

100 Years of Professional Military Education

A Quantico Centennial

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While Marine Corps University celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in fall 2019, several of its academic programs have a much longer legacy. This year marks the centennial for the Command and Staff College (CSC) and Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS), as well as the thirtieth anniversary for the School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW). Each program has grown and evolved in remarkable ways since their openings and has contributed during that time to the intellectual depth and warfighting ability of Marine officers across the ranks. As professional military education (PME) serves as a focal point of the *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance* and is a topic of keen interest to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense, it is fitting to mark these anniversaries with a look back at these educational programs and how they have changed over time to continuously meet the intellectual needs of the force.

Expeditionary Warfare School

On 13 May 2021, 234 Marine, joint Service, and international officers graduated from the EWS—the Marine Corps' career-level school for primary officer PME. The mission of EWS is to educate and train company grade officers in order to prepare them mentally, morally, and physically for billets of increased leadership responsibility across the FMF and the joint force, with emphasis on the warfighting

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capabilities of a MAGTF operating within a complex and distributed Naval expeditionary environment. This year's class graduated 100 years from when the Marine Corps introduced the earliest version of EWS—the Company Grade Officers Course—convened at Quantico in May 1921.¹ While the mission of the school has changed since then, its overriding focus of preparing company and junior field-grade officers for billets of increased leadership responsibility has largely remained the same.

Over the last century, the school has undergone several transformations in response to operational requirements of the Marine Corps, FMF, national military and defense strategies, and innovation in teaching methodologies. Major changes aside, the school remains one of the crown jewels of officer PME at the career level in general and the Marine Corps University in particular. Visionary leaders like MajGen John A. Lejeune and MajGen Smedley D. Butler were instrumental in the inception of the training and education courses EWS evolved from. Both of these senior

leaders saw the need for an educated officer in the Marine Corps and knew that the foundation for the Corps to build its future upon required an officer corps prepared for the uncertainty of the security challenges the Nation faced—challenges that would require education where officers could examine and test their experiences.²

Indeed, it was Lejeune's experience prior to and including World War I as well as the subsequent aftermath that convinced him of the need to address the "intellectual bankruptcy" of Marine officers through a standardized course of instruction in the "fundamentals of military history, land operations, weapons, administration, tactics, and strategy."³ Most Marine officers of the time had neither a high school or college education; this deficit stood in sharp contrast to how the Army and Navy approached professional military education, both of which had formalized war colleges. With increasing scrutiny from critics inside and outside the War Department and the Navy Department about the efficacy of the Marine Corps,

leaders like Lejeune sought to capitalize on the Corps' success in World War I.⁴ His early vision of a standardized course of instruction became the three months long Marine Corps Officers Training School (MCOTS).⁵ This course would later evolve into what we now know as The Basic School.

Shortly after second lieutenants began cycling through Marine Corps Officers Training School, Quantico developed another school that focused on the training of more senior company and field grade officers in subjects like marksmanship, tactics, and topography in a course called the Marine Officers Infantry School. As early as 1920, the Marine Corps recognized the similarity between these two schools and consolidated them into a single course but for two different levels—the Company Grade Officers Course and the Field Grade Officers Course, respectively. Here was the birth of what we now know as Expeditionary Warfare School and the Command and Staff College. In 1921, MajGen Butler, commanding officer at Quantico, approved the Company Grade Officers Course with courses covering tactics, topography, engineering, administration, and law with additional course in Spanish language proficiency for officers to qualify for promotion to captain—a reflection of ongoing operations in Central America. The first class convened in May of that year.⁶

Throughout the 100-year history of EWS, adaptation and innovation to meet the needs of the FMF and the Navy-Marine Corps Team have been the hallmark of organizational and curricula changes at the school. Just as Lejeune recognized the need for creating standardized training and education opportunities for Marine officers, EWS school directors over this past century adapted EWS to meet current and projected challenges the nation called upon the Marine Corps to address. The school continues this legacy as it continuously assesses and revises its curriculum and pedagogical and andragogical approaches to meet the current and emerging needs of the Marine Corps and joint force.

As EWS looks forward to the next 100 years, it continues its focus on ed-

ucating and training company-grade officers to prepare them for billets of increased leadership responsibility across the FMF and the joint force. Gen David H. Berger's *Commandant's Planning Guidance* has set a new course for EWS and other PME institutions in the Marine Corps to focus on great power competition and near-peer rivals in the INDOPACOM area of responsibility while maintaining the ability to serve as the Nation's ready response force. As the Service implements force design decisions for 2030 and beyond, so too is EWS revising its curriculum and teaching methodologies to account for these needs. These changes reflect what the Marine Corps has always done in its professional military education over the last century—prepare Marines for the uncertainties of not just the immediate future and the assignments graduates will undertake after leaving but future challenges in a contested maritime environment. In this, EWS remains a school of captains for majors—preparing Marines and officers from the joint force and international partners for future security challenges as experts in planning for MAGTF operations at the tactical and operational level.

Command and Staff College

That fierce dedication to warfighting and leadership excellence is also found in the Marine Corps' approach to educating field grade officers. For a century, the Marine Corps Command and Staff College (CSC) has dedicated itself to developing field-grade officers as ethical leaders, critical thinkers, and creative problem solvers ready to excel as planners, staff officers, joint partners, and commanders.

While nascent variations of officer education existed in the Marine Corps as early as the 1890s, the school known today as the Marine Corps CSC officially opened in 1920 as the "Field Officers' Course."⁷ Although modeled primarily after the Army's two mid-career officer schools in Forts Benning and Leavenworth, CSC began to take on its own Service-centric identity by the early 1930s when it shifted its curricular focus to what would become the Marine Corps *raison d'être* mission for the next

100 years: amphibious operations. Over the next decade, the students enrolled in the course would actively contribute to, not just learn about, the emerging doctrine that would be applied countless times during the renowned "island hopping" campaign of the Pacific Theater in World War II. The school itself would be forced to close for the first two years of the war due to the pressing requirement for officers but would reopen in 1943, prompted by the revised demand to have educated staff officers planning these operations. The faculty consistently updated the course material informed by the latest developments occurring in the theater to best prepare their graduates for their new duties.

After World War II, the now named "Command and Staff School" (eventually Senior Course, then Senior School) shifted the focus of its curriculum to the new threats of the Cold War but still maintained its primary focus on preparing mid-career officers to develop expertise in understanding and planning for amphibious warfare, so much so that in 1962 the capstone exercise included embarking upon amphibious ships at Quantico and transporting to Onslow Beach at Camp Lejeune to conduct an amphibious command post exercise. However, students also focused on subjects relevant to the changes in warfare during the period such as the utilization of the helicopter in operations, functioning in an atomic battlefield, and addressing the challenges of counterinsurgency warfare during the Vietnam era. By the 1970s, the Command & Staff College (the official name as of 1964) was also evolving its pedagogical approaches in the classroom with curriculum reforms in 1972, 1982, and 1988, which included courses on professional development (written/oral communication, computer programs, leadership, etc.), and the transition in instructional methods from lectures to Socratic seminars to better develop critical thinking.⁸

These instructional improvements would carry forward from the end of the Cold War into the 21st century. In the 1991 academic year, coinciding with the foundation of Marine Corps University, CSC updated its curriculum

again to reflect the new emphasis on joint operations and the employment of the MAGTF, and started hiring civilian PhDs specializing in military history and international relations. In 1992, CSC became the first DOD school to receive joint accreditation by the Joint Staff J-7, and in 1994, also received accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on College to offer a Master of Military Studies Degree. A decade later, CSC replicated its World War II experience by incorporating the learning imperatives from the current conflict, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, into the classrooms and included courses on Culture & Interagency Operations, foreign language training, and an “Immersion Week” with visits to supporting government agencies or cultural engagement trips to Egypt or Tunisia.

The most recent curriculum reorganization came in 2014 in which courses and exercises were redesigned to more accurately reflect the post-Operation IRAQI FREEDOM/ENDURING FREEDOM strategic challenges for the Marine Corps with offerings such as Evolving National Security Concepts and Operations and Complex Operational Problem Solving and Design.⁹ In response to the 2019 *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, CSC placed more emphasis on great power competition and naval integration, and incorporated more wargames into the curriculum. Today, the student body—which includes officers from all U.S. Services, many international partners and allies, as well as national security professionals from U.S. civilian agencies—is exposed to a curriculum that includes seminars on the new technological frontiers in warfare such as cyber, artificial intelligence, and social media.

While CSC has adapted its curriculum to the ever-changing paradigms of strategic priorities, doctrine, and technology and has embraced Information Age teaching methodologies, its purpose still adheres closely to the founding vision from a century ago: to “prepare the students to function as field officers in commands and to fill the more important staff positions in the Marine Corps.”¹⁰ The college

continues to challenge students with real-world operational problem sets in order to refine their skills as planners for follow-on positions in high-level staff billets in both Service and joint headquarters. While the content of the curriculum has evolved over the past century, the college has consistently remained focused on the Marine Corps’ expeditionary mission and warfighting “from the sea” for both the current operational environment and the strategic challenges of the future.

“Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.”
—Ernest Shackleton

School of Advanced Warfighting

The advertisement quoted above offered few tangible benefits for the eventual crew of *HMS Endurance* on its perilous Antarctic expedition, but it ensured Ernest Shackleton attracted men with the right purpose. A similar advertisement soliciting majors for assignment as operational planners might read something like: “Majors wanted for tedious staff work. No bonuses. Indoor work, long hours of complete fluorescent light. Three-year payback tour. Opportunity to shape the Corps’ most significant decisions.” Operational planners, also known as 0505s, fill key planning roles and support decision making requirements of senior leaders at MSEs, MEFs, MARFORs, and Headquarters Marine Corps. Most 0505s are majors or newly promoted lieutenant colonels who are experiencing staff duty for the first time. Interested officers should carefully consider their decision to become a planner because

the school application process is multifaceted, the curriculums that educate planners are rigorous, and the demands and rewards of these billets are unique.

The SAW traces its origins back to the “maneuver warfare movement,” the period leading up to and including Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr’s tenure as the 29th Commandant and the publishing of *FMFM 1, Warfighting*, in 1989. Gen Gray’s vision for a “world-class educational institution for the study of war and the profession of arms” within the Marine Corps CSC created the Art of War Studies program, which later became the Marine Corps War College, and a new second-year of CSC that evolved into SAW.

By design, SAW provided students an additional year for the study of military art—similar to the U.S. Army’s School of Advanced Military Studies. Gen Gray, having recently read *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914–1918* (1989, Praeger), assigned its author Bruce Gudmundsson, a Marine Corps Reserve captain who was working as a case study writer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, to develop the initial course. Dr. Gudmundsson developed a graduate-level military education program designed to amplify the staff college curriculum and link warfighting to the combat development process.

SAW formally began on 10 July 1990, with an initial class of twelve Marines and two officers from both the Army and Air Force. These students, selected volunteers, spent the year following CSC under the tutelage of Marine LtCol James Eicher, Dr. Bradley J. Meyer, and Dr. Gudmundsson.

SAW’s eligible student population has since broadened to include U.S. graduates of both resident and non-resident staff colleges, equivalent international military officers, and representatives of U.S. government agencies. Classes have increased from 16 to 26 students. Over the years, SAW has morphed from a course to train combat developers into a school that develops planners for service in critical high-level service, joint, and combined staff billets. To date, SAW has produced 726 planners from all U.S. Services and fifteen allied and partner



On 2 May 2013, the 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), Gen James F. Amos; retired Secretary of the Navy and former Virginia Sen John Warner; the 29th CMC, retired Gen Alfred M. Gray; and the Commanding General of Education Command and President of the Marine Corps University, BGen William Mullen III, broke ground for the John Warner Center for Advanced Military Studies, which today houses CSC and SAW and other elements of MCU. (Photo by Sgt Mallory VanderSchans.)

countries. Forty-six graduates have attained general officer rank with three notable Marines earning four stars: Gen (Ret) John Kelly (SOUTHCOM), Gen Frank McKenzie (CENTCOM), and Gen David Berger (CMC).

Much of SAW's original academic foundation remains the same. The curriculum is still divided into three major courses. *Foundations of Warfighting* is now called *Operational Art*. *Contemporary Institutions and the Preparation for War* is now *Operational Planning*. *Future Warfighting* is known as *The Changing Character of Conflict*. Each course promotes student learning in different ways. The *Operational Art* course explores military theory and campaigns from the Seven Years War to the present. Staff rides in the United States, Europe, and Asia complement the material studied in seminars. The *Changing Character of Conflict* course introduces students to causes of conflict and research methods to understand global trends that affect the security environment. Students research and write a "future war" paper advancing different ways warfare may or should change. The *Operational Planning* course develops

skills in creative and critical thinking, planning, red-teaming, and wargaming. Seven historic, contemporary, and future planning exercises challenge students to develop solutions to diverse problems. War games test and refine their operational proposals. All three courses prepare students for the unique, high pressure, and often high-stakes challenges they will face in their follow-on planning assignments.

As one of the Marine Corps' newest and smallest schools, SAW has evolved over the past 30 years, balancing its curriculum between the timeless lessons of war and the timely lessons of the present. But its core focus remains: to produce officers with the character, creativity, and competence to fill high visibility, high impact plans billets in the operating forces and supporting establishment.

Conclusion

A lot has changed over the past century, but the Marine Corps' commitment to educating its officers to be the most ready when the Nation is least ready has endured. With a renewed emphasis on academic rigor, experiential

learning, and developing in our students a Maneuver Warfare mindset with a focus on combat readiness, these MCU programs graduate Marine officers able to maintain "intellectual overmatch" against our Nation's enemies. In the highly complex and rapidly changing international security environment, that education promises to be as valuable today as Gen Lejeune's and Gen Butler's programs were a century ago.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Durham, *The History of the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School*, (Quantico, VA: Amphibious Warfare School Education Center, 1981).
2. Roy E. Moss, "Amphibious Warfare School," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: November 1967).
3. *The History of the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School*.
4. David S. Nasca, *The Emergence of American Amphibious Warfare: 1898–1945*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2020).
5. Ibid.
6. *The History of the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School*.
7. Maj Clyde H. Metcalf, "A History of the Education of Marine Officers," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: May 1936).
8. LtCol Donald F. Bittner, *Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1920–1988*, (Quantico, VA: USMC History Division, 1988).
9. Maj David J. Lipkin, "USMC Command and Staff College Curriculum Analysis," (master's thesis, USMC Command and Staff College 2019).
10. Maj Jesse F. Dyer, "The Military Schools in the Marine Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: March 1922).

