

Blanchard/Warfighter

Kristan M. Blanchard

Word Count:

Blanchard/Warfighter

WARFIGHTER

By

Kristan M. Blanchard

Blanchard/Warfighter

“To understand is to forgive, even oneself.”

-Alexander Chase

“Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.”

-Carl Von Clausewitz

Purpose	5
Preface	7
War and Combat, Defined	12
Definitions	12
The Scope of Combat Operations	18
Chapter 1: My Origins	29
1-1 Bloodline	29
1-2: Enlistment	36
Chapter 2: The Birth of a Marine, and Death of a Boy	42
2-1: Yellow Footprints	42
2-2: Com School	43
2-3: Field-Op	51
2-4: Epiphany	55
2-5: Proposal	58
Chapter 3: War	62
3-1: Orchestra of Death	62
3-2: Welcome to Iraq	66
References	76
Glossary	77

Blanchard/Warfighter

Purpose

Challenged words upon a weathered soul
rest heavily on the hearts of the tame
and the fingers of the forbidden protectors
wrapped vicariously around the triggers of their consciousness

They do so slither and sly outwardly; these words
through the moon dust below the clenched feet
of many man alike to no one but those from far; from high
who have come down to scavenge these plains; oceans of gander
for those who shall not remain much longer
wrapped in the guilt of their predecessors
doused in the vanity of their dreams
and ignited by the sincerity of their deity

These hands held high
in careful, meticulous union
attached to the physical essence who was once forbade
from enjoying the pain of too much light; an excess of taste
like a clock; the tick and the tock
back and forth in his head in sync with the drip and drop of his sweaty brow

The rhymes and screams and careful pleadings of those precious, peculiar few
who would have you call upon them as reason and as sense
these words fall between the cracks and the crevices hereunto
like a serpents eyes
transfixed; though
the treasons of no such language swindles through his senses

The meaning of stepping where he steps
in juxtaposition to the meaning of breathing the air he breathes
seems trivial, in comparison
to the existential internal struggle these words
have birthed
and maybe this, being the singular most important struggle
this conspirator of humanity may ever combat
to understand the roots of his being; ultimate exasperation

The giant may step where many mice once have
to each, the sun and the night, may very well appear similarly important
even though this same ground carries the shifting weight of an opposing specimen

Blanchard/Warfighter

surely it must still grasp and appreciate the power of reason and sense; of purpose

To forbid an angel to reign down from the skies we call heavens
this would seem as crazy as condemning a molecule of air to oblivion
but would I have the power, the right, the ability to make either insane distinction?

A state of my conscious giving impulse to my senses
if I was not given a purpose; a sense
for my existence?

*-K. M. Blanchard
January 19, 2010*

Blanchard/Warfighter

Preface

It is understanding that I seek in my life, and therefore also what I seek in the manufacture of this work.

As quoted in the previous page, Alexander Chase said “To understand is to forgive, even oneself.” This was the foundation of one of my previous books, a poetry compilation titled “*Of Blood & Ink*” written under the pseudonym Trenton Phoenix. The path I sought in “*Of Blood & Ink*” was to understand myself, and to forgive myself. It is with this book that I embark on a journey with you to accomplish the same, but the scope is broadened to include your son, your daughter, your husband, wife, mother, father – the list can go on and on. This is a rescue mission of our nation’s heroes - myself most certainly included.

It is because I belong to an exclusive group of sentient beings known as “Warfighters” – and although exclusive, they do not discern based upon sex, race, creed, age, or faculty. In understanding myself as a Marine, as a combat veteran, and more

Warfighters
Jul 26, 7:16 PM

Blanchard/Warfighter

simply just as a Warfighter, I can convey intimacies and human-common concepts that may aid you to better understand yourself, as well as others around you.

During the “Vietnam Conflict” (war), the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (further referred to in this work as PTSD) was not recognized, and essentially did not exist – although many other war time studies were being executed. In fact, it may not have been until the 1980’s that the term PTSD had any real weight in society.

I will never seek to define the medical or social parameters of PTSD, as I am not a Doctor, nor is it actually required pursuant to the understanding of our nation’s Warfighters. You may ask, how is PTSD not relevant to the people who fight our wars? I am not inferring it is not relevant, simply that its specific parameters, or definition, will not help to further aid my exploration of the mind or the emotion-set of myself, nor my brethren Warfighters. The symptoms of PTSD are as intimate and individualistic as the individual experiencing them.

There are arguably certain moments in a person’s life that will forever change the chemical makeup of that person – lasting, if not eternal markers of decisions made, and actions taken - or not taken. The unimaginable and impossibly quantifiable ramifications of these actions would be far to great to attempt at defining on paper, and could easily survive a lifetime of ones ambitious attempts to quantify. Simply put, the “what if” answers we sometimes fall privy to attempting to answer cannot always be satisfied, and in themselves can become “demons”. Some demons simply do not disappear and some demons will never subdue even under our most sincere conquests to vanquish them. Life.

Blanchard/Warfighter

If we can collectively agree that life is, at the *least*, a pursuit of endless possibilities whose outcomes define who we are, and their deviations in our life's course can, for the most part, always be altered; then we can assume that the only real great tragedy would be our own circumvention of our life, our own suicide – one possibility whose outcome could not be altered after our life has been taken.

Thus, as long as you feel a pulse when you put your finger to your neck, then forgiveness, in its vast many and intrinsic forms is attainable – even if we, the being needing or seeking the forgiveness, do not fully comprehend the nature of the forgiveness. The world may forgive one for their misdeeds, as it is understood by the world, but the person themselves may never forgive themselves. In my case, this journey is just that, a journey.

It is well within the chemical makeup, the same that I previously mentioned, of a man to understand that some of the things he is about to do, or will be willing to do, may cost him this forgiveness, and may cause for him to seek out a form of redemption for the remainder of his lifetime – but are worth the risk.

I ask you to apply this notion to war. In its most simplest form, I ask you to apply this notion of thinking to the willful aggression of one force against another pursuant to preserving either them selves, or another auxiliary force, ideal or entity. Thus, it is “worth it” to fight, and kill, and anything else that must be done, to protect what I am willing to protect. My blood says so. Every molecule of my physical existence pushes me to the edge of this ideology.

Blanchard/Warfighter

If I understand this concept – that there may very well be collateral damages to others, my interests, and myself in my endeavors to fight for my cause - then I can face the consequences directly. Although noble, and thorough in my attempts to understand and thus accept, I am afraid this notion falls naively short, as it does not seek to define what those “consequences” may become. But, really, how could it?

Obviously, a gunshot wound would be a potential consequence, to put it short and simple. But before we bother to define the infinite list of all of the obvious possible consequences, lets name a few specific outcomes that I, in my young life as a Marine, had not known to expect; alienation from the woman I fell in love with, the expectation of extreme violence against the same woman by the same institution that armed and thus empowered me, and being removed from my own house on account of the nature of my training and my combat experience.

To live on, move back home, and relive similar situations of alienation and the malicious premeditated acts that lead to my arrest and court proceedings intent on brooding my nerves and possibly taking away any right I earned to re-enter the United States Military, join any law enforcement, and also negate my birthright to possess and use firearms - regardless of my sacrifices to bear those arms in direct combat for this country I love so much - threatening to take those away from me.

They may make sense, now. But I was certainly blindsided, beat, and enraged by these deficits previously. I, like many thousands if not millions of other veterans, was overwhelmed by the ramifications of events and circumstances I did not yet understand, and am, in many ways, still learning to understand even now as I write these words.

Blanchard/Warfighter

I challenge you to open your mind and try to think laterally - as opposed to linearly - when reading this work, and critically thinking about the theories, stories, personal accounts, and concepts contained herein. Please further understand that I may refer to many people in here as male, or female, but the human condition is a human one, not a sex based one, and PTSD is not a sex based condition either. A Warfighter has no sex. The language contained is used for simplification when necessary, and to show merit to the actuality and raw authenticity of this writing.

War and Combat, Defined

***Using the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 – Warfighting, define war, and thus establish the ground for the term “Warfighter” and the possible difference between “Warfighter” and combatant. This section focuses on the theologies of war, and of violence in human nature, as well as the acts of aggression from concept through execution. This is non author-specific. Delete this instruction upon publication. ***

Definitions

In the “*Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1- Warfighting*”, Marine General A. M. Gray, 29th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps defined “war” as “a violent clash of interests between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force.” General Gray continued stating, “The essence of war is a violent struggle between two hostile, independent, and irreconcilable wills, each trying to impose itself on the other.”

Blanchard/Warfighter

Reference – MW – war

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines "war" as "a state or period of usually open and declared armed fighting between states or nations"

Thus, the term Warfighter (which, as of this writing is not formally defined or recognized as a word in the English language) arguably could be used to define those people whom have either elected, or have been elected to (drafted, as in the case of the Vietnam conflict) participate, or fight, in war, as it is aforementioned. We will hold this thought, and come back to it shortly

Reference – MW – Combat, and combatant

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary also defines "combat" as "a fight or contest between individuals or groups" and "combatant" as "one that is engaged in or ready to engage in combat."

A war zone is, at its simplest form, a district of open declared war. For instance, all of the country of Iraq is currently considered a war zone. Does this mean that battle, or combat, is occurring every second of the day over every square inch of the country of Iraq? It certainly does not mean, nor even infer this, but that it is reasonable to assume combat has and may still occur spontaneously through out that region.

Suppose that you are in a war zone. Suppose that you actually are a native to that said war zone, and a foreign militant force has come to your land for whatever the purpose. Suddenly, as it does in reality, combat occurs, the spontaneous eruption of aggressive violent force between two or more parties, neither of which you are involved with. This combat moves to your street. Are you a combatant?

Home 7/16/11 2:19 PM
Combatants and non
Combatants

Well, under the Laws of War, the U.S. Rules of Engagement, and common damn sense, anyone that takes up a weapon of any kind seizes to remain classified as a civilian

Blanchard/Warfighter

(not a target), and is now considered a combatant (possible target). You don't need to be an Islamic military aged male with an AK-47 in your hands to be a combatant, or a bad guy. A woman with a cell phone could be one. For that matter, a Christian, Caucasian woman, with a cell phone, could be a combatant. This goes into further explain the "*fog of war*" and gives credit to the notion that war is a vastly complicated and never static endeavor – a lateral concept as opposed to a simpler linear concept.

A Navy Corpsmen assigned to a Marine platoon, are not a Marines, they a in fact, as I stated, Naval Corpsman (we are speaking purely in a technical sense, because as far as I am concerned, any Naval Corpsman on a patrol with a Marine unit is a Marine!). The naval Chaplains assigned to Marine units are assigned Religious Protectors (RP's)- Navy fellows that carry the weapon system, and are classified as combatants, because the Chaplain is NOT classified as one, and thus does not carry a weapon – at least officially.

This is not to say Naval Chaplains routinely engaged in combat patrols for the seeking and destruction of enemy forces. But it is entirely possible for that same Chaplain to find himself chin-deep in full-blown kinetic combat. The rest of that scenario you can imagine for your self.

This information is provided to establish a kind of technical grounds for the differences between a combatant and a non-combatant.

If you ask me, anyone in or around active combat is a combatant (this does not mean my enemy, however).

As I have alluded to, the nature of a combatant may be situational – as it may

Blanchard/Warfighter

change spontaneously. This combatant may have been someone simply caught up in a conflict they were not a part of, but for the sake of survival, they engaged in a manner designed to aid in their escape, and/or survival. And they may live out the rest of their life never engaged in, or anywhere around combat. With this understanding stated, I would submit to you that to be a “combatant” is a temporary status granted upon actual or perceived environmental characteristics.

A “Warfighter” may be something of the same nature as a combatant, but prolonged, if not professional in nature – permanent. Someone who avidly seeks out combat, and executes duties pursuant to combat operations. A U.S. Marine Infantryman could be a “Warfighter” - and in almost every sense imaginable, *is a warfighter*.

United States Marines are an exclusive group in nature, and not inclusive (acceptance must be gained through process, and is only under extreme circumstances granted meritoriously, such as an award of the status of “United States Marine” due to an extreme set of circumstances or behavior - don’t hold your breath on this one). The same is to be said, effectively, for every branch of the military,

If we are not careful, we may interpret this to mean that any U.S. Service member is a combatant, or a Warfighter. Or that to be a Marine is to be a Warfighter. I would challenge this notion, and submit to you further that the exclusive group of “Warfighters” is not directly dependent on branch, but more on specific duties, most especially those duties actually executed in combat operations, and although those duties and circumstances may have arisen out of the willful agreement to partake, being warfighter is not actually contingent on willingness, or approval. My father being drafted into the

Home 7/16/11 2:18 PM
Real definition of
Warfighter

Blanchard/Warfighter

United States Army during the Vietnam conflict was most certainly a war fighter, and not because he elected to. I, on the other hand, openly sought out enlistment into the United State Marine Corps in clear mind and with good intentions, and even took matters in my own hands to further elect to be put into a unit that was already bound for full combat operations while I was reasonably safe in a unit that had not yet received orders to combat (Iraq) - a direct opposite of my father. But yet, we wound up brothers in arms, and blood, none the less. There are many other examples of individuals becoming war fighters regardless of election, but you get the idea.

So the traditional social boundaries such as gender, branch of service, and job code, are not actual parameters for defining a “Warfighter”. A female U.S. Air Force officer may just as well be a “Warfighter” along side a male U.S. Marine enlisted infantryman. I am not saying this is traditionally the case, as this is a theoretical set of parameters. But the point is still valid.

Blanchard/Warfighter

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (4 pages).

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (4 pages).

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (4 pages).

Blanchard/Warfighter

The Scope of Combat Operations

I would like to furthermore define the parameters of combat, and of conflict, insomuch as to establish the grounds for perceived danger, and the tangible and intangible ramifications of this perception.

If I come to your home, armed or unarmed, and I attack you, we are undoubtedly engaged in combat. This concept is simple enough.

In today's battlefield, the concepts of war, of battle, and of those who fight in the aforementioned are fluid in nature and change shape, tempo, and dynamic in real time, often times dissociated from our own (war fighters) awareness of acknowledgment of these changes.

In colonial American days, war was a linear battle – two opposing forces lined up facing each other in a sort of dual, the might and grit of linear kinetic combat at its highest point. Essentially, the winner was whoever was left alive when the smoke and the screams nullified. Personally speaking, I will pass on that kind of warfare.

They also resumed to live, and wrote our history books, as well as formed our

Blanchard/Warfighter

cultures. This is true of all societies, through out the length of perceivable time.

Today, I can press a button in a bunker in CONUS (continental United States), and engage enemies in combat halfway across the world - their blood, their screams, their deaths, are still very real, even if I am not left standing over the pile of those carcasses to see it, smell it and feel it. My Starbucks minutes after the act won't taste any different, I assure you.

It is in this very said manner that many of our enemy - High Value Targets (HVT's) - has been neutralized.

Alternatively, lets speak about the might of a single Marine infantry squad on a foot patrol in Iraq. A single squad of 13 Marines each carries a primary weapon system (a semi-automatic rifle, or small machine gun), and some with secondary weapons (handguns). For every four marines, one will have the light machine gun. Every Marine will carry a varying assortment of body armor, and a full combat load of munitions. Additionally, auxiliary devices such as M203 40mm High Explosive rounds (grenades launched out of a tubular device mounted below the barrel of a M16/M4 Carbine, or variant), fragmentation grenades (explosive balls meant to burst with explosive power as well as send out shards of fragmented metal), and other sticks of "Pyro" – used to warn and signal. These auxiliary devices may be regarded as standard issuance to individual Marines, or their groups.

The point is, we pack a big punch, and carry enough sustainment firepower to seriously wreak havoc and destruction on any target – point or area. Your average insurgent may carry an AK-47, or variant, but his munitions supply, his "pyro" supply,

Blanchard/Warfighter

and other weapons supply may be limited, if it even exists. Also, the condition of their weapon may be nearly combat-ineffective. As you may have been informed, or surmised, U.S. Forces, especially Marines keep their weapons systems in a constant state of optimal operation. You do not need to be a war fighter, government analyst or a doctor to figure out that single insurgent matched head to head with a single U.S. Marine is anything less than a deadly joke. If this small squad of heavily armed, expertly trained, willing, disciplined, and aggressive Marines was the only Marine unit in the AO, and could not call for reinforcements, or CAS (Close Air Support), or call in any additional help other than what they have packed on their bodies – they would still be one hell of a match for any fighting force. We carry enough death and destruction on our bodies to decimate an entire, dense urban block, without breaking a sweat.

Does this sound like people you would want to fuck with?

You can imagine, that unlike the video games, or action movies, its not too very often that a lone random combatant pops out of thin air to engage a squad of Marines in face to face kinetic combat. A single Marine posses the discipline, skill-set and aggressive attitude required to tacitly and entirely neutralize that target in a split second, before they even blink. I would submit to you that they might very well do so without consciously thinking about it. So I will leave you to your imagination to ponder the consequences of such actions when dealing with the entire squad, or even a fire team of Marines (four Marines), let alone a larger body of Marines

Do not take the aforementioned scenario to mean that this kind of combat does not occur, or has not occurred. It is simply rare. This is why our current Insurgent enemy

Blanchard/Warfighter

adapts, and uses Improvised Explosive Devices. It is why they are nameless, faceless, genderless, and even race-less. This is why they watch from a far, and use a cell phone to call to a sniper, or to detonate an IED. They fight via remote, not face to face. I could write an entire full length book talking about only this concept – and I would not be the only one to do so. Their cowards. But hey, “they” have been doing this for a few thousand years, in one way or another.

This lateral method of understanding the brooding concepts of war and its intricacies is vital to understand the mindset of the Warfighter, and as to who can be classified as a Warfighter.

In all actuality, a service member drinking his designer coffee inside of a bunker in CONUS can be considered a Warfighter, and a combatant, as they engage the enemy in combat. Although the psychological effects on such a Warfighter may seem to be nullified, and are likely dampened, it is entirely likely that they do exist and classic symptoms such as P.T.S.D. may very well surface none the less. So it is important to respect that, and not disregard those contexts.

I have never sat in a chair and played a video game and killed real people, and so I cannot say myself. But for the scope of the majority of this work, we are talking about more traditional forms of combatants, the ones closer to, if not directly physically involved in the combat operations. As we will further cover, much of combat stress, and the atmosphere of combat revolve around physical location and constant if not immediate threat – something that is difficult to perceive via proxy.

Blanchard/Warfighter

It is entirely possible that a Warfighter could carry out an honorable tour of duty and participate in combat operations without ever becoming a “trigger-puller”. It is entirely possible that this same said Warfighter may have never needed to kill another person, maybe even to the extent that they did not discharge any weapon system for the defense or offense of any of their interests – firing your rifle on the shooting range “in-country” is not the same as firing it at an insurgent – although both are technically weapons discharges in a combat zone.

This Warfighter may never even see the face of what is to be known as an insurgent, albeit our enemy, much like in the Vietnam conflict is constantly changing, and faceless in nature. The same person that sold the Warfighter some fruit the week before in the town market may be the same person, or one of the people involved with the detonation of the IED that took off the legs of their best friend. They would never know. Many Warfighters who have been killed or injured in action may have once stared their enemy in the eyes, and had a normal conversation with them. Combat changes on a second-by-second basis. If not even quicker than that.

If you refer back to the scenario regarding how heavily armed and lethal a single Marine is, let alone his squad, we can say that more often than not, it is reasonable that a small group of insurgents, or even a single insurgent would hardly ever, if at all, engage a patrol of Marines openly. We are not the easiest target around. And much of the situations that can be classified as “lessons learned” by the United States Military reinforce this “hard target” philosophy adhered to painstakingly so by nearly every warfighter, or group

Blanchard/Warfighter

of warfighters, that has survived, with or without “engagement”. This is certain true about any body of Marines.

These elite few, expertly trained, disciplined and knowledgeable “dogs of war” may never see face-to-face kinetic combat. But, does this mean they never see combat? It most certainly does not mean they have not seen combat. The short answer is, they were big enough, and bad enough, to prevent the threat in the first place. Ask any commander, any leader from the small unit on up to your President, and this is the most desirable form of combat. To detour.

How would you feel if you spent everyday inside of your neighborhood looking in every direction, three dimensionally, for anyone that may pose a threat to you, to your family, friends, or to your interests? How would you feel if you had to make peace with the notion that you cannot look at the ground in front of your feet every damn second of the day because you very well may be shot by someone twenty five feet in front of you, as well as a concealed enemy? And by not being able to inspect every square inch of land that you use for your next step, you may walk on a bomb. How would this feel for you? To be in constant state of threat, from every angle physically possible, by an enemy that has no face, no name, no uniform and no code of ethics. Their only honor is that granted upon killing infidels - which is more than likely also *you*. The Geneva Conventions does not apply to insurgents. In much of the same manner that weapons control laws in the United States doesn't affect a criminal. I shouldn't have to explain that.

Blanchard/Warfighter

How would you feel knowing that every human being that is in your sight, and the ones that are not in your sight, may be utilized in your immediate destruction? That the phone call the old man makes in the market 300 meters to your left may blow up the entire side of a building by which you will seek cover in 32 seconds?

To attempt to state all of the variables in a given time frame in combat would be impossible to accurately summarize. But none-the-less, this is a discipline you must execute to play in this game. When you decide your a bit tired of it, thats when a uniformed military member shows up at your parents house, your wife's house, with a flag.

With all of these fears, and realizations, you still must act kindly, professionally, humanly, and tacitly. You cannot control the situation, you can not harm people or kill them because they may very well be aiding in your immediate destruction. You cannot shoot that child that is laying soccer in the street whose ball happened to roll in front of your patrol, or that old man that is so old and sick as he cannot see while he is driving, and does not give way to your patrol.

Warfighters are not people who simply graduated high school and said "Yeah man, I wanna go kill some mother fuckers!"

Warfighters are trained, disciplined, professional combat tacticians. It takes education, awareness, and mental physical and spiritual strength to study the culture, the enemy, and understand the dynamics of war.

This is an element of a very real concept called "combat stress". It is constant, it is severe, it is dangerous, and it is also imperative that Warfighters manage the stress and

Blanchard/Warfighter

think through the objective. This is how an untrained enemy combatant can hide in his cozy quarters and take pop-shots at our patrols, and Marines can tacitly seek cover, seek out the origins of the gunfire, and return precise, and lethal fire to that target – by executing the discipline ingrained in them, to follow muscle memory, and at times, even think. I do not want you to think they are thoughtless, but sometimes, we don't actually think, we react, and we are good. This a set of principles and disciplined training that will for ever set us apart from you.

The term “Grunt” seems to instill a certain disrespect for the subject, eluding to a certain lacking of faculty and intelligence. You would be considerably naive and misguided to believe that is true about Warfighters. You do not need to possess a degree to be shot at, but you do need to possess a character set, and discipline to think tactically in a panic state when being directly engaged from a single or multiple targets, regardless of weapon and munition size.

It is human nature to use the “fight or flight” method. If I walk into a mall, and simply display an assault rifle, the amount of panic that would unleash would be devastating, let alone if I actually fired this weapon, even if only in the air. For most people. For me, I doubt I would blink let alone move until I articulated the situation. Believe me, I am not the only person to act this way.

Now imagine walking down a narrow alleyway, and suddenly you hear a whizzing sound fly by your head and a ting on the shabby constructed wall beside you. That would be a bullet, aimed at you. Is it time to flair your hands in the air, scream and shout, lose your mind and end up being killed anyways like a moron, if you don't end up

Blanchard/Warfighter

killing or hurting other people? I hope I don't need to answer that. A Warfighter possesses the faculties to seek out and destroy, by mentally navigating through the bullets whizzing by them, and be returning bullets that actually blow that persons head to pieces.

Rightfully so.

Sometimes, fire is not even returned. Marines do not open fire on a building simply because they think some bullets came from that direction. Not like in the movies. That isn't discipline. I can hand a ten-year-old boy a machine gun and say "Shoot shit, son!" Then his aunt takes a round in her pelvic bone.

So these big bad Warfighters could be shot at, and yet they may not return the favor and kill those bastards? That is exactly what I am saying is possible. It has happened, I have been a part of it, it likely happens more often then the returning fire to the originator, and this dynamic will likely not change. Unless we were insurgents and didn't give a shit about killing innocents, collateral damage, because I am doing the Lord's work and the rest of you don't matter.

We act out these exciting and adrenaline fueled moments all the time in our fantasies, in our movies, our video games, and our books. It changes though, when it's a real bullet meant for you, or your fellow Warfighters. How would you handle it?

So who is a combat veteran? And who is not? That is not such an easy thing to distinguish is it? I will tell you it has little to do with what ribbons are on their chest when they are in their dress uniform.

It is easy to see how this combat mindset could alter someone's emotional and psychological operations for the rest of his or her life. If you factor in the variables of

Blanchard/Warfighter

who is killed, and in what ways – such as a child with a grenade in their hand, or a woman with an IED vest that approached your patrol, so forth and so on – the extent of psychological altercation is exponential, if not immeasurable.

Blanchard/Warfighter

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (2 pages).

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (2 pages).

CONTENT OMITTED FOR PREVIEW (2 pages).

Blanchard/Warfighter

Chapter 1: My Origins

1-1 Bloodline

I grew up in the small town of Dayton, Oregon, 30 miles south of Portland. My family had at least two generations prior to me born and raised here. I first remember a nice home on Main street, right next to the cities quaint square park. We had a house fire when I was very little, in 1991 - this is most likely my first set of memories playing out in the dirt with my brother rushing out to fetch me. After spending a year and a half rebuilding the home, we moved back in to what was certainly an upgrade from the version of the house prior to the fire. A few years later, circa the time of my father's own father passing away, we moved up to the homestead on the hill. A home my father helped build with his bare hands when he was a young teenager, back before we had formal names for roads, and before any of the wineries set up shop overlooking the valley that was essentially my front yard.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Being nine or so, I had very little understanding of the appreciation my father had for this long, old, brick house that was as unrefined as our new post-fire home was indeed refined. A lot of history was painted in these walls, and frankly, not all of it was good.

One of the greatest gifts my parents ever awarded me was a sincere ability, and want, to work. I can say that much of my childhood did not consist of miniature firetrucks and summer nights playing baseball, but working outside maintaining the property, building a tree house, or something. If I was working with dad, I was most likely outside trying to stay busy so I wouldn't end up working with dad. This is a trait that paid off well in my adult life in the Marine Corps. At the age of twelve, I was quite adapt at splitting wood with a maul, or an axe, and more useful in this regard than many of the adults I was most often around. Dad taught me how to really work. And working pays off.

This is important, because my grandfather, my fathers father, provided for a large family, of which two of the children were adopted, while paralyzed. All I know of my grandfather was that he grew up working too, was a boxer during the depression, and was quite skilled with his own hands. But conveying our emotions properly, or even reasonably, is not a trait inherent in my bloodline. With as much work and toil in our blood, violence was also very near by.

I will be the very first one to look you in the eyes and tell you I was never hit by any of my parents, albeit the one time I decided to kick my father in the knee while he was sitting. But, that isn't the case for the rest of my family, on down the line. You see, my fathers own grandfather shot his wife dead and them himself with a shotgun. That is

Blanchard/Warfighter

the atmosphere my grandfather grew up in, and he passed it down the line with hammers and God knows whatever else being thrown across rooms at my father, and his brothers.

Breaking windows, probably bones, and certainly feelings. My father was raised in an emotional, and frankly often a physical war zone. Where real men didn't show emotions, they shut the fuck up and made things happen. If he wasn't one step ahead of his father in whatever task was at hand, he could expect a speedy and often dangerous reprimand.

That is a gift he passed down to me, without the flying hammers. As a child, I learned to be more useful and productive than not only many of the adults I knew then but the ones I know now, as an adult. My father was drafted to Vietnam, and once reporting for a drug test at the Military Entrance Processing Center (MEPS), he never came home until after his tour of ten months in Vietnam with the United States Army. His welcome home party consisting of his own father in a wheelchair angrily firing a rifle at him, as he had though he up and abandoned his poor, large, family. This of course after floating in to the harbor at San Fransico and haveing some hippies throw piss ballon at him and call him a baby killer. Of which I know he spent at least one night in jail. *Gee, thanks, pricks!*

These skills, and work ethic did not come free however. As skilled as my father was with his hands in fixing, building, and otherwise providing for us, he was almost entirely devoid of executable compassion and the ability to express feelings any more complicated than a five year olds temper tantrum. This is a facet of my childhood that has

Blanchard/Warfighter

formed the toxicity of the blood pumping through my veins, then, now, and tomorrow - and likely the same blood that will be seeping into the ground when I am buried.

In many literal ways, my first memories were of fighting, of combat. Of trying to understand my father, my mother, my brothers, and to remove the bumps in the road immediately ahead of the fiasco going on in front of me that almost entirely was assured to cause hurt to someone. The fights, threats, breaking of personal property, and emotional warfare lasted through-out all of my childhood, and the majority of my teenage years.

In a relationship fifteen years later, of which I will bring up later in this work, I learned that I possess a mastermind mindset, Extroverted-Sensing-Feeling-Judging, in as much as I often sit silently and weigh in on the situation, the players in the situation, and like a mastermind, I manipulate the variables and tones to propagate the outcome I deem is desirable. Simply put, I was the four, five, six, twelve, sixteen, and now twenty-five year old doctor of my family. I grew these abilities and instincts out of the need for protection of myself and my family - out of survival. There were several years where I couldn't actually tell you I remember a single bright day. In fact, the only memory I have of my twelve year of life is on my thirteenth birthday when my uncle and his family took me to the coast, and then bought me a birthday dinner at a casino. As a teenager, and even before, I was dark.

I was dark not because I was “emo”, or childish, or depressed, but because my innocence was long lost on the tribulations and violent tempers of my bloodline abusing

Blanchard/Warfighter

each other day in and day out, often times not even aware of why the hell they were screaming and breaking things in the first place.

As a teenager, I would tell you that my father has taught me two very valuable lessons that I could recall at any time. The first, to take my socks off when I sleep. I still do this. The second, to never be like him, or anyone else like him. In my early teenage years, my mother would sit my brothers down at our large oak dinner table, with my father's brother and tell us about my great grandfather murdered his wife and himself, all to please that we, being the fourth generation, could break the cycle. Staind's third studio album "Break the Cycle" would be the soundtrack of my teenage years, and largely a saving grace for me to identify with and thus clench to for exterior relation.

The later lesson was the single greatest proponent to my evolution as an artist, as a writer, a poet, a photographer, and a Marine. I sunk all my days in my room on a computer I learned how to build, because I used the time spent learning about computers, music, and writing, as an escape, to live with some sense of control and dignity.

The fact is, I was the most emotionally capable human being in my family and I was a kid. So I hid out on my computer, learning about web design, graphic design, writing, anything and everything, to include a larger vocabulary than most my age. I grew up under the musical influence of my older brothers 90's rock, which got me into bands like the aforementioned Staind, Godsmack, Nine Inch Nails (of which I would partially derive the pseudonym Trenton Phoenix I published "*Of Blood & Ink*" under, partially from Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor), Linkin Park (the bassist "Phoenix" being the other half of the name) and Alice in Chains. Much of my writing, both in "*Dark*

Blanchard/Warfighter

Tomorrow” and in the immense amount of poetry (which I would later compile hundreds and thus publish as “*Of Blood & Ink*”) I was spitting out was influenced by this music, and the tones show in the composition of my own writing.

This was right around the time when MSN and Yahoo chat were prominent, back in the days when “LOL” was really invented and widely used, and I socialized mostly over the internet because I could control the situation in a manner I could I rarely enjoy in person with the kids I knew elsewhere. The kids wrapped up in their happy little lives of bliss, or misbehavior. It was rarely in the middle. This electronic reality was a reality where I was not a victim, where I could communicate effectively, even better than most, and where I could filter the influences I was having. I was the boss. Not the fucking doctor.

But that concept didn’t last long, as I met people who were in similar situations, often times worse off than I was. This is where I learned about rape, about abuse, about drugs, about the fragments of our society that we like to burry. And sure enough, my need to be a doctor, to fix everything and everyone, was at play for years. At the age of fifteen I wrote a story about a young teenage girl who was brutally raped and beaten, and ultimately killed herself in a busy intersection via a large truck. I wrote the story from the eyes of an Angel, name Erik. This angel was quite literally me, written from the perspective of observation and fucking helplessness I had thrust myself into for years. Now I was fighting my family, I was fighting for the world, for teenagers I had never met but none-the-less felt an immense propulsion to try and help. My mother is right, this is when really lost my innocence. My families obtuse self-destruction doubled with the

Blanchard/Warfighter

worlds vicious and relentless rape and destructions of others piled high on my broad shoulders.

This is also where I met my future wife, and ex-wife. Of the hundreds of girls I probably had talked to that I had some how counseled, and frankly, fucking helped, this one young lady was not one of the problem friends. She was my age, and from California, and we quickly became quite good friends - in fact, best friends in the entire world. And as much as I knew about her, she knew about me. She has seen and heard the fights in my family, my father breaking in a door, yelling, me yelling back, and crying. She spent years with me as a teenager, and never actually with me. What the hell did it matter? The people with me were childish and cancerous, and exempt from the advent of myself, they likely would have killed some one. Probably deserved.

As a way to internalize what I was being exposed to and best apply it to my life, I started writing poetry. My first poem was written in my high school drafting lab also utilized as a resource center for computer programs that I was informally an aid in, or somehow partially running, listening to Yahoo's music radio station, with Switchfoot's "Meant to Live" playing, simply titled "How I feel". I was angry, hurt, perplexed, and I had more than enough to say about it. I was free to expose all of my angry and repressed imagined strifes freely, as raw as my blood was, without recourse, while being able to analyze it like a freak science experiment. I was doing better than self-medication, I was self-doctoring. A trait I still have to this day.

Blanchard/Warfighter

1-2: Enlistment

Amongst these years, I spent a lot of time in Boy Scouts, eventually earning the rank of Eagle Scout months before my eighteenth birthday. An accolade I had little formal use for, as I never intended to join the military.

All I wanted was to be out of school, and the fuck away from this world I pretty well resented that was my birth right.

After submitting some of the now close to three year old manuscript for “Dark Tomorrow” to my english teacher my senior year, and asking about the word “Epitome” and its context, I very shortly had to write up a summary for what I would do with my life after my nearing High School graduation. The hell if I knew?

Two days before it was due, I decided to track down the Marine recruiter locally, who was on a date when I called him, and set an appointment to come in and talk the next day after school. There wasn't a whole lot of talking. I signed the day before I graduated, June 9th, 2005. I didn't have the curtesy to ask my parents permission, I didn't need it, but I did bring up the idea the night prior to my signing to my mother, who's reaction was fairly typical - frantic as all hell. You would be shocked at how little thought, or question was put into this life changing decision. The recruiter asked me if I had considered any other branches, and if I had talked to any of their recruiters. I replied with a simple “Fuck no!”. I appeased him anyways, and walked into the Army's recruiting office. To be honest, I don't remember what I said or did, other than walk out less than two minutes later.

As a result of some of the more turbulent and destructive events in my family in my last year of high school, my parents were separated, my father lived elsewhere, while

Blanchard/Warfighter

my mother and myself lived in the home he built as a child. After breaking the news to my mother that I did enlist, my father came for Sunday dinner that weekend. He sat at his usual seat at the head of that same oak kitchen table, rather silently. He was aware of the news. At some point, a while after walking through the door, I sat down at the table, and he simply asked me "Are you sure?" I nodded, and said yes. That was the extend of my fathers counsel about my joining the war time United States Marine Corps.

I had no elusions of docility or safety. I remember clearly the lazy morning my freshman year of high school walking in a daze from my room half naked while listening to the TV blaring reports of a single plane crashing into one of the World Trade Center towers. Oh, I had not forgotten. I wanted to take out my anger towards my family and life on those fucking bastards. And I would soon get what I had asked for.

My best friend would plead with me not to change who I was, not to become a different man. I was excited, I had the naive idea of having her come down to San Diego in March of 2006, for my graduation from Marine Basic Training, and meet me face to face for the first time. Why not? Well, it didn't happen. Neither one.

I worked at Walmart for a two months prior to graduation, a job I would keep until I left for bootcamp that December. The basic summary of every encounter I had with friends, school teachers, school mates, co-workers, and stupid people I didn't even know asking ridiculous questions about a simple product at work was that I was wasting my young life, fighting for a president no one liked, and I would die - a young foolish and tragic victim in the war.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Well, candidly speaking, fuck you. I still stand by that. Enough people tried, but these words are a testament and those overly protected and cowardly people who warned and scolded me sometimes, as well as the bastards who tried to kill me, were wrong, and failed. Sorry about your luck, buddy.

I soon was very grateful that I had made Eagle Scout, as that award granted me the rank of Private First Class, E2, right out of bootcamp. This mattered for a few reasons, one of which was my pride, the other was that I was able to wear a single chevron on the shoulders of my Dress Alpha uniform when graduating - putting me at least six months ahead of the next Marine who wore no rank insignia, and was a Private. Thanks for pushing me, Mom!

To be honest, I craved the ability to up and leave this place, to go and play in a world where as much pain, work, sweat, and pissed off angry men were around me to yell at me and make me do things, not a damn ounce of it was personal. I was looking forward to a vacation, where I just had to listen, mind my own business, and do what the hell I was told to- and that was it? I didn't have to fix anyone? War, wasn't really a war to me. My life was a war, this was just a four year minimum get-away, with guns and foreign lands. I was a natural born adventurer, so really, I wasn't worried or scared.

Many of us that have seen Stanley Kubrick's cult classic film "Full Metal Jacket" will recall R. Lee Ermey's portrayal of Gunnery Sergeant Hartman discussing his un-bias towards race, or many other identifying features, as we are all maggots. Well, there are two points to be made there. One, E. Lee Ermey was actually a Marine Drill Instructor before acting, and two, his excellent and extremely sharp portrayal of a Marine Drill

Blanchard/Warfighter

Instructor was spot on - the Corps doesn't give a shit who you are, period - we are all pieces of useless and undisciplined shit, thank you very much to our equally failed and undisciplined parents.

You see, to the Corps, your a body, and no one will ever again be concerned with who you were, who you thought you were, who your mamma or your daddy wanted you to be, they will never again care about your damn girl friend, how much money you made, or what you did with your life. Because nothing is personal. This may come as a starkly surprising contrast to those romantic idealist that may have notions that a body of working men designed to coexist in such close quarters and operate in a war zone had better well get to know each other and be real close - handing your life over to a stranger makes no sense.

Well, there are two things to say to that. One, the Corps takes away any real identify you had before "Marine". So we are all strangers, but some how, unlike in any other instance, situation, or institution we would ever be a part of in our human existence, connected and equally identifiable brothers in arms - each reborn in the same hell hole.

Yes, I would trust my heart beat, and the heart beat of my unborn daughter to a Marine that walked into the supermarket on any given day that I had never seen let a lone met before in my existence, and probably, not you.

I graduated Marine Corps basic training with former NFL player Jeremy Statt, who enlisted because his college roommate (and fellow professional athlete) was shot and killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan by another Army Ranger. Jeremy's general tone was

Blanchard/Warfighter

that it was stupid that they got paid millions of dollars to play a game, while the men and women that die for us get paid shit, and still do. Well, he was right, and he did something about it. And Jeremy, pushed in and ate the same fine red dirt I did, he also swallowed the same spit from the same drill instructors screaming in our faces, that I did. The Corp's didn't give a crap. It didn't then, it doesn't now, and it never will.

Of course I didn't now this looking at Seargent Bowler that summer of 2005 as a fat lazy and slightly hairy civilian kid not even out of high school yet, but I got the general tone of the Marine Corps through him very well - "Shut the fuck up, no one cares." I wasn't incorrect.

So maybe I am that wired-backwards asshole who enlists to prove a point that you can't kill me, that no matter what, my mind cant be beaten, and I am king, if of shit-else but me. An ethos that is both revered and and thought of with distain in the Marine Corps.

The duality of man - our ability to posses traits and execute actions both merciful and condemning in the very same fluid movement - is also seen in the duality of the Marine Corps. Its rarely as simple as black and white. Kind of like the duality of our country and legal system seen in our ability to be handed weapon, trained to kill without hesitation, and then snap-to at attention for a random officer we do not know and willingly submit to his or her orders, as heroes - then come home and be seen as a hero, but only from a distance, as we are charged with contempt and accusations like domestic abuser for the very same ethos and code of actions that kept us alive. Weaponize us, authorize and empower us, respect us while the bullets fly, then fear us when we come home and try to be normal. Kind of sounds like Shakespeare, at least to me - a tragic,

Blanchard/Warfighter

juxtaposition of interests and outcomes, that often are just plain stupid, but never-the-less real. And we cringe in silence hoping this kind of sad shit never happens to us.

My first niece, Madeline, was due the day I was ordered to leave for Basic Training, December 12, 2005. Her mother ended up having a cesarian birth six days prior, and as a result, I was able to hold this new born baby girl - my first - in my arms the day she was born. A gift I would cherish for the rest of my life. A gift I would cling to multiple times in the years to come. I would not be able to do the same with my next three nieces.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Chapter 2: The Birth of a Marine, and Death of a Boy

2-1: Yellow Footprints

I stepped onto the yellow footprints in front of the recruit in-processing center aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego CA, on a very bright and early Monday morning – December the 12th, 2005. I briefly recollected the short six months prior, reassured myself that although I did not understand what was awaiting in the next several seconds, let alone years, I needed to be here. The blind faith of a young fool, or the honorable bravado of a natural born fighter? Who knows, who cares. Neither was going to change the rest of my life one way or the other. I clearly remember standing in a dark hallway with a buss full of other male young marines freshly shaved and bleeding from multiple cuts on their head.

After having freshly graduated High School back home in Oregon in June, and signing the papers to enlist the day before graduation, I spent the remaining time I had “free” working at a local retail establishment. Naturally, the topic of my immediate future had come up several times in those months, and the overwhelming conclusion and frantically irritating warning from my fellow co-workers was that I would die if I went into

Blanchard/Warfighter

the Marine Corps – with the inference that I would then be a victim to this war and this president.

Well, we can squash that now. Seven years later, I still have a pulse, and I am damned sure not a victim to anyone or anything other than my own binding chains.

Through the next twelve weeks, I was erased as a selfish human being and given a sweaty and dirty re-birth into the patriotic and glorious ranks of the *United States Marine Corps*. Two months into basic training, I couldn't remember how I felt before, or how I acted, and I damned sure didn't want to see a picture of myself prior. Maybe because I didn't have enough time to concentrate hard enough to remember how "jacked-up I was", or because I literally forgot – had some one forced me to beat it out of myself. Even as I write these words, it is difficult for me to recall many details.

At some point through the middle phases of my training, I received a letter from my publisher congratulating me on the completion of my "novel" I titled "*Dark Tomorrow*" – a 75 page book I wrote when I was fifteen years old about a young teenage girl who was violently raped multiple times, leading to her ultimate suicide via a truck in the middle of a downtown street. I had just turned nineteen when I received the letter, and I felt good about closing that four-year window of my life; and moving forward – as if I had a choice at that point.

2-2: Com School

I received the official notification during my last week of boot camp that I had been selected for an MOS range of Electronics Control – Electrician. I didn't know what

Blanchard/Warfighter

that meant. I would soon find out that after completing Marine Combat Training at Camp Pendleton, CA, I would further my initial training at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, Twenty Nine Palms, CA (MCAGCC, as it was named in 2006); at Radio Communications School – “Com School”. I was to be an “0621 - Field Radio Operator” – you know, those guys in those old war movies you always watch carrying around a hunk of metal on their back with a phone in their ears while they follow around an officer to subsequently be shot dead.

We (Marines) always chuckled at these kinds of descriptions of our jobs; possibly because it was actually pretty accurate in previous wars that were more kinetically fought (the world wars, Korea, Vietnam – essentially every armed conflicted up through the cold war). Also, possibly, because we (Marines) had developed a “sick sense of humor” as a means of coping with the realities of our training and what might be around the corner and the fact that we were moving forward regardless of what did or did not wait around that corner. You can call that idea what you want, ignorance, arrogance, foolish bravado, whatever. I call it being an United States Marine.

We’d laugh at death, laugh at being hurt, laugh at being outnumbered, and laugh at losing a fight. It’s not to say that a corpse is particularly funny, or the idea that we each may become that said corpse. This was a warriors way of coping, albeit likely a cave-mans method as well.

Desensitization was never a concept verbally acknowledged or made into an objective (no one ever shouted at us “now Marines, we are going to de-fucking-sensitize your bastard asses), but it was always the undertone of our training and our

Blanchard/Warfighter

communications amongst our selves. It was there, around us, inside of us, in everything we did – just as surely as the air, or the night was there with us. One could likely add desensitization onto that list of sacrifices made “to fight”.

In our exposure to “Fleet Marines” (Marines that operated in the Fleet forces that may deploy to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), as opposed to the Marines that taught our schools or courses (like our Drill Instructors), we learned a lot about the normal life of a Marine, and some of our banter had to do with where each of us would end up next – our duty station, and what unit - thereby characterizing what the hell we were going to do, or what would be done to us, with our time in the Marine Corps.

7/16/11 1:24 PM
POG and Grunt

The concept of joining the Marine Corps may contain some notion of difficulty and discomfort, and this would be correct. However, there are many sides to the Marine Corps; namely two – the Ground component and the Aviation component. As near as I could tell, their differences are as drastic as the difference between the Navy and the Marine Corps, or green fields of grass and shit holes in someone else’s war torn backyard. Among the ground side, there are Infantry Marines endearingly referred to as “Grunts” (MOS that begins with the 03XX designation, for instance 0311 are Infantrymen), and all of the other MOS’s. The grunts favor the term POG, or Personnel Other-than Grunt to negatively describe the others. It is malicious in nature, but it’s warranted.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Why would there be such segregation amongst fellow warfighters? As we previously established, not every Marine *is* a warfighter, for one. Furthermore, the simplest answer is because the life of a Grunt sucks compared to the life of any other Marine, period.. Even the few creature comforts enjoyed by Communications Marines (such as myself), admin Marines, motor transport (motor-T) Marines, etc are grand and royal in contrast to the utter shit holes the grunts tend to inherit, in “CONUS” (Continental United States), ”OCONUS” (out of CONUS), and forward deployed to any combat zone. Further so, the general job description of a grunt is what most people think of when they hear the term “Marine” or even “Soldier”, but yet, numerically speaking, very little of the Marine Corps actually is. Grunts can be seen as a type of elitist. This is not to say every Grunt actually thinks this way, it is a fairly linear method of thinking. But most do.

To further this cave-man-elitist mentality problem, the idea of a POG joining Grunts is not a good one. POGs don’t belong with grunts – you can think of it like a macho High School “who’s cool and who’s not cool”, or “who’s a jock and who isn’t” scenario.

So naturally, in com-school, a school for “Pogs”, to be sent to a Grunt unit was not a welcoming idea. Furthermore, “Boots” (a derogatory term used for Marines that are not seasoned yet – have not been on a deployment - meaning “barely out of training”) were met with hostility and the understanding that they really don’t know a damn thing – because that is how the Marine Corps teaches you – the hard way. So you can imagine what a “Boot-ass Pog” sent to an Infantry unit would do for his days - every form of

Blanchard/Warfighter

bullshit that could be lawfully (and sometimes unlawfully) pressed down upon him.

Simply put, your life will fucking suck.

We must understand that the United States Military, and more specifically, the United States Marine Corps, is very good at doing what its meant to do – for the Marine Corps that would be the death or capture of a target. The Corps may lack in other fashions, for instance prior planning on non-combat related tasks/mission.

This was exactly the case as I was awaiting my orders to my next unit, days before I graduated Com-School on April 6, 2006 (The same day that we (The United States) received word that Zarqawi had been killed via a few doses of US JDAMNS through his windows. If this doesn't ring any bells, think about the insurgent fellow that was in charge of kidnapping missionaries, US combatants, and any other a infidel he could get his hands on and cut their heads off on Al-Jazzier with dull machetes while they scream and squirm for 45 seconds). I was the last gradating Marine to receive his unit code. Essentially, everyone else knew what duty station they were being sent to, what unit, and thus what kind of unit – “Pog” or “Grunt”. I did not.

I headed back home on two weeks of leave before reporting to my duty station abroad Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. On this two week leave block, the second I have had in the Marine Corps, I spent a lot of time catching up with family, and trying to see old girl friends, or flings. One sunny day I sat on the couch in the living room overlooking the valley through the two wall-sized windows, and began to mentally compile the few hundred poems I had written to day to be published. This was the begging formation of *“Of Blood & Ink”*.

Blanchard/Warfighter

7/16/11 1:25 PM
MCBH Arrival

When I arrived at Honolulu International Airport on July 3rd, 2006, I asked the duty driver what unit he was apart of, and he told me 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division (MarDiv) - shortened to "1/12". This didn't mean anything to me, so I asked specifically what kind of a unit that is. He informed me, to my immediate relief, that its an Artillery unit.

For a little Marine Corps history, artillery used to be organized under the infantry units, right beside its mortar crews until sometime in the 1980's. To be a Mortarman, or a Cannonier (someone who fires Artillery), was to be a grunt as well.

For all intents and purposes, I was safe to enjoy a more comfortable and less dangerous, even easier life as a Marine now.

After a few weeks of settling into my unit, and realizing my duties as a new Communications Marine, I asked some of the senior NCO's (Non-Commissioned Officers, for the Marine Corps these are Corporals, E-4, and Sergeants E-5) about the deployment cycles of 1/12. I found out that I would not go to Iraq, and I may not even leave the island even to Japan for our Artillery training.

You have to understand something before you will realize the implications of this information. *I joined the Marine Corps knowing full well to expect, if not guarantee that my sweaty feet landed on-deck in Iraq or Afghanistan. I wanted to go to war; I pretty much asked for it.* And now, seven months into the Marine Corps, I find out I did all this crap to "sit and spin" in my comfortable barracks for the next three years. Hell no.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Home 7/16/11 1:26 PM
Going GRUNTS

After getting situated with my barracks, fellow Marines, the “S6 Communications Shop” that would be my new work environment, and normal routine of my non-deploying Head Quarters and Services Battery (H&S, the term “Battery” refers to an artillery battalion’s subsequent unit of Marines, as opposed to “Company” for infantry), I began to relax a bit as I transitioned into a normal “Fleet Marine” (Marine operating in the normal fleet Marine Corps). I spent a lot of time at the Motor Pool where all of our military vehicles and artillery cannons were housed, maintaining vehicles, and executing various drills to improve my proficiency with my communications equipment. Life was doable, the night was fun, often enjoying the sights of Honolulu, and learning about the rest of the island of Oahu. This was a nice break. But this isn’t why I signed my soul over to the United States Marine Corps. I wanted to “get some”.

The vast majority of us Marines (and the only reason I don’t actually globalize and say all of us is because it’s poor manners, but most likely still true) have a similar trait in common - in some way, shape, or form, we have been bastardized and we have a point to prove.

I say this to make a very clear point to anyone and everyone thinking about enlisting for reasons other than war, don’t. If you want college, or out of town, or even girls, join any other branch, not the Marine Corps. Because you will be that “%10” that joined because their damn girl friend thought it would be hot, and the first time a Drill Instructor spits in your face and makes you drink your own sweat off your brow while you are “getting some” in the dirt, you will hate yourself, and you will fail. This failure will cost every other Marine around you.

Blanchard/Warfighter

No, I very clearly Joined the Corps not for glamour, or for reputation, or for travel, pretty sights and beaches, street names and food I can't pronounce, or exotic skin, I joined the Corps to get what is mine. To prove a point - to lay down my foot and proclaim to anyone and everyone who may have ideas to try and hold me down to fuck off.

Some bright, and early Monday morning in late August (after about six weeks of being on island) at the Motor-pool, in our weekly Battalion formation, the Sgt. Major asked who would like to go to Iraq? I didn't initially respond - it's usually not a good thing to bring special attention to your self in the Marine Corps, especially as a boot. One of my communications Corporals next to me, a blonde haired blue eyed baby-faced surfer type of a Devil Dog - that looked more like a Playboy than a Marine (despite being a 2004 Fallujah vet as a Boot – Phantom Furry) - nudged me, and I shot my hand up in the air.

I didn't know what was about to happen, but I asked around, and learned the hard way, to find out that I would soon be detaching from my Head Quarters (HQ) Battery of 1/12, and attaching as part of a small FST (Fire-Support Team), consisting of a FST commander, A Lieutenant (that at this point wasn't even named or here on island yet, so he will be a boot too, even more so than I am), a Radio Operator (ME) and a Forward Observer (FO) to an Infantry unit for the purpose of Calling For Fire (CFF) – calling artillery, mortar and air strikes on enemy area targets from a distance. If this sounds fun to it, it's because it *is* fun.

Blanchard/Warfighter

So here I am, sometime in August of 2006, two months out of my Com-School where I was taught to fear being a Boot POG assigned to a Grunt unit, *volunteering* to go directly to that same said unit for my first combat deployment. *Semper Fi!*

2-3: Field-Op

I spent the next six months training with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, 3rd Marine Division for our March-October 2007 deployment to Haditha, Iraq. My life did “suck” in many ways more than it likely would have, and I met with a lot of anti-pog, anti-boot bullshit nearly everyday, but I am a natural fighter, and I fought the bullshit, even against my peers. It was all fun, long days, games, research, a lot of duty standing and learning about the theories of war, as well as the realities of it. And dealing with the crap passed down from the “seniors” (Marines senior to the boots, usually the previous generation “breaking-in” the newest generation) that were the last Marine unit to pull out of Afghanistan in 2005 (this is a moot point, but at one point-in-time, Afghanistan *was* stable, and the entire Marine Corps pulled out its footprint and handed it over to Army Command, you can surmise what happened as a result).

We did various field-ops (field operations) on and around our base, as well as other branch’s bases and training grounds scattered around the island. We took refuge in an old runway strip shaped like a cross with a central control tower on the outskirts of Bellows Air Force Base, about twenty minutes away from our own base, outside of Kailua Hawaii. I would find out that this beach, with the white sand, and great tides, was the primary training ground for Marine 4th Force Reconnaissance, but would seldom see signs of their training. The air force had really pulled away from this small base, and left

Blanchard/Warfighter

only small units of Military Police, and other operational units I didn't know about, while opening up the first half of the base to the public.

I enjoyed a small field operation with 1/12 in the previous months before they had orders to Iraq in the adjacent time frame as my infantry unit, and thus before I had “crossed-deck” over to 1/3. These small operations were primarily weapons training; firing Squad Automatic Weapons (SAWS, M249) and 50 Cal machine guns. I remember using my phone to video tape another Marine melting one of the two standard issue detachable muzzles to his SAW. This small training operation was mostly just fun in the sun, simply trying to get us [Marines] acquainted with our big play toys, before things got serious.

Part of the re-organization of the bases all around the island was that the Air Force handed over about 50 acres of dense green bush, sub-jungle land housing these two runways and one control tower built in the same cross shape in the crotch of both runways, to the Marine Corps for training. I would later hear many ghost stories and otherwise supernatural tales by many locals I would meet over the years here. One more glorious story was that this land was originally used by the natives to sacrifice animals, as well as people, and it wasn't unusual for some freaky things to happen at night. This was a type of holly land, a violent holly land. Not much to my surprise, I would hear many rumors that the Mokapu Peninsula that the Marine Corps claimed for its base was in fact entirely a holly piece of land, and the waters between it and the main land of the island were holy, and to this day we are not allowed to touch the water, for fishing, training, or

Blanchard/Warfighter

even maintenance. It sure looked like it too. I would be too consumed in heavy training to give a crap about anything supernatural.

I often thought about the possibility of being in areas where there were supernatural stories circulating, and the ego-centric Marine in me said I already was the biggest baddest mother fucker around. This attitude would be challenged in the coming months while on post in the Haditha Iraqi Police barracks where dozens of Iraqi Police were slaughtered like pigs.

This bellows Air Force-Marine Corps training ground was very dense in shrub and palm trees, with little creeks and canals running through it, and shreds of equipment, buildings, and other debris scattered. It pretty well looked like an abandoned war zone already. My hunch was this was a cheap way to simulate what we were about to step into anyways, and with the entire perimeter gated off, and being two “clicks” (referring to an actual click of a weapon sight, gauging about 1,000 meters/.62 miles as a round would graze over land uninterrupted) in from the main beach access, we didn’t need to worry about any civilians seeing our training ground not-prettyed up. This was a-typical of the Marine Corps.

We set up shop in one of the wings of the control building, laid out our cots, personal gear and small weapons and communications equipment, and hastily began organizing the make-shift motor pool, aligning vehicles, and cleaning heavy weapons. We would practice dismounted combat patrols up and down the run ways, and around the dense jungle-like roads, responding to imaginary enemy fire from our flanks, and from our rear. We would take courses on IED detection, and subversion, attempting to spot

Blanchard/Warfighter

suspicious trash from a ways away, and mitigate the dangers, rather (imaginarily) real or perceived. Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) Marines would come teach us classes on some of the current threat conditions and equipment used by the insurgency in-country. We were learning what trash was simply trash, and what trash would blow our bodies to pieces.

The drills continued to escalate into mounted patrols (in vehicles) along the twisty curvy dense jungle roads, while taking enemy fire from our flanks, and sometimes all around us, all over again. We would practice identifying the target location calling out the fire direction and responding appropriately, and then combating while taking casualties. The moment fire was heard, any Marine (or every Marine) was to shout out “contact left!” or “contact rear!”. A single or group of designated range coaches would walk around impervious to all combat and point at one of us and say “Your fucked!” or “Your arms blown off!”. The coach was responsible for simulating mass chaos, and damn they was good at it.

Through-out the course of our training, we would use blank rounds (shells packed with gunpowder but no bullet, designed to operate just like a regular round, but never actually propel any round - while clogging up our weapons systems with carbon twice as fast as a real round), SIM rounds (paint ball bullets), and be exposed to a variety of explosive simulation devices (usually propane contraptions). The chaos of war was easy to see, and attest to. Even knowing no real rounds were flying anywhere, you felt like you had to watch your ass every second you moved your ass. We took fire from buildings, shrubs, the roads, and hit booby-traps. And those SIM rounds were not just

Blanchard/Warfighter

paint balls. They could kill you, we had to take special precautions to not preeminently injure someone. Cracked and bruises ribs were not uncommon. I remember multiple briefings by Commanders, and our Corpsman to “wear your mother fucking PPE Devil Dogs!” (Personal protection equipment - consisting of gloves, ballistically rated eye protection, flak jackets, and Kevlar helmets). The idea was that one of these SIM rounds shot into your eye will penetrate and kill you.

Theres a saying we learned the first day of basic training. “Marine Corps rules and regulations are written in blood.” Essentially, every time a new order or regulation comes out, its usually because some one died to make it happen. In training dense environments, you could pretty well bet every order given was one that was “written in blood.”

2-4: Epiphany

Toward the ending of our “work-up” (the six-month training cycle directly before a deployment designed to prepare Marines for the specifics of the mission assigned by the Marine Expeditionary Force, MEF), we were at Schofield Barracks, HI (an Army base in the north-western part of the island of Oahu) executing MOUT (military operations in urban terrain – think Hollywood S.W.A.T. type room clearing) training, when I had a sudden epiphany. In less than two months I would no longer be a “boot” Marine that had never stepped foot on the soil of a hot combat zone, nor would I be training anymore.

I remembered the stories my seniors told me about Iraq, about Fallujah, Ar Ramadi, Haditha, and I remembered the news clippings, and other intelligence reported

Blanchard/Warfighter

about insurgent operations in and around Haditha. We will leave out all of the specifics, but it is safe to say in 2004, when the U.S. decided to unleash a biblical destruction on Fallujah – known as Operation Phantom Furry, what many regard as the last great battle of Iraq.

Fallujah was largely regarded as the greatest hub of insurgent activity; a place far too dense in insurgent operations and sympathy to sweep through executing traditional operations without extreme casualties and likely mission failure. The U.S. decided to act by utilizing PysOpps (psychological operations) in-which Human Intelligence Teams (HITs) would warn the inhabitants of the city weeks out that on “day-X”, the U.S. would kill every military aged male (MAM) in the city, and that if you are not an insurgent, leave now and take up safety in the refuge camp system that had been established outside of the cities borders. The idea was the good people could leave and have our protection and shelter, and the bad guys had to stay there, to eventually be exterminated. Proceeding the destruction, the U.S. would seek to re-build the city and grant property and newly constructed buildings to the original, and “good” inhabitants after taking out all of the bad guys. Obviously, this process would take some time, and finances - our taxes.

The U.S. prepared for Operation Phantom Furry by uprooting every forward deployed Marine Unit (and likely other non-Marine units) in Iraq and centralizing them outside of Fallujah as to, when “day-X” came, proceed forward and unleash the dogs of hell on that territory. *We don't mess around.*

Blanchard/Warfighter

What had happened when those units left their respective AO's (areas of operation) was that the Iraqi Police (IP's) were left to defend their territory themselves. *"This is not an issue; it's their job."* as you may think. At this stage in the war, the Iraqi Police infrastructure was at the toddler stages of development. We will skip hours of bantering and cut to the chase – they were helpless.

Haditha belonged to Saddam Hussein's tribe, the Albu Nasr. Although Saddam routinely killed and hurt many of his fellow countrymen, but not tribesman - he protected his tribe, and Haditha loved him for it (I tested this in 2007, following the news of Saddam's capture, I asked some of the IP's I was on patrol with if they were happy, and they became very upset with me and proudly displayed their coin with Saddam's three-dimensional likeness on it – I didn't speak that great of Arabic, but the point was not lost on me never-the-less. *And we bitch about Clinton.*

However, this didn't stop insurgents in Haditha from massacring the police station (of which I would soon take up post and look at the walls full of bullet holes and blood stains during my egress and degrees from post) and then rounding up every known associate of the IP's and every person they could tie to helping the infidels, like cattle, into the soccer stadium, and massacring them. This was the "wild wild west" - but maybe, a lot worse. Unlike in Clint Eastwood's films where the bandits beat people, may have raped one or two people, and sometimes shot one here and there, insurgents like to send a message, with no regard for sex, race, creed, age, capacity, or anything else. They will rape, beat, defame, mutilate and kill every infidel with no prejudice in their bullets or blades (often dull) - babies, elderly, males and females.

Blanchard/Warfighter

You must understand that the majority of territory in this war has always been, and will forever be mental. *Fear* elicits many behaviors, and controls people. The mightier fist that controls the fears of the people controls the land. This is the battle the U.S. must fight, to instill that aforementioned fear in the enemy and instill confidence and poise in the inhabitants with regards to our muscle and faculty to protect and lawfully define the land. I say lawfully chuckling, because its our American ideals of law that we abide by, something obsolete, at best, to these people.

Haditha was a blood bath at some point. And in our unit's "in-country briefing" the weeks before we deployed, we would find out that insurgent activity there had still not been curved, and the unit that we were to directly replace had sustained several KIA.

Trainings over now: time for real bullets and real bombs, from really pissed off mother-fuckers.

2-5: Proposal

I was on radio watch in the middle of the night when I had this epiphany. I asked a friend (who I would deploy, patrol on foot around Haditha for months bullshit around with often, and also stand months of post with - that would later become a deserter and likely land in Mexico after deployment) to let me borrow his cell phone. I called up my best friend, the only friend I really had from my teenage years before the Corps, and explained my feelings, and proposed to her over the phone that night. She said yes immediately. And laughed that I felt the need to explain myself so much. Of course I loved her. But that wasn't the point.

Blanchard/Warfighter

If you were to ask me then why I did this, I would of told you because it was natural for me; it seemed like the next logical and emotional step for me to take. I did love her, albeit love has many forms and densities.

In hindsight, I would tell you it is because I didn't have time to "fuck around" and wait for my butterflies to tell me this is the right step. I was 19, and I didn't know if I was going to have a pulse in two months, let alone my leg, or even my dick. I didn't know if a woman would want me a year from now, let alone accept me or love me. And in some small remote sector of my war cluttered mind, I wanted to go about my day in Iraq knowing I had something back home that knew what I was, who I was, and was waiting for me. War is a lonely venture, and to go about it with no love in your heart would be exponentially lonelier. She was a form of armor.

I suppose, when you believe you're about to look down the barrel of another man's weapon, you change your tone in life. Ask a young Marine. Many will tell you, and attest that they themselves may be guilty of this, that many of us proposed, or got our girl pregnant. God knows I had my thoughts about trying to get her here and pregnant before I left, so if I didn't come back with a pulse, I left behind my seed to carry-on what I was, what I may never have become.

I was raised in a very religious family, belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ("Mormon") – I was raised Christian. I have steadfast beliefs in marriage, in love, and sex, and none of these hastened notions was subjected to the same timeline I would have expected of myself a year before I proposed. All of that would have been thrown out the window with the intent of preserving my DNA. It's a simple

Blanchard/Warfighter

logic of preservation, and has shit to do with morality – the possession of or lacking thereof.

War changes a man, even before he sees it, and for a long time after - probably, for ever after.

The internal realization with every molecule of your body that you may very well meet your destruction in a matter of seconds parallel to every single aforementioned molecule weighing the consequences of every action and outcome you can conjure in a split second and clicking the safety off on your weapon system, knowing your about to do whatever it takes in the next few seconds - well, that changes every molecule of your body, and soul. You just made the choice to die if needed, and to more likely violently kill one, two, or twelve people - whatever it takes.

The last I recall, it wasn't as high octane or glamorous as it looks in the movies I see.

During my brief Christmas leave block, I told my family, and arranged for my Fiancé to fly here, and on January 4th, 2007, I wed her in a small ceremony on some private property overlooking Kailua bay, the south face of the Marine Corps Base I was stationed at. My family came to visit and participate, and then began the logistical matters of ensuring she was taken care of while I was deployed. For a new couple, not too much time was really spent “together” as much as it was spent organizing, planning, moving, and packing.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Our real time spent together as a new couple would have to wait eight months until I was back from my deployment. But we will get to *that* in due time.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Chapter 3: War

3-1: Orchestra of Death

Once I set up a joint banking account, secured a small studio apartment in Kaneohe or my new bride to live in while I was deployed, and otherwise locked-in any other administrative responsibilities I had, I flew with Bravo Company 1/3 to Las Angeles International Airport the first week of February 2007 and boarded some old military buses headed for MCAGCC, Twenty Nine Palms, CA for a month of Combined Arms Exercises (CAX). This was the month long training packaged designed to test and therefor quantify (and validate) my units last six months of combined combat training, as to certify us ready for combat operations in the months ahead. Upon successful completion of the package, MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) would give us the “go” order for our scheduled seven month deployment.

It is here that we would have our aforementioned “in country” briefing giving us the situation report (sit-rep) for the unit we were tasked with replacing, and the op-tempo (operational tempo) they were currently holding to. One that we would nearly double

Blanchard/Warfighter

very soon. I will sum it up. The shit was still hot. And we were “boots-on-deck” in less than two weeks.

Once my platoon was housed and had been oriented to the camp, the PX (post exchange), and our training schedule, I played games with my assigned gear. Packing, and unpacking, displaying it all out on a camouflaged tarp ready for inspection by my direct supervisor, a Sergeant that had deployed with this same unit in Afghanistan. The games never stopped. In fact, the games never stopped the entire time I was a boot. I did have one advantage over other Marines there. I was mainly controlled by one direct Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), as opposed to multiple. And he was often too lazy to really fuck with me, except when he had eyes on him, or I messed up. But to his credit, he did do a decent job, most of the time, of shielding me from some of the more stupid bullshit the grunt NCO’s would have rather had me do. With my down time, I did a lot of writing in a notebook, or I played a racing game on my Playstation Portable.

This is how I would realize most of the combat Marine Corps operated when in the field and on down time. Magazines, portable video games, and of course music from our iPods. I would enjoy this kind of time between bullshit boot games and infrequent unit organization for a short period.

I spent weeks practicing call-for-fire (the practice of a Forward Observer “FO” making a call over *my* communications radio to the Fire Direction Control (“FDC”) and essentially ordering a pizza - except this pizza was a made-to-order delivery of explosive artillery rounds on a designed enemy target). I would have classes in air conditioned buildings and lecture halls with junior and senior enlisted and commissioned Marines and

Blanchard/Warfighter

a few Navy fellows regarding munitions, the technology we used, and different types of fire missions and running through drill after drill of multi-level scenarios combining close air support (CAS), artillery, and naval guns (cannons mounted on naval vessels firing inland to our designed targets). We were now playing in a game that was designed to play out like an orchestra of death. Suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) missions were highly choreographed multi-teared operations of fighter jets neutralizing surface to air (SAM) missile locations with other fighter jets swooping in moments after to deliver the final series of explosive blows to the enemy AO.

In most combat scenarios in the Marine Corps, the devil *is* in the details, but most especially in these war games. We would learn to “deconflict by time” or “deconflict by space” in which we would think of the battle field in a three-dimensional physical realm, and also add in the dimension of time to offset the presence of one air asset from being destroyed by or nullifying the effects of a fellow air asset by being seconds off behind or in front of another asset, or being at a different elevation cleared to execute a given objective.

The end result was always impressive, and entertaining. It truly was an orchestra of death.

Although I would never execute any SEAD or CAS missions in combat, or even actually Call For Fire in combat, I had the most fun practicing radio technique and language, with the added luxury of watching real fighter jets exercise with us in the dead lands of the Mojave desert. I had the experience of watching a live missile slice through the air very close over my head when a machine used to laze a target wasn't seated

Blanchard/Warfighter

properly and the laser was shot too low. But only once. That was enough. I thanked God for days that higher didn't ask too many questions about that incident.

The majority of my time in CAX was spent memorizing "nine lines" - orders sent over the radio in such a way as to keep our position reasonably secure from enemy triangulation, while quickly and effectively sending over information regarding casualties. I can say I was blessed to never make the real call in combat. There was an injury while training where I did make a legitimate "cas-evac" call, but no lives were at stake.

None-the-less, my ability to rapidly and tactically establish communications and send over the required information for immediate evacuation were essential not only to mission success but to maintaining lives. To this day I have notebooks full of trial reports and notes aiding me in memorizing every potential element and stage of the nine-line.

If you were to ask me now to become proficient in this task, I could be so in less than day. And my training was more than adequate to assure me I would have no hesitation to successfully and timely execute a nine-line in combat. But I have often wondered how well I would do when combat was still in full swing happening around me. Although I would end up being a grunt, my primary duty was not to directly engage in combat, even when I am directly engaged. I must establish communications and under fire, execute procedures to provide sit-reps, cas-evac request, and other pertinent information in real time in order to protect us, our interests, and have response teams on the move ("oscar mike" - the phonetic abbreviation) route to our pos (position) as quick as possible. This was absolutely pertinent to our survival if shit ever did "hit the fan".

Blanchard/Warfighter

As a born fighter, and a man that entered the Corps asking for combat, I had to trust the other Marines around me to defend me while I take care of making a phone call.

That was a concept that was always a bit of a burden. I had to mentally prepare myself for this.

I began practicing holding my weapon system with one hand and “firing at the hip” while making a radio transmission. If I couldn't provide point accurate fire at an enemy combatant, I would at least present a hostile, and hard target, and if nothing else, provide covering or grazing fire while I made the calls.

Pretty soon, the drills and all the other exhausting bullshit of dealing with games designed to harden me, I would go home on leave for a week to see my wife, before flying to Iraq.

To be honest, I don't remember much about my week of life left before combat. I remember the tension of bills, a 20 year old wife scared shitless about what was about to happen, let alone how she would live in a foreign land with no friends or family to be there for her. Between the finances, and the excessive amount of pre-combat sex, my mind just wasn't there on that island with her. My mind was already on deck in our AO. Now I feel sorry for the poor girl. She probably thought a machine came back home, not her husband. *So much for my staying the same.* It had barely just begun.

3-2: Welcome to Iraq

Blanchard/Warfighter

I boarded a very large plane chartered elusively for 300 plus Marines, in Marine Pattern (Mar-Pat) Desert Digital camouflage utilities, with primary weapons systems in hand, on March 18th 2007. This sight may have been shocking to most onlookers to see a few hundred Marines walking through Honolulu International Airport with assault rifles, handguns, and machine guns in tow, like it's an everyday occurrence. I often wondered what vacationing tourists thought of this. But even still, I wasn't exempt from being partially strip-searched.

To this day I often set off metal detectors, and the poor man or lady responsible for searching and scanning me them selves has to deal with me. I remember cracking what I thought was a joke about "It's the shrapnel" to a young asian lady, who appeared very alarmed, headed home in my civilian attire (civies) on leave. To my knowledge, I don't have any shrapnel in me, but it seems a lighthearted way to ease a troublesome situation - none-the-less, she stopped wand-scanning me and let me proceed as I was intending, albeit a bit startled.

The Marine Corps likes to float around the oceans on Naval vessels as security during peace time operations. Marines get the chore of docking with the Navy at exotic ports all over the world. My seniors have told me storries of docking in austrailia, where the men treat the women so harshly, that hundreds of women line up on the docks and throw tennis balls with their information taped to them to try and snatch a U.S. military man.

Blanchard/Warfighter

Well, we aren't that lucky during war. We cut to the chase, forego any Naval adventures for seeking out exotic lands and women, and board large world class jet liners to take us straight to war.

Transporting an entire unit of Marines to a war zone may very well be one of the most intricate and vital logistical operations any given Marine unit ever undertakes. It is no small feat to transport an entire battalion of young Devil Dogs, along with all issues gear and weapons on-body to the air port, board a plane, and make a few lay overs in other countries before landing in at Kuwait International Airport, to then transport to a large military base and stand by for military transport across the border into a war zone.

There are a dozen, if not more stages, and at every stage, every head, every rifle, and every piece of serialized gear (weapons, weapons attachments, small communications equipment), must be counted at every step of the way. And to the individual Marine being transported, he or she must account for all of their own smaller pieces of issued gear, as life will quickly become hell if something is lost.

The United States Army is significantly larger than the United State Marine Corps. While I was active duty, it was said that the Army had more active duty female soldiers than the Marine corps even had active duty Marines, of either gender. Our portions of the defense budget are similarly prepared - the Marine Corps is poor. Marines "do more, with less". That means we don't get to lose stuff, we don't get what ever we want, and we don't get to maintain and fix everything we want either. Marines just make it happen. Losing a single item of gear is quite serious, regardless of its use, size, price, or

Blanchard/Warfighter

any other facet of its existing. Most Marines suffer inventory loss either in transport to war, or transport back from war.

In a combat culture where brining any excess attention to self is usually a very negative thing, keeping direct inventory over your gear is extremely important, and the accountability is felt up the chain of command. And when one Marine is somehow “unsat” (unsatisfactory), his supervisors will also deal with the questioning and chastising.

This is such a problem because, even at the smallest levels, loss of gear jeopardizing mission accomplishment and the combat effectiveness of the individual Marine, thus affecting the combat effectiveness of the entire unit. Loss of gear at a larger level can, and has, been grounds for demotion, relief of command duties, and even career blocking actions preventing senior officers from being promoted on time, or even ever again.

Once every Marine has loaded their two green 80 pound sea bags on the luggage train, they board the plane with laptop bags and weapons system in lap, the head count is made, and then Marines are free to store their personal belongings, with weapons laid in a certain fashion on the floor. Now it is important to note that we never receive our munitions allotment until we are in Kuwait about to cross the border.

You would think a jumbo-jet full of camouflaged and armed Marines on a plane flight across the world would be ready to put their headphones in and sleep - some do, but most start bullshiting rants and raves about anything from girlfriends, video games, and

Blanchard/Warfighter

who's going to kill what dirty hajie bastard first (Hajie being the often negatively used slang for an insurgent, but the literal title refers to any islamic person who has made the trek, or Haj, to Mecca, which is actually a respectful tittle). Occasionally, we spent our time trying to persuade our selves that any one of the attractive young to middle-aged female flight attendants gave a shit about us. The fact is, for me, I was so amped up knowing I was making my final trip to the first war I had ever partook in, and frankly didn't know what was in store for me.

The thought that the faces, sounds, and smells I was experiencing now could be some of the last I see of these Marines. The mouthy mexican SAW gunner with his hair just barely under Marine Corps regulation across from me bantering about how much of a bad-ass he was, and all of his homies back home in South Central, with that cocky young arrogant smirk and white teeth, may be laying in the dirt with half his body blown to shit in a matter of days. So I suppose this was a bit of an apprehensive, surreal moment in time that I tried to appreciate, and not sleep through. I hope that some nervous Marine around me saw this tan headed Devil Dog with almost no hair on his head whose barely in Marine Corps regulations him self, listing to his iPod, or writing, and appreciated me with thoughts of my dirty torn corpse in the near future too. Maybe, maybe not.

More truthfully so, I began imagineing everybody I knew, and all of their personality traits - or deficients - with a blank stare of a lifeless corpse. Maybe this sounds morbid - and it is - and maybe it sounds like I need to go see a shrink - and I do, and have - but I was trying to armor myself, to tighten down the hatches, and mentally prepare

Blanchard/Warfighter

myself to make sure the only lifeless corpse I was going to see was the other guy. I am sure he had some of the same thoughts at some trivial point in his combatant life, too.

Me? Fuck no. I got a little girl at home that I need to watch grow up. I got a wife to return to, and I have my own babies to make. No, not me. It will be you. It'll be everyone of you that tries, so help me God.

I, too, masked my apprehension and suspicions by dreaming up ideas that the stewardess were some how remotely interested in me - young, tan, Marine #34508, while listening to my music and trying to avoid menial conversation about magazines, women, and video games. I wasn't very successful. I knew the gears inside of my heart and my veins were tightening up, I kept staring at my rifle on the ground feeling a more intense connection to it then I did in training. Less of an administrative task to wield it and maintain it, and more like it was my fucking arm. I would need it, it would need me, for both of us to survive.

It wouldn't be long until we touched down in Germany for a few hours, allowing the plane to refuel, and restock supplies. I remember wasting time trying to connect to internet on my laptop, and watching some German music videos in the large terminal desolate of any life other than hundreds of war-bound young American Marines.

The terminal was modernly styled, quite (albeit the battalion of Marines) with clean white and silver architecture, rounded steel corners, and a lot of glass. A starkly opposing atmosphere to and sound to what I imagined was awaiting us. I remember using the restroom mostly because I thought I should enjoy these civilized facets of a non war-

Blanchard/Warfighter

torn society while I still could. Juxtaposed to the thoughts racing through my head and the slight anxiety I had of where I was headed, I took my time here, moved slowly, and tried very hard to enjoy what may be my last moments of relative peace; certainly for a while, and possibly, ever.

Eventually the civilized and non-exuberant peace ended as we all got up and made our way to the quadruple glass revolving doors and piled onto the long taxi styled terminal buss, headed out to the tarmac to single file into the airplane. There were two entrances with very tall steel stair cases on wheels. I loaded in the rear hatch, and took accountability of my weapon system and components, and resumed my cocooned long-term seating position. By this time, it was mid day in Germany, and as we took off, I gandered over the green landscape and long highways hoping the next time I ever make it back to this country will be when I am headed home, not in either a body bag, or with half my body so fucked-up from combat that they needed to med-evac me to Germany's military hospitals just to keep me alive.

The Marine Corps really dont have a presence in Germany, its mostly Army. And I had known other Marines, friends whos injuries were so severe that the facilities we had in-country were inadequate.

One of my friends growing up, a year older than I, and also a fellow Eagl Scout, enlisted prior to my enlistment, and was already in Iraq by the time I made it to basic training. I remember clearly sitting in a small restaraunt booth the day I graduated basic training with my mother telling me he was shot in the head. I wasn't moved, I sat rather still, and I waited for her to elaborate. Even that young into the Marine Corps, I knew

Blanchard/Warfighter

things didn't just happen that simply, there was more to it. He ended up taking a sniper round underneath his kevlar helmet through his head and out below his other ear. On boot leave (the leave period following basic training graduation), I remember him telling me stories that he didn't feel it. He just remembers being knocked off the top of the vehicle, out of the .50 caliber turret and hitting the deck. From that point he remembered waking up in some type of Iraqi medical facility with locals screaming things all around him before he blacked out again. His next memory was waking up in Germany, with no clothes on, apparently presumed dead. These are thoughts that may illicit nervousness and apprehension, but in fact only seemed to illicit a stark and firm resolve. *Them, not me.*

I didn't want my next visit to this beautiful green country to be of a similar circumstance. To this day, I am grateful to say my only experience visiting Germany in the military has been this airport terminal, but I didn't know that would be the case yet.

Through out all of your training as a Marine, the Marine Corps desensitizes you, removes you and nullifies you as a person, and re-births you as a member of a severely hardened group; a tactically sound and technically proficient human being by most anyones standards, even if you only meet sub-par Marine standards. This wasn't any different for me, not at any level. I may have went in to the Marine Corps as numb as one probably could be in the first place (after all I welcomed the desensitization and further nullification of common cares, interests, and concerns), but I still needed to experience the same "dehumanization" - as some in my life would be known to call it.

Blanchard/Warfighter

But I believe the gears that may have previously shifted in such a fashion, locked firmly into a sound place on this plane. Those sounds would echo through much of the forthcoming turbulence in my young life. I doubt too many of those gears have since shifted out of place. If any. Sitting here at a table on the street outside of a hotel restaurant, I still shift my eyes at any movement in any of my peripherals - completely safe and years away from any real combat. Some things simply do not change, rather or not their viable need still lingers.

Blanchard/Warfighter

FURTHER CONTENT OMITED FOR PREVIEW

FURTHER CONTENT OMITED FOR PREVIEW

FURTHER CONTENT OMITED FOR PREVIEW

Blanchard/Warfighter

References

- 1
- 2
- 3

Blanchard/Warfighter

Glossary

PTSD - Post traumatic stress disorder