



By Ted Croy

Welcome to your first deployment, America!

Thank you for your service.

Here we are, America. Over the last 10 days, we've entered into our own experience with the COVID-19 global pandemic that has catapulted the United States into unfamiliar waters. Early indicators saw a few isolated, [regional cases](#) followed abruptly by concerns in sports; particularly [basketball](#). Clear warning signs from China and Italy [forewarned us](#) that things change gradually; until they change suddenly. The COVID-19 virus is clearly a dangerous enemy that, within 2-3 weeks, has resulted in [44,000 cases](#) in all 50 states and over 500 deaths.

America, you're new to sheltering in place, lockdowns, and travel restrictions. Understood. Mundane practices such as handwashing and covering your mouth were, until very recently, social niceties. Now they're social mandates. [Such is life on a deployment](#), America, where restrictions and hygiene are there for your safety. These things can work. Aside from a

threat of nuclear war, you've enjoyed life over the last several decades free from a universally threatening entity that exposes you to acute and widespread danger.

Those of us in uniform are grateful for you have offer, *"Thank you for your service!"* in many ways through military discounts. *Good for you!* If I may now be of further service to you, America, and provide a few tips on how to survive (and thrive) now that we're all in this deployment together.

Keep calm

Rational fear motivates unhelpful and irrational behavior. I haven't seen any clear results on the effectiveness of a [toilet paper stockpile](#) on limiting disease progression. While COVID-19 is a clear and present danger, the relationship between the toilet paper stocks and the disease impact is not. We tend to collect comfort items and quasi-defensive items for those *just-in-case* moments. Today's toilet paper is yesterday's [nuclear weapons](#). Such is the irrational behavior motivated by real threats to our comfort or safety. Military folks have experienced the "gas chamber" where [you're herded into a small building wearing gas masks](#). Required to stand there for 60-90 seconds for the full effect, you had to say your name and unit then proceed to the exit when instructed. I remember dropping my gas mask within full view of a Marine gunnery sergeant whose icy look created a cloud of doom around me. I quickly forgot about the gas chamber as I was schooled about the importance of staying calm and following instructions via flutter kicks and pushups. [Keep calm, America](#), don't drop your mask.

Carry on

Everyone matters and contributes to the mission. America, your social and occupational activities are more interconnected than you realize. You commute on the same interstates, fly out of the same airports, make picks on the same March Madness bracket (at least you did), and have a similar Monday through Friday rhythm. When deployed, your mission changes, into a team mission that includes keeping yourself and those around you healthy. [Carrying a litter](#)(or stretcher) is a team-task. Since 9/11/2001, many of us have unfortunately carried several litters. Not the fancy wheelio kind that roll and fold into an ambulance—the two-pole variety that requires strong bodies and support an injured or sick buddy. America, carrying on the daily business means recognizing fully that we are a team and that the COVID-19 mission requires that we will have to *"carry a litter;"* both figuratively and literally. Carry on, America, we're all in this together.

Watch your muzzle: Safe weapon handling is a fundamental task that each Soldier must learn and never forget to execute. The barrel, or muzzle, of your weapon must always be pointed downrange safely away from others. The weapon is always treated as if loaded and we must trust one another to carry and utilize it safely for the sake of the team. The same now goes for an uncontrolled, uncovered cough in public—it's as dangerous now as a mishandled weapon and a frank reminder that we all hold the safety of others in our hands. Watch your muzzle, America—[cover your cough](#) and point it safely downrange.

Care for equipment

Dust, dirt, and carbon buildup inside a Soldier's weapon may impair it and cause a malfunction. Occasionally, poor maintenance will lead to a safety hazard for the user, but, more frequently it just doesn't work. America, your hands are similar to a Soldier's weapon. They can carry COVID-19 and many other bad things that could harm you or others. [Take care of your equipment](#), America, wash your hands.

Find the guy with the guitar

Good music can be uplifting in hard times. Music helps to both remember and forget; necessary during these times. A guy with a guitar strumming praise songs, country songs, or anything else can be a welcome reprieve and a particular song can hold memories for years to come. "[Beer for My Horses](#)" by Toby Keith and Willie Nelson was one of my family's deployment songs that I had burned onto a CD back when it was still legal in 2003 before Operation Iraqi Freedom started. Just hearing it now takes us right back to those times. [Drew and Elie Holcomb](#) are fast becoming our pandemic YouTube and Spotify favorites; a few of their videos may have gone viral—er, my apology. Too soon, right?

Write your war story

Things are moving fast, America. You are being asked to do unfamiliar things like stay at home, be resourceful, and contribute in brave, new ways. America, you have doctors, nurses, truck drivers, grocery workers, utilities personnel and multitudes others who have been thrust unwittingly onto the front lines of this pandemic leaving new tales of heroes.

How will you account for this? I recall going to a battalion command update once as a new Captain where I heard crazy acronyms, jargon, inside jokes, and major issues being discussed in a confusing blur it was difficult to understand. A squad leader nearby was writing detailed notes in an impressively dog-eared 5×8" green notebook that resonated

with attention to detail with sketches and personal notes. He gave me a fresh notebook and started my unbroken legacy of journaling that yielded over two dozen volumes of key missions, notes to myself, lessons, books I've read, sustaining Bible verses, historical events—and coffee stains.

There is even a website where Soldiers share their own personal lessons called *From The Green Notebook* that chronicles the [self-developmental benefits of writing](#) for military personnel. Now as a senior officer, I am profoundly grateful for the tip that that NCO shared with me on how to keep the fast-moving details organized. Now is *your time*, America. As fast as things are moving, time is compressed and a week feels like an eternity ago.

America, I submit that the consequences disease and war are challenging. COVID-19 will mark our society earliest upon our hospitals, [physicians, and nurses](#) who will do their best to save our fellow citizens. Physical therapists, respiratory therapists, and many others will be needed to restore mobility and health to the many who recover. Rally to support those heroes and, if you're one of them, I applaud you.

We should hope that COVID-19 kills some things around us, and it should claim them hard and mercilessly. Those things are caustic [political partisanship, self-absorption](#), divisiveness and the wasting of precious resources. Infect *those things*, COVID-19, and relegate them to the dustbin of history. What a luxury it was when our major social distancing focus was upon Prince Harry and Megan Markle [leaving the UK](#). *Good times, America, good times*. Instead of this vacuousness, may unity, teamwork, and the reality of our interconnectedness spring forth. Shared sacrifice develops deep bonds, America.

These are historic times you're in, America. [You've been here before](#). Over the next few weeks, if you're having trouble keeping calm, carrying on, caring for your equipment, or finding the guy with the guitar, please keep your muzzle pointed downrange as we saddle up and face COVID-19 together. I want you on my team so that a few months from now we can raise up our glasses and it'll be *my turn* to [thank you for your service](#)!

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