

# REFLECTIONS ON THE CORPS

## Paradox of the Corps: “. . . such other duties as the President may direct.”

by Gen Carl E. Mundy

*In light of the ongoing roles and missions debate, when the Nation looks to the Corps, it sees a unique force—flexible, austere, and hardhitting. It is just this aggregate utility that proves the Corps' worth.*

*In July 1950, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was rushed to Korea to assist the Army in stemming the North Korean tide. A British military observer of the desperate fighting in and around Miryang sent the following dispatch. "The situation is critical and Miryang may be lost. The enemy has driven a division-sized salient across the Naktong. More will cross tonight. If Miryang is lost . . . we will be faced with a withdrawal from Korea. I am heartened that the Marine brigade will move against the Naktong Salient tomorrow. They are faced with impossible odds, and I have no valid reason to substantiate it, but I have the feeling they will halt the enemy.*

*. . . These Marines have a swagger, confidence, and hardness that must have been in Stonewall Jackson's Army of the Shenandoah. They remind me of the Coldstreams at Dunkirk. Upon this thin line of reasoning, I cling to the hope of victory."*

*—From This Kind of War  
by T. R. Fehrenbach*

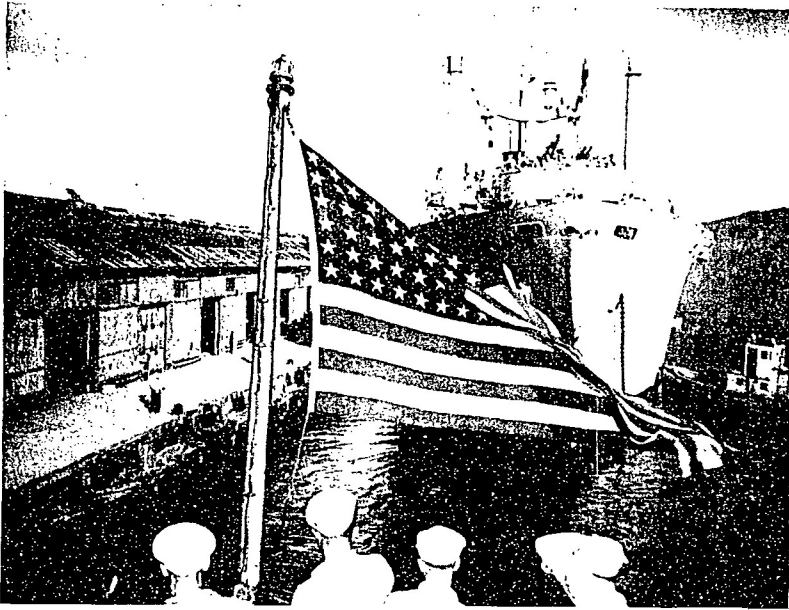
The Marine Corps exists for one purpose—to fight. Its readiness, its training, its expeditionary nature, its very fighting ethos—all these qualities—are functions of its maritime heritage and flow from its special configuration for service with the fleet. This role, assigned in law, has been and continues to be the *raison d'être* of the Corps. Indeed, throughout its

history, the Marine Corps has been forward deployed, maneuvering from the sea, responding to the crises of the Nation. By its very nature, the Corps also affords the Commander-in-Chief a ready option and unique capability with which to respond quickly as the Nation mobilizes for major war. When the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade attacked the North Koreans at Miryang, it fought as a land force and for all the same reasons that Marines are masters in coming from the sea, they drove into the Naktong Salient.

The Corps has frequently been employed as a principal participant in American land wars. On the surface, it would seem during these times, that this role of the Marine Corps duplicates that of the Army and accounts for the question: "Can the United States afford the luxury of a second land army?" Herein lies the paradox of the Corps: The general perception of its contribution to national security is often judged solely by the appearance that the Corps is an adjunct of the Army during the Nation's emergencies.

Comparing the Marine Corps with the other Services tends to blur its primary role and value to the Nation. These comparisons lack historical perspective and ignore the central reason for this Nation to have a forward deployed, maritime, force-in-readiness.

For its part, Congress has fixed in law the roles of all the Services. Carefully crafted to avoid unnecessary duplication, Title 10, United States Code



*The American flag waves proudly from the stern of the USS Clymer as it prepares to disembark Marines and their equipment in Pusan, South Korea on 2 August 1950. The USS Henerico can be seen in the background.*

(U.S.C. 5063) requires that the Corps:

- provide Fleet Marine Forces of combined arms . . . for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.
- provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy.
- provide security detachments for the protection of naval property at naval stations and bases.
- and shall perform such other duties as the President may direct.

More than any other role, it is this last one, " . . . such other duties as the President may direct," which accounts for the Marine Corps participation in every major American shooting war since the turn of the century.

In the law, Congress envisioned the Army to be the Nation's arm of decision for land conflicts. During peacetime, the Army would reside largely in the continental United States, would train for war, and would be ready to expand rapidly, through mobilization, to meet the requirements of any national emergency. At the same time, Congress intended for the Marine Corps to be forward deployed, serving with the fleet, to signal national re-

solve by its presence, and where necessary to intervene to support and protect American interests.

But noting the success of the Marine Corps structure in World War II and Korea, Congress legislated that the Marine Corps be a force of combined

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arms with highly trained and integrated air, ground, and logistics units. The subsequent high state of readiness and combined arms prowess that flows from this structure accounts not only for the Corps’ success in performing its myriad duties with the fleet, but also for its frequent service in conjunction with the Army during emergencies. Congressional committee language expressed the feeling:

. . . that far from being duplicative or competitive, such a force [the Marine Corps] would better enable the Army and Air Force to concentrate on

their major responsibility of preparing for all-out war.

In 1952, the Congress clearly saw the paradox of the Corps. America was then in the throes of the Korean War, its first major conflict after demobilization following World War II. The readiness of occupation forces, deployed to Korea from Japan, had been found wanting. Marines had responded early in the Korean crisis and played a crucial role both in the defense of the Pusan perimeter and the landing at Inchon. Organized, trained, and equipped for naval campaigning, Marines once again played a major role in an American land war. From this, Congress concluded that:

The need for Marines as a ready force is paramount when the Nation is largely demobilized; it may actually recede after full mobilization. The Nation’s ground shock troops must be most ready when the Nation generally is least ready.

For the United States, the Korean War was a watershed event. As the first large-scale shooting conflict of the Cold War, it demonstrated a Communist malevolence only previously hinted-at. Now facing a formidable global threat, the United States departed from its tradition of post-war demobilization and instead permanently stationed large Army and Air Force units in Europe, Asia, and in the United States to focus on and prepare for the massive continental war that seemed imminent.

The Marine Corps, meanwhile, in consonance with its unique role, continued in its maritime character, preparing for operations in the Soviet littorals and as forward deployed, combined arms teams operating in the Third World. It was here, in the vital peripheries of the free world, not the Fulda Gap, that the Marine Corps fulfilled its role as an expeditionary force-in-readiness.

Again and again, since 1946, the President has turned to naval forces to manage instability and respond to and resolve crises short of war. Structured for service with the fleet—austere, deployable, hard-hitting, sustainable—the Marine Corps is light in its footprint, but robust in its employment. The very reason for its utility as a force-in-readiness has often defined its usefulness for the President in prosecuting larger conflicts. This has held true from the time President Wilson directed the 4th Marine Brigade to

embark for France in 1918 to the time the Corps fought in DESERT STORM. But it is this same flexibility that may place the Corps at risk as the storm brews over defense spending.

Debate over the roles and functions of the Armed Services is historically brought-on by extraordinary fiscal pressures. Important spending decisions must be made about the types of forces that should constitute our national defense. As a review of Service roles and functions unfolds, a central theme of this effort must be a call for all participants in the debate to eschew Service parochialisms, to make clear-headed comparisons, and above all to consider what is best for America.

A current roles and function examination will be shaped by several influences. First, the Nation is going through a natural adjustment and downsizing of its military after 40 years of Cold War. In this process, there are great pressures to create miniature versions of the Cold War force structure with the Services simply taking a "fair share" cut of the reductions.

A second influence is the fresh memory of DESERT STORM, where once again, confronted with a national emergency, the Commander-in-Chief directed that the Marine Corps respond rapidly to an unfolding crisis. In this instance, reminiscent of Miryang, the fighting spirit, deployability, and robustness of the Marine Corps ac-

counted, early-on, for the stabilization of the Kuwaiti theater. When fighting finally came, nearly the entire operational Marine Corps found itself once again cooperating with the Army; as it had at Soissons, Pusan, and Vietnam. Often overlooked, though, is the contribution of the two amphibious Marine brigades, whose presence afloat, off the coast of Kuwait and Iraq, tied down as many as five Iraqi divisions.

The final influence, the drive for

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jointness within the Department of Defense, may lead some to see the Marine Corps combined arms, air/ground structure as an anachronism, containing forces which should more properly be provided by other Services. Taken together, these influences invite Service comparisons that suggest the combined arms structure of the Marine Corps or common equipment items with other Services are unaffordable duplications of capabilities. Marine armor

### **A long standing role . . .**

Though the concept of “... such other duties as the President may direct” shaped the role of the Marine Corps in the 20th century, Marines have been serving at Presidential direction for nearly 200 years. The Marine Corps Act of 1798 contained remarks by the Secretary of the Navy enumerating the missions of the Corps as being of an “amphibious nature” and were:

- sea duty,
- duty in the forts and garrisons of the United States, and
- any other duties on shore as the President, at his discretion shall direct.

or artillery or tactical aviation are viewed in isolation and held up as traditional roles for the Army and/or Air Force.

Looking at the Corps from the outside, one could be forgiven for drawing a parallel with the Army and missing the greater contribution of the Marines and the Naval Service. Far from being simply additive to Army ground strength, in such conflicts as Korea, Vietnam, and Kuwait, Marines played crucial enabling roles, usually naval in character, at critical moments within the larger context of the emergency. Further, to focus solely on the large wars in which the Marine Corps has participated, performing “such other duties as the President may direct,” is to overlook the principal contribution of the Corps as the Nation’s maritime force-in-readiness—a role outlined not only in the law, but demonstrated over 200 years. It also ignores the reality that in the uncertain security environment of the post-Cold War period, Marine expeditionary forces, doing what has been their charter all along, may be exactly the forces America needs most.

The force structure and capabilities of the Marine Corps are battle tried and “bought and paid for.” If a debate over roles and functions takes shape in the months ahead, participants must guard against assumptions and conclusions about the Marine Corps that are founded on the paradox of its employment. Rather, the debate must focus on capabilities, be based on the fact of flexible utility, and be driven by the requirement of what is best for America.

USMC



*During the Gulf War, four SEA SOLDIER exercises were conducted in preparation for a possible landing against Kuwait's heavily defended coastline. Three of these exercises took place in Oman, where this picture was taken, and one took place in the United Arab Emirates.*