

# The Marines' Task

by Lieut. Gen. Thomas Holcomb

Text of an address by the Commandant at New York on October 27.

This occasion serves to remind us that in spite of natural rivalry between the Army and the Navy and the Marine Corps, we have achieved in this war a notable integration and coordination between the services that has been an important element in our success to date. The Marine Corps, of course, is part of the Navy, but I hope I'm not indulging in wishful thinking when I say that if we were orphans I think the Army would be willing to take us in.

In this connection, it may amuse you to know that in the South Pacific recently, Marines and the Army have been fighting a little war of poetry. One of our men started the affair with a composition called "Our Fighting Men", dedicated, of course, to the soldiers. Here's the way it starts—

"A Marine told a sailor on Guadalcanal  
'The Army is coming, think of it, pal—'  
The Corporal answered him, 'All right, then.  
Let's build a clubhouse for Our Fighting Men.'  
"A Seabee rolled up and he asked, 'What's the  
score?'

The wagons and cruisers all laying off shore?  
And scads of destroyers are sweeping the bay.  
Is the Army finally landing today?"

"Their generals outrank ours, so they'll take  
command.

New rules and new orders will govern the land.  
They'll have some M.P.'s to push us around.  
When the Army takes over it sure shakes the  
ground."

"We can take it," said the Raider. "It won't  
be long."

'Til the Admiral bellers, and we'll shove on.  
And a little while later we'll be landing again.  
To make New Guinea safe for Our Fighting  
Men."

I gather that the Army got a little tired of  
hearing this poem recited by Marines in the  
area, because before long some unknown soldier  
genius came up with a reply titled "Well,  
Whose Marines?" This really is a great tribute  
to the Corps. I'll give you one verse—  
"We want him to be cocky, he's welcome to his  
pride.

They scratch him off the muster-right at the  
warship's side.

He makes the contact for us—that's what it's  
all about—

The Navy dumps him in there. The Army gets  
him out."

Then it ends—  
"We do not heed the yapping—we go our way  
serene,

For we are in his Army, and he is our Marine!"

Thanks to the training of the men in all  
branches of the service, and to the team-work  
between the branches, we have carried the war  
today to a point where we can see certain vic-  
tory ahead. It may be a long time coming, and  
it may be costly to achieve, and certainly we  
have no right to take things easy or indulge  
in self-congratulations. But I think we are  
entitled to look back briefly on what we have  
done in the last three years and take stock. The  
strides we have made have been a rude shock  
to our enemies, and ought to be a source of  
gratification to ourselves. In retrospect, the  
tasks and the accomplishments of these three  
years have been truly herculean.

Three years ago, we still were a nation at  
peace—not only in fact, but in our attitudes  
and our way of life. Many believed that some-  
how this all-engulfing war would pass us by,

and that we had no real reason to fight at all.  
Our Army consisted of 257,655 officers and  
men. Our Navy numbered 157,986 officers and  
men, and our Marine Corps had 26,801 officers  
and men. Our production of tanks, guns, mili-  
tary vehicles, munitions and other military sup-  
plies was practically nil. We were making some  
aircraft of excellent quality, but numerically  
the output was small compared to that of other  
nations.

No wonder the Axis was disdainful of us as  
a potential enemy! For ten years, more or less,  
the dictator nations had concentrated all their  
energies and resources on building their war  
machine, while we were living in a dream  
world. Hitler and company sneered at us—a  
soft, weak, "decadent" democracy, without the  
will or power to fight even if the war was thrust  
on us. And for a time it looked to much of the  
outside world as if he might be right. Many  
men in many nations believed that the Axis  
was invincible, and that the free peoples of  
the democracies indeed were doomed.

## IMPOSSIBLE IS ACHIEVED

But during our history we Americans more  
than a few times have proved that we can do  
what seemed impossible. In the short space of  
three years we have built an Army of more  
than 7,000,000. Our Navy now has 2,000,000 men  
and thirteen times the number of fighting ships  
we had in 1940, despite considerable losses in  
the interim. Our Marine Corps has expanded  
to a body of over 300,000 of as well-equipped,  
as highly-trained fighting men as any in the  
world. As we all know today, the conversion  
of industry from peacetime to wartime produc-  
tion, and the subsequent production of war  
goods, will stand as one of the great epics of  
our national life. We now have the greatest  
merchant marine in the world, an air fleet that  
dwarfs that of any other nation, and unlimited  
quantities of munitions and other equipment.  
Furthermore, in nearly every category our pro-  
duction still mounts steadily. We have created,  
in three short years, one of the world's great-  
est military powers.

## GAINS ARE IMPRESSIVE

The mere recital of these figures and these  
gains is impressive enough, but they do not  
begin to convey an idea of the almost over-  
whelming difficulties that have been sur-  
mounted, the incredible amount of planning  
that has been necessary. Reflect for a moment  
that a single Marine Division requires 20,039  
small arms weapons, 1,133 machine guns, 162  
pieces of artillery, 54 tanks, 557 "jeeps", and  
many trucks, trailers, and engineer vehicles.  
This division requires 13 ships, each of 10,000  
tons, for an overseas movement. A single squad-  
ron of dive bombers must have 18 planes. In  
a single day's operations this squadron will use  
36 1,000-pound bombs, and 11,160 gallons of  
gasoline and oil. When sent overseas a single  
squadron occupies the cargo and troop spaces  
of a 10,000-ton ship. So that our forces can  
strike with maximum power and effectiveness,  
all these and a multitude of other supplies  
must be available in the right place at the right  
time. Furthermore, every man who fights and  
uses these supplies represents at least six  
months of training, and an investment of over  
\$750 to turn him into a hard, able fighting man.  
The creation of this great power of ours



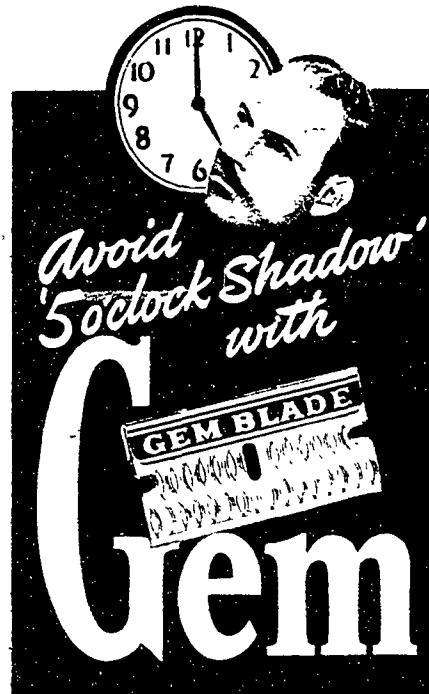
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since you got rid of that  
5 o'clock Shadow!"



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★ could not have been accomplished if it had not been for the fact that during the years of peace we maintained, in the Army, Navy and Marines, a corps of experts, military executives and planners, who were ready, when the call came, to start the tremendous job of building our war machine from virtually nothing. These military experts were matched, in civilian life, by the production geniuses of assembly line, turret lathe, mine, field and forest. Together these two groups have saved America in one of her most critical hours. Together they have given the lie to those who proclaimed that our democracy was too lazy to work and too soft to fight. *Of course* we have made mistakes, both on the home front and in the actual prosecution of the war. But on the whole, this gigantic effort has been made, and these vast goals reached, with efficiency.

★ This war is unlike any other in history, not only on account of its scope but also the nature of the fighting. It is the first war in which landings and amphibious operations have played so vital a part, most previous wars having been fought on land exclusively. Landing operations are, of course, the most difficult of all military maneuvers, and have so been acknowledged by all authorities throughout history. By the same token, they also are apt to be the most costly of all operations.

## WON FAME IN ATTACK

★ General James Wolfe, who won fame in his attack at the landing in Quebec in 1759, was himself the son of a Royal Marine Officer. As a past-master of amphibious warfare, he once described the hazards—as well as the importance—of landing operations, as follows:

★ "I have found out that an Admiral should endeavor to run into an enemy's port immediately after he appears before it; that he should reconnoiter and observe it as quickly as possible, and lose no time in getting the troops on shore. Experience shows me that, in an affair depending on vigor and despatch, the generals should settle their plan of operations so that no time may be lost in idle debate and consultations when the sword should be drawn; that pushing on smartly is the road to success, and more particularly so in an affair of this sort; that nothing is to be reckoned an obstacle to your undertaking which is not found really so on trial; that in war something must be allowed to chance and fortune, seeing that it is in its nature hazardous and an option of difficulties; that the greatness of an object should come under consideration, opposed to the impediments that lie in the way; that the honor of one's country is to have some weight; and that, in particular circumstances and times, the loss of a thousand men is rather an advantage to a nation than otherwise. . . .

★ The U. S. Marine Corps always has had a predilection for this kind of amphibious fighting. The Marine Corps history dates back to 1775, a year before the Declaration of Independence, the first service authorized by the Continental Congress. For nearly one hundred and seventy years, Marines have been specializing in amphibious warfare, and I believe the Corps has fought more continuously than any other service. We conducted landing operations during the Civil War, and again during the Spanish-American War. The Marines landed at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. They landed in Haiti, and Nicaragua, and at other places in Latin America and the Caribbean. They landed in China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion. Always, when trouble required the presence of United States forces, the Marines were first on the scene. This has given the Corps its great background of practical experience, and also has led to the development of a unique *esprit de corps*.

There is a notion in some quarters that a Marine is primarily a roughneck with tremendous fighting ability and unlimited courage.

Well, we have seen his courage and his fighting ability at Guadalcanal and Wake Island and a score of other places in this war. But what the public sometimes forgets or overlooks is the fact that the individual Marine is an expert in his particular specialty. As a strategic force we obviously do not compare in size with either the Army or Navy. We are not big enough to fight whole wars by ourselves. But what we lack in size, we make up in experience and specialized knowledge. In spite of our growth we are still a highly specialized service trained especially for amphibious operations.

## JOIN CORPS VOLUNTARILY

Marines for the most part join the Corps voluntarily. Because of the comparatively small number of Marines, every man receives the most thorough and intensive training possible. I believe this training is unmatched. No soldier is better equipped, better fed, better doctored and better cared for. It also is true that in the course of training the men develop a rather special feeling about themselves as Marines, and a special feeling—call it pride if you will—about the service. They think of themselves as a group apart, and they are jealous of the standing and organizational independence of the Corps. They are trained to work as independent units in perfect coordination with the Navy, and when occasion requires it, with the Army.

The Marine emerges from his training with a high degree of individual initiative. The true Marine isn't cocky, as he sometimes is made out to be, but he is self-confident, with the self-confidence that comes with knowing you have learned your job well. I recall one Marine who told me that his training had changed his whole outlook on life, by giving him a feeling of confidence in himself for the first time. And this feeling of confidence and individual initiative is something which Marine training deliberately instills in the men.

The type of operations in which we specialize often demands in modern warfare that men working in small units or alone be able to carry on independently. Marines know how to improvise and are taught how to survive and fight in any circumstances when the occasion requires it, without benefit of the rule book or orders from a commanding officer. This kind of fighting by individuals or small combat units operating independently is not confined exclusively to the Marines. We see the same thing in aerial and tank warfare, for example, and it is one of the most important developments in modern war. Today the unit, the in-



"We Probably Won't Get any Dances  
Tonight the Way Ol' Sarge Pulls Her Rank."

dividual, the picked specialist is of greater importance than ever before. And the Marine Corps ever since its formation in 1775 has concentrated on producing just such specialists, just such individualists.

#### ASSIGNMENT OUTLINED

Our chief assignment during the last twenty years has been to perfect the most modern techniques of amphibious warfare and to develop an amphibious expeditionary force of specialists of the kind I have described.

In this period we endlessly studied the practical and theoretical aspects of landing operations, and have analyzed the causes of success and failure of such operations in the past—Gallipoli and the German landings in the Baltic Islands in 1917—to mention two. As early as 1924 a force of Marines participated in combined amphibious training exercises with our fleet at Panama, and from 1931 to 1938 such exercises were held regularly in the Caribbean and at Hawaii.

Our Marine Corps Schools made the initial studies on combat unit loading, naval gunfire support, and the offensive use of chemicals in an amphibious operation. Out of our experience we developed the indispensable rubber boat, and applied to our special use the amphibian tractor. Any new weapon or new method which might be useful in our specialized operations was thoroughly tested. Nothing was rejected simply because it had never been tried before and might upset established ways of doing things.

#### CONDUCTED EXPERIMENTS

Many years ago, while controversy raged over the value of the airplane and the proper military and naval use of airpower, the Marine Corps was quietly conducting its own experiments, and was learning to employ planes which took off from carriers and came down on land as air support and as a means of supplying ground troops. Like all other parts of the whole, our air has been integrated and coordinated as an important member of a team. In passing, I might mention that the words of the Marine anthem recently have been changed to read. . . . "We fight our Country's battles, in the air, on land, on sea."

In the twenty years of training and experimentation that I have mentioned we have developed the finest force of its kind in the world, and one which has already played a crucial role in this war. Marine operations to date in the Pacific have been of the utmost importance, but these operations have been small compared to what will come. It won't be long before our forces are spearheading invasions on a grander scale. The action of the Marines on Guadalcanal has a special significance which is probably not generally recognized. It was our Country's first successful land offensive in this war, and I have no doubt the reason the Japanese continued to come back and back, was because it was the first time in their history they were forced to give up territory under the control of their sacred emperor.

But the contribution of the Marine Corps to date transcends the actual fighting which we have done. Just as individual Marines during their training learn to be members of a team, each with a special part and each having the responsibility for initiative, so the Marine Corps as a whole has played its part in the larger team composed of Army, Navy, and Marines. When war was imminent, we were able quickly to give the benefits of our training to the Army and Navy. Thus it has been possible in record time to train huge forces of men to become proficient in this most highly skilled branch of military science. The landing opera-

tions in Africa, Europe, and the Aleutians contained officers and men who received this Marine training—a fact which should help silence those who complain of lack of cooperation between the services. This has been, I believe, the great contribution of the Corps, above and beyond the heroic performance of our men in actual combat.

#### VICTORY BROUGHT

Thanks to those men, victory has been brought closer, perhaps by years. As I said before, it still may be far distant in time, but it is not too soon to be giving thought to what we shall do after it finally is won. When the last war ended, the nation demobilized as quickly as it had armed a few years earlier. Understandably in a peaceful country, there was a widespread popular revulsion against war and everything connected with it, including the services. For many years the Army and Navy were kept at the bare minimum of strength, and were begrimed funds necessary to develop new equipment. Now, the last thing any of us wants to see is the United States converted into a militaristic state, forever committed to maintaining huge standing forces. But I believe that after this war, we cannot afford to allow ourselves to drift into the same state of mind—and state of woeful unpreparedness—as after the last war. Hating and fearing war as much as we did, we actually invited it by refusing to maintain our strength and to assert it early and often. Who can say whether this war might not have been averted entirely if we had had the might and the courage to say "No" that day in 1937 when the China war began at Lu Kou Chiao, The Marco Polo Bridge, or before, when Mussolini's men marched into Ethiopia? Or when Hitler took Austria? Or at Munich?

Nevertheless, we were able to meet the great emergency of this war mostly because of the courage, zeal, and devotion of those who labored under great handicaps during the years of uneasy and insecure peace. Those men deserve our deepest thanks and respect, and the men who will guard our security in the post-war future likewise will deserve the respect of the whole nation. It should be regarded as an honor to serve with the armed forces in peace—as well as war—an honor that attracts the very highest type of man in the country. Modern war is an infinitely complicated business and we shall need the best brains in the country to direct our military establishments.

In the meantime, however, we still have a war to win. The Marines are again ready—and more than willing—to land anywhere, anytime, and along with the Army and the Navy I am confident that they will exercise an important role in spearheading the landings on the main island of Japan.



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