



Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

“Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier.” — *Samuel Johnson, 1778*

Two weeks after reporting to my first unit as a brand new second lieutenant I was located in the motor pool (no doubt seeking that elusive left-handed wrench) when I was told to report to the battalion XO's office. Reviewing my recent screw-ups, I moved out smartly. Once inside the XO's office, he informed me that, as the junior second lieutenant in the battalion, it was my duty to secure enough tables and chairs to accommodate the battalion's officers and senior NCOs at the O Club for a beer call that afternoon. Relieved that I was not being reassigned as the battalion's assistant S1, I departed.

The quartering party mission took a turn for the worse at the club where I discovered several other nervous lieutenants also scrambling to secure chairs and tables. Panic and chaos ensued, but I eventually corralled the requisite number of seats and guarded them until my battalion arrived. It was a different Army, in an earlier time.

Ask departing tankers or cavalrymen what they will miss most, and right after taking APFT and urinalysis tests, they'll say the “the people and the camaraderie.” Truly, the Army's greatest asset is its people, and this one constant is what most of us will miss when we leave. Yet, I wonder if we are failing to capitalize on this dynamic in the battle to retain young officers and NCOs?

“**Army Officers Say They're Not Having Fun Anymore**” screams a headline from the *Washington Times* (25 Sep 00). The Rowan Scarborough column cited a report by a study group for the Army Training and Leader Development Panel, which polled over 3,000 officers. The survey notes that well over 70 percent of surveyed lieutenants, captains, and colonels agreed with the statement, “I am not having fun anymore.” Granted, “having fun” is not our *raison d'etre*, but it sure makes life worth living and hardships worth enduring.

Back in “Olden Times,” prior to the deglamorization of alcohol and before “O Clubs” became what we now call “Leader's

Clubs” or “Community Clubs,” getting together for impromptu gatherings was a great deal of fun and a fairly regular event. Hail and farewells, for the most part, were also fun (I know this is hard to believe for many). Unfortunately, I fear we may have lost some of the esprit and camaraderie that made mounted warriors special, not to mention the fun. We should recapture this spirit.

No, heaven forbid, I'm not advocating the glamorization of demon rum or its consumption, but I wonder if the pendulum has swung too far in the balance between work and having fun. Informal gatherings designed to foster esprit provided most of us with a glimpse of our colleagues beyond the scope of the motor pool or weekly command “stab and jab” meetings. We got to see another side of the person who might be watching our flank.

Some will argue that we are so busy in today's rapid fire Army that when you get that rare weekend free — or any time off, for that matter — socializing at the club is the last thing you want to do. I hear you, but consider sacrificing the time needed for the sixteenth revision of the PowerPoint briefing and take the shop out for a beverage. Who knows, you might learn something about one the guys on your team.

Perhaps we can make our young officers and NCOs feel like they are part of a team rather than interchangeable cogs in a big machine. Cogs will quit the battle well before a member of a close-knit team quits.

This talk of teams allows me to segue into the beret flap. I won't get into the merits of the decision; haven't we seen enough of that? Rather, I'd like to point out that some of the comments spewed forth in this fray border on ludicrous and are totally unprofessional. Serving officers have been quoted stating that they would not want to be the first pay clerk or mechanic to wear a black beret into a Ranger bar (please note that these tough-talking officers always remain anonymous). Agree, disagree but stay professional and when the time comes — move out and draw fire.

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