

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Marine Corps University
User's Guide to Marine Corps Values

PROFILES IN COURAGE

1. Introduction. Courage, both physical and moral, is in the heart and soul of every Marine. It is the motivating force that makes Marines special, a cut above those in society who think of themselves first. Courage is the state of mind and spirit that enables Marines to face the fear of combat with the utmost confidence, and resolution to fight unreserved for what is right.

Adhering to a personal honor code is not quite the same as being law-abiding or following regulations. An honorable Marine, for example, will truthfully admit not cleaning his or her weapon, admitting violation of regulations requiring their cleaning.

Such an admission requires moral courage. It also means that the honorable Marine can be trusted to report things accurately. This is fundamental to trust, teamwork, and success on the battlefield.

Moral courage takes many forms. It could mean remaining at one's post under extremely difficult conditions. Dr. Craig M. Cameron described instances of this in his analysis of the 1st Marine Division's combat experience. On Guadalcanal, when there were no replacements for casualties, many 1st Division Marines would not go to sick call even though they should have been in the hospital for malaria and other tropical diseases. In their view it was more important to stay and protect their fellow Marines. Going to the hospital would have been tantamount to abandoning their friends.

The distinction between moral and physical courage is usually blurred. Many times, strength of character may manifest itself as physical courage. A good example occurred during the World War I battle of Soissons. A heavy German counterattack left First Lieutenant Clifton B. Cates, later Commandant of the Marine Corps, and a handful of Marines in a dangerously exposed position. Given the size of his force, he could have ordered a withdrawal. Instead, he sent the following message to his battalion commander:

"I am in an old abandoned French trench bordering on road leading from your CP and 350 yards from an old mill. I have only two men left out of my company and 20 out of other companies. We need support but it is almost suicide to try to get it here as we are swept by machine gun fire and a constant artillery barrage is upon us. I have no one on my left and only a few on my right. I will hold."

2. Overview. The purpose of this period of introspection is to study examples of Marine courage, appreciate the sacrifices made by fellow Marines to strengthen your own courage, and in some examples, further your own warfighting expertise.

3. References

Wise, Colonel Frederick M., and Frost, Meigs O.
A Marine Tells It to You. New York, NY, J.H. Sears & Company, Inc., 1929, pp. 201-239.

Fehrenbach, T.R. This Kind of War. New York, NY, The Macmillan Company, 1963, pp. 189-197.

United States Marine Corps. Guidebook for Marines, Fourteenth Revised Edition, 1 July 1984, pp. 33-35.

4. Discussion Leader Notes. Have each seminar member read the following profiles in courage. At the completion of each reading, there will be a list of "recommended" points of discussion to assist the group in identifying and appreciating the courageous acts of the subject(s) presented.

5. Discussion.

a. World War I--From Colonel Frederick May Wise's description of Bois De Belleau (the Battle of Belleau Woods)

"Just past noon, a runner came up the road with orders from Colonel Neville. We were to proceed to the northeast edge of the woods, which were northwest of LucyleBocage, and await orders.

By two o'clock that afternoon we were under way, going across open fields. High in the air I saw several German sausages (observation balloons). I knew those woods were going to catch hell shortly. In about an hour we were newly established on their edge. This time I had the men scatter well among the trees. I warned them especially against bunching up. We settled down again to wait for orders.

Along toward ten o'clock that night the German shelling started. They gave those woods hell. The Germans were pouring everything they had into that ridge. It didn't take any urging for the Marines to get into fox holes the minute they knew we were going to hold it. But though the Germans didn't launch any infantry attack, they kept up a continuous shelling with all the artillery in range, and poured an unceasing stream of machine-gun and rifle fire against that ridge. Everywhere up and down the line, masses of earth, chunks of rock, splinters of trees, leaped into the air as the shells exploded. Machine-gun and rifle bullets thudded into the earth unendingly. That place was getting warm.

About nine o'clock that morning Colonel Feland came up behind the ridge on foot. He told me the First Battalion was just a

little on my left. But the Third, he said, had been badly cut up and the rest of it was around LucyleBocage.

Clinging to the crest of that ridge, we found the German shells bad enough. But there was worse to come. They had trench mortars in the Bois de Belleau, and presently they began to cut loose on us with them. Those aerial torpedoes, nearly four feet long, packed with T.N.T., would come sailing through the air and land on the ridge. That whole ridge literally shook every time one of them exploded.

All that day the bombardment kept up. It was the most terrific fire I had ever experienced. At night it slackened somewhat, only to resume next morning. It kept up all next day. Some gas shells fell, too, but the gas wasn't bad enough to make us put on our masks.

Why the Germans didn't attack and break through that line of ours I never will be able to understand. All that second day we took the shelling in our faces and held the line. That night, thank God, it slackened again.

But it began all over again with daybreak on the third morning. We stayed there and took it and held our fire. There was nothing in sight but trees to shoot at. That third day passed with surprisingly few casualties. It proved to me that artillery can't drive infantry out of any place if the infantry scatter and stick. The way we were scattered, the worst a shell could do was kill one man.

We settled down for the third night. Cold food and ammunition were plentiful. On the morning of the fourth day a runner came up with a message that a side car was waiting for me back at the foot of the ridge; that Brigadier General Harbord wanted to see me at brigade headquarters. I found him in a farm house several miles back.

"Wise, he said, the Sixth Marines have made two attacks on the Bois de Belleau. The first one failed. The second made a little headway on the southern edge of the woods. You're on the ground, there. You know the conditions. It's up to you to clean it up. Go ahead and make your own plans and do the job." "Very well, sir." "Do you want some artillery assistance?" he asked. "No sir," I told him. "With the small amount of artillery we have, it only warns the Germans when the attack is to take place."

I left him and took the side car over to regimental headquarters in a house at La Voie du Chatel, about halfway to the ridge. There I found Colonel Neville. I told him what orders I had received. "May I have my other company?" I asked. He said he'd order it back.

General Harbord's order had given me carte blanche. I didn't see any use following the same line of attack which had failed with the Sixth Marines, as the Germans evidently had their lines of defense worked out to receive attacks from that direction. It was common sense to hit them where they weren't looking for it.

So I determined to risk everything on the unexpected and attack them from their rear. Thus I would get in between them and their lines of support, which were along the railroad in front of the northern edge of the Bois de Belleau.

I got back to the ridge and sent for my company commanders. The Germans were still hammering us with drum fire. Captain Wass, Captain Williams, Captain Durlbeck and Lieutenant Cook presently appeared. They were red-eyed, dirty, unshaven. We sat down under a tree.

I explained to them what our mission was and how it was to be accomplished. I told them it was a hell of a risk, but that I had a hunch that if we caught the Germans in the rear of their defenses, we would have much more of a chance of succeeding than in trying to attack over ground on which two earlier efforts had not been successful. I asked for any opinions. They all agreed with me. I set zero hour at four A.M. and told them we would get ready for the attack before daybreak; that after we got to the northern edge of the woods, any German shelling would hit among the Germans as well as us, and I doubted very much if we'd be annoyed by any shell fire.

From where we sat we could see the ground where the attack was to be formed, and they'd have plenty of time to explain to the junior officers and men exactly what was to be done. The whole thing depended on getting across the Lucy-Torcy road before daybreak and making a rapid advance to the northern edge of the woods.

The First Battalion was to relieve us at midnight. I had seen Major Turrill about it personally, so that the relief would be made rapidly and without noise.

I ordered that each man, in addition to his ammunition belt carrying one hundred rounds, was to be issued two extra bandoleers, giving him one hundred and twenty rounds more.

I also designated where my P.C. would be, both at the jump off and during the attack. Both places were in plain sight. They went back to their companies. The battalion was made ready for the attack. Down to the last man in the ranks, everybody knew every detail of the plan.

All the rest of the afternoon we stuck by our fox holes while the German drum fire continued. The men showed no excitement. By now they had been through enough to qualify them as veterans.

Late that afternoon I walked over and saw Major Turrill, who was with the First Battalion about two miles over on my left. He was all set to relieve us. I also went over and saw Major John

A. Hughes, commanding the First Battalion of the Sixth Marines, who had made the last attack on the southern edge of Bois de Belleau and was still holding it. Major Hughes confirmed my idea that it was almost an impossible task to take that position by frontal attack. He told me a lot, too, about what the German defenses were. In that clump of woods covering a knoll a mile

long and a half mile wide, rising sharply from the fields that surrounded it, was an outcrop of huge boulders cut with gullies and ravines, and with underbrush so thick in it that men could pass a few feet from each other, unseen. In that tangle were machine-guns camouflaged behind brush heaps and woodpiles, back of boulders and in shell proof pits under boulders. Snipers on the ground and in the tree tops. Picked German veterans who were fighting desperately.

I went back to the ridge after my talk with him, thankful that I had a free hand and could hit them from the rear instead of having to make a frontal attack."

"Night came on. I sat there under the trees, going over all the details in my mind, waiting for four A.M. to come.

Through the dark a runner showed up, asking for me. "A message, sir," he said, when I called to him. I looked at my wrist watch. Midnight. Four hours more to wait. I unfolded the message he handed me, crouched down, and turned the light of my electric torch on the paper. I read those typewritten lines. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was an attack order.

My battalion was ordered to attack the Bois de Belleau FROM THE SOUTHERN EDGE at four o'clock that morning, behind a rolling barrage. It was signed "Harbord." I was dumfounded. All my plans were up in the air. I knew that piece of paper I held in my hand meant the needless death of most of my battalion. Some of them would have died in the attack I had planned. But now, instead of hitting the Germans from the rear, I had to take that battalion to a frontal attack against a prepared position.

I did the only thing left to do. I sent runners out and called my company commanders in again. In about an hour they came stumbling through the dark.

"The plans have been changed," I told them. "We're to make an attack starting from the southern edge, following a rolling barrage. The front assigned us to attack on is so wide that I'm going to risk putting all four companies in the front line. We won't have any supports or reserves. So it's no good sending back word for reinforcements. 'H' hour is four o'clock."

I explained to them which companies would be formed from right to left, told them the point designated as the jumping-off place, the pace of the barrage, and where my P.C. would be.

When they left I felt sick. I sent a runner off to Major Hughes, informing him of the change in plans.

I sat there thinking it over. There was nothing more to do. The order had said that Hughes battalion of the Sixth Marines would advance simultaneously with us on our right. Days later I was to learn that Major Hughes never got any such order.

About three o'clock that morning the companies began to pull out. I went on down to my new P.C. I wasn't sick any more. The attack had to be made. That was all a man could think of, then.

I stood there under some trees by a ditch on the southern edge of the Bois de Belleau, and in the growing light watched my battalion march into position. It was getting lighter every minute. Suddenly the barrage dropped, several hundred yards in front of our lines. Half a mile in front of us, cultivated fields stretched up in a gentle rise to meet the thick wall of the woods. Earth flew in air as the barrage dropped into those fields. Fifty paces ahead in the next two minutes the barrage crawled. Amid the explosions of the bursting shells we could hear the German machine guns in the woods come to life. They couldn't see us yet, but they knew from the barrage that the attack was coming."

"The barrage lifted and crawled ahead. The whistles of our platoon leaders sounded up and down the line. The battalion rose to its feet. Bayonets fixed, rifles at the ready, the men started their slow advance.

I stood there watching them go forward. The Germans could see us now. They had the range. Here and there men were dropping. But the line went steadily on. The Germans couldn't have had better targets if they had ordered the attack themselves.

The barrage kept crawling on. About two hundred and fifty yards behind it the battalion went on, men dropping, men dropping, men dropping. Yard by yard they advanced. Minutes after, I saw them disappear into the woods. Those woods seemed to have swallowed up the barrage without an effort. Now they swallowed up the battalion.

As the Marines vanished into the undergrowth beneath the trees, the German machine-gun fire slackened. The detonations of the barrage had ceased. Across those fields from the woods I could distinguish machine-gun fire, rifle fire. A sudden ripping burst of machine-gun fire would break out. That meant the Marines were advancing on a nest. It would die down. That meant the nest was taken.

Back across that open field wounded men began crawling to the rear. There was a dressing station at Lucy, about a mile away.

Company runners began to come back out of the woods with reports. Messages hastily scrawled in pencil. This objective attained. That objective attained. Heavy casualties.

Prisoners commenced to come back. Convoys of twenty, thirty, fifty Germans, herded along by some single Marine--generally a wounded one at that.

They were brought to my P.C. for questioning. From my interpreter I learned they were the Twenty-sixth Jaeger Division, veteran Alpine troops. Also that there were more than eighteen hundred Germans defending Bois de Belleau. We were attacking with about nine hundred

We cut their shoe strings and shooed them back toward Lucy! They went contentedly enough. All of them said they were damned tired of the war.

From time to time company runners kept coming out of the woods with reports of objectives gained and held, about mid-afternoon I figured it was time for me to go and take a look-see. I left Legendre at the P.C., took Coutra with me, and went over to the edge of the woods. There were paths I could follow through the undergrowth.

Just inside the edge of the woods I came upon one of those German machine-guns camouflaged behind a brush pile. Dead Marines lay in front of it. Dead Germans lay about it. A strange silence held in the woods.

I got out to the right of my line, where Captain Lloyd Williams' company had gone in. They were in fox holes on the far side of the woods. Some junior was in command. Captain Williams had been shot early in the day, I learned. He died that night. The youngster in command told me of the terrific fighting they'd had. Foot by foot they had pushed their way through the underbrush in the face of a continuous machine-gun and rifle fire. Snipers had shot them from brush piles on the ground; from perches high in the trees. Germans they had left sprawled on the ground for dead as they went on, had risen and shot them in the back.

I went on down the line. Lieutenant Cook was unwounded, but he had lost several of his juniors and a lot of his men. He told me the same story I had learned from what was left of Captain Williams' company. And more.

"Whenever we took a machine-gun nest," he said, "another one opened up on their flank. That happened many times. The second one would never fire a shot until we had taken the first. Then they opened up on us."

His outfit, too, were in fox holes and waiting for the expected German counterattack.

Farther down the line I found Captain Dunbeck and what was left of his outfit. The same story all over again.

In his line, along the edge of the woods toward Germany, the men were mounting captured German machine-guns against the expected counterattack. There was plenty of ammunition for them. They had even found baby carriages and wheelbarrows filled with it beside the guns they had captured. Several of the juniors of this outfit were gone, and the losses in men had been heavy.

Captain Dunbeck told me how Lieutenant Heiser had died. Leading an attack on a German machine-gun nest, Heiser had been literally decapitated. His head had been cut clean from his body by a stream of machine-gun bullets that caught him in the throat.

Down on the left flank I found Captain Wass. Most of his juniors were gone, and half his men. What was left of his company had dug in, too, on the German edge of the woods.

Every one of those four companies had fought its way clear through those woods, from one side to the other.

Wass told me of one of his sergeants. Leading a squad against a machine-gun nest, the old sergeant shouted back at them: "Come on, you sonsofbitches--you've lived too long!"

He told me of the difficulties they had in orienting themselves in that heavy underbrush. There were no landmarks, once you got into those woods. If you turned around twice you lost all sense of direction and only your compass could straighten you out.

"The German machine-gunners are braver than the infantry," Wass said. "But when you once get within bayonet reach of any of them, they're eager enough to surrender."

Every one of those company commanders had been through the same mill. Savage, deadly work at close range in a tangle of undergrowth.

Nothing in all our training had foreseen fighting like this. If there was any strategy in it, it was the strategy of the Red Indian. The only thing that drove those Marines through those woods in the face of such resistance as they met was their individual, elemental guts, plus the hardening of the training through which they had gone.

I passed nest after nest of German machine-guns. Out in front of every gun lay Marines where they had fallen. Around the guns themselves there weren't so very many dead Germans. They had worked their guns up to the moment the Marines got among them with the bayonet--and then they had surrendered. Most of my wounded had been worked out. Here and there through the woods stretcher bearers were searching for more. There was some little evidence of that rolling barrage under which we had advanced, in a few shell holes and splintered trees. But not much. It hadn't hurt the Germans enough to mention. But it had given them plenty of notice that we were coming.

Though everywhere I could see Marines who had been killed by machine guns and snipers, though there were plenty of dead Germans, killed by rifle fire, nowhere was there any sign that the Germans had stood face to face with Marines at close quarters and fought it out. Always when it got hot and hand to hand, they had surrendered.

But now the German artillery stepped in. They had a pretty thorough idea of our position in those woods. About ten o'clock that night they sounded off. They gave us an awful pounding. It lasted for about two hours.

It was the heaviest artillery hammering I ever took in my life. The drum fire we had stood on the ridge before we attacked the Bois de Belleau had been child's play compared to it. High explosives from those German hundred-and-fifty-fives and plenty of seventy-sevens made a hell out of that stretch of woods. Trees crashed, torn to splinters. Jagged limbs and jagged fragments of steel filled the air. The sharp stench of the high

explosive choked us and started us sneezing; irritated our noses and throats until it hurt us to breathe.

The fumes of that high explosive, heavier than air, settled down in the fox holes in which we were stretched. They drove me out of mine, choking and sneezing. I went over to the ditch by my P.C. and stretched out there. Our casualties from that shelling were fairly heavy. Those two hours in which the Germans had shelled the living hell out of us, were followed by a silence as deep as the grave.

Again the air filled with the stench of high explosives. Again it settled, like a heavy gas, in our fox holes. Again we choked and sneezed and had to get up, walk away, and stretch out somewhere else. A gas mask was no good against that penetrating stench.

The Bois de Belleau was an unforgettable sight that night. I had dozed off in the dark during a lull. The explosions of renewed shelling woke me to see the blackness rent and torn everywhere with those terrific flashes of bluish flame from the bursting shells. Silhouetted in that ghastly light I could see splintered tree trunks and twisted limbs and the black mass of the forest stretching off on both sides. Then for minutes those flashes would come so fast that it looked as if a great ragged searchlight was playing up and down in the dark, so continuous would be the illumination. And all the time the shattering impact of the bursts would hammer on your ears.

By daybreak next morning I was out on inspection again. The woods were strangely silent. I found to my amazement that the terrific barrage of the night before had done comparatively little damage to our front line. It had torn the woods just behind the line to pieces. If we'd had supports in those woods, they would have been annihilated.

At the battle's end, the sight was awesome. Two weeks' growth of beard bristled on their faces. Deep lines showed, even beneath beard and dirt. Their eyes were red around the rims, bloodshot, burnt out. They were grimed with earth. Their cartridge belts were almost empty. They were damned near exhausted. Past physical limits. Traveling on their naked nerve. But every one of them was cocky--full of fight.

I lined the men up and looked them over. It was enough to break your heart. I had left Courcelles May 31st with nine hundred and sixty-five men and twenty six officers--the best battalion I ever saw anywhere. I had taken them, raw recruits for the most. Ten months I had trained them. I had seen them grow into Marines.

Now before me stood three hundred and fifty men and six officers.

Six hundred and fifteen men and nineteen officers were gone. Some had fallen at Les Mares Farm; some in the bottleneck and on the ridge across from the Bois de Belleau. The most of them had

gone down that morning we took the woods. Dead, or in hospitals far to the rear.

For seventeen days--since May 31st--they hadn't had a cup of hot coffee or a bite of hot food. They hadn't taken off their shoes. They hadn't had a chance to wash their faces. Even drinking water had been scarce for days. The only place they had found any rest had been on the bare ground. For the last four days they had even been without their packs. They had stood days and nights of terrific shelling without a chance to hit back. Behind an inadequate barrage, they had walked into the muzzles of German machine-guns and had taken them. They had driven trained German veterans out of fortified positions by frontal attack. Most of them raw recruits less than a year before, they had walked into the fiercest kind of woods fighting in France. In the face of the military axiom that twenty-five per cent casualties justify retreat, they had sustained over sixty per cent casualties--and had gone ahead and gained their objectives. Those objectives once gained, they had never given up an inch.

They had stopped the Germans at the nearest point a German with a gun in his hand ever got to Paris after America entered the war. At the Bois de Belleau they had done the impossible.

They had taken nearly twice their own number in German prisoners. They had captured more than fifty German machine-guns and half a dozen trench mortars. They had made a record that never was passed in the World War. But they had paid for it."

Seminar Discussion:

- (1) What did you find most courageous about the Marines preparing for, and fighting this battle?
- (2) Was following the General's orders to initiate a frontal attack (knowing it was not the smart option, with certain high casualties) an act of moral courage? What would you have done? Major Hughes' battalion never received the orders.
- (3) Open floor for general discussion, questions, and comments.

b. Korean War--From T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War

"The 5th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray, moved from dusty Masan in the south to Miryang. Here Murray and General Craig discussed their attack plans, while the tired and sweaty Marines bathed in the brownish waters of Miryang's river, received new clothing and equipment to replace that which had rotted in the slime of rice paddies, and speculated on their mission.

These men had seen only limited combat in the south, but they had already sweated off their shipboard fat, and were beginning to lick the heat. At first they had been no better prepared for the violent sun than had the Army, but, like the Army, they were adjusting.

And these men walked with a certain confidence and swagger. They were only young men like those about them in Korea, but they were conscious of a standard to live up to, because they had good training, and it had been impressed upon them that they were United States Marines.

Except in holy wars, or in defense of their native soil, men fight well only because of pride and training--pride in themselves and their service, enough training to absorb the rough blows of war and to know what to do. Few men, of any breed, really prefer to kill or be killed. These Marines had pride in their service, which had been carefully instilled in them, and they had pride in themselves, because each man had made the grade in a hard occupation. They would not lightly let their comrades down. And they had discipline, which in essence is the ability not to question orders but to carry them out as intelligently as possible.

Marine human material was not one whit better than that of the human society from which it came. But it had been hammered into form in a different forge, hardened with a different fire. The Marines were the closest thing to legions the nation had. They would follow their colors from the shores of home to the seacoast of Bohemia, and fight well either place.

General Church, to whose 24th Division the Provisional Marine Brigade was attached, considered both Cloverleaf, where the 9th Infantry was engaged, and Obong-ni Ridge parts of the same enemy hill mass; however, Colonel Murray asked for permission for the Marines to reduce Obong-ni before a general assault was made upon the Bulge. Murray felt the Ridge could be quickly and easily reduced, and, secured, it could be used as a line of departure for a general attack. In this he was wrong, but General Church agreed to the proposal.

The Marine order of attack was organized. Lieutenant Colonel Harold S. Roise's 2nd Battalion would lead, followed by 1/5 and 3/5 in that order. A little after midnight 17 August, 2/5 moved into an assembly area in front of Obong-ni Ridge.

D and E Companies of 2nd Battalion had been selected to lead the assault. They moved forward in the freshness of early morning, and by 0700 were in position to see their objective, a long, unprepossessing ridge, covered by shale and scrub pine, with six rib like spurs running down from it into the sodden rice paddies. Between the spurs and the low hills behind which the Marines gathered lay a long expanse of open rice fields."

"The maps issued to the Marine Brigade, as all the maps used by the United Nations in 1950, were based on old Japanese surveys, and inaccurate. The Marines did not know exactly where

they were. Conferring with Captain Sweeney of Easy Company, Captain Zimmer of Dog called the ridge "Red Slash Hill." From the Marine attack position a fresh, gaping landslide scar could be plainly seen in the reddish earth near the center of the ridge.

Andy Zimmer told Sweeney, "I'll take the area right of that red slash." Sweeney agreed. Each company would attack with two platoons forward at 0800, after the air and artillery preparation.

There were only 120 riflemen available to send forward in the first assault wave.

Now, far out in the Sea of Japan, the Navy carriers *Badoeng Strait* and *Sicily* turned into the wind and launched a total of two squadrons of eighteen Marine Corsairs. The gull-winged planes, clumsy under heavy bomb loads, could carry no napalm because of a shortage of fuel tanks.

For ten minutes, artillery of the 24th Division burst on the rear approaches to Obong-ni Ridge, and along the reverse slopes of the ridge itself. Then, when the artillery pounding ceased, the Marine air swarmed over the hill, blasting Obong-ni's spine. Dirt, dust, and flame spurted up in great gouts all along the ridge. To General Church, watching, it seemed as if the ridge were floating away in smoke.

Then, their bomb load exhausted, the Corsairs roared away. At 0800, the four thin platoons of Marines went forward, across the valley and toward the ridge, one thousand yards beyond.

Several war correspondents, watching from the attack positions, asked officers the name of the objective. None seemed to know, and one correspondent wrote "No Name Ridge" on his release.

The Marines splashed across three rice paddies and skirted a cotton field, and they drew fire, not from the ridge, but from automatic weapons on their flanks. The fire grew heavier, and now gaps opened between the attacking platoons.

In spite of the fire, the platoons reached the slopes of Obong-ni. Here mortar shells crashed down on them. And here the ground steepened sharply, forcing the Marines to climb slowly and painfully toward the crest.

Only one platoon, 2nd Lieutenant Michael J. Shinka's 3rd of Dog Company, made the top. Just to the right of the big red slash Shinka found a small rain gully leading upward, and through this his men crawled, bent over, panting, to the crest. Chunky reached the top of Obong-ni with only two thirds of his original thirty men--while the other platoons, faced with steep ground and heavy fire, stalled halfway up the slope.

The totality men atop Obong-ni had no protection to either flank. They found a line of empty foxholes dug by the NKPA, and poured into them, just as a hail of machine-gun fire whipped at them from enemy positions to their right. And then hand grenades

soared through the air from enemy holes down on the reverse slope.

The Marines could handle the resistance below them on the slope, but they couldn't stop the enfilading machine-gun fire from their right. Any man who came out of a hole was hit. Within minutes, Mike Shinka had five men down. There were no Marines supporting him, either to left or right. He realized the ridge was too hot. He shouted to his platoon sergeant, Reese, to get the wounded down, and ordered 3rd Platoon back down the hill.

Pulling the wounded men on ponchos, the Marines slithered back down the gully to a position halfway down the hill, where they had reasonable cover. Chunky raised his company CP by radio.

"We can reach the top and hold it," he told Zimmer, "if you can get that flanking fire off our backs." Shinka, counting, saw he had fifteen men left out of thirty. "Give me an air strike and more men, and we can make it."

"I can't give you any more men," Andy Zimmer said. "But the air strike is on the way."

All of the platoons of Dog and Easy had been stopped along the ridge, and Dog's reserve had to be committed to assist the platoon on Shinka's flank. Waiting for the Marine Corsairs to return and plaster the hill, Shinka and the other platoon officers did their best to coordinate a fresh attack.

The Marine aircraft buzzed over Obong-ni once again, blasting the snaky spine with high explosives until the ground trembled underfoot. When they finished, American tanks moved out into the open valley east of the ridge line and hurled shells into the sides and crest of Obong-ni.

The decimated Marine platoons went up the hill again. Again the enemy fire blazed up, much of it coming from the Cloverleaf hill complex on the north. North Koreans rushed back into their holes along the top of the ridge, which they had abandoned under the air strike, and rolled hand grenades down the front slope.

Again Mike Shinka and platoon were the only Marines to make the crest. Chunky arrived this time with nine able-bodied men. They saw moving men on the ridge to their left. The platoon sergeant, still on his feet, called, "Easy Company? "

A blast of automatic fire answered him. "Son of a bitch!" Sergeant Reese yelled, and returned the fire with a BAR.

Again Shinka's platoon was in an untenable position, enemy fire chopping at it from left and right, and from the reverse slope of Obong-ni. Reese fell shot through the leg; another man took a bullet in the stomach.

On the crest a bullet shattered Mike Shinka's jaw. Choking on his own blood, he bent over and hawked to clear his throat. He was unable to use his radio. He motioned his men to get back down the ridge slope.

As he checked the ridge to make sure no wounded Marine had been left behind, a new bullet took Shinka in the arm. The impact knocked him rolling down the slope.

As Shinka and his bloody survivors crawled back to their covered gully, a storm of fire shattered the entire Marine attack against Obong-ni. By 1500, of the entire 240 men who had been committed against the enemy, 23 were dead and 119 wounded in action.

They hadn't taken Obong-ni Ridge--but a lot of them had died trying. At 1600, Colonel Newton's 1st Battalion relieved the battered remnants of 2/5 in front of the ridge.

In command of the 18th Regiment, NKPA, holding Obong-ni Ridge, Colonel Chang Ky Dok knew his situation was increasingly desperate. During the day he had suffered six hundred casualties, forcing the 16th Regiment, which defended Cloverleaf, to reinforce him with a battalion. His ammunition supply was dwindling at a frightening rate. He had no medical supplies, and his wounded were dying from lack of attention.

He knew he could not withstand another day of American air and artillery pounding and a fresh Marine assault up the ridge. Because he had a captured American SCR-300 radio, tuned in on Marine frequencies, he knew that the 1st Battalion had relieved 2/5 along the front of Obong-ni, and he knew approximately where the companies of 1/5 were located, for the Marines talked a great deal over the air.

At last Colonel Murray had realized that Cloverleaf had to be taken before his Marines could assault Obong-ni, and late in the afternoon the 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry, had pushed the 16th Regiment from that supporting position. The American 19th and 34th regiments were pushing attacks north of Cloverleaf against the right flank of the NKPA salient with some success.

About to be flanked, Chang Ky Dok requested permission to withdraw west of the Naktong. The request was denied.

Colonel Chang, as all senior commanders of the Inmun Gun, was a veteran of Soviet schooling and the North China wars. He knew his only hope was to shatter the American attack before it started on the 18th. He was short of men, short of food, and, worst of all, low on ammunition. But he could still place superior combat power against the thin Marine lines in front of him at places of his choosing. As dark fell 17 August, he chose to attack.

A and B Companies, 1/5 Marines, had relieved the decimated 2/5 during the late afternoon of 17 August and continued the attack. They had taken two of the knobs of the Obong-ni ridge line, and with dark, they buttoned up for the night. They adjusted artillery on likely enemy avenues of approach, and in front of their own lines they strung wires to trip flares. They expected a strong enemy reaction by night--but they did not realize that the enemy, monitoring their radio, knew exactly how they were positioned.

At 0230 a green flare rose high over the dark and blasted mass of Obong-ni, and the night exploded into a continuous flare of light and noise. Enemy squads rushed down upon the Marines,

hurling grenades and firing automatic weapons furiously. As each squad dashed forward a little way, then hit the ground, fresh squads repeated the attack.

Screaming and firing, the North Koreans pushed into A Company, passed through, and slammed against B Company's perimeter. One platoon of Able was isolated, but the separate platoon positions held together. Finally, Able was forced to retreat off its knob, moving back down the slope into a saddle.

Against Baker's perimeter the North Korean attack broke. For three quarters of an hour it was touch and go, violent, close-in fighting raging over the ridge knob. Then, gradually, the North Korean assault faltered.

Within two hours, it was growing light, and the assault ended completely as the sky brightened to the east. In the early, shadowy daylight the Marines counted almost two hundred North Korean corpses sprawled in front of the two companies' positions. The number of wounded who had crawled or been carried away could only be estimated--but the 18th Regiment was shattered beyond repair.

But the cost had not been light. Half of the Marines who had watched the evening sun go down were no longer on their feet.

With daylight, those who were took up the attack once more, following the path of the enemy's withdrawal. Soon, a machine-gun held up Able's advance.

Captain John Stevens of A called for an air strike on the gun's position. But the gun was only one hundred yards in front of his men, and Battalion HQ refused to allow the Corsairs to strike so close to its own troops. Stevens argued. He said he couldn't go forward against the dug-in fire, and he would lose men trying to withdraw. He said his own men were in holes. Finally, Battalion agreed.

The Corsairs, piloted by men who were also ground officers, took no chances. One plane marked the target with a dummy run; another whistled in with a 500-pound bomb. The hillside surrounding the NKPA machine gun blew up with a tremendous wave of sound.

Stevens' Marines pushed into the smoke and falling rock and earth. They found the gun destroyed, and gunners dead of concussion. One of their own men had been killed, too--but a few minutes later they had the hill.

While 1/5 mopped up on part of the ridge line, Colonel Murray sent 3/5 into action on its north. The 3rd Battalion moved in rapidly, almost without opposition.

Behind Obong-ni, hundreds of defeated and demoralized North Koreans were streaming westward toward the Naktong. Now the artillery forward observers and the tactical aircraft overhead began to have a field day. Forced into the open by advancing Marines, dozens of enemy troops were brought under fire and killed.

By afternoon, 18 August, it was obvious to all that the NKPA 4th Division was in full flight. Marines and soldiers pushed westward, converging on the river, while artillery fell continuously on the Naktong crossings. Early on the 19th, Marines and troops from the 34th Infantry made contact on the riverbank; by that evening patrols could find no enemy east of the Naktong. The first battle of the Naktong Bulge had ended in complete American victory.

Less than 3,000 men of the NKPA 4th Division went back across the river. Its regiments had only from 300 to 400 effectives each. Almost equally important, the 4th Division had left its guns: 34 artillery pieces, hundreds of automatic weapons, thousands of rifles. For all practical purposes, the "Seoul" Division had been destroyed.

The fire brigade had arrived. It had been burned in the flames, but the fire was out.

It was a bitter moment for Major General Lee Kwon Mu, Hero of the North Korean State, when, on 19 August 1950, he received from Kim Il Sung the order, published several days before, that designated the 4th a Guards Division for its heroic accomplishments at Taejon."

Seminar Discussion:

- (1) What was the greatest act of courage? Was it moral courage, physical courage, or both?
- (2) What operational lessons can be drawn from the North Korean commander's possession and use of the Marine Corps radio?
- (3) Open the discussion to general comments, observations and questions.

Note: This Kind of War is one of many excellent books from the Commandant's Professional Reading List. If you appreciated this reading, other books on the Commandant's Professional Reading List will provide you with hours of reading enjoyment, and operational lessons that will improve your personal warrior skills.

- c. Vietnam--From Guidebook for Marines, Fourteenth Revised Edition

"In December 1967, Marine Corporal Larry E. Smedley led his squad of six men into an ambush site west of the vital military complex at Da Nang in South Vietnam. When an estimated 100 enemy soldiers were observed carrying 122mm rocket launchers and mortars into position to launch an attack on Da Nang, Corporal

Smedley courageously led his men in a bold attack on the enemy force which outnumbered them by more than 15 to 1.

Corporal Smedley fell mortally wounded in this engagement and was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions."

"Private First Class Melvin E. Newlin was manning a key machine gun post with four other Marines in July 1967 when a savage enemy attack nearly overran their position. Critically wounded, his comrades killed, Private Newlin propped himself against his machine gun and twice repelled the enemy attempts to overrun his position. During a third assault, he was knocked unconscious by a grenade, and the enemy, believing him dead, bypassed him and continued their attack on the main force. When he regained consciousness, he crawled back to his weapon and brought it to bear on the enemy rear, inflicting heavy casualties and causing the enemy to stop their assault on the main positions and again attack his machine gun post. Repelling two more enemy assaults, Private Newlin was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous refusal to surrender his position or to cease fighting because of his wounds."

"In June 1966, Staff Sergeant Jimmie E. Howard and his reconnaissance platoon of 18 men were occupying an observation post deep within enemy controlled territory in South Vietnam when they were attacked by a battalion size force of enemy soldiers. During repeated assaults on the Marine position and despite severe wounds, Staff Sergeant Howard encouraged his men and directed their fire, distributed ammunition, and directed repeated air strikes on the enemy. After a night of intense fighting which resulted in five men killed and all but one man wounded, the beleaguered platoon still held its position."

"Later, when evacuation helicopters approached the platoon's position, Staff Sergeant Howard warned them away and continued to direct air strikes and small arms fire on the enemy to ensure a secure landing zone. For his valiant leadership, courageous fighting spirit, and refusal to let his unit be beaten despite the overwhelming odds, Staff Sergeant Howard was awarded the Medal of Honor."

Seminar Discussion:

(1) Discuss the moral courage that drove Corporal Larry Smedley to attack an enemy force 15 times stronger than his own.

(2) Where do you believe courage such as Private First Class Melvin Newlin's grew from? Was it a strength that developed through training and discipline?

Respect and duty to his country? Your opinions please...

- (3) Discuss the courage that motivated Staff Sergeant Jimmie Howard to warn away helicopters that would take him to safety. Was this an act of moral or physical courage?
- (4) Open the seminar to general comments, observations and questions.

d. Summary. Have different members of the seminar group answer the following questions, using examples from the readings as appropriate. Answering these questions as a seminar, will ensure the important points of this chapter are brought together.

- (1) Define courage.
- (2) Give examples of physical and moral courage.
- (3) How is courage and character developed by the Marine Corps?
- (4) What effect did studying examples of Marine Corps courage have on your feelings for God, Country, and the Corps? Do you feel stronger, and more capable as a warrior?

6. Appendices. None.