

Sustain the Legacy

Feature Article on Colonel Giles Boyce

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Colonel Boyce addressing the entire MAGTF one last time with MRF-D, 2019

T-shirts for Christmas

Third graders typically don't know what they want for dinner, let alone what kind of career they want, but the choice of the Marine Corps was never complicated for Colonel Giles "Russ" Boyce. Born in Oxon Hill, Maryland, Boyce grew up in the suburbs, right outside of Washington D.C. Throughout his early childhood years, he knew he wanted to be a Marine Corps Officer because of a major family influence. "For Christmas I got a USMC shirt and shorts—red used to be the Marine Corps PT gear," he said. His uncle was a brand-new 2nd Lieutenant, going through The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia, which was close enough to where he and a bunch of 2nd Lieutenant Marine Corps Officers were able to attend many family gatherings and cookouts. Spending time outside and playing sports with these men really impacted Boyce: "I was the little kid that got a noogie and a wedgie from all these 2nd lieutenants, and I just became enamored." Throughout grade school, high school, and then all 4 years of college until his graduation from the University of South Carolina in 1993, he stuck with it and never changed his mind.

Infantry or Nothing

The choice of MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was as easy as his decision to be a Marine. Until his exposure to a few different Mosses, he considered being a pilot since that is what his uncle did. However, once he found about what the Infantry was in College during ROTC, he fell

in love. He explained, "After going to the field once, I was like, 'That's me.' The more I learned about it, the more I participated with the unit. I was hellbent on being an infantryman." Colonel Boyce really embodied his career choice. His passion and personality fit seamlessly with the infantry life and job. Being outside, putting in the hard, uncomfortable, long hours exposed to all of the elements, and conducting some of the toughest training is where Boyce thrived.

Six Marines

Checking into 1st Battalion 1st Marines in Camp Pendleton, California, as his first duty station was exciting for Boyce. The nerves were there, but they didn't overtake him. He was ready for his career to begin. There was a large community of Lieutenants there to help him get acclimated and up to speed on how things worked. His unit had just returned from a MEU (Marine Expeditionary Unit,) so his Marines were scattered a bit throughout base.

One of his earliest memories was as a 2nd Lieutenant checking in. After speaking with his Company Commander, he was ready to finally introduce himself to his first platoon. Finally, the moment he was ready for had arrived: to take charge of 41 strong, capable, enthusiastic infantrymen; he had his notes prepped and was hyped up: "I was like this is going to be awesome! And I walked outside, and I saw 6 people standing there. So I ditched the notes and just talked to them." Despite the initial experience taking command, Boyce remained focused and determined to begin training.

Welcome Aboard

As a 2nd Lieutenant, there were many new experiences for Boyce. One of them he wasn't fully expecting was the challenge of being apart from his close family. Going to college in South Carolina, he was still able to join in during all of the holidays. Now, however, with his first duty station in California, the Marine Corps didn't provide that luxury. "Once I showed up to 1st Marines, I had duty on Christmas. That was a part of my Welcome Aboard to the unit. I walked in and someone was like, 'What's your name?' and I was like 'uh, Lt. Boyce', and he said, 'Great. You have duty on Christmas.'" That was certainly an adjustment for Boyce. The Marine Corps was not gracious in giving him up for the next several holidays; however, he knew that the mission always had priority, and, while it wasn't what he was used to, he adapted and overcame.

Deployment Experiences

Colonel Boyce deployed more than ten different times throughout his 30 years of service. His first and second deployments were both MEUs (Marine Expeditionary Unit). During his first deployment, he served as a Rifle Platoon Commander. It is in this role that he feels like he truly learned his job and what a deployment even entailed. It was his first true learning experience as a junior officer, and, upon returning, he felt much more confident as an overall leader and Marine. On his second MEU, it was much like the first, but this time he served as an 81mm Mortar Platoon Commander, which Boyce stated, "was additive learning in conjunction with the first."

He did three deployments as a Company Commander, the first of which was a UDP (Unit Deployment Program) to Okinawa, Japan. “It was awesome. You’re in Okinawa, you train, you go to the beach, you go to Guam, you go to South Korea, you train some more,” he explained. “And I felt like I had figured out how to be a Company Commander. Then my second deployment was OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom] 1. That was significantly different.” The challenges and training for Iraqi Freedom pushed Boyce to be outside his comfort zone once again.

Over the next several deployments, the billets became more and more demanding while the responsibility and pressure became more and more challenging. Yet Boyce never wavered, always remaining sharp, and had his platoon training and ready for the next fight.

The final deployment he experienced was when he was the Commander of Marine Rotational Forces in Darwin. He described the billet this way: “2700 Marines in Northern Australia. 2 Infantry Battalions, a composite squadron, and a Combat Logistics Battalion. Being responsible for that is one thing, but the personal growth and experience of doing that for 7 months was significant.”

The progression of his first deployment to his last was obvious and remarkable. He reflected that “It makes sense to me now why the Marine Corps has billets you have to go through to progress and get selected for command. It didn’t make sense at the time. But the change, the development, the experience really is important when you reach that next level and get that next opportunity to lead Marines and Sailors.”

No-Sleep Decisions

There are no easy decisions to make as a leader. Every single one has some sort of effect. One of the hardest decisions Boyce had to make was when he was deployed in OIF 1: “I’ll paint arguably one of the most stressful conditions I’ve found myself in that I was required to make decisions in. During OIF 1, we had been awake for 2 ½ days and we had multiple companies that were in contact. And I was the Weapons Company Commander, so I was the Fire Support Coordinator, which meant that I was coordinating fire and support maneuvering.” He was in charge of approving the delivery of artillery, mortars, or aviation fire. Since there were friendly companies all in close proximity of each other, Boyce had to be 110% certain of his decisions. Being without sleep in a high-stress environment added extra pressure to the already intense situation. “I can still remember it vividly today. I was standing in the AMTRAK; I had been awake for more than 2 days so I could barely stay awake. All of us in the COC (Command Operation Center) were trying to determine if we could send these aviation fires. And I said no.” It came to light that the call Boyce made was the right one when it was passed that the “threat” was actually a friendly unit.

New Distractions

After three decades of service, Boyce reflected on what he thinks is the biggest change he has witnessed. He says that even though the Marine Corps still fights and wins, that members of the Corps have lost some of our interpersonal connections due to social media. At unit functions,

there would be no phones or internet to steal Marines' attention away from the present situation. On deployments, Marines weren't counting down the minutes to get back to friendly lines so that they were able to tap back into social media. They weren't distracted. "Marines aren't as focused," he explained, "And what makes Marines, what makes Sailors fight the way they do? We hear it all the time, we read about it. It's that they fight for the Marine or Sailor to the left and right of them. But it's because they knew them so well." Social media has drawn Marines away from creating very personal, caring, family relationships that are so necessary to stay determined throughout hard times. Boyce takes ownership of this passionate opinion by ensuring he makes time for the NROTC Unit at The Citadel to bond in non-working environments. During NROTC lab periods, he will often schedule "socials" with the cadets and active-duty personnel to build that camaraderie and rapport.

Family First

Boyce has many successes in his career, ranging from never having a friendly fire incident during OIF 1 and holding command throughout the Rotational Force in Darwin. When it comes to his personal success, there is no doubt in his mind what it is: "I will always say my boys, my sons, Kyle and Dylan," he said. Boyce and his wife, Krista, got married in 1999. Both of his sons now attend Clemson University. They grew up in the Marine Corps and know it well. His wife and sons were both very supportive of his career, never adding any pressure to him and his job. Whenever it came time to leave again, while it was harder to say goodbye, Boyce knew he had a very strong support system at home so he could concentrate on the current task at hand. Family has always been important to Boyce, from a kid until now. He never lost sight of that.



Colonel Boyce, his wife, Krista, and his sons, Kyle & Dylan

In Better Hands

Colonel Boyce has so many amazing experiences and wisdom to share. Finishing up 30 years of honorable, dedicated service is something to be proud of. Even though he is no longer going to

be wearing the uniform every day, he is looking forward to those who will. “You hear folks, older generations, they always say the Corps is in better hands. A few years ago, I would have said that with reservation. But I have been pleasantly surprised and it’s reassuring to see who’s coming into service, being here at The Citadel. To see the quality of the young men and women that are coming through college, joining the service to become officers. The Marine Corps always does a fantastic job with quality. We continue to bring in the right kind of human capital. The Marine Corps will continue to improve and sustain the legacy that it works so hard to achieve.”

There is no question that Colonel Boyce has left his mark on the organization. His true loyalty, his dedication to service, speaks for itself. From red t-shirts on Christmas to wearing his Dress Blues for the last time, Marines like him are the reason that the new generation has something to fight for.