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The Mission of the Marine Corps

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MISSION or job or work—use them or any other name you want to because the number of things and the kind of things we have to do remain exactly the same regardless of the name. Sometimes, I think it would be better if we did not use so many fancy words or so many elaborate phrases in discussing our affairs. We should not be carried away by hollow form—substance is the thing. We work at our job or task with a purpose to accomplish our mission! That sort of expresses it and uses all of the terms. But above all, we must be efficient in doing those things which face us today. Like a high-class public utility we must satisfy the American public with our services. We must perform the duties of today with smoothness, intelligence and courage—not merely dream about those of tomorrow.

Cur job is getting results no matter what task we are assigned. Doing our job, doing it well, and “doing the best we can with the tools we’ve got.” That’s our mission—our real reason for existing—stated without using a lot of technicalities and frills.

We know what our job was yesterday and we are struggling faithfully to do our work today, but who knows what it will be tomorrow? Probably something new and unique. It may be anything. Our job is intricate—diffused. It requires versatility. That means we must be mentally alert to anticipate, to plan ahead, to prepare and be ready to meet the requirements. There are those who say we cannot anticipate the requirements of a unique peace-job that might arise; that we cannot get ready. I believe we can. We should try to, anyway.

The theorist and the text-book writer surround a simple subject with so much mystery that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the truth of it. Yet, the truth is always simple and easily recognized when we see it. We should keep a proper conception of our job before us. And in defining it use a maximum of thought and a minimum of words. Then study how to do that job. And prepare to do it.

That great national corporation, the United States of America, of which every American citizen is a share-holder, has given the United States Marine Corps an important job. As long as the Marines do that job satisfactorily to the one hundred million or more shareholders, the Marine Corps will continue to exist. If we try to do the work of some other fellow or let some other fellow do our work—we cease to be a necessity and the Corps will die.

What is our job? Study the History of the Corps for a century and a half and you will get a suggestion. The job of the American Marines is to do its particular work as a part of the Naval Service in such a manner

that the Naval Service may efficiently serve the Nation during Peace and War.

We are a branch of the Naval Service. We are called Sea-Soldiers, and many other sobriquets that tang of the salt and fresh waters. The first Marine was that old descendant of Pithecanthropus Erectus who, astride a floating log and paddling with one arm, slew his enemy with the other. That was the first “floating-fighting-man.” He was the first Marine. Cut the ancestral knot that binds us to the waters of the oceans, seas, bays, gulfs, rivers, lakes and other wet spots and with the same motion you cut the throat of the Corps. And there is a mental as well as a physical to the Corps. Disintegration usually starts with the mind. Do not let the Naval-Mind of the Corps be changed to any other type of mind, that will leave only a memory, a history, of our grand and glorious Corps of the Ocean.

Every Marine Officer knows it to be a fact that their Corps is a branch of the Naval Service, even though on occasional instances detachments of it, are temporarily made part of the Army. The Constitution of the United States does not mention the Marine Corps but it does the Navy, and the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the Corps by virtue of it being an integral part of the Navy. The need of a Marine Corps will cease to exist when the necessity of the Corps as a branch of the Naval Service ceases to exist.

The job of the Corps is divided into two distinct phases—peace and war; though it should not be overlooked that practically all the duties performed in peace are continued during the war period. The war-job is merely superposed on the peace-job, that’s all.

The peace-job is continuous and never-ending. And similarly the efforts to make ourself efficient for our war-job should also be continuous. However, there is one thing we must not do. We should not neglect educating ourselves for peacetime duties. In plainer terms we must not sacrifice education for peacetime duties in order to educate ourselves for our war-job. We have time for both kinds of education and we must continually improve in serving the Nation during peace and at the same time carry out adequate plans that will find us ready if war unfortunately should again overtake us.

Our peace-time job should receive more thought in the way of preparing for it than it does. Major wars, beginning with the Revolution and ending with the World War, have proved the splendid usefulness of the Corps to the Nation. But the magnificent record of constructive achievements, and successes in minor wars, during a period of over one and a half centuries has conclusively proved that the Corps is a necessary part of the United States Government.

There is always a right way to do any job and we should always strive to find that way by studying the past and applying the results to the present and future problems. We should always acquire adequate information, work over that information, and arrive at sound conclusions as to these peace-time duties of the Corps. Never forget that without proper information any of our conclusions or opinions are worthless. The basis of this part of it is complete information and sound reasoning. Headquarters has its share in this work. Headquarters is the Head, the Brain, the Executive of the Corps, the Doctrine-Producer, the Methods-Maker, the Policy-Creator—it points out the path for the Corps as a whole, and for the individuals also, to march.

We must always think in terms of the Marine Corps. At least in terms of the Naval Service, of which our Corps forms a part. One of the jobs of Headquarters is to produce a system that will cause our officers to think in the same terms as to the job of the Corps. To speak and understand the same language regarding it. Just how Headquarters accomplishes this part of its task is not for these pages.

The Marine Corps Schools is one of the main mediums for the transmission of these policies, doctrines, methods, etc. to the subordinate executives—the officers—of the Corps. The Corps, like a human, possesses mental, moral, and physical qualities. Happy efficiency requires that these three coordinate. Headquarters, and its subordinate parts scattered throughout the Corps, do the creative-thinking—the schools and other appropriate mediums do the expressing. There must be the closest kind of coordination between the Schools and Headquarters. Otherwise neither Headquarters nor the Body of the Corps can fulfill their principal functions.

It is said that the best school is that of experience. The Corps has been an all-time student at this school and is still attending that great University. But only one character of education may be secured by experience. These experiences of the Marines for a century and a half recorded in printing, thought over, developed, and available for us to read and study would give us the great valuable asset known as the lessons learned "from the experiences of others." Think of how ignorant we would be if expeditions and such experiences would stop for fifteen years or so.

With earnest efforts to prepare for our work and efficient performance of our duty, morale and discipline will be well-cared for.

The peace-time job of the Corps sometimes appears simple, so simple that no thought over it seems necessary. That may be dismissed with the reciting of the old adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt." Look at some of the peace jobs of the past stated generally below:

Preserving the peace and required often to turn the other cheek; fighting numerous minor wars as the Chinese Boxer War (1900), Philippines Insurrection (1899-1904), Vera Cruz (1914), and others in the South Seas, East Indies, China, Japan, Corea, Formosa, Cuba, Porto Rico, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Africa, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Samoa; succoring little bits of civilization that have dotted the undeveloped spaces of the world; garrisoning the outposts of our democratic empire; relieving the suffering caused by earthquakes, fires and other catastrophes, at home and

in foreign parts; participating in the opening of the doors of the exclusive Asiatic states—Japan, China, Siam and Corea—to Western influence; rendering aid in the prevention of illegal slave trade; functioning as an international police force in every clime, training national guards, as in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Nicaragua and Samoa; making maps; on the spot upon the acquisition of new territory by the United States—Louisiana, Florida, Alaska, California, Samoa, Midway, Hawaiian Islands, Guam, Philippines, Porto Rico, Virgin Islands; road makers; bridge builders; always available to assist municipal police at home and abroad; guards of honor at national and international expositions; attaches in Latin-America; guards for assassins of presidents; guards at peace and armament conferences (Washington in 1922 and London in 1930); personal guards for our Presidents; guards at Presidents' camps; serving on board naval battleships, cruisers and plane-carriers; landing from these naval vessels anywhere and everywhere to protect American and other foreign lives, rights and interests; occupying forces for those nearby states over which the United States has elected itself guardian as Cuba (1906-1909), Nicaragua (1912-1925 and 1927 to date), Haiti (1915 to date) and Santo Domingo (1916-1924); participating in exploring expeditions—as the Darien and those of Admiral Byrd to the poles; protecting seal fisheries—as in Alaskan waters; protecting cable employees—as on Midway Islands; maintaining quarantine camps; protecting diplomatic missions as Abyssinia in 1904; relieving famine sufferers in China; administration of foreign states; guarding the United States mails (in 1921 and 1926); carrying mail, express, freight and passengers by airplanes in China, Nicaragua and Santo Domingo; fighters of pirates as in Haiti, Tripoli, Marquesas Islands, Barataria, West Indies, Porto Rico, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Sumatra, China and Formosa; makers of real American citizens, and also creating friends all over the world for the United States. All these and more.

It is this vast array of peace-time duties well performed that causes the American public to expect tremendous results from their Marines. Primarily we are a military organization, the same as the Army and the Navy, that must be ready to defend the Nation in war; but the public does not seem satisfied unless we are busy in peace-times doing something constructive. And this despite the fact that, as part of the Naval Service, we are as essential in war as the Army or the Navy. Such being the case we must confidently carry-on and successfully complete the peace-time job that has been given us.

War is always a possibility. It is difficult to prepare for. Principles of war are unchangeable but their application vary and methods are constantly changing. Material and personnel are different today than they were yesterday and will not be the same tomorrow. And we must be ready. Headquarters, Marine Corps Schools, and the other appropriate agencies of the Corps, should be continuously planning to have the Corps fully prepared for any future major war, in which the general function of the corps would be, as an adjunct of the Navy, to provide and maintain forces for land operations in support of the fleet for the initial seizure and defense of advanced bases and for such limited auxiliary land operations as are essential to the prosecution of the naval campaign.