

IDEAS and ISSUES

We welcome candid, professionally oriented articles on matters of interest to Marines, particularly ideas that would enhance professionalism in the Marine Corps. Length: 500-1,500 words; double space. Comments on articles published in the *Gazette* routinely appear in the Letters or Ideas and Issues sections three months following publication of the article.

Education

The Military Society: A Novel Idea For Professional Military Education

by BGen James R. Davis

The formation of the Military Society puts into place one more piece of the professional military education mosaic.

"... sunbursts of creativity in operational techniques and material development are the manifestations of the intellectual efforts of a long line of Marine Corps dreamers—corporals, captains, and generals. They were sometimes misunderstood, but they were men, who as Eric Hoffer said, tried to 'think beyond the moment; live beyond the day.'"

Victor H. Krulak,
First to Fight

The evolutionary nature of warfare necessitates equally evolutionary changes in military thought if armed forces are to remain adequately prepared for an uncertain future. This dynamic provides the basis for change in the curriculum and teaching methodology at Marine Corps professional military education (PME) schools. It also explains why, in July 1991, the Marine Corps University founded the Military Society. This article outlines the intent, conceptual framework, and functioning of the Military Society with the hope readers will better understand recent developments in military education and perhaps become personally involved in new ways.

Intent

The intent of the Military Society is to nurture a desire for the voluntary, after-hours study of warfare with other

professionals who share a mutual interest in military matters. By providing a group forum for exchanging ideas and studying the profession of arms, individuals with diverse backgrounds are united for professional seminars under the auspices of the Marine Corps University. For example, the two Quantico chapters meet twice a month and thus provide several opportunities a month for instructors and students from all schools, as well as Marines from tenant activities, to exchange ideas. At Camp Pendleton, aviators from Marine Corps Air Station El Toro join staff officers from I Marine Expeditionary Force and commanders from 1st Marine Division for seminar discussions on topics of professional interest chosen by the group.

Concept

Professional military education has been the catalyst of Marine Corps innovative thought for almost a century. It is not possible to trace the history of amphibious warfare, unification debates after World War II, vertical envelopment, counterinsurgency ideas, warfighting philosophy, or Marine air-ground task force doctrine without crediting the seminal role played by students and faculty assigned to Marine Corps schools. Understandably, this educational heritage continues to inspire



Marines to seek formal schooling at successive career stages. Unfortunately, limited resources make this prohibitive for most. While the number of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) attending formal schools has increased in recent years, the same is not true of the officer corps. Regrettably, less than 50 percent of the officer corps attends resident schooling after The Basic School (TBS), and it is not uncommon for those officers to experience 8- or 10-year gaps between their assignment to formal schools.

Collectively, these factors have prompted the Marine Corps to invest heavily in professional self-study programs to complement resident instruction. Professional self-study is PME accomplished by Marines outside the formal classroom environment to broaden their professional foundation in warfighting. Examples include the professional reading program, nonresident courses offered from the Marine Corps Institute (MCI), civilian education, and participation in the dialog carried on in professional periodicals. The Military Society now provides another venue for expanding one's professional horizons.

Most Marines are familiar with the professional reading program and MCI's correspondence programs. The manner in which the Military Society complements unit PME, however, may require an explanation. Unit PME is a commander's personal education program for the command. In many units, it consists of weekly officer, SNCO, and NCO schooling. Although the format of these sessions varies widely,

they generally focus on leadership issues or warfighting topics that relate directly to the unit's mission, standing operating procedures, doctrinal questions, or wargames. A common characteristic of unit PME is that it occurs during the workday as part of the training schedule, and as such, it is subject to the vagaries of operational tempo.

With this in mind, it becomes apparent how unit PME and the Military Society serve as mutually supporting programs. Generally speaking, even the best unit PME programs in the Marine Corps will not routinely incorporate diverse occupational specialties outside those assigned to the unit. This limits exposure to emerging ideas in other occupational fields. The Military Society is not tailored for unit-specific needs, and its sessions usually encompass a broader range of general warfare topics or Service issues. By blending the two programs, the advantages of one offset the disadvantages of the other.

Functioning

Military Society chapters are being activated wherever sufficient local interest surfaces. Currently, there are six operating chapters (see Figure 1). Membership is open to all ranks, including retirees, civilians, and the sister Services. To join, an individual must agree to annually write a paper on a warfare topic of personal choice. The paper must be presented to the local chapter for discussion and critique. This requirement is designed to ensure the Society surpasses "idle talk," contributes to the development of thinking and writing skills, and helps Marines become more comfortable with the offering up of ideas for professional scrutiny.

In addition to writing and discussing papers, members are exposed to new ideas by inviting outside experts in a particular warfare area as guest speakers. In September 1991, for ex-

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Camp Pendleton, CA	LtCol Peter A. Dotto 1st Marine Regiment 1st Marine Division Camp Pendleton, CA 92055-5503 W- AV 365-7105/7002	Marine Barracks Washington, DC	Maj Ronald L. Bailey Marine Corps Institute Marine Barracks 8th and I Streets Washington, DC 20013 W- AV 288-4110

Figure 1

ample, the Camp Pendleton chapter hosted Mr. Rich Atkinson, author of *The Long Grey Line*.

Although a set of bylaws provides broad parameters for Society operations, local chapters are afforded wide latitude to conduct their own affairs. Each chapter elects its own officials, determines the frequency of meetings, and decides on its own discussion topics. The points of contact of each chapter are in periodic contact with each other to provide a flow of ideas among chapters and a link to the University as desired.

The Future

Upon completion of the multimillion dollar research facility under construction at Quantico, Military Society members, and in fact all Marines, will be able to conduct research from their local commands via worldwide data links. Marines at Camp Butler will be able to write professional papers as thoroughly documented and researched as action officers at Headquarters Marine Corps or students attending U.S.-based formal schools. Additionally, a central database will be established so

members in one chapter can access a paper written on a related topic by a member in another chapter.

Summary

The Military Society strengthens professional self-study in the Marine Corps by fostering a conducive climate for studying warfare. It is another PME tool and not a substitute for formal schools, unit programs, correspondence courses, or individual reading. Yet, the idea of a unified Marine Corps necessitates the integration of Marines in an "off campus" learning environment. Marines around the globe need not wait for the next planning conference to share ideas with aviators, logisticians, and combat arms Marines. Moreover, great benefits will result when personnel from the supporting establishment and operational units in the same geographic locale come together to study their profession. Let's take advantage of this opportunity, Marines!



>BGen Davis is the president of Marine Corps University.

Quote to Ponder:

On Change

A brave man is not afraid of anything, not even a new idea.

—Robert Patterson

Quoted by LtGen Philip D. Shutler
at Marine Corps University Society
Meeting, Quantico, VA, January 1992