



## Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

I can't mention any names — this is a professional journal, after all, and this man and his wife were friends — but I can't help noting with sadness that our Army community lost two "dinosaurs" from the old school last month. At a time when we talk about the crucial need for caring, mentoring, and top-down loyalty, this Army couple walked the walk. We will miss them.

Wherever they served, they transformed units into tight-knit family-teams. I had the good fortune to work with them, an Army couple who viewed the Army as family and who took care of family. They turned our fragmented outfit into a team through impromptu Friday gatherings at the office and socials hosted with grace and camaraderie at their quarters. They remembered and honored old Army traditions and made sure we did the same.

Our family's experience serving with them was hardly unusual, but let me be specific: They knew the names of the wives and children of the men serving in our unit. When my youngest daughter went to the hospital, they were among the first to visit. Deployments were made easier because soldiers in the unit knew they would check on our families and render help if needed. Forget a birthday while deployed? No problem; they could be counted on to make things right.

Recently, the Chief of Staff of the Army requested the opinions of our "best and brightest" field grades at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, seeking to find out why young, promising officers were leaving the Army and what they thought of the leadership climate. Within a few days, given the speed of email, some of the results were leaked and available on the web, and the results were not pretty. If one is to believe the comments at these officer sensing sessions, mentoring and top-down loyalty "does not exist

in today's Army." I winced when I read one respondent's comment, that some of the seniors he'd served with would have gladly thrown him under a bus if it would have advanced their career. Other, less pungent comments reflected the same viewpoints.

Given this state of affairs, bidding farewell to a soldier and his spouse who set the standard in mentoring, caring, and loyalty is especially painful, and to make matters worse, I fear we are retiring more of these teams than we are raising.

I've been blessed with two or three great mentors in my career. It's difficult to define the qualities which comprise a great mentor, but I can tell you that the dinosaur mentioned here was frequently sought out by me and my peers for his time, experience, and counsel, and he never failed to provide. We knew he would go to bat for us, accompanying subordinates to butt-chewings from flag officers instead of invoking the ritual distancing dance. This mentor could also supply legendary butt-chewings when the situation demanded, though recipients of the onslaught understood when the storm subsided no grudges would be held. We respected this leader for his technical and

tactical proficiency, willingness to lead by example, and keen sense of humor (sadly, a vanishing trait). As good as this soldier was, his wife was truly the better half. A consummate team player and joy to be around, she will be missed by all those who served with her.

Those of us and our families fortunate to know and serve with this soldier and his wife will miss them and their tremendous spirit. So, to this Army team and teams like them who depart the Army every month, thank you. And for those of us who remain, it's time to step up and fill the void.

— D2



Photo by Robert L. Stevenson

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