

MEMORIAL DAY

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My name is Lane Welborn, I am an intern at Avenel Financial Group and Co/Investor Club. I am currently a student veteran and senior finance major at Coastal Carolina University. This paper is about Memorial Day and why we remember those fallen and the ones who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Whether it be from external combat or combat within the mind, we should remember and acknowledge these brave men and women.

My story is to give background and texture as to who I am and the experiences I had while serving. It is intended to be insightful, but not to detract from the real message; Memorial Day. Let us take note to the true meaning of Memorial Day and never forget that we live in the land of the free and home of the brave

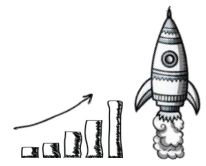
I grew up in Muscle Shoals, a medium-sized town in northwest Alabama. You may have heard of it in the song “Sweet Home Alabama,” and there is not much to it. Sports, specifically football and baseball, were always in my life from the time I could walk until the day I graduated high school. I had every intention to go on and play baseball at the collegiate level, but half of me also wanted to join the armed forces. Just like with sports, I had the desire to do something great with my life. The military to me was one of the most selfless, courageous things one could do.

My older brother served in the Marine Corps. He was someone I always looked up to. I knew that what he was doing in the Marines, I also wanted to do. He was in a sniper platoon and it sounded badass. Going into my junior year, I knew that serving my country was the path I was going to embark on. So, with permission of my parents, I signed the dotted line and swore in before I even graduated high school. Two days after graduation I was on a bus heading for Marine Corps Recruit depot, Paris Island.

Paris Island is where every enlisted Marine starts their journey. It is where you are stripped of any individualism and entitlement to learn the importance of teamwork and working as a collective whole. Paris Island is known throughout the world as one of the toughest military boot camps to date. After experiencing it first hand, I can say with some degree of certainty that this statement is true. For the next 13 weeks, my world was completely flipped upside down. Nobody can prepare you for the amount of screaming, running, exhaustion and mental strain experienced at Paris Island. I arrived in June and spent my entire summer in the South Carolina heat. To say it was hot would be an understatement.



During my time there, I met some of the most unique and interesting people I have had the pleasure of knowing. The people I met came from all walks of life. We were all at Paris Island because we believed in something bigger than



ourselves and wanted to serve our country. This was the theme throughout my military career. For me, bootcamp was a blur. It is hard to remember the specifics now as time has passed. Some things that bootcamp instilled in me were the importance of teamwork, respect of authority, and hard work with strong discipline. I left Paris Island knowing that I had accomplished something that very few people would. To me, that was a huge milestone and something I would have forever. As everybody knows, this is only the beginning of all military careers. The bulk of my experiences had yet to occur.

My military occupation specialty, abbreviated (MOS), was essentially my job. I had an infantry contract which meant I would be assigned an infantry unit upon graduation from advanced infantry school. These units are the tip of the spear in any conventional military operation and are the first to arrive in an area of conflict. My assigned school was located at Camp Geiger, which is a small section of the New River Air Station in North Carolina. There, I spent two months learning how to be an infantryman and the details of being an effective mortarman. This was a hands-on training environment where I learned my trade in the military. The training was hard but not impossible. Again, I met wonderful people and built many relationships during the time spent at Camp Geiger.

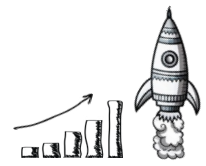
The hardest part that I can remember about advanced infantry school was the 20-mile hike to graduate. It was a brutal hike that had us mortar men carrying mortar tubes that weighed approximately 35 pounds on our backs in addition to the already heavy backpack and rifles. The hikes were tough and were meant to weed out people that would not be able to make it in the infantry. These type of training events in the military are more of character builders designed to test your internal drive and will power. At the time you are doing it, you are miserable and beaten down. You are pushed to limits until you just think you cannot go any further. Then you realize you can and push through to persevere.

Upon completion I was assigned my first real duty station, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, NC. The day I arrived has to go down as one of the scariest times of my life. If anyone has watched Jarhead with Jake Gyllenhaal you can gain a better picture of what I am referring to, minus the branding part using hot metal. Essentially, the new graduates from AIS are dropped off in front of the unit barracks and are assigned a room and company within the unit. I was assigned to a 60mm mortar company and it was hell my first month there. Take in mind that my unit had just returned back from Afghanistan and were hardened by war. These men, and I mean all men, because no women were allowed to serve in the infantry at this time, were hardcore and extremely intimidating. They were ready to break in the new guys and I knew I was in for a rough time.

The Marine Corps promotes a no hazing policy, but this did not matter, as this was a rite of passage, and all new Marines in the infantry must endure hazing to some extent. It was a short time for me in this uncomfortable situation, though, because I had a plan to get out of the line company and into what I really wanted to do. That was become a Marine Corps scout sniper.

I knew first I had to complete an indoctrination, or indoc for short, to be in a sniper platoon. These indocs are a process for which you are evaluated and tested to see if you have what it takes to serve in a sniper platoon for the battalion. This was single handedly the most agonizing and miserable week I had ever encountered in my military experience. It was a test of strength, endurance, mental fortitude, and the ability to work as a team. The week was full of simple but not easy tasks that seemed pointless. The tasks were nothing more than to keep us awake for extended periods of time. Cold, wet, and hungry were normal for this week and I had to push past a serious level of discomfort. The chafing, sore feet, and exhaustion were unlike anything my 19-year-old body had ever endured. I was not the strongest, fastest, or smartest; but I had a heart and desire to be there. I wanted this more than anything and I knew that as long as I did not quit, I would at least have a chance to get into this elite community.

In retrospect, I think this was the single most important aspect I got out of my service. Dealing with adversity and discomfort and continuing to push through to achieve a desired outcome is something I now apply to any challenge in my life. Many people did in fact quit and there were probably only 20 guys left out of the 40 that started. I was one of those 20 that made it to the final decision. Out of the 20, only 8 were chosen to become PIGS, which stands for



professionally instructed gunmen. I was one of the 8 and had done what I set out to do. I was now a member of a Marine Corps scout sniper platoon.

During my time in this unit's scout sniper platoon, I gained amazing training and experienced—some truly incredible things. I was able to hone my skills in shooting, as well as stalking in ghillie suits and land navigation. All of this was to prepare me for scout sniper school, which was the official school to becoming a HOG (hunter of gunmen). I was reassigned units after about 6 months at my first duty station. 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Division was my next unit at Camp Lejeune. I simply just transitioned to the scout sniper platoon there and continued training and preparing for sniper school.

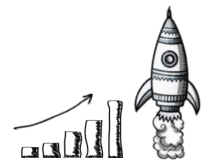
Although I eventually had a chance at sniper school, I was unable to complete the training and failed a land navigation iteration within the first two weeks. This was a huge upset in my life that led to becoming very depressed. All I had worked for up to this point was to get a chance at sniper school and I let myself down. To this day the thought stings, knowing that I was so close to getting the designation of Marine Corps scout sniper. However, I moved on from the experience stronger and more knowledgeable than I was when came in. I also accomplished something that very few people had ever done and this was enough for me.

After my time in the sniper platoon, I went back to my occupation as a mortarman in now an 81mm mortar platoon. I was now in a weapons company where I had my first deployment. By this time, I had a fiancé and was getting ready to deploy. This was a stressful time in our lives and I thank her for the support during my time on deployments. This first deployment was a Marine Expeditionary Unit or MEU. This is essentially a boat ride where Marines are taxied around by the U.S. Navy. We spent much of the deployment on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya.

We were part of what is now known as Operation Odyssey Lightning, an effort to free Libya from ISIL control by using air to ground operations. Jets took off day and night lighting up the coast with vicious missile strikes and it was quite an experience to be a part of. Since we could not shoot mortars from a ship, we as a platoon were tasked as a TRAP (tactical recovery of air personnel) response team for half the deployment. It was a job that you hope you never have to do, and luckily, we never did. It was to go into enemy territory and find pilots that were shot down while conducting operations. Our role was to find them and bring them back to the ship. The campaign was successful as there were a total of 495 airstrikes on enemy territory. We spent over 120 days at sea and for our efforts were rewarded with a few liberty ports. We got a chance to offload in Spain and Greece for some down time. A chance to de-load and explore the area was a huge morale booster. It was great to see places outside the U.S. for the first time and obtain an understanding of how the world perceives American military forces in their homeland.

Fast-forward to my second and last deployment, I was now in a different unit once again, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines. This was a Black Sea deployment and we were sent to a base in Romania. The goal of this deployment was to be present in the area and train alongside other NATO forces that are allies with the U.S. We conducted training exercises with nations such as: Greece, Canada, Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia to name a few. It was great to work alongside these militaries and get to know some of their troops on a personal level. I still keep in touch with several Canadian military guys to this day. It is a strong bond you build with individuals in the military. I think mostly due to the hardships and trials each person goes through. You have to rely on the people around you to get the mission done and to safely return home to your family.

During my second deployment, I had a baby on the way and would not be able to be there for the birth. She would be 4 months old before I got a chance to hold her. This deployment was tough due to this and I thank my wife often for sticking by my side and supporting me through my military career. I know it was not easy for her, and being able to stay strong through a time like that had of been challenging. This is what ultimately led me to leaving the military in 2018 and pursuing a college degree. I did not want to spend extended periods of time away anymore. Both of my deployments were around 6-7 months and I missed out on a lot—although this is what you sign up for and have to accept when you join the service. Men and women still continue to hold the line and serve this country on these type of



deployments and it is important to keep them in our thoughts for their service and sacrifice. Now, after learning about my background and experiences in the Marines, I want to pivot and conclude with the real purpose of this writing, which is Memorial Day.

I was fortunate in my military experience to not have to endure hard, sustained warfare with either enemy fighters or the tougher enemy, the mind. For others, it was not the same. Whether it be the trench warfare in WWI, the intense fighting of WWII, the jungles of Vietnam, the frozen South Korean landscape, the mountains of Afghanistan, or the streets of Iraq. Many gave the ultimate sacrifice for this country and for that we are able to remain free and live in a country where we have liberties to live life how we see fit.

Although most deaths in the military are contributed to the actual battlefield, the mind is powerful and is a battlefield of its own for many veterans. The weight of their actions and sights they have witnessed can overload the mind with grief and depression. Coping with such tragedy can sometimes be too difficult to bear. Veteran suicide is a real causality of war and is something that should be addressed as such. I personally know people who have taken their life because of their experiences in the military. Some struggle to fit in society and decide there is no point of living, and end their life short. It is our duty as Americans to come together and remember the service and effort of these men and women. We must never forget the courage displayed. They would leave their families behind because they chose to defend the flag unselfishly and that is what this nation stands for.

Memorial Day is so much more than a day off of work for a barbeque. It is not a time to take advantage of great sales and shopping. It is a time to stop and reflect. It is a time to remember where we live and what we have because of the acts of others. Our freedoms come at a cost, lives are taken and sacrifices are made to ensure our land stays free. This Memorial Day, please take the time to remember what this day is about and the price paid at the expense of our freedom.

