

# The Art of Command

by Gen A.M. Gray

*The following extracts from recent speeches given by Gen A.M. Gray reflect his views on leadership and the art of command—a subject area of great importance to the Corps and one the 29th Commandant feels strongly about.*

Leadership is the art of getting things done through people.

If you are to succeed as a commander, you must dedicate yourself to life-long learning about your profession. You have to be a student—a student of people and what motivates them; of weapons and equipment; of strategy, operations, and military history. You've got to be able to do anything you ask others to do. You've got to remember it is no sin to learn from someone who's junior to you.

As a leader, you have to recognize that your people want to be taught. They want to do well and to be somebody. You have to create an environment that fosters teaching, and you have to be both a teacher and a trainer all the time. You must be prepared to step up and teach at anytime, any place. You must train your service support and fighting elements to function as a team. You must train them how to communicate, how to maintain equipment, how to do whatever it takes to get the job done. The effective commander—the effective leader—is always a student, always a teacher, always a trainer.

Beyond all these things, you must remember you live in a fishbowl. You must set an example. If you don't show the way, if you don't do the right things, your people won't do them.

Leaders should think more about others than themselves. I don't like creeping careerism. I tell my people I'm their career planner. We need more professionalism and less careerism. Being in the Service is not a job. We don't work; we're members of a profession. We serve.

We now, in the Marine Corps, have more dependents than Marines. About 205,000 dependents and 198,000 Marines. We have to take care of the families. But the most important thing we can do for the families is to "bring

'em back alive." And that means Marines need good training. Time invested in operations and training is time well spent. The more you train in peace, the less you bleed in war.

I believe there will be war in the next decade. Probably some Third World scenario. The time to think about it is now. We need to be able to conduct low-intensity warfare. We need to be able to conduct revolutionary warfare and to defeat it. Sure, we have to be prepared for NATO contingencies, but we must not lose sight of the kind of conflict that's most apt to confront us. We must be effective at the low end of the warfare spectrum, in the protracted conflicts that so often occur in the Third World.

One of the key leadership challenges facing us is the need to learn to operate better in the joint and combined arena. Joint operations increase complexity. But they shouldn't become so complex that command and control becomes unworkable. We must remember that even minor contingencies require multi-Service support.

When it comes to training, I believe in having a campaign plan that is focused on warfighting. A campaign plan is really a thought process that integrates our efforts and gets everybody going down the trail together. Training and education programs have to dovetail. You need an annual training plan to be what you want to be. Without one, you won't get there.

Don't let the higher headquarters cause you to lose your focus. There are too many regulations and directives. We're trying to cut back on directives. We tend to lose sight of our priorities. If you can't tie something to operations, training, or warrior preparedness, then you'd better think twice before doing it.

The complexities of the modern, fast-moving battlefield will make it es-

sential that leaders at all levels are prepared to think, able to anticipate what might happen, and prepared to act. Learn to use mission-type orders. They are essential in battle today. Everyone must understand the commander's intent—two echelons up and two down—whether in administration, logistics, or signal. In the "fog of war" there is chaos, and in that chaos opportunities present themselves. The first to see these opportunities are the people on the "tip of the spear." They must act, and their actions must be consistent with the commander's intent.

That's why critiques during training exercises are so important. The purpose of the critique should be not only to examine what people did, but also—primarily—why they did it. It's the thought process that's important. Almost anybody can run around and yell "Arrrgha," but what counts is having people who can think.

A commander must let his people do things. You have to let 'em make mistakes—not dumb things that get them killed, but mistakes they can learn from. Marines care about their Corps. They want to be players in it. They want meaningful roles, and it is the job of all leaders to provide that opportunity for their subordinates. This is how you keep people challenged and committed.

We also have to recognize that today's Services—the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard are thin—we lack numbers and depth; we're not as robust as we could be. To overcome that, you must make your organization and your people winners. You'll probably never have your full table of organization and equipment. So, you must instill in your people the idea that "you take what you get and make what you want."

It's going to take bold, innovative, and aggressive leadership to overcome the complexities of the modern battlefield. Only this kind of leadership, exercised by both the commander and his staff, will provide purpose, direction, and motivation in combat. At all levels of command, leaders must be men of character. They must know and understand their people and the physical tools of battle. They must act with courage and conviction. Their primary function is to inspire and motivate their people to do difficult things in trying circumstances.

