LEGACY OF THE 29TH COMMANDANT
General Alfred M. Gray Continues to Serve



SSGT J. S. SANDERS, USMC

Gen Alfred M. Gray, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, attends the change of command ceremony for Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 (HMX-1) at Marine Corps Air Facility Quantico, Va., on July 9, 1987.

By Col Mary H. Reinwald, USMC (Ret)

Author's note: The editors of Leatherneck *and the* Marine Corps Gazette *were privileged to sit down with Gen Alfred M. Gray, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, for an extensive interview in late April. As he celebrates his 90th birthday, he's every bit as sharp and witty as he was in the late 1980s when he served as the Corps' senior Marine. Gen Gray reflected on his time in the Corps and his strongly held belief in the importance of educating Marines.*

Few Marines have had as significant and lasting impact on the Marine Corps of today as the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred M. Gray, whose tenure as the Corps' senior Marine was more than 25 years ago. His legacy in combat is reflected in his Silver Star, two Legions of Merit, four Bronze Stars and three Purple Hearts, and Gen Gray's continuing influence on the professional development of Marines and Marine Corps doctrine over the last 40 years is second to none.

"General Gray is a Marine's Marine—a tough warrior and demanding taskmaster with a heart of gold. In the toughest of situations he always saw the opportunity to make a difference by doing what was right and never worrying about who got credit," said Gen Gray's former aide, retired Lieutenant General George Flynn.

Background

A native of New Jersey, Gen Gray enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950 and served in reconnaissance billets as he worked his way through the ranks up to the grade of sergeant. The son of a Navy veteran, the general's decision to join the Marine Corps was a bit surprising to his family. "My father had been a seaman in the Navy in World War I. And when I came back from enlisting, he said 'Are you going to go to Bainbridge or Great Lakes?' I said Parris Island!"

His service as an enlisted Marine greatly influenced the rest of his career, and the general fondly remembers his best day in the Corps as the day he joined the ranks of noncommissioned officers. "I think as excited as I ever was as a young Marine … my proudest day probably was when I got to put corporal on my return address on the envelope [home]. That was a very, very good day."

Early Assignments in the Corps

His early years as an officer were spent in the infantry, but recognizing the need for improved signals intelligence, the future Commandant helped "restructure the Corps' cryptologic operations" and assisted in writing the doctrine for signals intelligence support to combat units. (*Editor's note: See "Radio Battalions in Vietnam During Operation Dewey Canyon" on page 50.*) The infantry officer ended up commanding the first Marine Corps' signals intelligence unit in Vietnam in 1962 and assumed command of 1st Radio Battalion later

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USMC

BGen Alfred M. Gray, CG 2ndMarDiv

in the war. His impact on the intelligence and communications communities is such that the General Alfred M. Gray Trophy for Outstanding Communications Leadership is presented to a Marine captain each year at the Marine Corps Association & Foundation's annual C4 Awards Dinner. He is also in the National Security Agency's Hall of Honor which pays "tribute to the pioneers and heroes who rendered distinguished service to American cryptology."

Even before his selection to the general officer ranks, Gen Gray's career was one that today's Marine Corps officers would envy, given his significant time leading Marines vice serving in staff billets. In addition to his time as commanding officer of 1st Radio Bn, he also commanded 1st Bn, 2nd Marines and went on to lead 2nd Marines, 4th Marines and the 33rd Marine Amphibious Unit.

As much as he enjoyed leading Marines, he is quick to mention that not all of his days in command were good days. Two events in particular stand out in the general's mind. "Some of the worst moments of my career were 43 years ago this morning (April 29, 1975) when we had to finish the evacuation of Saigon." Then-Colonel Gray, the commander of Regimental Landing Team 4, was in charge of the withdrawal of the ground security force from the American embassy. "It was a good moment from the standpoint that our people accomplished the very difficult mission under extraordinary circumstances with no casualties in the ground security force." But unbeknownst to Gray, in the chaos of the evacuation, two Marines who had been killed earlier in the day at the Defense Attaché's office were left behind. "I will tell you how furious I was when I found out back on the supply ship and how long we worked behind the scenes to try to get them back. We finally got them back, thanks to Senator Kennedy's intercession, a year later. I never forgot that."

Gen Gray said the worst day in his decades of service was Oct. 23, 1983, when he was serving as the Commanding General, 2nd Marine Division. "Thirty five years ago, we had the Beirut bombing of our BLT headquarters. I was in command of all the Marines and the 12 Sailors and the three soldiers that were killed. They were all my people." As he has many times over the last three decades, the general plans to go to the Beirut Memorial in Jacksonville, N.C. in October to attend the ceremony



SGT C.R. STOUT, USMC

Gen Gray meets with troops following a live-fire demonstration.

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PHI JOE LEO, USN



SSGT SCHULTZ, USMC

Above: BGen Gray participated in Exercise Team Work '76 while serving as CG, 4th Marine Amphibious Brigade.

Above right: The Commandant visited 1st Bn, 5th Marines during Operation Desert Shield in Saudi Arabia.

that commemorates the anniversary of the bombing.

The general later commanded Landing Force Training Command; 4th Marine Amphibious Brigade; Fleet Marine Forces Atlantic; II Marine Expeditionary Force; and Fleet Marine Forces Europe. His staff assignments are indicative of his wide ranging skill set; he also served in the Training and Education Division, the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Division and the Marine Corps Development and Education Center. Such a diverse career path provided the general with the solid foundation from which to institute numerous changes and initiatives during his time as the 29th Commandant.

Heading to Washington, D.C.

A somewhat surprising choice when selected as Commandant in 1987, Gen Gray was considered by some to "lack the smooth edges you normally see in Washington," according to a Defense Department official who was quoted in an article in the *Washington Post* announcing Gray's nomination. The general laughingly remembered, "There was a big criticism of this and that, and that I didn't have any couth and chewed tobacco. It was a whole laundry list of criticisms." He continued, "They thought I had never done anything with the Congress. They didn't know how many times I briefed them about NATO." So, in typical Al Gray fashion, the new Commandant took the bull by the horns, and made a concerted effort to work with everyone on Capitol Hill.

"When I first got to Washington, we were in bad shape with the Congress; the Congress was mad at the Marine Corps because of the incident in Moscow." Sergeant Clayton J. Lonetree, an Embassy Security Guard, had admitted earlier in the year to handing over classified documents to the Soviet Union. He was convicted of espionage at a general court martial in August, 1987.

After leaving his office at the end of each day, Gen Gray went to Capitol Hill. "I called on probably 90 percent of the senators and their officers. I talked to principals; I talked to staffers; I talked to secretaries. I talked to people who wanted to talk to me. I called on about a third of the House



ROBERT WARD

The Joint Chiefs of Staff gather for an informal portrait at the Pentagon. From left to right: Gen Alfred M. Gray, Commandant of the Marine Corps; GEN Carl E. Vuono, Chief of Staff of the Army; Admiral Carlisle A.H. Trost, Chief of Naval Operations; GEN Larry D. Welch, Chief of Staff of the Air Force; GEN Colin L. Powell, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; and GEN Robert T. Herres, USAF, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

and the message was very simple. What you see is what you get. We're going to tell you what the Marine Corps needs. And then step back and take what you give us."

The new Commandant's approach worked. "Tell it like it is. Don't ever, ever, ever tell anyone anything but the truth. Don't be afraid to bite the bullet."

Initiatives

According to Dr. Charles Neimeyer, retired Marine lieutenant colonel and former director of the Marine Corps History Division, Gen Gray is one of the most important Commandants of the modern Marine Corps era. "Throughout his time as Commandant, General Gray constantly emphasized the individual intellectual growth he knew was necessary for a future Marine Corps. Moreover, General Gray's seminal book, "Warfighting" (FMFM-1), has been, in my opinion, one of the most important contributions toward doctrinal development in Marine Corps history. Warfighting rightfully takes its place alongside the Tentative Manual for Landing Operations and the Small Wars Manual as part of the 'holy trinity' of all-time Marine Corps doctrinal publications."

Published in 1989, "Warfighting" described the tenets of maneuver warfare and was a prime example of Gen Gray's approach to leadership. In



SGT KISSLING, USMC

Gen Gray makes a point while speaking during a conference aboard the amphibious assault ship USS *Nassau* (LHA-4) in 1990.



SGT EDWARDS, USMC

His affection for Marines is clearly evident as Gen Gray speaks to a group from 2nd Bn, 5th Marines, in the field.

his foreword Gen Gray wrote: "This book describes my philosophy on warfighting. It is the Marine Corps' doctrine and, as such, provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight. I expect every officer to read, and reread, this book, understand it and take its message to heart … . You will notice that this book does not contain specific techniques and procedures for conduct. Rather, it provides broad guidance in the form of concepts and values. It requires judgment in application. The thoughts contained here represent not just guidance for actions in combat, but a way of thinking in general. This manual thus describes a philosophy for action which, in war and in peace, in the field and in the rear, dictates our approach to duty."

Those who served in the Marine Corps of the late 1980s often heard the CMC denounce the careerism that seemed to be prevalent throughout the Corps. "I'm your monitor" and "Don't send your uniforms to the dry cleaners" (since you might not be at the same duty station to pick them up) were often heard at all-hands meetings at which the new head of the Marine Corps spoke. "Homesteading" became a dirty word as Gen Gray shifted the Corps' focus back to warfighting and a reminder that every Marine was a rifleman. He started with the Schools of Infantry and instituted Marine Combat Training for all enlisted Marines who were not assigned the military occupational specialty of infantry. Thirty years after implementation, the success of the training is evident in the performance of non-infantry Marines throughout Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom among many others.

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The Commandant's Professional Reading List

Establishing Marine Combat Training Battalions was only the beginning of Gen Gray's initiatives. He also established what is now known as the Commandant's Professional Reading List saying, "Success in battle depends on many things, some of which we will not fully control. However, the state of preparedness of our Marines (physical, intellectual, psychological, operations) is in our hands. The study of our profession through selected readings will assist each Marine's efforts to achieve operational competence and to better understand the nature of our "calling" as leaders of Marines."

Quick to deflect some of the praise he has received for the highly successful program that is still going strong almost three decades after its inception, Gen Gray said: "Reading programs in the military was not a new idea. The Army had them, but they were for officers only, they weren't for everyone else. In my own experience, we had learned a hell of a lot through reading. I can remember when I was a young officer when I went to Korea on my first tour there and I read a book called 'Koreans and



PH1(SW) JEFF ELLIOTT, USN

Above: President George H.W. Bush watches as the CMC, Gen Alfred M. Gray, attaches a battle streamer to the Marine Corps flag during the National Victory Celebration held in honor of the Allied forces' liberation of Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. (Photo by JO1 J.D. Dimattio, USN)

Left: President Bush talks with Gen Gray prior to speaking to Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., in 1991.

"I wanted a plan to have a first class library at Quantico. I wanted to call it a research center because the library has an administrative connotation and the Congress wouldn't buy it."

Their Culture.' Learning how their villages were constructed and the way they operated was a help when I served in Vietnam.

"I remember in 1956 when I was in special operations up in northern Japan. And that's when this fellow wrote the book, 'The Ugly American' which incidentally President Eisenhower directed the military to read. It was all about Laos initially, but it was also about the cultures, not understanding the cultures and the mores and languages of different regions, and our inability to look at other countries and other people through their eyes which is something I harp on even today.

"And so most of what I learned through the years I learned through reading personally ... I used to read a lot about the Mideast. I knew the value of it and I felt that again it goes back even to our experiences in Vietnam and some things we did. And I felt that had we operated in a smarter way and taught our people more—you can't send everybody to school so reading was a good way to learn. I wanted that for everybody. I said the privates and PFCs should read the Marine Corps Guidebook. Everybody else has to be in the reading program.



Gen Gray and Jan, his wife of more than 30 years, greet his former aide, LtGen George Flynn. (Photo courtesy of LtGen George Flynn, USMC (Ret))

And so from lance corporals on we had the reading program. And my thought was very simple. What I was trying to do was hook them on reading."

According to one Marine veteran, the Commandant's goal worked too well. Gen Gray said, "I got one letter that I will never forget. Former Marine father from Colorado says 'I want to know what the hell you're doing with my Marine Corps.' He says it isn't the same as it used to be. 'My son came home from 13 months in Okinawa last week. And of course he hugged his mom and he shook hands with me and the first thing he said was, "Dad, is that library still around the corner? Because I need to get a book.' He said, 'My son never read a book in his life!' "



Marines of the support staff of the Amphibious Warfare School gather around Gen Alfred M. Gray, 29th CMC, for a group photograph. Kneeling in the front row from left: Sgt Howard, LCpl Gamboa, LCpl Sobotta, LCpl Murdock, Gen Gray, Cpl Juba, Cpl Lore and Cpl Oliveri. In the back row are, from left: LCpl Diaz, LCpl Stephens, LCpl Wallace, SSgt Vaccaro, Sgt Hamilton and Sgt Fuchs.

CPL MCCORMICK, USMC

The Marine Corps University

Perhaps Gen Gray's greatest accomplishment as Commandant was the establishment of the Marine Corps University in 1989. The Gray Research Center, a cornerstone of the University, was named in his honor a few years later in recognition of his many contributions both to the study of arms and the professional development of Marines. "When I became commandant in 1987, I said I want to establish a university." And in typical Al Gray fashion, that's exactly what he did.

"You know how everything was a pink routing sheet and all that bureaucratic hoopla? And of course as you know, I was not from that school. I just wanted to establish a university and I wanted to do it soon." Recognizing his role, the CMC ensured his Marines had all the support needed to accomplish such an ambitious task. "I wanted a plan to have a first class library at Quantico. I wanted to call it a research center because the library has an administrative connotation and the Congress wouldn't buy it." When asked where the money was coming from to fund the project, Gen Gray simply said, "That's my job. I will find the money."

He directed his staff to take a look at other services' efforts, in particular the Air Force and their programs and facilities at Maxwell Air Force Base, where he had spent significant time throughout his career instructing various courses. "I already was going to adopt the Maxwell thing but I wanted them to come up with the idea. That's part of how you get things done. That was the genesis of the idea of the research center." Today, the Marine Corps University provides resident and non-resident education to more than 65,000 students annually—students of all grades from all services, numerous government agencies and other countries. The Alfred M. Gray Research Center is one of the pre-eminent research libraries in the military and is home to the Marine Corps History Division and the Marine Corps Archives which contains tens of thousands of maps, documents, oral histories, and command chronologies.

Advice for Younger Marines

When asked what was the best piece of advice he ever received, Gen Gray went back almost 70 years to his recon platoon commander in the early 1950s, who spoke to him after he had been recommended for a commission. The general quoted the captain decades later. "To be a good officer he said what you've got to do is study hard and you've got to be out there and roll around the mud with the troops every day and then at night. I never forgot that and always tried to do that," said Gen Gray. The Marines who had the privilege of serving with him would confirm he suceeded.



ANDREW NOH

Capt Raymond N. Takor, USMC was the recipient of the 2017 General Alfred M. Gray Trophy for Outstanding Communications Leadership. LtGen Daniel O'Donohue, Deputy Commandant for Information, assisted Gen Gray, center, in presenting the award on April 19, at MCA&F's annual C4 Awards Dinner, Crystal City, Va.

"Retirement"

To say that Gen Gray is retired is a bit of a stretch. He has the energy of a man half his age and his continued service reflects that. He serves in a variety of billets within the Potomac Institute including Chairman of the Board of Regents, as well as serving as the Chancellor of the Marine Military Academy, the Chairman of the U.S. Marine Youth Foundation, and as a trustee of the American Public University System. He is a frequent visitor to Quantico where his sage counsel is sought in a variety of venues, many centering on the Marine Corps University. The former commandant also regularly attends many of the Marine Corps Association & Foundation's professional and awards dinners where his introduction is usually greeted with the loudest ovation of the night.

LtGen Flynn perhaps best described the former commandant when he said of the Marine whose history of service, innovation, and education is second to none: "His lasting legacy will be his selfless dedication to the true loves of his life: his wife Jan, his Marines, and his Corps."

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