



Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

"Anybody can sympathize with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature... to sympathize with a friend's success." — Oscar Wilde

July is here, and with its heat comes another list of majors who are to move on to lieutenant colonel (Congrats). This list marks my seventh or eighth look and final opportunity. While I resist the urge to purchase champagne, I anxiously await the list's arrival with crossed fingers for some combat buddies whose chances are significantly better than mine.

I won't use this forum or release of a promotion board's results to rant and rave about the injustices of the OER system, promotion boards, or PERSCOM. Quite frankly, I was pleasantly surprised to attain the rank of major and thoughts of a subsequent promotion caused me to think of an old quote by Groucho Marx along the lines of not wanting to join any club that would have him as a member. Rather, I'd like to point out that, sooner or later, no matter who you are or what heights you scale, the Army is going to tell you, "Thanks very much." One of my previous pass-overs occurred roughly when GEN Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe/Commander-in-Chief U.S. European Command, and the last American general to wage war, was invited to step down early to accommodate his successor's arrival. Sure, all of us feel that we should have made this rank, commanded at this level, or attained this job; it's the nature of the beast, and reflects the traits of the people we want in the Army. However, the cruel reality is that few of us will reach the rank, command, or job we believe we should, and this fact should not be viewed as abject failure (easier preached than accomplished).

Blinding flashes of the obvious gleaned from my experience include:

"There's a big difference between having a career and having a life. Be sure not to confuse the two," said Barbara Bush, speaking at Wake Forest's 2001 commencement. I recall my own day of infamy, that being the year in which I had vested the most hope in getting selected for promotion to LTC. Once the results were out, I dreaded going home and telling my wife that I was not selected. Fortunately, I was met outside the stairwell by running hugs delivered by two of my children (apparently, it did not matter to them that I had been not been selected for promotion). This spurred an epiphany — my life had not ended. One's career is important, but a better gauge of worth is one's performance as a parent or spouse. I'll set a good example for my kids, working hard in a noble profession, but raising them to be worthy adults takes precedence.

Ride hard and enjoy the ride all the way to the objective. Life ain't always fair; get over it! Many take the disappointment hard, slipping into a "woe is me" self-pity or bitterly angry mode. They let these sentiments impact both their performance and remaining time in the Army. Don't define success by a job title; define success by doing your job well.

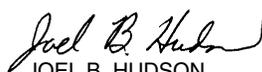
July also marks many **changes of command.** I'd like to remind speakers now diligently drafting and polishing speeches that Abraham Lincoln used a mere 267 words and little over two minutes to deliver the Gettysburg Address, not a bad benchmark. So if you find yourself stammering away past the 10-minute threshold and see soldiers in formation with eyes glazing over, wrap it up. People rarely complain about a short speech.

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