



The 3Ds – Lessons from a Soldier

Leaders | People | Reflections



The 3Ds - Lessons from a Soldier People

Then he stood in front of us - upright, composed, hands clasped behind his back in that unmistakable military stance.

No, this isn't about diagrams or architectural drawings.

It's about something far more enduring - a lesson in life, delivered not in a classroom, but on a training field by a man who pushed us far beyond what we thought we were capable of.

It began on a warm afternoon at Sir Hubert Murray Stadium No. 2 during cricket training. We were young, fit, competitive, confident in our stamina and certain of ourselves.

Or so we thought.

The coach called us in and said, almost casually,

“We’ve got someone joining the club today. He’ll be taking over your fitness drills.”

That was how Major Oala entered our lives.

We called him **Tuari Tauna** - the Motuan word for soldier or fighter. Someone who stands firm. Someone who does not retreat when things get hard.

He said very little. He surveyed the ground, nodded once, and motioned for us to begin.

What followed was humbling.

After twenty minutes, we were gasping.

After an hour, some of us were crawling toward the sidelines.

Then he stood in front of us - upright, composed, hands clasped behind his back in that unmistakable military stance. He wasn’t sweating. Not even close.

With a voice that carried authority, he said:

“You boys are soft. But I see potential.

If you’re serious about your sport, or anything in life, you’ll need to live by the 3Ds: Dedication. Determination. Discipline.”

That moment never left me.

Words That Stay

Thirty years on, those words still echo.

At the time, I didn’t fully grasp how deeply they would shape my thinking. I’ve tried to live by them - not perfectly. Life has a way of testing even the strongest resolve. But whenever I doubt myself, I find my way back to those three words.

Over the years, Major Oala rose through the ranks to become Colonel. Yet nothing about him really changed. He still turned up to training, sometimes straight from work, still in full uniform barking instructions from the gate, urging us to get our act together.

Behind the toughness was always calm.

Focus.

Stillness.

He carried authority without noise.

And he never stopped teaching the 3Ds.

What the 3Ds Really Mean

Dedication, he told us, is commitment. To something you believe in - your craft, your studies, your family, your body. Whatever it is, you must care enough to show up for it every day.

“You can’t flirt with success,”

“You have to court it.”

Determination, he explained, is what keeps dedication alive. The hunger. The inner fire.

“If you’re half-hearted,” he warned,

“your dedication won’t survive a bad day.”

But **discipline**, that was the pillar he valued above all else.

“Life is full of distractions,” he said.

“You’ll be tempted. You’ll tell yourself, ‘Just this once.’”

Discipline is what keeps you on the path.”

He reminded us often that the world is full of people who once had dedication and determination, but lost their discipline.

They slept through alarms.

Skipped training.

Stepped away when things became uncomfortable.

And quietly fell off the track.

A Sunday Afternoon Lesson

One Sunday afternoon at the old Colts Ground in Boroko, that lesson came alive.

United Cricket Club was playing. The crowd was large, the atmosphere relaxed. Three drunk men staggered into the stands, shouting, harassing spectators, throwing empty cans for attention.

One can landed just beside Colonel Oala.

Without a word, he stood. Calm. Measured. He walked over and asked them to leave quietly. They ignored him. He warned them again.

Then one threw a punch.

Then another.

Suddenly, he was facing all three.

Before anyone could react, a group of men surged forward from another part of the ground. They stepped in, shielding him, surrounding the situation, and dragged the troublemakers out.

In true PNG fashion, the message was delivered firmly.

They did not return.

Later that evening, as players gathered at our place for post-match drinks, I asked him, "Who were those guys?"

He smiled.

"They're soldiers too," he said.

"We look after each other."

Then he added something I've carried ever since:

"If you surround yourself with people who share the same values - dedication, determination, discipline, they'll look out for you too."

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