

A Lesson on Humility – The Cereal Story by
Anthony Fabiano, LtCol U.S. Marines (Retired)
Delivered to a JROTC Unit in October 2018

There is one word that I wish for you to remember.

One word? Does anyone know that word? One word?

The one word is humility.

My experiences are vast and wide. I had extensive travels in the military supporting the greatest democracy in the history of mankind.

Inside of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States built massive camps with twenty-four-hour access to some of the best food I ever had. At our base, Saturday night was steak and lobster. An interesting point was many aircraft would arrive from all over Iraq for a Saturday night meal.

I never had an issue eating well while deployed overseas that was until I went to Africa.

In 2010, I led the first ever joint U.S. military team into war-torn Liberia. We found a nation decimated by fourteen years of civil war. Over 400,000 Liberians had perished and one million displaced out of a population of just three million.

Upon arrival into Liberia I moved into a hotel by the old U.S. Embassy while my bungalow was being renovated. The U.S. Embassy loomed high on the hill with massive walls. Regardless of the defenses, it remains the most evacuated Embassy in U.S. history.

After a month stay at the plush hotel, I moved into an old Liberian Army compound that was being refurbished. The exterior compound walls were recently white washed and hid the bullet holes that altered Liberian history. In 1980, Samuel Doe was a Master Sergeant and on April 12 he took about forty of his followers up the hill to the Presidential Palace. While then President Tolbert was asleep in his bed, Samuel Doe murdered both him and his wife. A few days later, he lined the entire Liberian cabinet,

A Lesson on Humility – The Cereal Story by
Anthony Fabiano, LtCol U.S. Marines (Retired)

Delivered to a JROTC Unit in October 2018

mostly Tolbert's up against the wall of the army compound and summarily executed them. The only cabinet member allowed to survive was Ellen Sirleaf who went on to be Liberia's President and the first female president in Africa's history.

After I planned a grocery list, I drove the few blocks to the Lebanese market. The only viable store within Monrovia was operated by Lebanese who fled the fighting in Beirut. There were no traffic lights, let alone power. Driving was chaotic - swerving in and out - avoiding locals on motorcycles. No local dared venture in the street as feared being run over. The market had a ten-foot high fence around the entire compound. You had to drive inside the perimeter or be overrun by beggars. With the UN weapons embargo, local security guards carried giant clubs and had no problem using them to ward off beggars. I thought from the security posture that there would be a plethora of supplies inside the market.

Not so much. Inside the store, the shelves were bare. I discovered that the container ship from Lebanon had not arrived – no one knew if the ship was lost at sea or hijacked.

I looked for something simple to eat for breakfast. There were two types of cereal. I could not understand the Arabic writing on the cereal boxes. The pictures make it look the selection simple. One box had a large brown flake on the cover while the other appeared to be a circle loop that resembled a Cheerio. I chose the flake box and grabbed the last box on the shelf. The only milk product was almond milk that was hot from sitting outside. I had a small fridge so I grabbed a crate. After all, I would be in Liberia for at least ten months.

In the morning, I poured a bowl of cereal and stepped away for a moment. I came back and looked in the bowl as the cereal started to move. The bowl had more bugs than cereal. Fortunately, I had not poured in the almond milk that would have hidden the bugs.

Fast forward ten months when I returned stateside. I was shopping with my wife, and she asked me to go find some cereal. I obliged. As I walked down the cereal aisle, I was amazed at the opportunities. I was stunned – shocked by the assortments. I could not decide. For almost ten minutes, I stood in the cereal aisle motionless. Eventually, my wife found me and helped with a selection.

The next time you go shopping, take a moment and look at the variety of cereal products and reflect.

A Lesson on Humility – The Cereal Story by
Anthony Fabiano, LtCol U.S. Marines (Retired)

Delivered to a JROTC Unit in October 2018

Humility is a powerful word and the one word I hope everyone carries forward in life.