

The Commandant's Perspective

## Honor, Courage, and Commitment

by Gen Charles C. Krulak

*The ethos and values ingrained in every Marine are the foundations on which we build and the keys to our future.*

Long before we wear the uniform, long before the eagle, globe, and anchor is etched in our souls, we sense the special character that sets Marines apart. Silent to the ear, Marine ethos, values, and character speak to the Nation's heart. They say more about who we are than the dignity of our uniforms, the pageantry of our parades, or the inspiration of our hymn. The Nation expects her Marines to be the world's finest military professionals. The Nation demands that her Marines be forever capable and ready, rich in history and tradition, and instilled with the traditional virtues—honor, courage, and commitment—that demonstrate we remain faithful. In short, we must deserve the Nation's trust.

*“. . . the Nation has placed a measure of its trust and hope in the one hundred thousand men who have volunteered to serve the cause of freedom as United States Marines. The Marine Corps is always ready to fulfill that trust.”*

—Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift  
18th Commandant of the Marine Corps  
10 November 1946

Trust is not given, nor is it easily earned. Today, the trust of the Nation is our inheritance—a trust earned through the selfless valor and determined actions of generations of Marines on the distant shores and misty battlefields of our storied past. Left to us as part of our predecessor's legacy, it is now ours to sustain. The stewardship of this trust is our sacred responsibility. It is a debt we owe to those who have gone before us, and a promise we make to those who will follow. It is the guiding light of our ethos.

*“This high name of distinction and soldierly repute we who are Marines today have received from those who preceded us in the Corps. With it we also received from them the eternal spirit which has animated our Corps from generation to generation and has been the distinguishing mark of the Marines in every age.”*

—MajGen John A. Lejeune  
13th Commandant of the Marine Corps  
10 November 1921

Our ethos is not just what we do but who we are and what we believe. Today, as in the past, the spirit of this ethos is born in the hearts of men and women drawn to the Corps by a common calling—the desire to serve and a sense of duty born in ideals like patriotism, valor, and fidelity. It grows as they are transformed from citizen-patriots of the great American stock into Marines—mind, body, and soul. Like knights of legend, Marines are not made, they are transformed. They are forged in the furnace of hardship, tempered by the bonds of shared hazard, sharpened by the whet-stones of training and education, and honed to a fine edge by innovation and ingenuity. Marines, once transformed, are forever changed—instilled with beliefs, ideals, and

virtues that have meaning deeper than words. Today, some of these ideals—honor, courage, commitment—form the bedrock of our institutional and individual character. They are our core values.

*"He is the descendant of a line of heroes, the bearer of a name hailed as foremost in the annals of his country, the custodian of a long cherished reputation for honor, valor, and integrity.*

—MajGen John A. Lejeune  
13th Commandant of the Marine Corps  
10 November 1922

To be honorable one must live with honor. To live with honor, we must be faithful to our cause, to our purpose, to our beliefs. We must be faithful to our Country, to our Corps, and to each other. This faithfulness is never situational, and it must never be compromised. We must respect each other, believe in each other, trust each other.

*"Their training, their spirit, and their cold courage prevailed against fanatical opposition."*

—James B. Forrestal  
Secretary of the Navy  
Marine Corps Birthday, 10 November 1945

Warfighters understand the dimensions of physical courage. There are no greater supporters of peace than those who are sworn to risk their lives when war occurs. Knowing the eventuality of physical danger, physical courage is prerequisite for what we do. Physical courage spurs us to action in the face of violence and danger. However, our profession also demands moral courage—the strength of character, the mastery of fear, and the ability to make hard decisions under stress and pressure—and the integrity to do what is right. Integrity is not something we carry to work in a bag and change into at the office. It is not an accessory or part of the fabric of our uniform, it must be part of the very fabric of our individual character and of our Corps.

*"The Corps represents a most meaningful form of patriotism in action—individuals committed and dedicated to a career of service to the Nation."*

—Paul R. Ignatious  
Secretary of the Navy  
Marine Corps Birthday, November 1968

Commitment is a promise of resolve. Commitment is the investment that turns ideas into action. The continuity of commitment is dedication and determination, and the product is mastery of one's profession. Our commitment reflects our "attitude in action."

On this birthday, our Nation finds in its Marine Corps, men and women who exemplify the ideals upon which our country was founded—honor, courage, and commitment. In its Marines, it also finds men and women who know the meaning of patriotism, valor, duty, strength, discipline, and innovation—men and women who love Country and Corps. But as we reflect on our history, ethos and values, remember, the future will judge its past.

*"And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each of us, recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state, our success or failure in whatever office we hold will be measured by the answers to four questions: First, were we truly men of courage. Second, were we truly men of judgment. Third, were we truly men of integrity. Finally, were we truly men of dedication?"*

—John F. Kennedy  
35th President of the United States

A wise gentleman once stated that America has a Marine Corps because it wants a Marine Corps. Today, America wants a Marine Corps because she knows not only what we do, but also something about who we are, and what we believe—something about the standards of our ethos and our values. The Nation wants its Corps of Marines because we are a force she can trust. Our responsibility today and for the future is to preserve that trust. Honor, courage, and commitment will sustain us.

