

*Recently a Marine sent a message to the Commandant via Marine Mail outlining his concerns about officer promotions and retention. Here is the letter, along with the Commandant's personal response.*

**Concerns of an Officer**

□ While some would argue against me sending you this message concerning my views on our poor rate of officer retention, I believe that you would rather get an opinion from an officer currently wrestling with the decision of whether or not to continue to serve in the Ma-

rine Corps than that of any one of a hundred field grade officers far removed from that decision or period of their lives.  
Currently, I serve the Marine Corps as the executive officer, weapons platoon commander, and fire support team leader of Suicide Charley, 1st Battalion, 7th

Marines, and have been stationed here at Twentynine Palms for the past 2 years. I write not for any self-serving reason; but rather, because in my limited experience on active duty, I continue to see those Marines who best serve the Marine Corps decline orders that would have allowed them to extend

their active service.  
Officer retention comes down to two basic issues—competition and quality of service. As I wrestle, as do others around me, with the decision of whether to stay in the Corps, I must ask myself, “Will the Corps reward me for hard work and superior performance?” When

**The Commandant Responds**

□ Thank you for your E-mail and your views on officer retention. I appreciate the fact that you would express your concerns to me. I am answering you, but if you want to share my thoughts with your fellow warriors, feel free to do so. I will start by telling you that in the last 2 years, I have traveled over 340,000 miles visiting our Marines. I have talked to thousands upon thousands of Marines, both officer and enlisted. The one thing that has been driven home to me in all of these visits is the following equation:

perception+knowledge  
=reality=truth

With this equation as the basis of my comments, let me try to share some “knowledge” so that we deal with truth and not just perception.  
1. Your overarching statement that we have a “poor rate” of retention is not true. The reality is that the total increase in officer resignations is approximately 2 percent over last year and that includes aviators. As an example, in I and II MEFs in 1996 we had 38 captains leave the Corps. This year that num-

ber is 19 . . . down 50 percent from last year. Over the past 2 years, the total increase in officers resigning from the recruit depots has been two individuals. We have had absolutely no problems in augmentation nor do we anticipate any. Yes, we are losing aviators at a rate that we don't like! There are many reasons for that . . . Leadership concerns, the economy, the tempo, the air lines hiring, concerns over flight hours, etc. The fact that officers in your neighborhood (1/7) are getting out at a rate you feel is excessive is something that I will look into . . . But please understand that the Corps cannot possibly augment all the Marine officers who want to augment and so some attrition is needed to keep the Corps “healthy.” Now I know these facts may not jive with the “rumors” and articles in the *Marine Times*, but they are, in fact, the facts. To better appreciate the danger of rumors, I was told the other day that every single captain in 3/3 had resigned in the last 3 months. Since I used to command 3/3, that really caught my attention. I called the 3d Marine Regiment and discovered that no one had

resigned from 3/3 in the last 3 months . . . it was just a rumor. I then spoke to the CO of 2/3 (a good friend) and he related that he had not lost a single captain during his 18 months in command. My point is a simple one: Perception may be reality where you “sit,” but it isn't always truth!  
2. Quality of service. You mention that “we have lost our focus on warfighting” and that we have been overrun by those “attempting to make the Corps reflective of our society.” In the past 2 years, we have:  
(a) Raised our recruiting standards while every other branch of the Service has lowered theirs.  
(b) Increased the length of our recruit training, made it harder, returned over 100 hours back to the DIs, and instituted the Crucible. While every other Service went to gender-integrated training, your Corps has been the only one to hold with gender-segregated training. And if you think we haven't had to fight to do all of this—higher standards, longer training, the Crucible, gender-segregated—then you are really missing the boat.  
(c) Increased the length of MCT and made it totally

field time.  
(d) Increased the field time in School of Infantry by some 30 percent.  
(e) Started the cohesion effort to ensure that we remain as “teams” for the first enlistment.  
(f) Established the Warfighting Lab to “innovate” for the battlefield of the 21st century . . . the first real experimentation by any Service since the interwar years between 1920-1940.  
These are facts! They have been accomplished through the terribly hard work and efforts of a great number of officers and enlisted. Lost warfighting focus? I disagree! I have never seen us more focused on learning how to win the first battle of the next war. . . and ensuring that we have the best trained and equipped Marines we can to fight that battle! And none of the above even “counts” what the leadership of the Corps just did at the general officer symposium . . . where we cut structure that did not directly aid our 21st century warfighting capability in order to move over 5,500 Marines into the Fleet Marine Force and supporting establishment. For the first time in my 33

speaking of reward, I am not speaking of salary or vacation time; but rather, a chance to get ahead of my peers through hard work. Unfortunately, the answer to the above question is "No." Whether or not I outperform my peers in a qualitative sense, or even in a quantitative sense as far as productivity, does not matter; but rather, time in service or lineal standing at The Basic School.

EXAMPLE: Lieutenant A outperforms Lieutenant B in every possible way; however, Lieutenant B was commissioned 4 months ahead

of Lieutenant A. Whether or not A was ranked higher on every fitness report, Lieutenant B will still be promoted ahead of A and, therefore, be rewarded with both a rank increase and the pay raise that accompanies it.

Besides personal satisfaction, it does not pay for one lieutenant to bust his rear working harder than his peers. I find it hard to believe that in a civilian operation that seniority outweighs productivity. I worked as an aide to the city administrator of one of the largest cities in the South, and I

know that this attitude does not survive in any successful environment.

When speaking of quality of service, I speak not of monetary reward. No one enters the Marine Corps because of the pay or work load; but rather, because of the opportunity to serve in the finest organization in the world. Unfortunately, our Corps has been overrun by those attempting to make the Corps reflective of our society as regards to race, gender, etc. We have lost our focus as warfighters. While I could further elaborate on both subjects, I feel

that I have already used enough of your time. If you believe that these are the opinions of only one officer, I will end with the following statistic: of the nine officers that live in my neighborhood, or are in my command who were either offered an extension or augmentation, I know of one that will stay in the Corps. In the past 2 years that I have served in 1/7, I know that only six have elected to stay on active service.

**1stLt Adam T. Strickland,  
USMCR**

years as a Marine, we will have the Fleet Marine Force manned at over 90 percent! Over 90 percent!!! And these will, in 3 years, be Marines who have all gone through a tougher screening to get in the Corps, a tougher boot camp, a tougher Marine combat training/school of infantry, and be "cohesion Marines." And you say we aren't concentrating on making warriors and on warfighting . . . You are dead wrong!! That is exactly what we have been concentrating on!! For the last 2 years, all we have been working on has been "making Marines and winning battles." You may not see it yet at 1/7, but you better believe it is going to impact you big time! It's going to be the best Corps I'll have seen . . . And I've been in it for 33 years and around it for 54!!!

3. Competition. Again, I find myself having to disagree with you on your facts. The facts are as follows: Marines who outperform other Marines get selected for schools, promotions, etc. Performance counts! If you think it doesn't, take a hard look at the results of selection boards and you will see that performance counts.

And with the new fitness report, that performance will be obvious and count more!!! If performance didn't count, why are some people promoted and others are not? Secondly, those who truly "stand out" often find themselves on a "deep select" list . . . yes, deep select! This is not something that never happens, it happens! It happens at the captain level, at the major, and, yes, even the major general level! (MajGen Bolden was deep selected last year.) So when officers say that performance doesn't count, I cannot agree. I have been in this green machine for too long and know, for certain, that performance counts and counts big time!! You are a 1stLt. To you, performance may not seem to "carry much weight," but wait until you are a captain going for major, then come see me and we can talk about performance. (Of course, you'll have to catch me rocking in my chair in Williamsburg sipping a cool one!)

I know much of what I said probably sounds a bit "sketchy" . . . but think of this. . . this is your Commandant writing you. I've been at this computer for over an hour . . . just trying

to give you straight scoop. If I didn't think that this Corps of ours was worth your effort, your intensity, your dedication, I wouldn't be writing you. But you cared enough to write me your feelings and I owe you for that! If you are as good an officer as I think you are, please don't get out! We, your Corps, needs you. Will it always be fun? No! Will you get frustrated? Yes! Will you make money and live the good life? No! Will you absolutely make the best friends you will ever have. . . and lead the most exciting and challenging life imaginable? Yes!!! Adam, our Corps is about to enter the most exciting time that I have ever seen; it really is. We are holding the standard, holding the line. While all the other Services are caving in to what is politically correct, your Corps is standing tall and firm! Look what we've done compared to the other Services. Just today, the Army lowered its physical fitness requirements for men and women. Your Corps has raised them—women running 3 miles and doing situps, no age limit anymore for the physical fitness test (yes, the Commandant of the Marine

Corps now must run it!!), etc., etc. Be proud of who you are and what you represent! You are the equivalent of the legionnaire of old . . . the Roman Legion . . . holding the gates! Stick with it! And, oh by the way, pick out those good lieutenants that you want on your right and left flank and tell them to stay too! We will need them sooner than later!

One last point. When I was your age and rank, the Corps was populated by mental group 4s. We had massive drug problems, racial problems were rampant, boot camp was 6 weeks long, alcoholics led companies and battalions, etc., etc. It was the 2dLt Carl Fulfords and Tony Zinnis and Frank Libuttis and John Admirers, etc. who swore an oath to "gut it out" and make a better Corps. They did!! Help us make it even better!!

Semper Fidelis,  
**Gen Charles C. Krulak**