



In the words of those who do:

### How We Make Marines

Marines are trained to be successful in battle and in life. What can we as civilians learn from the principles instilled in them?

By Larry Smith

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How does the Marine Corps take 17-year-old civilians and, in 13 short weeks, **transform them** into Marines? How do they **motivate** these young men and women to become members of a group that needs to function at the highest level under enormous stress? PARADE Contributing Editor Larry Smith spent two years researching his new book, "The Few and the Proud: Marine Corps Drill Instructors in Their Own Words." He discovered that drill instructors are the key to making a Marine—and that there are lessons all of us can learn from them.

They arrive by bus, usually after dark, when they are more likely to be disoriented. A drill instructor wearing a "Smokey" hat comes in yelling that he will give them only seconds to get off "his" bus and line up on the yellow footprints painted on the street outside or face unmentionable peril.

Thus begins what many former Marines call the most difficult period of their lives. "In the beginning, we cried," recalls Staff Sgt. Christine Henning, 29. "We didn't know what they were saying. We didn't know what they wanted us to do."

They have joined the Marine Corps for different reasons. "I'd say that half come to escape from something," notes Sergeant Henning, who eventually became a D.I.—drill instructor—herself. "It may be family, limited prospects, a small town, no jobs, drugs, alcohol, abuse. They want to fix things in their lives. Some just come for education. Some come for travel."

"Many are totally convinced, by the time they're 17 or 18, that they'll never amount to anything," says R. Lee Ermey, 62, a D.I. at the Marines' West Coast recruit depot in San Diego in the 1960s who later played the rugged Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in the film Full Metal Jacket. "The drill instructor's job is to turn that around—and that's what he does."

#### Leadership by Example

"Drill instructors were not spit out on a rock, and the sun didn't hatch them," says Ermey. "They graduate from the D.I. School, and the drill instructor is the best the Marine Corps has to offer. Their leadership qualities are second to none. Nobody ever forgets his drill instructor."

"**The underpinning of the psychology of recruit training is leadership by example,**" explains Maj. Keith Burkepile, 37, who was director of the Drill Instructor School at Parris Island, S.C., for the last two years.

**"The drill instructor becomes the role model, and the recruit is inspired to emulate him or her."**

We want the Marines to be successful with their units, successful on the battlefield, successful in life.”

Here’s how they do it:

### “We Toughen Them Up”

Once “aboard” the depot—whether at Parris Island or San Diego—recruits go through “Receiving,” where they get their heads shaved, receive gear and undergo medical and physical tests. During the next three days, called “Forming,” they meet their drill instructors and learn how to be recruits. Twelve weeks of actual training follow. Parris Island—4 miles long and 3 miles wide—is known as a hard place, made special by sand fleas, stultifying heat and 500 fearsome drill instructors. It has four recruit-training battalions, one of them exclusively for women. More than a million young men and women have survived training there since 1915.

The physical challenge is grueling. In three months, recruits learn to march, to move through water with packs on, to rappel from 60-foot towers, to practice hand-to-hand combat and fight with a bayonet simulated by use of the pugil stick (like a giant Q-tip). They must qualify with the M-16 rifle, handle gas masks and solve the “Confidence Course,” culminating in an 11th-week event known as “The Crucible,” which lasts 54 hours and consists of combat-related activities that can only be accomplished through teamwork. Recruits get four hours of sleep a night and limited rations.

### “We Demand Obedience”

The very first thing a Marine learns is immediate obedience to orders. “There’s no getting around that Marines are trained to kill,” says Chuck Taliano, 61, who trained recruits at Parris Island during the Vietnam era. “The drill instructor’s job is to teach the basics of how to do it—by hand, by bayonet or by rifle—and how to stay alive. In a war, you haven’t got time to debate the issue. You have to give them instant willingness to obey orders.”

## How do you instill that kind of discipline? “By example,”

says Major Burkepile, explaining: “The sand fleas are going crazy, biting all over the recruits. The drill instructors are standing there. They’re not scratching. They’re not itching. You don’t think they’re getting bit? They’re getting bit too. They’re demonstrating by example.

“You know,” he adds, “**self-discipline**—even if it starts with letting yourself be bitten by a sand flea—**will take you a long way in life**. Americans love to eat good food, and it takes discipline to say when you’ve had enough without overdoing it. What makes a woman take care of kids and a family all day long and then, when her husband gets home, go out on a run? That’s discipline. She makes herself do it.”

## That self - discipline fosters independence and confidence

“If you think about it,” says Burkepile, “self-discipline will get a young man or woman of 22 to do a lot of things. It may send them to college, where they’ll have good study habits and succeed. It also translates to the workforce: Your self-discipline will get you to work every day. It’ll get you to pay your bills. When you talk to bosses in charge of hiring people, they say that once they have a former Marine on the job, they start looking for more.”

### **“We Instill Motivation”**

“Motivation,” says Major Burkepile, “comes from wanting to be better in life. It makes you feel good. We do two-hour physical-training sessions here in the morning that are very hard. You’ve got to get up for that, you’ve got to get motivated. Motivation comes from each of us being around each other. You see another person pumped up, and you go out and get pumped up, and it rubs off on the next person. It’s infectious. **If they’re fired up and motivated—if they’re working together as a team—they’re going to perform better.**

“In the civilian world, you **look for like-minded people** who are similarly motivated to help you acquire discipline.”

### **“We Insist On Teamwork”**

“Recruits learn how much easier everything becomes when they put the other guy first and help each other out—whether it’s making a rack or cleaning your weapon,” says Major Burkepile.

**“When people start helping each other, things get done faster and better.**

“We all get selfish. That’s just human. But you feel better if you help someone else.”

### **“We Work Them Hard”**

“If there’s one thing recruits do at Parris Island, it’s work hard,” says Major Burkepile. **“Discipline, pride, self-respect, motivation**—they all tie into that. If nothing else, hard work builds character. Hard work makes the unit better, it makes the individual better, and it keeps you mentally sound. A lot of times when they’re working hard, the recruits don’t realize that their physical condition is getting better. At the same time, they’re learning something new. Now they can translate that skill that they just learned by working hard into another task—whether in the Marine Corps or out. Hard work also builds camaraderie.

“I’m a horrible procrastinator around the house, but once I start doing something, I feel a lot better than if I’m sitting on my lazy butt watching TV.

“Hard work also prepares you for what could be down the road. Nobody knows what tough times are ahead—in the Marine Corps or out. If you know how to work hard, you can cope. It’s a habit of mind.

“It’s the same with kids. If they have halfway-decent **work habits**, it’s going to pay off in school, it’s going to pay off in life, and it’s going to pay off for society.”

### **“We Keep Them Busy”**

“If the recruit isn’t busy,” says Major Burkepile, “he feels sorry for himself. He thinks about Mom and Dad, TV, other stuff he could be doing. He thinks, ‘Why did I do this?’ But if he’s busy all day, he doesn’t have time to think about it. Training is over before he knows it.

“Keeping busy is a value in itself. It keeps you focused, keeps your mind off things that might drag you down.”

**Attitude** also is important, adds Major Burkepile: “The PT instructor will say, ‘Look, you have to be here. Why not get the most you can out of it and make it fun? Make it positive.’ All of sudden, they’re motivated, and they’re getting in shape.

“To anybody out there who wants to get fit, I say: ‘Find a way to make it fun—whether it’s a walk in the evening or running with friends or competing in a small way. The same with your job: Find a way to make it fun.’”

## “We Honor Tradition”

“As training goes on,” says Major Burkepile, “the weight and responsibility of the Marine Corps tradition really starts to sink in. When they receive that eagle, globe and anchor pin the day before graduation, many recruits will cry. They know the torch has been passed to them.

“In the civilian world, you make sure your children know where they came from—what their grandparents did, how they came over from the old country and built a life or worked selflessly for decades to provide for the family, surviving the Great Depression or World War II or Vietnam. It’s important to pass that stuff on. That’s family tradition.

“If you believe in democracy and America, it doesn’t matter if you’re a Democrat or Republican: You believe in the freedoms we have. Preservation of that doesn’t always come without work and even bloodshed. That’s part of the responsibility faced by these young recruits. They have not only the weight of the nation on their shoulders but also the weight of the Corps: not letting down the Marines of the past and the Marines right beside them—the man on the right and the man on the left. That’s a powerful motivation. It’s learning to be part of something larger than yourself.”

PARADE Contributing Editor Larry Smith is the author of “The Few and the Proud: Marine Corps Drill Instructors in Their Own Words” (Norton), now in bookstores.

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