Making The Corps Essay, Research Paper

MAKING THE CORPS

As a Wall Street Journal Pentagon correspondent, Thomas E. Ricks is one of America’s elite military journalists. He has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and awarded a Society of Professional Journalists Award for his writings based on the Marines. Thomas E. Ricks lectures to military officers and was a member of Harvard University’s Senior Advisory Council on the project on U.S. Civil-Military Relations. As a Pentagon correspondent, he can access information where no other civilian can step foot—traveling with soldiers abroad, his eyes tell the tale of the life of a Marine.

On December of 1992, U.S. troops landed in Somalia. It was Thomas E. Ricks’ first deployment as a Pentagon Reporter. Opening the beginning chapter, he speaks of his first-hand experience he encountered while traveling with a squad from Alpha Company of the 1st battalion of the 7th Marines. Exceptionally qualified, his work on Making The Corps was cited by Thomas E. Ricks himself. Few events were videotaped, and some related by several participants and observers. Thoughts of Platoon 3086 and military documentations, such as “Recruit Incident Reports” and “Recruit Evaluation Cards”, were used as well to get an inside feel of the way recruits and Drill Instructors see Boot Camp.

Why did he pick the Marines as his topic? Attracted to the Corps perception and morale, Thomas E. Ricks expresses the Marines as the only service still upholding its honor and tradition. Due to society changing into a commercial society with a “me” attitude, civilians focus on how they can splendor themselves with material items—never looking big picture at all that we can accomplish as a team if we give our heart and soul in life. Team meaning everyone on earth, for we are the people that provide for one another with peace and prosperity. As a Marine, it is imperative to have leadership skills along with being capable to work with others. This book was written to enhance the reader’s mentality of how the Marines operate. It informs those who are looking into the service, and provides an in depth look into the trials and tribulations it has been through—as well as conquered.

This book substantially explains the vigorous training platoon 3086 went through in order to earn the title of being a Marine. Not all made it; some moved into other platoons due to their lack of effort, while others were “washed out” because of improper conduct (some intentionally threw it upon themselves because the nature of Marine Basic Training was too unbearable). There were several key recruits who had stood out to their Drill Instructors, as well as to Thomas E. Ricks.

Andrew Lee was promoted to Private First Class when he graduated, for his committed efforts and excellence towards all aspects and adversities boot camp had thrown in his face. Charles Lees III was an unprecedented Marine as well. His bulky Samoan body trimmed fit after boot camp was over. These two men had the intelligence, skill, and agility to conquer Basic Training that led them to be the head of platoon 3086. In this segment, 3086 had racial tension that carried through most of the eleven weeks. One man, because of his color, accused the Drill Instructors of being racist—that is, until another African-American gave him flak. He couldn’t realize his weaknesses were his attitude and immoral judgments on how he perceived Boot Camp. That’s what happened to 1/3 of the platoon. There were some changes to those men, like the skinhead who came into Parris Island with a Swastika tattoo. The DI’s felt it was necessary for him and an African-American to share a tent; yet, ironically, they became friends during the rest of the time.

Thomas E. Ricks then covers the fundamentals of the eleven-week process, and reviews what had happened to Platoon 3086 after graduating. For some reason, Marines who had just graduated out of 3086 didn’t expect life in the Corps the way it turned out. Some Sergeants set a bad example and didn’t uphold the Marine Corps standards—therefore, the fresh Marines acted more Marine-like than some of their officers. This doesn’t apply to all that are in the service; there are always those other few who set a bad example. Some from 3086 went MIA (which caught up to them in the long run), and failed to go to their assigned areas.

In the later chapters, it explicates how the government tried to obliterate the Marine Corps because, as they put it, we had enough services already and there was no need for another branch of the Armed Forces. Democratic presidents in the past tried to shut them down; this is why the Corps works so hard to maintain its standards. The book also refers to the Clinton Administration back stepping on most military issues, as well. It also provides some depth into the past of what the Marine Corps beheld; when it was stuffed on its back by government, adversaries, (and surprisingly) itself.

By the government, we speak of congressmen leaving the Marines out to dry in its own flesh; other services cannot help because it is too dangerous to save those Marines who are the front-line of defense (who clear the path for the Army). This book explains how the Marines lost more lives during the Vietnam War than in World War II. Second- Lieutenants deploying more troops to die to cover up their mistakes they had made. Adversaries sending surprise attacks; like the unforgettable attack of “Beirut”. On October 23rd, 1983, a terrorist drove a truck full of TNT into a building full of Marines who were executing what seemed to be a peacekeeping mission. But what really affected the Corps is when General P.X. Kelly (back then, the commander) testified to congress that he was not accountable for the incident of Beirut because he was not in the chain of command. This gave media, like Time magazine-which was mentioned in the book-a perception that the Corps leaders weren’t watching their soldiers “6” (back).

Despite the troublesome times, Thomas E. Ricks does a wonderful job explaining the

rebirth of the Corps. Inside the Pentagon, two portraits hang valiantly. A picture of James Webb as Navy Secretary, and another of General Al Gray as commandant of the Marine Corps. Through the winter year of ‘86-’87 James Webb found conversations (as Ricks puts it) “soul-searching,” making it a necessity to speak with General Al Gray three times; because of his grasp on the spiritual problems of the Corps. Are you asking yourself how there can be two generals of the same service? Well the answer is that James Webb decided to appoint Al Gray as commandant after General P.X. Kelly’s past performance—should we say “Beirut?” Not agreeing, General Kelly went to Vice President George Bush to protest, and in turn, Bush deferred to the Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. During Al Gray’s first year as commandant, he took the role of being responsible for every Marine action, taking a different approach to the Corps—holding higher standards, and leading the way. Thanks to General Al Gray and James Webb, the Marine Corps is the top of the line service, building the marines into the few and the proud.

Judging the book by its content, information, and clarity, I would rate this as more than excellent. Thomas E. Ricks did a wonderful job giving an all around coverage of what to expect when entering the service, as well as its history. As being signed up to enter the Corps Basic Training to become a Marine, I found this very well written and informative to give me the knowledge I need to know. This would be a great book for anyone deciding to enter the Marine Corps who would want to be the best of the best.

This book should also be read to those that believe there is nothing to gain from any service. To those people that believe “military intelligence” is an oxymoron. If this were the case, most of civilian managers to big corporations wouldn’t be ex-marines. Making the Corps gives a brief insight of all that is needed to know to understand the Corps mentality. They are the few, the proud, the Marines…

Bibliography

Making The Corps was cited by Thomas E. Ricks himself (author of book). Few events were videotaped, and some related by several participants and observers. Thoughts of Platoon 3086 and military documentations, such as “Recruit Incident Reports” and “Recruit Evaluation Cards”.