



FRAGO 01-2024

"MAINTAIN MOMENTUM"

39TH COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

APRIL 2024



PREFACE

Marines, thank you for your service and sacrifices. The entire Marine Corps, active, reserve, civilian Marines, and our families continue to serve with the honor and commitment familiar to all who have ever earned the title, "Marine."

Prior to my confirmation as the Commandant, I issued White Letter 1-23, which confirmed the direction and momentum of our Corps' aggressive modernization, experimentation, and campaign of learning. I've had some time to reflect over the past few months and remain firmly committed to our current path. This Frag Order serves as a bridge between White Letter 1-23 and a forthcoming Commandant's Planning Guidance that will be released when I deem it appropriate. First and foremost, I aim to communicate my vision for **Who We Are, Where We Are Going, and How We Fight.**

WHO WE ARE

We are unique among the militaries of the world. First and foremost, we are a warfighting organization. We exist to fight and win our country's battles. Everything we do should center around that goal. The character of war may change, but its nature never will – it is the violent struggle between two irreconcilable wills. That struggle is where Marines thrive. We ask for nothing more than the chance to be First to Fight.

Ironclad discipline is the currency of our Corps. Steadfast adherence to our standards sets us apart and gives us a decisive advantage in combat. Discipline is, and has always been, the foundational part of warfighting – and that starts in garrison. The more we sweat in peace, the less we bleed in war.

The standards we enforce are Marine Corps standards. They are consistent and universal across the Corps, and all Marines will meet them. Our Marine Corps Orders outline the high standards that govern all essential aspects of our profession, and our NCOs, SNCOs, and officers maintain those standards. We will not lower our standards – ever. We do not ask young men and women to join us, and we do not promise them an easy life – we **challenge** them to **try out for a place in our Corps**. Those who compete to become a Marine, and who can meet and sustain our standards, deserve our best leadership. We are a proud meritocracy which welcomes all and judges them based on one thing: **do you have what it takes to earn the title, "Marine."**

We are a learning organization. Whether pushing the boundaries of warfighting development to the point of failure, or simply making an honest mistake, I expect our leaders to turn failures into opportunities for growth and development. A zero-defect mentality has no place in our Corps – it stifles boldness, initiative, and runs counter to our warfighting doctrine. Just as we turn a poorly planned training exercise into a lesson learned in our campaign of learning, when appropriate we will give our Marines – both junior and senior – a chance to redeem themselves when they fall short.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

Force Design set us on a critically necessary path – one that will continue. In White Letter 1-23, I outlined my top five priorities of 1) Balancing Crisis Response and Modernization, 2) Naval Integration and Organic Mobility, 3) Quality of Life, 4) Recruit, Make, and Retain Marines, and 5) Maximize the Potential of our Reserves. Those priorities remain at the heart of my strategy and the direction for our Corps, and are not in order of precedence. How we achieve each priority will require a delicate balancing and deliberate application of precious resources where, and when, they will do the most good.

By **Balancing Crisis Response and Modernization**, we will align and synchronize our Force Design advancements, while remaining unwavering in our commitment to persistent, global forward presence and our Marine Expeditionary Units. The changing character of war does not eliminate the need for forward deployed forces; we will continue to provide our Nation with world-class naval expeditionary forces deployed forward to campaign closely alongside our Navy shipmates. Our deliberate campaigning activities – both at sea and ashore – allow us to proactively posture our forces to deter malign actors, respond to crises, and provide our Nation's leaders with strategic decision space. Despite the threats that come from operating inside an adversary's weapons engagement zone (WEZ), forward-deployed Marines have outsized influence to shape the operational environment and cause our adversaries to think before committing to a course of action. Should they choose to fight, Marines will be ready with the best training and modern tools necessary to defeat them in combat.

To effectively balance crisis response and modernization, we must articulate the importance of Operations and Maintenance funding of ground and aviation training, maintenance, safety, and readiness; emphasize the importance of a predictable, adequate, sustained, and timely budget to fund modernization programs; advance our logistics capability, which is the pacing function; advance the role of our installations as power projection platforms; and continue to prove that when the Corps is provided a taxpayer dollar, we can show exactly where and how it has been invested in things that matter to our Nation.

I remain fully committed to the Force Design Campaign of Learning and all of its supporting efforts. The following assumptions will inform our modernization efforts.

1. The long-standing trend of increasing dispersion on the battlefield will continue and likely accelerate; frontages will increase, battlefield depth will increase, and sanctuary will be difficult to achieve.
2. Winning the all-domain reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance fight provides significant warfighting advantage. Losing this fight will be increasingly difficult to overcome.
3. The Marine Corps' ability to task-organize for specific missions will continue to be a source of competitive advantage for the service.
4. The future operating environment requires threat-informed modernization of Marine Corps capabilities.

To advance **Naval Integration and Organic Mobility**, we will maximize the potential of the Stand-In Forces and their contribution to the Joint Force, while remaining organically mobile, survivable, and sustainable within the littorals. We have been naval in our nature since our founding, and this key attribute is written into the laws which govern our Corps. By focusing on Naval Integration, we are reiterating our commitment to our naval heritage and reaffirming its relevance to our future. Effective naval integration involves naval forces fully prepared to compete, fight, and win with naval force offerings to Combatant Commanders, supported by Naval Doctrine and aligned with the Joint Warfighting Concept. We will staunchly advocate for and be unambiguous in our requirements for a mission-capable amphibious force, to include the following: the greatest possible readiness of the existing Amphibious Warfare Ship inventory; no fewer than 31 Amphibious Warfare Ships procured through cost-saving block-buys; two-year centers for LPDs and four-year centers for LHAs; and the criticality of the timely production of 35 LSMs and, in the interim, a Littoral Maneuver Bridging Solution.

The Amphibious Ready Group / Marine Expeditionary Unit (ARG/MEU) remains our crown jewel, and our Amphibious Warfare Ships are **the key enabler** of our critical missions of campaigning and crisis response. The ARG/MEU remains in high demand by Combatant Commanders, partners, and allies; our ARG/MEUs are powerful campaigning tools used to respond to crisis, build partner capacity, and prevent escalating events from turning into a larger conflict. Amphibious Warfare Ships enable our global, persistent presence – that presence has been the guarantor of peace and worldwide prosperity for the better part of the last century. More, the inherent mobility, flexibility and lethality of our amphibious forces enable them to hold potential adversaries at risk globally – providing Combatant Commanders and National leadership with a wide range of tools to deter, respond to crisis, or fight and win. As such, we will continue to advocate for our Amphibious Warfare Ships, including a littoral shore-to-shore capability, that enable us to be present at the decisive moment.

As we improve our Marines' **Quality of Life**, we do right by our Nation's most precious resources – our Marines, and we retain our lethal edge by retaining and investing in our top talent. We will accelerate investments in Marine Corps Total Fitness and focused investments in our Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resiliency (WARR) Centers, chow halls, Child Development Centers, and family housing; we will aggressively execute "Barracks 2030," the most consequential barracks investment plan we have ever undertaken; increase creative incentives for overseas and Pacific-based Marines; and we will increase initiatives for those Marines and their families who live away from DoD installations.

Quality of life doesn't just mean facilities, programs, and incentives. We will also build upon Talent Management to make better, data driven institutional decisions and policies for our Marines and their families through investment in Marine Corps Talent Management Information Systems. All Marine leaders know at an instinctual level that we have a **sacred and personal** responsibility to lead, mentor, and care for junior Marines – but there is more the institution can do to help.

With a focus on **Recruiting, Making, and Retaining Marines**, we will overcome a recruiting challenge facing **all** the services – by sending our very best to become recruiters and Drill Instructors. Our focus will be on recruiters and the quality of entry level training; on modernization of systems, technology, and how we use data to support recruiting, assignments, and retention; on targeted retention bonuses for critical skills **and** quality Marines; on installation resiliency and all-domain digital / cyber training ranges, classrooms, and devices; and on the timely implementation of Independent Review Commission recommendations to prevent harmful behaviors. With historically high retention rates, we will not take our Marines' commitment to service for granted, and we will continue to shape policies that recognize that commitment.



And by **Maximizing the Potential of our Reserves**, we will forge a lethal Total Force that is greater than the sum of its parts. To maximize the potential of our Reserves, we must appropriately resource our AC end strength to no less than 172,300 and an RC end strength of no less than 32,000 with the objective of returning RC end strength to 36,800. In order to achieve required end strength, we will appropriately resource Reserve affiliation and retention bonuses to ensure our Reserve recruiters and the Direct Affiliation Program are fully successful in attracting and retaining the most talented individuals. Additionally, we will seek the authorities required to fully enable AC and RC permeability; and will return critical National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account funding to historic levels and parity with the other Reserve Components to ensure concurrent and proportional modernization of our Reserves.

HOW WE FIGHT

We are and will remain a naval expeditionary force that fights from the sea as task-organized combined arms air-ground task forces. With Force Design in place, we will continue our proud history as our Nation's expeditionary **shock troops** that can deliver combat power **from sea to land** – now with the additional capability to project power **from land to sea**. As a globally present and persistent force, we remain inextricably linked to naval campaigns, and we will be forward deployed with both conventional and special operations forces, ready to transition at a moment's notice in times of crisis.

Modernization's effect on how we fight is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Our foundation as our Nation's expeditionary force in readiness, will not change. But the formations, capabilities, and methods we use against our adversaries must evolve. Just as the Marine Corps evolved from a Marine Amphibious Unit to the Marine Expeditionary Unit, and now to a force capable of not only Joint Forcible Entry Operations, but also a MAGTF capable of "standing in" – Marines always adapt to the changing realities of modern combat.

Combined arms today are more than coordinating ground maneuver, indirect fires, and close air support – already the most difficult task for any fighting force to master. To fight and win against a peer adversary, combined arms must now be all-domain, incorporating effects in and from cyberspace, space, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the information environment. The mastery of this evolution in warfare is what allows us to punch above our weight class. It is what will keep the Marine Corps – a relatively small but lethal service – respected by our friends and feared by our enemies across the globe.

MCDP-1 and Maneuver Warfare are ingrained in how we will fight, but our understanding of "maneuver" must evolve along with the changing character of war. Marines at the tactical edge will maneuver under multi-domain supporting fires to seize terrain and destroy the enemy. This will require a greater proliferation of larger numbers of lower-cost platforms which can provide multi-domain effects at the tactical level – increasing mass and reducing risk to our individual Marines by embracing crewed – un-crewed teaming. This approach includes an emphasis on robotics and autonomous systems, loitering munitions, ISR-T, integrated battle management and command and control, and increased ground, aviation, and maritime mobility.

Marine Stand-in Forces are at that tactical edge in combat. They deter by their presence alongside our Allies and partners, and their ability to conduct distributed operations, sense and make sense, and hold adversaries at risk through organic or joint fires. They will fight alongside other members of the naval, joint, and combined force within the adversary's WEZ. That adversary will attempt to deny and degrade the joint force's ability to see and sense. Marines will use the platforms and capabilities developed under Force Design to conduct multi-domain and multi-source collections and proliferate that intelligence across the joint force. We are the eyes and ears for the joint force, ideally positioned within the WEZ to conduct both reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, to act as a Joint Fires integrator for the combined force, and to strike the enemy from land and air to sea with organic sensors and precision fires, when necessary.

Sustaining those forces will be both vitally important and exceptionally difficult. Contested logistics can only be solved through a combination of technology and tactics. Forces will have to coordinate the deliberate application of multi-domain fires and maneuver to create the physical and temporal conditions necessary to support logistics networks. Make no mistake – a peer fight does not involve the use of iron mountains for sustainment. The Global Positioning Network and Maritime Prepositioned Forces will become but nodes among many within a larger, resilient sustainment web, which will not consist of single points of failure. This is a wicked problem to solve, but for Marines, it is not insurmountable. We became Marines to do hard things.

CONCLUSION

Marines, war is evolving – but that is nothing new. We evolve our equipment, training, and tactics to stay ahead of our adversaries. This evolution may change the shape of our formations or the technology we fight with, but it will never change the fundamental nature of our Marine Corps, nor the significance of each Marine. We have adapted alongside the changing character of war for centuries – we are still on top, and we will stay there. Further updates will be issued when necessary. Sergeant Major Ruiz and I are honored to serve beside you.

Semper Fidelis!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric M. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric M. Smith

General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps



ENDURING PRINCIPLES

- Marines are focused on combat; every Marine is a rifleman.
- Marines are ready, relevant, and forward deployed.
- Marines are innovative, adaptable, and versatile. Marines win.
- Marines do what is right for the Nation.
- Marines keep their honor clean.
- Marines take care of their own.
- The Marine Corps is a naval expeditionary force.
- The Marine Corps is an integrated combined arms organization of complementary air, ground, and logistics components.
- The Marine Corps is a good steward of the Nation's resources.



These principles, as articulated by
our 36th Commandant, remain relevant today.