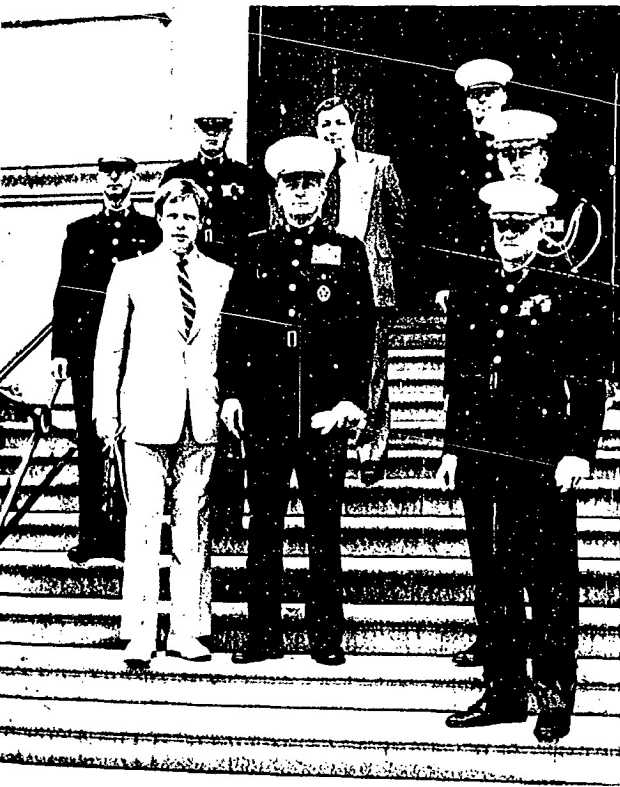


A Report on the Corps

by Gen Robert H. Barrow

Earlier this year the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania invited the Commandant of the Marine Corps to address its members in a session commemorating the 300th anniversary of the granting of the charter to the Commonwealth. The Commandant accepted and on 2 June appeared before the House. His remarks, delivered informally without notes or script, were later transcribed and are reported in this article.



Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen of this distinguished body, it is a great pleasure and a privilege to be in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, America's Keystone State, and particularly in this year of your 300th anniversary of the charter granted to William Penn.

Clearly, I should have journeyed here earlier.

I have been 10 times this spring before the House and the Senate down there in Washington. I did not receive the kind of greeting I received this morning. I like it.

Let me tell you a story, a true story. All recruits in the Marine Corps who go to Parris Island, South Carolina, come initially to Charleston by air. Then they are put aboard chartered buses if there is a large contingent, or if only a few come in, they may ride the regular bus from Charleston to Savannah, which would come in to Parris Island and discharge those few. It is always at night, usually about 1 o'clock in the morning. Back about 1973, when I was commanding general down there, one night the regular Charleston-to-Savannah bus run had aboard about 12 recruits who were to be discharged at Parris Island. They arrived, and I cannot adequately describe that scene. Some of these former Marines that are here with you, members of your august body, would remember. The bus pulled up to the recruit receiving barracks where a drill instructor stuck his head in the door and, in that kind of commanding voice they all have, said, "ALL RIGHT, OFF THE BUS." The 12 recruits got off the bus and so did a young 16-year-old lad on his way from Charleston to Savannah to visit his grandmother (pause) (laughter). Three days later (pause) (laughter) had you been at Parris Island, you would have seen this individual who looked like a recruit. His hair was gone, he had a bewildered look about him, but he was riding around in a Marine Corps sedan,



One too many got off the bus.

being given a kind of Cook's tour of the place before he was very carefully delivered to his grandmother's house in Savannah.

Clearly, there is a presumption at Parris Island that if you get off the bus, you want to be a Marine. And there is a presumption on my part today that if you invite me to talk to this House of Representatives, you expect me to talk about the Marine Corps. In any case, I like to be on safe ground, and so I will talk a little bit about your Marine Corps. You have more than full claim to it not only as taxpayers, but I can tell you that the sons and daughters of Pennsylvania have historically been disproportionately represented in your United States Marine Corps, and thank God for that. I would like to lead the applause.

When I served in China in World War II—I served most of it in a province called Hunan—there was an old Chinese saying that went, you cannot fight a war without Hunanese soldiers. I am not sure what virtues they brought to the battlefield, but I reckon one could say you would not be able to fight a war in this country without Pennsylvanians. They have been so very dedicated and patriotic and loyal in coming to the colors of all Services.

I would like to give you just a kind of a how-goes-it with your Marine Corps which will

necessarily touch on some other defense matters.

Your Corps today is 188,000. Now that is the smallest, of course, of all four Services, but it is not small, and I will give you a figure to compare it with. That 188,000 is substantially larger than the British Army. It is larger than the Army-Navy-Air Force of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand combined. So in the context of global Services, we are not a small Service, but more importantly, we bring to the military capability of this Nation some uniqueness which I need to remind you about.

We have three Marine divisions, each of which is the largest of any division in the world, combining all of the combined arms and capabilities you would find in a typical infantry-type division. But it never fights alone. It has a companion Marine Corps air wing. And together with the combat service support troops that support them, we are talking about 45,000 to 50,000 troops, and you have three such formations, and together they represent the only truly integrated air-ground team in the world. Then it is further combined with the Navy because, while we are not under the Navy, we are in the Department of the Navy and are inextricably linked to the United States Navy. We like it that way, we want it that way, and that is the way we go to war. When you take this Marine air-ground team and then make it part of a naval team, you in fact have embraced all the capabilities one would expect to find in any joint multi-Service task force, and that team today is the busiest it has ever been in terms of exercises and training in peacetime.

On any given day you will find Marine formations of various sizes in such distant places as Australia, South Korea, throughout the Mediterranean, and even northern Norway. Just this last winter we had a unit that was 150 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Norway for over a month. So that part of our Marine hymn which says, "in every clime and place," has real meaning. We train with more different allies than any other Service in the world, learning their capabilities, what they can and cannot do; perhaps teaching them something; and most especially, learning a lot about distant places that we might have to go to. In doing all of this, in a real sense we not only improve our readiness, but the fact that we do it proves our readiness, because they are not easy to do.

So you have a Marine Corps today that is sizable, versatile, and ready. What are we going to do with it? Well, I want to tell you, I hope we do not have to fight with it. I am into my 40th year of service and three wars, and while I



*Marines land at Gitmo—
“... the world's best amphibious capability.”*

am personally committed to your having a versatile, capable, ready Marine Corps, I think we all know that the best kind of war is the one we do not have to fight. So I would hope that your Marine Corps would do that which it does so well with the Navy and which regrettably is so little appreciated by the military analysts and some of the decisionmakers in Washington, and that is to deter—deter through strength, deter through being available and ready. It is one thing to build up the conventional forces of America as needs to be done, but it is quite another to do it and be able to put them up near the guy who is about to make mischief. And uniquely, the Navy and Marine Corps, since the days of our forefathers, have been that one capability that is responsive like no other to distant places through the use of international waters, through not having to intrude on anyone else's sovereignty until it is required, and without the dependency on bases and overflight rights. This uniqueness is beautifully represented today by the presence of Navy forces in the Indian Ocean, with a few small formations of Marines who come in and out from time to time.

That is the kind of capability that you will see being increasingly improved in the years ahead. But when you read about strengthening naval power and a 600-ship Navy, which is going to be terribly expensive, it is to give this country the kind of capability that we traditionally had, historically had, and which we have sadly neglected in the last 10 or 15 years; to give us the ability to use sea power, not only to control the sea, but to place it on a distant shore if necessary, wherever and whenever; and finally, to give us forces that are *flexible* (which

is to say do more than one thing) *mobile* (which is to say go more than one place) and *available* (which is to say do it now).

When I speak of a growing Navy, I do not want to leave you with the impression that the Marine Corps plans on expanding accordingly. Although we do not need a much bigger Marine Corps, we will be modernizing as all Services must. We do need a better way to get to where we may have to go, and while presently we have the world's best amphibious capability in our Navy and Marine Corps, the Navy part of it in terms of ships needs to be improved. It must grow along with the rest of the Navy forces to the 600-ship level.

Well, I have given you a little thumbnail, if you will, about our capability. Why do we need it? I think that we all in this chamber recognize how our relationship with other nations has been reduced to a kind of interplay that is unprecedented. Whether we are talking about access to resources or to marketplaces or to allies and friends, the new administration in Washington has clearly enunciated a policy that the Third World is not the Russians' playground. If there is an intrusion against our national interest, we will answer. And I hope we answer in a way that provides first a deterrence that I spoke of earlier. Such a response requires not only the courage to make a decision but to make it in a timely manner so that the forces can be there *before things go from bad to worse* and not wait until the eleventh hour. This administration is committed to achieving a conventional force capability sufficient so that we can respond globally with primarily, and certainly initially, naval forces.

Let me turn to another and my most favorite

subject. In Washington there is a great attraction to talking about strategy and drawing broad arrows, and, of course, there is also a great interest in the acquisition of the resources of war—new weapons, new equipment, keeping up with the technology—but there is something, ladies and gentlemen, that transcends all of that in importance, and that is people . . . people.

All of our Services are committed in an unprecedented way to being kept up to strength—which is to say around 2 million men and women—through the all-volunteer force system. At no time in the history of mankind has any nation attempted to man that size force with all volunteers. It translates into having to bring in to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps about 1,000 people a day, recruits if you will. It is a monumental undertaking. It is, in my judgment, the most difficult of all the various jobs that one might have in any of our Services, and it is very fragile, susceptible to such things as the economy.

The Services are presently, within the context of the all-volunteer force, doing what they have to do. But we know that in the decade of the eighties, the qualified people available—those who are eligible to serve—are going to decline approximately 20 percent. We know that we are living in a soft economy so that some of the people who are attracted to the colors are perhaps seeking employment. We know that there is a great belief in this Nation that somehow everyone should have a college degree, so there are colleges and industry competing for the same limited numbers who are eligible to serve. So those who are out there

recruiting are faced with plain old hard work.

Two years ago, I made a conscious decision to put the best people we had in the Marine Corps, if one can make that distinction, on recruiting duty. Some of them are here today. They are producing the results, but they still have some obstacles that they should not have to put up with.

I did not come to this great chamber to lobby you, but it was brought to my attention that this is one of the many states in our great Nation where recruiters of all Services have great difficulty in getting access to the high school seniors' list, that is to the names and addresses of the young men and women who are about to graduate. If this list is available to recruiters, it is possible to make some kind of contact with them, and the students have no obligation to do any more than listen to the first few words and hang up if they want to.

I cannot reconcile in my mind or experiences the situation in which the high schools of our country have foreclosed on our recruiters, who are out trying to make what the Nation has said they wanted, an all-volunteer force, and make it work. So I entreat you, I plead with you, to deliberate on this subject and give it your careful consideration.

Today, in the Marine Corps, in terms of the people side of the equation, we have made a commitment to excellence that perhaps is again unprecedented because of the all-volunteer character of the work we have to do and the difficulties encountered, but the results are encouraging. I am not a proponent or an advocate of the all-volunteer force, and ultimately we will have to face up to the draft, but we

Marine recruiters "are producing the results, but they still have some obstacles. . . ."



are making it and doing it very well.

Some several years ago we had in the Corps an embarrassment. When the draft ended, of all the Services we were the least prepared to go to the all-volunteer force concept, did not know what we were looking for, did not know how to do it, and we brought in some people who should not have been brought in. This is behind us, and I do not mind talking about it because it has a happy ending.

We made a policy statement and stated as an imperative that we would recruit 75 percent high school graduates, because every statistic has indicated that the high school graduate is 2 to 1 more likely to complete his first enlistment. He has a greater amenability to discipline; he is more trainable. And as an aside I will just postulate the question rhetorically, why do you think that is so? Do you think there is some magic about a piece of paper that he gets that says he graduated from high school? Most people, when you ask the question, "What is so important about it?" will give you superficial answers, such as, well, it demonstrates stick-to-itiveness or ability to get along with his peers or he is a goalsetter. Some of that may be true, but I will share with you what my belief is, having worked with this problem for so many years. More than anything else, it is the manifestation that he comes from a reasonably stable home where there was love and caring and encouragement for him to want to finish high school. That same environment has given him the kind of character-building that will make him succeed as a member of any one of our Services. And the opposite is true for the youngster who is dropping out of high school. More often than not, he is dropping out incidental to dropping out of the family. Well, for whatever reason, it is important that we look for the high school graduate, and we stated as an imperative 75 percent, the other 25 percent being at least 10th grade and scoring higher on the classification test. We came in last year at 78 percent. This year with a new test that is tougher and forcing the recruiters to work harder to find people who can pass it, we are meeting our high school objective and predict that we will come in somewhere between 82 percent and 85 percent with high school graduates, and that is an unprecedented number in this Service.

You should be encouraged that our youth today, despite what I think they have to put up with—the distractions of life and the lack of discipline in a lot of our institutions starting in the home and ranging through many of our

schools—still are responsive to the kind of discipline and training that we offer them in my Service. I am continuously impressed that there is a kind of thirst for it in our youth, and indeed, I believe many come to the Marine Corps for that reason alone. They come in part to believe in something that they can in fact really believe in, something which requires among other things some self-sacrifice to make that kind of commitment, a sacrifice of giving up your hair and your funny clothes and your loud music and a few other things. I also think that they want very much, in the case of the men, to prove their manliness, and I often say that self-discipline is the basis of all manliness, and if they can come to Parris Island or the recruit depot in San Diego and succeed and go home, sort of a U.S. Government-stamped: "man," then they have in their mind succeeded, and I think they have.

The two most important things that are learned at our recruit training, which we are committed to keeping as stressful and tough as possible, are not taught—the spirit of being a Marine and discipline. They are nevertheless learned by the everyday environment that our youngsters are cast in. It is important for you to realize that. As you read your newspapers and see some prospect of Marines going somewhere, you need not be the least bit concerned about whether they will do what needs to be done. I can assure you they will, and it rests in large part on whom we bring in, how we train them initially, and how we treat them subsequently. And you can take it from me, your Commandant, that your Marine Corps is a proud, capable, ready, manpower-quality organization that will do whatever the Nation says must be done. In this regard, I leave with you the thought that someone once said, "Success in battle is not a function of how many show up, but who they are."

I thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I know that I did not give you a prepared speech, I did not want to. I wanted to talk to you as a fellow Pennsylvanian—something impossible for me to do. I know you have picked up the fact that I am from somewhere well south of here. I am a Louisianian, but I am most of all a 50-stater, because I think this is a great and wonderful country of ours, of which this state is unprecedented in the representation of all the values and virtues that we as a Nation love and cherish. I came to Pennsylvania because I believe in you, and I am delighted to be here. God bless you. Thank you.

USMC