

The Force Enabler

Mental and moral development for our enlisted Marines

by Maj Andrew P. Kettner

The most effective capability in the Marine Corps is the ingenuity, character, and mental prowess of the individual Marine. This belief or similar construct is heard throughout Quantico, at Officer Candidates School, The Basic School, Expeditionary Warfare School, and Command and Staff College. Recent initiatives have failed to focus on the whole Marine concept, with current intent focusing almost exclusively on the importance of strengthening Marines physically. Specific examples include the physical fitness test standards, the creation of a Force Fitness Instructors, and the MOS Specific Physical Standards to assess individual Marine Corps officer physical fitness for potential to serve in different combat arms MOSs. These changes, while important supporting efforts, fail to support the Marine Corps' main effort: mental and moral development.

The Marine Corps continues to expect more of our junior enlisted Marines and NCOs with perceived mixed intuition success when reviewing sexual assault, annual training requirements, and aviation readiness. Leadership ultimately holds the responsibility of correcting this issue, and the Marines stand ready to execute—if only given the appropriate tools. Those tools are not guaranteed to be found in Marine Corps Institute Classes, Corporal's Courses, or MarineNet classes. Substantial mental growth is found in accredited academic colleges and universities with unique cultural experiences, high mental expectations, and a diversified student base of military and civilian students. Increased participation in higher education at civilian universities and colleges across the United States—both online and in the classroom—is the missing element needed to develop

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LCpl Phillips is using the tuition assistance program to pursue higher education. (Photo by Sgt Cody Shepard.)

Marines capable of the mental adaptability and responsibility the Marine Corps Commandant expects. Through reframing and enhancing the tuition assistance program and removing current obstacles within the promotion system, the Marine Corps can create a culture which both rewards college as a force multiple for decentralized operations and unequivocally supports the mental and moral development of our enlisted Marines.

The Marine Corps has a proud history of innovation, and the current Marine Corps leadership is no different in expecting greater autonomy and effectiveness. Published by HQMC in 1999,

MCRP 6-11D, Sustaining the Transformation, came back into the Marine Corps lexicon during the Commandant's reinvigoration of professionalism and *esprit de corps* within leadership of Marines. This publication states,

It [transformation] is an ongoing, dynamic process that begins with a Marine's first contact with a recruiter and continues throughout a Marine's life. Every Marine must understand: What the transformation is, the benefits that can derive from it, his or her place in it, and the multitude of ways he or she can affect the transformation.

This high bar of individual and institutional transformation is only achieved

with total institutional support of each Marine of which higher education pursuits is a major component.

The former Commandant increased the mediums in which the Marine Corps operates from not only land, air, and sea but also cyberspace and space in accordance with *FRAGO 01/2016*. The talents needed to win on these new battlefields exist within the Marine Corps, as does the work ethic and warrior ethos. However, the benefits of Marines learning through high education the skills and base theory needed to operate on par with their civilian peers are currently lacking. Successes in these areas are directly linked with the Marine Corps' willingness to invest in the transformation of the whole Marine—most importantly in their mental growth.

Tuition assistance is the key element, along with command support, that will ensure *MCO 1560.25, Marine Corps' Lifelong Learning Program*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, September 2010) continues to support, "readiness of active duty Marines and provide Commanders with a valuable tool to prevent obstacles that may detract from unit readiness." A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university is one of only three major requirements (the other requirements are graduation from Officer Candidates School or the Navy Academy Bull Dog Program and being medically qualified) for an individual to commission in the Marine Corps. It is commonly accepted that earning a college degree develops a commissioned officer's ability to prepare coherent thoughts, formulate a plan, write, think outside-the-box, increase time management skills, and challenge their perceived world views. These traits are not solely unique to commissioned officers, each is equally or more expected of our active duty enlisted Marines.

Decentralization of decision making and independent thought and action is a major theme within *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, 1997). In reality, the Marine Corps' training pipeline is lineal with the curriculum developed and managed by Training and Education Command. This statement is not meant to discredit the mental growth that occurs within

Training and Education Command, but it is unrealistic to believe that a tightly monitored education system will cultivate ideas that may be against its very construct or even question its very purpose for existing!

Midshipmen in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) do not attend Training and Education Command courses prior to commissioning, where the basic potential and attributes for future service as a commissioned officer are developed. Those leadership attributes, mental development, and bias for action are developed at a wide variety of universities, such as Tulane University, Texas A&M University, Norwich University, University of Maryland, and Ohio State. The unique attributes developed in classrooms throughout higher learning are then evaluated and refined in Training and Education Command schools

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such as Officer Candidates School and The Basic School; however, the base is developed during college. For the Marine Corps, this is a cost effective and efficient means in which to encourage independent decision making, mental development, and character development, not just for future officers but even more so an opportunity for enlisted Marines.

The Tuition Assistance Program is the current program of record, not the "Post 9/11 GI Bill," that is the Marine Corps' main effort for the Marines' mental development. *MCO 1560.25* states the purpose of tuition assistance is to

encourage personnel to voluntarily attend courses delivered by accredited civilian education institutions on camps, at resident centers, on military installations or through distance learning during their off-duty time.

In the current MARADMIN 687/14, *FY15 Tuition Assistance Guidelines* (Washington, DC: HQMC, September 2014), implementing tuition assistance did not fully support the Commandant's initiatives or Marines' mental and moral growth. Tuition Assistance is viewed culturally in the Marine Corps as a benefit similar to the Post 9/11 G.I Bill, with free health care or basic allowance for housing; in reality, the mental and moral growth that is nurtured through college education is more valuable on the battle fields of the future than any piece of equipment.

The Marine Corps is not fully supporting our enlisted Marines education while simultaneously expecting a Marine with college graduate-level understanding; college education is a force multiplier not a perk of job. In order to support the expectation of a Marine's total transformation, tuition assistance should be enhanced by removing barriers to enrollment enforced by the current MARADMIN 687/14. Specifically, the requirement to wait 24 months for first time active duty enrollment applications and the requirement to only take one course unless previous academic success of 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) is proven.

If the NROTC program was structured similarly, many Midshipmen would fail to make it through the four year process specifically as they work to overcome semesters in which they fell below a 2.0 GPA. If a Marine struggles to complete a given degree or falls below a 2.0 GPA, the Marine Corps' leadership should provide even greater support to ensure Marines are successful at what they are attempting. This is similar to the extra attention given to weak shooters on the rifle range or Marines who struggle with weight standards. Attending college is not a burden for the command; rather, it is an opportunity to further develop a Marine who can operate independently and have a bias for action in the midst of chaos.

The Marine Corps must continue to support those who want to take on the additional challenge of higher education, not dissuade them shortly after completing basic training and MOS producing schools. The first 24 months

barred under the current tuition assistance MARADMIN is exactly the timeframe when a new Marine feels like he can take on any challenge; give that Marine the opportunity to further his education and, most importantly, increase that local commander's combat readiness in the process.

Additionally, the tuition funding system must be reviewed and rewritten to allow successful Marines to not worry about paying for school on a quarterly basis. The current system operates on a first come first serve system, which is no way to support a Marine who starts the investment of time and energy into a multiple year educational program. Once a Marine is accepted to a university, the Marine should have no doubt—as long as he is in “good standing” with the university or college—that funds will be available for him to continue to pursue a higher education. The current MARADMIN governing tuition assistance is certainly not an example of positive re-enforcement as thirteen of the nineteen requirements are restrictive in nature. This is not leadership from the front or bold action needed to enhance the Marines' individual mental capabilities. However, with command support and implementation of these recommendations, the tuition assistance program will stop being viewed as an extra incentive or burden to a command and start being a commander's training priority.

That change will require investment of funds in tuition assistance well beyond the current trend. Tuition assistance in 2016 operated on a budget of \$34 million which is roughly half of the \$66 million dollars allocated in 2009, according to the *Marine Corps Times* article “Marines 2016 Tuition Assistance Program Escapes Budget Ax” by Matthew Schehl. The reduction over the past seven years in funds to support tuition assistance occurred while the Marine Corps remained with relatively the same personnel end strength. While this budget may seem large when compared against other programs of record, the funds allocated for individual mental transformation and growth through accredited colleges and universities as provided for in the Marine Corps 2016



An education and career technician explains how to use the tuition assistance program.
(Photo by Cpl Khalil Ross.)

Budget Request Holds Steady to Procurement, End Strength Goals, appears minimum at best:

The Marine Corps' fiscal year 2016 budget request was for \$24 billion dollars with procurement funding making up \$1.1 billion dollars, research, development, test and evaluation funding for the Marine Corps at \$835 million.

Funds must be found to increase the tuition assistance program, especially when the importance of the Marine Corps' most critical asset—the Marine, is so greatly enhanced by it. An Operational Action Group, formed within HQMC should provide detailed recommendations. However, an initial course of action for appropriate tuition assistance funding discussions should utilize the *Department of the Navy FY 2014 President's Budget Submission* request of \$139,876,000 for Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps funds. A similar Marine leader is developed through both programs, but the benefit of tuition assistance is the Marine Corps already has a Marine who has demonstrated an ability to overcome physical and mental obstacles, while a NROTC Midshipmen may not.

The Tuition Assistance Program, once enhanced, will create a more effective frame work to support Marines as

they seek a higher education. It will be command influence and Marine Corps' promotion policies that will determine the success of a change in Marine Corps culture which must reward successful college education. *MCO P1070.12, Marine Corps Individual Records Administration Manual*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, July 2000) states Proficiency encompasses:

Such attributes as mission accomplishment, leadership, intellect and wisdom, individual character, physical fitness, personal appearance, and competition of professional military education, Marine Corps Institute courses, and off duty education should also be evaluated and incorporated into the duty proficiency [marking].

If moral and mental transformation is of critical importance to our Commandant, and according to Gen Joseph F. Dunford, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Encouraging well-qualified Marines to utilize resources to better themselves via education and training is part of the Marine Corps ethos. This leads to better Marines and in turn better citizens.” This a more direct assignment of proficiency marks should be assigned for attending college-level courses. Specifically, the “Standards of Proficiency” for an

outstanding Marine should include “has earned a 2.5 Grade Point Average while actively pursuing a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree.” Attaining certificates in vocational skills is important, but there is a clear distinction between developing trade skills earned through a certification process versus the liberal and whole person development obtained through pursuing a higher degree.

The computation score system utilized in the promotion process must also be reviewed and updated to ensure that achieving higher education is as important as other elements of the Marine Corps computation system as outlined in *MCO 1400.32D w/ CH2, Marine Corps Promotion Manual, Volume 2, Enlisted Promotions*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, June 2012). Currently the order stipulates:

Self-Education Bonus: (Maximum of 100 points) is authorized for a combination of

- a. MarineNet/Marine Corps Institute (MCI)/Extension School which is the rating multiplied by 15 and a second sub-category of /
- b. College/CLEP/Vocational rating multiplied by 10. This formula at face value actually further reduces the importance of college courses towards earning the rank of Lance Corporal or Corporal when compared to completing MarineNet courses.

MCO 1400.32D w/ CH2 highlights the Marine Corps’ lack of support for college classes when, as an example of a “Completed Composite Score Worksheet for a Corporal in the USMCR,” a Marine completed 3 MCI courses and 3 college courses, receiving 45 points for the MCI courses and only 30 for the college courses. In reality, the three college courses were most likely nine credits of an academic rigorous nature

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and furthermore only three credits away from full time student status at most colleges and universities. The current *MCO 1400.32D* fails to incorporate or support the mental growth capabilities of the Marine Corps’ junior enlisted and fails to capitalize on the development of mental acumen through college courses. The computation system should be adjusted as follows: “Line 12. Self-education Bonus (Maximum of 150 points) 12. a. MarineNet/MCI/Extension School/CLEP/Vocational ____ X 10 / 12. b. College ____ X 15.” That addition will greatly increase the impor-

tance of college to our lance corporals and corporals and further incentivize higher education within the Marine Corps. By implementing these recommend changes in the promotion system, the Marine Corps will effectively develop mentally and morally adept Marines through a demanding college education.

In the March 2017 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, LCpl Andrew Lofternes wrote an article, “Our Historic Failure: Understanding and appreciating the need for a higher standard.” His article clearly portrays a Marine who is looking for more knowledge and experience and sees the solution to be a more in-depth study of history. LCpl Lofternes is correct, but there is so much more that the Marine Corps could provide if it increased its support of college education.

LCpl Lofternes represents the type of Marine who the Marine Corps expects and needs to propel the Corps into a new future where it is no longer land, air, and sea but also space and cyber. LCpl Lofternes represents the type of Marine who has the mental aptitude to answer the tough questions facing female integration and sexual harassment currently being solved by the Marine Corps and written about in this journal. By supporting LCpl Lofternes’ academic pursuits and the academic pursuits of his fire team leaders, squad leaders, and platoon leader, the Marine Corps will create a more lethal and adaptable force that will provide the unique answers and, more importantly, questions that Training and Education Command training courses alone cannot develop. By revising and reinvigorating tuition assistance and updating the current Marine Corps Promotion Manual (Washington, DC: HQMC, June 2012), the Marine Corps will demonstrate a shift in the leadership’s support of higher educational pursuits and ensure the Marine Corps’ number one capability, its Marines, are just as mentally aggressive and lethal as they are physically prepared for battle.



Tuition assistance programs are explained to recruits. (Photo by PFC Aaron Bolser.)