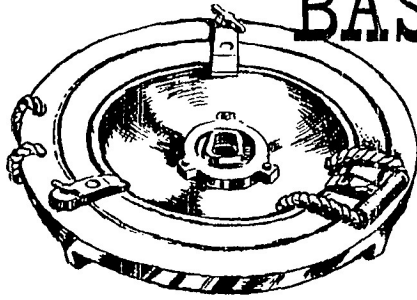




BASEPLATE

Mc GURK



Says Mr. Kernoodle: "A bone-crushing handshake
is no tip-off on how a Marine will act in battle."

• BERTRAM-THE-BAR-KEEP SCOWLED AT THE THREE OF US as we chose a table rather than stools at the bar.

"Old 'Laughing Boy' must be suffering from rheumatism in this moldy weather," Dusty chuckled. "Let's give him a break and pick up our own brews."

"Nix!" Tex whispered. "He is his most succinct, ungracious self when properly riled. Let's stir him up and get a real charge."

"Baseplate," Tex continued in a loud voice, "have you noticed how the service in this slopchute has deteriorated? They have a saying about Old Soldiers fading away. Wonder what happens to Old Marines?"

"Theirs is the worst lot of all!" Bertram growled as he shuffled to our table. "They have to pay for their past mistakes and innocent blunders by taking a lot of gaff from sassy lieutenants. In the Old Corps, the young officers had more respect for age and experience. And, Mr. Baseplate," he added menacingly, "Take your meat hooks out of that pop-corn bowl. This is no free lunch counter!"

"Speaking of the Old Corps," Dusty laughed, "Let me ask you something, Mr. Kernoodle. We've been arguing about the relative merits of some of our NCOs as leaders. Were you always able to spot the real leader as soon as you saw him in your day?"

"Nope!" Bertram snorted and moved off to wait on some new arrivals.

"Man! He sure is succinct today," Tex remarked. "Maybe I needled him too hard."

"He'll be back," Dusty predicted. "If there's anything Bertram loves to talk about more than the Old Corps, it's leadership. I offered him an irresistible combination."

Sure enough, before too long Bertarm was back, one ear cocked apprehensively to see if we'd picked another subject. Reassured, he pulled up a chair and wasted no

time in picking up where he had left off.

"You learn after awhile not to make snap judgments concerning a man's worth," he said earnestly. "I've seen big, rugged, noisy apes come apart at the seams the first time they had to make a command decision in combat. I don't mean they were physically yellow. They could follow, but they couldn't lead."

"I suppose, then, that you've also seen quiet, innocuous looking characters who qualified as really outstanding leaders?" Dusty asked.

"Definitely!" Bertram nodded.

"You mean to tell me that I can't size up a man's capabilities within 15 minutes after I meet him?" Tex laughed derisively. "Why, hell! I can usually tell by his handshake whether he has steel or syrup in his backbone!"

"I'll admit that you can often get a pretty good clue within a short time," Bertram said patiently. "However, I personally have more confidence in what I learn by talking to a man. I've been fooled by relying mainly on the appearance he makes or how hard he shakes my hand. Anyhow, this is not exactly the point Mr. Rhodes was making, as I understood his question."

"That's right," Dusty came to Bertram's defense. "I asked if he was always able to spot a man's leadership capability as soon as he saw him. As I understand it, Bertram, you said 'not always' and warned us against snap judgments."

Bertram nodded, saying, "You all know that a properly led outfit reflects the imagination, effort, and dedication of its commander."

"So remember this in rating your NCOs," he added as he stood up and prepared to leave. "The true worth of a leader is not judged by his personal appearance or gift of gab. It is measured by the overall results he obtains."

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