
Chapter 2.

Preparing for the Future

What battles lie ahead? What mission is next? Where will our country need us in ten years, five years, a few months, or tomorrow? Those are the questions the Marine Corps faces and, as the country's force in readiness, must be prepared to answer. Being prepared is not a new concept to Marines, but many of the threats in this modern and digital age are new. Future battlespaces will be vastly different from those of the past.

Marines must prepare to fight in the next great conflict. This necessitates training in a wide range of environments—to include the jungles, littorals, mountains, and urban landscapes—in all weather conditions. It also means that Marines must be prepared to create or exploit information

It is our obligation to subsequent generations of Marines, and to our Nation, to always have an eye to the future—to prepare for tomorrow's challenges today.

—General James T. Conway⁴

advantages in all warfighting domains, to include space and cyberspace. As such, training in the future will always differ from that of the past.

During the two decades of the Global War on Terrorism, Marines were surrounded by sand but far from any beach. After years of honing their capabilities in land-based combat operations, the

entire organization has proven proficient in that particular form of warfare. However, employing the skills that brought them success in the Middle East will not guarantee success in the next conflict. Marines must take the lessons they learned from past conflicts and adapt them to stay ahead of the ever-changing nature of war. However, past victories are just that—in the past; attaining victory on the battlespace of the future will require developing new skills and tackling new challenges.

Almost every piece of equipment and weaponry in the Marines' arsenal undergoes continuous update and advancement. The most crucial pieces of hardware—the bodies and minds of Marines—cannot be neglected. General James Mattis said, “The most important six inches on the battlefield is between your ears.”⁵ The enemies of the United States of America are continuously changing and preparing for their next encounter with Marines. Centuries of existence have brought many changes to the Marine Corps, but the goals—fighting and winning the Nation's wars and making Marines—remain the same.

FIRM GOALS AND FLEXIBLE METHODS

ALL MARINES message 042/00 published *The Vision Statement of the U.S. Marine Corps* and listed making Marines, winning the Nation's battles, and creating quality citizens as fundamental to achieving that vision.⁶ Since then, numerous Marine Corps publications and media have listed those three actions as the most important things the Marine Corps does for the United States. Each task requires continual evolution and innovation. The Marine Corps must regularly adapt to new information and technology, changes in society, the changing goals of various

adversaries, and evolving global politics. To meet the ever-changing demands placed on the Marine Corps, force structure changes are routinely required. Resizing units, reshaping force distribution, and reequipping Marines, while keeping hold of the purpose and mission of the institution, will ensure every demand is met with the required talent and equipment. The types and activities of war may change, but the fundamental nature of it remains the same: two wills clashing. The Marine Corps' role in everything from warfighting to humanitarian disaster assistance will also evolve, and Marines will continue to train for every likely and unlikely scenario.

Today's Marines—not some faceless “them” or “they”—will shape tomorrow's Marine Corps. All Marines are responsible for having the courage and initiative to make necessary changes. Taking an active role in making the Marine Corps a better, more effective organization keeps it functioning at the highest levels.

MAINTAINING OUR REPUTATION

The past 50 years have seen the Marine Corps prove itself time and again against some of the most bitter foes in the most austere locations around the world. Marines prepare for the future by studying history and learning from warfighting successes and failures.

Marines cannot be satisfied with average training, preparation, or performance. Having the reputation as the Nation's force in readiness carries with it specific responsibilities for every Marine, from the highest to the lowest individual level.

The Corps benefits when it attracts, and remains attractive to, Marines from a range of backgrounds, and thus, diverse perspectives and talents. Research in behavioral economics illustrates that teams with diverse perspectives and modes of thinking solve problems faster and more creatively. In this way, diversity provides us a competitive warfighting advantage over our adversaries, particularly those who place a premium on uniformity of thought.

—Talent Management 2030⁷

In garrison environments, Marines should find the connection between their daily habits and the larger operational picture. Tsunamis, terrorist attacks, non-state actors carrying out their malevolent plans, and other events can occur at any moment around the globe. Therefore, it is imperative that each Marine, unit, and command maintain a proactive, forward-thinking mindset regarding training, planning, and current operations. A Marine should ask, “Is my training preparing me for the fight; am I training for the fight in order to fight as I have trained?” Marine leaders might also ask, “Am I mentoring junior Marines and providing novel solutions to problems?”

The focus of the Marine Corps and the embodiment of being a force in readiness is an individual mindset. For example, one Marine’s attempts to increase personal run speed may have a minimal effect on that individual; however, the effect of many Marines improving their run speeds greatly influences unit readiness. Critical factors make the difference between being the victors or the vanquished, between saving a life or losing one,

between watching a family greet their Marine with hugs and kisses after a deployment or watching them receive a folded flag.

The missions, battlefields, and requirements of the Marine Corps continue to change. As the Nation's force in readiness, the Marine Corps has been and must continue to be adaptable—to improve, learn, and adapt to the changes occurring in the United States and abroad. This mission will test the resolve of Marines on all levels of leadership, as the Corps challenges its Marines to become the best versions of themselves, developing both professionally and personally. Such development is continual, through professional military education, off-duty studies, reading, audio books, podcasts, and other media. Every improvement makes the individual and the Marine Corps better. If the Marine Corps is to succeed in future theaters of operation, today's warfighter must be a continually adapting, continually learning Marine.

As Marines gain experience, they pass their knowledge on to others. In his book, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*, General James Mattis wrote, “By traveling into the past, I enhance my grasp of the present.”⁸ There is value and purpose in knowing and learning from the past, but where does that leave the future? The Corps that was created in 1775 little resembles the Corps today. Still, despite the changes that have taken place over hundreds of years, the Corps and the individual Marines within it continue to succeed. Through periods of growth and reduction, changing missions, and increasing demands, Marines have adapted to remain relevant and necessary.

It is impossible to say what the Marines in the future will be required to do. Humanitarian aid was not a consideration when

Marines were wading onto the shores of Nassau in 1776. Jungle warfare was not a concept to the Marines marching toward Tripoli. When First Lieutenant Alfred Cunningham convinced the Marine Corps to send him to flight school as the first aviator, no one foresaw jets landing on the decks of ships in the middle of the ocean. Conducting operations in and through the information environment could not have been envisioned prior to the 20th century. However, in every situation that has come to pass, we have seen Marines “improvise, adapt, and overcome.” Former Commandant General Charles Krulak wrote about the importance of this in his article, *The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War*. In it, he describes a hypothetical situation where a Marine is faced with an increasingly dangerous situation requiring assessment and action of known and unknown threats. Several problems present themselves at once and each requires a different form of response. General Krulak writes:

[Marines] will be asked to deal with a bewildering array of challenges and threats. In order to succeed under such demanding conditions they will require unwavering maturity, judgment, and strength of character. Most importantly, these missions will require them to confidently make well-reasoned and independent decisions under extreme stress—decisions that will likely be subject to the harsh scrutiny of both the media and the court of public opinion. In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and will potentially influence not only the immediate tactical situation, but the operational and strategic levels as well.⁹

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* states: “War is both timeless and ever changing. While the basic nature of war is constant, the means and methods we use evolve continuously...Drastic changes in war are the result of developments that dramatically upset the equilibrium of war...”¹⁰

To face new threats, there must be a goal—a vision for the Marine Corps as a whole. After multiple decades focusing on the Middle East our gaze must be drawn to the possibilities of fighting in different, diverse, and austere regions and the capabilities that will be needed for each. The Marines of today and the Marines still to come must be solution-focused, solving problems they come across or anticipating them before they arrive. Marines with a foundation of character based on the institution’s core values and principles will continue to earn the reputation of the Corps and rise to meet the future needs of the Nation.