



Energy

On the evening of August 4th, 2004, my platoon was tasked with executing a reconnaissance and surveillance mission inside of the Najaf Cemetery. Under the cover of darkness, we found covert positions behind the immense crypts and mausoleums and peered into the Old City to gain intelligence on the activities of the Mahdi Militia. The Najaf cemetery (Wadi-us-salaam) is the largest cemetery in the world covering nearly fifteen hundred acres. Shortly after midnight, we saw machine gun tracer fire arcing through the air on the far side of the cemetery. It appeared that the Najaf police station was under attack from the Madhi Militia. Knowing that our allies were in danger and that we were the closest unit, I called our Command Center and volunteered to reinforce the police station. I was told to hold my position and continue to report.

A few hours later, we saw enemy forces reengage the police station with increased intensity. Now we watched as not only machine gun fire, but also rocket propelled grenades exploded against the police station walls. Again, I volunteered to support the Iraqi police and again, I was ordered to hold my position and continue to report.

Shortly thereafter, the sun rose over the cemetery which compromised the areas where we hid. Our reconnaissance and surveillance mission was complete, and we returned to our forward operating base a few miles away. However, as on any battlefield, just because the mission has



been accomplished, it does not mean that the workday is done. We still had to clean our weapons and check all our vehicles and gear to ensure we were ready to respond if called upon. Further, as the Platoon Commander, I had to debrief the intelligence section on what we did and saw while on patrol which took a few additional hours. My Marines had been awake and working since 5AM the previous morning. It was now 7AM the following day and we were still working. As I returned from my debrief, I was relieved to finally get some rest after a long day (and night). I quietly sat down on my sleeping bag, trying not to wake my Marines who had only gone to sleep minutes before. As I was unlacing my boots, one of my Marines entered the tent holding out a radio handset.

“Sir, Pale Rider (our Battalion Commander) is requesting you” he said. Pale Rider then informed me that we were getting a force together to reinforce the police station immediately. Approximately half my platoon had been with me during the invasion of Iraq a year prior and had seen and experienced combat before. They, to some degree, knew what to expect. However, the other half was still in boot camp or even high school during the invasion. For them, this was their first chance to experience combat. Emotions were high and the energy was palpable. We mounted our vehicles and sped back down to the cemetery ready for a fight. We reached the police station expecting fierce resistance.

What we got were empty streets. We didn’t see or hear any militia members or gunfire. We drove around looking for something, anything to fight. The area was deserted. After thirty minutes, we returned to our base as the adrenaline bled out of our systems leaving us exhausted. We had now been awake for nearly thirty hours. Again, we cleaned our weapons, vehicles, and gear. I debriefed the intelligence section. Upon completion, when I returned to our tent, I didn’t even bother taking off my boots before I collapsed on my sleeping bag. As soon as my head hit the sleeping bag, my radio watch entered the tent.

With resignation unmistakably in his voice, he said “Sir, we are heading back out there.” I swore softly to myself. We just returned from the police station! There wasn’t anyone there! We are getting jerked around! We have been awake for thirty-six hours straight! Although my anger was “up,” my energy level was at all an all-time low.

We will all experience those days when our energy and motivation flags regardless of how much we love our teammates or the work that we accomplish. We are still human beings. There will be nights when we are stressed and don’t get a good night sleep. We will get sick. We will get in arguments with friends, teammates, and loved ones. We will not always be 100% energized and ready to attack. However, if we step on any battlefield, or more importantly, life with a poor attitude and a lack of positive energy, we are setting ourselves and the teammates we love up to fail. In order to be individually successful, it is imperative that we bring positive energy. However, bringing positive energy isn’t enough. We must share it! Doing so makes our teammates better.



Lying on a sleeping bag in Iraq, fully dressed, sleep deprived, and positive we were getting jerked around was a challenging environment to be sure. My poor attitude though was still a choice. Fortunately, I had great teammates and great team leaders in my platoon; combat experienced Marines who knew that if we drove off the base with a poor attitude and corresponding low, negative energy, and the threat turned out to be real, Marines would be, at the very least, injured or worst, killed. Instead, my team leaders and I did two things: first, we made a choice to bring positive energy. We were loud, excited, and motivated. More importantly, we shared that energy with our teammates, some, much less experienced. We made sure that we all left the base looking and feeling like the highly trained, motivated, professional unit that we were.

This time, upon reaching the Najaf police station, we were immediately hit with both machine gun and mortar fire. Thus began the Battle of Najaf, one of the most violent, bloody, and pivotal battles of the entire war. My Marines performed at superhuman levels; fighting for the next thirty-six hours without reprieve, and then daily for the next month.

“Everyone is a hero when it is seventy degrees and sunny out.” Unfortunately, that’s not when we need them. We need great teammates and great team leaders when it’s not. We need to bring and share positive energy when we are physically, mentally and emotionally drained, when we are hungry, tired, freezing cold or boiling hot.

My Marines did so in Iraq. Missions were accomplished and lives were saved. However, the Battle of Najaf would have turned out very differently for us if we weren’t ready, if my Marines didn’t have the selflessness and discipline to bring and share positive energy when we needed it the most.

“You go to the movies with good friends. You go to battle with great teammates.” Great teammates bring positive energy and share it with each other... *for* each other.

Jake “Mac” MacDonald

Lead Instructor

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