

IDEAS & ISSUES (FUTURE OPERATIONS)

Ambrosia

Chapter 7

by Maj Victor Ruble

Morning PT formations in the Marine Corps—no matter where you are in the world—present the observer with a cacophony of sights and sounds. From the varying levels of coverage that the green-on-green PT gear provided—anywhere from the Marine Corps lingerie system to shorts that looked like chinos—to the absurd trumpeting that made its way out of Marines’ orifices as their bodies continued to wake in the early morning hours, it would seem like the Marine Corps, almost as a whole, began each day attempting to reenact scenes from a Mel Brooks movie. The Marines who occupied COP Templeton [Combat Out Post Templeton] were no different.

The namesake of COP Templeton was LCpl Jamal Templeton, who was killed in an assault three months prior while attempting to pull the wounded members of his squad from their destroyed ACV [amphibious combat vehicle]. He saved six lives that day, sacrificing his own for his brothers. The medical officer said that, based on his wounds, his body was probably dead after he saved four—he was just too stubborn to go down, and he saved two more. Born to an Egyptian father and American mother, Jamal was a quiet kid from Detroit. He was a well liked and well known, having served the honor of being the youngest Marine in the battalion during the previous year’s Ball.

Standing in his place on the starboard side of the first rank, Aidan couldn’t help but turn in amazement at a particularly loud and long roar from one of the Marines’ backside. The look on his face broke the bearing of his platoon, which was attempting to pretend as if a sonic boom hadn’t just erupted in the middle of their formation. Seeing their platoon commander grimacing in

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a facial combination of *Are you kidding me!?, You need to go to BAS!, and H... Yeah!* had his formation losing its composure, but his comment of “good push” got the entire unit laughing hysterically. Just as soon as it came on, however, it stopped.

Capt Prophet made his way toward the formation, and, as if someone had replaced the gaggle with an entirely new unit of squared away Marines, the happiness was secured and the formation awaited their first sergeant’s commands. “Company! Atten-hut!”

200 or so rubber-and-foam soled heels smashed together in unison. Had he not served with these guys for the past year now, Aidan would have never

have guessed that the Marines who were just dorking around a few seconds ago could have been capable of executing this level of discipline at the blink of an eye.

The crunch of gravel sliding under the first sergeant’s running shoes as he executed his about face was the only sound heard as the company commander approached the head of the formation. As is customary, the first sergeant reported the company and the company commander took the report, all in hushed tones. This was essentially a scripted dialogue between the two—the discussion rarely strayed from, “Company X all present,” to which the commander would give some sort of reply in the affirmative. Sometimes in garrison, a thorough first sergeant would actually report an unauthorized absence or a platoon or sub-unit off conducting training or located at some other appointed place of duty. But here, on the northeastern shore of Qeshm Island,



Morning PT is an interesting experience regardless of location. (Photo by LCpl Carlin Warren.)

the only people not in formation were either on post, on a logistics convoy, or on the QRF (quick reaction force)—all of which Capt Prophet made a point to be intimately aware of—so the reporting portion of the morning formation was strictly a formality.

With the command of "Post!" from the company commander, key billets stepped off in unison to take their positions. Once the leadership was set, which was normally followed by a pause for effect, Capt Prophet would give the command "right face," and they would step off on some sort of unit PT. This ritual hadn't been conducted by Company A in quite some time, however. Until recently, the steady stream of indirect fire (IDF) coming from mainland Iran had not only delayed the implementation of the desalination plant (NGO [non-governmental organization] workers tend to have an issue with getting blown up) but was really cutting into Capt Prophet's unit PT program. But the MEU was finally able to get authorization to conduct air strikes in the Iranian Theater of Operations—strictly for defensive purposes—so the IDF threat had subsided ... at least for the moment. And knowing Apache 6, a moment was all Capt Prophet needed to PT the company into a world of hurt.

When their CO gave his command, the Marines were thoroughly confused as to what was about to transpire.

"When you receive the command to fall out, school circle around me," he started. "Fall out!"

Somewhat disoriented, the Marines just looked around, wondering what was what. A few stepped off smartly toward the center of the formation, but most huddled together in various groupings, asking the same question in various forms.

"What's this all about?"

"Alright Marines!," the First Sergeant finally chimed in. "I don't know what there is to talk about? The CO was pretty clear with his command, so let's move with a purpose people!"

This seemed to snap everyone out of their meandering and soon enough everyone was gathered in a perfect 180 degree arch around the burly Marine captain.

"Go ahead and take a seat folks. You're going to want to be sitting for this one." Usually one to mix words, the direct and ominous tone from Capt Prophet had everyone's full attention as each Marine looked for ample real estate to plop down onto.

As the Marines of Company A shuffled around trying to find their seats, Mack continued.

been getting since we got here. So, it's not just our wag-bag outhouses that are at risk anymore. The deuce (S-2) thinks these guys can do some serious damage to the desal (shortened name for the desalination plant), so we're going to hit the mainland and set up a welcoming party for them."

Ok, Aidan thought to himself. *Here it comes ...*

Rotating home seemed like an inevitability at this point—they were really just waiting on word of the next MEU that would be inbound to conduct the battle hand over so they could get out of there.

"So I've got good news, and I've got bad news," he stated.

Aidan immediately identified the smirk on Mack's face, denoting that none of what he was about to say was going to be good. And, if he knew his company commander as well as he thought he did, the "good news" was probably going to be the worse of the two.

"The bad news," Mack started as the last of the Marines settled into their places, "is that we're no longer staying in our little beachfront villa." This wasn't earth shattering news, as they were well into the fifth month of a six month deployment. Rotating home seemed like an inevitability at this point—they were really just waiting on word of the next MEU that would be inbound to conduct the battle hand over so they could get out of there.

Aidan felt himself almost get sucked in. Thoughts of libo ports on the way home flooded his mind, and in his anticipation, he almost tuned out the rest of the commander's brief.

"We're being tasked with moving out from here—time to be determined—and crossing the Clarence Strait before moving onto mainland Iran, near the vicinity of Bandar Abbas. Apparently, our little respite from that god-awful IDF is about to be short lived, and intel believes that the new guys are a lot more proficient than the harassment fires we've

"And now for the good news."

This is going to suck ...

"We're getting extended to do it."

Boom.

"The MEU that was supposed to RIP/TOA (relief in place/transfer of authority) with us is stuck dealing with an issue in the South China Sea, and since we did such a bang up job securing this place, who better to push our perimeter out into sovereign Iranian soil than us?" Mack smiled a proud grin, pearly whites showing.

Aidan couldn't tell if this was false bravado with heavy sarcastic undertones or if Mack truly believed that this was a good thing. It didn't matter. They were going. And, for a unit that was told when this whole thing kicked off that they were to avoid any and all perceptions that they were intervening in the Iranian conflict, who were now being told to push directly into Iranian territory, things had definitely taken a turn for the surreal.

"I need all of the officers in the SCIF (Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility) at 1000. The rest of you, I would pack as if you're not coming back people, 'cause I don't think we are." Capt Prophet looked at his watch. "The time on deck is 0615. Get to work. First Sergeant, you got 'em."

