What RDC Michael P. McCaffery Taught Me

Description

I sent an email to Matt at Black Five to make some personal observations about a story about John Kerry riding in a military aircraft. By telling a story of my Navy experience, I wanted to bring out differences in leadership. I could do this because of a man who was the first person I actually had working for me, once I was assigned my first leadership tasks at my first command, the USS MILWAUKEE (AOR-2).

I have decided to repost it here, as it is a tribute to Operations Specialist Chief Petty Officer Michael P. MacCaffery, USN, a man whom I owe much to for taking me aside and teaching me things that are the foundation of leadership. If he ever manages to read this, heâ€™ll be upset that I didnâ€™t refer to him as â€œRDC,â€• the Radarman rating that had been replaced with â€œOperations Specialistâ€• just before I came into the service. He was proud of the old moniker, and had a certain passion about him as he chomped on his half smoked stub of a cigar and snarled â€œRDC MacCaffery!â€• to make sure everyone one knew who he really was, after being addressed or introduced as â€œOSC Mac.â€•

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Hereâ€™s my posting:

Once more, itâ€™s the â€œwhen you think no one is lookingâ€• stories that tell your heartâ€¦

Before I begin, let me say something I learned about leadership. My twenty years in the Navy began aboard a replenishment oiler out of Norfolk. As an Ensign, I was a Division Officer, fresh out of several professional schools and college, but with no hands on experience in leadership of any significance beyond Boy Scouts and â€œplaying Armyâ€• at The Citadel. OSC Michael P. MacCaffrey, USN, began the age old duty of making something out of the know nothing that just became his â€œboss.â€• For at least the next six months (and I didnâ€™t realize what this was until about 4 years later), the Chief would ask me if Iâ€™d like a cup of coffee. Iâ€™d say â€œyes,â€• and weâ€™d head off to the â€œGoat Lockerâ€• (what a Chiefâ€™s Mess is called). Chief Mac would regal me with all sorts of stories, interspersed with questions, as we drank coffee, surrounded by the Backbone of the Fleet, the senior enlisted men. These stories were in the best fashion of parables. He slowly injected principles of leadership learned over centuries of human interaction, yet rasied to a fine art in modern western society, into my consciousneess, and sub-consciousness. Thatâ€™s the ground work, for the point of one of these coffee induced meetings (read â€œdisguised lecturesâ€•).

The discussion went something like this:

Chief Mac: â€œSir, if were at GQ (General Quarters) and we have to do Battle Messing (boxed meals delivered to yout combat stations, since you canâ€™t leave during heavy fighting), if we come up one ration short, who doesnâ€™t eat?â€•

Me: (Sort of knowing there was a key lesson here, and pondering the answer) â€œMe.â€• (I really had to think to come up with this answer, so I noticably hesitated before answering)

CM: â€œRight! What if weâ€™re short two rations?

Me: (I answered quicker now, as I was finally catching up mentally) â€œYou and I!â€•

CM: â€œYou got it! What if weâ€™re short three?â€•

Me: â€œYou, I and the Leading Petty Officer!â€•

CM: â€œRight again. Sir, the other thing is before you open yours, you make the rounds of every man in the watch station area and make sure he has a proper meal and donâ€™t you dare open yours up and start to eat, until they are ALL taken care of. Do this and these men will follow you anywhere.â€•

Over the next 19 years from that tour of duty, that simple leadership principle served me well, and the great leaders I worked for and with all had that as a part of their core beliefs. I was blessed by compentent people believing in me and together my units routinely stood out at the top of the heap, whether a Division, Department, Section, or a Ship, or Inspection or Training Team. It was more than about Battle Messing, itâ€™s all about the highest duty of a leader is to make sure his people are cared for before him or herself. Think about that for a moment, and consider those you have worked with whom you hold in highest esteem, and know they demonstrated that over and over to you.

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John Kerry grabbing the pizza in the story below is a statement not on his hunger, but his character. Thank God I had many Michael P. MacCafferys in my life as a leader. Iâ€™m saddened that John Kerry did not.

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