

I Think We've Got It!

Making maneuver warfare happen

by Col Michael D. Wyly, USMC(Ret)

Gen William F. Mullen III nailed it! His article in the July 2020 *Gazette*, “Reinvigorating Maneuver Warfare,” simply and succinctly clarifies for all ranks and specialties the “finishing touches” that will secure our Corps’ place as the world’s most formidable and effective fighting force. And, most importantly, keep our country strong and free. Gen Mullen has laid it out. Now it is up to the *rest of us* to make it happen. And when I say the rest of “us,” I mean from four-star general down to and including the Marines in the fire teams.

All MOSs are important, but all must focus on the fighting Marine who will close with the enemy. It is what we are about. Gen Mullen distills dimensions of readiness down to three:

1. Training: Coaching, teaching, and mentoring.
2. Assignments: Filling combat leadership positions and keeping them stable.
3. Testing: Ensure *competence* in all assigned to combat jobs (i.e., jobs confronting the enemy *in combat*), fire team through MAGTF

This means that all Marines must make it their *top priority* every hour of every day to enable, encourage, and *force* the aforementioned three functions to be competently and energetically implemented, 24/7!

Now it is up to all of us, top generals down to first tour after Boot Camp, together even with civilian administrators if they are to keep their jobs, to place the focus sharply and acutely where Gen Mullen has laid the keel.

>Col Wyly is a retired Infantry Officer and was a major proponent of the maneuver warfare concept.

IDEAS & ISSUES (MANEUVER WARFARE)

Reinvigorating Maneuver Warfare

Our priorities for manning, training, equipping, and educating should be on our close combat units

by MajGen William F. Mullen III

With the publication of *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, Warfighting*, our 29th Commandant, Gen Alfred M. Gray, cemented maneuver warfare not only as the Service doctrine but as a warfighting philosophy to guide all Marine Corps actions. It excelled at shaping how the Marine Corps prepared and pursued war as evidenced by the successes achieved during the Gulf War and beyond. Unfortunately, our ability to think and act as maneuver warfare adherents diminished during the steady state operational periods of the subsequent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and caused our 37th Commandant, Gen Robert B. Neller, to ask, “How do we reinvigorate Maneuver warfare?” This question caused me to

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think long and hard, and the result was the conclusion that our Marine Corps needs to fundamentally change how it educates, mans, trains, equips, and even perceives its close combat forces. Before we get to those recommended changes though, we need to describe how we arrived at this point.

The Decline of Maneuver Warfare

I believe Gen Neller asked the question regarding reinvigorating maneuver warfare for three primary reasons. First, the changes we have

seen in the Fleet Marine Forces over the past eighteen years of involvement in Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. After the successful maneuver warfare centric invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, counterinsurgency operations required Marines to “fight” from largely static positions. While small units employed maneuver warfare to gain positions of advantage during firefights, large-scale maneuvering was not required, which caused our skills to atrophy overall. These changes were compounded by the increased operational tempo, a great deal more prescription with training requirements, and less time between deployments. The result over time has generated small unit leaders who are less engaged with their subordinate unit leaders and leaders, in general, being more directive because of a lack of trust. These factors also engendered the belief on the part of many of our leaders that they had little to no control over the training in preparation for deployment, so they did not take ownership as much as they should. These factors have also led to a decrease in subordinate initiative where we have subordinate leaders thinking it is acceptable to merely wait for orders instead of taking intelligent initiative based on intent.

The second reason is the growth of technology that enables seniors to reach well down into the lowest tactical levels to direct actions they deem appropriate, as well as the extensive reporting requirements that only seem to grow from year to year. The ability to rapidly communicate with anyone, anywhere, at any time is a tremendous temptation



Physical training involves more than the PFT and CFT. (Photo by LCpl Julian Elliot-Drouin.)

MajGen Mullens article can be found in the July 2020 edition of the Marine Corps Gazette and online at <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Reinvigorating-Maneuver-Warfare.pdf>.

During the ten-year period between 1979 to 1989, we debated and developed the concept. Now, 31 years later, precisely and succinctly, Gen Mullen finds the key to make it permanent—and real. Read his article and re-read it. Follow it. If you do not understand,

write Gen Mullen a letter. Ask him. He has got it!

All the work that Gen Alfred M. Gray did in the early experiments in maneuver will come to bear in terms of real readiness—and when implemented on the battlefield, *victory*.

