

Observations from The Citadel Cadre Training Saturday, 5 August 2017

Once again, I found myself answering my alarm at 0430 (4:30am). My new bride, Debbie, had fixed me a large cup of coffee (Bless her heart!) while I got dressed and handed it to me as I left our home in Columbia. She had a sleepy expression that suggested I was nuts for trekking 120 miles in the early morning hours to watch a bunch of 20-somethings “train”.

This may be a little long, so grab a tall cold drink, find a quiet place to read my observations ... perhaps take some time to reflect a bit as well on what you have learned during your lifetime. Consider for a moment how beneficial your exposure to this kind of training and experience may have been while you were at The Citadel, or earlier in your life. It may not be ‘the end all be all’, but it is a start ... just one approach from which we all can learn.

For the third year now, the Commandant’s Department, led by Captain Geno Paluso ’89, US Navy Retired (SEAL), had organized training for the Cadre members ... a ‘train the trainer’ scenario. (For the non-Citadel reader, the Training Cadre is made up of upper classmen (Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors) assigned leadership responsibilities. Each hold rank within the Corps of Cadets, and are charged with training and indoctrinating incoming freshmen ... “Knobs”.)

This training was conducted by Command Post Technologies (CPT), which is owned by Scott Biscotti ’88, with instructors with varied backgrounds, men and women, but a large group of Army Rangers, Special Forces, Navy SEALs, both active and retired. There were 450+ cadets participating, men and women.

Several Alumni have asked why do I go down there to observe and watch? In one way or another, I go because I am curious about how the Corps of Cadets is evolving and changing. There are many ‘voices on the wind’ that say The Citadel is getting easier and that we need to go back to this or that way of doing things, but curiously, I never see the owners of those voices on campus observing cadet life away from big weekends, parades and such. I suspect they are still lost in their own reflection of yesteryear and trying to replicate something that aged out long ago. It’s easy to gripe and complain when one lives in a vacuum with no new or enlightened information. The cadets today are different, very smart and process information much faster. It is truly curious and inspiring to observe these Cadets responding to this type of training.

Arriving on campus at 0630 (6:30am), I had missed the early PT that had started at around 0430. The early PT is a bit of grinder which starts initially in the barracks and then moves out to the Parade Deck. I had watched this element last year and was told it was similar but a little different. It is designed to challenge the cadets physically, which also works on their initial mindset. It’s not easy. I recall several cadets had to take a knee and ‘drop some groceries’.

There is no published schedule for the participating Cadets, but it is very well orchestrated by CPT. To be clear, the Cadre is reminded of the shock and surprise they experienced as an incoming Knob in not knowing what was coming next. Only a few Cadet leaders wore watches, which was by design. Imagine not knowing what time it was, what was coming next, what would be required or how long this would go on. A ‘grinder’ is perhaps an apt description.

After a quick breakfast, the 450 cadets came down in their T-shirts and BDU pants and boots. They were randomly divided into 6 groups by the old-fashioned method, yet effective, counting off 1 through 6. Cadets who had lined up in their own Companies were quickly separated from their buddies by this process. This separation process assured working with others with whom they may not have been familiar and certainly challenge their team building abilities regardless of class. Throughout the day, the different groups would experience an hour and half at each of 6 different stations, curiously referred to as “evolutions”.

During and following each evolution, CPT Instructors would huddle up with their assigned group and offer advice and explanation for the lessons being presented in that evolution. Each evolution had a purpose. Each Instructor had standing as an experienced team member and leader. From their own experiences, they were sharing effective leadership principles and practices that could be applicable in either a military or civilian environment.

Below I offer a quick summary of the 6 stations, what I observed and took away. Again, I encourage you to reflect on your own life’s experiences, perhaps as a Cadet and also in your own life’s experience, great or small, and how you might have benefited from exposure to this type of training early in your life ... back when we were young, strong and bullet-proof:

1) Mark Clark Hall ... teaching relaxation under stress (Aikido – marital arts):

Aikido is a martial art form which is defensive in nature. Expressed differently, it focuses on a reaction to attack (think: stress) instead of the presumed offensive (attacking) form of other martial arts.

If someone grabs us by our arm, our complete attention is focused on that contact point. The instructors suggested and illustrated that when we shift our focus differently away from that pressure point then we have other options to counter the pressure. Similarly, when we are under stress, we tend to tense up and become rigid in our body and our thinking as we focus solely on the cause of our stress.

The instructor illustrated this point by holding his arms rigid to his sides as two Cadets lifted him up. Then the instructor completely relaxed and challenged the Cadets to lift him up again while his arms were relaxed. They couldn’t do it. Again, when we relax our options multiply.

It was a curious demonstration that highlighted when each of us is under stress we can be pushed around, man-handled physically and perhaps mentally by others, but by relaxing, we create the ability to change our reaction and our performance. It takes practice to relax under pressure and consider other options.

2) Parade Ground ... teaching teamwork via log and truck tire drills:

In this evolution, the Cadets were again divided into smaller teams. There were 5-6 to one heavy log and there were 6 different log teams. The challenge then became to lift the log as a team on command up on to their right shoulder, then hold it above their head, then to their left shoulder, then back down on the ground. There were also sit-ups done with the log. The team of 5-6 Cadets had to move as one unit, together. And yes, they were not allowed to talk. The commands were given by the Instructor. Then they had to coordinate with the other 5 log teams in a synchronized fashion.

There were races with the logs where the log team carried the log around a marker about 30 yards away on the Parade Deck and back.

At another station, teams of 6-8 Cadets were tasked to flip huge truck tires over and over in relay races. Then the teams were gradually reduced to 4 members and then to 2 members. It got harder and harder.

Every relay was of course a race. Teams working under pressure (read: competition, following someone else's instruction ... we have all been there). Winners got to rest a moment while the 'losing' teams ran again. The Instructor with a bullhorn was always reminding the teams the often-used refrain ... "It pays to be a winner."

This lesson highlighted the importance of working together, perhaps in a different approach. As a team became engaged together, the task was easier when the load was shared. As the team got smaller, the load heavier, the task became much harder. We must work together to be successful!

3) Obstacle Course ... teamwork under physically stressful situation



Kasey Hucks is standing to the left in a red shirt. She is charged with overseeing the physical fitness of the Corps of Cadets. As I heard several times during the day, she's cute but she can kick your butt.

This team building evolution was built around a 7-9 member team having to transport a stretcher with 150 pounds through the Obstacle Course. Only one member could speak to offer direction, usually the youngest on the team (yes, a sophomore could be leading a team of upperclassmen). As an added challenge, the stretcher could not touch the ground or any obstacle, or the team would have to start over. Ugh!

(I learned that the O-course today has controlled access that is governed by the Commandant's Department. As most of us are aware, the O-Course can be dangerous and many injuries have occurred there. I was led to understand the Marine ROTC Cadets use the O-course a lot and have the higher familiarity on how to negotiate it.)

The Marine cadets, having the most familiarity with the course, usually led the way to show their team the best way to navigate over an obstacle. Some of the CPT instructors would also jump in and show best ways to overcome obstacles, usually silently. Some Cadets struggled with each obstacle. Some were too short to reach certain bars. Some were not strong enough to pull themselves up. Teammates had to assist each other, and did ... silently.

It was amazing to watch hand signals quickly evolve within the team and the team came together helping each other through the obstacles. Most viewed it as a competitive challenge, perhaps not always cheerfully, but working through the challenge. Remarkably, I saw competitive yet cooperative attitudes. The leaders began to reveal themselves assisting and directing their teammates.

I was reminded of a saying attributed to the Navy SEALs and which I used raising my kids, "You don't have to like what you do, sometimes you just have to do it." On one level or another, we have all experienced that concept.

4) Swimming Pool ... teamwork under intellectually challenging situation:

The assignment here was to build a raft that could be paddled by two people the length of the pool. Basic materials provided included a plank of wood, 4 large plastic buckets, nylon rope (hard to tie tightly, because they are very slippery) and two paddles. The group was divided into two smaller teams. One team was in the pool, allowed to talk and offer directions. The second part of the team was up on the side of the pool to construct the raft but could not talk. Every two minutes the two teams would swap positions until a raft was built.

Now it may sound like everything was provided and it would be easy, but it is not. Again, the building team could not speak or communicate. The team in the water could talk but could not construct. It's incredibly challenging. You are racing against a clock and the other group on the other side of the pool.

Obviously, the challenge was to develop a successful plan to build the raft and overcome the communication issue between the two sub-teams. Here, you could see the frustration on their faces but curiously everyone was dialed in and trying hard to be successful.

5) Rifle Range ... performing precision tasks when stressed:

As a large group would arrive, they were initially organized into two teams. They would navigate down a line of tires with one hand on the tire and one on the ground, then pump out 5 push-ups before moving over to the next tire to repeat the process. As I recall, there were 5 tires, thus a total of 25 pushups. Then they would jump up sprint down about 30 yards down the parking lot and back, stand in line and repeat the whole process ... over and over.

Periodically, a small team of 7-8 would be pulled out to run upstairs to the Indoor Rifle Range to shoot a pellet gun at a target. Imagine, your heart is racing and you need to put a pellet downrange on target, preferably a bulls-eye to be perfect. (Some of you recall the instruction on controlling your breathing and pulling the trigger between heartbeats. Imagine trying that when your heart is pounding and your arms are shaking? It is much harder!)

The lesson here was trying to control your body and mind, to calm down enough to hit the assigned target.



The CPT Instructor at this station had retired from the Navy after 18 years as a SEAL and is currently teaching at the US Naval Academy. He emphasized how athletes must practice to hone their skills and get better, more competitive. Similarly, Leaders must also practice constantly and consistently to hone their skills. Leaders are NOT born, they are developed.

6) Jenkins Hall ... teaching Leadership (MOM)

This was perhaps my favorite station, which was more a lecture but had interactive elements. It allowed the Cadets to relax in the cool air a little bit, but also required them to think. The lecture was conducted by two Navy veterans from the SEAL community, one retired SEAL and one still active.

The active guy was from South Chicago, was an ex-gang member but had turned his life around by joining the Navy and had served for 18 years with the Special Warfare Combatant Craft (SWCC), whose motto is "On time! On target! Never Quit!" ... that may also have some business applications. The retired SEAL was now a consultant and author.

Both of speakers talked about the qualities required of effective leaders. While they shared stories to support their tenets of leadership, I will just provide some of their bullet points and encourage you to reflect and apply them to your own life's experiences:

- a) Rank and Intimidation is not leadership.
- b) Leadership = Inspiring and Motivating people with purpose, to a higher purpose and recognize their own higher ability to achieve success.
- c) Each of us hold on to challenges / fears but we must look for a path to redemption, forgiveness and opportunity ... not from others but from within ourselves.
- d) Expressing and genuinely listening to the challenges and fears of others earns empathy.
- e) Courage is essential to Leadership.

- f) Leaders inspire progress.
- g) Good solid inter-personal relationships are critical to being successful.
- h) We often don't see our own blind spots, we need to listen to others we trust. (We can see our errors in hindsight, but not necessarily in the present.)
- i) Heroes are servant leaders ... committing themselves selflessly to a greater cause.
- j) Leaders hold the line ... keep the standards high.
- k) Forgive yourself and others, and drive on.
- l) FEAR = False Evidence Appears Real
- m) Let your example speak louder than your mouth.
- n) Lead with compassion and empathy, and earn your bones:
 - Wishbone ... all your hopes and aspirations ... what will you resolve in your lifetime?
 - Backbone ... what are you willing to stand for?
 - Funny bone ... you must be able to laugh and enjoy ... the situation and yourself ... self-deprecating humor helps.
- o) Humility is necessary to learn from failure and weakness.
- p) Stop reflecting on your challenges / fears ... Go to work on making positive changes ... quit looking back and start looking forward.
- q) Courage and Authenticity are critical Leadership traits.
- r) Leave the Corps of Cadets better than you found it!

The instructors offered a **Fearless Leaders Model**:

1) Courage to Fail ... Leader acts with inspiring courage	2) Resilience to Recover ... Leaders react with a resilient attitude
3) Consciousness to Process Experiences ... Leaders must think with Higher Consciousness	4) Mindset for Success ... Leaders engage tasks with a mindset for success

The Cadets were asked to think of a model for the Selfless Servant Leader. The instructor suggested Mom ... Moms are servant leaders and come from a position of Love, which is their super-power.

M – Mission ... what must be done?

O – Others ... who must be brought in to be successful ... what skill sets are required?

M – Me ... what is my part on the team to accomplish the mission?

About 17:30 hours (5:30pm), all the Cadets came back together on the Parade Deck and sat on the bleachers. The lead instructor, retired Navy, who had served in the Navy SEALs for 30 years, asked the Cadets if they had had fun and learned anything. In response, there was very weary applause and cheering from the Cadets. He then told them to go back to their barracks, grab a sandwich that would be provided in front of each of their respective barracks and change into their PT uniforms (T-shirts, shorts, and tennis shoes). He also asked them to talk with their buddies about what they learned. He then told them to come back down in about 30 minutes to offer an “After Action Report” (AAR) ... what worked, what didn’t and what could be done better next time.

About 1815 (6:15pm), when the cadets came down for the AAR, they were surprised to see 12 busses waiting for them. The Cadets, who were now reunited in their own Companies, boarded the busses for a trip out to Folly Beach. They arrived on the south end of Folly Beach around 19:30 (7:30pm) ... traffic was a little thick on the weekend. They formed up by Company and Battalion and a head count taken ... one of many taken throughout the day. Then they ran out to the beach.

New training evolutions began immediately ... wading into the shallow surf, sitting down in the water, doing flutter kicks in the air, rolling around in the sand, and pretty much doing any kind of exercise the instructors could think of. Although I had to leave about 2000 hours (8pm) to drive back to Columbia, I understand they stayed out there until 2100 hours (9pm) or later.



On Folly Beach. Note the redshirts to right, those are TAC (Teach, Advise, Coach) Officers.

Curiously, as I stood on the beach with these Cadets, I saw a lot of grins and a few of them chuckling. To me, that observation spoke volumes as to their attitudes after nearly 15 hours of excruciating physical and mental torment overcoming various challenges. They were all still there ... still engaged for the most part... all 450 of them. Amazingly, I only heard of 3 injuries: a chipped tooth and two with pulled muscles. (The Citadel Sports Medicine team had been at every station during the day and at Folly Beach responding to calls for “Medic”.)

This training was all about building foundations in teamwork and the importance of communicating expectations with each other to have a chance at success. Indeed, during my Citadel cadet experience

as well as a career in business, none of us are ever successful by ourselves it ALWAYS takes a team and it ALWAYS requires effective leadership!

The challenges we faced as Cadets so many years ago, are still alive and well. Today's Cadets are challenged daily, if not hourly, physically, mentally, intellectually and their time management skills must be in high gear to balance it all.

It is intolerable and erroneous for Alumni, or anyone, to think The Citadel experience is getting easier. I will submit it may even be tougher in some ways but I will quickly suggest you consider that your strength covers my weakness and my strength covers your weakness. Expressed a different way might suggest, what is hard for you is easy for me, and what is hard for me is easy for you. How does one really define universally what is hard and what is easy? In the end, together we are so much stronger and successful when we perform as a team!

As Alumni and Employers, we should be encouraging those positive attributes in our respective teams today, and especially in offering positive encouragement in our conversations with Cadets. (We should not be telling stories from yesteryear which are largely based on stupidity and perhaps encourage a negative action.) We should be encouraging these Cadets to make the Corps of Cadets better than when they arrived as Freshman. Encourage them to build upon the good experiences they learned and pass it on. Forget the bad experiences, they will certainly have their fair share in due course without our input.

Indeed, when we focus only on the best attributes of our own experiences, we get stronger, smarter and better. Also, by being encouraging in positive ways, we encourage our teammates along a path of continued improvement that will instill in them a sense of pride and make us all proud as well.

It was a long day.

I still go down to watch and observe. Occasionally, I am invited to offer a presentation to Cadets. I truly enjoy chatting with Cadets whenever I am on campus. In those conversations and interactions, I remember myself as a Cadet. I see my classmates. I listen and smile a good bit. I'm amused a little. They talk about the same stuff we did so long ago. They complain about exactly what we complained about but in the big scheme of Life experiences they are truly small issues and challenges. Every one of them is looking for some encouragement, looking for a mentor for guidance, looking for that path to success ... the same path we sought so long ago and perhaps still seek today. As Alumni, we need to fill that need in positive and encouraging guidance to these cadets. We need to become better mentors!

As an observer, these Cadets make us ALL look good and can also make us proud that our Long Gray Line continues to be a mighty big challenge and that we are now providing quality instruction to train and educate Principled Leaders!

Go Dawgs!

Kevin M. Elmore '74