

MARINE ALUMNI

# Colonel Ray Kelly, USMC to NYPD "Big Apple" Police Chief Applied Corps' Lessons

By CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret)

**"V**irtually everything I learned about leadership I learned in the Marine Corps," reflected retired Marine Colonel Ray Kelly just days before relinquishing command of about 35,000 police officers and more than 15,000 civilian staff in the New York City Police Department.

On Jan. 1, 2014, when Kelly turned over leadership of the largest urban police force in the nation, he retained a unique distinction: He was the first person ever to hold the post of New York City police commissioner during two separate tenures for two different mayors. He was the only person with that distinction until newly elected New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed William Bratton as the new police commissioner. Bratton also had served as commissioner from 1994 to 1996 under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Kelly served under Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg from 2002 to 2013 and under Mayor David N. Dinkins from 1992 to 1994. During Kelly's 47-year career with the NYPD, he was in 25 different commands before being appointed commissioner the first time. He is the longest-serving police commissioner in New York City's history.

It may seem odd that for a cop with such credentials, police work was not his first career choice; from birth, Kelly was destined to be a Marine.

"From the age of 8 or 9, I knew I would go into the Corps. I had no choice," noted the slim and fit 72-year-old Vietnam veteran. The youngest of five children, his three older brothers all were Marines. "They would not have let me do anything else; they'd have given me Indian burns if I hadn't," he said, jokingly.

He was youngest by seven years, so his Marine brothers would return home on leave in uniform, bringing with them Marine Corps memorabilia. "I remember

as a kid reading the 'Guidebook for Marines.' You know, that little green book?" he reminisced. "I still have a couple copies of it."

His brothers were not career Marines. Ray was the only one who would go the distance. After three years on active duty, he transitioned to the Reserve, for a total of 30 years.

he reinforced my interest in the Marine Corps. I've followed his life, and he actually wrote a book about growing up on the west side of Manhattan where I grew up. His brother sent me a copy of the book."

In the end, Kelly figured out a way to have both careers at the same time. Both emerged when he was in college.

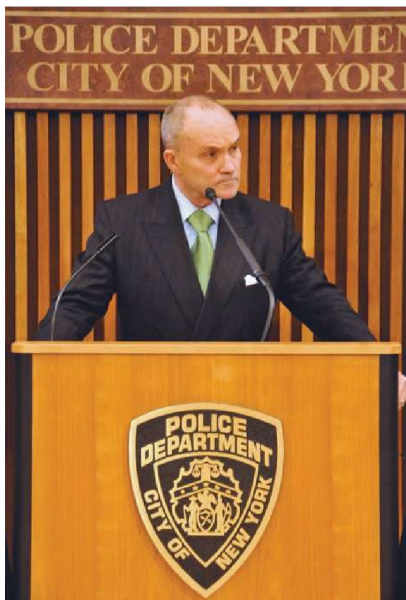
The native New Yorker was raised in Manhattan and Sunnyside, Queens. He was attending Manhattan College and working as a stock boy at Macy's when he saw an ad for the police cadet program and joined the inaugural class for three years. "It was a part-time job in the police department, and it was used as a tool to attract college students to police work," Kelly recalled. In his case, the tool worked because he would come to realize he enjoyed police work.

"It was a velvet trap," he said in an online article published on Veteransadvantage.com. "Responding to calls on a 4-12 [p.m.] tour has all the elements that make it one of the most exciting—and rewarding—jobs."

The idea of a Marine Corps career also emerged during college "and grew on me," he admitted. He said he joined the Air Force ROTC program because it was the only available elective choice besides another class he didn't want to take. "I never intended to join the Air Force," he confided.

In 1962, between his junior and senior years in college, he attended the 12-week Officer Candidates School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. It was a bit of culture shock. "I had never done anything like that," he recalled. "It was very difficult, and in those days the drill instructors were old school, a little different than it is now in terms of physical contact."

He remembered that running was challenging through the hills of Camp Upshur, where he and his fellow candidates spent the first half of the program, after which



**Retired Marine Reserve Col Raymond W. Kelly, a Vietnam War veteran, served the city of New York for 47 years, twice as the police commissioner.**

He remembered a Marine influence from another place: the Boy Scouts. "The drill master in my Scout group was a Marine, a Korean War veteran," he noted, pulling the memory from his days growing up in Manhattan. "He was really squared away, and I'm pretty certain he had been a drill instructor. He was a good guy, and

COURTESY OF MR KELLY

he said they marched down to the main side Quantico base for the remaining six weeks. The Hill Trail and the Hill Trail Extension were two infamous courses he recalled. "I don't know if they still exist now, but I remember that they were tough."

In order to get into the police cadet program, he had to pass the test to become a police officer. He actually served in that capacity for a brief time before he entered the Corps after graduating from college in 1963 with a commission to second lieutenant.

He shipped out to The Basic School (TBS) at Quantico and went on to become an artillery officer going to Camp Pendleton, Calif., with the 11th Marine Regiment. He deployed from Pendleton to the Republic of Vietnam for 12 months with 2d Battalion, 1st Marines.

"There were a lot of difficult days," he told Veteransadvantage.com about his Vietnam tour, noting that some of the most difficult came during an engagement, coincidentally called Operation New York, from Feb. 27 to March 3, 1966. That was an operation against the Viet Cong east of Phu Bai involving U.S. military and Army of Vietnam forces.

"We trapped a VC battalion on a peninsula," he said in the Veteransadvantage.com article. He described how his battalion encountered heavy resistance as they tried to rout the enemy. Kelly said that he witnessed the courage of young Marines who exposed themselves to enemy fire to go to the aid of fellow Marines. "To put someone else's life before your own personal safety embodies the essence of courage," the article attributed him saying.

"I still use the lessons I learned in the Corps every day," he said, stating that the



**Police Commissioner Ray Kelly was the Grand Marshal of the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, March 17, 2010. (Photo courtesy of Ray Kelly)**

lessons have formed the foundation of his career or rather careers.

After release from three years of active duty, Kelly joined the Marine Corps Reserve and served with the 6th Communications Bn in New York, starting in 1966. At the same time, he started working for the NYPD. Not known for half-stepping, Kelly graduated from the New York City Police Academy with the highest combined average for academics, physical achievement and marksmanship. About the same time, he returned to college, at-

tending law school at night.

Over the years, Kelly has achieved an impressive curriculum vitae: a B.B.A. (Bachelor of Business Administration) from Manhattan College, a J.D. (Juris Doctor) from St. John's University School of Law, an LL.M. (Master of Laws) from New York University Graduate School of Law and an M.P.A. (Master of Public Administration) from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He also has a cornucopia of honorary degrees from a dozen colleges and universities.



COURTESY OF RAY KELLY



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**In 1992, Mayor David N. Dinkins (above left) appointed Ray Kelly as the New York City police commissioner where Kelly served for more than a year. Then, in 2002, Kelly returned to his position as the city's police commissioner, reappointed by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg (above right), becoming the first person to hold the post for a second, separate tenure.**





COURTESY OF RAY KELLY

As commissioner, Ray Kelly oversaw the operations of the largest police force in the country and promoted coordination with numerous police agencies to provide a safe living environment. In this photograph, he is chairing a meeting with the Northeast Corridor Coalition, which meets to help secure the Amtrak rail line between New York and Washington, D.C.

Kelly's career outside the NYPD has been equally impressive, including senior managing director of global corporate security at Bear, Stearns & Co. Inc.; commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service; and undersecretary for enforcement at the U.S. Treasury Department where he supervised the department's enforcement bureaus including the U.S. Customs Service, U.S. Secret Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. He also held posts in INTERPOL, the world's largest international police organization.

During those assignments, he earned numerous prestigious awards, including the Alexander Hamilton Medal for Exceptional Service and the Exceptionally Meritorious Service Commendation from President Bill Clinton. The latter was awarded to Kelly after serving as director of the International Police Monitors in Haiti, a U.S.-led force responsible for ending human rights abuses and establishing an interim police force there.

His background paved the way for noteworthy meritorious service in his recently completed post as NYC police commissioner. Some of his accomplishments as

the commissioner include establishing the first counterterrorism bureau of any municipal police department in the country, establishing a new global intelligence program and stationing New York City detectives in 11 foreign cities, lowering NYC crime rates by 40 percent under his tenure and no further terrorist attacks occurring in NYC.



COURTESY OF RAY KELLY

As a Marine, 1st Lt Ray Kelly served a one-year combat tour with 2/1 in Vietnam beginning in 1966.

Kelly returned for his second tour as NYC police commissioner just after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. When Mayor Bloomberg offered him the opportunity, he didn't hesitate. "I wanted to get back in the game," he said in a CBS interview. "After the events of 9/11, I felt a little bit helpless not being in government."

Among the many antiterrorism measures he implemented was the first counterterrorism bureau of any municipal police department in the country: 4,000 cameras monitored by police officers observe life in the Big Apple minute to minute. NYPD police officers who answered directly to Kelly were stationed at nine countries outside the United States, assuming responsibilities for counterterrorism that normally were considered a federal-level function.

"Not everybody was happy about that," Kelly noted with a shrug of his shoulders during the CBS interview, addressing critics who said he was overreaching his authority. "That's life—you have to do the things that you think are right. This is a total-immersion job. You either do it, or you don't do it."

At least 16 potential terrorist attacks on New York were thwarted under his watch.

Below left: After leaving active duty, Ray Kelly went back to school and also became an NYPD patrol officer. He rose from cadet to commissioner.

Below right: New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly discusses the city's public transportation with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano at NYPD Headquarters in Manhattan, Feb. 18, 2009.



COURTESY OF RAY KELLY



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Kelly said he plans to be on the speakers' circuit after leaving his commissioner's post. His new career path also has led to a visiting fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations, an independent, non-partisan membership organization that is widely known as a think tank and publisher focused on foreign-policy choices facing the United States and other countries. His focus will be on counterterrorism, cybersecurity and other national-security issues.

Through it all, his Marine Corps background and experience have formed the foundation of his day-to-day approach.

"I have the 14 Marine Corps Leadership Traits taped to a page divider in my scheduler on my desk, and every day I look at it," he said. "I don't necessarily focus on it every day, but it is there, and I find that

it's a good reminder of how to do things: with integrity, with unselfishness, with courage and so on. It sort of centers me to go through the list and say, 'That's the way I should be; those are the leadership traits I should exhibit.'"

Kelly keeps close ties with the Corps and said he believes it is as good today as it has ever been, if not better. "The Marines that I meet, and I meet a lot of them, are smart; they're in shape; they're technically proficient and know their jobs," he asserted. "I have contact with the Commandant and the generals, and I'm very impressed with them. In my mind, there's no other service like the Marine Corps in terms of teaching you discipline and leadership skills and the things that you need to succeed in this complex and demanding world that we live in.

"It's not for everybody. It's clear that the Marine Corps is not a service for every individual. But for people who want to test themselves, to challenge themselves and see what they can do in some very demanding circumstances, it's the service for them because if you succeed, I think it gives you a lasting confidence and the ability to handle just about anything that comes up."

In spite of his many scholastic degrees, the basic lessons Ray Kelly learned in the Corps remain at the forefront. "You could teach hours and hours of courses on these things, but the leadership traits sum it up," he noted. "You use your Marine Corps training every day, but you're not necessarily conscious of it. The Marine Corps has a terrific way of teaching it and giving you fundamentals that lay such a foundation that it stays with you. ... It seems to work for me."

*Editor's note: Leatherneck appreciates the support of former deputy director of the Marine Corps Association and great friend, retired Col Lou Piantadosi, in making the interview with Col Ray Kelly possible.*

*Author's bio: The author, CWO-4 Randy Gaddo, USMC (Ret), was a combat correspondent as an enlisted Marine and later a public affairs officer. He retired from active duty in 1996 and now is a contributing editor for Leatherneck. He also is the winner of the 2014 Marine Corps Heritage Foundation's General Roy S. Geiger Award for best aviation feature published in 2013.*



COURTESY OF RAY KELLY

**Commissioner Ray Kelly and two NYPD Cricket league members celebrate the cricket league, which was formed by the New York City Police Department for teenagers from the Caribbean and South Asian-American communities in New York City to develop better relations between New York police and rising-immigrant communities in NYC.**