

# RMS<sup>+</sup>



REVUE MILITAIRE SUISSE INTERNATIONALE : U.S. MARINE CORPS



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The USMC basic training emphasises every corpsman needs to be trained as an infantryman. Traditionally, substantial emphasis has also been placed on individual precision marksmanship.

## Editorial

### Title

**COL (GS) Dr. Alexandre J. Vautravers**

Editor in Chief, RMS+

Switzerland has no Navy and therefore, no Marine Corps... It also has no direct access to the sea. And its last military landing operation was conducted in 1815. So why is the example of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) relevant today?

The small size, distinct traditions and culture of the Corps make it interesting for many armed forces throughout the World. Indeed, if we compare numbers of soldiers and units, these are not very different from the size of many small countries' entire armed forces.

At the center of these traditions is a common 'boot camp' which every Marine needs to go through - before becoming a specialist. This short period constitutes a strong base for every corpsman to experience and get to know the job and situation of the individual infantryman.

Given that the USMC has -almost by definition- a naval, land and air component, not to mention special forces, they can inspire many countries as far as doctrine and procurement go. The extremely high readiness and deployment rates of the force are also a significant strength.

Given the challenges of a multi-arm, high readiness, forward deployed force and a very limited budget, it is not surprising that the USMC has long prioritized its efforts. Clearly, the emphasis on rusticity and making do with proven, but older weapon systems, may sharply contrast

with the emphasis many professional armies have had on high tech, fresh-off-the-production-line and automation.

The reliance on rugged and simpler weapons has had strategic and doctrinal consequences. For several decades, during the Cold War, the USMC specialized as an 'entry force' supposed to take or delay a situation until heavier and better equipped units were able to build up and be shipped into the theatre.

More recently, the USMC specialized into a stabilization force, developing its expertise in harsh environment, low-intensity conflicts. This has led to the development of novel doctrines - such as the 'Three Block War', which has been widely discussed among many European armies.

With the end of the 'Global War On Terror' and the rising US focus on China/Pacific or the Ukraine/Europe theatres, the USMC is developing new doctrines for high intensity conflict. Their increased presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Scandinavia should also be noted.

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As we celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy landings and many others in the Pacific, amphibious maneuvers and landing craft are once again the subject of discussion and development.

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## USMC

### United States Marine Corps, Tip of the Spear

**Thibaut Mallet**

Journalist specializing in maritime and defense issues

«Marines are trained to improvise, adapt and overcome any obstacle in any situation. They have the will and determination to fight and keep fighting until victory is assured.» The raison d'être of the US Marine Corps sums up the spirit of innovation and adaptability essential to these troops who are called upon to intervene far from their bases.

Administratively attached to the US Navy, which provides transport to its areas of operation, the USMC has managed to protect its independence by developing its own joint employment doctrines, training curriculum and equipment after two centuries of operations.

### Missions

Since its creation during the Revolutionary War in 1775, the USMC's specialty has been amphibious assault. Its first feat of arms was the conquest of Fort Montagu and Fort Nassau against British forces in 1776.

But it wasn't until 1947 that this particular expertise was recognized, with the National Security Act definitively defining its role as an expeditionary force and its responsibility for developing appropriate tactics and processes for inter-service operations.

The Marine Corps also provides security for US embassies around the World, as well as close protection for the President at the White House and during his travels aboard «Marine One».

Initially used as assault troops in naval battles, the arrival of the propeller and increasingly effective artillery saw the Marines employed in the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century as an intervention force to defend American interests abroad. The Corps owes its return to amphibious operations to Major Pete Ellis, who in 1921 defined its doctrine for use in the event of conflict with the Japanese Empire in the Pacific. His vision was based on taking control of sufficiently large islands to transform them into strongholds, linked by a naval and air logistical network providing mutual support in the event of an attack.

This mesh makes it unnecessary to conquer all the surrounding islands, even if they are still occupied by enemy forces. As the latter are isolated and difficult to supply,

they quickly lose all capacity to cause harm. This leapfrog tactic is reminiscent of the encirclement and enemy suffocation tactics characteristic of the GO game so popular in Asia. Major Ellis spent the next 20 years preparing the Marine Corps for this mission.

Higgins Boat (LCVP) Amtrack and DUKW were developed.

New concepts for the use of aviation in fire support missions emerged. Forward Air Controllers accompanying the Marines during the landings guided bomber pilots to their targets by radio. Realistic training began in 1933. For 8 years, the Marine Corps was able to test and refine its concept of amphibious assault, coordinating assault group, naval artillery and air force.

Rarely has a force been so well prepared for its mission. The Pacific campaign and the landing at Inchon during the Korean War demonstrated the effectiveness of this doctrine.

The failure of the Iran hostage rescue mission and the invasion of Grenada revealed a counter-productive rivalry between the various US armed forces, preventing effective coordination and communication in the event of large-scale engagement.

As an integrated and relatively autonomous force, the Marine Corps did not suffer from red tape.

Its responsiveness and flexibility were clearly demonstrated during the invasion of Grenada, where they succeeded in taking control of 75% of the territory with only 20% of the resources committed.

The decision-making autonomy given to the Marines enabled them to adapt quickly to unexpected events, without systematically waiting for instructions. This notion of «commander intent», which General Patton would not have disavowed, explains, in part, this speed of progress in the field. «Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do, and let them surprise you with the results.

The separate status of *leathernecks* has been protected by law against any attempt at dissolution since 1952, and a Marine never misses an opportunity to assert his inde-