

Continuing the March—Part I: Defining the Course

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.



As the 30th Commandant, I assume the leadership of the Marine Corps from a long line of distinguished predecessors. Like them, I welcome the opportunity to continue serving the Corps and to continue the march of progress set by each of them in his time and place.

As indicated in testimony during my confirmation hearings, I have deep respect and profound admiration for the path—in nautical terms, “the course”—that many past Commandants have laid out so clearly for the Corps. There is no reason for us to deviate, fundamentally, from that path.

However, while maintaining the course delineated in our past, each Commandant defines course corrections that the Corps, as an institution, must take to meet the specific requirements of evolving strategies, changing threats, and budgetary realities reflecting the will of the citizens for whom our Corps exists.

In defining this future course, the traditions and fundamental characteristics that make the Marine Corps unique must be preserved. As Marines, we cherish the heritage of our Corps. We adhere to traditions, yet historically have not let them hinder our critical self-evaluation as we actively have sought new innovations and better ways of doing things.

That legacy will continue. My predecessors have influenced the shape of the Marine Corps, and, as all Commandants have done, I intend to build on their efforts. We will continue to refine and to improve on those ideas and concepts, especially on the high standards they have set for quality manpower, professional education, operational competency, and combat readiness.

In this respect, one of my first actions as Commandant was to send a letter to each general officer on active duty, asking for his or her thoughts on the future direction of the Corps—our “course.” While I’m still reviewing the contents of their replies, a few recurring themes are apparent:

- We need to maintain those attributes that make us “special” and pro-

vide us with the capability to make a unique contribution to our Nation’s defense.

- We need to develop a clear plan for what a smaller Marine Corps should be.
- Our future force structure must continue to be balanced between ground, aviation, and combat service support forces, and must include effective, adequately manned bases and stations.
- The future Marine Corps must continue to be organized as three active division/wing/force service support group teams; however, we need to look closely at our standing headquarters and Marine air-ground task force command elements and make reductions as necessary.
- We need to develop truly expeditionary component headquarters separate from our warfighting Marine expeditionary force command elements.
- Proficiency as the Nation’s premier force-in-readiness requires that we continue to emphasize realistic and demanding individual and unit training.
- We must continue emphasis on professional military education at all grade levels.
- Reserves may have to play an even greater augmentation role in the future.
- We can’t ignore our naval heritage; we need to continue to improve our integration with the Navy.

I’ll continue to read and reread these very important responses from the senior leadership of the Marine Corps and will refer to them frequently in the months ahead.

Besides the written recommendations from our general officers, I recently conducted a three-day retreat with the most senior general officers to discuss, in detail, the issues identified above and others related to the future of the Marine Corps. Not surprisingly, the future organization and size of the Marine Corps dominated discussion. As a result, I have tasked a specially organized planning group to define the organization and manning of the Corps for the future. After thorough

review by the general officers, we will move to implement that plan in the Marine Corps Program Objective Memorandum for 1994. This program will be formulated commencing in January 1992. Other issues will be the subject of further review both by my headquarters staff and the commanders of the Fleet Marine Forces and the Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

These were the first steps. I have already begun to visit the major posts and stations of the Corps and will continue during the next few months to meet with Marines and discuss our future.

My intent is to ensure that we accurately assess what our specified and implied tasks are going to be in the coming decade. The world is changing dramatically as I write this. There is a "new world order." But it's not all good news. As a Nation, we are facing a broad spectrum of conflicts. President Bush, Secretary Cheney, and Gen Powell have incorporated their thoughts in an evolving new National Military Strategy. This emerging strategy focuses on a significantly smaller U.S. military force oriented towards deterrence based upon a reduced forward presence complemented by enhanced contingency forces. Failing deterrence, we'll need a rapid response, and if required, the ability to reconstitute forces. There is a distinct place for a credible Marine Corps in this new strategy to provide the military capabilities our Nation needs.

These capabilities—our organization and our doctrine—will be more "joint" in nature. Not just because someone's told us to, but because that's the way we've always done business.

The Marine Corps' amphibious doctrine is an early example of a precept designed to meld air, sea, and land forces into a combat capability for a specific mission. Amphibious operations conducted during World War II were joint operations; Army units were assigned to Marine commands and vice versa. During Operation DESERT SHIELD, a British armor brigade provided I Marine Expeditionary Force a complementary capability that was unavailable with the forces at hand. Later, during DESERT STORM, the Army's Tiger Brigade filled this role. In increasing our joint orientation, the Marine Corps will continue to foster the idea of complementary Services that are not in competition for roles and functions.

The Nation cannot afford to main-

tain excessive redundant capabilities within the four Department of Defense Services. We need to be able to provide specialized forces. Forces armed, trained, and equipped to perform the functions necessary to meet our assigned Service roles for use by the Commanders in Chief (CinCs) of the unified commands in carrying out their combatant missions. Compositing a brigade of the 82d Airborne Division with a naval task force comprised of an amphibious and/or a carrier battle group and an Air Force composite wing, under a designated joint task force (JTF) headquarters, provides the basis for a truly rapid and affordable rapid-response force. We need to worry less about who commands and more about smooth integration. The CinCs have already begun to do this, with one or more of them already having designated the command element of a Marine expeditionary force as a JTF headquarters. In crisis response, we need to fully support the concept of joint sequencing. Early arriving units from all the Services must smoothly assimilate with in-theater assets.

One more thing is certain; we will get smaller. The Department of Defense's planned "Base Force" concept and, indeed, the programs being suggested in the Congress all mandate that. We must, however, ensure we do everything possible to maintain and, where possible, enhance our capabilities, even though we may be smaller in size.

As the potential threat of conflict with the Soviet Union has lessened, our Nation will continue to concentrate on regional conflicts. Operations SHARP EDGE (Liberia), DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (Southwest Asia), EASTERN EXIT (Somalia), PROVIDE COMFORT (Iraq), and SEA ANGEL (Bangladesh) are only the most recent examples. Similar regional instabilities and the threat of larger conflicts requiring ready, responsive, warfighting forces are the potential threats to our national security interests that will continue to require the capabilities Marines have historically provided.

As we look to the future, one point I'd like you to remember is that we have been successful because we have not been complacent. We will continue to examine ways to improve our capabilities. We will build on our past while forging our future. It is an imposing responsibility that we share. We'll need strength of purpose to answer the challenges facing us during the com-

ing few years to perpetuate our role as the nation's "Force-in-Readiness."

While some change appears inevitable, there are some things that remain constant over time, regardless of the circumstances. One of these is the feeling and respect the American people have for that national institution which is the U.S. Marine Corps. To them, just as to each of us, Marines are special. They expect—and we must continue to give them—Marines who are the epitome of professionalism and soldierly virtue; who are role models for the Nation's young men and women; and who endure the hardships of manning the Nation's lonely ramparts, responding to crises, and when they have to, who fight and win.

In sum, though the waters are choppy, we are on the right course. Our Corps began its "march" more than two centuries ago when the Continental Congress raised two battalions of Marines to help our Nation win its independence. Since that time, we've often found ourselves in harm's way. In every case, we've been ready when our country needed us. In the future, we'll remain capable of expeditionary deployments and employments anywhere in the world. We'll be ready, trained, and responsive. We owe our Nation and our Corps nothing less.

For two generations, my predecessors Commandants have collectively aimed the Corps in the right direction. Each has applied the course and speed changes necessary to the times. In the coming months, as your senior leaders help define those changes needed now, I will aim to do the same. For the moment, however, my initial guidance is simply, "Continue to march."

