

Forged to Perfection

Perfection. Modern society deems it unattainable, or at the very least, perceiving it to be a sisyphian task. For a young 18 year old thrust into military service, this is the new normal. From dress to attitude, you are asked, no, demanded to be perfect. This requirement serves to break with the old and build something new.

The struggle felt by many upon entering the military builds a brotherhood unlike any other. Fear and hate are said to be the greatest motivators, so perhaps, the hatred for bootcamp is wholly intentional. 'War is Hell.' If that's the case, what does that make bootcamp? Purgatory?

Speaking with Lance Corporal Mitch Wiseman of the 1st Division 3rd AAV Battalion, Bravo Company, peels back the curtain on some of the goings on in early military life. His experience is certainly not unique, in fact it was designed not to be so. That being the case, his story and words certainly ring true for the experience of thousands of young men and women who came through the Marine Corps ranks before him.

A sense of duty was surely present for Wiseman when he made the leap to drop out of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota to join the service. He was an 18 year old with a plan. Wiseman had his eyes set on being a Twin Cities cop. During his freshman year as a Criminal Justice major, he went on a police ride along that changed the course of his entire life. "I wanted to be a big city cop; he (the officer from the ride along) told me that if I wanted to go to a big department like that, that I needed some form of military background. It would make it way easier to get hired."

Some say the young join the military to run from their futures. Mitch Wiseman joined to take that future head on.

Becoming Lance Corporal Wiseman was a long and arduous task. Boot camp is divided into three phases, each containing their own brutalities and hardships. When Wiseman arrived at MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) San Diego for first phase, it was quite the shock. “The first three days you're up the whole time, no sleep,” said Wiseman. Lack of sleep is only the first obstacle to overcome. Sickness soon besets the recruits, “since you're with people from all over the United States you get sick right away, you are so sick it's gross.”

Discipline is one of the first lessons instilled upon entering phase one of bootcamp. This discipline extends to where recruits sleep. “You live in what is called a squad bay,” said Wiseman. “There's beds on both sides but you are not allowed to walk through the middle, the middle is called the drill instructor highway.” Recruits are forced to maneuver through the bay by squeezing through a small space in between their beds and the wall, giving a whole new meaning to the phrase, ‘my way or the highway.’

First phase of boot camp is where the recruits are put to their greatest test. Removed from almost all familiar comforts, even time. “For everything you do the drill instructors count you down, they say three minutes and you respond ‘three minutes I sir’ and then he would count down.” said Wiseman. “Except the countdowns are super fast like an auctioneer, you have no sense of time.” In all phases the recruits are trained to eliminate all mistakes. “There's something called IT (intensive personal training), and if you mess up the drill instructor will say, ‘go get on the quarterdeck,’ and he makes you do exercises for as long as he wants,” said Wiseman.

Second phase of boot camp took place at Camp Pendleton in the mountains surrounding San Diego. Some regulations become a bit more lax as the recruits begin to look more and more like Marines. “(second phase) is more of shooting and field work, three weeks of shooting and one week of field work,” said Wiseman. “The hours are crazy, you have to get up at 2:30 every morning and go to the range.”

Third phase takes the recruits back to the familiar confines of MCRD San Diego. “Pretty much you are already a Marine at that point,” said Wiseman. “When you get back you get your name tapes on, your uniforms, and get fitted for your dress uniforms.” Along the way recruits are instilled with the idea of striving for perfection. “The hardest part about adjusting is always having to be perfect about everything. If you're not perfect, you suck,” said Wiseman.

“At the end of boot camp you do the crucible,” said Wiseman. “It’s a three-day event, you get two MRE’s (meals ready to eat) and four hours of sleep over three days.” Even as you cross the finish line of boot camp, you are constantly being put to the test. “You have to do a bunch of training, it's crazy. You have to shoot again, boxing, you have to run everywhere.”

“After that, you graduate on a Friday, and that’s it. Then you get to go home for 10 days, that’s boot camp,” said Wiseman. The challenges of boot camp are not futile. The aim is to build better men and women. “You build a bond with everyone, you become brothers. It’s a big fraternity,” said Wiseman.

The stories and struggles of purgatory forge and harden soldiers against the potential of facing their truest test, the Hell of war.