

THE MARINE CORPS

An Essential, Integral Element of the Naval Service

By Lieutenant General A. A. Vandegrift, USMC

A statement made by the Commandant of The Marine Corps to the House Select Committee on Postwar Policy, May 11, 1944

MR. CHAIRMAN, the Marine Corps appreciates this opportunity to present to your Committee its views regarding the place of the Corps in the armed services of the United States. As we understand it, the problem now under consideration is to determine what system of organization of all the armed services will ensure the most efficient employment of the country's military resources in peace and in war. Our Corps, as a component of the Naval Service, has had over one hundred and sixty-eight years' experience with the principle of unity of command. It has learned the absolute necessity for the efficient control of well-balanced, thoroughly integrated, teams in the operations of war and in the accomplishment of essential peacetime tasks.

In the employment of modern military forces, there are certain general types of frequently performed major tasks which appear to indicate the best basis for permanent inte-

gration of the higher echelons of organization. One of the most important and distinctive of those basic tasks is that of projecting sea power, on, above and under the surface, against sea and land objectives. That task can be accomplished only by naval operations, both on the offensive and in protection of our coastal areas, overseas bases, and sea lines of communication. Lessons learned from such operations in this war have strongly confirmed past experience as to the organization which will guarantee their being conducted most efficiently. For that purpose we require a permanent combination of sea and air elements, with an integral, subordinate land-air force. Our naval service, as at present organized, provides the needed sea-air combination, with the Marine Corps as its required integral, subordinate land-air force. That force is needed to ensure, on call, the seizure or defense of advance bases for the sea-air combination, and their denial to the enemy.

The present status of the Marine Corps is the result of development growing out of long experience in war and peace. The parallel development of similar foreign forces indicates, by cumulative weight of evidence, the necessity for complete administrative as well as tactical control of this essential integral element by the Navy. Beginning with ancient Greeks, sea-going soldiers, specially trained and equipped, have been employed in naval operations. Among modern foreign navies, the two largest, England's and Japan's have similar organizations, as has the efficient navy of our ally, Holland.

Great Britain, under the Stuart kings, had need of such a force in its sea arm, and embarked an Army regiment. In the reign of Charles the Second, inefficiency, caused by conflicts of interest between Army and Navy, made it advisable to organize an integral subordinate land force under the Navy. The Royal Marines were then founded, with the title of "The Admiral's Regiment." Holland's use of ordinary troops at sea in the First English War (1652-54), proved that putting a soldier on shipboard does not make him a Marine. On the advice of Admiral de Ruyter, the existing Army complement with the Dutch fleet was replaced in 1665 by a newly organized regiment, trained as Marines and assigned as a permanent element of the Navy. That corps has been retained to this day. Personnel of the Royal Netherlands Marines are now serving and training with us and attending our Marine Officers Schools. Japan became of age as a world power without a Marine Corps, but after encountering difficulties of coordination in operations around Shanghai, in the early nineteen-thirties, found it desirable to organize, as an integral element of her Fleet, the Special Naval Landing Parties, often referred



"Amphibious operations are highly specialized."

to as the Imperial Japanese Marines, for use in swift amphibious movement and advance base defense. From forces of that organization we have met the toughest opposition of the Pacific War, including the defense of Tarawa.

The establishment of our own Corps in 1775 as part of the Navy grew out of British experience, and of the prior organization of bodies of colonial Marines in the French and Indian War. We continued to exist as a separate Corps even when the Navy as a whole was under the administration of the War Department. In 1867, in the period of reduction of the services after the Civil War, an attempt was made to abolish our Corps as a distinct branch, and transfer it to the Army. This brought forth such a storm of protest from the highest and most experienced officers of the Navy, and so much evidence of its usefulness and efficiency, that the Committee on Naval Affairs recommended, after thorough investigation, that the Marine Corps not only should not be abolished, but that its organization as a separate Corps should be preserved and strengthened. These historical precedents show that any reorganization which requires the functions of the Marine Corps to be performed other than by an integral part of the naval service, would not be a step in advance, but a setting back of the clock of progress.

OUR status, like that of similar foreign corps, results from the facts that our functions are highly specialized, and of a distinctly "sea-going" nature. The most distinctive of those functions is participation in amphibious operations as an integral part of the Fleet. Those operations, projected beyond the continental limits, require overwater movement and subsequent landing. Such a movement involves combatant ships and aircraft for escort and to furnish fire support, transports for carrying troops, boats to land them and the troops who are to do the fighting ashore. Time required for training troops is variable. Time for providing combatant and other vessels required in amphibious operations is a matter of years. The element over which troops proceed from our shores to an enemy-held area is water, the element of the Navy. It is for these reasons that the Navy has the major responsibility in the conduct of amphibious operations. In line with this responsibility, the Navy has established in each of its fleets an amphibious force.

The ground force element of the permanent naval amphibious force organization consists of the Fleet Marine Force which includes land and air units. The Marine Corps is an integral part of the Navy and the Fleet Marine Force is an integral part of fleet organization just as much as are the battleships, cruisers, destroyers, combat transports, and landing craft which are necessary for the conduct of amphibious operations.

THE Navy in time of peace has always been maintained at a high state of readiness in order that it may start operations immediately upon the beginning of war. Likewise has the ground force element of the Navy, the Fleet Marine Force, been kept at a high state of readiness for immediate operations with the fleet. Since the First World War, the Marine Corps constantly added to the knowledge of amphibious warfare through study and discussion in

its schools, and by the maneuvers of the Fleet Marine Force. It developed, with the cooperation of the Navy, almost the entire body of doctrine, the tactical methods, staff procedures and special equipment, employed so successfully by American forces in amphibious operations in this war.

The importance of swift action in the seizure of advance bases was demonstrated in this war by the Japanese seizure of Hong Kong, Singapore, Rabaul, the Andaman Islands and the Dutch East Indies. Most of this was accomplished in a matter of weeks. Their victories were accomplished or spearheaded by an unbelievably small number of Special Naval Landing Parties—the Japanese Marines—which are an integral part of their navy.

Prompt availability for overseas operations and speed of employment therein, are characteristics of a Marine Corps integrally a part of its Navy. This applies not only to major warfare but to minor expeditions, such as have frequently occurred in the past. Lives and money were often saved, both to the United States and to the countries assisted, by the prompt availability of a subordinate naval land element. The initial American occupation of Iceland, in the summer of 1941, provides the latest example. The required force of Marines was assembled, equipped and transported in a very short time. No delay was caused by interservice consultation nor by the submission of differences of opinion for solution by higher authority. The Navy issued the orders, and the Marines went to Iceland. It was as simple and effective as that.

On the thirtieth day after Pearl Harbor our first sea-air combination, with an already trained element of Marines, moved out in force to the Samoan Islands to hold them in defense of our vital supply lines to the South Pacific, and to advance further toward the enemy if the situation required such action. How long would it have been before they could sail if a land element had to be attached and trained? That the first American offensive by ground forces in this war was the landing of our First Marine Division at Guadalcanal is further confirmation of the readiness for amphibious action of the Navy's ground-air element.

IN August, 1942, a naval task force attacked Guadalcanal and Tulagi. The ground forces in the initial landing were elements of the Fleet Marine Force. You know that Guadalcanal was the furthest advance in the Japanese move to cut out sea lanes to Australia and New Zealand. It may be too early to say that Guadalcanal was the turning point in the war. I can assure you that if there had been no Fleet Marine Force as part of the Navy, the Guadalcanal operation could not have been undertaken at that time, and the Japanese advance would not have been stopped there. The Marines who landed at Guadalcanal were part of the Navy; they had been trained and especially organized and equipped for landing operations.

As the war developed, the need for amphibious troops became greater and greater in order that we might project our operations overseas, rather than to fight a defensive battle on our own shores. The Marine Corps was expanded to many times its original size. To date, every Marine Division that has completed its training, and most of our trained defense battalions, have already engaged in combat

with the enemy. I know of no other military organization which has had such a high percentage of its combat units engaged in active operations.

To meet promptly all calls to move by sea, ready to support any operation planned by the Navy, the Marine Corps is so composed that its combat units are entirely self-contained, and its air element is an integral part of the Corps. The primary mission of Marine Corps Aviation is to provide direct aerial support for the ground forces of the Corps in all types of operations. To accomplish that primary mission, it has been organized, equipped and trained to operate effectively from either land bases or carriers.

ONE of the most important factors in the successful conduct of amphibious operations, is the preliminary joint training of the landing troops with the Aviation units furnishing their close air support. No landing operation can be wholly successful unless an ample period of such prior training can be conducted. By using either carrier or land-based Marine Aviation to support Marines in landing operations, it is possible:

First—to have a more efficient air-ground team.

Second—to have a preliminary training phase for the aviation and ground forces involved while the air units are shore-based, thus permitting carriers manned by Naval Carrier Groups to be employed for longer periods on strictly naval missions.

The record of Marine Aviation in the Pacific, in terms of destruction visited on the enemy, has amply demonstrated its value as an integral element of the Corps. Combat experience there has demonstrated the necessity for adequate close air support of Marine Ground units in amphibious landings, and in the exploitation and defensive operations which follow. Advanced training of Marine aircraft squadrons particularly fits them for that task. The effectiveness of Marine Aviation can be judged by the results obtained at Guadalcanal where, during the period of consolidation, Marine Aviation furnished air support. Also later, at Munda and at Bougainville, Marine Aviation furnished close support during the landing, as well as during the subsequent consolidation.

The integration of Marine Aviation with Naval Aviation is equally valuable. As a part of Naval Aviation, it is well prepared to perform its supplementary mission of participation in other types of Fleet Air action, when and where the situation requires. Marine air units are now in training to operate from carriers. As carriers become available, they will be able to fly from them in close support of Marine landing forces, as well as to participate in other Fleet operations when such close support of units of their own Corps is not required. Far from duplicating the efforts of Naval Air Forces, such action by Marine Aviation is a valuable supplement, along parallel lines.

WHILE Marine Aviators are trained in sea search operations and operations from carriers, and can participate in naval missions, the Navy's carrier-based flyers often furnish support of the landing Marines by air reconnaissance, bombardment of ground installations, strafing and the laying of smoke screens. The Tarawa and Kwajalein landings

recently demonstrated this close naval air support, without which the operations would have been unsuccessful. By so ensuring the employment of both Navy and Marine air units on all types of operations, within the capabilities of their aircraft, we provide an excellent example of that Principle of War usually referred to as "Economy of Force."

In addition to the Fleet Marine Force, as an integral land-air element of the Fleet, it is necessary to employ forces to provide internal security for Navy yards and other shore establishments, wherever located, as well as aboard the larger combatant ships of the Navy. As all of these functions must be performed, there can be no *unnecessary duplication* in their performance by an organization specially organized, trained and indoctrinated for that purpose. It may be that some other organization could be employed, but the past experience of the Marine Corps, and its constant association with the Navy, ensure the utmost efficiency in performance, as well as providing the essential complete naval control over the personnel so employed.

In this war, some selected Army divisions have been given amphibious training, as there were not enough Marine divisions to spearhead all landings of our Army for large-scale operations against enemy land forces. Their landings differed from those of Marines employed in naval operations. They were only the initial movements of a large land campaign, or of a new phase of such a campaign, and so a transient incident in their whole combat effort. However, in proportion to the short time involved in their amphibious employment, they required considerable special training in the performance of tasks unrelated to their normal modes of action.

AMPHIBIOUS operations are highly specialized. Amid all the other requirements for employment of the peacetime forces, under conditions of shortage of funds and personnel, only a specialized organization, closely integrated with the Navy, can be expected to continue efficient training and development in that type of operations after the war. In time of peace, the Fleet Marine Force would continue to be a laboratory for field tests of new equipment and for development of ideas on amphibious tactics, technique, and material. In the event of another war requiring early employment of amphibious forces, the necessary striking force would be at hand, organized, equipped, and trained.

We should carefully distinguish between duplication of effort and parallel employment. A Marine unit, with its own guns, or storerooms, or supply of shoes, across the street from a unit of another service with similar equipment, is not an example of duplication. Duplication would exist only if the totals of both installations were beyond the essential requirements of both organizations.

Any suggested change of organization which would alter the status of the Marine Corps as an integral element of the Naval Service, must meet these tests:

a. Will greater efficiency result?

b. Will the cost to the government be less?

In time of peace, the American public measures military economy on a dollars per man basis. In war, they measure it purely on a basis of comparative results. In both respects, I believe the record of The Marine Corps is most favorable.

If only because they promote both efficiency and econ-

omy, I believe that the elements of tradition and *esprit de corps* should be considered. During over one hundred and sixty-eight years, our Corps has built up an *esprit de corps*, based on its splendid traditions as a combat service, which makes the United States Marine unexcelled as a fighting man anywhere in the world. That *esprit*, and those traditions, have been passed on to nearly half a million Marines during this war, and through them to a large segment of our people. There has been ample demonstration that we have held the esteem of the American public for over a century and a half. We can envision no gain to our country's readiness for war in any reorganization which would discard a tradition and an *esprit* as old as our nation, and which have become inspiring parts of our heritage.

The war undoubtedly still holds many more lessons for us. Certainly, at this time, we can see no evidence that so much of this war as has been conducted by our Navy indicates any urgent necessity for a drastic change in over-all organization of our armed forces. Lack of coördination between land and air forces, such as the failure of air support in the allied defense of Crete, should be critically

analyzed. Such study, together with other pertinent facts, may indicate that we are on the wrong track if we set up an over-all organization, whether under one or more cabinet departments, in which the primary division of the several services, in their highest echelons, is on the basis of separate air, separate sea, and separate ground forces. That solution, however plausible at first sight, may be an oversimplification of our problem, and eventually lead to the very duplication, overlapping of authority and conflicts of interest which we hope to avoid.

With the entire record of this war available to us after its termination, we should study and plan, we should clarify obscure incidents, and we should keep our minds open in the interim, to ensure the best organization when we adopt it. Otherwise, we may adopt one prematurely that would later appear less desirable, when all the facts are at hand as a basis of judgment. By opening up and continuing discussion of these matters, we believe this Committee is performing an invaluable service in collecting data, directing attention to the problems involved, and ensuring careful scrutiny of all the questions at issue in their solution.



Historic Defense of the Corps

OVER one hundred and twenty-five years ago, the Commandant of the Marine Corps had to fight to retain the strength of the Corps at one thousand men plus commissioned officers. At the request of Secretary of the Navy B. W. Crowninshield, the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Wharton, gathered together data showing the essential duties and responsibilities of the Corps. This information Secretary Crowninshield dispatched to the Honorable James Pleasants, Chairman of the Naval Committee of the House of Representatives. A copy of this historic document, printed in 1816, is on file in the Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps. Secretary Crowninshield's letter of transmittal is reprinted below:

Navy Department, April 11, 1816.

Sir,

In compliance with the request of the committee of the House upon Naval Affairs, communicated by your letter of the 4th instant, enclosing a resolution of the House of Representatives, I have the honour to state, for the information of the committee, that the number of officers, non-commissioned officers, musicians, and privates, proper to be retained in the marine corps, upon a peace establishment, ought not, under existing circumstances, to be less than

one thousand men, exclusive of commissioned officers, the number to which the corps was reduced in January last, in pursuance of the order of this department, copy of which, marked A, is enclosed.

It will be perceived, by an inspection of the representations recently made by Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Wharton, the commandant of the corps, of which copies are herewith transmitted, that to supply the wants of the service, and give effectual protection to the public property at the various depots, it would be impolitic, at the present time, to recommend a further diminution: and as the number of commissioned officers is not disproportioned to the strength of the corps, and as resignations frequently occur, it is not considered necessary to suggest any reduction in the number of the officers.

I have the honour to be,

With the highest respect,

Sir,

Yours most obedient servant,

B. W. CROWNINSHIELD.

Hon. James Pleasants, jun.

Chairman of the Naval Committee
Of the House of Representatives.