

29th Commandant Speaks to Corps

by Gen A. M. Gray

During his first weeks in office as the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen A. M. Gray visited many of the Corps' major commands to share firsthand his initial impressions, insights, hopes, and goals with as many Marines, particularly Marine leaders, as possible. Here are some brief extracts from his talks—a sample of the flavor—for those who did not get to hear him:

- The Nation loves its Marines. It prays for them, supports them, and funds them through the Congress. Because of this support, the Nation also places some demands on the Corps. It demands that Marines and the Sailors that serve with us be the best led, best trained, and best disciplined—in short, the best fighting force on earth.
- The Marine Corps is an elite, high quality military organization, but every officer and staff noncommissioned officer I have talked to tells me that we can get better. That's true; you can always get better. We either are as great as we say we are, or that's where we're going to go. And we're going to do it with some very fundamental and basic ideas. We are going to do the kind of realistic training that for the most part we've been doing, but it must be improved upon.
- Marines are special kinds of people. In my view, we are warriors and people who support warriors. That's the number one reason for our existence, and it's going to be the number one focus of all that we do during this Commandancy.
- There is going to be just one Marine Corps in this country, not five or six different ones. This is very important because we are going to be putting together forces from the Pacific and the Atlantic; there is an obvious need for common operating procedures, common doctrine, common instructions covering warfighting . . . This is a must, and we are going to make it happen.
- The greatest thing we have in our Corps today, the greatest thing we've always had, is the young men and women serving in our Fleet Marine Forces . . . The 29th Commandant has a simple formula for moving on—turn our people loose. We are going to create an environment where people can do things, seek challenges way be-

yond what we're letting them do today. People must be free to grow. As long as we let them be as great as they can be, we will, indeed, remain a great fighting force . . .

- It is the Third World, the so-called low-intensity conflict arena, where we are most likely to be committed in this decade . . . You had better break out the manuals and books about how to fight in this arena . . . It is almost all in Sun Tzu, and I commend him to you. And there's a lot of it in the book Rommel wrote as a young lieutenant, *Infantry Attacks*. Best of all, perhaps, is our own *Small Wars Manual* written in the 1930s and still available . . .

- As Marines, we are soldiers of the sea. We come from the sea, but we go wherever we must to do what has to be done. There is a school of thought that says that if we don't hang our hat on amphibious warfare, if we stray to anything except amphibious warfare, we are making a grave mistake. The truth is just the opposite. Our forte is preparedness. We must be mentally and physically prepared at anytime to go by air, to go by sea, and to do it right. It is the aggregate usefulness of our Corps to the Nation and to the free world that counts.

- Anybody can be ready to get on an airplane or go aboard ship, but can we win? Are we genuinely certain we have prepared ourselves to win? That's what we're going to work on because that's what matters most.

- We are going to get far better than we are today at matters involving maneuver and firepower. I happen to believe that you win by putting together combinations of firepower and maneuver and want to be sure that everybody understands that.

- We need to do a lot more at night. We've had a goal in the Marine Corps of doing half of our training at night, but we haven't been doing it. That's going to change.

- When it comes to physical fitness, what we really need are Marines and Sailors who can carry a wounded man 75 or 100 yards across the battlefield under fire and not kill him before a corpsman can fix him. We are going to go back to physical readiness training—things like units on obstacle courses, forced marches under combat conditions, and all of that. We are going to be able to do what has to be done in combat.

- We have, in my view, too much careerism creeping into the officer corps of Marines. What do I mean by careerism? Officers who worry more about themselves and how they are going to get ahead than they do about the people they are privileged to lead. Gen Kelley spoke to officers for three years on this topic. We let him down and obviously haven't done enough about it. We are going to continue the effort; we're going to stamp out careerism in your Corps.

- We want to build up Quantico and restore it to the true idea of the "Crossroads of the Corps." We are going to take the Training Department from Headquarters and put it at Quantico, merge it with the Doctrine Center, the combat analysis and concepts portion of the Development Center, and some of the education activities. We don't know what we'll call it; maybe an "Amphibious Warfighting Center" or a "MAGTF Warfighting Center." We are going to make a major investment there so we can remain the kind of dynamic, forward-thinking Corps we are today. We are also going to establish a command there consolidating all the people who do research, development, and acquisition and put it under the Assistant Secretary of the Navy as required by the new law.

- I want a thinking Marine Corps; I want an open, honest Marine Corps; I want Marine leaders who at all times are conscious of the special responsibilities that incur when you assume the title of officer of Marines . . . I want to hear from the field. This time I've done the talking; the next time I visit will be my opportunity to listen to you—to the noncommissioned officers and the junior and middle-ranked officers of the Corps—and I'll listen carefully. You never learn a damn thing while you're talking. I happen to believe the Corps needs *leaders* at every level—professionals who have a meaningful opportunity to play in our future. I guarantee that you'll have that opportunity with me, a standing invitation to be a true player. USMC