

# Every Marine a Rifleman

More than marksmanship

by CWO4 Gunner James Curtis

***“Every Marine is, first and foremost, a rifleman. All other conditions are secondary.”***

***—Gen Alfred M. Gray,  
29th Commandant of  
the Marine Corps***

“Every Marine a Rifleman” has been our slogan, our mantra, for decades if not longer. What does it really mean to us today? Does this simply mean that every Marine qualifies with their rifle annually? Maybe it means every Marine, and therefore every unit, can execute infantry tasks? I argue it means that every Marine receives a basic level of training in infantry skills and can be expected to conduct the mission of a rifleman if called upon to do so. I also argue it means that our non-infantry units can defend themselves, their positions, and their rear areas.

***“You don’t hurt ‘em if you don’t hit ‘em.”***

***—Chesty Puller***

The single most important skill for a Marine to master is marksmanship. Nothing we do fosters confidence in Marines more than confidence in their

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ability to employ their weapon against their foe. Marines who are confident with their weapon will have the tactical patience to take the split second and evaluate a situation before employing their weapon. Those who are not so confident will often pull the trigger in haste before the true tactical picture has presented itself. But alas, marksmanship alone does not make a rifleman; it is only one of the stepping stones to becoming a rifleman.

***“Wars may be started by the failings of humanity but they are won by the craft of the keen and intelligent minds that fight them.”***

***—Brendan Bigney***

Our mantra “Every Marine a Rifleman” is true. We may do a poor job of sustaining individual infantry skills in the non-infantry MOSs, but that can be addressed. If we expect them to be proficient at their own MOS while maintaining a certain level of proficiency in basic infantryman skills, then we have to identify what those basic infantryman skills are—marksmanship, camou-

flage, offense, defense, patrolling, and call for fire for example. This is one way we can codify the term “Every Marine a Rifleman.” The current *Marine Corps Common Skills Training and Readiness* manual is in the midst of being rewritten. This is our opportunity to detail what we require as a Service from our non-infantry MOSs throughout the Corps.

***“Don’t forget that you’re first Marines! Not all the communists in hell can overrun you!”***

***—LtGen Lewis  
“Chesty” Puller***

Should we expect all Marines and all units to be capable of executing infantry tasks? I argue yes—to some degree. The current environment we train in is time and resource constrained, and it would be unrealistic to expect a Combat Logistics Regiment (CLR) or Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS) to execute a ground attack. We do, however, expect them to conduct perimeter defense and their own security patrols. I argue that in any operation as the fight goes on and friendly forces are lost that there may come a time when detach-



**If every Marine is truly a rifleman, then every unit should be expected to perform infantry tasks.** (Photo by Cpl Devon Tindle.)

pilots and aircrews. We must include tasks that move units beyond self-preservation and compliment the combat power of those they support. A truck detachment armed with machine guns can be a very formidable force provided they have had an opportunity to train to collective skills in both the offense and defense.

***“We are an elite institution of warriors, and will remain so on my watch. It is our shared responsibility to ensure the continued health of our collective soul and identity.”***

***—Gen David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps***

ments from those supporting units may have to be called upon to fill the ranks of depleted infantry units or take on defensive roles in the overall operation. All Marine units must be ready, to some degree, to take on missions normally tasked to infantry units. They have day jobs, and we expect them to be good at them; however, they must be prepared to execute limited infantry collective tasks to ensure the success of the overall operation.

This topic needs more attention past the pages of the *Gazette*, but in closing, it is my firm belief that “Every Marine IS a Rifleman,” and every unit *can* conduct tasks outside of their primary function. Marine Wing Support Squadron Marines can conduct security patrols and Combat Logistics Battalion Marines *can* establish blocking positions. Our Corps is loaded with Marines across the force ready, willing, able, and basically trained to conduct combat operations regardless of primary MOS.

***“In combat Marines don’t rise to the occasion, they sink to the level of their training.”***

***—unknown Marine***

We need appropriate collective events within supporting unit’s training and readiness manuals that contribute to the collective warfighting force of the unit they are supporting. A quick review of current manuals outside of the ground combat element reveals those units do not prepare for employment in combat beyond tasks of self-defense, excluding



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