

Recruit Training

Challenging and tough

by Gen Louis H. Wilson

Adapted from the Commandant's statement before the Military Personnel Sub-Committee of the House Armed Services Committee on Recruiting and Recruit Training.

I share your deep concern over the recruit maltreatment cases which led to these hearings. I wish I could tell you that the McClure and Hiscock cases were aberrations in an otherwise perfect system. Unfortunately, I cannot. Shortly after assuming office, I had targeted recruiting and recruit training as areas in need of intensive review. I was not satisfied with the quality of our new recruits and I believed then, as I do now, that changes in recruit training are needed.

As this committee knows, we have been separating marginal Marines from our ranks as rapidly as possible, and the recruiting service has been directed to achieve a minimum of 67% high school graduates this Fiscal Year. Our quality goals are being achieved this year with many bonus effects. Specifically, morale is up, absentee rates are headed down, brig population is down, and the troops are looking good. We will stay on this course.

Last November, the review of recruit training began and culminated in a conference this spring. The results of this review and the actions we are taking will be discussed later. At this point, however, I would say to you that the unfavorable publicity, the courts-martial, and the attacks upon the integrity of the Marine Corps have been painful to us. As Commandant, I accept the full responsibility for the unacceptable actions of a few Marines. I would also state to this committee that the situation is well in hand. We now have a clear picture of the problem areas in recruit training and are taking all possible action—rapidly—

to minimize maltreatment cases in the future. Meanwhile, recruit training will remain challenging and tough, for we believe this is vital to the total performance of the Corps in peace and in war.

Each year, to maintain the personnel strength authorized by the Congress, we must attract about 50,000 qualified young civilians, transport them to our recruit depots at Parris Island and San Diego, and transform them into basic, dedicated Marines who can live up to the expectations which have traditionally been placed upon the Corps.

In my view, there are no more demanding, challenging, or important assignments for Marines than those associated with recruiting and recruit training. They are in every sense the lifeline of the Corps. Marines who perform these duties work long and difficult hours and, in general, I am extremely pleased with their performance. In fact, the Congress has recognized their extraordinary value, as well, through special duty assignment pay and other support. However, we are constantly striving to improve the processes by which we screen, select, and train them.

Today's recruiters cannot be an order-taker who waits in his office for walk-in volunteers. He must be an efficient, honest salesman dedicated to attracting quality Americans into the Marine Corps.

The whole recruiting process, like any contractual agreement, depends upon the integrity of the recruiter and the applicant. Whenev-

er one or both parties are dishonest, the system fails and constitutes a fraudulent or erroneous enlistment. We are clearly aware of our responsibilities in the process.

At our Recruiter's School in San Diego, selected noncommissioned officers learn about modern sales techniques, about the variety of enlistment options and educational and training programs available to those who enter the Marine Corps, and about the rules and regulations which apply to recruiting duty.

In the field, recruiters are under scrutiny of supervisors who are there to assist, advise, or admonish as required. Those who fail to produce satisfactory results, and those who violate regulations are removed from recruiting duty and punished, if appropriate. In Fiscal Year 1975, 252 recruiters were relieved for reasons which range from indebtedness to incompetence to malpractice.

I think it is appropriate at this time to make a comment with respect to the recruiting aspects of the McClure case. I cannot comment on the training aspects of that case, since the matter is currently being weighed by courts-martial. However, with regard to the recruitment of McClure, a thorough investigation could find no evidence of malpractice by the recruiter in Austin, Texas. Considering the information supplied to him by McClure and other sources, the recruiter's actions appear to have been reasonable and prudent under the circumstances. In this connection, getting complete background information on a prospective recruit can be a difficult and frustrating task. For example, thirty-four states deny access to juvenile and/or youthful offender records.

Although recruiting results this far this year are encouraging and we are striving to improve quality even more in 1977, the congressional budget cuts imposed last December have caused serious degradation in our advertising effectiveness and real hardships on the reduced number of recruiters who must get the job done.

Before turning to a discussion of recruit training itself, I would like to mention that last fall we began to shift the responsibility for recruiting from our six Marine Corps District Headquarters to the commanding generals of our recruit depots. This shift will be completed by 1 June 1976, and will give control

over the quality of recruit input to the officers who are responsible for producing a quality basic Marine. Concurrently, a brigadier general has been added to the staff of each recruit depot, for added supervision in both the recruiting and recruit training areas.

One additional point should be made at this time. In the aftermath of the Warner case, and at the suggestion of this Committee, we have tightened up medical screening procedures at our recruit depots. Any recruit who has not had a pre-induction physical within seventy-two hours of arrival is identified and sent immediately for a medical check before he continues processing. A complete physical examination is scheduled for the third day of processing. In no case does a recruit commence vigorous training without such a full examination.

Marine Corps "boot camp" has a well-established place in American folklore. It is simultaneously the source of the unique spirit of the Corps and the source of our greatest controversy. It is also the object of more misinformation—more misconceptions—and more mythology, both inside and outside the Corps, than any other aspect of Marine Corps life. I sincerely hope that these hearings will help place matters in proper perspective.

Recruit Training is designed to produce Basic Marines who are:

- disciplined;
- physically fit;
- proficient in marksmanship and other military skills;
- and imbued with self confidence, pride, a sense of duty, and a love of Corps and Country.

The process of building a basic Marine takes seventy-seven days, and it rests on a basic premise: That Marines must be able to fight—to survive—and to win the *first* battles in any future combat we may face. The traditional force-in-readiness role of the Corps demands this. Accordingly, we must provide our young Marines with the skills and with a mindset which enable them to face hazard and uncertainty without hesitation.

The key to this mental preparedness for combat is discipline. Unfortunately, to many who do not understand it, the term, "discipline" has a punitive connotation, or it stands for harshness and leadership by fear.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The dangers of the battlefield are fearful enough in their own right. Poorly trained and undisciplined troops unable to cope with combat fears and acting in fear of their leaders, as well—would be unlikely to survive. They would be even less likely to carry out their mission.

What we seek to instill is *self-discipline* and *self-reliance*. These enable our Marines to overcome their natural fears and to substitute cool-headed estimates of how to get the job done. Put another way: They must be able “to absorb the rough blows of war and know what to do.”

To instill self-discipline and self-reliance, then, Marine Corps recruit training has for years been conducted within an atmosphere of stress. Somewhat severe by everyday standards, this calculated stress is mild compared to the demands of combat. Those who learn to function smoothly in such an environment find a basis for mutual trust, confidence, and esteem—shared by the nine out of ten recruits who complete their initial training and become Marines.

Such a stressful environment has its effect on both the recruit and his drill instructor. Human frailty can and does lead to infrequent abuses of authority. It has been charged from time to time that such abuses are winked at and considered a built-in part of the system, unfortunate though they may be. I emphatically deny that charge. The fact is that suspected abuses are investigated and, where appropriate, offenders are disciplined in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice, as in the Hiscock case.

A continuing effort is being made to eliminate the potential for abuse of authority and the potential for incidents such as those that have led to this hearing. Last November, a review of recruit training was ordered. It culminated in a number of substantial changes, now being implemented: Major ones are

► First, the level of stress, on both the drill instructor and the recruit, is being lowered. More attention is being devoted to progressive training and development. The training syllabus had been reduced by 64.5 hours. However, training objectives have not been changed.

► Second, officer supervision of recruit training is being increased by more than double at the working level, with the addition of company executive officers and assistant series officers—eighty-four in all. While this added officer supervision is a key change, I would not want to imply a lack of trust and confidence in our drill instructors. The overwhelming majority of them are outstanding, dedicated, hard-working professionals. The additional officers are being provided to help ease the drill instructor's workload and stress.

► And finally, we are improving procedures to screen and to train officers and non-commissioned officers before assigning them to duty at the recruit depots, and to expand their training while on such duty.

I am determined that our recruits will be treated firmly, fairly, and with dignity and still be transformed into the world's best fighting men. The positive, productive, rugged, challenging, and physically demanding aspects of recruit training are being retained and in some cases enhanced. Our training regimen will remain tough, but not abusive.

Thousands of young Americans successfully complete Marine Corps recruit training each year. The overwhelming majority benefit from it as individuals, finding the experience a maturing one. Such benefits are passed on, indirectly, to their families and to their communities when they return. The nation benefits by acquiring both fighting men and responsible citizens.

Mr. Chairman . . . members of the Committee: The recruiting and recruit training processes of the Marine Corps are essentially sound. The substantial changes which have been and are currently being made will continue to result in improvement in both areas and will minimize the potential for recruit maltreatment.

Today, I am flanked by two graduates of boot camp—Lieutenant General Barrow, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, and Brigadier General Schulze, the Director of Personnel Procurement at Headquarters Marine Corps. They are not rarities. Over forty per cent of their colleagues in the general officer ranks began their Marine Corps careers as privates at Parris Island or San Diego. USMC