

Marines. In thirteen weeks, this trifecta of tactics gives rise to men and women worthy of the title “United States Marine,” a title each of them proudly carry with them throughout their lifetime.

The “Making of a Marine” is no walk in the park; rather, it is an excruciating 48-hour hike with 45 pounds of gear, running on only 4 hours of sleep with sweat pouring down backs and blood oozing out of boots. It is enduring the screaming and ridiculing of Drill Instructors (DIs) for blinking, sneezing, or flinching in formation. It is the choking, heaving, and vomiting when forced to take off masks in the gas chambers. It is physically demanding, necessary of course, to the overall physical transformation from civilian to Marine.

In order to earn the coveted title, in the thirteen weeks the recruits undergo three specific phases of physical training. Phase One (week 1-3) consists of martial arts and intensive physical conditioning that culminates into an Initial Strength test. This test includes a timed one and half mile run, pull-ups, and sit-ups to determine whether or not the recruit is qualified for further training, so as, with everything in boot camp, the pressure is on. Phase Two (week 5-9) consists of weapons training to “hone closer combat skills and master Marksmanship Training” (Military.com). During this time, recruits must pass rifle qualifications and undergo field training, which consists of spending days at end surviving in the elements with little sleep and few food provisions. Recruits also undergo gas chamber training, often cited as the worst experience of boot camp for many Marines. Finally, Phase 3 (Weeks 10-13) consists of swim qualifications, defensive driving training, first aid, drill, and further physical training. Based on this basic overview, it is no wonder why Marines often say that Boot Camp was the most difficult thing they ever endured throughout their life. As Military.com points out, “It has to be that way to prepare young men and women to be part the world's most elite fighting force.”

It's only fitting that arguably the most difficult military training ends with an equally as difficult test of will, fortitude, and strength. All of these weeks of training directly leads to the notorious Crucible, the final test of Boot Camp where recruits earn the title Marine. During the Crucible, recruits are tested for their ability to perform as a functional unit under extreme stress. With only eight hours of sleep and two MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) during a 54-hour test, the newly made Marines undergo a series of teambuilding exercises during a near 40 mile hike. All of the physical training culminates to this event. Many, with tears streaming down their faces, receive their hard-earned Eagle, Globe, and Anchor as newly made Marines.

However, the journey to the coveted moment at the end of the Crucible does not rely entirely on the recruits' physical training. As a whole, the Marine Corps boot camp training can be juxtaposed to a well-oiled machine – the physical training working hand-in-hand with the psychological. Every intimidation tactic, every intensive drill, every strategic torment is cog that allows the boot camp experience to be so effective. The new vulnerable recruits are like clay, ready to be painstakingly molded into new Marines by the machine that is the United States Marine Corps – the machine that produces about 19,000 new Marines every year. Clearly they have it down to a science – specifically, the science of psychology.

From the moment the Marine Corps recruits step out of the bus and onto the Parris Island training grounds, psychological tactics are employed. Viciously screaming DI's swarm the newest recruits, many spouting threats and disapproval concerning the look of the lot. A Marine recalls his first encounter with the Parris Island DI's, the recruits' figures of authority for the next thirteen weeks of boot camp. "Their mission was to tear us down to nothing. To make us believe we were dirt and lacking to share the same space with cow dung. We were no longer

thought of as humans. We were constantly reminded that we were not fit to be Marines”
(Anonymous).

From the outside looking in, this discouraging intimidation tactic seems counterproductive; what good does it do to demoralize the recruits straight off the bat? Despite how needless the intimidation seems, it effectively serves as a cog in the grand scheme of making Marines. As Lance Corporal Mckinley Huddleston explains, “The one thing to remember is that they [the DI’s] break us down so that they can build us up to be something greater.” Being broken down by the DI’s allows the recruits to submit themselves to their authority figures during their time at boot camp. Recruits do not have to think or analyze, only obey. Ingeniously, the United States Marine Corps embraces this undisputable psychological phenomenon studied by Stanley Milgram to its advantage.

Stanley Milgram, in his notorious psychology study, researched to what extent obedience to authority affects behavior, which is relevant to the analysis of what it truly takes to “make a Marine.” In his experiment, a participant was paired with another person, whom the participant believed to be another unaware participant. In actuality, this other person was an informed actor. Both “participants” were asked to choose “roles” from a hat, so that they would seemingly be assigned randomly as either the teacher or the learner. However, the drawing was fixed so that the participant picked the teacher role; both slips had “teacher” written on them, but the actor simply lied and said he/she randomly chose the student role. In this way, the participant always possessed the teacher role in the experiment.

Assuming their supposed roles, the learner was told to go to a separate room where electrodes were placed on him. The researcher of the experiment then took the participant (the teacher) to another room where the shock generator was housed. The researcher was the

authority figure in this experiment. The researcher told the participant that the learner was going to answer questions in the room over. If the learner got the question wrong, the researcher firmly instructed to the participant in the teacher role that he was to shock the learner. The more questions the learner answered incorrectly, the more the shocks increased by voltage.

Essentially, the experiment aimed to discover just how far the average person is willing to obey authority, even if it means hurting another person. In the experiment, the learner purposely answered incorrectly, meaning that the teacher had to administer increasing shocks each time. The shocks increased from 15 volt shocks to 450 volt shocks incrementally. As the learner continued to give wrong answers and the shocks increased by voltage, the learner acted as though in increasing distress (no real shocks were actually administered). When the teacher hesitated in administration of the shocks upon recognizing the distress, the researcher said the following prods for the participant to continue:

Prod 1: Please continue.

Prod 2: The experiment requires you to continue.

Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Prod 4: You have no other choice but to continue.

Whether or not the participant in the teacher role continued to administer the shocks relied exclusively on the participant's obedience to authority.

The results were shocking to say the least. Based on a poll Milgram conducted before his proposed experiment, it was predicted that only 3% of all participants would continue to the end, administering the excruciating shock of 450 volts. In actuality, a staggering 65% of all participants continued to the very end, administering the highest voltage to the seemingly distressed learner. 100% of the participants continued to the 300-volt shock before stopping.

While these results may seem to be an anomaly, Milgram conducted the same experiment 18 different times with very similar results – that clearly demonstrate the length humans will go in order to obey authority figures.

By applying the innate human psychology revealed by Milgram's experiment, an explanation for how the USMC shapes recruits into Marines becomes more apparent. The Marine Corps relies almost exclusively on the recruits' obedience to authority in order to motivate these young men and women to undergo such intense conditions and regulations throughout their boot camp experience. Yet this obedience to authority isn't simply about manipulating wannabe Jar-Heads into enduring strenuous physical tasks and punishments; ultimately, this obedience to authority shapes the Marine mindset, to obey command even in the most stressful of situations. In a moment's notice, a Marine must be prepared to act according to the command of his or her authority figure; in a combat situation, obedience is a matter of life or death.

However, while the physical training and the psychological discipline certainly shape the Marine, these two lenses make the Marine out to be nothing more than a jacked-up, brain-washed puppet of the United States Marine Corps. From the outside looking in, it's far too easy to reduce boot camp training to the physical drills and the punishments, the psychological submission and obedience, but neither of these transformations explain the pride that every Marine embodies. Merely taking into account the physical and the mental components is a far too black-and-white perspective when analyzing the complex transformation that occurs at boot camp, a transformation I witnessed my close cousin, Matthew – who is like a brother to me – undergo last summer. A close mentor of mine, an experienced Marine himself, assured me that after the thirteen weeks at boot camp “there will be a presence to him that you've never seen

before” (Bach). This presence that I indeed witnessed, I believe, was and is the embodiment of the Marine identity – an identity of selflessness, sacrifice, and love imbued during his time at Parris Island.

General Louis H. Wilson revealed what the identity – and ultimately the heart of a Marine – embodied in his toast at the 203rd Marine Corps Birthday Ball.

*The wonderful love of a beautiful maid,
The love of a staunch true man,
The love of a baby, unafraid,
Have existed since time began.*

*But the greatest of loves, The quintessence of loves.
even greater than that of a mother,
Is the tender, passionate, infinite love,
of one drunken Marine for another.*

"Semper Fidelus"

As the poem insinuates, the heart of a Marine is one that freely chooses to sacrifice for a fellow brother, for a fellow Marine. Those first thirteen weeks of boot camp “Make Marines” not simply because the recruits physically undergo a transformation or merely because psychologically they submit themselves to be “puppets” to the Marine Corps, but truly because during their time, the recruits experience a foretaste of true brotherhood. In those thirteen weeks, the platoon is a unit that lives and breathes for each fellow recruit. Each individual failure is a collective failure, and most importantly, each success is a collective success.

Humbly, the General Louis H. Wilson’s poem ends with the simplistic words “Semper Fidelus”, the motto of the Marine Corps. It is no mistake or coincidence that the Marine Corps motto is “*Semper Fidelus*” which is Latin for “Always Faithful.” Even to the point of death, Marines are faithful to one another. Marines are proud because of their heart and of the brotherhood they belong to and rightfully earned the moment they grasp the eagle, globe, and

anchor after thirteen weeks of boot camp. As the saying goes, “Once a Marine, always a Marine.”

In the opening picture of this essay, the newly initiated Marines run through the archway that proudly states “We Make Marines” just days after receiving their eagle, globe, and anchor. They are led by their DIs, their figures of authority, though now they run at the same pace. No longer mere recruits, they are on equal footing as their glorified DIs – now fellow Marines, brothers to the Corps. Underneath their steady footsteps lies the word “YIELD”. During their time at boot camp, the recruits seemingly yielded to the authority of the Marine Corps, submitting their identity, individuality, and will. Yet in actuality, each newly initiated Marine ultimately yields to one another, learning to trust and sacrifice for one another. In a seemingly compassionless environment, the Marine Corps makes Marines by indoctrinating just that – compassion and brotherhood.

Often it is said that Marine boot camp can not be fully understood unless the intensive transformation is personally experienced. For this reason, as a civilian myself, I leave the final words to Jason Bach, a former Marine who, since graduating from Parris Island in August of 1999 has had nearly two decades to reflect on his experience. He states, “The unity that arises from boot camp arises out of love: self-gift. I am more a Marine when I give myself to a fellow Marine, and by extension to the United States of America, in love. Ultimately, this is why Marines are willing to die for their cause: *obedience in love*. Not all Marines recognize nor would admit this, but it is the foundational truth of what it means to be a Marine.”

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