



1 MAY 2021

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY COMMANDANT, PLANS, POLICIES, AND OPERATIONS

Appearing before the Senate Military Affairs Committee in late 1945, LtGen Roy S. Geiger stated, “In 170 years, we have never acquired the view that to support another arm in performance of a service to the country was to suffer either indignity or loss of prestige. I wish everybody could share this same healthy outlook.”

This perspective, though offered on the heels of the Naval Service’s success in the Pacific in World War II, nonetheless permeates *Force Design 2030* and the focus on the Fleet Marine Force’s role within the Naval Expeditionary Force. As our Commandant stated in his *Planning Guidance*, “the Fleet Marine Force—acting as an extension of the Fleet—will be first on the scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis, and first to fight if required to do so.” This guidance is our catalyst for change to meet the challenges of the evolving strategic environment and is focused on ensuring that, true to our legacy, the Corps will continue to provide uniquely valuable contributions to America’s defense. The future fight demands that we enable, and are enabled by, not only naval but joint capabilities across all warfighting domains against an increasingly capable pacing adversary.

The evolution of both technology and the character of war that took place nearly a century ago, as impressive as it was, pales in comparison to the unprecedented pace of change occurring around the globe today. However, the truth captured by Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr., our 29th Commandant, in *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* endures: “War is both timeless and ever changing. While the basic nature of war is constant, the means and methods we use evolve continuously.” This short yet powerful statement must be our guidepost as we aggressively embrace this generational opportunity to modernize the force. The transformation underway across our Corps is the most dramatic undertaken since the interwar years when the foresight of Marine visionaries such as Lejeune, Ellis, and Carlton set the conditions for the success of Gen Geiger and his fellow Marines in the historic campaign across the Central Pacific.

Seizing this opportunity portends significant change in the years ahead to the composition of our infantry and artillery battalions, in particular. We undertake this change with a fully informed understanding of the threat and with the intent to continuously learn and refine our future force design through an aggressive campaign of continued, collaborative wargaming and experimentation. This historical strength of our Corps—**a willingness to fail, learn, and adapt quickly during periods of relative peace**—will illuminate the way forward as we develop these future force constructs and capabilities. Simply, we must innovate faster than our adversaries.

Innovative change is by its nature unsettling, but it is imperative if we expect to persist as a combat credible stand-in force in day-to-day competition, deterring adversary aggression, and, if necessary, fighting to enable the naval and joint force. Yet amidst this whirlwind of change are also two constants: the role of the Marine Corps as America’s premier crisis response force, and the centrality of the individual Marine to our success in the future fight. We will retain the agility and the capacity to respond to crises globally, wherever and whenever the nation calls, and we are investing in a rapidly expanding toolkit of new and advanced capabilities that will be eclipsed only by the increased level of responsibility placed upon our young Marines.

Increased lethality will come in ever-smaller force packages, more widely dispersed, in routinely challenged command and control environments. The *Planning Guidance* sets a high but necessary bar: fighting and winning in the future “requires elite warriors with physical and mental toughness, tenacity, initiative, and aggressiveness to innovate, adapt, and win in a rapidly-changing operating environment.”

To that end, training for the increasingly demanding missions associated with our future operating concepts is ramping-up, most immediately through Training and Education Command’s expansion and redesign of the Infantry Marine Course. These changes are aimed at significantly improving the knowledge, decision-making ability, and mental and physical prowess of our most junior warfighters. Exercises throughout the Fleet Marine Force are following suit, generating new tactics, techniques, and procedures to adapt to the rapidly evolving threat.

As we pace to a peer adversary, there is a buzz of excitement and a sense of urgency from the Service Headquarters to the Fleet Marine Force that I have not witnessed since the formal adoption of maneuver warfare that accompanied *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1*. We have much work to do, but I am struck by the observation that commanders across our Corps—and certainly within the GCE—seem guided by the succinct warning from preeminent military strategist Colin Gray that, “time lost is gone forever.” Let us waste no time in implementing *Force Design 2030*.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GWS", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

George W. Smith, JR.
Lieutenant General, U. S. Marine Corps
Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations