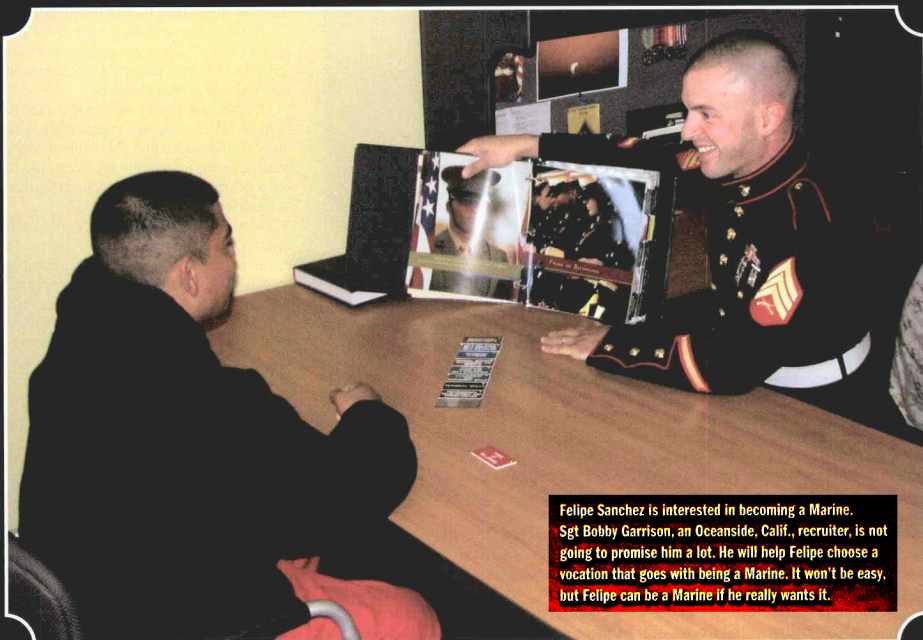


# Those Recruiting Duty Dress Blues



Felipe Sanchez is interested in becoming a Marine. Sgt Bobby Garrison, an Oceanside, Calif., recruiter, is not going to promise him a lot. He will help Felipe choose a vocation that goes with being a Marine. It won't be easy, but Felipe can be a Marine if he really wants it.

By R. R. Keene

Once you've been on recruiting duty, you will never again look at a set of dress blues the same way. ...

Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego and its palm-tree-lined streets, Spanish-style buildings and arcade serve as backdrop to the massive grinder where recruits on parade learn to march as one, although having come from every corner, culture and setting of the melting pot known as the United States. They've come to improve themselves and because they believe that becoming United States Marines is the best way to do that.

The Depot also is home to the Western Recruiting Region headquarters and the schoolhouse for all the recruiters who canvas the country, cities and towns. It

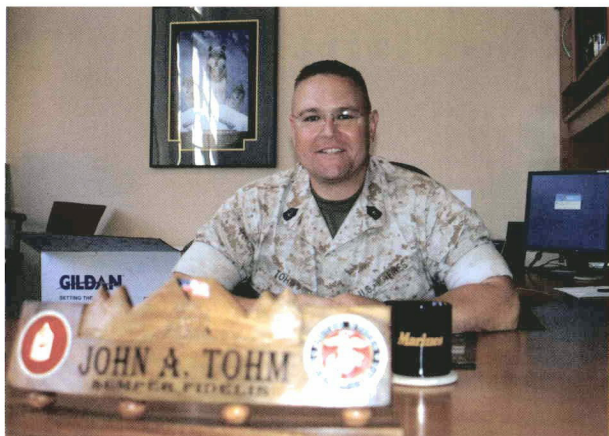
*The blue trousers with "blood stripe" set the noncommissioned officer instructors apart from not only their students, but also the majority of Marines on the Depot.*

seems appropriate that Recruiters School is only a few doors down from the Depot's Drill Instructor School. The two fashion the enigmatic icons that Marines remember for the rest of their lives: their

recruiter and their drill instructors.

Dress blue uniforms, the symbol of Marine recruiters, wear well under the Southern California sunshine. The blue trousers with "blood stripe" set the noncommissioned officer instructors apart from not only their students, but also the majority of Marines on the Depot.

What they teach also sets them apart from the majority of Marines. In a Corps of more than 202,000 active duty and 40,000 reservists, as of September 2009, there were 4,194 recruiters, all of them trained at San Diego where selected staff noncommissioned officers and NCOs are taught to perform the duties "inherent to the procurement and retention of enlisted Marines for the regular and reserve establishments" of the Corps. The school provides recruiters with the basic skills and knowledge to influence young men



**MSgt John Tohm is a career recruiter who's just about done everything when it comes to canvassing the street, running a recruiting station or heading up the Basic Recruiter Course at San Diego's Recruiters School.**

and women in selecting the Corps as a career opportunity.

In 2006, President George W. Bush approved a permanent end-strength increase of 27,000 Marines from 175,000 up to 202,000, and the Secretary of Defense established a timeline to achieve this growth by the end of fiscal year 2011. By the end of FY 2009, the Marines reached their goal, two years earlier than planned. They did it because the professional recruiting force, almost without interruption, made its recruiting goals for more than 12 consecutive years.

Although recently all the services have met or surpassed their recruiting quotas, proponents and critics of the Corps still wonder how the Marines perennially achieve success when other services struggle with recruiting. And, how do they do it in these times of war with continual combat deployments?

A weak job market certainly helps, but even before the rise in unemployment, the Marines were doing well enticing the nation's best young men and women to earn the eagle, globe and anchor.

"Recruiters have been very successful this year [2009], but that doesn't make the job easy," said Master Sergeant John A. Tohm, Course Head, Basic Recruiter Course. He should know—he's a career recruiter who wrote his first enlistment

contract in 1996. "I was in for about 4½ years and got out as a corporal, went back to Lubbock, Texas, and to Texas Tech University. I joined the Reserve and came back on active duty as a newly promoted sergeant and recruiter in Lubbock. I've been on recruiting since. I love it."

Now he's teaching recruiters and makes a point of telling them: "By no means is recruiting duty easier. We are just in a different time."

**R**emembering those canvassing days in Texas, he said: "When I first started, you could have certain waivers that you can't have today. Even then I had to work hard to write three contracts. Today, we have a bigger pool of people to choose from; however, that Marine recruiter on the street right now writing one or two contracts is working as hard as I did because we've gotten stricter with waivers."

The Marine Corps, not known to take shortcuts, is very selective about who joins its ranks.

The Corps is just as selective when choosing recruiters. Those who make the Corps a career know every Marine needs a successful tour on independent duty to compete for promotions. That means every leatherneck expects to be a "hat" on the drill field, to stand watch as a Marine security guard at a U.S. embassy or to wear

recruiting duty dress blues.

Recruiting duty has gotten a bum rap from some Marines. Scuttlebutt and sea lawyers say recruiting is too far from the real Marine Corps of high speed, low drag, boots and 'utes, kickin' ass in every clime and place.

Tohm shrugs it off: "A lot of Marines come to the school here, saying, 'Hey, I don't really want to be here.' But within the first week, they accept it and they are ready to go out and do their job for the Marine Corps. They got orders, and like any good Marine, they're going to march forward and do the best job."

The Marine Corps does all it can to help. While it may not sympathize with individuals bellyaching about their orders, Marine leaders certainly are not going to set a Marine up to fail in a high-profile assignment.

Twice a year, the Corps sends out Headquarters Recruiter Screening Teams to scour installations looking for potential recruiters. The HRST members are armed with names provided by Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps of individuals who, at least on paper, are qualified for recruiting duty. By the time the team shows up at a Marine Corps installation, the local career planners have passed the word. Candidates arrive at the HRST carrying their record book and their commanding officer's screening checklist. The team then goes through every candidate's record.

The Corps justifies the double-checking because it is important for its recruiters to have few distractions in their pursuit of qualified applicants. "Little problems can turn into big problems. We never want to send a Marine out on the streets [as a recruiter] to hurt him or her, cause financial trouble or marriage trouble, or stress-related issues," said Tohm.

There has long been a tradition within the Corps for commands to send the best people to assignments whether temporary additional duty or independent duty. Still, it is hard for a command to give up its best Marines to Recruiters School, Drill Instructor School or any assignment that prematurely takes them.

"Yes, we're talking to their best sergeants, the guys that are making things happen out there," said Tohm. "But the commands also know there is a bigger picture. The Marine Corps isn't going to exist if there aren't any recruiters, and we need the best sergeants, we need the best

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At Recruiters School, the students are interviewed, tested daily and challenged to learn the language of recruiting. SSgt Kyle R. Hanson (below, left) is quizzed by GySgt Jose C. Vasquez, group advisor. SSgt Hanson from Jacksonville, Fla., is scheduled to be assigned to recruiting duty in Daytona Beach. His twin brother, Sgt Dustin C. Hanson (wearing utilities in the bottom photo), will be just up the road at Recruiting Sub-Station Brunswick, Ga.



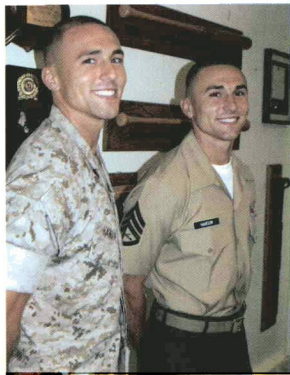
corporals, we need the best staff sergeants out there on the street because that's what America expects to see when they look at our recruiters."

The HRST interviews each Marine and checks off a long list of prerequisites. The team members look to ensure that Marines have the time left on their enlistment contract to complete a tour on recruiting duty as well as have three or fewer dependents. They also look to see if a Marine has any nonjudicial punishments, medical problems, family problems or any negative trends such as alcohol issues. Any number of discrepancies can disqualify Marines from assignment to Recruiters School.

If they are fit and qualified, usually they are assigned within two weeks to a school seat and know which of the six annual seven-week classes they will attend in San Diego.

When they check in, they are screened again. "Their CO's checklist is recertified," said Tohm. "We might pick up 300 students and our instructors take about three days again to ensure the student is qualified." The school screen along with the results of a physical fitness test, weight and measure of body fat are all calculated to ensure each Marine is not only prepared mentally and physically, but also socially and will look the part of a U.S. Marine.

"We usually drop 20 to 30 students,"



said Tohm. "Not that they are bad Marines, it is just that for whatever reason, we don't see them as qualified to go on recruiting duty at this time. A lot of them do go back to their units, fix whatever issues they have and then come back."

Gunnery Sergeant Patrick J. Griffin started out 19 years ago as an infantryman, and then was an aviation hydraulics mechanic. He finally became a recruiter at Recruiting Station Baltimore. He's at the Career Recruiters Course getting ready to start a second tour as a recruiter, military occupational specialty 8412.

He said he loves recruiting, but "also these young kids, raw and on the street as high school seniors or graduates, they don't have anything. They lack discipline. You send them to recruit training and they come back and you see how it has transformed them. I think that did it for me, knowing I could help the Marine Corps by putting in good people and help those looking for a challenge and looking for a change.

"I get goose bumps thinking of how these kids come into the Marine Corps. You've got a mom who says her son 'is not going to make it.' A dad who says, 'My son's lazy. He's not going to make it.'"

"What I love most is when they come home as Marines; I see the parents do a 180. They are so proud." "Gunny" Griffin should know. He was one of those kids lacking direction and discipline with no ambition. He found the Marine Corps to be competitive, challenging and conducive to making great citizens. He found a home.

Two Marines attending the school, Sergeant Winter N. Eastridge and Staff Sergeant Jeffery W. Miller, are looking forward to recruiting. Sgt Eastridge has been assigned to RS Las Vegas and SSgt Miller is going to Oklahoma near his hometown of Tulsa. Usually, Marines are able to get one of their three choices of duty stations. It is getting through the course that's a challenge.

***Career recruiters are a contradiction in a Corps that basically believes specialization is for insects.***

"Even though I've taken college courses for speech and English, the instructors here present everything more realistically. They want us to perform adequately, so they tell us exactly what is happening on the street. The instructors have been there, they've done that and are able to relate the course material to real-life situations," said Eastridge.

SSgt Miller said, "They teach us to do more than the minimum. We've learned things happen on the street that you may not expect; there are quick, unexpected changes to plans. They teach us how to think on your feet with a whole lot of pressure."

MSgt Tohm has 12 instructors and four senior instructors working at the Basic Recruiter Course. Also, at the Recruiters School, they have the Prior Service Recruiting Course, Career Retention Specialist Course and the Career Recruiter Course. Marines quickly learn that successful recruiting keys heavily on how well a recruiter can speak in public, and

that is emphasized from the first week of school.

According to Tohm: "We get them up in front of their peers and have them give certain speeches, and give them in a certain way. We learn quickly if they can communicate effectively with people. If they can't, we send them back to their unit. They know recruiting isn't for them, and perhaps they should look to being drill instructors, MSG duty or maybe they [will] be assigned to one of the Schools of Infantry to get their B-billet [independent duty] out of the way."

Public speaking, professional sales skills, recruiting station operations and leadership play a large role in the training. The students essentially learn the language of recruiting. Everything is hands-on practical application, and everything is videotaped and evaluated. The stress level increases during testing. Students may be practicing making phone calls, taking exams or being critiqued. Every time they sit down with an instructor, they are being

tested while a camera is on them. The school records everything. "If he or she makes it through Recruiters School, that tape goes to their assigned recruiting station where it will be used by the local recruiter instructor to continue their training," even as they recruit, said Tohm.

They learn how to recognize and help point a young person toward his or her particular needs and ambitions in life.

The recruiters call it "a needs satisfaction selling process." The Marine recruiter finds out what potential recruits would like to do with their lives. "Hopefully, we can marry that up with something comparable in the Marine Corps and help them achieve their goals in life through the Marine Corps," said Tohm.

MSgt Tohm has what he considers to be an edge. He is a career recruiter—MOS 8412—one of only 549 in the Corps who not only recruit, but also are the backbone and corporate knowledge of the recruiting service. When it comes to all aspects of recruiting, men and women such as MSgt Tohm are the duty experts everyone goes to. They can give sales talks in their sleep and at the same time mentor those traditional 8411 recruiters, on loan from their primary military occupational specialties.

Career recruiters are a contradiction in a Corps that basically believes specialization is for insects. An anomaly because career recruiters are just that: career recruiters—dress blues for the rest of their time in the Corps. There's no more fleet or operating forces, no other duties such as MSG or drill instructor, no deployments, no anything that doesn't directly deal with recruiting for the Corps.

In return they receive monthly special duty assignment pay of \$450, and, more importantly, provide needed continuity in a critical and crucial area.

All of the school instructors are 8412 career recruiters with five to 10 years "on the street." Career recruiters have all been canvassing recruiters, have run recruiting stations, been part of the command group and mentored and monitored other recruiters.

"Promotions are good," said Tohm. "As an 8412, I think promotions are comparable to the other military occupational specialties. I think having a successful B billet as an 8411 puts them a little ahead of their peers and makes them a little more competitive."

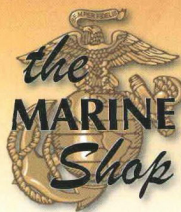
But MOS 8411 or 8412, promotion or no promotion, recruiting duty is no boondoggle assignment. It has real challenges.

**Everything the students do in class is recorded. The recordings are used to critique the students' techniques, and a copy of each student's videotape is sent to his or her assigned recruiting station's recruiter instructor to aid in continued training.**



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Recruiters of today have serious responsibility and time-management challenges. MSgt Tohm explained: "Once they meet an individual, they are looking at hours spent showing him what the Marine Corps offers. If he or she decides they want to be Marines, the recruiter is now looking at hours of prepping and getting them ready to go to the MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] where they enlist in the United States Marine Corps. We have high school graduates waiting six or nine months to go to boot camp. Recruiters are having to focus on keeping those young men and women in the program, making sure they are ready to ship to recruit training."

"Recruiters are looking at minimum, an hour to two hours a week spent with helping them prepare for the rigors of boot camp, whether it be physical fitness or mentally preparing them or spending time with their family; getting them ready to leave."

Sometimes preparing the families is just as important and challenging as preparing the new enlistees.

"Recruiting command groups are saying, 'We've got to take care of the family. We got to make sure the family's questions are answered, make sure that they are prepared for their young man or young woman to go to boot camp,'" said Tohm.

Tohm continued, "When do those recruiters make those phone calls we graded them on? When do they go out, shake hands and meet prospects? They go through the day from one person to the next. They have a lot of things to manage. That's not counting career talks—all the paperwork they have to do. That's not counting their government vehicle they have to manage."

**R**ecruiters also work to build and maintain good relations with high schools. There still is a need for lists of students. "The recruiter works to prove to educators, school administrators and people in the communities they are not just there to snag up young men and send them to war," said Tohm. "They are really there to help young men and women with careers, to help them advance in life."

Today there is a trend to use social media: "Twitter," "My Space" and "Facebook." Recruiters say, "A poolee can 'twitter' one person and it goes out to 10, 15 or 20 people. Some recruiting stations have their own 'Facebook' accounts so people can go straight to the RS through Facebook," said Tohm.

The Recruiters School has only seven weeks to cram a tradition of recruiting and spirit of success into Marines who will work almost nonstop putting America's best onto the yellow footprints painted at the far end of the MCRD San Diego ar-

cade or at Receiving Barracks, Parris Island, S.C.

"When you are on the streets of America and you are going from person to person and every one of them is telling you, 'No,' you've got to really believe in the Marine Corps and what the Marine Corps stands for to keep doing that, day in and day out. After being told 'No' a hundred times over the phone, it's not the best feeling in the world, but you are still striving for that one young man or young woman waiting to be contacted and you can help better their lives or make them more successful. They are going to be the next Marines."

"You get to see that young man or young woman who had no options or didn't know of any options. You help them become a Marine. Later, you find out they earned their degree, maybe even became an officer or maybe they just did their time, got college money, came back and are successfully working in the community. They can say, 'I got my start with Sergeant Smith, my Marine Corps recruiter, five or six years ago.'"

"Long hours, yes," said MSgt Tohm. "It's hard, but very rewarding work."

Ask any recruiter after a 13-hour day. He'll sell you, motivate you and make you want to wear those dress blues.

