

34th Commandant's Priorities

I don't start any conversation without talking about our number one priority, and that is our Marines in contact, our Marines at the point of the spear.

— General James T. Conway, 34th CMC

We are a Nation at war, and **our Marines and Sailors in combat remain the number one priority**. We will continue our focus on the following:

- Achieve victory in the Long War
- Right-size our Corps to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio in the active component
- Provide our Nation a naval force that is fully prepared for employment as a MAGTF across the spectrum of conflict
- Reset and modernize to “be most ready when the Nation is least ready”
- Improve the quality of life for our Marines and our families
- Rededicate ourselves to our Core Values and warrior ethos
- Posture the Marine Corps for the future

1. *CMC Bullets* are recent remarks by the 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps. **The intent of this document is to enhance and synchronize the institutional communications of the Marine Corps.** Each passage or quote is annotated, with the date, location, and audience of the speaking engagement appearing in the footnote. Where necessary, brackets are used in the text to clarify, provide additional context, or identify another speaker or reference by CMC when unclear. ***CMC Bullets* is not for citation or use in publication.** For more CMC communication, visit the [Strategic Communication \(SC\) Website](#) and the [Commandant's Home Page](#).

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CURRENT EVENTS

My biggest problem as Commandant is I've got 150,000 Marines who want to get to Afghanistan.

— General James T. Conway, 34th CMC
Town Hall, MCB Hawaii, 5 March 2010

IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, AND PAKISTAN²

I mentioned Iraq to you just briefly. We advocated, as early as probably two or three years ago, that the fighting was essentially done in Iraq and our Marines there were providing the role of a nation-building force. We were doing advise-and-assist functions.

That message has essentially gone through the works and today, we have 150 Marines or so in Iraq, down from a standard load of about 26,000. Again, I think that's a good thing. Many of you will be coming out under a victory pennant. We have done what we were sent there to do by our nation.

We started to see the change about the end of 2006 – when the Sunni tribal chieftains came to us in the Anbar province and said, we have had it up to here with the al-Qaida. They have a murder and intimidation campaign at work, taking out our women, our children in some cases, through their lack of responsibility.

They've offered us a 15th century lifestyle that we in no way find attractive and now they want to intermarry our women. Maybe that was the last straw, but in any event, they came to us and said if you will join with us, we will slaughter them. And they were good to their word. And so the Awakening was begun and it spread throughout the country.

And then the goodness in all of that is that it has showed the rest of the countries in the region that the al-Qaida and the extremists can be beaten and that moderates will once again take over their religion. And so you have other nations in the region in more covert fashion with their security forces doing just that. And so that is an essential ingredient in the early stages of this long war.

We're not there, of course, in Afghanistan. I think that Afghanistan today is probably where Iraq was in 2004, 2005. And so we've got some ways to go before we get over that security hump there and start to think about perhaps one day coming out of there. We are in, once again, the worst province in the country. We drew the short straw in Anbar; we drew it again in Helmand.

2. The below is from: CMC Remarks, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 20 May 2010.

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Helmand is the birthplace of the Taliban. We're trying to win hearts and minds of the parents of the people that we're fighting. It's going to take a while. **They're going to have to understand that we are indeed the strongest tribe and that we're not going to leave until this fight is won, and that the Taliban, if it's going to be an effective organization, needs to be a political organization, not a militant organization. Ergo, the efforts towards reconciliation.** But we think that there's going to be a lot kinetic activity to get us to that point in time and we're certainly not there yet.

We're in the worst drug province in the whole region. That Helmand River Valley is rife with opium crop, and it's problematic for us. We're having to deal with farmers who actually made a mistake. Before Marja, they thought they could plant the opium and have a traditional harvest this year. That didn't happen because we now own that turf and we didn't allow for that kind of a harvest because it's money that flows into the pockets of the Taliban and the associated al-Qaida.

So young men, in some cases, women, like you are out there paying the farmers a minimal amount of funds to bury the crop or burn it or somehow dispose of it rather than see it carted away by the Taliban. The estimates are somewhere between \$80 million and \$400 million a year – a wide range; I got it – but in any event, a lot of money going to the Taliban. And we simply cannot allow that. So our people, although they're combat leaders, are also agriculture experts in their duties in the counterinsurgency environment, trying to make sure that the farmers understand, you are going to have to plant other things.

We, a collective “we,” have to do something about the Afghan government. In that region of the world, corruption is much more rampant than it is in most quarters of the globe. But the fact is, if we witness last year's effort against the poppy, the government sent out teams and these teams were told where they would go and they were told where they would not go with their effort.

Absolutely unacceptable from our perspective. No way in the world that we can accept that as a legal form of government that we one day hope to turn over to, responsibility, as we start to, again, pull down. It's above our pay grade. We can't do a lot about it except let people know what happens where the rubber meets the road in terms of the execution of the government's policies.

The fact is, though, it's part of our doctrine that you've got a responsible government that you turn over to, that you train to do the best you can with their security forces and then you start to look at departing the AO. We've got a ways to go. **We can be wildly successful in Afghanistan and it wouldn't matter if the Pakistanis across the border weren't having some measure of equal success.**

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Now, if I talked to you all a year ago, I would not have been very optimistic about that because they were not showing a great deal of progress. The fact is, though, that has changed. In the last year, there have been two fairly major operations that the Pakistanis have run. The first one, I believe, they actually achieved operational surprise in an era – at a time when that’s hard to do.

They simply went into the attack one morning, did not build up forces, did not bring in supplies and ammunition, did not threaten, did not talk to the local tribal leaders. They just moved and then they did those things in the wake of catching the enemy off balance. And they killed a lot of bad guys and they chased them out of some areas up on that Afghan border. This last fall, once again, they went into an attack in a different region near the border.

Normally – we’ve see them do that in the past – normally, they’ll withdraw when the weather gets bad and the snow gets into the passes. This year, they issued a weather kit. And if you follow it closely, as of course, we do, about every other week or so, they kill large numbers of those people and in the intervening week, they’re rounding up the leadership and locking them up.

I really believe that Pakistan now accepts that those people represent an existential threat to their nation and they’re doing something about it – not as much as we would like, but they’re doing a heck of a lot more than they were, again, as much as just a year ago. So we’re encouraged by that.

RIGHT-SIZING THE MARINE CORPS AFTER AFGHANISTAN³

Are we going to see a decrease in size of the Corps? Now, the answer is, I think absolutely. **Right now we’re 202,000 Marines. That’s our wartime footing.**

Historically we’ve ranged somewhere between 175,000 and 188,000. And, in fact, I’ll tell you, as recently as yesterday afternoon I had a meeting with our three-stars talking about the budget and some of the things the Secretary of Defense is saying about the budget and the fact that we need to make some assumptions in terms of what that size of the Corps is going to be when we start to come down.

We don’t want to do it prematurely. I mean, I’m not talking out of school but I’ll tell you that the chairman of the JCS initiated a conversation in the Tank probably two weeks ago now about maybe reducing our force structure and saving some money; that gets to our personnel costs, investing that someplace else.

3. CMC Remarks, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 20 May 2010.

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We're not dreading the conversation – that was our response back to him, at least Army and Marine Corps – one day, yes, but not today, okay, because we're just now achieving 1-to-2 [deployment to dwell]. We're just now getting to the point where we can sustain this for a long time. And until we're past that security hump, if you will, and seeing good things happen, we don't even want to contemplate.

Our personnel costs are 57 percent of the Marine Corps budget. That's a lot. And we've been told that when we do downsize we could probably keep that money for some other things. So there will come a time when it makes sense; it will be a good investment and we'll want to do that. What that size will be, I don't know. If I were to snatch a finger out of the air today, 188,000. How about that. That's still big enough that we can do more if this long war continues but not so small that we become irrelevant.

So I think you will see a downsizing probably in your time in the Corps. If it's like what we've done in the past it will be very logical. It will be drawn out, not abrupt, and people will understand, have a chance to make plans, make determinations and those types of things. We owe that to your Marines, both officers and enlisted. And I fully think that it will happen but also that it would evolve over time when it makes sense to do so.

THE DEFENSE BUDGET CRUNCH⁴

The secretary's budget review, of late, is extremely interesting. There for a while, we were scratching our heads saying, okay, we're trying to see the implied guidance here, and we're not quite sure what it means. But he has been more, I think, directive in recent weeks in telling us what it is he wants to do. I think it won't come as a surprise to you, he feels like that we can get 1 percent real growth over the FYDP – not a lot, when you consider where you are and the fact that the nation's at war.

His concern is that if you crank in sort of the cost of inflation at 2 to 3 percent over that same period, what you've got is a net reduction. And he wants to, I think, fence off or set aside certain core requirements, competencies that the department has, not least of which, again, is winning this fight we're in. And so he's got to find savings in order to be able to do that. And we're looking at excess overhead, some of those types of things that are nice to have, but perhaps not have-to-have types of items that have sprung up while, as he would say, the gusher has been flowing.

So that's our most recent tasker – take a look at all those things, see what we can trim and try to get him and the Department about \$15 billion a year. That's the target. Now, this information that I'm providing to you is sufficiently recent that we don't yet have a service target. I think PA&E is working those right now. We should get something in hand pretty soon

4. CMC Remarks, Company I, The Basic School, Quantico, May 11, 2010, and CAPSTONE, The Pentagon, May 24, 2010.

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that tells us, this is your portion of the pie. And we'll be active in trying to see just what we can do to provide.

We're going to have to [reset and reconstitute our force and get back to training in our core competencies] in an area of declining dollars. If you've been listening to our Secretary of Defense, the warning signals are pretty dramatic. A month ago, he was talking about 1 percent real growth in the Defense Department's budget until this war is done. The secretary obviously has had some conversations with some people in the White House because his attitude and his verbiage has changed dramatically.

First saw it about three weeks ago at what he calls a large group meeting for all the service chiefs and a number of his staff. A number of combatant commanders are brought in to talk about all manner of things. But he gave us some concerns and cautions at that point that we're probably not going to see 1 percent real growth on through the rest of the – in the future. In fact, it's probably going to start to take a nosedive. Started couching it in terms of hard decisions that our country has to make.

Well, if you've read his speeches or listened closely over the last few weeks, it's gotten even more intense. So I really think that what we're seeing out there is a period in time where we're going to be in a war, trying to keep the all-volunteer force viable, trying to prepare for the future and doing it with less dollars.

Now, we're Marines. We're used to doing it with less dollars. I honestly believe there's a lot of waste out there that can be tightened up and things that can be done to make you better. We just got to get after the right kinds of things: You all have seen it. I believe today if we sent General McChrystal or maybe Petraeus a directive that said, cut 15 percent of your contractor costs, we could do that and not give back a bit of the way this war is being conducted. We could probably send him the same message next year and in the process, save a lot of money.

When the president announced that he was sending 30,000 additional troops, the computation was \$1 billion for each thousand troops. That's not what it takes to send that number of Marines and soldiers into the field. That is a lot of money. A lot of it is going down the construction and contractor kind of rat holes that we don't get back in any way. So I honestly think that there's a lot of money there that can be saved before we start looking at some very valuable programs that we have in the out years that are going to continue to keep us strong.

But the fact is we're all going to have to understand that in the terms, again, of Secretary Gates, the gusher is being shut down. There will be money but not nearly amounts of money that we've seen in the past. And y'all are going to live through it, but you're just going to have to respect that and say, okay, how do we move forward.

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Thank you for the question. About five years ago – I wasn't party to it – but five or six years ago, we decided to do less with GS workers [federal employees] and go to contractors because it saved money. Six years later, we're being told, get rid of your contractors and go to GS workers because it saves money.

Hey guys, this is confusing the children. You know, it is understandable, I think, in some ways, with this all-volunteer force hard at work, that we use a lot of contractors services. You all have seen it, where we take a major from your outfit and send him to be an IA for a year. Who's doing his job? And in a lot of cases, the CO says, well, I don't know who's going to do his job. I'm going to contract it out to this outfit and we're going to have a guy sit at that desk. He's going to do the best he can for a period of time.

It's nothing major; it's just sort of the nature of your question. You know, the contract police at the gates are not MPs, and so we accept a lower standard, but that's because our MPs are one of those low-density, high-use MOSs. And we don't want our MPs to get worn out, so we find a way to work around it. I think the answer to your question is, there will come a day, when everybody's back, that we say, okay, do we really need all this help? And the answer is, I think, probably going to be no.

There may be a day before that where we say, we just can't afford it and maybe we just have to go short with that capacity because, again, contractors are eating our lunch, literally. I'll tell you, when MEB Alpha got into theater, I was saying, "we're expeditionary." We're going to go there and live hard because this is Afghanistan. Hell, when I visited, the brigade commander told me when he got there, the contractors were matching us 1-for-1.

They beat us there! They lived expeditionary, I guess, for a while, but when we got there, they were actually living pretty good again. We can't afford to do that forever. So I think that my – in fact, my recommendation, my best military advice to Secretary Gates – is going to be before you start cutting away people or programs, let's start tightening our belt.

I think that what we see happening in Afghanistan, and certainly what we saw when we got back to Anbar in Iraq was wasteful. You know, 5,000-calorie meals three times a day, your choice of six main courses is not what we need in a combat environment. If we went to soup and salad and sandwiches every other day, we'd save no telling how much money. And still, you would gain weight.

I just – there's a lot of waste out there. You see the Toyota parking lots with all the light-skinned vehicles that these people drive, all that takes fuel, all that – you know, these guys are making twice what we're making, spending a year over there at a lot less the risk in most cases. So how long – you know, if we're going to be in an era affecting budgets, how long can we continue to do that? So if I sound like I have a little bit of a case of the jaws with the contracts, you're right.

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NEAR TERM ISSUES: "R4"⁵

We've got coming, in the very near term, what I would call R4: **reset, reconstitution, regaining** some of our core competencies and then **right-sizing** the Marine Corps, when the time comes for us to actually start, I think, what will be inevitable draw down of forces. The reset and reconstitution is expensive. Our gear is being left in theater and it's being burned up at a rapid rate – in some cases, seven times more than ordinary peacetime use.

And we're starting to see a gap between what we had been paying for through the largesse of the Congress and what our continuing need is. So we've got to stay on top of that, lest we be caught at a point in time when the gates slam shut and we're just not ready for that next engagement – very big issue.

We've got to regain those core competencies that we lost being the world's finest counterinsurgency force. We also represent to this great nation has expeditionary capability, fast, austere and lethal when the nation needs that. And yet today, it's a fairly hollow promise. Today, we don't exercise those kinds of things, so we've got to get back into where we were – any enemy, anytime, anyplace in defense of this great nation.

And eventually, we have to right-size. One of my priorities coming in was to right-size the Marine Corps as we went up that ladder in terms of numbers of Marines. I think the day will come when we've got to look at how far down do we go. I think 170,000 is way too low; 202,000 is probably way too high for a peacetime Marine Corps. Somewhere in between, there's a right number out there and you young ladies and gentlemen are going to have to help decide what that number looks like. What should our sustainment force be for those uncertain years that we face?

CONCERNS ON THE HORIZON⁶

Folks, Annette and I are very shortly going to close out what will be 40 years in the United States Marine Corps and four incredible years as the commandant of that service. It's been a wonderful life for us. We've raised three strong children that now have families of their own, within that service. It's a tremendous organization and we've met some truly astonishing people. So we leave with a smile on our face, but I'll admit to this audience, we go out with a little bit of a furrow on our brow because we consider that we've had it very, very good. We see some concerns on downrange.

5. The following is from CMC Remarks, Marine Corps Association Foundation C4 Awards Dinner, Crystal City, Virginia, April 29, 2010.

6. The following is from CMC Remarks, National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) Annual Award Dinner, McLean, Virginia, April 28, 2010. At this dinner, CMC received the Dwight D. Eisenhower Award. For more on the event, see: <<http://www.ndia.org/meetings/Pages/AnnualEisenhowerAwardDinner.aspx>>

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And some of you young people in the audience tonight and the folks here from industry are going to have to engage those concerns. First of all, I truly think that our country continues to be at risk from those who would attack our innocent women and children on our home shores. We lost 3,000 people on 9/11, but as Gordon England, the former secretary of the Navy, used to say, we didn't lose 30,000 or 3 million only because those people didn't have the capacity to do that.

I think as each day passes, that capacity, unfortunately, in some ways, grows stronger. And so I think we all have to keep our guard up to defend the men and women and children of this great land. I think that our country has tough choices ahead. There are going to be hard choices out there because of our fiscal picture. And I think that our military is going to have to be a part of those hard choices. And it may well be that we don't have everything that we want, but only what we have to have.

And we will have to cut away some capability and do without some things that we think are absolutely essential to the various missions that are out there on the side. We don't know how long this long war is going to last. But the fact is, the enemy strategy – his grand strategy – says if it takes 100 years, so be it. And we will continue to attempt to attack, we will continue to attempt to bankrupt the United States and Western Europe.

And in some ways, you could argue that the enemy is on plan. We've got to disrupt that. We've got to kill or capture, we've got to get at the basic fault lines that are there that are causing this intense hatred to exist in major populations in the world. And you folks in industry are going to have to help.

We have an expression in the Corps that we sometimes have to do more with less, and I honestly think that's what we face in the not-so-distant future. As monies get tight, we're going to have to look at equipment sets that are entirely interoperable, lighter, cheaper, ideally, but will nevertheless get the job done to defend this great country. And so I think those are some of the challenges out there that we all face in the next years and arguably, decades.

The great thing about our country and the thing that gives me, I think, tremendous encouragement for the future, is that we have a great young generation at work today. They're in Iraq and they're in Afghanistan tonight. They're from all the services, and they're on the high seas. They're in places where we're not in conflict because they love this great land here. Tonight, I accept your very gracious award on behalf of those – of that generation who wear this uniform. God bless you all, and thank you very much. (Cheers, applause.)

HEALTH OF THE FORCE

HEALTH OF THE FORCE UPDATE⁷

If you had asked me to cite the condition of the Marine Corps in 2010, after nine years of war with an all-volunteer force, I would have predicted “not very good.” The force just isn’t built to do that. But the fact is, I am very pleasantly surprised and I would tell you folks that it’s pretty doggone good. I think there are some cultural factors that help us, compared to, perhaps, some of the other services. We do seven-month deployments – seven months gone, seven months home, and then turn it around and go back and do it again.

And we tend to get people out of our operating forces after about three years. You’ll take your turn, over about a three-year period, but then you’re going to go to what we call a B-billet. You’re going to go to training or recruiting or a headquarters somewhere, take a break, spend some time with your family, get used to sleeping in your own rack. And then you’ve got to come back and do it all again in about three years. Unlike our brothers in the Army – if you talked to a soldier that says he’s done three tours with 3rd ID, do the math. One-year, 15-month tours – he’s there six, seven, eight years.

So we’re just different in that regard, and in some ways, I would argue better, because our families and our Marines certainly seem to enjoy the seven-month deployment. Again, that certainly seems to work well for us. We track about a dozen figures – metrics, if you will – each month to try to help keep a finger on the pulse. And they’re the things you might expect: UA rates, desertion rates, child abuse, spousal abuse, suicides, divorces, alcohol abuse, and sexual assault.

Except for suicide, which is doggone serious to us and doesn’t appear to be trending better as we start this year, sexual assault and alcohol abuse, our figures today are the same or better than they were in 2001. If you look at re-enlistment and enlistment, our enlistment figures are just over the top. I mean, we’re at 99 percent high school graduates.

Frankly, I don’t want to go to 100 percent, because I still want the opportunity out there for this inner-city kid or someone from my home state, who does not have a great secondary education system, to be able to come into the Corps and be a squad leader if that recruiter can look at this young man and say, you’ll be a great squad leader in three years.

7. CMC Remarks, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 20 May 2010, and CAPSTONE, The Pentagon, May 24, 2010.

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I got it that you can't pass the ASVAB, but you graduated from high school; you were a fullback and linebacker on your football team; and you'll be a great damn Marine. We've just got to get you through boot camp and get you on the road. We need that kind of flexibility and we keep that in a percent or a percent-and-a-half not being 100 percent high school graduates.

Last year, we closed out retention for both the first-term force and the career force halfway into the fiscal year. This year, we're going to do it in about six months [for the first-termers] and nine months [for the career force]. Part of that's bonuses, I got it, but the bonuses are helping us keep the sergeants in the rifle squads even beyond their three, three-and-a-half years in the operating forces. That tells you – it should tell you; I think it tells me – that **our Marines enjoy what they're doing. They feel like they're making a difference.**

In **officer retention**, we calculate, on an annual basis, that nine out of 10 – 90 percent – will stay past their initial contract. In fact, 94 percent are staying past their service contract. Nine-and-a-half of our officers out of 10 want to stay with us to see this thing through. Again, I find that very encouraging.

However, what we've found ourselves having to do is create what we call career designation boards. The old name was augmentation. But the fact is, this year, we will convene the first one in a while, and 85 percent of our young officers will be invited to stay, to continue what could be a career. The other 15 percent, we will encourage to join us in the Reserves, where we have a little bit of an officer shortfall anyway. But the fact is, we're being driven to that, based upon the fact that great, young Americans want to keep doing the job they're doing in taking this fight to the bad guys.

We say that we recruit a Marine, but we actually retain a family. We have put a lot of money, as has the Army in particular, into **family service programs**. What the retention figures tell me is that, especially for the percent of the Marine Corps that's married – and that's about 48 percent – that Sally looks at that piece of paper and says, you know, they value me; they're trying to take care of me when you're gone; it's okay if you sign on for another three, four, five, six years – you fill in the blank. Because I think we realize if Sally decides she's going back to Texas, Jake is going to follow, sooner or later. That's the way that normally happens. That's our thrust; that's our effort. By all indicators, it seems to be working.

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Marines are drinking too much. We're seeing some fairly significant growth in our DWI/DUI – states have various definitions of it – but driving while intoxicated. I don't know if it's got to do with the deployment cycle or what it is, but you're going to see that out there and you're going to have to take measures to curtail it. We don't want to end it completely. Happy hour has its purposes in any Marine officer's club. But done to excess, done on a binge kind of a basis, it is not good for officers or troops. And yet, it is something that we're seeing increasing.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT⁸

CMC ON LEADERSHIP

What I thought I ought to do in a lecture on leadership is offer you, perhaps, just a few tidbits of what I would call Marine Corps leadership, and I think that they are probably applicable almost regardless of the things that you decide to do in life.

The first of those is **integrity**. You must be, in life, a man or a woman of character. First and of foremost importance, where I come from, is that you must maintain your integrity. Now, let's talk definitions for just a moment. Integrity is, you don't lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do. That's my definition. That's the Marine Corps definition of integrity and I hope yours is somewhere close to that. But your integrity is critically important to you as you go through life.

Your integrity is, in addition to your word and your handshake, is better than any contract that you can sign, because then people will believe in you. If people cease believing in you, that what you say is honest or accurate, then you'll never be believed again. So you must go to whatever lengths necessary, young men and women, to protect your integrity. Keep it close. Hold it dear. You can make a lot of mistakes in our Marine Corps, but the one you dare not make is to compromise your integrity. If you have done that, then you are of little or no use to us as we go forward.

Secondly, **you need to be able to expect the unexpected in life**. Life is full of surprises. We have a saying that no plan of action survives first contact with the enemy, so you have got to be prepared to move to rapidly to another course of action. Keep your options open. Develop the mentality that says, I will be adaptable. When things change, I'm not going to sit there and cry and cuss and complain; that's a waste of time.

I'm going to look at the alternative courses of action that will still achieve what it is I need to do, and I'm going to move on. I'm going to get traction. So you've got to be adjustable. You can't simply absorb the blows and say that well, all is lost, and I need to go jump off a bridge. Be thinking about, how else can you get that done and get after it?

Third, **in the absence of orders, attack**. By that, I'm saying to you, be bold and be aggressive, but also be smart. We follow orders *for somebody*. What they think is important. What it is that they want you to do is your mission; what they see as mission completion is your end state. Get some idea of where the boundaries are – how much latitude do you have.

8. The following is from CMC Remarks, Principled Leadership Symposium, The Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, March 18, 2010.

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In that construct, be aggressive. If others would wait for another set of instructions, blow past them, because you know your mission set and you know what your boundaries are. Stay on the attack. **Our society rewards those who show initiative.**

Lastly, it's a simple phrase, but it's got tremendously symbolic importance: **Officers eat last.** Here in our Corps, and I think, really, all of the U.S. Armed Forces, we have these little meals that come in plastic. Yeah, they're okay for a while, but they get kind of old after a while. Most of you, I'm sure, have had them. And we used to relish when the warrant officers and the company gunny brought food to the field – hot food – from the mess tents.

Now, in combat, it's the same thing. A good, hot meal will do wonders for morale. But invariably, there's not enough, or the lads are just hungry. As the leader, you make sure that those that are doing the hardest work get fed first. **Take care of your troops, is the message here.** There are lots of times when officers and I have had coffee and scraps of bread, but that's all right, because those that need the sustenance are getting it first.

Take care of your people; they'll take care of you. And there's no limit to how high you can sail. For those who join us, we welcome you with open arms. For those who choose to do something else in life, we ask for your support. It is a military that needs the support of the nation. The number one question in the minds of the troops is always, "Is the country behind us?"

Q: Sir, you talked about the essential nature of integrity for an effective leader. And I just wonder what advice you might have for this next generation of leaders, in terms of, how do they maintain their personal integrity, even when no one's looking?

CMC: Ma'am, that's the definition of integrity. Doing the right thing even when no one is looking. And you know, you've just got to follow your gut. I talk to every class of new general officers, and the very first leadership point I make with them is, just do the right thing. We don't talk in terms of integrity; that would be insulting to the people that have reached that position in life. But you still have to do the right thing.

Sometimes it's harder; sometimes it takes longer; sometimes it's more expensive. But you have got to do the right thing. Otherwise, it can be a tremendous embarrassment to yourself, to your service, to your family. And at the flag officer level, you can get a lot of attention when that type of a thing happens. So it is also true at the second lieutenant or the NCO level as well. Just do the right thing.

Your instinct, your upbringing, should tell you what that right thing is. You've got to listen to your instincts and just realize that, you know, this is the person that I want to be. And you know, I once had somebody tell me, once you violate your integrity, everything else is easy. (Laughter.) You've got to avoid getting to that point, you know?

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And again, the problem is that you don't get to restart that clock. Once you step over that line, there is not another line, and you don't get the chance to step back. So you've got to protect it; you've got to hold it dear and treasure it.

ADVICE TO A NEW LIEUTENANT

Q: Good morning, sir. **What advice do you have for a new lieutenant, sir?**

CMC: You're going to be accountable. We're going to give you a certain level of responsibility. We're going to give you some tremendous young troops. And you're going to lead them and execute that responsibility.

We're going to expect you to lead by example; don't ask your troops to do anything that you're not prepared to do yourself. In the end, we're going to hold you accountable for that platoon and for accomplishing your mission, and for your leadership. And so that's, perhaps, something that young men and women need to understand about our Corps. It's an important part of what we do.

Now, you don't have to do it by yourself. My very first platoon, very first day, out at Camp Pendleton, I made a mistake. I'll tell you about it. I had met the platoon commander, who was a Marine staff sergeant. He had been in command of the platoon for about six months. We had a great conversation for about an hour-and-a-half. I said, "How soon can I speak with the platoon?" He said, "This afternoon." That's exactly what I did.

That was my mistake, because I was new to them; they were new to me. And I had, probably, half a dozen great, young NCOs in that platoon and I had not spoken with them. I had not given them the respect to their position to talk with them – my squad leader and a couple of my team leaders – after I spoke to my staff sergeant.

Later on, when I took command of the 106mm Recoilless Rifle Platoon, I spoke to the platoon sergeant, who was actually a gunnery sergeant, and I also brought in my squad leaders and team leaders. We sat down and had a great conversation. *Then* I spoke with the platoon. These guys were all in the front row, and they had great body language. I talked about some of the things they thought were important, with regard to where we were going to take that platoon.

My point to you is that, I think almost regardless of service, you're going to have some incredibly dedicated and talented young men and women who are your NCOs and staff NCOs. Use them. Work them hard. You'll be new and without experience; they'll be older and with experience. What a great team. Go out together and work some miracles.