

## Military service builds character

By Bill Shaw

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The photo you see in my column today is 50 years old. As I make my run this morning, the strains of the “Marines Hymn” will echo through my head on this 233rd birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. Throughout the world, Marines will celebrate the occasion.

I attribute my physical fitness discipline, in part, to my time in the Marines. I also learned teamwork, racial tolerance and brotherhood.

I joined the Marine Reserve unit in Shreveport, La., at 17 with the permission of my parents just before I began my senior year in high school in 1956. Then, my peers and I had the military draft to face. The Marines took only volunteers. I planned on going on active duty after I finished college.

Like many of the 18-year-old college freshmen I taught at Brazosport College, I was immature and unprepared for the self-discipline required to be successful in college. I flunked out of college after three months. With seemingly no future, I exercised my option to go to boot camp and

active duty in the Marines.

In boot camp, we ran everywhere. We ran to get in shape. We were required to study our guide books. We were tested in the classroom and on the obstacle course. We learned teamwork and respect for our fellow recruits. As a southerner from the segregated



South, I had never been around African-Americans. The Marine Corps was integrated. Black youngsters were in my platoon, and many drill instructors were black. I learned to live with Hispanics and youngsters from all over America. I learned racial and ethnic tolerance, something I might not have learned otherwise.

In the three months of boot camp and the following six weeks of individual combat training that every Marine must complete no matter what his assignment, troop leaders stressed physical fitness, personal discipline and teamwork.

When I finished my tour of active duty, I returned to civilian life a man rather than a boy. I went to work as a truck driver and warehouse roustabout with a second job as a grocery clerk and began college again and finished my degree.

In my 30s, I fell victim to a self-destructive lifestyle. I dug deep to resurrect the discipline and a physical fitness reg-

imen taught in the Marines, still there after 20 years.

What our American youth need in this era of morbid obesity and addiction to the computer and video games is something to snap them out of their self-destructive lifestyles. I believe in universal military or community service for every able American, male and female. Many of our younger people have little respect for our country or the privileges they have as Americans. I think they all owe at least six months to their country after high school graduation to put them in better physical condition, to teach them discipline and teamwork, and to create a respect and appreciation for our country.

Such service need not interfere with their college plans. The service could be done on weekends or in one- to six-week summer camps. One of the reasons I failed in my first attempt in college is I had never been away from home on my own and had no discipline. How many youngsters do you know who have headed off to a college, failed and returned home because they did not have the discipline and maturity to handle their freedom away from home?

Happy birthday, USMC. Thanks for the discipline and maturity you gave me. Semper fi! Thanks to all our veterans, especially those who died in the defense of our country and freedom. Honor them tomorrow.

**Bill Shaw's running column appears in *The Facts* every other Monday**





