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March 2008

CAPPER'S

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Editor's Notebook

[Editor's Notebook](#)

[Open Session: What Readers Think](#)

[Feature](#)

[Post Dates](#)

[State Quarter](#)

[Heart of the Home](#)

[Poetry](#)

[Garden Clippings](#)

[On The Garden Path](#)

[Planting Dates](#)

[Article Archive](#)

[Quilts](#)

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[Contributors](#)

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[Who We Are](#)

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[HomePage](#)

At times, boot camp resembles sewing bee

The Marine Corps doesn't discuss it openly as it recruits "the few, the proud," but the first piece of metal issued in basic training is neither a bayonet nor a sword - it's a sewing needle, accompanied by a spool of thread.

The look on the faces of my more gung-ho colleagues when we found that out was a combination of bewilderment and betrayal. These guys had joined up to brandish sabers and savor the glory that goes to the victorious. How were they going to achieve that with a needle and thread? When it comes to turning boys into men, however, the Marine Corps has used the same pattern for 231 years: Develop pride in appearance, and pride in performance follows. Mending our torn fatigues was as much a part of the routine as marching. On the night before boot camp graduation, the barracks looked like a sewing bee. Most of us had lost several inches around the waist, so we were earnestly bunching the waistlines of our dress trousers and stitching them in place. The alterations were crude, but that tailoring experience left me in awe of those who know what they're doing - like the many readers who share stories in our Heart of the Home section (Pages 25-36) about the creations they've made through the years for their families and friends.

In 1846, the first American patent for a sewing machine was granted to Elias Howe, who was following a dream - literally. He awoke from a nightmare in which cannibals, preparing him as a meal, were pumping their spears up and down in a frenzy. The spears had holes at the tips. This frightening vision inspired him to develop a mechanical process involving a needle carrying thread at its point through cloth and creating a lockstitch with thread fed from a shuttle moving along a track underneath.

Now, manufacturers such as Brother and Singer incorporate digital technology to scan images into embroidery patterns. Technology may have expanded the potential of sewing, but judging from our readers' accounts, it's still the love and care put into the work that makes sewing the art that it is.



Dennis McLaughlin
Managing editor