

Brass Buckles

All candidates are issued brass buckles for their belts that must be shined to a flawless luster devoid of scratches, buff marks, and dents. Adding misery to the experience of shining the new brass is the removal of the quartermaster or lacquer coating that was sprayed on them to prevent tarnishing from the air, humidity and oils from your skin as you adjust or touch it throughout the day. However, the factory shine that was buffed prior to the coating application is not good enough to meet Marine Corps standards, candidates shall shine brass until our thumbs and fingers are callused, dried out, and burned from the friction of heat as they vigorously shine brass to meet the exacting standards of their Drill Instructor.

I have always prided myself on the quality of the brass shine that my candidates have acquired so early in training. However my methods for developing those quick results very well may have been perceived something short of sadistic. I would have the class line up in the passageway outside their rooms with their brass buckle, Brasso or Never-Dull. I would show them an example of the standard I was expecting them to achieve with the instructions **"To breakdown the coating to expose the brass that needs shined will require friction and speed when rubbing the brass buckle with your rag and polish"**. I would give them 15 minutes to achieve my benchmarks of progress followed with threats of punishment for not meeting the standard on time.

"HARDER BOY!"

"GOOD SWEATHEART, TAKE YOUR TIME...THE WHOLE CLASS IS GOING TO PAY FOR YOUR LACK OF EFFORT"

"FRICTION, I WANT TO SEE HEAT AND FRICTION WHEN YOU ARE RUBBING MY BRASS. THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR MOLESTING MY BRASS, YOU RUB IT AND RUB IT HARD"

Finally their time is up and I command "STOP"

"STOP, AYE AYE SIR" The candidates shout in unison as they lock their body up at the position of attention. They are covered in sweat, fatigue, and their nerves are beginning to fray.

"WHEN I GIVE THE COMMAND YOU WILL WIPE OFF YOUR BRASS AND PRESENT IT IN YOUR OPEN PALM FOR INSPECTION...DO IT NOW"

"AYE AYE SIR" they said in unison and did as ordered. However the heat and humidity and dripping facial perspiration quickly obscures their efforts, the brass keeps fogging up in their open hand.

My comments run the gamut of:

"NASTY" "UNSAT" "PATHETIC" "UNACCEPTABLE" "NO EFFORT"

I announce my displeasure and put them on their face and have them do pushups, leg lifts and squat thrust AKA bends and thrust. After several minutes of exercise I put them back on the clock for another ten or fifteen minutes and the whole process is repeated. Once I get about 50% of the brass looking like I want which is normally about one hour, I add a new element of stress called peer pressure.

This time when I inspect the brass I tell them "IF YOUR BRASS IS NOT TO STANDARD, YOU WILL BE TOLD TO BEGIN SHINING YOUR BRASS SOME MORE SO THAT YOU CAN CATCH UP. MEAN WHILE THE PIG TO YOUR LEFT WHOM I JUST INSPECTED WILL HIT THE DECK AND BEGIN PUSHUPS AND PAY FOR YOUR LACK OF EFFORT. HE WILL EXERCISE UNTIL YOU HAVE REACHED THE BENCHMARK STANDARD I AM EXPECTING. HOWEVER, IF THEY ARE SHINING BRASS BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES DID NOT MEET MY STANDARD THEN IT WILL BE THE FIRST AVAILABLE CANDIDATE TO THEIR LEFT THAT IS NOT SHINING BRASS OR DOING PUSHUPS WHO WILL PAY FOR YOUR SINS". You would be amazed at the renewed effort and energy expended by those whose brass was UNSAT when I have them polishing brass while others pay with the pain of exercises.

"NOT GOOD ENOUGH, YOUR FRIEND HERE CAN PAY FOR YOUR LACK OF EFFORT" The innocent candidate standing beside the deficient candidate drops to the pushup position and begins his or her pushups. I can see the stress wearing on the candidates whose brass did not meet my expectations. They don't know it yet but I am laying the foundation for developing unit cohesiveness as a class. For many candidates this will be the first time in their life that their actions have had a direct impact on others, good or bad. I can see the improvement in the efforts of those deficient one's still standing, shining their brass to catch up to meeting the standards I have imposed. My taunts of "DON'T MAKE ANY EFFORT TO SHINE YOUR BRASS

CANDIDATE, THEY DON'T MIND PAYING FOR YOUR INCOMPETENCE" initially have a caustic effect on those exercising as they are angry for suffering due to the incompetence of others. The grunting of those on the ground doing pushups begins to grow louder and louder. I like it; I want the dramatic sound effects to emphasize to those deficient candidates still shining brass that many others have suffered because they failed to give me their best effort 100% of the time. Finally after the candidates exercising are sufficiently exhausted I have them recover to the POA. I give the class a head call so they can rest and rehydrate and talk about things in the head. We have at least another two hours of this pain ahead of us, only they don't know it yet.

By taps the brass looks like it was shined on a buffing wheel turning at 12,000 RPM with Jewelers rouge. I have them store their shined brass carefully in a soap dish wrapped in a handkerchief for Fridays Poopieville outpost inspection.

It's Friday morning and the candidates are upstairs in their rooms prepped for the wall locker, rack, foot display and desk inspection by the class officers and class drill instructors. I am tired of seeing the maximum efforts of my class ruined by overzealous drill instructors throwing their brass into the wall or down the corridor because although my class has outstanding presentation brass, all of us drill instructors know they are not going to pass the Poopieville outpost inspection and a lot of brass is going to get thrown around. I decide to change things up this time.

It is 15 minutes prior to the scheduled kick off time for the inspection and all of us drill instructors have assembled in the Chief Drill Instructor office for the safety brief and conduct of the inspection brief.

"Drill Instructors, we are going to do something a little different this time. There will not be any presentation brass for inspection" I said.

"What do you mean there isn't going to be any presentation brass, why the hell not Gunny" said the CDI and Battalion NCOIC almost in unison.

"Because, all you are going to do is destroy it and the brass looks damn near perfect".

"Gunny, you have less than fifteen minutes to have that brass on display for this inspection" said a very pissed off Master Gunnery Sergeant. He didn't

care too much for his Drill Instructors making changes to the way things were done, especially if there is a perception of softening of the Navy OCS program.

I left the office angry and frustrated to say the least. I had my class get their brass out for display and returned just in time for the inspection to commence on schedule. What I didn't know was the Battalion NCOIC GYSGT Woolett told the Master Gun's he was going to get some junk brass and play a joke on me.

We head upstairs to where my candidates are and I stand in the hallway observing the Outpost Inspection of my class. Sure enough I hear GYSGT Woolett "YOU CALL THIS SHINED" and at which time he turned his body preventing me from seeing him switch the brass he inspected with the junk brass I did not know he had and then he walked out into the hallway past me and threw it as hard as he could down the passageway. I am certain the brass looked like a train had run over it by the time it stopped due to the sound of the brass grinding and skipping down the passageway. I was angry to say the least because my prediction came true. MGYSGT Holtry was grinning ear to ear, shaking his head; I am getting hot under the collar because I know how good the brass in my class looked. This story repeats itself for several rooms. At some point Master Gunnery Sergeant Holtry clues me in on the joke when he knows GYSGT Woolett has run out of junk brass.

Ah, Drill Instructors; you just have to love them! They are passionate about everything they do.

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