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Culture Warriors:
Marine Corps Organizational Culture and Adaptation to Cultural Terrain
Major Ben Connable, USMC

As Soldiers and Marines began returning from Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003, a grass roots debate erupted over the ability of our military to operate amongst indigenous cultures. Lessons learned in irregular warfare campaigns dating back to the early 20th Century had not been sufficiently institutionalized to prevent our troops from making thousands of grievous cultural errors in the Global War on Terror, or the "Long War."¹ The services responded to this critical failure with a deluge of cultural and language programs. The Marine Corps, with a rich tradition of cultural study and decades of experience fighting at the outreaches of the American empire, is well suited to take the lead in developing and institutionalizing the kinds of military cultural competencies required to achieve victory in the Long War.

This article will discuss the historical, doctrinal, and institutional factors that make the Marine Corps adept at embracing organizational change and at operating in culturally complex environments. A relatively small organization compared to the other services, the Corps always has been forced to do more with less, adopt unorthodox methods to win, and grant unusually high levels of authority to its junior leaders. The Marine Corps' empowerment of junior leaders and its confident warrior ethos tend to produce mavericks who effect change disproportionate to their rank or status. These Marines in turn are shepherded and championed by seasoned officers with similar inclinations.

Purposefully decentralized authority makes for an inherently flexible and adaptive fighting force. This flexibility imparts an innate ability to adapt to foreign cultures and empowers a vocal and nearly continual grass-roots appraisal of Marine Corps field tactics. All ranks openly and aggressively debate history and tactics in professional journals, school houses, letters and over the more than occasional beer; a reverence for Marine history sustains the visions of the mavericks and the experiences of combat. Both revolutionary ideas and grounding lessons in the oft-forgotten complexities of foreign culture and irregular warfare are thereby woven into the institutional fabric of the Marine Corps.

Although Marines become periodically distracted from a focus on culture, they have usually been able to quickly adapt their tactics to operate in the kinds of "small wars" they will most likely face in the coming decades. This capability took root during the "Banana War" campaigns of the early 20th century.

Small Wars Shape the Corps

Marines reverently refer to the Small Wars Manual of 1940.² For many, it is proof that the Marine Corps has always "gotten" counterinsurgency operations and cultural terrain; in many ways it is seen as the Corps' secular bible. The Manual mines the collective experience of Marine expeditions in the Philippines, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua from 1900 through the early 1930s. Republished in 1986, it fed the development of the maneuver warfare concepts that lie at the heart of modern Marine

Corps doctrine. The lessons of the Marine experience described in the Manual are playing a central role in the current debate over counterinsurgency theory.

Keith Bickel closely examines the genesis of the Small Wars Manual in *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940*.³ Far from glamorizing the Corps as inherently adaptive to complex counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics, Bickel describes the slow, turbulent, and often inefficient transformation of a Marine Corps that had until that time been fixated on large scale combat or security duties. Until the publication of the Small Wars Manual the Marines principally relied on Army doctrine and writings to prepare them for COIN operations.⁴ Marine lessons learned in the Philippines and Haiti had to be painfully relearned in the Dominican Republic and then again in Nicaragua before they became part of the Corps' collective knowledge.

The cultural and tactical experiences of Marine icons like Smedley Butler, Merritt "Red Mike" Edson, and Lewis "Chesty" Puller⁵ earned in the Caribbean campaigns are reflected in the actions of veteran Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. These concepts are expressed by David Galula in his seminal work on small wars, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*.⁶ control of the population is the key to victory; uncertainty and friction are exponentially greater when fighting insurgents rather than conventional forces; knowledge of the indigenous culture, language, and psychology are critical combat multipliers. These last lessons are expertly articulated by Marines in a series of professional journal articles written during the Banana War campaigns and captured in a separate section on psychology in the Small Wars Manual.⁷

Operating in small groups often far removed from major bases and with minimal supplies, both Marine and Army leaders in the Caribbean and the Philippines were forced to make the most of the assets they had on hand. Realizing the criticality of population control in the absence of overwhelming force, they engaged the local populace with medical and reconstruction projects while working to provide local security. Whenever possible, they trained local security forces to execute the tasks that required the most interaction with civilians - checkpoints, urban patrols, local security, and administration.

Both Marine and Army leaders (many with several tours in COIN campaigns) adopted non-doctrinal procedures, learned from their mistakes, wrote articles, and engaged their peers in pointed debate on small wars tactics. However, only the Marine Corps followed through with comprehensive doctrine. What was it that led the Marine Corps of 1940 to embrace counterinsurgency lessons of the early 20th Century while the Army remained fixated on conventional missions?

The answer is complex and open to debate: The smaller Corps inherently was more flexible than the Army from a broad organizational standpoint; Marine officers had greater latitude to write professionally on small wars subjects and serve as proponents for doctrine than their Army counterparts; larger-than-life Marine personalities like Butler and Edson had a disproportionately significant impact on doctrine in a relatively small Marine Corps. It is possible that the Marine Corps simply was searching for a unique mission to set it apart from the Army as it struggled for institutional survival. Marine Lieutenant General Victor Krulak refers to what he called a "sensitive paranoia" as one of the primary motivators driving successive waves of Marine transformation.⁸

Bickel points out that the Nicaragua campaign played a significant role in the transformation of the Marines into true small wars practitioners. Prior to the six year

campaign in Nicaragua, the Corps had made only halting attempts to incorporate COIN and cultural warfighting lessons into doctrine and professional education. One general officer lamented this lack of preparation: “We received no training in (small wars) when we were ordered to these places... I arrived in Managua... and three days later I was out in bandit territory with a patrol, having received no instruction on the situation, the general intelligence situation, the methods to be employed, training (sic).”⁹

Within a year of the initial Marine deployment to Nicaragua, however, Headquarters Marine Corps was officially sanctioning professional writing on small wars and lessons learned from the ongoing campaign. Edson and two Majors (Harrington and Utley) led the dialectical charge in the Marine Corps Gazette and other venues.¹⁰ By the time the Marines had drawn down in Nicaragua, small wars lessons had been inculcated in the Marine Corps professional education system. The preliminary edition of the Small Wars Manual was published by 1935.¹¹

The big personalities behind the development of small wars doctrine went on to teach lieutenants and pass along their experiences to new generations of Marines. By 1929, Edson was teaching at the Basic School; Puller followed in 1936. The Basic School,¹² an institution unique within the American military, brings all newly minted lieutenants together for several months before sending them off to their various specialty schools. This period of common bonding traditionally has offered a tremendous opportunity for the Marine Corps to shape its officers and jump start transformation.¹³

Insightful school commandants shepherded the small wars curriculum through several attempts to eliminate COIN training in favor of other lessons. Between seven and ten percent of formal officer schools curricula were devoted to small wars courses in the decade prior to World War II.¹⁴ Although the Small Wars Manual was momentarily forgotten as the Marines focused on advanced basing doctrine and amphibious operations, its imprimatur had been stamped on the Marine ethos.

Willful men trying to press home new ideas in a large bureaucracy often are ignored, sidelined, or cast aside by status quo ante bureaucrats. There was something different about the Marine Corps that allowed a few men to have such an impact on the Corps’ central mission. Both Keith Bickel and Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, USA, (*Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*)¹⁵ examine the role of the individual visionary in the transformation of an organization. They both infer that bright individuals at the junior as well as senior level must see an idea as worthwhile to allow it to germinate.

The Marine Corps had the requisite mid and high-level thinkers required to champion the small wars cause. The Marine Corps of the early 20th Century was also what Nagl calls a “learning organization.” He lays out a checklist to determine whether a military organization encourages internally generated transformation.¹⁶ Arguably, the Marine Corps of the 1930s meets all five of his requirements: it promoted suggestions from the field, encouraged subordinates to question policies, institutionally questioned its basic assumptions, generated local SOPs, and had a senior officer corps in close touch with men in the field.

Development of the Small Wars Manual set a standard for transformational process that Marines continue to replicate today. The Corps is an organization that has always valued and exploited its history to preserve the hard-won lessons of past generations. Although the Manual itself represents a benchmark in doctrinal development, the history of the process and the personalities are equally critical to

sustaining the learning culture of the Corps. For Marines steeped in institutional history, the development of the Small Wars Manual is the foundation for successive waves of innovation and doctrinal adaptation.

A Chinese Communist in the Commandant's Court

Although the onset of World War Two effectively cut short the progress towards a comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine for the U.S. military, the Marine Corps continued to experiment with cultural terrain and behavioral sciences. Influential individual Marines also continued to have great impact on the evolution of the Corps. Brigadier General Evans F. Carlson was perhaps the most controversial of these visionaries. Military historians have given Carlson short shrift,¹⁷ but he left a distinct and lasting impression on the Marine Corps approach to warfighting, culture, and human behavior.

Heavily decorated in World War One and Nicaragua, Carlson spent six years in China over the course of three tours, immersing himself in Chinese culture and studying first-hand the operations of the 8th Route Army as it battled Japanese occupying forces.¹⁸ Carlson's time with the Chinese evoked significant personal transformation. He observed the success of communist guerilla and conventional operations against the Japanese as he lived, marched, and ate with his counterparts under demanding conditions.

After one particularly grueling march of 58 miles, Carlson came to the conclusion that the "ethical conditioning" of the Chinese lay at the heart of their success. Each and every soldier knew why he was fighting and believed in the cause. Perhaps more importantly, they believed in the officers and men around them and labored as one towards a common goal. They defined this spirit as *gung ho*, which loosely translates as "working together."¹⁹ The Chinese Communists practiced an egalitarianism unseen in Western militaries.

Carlson embraced the *gung ho* concept and transferred the fighting ethos of the Communist Chinese to the Marines of his Second Raider Battalion, an elite unit formed early in the war to conduct raids on Japanese held islands. He altered the standard fighting formation to fit this new, flexible spirit, creating what eventually would become the modern Marine fireteam.²⁰ Carlson's communist-inspired classlessness won him little praise at the time but arguably gave birth to several central tenets of contemporary Marine Corps leadership: officers eat and dress as their men; every Marine down to the most junior private can professionally critique an exercise or operation; self-discipline and individual motivation are more valuable than forced obedience.

From an institutional standpoint, Carlson's success was further evidence that the Marine Corps was a learning organization, albeit an unlikely one. An institution that prides itself on tradition and obedience to orders would not appear to be fertile ground for Carlson's communist philosophy. His impact was so dramatic, however, that an Internet search for the words "gung ho Marine" returned 9530 results.²¹

A dichotomy in the Marine personality is revealed here: The soldierly virtues reflected in the ramrod-straight poster Marine are in conflict with the rebellious and occasionally piratical instincts of men raised on romantic notions of heroism and expeditionary service. Many Marines simultaneously adhere to a strict warrior code while willfully - sometimes gleefully - disobeying orders and speaking unkind truth to

power. It is this instinct that leads junior Marines to worship unconventional men like Evans Carlson and a few senior Marines to shepherd his ideas to fruition.

Viet Nam: Small Wars Reborn

The Marines sustained an intensive focus on cultural terrain, guerilla warfare philosophy and counterinsurgency tactics even as the Department of Defense fixated on the Soviet threat during the early Cold War. The Marine Corps Gazette, published since 1916, continued to serve as a semi-official professional debating forum for Marine officers and staff NCOs, and in 1962 the Gazette published a collection of articles and essays entitled *The Guerilla and how to Fight Him*.²² Through liaison officers and official exchanges the Corps kept close tabs on the development and philosophy of the Army Special Forces units as the advisor mission to Viet Nam expanded in the early 1960s. Through these exchanges the Marines absorbed the lessons of the SF advisors,²³ coupling their Viet Nam experiences with the tactical lessons of Haiti and Nicaragua. Marine units trained hard in counterinsurgency tactics in the early 1960s with the expectation they would be deployed in increasingly greater numbers to Viet Nam.²⁴

By the time the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed in Da Nang in 1965, a great number of Marine officers were primed to experiment with small wars tactics to defeat the Viet Cong. The most successful and famous of these experiments began as a battalion-level initiative by 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines in Phu Bai. Marines working to secure the area around the Da Nang military airfield found they had too few troops to provide full time coverage of their tactical area of responsibility. In an effort to multiply their combat power, the Marines decided to beef up the local Vietnamese “Popular Forces,” or PF, a poorly organized local militia who often fled the Viet Cong.²⁵

Lieutenant Colonel William “Woody” Taylor, the battalion commander, wanted the PF to defend their own villages from the Viet Cong when the Marines were unavailable. To give the PF some backbone, Taylor and his staff planned to embed a Marine rifle squad within each unit, a risky tactic that would leave the Marines and Corpsmen exposed and in need of a nearby quick reaction force. Taylor assigned Paul Ek, a Marine Lieutenant who had served as an advisor with the Army Special Forces and who spoke some Vietnamese, to teach and mentor the Marines assigned to this mission. The Combined Action Program was born.²⁶

CAP was a tremendous success. The Third Marine Amphibious Force expanded the four CAP squads in Phu Bai in August of 1965 to 111 by July of 1969. CAP Marines accounted for 7.6% of (Marine-related) reported enemy KIA while suffering only 3.2% of Marine casualties during that time.²⁷ The CAP school started by Ek was expanded, and the quality of the program was improved and shaped to match the changing nature of the fight in South Viet Nam and the differences between various areas of operation. Two quotes from South Vietnamese officers on CAP are informative:²⁸

I would emphasize that in thinking about CAP teams, we must view them from both a military and political point of view. The important thing politically is that the CAP team symbolizes American presence in Viet Nam. By their behavior, the CAPs refute VC propaganda. They show the people that the U.S. presence is

different than that of the French. *Major Dai, Sector Chief for Regional Force/Popular Force troops, Quang Tri Province*

What can one company of regular troops do, operating in an area? Compare this with ten CAPs – going on patrols, setting ambushes, doing some civic action – they’re really having an impact on 30,000 people. I’d pick one Combined Action Company over a battalion of infantry, if I had a choice. We need some big units, yes, but in general this war is for the people. *Colonel Vin, Commander of all PF troops in I Corps*

Development of the CAP concept mirrored that of the Small Wars Manual; it required the initiative of relatively junior officers coupled with the aggressive mentorship of senior leaders. In this case, the III MAF Commanding General, Lewis W. Walt and Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, both decorated combat veterans, recognized the value of CAP and championed its growth. Walt understood the cultural terrain of Viet Nam; he reflected the comments of the Vietnamese officers in his memoirs: “The struggle was in the rice paddies....in and among the people, not passing through, but living among them, night and day...and joining with them in steps toward a better life long overdue.”²⁹

Walt and Krulak’s efforts to sustain CAP had the backing of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr. This support was critical as the Marines fought to sustain the program in the face of determined opposition from General Westmoreland, the head of the Military Assistance Command (and later the Army Chief of Staff). Westmoreland eventually was successful in turning the pacification programs over to the South Vietnamese. These programs failed in the absence of American support.³⁰

Greene may have lost the fight with Westmoreland, but the Commandant’s efforts in support of CAP had a lasting impact on the Marine Corps.³¹ The position of Commandant is as much historical, ceremonial, and sentimental as it is administrative; the Commandant is often revered by Marines of all ranks and his dictums carry significant weight within the Corps. It is not uncommon to hear Marines say, “The Commandant says so, so that’s the way it’s going to be.”

With such venerated status, the Commandant traditionally has wielded more institutional authority than his service counterparts. Although bureaucratic inertia drags on the Marine Corps as much as it does any other organization, the Commandant can sometimes effect paradigm shifts against strong currents of internal and external protest. This authority has proven critical to the ability of the contemporary Marine Corps to adapt to asymmetric threats. Commandants have often served as the ultimate champion of maverick or revolutionary ideas.

The Commandant’s support for the combined action mission was matched with enthusiasm in the officer and enlisted ranks. The CAP experience was etched into the collective conscious of the Corps. Hundreds of articles, books, and papers were written by Marines or about the Marines in CAP units. As it had many times in the past, the Marine Corps Gazette captured and popularized a critical small wars tactic. The thousands of Marines who participated in CAP passed along their lessons learned to new generations. By the time the Marine Corps went into Iraq in 2003, the cultural and

counterinsurgency lessons of the program were still fresh in the minds of the colonels and general officers leading the way.

Paradigm Shift: The Corps Adopts Maneuver Warfare Theory

As early as the late 1970s, a few Marine officers began to experiment with new doctrinal warfighting concepts in an effort to break free from the doldrums of the post-Viet Nam era. Articles on Maneuver Warfare began appearing in the Marine Corps Gazette in late 1979, and military historian William S. Lind wrote a seminal piece on the subject in the March 1980 Gazette.³² Lind, a civilian with no military experience, came across as the epitome of a quirky Marine “wannabe.” He frustrated, irritated or alienated every Marine officer he met bar one: the future Commandant of the Marine Corps General Alfred M. Gray.³³

An experienced combat Marine with service in Korea and Vietnam, Gray saw genius where others saw irrational unorthodoxy. While commanding the Second Marine Division in 1981, Gray set up a board of 15 officers to examine, develop, and promulgate Maneuver Warfare theory at Camp Lejeune.³⁴ Gray was changing the warfighting doctrine of his division without the official sanction of the greater Marine Corps. This faintly rebellious grass roots divergence met with hostility but was allowed to flourish at the division level. It was not until Gray’s term as Commandant that Maneuver Warfare would be adopted as the foundational doctrine of the Marine Corps.

The vehicle for transformation came in 1985 with the publication of Bill Lind’s *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*.³⁵ Maneuver Warfare was not a revolutionary concept. Lind essentially boiled down the time-tested warfighting philosophies of Sun Tzu, Carl von Clausewitz, and Colonel John Boyd³⁶ and situated them in the context of the decentralized tactical theory of the World War I and II German Armies. Command orders were to be purposefully imprecise to allow for low-level initiative and innovation. Tempo took on greater significance than force. Marines would avoid enemy strengths and attack their weakest points. Evans Carlson had expounded many of the same theories in the late 1930s.

The Marine Corps of the 1980s was not, however, the decentralized, high-tempo, free-flowing organization envisioned by Lind and Carlson. Gray forcefully drove home his effort, commissioning the *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1: Warfighting*.³⁷ Later republished as a Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication, *Warfighting* flew directly in the face of the conventional, attrition-style warfare studied and practiced by the Cold War U.S. military. Gray leveraged the brilliant simplicity of *Warfighting* to transform the operational philosophy of the Corps. By the early 1990s, Marines were teaching, practicing, and executing Maneuver Warfare and had begun to embrace Lind’s decentralized command theories.³⁸ There was ample precedence for this kind of leadership in Marine Corps history from the early days of the service through Viet Nam.

Gray and Lind, an outspoken general and a quirky outsider, dramatically restyled the Marine Corps. Lind provided the philosophy while Gray sustained the Maneuver Warfare vision through what would become a highly polarizing ten year debate.³⁹ They reshaped not only the way the Corps would fight on future battlefields, but also how Marines down to the fireteam level would act and react in confusing, non-linear battlefield environments. The concepts of flexibility, personal initiative, and self-reliance

championed by Smedley Butler, Merritt Edson, Evans Carlson, and Lewis Walt were reinvigorated just in time to prepare the Corps for the next wave of small wars.

The New Small Wars: Somalia to Iraq

The first test of Maneuver Warfare theory in a small wars environment would come when the Marines landed in Somalia in 1992 in support of Operation Restore Hope. Although they lacked the cultural expertise and training of the Banana War veterans, their inherent flexibility allowed them to succeed in an oftentimes bewildering urban and tribal environment. Marine General Anthony Zinni, a cultural pragmatist and strong proponent of cultural intelligence in support of military operations, pushed the Marines to work with the local clan leaders and to practice many of the tactics embodied in the Small Wars Manual. Zinni would continue to propagate cultural small wars theory as the Commanding General of the United States Central Command.

As Marines deployed around the globe in the years following Somalia, it became more and more apparent that the disintegration of the Soviet Union meant increased involvement in collapsed states, more dispersed small unit operations, and more interaction with indigenous civilians. General Charles C. Krulak, the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, clearly articulated the nature of modern small wars and identified the skills required to succeed in a complex cultural environment: “In one moment in time, our service members will be feeding and clothing displaced refugees, providing humanitarian assistance. In the next moment, they will be holding two warring tribes apart - conducting peacekeeping operations - and, finally, they will be fighting a highly lethal mid-intensity battle - all on the same day... all within three city blocks.”⁴⁰

Krulak postulated that in order to succeed in the complex three-block war environment, young enlisted Marines would have to possess especially strong moral character and leadership ability.⁴¹ The “strategic corporal” would be mentally agile and tough enough to quickly transition from humanitarian operations to urban combat without losing the goodwill of the local populace. Krulak was describing the same kind of Marine Evans Carlson recruited for his Second Raider Battalion and the combined action units were looking for in Viet Nam. There was nothing new here; the strategic corporal article simply reminded Marines of their small wars narrative.

The Marines deploying to Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 were as poorly trained in cultural intelligence and cultural terrain as their counterparts in Somalia or even 1920s Nicaragua. Arabic language skills were almost non-existent and even the most rudimentary cultural nuances were a mystery to many Marines. Although they made a great number of mistakes and lost tremendous opportunities along the way, the Marines quickly adapted and were conducting complex stability and counterinsurgency operations within months of deployment. By the summer of 2003 the Marines in southern Iraq had implemented a small CAP program and were making strides in developing local government and security.

Prior to returning to Iraq in 2004, then-Major General James N. Mattis, Commanding General of the First Marine Division, held a conference to discuss the kinds of counterinsurgency tactics he wanted to employ in the Al Anbar Province. The conclusions and orders from the Security and Stability Operations (SASO) conference read like a distillation of the Small Wars Manual.

Among the more than 80 key points were instructions from the tactical (if you knock at the door of a house as part of a cordon operation, try not to look directly inside when the door opens) to the strategic (the insurgent center of gravity is the support of the population).⁴² Mattis ordered each infantry battalion to field a CAP platoon to mirror the success in Phu Bai in 1965 and Hillah in 2003. The Marines, however, had little chance to test out the CAP program or other non-kinetic counterinsurgency tactics in Anbar.⁴³ Just one month after the Division re-deployed to Iraq, they became embroiled in the first battle for Fallujah.

Leading the Cultural Charge

Mattis returned from Iraq in 2004 dissatisfied with the cultural intelligence and cultural training provided to his Marines.⁴⁴ He realized that unless the Marine Corps institutionalized the small wars tactics and cultural lessons of Fallujah, Ramadi, and Hadithah, the next battle in the Long War would be as painful as the first. As the new commander of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), Mattis was perfectly positioned to ensure that culture became an integral part of Marine training and education.

Far from meeting opposition, he discovered that a grass-roots cultural renaissance already was underway amongst the officers and non-commissioned officers recently returned from Afghanistan and Iraq. These Marines were teaching local unit-level cultural and language classes across the Marine Corps with little guidance from above. Simultaneously, the Commandant directed that the Marine Corps attack the weaknesses in cultural training exposed by OEF and OIF. Within a year of returning from Iraq, LtGen Mattis had established the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) at Quantico, the seat of the Marine Training and Education Command.

By the end of 2005, cultural terrain classes had been incorporated into several levels of Marine professional military education.⁴⁵ Marines were receiving live training in mock Afghan and Iraqi villages to prepare them for deployment while conducting focused language training supplemented with computer-aided training materials.

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, already heavily involved in cultural studies, picked up the lead for cultural intelligence within the defense intelligence community. "Cultural Intelligence" is now taught at the Marine intelligence schools, and MCIA continues to develop a range of detailed ethnographic studies to support expeditionary operations. The doctrine division at MCCDC began working on incorporating cultural terrain and cultural intelligence into new publications that will have a lasting impact on Marine operations and training. The new Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned created an Internet-based information vacuum to capture combat and cultural lessons for analysis and promulgation. As of mid-2006, every Marine lieutenant passing through the Basic Officer's Course will be assigned a region of the world to study; this study will be supported with appropriate culture and language material from the CAOCL.

While none of these programs perfectly meet the cultural training or cultural intelligence requirements of Marines deploying to fight global terrorism, they constitute a critical step beyond previous efforts to institutionalize culture in the Marine Corps. Acutely aware that culture as a core competency might quickly be discarded in the face

of a resurgent conventional threat (as it was in the late 1970s), every effort has been made to drive deep stakes in the professional education system. Also aware that aggressively pushing culture on Marines rightfully focused on offensive combat skills could backfire, culture instead is sold as simply another element of battlefield terrain, or "cultural terrain."⁴⁶

In late 2001, culture typically was an afterthought in a Marine training schedule. By late-2006, culture is an integral part of Marine training, intelligence, and professional military education. Cultural competency is accepted as a critical skill by most Marines. Tens of thousands of Marines have direct experience applying cultural training in multiple tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Marine Corps flexed in the first decade of the new millennium to meet the cultural challenges of the small war just as it had in the 1920s, 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s.

Conclusion

At some point within the next few decades a new threat will emerge that will shift culture and language skills to the back burner. Cultural classes will be pushed out of crowded PME curricula to meet new requirements; officers pressed to train Marines for combat will allow training schedules to drift towards core skills like shooting and patrolling; intelligence professionals will be distracted by pressing new requirements from above and below. Some of the progress towards cultural competency made in the first few years of the Long War will be lost.

As long as the Marines retain their reverence for history, continue to deploy to developing nations, and sustain their expeditionary character, however, the foundation of cultural skills laid with the Small Wars Manual will remain intact. Institutional flexibility, ingenuity, and tolerance for internal dissent will allow the Marine Corps to rapidly adjust to any complex cultural situation it is faced with in the foreseeable future. The wholesale realization and acceptance of cultural competency as a critical warfighting skill by the veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq will ensure that the programs instituted today survive until Marines face their next great cultural challenge - the Marines will remain preeminent culture warriors.

Major Ben Connable is an intelligence officer and Middle East/North Africa Foreign Area Officer currently serving as the program lead for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity's Cultural Intelligence Program. He has served three tours in Iraq as an intelligence officer and FAO, most recently as the senior analyst in al-Anbar Province. He teaches Iraqi culture at the Joint Special Operations University and other forums; he has trained over 3,000 Marines and soldiers for deployment to Iraq. Major Connable is 39 years old. He has an MS in Military History (Intelligence) and an MS in National Security Affairs.

¹ The "Long War" is a term recently coined by several Department of Defense officials, including the Commander of the US Central Command General John P. Abazaïd, to replace the term, Global War on Terror. This term appeared in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report of 2006, page 9, available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf>

² *Small Wars Manual*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1940. Reprint, Manhattan, KS, Sunflower Univ. Press, 1987.

³ Bickel, Keith B. *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940*. Boulder, Westview Press, 2001.

⁴ *Ibid*, page 58.

⁵ Edson was given his nickname in Nicaragua due to the color of his beard. Puller's posture and physique (he typically is photographed with his chest jutting forward) earned him his moniker. The "red" in "Red Mike" leads some to confuse Edson with one of his contemporaries, Evans Carlson, who spent a great deal of time with the Chinese Communists and incorporated communist leadership practices into his command style. See "A Chinese Communist in the Commandant's Court" in this paper.

⁶ Galula, David, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. New York, Praeger, 1964.

⁷ *Small Wars Manual*, Section III, pages 17-32.

⁸ Krulak, Lieutenant General Victor, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*. Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1984. Krulak stated that, "Beneficial or not, the continuous struggle for a viable existence fixed clearly one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Corps - a sensitive paranoia, sometimes justified, sometimes not. It is in this atmosphere of institutional vigilance that the Marines have been nourished over the years. This instinctive personal concern of the Marines as individuals for the survival of their Corps has certainly been one of the principal factors in its preservation."

⁹ Bickel, page 144.

¹⁰ Bickel, pages 172-203. The Marine Corps Gazette is the independent but officially sanctioned professional journal of the Marine Corps published by the Marine Corps Association on the Marine Corps Combat Development Command in Quantico, Virginia.

¹¹ *Manual for Small Wars Operations*. Quantico, VA, Marine Corps Schools, 1935.

¹² The Basic School (TBS) is home to the Basic Officer's Course, the formal name of the school for new lieutenants. Further information available at: <https://www.tbs.usmc.mil/>

¹³ This proved especially true in the late 1980's and early 1990's as the Marine Corps instituted the transformational Maneuver Warfare concepts described in *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (Warfighting)*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of the Navy, 1989.

¹⁴ Bickel, pages 190-191.

¹⁵ Nagl, John A., *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Viet Nam*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002.

¹⁶ Nagl, page 10. The question set is drawn from Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope is not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army*. New York, Random House/Times Business, 1996.

¹⁷ Carlson, who resigned from the Corps in 1939 out of frustration with American policy and restrictions on his freedom of speech, was seen as a Communist sympathizer and erratic maverick by many of the senior and more traditional Marine officers. He rejoined the Corps in 1941.

¹⁸ *Brigadier General Evans Fordyce Carlson, USMCR*, Who's Who in Marine Corps History. History Division, United States Marine Corps. Available at: http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/HD/Historical/Whos_Who/Carlson_EF.htm

¹⁹ Evans F. Carlson, *Twin Stars of China*. New York, Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1940.

²⁰ A fireteam consists of four Marines, one carrying an automatic weapon and one leading the team. There are three fireteams in a standard Marine rifle squad.

²¹ 07 November 2006 search results for "Gung Ho Marine" obtained from <http://www.google.com>.

²² Green, LtCol T. N., *The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him: Selections from the Marine Corps Gazette*, ed. for the Marine Corps Gazette, New York: Praeger, 1962. The book leads off with a selection from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung*, also known as the *Little Red Book*.

²³ There is little competitive comparison between the Marine Corps and the Army Special Forces units in terms of cultural and counterinsurgency capabilities. Special Forces units are specifically designed to operate in complex cultural environments.

²⁴ Krulak, chapter 12.

²⁵ Allnut, Bruce C., *Marine Combined Action Capabilities: The Viet Nam Experience*. Virginia, Human Sciences Research, Inc., 1969, published for the Office of Naval Research.

²⁶ Ibid, pages 9 and 10. Allnut and others point out that the program originally was called the Joint Action Program but was changed to match official doctrinal terminology.

²⁷ Ibid, page 11.

²⁸ Ibid, pages 11, 12, and G-1 to G-3.

²⁹ Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy*. NY, Funk & Wagnals, 1970.

³⁰ Sheehan, Neil, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Viet Nam*. New York, Random House, 1988, and Corson, LtCol William R., *The Betrayal*, New York, W.W. Norton Co., 1968. Corson served as Director of Combined Action for General Walt.

³¹ Major (then Captain) Keith Kopets, USMC, ably summarizes the CAP experience in "The U.S. Marine Corps and the Combined Action Program in the Viet Nam War: An Exposition and Evaluation," given at the May 2001 Society for Military History Annual Conference in Calgary, Canada. Available at: <http://capdelta4a.homestead.com/kopets.html>.

³² Lind, William S., "Defining Maneuver Warfare for the Marine Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette* (March 1980): 55-57.

³³ This conclusion is based on the author's personal observation of Lind interacting with Marine officers at the Basic Officer's Course (BOC) in the mid-1990s and tens of conversations with fellow officers of all ranks about Lind, most recently in 2006. In the early 1990s, Lind frequently would dress up in a World War I German officer's uniform to participate in BOC and Infantry Officers Course classes and discussion groups. During the 1995 mess night of the TBS Bravo Company class, Lind, an invited guest, gave a lengthy and impromptu toast to "the brilliance of Operation Barbarossa," the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The universally negative reaction to this speech by the attending officers was typical of the response Lind evoked with his heartfelt but socially awkward outbursts.

³⁴ Anonymous, "Maneuver Warfare Board at Lejeune," *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1981): 6-7.

³⁵ Lind, William S., *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1985.

³⁶ Respectively: Griffith, Samuel, *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*. London, Oxford University Press, 1988 (reprint); Clausewitz, Carl Von, *On War*. Translated and edited by Michel Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989 (reprint); Robert, Boyd, *The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War*. New York, Little, Brown, 2002.

³⁷ Schmitt, Captain John, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1: *Warfighting*. United States Marine Corps, 1989.

³⁸ For an examination of the developmental and philosophical differences and similarities between Maneuver Warfare and the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle doctrine, see: McKenzie, Major Kenneth F., USMC, "Defining the Event Horizon: The Marine Corps and the Dialectic of Maneuver Warfare and Airland Battle," Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1992, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1992/MKF.htm>

³⁹ Captain John Schmitt, the author of FMFM-1 (and later Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1), deserves a tremendous amount of credit for developing and clearly articulating the philosophical underpinnings to Maneuver Warfare theory.

⁴⁰ Krulak, Gen. Charles C. "The Three Block War: Fighting in Urban Areas." *Vital Speeches of the Day*. New York: December 15, 1997. Vol. 64, Iss. 5, pages 139-142.

⁴¹ Krulak, Gen. Charles C. "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War." *Marines Magazine*, (January 1999), available at: http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm

⁴² Points from the First Marine Division Security and Stabilization Operations (SASO) conference held at Camp Pendleton on 19 December, 2003. Author retains unpublished notes in electronic format.

⁴³ Several battalions implemented CAP and every unit down to the platoon level continues to execute various traditional counterinsurgency tactics in a trial and error effort to achieve local tactical success. In 2004, the Second Battalion, Seventh Marines of Lieutenant Phillip Skuda had an effective CAP program in the Hit area just north of Ramadi.

⁴⁴ Observation based on the author's experience supporting MCCDC in standing up the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning for LtGen Mattis.

⁴⁵ The goal of the Training and Education Command is to develop a laddered series of culture classes that will build upon each other as a Marine progresses through his or her career.

⁴⁶ As of December, 2006, this is a non-doctrinal term. Cultural terrain is also referred to as "human terrain" within the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense.