



Congress and the Corps

by Gen Robert H. Barrow

† On 31 January 1980, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, in company with the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations, appeared before the House Armed Services Committee to present his first annual posture statement since assuming office. In this issue the GAZETTE presents the Commandant's extemporaneous opening remarks, extracts from his answers to several questions, and his formal posture statement submitted as a report on the status of the Corps and in support of the budget for fiscal year 1981.

Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, this is my first appearance before this Committee. I look forward to being with you for most of the day. I am pleased to be part of this team before you. I have about four or five points I would like to make with respect to your Marine Corps.

I would like to move quickly to the most important one. First would be people. All of us like to talk about grand strategy and weapons and equipment, but in the final analysis all of that will work because people make it work. In my view, that is the biggest challenge in this country today—to determine what kind of force we have relating to people.

Now, coming quickly to the point, the all-volunteer force is in trouble. You have a quality Marine Corps, but it is a quality Marine Corps in spite of the all-volunteer force and not because of it. (Applause.)

You have a quality Marine Corps because there are at work about six factors, all of which apply to the problem in an ever-increasing period of difficulty.

First, we have devised personnel management procedures and policies that ensure the kind of quality we are presently getting in terms

of the recruiting criteria. Let me underscore that had these same policies been put into practice back in the days when we were not doing well, we would have done well. All of the improvements in recent years over conditions of the early 1970s have primarily to do with the policies since adopted. These new policies also relate to the retention of Marines. Noticeable among them is the decision to have the 75 per cent high school graduates an imperative as opposed to a goal in our enlistment criteria.

The second factor in achieving the kind of quality that we have today is the recruiter himself. He has, in my judgment, the most difficult job in all of the Marine Corps. He is working against the odds. There is, as you know, a declining number of eligible people to be recruited. He is working increasingly in the lower socio-economic part of our society, which is not to say that they do not make good Marines, but their trainability for some of the more difficult skills is certainly questionable. It is often not there. He is producing in these most difficult times a product that is increasingly different from the one we had in years past. For example, in the top two mental group categories, number one and two, we have seen

a decline from 36 per cent in 1975 to 23 per cent in 1979. All of this is in the face of an increasing requirement for people who can be trained in the technical skills. The recruiter is doing his job with great difficulty.

Then, the next factor comes into play. We have in the Marine Corps in recent years adopted the most stringent quality control at our recruit depots that can be devised. It is working. It is designed to ensure that the unqualified fellow that slips through the net at the recruiting station is caught before he is too far down the road in our Marine Corps.

The next step is the drill instructor himself. I could not underscore enough the importance of his role in making the all-volunteer force work for us. He takes what the recruiter gives him. He gives the recruit the discipline, the spirit, and the motivation to become a qualified, good Marine. In that connection, I know that this Committee with some frequency has expressed concern about how we are doing in the training of our recruits in terms of fairness. We remain constantly vigilant on this. I can assure you that we are better today than we have ever been in terms of the quality of drill instructors and the way in which they perform.

After recruit training, the new Marine will most likely go to the Fleet Marine Force. He will encounter what I believe to be superior leadership in our young officers and noncommissioned officers. This is an area where we are not having any problems. Indeed, we are doing extremely well. The young Marine will live under a set of uncompromising standards with respect to performance, appearance and the like, and he will be kept quite busy.

In your Marine Corps, the operating forces have a tempo of operation which has to be seen to be believed. They are in their own words "in constant motion." They train and conduct operations all over the world. We like it that way. This is not a complaint.

In the last year we had Marines training in some 19 countries around the world; Norway, Denmark and Germany, for instance; also Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Australia, Canada, and Korea, just to name a few. This gives us an opportunity to learn a lot about a wide variety of geographic and climatic conditions and an opportunity to work with a wide variety of our allies. It is done to improve our readiness, but in a real sense doing it also proves our readiness, because most of these are very difficult operations. To do them as well as we do is in itself reassuring as it reflects our readiness to do a wide variety of things.

The next point I would like to make is how the Marine Corps fits into the scheme of things, particularly as it relates to requirements for conventional forces. I suppose since the days of our founding fathers we have always had more military requirements than we have had the capability to meet, except in the last major wars where we could get pretty much what we needed in order to win. Some people refer to this condition as the strategy force mismatch.

Whatever it is, we traditionally meet this disparity by having forces that are mobile, flexible and available—which is to say, mobile to go more than one place, flexible to do more than one thing, and available to do it now. To me this describes the Navy and the Marine Corps team.

This is demonstrated daily by the kind of requirements we have and the training we do. It is a capability that is presently strong, but can be strengthened. I feel personally that there is no more important thing for our country than to see the strong revitalization of something we have almost forgotten how to say—sea power.

We are a maritime nation historically and geographically, and we, in my judgment, have to a large extent taken our focus off that most critical of capabilities—sea power.

Now, the Marine Corps only wants to be a part of that equation of sea power. In this connection, what are our needs?

We need to modernize. In this connection, I am disappointed—the Marine Corps is disappointed. Once again for the third year, there is an aircraft we feel strongly about that is not in the budget. Other modernization that relates to your Marine Corps has to do with amphibious lift. We are pleased to observe that the budget contains the LSD-41. We are grateful for this, but it does not address the problem of block obsolescence that faces us in the latter decade of this century, which must be met well before it comes upon us.

Now, Mr Chairman and other members of this Committee, I would conclude by saying that I can reassure you that wherever there are Marines today, there is with each and every one of them a strong commitment to excellence. There is excellence in everything that they do and stand for.

There is a saying that the mark of excellence begins with the attitude of excellence. We believe we are good. We believe we are good because we are. We can be better, and I look to this Committee to help make this happen.

Thank you.