

Improvise, Adapt and Overcome

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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 8th 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...

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