

The Commandant's Perspective

Thinking Anew

by Gen Charles C. Krulak

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, so we must think anew.—Abraham Lincoln

When I assumed the duties of the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, I set out planning guidance in order to provide strategic direction and ensure unity of effort as the Corps moves toward the next century. At the core of this guidance was a vision of the Corps as a versatile, decisive force—one that not only remained committed to its traditional high standard of military excellence, but also set a new standard in its ability to anticipate change and adapt to new realities. My intent was—and remains—that while our basic measure of success remains victory on the battlefield, we must draw upon our rich heritage of innovation and develop a Corps-wide capacity for adaptation that gives us the versatility and flexibility we need as we move into the next century.

Many of the objectives that are laid out in the Commandant's Planning Guidance have been accomplished or set in motion. We have transformed the way in which the executive leadership of the Corps makes decisions, and we have made giant strides in focusing our efforts in allocation of resources. The integration of professional military education and doctrine, a subject of intense debate for decades, is now underway at the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, as is a new, more focused process for structure sponsorship. The Commandant's Warfighting Laboratory is not only a reality, but is well along toward its first set of experimental efforts. We have developed the nucleus of a Joint Task Force Headquarters, and the first Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force will be in place at Camp Lejeune in just a few short weeks. These changes and many other efforts will have a major impact throughout our Corps, and they will continue.

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In this process, we have also gained a clearer understanding of the challenges that still lie ahead. Talking about “changing the way we do business” has been easy; actually making changes in the way we operate is not. While some adjustments have proved to be relatively straightforward, others are so complex and far reaching in their effects that any innovation must be accomplished carefully—both deliberately and incrementally. Quite frankly, in some ways the bureaucratic mindset opposing innovative thinking is far more entrenched than I would ever have imagined. In several cases I have seen more fear than optimism about the opportunities at hand. Perhaps this is understandable in a force that holds tradition and the touchstones of the past in such high regard, but it is not defensible or excusable given the consequences of standing still when we must move forward. Our 220 years of accomplishments give us much to take pride in, but we must not let this esteem for our past blind us to the opportunities of our future. We must never lose contact with one of our key touchstones: Marines are innovators and improvisors.

As the Corps heads toward a new era, ALL HANDS must be involved in taking us there. Wisdom and insight are not the exclusive domain of those who work inside the Beltway, at Quantico, and elsewhere in the supporting establishment, or in the Fleet Marine Force. Every Marine has a role to play, and indeed an obligation to think hard about the future. For those who wrestle with the daily struggles of contingencies, scheduled and non-scheduled deployments, maintenance management, manpower headaches, and the myriad other problems of “the real world,” finding the time to think beyond tomorrow seems utterly impossible—yet it is critical that we do exactly that. Leaders at every level, from Commandant to the fire team leader, need to take a very hard look inward and take aggressive steps to clear away the things they have control over that obstruct the process of creative

thinking and innovation. As we cope with daily issues and challenges, we do not have the luxury of some cosmic "ENDEX" when we can turn off what we are doing today and begin working on tomorrow and the day after. No matter what the next century brings, the Corps' role in it will be founded on the thinking we do today. The future will be built "en route," and all Marines must condition themselves to contemplate and reflect upon that future even as they solve the challenges of today.

The world coming at us over the horizon will be very different, and our Corps must be prepared to adapt to it. We need to have the courage to talk openly and pointedly about what this new world will mean for the Corps, not just in terms of individual pieces of equipment, but doctrine, training, organization, etc. It does no good to talk of radical new weapons, sensors, or means of mobility, then overlay them upon a Corps that is organized and operated the way we are today. This would be ludicrous. Yet this is exactly what happens when we think about where we will be 20 years from now—two decades into a quantum change in the battlefield—without really opening up our minds to new organizations and concepts. I am not suggesting that every existing organization has to change or that every new idea will succeed. If new ideas and organizations are tested honestly—and they will be—many will fail. But many will also succeed—perhaps far more than some have even dared to believe.

Countless people fought hard to preserve the Corps' capabilities in the post-Cold War era. We need that same energy and focus applied to reaching the day after tomorrow. The reality is that we must now move beyond "holding the line" and challenge ourselves to adapt to a new world. Let me offer a few specific ways in which we can do that:

- We have already begun to raise our standard of professional military education (PME). That must continue. I want every Marine to understand that education must be a daily, continuous process, just as much a part of the daily routine as physical training. The days of waiting passively for the system to provide an opportunity for PME are over. "Every Marine a rifleman, and every Marine a scholar in the profession of arms . . ."
- With the Traders' Game, "Doom Marine," and several other new efforts, we have taken the first tentative steps toward a transformation of how we train the individual Marine for the role he or she must play on the radically different battlefield that is at hand. In the years to come, I will seek nothing less than a complete transformation of each individual coming through entry level training, so that those who take their place among our ranks will unquestionably be the most physically fit, emotionally ready, and mentally capable warriors our Nation has ever fielded.

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• The Sea Dragon process and other efforts by both the Commandant's Warfighting Laboratory and MarCorSysCom will transform the way we equip Marines for war. We must not shy away from the organizational and doctrinal changes these efforts will invite us to study. We all accept that the individual Marine remains paramount, but that cannot become an excuse to ignore the reality of changing technology. The MEU(SOC) has been a tremendous success; time and again it has proved itself to be a critical instrument of national policy. But is the MEU of today the right force for the next century? The concept of a division of three infantry regiments, a regiment of artillery, and a robust set of combat support and combat service support units was born in an era of warfare vastly different from that which we are entering. Is it still a valid organization for the kind of wars we will fight? These are the kind of hard, gut-wrenching questions we must ask ourselves and provide answers to if we are to be successful the day after tomorrow. I do not presume to have answers to any of these questions in my hip pocket, but I am certain that if we as a Corps do not think hard about them, we are not going to survive the changes that are coming.

Change will be required, and change will be made—not because it is fashionable or politically correct, but because it will be essential for making Marines and winning battles in the next century. I charge every Marine to be involved in our march to the day after tomorrow, to contribute actively in making sure that we make the right changes, and to keep intact those things that truly do not need to be changed. As we contemplate the path ahead, Abraham Lincoln's words provide wise counsel for every Marine: "As our case is new, we must think anew."

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