

The Eagle-Eyed Bird Who Overlooked His Own Nest

Col. Leonard F. Chapman, Barracks CO from 1956-58 (and was later to become Commandant of the Marine Corps) was legendary, not only for his creativeness (it was he who instituted the Evening Parades in 1957), but also for his high standards, and for his eagle-eyed ability to determine any deviation from his strict standards and requirements. He was a perfectionist, and his standards and requirements extended to officers, enlisted, equipment, buildings, grounds and ceremonies. In short, to anything connected to the Barracks.

He could spot an improperly worn barracks cap from the length of the parade deck, and un-shined leather and/or an "Irish pennants" from 50 feet away. Very few senior Marine officers were reputed to be his equal in eagle-eyed observance of everything within his purview.

June 6, 1958 was my final day of Active Service in the Marine Corps, as I had decided to go to law school. I had a 1500 appointment with Colonel Chapman in his office. The purpose of the visit was to tell him how much I enjoyed serving under him, as well as how much I had enjoyed serving at the Barracks, first in MCI as a ceremonial platoon leader and as OIC of the Instruction Section, then in CGC as leader of the 1st Plt. Silent Drill Team, and finally as assistant USMC liaison officer for the Interment of the Unknowns on 30 May, 1958.

Apart from his formal comments thanking me for my service at the Barracks, he broke into a smile and asked how I enjoyed living at Center House. I told him it was an honor to live in such an historic place, and that all of us young bachelor officers had many good times there. He then began to chuckle and tell me that he and Sgt Maj Zim had been keeping a sharp lookout on my after-hour doings as the leader of "his Center House rat pack" and he related several funny stories about some of our antics.

At the conclusion of the visit, I stood to shake his hand, and couldn't believe my eyes: the National Colors were upside-down on the flagstaff! Knowing his penchant for eagle-eye inspections and demands for absolute perfection, with a straight face I asked him if he was experiencing any particular distress, and I couldn't resist a big smile. He asked "what are you talking about, and I said I had ALWAYS HEARD THAT AN UPSIDE-DOWN FLAG WAS A SIGNAL OF DISTRESS. He turned around and immediately saw the National Color upside down on its flagstaff, turned red-faced and went immediately to the door and called for Sgt Maj Zim, who promptly re-aligned the Flag properly, and the Colonel told him to find the culprit and give him a lesson on flag handling. He turned to me,

grinned, and said "you've gotten me again," shook my hand with a smile, and I left.

I returned to the bar at Center House to tell them of the incident, when a messenger from the CO's office appeared, came into the bar laughing out loud, and from an official envelope handed me the following:

HEADQUARTERS
Marine Barracks
Washington 3, D. C.

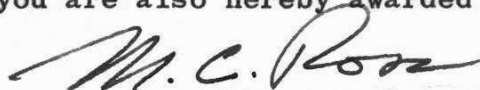
From: Marine Barracks, Washington 3, D.C.
To: First Lieutenant Stephen A. TRIMBLE USMC

Subj: Award, and recognition of services for duty performed on
6 June 1958, presentation of

Ref: (a) Incident at Commanding Officer's Office on 6 June 1958

1. For outstanding performance of duty above and beyond the call of your rank you are hereby awarded the ORDER OF THE UPSIDE DOWN NATION COLOR.

2. Personnel of this Headquarters will be long aware of the incident in reference (a). Such incidents as these help to brighten a sometimes long and dreary day. For the occurrence in reference (a) you are also hereby awarded a "WELL DONE".



M.C. ROSS
By direction