



~ 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 precedence¹ 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 2nd 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*²?, 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 Riyals³ 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 ITT⁴ 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:

¹ 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!

² 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)!

³ A Ryal is a unit of Saudi (folding) Currency; 100 of them at the time being roughly equal to \$26.

⁴ 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).

