

## E.O. Wilson describes his schooling at age 7:

The Gulf Coast Military Academy was classed each year without fail as an Honor School by the United States War Department. In other words, it was a boot camp. Its regimen was designed to abrade away all the bad qualities inhering in the adolescent male, while building the kind of character that does not flinch at a whiff of grapeshot. “Send Us the Boy and We Will Return the Man” was its motto. The 1937 yearbook, from which my childish face stonily gazes, explains the formula with pitiless clarity:

—The daily work is a systematic routine in which every duty has its place in the day and, therefore, will not be overlooked.

—By association with other cadets, each cadet begins to recognize himself as an integral part of a body and, with this in view, he assumes the correct attitude toward the rights of others.

—By being thrown on his own resources, a boy develops initiative and self-dependence and grows away from the helpless, dependent spirit into which many boys have been coddled.

The systematic routine the author had in mind (and was he, I wonder, square-faced Major Charles W. Chalker, Professor of Military Science and Tactics, whose photograph gazes out at me from the yearbook?) emulated those of the adult service academies. It could be used today, if softened a bit, at the Marine training camp on Parris Island. For seven days a week real bugles, played by cadets proud of their job, led us lockstep through the Schedule. First Call 6:00, Reveille 6:05, Assembly 6:10, Sick Call 6:30, Police Inspection 6:40, Waiter’s Warning 6:45, Assembly and March to Mess 7:00, School Call 7:40. Then, without bugles, came calls to change class, Chapel Assembly 10:20, Intermission 4 minutes, Warning Call, Return to Class. And so tramp forward through the day, finally to dinner. The bugles resumed with Call to Quarters 6:50, Study (no radios!) 7:00, Tattoo 9:15, and Taps 9:30. No talking afterward, or you go on delinquency report.

On Saturday the schedule was similar but lighter, with time off for leisure, athletics, and delinquency reports. On Sunday we really snapped to life: shined our shoes, polished our buttons and belt buckles (uniforms mandatory at all times, formal gray and white on Sunday), and attended church. Then we prepared for Battalion Parade, which kicked off at 3:30. We marched out in formation, to be watched and graded by unit and individual, past officer-instructors, visiting parents, and a few curious, respectful townspeople. The youngest boys, of whom I was one, brought up the rear.

The curriculum was laid before the student in resonant single words: arithmetic, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, history, English, foreign language. No art, nature field trips, and certainly no enterprises with wimpy titles like “introduction to chemistry” or “the American experience.” Some electives were allowed, but only in cheerless subjects such as Latin, commercial geography, and business ethics. There was an implication that if you could not cut the mustard in the military, there was always commerce. Older cadets were trained in rifle marksmanship, mortar and machine-gun fire, surveying, and military strategy. Horsemanship was encouraged. We grammar-school students looked forward to someday enjoying these manly activities.

(Source: Chapter 2 of *Naturalist*, Island Press, 1994)