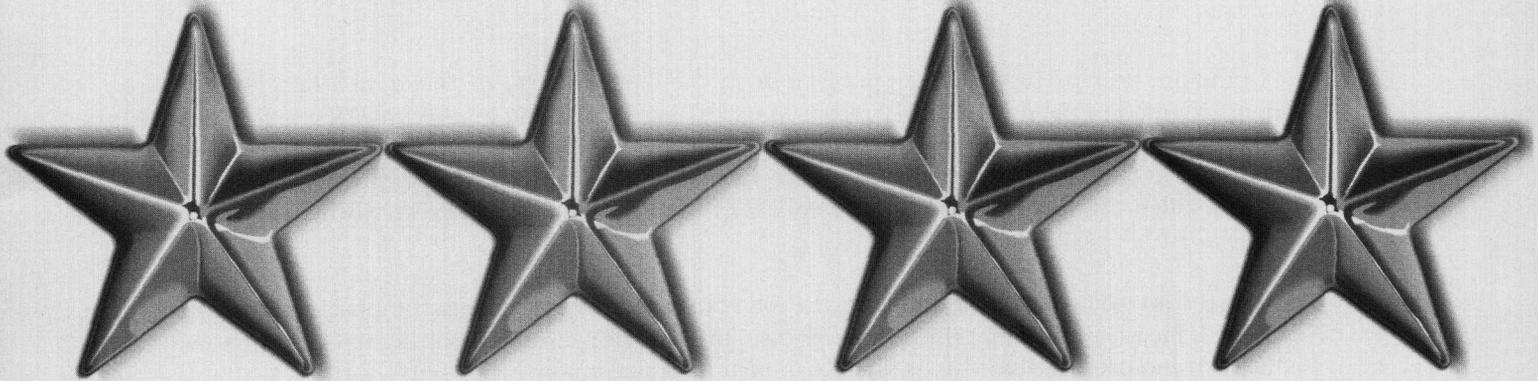


# ***Commandant's Guidance***



## ***Update***





1 July 2000

A year ago, I issued the *Commandant's Guidance* as an expression of my personal philosophy concerning our Corps. As a broad statement that is descriptive, rather than prescriptive, the document is true to its title: it provides guidance from the Commandant regarding subjects that are of interest and concern to Marines. These subjects were carefully chosen, but at the conclusion of my first year in office, I directed my staff to assist me in reviewing the *Commandant's Guidance* to determine whether there were any areas in need of refinement or any important issues that had been overlooked. The resounding and unanimous answer echoed the conclusion I had already reached: **SAFETY**.

In the one-year period following publication of the *Commandant's Guidance* on 1 July 1999, accidents resulted in the deaths of 112 of our Marines and Sailors, and injuries to 775 others. These statistics include both training and off-duty mishaps. The numbers are alarming. Sadly, in many cases, deaths and injuries could easily have been prevented. For example, 50 percent of the Marines killed off-duty in motor vehicle collisions were not wearing seatbelts. Such losses are as senseless and inexcusable as they are tragic.

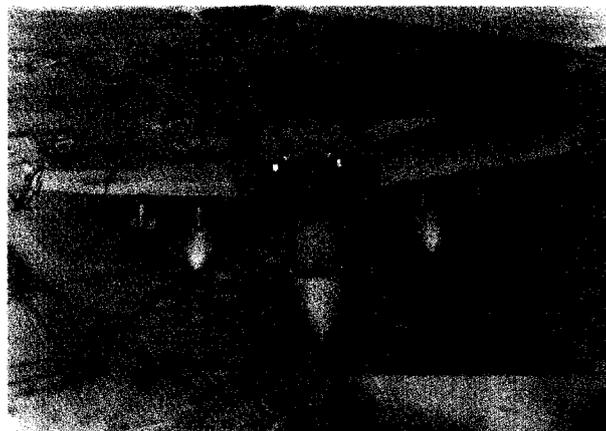
The record would appear to indicate that the Marine Corps has become complacent about safety, but let me assure you that this is not the case. In fact, safety is one of our highest priorities and is of such importance that the Assistant Commandant personally heads our efforts in that area, chairing an Executive Safety Board that directly engages the senior leadership of the Corps in addressing and resolving issues. Safety is a subject that has held my own close attention throughout the past year, and I am convinced that we have a problem. However, it is a problem that we can correct through the concerted application of leadership, common sense, and discipline: resources that are available to the Corps in abundance.

With these things in mind, I have issued an update to the *Commandant's Guidance* addressing this most important subject. As safety is an inherent function of leadership, this new material should be considered an integral part of the section in the *Guidance* entitled "Leading Marines." Like the original document of which it now forms a part, this addendum is intended to establish "Commandant's intent" with regard to one of the most pressing challenges facing us today. Marine leaders at all levels must translate this intent into action by implementing appropriate measures to attack and defeat the unsafe acts and conditions that are robbing us of our most precious asset: our Marines.

The situation is clear. The mission: eliminate avoidable accidents. H-Hour: NOW.

Semper Fidelis,

**S**afety, both operational and personal, is the responsibility of every Marine. It begins with leadership. The message is simple, and as old as the Corps itself: leaders take care of their Marines. That duty is all encompassing, touching almost every aspect of our personal and professional lives. Marine leaders take responsibility for the actions and omis-

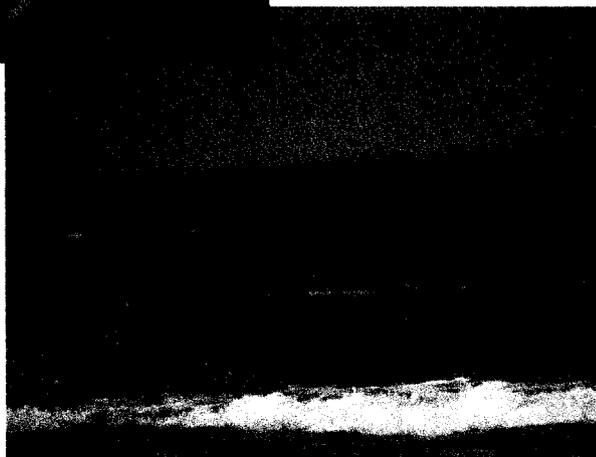


sions of the men and women they lead, on duty and off, to an extent that is unique to military culture, with no counterpart in the civilian world. They actively concern themselves with their Marines' welfare and combat preparedness, including their physical and mental well-being, training, personal readiness, and family readiness. It is evident, then, that conditions, practices, and habits posing a threat to the safety of Marines must be sought out, attacked, and eliminated by leaders.

A leader's responsibility for safety includes three broad functions. First, leaders establish an organizational culture emphasizing the importance of safety. This requires more than perfunctory safe driving lectures. It is, instead, a continuing educational process that seeks to stimulate an attitude of true safety consciousness in every member of the unit. A leader's second function with regard to safety is supervision. Inherent to authority is the obligation to issue and enforce policy. Too frequently, accident investigations re-

veal a fateful deviation from regulations. Supervision and enforcement can prevent many such occurrences. Finally, leaders seek balance. The Marine Corps is a combat organization, and combat is an extraordinarily dangerous activity in which success often entails risk. Accordingly, we value leaders who are prudent risk-takers. This is a critical element of the Corps' reputation for success in combat and it is essential that it be preserved. In combat, leaders constantly assess risk, seeking to accomplish the mission while protecting their Marines. When the risk is too high, we seek other means of approaching the mission. We must translate this habit to the training environment. Our goal is to train realistically, but *safely*, recognizing and assessing risk, just as we do in combat.

Responsibility for safety does not end with leaders. To reinforce the actions of leaders, all hands, regardless of grade or billet, must be mindful of safety concerns and watchful of their fellow Marines. There is an old and well-known saying that tells us, "Marines take care of their own." These words express in simple and direct terms the very powerful idea that each of us bears responsibility for our shipmates. It is a concept that has given rise to countless acts of heroism in combat and elsewhere, as Marines and Sailors have selflessly striven to preserve the lives of stricken comrades, facing



danger and even sacrificing their own lives in the process. This is the epitome of physical courage, and the spirit to perform such acts of heroism is present in the heart of every Marine. But in the realm of safety, it is often moral courage that is required: the fortitude to step forward and speak up when an unsafe act or condition threatens harm. Such moral courage is an essential element of the character of the U.S. Marine. It is a part of our institutional identity. We will use it liberally in our assault on preventable mishaps.

The final responsibility for safety rests with the individual Marine. Leaders set the conditions in which safety matters receive the proper emphasis, and all Marines strive to "take care of their own," but the power to act wisely frequently rests

in the hands of the individual. For example, a Marine on liberty usually decides alone whether to fasten a seatbelt or wear a motorcycle helmet. In keeping with my philosophy that Marines always try to do the right thing, I expect and require

all Marines to act appropriately in exercising their individual safety responsibilities.

Clearly, safety affects almost every activity in which Marines engage: training, recreation, and the basic daily routine. As such, we will afford it the attention it warrants, with the goal of

eliminating preventable mishaps. Through responsible risk management and safety awareness we will accomplish this mission. As Marines, we can settle for nothing less.

