



6 March 2022

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Thirty-three years ago on this date, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Al Gray, published Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 — *Warfighting*. This “little white book” was, and is, one of the most important statements our Service has ever made about how we understand the essential foundations of our profession: what war is, how we prepare for it, and how we fight when it comes. This anniversary is an appropriate time for us to pause and consider the impact of *Warfighting*, what it means for us today, and where we need to go with its ideas in the future.

As the largest and most flagrant act of conventional armed aggression in Europe since 1945 unfolds in Ukraine, many of us are naturally reflecting on what we think we know about warfare, and what has and has not changed over the years. The Marines who wrote *Warfighting*, and the strategists and thinkers of different eras upon whose ideas they drew for inspiration, were engaged in a similar sort of active reflection, fusing their observations about contemporary affairs with their knowledge of history to advance the profession. As General Gray later observed, this process was, and remains, essential: “Like war itself, our approach to warfighting must evolve. If we cease to refine, expand, and improve our profession, we risk becoming outdated, stagnant, and defeated.”

With this admonition in mind, it is worth remembering the breadth and excitement surrounding the bottom-up revolution in military thought that produced FMFM 1. This was not limited to the Marine Corps, but was really the last genuine far-reaching period of reform for the U.S. military as a whole. It was a true civil-military effort to process defeat in Vietnam, the ever-present Soviet threat, advances in military technology, and ongoing learning from the operational successes and failures of both American and foreign militaries into the doctrine and organizational structures that still shape our activities today. Politicians and their advisors, generals, historians, and more junior military members in all the services put their utmost energies into this learning process. It produced not only the maneuver warfare concepts that have shaped the thought of Marines for decades, but also the efforts at Joint integration reflected in the Goldwater-Nichols legislation and the far-reaching revolution in professional military education and manpower management that flowed from it.

For Marines, this remarkable achievement enshrined in our basic doctrine an understanding of the nature of war that is timeless. *Warfighting* reminds us of essential factors in war that we ignore at our peril: the power of the human will and spirit; the ever-present influence of friction, fog, and chaos; and the likely futility of any approach to warfare that seeks an unattainable certainty or prioritizes a single element of the combined arms equation over the integrated application of the whole.

Warfighting, like the works of other great strategic minds that inspired it, is above all else a theory grounded in history – and we must ensure that our understanding of that history remains sound. While advances in technology generate a great deal of discussion and are obvious to all, less obvious is the fact that our understanding of history itself has also evolved. Are we assessing both the march of technology and the lessons of history as regularly and aggressively

as we should? Are we adjusting our course as necessary? Are we being true to the 29th Commandant's challenge to "refine, expand, and improve our profession" and evolve our approach to warfighting?

I believe we are, but we must commit to a more rapid pace of institutional learning to meet the challenges of both today and tomorrow. A quick look at the headlines on any given day makes obvious the urgency of the effort. In the spirit of the era of deep thinking and great reform that produced FMFM 1, I want to hear more from Marines at all levels, and those who support and care about Marines, on the lessons of contemporary and more distant history, and about the implications of the current era of unprecedented technological change on warfighting. As Marines, "becoming outdated, stagnant, and defeated" is simply not an option.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. H. Berger". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H" and a smaller "B" and "Berger" following.

David H. Berger

General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps