

The third hundred years

by Gen Louis H. Wilson
Commandant of the Marine Corps



This month we celebrate the bicentennial of the United States Marine Corps. It is fitting and proper that we pause and reflect upon our heritage at this time. The justifiable pride we feel from past accomplishments of Marines is a legitimate source of inspiration to us today. It is equally important, however, that we look to the future as well. Whatever we know or learn about our history is intrinsically useful only to the extent that it serves as a guide for the future. In looking to the future, we must have a firm grasp on where we stand now. I would like, therefore to share a few thoughts on our Corps—past, present, and future.

The history of our Marine Corps has been told by many capable writers. We emphasize our past and our traditions from the moment a recruit first meets his drill instructor. We use examples from our past to inspire our future leaders. At mess nights, birthday balls, parades and ceremonies, we honor those who have gone before, and we retell old tales of glory with pleasure and satisfaction. The lessons of history are meaningful.

It is important to recall that the Marine Corps has always been an amphibious force. The resolution of the Continental Congress of 10 November 1775 said that all enlistees into the Marine Corps should be "good seamen . . . acquainted with maritime affairs." Our need to operate from a waterborne environment has not changed over the years, though we have been called to perform a variety of other tasks. We have served aboard ships of the fleet with pride, and our close relationship with the Navy has been the basis for our very existence.

The period of the American Revolution is under close scrutiny today, as it should be. A review of the role of Marines in that conflict illustrates our amphibious character as well as our mobile, flexible qualities. The two battalions of Marines raised were "to serve to advantage by sea when required." They were also to be "considered as part of the number which the Continental Army before Boston is ordered 'o consist of.'" Although it is hard to read intentions into historical documents, it is clear that the Congress intended the Marines to be soldiers and seamen at the same time. They would be a distinct corps of infantrymen capable of serving in ships.

The first missions for these Marines were amphibious in nature. Precedents in the history of British Marine units make it clear that Congress intended the Marine battalions to land from ships and fight ashore. In March of 1776, the Marines

carried out a successful landing in the Bahamas, capturing vital supplies for the Continental Army. This first operation was in fact an amphibious raid, the first of many that American Marines would execute.

Throughout the remainder of the Revolution, Marines fought in a variety of roles. They served with distinction aboard ships of the young United States Navy and were a favorite of John Paul Jones. Thus began a long tradition of close association between Marines and Sailors. Marines also served in Washington's Army, and appeared at vital points, particularly during the Trenton-Princeton Campaign of 1776-77. Here a precedent was established for Marines to serve side-by-side with the Army in a reinforcing role when additional trained, ready infantry was required.

For all practical purposes, the armed forces of the United States ceased to exist at the end of the Revolution. By 1798 it had become apparent that not only were an Army and Navy necessary, but also a formal Marine Corps. The Corps was established primarily for shipboard duty, but also for garrison duty and any other duties directed by the President. Thus for 177 years we have been formally charged with a general responsibility to perform any tasks required in the service of the nation. This directed duty was reiterated in the National Security Act of 1947. Marines have always been proud of the implication that we can perform any task the Commander-in-Chief might assign. But the emphasis has always been, and is today, on our amphibious role.

For the first one hundred years of its existence under the 1798 Act, Marine amphibious operations were very limited in scope. Marines participated in the many wars fought during that century, but their role was not decisive. In 1898, however, the Marines proved decisively that being prepared to conduct a landing is more than a matter of good intentions. On 10 June 1898 a battal-

ion of Marines under LtCol Huntington, well equipped for tropical warfare, made a successful landing at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and captured the base which we still occupy today. It was a small operation by any standards, but it demonstrated that troops geared for landing operations could land on a hostile shore with a reasonable expectation of gaining a foothold and surviving. In comparison to other landings the Marine example was noteworthy, if small.

It was apparent in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War that the United States needed a sound amphibious doctrine. The existence of a newly-acquired overseas empire called for means of protecting far-flung possessions. The writings of Mahan illustrated the necessity for controlling the seas and establishing bases for support of American naval forces. Marines foresaw a need for establishing overseas bases in the presence of a hostile enemy. Even before World War I, the Corps had begun to mold an amphibious doctrine which would serve the nation's needs.

The interruption of World War I in the evolution of the Marine Corps' basic mission demonstrated the value of ready forces. Marines comprised but 25,000 of over two million U.S. troops in Europe, but their contribution was disproportionate to their numbers. The motto "First to Fight" became part of the Marine tradition.

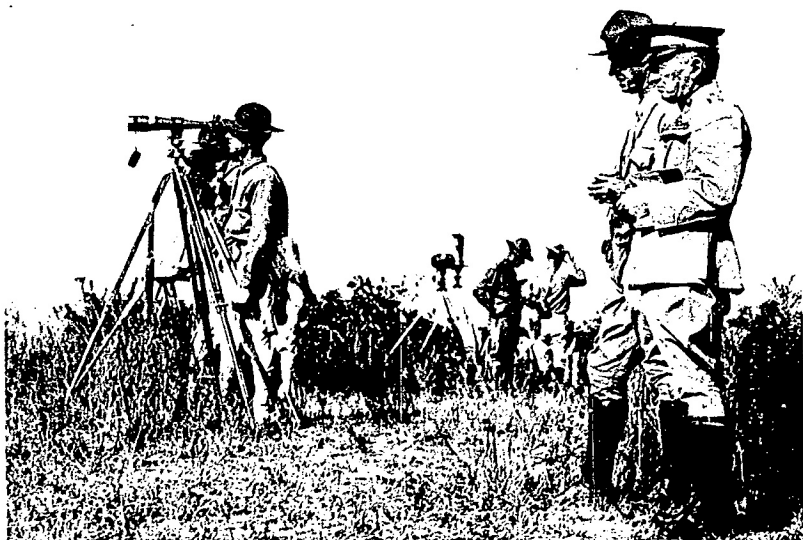
The era between World Wars I and II was the most significant in the history of the Marine Corps as an amphibious force. The Corps made its reputation at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and other legendary places, but the skill which enabled the Corps to perform so successfully in the Pacific campaigns was wrought in the 1920's and

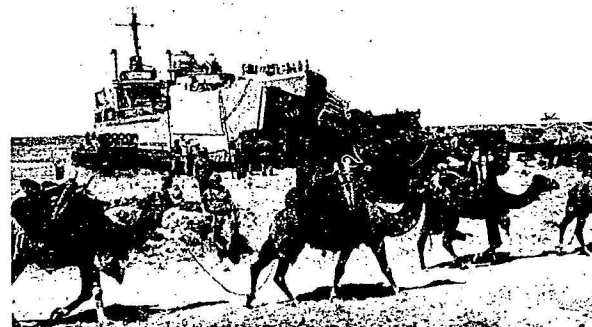
30's. The early operations of the Pacific War were testing grounds—bloody ones—but the hard core of sound doctrine already existed at the time of Guadalcanal. Major Ellis and his successors at Quantico and elsewhere provided the intellectual basis for what became the most monumental physical task the Corps ever faced. It is also worth noting that although Marine units did not participate in the massive landings in Europe, many of the spearhead Army divisions had trained with Marines in pre-war exercises, and Marines filled vital roles on the staffs of Army and Navy commanders in Europe. The perfection of amphibious tactics in the Pacific has been called by one military historian the most far-reaching tactical innovation of the war.

The advent of the nuclear age caused major revisions in American military planning concepts. Many strategists believed that amphibious landings had been rendered obsolete by the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Inchon proved them wrong. MacArthur's brilliant stroke was based upon the ability of Marines to execute his plan. The mobility and flexibility of amphibious forces were indispensable in salvaging for the United Nations' forces an opportunity to assume the offensive in the first phase of the war. The Corps had established not only its right to exist, but also its indispensable role in the structure of America's armed forces.

The Vietnam War was costly for the United States. The final chapters on this conflict have yet to be written. It is clear, however, that much can be learned from this experience. The memories are fresh in our minds—the bitter and the proud. Vietnam can be a stepping-stone to greater pro-

MajGen Lejeune, 13th CMC, views artillery firing exercise at Quantico in early 1920's. The 26th Commandant sees a need for "vast improvement in the use and control of supporting arms" in the immediate future.





"Our weapons and equipment must be consistent with our mission."



professional maturity for our Corps. It is up to all Marines to ensure that whatever can be productively gleaned from that experience is incorporated into our doctrine and put to practice on our training fields.

This brief survey of our proud heritage is intended to serve as a guidepost for our future development. If we use the lessons of history wisely, we will continue to grow and flourish as a fighting organization. If we dwell upon traditions with no thought of further progress, we will stagnate and die. We must always study the past with an eye on tomorrow.

The Present—1975

The most difficult task in evaluating our place in the history of our nation is determining exactly where we stand now. Self-analysis is always difficult but we should strive for an objective, realistic examination of our current status. Such an approach requires professional integrity and honesty. We have to ask ourselves tough questions, search for elusive answers. There are many areas requiring constant attention. I would like to touch on what I consider to be the most important issues.

Personal Responsibility

There has been some concern that our recent initiatives have been primarily cosmetic in nature, that we may be too concerned with appearances and not with what lies underneath. In other words, what is so important about the perception of Marines in the public eye?

It is exactly because we are concerned about what is underneath the surface that we are emphasizing the external appearance. The reason is that it simply makes our job easier. It tells everyone in and out of the Corps that we allow no room for compromise. We are not interested in standards that exist only on paper. We need the kind of commitment from all Marines that accepts all our standards unconditionally. A man or woman who believes in the philosophy of the Marine Corps will have no trouble complying. Those who cannot will be easy to identify.

We intend to apply the concept of personal responsibility to all aspects of performance. We are starting with physical fitness, weight control, and personal appearance because they are basic. Our very right to exist as a force in readiness depends upon the credibility of our claim that we are indeed ready. Not in a month, or a week, but now. I emphasize as well that the standards we define at Headquarters are minimums. They apply to the 40-year-old individual who spends long hours at a tough desk job. They will not be enough for a unit commander in the FMF. In other words, plenty of room for individual initiative still exists within the broad guidelines we have established.

Many other aspects of individual responsibility are vital to our claim of readiness. We are advertising that a dollar invested in the Marine Corps will return a dollar's worth of defense to the taxpayer. This does not mean that as long as some contribute a dollar ten, others can get by with ninety cents worth of effort. No one can work with all the stops out for years on end. We therefore have annual leave to provide needed relief. We do



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not provide “soft” jobs as breaks between FMF tours. If a job can occasionally be done in less time than anticipated, the time saved can be used in many productive ways. A Marine can sharpen his mind by professional reading or extra education. He can get involved in his community in ways which demonstrate that Marines are productive members of society on and off the job. He can sit down and reflect on the state of the Corps or any other matter and put his words on paper. Most important, he can ensure that he spends his free time in ways which contribute to his physical, mental, and professional well being.

Individual responsibility also means that each Marine contributes to making our Corps a healthy place to live. We must maintain a climate of high moral standards so that all Marines and their families feel at home with us. Drug and alcohol abuse and other intemperate habits tear down the structure of physical and moral health which we need to maintain. We need good men and women—more than just a few—to fulfill our mission. As I go around the country talking to groups about our Corps, I must be able to look every parent right in the eye and say, “If your son or daughter joins the Corps, he will have a good life in a healthy environment.”

Professionalism

Professionalism includes the concept of personal responsibility discussed above, but it is a much broader term. Professionalism incorporates all those elements necessary to ensure that we as a Corps remain competent to fulfill our missions. It means that we maintain individually and collec-

tively a high degree of expertise in all the areas necessary for us to function as a fighting organization. We achieve this expertise by education and training, and maintain it by exercising our skills and keeping abreast of new techniques.

Professionalism means that when we are working outside our primary military occupational specialty, we keep up with developments within that specialty by whatever means are available. It means that when a Marine attends a school of any kind, he strives to get as much out of the experience as he can. It means that unit commanders at all levels know their jobs and ensure that every Marine in their command knows his own job in turn. Professionalism requires that we as a Corps collectively seek to improve our combat skills and amphibious techniques.

One area which requires immediate attention is fire support coordination. Our performance in Vietnam left much to be desired despite the best efforts of many professional Marines. Circumstances were trying and externally imposed conditions were a factor, but we still could have done better. There is need for vast improvement in the use and control of supporting arms.

Fire support coordination has never been simple. Hard work will be necessary to get the margin of error down near zero, but it is vital that we do so. Newer weapons, better communications, and advanced technology will assist the unit commander in getting better fire support, but these advances will not make matters any simpler. Better weapons will mean the commander will have more sophisticated choices to make, and increased surveillance will mean that he will have more tar-

gets to choose from. On a fluid battlefield, commanders will be concerned with events located farther away than previously, so the advanced communications equipment we will see will be challenged by the need for wider dissemination of information.

All these factors and others lie behind the decision to develop an advanced training center at Twentynine Palms for fire support coordination. Plans are well underway, and exercises will begin this fall. We have the facilities to train unit commanders and their staffs at all levels. We will not only provide training, but will also be able to evaluate how well our officers and NCO's can adapt to rapidly changing conditions in an increasingly complex environment. The results and benefits will be manifold. Leaders will gain more confidence in the arms that support them. Supporting units will become more proficient, inspiring further trust. Marines at all levels will have greater confidence in their superiors, with the result that a substantial rise in morale across the board will occur. Coupled with better fire support, this increase in esprit will mean that the combat power of Marine forces is raised by a multiple factor. The nation needs—demands—this kind of improved return on its tax dollar.

Some further ways of improving our overall efficiency are underway and still others are under study. All are aimed at improving combat readiness. Personnel matters are getting priority attention.

Our authorized strength will remain at 196,000 for the foreseeable future. We will remain at this strength as long as we can successfully recruit and

retain the quality of young men and women necessary to meet our MOS requirements. It is difficult to predict in advance how a potential recruit will fit into our ranks, but generally a high school graduate has demonstrated that he can cope reasonably well with discipline and those demands on him necessary to get his diploma. We will therefore strive for 75 per cent high school graduates for Fiscal Year '77 and after. Further, we are reorganizing the recruiting chain of command so that recruiters will report to the recruit depot commanders. They will then share in the responsibility for the product we get out of boot camp.

Within our FMF units we will maintain a minimum personnel readiness category of C-2. We will meet this goal by reallocation of our personnel assets. Assignment of junior NCO's to the divisions will anticipate future needs and promotions to avoid a poor distribution of Staff NCO's at a later date. To correct existing imbalances, some PCS moves are necessary and have been initiated. Minor restructuring and relocating in the three divisions and wings are further means of maintaining overall readiness to meet global responsibilities. These moves will be implemented as necessary.

Absenteeism also has a detrimental effect on our readiness. Recent efforts have begun to improve this problem, but more hard work and positive leadership are necessary. We will weed out the malcontents and nonperformers to the benefit of all. As morale improves, the entire barracks climate will reflect the sort of standards we demand. Our leaders will be able to concentrate on rewarding good Marines instead of punishing bad ones.

"We will seek to improve combat support weapons and aircraft."



The key to esprit, which is the hallmark of our Corps, is recognition of the fact that we are a military organization and not a social club. It is necessary, of course, that we foster the kind of healthy personal relationships and mutual respect among *all* Marines that lead to success on the battlefield. There is room for everyone who is willing to work. All our leaders must demonstrate the leadership necessary to make our personnel policies work.

Weapons and Equipment

We emerged from Vietnam with an arsenal of weapons and support equipment which was thoroughly combat tested. Most of our inventory consisted of items which had demonstrated performance under a variety of circumstances. In the few years since, developments in weaponry have caused us to reevaluate some of our systems and investigate new ones. Certain initiatives have already been adopted. Without going into detail, I merely want to present some general concepts here which will serve as guidelines for future procurement programs.

First of all, our weapons and equipment must be consistent with our mission. We are mobile, flexible, and amphibious. We are not an armored force, nor are we specifically tasked to engage in protracted land warfare far from sea lines of communication and naval support. Our arsenal will accordingly remain relatively light and mobile. One of our guiding principles has been economy, and we will seek to avoid systems which are complex, costly, and overly sophisticated for our needs. We must have communications equipment

which is compatible with that of the other services and our allies. We will attempt to use existing technology where feasible, and improve upon existing items in lieu of costly development programs. We will not be blind to change or innovation, but will merely look extra close to ensure that new additions to our inventory are truly compatible with our needs. We will continue to monitor research being done by other services and external agencies, and will concentrate on keeping what we already own at top levels of efficiency and readiness.

Summary:

I believe I have demonstrated that we are not in bad shape here in 1975. But there is a constant need to keep the pressure on ourselves. There is a need for intellectual honesty about what we are and what we are doing. We have a firm basis from which to launch our third century. We must begin this process with our accustomed determination, dedication, and loyalty.

The Future—1976 and After

Marines in 2076 may look back upon three centuries of service with satisfaction or remorse. As I have tried to point out in the previous pages, what our successors a century hence perceive depends upon what all of us do today. The next hundred years begins tomorrow. It will not do to wait until times get better or things get easier. It is more than a cliché to say "the future is now."

Still we must plan ahead, speculate, use our imagination and all our intellectual resources to



"We will constantly monitor developments in the aviation field to ensure that our combat aircraft are the best possible platforms."

prepare for the unforeseeable. We are now recruiting young men for future officer roles who will not reach the field before 1980. The recruits of 1975 will be the Staff NCO's a decade from now. If history follows past patterns, they will be bigger, smarter and better than we are, as will their successors. We had best be ready for them.

Many of the initiatives which we have introduced in the last few months will ensure that the Marines who follow us will be able to carry on the traditions that we have inherited from our predecessors. We have enjoyed for years a close partnership with the Navy which is indispensable to our existence. The recently established Navy-Marine Corps Board is a top level group designed to solve mutual problems and further cooperation between Marines and Sailors. The spirit of good will and understanding within the naval service has never been higher. We shall continue to pursue our common goals with determination.

At present we are able to move slightly more than one MAF with the existing Navy amphibious shipping. The addition of the LHA amphibious assault ships will improve this capability, although the retirement of older vessels will leave us short of where we would like to be. It is not necessary here to review all the problems inherent in ship procurement in this inflationary age, but the Navy is dedicated to improving the size and quality of the entire fleet, including amphibious ships. The newer family of ships will be faster and better than those we have relied upon in the past, so that even with a temporary shortfall in numbers of berths, we will be able to move more Marines to more places than has recently been the case. Off in the distant future are far more sophisticated, high-performance assault craft which will eventually be capable of speeds over one hundred knots. These vessels are off the drawing boards and in the test phase. To get the maximum benefit from these ships may require substantial reevaluation of our ship-to-shore tactics. Certainly coordination and communication will be more challenging in this high speed environment. Again, the time to start planning is now.

Recent events have demonstrated the efficacy of military airlift using Marines as airlifted assault troops. It is necessary that we continue to work in close cooperation with the Air Force as a means of supplementing our surface mobility. The movement of Marines by the Military Airlift Command is a proven method of increasing our ability to respond instantaneously to threats which may arise on any corner of the globe. Training exercises with the Air Force must continue to be a part of our future planning.

There has been considerable speculation about

the Marine Corps's ability to exist in an armored environment. There is, however, no plan afoot to increase materially our FMF tank units. We must constantly reexamine our armor doctrine and devise ways to shift tanks from one locale to another. We can improve upon existing equipment and add to our inventory light anti-armor weapons. When combined with all our organic air and ground assets, which can be effectively brought to bear on enemy armor, these weapons will enable Marines to perform in any foreseeable circumstances.

Our training in the future must emphasize our worldwide mission. Exercises must reflect the geographic conditions of either flank of NATO and everything in between. We may be involved again in Asia or anywhere else, and we must be ready. To this end, we are constantly searching for new training areas which will enable us to test personnel and equipment in realistic conditions of all sorts. While our focus may alight on the Middle East or any other potential trouble spot, we dare not have tunnel vision.

Our support establishment in the FMF and elsewhere will be under close scrutiny to assure that the Marine in the front line with the rifle continues to get everything that he needs to stay alive and succeed in combat. Within the FMF, we will seek to improve combat support weapons and aircraft. Newly developed artillery weapons and improved ammunition will be incorporated into our battalions in the near future. We will constantly monitor developments in the aviation field to ensure that our combat aircraft are the best possible platforms for the support of our ground troops. New logistic support concepts will strengthen the links in the chain which holds the amphibious force together. Our entire support establishment will be geared to enhancing the readiness of FMF units, and shifts and adjustments will be made when necessary.

All of these statements of our positive intention to maximize our fighting capability represent realistic goals. They can be met. The path into the future is rarely an easy one, and some will stumble along the way. Working together we can avoid many of the obstacles which will appear. I see no reason to take a piecemeal approach to problem solving. We must have priorities, and fiscal restraints may slow us down at times, but our efforts must apply across the board to all our endeavors. We have to move as one man to make a reality of our stated plans.

Marines have never claimed to be second best. As we embark on our journey into the next one hundred years, let us step off together. We can do the job.

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