

Folks,

There are so many personalities on the camp and in the Marine Corps, that the limitations of the English language are truly realized. From the [redacted] machine gunners to the quirky intel guys, the best wordsmith would run out of ammo in this shooting gallery.

"Just quit being frickin' slobs. Clean up your doggone trash and pick up your dog's sh*t, for chrissakes."

The Company Gunny is a hallowed task in the tradition of the Marine Corps. As with traditional jobs, the task of ensuring a Company of 130 Leathernecks are fed was simple in the 1950's. Simple but annoying. There had to be at least one guy that couldn't eat pork or something. Now things have changed.

The term "Light Infantry" was always a huge misnomer. Now it is an outright lie. The weapons, ammo, and gear has improved over the last decade, becoming lighter and more durable, but the multitude of required gear has increased exponentially. Radios got cheaper and more portable, meaning everyone has to have one. Night Vision goggles are great but still have a given mass and density and when subjected to the Earth's gravitational field, they gravitate to the ground and break. Flack jackets can now stop more than just flack. They can stop sniper bullets (sometimes) but they too have mass, et cetera.

M4 carbine a small version of the M-16 assault rifle that weighs 5 lbs empty. When handed out of the tiny armory window (in the middle of the night) the folding stock and short barrel impressed me. It was handy. The old "iron sights" were replaced with a 4x power scope. Add .5 lbs. The scope is amazing and durable. When the scope inevitably breaks, the back up iron sights are bolted underneath the scope and adds .2 lbs. A small brown box was bolted to the front handguard. It has several features like a red laser, IR laser (only visible with NVGs), flash light and IR spotlight. Add .3lbs. A full mag of ammo adds a solid pound, and the "broomstick" foregrip adds another ounce or two. The result is a mean-looking weapon that can do everything but cook you dinner.

But it weighs as much as a regular M-16.

As I was inspecting my new toy, the armorer banged impatiently on the cage bars. "Here is the rest of your stuff, sir." I thought, ok, cleaning gear. A sling, perhaps? Yes, and more. NVGs, the NVG helmet mount, cleaning kit, blank ammo adapter, boresight kit, sling adapter, batteries for everything, 7 30-round magazines and a cleaning toothbrush were piled at my feet. My sweet little 5 pound rifle became a nightmare of probably-expensive gadgets to break, then lose.

Warfare (for developed nations) has changed a bit, and it is probably Bill Gate's fault. Computers are not an option and do more than play solitaire. I would be nearly useless without them. I cannot imagine wandering the desert with just a radio; I'd be so out of touch! I need to coordinate, share info and complain. The company command post used to be a tent, some plywood, and a crate of C-Rats for chairs and tables. Now we have custom warfighting command center kits with lights, projectors and computer terminals. There is no way for a modern company to move without trucking some of the gear out.

Now the "Co GySgt" is a full-time logistician job that is bestowed on a guy that has known little more than being a grunt. Poo paper, hand sanitizer... and Marines can't just eat MREs all the time! The

thermal scope needs special batteries and the machine guns need special oil. The Company Cook has to have his set-up so that he can heat the tray meals.

Keeping Manland functional is a challenge, since it has been cobbled together over the past months, truckload by truckload. The original structures were just the mud huts. Generators came in a few months after the 1 July "invasion" (Happy Anniversary, Helmand) so that the command posts could charge radio batteries and have lights at night. The A/C units probably arrived during the winter months and more generators had to be brought in. The old genny's were not removed, so the power grid looks like an [redacted] 6 year-old's drawing of a plate of spaghetti. Plywood huts came next, followed by additional sandbag reinforcement and more air conditioners. The internet cafe and chow hall came after that, creating an additional need for more generators. The assortment of generators are of different make, model, and manufacture date. They all burn gas at different rates. No matter where you are on Manland, you can hear air conditioners winding down and someone shouting obscenities. Gunny D comes charging out of somewhere shouting "am I the only one keeping this sh*thole running? Who was supposed to fuel that generator?!?" He finds the poor sap and goes Beetle Bailey on him. Then, he wills the generator back to life via pure anger like a Voodoo priest.

The showers came early in the life of Manland. Concrete paddocks were poured and plumbed. Real doors were installed. The roof halfway covers each stall... maybe they ran out of wood halfway, but it creates a nice semi-outdoor feel. We are quite proud of our showers and I am likely to reference them again. Right now, they are not functional. The Pakistani generator died a catastrophic death and now the pump that draws water from the well is agonizingly silent. We now collect a half-dozen water bottles and make due. Gunny D is charged with the resurrection, but that involves local contractors. The anger card is played often, but to no good effect.

On the other side of camp, another Gunny is charged with a timeless and essential role. Of the 5 platoons that make a company, Weapons platoon has the most gear, guns and [redacted] machine gunners. It is his job to keep Weapons platoon running and it regularly causes him to blow a psycho fuse. Gunny L lives in my hooch along with the Lieutenants (yes {sigh} I live with Lieutenants) and he is a pretty good guy to live with. He is always happy to take my money in poker games and has a fresh sea-story ready at all times.

Our hooch, the Ponte Vedre, seems to be his sanctuary. He comes crashing in at odd hours, getting back from the toughest patrols and stinking like a dead dolphin, yet he seems to be pretty calm. He occasionally "vents" in Ponte Vedre, but not at the level he is capable. Out in the camp he does his job ensuring the Marines are behaving and upholding standards of military discipline. I saw a poor kid stacking crates of water bottles at noon. He was soaked in sweat and generally hating life. "I took my gloves off during a patrol."

I understood and I didn't; it was a pretty minor infraction but that water needed to be moved. Those gloves cost money and losing them would cause the other Gunny to go a little more insane. Gloves are also fire-proof. Gloves are also hot.

Regardless of a simple helicopter pilot's understanding of the whole thing, Gunny L knows his job. He is an expert on the multiple types of weapons and knows what it takes to keep them running. He stands watch in the command center and alternates as convoy commander for our fleet of MATVs.

Well, I have rambled enough. Hopefully, I'll have a great story about the 4th of July Cook-Off (mmm, smoked goat). I hope everyone has a great time celebrating the Independence of these United States by blowing up a small portion of it. I'll keep the fireworks to a minimum here.

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