

The Commandant's Perspective

The Crucible: Building Warriors For the 21st Century

by Gen Charles C. Krulak

In a world of international civil unrest and uncertainty, the Corps continues to prepare its Marines for the eventuality of combat on tomorrow's battlefield.

On the 26th of May 1997, I delivered a Memorial Day address at a solemn ceremony on one of the Marine Corps' most sacred battlefields: Belleau Wood. The tenacity, valor, and sacrifice displayed by the 4th Marine Brigade during that epic battle forever cemented the Corps' reputation as the world's fighting elite. Since Belleau Wood, Marines have been looked upon as professionals, honed to the highest standard, sharpened for any challenge, warriors without peer.

After the ceremony, I spent the rest of the day walking through the wheat fields, forests, and villages where the 4th Brigade fought. This is hallowed ground. Even to this day, the battlefield bears the scars of vicious combat—fighting positions, trenches, shell holes, and shards of shrapnel are everywhere. It was a wonder to me that anyone could survive, much less prevail, in the cauldron that was Belleau Wood. Survival required much more than just courage and exceptional training. The individual Marine rifleman had to be innovative, resourceful, and capable of making the right decision in extremis—in many ways, a force of one. More importantly, though, each and every Marine at Belleau

Wood had to believe in his heart that, although he might seem alone and on his own in the darkness of the forest, he was actually fighting as part of an inseparable team—his unit—Marines who he could never let down.

While walking in the wheat field through which the Marines attacked on the 6th of June 1918, it dawned on me that the battle of Belleau Wood was won before it was even joined. On the eve of their trial by fire, the Marines of the 4th Brigade were supremely confident in their personal abilities to carry the day, and more importantly, they felt an incredible allegiance to their unit and to their fellow Marines. It was these attributes that enabled them to prevail in the crucible of Belleau Wood. These same attributes—confidence and allegiance—will be necessary for success in the battles that will confront Marines in the 21st century. The Corps' Crucible of today is designed to help Marines prepare for those future battles through the in-



Gen Krulak, accompanied by Maj Denis P. Muller, lays a wreath at the foot of the 4th Marine Brigade Memorial at Belleau Wood on 26 May. On the left is the French military representative, MajGen Pierre Coursier.

culcation of these attributes.

I know that many of you have already heard of the Crucible. Some of you are even beginning to receive Crucible-trained Marines into your units. Let me share with you our rationale for starting the Crucible, identify what this training evolution entails, and then discuss the opportunities and the challenges that it poses to us as leaders.

Why the Crucible?

The Crucible was not implemented because we found our tried and true methods of recruit training to be flawed. Nothing could be further from the truth. We developed the Crucible for two major reasons. The first reason is that we saw a change in the operating environment in which our Marines will be employed. Decentralized operations, high technology, increasing weapons lethality, asymmetric threats, the mixing of combatants and noncombatants, and urban combat will be the order of the day vice the exception in the 21st century. Our Marines must be good decisionmakers. They must be trained to the highest standard. They must be self-confident. They must have absolute faith in the members of their unit. This is why we have instituted the Values Program for all Marines. This is why we have enhanced the way we transform America's sons and daughters into U.S. Marines. This is why we have included the Crucible as part of the Transformation process. We must ensure that our newest Marines fully understand and appreciate what the Marine Corps represents, and that, as members of the world's fighting elite, they must uphold the sacred trust we have with our great Nation—and the sacred trust that we have with each other. The Crucible is designed specifically to contribute to the making of this kind of Marine. Preparing our young Marines for battle is the genesis for the Crucible.

The second reason for the Crucible was derived from subtle changes in the societal norms and expectations of America's youth. We have all heard the term "generation X," a term often associated with a negative connotation. Yet, it is from this generation that we recruit the Marines who will be our future. It is, therefore, important for us to understand just how the young people of today view the world, to understand what motivates them. Almost 2 years ago, we brought in a team of psychologists to tell us about generation X. From them, we learned that young people today are looking for standards, and they want to be held accountable. They, for the most part, don't mind following, but they can lead and want to lead. Most want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to be something special. Most believe in God. Many don't fully recognize it as such, but they want to have faith. These traits manifest themselves in a tendency to join—join gangs, join fraternities and clubs, join causes. These are exactly the same attributes and attitudes that offer the Marine Corps a tremendous opportunity. Generation X does not want to be "babied." These young Americans are looking for a real challenge. They desperately want to be part of a winning team; they crave the stature associated with being one of the best. These are the Marines of the future, the warriors of the 21st century. The Crucible is giving them exactly what they want—and exactly what we need.

What Is the Crucible?

Remember that Transformation is a four-step process: recruiting, recruit training, cohesion, and sustainment. The Crucible is the centerpiece of the recruit training phase. It is a 3-day training evolution that has been added to the end of basic recruit training, designed specifically to make Marines better warriors. It features little food, little sleep, over 40 miles of forced marches, and 32 stations that test physical toughness and mental agility. The events are designed to focus primarily on two areas—shared hardship and teamwork. We wanted to create a challenge so difficult and arduous that it would be the closest thing possible to actual combat. We wanted to create for the recruits a Crucible that, once experienced, would be a personal touchstone and would demonstrate for each and every recruit and candidate the limitless nature of what they could achieve individually and, more importantly, what they could accomplish when they worked as a team. To accommodate this culminating event we lengthened recruit training to 12 full weeks. The Crucible has been strategically placed in the 11th week

of training, a week we have designated "Transformation Week."

The drill instructor is still the backbone of the recruit training process. The drill instructor's role in the first 10 weeks of recruit training remains as it always has been. However, during Transformation Week the drill instructor trades his or her traditional campaign cover for a soft cover or a helmet, and transitions to the role of a team leader and mentor for the Crucible process. The drill instructor guides the recruits, seeking to build confidence in their individual abilities and to emphasize the importance of the team. The objective is to build a sense of unit cohesion so that by the end of the Crucible the individual recruits see the value of working together, in a common cause, to overcome the most arduous tasks and conditions.

The drill instructor's job is not over, however, when his or her recruits complete the Crucible. There is a week remaining—Transition Week. It is the time when our newest members have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to increase their knowledge and confidence so that they are fully prepared for what lies ahead. It is during this last week that the drill instructors debrief the recruits' Crucible experience, identifying and reinforcing the teamwork and values that allowed them to prevail in times of duress and hardship.

The Opportunity and the Challenge

The results of the first iterations of the Crucible have been impressive, not only in the increased sense of pride and maturity in our new Marines, but in other, more tangible, ways as well. For example, liberty incidents of the Crucible-trained companies going through infantry training battalions at the schools of infantry have decreased dramatically. Both schools report that companies composed of Marines who have completed the Crucible are performing better than Marines who underwent the syllabus prior to implementation of the Crucible. Recruiters report that these new Marines, when assigned to the Recruiters Assistance Program, are more responsible and more confident. These are preliminary results, but clearly we have hit the mark. We have taken a proven process that produces the finest fighting men and women in the world and actually improved it!

Now as these Marines—tempered in the Crucible—enter our ranks, it is up to every leader in the Corps to combine the strengths of our experienced Marines with the intensity of our new Marines. This amalgamation will increase unit warfighting capabilities. As always, Marine leaders must capitalize on the strength that every Marine brings to the team.

You have great Marines now. Your new Marines will be the same in many ways yet will be different for their Crucible experience. Think about how you will capitalize on that difference. Think about how you will meet this challenge. While it is true that leadership fundamentals are timeless, the method of application varies with every scenario and with each individual. I have complete confidence that in this organization of leaders you will find the methods to maximize this opportunity wherever you are—in your fire team or shop, in your battalion or squadron, in your Marine air-ground task force, or on your staff.

The battles ahead will be violent, chaotic, and lethal. It is our responsibility to prepare our Marines for these future trials. They, like their forefathers at Belleau Wood, must have complete confidence in their individual abilities and in those of their unit. The Crucible helps instill that confidence. But, it only helps. It is up to us to do the rest with good, old-fashioned, Marine Corps leadership.

Semper Fidelis.

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The monument dedicated to the 4th Marine Brigade at Belleau Wood. The monument was dedicated in 1955.