

# SMMC

## “THE ‘NEW’ CORPS”

by SgtMaj Troy E. Black, 19th SMMC

**“Old breed? New breed? There’s not a damn bit of difference so long as it’s the Marine breed.” —Chesty Puller**

Over the course of time, there has been a tendency of the older generation of Marines to view the newer generations as not measuring up. Interestingly, those Marines were told the same thing when they were “boots.” Each line in the sand calls into question the ability of aspiring leaders to serve with as much honor, courage, and commitment as the last. These “lines in the sand” stretch from Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir, and Hue City all the way to Fallujah, Marjah, Sangin, and countless other battles. Like previous generations, this “New Corps” has made their own historic contributions to our legacy and proven their mettle in the crucible of combat.

I entered the Marine Corps in 1988 at the end of the Cold War and immediately learned the value of lessons passed on from one generation of Marines to the next. President Ronald Reagan was still in office, and many of my instructors at Infantry Training Battalion were Vietnam veterans. When I arrived at my first duty station, many of my battalion’s leaders were also Vietnam Vets. While their tales of combat were inspiring, those warriors were skeptical of us and thought my generation was soft because we grew up in the 1980s. Regardless of their personal feelings, and to their credit, those combat experienced leaders focused their efforts on training us to a high standard. Ultimately, my generation served together with many of them to achieve success in DESERT STORM. They understood that giving the individual Marine challenging training, firm leadership, and instilling a disciplined approach to all tasks were essential if we were to be successful on the battlefield, regardless of how our generation was labeled.

As the Vietnam veterans began to leave the ranks, my generation assumed greater responsibility for training the next generation of Marines. Even though the number of combat veterans dwindled, those that went before had prepared us to take up their task. As I became a more seasoned NCO, my appreciation for the lessons I received from that earlier generation grew. I committed myself to sharing their experiences, as well as my own, with those I had the privilege to lead.

On September 11th, the world changed. At that moment, the majority of the Marine Corps had little practical combat experience. The question we asked was, did each Marine of the new generation have the grit, determination, and resolve to fight and

win? We didn’t know for sure, just as the Vietnam generation could not be sure about me and my generation. Yet in both cases, leaders set a high standard and expected each Marine to not only meet it, but to exceed it.

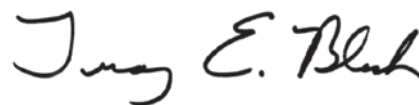
Over the years, I have experienced many new efforts designed to improve our Corps. Examples like the publication of Leading Marines and the stand-up of the Squad Leader Development Program illustrate the kinds of investments the Marine Corps has made over the decades in raising the performance of our most critical resource, the individual Marine. I see the implementation of talent management as the next logical adaptation in our approach to unlocking the potential in each Marine.

Talent management is an extension of our time-honored methods of bringing the best out of the Marines we lead. By developing the capacity for greater responsibility and passing on our lessons learned from one generation to the next, we are ensuring our ability to fight and win in an era of great power competition.

I have learned from the very beginning of my service, that each preceding generation will be inherently critical and demanding of the next. They will relentlessly challenge their successors to be better and do better in order to develop their warfighting spirit. Without fail, they will breed brilliance in the basics and perfection in warfighting skills. They will be ceaseless in their commitment to teaching, coaching, and mentoring their Marines. They will take seriously their responsibility to train their replacements because they know that one day they will leave the battlefield in the hands of those they have lead.

As the Commandant steers our Corps to meet the challenges of the future, we must focus on developing talent within our Corps. We must ensure those we trust to lead understand their role in forging the next iron links in the chain of Marine generations that stretches all the way back to 1775.

Semper Fidelis,



TROY E. BLACK

19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps