



THE 38TH COMMANDANT'S INTENT

Changes of commandants – like all other changes of command – are exciting times for the organization. Changes of command allow us to reflect on accomplishments over the past several years, and look ahead to where we need to go. Over the last four years, given the exceptional leadership of our 37th Commandant, we began to make the necessary changes to meet the challenges in the years ahead. We know we must return to our naval roots because that is what our Nation needs. We gained a better appreciation of evolving threats to assured access of the global commons. We laid a strong foundation for the design and development of the future Fleet Marine Force. We are moving in the right direction. The decisions we make over the next few years will likely shape the Marine Corps for decades to come.

My vision is for the Marine Corps to be manned, trained, and equipped as the world's premier naval expeditionary force-in-readiness; forward-postured with the fleets to deter conflict and respond to crisis; and globally recognized as an elite Corps of Marines of exceptional talent and virtue.

As we look ahead and visualize the Marine Corps our Nation needs, we require the assistance and support of every Marine – those serving and those who have served. My “Commandant's Intent” is framed by five priority focus areas: **force design, warfighting, education and training, core values, and command and leadership**. Concurrent with the issuance of my intent, I am providing detailed instructions to senior leaders in my Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG).

Force Design

The principal challenge facing the Marine Corps today lies in continuing to fulfill our role as the naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, while simultaneously modernizing the force in accordance with the National Defense Strategy – and doing both within the fiscal resources provided. New threats, missions, and technologies drive us to adjust our organizational design, modernize our capabilities, and upgrade nearly every aspect of our training. We will not wait for perfect clarity when it comes to forecasting the future operating environment. Instead, we must focus our efforts on driving change from the tactical level and organizing to adapt.

Adversary advances in long-range surveillance and fires make closer naval integration an imperative. Power projection has been a focal point for Marine forces for many years. Now we must learn how to rapidly transition from a persistent naval forward presence posture to execution

of sea denial or sea control missions. Our Fleet Marine Forces must support the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) and Fleet Commander concepts of operations, especially in vicinity of close and confined seas. Future naval force development and employment must include new capabilities to ensure the Navy-Marine Corps Team can operate and maneuver in any region to advance or protect our national interests, or those of our allies. Marines must focus on exploiting positional advantage and defending key maritime terrain to enable persistent sea control or denial operations. Together, the Navy-Marine Corps Team must enable the joint force to partner, persist, and operate forward wherever and whenever we are called to do so. To meet these requirements, we must redesign our force. This is my top priority as Commandant.

The structure and composition of the Marine Corps of the future may look much different than the force we all first joined; however, the spirit and ethos of what it means to be a Marine remains unchanged.

Warfighting

We must be prepared to handle the spectrum of missions described in the National Defense Strategy and the National Military Strategy. To succeed, Marines must be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces. That is how we deter or defeat our adversaries in support of fleet operations. In crisis prevention and crisis response, the Fleet Marine Force – acting as an extension of the Fleet – will be first on the scene: first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis, and, if required to do so, first to fight. The Marine Corps must always be the force-of-choice – “a certain force for an uncertain world,” as noted by the 31st Commandant. Whatever the crisis might be, our civilian leaders should have one shared thought: send in the Marines.

Operating forward, whether forward-postured or forward-deployed, we remain fundamentally naval and expeditionary in character and identity, as comfortable and formidable on the seas as operating ashore. This requires significant change in our current posture, force development, training, and professional education. With the Navy, we must be able to go anywhere on short notice, into an uncertain and perhaps austere operating environment, ready to respond to the toughest tasks facing the Combatant Commander.

Our Fleet Marine Forces must be uniquely capable of Expeditionary Advance Base Operations (EABO). This emerging operational concept centers on persistent forward naval operations within an adversary’s intelligence, surveillance, collection, and weapons ranges – all without relying on well-developed fixed bases and vulnerable extended supply chains. Our forces must provide the Combatant Commanders and Fleet Commanders a stand-in force capability that can persist while other platforms and formations seek stand-off range. As with any emerging operational concept, extensive experimentation is needed to further refine the organizational structures, weapons systems, and logistics to execute EABO in contested spaces. We must accelerate EABO development and adapt as we learn.

Education and Training

To best prepare Marines for the demands of combat and combat leadership, we must prioritize funding and personnel dedicated to education and training. While different, education and training are inextricably linked. Education denotes study and intellectual development. Training is primarily learning by doing. We will not train without the presence of education; we must not educate without the complementary execution of well-conceived training. As the 31st Commandant noted – “any mission undertaken by the Corps will flow directly from our ability to both train and educate every Marine.” Elite warriors require elite training and education, and we are not there today. Getting there requires substantial reforms in both the organization of our training commands and formal schools as well as the selection of Marines as trainers and educators.

We must change our Training and Education continuum from an industrial age model to an information age model. We need to critically assess how we select, train, and evaluate instructors, and how we inspect our formal school houses. All Marines have the individual responsibility to dedicate themselves to continuous self-improvement – that’s part of being an elite warrior. The Marine Corps has a responsibility to help us get there, but also to hold each of us accountable if we fail to do our part.

Core Values

Our warfighting spirit and character are based on the values of honor, courage, and commitment. The sentiment these concepts evoke are seen and felt in the shared experiences, hardships, and challenges in training and combat and embody what it is to be a Marine – they cannot be mandated, yet live in the collective soul of our Corps. Our rich history demonstrates this ethos and has led generations of Marines to success on and off the battlefield. Because Marines are the centerpiece of the Corps, our first concern must be how we recruit them; educate and train them; instill in them our core values and sense of integrity; equip them; and treat them with dignity, care, and concern.

We are a force rich in history and traditions; however, we cannot let nostalgia stifle our critical or creative thinking. We must innovate and change, but always with a clear sense of what sets us apart as Marines. We are not defined by equipment, aircraft, vehicles, or organizational structures. Our identity is firmly rooted in our unique warfighting spirit, our expeditionary ethos, and our ability to adapt and overcome despite formidable challenges. Marines fight and win, in any clime and place. This is who we are and what we do.

Command and Leadership

The most important thing we do is make Marines. Accordingly, those selected to command Marines have earned our special trust and confidence and are accountable for the decisions and actions of those within their charge. As Commandant, I consider the selection of the best and most qualified commanders my responsibility, and will ensure that Marines have the best leadership possible. When commanders fail to measure up to accepted standards, an immediate change must occur.

I will ensure that Marines are well-led in and out of combat, and taken care of physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Taking care of Marines means doing all we can to ensure that they are mentally and physically equipped for the rigors of combat. “Taking care” also means vigorously enforcing our high standards of performance or conduct. When individuals fail, they must be held accountable, simple as that. Elite organizations do not accept mediocrity, and they don’t look the other way when a member of the team comes up short of what is expected. There is no place in our Marine Corps for those who deliberately misuse their authority to physically or sexually assault another; no place for those who risk the lives of others by operating a motor vehicle while impaired; no place for those who are intolerant of their fellow Marines’ gender or sexual orientation; no place for those who engage in domestic violence; and no place for racists – whether their intolerance and prejudice be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. I will communicate additional guidance to all commanders in the very near future establishing clear guidelines and my expectations.

When an organization has internal problems, the first reaction can be to either elevate the response to the most senior levels or look to the most junior ranks for corrective action. In the Marine Corps, leaders who have the base experience, maturity, and close daily connection to the most junior Marines are our company grade officers and mid-grade SNCOs. Those leaders – officer and enlisted – have my full faith and confidence. I know they are capable of balancing a sincere concern for our Marines’ well-being with an unwavering commitment to our high standards. They have and will continue to set the appropriate example, and must be allowed to lead without the unnecessary interference and micro-management of senior Marines.

I require leaders to provide all Marines the opportunities to lead, educate, train, supervise, and enforce our high standards. Do not encroach on their space unnecessarily. Coach, teach, and mentor, but do not prescribe every action. Our doctrine is maneuver warfare, which depends on commander’s intent and mission-type orders. We should train the way we will fight.

I am deeply honored to be the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps – it’s a great time to be a Marine. There are certainly challenges ahead, but I believe we also have many more opportunities in front of us. Success requires that we all ask and work to answer a handful of basic questions. What are we not doing today that we should be doing? What are we doing that we should be doing differently – a better way? What are we doing that we should stop doing? Marines have always taken pride in being out front, on point, leading the way. We need all Marines in the fight and focused on executing this intent.

Semper Fidelis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. H. Berger', with a stylized, flowing script.

David H. Berger
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction
prohibited without permission.