

Answering the Warder's Call

By Michael E. Witzgall
Tactical Training Consultant
Charlie-Mike Enterprises, Inc.
www.CMESWAT.com
CMESWAT@aol.com

*For Chief George "Boats" Boatright
Palmer Alaska*

Preface: This is not my normal SWAT/police type article and I know that you will not be able to read it until well after the holidays; still, if you are standing at the cross-roads of your law enforcement, military or fire/rescue career and thinking of doing something else, I hope that you find this helpful.

Last week I was asked to be the guest speaker at a Christmas/Holiday banquet for the Princeton Police Department. Princeton PD is one of my most favorite agencies in Texas. I have had the honor and privilege to be a very small part of their tactical/SWAT education. So, when I was asked to speak at the banquet, there was no way that I would turn them down.

Then the problems started. I could not, for the life of me, decide on a subject matter. I knew that I didn't want to do a standard "Christmas 101" speech. I also knew that the officers would have their families with them and that members of the city government might be in attendance – so I couldn't tell my normal police stories laced with colorful dialogue and gory details. No, I wanted this one to be different, meaning that I wanted it to be personal. I wanted it to be something that I would want to hear - *that I have heard* - when I needed it the most.

Here is my presentation "*Answering the Warder's Call.*"
Written the day I was to give this speech: December 11th 2010

"Two years ago, I had the privilege to do some law enforcement training up in Palmer, Alaska. I was running the officers through some very exhausting drills when the Chief of Police (George "Boats" Boatright) showed up. Boats is an aging warrior – everybody's grandfather – and one of the finest men that I have had the pleasure of meeting. At first I thought he was there to watch training, but instead he came over and stood next to me. After a few seconds of silence, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "*Mike, I know you would rather still be in uniform running and gunning, but I want you to know that you have saved more lives and had a greater impact teaching than you would have had otherwise.*" Boats squeezed my shoulder and said, "*I just thought that you needed to hear that.*" Boats smiled at me and then left."

I think about what the Chief said to me almost daily. I've wondered if he knew or sensed that I was struggling and thinking that it was time that I retired (for real this time). I've also wondered if he could see my eyes through the paintball mask I was wearing, because his kind words had brought me to tears.

What Boats said to me was what I needed hear at a very crucial time in my life. It is my hopes that what I say tonight will have the same effect on you, the officers, and equally as important - your families.

When I was a small boy my father, who was a career military officer, sat my older brother and I down for a talk. Unknown to us – though I am sure my Mother knew – my dad had just received orders to Vietnam. My father was already a highly decorated war hero from World War II. In that war he served in an Infantry unit that had suffered a 225% casualty rate. And now he would be leaving again; but this time he wasn't a 17 year old kid off on a great adventure. Now he was a 38 year old man with a wife and 4 young children.

Though I was very young at the time, it was obvious to me that my dad didn't want to go. His words that night are burned in my memory because it was then that I first began to understand that some jobs are just different and more important than others. My father looked us in the eyes and said:

“Boys, you know that I love you and your mother and your little brother and sister with all my heart, with all my soul. And I never want to be away from you. You both know that my job is very different than that of most men and now, because it is different, I must leave you. Where I go you cannot follow – leastwise not until you are men. And then I hope not. I go where brave men are fighting and yes, some are dying too; but with God's help I'll return someday. Take care of your mother and the kids and always remember that no matter what happens to me, that I love you.”

Later that night my father was sitting in the den playing his guitar. The lights were off and the fire place was burning – even today if I shut my eyes I can still hear him playing the guitar and singing. I can still smell the wood burning.... And I can still feel the knot that was in my stomach.

I walked in, sat at my father's feet and hugged his legs. For several long minutes I just sat there cuddled up against him listening to him play and sing (my dad had a beautiful singing voice). Then he stopped, placed his hand gently on my head and said, “What do you wish to ask me, son?”

With tears in my eyes I asked “Why do you have to go?”

His response was not an explanation that the average child would understand; but certainly one that I could. For you see my father – like me – loved history and believed that history is our greatest teacher. Unlike my brothers and my sister or my friends that enjoyed playing with toys, my greatest joy had been playing with little green army soldiers with my Dad. We would spend hours putting them in formations of great battles as dad would explain the tactics used.

On other occasions, Dad and I traveled to all the battlefields of the civil war where we would walk the paths of both union and confederate armies. Dad took me to any and every military museum (some legal – some black market) that we could find.

Now that you understand some of my 'military' upbringing, you'll understand that what my father did next was, in my opinion, a perfect answer to my question. Setting his guitar

aside, he stood up, took a book from the fire place mantel and read this poem to me (in between the paragraphs Dad would explain their meaning).

The Quest

By Rudyard Kipling

The Knight came home from the quest,
 Muddied and sore he came.
 Battered of shield and crest,
 Bannerless, bruised and lame.

Fighting we take no shame,
 Better is a man for a fall.
 Merrily borne, the bugle-horn
 Answered the warder's call: –
 "Here is my lance to mend,
 Here is my horse to be shot!
 Ay, they were strong, and the fight was long;
 But I paid as *good* as I got!"

My Dad's Explanation

Our hero is returning from a great battle. One that was probably lost. He's beaten up, his shield a dented and his crest – found on his body armor – is crushed in. He has lost his Flag (banner). But even through all this, he says that he is proud to have fought – and even if he had died it was better than not fighting. I'll speak of the Warder's Call, what it means in a minute. But remember, everything this man owns – his greatest treasures – have been destroyed. His shield, his armor, his lance and even his War horse is fought out and must be put-down. Yet he refuses to give up and admit defeat!

"Oh, dark and deep their van,
 That mocked my battle-cry.
 I could not miss my man,
 But I could not carry by:
 Utterly whelmed was I,
 Flung under, horse and all."
 Merrily borne, the bugle-horn
 Answered the warder's call!

Here the Knight describes the great army of his foe that mocked him as he attacked. So vast was this army that any direction the Knight swung his sword he could not miss – but he could not fight through. Eventually, overwhelmed by enemy numbers, he and his horse are pulled under.

"My wounds are noised abroad;
 But theirs my foeman cloaked.
 Ye see my broken sword –
 But never the blades she broke;
 Paying them stroke for stroke,
 Good handsel over all."
 Merrily borne, the bugle-horn
 Answered the warder's call!

The Knight says that his 'wounds are noised abroad' – news of his defeat spreads quickly among his own people that do not talk about the dead of the enemy. People only talk of *his* broken sword (meaning his loss); but never speak of the damage his sword did to the enemy. Or that his sword (him) stood its ground (good handsel) overall.

"My shame ye count and know.
 Ye say the quest is vain.
 Ye have not seen my foe.
 Ye have not told *his* slain.
 Surely he fights again, again;
 But when ye prove his line,
 There shall come to your aid *my* broken blade
In this last, lost fight of mine!
 And here is my lance to mend,
 And here is my horse to be shot!
 Ay they were strong, and the fight was long;
 But I paid as *good* as I got!"

Even though his countrymen have ridiculed him, the Knight refuses to forsake his oath. In this last paragraph the enemy now attacks his country *at home*. The scorned Knight, with his horse dead and with nothing but a *broken blade* in his hands; stands ready to fight even though he knows the battle already is lost. The Knight will not break faith with his country. He will, even if it means his death, continue to serve.

After reading this poem to me with some of the same explanations I have given you, my father went on to say just a little bit more (I've changed some of it to fit law enforcement and not the military, but the message is essentially the same).

“Son no one really knows the absolute origins of Knighthood. What we do know is that by 400 AD most of Rome had fallen; Roman law and the armies that protected Rome’s citizens were all but gone. The lands were ravaged by disease and bands of criminals. To leave one’s home or the confines of a walled city after dark often meant that you would be robbed or even killed for the few possessions that you owned.

Anarchy reined. Many people today fail to realize that humankind nearly perished. At the height of Rome – world wide – it is believed that the world population was somewhere around 100 million. During the brutal years that followed the fall of Rome, that number would be reduced down to less than a ¼. It was called the “Dark Ages” and it would last for almost a thousand years.

But slowly, over those same centuries that followed Rome, brave people – some from simplest means, others of nobility – many of different beliefs, cultures and faiths began to come together and began to fight back to reclaim their lands from those that celebrated in evil. At some point in history the title “Knight” was given to these men. In old German the word is pronounced Knecht – it means Servant.

When not patrolling, the Knight would work his own lands always waiting for a signal that danger loomed: This signal could be a fire at the top of hill, the sound of a drum in a nearby guard tower; but more often than not, – it would be a bugle. Regardless of what the signal was, it was known as the “Warder’s Call.”

When the Warder’s Call was sounded, the Knight would drop whatever he was doing, don his body armor, make ready his shield and sword, saddle his steed and then ride to the sound of battle.”

My friends, how much like the Knights of antiquity we are today. The signal is different – a cell phone ringing in the middle of the night, a high pitched tone coming over your patrol vehicle’s radio or a blasting noise that reverberates throughout the station house all that signal that there are people in need. Our equipment isn’t the same and our laws are different – that’s easily understood! But what we do next – when the alert is sounded – has not changed in more than a thousand years of service. We, the Blue Knights of today, answer the Warder’s Call! We answer the call to Duty.

In America there are hundreds if not thousands of occupations – some that claim that they are a profession, a trade or even a practice. Some people in religious vocations consider their work a “calling” and while I believe that is indeed true – I also believe that there are three other great Callings: the U.S. Military, Law Enforcement and Fire & Rescue.

Without these three none of the other callings could or would exist in America today. In nearly every religion somewhere in their teachings is a passage that states (paraphrased) “that you were called to serve, long before you were ever born.” Many people more learned than I would tell you that passage only applies to religious work. I disagree, because unlike other “callings” our three requires sacrifices beyond missing a few meals, not getting enough sleep or having low pay. Sometimes it requires the ultimate sacrifice of not just the body, but also the heart, mind and soul. And sometimes it requires the taking of human life without judge or jury.

Ladies and Gentlemen when I first started trying to write this speech, I wanted to say something that would help the officers that are here tonight to remember that what they do is very important and, though you are rarely told as much, your effort and dedication are greatly appreciated. We all became cops for essentially the same five reasons and, I dare say, that we stay cops for the same five reasons.

1. Because we want to help people. We see people in need and we know that it is us that must help. Not for pay. Not for benefits. Not for medals, commendations or attention; but because we see people that need our help.

2. We believe. Many people search their entire lives looking – searching – for something to belong to, something to believe in, for something good, pure and honest. We do this work because we believe that it is important. We believe a greater good can be achieved by living in a society with laws: Laws that we are charged to enforce.

3. It fulfills our warrior spirit and it completes who and what we are. How wonderful it is to know what you want to be when you grow up. If you ask most cops why they joined up they will tell you “it’s all they ever wanted to do.” You would get the same answer from career Military and Fire & Rescue. Each of us have had many part time jobs in our years, but unless you have also served in the Military or Fire/Rescue, only law enforcement has fulfilled your warrior spirit. Nothing has ever made us feel so alive – so complete than when we answer the Warder’s Call.

4. Because we gave our oath. We are sworn to protect and serve. Many of our oaths of office have words like that of our Military brethren “to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic.” Our oath also states that we will uphold the laws of the State Texas.

Our Constitution and our laws are founded in the principles given to us by our country’s forefathers through God’s guidance. You see, my friends, our oaths, what we have sworn, pledged or promised to do are not given to imperfect men or to a political group, but to an ideal greater than us all.

When we gave our oaths we made a Covenant between us, God, our Country/State and our fellow Knights. This Covenant is sacred and cannot be set aside – ever! It can be broken; it can be tarnished as some false Knights have done. But if you are true to this Calling; from the moment you made this Covenant and pinned on that Badge – that Shield, you answered the Warder’s Call and began a life of service.

5. And last, we do this job, we answer the Warder’s Call because it is the right thing to do.

We do this because we want to help people. We believe, it fulfills our warrior spirit, because we gave our oath and because in our heart of hearts *we know that it is the right thing to do!*

Folks, I am almost done. But before I close, I would like to read to you two things. The first is something that my older brother Fred wrote years ago when I was hurting over the loss of yet another good friend and fellow Knight. In this time of pain and sorrow, I was questioning being a Police Officer. He put these words on a plaque that hangs in my office. It is one of my most valued possessions and it reads as such:

. . . . And in those days, the Land was troubled. There was corruption in high places. There was violence and anarchy in the streets.

A few courageous spirits answered the challenge. They opposed the violent, confronted the unjust, and protected the innocent.

Criticized by many and thanked by few, they remained faithful. They were lonely Sentinels, standing vigil in the whirlwinds of chaos.

But one day, the Land was healed. Peace and order were restored. Justice reigned.

The Sentinels were rewarded with their rightful place in the Halls of Honor; seated at the right hand of God.

The second thing I wish to read, if you would accept this from me, I would leave you with my own Knight's blessing that I wrote more than 30 years ago when I said good-bye to my friends, brothers and team mates in the Marine Corps elite Reconnaissance teams:

*“My fellow Knights, I pray that you have a mighty steed to carry you into battle,
A strong sword and shield to protect you in the fight,
A bright star to guide you through the darkest times,
Cool drink at the battle's end.
And when you return to the castle, as must we all, and the draw bridge is dropped with a
smashing sound and the gates are flung opened with the rattling of chains; and when the one
true High King dressed in his golden armor walks out to greet you, know that he will
embrace you Knight to Knight, Warrior to Warrior – and with tear filled eyes he will whisper
in your ear “Welcome home thou good and Faithful Servant.”*

Those were my words on December 11th 2010 and my Dad's words in 1966. I am not sure if they helped any of the officers in attendance to stay and continue this worthy fight. I certainly hope so. I also hope that anyone reading this speech would understand what I tried to say and take it to heart that answering the Warder's Call is, and shall always be, the right thing to do. God Bless you my fellow Knights.

Michael E. Witzgall
Tactical Training Consultant
Charlie-Mike Enterprises, Inc.



The son of a career military officer, Mike spent 12 years on active duty as a noncommissioned and commissioned officer (mostly carrying a rifle, rubber boat, and dive equipment running up and down the beaches of sunny California). In 1988 Mike left the military and joined the Dallas Police Department. While with Dallas, Mike became a highly decorated officer serving as a patrolman and as a Tactical officer (SWAT). Mike's tenure with Dallas ended after a severe line of duty injury forced him into early retirement. Currently, Mike is co-owner of Charlie-Mike Enterprises, Inc. that specializes in teaching Basic and Advanced SWAT schools, Hostage Rescue training and Counter Paramilitary Operations courses. Mike can be contacted at (972) 291-7809 or at Charlie-Mike Enterprise, Inc. website is www.CMESWAT.com.