

On course, on speed

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The Commandant's Perspective

On Course, On Speed

by Gen Charles C. Krulak

Although much remains to be done, the progress already made on the Commandant's Planning Guidance 'reflects a Corps on the move, a Corps that is thinking hard about tomorrow.'

In July 1995, we published a vision for the Marine Corps as we move toward the 21st century (see MCG, Aug95). It captured the thinking done by many Marines and friends of the Corps over several years and covered the tenure of several Commandants. Spelled out in the form of the Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG), this vision was framed in terms of warfighting, manpower, core values, training and education, and naval character—the five pillars that are the foundation of how we make Marines and win battles.

Over the last 12 months, Marines at every level of our Corps have made tremendous progress in translating the vision of the CPG into reality. Some have questioned why we need to do so much in such a short period of time, while others have questioned why we could not do more. There is no doubt that the CPG has encouraged all hands to think hard about our future, and I thank everyone for their important contributions to our Corps. As we complete this first year, I want to share with you a perspective on what we, as a Corps, have accomplished.

We have no more important responsibility to the American people than to win our Nation's battles. Virtually everything in the CPG is based on this core concept, reinforced by the belief that we must continue to innovate and improve our force. As we have seen in Bosnia, in Liberia, in the Central African Republic, in and around Kuwait and Iraq, and in a host of less publicized but equally demanding contingency situations, these capabilities are in constant demand. Our operating forces around the world have met the call every time. The superb efforts of our Marine expeditionary units (MEUs) in the Adriatic, and in support of the embassies in Monrovia and Bangui, have demonstrated that a ready, robust expeditionary force is an essential tool of statecraft as we move toward the next century and a new set of national security challenges.

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Preserving this force means that we must continue to optimize use of the resources made available to us. We have consolidated resource allocation under the deputy chief of staff, programs and resources and fine-tuned the Combat Development Process at the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) to ensure that our requirements are well-anchored in our operational concepts, prioritized, and adequately resourced. We have complemented these efforts with a Grassroots Campaign that helps ensure that our former and retired Marines and friends, as well as the public, not only hear our story, but understand the issues at stake as policies and programs compete and are debated. This campaign is already paying dividends and will be critical as major national priorities are discussed this fall and beyond.

No matter how prepared we are today or how much we improve and innovate to meet the demands of the future, if the unified commanders (CinCs)—the force employers—don’t understand the instruments at hand, our efforts will count for little. To ensure that they gain this understanding, and to keep them abreast of resource issues critical to future capabilities, we have developed and implemented a set of annual briefings for each CinC. These briefs outline Marine Corps capabilities vital to his area of operations and war plans and how support of Marine Corps programs in resource discussions can translate to improved warfighting capabilities. This ongoing update, individually tailored for each CinC, augments the work of Marines who occupy key billets on CinC staffs, as well as the staffs of their Marine component commanders.

While we are improving the way we educate the CinCs about our capabilities, we are also well underway toward providing them the means to employ the MEU command element as a forward joint task force (JTF) headquarters aboard ships of an amphibious ready group. Just as important, we have completed the first two phases of establishing a standing JTF Headquarters at II Marine Expeditionary Force. This will be an off-the-shelf, ready-made JTF that can deploy at very short notice and is fully expeditionary. Focusing on the United States Atlantic Command (USACOM), this initiative provides the CinC a stable, experienced headquarters staff—a “full-up round”—that can be brought into the fight at a moment’s notice. While the exact future of this headquarters will depend in part on the future of USACOM as a force provider, its value has already been recognized. It has been designated the planning headquarters for all contingency plans in USACOM but one. Through these efforts, we are marrying the capabilities of forward deployed naval expeditionary forces with joint doctrine—providing capabilities far beyond those available even 5 years ago.

We’ve made significant strides toward institutionalizing innovation. We now have a fusion point for innovation efforts around our Corps and a clearing house for new concepts, new organizations, and new uses of technology—the Warfighting Laboratory. The Lab has developed a 5-year plan to conduct concept development and experimentation. The first phase of the plan, slated for March 1996–March 1997, is named “Hunter Warrior” and will test selected new operational concepts, tactics, and supporting technology. “Hunter Warrior” will culminate with a free play, force-on-force exercise, pitting approximately 1,300 Marines of a special purpose Marine air-ground task force against a mechanized regiment in February and March 1997.

The Lab is also coordinating current nonlethal weapons experiments at Camp Pendleton and has been instrumental in the standup of the chemical-biological incident response force (CBIRF)—the first force designed from the ground up to deal with the consequences of an attack similar to the one aimed at the Tokyo subway system last year. A revolutionary concept in use by the CBIRF is an “electronic reachback advisory group” composed of some of the top scientific minds in the Country. This group is linked electronically to the CBIRF by laptop computers and other communications technology, forming a “virtual staff.” This group will provide realtime expert advice to the on-scene CBIRF commander in the event of an attack. Recently, the CBIRF completed a successful series of tests and evaluations and deployed as part of the security contingent for the 1996 summer Olympics in Atlanta.

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No less important in “priming the pump of new ideas” has been the success of Marine Mail. Marine Mail was established to capture the creative thinking and innovative ideas of all of our force and to gain perspective on three questions: What aren’t we doing that we should be doing? What are we doing that we should do differently? What are we doing that we shouldn’t be doing? Initially there was some concern that this kind of communications would undermine the chain of command. However, I can tell you that abuses of that nature are rare and are far outweighed by the insights gained leveraging the knowledge and perspective of the Total Force.

The most important thing we do is make Marines. The individual Marine is the Corps. Regardless of doctrine or organization, everything starts with getting the right men and women into the Corps. We are doing just that. We increased our quality standards and still met our recruiting goals for 11 straight months! In the present recruiting climate, the toughest we have seen in a generation, only the Air Force has come close to this level of performance. Quality is the mission, and we’ve achieved great success in that mission. The Grassroots Campaign helps here as well by getting the Marine Corps’ message to the quality young Americans who are the future of the Corps.

A key tasker in the CPG was to repair the way we manage our structure, to ensure that our most vital asset, our people, are utilized effectively throughout the force. We have initiated a single structure sponsor for the entire Marine Corps. This is a step forward fixing the manning problems that have plagued both the Fleet Marine Force and Supporting Establishment for some time. The structure sponsor is up and running at MCCDC and is fully integrated into the Combat Development Process. We are making progress, particularly in aviation manning, but these fixes cannot and will not happen overnight. Lasting change takes time. However, with the single structure sponsor, we can now effectively accomplish “cross-level” manning in a way that simply wasn’t achievable before.

Fantastic recruiting and efficient management of our structure, however, count for little if

our core values of honor, courage, and commitment do not frame the way we live and act. The inculcation of core values begins with the first contact an individual has with his or her recruiter. Core values must receive continual emphasis and reinforcement at boot camp and throughout a Marine's career. The formative events of recruit training, where an individual's transformation from civilian to Marine takes place, is also where we drive home these core values (see pp. 54-58). Later this year we will enhance recruit training, making it more challenging physically, mentally, and morally. Marine recruit training has a well-documented history of challenge and intensity. That will not change; the success of that training has been proven in combat. We will continue to make Marines as we always have, retaining the positive, timeless aspects of training. We are adding a week to recruit training to incorporate a "defining moment" for our recruits—the crucible. This event will cap the transformation that is recruit training. It will be the rite of passage, a defining point in a young Marine's life, a change that will last forever. This event will require teamwork; no individual will be able to complete it alone. The team, under the leadership of its drill instructor, passes the test together. The result will be an experience that challenges the mettle of each and every recruit and results, literally, in a transformed American.

"Making Marines" doesn't end with graduation from boot camp. The process of making Marines is a comprehensive, long-term effort extending from recruiting, recruit training, initial assignment, and onward throughout a Marine's career. Beyond boot camp we are working to enhance unit cohesion and sustain the "transformation." Our cohesion program is still in the developmental stage, but will center on team building and unit stability during initial assignment. Sustaining the "transformation" of boot camp will focus on reinforcing core values, whole Marine character development through training and education programs, and renewed emphasis on combat leadership, responsibility, and accountability.

Upon the foundation of "making Marines," we are building a comprehensive, career-long training and education effort. During times of scarce resources, we have always turned to education and training to keep our warfighting edge. We will do the same today. Such things as the popular arcade game "Doom," a new family of tactical decision games, and a version of checkers that will stress rapid decisionmaking skills are making "modernizing the mind" more than just a slogan. Education is the essential companion to training. We are making education available to all Marines, not just a select few. Together with a revitalized professional reading program, this access to education makes it possible for Marines to pursue professional education continuously throughout his or her career. Improved education opportunities will be critical to fielding a Marine Corps that can successfully adapt to changing battlefields and, indeed, a changing world.

Hand in hand with this professional development effort goes the creation of what I call the "culture" of the Naval Services. I have said many times that the Navy and Marine Corps provide a tremendously versatile and unique warfighting capability to the Nation. For this reason, the bond between the Naval Services must remain strong. Over the last year, we have reinforced this bond in many important ways: a more closely integrated programming process, expanded integration of Marine squadrons with carrier air wings, tighter coordination between the Marine Corps and Navy staffs at the action officer level, and a closer relationship between MCCDC and the Naval Doctrine Command. Marines understand the fundamental importance of our naval character and will continue to be expert in the use of seabases for any type of operation, ashore or afloat. This outlook breeds the flexibility and adaptive style of warfighting that will be vitally important to the success of any expeditionary operations—today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow.

The CPG was designed to provide a common direction—a commander's intent—for the Corps during the tenure of the 31st Commandant and beyond. Virtually every tasker set forth in the CPG has been met or is near completion. The five highest priorities—enhancement of our organization and processes to secure adequate fiscal resources; refining manpower processes and policies; improving our education and training institutions; establishing the Warfighting Lab; and, establishing the standing JTF Headquarters and a JTF command and control capability in MEUs—are all underway and reaching maturity. More importantly, we are seeing a fundamental change in outlook. A future of challenge is increasingly seen as a future of opportunity, and answers to problems that once seemed insoluble now seem within our grasp. This reflects a Corps on the move, a Corps that is thinking hard about tomorrow, a Corps that is leaning into the task of preparing itself for the day after tomorrow. We will not rest. We will continue to survey the horizon to ensure progress and to adjust our heading as required. In the months and years ahead, I want us to continue stretching the envelope, pushing ourselves to think hard about challenges, opportunities, and solutions.

Our progress to date on the many initiatives the CPG outlined is a testament to your commitment to the future of the Marine Corps. The same commitment will ultimately determine solutions to the challenges that lie ahead of us. Maintain the momentum. Semper Fidelis!

