

Training Command

Implementing *Force Design 2030* through “The Game of Inches”

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The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* rightly asserts that the United States “must make difficult choices and prioritize what is most important to field a lethal, resilient, and rapidly adapting Joint Force [because] America’s military has no preordained right to victory on the battlefield.”¹ The sentiments expressed in this observation are sobering. It mandates that the U.S. military take a hard look at how it is preparing for future competition, crisis, and conflict and assess whether those methods will meet the required end-state. What once seemed futuristic and unsettling continues to become a reality. This comes as the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation exploit maritime gray-zone operations and continue to aggressively pursue conventional and hybrid capabilities that erode U.S. military advantages, such as the proliferation of long-range precision missiles.² If these challenges are unresolved within the next decade, the Department of the Navy projects that the People’s Liberation Army Navy, People’s Armed Force Maritime Militia, and Russian Battle Task Groups will leave our Naval Service unprepared to protect national interests by sea.³

After conducting his analysis, Gen David H. Berger, the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), determined that the Marine Corps must change to fight and win against a near-peer competitor in today’s rapidly evolving operating environment.⁴ One can summarize the Marine Corps’ current situation with the four-minute speech Al Pacino gives his team in the 1999 movie *Any Given Sunday*. In the film, Pacino’s character sees the challenges his team is about to face and knows they cannot win in their current state.

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Training Command is implementing the requirements of Force Design 2030 into entry-level training. (Photo by LCpl Dalton Swanbeck.)

He begins his speech pleading with the team by saying,

I don’t know what to say. Three minutes until the biggest battle of our professional lives all comes down to today. Either we heal as a team, or we are going to crumble inch by inch, play-by-play until we are finished.⁵

This is the message conveyed in the 38th Commandant’s *Planning Guidance* and *Force Design 2030 (FD2030)* is how the Marine Corps will “fight its way

back into the light.” Building this future force requires significant investment in training and education, a top priority focus area for the Marine Corps, which is precisely why Training Command is moving out and aggressively implementing *FD2030* requirements into entry-level training (ELT).⁶

Opportunities

“The inches we need are everywhere around us.”⁷

In the “game of inches,” first downs are essential to winning. This is the premise behind Training Command’s implementation strategy. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that the command is moving with a sense of urgency to exploit opportunities, seize the initiative, and implement innovative non-standard solutions to problems. These efforts have been fruitful. Within the last year, the command determined the “totality” of the resources needed to implement *FD2030* requirements across its 17 Major Subordinate Elements, incorporated 21st century learning technologies and methodologies into ELT, updated over 450 Programs of Instruction, and refined and implemented the Transformation Enhancement Program (TEP).

TEP reinforces the Department of the Navy’s Core Values and enhances the warrior ethos received by Marines during Recruit Training and throughout their respective ELT pipeline. It supports creating a force able to sustain distributed operations in austere and disparate environments. TEP further enables the persistent stand-in force, capable of executing CMC’s intent through fortifying the core institutional tenet: “Every Marine a Rifleman.” In the foreword of the recently published *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, the CMC states:

from “recruitment to retirement,” [Marines] are an integral part of the Nation’s strategic competition with other actors. Marines are always competing, even when they are not fighting in combat.⁸

TEP instills this realization in all ELT Marines and reinforces what former Acting U.S. Secretary of the Navy Thomas B. Modly meant when he wrote:

it is only through a sound educational foundation, and supported, continuous lifelong learning that our naval leaders will be able to comprehend the dynamic geopolitical environment and make key decisions that will ultimately affect the security and prosperity of the United States.⁹

Challenges

*“Either we heal now, as a team, or we will die as individuals.”*¹⁰

The CMC’s guidance to the Marine Corps opens the door to extraordinary possibilities for change and success.¹¹ The challenge is that our Marines and civilians are often reluctant to change. This deeply rooted, human tendency is a major source of institutional friction. *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, warns our Service that friction surrounds any endeavor and stands ready to stifle momentum, creativity, and mission accomplishment.¹² Navigating through this friction to implement *FD2030* requirements has been inevitable since ELT considerations are more often than not overlooked by many organizations’ planning activities external to Training and Education Command.

The envisioned multi-disciplinary infantry Marine requires investments in time and resources (both materiel and manpower) that Training Command and its partners are diligently working.

The lack of understanding by these external organizations of what Training Command does and its role in delivering capabilities for *FD2030*, despite training and education being a top priority focus area for the Marine Corps, led the command into uncharted territory. The command has faced, and still faces, many challenges in implementing *FD2030* requirements into ELT. These include competing within the Service for limited funding, facilities, and manpower; integrating ELT requirements into Service-level processes to support 21st century learning initiatives; and handling increased throughput at the Major Subordinate Elements, given the growth of several occupational fields.¹³ Additional Training Command challenges consist of coordinating with multiple stakeholders to identify the exact skills each military occupational specialty requires to enable FMF readiness in the developing operating environment, defining the requirements for implementing emerging capabilities into ELT and changing inflexible, outdated, and impractical processes and timelines.

Building the 2030 force requires the procurement of advanced technological capabilities and the establishment of new mental and physical standards necessary to create tomorrow’s warfighter. The challenge is that both these efforts must occur simultaneously and immediately, within time constraints, and such changes alter existing operational capabilities—resulting in near-term risk. Similarly, to produce the 2030 warfighter, Training Command must sustain current activities while also innovating new approaches and concepts to learning, but it cannot do either without dedicated manpower or resources. This is evident in recent efforts to transform the infantry ELT

pipeline by implementing a fourteen-week Infantry Marine Course.¹⁴ Ideally, the Infantry Marine Course will produce better-trained Marines who can integrate seamlessly into the FMF. The envisioned multi-disciplinary infantry Marine requires investments in time and resources (both materiel and manpower) that Training Command and its partners are diligently working.¹⁵ Tackling this hurdle by working in unison with multiple Service-level organizations may be the exemplar or case study for how Training Command supports other occupational fields in the foreseeable future. Any organization unable or unwilling to make this investment could cause the Service to lose hard-fought inches critical to achieving *FD2030* objectives.

Institutional Integration

*“I think you’re gonna see a guy who will go that inch with you.”*¹⁶

Training Command—faced with many challenges under compressed timelines including implementing new and soon-to-be fielded equipment into ELT such as the Marine Air Defense

Integrated System (MADIS) at Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School—recognized that reinforcing fires from adjacent units would be necessary.¹⁷ No Marine fights alone and one unit cannot singlehandedly prepare to win our Nation's battles. Applying this principle, Training Command—in conjunction with Capability Development Directorate, Marine Corps Systems Command, Program Executive Officer Land Systems, Manpower Plans and Policy, Installations and Logistics, and Marine Corps Installations Command—established the 4-Pillars working group to develop integrated and holistic approaches to training solutions for *FD2030* capabilities. All of these commands had to take on additional duties and responsibilities since they, like Training Command, had to balance addressing competing requirements associated with their primary mission with the demands posed by *FD2030*.¹⁸ The early recognition of the value of such a venue, coupled with its fruitfulness in tackling *FD2030*, 21st century learning, and foundational-level initiatives at the colonel and general officer levels, solidified its purpose and participation. The 4-Pillars working group has increased each command's understanding of the many challenges associated with implementing *FD2030* into ELT and facilitated the necessary and timely changing of Service-level policies and processes to meet current needs. Recent successes from this collective body include modifying the MADIS fielding timeline and receiving over six million dollars in facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization funding to repurpose ELT facilities aboard Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA.

Continuing Actions

"On this team, we fight for that inch!"¹⁹ Al Pacino ends his speech by asking the players, "now ... what are you going to do?"²⁰ allowing them the opportunity to self-reflect and decide for themselves whether they will change to meet the challenges they are about to face, minutes before playing the biggest game of their lives. The CMC has asked all of us the same question.²¹ Like

the players on Pacino's team, Training Command has receptively embraced the CMC's call for change and continues moving the ball down the field with its partners, fighting for every inch!

Notes

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3. Ibid; and Dakota L. Wood, "U.S. Marine Corps," Heritage Foundation, (November 2020), available at <https://www.heritage.org>.

4. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: 2019); and Mallory Shelbourne, "Berger Reaffirms Commitment to Force Design 2030 Overhaul In Memo to New SECDEF," *USNI News*, (March 2021), available at <https://news.usni.org>.

5. *Any Given Sunday*, directed by Oliver Stone, (Los Angeles, CA: Warner Brothers, 1999).

6. *Commandant's Planning Guidance*; Yasmin Tadjdeh, "Marine Corps Taking Training Out of the Industrial Age," *National Defense Magazine*, (December 2019), available at <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org>; and Donald Meyer, "Implementing the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps' Planning Guidance into the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps Program," (master's thesis, U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2020).

7. *Any Given Sunday*.

8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, (Washington, DC: December 14, 2020).

9. Department of the Navy, *Education for Seapower Strategy 2020*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Navy, February 2020).

10. *Any Given Sunday*.

11. Chris Cannon, "The Commandant Needs Our Help: Accelerating Marine Corps Force Development," *CIMSEC*, (August 2020), available at <https://cimsec.org>.

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15. Philip Athey, "Chess during Downtime: How the Corps Wants to Increase 'Thinking' in Marine Infantry," *Marine Corps Times*, (January 2021), available at <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com>.

16. *Any Given Sunday*.

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20. Ibid.

21. Chris Cannon, "The Commandant Needs Our Help: Accelerating Marine Corps Force Development," *CIMSEC*, (August 2020), available at <https://cimsec.org>.

