

# My Small and Mighty Corps

By Matty Speights

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*A Private, Unpublished Book*

*(286 Pages)*

To the one whose heart intimately belongs a Marine,

In this lifetime, you experience what few can fathom. You know your Marine's strengths, weaknesses, and shortcomings--and you give your love and support despite all obstacles. You bring up the children of Marines, you battle the bills, you are the rock of your family. Thank You, Thank You, and Thank You. You are the one behind the curtain; You are the unsung Hero.

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To the Mothers of America,

I find myself in an awkward predicament in writing this book. I am a good man, a family man. I don't like to think of myself as crass. Well, good clean family men don't write about uniformed protectors of America slinging turds at eachother, or folding up their weenies into various shapes beside a flashlight to cast Disney character shadows on a big rock at night in the desert.

But that's what this book is about. It is my personal account of the Marine Corps: the good and the bad, in all of its glorious humor. I understand that it may have taken a great deal of persuasion to sign the papers so your boy could join his beloved Corps at age 17. Don't be discouraged, they'll take good care of him... but don't read this book either. In the event that you do, I have kept it largely free of profanity.

Thank you for your sacrifice.

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To those who have been, who are, who will be; to those who tried to be; to the Corpsmen of; to the Honorary; to the Young; to the comrades-in-arms who have fought beside; those who would have, but couldn't join; to the broken; to those who lacked the courage, but respected; to those holding the title, but shamefully rejected from; to those who have never known; to the supporters of, the lovers of, the family and the friends of, the grateful for, and finally the fine men, women, and fallen... Marines.

Semper Fi,





*I didn't punch him in the stomach. I simply poked him in the gut with a "thbbt" fart noise and said "hooHOO!" like the Pilsbury Doughboy. He punched me, though. And my face was covered in spit. "WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE!?! DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? I'M THE SERGEANT MAJOR OF INFANTRY TRAINING BATTALION!" My four-month career in the Marines was over, I just knew it. I mistook the shadowy figure standing beside my rack for my assistant machine gunner, Matt Stroh. Only I could screw up this badly, and on the eve of graduation, of all times. "HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF SOME JERK JUST WALKED UP TO YOU AND SAID (and there's the punch) 'THBBBBT, WOO-HOO!!!' YOU LITTLE..." The whole squad bay was awake now. The halogen lights sputtered to life as the last few guys stood on line. What the heck is the Sergeant Major doing here, anyway?*

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## INTRODUCTION: A Primer to the Marine Corps Structure

One of the first things you'll need to know about the Marines is the way they are structured. Since personnel ranks are mentioned in many of these stories, you'll need to know the skinny on the Marine Corps rank system, and highlights of the organizational structure.

Enlisted personnel represent the blue-collar working class of any military. In the United States, these men and women are required to have a high school equivalent education, pass a rigorous medical screening, be drug-free, and pass a physical fitness test. They are classified according to a vocational test called the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or ASVAB.

Officers represent the white-collar management of any military, and rate a salute. In the United States, these men and women have similar requirements as enlisted personnel entering the service, with exception to education—a four year college education is

required. Upon completion of entry-level training, these members of the U.S. military receive a congressional commission to serve as officers. Selected enlisted Marines who have attained their 4-year accredited degree may be selected to enter training to become commissioned officers.

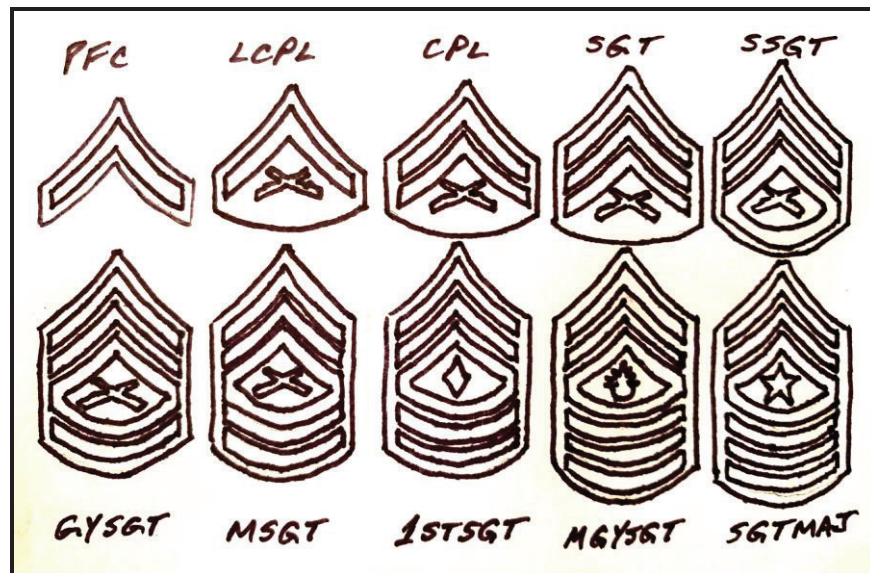
Warrant Officers represent a special breed of men and women who have served as enlisted personnel in the military and transitioned to a separate middle class of working officers. They also rate a salute, and all of the benefits of regular commissioned officers. In many ways, Warrant Officers are more respected by enlisted members than other officers, because they are formed from the middle and higher enlisted ranks.

## RANK STRUCTURE

U.S. military personnel, regardless of service branch, are broken into pay grades. Enlisted pay grades are E-1 through E-9, and officer pay grades are O-1 through O-10. In the Marines, the pay grades are equivalent to the following ranks:

- E-1 Private. Also known as Pvt. or PV1. This is a title held by (1) baby Marines, (2) half of the Marines that pre-date World War II, and (3) any Marine who spends a considerable amount of time in the brig. A Private is slick-sleeved, meaning that he or she wears no rank insignia on the uniform. A Private in the Marines is not concerned about rank. This person is a Marine, and that title alone is precious.
- E-2 Private First Class, or PFC. It is depicted on a Marine's uniform by a single stripe, which looks like an upward-pointing chevron. This rank exists solely to make a Marine proud that he or she is no longer a Private. A PFC in the Marines is not referred to as "Private."
- E-3 Lance Corporal, or LCPL. It is depicted on the uniform as a single stripe with crossed rifles underneath it. These

tough ankle-biters are commonly called a number of names, such as “Lance,” “Lance Coolie,” and “Lance Coconut.” I have no idea why this title takes such a beating. Lance Corporals probably make up the bulk of enlisted Marines. This is the average rank of the Marines you see on recruiting posters or Marine Corps commercials.



- E-4 Corporal, or CPL. It is depicted on the uniform as two stripes with crossed rifles underneath. Corporal is the first of the ‘Non-Commissioned Officer’ (or NCO) ranks in the Marines, and is therefore considered the first respectable title that an enlisted Marine earns. Corporals arguably do more actual work than anyone in the Marines.
- E-5 Sergeant, or SGT. The nucleus of Marine enlisted ranks, depicted on the uniform as three stripes with crossed rifles underneath. In the Army, you may call the bearer of this title “Sa’arnt” or “Sarge.” Not in the Marines. You call him or her, “Sergeant.”

- E-6 Staff Sergeant, or SSGT. The first of the ‘Staff Non-Commissioned Officer’ (or SNCO) ranks. Three stripes up, one stripe down (also called a rocker), with crossed rifles in the center. When you have attained this rank, you’re generally considered a careerist, meaning that you are probably serious enough about your career that you will stay in the service for more than twenty years and retire. Staff Sergeant is the first rank in the enlisted chain that demands increased administrative responsibility. Unlike in the Army, you may not refer to the bearer of this rank as a Sergeant. The proper title is Staff Sergeant, or Staff Sergeant of Marines.
- E-7 Gunnery Sergeant, or GYSGT. Also known as ‘Gunny.’ Three stripes up, two rockers (stripes down), with crossed rifles in the center. This is the most recognizable Marine title, thanks in no small part to movies like *Heartbreak Ridge*, starring Clint Eastwood as Gunny Highway, and *Full Metal Jacket*, starring R. Lee Ermey as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman. Marines will never refer to a Gunnery Sergeant as *Gunny*, unless they know the Gunnery Sergeant and he or she is okay with it. Earning this rank—a title that commands respect—is a pinnacle achievement in the Marine Corps; I have known of two officers who relinquished their commissions to join the enlisted ranks and work toward the attainment of that title.
- E-8 There are two separate ranks for this pay grade:
- (1) A Master Sergeant, or MSGT, is a Marine who is considered to be an expert in his or her field—equivalent to a senior field supervisor. A Master Sergeant is identified by having a rank insignia of three stripes up, three rockers, and crossed rifles in the center. This person is a working leader who is technically proficient in a specific skillset. A cool Master Sergeant will often be referred to by his or her Marines as “Top.”

(2) A First Sergeant, or 1SGT, is primarily a personnel manager, and not necessarily a technical expert in the place he or she is assigned. Three stripes up, three rockers, with a diamond in the center.

To further clarify, a Gunnery Sergeant (E-7) who works on aircraft may be promoted to Master Sergeant (E-8) and continue to work in a supervisory role in the aircraft maintenance field, or may be promoted to First Sergeant (E-8) and be a personnel supervisor in any unit or field of work, for instance an infantry battalion. First Sergeants occupy a small percentage of E-8's in the Marines, and as such, generally hold a higher level of respect with their title.

E-9 There are three separate ranks for this pay grade.

(1) A Master Gunnery Sergeant, or MGYSGT, is the next rank of logical progression for a Master Sergeant (E-8). Three stripes up, four rockers, and a bursting bomb in the center. A Master Gunnery Sergeant may endearingly be called "Master Guns," "Big Guns," or a variety of similar names. Of the two E-9 ranks, a Master Gunnery Sergeant will usually be the 'good cop.'

(2) A Sergeant Major, or SGTMAJ, is the next rank of logical progression for a First Sergeant (E-8). Three stripes up, four rockers, with a five-point star in the center. There may be multiple Master Gunnery Sergeants in any given unit, but there is only one Sergeant Major. There are no endearing terms for the bearer of this rank; you call him or her Sergeant Major.

(3) The third E-9 rank in the Marines is 'Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.' There is only one Marine in the Corps who wears this rank, which looks like a Sergeant Major's rank but instead of having a five-point star in the center, there's an EGA (Eagle, Globe, and Anchor) in the center, flanked by a small 5-point star on either side of the EGA.



- W-1 Warrant Officer 1, or WO1. This is the first of the Warrant Officer ranks.
- W-2 Chief Warrant Officer 2, or CWO2.
- W-3 Chief Warrant Officer 3, or CWO3.
- W-4 Chief Warrant Officer 4, or CWO4.
- W-5 Chief Warrant Officer 5, or CWO5.

#### Gunners

- O-1 Second Lieutenant, or 2NDLT. The first of the commissioned officer ranks. Less than one year before attaining this title, many of these recipients were waking up facedown in a frathouse urinal filled with their own puke. In less than one year after attaining this title, these pubescent ‘leaders’ will be giving orders to 20+ year hardened veterans—thanks to their college degree. In all branches of the service, a Second Lieutenant is often called ‘Butterbar,’ or ‘Second Louie.’ Because of the length of entry-level officer training in the Marines, you will rarely spot a Second Louie in the fleet—by the time their training is complete and they are assigned to a command, they have traded their gold bar for the silver bar of a First Lieutenant.
- O-2 First Lieutenant, or 1STLT. Like a Second Lieutenant, but a year or two older. For many enlisted Marines, a Lieutenant is a Lieutenant and they’re all the same. Remember, you can’t spell lost without LT.
- O-3 Captain, or CAPT. Captain is a respectable rank. Most Captains in the Marines are pretty solid leaders; unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the O-3’s of every service branch. I’ve met some pretty childish ones. This rank of Captain is not to be confused with a Navy or Coast Guard Captain (Pay Grade O-6), which the other service branches call a Colonel.

## WOMEN MARINES

In the Marine Corps, men and women are segregated during entry-level enlisted training (boot camp). Women Marines (WM's) do not serve in combat arms roles (infantry, armor, artillery, etc.), though they may be assigned to combat arms units in a support role. Regardless of role, Women Marines are still Marines, and as such have the primary role of being riflemen. They serve in combat zones and they will shoot your ass as dead as any other Marine will.

## TRAINING

Enlisted Marines are made at one of two places, depending on whether they were recruited East or West of the Mississippi. East of the river, Marines attend recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) East, Parris Island, South Carolina. Parris Island is often called 'PI.' West of the river, Marines attend recruit training at MCRD West, Camp Pendleton (San Diego), California. Marines collectively refer to this training as boot camp, NOT 'basic training.' Very young Marines will argue competitively about which MCRD is better, PI or Diego. Young PI Marines often dog on West Coast Marines by calling them 'Hollywood Marines.' Parris Island has swamps, crabs, gators and sand fleas; Camp Pendleton has the grueling gut-check mountain known by Marines by a particular title which some may find offensive. For the sake of this book, we'll call it "Mount Motherpuppy."

Marine Commissioned Officers are made at one of two places: at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, or at Officer Candidate School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. The basic requirements for completing entry-level training as a Marine officer are much more stringent than those which govern the enlisted training process. Rivalries similar to the enlisted ranks exist among officers when it comes to where they attended entry-level training, but these rivalries are more heavily weighted in terms of affecting promotions over the span of their career.

## I. RECRUIT TRAINING

***“That which does not kill me makes me stronger.”***

--Friedrich Nietzsche, Friend of Marine Drill Instructors

Few stories are told amongst Marines, with as much enthusiasm and laughter, as those of Marine boot camp. Whether from the dry heat and steep mountains of the recruit depot in San Diego, California, or the alligator-laden swamps and sand fleas of Parris Island, South Carolina, Marines of both East and West coasts each hold this idea in common: ‘boot camp sucked.’ But since Nietzsche’s above-referenced quote does in fact hold some water, this induction later is esteemed with pride and recounted with laughter. Following are some highlights and stories of boot camp.

### SUPER SECRET UNDERGROUND

*“Keep your face planted on the table. Stop moving.” The men behind me were all about business. You’d better believe I was going to do exactly what they said. I buried my head into my folded arms on the table along with my counterparts, reminiscent of ‘quiet time’ in Kindergarten. Then I tried to recall how this all went down.*

The official website for the airport is very user-friendly. Of the seventeen tabs from which to choose on the main page, one is called “airport maps.” I click on it. Yeah, there it is... that’s the main terminal. Atrium, yup--restrooms, info desk, ATM... funny, I never saw any of that stuff. Only a blur of spit and green. I might

as well have been bound and gagged as I was exiting the aircraft. Judging by all the stairs, the turns, and by the temperature of table under my forehead, we were all somewhere deep in the basement of Charleston International Airport, awaiting our fateful trip to Parris Island.

Would-be Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen who have sworn the standard U. S. military ‘Oath of Enlistment’ at their local ‘MEPS’ processing center are placed in an administrative pool of bodies awaiting training. For this reason, they are called ‘poolees.’ This prestigious title, like unto the title ‘larva’ in the insect world, usually comes with a bonafide t-shirt and a few bragging rights. A poolee might join the Delayed Entry Program and return to finish high school. He will inevitably show off his bright red “Marines” shirt like a peacock. The shirt basically says: *I have met the preliminary qualifications for becoming a Marine (soldier, sailor, airman). I have signed my name on the dotted line, fully accepting the fact that I may be sent into harm’s way at a moment’s notice. Guys, shiver. Chicks, faint. Dig me.*

Reality sets in when you, the poolee, find yourself in a Boeing 737 at 20,000 feet and your head deflates. You are seriously on your way to boot camp, armed with the clothes you’re wearing, a meal ticket for use at the airport when you arrive (good for one big steak dinner), and a little white paper bag which reads, ‘for motion sickness’ in seven languages. Me? I wrote my wife a letter on the barf bag and planned to drop it in the first mailbox I

saw, somewhere between the plane's exit tunnel and a nice airport restaurant.

I glance over at my best friend, John, who was out like a light. The Marines let you sign up on the 'buddy program,' which promises to keep you and your buddy or buddies together in the same platoon throughout boot camp. This is a symbiotic relationship: the Marines get another fresh body and you get to crap your pants next to somebody special. As I recall, the promise that you and your buddy will be kept together is the only promise the Marines ever made at enlistment.

The plane landed, I walked up the exit tunnel and was met halfway by an intimidating individual. This spit-spewing, screaming blur of green ranted like a crazed lunatic and snatched up everybody's meal tickets. Until this point, I hadn't noticed that the entire plane was full of poolees – and no one else.



So now we're moving through the airport, playing follow-the-maniac in a single file line, weaving through civilian travelers and businesspeople in the fashion of a Chinese parade dragon, or the old 'centipede' computer game. I'm sure Charleston airport is beautiful, but the only part I remember is the underground lair that contains would-be Marines awaiting bus transfer to Parris Island. You're fed a cold ham sandwich and a juice box, you're yelled at, you're scared for three hours, and then you leave. **“Keep your face planted on the table. Stop moving.”** While I was facedown (waiting for the bus), I remembered thinking, *They're all in on it! What a betrayal! Charleston airport's owner, executives – civilians like me – are in cahoots with the Marines, of all people –*

*allowing an underground portion of the airport to be used, essentially, as a cage! I got over it.*

## THE 'DI'

Few entities in this world (who are actually real and not just TV creations) can intimidate someone quite as effectively as a Marine Drill Instructor. A perfect portrayal of a Marine 'DI' was played by R. Lee Ermey in Stanley Kubrick's "*Full Metal Jacket*." Upon arrival at Parris Island, recruits are welcomed warmly by these beasts, the recruits' loving caretakers for the next three months (recruit training varies annually between eleven and thirteen weeks of training).

A typical encounter with a DI would be as such: you're using the lidless toilet, which sits alongside twenty others of the same (no dividers), and you've been there for maybe a minute. All of a sudden chills run down your spine, from the nape of your neck all the way to your pooper. A DI has just entered the 'head' and he's furious. His over-the-top loud voice is thrice amplified by the acoustics of the small hallway-style bathroom. Before you know it, he's in your face – literally – spitting and hissing and yelling at the top of his lungs. "Squeeze it out; pinch it off, you disgusting turd-burglar! Get off my daggum toilets!"



The bus pulls up, the tired and nervous new recruits scramble off the bus, and a handful of ‘handlers’ yell from every direction, pushing their way through the crowd of confused recruits and herding them onto the pre-painted infamous yellow footprints – ‘it has begun.’ These handlers are in fact DI’s, but they are (unbeknownst to the recruits) only temporary as far as the recruits are concerned; they’re used to move recruits through the necessary formalities of induction. Uniform issue, basic rules and regulations, indoctrination, and initial haircut are some of the first orders of business in this temporary 24-hour stage.



The Marine Corps recognizes the influential role that families, specifically mothers, play in an individual's decision to join the Corps. To keep the flow of fresh young bodies to boot camp from being altered, the Marines let mom know that Johnny is gonna be all right. The first thing that happens once you're off the yellow footprints is a forced letter home. A DI makes the recruits to sit down at a series of big tables, then stands over them and says, "You will now write a friggin letter to Suzie or Mama or whomever." He dictates...

DEAR MOMMA

"Dear Momma, comma. New paragraph. I made it safely to Parris Island, period. My Senior Drill Instructor is taking good care of me, period. I am in good health and good spirits, period. New paragraph. Love, comma. New paragraph. Now sign your name--Recruit Johnny or whatever. Now fold the letter. Fold it again. Place it in the envelope. Lick it. Seal it. Pass it to your right. Stand up, face the right... MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!"

NAVAL PARLANCE AND MARINE-ISMS

Marines, and the Naval Services in general, contribute greatly to the cornucopia of words and phrases in the English language today. This is learned quickly by the Marine recruit, who adapts and absorbs for fear of a DI getting up in his junk. A floor

instantly becomes a ‘deck,’ a door becomes a ‘hatch,’ a window is a ‘porthole.’ The ceiling is now the ‘overhead,’ stairwells are ‘ladderwells,’ the bathroom is now ‘the head.’ ‘Scuttlebutt’ is the term for both a water fountain and for gossip. A bed is a rack, wall is a bulkhead and all cardinal directions (left, right, front, rear) are replaced with ‘port, starboard, forward (astern), and aft’ respectively. These are your primary examples of ‘Navy-speak.’

In addition to the language of the Navy, recruits must learn Marine verbage. Junk food is collectively referred to as ‘geedunk’ or ‘pogey bait,’ a flashlight turns into a ‘moonbeam,’ running shoes are ‘go fasters,’ and a writing pen is an ‘inkstick.’ At boot camp, the words ‘daggum,’ ‘freakin,’ and ‘stinkin’ can be inserted in the place of any adjective or adverb. Likewise, ‘yoo-hoo,’ ‘nasty,’ or ‘booger’ can take the place of any noun or pronoun. Here’s one, “Hey there, Yoo-hoo! Grab that daggum friggin daggum rifle and freakin point it at the friggin stinkin target, cornball. Yeah, that’s right, sweetheart, I’m talking to you. Hey Pinocchio! Yeah, you! Pay friggin attention to the daggum stinkin target, dingleberry!”

The Marine Corps favors three superlatives above all others, in the following order: 1. Outstanding, pronounced Out—**STAN**ding or Out-freakin’ standing. 2. Stellar... pronounced in such a way that the word just hangs in midair, similar to Tony the Tiger’s *Frosted Flakes* line, “Theyrrrrre Grrrrrreat!” Like this: “Stellarrrrr.” 3. Fantastic. Usually preceded by “that’s” and followed by an interrogative, like “yunderstand that?” or “good-to-

go?” Example: That’s fantastic, is it not? Common ‘hybrid’ superlatives are “good-to-go,” “locked and cocked,” “AJ squared-away” and “high-speed, low-drag.”

You may have noted that in the last paragraph, the phrase “good to go” was used in two separate examples, both as a statement and as a question. Yes, it’s both. The Marines do that to a lot of words and phrases, chiefly “Er” (it’s a word in the Marines, but I wouldn’t argue that in Scrabble) and the classic “Oo-Rah.” In question form: We’re all gonna run up that hill, Oo-Rah? The appropriate answer to the question would be “*Oo-Rah!*”

Now, the word “Oo-Rah” (again, not a Scrabble word) comes in many packages. Some Marines pronounce it to the T, others stretch their mouth when they say it (Eww-Raaah). For some, the “*Rah*” is silent, others omit the “*Oo*.” Many Marines simply bark it out, and it sounds like they’re clearing their throat. Lastly, it is increasingly popular among modern Marines to sharply say ‘*ARAH*’ in the back of their throat, thrusting air out of their diaphragm or using their ‘chest voice,’ as my wife would say. I usually fell in the latter category. I saved my *Oo*’s for special occasions.

Grrr and Yut are also Marine words. Free agents, really. GRRRRRR is actually more like it, and Yut is pronounced either with exaggerated elongation (Yuuuuuuuuuuut), or in the quick, chopped version “Yut-Yut.” The meanings vary depending on the situation. Okay, at this point, you’re thinking Marines are pretty weird, right? Well it’s like the joke goes, ‘Where does a 600-lb.

gorilla sit? ...Wherever he wants.’ The Marines being the gorilla, they can make up whatever words make them happy.

## HOW DIRTY LITTLE MARINES GET CLEAN

Good health and hygiene habits are not lost on Marine recruits. On the eve of a recruit’s first shower at boot camp, a Drill Instructor will give a verbal instruction of how to wash. The following instructions are yelled out in a whopping 10 seconds: “Hands, face, hair, ears, neck, torso, abs, arms, legs, nuts, butt, feet, in that order. Rinse your bar of soap. You’ve got two minutes. One minute. Three, two, one, YOU’RE DONE. YOU’RE FREAKIN’ DONE!!! Get out, get on line.” Shaving instruction is a similar process.

## PT SHOWERS

Twice a day, and sometimes thrice a day, recruits hit the showers. Depending on how much hygiene time is allowed, the individual recruit will spend between twenty seconds and two minutes in the shower. There are many times when the water is turned on, everybody forms a line and simply runs through the shower and back out. The other one, least preferred by recruits, consists of two elements: 1) a shower room with ten shower heads spraying either scalding hot or freezing cold water, and 2), every swinging Johnson in the platoon (about fifty) crammed into the

ten-man shower room. No room for claustrophobics to be sure. It was always funny to see the one guy with soap in his eyes miss his chance to rinse.

## HEALTH AND COMFORT INSPECTIONS

Once a week, recruits are the recipients of a health & comfort inspection, where they are physically checked by a medical doctor, or--at a minimum--by a 23-year-old commissioned officer with a BA degree in underwater basketweaving. To prepare for these inspections, DI's will supply the recruits with two huge wide-mouthed pickle jars, and have them labeled "mug jug" and "foot jug" accordingly. The jars are filled with cotton balls and alcohol. Then the recruits will add their GI Aqua Velva or Electric Shave 'smellgoods' to the jars.

After showering and shaving, a blur of brown and pink naked young men run past the mug jug, the foot jug, and the hanging trash bag in that order. The clean-fingered and toed recruits flip-flop their way back on line in their shower shoes, awaiting inspection in their birthday suits. The DI on duty may then walk down the line with two large spray bottles: One filled with aftershave and one with mouthwash. "Close your eyes, open your mouths." The DI is sure to 'accidentally' spray at least one recruit in the eyes with mouthwash, and in the mouth with aftershave. It's usually a recruit with a bad attitude that nobody likes, so no one seems to mind.

There are several funny stories that can be derived from health and comfort inspections, probably because all of the proper elements are in place. Naked men of all colors, conditions, and accents; zero privacy; and wise-cracking DI's. Here's one for you.

All recruits are naked and on line as the 'heavy hat' (the bad cop of a drill instructor team) goes stomping down the DI highway to pre-screen the squad bay before the Company Commander comes through to inspect. Well, apparently one of the recruits had a raging hard on. The DI went marching down the DI highway, and without pausing or skipping a step, he removed his DI campaign cover (Smokey the Bear hat) and placed it on the recruit's manhood. "Don't let that freakin touch the deck, Nasty," he said in a loud and thunderous voice, simultaneously snapping loudly and pointing his finger in the recruit's face as he passed.

The DI marched right out the hatch. Maybe it was a cold tailwind from an open window in the squad bay, but the recruit lost the battle quickly. The DI, who probably just stepped outside for a chuckle, slammed open the door and filled the space inside the door frame with his angry body. The recruit was arched backwards (as if doing the 'limbo') in a last-ditch effort to keep the hat from sliding down his legs and falling onto the ground. The DI, probably close to losing his bearing in front of the recruits, returned outside and slammed the door behind him.

Another story: In every platoon of recruits, the DI's appoint a Guide. The Guide acts as a sort of leader amongst the other recruits. Well, our Guide let it go completely to his head.

He was a jerk to all the other recruits, and he was a serious prima donna. Everything he touched turned to gold, and he knew it, and he gloated because of it. Well, during another health and comfort inspection, our Guide was loudly scolded for improper hygiene of the genitals ... “What are those bumps on your ballsack? Are those genital warts, recruit?” “Sir, no, Sir.” “Are you sure?” “Yes, Sir.” “Don’t argue with me, recruit. I’ve seen genital warts before, and those look like genital warts. They’re not annotated in your records, so I think you must’ve just gotten them. Have you been properly instructed in personal hygiene techniques?” “Yes, Sir.” “Have you been applying those techniques?” “Sir?” “Come with me, recruit. Put your clothes on and come with me.” Our Guide was led away to the applause of perfectly silent chuckles.

The next ‘health & comfort’ story is one of my favorites. There is always one guy in every boot camp experience who can’t speak English to save his life. Ours was recruit Francois, from French Guyana. Now, if you’re even remotely tuned in to French, or to general world culture, you know that his name is pronounced “Fran-swah.” Of course, one of our DI’s, Staff Sergeant Gable, persistently called him Fran-choice, and at boot camp, the name stuck.

So Franchoice is standing on line when The Sir (Marine-speak for an officer) steps in front of him and begins to inspect his fingernails for cleanliness. The standard report for these inspections is, “Sir, this recruit has no medical or physical problems to report at this time, Sir!” Franchoice instead sounded

off, “Suer, dis reccrute believe he has de emmorhoid!” The accompanying DI: “You got what? Hemorrhoids? Who do you think you are, Doctor Markus freakin Wellby? Bend the heck over!” Then, pointing at the last recruit inspected, “You! Look up his butt and tell me if he’s got hemorrhoids!”

### I’M NOT STUPID

There’s no such thing as a dumb question. Only dumb recruits. From time to time, a recruit will ask the elusive ‘dumb question,’ and a DI will escort him to the head, have him look into the mirror and repeat something witty (often repeatedly). A common phrase is, “I’m not stupid, you’re stupid. I’m not stupid, you’re stupid ...” It’s even funnier two hours later, when the rest of the platoon goes to chow, returns from chow, and sees him still in the head, perhaps with a DI standing next to him, and the recruit is moving from one mirror to the next, screaming at the top of his lungs, “I’m not stupid, you’re stupid!”

### TELEVISION

Everything in boot camp is in some way associated with pain. Still some morons fall for the same old ‘bait’ every time. When a DI comes into the squad bay and asks who wants to watch TV, at least one or two brave souls will raise their hands. The TV turns out to be imaginary, and it is ‘watched’ in the following



painful position: lay on the ground, face down, stretched out, and rest your head on your fists with your elbows on the ground, as if watching Saturday morning cartoons on your raised television while laying facedown. Now, turn this into a modified push-up. The only four points on the ground are your two elbows and the toes of your boots. From time to time, a DI will tell you to ‘change the channel’ or eat some of your imaginary popcorn. This must be done without breaking the position (no lying down on your stomach).

#### PHONE CALLS

“Who wants to call home?” is another loaded question. In any other branch of the service, it might be a serious question. In the Marines, however, there are three constants: for the next three months of boot camp, you will (1) not make a phone call, (2) not see a member of the opposite sex, and (3) not get within half a mile of civilization, let alone smoke a cigarette or go to the PX to buy a cookie.

So who wants to call home? The recipients of such a treat (probably the same two gullible recruits) will probably end up calling out, “Home! Home!” all day long. Oh yes, add lots of push-ups, for being stupid.

#### SAND FLEAS

Do not kill sand-fleas. Every would-be Marine should already know that. You see, prior to boot camp, the inquisitive would-be's will probably rent every movie about Marines that can be found at Blockbuster. In one famous scene from a well-known John Wayne movie, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, Sgt. Stryker (Wayne) 'dressed down' one of his men for swatting and killing a sand flea, whereafter members of the platoon turned over dirt and leaves until the wee hours searching for the dead flea. Then there was the classic question of whether the sand flea was a male or a female. For some reason, the Corps' longstanding relationship with the ravenous, biting, swarming little beasts has evolved into quite an affinity.



When recruits are standing outside in formation, the sand fleas will congregate on them. Sand fleas will crawl into your ears, fly into your eyes, or get breathed in through your nose. They travel alone, but amass quickly on the soft sweet skin of recruits, especially sweaty ones. They will bite and it will hurt, sting, and itch; but Marine recruits WILL NOT MOVE. “Let ‘em eat!” the DI’s bark, “They were here first, let ‘em eat!” Since there is no apparent double standard, the DI’s get chewed up too, but they are well-disciplined and also do not move (as would be expected). The funny thing is, I’ve never before or since encountered a similar

biting sand flea, except for on Parris Island. Years after my stay on the island, the Marines would enter into a contract with the Air National Guard to spray the island with insecticide (as dependent spouses, children, and other non-Marines were also victims of the growing infestation). The insects are pretty resilient, though, and I'm sure there are more than a few of those bulletproof little dirt monkeys left every time they spray.

#### TYPHOID SHOTS

Marines are living proof that needles won't kill you. Every person who wears the uniform is practically a walking pincushion. When recruits are in their initial week of boot camp, they are run through a gauntlet of auto-injector-fed vaccines and immunizations (basically, spring-loaded or pneumatic-driven needle meds). The typhoid shot is particularly memorable, because after it is administered into your meaty butt-cheek, you are directed to form a line, sitting down and straddling the man in front of you. Then, as a drill instructor calls cadence, the whole line of recruits will rock from side to side to work the glutes so as to reduce the hard and painful lump that begins to form on each recruit's respective buttock. "Left, right, left, right."

#### CALL A DOCTOR

I'm sure that every Marine, looking back, remembers having to make an 'emergency' head call (bathroom break). The experience goes something like this:

Recruit: (fidgeting) raises hand

DI: Waddaya want?

Recruit: Sir! This recruit requests to make a head call, Sir!

DI: Is it an emergency?

Recruit: No, Sir.

DI: Hold it then.

Recruit: (later) raises hand again

DI: Now what, recruit?

Recruit: Sir! This recruit requests to make a head call, Sir!

DI: Is it an emergency?

Recruit: Sir, yes, Sir!

DI: Then you'd better wave your arms above your head and sound like an ambulance! And move like one, too – Git! Move, recruit!

Recruit: (running to head, waving arms around in circles like a flashing police light) woooo-woooo-wooo-wooo...

#### ID CARD TROUBLE

One time, a recruit failed to refer to himself in the third person, instead referring to himself as 'I' or 'me.' The DI rushed up to him and got in his face. "Who the heck is a 'me'? What did you just say, recruit?!" Recruit: "Sir, I..." DI: (furious) "I?!"

Who is I? What the... Recruit, what you have is a serious case of mistaken identity. Get out my daggum back hatch!" The recruit comes back inside holding a large rock and trailing the DI, and gets back on line. "This is your new ID card. Take it with you everywhere. It will remind you who you are, understand that?" That poor kid carried that rock everywhere for the duration of rifle range phase.

#### THE CANTEEN KID

Speaking of range phase... Nearing the end of training, recruits go to the rifle range for two weeks. They receive classes just beyond the 500 yard line and take breaks throughout the day to refill canteens and use the head. During one such particularly short break, I ran to head with a few other recruits. We filled canteens from the spigot while others relieved themselves. We hadn't been at the building a full minute when it was time to run back. I had three full canteens. Two were mine, and one was my buddy's (I filled it while he was using the head). He was running about thirty feet in front of me, so I yelled out his name. He turned his head around while running and, when he saw me, I launched his canteen at him. He didn't see me throw it, though, and his head quickly resumed its original position facing in the direction that he was running. Right about then, all four pounds of water-filled hard plastic hit the back of his head. He was out cold when the DI demanded, "Who threw that daggum friggin canteen?!!" As the

pack of traveling recruits kept running (pretending not to hear the furious question), I led the pack, hoping silently that I hadn't done too much damage.



### BEAUFORD'S BROWNIE

One week of a Marine's boot camp experience is spent in the bowels of a galley (kitchen) as either a cook, a messman, or a dishwasher. Recruit Beauford was the spitting image of Bubba in Forrest Gump. During recruit Beauford's mess and maintenance week experience, he worked 'the line' as a messman, pulling trays of cooked food out of their warmers/coolers and serving them to

the platoons of recruits coming through the chow line. He had just retrieved a large brownie tray from its warmer when a DI arrived on the scene. “Recruit Beauford!!!” “Sir, yes, Sir!” “I want you to take this daggum freakin knife and daggum, daggum cut this tray into three inch by three inch brownies, do you understand that?” “Sir, yes Sir!” “Good, when I come back I should see exactly sixty brownies, *capice?*” “Sir, yes Sir!” “Good. Do it now.” “Sir, aye, aye, Sir!” The DI turned around walked away about two full steps, the turned back around and marched right back up to within half an inch of recruit Blue, face to face. “RECRUIT BEAUFORD!” “Sir, yes Sir!” “I thought I told you to cut those brownies three by three inches! What in the Sam T. Hell is that one friggin’ humongous brownie doing in that pan?!” Recruit Beauford, of course, had not had even a few seconds to pick up the knife and, therefore, hadn’t cut anything yet. Nonetheless he responded promptly, without thinking twice, “Sir, that would be a Big Benjamin Bryson Beauford Special Birthday Brownie, Sir!” Obviously satisfied by the instantaneous answer to his bogus question, the hat nodded with his same mean scowl and said “Out-freakin’-standing, recruit Beauford. Carry on!” With that he turned and marched away, and I can’t imagine Beauford having slept with anything less than a huge grin that night.



## MT. SURIBACHI

Mt. Suribachi is the prominent peak on Iwo Jima upon which Joseph Rosenthal's famous Marine flag raising picture was taken. It is also the subsequent reaction that occurs when a recruit leaves his foot locker unlocked. "Everybody get your foot lockers and get on line!" All the recruits scramble as the DI's count down "5, 3, 2, 1. You're Done! Unlock them now. You've got 5, 4, 1. DONE!! You're freakin done! Dump them now. RIGHT FREAKIN NOW! DUMP 'EM! DUMP 'EM! DUMP 'EM! NOW!!! RAAAAH!" At this time recruits are simultaneously getting 'thrashed' with push-ups, mountain climbers, flutter kicks, etc. "Kill Yourself" was our cue to commence self-punishment through PT, until large sweat puddles formed all over the highly polished floor. Meanwhile, the DI's would be kicking everybody's personal gear all over the place, and two or three recruits would already be sweeping the gear into a large heap. That 'heap' was affectionately known as Mount Suribachi. We would get back on line, admiring the mountain through sweat-stung eyes, and when the DI's would give the 'GO,' we had about ten seconds to grab whatever we could and cram it in our foot locker. That meant, inevitably, we would all be very, very sneaky in the middle of the night, and in the morning, everyone would magically have exactly what they originally had in their foot lockers, right down to Mary Jane's pretty pink panties that mysteriously made it through the mail.

## NAME GAMES

Recruits' last names are often the source of drill instructors' amusement. In one instance, there was an assortment of 'colors' in a platoon: Recruit White, Recruit Black, Recruit Brown, and Recruit Redd. One of their DI's would not let them be separated from each other and referred to them collectively as 'my little crayon box.' Often times he would call for two of them by mixing colors: "Recruit Mauve!" at which Redd and Brown would come running. "Gray" and "Pink" were also common mixes.

Once just before church service on Sunday morning, my platoon beheld a spectacle that brought laughter-induced tears. *Of course, this is the Marines, people. When I say laughter, I mean that on the **inside** we were laughing, but on the outside, we simply looked like stone-faced killers.* We were adjacent to the crayons' platoon, and Recruit Redd was being chewed out for his apparent stupidity. Their DI had instructed three other recruits to hoist Recruit Redd, hold him horizontal at waist level, and spin him around on the side of the 'crayon box' (two random recruits facing each other with arms outstretched, almost holding both of each other's hands--Recruits Black, Brown, and White were crunched between them in the 'box'), thus sharpening his head with the built-in crayon sharpener. "Listen here, sharp one, don't brain fart like that again." "Sir, aye aye, Sir!"

Other names were adoptive. A recruit in my platoon contracted genital parasites in boot camp (crabs). All of our racks

were pushed closer together in one corner of the squad bay, while he was separated in the extreme opposite corner, a rack to himself, with orange road cones around him. Whenever the DI's needed him they would simply call out "Crab!!!" (Sounded like "KA-RAAAB!") and he would come running sideways with his arms up, making clawlike pinching gestures with his hands. Whenever a recruit was made to report his post, he would do it as such, "Sir, good evening Sir! Recruit Smith reports platoon 1234 all secure, Sir! Sir, there are 48 recruits, 49 rifles, 49 foot lockers, and one crab-infested recruit, all secure, Sir!"

One night we were awakened and made to stand on line, while Crab was summoned and went running (sideways) and pinching, right out the back hatch. We later would learn that he was taken upstairs to another platoon for 'fight night.' After fifteen minutes, crab and another recruit (looking exhausted) from the platoon upstairs were escorted into our squad bay by about five DIs from three platoons. The cones were collected from around Crab's rack and were placed in the center of the squad bay as the boundary of a six foot by six foot square. Then the one DI yelled out the rules. Recruit 'Crab' was going to fight recruit Flea from upstairs (Flea was his real name). Flea could only jump and Crab could only pinch. The bout lasted about five minutes, maybe ten – Flea, hands locked behind his back, threw his body into Crab countless times, pummeling him. Crab got in his fair share of pinches, bruising up Flea's upper arms, but that was about it. The DI's let us gather around for the fight, and it made for some good

laughs; one of the very few times we could do that openly at boot camp.

## HOLIDAYS

The best boot camp stories, I truly believe, happen over the holidays. Our platoon got very little sleep around the holidays. Just days before Christmas, we were stood up, in our underwear, next to the bulkheads, and told to ‘break out our moonbeams.’ When every man had his angle-neck flashlight and was standing against the wall again, we were assigned a post – two men per window. Since every moonbeam has two additional colored lenses, we had to alternate red, white, and blue. For two hours each night, we were the ‘Christmas lights’ for our building. All the way around our deck (floor), the colors were alternated. The DI called cadence with the slow, steady, heavy step of his boots as he paced up and down the DI highway. Red, white, blue, red, . . . by Christmas Eve, we all had cramps in our thumbs from holding our flashlight buttons.

## THE BIG SURPRISE

One Christmas Eve, our Senior Drill Instructor (the father figure, or ‘good cop’ of the DI team) instructed us to each take one of our socks out and hang it atop the head of our rack, “just in case Santa comes tonight.” Well, we did as we were told, and I must

say that I truly believed that there might be candy inside our socks when we woke up. The Senior DI had a foot locker chock full of cavities-to-be, which we saw from time to time if the SDI's door was open. Late that night, I heard a rattle and peeked out from between partially closed eyelids to see the firewatch placing something in each sock. Waiting until he passed, I *slivered and slunk* like the Grinch to my sock, then pulled out a small piece of paper. Getting my flashlight out and then crawling under my wool blanket (which obscured the light from the firewatch), I read the paper – “500 pushups.” Curious, I sneakily snatched small notes from other socks, to see if someone had a lesser ‘gift.’ No luck. “Mountain climb until you die” and “1,000 flutter kicks” were the first two I pulled out – then, I got an idea. Devious? Yes. Feasible? Yes. Hilarious? I thought so.

I pulled a few sheets of paper out of my letter-writing gear, then got under my covers with the flashlight again and went to work, making my own set of ‘presents.’ “Double Chow.” “Ice cream with dinner for one week.” “No PT for a week.” “Drill instructor for a day.” On the back of each, I wrote, “see Senior DI to claim prize.” I replaced the SDI's pieces of paper in their respective socks, but stuffed them low into the toe of each sock, and placed my paper near the top of each sock. In the morning, I woke up and remembered my actions, wondering just how smart the idea was. More than likely, the DI's would be furious, and we would all thrash until someone had the integrity to fess up. It was Christmas Day, however, and I was saved by the morning church

service. By the time we marched to the chapel, sang some songs, and came back, the joke would be out and the thrashing would be over. I was wrong.

When the five of us returned to rejoin the rest of the platoon 'chilling out' (polishing boots, scuzzing the deck), a line was formed outside the SDI's duty hut. Recruit Vast was the first in line, and I moved my scuzzing operation to within hearing distance. He was talking to the recruit behind him. "I got the 'Big Surprise!' I wonder what it is? I hope it's not push-ups or something." I went over to my buddy, John, trying not to laugh and pulled him out of the line, "It's a joke!" I told him. "I made those things!" "You dog!" He said, "I knew it had to be you! Ha!" He was laughing himself. "What do you want?!" Our Senior DI barked at Recruit Vast from behind his desk. Recruit Vast centered himself on the hatch. "Sir, this recruit is here to claim his 'Big Surprise, Sir!" "You want WHAT? Give me that [piece of paper, presumably]!" The silence seemed to last forever. My heart almost stopped as I recognized the calm before the storm. "Oh, I see." The Senior Drill Instructor sounded almost amused. "You want the BIG SURPRISE?" Then he exploded. "YOU'LL GET YOUR BIG SURPRISE, VAST! HA, HA, HA, HA. YESSSS, YOU'LL GET YOUR BIG SURPRISE. I GOT A WHOLE BAG OF BIG SURPRISE FOR YOU, YOU MAGGOT! GET THE FRICK OUTTA MY HATCH!!!"

At that, the rest of the line instantly dissipated. Within five minutes, the DI's had collected all of my little notes, laughing out

loud at each of them. Then, we gave the DI's our Christmas presents – billions of little drops of sweat, for hours. I remained undiscovered. Then somehow, word filtered out that I had been the perpetrator (someone saw me the night before). I still didn't know that anyone knew. Vast was paying for his 'Big Surprise' long after all of us had finished. He was really taking a beating. Then, in desperation, he yelled out "SCREW YOU, SPEIGHTS!" I took his place even as the giddy DI's swarmed me and toyed with me, the Christmas present mastermind, until I was flopping around on the floor like a dying fish in a pile of sweat. Looking back, it was worth it.

#### COOKIES, ANYONE?

During the holidays, recruits receive tons of goodies from loved ones. Grandma Speights sent me one of her traditional handmade candy wreaths, and it was hung on the SDI's hatch. Though plenty of opportunity was there, not one of those colorfully wrapped caramels, or chocolates, or hard candies was pulled from that wreath for a month. Simply put, no one had the balls, and for this reason: just before receiving the wreath in the mail, recruit Jackson opened his eight pound box of cookies from mom and stuffed two oatmeal raisins in his mouth before the DI came to inspect the package. The DI smelled the cookies on his breath and made him eat the whole box by himself in less than ten minutes. When he couldn't eat another crumb (he was obviously

in pain), he got his butt seriously trashed until he puked all over the squad bay. Now, who's hungry?

Recruit Martinez made sure to tell his parents not to send pogy bait, but instead to send razors, toothpaste, and aftershave, which were all authorized items. He stood on the quarterdeck while the DI inspected his newly arrived parcel. "Recruit Martinez?" "Sir, yes, Sir!" "What is this?" "Sir, it's Old Spice aftershave, Sir!" "Are you sure?" "Sir?" "Did you taste it?" "Sir, no Sir!" "Take off the cap." "Aye, Sir!" "Put the bottle in your mouth." "Aye, Sir!" "NOW DRINK IT! DRINK IT! DRINK IT ALL, RECRUIT!" Just as the DI was yelling, the back hatch slammed. It was the Series Gunnery Sgt. (he was, among other roles, the Human Resources Manager of this organization) and the DI didn't flinch. In the middle of his raving, he changed, like the flip of a switch. The whole incident went like this, 'NOW DRINK IT! DRINK IT! DRINK IT ALL, RECRUIT!' (door slams) "RECRUIT MARTINEZ, I TOLD YOU TO GET THAT BOTTLE OUT OF YOUR FRIGGIN' MOUTH! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? WHAT IS IN THAT BOTTLE, RECRUIT?" "Sir, aftershave, Sir!" "DOES IT HAVE ALCOHOL IN IT?" "Sir, yes, Sir!" "AND ARE YOU ALLOWED TO HAVE ALCOHOL AT RECRUIT TRAINING? GET THE HELL OFF MY QUARTERDECK!!"



## HE HIT A DRILL INSTRUCTOR... AND LIVED

Marines don't drink ... much ... okay, that's a lie. A Marine drill instructor gets tanked at a bar one night and goes home, but his wife will not let him in – he's too drunk. His last resort is to go back to his squad bay and sleep in the duty hut. On his way over there, he stops into a different squad bay to mess with the recruits on firewatch. Recruit Mullins, a large, bodybuilder-type recruit, is the firewatch – he heard the door shut and walked over to where he heard someone scurry, and flashed his moonbeam. “BANG!! YOU'RE DEAD!” yelled the off-duty DI, who—visibly drunk—was wearing shorts and a crew shirt, sporting a well-aimed and deadly finger pistol. The DI simultaneously lunged at the recruit and Mullins met his face with a swift elbow, knocking the DI out cold. Recruit Mullins learned the whole story after his Company Commander commended him on his quick thinking and decisive action during firewatch.

## GET SOME

The most important part of the day during boot camp, as most recruits would agree, is ‘mail call.’ Mail is your window to the outside world. Since the DI's are always looking for reasons to thrash recruits, it is necessary to make a recruit pay for fruity mail before he receives it. If recruit Joe Smith receives a letter that smells like perfume, or says, ‘SWAK’ on it, or has a heart, or the

envelope is pink, or any other foo-foo crap, then recruit Smith will pay dearly for that letter. Usually, recruits are all the more happy to oblige, knowing the just reward of a letter in-hand. After I wrote to my wife about this, I started receiving all sorts of dandy little letters with sweetness written all over the envelopes. Our Senior DI had a saying, “The pinker they are, the stronger you’ll get.” I got very strong. She sent me the pinkest cards around, and would write taunting notes on the outside. One, I remember, was this: “One – two – three - four, get my husband on the floor.” Another simply had the word “PUSH!” written on the envelope a thousand times. “PUSH! PUSH! PUSH! PUSH! PUSH!...” Ah yes, my wife the jokester.

#### STANDBY TO PLAY GAMES

“I’ve got more games than Milton Bradley.” It’s a popular DI phrase. And it’s true. A DI who is in the mood to play games may have recruits participate in scuz races. Scuzzing the deck is the only way to clean a floor in boot camp, until late in the training cycle when recruits ‘graduate’ to mops and brooms. To scuz a deck, wring a towel into a twisted rope, hold it at each end, and push it along the floor at high speed, as a human dust mop. Your knees may not touch the ground. You’ll do the whole squad bay, over and over again. A scuz race is simply comprised of two or more recruits that scuz the deck at the same time, racing around the perimeter of the squad bay. As always, it pays to be a winner.

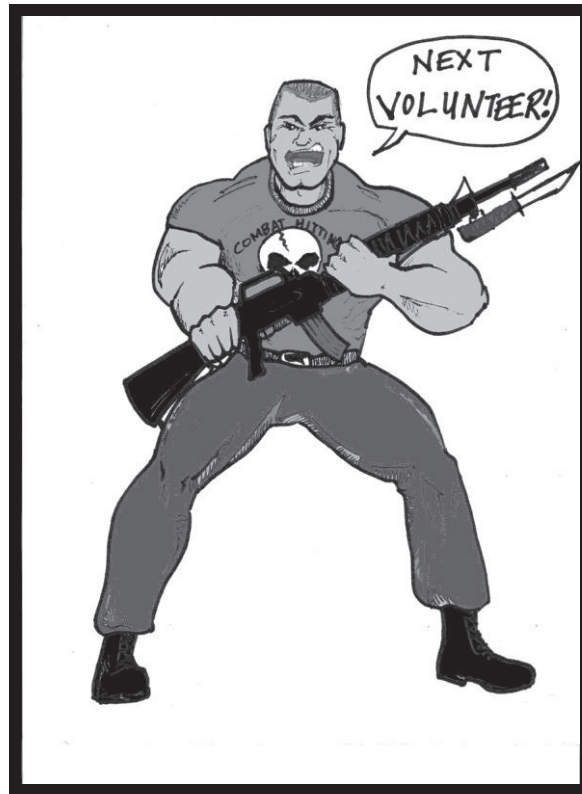
Worm diggers are another type of game. Such games would not ever be played in the Marines because it would be considered 'hazing,' and hence, illegal. To conduct 'worm diggers,' recruits spread apart at double arms' interval and drop trous (trousers) while standing in a remote sand-filled pit. Then they drop, laying face-down in the sand. Then the DI barks out a slow cadence: "Left... right... left... right..." This indicates the direction that the recruits spin on their, um, bellies. Like I said, it would never happen.

#### COMBAT HITTING SKILLS

"With a motivated one-twoback!" The huge Puerto Rican-looking dude named Sergeant Aguilar was wearing a tight black cotton shirt with a big red skull on it. "Reach out and GET SOME!!! AAAAAAA!" He looked as if he ate pieces of crap like us for breakfast. "Now execute a head-crushing boot stomp to the face! AAARRRGH!" He hardened our bodies every other morning with pugil sticks, rubber knives, boxing gloves, and hand-to-hand techniques. "Finish your opponent with a motivated killing blow!!!" I wish I could accurately depict his accent. He was loud, choppy, and vicious. I wonder what he's doing these days. Probably working some office job, bench pressing his desk as we speak. "Get some! Get some!"

When Sgt. Aguilar was finished with his instruction each day, the DI's would take over. They would stand us up in two

lines, tallest to shortest, with each line facing the other. Each man's mirror was roughly his own size and weight... but that was just for show. You see, the Warrior Dome, where most of the fighting takes place, is in plain view of a main road on the Island. A main road that is likely traveled by big wigs that are overly concerned for the well-being of recruits. Sometimes when that main road was clear, the DI's would quickly mismatch a pair of recruits, stuffing them in that 4' x 4' box for a quick fight. A big beefcake against a mouse. A tall skinny dude against a short squat one. It was the drill instructors' own social experiment. I remember fighting this guy named Castro... or was it Cruz? We were pretty equally matched. His first punch knocked my loose headgear sideways, completely obstructing my view. He pummeled my head for a solid two minutes, to the cheers and spit of a few crazed DI's. Good times. I would have loved to see what the DI's did when Riddick Bowe tried to join the Marines a couple years later.



A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION... A LITTLE MORE  
AGUILAR

*“When I say attack, you say kill!”*

When Sergeant Aguilar would speak, he had our attention. Quite the audience, too--Three platoons, roughly 140 guys, amped up on endorphins and testosterone, getting ready to duke it out in The Octagon. He would say rapidly, almost as one word, “When I say ‘AH,’ you’re suckin’ wind. When I say ‘TACK’ you’ll sound off wit a loud an motivated ‘KILL’ OO-Rah?” “OO-Rah!” said

the squeaky recruits. “Oh HELL NO, I said OO-Rah!” **OO-RAH!!!**, the recruits corrected. I know... you had to read it twice because it sounds confusing. Aguilar would then say “AH,” and the recruits would fill their chests with air, sucking up the atmosphere around them like a huge two-second shop vac-- “Ceeeeep!” “That’s weak, blow it out.” “Psheeeew”-- the recruits deflate. “AH,” “Ceeeeep...” “Blow it out.” “Psheeeew.” “AH,” “Ceeeeep...” “TACK!” “**KEEEEEEL!!!**” the squeaky recruits would bellow. “Good to go! First two teams, ENTER THE OCTAGON!”

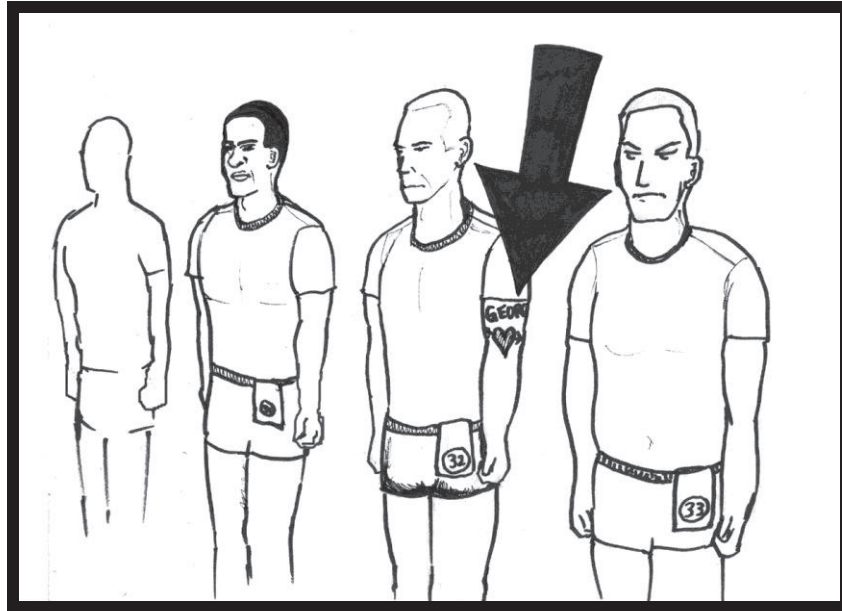
#### KHAN AND THE KUDZU

Okay, so it wasn’t Kudzu, it was Spanish moss. Both plants are invasive species that have choked the trees of the American South for decades. Like much of South Carolina, Parris Island is covered in Spanish moss. One morning, we were marching to a large building for some classes on Marine Corps subjects. The morning was silent except for the thunder of boot steps echoing across the parade deck. “Pllaaa-toon, HALT!” The final echo to resound sounded like, “Pop, Crack!” Then two seconds later, there was a muffled “thwump!” The echoes had produced enough vibration to shake loose a man-sized clump of moss from the tree we stopped under. The clump of moss fell like a sack of wet rags from the tree and completely swallowed Recruit Khan, who of course maintained his bearing until we were told to

fall out and head inside. It produced more than a few chuckles (silent ones, of course).

## PAYBACK

One guy didn't like me too much. The feeling was mutual. He tied my boot laces together one night while I was sleeping. It caused me to lose precious seconds in the morning, so I stood on line half dressed. Even though the DI's know what's really going on, they will always take it out on the slow one. I did hundreds of push-ups and mountain climbers. That night, I returned the favor. As soon as the firewatch passed me, I sneaked off of my rack, unlocked my foot locker, grabbed a permanent marker and low-crawled to ol' boy's rack. As I looked at his exposed arm, I couldn't think of what to write. I knew that any scribble would be effective... no, wait a minute... I got an idea. I carefully drew a big, fat heart on his bicep. It took a few tries to complete it, because either he'd twitch or I'd get close to bustin' up laughing. Not quite finished, I filled the heart with six letters, "G-E-O-R-G-E." Sergeant George was our heavy hat, aka the meanest DI around. I went to bed after completing my masterpiece. When we woke up in the morning, to my surprise, Sgt. George was the DI on duty. He stomped down the DI highway and made an unexpected stop. He snatched that kid up by the arm and dragged him to the quarterdeck. Almost killed that poor boy. It was the funniest crap I'd ever seen in my life. Revenge is sweet!



## COPENHAGEN MAN

There was a genius in my platoon at boot camp who thought that it would be a great idea to sneak into the DI hootch one day during a short period when we weren't supervised. Apparently he saw the Senior DI's can of dip sitting on his desk through a partly open door. He slipped in, snuck a dip, and slipped out just as the SDI came back on deck. "ZERO!" bellowed our Senior. "Freeze, recruit, freeze!" was our immediate response and action. Recruit Fain bolted into the head. A toilet flushed, presumably to be rid of the evidence. The Senior Drill Instructor stomped in the head, dragged Fain out and stood him in the middle of the DI highway. He walked to his hootch. He walked back out



with a can of Copenhagen snuff, shaking it to ensure that it was full enough to suit him. It was. “Recruits,” the SDI said in calm voice, “turn around and face the bulkhead.” We did. Then we heard the SDI hiss into Fain’s ear. The can lid popped. “Eat it. Eat it all. Swallow that crap now. SWALLOW IT!!!” Fain ate that whole can of dip and puked all over the place.

## BROCKWAY

Our platoon picked up a fourth DI midway through the training cycle. His name was Brockway. I was posted as the roving firewatch one night, and he started making his way for the exit. It is the recruits’ duty to open the door before a DI can even get a chance to touch the door handle. Anticipating his intention to leave the building, I picked up my pace toward the door. He was just in front of me, and he picked up his pace as well. He was closing on the door, so I started running. To my surprise, he started running too. We were both in a full sprint for the door. He won. He passed through the door, then re-entered and called me. “Sir, yes Sir!” I said as I snapped to attention. He waited a moment, not making a sound, as I tried to conceal my labored breathing. “Your sprinting sucks crank, Recruit Speights.” “Aye, Sir.” Then he left.

## BUTT SERVICE

*This story cannot be fully appreciated unless you have worked in the pits (or butts) of a rifle range, moving targets up and down for shooters, as every Marine does annually.*

“You’ve got to give good butt service to get good butt service!” said Drill Instructor Sgt. Gable as one half of the platoon separated from the shooting half to go ‘pull butts,’ or work the targets. We marched down to the back side of the berm and took our places on our assigned targets. A voice crackled over the loudspeakers. “Recruits, head down to the target shed and grab one ‘dog’ target, on B-mod target, a red/white lollipop, a black/white lollipop, an ammo can full of 3,” 5,” and 10” shot markers and spindles, a roll of black pasties, and a roll of white pasties. Be sure to grease your tracks and pick up some tie-ties from the NCOIC of the butts.”

On the other side of the berm, you could hear the far echo of recruits repeating the safety rules of the range. *“Treat every weapon as if it were loaded!... Never point your weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot!... Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire!... Keep the weapon on safe until you intend to fire!... then, they yell “Sir, Yes, Sir!”* a few times. They’ll be shooting soon. After fumbling with these huge targets in the wind, everybody finally gets their practice targets up and ready. Shots fly... “CRACK! CRACKCRACK!” Dirt sprays. Wood frames splinter. A different loudspeaker