had reference to the Commercial Airlines under contract to the Government for taking the returning veterans from Vietnam back to the United States.

<sup>5</sup> Corksocker is of course, a deliberate misspelling to avoid grossing out our more genteel readers.

# Charlie Reynolds and the “Ishikawa Fuzz”

By Dick Culver

You'd have to have been stationed on Okinawa in 1962 to fully appreciate the following story. While the names of most places have remained (essentially) the same, some of the spelling has been sorted out over the years, but here I will use the spelling we used at the time in telling of the story. Any variation will be noted in the text.

It was the spring of 1962 and those of us chosen to represent our various Regiments, were firing across the Marine Corps Match Course every Monday through Friday in practice for the match that would decide the regimental and individual winners of the Far Eastern Division Match. The individual medal winners would be sent TAD (Temporary Additional Duty) stateside to fire in the Marine Corps Matches.

The individual medal winners (both rifle and pistol) in the Marine Corps Match are then normally chosen to join the Marine Corps Rifle and Pistol Team forming at Quantico. The summer consists of constant practice, and match competition to season the new shooters to the match routine and perhaps more to the point, constant competitive pressure under match conditions tends to make sight alignment and trigger squeeze second nature, something that I found came in mightily handy in combat. As the summer progresses, the constant exposure to some of the best marksmen (and now-a-days, women) prepares the team members for the final competitive test of the shooting season, that of the National Rifle and Pistol Matches. These matches have been held at Camp Perry, Ohio since 1903, if you allow for a few breaks for WWII and Korea. The “Nationals” as they are called, pit each armed service, and their Reserve and National Guard Components against one another. Not to be outdone, there is also some stiff competition from the civilian side of the house with each state entering a team, along with a number of extremely hard-holding individuals who give the military a run for their money.

In the Marine Corps each year, we publish a bulletin (it used to be in the 8591 series) soliciting participation from each (any?) individual who has fired at least Sharpshooter with the rifle during his last qualification on the range. The Marine Corps order is specific and unless overriding operational needs can be produced, each qualifying applicant must be granted his opportunity for honor and glory. Officers are not so lucky, as they are appointed by each Battalion and Regiment to represent the Regimental Team. He (or *she* now-a-days) must meet the Rifle Sharpshooter qualification requirement (no qualification requirement with the pistol), but since Marine Corps orders require that each Regiment (and separate battalion) field a team, there is little or no way off the list once you are captured.

Match rules specify that each Regimental (*and* Separate Battalion – Engineers, Recon, Tanks, etc.) must have a team that consists of at least one Officer, one (totally) “new man” who had never fired in the Division Matches before, and two other folks who can be old time shooters. The composition of this line-up is specified to ensure that the Officer Corps becomes acquainted with the competition-in-arms program (this worked well until the Vietnam War kicked off a rash of Warrant Officer [former enlisted of course] that skewed the program a bit). Back in 1962 however, this did not apply! The so-called “new enlisted man” insured a yearly infusion of “new blood” into the program to keep the Competition-in-Arms from becoming a collection of old goats and range rats! The program as set up worked very

well indeed, and many of our Distinguished Shooters over the last century have gone on to become quite famous and highly decorated in the combat arena<sup>1</sup>.

I have gone through the evolution of personnel selection for the Marine Corps Matches to let you understand the final portion of this sea story. On to the story –

Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines was stationed at Camp Hansen, I simply continued to occupy my assigned BOQ room even though the matches were being held at Camp Schwab that year (some miles to the North). Those that came in from other locations from many Far Eastern Commands, were assigned local quarters for the matches. If you happened to be stationed at Schwab, your daily trip was negligible, but if you happened to be stationed at Sukiran (later spelled Zukiran, now included under the umbrella of Camp Foster) you had a long drive indeed, considering the first round cracked down range at first light.

### **Enter Charlie Reynolds:**

Now Charlie was an aviator and was stationed in Japan. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing was also required to enter a team, and because of Charlie's skill with a rifle, he was sent down to "The Rock" as the OIC of the Wing Team. Most of the "imported shooters" allowed themselves to be billeted at Camp Schwab, but for some unknown reason (probably to take advantage of some fine liberty opportunities) Charlie made liaison with one of his old "wingie" buddies stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station, Futenma (essentially a helicopter installation to support the deploying Infantry Battalions – we unwashed "grunts" used to spell it Futema). Since his buddy was deploying with one of the Infantry outfits, he loaned Charlie his BOQ room *AND* his car (a junker as most were in those days).

Now the Air Station was even further south than Sukiran/Foster, which made for a *VERY* long drive to get to Schwab in time to crack the first round down range at "zero dark thirty." Further complicating things was the fact that the road system was extremely primitive in those days, and at best they were narrow two-lane affairs. High speed runs were hazardous, but the extremely early hour was in Charlie's favor. ...Or would have been if it hadn't been for one lonely, extremely bored Okinawan Cop who was stationed in the Ishikawa Beach area.

Ishikawa Beach is *now* a thriving resort area along the road from Futenma to Camp Schwab, but was relatively sparsely inhabited over 43-years ago. By the time Charlie had his "fivver" wound up heading for the range, Ishikwaka represented a relatively straight piece of road leading to Schwab. One morning, the aforementioned Dink Police Officer in question, noted a round-eye attempting to set some sort of new speed record driving through his assigned stretch of road. A short chase ensued and Charlie pulled over. The dutiful cop wrote out a ticket for the offending Marine lieutenant, Charlie signed it, stuffed it in the glove box and lit his afterburners once more for the Schwab Range.

If this had been a one-time thing, it would have no doubt gone unnoticed, but it became something of a game and gave the Ishikwaka Fuzz a meaning to his dreary existence! Virtually every morning this lone traffic cop would lay in wait for Charlie, and over a period of about 4-weeks, he was never disappointed. Charlie, never being one to let minor stuff bother him, would sign the daily ticket, stuff it in the glove box and kick in his afterburners again. As far as I know, Charlie was never late which has to say something for his driving skills, or perhaps aviation reflexes. His accumulating police record certainly didn't seem to worry him,

as he was his usual jovial self every day. Charlie had a large repertoire of jokes and funny sayings that kept us all amused. None of us were aware of Charlie's brushes with the local gendarme.

As luck would have it, Charlie "placed" in the rifle in the matches, resulting in his selection to fire in the Marine Corps Match back in the States. Charlie of course, packed his utilities and liberty clothes, spiffed up his old friend's BOQ room, made sure the car he had borrowed was appropriately cleaned out, topped it off with gas and had plenty of oil. Since his buddy was still deployed there was no personal change of command effected on either the room or the car. The only thing Charlie *hadn't* cleaned out was the glove box in the car. When Charlie departed he left a nice note thanking his buddy for the use of the room and vehicle, but didn't mention the fact that the vehicle had continually been used to flagrantly violate the Ryukyuan traffic regulations for over a month.

I only heard the results of this little debacle a couple of years later, having taken a hiatus from the shooting arena for several years, and being stationed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District Headquarters in New Orleans, had little or no contact with the Wing. Eventually however, there was a story floating around that indicated a temporary rift in friendly relations that had occurred between Charlie Reynolds and his old buddy stationed at the Futenma Marine Air Facility. Apparently this had something to do with a recently returned helicopter pilot being actively pursued by the Dink Police who noted that the Marine Corps' total disregard for Okinawan laws was hardly conducive to harmonious relations between the conquerors and the conquered. In short they wanted a large piece of one Marine Lieutenant's fanny, and apparently they didn't much care who it was, but they had signed tickets that matched the license number of the automobile in question.

How this dilemma was finally solved never became totally clear, but a certain personal iciness in an interpersonal relationship between two former friends precluded any further loaning of lodging facilities and personal transportation for several years. Did Charlie's buddy become the subject of any NJP as a result of Charlie's shenanigans? I rather doubt it, as in 1962 the local residents of Okinawa were still remembered as a part of Japan, the rotten SOBs who had chosen to bomb Pearl Harbor... What goes around, sometimes comes around, don'tcha' see? Heh, heh, heh...

'Till we meet again Charlie...

Semper Fi,

**Dick**



<sup>1</sup> At least two Marine Corps Commandants have been Distinguished Shooters. Tommy Holcomb was one of the Corps' earliest Distinguished Marksmen and served as the "Inspector of Marksmanship" for the Corps. He was a member of the Marine Corps Rifle Teams of 1901, 1902, 1903, 1907, 1908, and 1911, and was a shooting member of the Palma Rifle Team in 1902 and 1903. As a Major, Holcomb won a Navy Cross and four Silver Stars in the Belleau Wood and later actions, being mentioned three times in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Dispatches. The French Government conferred on him the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and three times awarded him the Croix de Guerre with Palm.

Colonel Dave Shoup, the defacto commander ashore at Tarawa won a Medal of Honor for his exploits, and following the war chose to fire in the Division Matches to become a Distinguished Pistol Shot. Shoup's main assistant ashore was a Marine Major named Jim Crowe (who wore a most spectacular red handlebar moustache) was a double distinguished shooter, and was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on Tarawa. Like the redoubtable Colonel Bill Lee, Crowe had been a Marine Corps heavyweight boxing champion. Both Shoup and Crowe played themselves in the movie "The Sands of Iwo Jima"...

Red Mike Edson, CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Raider Battalion was a Distinguished Marksman who captained several USMC Rifle Teams at Camp Perry prior to WWII. He had a Navy Cross from Nicaragua, and won another on Guadalcanal. His defense of Bloody Ridge (Edson's Ridge) resulted in his being awarded the Medal of Honor.

Chesty Puller's Gunnery Sergeant in Nicaragua was a certain Bill Lee who won three (3) Navy Crosses prior to WWII. Bill eventually made Bird Colonel and had been the heavy weight champion of the fleet as a Gunnery Sergeant while stationed on a coal burning battleship.

Major General W.H.Rupertus, the author of the Rifleman's Creed still taught in Boot Camp, was a Double Distinguished shooter. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on Guadalcanal and was in charge of the Marines on Peleliu

Brigadier General LWT Waller, Jr. was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions at Belleau Wood as the CO of the 6<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion. General Waller had won his Distinguished Rifle Badge in 1913, and captained several United States International Teams following WWI.

Carlos Hathcock, noted Distinguished Marksman and winner of the Wimbledon Cup (the long range Championship of the United States) went on to become one of the Corp's most noted snipers with 93 confirmed kills. It is rumored that he accounted for the demise of more than three hundred of the enemy in two tours in Vietnam.

Colonel Wesley Fox, also a Medal of Honor recipient during Vietnam, shot with me at the Eastern Division Matches at Camp Lejeune in 1965 as a Master Sergeant.

The thrust of my dissertation concerning Marine Corps Rifle (and Pistol) Competition is that the ability to shoot one's service arms does *not* place individuals wearing the appropriate badges in the "pansy" category. As I once told my roommate during the Division Matches when he mentioned what a great "sport" rifle shooting was. I told him that I never looked through my rifle sights that I didn't see some dink's head sitting on my front sight blade! He said something to the effect that I was one sick puppy, but I make no apologies...

# Lieutenant Kaag and the Sleeping Indian

By Dick Culver

This one is a tribute to the paranoid mindset of the military brass. It started when (then) Second Lieutenant Donald B. Kaag reported to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division and was subsequently assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion, then located at Camp Hansen, Okinawa. Now Don wasn't your everyday 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, being 27-years old, and a former enlisted Marine who had at one time been scheduled to attend the Naval Academy.

The hate and discontent in Southeast Asia had given off the unmistakable whiff of burning cordite, and Don decided to quit his preparatory studies for Canoe U. and volunteer for the beckoning jungle environs of former French Indochina. Being assigned to a rather hush-hush radio relay unit, his (and his unit's) actual service is not well documented, but his experiences subsequently left him with a rather perverted sense of humor, and a sometimes overpowering urge to gently screw with the powers-that-be. The following story may or may not have been a deliberate attempt to leave the command structure scratching their heads, but none the less, deliberate or not, the effect was the same!

Before departing for the "Rock" in mid-1972, Don had ensconced his bride in one of the most picturesque locations in the entire United States, Jackson Hole, Wyoming. To get the gist of the story, a bit of local terrain appreciation is necessary for the reader not familiar with the area. It is located in a high mountain valley, with the Grand Teton Mountains on the Western Side, and nestled in by the Sapphire Mountains on the Eastern Side. Many movies have been set in the Teton Mountain area including such classics as *Shane*. It is truly spectacular country if nothing else – however it does have one characteristic that keeps the area from being overrun by fleeing Californians, it snows – a lot! As beautiful an area as it is, the snow sorta' acts as flea-repellent to those who would change it into a socialist paradise. Thank the 'Weather Gods' for small favors.

Like all locals, the old timers of Jackson Hole have various tales that predict the fearsomeness of a coming winter. Little things, like extremely long fur on the caterpillars (somewhat reminiscent of "Oracle Jones" in the movie *"The Hallelujah Trail"*)<sup>1</sup>, or the squirrels storing more nuts than usual, are said to be sure-fire indicators to lay in a goodly supply of firewood. One legend the Jackson Hole residents *HAVE* agreed upon over the years however, is a bit more understandable. It seems that one mountain rock formation on the Sapphire Mountain side of the valley, has the appearance of an Indian laying on his back in a supine position. It may take a bit of imagination to see it clearly, but this one has a universal consensus of being a resting (if not sleeping) Native-American (heh, heh, heh). Local lore has it that early snow on "The Sleeping Indian" is indicative of an early winter – it would certainly make sense to me, sorta' like opining that the river is rising when your feet are getting wet. Considering various local legends, early snow on the Sleeping Indian falls into the same niche as the Groundhog seeing (or not seeing) his shadow on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Now that we have set the stage, on to the story that inadvertently set the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion's brass glancing and whispering.

Don's wife was sitting by herself in Wyoming and pondering the length of her husband's deployment. Since this was their first lengthy separation since tying the nuptial knot, she was a faithful correspondent, and included many of the local goin's-on and small talk, because it made her feel closer to her other half. Low and behold, one morning she saw the infamous

harbinger of an early winter; the snoozing Redskin had a snow comforter! Since sending this tidbit by normal mail would have made the hot (cold?) news old-hat by the time he received it in the normal course of things. Being new to the Corps and extended separations, she used the universally accepted method of semi-instant communications, *the Western Union Telegram!*<sup>2</sup>

What she DIDN'T realize was that when telegrams are sent to deployed service members with an APO or FPO address, they enter the military communications channels, and are delivered much like any military message. Normally, telegraphic communications to deployed service members were reserved for emergencies including such things as births, deaths, or serious illness in the immediate family, *and* sent by some sort of official agency such as The American Red Cross. Hot ticket local weather predictions were not the norm for military message traffic! It's not illegal, but tying up the message center with trivia is not generally considered to be good ju-ju. It's hard to fault a naive young wife however, and the received message was cryptic enough to avoid an immediate fanny chewing by the local Commanding Officer.

Don got a summons from his company commander, with instructions to immediately report to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion, Commanding Officer. Upppssss... A second lieutenant being sent to report to a Battalion Commander? Such a summons for a young Lieutenant is not considered to a good thing, and he was a bit apprehensive when he checked with the adjutant. The adjutant informed Don that the Colonel was awaiting his presence! Uh oh, now what? Upon locking his heels in front of the Battalion CO, Don was handed a military message by the Colonel who had a quizzical look on his face. The message read:

### **SNOW ON THE SLEEPING INDIAN LAST NIGHT**

Now Don knew exactly what the message meant of course, but the Colonel certainly didn't. The cryptic message no doubt conjured up visions of the message traffic sent to and by the Partisans in the French Underground prior to the Normandy invasion – such things as “Pierre has a long moustache” and other enigmatic communications. These messages of course had meaning to the partisans, but would be total gibberish to the German intelligence folks. Since the major part of Don's message was filled with the obligatory military acronyms and message routing, the originator of the message was not immediately obvious.

Absolutely brimming over with curiosity, the Colonel asked Don if there was anything he wanted to tell him? Don having an absolutely evil sense of humor as noted above, and being quick in his mental machinations, came up with the perfect answer. “No sir, but this is very good news!!” With that a relatively long-of-tooth 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant took the appropriate two paces to the rear, did a smart about face and headed back to the company area.

As in any military organization, it didn't take long for the word to spread that Lieutenant Kaag was some sort of “spook” as opposed to a standard, M1A1 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. What else would fit the profile? Being somewhat smarter than the average Bear, Don kept his mouth shut, and conveyed the message that most of ‘em *wanted* to believe with a occasional knowing smile, and exuding an aura of “clandestineness”. Since everyone *wants* to know a “spook”, his contemporaries simply filled in the blanks for themselves. Don's status as just another brown-bar was over, and all hands, including the CO, treated him with a bit of deference as would befit a member of a “three lettered” intelligence community!

Some months later, I became Don's Company Commander<sup>3</sup> when he was assigned to III MAF, and have kept in contact with him over the years. He later retired as a Lieutenant

Colonel in the Army Reserve establishment, having served with the Army tankers for several tours including one in Germany.

Don continued his education and is now a high school history teacher in Moscow, Idaho a stone's throw from Coeur d'Alene, and the home of the University of Idaho. I would rather imagine that his history classes have a unique flavor, nudging ever so slightly towards a strict interpretation of the Constitution.

Semper Fi,

*Dick*

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The movie *The Hallelujah Trail* was the story of the residents of Denver panicking due to a prediction by the local seer (Oracle Jones) who had noted that the fur on the caterpillars was longer than usual, thus foretelling a long winter. It was feared that Denver might get snowed in, cutting off their supply of hooch. The prediction by "Oracle" caused the locals to send for a wagon train loaded with liquor to ward off the winter chills. The Army was sent to guard the train. The Women's Christian Temperance Union organized another wagon train to stop the delivery. A truly fun movie, with Burt Lancaster, Lee Remick (head of the WCTU), Jim Hutton (the straight man for Lancaster), and Donald Pleasance as "Oracle" Jones. The Indians of course have their own column bent on hijacking the booze on the wagon train. Check Amazon to acquire a copy of this little jewel.

<sup>2</sup> None of this would have occurred in the modern era of course, but then e-mail didn't become the de facto means of instant communications that began to emerge in the 1990s and is now a fact of life. In the early 1970s the thought of communicating with your family from the Far East with a lap-top computer would have fallen into the same realm as Buck Rogers.

<sup>3</sup> For several months I served as CO of Headquarters Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, a job I cordially hated, but it did have some perks in that I was also the Company Commander of the Commanding General (naw, don't ask, it's too complicated and not worthy of a detailed explanation). I worked my bolt until I was finally assigned as the S-3 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and got a trip to Phnom Phen from the assignment. All things come to he who sits and waits!

# Black Jack Westerman

Dick Culver

Now here's a name that brings back memories – lots of 'em! He was a Marine's Marine, and was held in at least awe by virtually all those with whom he came in contact. Many senior officers were not impressed (primarily I think because they weren't in his league), but certainly they didn't have the chutzpa to mention it in his presence. He was a legend in the Corps, and no matter what your personal opinion of his talents, he was all Marine. Black Jack was also alternatively called "Evil Black Jack" or perhaps a few more unmentionable sobriquets, but whatever else he was, Black Jack was a man to ride the river with.

There are many stories that followed him around the Corps, all of them designed to get your attention and hold it. He had been commissioned from the ranks in 1949 and had headed to Korea in time to make Pusan Perimeter, and the Inchon Landing. He and another of my favorite Commanding Officers, John Counselman, had traded command of the same Platoon, one commanding it while the other was in the hospital on several occasions. Both had been awarded the Navy Cross while commanding the same unit. It was probably a truly salty platoon that emerged from the first year of the Korean unpleasantness. The story went that Jack had made the Pusan Perimeter when the Brigade was thrown in from Hawaii, and he had been one of those who had stemmed the tide of the North Korean Army when their less prepared sister service units had been badly used up, primarily due to a lack of training, and perhaps at least partially due to a lack of suitable equipment. The Marines, always being short of equipment, felt right at home, and as the old Houseman poem went:

*"...Their shoulders held the sky. suspended;  
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay."*

The Marine Brigade saved the Pusan Perimeter and were then pulled out and embarked on shipping for Inchon. Jack had a humongous scar on his left arm that went from his wrist to his elbow and had obviously once been a gaping wound. At a party held at his quarters I once asked him about it, and his comments were short but to the point. He explained that they had been on the lines so long (this was during the Pusan evolution) that the entire platoon was essentially asleep on their feet. Jack positioned the platoon and spent several hours checking the lines to make sure everyone was awake. After his third pass, and finding everyone in a semi-catatonic state, he decided to get a couple of hours of sleep himself. Pulling his poncho over his head, and using several large rocks to anchor it against the wind, he quickly dozed off only to become aware of some activity outside his makeshift digs. A glance from under the poncho showed a pair of tennis shoes, and since the Marines wore no such footwear, Jack assumed that it must be the Zips. He felt around for his Carbine, making sure he didn't disturb his poncho in such a manner as to attract undue attention. Unfortunately his weapon wasn't conveniently within his grasp without alerting the North Korean. Suddenly the tennis shoe clad Zip bayoneted Jack in the left arm. Now Jack was a BIG man and not easily subdued by one lone Korean. Jack grasped one of the rocks he was using to hold his



**Black Jack  
Westerman**

poncho down, and grabbed the hapless assailant, and beat the guy to death with the rock. He bound his wound as best he could in the dark and then rolled over and finished his nap before seeking medical attention.

Jack was eventually medivaced from Korea with a serious back injury (I never got the exact particulars on that malady) and sent to the Naval Hospital in Bremerton, Washington. Once he was out of danger, he was encased in a sizeable body cast that went from his waist to his shoulders, allowing only minimal arm movement. His wife, understanding soul that she was, smuggled a very large Hawaiian Sport Shirt into his hospital room. A pair of scissors and some judiciously hidden safety pins readied Jack for his first night on liberty since the Pusan Perimeter action. He was apparently able to hoist a brew even with his "pinioned arms" and was well into his second glass of suds when some loud-mouthed civilian at the bar for reasons unknown, started bad mouthing the Marines. The story goes that Jack listened to several of these diatribes before telling the individual to shut the #\$%& up or he (Jack) was gonna' kick his fanny up between his shoulder blades. His antagonist, now well fortified with "the grape" himself, took one look at the wounded, but sizeable, Marine and laughed, thinking he was safe! He apparently did not see the look in the eyes of a gentleman who had once beaten his antagonist to death with a rock! Seeing only a guy in a body cast, he continued haranguing Jack and the Marine Corps. BAD MISTAKE! The story goes that Jack came after him, pinned him to the bar with his cast and bit his nose off! There are several other versions of course, one of which has Jack biting his ear off, but the outcome was the same! Lesson? Don't mess with or underestimate Jack Westerman!

Years passed, and I had yet to meet Black Jack Westerman. While I had about 12-years time in the Corps by 1965, I had just left 3-years stationed in New Orleans at the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District Headquarters, a job I cordially hated. Until my exile in New Orleans, I had been alternatively an Artilleryman, an Infantry Type and had spent a tour in the old First Force Reconnaissance Company. Needless to say, I viewed any sort of administrative assignment with an extremely jaundiced eye. I would have been tickled to have been assigned to an I&I Staff *training* Reservists, but these headquarters clowns had me signing discharges. Hell, if I'd have wanted to be a clerk, I'd have gone to work at Woolworth's! I had great respect for the reserves themselves (they had done yeoman service in Korea and were our backup in the event of a major dust-up), but being a SLJO in the District Headquarters shuffling papers was beyond the pale!

Service with the Reserve District Headquarters was not one of my career highlights, but at last I had finished my tour, gotten out of purgatory and been reassigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. My original orders had been to report to the Division during the last half of May of '65, but in order to escape my lingering damnation, I volunteered to shoot the Eastern Division Rifle Matches, which sprung me a couple of months early from the District Headquarters. Since the Matches were located in the same geographical area as my new assignment, I thought I had beaten the system by a bit.

"Odin" has a strange sense of humor and by the grace of the almighty I managed to place in the Division Matches and was selected to fire both in the Marine Corps Matches and subsequently to shoot with the Rifle and Pistol Team that summer. While I enjoyed demonstrating my erstwhile skill with my assigned enemy-repelling ordnance, I had never been a range rat, but rather tried to time my shooting sessions between FMF assignments. Well, it worked, but rather than simply allowing me to return to Lejeune following my Summer of shooting, I got orders to report back to New Orleans and spend still another month away

from my beloved Corps. My original orders had me assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Regiment, but when I finally reported in to the Division in October, my original billet in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines had been filled. The Division Headquarters personnel folks however were thrilled to see that I had some Reconnaissance experience since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion was short of officers. By pure chance, I had become a welcome billet filler.

By mid 1965, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division was approaching the status of a “casual organization”, and was essentially being used as a manpower replacement pool for the units assigned to the Republic of Vietnam. Being a soldier by trade, I was literally chomping at the bit to “kill a Commie for Mommy” as the saying used to go! I was NOT amused at becoming a billet filler in a replacement pool.

The personnel officer at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division asked me if I had ever heard of a Lieutenant Colonel named Jack Westerman? I politely answered “no”, with a quizzical look on my face. He chuckled and said something to the effect, that I would probably welcome a set of orders to Wes Pac once I had served my time with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion. I left scratching my head, wondering what he meant! I was soon to find out.

Upon getting past the Battalion Adjutant at 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon and being ushered into the Commanding Officer’s Office, I was greatly impressed by one of the most imposing gents I had ever seen. He was seated, but even then, the fact that he had one elbow on each corner of his desk without stretching, bore witness to his size. His face was inscrutable, but bespoke of much service. He was deeply tanned and one cheek was adorned with what appeared to be a full set of tiger claw marks, Hummm... I was literally speechless, something unusual for me. He looked up and I imagine expected me to be somewhat taken aback, his expression while not exactly menacing, was anything but friendly.

Since I was wearing my greens with what few dangles I had garnered, I felt somewhat undressed while viewing Jack Westerman’s multiple rows of ribbons topped off with a Navy Cross. To say I was impressed would have been an understatement. I wasn’t sure what was coming next, but I guarantee that my fanny was appropriately puckered.

He made the obligatory welcoming remarks, and finished off saying “so you’re one of those damned “dingers”, eh?” Now being known as a “dinger” or a “range rat” was anything but a compliment as it bespoke of individuals who were suspected of avoiding field duty by ensconcing themselves on one of the Rifle Teams. While I have always disliked the term “dinger” except when used in a joking manner, I decided to attack!

“Well sir, no I’m not a range rat, and I have always considered myself a Marine who knew how to shoot, not a shooter who only came to the FMF when dragged off the range! I’ve always looked at shooting as practicing my skill at arms, and I never see a bullseye when I look through the sights, I always see some dink’s head sitting on my front sight blade!”

Black Jack stood up with what “could have” passed for an evil smile, and said, “welcome to my battalion captain!” Apparently I had chosen the only words that would have favorably “tweaked his trigger” (sorry for the pun), and we initially became friendly adversaries... He was playing wait and see, but it was a decent start.

I made sure that everything he asked, I did with 110% effort and he would occasionally call me in the office and ask how things were going. Most of the rest of the Battalion Officers

made an overt effort to stay in “hull defilade” when the Colonel was out and about, but I began to enjoy trading friendly barbs with him, and often he would smile back, but always seemingly awaiting some inadvertent screw-up. I was determined not to give him one.

Time passed and my company (A Company) was selected to take a full compliment of troops (some extra bodies were pirated from the other companies including some 6-month reservists) down to the Army’s Jungle School in Panama. Now I was blessed with an outstanding Officer and some fine NCOs. Since we were almost operating in a cadre status, I had only one other officer, my XO, a second Lieutenant named Skip Hartnett, and Sergeant Francis A. McGowin (of *McGowin and the Buckets* fame) as my acting Company Gunnery Sergeant.

Hartnett had been commissioned from the ranks as a corporal, **out** of A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion some months before, the very self-same outfit to which he had been reassigned upon reporting back to the FMF (an unheard of procedure at the time, but then we were in a shooting war, and the ranks were thinning out). He was not without some previous military experience as he had put in some time at the Citadel, and was a Scuba School graduate. When Skip decided to quit the Citadel and try his hand at real soldiering, he told his grandmother, a very proper lady of the Charleston, South Carolina society, what he had done. She reportedly looked at him in horror, and said, you didn’t use your **real name** did you? Skip’s Grandmother was from a different and perhaps more genteel era!

When Skip reported back into the Recon Battalion, Westerman asked if he’d like to be assigned to a different outfit since he had just been commissioned out of A Company, some months before. The feeling was that it might be a bit awkward to work with his former enlisted friends as a newly commissioned officer.

“Nope,” says Skip, “the troops all knew I was a SOB when I left, and I ain’t changed a bit!”

McGowin of course needs no introduction, but by now was sporting a handlebar moustache (again unheard of at the time) and had it waxed to perfection reportedly lubricated with “Cramer’s Firm Grip”. It was becoming obvious that Skip, Mac and I were all renegades, and that suited Black Jack right down to the ground! The other senior NCO heading to Panama with us was First Sergeant Martin, probably the only true gentleman in the group. As the old observation of the Artillerymen goes, Martin lent dignity to what otherwise would have been a vulgar brawl!

One afternoon I got a call from the Battalion Headquarters to get up to see the Colonel immediately. Scratching my head, I grabbed my cover and beat-feet for the Colonel’s office. Colonel Westerman wanted to know how my plans were progressing for the deployment to Central America.

“Fine,” I told him, “we’re all set!”

“Oh yeah,” sez the old man, manifesting a thinly disguised sneer, “what sort of briefing are you going to give the General before you shove off?” thinking he had caught me in some sort of lapse of preparation.

“Again not a problem,” sez I, “I’ve already got the briefing ready to go! (lying in my teeth).”



“Oh yeah?, let’s hear it... Now!”

“Uppsssss...”

Now anyone who knows me very well, knows that if I have *anything* going for me is the ability to think on my feet, and verbal tap-dances to cover the appropriate situation tend to flow naturally. I was gonna’ need this dubious talent in spades this time. I covered what **I** would have wanted to hear if I were the CG, and gave Black Jack what I considered to be a decent briefing. The Colonel looked up at me somewhat amazed, and said, “What sort of vehicle are you going to take to Panama?” I told him a PC (Personnel Carrier), and Westerman said, “ya’ see! I knew you were gonna’ forget something!” But he was slightly smiling when I left his inner-sanctum. Once again, I had ducked the poison dart, and the Colonel loved it. One thing he truly admired was someone who could make his brags and then produce – in many ways, Black Jack and I were two of a kind! Whew...

## FADE TO PANAMA AND RETURN

After a month long adventure that has many McGowin and Hartnett stories that will be told separately, we were waiting on the jungle airstrip for our C-130 to show up. While we were cooling our heels, one of my Corpsmen came over to me with a sand bag that was suspiciously squirming. *Squirming?* Hummm...

“Skipper,” says the Doc, “what should I do with these?”

“These? These *WHAT?*”

“Why our Boa Constrictors,” he says with an innocent look on his face.

“Boa Constrictors? *What* Boa Constrictors? What in the hell are you gonna’ do with Boa Constrictors and where in the hell did you get ‘em?”

“Sir we traded the “*San Blas*” Indians out of ‘em! We’re gonna’ take ‘em back to the *Field Medical Research Lab*” he said proudly!

“Geesch! Well, I never wanna’ stand in the way of science, tie the bag up with some parachute cord and stash it under the seat of the PC!”

“Skipper,” came a voice in a stage whisper, “the Colonel’s gonna’ be pissed!”

“Really?” I said, “why?”

“Well, I heard rumors that the Colonel says that the next outfit that comes back with snakes from Panama is gonna’ get their @\$ \$ handed to ‘em!”

“Uh Oh...”

Well, the only way to handle this is to keep my mouth shut and feign ignorance and stupidity – in this case, he’ll believe both! We are soon winging our way back to Cherry Point. When we arrive it’s about 2100 on a Saturday Night, and the kids haven’t been on liberty for a month. To say that they were anxious to get off for a little time in the ville, and back to their

families is an understatement. We had only one fly in the ointment! One duty-struck, and mightily “urinated-off” customs agent who had been extricated from his night in front of the TV to shake down a Marine Recon Company returning from the jungles of Central America. He went out of his way to express his displeasure by being what can only politely be described as overzealous!

This clown had every personal bag and pack field-stripped on the tarmac, and even deflated the spare tire on the PC to make sure we weren’t smuggling some unnamed contraband back from the Canal Zone. After about an hour and a half, he had discovered a grand total of nothing, and was figuring what he could do next to make sure we didn’t remember this as a pleasurable experience!

He finally gets into the cab of the truck. Being thorough, he goes through the glove box and finally sticks his hand under the seat of the truck. He is grinning from ear to ear, just knowing his efforts have been successful. He pulls the sandbag out and starts to undo the parachute cord tying the mouth together.

“And just what do we have here?” he says with smug satisfaction.

The boas’ have become lulled into a stupor due to the heat in the aircraft and the droning of the engines, and are not making their presence known... Yet! I had a diminutive and funny Black Marine as a driver who began to see the potential of the situation. At this point the Customs Officer sticks his arm into the bag up to his elbow!

“Suh, dem’s *Fur de’ Lances*,” he says with a thinly suppressed hint of humor surfacing! The officious idiot’s hand had just contacted the coiled bodies of the snoozing serpents!

“Oh \$hit,” he says with some small concern evidenced in his voice (some would use the term “*panic-stricken*”!).

Now I don’t to this day know if it is (or was) legal to import snakes into the country, but urban legend says that cold-blooded varmints are exempt from vet checks or animal control! Whatever the reason, the Federal “animal control officer” decided enough was enough, tied the bag (tightly) back together and stuck it back under the seat. With a dismissive wave of his hand he indicated that his inspection was over! I could have kissed my driver, and sorely wished I had a camera handy when the “duty-struck” customs type felt the snakes in the bag!

Black Jack never found out about our “snake importing” enterprise, or if he did he didn’t mention it. For several months thereafter however, there was a ceremonial “snake feeding” session at the BAS (Battalion Aid Station) on Friday afternoons when the “chancre-mechanics” fed white mice to the newly welcomed battalion members (the boas) from the jungle expanses of Panama. To the best of my knowledge, the Boas never made it to the Navy’s Field Medical Research Lab, but since Black Jack never mentioned the incident, I decided to keep my mouth shut.

Several other stories about the snakes floated about including when they escaped in Skip’s quarters after he poured them out on the deck the night we got back, sending the girls onto the couch. The confused Boas then crawled down into the heat ducts for warmth – it was late January, and such asylum was perfectly natural for a jungle raised snake. The following Monday the base maintenance folks fled for their lives telling Miss Kay (Skips

Memsahib) that they'd be back when "serpent control" had finished extricating her pets (we figured that tactical self preservation dictated not leaving the snakes in the Battalion Area until Monday morning when we were there to supervise their integration into battalion's daily routine).

## BACK TO BLACK JACK

Winter oozed into Spring and Skip departed on his first Med Deployment as a platoon commander, and I was left with my faithful First Sergeant and McGowin to hold down the fort, when I was again summoned into the Black Jack's inner-sanctum. By now we had displaced from our old base at Montford Point, and relocated to Onslow Beach. The serpent incident had subsided somewhat, so I wasn't expecting any undue flack.

"Culver," says Black Jack, "I've got a question for you! As you know, we have garnered 2<sup>nd</sup> place in every event we've entered including football, bowling, and other activities, and we've only got one more to go to decide our final standing in the Commanding General's Cup!"

As a note, if you place high enough in each category, you can win the coveted CG's Cup even if you never win a single event, since the entire thing is based on an aggregate score. We were a VERY under-strength Battalion even in peacetime circumstances. ...And we had to compete against every regiment in the Division (a regiment at that time being at about 5000 bodies when fully fleshed out)! The Recon Battalion only went about 600 men during fully manned peacetime strength. It wasn't the quality of the individuals that made the difference under normal circumstances, but rather that you were more likely to find qualified individuals in any line of endeavor from a group of 5000 than one of 600! Black Jack WANTED that cup if for no other reason than to break it off in the fanny of all those who thought he was an unwashed and uncouth (although brave and highly decorated) clod!

I asked what event was left open for us to compete in for the finals?

"Why the Intramural Rifle and Pistol Competition," he says with an innocent look on his face! "Can you take a team out there and get me 2<sup>nd</sup> place?"

"No Colonel, I'm afraid you have the wrong man!" I tell him.

"What?" he says with an extremely disappointed and definitely hostile tone in his voice, "I thought you were an ace rifle shooter?"

"I see what you're driving at Colonel, but if you want 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, get yourself another boy! Now if you want to WIN the thing, then I can probably help you out!"

"You're a smart @\$ \$ little SOB," sez Jack, "Are you telling me we can win the match?"

"Colonel, I don't go into anything to lose, but if you wanna' win, I'll do my best! Never forget there's no second place winner in a gunfight!"

Now Jack knows that so far I have made good on my brags, and is beginning to see the humor in the situation.

“Ok smart @\$\$, how many men do you need to do the job?”

“Four.” sez I “that’s all we’ll need to win the thing! The Intramural Rifle Teams consist of four men.”

“Gawd Damnit,” he says, “why don’t you take everyone you’ll need? The 6<sup>th</sup> Marines have a 30-man team and the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines have a 40-man contingent. I’m not sure how many the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines have, but they have fielded a sizeable team also!”

“The Rifle Team Match is a four man evolution,” I said, “and there’s no need to take a passel of folks out there, they’ll just get in the way!”

“At least take an extra man incase someone gets sick!”

Seeing his logic, I agree to take six including the Corpsman plus a four man pistol team.

“If you screw this up, it’s gonna’ be your fanny!” sez the Colonel! “Who ya’ gonna’ take?”

“Well, I intend to take myself, Sergeant McGowin who’s a hell of a rifle shot, Corporal Foley who’s shot the Division Rifle Matches before, and I’ll take a look at volunteers and pick one who’s a motivated high expert.”

The die was cast and we began to plot our triumphant overthrow of the major Regiments to enshrine Black Jack into the athletic and military skills hall of fame of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. The resultant competition has many individual stories (perhaps better told separately), but McGowin, Foley, I and a young kid named Metze (a high expert, but with no match experience) departed for the range with blood in our eye and gently humming the Marine Corps Hymn.

The entire match was a one week evolution, with what is called “Preliminary Day” fired on Wednesday, Individual Match Day on Thursday, and Team Match Day on Friday. Every day following the firing schedule I was admonished to call the Colonel and give him a report of our progress and some hint of how our eventual standings were stacking up against the Infantry Regiments and all the other Separate Battalions (Tank Battalion, Engineer Battalion, etc.). Having McGowin was a definite plus as he kept the other shooters motivated, and Foley was an old time rifle shooter. Only Metze was an unknown quantity, but he was coming along well. Not only was Mac an outstanding rifle shot, but he was an excellent coach. I made a mental note not to allow him to bury Metze in the sand with a bucket over his head to improve his concentration.

Each day I’d give Black Jack a status report, and acted much like the “*Rothschild Dispatch Riders*” dutifully reporting to Rothschild at the British stock exchange during the Napoleonic Wars. Rothschild would hang his head in apparent sorrow indicating that his riders were bringing news of England’s impending defeat at the hands of Napoleon at Waterloo. Of course nothing could have been further from the truth, and Rothschild publicly sold his shares in the Bank of England as if they were worthless, while his minions on the floor bought them back for pennies on the dollar. By late in the day, Rothschild “owned” England! The scenario was much like this with Black Jack I suspect. He made his bets and hoped I wasn’t whistling Dixie out my posterior.

At a scheduled luncheon on Preliminary Day, I called Jack to report our progress and he asked if we had won the match.

"Well, we did well individually, Mac was high individual, I came in second, Foley third but Metze only came in 10<sup>th</sup>!"

"I knew it," bemoaned the Colonel, "we're gonna' lose!"

"Nope, I have high hopes for the individual match and the team match!" You could almost hear the Colonel's dashed hopes on the telephone!

I called the Colonel the following day after the Individual Match.

"Well," he said with a resigned tone in his voice, "how did you do?"

"Different than yesterday," I replied, "in the individual match, I came in 1<sup>st</sup>, McGowin 2<sup>nd</sup>, Foley 3<sup>rd</sup> and Metze came in 7<sup>th</sup>!" Not too bad for a bobtailed Separate Battalion with only 4 shooters, eh what?"

Not knowing how to handle the news he came back with, "yeah, but you'll probably screw it up in the team match!" but the apprehension in his voice was considerably soothed.

Everything would have gone smoothly in the team match until a very nervous Metze fired his first off hand shot on the wrong target! Now we were sucking wind. We held hard across the rest of the course, but by the time we hit the 500-yard line we were the last team still on the firing line. It was rumored that the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was convinced that they had us beaten, and were already preparing to divide the loot. I was coaching our last two shooters, Mac and Foley, and we were down to the last two shots in the match. Rumors of scores spread like wildfire, and our competitors couldn't wait to get down to tell us that in order to win, each of our last two shooters had to shoot a 5! Hummm... About this time, the Division Commanding General, Major General Orin Simpson, stopped behind our firing point (logical since we were the last team left on the line). General Simpson had stopped by to observe our actions in Panama during our stint in the Jungle School noting that we were acquitting ourselves well, and of course I had briefed him prior to our departure for Central America. We were not an unknown quantity.

"Well," said General Simpson, "how are you guys doing?"

"Winning the Rifle Match General," was my reply.

"Really? You'd better tell the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines! They think they've already won it!"

"General, if you'd be so kind, you'd better tell them to quit dividing the loot, all we need to do to win this thing is shoot one more 5," I said, just as the final target came up with a white spotter in the center!

The General shook our hands and congratulated the team, and I noted with some pleasure that our old curmudgeon, Black Jack, was waiting behind the lines to see the final outcome. I have never figured out if he knew I had called it right, or if he was planning a firing squad behind the Flag Pole! I've never seen that big a grin on the old "knuckle-dragger"

before or since! I think he was more proud of us than I was, and that would have to have been going some! As I said, Westerman was a Marine who admired a man or a team that made good on their “brags” and I truly had a horseshoe shoved up my fanny that Spring Day at Lejeune.

I have many more Westerman stories, but this could easily become a book instead of a sea story, and I’ll save some of them for later.

I suppose our relationship went well, as later in Vietnam, he asked for me by name when he was the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. I’ve always wondered if in some sort of strange way we were two of a kind as I noted before?

I have many fond memories of that fine (if somewhat eccentric) old gentleman. After we had retired, Skip Hartnett was up in North Idaho visiting in the early 1980s, and as usual on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November (the Marine Corps Birthday for those of you not acquainted with USMC Legend and traditions), we had acquired a Marine Corps Birthday Cake, and laid in some Cognac and

Champaign to make “French 75s”. After reading the traditional Birthday Message (to ourselves – Marines are a strange bunch), and cutting the cake with a 16” ’03 Springfield bayonet, we decided to see if we couldn’t run my phone bill up to an unmanageable figure searching for old friends and comrades. Several French 75s into the exercise, we both got to wondering what had happened to the infamous Black Jack Westerman. I recalled hearing that he had retired in Bremerton, Washington (the location where he had bitten the guy’s nose off over 30-years before). We did a directory search and sure enough they did have a Westerman in the phone book so we took a chance.

The gentleman answering the telephone turned out to be Black Jack’s son whom I had known as a wee rug rat in the mid 1960s. He regretfully told me that both his mom and dad had passed away some years before, but we reminisced with some of the old stories. I hung



**General Simpson, CG 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division presenting the winning trophies to the team members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, Spring 1966. General Simpson handing Cpl. Foley his trophy. 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion members are Lt. Col. Black Jack Westerman, Capt. Dick Culver, Corporal Foley, Sergeant Francis A. McGowin, and Corporal Metze. Other teams placing in the competition are in the background awaiting their trophy presentations.**

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division Photo)**

up considerably saddened, I had somehow thought of him as being indestructible. If not truly indestructible, I had pictured him personally subduing an entire enemy Regiment, or throwing himself on a Nuclear Bomb to save those entrusted to his care! I can only imagine the conversation he and St. Peter must have had when he reported to his last muster.

A final thought comes to mind, like the legendary Captain Jimmy Bones of WWI fame and poem, Jack may return from tending the gates of Hell to subdue the latest version of the Hun, it wouldn't surprise me in the least!

More stories later...

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# Black Jack Westerman

## ~ and a Request Mast with General Krulak~

By Dick Culver

In September of 1968 I was assigned to attend the U.S. Army Civic Action and Military Government School in Ft. Gordon, Georgia. I was not thrilled with the assignment. This conjured up visions of serving in the rear with the gear as the old saying went, I and wanted to head for a combat unit in Vietnam, not to serve with an S-5 or G-5 (Civic Action) outfit in a Regiment or Division Headquarters.

Skip Hartnett<sup>1</sup> and I had virtually haunted the assignment branch at HQMC making our desires known for assignment to WesPac<sup>2</sup>. Our first efforts had been greeted with the “shut up and wait your turn” routine” and we would return to Camp Lejeune with a begrudging eye to those who had been so honored. If we had only known! The last time I went up however, they wanted to know when I could be packed? My how times change – the casualty lists were beginning to make the rounds and what had seemed like a great adventure had turned deadly serious almost overnight. Wives were no longer eager for their warrior husbands to go out and perform mighty deeds if it meant becoming a widow and raising a bunch of kids on her own! There’s an old saying that a *Career Marine* looks forward to his next duty station, a *Professional Marine* looks forward to his next shooting situation... The ranks of the true *Professional Marines* seemingly thinned rapidly when the aluminum boxes started coming home.

I had always dreamed of serving as a Rifle Company Commander, and being assigned as a staff pogue was not something that warmed the cockles of my heart. Since it was not in me to deliberately do anything but a workmanlike job in any assigned task, I put my heart into the school, and eventually came out number three in the class. Since we had been entrusted with our own OQRs (Officer Qualification Record - the officer version of a service record book), I cleverly removed the page from *my* record book that chronicled my accomplishments and attendance at the Civic Action and Military Government School. This I filed it away for reinsertion when I got back from Vietnam. Hopefully no one would notice my two month absence from the Corps. I was given a set of orders to Staging Battalion<sup>3</sup> at Camp Pendleton, only to find that Skip (now assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company) had already departed for Pendleton awaiting the formation of the entire 3rd Force Company. I on the other hand, was thrown in with all the other hands heading for Wes Pac. While I was somewhat relieved, I secretly envied Hartnett who was soon to be deployed (as an aside note, I actually beat him into country, but that is something in dispute as to being permanently deployed as opposed to being down there in a TAD duty status).

When I had finished the Staging Battalion phase of training, we were told that 10% of those finishing Pendleton were due to deploy by ship. Knowing the luck of the Irish/unlucky English, I immediately packed my seabag, and we departed on the USNS<sup>4</sup> *LeRoy Eltinge*. While at sea, some of us received advanced notice of our assignments, and I was somewhat thrilled that I had been assigned as a Company Commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. The real thrill was that the Battalion Commander was a certain Lt.Col. Black Jack Westerman, late of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion. I couldn’t have been happier, and was scheduled to join the Battalion on Okinawa, now refitting and preparing to deploy as one of the two floating Battalions known as the SLF (Special Landing Force). Now this was a job



much to my liking, as it promised potential fireworks and was being skippered by one of my favorite Marine officers. A plan was beginning to come together.

## THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MOUSES AND MARINES

Upon reporting to the Regimental Headquarters of the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment<sup>5</sup> (the base unit at the time monitoring the training and deployment of incoming Battalions, and the units providing training for the deploying Marines), I was informed that I had been reassigned from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines to being the CO of A Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion then detailed to conducting raid training for the Battalions being refitted for the Special Landing Force. I of course, was outraged! I beat a straight line for the Regimental Headquarters. The CO of the 26<sup>th</sup> Marines at that time was an old Colonel named J.J. Padley, a veteran of Iwo Jima, who believe that all Marine should served where they are assigned without questioning the wisdom of the assignment. I protested that I would be better suited as a rifle company commander, and he pointed out the my multiple reconnaissance assignments made me the perfect candidate to take over the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade Raid School (then under the cognizance of the 26<sup>th</sup> Marines). He told me in no uncertain terms that he was going to hold me on Okinawa for 6 months and **then** he'd see about getting me down to Vietnam. **I** explained in no uncertain terms that I hadn't requested assignment to SEA<sup>6</sup> to spend half of it sitting on my posterior on Okinawa. He then explained that **HE** was running the outfit, and I'd damned well do what I was told! We did not part friends!

My next stop was Colonel Jack Westerman's BOQ Room. He acknowledged my visit with a hearty handshake and wondered what had taken so long for me get over to see my new Battalion Commander. I regaled him with my tales of sorrow and woe and cursed the entire chain of command that was trying to keep me from serving with 1/4 in general and Colonel Westerman in particular. Black Jack considered the situation for a few moments and asked if I had heard that Lt. General Krulak (Commanding General of FMF Pac) was shortly due on Okinawa for a visit? Being somewhat ignorant of the movements of senior officers, I had to admit that I hadn't heard of such a visit.

Colonel Westerman's solution was simple. He explained that any Marine Officer (or troop for that matter) had the right to "*request mast*"<sup>7</sup> with the CG FMF Pac (or any senior officer) if he was readily available. I considered that for a moment just knowing Black Jack might just possibly have come up with a solution to my unsolvable problem. I headed back to the Regimental Headquarters looking the Regimental Adjutant (an old friend of mine from Basic School days, a Captain named *Mike Salmon*). When I told him of my intent, Mike recoiled in horror (his dad was a retired Marine General from the Aviation Community, and he was not used to bucking the system).

"Dick," he said, "Colonel Padley will have your @\$\$ for this, he was pretty specific in keeping you here for six months. "

"You and I both know the Colonel can't keep me from requesting mast, and I've gotta' give it my best shot!"

"Culver, you're right about getting shot," Mike sez, but in this case I ain't sure we're not talking about the firing squad!"

My request mast request was submitted with Mike shaking his head. You could hear a near nuclear explosion coming from the Regimental Headquarters all the way up to my

Company Office a couple of blocks away. To save tender ears, I will omit the conversation that ensued between Colonel Padley and wata<sup>8</sup>, but it was as masterful fanny chewing as I ever had. I refused to withdraw my request and the Colonel began to plot my demise. Little did I know how deep the evil intent and desire for retribution-in-kind ran when a man pinned on his bird – this however was a lesson I was to learn in spades in the months to come!

I was sitting in my Company Office feeling pretty smug a couple of days later when the phone rang. It was Mike on the ding-wa (Japanese slang for telephone). Not knowing the content of his message, I answered just knowing that he was calling to give me a time for my request mast. Quite the contrary, Mike said in almost hushed tones, “Culver, you’d better dig in deep, General Krulak has just cancelled his trip to Okinawa!”

Uh Oh... my worst nightmare had just materialized. The General isn’t coming and Colonel Padley had made sure that I knew the consequences of my ignoring his explicit orders! I had visions of spending a whole year on Okinawa, and only getting south by requesting an extension of an additional six-months or a year to get to Vietnam as an object lesson! I went back to Colonel Westerman and explained the result of my ill thought out plan of action. He sympathized, but allowed as how it was now out of his hands and it looked like I was going to have to lay in my own nest of thorns.

### **BUT IT AIN’T OVER YET!**

The young lad I had relieved as the Company Commander of A Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Recon Battalion had taken my place as one of Black Jack’s company commanders. I had known the gentleman for quite some time and we often talked. He came to me for advice on how to handle a knuckle dragger like the Black Jack. I gave him my best advice, and he returned almost on a daily basis. Finally he showed up during noon chow one day in somewhat of a panic.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Culver, we were having a skull session sitting around in a circle discussing our solutions to various problems that might arise. His last question was what were our solutions to having to give a “body count” to the higher echelons when asked by Division Headquarters. The Colonel had just gotten through the first three Company Commanders, and was satisfied with absolutely NONE of their answers! What do I do?”

“Well, what solutions did they come up with I asked?”

“Well a couple of ‘em suggested sending troops out to count the bodies, and one suggested that he’d personally go out and count ‘em to verify the correctness of the count! The Colonel was visibly irritated, and made his displeasure known! I’m next, what-in-hell do I tell him?”

I sat back in the chair and grinned. That’s easy was my reply, just listen up and do exactly what I tell ya’. What ya’ tell him is that you intend to verify the count by collecting ears, but specify that in order to get a correct count, you only intend to take left ears to keep from being accused of double counting!

He sat there in disbelief.

“Culver, he’ll kill me if I come up with that sort of cockamamie scheme. He’d think he was dealing with a mad-man.”

"Listen, have I ever given you bum information on Colonel Westerman? Trust me on this one, just tell it exactly like I told you. If he jumps in your fecal matter, tell him "I personally told you to tell him that to see what his reaction would be. It's a win-win situation!"

"Culver, if you screw me up on this, I'll personally come back here and take a few ears!"

"Not to worry," sez I, "I know what I'm talking about! – oh yes, and be sure you come back and tell me how it comes out!"

I had almost forgotten the noon time conversation when the door flew open about 1730 followed by a much relieved Company Commander. I looked up and grinned and asked, "well, how'd it go?"

"**Great!**, " sez Black Jack's new Company Commander, looking greatly relieved.

"The Colonel looked at me with a small smile and said, "not bad, I like it, but no, we can't take ears, the hierarchy will panic it and it'll get lots of unfavorable publicity. Still, I like the way you think!"

"Dick, was Black Jack serious? He wouldn't *really* have had me collected ears would he?"

"No me lad, he was simply testing you to see what sort of testicular fortitude you had. You passed the test in spades! Congratulations!"

"OK now that you have dodged the first bullet, I told the newly indoctrinated Company Commander, I have some more advice for you. If Colonel Jack asks you to do a job, be damned sure you do that and as much more as you are capable of. Level with him, and do the job or die trying. He'd do the same for you. He's a commander worth savoring and you have no idea how much I envy you your job.

By the time Black Jack and 1/4 left the Island, I had conducted a raid school for one of his Rifle Companies, and helped his assigned sniper platoon fit their M14 Rifles with scopes in anticipation of receiving the then new M40 Remingtons. Both the Sniper Platoon Sergeant and his faithful armorer, Sergeant Ted Hollabaugh were old friends of mine and I turned to with a will. Unfortunately I personally never saw Colonel Westerman again, but heard through the grapevine of several Network Reporters that interviewed him for the waiting American Public. He sat with his feet apart, wearing a soft cover and casually dusting the ashes from the end of his cigarette. The more irritating the reporter, the further the ashes would be flicked towards the camera. When the interview was over, he left no question in anyone's mind that he was in Vietnam to finish killing the Commies he hadn't managed to "off" during his time in Korea. If the American public had been listening carefully, they'd have learned a valuable lesson! You go to war to win and that's why he was there! I tried to keep track of Colonel Westerman over the years but circumstances beyond my control kept us apart.

As a final touch to the story, the Hill Fights (881 and 861) at Khe Sanh broke me loose from Padley's curse<sup>9</sup>, and I served on the Special Landing Force Bravo in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines as a Company Commander for 9 thrill packed months before we ever got an in-country base camp, for my last two months. This was the first and only time we gotten hot chow, a shower, and a rack we didn't have to dig (excepting a total of 12 days out of the 9-month SLF tour spent aboard ship)! Life was good!

I still occasionally wonder while puffing a good cigar and quaffing a snifter of Cognac what it would have been like to serve with Colonel Westerman in combat, but of course, it's one of those unanswerable questions that will forever linger in my mind...

## ROC

<sup>1</sup> Skip Hartnett was my Executive Officer of A Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion during Colonel Westerman's reign as the Battalion Commander. He talked me into sending him to Airborne School when I became the Battalion Operations Officer. Skip had always "drooled" over my Gold Jump Wings (well "drooled" might be an exaggeration, but the little drops of saliva often appeared when checking the front of my shirt). Skip had decided he wanted such a sign of individual manly prowess for his own. We did not yet have a silver "Scuba Bubble" in the Naval Service, although Skip had been through Scuba School when he was a Corporal in the Battalion prior to getting commissioned. I shot myself in the foot by sending him to Jump School as almost as soon as he had come back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon, the Corps was starting to form the 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company out at Camp Geiger, and Skip became history although we served together several times following our initial encounter including two tours in Saudi Arabia. After a minimal amount of training, 3<sup>rd</sup> Force was whisked off to Camp Pendleton awaiting a fleshing out in personnel and additional tactical training.

<sup>2</sup> WesPac was a commonly used abbreviation for Western Pacific which included South East Asia and the climes of Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> Staging Battalion was an administrative and training outfit based at Camp Pendleton charged with the preparation of troops who had not yet had the thrill of operating in the wiles of Vietnamese Jungle Fighting. The school phases were usually run by individuals freshly returned from "France's Folly". Courses were given to update everyone's map reading skills, classes on booby traps, the latest weaponry, grenade throwing and radio techniques. It had been many a year since some to the troops who attended had seen combat.

<sup>4</sup> A USNS Ship is actually a *Navy Auxiliary Ship*, skippered by a Naval Officer on active duty but manned by a merchant crew. The Gun Crews were regular Navy and manned by US Navy Gunner's Mates. The USNS stands of United States Naval Ship. This deployment was to be the LeRoy Eltinge's final voyage. She was to drop us off, pick up some Korean Marines in Vietnam, take them back to Korea and then make her final voyage home to be scrapped. She sailed with a permanent 7 degree list, and only calm seas kept it from being a wild ride!

<sup>5</sup> The 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was initially stationed on Okinawa, and had cognizance of the training of all troops going to Vietnam or being re-outfitted and trained to perform the duties of the Special Landing Force. The entire thing was being overseen by The 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade who had cognizance of the SLFs. The SLF was a Battalion Landing team (actually a bob-tailed Regiment) designed to make small circles in the South China Sea to act as a rapid reaction force to send in if any organization got in a feces sandwich in country either in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division Areas. It in fact operated much like a huge "Sparrow Hawk" rapid reaction force to pull hot chestnuts out of the fire. It was not a job for the faint of heart. The 26<sup>th</sup> Marines eventually deployed to the Khe Sanh Area and under the redoubtable Colonel Lownds, fought off great hordes of Ho Chi Minh's finest.

<sup>6</sup> SEA stood for South East Asia.

<sup>7</sup> A "request mast" is an interview with a senior officer that can (technically) be requested by an individual who feels he has a grievance. Sometimes this works out to the advantage of the requesting individual, but often is used to point out to the "requester" why he should be happy with the decision that has not met with his approval. I suspect that this would have been the result of my requested audience with General Krulak, as General Officers ordinarily side with Regimental Commanders as a matter of principle. I had decided to take a chance since General Krulak had a reputation for being a fighter, and had won a Navy Cross in WWII as a Para-Marine. The worst that could happen was for "The Brute" (as he was nicknamed in the Corps – he stood about 5'5" tall and had to get a waiver from the Marine Corps to be offered a commission out of his Naval Academy Class) to tell me that he understood that I wanted to go "close with the enemy", but in this case my services were needed in a training mode. While that wouldn't have made me happy, at least I would have made a maximum effort. Technically speaking, at that time, "The Brute" and the CG FMF Lant (for Atlantic) were the two most senior

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officers in the Corps ranking just below the Commandant (this was before our participation in joint staffs and now having more 4-star generals than were needed to run a bob-tailed squad. When General Walt was made Assistant Commandant, he too was given a 4-Star Rank which was to be used only when the Corps strength was above a certain level. For whatever reason, the Assistant Commandant has retained his 4-Star since. This of course is sometimes handy when dealing with officers in sister services...

<sup>8</sup> Watash is an old far eastern term meaning "yourself, or myself", etc. It is roughly the same as *moi* in French.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel J.J. Padley took RLT 26 south to occupy Khe Sanh in May of 1967, but by then I had left for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines. How does the old saying go? *All things come to him who sits and waits*. Needless to say my fitness reports for the remainder of Padley's tour weren't exactly designed to get me promoted on the fast track. If I had already been indoctrinated into the wiles of pitched combat, the job of Raid School Commander would have been a fine one indeed. It was the only time during my entire career that I had wall-to-wall submarines, and helicopter support and a full compliment of rubber boats (also known as LCR's for "Landing Craft Rubber" sometimes known as the IBS for "Inflatable Boat, Small" but forever known in the vernacular as *LBRBs* standing for "Little Bitty Rubber Boats"... My real bitch had been that there were any number of individuals who would have sold their souls to be assigned out of harm's way by an "unfeeling" Colonel of Marines. Ah well, so it goes!

# Private Moore

I had been comfortably ensconced as the Company Commander of Alpha Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion for about five months that morning in the early Spring of 1966. My XO, Skip Hartnett was deployed with his platoon in the Mediterranean, and “A Company” was reduced to myself, First Sergeant Martin, and my acting Company Gunny, Sergeant Francis A. McGowin for senior people. With Hartnett gone, it seemed like we were all performing multiple roles, taking up the slack for the deployed personnel. The Division was stripped to the bone since not only did it have to work with bob-tailed Battalions, but also had to satisfy Fleet Marine Force Atlantic’s requirement to keep a Battalion Landing Team in both the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. New personnel reported in daily, but in many instances were shanghaied to fill quotas for Vietnam deployment before the month was out. Hectic doesn’t quite cover it.

When we had good NCOs to take up the slack, somehow we managed to survive, and in many instances even thrive. As mentioned elsewhere, McGowin was a noted former Drill Instructor, rifle coach and instructor from Parris Island. Mac had previously gained some small amount of fame shaving his recruits with a blow torch, although that part of his past had settled down to something of a chuckle. Since we were almost in a “cadre” status, running an under strength Recon Company presented no great challenge, especially with the assistance of such able individuals as Sergeant McGowin and First Sergeant Martin.

McGowin as related elsewhere, was an individual who was totally dedicated to the Marine Corps and could be counted upon to do any assigned task and do it well. Mac always had the troops squared away for inspections, and they would have literally charged the gates of Hades with buckets of gasoline had he even indicated that such was his desire. He was a motivating, and charismatic NCO that the troops would have followed anywhere without the slightest hesitation. It was in this guise that Private Moore came to my, and hence McGowin’s attention.

Private Moore was something of an enigma. He had graduated from Boot Camp as the Platoon Honor Man and was noted as being totally motivated and highly squared away. He had asked specifically to be assigned to the Reconnaissance Battalion, but once he had settled in, his entire demeanor seemed to change for the worse. His formerly noteworthy attitude degenerated, and he became surly in his dealings with his NCOs and slovenly in his personal appearance. This once “Marine’s Marine” had become the Battalion \$hit bird. Several companies had been graced with his presence, but if anything, he went from bad to worse.

Moore’s past performance saved him from being instantly relegated to the trash heap or the Brig, but everyone seemed at their wit’s end in how to deal with this miscreant. All that was shortly to change. I got a call from Colonel Black Jack Westerman roughly outlining Moore’s past performance and recent attempts to salvage what could and should have been a good Marine. When the conversation with the Colonel ended, I had accepted the responsibility for giving Moore one more chance at personal redemption. Enter Sergeant McGowin.

“Mac,” I said, “we’ve got a problem to solve and the Colonel thinks we’re the ones to handle it!”

“Oh really Skipper, what seems to be the problem?” asked Mac.

I outlined Moore’s past performance, and told him that Colonel Westerman asked if we though we could square him away? Since I know troop handling is your forté, I accepted the challenge, knowing you could handle the job if anyone could.”

Mac looked at me with what I would eventually come to recognize as an inventive gleam in his eye, and evidencing a slight hint of amusement in his tone of voice.

“First question Skipper, do you care how I take care of the problem?” Mac asked.

Squinting my eyes, and with a small hint of apprehension in my voice, I replied that the idea was to make a good Marine out of Moore, not to hospitalize him, or worse yet to have me brought up on charges for maltreatment!

“Ah Skipper, you know I wouldn’t do anything like that,” Mac said with an inflection in his voice I would later come to recognize with “flashing red lights” in my comprehension of his intentions.

I wasn’t really worried, as Mac’s judgment was normally pretty level headed even if his methodology was a bit eccentric.

“Ok Mac, see what you can do with him, and give me a report your progress if anything gets way out of line.”

We were more than normally busy in the Battalion due to our recent move to Onslow Beach, and a Battalion fixation on getting our new area squared away. Unfortunately, Private Moore sorta’ slipped through the cracks of my conscious mind. At least he did until I noticed what had to be some sort of aberration. McGowin was checking the area which was a normal procedure early in the morning, but what wasn’t normal was that Mac seemed to have acquired what the Brits would call a “Bat Man”... When Mac would proceed to his next stop, following behind him about two paces to his left and two paces to the rear, was Private Moore. Not only that, but Moore was wearing boots that you could have shaved in using his trouser creases for a razor. Here was an entirely different Private Moore than the one I had turned over to Mac some weeks earlier. He stood at rigid attention when he stopped, and spoke only when spoken to. The first words out of his mouth were “yes sergeant. McGowin” or “no sergeant McGowin” leaving the definite impression that only the substitution of “sir” instead of “sergeant” would have been necessary for a carbon copy of proper Marine Recruit behavior. Ought oh! Alarm bells began to go off in my imaginative and now slightly apprehensive brain-housing group.

“Sergeant McGowin, how about stepping into the office for a second, I have a couple of questions on one of our projects,” I said, raising my voice an octave or two higher than I should have.

“Right away Skipper,” Mac said, “what have we got going now?”

“Mac, what’in hell has gotten into Moore? I’ve never seen him like this before, and he gives the appearance of a well disciplined Marine Boot!”

Mac grinned and started to explain. I could hardly wait, but my eyes started to squint and I filled up my coffee cup for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in 10-minutes.

“McGowin, what kind of trouble are we in?”

I can still see the old country boy grin and hear his Alabama drawl as he tried to suppress a smile that usually indicated he’d thought of all the consequences and had the situation handled. Dear Allah, I was praying so, but conversely I didn’t see any bruises on Moore, no black eyes and noted an apparent total willingness to perform McGowin’s every desire and command with enthusiasm and alacrity! – In short, Moore had once again become the personification of the perfect Marine Private. Something was eluding me, but I waited for Mac’s full explanation.

“The problem is Skipper, is that no one understood Moore, it just took a little NCO psychology to solve the problem!”

“Just *WHAT* was it that we didn’t understand Mac? He just seemed to change overnight from one squared away troop to a total \$hit bird!”

“Well Skipper, the story he told me was that he had always wanted to be a Marine, and Parris Island was exactly what he expected, squared away, tough NCOs that knew their stuff, and were hard disciplinarians. He found out that immediate and unquestioning obedience of orders resulted in praise and recognition. ITR was Ok too, and he was so busy soaking up his newly acquired combat skills, there was little time to think about anything else – essentially it was simply an extension of Boot Camp. When he came to the Division, everyone was being shipped to Vietnam, and while discipline wasn’t non-existent in a Recon organization, normally the troops were already well trained and required little supervision in their day to day tasks. Moore was so used to being fallen-in and counted-off, he wasn’t prepared for such a rapid transition, to a ‘team mentality.’ If Moore had simply been sent to a standard Infantry Battalion where the troops preformed normal infantry functions with NCOs vying to see who would have the most squared away squad, Moore would probably have made fire team leader and perhaps squad leader in short order. Moore’s problem was that he simply wasn’t ready for the camaraderie that’s usually the stock and trade of reconnaissance outfits that operate in small teams, and have a more relaxed attitude towards their mission.”

“Mac, do you mean to tell me that Moore simply misses the hard-@\$\$ discipline of Boot Camp? Is he some sort of masochist? A sort of ‘oh beat me, beat me!’ type?”

“Well Skipper, not exactly, but I think he would be right at home in the French Foreign Legion, with ex-Nazi NCOs! He has the ‘march or die’ mentality!”

“Un huh, and I suppose he just sat down and told you all this, right?”

“I just kinda’ figured it out for myself after having several conversations with the lad!”

“McGowin, you’re amazing, just how *did* you get your point across?”



“Skipper, did you ever hear the story of the old farmer during the Model T days who was whipping a mule when a guy pulls up in his fivver, and tells him to stop abusing that fine animal. The farmer asks if the guy has any other method for getting the mule to move? The fivver-driver gets out of the vehicle, takes the farmer’s whip away and throws it over the fence. The farmer was outraged, but held his temper and asked what the guy intended to do? The driver goes over and picks up a new fence post waiting to be installed, gets in front of the mule and hits him between the ears as hard as he can, dropping the mule to his knees. The panic stricken farmer asked him what in the hell did he think he was doing, as surely that was worse than the whipping. The driver took the animal gently by the harness and the mule went along willingly. The driver looked back at the farmer and said yeah, but the trick is first ya’ gotta’ get the mule’s attention!”

I sat down behind my desk, pinching my nose between my left thumb and forefinger, with my elbow resting on the desk top. I had my head lowered slightly and was looking apprehensively out from beneath my eyebrows, blindly searching for my coffee cup with my other hand. Mac stared at me with the most totally innocent look I’ve ever seen and awaited my reaction.

“Jesus Mac, what in the hell did you use for a fence post? ...Or don’t I want to know?”

“Don’t ask Skipper,” were his final words as he left the office.

I never did, and Moore remained a stalwart, dedicated and squared away Marine – just all depends on the fence post and the “fivver-driver” it would seem.

Semper Fi,

*Dick*

# The Education of a Company Commander

By Dick Culver

The experiences below are true and are extracted from a rather eventful tour in Vietnam during the spring, summer and fall of 1967. I hadn't thought of many of the occurrences for a number of years, until I was recently rereading *Murphy's Laws of Combat*. Those simple truisms are always amusing and often worth considering in a real life scenario. It occurred to me that similar truisms told with the story behind them might be informative and amusing for a budding combat leader. Some of the stories below are told tongue in cheek, some are deadly serious, but all of them are true. They are not necessarily in order, but each is told in a manner that tries to lead into the next one. Read them and chuckle, but never forget: there's a grain of truth in all of them.

## LIVES FOR REAL ESTATE:

It was the spring of 1967 and I used a camouflaged sweat rag to wipe my face. We were standing in the middle of a village, now in wreckage from the constant carnage of war. It was the second time in as many weeks that we had been through the same village. The constant fighting for the same terrain on a weekly basis was beginning to wear thin. I called for the company XO, Lieutenant Mike Chervenak, to come up, and he was soon standing beside me.

"Hey Mike, do you get the feeling we've been here before?"

"Yeah, Skipper, and before you came we'd been here several times before that!"

"Is it just my imagination, or does this strike you as a bit stupid? Using 'high-diddle-diddle' tactics to take a piece of terrain we're gonna' give back tomorrow strikes me as idiotic!"

"You've got that right, Skipper - we take the same piece of terrain almost on a weekly basis only to walk off and leave it to the gooks!"

I think that moment in time changed my tactical appreciation of the war to win the hearts and minds of the people. I vowed never again to deliberately trade lives for real estate. This wasn't Belleau Wood, nor was it Saipan or Iwo Jima. We had become a "beat cop," essentially making the streets safe from the Commies. While the VC and NVA were getting a bit edgy about showing themselves, they seemed to know exactly when and where we were going to be. I became a believer in leveling the objective with artillery and air before walking in to sweep up the results.

Mercifully, I wasn't the only one to arrive at this conclusion. We had simply watched too many movies and been through the WWI, WWII and Korean school of combat! No one had given us the postgraduate course on guerilla warfare.

**Lesson** - Use supporting arms to avoid needless loss of life. Getting bled to death by Ho Chi Minh's followers using obsolescent tactics bordered on insanity.

## HIGH ANGLE FIRE:

My initial introduction to the horrors of high angle fire was one that probably saved a number of lives by making me one cautious muvva! It was during Operation Hickory during the May/June time-frame in the DMZ. The idea was to land next to the Ben Hai River (the dividing line between North and South Vietnam) and drive the NVA south into the waiting arms of the "White Mice"<sup>1</sup>.

At the time, I was the Commanding Officer of Headquarter and Service Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, a job I cordially hated. I was constantly working my bolt to be assigned as a rifle company commander. As it turns out, I wouldn't have long to wait!

I had supervised the initial sending of supplies ashore from the USS Princeton, and was chafing under my ignominious job. Once I had satisfied myself that all was well aboard ship, I bummed a ride on the next CH-46 heading for the beach. Instead of a fire swept landscape, I found a barren hilltop with the Battalion antenna erected and a frustrated Battalion Staff that had just watched most of the NVA swimming the river back to North Vietnam. The Battalion was busy digging in. The terrain was sparsely vegetated, and the turf was as hard as a rock. Entrenching tools barely made a dent in the soil, even after an hour or so of digging. What we needed here was a platoon of backhoes, or some cratering charges!

I reported to the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. "Pappy DeLong". Now, Pappy understood my desire for a rifle company, and he chuckled when he saw that I had wangled my way to the field. "Moose" Beard, the XO, was not as amused. The Moose had told me to stay aboard ship and make sure everything was being sent ashore in an expeditious manner. Moose wasn't really as upset that I wasn't aboard ship as he was that I was taking advantage of Pappy's good nature! Pappy, understanding soul that he was, gave me a half hour to look around while Moose fumed. When Pappy was occupied with other matters, the Moose told me to get my skuzzy fanny back aboard ship. Ah well, this was boring anyway, and I *wasn't* looking forward to having to dig a hole in turf that had a greater semblance to concrete than to dirt. Since the Battalion was due to move out momentarily, no one was taking the "burrowing" project seriously - as it turns out this was a major mistake!

As Moose and I talked, a flight of CH-46s set down in the Landing Zone, disgorging the expected White Mice. They had, of course, timed their arrival until the LZ had been reported as cold<sup>2</sup>. The sudden arrival of the White Mice was to change all that, as our O1-E Artillery spotter aircraft was running low on fuel and had to return to Dong Ha for a refill. Choppers in the LZ were an absolutely irresistible target for the NVA gunners, who had been chafing under the threat of counter-battery fire directed by our spotter plane. A CH-34 landed in the zone a moment or two following the CH-46s. I went over to talk to the CH-34 crew chief to see if he would drop me off on the Princeton. The noise of the chopper effectively blocked out any meaningful conversation, but the crew chief's eyes were suddenly the size of saucers! He pointed aft to the area behind the CH-34, waved and said "by-by"... The chopper disappeared in a cloud of dust. I looked rearward to see what was upsetting the crew chief. It didn't take but a second to see

what the problem was - a large cloud of dirty black smoke indicated incoming fire! Oopsss... Things were fixin' to get exciting!

The major complication was that the NVA had some large bore artillery positions (85mm and 122s) just across the river, and were simply waiting for the spotter plane to leave, to avoid bringing down the wrath of hell on their heads if they fired at the choppers. We were now sitting on the hill like ducks in a shooting gallery. The only saving grace was that several platoons were conducting patrols out of the area. This mercifully left a number of empty holes open to the fastest man.

My horror was compounded by the realization that I had not bothered to dig a fighting hole, knowing that I was to return to the ship momentarily! Uh oh! Oh well, any old port in a storm, I suppose. I headed for the nearest seemingly empty hole identified by a poncho erected with several branches to act as a sunshade. Executing a slide that would have done justice to Ty Cobb, I went in "spikes up"... Seems that another gent and myself arrived in the somewhat inadequate shelter simultaneously. The original owner of the hole had gotten down about 4" in the rock-hard dirt and the thing was about 4 feet long. My fellow occupant had arrived in such a manner that we were feet to feet with our heads pulled in just far enough to give a minimal amount of protection. Our legs and knees were intertwined. I introduced myself to my fellow refugee.

"Afternoon, my name is Culver."

"And a good afternoon to you Captain, my name is Doc Jones (not his real name)."

Miracle of miracles - I had landed in our excavation with a Navy Hospital Corpsman. This might have possibilities, assuming we both survived. A good 20 minutes and almost 200 rounds of gook artillery later, I had discovered a number of interesting truths...

**Lesson** - People with very little to do often kill time by counting such things as the total number of enemy artillery shells fired into your position.

**Lesson** - If you stop for five minutes, make like a mole!

**Lesson** - If the terrain is too damned hard to burrow in with an entrenching tool, don't let your spotter plane go home until another is on station.

**Or -**

**Lesson** - If you don't have spotter planes to keep hostile high angle fire off of your fanny, and digging is almost impossible without engineer equipment, don't deliberately "urinate-off" off the enemy.

**Lesson** - Never erect your Battalion Radio Antennae in plain sight! Giving the enemy pre-staged aiming stakes is insane!

**Lesson** - All high angle fire is evil, both enemy and friendly. I have found many uses for friendly high angle fire, but all of the darned stuff has "to whom it may

concern" written on it. Friendly artillery is only slightly less evil than the enemy stuff, and both will kill you with very little regret!

I climbed out of the shallow revetment with my eyeballs rotating like the wheels in a slot machine. After careful examination I found that I was bleeding in a number of unimportant places, but the Doc obliged with a couple of stitches, iodine and bandages. I counted my lucky stars and headed back to the CP. Moose, quite probably the largest single target on the hill, greeted me with the following:

"Well, Culver, how do you like combat now?" he said in his usual high and extremely irritating nasal twang.

"Sir, there's nothing like a little hostile artillery to get your adrenaline flowing, I always say!" I replied, lying in my teeth!

The Moose's attention was now directed elsewhere, and I started looking around the carnage left by our recent bombardment. The corpsmen were rapidly getting our wounded and dead taken care of, and the wounded were forming a line to board the first medivac chopper bound seaward to the Princeton. What gave me the cold chills was a hole that had been located about 10 feet from mine. It seemed to have vanished leaving only churned up dirt. I went over and looked. With a small amount of searching, I discovered that the only thing left in the hole was a pair of bones sticking out of a pair of Jungle Boots with lots of rather red-stained churned up dirt... Yech...

Now the casualties awaiting the medivac birds were beginning to bunch up, apparently figuring that lightening never strikes twice in the same place. This began to worry me greatly, because since I could see across the river, common sense told me that they could see us as well - bunched troops attract fire! I went to the head of the line and gave them the standard lecture that one round will get you all - get 7 yards interval between men and assume a prone position. They looked at me with a dazed look like I must have lost my mind! These guys were acting crazy, apparently somewhat shell shocked from the bombardment! I began taking them individually by the arm and stepping off 7 extremely long paces between men, using language that I had first learned at my Drill Instructor's knee! The men seemed lethargic, but did as they were told. One Headquarters Staff-Section Gunnery Sergeant came over and grabbed me by the sleeve:

"Captain, you can't talk to them like that, you don't know what they've been through!"

"Gunny, where the hell do you think I've been for the past hour or so? Of *course* I know what they've been through, I just don't wanna' do this thing all over again! If YOU ain't gonna' do your job, get the hell out of my way!"

**Lesson** - Don't always depend on senior NCOs to have their stuff wired together after taking 200 rounds of incoming 122s. Not everyone is John Wayne.

The Gunny left shaking his head with a pair of glazed eyes. The Moose motioned me over.

"Well, Culver, looks like you are gonna' get your wish - the Foxtrot Company Commander got blown off the hill and has been medivaced. You go in for Foxtrot!"

"Fine, Major, just where the hell is Foxtrot located?"

"Just go with the Gunny here, he's from Foxtrot and he'll take you up to check out the company positions! Call me if you get into trouble!"

"Right, Major, will do."

**Lesson** - Be careful what you wish for...

### **ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND:**

It was getting dark when I finally arrived at the Foxtrot position. The Foxtrot Company Gunny gave me a tour of the lines, but it was darker than the inside of a meat locker. In the daylight it might have been informative, but this was sorta' like inspecting a darkened closet. Finally the Gunny deposited me at the former Company Commander's hole and told me it was all mine. Great, and the dirt was a lot softer here! My pre-dug hole was just about the right height and depth. I began to breath a bit easier.

Spreading out my poncho in my inherited fighting hole, I took off my gear in expectation of getting a couple hours of sleep. It proved to be hotter than the hinges of hell in the hole, so I stuck my head up and took a look around. The brush bordering the perimeter seemed a bit too close to my hole for my tastes, but everything appeared quiet. I decided to take a chance. I repositioned my poncho on the ground just to the side of my pre-dug fighting hole and stretched out. I hadn't been laying there for more than 10 minutes when I heard a "swoosh", "swoosh", "BAM", "BAM"... A couple of large explosions rocked the night, and worse yet, the concussion came from the hole I had just climbed out of. Holy Catfish, *NOW* what!?!? This was not shaping up into my best all time day! Memorable? Yep! Thrilling? You can say that again! *Enjoyable* would be stretching it a bit!

I carefully investigated what was left of my hole and found that some dink had thrown two Chi-Com stick grenades in to welcome me to the area! Luck was with me that night however, as both grenades blew apart on the seams of the cast metal bodies and simply made a loud noise... This had not been a day for the faint of heart! Dawn revealed that my predecessor had dug his hole within 15 feet of the jungle underbrush. Worse yet, the jungle underbrush was the forward edge of the Foxtrot Company lines. No one had seemed to consider the consequences! It was obvious that I had a large job ahead of me. All I had to do was survive long enough to get things straightened out..!

**Lesson** - Never assume that your predecessor knew what he was doing when he laid in the company positions!

**Lesson** - Always pick the location of your own fighting hole!

**Lesson** - Take command of a rifle company during daylight if possible!

## **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT:**

The "rules of engagement" had been explained to us upon arrival in country: "Thou shalt not fire upon any hostile forces until they fire on you - FIRST"! This seemed a bit asinine when first mentioned, but upon being introduced into the intricacies of the reality of the conduct of war in SEA, it became apparent that this was some sort of game played by our State Department and the Communists of North Vietnam. Specific instances of restraint could then be paraded before the United Nations. However it was played, it amounted to gambling with the lives of the Marines (and soldiers, of course) attempting to free the citizens of South Vietnam from the rule of the Communists. Little did we know that the war was actually (or at least in part) a game designed to enrich certain friends of the Chief Executive of the United States (The Brown Construction Company and several chopper manufacturing outfits) and to advance the careers of high ranking military officers who were able to bite their tongues and follow the direction of their masters. Only those willing to lick the boots of McNamara and Johnson were allowed to play! Ambassadors were changed like socks in order to obtain one that would bend to the will of the President. All of these machinations, of course, were to act to the detriment of the troops in the field.

I had early on decided that I wasn't about to let some ridiculous "don't fire unless fired upon" rule lessen my or my troops' chances of making it home in one piece. As it turned out, others before me had made the same decision. One particularly onerous order prevented the calling in of artillery or air support on a village complex that was not delivering heavy automatic weapons fire on your position. Well, OK, but the definition of heavy automatic weapons fire was certainly open to interpretation!

The standard modus operandi for a thinking company commander depended upon his ingenuity. My personal method can be deduced from the following (somewhat simplified) radio transmission following a burst of fire from a village we were assigned to take. Several rounds had been fired into our position to get our attention, but I rather imagine that it would not have come under the definition of "heavy automatic weapons fire". I understood that those in command positions were likely to cover their fannies... It comes under the heading of human nature.

"Arty, this is Hotel Six, over."

"Hotel Six, send your traffic, over."

"Fire Mission, one round HE, coordinates 12345678 (bogus coordinates of course) over."

"Hotel Six, our map shows a village at those coordinates, are you taking heavy automatic weapons fire? Over."

Pointing at one of my M60 gunners who was standing by and a rifleman who had a functioning M16 (unusual), I snapped my fingers. Substantial bursts emanated from both weapons.

"Arty, did you hear that? If you want more, I'll put the gooks on the hook, over!"

"Roger Hotel, I heard the fire, on the way, wait!"

Unscrupulous and cruel? Certainly not in my estimation. Those Dinks had fired at us. The fact that they didn't have their AKs on full automatic wasn't gonna' get my kids killed! I'd do it again in a heartbeat! The Artillery and Air folks knew what was going on and were simply looking for an excuse to support the infantry with air strikes and artillery fire.

I had one situation where one of my troopers told me that he saw a bunch of Dinks in the tree line in NVA Uniforms, carrying AKs and asked if he could shoot at his potential and almost certainly hostile antagonists. Holy Catfish, what a stupid question! I didn't CARE if they were shooting at us yet! OF COURSE it was OK to shoot! If it wasn't, how in the hell could you ever conduct an ambush? After the firefight, I told the young lad who was attempting to play by the rules that he would play by MY rules! If he's a Dink, he's armed, and he appears to be hostile, it ain't necessary for the other guy to go for his gun first! We were playing to win, and you sure as hell weren't gonna' win if you had to ask permission to shoot at the enemy. I told the assembled company that the next individual to ask such a question was gonna' be horsewhipped! Of COURSE it's OK to shoot at the enemy - that's what war is all about!

If I'd been in charge of the Marine Security Guards in Tehran in 1979, I'd have personally shot the guards who didn't blast the Camel Jockeys attempting to storm the Embassy. Allowing the State Department to call the shots once the ball has opened is crazy! My Marines and U.S. Citizens come before political decisions. I would also have had Tehran leveled to about ankle-high rubble. The Marines and State Department employees know the risks, and should be willing to abide by them when threatened. The Ayatollah was intent on taking Iran back to 10<sup>th</sup> Century Islam! I'd have bombed 'em back to the Stone Age and would have obliged the followers of the Ayatollah by leaving the city in rubble! Other cultures understand power but do not respond to diplomacy, which they consider weakness. I would never leave any doubt in the minds of those who would screw with the United States. Needless to say, I have never been contacted for duty with the Department of State!

**Lesson** - Fight your own battles according to the scenario dealt to you by the situation. The lives of your own folks are more important than the lives of the enemy. You are the individual on the ground and you were charged with keeping your Marines alive. You owe nothing to the State Department, only to your men, your Country, and the Constitution of the United States! Let the diplomats of the world pound sand!

## **SEX IN COMBAT:**

On two separate occasions I witnessed the ramifications of sexual liaisons in combat; both were enough to give a man pause to think. These took place in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Area just below Da Nang. It was during June of 1967, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was conducting a sweep of a known Communist stronghold. Prior knowledge of our assignment assured that we would not run into any major VC attacks, since the ARVIN folks admitted to at least 10% of their troops being Viet Cong. Since we were required to coordinate with the "friendlies" in the area, the



chances of running into a major unit were pretty slim. Unlike our usual operations in the DMZ area, the VC usually set booby traps and faded into the landscape until the Marines had left.

One of the other companies roaming the area caught the resident VC Pay Officer and his female helpmate with a large briefcase full of cash. They would probably have escaped had their hormones not gotten the upper hand. This stalwart pair were caught "en-flagranté," literally with their black pajamas down! A quick grab for their AKs was too late to prevent their joining each other in eternal embrace - too bad the Piasters<sup>3</sup> left in the briefcase were essentially worthless. Ah well...

**Lesson** - All troops are horny, even the enemy. Don't expect your opponents to behave differently than any other fighting person in their prime. Consider the ramifications of the politically correct and totally integrated infantry fighting units currently being demanded by the ladies!

My second encounter with raging hormones occurred during the same operation. We had spent almost three weeks running patrols and sweeps in the area next to the coast just east of Hoi An. On our last day, we finally checked out a village that was strangely devoid of any males of military age. This did not bode well, as such a lack of males indicated that the VC had taken their weapons and faded into the woodwork awaiting our departure. Since we had been told to remain in the village until the following morning, when we were to be picked up and taken back to the U.S.S. Tripoli,<sup>4</sup> I had planned on withdrawing to the beach just before dark and forming a 180° perimeter.

To kill time in the interim, we decided to conduct what was usually called a Med-Cap<sup>5</sup> to help the local villagers. Now Marines love kids, dogs and little old ladies, and they went at it with a will. "Boo-boos" were bandaged, medicine was dispensed and the Marines assisted the villagers in repairing some of the fallen down structures. As the light began to fade, we withdrew to a 180-degree perimeter close down by the beach. By evening we seemed to have established a very friendly rapport with the locals. All seemed well, and the Marines relaxed a bit. Soon after dark, some of the young girls from the village came out to the edge of our lines with baskets of the local fruit. One of my young Native-American Marines with the unlikely name of "Yellow Thunder" seemed to be singled out by one of the fairer young maidens.

"Hey Marine, you wanna' go Boom-Boom," she asked shyly?

Now Yellow Thunder was more than up to the task at hand (no pun intended)! He climbed out of his hole with an accommodating look on his face!

"Sure, if you wanna' go "Boom-Boom", I'm your man," said the lad who could only be described as ready!

Yellow Thunder got "Boom-Boom" alright, but it wasn't quite what he expected! The twin booms were from the muzzle of a hidden AK that took him in the shoulder. Mercifully, the wounds weren't life threatening, but Yellow Thunder was a much wiser Marine.

**Lesson** - All Marines are horny but some are more willing than others. And sometimes something is lost in the translation of the native tongue! "Boom-boom", it would seem, has two different meanings, depending on who's translating.

## **RIVER CROSSING UNDER FIRE:**

When I think back to this operation, the discussion of Capt. Nathan Brittles and the Major in *"She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"* always comes to mind.

"Nathan," says the Major, "young Pennell has to learn to cross a river under fire just like we did!"

I never truly appreciated young Pennell's problem until one June afternoon in bandit country.

We were operating independently, doing a sweep of an area known to be rife with constantly marauding VC, not totally unlike the Indians in the American West. Now, river crossings are always a challenge when you are forced to execute the maneuver without the benefit of boats. A prudent commander always had a 120-foot rappelling line with each platoon along with a fair length of parachute cord. We were so equipped, AND we had our marauding Indians. Unfortunately, unlike the river in *"She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"*, we were not blessed with a shallow ford. Our stream was about 15 feet deep and about 60 yards across, but we had it handled. The only challenge was a way to get our crew-served weapons to the other side of the river without taking them out of action or getting them soaked. Obviously some "poncho rafts" were called for. We set up half of our mortars to cover the other bank and covered our crossing point with M60 Machine Guns. After appointing a "volunteer" to swim the river with the lightweight length of parachute cord, he handily swam to the other side. We had attached one end of the parachute cord to a length of rappelling line. Once our stalwart volunteer was on the other side, he pulled the rappelling line to his side of the river and secured it to a tree. Tying the other end to a tree on our side completed the rope bridge. Brush rafts were constructed with native underbrush and ponchos and tested for their ability to support a load.

Half of our mortars and machine guns were loaded aboard the rafts and pulled to the other side while the guns and mortars on our side of the river supplied cover for our crossing troops. There was only one fly in the ointment, a VC rifleman who had positioned himself on a high bluff across the river and well above our landing spot. Mercifully, he couldn't shoot worth a damn. It was just a bit worrisome to have small waterspouts next to you as you prepared to make your way to the far bank! We, of course, returned fire with mortars, machine gun and rifle fire, but he was essentially in defilade behind the crest of the bluff. It was frustrating but not terribly dangerous.

Once our mortars and machine guns were safely across, we set up a similar covering fire on the opposite bank for the tail-end folks from the company bringing up the rear on our crossing. In best John Wayne fashion, I volunteered to be the last man across. With all hands safely on the other side, I ceremoniously untied the rappelling line on my side of the river and started to wade into the stream. I had my helmet in my

right hand, and the incompetent sniper got his first and only hit of the afternoon! He ricocheted a round off the helmet in my right hand!

"Uh Oh... was that a lucky shot?," I thought, "or is this guy finally getting the range?"

Well, no time to cipher this one out! I figured my best course of action was to get across before his mentor gave him a couple of more lessons in sight alignment and trigger squeeze!! I was wondering how young Pennell would have handled this! Safe on the far side of the river, I breathed a sigh of relief and admired the helmet that had taken the only hit of the afternoon. I was wondering if our sniper was shooting at me and hit the helmet by mistake, or if he was giving me a lesson in personal humility? Either way, it was a sobering experience for sure.

**Lesson** - Never volunteer to be the last guy across the river if the guy taking pot shots is learning as he goes. And never underestimate young Pennell's problems the next time you watch *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*.

### **GINGERLY WIPING EGG OFF YOUR FACE:**

Once we were safely across the river and making our way down a road on top of a rice paddy dike, we had begun to breath a sigh of relief. Apparently our tormentor had given up and stopped firing at us. But just then a blast of machine gun fire from the bluff told me our sniper had brought in reinforcements. The entire company hit the deck behind the protection of the paddy dike. Now the SOB was playing MY game. I yelled for my radio operator to give me the handset so I could bring in a gunship on this pesky clown. Fire continued to sweep across my position and I was cursing the gent who had designed the Jungle Utility Jacket for making the buttons too thick... I called for the radio again. Suddenly a voice from above said:

"Here ya' go Skipper, who do you wanna' call?"

Above me? Now wait a minute! What the heck is my radio operator doing above me, with me trying to eat dirt? A glance upward revealed that the entire company was in the process of climbing out from behind the dike and dusting themselves off! Looking around I saw the situation a bit more clearly! While the first burst came from the bad guys from the bluff, the subsequent bursts had been from my own M60s returning fire causing the enemy gunner to flee. Oopsss... Ahem! I crawled out of my position behind the dike and got to my feet with a bright red face. I covered my embarrassment with a statement to the effect that I was gonna' compliment our gunners for getting the M60s in action so fast. The troops all kept straight faces, and there wasn't even one snicker! I could have kissed 'em.

**Lesson** - Get your head up far enough to evaluate the situation and have a good cover story. The alternative is to have an excellent Rifle Company that doesn't laugh at the CO when he does dumb things!

## A SURE WAY TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE VC:

We were heading ashore in our CH-46s to handle a situation in the in the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment's Area. We were used to operating in the DMZ area where we were in daily contact with the NVA, a full time professional fighting force. Molesting the VC was a different kettle of fish. These guys had a way of disappearing into the mists when the Marines moved into their area. As we came across the coast, we weren't really expecting trouble, as it was supposed to be well coordinated with the ARVINS who routinely kept the VC apprised of our movements. We expected a cold LZ. Imagine our surprise when we started taking rounds through the skin of the choppers! At least two casualties never left the birds and returned instantly as medivacs.

The rest of the day was a constant shoot-out with the bad guys. We had landed with Dave Burrington with NBC News, and some puke from ABC who proved to be a left-wing gent who became a constant pain in the fanny. Now, Dave was a decent guy, and he had more chutzpah than sense. He and his cameraman stuck with us throughout the fight. Pretty soon it was apparent that we were in contact with a heavy force of VC. After fighting with the NVA, these guys were amateurs, but a poorly aimed round can kill you as easily as a well aimed round. These guys weren't shooting very straight, but there was a lot of fire to keep us honest. After we had taken care of the task at hand, we began to wonder why the VC had chosen to fight us mano-a-mano... This just wasn't like them. The after action report gave us the answer. It seems that the helicopter pilots had inadvertently set us down in the wrong landing zone - one that just happened to be astride of the VC Battalion's escape route! No wonder these guys were upset!

**Lesson** - If you want to make contact with the Viet Cong, *don't* give the ARVINS your correct coordinates! And if you don't wanna' fight, don't cut off the enemy's escape route! Even a mouse will bare his fangs when cornered!

## GUNFIGHTS WITH HOODED COBRAS:

During the above shoot out, my radio operator was about 10 yards in front of me as we moved across the field. When we took our first burst of heavy automatic fire, everyone took cover behind the dry rice paddy dikes. I was just getting situated in order to swing my rifle towards the enemy when a large object came hurdling through space and landed right on top of me... Ooph... It was my radio operator! What the hell??

"What the heck is wrong," I asked?

He was speechless, but his eyes were the size of saucers! He was wildly gesturing forward and his mouth was working but nothing was coming out! I knew SOMETHING was wrong, but he was incoherent! I bellied forward to his former position. My GAWD! There, raising up on his tail, was an extremely pissed off King Cobra! Now this Cobra wasn't giving an inch and was indicating that *"I"* was the object of his hate and discontent! I fired my first rounds out of my belt gun in Vietnam at that outraged serpent, filling the air with lead. I didn't hit a dad gummed thing as I was crawling at top speed backward feet first! To say that he got my attention would be an extreme understatement! Apparently he had found a hole after our inadvertent encounter, because, after the battle, I couldn't find hide nor scale of the slinky varmint!

**Lesson** - Cobras are apparently apolitical, favoring neither the communists nor the defenders of freedom. Never, ever, piss off a Cobra when you are otherwise engaged in a major shoot out with the enemy.

**And as Murphy says in his rules of combat:**

**Lesson** - Never occupy a foxhole with someone braver than you are!

~ Gray Rebel Hotel Six<sup>6</sup> out ~

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### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "White Mice" was a derogatory term applied to the Vietnamese National Police not noted for their propensity to expose themselves to hostile fire.

<sup>2</sup> A "cold" LZ was simply a zone that was not receiving hostile fire.

<sup>3</sup> Piasters were a unit of Vietnamese Currency. Much harder to get rid of than U.S. Greenbacks.

<sup>4</sup> SLF Bravo, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines had changed shipping from the USS Princeton to the USS Tripoli following Operation Hickory in June of 1967

<sup>5</sup> A "Med-Cap" was the name given to an exercise conducted by a unit to provide medical and subsistence to a local village to assist its citizens and create good will among the natives.

<sup>6</sup> "Gray Rebel Hotel Six" was my call sign as the Commanding Officer of Hotel Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment while on the Special Landing Force. "Gray Rebel" (which today would no doubt be banned as politically incorrect) was my Battalion's call sign.

# The Saga of “Cold Steel” Gunning

By Dick Culver

It was the summer of 1967, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment was sweating out their assignment as *Special Landing Force Bravo*. The Bravo Group of the SLF along with *SLF Alpha*, (the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment), was assigned to bore small holes in the ocean environment off the China Station and as such was seeing more action per square inch than any Marine Battalion in either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. The job of the SLF(s) was to act as a sort of super *Sparrow Hawk* to be landed as necessary if things went to hell in a handbasket. As a result, we spent a lot more time ashore than aboard ship. Out of a total of 9 months while assigned to the SLF, we spent a total of 12 days aboard our assigned shipping... It was a thrilling assignment, to say the least. Casualties were high, but troop morale was equal to the challenge. We were professional soldiers with a job to do, and we went after it with a vengeance.



From left to right: Lt. “Cold Steel Gunning” Col. William Dick, C.O. of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Green Jr. Photo taken at Camp Evans, slightly southwest of Quang Tri in the Summer of 1967.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment was temporarily attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment for operations while assigned to the Special Landing Force.

Since we had more than our fair share of casualties, we were constantly getting in uninitiated replacements, both officer and enlisted. This was not a particularly healthy assignment in terms of life expectancy, but individual and group morale remained high. If you were looking for a fight, the two SLFs represented an outstanding opportunity to fulfill your fondest dreams. At this point in time, a most unlikely 2nd Lieutenant appeared on the scene. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Gunning was the epitome of the unlikely replacement. He almost immediately became known as “Gunny” (a most unkind take-off of his family name). The term “Gunny” within the Corps usually evokes an image of a knuckle-dragging grizzled NCO of many years service and an intimate knowledge of combat. This was NOT an apt description of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Gunning. Gunning, if given the benefit of the doubt, looked like anything but a combat Marine. He was an inch or two shorter than 5’8”, and weighed in (with a pocket full of rocks) at about 140 lbs. He wore the issue black framed glasses, and looked for all the world like the small cartoon character that played with the intelligent dog in the Saturday Kids Programs on TV. At first glance, Gunning looked like the popular conception of a “computer geek” – all he needed was a piece of white tape around his glasses, and the obligatory plastic pocket protector. Poor Lieutenant Gunning became something of an affectionate mascot.

Unknown to all of us, was that Gunning's slight frame and outward appearance masked a fighting man of awesome proportions. It turned out that Gunning was a warrior in geek's clothing. We were destined to be treated to an object lesson in the old adage of "don't judge a book by its cover"! It turned out that young Gunning was anything but a geek. Gunning was about to make SLA Marshall's evaluation of the use of the bayonet in modern combat invalid, at least within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment. Enter, "*Cold Steel Gunning*," Marine extraordinairé...

Almost as soon as Gunning reported to the Battalion, he was bugging the Adjutant and the S-1 (admin officer) for assignment to an Infantry Platoon. Young Gunning was good natured and had a sense of humor, but he did NOT come to Vietnam to be a desk ornament. He had watched all the John Wayne movies and was an extremely motivated Infantry Lieutenant. Lieutenant Gunning had come to Southeast Asia to make the world safe for Democracy. The entire battalion had considered him to be a "gungy characterization" of a cartoon character, and were determined to keep him from getting himself hurt – more to the point, they also were determined to protect the troops from the machinations of an extremely wet behind the ears shavetail...

Gunning was assigned as a "Zulu" staff officer in the Battalion Headquarters, to protect both himself and the troops from being a part of Gunning's learning curve. Gunning began chewing on his upper lip in frustration, and working his bolt on a daily basis to get assigned as a Rifle Platoon Leader. The Battalion Staff smiled indulgently, and said nice things about his motivation, but no one was about to turn him loose with a gen-u-wine rifle platoon, both for Gunning's own protection and to save the troops from becoming training aids.

Gunning's persistence in his quest for a platoon soon took on the proportions of a major campaign. He lost no opportunity to regale the staff officers with requests for assignment to a *real* combat outfit, and most of us would hide behind rocks to avoid hearing the lament of the extremely frustrated lieutenant. Gunning was rapidly making himself a major pain in the fanny. Finally, in desperation, the Battalion Commander hatched a plan to give Gunning a taste of combat and still protect any enlisted personnel assigned to the platoon. A consensus was taken from all of the companies for the most hardened, savvy, combat-wise, and competent platoon sergeant in the battalion. The young staff sergeant was taken aside and briefed on the plan. The staff sergeant was told in no uncertain terms NOT to allow Lieutenant Gunning to hurt himself or the troops. In short, the Platoon Sergeant was to be the de-facto Platoon Commander, although he was not to destroy Lieutenant Gunning's feelings of self worth. In other words, he was to save Gunning (and the troops) from himself.

Gunning, now a platoon commander, set about squaring his new platoon away and preparing them for the crucible of combat. He went about it with a will. The rest of the Battalion looked on with benevolent amusement and Gunning's platoon sergeant rolled his eyes in frustration. Lieutenant Gunning was an extremely likeable kid who had been thrown into a real world situation for which he seemed ill suited – or so we thought –

Finally the day came when Gunning was to sally forth on his first patrol in bandit country. The platoon sergeant got several clandestine lectures on what to do if things went to hell in a handbasket. As Gunning left the base camp, everyone held their

collective breaths. We were sure that this had the makings of a disaster. Thank goodness Gunning's platoon sergeant was a combat savvy old NCO.

As luck would have it, Gunning's first foray into bandit country was anything but uneventful. He was a bit over a click and a half from friendly lines when the platoon ran into what was adjudged to be an NVA Platoon. The NVA were not about to be run out of Dodge by a mere platoon, and immediately engaged Gunning's outfit with automatic weapons fire. Like any intelligent unit, everyone hit the deck behind a convenient rice paddy dike until they could evaluate the situation. Gunning took a look around, considered the alternatives and yelled to the platoon to "*fix bayonets!*" He had seen all the John Wayne movies, and fixing bayonets seemed to be the obvious solution. A dead silence only punctuated by rounds cracking over their heads seemed to prevail for a second or two. Instead of looking at Gunning, every eye was on the Platoon Sergeant. The dumbfounded Platoon Sergeant looked up and down the line, scratched his head and said;

"You heard the Lieutenant, *fix bayonets!*"

The troops looked at one another, looked back at the platoon sergeant, and fixed bayonets! Gunning, in best John Wayne fashion, yelled "Charge" and climbed out from behind the cover of the rice paddy dike. Gunning took the lead, firing his .45 at the dumbfounded enemy, followed by an equally dumfounded Marine Rifle Platoon. The NVA looked unbelievably at 40 seeming madmen charging at them with knives affixed to their rifles and filling the air with loud and obscene language. A bayonet charge was something entirely new to the minions of Ho Chi Minh, and it must have been extremely demoralizing to a unit not attuned to the mystique of the blade! The Marines continued screaming like banshees and headed for the NVA position hell bent for leather. Having never faced anything like this before, the bad guys did the only honorable thing, threw down their weapons and ran like hell. Lieutenant Gunning stood in the former NVA position reloading his .45, no doubt thinking that this stuff really DOES work. The Platoon Sergeant was still shaking his head in amazement, and the troops began to look at the meek, mild, brown bar with an entirely new perspective. *HERE* was a real fighting man. The kids couldn't wait to get back to the base camp to make their brags and tell stories of their midget John Wayne platoon leader!

As luck would have it, within the coming week the scenario was repeated, only this time with Gunning's platoon coming under fire from an NVA Company. Since it had worked so well before, young Gunning again gave the order to fix bayonets. The troops and the platoon sergeant, now getting into the spirit of the thing, fixed bayonets without question and waited for the order to charge – and charge they did, giving another appropriate Rebel Yell, running hell bent for leather, rather obviously intent on reaping destruction on the enemy. It has often been said that success breeds success, and certainly if Gunning was any example, the old saying was proven in spades. The NVA again threw down their weapons and fled the field. Needless to say, it was a somewhat "swaggering" platoon that came back into the lines that evening.

It didn't take long for Lieutenant Gunning to become the toast of the battalion, often in a kindly fashion referred to as "*Cold Steel Gunning!*" Gunning had become something of a legend in his own time.



Gunning finished out his time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines and went home sporting a chest full of medals and an untarnished reputation. None of us who had known "*Cold Steel*" ever again made the mistake of judging a book by its cover.

I only saw young Gunning one more time. He had elected to make a career out of the Corps and was a Captain stationed on Okinawa in early 1973. He had apparently become enamored of a young lady and was mentally planning his future with the intended Mrs. Gunning. He took a couple of weeks leave and met his intended in Hawaii. Upon returning to the Rock, he was posted as the Battalion Officer of the Day one weekend, and was found dead by his own hand in the OD's office the next morning. The details were murky, but scuttlebutt said that his young lady had dumped him for another and broken his heart. Gunning didn't know how to be anything but sincere and dedicated to the task at hand. Obviously he (like so many other warriors) could not fathom the mind or intentions of a woman. It would seem that the fickle affections of a lady had done for a soldier who knew no fear of the enemy...

**ROC**

# The Four Gates To Hell

By Dick Culver

Extreme Northern I Corps was hotter than the hinges of Hades in late June /July 1967, and the veterans of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment were looking forward to backloading onto our new amphibious shipping. Assigned to Special Landing Force Bravo, a sort of super Sparrowhawk unit, our modus operandi was to bore small holes in the South China Sea off the Vietnamese Coast waiting to reinforce any unit that might need assistance. We were one of two reinforced Battalion Landing Teams that acted as a floating reserve for the Marines in Vietnam - a sort of predecessor of the modern MEUs.



While the uninformed were convinced that we had a cushy job with hot chow and comfortable sleeping arrangements, alas, the actuality of the situation never matched the perception. It sounded good, but... Out of a nine month period on the SLF we spent only 12 days aboard ship. Once assigned to the SLF, while technically still a part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, we came under the operational control of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade with its headquarters on Okinawa. Anytime we were sent out as a firefighting brigade, to either Marine Division, the 9<sup>th</sup> MAB seemed hell bent on offering our services to either Division (following the initial emergency), usually for a period of 30 or more days. Now no self-respecting Marine Division would turn down the services of a "fresh, well rested reinforced Battalion Landing Team," of course, so our days were thrill packed, and eventful, offering lots of sun and outdoor air. We had no permanent base camp, meaning no "slop chute" (Marine for beer hall), and virtually no hot chow. U.S. Naval Shipping has been "dry" since the turn of the last century due to the efforts of Carrie Nation and her Saloon Smashers... This revolting situation designed to make the Navy and its minions into plaster saints, made for an extremely bleak and uncomfortable existence, punctuated with moments of great excitement. Don't forget, unlike a normal unit conducting a sweep, when they called for us the situation was already hot. At the end of our nine months of exile, we had accumulated over 800 casualties. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines wasn't exactly the poster child for the life insurance companies.

Having been assigned to the SLF in April of 1967, 2/3 had participated in a number of major operations... Beacon Star (April), the Khe Sanh Hill fights (April/May), Operation Hickory on the Ben Hai River, then pushing southward to Cam Lo and Dong Ha in late May as part of Operation Prairie and Cimarron. We backloaded onto new amphibious assault shipping, the USS Tripoli, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. We had hardly stowed our gear and we were off again, this time to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Area in the Pagoda Valley Area as a part of Operation Beacon Torch. Beacon Torch was terminated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, and we were brought back aboard the Tripoli for a much needed shower, a change of Jungle Utilities and the first hot meal in two weeks. We were ready for an uneventful cruise on a brand new ship with a little slack and a chance to write some letters home... The best laid plans of mice and Marines often go awry.

We dumped our filthy gear, got a shower (the Navy didn't cotton to foul smelling Marines in their chow hall), chowed down and contemplated our good fortune of a couple of days rest. Our idyllic mental image was shattered early the following morning (3 July) by a message ordering us to standby to be landed in the vicinity of the Cua Viet River near Dong Ha in support of 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division units heavily engaged northeast of Con Thien. Our first day out of the field became a frantic scramble to rearm, distribute grenades, mortar rounds, and small arms ammunition, scrounge up makeshift rods to clear jammed M16s and sketchy briefings based on cryptic messages received from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. Rifles and machine guns received a thorough going over. The inevitable letter to the homefolks was penned, and those so inclined attended religious services and made their peace with God.

The waiting and anticipation was the hard part, but that ended at 0200 on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>. By 0700 we were rotoring our way back to our old stomping grounds near the 8" self-propelled artillery battery at Cam Lo. The plan called for 2/3 to sweep an area known as Leatherneck Square north to the Marine Enclave at Con Thien. Scuttlebutt from those in the know indicated that this did not bode well.



**Hotel 2/3 loading the CH-46s, morning of 4 July 1967  
LPH-10 USS Tripoli      Moose Beard Photo**

Con Thien was NOT a nice place. Known to the Marines in Northern I Corps as "The V-Ring", it sat within easy reach of the NVA Artillery located just across the Ben Hai River. To orient those not familiar with the geography of the Vietnamese DMZ, the Ben Hai acted as the dividing line between North and South Vietnam. I had learned to hate high angle fire weapons while sitting on the south side of Freedom Bridge (spanning the Ben Hai) during Operation Hickory in May. When our "birddog" artillery spotter plane left to refuel, the NVA used the battalion radio antennae for aiming stakes, dropping approximately 185 rounds of mixed calibers of heavy artillery on our collective fannies shortly after our landing. Crouching in a half dug hole in rock hard dirt, I silently cursed the artillery gods and their ugly handmaidens, the mortar fairies. As the old saying goes, I understand the round with my name on it, but the "to whom it may concern" stuff is scary as hell. High angle fire falls into the latter category. The residents of Con Thien lived with this threat constantly.

Con Thien is a miserable little series of 3 hill masses, two of which were continually manned by a Marine Battalion to deny it to the NVA. The ARVINS held the 3<sup>rd</sup> hill with the enthusiasm of a slug and were not well regarded by the Marines. Anyone who held Con Thien, however, could look down the entire strip to our 8" batteries at Cam Lo and control the area using the artillery batteries on the NVA side of the Ben Hai. In short, it made a heck of a good FO position. This would then have allowed the NVA free run on the south side of the Ben Hai River and made Cam Lo untenable. This, of course, we could not allow to happen. The actual assigned battalion position at Con Thien was only large enough to accommodate two of the four rifle companies that comprised a Marine Battalion without

drawing constant bombardment from the NVA batteries. The other two rifle companies had to establish constantly moving patrol bases around the "V-Ring" to monitor the movement of any NVA attempts to infiltrate the area. If the screening companies were lax in their patrol and ambush techniques, the NVA would take advantage of the sloppiness. Slipups would allow the bad guys to mass and launch an attack to take the coveted high ground. Needless to say, being assigned as the "duty battalion" to occupy and defend the "V-Ring" was not a favorite assignment. The patrolling companies were rotated with the two occupying the lines, but there were no days off.

The "dust up" that followed started as a perceived NVA ambush of a platoon of Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, but turned out to be more... MUCH more... Bravo Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Ninth Marine Regiment was about to receive the unenviable but appropriate sobriquet of "The Walking Dead"<sup>1</sup>.

What had been initially thought to be a simple ambush was later reported and recorded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division record books as a well-coordinated attack on the Marines of B/1/9 by 5 NVA battalions with supporting artillery. Needless to say, Bravo Company was in deep kimshee... The NVA had essentially embraced the hapless Marine Platoon in what can only be described as a "boxer's clinch," thus denying them the ability to employ supporting arms without killing their own people. For whatever reason, the radios seemed to have "bullet magnets" in them on that fateful day, and a number of radios were rendered "hors d combat", not by snipers, but in large part by bad luck (shell fragments, etc.). The fighting was so fierce that it was like blundering into a nest of fire ants. Counter-ambush techniques only revealed a seemingly limitless depth to the NVA positions. The situation was much like "Brer Rabbit and the Tarbaby"... The patrol had "caught the squirrel", but turning him loose proved to be damned near impossible. A simple platoon patrol was not equipped to take on a major attack by multiple battalions... the lack of radio communication simply compounded the problem. Alpha Company, sent to relieve Bravo, ran into the same ant hill of NVA. While Alpha and Bravo weren't losing the battle, they sure as hell weren't winning, either.

The plight of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment got the attention of those in control of the Special Landing Forces, and ended the dreams of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines for a few days off the lines. The landing of our CH 46s at the Cam Lo Artillery position on the morning of the 4th (close by Highway 561) brought back memories of earlier campaigns. After all the hustle, we assembled and sat down to await further orders to move north to relieve our brothers in arms. A hot sun and lack of meaningful activity began to wear on everyone's nerves. We had heard all sorts of scuttlebutt, such as Bravo 1/9 had been shot all to hell (not too far from the truth) and that we were to go in and help recover the bodies (this unwelcome task mercifully fell to others; I was not looking forward to that one). No, it turns out that we were to close the back door to the fight that came to be known as "Operation Buffalo", and sweep northward from Cam Lo to Con Thien. The word of the Bravo 1/9s "Last Stand" began to filter down. We were not amused as many of us had friends in the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment. I had once served as the XO of Golf 2/9 and felt a certain affection for my old outfit. At least it would seem that we were gonna get a chance to even some scores.

Assigned to head north towards Con Thien, flanked by Echo Company under Capt. Bob Bogard, I was more than a little surprised to hear the roar of heavy machinery

approaching our jump off position from the south. Two M48 tanks with Marine Corps markings lumbered up behind us. Somewhat unprepared for the arrival of unsolicited armor, I went back to see what the official word was. Sitting in the lead tank was a familiar face, that of an old friend, Staff Sergeant Max Falligan. Max was an old Distinguished Pistol shooter and compatriot from our days on the Marine Corps Pistol Team.

Max was leading a section of two M48s from Alpha Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion and had already put in nine months in and out of Con Thien. I was especially glad to see him, as he was the most unflappable guy I knew. Our pre-war experiences had led me to think of Max as a guy with a ready smile and a seemingly bottomless supply of jokes to keep everyone smiling. While I had never seen him in combat before, I hoped his ability to fight was as skillful as his ability to keep everyone amused. Still, there was something about Max that led me to believe that he was real fighting man, and he had survived 9 months in and around the "V-Ring" commanding a section of tanks. Better yet, he knew the terrain like the back of his hand. Max's ability and prowess as a warrior were to be a godsend in the next few days.



**M48s moving north toward the Ben Hai River,  
July 1967**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division Photo**

We used Max and his iron forts to put canister rounds into likely looking ambush spots and essentially blasted our way northward towards Con Thien, taking out suspicious vegetation along the way. The kids loved the use of extreme recon by fire, and began to "see" things that may or may not have been there just to watch their tank buddies at work.

Moving northward we stopped about 3 clicks short of Con Thien for the night. We put out our LPs and ambushes and settled in. The tanks complicated things a bit, as the steep terrain in some areas of our axis of advance caused the tanks to grind their treads making the vegetation slimy and more than a little slick. Marines following in trace of the tanks did a lot of slipping and sliding scaling the rolling hill masses "slimed" by the tanks. The kids still seemed content to have the iron monsters along and the tankers and the infantry troops began to form a bond. We put a strong perimeter around the M48s and waited until dawn.

Moving northward on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of July we continued along our assigned axis, blasting our way northward. We moved into position just south of an old Cathedral known to all in Northern I Corps as "The Four Gates to Hell Church".

Prior to securing the perimeter for the night I sent a platoon sized patrol with both tanks down into the shallow valley to take a look at the old Cathedral and surrounding terrain. We did a rather thorough but rapid search of the area, yielding nothing of note. The



2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon Commander, Lt. Carl Zander, a conscientious and capable platoon commander marked the area for a more thorough search in the morning. Zander and his platoon returned to the CP along with Max Falligan and his brace of M48s. No one could quite shake the feeling that we were being watched during our mini-sweep of the churchyard.

As we started securing the perimeter for the night, a strange rumbling noise came from our left flank. All hands alerted and the rocket gunners assumed firing positions. Two more M48 Tanks rumbled into our position. It seems that Bob Bogard of Echo Company was not a tank lover because in the words of the WWII Bill Mauldin cartoon, "moving foxholes attract attention." Bob had worked a deal with our Battalion CO, Moose Beard,<sup>2</sup> to get *shet* of his two M48s by sending "those damned tanks" over to Hotel Company<sup>3</sup>... A call to "The Moose" verified the assignment of the second pair of M48s to Hotel Company.. Hummm, Hotel was becoming a veritable fortress, and I couldn't have been happier.

I discussed the Four Gates to Hell Church with Max since he had been operating in the area for about 9 months.

"Hey Max, what's the word on the old church down there?"

"Well Skipper, it's some sort of National Landmark and no one's allowed to touch the damned thing!"

"But Max, doesn't it supply a really first class FO position for the Zip mortars?"

"You bet Skipper, but every time we try to take it down, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division puts the kibosh on the idea! The Area Commander won't let us touch the damned thing"

"Even if we're getting Marines killed because of it?"

"Yep, doesn't seem to make much difference, the Church is a protected landmark!"

Something in me rebelled at allowing Marines to be killed to preserve an abandoned building and I figured I'd pursue the topic the following day. In actual fact, we did better than that, but that's the rest of the story.

Come the dawn of 6 July we sent our patrol, consisting of Lt. Zander's 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and Max Falligan's section of M48s, back down in the valley to check out the Four Gates to Hell. It didn't take long to get results. The sudden incursion of the Marines into the churchyard brought forth a fusillade of AK-47 and 60mm mortar fire, and a mad scurrying of NVA in the area around the Cathedral. Lt. Zander's platoon deployed following the initial hail of hostile fire. Zander's M79s, 3.5" Rockets and M60s were working and his riflemen were picking individual targets.

Max's tanks immediately swung into action. The 90mm guns were using canister and the 50 caliber Ma Duce cupola guns to add to the NVA's discomfort. It was hotter than hell that morning, and the tanks were driving unbuttoned (hatches open). Max's tank was just going over a rice paddy hummock with the bow of the tank still in the air when three RPG-2

rockets found their mark. The first rocket hit the driver's open hatch, severely wounding the driver and knocking out the electrical system in the tank. The second round hit the boogie wheel in the suspension of the tank and the third ricocheted off the top of the tank turret literally blowing Max out of the turret. Max as unflappable as ever, aviator sunshades still in place, simply climbed back into the turret and started traversing the thing by hand, aided no doubt in this instance by a healthy flow of adrenaline. He managed to get off something like 57 rounds of 90mm before either the gun jammed or they ran out of ammo. Now traversing an M48 tank turret with the electrical systems gone is an amazing feat, but Max was a determined man. With his 90mm out of action, Max unlimbered a Mossberg sawed off pump shotgun along with an M14 bandolier stuffed full of 12 gauge fléchette ammunition he kept stashed in the turret. In a cold rage over the fate of his beloved tank and his wounded driver, Max was taking out his extreme displeasure on the NVA. After having fired all the fléchette ammo with the shotgun, Max borrowed a rifle from one of Zander's 3.5" Rocket Gunners and shot an NVA out of the church steeple. The NVA was apparently intent on calling in mortar fire on the platoon, something we didn't need at that moment in time.

As the hate and discontent exploded in the church yard, I was still on the high ground with my second section of tanks. Zander's radio narration was fascinating, but it became obvious that we had a chance to surprise the arrogant little @\$\$holes by bringing in a little surprise cavalry. The NVA obviously knew that we had a rifle company reinforced with a section of tanks, but I seriously doubted that they had seen the second pair of tanks pull in at dusk. We mounted out to smash these guys like a bug. While we were heading down the hill, the tanks raced ahead and came around the corner into the main battle area. One of the real surprises for "Ho Chi Minh's finest" was that one of the tanks was a "flame tank", better known as a "Zippo". It soon became obvious that the dinks wanted nothing to do with this fire breathing monster and were in such a panic that they were running into one another to get away from its fiery breath. Zander's platoon along with the relief force was helping the fleeing NVA along their way with well aimed rifle fire. The bodies of 16 NVA bespoke of the effectiveness of the fight at the Four Gates to Hell. The ambushers had been ambushed - how sweet it was! Now it was time to clean up the mess.

As Max was supervising the hooking up of his ailing M 48 to one of the other tanks, the NVA gave us a parting gift, 15 rounds of pre-registered mortar fire that was quickly silenced by our counter battery stuff, but not before 13 of my men had caught themselves a souvenir in the form of a mortar fragment. I was in a foul mood. Once Max, sunshades still in place, had supervised the dragging of his injured tank back to the company perimeter, I rounded him up for another talk.

"Max, do you remember our conversation last night?"

"Yes sir I do Skipper!"

"How long have these little @\$\$holes been using the church steeple for an FO position?"

"As long as I can remember Skipper, and I've been up here for 9 months. The guy I replaced told me about it. Everyone I know wants to get rid of it, but no one seems to have the b@++\$ to do it! It's a National Landmark, and the Area Commander won't let

us touch it! The result is that it stands there on a day to day basis serving as the perfect FO position for the NVA!"

I stood there for several minutes weighing Max's observations and comments. The question was, what in the hell could they do to me if I simply did the deed and asked later? Wait a minute, maybe there's a better way -

I decided to try a different tack...

"Hey Max, are you currently attached to me?"

"Why yes sir, those were my instructions and understanding..."

"And I am a part of the Special Landing Force which technically belongs to the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade, right?"

"Yes sir, that's the way it was explained to me!"

"That means that I don't technically fall under the Area Commander, is that right?"

Max is beginning to see where the conversation is going and starts to warm to the subject.

"Max, since you currently belong to me, if I gave you an order, would you obey it?"

"Sir, your wish is my command!"

"In other words Max, if I told you to take down that damned steeple, would you do it?"

"Skipper, you bet your sweet @\$\$ I would!"

My next stop was to clear this thing with the Moose. I wasn't particularly worried as the one thing the Moose hated was red tape.

"Gray Rebel<sup>4</sup> Six Actual,<sup>5</sup> this is Hotel Six Actual"

"This is Six Actual, send your traffic"

I had to be cagey about this, and the quickest way to get caught was to advertise what I had in mind.

"Gray Rebel Six, I've got a structure up here that has been used for an NVA FO position that I am in a position to take out with some 90mm, am I cleared to do so?"

"Well Hotel Six, I have no objections, go ahead and take it down, how are ya' gonna' do it?"

"With 90mm HE if it's OK, the tanks think they can do a good job of it. This one's been a pain in their fanny for several months and they'd like nothing more than to fix it to where no more Marines are killed because of it"



Now Moose knew where we'd been fighting all morning and knew what I had in mind, but neither of us said anything out loud. If he didn't know SPECIFICALLY what the target was, he'd have plausible deniability, and I could claim ignorance of local regulations. The plan was coming together.

While I definitely wanted that "Marine Killing" FO steeple out of the way, the history buff in me was bothering me a bit. I didn't specifically want to destroy the Four Gates to Hell Cathedral, but then I didn't want my Marines killed because of an administrative agreement. If the Vietnamese (either North or South) didn't want the church injured, all they had to do is NOT use it to help kill my people. The die was cast...

"Gray Rebel Six, Hotel Six again."

"Send your traffic Hotel."

"Gray Rebel, can the Battalion. Air Officer frag<sup>6</sup> me a couple of birds to remove anything of value from the 'soon to be former' FO position?"

"Hold on Hotel, the choppers will be there in the next three zero!"

We sent a platoon down to the Four Gates to Hell and removed the artifacts and vestments still in place from a long departed congregation and clergy. Everything of value was carefully packed and prepared for its ride to Division Headquarters, following a suitable delay of course, to give our plan a chance to come together, before word leaked to someone who would be required to make a political decision.

One young Hispanic Marine from Los Angeles wanted to ship the artifacts back to his own Parish. Talking him out of taking a large Crucifix was a real challenge; even though his motives were pure, it would not have done our cause any good if we were caught "looting" the Cathedral... The Catholic Chaplain finally got the lad settled down, but I'm convinced that he considered it part of the spoils of war.

Now it was up to Max.

"Max, it's all yours, do you think you can do the job?"

"Skipper, it's as good as (blown) down as long as we don't run out of HE<sup>7</sup>."

Max and his armor plated companions began to systematically take the steeple down. He was well on his way to reducing the entire thing to a pile of stones when the supply of HE ran out except for a couple of rounds kept back just in case. We had enough canister left to fend off the Indians in case of trouble that night, and it was now time for phase two of the plan.

I got my Artillery Forward Observer, Lt. Mike Madsen, up for a conference. Now Mike had been watching with rapt attention throughout the entire process and knew what I was gonna' suggest. Before I even got the entire phrase out, he was on the hook to the 8" Battery at Cam Lo. Soon we had some VERY large projectiles working over what Max had

left. Eight-inch rounds are truly awesome and these were no exception. The battery at Cam Lo had a registration on the pesky FO position, but hadn't had a chance to use it due to regulations – now the gloves were off! The destruction was awe inspiring. Now to phase three!

It turns out that the Battalion Air Officer was chafing for a chance to use a couple of Phantoms in the fray, and who was I to frustrate his desires. Two hundred and fifty pound bombs are in a class by themselves, and soon the former Forward Observer's position was more suitable for a gravel pit.

The Four Gates to Hell had killed its last Marine...

While the Operation Buffalo continued for several days after the Four Gates to Hell became history, the thing was winding down. The NVA's withdrawal from the area around Con Thien left some nasty booby traps and departing sniper fire, leaving the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines free to participate in such subsequent operations as Hickory II, Kingfisher and Bear Chain to name a few. We were not to get back to the USS Tripoli for many days. It had truly become "Day on, Stay on" for what became known as the "Rent-a Battalion"... Those of us who eventually finished the tour on the SLF in November of 1967 were truly survivors.

As a side note, I ran into Max Falligan again in the summer of 1977. At the time I was the Operations Officer of MTU at Quantico and we were firing the Inter-Service Pistol Match in Nashville, Tennessee. Max had retired from the Corps and was dressed rather nattily in a suit, a far cry from the last time I had seen him. He was working as a detective for a law enforcement outfit near Nashville. Being an old Marine Corps pistol shooter, he came over to see some of his old compatriots. I asked him if he had ever gotten the Silver Star I had written him up for. He expressed surprise and had never seen the paperwork or heard of the award. Max had gotten his third purple heart the day of the Four Gates to Hell battle, and had been sent back to Okinawa.

I have always suspected that Max's platoon commander (the leader of the second section of tanks with us during the battle) put the kibosh on Max's citation. The lieutenant, who shall remain unnamed, was an old mustang who was not exactly a shrinking violet. Following the shootout in the church yard, the lieutenant gave me a small piece of paper with his name, rank, serial number and organization on it for possible consideration for a decoration. Somewhat disgusted with the blatant self-aggrandizement, I simply threw it away. The lieutenant pulled out with his two tanks shortly thereafter, but we escorted Max back to his initial withdrawal point with our thanks.

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> As the Vietnam War wore on, the entire 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment came to claim the title of "The Walking Dead", but to the participants of early July 1967, Bravo and Alpha Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment were the only legitimate claimants to the title. It could well be expanded to include the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in early July 1967, as many elements participated, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions were not truly privy to the title in the same sense as Bravo and Alpha 1/9.

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<sup>2</sup> Our Battalion Commander, Major "Moose Beard", a former Corporal in WWII, and a professional football player prior to Korea, was (if nothing else) a BIG man. Going well over 6 ft. and I suspect topping at least 240 lbs, his nickname was well earned. His legs were so large that the issue laces that came with a set of jungle boots would not go through the top two laces of his boots. The Moose was a bit disdainful of the hierarchy, having been passed over for Lt. Colonel several times. He did not sweat taking the brass to task, and was not particularly careful to pick his spot to do so. Although there were a number of Lt. Colonels waiting in line for an Infantry Battalion, the Moose's competence put him ahead of his supposed seniors when it came to combat leadership. While he was a competent SOB, he was at the same time sarcastic and irritating. A high nasal twang simply made the sarcasm more biting. While I would have followed him anywhere, it was a definite love hate relationship. No one would have ever recommended him for service with the Diplomatic Corps. Major Beard was eventually given a temporary promotion and "The Moose" retired as he should, as a Lt. Colonel of Marines.

<sup>3</sup> To put this in its proper perspective, Bob Bogard and Echo Company were pushing through more dense terrain than Hotel Company, and the M48s were slowing his progress. Transferring the tanks to Hotel made eminent sense tactically – however, Bob's loss was our gain, and one that I would greatly appreciate in the days to come.

<sup>4</sup> Our Battalion call sign on the SLF in 1967 was "Gray Rebel", a call sign that would be terribly Politically Incorrect in this day and time.

<sup>5</sup> "Actual" meant you were talking to the REAL person (i.e. the Commanding Officer) as opposed to the CO's radio operator.

<sup>6</sup> "(to) frag" (a verb), meant to send a chopper using a "fragmented order" (from its original mission) diverting a "bird" to perform an interim mission.

<sup>7</sup> HE stands for "High Explosive", one of the many types of ordnance available to tank crewmen.

# Sight Alignment and Trigger Squeeze

Dick Culver

I was listening to a discussion of the necessity of carrying belt guns in combat. The general consensus of opinion seemed to be that a handgun was an anachronism in modern combat, and more suited to the days of cavalry charges. No one seemed to care that our military had sold out to the NATO agreement to go to 9mm as a SOP to our European Allies... After all, who cares? Nobody ever uses the damn things anyway!

I smiled to myself and thought back to a few years prior when I was mighty glad to be carrying a belt gun, in fact without it, I wouldn't have been listening to the conversation between the young pups sitting at the bar...

The month of July 1967 was damnably hot in the area southwest of Quang Tri, and Hotel Company had just been landed to conduct a sweep of a minor village that had supposedly already been swept the afternoon before. Sounded like a cakewalk compared to our usual assignments, until one of the young troopers detected movement in a tree line 300 yards distant. Since we were short of dry ground, we were putting in defensive positions in a graveyard adjacent to the small ville to act as a patrol base. The only thing that set my hair on end was the presence of the inhabitants of the settlement in the graveyard, and they weren't talking. Something was definitely amiss. The ville was long and narrow, with hardly enough room to maneuver a platoon, let alone a company sized unit. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon was dispatched to enter the village along the long axis to drive any NVA into our fields of fire. In combat, however, I had long since learned that nothing is ever as it seems. With our 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon approaching their objective, we began to take fire from the tree line. The fight was on.

After a few minutes, communication was lost in the ensuing mêlée in the woods. No communications, platoon within the tree line! I was frustrated - I do not do vicarious firefights well. I decided to investigate.

Taking my radio operator, I left my Executive Officer in charge of the perimeter and headed for the battle. There was a hedgerow on the left of our perimeter that might at least offer some concealment from direct observation by the NVA, now heavily engaged in the wood. My plan was to get down there and extract the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon so I could call artillery in on the tree line. Obviously, I didn't want to call for artillery while my folks were in there, and they weren't answering the radio.



"Big Red", DCM veteran of the hedgerow fight, in "Evening Dress"... A \$20 engraving job on Okinawa and a Swenson hard chrome 'suit' were a reward for services well rendered.

Now, I have been a pistol aficionado all my life, and I had hauled my own pistol to Wes Pac in direct violation of Marine Corps orders. It was an M1911, a veteran of WWI that I had obtained for the munificent sum of \$20.00 through the Director of Civilian Marksmanship. Most of those obtained from the DCM had been essentially new, but alas mine was a real old timer... It was devoid of any meaningful finish and rattled like a box of bolts, but I set about making a personal sidearm out of my "worse for wear" veteran. I had a High Standard .22 Pistol front sight milled into the front of the slide, and attached a Bo-Mar sight to the back end. While I was no gunsmith, I was fairly clever with a stippling tool and had done what I considered to be a very workmanlike stippling job on the front strap to limit my grip from slipping when my hands were sweaty.

While shooting for the Marine Corps Pistol Team in the summer of 1965, one of the armorers added a match barrel, an aluminum trigger, did a trigger job and tightened the slide. The damned thing would finally shoot and shoot well. Keeping 'em in the 10 ring of a Standard American Pistol Target was no sweat at 25 yards, and head shots at 50 were a breeze. An E-Silhouette set out at 100 became easy to hit consistently. Some home brewed handloads and I would be ready to go to war. Heavy Keith flat nosed cast bullets over a healthy dollup of Unique Powder, sealed primers with fingernail polish, and bullets waterproofed with a mixture of road tar and kerosene painted inside the case with a match stick completed my preparations.

Yes, I know all the legends about the illegality of lead bullets, and cautions from supposed firearms experts about handloaded ammunition in combat, but since it was my fanny, I essentially ignored the arm-chair warriors and took 'em anyway. This was the pistol and ammunition I had in hand that miserably hot afternoon just south of the DMZ... As it turns out, I was well armed.

Running down across the field in the shadow of the hedgerow, I had my hand cannon cocked and locked, firmly grasped in my right hand pointed out and away from my leg to prevent acquiring a self inflicted gun-shot wound. Encountering the bad guys before I reached the tree line hadn't crossed my mind - I was much more concerned with getting my platoon out of the ville so I could call in some heavy artillery and get this thing over with a minimum loss of life on our part.

Suddenly, and without warning, a distinctly Oriental face appeared from behind the hedgerow, hardy 10 feet away. He had an evil look on his face and was holding onto his AK-47 while looking at me in total disbelief. I don't think he had expected any hostile company. My AK wielder had obviously been preparing to lay some flanking fire onto our CP in an effort to distract our efforts aimed at greasing his comrades. Surprise, surprise! And trust me, NO ONE was any more surprised than I.

In pure panic, I half turned and snapped off a shot at my unwelcome visitor underhanded almost like pitching a softball! Mercifully my first and wildly thrown shot hit the gent right between the eyes. By now the situation had my total attention. As I stood there in total disbelief, the first guy's buddy stood up next to where his friend had met his maker. He too was clutching an AK, but he was intent on looking down at his friend's ruined face. This was a tremendous mistake, because by now I was ready! I swung the .45 around and center punched number two with a 237 grain Keith in the breast bone. Number two went one way and his AK went the other.

My mind was racing. I figured that I was probably facing a squad sized unit behind the hedgerow. If I ran, I was sure to get hosed in the back with automatic weapons fire. If I had to go down, I always promised myself that I'd be looking at the guy who did for me. I couldn't see over the damned row, so I took the only other alternative, I dove over it. My radio operator was yelling "No Skipper, no!" but was right behind me, attempting to get his rifle unlimbered.

The hedgerow was only about four feet high, and when I landed I found myself totally alone except for my faithful radio operator who had followed me in my personal assault. Looking around to assess the situation, something suddenly occurred to me... "I wonder how those Keith Handloads performed?" Pulling out my K-Bar, I prepared for field surgery. My disbelieving companion looked on in total horror.

"Skipper, what in the hell are you DOING?"

"Quiet kid, I'm checking something out!"

"You can't do that, it's barbaric!"

"Nope, the scientific curiosity of an old time handloader!"

"SKIPPER! **NO!**"

"Shut up kid and help me get his jacket off!"

"*SKIPPER!...*"

A burst of automatic weapons fire brought me back to reality... What the hell WAS I doing, hell, I've got a platoon to extract. And now the @\$\$holes know where we are! I re-sheathed my K-Bar, threw a fresh magazine in the belt gun, and headed for the ville, with a still disbelieving, but obviously relieved radio operator hot on my heels.

As a personal "after incident report", we were successful in extracting the platoon and returning to the CP. The situation in the ville was getting hot. We had plenty of rifle ammunition as the M16s weren't firing reliably, but we were down to about one belt per M60 and about 5 rounds per mortar tube as we had been firing more or less constantly all afternoon. A fire mission on the tree line would be wasted if we didn't have the company ordnance to take advantage of the artillery. We had to be ready to assault the entrenched NVA as the artillery lifted. The extreme heat meant that water would be as important as the ammo, and our water supply was getting low.

Two CH-46s came in with our requested water and ammo, but two RPGs from the tree line got a couple of solid hits on the birds in our landing zone. The landing zone was uncomfortably close to the trees, but wet rice paddies on three sides limited our options. Resultant shrapnel from our wounded birds resulted in 17 casualties among the troops trying to unload the choppers. The birds departed with most of our supplies. Although they were leaking hydraulic fluid, the injured birds managed to crash land in the Battalion CP. A second try by some aviators with more b+++ than sense got our gear to us by lowering the tail ramp and tilting the choppers nose up and literally

dumping our water and ammo onto the LZ like a dog fertilizing the front lawn. I could have kissed those birdmen. Now that I had the wherewithal to conduct the assault, I HAD to get some artillery on the NVA in the tree line. Unfortunately, there was a large fly in the ointment.

Since we were freshly ashore from our floating base camp, the USS Tripoli, our own artillery battery was not yet ashore. I had expected them to be set up by now. All was not lost, however, as my Artillery FO, Lt. Mike Madsen, reminded me that the ARVINS had a 155mm battery stationed at Quang Tri. Mike also pointed out that the ARVINS had a reputation of being totally incompetent artillerymen, but he would call in a fire mission if I insisted. What the hell, I thought, let's give it a try!

"Mike, call in the registration 1000 meters over and walk it back, that ought to give us a little cushion!"

"OK Skipper, but we're playing with fire here!"

"Ya think 1000 is too close?"

"Naw, that oughta' do it!"

"OK, get with it!"

Mike was soon chattering on the PRC-25, and we sat back to wait. We were not to have to wait long, as the sound of a sizeable artillery round announced that Quang Tri was on the job. As luck would have it, the first round hit dead in the center of the NVA in the tree line.

"Holy catfish Mike! What in the hell is going on? I'm sure as hell glad we didn't call that stuff in with the REAL coordinates!"

"I told ya' Skipper, those guys are hamburgers!"

"Damn! - Oh well, call in a 'fire for effect' before they forget what they just did!"

"Roger Skipper, I'll have 'em on the way in a couple!"

The "fire for effect" landed with satisfying results. We continued to call for additional rounds until Quang Tri claimed they had expended their ready ammo supply... The ville was a shambles, but night was rapidly falling. Damn! A night attack in that mess would be an invitation to disaster! I resolved to dump some more 155s at dawn and follow it into the ville.

We pulled in the perimeter and put out LPs, although we were almost within effective bayonet range. We spent a sleepless night, but we had the advantage of pre-registered 155s... I love accurate pre-registered fire!

First light found us filling in our fighting holes to deny their use to any future NVA who might be intent on using the graveyard as a fighting position. We gathered

ourselves for the assault and Mike called in the same fire mission that had been so effective the evening before. The first round came roaring in - right in the middle of our position!

"Mike, what the hell's going on?"

"Christ Skipper, I don't know! I told ya' these guys were incompetent!"

"Either get these tools to cease fire, or shift it onto the zips!"

"Roger, will do!"

We finally got the fire moved sufficiently to tear up the tree line, and mercifully without any Marine casualties. The entire company moved smartly into the tree line with a will. Anything was preferable to getting shot at by friendly artillery, most especially 155s!

The assault was a total anticlimax... The NVA had gotten their bellies full of 155s the evening before. Aside from numerous blood trails, and a couple of overlooked AK-47s, the village was bare but stomped flat! Our quarry was long gone.

I took a personal trip behind the hedgerow I had followed the afternoon before. I still hadn't satisfied my curiosity about big flat pointed Keith bullets! Alas, the NVA had hauled off their dead. The discovery left me with mixed emotions as I find something of a kinship with warriors who take care of their own. I was beginning to feel the worse for my intellectual curiosity about the effectiveness of my handloads. I was glad they got him back in one piece.

I managed to get my personal sidearm back to the States following my tour and today it hangs in a place of honor on my wall. I find it hard to regret my decision to bend the rules all those years ago.

Now there are times when I sit by the fire sipping a glass of Claret while reading the various gun rags that insist that the belt gun is an anachronism in modern combat. I fondle my sidearm of long ago and smile. I suppose it's all in how you look at it.

## ROC



# “Horrible Jones”, McDivit, and the CH-46 Helicopter

By Dick Culver

It all started with a design flaw in the CH-46 Helicopter. In their scramble to replace the aging CH-34 troop carrying Helicopter, the Marines had chosen the CH-46. At first, it seemed to be at least adequate for the job, but continued operational use began to uncover seemingly minor problems that became problems of major proportions. The transition to the CH-46 was not yet complete in the summer of '67, and the CH-34 was still in use with many units. The flaws in the CH-46 however were to come back to haunt us big time, especially if you happened to be serving in one of the battalions assigned to the Special Landing Force!

In an inspired flash of genius, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific had created a new unit called “The Special Landing Force”. This outfit was designed to do several things. Operationally, they had the job of boring small holes in the South China Sea and waiting for something untoward to occur. The Special Landing Force was in modern parlance, the 911 service of the Vietnamese Coast. It was broken down into two separate reinforced Battalions, and designated SLF Alpha, and SLF Bravo. Each unit had a standard Marine Infantry Battalion with attachments of an Artillery Battery, an Engineer Company, an Amtrac Company (amphibian tractor company), a Recon Platoon, a Helicopter Support unit (engineers trained to clear and set up landing zones, and perform sling loading/unloading and resupply missions), and a Helicopter Squadron for landing operations.



1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Horrible Jones and the Exec of Hotel 2/3, Mike Chervenak

Our main base of operations was an LPH (Landing Platform-Helicopter) housing two rifle companies, the Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Company (better known as “Heat and Steam”) and the SLF Headquarters Group. The LPH was essentially a small Aircraft Carrier designed to support helicopter assault landing operations. Two of the four battalion rifle companies were stationed aboard the LPH, and two aboard an APA (Assault Landing Ship). The additional support units were stationed aboard an LST (Landing Ship, Tank), and an LSD (Landing Ship, Dock) designed to launch Amphibious Tractors if it became necessary to revert to pure surface amphibious transportation (assuming weather precluded helicopter operations). The APA could launch and recover troops utilizing Mike Boats (the jobbies with the drop front seen in most WWII movies).

The SLF was an inspired concept. For those of you who didn't have a chance to participate in the evolution, the idea was this. A Marine Battalion (of either the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division) would be rotated out of country (Vietnam) up to our prewar base(s) on Okinawa.

The idea was several fold, first it gave the battalion a chance to turn in their worn out gear, get some evening liberty without getting shot at for about 4 weeks, and flesh out the battalion with replacements for our battle casualties. The new replacements would have a chance to train with the veterans and get used to the individuals in their units (squads, platoons, companies, etc.).

Upon completion of their re-outfitting and training, the battalion would be designated either SLF Alpha, or SLF Bravo, depending on the assignment. The newly designated battalion would then be sent down to the Philippines for a practice landing exercise, followed by a “real” landing in the Delta of Vietnam. These Delta Landings were referred to as “Deck House Operations”. After the Delta Landing, the newly blooded battalion would be sent once again to the Philippines for about 3 – 4 days liberty in Olongopo (Subic Bay), and then board their amphibious shipping and return to patrol the Vietnamese Coast as a 911 force for a 6 week period and then (theoretically) be rotated back into Vietnam to a semi-permanent base camp from which they would conduct operations as dictated by the appropriate Commanding General (1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division). A new battalion would then be loaded aboard the amphibious shipping and be rotated back to Okinawa to go through the same retraining cycle, only to eventually be sent back in country. The idea was to have a battalion training on Okinawa, two serving as SLF Alpha and Bravo, and one standing by to go back to the Rock and be refurbished and retrained. On paper it sounded great. Unfortunately in the case of 2/3 and 1/3 it didn't work out that way – Murphy took a hand.

Both 1/3 and 2/3 were destined to spend a full 8+ months on the SLF. Sounds soft, eh what? Well, if it had been a mainly shipboard assignment with only an occasionally thrilling interlude, all would have been well, but the period of April through November of 1967 was not to be one of peace and tranquility. I can't answer with any amount of certainty for 1/3 and SLF Alpha, but for 2/3 and SLF Bravo the 8 months were designed to satisfy the most addicted of adrenaline addicts! The Battalion started with a minor operation in April that turned into the notorious hill fights at Caisson (881 and 882 both north and south). The Hill Fights were marked with numerous jammed M16s with cleaning rods down the bore to eject the empty cartridge cases.

By the first week of September 1967, my rifle company had only five individuals that had not been awarded the Purple Heart. The Battalion itself sustained over 800 casualties in the 8 month period... As I said, not an assignment for the “faint of heart”, but certainly one to help you decide if soldiering was to be your life's work.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment had been assigned a Helicopter Squadron that was equipped with the then relatively new CH-46 helicopter, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed aboard the U.S.S. Iwo Jima and were still using the relatively ancient CH-34 choppers.

As if to add insult to injury, not only had we been given rifles that didn't work, but our helicopters started disassembling themselves in flight! Some design flaw in the CH-46 Helicopter allowed the tail pylon to start separating from the rest of the bird after an extended period of flying. The situation became so bad that the scuttlebutt was that a wounded man was eligible to be awarded the Bronze Star for allowing himself to be med-evaced in a CH-46. Once the disastrous self-disassembly of the CH-46 this had

been discovered, the “powers that be” decided to immediately rectify the situation. The brass had decided that it was a top priority to have the Boeing Aircraft Corporation to fix the defective aircraft. I can only surmise that the quick action was prompted by the fact that the brass was occasionally required to fly in the helicopter from Hell. Now if we could have armed the Brass with the M16 rifle and made them go on patrol, the infamous M16 incident might well have resolved itself more rapidly, but alas, ‘twas not to be... At any rate, the offending helicopters were packed aboard the U.S.S. Tripoli and shipped back to Okinawa for repairs. This left SLF Bravo (2/3) afoot and without helo support. SLF Alpha was still using CH-34, so were not affected by this incident.

Prior to departing for Okinawa, all of the Second Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment’s personnel and equipment were offloaded and sent to Camp Evans to co-locate with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment located just southwest of Quang Tri. We were sent on several operations to keep us busy while the choppers were being fixed, and just before we were to backload aboard the Tripoli now equipped with the *improved* (and hopefully repaired) CH-46 Helicopters, we had a couple of days respite while helping 1/4 man the lines around Camp Evans. With the stage now set, we’ll get on with the saga of Pfc. McDivit (not his real name).

Now McDivit was a 60 mm mortar crewman with Hotel 2/3, and probably the most devoutly religious individual in the entire company. While not a Contentious Objector, he was the Protestant “Lay Leader” of Hotel Company<sup>1</sup>. It wasn’t that McDivit was a bad Marine, in fact he was highly regarded by his own mortar crew... But, McDivit was married with a young child and had decided that field duty was possibly going to prevent him making it home and helping to raise his youngster. This of course, was a common desire of many of our young newly married troops during the Summer of 1967. Once ashore however, McDivit was a model Marine and performed his duties with skill and daring, but getting McDivit ashore was not a task for the faint of heart! McDivit usually left the Tripoli with a piece of bulkhead firmly grasped in each hand and a boot in his fanny. While he would not deliberately avoid hazardous duty, he was always figuring a way to stay aboard ship rather than go back to Indian Country.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of Hotel Company was a legend in the Corps. He had served as a Drill Instructor twice in his career, once before the well-known McKeon incident<sup>2</sup> at Parris Island, and once following it. He was an imposing figure, standing approximately 5’11” tall and weighing in at about 210 lbs., none of it fat! He had played semi-pro football at one time and his face wore the scars of having gone through the windshield of a car during an inattentive moment of driving. When Jones returned for his second tour on the field, his former junior DI from his first tour as a DI was now serving as an instructor at the (then) newly formed DI School at Parris Island. It is rumored that his first words upon spying Kenny Jones was “Oh NO!” He’s back!

Now Kenny Jones was known as “Lockerbox Jones” from his habit of having his charges do the manual of arms with a footlocker, and was known as an all around bad @\$@ throughout the Corps. By the time he finished his second tour, he was known as “Horrible Jones”, and not without cause. Jones probably turned out more honor platoons on the Island than any other DI, but his recruits left as “squared away noodles” with the ability to out shoot, out shine, out march and out drill any other unit. Horrible Jones was

a hard (and feared) taskmaster. He was a Marine's Marine and worked to keep himself and his reputation in tact.

McDivit's constant machinations to avoid field duty soon came to the attention of Horrible Jones and an adversarial relationship was almost unavoidable. The more McDivit attempted to avoid field service, the more Jones was on his case. Now Horrible was actually a very caring individual, and had his troop's welfare at heart, although he worked at not allowing such human feelings manifest themselves on a day-to-day basis. It was obvious to me, but the troops did not go out of their way to encounter the awesome wrath of the legendary 1<sup>st</sup> Soldier.

Finally McDivit had been in Vietnam long enough to earn a trip to Hawaii on R&R. He apparently met his wife and mother in the tropical paradise and then flew back into Da Nang, a refreshed Marine with a new gimmick to avoid further field duty. Upon his return, McDivit requested to see the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant (something he usually avoided at all costs). McDivit tells Horrible Jones that he (McDivit) is now eligible to be sent out of the combat zone. It seems that McDivit met a young lad returning to the States by virtue of being a sole surviving son<sup>3</sup>. McDivit told the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant that after having talked to the lad in Da Nang, he had reason to believe that he too was a sole surviving son. Horrible, with a look of disbelief on his face said;

"McDivit, youse had better NOT be no sole survivin' son, as you signed a statement in your enlistment contract stating that you wasn't no sole survivin' son! False official statement is grounds for a court martial!"

McDivit replied with an innocent look on his face, saying that his mother had just told him that his father had been in the Navy in WWII and had gone down with his ship. Jones, genuinely concerned, told McDivit that he wouldn't want to be responsible for the death of the last remaining male in his family, but that he'd have to write home to get the appropriate paperwork. To be on the safe side, Jones assigned McDivit to mess duty to keep him out of the line of fire until the situation could be resolved.

Shortly thereafter, 2/3 went ashore for an extended period of combat while the CH-46s were on Okinawa having their tail pylons being glued back on. Time passed and the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant and I were occupied with fighting the war, temporally forgetting about the ongoing saga of McDivit and his soon to be confirmed status of the last surviving male member of the McDivit family. McDivit in the meantime was busily concerning himself with washing pots and pans and working in the messhall. The battalion messhall had also been temporarily assigned to the beach until we got our air transportation back. While we were out running several major operations, the 2/3 messhall was co-located with the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment's messhall in Camp Evans.

Finally the long awaited word came down that the U.S.S. Tripoli was on its way back to Vietnam with the newly repaired CH-46s aboard. This was a gala occasion, as we were tired of pulling all the guard duty for 1/4, and were anxiously awaiting a return to our LPH for assignment to further adventures as the SLF. This called for a drink.

Please understand that while other Marines stationed on a permanent basis in Vietnam got a regular beer ration, we got no such amenities. Ships of the U.S. Navy

have been “dry” (without benefit of alcoholic beverages) since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century compliments of such stalwarts as Susan B. Anthony and others of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. We had not had a beer in almost a month. From some unknown source, a pallet of beer appeared, and the battalion was treated to two whole beers apiece... THIS was a momentous occasion. Now while two beers isn’t exactly a night on the town, when you’ve been without for a month or so, normally quite staid individuals begin to loosen up a bit. I figured that something was up when I saw Horrible Jones approaching my hooch.

“Skipper.” he says, “I just got a letter in for the Chaplain of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Hotel Company, and dat bein’ me, I opened it!” I braced myself, this didn’t bode well, since Chaplains are not assigned any lower than battalion level. This letter had obviously NOT been intended for the eyes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant!

With a sinking feeling, I asked exactly what did the letter have to say? With a small grin and perhaps a bit of reticence on his face, Horrible said that the letter was from McDivit’s mother. Uh oh... this has gotta’ be a Jim Dandy!

I read the letter knowing that we were on extremely treacherous ground! My worst fears were realized. It seems that McDivit’s mother was writing to the Chaplain asking if he would break the news to young McDivit that he *wasn’t* actually sole surviving son. It seems that McDivit’s mother had had a momentary dalliance with a traveling salesman during WWII, and had become pregnant (a mortal sin in those days). Her family had disowned her and sent her and her illegitimate son to live with her grandmother. McDivit’s mother (since she wasn’t married) had simply pulled the name McDivit out of thin air. Unfortunately “Mrs.” McDivit never could bring herself to tell the lad of his true lineage!

I was now faced with informing the most religious kid in Hotel Company that his mother was actually a “fallen woman” and that he was in official parlance, illegitimate. Hummm...

Seizing on an inspired solution, I told Horrible that *HE* was going to have to take the letter to the REAL Chaplain of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Hotel Company and explain the circumstances. Horrible looked at me as if I was in possession of three heads.

“Aw Skipper no, I can’t do that!”

“Sure you can Horrible” sez I (grinning to myself for putting the heat on Jones for a change), “but no sweat, I’ll go with you”.

Jones and I proceeded to the bottom of the hill where the Chaplain’s tent was pitched. After a somewhat strained discussion, the Chaplain told Jones that he thought that it would be quite alright if he (Jones) handled the entire mess.

“Aw no youse don’t,” sez Jones, “you don’t do no First Sergeantin’ and I don’t do no Chaplainin’ – dis one’s yours!”

“Very well,” says the Chaplain, “send the lad down to see me!”

We left the tent with our tails tucked between our legs.

Not to be cowered for any length of time, Jones sent for McDivit. Soon a figure in a “tee shirt” and a white mess hat was running from the mess hall to our position on the hill above the Chaplain’s tent.

“You wanted to see me 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant?” sez McDivit.

Jones looked at McDivit with a somber expression.

“McDivit you bastard, get down and sees de’ Chaplain!”

Jones looking over at me with a totally straight face says in a voice more appropriate for a parade deck, “he’ll knows what I means in a minute!”

I was totally speechless... Jones never cracked a smile, but I’ll never forget that afternoon if I live to be a hundred!

### **Postscript:**

To his credit, McDivit came out of the Chaplain’s tent smiling, and never again sought to avoid going to the field. He continued to perform as a most excellent 60 mm mortar gunner for the remainder of his tour and finally went home without a scratch. I later ran into McDivit with his young wife and son in the PX at Quantico and had a nice visit. I don’t know what ever happened to him, but the story still is one of my favorites when I think of those days of long ago and the graveyard humor we often shared in a hostile environment.

Horrible Jones was a combat veteran of Korea and a twice-extended tour in Vietnam. He still wore the scars from wounds in Korea. The Marine Corps was his whole life, and after we both went back to Camp Lejeune following our tour with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Third Marines, Jones volunteered to go back for yet another tour. He was assigned to the Civic Action Platoons, and was out on an inspection tour with several others. He and the group were hitching a ride on a Navy Riverine Patrol Boat, sitting on the forward deck. For those of you who believe in fate, Jones was meant to cash in on his last tour. A single mortar round fell out of nowhere and landed on the deck in the middle of Jones’ group. I lost a great friend and the Marines lost one of their finest Staff NCOs... I still miss Horrible, a gruff old bear with a heart of gold. I suspect he’ll be waiting in Valhalla, where all great soldiers go for their final post.

## **ROC**

### **End Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> A religious “Lay Leader” is usually appointed to a field unit to hold religious services for the Marines in the field when a Chaplain isn’t available. Having attended several of McDivit’s services, I can attest that he held a very serviceable field religious service. McDivit was most sincere in his religious beliefs.

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<sup>2</sup> S/Sgt. McKeon was known as the Drill Instructor that marched his platoon into Ribbon Creek on a night march in April 1956 during which six of his Marines were drowned. American mothers were up in arms. The resulting court martial resulted in a complete revision of the Recruit training program in the Marine Corps. The new program included the formation of the DI School and the bringing back of the Field (Campaign) Hat and NCO Sword as symbols of authority. No less of a person than the legendary Chesty Puller testified for the old Marine Corps training methods during McKeon's court martial. McKeon was broken and imprisoned but was later restored to duty, but needless to say his career was over. The new regulations resulting from this incident prevented the DIs from touching a recruit for virtually any reason or using foul or insulting language during their conversion from "civilian scum" to finished Marine. Most of the regulations were cleverly circumvented of course (until recently), but required the DIs to use more inventive methods of getting around the new restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> The status of "sole surviving son" was one bestowed by the Department of Defense exempting the sole surviving male heir of a family from (further) combat if all of the (other) male members of the family had been killed in combat. This is supposed to allow the lineage of a family to survive. It is quite correctly felt that such a family should be spared from further sacrifice. This regulation is essentially in the tradition of the recent hit movie "Saving Private Ryan".

# Indian Summer in Indian Territory

By Dick Culver

The summer of 1967 was beginning to creep into the first stages of fall in the Republic of Vietnam, but you couldn't tell it by the weather. The country just above and West of Quang Tri was hotter than the hinges of hell, appropriately coinciding with the expected results of the upcoming elections. The powers that be had decided to ensure that General Ky would become next the President of South Vietnam.

As the Company Commander of a Marine Rifle Company, I had been assigned to join the blocking forces placed to guarantee the fairness of the upcoming election. The fact that the eventual outcome at the polls was a foregone conclusion was of little consequence to those of us performing a minaret for the rest of the World to see and say "yea, verily"...



Major Dick Culver

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, along with its support elements including an Artillery Battery, an Engineer Unit, an Amtrac Company, Helicopter Support Troops, a Recon Platoon and a Helicopter Squadron, was one of two Battalions designated to sail in small circles in the South China Sea as a floating reserve for both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Divisions. The floating reserves were called the SLF for Special Landing Force (a sort of predecessor to the modern MEUs).

The SLF was divided into two segments, 2/3 (our Battalion) was designated *SLF Bravo* and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment comprised the second, or *SLF Alpha*. I was the Commanding Officer of Hotel Company of 2/3. Our call sign was what would now be considered to be terribly Politically Incorrect... The Second Battalion of the Third Regiment was known as "Gray Rebel", and I was "Gray Rebel Hotel Six"; most appropriate, I thought, for a gent who had two Great Granddaddies who had served in the 59<sup>th</sup> Alabama during the Late War of Northern Aggression!

The SLF was designed to come in and assist any organization that inadvertently stepped in deep Kimshee... In other words, we comprised a firefighting battalion to assist any unit in I Corps that bit off more than they could chew. We were, in simple terms, "A Sparrow Hawk Unit with Steroids". To say that the duty was thrilling was something of an understatement (we sustained over 800 casualties in a nine month tour). Normally, when we were ordered ashore, we knew the landing zone was already hot. Thus the assignment to "block" for the election was considered soft duty for a Battalion that had been on the SLF for over six straight months. My rifle company had only five men who had not received at least one Purple Heart; I was not one of them.

While the blocking duty was not as rigorous as what we usually drew for an assignment, it was not without certain hazards. Any Rifle Company Commander worth



his salt knew that sitting in one location for more than one night was semi-suicidal, and we had been ordered to stay in place for *three*! We were *not* amused! The march to reach our assigned ridgeline had been strenuous and we had sustained several heat casualties, which did not contribute to the overall morale.

I was extremely fortunate in that I had inherited one of the finest Rifle Companies in the Corps one night during a pitched battle some months earlier. If I had been allowed to pick my own people from scratch, I could not have done better with a stack of record books many feet high and a month to peruse them. The Lieutenants were the best I had ever worked with and the NCOs were outstanding. Better yet, the officers, NCOs and enlisted worked as one and trusted one another in a manner I have never experienced before or since. I would have trusted any one of them with my life and often did. It was truly a fortunate set of circumstances. To add icing on the cake, they all had a sense of humor that added to the ability to survive in a hostile world.

Needless to say, since we were required to stay in a fixed position, we ensured that our patrolling efforts were heavily beefed up, as were our outposts and night ambushes. We were not going to get caught with our trousers down. Late in the afternoon on the last day of the election frivolities we were sitting on the hillside breaking out our evening C-Rats. Up until now, things had been almost boring. The patrol activities had yielded negative results and the ambushes were batting zero. We had begun to relax – perhaps a bit too prematurely.



**Blocking for the Elections  
September 1967  
Ammo Dump at Dong Ha burning in  
background**

While I sat heating a can of “Ham and Muvas<sup>1</sup>”, and wearing a soft cover, the sound of a rifle shot rang out. Reality returned to Hotel Company. At the bottom of the ridge we were occupying, there was a bit of unusual activity in the tree-line. My radio operator claimed to have seen some movement and a puff of smoke from below the ridge. I was carrying a .30 Carbine with several magazines of tracer rounds to mark close-in targets. I gave my radio operator my binoculars and unlimbered the little carbine. I had him pass the word via radio that I wanted everyone on my side of the hill to fire two rounds of 5.56mm into the spot I had fired a tracer. And then the fun began... Every time I would fire, the hillside would reverberate with gunfire and the tree line seemed to be alive. My radio operator began to have fun with the situation and gave me several “corrections” that would indicate the perpetrator of hate and

discontent was on the move.

Suddenly the 60 Mortar NCO asked permission to shoot-in his night defensive fires. Since he had a grin on his face, how could I refuse? The thud of outgoing 60s soon

reverberated in the evening air. No sooner had the 60s left the tubes, then the 81 Section Chief asked my blessing to get clearance from the FSCC<sup>2</sup> to shoot in his night defensive fires. The 81s were soon challenging the 60s for supremacy. The Company Gunnery Sergeant asked if I had any objections to having the 3.5 Rocket Gunners to join in the fray, and the one-sided firefight escalated. The edge of the wood line began to smoke with White Phosphorus rounds. The "Zips" hadn't given up, however, as when one of the 3.5 Gunners went into a kneeling position, the desperate NVA tried to spoil the aim of the gunner. A quick round between the 3.5 Man's legs did the trick and he yanked his shot ricocheting a 3.5 WP round off the ground about 30 feet in front of him and sending it mercifully unexploded into the tree line to detonate harmlessly.

I began to get a bit suspicious when the Artillery Forward Observer asked to check his night defensive fires, but what the hell, fun is fun! I was gratified that the Artillery was on target, and could be depended on to do evil things to sappers if they decided to molest our position during the night.

The Battalion S-3 (Operations Officer) called in and asked what the hell was going on? I described a fire-fight of sufficient proportions to justify our somewhat heavy expenditure of ordnance. He told me that they had just received notification that there were two F-4s returning to base with unused 250 lb. Snake-Eyes<sup>3</sup> and wanted to know if I could use them. The company was now beginning to get with the program and was helping with all the small arms fire we could muster without expending our ready supply of ammo. I answered in the affirmative on the Air Support and told them that I would mark the target with 60 mm WP.

The wood line soon was ablaze and the entire earth shook, since the edge of the tree line was only about 200 yards distant. Needless to say we were not molested that night! A search of the tree-line in the morning revealed the remnants of what appeared to be an NVA Platoon, but it was pretty hard to say, since the 250 lb. Snake-Eyes leave little to the imagination.

The election was over and we were due to withdraw to the beach and be picked up by Mike Boats<sup>4</sup> for return to the USS Tripoli. The Tripoli served as our home base during our tour as SLF Bravo, although we were only destined to spend a total of 12 days on the ship during our nine-month SLF tour.

The Battalion was to move out in trail with Hotel Company bringing up the rear as "Tail End Charlie" during the Battalion withdrawal. We weren't exactly ecstatic over this maneuver, as the last Company in column usually gets the benefit of any hate and discontent that the enemy wishes to administer as a parting gesture. After our encounter the evening before, I doubted seriously that the NVA would be amused. Little did I know!

The withdrawal from the ridgeline went smoothly and all seemed to be progressing well. Last company or no, we were progressing without incident as we passed below Quang Tri heading for the beach to meet the Mike Boats.

I was located about the middle of the column while my Executive Officer, Mike Chervenak, was bringing up the rear with the Company Gunnery Sergeant, Franklin

Craddock. Mike was about as savvy a Lieutenant as I have ever served with. Much like the twins shown in scientific studies, Mike and I tended to have the same thoughts at the same time – this made tactical deployment in a firefight a piece of cake.

Gunny Craddock was a former Drill Instructor with the fighting heart of a Roman Centurion. My Company First Sergeant was an old time NCO from Korea and a two time Drill Instructor from Parris Island. Jones was better known as “Horrible Jones” or “Locker Box Jones” throughout the Corps... he was a true professional and was respected (or at least feared) by the entire company. My job was as simple as keeping my head and letting the company run itself!

As we got within striking distance of the beach, I suddenly became aware of the sound of mortar rounds leaving the tubes... And they were close! The only possible point of origin had to be the tree-line about 150 yards on our right flank. Without even thinking, I got Mike on the hook and told him to get the 81s on the tree-line. He chuckled a bit and told me that they were already on the way. Soon both the 60 and 81 mortars were on target and the M60s were joining the fray. I was just asking the Artillery FO to contact Quang Tri for a fire mission. The next step would have been to call the Battalion CP for the possibility of bringing in Air when I noticed a long bamboo pole coming out of the tree-line. This wouldn't have been remarkable in of itself, but this one had a small white handkerchief tied to the top of it! Since the white flag was waving frantically, I called a cease-fire! Sudden silence and the spectacle of a line of troops wearing U.S. Style Helmets and what appeared to be ARVIN Uniforms came winding out of the foliage. The most notable thing about our former adversaries is that they all had their hands in the air and their rifles slung muzzle down. It appeared that these guys had done this before! Hummm...

I called Battalion and told them what we were observing, and asked what disposition they wanted of the marauding troops. I was fully in favor of tying their hands and marching them to the Mike Boats. Heck, the brass could sort the thing out! Some of the troops, of course, had more imaginative suggestions. Since no one had been injured on either side, I allowed reason to prevail, and stripped them of all the ammunition I could find and sent them back to Quang Tri on their own recognizance...

Everything in me told me that there was more to this exchange that met the eye, but I have always had a soft spot in my heart for the helpless and inept so I let them go. In retrospect I have always wondered how many deaths these guys were later responsible for?

We continued to the beach when some unnamed Marine started singing the Marine Hymn... I expected some disgruntled trooper to fling a dirt clod at the “gungy” Marine. Instead, the entire column slowly took up the refrain and, much like a John Ford movie, the entire company was singing “From the Halls of Montezuma” at the top of their lungs. It was truly an emotional moment and if it hadn't been for a bit of wind kicking up some dust, I'd have sworn that a bit of moisture had formed in the corners my eyes...

General Ky was victorious in the election of course, and I suppose we *were* successful in our blocking efforts, as there were only twice as many kidnappings and murders in the surrounding villages as usual. I WILL wager one thing though; I suspect

that very few NVA units in the area above Quang Tri in 1967 ever again fired a shot at a dug-in Marine Rifle Company.

# ROC

## END NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Slang for C-Ration ham and lima beans – you fill in “Muvvas” for yourself.

<sup>2</sup> FSCC is an abbreviation for Fire Support Control Center, an organization set up coordinate high angle fire weapons to clear air corridors for the aviation segments of our support elements. The clearance was required if the trajectory of the expended ordnance would possibly be within the flight path of a low flying aircraft. 81 Mortars fell within that parameter, but 60 Mortars did not.

<sup>3</sup> “Snake Eyes” were a slang term for a tail fin assembly on a 250 lb. bomb that retarded the forward movement of the bomb allowing it to drop straight down, and thus more accurately on their intended target.

<sup>4</sup> A Mike Boat is an amphibious landing craft carried aboard an attack transport ship (APA) for the landing of troops during an amphibious assault. You’ve seen them many times in the movies with the drop front landing ramp with the troops splashing ashore in the surf.

# **Infantry Officer by Trade, Intelligence Officer by Accident**

**By Dick Culver**

**T**he Fall of 1967 spelled a time of transition for this old Infantry Officer. I had spent my entire career in either the Infantry or Reconnaissance fields with a short tour in the Artillery as a youngster. I was not prepared for the late fall of 1967. Having spent the last seven months as the Commanding Officer of two Infantry Companies, I found myself temporarily sidelined by a long neglected foot infection that the sawbones told me would result in sporting a peg-leg if left untreated. Not envisioning myself as "Long John Silver," I finally succumbed to the insistence that I turn myself into the ship's hospital.

At this particular point in time, our old Skipper, Major Moose Beard, had received orders to return to the States for a well-earned rest. The Moose had promised his Captains that before his departure, he would make sure that all the young Captains would get a crack at an Infantry Company, such an assignment being considered to be a necessary "ticket punch" to ascend the promotion ladder. As good as his word, *The Moose* did a last minute re-shuffle and appointed his staff Captains to billets as Company Commanders and relegated his experienced Company Commanders to jobs on the Battalion Staff. The unsuspecting replacement Battalion CO was soon faced with somewhat of a dilemma. While all of us who had served as Company Commanders were able to breath a temporary sigh of relief, the former staff officers were essentially thrown to the wolves cold.

All young Marine Officers are educated in the rudiments of staff work, and the intricacies of commanding an infantry line outfit. The Officer's Basic Course at Quantico gives all hands a fairly through grounding in the basics. Unfortunately, there are many nuances that must be learned by experience... Certainly the small subtitles of commanding a Rifle Company in combat is one of them. ...And as I was to learn the hard way, staff functions are not exactly cut and dried either. While the ideal way of sliding Captains into new assignments is the use of a gradual method allowing both the new Company Commanders and new Staff Officers a chance to break into the job gradually. Alas, the commitments of combat sometimes call for a more abrupt transition. While the gradual method makes for a smoother transition, Marines are adaptable as I was soon to find out.

I personally had the option of being an underling in the Operations Shop (the S-3) where I would have wound up working for a gentleman I considered to be a living, breathing incompetent. On the other hand, the Intelligence Shop was up for grabs leaving me as my own boss as long as I did my job and kept the Battalion Commander happy. Having spent much of my early career in either Force Reconnaissance or Division Reconnaissance outfits, I was considered to be the optimum choice for Intelligence officer's slot. I never considered the differences in gathering intelligence and processing it for use by the infantry, but I was soon to learn the hard way!

My long time buddy, Reggie Ponsford, had the misfortune of recuperating from a case of malaria at Cam Ran Bay at the time of the transition. Reggie was probably one of the most aggressive infantry commanders in the Marine Corps, and I had known him for a number of years, although his attitude toward "staff pukes" had earned him no

friends on the Battalion Staff. Having no champion in the ranks of the battalion, poor Reggie became the S-4 (Supply and Logistics) Officer. In retrospect, I considered myself fortunate to be selected as the Battalion S-2... At least I'd have a chance to hit back at the enemy first hand. Well, sort of anyway, as long as the somewhat idiotic rules of engagement were followed.

### **GETTING MY "INTELLIGENT" FEET WET**

Upon being released from the hospital, I found that the Battalion was on its final operation as the Special Landing Force. We were to be assigned to the An Hoa area, to work with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. I moved in to the S-2 Shop with great gusto and one more opportunity to close with the enemy.

The troops assigned to the Intelligence Shop pointed out where my new digs would be and helped me move my gear in. Knowing virtually nothing about being a Battalion Intelligence Officer, I did what any hard charging young Marine would do, I simply occupied the position and waited for something to happen. As luck would have it, I wouldn't have long to wait!

During November of 1967 we were assigned our final operation as Special Landing Force Bravo. We moved into a position not far from An Hoa. We were assigned as a supporting element for a major operation being conducted by the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. Following this assignment, we were to move into a permanent base camp in an area called "The Triangle Outpost" about 20 clicks south of Da Nang. This meant that we would have real hooches for our racks, a mess hall and a club – hallelujah! Home would no longer be where you dug it, real beer would be available and we would start getting hot meals for the first time in 9 months. We could hardly wait! But we still had this one last operation to finish before we moved into paradise.

I had just stowed my gear and started to get the intel ops started when a runner came breathlessly into the tent.

"Skipper," he said "we've just gotten in a batch of prisoners and the operations folks want an intel report!"

"Really?" I said, never having had much contact with the enemy except for our body counts. "Where the heck are they?"...

"Down in the ITT<sup>1</sup> tent Captain, the ITT NCO is interrogating 'em now!"

"Great," I said, "where *IS* the ITT Tent?"

"Come on Skipper," I'll show ya".

I entered a hard backed GP Tent where a number of prisoners were stripped to the waist. These worthies were standing with their feet spread and about two and a half feet back from the bulkhead<sup>2</sup>. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were maintaining their balance by leaning forward, supporting themselves on their foreheads, against the strong-backed tent walls.

The tent was divided into two parts, the outer chamber with the prisoners appropriately standing with spread feet to make a dash for freedom improbable, and the

inner “interrogation chamber”. As I started to enter the “inner sanctum” I was greeted by a Marine Staff Sergeant with a frown on his face.

“Good Afternoon Staff Sergeant, I’m Captain Culver, the new intelligence officer assigned to this area!”

“Good afternoon Captain, my name is S/Sgt. Dan Johnson (not his real name of course), I’m the local ITT interrogator.

“Great Sergeant Johnson, I’m here to watch, I’ve never seen any prisoners interrogated before!”

A look of absolute horror crossed Sergeant Johnson’s unbelieving face.

“Skipper, if you’ll just go back to the CP, I’ll bring you the results!”

“No sergeant, I’m the new Battalion Intel Officer, and I’m trying to get my feet wet and see how this stuff is done.”

An even more apprehensive look crossed his face.

“Skipper, honestly, you can be doing something else, I’ll save ya’ a lot of time. I’ll have the stuff up to ya’ shortly!”

I could tell that this was gonna’ be a hard sell.

It suddenly occurred to me what the problem was... I suspect that NO interrogator of ANY army wants any officials watching the interrogation process. Hummm... Now what to do? I considered the alternatives and went to the first prisoner in line standing at a leaning parade rest with his neck muscles straining to supporting his body to keep it from falling. With a quick foot sweep, I knocked his feet out from under him allowing him to crash to the floor leading with his face. The resounding thud was deafening in the otherwise silent tent. I suspected that I had just transformed myself from a Battalion Intelligence Officer into a war criminal. Going back through my memory banks and seeing Marines deliberately mutilated by the enemy soothed my somewhat frayed conscience. At any rate, the die was cast!

“Now Sergeant Johnson, do I qualify to come into the “inner-sanctum?”

A wave of relief crossed the Staff Sergeant’s face. He grinned slightly, now having an apparent co-conspirator in the intelligence gathering process, and motioned me into the interrogation chamber.

I immediately noticed a triangular set-up of tables and chairs such that the interrogator (Sergeant Johnson) sat at one end of a long table, the interpreter at the other end. The prisoner was seated at a separate table. Sergeant Johnson had a EE-8 Field Phone in front of him with a set of attached wires trailing across the tent floor in the direction of the prisoner. For purposes of observation and taking notes, I took a chair behind and to the right of the interrogator.

I was first taken with the observation that the interrogator never spoke directly to the prisoner, but rather to the interpreter. The “interrogee” was forced to make a definite head movement to view either of the other two individuals. This deprived him of being

able to pick up any interaction between the gentleman asking the questions and the individual translating the questions into Vietnamese. This was truly a psychological disadvantage for a prisoner suddenly separated from his unit and friends.

The second thing I observed was that Sergeant Johnson never spoke Vietnamese to the prisoner, but rather would address the interrogator, almost as if interrogating the interpreter himself. The interpreter would then turn to the prisoner and ask the question in his native language. The prisoner's answers were then given back to the interpreter who would then give Sergeant Johnson the prisoner's answers. During a break and out of earshot of the interpreter and the prisoner, I asked Johnson why he didn't direct the questions to the prisoner personally.

"Well Captain, I speak better Vietnamese than the native interpreter but I don't trust those clowns – you never know whose side they're on. That guy in there doesn't know that I speak Vietnamese other than a few rudimentary phrases. This allows him the feeling that he can speak to the prisoner in front of me without my knowing what he's talking about. He thinks I'm a Spanish linguist, not a Vietnamese linguist. This really comes in handy – kinda' like having a hidden microphone in a room or using one-way mirrors. You usually find out a lot more this way. The interpreter thinks that HE taught me all the Vietnamese I know! Works great!"

"Not bad Johnson, you're a real tricky guy! My compliments!"

"Thanks Captain, now let's get back to interrogating the prisoner before he forgets why he's here."

After about 45 minutes of relatively ineffective interaction with the prisoner, Sergeant Johnson attached the two stray wires from the EE-8 Field Phone to the prisoner's index fingers. I watched in fascination... Sergeant Johnson's next question was more to the point, but was still greeted with what amounted wall of silence. Sergeant Johnson began to examine a .45 Automatic Pistol laying on the table in front of him with considered interest. He knowledgeably pulled the slide to the rear after removing a loaded magazine, dropping a live round on the table. Without looking at the prisoner, he reloaded the ejected round back into the magazine and reinserted magazine in the pistol and allowed the slide to go forward. At no time did he point the pistol at the prisoner nor even overtly threaten him with it, but the message was clear. The prisoner's answers began to flow a bit more freely. This continued for about 20 minutes which included several more sessions of loading and unloading the pistol, but the prisoner had become complacent again.

At this point Sergeant Johnson's question was more to the point but got the same stoic resistance. Johnson had the interpreter ask the question one more time. With no meaningful response from the prisoner, a quick turn of the ringing crank on the field phone by Johnson got the prisoner's apt attention. He cringed and attempted to pull away from the wires, but they were firmly attached. Several turns of the crank later the prisoner had become amazingly cooperative.

A final even more pointed question concerning the location of the VC command post met with stony silence even after a few judicious turns of the crank. At this point, Johnson got up quietly and placed the EE-8 on the table in front of the prisoner. The prisoner watched anxiously and looked back and forth between Johnson and the



interpreter with a quizzical look on his face. Johnson came back to his table and began contemplating his pistol once more. After asking the question one more time, Johnson told the interpreter to tell the VC to turn the crank himself. An exchange between the VC and the interpreter resulted in a violent shaking of the head by the interrogatee, a look of abject terror on his face.

Johnson had the interpreter repeat the instruction several more times. Johnson continued to contemplate his pistol, but now began to turn to face the VC directly for the first time with a look of absolute menace on his face grasping the old Colt in a manner that indicated that he knew what to do with it if the answers didn't start coming... He fairly growled his request to the interpreter, making even the interpreter cringe. The VC complied, "cranking himself" to the ground with appropriate theatrics. After the second session of self-electrification, the VC became super cooperative and began spilling his guts to Johnson.

After leaving the inner-sanctum of the interrogation room, Johnson broke out a cigarette and I lit a cigar.

"Johnson," I asked, "how do you know the information he gave you was the real thing?"

"Skipper, ya' get a feel for these things after a year or so, and if you know the language well enough, you can pick up inflections in the voice and little hints... Believe me, I know when they're lying!"

"How about the location of their CP?"

"Skipper, you can take that one to the bank!"

"OK, I have another question just for my own information – why do you wire their fingers instead of say, the testicles?"

Johnson laughed.

Skipper, ya' gotta' know two things, first there are more nerve endings in the fingertips than there are around the balls! Second, if the Colonel was to suddenly walk through the tent flap and I had his balls wired for sound, there'd just be NO way to explain it! Since I get the same or better results with the fingertips; why take the chance of being *misinterpreted*? If you were watching carefully, I kept the wires close to hand just in case. That way, a quick yank of the wires gives me plausible deniability! Yeah, I COULD have had him wired, but there is no tangible proof, but a prisoner with two wires around his balls leaves little or nothing to the imagination!"

"Got it Johnson, you're a bloomin' genius!"

"Not really Skipper, but I'll stand by my results! I've been here two years now, and I very rarely make a mistake."

"Hey Johnson, that field phone is a really neat idea – yours?"

"Nah, it was old when Noah loaded the Arc, but it IS truly effective. The problem is that you've got to know HOW to use it or you'll get skewed results! For instance when I first started, I was a bit more heavy handed than I am now and things would

occasionally take an unexpected turn. For instance, one afternoon I got three confessions to the assassination of Lincoln and two guys admitted setting the Chicago Fire! Heh, heh, heh..."

"Geeze! I get your point, too much is just as bad or worse than too little! – Just how powerful is that damned phone ringer?"

"Actually Skipper, it's less potent than you'd think. As I recall it puts out about 90 volts, but the output is in milliamps and is essentially harmless but pretty frightening to the prisoners. When I remember what those guys have done to our prisoners, I find it hard to worry about shootin' 'em a little juice to save some of our guys lives. Now the ARVINS<sup>3</sup> are absolutely vicious. They'll take 4 or 5 prisoners up in a helicopter and ask the first one a question. If the answer ain't satisfactory, they simply kick the poor bastard out without a parachute and then turn to the next guy in line. I've never heard of anyone having to go to the third prisoner."

Johnson continued "...And if you think THOSE guys are bad@\$e\$, you should see how the Korean Marines operate. They're the most bigoted people you'll ever come across. They are convinced that all other Orientals are inferior to the Koreans, and they like nothing more than to get a couple of Vietnamese prisoners. They have a hell of a rep for being very effective against the Vietnamese, but it's all rumors 'cuz they won't willingly operate with anyone else. No witnesses doncha' see! They hate the Communists and they REALLY hate the Vietnamese Communists. Very few prisoners survive a Korean interrogation, and they don't keep a lotta' records if you catch my drift! Most of 'em come to Vietnam just to get in a little combat time!"

"Thanks Johnson, I've had a real education this afternoon," I said heading back for the Intel tent to transcribe and pass on my newly acquired info."

I settled down behind my field desk, lit a cigar and began to scribble my observations. I transcribed the co-ordinates of the VC Headquarters and took it over to the Battalion Air Liaison Officer.

"Hey Joe, what can you give me to take out a VC Battalion CP?"

"Culver, if you'll quit blowing cigar smoke in my face, I'll give you a mini arc-light to take the thing out! ...A BATTALION CP you say? Well now... For a Battalion CP we in the Wing can probably come up with enough ordnance to level Hanoi!"

"Nah Joe, this is a VC Battalion operating in our area of operation. We'd better get this one laid on quick or those little gooners may decide to shift locations!"

"No sweat Dick, I'll get right on it! How's a little fireworks by evening chow sound?"

"That oughta' do it Joe, we'll give 'em something to aid their digestion!"

The mention of chow made my mouth water, we'd just put in seven straight months eating "Cs" in a hole in the ground. Having access to a mess hall was a luxury we were having trouble getting used to. I continued writing but my mind was on hot chow.

It was getting close to Thanksgiving and the chow had been getting better day by day. I could hardly wait. Staff Sergeant Johnson brought in his interrogation report and I lost myself putting it in a finished paper for the Battalion CO. Finally finishing up, I

closed the desk, delivered the Intel Report to the S-3 and headed for chow with great anticipation. Going into the mess tent I met Johnson, my co-war criminal from the ITT Team. Filling our trays we found a vacant spot and started to eat. Some fifteen minutes into the meal I found that Vietnam was actually sitting astride a major earthquake fault! A horrible noise filled the air and trays went flying everywhere. Troops and officers dove under the tables and we looked at each other in wonder?

“Hey Johnson, what the f++k was THAT?”

“Dunno’ Skipper, but it sounds like the Commies have finally gotten some air support!”

**AIR** support!?? My mind raced...

Suddenly the light dawned! Uh oh, think fast Culver – just WHERE the hell WAS that CP? Hummm... I beat feet back to the Intel Tent and headed for my situation map. Checking the VC Battalion CP against our current position I saw the problem. Damn it, I should have checked those coordinates a bit closer before I had the wing pull a mini arc light! Damn. The explosions continued to rock the area and the noise was deafening. The earthquake-like shocks continued. Heading back to the mess tent I found everyone still taking cover under anything available. It sounded and felt like the end of the earth. I looked over at Johnson and he looked at me.

“Skipper, is this what I THINK it is?” said Johnson.

“No question in my mind Johnson, sounds like our little interrogation session may have spelled the demise of the local VC effort for a day or two at least!”

“Don’t bet on it Captain, those little weasels dig in like gophers, they’ll survive, but I’d say we definitely got their attention!”

Crawling over to the Air Liaison Officer not wishing to give the impression that I knew we were in no immediate danger, I got to Joe who was now about to bust a gut in hilarity...

“Don’t laugh you idiot, it won’t take long for these guys to realize that WE’RE responsible for this!”

“Relax Culver, those guys in the F4s are good, we’re in no danger, but I’ll bet the little momma-sans will have their hands full washing out a bunch of skivvies in the morning” said Jones with tears rolling down his face!

I made a mental note to myself never to call in any air-strikes until I had checked their proximity to our personal location more thoroughly. When the explosions began to recede, the gents under the tables began to resurface. I too was asking what in the heck the explosions were all about, being very careful not to allow the cause of the mini arc-light to become general knowledge. I marked this one down under lessons learned, but I can still see the unbelieving look on their faces – heh, heh, heh...

## **RESURRECTING THE INFAMOUS CHINESE ADVISOR**

About two nights after my mini arc-light I got a call from Foxtrot Company.

"Hey Two, we found a VC graveyard out here and when we were unearthing a couple to check 'em out we've come across one that appears to be a Chinese Advisor!"

"Your \$+itting me, right?"

"Nope, sure looks like one to me!"

Not being of a ghoulish nature I contacted the Battalion CO to find out what he wanted done with the corpse. He sounded like he was foaming at the mouth over such a find.

"Well, have 'em put him in a body bag and ship him back to the CP damn it, this may well be an intelligence coup!"

Oh great, now I have to make room for a Chink stiff! Rats...

"Aye aye Colonel, I'll have him brought in." I radioed the information back to the Company commander, Foxtrot Six.

"Your kidding, right? This guy is pretty ripe! He's been planted awhile."

"Quit bitchin', I ain't looking forward to this any more than you are! Just bag him up and send him back, I'll frag a chopper to your pos. The CO wants a Chink Advisor to show to the folks at Division – that'll teach you to mention a Chinaman!"

"Right Two, I'll get right on it, but I'll get ya' for this one, out."

Almost immediately, Foxtrot got the word to saddle up and move out.

"OK Two, **now** what do I do with this stiff?"

"Replant him and mark the spot, we'll dig him up later!"

"Roger Two, will do, out."

Five minutes later, the word was changed again, and Foxtrot Company was ordered to dig in for awhile. The Battalion CO called me and asked for his Chinaman.

"Right Six, I'll have him resurrected and brought back," I replied.

Foxtrot Six was not amused.

"You want me to dig this guy up *again*?" he asked in disbelief.

"You got it... The CO *WANTS* that advisor! That'll teach ya' to mention Chinese Advisors!"

"Damn you Culver," he said violating radio code!

Shortly the word was changed once more, ordering the company to move out.

"Foxtrot Six?, Two here! Got some bad news, plant this guy again and prepare to move out!"

"Culver, you're a dead man when I get back!"

Orders were changed again within minutes ordering another stand down... I suddenly had the idea that nobody knew what was going on, but the demand for the Chinaman surfaced again (no pun intended). I put my assistant on the radio to talk to Foxtrot Six so I wouldn't be the one to break the news about sending the Chink Advisor to the rear! Not only that, I wanted a running start. The sounds over the radio headset were not for the faint of heart. A chopper was dispatched however with Foxtrot Six grudgingly promising to send me the missing body.

My assistant was a fresh youngster just assigned from a rifle company and was anxious to get broken in to intelligence work. He immediately started pestering me to allow him to see the Chinese Advisor. I knew better, but what the hell, this was war and the kid needed a lesson. As I heard the chopper approaching I broke out a gas mask. My new assistant looked at me funny, but went running for the landing zone. By the time the green body bag had been unloaded the young Marine was already unzipping it. I was in no rush to see a putrefying corpse that had been resurrected three times in one night. My young Lance Corporal couldn't wait. I could see him unzipping the bag. By the time I got there, my assistant had disappeared but I could hear him retching to one side. I looked in the body bag, and I suppose IF you used your imagination, it COULD have been a Chinaman, but then on the other hand he was a bit ripe for positive identification. I called the Battalion Commander.

"Gray Rebel Six Actual, this is Two Actual, over."

"Roger, Two what do you think, IS he a Chinaman? Over."

"Skipper, he DEFINITELY a Chinaman in my opinion. I think we need to ship this stiff up to Division Headquarters for those rear echelon clowns to take a look," I said, chuckling to myself thinking of the looks on the faces of the guys who had three sets of starched jungle utilities in their wall locker to go with their spit shined jungle boots.

"Roger Two, I'll respect your judgment, ship the body back on the same chopper!"

The chopper flew off into the night for a rendezvous with the anxiously awaiting staff penguins at Division. I chuckled to myself. Wellll... they'd asked for it, why deprive them of the find of a lifetime? I headed back to the tent. All I had to contend with was an outraged Foxtrot Six – maybe I had something to trade him? I'd worry about that one later.

## **A NEW HOME AND NEW PROBLEMS**

Following my first great "intelligence adventure" in the An Hoa area, operating with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, our battalion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment finally moved to their first permanent base camp in 9 Months. Our orphan battalion had been what was essentially a "fire-fighting" unit known as *Special Landing Force Bravo*. When anything went awry and a unit got into trouble, we were sent in to help, much like a super sparrow hawk. We had been shuffled from pillar to post and farmed out to whatever Division need a "fresh" battalion for almost 9 months. We now moved into a base camp in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Area. We took up residence just south of Da Nang in what was called "The Triangle Outpost". We looked forward with great expectation of hot showers, semi-permanent hooches with real racks and officer and enlisted clubs available during lulls in combat. We had only heard of such in legend... Real beer and a

Battalion Mess Hall were the shining jewels in a fabled crown only spoken of in whispers lest they disappear in the mists of dreams. We took off our packs and moved in to our new quarters.

I was spiffing up the Intelligence Hooch and preparing to settle down with a good cigar when I got a call to go see the Battalion Commander ASAP. Grabbing my map packet and appropriate writing implements I headed for the CP. The Battalion CO motioned for me to come in.

“Well Culver, when can you have an intelligence study done on our new AO<sup>4</sup>?” said the Colonel?

Area Intelligence Study? Hummm... Now I’ve heard of those, but I wonder what the hell they look like? Damn, I wish I’d gotten a few days of schooling on this. Prisoner interrogation? I had that one down pat, but an intelligence study? Time to hit the books – *FAST!*

“Colonel, I’ll get on it right away. I’ll need some transportation and a few documents, but I’ll expedite the process.”

By now the Colonel realized that most of his staff officers were simply infantry types in staff suits, so he looked at me a bit quizzically but didn’t say anything.

“OK Culver, let me know when it’s done!”

“Aye, aye Sir, no sweat!” No sweat my *fanny*, now I was beginning to sweat a bit!

Back in the Intel Hooch I began to evaluate my situation. First, what the hell is an intel study and what’s it supposed to look like, I thought? I had seen such in Basic (Officer’s) School of course, but had never studied them in detail – always figured there’d be one to copy from if the \$hit hit the fan! An investigation of the existing files told me that my predecessor had done me no favors. There was nothing in the files that even closely resembled an Area Intelligence Study. Maybe they had been left aboard ship? Wherever they were, I was hung out to dry. Now what? Well Culver, they always said that if in doubt head for the sound of the guns. Upppsss... That’s IT! Of course! Hell, I’d have bet big bucks that no one else was terribly checked out on Intel Studies either. I’d just use my fertile imagination and tailor the thing to the location of the enemy in our area – couldn’t go too far wrong!

When I was stationed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District Headquarters in New Orleans, I had been the low man on the totem pole in an organization that had Majors emptying trash cans. As a result, I became the SLJO<sup>5</sup> of the District Headquarters. One of those jobs was to conduct JAG<sup>6</sup> Investigations of any undo activities that occurred in the City of New Orleans. These included injuries to transient military personnel, deserters, AWOLs, serious traffic accidents involving injury to life or property, theft, etc. While this wasn’t my favorite pastime, I DID learn a lot about investigations. I thought about the Intelligence Area Study a bit and decided to conduct a JAG Investigation of the VC and his operational area which pretty much overlapped our own.

I took stock of what I DID know about combat intelligence, gleaned mostly from my studies in the Basic Officers Course some 9 years before. I knew the enemy could and would (under normal circumstances) do one of four things:

- 1) He could attack
- 2) He could defend
- 3) He could reinforce... or
- 4) He could withdraw

Guerillas of course often did all four in varying sequences that favored his limited personnel and resources. This would make things easier by a bunch and besides which, it just might make it sound like I knew what I was talking about. I could only hope.

Now a JAG Investigation takes the rough format of three things. First, you list all the things chronologically that you did to gather your information in as much detail as necessary to make it clear that you did a thorough job. The second phase was to take all the information that you gathered and could authenticate, and arrange it into what were called "findings of fact". Rumors, maybes, and possibilities had to be listed as such and not represented as absolutes. The final portion of the investigation consisted of your recommendations based on your findings of fact. Voilà... the light began to dawn, I had my format! Now all I needed was the facts and apply the entire mess into the four basic options open to the enemy. If I did a serviceable job on this one, even *I'd* be happy with such a document.

I headed to the Battalion CP to see the Air Officer to lay on transportation back to Division Headquarters to talk to the Intelligence folks. At least I wouldn't have to look like a total "dumb \$+it" and ask what the hell an Area Intelligence Study was. Soon winging my way back to Division in an Army "Slick" that had been diverted for a quick pick-up to drop me off to see the folks at Division G-2. Hell, maybe I could even bum some ice cream out of this trip.

Similar trips to the Wing Intelligence people and the S-2 Shops of surrounding Regiments and Battalions soon left me with a mail sack of information to go through. My work was obviously cut out for me. The following day was a real ring-tailed Jim dandy, but by evening chow, things were coming together nicely. Placing the information carefully into my JAG format, I had my document complete with maps, enemy activities and recommendations for course(s) of action. I deposited my finished product on the Colonel's desk. The next morning he sent for me and I headed for the CP with heart-in-mouth.

"Culver, come in, come in," came a voice booming from the Colonel's office!

Hey, he sounded almost friendly! Hummm...

"Yes sir, you wanted to see me?" I answered.

"Culver, I didn't realize you were a professional intelligence Officer! This is the finest Area Study I've ever seen! Great job!"

Uh oh, something's wrong, he *COULDN'T* be talking to me! I blushed appropriately and stood with my heels locked in front of his desk. The other shoe was bound to drop momentarily.

“Culver, I want you to make copies of this and take one to Division Headquarters and all the Regimental CPs... This information needs to be gotten into the hands of the operational units. I believe you have a new slant on the situation and I agree with you fully! Great job!”

My Gawd, NOW he's trying to make me the Division laughing stock... somebody's bound to figure out that I don't have a clue... Oh well, at least I ain't in trouble yet. As luck would have it, the darned thing made the rounds and met with nothing but praise. I was sure that either the Division Intel folks were clueless or I had inadvertently stumbled and fallen into the cesspool and come out smelling like the proverbial rose! Miracle of miracles, never a word was ever said about the JAG Investigation of the VC south of Da Nang. Odin does have a sense of humor!

Life was good in the intelligence community after that. I was accepted as a full-fledged Combat Intelligence Officer, and the Battalion Commander made every briefing always complimenting me on my knowledgeable and thoughtful briefings. I said nothing, as Mrs. Culver didn't raise any damn fools.

Many years later when I finally retired from the Corps, I carried as a souvenir a secondary MOS<sup>7</sup> as an Intelligence Officer, earned the hard way. I occasionally see former Staff Sergeant Johnson, who also retired as a Major. When we meet, we still grin at each other in remembrance of a day in RVN that a savvy old Staff NCO educated an Infantry Officer in the ways of combat intelligence.



#### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> **ITT** is the designation for the Interrogator Translator Teams, those assigned to question and translate the replies given by captured enemy soldiers. The ITT Personnel are educated in the language of the enemy and must maintain a working knowledge of any evolving tactical situation in the various areas of operation. The ITT personnel are usually an interesting combination of psychologists, and military tacticians.

<sup>2</sup> **Bulkhead** is Marine -“ese” for wall.

<sup>3</sup> **ARVIN** – This refers to the Army of (South) Vietnam, the non-communists, and supposedly our allies.

<sup>4</sup> **AO** – stands for Area of Operation.

<sup>5</sup> **SLJO** stood for “\$+itty Little Jobs Officer” – a catch-all phrase for any undesirable or onerous job that nobody else wanted or had the seniority to avoid.

<sup>6</sup> **JAG** stood for Judge Advocate General. The JAG set forth the de-facto guidelines for any legal actions taken against military personnel in **any** armed service.

<sup>7</sup> **MOS** stands for Military Occupational Specialty.



# The Fastest Gun South Of Da Nang

by Dick Culver

The time frame was December 1967, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment had recently been replaced as the fire fighting detail on the Special Landing Force. Up until that time, 2/3 had been utilized as a sort of "Super Sparrow Hawk" designated to pull any outfit with their fanny in a crack out of a \$++t sandwich. This duty, while arduous and interesting had its definite drawbacks (aside from the obvious, being almost continuously in the line of fire). Our base of operations was literally an LPH (Landing Platform, Helicopter – a small aircraft carrier designed to launch [vertical] amphibious assaults utilizing helicopters). Our particular LPH was the U.S.S. Tripoli, the LPH-10.

Now living aboard ship might sound like a soft touch, and indeed if we HAD lived aboard the LPH it would have been a genteel existence, however for over nine months, we spent all but about 12 days ashore. Once we were launched to assist some organization that was in "Deep Kimshe", our services (as a unit) were usually offered (compliments of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade – our parent unit stationed on Okinawa) to whatever Marine Division we happened to be attached. Needless to say, no self-respecting Marine Division ever turned down such an offer and we spent almost 9 straight months in the field. Other units *permanently* assigned to the Division(s) were assigned *permanent* areas of operation, and each Battalion had a *semi-permanent* camp. These camps usually had Officer, Staff NCO, NCO and Enlisted Clubs, a battalion mess hall and permanent hooches for the troops. We, as the *Special Landing Force*, on the other hand, lived in holes we had dug, dined primarily on C Rations, and virtually never got beer rations since U.S. Naval ships have been "dry" (devoid of alcoholic beverages) since the turn of the century. This made for a VERY Spartan existence!

Other units were usually stationed close to some existing Vietnamese Village. Here the troops were more or less free to bargain with the villagers for small souvenirs, and other less mentionable amenities. Having been (literally) living out of a fighting hole for 9 months, our troops took advantage of their newfound freedom(s). One of the more salable products produced in our nearest Village were "wild-west" type holsters, produced in the mold of the best Hollywood tradition.

Until that time, most of the old-timers (Officers and S/NCOs) had acquired holsters for their government model M1911s that were somewhat different than the standard issue M1912 leather pistol scabbard for the old war-horse. I personally carried my DCM



Reggie with Smoking Holster

M1911 in a Berns-Martin "Raider Holster". "Big Red", as my personal sidearm came to be called by my Hospital Corpsmen, was carried "cocked and locked" with a safety strap between the cocked hammer and the rear of the slide. I was perfectly comfortable with that rig and still have it among my pile of "sacred stuff".

Everything would have gone well, but most of the young troops authorized to carry a .45 Automatic had not brought any non-regulation holsters from home with them. Having seen all the officers (and many S/NCOs) carrying their "hawg legs" in non-reg leather, they lusted after individual leather and the opportunity to display their individuality, much like Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson. The kids felt that this would be the perfect opportunity to acquire a suitable gunfighting rig for themselves. The wild west holsters being purveyed in the nearby ville were too much to resist. Within a week or so of our battalion returning to a permanent "in country" status, virtually every authorized "pistoleer" looked like an extra in a Clint Eastwood Spaghetti Western.

Our new Battalion Commander was a stickler for regulations and since we were no longer tactically widely disbursed as we had often been in the past, it was much easier to keep an eagle eye on our choice of web gear and gun fighting rigs. As long as the variations in leather pistol scabbards were minimal and not terribly noticeable, our former skipper had traditionally turned a blind eye to our eccentricities. With the outbreak of low slung gunfighter leather running rampant throughout the battalion, this had pushed our normally patient CO beyond the limit.

At the morning staff meeting, our new battalion commander made it plain that everyone had until noon that day to dispose of their cowboy (and other) non regulation holsters. By morning colors, anyone caught sporting anything other than a regulation M1912 holster would be summarily "drawn and quartered". With great reluctance we put away our "non-reg" leather. For a few days, everyone went around with long faces and the most regulation of gear, but we still were bitching about the sudden twist of fate that removed some of our individuality.

One of my most stalwart compatriots was a Marine Captain who had followed me around the Marine Corps since we had both been 2nd lieutenants. This gentleman was one Reginald G. Ponsford III, a product of El Paso, Texas. Needless to say Reggie was one tough hombre – anyone who survived childhood with a name like that in El Paso was not likely to be a pansy! Reggie had grown up tough. He stood about 5'10" tall, and had been a wrestler and prizefighter in his youth and was still double tough (he had scars all over the top of his head to prove it). During our days with 2/3 we had had matching Rifle Companies and had seen some rough times together. This coupled with our previous service together had created a rather close bond that exists to this day. Reggie is one of my favorite characters.

When our previous Battalion CO had been rotated back to the States, he had promised all the Captains that they would get a crack at a Rifle Company (considered to be a necessary "ticket-punch" in the climb up the promotional ladder). As a result, when he left, he made all the existing Company Commanders Staff Officers, and all the Staff Officers, Company Commanders... needless to say this did not bode well. The new Battalion Commander was in a position of having to operate with Company Commanders with no field experience, and staff officers who had openly disdained the

previous staff officers (now Company Commanders) that they had replaced. Since I had been an old "Recon Troop" in days gone by, I wound up as the Battalion Intelligence Officer. Reggie Ponsford had gotten a case of malaria, had been evacuated to Cam Ron Bay and wasn't present in the Battalion to defend himself. Reggie thus inherited the (unglamorous) job of Battalion S-4 (Supply and Logistics). Needless to say, my knuckle dragging buddy was not amused! Reggie would have been perfectly at home "doing in" the enemy with battle axes, and saw no humor in having been reduced to issuing "beans, bullets and Band-Aids". I was in total sympathy with Reggie, but could at least rationalize that I was in a position of analyzing the enemy's probable course(s) of action, and capable of causing some hate and discontent among the VC and NVA by pinpointing targets. My ability to do this stemmed from intelligence extracted from prisoners (most gently of course), and thus possibly influencing the war effort. Reggie had become a simple "supply puke" and I left no opportunity unturned to remind him of his "reduced status"...

Now that the stage is set, we will get to the meat of our story. Fast forward to a small chunk of terrain immediately behind the Battalion Commander's Hooch. There were several of the various Staff Officers and Company Commanders standing in a small group bemoaning the loss of our favorite pistol pouches. Grumbling was rampant and many foul things were being attributed to the manufacturers of the Wild West leather gear. Some of the lads hailing from the southern climes were contemplating having loved ones send them voodoo dolls for the insertion of appropriate black pins. Most of the lads were in a foul mood.

Sensing that the mood was going to progress from foul to ugly, I decided to take a hand. Remembering a trick an old time MP once showed me for cocking the M1911 in a GI holster one handed, I decided to hold class to demonstrate the advantages of the M1912 Holster.

Taking my pistol out of its regulation holster, I cleared the weapon in the approved manner. For the un-anointed, this consists of removing the magazine and sticking it in your belt. You then pull the slide to the rear, and look into the chamber to insure that the pistol is, in fact, clear. You can then allow the slide to go forward, pull the trigger, reinsert the magazine and re-holster your pistol. Since I was going to demonstrate the "one handed cocking technique", I simply left the magazine in my belt, emptied the chamber and pocketed the round I normally kept in the chamber.

I then demonstrated the "one handed cocking technique" by pushing the pistol into the M1912 holster in such a fashion that the lower portion of the slide was resting on the shelf normally forming the "stop" that the trigger guard rests upon when it is normally placed in the holster. When the lower portion of the slide is pushed smartly down on the "trigger guard shelf", the slide will remain motionless, and the receiver will go downward. The barrel will protrude into the normal "slide channel" in the main portion of the holster normally housing the entire slide of the M1911. The barrel protruding into the slide channel allows the slide to go to the rear in relation to the receiver and forces the slide to its rearmost position. If a loaded magazine is left in the weapon, and the force causing the recoil spring to compress is relaxed, the slide will rapidly go back in battery under spring tension, stripping the top round off the magazine. This action will result in loading the pistol and leave the hammer in a cocked position. If your adversary is in

front of you, you can then level the pistol at the "blighter" and blaze away! Most efficient and a very good trick to know if you are required to carry the M1911 in a GI Holster with an empty chamber. As described, it is a safe practice, but if you get out of "sync", evil things can happen! And thereby hangs a tale...

After demonstrating the technique several times, Reggie says to me, "Culver, you're gonna' blow your foot off screwing around with that thing! Now how was that again?"

I demonstrated one more time and Reggie decided to try it for himself. Now Reggie usually carried his pistol in his holster with the hammer down and with an empty chamber (not a practice I personally favor, but then...). Everything would have gone alright, but for one small fly in the buttermilk.

Reggie had loaned his pistol to his supply sergeant to go shoot rats at the local dump to keep his shooting eye in. The young lad was used to carrying a round in the chamber with the hammer down (another practice I do not personally favor). When the sergeant returned from the dump, he cleaned it thoroughly and gave it back to Reggie in the same condition in which he kept his own sidearm – a round in the chamber, and a loaded magazine, but with the hammer down.

Reggie of course, thinks the lad returned the pistol to him in the same condition in which he found it – empty chamber, slide forward, hammer down, but with a loaded magazine in the magazine well. You can probably see this one coming.

Reggie clears his pistol in the manner HE considers will make it safe. He removes the magazine and puts it in his belt. Since he never carried a round in the chamber inside the wire, he allowed habit and assumption get the best of his good judgment. He simply didn't bother to check the chamber! Exceptionally bad maneuver!

With his (supposedly) unloaded pistol, Reggie copied my demonstration of the one-handed cocking technique. The scheme worked and cocked the pistol, but a loaded round already in the chamber is just long enough for the "holster cocking technique" not to eject it from the ejection port, and the offending round simply re-chambered itself as the slide returned to battery. Ponsford looked at his cocked pistol and said something to the effect of, "Well I'll be damned!"

Reggie then stuffed his pistol back in the holster and pulled the trigger to ready himself for one more go at it! The entire area was rocked by an unexpected concussion and the smell of cordite. The area was absolutely saturated with silence, and upon looking around, I find that Reggie and I are alone behind the Colonel's tent with the door slowly opening.

"Uh oh!" I thought, "this could get ugly!"

A booming voice from the hooch demanded, "what the f++k was THAT!"

Reggie stood up as straight as his tensed muscles and aching ears would allow and said, "Aw Colonel, one of your damned fool captains just shot the end out of his holster!"

"Really?" said the Colonel, "who in the hell was that?"

Reggie sorta' hung his head and said..."Me", with his demeanor fairly dripping with regret.

The immediate silence was even more deafening than the earlier pistol shot. The Colonel was looking at both of us like we were from the Planet Mars, and no doubt plotting his upcoming "drawing and quartering ceremony." I excuse myself on the pretext of preparing the Intelligence Summary for the following day, leaving Reggie to talk his way out of this one!

Reggie was awarded five days "hack" for his indiscretion ("hack" being an administrative confinement to quarters when not performing your normal daily duties). Hack was, of course, a semi-meaningless formality in Vietnam, and by Friday Reggie was his old smiling self, although keeping his hand well away from his issue M1912 holster. A small get together at the Club that afternoon resulted in the presentation of a GI helmet to Reggie that had been shot full of holes (seemingly with an M60 Machine Gun). There was a specially marked dog tag on a chain hung through one of the holes – the inscription read, "To Capt. Reggie Ponsford, From a Nervous Staff".

Only a miracle had kept the inscription from reading, "To Three Toes Ponsford, From a Nervous Staff!" Heh, heh, heh...

I never asked Reggie if he had perfected his one-handed cock and draw technique, Mrs. Culver didn't raise any damn fools.

**ROC**

# Floyd Gibbons' Legacy to the Marines ©2006

By Dick Culver

While the Marines had been among the first to arrive in France after our declaration of against the Kaiser, they had initially been utilized guard and garrison troops. General Pershing, while impressed with the smartness of the Marines and ability to perform even the most menial tasks with complaint, he was not convinced that a bunch of Soldiers could or would function well when integrated into a modern land Army. The Commandant was not amused and used every trick could muster to get the Marines into a separate unit would function under their own officers and NCOs. Grudgingly they were slowly put into the lines to accustom them to the peculiarities of trench warfare and were finally brigaded with the U.S. Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade consisting of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments and the 5<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion. The Marine Units were the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiments and the 6<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, collectively known as the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Brigade.



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Constant training and tours in the trenches had hardened the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Division which now was the parent unit of both the Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Brigade commanded by Army Major General Harbord. While both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Brigades had been combat seasoned, neither had ever participated in a major action. This was soon to change.

**The Battle for Belleau Wood was fierce and often very personal. Marine affinity for the bayonet terrified the German Infantry.**

The French notified General Pershing that Paris was in danger of being overrun, and the German 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Division had advanced within 50 miles of the City of Light. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was tapped to stop the German threat to Paris and to the honor of the French citizenry. Since this is primarily a story of Marines, I will stick primarily to the Marines' action, but can't leave out an organization that the Marines thought of as their own – the Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers (a part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> [Army] Brigade).

The first couple of days resulted in further German advances being repulsed by extremely accurate Marine rifle fire and counter-attacks. The battle began to grow and reach crescendo proportions from the 1<sup>st</sup> of June though the 6<sup>th</sup>. The 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment had advanced on hill 142 the morning of June 6<sup>th</sup> to be followed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment on the evening of June 6<sup>th</sup> to make a push for the wood proper.

Floyd Gibbons had become perhaps as famous as (but a bit more flamboyant than) Ernie Pyle in WWII, and was noted for his friendship and admiration for the U.S. Marines. On the evening of 6 June 1918, Gibbons attached himself to 3/6 under the command of Benjamin S. Berry. Major Berry advised Gibbons to go back as it was "hotter than hell in there"... Major Berry advanced and was almost immediately wounded. Gibbons hit the deck and was soon

wounded in both the left arm and shoulder. A final bullet ricocheted off a rock and took out his left eye exiting through the right side of his helmet... Gibbons remained conscious throughout the entire ordeal until he could be finally evacuated and removed via ambulance to a field hospital. Prior to jumping off into the Wood, Gibbons had handed his earlier dispatches to a friend prior to entering Belleau Wood, asking him to file his notes for him if he did not survive the ordeal, and thereby hangs the tale.

General Pershing had an “ironclad” rule against identifying individual units in contact with the enemy, and until this time no specific unit had been identified in action. The American Public was literally slobbering for news of their units overcoming the Huns. Things were about to change!

Floyd Gibbons was a popular and well known individual greatly admired by his contemporaries. The news of his grievous wounds spread rapidly to the rear and it was feared that Floyd had written his last story. The censors got together and decided to publish Floyd’s last dispatches without censoring them as a tribute to the famed reporter. The Army censors also being great fans of Gibbons, agreed and Floyd’s last dispatches were published lauding the glorious exploits of the Marines in Belleau Wood. This was done without the knowledge or permission of General Pershing! The Marines being unaware of the content of Gibbons’ dispatches and up to their ears in Germans, simply continued to attack.

The dispatches concerning the battle of Belleau Wood continued to roll in uncensored for three more days and the Marines soaked up the lion’s share of the publicity. Finally the censorship was reapplied in spades and unit identification was again stopped by the Army censors. ...But it was too late. The American Public, hungry for news of “their boys” in the trenches, took the Marines to heart and rightly or wrongly, the Corp’s reputation was made.

Floyd survived his terrible wounds and was eventually awarded the Croix de Guerre with palm while being escorted by his beloved Marines as an honor guard.

The indiscretion(s) resulting from publishing Floyd’s unaltered dispatches, forever changed the American Public’s perception of the United States Marines. Now these elite troops were the most important ground troops suppressing the Hun and winning the war against the Kaiser. The Marines of course, had no idea of what was happening. Conversely, General Pershing DID have an idea and was busily gnashing his teeth.

The Marines continued to shed glory on themselves throughout the end of the war and came away with an unblemished reputation. The Marines had become (rightly or wrongly) the darlings of the American Public.



**Floyd Gibbons with Marine escort going to receive his Croix de Guerre**



Floyd became instantly identified with his Marines and for many years thereafter went into places of eminent danger with “his” Marines, usually wearing the Marine Forrest Green Uniform. In 1941, Floyd Gibbons was posthumously made an official U.S. Marine by the Marine Corps League.

Once the war was over, General Pershing commissioned a French sculptor to create a bronze statue to commemorate the U.S. Army Doughboy’s service in WWI. General Pershing told his staff to furnish a model to pose for the French sculptor for his commemorative statue. Apparently not too much guidance was given, and the individual assigned to pose for the statue was a Marine Private. The Frenchman, having no intramural rivalries in *his* psyche, modeled the Marine Private in his entirety – complete with the Marine Corps Emblem on his helmet!



2.1 Passengers of private vehicles dismount to honor Colors or National Anthem.

**Photograph of Iron Mike Standing Guard over the old Headquarters Building in Quantico.  
Picture taken from my *Guide Book for Marines* dated 1951, illustrating the proper rendering of honors to the colors when passing in an automobile during Colors or playing of the National Anthem!**

When General Pershing saw the finished statue, he refused to accept the Frenchman’s work of art, since it had a USMC emblem on the helmet! Pershing was, in a word, outraged (and still extremely upset about the breach of censorship which he saw as an unfair overshadowing of the United States Army’s exploits in the Great War)! General Douglas MacArthur was also outraged and continued to hold a grudge even after he fled Corregidor in the early days of WWII. When safely ensconced in Australia, “Dugout Doug” immediately wrote each (Army) unit left on the Rock up for a Presidential Unit

Citation – all except one, the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Marines. When his oversight was pointed out to him, he ground his teeth and made a statement to the effect that the Marines had garnered unfair publicity in WWI and he was not going to add to their fame and glory in “*THIS*” war! It wasn’t until the Inchon Landing in Korea that he finally forgave the Marines their earlier



indiscretions when they pulled the Army's chestnuts out of the fire. From that time on, they became "his" Marines and apparently all was forgiven, some 32-years after the fact.

Help was in the wings concerning the now orphaned statue, with the lonely Marine Corps Emblem however, as General Smedley Butler (holder of two Medals of Honor) saw the statue and fell in love. He took up a collection from all the Marines in the AEF and bought the statue from the Frenchman. They shipped the artwork back to the United States and placed it in front of the old Headquarters Building of the Marine Corps Base at Quantico.

<sup>1</sup>The statue stands there today as a reminder to the Corps of its heritage and remains on guard over the old Headquarters Building of long ago. I often have stood in front of it and harked back to an earlier time. Although uncovered, I have given a slow and meaningful mental salute to those fine Marines who fought and often gave their lives so that later generations would enjoy freedom. My generation (living in the shadow of theirs) would be inspired by the glory and sacrifices of those gallant "Soldiers of the Sea" who went before. When I was a youngster in the Corps, we still had Marines on active duty who had fought at Belleau Wood, and were combat veterans of "The Great War." Two of my first three Commandants (General Cates and General Shepherd) had fought at Belleau Wood and received the Navy Cross for their actions (General Shepherd and General Cates. A third, General Pate, was also a veteran of WWI (albeit an Army veteran of the Great War). One of my mentors of the time was a Marine Warrant Officer who had participated in WWI and been assigned as a part of the famous railroad "Mail Guard" in the 1920s...

General Cates, then serving as a Captain, had been my Dad's OIC of the Spokane, Washington Recruiting Station in 1925. I once stood in awe while they talked while stopped on the steps to "*Little Hall*" (the old PX) in Quantico. Cates was the Commanding General of Quantico at the time, having stepped down from the office of Commandant after a four year tour – General Cates simply wasn't ready to retire! My point is simply that I felt much closer to the veterans of the *Great War* than those who now serve. My Dad had joined the Corps in 1918 (a bit underage), and much later had a contemporary with him during WWII who had sailed around the World as a member of the Marine Detachment on a Cruiser with Roosevelt's Great White Fleet in 1905... It is now a different century of course, and perhaps a bit more difficult to personally identify with those who made history before us, but not so very long ago, such was not the case with the veterans of Belleau Wood!



Iron Mike standing in front of the old Headquarters Building in Quantico. Note Marine Emblem on helmet.

## ROC

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### **Personal Commentary on Iron Mike and the Statue (also so-named) at Parris Island:**

The statue in the story is often called "*Iron Mike*" although another statue of a WWI Marine with a machine gun over his shoulder also stands at Parris Island and was called "Iron Mike" when I was stationed there... I was aware of both, since I had grown up around Quantico, and when I went to Parris Island, I was told that the statue on "the Island" was also known as

Iron Mike! In my youth, I simply assumed that every Marine Corps post must have a WWI statue called “*Iron Mike*”! Which came first? I don’t have a clue, but my Dad, a Marine in 1918 told me that the statue in Quantico had been there as long as he could remember (which was actually shortly following WWI). Since my Dad went to boot camp at Parris Island in 1918 I would surmise that the Parris Island version came along somewhat later?

#### **A Continuation of the Discussion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Brigade and the Second Army Division:**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Marines were closely tied to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Division (Commanded by General John A. Lejeune, following [Army] General Harbord’s reassignment to the AEF Staff) – General Lejeune thus became the first Marine Corps General to ever command an Army Division). The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Brigade held a great respect for the Army infantry contingent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers. Following the war, the Marines changed the name of their (*personal*) magazine, originally called “*The Marines Magazine*” (a sort of predecessor of the “Leatherneck” magazine), to the “*Marines Magazine and Indian*” in honor of their brothers in arms (the patch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division depicted a colorful Indian Head as their logo). I once donated a number of copies of “*The Marines Magazine*” (including the *last* issue so named) and the *first* issue of “*The Marines Magazine and Indian*” along with many other copies of both “*The Marines Magazine*” and “*The Marines Magazine and Indian*” to the Marine Corps Museum. These had been in my Dad’s trunk, along with many copies on either side of the name change. I checked a couple of years later only to find that the magazines My Dad and I had donated had somehow disappeared (...into someone else’s collection?). Egad! I have never donated anything else for the enlightenment of our modern day Marines – If they weren’t going on display, I would rather have had them myself! A *hard* lesson learned the *hard* way I suppose!

John W. Thomason makes frequent mention in his book, “*Fix Bayonets*” of the Marines’ affection for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineers. The tone of the articles in the magazine conveys great camaraderie between the Marines of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade and their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Apparently it was a great “love-love” relationship.

**End notes:**

<sup>11</sup> The picture of the “stand-alone statue” of “Iron Mike” is courtesy of Colonel Walt Ford of Leatherneck Magazine. Colonel Ford is a fine gentleman who is always of great help in both illustrations, and background information usually of great interest to the readers! He has always been of great assistance, and only occasionally raps my knuckles with the legendary ruler said to have been used by the Sisters conducting the instructional packets administered by the Catholic Schools, heh, heh, heh... (usually *needed* I might add, and always done with great grace and aplomb).

# FATE

BY DICK CULVER

I suppose many, if not all, who have stared the “Grim Reaper” in the eye in one manner or another, depending on their vocation, have occasionally pondered their place in the overall scheme of things. Is there really a bullet out there with your name on it? ...Or if you buy the farm will it be from one marked “*to whom it may concern!*”? How many of you have ever gotten that creepy and sometimes unshakable feeling that **your** time was up and you were not going to make it through the next operation? Many have, and since such feelings or premonitions *occasionally* come true, (it’s simply a matter of percentages, I suppose), the legends take on a life (or death in this case) of their own. The mere fact that the individual who finally caught “*the one with his name on it,*” voiced his premonitions to close companions may have perhaps given an unwarranted boost to the feeling that your fate is occasionally controlled by supernatural forces, or certainly in the hands of some unknown “puppet-masters” pulling the strings. Let me tell you a few true stories, and let you decide for yourselves...



## A BIT OF BACKGROUND...

Some of these stories occurred in the early summer of 1967 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment was engaged in a continuing operation off the coast of South Vietnam as a part of Special Landing Force Bravo. Now, if there was ever an assignment that would keep the adrenaline pumping, this was it. Essentially our battalion was assigned to the USS Tripoli (LPH-10, a small aircraft carrier designed to house the majority of an Infantry Battalion, and its supporting helicopter air assets – helicopter transport, and gunships). Other elements of the SLF Battalion (there were usually two, Alpha and Bravo – 2/3 comprised SLF Bravo) were housed in a LST and an LPD designed to house additional personnel (both battalion assets, and supporting units, artillery, engineers, HST personnel, etc.). This seaborne conglomeration (essentially a bobtailed Regimental Landing Team) would sail in small circles in the South China Sea close to the nearest expected action. If one of the Division (1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>) units came under intense and unexpected fire, the staff personnel (from III MAF or Division Headquarters) who kept their fingers on the map, would “land the landing force”. A sort of cavalry to the rescue operation, much like the “sparrow hawk” concept, only on a much larger scale. What you must understand is that when the SLF was sent ashore, the fat was already in the fire, and you could expect “incoming” as you landed. Assignment to such a unit was not designed to give your life insurance agent untroubled dreams!

Several other stories take place over a much longer period of time, and were perhaps cumulative actions, albeit still possibly falling under the overall mantle of an all-knowing and all-seeing higher intelligence we have come to call our **FATE**...

## STORY NUMBER ONE...

In the early summer of 1967, following several reasonably hot operations, a young hard charging lieutenant was assigned to the battalion as an Infantry platoon commander. He was typical of the youngsters we were receiving from the Basic Officer's School, motivated and just generally "gung-ho". He was well built, and obviously in good physical shape, and to hear him tell the story, he was looking forward to a long Marine Corps Career. Certainly he performed up to expectations, and he was a great example for the troops. He had his leadership traits down pat, and the kids assigned to his unit seemed to "lord it over" some of their contemporaries, pointing out that they had the best platoon commander in the company. The young lieutenant responded in kind and treated his men well. It seemed to be a win-win situation. After several spirited firefights, however, the lieutenant no longer seemed to be the same happy-go-lucky individual who had joined the Battalion a month or so earlier. He had let it be known to some of his peers that he had begun to get the feeling that he wasn't going to survive Vietnam to make it home to his family. He began to believe that he was going to be the victim of a sniper's bullet, and that it would be fatal. He never made this public knowledge, but a few of his close friends let the information leak. In short, he personally had bought off on "*the bullet with his name on it*" routine.

One afternoon while exchanging fire with the NVA, a single shot (most probably) from an AK-47 came out of nowhere and hit the lieutenant reasonably high in the chest, and off to one side. The Corpsman got to him almost immediately, and pronounced that the Lieutenant was gonna' be OK, and that he was going to medivac him to the Tripoli in about 15-minutes. The Corpsman gave him a morphine shot to hold down any inadvertent pain, he had his wounds bandaged, and the Corpsman gave him water. The kids in his platoon came over and good naturedly told him they'd expect him back in the field as soon as he finished screwing off. The lieutenant was loaded aboard the medivac CH-46 and taken straightaway to the Tripoli. The only problem was that the lieutenant died en route to the ship for no particular reason the doctors could discern. Apparently, he died of shock, and considering his mindset it may well have been self-induced shock based on his deep seated belief that he was going to die from a single rifle bullet.

Do people die from self-induced shock? Yes, they most certainly do. Do you suppose the lieutenant mentally *killed himself* or that he had in fact found the "*one with his name on it*?" You'll have to decide that for yourself. Was the single bullet his **"FATE"** or his destiny?

## STORY NUMBER TWO...

This one has to do with a Captain who was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment fairly late in our evolution on the Special Landing Force. He had participated in some of our operations up close to the DMZ (extreme Northern I Corps) and as a result he had become used to fighting the NVA as a uniformed force, and not in the "get killed by a booby-trap set weeks earlier" scenario that we later experienced when we finally moved into our permanent base camp south of Da Nang, called The Triangle Outpost. Since most of us in the Battalion had experienced both methods of fighting the wily foe, we were able to shift gears on a moment's notice.

Our Captain (who we'll call John) had come to us from a tour of I&I Duty in New Orleans, stationed down on the Lake Front. He was a deeply devoted family man with an enduring love for his wife of some years. He talked of nothing else, and yet one day he received a most literal "Dear John" letter telling him that she was taking the family and "splitting the sheets," to use the vernacular of the day. This was apparently a total surprise to John, and it hit him very hard indeed. He was morose and his off duty conversations were filled with his desire to get back and get his family problems straightened out and bring the love of his life back into the fold.

To be absolutely honest, John's performance as a Company Commander didn't seem to suffer, and if anything he became even more aggressive – of course, we may have been missing the obvious. When the Battalion finally put in to the Triangle Outpost, having finished our tour with the Special Landing Force, we collectively breathed a sigh of relief and began to live like civilized human beings with hard-backed tents, canvas racks, a shower tent, and even a mess hall to heat our C-Rats. Life had become very good indeed for those accustomed to digging our own hooches and heating our own C-Rats. Our Mess Tent was a delight, and we even got an occasional hot meal that didn't originate in a can.

Patrol actions, however, now had degenerated to those that often resulted in wounds caused by booby-traps instead of concerted firefights. Dying from the actions of individuals performed several weeks earlier was maddening, and it caused an entire rethinking of our daily tactics. Shooting at uniformed soldiers engaged in a more or less conventional war was an entirely different smoke! While it wasn't out of the question to occasionally come across some armed Viet Cong, these were uncommon.

John began personally leading patrols as a Company Commander, a job normally relegated to platoon and squad leaders. Finally, one day John led his last patrol and ran into a command detonated mine that almost blew him in half. Tough to the last however, he remained conscious for a number of minutes after the detonation. The Corpsman was working feverishly over him, although shaking his head. John's last words? *"Tell my wife I love her!"*

Now the question has to be, did John deliberately push his luck knowing he had lost his one true love and wasn't able to face life without her, or had his dedication to duty caused him to loose track of normal sensibility and caution? Had the entire thing been a way of committing suicide rather than facing life without his wife? ...Or had John finally run into *"the one with his name on it?"* Perhaps the final booby-trap was simply his **FATE?**

## **STORY NUMBER THREE...**

This one is a bit displaced in the final fate of the individual involved. It has to do with a young Lieutenant who came to us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>Rd</sup> Marines with the appearance of a lovable nerd but departed with the well deserved sobriquet of "Cold Steel Gunning".

"Cold Steel" was an unlikely looking young lad who lived to become a Marine Corps Hero. His story is better and more completely told in the sea story "Cold Steel Gunning," but I will give you a quick synopsis here. After having made the entire Battalion Staff miserable in his efforts to be assigned to an Infantry platoon, he finally wore the entire crew down and was given an NCO considered to be the toughest Platoon Sergeant in the outfit. The Platoon Sergeant was assigned to save the troops from Gunning, but, perhaps more to the point, to save Gunning from himself.

It would seem that we had worried unnecessarily as Gunning was more than up to the task at hand. Upon being accosted by an NVA Platoon, Gunning had retaliated by ordering his platoon to “fix bayonets” and driving the enemy from the field. After changing the magazine in his pistol following his famous bayonet charge, he became the toast of the platoon, and a couple of weeks later following another bayonet charge, this time subduing a NVA Company, he became the toast of the Battalion. He eventually left Vietnam with at least one Silver Star and a chest full of medals, apparently with nothing else to prove.

I saw young Lieutenant Gunning one more time, after he had made Captain, this time in 1973 when he was serving as a Company Commander in the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines up at Camp Schwab. Gunning had found his niche in life and had decided on becoming a professional U.S. Marine. He had just come back from an R&R Trip to Hawaii to meet the love of his life, apparently to make preparations to “tie the knot” of nuptial bliss. Upon arriving back on the Rock from his sojourn, he was assigned as the Battalion Officer of the Day. Our legendary hero was found dead in his office the next morning, apparently by his own hand still clutching his issued .45 Automatic Pistol.

It has always been my contention that some wee lassie did for “Cold Steel Gunning” what the entire North Vietnamese Army hadn’t been able to accomplish during his tour in South East Asia.

My question is, was this a preordained **FATE** for the lad destined to be a hero in combat, but ultimately unable to handle civilian life and its feminine nuances? Are some individuals superbly equipped to handle combat, but totally unprepared to respond to life in the outside world? Had “Cold Steel Gunning” simply worked Captain John’s **FATE** in reverse, getting his “Dear John” in person as opposed to a letter from a widely displaced and no longer loving wife? One other possibility to consider is that perhaps “Cold Steel” had been fated to die in combat in Vietnam and the Grim Reaper had inadvertently turned his head just for a second during Gunning’s mighty exploits, allowing him to miss his appointed rendezvous with death, much as in the movie “*Final Destination*”?...Or had Gunning simply found “*the one with his name on it*” in his own holster?

## STORY NUMBER FOUR...

This one is a little more difficult to deal with as it was an on-going thing. It has to do with my well known 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, Kenneth R. (Lockerbox) Jones, sometimes referred to as “Horrible Jones” for some unknown reason (heh, heh, heh)... Jones was a professional’s professional. Two tours as a drill instructor in the early to mid 1950s had established his reputation as a strict disciplinarian. His first tour on the field had made him a legend, and his return after the infamous McKeon incident in 1956 reintroduced him to his former Junior Drill Instructor who was now an instructor in the newly formed Drill Instructor’s School. Jones’s former assistant is said to have exclaimed “Oh No! He’s Back!” The originator of the “locker-box” drill for his platoons had returned to ensure that his Marine Corps had not gone to hell in a handbasket.

Jones had served in combat in Korea and carried a number of scars that bespoke of healed bullet wounds. Rumor control said that Jones had once played semi-professional football, and his physical build would have allowed him to participate in such activities. Facial scars supposedly acquired from going through the windshield in a car mishap gave him the countenance of one tough cookie. From personal experience, I can categorically state that he

was everything his reputation, record book and appearance would lead you to believe were truisms. One of my later Battalion Commanders following Vietnam told of Jones' exploits as one of his platoon sergeants in an infantry Battalion. Although Jones was legend, he apparently wasn't one who had milked the system for every available ribbon and dangler. His display of fruit salad was impressive enough, sporting a Bronze Star and appropriate Purple Hearts ...obviously he had not padded his record with anything that hadn't been forced on him by admiring commanders.

Jones' demeanor with the troops was something of a facade, as he pretended to be "*Jack the Ripper*," who was the very nemesis of a lad who failed to do his duty. I watched him supervise a youngster who had not worn his flack jacket on patrol bury his body armor in a 6'x6'x6' hole, fill it in, and then dig it up again. The uninitiated would have thought of this as punishment, but I saw it for what it was – Jones liked the kid and was trying to impress upon him the necessity of wearing it to make it home alive.

As the first sergeant of the company he was hard on the Marines, but would never allow any NCOs from the other companies to screw with "his" troops. He went well out of his way to conceal his activities, but Jones for all of his bluster was a "softie" at heart. The kids were not easily fooled, however, and while they avoided his wrath like the plague, they had a place in their heart for their legendary First Soldier.

He had a sense of humor that was also legendary, and he often took his fellow Staff NCOs to task just to keep 'em on their toes. In the Hierarchy of the 9 tiered rank system, certain nuances were to be observed, but not always voiced. The so-called line ranks (Gunnery Sergeant, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant and Sergeant Major) were placed in the scheme of things above the more technical grades (Master Sergeant, and Master Gunnery Sergeant). One of Jones' old friends was the communicator of the battalion, a Master Sergeant named Flannigan. Every morning when Jones would climb out of his hole, he would look over at Flannigan and the conversation was always the same:

"Youse realizes, Flannigan, dat a First Sergeant is *ALWAYS* senior to a Master Sergeant, regardless of date of rank!"

Flannigan, a funny gentleman himself, and a great communications man, would simply look over at Jones and roll his eyes. It was a great joke between them, and it never varied.

I had come to view Jones as one of the great truisms of the Corps, eternal and a sort of keeper of the eternal flame. The 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant sort of took me under his wing and in his own gruff fashion attempted to keep me out of trouble. To say that I was "gungy" when I arrived would have been an understatement. What he saw in my worthless fanny, except for perhaps a bit of prior enlisted service, was something of a mystery to me. Perhaps it was because down deep we both had an overriding love of the troops and tried to get 'em home safe. When I would attempt to do something a bit off the wall, like lead a patrol during an operation, Jones in his own way would attempt to dissuade my John Wayne urges by pointing out that while it was certainly my company, and of course I could do anything I wanted, that if I were to get killed it would leave the company without a commanding officer (indicating that this would be a VERY bad thing), but of course the Company Commander could do as he wished. This would be done in front of the troops, which had the effect of pointing out that bayonet charges were not really MY job, but if I wished to continue he'd understand. He probably saved my bacon several times using this technique and appropriately shamed me without making me look like a chicken \$hit in front of the troops. Once I figured out that he was



actually acting in my best interest (as well as the company's), I came to love the old bear. He was essentially what the Marine Corps was all about.

Jones was on his second extension in Vietnam when I inherited him, and he had done more than his share of the dirty work. I kept gently prodding him to find out if he ever intended to go back to the land of the big PX. He'd usually grin and say no more about it. Then one day, he came to me with (for him) a rather unusual request. Jones asked me if I would have any objection if he stayed behind in the Company Office aboard ship for awhile, as the work was beginning to pile up. I of course had no objection, as most of the Companies ran a version of this anyway. Normally the Company Gunny was the senior NCO during minor operations, when the Battalion had not been off-loaded for an extended period. He then made a statement that was seemingly out of character for the most knuckle-dragging First Sergeant in the Marine Corps. He said that he was finally getting a little antsy and starting to duck at any unexpected loud noise (hell, I thought that went with the entire situation). Bear in mind that Jones had participated in the "Hill Fights" on hill 881 in April, and that was a whole war in itself! I told him I understood, and that I thought a bit of time in the office might be good for the organization. But for Jones to admit becoming nervous under fire was seemingly totally out of character for him. Since we had become pretty close, I thought that such a revelation was an indication of mutual trust. I kept my mouth shut, as Jones had earned his mini-R&R in spades!

During the battle for the tree line and small hedge rows in the village of Ap Se Quan, just a bit southwest of Quang Tri, we had two CH-46 re-supply helicopters shot out of the landing zone (actually a graveyard, the only dry ground capable of handling a CH-46) with RPGs, wounding 17 individuals who were on the working party. One of the wounded was my Company Gunnery Sergeant, Franklin D. Craddock, another stalwart NCO and former Drill Instructor. Craddock, refusing to be medivac'd, jumped over the tale gate of the CH-46 staggering out of the landing zone. Craddock simply wasn't ready to be medivac'd! I got him patched up as best I could, but he obviously belonged in sick bay. When the choppers landed in the morning with our re-supplies and to take out the residual wounded, Horrible Jones appeared, as if by magic, doing a contact relief of Gunny Craddock. I had not sent back for the First Sergeant, but he had gotten word of Craddock's wounds and orchestrated a sort of NCO Change of Command. Jones hadn't been out of the blast but for a couple of weeks, and I would have opted to let him have a bit more rest and relaxation, but old time NCOs have a mind of their own.

Lest this become a Horrible Jones biography, I will taper off of the minutiae, and get back to the original tale. When I finally became the S-2 of the Battalion, and Hotel Company fell to another commanding officer, Gunnery Sergeant Craddock finally allowed them to "*find*" all of his many wound tags and medivac him back to Okinawa. I only had a couple of months left in country and often visited my favorite First Sergeant. One day, I asked Horrible if it was true that he was finally going home. He grinned and said, "Yep, Skipper, I got a letter the other day from my missus." The letter read as follows, if he was to be believed:

"Horrible, now I knows youse loves da' Corps, and feel dat your place is in combat, *BUT*, come dis June der's gonna' be a lot of "fornicating" (using different language of course) going on, and if youse wants to get in on it, you'd better be here!"

I left Horrible to continue his packing as I was preparing to head back to Camp Lejeune.

Getting my own affairs unscrambled left me with little time to socialize, and since I was now stationed at the Rifle Range at Camp Lejeune, some twenty miles from the main base,

and living in quarters at the range, my socializing mainside was severely curtailed. Generally speaking, I only saw any of my old time friends and acquaintances when they were assigned to the range for requalification.

I was notified one day in May that I was to report to the flagpole in front of the Base Headquarters at 0800 on a Friday morning. I attempted to beg off, telling the General's Staff Secretary that there was some mistake. I got another call telling me that "I" was the entertainment for the morning for a visiting Naval Academy Class. I grudgingly showed up, rather than disobey a direct order, and who should be standing tall to watch the ceremony but a certain First Sergeant Horrible Jones and Gunnery Sergeant Franklin D. Craddock. After a few handshakes, Jones and Craddock came over and said somewhat conspiratorially, "Ya see Skipper, we told ya' we'd take care of ya'!" With that, the General requested (demanded?) my presence in his office for a little talk, and Jones and Craddock disappeared before I could palaver with them.

Now is when Jones' story begins to take on something of a supernatural note. Following a tour back at Lejeune, Horrible again requested another tour in Vietnam. It was almost as if he was being driven by some unseen force to cause some preordination to come to fruition. I was somewhat relieved to find out that Jones had been assigned to the Civic Action Program. While this program COULD get exciting, most of the action was with the squads stationed out in the various villages as advisors to the local Vietnamese militia elements. Jones, being one of the supervisors of the program, made a point out of visiting each unit out in the field (in typical Jones fashion) whenever he had the chance. One day in January, 1970, Jones and two of his cohorts hitched a ride with one of the Navy Swift Boats going into the back country to pay a visit to some of the CAP Units. Jones and his companions were told to get a comfortable place to sit on the foredeck since they were in a relatively quiet sector, and little or no action was expected on the way. An unexpected explosion coming seemingly out of nowhere left the foredeck a twisted mess of human remains and wreckage. A "gook mortar round" came crashing down just forward of the pilot house and killed all three of the Marine passengers, Horrible Jones being among them. No further fire was received, the round essentially performing the duties of a "Deus ex Machina" in a Greek Play and providing an improbable end to a story line apparently originating many years before.

Now, my question is, was Jones simply destined to die in combat with the Marines he loved so well, or had he pushed the envelope one too many times? Having been in many extremely sticky combat situations with rifle, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire abounding, he had skated with mostly minor wounds, only to die from an extremely unlikely round of detached mortar fire, perhaps not even aimed at the boat? Odds? One in Ten Million or more? Was this Jones' round marked "*to whom it may concern*" or was it "*the one with his name on it*"? Perhaps the single mortar round had simply sealed a **FATE** ordained many years before?

## STORY NUMBER FIVE...

And perhaps one of the most intriguing stories of all... This one deals with an old friend of mine, with whom I had served on and off for many years, a Lieutenant Colonel named Charlie Reynolds.

Now Charlie started out in the Marine Corps as an enlisted lineman in a communications outfit. He often told the story of his First Sergeant requiring the troops to climb a practice

telephone pole wearing pole climbers to retrieve their liberty cards stashed in a box on top of the pole.

Charlie was an able and competent lad who attracted the favorable attention of his superiors and was recommended for OCS. Upon successful graduation, Charlie decided to try his hand at becoming a Marine Aviator, and he was again one of the top in his class. Further, his expertise with both rifle and pistol convinced his CO that he should compete in the Marine Corps Division Matches as a representative of the Air Wing Team. Charlie, of course, did well - eventually becoming both a Distinguished Marksman and Distinguished Pistol Shot.

Early in his shooting escapades we had served together shooting the Far Eastern Division Matches on Okinawa, when Charlie bamboozled the Ishikwaka Fuzz in their relentless drive to make Okinawa safe from the irresponsible driving practices of the U.S. Military. Charlie was fun to be around and one hell of a rifle shooter.

Time passed, and during the Vietnam fracas Charlie put in two tours in country, one as an A4 driver (a small attack aircraft primarily used for close air support of the ground troops), and a second as a HU1E Gunship pilot (a predecessor of the Huey Cobra Gunships). Charlie was no *pansy* wingie, he was a true warrior, and he took the time to personally zero his four forward firing coaxial M60 Machine Guns. By setting the Huey down on a couple of logs, he got out with some substantial wrenches and, with the help of his crew chief, he loosened and retightened each gun until he was satisfied that it was dead on target at the optimum "anti-communist" range. Charlie was a warrior, perhaps more compatible with rifles and bayonets than silk scarves and moustache wax. His tours left him with at least one Silver Star and a reputation as one of the all time great combat pilots. The infantry loved him as he would almost get in their hip pockets with his A4 when they called for close air support. If Charlie could have found a way to attach a 16" Springfield bayonet to his Huey, I'm sure he'd have finished off any surviving enemy with the nose of his ship!

In 1976 I was assigned to MTU to relieve Major Dave Willis at MTU and found that Weapons Training Battalion was in the able hands of my old friend, now Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Reynolds. I couldn't have been happier. It's always a pleasure to serve with a combat Marine whose entire thrust in life had been to close with and destroy the enemy. We both agreed that the true purpose of both WTB and MTU was to develop better and more effective combat techniques with the service rifle (and pistol, of course) and pass such on to the operating forces. I had always considered myself to be a Marine who knew how to effectively use his service weapons, as opposed to one who was dedicated to winning Olympic Medals. While the medals were important as an indication of your skill level with your individual service weapons, they were not unlike a Ranger Tab or a set of Airborne Wings, as opposed to a symbol of personal glory. Competition was great, but it served primarily as a way of honing your ability to cancel the enemy's birth certificate. Combat was the watchword, and in Charlie I had a kindred spirit.

Time passed, and instructional teams were run for the various Division Matches. With Charlie's blessing we got our first post-Vietnam Marine Corps Sniper School off the ground, although I suspect with anyone else in charge they might have objected to the way we had to rob Peter to pay Paul, since we were operating without budget, training aids or allocated funds. Charlie was the key to the salvation of the Sniper School, by constructively turning his head if nothing else.

After many years, Charlie decided to retire in November of 1977, and he headed back to Huntington, Tennessee, bought a house, and settled down... well at least for a time, at any rate. As with most aviators, Charlie was still yearning for the wild blue yonder. A bit of searching found him working as a pilot for the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) and getting his adrenaline fix in flying light planes for over-flights of reservoirs, dams and power plants.

Skip Hartnett and I made a trip up to Hanscom Air Force Base in the early Spring of 1978, and upon arrival back in Quantico, we encountered a very somber crew. Not knowing what the word was, I asked if the Commandant had passed into Valhalla?

"Worse," was the reply, "Colonel Charlie has bought the farm!"

Dear Allah... Not Charlie - what happened?

"We don't really have the details," was the reply, "but apparently a wing fell off his plane, and both he and his mechanic auggered in!"

The details were never clear, but as best anyone could figure out, both Charlie and his mechanic had given the plane a good going over and had taken it up for a test hop, when the wing came loose and folded across the top of the fuselage. There was obviously no recovery from that one, and one of the great all time warriors had gone to Odin's care, not in the heat of combat defending the world's greatest Republic, but conversely in the employ of one of Franklin Roosevelt's first attempts to bring socialism to the United States. Somehow I don't think Charlie would have been amused if he had cogitated on the perverse implications of defending socialism after having spent his entire life attempting to keep the spread of Communism in check.

I have carefully considered the ramifications of Charlie's demise, and have often wondered if he was simply destined to die in aerial flight, and the long Scythe of the Grim Reaper had somehow missed him when he had the chance all the years in the past? Would anyone flying that aircraft that ill fated afternoon have had the wing come off, or was it waiting for Charlie to correct some past mistake? Perhaps the apparent freak accident was simply in the cards, and his **FATE** been decreed long ago? ...Had Charlie finally found "*the one with his name on it*" over Tennessee instead of South East Asia, or was the wing marked "*to whom it may concern*"?

## STORY NUMBER SIX...

While this collage of vignettes is hardly a clincher to any of the above related tales, it has to do with personal experiences and is therefore immediately suspect and open to criticism. The mini-stories related here are simply an attempt to illustrate the other side of the coin: stories where I *should* have become a statistic, but for some unknown reason avoided my personal final liaison with the man with the scythe. I offer them simply as "what ifs," but somewhat interesting ones nonetheless.

During a few bouts with military parachute jumping I have had several incidents that should have "done for" this worthy, only to have them come out alright.

During one night jump at Camp Pendleton in 1961 a Marine drifted over 1700-yards in the air and landed in Lake Pulgas. Since we were operating well away from any expected water obstacles, we were not wearing life vests. In this particular case, it may simply have been the lad's time to meet his maker. He was one of only two non-swimmers in the old

Force Recon Company, and he drowned wrapped in his own shroud lines. This case is essentially inexplicable, since no one else on the jump drifted over 400-yards. It would appear this particular individual might well have walked in front of a freight train that night if he had not been involved in parachute operations. On the other hand, I have personally shaken out a double malfunction, and landed safely, if somewhat sweaty. I remember smoking one of only three cigarettes in my entire life following that incident, and I burned my lips on the third puff. Close but no cigar (for a bad pun).

While rappelling out of a HUS Helicopter (later re-designated as the CH-34) at Onslow Beach in 1966, I was the first individual “on rappel.” We were hovering at about 90 feet, and in best recon fashion, I got myself about 20 feet of rappelling line slack and went out the door yelling “RECON” at the top of my lungs (the troops expected such nonsense from their officers, and who was I to disappoint them?). The trick was to have your right hand securely holding the line, and once you hit the end of your 20-foot slack and your downward motion stopped, you then went through the normal rappelling routine guiding the line with your left hand and breaking with your right. In theory this looked a lot more dangerous than it really was. The safety man on the deck had hold of the end of the rappelling line and could stop your downward motion by simply tightening the line. Unfortunately, two things happened simultaneously. First, in my haste to demonstrate my macho rappelling technique, I inadvertently lost my hold on the rappelling line with my “break hand” (this is NOT a good thing!). Still, an alert belay man on the deck could have averted disaster at any point by simply tightening the slack on the line. Problem? He was palavering with his buddy and not paying attention to what was going on. I was desperately grabbing for the line with my right hand to regain control and the ability to break my downward motion. Alas, no go - I was suddenly in the process of setting a new speed record from chopper to the beach – I KNEW this was gonna’ hurt (badly – 90-feet is a fur piece!). Somewhere along the way, an understanding Odin shoved the rappelling line back into my right hand, and by applying my best “breaking action” I came to an unceremonious stop with my feet about 2 feet off the deck. I, of course, simply let myself down the last two feet, bowed deeply from the waist to the applause of the troops who were sure I was simply showing off for them. Yeah, right! Jesus, Joseph and Mary! I backed out of the remaining rappelling line and excused myself from the rest of the exercise, making the excuse of turning out the usual interminable reports. I went back to the office coming very close to a mild (make that *major*) cardiac arrest. It took three tries to keep a whole cup of coffee from spilling all over the desk. I made mental notes to myself to avoid such hot-dog idiocy in the future. You just never know when Odin may be taking a nap!

Odin again took a hand during my escapades in Vietnam. I stepped into a “Zip” Panjii pit up to mid-thigh only to find that the sharpened bamboo stakes were rotted to the point of being almost powder. I suspect that that one had been left over from the French Indo-China days. Another bullet dodged, in a manner of speaking.

While executing a midnight change of command of a Rifle Company (my predecessor had been medivac’d following an artillery barrage), I was guided to my new digs by the Company Gunny. It was darker than the inside of a meat locker, and the surrounding tree line looked to be entirely too close for my personal tastes. Under the circumstances I had no choice in the location of my temporary Command Post, so I decided to hunker in until first light when I could assess the situation. My pre-dug foxhole (I still call ‘em foxholes, my heart is firmly entrenched in WWI) was of adequate depth and width. Perhaps Odin was looking out for me once again – I had no idea! My first action was to put my poncho liner in the pre-dug hole and get some shut-eye; it had been an exciting day. It was hotter than the hinges of

Hades in that hole, so I moved my makeshift CP and poncho liner to the top of the hole to get some fresh air. I had no sooner laid down than I was aware of some “swishing sounds” in the air followed by two spirited “booms” that emanated from the hole I had just evacuated. I grabbed my rifle and rolled over at the ready and spent the rest of the night squinting into the blackness of the surrounding vegetation. Morning light demonstrated how close a thing it had been. There in the hole I had just evacuated were the un-fragmented bodies of two Chi-Com stick grenades that had simply blown apart on the seams of the cast warheads. The damned things had simply separated without the normal fragmentation that that makes ‘em hazardous to your health. One fragmentation grenade I could have understood, but two? I can’t even imagine the odds! Chalk up another one to the whims of the Gods of War!

Just prior to my double-dud grenade affair, I had been on the side of a hill overlooking the DMZ and preparing to re-embark aboard the U.S.S. Princeton when I found myself in a spirited artillery barrage, compliments of Ho Chi Minh’s finest. The chopper took a wave off, and I went hunting a hole since I was simply ashore observing and hadn’t dug in. It seems that our spotter aircraft had left to refuel and the Zips were taking the opportunity to use our Battalion Radio Antennae as aiming stakes. Since cover was at a premium, I took advantage of a partially pre-dug hole that was not occupied. After doing a good second base slide, I got some of my body into the hole. The terrain was about as hard as concrete, and my predecessor had only gotten down about 4 inches in depth and had made his prospective shelter about 4 feet long. Anything beats nothing, and I was thankful for small favors. I found myself sharing the hole with another wayfaring stranger, a hospital corpsman who had been making his way across the hill mass. About 185 rounds of Zip artillery later, I finally got my eyeballs to stop spinning like slot machine wheels, dusted myself off, and climbed up to assess any personal damage. Aside from a number of minor perforations that were handily stitched up by the Doc and doused with a bit of iodine, I was back in battery. I started looking around for another individual who had slid into a hole about 12 feet away as the artillery barrage started. At first I thought I might have been hallucinating, as no hole was to be found – at least not until I checked a bit closer. A bit of probing disclosed a pair of jungle boots with bones sticking out and a lot of reddish-pink dirt. Nothing particularly spooky about this one, of course, as the Artillery Gods are always fickle and often can’t keep their rounds in the same grid square. The former occupant of the boots had simply gotten one marked “to whom it may concern!”

During a river crossing under fire (reminiscent of young Penell’s dilemma in *“She Wore a Yellow Ribbon”* but without the shallow ford), I volunteered to be the last guy across. We had sent a scout swimmer across with a piece of parachute cord tied to a rappelling line to secure on the opposite shore. By making brush rafts, we took one half of our heavy and automatic weapons across, while we covered the rest with our remaining guns. Once our ordnance was secured on the opposite shore, we used them to cover the crossing of the remainder of the company using the same techniques. Our only serious antagonist was a Zip automatic rifleman ensconced on a bluff overlooking our river fording operation, who mercifully couldn’t seem to hit the deck with his cover! He shot at us sporadically all afternoon without making a solid hit. Mercifully, we suffered zero casualties. It was finally my turn, and I dutifully untied the rappelling line on my end; holding my helmet in my right hand, I waded into the water. The little clown made his only hit of the afternoon and ricocheted one off my helmet, holing my helmet cover but leaving all else untouched. Either he was getting better, or I was making my departure just in time. Odin again? I began to wonder...

To cut this discussion short, let me skip from the jungles of South East Asia to the hills of North Idaho circa 1997. Always looking for one more adrenaline rush, I had applied for a job

running the external security for several embassies/consulates in both Africa and South America. The intricacies of the negotiations are interesting but not germane to the subject of **"FATE"**... except for one thing. The first Embassy I was offered was that of Kenya, as I had spent some time in the area previously. Before that contract came to fruition, however, the entire assignment process was overcome by events, and I was assigned to the U.S. Embassy and the Consulates in South Africa. The individual assigned to the Kenyan Embassy was a retired black Marine Gunnery Sergeant who had ties with the local natives. While I would have enjoyed the Kenyan assignment (I'm a Robert Ruark fan), I was more than happy with South Africa. The Embassy Assignments were all handled by the same parent company bidding for the contracts with the Department of State. Shortly after these assignments, the Kenyan Embassy in Nairobi was blown up by Muslim extremist, killing many people - including Embassy and security personnel. Had the Gods of War once again taken a hand leaving my skuzzy fanny unscathed? The possibilities give pause to contemplate the entire concept of **FATE**...

What's going to be my ticket to Valhalla? I would certainly like to think I won't be run over by a manure truck while crossing the street headed for a Baskin-Robbins. What would be my choice? When it's necessary to finally visit the Great Hall presided over by Odin and tended by the Valkyries, I suppose the ultimate method of demise would be to swing on a gibbet after having been tried for, and convicted of, rape at the age of 105 years - suspected or *accused* of rape wouldn't count – but *convicted*, now, there's a thought, eh what?

This, then, concludes my contemplations on the concept of preordination at the hand of unseen or supernatural forces. **FATE** or happenstance? It all depends upon how you look at it, doesn't it? Does the Grim Reaper play favorites, or do we all have a predetermined destiny with our own **FATE?** But then, that was the premise of our discussion, wasn't it? Hummm...

**SEMPER FI,**

**DICK**

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# Camel Tales

**Experiences with the Royal Saudi Marine Corps  
by Mustang Major Dick Culver, USMC (Ret)**







# UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

## THE BASICS

Islam is a religion based on the teachings of the prophet **Muhammad** in the Arabian Peninsula (570 CE – 632 CE). Through conversion and military conquests Islam spread rapidly throughout the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century the *caliphate* stretched from Spain through Central Asia. The historical divide of Islam into Sunni and Shiite was caused more by political dispute over successors than doctrinal differences, although differences gradually assumed theological and metaphysical overtones. Both Sunni and Shiite have enumerated creeds and rituals. Sunni creed is based in the **Five Pillars of Islam** and rituals are portrayed through the **Six Articles of Belief**. The **Shiite** creed is the **Roots of Religion** and its rituals are contained in the **Branches of Religion**. Other denominations have different enumerations of creeds, although this does not necessarily mean that one denomination rejects creeds not enumerated. For example, Shiite enumerates **Jihad**, while Sunnis do not, but both agree that it's an indispensable creed.

### 3 Main Islamic works:

- ***Qur'an*** - believed by Muslims to be the divine word of God revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. It is the central religious text and the source of Islamic law (Sharia).
- ***Sunnah*** – based on Muhammad's practices and his examples, it is not an actual text but guides the practical matters of Islamic worship.
- ***Hadith*** – contains narrations of Muhammad's sayings, deeds, and actions.

### 3 Major Branches of Islam:

- ***Sunni***: Those who follow the *Sunnah* and believe in the caliphate. Sunni constitute 85 percent of the world's Muslims. Sunni Muslims believe that because Muhammad did not designate a successor, the best or most qualified person should be either selected or elected as leader (caliph). Because the Quran declared Muhammad to be the last of the prophets, this caliph was to succeed Muhammad as the political leader only. Sunnis believe that the caliph should serve as the protector of the faith, but he does not enjoy any special religious status or inspiration.

❖ four major Sunni **Shariah** or schools of theological law:

- **Hanafi**, dominant in the Arab Middle East, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan;
- **Maleki**, in north, central and west Africa and Egypt;
- **Shafii**, in east Africa, Indonesia and southeast Asia; and
- **Hanbali**, in Saudi Arabia.

- ***Shiite***: Those who follow Ali ibn Abi Taleb (the 4<sup>th</sup> Caliph and Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law). Iman Ali was Muhammad's first convert to Islam. Shiites reject the authority of the first 3 caliphs and believe that succession to the leadership of the Muslim community should be hereditary,

passed down to Muhammad's male descendants. These Imams serve as both religious and political leaders. The Shiites believe that no caliph since Ali has been legitimate. Shiites use a different interpretation of the Hadith and consider the sayings, deeds, and writings of their Imams to be authoritative religious texts. Shiite constitutes 15 percent of the world's Muslims. Today there are approximately 120 million Shi'ite Muslims in the world.



❖ four major Shiite **Shariah** or schools of theological law:

- **Ithna Ashariya or Imami**, the state religion in Iran, dominant in Iraq and also found in Afghanistan;
- **Nizari Ismaili**, present throughout the Muslim world, including Afghanistan, led by the Aga Khan;
- **Zaidiya**, in Yemen;
- **Mutazila**, in Syria and Lebanon.

❖ **Shiite Denominations:** *Shiites* split into three main divisions as a result of disagreement over the number of Imams who succeeded Muhammad.

- ❖ **Jafaryia (Twelvers):** They believe in twelve Imams, the number of imams recognized by the majority of Shiite after the death of Muhammad. The term Shi'a is usually meant to be synonymous with the Jafaryia/Twelvers. The largest Shi'a school of thought (80%), they are predominant in Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain.
- ❖ **Ismailiyah/Ismaili (seveners):** believe the first five Imams were the rightful successors of Muhammad, but *believe the succession should have continued through the sons of* the Sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq. The Ismailis became those who accepted Ja'far's eldest son Ismail as the next Imam, whereas the Twelvers accepted a younger son, Musa al-Kazim. They are also the only Islamic sect that has a true Imamate. They have a direct succession of 48 Imams. The current and 49<sup>th</sup> Ismaili Imam is Aga Khan IV.
- ❖ **Zaidiyah/Zaydi (fivers):** The Zaydi separated from the twelve and Ismaili sects over a disagreement as to who the fifth Imam was. Twelvers and Ismailis believe it was Muhammad al-Baqir, while Zaidis hold that it was his half-brother, Zayd ibn Ali.

### Other Shi'a Sects:

- ❖ **Alawi:** The Alawi are classified under Twelver Shi'a Islam, but differ in a special regard for Ali as a Manifestation of God. They broke away from the Shiite in the 9<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of Ibn Nucair Namin Abdi. Alawites are considered a secretive group, and do not accept converts or openly publish their texts. Found almost exclusively in Syria and Turkey. The ruling party in Syria is Alawite.

❖ **Alevi:** Alevi are sometimes categorized as part of Twelver Shi'a Islam, and sometimes as its own religious tradition. They have many Sufi characteristics and express belief in the Qur'an and the Shi'a Imams, but reject polygamy and accept religious traditions predating Islam, like Turkish Shamanism. They are significant in East-Central Turkey.

❖ **Dawoodi Bohras:** Dawoodi Bohras are the main branch of the Bohras (a Musta'li subset of Ismaili Shi'a Muslims) based in Pakistan and India. The Bohras believe that the 21st Imam, Imam Taiyab abi al-Qasim (a direct descendant of Muhammad via his daughter Fatima\_Zahra) went into seclusion and established the offices of the Da'i al-Mutlaq, Ma'zoon and Mukasir.

➤ **Kharijites:** Broke away from both Sunni and Shiite during late 7<sup>th</sup> century succession. They follow the 5 pillars of Sunni Islam but add Jihad as a 6<sup>th</sup> pillar.

❖ 4 major sects: Azraqi, Sufri, Ibadi, and Haruriyya. Only Ibadi still exist in significant numbers in Oman and in smaller numbers in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Zanzibar.

**Other Sects:** *The followers of these sects consider themselves to be Muslim, but are not recognized as such by the mainstream.*

**Ahmadiyya/Ahmadis:** founded in 1889 in the Punjab and based on the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908). Ahmad claimed to be the appearance of the promised Messiah (or, according to some the manifestation of the Prophet Muhammad as well as an incarnation of Jesus and the Hindu god Krishna). Ghulam Ahmad taught that Jesus feigned his crucifixion and resurrection, then lived to be 120 years old in India, contradicting the orthodox Muslim doctrine that Jesus was taken up into heaven before his death. Ahmad also reinterpreted *jihad* as a nonviolent battle against nonbelievers, using as its weapon the pen instead of the sword. These doctrines, along with the teaching that Ahmad was a prophet like Muhammad, have led Ahmadiyyas to be denounced as heretics by most of orthodox Islam. Upon the death of Ahmad, Mawlawi Nur-ad-Din was elected as successor (caliph). When he died in 1914, the Ahmadiya group split into two groups:

- **Qadiani**, who recognize Ahmad as a prophet; and
- **Lahore**, who regard Ahmad only as a reformer of Islam.

Today there are about 170 million Ahmadiyya Muslims in the world. Qadianis reside mainly in Pakistan, where they are zealous missionaries for Islam and the two prophets Muhammad and Ahmad. Lahore Ahmadiyyas also seek converts, but more to Islam in general than to their particular sect. Ahmadiyya Islam is also associated with several Sufi orders, most notably the Al-Badawi order of Egypt, named for an Islamic saint who died in 1276.

**Zikri:** Zikri is based around the teachings of Syed Mohammad Jaunpuri, a 15th century Mahdi claimant. In religious practice, the Zikris differ greatly from mainstream Muslims, and there is debate about whether to call them Sunni, Sufi, or a sect of their own. Zikris perform five times daily prayers

called **Zikr** in which sacred verses are recited, as compared to the orthodox practice of **Salah**. Most Zikris live in **Baluchistan**, but a large number also live in **Karachi**, interior **Sindh** and **Iran**.

### **Other Groups/Movements:**

**Wahhabism:** Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab began a campaign of spiritual renewal in the smaller city states of Arabia in the mid- 1700s. His extremely traditional group opposed all innovations within Islam, often using violence to enforce its views. The group threatened to become the first nation state in Arabia, prompting a crackdown by the Egyptian army in 1818. Today, Wahhabism is quite strong in Saudi Arabia. It demands punishment for those who enjoy any form of music except the drum and severe punishment up to death for drinking or sexual transgressions. It condemns as unbelievers those who do not pray, a view that never previously existed in mainstream Islam. Wahhabism has been an inspiration to Osama bin Laden.

**Sufism:** a spiritual practice followed by both Sunni and Shiite. Sufis generally feel that following Islamic law or jurisprudence is only the first step on the path to perfect submission; they focus on the internal or more spiritual aspects of Islam, such as perfecting one's faith and fighting one's own ego.

**Salafism:** Salafis preach Islamic **monotheism**, or **tawhid**, and gained significant teachings from **Ibn Taymiya**, a 14th century Syrian scholar. Salafism is in general opposed to Sufism and **Shi'a Islam**, which they regard as heresies. Salafi theology advocates a puritanical and legalistic stance in matters of faith and religious practice. They see their role as a movement to restore **Islam** from what they perceive to be innovations, superstitions, deviances, heresies and idolatries.

**Islamism:** Islamism is a term that refers to a set of political ideologies derived from various fundamentalist views, which hold that Islam is not only a religion, but a political system governing the legal, economic and social imperatives of the state. The religious views of Islamist organizations vary. The most prominent group is probably **Al-Qaeda**, other groups include the **Muslim Brotherhood**, the largest opposition party in Egypt, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Although violence is often employed by some organizations as a means to an end, not all Islamist movements are violent.

## **CREEDS AND RITUALS**

### **Sunni 5 Pillars of Islam:**

- **Shahada:** profession of faith, the belief in one God (Allah) and that Muhammad is his prophet
- **Salah:** prayers five times a day (dawn, sunrise, noon, dusk, sunset) dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall
- **Zakat:** alms giving to the poor are obligatory and are basically 2.5% of the income based on the lunar calendar.
- **Sawm:** fasting is required for the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims are prohibited from eating, drinking, smoking, and engaging in sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk. It can also be done voluntarily if one feels the need.

- **Hajj:** a pilgrimage to Mecca required once in a lifetime for all Muslims financially and physically able to go.

### **Sunni 6 Articles of Belief:**

- **Tawhid** – Belief in God, Oneness
- **Nabi and Rusul** – Belief in all the Prophets and Messengers sent by God
- **Kutub** – Belief in the Divinely Revealed Books
- **Mala'ikah** – Belief in the Angels
- **Qiyamah** – Belief in the Day of Judgment and in Resurrection
- **Qadar** – Belief in Destiny (Fate)

**Shiite Branches of Religion** (Shiite believe in the same 5 Pillars as the Sunni but categorize them differently)

- **Salat**—“Namaaz” in Persian (Prayer) – performing the five daily prayers
- **Sawm**—“Roozeh” in Persian (Fast) – fasting during the holy month of Ramadan
- **Hajj** (Pilgrimage) – performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. Also, one who has performed this Pilgrimage gains a prefix of “Haj—“ in front of his name, similar to one who gains the title of Dr. after acquiring a PhD. People with the title are treated with great respect as this is a great honor in Islam.
- **Zakat** (Poor-rate) – paying the poor-tax
- **Khums** (One-fifth of savings) – paying tax
- **Jihad** (Struggle) – struggling to please God. The greater, or internal Jihad is the struggle against the evil within one’s soul in every aspect of life. The lesser, or external, Jihad is the struggle against the evil of one’s environment in every aspect of life. This is not to be mistaken with the common modern misconception that this means “Holy War.”
- **Amr-Bil-Ma’rūf** – commanding what is good
- **Nahi-Anil-Munkar** – forbidding what is evil
- **Tawalla** – loving the Ahlul Bayt and their followers
- **Tabarra** – dissociating oneself from the enemies of the Ahlul Bayt

## **Shiite Roots of Religion**

- **Tawhīd** - The Oneness of God
- **Adalah** - The Justice of God
- **Nubuwwah** (Prophethood): God has appointed perfect and infallible prophets and messengers to teach mankind the religion (that is, a perfect system of how to live in “peace” (“submission to God”)).
- **Imamah** (Leadership): God has appointed specific leaders to lead and guide mankind — a prophet appoints a custodian of the religion before his demise.
- **Qiyamah** (The Day of Judgment): God will raise mankind for Judgment

An additional Shiite doctrine is ***Dissimulation***, which is the dissimulation of one’s religious beliefs when one fears for one’s life and/or the lives of one’s family.

## The Twelve Shiite Imams

Ali ibn Abu Talib (600-661)

Hasan ibn Ali (625-669)

Husayn ibn Ali (626-680)

Ali ibn Husayn (658-713)

Muhammad ibn Ali (676-743)

Jafar ibn Muhammad (703-765)

Musa ibn Jafar (745-799)

Ali ibn Musa (765-818)

Muhammad ibn Ali (Taki) (810-835)

Ali ibn Muhammad (Naki) (827-868)

Hasan ibn Ali (846-874)

Muhammad ibn Hasan (868-disappears in 940)



## ISLAMIC TERMS

**Ayatollah:** *Sign of God* Title given to highly ranked religious scholars in Shia'ism.

**Caliph (khalif):** deputy or successor. A political leader of the Muslim community (ummah). The most important of these were the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs who ruled after the death of Muhammad.

**Hijira:** The Prophet's flight to Medina in 622 AD, marking the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

**Imam:** literally, leader; e.g. a man who *leads* a community or *leads* the prayer; the Shi'a sect use the term only as a title for one of the twelve God-appointed successors of Prophet Muhammad.

**Imamah or imamate :** successorship of Prophet Muhammad and the leadership of mankind.

**Islam :** is name of the religion and means submission to the will of God. This means living a life of faith and practice as defined the Quran and participating in the life of the community of believers (the Ummah).

**Jihad:** ("striving"). Holy war; the defense of Islam against its enemies. Sufism focuses on the "greater" *jihad* against sin in oneself.

**Mufti:** Islamic judge or scholar who is an interpreter or expounder of Islamic law (Sharia), capable of issuing fataawa (plural of "fatwa")

**Muslim:** is a follower of Islam who makes submission to God

**(pbuh)-** "Peace be upon him" always said or written after quoting Muhammad

**Qur'an:** ("recitation). The sacred text of Islam, revealed to Muhammad over a 20-year period by the Angel Gabriel.

**Ramadan:** The ninth month in the Islamic calendar, for the duration of which Muslims fast during the daylight hours to commemorate the giving of the Qur'an.

**Ummah:** the community of Islam

## IMPORTANT DATES IN ISLAM

622 CE Hijira – Muhammad and followers flee to Medina. Islamic calendar (AH, Anno Hegirae) begins.

632 Death of Muhammad. Abu Bakr chosen as caliph

633-42 Muslim armies take the Fertile Crescent (Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia), North African coast, parts of Persian and Byzantine Empires

c. 650 Caliph Uthman has the Qur'an written down.

656 Uthman is murdered; Ali becomes fourth caliph

657 Battle of Siffin. Mu'awiya, governor of Syria, claims the caliphate

659 Arbitration at Adruh is opposed by Ali's supporters

661 Ali is murdered; Mu'awiya becomes caliph. Beginning of Umayyad Caliphate (661-750).

680 Death of Husayn marks beginning of the Shi'at Ali ("party of Ali") or Shi'a sect

685-705 Reign of Abd al-Malik. Centralization of administration - Arabic becomes official written language (instead of Greek and Persian) and Arab coinage is established

732 Muslim empire reaches its furthest extent. Battle of Tours prevents further advance northwards.

765 Division within Shi'ites - majority are the modern Imamiyya (Twelvers) who co-exist with Abbasid

caliphs; minority are more extreme Isma'iliyya (Seveners).

800s Written collections of Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) are compiled

940 Muhammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth imam, disappears. Twelvers still await the future return of the "Hidden Imam."

1453 Mehmet Fatih (rules 1451-81) conquers Constantinople. The two halves of the Ottoman Empire are

united and the sultan becomes Byzantine emperor.

1501 Isma'il (1487-1524) claims to be the Hidden Imam and is proclaimed Shah (king) of Persia. Twelver Shi'ism becomes official religion of Persia.

1700s Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab rejects Sufism and all innovation (bid'a). Founds what becomes the Saudi Arabian kingdom.

1918 Fall of Ottoman Empire. League of Nations grants Britain mandatory status over Palestine and Iraq, and France over Lebanon and Syria.

1927 Tablighi Jamaat reform movement founded in India.

1928 Ikhwan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brothers) founded in Egypt.

1941 Jamaat-i Islami reform movement founded in Lahore, India.

1947 Pakistan founded as an Islamic nation. Islam becomes a minority religion in India.

1979 Shah of Iran is overthrown by Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini, who establishes strict fundamentalist rule of Shi'a principles.

One of the foremost of these Islamic fascists, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad, recently claimed that the Holocaust was a hoax dreamed up by the Allies and their Zionist cohorts. In addition, he blames the state of Israel for all that's wrong in the Arab world: "The peoples of the Middle East have also borne the brunt of the Holocaust. By raising the necessity of settling the survivors of the Holocaust in the land of Palestine, they have created a permanent threat in the Middle East in order to rob the people of the region of the opportunities to achieve progress... The collective conscience of the world is indignant over the daily atrocities by the Zionist occupiers, destruction of homes and farms, killing of children, assassinations and bombardments."

Thus, as far as the Islamists are concerned, Zionists and the West are in the same boat. "God willing, with the force of God behind it," Ahmadi-Nejad has said, "we shall soon experience a world without the United States and Zionism."

Now, as Thursday's United Nations-imposed deadline for Iran to halt its nuclear fuel production has come and gone, the rogue state remains defiant. "[The West] should know the Iranian nation will not yield to pressure and not accept any violation of its rights," said Ahmadi-Nejad. "Arrogant powers are against Iran's peaceful nuclear progress."

Anticipating Iran's response, the Bush administration has come out swinging and—we are pleased to say—building on the President's Islamic fascist theme.

Speaking at the annual convention of the American Legion, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recounted the history of World War II and the Cold War, warning against those who counsel appeasement and retreat today: "I recount that history because, once again, we face similar challenges in efforts to confront the rising threat of a new type of fascism, but some seem not to have learned history's lessons," the Secretary said. Indeed, just as Adolf Hitler would not be appeased as he pressed his grand plan for war, so also today's fascists will find only encouragement in the West's accommodations.

“With the growing lethality and the increasing availability of weapons,” Rumsfeld went on to ask, “can we truly afford to believe that somehow, some way, vicious extremists can be appeased?”

On the 67th anniversary of Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland, we cannot again be lulled into the false comfort of complacency and appeasement against a new fascist foe.

In a policy address of his own at Nebraska’s Offutt Air Force Base this week, Vice President Dick Cheney voiced the same theme. “This is not an enemy that can be ignored, or negotiated with, or appeased,” he said, “and every retreat by civilized nations is an invitation to further violence against us. Men who despise freedom will attack freedom in any part of the world, and so responsible nations have a duty to stay on the offensive, together, to remove this threat.” Today, as the world marks the 67th anniversary of Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland, we cannot again be lulled into the false comfort of complacency and appeasement against a new fascist foe.

What, specifically, is the threat posed by these Islamic fascists? Is the threat limited to the occasional believer mowing down a few American Jews with an SUV?

Of course not. Nor is the threat limited to the sort of mass murder we witnessed five years ago this month in New York, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania.

Rather, as this column has stated time and again, **the real threat posed by Islamic fascism comes in the form of a nuclear device in the hands of a terrorist surrogate.** In the present case, the Cold War’s deterrent doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) does not apply. A nuclear strike against the United States won’t come in the form of a missile launch from silos on the other side of the world, or a submarine lurking off our shores. Rather, as a recent RAND study speculates, a nuclear terrorist attack against the U.S. will come from a cargo container aboard a freighter arrived in a U.S. port, or, alternately, transported across the porous southern border with the same mechanisms used to smuggle tens of thousands of illegal aliens every year.

Hamid Mir, the famed Pakistani journalist who obtained the only post-9/11 interviews with Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, believes a nuclear attack against the United States is on the horizon, to be coordinated by the cleric-fascist state of Iran and its terrorist surrogate, al-Qa’ida. “Al-Qa’ida and Iran have a long, secret relationship,” Mir says, and they’ve named their plans for a nuclear attack on the U.S.—**using nuclear devices that Mir believes they already possess**—“American Hiroshima.”

The association between Iran and al-Qa’ida, Mir says, dates to June 1996, when bin Laden joined other jihadist leaders in Tehran to discuss their goals. Others in attendance included Muhammad Ali Ahmad of al-Qa’ida, Imad al-Alami and Mustafa al-Liddawi of Hamas, Ahmad Jibril of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Egyptian Islamic Jihad’s Ahmad Salah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s Ramadan Shallah, Hizballah’s Imad Mugniyah and Abdallah Ocalan of the Kurdish People Party. The meeting, says Mir, produced the “Committee of Three,” consisting of bin Laden, Salah and Mugniyah, who would be responsible for the “coordination, planning and execution of attacks” on the U.S. and Israel. Shortly thereafter, on 23 August 1996, bin Laden issued his fatwa, “Declaration of War on Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Holy Places.”

In one interview with Mir, bin Laden boasts, “It is not difficult [to obtain tactical nuclear devices], not if you have contacts in Russia with other militant groups. They are available for \$10 million and \$20 million.” At the time, bin Laden claimed already to be in possession of such devices, and Mir believes

that they may already be forward-deployed within the United States. While this information is, of course, not confirmable, and may be no more than enemy misinformation, it *is* plausible.

For these reasons—the nature of our enemy’s threat and his determination to see our destruction—the only applicable defense is the doctrine of pre-emption. Thursday, the same day Iran rejected the deadline for ending its enrichment of uranium, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported finding traces of highly enriched uranium at an Iranian nuclear plant. Uranium of this variety is used *only* for the production of nuclear weapons. Our only strategic option and our best hope of averting a nuclear attack, though it’s certainly no guarantee, is pre-emptive warfare against our enemies. As the five-year anniversary of 9/11 approaches, let us be mindful of Islamic fascism’s deadly determination. Let us match it with a deadly determination of our own.

### ***Quote of the week***

“Unless we in the West adapt more quickly than do canny Islamic terrorists in this constantly evolving war, cease our internecine fighting and stop forgetting what we’ve learned about our enemies—there will be disasters to come far worse than Sept. 11.” —Victor Davis Hanson

### ***On cross-examination***

“Somehow, despite contrary facts that are palpably clear in the historic record, [American and European leaders] have managed to convince themselves and the world that the most terrible wars of the 20th century occurred because nations didn’t do enough talking to resolve their differences [when in] fact, they occurred because shortsighted, peace-minded leaders allow[ed] good intentions and wishful thinking to take the place of an accurate assessment of the identity and intentions of their adversaries

## **Medieval Islamic History**

[Semitic](#) people probably first moved into the [Arabian Peninsula](#) around 2000 [BC](#), coming from Mesopotamia. They were [nomads](#) when they arrived, who travelled around with their [sheep and goats](#) pasturing them in different pastures at different times of year. And they stayed nomads: many of them are nomads today.

In the southern part of the peninsula, on the other hand, the people were [farmers](#). We’re not sure where they came from, but the [Queen of Sheba](#) mentioned in the [Bible](#) may be one of these people.

By the time of [Alexander the Great](#), we start to know a little more about the Arabs, because the Greeks were [trading](#) with them. The [Romans](#) also [traded](#) with the Arabs, who got spices and other things from [India](#) and sold them to the Romans for [gold](#).

In the long war between the [Sassanids](#) and the [Romans](#), different tribes of Arabs fought on each side. In this Late Antique period, the kingdom of Saba (Sheba) fell apart.

The Prophet [Mohammed](#) was born in the northern Arabian trading city of Mecca between 570 and 580 [AD](#). When he was forty years old, he heard the angel Gabriel speaking to him and telling Mohammed

that he was a prophet in the line of [Abraham](#), [Moses](#), and [Jesus](#), who would continue the faith those prophets had started. Mohammed's faith was called [Islam](#) (iz-LAMM). After a slow start, Mohammed made a lot of converts to his religion, and after he won some military battles, most of the other Arabic tribes also converted to Islam. After they had done that, Mohammed's [successors](#) attacked first the [Romans](#) and then the [Sassanids](#) to convert them. By 640 (after the death of Mohammed) the Arabs controlled most of [West Asia](#), and soon after that, under the rule of the [Umayyad caliphs](#), they conquered [Egypt](#). By 711, the Umayyads controlled all of [Western Asia](#) except Turkey (which was still part of the [Roman Empire](#)), and all of the southern Mediterranean: [Egypt](#), Libya, [Tunisia](#), Algeria, Morocco, and most of [Spain](#).

By 800 AD, however, under the rule of the [Abbasid caliphs](#), the Islamic Empire had already begun to break down into many smaller kingdoms or caliphates (KAL--if-fates). The main part of it was ruled from Baghdad in modern Iraq. In the 900's control of Baghdad was taken over by the newly arrived Turks or [Seljuks](#), and the [Fatimid](#) dynasty took over [Egypt](#) and Israel and Syria. In the east, the [Ghaznavids](#) took over Afghanistan and then [northern India](#) about 1000 AD.

In 1096 AD, Europeans called [Crusaders](#) invaded and conquered a good deal of Israel and Lebanon from the Fatimids. But by 1200 most of the conquered land had been reclaimed by the [Mamluks](#) and the [Ayyubids](#) (under Saladin). At the same time, the [Almohads](#) had succeeded in forming an empire out of North Africa and Spain.

But during the 1200's, the [Almohad](#) empire began to break apart. In northern Spain, the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, and Portugal beat the Almohads in 1212, and had conquered most of Spain by 1248. In [North Africa](#), the Almohad empire split into three smaller kingdoms: the Hafsids in the east, the al-Wadids in the center, and the [Marinids](#) in the west. In 1260, the [Mongols](#) invaded West Asia, and conquered the eastern part of the Islamic Empire, as well as northern India and Afghanistan.

During the 1300's and 1400's, the armies of Aragon and Castile gradually forced the Arabs out of Spain (they called this the [Reconquista](#)), finishing up in 1492 AD. By 1453 AD the [Ottomans](#) (successors to the [Seljuks](#)) had begun to establish the Ottoman Empire by conquering Constantinople (modern Istanbul). In 1517, the Ottomans conquered Syria and Egypt, and by 1639 AD they had taken Iraq. The Ottoman Empire lasted until the end of World War I in 1918 AD, and takes us out of the period covered on this site.

## Mohammed

Mohammed was born in the Arab trading and pilgrimage city of Mecca, in the [Arabian peninsula](#), between 570 and 580 AD. His parents were part of a family of [traders](#), not among the ruling families of Mecca, but certainly not poor either. Mohammed himself however grew up poor, because both his parents died when he was still very young. Probably his grandfather brought him up.

When he grew up, Mohammed married a wealthy widow named Khadija, whose first husband had been a trader, and so he became well-off again. Probably he became a trader himself.

When Mohammed was almost forty, he heard an angel from God speaking to him for the first time (compare the [story of Moses](#)). The angel, Gabriel, told Mohammed that there was only one God, that it was wicked to worship idols (statues and images of gods), and that the end of the world was coming soon, with the Last Judgment. All of these ideas were already common in Mecca, where there were

some Christians and many Jews, and presumably also some Zoroastrians. Mohammed also heard Gabriel telling him the words of the Koran.

At first the Meccans seem to have felt that Mohammed's preaching was harmless, but later, as he got more support from the lower classes, and really began to say that people should not worship the old gods, the upperclass Meccans threw Mohammed out of town (like Zoroaster). People beat up and even killed his followers, who began to be called Muslims. Some of them fled to Ethiopia. Mohammed himself fled to the nearby town of Medina, where there were a lot of Jews, who ran the town though they were widely hated by the Arabs who lived there. Mohammed's flight to Medina in 622 AD is called the Hejira (hej-EYE-rah) in Arabic, and it is the date where the Moslem calendar begins. Mohammed gathered a following in Medina, though he failed to convince the Jews to join him as he had hoped. In 630 AD he returned to Mecca with an army and conquered it. After he won another victory against Arabic tribes in 630 AD, other Arabic tribes began to send messengers to Mohammed to say that they would submit to his rule, because he was so successful that he must have God on his side.

On June 8th, 632 AD, Mohammed died, at about 50 or 60 years old.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/islam/history/mohammed.htm>

Hellenistic Greece for Kids - who was Alexander the Great? what happened after the Peloponnesian War?

## Hellenistic Greece



### Alexander fighting Darius, the Persian king (mosaic from Pompeii)

After the Peloponnesian War was over, all the cities of Greece were worn out and poor. Many men went and fought for the Persians for money. But others tried to rebuild the cities. This was the time of Socrates and his student Plato, the great philosophers.

Philip of Macedon (on a coin)

But to the north of Greece, in a country called Macedon (MA-suh-donn), King Philip had noticed that the Greeks were very weak. He attacked the Greek city-states and one by one he took them over. When Philip was assassinated in 336 BC, his son Alexander became king, and he also ruled Greece. Alexander was only 20 when he became king. At first a lot of people thought he was too young. But he not only held onto Greece, he also took a big army of Greeks and Macedonians and attacked the Persian Empire!



Alexander was a great general, and the Persians were also weak at this time. So, little by little, Alexander took over the Persian Empire: first Turkey, then Phoenicia, then Israel, then Egypt, then further east all the way to Afghanistan and India (see map). In India Alexander's troops refused to go any further, and he turned back. But a lot of the soldiers died on the way back, and soon afterwards, in 323 BC, Alexander himself died of a fever, in Babylon. He was 33 years old.

Alexander died without any sons old enough to rule, and so his kingdom was split up among his generals. There were three main parts: Egypt, which was ruled by a man named Ptolemy, Seleucia (modern Israel, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan), which was ruled by a man named Seleucus, and Macedon and Greece. Although these three kingdoms often fought each other, still the Hellenistic period was one of prosperity and learning. A great university was founded at Alexandria, in Egypt. The philosopher Aristotle worked in Athens. Scientists and philosophers (all men) visited back and forth between India and Greece. The combination of the knowledge of West Asia and India with that of the Greeks led to great achievements in science, in philosophy, and in art.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/history/hellenistic.htm>

## Zoroastrianism

Around 1000 BC (probably), about the same time that people in India were writing the Rig Veda, a man named Zoroaster (also called Zarathustra) was a priest in a small temple in the eastern part of Western Asia, in an area with a lot of small kingdoms and no major power. Zoroaster believed that he heard the voice of his chief god, Ahura Mazda, speaking to him and telling him to start a new religion. He told people that the god was speaking to him, and what the god wanted, but they didn't believe that the god was really speaking to him. The other people in the town just thought he was suffering from mental illness. They laughed at him and made fun of him.

Zoroaster sadly left town and travelled around West Asia looking for somebody who would believe him. Finally he found a king who did believe him. He started to get some followers.

The new religion stayed small for five hundred years, but then they had a big success. We don't know how it happened, but Zoroaster's followers convinced the new king of the Persians, Cyrus, to support Zoroastrianism (named after Zoroaster). With the support of the king, Zoroastrianism soon became very popular.

These are some of the main beliefs of Zoroastrianism as the Persians practiced it. There is one main god, Ahura Mazda. He has twin sons, and one of them is for Truth and the other is for the Lie. On the side of Truth are Light, Good, Justice, and people who settle down in cities and farm their land. On the side of the Lie are Darkness, Evil, and people who travel around and do not farm. While you are alive, if you follow the Truth, you will have a better life: you will find love and money and victory in battle. After you die, you will go across a bridge to a good place. But if you follow the Lie, everything will go wrong for you while you are alive, and after you die you will fall off the bridge and go to a bad place, where it is cold and dark and there is nothing good to eat.

Zoroastrianism was the main religion of the Persian kings for 200 years, until they were conquered by Alexander the Great in 330 BC. The Greeks who ruled West Asia after Alexander didn't care about it much, and neither did the Parthians. But the Sassanids, when they took over the Parthian Empire in 227 AD, were very strong believers in Zoroastrianism. The Sassanids tried to make all the people in their kingdom Zoroastrians. So there were many Zoroastrians in the Sassanid Empire, and the faith even spread into India and all the way to China.



When West Asia was conquered by the Arabs around 650 AD, most people gradually converted to the religion of the Arabs, Islam. But there are still some Zoroastrians in the world today, mostly in northern India, where they are called Parsees (meaning Persians).

## The Persians

Around 1200 BC, some new people invaded West Asia from the north. These people were called the Persians and the Medes. Both of them were Indo-European people, distantly related to the Hittites, the Greeks and the Romans. Like the Scythians, the Medes and the Persians were nomadic people. They travelled around Siberia with their horses and their cattle, and grazed the cattle and the horses on the great fields of grass there. Usually they lived well enough this way.

But sometimes the weather was worse than usual, and the Medes and Persians could not find enough to eat. This time, when that happened, the Medes and Persians headed south into West Asia. Maybe they had heard that there were Dark Ages there and they thought it would be easy to take over. Maybe they just thought it would be nicer in the south, where it was warmer.

They settled in what is now Iran, and we don't hear much about them until about 600 BC. Probably they could not fight the Assyrians and didn't try to. But by 600 BC the Assyrians were getting weaker. At this time the Medes and the Persians mixed into one group, under one king.

### Tomb of Cyrus the Great

At first the Medes were in charge, but in 559 BC Cyrus, who was a Persian, made himself king, and from then on the Persians were in charge. Cyrus (SIGH-russ) soon also conquered the whole rest of West Asia: the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Jews, the Phoenicians and the Syrians, and also the Lydians and the Greeks in modern Turkey. He is remembered as a good ruler. He managed to unify a very diverse group of people, with many different languages and religions. At the same time, he allowed each group to keep their own religion. This is especially surprising because he himself had recently converted to Zoroastrianism and clearly felt strongly about his new faith.

When Cyrus died in 530 BC, his son Cambyses (cam-BYE-sees) became king. Cambyses added Egypt to the Persian Empire, beating an Egyptian army that also had many Greek soldiers fighting for pay. But according to Herodotus Cambyses suffered from severe mental illness later in his life, and eventually his own people killed him.

In 521 BC Darius (da-RYE-us), who was a Persian and a Zoroastrian but only a distant cousin of Cyrus and Cambyses, seized the throne. He moved the Persian capital to the new city of Persepolis, and hired workmen from all over to work on the new buildings there. Some of the men working at Persepolis seem to have been Greek.

Darius also tried to conquer the Scythians, but failed.

In 490 BC, Darius tried to conquer Athens and mainland Greece. Some of the Greek cities, like Thebes, surrendered to Darius or made treaties with him. But Athens fought back and defeated the Persians, and Darius took his troops and went home.

The next Persian king, Xerxes (ZERK-sees), put down a big rebellion in Egypt and then attacked Greece again in 480 BC. But Xerxes was also defeated, and went home. The Persians pretty much stopped trying to expand their empire then. But they continued to rule from Afghanistan to Turkey and Egypt for another 150 years, until they were conquered by Alexander the Great.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/westasia/history/persians.htm>

# Medieval Islamic History

[Semitic](#) people probably first moved into the [Arabian Peninsula](#) around 2000 [BC](#), coming from Mesopotamia. They were [nomads](#) when they arrived, who travelled around with their [sheep and goats](#) pasturing them in different pastures at different times of year. And they stayed nomads: many of them are nomads today.

In the southern part of the peninsula, on the other hand, the people were [farmers](#). We're not sure where they came from, but the [Queen of Sheba](#) mentioned in the [Bible](#) may be one of these people.

By the time of [Alexander the Great](#), we start to know a little more about the Arabs, because the Greeks were [trading](#) with them. The [Romans](#) also [traded](#) with the Arabs, who got spices and other things from [India](#) and sold them to the Romans for [gold](#).

In the long war between the [Sassanids](#) and the [Romans](#), different tribes of Arabs fought on each side. In this Late Antique period, the kingdom of Saba (Sheba) fell apart.

The Prophet [Mohammed](#) was born in the northern Arabian trading city of Mecca between 570 and 580 [AD](#). When he was forty years old, he heard the angel Gabriel speaking to him and telling Mohammed that he was a prophet in the line of [Abraham](#), [Moses](#), and [Jesus](#), who would continue the faith those prophets had started. Mohammed's faith was called [Islam](#) (iz-LAMM). After a slow start, Mohammed made a lot of converts to his religion, and after he won some military battles, most of the other Arabic tribes also converted to Islam. After they had done that, Mohammed's [successors](#) attacked first the [Romans](#) and then the [Sassanids](#) to convert them. By 640 (after the death of Mohammed) the Arabs controlled most of [West Asia](#), and soon after that, under the rule of the [Umayyad caliphs](#), they conquered [Egypt](#). By 711, the Umayyads controlled all of [Western Asia](#) except Turkey (which was still part of the [Roman Empire](#)), and all of the southern Mediterranean: [Egypt](#), Libya, [Tunisia](#), Algeria, Morocco, and most of [Spain](#).

Medieval Islamic history for kids - a summary of the origins of the Arabs, the Islamic conquests, and the Islamic empire to the Ottomans.

## Medieval Islamic History

(second page; click here for the [first page](#))

By 800 [AD](#), however, under the rule of the [Abbasid caliphs](#), the Islamic Empire had already begun to break down into many smaller kingdoms or caliphates (KAL--if-fates). The main part of it was ruled from Baghdad in modern Iraq. In the 900's control of Baghdad was taken over by the newly arrived Turks or [Seljuks](#), and the [Fatimid](#) dynasty took over [Egypt](#) and Israel and Syria. In the east, the [Ghaznavids](#) took over Afghanistan and then [northern India](#) about 1000 [AD](#).

In 1096 [AD](#), Europeans called [Crusaders](#) invaded and conquered a good deal of Israel and Lebanon from the Fatimids. But by 1200 most of the conquered land had been reclaimed by the [Mamluks](#) and the [Ayyubids](#) (under Saladin). At the same time, the [Almohads](#) had succeeded in forming an empire out of North Africa and Spain.

But during the 1200's, the Almohad empire began to break apart. In northern Spain, the kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, and Portugal beat the Almohads in 1212, and had conquered most of Spain by 1248. In North Africa, the Almohad empire split into three smaller kingdoms: the Hafsids in the east, the al-Wadids in the center, and the Marinids in the west. In 1260, the Mongols invaded West Asia, and conquered the eastern part of the Islamic Empire, as well as northern India and Afghanistan.

During the 1300's and 1400's, the armies of Aragon and Castile gradually forced the Arabs out of Spain (they called this the Reconquista), finishing up in 1492 AD. By 1453 AD the Ottomans (successors to the Seljuks) had begun to establish the Ottoman Empire by conquering Constantinople (modern Istanbul). In 1517, the Ottomans conquered Syria and Egypt, and by 1639 AD they had taken Iraq. The Ottoman Empire lasted until the end of World War I in 1918 AD, and takes us out of the period covered on this site.

Mohammed for Kids - Islamic History - who was Mohammed?

## Mohammed

Mohammed was born in the Arab trading and pilgrimage city of Mecca, in the Arabian peninsula, between 570 and 580 AD. His parents were part of a family of traders, not among the ruling families of Mecca, but certainly not poor either. Mohammed himself however grew up poor, because both his parents died when he was still very young. Probably his grandfather brought him up.

When he grew up, Mohammed married a wealthy widow named Khadija, whose first husband had been a trader, and so he became well-off again. Probably he became a trader himself.

When Mohammed was almost forty, he heard an angel from God speaking to him for the first time (compare the story of Moses). The angel, Gabriel, told Mohammed that there was only one God, that it was wicked to worship idols (statues and images of gods), and that the end of the world was coming soon, with the Last Judgment. All of these ideas were already common in Mecca, where there were some Christians and many Jews, and presumably also some Zoroastrians. Mohammed also heard Gabriel telling him the words of the Koran.

At first the Meccans seem to have felt that Mohammed's preaching was harmless, but later, as he got more support from the lower classes, and really began to say that people should not worship the old gods, the upperclass Meccans threw Mohammed out of town (like Zoroaster). People beat up and even killed his followers, who began to be called Muslims. Some of them fled to Ethiopia. Mohammed himself fled to the nearby town of Medina, where there were a lot of Jews, who ran the town though they were widely hated by the Arabs who lived there. Mohammed's flight to Medina in 622 AD is called the Hejira (hej-EYE-rah) in Arabic, and it is the date where the Moslem calendar begins. Mohammed gathered a following in Medina, though he failed to convince the Jews to join him as he had hoped. In 630 AD he returned to Mecca with an army and conquered it. After he won another victory against Arabic tribes in 630 AD, other Arabic tribes began to send messengers to Mohammed to say that they would submit to his rule, because he was so successful that he must have God on his side.

On June 8th, 632 AD, Mohammed died, at about 50 or 60 years old.

Sassanids for Kids - hey, that rhymes!

# The Sassanids

Head of a Parthian (from the Louvre)

In 211 AD, a group of Persians called the Sassanids (the descendants of Sassan) took over control of the Parthian Empire from the Parthians. The Sassanids were proud of their Persian heritage, and they wanted to reestablish the borders of the old Persian empire. This meant reconquering all the land to the edge of the Mediterranean Sea from the Romans (Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey), and also reconquering Egypt from the Romans.

Like their Persian ancestors, these Sassanid Persians were Zoroastrians, and they also wanted to spread the Zoroastrian faith.

Arshashir

Shapur I, son of Ardashir

The leader of the Sassanids, by 227 AD the king of the Parthian Empire, was named Ardashir (the Greeks and Romans called him Artaxerxes). He organized a very strong and unified government. Then he took the army and invaded Roman territory in West Asia. Neither side won a clear victory, and this set the pattern for the next four hundred years: a lot of fighting but no real change in the borders.

Assyrians for Kids - who were the Assyrians? where did they live? what did they do?

# Assyrians

Sargon of Akkad

We first hear of the Assyrians around 2300 BC, when Sargon of Akkad invaded their small kingdom to the north. After 2000 BC, when Assur became independent of the collapsing 3rd Dynasty of Ur, the Assyrians became well-known traders, who travelled constantly between Assur and southern Turkey with their donkeys, carrying cloth from Assur and tin from beyond the Tigris to the east, and trading it in southern Turkey for gold, silver, and other metals. But as the Hittites took over Turkey around 1800 BC, this trade gradually collapsed. The last Assyrian caravan to Turkey was ca. 1780 BC.

By 1700 BC the Assyrians had been conquered by the Amorites, and later they were controlled by the Hurrians for a long time. But when the Hurrian kingdom collapsed about 1360 BC, the Assyrian governor of Assur, whose name was Assur-uballit, saw his chance and began calling himself the King of Assyria. Assur-uballit and the Assyrians soon had to fight both the Hurrians and the Kassites in order to stay independent, but they won their wars and were able to establish themselves. They made a lot of alliances with the Kassites to their south, with many Assyrian princesses marrying Kassite princes and vice versa.

Under their king Tukulti-Ninurta I (known in the book of Genesis as Nimrod), about 1225 BC, the Assyrians conquered the Kassites and the city of Babylon, capturing the great statue of the god Marduk

there and bringing it back to Assur. But people objected to this sacrilege, and the conquest of Babylon, and a mob led by his son burned Tukulti-Ninurta to death by setting fire to his palace, and freed the Kassites again. A Dark Age overtook West Asia about this time, with the invasions of the Sea Peoples and a lot of movement among the Hittites, the Hurrians, and the Jews, and the gradual collapse of the Kassites as a result.

The Assyrians were the only big kingdom in West Asia not to collapse as a result of the Dark Ages, and so they were in a good position to take over afterward. By 1115 BC, under their king Tiglath-pileser I, they were able to expand south into Babylonia again (being more careful to respect the ancient gods there this time), and west. At first, these were basically plundering expeditions. The Assyrian army, which was feared everywhere, started out pretty much every spring going south along the Tigris river, and then cross to the Euphrates and follow that upstream until it got home again to Assur, around the end of the summer.

Along the way they would collect whatever took their fancy: cloth, gold, artwork, or slaves. Assyrian inscriptions call this "tribute", but people either gave it in order to keep from being attacked, or the Assyrians attacked them and took it anyway. These plundering expeditions continued more or less every year for hundreds of years, down to Assurnasirpal's reign in the 800's BC.

Assurnasirpal's son Shalmaneser III decided to expand the Assyrian empire even more. He took the plundering expeditions even further west, where he first met the Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judah. At first they resisted him successfully, but by the 830's Shalmaneser seems to have placed pro-Assyrian Jews on the thrones of both kingdoms, and we guess that he collected tribute as well.

But in 827 BC a great revolt, centered on Nineveh, at the end of Shalmaneser's reign forced the Assyrians to abandon their conquests in the west, and they were weaker for some time. The army did not go out every year to plunder anymore, and when the army did go out it was mostly just along the old route to the south. It didn't cross the Euphrates to the west anymore.

A powerful king from a new family usurped the throne of Assyria in 744 BC. His name was Tiglath-pileser III, and he was very ambitious and very strong. He began taking the army out every year again, and he took it not just along the old route, but west again, where he conquered Israel, the Phoenicians, and many other small western kingdoms. In the later part of his reign, there was another Babylonian revolt, but Tiglath-pileser succeeded in putting it down.

By the reign of Sennacherib in 705 BC, the Assyrian army again stopped going out every year on plundering campaigns. They had conquered everything near enough to rule, and even dominated Egypt. Now the kings concentrated more on providing services to the conquered people that would keep them from wanting to revolt. The Assyrian kings now built highways and bridges and water systems, established courts to settle disputes among their subjects, and encouraged scholarship and art with great libraries at their palaces. This was the time of the great kings Esarhaddon and his sons Assurbanipal (in Nineveh) and Shamash-shum-ukin (in Babylon). (the prophet Ezra refers to him as "the great and honorable Ashurbanipal" (Ezra 4:10).) But Assurbanipal and his brother got into a civil war in 652, and by the time Assurbanipal won four years later, the Assyrian empire was terribly weakened.

The western territories - Israel, Judah, Phoenicia, and others - began to revolt, and the Babylonian territories to the south as well. By 612 BC only Egypt remained loyal to Assyria, as a great alliance

between the Jews, the Medes, and the Babylonians combined to crush the last, weak Assyrian kings. Egypt's efforts to send help to the last stand of the Assyrians were stopped by Josiah at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BC. By 605, both Assyria and Egypt had to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and the Babylonians took over control of West Asia.

The Mediterranean and West Asia

## West Asia: Land against Sea

One common theme in the history of West Asia has been the conflict between land-oriented people and sea-oriented people. Often there is a group of people living in West Asia who are mostly land-oriented. These people don't sail boats much, and they think of their kingdom as covering a certain piece of land. They often think that their land should include everything between the mountains of Afghanistan and the Mediterranean Sea. Some people who have thought this way are the Assyrians, the Persians, the Seleucids, the Parthians, the Sassanids, and the Umayyads.



But at the same time there is often a group of people living in West Asia who are mostly sea-oriented. These people sail boats a lot, and they think of their kingdom as being all the land around a certain body of water. These people often think that their land should include everything around the Mediterranean Sea. Some people who have thought this way include the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Crusaders, and the Ottomans.

But it is impossible to make both groups of people happy at the same time. They are always fighting over the strip of land which is in West Asia, but borders on the Mediterranean Sea (modern Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel). Even today, these are countries where there is a lot of fighting. So the Egyptians fought the Assyrians, the Greeks and the Egyptians fought the Persians, the Egyptians fought the Seleucids, the Romans fought the Parthians and the Sassanids, the Islamic Umayyads fought the Byzantines, and the Seljuks fought the Crusaders.



## The Gifts of the Magi

...to the star, which they had seen in the east, went before them, 'till it stood over where the young child was.

10. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11. And when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him:: and when they had opened their treasurers, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."...

St. Matthew  
Chapter 2

Since earliest childhood, we have been told of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh brought as gifts to the Christ Child by the Magi. Gold, of course, is self explanatory, but how many are aware of what

frankincense and myrrh actually are, and of what significance they were as gifts? If we consult the encyclopedia, we find under frankincense:

...“an aromatic resin from a tree that grows only in southern Arabia and the Horn of Africa.” For centuries, along with myrrh, frankincense was the mainstay of trade in those regions. Frankincense was used in offerings of pagan religions and in funeral rites. In ancient Israel, frankincense was used in the incense burned in the temple”...

Myrrh is described as:

...“an aromatic gum resin secreted by shrubs and small trees native to Arabia, Ethiopia, and Somaliland. It oozes from cuts in the plant stem in the form of pale yellow “tears” that become brown or even blackish after solidification on exposure to air. Myrrh was widely used in the ancient world as an ingredient of perfumes and incenses, and sometimes as a topical antiseptic and astringent, and was often used in embalming materials”...

The selection of gold as a gift for the promised King would seem logical in light of its traditional association with royalty and its inherent value, but what of frankincense and myrrh? Would not gifts of greater material value have been more appropriate?



What of silver or precious jewels? We find the answer in several references and legends.

We know from history that frankincense and myrrh had great value as trade goods in the biblical era, but perhaps the symbolism described in the familiar Christmas Carol, "We Three Kings" sheds the most light on the mists of the traditional past. Of the gifts, it ascribes (or alludes to), the following purposes for each gift. Gold was brought to crown the King as befitted any monarch. Frankincense was to be used in the worship of the Child as God, even as it was used in the Temple in Israel of that day. Myrrh symbolizes the suffering and subsequent death of the Christ Child considering its traditional use in funerary practices and in embalming materials. The pertinent stanzas read:

"Born a king on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring to crown Him again.  
King forever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign."

"Frankincense to offer have I,  
Incense owns a Deity nigh,  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship Him, God most High."

**"Myrrh is mine: Its bitter perfume  
Breaths a life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in a stone-cold tomb."**

**And finally tied together in the last verse:**

**"Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and Sacrifice;  
Alleluia, Alleluia,  
Earth to Heaven's replies."**

**There you have it - whatever you choose to believe, it is a beautiful story, and one deeply rooted in the Christian history and tradition. This symbolic gift is given in the true spirit of that original Christmas Day in hope that it will enlighten and as least some small way, make this Christmas Season a more meaningful one for you and yours.**

# **Merry Christmas**



# A Parrot's Tale in a Camel Tail

*An Exercise in Saudi Chain Yanking and a bit of Christmas Cheer...*

Abdul Parrot and I started our tour in the land of the eternal dune at the same time. He had been a gift by an acquaintance who apparently saw the thing hanging in some shop and thought it might be the perfect companion for someone heading for Saudi Arabia. I was amused, but not terribly impressed at the time, and almost left ol' Abdul back in North Idaho when I was packing. In retrospect, I'm most glad that I chose to take him with me, as he gave me a way to continually yank the tail feathers of our hosts. Abdul did his job well and is still one of my most prized possessions from those far off days!



**Hartnett and Culver in the Dunes**

I initially had Abdul, perched appropriately on a brass ring and hanging from a light fixture in my new digs. Abdul sat there in apparently contented silence until my old compatriot Skip Hartnett showed up to help train our newly assembled Camelnecks. During one of our field exercises we had used a fair amount of pop-up parachute flares. Policing the area to get rid of our "*debris de guerre*", we picked up a number of expended nylon parachutes used to suspend the flares. It would also seem that Skip had a roll of heavy braided nylon cord that set his inventive mind to racing. One of the nylon parachutes (after a session through the washing machine) did nicely for a gutra (the traditional Saudi head cover). Taking the cord, carefully measuring the length, and fusing it with a match flame he came up with a sort of mini-gal look-alike (the legendary camel hobble used on top of the traditional Saudi head covering). Blackening the improvised "fan belt" with a magic marker and placing it on Abdul's headdress made a complete rig to top off Abdul's bare dome. The finished head topping looked for all the world like what we infidels irreverently called the "table cloth and fan belt", officially known



**Abdul was always a Rebel**

of course, as the gutra and agal. The newly adorned Abdul now hung in my quarters as a sort of dig in the Saudi ribs. Somehow I could almost see Abdul apparently smiling in his new role as an Arab harassment tool.

Now the Arabs absolutely knew we were screwing with them, but weren't exactly sure how! Abdul simply hung there without comment and caused a bit of head scratching on the part of our hosts! We of course, went our merry way with tongue-in-cheek. The usual visitors to my quarters remarked that I was a-fixin' to get my feet beat with a split bamboo cane for screwing with the Saudis, but the effect was so delightful I decided to leave Abdul in place until they came to drag me off to the local Bastille... I don't think they ever caught on in almost three years of Abdul's piercing stare while hanging from my overhead<sup>1</sup>, always adorned with a headdress appropriate to the season!

I took my first R&R in October of 1985 up in London Town, and hit Harrods's Department Store (where the Queen shops), and picked up all sorts of Christmas decorations. Actual Christmas ornaments were difficult to acquire in Saudi since the Muslims were noticeably cool about the celebration of

Christmas. I personally LOVE Christmas and wasn't about to be deterred by some Rag Head reservations about our celebration of the birth of Christ. Now the Muslims acknowledge Jesus' existence and in fact consider him to be a great prophet, but not the **greatest** prophet – that honor goes to Mohammad himself! Both Christians and Jews are considered to be fellow “peoples of the book” (the Old Testament) by the Muslims, however they tend to get very upset when you try to celebrate Jesus' birthday. They consider Jesus to have been a very holy man, but also a normal human being, i.e. *NOT* the Son of God (or Allah in the Arabic Language).



**Abdul with his Arabic Headdress – The Classic Gutra and Agal**



**Abdul Claus celebrating Christmas**

While the celebration of Christmas is officially discouraged by the Muslims in general, you must understand that the Saudis in particular and the businessmen never let a shekel sneak out of their pockets. “Holiday (or Seasonal) Trees” were sold quite openly in the Souks and finding one to decorate the quarters was a non-problem. With my Christmas Tree erected, and the tinsel strung, Abdul looked almighty lonely hanging there in his everyday Gutra and Agal. Not only that, but Abdul's Gutra was white, which is a traditional summer color, and here it was in December. A bit of head scratching and eureka! Abdul



**Christmas in Jeddah '86**

needed a Santa Clause hat! A red sock was rounded up, and a large cotton ball attached to the top. The new headdress pulled down nicely over his head, and lo and behold, there in all of his splendor, hung Abdul Claus!

Now the Saudi building superintendents had free run of our apartments but never a word was ever said about Abdul, but I'd bet **BIG** Hollalas<sup>2</sup> that they were biting their tongues. I even considered giving Abdul a light coating of pig fat so that if anyone ever tried to take him down, they'd be in deep Muslim doo-doo, but somehow I don't think he'd have looked good with greased feathers, so I just left him in his adorned (but ungreased) splendor. I figured that if they ever **did** try to unhook him, I'd simply tell them that I had anointed him with an emulsified porcine lubricant to give the perpetrator a cardiac arrest!

Abdul came home to North Idaho to hang in an honored place in my kitchen window appropriately suspended by some nylon fishing leader from a swag hook so that he could look out over the field and remember our far off days in the dunes.

## ROC

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> "Overhead" is "Navy/Marine – speak" for ceiling...

<sup>2</sup> Hollalas are fractional Saudi Coins of relatively minor value. Counting your hollalas would be like counting your pennies.







## Carlos Makes a "Head Call"

### *A Saga of the Saudi Arabian Air Defense Force*

This incident took place shortly after our arrival in Saudi last March<sup>2</sup>. A bunch of us hopped on the company bus that runs down to the various Souks<sup>3</sup> on certain nights of the week. If I recall the group, it was Bill Sweeney, Bill Honeycutt, Skip Hartnett, Chuck Julian, Jon Ashbrook, Jimmie Dorsey, myself, and of course, Carlos. This particular night, we hit the Main Souk, which is well endowed with all sorts of shops, purveying everything from gold to silver, clothing, watches, electronics, in short if it can be had in Saudi, you can usually find it in the Main Souk. Virtually anything that is sold in any of the Souks can be bargained for, usually for a good sized discount off the asking price. Having spent several years in Jeddah on a previous tour, Hartnett and I were renewing our acquaintance with several shopkeepers, most of who still remembered us even after an absence of six years or more (it may have been due to our obnoxious personalities or the handle bar moustache, but any rate, we were having a great old time).

Having placed us in the Souk on this particular night, it is also necessary for the reader to realize that one of the more maddening experiences while shopping, is to get well into a bargaining session just when "prayer call" goes. These guys pray five times a day, every day of the week, and my friends, when prayer call goes, everything stops, period!!

They start off the day with prayer at daybreak, pray again at noon (or thereabouts), on into the evening, etc. Prayer times vary due to phases of the moon, but first call for each prayer is published in the daily paper(s). When prayer call starts, everything closes down. Shutters/grates are pulled down over all the store fronts, and the religious police come along to make sure all the "faithful" head for the nearest Mosque.

Prior to entering the Mosque for prayer, the faithful are required to purify themselves by washing their hands, feet, faces, etc., to avoid angering the "Almighty"... Allah, in this case of course. In Saudi Arabia, there are more Mosques than you can shake a stick at. It is said that a Mosque must be built so that one is within walking distance of any believer. Having taken a good look around, I'm here to tell you that **I** believe that!

When you are building any new facility (the rifle range, for instance), one of the very first buildings to be erected is always the Mosque. Along with the Mosque, there must be a

“washing facility” to perform the appropriate cleansing/washing absolutions prior to entering the Mosque to pray. Most, if not all Mosques have their own washing facilities, but when you're talking about the Main Souk, with everybody (the faithful, that is) heading for “Mosque” at the same time (being “herded” by the religious police), it can get pretty crowded.

To alleviate such crowding, virtually any toilet facility in Saudi is set up for foot washing and other sanitary absolutions prior to prayer (cleansing/washing of hands, feet and whatever...). One of the other peculiarities of a Saudi “facility,” is the absence of any type of a “trough type urinal.” They either use individual urinals, inside of an enclosed stall (normally just a hole in the deck with a couple of dividers for privacy). There is a certain modesty in this society that prevents “flaunting one's whatever” and they (the Saudi Marines) used to think that we “Westerners” were terribly crude when we would utilize the nearest sand dune when we were operating with them in the desert. The Saudi's would get down on their knees and dig a small pit in the sand... They also wanted to do abandon ship drill, and drown proofing while wearing a full sweat suit... all this from an outfit that apparently learns at birth how to pick their nose with one hand while scratching one's “crotch” with the other in public, and seem to be able to switch hands without missing a stroke... hummm... The point I'm trying to make is that there are no “trough type” urinals in the heads over here. With the stage so set, we can get on with our Carlos story.

While the rest of us are dickering for some sort of trinkets, Carlos feels the necessity to answer a sudden call of nature. Upon asking directions to the nearest “facility”, he is pointed up a winding set of steps not too far from our shop. Shortly after Carlos disappears, first call sounds for evening prayer. The shops start to close, and all the new guys are standing around gawking at the unfamiliar sights and sounds emanating from the Souk.

Carlos is gone for about 15 minutes. He comes back down the stairs with a funny look on his face and makes a remark about what weird “head facilities” they have in this country. Upon further quizzing, he tells about this rather disagreeable guy wearing the traditional Saudi Head Dress<sup>4</sup> and Thobe<sup>5</sup> coming into the place while he (Carlos) is using the urinal... seems this character is making some rather rude if somewhat unintelligible remarks.

Carlos says about the time he was finishing up, this guy (obviously cursing in Arabic) washes out the “urinal” with some sort of hose and starts to wash his feet in this interesting recess in the deck... Without any further discussion, I figure it is **definitely** time to pull an “exit stage left” and head for another location. This **probably** rates right up there with eating with your left hand after returning from the “powder room<sup>6</sup>.” I can only imagine, actually I was too busy “beating feet” for safer stomping grounds! With a beginning like this there will no doubt be a number of Carlos Stories before we get back to the World.

**ROC '93**



## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> In Naval Terminology, the term "head" means the same thing as "rest room," "the facility," "the John," etc. Comes from the time when running water and/or flush commodes were something well into the future. To avoid leaving rather unsanitary piles of "ka-ka" or "do-do" laying about, the Sailor or Marine needing to answer a call of nature, went up towards the bow (called the "head" of the ship) and dangled the appropriate portion of his anatomy over some nets stretched for just such a purpose. Must have been a real thrill in a typhoon!

<sup>2</sup> This took place in the Spring of 1993.

<sup>3</sup> The term "Souk" in Saudi Arabia is another term for "market," "shopping center," or in different locals in the Mid-East sometimes called "the bazaar." Here the various Souks usually are classified according to their specialty, i.e., "The Gold Souk," "The Rug Souk," or sometimes according to ethnic origins, i.e., the "Syrian Souk," etc. In this case, it was its location, the "Main Souk."

<sup>4</sup> The "head dress" is what we infidels irreverently called "*the table cloth and fanbelt*". Actually it was a cloth head covering (much like a very large handkerchief, usually red and white checkered) topped with a thick two strand cord that originally acted as a "camel hobble" in days of old when not wearing it atop one's noggin.

<sup>5</sup> The "Thobe" is the traditional Arabic Robe (usually white) worn as an outer garment.

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, the left hand is NEVER used to shovel food in ones mouth (assuming the individual is right handed). This comes from the days before the invention of toilet paper, and the left hand was used for such unspeakable acts as personal cleanliness. In the days before toilet paper, the individual was required to "wipe" with sand... Egad! Thus the right hand is always used for eating, never the left! The practice of cutting off an offenders hand in the Mid-East was not to keep him from stealing, but rather to banish the perpetrator from polite society. No one would allow an individual with only one hand to sit at the table with fellow Arabs due to what the "one handed one" must be required to do with his remaining hand. In essence it was a method of banishment.





## ~ Random Thoughts ~

### ***Saudi Mentality, Attitudes, Training, and Fighting Spirit Taken from *Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC****

In order to gain an insight into the problems of forming and training a Corps of Saudi Arabian Marines, one must consider the following:

The *first* problem is the lack of volunteers. You must understand that, these guys were “dragooned” into the Marine Corps out of a Navy that never sails. “Yanked” as it were, from a life of “genteel tea drinking” into an existence of 0400 reveille, 3-5 miles of running, obstacle courses, violent physical exercises, marches in the sun, night problems, and, horror of horrors, *getting wet!* Although little is said about it, the ships of the Saudi Navy rarely put to sea (the joke is that they all have a “bungee cord” attached to them!). When they are scheduled to go to sea, “stage whispers” from the Infidel Saudi Naval Advisors have it that mysterious sabotage more often than not prevents a ship from sailing! There is one story of a ship that finally left Jeddah and sailed around to the other coast to Jubail. Upon tying up at the pier, the entire crew (Captain & all) shoved off and went home... The Saudi Navy had to bring in a whole new crew to sail it back to Jeddah. Hummm...

One side note; **tribal alliance**. One of the greatest downfalls of the Arab World in general is the tribal nature of the people. Military rank notwithstanding, tribal prominence/hierarchy becomes a major “bone of contention”. When push comes to shove, no tribe is willing to take orders or accede to the precedence<sup>1</sup> of another (much like the American Indian!). For instance, an “Otayba” would never be willing to take orders from a “Sakran”, who would never take orders from a “Gamdi”, who would never take orders from a “Qahtani”, ad nauseum.

The Sa’uds currently control Saudi Arabia (hence the name of the country), by right of conquest, but. It was not always so. Take, for instance, the battle of Jarred in January of 1915, Abdul Aziz’s first (and only) major battle as an ally of the British in WWI. The battle saw a crushing defeat for Abdul Aziz and the fighting death of the British Liaison Officer, Capt. Shakespeare (a shirt-tail relative of the famous Bard). It seems that the Ajman Tribe (Bedouin) assigned to protect the artillery “wheeled” at the crucial moment of the battle allowing the Shammar Cavalry (Turkish led) to capture Abdul Aziz’s field guns (protected by one lone Englishman and his Webley!). It has never been determined whether the Bedouins switched sides deliberately or simply “chickened out”, but the legend of the Bedouin Warrior pales a bit at best... This “stellar” performance caused the British to throw the legendary “Lawrence of Arabia” in on the side of Shareef Husain (great grandfather of King Hussein of

Jordan, circa 1987) and blood enemy of Abdul Aziz, an arrangement the Sa'ud Family has never forgiven (Lawrence of Arabia is not one of the Saudi's favorite characters)! Until tribal rivalry can be overcome, the Arabs are destined to be a 3rd rate military *force*... only an accident of geology (oil) prevents these characters from being caravan raiders or purveyors of used camel dung in the 1980's...

And then there are the officers... Officers (as best I can discern) are selected because of their ability to absorb an education (ability to read, write, learn languages, etc.). This of course, assumes that they are politically and socially well connected as well. After selection they are sent to a "Naval Academy" in Pakistan for several years and then return to our glorious fold. Upon careful consideration, I have yet to find a single useful thing learned in Pakistan, with the possible exception of polishing their command of the English Language. Several subjects that *HAVE* made a lasting impression on them seem to be, "tea drinking," the inherent "greater worth" of an officer over an enlisted man, how to avoid duty and how never to be *ANYWHERE* on time. They learn to avoid blame for any personal screw-up and to attach it to someone else (preferably an "infidel"). Above all else, when confronted with a subject that they wish to avoid, they claim they have "already had it (that) in Pakistan!"

Physical discomfort is not one of their "biggies" either. Fights, when they occur (rarely at best), amount to "pushing contests," or more commonly, "shouting contests!" Pugil-Stick Instruction is usually a large yawn, punctuated with an occasional spirited contest between a couple of Saudi Marines of African tribal origin. Mental resolve to carry on under physically tiring or unpleasant conditions is foreign to them!

Take the case of Lieutenant Kareem. Lieutenant Kareem was selected/appointed from our (then current) Saudi Marine Class to be the Friendly Force Commander during our "two day war" – a sort of culmination exercise of our Saudi Marine Training Curricula for each class. Part of the scenario was for the Friendly Forces to assault and secure an old (abandoned) Saudi Coast Guard Station on the Jeddah Naval Station. Once the objective was secured, the friendly forces had until 0200 hours to prepare for their night attack against a dug-in enemy position. Pat Teague and Rod Roper were overseeing the Opposing Forces (OpFor) which constituted the "Bad Guys" for our Saudi Marine Heroes.

Having watched with great anticipation for a frenzied preparation of our stalwart force in preparation for this great evolution, I was somewhat disappointed in their seeming lack of meaningful efforts to get ready for the great push to clear the area of the aggressor forces. This did not bode well. I set out to find our stalwart commander, the much esteemed Kareem. Unfortunately this isn't as easy as it sounded. I put out scouts to find the missing Lieutenant. Finally after the area has been thoroughly searched, Lieutenant Kareem emerges from the bowels of the old (abandoned) Coast Guard Headquarters Building wearing not his "night-fighting duds," but rather a "night shirt straight out of the 1890s – all he was lacking was an old-time "night cap!"

"Lt. Kareem," sez I, "it is time for the night attack!"

"Oh Mr. Culver" sez Kareem, "we are *VERY* tired, we will attack later!" Aarrggg...

"Later my @\$\$ Kareem, we will attack *NOW*!"

"Oh Mr. Culver, we are VERY tired, perhaps we will attack tomorrow," sez Kareem and damned if he doesn't go back to the rack!

Since we have no real "hammer," no amount of persuasion will get Lt. Kareem or his Saudi Marine minions off their posteriors, and the attack is postponed until the "morrow"...

Pat Teague, supervisor of the OpFor Aggressors who have been patiently awaiting the supposed good guys to attack is fuming! Pat and Rod Roper have been cooling their heels awaiting the last great “jump off” of our mighty warriors to no avail!

“Dick,” sez Pat, “where in the hell have you guys been?”

“You wouldn’t believe it if I told you,” sez I, “but now they’re refusing to move this morning until they’ve been fed!”

“WHAT?” sez Pat, “where in the hell are they now?”

“Don’t know,” sez I, “I went back with Skip Hartnett to get ‘em some hot chow at the mess hall, and the supposedly starving lil’ tools are missing!”

Scowering the entire area finally turns up our wayward band of Marines playing soccer on the beach. Pat’s rather pithy comments to the young Lieutenants are here censored to avoid offending sensitive ears. Suffice it to say they have (just) had a history lesson that encompasses their mother’s proclivity for familial sexual relationships, and some small mention has been made of their probable bestiality with the “ships of the desert.” The lieutenants are now scowling as they know they’ve just been insulted, but obscenity doesn’t always translate directly and it will no doubt be a couple of hours before they get their newly acquired terminology straight!

We feed the hot chow, and prepare the fledgling Camelnecks for their jump off. Maybe something good will come out of this yet!

The ensuing attack (a mere 6-hours late) sees the friendly forces advancing in good order, using approved tactics until they reach the objective and prepare for the final assault. We are positive that the finale of this somewhat delayed exercise will make up for their lack of blinding speed. Hot chow and lots of rest is probably just what they needed!

We are now patiently awaiting the enemy to flee, the good guys take over the position, consolidate their new lines, pursue by fire, redistribute the ammunition, dig in and prepare for a counter-attack. Mercifully, the traditional hot chow has already been taken care of, and bringing up the mail probably won’t be necessary as the “Camel Express” won’t be along for a week or two

What transpires next is the thing of legends! When our stalwart forces top the ridge line, amazingly no bayonets appear, no vertical butt strokes, or hand to hand fighting seems to be taking place. I have to rub my eyes to make sure I’m not dreaming! Indeed, not only is no hand to hand fighting taking place, but rather the enemy and friendlies are engaged in a hugging and kissing contest. You would honestly have thought that these gents hadn’t seen each other for months, and were now participating in a family reunion or even worse yet... perhaps they have something going on a more personal basis! The most simple explanation is of course the relatively long separation of our troops, after all they haven’t seen each other for a full 24-hours. The explanation of the outcome of the Israeli-Arab wars is becoming more apparent as our experience increases!

The attack (call it either night or daylight at this point) has gone so abysmally, we get the troops together and explain that their performance has been less than satisfactory (using slightly more forceful language of course). Since this must be remedied for them to successfully pass the course, we tell them to get organized as we are now going to ensconce the aggressors in the old Coast Guard Station, and our good guys are going to organize an

cross-desert approach march, and assault their butt-patting buddies in yet another attack, and **THIS** time it'd better be good! Lieutenant Kareem is now getting openly hostile and surly. He allows as how they have attacked enough, and intend to go home. We get them pointed back to the final objective, but alas the second attack/assault is no more satisfactory than the first. Falling the class in and telling them that they must continue the exercise until they get it right produces a near riot (or a close to a riot as an Arab is capable of getting). Kareem allows as how he's taking them back to the training center and they are done attacking! We watch unbelievably as the column of Saudi Camelnecks trudges across the desert for their barracks!

The perceived ringleaders of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arab Revolt (the first was during WWI led by Lawrence) were hauled up to see Commander Ammar to answer for their crimes and lack of appropriate aggression. As the young officers are hauled into Ammar's office, they promptly file over to the RSMC Commandant and kiss him on both cheeks! *Shades of Archibald Henderson*<sup>2</sup>?, what the hell kind of outfit is this?

During our after-action conference following the two-day war, we expressed a desire to drop several of the more inept lieutenants from the course. Commander Ammar explains to us that we CAN drop a lieutenant from the course if he is deemed to be unsuitable, but under the current regulations, the "dropee" will get to sit around in the office and drink tea and still be given credit for having graduated from the course!

To make matters worse, Pat and I are instructed that any future reference to our young charges as miserable little "mother molesters" (using the more colorful terminology of course) will be viewed with extreme displeasure. Since this was our second cautionary lecture, the Commander was sure we had gotten the point! It is well to explain here that our first offense was the direct result of having the lieutenants breaking up into small groups while engaged in a tactical desert march and holding hands in what can only be described as "gaggles" of very friendly lads... I personally thought the use of the rather crude terminology was rather apt at the time. Oh well, they can't control what we're thinking – yet!

Military incompetence aside, deep down the Arab can be a cruel, if inept opponent! This is often evident during our classes on the "handling of Prisoners of War or "The Law of Land Warfare". They cannot understand any prohibitions against torturing or killing prisoners. Their ancestors have been "skinning" their opponents alive throughout recorded history, why stop now, I suppose??

Speaking of cruelty and/or blood & guts, the RAMBO movie genre arrives on the scene. Now the Saudis have a prohibition on public movie theaters, but the VCR is going strong! One of our Bedouin Lieutenants is a great fan of Rambo. During one of our "between class discussions," he allows as how **no one** could make him talk, even with torture! Chuckling to myself, I look at Hartnett, and he grins back at me, hee, hee, hee... I allow as how we can make him tell us in great detail, for instance what his Grandfather used to do to camels and never lay a hand on him! The lieutenant bristles and offers to bet BIG Riyals<sup>3</sup> that nobody can make HIM talk! The deal is cut and the lieutenant is placed on a board (with head slightly down hill). Now I don't know if you've ever seen the "old wet towel over the nose and mouth routine," with water applied to the towel from a canteen...(not that I've ever done this before you understand, but some of my old ITT<sup>4</sup> Types used to have some stories.. hee, hee, hee!). Without going into sordid detail, suffice it to say, common decency prevents me from relating what the lieutenant's grandfather really did to camels, but he's sure kept his mouth shut. since! The point to this little dissertation is while I would have little trepidation at the prospects

of going to war with the Arabs, I would **not** care to be captured! They tend to be a people of no mercy and great cruelty; ...that camel sure caught hell from Grandpa!

They tell the story of the Israeli and Arab tank that collided over a sand dune during the Yom Kippur War. The Arabs are reputed to have climbed out of their tank with their hands in the air crying “we surrender, we surrender,” while the Israelis grabbed the back of their necks and yelled “whiplash, whiplash” ...perhaps it is simply the nature of the beast...?? Ah well...

**ROC**

### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> There is an unspoken hierarchy of tribes, giving precedence to those considered to be higher on the totem pole than others. While it is never openly spoken of, a Lieutenant from a higher ranking tribe may well simply ignore the orders or directions of a Commander from a tribe considered to be of lesser importance. Needless to say, this does NOT allow strict obedience from a military chain of command. Bad, bad ju-ju!

<sup>2</sup> Archibald Henderson is perhaps the most famous of U.S. Marine Commandants, having served in the Office for 39-years! He once hung a sign on his office door in the 1820s stating “gone to fight the Indians, be back when the war’s over!” It would be hard to imagine a U.S. Marine Lieutenant kissing Archibald on both cheeks (or anywhere else)!

<sup>3</sup> A Ryial is a unit of Saudi (folding) Currency; 100 of them at the time being roughly equal to \$26.

<sup>4</sup> ITT Teams are used in the Marine Corps in conjunction with intelligence gathering efforts. ITT literally translates to “Interrogator Translator Teams” and specialize in interrogating prisoners (very gently, and in full compliance with the Geneva Convention of course).





## How it all Started...

### *A Quick History of the Beginnings of the RSMC (Amphibious)*

While I didn't get in on the absolute beginnings of the formation of the Royal Saudi Marines, I arrived shortly after the graduation of the first class of stalwart Saudi "Camelnecks"... I suppose I was much like the legendary second Marine to report to the Bonhomie Richard when John Paul Jones was assembling his crew. The first Marine reported to the Officer of the Deck and was reputed to have been told by the befuddled OD to go aft and have a seat until he figured out what he was to do with a Marine. Shortly thereafter, Marine number two arrives and is told by the OD to go aft and find a seat next to the first. The first Marine is said to have greeted the second Marine with the salutation "Boy you should have been in the Old Corps!" – and so it was. I can definitely identify with the second Marine to report to the Bonhomie Richard! I suspect that generations of Marines have been so welcomed!

Some years later, and following the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, I was told by some active duty Marine that he was one of the first Marine Instructors to form the Royal Saudi Marines. I chuckled a bit and told him that he was mistaken, that we had preceded him by about six years. He insisted that THEY had formed the Corps and were its first instructors. Obviously a history lesson was needed for this "Johnny-come-Lately Leatherneck."

He stared in disbelief but after hearing our story, his reply was, "well yeah, but you guys were **civilians!**" And so we were, although a bit rougher sobriquet has occasionally been applied. I pointed out to him that the Baron von Stueben who trained the Continental Army for George Washington was also a non-citizen, and initially operating at the behest of General Washington and not actually a legitimate part of Washington's stalwart band. The young Marine went away shaking his head, absolutely sure that I was trying to rob him of his place in Saudi Marine History. Those of us who had been there knew better! While I don't place us in the same status as the *Prussian Drill Master*, we had done our part. I encountered another Marine at the National Rifle Matches during the summer of 2003 who also was somewhat befuddled at my revelations, as apparently he too had had a hand in training the RSMC, albeit somewhat later than our efforts back in the late 1980s. Perhaps these Camel Tails will serve to set the record straight. I suspect that for anonymity I should use some sort of *nom de guerre* to give plausible denial in the future!

My own contact with the (soon to be) stalwart “Camelnecks” came at a New Year’s Eve Party in 1984 while perusing a copy of the *Spokane Spokesman Review*. Being somewhat bored and attending in the singular, I checked out the classified ads. Lo and behold, an item virtually jumped off the page at me – “military instructors wanted for the Royal Saudi Marine Corps” by some outfit called SIBC Basil out of Delaware. I surreptitiously copied down the telephone number lest anyone think that I would be interested in such an undertaking. At this time I was a contract firearms instructor for the Idaho POST (Police Officer’s Standards and Training) Academy and usually held my classes in the Coeur d’Alene area. I called the company (Basil) only to find out that all the positions were spoken for with the exception of “The Gunnery Instructor”... Hummm... I have often wondered if Allah was smiling on me that day – later I thought that perhaps I found that damned ad as some sort of opportunity to atone for some of my misdeeds? Either way, it was the start of a great adventure. Apparently the scuttlebutt spread rapidly and I got a telephone call from a gentleman by the name of Pat Teague who was then serving as the Marine Instructor for the Kellogg, Idaho USMC ROTC Unit. Pat had also signed on with this worthy undertaking marking the beginning of a long friendship. We adjourned to a local “watering hole” known as *Gibbs Tavern* (an establishment perhaps to occupy a spot in RSMC History not unlike that of Tun Tavern in Philadelphia in 1775). We proceeded to down several libations (or was it pitchers?) and trade stories. It seems that we had once served together in a rather small (but prestigious) Marine Corps unit back in 1960-61 known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. This was really something of a fluke, as the entire company of that time consisted of only 14 officers and 147 enlisted, AND we were one of two such units in the entire Marine Corps with legitimate parachute billets. Needless to say, we walked with a bit of a swagger in those far off days. Pat had served in the Reconnaissance Platoons, while my dubious distinction was as a Pathfinder Team Leader (sometimes referred to by the “bubble-heads” as “trashfinders” – insensitive dolts!). We traded stories and personages from our mutual past, reminisced over the old days, and were looking forward to heading to the dunes – had we only known! Pat and I had also served together in the early 1970s in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the legendary 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, so it was almost like a gathering of the clan.

Since I was a bachelor at the time with no one to assist in closing down the homestead, it took me a few days longer to head for Saudi. Pat arrived in February 1985, and I followed in April. It was the start of a long friendship that continues to this day.

The Saudi Corps had several false starts, and was initially fleshed out with a retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel by the name of Tom Beldon, a retired Gunnery Sergeant named Norman Jennings, and a Marine Reserve Sergeant named Rod Roper who was to serve as the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expert. A retired Marine Master Sergeant named Paul Shomper was tagged to become the Gunnery Supervisor, and I was to be the Gunnery Instructor. Basil was still looking for a “Seamanship Instructor”... What the hell? Seamanship Instructor? What was going on...??

I checked with Basil and they allowed that the billets had been set-up by the British and reflected their somewhat offbeat cut on naming and organizing a newly formed Marine Corps. In the meantime, Lt.Col. Beldon was called home to take care of some pressing family matters and never returned. Norm Jennings was caught up in some sort of “alcohol libation sipping bash” and was summarily shipped out of country. I had called an old Marine Corps friend of many years, Skip Hartnett, also a Force Recon alumni, and my former Executive Officer in A Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion in 1965. Skip had some experience handling sail boats and since Basil was almost at their wits end trying to find a

Seamanship Instructor, Hartnett became the natural billet filler, and joined us during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in May. We were slowly attaining our complete compliment of instructors. Paul Shomper was delayed for a number of weeks and I was promoted by Basil (even before I left the States) to become the Gunnery Supervisor. Paul joined us in the early Summer of 1985 and took up the Gunnery Instructor's billet.

By April of 1985, Pat, Rod Roper and Tom Beldon had turned out the very first class of Saudi Camelnecks, and voilá, we had a ready made Corps of approximately 40 Amphibious Warriors ready to repel boarders should the Arabian peninsula be invaded by enemies of the Kingdom. With the exception of the wealth of "black gold" currently sitting under the dunes, I was having a problem wondering who in the blue blazes would want the place? But for an accident of geology, the Arabic Rag-Heads would still be purveying used Camel Manure.

With Beldon gone to take care of familial problems, Pat inherited the job of Training Coordinator, the head of our stalwart band who acted as a sort of buffer between Commander Ammar Al Quatani, (the defacto Commandant of the Royal Saudi Marine Camelnecks), and the rest of the instructors. As I watched the events unfold, I did not envy Pat his job. Dealing with Commander Ammar was like dealing with a kid in a candy shop run amuck! The Commander spoke perfect English, and had attended all the "hot dog staff schools in the States" including the USMC Command and Staff School. Problem? I don't think Commander Ammar really understood the curricula that was offered. Oh he heard the words, but didn't always understand the underlying instruction. Better that they should have started him in Boot Camp and let him work himself up. It was our job to give him what he *THOUGHT* he'd heard, and this wasn't always as easy as it sounded.

Roper was an old timer, and kinda' rolled with the punches, and I had decided to sit back, do the assigned job and enjoy the entire thing as a large adventure. All we needed now was our Seamanship Instructor. Enter Skip Hartnett during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of May, boy sailor, and quiet cynic observing the goings on in the manner of the old timers referred to in Thomason's book, "Fix Bayonets"... Much as the old-timers described by Thomason, he had a tolerant scorn of nearly everything on earth except the American Marines, but in many ways, that described our entire crew. We were shortly joined by Paul Shomper, aka "Paulie-Poo" (an affectionate name he still holds to this day), and occasionally referred to as "Four-Egg Shomper" making reference to the fact that Paul was able to consume prodigious amounts of chow. We were "*ready*," if just one word could describe our attitude! In a single phrase, it would have been, "*bring on the Allah Condemned Feline!*"

Initially we were assigned to the Royal Saudi Navy Base in Jeddah and turned out classes that lasted about 3-month's duration with the Officers and Enlisted personnel intermixed. Our classes were elemental, and in many ways were a sort of Boot Camp, combined with an Advanced Infantry Training Course (much like the old ITR – Infantry Training Regiment, a sort of post-boot camp tactical training phase). We taught elemental and advanced marksmanship, infantry tactics (raids, ambushes, helicopter assaults, and night infantry tactics).

Map and compass work was high on the list, and thank goodness, the annual magnetic declination constant for Saudi Arabia was less than 1-degree per year, otherwise we'd *STILL* have fledgling Camelnecks lost in the Desert! We ran the little tools every morning and put them through obstacle courses. They swore we tried to kill them on a very high rappelling tower. Swimming and water indoctrination was a challenge (Arabs don't like to get wet) but



we always made enough progress to keep our interest up. We eventually acquired our own armored cars, not totally unlike the U.S. Marine LAAVs except that the Saudi versions had six wheels vice the eight of the United States versions. We taught amphibious raids, and practiced rubber boat training with the old U.S. Navy/Marine Corps seven man rubber boats. Aside from the occasional frustrations borne of an Arabic tribal lack of motivation, the entire evolution was fun and games.

Occasionally we had a few classes that kept the adrenaline flowing. For instance, our Explosive and Demolition Classes would probably have cancelled our life insurance policies had the appropriate “insurance carriers” been notified, but we survived by pure dumb luck!

While we were constantly monitored, for the most part we were left alone to conduct our training in the manner we chose. Now this is heady stuff! Have you ever wanted to start your own Corps? Design your own emblems? Organize your own units? All this we did and more, all in the name of the defense of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)!

Eventually, the three month classes began to become a thing of the past, and we were often left to twiddle our thumbs occasionally punctuated with a new class reporting, being oriented, and the class newly started, only to have the entire crew disappear over a long weekend – no explanation, no nothing, just boredom! The lack of running legitimate three month classes was leaving us to contemplate our navels rather than to overtly train young Saudi Camelnecks. Boredom was beginning to set in!

A little known regulation with the U.S. Military surfaced that indicated that all retired military expats were required to have permission from their individual services to work overseas and out of CONUS in a tax free status. The penalty for not having permission was the immediate stoppage of your retirement pay, coupled with a requirement that you repay all of your retirement that was paid to you while so employed! Most did not, and there was much “breath holding” going on by the entire Basil contingent. By purest chance, and advice from Skip Hartnett before we left, I had applied for and received the requisite permission. Skip, my personal mentor on this little stumbling block, had mentioned this regulation to Basil prior to departure, and they had told him not to worry about it, as it didn’t apply! Thus the guy who had recommended that I apply for permission had not, and was to rue the day he had taken Basil’s advice.

It seems that some lady Lt. Col. Disbursing Officer (finance to you in the Army), remembered some previous run-in (on active duty) with Skip, and caught him with his knickers down. She stopped his retirement pay, and only his memsahib found out about it in the States on payday. Needless to say, our Seamanship Instructor departed for his home digs to get his pay sorted out, all the time regretting he had referred to the Lady Lt.Col’s prowess as a Marine in terms that only a “female-canine” could understand. Goodby Skip, hello Lee Barta!

Lee, a retired Amphibian Tractor Marine, took over the Seamanship Billet (logical in a way I suppose). Lee was a great guy, but I always got the impression that he was more of a gentleman than the rest of us “unwashed” old grunts. He lent a shade of dignity to an otherwise uncouth gaggle of pirates.

Eventually Commander Ammar, the titular head of the Marines, in order to keep the billets filled to make Basil happy (they were paid according to the filled billets), promoted Rod

Roper to the billet of Assistant Training Coordinator, and a search went out for a new Explosive Ordinance expert. Rod could have handled the job without any problem as the job as Assistant Training Coordinator wasn't one that was particularly demanding, but as pointed out, filled billets put money in Basil's corporate pockets.

Even though the billets for the Saudi Marine Corps were to be filled with retired U.S. Marines, occasionally a recruit from one of our sister services slipped in unnoticed to keep the Table of Organization filled. Rod Roper's replacement was a retired Army EOD man (whose name escapes me at this late date) who was absolutely horrified at the prospect of doing a three mile run every morning to keep our Camelnecks in shape. He immediately pointed out to us that he had experienced a mild heart attack and declined to participate in our physical fitness program. This of course did not exactly "tweak" the cockles of our Training Coordinator's heart, and Pat approached the individuals running the Personnel Offices. After appropriate grilling, our new arrival also fell back on the "weak heart" routine with the hierarchy and he was given a one way ticket back to the States. We continued to train our youngsters with the personnel on hand. At least during my tenure, we never did fill the EOD billet, and the Marine Advisory Group continued to function without a hitch.

Eventually, the classes began to totally wane on the west coast of the peninsula (by the Red Sea), and our contract with SIBC Basil was coming to an end. The entire end of contract found the entire Saudi Naval Amphibious contingent (both the Marines and the Naval Special Unit, aka SEALs) preparing to move to the Persian Gulf side of the peninsula (don't ever let the Arabs hear you call it anything but the Arabian Gulf!).

We were offered the option to sign on directly with the Saudi Navy vice an intermediary U.S. Corporation, and Pat, Rod, Four-Egg, Lee, and I decided to try our luck with a bit of mercenary free lancing. We drove across the peninsula eventually arriving at the Sea Port of Jubail, and hanging our training hats at a place called "Ras al Gar" ("Ras" meaning "point" as in a point of land) a few kilometers below Jubail. Eventually in 1990/1991 Ras al Gar became home to the U.S. Marines as their jumping off point for action in Kuwait and points north during Gulf War I.

Jubail was a new experience as the weather had changed almost 180 degrees. We now had some semblance of seasons, with the spring being cool and wet (light jacket weather) and the summers didn't seem so hot. We were no longer living in hotels rented by the Basil Corporation, but rather in rehabilitated house trailers, and not too well rehabilitated at that! Chow was no longer cooked in the Corporation Dining Facility by retired British Military Cooks, but rather the chow was contracted for by the Saudis at as cheap a rate as they could get. Our messhall (Saudi Expat Mess) was run by a Pakistani Group who specialized in both fish and chicken as the cheapest of fares (both of which I cordially hate!). The fin and feather chow almost starved me to death that last year, but the overall take home pay had increased enough to keep my mouth shut (both in eating the food, and the increased take-home!). Where Jeddah had been over-run by stray felines, Jubail was over run by dog-packs (friendly enough, but very tribal, much like the Arabs themselves).

Jubail was a sort of "hick town" compared to Jeddah, and even the Arab Slave Market was still standing, although I'm not too sure when they used it last, although rumors abounded. The people were friendly, and while they were susceptible to a little arm twisting and bargaining, it still didn't have the variety and familiarity of our old digs. Dhahran however, was within shopping distance and had plenty of variety for the most sophisticated shopper.

Availability to the monthly parties at the Consulate in Dhahran, and some “pork-based chow” in the club on the U.S. Airbase there made it seem like home and gave us a way of saying “intercourse-you” to the Arabic hierarchy...

We were still training Saudi Camelnecks, but it seemed that we were becoming more of a Christmas Tree Ornament for the Saudi Navy, in a sort of “see here, we’ve got real Marine Instructors” type of thing. Got wet a lot holding rubber boat classes, and had lots of time to get in some really long runs on Saudi Saturdays (the Saudi Weekend is Thursday and Friday with Friday being the rough equivalent of our holy day).

Our contracts required that the infidels go to work on Thursdays, with the entire Saudi Navy off for the weekend, we got creative for entertainment. Pat and I would often go on 10-mile runs on Thursdays, but it was just for entertainment and we’d run slow enough to discuss ballistics and Elk Hunting expeditions while hoofing it through the desert. I got my primer from Pat on how to “super-glue” Forrest Service Gate Locks when they were used to deny access to legitimate hunters, we solved most of the problems of the world and even came up with a few they’d never even thought of...

Rod Roper started taking a correspondence course on photography and was getting right clever with his Japanese Glass. Four-Egg had gotten acquainted with a young Cypriot Girl of Greek extraction when on R&R and was either writing, calling or romancing her on R&Rs. Lee Barta and I would often make shopping expeditions to Dhahran, while Pat and I would hit the U.S. Air Base to partake of the various forbidden delights of the States, or the Consulate in Dhahran for some of their monthly parties.

Eventually we all began to break up and go our separate ways. I had gotten a job offer from the Kellogg (High School) ROTC Unit (on a tip from Pat Teague who’d worked there before we wound up in the sand dunes) at the expiration of my contract. Paulie-Poo went to Cyprus when his contract expired and married his little sweetie. Pat hung around for another year along with Rod Roper. Lee Barta went home to Missoula, Montana, and of course Skip Hartnett had left when the Marine Corps stopped his pay back in ’86.

I seriously considered an enlistment in the French Foreign Legion on my way home, but found out the minimum enlistment was five years! Uppsss... Five years as a Frog somehow didn’t appeal to me, although I was in good enough shape at the time to have faked the age restrictions. Somehow I couldn’t picture myself munching Brie Cheese and quaffing vino on liberty in some African hell hole... It was one thing to be with your friends in the dunes, but among thieves and scalawags with no way out for five whole years decided me against such a course of action. Adventure is one thing, but deliberate masochism is another.

The crew was breaking up, but in some ways even today it’s almost like we were all there only yesterday. Rod Roper unfortunately passed into Valhalla due to cancer some years back, but I am still in contact with most of rest of the scoundrels.

After working for the Census Bureau in the 1990 census, Pat went to work for the Idaho State Veterans Administration where he’s still employed. I had his young’uns in the USMC ROTC classes in Kellogg as you might have expected. Young Steve Teague joined the Corps, went to Saudi and occupied some of our old “digs” at Ras al Gar during the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War.

Skip Hartnett and I went to Saudi in 1993 for another year of fun and frivolities, this time training the Royal Saudi Air Defense Force. While I haven't seen Paul Shomper for a number of years, we still trade e-mail and stories from long ago. Skip and I tried to get him on the Air Defense Force Contract in Saudi back in '93 and we had received permission on a supposed "follow on contract" that never transpired. Too bad really, as Paul was one of the all time good guys. We used to joke that Paul never met a lass that he wouldn't marry, but to his everlasting credit, he had made a good life for his family in Cyprus.

This series of stories then simply fleshes out the bare bones of the history I've given here, and hopefully will give you the flavor of our life of adventure in a land far, far, away in a time long, long, ago!

***Semper Fidelis,***

***Dick Culver***

***Retired Major of Marines***

***Gentleman Adventurer***

***Fancier of Genteel Ladies***

***~ and ~***

***Fine Beagle Hounds (not necessarily in that order)***

***Coeur d' Alene, Idaho***

***A.D. 2003***





## ***The Unintended Consequences of Changing Times and Situations***

*Taken from Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC*

The conversation started in the office of the Marine Corps School in Jeddah. It was during a slack time between training sessions, and the subject of our rambling discourses often ran from politics, to our varied and sundry military experiences from the misty past. All in all, great fun and gave us a chance to regale each other with half truths and remembered encounters during our various military assignments. In the space of some 20+ years the exactness of our memories were no doubt clouded with a rather personal take on various adventures. All except one...

Pat Teague, our training coordinator and I had served together several times, and had a number of shared acquaintances and experiences. Pat and I had served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company in the 1961 time frame. I later left to go to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and later to the Far East and serve as the XO of two Rifle



**Culver pondering  
the possibility of  
becoming a tent peg**

Companies in the process. My tour as the XO of Golf Company with both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, was followed by an assignment to the Reserve

Branch in the 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps District Headquarters in New Orleans. My somewhat (personally) unwelcome presence in the former abode of Marie Laveaux had me signing discharges in a small office cubical just prior to the infamous Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. To say that I was not a happy camper is something of an understatement. Pat however (lucky dog), was still serving in a Recon Platoon in 1<sup>st</sup> Force. During one of our daily bull sessions in Jeddah while complaining about my unceremonious assignment to



**Pat in Jeddah**

New Orleans, somehow the conversation swung around to how close we came to invading Cuba, and finding out just how serious the Rooskies were about starting WWIII. From my point of view, I was sitting literally under the gun with nothing more lethal than a government

issue pen a mere 90 miles off the Cuban shore, and most probably a juicy target for the missile batteries, controlled by the Russian advised Cubans. While the Cubans would probably have done us a favor by wiping out the snarled administrative garble common to our District Headquarters, it did not engender warm fuzzy feelings in the New Orleans clime, most especially since I couldn't find a single place to affix a bayonet to that damned pen!

The United States stationed an invasion fleet a few miles off the Cuban coast with full intention of "Landing the Landing Force" if negotiations broke down! Fur was standing up on virtually all necks and of course nowhere quite as stiff as with those scheduled to go ashore. Pat told me that his recon team was scheduled to parachute into Cuba ahead of the invasion and set up a radio site to relay ground surveillance of the Cuban's actions prior to actually sending troops ashore! Much to his dismay, Pat pointed out that some "rocket scientist" had discerned that the Recon Teams scheduled to be dropped into Cuba would only be armed with a .45 M1911A1 Pistol and two hand grenades! What sort of idiot would have come up with such a scheme?

I was sitting at my own desk gently chuckling, with Pat looking at me like I hadn't understood what he had just said. Unfortunately, I understood exactly what he said, and worse yet, I knew exactly where such insanity had come from. Unfortunately, "**I**" was the culprit, albeit a year or so removed from the actual situation in 1962. I had simply misjudged the acumen of those running the show for the Cuba "dust-up", who had apparently not thought out the changed tactical and strategic situation from those envisioned in the original armament concept... In my opinion they had failed to consider the old adage that everything depends on the situation and the terrain. I had of course, underestimated Murphy's eternal influence.

I debated telling "Ugh Teague" (so called from his imposing stature and hairy appearance approximating that of the legendary cave man) where the scheme had originated lest I become an after-the-fact "tent peg" even though it was 25-years in the past by the time we were reminiscing. After some deep thought and soul searching, I decided my companion needed to know what had prompted such a seemingly idiotic decision. To make it more understandable to the "unwashed" we need to go back to the 1950s and 60s to get a take on how the Force Reconnaissance concept was perceived and how their assigned missions had evolved.

## **Setting the Stage:**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the reconnaissance satellites were not yet a part of the equation. The Recon community had taken it's origins from the Recon Platoons deployed in the Pacific that landed and brought back important information that was rendered down to hard military intelligence prior to amphibious landings. Good stuff, but it relied entirely on the expertise and guts of the recon platoon members and was always at the whims of weather, surf, and inadvertent discovery by the enemy, thus conceivably blowing the cover of an entire operation.

Following WWII, reconnaissance doctrine continued to evolve and recon platoons were used in Korea to great advantage. Following Korea, an organization known as Amphib Recon was born (although there are those who claim that the Amphib Recon sobriquet was also used in WWII and Korea). The Amphibs were conceptually working for the Fleet Marine Force Headquarters, both FMF Atlantic for the East Coast, and FMF Pacific for the areas, reaching from the West Coast of the United States and thence to Hawaii, and the Far East. Essentially these outfits performed duties that are now the job of highly sophisticated

reconnaissance satellites, but at the time worked for what was then referred to as FMF Lant (usually located in Norfolk, Va.) and FMF Pac (usually located in Hawaii).

By 1954 a new concept was envisioned and tested by an organization known as Test Unit 1, operating primarily out of Camp Pendleton, California. Test Unit 1 was in charge of developing reconnaissance techniques (among other things), to include the existing amphibious reconnaissance units, and a relatively new concept, that of clandestine parachute insertion of reconnaissance teams, as opposed to strictly seaborne entry, utilizing submarines, rubber boats, and Scuba techniques.

A third facet of the “tested” reconnaissance unit was designed to provide initial terminal guidance for helicopter insertion of the landing forces, to augment the normal ship-borne landing craft. LPHs were a relatively new idea (Landing Platform, Helicopter – a miniature aircraft carrier for helicopter operations), but no one had worked out the final doctrine on Heliborne Assault techniques. These “terminal guidance teams” for the envisioned Helo Ops would be responsible for clearing designated landing zones of obstacles, setting up landing panels, and defending the landing zones until the assault waves of helicopters could establish an airborne “beach head”... The idea was to insert a “Pathfinder Team” by parachute several days to perhaps a week prior to the/an invasion to prepare and defend the landing zone. The Pathfinder segment of the Marine Recon unit took its name from the Army Pathfinder units that jumped into assigned (parachute) landing zones to prepare them for the main assault waves of Airborne troops in WWII and Korea. The Marine Pathfinders would have a number of teams assigned to the platoon to cover multiple landing zones, including alternate zones if any of the primary zones were compromised or under heavy fire.

The entire recon unit under study by Test Unit 1 consisted of an Amphibious Recon Platoon (initially not airborne qualified), a Parachute Recon Platoon, and the Parachute Pathfinder Platoon. In 1957, the reconnaissance portion of Test Unit 1 morphed into a new unit called the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company, having (as set forth above) an Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoon (still not airborne qualified), a Parachute Reconnaissance Platoon, and the Parachute Pathfinder Platoon. Further thought (and a small amount of resentment by the non-parachute qualified amphibious reconnaissance folks who didn’t get to draw jump pay or wear the coveted silver wings of a jumper) caused a reshuffling of the concept to include the airborne qualification of the Amphibious Reconnaissance Platoon, and brought the Amphibious Recon Platoon and the Para Recon Platoons together under the collective banner of simply the Reconnaissance Platoons, both cross-trained in amphibious and airborne operations. The Pathfinder Platoon dropped the “Parachute” Pathfinder Platoon designation and became simply the Pathfinder Platoon. The concept seemed to be working well, and in 1958, 1<sup>st</sup> Force broke off a sizeable chunk of their experienced personnel and sent them to Camp Lejeune, N.C. to form the 2<sup>nd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. For purposes of this discussion, the rest is history, as there are a number of books out there that chronicle the progression of the Reconnaissance Companies in a most workman-like fashion. The mini-history lesson is simply a prelude to explain the rest of the story.

About the time the Force Reconnaissance Companies were being formed, a second reconnaissance concept came about that set forth a sort of division of labor within the Reconnaissance community. Each Marine Division was to be blessed with a Division Reconnaissance Battalion, designed to be the eyes and ears of the operating infantry. Essentially, the Division Reconnaissance Battalions were designed to provide tactical reconnaissance information directly in front of each operating unit on a real-time basis. The

Recon Battalions were not tied in with Force Recon at the time, and worked for and were part of the Table of Organization of each Marine Division as opposed to being attached to the Fleet Marine Force Headquarters. For better or worse, we of the Force Reconnaissance Community considered the Division Reconnaissance outfits to be “pogues” – after all, if you hadn’t been to jump school, you weren’t \$hit as the saying used to go. The feeling in the Force Companies was that the Division Recon folks were “wanna-bees” and not worthy of consideration by we “Force Types”... Being assigned to a Division Reconnaissance unit was considered to be a fate worse than death! Gag, wretch, wheeze!

Conversely, the Force Reconnaissance Companies were designed to gather strategic (not tactical) intelligence/reconnaissance information for overall invasions of foreign soil. The Force Company recon teams were to be dropped by parachute (or even inserted by rubber boats or scuba via submarine) deep into enemy territory up to 6 months in advance of a planned invasion, gather information, and ideally to withdraw (or be extracted) hopefully without ANY enemy contact! The extraction was envisioned to be accomplished by clandestine means (rubber boat, air pickup, or even the helium balloon extraction [called “Skyhook”] as shown in the movie “The Green Berets”)... In those early days, the Reconnaissance Platoons were designed to do the jobs now routinely assigned to the spy satellites. Unfortunately, such did not exist in the early days.

### **The Evolution of Weaponry In the Reconnaissance Community:**

Our quasi-official armament on the platoon level (both Recon and Pathfinder), was the M3A1 Submachine-Gun (better known as the grease gun). This was a full automatic .45 caliber submachine-gun designed as an inexpensive replacement for the Thompson Submachine-Gun. Platoon Commanders usually carried a M1911A1 .45 Automatic Pistol, and those in both the Recon Platoons and the Pathfinder Platoons carried the ubiquitous Grease Gun.

In 1957 the new U.S. Service Rifle became the M14 and the mighty M1 was slowly phased out of system although we (in the Marine Corps) were not to see the M14 as our service rifle in the Divisions until late 1964, early 1965. Within the Pathfinder Teams, the official machine-gun was the M1919A6 utilizing a bi-pod and shoulder stock. This was to be replaced by the M60, and of course, the M79 Grenade Thrower came on the scene. In 1960-1961 however, we were still operating under the old weapons system.

Our operations officer in the First Force Company was an old time, very savvy Marine Captain by the name of Dale Davis. Captain Davis was a true warrior. Too young to enlist in the Marines for WWII, he had served as a (slightly?) underage seaman in the Merchant Marine, enlisting in the Corps as soon as he was of age. He was eventually commissioned in the Corps, served with distinction in Korea and came to us after having served in the Marine Corps Advisory Group in South Vietnam well in advance of our official involvement in Indochina. Having been blessed or cursed with gray hair at an early age, he came to us in First Force as a Captain with what we considered a wealth of fruit salad on his chest, and of course the obligatory silver jump wings. Captain Davis was definitely up to the task of running the operations shop. Captain Davis’ place in this evolution will become evident shortly.

Tactically however, we had inadvertently stumbled upon a dilemma! We were by definition, manned by the most knuckle-dragging group of enlisted troops and officers to grace any existing operational unit, unless of course we count the 2<sup>nd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company. Our dilemma was this... Operational reconnaissance teams were “peopled” with individuals who wanted to go out and kill something; aggressive is something of an



understatement... “Kill a Commie for Mommy” comes to mind. Unfortunately, the adventuresome spirit necessary to talk a normal human being into jumping out of a perfectly good airplane, tended to slop over somewhat into the operational provisos of the assigned deep reconnaissance missions. With a satellite ball whirling overhead, you don't have to tell the “*electronic intelligence gatherer*” not to engage the enemy, you just program it to gather the required pictures and transmit them back to base. Alas, it wasn't that simple with the M1A1 “Knuckle-Dragger”, populating the Recon Platoons during the pre-satellite days!

Mercifully, this dilemma occurred about the time we were testing the (then) new weapons systems, and a realignment of weapons assignment within the Company was in the offing. Since I had previously shot in competition with various Marine Corps teams, and was something of a weapons aficionado, I was given the nod as the weapons test officer for 1<sup>st</sup> Force (subject of course to the approval of the powers-that-be), by Captain Davis. We ran multiple tests utilizing the newly available weaponry, and came up with the following recommendation:

**Pathfinder Platoon:**

1. Individual Weapon – M14 Rifle with sufficient magazines appropriate to the envisioned operations.
2. Side arm – M1911A1 Pistol with appropriate magazines
3. Squad Automatic (capable of defending the landing zone) – M60 Machine-Gun
4. Each pathfinder team was to carry an M79 Grenade Launcher
5. Appropriate demolitions, chain saws, brush axes, and explosives to clear any obstacles that would hinder any helicopter landing operations.

**Reconnaissance Platoon(s):**

1. Individual Weapon – M1911A1 Automatic Pistol with appropriate magazines.
2. Two hand-grenades per each member of the recon platoon members.

OK, I suppose the legitimate question is, what in the hell was going through your mind in recommending that each Recon Member carry ONLY a pistol and two frag grenades instead of their familiar Grease Guns?

**The Rational for the .45 Automatic and two frag grenades:**

OK, here goes. Our initial problem had been to keep the extremely gungy Recon Team members from engaging the enemy in a concerted firefight (don't forget the “Kill a Commie for Mommy” bit mentioned earlier!). Here we had some of the most motivated and aggressive individuals in the Corps armed with full automatic weapons and we told them not to pick a fight – yeah, right!. A chance encounter was more likely to engender a full fledged fire fight than not. “After all, they gave me a sub-machine gun did they not?” The flip side to that was (at least in the thinking of the time) that the individuals armed with only the M1911A1 would be extremely careful not to engage the enemy unnecessarily, and thus much more likely to return to the Reconnaissance Headquarters in the rear with their intelligence information so that the operating Infantry force could take appropriate and timely action.

You can no doubt discern the rationale that went into the armament argument. All this becomes simply academic when the bullets are flying however. The fragmentation (frag) grenades however (in concept) would give a determined and clever man a chance to “break contact” with the enemy, and continue to escape and evade – hopefully to the pre-assigned pickup point. Hopefully their rather light armament would discourage individual “chance taking” and make clandestine withdrawal more likely. In short it was a way of shading your/our reconnaissance bet. Using the deep pre-D Day reconnaissance concept of the time, calling in air strikes or naval gunfire to get our “snoop and poop” lads off the hook would go a long way to tipping off the potential enemy/invasion target! Well, what the hell, you volunteered to jump out of airplanes didn’t you? Who said the missions were gonna’ be a cake walk?

The powers-that-be bought off on my recommendations although Captain Davis did look at me a bit funny when I first laid it out on the table. Considerable discussion followed, and the hierarchy had to admit that there was some small truth to the rationale. Both I and Captain Davis wound up in the Far East following the unexpected relief of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Chief of Staff (for a different matter), and I hadn’t thought about the weapons recommendations for eons until Pat and I were kicking the subject around some 25-years later.

### **A Miscalculation:**

Where I had screwed up was assuming that no one in a decision making position would take my recommendations as cast in concrete and not apply some common sense to the equation. Don’t forget, the original concept was for DEEP pre D-Day reconnaissance up to 6-months prior to an invasion. Here however, we have the entire fleet sitting off the shore of Cuba awaiting the nod to land the landing force! Inadvertent discovery of a reconnaissance team was obviously NOT going to blow the program, as the whole world was waiting with baited breath for the outcome! Planning to send the recon teams in with a .45 Automatic and two frags bordered on insanity given the circumstances manifesting themselves during the Cuban dust-up. My problem was that I had assumed a certain amount of tactical acumen would be utilized appropriate to the situation. Alas, the best laid plans of mice and Marines, sigh...

What would I have done? Since I wasn’t on the ground, I can’t give a definitive answer, but here’s what I *THINK* I would have done! I would have sent the recon teams in with a M1919A6 Machine-Gun (or the M60 Machine-Gun – but I don’t think we had totally switched over to the new weaponry yet), and an M79 Grenade Launcher (again, had they been readily available for the operation), along with a bag of grenades. I would have made sure that the teams would have had access (at least by radio contact with the shipping) to naval gunfire support and have several heavily armed aircraft awaiting on the off shore carriers to give the Cubans something to think about while the recon teams continued their mission or called for extract. Don’t forget, once the ball was opened down there, it would be a typical “Katy bar the door” situation. Clandestine’ness’ would have rightfully gone out the window, and air strikes and naval gunfire would have been the order of the day. The Machine-Gun would have given the hapless lads on the ground a hedge until they could be extracted or relieved. I can’t be too harsh here with those pulling the tactical strings, as there might well have considerations that are not apparent in this far off time, still...

Essentially, the law of “Unintended Consequences” had taken charge and the .45 Auto and two fragmentation hand grenades had been found wanting, not because the concept was

wrong, but rather because (in my opinion) someone had not factored in the old adage "It all depends on the situation and the terrain" truism! I could use the old "saw" of "the exception proves the rule" but then you just never know...

### Culver "fesses" up:

I considered the "tent peg" possibilities and decided to spill the beans on where the infamous .45 Automatic and two frag grenades had originated. I was MOST careful to be diplomatic in my explanation, and even though "Ugh Teague" eyed me suspiciously for several days, I think that even he saw the humor of a decision made in peace that under certain circumstances doesn't wash in time of war!

I would have been most distressed if Pat had bought the farm in Cuba, sporting only a sidearm and a couple of frags. We would never have gotten to serve together in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and later in our efforts to make Camelnecks out of the Diaper Heads... A true loss! But then who would have thought that anyone would have taken the recommendation on weapons and armament so literally? As the title of this 'tail' most literally says, ***"The Unintended Consequences of Changing Times and Situation."*** Ah well...

# ROC



# Why Do the Fundamentalist Islamics Hate America?

By Dick Culver

In a word, they don't, or at least not in the way you would imagine. What we have come to call hardcore Muslim Fundamentalists are essentially an aberration in the Islamic tradition. Islam is basically a gentle and caring religion if read and interpreted literally, but in the hands of a fanatic it can become extremely dangerous.

## History:

Most of the strict Muslim "traditionalists" (especially in Saudi Arabia) had their modern origin in a sect called the Wahhabis. This was a puritanical reform movement begun by the conservative Syrian Jurist Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703 – 1792). He was faithful to the Qur'an (the supreme body of Islamic law) and to the Hadith (usually called the Sunna). The Hadith is a compilation of actions and utterances attributed to the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, and passed down (usually verbally) as a living guide to the practice of Islam.

The Hadith provides a sort of expansion to the text of the Qur'an and acts as an Islamic guide to living, based on Muhammad's personal actions and explanations of the meaning of the Qur'anic passages. One of the big rubs is that it has an "oral" tradition, passed down from generation to generation as opposed to a written one, and has been suspect from time to time as having been changed, or at least modified to suit the political or social "bent" of those who were teaching the faith from one generation to the next.

The Wahhabis would be much more at home in a world not tainted by electric lights, automobiles, trains, alcohol or tobacco. Their idea of the perfect Muslim World would be a world harking back to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century with very little to distract the faithful and as above, they rejected all luxury, dancing, gambling, and the use of tobacco and alcohol. This strict adherence to the "fundamentalist" interpretation was not shared by all. Warfare between the Wahhabis and their opponents resulted in their purging the Islamic shrine of Karbala and the cities of Riyadh, Mecca and Medina before eventually being defeated by the Turkish Sultan Mahmud II in 1818. While the Wahhabis were defeated in battle, their influence lingered on, chiefly on the Arabian Peninsula which now is chiefly controlled by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## Enter the Saudis:

The founder and 1<sup>st</sup> King of Saudi Arabia was Abdul Aziz al Saud, and his early upbringing at the hands of his father was heavily influenced by his father's inclination towards the teachings of the Wahhabis. Abdul Aziz was however, a practical man of great humor and intelligence, who tended to be a bit more liberal in the interpretation of the Islamic tradition than that of his Father's generation. Abdul Aziz managed to consolidate the various Arabic tribes in the early 1930s, by *preaching* strict Islam but instituting policies that were much more liberal than those envisioned by Wahhab. As a result, Saudi Arabia tends to be a country that does not usually take an extremely hard core stance on most subjects. Their religious leadership will dispute that of course, if asked to describe the stance of Islam in Saudi, but nonetheless government of Saudi Arabia can hardly be considered a hot bed of fundamentalist Muslims.

The *façade* of strict Islam is one of the things that allowed Abdul Aziz to unite the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula under one flag. Abdul Aziz of course, blushinglly named his

consolidated country “Saudi Arabia” in honor of his tribe/family (the Sa’uds), but his leadership brought Saudi successfully into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The discovery of oil made Saudi Arabia an extremely wealthy country, and Abdul Aziz’s fascination with modern inventions and conveniences led to a much more informed and enlightened citizenry. Such attitudes towards modernization did not sit well with the older “moss-backs” who, in their heart of hearts, desperately wanted to return to the Islam of Muhammad. In this attitude lies a major portion of the problem(s) that divide the followers of the Prophet. There tend to be pockets of fundamentalist Islamics in any Muslim society.

### **Background of Mid-Eastern Religious Practices**

Strangely enough, many of the so called “bans” on certain goods and practices were instituted by Mohammed, not because of any divine enlightenment from Allah, but rather as a practical restraint on excesses practiced by individuals of the faith in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. The world Muhammad struggled to enlighten, was one that would have made the residents of Sodom and Gomorra blush. Wining and wenching were rampant, men coveted other men’s wives, freely fornicated with any that would have them and spent much of their spare time in a drunken stupor, when not practicing depravity.

### **Religious Expedients:**

Mohammed instituted the covering of “wenches” (including face veils) to discourage licentiousness. Alcohol was forbidden, not because of any divine revelation, but because it prevented a total dedication to the one God (Allah), and encouraged acts that were unworthy of a good Muslim.

The prohibition against pork was again, not truly a religious ritual or prohibition, but rather the edict of a practical (enlightened) leader of his “people.” Since in the absence of refrigeration, pork spoils rather rapidly and is the cause of trichinosis, which was an essentially fatal disease in ancient times. The same prohibition was placed on the Jewish tribes by the Rabbis (the word really means “teacher” and had no true religious significance in the sense that the word Minister or Priest would have). The Rabbi was simply the most educated (and usually the most intelligent) individual in the social hierarchy of a particular community. These Rabbis were well acquainted with the danger of spoiled pork.

Since the Jews and the Arabs are both Semitic tribes with the common father of Abraham. The prohibition on pork no doubt was a shared heritage between the two close but disagreeing peoples. It is hardly likely that Allah or God hated pigs or swine, but their “enlightened ones” prohibited the eating of the flesh of swine as a matter of health rather than religion. It was given a religious connotation of course, because if it had been a secular prohibition, the quasi-faithful might well have done a little experimenting on their own.

The Catholics too, have food prohibitions that are sold by “The Church” as a religious obligation, but the origin is much more mundane. The mandatory eating of fish on Friday was for many years thought to be a religious requirement. Careful checking into the history books will reveal that at one point in time, the Italian fishing industry was in danger of “tubing it”. The Pope who (at various times in history) was both the secular and religious leader of the Italians/Romans, saw that the good Italian Fishermen were in danger of starving to death (figuratively at least). He decreed that all good Catholics (encompassing most of the Italian continent) were to come to the aid of their fellow Italian fishermen, by buying and eating fish on Friday... True story! The Vatican denies it of course, but nonetheless there is more truth to

the tale than fiction, and another (very practical) “must do” was given the veil of religious sanctity.

My point here is *not* that the various religions were dishonest with the faithful, but rather that they used a practical method of getting the faithful to do the bidding of the church.

Veiled ladies, prohibition on the eating of pork or the drinking of alcohol were not truly *religious* prohibitions, but rather secular decisions using “divine revelation” to enforce some pretty practical rules to live by, in order to keep the faithful in line. If they had been put forth as simple rules of society, they would no doubt have been ignored. Now if they were the will of Allah...

### **A More Modern Interpretation:**

Even a few of the famous “Five Pillars of Islam” have been distorted by advances into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The “Five Pillars” are:

- 1) The profession of faith.
- 2) Prayer performed five times daily.
- 3) Charity towards one’s fellow man (as long as that “man” is a fellow Muslim).
- 4) Fasting during the Month of Ramadan.
- 5) A pilgrimage of the faithful to Mecca at least once during a Muslim’s lifetime.

While the fast of “Ramadan” is observed during the *month* of Ramadan by abstinence on the part of the faithful of food, drink, smoking and sex during the daylight hours (usually determined by the mullahs by whether a man can discern the color of a black and a white thread on the back of the hand). Ramadan usually brings faithful Muslims to a standstill during the prescribed month in daylight hours, but they are allowed to indulge in the various prohibitions during the hours of darkness. The intent of the lifting of the prohibitions after dark was to allow the faithful to indulge in enough water to slake their thirst, and take the hunger pangs away. It was NOT intended to be a license to “party hearty”! – Enter Thomas Edison, stage left...

This fasting was decreed by Mohummad to remember the less fortunate and remind them of their obligation to extend charity towards the less fortunate. Everything went well until the invention of the electric light. While the letter of the Islamic Law is still observed, you would have to spend the month of Ramadan in Jeddah to appreciate how the “faithful” have come to “bend” the rules and regulations. Traffic is so thick at night that you almost have to walk across the hoods of cars to cross the street, and the shops which open during the hours of darkness, stay open until dawn. Restaurants are packed, and when the (naturally) exhausted faithful return home or to work for a day of fasting, they are almost literally noodles... We secured training (for all intents and purposes) for the Saudi Marines during Ramadan after trying to hold classes the first few days. Our fledgling Arabic Leathernecks were “done puppies” until the coming of darkness.

I bring this to light primarily to illustrate that not everything is followed to the exact intent of the Islamic Law, but the prohibitions tend to be interpreted in an expedient manner. The Saudis should make excellent lawyers.

Saudi Arabia is the location of the two holiest shrines of Islam, the Mosques in Mecca and Medina. The rest of the Islamic world is envious of the Saudis hogging (– uppppssss sorry) the symbols of Islam. Several times in recent history, other “more worthy” Islamic nations

and/or groups have attempted to take over the shrines by force. The usurpers feel that the two holy mosques could be better protected and maintained by a more holy (translate, more fundamentalist) representative(s) of the Prophet. The Saudi's possession of Mecca and Medina remains a rather fundamental bone of contention within a religion that purports to be the one true faith destined to take over the World.

### **Fundamentalism in Today's World:**

Fundamentalism was brought forcefully into focus on the Western Stage by the Ayatollah Khomeini's takeover in Iran in 1979. From out of the blue, came a truly fundamentalist Muslim who wished to return Iran to 10<sup>th</sup> Century Islam. By engineering a popular uprising he managed to whisk Iran back in time to the fundamentalist concept. The United States was caught totally off guard, and the peoples of Iran (some willingly, some not so willingly) went along with his teachings. Modern dress for women went the way of the "Do-Do Bird". The Ayatollah had accomplished in Iran what Wahhab had tried to do in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century to all of Islam. This movement seemed to ignite a new fervor for a more hard-nosed approach to Islam and one more suited (according to the hard-core Islamics), to demonstrating the superiority of Islam over all other religions. While the Jewish People and the Christians are both considered to be "Peoples of the Book" (the Old Testament – common to all three religions), Islam is touted as the one true religion espousing true monotheism. The Islamics felt/feel that the Jews had violated God's edicts by worshiping the Golden Calf, and the Christians deified Jesus Christ (the Muslims do NOT deify Mohummad), and some Christians even mentioned the "Holy Ghost" – all tantamount to blasphemy! All but Islam had strayed from God's (Allah's) word. It was obviously up to the "faithful" to bring about the conversion of the masses. Who was better suited to the task at hand than fundamental Islam?

### **Once They've Seen Pareé...**

Unfortunately for the fundamentalists, the most rich and powerful Islamic Nation was Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, in their zest for living in the modern age, had seemingly embraced the West. The more affluent families were sending their sons to American (and other Western) Universities with little or no supervision, and exposing them to one of the most free-living societies ever developed. Human nature dictated that the youngsters sent to our country would absorb a certain amount of one of the most permissive cultures on Earth. They LIKED our freedom, drank our booze, and romanced ladies who were as liberated as even *they* were becoming. This was GREAT stuff, and they took home a taste for much of what they had absorbed. In a sentence, they were straying from the ways of Muhammad, and in the eyes of the fundamentalists were defiling the faith as taught by Muhammad. To paraphrase the old WWI song – *"How ya' gonna' keep 'em down on the dunes once they've seen Pareé?"*

### **A Side Note:**

The citizens of Saudi Arabia are held to extraordinarily strict observance of the tenants of the Islamic Faith. Why? The rationale is that those who protect the two holy Mosques must adhere to a strict observance of the faith. However, much like the observance of Ramadan, much of this is a façade. There is an unwritten rule that allows citizens of Saudi to "unwind" when they clear Saudi airspace. If they fly out of the Kingdom on *"Saudi Air"* they are stuck with the rules set down by the prophet until they reach their western destination, ...but if they go out say, on Sabrina Airlines or British Air, all bets are off. As soon as Saudi Airspace is to

the rear of the vertical stabilizer, a line forms on both sides of the passenger compartment by the Saudi Citizens waiting for access to the rest room facilities.

Gutras (the headdress looking like a small table cloth), Agals (the “rope” coiled on top of the headdress – sometimes called the “fan-belt” by irreverent infidels), Thobes (traditional Arabic robes) disappear, and gentlemen dressed in Brooks Brothers Suits, Gucci Shoes and other western dress emerge from the “facility”... On the ladies’ side of the house, the ladies with their abayas (the traditional black body covering and face veils) are gone, and the ladies emerging are wearing western clothing, lipstick, rouge, perfume, western dresses and high heeled shoes. The men and ladies (almost universally) return to their seats and order appropriate cocktails to go with their newly acquired garb. They are no longer representing the “keepers of the two holy Mosques” and thus have nothing to prove to the world, as they are not immediately identifiable as Arabs or Muslims.

Truly, it would seem that the Islam as practiced by the Saudis has been diluted somewhat by the modern Western influence. The Imams remaining in the Kingdom are acutely aware of this practice and sit in alleyways and gnash their teeth, cursing the Western influence that is personified by the Infidels from America. It would seem that they all *like* the freedom, but they don’t want anyone watching when they thumb their noses at the Prophet.

At this point you can begin to see why the American influence tends to rile the puritanical streak inherent in the older and less affluent Muslims. Those old timers remaining in the Kingdom are not amused. Not only don’t they have access to the outside world (financially), but they don’t like what they see when the wayward Muslims return! Many of the religious fanatics are ready for a return to the equivalent of “Wahhabism” and yearn for a way to dispose of what they have come to regard as the despoiler of fundamental Islam, the Americans and the American influence.

### **The (1<sup>st</sup>) Gulf War and a Slap in the Face:**

Saddam Hussein kicked things off of dead center, and suddenly Saudi’s sacred oil fields were exposed to probable if not absolute danger of being taken over by an unscrupulous dictator who wanted to take over the oil fields AND probably more to the point, Mecca and Medina, the location of the two Holy Mosques. Not only would he gain great wealth, but more importantly as a Muslim, great status and prestige as the “new” custodian and protector of the two holy Mosques... Saudi panicked, knowing that they were incapable of repelling boarders (i.e. Saddam Baby), and called on the United States for assistance. We (of course) were more than willing to cooperate as nobody in this country wanted to pay \$5.00+ for gasoline. The coalition was formed and we (as agreed) put in ground troops to protect the Arabian Peninsula from the usurper.

Here was our worst mistake. In consonance with the politically correct efforts of the Femi-Nazis, we decided to allow “female soldiers” dressed much as their male counterparts in camouflaged uniforms, to be seen driving trucks and acting well out of character for what “the faithful” considered to be proper behavior for ladies in an Islamic Society. This was not done out of any military necessity, but rather to appease and pander to the desires of those who wanted to prove that God (Allah) is a woman, or at least NOT a man! We would have made just as many points by having a “pig roast” and inviting the Royal Saudi Family to attend! It just ain’t (or shouldn’t have been) done by an astute State Department! The Islamics were obviously NOT amused, and herein lies a large part of the hate and discontent that ruffled the fur of Osama bin Laden. “Osama Baby” felt that the presence of the American Armed Forces



in his country (deliberately rubbing the Muslim's noses in our total disregard for their customs and practices) was an (deliberate) affront to their beliefs and practices, and exposed the Muslim citizenry to unacceptable (non-Muslim) practices. It would seem that Gloria Steinem and the "NOW" movement may well have been responsible for the loss of 3000+ lives simply to make a politically correct statement. Perhaps God (Allah) "IS" a woman after all? Hummm...

### **Fast Forward to Present Day:**

Why is the seeming rage of the Muslim Fundamentalists directed at the Western World in General and the United States in particular? The short answer is they are in desperate need for a focal point to rally the (fundamentally) faithful. Traditionally, the youth of a culture is looking for a cause. Being *against* something is much easier to sell than being *for* something. Examples? Check out the counter-culture in our country during the 1960s and early 1970s. It was easy to work the kids up into a froth and rally them around a banner. If it wasn't the war in Southeast Asia, it was the materialism of their parent's generation.

Did these demagogue-led individuals have a point? Well, yes and no. While there was just enough truth to the alleged allegations to give a phony legitimacy to the line of protesting, many (if not most) of the youngsters involved were simply looking for a cause – make that ANY cause. The youth of any country seem to have a need for causes, something to be for, but as I pointed out above, more often the easiest target is something to be against. Traditionally, it's always easier to be against something than to be FOR something other than some vague high sounding goal. Examples would be the removal of Americans from all Muslim countries, or let's kick all Jews out of Palestine, or some other popular cause.

Most of the Muslim countries are dirt poor, and the youngsters have no access to books (many cannot read anyway), movies, or Television (perhaps mercifully). Unemployment is off the page, and the job market is not promising – in short they have nothing to look forward to. This doesn't really apply to the Saudis as they are one of the most well-to-do societies in the world thanks to their abundance of oil and the ready market for it. Poverty is insignificant and charity is well attended by the faithful. All in all, it is a happy (if not totally free) Kingdom.

For the rest of the Islamic World, seeing the United States seemingly teeming with luxuries, and living what the fundamentalist Muslim would consider to be a dissolute existence simply fuels the fires of discontent, carefully fed by the religious fanatics. The youth are easy targets for the political and religious leaders who would take advantage of any situation to broaden their power base. The United States makes an almighty tempting target. We are accused of supporting Israel over Muslim Countries (perhaps rightfully so in this case), and they see a large Christian–Israeli conspiracy designed to deprive the Palestinians of their rightful homeland. Each additional charge adds fuel to the fire, and causes a righteous sounding basis for rioting in the streets. Suddenly the prospect of being able to kill Americans (and by default any of our allies) appeals to those who know no better. American Flags are burned and a Jihad is called for against those who are making war on Islam. No mention is made of course, of the acts of terrorism that perpetrated the most heinous murder(s) ever visited on an innocent population of civilians from a diverse collection of countries. This is accepted as the just desserts for a dissolute and evil society – now becoming known throughout the Islamic World as "The Great Satan!"

One of the tip-offs is that for the most part, the Muslim individuals from affluent countries are strangely quiet, and (at least in public) are agreeing with our crusade to wipe out the

terrorist camps and do away with world wide terrorism. Underneath however, a long simmering resentment is seething. The entire Muslim World is resentful at the United States' support for Israel over the Palestinian people's fight to retain their homeland. In many ways, they have a valid point if you use a logical instead of a religious argument. Most of those who argue for a Jewish homeland tend to ignore that the Israelis (in any great numbers) had been gone from ancient Israel for almost 2000-years, and the argument for being "given" their traditional "digs" is based on two things. First, the fundamentalist Jews and Christians (yes, we have them too) point to Biblical references, and those given the job of managing the great number of displaced European Jews after WWII were looking for a way to solve the problem and wash their hands of a very sticky problem.

Granted, the Jews had been badly treated by the Nazis and many did not have homes to return to in Europe. ...But conversely, the Palestinian people had not been responsible for the atrocities committed against the Jews and were suddenly being faced with displacement from their homes without so much as a "by your leave"... The Jews saw a chance to reclaim what they (Biblically) thought of as their rightful home and the fight was on. Religious arguments hold very little water, if for instance you happen to be a Buddhist, a Hindu or a Wiccan. Quite frankly, those folks don't CARE what the Biblical references say in reference to the restoration of a Jewish homeland!... Their sacred texts say nothing about it and we must admit to a certain amount of self-assured Christian and Jewish arrogance by imposing our beliefs on an unprepared and dispossessed Palestinian citizenry.

### **An Example:**

Let me give you an example. I live on my little mountain top in North Idaho and have owned it for over 37-years. I've built my abode, tilled my ground and generally not bothered anyone. What say, if I was suddenly accosted with a group of Indians (I refuse to say Native-Americans – I'm a Native American too!) with feathers stuck in their headbands! They announce most imperiously to me, that they are here to reclaim their rightful land(s). They announce that "The Great Spirit" has come to them and told them to go reclaim the lands that had previously been held by their ancestors. Essentially the edict would be "get the @\$% off our lands paleface, we are here to reclaim rightful Indian lands! You don't suspect that I would be a little indignant about such a declaration now do you? I guarantee that I would grab my fowling piece and them "pesky redskins" would be running for cover, I don't give a d@mn what the Great Spirit told them to do! The same argument is directly applicable to the Palestinian Situation, except there they (the Israelis) had foreign military help to displace the long-time residents, and subsequently that "fine" organization, the United Nations. If you were a Palestinian would you be "urinated off?"... I sure as hell would! The most obtuse of individuals should be able to make the rather easy comparison to the situation in the Mid-East.

When I was serving in Saudi Arabia, a commonly asked question by the young Saudi Marines was "Why do you favor the Jews over the (Saudi Arabian) Arabs? We cost you no money, buy your goods, and often purchase your expertise and equipment! We want to be your friends (very true at that time), and yet you treat us like second class citizens. We deliberately hold down the oil prices in OPEC to please the Americans even though it makes us many enemies in the Arab community of nations, and still you favor the Israelis. They cost you huge sums of money, and demand more (usually citing their abysmal treatment in WWII and stating that they are your only true friends in the Mid-East). We have not tried to bomb or strafe any of your ships (i.e. the U.S.S. Liberty in 1967), nor have we recruited any people in your intelligence service to spy on you (i.e. Jonathan Pollard)! We simply don't understand!"

You know, I couldn't think of a single answer that made sense with the exception of a large Jewish electorate that swings a mighty hammer in the halls of Washington politics.

Please understand, this is not an anti-Jewish diatribe, but rather an attempt to let you understand the reaction of much of the Muslim World to the political antics of the United States. From their viewpoint, it would not be difficult to understand the rejoicing in the streets when the news of the Twin Towers going down in flames was announced.

No, they don't hate us for what we are, but rather for what they perceive us to be. The soldiers in their battle (the overt terrorists) will be the young and disillusioned Muslims with nothing to lose and have found a hero in Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden has found his niche in life and a way to overcome his mundane place in the overall hierarchy of the Laden family. His return to Saudi Arabia seemingly overcame him with rage that the Royal Family had sold out the country currently assigned the task of being the keepers of the two holy mosques. Criticism of the Sa'ud Family in general and King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz al Saud in particular, earned him the displeasure of the Royal Family. He has convinced himself that Saudi has become soft and no longer worthy of being the de-facto guardians of the faith and the most holy places in Islam. For his criticism of the King and his family, Osama was disowned and banished. Now he's REALLY pi\$\$ed and moves around stirring up trouble as he goes. His magic elixir is the root of all evil (as the saying goes), money, and a disaffected Muslim youth.

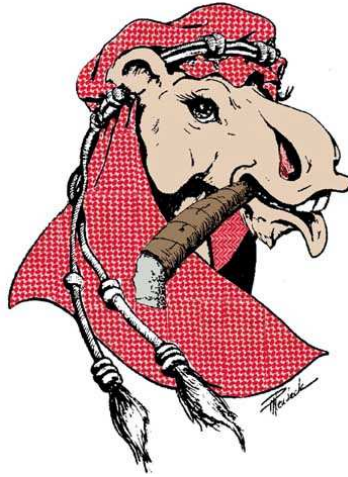
The rest of the Muslim World will be watching and waiting to see how the events shake out. In general, as pointed out above, they are not happy with us because of our stance on supporting Israel, even when Israel is obviously in the wrong. The Arabs will be quick to point out that being a Jew doesn't necessarily make you right! Here I'd have to agree. The more moderate Arabs have to rattle swords with their Muslim brotherhood (kinda' like agreeing with the "Crips" when you are surrounded by the entire gang), but they would really prefer to be our friends. Make no mistake however, if we want the Arab World to side with us, we've simply got to learn to treat all in the Mid-East even handedly. You cannot continually beat your dog and expect him to jump in your lap when you come home. He may not bite you, but then it takes a bit more than abuse and an occasional table scrap to make him your friend.

The Israelis keep telling us that they are our only real friends in the Mid-East, but if that is true, we certainly don't need any additional enemies. What they MAY mean, is that they WANT us to be their only friend – a subtle but distinct difference.

The coalition of many nations has been a necessary expedient in this evolution. Arabic/Muslim Nations who are looking to either side and seeing additional Muslim allies eyeballing them suspiciously. There is no witness protection program for a moderate Muslim country who wants to help stamp out terrorism. They know that they will have to live in the Mid-Eastern World once this counter-terror campaign has come to an end. Compare it to "Greasy Thumb Gulick" selling out Al Capone in Chicago of the early '30s. The law enforcement folks would have loved him, but there'd have been no place to hide once "Al Baby" was put away! Don't forget, "Al Baby" had lots of friends.

So, while we do have some genuine friends in the Arabic World, putting their arms around the "Great Satan" is not a politically correct thing for them to do. Don't forget, when "big brother" goes home, it's gonna' get real lonely out there "in the hood"...

**ROC**



## ***The “Penguins” and the Infidels***

### ***A Whole New Look at a Flightless Bird in a Tuxedo***

Soly Catfish Batman, he’s finally blown his top, or quaffed one too many jugs of Jeddah Jin! Why in the world are we talking about an Antarctic Bird in conjunction with Camel Tails? I thought those critters are confined to the extreme southern regions of the rotating globe, or to zoos with air-conditioning, and appropriately cooled swimming pools? Good question my well informed friend, but it comes under a different heading – to paraphrase Longfellow...

“Listen my children  
and you shall hear,  
of the late night Souk raid  
of two infidels dear!”

Heh, heh, heh...

Obviously, a new definition must be proffered before this entire tail (tale?) becomes clear. In short, a definition of a Penguin to an Expat of Western extraction has absolutely nothing to do with a zoo, unless of course you are willing to define the entire sandpit (aka The World’s Largest Litter Box) a zoo. In retrospect, there may be ample rationale for such a definition, but lest I get distracted, let me stick to the story of the Penguins and the Infidels.

It seems that when Mohammad was splicing his new religious teachings into what would become the Qur’an, he was faced with a rather rebellious and unruly crew of camel raiders as his converts. Now these gents were imbued with a squalid set of moral standards, and social graces. Licentiousness was rampant, and off-duty orgies were the order of the day. Such conduct, he commanded, must stop if they were to please the Almighty! In desperation, he took a very secular solution to



**A Pair of Souk Raiders with the RSMC  
(Prior to Penguin Evaluation)  
Hartnett (L)                      Culver (R)**

what has now taken on the 'mantel' of (and been accepted as) holy writ. The new guidelines of personal conduct must discourage drunken revelry, and constant "*squeeze-poaching*" must be nipped in the bud, lest it encourage traditional Arabic Blood feuds over rivalries concerning the female of the species. Rather than take a simple "commandment route" as had Moses, Mohammad decided to go the "what you don't know (or see)" may well prevent inner-tribal and inner-personal rivalries and warfare.

The solution? Take your women and "**hide** them (and their more alluring features)" under the guise of protecting them from the world! What could be simpler? First you must cover the ladies' limbs and any projecting skin that might tweak the interest of licentious individuals.

Many of the inhabitants of the Arabic climes had only an occasional lonely camel to satisfy their carnal desires during lonely weeks in the dunes. When reintroduced into civilized society during occasional trips to the population centers, a lustful camel jockey would be less likely to go 'wenching' if he could only see what appeared to be a black potato sack propelled with a mostly hidden pair of feet. The total image would be accomplished by covering the female body with a black wrap-around garment called an "Abaya." The Abaya was complimented with an appropriate head covering, called a "Hijab" (often white or light colored, although it *can* be black), topped off with a face veil (colors vary) called a "Niqab" that would allow the lady to breath, but "mask" (a verb) the facial features while still allowing enough vision to keep the camouflaged female from bumping into an occasional donkey cart during the normal course of a day's activities.

To an uninitiated Infidel, the resultant Arabic vision of loveliness would appear, at first glance to approximate the appearance of a Penguin. The black Abaya with contrasting light colored head covering, (the Hijab) together with the Niquab (veil, usually of a wispy material) give credence to the visual analogy of the well known flightless bird of Antarctic origins.

Certain other Muslim social conventions apply here, but are seldom spoken of in public. These are usually passed on in whispers to any newcomers to the Dunes to allow them to sidestep less obvious faux pas to keep them out of trouble. In a rough, but not necessarily chronological order, they are:

- 1) Arabic Ladies of Islamic Faith are not allowed on the streets unescorted except by male members of the family.
- 2) Infidels or even other male members of the culture are not allowed to comment on the appearance of the ladies while in polite society. For instance, it is never permissible to tell a Muslim male that he is married to a beautiful lady, (not that you can truly tell under the Penguin attire anyway).
- 3) Prayer Call goes five times per day, calling for the Muslim Faithful to attend Mosque. If you are out in a Souk (shopping center/area), you will notice the female members of the Muslim world are not allowed to attend Mosque with their male counterparts. While by tradition, there is supposed to be a Mosque within walking distance in settlements, there are apparently no alter-facilities for the female counterparts. If a family is out shopping, this leaves unescorted Penguins loose in the Souk by themselves.

While no written guidelines have been proffered to the "unwashed," apparently it is considered quite proper for all of the unescorted ladies to "*flock*" together (an appropriate term for Penguins) for protection and a bit of female companionship. They are NOT allowed to speak to any non-Muslim males when so flocking, and the penalty

to both parties is said to be extreme. “Head Chopping,” (the Saudi method of capital punishment), is often mentioned in hushed whispers in conjunction with such transgressions. Infidels caught talking to such ladies are instantly considered to be at fault, as no truly faithful Muslim female would even think of violating such an unthinkable (but unspoken) rule! As an infidel, you are immediately considered to be guilty, because if you were **not** in their country, the incident would not have occurred, capisca?

- 4) No female of *ANY* sort is allowed to be in the company of a male unless he is a member of the family (husband, father, brother, cousin, uncle, etc.). No exceptions, and this applies to Infidel Females as well. At least ONE male member of the family must be present in a vehicle or in a walking group. The Religious Police are quite strict on enforcing this one.
- 5) Ladies (wives, daughters, or even girl friends) of Saudi employed Infidels are “quasi-required” (or encouraged) to wear an Abaya to cover their bare skin, although the face veil portion is not usually enforced (licentious Arabs like to “cop” a look too!). A sort of self-appointed gaggle of bored little old men haunt the Souks, drinking tea in small groups awaiting an unwary female infidel to show herself without appropriate skin covering. Upon sighting such lawful prey, the religious “*Nazi over the hill gang*” rush out of their darkened alley corners with cans of spray paint to decorate the offending areas of exposed skin. This is of course meant to be a lesson to the unfeeling female transgressors, and I suppose to give these old geezers a feeling of self-worth in an otherwise lusterless life. In western countries, bored little old men play chess or checkers, but these tools are simply frustrated graffiti artists!

These individuals who I will refer to as the “Graffiti Police,” are another matter entirely from the official Religious Police. I suppose approved body graffiti does give the aging retirees a sense of purpose. The *real* Religious Police usually look the other way during the “paint-job(s)” unless some sort of physical altercation occurs. If the lady is accompanied by the appropriate male member of the family, and still gets spray painted, physical confrontations have been known to occur between the geezers and a protective husband. The geezer usually gets his posterior handed to him, in which case the Religious Police pick up all parties, but usually allowing the geezers to go with a pat on the back. Normally the offending husband is put in the Saudi Slam until his employer can bail him out. Usually, the punishment (to satisfy a sense of “geezers honor”) is a trip back to your country of origin.

While the above diatribe seems a bit mundane, the consequences of transgression are deadly serious! The list is meant to give you a sort of feel for the local religious practices and social customs of the Muslim society as applied to Saudi Arabia. As pointed out above, essentially the only (true) religious significance attached to the Abaya and the facial coverings is/was an attempt to prevent “wench-poaching” in a wildly licentious society as viewed by Mohammad in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the “word” was put out by Mohammed, and is therefore considered to be divinely inspired, regardless of the original rationale. It would seem that Sodom and Gomorra were not the only population centers encouraging lewd and licentious behavior in days of yore.

Venturing into the Souk on a nightly basis was quite common for members of the Royal Saudi Marine Instructor’s staff as a group or by ones and twos. Remaining in your quarters,

your choice of entertainment consisted of a company controlled TV network, run by volunteers. The TV fare was mainly ancient British Soap Operas. Arrrgggg... Dear Allah!

Basil (our parent company), did maintain a paperback library stocked by employee (book) donations, but usually without the current top ten best sellers occupying the shelves. The literary fare wasn't exactly awe-inspiring, although I had found an occasional good read amongst the piles of much read tomes.

The Souk? Now, that's a different kettle of fish. The shops are well equipped with everything from gold and silver, to electronics, cameras, "boom-boxes," or even perfume shops. Such a plethora of shopping goodies allow the Expats to pick up presents for their friends and loved ones at home, but best of all, the shopping was legitimate entertainment and exercise!

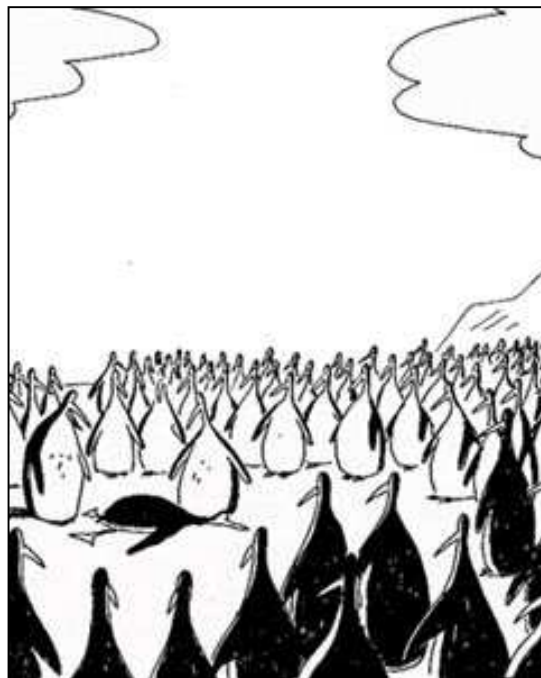
On one of these nightly forays into the commercial shopping area known as "The Main Souk" you could expect to be caught in at least one prayer call about mid-evening (the exact times depended on the phases of the moon). Even during evening Prayer Call which usually lasted for about 30-45 minutes (actually there was one long and one relatively short evening prayer), the non-Muslims could wander around the Souk and peer through the security screens/roll-down bars placed over the shop windows.

The shopkeepers and many of the shoppers would head for the nearest Mosque, leaving the streets almost empty of the faithful during prayer call. The only inhabitants of the quasi-deserted Souk were the Infidels, a few gendarmes, and some Penguins who were not allowed to attend Mosque with their men-folk. It was during just such a prayer call that our story occurs.

Skip Hartnett and I were walking through the Souk during prayer call, and having nothing better to do, were checking out the offerings in the window of a perfume shop. Off to our right was a large flock of Penguins apparently killing time until their male loved ones returned from Mosque. Since there was nothing worth looking at in the flock, (maybe Mohammed had a point there?), I turned back to the shop window. Suddenly I was aware of being surrounded by the entire Penguin flock, giving every appearance of checking out the perfume choices (or at least so we thought). Suddenly the flock was getting VERY close and crowding in allowing little or no movement. In retrospect, it would seem to have been a deliberate ploy masking their activities from the eyes of the roving religious police.

Hartnett says to me, "Culver, get your hand off my 'posterior' (using a different word of course, starting with the letter "a")!"

"What in the hell are you talking about?" I replied. "Both of my hands are in my back pockets!"



**Hartnett, I felt this "flipper" on my fanny, and just lashed out! Dear Allah, what have I done?**



"Bull \$h+t," says Hartnett, "somebody just grabbed my fanny!"

"Well it sure as hell wasn't me, I ain't into that sort of stuff!"

"Culver, don't mess with me, I *felt* it!"

About the time it was gonna' get personal, I felt a hand distinctly placed on my own rear end, and it was considerably smaller than Hartnett's sizeable meat hooks! Hummm... It suddenly dawns on me! We are being "felt" or perhaps "groped" by the curious Penguins! Uh oh, this does *not* bode well! I look over and Skip is chuckling, now seeing what was transpiring. He held both of his hands out to give me the idea! *Now* what "*Maynard?*" It would seem that the much sheltered female members of Arabic Society are just as human as "real girls!"

Trying to figure a safe way out of a mess that could have serious consequences, I hear a voice behind me speaking in feminine tones in perfect English. I answered to be polite (upssss Culver, don't urinate-'em off, they might call for the cops – a variation of the old "badger game?" ...*Danger* Will Robinson!). As it turned out, our initial fears were unfounded, although the consequences could still be humongous if caught en-flagranté!



<sup>1</sup> They were most curious about the United States. All of a sudden several more chimed in and soon we had a very pleasant, many way conversation going. We tried to satisfy their curiosity (intellectual only! – I *know* what you're thinking)! We took care to keep our voices low enough to prevent them carrying outside our "flock" to avoid attracting the attention of the gendarmes. The girls seemed to

understand the drill, and played the same low-key game while we conversed on many subjects. Much of the conversation had to do with the freedoms of American Girls in what they (correctly) perceived as a more open society! Soon the street hubbub indicated that Mosque was over and the Muslim shopkeepers and shoppers were returning to the streets. The Penguins started to discretely disburse, and "de-flock" themselves. We were soon left on our own perusing the perfume selection in the shop window. I somehow felt a bit wistful at their departure, as it was refreshing to find that all people, regardless of societal restrictions are basically the same.

While it was tempting, we never went back to the exact same location during prayer-call to see if our new found conversationalists would return. I wondered (as I suppose did Skip) if our posteriors passed Arabic muster in the overall scheme of things? Hee, hee, hee...



Always remember, all situations, no matter how dangerous the *potential*, have their humorous side, along with a slight adrenaline rush! Whenever I saw a flock of Penguins after that, I always wondered? ...but consideration of the possible consequences always pulled me back into reality! Sigh...

**ROC**

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The Marvelous Penguin graphics were shamelessly stolen from one of my favorite cartoonists, Gary Larson in his *Far Side Series*. While the original captions wouldn't have been appropriate, I substituted my own to fit in with the story line. My apologies and "unauthorized thanks" to Mr. Larson, much as I have pirated parodied lines of Robert Service's and Rudyard Kipling's poetry over the years. Obviously he's in good company (theirs if not mine).





## I become an "Asset"...

*Taken from Camel Tails – A Sage of the RSMC*

Now here's one that always seemed a bit surreal to me, as it totally disillusioned me and my opinion and misconceptions of our National Intelligence weenies, the much vaunted Central Intelligence Agency. We had been in country for over a year when this one occurred and I had just returned from R&R back in the States. Skip Hartnett had recently returned to Florida to unscramble the loss of his retirement pay, having been the apparent victim of a vindictive Lady Lt. Col. USMC Disbursing Officer that found out that he had not applied for permission to work out of country on our Marine Corps training contract. I had done so much by accident, and at the direction of Hartnett himself. Skip came over a bit later than I, but when he mentioned the requirement to obtain permission from your service to Basil (our parent company), Skip had been told by Basil that such permission wasn't necessary, and not to worry about such things. Skip took Basil at their word and came without his authorization. It turns out this was an exceptionally bad move!



**"ASSETS" MUST  
ALWAYS BE  
INCONSPICUOUS,  
CLANDESTINE AND  
ENIGMATIC!**

I had **my** permission slip (note from Mommy?) but much like Skip, no one else had applied for one. I received my authorization the day before I left the States, but truthfully I had forgotten all about even submitting my application, and would have left without even thinking about it if it hadn't shown up! For some inexplicable reason, Hartnett was the only one taken to task for his directed (by Basil) oversight. Skip claimed that his unwarranted attention was due to some altercation with the infamous Lady Lt. Col. he had while still on active duty, and knowing Skip, that certainly wasn't out of the question. For whatever reason, he took the brunt of the vendetta, and everyone else, including all the retired Army and Navy Personnel sat around much afraid of quarrying their respective services to find out if they were on shaky ground.

Pat and Paul were understandably silently cursing Hartnett for having called down the thunder on the situation, and no doubt wished he'd simply shut up and take his loss of retirement and not stir the pot. Nothing was said, but the mood of the men in the entire Basil gaggle of military retirees was an ugly one. Internally, I'm sure our Marine Folks weren't serious, but I got the idea that the rest of Basil **was**! The biggies of Basil took the same stance. Some were retired Navy Captains and their retirement pay had been substantial – give it back? Five or six years worth at approximately \$50,000 per year? Hey guys, here

we're talking one quarter million dollars here! Give it back? Right, and my name is Mickey Mouse! They'd have to have disappeared into the "Empty Quarter"<sup>2</sup> never to return to the States.

Poor S.M. got the short end of the stick without so much as a smidgen of sympathy from any of the other Expats working the Navy contract. As best I can figure, they didn't want to (or to have him) attract undue attention to a really bad situation – who wants to give back literally years of already collected retirement pay? And as I have already pointed out, in some of their cases it would have amounted to over one quarter million dollars! What's worse, Basil denied ever having told Hartnett not to bother with his "permission slip!"

Don't forget, they ***always*** shoot the messenger, and S.M. had become the bad guy by default... Don't forget the treatment the Lady FBI agent got when she pointed out the FBI's refusal to act on her memo just prior to 9/11. Hummm...

I, of course, sat around rather smugly, being the only "legal" one in the crew and didn't let any of them forget it, although I walked rather softly around Pat lest I become a tent peg. The entire situation eventually simply went away, and the Marine Corps quietly let the entire thing drop, and as far as I know it was never addressed by the Army.

The lesson I learned from this evolution was that you never want to get involved in any bureaucratic nonsense with ***any*** agency having a three or four letter designation (Army, Navy, USMC, FBI, CIA, BATF, etc.). When the going gets greasy, everyone runs for cover, and ***you*** my friend, are on your own. If you don't have your tail feathers covered, you ain't gonna' have any friends in the "***hood***"! I think they call it plausible deniability?

I should have remembered my lesson well, having been one of two individuals who wrote a letter blowing the whistle on the M16 malfunction problems in 1967. My XO, a certain 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Mike Chervenak was the real hero of the evolution, but since I had helped compose the letter, honor required that I take my share of the blame. The letter got published in the Washington Post (not the original intention at all), but as I recall it had been originally written to Mike's congress critter. The lesson wasn't in writing the letter, but rather that when the feces came rolling down the hill, many if not most of our former compatriots who had screamed just as loudly when we were losing lots of Marines, ran for cover when it was THEIR mammary gland caught in the ringer! Men with cleaning rods stuck down the bore of their Matty Mattel Specials (trying to dislodge stuck shell cases in the chambers) loomed largely in our minds, but suddenly the individuals without the appropriate amount of chutzpa didn't remember a thing about it once the problems began to work themselves out with redesigned parts.

The M16 had become a ***VERY*** hot potato, and the Commandant had stood up on Television waving one of them around stating that the only thing wrong with them was that we didn't have enough of them! The Corps wanted someone's fanny for all the unfavorable publicity, and for contradicting the Commandant's public statement. I had no idea that I ***had*** contradicted Wally Green's<sup>3</sup> contention, as it had been over 2-years since I had watched TV! I'm sure that the Commandant wouldn't have deliberately hung his Marines out to dry, but he sure had some low-life underlings who had put their "chop" on some questionable data and weren't about to be contradicted by some mere Captain or 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant whose troops were dying in the field!

I spent about a year in Limbo over the infamous M16 situation, and former friends often wouldn't speak to me unless I ran them down. Being seen speaking to a pariah was not a good career move. Action in the field had saved my somewhat stalled career, and with a

promotion and having been kissed on both cheeks, all of a sudden I had lots of friends again. But with the exception of a few good guys (Skip Hartnett being one of the few who never wavered), I never trusted any of them totally again. I maintained a reasonably cordial relationship with most, but always slept with one eye partly open if you catch my drift.

OK, OK, we've heard the sea stories, but what do they have to do with your becoming an "asset?" ...And exactly what IS an asset? Good questions, and I'm "afixin' to 'splain' as they say down in Kentucky.

With Hartnett gone, and Patrick tending to his moon-shining enterprises in Jeddah one Saudi weekend, I got talked into going to one of the occasional bashes held by the Marines assigned to the Consulate Security Detail in Jeddah. This is what we in the Marines call Embassy Duty, and while you have to be especially squared away and talented to be selected for such an assignment, the duty itself is not exactly a piece of cake.

The Non Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Jeddah detail was a very squared away young Staff Sergeant named Tom Crawford who had literally been born into the Marine Corps, in the Navy hospital at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. His Dad had paid the final price in Vietnam, and had gone on to secure his place in Valhalla. Not to be deterred, Tom was determined to carry on in his Dad's footsteps. We struck up a friendship that lasted for many years; one that came under the heading of an instant bonding. The Royal Saudi Marine Instructors had a standing invitation to the various bashes held in the "Marine House" on the Consulate compound and it became essentially our second C.P.<sup>4</sup> The Consulate compound being considered sovereign American soil of course, and was the preferred watering hole for all the U.S. Expats.

A month or two after we had developed a sort of standing 'invite' to the compound, even when there *wasn't* a bash going, I got what I considered a strange request from Tom.

"Hey Dick," sez Tom, "there's a guy here at the Consulate who wants to have a long talk with you!"

"Ok," I agree, "But what does he want to talk about?"

"I'll let him tell ya'," sez Tom, "but I think you'll find it interesting!"

Hummm, I'm thinking, wonder if I insulted a member of his family or the staff at one of the parties? I don't think so, but then ya' never know with these State Department guys?

A meeting was set up, and about a week later I get a call asking me to come down to dinner at Tom's house, and afterwards meet the mysterious Consulate gentleman who wants to talk to me. Well, I've never turned down a free meal, and besides I'm almighty curious about this pending palaver.

To cut through the unnecessary BS, it turns out that the individual who wants to talk, worked in the communications section of the Consulate. Now this sends up a warning flag, as the Comm-Shed (as the Communications sections are usually called even in the Marines), are often thinly disguised "spooks" working a cover job to allow them access to all incoming and outgoing communications traffic, and to send what they need to maintain contact with the appropriate headquarters. Needless to say, the gents working in Comm with an Embassy or Consulate have security clearances that even omit Allah himself from the access list!

After about an hour or so, a very scary scenario had presented itself – especially scary in retrospect in light of the world situation that has subsequently unfolded since 1990. It seems that “*The Company*” had minimal intelligence sources in the Mid-East<sup>5</sup>, and those in and around Jeddah and the Saudi Naval Establishment were essentially non-existent! Hummm... While I am always up for assisting my Country, and indeed have offered to pay the ultimate price a number of times, mercifully, up until then at least – it had not been my time to hang it up.

Not having worked in the Intelligence Community since the late ‘60s or early ‘70s I had some small doubt that I would be of much use. Calling on my patriotism (drat!) and intelligence gathering skills of long ago when working in the Reconnaissance outfits, he was sure I’d do just fine. Upppsss... This *ain’t* going exactly how I had planned! Changing the thrust, I told him I’d do better than that, and I’d personally take him aboard the Navy base while we were actually training the Saudi Camelnecks, and let him look for himself!

“No good,” sez he, “we’re not allowed to do any ‘overt’ spying under our current guidelines, and must (emphasis on MUST) obtain all our information from U.S. Expats<sup>6</sup> with appropriate credentials!”

“Credentials?” I reply, “What credentials? All I’ve got is a Life Membership in the NRA and a card saying I’m a member of the Force Reconnaissance Association! I don’t even have a credit card!”

“So much the better,” sez he, “we don’t want our assets too well known, and you come highly recommended!”

“Highly recommended by who? My Mother?” I ask. “Exactly what do you want to know? I can give you an in-depth analysis right now! These gents are the consummate douche-bags I started to explain! If the Israelis ever attack Saudi Arabia, the worst injury they’ll get will be a case of whiplash from stopping too suddenly at the Red Sea!”

“Yeah, yeah, I believe you,” my prospective ‘controller,’ replied, “but I need orders of battle, names, dates and pictures of the insanity you are talking about!”

Oh good, I think, now I’m gonna’ be a damned spook, and I didn’t hear him say a thing about how many Hollalas<sup>7</sup> they were going to contribute to my war bag!

“Tell me sire, exactly what is the pay scale for an ‘asset’?” I inquire.

“Assets do it for love of country and adventure,” the slick talking Commo says!

Now I’m asked to be an unpaid, but highly patriotic asset I think. Somehow this does not bode well, especially in light of my previous experience with three and four lettered organizations. Careful here lad, everything is not as it seems I would guess!

“Sire, just how am I supposed to get this information to you?” I ask.

“Just make the parties at the consulate, and we’ll always have someone there to take your latest stuff. Worst case, you can always just relay it to Tom Crawford if something suddenly comes up,” he replies.

“What happens if I get my fanny in a crack?” I inquire.

“Well, you’d better hope that doesn’t happen, as the State Department has a very definite hands-off policy when it comes to ‘urinating-off’ the Saudi Government, ...oil prices you know! If you get your butt captured, you’re on your own, and we will deny all knowledge!” My only reply at this point is “Arrrggggg”...

“You’ve gotta’ be kidding?” sez I!

“Nope, but there’s not much chance of getting caught if these guys are as incompetent as you say!” my slick-talking prospective controller replies.

My mind is reeling with *deja vous* of earlier swindles where I (and others) were left hanging out to dry. The late retirement pay debacle instantly came to mind!

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you mean that I am to be an unpaid ‘asset’ hanging my skuzzy fanny out in the breeze, you guys won’t help, and I’m on my own if the feces strikes the ventilation?” I summarize!

“You’re quite a smart fellow” he says, “you’ve got it down pretty well pat!” “Now the question is, will you do it?”

Now the rotten SOB was appealing to my latent patriotism, this wasn’t fair at all! Worse yet, I could feel my resolve weakening! Culver, you **know** better than this line of bull, tell him no and get it over with! Look at what Basil did with its own employees after **they** had given the advice not to worry about getting permission from your former military service to work in the dunes! The only thing going for the Agency is that they have *always* been known for using the plausible deniability routine – at least they’re up front with it, no illusions, just fact! Those clowns play dirty and seem to thrive on it. On the other hand, there would be a chance for some adrenaline in this one... Hummm...

“Just one more question,” sez I. “What about the Navy Captain in charge of the Military Training Mission? Doesn’t he supply you gents with good information?”

“This is not for publication,” sez the prospective controller, “but the Captain just ain’t that smart, and besides, he’s trying to advance his career by writing glowing reports to his bosses indicating that he (the Captain) is doing a marvelous job of training the Saudi Naval Forces! He’s worse than no help at all!”

“Hummm... well, my question is, do you have an extra Heinekens Beer floating around somewhere?” The resident spook produces the requested brew and the deal is sealed, albeit with some small feeling of discomfort growling in my stomach.

I left the compound that evening with a feeling of duty, honor, country and an overwhelming desire to screw with the Saudi Naval Establishment. The question was, what to do? Well, Pat already thinks I ain’t always playing with a full deck, and he’s convinced I’m trying to get him locked up anyway. No problem there, I’ll just be myself... Heh, heh, heh...

Well, I continue to take pictures, and always place the blame on Commander Ammar al Quatani, who wanted to fill his photo album with pictures of his fledgling Camelnecks<sup>8</sup>!

All goes well for awhile until one day we get a young Navy snail<sup>9</sup> into one of our training classes. This little maggot is very concerned that we are taking pictures of Marine Training. Now even though this gent has a GCT slightly above room temperature, he is becoming a major pain in the @\$\$\$. I always ask him if he’d like to tell the Commander that he can’t take

pictures of our training cycle? He of course, demurs, not willing to take on the Commander, but he's anything but happy.

Almost as if by magic, a Navy Lieutenant named Esau shows up to monitor our training, and he always looks most unhappy when I am doing a Photo Op of our young Marines. I strongly suspect that this clown is a plant, egged on by our young and very objectionable snail. When I get some of the pictures back from the photo shop (in the Souk<sup>10</sup>), Lt. Esau expresses great interest, and would like to know if he can have them to show to his fellow Naval Officers. I smell a large rodent, but give him the stack of freshly printed flicks. What he doesn't know, is that I ordered two sets of prints and have slipped the other set to the "resident spook at the Consulate."



**AN ASSET IN PLACE**

After the weekend, Esau is again in attendance, and I ask him for the photos back. He hedges, and allows as how we are not allowed to have them. I explain that we are taking them at the behest of the Marine Commander, and he then tells me that we are not allowed to take them even for the Commander<sup>11</sup>. Now I know something is rotten in Denmark, and tell him that I'll run the situation past Ammar. He still refuses to return the photographic artwork. I check with the Commander giving him a rundown of Esau's machinations. The Commander being a shrewd old duck (slight pun here) tells us that it's OK to continue to take pictures, but not in front of Esau. I grin and agree – now I have an unknowing fellow conspirator in the spook business, and things continue to go smoothly, with Ammar unknowingly spying on himself!

Pat continues to chide me about being a bit obvious in flipping the Lieutenant the paw<sup>12</sup>, and continuing to chronicle our activities. I began to smell another mouse in the cheese factory and strongly suspect that our Comm Shack spook has shaded his bet and brought Pat into the intelligence fold as a just in case. Shrewd maneuver, I'll give him that. I often see Pat at the Consulate also talking to our "Company Man" and I now rest assured that this guy is a pro at his job, even if he won't come out and hang his fanny in the breeze personally. Maybe that's how you survive in the clandestine business?

Occasionally a couple of guys in "suits" will show up at the parties in the Marine House and sit in on our discussions. I'm beginning to see that these gents are serious about gathering intel info on the Saudi Forces, and I'm beginning to hope that unlike "Tigger,"<sup>13</sup> in the kiddie cartoons, I'm not the only one! Surely the "Boys in the Band"<sup>14</sup> have other snitches and amateur photographers in their fold?

One contact with the U.S. Navy Captain running the Military Training Mission on the Red Sea side of the country convinces me that my spook buddy was absolutely right about this clown's grasp of military knowledge and training procedures! I then knew why they were desperately looking for



**LT. ESAU, "THINLY DISGUISED" SAUDI INTELLIGENCE OFFICER**

a creditable source of information. Bureaucracy is the same everywhere it would seem. The Captain was a self-serving bureaucratic tool!

As our original contract was coming to a close, Pat, Paul Shomper, Rod Roper, Lee Barta and I get our heads together and decide to sign on directly with the Saudi Navy with no American Company as a buffer. We're not too sure just how legal it is, but it sounds like a likely adventure. A last party at the Consulate results in my man in the Company giving me a lecture and an introduction to his counterpart on the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula working in the Consulate in Dhahran. My last caution is to be careful, and with instructions to stay in touch. He is now preaching to the choir, and I'm beginning to develop a case of mild paranoia.

Once in Jubail (located on the Persian Gulf side of the Arabian peninsula) with our new headquarters at Ras al Gar, we continue the same drill as we had in Jeddah. Organized training was beginning to taper off, and we would get classes starting that would suddenly disappear only to have a new class with no experience show up the following week. Frustration abounded, and we were beginning to look and feel more and more like Christmas Tree Ornaments (probably an unfortunate choice of comparisons) designed to give Ammar a bragging point that he had American trainers/advisors for his newly formed Marine Corps.

A reestablishment of my bonafides required a contact with the U.S. Consulate on the Persian Gulf side of the Country. This wasn't exactly a hardship as the Consulate provided a convenient and pleasant watering hole in an otherwise dry country. I supposed we'd simply have to make the ultimate sacrifice and make the social functions in our new digs. Trips to the Consulate in Dhahran were always welcome of course, and Pat and I would often visit the American Officer's Club at the U.S. Airbase where we could order pork and appropriate libations free of the restrictions of the Muslim culture. Things at the Consulate were a bit more formal than those in Jeddah, and my contact(s) now all wore suits, and usually made an effort to greet me soon after crashing the various bashes. All of a sudden, I noted that I was becoming something of a pariah at the gatherings, and I was left pretty much alone with the "suits"! Not nearly as much fun as in Jeddah, but things were running along smoothly.

I only had one more major clash with the Saudi Intelligence people, and again it was over some photos I had taken of our newly arrived 81mm Mortars, and our mortar drill. Rather than waste bandwidth here, I will refer you to *"Tweaking the Beard of the Prophet"* chronicled elsewhere in the Camel Tails, but that was one that gave me a feel for what it is really like to play spook and almost get caught with my drawers down around my ankles! It worked out fine, but I had to call in some of my markers with our Navy SEAL cohorts to bury the evidence! The Saudis thought they had me dead to rights, but Yankee ingenuity outdoes rag-head arrogance every time! I eventually got on the plane with my carefully hidden evidence and gave it to the Agency when I got back to North Idaho.

At my last get together at the Consulate, I was presented with an American Flag that had flown over the U.S. Territory in Dhahran,<sup>15</sup> a lot of handshakes all around and a rather ominous piece of information that I would be visited by a representative from the Company when I got home. I began to feel like Scrooge who had been told to expect to meet three ghosts after the clock struck 0100!

They were as good as their word, and sure enough, a gent in a suit pulled up to my Quonset Hut after I was re-ensconced in my hill top fortress. This guy was like a comic opera figure – he showed me his credentials, and we sat down at the kitchen table with cookies and



coffee, and went over the whole thing again. He took damned near all of my extra photos (except for some I had kept for my self of course, heh, heh, heh...). He spent about two days debriefing me, and at the last minute he pulled out *another* set of credentials that he assured me were his REAL identity! Huh? How many sets of paper do these guys carry<sup>16</sup>? He asked me if I would like to continue to work for the Company, and I assured him that I would love to, but alas I never heard from him again! This spook stuff gets under your skin!

That was almost the end of my experiences as an “asset” and probably would have been if Saddam Hussein hadn’t rolled into Kuwait with his tanks during the Summer of 1990. Thinking I might have some interesting observations that might be of some use to my beloved Corps, I called them almost immediately. They yawned a bit, wanted to know if I was an Arabic Linguist (which of course I was not), and politely told me to go pound sand. I steamed for about a week, and called the Training Branch at HQMC. Same thing, only seemingly a bit more bored! Aarrggg... A third call to the Intelligence Branch engendered a bit more interest, but they allowed as how if they needed my services, they’d be in touch. School<sup>17</sup> was starting, and I gave it up – terrible to be a has-been, sigh...

About a week later I got a call from Colonel Dave Willis, the Commanding Officer of Weapons Training Battalion at Quantico who wanted to know how soon I could get packed and get back to Quantico? Huh? “What gives?” I said. “Don’t ask a lot of questions,” says Dave, “but the CG wants you to brief the General Staff!” Dear Allah, nobody had ever asked me for directions to the head (Navy/Marine for restroom) before, and now they want my skuzzy fanny to brief the General Staff? I was charmed!

It seems the General had read my Camel Tails and was in hysterics! Elly Land, the Memsahib of my old compadre from times of old, Jim Land, had given Colonel Dave Willis a set, and he had relayed them to General Paul Van Riper. The only thing I could think of was they were short of laughs, and wanted me to amuse them! How embarrassing!

Actually the briefing (briefings really, there were a series of them), went quite well, and they even seemed interested in my observations (knock me over with a feather!). I was asked what, in my opinion, was going to happen once the ground war started? Well now this was in September 1990, and the ground fracas wouldn’t start until February, but I began to catch a whiff of gunsmoke. I told them that the war would last between three days and three weeks, and the biggest problem would be 200,000 troops with their hands in the air (little did I know that 100,000 of them would E&E before the hostilities started). As for the time frame? I missed my calculations by 12-hours on the high end of the low side... They initially rolled their eyes and gave me the “*yeah, right!*” look, but when the actual hostilities had ended, they though I was some kind of genius? In all honesty, if they’d been there with our stalwart crew training the Camelnecks, they too would have come up with a similar figure.

General Van Riper wanted to know if I’d be willing to go back in country, and I readily agreed as long as I could go as a Marine, and not a civilian. The General said he understood and had me fitted out with desert cammies and I began to plan my entry back into the fray. I got as far as Twenty Nine Palms just as the war ended – seems that I was a victim of my own predictions. Trudging wearily back to Idaho, I was sitting in the ROTC Office in Kellogg, Idaho one afternoon not too long after my return when I got a call from Counter-Intelligence at HQMC asking if they could come out and visit for a day. I readily agreed and awaited their arrival. The Master Sergeant in charge of the detail wanted to know exactly **how** I knew what the drill was gonna’ be? “Top Secret stuff,” I replied, “I’m not sure you’re cleared, I’ll have to

check it out with Langley!” They shook their heads, packed their briefcases, grinned and headed back to D.C. Who says playing spook ain’t fun? Heh, heh, heh...

## ROC

### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> While this isn’t an “exact,” generally the operational forces of the three lettered Agencies fall into three tiers. You have the career spooks, Langley Trained, but who usually act as “controllers” for a set of scoundrels usually called “contract agents” who are paid professionals, but not necessarily in the business as a career. Many are foreign nationals who simply spy for money as opposed to a love of country. The third tier is/are the “assets” who are usually patriotic (or possibly those who the Agency blackmails into service) individuals who happen to be located for various business or traveling purposes in a country of interest. Most “assets” work for love of country and come under the “unpaid” segment of spooks.

<sup>2</sup> The “Empty Quarter” is a section of the Arabian Peninsula so remote and without amenities that no sane man wants to go there. Pictures of the dune formation in the “Quarter” give rise to the usual vision of a mid-eastern desert clime. Abdul Aziz is rumored to have holed up there around the turn of the last century to avoid detection when they were planning on retaking Riyadh from the Rasheeds. A very barren and seldom visited piece of desolate turf.

<sup>3</sup> Wally Green was the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time.

<sup>4</sup> C.P. stands for “Command Post”

<sup>5</sup> This is no longer the case of course. The place is now swarming with agents, pseudo-agents and intelligence types, but you must remember this was prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, and the invasion of Iraq. Saudi Arabia and the Diaper-Heads were an operational and intelligence backwater in 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Expat is the slang term for Expatriate, usually the term used for foreign nationals working in a country different than their own.

<sup>7</sup> A Hollala is a fractional Saudi coin of little value. Counting your “hollalas” is sort of like counting your pennies – usually used in jest.

<sup>8</sup> Camelneck is a term we jokingly used to refer to our fledgling Saudi Marines. Essentially a comical take off from the American Marines being called “Leathernecks,” or the British Royal Marines being referred to as “Bootnecks”...

<sup>9</sup> Snail was an uncomplimentary term usually applied to an individual with a low station in life. We also had cleaning snails, coffee fetching snails, etc. Not a complimentary term!

<sup>10</sup> Souk is a Saudi shopping area varying from a mall to strips of shops in a certain area. We also had “specialty Souks, i.e. “The Main Souk,” “The Gold Souk,” The Syrian Souk,” etc. each usually alluding to the goods to be found there. In some segments of the mid-east, the Souk is also known as the Bazaar.

<sup>11</sup> There is an unspoken hierarchy within the Saudi Military in which the intelligence people apparently override the operational folks. This is probably much like the Gestapo or the SS in WWII Germany. Rank apparently is not the factor in the intelligence community keeping the rag-heads safe for the Monarchy! A really weird set up making you wonder who’s really running things?

<sup>12</sup> Flipping me the “paw” is a term I have always used to describe the action(s) of the family puppies, who when told to do something that they understand perfectly, but deliberately choose to ignore; instead giving me the canine version of an extended middle digit! An extremely useful term, mercifully not instantly understood by the diaper-heads when used in casual conversation.

<sup>13</sup> If you’ll remember the old cartoons, “Tigger’s” famous song points out that the most wonderful thing about Tiggers is that I’m the only one!

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<sup>14</sup> “The Boys in the Band” is an often used slang term for the employees of the Agency or the CIA.

<sup>15</sup> I suspect that the American Flag was in lieu of a traditional gold watch (gold sundial?) given to retirees in any line of work! By diplomatic convention, the grounds of a country’s consulate or embassy is always considered to be an extension of the soil of the country involved.

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes these guys reminded me of Curley, Moe and Larry. I’m sure there are some really first rate operatives out in the field somewhere, but simply being employed by a “three lettered organization” didn’t make you James Bond!

<sup>17</sup> I had taken a job as the Senior Marine Instructor with the USMC High School ROTC program when I returned from the dunes. Pat Teague had held the job of Marine Instructor there before he departed for Saudi, and sorta’ nosed me towards the job with the school district. It was a great job, and I really enjoyed it, but it was a 100-mile round trip jaunt to work and back every day. The School Superintendent thought *HE* ran things, and I kept pointing out that I could make more picking dingle-berries than they were paying me. He was convinced that he was doing me a favor allowing me to work there, and I took the stance that it was really the other way around. Things came to a head during the spring of 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the hierarchy of the School Board made the statement that NOW the kids could get real jobs and not have to associate with the military. They surreptitiously attempted to do away with the ROTC Program, but by marching on the School Board Meeting (aided most ably by Pat Teague) we broke it off in their fanny. They were NOT amused and made every effort to terminate my contract. I prevailed by using the press, the TV channels and a whole gaggle of enraged parents. The Marines at the 12<sup>th</sup> District Headquarters in San Francisco kept me informed and secretly giggled at my yanking the School District’s chain. The School Superintendent was not happy but was caught between a rock and a hard place. Initially he stated that he had really enjoyed my tenure with the school district, but he thought it was time to get some new blood in the position. I grinned and told him that he was going to teach the kids a bad lesson, that if you fight for something you believe in, you are punished for it. He assured me that was NOT the case, but I pointed out to him that I was sure that he was correct, but that the newspapers and the TV stations would probably see it differently. He visibly blanched and left the office. About two days later he called me dripping good will and allowed as how they really **needed** me (yeah, right!) and renewed my contract. I was fuming but had stayed two more years just to make it my idea! When Colonel Dave Willis (now retired) called in 1993 and asked if I’d like to go back to Saudi, I readily agreed. This time it was to be a weapons’ instructor for the Royal Saudi Air Defense Force (similar to a Hawk Missile outfit). I did an in-house change of command with my Sergeant Major, shook hands with all the teachers and the Principal (totally ignoring the School Superintendent), and headed back to Saudi with no regrets! I LOVE winning!

I tried to get Pat to tag along on the second sojourn to the “World’s Largest Litter Box” but he was gainfully employed by the Idaho Veteran’s Services Department and had become something of a key man in the organization. Hartnett on the other hand, came along, this time armed with permission to work out of country. We tried to get Paul Shomper, who had settled in Cyprus with his new wife, to come back. He was willing but alas, all the billets were filled and he was scheduled to come on board if (and when) we got the much desired “follow-on contract” which unfortunately never materialized.

# ***Tweaking the Beard of the Prophet***

## ***A few Adventurers of an "Asset" with the RSMC***

The time was late 1987 and my contract with the Royal Saudi Arabian Navy was rapidly drawing to a close. Almost three years in the Kingdom had begun to grate on the nerves, and I was ready to return to the U.S.A. Enough was enough, and I was looking forward to returning to my beloved Idaho Mountains. Unknown to me at the time, I was about to get in one more dig into the ribs of the minions of Abdul Aziz al Saud.

I had signed on almost three years before to help start, raise and train the Royal Saudi Marine Corps. It certainly sounded like fun, but I hadn't reckoned with the lack of skill, personal pride, and ability of those who populated the ranks of our fledgling service. We had essentially "dragooned" a number of (mostly) unmotivated individuals out of a "tea drinking" Navy into a service that would be trained and equipped to impose their will on the enemy (whoever that might turn out to be). While there were exceptions, most of our charges had absolutely no inclination to expose themselves to the inconveniences normally associated with metamorphosis into a semblance of what is normally thought of as being a Marine. We had our work cut out for us, believe me!



**Culver with the Saudi Marines**



**Commander Amar al Quatani  
Commandant of the RSMC**

We worked almost totally independently from the normal Saudi Naval Command and were left pretty much on our own most of the time. We were motivated and experienced instructors, most former members of the Marine Corp's Force Reconnaissance Companies, EOD experts or ordnance and marksmanship trained. For companionship we had a contingent of Retired Navy Seals who were attempting to work the newly formed Saudi "Navy Special Unit" into some semblance of a Saudi Special Warfare/UDT unit. The Navy was having the same problems we had, but on steroids! The Seals and Marines often got together to discuss the idiocy of the entire task of producing highly

trained and motivated assault personnel out of a sow's ear (probably a poor choice of comparisons considering the circumstances and the aversion of the Muslim Religion to swine). Both the Marines and the Navy Seals were working for a Saudi Navy Commander, Ammar al Quatani. Now, Commander Ammar was basically a "hot-dog" who had spent quite some time in the United States, attending various Military Courses such as the USMC Command and Staff School, and the Air Force language school in San Antonio, Texas. While he wasn't exactly a chip off the old "Recon Block," he spoke excellent English and knew enough buzz-words to keep the pot stirred. He had, however, acquired a taste for photographic operations (better known as Photo-Ops). Being the daddy of the Royal Saudi

Marines and the Saudi Navy Special Ops, he intended to impress all and sundry of the marvels and professionalism of his new formed units – and that took “eye-candy” in the form of photographic records of their accomplishments. This was to work right into the Agency’s plans to spy on the Saudi Naval Services. It became the perfect cover for intelligence gathering.

Everything went well initially, as we were just as interested in taking pictures as he was in sticking them into his newly acquired photo album. Marines (as has been long suspected) are seldom without a camera to record their mighty deeds. Both Commander Ammar and we were happy. Needless to say, however, we always kept the negatives and a copy of the myriad of photographs. The fly in the ointment was that there was a well known “official” ban on taking photographs on Saudi military installations. Commander Ammar winked at the regulations and his press photographer(s) continued to function without any noticeable interference.



**Saudi Marines snapping in with G3 Rifles prior to Rifle Qualification on the range**

Things began to get a bit dicey as a particularly unspectacular young Navy “snail” was assigned to the Marines as a student. He wasn’t the brightest star in the sky, but he seemed to be intent on making sure the regulations against taking photos on the Navy Base were rigidly enforced. He first asked us not to take any photographs, and when we told him that the Commander had ordered us to take the pictures, he at first seemed confused, and then upset. My reasoning was that a Commander’s wishes must take precedence over the wishes of a “no-

class duck.” The young snail wasn’t about to take on the Commander, but within a couple of days a very smooth Saudi Navy Lieutenant named Esau began monitoring our training. He participated in our operations and watched us photographically recording the deeds of the young Marines in the course of their duties. After the film had been developed, the Lieutenant asked if he could see the pictures, and he seemed to be quite pleased with the results.

Commander Ammar had taken a couple of days leave, and Lieutenant Esau wanted to “borrow” the photos to show his contemporaries how well the Marines were progressing. Upon his return to the base after the weekend, we asked for the photos to turn in to Commander Ammar but were told that “we” were not allowed to have the photos, and he would retain custody of them for official purposes. As you have no doubt guessed, Lieutenant Esau was a member of Saudi Naval Intelligence sent over to keep an eye on the suspicious activities of the infidel instructors. From that time on, we continued to take pictures, but we carefully avoided any overt display in front of the Navy intelligence Lieutenant. It was still great fun to take pictures in front of the “student-snail” who remained frustrated during his entire tour with the Marines.

The seeming Saudi aversion to having “uncensored” photographs leave “The Kingdom” manifested itself in more ways. We began to check out the regulations, as rumors abounded on infidels subjected to having their bare feet beaten with split bamboo for transgressions against the wishes of the Saudi Government.

It seems that there were also prohibitions against taking pictures, not only of (or on) Military Bases, and Oil Refineries, but also any pictures that might embarrass the Kingdom in the eyes of the world. For instance, one expatriate worker was an amateur photographer taking pictures of Jeddah on a weekend outing. As long as he stuck to the buildings and monuments all went well, but it seems that he was carried away by the moment and took a picture of one of the many back alleys. He was taken into custody and his camera and film confiscated. The authorities found that one of the pictures showed a trash can in an alley, and were sure that he intended to publish the photo in some sort of magazine that might make the “progressive” Kingdom look bad (or backward) in front of the rest of the civilized world – horrors, a trash can? How unfeeling of the blighter to take such a picture!

The first time I ran afoul of the law in my photo-ops was quite innocent, and well prior to my contacts with the more clandestine members of the communications folks located in the Consulate. We were driving back to our quarters from the Navy Station at the end of a long day. Our northbound route home took a four lane highway bordering the Red Sea for much of its length. We looked over and saw an entire herd of camels occupying the southbound lane and all the camels seemed to be trotting in perfect harmony. This was too good to miss, so I stuck my Nikon out the window and captured the moment on film. Suddenly, out of nowhere, there appeared a Toyota Land Rover (the Jeep-like configuration) with a bubble-gum machine on the top of the vehicle. A very officious individual in uniform climbed out of the vehicle and ordered us to immediately surrender our cameras and follow him to the office. He pulled into the office of an Oil Refinery bordering the highway.

When we asked him for an explanation for such treatment, he (in very broken English) told us that we had most flagrantly violated Saudi law by taking pictures of the oil refinery. I was scratching my head as we were taking pictures out of the side of the car away from the refinery. He triumphantly pointed to two oil tanks across the road from the main refinery. He then demanded that we surrender our *lgamas* to him (an *lgama* is the Saudi equivalent of a “green-card” issued to expats working in the Kingdom). Since being without your “green-card” was prima-facie evidence of being in the Kingdom illegally, you guarded it with your life – being apprehended without “your papers” was worth a trip to the Saudi slam! Upon his second demand, I got a bit belligerent and told him that I would only surrender it to the police. The irate security guard was sure that his authority has been impugned, and he started shaking his fist. I repeated my intention to only surrender it to a legitimate police officer, not some Saudi “door-rattler”... He told me that they cannot allow pictures to be taken of any oil refinery, because of the possibility of sabotage or terrorism. He again demanded my *lgama*; I, of course, refused!

I suddenly had a bright thought: maybe I could screw with this guy’s brain-housing group!

“You know,” I said, “that the United States built these refineries and already have a copy of the plans! What could a couple of pictures hurt?”

“On no,” sez the snail, “it would be illegal for the United States to have a copy of the plans for this refinery!”

This guy obviously ain’t playing with a full deck! I decide to go on full mental attack!

“You know about satellites that can take pictures from far out in space, don’t you?” I asked.

The door-rattler is now totally bemused and confused.

“Satellites?” he says. “What (are) satellites?”



“Rotating little balls up in the sky with cameras attached that can take pictures of anything in the Kingdom! They can take pictures with such great detail that they could take pictures of the King going to the bathroom,” I said pouring it on a bit thick!

The little security guard blanched totally white, and his eyes got as big as saucers.

“You take pictures of King going to BATHROOM?” he says in obvious rage and disbelief!

Uh oh, I may have gone too far in my attempt to screw with the little idiot! The security snail went running for the front office, but we still had possession of our Igamas!

A very well-spoken Saudi dressed in a western suit came in and settled the snail down and shook his finger at me with a thinly disguised smile – who says these guys don’t have a sense of humor? He then explained that he is bound by Saudi regulations not to allow anyone to take pictures around the refinery. I took pains to explain that we were new to the country and had never seen an entire herd of camels on a freeway. His eyes lit up, and he said he now understood. He took our film and had it developed while we were served tea and given complimentary copies of the refinery’s propaganda hard-backed calendar.



**RSMC Instructor Pat Teague holding Rubber Boat training for use in amphibious raids Persian Gulf in background**

Our film was returned properly developed and sure enough, one of my pictures of the camel-freeway shot DID have an oil storage tank in the background. He took a paper cutter and removed the offending tank and returned our film to us with a free developing job! He jokingly said that anytime we need a quick develop job, all we have to do is take all the frames we want except the last one, and then come by and take a picture of the refinery and turn the film over to him! He will develop our film free and simply keep the one of the

refinery. He roared, laughing, and slapped his thigh. Handshakes all around and we were sent on our way and no jail time! Whew... I probably shouldn’t have mentioned the King and the bathroom, I suppose. Mercifully, the head man was a western educated gentleman who realized that evil intent isn’t always inherent in western actions...

We continued to take pictures, but we became much more circumspect in flaunting our photographic efforts. Midway in our tour, the entire Saudi Marine Corps was transferred to the Persian Gulf side of the Arabian Peninsula. Our new home was Jubail, with our base located at Ras al Gar, where the U.S. Marine forces were staged during the (1<sup>st</sup>) Gulf War. By this time, our contracts with the Saudi-American company had expired, and those of us who had decided to stay, signed on directly with the Saudi Navy. Quarters and chow immediately went seriously downhill, and we were billeted in salvaged trailers. The Saudi Navy hired some Pakistanis to handle the culinary efforts to feed the expats on the Navy Contract. There are two things that I will avoid if at all possible in the way of chow, and that’s anything with fins or feathers! I almost starved in the final months in country! Geesch...

Back to the final weeks of our contract. Photo-ops continued, and we hadn't been bothered by any of the ever diligent Saudi Intelligence service minions. But that was to change in the next couple of days, and I finally got my chance to tweak the beard of the prophet one final time!

We had just received the compliment of 81mm Mortars that we had been expecting. They had been over two years in coming, and we looked forward to giving them a workout. One interesting note - these were brand new! I don't think in my entire Marine Corps career I had ever seen one of these things in the grease! They were gorgeous (if you can ever call a pig-iron piss-tube gorgeous!). Having spent a tour in the Artillery in my younger days, I got the nod to be the lead instructor in the mortar instruction. Once I had gotten our fledgling Camelnecks familiar with the guns, I started mortar crew drill, having the crews racing to see which team could get their gun(s) set up first. Anyone who has ever served in mortars can picture the drill. It was obviously time to take some pictures for Commander Ammar's scrap book. Unfortunately, as it was to turn out, Commander Ammar was on a two week leave.



**Boat Team One falls in ready to launch**



**"Boat Team One, In the Water!"  
Former Force Recon Marine Pat Teague  
supervises Saudi Marine Raid Training**

I had no sooner taken the pictures, than I saw a third-class duck drive past the training area, just as I was putting the camera away. He was leaning out the vehicle window looking on in disbelief. I took the camera straight back to the office and removed the film and hid it in my running socks stuffed into my tennies in my bottom drawer. I wasn't about to let the Saudi duck take my film. I then returned to the instruction area to await the arrival of the gendarmes. Sure enough, he wanted my camera. Now by this time I had acquired a

Nikon F3 and wasn't terribly anxious to let some camel-mechanic screw around with a fairly complicated piece of gear. Reluctantly, I got the camera out. He asked for the film. I had run the mechanism ahead for a number of frames so that even with the camera empty it appeared that I had been taking pictures. I ceremoniously rewound the mechanism and opened the camera back. Much to my horror (and the duck's) I found that I had been taking pictures with an empty camera! Oh No! What could I have been thinking? I explained that I hadn't used the camera for months and had assumed that it was loaded with film. I shrugged my shoulders and displayed the empty camera. Now the duck wasn't Albert Einstein, but he knew I was winding his watch on this one. He reluctantly took the camera and disappeared.



That evening, I took the film home in my rolled up socks and put it in my underwear drawer in the trailer. Several days passed and nothing was said, but I still didn't have my camera back. It was obviously time to reclaim my property. I was within a week of exiting stage left from the Kingdom, and I wasn't about to donate my camera to the camel jockeys. I drove up to the security office and was met by an older tall, thin, mustang Navy Lieutenant who immediately demanded the film. Right, I thought to myself, about the time the sand dunes turn to grassy hills! The lieutenant turned from surly to insulting.

"You are lying," he says, "give me the film!"

"Lieutenant," I sez, "in MY Navy, if a junior officer were to tell me I was lying, I'd unscrew his head and defecate in his neck" (using slightly stronger language, of course)! "Of course, since this isn't my country, I won't do that, but you must understand I have just been insulted!"

"You must think we are stupid," he says, "give me the film!"

"I didn't think you were stupid until several minutes ago, but I'm beginning to change my mind!"

The lieutenant was becoming apoplectic...

"Lieutenant, even though I DIDN'T take any pictures, if I had any film in the camera, Commander Ammar has requested that we take pictures of the training for his scrap book!"

"Commander Ammar doesn't have the authority to do that – ***I*** am the intelligence officer and he must do what ***I*** say!"

"Do you mean that Navy Lieutenants are senior to Commanders? No wonder you guys need help!"

By now the lieutenant is no longer coherent. He ordered me to report to the senior intelligence officer on the Jubail Naval Base, and gave my camera to the third class duck who had originally confiscated it. The Lieutenant instructed him to stay with me while I went to see the head Intelligence Officer. Uh Oh, this did NOT bode well!... Time to start thinking ahead. A quick stop at the main gate resulted in a clearance to the security office. I began to imagine that this might be one of those times my "contact" in the American Consulate warned me about. I could see that one minor agency "Asset" was about to be hung out to dry if I couldn't figure a way out of this one!

I was met by a pleasant enough older Navy Lieutenant who introduced himself as the Chief of Security. He had obviously heard the entire story from the red-faced lieutenant at Ras al Gar and was ready for me. Instead of playing the bad-a\$\$, this guy was using the good-cop routine. He gave me what passed for a fatherly lecture, explaining that while it is good to admit making a mistake (giving reference to my story of having forgotten to put film in the camera), he thinks it is highly unlikely that such an intelligent individual as myself would make such an error! He told me that it will probably be necessary for me to have my quarters searched. He also explained that the security personnel would of course, look in all of my underwear, socks and other personal effects and if it was there, they would no doubt find it. A cold knot formed in my stomach, but I decided to gut it out. We "Assets" are known for our cool and calm demeanor (yeah, right!) – However, I would NOT let the raggies win this one! I wanted that film, as a matter of honor if nothing else! I told him that I would be happy to have

him conduct a search, all the time maintaining a cool outward demeanor. He told me that he must go to lunch but would finish the conversation after chow. Hummm...

I asked the thinly disguised Gestapo agent if it was alright to go over to the finance office and get my final pay during the lunch break, thinking to make a break for it, get to the trailer, and dispose of the film with my buddies in the SEAL contingent. The lieutenant agreed as long as the third class duck accompanied my wanderings. With little or no fanfare, I grabbed the company car and headed for finance.



**Infamous Picture of our Mortar Training with the Marine Corps, Naval Instructors and Saudi Officers – one picture from the roll of film that got me in *BIG* trouble with Saudi Naval Intelligence!**

gonna' cost me big time for bailing my fanny out of the soup. I smiled back and agreed – this was no time to negotiate!

Having just established my "innocence," I went back by Finance and picked up my shadow, who reluctantly left his buddies to their tea. I explained that the Navy wasn't ready to pay me yet, and I couldn't find "Mr. John"... The Saudi's answer to Albert Einstein said that he understood, and we returned to the Gestapo headquarters.

The intelligence icon of the Saudi Navy continued with his cautions and informed me that he was a graduate of our intelligence schools in the States. Great I think, now I know what's running through his mind. He told me that since we are both officers, and he realized that everyone has something he wants to hide, that he would allow me to make a phone call to anyone I like and he will not listen (yeah, right!), and that way I can be sure that they won't find anything in my trailer that I wouldn't want found! Heh, heh, heh... That one was old when Mohammad was wearing his diaper on his fanny instead of his head!

I told him that his offer of the phone call was appreciated, but that I had nothing to hide. I pointed out that they would find my K-Bar Knife with a day-night flare

I told my Navy shadow that I must find "Mr. John" (the Saudis usually use the first name rather than the last), and that he was welcome to come with me if he wanted. By now the "shadow duck" was settled in with his cronies, drinking tea, and he allowed as how he'd stay there, but I should tell him before I leave. I breathed a sigh of relief and headed for my quarters solo – whew! Upon pulling up in front of the trailer, I wasted no time cleaning all the contraband out of my drawers - and took it over to my SEAL buddy. He grinned and told me it's



**Saudi Marine Instructor's Patch**

taped to it for water safety, and he says that would be quite alright. I also informed him that I had one of the pencil flare guns to be used as a safety device in the event of a training accident, plus assorted web gear to carry my canteen and jungle kit. Again, he readily agreed that all this would be considered to be legitimate gear. With that, he lapsed into more small talk and finally made his decision. He told me that, upon reflection, he's sure I'd been telling the truth all along and that no inspection would be necessary! Idiot! They may have given him a diploma from Intel School, but he sure didn't learn much about human nature! We "Assets" however, were ever clever, clandestine and enigmatic! Heh, heh, heh...

He returned my camera and we exchanged addresses so he could visit me in the States. We departed with appropriate handshakes and smiles... I laughingly informed my "controllers" at the Consulate of the possible visit in North Idaho by the Saudi Naval Intelligence Service, and they laughed. I wouldn't sweat it was the reply, they don't even trust their OWN intel types to leave the Kingdom unescorted!

I was still smiling to myself when I climbed aboard the "Freedom Bird" with my film tucked safely away in my gear. I kept one copy for my personal files of course and dutifully gave the other to the Agency contact when he and I shared cookies and coffee on a mountain top in Idaho. The Prophet's Beard had been tweaked one final time!

**ROC**





## ***Panic and glory in the glare of bursting bombs!***

***Taken from Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC***

Looking back on this incident, the Saudi thought processes are a bit more transparent than they were some 18-years past. At the time the Saudi Marine Advisors were kept in the dark on external activities, much like the allegorical mushroom and supplied with plenty of fertilizer. ...Ours was not to reason why, ours was but to do or die? Little did I know in those far-off days.

A fairly hot shooting war had been going on between Iraq and Iran for quite some time, with neither side making much headway. Eventually, both sides were sending children in the assault waves with little or no ground gained. Neither side could be said to be mighty warriors cast in the mould of Saladin who opposed Richard in the Crusades. Since Iraq was Saudi's (literal) next door neighbor, it was deemed in the Saudi's best interest to assist the known Sunni Muslim<sup>1</sup> ruling faction in Iraq against the unknown Fundamentalist (Shiite) Muslims currently running amok in Iran. Iran of course had been a model of stability under the leadership (or rule, take your pick) of the Shah, but all reason and restraint collapsed with the restoration of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Several things were seen as potential dangers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ayatollah was preaching against any secular ruling hierarchy, pointing out the dastardly sins perpetrated by the Shah in Iran, thus leading true Muslim believers into an unholy way of life. Once brought out of exile and restored to the Iranian leadership, the Ayatollah set out to correct that mistake! Blood flowed, and the people seemed eager to return to their Islamic roots, and all vestiges of Westernism were considered to be a blot on a true believer (not to mention that opposing the Ayatollah was not considered a formula to reach extreme old age)! Brooks Brother's suits were relegated to the trash cans, and traditional Mid-Eastern clothing restored to favor. Women reverted to face veils, Westerners in general, and Americans in particular reviled. Since the Iranians did not consider themselves to be Arabs, but rather Persians, there was a natural animosity between Iraq and Iran. Iran also licked their lips over the vast oil reserves under the sands of Iraq and coveted this as a resource that **should** by the Grace of Allah belong to the/a 'more' faithful Muslim regime.

Conversely, Iraq was a secular dictatorship being run by the Arabian strongman, Saddam Hussein. While Iraq was devoutly Muslim on the unscratched surface, the Iranians considered the Iraqis to simply be paying verbal homage to Islam without supervising its strict observance, as *should* all followers of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). Now if Iran could just wrest the control of the oil deposits from those miserable Arabs so that good Persians, (who were ever so much more devout Muslims than the Iraqis of course), the cause of the

“Enlightened One” would be afforded its just due. It would be but a short step to Iraq’s sister country, the absolute Monarchy of Saudi Arabia. While Saudi pays lip service to being a theocracy, it is actually anything but! Religious police insure Mosque attendance, but make no mistake; it is the Sa’ud Family that rules the Kingdom, NOT the Mullahs! The Iranians have never made any bones about thinking that THEY were the Islamics with enough chutzpa (perhaps a poor choice of words here), to be the titular custodians of the two most holy places in Islam (Mecca and Medina), custodians of the sacred Hajj and then of course, there’s all that oil! Essentially there was a very careful balancing act going on in the mid-East. Make no mistake, the Islamics would band together to defeat the Infidels in a religious war, even if they made mincemeat out of each other afterwards. BUT, when one country has control of virtually everything of value to a Muslim (custodianship of the two Holy Mosques, and the largest known oil reserves in the world), they are willing to bend the rules a bit to keep it.

In a careful tightrope act, Saudi was backing the Iraqis with material (truck convoys left for the front on a regular basis) the Saudis were studiously staying out of the fray (as well they should, with their level of military expertise to actively engage in combat without LOTS of help would have been tantamount to suicide). Unfortunately, when one of the ships of the Saudi Navy rounded the peninsula and headed north towards the fighting, someone put a round or two through a Saudi Ship. This brought on a case of near terminal shakes on the part of the Saudi Navy (and probably the Army too), and it was deemed necessary to start organizing their newly formed Marine Corps into an operating tactical unit – Enter the Saudi Marine Battalion. The following few paragraphs and comments scribed at the time will give you the flavor of the exercise, and given that we had no idea exactly what had tripped their trigger.

#### **Comments from notes taken from Culver’s diary in 1986:**

*Things are getting a little hectic around here, the Saudis seem to be gearing up for some sort, of perceived threat! Seems one of their Arab or Iranian neighbors put a few holes in one of their Frigates over on the other side of the peninsula. I knew it was a stupid idea to take the “bungee” cords off of their ships!! The Saudi Navy does much better when their ships are moored to the pier. Their main talent is “Olympic Tea Drinking”, oh well, it’s a living. I suppose.*

*Part of their “gear up” is trying to get their Marine Battalion off the ground. A couple’ days ago one of our former student lieutenants came by to proudly inform us he was going to be the Battalion S-4. “Great”, sez I, “how do you like it?” “It’s great,” sez he, “by the way, exactly what does an S-4 do?” Hummm..*

*As a part of this great push, the Navy Commander in charge of the effort of coming up with a working Marine Corp Battalion wanted me to write down a list of all the things that the officers in a Marine Battalion are supposed to do. I came up with a list that was straight out of Marine Corps publications (the same basic information we give our fledgling U.S. Marine Officers). “Not detailed enough,” sez he! I take him a list that is more or less an account of what a company commander does on a daily basis (as best I can remember at my rather advanced age!). “Still not detailed enough.” sez he! Damn!*

*Now this is crazy! Heck, how dadgummed detailed can you make such a list? I finally decided to go “whole hog” (upppss, another Freudian slip, sorry). I’ve now got a list that includes suggested time slots for “head-calls<sup>2</sup>,” together with suggestions on how many squares of appropriate tissue to use depending upon the severity and volume of the “call of*

*nature!” I’m thinking of adding a paragraph to cover head-calls in the field, including the appropriate granulation and color of sand to use for sanitary purposes (they don’t get toilet paper in their field rations!). If I don’t get sent home for this little treatise, I’m bullet, proof!*

### **Back to present day:**

After my departure from the World’s Largest Litter Box at the tail end of 1987, we had no idea that Saddam would allow his megalomania to overpower his common sense. The war between Iraq and Iran had petered out due to a lack of young cannon fodder, and the final realization that the Iraq-Iran War was a futile and essentially un-winable endeavor. Both Iran and Iraq breathed a sigh of relief when the war ended in a virtual stalemate. Iraq looked southward towards their neighbor, Kuwait and in 1990 mounted out an expedition to reduce the “mini-country” to possession to act as a jumping off point for his real target, Saudi Arabia.

Saudi of course panicked and called for their white knight (the United States) to come to their rescue. Based on the actions of (or lack thereof) President Jimmy (the Wimp) Carter during the Iranian takeover of the American Embassy in 1979, Saddam gambled that we would do nothing. Saddam of course, guessed wrong! This time he had not taken into account the fact that Saudi Arabia had a history of deliberately holding down the oil prices in the OPEC community, thus earning the enmity of their fellow Arabic nations, but securing the tacit friendship and assistance of the United States. Don’t forget Americans like affordable gasoline prices. The invasion of little Kuwait offered us the excuse of liberating a small defenseless country, and since Saudi didn’t have the military expertise to throw out the oppressors, the job obviously fell to the country that had been the recipients of historically low gas prices. Enter the defenders of right and freedom!

Saddam was betting on Arabic Blood being thicker than oil and the entire Arab (if not Muslim) world flocking to the colors and taking up arms against the infidels. The Saudis threw their considerable weight around and convinced their fellow Muslim countries that “there but for the grace of Allah, goes the rest of the Mid-East.” Since Saddam was not a particularly well liked strongman, and did not have the persona of a Muslim Ayatollah, it became fairly easy to convince other Muslim countries to help defeat his “power play.” To allow Saddam to take over a relatively helpless Kuwait, “there *INDEED* but for the grace of Allah go I,” was the perception, and quite probably they were exactly right... The Saudis knew that they were next on Saddam’s list. Saddam of course had his eyes on the oil, power and the control of the two most holy sites in Islam, Mecca and Medina. With those, he would have virtual control of the entire Arab world, and Iran would not be in a position to do a damned thing about it!

The only possible fly in the ointment was keeping Israel from screwing the goose! Obviously Israel could not be included in the coalition, as no Arab Country would have participated, and the deal would have become Muslims against Infidels regardless of flavor, and then Muslim against Muslim in the dust-up that followed! If Saddam had thrown one missile that struck Israel and caused a retaliatory strike, the deal would have unraveled like a ball of yarn. The United States, it will be noted, soothed the ruffled fur of Israel by supplying them with Patriot Missiles for defense, and with the admonition that financial aid would cease if they did not toe the party line and refrain from shooting back! Although not kept on the front page in the news, everyone was treading on very thin shelled eggs for the entire period of hostilities.

Following the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, I again trudged back to the *World’s Largest Litterbox*, to be assailed with a “new” Saudi Military persona! After all, they had personally won the first one quite handily, and now were wearing “Patton-esque” uniforms with binoculars around their



necks posing on book covers while writing about their glorious victories against their enemies. Self-deception is a marvelous thing!

In retrospect it's well that we were able to get that first Saudi Battalion of Camelnecks squared away to defend the shores of Ras Al Gar, and make sure that our Battalion Staff Officers knew how to schedule head calls, using the appropriate number of sheets of tissue! I've always wondered what granulation of sand they used in the field?

**ROC**

## End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> While the Sunnis and the Shiites are both of the Muslim persuasion (*kinda', but not quite like Baptists and Methodists – there is much more animosity between Muslim factions!*), they have different views on the subject, stemming originally from the “real” inheritors of Muhammad's leadership following his demise. Both think they are correct which leads to (sometimes violent) conflict. As a comical example in Jeddah during the annual Hajj (obligatory pilgrimage, once in a lifetime trip to Mecca for the faithful), the Shiites have special busses with the tops cut off to allow them to be closer to Allah (true story!). I've always wondered what their submarines look like? Hummm...

Saudi has a Sunni majority whereas in Iraq there is a Shiite majority. Through Saddam, the Sunnis ran the country with an iron hand, and kept the Shiites under their thumb resulting in a seething discontent of the more numerous Shiite majority. Unlike Iraq, the Saudis do not openly persecute the Shiites. The Shiites in Iraq however, were definitely treated as second class citizens and are now looking for revenge! This does NOT bode well! The Saudis may have been originally backing Saddam for a well thought out reason. A Shiite uprising could stand the entire mid-East on its head!

<sup>2</sup> “Head-call” is “Navy-Speak” for a call of nature... The Army would speak of going to the Latrine, and a civilian would simply utilize the bathroom.





## **The Saga of Black Cat**

**Taken from *Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC***  
**By Dick Culver**

I tell the following story with some trepidation. I initially had declined to include this one in my “Camel Tails,” but after some consideration, I decided that it was just too funny to let lapse into the mists of time. My only caution is that it is probably not for the ears (or eyes) of the younger set. While not exactly “X-Rated” it should receive at least a *PG-17* label. That having been said, herein lies the tale (tail?).

In 1985 both the Marines and the Navy had a training presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There were five retired Marines recruited to raise and train the Royal Saudi Marine Corps, and three former Navy SEALs and one retired Army Special Forces type running what was called the Saudi Arabian Special Forces Unit. This was something of a misnomer, as what they should have called the outfit was the Special Navy Unit or the Special Naval Warfare unit. The Marines consisted of three former USMC Force Reconnaissance Marines (Pat Teague, Skip Hartnett, and myself), one Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expert (Rod Roper), and a former Nuclear Security man and weapons expert (Paul Shomper).



**“Black Cat”  
Much Beloved  
Feline of the  
Saudi Naval Forces**

The Navy Unit had their share of problems, as virtually none of their students were qualified swimmers and what little aquatic experience they had acquired had been overseen by a gaggle of Pakistani-types doing an exchange tour with the Saudi Navy. We watched with some amusement as the Pakis used poles (not unlike cane fishing poles, albeit a bit stouter) with a rope attached and tied to the fledgling Saudi frogmen allowing them to be towed up and down the indoor swimming pool until they sank or learned how to swim! Hummm... Underwater scuba navigation had been accomplished by the Pakis pre-anchoring lengths of cable on the ocean floor leading to the beach that allowed the stalwart Saudi Sailors to pull themselves hand-over-hand to the beach. The use of the magnetic compass was difficult to teach on dry land for our Marines and apparently a virtual impossibility to teach to the scuba students underwater. The Pakis had solved the problem in a most workmanlike fashion, although the outcome in combat would be problematical to say the least.

Since we in the Marine Corps contingent shared many of the skills of the former SEALs, parachute jumping, scuba techniques, etc., we watched with some amusement at the rather



halting progress that our brothers in arms were experiencing... They had our sympathy, and our good wishes. We rarely trained together, but often commiserated when actual training was not in progress, as we knew many of the same people in the service and were operating with the same level of incompetence with our charges. We realized that our efforts would probably go for naught in the big picture, but what the hell, it was a living and kept us from playing in traffic.

When training was slow or we were between classes, we would often hold the traditional military bull sessions common between our two sister services. We (as Americans) held some built in necessity for accumulating pets, and lavishing affection on them as only the U.S. military can do, which brings us to the story of our respective cats.

Now having served on both coasts of Saudi Arabia (the first two years in the Jeddah area bordering on the Red Sea, and the last year or so on the east coast near Jubail [Ras-al-Gar]) on the *Persian Gulf* which the Saudis adamantly maintained was properly named The *Arabian Gulf*. The Red Sea side of the peninsula is virtually devoid of dogs, but is almost overrun with felines! Cats, cats and more cats! When you'd hit one of the metal dumpsters with a rock, it would literally rain cats of all types, kinds, and descriptions. Conversely, the Persian Gulf side is overrun with dogs, with virtually no cats in sight. The tale of Black Cat necessarily took place during our tour in the Jeddah area.



**Bonnie Pussy Cat on fence enjoying the Saudi Sun**

totally amazed, and figured it must be something about a Saudi feline instinct, having to do with the survival of the fittest. Clyde departed the area never to be seen again although we searched the various wood piles and the boat locker looking for the rejected cat. Kipling had it right when he said that the female of the species is more deadly than the male! At any rate, we attempted to bring young Bonnie up to be a proper young Marine kitty.

While this was going on, the Navy types had come up with a black cat marked remarkably like Sylvester Pussy Cat of the

We came across two small kitties of orange and white persuasion, barely weaned from their momma. Since the Saudis often sent extermination parties around to kill the excess kitties, we decided to save the tykes from the likes of the cat killers. We named the pair Bonnie and Clyde, and brought milk from the mess hall, and all sorts of goodies for their enjoyment and pleasure. It became obvious early on, that Bonnie was the dominant kitten of the pair. Once she discerned that Clyde was consuming more than she considered to be his fair share of the chow and goodies, she soundly whipped his furry fanny, boxing his ears and sending him packing! We were



**Black Cat surveying his prospective harem**

cartoon series. Lacking the imagination of the Marines, they quite mundanely named the male feline of their affection, simply "Black Cat." Conversations between the Navy folks and the Marines of course occasionally speculated on a cross breeding of the Navy's Black Cat, and the proper young lady USMC kitty, Bonnie. This was to take place somewhat in the future however as they were both rather young.

I'll have to give the Navy their due however, Black Cat lacked for nothing a cat could desire. He was petted, allowed to sleep in their desk drawers, and brought continual delicacies to tickle a cat's pallet. I was totally taken aback one morning however when I walked into the Navy office as it appeared that one of the old chiefs was satisfying Black Cat's most intimate desires by what appeared to be... Naw, even the NAVY isn't THAT perverted I thought, but when I mentioned the apparent perversion, the Navy gents simply looked at me as if I had two heads and made mention that "how was a kitty to learn?" and they didn't want Black Cat to get any kitty venereal diseases. I went outside shaking my head, not believing what I "thought" I had just witnessed. Several others of our group verified that they too had witnessed a similar sight. Dear Allah! That's what you get when you get too much sun and have spent too long in the Kingdom with no diversions!

Taking the above descriptions of the Navy's attachment to Black Cat, they became visibly distraught when their favorite kitty came down with what appeared to be a case of the mange! Horrors! Now what? The Marines and the Sailors had a confab on the proper treatment of feline mange, and no consensus was forthcoming. I pointed out that when I was a kid, they often treated mange on an animal with sulfur mixed with axle grease. Since nobody knew



where to acquire any sulfur that solution was out, besides what do you do with a cat smeared with axle grease who's used to sleeping (and goodness knows what else) in your lap! Back to the drawing board!

I suddenly had an inspiration. I had gotten some nasty coral cuts on my feet earlier while attempting to get our young Marines used to getting their bodies wet in the Red Sea, and urban legend said that the coral indigenous to that region could result in some nasty infections. I figured that perhaps soaking my feet in peroxide might just preclude

### **Bonnie attending to administrative duties with the RSMC**

such a disaster. A trip to the local Saudi Navy Sick Bay brought me in contact with an exchange Paki Navy Hospital Corpsman. He obliged my request for a bottle of peroxide in a rather large dark brown bottle with an obviously dissolving plastic cap, apparently the result of oxidation from the contents. Since the writing was in Arabic, any cautions and/or strength of the contents were undecipherable to this Marine infidel. I should have perceived something was amiss when I detected the slightest hint of a smile on the Paki's usual deadpan expression.

Upon repairing to my digs, I dutifully washed my feet and looked around in vain for some sort of receptacle to pour the peroxide into to soak my cut-up feet. Finally I decided to use the sink and by standing on the commode seat, I was able to soak each foot for what seemed to be an appropriate amount of time. I should have been suspicious as my feet were actually



foaming (much like when you wash your mouth out with peroxide). Now it didn't sting, so I dried my feet, but suddenly it felt like someone was using a blowtorch on the bottom of them! Dear Allah, this did not bode well, as it was about a three quarter mile walk to the mess hall! I managed to get to my rack and lay down with my feet hanging over the end of it to air out. It was almost two hours before the pain had subsided enough for me to get a pair of shoes on and hoof it to the mess hall, but they were still mighty tender. Apparently this stuff was almost pure peroxide, and had literally boiled all the dirt and oils out of the soles of my feet. Damn, I sure wished I could have read the label (along with any cautions) – that stuff was potent! My barely tapped bottle sat unused in the medicine chest with a piece of plastic wrapped around the top as the original plastic cap had simply crumbled in my hand, NOW I understood why!

Back to Black Cat, (you can probably see this one coming). The retired (U.S.) Navy Chief SEAL hospital corpsman we simply called *Doc* in the manner of the Naval Service, allowed as how this stuff might be just the stuff to cure Black Cat's mange! I had not gotten too descriptive when I described how it boiled the dirt and oil out of my feet, and prevented infection, so Doc told me to bring the stuff to work. I dutifully packed my bottle of liquid "oxidizer" (this stuff could have been used for rocket fuel!) and took it over to the Navy digs.



**Black Cat looks on as his "intended" relaxes  
between training sessions**

Doc poured the sink full of the stuff (it was a BIG bottle), and prepared to immerse the cat! Now Black Cat had always been treated like royalty and suspected nothing – anything Doc wanted to do was alright with him (by now I'm thinking back to previous evolutions I had witnessed). Much as with my feet, the effect was not immediate, and Black Cat seemed to be luxuriating in his cool bath in the summer heat. As Black Cat's lesions started to froth when the peroxide got down to the seat of the mange, he suddenly let out a yowl that would have cracked fine crystal wear! That cat became a virtual flurry of hysterical activity, almost literally rounding the walls in a perpendicular

fashion, never apparently hitting the deck, much in the manner seen in cartoons. No one could catch him, and I suspect that if someone *HAD* been able to lay hands on that enraged feline, it would not have been a pretty sight! Here his favorite sailor and alleged surrogate sexual partner had just dipped him in liquid fire! Black Cat fled the building through an open door and was gone for days. Search parties came to naught, but after about a week, Black Cat's remembrance of good chow began to ameliorate his disposition towards the U.S. Navy in general and Doc in particular. Upon Black Cat's return his fur had turned bright red, compliments of his peroxide bleach-job. It took several months for his fur to return to its normal color. Black Cat resumed residence with his Navy mentors, but he never again was quite as cozy with the co-inhabitants of the Navy quarters.

I went to great pains to keep from inquiring how the cat scalding session had affected Black Cat's and Doc's rather cozy relationship, Miz Culver didn't raise any damn-fools! At some future date, I'll relate how Black Cat was finally introduced to normal feline-type carnal relationships with his intended, Miss Bonnie Pussy Cat.



## ***"Bugs" Teague, Jeddah Bootlegger***

*Taken from Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC*

**N**ow here's one that needs a bit of explanation! The Muslim faith eschews the use of alcoholic beverages, and discourages the use of tobacco. While most Muslims have at one time or another tasted "a drop of the grape," it is not approved or openly allowed by the religious hierarchy, most especially in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Apparently during the time of Muhammad, most of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were not above "wining and wenching" in a fashion that would have made the citizens of the legendary cities of Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Allah's Greatest and Final Prophet (May Peace be Upon Him!), decided that the image of a sober citizen would reflect greater credit on the new religion, and perhaps prevent drunken brawls, wench poaching, and maybe even result in improved Camel driving safety. Whatever the reasons, the rule was laid down and the (devoutly) faithful were and are required to abstain from alcohol.

Other prohibitions for the faithful require the faces of wenches be covered (or at least "blurred" by wispy veils), as is any exposed (suggestive) display of limbs, to keep licentious Muslims from succumbing to a violation of the "thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" Commandment. I'm sure that the intent had some merit, and I've even read treatises from Muslim Lady converts in the Western World praising the idea. The Muslim convert comments however, were pointed toward the idea of ladies not having to use makeup or indulge in constant dieting... Hummm? I have definitely seen a few non-Muslims ladies in the Western World who could benefit from the "potato sack" routine as a favor to the citizenry at large, but I digress...

As things progressed and the religious Mullahs grew in power and supposed wisdom, they began to interject their own prejudices into the overall scheme of things. Often new products came to light that were not known in Muhammad's time have similarly been demonized, if not strictly prohibited. Tobacco was deemed to be bad for the health of a Muslim following Sir Walter Raleigh's return to England from the New World. British influence in trading in the Eastern Hemisphere caused it's migration to other countries in the normal course of commerce. Hardly anyone would argue that tobacco is good for your health (Muslim and Infidel alike), but despite being frowned on, a goodly portion of the Saudis smoke like chimneys.

The Saudis are extremely strict with regards to the no alcoholic beverage routine within the boundaries of Saudi Arabia proper. If an infidel is caught drinking you are a sure seat-holder

on the next aircraft leaving for the States (or your country of origin). Hushed conversations with some of the older U.S. Special Forces folks in “The Kingdom” claim, (unofficially of course), that they were surreptitiously used to put down an attempted takeover of Mecca during one of the annual Hajj pilgrimages, thus violating the Saudi restriction of having no “infidel” ever set foot in the holy city. Such a takeover would be disastrous for all hands however, so occasionally the rules can be bent. If the Sa’ud Family were overthrown, the entire oil consortium would be in disarray, and a situation similar to the late hate and discontent in Kuwait would be a definite possibility. All this leads to the Saudis keeping the lid on “un-Muslimlike behavior” within the Kingdom proper. It falls within the old adage of being “purer than Caesar’s wife” and serves as a pious front presented to a number of jealous Muslim neighbors. Many other Muslim/Arabic countries would dearly love share in “Allah’s Oil” and to have the prestigious Muslim duty of assuming custodianship of Mecca and Medina.

That having been said, once a Saudi Citizen (with attendant wives) becomes airborne and past the Saudi airspace on a non-Saudi airline, a line forms to the washroom facility on both isles of the aircraft. Saudis, (both men and women), enter dressed in their traditional Arabic garb, and come back looking like an ad out of Brooks Brothers or Ralph Lauren. The figurative gloves are off, and appropriate libations are ordered from the flight attendants. The Saudis seem quite at home in the western culture and apparently if not physically hanging their “Gutras and Agals<sup>1</sup>” within the confines of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they are quite content to sample the evils of the decadent West (just to make sure they understand what they are against of course!).

King Fahd himself is said to take occasional trips to a “dry-out facility” rumored to be located in England? Just tales told out of school of course, but who knows? The only LEGAL (drinking) alcohol in country is available in the various Embassy or Consulate Compounds where the grounds constitute (for instance), U.S. sovereign territory and is exempt by diplomatic protocol. Unfortunately, for the more than *occasionally* thirsty individual, trips to the Consulate and/or Embassy, and social occasions are *sometimes* type of things and not available at a moment’s notice. For those inhabiting the Kingdom who enjoy an occasional “nip” on demand, there is only one answer other than the black market. Bootlegging! Shades of Chicago in the 1920s! Such activity, if not flaunted in the official faces of the locals, is simply ignored. When engaged in a bit of grocery shopping in the local Supermarkets, the contents of other westerner’s shopping carts bring about a barely suppressed grin. Obviously western inhabitants in the Kingdom come past with bottles of non-alcoholic grape juice, and their shopping cart baskets are literally overflowing with potentially fermentable fruits, such as oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit. Strangely enough, the average westerner seems to go through prodigious quantities of sugar and yeast – baking lots of bread I suspect!

Some of the more inventive engineers even build passable stills, complete with condensation coils, and mash cooking pots. One lad living in our Condo Complex (rather ominously called “The Twin Towers”), had apparently acquired a key to an unassigned apartment to house his distillery (wouldn’t be terribly intelligent to run a working still in your own quarters of course). The moonshiner was from Montana, and normally wore cowboy boots with his civilian clothes. After a rather spirited sand-storm, the breeze-ways between the apartments were covered with a light coating of sand. The individual in charge of maintenance was checking for any possible damage due to the spirited wind attendant to the storm. He noted several sets of cowboy boot prints tracing a path between our Montana lad’s quarters and the unused (and supposedly unoccupied apartment). A quick turn of the key

found the subject still set up in the kitchen, and obviously in operating order. Our hero could have saved himself a trip home with the use of a broom, and perhaps by wearing a different style of footwear! ...However, Montana beer isn't all that bad when it comes right down to it.

All of this leads me to my tale of a noxious brew commonly known as "Jeddah Jin" back in the mid-1980s. Now Pat Teague had preceded me into Saudi by about 6-weeks, and had already gotten oriented and accustomed to the local culture. On our first Saudi Weekend (Saudi weekends are Thursdays and Fridays, with Friday being their holy day roughly equivalent to the Christian Sunday). Patrick suggested that we pile in the company car and go to an apartment out in town a friend of his leased. I couldn't imagine what would be the attraction of leaving our rather comfortable digs, but he just grinned and I followed. We wound around until he found the place, and we took the elevator to one of the upper decks. Once introductions had been made, Pat took me back to look at his mysterious five gallon jug stuffed into a cabinet. "Sniff this," he said proudly, taking the top off a batch of something that seemed to have a life of its own! No question, this stuff was fermenting, and I began to understand hiding his chem lab in a location totally apart from our normal haunts. He scooped out a ladle full of the evil looking (and smelling) liquid and said, "here, give THIS a taste!" (obviously proud of the concoction). Dear Allah! No question about its alcoholic content, but it was faintly reminiscent of drinking the oozing liquid left over from a forgotten batch of fruit in the basement! It was alcoholic enough to preclude being poisoned by imprisoned creepy-crawly critters that may have fallen in, but it was not for the faint of heart. Not only that, it left a distinctly yeast flavored coating on the back of your teeth!

"What the heck was that?" I asked. "**Jeddah Jin**," he says looking proudly at his five-gallon jug! I didn't want to hurt his feelings as this stuff was obviously the source of some pride, but even in a totally dry country, I wasn't anxious to swill great quantities of that particular batch!

"Does it always taste like that?" I asked cautiously.

"Naw, sometimes it doesn't come out so good," he said.

"You mean this is a primo batch?" I said somewhat unbelievably.

"A decent batch, but not a great batch," sez Patrick.

I make a mental note to investigate straining paint thinner through loaves of bread! Whew!

As time progressed of course, Pat got considerably better at his secondary trade, and the stuff became "almost" drinkable (notice the "*almost*"). Seems that the stuff varies considerably with the amount of Grapefruit, Orange and Lemon mixture, and the amount of fermenting time. A true artisté could make the stuff sing I'm told, but I began to romance the Marine Guard at the Consulate<sup>2</sup> as a way of avoiding the Poison Control Center.

To get a proper appreciation for the process, you must understand that this stuff doesn't have a decent vintage, at least not in the normal sense of the word. There are no "good years" for "JJ" but perhaps a "good week" or even a "good day." True experts could tell a batch by a "good hour" but I never got fond enough of the stuff to work up any expertise in "JJ" tasting. Never could get used to the "bouquet" hee, hee, hee...

For those with an adventuresome spirit, I herewith include the formula for "Jeddah Jin" as I so carefully transcribed it long ago.

So, here's sand in your eye<sup>3</sup>, and "%\$#@ " (a verb) the whole damned crowd and the

Camel(s) they rode in on!

~ SATISFYING AND REFRESHING (Yeah, right!) ~

#### ***“JEDDAH JIN” FORMULA***

- 2 Grapefruit, Quartered
- 2 Lemons, Quartered
- 2 Potatoes, Quartered
- 6 To 8 Oranges, Quartered
- 5 Pounds Of Sugar Dissolved In Hot Or Boiling Water
- 1 Tablespoon Of Yeast Dissolved In Hot Water (Insure that the yeast has started to work)

The above ingredients are to be placed in a plastic five (5) gallon container filled with water.

The container is to be left open and stored in a cool dry place.

Check daily to insure that the mixture is brewing ...also taste after the ‘third or fourth day.

With “J J,” long brewing can result in a sour batch; normally 5 to 8 days is sufficient.

Transfer the resultant brew to mason jars or bottles that can be sealed.

Make sure that you have some sort of stomach pump available to remedy any miscalculations!

Do ***NOT*** operate any machinery that requires hand-eye coordination following any significant intake of this “witches brew!”

So here’s to “***Bugs Teague***” the notorious Bootlegger of Jeddah (named after “***Bugs Moran***” who ran the North Side Mob in Chicago in the 1920s, a major competitor of Al Capone in the bootlegging wars). Without Pat, I wouldn’t have had nearly so much fun, and my Camel Tails would have been much the poorer and less colorful! Thanks for the memories my good and trusted friend!

***ROC***

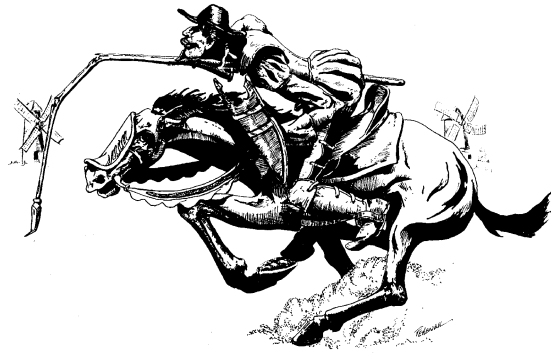
#### **End Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Gutras and Agals are the traditional Arabic headdress including the black rope and the cloth head covering often called irreverently “the table cloth and fanbelt”... The fanbelt (according to legend) was originally a camel hobble, twisted into a loop and placed on the cloth head protection as a convenient method of storage.

<sup>2</sup> The Marine Guard at the Consulate held monthly parties, often inviting “favored” guests to attend. The Marines had ***many*** “friends” as they had the only legal booze in Jeddah. Since the parties were held on “American Soil” (according to diplomatic convention), beer and hooch were available to the party goers in reasonable quantities. Departing the Consulate in an obviously inebriated condition however could potentially result in Saudi Jail Time!

<sup>3</sup> The “*Sand in your eye*” toast, is a take-off on the old gruesome toast from the muddy trenches in France. When they raised their glasses and said “here’s mud in your eye” it alluded to being buried in the muddy terrain on the battlefield and “patted in the face with a spade” in a manner of speaking. The “*intercourse*” the whole damned crowd and the camel(s) they rode in on is of course self explanatory.



# The Infamous “Escape Clause” ...

By “The Master Jouster”

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Endnotes are indicated in (red)

In the wake of the latest news releases concerning the Oklahoma City Bombing there seems to be a resurgence of interest in the possibility of a Mid-Eastern connection to John Doe number 2, (and maybe numbers 3, 4 and 5 if in fact there are that many extra "John Does")... Even if it should turn out that there are no Mid-Eastern connections to Oklahoma City, the documented fact remains that many of the air hijackings and the World Trade Center Bombing were undeniably the work of Muslim Terrorists.

You might well ask; *"who the heck cares what the ethnic origin of the terrorists are?"* ... or; *"what possible difference could the fact that the terrorists are Muslims?"* Haven't we had our share of "Christian Terrorists"? Religion (or *professed religion*) seems to have had little or no bearing on "savagery" throughout the ages! Check out the recorded actions of the Christian Knights during the Crusades! Many of those embracing one religion or another have committed acts that can only be described as *"bestly"* or *"horrible"*. The mass murder of millions in Cambodia was overseen by many claiming to be either Catholics or Buddhists. Many of the Vietnamese who executed their own countrymen (after the fall of Saigon) were supposedly practicing Catholics (due to the French influence). The European Jews were slaughtered en-mass during the Holocaust by an ostensibly Christian Nazi Germany (although there are some who claim that the Nazis were *not* Christians regardless of their fascination with early Christian relics). Were not the "inquisitions" carried out in the Middle Ages with the blessings of the Pope himself? How could the Muslim Religion come up with anything more horrible than some of these examples?

To understand just what makes a Muslim Terrorist so deadly, you must have at least a rudimentary knowledge of what makes a Muslim "tick". I'll try to keep this short and to the



point and to keep it interesting without getting deep into the various sects and sub-sects that make up the followers of Muhammad.

First, you will usually hear Muslims refer to *their* God as "Allah". Please understand that Allah is simply the Arabic word for "**The** God" and He (or *She* for the Femi-Nazis) is exactly the same God worshipped by the Christians and the Jews. You see, all three religions share the same "Old Testament" varying only in minor details. The "biggie" for the Muslims is that they feel that when Abraham took his first born son up the mountain to be sacrificed in accordance with the instructions from God (Allah), it was in fact *Ishmael*, not *Isaac*, that he placed on the altar. It seems that Abraham's wife Sara was a bit "long of tooth" and was barren, so Abraham took a concubine named "Hagar" (a not uncommon practice in those days) who then bore him a son "Ishmael". The unthinkable then happened... Sara suddenly found herself "with child". *Her* issue was Isaac, who the Jews claim was the son offered up to God as a sacrifice. This is of course disputed as I said before, by the Muslims. Sara, having a woman's temperament, ordered Hagar banished (along with Ishmael) to the desert. Hagar and Ishmael were hurting for water and Hagar (so the story goes) struck the ground with a rock (some say stick?), and viola' the great "*Zam-Zam*" Spring came forth, and the city of Mecca was founded. The Jews claim Isaac was the founder of the Jewish People and the Muslims feel that Ishmael was the founder of the Arabic People... and so it goes...

The Muslims believe in Jesus Christ and feel that he is in fact a great prophet, second only to Muhammad himself. The Muslims feel however, that **they** are the only religion that truly believes in only one God, the Jews having "*blown it*" by creating the Golden Calf and the Christians having "*screwed it up*" by deifying Jesus Christ... The simple fact is that even the Muslims believe that both the Jews and the Christians are "*People of The Book*" and therefore tied in a somewhat loose common knot. The *Arabic* Muslims don't hate the Jews because they are Jews, since both the Jews and the Arabs are of a common Semitic Tribal origin. The *Arabic* Muslims simply feel that the Jews are misguided (or misinformed) Semitic brothers. The Muslim's **real** "*hate and discontent*" is toward the so-called Jewish "*Zionists*" (those set on reclaiming Israel from the Arabs) who (the Muslims feel) are quite unfairly confiscating the lands of good Muslim brothers and killing Arabs in the process. At least part of this "hate and discontent" is also aimed at anyone assisting the Jews in this "Zionist" effort (virtually the entire Christian World).

My personal experience in the Mid-East tells me that the *Saudi* Arabians (or at least the Saudi Arabian Government), would truly like to be friends to the United States but cannot understand our obvious bias towards the nation of Israel. I must admit a certain logic in their reasoning myself. The Saudis always more than pay their own way, cost us nothing, keep the lid on oil prices and do not attempt to sink our ships when it becomes expedient to their military cause (check out the Israeli attack on and attempt to sink the U.S.S. Liberty during the Six Day War in 1967, resulting in the wounding and killing of a number of U.S. Servicemen).

The real key to the reason that a Muslim terrorist is especially dangerous is found in the way that they interpret the Old Testament's description of the "Resurrection". The Muslims are indeed people of the Old Testament and are big into the "eye for an eye" and "a tooth for a tooth" concept. They also buy the same Heaven and Hell as the Jews and the Christians. According to the Muslim version, the dead person lying in his or her grave will be visited by three especially "big and ugly muvvas" with iron mallets. The recently deceased is asked three questions. First he (or she) is asked "*which direction they face when they pray*" and

they must answer *"towards Mecca"* (originally it was Palestine). They are then asked, *"how many times a day they must pray,"* and they must answer *"five"*! The last question is, *"who is the greatest and final prophet?"* and they must answer *"Muhammad"*! If they answer correctly, their grave widens and a large window opens up so that they may see their place in heaven while they await the Resurrection. If however, they give the wrong answer(s), they are beaten by these *"big uglies"* with the iron mallets until their bones intertwine (their description). The somewhat abused corpses are then turned "face down". Their graves then close in on them and squeeze them (quite uncomfortably) and they are given a "little itty-bitty" window through which they may observe their "standing room in Hell" while they await their punishment after the Resurrection... Now we come to the real meat of the discussion, *the ultimate "Escape Clause"*... And this *"escape clause"* is what makes them so dangerous as terrorists!

The escape clause is essentially a footnote to what is known as a *"Jihad"* or Holy War. It seems that their interpretation of the *"Koran"*(1) recognizes that an occasional "Holy War" against the "infidels"(2) is necessary to preserve the Muslim Religion and of course **some** of the Koranic religious teachers espouse the eradication of *all* other religions by the Muslims as a "holy cause". The common thread that runs throughout the entire "Muslim catechism" is that any Muslim killed while involved in a "Jihad" gets to bypass the long wait in the grave (staring at their future home in Heaven or *worse*). They will be **instantly** whisked to Heaven if they are killed while participating in such a "Jihad". ...and will thus avoid the possibility of giving a wrong answer during the visit of the three tough "hammer wielding" visitors to their graves! The current definition of a "Jihad" (in some Muslim quarters) has come to cover a number of activities that fall short of a full-fledged war. Virtually any violent activity in defense of (or constituting vengeance for acts alleged to have been directed against) the Muslim Religion (or even a Muslim country) is thought of as a "Jihad"... Now if you are a religious zealot, in this case a Muslim Zealot, and you really, **really** want to find a way to be with your Heavenly Father without waiting for what must seem to be the proverbial "eternity"... this would present a unique opportunity!

Please understand that not all Muslims are religious zealots, anymore than the average Christian is a religious zealot. Many of them are rather lax about Mosque attendance and while they may consider their religious beliefs to be profound, they could or would not be considered to be religious "crazies". If you will be honest with yourself, you will have to agree that in the United States we have our share of religious cults and extremists (consider the mass suicide of the "Heaven's Gate" types to hitch a ride on an approaching comet... and David Koresh and his Branch Davidians in Waco (not to *mention* Jim Jones' "Cool-Aid Cocktails" in the Jonestown mass suicide...)). The problem is that when Muslim religious extremists become terrorists, they all seem to buy into the same "Jihad" routine and believe that they are in a *"Win-Win"* situation... In a "best case scenario" they will avenge the Muslim faith, a Muslim country, or their Muslim brothers. If they are *killed* accomplishing (or even *attempting* to accomplish) these things, they are *instantly* taken to Allah to spend the rest of eternity. Here we have *glory* and *reward* (paraphrasing "Indiana Jones")... without the mental or physical discomfort of spending much of their time in a moldy grave awaiting the resurrection and their just deserts (a very unpleasant prospect even under ideal conditions)! Rumor control says that they are also promised 72 virgins who will await them in Paradise (a not unwelcome treat for a number of these characters who's main exposure to women has been limited to black potato sacks propelled by almost invisible feet!) (3).

There my friends is the ***"Infamous Escape Clause"*** and the reason that all Muslim Terrorists are *extremely* dangerous! These are not simply some nuts with an axe to grind,

these folks mean *business*, and if it causes their death so much the better! If they say that they are prepared to die for their cause, ***they almost certainly mean exactly that!*** They will not bargain, and they very rarely bluff. Non-Muslim Political Terrorists are a different breed of cat. For instance, the IRA terrorists would just as soon "live to fight another day" in most situations... besides which, the IRA lads may even reason that if they live, they may indeed be able to perform even greater acts of terror for the "cause" in the future! Not so the Muslim Terrorist... When they strike, when they hijack an airliner, or show up "*wrapped in a vest of high explosives*", the law enforcement folks dealing with *those* terrorists had *better* take them very VERY seriously. Never forget the Muslim Terrorists are operating with the sure and certain knowledge that *they* win either way...

## ROC '97

### Endnotes for: (*The Infamous "Escape" Clause*)

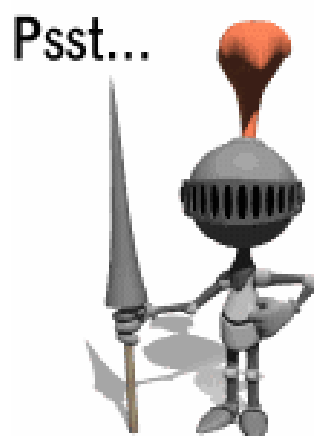
- 1) The "Koran" (or Qur'an) is sorta' like their New Testament. The Koran contains God's revelations to Muhammad laying out in great detail how all good Muslims should worship God and conduct themselves as faithful followers of Allah.
- 2) An "infidel" is literally a "non-believer". The Christians usually referred to the Muslims as "Infidels" during the Crusades.
- 3) The rumored "Heavenly Reward" of 72 virgins upon arrival in Heaven was obviously promised before it was discovered (and chronicled in the "Marine's Hymn"), that the Streets of Heaven are Guarded by United States Marines. The Muslims are obviously not well checked out in the liberty habits of young Marines or they would realize chance of encountering 72 Virgins in Heaven would seem slim at best! Perhaps the mullahs need to go back to school realizing their "Heavenly rewards packet" is in desperate need of updating! Perhaps a newly updated and adjusted "rewards package" (using the above information – would the Marines lie in their Hymn?) ...might tend to dim the burning desire of volunteers for the human bomb brigade?



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# Miscellaneous

by Mustang Major Dick Culver, USMC (Ret)



# The Last Train Holdup.....

By Dick Culver

This one probably doesn't exist in any of the record books, but it's true none the less. It all started with a western movie made in 1948 starring Alan Ladd, Robert Preston, Donald Crisp, and William Demarest. The plot ran roughly as follows. Alan Ladd played a soft spoken railroad detective named Luke 'Whispering' Smith, noted for his ability to bring in anyone causing grief to the railroad. He was eminently successful, and found himself ultimately after an old friend, Murray Sinclair (played by Robert Preston), who has been working for the railroad as a trouble shooter. Murray is living (apparently) above the means of his railroad salary. His prosperous ranch is such that his railroad stipend would not justify.



**C&O Locomotive used to pull the "Chessie" and the "Sportsman" prior to their conversion to steam**

...You can see this one coming of course. Murray's wife played by Brenda Marshall who was once a "flame" of Whispering Smith and still carries a "torch" for him. (little play on words here, heh, heh...). William Demarest (playing Bill Dansing), is an old friend of Smith and who knows Murray Sinclair from Murray's current position on the railroad as a troubleshooter. Demarest voices the unspoken consensus that "Whisperin' Smith's" old friend is responsible for looting train wrecks, working for an early day Western Godfather-type, Barney Rebstock, played by Donald Crisp. All in all a great western, even in today's conglomerate of shoot-em ups.

## Setting the Stage:

I was initially living in Ashland, Kentucky, where my Dad was the Warden of the Federal Penitentiary, some 5-miles out of town in a small wide spot in the road called "Summit, Kentucky". The rug-rats of the Prison personnel went to school in Ashland, transported by an old panel truck that took us to the "institutions of higher learning", and returned us following the daily attempts to educate us for whatever our future pursuits might be. Having relatively few youngsters in our local (prison) community, we tended to make new friends among our more "couth" schoolmates in town. One of my best newly acquired compatriots was a youngster named Billy Joe Lockwood. Billy Joe's dad was the Road Foreman of Engines for the Eastern Division of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.

Ashland, Kentucky was an interesting city, being located essentially at the junction of Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia (a true tri-state area). It was a bit more cosmopolitan than the average Kentucky settlement, and was a/the Railroad hub of the Eastern Division of the C&O Railroad. Ashland was also the location of Armco Rolling Mills (heavily into the production of steel products). The local Radio Station was called **WCMI**, standing for **Where Coal Meets Iron**. Many of the citizens of the Ashland were not natives of the Kentucky Hill Country, but had congregated in the area due to their expertise in one or another of the

various industrial pursuits. Ashland was not one of your average “hick” towns that exist in the imagination of those who picture Kentucky as a backwoods conglomerations of hillbillies.

Both Billy Joe and I shared an avid interest in railroading. I had been interested in *The Great Iron Horse* since I was a wee nubbins’. We just naturally gravitated towards one another. Bill had always figured on following in his daddy’s footsteps and becoming a Railroad Engineer. Bill’s daddy had acquired his position as the Road Foreman of Engines after many years as an Engineer on the C&O. You must understand that this was still in the age of steam, and the Diesel had not become the “fate accompli” of the steel rails that had united the country following the Late War of Northern Aggression (Civil War to you Damn Yankees). We were living in an era that sorta’ straddled a transitional era in our history.

Since we were close buddies, Bill’s daddy got us a summer job as “*assistant firemen*” on the little steam Yard Engines that shuffled the cars around the yards. We were paid a pittance from funds set aside for “casual labor” and not carried on the social security rolls, ...and of course, the minimum wage was some years in the future. I’m sure that the Bill’s dad knew we would have worked for nothing just for the privilege of working around the railroad (not to mention “firing engines”), and soaking up railroad lore and just rubbing shoulders with “real” railroad men! It was a summer of pure fun, and although stuffing coal into the fireboxes of those little yard engines might sound simple, it was enough to put calluses on young hands, and bring forth salty froth from our sweat glands (not to mention a little “salty language”) that can only be imagined in this modern day and time. Current (PC) guidelines require the hiring of relatively frail individuals of both sexes to fill available billets for engineers on the Con-Rail and Amtrak lines. It sorta’ came under the heading of who would have “*thunk-it*”, even in the waning days of steam?

About 1951 my Dad was transferred from Ashland, Kentucky to the Federal Lockup in Petersburg, Virginia (roughly 400-miles to the East). In the way of background, my Dad had been transferred from Petersburg in 1934 to Alcatraz as one of the first five lieutenants assigned to Alcatraz when it became a Federal Prison, then being transferred from Military control, and he was now being transferred back as the Warden. While this was something of a success story, it was not viewed exactly as a plus when you were 15-years old.

Now put yourself in a position of entering your first year of High School and having to leave all of your friends from grade school and Junior High School behind. Even for a guy used to pulling up stakes on a regular basis (when moving around in both the Marine Corps and the Federal Prison System), moving after your 9<sup>th</sup> grade year was a bit traumatic. Being an understanding individual however, my dad agreed that it would be a good transition for me to go spend a few weeks with Billy Joe Lockwood over in Ashland in the Summer of 1951. Not only that, but I got to travel by train (my favorite mode of transportation before the ghastly transition from steam to Diesel power on the railroads).

Nobody checked your baggage in those days, and shaking down a 15-year old kid wasn’t high on their list. I came with appropriate ordnance including an 1878 Colt Double-Action Army in .45 Colt caliber, with a much worn and flaking nickel plated finish. All in all, not exactly a collector’s piece, and one that I would not have shed many tears over losing. ...Still it was a shooter, and in those days (as in these) I never went anywhere unarmed. As with many youngsters in those days, I always had a large western neckerchief, blue jeans and a couple of much faded western style shirts.



## A Fateful Day at the Paramount Theater, “No Mam’, we don’t rob ladies”!

Bill and I got our jobs back that summer, back to firing yard engines, and resuming our old acquaintances in the yards. As usual, they treated us as pets, and patted us affectionately on the heads. We settled into our old routine. ...Until the two of us went to the local Paramount Theater one Saturday morning to watch the weekly Westerns, catching “Whispering Smith”, the railroad yarn as described in the first paragraph above.

Being always into railroading (including model railroading), we got to talking it over and decided that there just hadn’t been a real train holdup since the demise of the old west! Hummm... OK, *now* what? Well, what if, just what *if*, the two of us took the bull by the horns (in the interest of maintaining railroad tradition of course), and pulled off one last train holdup? A long discussion ensued, and we began to plot! When you’re 15, the consequences are sometimes outweighed by the promise of adventure, and so it was...



**The Chessie  
Passenger Logo  
from the C&O  
Railroad 1937-1972**



**The C&O Sportsman circa 1951**

While I was into railroading, Bill was what could only be described as fanatical on the subject. He had essentially memorized most of the major train schedules that flowed into and out of Ashland on regularly scheduled runs. One in particular was called “The Chessie” and ran from Cincinnati, Ohio to Washington, D.C. The same train, with only the name changed was called “The Sportsman” and ran the reverse route from D.C. back to Cincinnati. These little jewels were of the old school complete with “observation cars” complete with searchlights.

Only a few years before (1947), the Presidential whistle-stop tours had been held by the major candidates, with their trains stopping at all major cities for political speeches hoping to sway the electorate. The 1947/48 contest had been between Harry Truman and Tom Dewey. My dad had held me on his shoulders to watch Truman’s speech from the back of his train attempting to sway the electorate.

Remembering the railroad role in such recent political evolutions, a thought came to the pair of us... A regularly scheduled train would be coming by within striking distance. A small town, Catlettsburg, Kentucky was located approximately 13-miles from Ashland along a rather desolate strip of terrain with much of the road-bed fill being built-up out of railroad cinders. Having not been over that way for many years, I imagine that the (then) relatively deserted strip is probably now built up with housing and whatever. ...In those days however, it was for all intents and purposes desolate. Bill reached back in the recesses of his memory of train schedules and came up with the timetable of the “Sportsman” returning from D.C. to Cincinnati. Mercifully, the schedule was in the hours of darkness, and would conceal a couple

of young scalawags bent on maintaining the traditions of Wild West train holdups.

Catlettsburg was a small town located at the junction of the Ohio and the Big Sandy Rivers and was just across the Ohio River from West Virginia. Tradition had it that the back of the Catlettsburg Courthouse still held lead from several shoot-outs between the Hatfields and the McCoys of feuding fame!

The leader of the Hatfield Clan was “Devil Anse” (for Anderson) Hatfield, and hailed from the West Virginia side of the River. The McCoys were Kentuckians. To give you some idea of how many years ago this was, my 6<sup>th</sup> Grade English Teacher had actually met Devil Anse Hatfield when she was a young girl, Devil Anse having succumbed to the effects of a stroke in 1921.



Devil Anse Hatfield

Bill and I both had driver's licenses at the age of 15 (they were pretty lax on ages in those days to accommodate kids driving for farm purposes, and the lack of an Interstate Highway system). We were fairly good sized, and attracted little or no attention while driving. On the appointed night, having checked the schedule carefully, we borrowed his mother's 1948 Studebaker Champion, stashed the garments we were figuring on using to pull off our imitation of Jesse James, and headed for the lonesome strip that existed in those days about half way between Ashland and Catlettsburg. We pulled off on a wide spot up against a bank and put on our neckerchiefs, and battered cowboy hats, and of course, my 1878 Colt Double Action .45 (not loaded, I simply had it along in its holster for appropriate effect – I sure as hell didn't figure on shootin' anyone!). In retrospect, that probably wasn't my smartest move – if anyone on the train had been armed (not out of the question in those days), they'd have been perfectly justified in shooting my fanny! It just wouldn't have been authentic if we hadn't had a “hog leg” along, don'tcha' see? Demanding their “clinkables”<sup>1</sup> without a gen-u-wine “pistolaver”<sup>2</sup> would have gotten us laughed off the train, even if it WAS simply a “prop”!

We had this one all figured out. We were going to stop the train using a readily available item called a “railroad torpedo”. These torpedoes were a packet of compression/impact-sensitive explosive in a square package about the size of a packet of military rifle cleaning patches, albeit a bit thicker. The “powdery” explosive mixture inside the packet was almost unbelievably powerful. I once took a pinch of the stuff, placed it on the sidewalk, and struck it with a hammer. The resultant explosion blew the hammer head “plum off” as the saying goes! No wonder you could hear the noise above the sound of a fully functioning steam locomotive! A fairly wide strip of “lead ribbon” was fastened to the packet and anchored from the inside. These little jewels were used as signaling devices by the conductors and brakemen to alert the Engineers/Firemen to obstructions or hazards on the track ahead. They were extremely loud, and could be heard well above the roar of a steam locomotive (you've got to have heard one of these jewels to appreciate the noise of the “bang”!). Whew! The railroad torpedoes were usually stored in the caboose, baggage car, and/or locomotive cab. Security on such things in those days was essentially nil, and they were easily come by.

One packet (torpedo) placed on the track and anchored by bending the lead ribbon around the rails, signaled “extreme caution”, possible construction or need to slow down on the track ahead. If you placed two of these torpedoes, ten paces apart, it meant “*lock the wheels, probable wreck on the track ahead*”! It was understood, that you didn't have time to



check to make sure, the engineer just locked the wheels and stood by for a possible disaster! When you locked the driving wheels of a steam locomotive, it meant that sparks flew, and everybody stood by for the traditional ram!

The (large) *drive(ing) wheels* of a steam locomotive were separate from the so-called “*tires*” encircling the wheels themselves. When the “*tires*” developed a “flat spot” (caused by a “screeching” stop or became excessively worn from “time in service/mileage”, the tires could be heated in the locomotive shops, and removed from the wheels to be replaced by (a new set of) pristine tires. This was no small task, and created a major operation for the locomotive repair facility, it was not something you did on a whim!

Bill and I had figured to stop the *Sportsman* with two torpedoes placed on the rails, the required ten paces apart. Figuring on the approximate distance necessary for the train to pull to a stop after hearing the twin explosions. We were gonna’ position ourselves in/on the steeply slanting cinder road bed that composed the built-up fill, so that the observation car (last car on a streamlined passenger train of the era) would stop about even with us. Once the train was stopped, we figured to swing aboard the observation car of the now immobile train, cowboy style (sans horses of course). Since we really weren’t interested in robbing anyone, we were simply going to take off our cowboy hats and meander down the aisles of the passenger coaches, refusing to take anything from the female passengers with a comment of “oh no Mam, we don’t rob ladies” or some such chivalric gibberish. Instructions to the male passengers would be something to the effect of “just put yore silver ‘clinkables’ in the hat partner!” We of course, planned to leave our “ill gotten gains” in an obvious spot for their retrieval. The entire thing was simply an adventure, with the possibility of being the last two “yahoos” in history to pull off a train holdup during the age of steam! Everything seemed to be going well, at least at first. We drew straws to see who was going to put the torpedoes on the track, and of course, “I” drew the short straw (drat!).

I dutifully placed the first torpedo and then paced off the required ten paces. So far, so good! We then hunkered down, pulled up our bandanas and waited for the Sportsman to make its appearance. Sure enough, much like “El Duce<sup>3</sup>”, someone had the railroads running on time!

The two explosions rocked the night, and the Sportsman showed the immediate effects of a panic stop. The drivers appeared to lock up and the now immobile wheels threw off sparks that would have done justice to a 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks display. We had come pretty close to judging the stopping point of the aft end of the “Mighty Sportsman”... As the smoke settled, two young “Jesse James” imitators prepared to swing aboard in true Wild West fashion!

As the two young miscreants prepared to embark on a life of crime, it became immediately obvious that something was badly amiss! Before we could get in a position to stand up and prepare to swing aboard, the large spotlight on the rear of the Sportsman came to life! People seemed to be boiling out of the Observation Car, and the light coming from the Spotlight on the end car silhouetted those disembarking as being foul-mouthed, excited and worse yet, armed with pistols! Egad! How in the hell did they know? Had they seen us? What caused such excitement by some extremely agitated and armed hostiles!

Billy Joe and I weren’t exactly stupid, and it became immediately obvious that getting caught with bandanas and a .45 Colt Pistol wasn’t going to result in our being nominated for “teen-agers of the year!” Both Billy Joe and I pulled down our bandanas, and I set about

burying the 1878 Colt in the “cinder-pile”... We then set about personally burying *ourselves* in the cinder bank, making as little noise as possible! This had the makings of a major disaster!

This “search” was carried on for what seemed to be the entire night, but in truth probably only lasted about 15-minutes. The armed searching party finally swung back aboard the train, and the Sportsman started to slowly pull away. Anyone who has ever watched a steam locomotive get underway will picture this clearly. The big drivers started to roll with an initial bit of spinning to pick up some “purchase”, punctuated by much “steam huffing and chuffing” as forward momentum was gained. When the large “drivers” reached the “flat spots” on the now flattened steel tires, a very audible “clank” indicated the location of the flat spots. The flattened “smack” of the wheels became more indistinct as the engine picked up speed. Billy Joe and I looked at one another and a large wave of relief slowly caused the draining of color from our faces! Dear Allah! We both breathed a huge sigh of relief. Heading back to Bill’s house, we repaired to our bedroom, and quietly hit the rack, two very relieved young scalawags. Tomorrow was going to be an interesting day...

We headed down to the railroad shops (engine repair facility) with our ears straining for any scuttlebutt about the previous evening’s festivities. There awaiting a “change of tires” was the locomotive that had been heading the Sportsman the night before. Talk around the shop was wondering about the unexpected sudden stop of a mainline passenger train. Again the talk ran to the possibility of some sort of political entity riding the Sportsman, and attended by appropriate bodyguards. Hummm... well, at least it wasn’t Harry Truman with attendant Secret Service protection piling off the train. Obviously it wouldn’t have done to have asked too many leading questions, since (at least at that moment), no loose talk among the old timers had led to the speculation of two young idiots trying to gain a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

In retrospect, had the gents carrying “heat” captured a pair of young idiots wearing bandanas, and carrying a .45 1878 Colt, I could just picture the headlines that could have resulted – “Son of the former Warden of the Federal Penitentiary in Ashland in custody following attempted train holdup!” Oh good... My Pappy would have been thrilled.

Thinking back on the entire evolution, I don’t know if it was pure chance, dumb luck, or the ultimate switch from steam to Diesel that saved me from a life of crime? Who in the world would have wanted to be remembered for holding up a dadgummed Diesel? How unglamorous can you get? Now occasionally manipulating the system within the Corps to assure the accomplishment of assigned missions or taking care of the youngsters entrusted to your care may well have caused a bit of stretching of the letter of the law, but never the intent...

Semper Fidelis,

**Dick**

**End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> “Clinkables” was a slang term for the “clinkable silver coins” common in the old West.

<sup>2</sup> “*Pistolaver*”- A non-word laughingly used to describe a handgun of any description, be it revolver or semi-automatic. Sometimes used as a “hillbilly” description of your belt gun often carried on a Saturday Night to assorted dances or *hoe-downs*; not to be confused with “*nappy headed hoes*.” Heh, heh, heh...

<sup>3</sup> “El Duce” (Mussolini, the dictator of Italy in WWII) was said to have bragged he had the trains running on time!

# Smedley D. Culver

By Dick Culver

So how did my youngster come by the name of Smedley D. Culver (his real name was James Richard Culver of course, but then that's the gist of the story)? It started out as a joke originally, but got out of hand and lasted for a number of years. Unfortunately my reputation as a slightly unhinged Marine fully capable of naming his young'un "*Smedley*" wasn't that far out of the realm of reality in the mind of many of my acquaintances. I'm not totally sure it ever got totally squared away, but it was fun for a while. Here's how the thing got started.

I had served several years in the old 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company at Camp Del Mar, and was subsequently sent over to become the XO of Golf Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines at Camp Margarita. While I had a great tour with the Force Recon Company and made many friends, eventually however, all good things must come to an end. Certainly being assigned to the legendary 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment could hardly have been construed as a punishment. I found myself as the Executive Officer of a Rifle Company sporting more men than the entire Force Reconnaissance Company was a new experience.

About the time I was departing 1<sup>st</sup> Force, the Reconnaissance Units, specifically the Force Reconnaissance Company units belonging to FMF Pac, were beginning to expand their presence throughout the Pacific Theater (under the guidance of FMF Pac in Hawaii). First Force started by placing a Pathfinder Team on Okinawa to support any potential helicopter landing efforts, should we be required to "*land the landing force*" on a foreign shore. In the 1961/1962 time frame, we hadn't actually worked out our "*heli-borne tactics*", and we were not actively at war with anyone in the Far East. The Vietnam fracas was several years into the future, and we had never actually utilized a full blown Helicopter Assault from amphibious shipping – all this was to be in the not too distant future!

The individual tapped to take our first "permanently deployed" Pathfinder Team to the Far East was an extremely squared away young Marine first lieutenant named Dick Rigg. Now Dick was the sort of individual you would have selected to eventually become the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and when taken as an individual Marine Officer, he "oozed" the personality and good looks that the Marine Corps Recruiting Service would have selected for a recruiting poster. Dick was a tall, good looking (or at least, so the girls seemed to think) individual who had everything he touched turn to gold. He had come out first in virtually every school he had attended and was of the staunch and sterling character recruiting officers would kill for.

Dick certainly had nothing against an occasional beer, although he very seldom consumed more than one during "Happy Hour". He was a devoted family man who taught Sunday School when he was together with his family at Camp Pendleton. When Dick arrived on Okinawa, he bought two of the then obligatory (family) tape recorders at the local PX, and sent one home to his wife Lynn. Dick would then find suitable "kids-books" at the local Army and Air Force Exchanges, read the book into the tape recorder and send it, along with the book back to his wife so she could play it for his youngsters! There was certainly nothing phony about his entire persona, he was truly a good Marine and one of the most dedicated family men I have ever

known! A man of extreme good character and love of family – essentially what the Corps was looking for!

Dick and I had become good friends at the old Recon Company, and while I was bemoaning his getting such a fine assignment (as the deployed Pathfinder Platoon Commander), he was trying to figure out how to trade jobs with me so he could remain in California with his family. It wasn't that he had anything against being assigned to Okinawa, it was simply that he truly loved his family, and his familial togetherness. Dick departed for Okinawa before the entire transplacement evolution had taken place, while I was still with Golf, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. As prestigious as being a member of the old 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was, I would have traded jobs with him in the proverbial heartbeat! I simply liked jumping out of airplanes!

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines was selected, (according to the transplacement scheme of the times), to head for the "Rock" (the slang terminology for Okinawa) in June of 1961. The "transplacement evolution" was a way of switching Battalions from the West Coast to the Far East by simply changing Battalion designations when the new battalion arrived in place and the old Battalion headed back for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Hence, 2/5 (2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines) departed Camp Pendleton, and arrived on Okie as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. People had changed places, but only unit designations actually swapped. It could be a bit confusing, but it was a workable scheme when the Corps was attempting to save money and make the Department of Defense appear to be getting more for it's defense dollar. OK, back to the story...

Originally, 2/5 destined to become 2/9 was assigned to Camp Sukiran on the Rock (Sukiran was area later to be spelled Zukiran and still later for the (Marine) Camp itself to be re-designated Camp Foster). Sukiran was located not too far from the Army's main encampment at Camp Buckner and a fair distance south of Kadena Air Force Base. Within reason at Sukiran, we were allowed to select our roommates if we were collocated with another unit located within the same complex.

As luck would have it, Dick Rigg had a room at Sukiran, but needed an additional roommate to keep the BOQ (Bachelor Officer's Quarters) fully occupied on the books. I was thrilled, and got together with Dick. Sharing a room was a good deal for both of us, being old friends and old ponyos from the Recon Days. This allowed me to scrounge an occasional "permissive jump" with the Pathfinder Detachment, keep my hand in the parachute business, and maintain my association with some of my old Pathfinder troops from my former unit – it was, in the vernacular, a "love-love"



**Culver "bumming a permissive jump with the Deployed Pathfinder Platoon. Sergeant Bob Happy with his hands on his hips and back to the camera.**

situation, and I settled in with a smile. Lynn (Dick's wife) and Carolyn (my memsahib) were friends from our days at Pendleton.

When I was scheduled to "transplace" to Okinawa, my wife was 7 months pregnant and thus by the rules of the day, I could have opted out of the transplacement cycle until the youngster was born. Being one of stalwart duty (some would have used the term "duty struck"), I opted to have my wife go back to the East Coast and live with my folks while I was "frolicking" on the Rock putting me in a position to get a bit of an adrenaline rush should the United States be drawn into a war in the Far East. Carolyn wasn't exactly ecstatic with my decision, but she kept the traditional stiff upper lip, and having been raised in a Marine Corps family, said nothing while I departed on the U.S.S. Pickaway (APA 222).

Dick Rigg and I had a number of discussions during the days that followed, and he watched with interest as my proximity to impending fatherhood drew near. Finally one day I received a telegram announcing that Carolyn had given birth to a new Marine at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. I was thrilled of course, and immediately went to the local PX and procured a box of Cigars to pass out, as is the practice within the male military (and I suppose civilian) community.

While I was dispensing the stogies, Dick Rigg was strangely silent but was watching me with interest. Finally he broke his silence.

"Well Dick, what ya' gonna' name him?" he asked.

Always being quick with an answer (I knew this question would be coming, and I had prepared myself), I replied, "Why, Smedley D. Culver of course!"

A look of absolute horror (well concealed of course) came over his face.

"Smedley D. Culver?" he said – "Smedley? Really?"

I could see I had him hooked so I let it hang in the air a bit.

"Of course I said, what else would be appropriate?"

"Why **Smedley**?, he asked (a really strange look coming over his countenance).

"Why for Smedley Darlington Butler of course!" was my reply! "You know, for Major General Smedley D. Butler, two time Medal of Honor Winner – if it was good enough for Smedley, it's gotta' be good enough for my kid! Wouldn't you agree?" (I of course was chuckling, but kept my amusement to myself!).

It was pretty plain that Dick was horrified, but was too polite to make mention of my ill thought out choice of names!

"I see", said Dick as he walked away as if to consider his next comment. None was forthcoming so I figured I'd won round one.

Several days went past with no further discussion until one afternoon Dick came into the room and made mention, (most discretely of course).

"Hey Dick, you know it's not too late to change the name from Smedley you know!"

Now it was my turn to be (or act) aghast! “Change it?,” I replied, why on earth would I want to change it?

Seeing a change of names appeared to be a lost cause he dropped the subject, but it didn’t take too long (unbeknownst to me personally) for the word to spread throughout the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. I even had one young NCO who had served under me as a PFC at the Rifle Range in Quantico back in 1959, that picked up on my youngster’s name while serving as an NCO in the Division in 1961. The die was cast, although it would come back to haunt me years later. I promptly forgot about the whole conversation, since Dick was a most sincere individual and thought he was doing my youngster a favor – little did he know, even Dick Culver wasn’t that off plumb!

I should have suspected the story had gotten out of hand when I picked up my wife from my folks in Alexandria, Virginia, stopped by her family’s house in Triangle, and swung by General George Van Orden’s firearms and equipment store in Quantico (*“Evaluator’s Limited”*) to pass the time of day prior to departing. *Evaluator’s Limited* was located just down the hill from Carolyn’s folks’ house in Triangle (the Quantico local).

The Van Orden’s were a shooting family, with Mrs. Van Orden, an old competitive pistol shooter herself, and the wife of General George Van Orden, the father of the U. S. Marine Corps Ordnance School at Quantico. The General being a famous Marine Corps shooter in his own right, started *“Evaluators Limited”* as mentioned above and literally evaluated and recommended various firearms for the Marine Corps and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (specifically Sniper variations of the Model 70 Winchester, and well honed and polished versions of the Smith and Wesson .357 Magnum for the FBI who had co-located their FBI Academy on the Marine Corps Base at Quantico).

Mrs. Van Orden had been personally acquainted with General Smedley Butler in the 1920s when General Van Orden had been stationed at Quantico as a Second Lieutenant. Mrs. Van Orden had, of course, personally met General Butler during several of the obligatory military receptions held by the Commanding General throughout the year. She (as were most Marine Corps Officer’s wives) was acquainted with General Butler on what might be termed cordial speaking terms (“Why yes Mrs. Van Orden, how are you and the family doing?” type of verbal exchange). This would not have been unusual of course, since the entire United States Marine Corps was smaller than the New York Police Department in the 1920s!

I had once dated Mrs. Van Orden’s Daughter *Florette* (Mrs. Van Orden’s name was Flora), and in fact I had escorted *Florette* to our VMI *“Ring Figure Hop”* at the Institute in 1956. *“Ring Figure”* was a traditional formal dance when a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Cadet with serious “designs” on his lady, presented their date with a miniature copy of their Class Ring as a token of their impending esteem. Florette and I were not yet that close, and Florette ultimately married a Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant named Kelly, but our families remained close. Still, Mrs. Van Orden treated me as a sort of 2<sup>nd</sup> Momma and couldn’t resist *“winding my watch”* when she got a chance.

The first words out of her mouth when I stopped by her store were, “How’s little Smedley doing?” I should have smelled a large rodent, but having known her for many years, it went right over my head!

“Why fine Mam,” was my answer, never thinking about the sobriquet “Smedley she had dropped on me without even a hitch. I later joked with her about my naming (even in jest) my

kidlet, Smedley, even as a joke, and she never let on – apparently there had been a fair amount of joking in the Corps about my naming the kid Smedley, and many of the Marine Corps shooters who did business with the Van Orden firearms supply business had exchanged “tee-hees” about the slightly unhinged but widely known character (Culver) who had saddled his young’un with the name Smedley D. Culver. I had actually named the youngster James Richard Culver, but obviously it was more fun to spread the name Smedley than Jim. In later days we all had many laughs about the entire evolution.

All had essentially been forgotten until I had a set of orders sending me to Vietnam in the Fall of 1966. I had traveled west with my squirt and Memsahib heading for Camp Pendleton with a side trip through Idaho to find some decent land to build a ranch and settle the family when my wandering days were over. I finally found my “dream 160-acres”, did the paperwork, and took the wife, the youngster, and myself down through Salmon, Idaho to meet Elmer Keith (a notable Shooting figure of the day). The Culver family eventually arrived at Camp Pendleton in the fall of ‘66.

My old Executive Officer, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon Battalion who I had left (or *thought* I had left) at Camp Geiger on the East Coast helping the 3<sup>rd</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company get organized, had preceded me to Pendleton and was already in Quarters. Since Skip’s memsahib (Miss Kay) and Carolyn were old friends, we dropped our anchor at their digs while I was out practicing my soldiering skills at what was known as “Staging Battalion”.

While out on one of the ranges we were required to put our troops through, I noticed my old NCO who had been with me in Quantico in ‘59 and again on Okie in ‘61 when I was with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was now one of the range NCOs at Staging Battalion. What was the tie-in? A bit strange I suppose, but the Corps was relatively small even in those days! Well, the relatively young NCO had known me when I was an unmarried brown-bar (2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant), and later on Okinawa when I was the Executive Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines. He of course was there as I mentioned in 1961 when the word got out that I had named the youngster “Smedley D. Culver”... You can probably see this one coming? Heh, heh, heh...

While we were putting rounds downrange on the field firing range my old NCO and I renewed our acquaintances and caught up on the years that had ensued since we last served together. He was a great Marine, and I was again to meet him some years later when he had been commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on the Rock in 1973.

After our conversation however, I noticed he was having a rather hushed conversation with one of his fellow S/NCOs (well out of earshot of the maddening crowds), and delivered in a quasi-private manner. As we were finishing our range firing exercise, the other S/NCO came over to me and asked in a very discrete manner if it was true that I had named my youngster “Smedley D. Culver”? Seeing the humor of the situation, I answered, “Of course, I thought it would be appropriate for the lad to be named for a two-time Medal of Honor winner – who knows, he might even become Commandant some day!

The young S/NCO privately agreed (after all, what else could he do, heh, heh, heh...?). and went away to further spread the “Smedley D. Culver” rumor! To my knowledge, it’s still going to this day!

And so it should! If he didn’t become the Commandant, he should have! His mother and I would have had it no other way! Oooh Rah...



# “Should auld acquaintance be forgot”...

By Dick Culver

The lines of the old Bobby Burns' song, "*Old Lang Syne*", bring to mind the subject of this Sea Story. "*Should old acquaintance be forgot*" doesn't normally bring to mind visions of Odin's Great Hall of Valhalla in more peaceable times, however the hazards of being shot at for whatever reason, by those intent on canceling your birth certificate, sometimes bring about some interesting and often very personal conversations concerning the fate of Marines, drunks and puppies.

I've never been a "Bible Thumper" as some who dwell on the Holy Scripture are called, but even as a young'un, those of us in the ranks were reminded that "there are no atheists in a foxhole!" Yeah, yeah, I know the current correct terminology is "*fighting hole*" but then I came along in a different day and age. Regardless, the message was clear, but seemingly somewhat detached during peacetime.

Once the rapidly rotating cylindrical projectiles (bullets in the vernacular) started flying, one somehow seemed a bit closer to one's Maker. I once remarked to a friend that I am still trying to make good on some promises made under fire.

When we actually had genuine Chaplains who made it to the field for Sunday Services, I was always careful to attend such services. I told myself that such attendance gave some small amount of comfort to the troops to think the "Skipper" was a man of faith. While I told myself such small fibs, in actuality, I *did* receive some spiritual comfort from the services... the experiences of childhood run deep. I even attended the verbal messages given by the "lay leaders" assigned to the Companies, and quite frankly, some were as good as those given by individuals being paid by the military to be professional "Sky Pilots"... I always figured that those who had to participate in "bullet ducking" on a frequent basis (the "lay leaders"), had perhaps, a better feel for the realities of the ongoing daily situation.

Don't get me wrong, once back safely on Stateside soil, I tended to revert to my usual sinful ways, and very rarely attended church on my own. Not that I no longer believed, but the daily reminder of our personal vulnerability was absent and my soul was perhaps, the loser in the long haul. Alas, 'tis the nature of the beast I'm afraid.

I have always believed in the power of prayer however, as even in my less than constant attention to the Supreme Being, I have seen prayer seemingly work wonders, even in peacetime. I could regale you with personal experiences, but if you are of the normal bent, there will always be some sort of question that might lead you to believe, or at least wonder, if the same sort of thing would have occurred even without the intervention of a bit of Divine assistance.

Do such things as prayer actually work? If you choose not to believe, I'd say you are much the poorer for doubting. When a friend or even a pet is seriously ill, I still resort to a bit of knee bending, but usually keep it to myself rather than be branded as some sort of "Holy Joe"... I rather imagine that most have had similar experiences over the years. The fact that more often than not, the asked for assistance seems to work, making such requests definitely worth the effort. I may "poo-poo" such efforts publicly, but deep down, I'm not so sure!

When the bullets are actually flying, all bets are off and I get a bit more serious about such things. I recall one instance after I had become the Battalion S-2, when we had crossed

the Hai Van Pass, and dropped down into what we jokingly called “The Bowling Alley”. A truly nasty place in terms of defensive military posture.

Our new Battalion Commander was “queer for” (*enthusiastic* about – a term no longer in general usage) erecting tentage for the battalion (a “by the book man” on such matters), whereas his predecessor, Major Moose Beard, had operated primarily out of his hip pocket, orchestrating the tactical situation from his personal foxhole. The VC (or even possibly a few itinerant NVA) had located their mortars in/on the high ground surrounding the long flat plain that followed the pass defined by the high ground to our northeast. It was a nasty enough location that our 105mm Gun Battery was forced to dig holes in the surrounding flat surfaces to allow the gun tubes to recoil deeply enough to gain sufficient elevation to fire back at our assailants.

The VC weren’t the most accurate mortar gunners in the world, but they had the legendary high ground. Constant patrolling action by various Rifle Companies however, kept ‘em in hiding for the most part. I suspect that they had buried their mortar tubes (in what they figured was a reasonable angle of elevation and deflection, topped off with a makeshift muzzle cover, and a few sprigs of local “flora” for camouflage). Our assailants could simply come by when the coast was clear and dropped a few rounds into the buried tube(s) and beat a hasty retreat without having to carry the guns and bipods with ‘em. If this was what they were doing, it answered in part, for their relative inaccuracy. None the less, in my personal opinion, the “Bowling Alley” was a particularly unhealthy location for those on the receiving end!

Once told to locate a CP for the S-2, I set about it with a will, Mrs. Culver’s youngster did NOT intend to be on the receiving end of a zip mortar round! I dug a fairly deep hole to house my personal hole/bunker/CP, and then went to work scrounging a fair number of barbed wire stakes to act as sandbag supports for the “overhead” of my new “digs”. These stakes, placed horizontally, were ultimately to be topped with numerous layers of sandbags to soak up the nose cone detonation of a Chinese or Russian mortar round.

Having finished the hole and the placing of the barbed wire stakes, I went on a sandbag safari. Having procured a “wired” bundle of sandbags, I set about filling them with a will, inspired by our (more or less) daily afternoon and thus quasi-predictable mortar attack. I was located fairly close to the Artillery Battery Commander’s tent and FDC (Fire Direction Center), and he had solved the problem by building a sandbag revetment close by that made it fairly easy to dive into in the event of emergencies.

That particular afternoon, our Arty Commander was enjoying his afternoon gourmet delight of C’s, (a can of “Beans and Franks” as I recall) when our afternoon calling card from “Charlie” came dropping in! He set his Cs down carefully, and most gracefully dove over the revetment into the relative safety of his sandbag retaining wall. When the smoke had settled, he was unscathed, but his can of C-Ration “Beanie Weenies” had taken a direct hit! Arrggg... I noticed a certain flurry of activity in the Arty area constructing an overhead cover. It would seem that my activities had been vindicated, mercifully with no one injured! Our afternoons in the “Bowling Alley” environs began to take on the same daily regularity of the legendary “*Washing Machine Charlie*” on Guadalcanal. I was not amused.

I had inherited the S-2 Shop while I was in the Hospital aboard the USS Tripoli, and was used to operating with a Rifle Company. This quasi-small shop existence was going to take some getting used to. The day after I had finished my makeshift bomb shelter, one of the Rifle Company’s S-2 Scouts stopped by the Battalion CP and was directed to the new S-2 Shop (my hole). Shortly after his arrival, the afternoon mortar barrage began to make our life

miserable. I motioned for the young Marine to join me under my newly sandbagged CP, and hoped I hadn't guessed wrong on their ability to soak up the blast from a zip mortar round.

The youngster wasn't used to such cramped quarters and seemed to be a bit hesitant to join me in my newly finished shelter. I didn't wait for his less than enthusiastic presence and plastered myself against my dugout bulkhead, knowing that the barbed wire stakes would probably be strongest in their shortest span. His reticence came to an abrupt end when the first round landed close by. Suddenly I was joined by an enthusiastic, if somewhat questioning, Marine. He heard me mumbling in my personal position and naturally figured that I was talking on the PRC-25.

Being naturally curious as are most youngsters, he asked "who I was talking to"?

I told him that he'd (my S-2 Scout) better hope that HE was listening, as I was having a personal, enthusiastic, and most earnest conversation with "The Almighty"...

My young Marine looked at me like I had two heads.

"The Almighty"? he said.

"Yep, how long have you been in country lad?"

"About two weeks sir," was the reply.

"Well son, you'll find that you can often get more help from above than you can from other folks who are also hugging the sides of their foxholes! Hopefully, "HE's" on our side this afternoon!"

The mortars stopped as soon as we got a few artillery rounds in the air, and all calmed down to a dull roar with most of us "making book" on the political leanings, lack of marital status of the parents of, and probable (collective) devious sex habits of our opponents. As usual, the Zips had been unsuccessful in extracting their pound of flesh, but our nerves didn't truly appreciate the relative calm for another half hour or so.

I never got to talk to that particular lad again in a "one-on-one basis", but hopefully the youngster got my thinly veiled message, ...that a bit of humility expressed to our Creator often went a long way.

To this day, often the strains of Bobby Burn's tune play softly through my subconscious, when thinking back over the years...

*"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
...And days of auld lang syne!"*

Perhaps, *just perhaps*, "The Almighty" was listening after all? On that day (as on a number of others), I'd remembered one very helpful "*Auld Acquaintance*". I'd like to think he was looking out for one very humble Marine Captain, and an appropriately apprehensive S-2 Scout in a fighting hole.

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

# Traditions, Toasts, Sayings

~ and ~

## Origins of Superstitions

### Originating during “The Great War” (and a few earlier)

#### Historical Background:

With Armistice Day now rapidly approaching, it may well be the time to dig back in my ancient files and resurrect some of the trivia we used to post on the page a couple of years back. The page wasn't so crowded then, and we had a lot of contributors to our trivia section. A change of servers essentially wiped out my collection of trivia, but I figure it might be fun to try this again.

Virtually everyone knows the origin of Armistice Day when “The Great War” ended on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month. This was an occasion celebrated by all the allies (I'm sure the Central Powers also breathed a sigh of relief). Armistice Day (in the United States) received its official name in 1926, and was declared a National Holiday in 1938 and until 1954, the name stuck.

Because WWII also contributed 400,000 more honored dead, and the exact cessation of hostilities was divided between two different theaters of war, it was difficult to pinpoint a specific day to honor the WWII Veterans. A proposal was made to change the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day, but the congressional wheels grind slowly. On November 11<sup>th</sup> of 1954, the Korean War, having been essentially ended by the peace talks at Panmunjom in July of 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill making the 11th of November the official day honoring ALL U.S. Veterans.

In 1968, President Johnson decided to “diddle with history” and to make Veteran's Day a long weekend for at least government workers (many of whom had not even served their country). His scheme changed the celebration of Veteran's Day to the 4th Monday in October. This was not greeted by universal acceptance or good humor, as the 11<sup>th</sup> of November had become a sacred historical landmark.

The Marines were particularly unhappy as the Marine Corps Birthday is the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, and the 11<sup>th</sup> traditionally gave them a day off after the rather spirited celebrations that traditionally occur on the 10<sup>th</sup>. It seems that the rest of the country agreed with them (with perhaps slightly different motivation and rationale), and Veteran's Day was changed back to 11 November, appropriately enough on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1978. The Marines breathed a tremendous sigh of relief.

I personally have no great love for the designation of the 11<sup>th</sup> to honor **ALL** Veterans on a single day, I will always think of the 11<sup>th</sup> as Armistice Day (I'm a history buff). I personally want a day honoring the cessation of the hostilities in Vietnam separate and apart from the

generic Veterans Day. The question is, which day to pick? Perhaps we'll have to wait until Jane Fonda strangles on an allegorical male sexual appendage attached to one of her Communist Buddies? Hummm... We can only hope!

Canada and England also refer to Armistice Day as Remembrance Day which also honors the Dead of the Commonwealth not only in WWI but all wars. Poppies are traditionally sold to benefit the surviving veterans of past wars, and in England, the streets are literally filled with individuals selling paper poppies. The Poppy is a tradition stemming from a WWI poem called "In Flanders Field" written by a Canadian Surgeon, after the battle of Ypres. Major John McCrae was also a veteran of the Boer War as well as "The Great War." The gallant Major McCrae also "bought the legendary farm" not long after penning his famous lines.

### **In Flanders Fields**

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow*

*Between the crosses, row on row,*

*That mark our place; and in the sky*

*The larks, still bravely singing, fly*

*Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago*

*We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,*

*Loved, and were loved, and now we lie*

*In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:*

*To you from failing hands we throw*

*The torch; be yours to hold it high.*

*If ye break faith with us who die*

*We shall not sleep, though poppies grow ...In Flanders fields.*

**~ Major John McCrae ~**

The poppy remains one of the most poignant reminders of the Allied sacrifices of the Great War (most specifically the Canadians and the English). I spent November 11<sup>th</sup> in England a few years back, and it appeared that all the British Veterans wore their respective (former) military headgear on that day, even with three piece suits – I noted several individuals proudly attired in the Red Berets of the British Airborne or the Green Beret of the Royal Marines... I was impressed with their patriotism, rather refreshing after witnessing our

youth with pigtails burning the American Flag and throwing phony medals over the fence at the White House, during the late fracas in Southeast Asia.

### **Superstitions with their Origins in “The Great War”:**

One of the first that comes to mind is that it's bad luck to have three cigarettes lit on a single match. It seems that keeping a match burning long enough to light three cigarettes was just long enough for a sniper to get a definite fix on your location. Just about the time I figured out the three on a match saying, someone chimed in and said that it had actually originated in the Boer War. This is entirely possible since the Boers were noted marksmen and often picked off a lone British Soldier standing in the open. The British complained that the Boers weren't fighting fair as they were, for the most part, wearing beards that made them difficult to pick out in the tree lines – Hummm, maybe there's a lesson here somewhere. I can't vouch for the Boer War connection of three on a match as I was in Cuba at the time, hee, hee, hee...

One individual (from the Boer War) pointed out that it was hazardous to your health to stand next to white rocks and brought to mind the story of Herbert McBride (author of “A Rifleman Went to War”) and his sniping efforts with the British during WWI. McBride was a former U.S. National Guard Captain who had served in a Gatling Gun outfit prior to the turn of the century. He was an old competitive rifle shooter and had fired on several teams at Camp Perry. His adventures in the gold rush in Alaska had kept him from making the Spanish American War, and the Canadians wouldn't allow him to enlist for the Boer War because he wasn't a Canadian citizen. When prospects for an immediate war fizzled out in 1914 when President Wilson failed to follow up on the unpleasantness at Vera Cruz, McBride joined the Canadian Army who wasn't too choosy by the time WWI came along. All this is simply a lead in to our superstitions and cautions from WWI. McBride's book is well worth reading and as I recall can be bought through the NRA... Now back to the story...

It seems that McBride (and his fellow snipers) found that shooting at cans and boxes on the top of enemy trenches was counter productive and could in fact, be hazardous to your health... Snipers just naturally like to check their zero when covering a wide area of possible targets. Odd rocks (as in the story of the Boer War) were very attractive, but the enemy, being smarter than the average fox, figured out that by judiciously placing boxes or cans on top of the trench line, the snipers could be induced to check their zero. If the box or can was marked “just so”, it could be accurately relocated on top of the trench if a sniper shot it off. By simply using a straight stick, the “snipees” could use the bullet hole to (more or less) accurately locate their antagonist. Needless to say, the sniping community took great care to leave the tempting cans and boxes without the telltale holes that would give away their position...

### **Toasts:**

Where did the origin of the word “Toast” come from? Strangely enough it did indeed come from the word “toast” (or burned bread). Romans sometimes added burned bread to lesser-quality wine to reduce the acidity and make it more palatable. The Latin, “tostus,” which means toasted or parched, became synonymous with the drink. Ha! Gotcha' on that one I'll bet! Or perhaps more to the point, a warrior's toast! At the full moon, Viking priests toasted their chief god Odin using the skull of a fallen foe as a cup. Some say this is the

derivation of the Scandinavian toast, "Skoal (Skull?)." ...And you gents wondered why I became a "non-practicing Odinist?" heh, heh, heh... Now for WWI –

The saying when making the toast "Here's mud in your eye" DID in fact originate during the War to End All Wars. In of itself, it would seem to be meaningless unless you had spent literally years in the mud of the stagnated WWI trench warfare... The toast was a bit of "graveyard humor" that is so common amongst frontline combat troops. That toast is closely akin to the old British Regimental Toast – "Here's to the next one to die!"... Not very encouraging, but you've gotta' have been there as the saying goes! The toast – "Here's Mud in Your Eye" was an allusion to having mud shoveled in your face (similar to the saying of being patted in the face with a spade) when you "went west", the WWI saying for "buying the farm".

...So on November the 11<sup>th</sup> this year, if you go to the VFW, American Legion, Canadian and Australian Legion, or just plain celebrate Armistice Day at home, the next time you hoist one to fallen comrades, (or absent comrades – the saying varies, but the intent is the same) remember with a bit of respect the toast "Here's Mud in Your Eye" was one made by those who helped win the War to End all Wars... They (as we) were (and are) in the company of gallant gentlemen!

Semper Fidelis

~ **ROC** ~

### **Addendum;**

As in most wars, libations usually become favorites based on the experiences of the returning fighting men. A couple that seem to have survived the ages are the Cuba Libré (rum and coke with a twist of lime), and the French 75 (variations of Cognac mixed with Champagne and a bit of lemon juice to taste). What do you suppose will be written in future volumes on our late war in the jungles of Southeast Asia as our favorite drink? **Ba-me-bah** (pardon the spelling, but I am referring of course to that ubiquitous [usually] warm bottle of beer with a tiger on the label, purveyed in the villes by little oriental girls with black pajamas - this stuff was also known as "Tiger Urine")? Not too bad after you used an old sock to strain it through to to make sure you weren't ingesting ground-glass that sometimes found its way into the bottom of the bottle! Heh, heh, heh...

**To “Marines and Others” to paraphrase an old John W. Thomason title...**

What with the 10th and 11th of November creeping up on us, I thought that it was time to post my annual "appropriate libation" formula(s) to allow those so inclined to stock up on the necessary ingredients! Well then, go forth (or even fifth - little pun there) and enjoy. ...And here's to absent comrades or mud in your eye as appropriate!

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

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### ***FORMULA FOR THE INFAMOUS “FRENCH 75”***

It seems that after every war, there is a favorite libation that somehow comes home with the returning combat troops... After the War of Cuban Liberation (Spanish American War to you new comers) it was the Cuba Libré... (this was simply the well known Rum and Coke – with a slight twist of lime)... After WWI it was a drink named after the famous French Artillery Piece, “The French 75”! Needless to say this drink was noted for its “kick” and its ability to slip up on you. It was always a great favorite at Marine Corps Birthday Bashes and artillerymen held it in high esteem....

**Current Official Bar Drink Mixing Books list the formula as follows:**

1. 1 ½ ounce Cognac (brandy will do nicely) – 1 ½ oz. is usually considered to be a standard shot glass.
2. 1 ounce Bar Sour (I never heard of this stuff, but after tasting it, I'd say that probably Collins Mix or Lemon Juice will do – I've seen many a punch bowl made of this stuff without using it, probably because of where I had dug my hole at the time!).
3. Pour into a Collins sized glass (or canteen cup) and fill with Champagne and add a bit of ice.

**Another Formula from a Drink Mixing Page (similar but with subtle variations):**

French 75 (Cognac)

1 1/2 oz Cognac  
1 oz Lemon juice  
1 tsp Sugar  
6 oz Champagne

Mixing instructions:

Combine cognac, sugar and lemon juice in shaker. Add ice and shake till chilled. Pour into champagne flute. Pour champagne over cognac concoction. Garnish with lemon curl.



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Watch out, these things don't really taste like much more than sparkling vino, but they'll grow on ya' in short order.

If you can't remember all the fancy measurements, the following will work! In the field and far from chimney smoke, we used to make the stuff by dumping a bottle of Cognac or Brandy in a punch bowl, along with a couple of bottles of Champagne, and a couple of drops of lemon juice to taste (you can omit the lemon juice in a pinch)... Add ice and you are ready to go. Air Wingers can simply put the covered bowl in a tub and cool down with av-gas or CO2 fire extinguishers... If the bullets are flying, and refrigeration isn't handy, drink it warm, you won't notice after a couple anyway!

Don't schedule anything for the next day!

Great for the Marine Corps Birthday when you have the 11<sup>th</sup> to recuperate, and MOST appropriate for Armistice Day...

Happy Birthday Marines, and a Happy Armistice Day to all!

Semper Fi,

Dick

**NOTE:** This stuff is also known as "Artilleryman's Punch" for those who no longer remember that a French 75 was the de-facto Artillery Piece from WWI until WWII. When I was going to school at VMI, the cannon we used for the Evening Gun Salute (to lower the flag) was still a French 75. It wasn't replaced by a 105 until about 1957....

**P.S.** For all you Ducks, Squids and Pollywogs, it would be well to have a friendly Marine to escort you home after a night of these! Most Army Artillerymen are bullet proof on these, but a standard grunt may have to work up an immunity... Airborne troops are resilient but you may get the sensation of "still floating" after a few libations!

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## FORMULA FOR HOT BUTTERED RUM

This time of year is always one for toasts and holiday libations. We hear of such things as “here’s mud in your eye”, “to absent comrades” etc. Most of these have some sort of military connotation(s) and are usually given while gathered around the punch bowl.

“Here’s Mud in Your Eye” had to do with the abysmal conditions in the trenches in WWI, and the fact that the average Doughboy never could seem to get clean. The trenches were eternally muddy and the lack of bathing facilities made it even worse. When a man finally caught “the one with his name on it”, the mud in your eye alluded to the fact that you were going to get patted in the face with a spade. Since the ground seemed to be a sea of mud, when you were buried it would be most likely that you would get “mud in your eye” – hence the gruesome toast. “To absent comrades” is self explanatory... There are many others of course, but these are simply a couple that come to mind.

Since the upcoming season(s) will soon be upon us, I thought it only fitting to slip in my favorite libation for such toasts to be used for such events as Halloween (to be here shortly), Armistice Day (I’m a traditionalist), The Marine Corps Birthday, Thanksgiving and Christmas...

I had always heard about Hot Buttered Rum and thought it sounded like the perfect cold weather drink. Well, I finally ordered one and much to my surprise and dismay, it was made with mostly hot water, sugar, rum and enough butter to coat the backside of your teeth! Yeech... My curiosity having been satisfied, I never ordered another. However...

Being a voracious reader, I was re-reading Kenneth Roberts’ “Northwest Passage”... I stopped dead in mid-paragraph, and marveled that I had seemingly rediscovered the original colonial recipe for the legendary drink! No hot water, no sugar, just natural cider and rum with a bit of butter. Hummm... In the book, they were making the brew in a kettle outdoors and heating the concoction by stirring the pot with a hot poker heated in the fire.

I decided to experiment, and here’s what I came up with... All you need are the following:

- 1) Five Quart Crock-Pot (or equivalent).
- 2) One Quart (or one Fifth) of Dark Rum. (depends on your guests and the occasion!).
- 3) One gallon of sweet cider (fresh squeezed and natural is best if you’re gonna’ make it right away, but pasteurized cider from the grocery store will do). I’ve tried making it with hard cider, but it tends to be too bitter for my taste!
- 4) One squeeze bottle of Parkay (or any tub of butter or margarine). I’m lazy and spent many years as a bachelor – Squeeze Parkay was known as “bachelor-butter”.
- 5) One small (shaker) can of Nutmeg and one of Cinnamon.

Pour the hooch (rum) in the crock pot first, followed by the Apple Cider. Fill the crock-pot to about 1” from the top. Sprinkle the top of the liquid ingredients with nutmeg and cinnamon to taste and stir them well into the brew. Set the pot on low and allow to simmer until it’s ready to serve. Allow about 3 – 4 hours (or more) to reach drinking temperature. It doesn’t seem to

hurt it if you leave it plugged in all day, but remember to keep the top on the pot or the more volatile rum will evaporate. If you are going to be gone for a while, I advise putting a large piece of aluminum foil across the pot and putting the glass top on over the foil. This takes care of most evaporation.

When you are ready to serve, put a good healthy squeeze of the Parkay, margarine or butter (several tablespoons – don't overdo it as much as in the modern commercial drink, it'll coat the back of your teeth!). Too little butter is better than too much. If you want more, you can either add it to the individual cup or to the pot...

Enjoy...

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A couple of suggestions:

A pot of this stuff is great to have waiting for you and your guests when you come in from a day on the slopes or from a snowmobile outing... DO NOT IMBIBE THIS STUFF PRIOR TO DOING ANYTHING THAT REQUIRES HAND-EYE COORDINATION!

While my youngster was still in the "Trick or Treating" mode, I used to make up a pot for Halloween. I would dress "all hands" in some sort of costume (even Annie Beagle had a small sheet with a hole for her tail), and put two TV trays outside the door (I was living in quarters on a Navy Base, so all trick or treating was done on foot and accompanied by appropriate parents).

I would run an extension cord for the Crock-Pot out to one and festoon the tray with "to go" Styrofoam cups... The other tray was laden with the usual and approved "wrapped" Halloween candy, etc. The parents would come by with their kids, and I would ladle them out a cup of Hot Buttered Rum... Everyone would leave happy, but I noticed that I was getting a lot of return business (hee, hee, hee...). By the time the evening was over I had gathered quite a crowd. It was lotsa' fun and it became a sort of Halloween Tradition.

When I was stationed in the Boston Area with the Air Force, I'd usually take the rugrat to the Salem Witch Museum and have my traditional pot of Hot Buttered Rum for the evening festivities (again we were on base and it was a "no-drive" situation)...

The Hot Buttered Rum pot is also appropriate for a family gathering during the holiday seasons and can be "built" early in the morning and forgotten about until after dinner... We used to make one for the Marine Corps Birthday Ball and Mess Nights too... A very versatile concoction...

At any rate, a most Happy Halloween, Marine Corps Birthday and Armistice Day, and "Here's Mud in Your Eye"...

Semper Fi,

**Dick**

## Captain Jimmy Bones And His Devil-Dog Marines

'Twas winter time in Quantico in nineteen-twenty-two,  
The slum was pretty rough that night, and all the men felt blue;  
The hail and sleet, with ghostly feet beat on the bunkhouse dome,  
Some men doped out their time to do, while others thought of home.

Then from the starless night, there slipped in through the bunkhouse door,  
An old top sergeant that no man had ever seen before;  
The hoar frost glistened in his hair, his eyes like star shells shone,  
A gnarled mustache hid half his face, and he was skin and bone.

He sat down near the glowing stove and warmed his fleshless hands,  
The chill of death was in his breath, like thunder his commands;  
His voice was hollow, like the tone of one who'd long been dead,  
And when he spoke, the silence broke, and this is what he said:

"Pipe down, all you devil-whelps, and snap out of your dreams,  
And a tale I'll tell of heaven and hell, and the Devil-Dog Marines;  
Just Captain Jimmy Bones, M.C., their skipper wrote his name,  
He was a fiend for fighting, he had no care for fame."

"Have never seen so fierce a man on land, nor sky, nor sea,  
He had a scar for every war, and fought in ninety-three;  
When he was riled, he had an eye that drilled a hole through men,  
He spoke but once, and no man asked him how, nor why, nor when."

"Now Jimmy was the headpiece of a hundred brave Gyrenes,  
He used to have a whole lot more who died from eating beans;  
But them what ate the chow and lived, they sure were hard-boiled guys,  
They flicked the bullets off their coats just like so many flies."

The old top sergeant's voice grew low, and at its ghostly gloom,  
Men shivered, and the vermin crawled upon the bunkhouse broom;  
He stuffed a live coal in his pipe, and deeply did inhale,  
He blew the smoke clean through the roof, and then resumed his tale.

"They say the devil made him mean when he was in the skies,  
And filled them all so full of hell it shone out through their eyes;  
Then old St. Peter found the bunch, and gave them souls of white,  
But hell still boiled up in them, and they couldn't else but fight."

"So Peter had to can old Nick, and when to earth he fell,  
He got himself a steady job recruiting souls for hell;  
Well, Peter stamped Marines 'OK,' and marked them all first class,  
'Cause all that ever scared 'em was to see a looking-glass."

"Now some they come from Texas sand, so they was full of grit,  
And some was from Montana plains where they'd been roughing it;  
Some more they come from old New York, and wore a Bowery frown,  
Then some which was the toughest came from good old Frisco town."

"Old Jimmy Bones shoved off for France in nineteen-seventeen,  
And shipped across the toughest crew the world had ever seen;  
Each man had 'First to Fight,' tattooed across his chest, in black,  
And right betwixt his shoulder blades, 'Watch out, we're coming back!'"

"Them hundred Devil Dogs sure was a bold and daring crew,  
They bit the soles right off their shoes whenever they'd want a chew;  
There wasn't one among that bunch of those U.S. Marines  
Who couldn't spit three fathoms deep, and sink three submarines."

"And when it came to shooting guns, why, say, them men were there,  
They'd shave a man a mile away, and never miss a hair;  
They'd trim the eyebrows off a lark, a- soarin' in the sky,  
Or shoot the points off shooting stars, as long as they had an eye."

"They cruised on all the seven seas and rationed on hard tack,  
They fought their way around the world and half to hell and back;  
They fought in every war there was, clean up to Vera Cruz,  
The only things they hadn't fought was huns, and too much booze."

"Now Jimmie Bones reached France OK with that all-furious crew,  
And everyone turned round to say, 'No savvy parley-vous';  
The French girls grabbed them by their hands, and washed their necks with tears,  
The French men slapped them on their backs, and yelled them deaf with cheers."

"Then Jimmy made a speech, and said, 'I hear you got a war,  
Around here somewheres hereabout, and that's what we're here for;  
But all I got to say is this. Enjoy it while you can,  
I'm going to clean up Germany If I lose every man."

"The Germans learned that Jimmie Bones had crossed the sea to fight,  
And when they got that awful news, their feet turned cold with fright;  
And when they lamped that roughneck crew from off an aeroplane,  
It nearly knocked 'em for a goal, and some went plumb insane."

"Said they, 'What is this thing, Marines? If they had said before,  
They had such Devil Dogs as these, there wouldn't be no war';  
So that is how they got their name of 'Devil Dog' Marines,  
And ever since, they've chased the Dutch dachshund clean off the scenes."

The old top sergeant rolled his eyes, as if to recollect,  
And where he let his fierce glance fall, it scorched six feet of deck;  
Said he, "No man has ever lived that crossed old Jimmy Bones,  
He had the power that lifted men, Or dragged kings down from thrones."

"A general of the allies looked out through his periscope,  
And seen ten million German huns a-coming on the lope;  
He bit his short mustache and said, 'We're in an awful stew,  
We've only got a million men. It looks like they'll break through.'"

"Then, Jimmy Bones piped up and said, 'You didn't count Marines,  
I've got some hell-dogs that'll chew the spikes right off their beans;  
'Cause numbers don't mean nothing to my well-behaving crew,  
Why, they ain't been to school enough to count the men they slew.'"

"The general said, 'You win, my man. Go take your wild Marines,  
And form a scouting party just to double up the scenes;'  
Then Jimmy Bones saluted stiff, and to the general said,  
'We'll break through to Berlin, sir, If we don't, we'll come back dead.'"

"With that, he yelled, 'Outside, Marines, and snap out of your hop,  
We're going out to gather up that German lemon crop;  
And if I see one of you men so much as leave a rind,  
You'll rate the brig 'till kingdom come, and sixty dollars fine.'"

"The hundred Devil Dogs fell out, and then they all fell in,  
And each one closed a gap in ranks by shaving up his chin;  
The chief cook turned up missing when the time for counting come,  
But he was cooking shrapnel up to make the crew some slum."

"Then Jimmy Bones, he gave a talk, to all his men, he said,  
'We're shipping out on heavy seas with reefs and shoals ahead;  
But all I got to say is this, remember you're Marines,  
Cause water settles everything, and that's what our name means.'"

"He marched 'em up on company front, in quick and double-time,  
He marched 'em in a riot squad and in a skirmish line;  
He ran 'em in a platoon rush, and then by single squad;  
And each advance ten thousand huns stretched out and hit the sod."

"He mowed 'em down with Browning guns, and with their Springfield gats,  
And them they couldn't get that way they stuck with bayonets;  
And when it came to trenches they just shoved the banks all in,  
And tons of huns were swallowed up, and never lived again."

"The Germans shot a bunch of bombs of dead limburger cheese,  
But all it did to Jimmy's men was make them cough and sneeze;  
Then Jimmy lit a strong cigar from off a passing shell,  
Three million huns got one good whiff, and died of that vile smell."

"The hundred Devil Dogs shoved on, their eyes flashed liquid fire,  
Which melted guns and cannons up just like they were lead wire;  
They kicked about a million huns into the River Marne,  
And if they drowned, or sunk, or swam, they didn't give a darn."

"The Germans thought that judgment day had come to take its tolls,  
They got the jula in their knees, and trembled in their souls;  
And when they saw those Devil Dogs, and heard their awful yell,  
They knew their judgment day had come, and they were picked for hell."

"So, what was left threw up their mitts, and hollered 'kamerad,'  
But Jimmy's men thought that was Dutch for talk profaning God;  
So they stuck their bayonets right through them anyhow,  
And buzzards came down from the sky and ate 'em up for chow."

"Now Kaiser bill and Hindenburg was in a game of craps,  
He staked his royal crown against a box of ginger snaps;  
Old Hindy won the crown and said, 'This ain't no good to me,  
I'd sooner have a bite to eat than all of Germany'"

"Said Kaiser Bill, 'I'll tell you what. You lend ten marks to me,  
I'll pay you back in a month or two with French indemnity.'  
Said Hindy, 'Where'd you get that stuff. Do you see any green on me?  
I bought myself some Liberty Bonds from Mrs. Liberty.'"

"Just then the crown prince busted in and said, 'Oh papa dear;  
I see some wild men coming who will wreck this joint, I fear;  
I'll shoot a long-range shot at them, and if they still persist,  
Then I'll take about a million men and slap them on the wrist.'"

"The Kaiser took a peek out from a half-raised window blind,  
And seen a hundred Devil Dogs a-swimming across the Rhine;  
The river was a-running blood, From all the men they slew,  
And every time they'd duck their heads, they'd drink a quart or two."

"The Kaiser's hair stood up on end and turned from black to white,  
And when he spied old Jimmy Bones, his blood ran cold with fright;  
He grabbed the prince's hand and said, 'Don't fool with that wild Yank,  
He'll fill you full of bullet holes where Papa used to spank.'"

" 'What ho the guard!' Cried Kaiser Bill. 'There ain't no guard no more,'  
Said Hindenburg, 'The guard was shot out there by the palace door,'  
'Where is my ally Gott?' yelled Bill. 'Von Gott, he ain't at home,'  
Said Hindenburg, 'The Gott you had was in your crazy dome.'"

"The Kaiser's eyes stuck out a mile. 'What shall I do?' said he,  
'I'll save myself and my six brave sons. To hell with Germany,'  
Said Hindenburg, 'It went to hell long time before this thing,  
Ten million huns that you sent there are waiting for their king.'"

"The outside palace door crashed in. There was a mighty roar,  
'Thank gott,' said Hindenburg, 'I'll see that mush of yours no more,'  
With that he grabbed his gat and blew the brains out of his head,  
And Kaiser Bill knowed then and there he meant just what he said."

"The Kaiser beat it for the door and flung it open wide,  
And there he met Jimmy Bones a'coming just outside;  
Behind him were his Devil Dogs with gleaming bayonets,  
And Kaiser Bill knowed they had come to get a whole world's bets."

"Then Jimmy gave him just one look that turned his gizzard pale,  
And made him wish that he had spent his life in some nice jail;  
Said Jimmie Bones, 'So you're the cur that kicked up all this row,  
You've got about an hour to live, so don't give us no gow!'"

"The Kaiser's nerve went over the hill. His brow dripped bloody sweat,  
He got down on his knees and cried and got the carpet wet;  
His teeth, they rattled, just like dice do in a game of craps,  
And every word that Jimmy spoke was like a note of taps."

"Then Jimmy Bones drewed out his gat, and then he tossed it by,  
Said, 'you ain't fit enough to live, and not that fit to die;  
You've served the devil all your life, but now you'll work for me,'  
And then he thought of things to do. Jim Bones can think of three."

"You'll stand a guard of twenty hours around the Arctic zones,  
With fifteen minutes out to thaw the marrow in your bones;  
And every hour throughout the night you'll answer reveille,  
And every twenty years or so, you'll rate a liberty."

"And all you'll have to drink is German blood you've shed,  
And when you're hungry, you will gnaw the bones of German dead;  
You'll do a jolt in eighty-four for ten or twenty years,  
And under a hard-boiled non-com you'll shed your dying tears."

"Then Jimmy stopped, and silence filled the gloomy castle hall,  
The Kaiser rose and tried to speak, then fell against the wall;  
Said he, 'I thought the devil was a mean and ugly guy,  
But you've got Satan cheated with one look out of your eye.'"

"Said Jimmy Bones, 'Now that ain't all I'm gonna leave you do,  
Them things is just light duty, but there's heavy duty too!'  
The Kaiser throwed up both his mitts. 'You win!' That's all he said,  
He gave a yell that was heard in hell, and then fell over dead."

The old top sergeant paused awhile to see if some would doubt,  
He sneezed a sneeze, the stoves grew cold, the window panes fell out;  
He rolled himself a cigarette from sweepings off the floor,  
And lit it with his flaming eye, and then resumed once more.

"Now German spies sent word to France that Jimmy Bones was dead,  
And all his hundred Devil Dogs was slaughtered too, they said;  
The women weeped a lot of weeps. The men felt pretty bad,  
And all of them were mourning cause the shock it hit 'em bad."



"The cook was boiling coffee up from a piece of dried-out meat,  
Said he, 'If they is dead or not they'll be back here to eat;  
The world has never seen the time Marines have met defeat,  
They would have gone to hell to cut off Kaiser Bill's retreat.'"

"A sentry sighted Jimmy's men a'coming over the hill,  
And dragging on behind them what was left of Kaiser Bill;  
And when they reached old Paris, they were met with yells and cheers,  
And showers of gold enough to last 'em all a thousand years."

"They hung a million medals on old Jimmy and his crew,  
And when they took 'em off they had a barrel full or two;  
And ever after that each lived just like a millionaire,  
They never answered reveille, or heard a bugle blare."

"And all they did was bunk fatigue from then, forever more,  
And when they died, they went above and knocked on heaven's door;  
Old Peter came down to the porch and hollered, 'Halt! Who's there?'  
"United States Marines," said Jim. First here, and everywhere"

"So Peter let the whole bunch in along with Captain Jim,  
And each one grabbed himself a harp, and sung the Marine hymn;  
And ever after that each stood his guard on heaven's green,  
And nary a German has got past the brave U.S. Marine."

The old top sergeant heaved a sigh that raised the bunkhouse roof,  
And those who sat too close to him were blown ten feet aloof;  
He cut the sling from off a gun and took a three-foot chew,  
And where he spat, the floor gave way, and hell came boiling through.

Then from the fiery pit there rose a corporal of the guard,  
His face was sunk, his flesh was iron, his look was twice as hard;  
Said he, "The detail's still intact around the brimstone floods,  
The devil's peeling onions and the Kaiser's peeling spuds."

The old top kicker knit his brow, said he, "All right, that's well!  
But when you've finished with that job they'll start to coal up hell;  
And if them billion tons ain't in before they shut an eye,  
I'll run 'em up 'fore Jimmy Bones, and let them tell him why."

The corporal turned and leaped head on down through that fiery mass,  
The floor closed up, the bunkhouse swayed with clouds of molten mass.  
The top arose, the lights went out, Taps sounded, came the rain,  
A chill swept through the room and he was never seen again.

## Welcome to 'PEACEFUL' Kosovo

Anti-Christian Muslim atrocities ignored by free world

© 2005 G2 Bulletin Publishing date: 18.08.2005 19:53

As the war against Jihadi terrorism rages in Iraq and Afghanistan, militant Islam goes unchallenged in a U.S. battlefield of the 1990s.

The immediate victims of the jihad in Kosovo are the minority of 210,000 Christians who found themselves on the short end of the stick after the U.S. and NATO forces interceded on behalf of the Muslim, Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army, organized in part by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network.



Another burned-out church in Kosovo

Local Orthodox Church officials have failed to convey their plight to the super powers, which only a decade ago intervened in the atrocious civil war in what used to be Yugoslavia. The creation of the independent entities of Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia was the end result of that furious ethno-religious conflict. The fate of Kosovo in the southern part of Serbia, surrounded by Albania to the west, Macedonia to the southeast, and Montenegro at the west, remains unsolved. Politically suspended in mid-air Kosovo has become subject to Islamic tyranny gnawing at the Christian population's historic civil and religious rights.

The unsettled issue of independence for Kosovo continues to be what the Central Intelligence Agency diplomatically describes as an "international dispute". A CIA document states: "Kosovo remains unresolved administrated by several thousand peacekeepers from the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, stationed in the troubled province since 1999."

The unclassified document also states that Kosovar Albanians overwhelmingly support Kosovo's independence, while Serbia opposes it. Thus the province's problems continue to brew, as one Kosovar Orthodox priest described: "Add to the problem the destruction of the civil war, the refugee issue and the growing force of Islam, you can only expect the pressure cooker to burst."

A major danger to security, and therefore a problem for all those involved with the U.S.-led war on terrorism, derives from Islamic militants moving with full force into the vulnerable

province. The international community, represented by UNMIK and the Serbian and Montenegro armed forces, is a mere scarecrow defense lacking any significant power to control the Islamic onslaught. Only when it comes to the sheer physical protection of Kosovo's Christians, especially those who live in the Prizren Bulge stuck between Albania and Macedonia, does the international force take any action. As a result tens of thousands of Kosovar Christians fled their homes, the remainder live in fear of attacks and pogroms, such as the events of March 2004 when churches and ancient cathedrals were burnt to the ground and desecrated.

The Muslim Albanians who destroyed churches are now building mosques on the ruins. They have attacked churches, burned buildings and torn down crosses while French and German U.N. troops stood by because their mission is to protect lives not property. On the other hand, U.S. and Italian members of the U.N. Interim Mission in Kosovo risked their lives in an effort to save historic Christian monuments dating back to the Byzantine era from being razed.

Despite apparent U.N. indifference the immense problem surrounding the plight of Kosovo's Christians is gradually trickling into the consciousness of western politicians including some U.S. lawmakers.

The strong Islamization move in Kosovo is now attracting also the attention of intelligence and counter-terror experts. During an Aug. 12 congressional staff briefing, a video of Muslim ferocity was shown and details of the situation were described by a number of former State Department officials. A day earlier, U.S diplomat Thomas Patrick Melady called for a significant increase in international pressure in Kosovo. Melady, a seasoned ambassador, was obviously deeply upset by the information he himself provided, especially over the desecration of churches.

Frederick Peterson, an analyst on counter-terrorism with the Institute for Security Studies at the University of Nevada, and Joseph Griebosky, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, referred to Kosovo's numerous new mosques funded by Saudi and Iranian funds. Currently these mosques are mostly empty, but their mere existence reflects plans to indoctrinate residents with the radical Wahabi form of Islam and a plan to gradually convert more and more Christians. The new mosques carry plaques acknowledging funding from Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

The situation in Kosovo is of great importance to those at the forefront of counter-terrorism. The province has become a magnet for jihadists, who regard the Balkans as an important bridge on their way to west Europe's heart. Intelligence analysts believe the cities of Pristina and Prizren are part of a terror and narco-terror smuggling pipeline going across Serbia, through the city of Uzice all the way to the Croatian border. From there the way to Western Europe is short and relatively easy. Jihadists have become quite familiar with the area due to their involvement in the civil war, which brought an end to Yugoslavia as an integrated entity.

They lean heavily on the support of Islamic radicals, even Albanian Muslim rank and file, in an elaborate plan to turn Kosovo into a Jihadi base. The fact that most of the funds for the so-called Islamic revival of Kosovo come from Wahabi Saudi Arabia and from the Iranian Shia ayatollahs should be a wakeup call for the west, perhaps even more so to the U.S., which during the Clinton administration was the motivating force in bringing down Yugoslavia. The U.S., more than any other country, stood up for the protection of the Muslim minority in Yugoslavia – even though the KLA was organized by bin Laden.

Summarizing a presentation on Capitol Hill, defense analyst Peterson said: "With final status changing from Serbian Orthodox hegemony into at very best a gray line, the dividing line between the Christian and Islamic world moves closer to the European Union, and we are at great risk of tolerating what should not be tolerated in order to buy some peace in our time."

Many analysts who expect the Kosovo power keg to explode anytime now share this view. In their eyes opinions expressed on Capitol Hill should be amplified across the free world in time to confront a cultural and religious war gaining momentum in Western Europe's backyard.

Said Peterson: "We have three choices: convert, submit or die, but there is a fourth choice -- and that's to fight. What is going on in Kosovo today is the future of Europe tomorrow."

**-- G2B contributor Yoram East**

# Night Passage to Pristina - Part 1

By Dick Culver

The shooting war in Kosovo was beginning to wind down, and Jake Livingstone and I were headed for Pristina to see for ourselves. A week in a "safe house" in Tirana, Albania had given us a chance to orient ourselves to the "Albanian" attitude towards the war. We needed the time to get our Press Credentials from NATO and establish our bona fides for travel in the Kosovo countryside. What made me a bit apprehensive was that there was a rumor that Jake had a price on his head in the Balkans.

"Hey Jake, you reckon they'd lock us up if we're caught?"

"Culver, if they catch you with me, gettin' locked up is gonna' be the least of your worries!"

"Oh good, Jake! I think I'll go out and find a pair of handcuffs!"

"Handcuffs? I thought you understood, it's US who are gonna' be wearing the bracelets!"

"Jake, YOU misunderstand MY idea! If it looks like they're gonna' close in on us, I'm gonna' slap the cuffs on you and yell, I've got him, I've got him!"

"@\$shole!"

Barracks humor aside, the local attitudes seemed to indicate a need for treading extremely lightly on initial contact with roving individuals in the Kosovo countryside. Since the town of Pristina was rumored to be occupied by the British Forces, I wasn't concerned about our movement once we reached the seat of the provisional governmental control of the NATO forces in Pristina, but it would appear that everyone was simply waiting for NATO to withdraw so full blown hostilities could be renewed.

Since we were not allowed to pack a belt gun into Albania, and I hadn't had an opportunity to put a rock in my sock to allow me to arm myself - (that was high on my list), at this point my entire armament consisted of an extremely sharp Spyderco "Catcherman" filleting knife in my hip pocket and a Newt Livesley G-45 Neck Knife. Jake was also armed with a couple of shivs. Our party consisted of two individuals traveling by air into Kosovo through Macedonia, with Jake and I grabbing a car for hire to take us to the Albanian-Kosovo border. The original plan called for the "ground-bound crew" to be picked up by an agent at the Kosovo border and to continue our sojourn to Pristina by car. Our transportation was to be supplied by an operative nicknamed "Hair Oil"... Better we should have hired Gomer Pyle!

Leaving Tirana, our initial foray towards Kosovo started out in a tame enough fashion, but this was to change materially as we headed into the mountains. Our driver was a frustrated Mario Andretti with a seeming death wish. The roads reminded me of my youth in the Kentucky and West Virginia mountains on roads designed for cars the width of Model A Fords. The only difference was a total lack of guard rails and a drop so severe that a

misdirected plunge over the edge would have allowed a scream that would have continued for a full five minutes before hitting bottom. Come to find out, the driver was hoping to shorten his exposure to the marauding bands in the hills to an absolute minimum. This was being accomplished by speeds that would cause Indianapolis Race Drivers to turn green with envy. *My green color in the back seat had nothing to do with envy!*

We were passing all sorts of mule or horse drawn carts, including several tractors towing farm wagons full of returning Kosovo Muslims. Ostensibly the pilgrims on the road were heading home for a kinder, gentler (and hopefully Serb free) Kosovo. The initial impression of the returning vehicles was of some sort of gigantic hayride. The pilgrims seemed in fine spirits, waving and yelling to one another. As we neared the Kosovo Border, the traffic picked up considerably, and we were soon joined by an extremely frustrated Italian NATO motorcycle cop attempting to make order out of chaos without much success. As we neared the border, our driver's speed picked up along with our desire to meet "Hair Oil" at the Kosovo Border. *Anything* to get out of that damned car! I might not have been so anxious if I had known what was coming. Our driver dropped us off about 200 yards from a German Panzer outfit guarding the Albanian/Kosovo border and sped off with his doors hardly closed... Apparently, he knew something we didn't. We were fixin' to get an education however.

By the time our fleeing ride from Tirana had dropped us off, twilight was closing in on the Kosovo countryside. The Germans had a large tank and a number of armored personnel carriers guarding the border. The road was lined with razor wire with red triangles suspended at regular intervals. The signs were stenciled with the rather unsettling marking of "*Minen*". Hummm... A small "pull-off" area alongside the road about 50 yards inside the Kosovo Border provided the only possible stopping place for any traffic from Pristina. This wide spot was right next to the razor wire and easily within sight of the border check station. This small wide spot would have allowed a single small vehicle to have parked - maybe! Our arrangements were to have been picked up at the Kosovo Border at 1800, and it was now 1730... I checked with the civilian interpreter assigned to the Panzer Unit. He told me that he had been there all day, and there had been absolutely no one asking for us, and no one had been parked in the only pull-off spot during his entire tenure. Jake and I settled down, leaning against our rucksacks waiting for Hair-Oil to arrive. Our last conversation with Hair-Oil had indicated that all the bridges had been blown between the border and Pristina, and that heavy fighting was still ensuing in the streets. Perhaps he had simply been delayed or detained due to tactical considerations. We were willing to grant him the benefit of the doubt. The truth was somewhat more amusing, but we weren't to get the straight scoop until later. There's an old saying that the truth shall make you free - in this case the truth would change our attitude of annoyance to one of carefully contemplated homicide!

After a number of hours it became obvious that Hair-Oil wasn't gonna' show. We were faced with sleeping alongside the road using our rucksacks for a pillow. The only safe waiting area was a strip about 6 feet wide next to the mine field where an inadvertent roll-over while sleeping had the potential of making our eardrums meet in the middle or worse. The prospect of instant vaporization of a couple of wayfaring military correspondents was not appealing! I was beginning to mentally curse Hair-Oil and I hadn't even met him yet!

By 2100 we had decided that Hair-Oil definitely wasn't gonna' show, and the prospect of sleeping on the edge of a minefield was not my idea of fun. Something had to be done. Jake

and I flipped a coin and I lost. It was my job to hit the Panzer interpreter up for a ride in the direction of Pristina. After promising the stalwart interpreter a copy of the magazine with a picture of him directing traffic, he agreed to flag us down a reliable ride. I took a picture of the interpreter with my Nikon, although it was a bit dark for anything to come out. Since he wasn't up on the nuances of photography, I suppose that he figured that I was... The deal was sealed, however, and he started interrogating some of the more reliable pilgrims returning to their homes.

Finally the interpreter came over and pointed to an aging YUGO automobile with a driver who could have played the part of "Lurch" in the Addams Family. The driver stood about 6' tall, was built like a tree trunk, and had a dark 6-day growth of beard. His knuckles barely cleared the deck when he walked. This was not a man to meet in a dark alley. The YUGO should have been junked years ago and was devoid of any kind of handles on the inside of the doors with the exception of the drivers side. No window cranks, no door handles, and no way out unless the driver chose to let you out. The muffler was toast, and the fumes of the exhaust simply seeped through the holes in the floorboard. Jake drew the back seat. Jake's rear window was rolled down about 1", but couldn't be adjusted. If (and this was a BIG if) the YUGO obtained max velocity of 40 mph, the resultant suction would draw the exhaust fumes out of the car. The car would barely do 40 mph and the resultant noises indicating that the engine was about to self-destruct were a bit disconcerting. We forged ahead into the night.

Our first stop was mandated by a NATO check point that indicated the route was sprinkled with Serb assassination squads and that we'd better have a convincing story if stopped. AKs are apolitical. Warmly reassured, we settled back while Lurch increased the velocity of his aging mobile coffin. We passed several small villages that seemed to be deserted. Hair Oil had at least part of his story right, some of the bridges were blown, but the resourceful residents had made emergency detours that sufficed for passage. Suddenly, the adrenaline factor increased exponentially! Lurch pulled off the road, stopped the YUGO and turned off the lights. We were now in what would appear to be total darkness next to a patch of woods. Uh oh... the car died. Lurch suddenly started using the light dimmer to send light signals to unseen parties. The unsettling part was that several other unseen cars were answering the signal. A vivid imagination conjured up Serbs with AKs and an attitude approaching the YUGO. False alarm, Lurch started the car and we pulled back onto the road and continued the journey. Not a word had been spoken at this point.

Suddenly Lurch initiated the first conversation.

"You Americans?"

"Yes, we're Americans"

"You bomb Serbs? Bad, bad! Boom, boom, boom!"

This apparently exhausted Lurch's entire command of the English Language as no more conversation was forthcoming... We were then left with the following interpretation to his cryptic conversation:

"You Americans?" - no interpretation necessary.

"You bomb Serbs? Bad, bad! Boom, boom!" - now this could be interpreted several ways as best Jake and I could figure. Either the Americans bombed the Bad, bad Serbs to his (Lurch's) satisfaction -or- It was extremely bad that we bombed the Serbs who were his buddies.

Lurch's lack of ability to communicate his exact feelings left a cold feeling in the pit of the stomach. This was multiplied many times as Lurch again pulled off the road and used his headlights to signal some unseen individual or individual. Visions of being left laying in a Kosovoian ditch left us contemplating our life insurance. Unfortunately, the bodies would have simply disappeared or had the heads mounted on sharpened stakes alongside the road. I was beginning to regret not having picked up those handcuffs in Tirana.

The next "signaling stop" also provided Lurch an opportunity to answer the call of nature, and Jake and myself crawled across the controls and exited through the driver's door (the only one with an inside door handle). We now figure that we might well be in a very tight spot depending on which interpretation fitted Lurch's analysis of the Serbian bombing situation. We could almost see phantom Serbs approaching the YUGO from the tree line. Having only a couple of "shivs" to repel boarders, we discussed our options. Jake insisted on remaining in the back seat (due no doubt, to the much coveted 1" crack in the rear window). The conversation went something like this:

"Hey Jake, ya' wanna' get up front for awhile? Your legs are longer than mine!," I said angling for a seat next to the only source of fresh air in the exhaust filled YUGO.

"Naw, that's OK, I'm used to sitting in the back!"

Translation, "You ain't getting' me up there, I like fresh air!"

"Well, if it gets a bit exciting, are you gonna' take care of Lurch's throat?"

"Yeah, I'll take the throat!" sez Jake.

"OK, I'll take the top of his right arm on the steering wheel, or if he makes a move, I'll sink mine into his right side. I figure that if I can get the top of his right arm, I can take his right hand out of action. If not, I'll go in under the ribs! Every little bit helps! Maybe, just maybe, we can grab a couple of AKs and head into the tree line!"

"Yeah, sounds like a plan! Uh oh, here comes Lurch... He may be fakin' on how much English he understands!"

We climbed back into the car since the external door handles were still working. Lurch kicked the YUGO over, and we headed off into the night. After several more signaling stops, we finally pulled off onto to some sort of side road and stopped in a field. Lurch exited the car without a word and disappeared. Oh Good!...

Again, Jake and I pulled the climb over the seat bit, exited the YUGO, and started reviewing our options.

"Hey Jake, where the hell do you figure we are?"



"Damned if I know, but that faint light on the skyline *MAY* be Pristina!"

"OK, that leaves us two options, either head for the woods and sack out until it gets light enough to see, or just use a little "dead reckoning" (bad choice of words) and head for that faint glow on the skyline! Let's give it a couple more minutes and make our move! Damn, and me with no handcuffs!"

Our planning was interrupted by several figures moving through the darkness. Soon, Lurch reappeared with a very nice looking young lady and a middle aged guy. It turned out that the girl was a 5<sup>th</sup> year Medical student with her daddy. Much to our relief, the girl spoke excellent English. A short conversation revealed that these folks were extremely anti-Serb and appreciated the U.S. Bombing effort! Whew... She understood that we were going to Pristina to cover the situation for the *Soldier of Fortune* magazine.

The girl, her daddy and Lurch went into a huddle. When they came back over, it seemed that the young lady and her daddy had talked Lurch into escorting us into Pristina that night! Wonder of wonders – The Swede's Odinist roots must be in tune with the Scandinavian hierarchy. Maybe, just maybe, Valhalla was a bit full at the moment - I was in no great rush to investigate the Hall of Honor before my time! Barring some unforeseen disaster, it looked like a very long night might be going to result in a rack in Pristina.

The rest of the trip was a bit more relaxed, although I noticed that Jake was striking up a fair speaking relationship with the young medical student. We finally pulled into the back of the Grand Hotel in Pristina. We all got out and shook hands. Feeling that we owed these fine folks something for getting us to Pristina in one piece, we dug in our pockets for extra deutch-marks to at least pay them for their fuel and indicate that we truly appreciated their help. They didn't want to take anything as they considered us (as representatives of America) their saviors from the Serbs. With much persuading, we finally got them to take some small remuneration, but only under protest. As we were parting, the good-looking medical student grabbed Jake and kissed him! With my luck, you guessed it - I got hugged and sloppily kissed by Lurch, six-day growth of beard and all! Some people just live right I guess. I was beginning to understand why Jake had a price on his head...

I admit to feeling a large twinge of remorse for planning Lurch's demise - very nice folks in retrospect, but I'd have sure felt a bit better if I'd have had a better translation of:

"Bomb Serbs?... Bad, Bad... Boom boom boom!"

Just goes to show you, appearances can be deceiving!

ROC

# Night Passage to Pristina - Part 2

By Dick Culver

Waving goodbye to our benefactors, Jake and I headed for the lobby of the Grand Hotel. The place seemed to be in a state of well-ordered bedlam. The desk was manned by a confused but willing hotel clerk, but they had no reservations for Jake and me. As it turned out, this wasn't a real problem, as the Serb Assassination Squads had just exited stage left. Rooms were available as long as we didn't mind essentially hot racking it with the Serb assassins... The Serbs had grabbed a hat and departed for safer digs.

Since this was a *Soldier of Fortune* evolution, it seemed only proper to make contact with Colonel Bob Brown, who was to meet us that evening in the Grand Hotel. Easier said than done. The clerk did a thorough check of his records and couldn't find any registration for Col. Bob Brown. Now, this was absurd; he *HAD* to be there, there just ain't anywhere else to crash in Pristina. Ugly images began to seep into our imaginations. Only the sight of a piece of mail for the Colonel prevented us from mounting out a search party. We pointed out the note, and the clerk said something clever like, "Oh, *THAT* Colonel Brown?" It was obvious that the clerk could speak pretty good English, but his reading and comprehension were a bit shaky.

Jake and I grabbed a room on the 9<sup>th</sup> deck (a mixed blessing since the elevators seldom functioned). Our location was great for the leg muscles, but I was cursing the amount of gear I had brought along. It DID give us a pigeon's eye view of much of the city.

We stopped by the Colonel's room and found that his trip has been essentially uneventful. Just my luck; if there's a hard way to do something, I seem to gravitate to it. In the Marines, when I heard that ten percent of the troops were deploying by ship, I always packed my seabag - I was never wrong. My luck had held!

We stowed our gear and settled down for the night.

The dawn broke and it suddenly occurred to us that our last meal had been in Tirana. The activities with our kamikaze driver and Lurch had taken their toll on our stomachs. Obviously, breakfast was in order. The dining room of the Grand Hotel was neat and clean, if you didn't count the remnants of the huge plate glass windows not yet removed from the area around the now vacant openings. While the accuracy of the Cruise Missiles was superb, concussion still removed a mighty amount of glass.

A rather decent European Style breakfast buffet was laid out on a large serving table. Piles of plates summoned the masses to partake of the morning offering. It took little urging to get me to the source of chow. They had everything imaginable from eggs and bacon to fresh melons. I knew things were getting back to normal when a young cultural advisor for the U.N. standing in line with me wanted to know if I thought the food was "organically grown." *Organically grown?* Dear Allah, the entire world is just sweeping up the debris of war, and she wants "organically grown" chow - no wonder the U.N. can't keep their stuff in one bag! Feeling certain that the locals HAD grown the stuff organically (*how* organically worried me a little to tell the truth!), I assured the cultural advisor that it was almost certainly organically grown, wisely keeping my suspicions to myself.

After disposing of the morning offerings and enjoying a morning cigar, I looked up to see a rather tall individual entering the dining room from the lobby. This gent was festooned with cameras and headed straight for our table. Jake nudged me.

"Hey Dick, there's the clown who didn't pick us up last night!"

"Really? You mean *Hair Oil*?... Do you know this guy?"

"Oh yeah! He ain't my favorite human being, and last night removed any decent feelings that I may have had about him!"

"Just who is this guy Hair Oil?" I asked innocently.

"Well, Colonel Bob sometimes hires this guy to do odd jobs and furnish transportation to wayfaring reporters," said Jake.

"Is this the guy you and Harry were talking to on the phone in Tirana?" I asked.

A quick aside. Harry was a former Navy Seal whose impressive size and probable ferocity was softened a bit by an absolutely evil sense of humor. While Harry was technically not a member of our expedition, he had attached himself to our bunch. A common interest and friendship from earlier forays made us spiritual if not actual partners. Harry was a welcome addition and companion.

"Yep, he's the one! Didn't Harry and I tell you he was an untrustworthy @\$\$hole! If the bullets ain't flyin' Hair Oil is pretty reliable. Hair Oil also tends to be reliable if someone's threatening to break his rice bowl. It's my guess he was scared spitless to make that trip in the middle of the night!"

"Well, how about the firefights that were still going on in the streets?" I asked.

"I was talking to one of the kids of the Atlantic Brigade last night for a minute or two and he said that there hadn't been any active shooting in the streets for several days. He thought Hair Oil simply heard the kids celebrating their capture of the bar in the hotel Mexican style, by firing their AKs into the air in a fit of youthful enthusiasm!"

The light began to dawn. It seems that the kids of the KLA had made the capture of the bar in the Grand Hotel a major priority, and as the Serbs were taking flight, they celebrated their "bar conquest" by firing their weapons in the air in the manner of most partisan soldiers, no doubt well fortified with the alcoholic offerings of the bar's merchandise!

Colonel Brown greeted Hair Oil. Hair Oil then looked at Jake and demanded to know where we had been the night before. Jake told him that we had waited for over three hours after his arranged arrival time and hadn't seen hide nor hair of him. Hair Oil protested vigorously that he had been there for hours before the appointed pick up time of 1800.

At this point my patience was wearing thin.

"I don't know where you were *Hair Oil*, but the interpreter told us that *NO ONE* had been there all day, and there was only one spot where a car could park! To be as polite as I can, I'd say that you are a prevaricating male puppy of a female canine! Don't try to Bull \$++t an old Bull \$++tter!". You could have gotten us killed with your BS."

"Just who the hell are you?" said Hair Oil.

"I'm the guy who just called you a lying SOB!" I sez.

Jake, who hadn't said a word since the initial exchange, began looking at him like it was time to stop talking and start an a\$\$ whippin'. Hair Oil stepped back. Jake and I stood up. Colonel Bob took Hair Oil by the arm and led him to a table by the now non-existent window and told us to stay where we were, sit down, and behave, while he took Hair Oil over and had a long talk with him. Jake and I sat and ground our teeth while Colonel Bob had a spirited conversation with our missing ride from the night before. The Colonel then motioned for the two of us to come over. With no prompting, Hair Oil started in on his vehement denial again, indicating that it was the two of us who were lying. With this, Jake grabbed Hair Oil by the collar and without another word, started a swing designed to separate Hair Oil's head from his shoulders. With this, Hair Oil made a swipe at his photographer's vest as if to draw a pistol. Now I've seen this move many a time, and I know what comes next.

"I'm gonna' kill you," says Hair Oil to Jake!

Anticipating a belt gun appearing in Hair Oil's hand, I slid around to the other side of the table and pulled a 6" long and very sharp Spyderco filleting Knife out of my hip pocket. Jake was trying to get a better swing at Hair Oil. By now I was in front of Hair Oil as he attempted to put Colonel Brown between him and Jake. He now heard my blade snap open and lock.

"You're a dead man!" says Hair Oil to me.

"Not unless you're a lot better than I think you are!" I sez, planning to plant the Spyderco up to the hilt in Hair Oil's gizzard.

At this point Colonel Bob began to see all the pieces of a major dust up falling into place.

"For Christ's sake don't kill him!" says the Colonel, visibly worried about Hair Oil's imminent demise.

Colonel Brown, now convinced that he had a couple of deranged idiots working for him, ordered us to go sit down at our former table. Col. Bob told us under pain of death not to engage Hair Oil in any further conversation - PERIOD! He then turned to Hair Oil and told him to get the hell out of the hotel and to stay away from Jake and me for his continued safety. At this point, I spied a well dressed young man who appeared to be working for the hotel. He was walking rather rapidly toward me and seemed to be concerned about my rather wicked looking knife, which I was returning to my hip pocket. He turned out to be the Hotel security man, who had been watching the entire situation develop. Bear in mind, the entire evolution had occurred in the space of less than a minute.

"Please sir," the security man said, "I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't knife the gentleman in the dining room!" in a tone that indicated that knifing him in any other location would be perfectly alright with him!

"No problem," sez I, "I was just planning on cleaning my nails and my compatriots pointed out that no true gentleman ever cleans his nails in the dining room. I apologize for my rudeness!"

The security man was visibly relieved but saw the humor of the situation.

"You have my personal thanks," he says. "We're just getting the dining room cleaned up and good help is getting hard to find. Most of the young men are currently employed by the KLA. You can see my problem!"

As Hair Oil exited the hotel he passed Harry, who was sitting on the front steps enjoying the sunshine. Harry looked up at Hair Oil.

"Hey, Hair Oil, you mean nobody's killed you yet?"

Hair Oil looked at Harry unbelievably and increased his pace towards the street! I never saw Hair Oil again.

The next few days were spent interviewing participants of the recent fighting. The members of the KLA (the Kosovo Liberation Army) were a motley group composed mainly of Kosovars of Albanian extraction, usually Muslims. One rather interesting faction was a group that called themselves "The Atlantic Brigade". This outfit had been recruited in the Bronx mostly from those with relatives fighting the Serbs. One young lady named Linda, who was a 16 year old high school student, wore an American Flag bandana around her head. Her father was the leader of one of the KLA groups. Most were about 18 to 24 years old, and while dedicated to the cause were essentially youngsters with an adventurous spirit. One red-haired Irishman in his mid-20s was a true Mercenary, on his third war and already looking for another.

I ordered a beer at the bar. A smiling bar tender delivered the requested libation. I paid him in Deutch Marks, the only currency I had available. The barkeep smiled widely and gave me change in Serbian money. Being a bit dry, I ordered another. Sliding my Serbian change toward him brought an instant frown. He shook his head with a frown. Now what? I asked what was wrong. He told me with a slight smile that they didn't take Serbian money! Huh?

"But YOU just gave me the change," I said!

"Yes sir, that's true, but we don't *TAKE* Serbian money," he said with a grin.

"Now wait a minute! How in the heck am I supposed to get rid of this stuff," I inquired?

"I'm quite sure I don't know," replied bar tender, with a smirk on his face!

Lesson learned, never underestimate the guile of your enemy! These guys were survivors! I returned to the table with the kids from the Atlantic Brigade.

It seems that the Atlantic Brigade (and other freedom fighters) without prior military experience were trained over the border in Albania for approximately four weeks. They were then armed with essentially new AKs and a few brand new Barrett .50 Caliber Sniper Rifles. The newly trained recruits were then herded up to the Kosovo border and pointed in the right direction. Artillery and air support were provided by (ahem...) unseen forces and helped speed the war to a close. Cruise Missiles took out the Post Office and Police Stations in Pristina in an almost surgical fashion. This was a VERY well financed war!

About the only peripheral damage Pristina sustained from the missile attacks was broken glass from nearby buildings. The Cruise Missile strikes were designed to remove the records from police sources, and the destruction of the post office prevented any use of Post Office records for pinpointing the addresses of those with an Albanian background. Otherwise, the city of Pristina was left largely intact. Jake and I foraged through the rubble of the destroyed Police Station and found many of the Serbian records kept on "enemies of the state," complete with photographs and fingerprints. Someone had done a very professional job of removing the records...

The Brit Paras (NATO) were assigned to keep the peace in Pristina, and a relatively quiet demeanor of the local citizens indicated that they were successful. A strong military presence ensured compliance. The British Major who seemed to be running things at the military headquarters was conducting business in the typically understated British manner. He was not happy that some of the ethnic Serbs had chosen to stay in a "liberated Pristina," however! Their presence in close proximity to the returning Albanian Kosovars provided an extremely tempting target. The Albanian Kosovars whose families had been "purged" in the interest of Serbian ethnic cleansing were understandably upset. Isolated but continual instances of Albanian revenge often occurred during the hours of darkness. Serbian residents residing in the countryside outside the more populated areas of Pristina were particularly juicy targets. Needless to say, the remaining Serbs were petrified.

One condition of the cease-fire allowed only Albanian KLA members with clearly defined police duties to keep their weapons. This was only very loosely enforced. The Major explained that eventually his forces would be withdrawn. The resulting vacuum would result in chaos, and he wasn't enthusiastic about leaving the citizens with no way to protect themselves. As I understood it, his policy came close to the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the U.S. Military. No incidents, no weapons confiscation. A very understanding man, that Major. I know I certainly wouldn't have turned in MYAK!

Jake and I bummed rides with the Paras with the blessings of the British Major. After several patrols, it became obvious that the streets were quiet and likely to remain that way as long as the Brits remained in charge. Harry, Jake and I decided to do a little free-lance sight seeing for ourselves. The streets remained quiet. We headed back to the Grand Hotel.

Young Linda, the teen age volunteer from the Bronx, had made contact with her father, who now proudly stood with his arm around her. Several members of the Atlantic Brigade, who had been regaling us with stories of their daring-do in typical youthful enthusiasm, were heading to the hinterlands and offered to take anyone interested to see some of the

farmhouses where the fighting had raged several days before. Harry chose to go in order to take pictures with his digital Sony Camcorder. Jake and I had received a different assignment and had to pass. The stories that filtered back were almost unbelievable!

Entire families of Albanian extraction had been murdered and left to rot in their houses. The Serbs not only killed the people, but also any dogs that chose to stay close to their masters. The cats fled, having only a culinary interest in those who had supplied their sustenance and shelter. At least one body was usually thrown down the family well to ensure that the water supply was poisoned. The bodies were often scalped, and the faces were skinned from the bodies, leaving only the skull and underlying muscle tissue. The scalped faces were usually nailed to the sides of the houses. A favorite means of warning any who chose to remain was the beheading of some of the corpses and placing the head on a sharpened stake for the sheer terror effect. This wasn't just murder, it was barbarism not seen since the Middle Ages. The killing of the ethnic Albanians to "cleanse" the population was so foreign to my nature as to boggle my mind. Understandably upset, the returning (and surviving) Albanians wanted revenge. While killing is killing, killing to purge the "State" is reprehensible. Killing for revenge is understandable. I understand revenge as it often represents justice, whereas legal satisfaction of the law does not. No wonder the remaining Serbs were getting nervous!

A number of days of roaming the streets of Pristina had begun to wear thin and it was time to start thinking of branching out a bit. We had planned to visit the Marines who had come ashore, but by the time we were ready to leave they were in the process of relocating, leaving the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Division in place. Since this was Jake's old unit, we decided to drop in on "The Big Red One".

Colonel Brown was heading out in a different direction to cover the situation more completely further north. Jake and I were on our own once again. We departed with Harry in tow. We bummed a ride headed toward the enclave of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division known as Camp Bonesteel. We stopped in the nearest town to the Army CP which was overrun with U.S. Army troops. Everything had come to a stop to oblige a bunch of "visiting firemen" were making a publicity stop. We were introduced to the Commanding General of the Big Red One and stood by while visiting Congressmen came through for a politically obligatory hand shaking and speech making stop.

The General arranged for a ride for us to Camp Bonesteel with the Division's Public Affairs Officer, Major Eric Gunhaus. As the meeting broke up and the politicians headed out to their next stop, Major Gunhaus took us to the Base Camp in his Hummer. As could be imagined, the camp for an entire Army Division was of gigantic proportions. The camp was being built as we watched. Major Gunhaus provided us with an excellent briefing and offered us a ride to Macedonia in the General's Blackhawk. This HAD to be preferable to another thrilling ride through the Albanian mountains with our personal Mario Andretti.

In a fit of generosity, Jake presented Major Gunhaus with his personal Livesay Neck Knife. Most appropriate, I thought, as Gunhaus had gone out of his way to ensure that three wayfaring adventurers had enjoyed their stay with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Eric waved goodbye to us as we boarded the General's chopper on our way to the NATO re-supply base in Macedonia. I still exchange an occasional e-mail with young Gunhaus, a truly fine and accommodating gentleman.

The trip proved uneventful, the only casualty being my press credentials hung unwisely around my neck. I was extremely familiar with the riding characteristics of CH-46s, CH-53s and UH1-Es, but the down wash of a Blackhawk must be experienced to be believed! Trying to lean out the door to get a couple of good shots with the camera resulted in an unidentified object being sucked out the door of the chopper! Upppsss...My press credentials were drifting slowly down somewhere between Bonesteel and the Macedonian re-supply base. I immediately started thinking up excuses as to why I was wandering around the Balkan countryside without proper identification. Nothing to do but get a fresh set in Tirana, IF I ever got to Tirana!

The folks at the re-supply base were busier than a one legged man in an @\$\$kicking contest. Nothing really to do here but arrange for some land transport to the Albanian border. Since we weren't to be traveling through any known hostile territory, it sounded like a piece of cake. Engaging a cab driver with a sense of adventure, we propositioned him to take us all the way into Tirana. I climbed into the back seat and began to relax. All went well, the countryside was beautiful. Night began to fall, and our first screw-up became obvious as we approached the Macedonian-Albanian Border. Since we had entered Kosovo directly from Albania we had no entry visas indicating that we had ever crossed the Macedonian Border. The explanation was simple, but the fact that the Border Guards had a limited command of English made the situation a bit dicey.

We bailed out of the Taxi and went into the check station. What to do? We did the only honorable thing, we lied and bribed the guard. We used the universal passport in war-torn countries - money!

The rest of the trip was uneventful. No thousand foot drop over roads with no guardrails, and no Lurch signaling unseen checkpoints with his headlights. How boring. The trip seemed interminable as night fell over the countryside.

As our stalwart Taxi Driver pulled up in front of the Safe House, we climbed out with a sigh of relief. We wound our way through a back alley to reach our refuge. Half expecting Colonel Bob to have beat us home, we found the house unoccupied. Ah well, the prospect of a good night's sleep summoned. We crashed.

The next dawn gave us time to clean up our gear and check with the NATO folks on any other likely prospects of lively action in Kosovo. I, of course, had to renew my NATO Press Credentials. I went through filling out the required forms and having a picture attached.

Proudly clutching my renewed bona fides, I noticed Jake talking to a couple of Chinese gentlemen to one side. It seems that they were Chinese Reporters (usually cultural types, and thinly disguised agents of Chinese Intelligence). They had been vehemently demanding bodyguards to accompany them into Kosovo. I had told them that there was really very little danger, but they were not to be deterred. The Italian Colonel passing out the Press Passes grunted and allowed them to stew in their own juices. Wandering around looking for allies in their quest for personal protection, they had blundered into Jake, NOT an admirer of Communist China. Jake was up to the exchange!



Somehow, the conversation had gotten around to the subject of Cruise Missiles. They were telling Jake that they had it on good authority that the U.S. Cruise Missiles were terribly inaccurate. Preying on the then recent bombing of the Chinese Embassy, Jake looked at them with a completely innocent stare and said, "Well, it was good enough to take out the Chinese Embassy, wasn't it?" The Chinaman looked at Jake in horror and momentary disbelief. As Jake turned to leave, I could have sworn that I heard him say under his breath, "but it probably wouldn't have been nearly as accurate if we hadn't had a man on the inside!" We left two Chinese agents with their mouths hanging open. I wonder if the embassy personnel were purged? Heh, heh, heh...

We waited around Tirana for several days hoping for word from Colonel Brown, but to no avail. Since we had no contact phone number, we had to start our sea trip by ocean-going ferry back to Italy. As it turned out, Colonel Bob was still following leads in the Northern part of Kosovo and would reappear, Brown fashion, several weeks later. We were a bit concerned, but knowing the Colonel's ability to handle himself in sticky situations, we were not in a panic stricken state.

Not having anticipated our long separation, we were running a bit short on ready cash, and our airline reservations in Rome were rapidly approaching. Jake made a couple of cryptic calls for transportation from Tirana to Durrës where we were to catch the ferry. The trip was an overnight sojourn, crossing the Adriatic to the Italian port of Bari. From Bari the train wound across the Italian Boot past Naples, turning north towards Rome. Ah Rome, "The Eternal City." We were not prepared for what was to come!

We knew that we were operating on limited capital, but after eating we pooled our remaining "jing" only to find that lodgings were gonna' be sparse. Rome is one expensive joint! Just outside the railroad terminal in Rome, we were accosted by a young lady hawking special prices on local lodging. Hummm... We told her what we had to spend. She told us she had JUST the thing that would fit our budget. We followed her with anticipation of a decent night's rest in a nice hotel. We should have known better.

Walking up the street towards the hotel we had used on our way to Albania, it appeared that our new digs were at least located in a nice neighborhood! We suddenly took a hard left down a side street. Lots of bright lights, but no obvious hotels. Suddenly the gal points up to a sign advertising the "*Chica-Chica Boom Club*"! Uh Oh - The hotel wasn't a roach motel, but the furnishings seemed to be early Victorian. Checking at the front desk, the clerk indicated that we could rent the room for as long as we wanted... from an hour up! Hummm...

A number of questions to the desk clerk revealed that the "*Chica-Chica Boom Club*" didn't have any twin singles, just single rooms with one double bed. The elevators were so small that it was a real squeeze for two people. We wondered when they built this place. While the sheets were clean, I got the definite feeling that we were "hot racking" our assigned room. I was afraid to open the door, lest I find a line outside waiting for their turn.

"Hey Jake, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Yeah, no question about it! Where I come from they burn red lights in front of a place like this! This is a high class whore house!"

A Roman "House of Ill Repute?" How was this gonna' read on the after action report? And only ONE double bed! Now Jake was a nice guy, but ...

"Hey Jake, ya' wanna' flip for the bed?"

"Naw, just spread your sleeping bag out on the bed, and I'll do the same."

"Jake, you don't roll around in your sleep a bunch do ya?"

"Not usually, but look at it like this - we've both got neck knives, right?"

Neck knives? Dear Allah! How's this one gonna' read? North Idaho adventurer stabbed in male lover's tryst in Roman Sporting House... Wonder how they did this in the old West when the Gold Camps were filled to overflowing? My appreciation for western history was getting a whole new perspective!

We stowed our gear, squeezed into the little itty-bitty elevator, and went out into the street to check out Rome after dark. By pure chance we found Harry, who had flown back to Rome in style and was hanging his hat in one of the better hotels in town. I made lots of mental notes to myself.

With a day to kill until our plane departed for the States, we set out on a foot tour of Rome. We hit everything, from the Coliseum, to the Roman Forum, to the Vatican. We broke bread with Harry that evening and talked over the trip. Was it worth it? No question about it! My eyes were opened once more to man's continual inhumanity to man, and I had achieved a new appreciation for the situation in the Balkans.

I might have remained a closet isolationist if Milosevic's ethnic assassination squads just hadn't killed the dogs.

**ROC**



## Contrary to Good Order and Discipline

By the Master Joustier

**T**he cases of Lt. Kelly Flinn and General Joseph Ralston are currently dominating the American Political scene, occasionally even pushing the trial of "Lee Harvey McVeigh" into the background. Charges of male chauvinism and favoritism are rampant. Politicians are expounding on both sides of the issue, usually with a total lack of understanding of the issues involved! Ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you that the issues involved here have virtually nothing to do with morality as we normally think of it. The issues here are what make an effective and efficient fighting organization, not some Puritan rules that can be traced into antiquity.

Let's examine why the so-called adultery issue is even addressed in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). While this Country's roots are predominately of the Judeo-Christian persuasion, the seemingly prudish provisions of the infamous Article 134 of the UCMJ have virtually nothing to do with morality per se. The prohibition against adultery is addressed in Article 134 to prevent an erosion of combat efficiency within the Armed Services. As a sort of lesser included offense, the prohibition also extends to something called "fraternization"... let's take a look at the dictionary definition of these two terms.

**a-dul-ter-y** n., pl. *a-dul-ter-ies*. Voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful spouse.

**frat-er-nize** v. *frat-er-nized*, *frat-er-niz-ing*, *frat-er-niz-es*. 1. To associate with others in a brotherly or congenial way. 2. To associate on friendly terms with an enemy or opposing group, often in violation of discipline or orders. --frat"er-ni-za"tion n. --frat"er-niz"er n.

These little jewels are inserted into the UCMJ to prevent blood feuds and indeed blood shed within our military community. The resentment felt by any person when they find out that their spouse is cheating on them is magnified many times over if the individual is in a combat zone and not *home* to defend their marriage. Now crank the following factor into the equation. What if the individual "snaking" your spouse happens to be another member of the Armed Forces? Do you begin to get the picture?

Lets put a different spin on the military version of the adultery bit. Say the individual running around with your spouse is your military senior. The feeling on the part of the junior is often "well I can't compete with him (or her)", or worse yet -"why go to the 1st Sergeant (or

Captain), they aren't gonna' believe me, care, or do anything so why bother?" The individual so wronged is hardly going to be an effective part of his or her military team. Resentment will fester, the story will get around, and the senior officer or non-commissioned officer will be seen as taking advantage of his (or her) rank and position. He (or she) will lose the respect and backing of his (or her) juniors and thus his (or her) effectiveness will take a nosedive as will the effectiveness of the unit.

Worse yet, carried to the ultimate extreme, revenge or blackmail may well enter the mind of the aggrieved individual. How about a platoon sergeant "*romancing*" the wife of a subordinate, or the Company or Battalion Commander having an affair with the spouse of a member of his command? In the infantry during the heat of battle, many opportunities present themselves for a "stray" bullet to find its mark in the "blighter" perceived to be the violator of our hero's spouse. It doesn't take much imagination to add the details. Or, how about this one? What if Lt. Kelly Flinn's "sweetie" was married to a lady aircraft mechanic? Now what if this mechanic was assigned to maintain Lt. Flinn's aircraft... The possibilities boggle the imagination! Loose hydraulic fittings, "frayed wires", hydrocarbon eating microbes in the fuel tank... sabotage would be a tempting possibility to an outraged junior. *You* may be more forgiving, but such things would certainly occur to *me*!

So far we've just been talking about adultery, but what about "*fraternization*"? What could possibly be the harm of two unmarried individuals of the opposite sex holding hands? Well, the answer is that it all depends... Even though the details aren't covered in great detail, normally if the "handholding" is between two enlisted folks in entirely different units, the conduct is considered acceptable. The same goes for two officers (assuming that they are of the opposite sex of course). The crossing of the line between officer and enlisted is normally prohibited however. If a captain is "dating" a sergeant for instance, it has always been felt that the sergeant could possibly "twist the arm" of the officer to get his or her way, "skate" on duty or be perceived to be receiving special favors! If you are playing "kissie-face" at night, it might be a bit of a problem to take orders from your "squeeze" the following day! Even if you played it totally straight, others in the unit would *assume* that the "honey-wa" was receiving special favors. In the Marine Corps, it is (or at least was) considered to be in bad form for a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) to even go on liberty with a "non-rated man"... This wasn't chiseled in stone, but it was seriously frowned upon.

In light of the above ground rules, let's take a look at the conduct of Lt. Kelly Flinn. We'll do this in a question and answer format:

**Q.** Wasn't Lt. Flinn's affair with a civilian, a Mr. Marc Zigo?

**A.** Yes, but he was married to a woman on active duty in the Air Force.

**Q.** Weren't Marc and his wife separated?

**A.** Their initial status was not announced, but after the incident they certainly were!

**Q.** Didn't Marc tell Lt. Flinn he was single?

**A.** Supposedly, but when his wife ("Airperson" Zigo) complained to her superiors, Lt. Flinn was called in and counseled concerning the situation. Lt. Flinn was told to sever

her relationship with Marc because it was causing hate and discontent in the unit and that she (Lt. Flinn) was in violation of Article 134 of the UCMJ.

**Q.** What happened then?

**A.** Lt. Flinn acknowledged that she understood and would obey the order. Instead, she continued to see Marc in defiance of a direct order and lied to her superiors that she had terminated the affair.

**Q.** Then Lt. Flinn wasn't being disciplined just for adultery?

**A.** That's correct. Until Lt. Flinn was counseled concerning Marc's status, her conduct could have been written off to poor or questionable judgment. After the situation was clarified by her senior officer(s) she placed herself in a position of disobeying a direct order by continuing her affair with a married man and lying to her superior officers that she had terminated the relationship... worse yet to a man whose wife was in the U. S. Air Force. No matter what your sex, whether you were first in your Air Force Academy Class, or the first woman allowed to fly B-52 Bombers, *direct disobedience of a direct order cannot be tolerated in the U. S. (or any) Military!* ...And when you tell your commanding officer that you have in fact terminated the relationship when you have not, you are now lying to him as well. Now lets just suppose that the individual who knowingly lies to a superior officer and disobeys a direct order is also one trusted to fly B-52 bombers armed with nuclear weapons... Humm, scary, eh what?

OK, well let's assume that you will now buy the rationale of "sacking" Lt. Flinn, but you ask why it is apparently perfectly alright for General Joseph Ralston to do the same thing and get away with it. This would seem to be a double standard. Here is a **MAN** who is committing adultery and he's apparently going to be allowed to skate! Isn't this just another example of male chauvinistic behavior? It's *OK* for a man, but the woman is forced out of the Air Force, is that right? Isn't this a double standard?

**Q.** Isn't General Joseph Ralston being given preferential treatment because of his rank and because he's a man?

**A.** Not really, we have two entirely different sets of circumstances here. The object of General (then Colonel) Ralston's affections was an *unmarried **civilian** lady*, in no way connected to the military establishment. His actions were unlikely to affect or influence the military community in any way... except possibly in a positive fashion assuming the lady made him happy. Remember I said that I was going to argue this from a perspective of military efficiency, not morals.

**Q.** Well, I thought we were talking about adultery here, how is adultery any different between Lt. Flinn's romance and General Ralston's affair?

**A.** Good question. Lt. Flinn's "squeeze" is (was?) married to an active duty military member. "Airperson" Zigo became extremely agitated and unhappy that an officer in "her" service could take her husband away from her while the Air Force simply looked on! Allowing this sort of behavior to go on definitely destroys morale and performance in our military services. General Ralston's adultery concerned his own estranged wife and

a *totally detached unmarried civilian woman*, and did *not* have the potential to effect the morale of any military organization. Remember military efficiency, not morality is the point here!

**Q.** Why was Lt. Flinn forced to leave the service with a General Discharge as a result of her adultery and General Ralston allowed to remain? ...And now it looks like General Ralston is going to be elevated to the job of *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*! How can *that* possibly be fair?

**A.** Again it's not at all the same thing. The chances are great that *if* Lt. Flinn had heeded the counseling that Marc Zigo was married to an Air Force enlisted person, and that she (Lt. Flinn) should cease her adulterous activities, she would have been let go with a warning, and a finger shake. *If* she had done what she was told, I suspect that Lt. Flinn would *still* be flying B-52s and the incident would have died a natural death. Allowing an Air Force pilot to continue flying B-52s armed with nuclear weapons after having disobeyed a direct order and having lied to her superior officers borders on insanity. Conversely, General Ralston's adulterous actions (although perhaps morally reprehensible to Christian sensibilities) wouldn't necessarily indicate that he would be unsuited for the Chairman's job. Remember, it is not adultery per se that is addressed in Article 134, it is *conduct contrary to good order and discipline*!

**Q.** Well don't you agree that General Ralston's conduct is just as reprehensible as Lt. Flinn's?

**A.** Well, I thought I had made this point clear. From a religious standpoint, adultery is adultery, is adultery... but then Lt. Flinn was *really* disciplined for her actions following her adultery, and continuing her adultery after she had been told to cease and desist. The chances are very great indeed, that Lt. Flinn's adultery would have been swept under the rug if she hadn't defied her Commanding Officer. Conversely, General Ralston's conduct was fleeting, was known by his superiors, and did not affect the military. In other words, his conduct was not contrary to good order and discipline of the Armed Forces of The United States. The issue simply vaporized as Lt. Kelly's conduct would have vaporized if she had not continued to be guided by her biological urges... Remember the UCMJ is a practical working military document concerned with winning our wars... the Chaplain's Corp is concerned with winning our souls!

We must be very careful not to let politicians such as Senator Olympia Snowe from Maine make a "Femi-Nazi" issue out of this... Let's not allow the rabid feminists to shout "See! The male chauvinist pigs are trying to undo the feats of such wonderful girls as Lt. Kelly Flinn!... Look at that awful General Joseph Ralston! He "romanced" his mistress and nothing happened to HIM! This is a double standard! It's not fair! We demand that General Ralston be strung up by his b++s, and Lt. Flinn be reinstated in the Air Force!"

Another well-groomed **MALE** Senator was heard to say during the Flinn affair..."we've got to bring the Armed Forces into the mainstream of modern society!" The sad part was that the idiot (Senator though he may have been) didn't have a clue! What was his point? "*If it feels good, do it!*" (al-la the flower children of the '60s)? "My Gawd"... I certainly hope we've gone past that insanity! On the one hand we have the Femi-Nazis demanding the reinstatement of an officer who deliberately disobeyed a direct order and then lied about it (and wants to be allowed to continue to carry nuclear weapons on her aircraft). On the other

hand (*and just as dangerous*) are the remnants of the "flower children" who think everyone should get high and "romance" (to use a polite term) anyone they see fit regardless of the consequences... after all we've **gotta'** bring the Armed Forces into the mainstream of modern society! Oh my...

Well ladies and gentlemen, we just *may* have a war or two to win in the meantime. Playing "tit for tat" in this exchange sounds like a heck of a price (in the words of the immortal Dirty Harry) to pay for being stylish! The rationale (as I understand it), is to win wars, not popularity contests. I'll admit that General Ralston has a lousy sense of timing, but if we're gonna' get specific with our pointed pencils and adulterous conduct, we might consider FDR, John F. Kennedy, and LBJ. Of course they didn't "romance" one of their NCO's wives either! And then there's "Slick"... but since he's never fought in a war, how could he possibly know anything about winning one? Now what was that about "*contrary to good order and discipline*"? Allah help us!

*ROC '97*

# The Saga of the M16 in Vietnam (part 1)

by Dick Culver

The following story is one that I tell with some trepidation, since my experience(s) with the "Matty Mattel Mouse Guns" were not pleasant ones. In this time and place far separated from the grim reality of kill or be killed, the bitter memories of the "little black rifle that wouldn't shoot" have started blending into the mists of long forgotten firefights. Some of the bitterness of those days of long ago will no doubt color the story somewhat, but in order for the reader to understand the story from the perspective of those of us who experienced the frustration, this is probably unavoidable. There seemed to be a callous disregard for the lives and well being of those individuals who willingly fought and often died using a seriously flawed rifle. This is their story then, for those who went in harm's way with the XM16E1, and most of all, for those who didn't come back. May their sacrifices never be forgotten.



Like most things, the reality of being armed with an ineffective weapon was of little import to those who were not risking their lives on a daily basis. By the time the problem was finally fixed, many friends and comrades had been awarded "*the white cross*", or in the verbiage of the time, had "*bought the farm*". Many lives could have been saved if a few individuals in "decision making billets" had possessed the intestinal fortitude to correct the problem. ...And the problem was "correctable" – all that was necessary was the application of a bit of guts and common sense. Aircraft that are suspected of being flawed are immediately grounded until a problem has been corrected, or a fix has been found. And so it was with the Marines' CH-46 Helicopter during the same time frame. The tail pylons started rather abruptly separating themselves from the bird with catastrophic results. The CH-46 was quite rightly grounded and sent back to Okinawa until the problem was isolated and fixed. For some unexplained reason the same rationale was not applied to a rifle that was costing lives on a daily basis. Perhaps the "*Wingies Union*" was stronger than the "*Grunt's Union*" – whatever the reason, dead is dead, and the Grunts were not amused! Unfortunately, doing the "right thing" would have cost individuals in positions of authority considerable embarrassment – something that no one was willing to risk. The "air types" could blame Boeing, but many of the decisions concerning the M16 were made within the "military industrial complex", making it more difficult to pin Colt to the wall. Individuals within the Military who had given their "yea verily" to the project would have found themselves looking for another job.

Rather than bore you with cold statistics and hard facts to start, I will tell the story as it happened and as I remember it. Making allowances for the dimming of the memory after 32 years, the entire saga still stands in my consciousness as if it happened only yesterday – things like that are hard to forget.

Our outfit, the Second Battalion, Third Marine Regiment, was selected to assume the duty as one of the two Battalions filling the job as the "Special Landing Force". This evolution consisted of a quick trip out of Vietnam to the peacetime home of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division



(Okinawa), for a refurbishment of web gear, worn out equipment, and the fleshing out of a casualty riddled Battalion with fresh replacements. This slight respite from the "free fire zone" afforded new replacements an opportunity to gain experience and training with their new organization. The SLF was in fact a BLT (Battalion Landing Team) with enough attachments to make it into a sort of "bobtailed Regiment". In addition to the standard four line (infantry) companies, and an H&S Company (Headquarters & Service), we also had attached: a Helicopter Squadron, an Artillery Battery, a Recon Platoon, an Engineer Platoon, Amtracs (Amphibious Tractors/Landing Vehicles) and various other supporting elements. At that time, an (unreinforced) Infantry Battalion (before being festooned with the above attachments) consisted of approximately 1100 men. 1/3 (1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment) was to be designated as SLF Alpha, and 2/3 was to make up SLF Bravo.

The SLF's job was to act as a sort of "Super Sparrow-hawk" (cavalry to the rescue stuff) to reinforce any organization actively engaged with the enemy who wound up in a "feces sandwich"... when the brass sent in the SLF, someone was already in big trouble! Knowing that you were headed into a "hot LZ" (landing zone) on a rather repeated basis made for a very exciting tour. The normal SLF tour of duty was usually scheduled for a duration of 6 weeks. The outgoing SLF Battalion was then returned to its parent Division (1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>), and a new Battalion took over the rather thrilling duty as "The I Corps' Fire Brigade". It was an ingenious scheme, as it allowed the Marines to refurbish their battalions occasionally, and allowed time (albeit relatively short), to train new replacements out of the line of fire. Normally, the SLF tour was anticipated by the selected Battalions with some enthusiasm, as it was *supposed* to include one short R&R for the Battalion in Subic Bay, prior to the SLF's reassignment to the RVN. Needless to say, no one in 2/3 ever saw Subic, except as a casualty. *Murphy*, always taking a hand in things, stirred the pot in such a way that the refurbishment and replacement of battalions on the SLF was curtailed after the vicious "Hill Fights" around Khe Sanh in April of '67. 2/3 (and their sister battalion, 1/3) had taken on the best that the NVA could throw at them and whipped them hands down, but it was not without cost. Many a dead or dying Marine was found with a cleaning rod shoved down the bore of the little black rifle...

The constant pressure on I Corps starting that Spring left 2/3 manning the ramparts as one of the two SLFs for a period of nine months (versus the normal 6 weeks)! When the smoke finally settled, 2/3 had taken over 800 casualties and those who survived walked away with a sigh of relief. By August of '67, my company (Hotel, 2/3) had only 5 Marines without at least one Purple Heart, and I was not one of them.

Technically, the SLFs were supposed to return to the LPH (and other supporting shipping) after a battle, lick their wounds, get cleaned up, draw more ammunition and standby for the next mission.

By way of explanation to those who have not been in the Corps or associated with the Navy, "LPH" stands for "Landing Platform - Helicopter". The LPH is in fact nothing more than a small aircraft carrier, primarily designed to launch helicopters for a Marine (or perhaps Army) landing force. The supporting shipping usually consisted of an LSD, ("Landing Ship - Dock" designed to launch Amphibian Tractors for a seaborne surface assault), an LST ("Landing Ship - Tank", self explanatory) and an APA (assault transport to house additional troops). All together, they made up the seaborne vehicles for a rather formidable assault force.

*Murphy* again took a hand, and out of those fateful 9 months, we spent approximately 12 days aboard our assigned shipping. The rest of the time we got "chopped op-con"<sup>1</sup> to one of the Infantry Regiments ashore (transferred to, and under their operational control) - after all, we were those "pogues" who lived aboard ship and had it easy, were they not? Everyone figured that we were well rested and ready to go. The Regiments ashore, of course, took full advantage of such obviously fresh troops, and threw us into the very "choicest" assignments, to allow their units a breather – we were eventually referred to as the "*day on - stay on battalion*", and brother, they weren't kidding!

It was in the arena outlined above that I got my first introduction to the XM16E1. When 2/3 arrived on Okinawa to refit and train for their duties as SLF Bravo, they were already licking their wounds. The Battalion had been ambushed on a march between two hill masses, losing their Commanding Officer and Sergeant Major, along with numerous other individuals. While they were hardly demoralized, they possessed a particular affection for their CO and Sgt.Maj. and were chomping at the bit to return to the RVN to avenge the Battalion's losses. Shortly after 2/3's arrival on Okinawa, the Battalion learned that it was scheduled to draw a new "experimental rifle"... the XM16E1. 2/3 dutifully turned in their M14s to draw a curious little plastic thing that drew lots of snickers and comments from the old timers (we still had a few WWII vets in those days). The Battalion was given an orientation lecture in the Camp Schwab Base Theater by some ordnance folks, sent to the range to fire some sighting in rounds, and pronounced properly prepared for combat... little did they know!

The Battalion was told that they would now be able to carry 400 rounds ashore on each operation, and were now armed with an accurate, hard hitting rifle that would tear a man's arm off if you hit him. The lecture was impressive. The interesting thing is that the Marines WANTED to like the little rifle – it was light, cute, and supposedly extremely effective! Marines are always in favor of a weapon that will dismember their enemy more efficiently and more effectively. The Marines of 2/3 left Okinawa READY to go try this "jack the giant killer" on the NVA or Cong (they didn't care which, as long as it made a good fight!). However, there were several flies in the ointment. First, they only had one cleaning rod per rifle and no replacements – sounds reasonable, but events were to prove this assumption wrong. The second problem was that ordnance had only enough magazines to issue three (3) per rifle, and they were "twenty rounders". The thirty rounders in those days were only being used by the Special Forces – Robert "Strange" McNamara, (The Secretary of Defense), had decreed that the 20 round magazines were more cost effective than the 30 round magazines (this from the guy who was responsible for marketing the Edsel!)? We were now armed with the latest in weaponry, and able to carry 400 rounds ashore. Our confidence level would probably have been considerably higher if we had been issued more than three 20 round Magazines per gun. We were promised more of course, and as it turned out, it became true, but only because we were able to pick up those left behind by the casualties. The long and the short of this lesson, however, was that they were trying to get the M16 into action well before adequate supplies were available to support the weapon, even if it had been functioning properly. Politics is indeed a strange game!

Ammunition was issued in "white" or "brown" twenty (20) round boxes. Bandoleers with "clipped ammunition" in ten round "strippers" had not yet made their way to South East Asia. While this would have been a handicap under normal circumstances, it turned out to be a "non-problem"... A full 50% of the rifles wouldn't shoot semi-automatically! The unfortunate individuals armed with the malfunctioning rifles couldn't shoot enough rounds to need more

than the initial three magazines at any rate! Three hundred and forty rounds in 20 round cardboard boxes were stowed in our packs, with the idea that during a firefight, a man who had run dry, could roll over to his buddy and take ammunition out of his pack and his buddy could do the same. As it turned out, this rarely figured into the equation.

The first clue (for 2/3) that something was wrong came during the battle of Hill 881 North... but *all* the Hill Fights at Khe Sanh in April '67 came up the same – dead Marines with cleaning rods stuck down the barrel of their M16s to punch out cartridge cases that refused to extract. At first, we considered that the experiences encountered during the Hill Fights might have constituted an isolated incident, but as experience was to prove, alas, 'twas not so! The regulations of the time required that all such malfunctions were to be documented, and reported to Ordnance Maintenance/Division Ordnance. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Marines must have filled a 6X6 truck with malfunction reports attempting to stay within the administrative guidelines. We submitted the required reports and waited – we wanted the problem *FIXED* – NOW, and we were willing to play the ordnance paperwork game if that was what it took to correct the situation!

Spring stretched into summer, and summer gave way to fall, with reams of paperwork having being sent out to the Ordnance Maintenance Folks on the "Rock" (Okinawa) and to the ordnance folks in Vietnam. We outlined, in great detail, the failure of the much vaunted M16 to perform as advertised... It simply *wasn't* working! It seemed that if your rifle *would* shoot, it would shoot under almost all conditions (if clean), but if it *wouldn't*, no amount of coaxing would help. All of the M16s seemed to be extraordinarily sensitive to carbon build-up, even if the rifle was one that would shoot when freshly cleaned. This meant that in a long and heated firefight, it was possible to have a much larger percentage of rifles "out of action" than the 50% that didn't want to shoot at all. Something was seriously amiss! A rifle that refuses to shoot during a firefight, is unsuitable as a combat implement. The NVA was obviously not gonna' allow us a "time out" while we held a cleaning session! My first clue to the solution to the problem came from talking to the Battalion Armorer. He had an M16 that worked under almost all conditions. I asked him what he had done to it, and he replied that he had taken a ¼" drill, attached a couple of sections of cleaning rod to it, and put some "crocus cloth" through the slotted tip (like a patch) and run it into the chamber and turned the drill motor on. He "horsed" the drill a bit and apparently relieved the chamber dimensions just enough to ensure positive functioning. This was a sort of precursor to the "chrome plated chamber fix" that would be applied in days to come.

FSR (Force Service Regiment – which also acts as a home for the small arms repair folks), sent a trouble shooting team to visit us aboard the LPH shortly after the "Hill Fights" to try and pin down the problem. As soon as the ordnance team arrived, they made it clear that THEY were already well informed (meaning they'd already made up their minds) concerning our problem and had decided (without so much as a question to us) that WE as a Battalion were responsible for a bad rap being given to a marvelous little rifle! The lads in the rear had decided that WE were simply not keeping our rifles clean, and if we weren't such inattentive and unmotivated "oafs" being led by incompetents, we wouldn't have such a problem. Needless to say, the hackles stood up on the back of our necks. "Them wuz *fightin'* words!" ...And we wuz peaceable folks (well sorta' anyway)! To say that they had misread the problem is an understatement!

Certainly from a personal standpoint, they were full of "un-reprocessed prunes". My background in small arms went back as far as my conscious memory, and when I "screwed

up" with a firearm of any kind as a kid, my Daddy left knots on my head and welts on my "stern-sheets"! During this time frame, I had just finished firing on the USMC Rifle Team (in 1965 – this was now 1967) and to say that I had high standards of weapons cleanliness for my rifle company is an extreme understatement. If the rifles had been clean enough to eat off of before the visit from the FSR clowns, rifle cleanliness moved up a notch to "autoclaved" as a result of the insults they were bandying about! We literally fired thousands of test rounds over the fantail (the stern) of the LPH. Each of the issued rifles was fired, cleaned and then fired again! ...Same story, about 50% of the rifles were reliable and 50% were "non-shooters". We cleaned the rifles between strings of fire (and *this* test was conducted in the more or less "sterile" conditions encountered in a shipboard environment), with the same results! NOW we were getting worried.

The malfunction reports continued to pour into the rear echelon papermills without any tangible results. On one notable occasion, a stalwart Marine crept around in a flanking movement on an enemy machine gun position. He assumed a quick kneeling position to get a clear shot over the sawgrass, and "did for" the hapless NVA gunner! His second shot aimed for the assistant gunner never came, as his rifle jammed and the assistant gunner avenged his dead comrade by splattering the Marine's gray matter all over the stock of the Matty Mattel Special. After the fight, we sent his little black rifle to Division Intelligence with a complete report on the events (without removing the brain matter from the stock). We waited with baited breath for the response to this one, but alas to no avail! Still no action! Normally aggressive Marines were understandably getting a bit edgy about being assigned to listening posts or outposts. Ambushes were, more likely than not, to result in Marine casualties. We started stealing and or trading the cute little black rifle for M14s. Many rear echelon troops (usually known as *REMFs*) were more than willing to trade their old fashioned M14s for a little lightweight rifle that was easy to carry, (the M16s in those days were reserved for the frontline troops). Supply and demand prevailed, and what we couldn't trade, we appropriated (a polite military term for outright theft!). The Engineer troops assigned to us for support (mine clearing, demolition, and setting up helicopter landing zones) were still armed with the M14 (not being infantry). The Engineers became some of the most popular troops in the Battalion and made up a substantial part of our base of fire. I was always partial to Engineers anyway, and these guys cemented our relations in a big time way – good people those Engineers – and *THEY* were armed with a *REAL* rifle!

It finally became apparent that no one was gonna' come to our rescue! Our reports were falling on deaf ears, and our Battalion Commander was more than a little annoyed. The bayonet had become more popular than before and indeed enjoyed a resurgence of usefulness, until in the throes of hand to hand combat one of the lads gave the enemy a vertical butt stroke that resulted in his holding a "two part" Matty Mattel... Captured AK 47s began to show up in increasing numbers, but they were a double edged sword. The AK 47 had a rather distinctive sound when fired, and would occasionally result in the Marine "wielding" the foreign piece, receiving a bit of "friendly incoming"! This was in addition to the fact that ammo re-supply for the AK was a problem. After a fire fight, the battalion S-4 (supply & logistics) frowned on requests for a couple of thousand rounds of 7.62 X 39...

Things were getting desperate... Our Commandant at the time, General Wallace M. Green, when queried about the rumors filtering back from the front-line troops, contacted the Marine Corps ordnance people and asked them what the problem was. The Ordnance Brass "bleated" the school solution and told the "*Commandanche*" that the problem stemmed from poor weapons maintenance and a lack of leadership! The Commandant then appeared on TV

and announced to all the world that the only thing wrong with the M16 was there weren't enough of them! How RIGHT he was! It took 20 rifles to get off 20 rounds! We were enraged! – and we began to plot! Never let it be said that the average Marine isn't cunning, if not terribly intelligent.

This is probably a good place to describe the actual malfunction that was prevalent with the "mouse gun" – although there were variations the problem was essentially as follows:

- 1.) The rifle would be loaded normally, i.e., a loaded magazine would be inserted and the bolt would be allowed to go forward, causing a round to be chambered.
- 2.) The trigger would allow the hammer to fall, with the rifle firing the first round in the expected fashion. Then the problem began...
- 3.) The bolt would start to the rear, but the cartridge case would remain in the chamber. There were two variations to this one, one in which the extractor would "jump" the rim, and one where the extractor would "tear through" the rim. Either version left the case in the chamber.
- 4.) The bolt would start forward stripping the next round from the top of the magazine.
- 5.) Since the chamber was already occupied by the cartridge that had just been fired, the newly fed round would shove the bullet tip firmly into the stuck case effectively jamming the rifle.

This "jam" could be cleared by:

- a.) Removing the magazine from the rifle, pulling the bolt to the rear, and locking it in this position by depressing the bolt catch.
- b.) If the newly fed live round did not automatically fall free (it often did), you had to shake the rifle to allow the round to fall free of the magazine well.
- c.) A cleaning rod was then inserted in the muzzle and the "stuck case" was driven out of the chamber.
- d.) The magazine was then reinserted and locked into the magazine well, and the bolt allowed to go forward by depressing the bolt catch. The bolt would again strip a round from the magazine and reload the chamber.
- e.) This round could then be fired and the entire cycle started all over again.

Essentially we had been reduced to a *"magazine fed, air cooled, single shot, muzzle ejecting shoulder weapon"* shooting an inferior cartridge. How lucky can you get?

Mike Chervenak, my XO (executive officer) was a man of rare moral fiber. Not only was Mike one hell of a good Marine, but he cared for and about our Marines... and the M16 was continuing to get them killed. On one of the very few days we spent aboard the LPH preparing for our next thrilling adventure, Mike came to see me in my quarters.

"Skipper" said Mike, "what the heck are we gonna' do about this miserable little rifle?"

"Well Mike," I replied, "I guess we're doing about all that can be done – I'm about out of options! All we can hope for is that ordnance'll find a fix!"

Mike being smarter than the average bear, drug his toe in the dirt and asked, "Skipper, do I have your permission to write a letter to my congressman?"

"Well Mike," I said, "I can't tell you *NOT* to write such a letter, it's a free country!"

"Well Skipper," said Mike, "what would YOU do?"

Uh oh – now I'm trapped! "Well," I told him, "I'd probably write a letter to the Commandant!"

"But Skipper," Mike says, "you *KNOW* he won't ever get to see it!"

"Wrong," sez I, "all you have to do is put 'copy to: Senator Zlotz' (or whoever) at the bottom of the letter, and military paranoia will kick in! The staff will be afraid *NOT* to show it to him, lest he get a call from an outraged Congressman!"

"Yeah," said Mike, "but I'll bet that nothing will be done about it even if he *DOES* see it!"

"Well, you're probably right," I tell him, "but it might be worth a try!?"

Mike, somewhat discouraged at this point, allows as how it'll probably be more effective to send one to his Representative. I agree without overtly suggesting that he do so. He turns to go, but just as he reaches the Water Tight Door (WTD), he turns around with a slight grin and says "Skipper, would YOU help me write it?"

Hummm... the rest is history. Mercifully we did a workmanlike job on the letter, and simply explained the problem (much as above) and made note that it took precious seconds to clear a jammed rifle that an Infantryman doesn't have in a firefight. We were also careful not to call names or point fingers, and that's all that saved us in the light of things to come! I'm not too sure who Mike sent the letter to, but a copy of it WAS published in that "Communist Rag", *The Washington Post*!

Mike was on R&R when the thunder came rolling in. He received a "person to person" phone call from "Wally" (Wallace M. Green, the Commandant, who hangs his hat in Washington, D.C.) in Vietnam! Alas, Mike was not there to take the call! The brass came to me of course, asking where Mike had gone when he left on R&R. Since Mike had earned his R&R in spades, and I didn't want to screw it up for him (knowing the problem would still be there when he returned). I did the only honorable thing I could and lied! Hee, hee, hee... Mike finished his R&R in good order and without harassment.

When they discovered that I had aided and abetted Mike in his endeavors, the feces struck the ventilation! That letter kicked off FIVE simultaneous investigations; one from the Third Marine Division, one from the 9<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Brigade, one from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment, one from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment (us) and last but not least a Congressional Investigation led by a Congressman from Louisiana named "Speedy O. Long" (yes, that was really his name!). During the investigations, the Battalion hid me so far back in

the "*ding toolies*" that it was necessary to pipe in air and sunlight. Mike and I had become the "pariahs" in the Marine Corps in general, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division in particular. However...

At long last people started doing something overt for a change. We were pulling an operation down in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division AO, south of Da Nang (AO stands for "area of operations") – the SLF was essentially a "hired gun" and went wherever there was hate and discontent). The Corps "*flew-in*" a C-130 with 400 brand new XM16E1 rifles along with a Marine Warrant Officer considered to be an expert in the small arms ordnance field. The ordnance Warrant was an old friend of mine who had been the Marine Representative to Cadillac Gauge when they were building the "Stoner 63" System. He had been a Staff Sergeant at the time and we used to sit on my living room floor and disassemble the Stoner System over an occasional beer (well, maybe *several* beers) when the Marine Corps was running its Stoner tests in at Camp Lejeune. Now, I tell myself, we'll get some results, Bob is a pretty savvy guy! ...Wrong again "*gopher breath*"! – Bob Baker (the Marine Warrant Officer), had suddenly and inexplicably switched to (what we thought of as) the enemy camp!

In a private and rather heated conversation with Bob, he allowed as how the problem was that we weren't keeping them clean enough!

"BS." I said, "Bob, you know me better than that!"

"Nope," he said, "the M16s will work if they're clean!"

Seeing that I had reached a dead end, it was time to try a different approach. Another Captain/Company Commander and I (he having just as much a case of the "\$%#^" over the "16" as the rest of us) watched as WO Baker utilized his \$800 ultra powerful chamber scope to examine the M16 rifle chambers of a line of troops brought in out of the lines for evaluation of the condition of their rifles.

This marvelous chamber scope was supposedly powerful enough to make any imperfections in the chamber look like the surface of the moon. The first man stepped up to the front of the line and handed over his rifle. Bob sticks the chamber scope in the chamber, shakes his head and throws the old rifle in a pile that was to grow materially in the next couple of hours. The Marine was then issued one of the new rifles brought in on the C-130. Watching the lad with his "brandie, brand new" rifle stride off. Bob Bogard (the other Company Commander) and I chased him down (out of sight of course). We talked him out of his rifle, threw it into the dirt, kicked a little over it, picked it up and dusted it carefully off (to make it look like a "used" rifle). We then waited awhile until a number of folks had gone through the line and "number 1's" face had faded from WO Baker's recent memory. We put the trooper back in line and hid and waited. When (Warrant Officer) Bob stuck his chamber scope into the new rifle, he again shook his head and threw the new rifle on the pile of discards! Gotcha! When we pointed out to Bob what we'd done, he went orbital (not a word to come into general use until '69 of course)! He accused us of not taking his efforts seriously, and trying to make him look bad – not hard to do at this point! While we had outraged the brass, a seed of doubt had been planted, and it grew!

Back at the Command Post, a rather short civilian gentleman of Asian extraction wearing a Colt Detective Special on his belt, strode over to see me. I recognized him as a Mr. Ito, the Colt Representative that had flown in with the 400 rifles.

"Howdy," he sez, "my name is Ito!"

"I know," I said, "and my name is Culver."

"Yes, I know," sez Ito, and at that point, I figured that my fanny was truly gonna' be grass.

My instincts in this case were wrong.

Mr. Ito turned out to be a heck of a nice gentleman and told me all sorts of revealing stories. Among other things, he told me that Colt had offered to chrome plate the bores and chambers of the M16s for the sum of \$1.25 each, but that Robert "S" McNamara had vetoed it as being non cost effective. Mr. Ito sent me a "care package" when I got home, guess what it contained? A double handful of Colt M16 tie tacks<sup>2</sup>. Grrrrr...

Ultimately, Colt wound up chrome plating the chambers (and later the bores) of the M16s, thus reducing the coefficient of friction between the cartridge case (not necessarily a good thing, incidentally) and the chamber. The bolt then began battering the frame from the excessive velocity in its rearward movement, and they again gave the "*patient*" with a brain tumor an aspirin tablet as a "*fix*" – they simply made the buffer group heavier! But the real story had yet to be told. The story eventually leaked in bits and pieces but was never made public in the headlines it deserved. The rifle was eventually fixed, but at what a price... Much like the guy unjustly accused in print - when the real culprit is found, the headlines don't shout out his innocence, a retraction is usually printed in extra small type on the last page. The guys who died for this folly can never be brought back, and the people responsible who fought the problem by placing the blame where it wouldn't get *their* fingers dirty came away clean.

Somewhat later, a new Battalion Commander, who hadn't fought with us in the old days when the rifle was at its worst, inherited 2/3 in time to preside over the ensuing hate and discontent. He called me in during the ongoing investigations, and chided me about my stance on the rifle.

When I stood firm, he asked me, "Culver, just what would be *YOUR* solution?"

"Easy." I said, "it's only been 9 months since we turned in our M14s, all that's necessary is for us to draw the 14s again until ordnance can work the bugs out of this little piece of #\$\$@&!"

"Unfortunately," said the Colonel, "it's not as simple as that!"

"Unfortunately," sez I, "it's *EXACTLY* that simple! What you mean is that it's not '*politically*' that simple!"

I was dismissed without another word.

The aftermath? The rifle was eventually fixed of course, but at great cost in life and suffering. Unfortunately, "fixing" the M16 left us saddled with a service rifle that shoots a cartridge not powerful enough to be used on anything larger than groundhogs according to most state hunting laws. The latest version is almost as heavy as the M14 without any of the



14's redeeming features. In retrospect, the cost of saving reputations and enhancing corporate well being was high... too high. Mike and I both spent an extra year in grade and Mike decided not to stay on in the Marine Corps even though he was a regular officer, and a damned fine one at that! That was one of the larger tragedies, as Mike was one of the truly good guys. Men of principle are more rare than the Hope Diamond in real life, and he was one of those. After the decorations had settled on the scene in SE Asia, they decided to keep me around and I was too stubborn to quit. The Corps, with what can only be described as a rather macabre sense of humor, sent me to Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California and made an Ordnance Engineer out of my somewhat "frayed" fanny. Life is often rife with seemingly contradictory incidents. Most of these give truth to the statement of George Burns in the movie, "Oh God" where he describes God as a comedian playing to an audience that's afraid to laugh! Amen...

In "Part 2" I'll tell you what the problems *REALLY* were and why so many were fighting to keep the lid on the situation. The real story is not one to give you great confidence in our leadership or human nature. War and politics truly make strange bedfellows!

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### End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> "Chopped Op-Con" literally meant detached from the operational control of the parent unit, in this case, the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade, to another operational unit (usually a regiment in the Area of Operations [AO] of whatever Divisional [1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division or 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division] area you were operating in).

<sup>2</sup> In all fairness to Mr. Ito, he also sent me a match barrel for my .45 Government Model, and some great .45 Auto and Single Action Army tie tacks. He also sent me a whole XM177E2 (a sort of predecessor to the current M4 Carbine), which was appropriated by the Battalion Commander as his personal weapon (I had asked Mr. Ito if it was possible to buy the short barrel group and a collapsible stock to put on my M16 – he sent the whole thing!). The last I heard, the rifle had been passed down from Battalion Commander to Battalion Commander as a sort of badge of office. I never felt any rancor in losing my prize, I figure it went for a good cause. Mr. Ito was truly a jewel among men!

# The Saga of the M16 in Viet Nam (Part 2)

By Dick Culver

In Part 1, I covered the saga of the M16 from a standpoint of personal remembrances. The trials and tribulations of the average grunt carrying "the little black rifle" in the field were especially frustrating because we were swallowing the party line totally. As far as I knew, my Corps had never lied to me before, and I could see no reason why they would. As it turned out, they too were being lied to, but too many in high places had put their "chop" on the "give us the M16 now" requests. Human nature dictates that very few people in high places like to back down, apparently even when lives are at stake (as long as it isn't their life of course). Marines, too, tend to "link arms" and assume a "we'll take care of our own" attitude and I assumed that this was simply an extension of this prevalent attitude.

One statement by an outraged Colonel on the Division Staff finally changed my mind on the "we'll bite the bullet and fix this thing ourselves" attitude. When Mike was called up to the Division Headquarters over the infamous letter published in *The Washington Post*, this Colonel asked Mike, "Lieutenant, where's your loyalty to the Marine Corps?" (asked in a tone that indicated that the Colonel considered Mike to be a disloyal SOB). Mike turned the tables and asked the Colonel if they had lied to them in Basic School (the USMC Basic Officer's Course)?

"What are you talking about?" asked the Colonel.

Mike replied, "we were told in Basic School that loyalty in the Corps went down as well as up! Does this mean that loyalty is only to be expected from the bottom up? The men of our company have been told from Boot Camp that the Corps takes care its own, and that's what I'm trying to do. I've followed all the rules and regulations concerning malfunction reporting, with absolutely no results other than feedback that indicated that I was lying in my reports. I only stepped out of bounds when it became obvious that careers were more important than the lives of our men. Obviously the average Marine is expendable if political correctness appears to be at risk!"

The Colonel dropped the subject.

While I (mercifully) didn't get in on the above interview, the word spread like wildfire on Mike's return. I took it rather personally when it appeared that careers and reputations were more important than saving lives, and it became a sort of self imposed holy cause on my part to get at the truth. Some of the story below is a matter of personal opinion, and I have tried to identify that portion rather than simply make my point(s) by tall tales and innuendo.

All the above having been said, here are the distilled results of what I found during the ensuing years. I have not attempted to make this a textbook, but a "what went wrong and why" primer. If you want more detailed information there are whole books out there on the subject. Many of the below listed facts are drawn from available documentation, and some are simply the result of personal experience. As I pointed out in Part 1, the Marine Corps, with a rather warped sense of humor, sent me to graduate school to become an ordnance engineer. While a degree doesn't necessarily make you an expert in anything (except on

paper), people tend to listen more readily when you wave a degree at them. One of more interesting things about this one is that, having grown up around weaponry all my life, I knew virtually everything about small arms ordnance that I know now, before I went to school. I wrote an eight page statement on the problems (or at least my observations on the problems) with the M16 during the investigations of 1967, one copy of which was sent back to the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade on Okinawa. A friend of mine stationed at the Brigade Headquarters, was sitting in the office when they read my statement. Since this individual was a long time friend, he listened with more than average interest when they got to mine. The Colonel reportedly read my contribution and tossed it in the trash can with the comment, "just who in the hell does he think he is? – some kinda' expert?" From the time I heard of that one, I swore that I would find the truth, and here are the results of my efforts. Unfortunately not everything is documentable, but the information fits into the jigsaw puzzle rather well. Here we will deal with the problems and misconceptions surrounding the M16 Rifle and attempt to show what went wrong. The tale is rather twisted, but bear with me on this.

### **Background (The Armory System of Weapons Development):**

You must understand that for many years there had been a faction of the American Public that was not happy with our "Armory System" of weapons selection. Rightly or wrongly, there had always been a feeling from the American public that the "small time" arms designer could not get a fair shake when it came to a new ordnance concept. The attitude also prevailed that any rifle or rifle design submitted to the Army had little or no chance of getting fairly evaluated, due to the "Not Invented Here" attitude of Springfield Armory. Although probably not true, that feeling was in the air when the M1 Rifle was selected as our new service rifle. The M1 had a myriad of nickel-dime problems with the first production models, such as the infamous 7<sup>th</sup> round stoppage, the rear sight that refused to hold its elevation and other problems. Melvin M. Johnson stepped in with his recoil operated rifle that tested very well indeed against the Garand, but was "picked to pieces" on little things, with the Army Ordnance folks pointing out the obvious superiority of the M1. The Marines weren't so sure. One contingent under Capt. (later Brig. Gen.) George Van Orden, the founder of the Marine Corps Ordnance School, were proponents of the Johnson Rifle, while the test conducted by the Marines on the West Coast held the M1 to be the best of the semi-autos, but chose to go with the M1903 over both of them.

While I think the Johnson was a fascinating rifle, I'm personally damn glad that they picked the Garand. The Armory system actually made very few mistakes, but the public is a fickle mistress. I am reminded of the apocryphal inventor (as an example) who always claims that HE had the final answer to the "gasoline mileage" breakthrough, but the Government (or, the big Oil Companies, or whoever) came along and bought his patent (or paid him not to market the invention, etc.). At any rate, you get the picture, every inventor is convinced that HE had the answer, but no one would listen (or look, or whatever...). I'm not saying that some of this isn't true, but a large portion is pure hogwash.

The reason that many of the inventors were turned down by the lads at Springfield Armory was that they (Springfield) had already tried many of the ideas and found them wanting. There are very few "new" concepts in weapons design, once you get past the basic operating systems (manual, gas operated and recoil operated), although there are variations of incorporating them in a design (the short stroke piston, long versus short recoil, etc.). Most of these neophyte inventors wanted the government to take their ideas and run with them (spending Government money on R&D of course), and when the Government didn't bite, the

legend was perpetuated. Generally speaking, inventors who had developed a working model of a new design were welcomed at the Armory, and the weapon given a fair shake (John Garand falls roughly into that category). If one of these inventors happened to be working for a large corporation (such as Eugene Stoner and ArmaLite/Fairchild Aircraft), things changed a bit. The large corporation(s) had enough money to develop a new system on their own. Once major money was involved, (with a certain amount of ego or true dedication to their new idea cranked into the equation), the organization and/or the inventor tended to get irate if the Government didn't jump on their new "gizmo" with both feet, kiss them on both cheeks and ask them why they didn't come forward sooner! When this didn't happen, the organization would often complain to their local Congressman or Senator, claiming Armory favoritism. Such things can tie things up in court or force the Government to try their latest gadget by greasing the appropriate palms, appealing to sympathetic Congressmen, or airing their grievances in a news hungry press. Since many constituents had stock in such corporations and more often than not distrusted the Government, political pressure was brought to bear that would not have been possible in a government procurement system; and therein lay the problem.

I am certainly not downplaying Eugene Stoner's genius in the arms designing field, but he was playing hardball in an arena with considerably more interest in profit margins than operational suitability. Eugene was indeed a talented gun designer, and perhaps rivaled John Browning in some respects, but every time he came out with a new design, Fairchild Aircraft would have more money invested in his concepts, and of course THEY had stockholders. His initial efforts were on the M16's big brother, the AR-10. The AR-10 was essentially the little 16 with steroids. It did in fact use a man sized cartridge (the 7.62 NATO), but to put it politely, it was a "beast" to shoot (I've tried one of the original versions)! It would supposedly float with about 1" of the buttstock protruding from the water if thrown in a swimming pool (you'll have to take their word on that one, as I never tried it). The Government had been experimenting with a smaller service round for some time along with several other ideas such as the SPIW, and multiple projectile 7.62 rounds, but never with any real success. With the 5.56 (.223), they came upon a saleable product.

### **Enter the Air Force:**

While initially, the U.S. Army wasn't buying, the Air Force thought it would be a marvelous replacement for the aging .30 Carbine. Over many objections, the Air Force (with the support of General Curtis LeMay) finally obtained permission to buy a number of the little AR-15s as an airfield perimeter defense weapon. This was probably a task worthy of the "mouse gun", but would hardly qualify the weapon as a suitable rifle for the front line Infantryman.

### **Comparative Cartridge Ballistics:**

In order to appreciate what the infantryman was giving up with the 5.56 mm, it is necessary to look at the specifications of the two cartridges and compare them to other rivals of the time – AND compare the results with the pipsqueak .22 Long Rifle:

**7.62 NATO (M14 & M60 Machine-gun):**

**Bullet Weight = 150 grains**

**Nominal Muzzle Velocity = approximately 2700 fps.**

**Muzzle Energy = 2427 ft. Lbs.**

**Residual Energy at 500 yds. = 1576 ft. lbs.**

**5.56 NATO (XM16E1):**

**Bullet Weight = 55 grains**

**Nominal Muzzle Velocity = approximately 3185 fps**

**Muzzle Energy = 1239 ft. lbs.**

**Residual Energy at 500 yds. = 252 ft. lbs.**

**.22 Long Rifle (Generic .22 Rifle):**

**Bullet Weight = 40 grains**

**Nominal Muzzle Velocity = 1335 fps. (high velocity ctg.)**

**Muzzle Energy = 158 ft. lbs**

**Residual Energy at 500 yds. = ?**

**7.62 X 39 (AK-47):**

**Bullet Weight = 125 grains**

**Nominal Muzzle Velocity = 2400 fps.**

**Muzzle Energy = 1598 ft. lbs.**

**Residual Energy at 500 yds. = 414 ft. lbs.**

**.30 Carbine:**

**Bullet Weight = 110 grains**

**Nominal Muzzle Velocity = approximately 2000 fps.**

**Muzzle Energy = 976 ft. lbs.**

**Residual Energy at 500 yds. = 182 ft. lbs.**

If you will notice, these figures list the velocity and energy both at the muzzle and for the maximum effective range of U.S. (shoulder) Small Arms, (generally figured to be approximately 500 yards or 460 meters). The proponents of the AR-15/M16 attempted to change the maximum effective range of the U.S. Service Rifle to 300 yds. as a more realistic figure. What they were really saying, was that the 500 yd. figure made the AR-15 look bad in comparison to the M-14, but the Army decided to stand fast. The 500 yard figure had been taken from the combat experience(s) of a number of wars. Experience and first hand observation are hard to refute, unless of course, the figures of a conceived scenario better suit your purposes... and not all wars can be guaranteed to be fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Even for the mathematically challenged, it should be obvious to the most casual observer that the 5.56mm isn't in the same league as the 7.62mm NATO.

If you compare the muzzle energy of the .22 LR to the terminal energy of the 5.56mm NATO at 500 yds., you will find a difference of only 94 ft. lbs. Not exactly what I would

consider a definitive difference. Sure we are talking muzzle energy compared to the residual energy at 500 yards, but the 5.56mm was (is) touted to have a maximum effective of 500 yards. Dream on! Accuracy, interestingly enough, has never been the problem. No one has ever complained about the accuracy of the "Mouse Gun" (after the change from a 1-14 barrel twist to a 1-12). Initially at least, the problem was the reliability of the issued weapon. Quite frankly, in 1967 I used to dream of a Marine Rifle Company armed with M1903 Springfields! I would have laid money that such an outfit could have taken Hanoi if given the mission. Nay, 'twas not *accuracy* that was the problem...

At that same 500 yards, there is a difference of 1324 ft. lbs. of energy remaining for the 7.62mm in excess of the energy of the 5.56 mm. The 5.56 is down to a puny 252 ft. lbs. versus 1576 ft. lbs. for the 7.62 mm. Only the .30 Carbine is outclassed by the 5.56 mm at 500 yards, and it (the .30 Carbine) was designed as a replacement for the pistol cartridge. No one in their wildest imagination would place the .30 Carbine's effective range in excess of 300 yards. Yet even at that range the Carbine still retains 273 ft. lbs. of energy which exceeds the 5.56 mm's remaining energy at its advertised maximum effective range by 21 ft.lbs. Folks, something is wrong here! To the best of my knowledge, there is not a single state in the United States that will allow the 5.56mm NATO round to be used as a hunting cartridge for a deer sized animal (a good sized deer will go up to 150+ pounds, or roughly human sized). Why in their remotest dreams the military feels that a cartridge that is acknowledged to be suitable only for varmints is a viable anti-personnel round, is beyond my comprehension.

Penetration was not the long suit of the 5.56mm either. The common "Grunt" soon became aware that the "mousegun round" often ricocheted off of bamboo thickets, and had little effect on earthwork emplacements. The U.S. Ordnance manuals list the penetration of the .30-'06 as M2 ball as 36" of oak at 200 yds. Since the ballistics of the ball 7.62mm round are essentially the same, I can only assume that the 7.62 will do the same although I have never tried this personally. I DO know that a .30-'06 AP round will punch a power transmission pole at 200 yards like Swiss Cheese. I've been waiting for some bad guy to hide behind a telephone pole for years! The initial demonstrating teams for the 5.56mm loved to show the effect of the "mouse gun round" on a concrete block wall at 25 yards when the rifle was fired in the full automatic mode. The effect was truly awesome! I asked the demonstrating ordnance folks to try the same stunt at 200 yards. They grinned and said that such a demonstration would not give the desired impression of power. In other words they had the demonstrations rigged in favor of the 5.56mm! I wonder how many feet of oak the 5.56mm will penetrate at 200 yds?

The rather miserable penetrating power of the mouse gun was proven to me in spades during a rifle requalification firing session on Okinawa in 1973. CWO-4 Marine Gunner Dave Luke (a former U.S. Service Rifle Champion) was supervising the butt detail. The rifle range at Camp Hansen is built between two mountains along the long axis of what can only be termed a wind tunnel. The wind on the Rock would often come whistling down that cut in the mountains giving a headwind of 25 mph. So it was on the day in question. The Marine Corps, being frugal, does not use fresh targets for each day's firing, reserving the virgin targets for qualification day (usually Friday). As a result, we used multiple target faces (repair centers) on our targets during our practice sessions, held to the target with a rather disgusting paste of roughly the same consistency of flour and water. This stuff dries hard, and after several days, the thickness of repair centers becomes relatively thick. Since this was a Wednesday, we had

a fair thickness of repair centers on the targets. I was stationed on the firing line when I got a call from Gunner Luke in the butts.

"Hey Major" said the Gunner, "I've got something down here you need to see!"

"What's that Gunner," I replied.

"Major, we've got bullets sticking in the target faces!" said Luke.

"The hell you say Gunner?" sez I, "wait one, I'll be right there!"

I called a cease fire and headed for the butts in the safety vehicle. When I got there I could hardly believe my eyes! Sure enough, there were a number of projectiles that hadn't completely penetrated the multiple target faces at 500 yards. For a moment, I considered that the Gunner might just be pulling my chain, and inserting spent projectiles in the bullet holes for a joke. Two things changed my mind. First, while Dave Luke has a sense of humor, it doesn't run to things like that, and secondly all the projectiles stuck in the target faces showed no evidence of having struck anything more solid than a thick piece of paper. Not only that, but Dave was a professional range officer and we were conducting practice for a Battalion requalification program. Any undue delays would have reflected unfavorably on Dave's ability and he was not one to have allowed anything to interfere with his duties unless he considered it extremely important.

While I had never been a proponent of the mouse gun's, even I would not have thought that the M16 was this underpowered! You can now understand why I am somewhat skeptical of the claims of an 800 yard maximum range for the new M16A2. An additional 8 grains of bullet weight is incapable of making a major difference in penetration, and at 800 yards - ? Right, and my name's Mickey Mouse! No wonder the folks developing the M16 wanted the maximum effective range reset to 300 yards!

### **The "Meat Ax" Effect:**

Yes you say, but what about that fantastic "meat ax" effect that the 5.56mm round has on flesh? Won't the 5.56 mm tear a man's arm or head off if it hits him? In a word, no! This is a myth that has been perpetuated since the AR-15/M16's earliest days, and here is as good a place as any to lay this claim to rest! The original .223/5.56mm was derived from the little .222 Remington or at best the .223 Remington Magnum Cartridges. Now the .222 Remington and .222 Remington Magnum originally used a 40 or 45 grain bullet and a 1-14 barrel twist. Ballistic engineers found that 55 grain bullet pushed the stability of the 1-14 twist to the absolute limit in terms of stability. The initial rounds loaded for the 5.56mm were marginally ballistically stable, and tended to tumble if anything got in its way.

This was apparently especially true of flesh. A 55 grain bullet striking flesh when only stabilized with a 1-14 twist, tumbled with devastating results, but it had a problem – it was only marginally accurate. Now it's possible to have a bullet that is known to tumble, but if it won't reliably hit the target at the maximum effective range you are in big trouble. After the initial test results (including some in Southeast Asia) were in, it was apparent that this WAS an effective round (assuming that a tumbling bullet was employed)! However, it also became obvious that this rifle wasn't exactly a "tack driver" in terms of accuracy. Air Force cold

weather tests in January 1963 showed definite "bullet wobble" around the projectile's rotational axis causing unacceptable accuracy. As any good ordnance folks would do, they tightened the twist to 1-12 and the accuracy improved. The order to change the barrel twist was signed by Robert S. McNamara on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1963. The accuracy immediately improved, but the "magic bullet" quit tumbling! All of a sudden, we had a reasonably accurate round with a bullet that was essentially ineffective in terms of cleaving flesh with the much vaunted "meat ax effect". The round was now reasonably accurate as stated, but much underpowered for its designed maximum effective range of 500 yds.

### **The Demise of Springfield Armory:**

Unfortunately for the America, one lone solitary event was to doom the Armory system of weapons procurement. Robert McNamara had come to power with JFK in 1961. McNamara made no secret of the fact that he considered the Armory system to be wasteful and hidebound. He made a clean sweep of the former Pentagon ordnance experts and replaced them with Ph.D.s and private sector cronies, most of who had no clue as to the difference between a muzzle and a trigger. Many of these gentlemen were former members of the Rand Corporation "Think Tank". My experience with such "experts" has never been one to give me a warm fuzzy feeling as to their real world expertise. Robert McNamara made no bones about his disapproval of Springfield Armory, and would have liked nothing better than to close it down. The only thing saving Springfield was the fact that it resided squarely in President Kennedy's home state of Massachusetts, and was essentially under his protection much as was the Boston Navy Yard. One fateful day in November 1963 changed all that, and from that moment on, Springfield Armory was living on borrowed time.

### **The (deliberate?) Perpetuation of a Misconception:**

Following the official change of barrel twist rate, a bit of disinformation (perhaps better classified as marginal dishonesty) kicked in! The individuals attempting to sell the 5.56mm as the new service cartridge had lost one of their major selling points! We were now armed with a weapon that would poke knitting needle sized holes in the enemy, but without the so-called "devastating effect" of the bullets fired in the 1-14 tubes. Since the individuals in love with the mouse gun concept were in the "selling" mode, they were somewhat reluctant to inform the powers-that-be (and the American Public) that we were no longer dealing with a "devastating" round. This is of course understandable considering human nature, but still a bit "iffy" in terms of honest evaluation of the effectiveness of the prospective cartridge for our primary "go to war gun".

Unfortunately, a sizeable portion of the American Public still believes in the "meat ax" effect of the M16. As a quick anecdotal story, while I was in the early throes of learning to live with the little black rifle, I went to our Battalion surgeons, and hospital corpsmen with a question.

"Had they seen anything during their treatment of wounds that would indicate that the 5.56mm hit harder than any other round?"

I received a negative answer, but they promised to start investigating more closely. A daily check during periods of intense combat always turned up the same answer. None of the devastating effects described by the M16's most ardent proponents, were being encountered



by our medical folks. We were not privy to the above technical information in the Spring and Summer of 1967, of course. Having been told of the rifle's extreme effectiveness before the Battalion left Okinawa to assume the duty as SLF Bravo, I was beginning to have personal doubts about the Brass' evaluation of Colt's latest toy.

### **Quick Fixes by the Troops:**

I could have lived without being armed with a "meat ax", but I as a professional infantryman was loath to have a rifle that would not repeatedly "go bang" when called upon to do so. We tried everything we could think of to remedy the problem. We were keeping our rifles as clean as any man could whose life depends upon such cleanliness. Still... there was a nagging doubt. After all, the ordnance folks were Marines, and surely they wouldn't lie to their brothers would they?! As a result, we tried different lubes that wouldn't pick up dirt, and even tried washing the rifles in gasoline pilfered from the motor transport types. A favorite of the time was some stuff called "*Dri-Slide*" (I'll have to take a hit on spelling here, as I remember it being a proprietary one). *Dri-Slide* contained a highly volatile carrier with something akin to powdered graphite that would deposit a "non-sticky" lubricant on the metal when the carrier evaporated. The U.S. Mail was burdened with many cans of *Dri-Slide* being sent from home to the Marines in Northern I Corps.

Anything greasy seemed to pick up powder residue and acted as a carrier of the stuff to ensure that the abrasive residue was distributed in a fashion reminiscent of lapping compound. This was obviously bad "ju-ju" to a rifle that already seemed to be more than slightly susceptible to dirty powder and the residue of battle. Immediate temporary fixes amounted to such things as having your cleaning rod assembled and taped to the side of the rifle, much in the style of the Civil War musket. By making a couple of loops with ordnance tape (also known to the airborne troops as "rigger's tape") with a piece put inside the loop to prevent the sticky side from impeding the rapid withdrawal of the "ramrod", your makeshift ejector was more easily accessed for immediate use. Unfortunately this was a double-edged sword. When a man was wounded and medivaced, the cleaning rod was often lost in an attempt to evac the Marine's rifle and his personal gear with him.

Under ordinary circumstances, this wouldn't have constituted a problem, but don't forget, we were issued one cleaning rod per rifle and there were no replacements available. As a result, many of the rifles issued to new replacements (taken from our wounded) were issued without cleaning rods, but, with the instructions to "use your buddy's." Most of the individuals that were medivaced were wounded due to the fact that their rifles malfunctioned; thus the rifles that were reissued, were those that were most susceptible to jamming and needed a cleaning rod to be used as an ejector (as opposed to a cleaning device). An already bad problem was being compounded.

### **An Analysis by the Bad Guys:**

During my latter days with 2/3 I served as the Battalion Intelligence Officer. One of the reports that came in was an intercepted message from the Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists). The VC were not as well equipped as the NVA (the North Vietnamese Army - the regular Vietnamese Army people who operated primarily in the North just south of the DMZ).

We as Marines, usually policed all (or as much as we could find) of our equipment left on the battle field by our wounded. Most of course, was sent to the rear with the wounded man, but there would occasionally be items on the battle field by the departing units. The VC used this recovered equipment to equip their own rather meager supplies as would any good guerilla force. The intercepted document reinforced this practice, exhorting the VC troops to police the battle fields for usable equipment. This document however, had one telling exception to the rule. It stated that all equipment was to be picked up with the exception of "the little black rifle" which is useless to our cause!

I knew exactly what they were talking about!

### **Enter Ball Powder:**

Had we but known, the problem was not simply dirty powder or a lack of regular and conscientious cleaning by the operator, but was due in fact to the burning rate(s) and burning temperature of the powder coupled with varying gas-port pressures depending on the powder. It seems that the AR-15/M16 was developed and tested with extruded IMR (Improved Military Rifle) powder. This powder is relatively clean burning, but has a relatively high pressure peak during its initial ignition. Remington had been using some stuff called IMR-4475 that worked extremely well, but wasn't terribly consistent from lot to lot. Remington had solved the problem by using selected lots of the powder to obtain the desired burning rates and functioning in the M16. In fact the entire testing had been accomplished by using such ammunition. The double based powder (so called because it used both nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose in its manufacture) burned hotter than ball powder due to the nitroglycerine content, and the chamber pressures tended to be a bit higher than with say, ball powder. Because of the quality control problems with the double-based extruded IMR powder that had been used by Remington, all manufacturers of the 5.56mm cartridge preferred to use a less finicky ball powder. The argument was essentially that ball powder burned cooler, thus giving less barrel/throat erosion, and had a lower peak pressure, and would stay well within the pressure limits prescribed for the cartridge. The requirement for using only selected lots of IMR powder having been circumvented, not to mention the great amount of ball powder on hand, the problem seemingly had been solved. In May of 1964, the authorization to use "alternative propellants" was signed without conducting any sustained additional functioning tests. Even Gene Stoner himself issued a warning against such a procedure, but to no avail, and unfortunately there were several unsuspected flies in the ointment, much as Stoner had predicted.

The first and perhaps most important one was that they had not bothered to check the "port pressure" of the alternative powders. While it was true that the ball powders did have a lower "peak" pressure, they also had a higher port pressure. Let's start this discussion from a simple but accurate premise. All gas-operated mechanisms must be timed. This seemingly simple truism can be applied to automobiles as well as rifles. If there are moving parts involved that are influenced by gas pressure, it is necessary for all of these parts to arrive at their appointed location as designed, and to arrive at the proper time. Since the ball powder had a higher port pressure than the IMR-4475, the gas being vented through the gas tube was under greater pressure as the projectile passed the gas port than would have been the case with the IMR powder. Since the gas was under greater pressure, it should not come as any great surprise that the gas was traveling down the gas tube more rapidly than was normal during its designed functioning cycle. This meant that the gas reached the "gas key" on top of the bolt earlier in the functioning cycle than usual. It did, in fact, arrive while the

cartridge case was still firmly "obtured" to the chamber walls by the pressure of the gasses caused by the ignition of the cartridge.

By way of explanation, "obturation" is a physical process that takes advantage of the elasticity of the brass cartridge case and causes it to expand and conform to the exact shape of the chamber walls. The brass even sticks little fingers into minor (often invisible) irregularities in the chamber, thus sealing the chamber effectively and keeping gas from being blown back into the face of the operator. In of itself, obturation is a very good thing. The problem here, however, is that the gas reaching the bolt was arriving before the case obturation had subsided and the residual chamber pressure would not allow the brass to be easily broken loose from its hold on the chamber walls, extracted and ejected. The high port pressure and resulting delayed duration of case obturation often, if not usually, caused the extractor to either "jump the case rim" or pull through it, causing the case to remain in the chamber.

This "stuck case" problem was compounded by the fact that the ball powders being used by Remington (CR8136), Olin and Federal (WC846) were much dirtier burning powders than IMR-4475, and tended to "dirty" the rifle chamber area much quicker than the earlier powder. The dirt that deposited itself in the chamber and feeding areas of the rifle added to the extraction problems – dirty chambers tend to resist extraction to a much greater extent than clean chambers by increasing the coefficient of friction between the case and the chamber walls, thus making the cartridge case more reluctant to leave the chamber. Even dirty chambers can be kept clean with constant care, but unfortunately the dirty powder was aided and abetted by a calcium carbonate deterrent coating applied to the powder that added to the fouling problem. Alas the problem grew worse.

The higher port pressure of the ball powder also increased the cyclic rate of fire of the M16 (already too high in my opinion – the ideal rate of fire for a full auto is normally 500 rds. per minute). These started out at about 775 rds. per min. and sometimes reached 900 rpm in extreme circumstances. This was to become abusive to the rifles in light of what followed.

### **The Chrome Plated Chamber and the Watermelon Seed:**

OK, we will now leave the Army wrestling with the ball powder problem, and switch to the "quick fix" that was instituted as an interim solution to the criticism descending upon the military hierarchy. The first was the chrome plating of the chambers (and later the bore). It was reckoned that the chrome plating would reduce the coefficient of friction between the chamber and the cartridge case, resulting in easier extraction. Well, yes, and so it was; however, let's analyze the side effects. Have you ever taken a "still slimy watermelon seed" and squeezed it between your fingers and watched it as it squirted out? I'm sure everyone has tried that one at least once unless you are a permanent resident of the South Pole. What was happening was that with the reduced coefficient of friction and the easier to clean, slicker (and of course *tapered*) chamber, the brass was extracting considerably easier and almost squirting (much like the watermelon seed) the case out and causing the bolt to come to the rear with greater velocity than normal. That coupled with the increased cyclic rate (compliments of the ball powder) caused the rearward traveling bolt to batter the receivers rather badly. Since the timing problem had not actually been solved, this meant that the brass was being extracted while the case was still at least partially obtured in the chamber. As long as nothing else went wrong, this didn't seem to cause any catastrophic failure of the rifle, watermelon seeds notwithstanding.

### **Another Aspirin for a Brain Tumor:**

Rather than "retime" the gas system, or switch to a more stable IMR powder, the Army chose to stick with ball powder, as literally millions of rounds were on hand and there was a shooting war in progress. Now that the stuck brass problem had lessened (but had not been totally been alleviated), the next bugaboo was the "receiver battering problem". That one was fixed with the usual "aspirin for a brain tumor" prescription! Colt and the Army simply went with a heavier buffer group to lessen the impact to the frames, leaving the cyclic rate of fire unacceptably high, but at least the rifles were shooting after a fashion. The military was breathing a sigh of relief to have the U.S. Congress off their posteriors, and the entire problem was swept under the rug and seemingly forgotten, by all except those of us who had been the guinea pigs on McNamara's think tank solution to weapons procurement.

### **And Now, Slam Fires Too!**

In the middle of all our malfunctions, we had another dangerous problem that reared its ugly head. In the middle of a pitched battle in June of 1967, my company had two M16s literally blow up during firing! I was already pulling my hair out, but this seemed to be the final straw. These two stalwart lads had been firing some of the few rifles that were at least marginally functional. In the middle of a string and within a couple of minutes of each other these two rifles literally exploded in the riflemen's hands. Apparently, when the bolt closed, the rifle fired as in a "slam fire" scenario, and the rifles fired out of battery. This explosion blew off the carrying handle and most of the upper receiver. The remaining force blew down through the magazine well ( bulging the well on both sides), leaving the magazine tube in the well, but blowing all the rounds and the floor plate out the bottom of the rifle. The operators received scratches on the inside of their forearms from the rapidly exiting floorplates, but mercifully sustained no other visible injuries. In one of the two rifles, the bolt (sans carrier) was still dangling from the locking lugs with a blown case in the chamber. The second rifle was missing the case, the bolt and the bolt carrier. Both rifles were still rather comically held together by the hinge pin. If I had disliked the M16 prior to this, my dislike was rapidly ripening into an overt case of hate. To compound the problem, I had Dave Burrington from NBC News with the company covering the day's rather thrilling events (Dave was a nice gentleman, and he and I got along very well, considering the circumstances). The other newsman tagging along was some roaring a\$\$ hole from ABC News that I would have willingly "done for" if the opportunity had presented itself. My problem was that both of them had their cameramen trying desperately trying to get pictures of the destroyed rifles. This was prior to my crusading phase with the M16 and I was unfortunately able to keep them from taking any pictures. At that point in time I figured our dirty laundry should be cleaned up by the Marine Corps as opposed to a press that was openly hostile to what we considered our way of making a living. After all, we considered our mission was to keep the world safe for God, motherhood and the American Way. If I had only allowed those pictures to be taken, the whole M16 story might have turned out differently. The press might have caused the investigations to have been instituted by outraged congressmen, and Mike and I would not have had to write the "letter heard round the world" – ah well...

It turns out that the slam fire problem, while relatively rare, was well known within the Army Ordnance circles. Rare? ...and I had two within five minutes of each other? Damn, someone was trying to tell me something. The slam fire problem stemmed from soft primers, dirty chambers and a floating firing pin. Obviously a cartridge stripped off the top of a magazine and driven into a dirty chamber (perhaps slightly smaller than usual?) might well

refuse to completely seat. If the bolt was slamming forward with fair velocity, and stopped abruptly with the case almost (but not quite) seated, just short of the locking lugs performing their magic, the weight of a firing pin continuing to move forward (as in Newton's Laws of Physics) might well make contact with a sensitive primer causing the cartridge to fire with the bolt unlocked!

After much study, the Army Ordnance folks recommended a much harder primer, but none of the ammunition companies would bid on such ammunition as they felt that it would cause more failures to fire than it did slamfires. Many fixes were tried including a spring loaded firing pin (versus the floating one), but Colt finally came up with a simple fix that solved the problem. A lighter firing pin solved the problem and the slam fires went away.

### **Rifles Issued With Known Problems?**

While I have checked the ordnance reports of the time, most of the problems that have been discussed were known and supposedly fixed before our Battalion even drew our brand new XM16E1s in April of 1967. Even though many of the problems and the fixes were supposedly known, our rifles still had unplated chambers (actually the chrome plated chamber wasn't approved until the end of May 1967), light buffer groups and heavy firing pins – hell, I don't know, maybe the Navy Medical folks needed the practice, or it was cheaper to write off the older models in combat than recall them for an upgrade. I have the definite feeling that many of the histories were written after the fact and the dates filled in to put those at fault in the clear for posterity to read and judge. Perhaps I judge too harshly, but those were brutal times, and I was young and idealistic – and my bubble had been forever burst.

### **Smaller Chambers?**

One final story and I will conclude this rather rambling discourse. This one is an attempt to explain the 50% of the rifles that functioned reasonably reliably and the 50% that refused to do so. I must interject that the 50% figure I am using is strictly subjective. When we fired these rifles, we made the observation that approximately half of the darned things seemed to shoot and half didn't. Not knowing that we should have kept exact figures for later analysis, we were simply making informed observations. Please keep this in mind during the following discussion.

There were many (unsubstantiated) stories floating around that there was a slight difference in chamber dimension between the ArmaLite chambers and the Colt chambers. While it was reputed to be very minimal, and under ideal circumstances the commercial or military ammunition would work satisfactorily in both guns, under less than ideal circumstance things went to hell in a handbasket. It was rumored that the Colt chambers were ever so slightly tighter than the ArmaLite chambers (a matter of a ten thousandth or so). That would have been no problem in a commercial rifle, but here the work was moved to Colt and they were having labor problems and union shops are notorious for work just good enough to get by. The Colt Union Shop problems were such that a two month strike took place in 1967 over the report that the Army was looking for other (additional) manufacturers to supply M16 rifles to the military.

It was also reported that the quality control at Colt was not as stringent as that at ArmaLite. Don't forget, they (ArmaLite) were trying to sell a new product over the objection of

the Ordnance Corps, and by the time Colt came along the fight had been largely won. Assuming the quality control was slightly looser at Colt, let's take a quick look at the classic "Bell Shaped Curve" (assuming a normal statistical distribution) used in statistical analysis. The "+ side" of the curve would show that at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the chambers would have been tending toward the *maximum* allowable chamber dimension (statistically), thus giving no problem. The other  $\frac{1}{2}$  (the "- side") would have been closer to the *minimum* allowable (Colt) dimension. Unfortunately under this premise, the minimum allowable Colt chamber would have been smaller than the minimum allowable ArmaLite chamber.

One of these "small (Colt) chambers" coupled with the lack of a "retimed gas system" and the admitted powder residue problem caused by the use of ball powder, could explain the mysterious (perceived) 50% jamming problem often present even when the rifles were freshly cleaned. The ball powder would have rapidly fowled the chambers. Thus a cartridge case designed for the slightly larger ArmaLite chamber (with tighter quality control) being forced into a minimum Colt chamber, coupled with higher port pressure and dirty powder, would have strenuously resisted extraction. It is not my intention to accuse Colt of deliberately manufacturing rifles that wouldn't fire. If the IMR Rifle Powder had been retained, there would probably have been no problem. If, however, we combine the smaller allowable (minimum) chamber with a dirty powder, we have the formula for a military disaster.

The scenario would go roughly like this. A cartridge case would be stuffed into a "small chamber" (dirtied with a residue known to result from the ball powder combustion). During the firing cycle, the primer would ignite the powder and launch the projectile down the bore. The resulting chamber pressure would "obturate" the cartridge case to the chamber walls. Since the "gas port pressure" is higher with the ball powder than the IMR, the bolt would start to the rear under the pressure channeled through the gas tube and attempt to initiate the unlocking and extraction portion of the operating cycle too soon. An attempt to extract a cartridge case still plastered to the chamber walls by residual pressure, and further resisting such actions due to the increased coefficient of friction resulting from the powder residue in the chamber would often cause the extractor to either pull through or jump the case rim, leaving the case in the chamber. If the "small chamber" premise *IS* true, it would go a long way toward explaining the "unexplainable problem". I suppose we will never know for sure, but it makes sense in light of what we know today.

A retired Colonel (an Army ammunition expert) told me a story in 1974 that boggles the imagination. This gentleman told me that he was sent to open up the production of 5.56mm NATO ammunition at the Twin Cities ammunition plant in the early 1960s. He asked his boss (unnamed) for the specifications of the 5.56mm cartridge dimensions. He was supposedly told that they didn't have the dimensions and he would have to get them on his own (you've gotta' be kidding!). He told me that he went on an "M16 Rifle safari" to obtain a statistical sample of M16s for making "chamber casts" to discern the correct cartridge dimensions. After a concerted search in such places as Ft. Leavenworth, Ft. Campbell and Ft. Knox, Kentucky, he came up with 17 rifles, all early products of ArmaLite. He took the necessary chamber casts and came up with the cartridge specifications (which may of course have been ever so slightly larger than the later Colt chamber dimensions). While this sounds a bit far out to me, I am in no position to cast stones. Many of the machinations concerning the saga of the M16 are a bit "far out", even though they are verifiably true. If (and this is a BIG if) the tale *IS* true, such an unlikely story would add credence to the "small chamber" idea. On the other hand, the Colonel had no reason to lie, he wasn't aware of my background or previous experiences and we weren't engaged in a "can you top this" sea story session...

## **The Demise of Ordnance Expertise Within the Army:**

In retrospect, the M16 was the result of an open bid system overriding the expertise of an experienced ordnance corps. While we often get better products in a totally free market economy, this procurement system assumes a level of ordnance expertise not normally within the grasp of an inventor and his backers "force feeding" a new weapons system on the military to satisfy the desires and egos of civilian inventors. The Army Ordnance system was not loath to contact talented civilian inventors for their expertise in term of new weaponry, but with the M16 it was a case of the Industrial Complex (of the "Military – Industrial Complex" fame) telling the military what it needed and then forcing them to buy it. The Armory system had worked, and worked well, and we are still smarting from the lack of the expertise that Robert McNamara eliminated along with Springfield Armory using his "bottom line procurement procedures".

The Army isn't always blameless either, as evidenced by their efforts to produce a rifle for all seasons that resulted in giving the M14 an undeserved bad rap. The effort to produce a rifle that would replace both the M1 and the BAR was doomed to failure from the start. I personally feel that the M14 was the *finest* battle rifle ever adopted by the United States, but conversely, it came very close to being the *most unsatisfactory* squad automatic weapon we have ever adopted when employed in the full automatic mode. The full automatic feature and the M14 did not get along well together. It was simply too light to do the job. If we had discarded the full automatic feature of the M14 and substituted the M60 machine gun for the BAR to maintain commonality of ammunition, we would have truly had a Marine Rifle squad of awesome capability! This would not have been the ultimate solution, as the M60 exceeded the reasonable weight of a "squad automatic", but it would have been a fix we could have lived with while a new squad automatic was being developed,

Attempting to have one rifle do everything well is just as unrealistic as having one aircraft that fills every need for our air arm. The F111 was one attempt to do this, and ultimately it failed in its task. It did a couple of things very well indeed, but most aviators will tell you that it is far better to have a really good fighter aircraft, another designed primarily for air superiority, and an attack plane to support the troops on the ground. A bomber very rarely can fill in satisfactorily as a fighter, but still they try. And so it is with the service rifle. Even though the M16 was equipped with a full automatic switch, it made an absolutely horrible squad automatic weapon. Had I had my way, I would have had a talented welder put a bead of heliarc on the M16 frame rendering it incapable of full automatic fire. Most of today's military experts seem to have forgotten that there is a vast difference between "*fire power*" and "*volume of fire*". Someone should hold classes! Ultimately, the services did adopt the FN (M249) version of the SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon), and it seems to be a fine little gun, although it still shoots an anti-groundhog projectile.

## **Tactical Considerations and the "All Around Rifle":**

In our enthusiasm to come up with the perfect rifle, ordnance seems to occasionally forget that a certain amount of cohesiveness of the rifle squad is/was based upon the teamwork necessary to keep the squad automatic rifle in action – at least that has always been the case in the Marines. Early in WWII we traded our old eight-man squad for a 13-man squad composed of three "four man" fire teams and a squad leader. Each fire team had one BAR (a total of 3 per squad) and each fire team's job was to keep the BAR in action. This accounted for the cohesiveness in the fire team I spoke of above, and gave each fire team member a

reason for existence. In the old days, we (as troops) were cautioned that (in combat) if there were only three men left in a squad, all three had better be carrying a BAR. The M14 with its selector switch and bipod did away with all that, as now all the rifles looked the same. The heat of the jungle caused the ever weight conscious Marine to leave the bipod in the rear to cut down on his load. Since every M14 was easily converted to full auto, most were. At this point, the fire team members no longer felt the necessity of covering and supporting the automatic rifleman, since all the rifles now looked and functioned alike; tactics went to hell in a handbasket.

The M16 simply perpetuated the mistakes of the past, except that it was now worse. Now every gun had a "go faster switch" and fire discipline became a thing of the past. I still remember the TV coverage of the battle of Hue with the rifleman sticking his M16 over the parapet by the pistol grip and firing a full magazine without the slightest idea of what he was shooting at. What a waste! Tactics were going the way of the "Do-Do Bird" and everyone was marveling at the number of rounds that the average rifleman was able to fire against our enemy(s), although I began to suspect that our real enemy resided in the Defense Department in the name of Robert McNamara, and leadership in the Military by individuals who hadn't seen combat since the charge up San Juan Hill.

### **Silk Purses and Sow's Ears:**

In the retrospect of 37 years, I sometimes despair. In 1977 when I was stationed at MTU (Marksmanship Training Unit) Quantico, Virginia, one of our former shooters (Maj. Bruce Wincensen) was transferred in the normal course of assignments to the Ordnance Section of the Marine Corps Development Board, and was assigned to the project of coming up with a product improved M16. Bruce did a rather workmanlike job on the project, and when the smoke settled we had the M16A2. While the M16A2 is undeniably an improvement over its predecessors, we are still stuck with a rifle that doesn't qualify as a deer sized hunting rifle in but one or two uninformed states.

As a matter of personal harassment, I used to call Bruce occasionally and ask him how he was coming along with rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic – his answer was usually unprintable. The bullet weight has been increased to 63 grains, and its accuracy (most especially in the match versions) is superb. The M16A2 (in a match-conditioned version) is now often beating the M14 in match competition, but then the *accuracy* of the M16 has never been my bone of contention. The barrel weight had been increased and the barrel twist tightened to 1-7 to accommodate the heavier bullet. The maximum effective range of the M16 is now said to be 800 meters (someone is smoking something not authorized by the UCMJ). However the M16A2 now weighs in at a hefty 7.9 lbs., just short of the M14's 9.3 lbs. (a difference of a mere 1.4 lbs. but still delivering a projectile with the punch of an anti-varmint device). I hasten to add that the *normally* quoted weight for the M14 was 8.7 lbs, versus the above quoted 9.3. I was simply giving those who would dig out the maximum quoted weight the benefit of the doubt. At 8.7 lbs. the weight differential is just over 3/4th of a lb. heavier than the M16. Obviously, the lightweight rifle had become anything but! The addition of a mere eight grains to the bullet weight (a grain is 1/7000<sup>th</sup> of a pound) does not fill me with a great deal of confidence or fill me with thoughts of increased lethality. A mouse(gun) is a mouse(gun) is a mouse(gun)...

Mercifully, the Marines were able to take the objectionable full automatic switch off of the M16 and substitute a three shot burst control switch. Many individuals in high positions were



in love with the full automatic feature of the M16 (or any service rifle), and the 3 shot burst was simply included as a "sop" in the redesign of the M16 for those too ignorant to have a grasp of good infantry tactics.

While there is a place for a lightweight full automatic in the infantry TE (table of equipment), it is more properly included as a carbine or submachine gun. The current M4 Carbine, (a variation of the M16A2), works very well and lends itself very nicely use in close combat and for the clearing of houses and buildings in a built up area.

In my opinion, the three shot burst control on the service rifle, means that a pull of the trigger by a "panicked or inexperienced troop" will only result in two wasted rounds instead of 29! Some so-called experts have said that S.L.A. Marshall (S.L.A. indicating General Marshall's initials) claimed that the addition of a full auto switch resulted in more individuals firing their rifles in combat. If this is so, it is a sorry indictment of our military leadership. While some individuals have questioned S.L.A. Marshall's findings in recent times, there are still those who place a great amount of credence in his observations.

A properly indoctrinated combat soldier will not only fire his rifle but he will also get hits on target. The problem is not with weaponry, but with leadership!

### **And Finally:**

The ultimate adoption of the M16 essentially reduced the effective range of the Marine Rifle squad from 500 yards to an optimistic 300, but no one in a position to do anything about it will admit it! A Marine Lt. Col. in the intelligence field was assigned to attend the Annual G2's Conference in 1982 held at Headquarters Marine Corps. He told me the following story in confidence, so I will omit his name for obvious reasons. He stated that a high point of the conference was a brief address by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, at that time General Robert H. Barrow. General Barrow closed the conference with a comment about the new M16A2 Rifle the Corps was adopting. He told them about the developmental work that Maj. Wincensen and the Development Board had done on the rifle and added;

"If I learn of ANY officer or Staff NCO criticizing the new M16, that Marine can tattoo his rank insignia on his collar bone (an exact quote). He'll never be promoted as long as I'M the Commandant!"

Some things never change...

### **Valhalla and Beyond:**

In Norse mythology, fallen heroes were welcomed to Valhalla as a reward for valorous conduct. Those of us in the profession of arms often speak of this, the warriors' final resting-place, where no one grows old, and honor is held in high esteem. If there is an all-knowing and all-wise God, as there must surely be, we will someday meet our comrades in arms at the gates of Valhalla, and shake the hands of our friends... I only hope that we will be as worthy of entrance as those who secured their place defending a cause in which they believed, using a rifle that was not worthy of their bravery and sacrifice.

...And may the Marine Corps always be guided by the words of Marine Maj. Gen. Rupertus' in *The Rifleman's Creed* (included in all the rifle qualification score books in the Marine Corps):

*"My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, not the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit..."*

I can only add Amen...

## ROC

### And a Post Script:

While my story has been mainly about Marines since they are my people and I know them best, I am also painfully aware that many of our Army brothers went through the same frustrating ordeals that were experienced by the Marines in Northern I Corps. To those fine gentlemen, my hat's off to you and for those who gave their lives in the performance of their duties. You have my everlasting admiration and my thanks. The following parody in the style of Robert Service is dedicated to you as well!

### **For Hotel Company**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Marines**

There were strange things done under the jungle sun  
By the men with the "Matty Mattel",  
The jungle trails have their secret tales,  
Of men who've had a glimpse of Hell.

There were memories clear of loved ones dear,  
Who resided on Stateside sod,  
By the sweating veterans of jungle fights,  
As they cleared their jams with a rod.

These were the Marines of the Infantry line  
Who offered the country their souls.  
Of men who tried and fought and died  
And here their story is told.

'Twas a different time and men of a different breed.  
Their story's of danger in a different clime,  
Of jungle fights where they fought and died,  
With a plastic toy and a cleaning rod...  
-- for McNamara's bottom line!

With apologies to Robert Service

***Semper Fidelis my friends...***

## The Pipsqueak Pistol That Never Was...



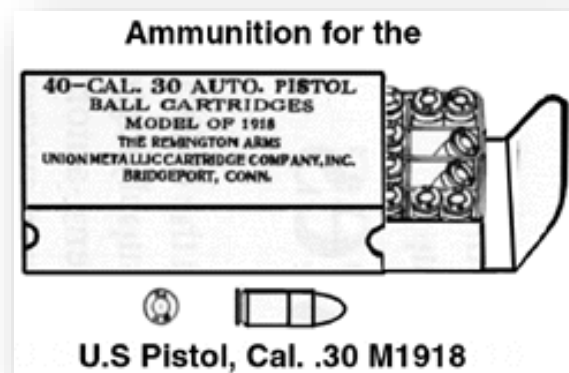
By Dick Culver

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The halls of Congress were awash with rumor in the Summer of 1918... It seems that a bit of Secret information had inadvertently fallen into the hands of some Washington Officials. The United States was adopting a new pistol! Why in the world would we do THAT?? Now it had only been seven years since our (then) new service pistol had been selected to replace the ineffective .38 caliber service revolver. The selection and testing procedure for the Colt Government Model had been long and rigorous and everyone seemed happy with the new Service Arm. To add insult to injury, the new pistol was supposedly designated "The U.S.

Pistol, Caliber .30 M1918". Advocates of the Colt .45 Caliber Service Pistol were outraged... A new pistol? And to add insult to injury, a in a pipsqueak .30 caliber at that! Hadn't we learned our lesson in the Philippine Insurrection? The .38 Colt Revolvers simply wouldn't stop an enraged and drugged Philippine Insurrecto, and NOW some idiot was adopting a tiny .30 caliber as a replacement! Those who heard the news were indignant and wanted some answers!

They would have been surprised indeed if they could have found any of the ammunition for the new pistol, had an opportunity to dissect it and been shown the fact sheet - perhaps even impressed! It seems that the new cartridge for the .30 caliber pistol utilized an 80 grain projectile launched by 3 1/2 grains of Bullseye Powder. This tiny pill left the muzzle of its intended weapon at 1300 feet per second, could reliably hit a man-sized target at 350 yards and would kill, given a good hit, as far out as 500 yards. Not bad for a handgun! The fly in the ointment was that this pistol looked like nothing ever before seen and was held in strictest secrecy. While the U.S. Pistol, Caliber .30



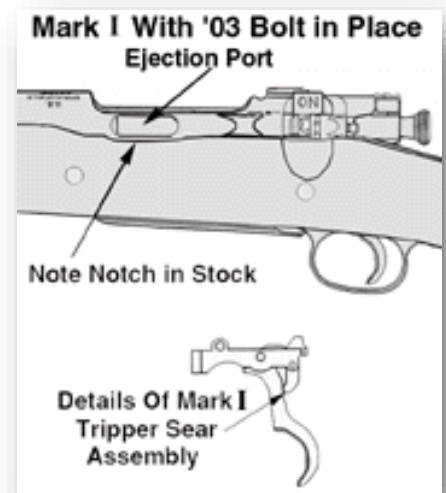
M1918 functioned like a blowback pistol, shooting what appeared to be an extra long .32 ACP round, there all resemblance ended. Much as Winston Churchill named the first armored vehicles to fight in WWI "Water Tanks" to conceal their identity and purpose, so it was with our new "pistol".



When asked for a secret demonstration, the request was readily granted. Mr. Pedersen's considerable reputation as an arms designer had preceded him. A collection of Generals and Ordnance Department Brass assembled at the Congress Heights Range Facility in Washington D.C. *The U.S. Automatic Pistol, Caliber .30, Model of 1918!* The mysterious "Pedersen Device", designed to give the Allies the upper hand during the big spring offensive of 1919 had been born...

The information of the existence of such a weapon was flashed in code to no less a person than General John J. Pershing. At his direction, an Ordnance Captain was sworn to secrecy and dispatched to France to demonstrate our first prototype semi-automatic rifle. The demonstration took place in December of 1917 and General Pershing was more than impressed. He ordered 100,000 of the devices with appropriately modified M1903 Springfield Rifles to be delivered to France at the earliest possible moment. Remington went into production started production of the Devices in early 1918. By now Remington was well into the production of the Pattern 17 Enfield. Plans were also made to do a feasibility study as to whether a similar device could be made to function in the M1917 Enfield and the Russian Mosin-Nagant. A tool room model of the Device for the M1917 Enfield was demonstrated in August 1918 and designated the M1917 Mark II. A photograph also exists of at least one tool room model of a Pedersen Device for the Mosin-Nagant.

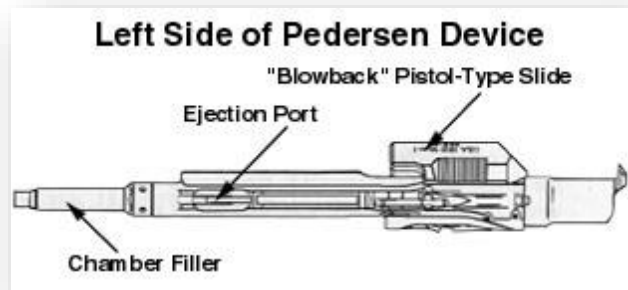
Word was dispatched to General Pershing by courier that a total of 500,000 rifles and Devices (a combination of both Springfields and Enfields) could be ready for the 1919 Spring Offensive. Since the war ended just over two months after General Pershing received the word, no production was initiated on the Enfield version. Production of the Springfield Pederson Device(s) was halted at the end of February 1919 with a total of 65,000 Devices having been produced. Strangely, the production of the specially designed M1903 Rifle was not begun until 2 December 1918; almost a month after the Armistice had been signed.





Production of the Mark I Rifle continued until the fall of 1920. Total production figures of the Mark I M1903 indicate that a total of 101,775 rifles were produced. The question is, how much of a job was it to convert the M1903 bolt action Springfield into a semi-automatic, and just how was it accomplished? The answer is simple, even if the solution was not. Mr. Pedersen made very few modifications to the existing M1903 Springfield. Because it was necessary to mount the device into the receiver of the rifle itself, an ejection port had to be cut into the left side of the receiver and the sear mechanism of the '03 had to be modified to release the firing pin of the Device once the trigger was pulled. The specially modified receiver had a long oval slot milled into its left side to act as an ejection port, matching the ejection port of the Device. The specially modified receiver was given the nomenclature of *The U.S. Rifle, Cal. .30, Model of M1903, Mark I.*

In order to make such an invention practical, it had to function in a service rifle, and be readily converted back and forth to ensure that the infantryman had access to both long range, accurate and powerful ammunition (.30-'06) and the smaller rapid fire cartridge. Since the Pedersen Cartridge was little more than a longer version of the .32 ACP Cartridge (which is actually a .30 caliber), it would have obviously rattled around in the .30-'06 Chamber. This "slight problem" was solved by using a chamber filler that was part of the Device and was rifled with ten shallow lands and grooves. The chamber filler had a much smaller pistol cartridge chamber that mated with the firing pin and extractor of the device itself. When the cartridge was fired, the "lump" on the rear of the device acted as the equivalent of a pistol slide. The slide's weight allowed the device to function like a blowback pistol.. The empty cartridge case was ejected through the ejection port in the side of the device (see illustration of the left hand side of the Device to the right), which was designed to be aligned with the ejection port milled into the side of the Mark I Springfield Receiver.



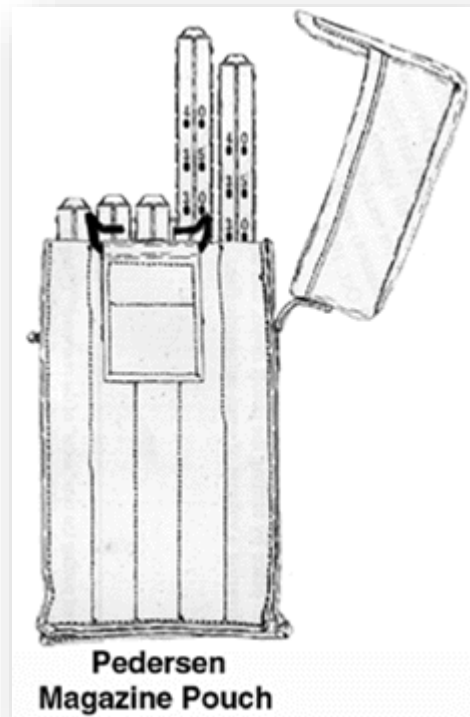
The device itself was held into the action utilizing a specially designed Magazine Cut Off, and the sear of the Pedersen Device was triggered by a special "tripper sear" that replaced the normal sear of a standard M1903 Rifle. The "tripper sear" would function with either the M1903

utilizing the standard bolt or with the Pedersen Device in place. All that was required to interchange the standard bolt with the device or vice versa, was to put the Magazine Cut Off in the center position, remove the standard '03 Bolt in the normal fashion. The device could then be rapidly inserted in its place, being sure to rotate the Cut Off back into its normal position. With a little practice the bolt - device exchange was extremely fast and easy to accomplish.

The Pedersen magazines easily snapped in and out of the receiver with one hand, and held 40 rounds each. When firing the rifle with the Device in place, the magazine stuck out of the right side of the receiver at a 45°, and the rifle was fired in a conventional fashion. The tests conducted to approve the production version of the Device and the Mark I were carried out by both shooters and target-pullers all sworn to strictest secrecy. The target-pullers were totally in the dark about what sort of weapon they were marking targets for, and the shooters were not allowed to speak to those pulling and marking targets in the butts.

The rifles were manufactured by Springfield Armory starting with serial number 1,034,502, but reportedly, the serial numbers were intermingled with the standard Springfield production, so no definitive serial number range can be discerned. The Devices themselves were manufactured by Remington-UMC at their Bridgeport, Connecticut plant.

It was envisioned that the Doughboy would carry his normal cartridge belt holding 100 rounds of .30-'06 ammunition, and two web magazine pouches holding five 40 round Pedersen Magazines each for a total of 400 rounds of Pedersen Ammunition. The Cartridge Belt would be further festooned with a metal can designed to carry the Device when using the .30-'06 bolt, and a cloth pouch to carry the bolt when using the Device. Ammunition for the Device came in 40 round boxes designed to fill one magazine. The weight of the Device itself was just over 1 ¾ lbs, and each loaded magazine added slightly over an additional pound. The entire rig with 10 loaded magazines (400 rounds), the Device and the storage can added approximately 14 lbs. to the rifleman's load. This additional weight was felt to be justified, considering the potential of the Device to break the trench warfare stalemate. This was to be the Allies' Secret weapon to end the war!



**Metal Carrying Case  
For Pedersen Device**  
(note belt hooks)



An evolution in tactics began to emerge in the 1920s that seemed to indicate that the static trench warfare was a thing of the past. In light of the new thrust of infantry tactics, the pipsqueak cartridge fired by the Pedersen Device would be of little use in a fluid Infantry environment, especially against aircraft or armored vehicles. The projectile fired by the Pedersen cartridge lacked the ominous “crack” caused by the .30-’06 bullet breaking the sound barrier – a sound judged to be unnerving to our enemies on the battle field. All these considerations were added to the fact that Springfield Armory had been seriously working on a full caliber version of a semi-automatic service rifle since the end of WWI. The M1 Garand spelled the final death knell for the Pedersen Device. Interestingly enough, Mr. John Pedersen himself was one of the arms designers who had submitted a semi-automatic rifle design to compete with the Garand. Only the intervention of General Douglas McArthur kept the .276 Pedersen Cartridge from becoming the official service cartridge of the U.S. Army. The original Garand was designed around the .276, not the .30-’06.

By 1931 the Pedersen Device was declared obsolete and ordered destroyed in April of that year.. The *Secret* classification of the Pedersen had been downgraded to *Confidential* on 17 December 1919, where it remained until their destruction in 1931. The Mark I Rifles remained in storage until 1937-1938 when they were restored to the standard M1903 configuration by replacing the tripper sear and Magazine Cut Off with the standard versions and reinstalling their standard bolts. Thus the Mark I was returned to service. The ejection port, far from weakening the receiver was judged to provide additional gas relief in the event of an overload or pierced primer. All Mark I receivers were of the double heat treated variety, thus assuming correct headspace, the Mark I Springfield is an extremely safe rifle to shoot.

There are several versions of the destruction of the Devices themselves, but the most prevalent is that they were burned at Benicia Arsenal in California by pouring gasoline over them and their magazines and simply torching them off. This version receives some validity due to an occasional magazine or even a Device itself that will appear with obvious fire scale over all or most of their bodies.

There are precious few of the Devices remaining, as only a small number of the devices were saved for posterity. One may be seen at each of the following museums:

The Smithsonian, Springfield Armory Museum, the Marine Corps Museum, the Armor Museum at Ft. Knox, the West Point Museum and at least one at the Remington Museum (presumably along with tool room models of the Pedersen Device designed for the Enfield and the Mosin-Nagant).



While several Devices are known to be in private collections, the grand total of surviving pristine Devices is probably in the neighborhood of between 25 and 30, although there may be more. At least one was found in the German Ordnance Collection at the conclusion of WWII, although the German specimen may well be one of those currently residing in the Museums listed above. The presence of a copy in the German Collection would seem to indicate that our effort to keep the Pedersen Device classified was all for naught, unless of course, they acquired their copy after the Devices had become obsolete and supposedly destroyed.

Even though the Pedersen Devices themselves are scarce, such is not the case with the Mark I Springfield. While considerably rarer than the standard M1903, many of the remaining Mark Is were later sold through the DCM sales program following WWII. Because of the relative lack of publicity of the Device and its companion, the Mark I M1903, the recipients were often at a loss as to what they had acquired. An article written in the American Rifleman in 1932 by then Major Julian Hatcher had explained our secret weapon of WWI, but apparently few took note. The Mark I and the Pedersen Device remained largely an enigma until the mid to late 1950s when they started to appear in steadily increasing numbers.

The recent lottery conducted by the Civilian Marksmanship Program specifically allowed the potential buyer to request a Mark I. For those of you lucky enough to be drawn for the elusive Mark I, be assured that you have acquired one of the most interesting pieces of U.S. Ordnance History ever produced by Springfield Armory – the unique companion piece of the “The Pipsqueak Pistol That Never Was”...

