

"An 8th&I Drumming Out"

In early 1957 T/Sgt John T Green and I, then a SSgt, were transferred from MCI Co. to the newly formed H&S Co., which was commanded by Major. Dick Kurth (he had been recently assigned from Guard Co) Major Kurth was with us only a short period when he was transferred to Saigon. Major Larry Marousek replaced him as Co of H&S Co. There were two Marines transferred from Guard Co to H&S for courts martial. I can't specifically recall the names of the Marines or what the charges were.

At that time a television company called "Wide, Wide World" was scheduled to film the parade sequence for national distribution. A large hole was to be dug at the end of the parade deck near the gas pumps, so that a camera could be lowered into it for a low-angle view of the Marines marching round the parade deck. The hole was dug by these two Marines that were awaiting courts martial. This was much to the chagrin of all Marines stationed at the Barrack as the parade deck was a "sacred" place and here a hole was to be dug by two miscreants to accommodate a television company!! I was given the task of supervising the digging of the hole!

The court martial was convened and one Marine was found guilty and was sentenced to be dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps. The following procedure occurred (to the best of my recollection as I remember it happening some 50 years ago):

Col. Chapman (Barracks CO), Sgt Maj Zym (Barracks Sgt.Maj.), and a D&B drummer (recently identified as Dominic De Vito) were present with the convicted Marine on the Commandant's walk just outside the CMC's garden gate. The Marine was in winter service A without a cover. Two lines of Marines about six feet apart, each line facing each other, extended from the Commandant's walk down the parade deck across center walk to the end of the parade deck (at a point where the saluting batteries were to be eventually placed), and out to the edge of the main gate entry to 8th street.

The charges were read and the Sgt Major removed the Marine Corps buttons from the convicted Marine's blouse and they were thrown to the deck (the EGA emblems had already been removed from his uniform) His belts were also removed along with his field scarf. He was then told to turn and face the parade deck, shoulder his sea bag and walk to the Main gate. The drummer beat a slow beat as the convicted walked, with the Sgt Major and the drummer following him to the gate. We were instructed to perform an about face as he passed us, which we did. After he passed us we turned back to watch this procession. The Sgt. Maj stopped him at the gate and threw his sea bag onto the sidewalk on 8th street and put his foot to the rear of him and propelled him to the street.

We were then dismissed.

This is what I remember, something which I will never forget. While the fog of aging dims some memories, the look on the face of that Marine walking to the gate, holding up his trousers with one hand and his sea bag with the other, and the faces of those that witnessed this event, will never be forgotten. They will be stored in the memory of one who served with the finest and was involved in many remarkable, memorable and just plain awesome events during my four years at the Barracks.

I have reviewed this incident with others that were at the Barracks at that time: John Green remembers the drumming out as I do. Ron Burton recalls that it happened, however he was at Arlington that day and did not witness it..

Joe Larkin (55-59)
Capt. USMC Ret.

Nick Bailey recalls the incident:

I believe that that the two individuals were a S/Sgt and the other a Pvt. or PFC. The S/Sgt. was a mess cook and the Pvt. was on mess duty. They went on liberty together and had raped a woman at gun point. If memory serves me I was on Guard that night and was in the guard shack, so I must have been the Corporal of the Guard. They came in intoxicated and laughing, boasting about the incident and then retired to the barracks. Soon after the civilian authorities arrived at the gate and the OD was called. I wonder if these are the two??? It seems though that they would have gotten much more than a drumming out and I really don't know what happened to them.

I wonder if anyone else recalls this?

Semper Fidelis

Nick Bailey

Editor's Note: At that time, the criminal prosecution would have been done by the civilian authorities, and when guilt was established, the individual was given a dishonorable discharge for a crime of this magnitude. The criminal prosecutions may have terminated at different times, which might explain why only one was drummed out at this time.

Chet Russo adds:

I was present at the Marine Barracks, Norfolk, VA in 1961 when we had one of the last drumming outs of the Corps. The article on our web site is quite accurate. At the ones I attended the SgtMaj read the charges and findings as well as the Dishonorable discharge. He then handed them in an envelope to the Sergeant of the Guard (SOG).

The accused was dressed in blue navy civilian (brig) clothes and issued travel vouchers which had "Dishonorably Discharged - USMC" for food and transportation (TRs). He was led to the main gate (Gate #2, NOB) followed by an armed SOG and two drummers behind him which played a slow dirge. It should be noted that traffic stopped and the humiliation was total.

At the gate there was a white line indicating the base property line. The SOG instructed the accused to cross the line whereupon the discharge documents were thrown on the ground in front of the accused. Across from the main gate was a locker rental facility that sailors used to store civilian clothes (as we had to wear uniforms in and out of the base). The accused would run in and change clothes (if he had an account) as the clothes issued at discharge were known by everyone as brig attire minus the stencil on the back.

Shortly after 1961 "drumming out" ceased, as the new SecNav considered it to be a cruel and unusual punishment.

I really sometimes wonder about the merit of such a decision.

Semper Fi,

Chet Russo