As a Cub Scout, I could not define the word *thrift*—I guessed it meant “clever.” Founded in 1910 by a British war hero, Boy Scouts say this:

A Scout works to pay his way and to help others. He saves for the future. He protects and conserves natural resources. He carefully uses time and property. On Scout camp outs you will learn to live comfortably with little more than the clothes you are wearing and the gear in your pack. Likewise, you can live other parts of your life simply and well, taking care of what you have and being generous to others. Paying your way with money you have earned gives you independence and pride. When you save your own money to buy a Scout uniform or something else you need, you learn the real value of those items. You will also be sure to take good care of them. Even if you only have a few dollars, get in the habit every month of saving money in a bank account. Share what you have with others, too, and talent is just as valuable as donating money. Do all you can to minimize waste.

Art of War vs Science

Listening to Gen Joseph Dunford and the other Service chiefs testifying before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) concerning the 2016 fiscal year defense budget was most enlightening: “Most of what was expected of a lieutenant 15 or 20 years ago now falls on the shoulders of a sergeant,” explained Gen Dunford. This means not only increased responsibility and knowledge, but increased “trust and confidence in the … abilities” of Marine leaders—the art of making winning teams out of limited resources, including eligible Americans. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus addressed the strategic and operational levels when he said “requirement after requirement after requirement” during acquisition often adds no value to a weapons system. Increasing trust at all levels is essential to combating unnecessary cost. Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James reflected this fact when she said,

I know the tendency when things go wrong is to put more processes and more oversight in place, but actually again from a business perspective, the less in this case, the better. Trust people and hold them accountable when things go wrong.

Personnel management also benefits from fewer processes and more genuine concern.

A congressman also noted that, while many concerns are tied to adequately funding the Armed Forces, some concerns money cannot fix—namely strategy. If it is unethical to send in troops who are underequipped or undermanned (budgetary concerns), it is also unethical to send them into harm’s way without a strategy (a non-budgetary concern). Although this congressman was not impressed by descriptions of our current strategy in the Middle East, I mention this not to critique, but to establish that while budgets can fund the science of war, they cannot fund the art of war.

Victory—Earned, never Bought

While it is tempting to enter debates concerning issues above our pay grades, including women in the infantry and foreign strategy, we can do our part by reducing waste, working hard, and rest:
ing adequately in order to be productive (and not merely busy). If victory could be bought we would not need a Marine Corps. Rubrics cannot ensure victory. Artists are creative, and only martial artists can create the conditions for victory against a thinking enemy. Money may be a factor, but history testifies to how well equipped armies often lose to poorer but more efficient ones.

Our superior officers—congressmen—applaud the thrift of Marines. With a mere 6 percent of the defense budget, Marines provide 21 percent of America’s infantry units and 15 percent of fighter/attack aircraft. We know that war is not an arithmetic difference between forces, but a matter of who shows up. Marines do more with less, and we must be prepared to do more with even less in the future. This is an art. If sergeants are doing what lieutenants used to do, and if infantry units which, according to Gen Dunford, used to “defend a frontage of 3,000 meters and attack on a frontage of 600 meters” are spread across six countries as part of a special purpose MAGTF, how should we train privates first-class and second lieutenants?

Art and Culture

Although TBS provides a solid foundation in the science of war, the cost must not outweigh its benefits. Games ended in Phase I at OCS, but TBS does not “trust (lieutenants) and hold them accountable when things go wrong” even though “most of what was expected of a lieutenant 15 or 20 years ago now falls on the shoulders of a sergeant.” What Gen Dunford said about acquisitions can be said about TBS: “Today we’re actually responsible for requirements and resources and not outcomes. I think that’s where I’d zero in on—[our] responsibility for outcomes as well.” Outcomes—quality officers—are more important than quantities of officers. To cultivate a force-in-readiness, TBS should tolerate less nonsense from students and staff commanders—everyone. People treated like adults act like adults. Student officer billet evaluations should be more formative than remarks such as, “Your floor wasn’t mopped” or “You got ac-

countability of your platoon fastest.” They should be reflective and Socratic: a) How did you build a sense of responsibility in subordinates? b) What was your greatest challenge in this billet? c) What did you do about it? and d) What could you do better? Fitness and test grades may be quantified; the rest should be qualified. Ranking students on each and every task merely adds “requirement after requirement” but not value. Games—wasting hundreds of man hours in daily formations—are unbecoming of an institute vested with a “trust and confidence” to do more with less and to provide faithful leaders to America’s sons and daughters: enlisted Marines.

If Americans don’t have kids, and if they don’t educate their mental, physical, and character aspects, Marines will be as historic as a statue, even if it resembles the flag raising on Mount Suribachi. Consider that 75 percent of Americans ages 18 to 24 are ineligible for military service for lack of the three disciplines: they have medical concerns, mostly obesity (physical), lack the education standards (mental), or they are in the criminal justice system (character). Perhaps Aristotle was right when he stated that the basic political unit is the family—the environment that cultivates the body, the mind, and the soul. We have problems that money alone cannot solve.

Readiness: Our Basic Warrior Stance

Service chiefs consider three categories when making decisions: end strength, readiness, and modernization. Investments in these categories are, respectively, short-term, mid-term, and long-term. End strength is the most flexible. On the other hand, modernization initiated 10–15 years ago is only now materializing. Yet the area of concern to most Marines is a mid-range goal that we must sustain daily: personal and unit readiness. Physical fitness, mental vigor, and character strength are not destinations, but lifelong journeys. We spend most of our time and effort creating conditions and a few moments capitalizing on them. Being ready means setting conditions today for winning in any clime or future time.

Readiness is a team effort. Personnel contribute only a fraction of the internal friction generated by a bureaucracy like the Marines. Policies are more pervasive. Working within the same constraints, different people will produce similar results. Readiness depends on the wisdom of policies that shape our culture, norms, and habits. Increasing trust and decentralizing leadership is the most efficient way to sustain the Corps—in fact

We’ll be expected to do more with less. (Photo by CW2 Paul S. Mancuso.)
the only way to fight across six countries
and several decades. Decisions made
today directly shape future problems
that appear years after a Marine sepa-
rates. Gen Gray said, “It doesn’t cost
anything to think.” We must commit
to that scary T-word and work smarter,
not lavishly. We cannot ask our Marines
to do what we are not willing to do.

A Marine is Thrifty

One aesthetic that attracted me to
the Marine Corps was a tough shab-
biness, an unpolished wear character-
istic to Marine Corps gear—pull-up
bars with ripped tape. I admired how
Marines made do without: two retired
Marine drill instructors at my church
shared stories of how Marines instruc-
ted them to save nails from discarded
shelves and to straighten them with a
hammer if necessary. They thought it
was a joke—it wasn’t. That was the
1980s. Even my officer selection of-
lice in Lansing, MI, possessed this
no nonsense “shabbiness” just across
from opulent Michigan State Univer-
sity—tiles had been removed in the
drop ceiling above the pull-up bar to
make head room, the address—507
and a half—was located via a hidden
staircase sandwiched between shops
because the officer selection office had
no street frontage. For training we bor-
rowed the Army’s ROTC facility on
State’s campus when Army cadets were
at the football game—on Saturdays.
Training with shabby gear and fight-
ing with shabby gear are two different
things, but the familiar absence of per-
fert equipment teaches skills integral to
our Marine ethos: improvisation and
resourcefulness, making do, and “all
that is highest in military efficiency and
soldierly virtue.” Shortages in garrison
better prepare Marines for battle by
developing a familiarity with incon-
gruities, dilemmas, and the necessity to
improvise and communicate. Sharing
requires coordination and builds trust
and efficiency. By doing more with less,
Marines can preserve resources for fu-
ture training and save dollars for truly
necessary acquisitions.

If returning unused blank rounds,
for example, is “too much work” then
we are training Marines to be both lazy
and wasteful, cultivating a culture of the
disposable. Food service used to em-
ploy Marines to serve chow and clean
blackened pans at no added cost to the
taxpayer. Now we pay profit-seeking
contractors. Before an audit this con-
cerns Gen Dunford and others because
we cannot control or account for Federal
funds allocated to contractors. If civil-
ians can profit from our wastefulness
so can the enemy. This lack of self-re-
liance, born from surplus, reflects how
the American lifestyle has changed.

An American family used to main-
tain what it owned and operated. A man
was expected to change his own engine
oil and conduct routine repairs on his
car, to mow his own lawn, and fix his
own plumbing. A man valued the tools
he purchased, but he was valued not for
his expensive equipment but for his use-
fulness with those lifelong investments.
A haircut was a treat and dining out was
reserved for special occasions. But today
we pay other people to do everything
for us: we hire a lawn service and then
purchase a gym membership to keep
active. We are reduced to a single func-
tion. We cease to create because we give
up on artistry in this Age of Science.
But “processes” and mere “numbers”
do not win battles—or hearts. We may
wonder with T.S. Eliot, “Where is the
wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost
in information?” In the Marine Corps
this is unacceptable. We must empower
subordinates and mentor them to re-
place us. We must train apprentices in
the art of war. This only costs us genu-
ine concern and humility. The Nation
in general and Marines in particular
must rediscover the old American art
of thrifty self-reliance, and there is no
time to lose.

To win the future we must pull to-
gether—Gung Ho.

Notes
1. Information accessed at: ascoutis.org/thrifty.
   php on 23 March 2015.
2. Service Chiefs Testimony Before the House
   Armed Services Committee broadcast 18 and
   20 March 2015 on C-SPAN Radio 3.
goodreads.com.