



20 April 2020

Fellow Marines—

There has been some discussion lately concerning reports that I intend to curtail displays of the Confederate battle flag. I want to provide you my views on this issue—directly.

All of our installations have regulations prohibiting the display of symbols related to hate speech. These regulations are not intended to weigh the value or specific meaning of any particular symbol. Rather, they help cultivate an environment which promotes unity and security by limiting offensive or divisive displays. Leaders must always act thoughtfully when enforcing these provisions because they directly impact a precious constitutional right—the right to free speech.

As Commandant, my primary job is to prepare Marines to fight and win in combat. Winning in combat requires a successful team. From the time Marines enter the force—whether at Parris Island, San Diego, or Quantico—we emphasize that all of our expectations for them relate to their identifying with the team. We train, eat, sleep, sweat, succeed, or fail, together. Our pride in the uniform underscores our bond; it reminds us that we are a Corps; that we prize the team more than the individual. In every facet of every significant endeavor involving Marines, the team has been the primary component. We are a warfighting organization, an elite institution of warriors who depend on each other to win the tough battles. Anything that divides us, anything that threatens team cohesion must be addressed head-on.

I ask every Marine to understand that I fully accept my duty and responsibility to help build this team. That means I must identify symbols or subcultures that degrade the cohesion that combat demands of us. It is not enough to show up; we fight to win. Failure to accomplish our assigned mission has never been an option for Marines.

In this vein, I have determined it is time to act to exclude from our Corps public displays of the battle flag carried by the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. In doing so, I am mindful that many people believe that flag to be a symbol of heritage or regional pride. But I am also mindful of the feelings of pain and rejection of those who inherited the cultural memory and present effects of the scourge of slavery in our country. My intent is not to judge the specific meaning anyone ascribes to that symbol or declare someone's personally held view to be incorrect. Rather, I am focused solely on building a uniquely capable warfighting team whose members come from all walks of life and must learn to operate side-by-side. This symbol has shown it has the power to inflame feelings of division. I cannot have that division inside our Corps.

Marines are committed to Country, Corps, and our fellow Marines. While we serve on this team, we must respect the views of other Marines and embody the priorities of the team. Building strong teams requires seeing things through each other's eyes; walking in each other's shoes. When we do so, it is not uncommon for us to find that ideas we held in our youth, or language we thought was common, was in fact considered offensive and unacceptable to others.

To do my duty and build this team, I must focus on the constant and timeless values that we share with the Navy—Honor, Courage, and Commitment. We must remove those symbols that have the effect of division and not mere disagreement.

I am asking every Marine to focus on the team and the symbols that bring us together—the eagle, globe and anchor. The stars and stripes. Our battle colors. Our MarPat uniform. Team over self: that is how we must operate to fight and win.

Semper Fidelis,

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

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