

# A military-grade weapon demands some military-grade training

By **JORDAN CHANEY**  
For The East Oregonian

When the Columbine High School massacre first happened, Marilyn Manson, a popular and controversial musician, was blamed for the school shooting due to some of the violent lyrics in his music. The media said that he was in some part responsible, so a reporter asked the musician what he would've said to the students that shot up the school in attempt to prevent it from happening.

But before I tell you what the controversial musician responded with, I want to tell you a story about an old friend of mine: Isabel.

I met Isabel shortly after I took the ASVAB for the Marine Corps on Sept. 11, 2001. The smoke and fire hadn't even cleared from the Twin Towers falling and I had already raised my right hand and took an oath to protect our country from enemies both "domestic and foreign."

Even though my views about militaries and wars have dramatically changed since then, I'll never forget the training that I received during boot camp — and how could I? The extensive and exhaustive training is designed to stay with you for the rest of your life. And it does. To this day, I still sit at the dinner table with my feet at a 45 degree angle, and I still shave my chin and upper lip every single morning.

Those are a few innocuous examples, but the training to become a United States Marine is as physically demanding as it is psychologically demanding. As it should be. I mean, after all, we were training to go

to war. I'd liken the brainwashing phase of boot camp to taking a spoon to the inside of a honeydew melon and scraping it clean until all that's left is a bitter light green rind, then filling it with what you wish. That sweet hollow space is then filled subliminally with weapons knowledge and safety training. Here are some examples: The toilet paper roll always had to have a 45 degree angle folded into the last sheet after usage, our bunk beds had to be made so that 18 inches of white were showing, and we even had to stand with our feet at a 45 degree angle.

The 18 inches of white sheet showing was a reminder of the length of the weapons barrel, which was more muzzle awareness training, and the 45-degree angle is a rifleman's safest range to prevent friendly fire. Our training was thorough.

Upon being issued our M16-A2 Service Rifles, we were first instructed to give them a name, a woman's name, the name of a lover. They wanted us to have a deep and intimate connection with our weapons. I named mine Isabel. Isabel would now become an extension of my person. Every single night from that day forward I would recite The Rifleman's Creed. Google it, it's too long to quote here, but imagine reciting an affection prayer to an inanimate object designed to take human lives every night. It's creepy, really creepy when I really stop and think about it.

On top of all that, before we were ever allowed to shoot the weapon, we had to be able to disassemble and reassemble it in under 60 seconds on our knees while a drill instructor yelled and screamed at us. But

from all that, I became an expert rifleman at the top of platoon. I even qualified for sniper school, according to my ecstatic drill instructors jumping and shouting in excitement over my 10 bullseyes from 500 yards a way. I took their "attaboys" with a grain of salt because all I could see were human beings on my target practice paper.

Trust me, I don't want the "slippery slope of situational ethics" to gradually take away anyone's right to bear arms. I don't own any guns, but I would like to think that if some of my fellow Americans' worst nightmares came to pass, that they would take up their arms and defend my family and me as well.

But what I think would be fair and reasonable is to have a law passed that says if a person really wants to own a military-grade weapon, like the M16 A2 service rifle or the AR15, they would at minimum be required to get military-grade training, or spend four grueling months in a boot camp-like situation with barking drill instructors ... and Isabel. I don't think civilians need to own military weapons in the first place, but that is my own personal opinion.

I honestly didn't even want to write this piece because the arguments are as old as the battle itself. I have seen a new wave of youth standing up for a better world now. It's inspiring. I stood with #MarchForOurLives last weekend because that is what our kids are asking us to do, figure out our mess and save their lives.

So, while wearing what looked to be coffin makeup, purple lipstick, and greasy black hair — Marilyn Manson sat back in his chair, and almost embodying Yoda



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

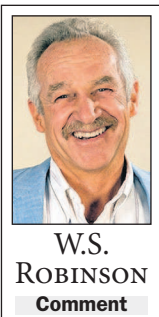
Poet Jordan Chaney from the Tri-Cities spoke at the First Methodist Church in Hermiston this January.

himself, shot back with, "I wouldn't say a single word to 'em. I would have listened to what they have to say, and that's what no one did."

Jordan Chaney is a poet and author who lives in the Tri-Cities and works with youths in arts and leadership.

# Killer bees are calming down

I have felt the stings of killer bees. My first bee job was in Jordan, where the Holy Land race of European honeybee, *Apis mellifera syriaca*, is a holy terror. I showed up for work in khakis, sleeves rolled to the elbows, an outfit I'd wear to work fairly aggressive bees in the United States.



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My Jordanian partner, Muhammed, took one look and burst out laughing. We went to a tailor for thick-weave, heavy white coveralls, which I wore over my khakis, tucked into high leather boots in the baking desert heat.

Still, merely approaching a Jordanian apiary inspired caution, if not downright fear. Our driver would wait in the oven-like cab of a pickup, windows rolled up. Even after we finished, we kept our veils on, bees bouncing off them as we hopped aboard the flatbed and sped away from the clouds of raging insects.

A year later, I was working bees in Kenya, where in Swahili the honeybee is called "kali" — a word that means "fierce." I was happy that I still owned my tailor-made coveralls. I dreaded opening the hive. The neighbors across the fence got even angrier than the bees.

That bee belonged to the subspecies *Apis mellifera scutellata*, the African race dubbed a killer after it was introduced to Brazil in 1956. Twenty-six queens escaped from a research project there, and the bees flew north, interbreeding with more docile resident honeybees. But they retained much of their frighteningly defensive behavior. Tales of carnage the "Africanized" killer bees left in their wake were numerous and terrifying. Occasionally they were even true. People died.

So when the opportunity arose recently to work with the so-called killer bees in southeastern Mexico, I bought a spanking-new, brilliant white suit of heavy fabric, bee-tight with its zip-on "fencers' veil."

Luis Manuel Godínez-García, biologist at the Universidad Politécnica Mesoamericana in Tabasco, recalls when the African bees first hit southern Mexico in 1985. He told me of a TV news reporter who had to abandon his camera and tripod to the masses of stinging bees, leaving

Godínez-García to recover his equipment hours later.

"Even then, my veil was so thick with bees I could see nothing through it," Godínez-García said.

But surprise: The bees are gentler than they used to be. Not exactly kittens, but they're manageable. I spent three weeks in Tabasco at the turn of the new year, and with Godínez-García worked many hives of Africanized bees. He knows how to keep the bees calm. He works with a team of two or preferably three people, uses a lot of smoke, and occasionally mists the bees with water to wet their wings and keep them from flying.

"The only time they are dangerous," he says, "is when you make a serious error."

There's a combination of natural and artificial selection, on both humans and bees, going on in Tabasco. Many beekeepers accustomed to gentle bees abandoned the business upon the African bees' arrival. A new generation took over, with different expectations about stinging behavior.

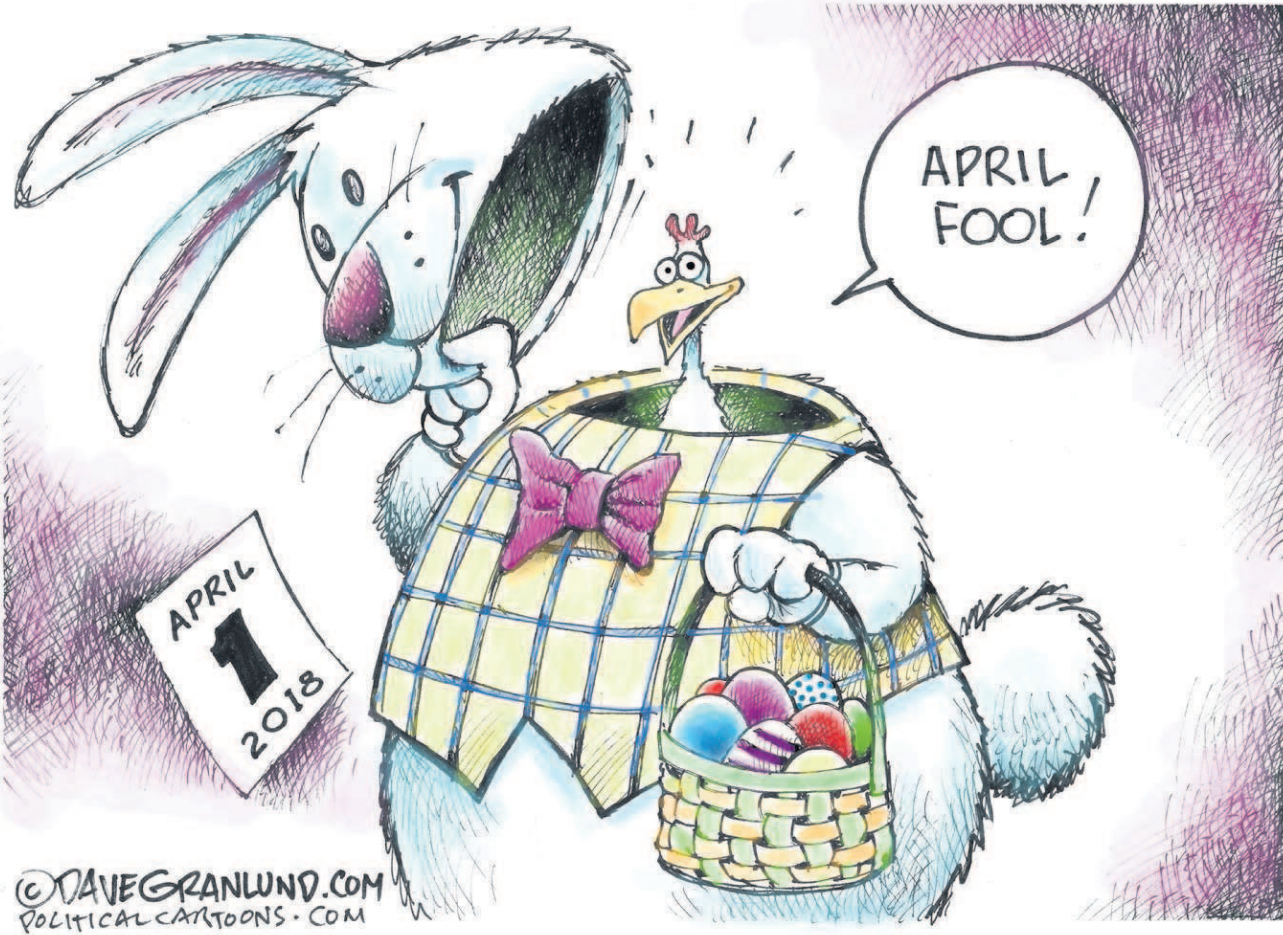
People destroyed extremely defensive swarms, hiving gentler bees that over time spawned gentler offspring. Godínez-García also encourages beekeepers to harvest bees from the forest, where natural selection has favored bees resistant to the mite pest, *Varroa destructor*. These mites are major contributors to the loss of European honeybees around the world, but in Godínez-García's corner of Tabasco I saw no mites.

Similar trends toward tractability are emerging in other places where the "killers" have appeared.

These findings bode well for the future of beekeeping across the southern United States, where African bees are well established and the need for their crop-pollinating and honey-making services is strong. We may end up with a manageable honeybee that is resistant to mites.

My new bee suit? It's still in its plastic wrapping.

W. S. Robinson is a contributor to High Country News. He teaches at Casper College and recently visited Mexico as a Fulbright specialist.



# Safety upgrades coming to Cabbage Hill

I would like to share some information regarding an upcoming safety improvement project along Interstate 84 between Pendleton and La Grande. This freeway section offers many challenges, especially during inclement weather conditions.

The Oregon Department of Transportation recently finalized its Interstate 84 Corridor Management Plan that suggests key safety improvements for the freeway through Eastern Oregon, from Boardman to the Idaho border. We are now finalizing the design of our first project based on recommendations listed in the plan. It will focus on the beautiful but often challenging freeway section between Pendleton and La Grande. Construction will take place in 2019 and 2020. Additional plan recommended changes will be pursued as funding becomes available.

The project includes:

- More than a dozen new variable message signs at various mile points. The new signs will consist of lighted message boards mounted above the interstate, similar to the speed limit signs in the Baker Valley area. Some will be linked to road and weather sensors to display safety messages and real time information, which could include temperature, presence of ice or low visibility/fog, chain requirements and more.
- 10 road/weather sensors.
- A dozen curve warning signs with flashing beacons

in the Grande Ronde River Canyon west of La Grande.

- Nine miles of cable barrier between eastbound and westbound lanes at two locations to prevent cross over crashes (roughly between mileposts 229 and 238 and mileposts 249 to 250).

- Two miles of LED lighting at Cabbage Hill westbound curves; 20 lights will be installed initially with additional illumination as funding allows. The LED illumination will help delineate the westbound lanes through the curves as you are driving down the hill.

- New road camera (westbound MP 247.4), snow zone sign (eastbound MP 220.6), and ramp gate (westbound Exit 224).

- More than a dozen miles of yellow reflective markers attached to guardrail in Cabbage Hill area.
- More than 10 miles of buried power line (to support these enhancements and future upgrades).

The project is currently funded at \$11 million, with \$4 million allocated from the 2017 Transportation Bill. Eastern Oregon was very fortunate to receive the extra funding support from our legislators. Without the bill, we wouldn't be able to construct the number of safety improvements we have planned now and for future projects.

In addition to the work scheduled between Pendleton



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and La Grande, a separate freeway safety project will add a third lane for eastbound trucks in Ladd Canyon, east of La Grande, in the next couple years. This challenging freeway section has been the site of numerous closures in the past due to trucks spinning out and not enough room for traffic to get around disabled vehicles.

Although the I-84 corridor plan is new, construction safety improvements are not. Major Eastern Oregon freeway projects built over the past couple decades include adding the third lane for westbound trucks at Spring Creek grade east of Meacham in 2015 and a third eastbound truck lane north of Ontario at Three Mile Hill in 2009. In 2006, the Burnt River Canyon area south of Baker City received curve corrections, curve warning signs with flashing lights, variable message boards and radar speed signs that have greatly reduced the number of crashes in that area. We've learned a lot from those improvements and will be adding similar signs and advisories next year through the twisty Grande Ronde River Canyon, west of La Grande.

Since 2005 more than a dozen I-84 truck chain-up areas were constructed or enhanced, several stretches of new snow zone fencing have been built, and numerous highway cameras

and variable message reader boards have gone up between Boardman and Ontario.

We wish we could implement all the safety improvements on our wish list right away. But like everyone else, we have to prioritize based on available funding and resources.

Along with constructing safety improvements in the summer, we perform around-the-clock winter maintenance operations to keep the highways as safe as feasible. This year we have added new snow plows that can clear two freeway lanes at one time and we're using salt on the interstate when appropriate. These changes are helping improve winter conditions, but we can't be everywhere at the same time. And, no amount of salt or plowing will replace the need for motorists to drive responsibly.

Excessive speed for the road conditions and distracted or inattentive driving remain top contributing factors in serious crashes. The new signage and sensors will help alert you, but everyone needs to stay focused on driving and slow down when ice, slick conditions, fog, or other road hazards such as blowing dust might be present. Please remember it is still snowing in the mountains.

At the end of the day, we want everyone to get home safe.

Marilyn Holt is ODOT's district manager based in Pendleton.