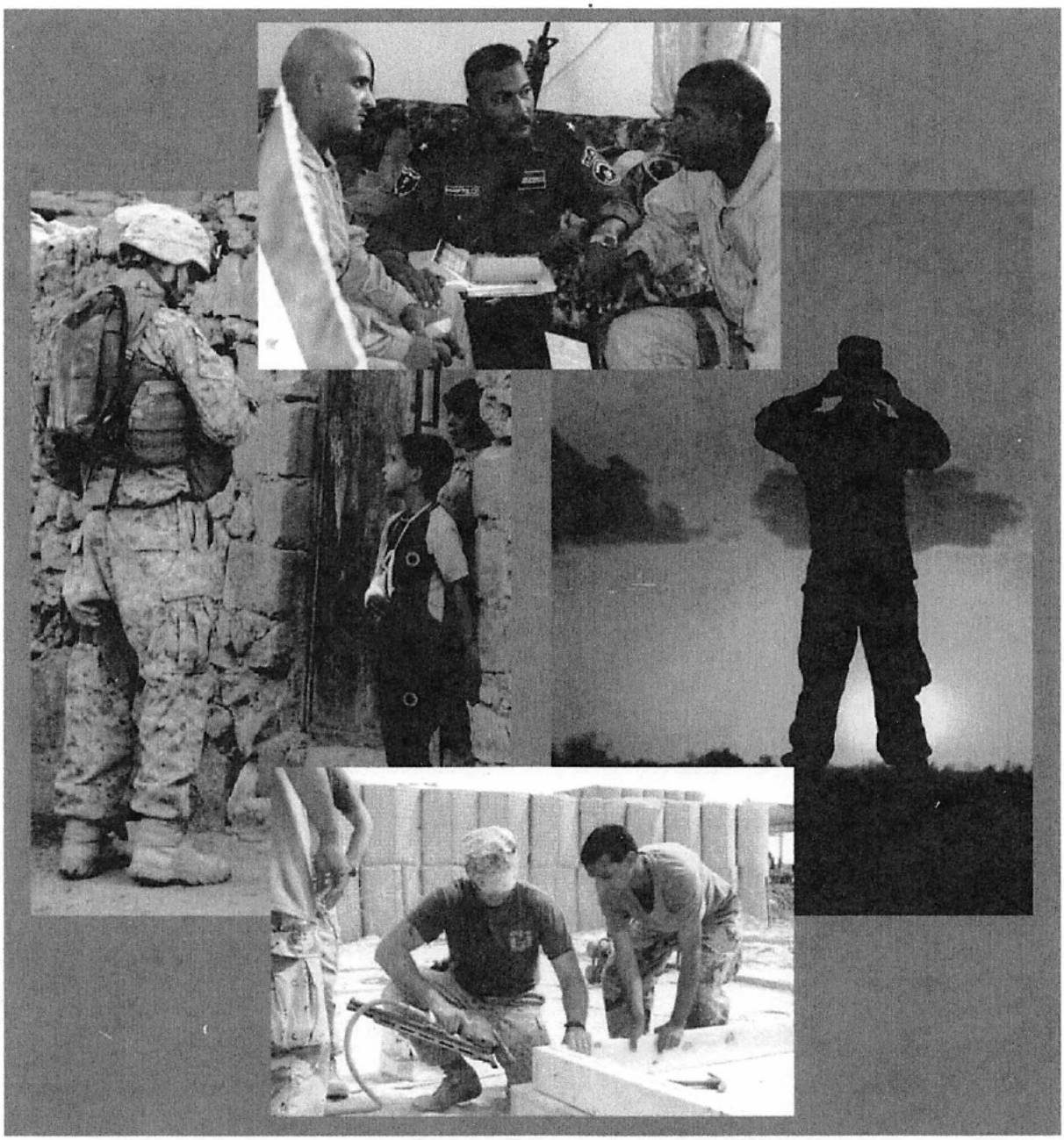

MARINE CORPS CULTURE:
THE ORIGINS & APPLICATION OF THE EXPEDITIONARY ETHOS

BY (b) (7)(C) [redacted]

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the origins and impact of the organizational culture of the Marine Corps. The culture of any military institution is a collective set of beliefs, rituals, and norms that govern how individuals act and how the organization responds to events and stimuli. The Marine Corps is often thought of as a highly traditional military service; deeply devoted to its unique core competencies, historical icons, and traditions. But the Leathernecks are not a rigid institution, hidebound by history or a slavish devotion to the past. The Marines identify themselves as a highly adaptive organization, and can point to a long line of tactical and technological innovations they have brought forward. Some of these innovative approaches involve the lower end of the conflict spectrum in what the Marines call Small Wars. This is an umbrella term for conflicts including counter-insurgencies, stability and support operations (SASO), and irregular warfare.

This paper will focus on the Corps' operational history in this wide range of contingencies, and draw insights regarding how these conflicts have contributed to or been influenced by Marine organizational culture. The Corps' unique expeditionary ethos is a major element, if not the crucial institutional attribute, of its overall organizational culture. This effort will seek to comprehend how the unique culture of this armed force developed, and how it influences, positively or negatively, its performance in stability operations and counter-insurgencies.

The Marine expeditionary ethos includes attitudes and beliefs built into the planning assumptions made about the operating environment and external support. Expeditionary operations typically are conducted in austere environments–from sea, land, or forward bases–and will likely require US forces to operate without reliance on third party or host-nation support. This does not mean that an expeditionary force is necessarily small or lightly equipped, but that it is no larger or heavier than necessary to accomplish the mission. Supplies, equipment, and infrastructure are limited to operational necessities; "nice to

haves" are ruthlessly carved out. Operational considerations such as readiness, realistic and stressful training, force protection and intelligence consistently prevail over peacetime considerations. Being prepared to operate without host-nation support is relevant to SASO since most missions are conducted within states that have failed or at least are substantially weak in basic services and functions.

From the day recruits join the Corps they understand that they are going to deploy, and that they must be mentally and physically ready. This focus on a constant state of readiness to deploy underscores the expeditionary culture. The Corps is famous for its physical readiness, but the cognitive or intellectual aspects are more important to the ethos. The ethos accepts ambiguity and uncertainty, preparing planners and operators to adapt to the conditions found once they arrive in area of operations. Fixed schedules, perfect intelligence, guaranteed transportation and support arrangements, and sunny weather are not expected—quite the opposite is inculcated in the mindset of Marine planners and commanders.

Decentralized command and control is also central to the expeditionary ethos. Rather than expect to oversee all the details of a plan and its execution, Marines are taught to employ mission type orders, leaving the details of execution to the subordinate commanders, operating under a shared understanding of the commander's overall intent. This approach leaves the details to the people closest to the problem, with the most recent information and feel for the context of a decision. It also maximizes the initiative of junior commanders and reinforces responsibility and awareness of the larger context in Marine leaders.

Boldness, creativity, and risk taking are all revered as individual and organizational traits. Aggressiveness is expected, even in the face of large odds or uncertain conditions. While aggressive action is prized, it is coupled with a preference for indirect approaches rather than simply applying brute force. Maneuver warfare seeks to apply strength against weakness, and seeking out vulnerabilities and creative solutions is the epitome of the Marine way.

This expeditionary ethos has both an institutional and individual dimension. Marine doctrine explicitly underscores the importance of the individual Marine armed with an

expeditionary mindset. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 3, *Expeditionary Operations,* states

> *The expeditionary mindset implies a Spartan attitude: an expectation and a willingness to endure—in fact, a certain pride in enduring—hardship and austere conditions. . . . [and the] versatility and adaptability to respond effectively without a great deal of preparation time to a broad variety of circumstances. Another part of this expeditionary mindset is a global perspective oriented to responding to a diverse range of threats around the globe rather than to a specific threat in a specific part of the world.'*

Because of this global perspective and the diverse range of threats, the Marines have not historically invested deeply in understanding of specific foreign cultures. They develop a broader sense of the importance of "operational culture" to teach Marines about local power or political systems, the role of culture in shaping how societies function, and the need to develop empathy with local populations.

This paper is organized into four parts. The first three sections concisely cover the case histories of Marine Corps participation in The Banana Wars, Vietnam, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The final section holistically analyzes the Corps history and these case studies to draw conclusions about the expeditionary ethos that makes the Corps relatively successful in these ambiguous and precarious conflicts. This attribute, or more accurately set of characteristics and attitudes, suggests that the Marines are institutionally well positioned to succeed in such missions.

The Banana Wars

The Marine Corps' experience and reputation at Small Wars is firmly grounded in Central America and the Caribbean, but their initial exposure to this form of warfare actually began in the Philippine War from 1899 to 1902. The Marines were ordered to organize and dispatch a regiment, which was the largest deployed formation up until that time. Under the command of Major Littleton Waller, the Marines helped tame the rebellion led by the Filipino

leader Emilio Aguinaldo. They executed this mission without popular support or much experience.

Working closely with the Army and Navy officers, the Marines helped dampen the rebellion by fighting principally in the jungle and fringes of population centers. The final campaign saw Waller leading a provisional brigade, another first for the "Leathernecks," against the most committed guerrillas on the island of Samar. During these campaigns the Marines honed counter-insurgency skills and jungle combat techniques, learning to maintain jungle base camps, train indigenous personnel, employ translators, and adapt to foreign cultures. From the Army, the Marines learned the non-kinetic aspects of a counterinsurgency, especially the building of public works, local governance, and the raising of native police forces.

This skill base was used a little more than a decade later when the Marines were ordered into Haiti in 1915. This was the beginning of the so-called Banana Wars, in which the Marines were often portrayed as serving corporate interests of American banks or investors. In this case, a revolution had toppled the elected government of President Vilbrun Sam in Haiti and a reluctant U. S. administration wanted order. It also wanted to preclude the need for Europeans intervention. The Marines were not strangers to Haiti or its capital of Port au Prince, having conducted 19 landings there between 1857 and 1913 to quell disorder and protect the lives and property of American citizens. This time the President ordered the Navy to take charge, and more than 2,000 Marines were sent in again under the command of the ubiquitous Colonel Waller.

The Marines had learned their previous lessons well. Upon landing they provided local security, as well as proving medical care, feeding the elderly and disabled, and disarming the population. This "indirect approach" was generally effective. Generous amnesty conditions and weapons buy back programs also proved to be valuable. Eventually, the U.S. government exerted pressure to install a favored official as the local face to American dominated government. But this produced a backlash among the local population. In September 1915, the local *cacos* rebelled and began ambushing the Marines and disturbing the railroad networks. This rising was quickly crushed by aggressive assaults by

the Marines on rebel strongholds, as well as courteous treatment for prisoners, surrendered *cacos*, and supporters.

Ultimately the Marines turned back to a more indirect approach by raising a cadre of local police, the *Gendarmerie d'Haiti,* led by the famous Marine Lieutenant Colonel Smedley Butler and officered by young Marine NCOs who simultaneously drew both their Marine and local government salaries. These aggressive NCOs developed effective small local units, and the *Gendarmerie* was sufficient to keep the peace for a few quiet years until a second *caco* war began in 1919. Possibly engendered by the poor quality of Marine leaders due to the pull on resources for the battlefield in France, the *Gendarmerie* was increasingly ineffective at maintaining local order or at dampening the growing power of the *cacos.* The populace resented the increasingly corrupt government and continued to support the rebel leader Charlmagne Peralte. Peralte was eventually killed by a Marine-led patrol that used a ruse to get access to his camp.

While improving local governance and public infrastructure was the principal thrust of the American campaign, credible military force and local security were also required. The Marines are credited with killing 2,250 *cacos* and took 11,000 prisoners over a five-year period, at the cost of 13 Marines. Force levels in Haiti were reduced to 800 Marines in the capital and major towns in Haiti during much of the 1920s

Nicaragua, 1926-1933

The Marine experience in Nicaragua followed much the same pattern. The Marines had been stationed there since 1912 when they had landed to put down a revolt. A legation guard remained until President Harding decided in 1924 that they would withdraw. The last detachment sailed away from Managua in August 1925. But election disputes and local disorder brought them back in 1926, ostensibly to protect U.S. lives and property but more accurately to bolster the pro-U.S. government of Adofo Diaz and its tenuous hold on power. Within two months, a total of 2,000 Marines had been dispatched and taken up posts in the two large port cities of Nicaragua. They bolstered the government and stiffened American diplomatic efforts to arrange a truce between competing factions. The Marines eventually

garrisoned more than a dozen cities and towns, and their complement grew to a full brigade of 3,300 Marines, including two squadrons of aircraft.

Most of the contesting factions were willing to negotiate but one holdout, Augusto Cesar Sandino, refused to participate. A strong leader, he would successfully hold out for five years – eluding every snare, avoiding raids by Marine aviation, and declining to engage in major combat unless the odds were in his favor. While the Marines and the local government successfully kept Sandino at some distance, they could not eradicate his insurgency despite a series of penetrating patrols sent to find and destroy the Sandinistas in their mountain camps. Benefiting from international support and external sanctuaries along the rugged Honduran border, Sandino continued to draw additional committed forces to his cause. As in Haiti, the Marines raised up a local Guardia as a constabulary force that augmented the Leathernecks' strength and afforded them better local intelligence and knowledge of native conditions. Again, using an indirect approach and developing a nascent local solution to the problem was stressed.

Due to the austere nature of the terrain, the Marines began to rely upon the rapidly growing capabilities presented by the airplane. A new chapter in Marine innovation and expeditionary adaptation was written. Marine aircraft learned how to support ground troops with machine guns and boxes of crude bombs to drive off guerrilla raids. Later in this conflict Marine aviators would further distinguish themselves with invaluable logistics and evacuation missions in support of their brother Marines. From this conflict the intense cooperation and mutual understanding between ground and aviation elements of the Marine Corps originated. This combined arms capability remains central to the Corps structure and organizational culture today.

The Marines continued to apply pressure against the insurgents, pressing deeper into rebel territory, using rivers to penetrate into guerrilla strongholds. The goal was to maintain constant pressure on the rebels and deny them sanctuary, which remain principles of effective counterinsurgency doctrine today. The Marine patrols used native guides, and lived off the land when possible, and exploited aviation support to bring in new clothes and medical supplies. As in all the Banana war campaigns, these patrols reflected lessons the Marines absorbed into their doctrine and culture.

The value of aggressive small unit leadership, decentralized operations over micromanagement, combined arms, disciplined and accurate marksmanship, rigorous training, relentless patrols and pressure, and intimate interaction with local units, were the principal characteristics learned by the Marines in this era. Many famous leaders of the Marine Corps amphibious campaigns of World War II including Generals Lew Walt, Chesty Puller and Red Mike Edson learned their jungle fighting techniques in the Banana Wars.

Figure 1: Key Lessons Learned From Banana Wars

Ambiguity. *"Small wars involve a wide range of activities including diplomacy, contacts with the civil population and warfare of the most difficult kind. The situation is often uncertain and the orders are sometimes indefinite."* The Manual goes on to characterize these activities as *"conceived in uncertainty, are conducted often with precarious responsibility, under indeterminate orders lacking specific instructions."*

Cultural Intelligence. The nature of Small Wars places a premium on an in depth knowledge of a nation's or people's strategic culture—but more importantly its societal culture. As stressed in the Small Wars Manual, a detailed understanding of human psychology, social customs, and the history of a people is crucial to preclude pitfalls and of primary importance in the development of plans. *"The campaign plan and strategy must be adapted to the character of the people encountered."* As the Small Wars Manual notes, the contacts between Marines and civilians is a dominating factor in Small Wars and that the characteristics and culture of a people are subjects for intensive study.

Intelligence and Planning. Small Wars generate from social and political deficiencies, and planning must identify the root causes of the conflict, not focus solely on military matters. This necessitates *"a knowledge of the mental soil in which the ideas that direct its course have to germinate."*

The Unique Character of Stability Operations. Each conflict is different and must be examined closely for its unique socio-economic and political factors, as well as the external conditions, as *"to a greater degree is each small war somewhat different from anything which has preceded it."* "A knowledge of the history of interventions and the displays of force and other measures short of war employed...in the past are essential to thorough comprehension of our relations with foreign states insofar as these matters are concerned."

Discriminate Force. *"In small wars caution must be exercised and instead of striving to generate the maximum power with forces available, the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life."*

The Marines published their lessons learned in their *Small Wars Manual (SWM)*, first printed in 1935. More than 60 years later, the *SWM* is still an excellent primer on low intensity conflict and required reading in Marine Corps education institutions. See Figure 1 for a listing of key lessons. The Marines gained an early appreciation of the political and socio-economic aspects of counterinsurgency or guerrilla warfare. Operations were characterized by a detailed understanding and empathy of the local population, small unit patrolling to maintain pressure and to isolate the insurgents, and the training of locally grown constabulary forces. The latter included the employment of combined units made up of a mix of U.S. and local forces. To provide the necessary leadership, the Marines were usually compelled to establish local schools for their own NCOs to improve their understanding of local language and culture, and to improve their basic warfighting skills.

Vietnam and the Combined Action Program

The Marines fulfilled a wide range of roles in Vietnam, including their initial landings and defensive missions in Da Nang, the savage defense of Khe Sanh, and the brutal city fighting in Hue City. However, one of their more innovative concepts for irregular conflicts in Vietnam was known as the Combined Action Program (CAP). Several U.S. Army students of the war in Southeast Asia have credited the Marines with a unique and valuable initiative.

Marines trace CAP back to their own experiences in the "Small Wars" of Central America, specifically during their involvement in Nicaragua. Some authors draw upon similar programs employed by the French. But the official origins of CAP in Vietnam were from the bottom up. Drawing upon some Vietnamese-speaking officers and a cadre of volunteers, one Marine commander formed combined teams with local forces built around the Marine basic rifle squad of 13 Marines and a Navy corpsman. Each of these squads was integrated into a local militia (PF) platoon to form what was known at first as a "joint action platoon." These units would live, eat, train, and operate together within a village. The Marines would provide training and moral support, advise on patrols, strengthen the defensive positions in and around the village, and coordinate fire support from U.S. assets if needed.

The program grew over time, and included crash courses in Vietnamese culture and political architecture at the local level. Critics of the program note that language training was

notably absent, a weakness of the program that would continue throughout its existence. But early results were achieved, and local security improved to the point that government officials and elders began sleeping in their homes again instead of at fortified positions. As the villagers began to feel more secure from VC coercion they began to provide tactical intelligence on the VC, and VC-initiated ambushes and activity declined markedly. Other Marine units throughout the I Corps zone soon emulated the technique. Ultimately the CAP effort got official support from senior Marine leaders, especially LtGen Lewis Walt, the Commanding General of III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), who was a veteran of the earlier Small Wars era. Yet, the program was criticized by Army leaders who favored destroying the insurgents via "search and destroy" missions, and felt that the Marines were too passive sitting in defensive positions.

In 1967, LtGen Walt formally approved and established the CAPs as a distinct element of the Marine counterinsurgency program. He set up formal chains of command, formulated equipment plans, and grouped the squads into Combined Action Groups (CAG's). The training and preparation of the CAP Marines and their supervision improved. A total of four CAGs were eventually operating in 1969, the apex of the program. At that time some 2,000 Marines were devoted to 114 CAP platoons.

By the metrics of the day, CAP was hugely successful. It was a relatively low cost program, and many Marines bonded effectively with their local units and with the villagers themselves. The proverbial "hearts and minds" contest for the population swung over to the South Vietnamese and their American partners. Numerous contested villages were brought over to supporting the Saigon government. As demonstrated in Francis "Bing" West's book *The Village*, the Marines bonded with their villagers and PF teammates, and organized an effective combined Marine/PF defense that helped set the stage for the population's security and established a foundation for other pacification efforts to take root.

The important point to take away from the CAP program is the concept that defeating an insurgency is rarely a function of the external supporting force achieving victory itself through kinetic means. The CAP program did not attempt to defeat the insurgency directly, it indirectly sought to isolate the VC and deprive them of the support and sanctuary they garnered by intimidating the local villagers. This indirect approach remains critical to the

Corps operational philosophy as captured in its Maneuver Warfare doctrine which is applicable in all modes of warfare.

Operational Iraqi Freedom

After their rapid mechanized drive to Baghdad in April 2003, the Marines had to shift swiftly from high intensity combat operations in the eastern half of the city to post-conflict stability operations. This required extraordinarily disciplined Marines and well-established techniques and procedures, adapted to the circumstances on the ground in the specific cultural context of the country being assisted. It would have been very natural for the Marines, honed as their combat skills were for the "March Up," to continue focusing on the kinetic side of things and chase down the remnants of opposition. Instead, General James N. Mattis reinforced the shift by issuing a new mission order and a new Commander's Intent to ensure his force made the necessary shift in attitude and deportment. The additive "Do no harm" phrase to the Division's rules of engagement, shifted the Marine orientation from fighting against an enemy to one that was fighting *for* a population. The Marines leaned on the Small Wars Manual and T. E. Lawrence for inspiration. While public order would have to be established quickly, an indirect approach was recognized as the long term solution. Lawrence's famous maxim that "better that they do it tolerably than you do it yourself perfectly" was widely quoted in theater.

The Marines of I MEF quickly established local order and set up Regimental and Battalion level Civil-Military Operations Centers to coordinate the provision of aid from U.S., Coalition, and private international relief organizations with local leaders. Within a few days, the Marines were ordered to occupy a different area of the country, and to divide their ground forces in seven different cities and towns. As part of this physical shift, Mattis ordered his Marines out of their armored vehicles and trucks to conduct dismounted patrols in order to get closer and more intimate contact with the populations they were securing. Body armor was reduced, commensurate with the local commander's estimate of the tactical situation. Marines were ordered to remove their helmets and sunglasses. "Wave tactics" were emphasized to Marines to improve their interaction with the local population by smiling and waving on patrols. All of the Marine's tanks and heavy weapons were shipped

back south to Kuwait to begin their redeployment to America; they were anathema to their historical conception of SASO. An intimate connection with local leaders and the general populace was to be gained by constant patrolling and direct interaction with local leaders. Local solutions to local problems were to be sought and rapidly implemented. Direct action by Marine military power was taken only in emergency situations where no other solutions existed. The application of force or firepower would be purposeful and discriminate, not overwhelming and potentially counterproductive.

Given the enormous challenge of initially trying to gain access and maintain a modicum of control over this diverse area, the Marines decided to decentralize responsibility for each local area to the designated military battalion commanders assigned to each town. They each became the military governor of their respective area, although they were not to act as such. The Marine approach was to quickly bring the maximum benefit to the greatest number of people possible, trying to build momentum and support for local leaders to arise and take responsibility.

Trained to work with minimal policy guidance and to visualize what their commander was trying to achieve, the Marines didn't wait for detailed guidance or expect a lot of help from the Coalition Provisional Authority as it struggled to get its arms around the major political problems in Baghdad proper. Marines are trained to expect ambiguity in Small Wars and Marine officers are educated to exploit every opportunity. These commanders recognized from their education and the *SWM* that waiting for external assistance or more prescriptive instructions was unnecessary. They also recognized that leadership would have to be even further decentralized from Battalion and Company commanders down to the Lieutenants and squad leaders on patrol who would provide the vast majority of day-to-day contacts with the indigenous population.

Armed with the clear intent of their commander, and the modicum of common sense and lessons passed on from the past, they set to work armed with initiative, imaginations, and intellect. Basic services and a veneer of security were quickly set in each city and town. These efforts were hamstrung by the inadequate and looted infrastructure and absent technicians to operate and maintain it. Each commander took charge of his adopted city, and tried to put it on a clear path for a sustainable recovery and a better peace. Each

commander took a slightly different approache based on the peculiar make up of his city or "microclimate." Each city had a different tribal or religious composition, as well as different problems.

Operating under broad guidance, each commander set to work with his local leaders. Priority of work was established under the mantra of Police, Power, and Popular Government. Once physical safety was satisfied in terms of local security, the Marines would turn to power (especially electricity). Power was required to restore a suite of essential services. Without energy distribution, maintaining order would be unfathomable. Finally, the Marines would seek to generate popular governance, and introduce the Iraqi population to democracy—subject to their own culture, not necessarily a microcosm of mainstream America.

Due to the large areas to be covered with limited manpower shortages, and demonstrating the cultural attribute of "every Marine a rifleman," Marine commanders employed their artillery and weapons company assets as provisional rifle units to increase street presence and local order. Indirect approaches to maintaining order were quickly sought by enhancing the clout of local leaders and raising a new police force. Several Battalion commanders established their own police training academies and began producing new local police elements untainted by any association with the prior regime to begin patrolling with the Marines.

Demonstrating an enormous degree of cultural sensitivity and discipline, as well as decentralized command and control, the Marines of I MEF served from April to October in the volatile Shiia dominated area within only one fatality caused by a sniper. The California-based Marines then shipped home in late 2003.

But these same Marines were ordered back to Iraq in March of 2004. They had hoped to apply some time-tested principles derived from the Corps' extensive experience with insurgencies captured in the classical *Small Wars Manual* and from Vietnam. A major component of the strategy required a greater emphasis on training the Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi Police. The Marine Corps has always understood that the training of indigenous forces is a crucial aspect of any effective counter-insurgency strategy. One option for improving Iraqi security force operational effectiveness was the creation of a hybrid CAP

program – with U.S. Marines living among the Iraqi people, training together, and conducting Joint U.S./Iraqi security patrols.

This "hybrid" CAP concept met with mixed success. Each battalion was required to assign and train one platoon for CAP duty. The CAP element was considered by senior officers to have been fully successful, albeit limited due to the constraints on forces. Depending on the tactical situation, some CAP elements served largely as training advisors. Other lived, ate, and fought with their Iraqi counterparts, apart from their parent unit and away from the well-defended American camps. This approach, "living with their counterparts and sharing all duties and dangers with them, this common bond facilitated communications and understanding, enabling both cultures to solve the complex problems faced in combat," noted one participant. Some CAP units, led by Marine NCOs, fought very effectively in the high intensity cauldron of the second battle for Fallujah in November of 2004. Others were ineffective or infiltrated by insurgents and corrupted from within.

The Marines involved in this mission are extremely proud of their accomplishments, and senior leaders claim it was a success, "hands down." But some of the challenges of the original CAP concept in Vietnam came up again. Too many of the assigned CAP Marines were young and on their first enlistments. They had insufficient language training, proficiency in foreign weapons, and instruction on indigenous culture. They had little grasp how to train foreign forces in the midst of an insurgency. From this experience in Iraq, the Marine Corps has learned, once again, the importance of highly prepared and skilled trainers and advisers as a key component of effective counterinsurgency. Accordingly, it has set up new permanent units with a formal training regimen to serve around the globe training foreign militaries as needed.

The Expeditionary Ethos

The Marines have a unique institutional culture drawn from 230-odd years of storied campaigns and selfless service. From this rich trove of legacy, numerous norms, values, and rituals have emerged. Yet, the most powerful and most relevant cultural characteristic is their expeditionary ethos. This ethos is the most critical contributor to the Corps' success at SASO and complex contingencies. The astute student of military history in general, and the

Marine Corps institutional history in particular, can see this ethos emerging from the Corps' Small Wars period, and its modern-day exposition in situations like OIF. This ethos has been assiduously cultivated and exploited by Marine leaders over several generations. It is this ethos that animates many of the innate actions that the Marines have undertaken during SASO in their history and most recently in Iraq.

Many military organizations use the term "expeditionary" to describe themselves or to label distinct units. Marines believe the term "expeditionary" encompasses far more than a mission involving actions beyond U.S. borders, the official Joint definition. To Marines, the term "expeditionary" describes an institutional capacity and cultural predisposition, a perspective or philosophy that influences every aspect of organization, training, and equipment. One can find this characterization in the Marine's capstone concept *Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare*. The Marines describe an expeditionary force as: "An agile force, flexibly organized, and prepared to accomplish a broad range of military objectives in a foreign country or region. Such a force must be able to deploy rapidly, enter the objective area through forcible means, conduct a wide set of military tasks, sustain itself for an extended period of time, and withdraw quickly."

For Marines this is a basic capability statement, and a fairly high standard for military professionalism, but behind it is the idea of expeditionary culture or ethos. For Marines, the term "expeditionary" connotes more than the mere ability to deploy overseas quickly when needed. Expeditionary is an institutional belief system that influences all aspects of organizing, training, and equipping by acknowledging the necessity to deploy rapidly, arrive quickly, and begin operating from the instant you arrive. Such "come as you are" attitudes are embedded n the force design of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) construct, the way the Marine Corps designs its operating forces.

This expeditionary mindset is a powerful component of the Marine Corps' unique Service culture. Beginning with recruit training, Marines are imbued with the notion of doing more with less, of fighting and prevailing in an austere operational environment, of living a lean existence: all metrics on the expeditionary readiness yardstick. They are prepared to use their own initiative and readily solve problems on their own with a minimum of guidance. They are eager to apply their creativity to unforeseen problems, without doctrine or clear

guidance, within a foreign culture. These things are not platitudes or recruiting slogans. They are necessary parts of creating and maintaining mental preparedness for complex contingencies. The rugged lifestyle to which they become inured through training is second nature, and is held as a point of pride. Economy is elevated to an art form. The result is that Marine units can operate almost indefinitely with low logistical overhead. General Jim Jones, the former Commandant and now NATO Supreme Allied Commander put it best when he noted the Marines are "trained to do as much as we can with as little as we get."

Conclusion

Because of this expeditionary mindset, Marines are constantly prepared to adapt to new situations, and mentally agile enough to create innovative solutions to unanticipated circumstances. SASO contingencies generate more than their share of such circumstances. Thus, Marines look to creative solutions, prepared often at low levels. Marines do not look for explicit guidance, formal doctrine, or tactical templates or checklists. An expeditionary mindset is correctly defined as "an attitude of multi-functionality rather than specialization, curiosity rather than complacency, and initiative rather than compliance." In short, this expeditionary ethos prizes adaptability and creativity as a part of warfare, and mandates the ability to make things happen, to improvise on the fly like a jazz ensemble.

This does not suggest that the Marines do not prepare their personnel, or that a deep study of military history is frowned upon—quite the opposite. Professional study gives the modern warrior an edge, as doctrine and experiential learning must furnish the intellectual tools with which to diagnose unexpected requirements, and a menu of combat proven options from which Marines can create their own solutions quickly and effectively. The ultimate objective of this rigorous preparation is not to constrain initiative or creative thinking—but to foster it to gain an advantage. A component of this preparation is a general understanding of culture and its influence on operations in Small Wars.

Another key lesson has been the need to appreciate the primacy of political and socio-economic aspects of counterinsurgency or SASO missions. Campaigns are planned with as detailed an understanding of the local population and its underlying grievances and perceptions as can be gained. Indirect approaches over kinetic solutions are to be sought.

Securing the local population is understood to be a basic requirement, with, relentless small unit patrolling undertaken to establish credibility with the citizenry and to maintain pressure and isolation of the insurgents. Decentralization and empowerment at the local tactical level is prized over hierarchical deference to senior officers and delayed responses or approvals. A principal and recurring element of the indirect approach is the training of locally grown constabulary forces. This often starts with the employment of combined or integrated units made up of a mix of U.S. and local forces.

The expeditionary ethos is the crucial component of the Marine's unique institutional culture and is the basis for the Corps' success in complex contingencies in the past. Given that most prognosticators project a coming "perfect storm" of ethnically or religiously-based conflict to characterize the near term security landscape, this expeditionary ethos will continue to give the Marines an edge in tomorrow's inevitable contingencies.

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