

# Who We **ARE**

**In an ever-changing, ever-dangerous world, the Marine Corps remains a constant in our nation's defense: Always faithful. Always ready.**

**By General James F. Amos,  
U.S. Marine Corps**





**F**rom the American Revolution to Afghanistan (this month marks 237 years) Marines have played a key role in the warfighting heritage of our nation. Yet, the Marine Corps is but one arm of a strong team. On the modern battlefield, no element of the joint force fights alone. I am fortunate to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with my fellow service chiefs—each leading their respective branch, each representing the world's finest. It is with pride that Marines take their place among those warriors. Each service fills its unique role in the joint force, but none can win without the others. In fact, this tightly integrated, multi-domain capability is the very essence of what makes the U.S. joint force so powerful.



Marines and amphibious naval forces operate in an expeditionary lane that makes use of position and tempo across the physical domains. The Marine Corps' special role in the joint force remains grounded in our ethos. Indeed, *who we are* shapes *what we do*, and *how we do it*. To Marines, the intertwined nature of our spirit and our actions is so natural that we struggle to tell our story in any other terms; it is the service-defining principle that has brought victory on hundreds of battlefields. What matters most about the Marine Corps is not its warfighting methodology, but its warfighting philosophy. To understand the role of the Marine Corps in the nation's defense, you have to start with the individual Marine.

## Making a Marine

We are United States Marines. We have carried a tradition of honor, courage, and commitment since 1775. Marines have fought in large wars and small, smoothly adapting to the nation's needs and demands. The adaptability of Marines to challenges in every clime and place is a hallmark of our Corps. We have fought pirates, insurgents, regulars, and irregulars. We've fought them in the air, on the ground, at sea, and in cyberspace. We are expeditionary, tough, disciplined, and always faithful. We have a well-earned reputation for directness, but this belies a subtlety and complexity in our warfighting.

We serve. We are proud to defend a great nation. In the information age, the headlines come from all continents, and at all hours. Yet, while tyranny rises and falls, while injustice spreads, while innocents are threatened and global stability is challenged, Americans are confident of one thing: their Marines stand ready. Americans need a force that is ready to move to the sound of chaos. Our leaders need a ready force that can be committed at a moment's notice to buy time for strategic decision-making. Wherever and however our citizens, allies, or interests are threatened, this nation needs a force ready to respond to today's crisis with today's force . . . today. In special partnership with the world's finest Navy, Marines are that force.

We make Marines. What happens on the parade decks at Parris Island and San Diego, or in the hills of Quantico, is what makes us Marines—it is the hardening of body and mind, the infusion of discipline and the casting of an indelible esprit de corps. Marines come from all walks of life, every race, every ethnicity, and both genders. *E pluribus unum*: from many, one. We take the best young Americans and shape them through a crucible of tough training. From diversity, a uniformity of character and discipline emerges. We temper them in core values—honor, courage, and commitment—to make them resilient. We polish

U.S. MARINE CORPS (BRYAN NYGAARD)

**The Marine Corps today may have the latest weaponry and equipment, but its core strength has always been the individual Marine, the author says. The service's spirit and principles, he asserts, make Americans confident of one thing: their Marines always stand ready. In a photo that captures a sense of that readiness, Corporal William Cox provides security for an MV-22 Osprey preparing to take off in Afghanistan's Nimroz Province in December 2011.**

them to a razor-sharp edge, honing them with a dedication to duty that makes a Marine willing to serve, willing to sacrifice, willing to fight. We instill in young warriors the idea that one succeeds by being part of a team, serving a cause greater than one's self. "Marine" means living hard, executing any mission, no matter how austere the conditions. "Marine" means leaders who are trusted, biased for action and accountable. "Marine" means men and women who know that to lead is to serve. "Marine" means being always faithful to the nation and one's fellow warriors . . . it is a moral imperative that drives Marines, from fire-team leader to Commandant.

We prevail on the battlefield; any battlefield. "The Marines have landed and the situation is well in hand." Our success is founded on one thing: the Marine Corps ethos and its manifestation in the individual Marine. For Marines, failing to achieve success is unthinkable; personally or professionally. Over centuries, the courage and fortitude of Marines have made household names of places like Belleau Wood, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, Khe Sanh, Kuwait City, Fallujah, and Marjah. That legacy continues, revealed in places like a tsunami-ravaged Japan, an imploded Libya, a flooded Pakistan, a shell-shocked Beirut, and a Taliban-infested Helmand Province in Afghanistan. We are proud of our heritage, and sometimes wear our pride on our sleeves. I do not

think the nation would want it any other way, for we are America's Marines.

We make our nation strong. Building Marines is an investment in the character of our citizenry. The Marine mindset draws from the special characteristics of the American people, and they are rightly proud to be reminded of the virtue that lies within them. The large number of Marines who have gone on to be successful CEOs, entrepreneurs, astronauts, university presidents, and political leaders gives evidence that selfless service, disciplined character, strong values, and mental toughness stay with a Marine long after he or she takes off the uniform. Today's young Marines represent the strength of our youth, the legacy of our elders, and the pride of our nation.

## A True Naval Partnership

The men and women of the U.S. Navy are our essential partners across the expanse of conflict. In a "single naval battle" approach to warfighting, the combined capabilities of the Navy-Marine Corps team provide for a smooth application of naval power across multiple domains. In a well-choreographed combined-arms capability, the Navy-Marine Corps team uses the advantages of all domains to project naval power across the full range of conflict. We give the joint force the ability to rapidly mass combat power in unexpected places, the resiliency to operate

under austere conditions with a low footprint, and the ability to apply discriminating target selection when operating among the people. We also provide the flexibility to rapidly return to the sea when the mission is complete. Together, the naval services provide the ability to gain access and project power across domain seams, and through the full range of military operations.

The Navy-Marine team is the essential element in the security of a maritime nation with global responsibilities. As an inherently multi-domain force, the amphibious ready group/ Marine expeditionary unit (ARG/MEU) team represents a microcosm of the warfighting jointness that makes U.S. force so effective. We think of this special naval team as the Swiss Army knife of the joint force. We move over



The author says the Marine Corps takes the best American youth and shapes them through a crucible of tough training, while instilling in them "the idea that one succeeds by being part of a team, serving a cause greater than one's self." Here, drill instructor Staff Sergeant Bryan Reza corrects recruit Kevin D. Dezelske during bayonet training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California.

U.S. MARINE CORPS (CRISTAL DRIERY)



the seas, providing forward presence without a heavy footprint or large infrastructure ashore. We fly advanced strike aircraft, but can operate them from distributed locations and austere infrastructure. We use advanced ground weapons, but employ them in small numbers, integrated into combat formations that are infantry at their core. We often operate from the sea, but easily transition via air and surface into the vital human domain ashore. We move rapidly over global distances, but have the inherent sustainability that marks a truly expeditionary force. The operating tempo of our sailors and Marines in the ARG/MEU cycle has remained high throughout a decade of conflict, and we are not coming close to meeting the global demand for these flexible and utilitarian forces.

## Ne Cras . . . Not Like Yesterday

In the 1950s, the American defense establishment was in an era of transition, on the other side of the Cold War from where we are today. In 1957, our 21st Commandant, General Randolph Pate, reached back to first principles to guide the evolution of the Corps. He posed this question to his staff: “Why does the United States need a Marine Corps?”

In response to his query, Commandant Pate received a lengthy reply from one of his young brigadier generals, Victor “Brute” Krulak, (a hero in his own right, and the father of a future Commandant) that included the following:

The American people believe three things about their Marines:

- They believe when trouble comes to our country there will be Marines—somewhere—who, through hard work, have made and kept themselves ready to do something useful about it, and do it at once.
- They believe that when the Marines go to war they invariably turn in a performance that is dramatically and decisively successful—not most of the time, but always. Their faith and their conviction in this regard is almost mystical. The mere association with the word “Marines” with a crisis is an automatic source of encouragement and confidence everywhere.
- They believe that the Corps is downright good for the manhood of our country; that the Marines are masters of a form of unfailing alchemy that converts un-oriented youths into proud self-reliant, stable citizens—citizens into whose hands the nation’s affairs may safely be entrusted.

Although written in the vernacular of the 1950s, those ideas still resonate with Americans today. The Marines are ready. When Marines are turned loose on a problem they always find a way to emerge victorious. Americans still trust that, regardless of the chaos, friction and turmoil they read in the headlines every day, their Marines remain vigilant—a rock of strength against an ocean of uncer-



The men and women of the Navy are Marines’ “essential partners,” often working together in what the author says is viewed as “the Swiss Army knife of the joint force”—the ARG/MEU team. Here, a Navy chief directs Marines of the 31st MEU as they fight a simulated fire on board the USS *Denver* (LPD-9), part of the *Essex* ARG conducting operations in the Pacific in March.

tainty. *The Tonight Show*’s Jay Leno perhaps spoke for all of America just days after the 9/11 attacks when he said “Now it’s time to send in the Marines to settle the score.”

But clearly, the security environment of today has changed. Our nation has a more complex role than it did in the 20th century. The threats to our nation come in different shapes and sizes—many that would be unrecognizable to previous generations of Americans. Wily opponents have adapted to the conventional dominance of U.S. forces, and have demonstrated themselves to be intelligent, cunning, and brutal. They operate among the people, making them difficult to defeat through precision fires alone. Those types of challenges lack the simple clarity of preparing for conflict with a conventional opponent, but they reflect the realities of the age. The enemy gets a vote. As much as we desire peace, events will continue to compel U.S. involvement in conflict. This is the world as we find it, and this is the world for which we must be prepared.

Our 32nd Commandant, General Charles Krulak (Brute’s son) spoke of the Roman pro consul Varus who handily defeated Germanic tribes in the northern edge of the Empire. Returning some years later when trouble rose

again, he was soundly defeated by these same tribes. He lost his legions and his life. “*Ne cras. Ne cras,*” he was heard to mutter— “Not like yesterday.” An adaptive enemy had learned from its earlier defeat, while the Romans had learned little from their own success. Our world is full of adaptive threats; thinking foes with no special reverence for the technical capabilities of the U.S. joint force. The largest potential obstacle to future success will not be declining budgets, but failing to recognize a changing world; our success will be measured in how much we learn from our past, how well we observe the changing

three physical domains, but their integration was a tenuous thing. Today, we employ a level of sophistication in the joint force that was not available in the 1950s. Today, the presence of tightly-integrated, multi-domain capabilities in the joint force makes the whole stronger, more resilient, more adaptable, and more effective.

Today, we understand that jointness is a warfighting philosophy—not simply a bureaucratic organizing principle—something missing from the discussion in the 1950s. The strength of that joint force is its smooth application of multi-domain capabilities against any opponent. It is the continuous asymmetric projection of power to defeat conventional or unconventional foes alike that is our emerging way of war. While we often still think of physical domains—land, sea, and air—we also recognize that the complexity of modern conflict has expanded into new realms. As we have discovered through a decade of increasingly complex conflict, thinking solely in terms of physical domains limits the effectiveness of the joint force. Jointness demands a philosophy of full-range warfighting, not a simplistic segregation of capabilities into organizational stovepipes. It demands we consider all of our actions through the lens of their effect in the human domain, the most important of them all.

The utility of a force that is comfortable in each of the physical realms is a key advantage, but the necessity of a force that can operate swiftly across the seams of modern conflict is compelling. In Marine warfighting philosophy we call it combined arms. Our ethos creates an individual flexibility of mind, a strength of body, and a firmness of character. That code under-



U.S. MARINE CORPS (JENNIFER M. BALEZ)

**Marines readily adapt their legacy of service in combat into the realm of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief—often in conjunction with naval forces—around the world. These Marines of Combat Logistics Regiment 37, 3d Marine Logistics Group, III Marine Expeditionary Force, load food at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Okinawa, for delivery to tsunami-ravaged Japan in March 2011.**

characteristics of warfare, and how we anticipate the ways our enemies will choose to challenge our national interests and the joint force. These enemies, observant and cunning, have studied our every move on the modern battlefield. Industrial-age opponents have evolved information-age capabilities. *Ne cras.*

## Excellence in Joint Warfighting

In the 1950s, Commandant Pate’s question was an especially hard one to answer. The appeal to sentiment reflected in Krulak’s response was a reflection of the times. The services, including the newly independent U.S. Air Force, were defined by their physical domains. Operational thought was linear and sequential. We prepared to fight conventional opponents, dominating them through advanced technology. We expected them to fight against us in a similarly conventional way. Operations took place in

writes an institutional cohesion built on tacit understanding. It is how a well-drilled squad beats an all-star team every time. Our specialization is smooth and tightly integrated multi-domain warfighting: jointness—from the bottom up.

## Now More Than Ever

*Marines provide a stabilizing presence.* America’s forward strategy for maintaining the global commons, preventing regional conflict, and countering threats to our interests will rely on engagement by forces that tread lightly on partner-nation sovereignty. Marines are part of an on-scene naval presence that demonstrates America’s commitment to be there for its allies when troubles threaten.

*Marines deter aggression.* The faction-leader in an urban slum or a mob converging on an embassy are not effectively deterred by the idea of a missile strike from over the horizon, or a force that could arrive in a month.

The deterrent effect of the Navy-Marine Corps team poised to immediately discharge an armed force on the ground is real, ready, and relevant.

*Marines swiftly defeat aggression when deterrence fails.* Marines operate comfortably in the “time” domain, and our timeline is today. The ability of Marines to rapidly intercede gives the nation the ability to contain crisis at its lowest levels. The same amphibious capabilities that provide tactical deterrence aggregate together, along with maritime pre-positioned ships, to project naval power in a hurry to places that matter.

*Marines assure littoral access.* Modern anti-access and area-denial capabilities make the broad strategic flexibility of the U.S. joint force even more important than before. The integration of expeditionary capabilities into a counter-A2/AD strategy gives options to the joint force, greatly complicating the enemy’s choices, especially when conflict unfolds in unexpected ways. A full-range naval force provides precision fires and counters enemy action in the human domain. It strikes the global interests of a threat outside a local conflict area, and disperses capability across platforms and to austere sites. That flexibility gives the joint force options to asymmetrically dictate the terms of conflict rather than symmetrically respond to threat actions.

*Marines are ready for the threats of tomorrow.* Consistent with our ethos, Marines will continue to adapt to the demands of the emerging security environment. Today, Marines routinely launch operations from the sea from hundreds of miles over the horizon. Tomorrow, the modern Marine air-ground task force will provide the capability to distribute fifth-generation strike capability across multiple flight decks and expeditionary airfields. It will deny key terrain to the enemy, defend the terrain of allies, defeat proxy campaigns, or project advanced defensive or offensive strike capabilities.

When the nation pays the sticker price for its Marines, it buys a triple-purpose force, one that has the ability to operate in a stabilizing role, respond immediately to any crisis, and if/when necessary, to rapidly scale up to meet the requirements of a major theater war. For just 8 percent of the defense budget, expeditionary naval forces provide an efficient and effective hedge against both the nation’s most likely and most dangerous security challenges.

## Coming Full Circle

After 237 years, our role still begins and ends with the Marine. For more than two centuries, Marines have



U.S. NAVAL INSTITUTE PHOTO ARCHIVE

Marines do not know where, when, or whom they will next be called on to fight, the author notes, but is certain that when the bugle sounds they will be ready. Battlefields may change over time, he says, but the vigilance and readiness of those who answer that call today is indistinguishable from that of those who went before, such as these riflemen of the 7th Marine Regiment at Chosin Reservoir in Korea more than 60 years ago.

responded to change in ways both timely and timeless. While our concepts, training, and equipment have adapted, our fundamental character has not. Against these complex enemies, Marines remain physically strong, mentally agile, and imminently practical warfighters. The cohesion, fidelity, and expeditionary mindset of Marines have proved a recipe for success. Americans of an earlier era might not recognize the battlefields of today, but they would recognize the warriors in whom they have entrusted their security. They would recognize the special role that a forward-deployed, ready force plays in our nation’s defense.

Americans still believe the same things about Marines that they did in 1957, and they are right to do so. Marines will continue to live hard, train hard, and fight hard, providing the nation with a ready capability to contain the crisis, plug the gap, or hold the line. We do not know where we will fight, but we know that we will be ready when the bugle sounds. We do not know whom we will fight, but even the toughest adversaries have not proven our equal. We do not know when we will fight, but we are ready to leave tonight—it has always been that way.

We will remain . . . Semper Fidelis. ❖

---

General Amos is Commandant of the Marine Corps.