

THEY HAVE A DREAM

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[Assignment: Write an essay in which you analyze, by using stated criteria, a group of people, ideas, or objects. Your goal is to make a point by classifying them into groups based on their characteristics.]

In a few short months, high schools all over the United States will be conducting commencement exercises for the class of 1993. Soon thereafter, thousands of young men and women will take a bold step forward and depart their hometown enroute to Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Affectionately known by Marines as "the land that God forgot," it is here that these young men and women will subject themselves to the physical harshness and psychological discipline that transforms an ordinary citizen into a Marine. Many people wonder what makes these young people take that hard step forward and become a member of the world's premier force in readiness. I remember the day I told my friends and family that I was going to enlist. They told me I was crazy . . . but I wasn't. They predicted that I wouldn't complete recruit training . . . but I did. So what motivated me, and the thousands of Americans very much like me, to enlist in the first place?

This is a question I was asked frequently when I was a recruiter for the Marine Corps. The truth is that there is no single reason that people choose to enlist in the Corps. If you went to Parris Island and asked 100 recruits why they were there, each would give you a slightly different answer. My encounters with young men and women on recruiting duty, however, allow me to say with confidence that at least 95 of those recruits enlisted for the same reasons the following five categories of people will enlist.

The Hard Chargers join the United States Marine Corps because they want to challenge themselves and determine if they have the intestinal fortitude to earn the title of Marine. These young men and women were the ones I most enjoyed working with. They typically decide prior to the end of their junior year of high school that they are going to serve in the Armed Forces, and the majority of them enlist in the Delayed Entry Program prior to the end of the first semester of their senior year of high school. It was easy for me to determine if someone was a Hard Charger. Primarily, when I would ask them why they wanted to join the Marine Corps instead of another branch or the Armed Forces, they would state that they wanted to be a member of the best team or that they thought the Marine Corps had the sharpest looking dress uniform. Secondly, they aren't too concerned about the job that they are enlisting for. All that interests them is becoming a United States Marine. Aggressive, athletic, and dedicated is how I would characterize the majority of the Hard Chargers.

Pressure from family members, either direct or indirect, is the key factor that influences the Apostles to enlist in the Marine Corps.

These individuals typically have a dominant father or role model who was (or is) a member of the Marine Corps. Because the Marine Corps is the smallest and most elite branch of the Department of Defense, former Marines often recall the time they spent in uniform with fondness and great pride, and regard the other branches of the Armed Forces as somewhat inferior to the Corps. They consider their experience in the Marine Corps as their passage from adolescence to adulthood, and encourage their children to follow in their footsteps. Roy Oshop, the Air Force recruiter whose office was adjacent to mine, once told me that he never recruited a person into the Air Force who had a father who was a former Marine. I think that statement is a testimonial to the loyalty former Marines have to the Corps and impress upon their children. When an Apostle successfully completes recruit training, the time-honored tradition of esprit-de-corps is handed down from father to son, and I have never met a Marine veteran who wasn't damn proud of his child for deciding to become a Marine. As a matter of fact, some of the Apostles I enlisted were third or fourth generation Marines.

The prospect of serving their country as a means of helping to finance a college education is why the Scholars resolve themselves to become United States Marines. These folk are typically good students in high school who, near the end of their senior year of high school, realize that they can't afford to attend college. Usually they are intelligent and clever, but not scholastically competitive enough to be awarded a scholarship. Some come from poor families, but the majority come from middle-class families who earn too much annual income to qualify for student aid, but whose income is insufficient to provide a college education for their children. The Scholars routinely score very high on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, a written exam administered to all candidates for enlistment, which qualifies them for a financial bonus of up to \$5,000 if they enlist for a mentally challenging job such as air traffic controller. All of the Scholars I've encountered elect to contribute to the G.I. Bill, which is a voluntary program that provides \$14,400 for college related expenses in exchange for a \$1,200 deduction from their first year's earnings.

The Wanderers are people who love to travel and want an opportunity to get away from their hometown and see the world. It was easy for me to identify these folk. Almost all people in this group would sign an enlistment contract which guaranteed them orders to an overseas duty station, such as Japan or the Philippines, upon successful completion of their military technical school. Most would enlist for combat-oriented jobs, like the infantry or artillery, because Marines assigned to those units generally travel overseas more frequently than Marines assigned to support jobs, such as supply or administration. Once on active duty, these Marines typically volunteer for every deployment or military operation they have the opportunity to participate in.

The Drifters are a fairly small percentage of the people who volunteer to serve, but I think they are numerous enough to be classified as a group and not be overlooked. The typical Drifter is a person who graduated from high school anywhere from two to six years prior to enlisting in the Marines. They usually were employed, but the positions they held offered low earnings, no job security, and little satisfaction.

Entering the Marines to learn a marketable job skill, such as electronics repair, computer programming, or aircraft maintenance, is what motivates the Drifter to enlist. Most of these folks view the Marine Corps as their last real chance to learn the skills they know they will need to earn a liveable wage in a competitive society, and are so determined to succeed that almost all of them will successfully complete recruit training.

I should probably make one additional statement about the people in the last four groups. It is my opinion that everybody who enlists in the Marines has the soul of a Hard Charger clamoring to come out, but may not yet realize it. The Scholar, for example, might think he is enlisting to obtain money for college, but I don't think that is his only motivation. For if it were, I think he or she would embark upon the easier-traveled path and join another branch of the service. So what is it that makes one want to enlist in the Marine Corps? I think the answer to this question is that all of them want to challenge themselves. I used to tell people that if they want to "aim high," "sail the seven seas," or "be all that they could be," they should consider joining another branch of the military. If, on the other hand, they want to challenge themselves like never before and live up to their full potential, then and only then should they consider enlisting in the Marine Corps.

The United States Marine Corps is an organization that has been kept alive by the Scholars, Wanderers, Apostles, Drifters and Hard Chargers of many generations. For 217 years, these people have enlisted to pursue a dream and earn the title of Marine. To all those fine young men and women about to depart for Parris Island, I salute you and wish you the best of luck and God's speed. *Semper Fidelis.*