

THE MARINE CORPS

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Gazette

**Statement By
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Before
The Senate Naval Affairs Committee
Hearings On S. 2044**

Never has the role of the Marine Corps in peace and war been summarized better than in the Commandant's speech to the Senate Naval Affairs Committee on 6 May 1946. Although this address was widely quoted and reported in the public press, the Gazette feels that this, the complete and unedited record of Gen Vandegrift's remarks, should be available to all professional marines in a permanent form. Additional copies will be supplied upon written request to the Editor.

LAST autumn I testified before the Military Affairs Committee on the subject of unification of the Armed Forces. Since that time the real points at issue have been brought into sharp focus, and it is now evident that the entire problem revolves about two fundamental theories which stand squarely at variance. On the one hand is the War Department General Staff theory—implemented in S. 2044. This contends that the complexities of modern warfare justify an extension of political-military control into fields of government which are essentially civilian in character. Standing in direct opposition to this theory is the Navy's belief that those same complexities in modern war indicate a need for broader participation and closer attention by the civilian elements of government, all coordinated by an authority with roots in the Congress, rather than in the Pentagon.

Beyond the foregoing general observation regarding basic factors I do not propose to tax this Committee with a further restatement of the detailed faults, weaknesses and inequities existing in the War Department merger plan. These have already been explored thoroughly and are well known. Instead, I intend to devote my time before your Committee to a subject with which I am thoroughly familiar and one which, in the light of current developments, I feel it essential that the Committee appreciate fully before the close of its deliberations. That subject is the specific effect which approval of the pending unification measure would have on the United States Marine Corps.

Marines have played a significant and useful part in the military structure of this nation since its birth. But despite that fact, passage of the unification legislation as now framed will in all probability spell extinction for the Marine Corps. I express this apprehension because of a series of facts which I feel must now be placed in your hands as an important element in your deliberations. They may be summarized in one simple statement—that the War Department is determined to reduce the Marine Corps to a position of studied military ineffectiveness—and the merger bill in its present form makes this objective readily attainable.

For some time I have been aware that the

very existence of the Marine Corps stood as a continuing affront to the War Department General Staff, but had hoped that this attitude would end with the recent war as a result of its dramatic demonstration of the complementary and non-conflicting roles of land power, naval power, and air power. But following a careful study of circumstances as they have developed in the past six months I am convinced that my hopes were groundless, that the War Department's intentions regarding the Marines are quite unchanged, and that even in advance of this proposed legislation it is seeking to reduce the sphere of the Marine Corps to ceremonial functions and to the provision of small ineffective combat formations and labor troops for service on the landing beaches. Consequently I now feel increased concern regarding the merger measure, not only because of the ignominious fate which it holds for a valuable corps, but because of the tremendous loss to the nation which it entails.

The heart of the Marine Corps is in its Fleet Marine Force, an organic component of the U. S. Fleet, consisting of the amphibious assault divisions which spearheaded our Navy's victorious westward march across the Central Pacific, and the Marine Air Arm whose primary task is the provision of close air support for the Marines who storm the beaches. The strength of that Fleet Marine organization lies in its status as an organic element of our fighting Fleet;—prepared at any time and on short notice to extend the will of the naval commander ashore in the seizure of objectives which are vital to the prosecution of a naval campaign or in the protection of American interests abroad. This is the demonstrated value of the Fleet Marine Force, a powerful source of ready strength to the nation, both in war and in peace.

A SIGNIFICANT corollary to the fighting function of the Fleet Marine Force, and actually the one which has required the most sustained effort, is the task of developing the techniques, doctrines, equipment and procedures which relate to the amphibious specialty. The Marines have pursued this effort continuously throughout their history, and during the period between World Wars I and II, the Corps recorded what history will prob-

ably assess as the most significant of its many contributions to the development of our national strength.

During that lethargic period of peace, even as early as 1921, the Marine Corps accurately forecast the exact pattern of the coming war against Japan. We were impressed by its amphibious character but the sombre lessons of the Dardanelles Campaign were fresh in our minds, and we resolved that the coming amphibious war would not involve a repetition of the shambles of Gallipoli. We devoted all our efforts and most of our slender resources to the task of analyzing the Dardanelles failure and developing a modern amphibious technique which would bring together the land, sea and air forces in united action in execution of this most difficult problem of warfare—the major landing operation. In conjunction with the Navy we provided the nation with a doctrine, technique, method, and equipment which became the standard pattern of amphibious warfare adopted not only by our own Army but by the armies and navies of eight United Nations as well. It proved to be the key to victory in every major theatre of the war and I believe it to be the most important contribution any American service has ever made in the field of purely prospective development of a form of major warfare.

It is notable that no parallel effort was being made anywhere by the world's armies and navies with the possible exception of the Japanese. It is significant that professional military opinion throughout the world was bemused by the axiom that: a landing against resistance is an impossible feat of arms. We knew in 1921 that victory in the coming war would require innumerable such landings and we worked to make them possible, not only for ourselves but for our Army and the Armies of our allies. We take pride in the fact that over forty of our new national army divisions, as well as many belonging to the Allied armies, were trained in amphibious warfare by the doctrines we devised and that these same forces acquitted themselves so well in the amphibious phases which were a prelude to the great invasions.

THIS unique American achievement was made possible mainly because of the existence of a vigorous Fleet Marine Force, in whose practical laboratory the research and development was conducted. But that Force will almost certainly be transformed into an ineffective military nonentity if the merger legislation now before this Committee becomes

law. That bill gives the War Department a free hand in accomplishing its expressed desire to reduce that Fleet Marine Force to a position of military insignificance, restricting its combat elements to small, lightly armed detachments and units which would be of little significance in amphibious warfare as we know it today. If the title Fleet Marine Force is retained at all it will serve only to dignify what actually is merely a shadow of a military body—one of no ponderable value to the Navy or the Nation.

TO begin with, it should be observed that, because of the character of the war just ended, great attention was focused on amphibious operation. There is, however, no real reason to believe that this particular form of special operation will occupy a different place in the event of another conflict than it occupied in the first World War or the American Civil War—a special operation incident to the conduct of the Naval campaign.

Second, it is to be realized that the Marine Corps is a small, highly skilled body of specialists which has earned world-wide professional prestige without benefit of West Point tradition or General Staff direction. Its success rests squarely on its development of a form of military service based on the premise that while the American man in uniform is a warlike individual, he does not respond to methods applicable to the conscript armies of Central Europe. The Marine Corps' guiding principles stem from such intangibles as democracy, recognition of the individual, and the timeless value of personal leadership as opposed to machine direction.

A final, and not inconsiderable, factor has its roots in simple manpower mathematics. This same Congress has recently, and upon mature deliberation, fixed the strength of the Marine Corps. Despite this fact there is still a clear realization in the confines of the War Department General Staff that the smaller the Marine Corps the less its demand on the manpower of the nation—to the ultimate advantage of an Army which traditionally in time of peace is faced with a difficult problem of recruitment.

It may be said that the apprehensions which I have just voiced are unnecessarily pessimistic, that the value of the Marine Corps is so obvious that its destruction is unthinkable—its perpetuation a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, I know that the War Department's intentions with respect to the Marine Corps are well advanced and care-

fully integrated. I have seen them in a form emanating from the highest quarters of the War Department. And I also know that the structure of the unification bill as it now stands will provide perfect implementation for those designs. Under the provisions of this legislation the single Secretary for Common Defense and the all-powerful National Chief of Staff are entirely free either to abolish the Marine Corps outright or to divest it of all its vital functions, leaving only a token organization in order that the name of the Corps may be preserved. And if the proposed Chief of Staff is of Army antecedents I feel there is strong possibility that that is precisely what will take place. Finally it is of great significance to note that, as the bill is now framed, this summary and altogether arbitrary action could be effectuated by simple departmental order, without prior reference to the Congress.

THE foregoing summarizes what, in all probability, will happen to the Marine Corps if the current merger legislation becomes law. It summarizes *why* it will happen, and *how*. However, it does not give any evidence of the disastrous effects which loss of the Marine Corps will have on the Nation itself. The first and most serious of these effects is the loss of the nation's primary force in readiness. The results of such a situation may be exemplified by considering what would have befallen our nation had there been no Marine Corps standing in readiness in the early days of the recent war.—The occupation of Iceland, when Marines were put in motion within a matter of hours, would have been delayed for months, because there was no Army force ready to undertake the task. The operation against Guadalcanal could not have been launched when it was, because there were at that time no Army troops prepared to conduct amphibious assault operations. And had we been without a vigorous and effective Marine Corps at the onset of the war the United States would have found itself in the hapless position of the British who, for the want of a small professional landing force, suffered a disastrous strategic defeat in Norway. It will be remembered that the German resources in northern Norway were, for a time, badly over extended, and that the British Home Fleet was able to steam with impunity into Trondjem Fiord and shell the lightly held city. But the Home Fleet had no organic Fleet Marine Force to land and seize the strategic town.—The Royal Marines, traditional troops of the British Navy, had

been divested of their amphibious functions and were engaged in duties of lesser significance—such as operation of landing boats. By the time Army troops could be alerted for the task the fleeting opportunity was lost and German strength in northern Norway had reached such formidable proportions that an attack was no longer practicable. This parallel between the British disaster and our military future under a defense structure dominated by the War Department cannot be ignored.

It is particularly significant to note that this demonstrably inadequate employment of the British Marines is the precise pattern of the War Department's conception as to the function of our own Marine Corps. The Royal Marines lacked a modern form of amphibious organization enabling them to carry out their mission with the fleet; and it is that identical organization in our own Marine Corps which the War Department seeks to reduce to ineffectiveness. I can likewise add that latest advices are that as a result of the war the Admiralty has initiated an expansion of the missions and functions of the Royal Marines to a status more nearly corresponding to our own.

BUT it is not in the matter of major war-time employment alone that the value of a Marine force in readiness is realized. The Marines serve another continuing purpose—the provision of forces to protect our national interests abroad in peace as well as in war. Here in my hand I have a State Department publication entitled "Right to Protect Citizens in Foreign Countries by Landing Forces" which records the significant fact that of 61 such operations conducted at the instance of the State Department prior to 1933, the Marine Corps participated in all except 11. And as further emphasis on their position as the nation's primary ready-to-act force it is in point to recall that the Marines have had forces actually operating in the field for 49 of the last 50 years, and have engaged in actual combat in 27 of those same years.

This is only the first loss which the nation would suffer in the destruction or eclipse of its Marine Corps.—And it is a loss which cannot be compensated by the part-time assignment of Army troops to naval purposes, for it is not the genius of a National Army to act as a highly mobile fighting force in instant readiness. Armies are ponderous; they organize and prepare for operations with care and deliberation, and they have great staying power. While these are unquestionably ad-

mirable virtues, they still are not the characteristics which go to make up an effective, mobile, amphibious fighting force, in peace or war—a force ready to act as a part of the Fleet at any time.

THIS, indeed, is the fundamental difference between the Marines and the Army and the effect of this difference has been manifest many times. There is a continuous record of instances in our national history where the Army could not move at all, or could not move soon enough to satisfy the needs of the situation—Cuba in 1906, Vera Cruz in 1914, Iceland in 1941 and Guadalcanal in 1942, are only a few typical examples which demonstrate the point I make. In each case the Army arrived on the scene only after the objective sought by the United States had been accomplished by Marines. This is not offered in criticism of our Army but as a factual statement of the effect of basic functional differences. These may be summarized in a simple statement—that no matter how hard it tries, a great national Army cannot be a specialist Marine Corps—and still be an Army.

It is a Marine's duty to be ready anytime, and I am pleased to be able to report to you that the condition of readiness prevails within the Marine Corps today. Our field forces are fully prepared to take the field at a moment's notice. They are well trained and are prepared to carry out their functions with their customary efficiency, spirit and morale, at a time when the responsible heads of other services are complaining of disintegration of fighting power accompanied by problems of low morale and deterioration of discipline. I can assure you that these conditions are not existent in the Marine Corps. *The Marines are ready*, and if it came to a fight today I do not know who could replace them.

A second and extremely significant advantage which would pass with the destruction of the Marine Corps is the preeminence we have enjoyed heretofore in the field of amphibious development. The United States entered the past war in the enviable position of knowing more about amphibious operations than any other nation in the world. It cannot be said, however, that the same favorable circumstances existed with respect to the other specialized forms of warfare.

But our dominant position in the field of landing operations did not come about by chance.—It was the logical issue of twenty years of conscientious devotion by the Navy and Marine Corps to the complexities of the

amphibious subjects;—to the development of the detailed techniques, doctrines and equipment which later proved of such value to the armed forces of both our own and allied nations. This success in the field of amphibious development is directly attributable to one fact and one fact only;—that the Marines have always viewed the landing operation as a specialty—their specialty, and their efforts have been oriented in that single direction on a full-time, year-in-and-year-out basis.

But without a vigorous Marine Corps, the country will be dependent for its amphibious progress on the Army—an Army with a myriad of other more general, and perhaps more vital, concerns related to the security of the United States. Under such circumstances the amphibious project, heretofore the subject of our full-time devotion, would take its place as just one more of the Army's long list of special problems;—alongside such matters as fighting in the mountains, the jungle, the desert, and in the snow. There is thus every indication that our future capacity to conduct amphibious warfare would be seriously impaired.

If this conclusion seems unwarranted, one has only to consult the Army's governing tactical document, the current Field Service Regulations. In that book, out of a total of 1094 paragraphs, exactly eight are devoted to amphibious operations, and furthermore the subject is assigned last place in the discussion of the twelve special forms of military operation,—appearing directly after Partisan Warfare.

HISTORICALLY it is likewise patent that specialties do not flourish under our War Department. The vast programs related to the security of our nation and its possessions seem always to eclipse the need for impetus which a growing specialty requires. There may be a flurry of passing interest, as is now being manifested in the superficial elements of the landing operations field, but the end result is almost invariably the same.—A minimum of nourishment for the specialty; restricted development amounting to almost total eclipse, and finally an inadequate state of readiness at war's onset. Outstanding examples of this situation are to be found in the fate of two specialties which were the subject of worldwide development between the two world wars;—namely, airborne operations and armored warfare.

The groundwork for study of airborne tactics was laid by the Russians during the 1930s. With our superior technical capabili-

ties it might have been assumed that the United States would strike boldly into the airborne field and soon occupy a dominant position, but this did not prove to be the case. Although the Russians continued their developmental program and were soon outstripped by Nazi Germany, the United States still did next to nothing.—So little in fact that General Devers, in his recent report on the activities of the Army Ground Forces in the war, was constrained to observe:

“The Nazi use of airborne troops in Holland and Crete made the world gasp, and their parachute regiments, so successfully demonstrated there, *were the originals on which our airborne division was patterned about a year later.*”

THUS our technical excellence, which might have served such a valuable purpose in the development of the airborne field, was left unexploited and we entered the war in the unenviable position of having to copy from our enemies in a subject which was peculiarly adaptable to the capabilities of our own country.

In the matter of the armored warfare specialty, the story is essentially the same.—The closing events of World War I made clearly apparent the part that armor would subsequently play. Despite that fact, in 1920 the Army Tank Corps was abolished and all tank units were absorbed into the Infantry. In the ensuing years we made little progress in tank development because tanks were a specialty, and specialties do not flourish in our Army. Indeed, as late as 1932 we still possessed large numbers of World War I tanks—of French design, and the idea of a mechanized force, then receiving worldwide attention was repudiated by the War Department. Actually it finally required vigorous action by the Congress of the United States to impel the War Department into coordinated action in the tank field.—It was this very body that in 1932 incorporated in an appropriation act the provision that no monies might be expended for the maintenance or purchase of fuel for overage military vehicles. And it was only after this effort on the part of the Congress that our belated armored development began. But as a result of this delay the United States,—the greatest industrial nation in all the world,—entered the war with a tank inferior to that of our German enemy;—inferior even to that of our less richly endowed British and French allies. And despite our most determined efforts to match

the German development we ended the European war with a standard tank which many of our own experts characterize as inferior to the German Royal Tiger.

BUT such was not the case with amphibious operations. As I have noted previously we entered World War II with unquestioned superiority in the amphibious field over every other nation in the world. The benefits gained and the lives saved by that superiority were of course incalculable. But in any event it is plain to see that we would have indeed been in serious difficulty had the Marines' development of the amphibious technique proceeded no further than the kindred development of airborne and armored operations. For this reason I strongly urge this Committee to oppose any legislation which will place the problem of amphibious development in a category in any way comparable to that occupied by our unfortunate airborne and armored programs before the war,—unless there exists some certain and unquestioned compensation to be realized in exchange for the sacrifice.

I, for one, fail to perceive any possible compensation, however small, either in economy, increased efficiency or in elimination of duplication. As regards economy the Marine Corps has throughout its existence maintained a reputation for utmost frugality, sometimes bordering on penury. In the days of peace preceding the recent war, the United States was possessed of the world's top ranking Marine Corps. In 1938, that investment in security cost the nation about \$1,500 per Marine. At the same time the United States possessed the world's 18th place Army—at an annual cost of over \$2,000 per soldier.—This is surely no indication of possible economies to be expected in compensation for the sacrifice of a proven professional fighting force.

In the matter of efficiency I have only to refer you to the manner in which the Marines prepared for the war just past and to the manner in which they fought that war. A similar assessment of the manner in which the War Department prepared its forces for the conflict and of the manner in which its operations were conducted gives no slightest indication that an exchange of Marine specialists for soldiers would result in increased efficiency in the amphibious field. In fact, such an analysis might indicate that the country would not long remain in a position to wage amphibious warfare on the same professional basis as heretofore.

And finally there is the matter of duplica-

tion. The War Department is now contending that the amphibious efforts of the Marines, despite their century and a half of precedent, are an invasion of the Army's sphere,—an unjustified duplication. In that regard I wish to state that no such duplication exists. The amphibious specialty is the Marines' sphere, and the Army is not and never has been in the amphibious field. It does not have the schools, the training facilities, the development agencies, or the continuity of experience which are essential complements to the maintenance and development of a full-time amphibious specialist force. Furthermore, those Army troops which took part in landing operations during the past war were actually applying the principles and using the techniques, methods and equipment developed by the Marine Corps. In some cases they were even trained by the Marine Corps. At the present time the Marines are continuing their devotion to the study and perfection of their specialty,—standing ready again to impart their knowledge, whenever needed, to any other element of the armed forces. So, if at this time the War Department undertakes to set up the mechanism to enter the amphibious field, *a source of duplication will indeed exist*, but the responsibility for that duplication will rest not with the Marines but with the War Department.

AND as a final element of the cost to the nation, hidden in the pages of S. 2044, I feel it in point to observe that in sacrificing its Marine Corps the country would lose more than a highly trained and thoroughly proven body of fighting men. It would lose a symbol of real democracy,—a truly American form of expression of military service. Military service is an honorable thing; in the Marines men and officers believe in it. And the relationships between officers and men of the Marine Corps have long rested on a sound basis. Reforms which elsewhere are only talked of today were carried into effect in the Marine Corps at the close of the last war—27 years ago. Our discipline is strict but it has been humane and based on understanding. I am proud to be able to report to you that the Marine of World War II had the same regular character and steadiness in battle that distinguished his predecessors from the Revolution onward. He was the average of all American boys, but in him our system was able to develop, rather than suppress, his native American character, courage, and faith. It is a notable fact that few men have ever

left the Marine Corps without a feeling of undying loyalty toward it. I think these things are proof that our system is good and that it is worthy of preservation.

I realize that the observations which I have made today are of a thoroughly unequivocal nature, but I can assure this Committee that my expressions are based on fact and not on conjecture. In making those statements I feel that I have acted in a dual capacity—as a professional military specialist who by experience is qualified to advise the Committee in his specialty, and at the same time as a citizen of the United States who should not stand unheard while ill befalls his country.

THE Congress has always been the nation's traditional safeguard against any precipitate action calculated to lead the country into trouble. In its capacity as a balance wheel this Congress has on five occasions since the year 1829 reflected the voice of the people in examining and casting aside a motion which would damage or destroy the United States Marine Corps. In each instance, on the basis of its demonstrated value and usefulness alone, Congress has perpetuated the Marine Corps as a purely American investment in continued security. Now I believe that the cycle has again repeated itself, and that the fate of the Marine Corps lies solely and entirely with the Congress.

In placing its case in your hands the Marine Corps remembers that it was this same Congress which, in 1798, called it into a long and useful service to the nation. The Marine Corps feels that the question of its continued existence is likewise a matter for determination by the Congress and not one to be resolved by departmental legerdemain or a quasi-legislative process enforced by the War Department General Staff.

The Marine Corps, then, believes that it has earned this right—to have its future decided by the legislative body which created it,—nothing more. Sentiment is not a valid consideration in determining questions of national security. We have pride in ourselves and in our past but we do not rest our case on any presumed ground of gratitude owing us from the nation. The bended knee is not a tradition of our Corps. If the Marine as a fighting man has not made a case for himself after 170 years of service, he must go. But I think you will agree with me that he has earned the right to depart with dignity and honor, not by subjugation to the status of uselessness and servility planned for him by the War Department.