

# Forces

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## The Crucible

Matthew M. Rogers

*Thud, thud, thud, thud. "You're never going to make it, recruit." Thud, thud, thud, thud. "You're why good men die, recruit." Thud, thud, thud, thud. "When we get to the obstacle course, there's a faster way down." Thud, thud, thud, thud.*

My chin strap broke on my helmet and now it banged against my face when I crawled. With every dig of my elbow, a plume of Camp Pendleton moon dust caked onto me and all of my equipment. As I dragged myself along my belly, the shrieking screams of the D-day invasion scene from *Saving Private Ryan* echoed across the California desert. "Better keep that skull dragging Rogers," said Sgt. Rodriguez. "Turns to pink mist real quick." Under barbed wire, we kept our heads dragging on the ground while we crawled on our backs and stomachs in order to keep a smaller profile. They taught us that it gave the enemy a smaller profile to shoot at, which I was sure wasn't wrong; but that night it was beside the point. We were 24 hours into the infamous "Crucible." The final trial in Marine Corps boot camp where a recruit, if strong enough, finally becomes a Marine. But before we could earn the coveted Eagle, Globe and Anchor on top of "The Reaper," we had to hike 50 miles and do 30 different obstacle courses on two MREs (Meals Ready to Eat, a.k.a rations) and four hours of sleep in two and a half days.

I had just started to eat my favorite meal, the brisket plate from Hutchins Barbeque in downtown McKinney, when I heard the click of a flashlight and saw the brightest beam of light I'd ever seen. "Rogers wake up. I'm not trying to be a blue falcon, but you have fire watch. Sorry bro." Scratch that, now three hours of sleep in the crucible. Although my day had started earlier than I'd liked, it was finally time to climb "The Reaper." There was a 3-mile hike just to get to the base of the mountain. We'd left our bivouac at four in the morning. So when we got there, it was still dark.

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**T**he Senior Drill Instructor for our platoon, Staff Sergeant Tena was going to lead us up the mountain from the front. In a letter home to my father, I described SSgt. Tena's duty to our platoon as "[He] covers paperwork, keeps DI's from getting too brutal, arranges the schedule, and goes over/teaches life stuff. Considered the 'dad' and doesn't discipline unless we really mess up." It was a shot of motivation to want to keep up with the Senior Drill Instructor.

Another source of motivation was Sgt. Staton who would be leading from the rear of the platoon. He would

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be providing words of wisdom for any recruit who needed a reason or two to get up the mountain. His vast vocabulary, I was sure, was about to be displayed. I had found in all my letters, I had only written about him once. "His only job is to make us sad, depressed, miserable and unmotivated. I hate this man more than anything."

**E**ach of us were checking to make sure our boots were still rigid and our laces taut when the Senior Drill instructor decided to give some words of wisdom. "In case you were wondering, I can't confirm nor deny



**Untitled** Sara Carpenter

whether or not I've killed someone," he said. "But I know, in Afghanistan, I was slinging rounds down range and someone got got. But don't turn around." Obviously at that moment the whole of platoon 1046, myself included, had to turn around. Way out in the distance, two cardinal red lights in near pitch black darkness took off vertically as if they were spaceships. Not a soul in platoon 1046 would've minded being on that injury vehicle at that moment. "You all didn't wanna listen," SSgt. Tena said. The hill was so steep that, standing up, you could reach out and touch the ground. The 50 pounds of gear and a rifle on our backs made it that much harder to get up the mountain. Yet, once we got into the thick of it, it was as if nothing could touch us. When we went to sleep that last night, most of us fell asleep before we could even get into our sleeping bags. But now we were on top of the world. The end was in sight.

Once we reached the top of "The Reaper", all of Charlie Company went into the final crest of the hill together. All 600 of us recruits war cried like animals as we ran down. The company first sergeant and the Commanding Officer did a speech, then we all sang the



**New Growth** Maria Guadalupe Guerrero

Marine Corps Hymn. *"From the Halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli. We fight our country's battles, in the air, on land and sea. First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean. We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine."* The company first sergeant called Charlie Company to attention and ordered the drill instructors to "turn these recruits into Marines." Sgt. Castro, the one who rode me the hardest for every hour of the last 87 days came up to me. He looked me in the eyes and shook my hand. "I always knew you had it, Marine."