

# The Tea Boiled Over

An open letter

by Capt Lakyra Pharms

The date is 8 February 2040. The President has addressed the Nation of the decision to sign into law a bill passed by the U.S. Congress to abolish the Marine Corps and dissolve its personnel and assets into the Army, Navy, and Air Force. There is a sigh of relief from the general public. How did we get to this point? Just twenty years prior, the American people still wanted and celebrated having a Marine Corps. In 1957, BGen Krulak stated that as long as the American people are convinced that the Marine Corps is honest, deeply rooted, and above question or criticism, it will continue to exist. But there was a tea brewing behind closed doors that boiled over onto the American public and created opportunity for our adversaries. The tea was the flavor of a 2019 LinkedIn article titled, “The Marine Corps: Always Faithful ... to White Men”; the boiling water was an organizational culture unable to truly embrace diversity and inclusion, the pot was the constant struggle of an organization to remain relevant in a joint operating environment, and the fueling flame was an adversary taking a page from Russia’s rulebook and striking a force with a propaganda campaign. Please, enjoy a fresh cup while I explain how the tea killed the team.

*The Flavor.* Back in 2019, retired Marine Corps Col Thomas K. Hobbs wrote a LinkedIn article highlighting the Corps’ organizational culture favoring the success of white men. It highlighted microaggressions stomachached by minority officers, MOS assignment practices in The Basic School that may be setting officers up for failure, and how the Service could benefit from a preparatory program for officers who struggle with basic military skills. This article was heavily embraced, shared,

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**Americans have wanted a Marine Corps because of battlefield victories and how Marines represent the best of the nation. (Photo by Cpl Nathan Hall.)**

and discussed amongst the minority officer community but dismissed elsewhere based on the title alone. This was one event among many highlighting how the minority experience is heavily ignored throughout the organization. Holding true to the ethos “Every Marine A Rifleman,” the Corps maintained a high regard for its infantrymen and continued to reserve the highest levels of command for those who served in that capacity, thus limiting opportunity for Marine officers serving in other occupational specialties. The Marine Corps was succeeding in recruiting a population that reflected the nation’s diversity, but behind closed doors, it was failing at grooming that popula-

tion to lead the force from the front. The American people have historically wanted a Marine Corps because of the pride in its victories and how it represented the nation with class. With the baby boom generation aging out, the population growing more diverse, and that diversity reflecting in the nation’s top leaders, the Marine Corps’ failure to embrace a culture of inclusion was making it a sore in the eyes of the American public.

*Boiling Water.* Congress put pressure on the DOD to ensure the armed forces allowed the best and brightest to lead and represent the nation; with the military being an extension of policy, it is imperative that the most qualified of-

Officers are developing the military plans to support U.S. interest. In 2033, the DOD released an updated Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. It mirrored much of the 2012 implementation of Executive Order 13583 to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce, but there was an emphasis on promoting such amongst the ranks of the armed forces officers. The Marine Corps responded to this in 2035 with an ad campaign highlighting diversity in its officer ranks and a culture of inclusion. Marines (active and retired) took to online forums to voice their opinions of the ad campaign, and thus #NotInMyCorps was born. This viral hashtag featured Marines' negative opinions toward the policy of inclusion and their claims that it degraded the organization. The opinions mirrored much of what you would see in a *Marine Corps Times* comment section. There was also a flood of personal accounts exposing organizational bias that was so shocking; it forced the media to turn its attention to the Marine Corps. The Corps has been on the receiving end of negative media attention in the past (i.e., hazing culture in recruit training and attempts at sweeping war crimes under the rug), and now, it was catching heat from the American public for false advertisement.

*The Teapot.* Aside from the above, the Marine Corps was also scrambling for a seat at the joint table. Section 5063, Title 10, United States Code, list the functions of the Marine Corps, with its most unique functions being to conduct amphibious operations and to conduct complex expeditionary operations in urban littorals and other challenging environments. In our current operating environment, adversaries are more likely to perform offensive operations short of armed conflict. The unique functions of the Marine Corps were the in lowest in demand, making it difficult for the Navy to justify further dedication to the department. The MAGTF became the greatest asset provided by the Corps, but the increase in joint operations between the Army, Navy, and Air Force created a more unified Joint Force, and there was simply no room for duplicates. The 2032 congressional elections resulted in

the inauguration of the most diverse House of Representatives in the Nation's history, and they made analyzing national spending a priority. Congress took great interest in researching the efficiency of the DOD since it carries the nation's highest price-tag. A 2033 study by the RAND National Security Research Division highlighted the Marine Corps as the least effective when tasked in support of stability and civil-military

of women and non-white servicemembers, which caught the attention of our allies. As American disapproval of the Service increased, the world wanted to know why the United States, the standard bearer, continued to hold on to a branch of Service with what appeared to be outdated values. This campaign also highlighted significant gaps in our cybersecurity posture; we were unable to stop China's social media flood. Un-

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operations. In comparison to its sister Service commanders, Marine Corps task force commanders were the best at rebuilding infrastructure and establishing rule of law but were the least likely to relate to the experience of indigenous populations and institutions, were the least capable of empowering host nation governments and non-governmental organizations to resume control, and took the greatest amount of time to accomplish these missions. The study attributed this to the lack of diversity of experience in the organization's top leaders; plans were developed from a position of power with an inability to truly connect to the experiences of the people they were helping.

*The Flame.* Historically, Russia has been able to achieve objectives in competition below armed conflict through attempts to separate the United States and friendly states politically via execution of information and unconventional warfare. China saw opportunity in the growing media attention on the Marine Corps and took a page from Russia's rule book to eliminate the world's most feared fighting force without firing a single shot. They executed a disinformation campaign to exacerbate the damage already done by #NotInMyCorps. Social media was flooded with articles detailing exaggerated personal accounts

der UN pressure to take action and the growing need to strengthen our posture, the proposal was made to cut the Marine Corps and increase funding to the U.S. Cyber Command. Congress put it to vote, passed a bill, and the rest is history.

*Sips Tea.* As a Marine, it pains me to witness the demise of an organization I hold near and dear to my heart. I dedicated twenty of the greatest years of my life to the Corps, and I am grateful for every second of it. But those years carried an underlying pain of never truly feeling accepted by the Good 'Ol Boys Club and the frustration of watching concerns fall on deaf ears. It is an experienced shared by most, if not all, minority Marine Corps officers. If I could travel back to the year 2020, I would tell the Marines to take their efforts to breed a culture of inclusion seriously. The Corps will not be able to keep up with a changing world if it continues to cater to white male infantry officers; as an organization, we need to groom all officers, regardless of race, gender, or MOS, to lead the force from the front. The benefits of diverse leadership are simply too great to ignore. If the Marine Corps continues to ignore this hot tea, it will boil over and be used against us.

