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*Adventure in Peacetime: The Career of Brian Allen, USMC*

Sergeant Brian Allen served as a Marine on active duty from 2013 to 2017. A native of Roanoke, Virginia, he had originally hoped to attend college at the Virginia Military Institute in nearby Lexington. He was not accepted, however, and thus chose to enlist in the Marine Corps as an alternative. While Mr. Allen's father was delighted at his son's choice, his mother was not so happy. In fact, Mr. Allen claims his enlistment papers were "signed with my mother's tears."

Mr. Allen's first taste of Marine Corps life came at Recruit Training, or "boot camp," at Parris Island, South Carolina. When asked to what it was like, Allen said "it was the only time in my life I had ever felt dread." Mr. Allen recalls the culture shock he felt upon arriving, as his lifestyle now consisted of constantly being yelled at and ordered around. While there, he underwent the same training all Marine recruits do, consisting of hiking, physical training, marksmanship practice, and martial arts training, among other things. However, what may come as a surprise is that most of the time he and his fellow recruits spent at Parris Island consisted of time in the classroom. Lectures on Marine Corps customs, culture, and history were among the many subjects taught throughout training. Mr. Allen recalls being glad to finally graduate boot camp. He claims the ride over the bridge into mainland South Carolina was amazing, simply due to his riding in a car and hearing music for the first time in three months.



After finishing Recruit Training and being given a brief ten-day break, Mr. Allen began the next phase of his Marine Corps career. This consisted of combat training and job training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The latter, in Mr. Allen's case, was engineer training. He had originally wanted to be a combat engineer, but was instead made an Engineer Equipment Electrical Systems Technician. Allen says he regrets "not making sure that (enlistment) contract was what I thought it was," feeling as though the job he was given was not the one he had wanted. More disappointment came after he graduated from engineer school. After checking in at his first duty station in Beaufort, South Carolina, Mr. Allen learned that his unit had returned from Afghanistan the day prior, and would thus not be redeploying any time soon. This disappointed Allen, as he had long hoped to participate in the war there.

Despite his initial disappointments with his career field and his unit's status, Allen came to enjoy his Marine Corps career. His time

on active duty took him to several places around the country, including several visits to Yuma, Arizona. Allen found that he greatly enjoyed the responsibility bestowed upon him at times. Though just a teenager, Allen often found himself being personally responsible for military equipment worth millions of dollars. Such personal responsibility is rarely experienced by civilians of the same age, and Mr. Allen felt as though the experience taught him a great deal about maturity.



Mr. Allen also shared his opinion of many of the Marine Corps' downsides. He mentioned poorly-maintained facilities and equipment, as well as a negative command climate across the Corps, where Marines do not feel as though their superiors care about them. When asked if he was still satisfied with his branch of choice, he said yes, as he is still very proud to be a Marine. However, he did note that at times he had considered switching branches, with the Army having crossed his mind as a potential alternative. Allen has resisted the temptation to switch, however, claiming that he is "too much of a Marine."

Mr. Allen also shared his reasons for leaving active duty after his first enlistment. Chief among these was to begin a family. Ashley, his current fiancé, is the very same girlfriend that had once

driven him home from boot camp. Realizing that the life of an active duty service member can often stand in the way of family life, he chose to leave active duty and switch to the reserves. Mr. Allen joined a Marine Corps Reserve unit in Columbia, South Carolina, where he now serves as an infantryman. Meanwhile, he and his fiancé live in nearby Charleston where they attend undergraduate college and medical school, respectively. He claims to enjoy reserve life a great deal, and was quite proud to be reclassified as an infantryman.

Reserve life has been no less adventurous than life on active duty. As a reservist, Mr. Allen has participated in countless training exercises. These have taken him to a variety of locations, including Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; and Marine Corps Base Twentynine Palms in California's Mojave Desert. Furthermore, several of these exercises have included live-fire training, giving Mr. Allen the opportunity to fire rifles, squad automatic weapons, and grenade launchers, as well as working with larger weapons, including 81-millimeter mortars, TOW wire-guided missiles, and 25-millimeter cannons. He notes that the lifestyle of an infantryman requires a great deal of physical and mental toughness. However, as reservists are only training for a single weekend each month, this toughness must be fostered on their own time. This means that Mr. Allen personally must make sure to stay fit during civilian life. What is more difficult is making sure his subordinates do the same, as they are on their own for the bulk of the month, with no one to push them to improve. Mr. Allen has thus had to learn how to inspire his men to self-improvement rather than simply forcing them to improve on his time. He believes this has taught him a great deal about leadership. Overall, he finds the life of a Marine Corps Reservist to be highly rewarding, but in different ways than that of a Marine on active duty.

Looking back, Mr. Allen is quite proud of his time on active duty in the Marine Corps. Although his mother's tears "signed the enlistment papers," he doesn't think she could be more proud, along with his father. Furthermore, his fiancé, who began supporting him as his teenage girlfriend, is incredibly proud of her husband's service. His military career was not quite what he ever expected it be, but nonetheless he is extremely proud to have served, which he continues to do as a reservist. He is considering applying for Marine Officer Candidate School so that he may one day continue serving the Marine Corps Reserves as an officer.

