

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

WHO IS "THAT GUY?"

EN101: COMPOSITION

SECTION 44E

CAPTAIN MICHAEL WARREN

BY

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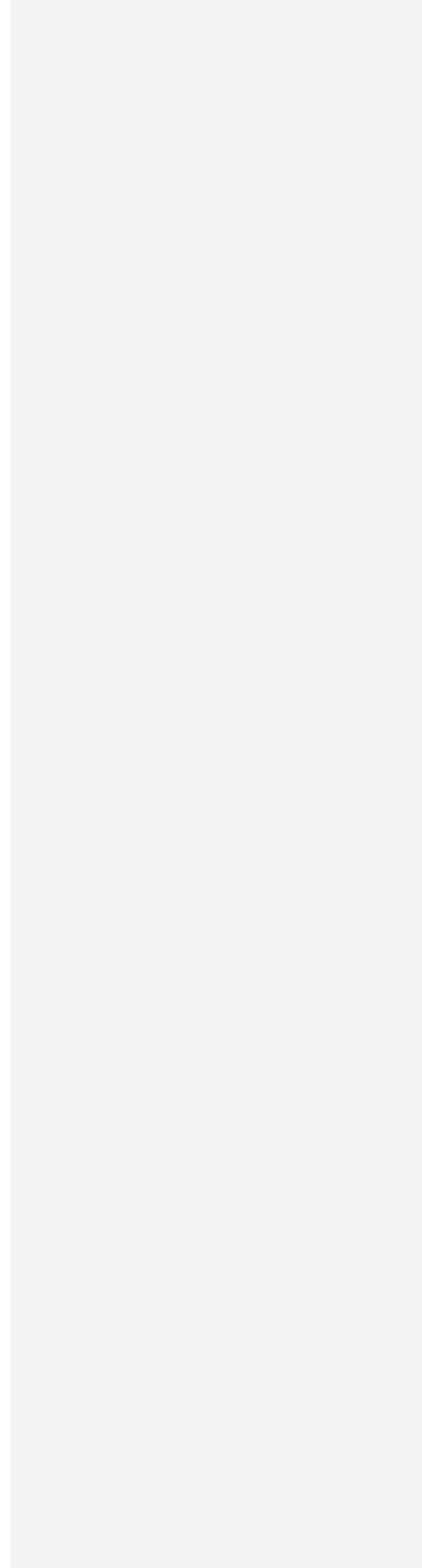
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The first chapter of Staff Sergeant Andrew Belet's book *Habit*, "Touchdown," takes the audience through two stories. The first tells of Belet's high school football career and his complementary party lifestyle. The second story describes¹ his deployment to Afghanistan as a Marine Corps squad leader. These contrasting flashbacks show the change in perspective the author undergoes and the power of perspective in general. Perspective changes in this story occur because of sheer logic, a revelation or understanding gained via emotion, and by gradual development spurred on by core values. However, the author's alternating flashbacks meld together into one story: the tale of the life of "that guy."

During the former of these types of scenes, Andrew Belet depicts himself as the quintessential stereotypical jock. His life revolves around the game of football. In between practices and games, he fully devotes himself to several "noteworthy" hobbies: namely chasing girls and partying. The relatively few other characters in the chapter mostly appear while Belet is pursuing these hobbies; they help magnify his persona as "that guy." The stories he relates, while² by no means "unique" or "new," forge a connection between the author and readers. Regardless of age, gender, or background, virtually everyone who has gone through high school feels linked to Andrew Belet, your everyday average Joe.³ Some may have personally known "that guy" and can easily recall him at parties "kick[ing] open the door [fashionably late, and accompanied by]... a true Montana yell [and a] thirty case of Keystone Light" (Belet 12).⁴ Other readers themselves were similar to Belet, and had nights like the author's involving winding up in a stranger's hot tub and "nervously pretend[ing] to kick back, as if ... [they had] been there all night relaxing" (Belet 14) to evade the police. Such people also connect with their fellow accomplices, who would dive into the getaway vehicle with you and without fail "produce...two lukewarm 'Stones'" (Belet 15) they had salvaged before the police raid.

However, surprisingly this target audience does not seem to include veterans or military personal. Belet includes numerous explanations to supplement his usage of military terminology and activities, which would be unnecessary for a military audience. In some situations, such as

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where Belet describes a weapons platoon as a, “platoon... broken up into three sections: 0331 machine gunners... who utilize the M240G 7.62 mm machinegun; 0341 mortarmen, firing the 60mm mortar; and 0351 assault men, using various explosives and the SMAW rocket” (Belet 10), the level of detail becomes so overwhelming that it detracts from the overall cohesion of the chapter. Such instances undermine, but do not destroy the link Belet seeks to create with readers.

The author utilizes the ethos link he establishes with the audience by incorporating other aspects to his teenager self into the chapter. Belet reveals that in high school he developed a strong work ethic while striving towards his goal of earning a starting position on the varsity football roster. The teenage jock displays virtues such as determination, dedication, and heart by undergoing challenges that include sacrificing his summer mornings to wake up at 5:45 to work out, downing a “foul concoction” of “Mus-L-Blast 2000 protein shake... milk, a scoop of peanut butter and two raw eggs” (Belet 5), and enduring having a constantly fatigued and bruised body. Belet does this with “an untouchable attitude,” (Belet 5) that will carry him through his professional adult career.⁵

The author did not ideally include these values in his description on his younger self. Though not explicitly stated, the audience realizes these traits⁶ ultimately were major factors in altering his lifestyle and character development into that of Marine Corps Corporal Belet who is preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. This older version of Belet is no longer a carefree partier, but rather he is a leader. As a squad leader, Belet is responsible for the lives of six other Marines and is⁷ determined to have them “make it through the deployment together or not at all” (Belet 5). Although this transformation happens gradually over a large time gap, the alternating flashbacks emphasize just how big of a change this is by making it seem more sudden.

Core values such as hard work account for much of this change in perspective; however, a few supplemental sections could add greater clarity to the change-in-perspective theme. The addition of significant characters, or simple dialogue between Belet and other characters would help readers understand this viewpoint change in way that a mere inner monologue cannot

express. Yet, even without additional characters, for the majority of the chapter, the two storylines captivate readers. Certain transitions between alternating scenes (in particular the one in between a scene in the freshman showers and the scene where the description of several restructurings of Belet's unit occurs) are rough, but not to the extent that adding or deleting of a clarifying or extraneous detail would not resolve the issue.

Though matured in many ways compared to his high school self, Belet's language and diction in his recount of the deployment reveals he retains the gung-ho thrill seeking mentality that allowed him to succeed in the past. This does not mean he is fearless or reckless, for Cpl. Belet makes it clear that even as his C-130 lands, "[t]s show-time and ...[he's] scared shitless" (Belet 2).⁸ However, he draws upon the confidence and courage his work ethic has developed, reflects about his own background (in terms of both experience and pedigree), reassures himself he "was born to do this" (Belet 2), and focuses on the mission at hand.

Although this diction draws the audience into the story by recreating the environment of a high school locker room and a Marine camp, the nature of the wording can be confusing, or lead to awkward and ineffective tangents that result when this type of language suddenly switches as the author attempts to clarify his meaning. Also, the capitalization of certain words, such as "Football" (Belet 1) and improper grammar usages, as in "Me and Tommy" (Belet 1), take away from the flow of the chapter. However, overall, such instances are only occasional, and the variety in sentence structure and the actual content of the sentences cause readers to overlook these minor flaws.

Belet explores his change in perspective, without a change in core virtues, again as he considers the concept of smoking. Quitting is something we take for granted as a negative sign of weakness, that society frowns upon. However, for something such as smoking, Belet reasons, "quitting a bad habit takes effort and determination" (Belet 9) and rather than being an "easy way out," (Belet 9) it is something almost courageous. By referring to this "novel concept" (Belet 9) in such a philosophical manner, Belet illustrates how logic itself can change a person's perspective

in life. Though seemingly simple, this logic is rather appealing. It is a powerful technique Belet could utilize more by weaving it into other areas of the chapter.

As he arrives in Afghanistan, Belet immediately raises his guard, trusting no one, and preparing for the worst. In some ways, he reverts to his loner “no one can keep up with me” (Belet 4) mentality for survival’s sake. However, during his first mission Belet undergoes yet another change in perspective when he sees the situation in the area firsthand.⁹ Instead of being surrounded by Afghans “who hate Americans” (Belet 16) as popular media led himself to prepare for, he discovers something much different. Belet’s eyes are opened by simple gestures the Afghans make, such as “yelling “Thank You” in...Pashto[,] giv[ing him]...a thumbs up,” (Belet 16) the pure innocent friendliness of the children, and the overall hospitality. He comes to grips that the war is “about these people,” (Belet 17) and not other tangible goods and intangible concepts like power.

For Cpl. Andrew Belet, what may have been an uneventful day involving meeting local leaders, conducting foot patrols, and removing a missile from a backyard, becomes a viewpoint altering experience. The events in the background touch and transform him from a wary and distrustful soldier, to a man who believes he is “making a difference” (Belet 19). Belet’s experiences in high school and those in during his deployment show a phenomena that many people often fail to realize. Doing something challenging like shooting for a varsity starting spot, or deploying into a warzone, has its own rewards, some, which may be expected, and others that are unintended, but not unwelcomed. In high school, the expected benefit was the confidence that comes along with pushing yourself to the limit, while in Afghanistan the ‘expected’ benefit may actually be the sense of pride, accomplishment, and the feeling that your deeds are contributing to making a difference that Belet felt so strongly. Likewise, the unexpected prize in high school was the partying social circle that is linked closely with high school football, whereas in Afghanistan it was the heartfelt gratitude and the social hospitality of the locals (such as the friendliness exemplified by the children).

The contrasting ending to the chapter¹⁰ emphasizes this poignant change in Belet's outlook. These descriptions, combined with the stark contrast between the different perspectives in Belet's life, produce a strong bond between the audience and the author's emotional experiences. Such usage of pathos, complimented by the reputation Belet creates for his character allows the audience to understand Belet's theme about the power of perspective. These supporting techniques are even more effective if the audience considers the timeframe of the story. It is inspiring¹¹ that a man from a background we all can relate to either vicariously or directly undergoes such growth in an era where popular culture and the media promote utilitarianism as the key to success.

As described in "Touchdown," perspective is not absolute. It can and will change, as we continue to¹² reason, mature as we progress through adolescence, and learn about the outlooks of others through firsthand experience. These changes in viewpoints mark a turning point in how we live. They are both a start and a finish, just as the title, "Touchdown," refers both to the end of a football game — the symbolic end to the author's high school lifestyle — and the landing of the C-130 at the start of a deployment.¹³ Belet changes in perspective in the chapter force the audience to examine themselves and have somewhat of their own change in perspective in light of his descriptions. As a cadet at West Point, I am a unique medium for the author. I represent someone who has seen the "that guy" Belet represents in his high school years, and I will eventually be among ranks of "those guys" that Belet becomes while on deployment. My perspective and advice will be extremely useful considering these circumstances. This is the least anyone can give to someone like Staff Sergeant Andrew Belet who is still "that guy." "That guy:" a selfless hero who is continuously molding his perspective in a way that yields an ever-increasing positive contribution to the world.

¹ Christopher DeTrempe, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 22 October 2008. Christopher DeTrempe recommended that I break this idea into two simpler sentences.

² CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner recommended I deleted some extraneous information that followed this sentence.

³ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner suggested I reword this sentence so that the essay does not overuse the term "that guy."

⁴ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner helped me restructure this sentence so that it does not involve unnecessary colorations and so that it flows better with the purpose of the paragraph.

⁵ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner recommended I reword parts of this sentence by deleting some excessive wording and replace such areas with short clarification details.

⁶ Christopher DeTrempe, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 22 October 2008. Christopher DeTrempe recommended that I use a word instead of a vague concept such as "things" here.

⁷ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner suggested some words here that did not really contribute to the overall value of the sentence.

⁸ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner informed me that in an essay such as this, it is not necessary to censor vocabulary directly quoted from the author.

⁹ Christopher DeTrempe, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 22 October 2008. Christopher DeTrempe suggested that I change the wording of this sentence from "for himself" to "firsthand" to make the sentence flow better.

¹⁰ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner helped me eliminate a section of background information that was unnecessary for an audience already somewhat familiar with the chapter.

¹¹ Christopher DeTrempe, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 22 October 2008. Christopher DeTrempe suggested that I restructure this sentence to make it flow better.

¹² CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner recommended that I delete a section of this sentence that included extra information.

¹³ CDT Chris Wagner, B-3, '11, assistance given to author, through email, West Point, NY, 21 October 2008. CDT Wagner explained how using a dash here would be both more appropriate and effective at conveying my point.

Works Cited

Belet, Andrew. "Chapter 1: Touchdown!" Habit. 2008. 1-19.

DeTrempe, Christopher. Email. 22 October 2008.

Wagner, Christopher. Email. 21 October 2008.