

A CREDITABLE POSITION
JAMES CARSON BRECKINRIDGE
AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARINE CORPS SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

Immediately after World War I, the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps implemented an officer education program. Called the Marine Corps Schools (MCS), the Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, gave the schools the mission of educating officers throughout their career. MCS struggled during its first decade of existence due to operational tempo and a poor curriculum. The direction of MCS changed greatly with the assignment of James Carson Breckinridge as the commanding officer in 1928. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role Breckinridge, an unconventional and intellectual officer, played in reviving the MCS and turning it into the authority on Small Wars and Amphibious Operations. It will show that Breckinridge, drawing on observations made of college education systems, focused the Marine Corps Schools on the task of teaching officers to analyze problems and find solutions and not rely on memorized book answers.

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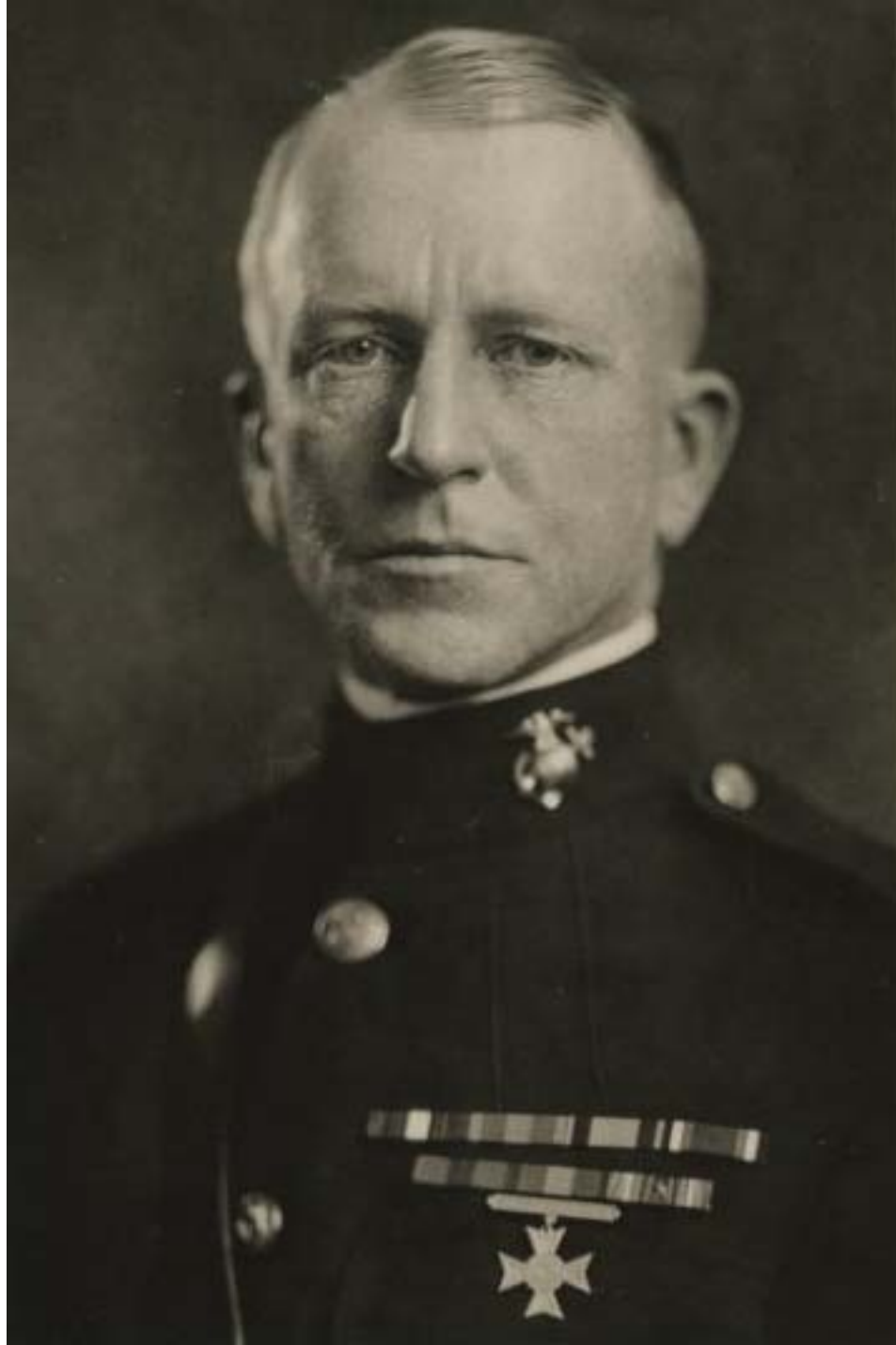
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James Carson Breckinridge

Photo Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration

Dedication

To Dad and the Marines of Marine Corps Security Forces, Naples Italy. Speed, Force,
Discipline.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

From the deck of the U.S.S. *Hancock*, Lieutenant Colonel James Carson Breckinridge surveyed the coastline just off San Pedro de Macoris, a small port town on the south edge of Santo Domingo, the modern day Dominican Republic. The lush green forests and sugar plantations along the coast contrasted sharply with his previous duty station as Naval Attaché to Norway and Sweden. Breckinridge lacked the luxury of letting his mind wander about the beauty of Santo Domingo. Instead, his eyes focused on the terrain, roads, and other infrastructure of San Pedro. What dangers did the trees hide? Where could he billet his men? What areas gave shelter to the bandits? Breckinridge's trip to Santo Domingo was not a reward for his faithful duty in diplomatic affairs in Scandinavia. The *Hancock*, a Spanish-American War era transport did not meet the qualifications to be a luxury liner. No vacationing businessmen roamed the decks or inhabited luxury suites. Instead, the hold of the *Hancock* contained the personnel and equipment of the 15th Marine Regiment. Rumors of banditry destabilizing the country circulated around San Pedro. On 26 February 1919, Breckinridge gave the order to start landing the Regiment. His orders: defeat the bandits, secure the economic resources, and stabilize the region. In time the orders, while clear, proved quite difficult to meet.

The landing of the 15th Regiment, by now attached to the 2nd Provisional Brigade of Marines, doubled the strength of the Corps in Santo Domingo. Commanded by Brigadier General Joseph Pendleton, the 2nd Brigade boasted a strength of 3000 Marines scattered across the island country. Their target? A random collection of bandit groups ranging in size of a few dozen to 300 hundred. Marines encountered a population hostile to their presence. Civilians

who helped the Marines faced death or mutilation at the hands of the bandits.¹ Caught in the middle, the civilians also encountered harsh treatment at the hands of the Marines. Prior to Breckinridge's arrival in Santo Domingo, Captain Charles F. Merkle committed suicide while awaiting courts-martial for mutilating a civilian and ordering four others shot.²

Men who had enlisted to fight in France during World War I comprised the majority of the rank and file in Santo Domingo. Poorly trained and disgruntled about their duty station in the Caribbean, missing their chance to participate in the epic battles in France, their morale had reached the nadir. Edward Craig, a company commander in the interior of Santo Domingo, slept with a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) by his side out of fear of his near mutinous men.³ Morale problems, an elusive enemy, hostile local population, and lack of reliable lines of communication plagued Breckinridge.

Years later, while writing a letter to his sister, Breckinridge commented on the real problems he encountered in Santo Domingo. Breckinridge stated that the bandits developed as a symptom of bigger problems. He saw no reason in applying the lessons of war to a countryside already destroyed by a neglected infrastructure. But his training and lack of professional education in the Marine Corps did not offer him a solution to the problem. Indeed, his lack of professional military education prevented him from figuring out the main problems of the

¹ Edward A. Craig, Lieutenant General, USMC (Retired), interviewed by L.E. Tatem, Major, May 16, 21, 27, and June 8 1968, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA., 17.

² Ibid., 33.

³ Craig's career in the Marine Corps continued until his retirement in 1951 as a Lieutenant General. In World War II, he commanded the 9th Marine Regiment during its amphibious landings at Bougainville, Guam, and the Marianas Islands. For his work with the V Amphibious Corps at Iwo Jima, he received the Navy Cross. In the opening phases of the Korean War, Headquarters Marine Corps placed him in charge of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. Craig, IV, 20.

country for his first six months in Santo Domingo.⁴ An article written for the *Marine Corps Gazette* in December of 1941 gives the reader an insight into the strategy used by the Marines in Santo Domingo, including the seizure of livestock and supplies from the civilian population. This step prevented the material support of the bandit insurrectionist. Unfortunately, this tactic also turns the majority of the civilian population against the Marines even further.⁵

To better understand the problems, Breckinridge took to touring the countryside regularly, talking to locals, inspecting outposts, and ensuring Marines treated civilians with an even hand.⁶ While he writes some about his tours, other Marines give vivid details about the problems the Dominicans gave Marines. Looking to other sources about campaigning in Santo Domingo it is possible to see the problems encountered. Lt. Colonel Henry Davis served in Santo Domingo from 1917 to 1918. Writing an article to the *Gazette* in 1920 he states that the major problem encountered developed from banditry related to unemployment. It was his opinion that Dominicans only respected force and it required a strong hand in dealing with them.⁷ Major E. H. Ellis gives further insight into the bandit problems in Santo Domingo in his March 1921 article to the *Gazette*. He recognized that no military organization existed in Santo Domingo. Any resistance encountered grew from disorganized groups of bandits. This made the job of the Marines much more difficult for several reasons. The bandits had no property and

⁴ J.C. Breckinridge to Mary Breckinridge, Monday 3 June 1929, James Carson Breckinridge Papers, Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps (USMC Archives), Quantico VA., 11-H-4, Box 13, Folder 20.

⁵ Samuel H. Harrington, Major, USMC, "The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars," *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 no. 4 (Dec. 1921), 477.

⁶ Craig Oral History, 15.

⁷ Henry C. Davis, Lt. Colonel, USMC, "Indoctrination of Latin-American Service," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no. 2 (June 1920), 154-155.

travelled light, they relied on the support (even coerced) of the civilian population. Any bandits captured and turned over to the Dominican prison system tended to escape and return to their point of origin. The Marine Corps force on the ground had been kept so small that there was one Marine for every five square miles.⁸

Breckinridge, after time to examine and reflect on the bandit problem, developed an understanding of it. In an article written a few years later, he wrote about his thoughts on the roots of the bandit problem. Breckinridge clearly points out that this discovery developed from many of his rides and talks with Dominicans.

"Hombre!" "Si Señor?" Being a Dominican, although one whose credit is not one cent, he is invariably polite. Therefore I change my salutation, so as not to be outdone in courtesy by such as he. He bows and I salute or lift my campaign hat; he is minus covering for either head or feet, and has but little in between. I address him again. "Senor, will you please talk to me for a little while?" "Como no"- quite apathetically. "Where is your conuco?" (patch of land). There follows a burst of rapid Spanish from which I gather that he has a little piece of land, but no longer lives upon it because he fears the gavilleros (gangs of outlaws). Many others have joined the gavilleros to protect themselves and their property, but they are good men at heart and would rather work on their conucos. Do all the gavilleros own land? No, many of them have sold it to the ingenios (estates), and now have nothing of their own. Were these men gavilleros before they sold their land? No, they owned conucos, and had chickens, and some pigs, and maybe a donkey; there were some outlaws, but they were mostly good people, and "muy patriotico!"⁹

During his tours, he discovered what the people of Santo Domingo needed: stability and security.

Ensuring employment, crop production, and land ownership appeared to be the logical method

⁸ E. H. Ellis, Major, USMC, "Bush Brigades," *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 no. 1 (March 1921), 11-12.

⁹ J. C. Breckinridge, Colonel, Fleet Marine Office, U. S. Marine Corps, United States Fleet, "Land Ownership and its Relation to National Stability" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 134 (Nov. 1927), 210.

for establishing the island's stability and security. This discovery benefitted Breckinridge in two ways.

Immediately, this realization allowed him to design policies and orders to improve the infrastructure, boost employment, and help locals regain control of their country from the hands of the bandits. The long-term results not only benefitted Breckinridge but the entire Marine Corps as well. The time he spent rebuilding Santo Domingo would directly influence how Breckinridge viewed the education of officers and their duties as Marines. Breckinridge also began to understand that his lack of military education prevented him from developing into an excellent military officer. He knew other officers suffered from the same lack of education. Less than a decade later, Breckinridge received orders to command the relatively young Marine Corps Schools. During his tenure there, the lessons learned in Santo Domingo played an important role in directing major changes in the curriculum and goals of the MCS.

What role did James Carson Breckinridge play in the development of the Marine Corps Schools? Breckinridge's personal development as a military intellectual during the years between World War I and World War II greatly influenced the direction of the Marine Corps Schools (MCS). Under his direction, MCS evolved from collection of unrelated courses adapted from Army curriculum to a coherent plan of education that trained officers to think. While commanding the MCS, Breckinridge coordinated the development of two manuals, the *Tentative Landing Force Manual* and the *Small Wars Manual*. The production of the *Tentative Landing Force Manual* revolutionized warfare by collecting and distributing, for the first time in history, the information necessary to conduct a successful amphibious assault on a contested beach.

The *Small Wars Manual* proved just as groundbreaking. The information provided in the manual allowed officers to use their intellectual abilities to solve the problems of insurgent

warfare rather forcing them to execute set-in-stone directives. Even after 75 years, the Marine Corps use a revised version of the manual. Both manuals, written by the instructors and students of MCS, are the product of the educational changes brought to the Schools by Breckinridge.

While the study of institutions provides an overview of how they develop, the study of individuals opens the doors to understanding why institutions evolve in the manner they do. Examining Breckinridge and his role in the development of MCS contributes to a richer understanding of events, ideas, and debates during his tenure. Breckinridge faced a daunting task. How does a military education system remove mechanical action from officers and instill the development of analytical ability and original thought? A critical task for a military force is developing original thought and analytical ability in an officer corps while balancing it with the necessary doctrine to maintain common goals. Breckinridge's theory on the development of an officer's mind is still relevant today.

The introductory chapter includes a brief historiography on the Marine Corps educational systems. To comprehend the changes made in the MCS it is vital to look at the history of the Corps. The next chapter examines Marine Corps history prior to World War I. Chapter 3 covers the Marine Corps involvement in World War I and the problems stemming from lack of education. The development of the Marine Corps Schools and the problems they encountered follow in chapter 4. Chapter 5 details the intellectual development of Breckinridge and his tenure at MCS.

Historiography

To examine the development of the Marine Corps Schools under Breckinridge requires a review of several areas of past historical research. This section presents a brief historiography of

this research. The past research examined will focus on the Marine Corps Schools, U.S. education theory in the 1920's and 30's, and professionalism. Each part of the previous research helps build the foundation for this study.

Studies of the Marine Corps Education System

Studies of the Marine Corps Schools are rare. When compared to the innumerable volumes produced detailing the battle history and doctrine of the Marine Corps, the total number of pages dedicated to the development of the MCS is disappointingly small. Allan Millett's *Semper Fidelis*, the definitive broad-scoped history of the Corps, only mentions the MCS in passing as an agent of information transmission.¹⁰ Millett focuses on how the MCS produced the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*, which became the cornerstone for the Marine Corps' Amphibious Doctrine. Millett does not examine how the MCS developed the intellectual ability to write the *Tentative Manual*. Two other histories of the Marine Corps mention the MCS in passing. *Soldiers of the Sea* by Robert Heinl, a general history of the Corps from its beginning, and *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War* by Jeter Isley and Philip Crowl, a history of the development and use of the Marine Corps' amphibious doctrine in World War II, both make passing reference to the MCS. All three books state that the Marine Corps recognized a need for better education. However, none of them examines how the MCS developed or evolved in the inter-war period.¹¹ While these books provide general knowledge about the history of the

¹⁰ Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, The Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 263, 323,326,328, 336-337.

¹¹ Robert Debs Heinl, Jr, Colonel, USMC, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1175-1962*, 2nd ed.(Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1991), 253-254, 293. Jeter A. Isley and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 35-36.

Marine Corps, they pay very little attention to discussing how Marines learned their profession during the inter-war period.

The first close examination of the MCS comes from an unpublished manuscript currently located at the Marine Corps Archives in Quantico, VA. Anthony A. Frances' *History of the Marine Corps Schools* covers the inception of the School of Application at the end of the 19th century and continues through the development of the inter-war MCS all the way to 1945. Frances aptly lays out how the MCS advanced during the inter-war period. He claims the development of the Fleet Marine Force, along with the progressive-thinking Breckinridge, served as the dynamic factors in advancing the schools prior to World War II.¹² Frances points to Breckinridge's attempt to draw on the educational theories of universities as a method to develop a better education program for Marine Officers.¹³ For researchers looking into the development of the MCS, Frances' unpublished manuscript provides the best introduction to the subject. All scholarship written on the subject of the MCS relies, to some extent, on the information given in *History of the Marine Corps Schools*. For the purpose of this thesis, Frances' short few pages on the evolution of Breckinridge's desire to improve the MCS education process opens the door to closer introspection. Why did Breckinridge adopt this method of education? What deficiencies in the education system did he intend to address and why?

Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the Marine Corps by Kenneth Clifford ignores the battle history of the Marines and examines the innovation of the Corps

¹²Anthony Frances, *History of the Marine Corps Schools*, (unpublished manuscript, 1945) USMC Archives, 38, 40, 45.

¹³*Ibid.*, 37-38.

during the 20th century. Clifford recognizes that the advancement of the Marine Corps did not occur in a vacuum and attempts to understand the political and economic climate of the U.S. when innovations occurred.¹⁴ There are two events directly related to the MCS revealed in this book. Study of the British amphibious campaign of Gallipoli by the MCS and the creation of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* both influenced the future of the Marine Corps.¹⁵ In the chapters that deal directly with the subject of this paper, Clifford focuses mainly on the details of the creation of the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*. He does mention the change in direction of the schools but does not locate the intellectual roots of the changes.

Leo Daugherty presents a close study of the evolution of the Marine Corps during the inter-war period in his 2001 dissertation *To Fight Our Country's Battles*. According to Daugherty, World War I "...introduced an entire generation of Marine Corps officers to the lessons and requirements of modern warfare."¹⁶ His dissertation demonstrates that World War I affected the Marine Corps profoundly. Because of the war, the Marine Corps instituted reforms to better prepare for the next war.¹⁷ Daugherty concentrates on how the Marine Corps transformed from a group of small war specialists to a cohesive force wed to the amphibious doctrine. Where he does discuss the evolution of the MCS in detail, he does not produce a

¹⁴ Kenneth J. Clifford, Lieutenant Colonel, USMCR, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the United States Marine Corps 1900-1970* (Washington DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1973), V.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, V.

¹⁶ Leo Daugherty, "*To Fight Our Country's Battles: An Institutional History of the United States Marine Corps During the Interwar Era, 1919-1935*" (PhD diss, The Ohio State University, 2001) 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

foundation for the development of intellectual changes of the Schools outside of lessons learned in the war and military arenas.

Currently, no one knows more about the history of the Marine Corps Schools than Donald Bittner, Historian of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. Bittner has presented and published papers on the U.S. Marine Corps as well as the British Royal Marines. An occasional paper has certain relevance to this thesis. In the introduction, Bittner gives ample warning to those wanting to study the development of the MCS. The records needed to do proper research are no longer around. Whether lost to time, forgotten on a dusty shelf somewhere, or destroyed, the loss of these records prevents the development of a clear and crisp picture of the schools during the inter-war period.¹⁸ Bittner's work focuses on the evolution of the current Command and Staff College, which went by multiple names during the inter-war period. Most Marines referred to it as the Field Officer's Course.¹⁹ The first few chapters of Bittner's book concentrate on the same period as this thesis. Bittner notes Breckinridge's desire to change the Field Officer's Course and the MCS in general as well as a desire to increase the intellectual ability of officers throughout the Corps.²⁰ While close to a complete study of one part of the MCS, it misses a key aspect in the changes brought to the schools during Breckinridge's time as head of the schools.

¹⁸ Donald Bittner, Lieutenant Colonel, USMCR, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1920-1988" (Occasional Paper, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Washington DC, 1988) XVIII.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

Bittner fails to recognize where Breckinridge, and for that matter, other progressive officers in the Corps, drew the knowledge needed to change the schools. All of the previously cited works in this historiography miss this key aspect. The previous works, for the most part, neglect the idea that Marines developed a set of educational ideas based on sources outside of the military sphere. Such works leave the reader with the belief that the educational ideas evolved from lessons of World War I and self-introspection only. In actuality, officers like Breckinridge received significant influence from outside sources and attempted to apply them to the development of officer education.

Other Works

Any research on the development of MCS is incomplete unless it offers a look into works reflecting on the development of military education outside of the Marine Corps. A study of military intellectual development must include Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*. The majority of this book deals with the professionalism of an officer corps. Huntington states that for a modern army to professionalize it must possess expertise, responsibility, and corporateness. For the purpose of this paper, the understanding of expertise provides vital insight into the development of MCS. The expertise forms from experience and education. Military officers rely on greater amounts of professional education because of the limited opportunity to apply their craft. The complexity of military operations forces officers to continuously educate themselves and understand not only new techniques but the history of those techniques as well. Above all, officers need to master a broad background of subjects that are

not entirely military related. Without this knowledge, the officer cannot function as an expert in his field.²¹ A professional officer corps cannot exist without a solid foundation of education.

Soldiers and Scholars by Carol Reardon looks at the development of Army officer professionalism from 1865 to 1920. Reardon's book closely examines the Army's study of military history and its relation with the budding American Historical Association (AHA).²² Army officers and scholars worked together and against each other to further the studies of military history during the early 20th century. While the Army benefitted from its study of military history, it adopted methods of study considered ahistorical and in violation of the AHA's scholarly standards. According to Reardon, the Army took charge of a realm previously maintained by academia and molded it to fit the needs of the Army education system.

The current scholarship in the development of the Marine Corps School system invites further study. A gap in the scholarship exists because of a concentration on battle histories and a lack of source material. For the casual reader of history, interest in how Marines fight outweighs the question on how they develop their knowledge to fight. Those who seriously study history must understand the roots of military theory and education systems to understand why a force follows a particular doctrine or fights in a specific manner. The purpose of this thesis is to fill in a gap in Marine Corps history and demonstrate how one officer helped change how Marines fight wars.

²¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 8-14.

²² Carol Reardon, *Soldiers and Scholars: The U.S. Army and the Uses of Military History, 1865-1920* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 4-6.

A Note about Sources

As previously stated, a good portion of historical documents about the Marine Corps Schools has been lost to time. For primary sources, I relied on oral histories on file at the United States Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections at Quantico, Virginia. The personal papers of Breckinridge, also on file at Quantico, provided the majority of primary source information. Breckinridge's personnel file, located at the National Archives and Records Administration facility in St. Louis, Missouri, provides an accurate timetable of his duty stations and some correspondence not on file at Quantico. The remaining primary source information comes from the autobiographies of Marine and Army officers, newspaper articles, and articles written for the *Marine Corps Gazette*.

Chapter 2 - The Marine Problem

The United States Marine Corps spent the first century of its existence without a formal school for its officers. From 1775 until 1882, post commanders handled the education of newly commissioned officers. A wide variation in education and the intellectual abilities of officers resulted from this method of indoctrination.²³ As a result, Marine officers could not develop professionally because they lacked a solid education to provide them with the expertise needed for their craft. The lack of education during this period did not prevent the Marines from accomplishing their missions. Indeed, this style of officer who led the Marines took Tripoli, captured Chapultepec, ended John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, fought naval and land engagements during the Civil War, and conducted reprisal raids against a Korean fort in 1871.²⁴

Despite a splendid battle record in the first century of its existence, the Marines received criticism from officers of the U.S. Navy and U.S. citizens. The conduct of Marine officers and enlisted, their failure to modernize and professionalize drew the ire of civilians and sailors alike. In 1890, a Lieutenant W.F. Fullam of the U.S. Navy began to call for the removal of Marines from warships. During this period, Marines provided the discipline on ships. Fullam, in a series of articles written to the New York Times under the pen name of "Fairplay" stated that keeping Marines on warships prevented naval officers from developing close ties with their enlisted. Removing Marines from ships would allow the commissioned and non-commissioned officers to

²³ Dion Williams, Brigadier General, USMC, "The Education of a Marine Officer," *The Marine Corps Gazette* 18 no. 1 (May 1933), 16.

²⁴ M. Almy Aldrich, *The History of the United States Marine Corps* (Boston: Henry L. Shepard & Co, 1875), 50, 108-109, 126, 163, 178, 214-215.

take responsibility for the discipline and order of the ship. By putting the Marines on shore, the Navy could develop its own professionalism. Fullam would continue to argue this point until President Theodore Roosevelt removed the Marines from ships in 1908. Congress, with the support of newly elected Howard Taft, reversed that move in 1909.²⁵

The Marines suffered a crisis of image at the end of the 19th century. Aside from the majority of Navy officers wanting to remove Marines from ships, multiple internal problems affected the future of the Corps. The first major problem of the Marines stemmed from the massive desertion rates. In 1890, 520 enlisted Marines, twenty-five percent of the authorized strength, deserted.²⁶ Two theories described why the enlisted deserted. The first attributed enlistments to vagrants who volunteered during winter looking for a warm place to sleep. When the weather improved, they deserted. The second theory stated that too many duties overworked the Marines.²⁷ The leadership of the Corps never determined the major cause of desertion. A single fact did evolve from this problem. The Marines could not enforce the discipline on Navy ships if they could not maintain a force of sufficient strength and reliability.

The Marines faced more bad publicity from issues other than desertion. Dereliction of duty due to drunkenness caused credibility issues within the Corps. The credibility issues grew worse when the details of the drunken episodes made it to the pages of the *New York Times*.

Sent ashore to protect the U.S. Consulate in La Guaya, Venezuela, Marines took advantage of a

²⁵ "Lieut. Fullam's Paper Creates a Decided Sensation," The Naval Institute, *New York Times*, November 22, 1890., Lieutenant Colonel John G. Miller, "William Freeland Fullam's War with the Corps," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 105, no. 11 (November 1975): 38-39., Clifford, 4-5.

²⁶ Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps Search for a Mission: 1880-1898* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 100.

²⁷ *Idid.*, 100., Millett, 103-104., "More Marines Wanted," *New York Times*, November 10, 1899.

relatively calm moment and raided the liquor stores of the Consulate. The antics of the drunken Marine guards terrified the citizens of Venezuela worse than fear of the uprising. Navy officers quickly pointed out the drunken Marines' dereliction of duty and replaced them with bluejackets.²⁸

While desertion and drunkenness plagued the enlisted ranks, Marine Corps officers suffered from their own problems as well. The Marine Corps officers displayed no professionalism at the start of the 1880's. Slow promotions and stagnation within the ranks prevented the removal of incompetent officers. Congress, tightening the budget, continually reduced the number of officers until 1879 when the officer corps totaled 75 commissions.²⁹ The Navy Bill of 1874 set the authorized strength of officers at a level that provided one officer for every 80 enlisted. The same bill reduced the rank of the Commandant of the Marine Corps from Brigadier General to Colonel.³⁰ Marine Officers encountered the same problem of stagnation that plagued both the U.S. Army and Navy in the decade after the Civil War. Advancement in rank took decades giving the officers little incentive to remain proactive and created morale problems throughout the Corps.

Stagnation and too few numbers comprised only a small part of the Marine Corps officers' problems. The inability to develop professionalism extended further than just a matter of numbers. A major obstacle to professionalization of the Corps derived from the recruitment process for new officers. After the Civil War, the political appointment of officers dominated

²⁸ "The Marines Failed," *New York Times*, October 21, 1892., Shulimson, 117-119.

²⁹ Shulimson, 28.

³⁰ Millett, 103

the Marine Corps. A young man only needed a political connection to gain a leadership position in the Corps. Officer candidates did not need to attend or graduate from the Naval Academy or the Military Academy to receive a commission.³¹ Poor quality best describes the junior Marine officer during this period. Very few stayed for long-term careers. Many served short terms and left to pursue other goals. The political patronage of the Marine Corps invited criticism from the other services and even civilians. The press gave new meaning to U.S.M.C. by labeling Marines as “Useless Sons Made Comfortable.”³²

At the start of the 1880’s, the Marine Corps officers lacked the ability to transform themselves into a professional group of officers. Following Samuel Huntington’s criteria for the development of a professional force, one can clearly see that the Marine’s development of professionalism encountered a roadblock. Political appointment of officers, a system in place since the inception of the Corps, prevented the recruitment of officers from the Naval Academy. This system of recruiting officers retarded the growth of expertise. Political appointees rarely served more than a few years and rarely developed all the skills necessary to transform them into efficient sea-soldiers. The quick turnover of junior officers prevented the inter-generational exchange of skills needed to form an expert officer corps that advanced Marine Corps professionalism. Lacking a formal school or even a professional journal, the few committed Marine officers faced multiple roadblocks to incorporating knowledge needed for an evolving military force.

³¹ Jack Shulimson, “Charles G. McCawley,” in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, ed. Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 99-100.

³² Merrill L. Bartlett, “Ben Fuller and the Genesis of a Modern United States Marine Corps, 1891-1934,” *The Journal of Military History* 69 no. 1 (January 2005), 74. Millett, 109., Dirk Anthony Ballendorf and Merrill Lewis Bartlett, *Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 21.

Starting in 1882 the quality of the junior officers slowly started to improve. The Naval Academy, in the late 19th century, continually graduated more midshipmen than the Navy needed. Overwhelmed, the Navy turned many of these graduates away. The U.S. government funded the attendance of each midshipman to the Naval Academy. Preventing them from entering the naval service meant the government gave a free education to the midshipmen without receiving any return. To ensure the government received a return on its investment in the education of midshipmen, the Naval Appropriations act of 1882 instituted the selection of Marine officers solely from the graduates of the Naval Academy.³³ Between 1883 and 1897, the Marine Corps commissioned fifty new officers, all of whom graduated from the Naval Academy.³⁴ A simple act of legislation to protect the investment of the government ended the political appointment of Marine officers. The officer corps finally possessed a solid base to begin building a professional cadre of officers. What the Marine Corps lacked was a formal school to educate the new lieutenants.

The School of Application

By the 1880's Marine officers started calling for the establishment of a practical school. New officers and enlisted needed to learn the necessary skills before being assigned to a duty station.³⁵ Captain Daniel Mannix, USMC, proposed the development of a school application that

³³ *Naval Appropriations Bill of 1882*, HR 6616, 47th Cong., 1st sess., (June 21, 1882): H 1443.

³⁴ J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 3rd ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1992): 86.

³⁵ "Marine Corps Reforms," *New York Times*, September 5, 1889.

trained future officers in gunnery, torpedoes, electricity, and drill. Mannix believed enlisted Marines should attend this school as well.³⁶

Captain Mannix received assistance in creating the school of application when Colonel Charles Heywood assumed the role of Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1891. Commandant Heywood previously had worked closely with Mannix and believed that the establishment of an advanced school would increase the capabilities of the Marine Corps.³⁷ Commandant Heywood made the establishment of a school for Marines a priority of his office. Working closely with Mannix, the Commandant began to plan for an advanced school.

In September 1891, the Marine Corps School of Application inducted its first class of officers at the Marine Barracks in Washington D.C.³⁸ The original course of instruction lasted eight months.³⁹ To ensure the students received the undivided attention of their instructors, Heywood exempted all instructors from other military duties.⁴⁰ Heywood maintained direct supervision of the school and placed Captain Mannix as its director and head instructor.⁴¹ Mannix previously had attended the Navy's torpedo and Army's artillery schools as well as instructed at the Tianjin naval school in China, a school set up to improve the Chinese Navy. His experience provided him with the proper background to establish the School of Application.

³⁶ Jack Shulimson, "Daniel Pratt Mannix and the Establishment of the Marine Corps School of Application, 1889-1894," *The Journal of Military History* 55, no. 4 (October 1991): 473.

³⁷ Shulimson, 475.

³⁸ Clifford, 36.

³⁹ Millett, 119.

⁴⁰ Shulimson, "Mannix," 475-476., Shulimson, *The Marine Corps Search for a Mission*, 34.

⁴¹ "The Marine Corps School" *New York Times* April 27, 1891.

Mannix brought experience in educating officers and enlisted, a skill lacking in most Marine officers of the day, and field craft to the school. He proved an excellent choice.

The School of Application provided newly commissioned officers with their first real taste of Marine life while giving them a foundation of military and naval principles needed for their career. The course included infantry drill, gunnery, torpedoes and mines, engineering, minor tactics, and even electrical systems. In an article published by *The Marine Corps Gazette* in 1933, readers received a copy of the final exam for the introductory class of 1891.⁴² The 214-question test provides us with a major insight on class instruction. Divided into eight sections, the test, examined the student's knowledge on:

1. Infantry and Artillery (23 questions)
2. Duties of Marine Embarked (15 questions)
3. Military Law and Courts Martial (14 questions)
4. Submarine Mines and Torpedoes (18 questions)
5. Hasty Intrenchments, Defenses, Signaling, Etc. (16 questions)
6. Minor Tactics and Field Service
 - a. Reconnoitering duties (7 questions)
 - b. Time and space (5 questions)
 - c. Advanced guard outposts (12 questions)
 - d. Principles of attack and defense (15 questions)
 - e. Employment of infantry (7 questions)
 - f. Employment of cavalry (4 questions)
 - g. Rear guards and marches (12 questions)
 - h. Rivers and defiles (15 questions)
 - i. Villages and woods (7 questions)
 - j. Convoys (7 questions)
 - k. Night Attacks (7 questions)
7. Strategy and Tactics (29 questions)

The questions ranged from the simple – e.g., naming the parts of the Springfield rifle - to difficult – e.g., “give a method of defending a harbor by submarine mines, and show by sketch

⁴² Williams, 22-25.

where the different kinds would be placed in the channel.”⁴³ The test did indeed require the student to know all of the subjects taught at the school. Question 213 - “What was the Prussian final formation for attack in 1870, and why did this increase the effect of the aggregate amount of fire?” - and question 214 - “Considering the changes in contemporary tactics, what should be the disposition of first, second, and third lines, and general reserves on the defensive?” - illustrates how the school looked at recent European military history and tried to interpret how to apply lessons learned from the Franco-Prussian War.

The School of Application continued to educate officers from 1892 until the Spanish-American War. In April of 1898, Commandant Heywood, recognizing the sudden need for more officers outpaced the capabilities of the school, temporarily closed it. Instead of new officers receiving eight months of instruction on required topics, they received a short course on drill and tactics along with orders to their new units.⁴⁴ James Carson Breckinridge, commissioned as a second lieutenant in July of 1898, received this abbreviated training.⁴⁵ The conclusion of the Spanish-American War did not reduce the growing demand for officers.

The early 20th century saw a major change in the cornerstone of American foreign policy, commonly known as the Monroe Doctrine. Issued in 1823 during President Monroe’s address to Congress, the Monroe Doctrine stated the United States would protect Latin-American nations

⁴³ Williams, 22.

⁴⁴ Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps Search for a Mission: 1880-1898*, 182.

⁴⁵ “Record of Breckinridge, James Carson”, Official Military Personnel File of James C. Breckinridge. RG 127. National Archives & Records Administration (NARA USMC)

from European imperialism.⁴⁶ Unique situations began to appear at the start of the 20th century that would challenge the United States' dedication to the doctrine. Concerned over unpaid debts, European powers began to seek redress for the lack of payment from their Latin-American debtors.⁴⁷ President Theodore Roosevelt faced a difficult challenge. He could allow the European powers to intervene in Latin America to recover their debts, he could deny the European powers access to Latin America and stay out of Latin American affairs, or he could intervene into Latin America and ensure payment of their debts. During a speech to Congress, President Roosevelt stated...

Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.⁴⁸

The key idea of the speech, known as the Roosevelt corollary, dominated the U.S. Latin America policy until the mid-1920's. In order to preserve the Monroe Doctrine and prevent European encroachment into Latin America, the United States ensured the debt and stated that it would act

⁴⁶ President James Monroe, "Message at the commencement of the 18th Congress 12/02/1823"; available from <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=23&page=transcript>; Internet; accessed 19 November 2008.

⁴⁷ John M. Matthews, "Roosevelt's Latin American Policy," *The American Political Science Review* 29 no. 5 (October 1935): 806-807.

⁴⁸ President Theodore Roosevelt, "Message to Congress 12/04/1904"; available from <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=56&page=transcript>; Internet; accessed 19 November 2008.

as an agent to retrieve payment for the European investors. The issuance of this corollary turned the United States from a mere protector of the hemisphere to a policing or collections agent.

At the same time, the United States entered into an Open Door policy with Europe over trade rights with China. Wanting to protect open markets and prevent the parceling of China to nations like Great Britain and Germany led the U.S. to work in conjunction with these nations to establish international communities in China⁴⁹. Both China and Latin America give examples of the expanding influence of the United States. The Marine Corps, riding on Navy warships provided a ready force to go ashore and protect U.S. policy and interest. For the next half century, Marines would intervene in Latin America and China to help stabilize weak governments.

Marines stationed in the Philippines rushed to the aid of Americans trapped in Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Insurrection in the Philippines, starting in 1902, kept the Marines busy on pacification duties as well. The school, still incapable of producing the officers needed in the face of these demands, remained closed. In 1903, it moved to Annapolis, Maryland, and reopened. The School of Application went through several moves and name changes until its final move to Quantico, Virginia, in 1917. The School of Application, with the U.S. entry into the Great War, became the Officer's Training Camp. Like the Spanish-American War, the manpower requirements of the war forced the Marines to suspend the time consuming education of the school and adopt methods to give officers quick training for war.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy: 1898-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 9-10.

⁵⁰ Donald Bittner, "The Basic School," *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary*, ed. William E. Simmons (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 76-77.

Other Educational Opportunities

Even before the School of Application opened its doors, Marines received limited opportunities to attend schools provided by the U.S. Army and Navy. Capt. Mannix, before starting the School of Application, attended the Navy's Torpedo School and the Army's Artillery School in the 1870's.⁵¹ These schools, concentrating on engineering and technical issues, provided Mannix with an insight into the Marine Corps' need to establish its own school. In the early days of developing U.S. military professionalism, technical education laid the groundwork for building better officer education programs.

Colonel Emory Upton, U.S. Army, travelled to Asia and Europe in the 1870's to learn about European military systems. He returned to the U.S. with a list of changes needed to improve the education of officers. Upton noted the Prussian method of combining formal schooling and the difference between line and technical officers. Commanding General of the Army William Sherman opened the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (later to become Command and General Staff College). Sherman sought practical education for officers. The practical education included tactical instruction, field exercise, and strategic studies while attempting to eliminate the mechanical step-by-step method of teaching provided in drill manuals.

Lessons learned in the Spanish-American War prompted Secretary of War Elihu Root to put forth the idea of the Army War College. Organized in 1901, the college aimed to educate

⁵¹ Schulimson, "Mannix", 470.

field grade officers for staff duty by creating war plans.⁵² Unlike the Schools at Ft. Leavenworth, the War College moved beyond the tactical and technical education of officers and concentrated on theoretical course work. Students dived into intricate military problems and war games. Taken from the Prussian, and later German, General Staff system, *Kriegsspiel* or war games taught U.S. officers how to solve complex military problems with nothing more than a map and set of instructions. Most *Kriegsspiels* used by the War College evolved from actual Civil War battles. By implementing *Kriegsspiel* into the curriculum, the Army War College exposed Marine officers to a line of thought that did not rely on the mechanical actions of fieldwork. *Kriegsspiel* forced Marine officers to theoretically coordinate large troop movements, logistics, time constraints, and offensive and defensive operations without needing to assemble the actual troops.⁵³

In the Navy, most of the schools continued to concentrate on engineering and technical skills. Evolving from sails to steam and muzzle loading cannons to long-range breech loading guns required officers well versed in math and science. While this type of education proved beneficial to the Navy, it ignored a critical component for preparing officers to command. Officers, with competent educations in technical areas, lacked a school to teach them how to apply their craft to naval warfare. To remedy this, Commodore Stephen Luce opened the Navy

⁵² Perry D. Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics 1865-1899* (Tuscaloosa AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 6. William E. Simons, "Introduction: A PME Panorama." In *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary*, ed. William E. Simmons (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 5-7., Timothy K. Nenninger, "Early Army Professional Military Education System." In *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary*, ed. William E. Simmons (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 121-122., Robert A. Brace, "The Army War College: 1901-1940." In *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary*, ed. William E. Simmons (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 61-63.

⁵³ Reardon, 18, 43-45.

War College. Luce designed the college to teach naval officers tactics and strategy as well as naval history.⁵⁴

Between the Marine Corps School of Application and the Army and Navy's War Colleges, a Marine officer encountered a greater opportunity for professional education at the start of the 20th century than a short 20 years prior. Several notable Marines attended the War Colleges before the start of World War I. Earl H. "Pete" Ellis, father of the Marine Corps' amphibious doctrine, attended the Naval War College along with Randolph Berkeley, the first Brigadier General to command the Marine Corps Schools.⁵⁵ The 16th Commandant of the Marine Corps, John H. Russell, as well as Brigadier General Dion Williams and Robert Dunlap, a contender for the commandancy before his tragic death in a mudslide, all attended the Naval War College prior to World War I.⁵⁶ Eli Cole, winner of the Navy Cross for his actions in Haiti in 1915 while in command of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, attended the Army War College as did John A. Lejeune, commander of the 1st Infantry Division during the war and 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps.⁵⁷

Lejeune's autobiography provides the best insight into the advantages Marines gained while attending the colleges. Reflecting on his time at the Army War College, Lejeune wrote:

The close application and the constant concentration was what I needed to systematize my mental reactions and to enable me to think connectedly, logically, clearly, and in proper sequence.

⁵⁴ Evelyn M. Cherpak, "Naval War College." In *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary*, ed. William E. Simmons (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 223-224.

⁵⁵ Ballendorf and Bartlett, 53.

⁵⁶ Millett, 284-285.

⁵⁷ Merrill L. Bartlett, *Lejeune: A Marine's Life 1867-1942* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina, 1991), 53.

Above all, the training in quick and accurate thinking produced the ability to formulate sound decisions expeditiously, and what had previously seemed difficult and laborious finally became automatic and instinctive.⁵⁸

Lejeune states his time at the War College gave him confidence in his intellectual ability and the realization that he could meet any task assigned to him.⁵⁹ Considering the Marines who graduated from the War Colleges either made general or provided important theoretical advances for the Corps, it is apparent the colleges played an important role in developing the Marines' educational process. The colleges exposed the officers to new and critical ways of thinking that did not revolve around technical or mechanical knowledge. Instead, they benefitted from instruction on the use of theoretical thinking and the application of tactics and strategy.

By 1910, the Marines benefitted from their own basic officer education at the School of Application and advanced educational course taught by the war colleges of the Army and Navy. One other Marine school developed before the start of World War I. The Advance Base School evolved from the U.S. acquisition of territory during the Spanish-American War. The Navy's newly formed General Board, a general staff designed to look at strategic issues concerning the Navy, foresaw a need for Marines to defend the recently gained bases in Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines. In 1902, Captain Dion Williams published an article on the defense of the new bases in *The Proceedings of United States Naval Institute*. This article presented the same argument for the use of an advanced base force put forward by the General Board. The future wars of the United States, Williams proposed, would occur at sea. Protecting the sea lines of

⁵⁸ John A. Lejeune, Major General USMC, *The Reminiscences of a Marine* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company Publishers, 1930), 187.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

communication ensured freedom of action for the U.S. Navy. Each base served a role as a vital link in the lines of communication. Defending each base with battleships cost too much and did not allow the Navy to concentrate its ships for operations.⁶⁰ The inability to concentrate the fleet into a large battle group put the entire Navy at risk of destruction in piecemeal battles.

Garrisoning the bases with Marines capable of repelling any hostile assault protected the base while freeing the fleet for action. Williams quickly pointed out that Marine officers lacked the education necessary to take on this mission. He mandated the creation of post schools, schools established and controlled by post commanders, at each base to teach the art of advanced base operations.⁶¹

Eight years later, the Marine Corps opened the doors on the Advance Base School. On April 18, 1910, Commandant of the Marine Corps George Elliot submitted a memo to the General Board detailing the establishment of the Advance Base School. The proposed school concentrated on both theoretical and practical aspects of defending naval bases on foreign shores. The school included education for officers and enlisted and focused on four sections of instruction. The gun defense taught the use and placement of naval guns and artillery. Mobile defense studies included building field fortifications, lessons of the Russo-Japanese War, use of artillery in infantry operations, and map reading. The third section trained officers on how to properly employ a mine defense, use of submarines in the defense, and water obstructions. The

⁶⁰ Dion Williams, Captain, U.S. Marine Corps, "The Defense of Our New Naval Stations," *The Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 28, no.2 (June 1902), 182-183.

⁶¹ Williams, 193.

General Considerations section included classes on organization and supply, necessity and use of bases, historical studies, and the creation and use of war plans.⁶²

While the majority of the school dealt directly with technical education (use of mines, gunnery, field fortifications) and tactics, the creation of war plans and historical studies stand out. Emerging from *Kriegsspiel* lessons taught at the Army War College, these two areas provided Marines with some semblance of theoretical thinking. Along with instruction in the use of their weapons, officers received the theoretical exercises allowing them a chance to develop their knowledge on the best methods for defending the advance bases. Unfortunately, the school encountered difficulties in meeting its goals. The small size of the Marine Corps and its continuous use as an expeditionary force prevented many officers from attending the full class cycle.⁶³ Even with this drawback, the Marine Corps managed to train 1,700 officers and men, roughly one-fifth of its authorized strength, at the Advance Base School in the first two years of opening.⁶⁴ The Advance Base School continued to operate through World War I. By the time the United States entered into World War I, the Marine Corps possessed the foundation of an officer education system. The School of Application and Advance Base School concentrated on the technical aspects of weapons and tactical drills with a minor look at some theoretical thinking. As Marine officers attained field-grade commissions (Major or higher) they received the opportunity for advanced education. Their exposure to the Naval and Army War Colleges

⁶² Memo from the Major General Commandant George Elliot to Secretary of Navy Truman Newberry dated April 18, 1910, Marine Corps Schools History, Unnumbered Box, Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico VA., Enclosure 1 (attached to memo dated April 18, 1910), Marine Corps Schools History, Unnumbered Box, Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico VA.

⁶³ Millett, 278.

⁶⁴ Heinl, 161.

provided the foundation for theoretical learning. Officers who attended these courses returned with a working knowledge of planning troop movements, combat operations, logistics, time compression, and hundreds of small details they would not encounter under normal circumstances until entering a war. While the War Colleges provided Marine officers with advanced education, very few Marines received or sought the opportunity to attend the colleges. Experiences in World War I proved all levels of Marine Corps education inadequate.

Chapter 3 - Rude Awakenings

Even before the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, the Marine Corps experienced major changes. 341 officers and 10,056 enlisted men comprised the Corps at the start of 1916. The National Defense Act of 1916 increased the authorized strength to 649 officers and almost 15,000 enlisted. On November 11, 1918, the might of the Marine Corps included almost 2,500 officers and 70,489 enlisted.⁶⁵ In two years, the Marine Corps size increased from its prewar size by seven fold. This chapter examines how the Marine Corps prepared its officers for the war. It explores the changes in officer selection, training, and education during the war, and demonstrates the inadequacy of Marine officer education at the time.

The Corps' explosive growth during World War I occurred due to the lobbying of Major General Commandant George Barnett. The Commandant intended to uphold the Marine Corps slogan of "First to Fight". He orchestrated the inclusion of a brigade of Marines in the troop convoy to arrive in France. At the same time, Barnett promised the Navy that the Marine Corps could continue to meet its obligations to the Navy as well as continued expeditionary duty to Latin America.⁶⁶ The Marine Corps now faced multiple challenges of upholding its traditional duties on Navy vessels, maintaining order in Haiti, Santo Domingo, and China, and fighting a major war in Europe.

⁶⁵ Heinl, 611.

⁶⁶ George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato CA: Presidio Press, 1999), XV., Millett, 289-290., Heinl, 192-195.

The sudden growth of the Corps forced a new source of officers outside of the Naval Academy. New officers, drawn from civilian life, enlisted ranks, previous service, and military schools like the Virginia Military Institute received commissions in the Marine Corps.⁶⁷ The number of applicants vying for enlisted slots allowed the Corps to select only the best to fill the ranks. Out of 239,274 applicants, only 60,189 entered the ranks. In a time of global war, the Marine Corps experienced a massive change in the quality of enlisted. Instead of the drunken, deserting dregs previously enlisted, the high quality of those applying allowed the Marines to select only the best, enlisting only one-fourth of all who volunteered.⁶⁸ Out of this 60,000, the leadership of the Marine Corps realized they held in the enlisted ranks men of college education and outstanding character. Some of the enlisted included college football players, Ivy League athletes, the son of the Secretary of the Navy, and even former Congressmen.⁶⁹ Noting the quality of these men, the Commandant of the Marine Corps decided to only commission officers from the enlisted ranks and Naval Academy. The Corps no longer accepted civilian appointments.⁷⁰

The time constraints placed on training and educating the newly commissioned officers forced the Marine Corps to change its officer education system. Entry into the Great War forced the School of Application to close its doors in 1917 after educating graduates of the Naval

⁶⁷ Edwin N McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the First World War* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), 21-22.

⁶⁸ McClellan, 14-15., Millett, 291.

⁶⁹ Edwin Howard Simmons, Brig. Gen., USMC (Ret.) and Joseph H. Alexander, Col., USMC (Ret.), *Through the Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 22., Millett 291.

⁷⁰ McClellan, 21,

Academy class of 1915 and three officers commissioned outside of the Academy.⁷¹ The Commandant could not justify spending a year to train each officer during a time of national emergency. In place of the School of Application, the Commandant implemented a quick system to train officers for the war. Civilians who received commissions reported to depots on both coasts to begin initial training. In October of 1917, 345 new second lieutenants arrived at Quantico, Virginia for Officer Training Camp. The course lasted 10 to 12 weeks. Officers received training in musketry, tactics, infantry drill, interior guard, bayonet, topography, gas warfare, sea duty, engineering, and military law.⁷² The expedient training gave new officers a rudimentary understanding of combined arms, the integration of all weapon systems and personnel into a cohesive combat unit. Sand table exercises at the end of the course allowed the new officers to demonstrate their ability to apply what they learned during the course.⁷³

The U.S. Army and Marine Corps established a similar school in France. This school trained enlisted who received battlefield commissions. The Marine Corps' Officer Training Camp in Gondrecourt, France, graduated 164 newly commissioned lieutenants.⁷⁴ The previous education and training of the enlisted allowed the schools to skip most of the basic military

⁷¹ Williams, 21., Frances, 22.

⁷² Frances, 22., McClellan, 21., Dion Williams, Brigadier General, USMC, "The Education of a Marine Officer: Part II" *The Marine Corps Gazette* 18 no. 2 (Aug. 1933), 17.

⁷³ C. N. Muldrow, Captain, Assistant Instructor, Marine Officer's School, "The Impression of First Lieutenant James C. Blank, Student, Marine Officer's School, Field Training Depot, Quantico, VA." *The Marine Corps Gazette* 9 no.1 (Mar. 1919), 43, 45.

⁷⁴ McClellan, 22-23., Frances, 23.

knowledge and drill. Instead, the new officers received a concentrated one-month course focused on items a new officer should know, namely tactics and employment of personnel.⁷⁵

Schools on both sides of the Atlantic gave junior officers a concentrated course in officer education. According to most writings of the day, the training provided each officer with a realistic “basic technique of fighting and winning battles.”⁷⁶ The education gave every officer who completed the course, of which few did not, a bare bones schooling in leading Marines. Later, long after the war, officers trained in this manner began to detail the deficiencies of the school.

Clifton B. Cates, a newly appointed 2nd lieutenant fresh from the University of Tennessee in 1917 recounted his experiences at the Officer Training School.

I would say that at least half of it wasn't worth a 'hoorah.' For instance, I spent at least half of my time in trying to learn the Semaphore and the Morse code, and what good was that for a Second Lieutenant. And, of course, we had lots of close order drill. We had some extended order drill and we dug trenches and we threw dummy grenades. Some of the training was good but a lot of it wasn't worth much.

I think with the training that a youngster gets these days that, if we had had that training during World War I, I don't believe we would have lost one-third of our men. There was very little team work. You usually just got up, rushed in, fired, and there wasn't any covering fire, any maneuvering. You just got up and went forward.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Simmons and Alexander, 54.

⁷⁶ Frances, 23.

⁷⁷ General Clifton Cates hold the distinction of commanding a Platoon, Company, Battalion, Regiment, and Division in combat, a rare feat in the Marine Corps. He also fought in every major battle the Marine Corps participated in during World War I. From 1951 to 1954 he served as the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps. Clifton B. Cates, interviewed by Benis M. Frank, 28 March 1967, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA.

Reflecting back on the realistic techniques to fighting and winning battles, Cates did not believe the training accomplished nearly enough. Too many Marines died because of the inadequate training.

Graves B. Erskine, another young lieutenant at the start of the war, attempted to resign his commission and go join the Canadian Royal Highland “Black Watch” Regiment. Erskine found the training he received unsatisfactory and a waste of time. He wanted to get into the war as quickly as possible. Days after submitting his letter of resignation, Erskine received a transfer from the school and deployed to a line company. After his experience at Officer Training Camp, Erskine refused to attend any Marine Corps’ school for the remainder of his career.⁷⁸

Captain Charlie Barrett, veteran of Vera Cruz and the Meuse-Argonne Campaign, at the end of the War, received a letter of commendation for his work training new officers. Later he related to a former student that he deserved a general court martial for his work.⁷⁹ Considering the section on “minor tactics” consisted mainly of learning how to dig trenches, one does not find it difficult to consider the training and education inadequate.⁸⁰ Students and instructors alike lamented the lack of proper preparation the Officer Training Camp provided. This lack of education resulted in a high price tag in blood.

⁷⁸ Retiring in 1953, General Graves B. Erskine commanded the 3rd Marine Division during the battle of Iwo Jima. At the end of the war, before Marines of the 3rd Division received their discharges home, Erskine established vocational schools for the Division on Guam. He intended the schools to give any Marine without an education, a chance to find a job upon reintegration with the civilian workforce. Graves B. Erskine, interviewed by Benis M. Frank, 1973, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA.

⁷⁹ Lieutenant General Robert Blake retired from the Marine Corps in 1949. He fought in every major engagement in World War I. During World War II he served as the Chief of Staff for the 3rd Marine Division and as Deputy Chief of Staff to the 10th Army located in Okinawa. Robert Blake, interviewed by Benis M. Frank, March 28, 1968, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA.

⁸⁰ Brigadier General Robert C. Kilmartin, Jr. never made it to France during World War I. He spent most of his career in the Marine Corps as an adjutant, working in legal, or planning. Robert C. Kilmartin, Jr, interviewed by Benis M. Frank, 1982, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA.

Frederic Wise, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marine Regiment witnessed the results of the wrong kind of education training. A tenacious defense by German machine guns at Belleau Woods destroyed over half of the 2nd Battalion. Wise later wrote in his autobiography:

Nothing in all our training had foreseen fighting like this. If there was any strategy in it, it was the strategy of the Red Indian. The only thing that drove those Marines through those woods in the face of such resistance as they met was their individual, elemental guts, plus the hardening of the (physical) training through which they had gone.⁸¹

For Wise, he believed enlisted men possessed a physical stamina instilled in them by the training regime. However, they could only complete the assault because of their stamina and personal courage. Neither officers nor enlisted had the proper training or education to complete the mission without catastrophic losses. Wise's battalion, formerly over 1,000 men strong, emerged from Belleau Woods with 350 enlisted and six officers, even after receiving 150 replacements after the first day of the fight.⁸²

During the war, the Marines fielded one combat brigade (the 4th) which fought as part of the U.S. Army's 2nd Division. The 5th and 6th Regiments and 6th Machine Gun Battalion comprised the 4th Brigade. The Marines entered the trenches as a combat unit on March 17, 1918, and concluded combat operations on November 11, 1918. Out of the 9,300 Marines that comprised the Brigade, it suffered 1,342 killed and 8,292 wounded in less than eight months of

⁸¹ Frederic May Wise, Colonel, USMC and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells it to You* (New York: J.H. Sears & Company, Inc., 1929), 222.

⁸² Millett, 303., Wise, 224.

combat.⁸³ The Brigade nearly bled dry if not for the replacements arriving almost daily from the debarkation port of St. Nazaire. Compared to the losses the British and French suffered in other battles, the number of Marines killed and wounded seems insignificant. For Marines, however, the numbers of dead and wounded nearly equaled their pre-war strength. These numbers shocked junior and field grade officers alike.

While the junior officer training and education suffered during the war, a few mid-level officers received the opportunity to attend the Army's General Staff School held at Langres, France. General John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F) believed the growth of the Army required more trained staff officers. A telegram Pershing sent during the buildup of American forces shows how important he considered a staff school.

Urgency training general staff officers for particular duty at army headquarters cannot be overestimated. Their services are needed now to study details in connection with operations and other duties. Our staff officers generally have little conception of problems involved in directing armies *** or of strategic questions involved.*** We are now planning for a spring campaign and success is not possible without thoroughly efficient General Staff.

⁸⁴

The number of staff officers needed eclipsed the number of officers in the Army prior to the war. To meet this demand, a three-month General Staff School opened shortly after the A.E.F. arrived in France. The course instructed officers in staff organization, administration, logistics, and combined arms. Pershing required the General Staff School to instill a common doctrine into all of the officers attending. Recognizing the school did not last long enough to teach all of the

⁸³ Heinl, 196-197., Clark, 434.

⁸⁴ John J. Pershing, Commander in Chief, American Expeditionary Forces, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol. 1. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), 155, 259.

important components of staff duty, Pershing stated officers had to learn the rest from “the costly school of experience.”⁸⁵

Marines attached to the 2nd Division gained excellent experience from attending the General Staff School. Holland “Howlin’ Mad” Smith, future commanding officer of the V Amphibious Corps during World War II, attended the first course instructed. Because of Smith’s experience at the Staff School, the Army, which maintained control of Marine officer billets while attached to the 2nd Division, transferred him to the position of Assistant Operations Officer for the 1st Corps. At least another five Marine officers attended the Staff School at Langres.⁸⁶ The lessons learned from the school quickly moved into the professional journal of the Marine Corps, *The Marine Corps Gazette*.⁸⁷ One of the greatest lessons learned by the Corps during the war focused on the development of staff work.⁸⁸

The Marine Corps emerged from World War I bloodied but victorious. They proved themselves capable of meeting a modern, well-equipped army and winning the battles. After the signing of the armistice, Marines had to learn to mitigate the high cost of victory. Lessons learned on the battlefield needed translation into lessons learned in the classroom. Emerging from the war officers of the Corps took the battlefield lessons to heart and developed a plan for a new education system.

⁸⁵ Pershing, 155-156.

⁸⁶ Holland M. Smith, General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.), and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 44.

⁸⁷ H. L. Roosevelt, Lieutenant Colonel, A.Q.M., USMC, “A Proposed General Staff for the United States Marine Corps,” *The Marine Corps Gazette* 13, no. 4 (Dec. 1918), 300-301.

⁸⁸ Kenneth W. Condit, John H. Johnstone, Major, USMC, and Ella W. Nargle, *A Brief History of Headquarters Marine Corps Staff Organization*, (Washington DC: Historical Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1970), 10-11.

Chapter 4 - Coming to Terms

The conclusion of World War I did not give the Marine Corps much time to relax. Occupation duties along the Rhine, demobilization, as well as the traditional expeditionary and naval duties kept the Corps busy. Along with these activities, Marines began to question their role in the U.S. armed forces, as well as what the future might hold. Above all, discovering the best way to educate new and veteran officers occupied the minds of many officers. This chapter examines the development of the Marine Corps Schools immediately after World War I. It will show the Corps lacked the knowledge base and educational experience to build a strong school system.

In September 1919, the *Marine Corps Gazette* published an article by Major E.W. Sturdevant. A graduate of the Army's General Staff School in Langres, Sturdevant put to paper his beliefs on developing an officer education program. "A System of Instructions for Officers of the Marine Corps" listed Sturdevant's reasoning for a new school system and the requirements to meet. According to Sturdevant, the role of the Marine Corps expanded because of the war. At the same time, technological development in tanks, aircraft, artillery, and logistics expanded the size and nature of warfare. No longer could an officer expect to lead a division of riflemen alone. To win the modern battlefield required an officer to understand and use combined arms. Pointing out that officers who fought in the war had the best school possible – i.e., the school of experience - Sturdevant noted these officers, especially junior ones commissioned during the

war, held no experience with expeditionary or sea service. Likewise, older officers retained on expeditionary duty during the war did not gain any education in modern warfare.⁸⁹

Sturdevant focused on the need of the Marine Corps to possess specialists in the ranks. Traditionally, Marine Officers considered themselves “jack of all trades” and believed they must adequately perform any duty given them. With the ever-expanding technological base in warfare, the jack of all trades became a liability. Mastering their trade and focusing on all aspects of warfare prevented them from acquiring the minute technical detail to master any particular field. Marines did not develop the expertise needed to professionalize. Sturdevant advocated for all Officers to specialize in a field that met the needs of the Corps. Before specialization, however, Sturdevant argued they must go through the same Infantry training. The proposed curriculum sought to produce groups of officers specialized in aviation, artillery, logistics, and advanced base operations, to complement their foundation in infantry operations.⁹⁰

An editorial in the next issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette* challenged other officers to reply to Sturdevant’s article as well as propose new ideas in building a better Corps. Editors of the *Gazette* sought articles on:

- Tactical changes due to the introduction of new arms and the lessons of the Great War.
- Machine Guns.
- Automatic Rifles.
- Training of Marine Detachments aboard ship.
- What type of transport is best suited to Marine Corps needs.
- The supply question on tropical expeditions.

⁸⁹ H.M Smith to Edwin N. McClellan, March 18, 1920, H.M. Smith Papers, Collection 382 Box 7 Folder 2A Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico VA., E.W. Sturdevant, Major, USMC, “A System of Instructions for Officers of the Marine Corps” *Marine Corps Gazette* 4 no. 3 (Sept. 1919), 232.

⁹⁰ Sturdevant, 233,235.

- The Haitian Constabulary.
- Technical Schools for the Marine Corps.
- Advanced Base Training.
- An Educational System for Officers of the Marine Corps.⁹¹

The call for articles on tactical changes and educational systems for officers stands out on this list. However, every item listed required some form of advanced education for the officer to perform his duty properly. The list demonstrates the eclectic duties assigned to the Corps and the necessity in building a school system designed to educate Marines. Discussions on the direction of education in the Corps continued to emerge in the *Gazette* and, today, offer a snapshot into the thought processes behind the development of the schools.

The calls for a new school system not only occurred in the professional journal of the Marines. Major General John A. Lejeune, returning leader of the 2nd Infantry Division in the Great War and commander of Marine Barracks Quantico, in 1920, initiated a transformation of officer training. Speaking to the House Committee on Naval Affairs, Lejeune detailed the greatest lesson he learned during the war. “You know there used to be an old theory that the soldier ought to be ignorant and illiterate and like dumb, driven cattle. I think our experience in this war shows the more intelligence, the more education, and the more initiative he has the better soldier he is.”⁹² Lejeune envisioned a Marine Corps full of proactively educated officers and enlisted. During the same committee hearing, Lejeune laid out the past educational philosophy, the problems it caused, and steps the Corps must take to change the situation.

A great many of us have had a desire for a long time to see a school established where officers will learn their duties as captains and field officers. Our officers have had to be self-educated. Few

⁹¹ Editorial Notes, *Marine Corps Gazette* 4 no. 4 (Dec. 1919) 390.

⁹² House Committee on Naval Affairs, *Naval Appropriations Bill*, 66th Cong., 2d sess, 1920, H. Hearing 1920-NAH-0025, 1830.

of us have had the opportunity of going to Fort Leavenworth or the Army War College or the Navy War College, and the average officers have had no opportunity to learn anything in regard to their higher duties except by studying themselves or what they learned from practical experience... ..It is our aim for all officers to have as good opportunities to obtain a military education as the officers of the Navy and the Army. Education is absolutely essential; an educated officer makes for educated men and an ignorant officer makes for ignorant men.⁹³

Lejeune's beliefs required a stronger educational system for Marine Officers. Colonel R. H. Dunlap, reflecting on the past Marine Corps educational philosophy during the same period, agreed with Lejeune's belief that the majority of the best officers taught themselves due to the lack of professional schools.⁹⁴

Not limiting the ideas of education to officers alone, Lejeune along with the help of Brigadier General Smedley Butler began a series of vocational programs at Quantico. These programs ranged from basic high school education to training in automotive repair and clerical education. Enlisted Marines received additional educational opportunities through a correspondence course system established as the Marine Corps Institute.⁹⁵ A Corps capable of operating in the post-World War I era necessitated a strong cadre of professionally educated officers to lead an educated formation of enlisted.

⁹³ Ibid., 1828.

⁹⁴ R. H. Dunlap, Colonel, USMC, "Education in the Marine Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette* 10 no.3 (Dec. 1925), 149.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1822-1824.

Birth of the Marine Corps Schools

The establishment of a new officer education system immediately after the war became a priority for Lejeune. Before Lejeune returned to Quantico from his duties in France in 1919, the Officer Training Camp, under the direction of Major Jesse Dyer, extended its curriculum to twenty-two weeks from its previous ten-week course. The name of the Camp changed to Marine Officer's Training School.⁹⁶ Like its predecessor, the School of Application, the Marine Officer's Training School focused on training newly commissioned officers for their service in the Corps. The school educated officers on "infantry drill, physical training, manual of interior guard duty, signals, infantry weapons, equitation, administration, engineering, topography, law, first aid and hygiene, tactics, and musketry."⁹⁷ Classes on torpedoes, electrical ship systems, and naval gunnery disappeared from the curriculum as Marines focused on their role as a seaborne infantry force.

Alongside the Training School, the Marine Corps wanted to create a course of instruction aimed at giving officers commissioned during the war a better education than they received at the Training Camp. The Marine Officer's Infantry School lasted twenty weeks and covered subjects on tactics, combined arms, planning, problem solution, topography, and tactical principles.⁹⁸ Aimed at junior officers with experience in either France or expeditionary duties during the war, the curriculum duplicated the Officer's Training School's. Within a few months,

⁹⁶ Frances, 27.

⁹⁷ "Professional Notes," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no.1, (Mar. 1920), 113-114.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

Lejeune, now Commandant of the Marine Corps, ordered the establishment of a new three-tiered school system.

The reorganization of the school system started in spring of 1920. Lieutenant Colonel John Beaumont, commander of the Marine Corps Schools, restructured the two schools into new courses designed to educate officers at different stages of their careers. The Officer's Training School transitioned into the Company Officer's Course and the Marine Officer's Infantry Training School became the Field Officer's Course. The Field Officer's Course accepted only senior Captains and field grade officers (Major or higher). The Company Officer's Course took senior Lieutenants and junior Captains. Both courses focused on tactics, law, topography, administration, and field engineering. The Field Officer's course included "... many map problems, tactical walks, and map maneuvers designated to test an officer's ability as a commander of forces composed of all arms or as an executive staff officer."⁹⁹ The design of the two schools gave officers access to continuing military education throughout their careers.

The third tier in the Marine Corps education system started in 1922. The Basic School, designed as the new course for freshly commissioned officers, gave officers an entry-level education in the same subjects covered by the Company and Field Officers' courses. With the development and implementation of all three schools, the Marine Corps instituted a system to advance the education of officers during their entire career. The birth of "a system of military schooling whereby each officer will be fitted for both his grade and the next higher grade prior to

⁹⁹ Frances, 28-29., Professional Notes, "The Quantico Schools," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no. 2 (June 1920), 316-317., Professional Notes, "Officer's Schools at Quantico," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no. 1 (Mar 1920), 113-115., Lejeune, 463.

his promotion...”¹⁰⁰ For the first time in its history, the Marine Corps now owned their personal education system designed specifically to instruct officers up to field grade level.

A recognizable deficiency in the budding school system did not escape Lejeune. The lack of qualified instructors plagued the schools. Finding Marines with enough experience and education proved difficult. While a few self-educated officers and war college graduates held prominent positions in the Corps, too few existed to teach a comprehensive course schedule. To assist in gaining the knowledge required, Marines continued to attend Army schools at Ft. Leavenworth (service schools), Ft. Benning (infantry school), and Ft. Sill (artillery school), as well as the Naval and War Colleges. Lejeune intended the Army courses to serve as a foundation for Marine education. Officers sent to the Army schools returned to the Marine Corps Schools as instructors.

The curriculum of the Field and Company Officer’s courses followed those taught by the Army Service Schools¹⁰¹ at Ft. Leavenworth. By design, they did not cover the scope or depth of the Service Schools and intended to change parts to fit the needs of the Corps. Editors of the *Marine Corps Gazette* recognized three areas requiring modifications to the Army’s curriculum. Marines, due to their nature of being transported on ships, travelled lighter and maintained less equipment than the Army. Tables of equipment and organization (T.O. &E.) changed to meet Marine formations. Along with smaller T.O. &E., the many missions of the Marines required

¹⁰⁰ Navy Department, United States Marine Corps, *Annual Report of the Major General Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1922* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), 5.

¹⁰¹ The Army Service Schools at Ft. Leavenworth included the School of the Line and General Staff School. The School of the line was the first year course at Leavenworth. Top students from that course moved on to the second year course, the General Staff School. Between 1923 and 1929, the course transitioned to one year and became the Command and General Staff School. Nenninger, 50-51.

small groups of men to take on tasks requiring more initiative of junior officers than junior officers in the Army. The scattering of small detachments of Marines across Santo Domingo, discussed earlier, is a prime example of the type of isolation of Marine officers that required personal initiative. The adaptation of the Army curriculum had to reflect this need for personal initiative in all officers, encouraging it and not stifling it.¹⁰² This modified Army curriculum served as the foundation for the development of the Marine Corps Schools during the 1920's. Built on a curriculum not designed for the Marines, the foundation restricted the development of Marine professional education in the end.

Problems of the Schools

From their inception, the new series of Marine Schools suffered from multiple problems that affected their ability to prepare officers for their duties. A lack of a clear-cut mission or doctrine and a constant threat of school closure due to operational requirement plagued the Schools throughout the 1920's. Another problem threatened MCS as well. Despite the best attempts to modify Army curriculum and increase the initiative of the students, many students believed the curriculum actually stifled initiative. These problems prevented the Corps from developing an education system that provided officers with a strong intellectual development. At the same time, these problems caused a continued reliance on Army schools to develop the best Marine officers.

Defining the mission of the Marine Corps proved problematic. Prior to entry into the war, many officers began to call for the establishment of both doctrine and mission. The debate

¹⁰² Professional Notes, "The Marine Corps Schools," *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no. 4 (Dec. 1920), 409.

heated up through several issues of the *Marine Corps Gazette* during 1916.¹⁰³ Entry into the war tabled the discussion for a short time. After returning from the trenches of the Western Front, many Marines realized the war had changed the Corps but they did not understand exactly how it had changed. Captain Earl Jenkins wrote to the *Marine Corps Gazette* in the fall of 1920 and put to words what many officers understood.

The war expanded the human mind, it has incited it to thoughts which heretofore lay hidden in the recesses of the brain. The men are thinking. The officers must think, too—and think hard that the same relationship as of old, the same qualities of leadership be maintained.

The war was a stimulus to thought—it was an awakening—a renaissance.¹⁰⁴

The war caused a re-birth of the Marine Corps. Finding intellectual nourishment for the new Corps became the priority. The problem stemmed from not knowing what exactly the nourishment needed to be.

Since the entry of the U.S. into World War I, the officers of the Corps served in the trenches of France fighting a first class German Army; patrolled the jungles of Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua as an expeditionary force; stood guard over various U.S. legations around the globe; and provided detachments for U.S. Navy ships. The multiple missions and duties of the Corps created an identity problem. Marines wanted a definitive mission. Groups of officers seemed to possess different ideas of what the definite mission should be. One officer, Smedley Butler, believed in removing all ties from the Navy. Butler believed this action served

¹⁰³ John H. Russell, Major, USMC, “A Plea for a Mission and Doctrine,” *The Marine Corps Gazette* 1 no. 2 (June 1916).

¹⁰⁴ Earl H. Jenkins, “The New Marine Corps,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 5 no. 3 (Sept. 1920), 258.

the Corps' best interest.¹⁰⁵ To Butler, pursuing missions similar to those assigned during World War I in Europe and expeditionary warfare made a stronger Corps and reduced its reliance on the Navy. For Butler, an independent Marine Corps with little or no ties to the Navy was the future of the Corps.

Another small group believed that focusing on small wars, currently known as anti-insurgency operations, provided the Marines with a tailor-made mission. Always aboard Navy vessels, Marines responded quickly to numerous insurrections in Latin America and Asia. Even while fighting in the Great War, Marines continued to fight various small wars in Latin America. Officers such as Major Earl H. Ellis, Lt. Colonel Henry Davis, and Major Samuel M. Harrington wrote articles to the *Marine Corps Gazette* in support of continuing Marine service in Latin America.¹⁰⁶

The third group of officers believed the mission of the Corps tied directly into the mission of the Navy. Having Marines aboard warships provided the Navy with a “body of naval infantry” dedicated to projecting the fight ashore.¹⁰⁷ The traditional understanding of the mission of the Corps prior to the war meant cooperating with the Navy in order to ensure the accomplishment of naval missions.¹⁰⁸ Commandant Lejeune retained this belief after the war as well and recognized the conflict with other officers over the direction of the Corps.

¹⁰⁵ Millett, 324-325., Bartlett, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Earl “Pete” Ellis mysteriously died in the South Pacific while on an intelligence gathering mission in 1923. Before his death, he published a paper titled *Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia* in 1921. The publication details the amphibious missions the Marine Corps will take on during a war with Japan. Ellis, 14., Davis, 154., Harrington, 474.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Blake, Captain, USMC, “The Marine at Sea,” *The Marine Corps Gazette* 10 no. 1 (June, 1925), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Russell, 109., Charles A. Doyen, Colonel, USMC, “Discussion on a Plea For a Mission and Doctrine,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 1 no. 2 (June 1916), 188.

It caused, too, every effort to be made to convince officers and men of the soundness of the doctrine that the future of the Corps would be determined by their ability to serve efficiently with the Fleet in the conduct of the shore operations which are essential to the successful prosecution of naval campaigns in war, and which are essential to the successful conduct of the foreign policy of our country in peace.¹⁰⁹

Brigadier General Rufus Lane, the Inspector General of the Marine Corps and Brigadier General Dion Williams published articles in the *Gazette* reflecting on Lejeune's belief. For continued relevance, the Marine Corps needed to maintain close ties with the Navy and ensure that it did not become just another land army.¹¹⁰ To back this belief, officers merely pointed to the British and French naval fiasco at Gallipoli during 1915. The initial attempt to force the fleet through the Dardanelles failed when the combined fleet could not reduce the Ottoman coastal batteries. Marines developed a theory based on landing a small force to reduce the coastal batteries. Instead of rushing warships through the Dardanelles, a landing force put ashore provided a better chance for eliminating coastal defenses and preserving the strength of the fleet.¹¹¹ The adoption of War Plan Orange in 1921 along with the Washington Conference on Naval Disarmament reinforced the need for a well-trained force of seaborne infantry. War Plan Orange detailed the strategy the U.S. would employ if they went to war with Japan. The Washington Conference led to the Five Power Treaty. This treaty limited the number of ships the navies of the United

¹⁰⁹ Lejuene, 465.

¹¹⁰ Rufus H. Lane, Brigadier General, USMC, "The Mission and Doctrine of the Marine Corps," *The Marine Corps Gazette* 8 no. 1 (March, 1923), 12., Dion Williams, Brigadier General, USMC, "The Fleet Landing Force," *Marine Corps Gazette* 11 no. 2 (June 1926), 116.

¹¹¹ Blake, 2., Clifford, 26, 27., Isley and Crowl, 17., Louis Jones interviewed by Thomas E. Donnelly, Major, 1973, transcript, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA 63.

Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, and Japan could possess. It also restricted the erection of permanent fortifications on Pacific Islands. The restrictions of the treaty on both the size of the fleet and prevention of fortifying Pacific Islands held by the U.S. created an ideal situation for the development of the advanced base force.¹¹² Limited to a small number of ships to defend its Pacific bases, the U.S. Navy needed to devise a method to keep the lines of communication open. A force of Marines trained to take and hold these islands provided the best answer to the problem.

These three different ideas on the direction of the Corps caused some confusion in the school system. What should the curriculum be? Should it focus on small wars, large land battles against European nations, expeditionary duties, or advanced base operations? Each mission held its advantages and disadvantages for the officers of the Corps to consider. Deciding how best to educate officers on these multiple roles proved difficult for the instructors of the Marine Corps Schools.

A second problem stemmed from the post-war reduction in size of the Corps. By 1920, the strength of the Corps shrank to 962 officers and 16,085 enlisted. In less than two years, the Corps transformed back into a small cadre of volunteers one-quarter the size of its war-time strength.¹¹³ The commitments of the Corps in Latin American expeditions, ship detachments, and legation guards quickly used up all available manpower. When emergencies arose, such as trouble in Nicaragua in 1927 and Cuba in 1933, the schools closed as the lack of officers forced students to leave the classrooms and join the expeditions.¹¹⁴ Operational requirements threatened

¹¹² Millett, 319-322.

¹¹³ Millett, 654.

the stability of the Marine Corps Schools. Without enough officers to meet the needs of the Corps' operational commitments, officers did not benefit from an uninterrupted education system.

The lack of a clear-cut mission and threat of class interruption put a negative influence on the schools. The conflict over the direction of the Corps prevented the schools from developing a solid curriculum. At the same time, the threat of deployment prevented the schools from developing a sense of continuity. The stifling of initiative drew the ire of one the Corps' leading intellectuals and Commanding Officer of the Marine Corps School.

Writing to the *Marine Corps Gazette* in December 1929, Colonel James Carson Breckenridge, Commanding Marine Corps Schools, attacked deficiencies he saw in the system. He believed the schools repeated themselves, did not allow for fresh thought, and allowed officers to only respond with "the book" answer rather than develop the ability to analyze situations critically.¹¹⁵ The school system arbitrarily taught students that every problem had one set answer. When the student left the school and encountered a situation not put forward in the book, he lacked the intellectual ability to develop an answer outside of the classroom answer. Others recognized a similar problem with officer education. Samuel B. Griffith, II, stated the schools did not encourage imagination or initiative. They merely stressed a single correct

¹¹⁴ Navy Department, United States Marine Corps, *Annual Report of the Major General Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1927* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1927), 10., Navy Department, United States Marine Corps, *Annual Report of the Major General Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1928* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1928), 6., William O. Brice, interviewed by Thomas E. Donnelly, Major, USMC, May 15-16 1971, transcript, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA
38.

¹¹⁵ J.C. Breckinridge, Colonel, USMC, "Some Thoughts on Service Schools," *The Marine Corps Gazette* 14 no. 4 (Dec. 1929), 230.

answer to classroom problems that rarely applied to the real world.¹¹⁶ Not only did single answer problems prevent the development of personal initiative in officers, it negated what they learned in the schools. Instead of learning how to evaluate and respond, officers learned how to cram for tests to pass the course. They quickly lost what little useful information they gained due to improper study methods. With this criticism in mind, Breckinridge started to develop a plan to revive the Marine Corps Schools and put them on a better path.

¹¹⁶ Samuel B. Griffith, II benefitted from two careers. He led the 1st Marine Raider Battalion during World War II during his first career. As a second career, he earned a PhD from Oxford and spent the remainder of his life as a highly respect scholar and author. His best-known work is a translation Mao Tse –Tung’s *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Samuel B. Griffith, II, Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired), interviewed by Benis M. Frank, 1976, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA
12.

Chapter 5 - Fighting to Revive the Schools

Breckinridge wrote the article to the *Gazette* at the end of his first assignment to the Marine Corps Schools. Assigned as the Commanding Officer of the Schools in July of 1928, he immediately noticed a problem with the Schools and began to search for a solution. His search took him outside the traditional realm of military studies and into the world of modern academia. Transferred in December of 1929, Breckinridge did not get a chance to implement the changes the school needed fully. The need for improving the Schools remained with him through the next few years and when promoted to Brigadier General in April 1932, he returned to Quantico to take charge of the Schools once again. To fully understand the problems Breckinridge had with the Schools and how he developed his solution, it is necessary to examine his background prior his assignment there.

James Carson Breckinridge

Born in Tennessee in 1877, James Carson Breckinridge volunteered for service in the Marine Corps during the Spanish-American War. He received his commission as a second lieutenant in 1898. Even before joining the Marines, Breckinridge, a well-travelled son of the U.S. Ambassador to Russia in the 1890's, benefited from a varied education. He attended prep school at Friends Select School in Washington D.C., and spent two years at College de Laucy in

Geneva, Switzerland. In 1897, he enrolled in classes at the University of Tennessee, leaving after one full year to join the Marine Corps.¹¹⁷

Shortly after the Spanish-American War, Breckinridge received a permanent commission as a first lieutenant. The normal deployments to the various ship and shore duties carried out by Marines at the turn of the century took up the next few years of his life. During this period, Breckinridge began to demonstrate his ability to contemplate and write theories on the direction of the Corps. While attached to the U.S.S. Minnesota in 1908, he penned an informal paper titled “The United States Marine Corps, Its Uses and Function and Proper Disposition.” In the paper he stated the Marine Corps should operate “...somewhat akin to that of the cavalry; a military arm to move rapidly by conveyance to some point where it is needed in a hurry, there to discard the conveyance and make a stand until the heavier, and as such, more slowly moving bodies, can come up to relieve them.”¹¹⁸ In Breckinridge’s theory, only the method of conveyance differed between the Marines and cavalry. Instead of horses, Marines relied on ships to deliver them to the point of action. Just as a cavalryman must know everything about his horse to travel rapidly, the Marine must maintain nautical knowledge and understanding of his ship to travel swiftly across the oceans.¹¹⁹ This simple passage, so clear in its explanation, gives insight into the role Breckinridge understood the Marine Corps played as part of the Navy.

¹¹⁷ J.C. Breckinridge to Major General Commandant, November 19, 1924, NARA USMC., Record of James Carson Breckinridge, NARA USMC., Major General Commandant to Chief of Naval Operations, Detail of Captain James Breckinridge, NARA USMC.

¹¹⁸ James Breckinridge, “The United States Marine Corps, Its Uses and Functions and Proper Disposition.” Unpublished essay, 1910, USMC Archives. File 11-H-4, Box 19, Folder 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Written after President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order to remove Marines from Navy warships, Breckinridge presented a sound reason for maintaining Marines aboard ships. In the era of the Great White Fleet traveling the world and increasing U.S. worldwide interaction, the Navy needed a rapidly deployable expeditionary force aboard ship to back U.S. policy.¹²⁰ He proposed a plan of action ensuring Marines received proper military training by conducting landing operations and maneuvers. Breckinridge expanded further, saying if Marines remained separated from ships, they must work often with the Navy to ensure they do not lose their nautical skills.¹²¹ The paper presented Breckinridge's beliefs in a clear and concise manner, demonstrating his ability to think through a problem and present multiple solutions. Fortunately for the Marines, Congress observed the same advantages described by Breckinridge. In 1909, they overrode Roosevelt's order and returned Marines to the decks of Navy warships.¹²²

Breckinridge's reputation as an intellectual junior officer led Captain Benson, of the U.S. Navy battleship Utah, to request an evaluation of an idea to establish higher levels of discipline into the Navy. Breckinridge responded to Benson's request with a twenty-six point plan aimed at transforming the Navy from a rank structure designed around sections or departments of the ship to a general company type formation, if adopted. Instead of having the command flow through the engineering or line departments, all personnel would be grouped into a formation based on the ship alone. The plan increased the leadership roles of both junior officers and senior enlisted personnel. In the plan, Breckinridge recognized more than the basic need to

¹²⁰ Clifford, 3-4.

¹²¹ Breckinridge, "The United States Marine Corps," 13-15.

¹²² Clifford, 4-5.

increase discipline throughout the Navy. His solution recognized the need to increase the spirit and knowledge of all personnel.¹²³

Both essays point to an intellectual understanding of problems in the Marine Corps and the Navy. In each case, Breckinridge attempted to solve problems considered above the head of a junior officer. Breckinridge's problem solving abilities served him well over the next few years. Expeditions to Panama and Nicaragua and detachment to Navy warships continued. On April 21, 1914, he landed with the Marine Corps force at Vera Cruz, Mexico. His actions during the landing earned him a commendation for defending a railway roundhouse.¹²⁴ His next two duty stations exposed him to the administrative duties of upper command and international diplomacy on levels he had yet to encounter.

Upon leaving Vera Cruz, Breckinridge became the Aide-de-Camp of the Major General Commandant Barnett. Breckinridge's work with Commandant Barnett impressed the senior officer of the Corps. When a position of Assistant Naval Attaché to Petrograd, Russia, opened in 1916, Barnett heartily recommended Breckinridge for the position. As the U.S. entered World War I, Breckinridge remained in Petrograd until August, 1917, when he transferred to the American Legation in Christiania, Norway and Stockholm, Sweden, becoming the first Marine Officer assigned as a Naval Attaché. His actions while assigned as Attaché earned him a Navy Cross, the second highest award in the naval services.¹²⁵

¹²³ James Carson Breckinridge, "General Discussion," Unpublished Essay, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 12.

¹²⁴ The Secretary of the Navy to Captain James C. Breckinridge, July 31 1914, NARA USMC., Commander-in-Chief to Secretary of the Navy, July 7 1915, NARA USMC.

¹²⁵ Record of James Carson Breckinridge, NARA USMC, 5-6.

After the war, Breckinridge once again returned to various expeditionary and ship assignments until receiving orders in 1921 to the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, RI. After completing the course, he received orders to the U.S. Army War College the following year. His attendance at these two schools stands out. Prior to his orders to the War Colleges, Breckinridge received no formal military education. The suspended operations of the School of Application during the Spanish American War deprived Breckinridge of a basic military education. Until his appointment to the Naval War College, any military education achieved by Breckinridge came from readings he selected himself or with the guidance of senior officers. Gen. Lejeune meant personnel like Breckinridge when he referred to the self-educated officer.

Taking advantage of his first formal education, Breckinridge successfully completed both courses.¹²⁶ However, his personnel record also contained an unfavorable fitness report from the Commanding General of the Army War College. The fitness report described Breckinridge as “Courteous, dignified, serious, thorough, sincere, brief, loyal, he seems lacking in resourcefulness, initiative, aggressiveness, alertness, imagination, (unreadable). Is shy, reserved unimpressive, unconvincing neutral.”¹²⁷ No clear reason why Breckinridge received such a scathing fitness report is given. Speculation can attribute the poor evaluation to his lack of formal military education or a misdirected self-education. Clearly, Breckinridge’s abilities conflicted with the accepted style of the Army. It had no negative effects on his career in the end. It did cement Breckinridge’s belief in the ineffectiveness of the Army’s education system, a belief that played a large role in his handling of the Marine Corps Schools some years later.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 6., United States Naval War College, Letter of Completion, NARA USMC., The Army War College, Letter of Completion, NARA USMC.

¹²⁷ The Adjutant and Inspector to Colonel James Carson Breckinridge, 30 August, 1923, NARA USMC.

A thesis prepared by Breckinridge for the Naval War College gives insight to direction of military forces: “From a nation to an Army, Fleet, Ship, Regiment, or a Squad, through all the ramifications of Logistics, Government, and Command, the chief qualification for success is education.”¹²⁸ Breckinridge examined the role of the original British Expeditionary Force at the start of World War I. “This force was composed of intelligent men, highly trained, and endowed with a sympathetic confidence in the wisdom of their management and the justice of their cause which was only equaled by the blind confidence entertained by their superiors for themselves.”¹²⁹ In short, Breckinridge understood how much confidence Marines gained when they developed their intellectual capabilities. A Marine self-confident in his intellectual abilities, in turn, gave his superiors confidence in the Marine and allowed him to do any assigned task without interference.

Breckinridge, benefitting from his education prior to his commissioning, essentially attacked the lack of professional education he received as junior officer. Relying on self-education did not provide satisfactory results. Such a system did not produce positive results and made the Corps susceptible to developing an officer corps not learning the right lessons for conducting war. Later in life, Breckinridge reflected on a pitfall of self-directed study.

I once read a damn-fool book called “The Tactics of Coast Defense”, by some Army officer whose (sic) name I forget. I knew it was nonsense at the time; but I also knew nobody else had read it, or heard of it. So I quoted it far and wide, and worked up a

¹²⁸ J. C. Breckinridge, Colonel, USMC, “Principles of Command,” (thesis, Naval War College, 14 January 1922), USMC Archives, File 11- H -4, Box 15, Folder 5, 9.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

very creditable reputation for being a remarkably deep and well read officer!¹³⁰

The letter shows how one self-educated officer can spread suspect knowledge throughout the officer corps if other officers lack education. From this thesis, one sees Breckinridge viewed the development of the Marine Corps Schools in the early 1920's as a positive step in establishing a guided learning system for officers.

After graduating from the War Colleges, Breckinridge took over as director of the Marine Corps Institute (MCI), a correspondence course system for enlisted established after World War I. Taking over MCI in August of 1923, Breckinridge witnessed its potential. Writing to the former director, Major C. B. Vogel, Breckinridge thanked him for the excellent organization and smooth operation of the staff of MCI. Claiming to "...rapidly becoming indoctrinated" with the goals and ambitions of the Institute, Breckinridge sought the counsel of Vogel, now attached to the fleet, in order to improve the completion rates of the students.¹³¹ In an unpublished paper, written in 1926, Breckinridge detailed the qualities that made MCI a successful program for the Marines. Namely, it rewarded those who sought self-improvement by allowing them opportunity to apply their free time to educating themselves. Breckinridge felt the duty of the Marine Corps included improving the quality and citizenship of its enlisted by giving them educational opportunities to which they normally did not have access.¹³² For Breckinridge, no matter what the rank or billet, all Marines deserved an education.

¹³⁰ J.C. Breckinridge to Colonel Smith, 21 November 1934, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

¹³¹ J.C. Breckinridge to Major C.B. Vogel, USMC, 20 September 1923, C.B. Vogel Personal Papers, USMC Archives, File 1112, Box 1, Folder 10.

¹³² James Carson Breckinridge, "A Romance in Education" unpublished essay, 12 December 1926, USCM Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 16, Folder 7.

Retired Lieutenant General Thomas Bourke gave some insight into Breckinridge's involvement with the students of MCI. Bourke, serving under Breckinridge at the time, recalled an incident where a corporal presented a letter addressed to a Marine drop-out from the MCI program. The letter, written for Breckinridge's signature included the phrase "I am very surprised and shocked to hear you have discontinued..." Breckinridge replied, "I am not surprised or shocked at anything. Rewrite it."¹³³ This anecdote indicates two things about Breckinridge. He obviously took an active part in following the education of the enlisted. Signing basic correspondence instead of giving it a rubber stamp shows how serious he took the drop out of a single student. Second, he thought highly enough about the program to track and encourage those who tried to drop out to ensure they continued their studies. Breckinridge's tenure at MCI became a watershed moment for him. He took charge of an established education program, a program enthusiastically supported by the enlisted students as well as the officers directing it. For the first time in his professional career, Breckinridge witnessed a Corps-wide acceptance of educational development. Even though the development centered on the vocational education of the enlisted, it still provided Breckinridge with a glimpse of the possibilities when students and staff alike enthusiastically embraced education. A few years down the road, Breckinridge wrote to his sister that he was wed to the ideas and concepts promoted by MCI.¹³⁴

¹³³ Bourke commanded the 2nd Division artillery units at the battles of Guadalcanal and Tarawa. During the assault on Saipan, he commanded the V Amphibious Corps artillery. Thomas E. Bourke, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired), interviewed by Major L. E. Tatem, 1973, Marine Corps Oral History Program, United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico VA 11.

¹³⁴ Letter to Mary Breckinridge from J.C. Breckinridge, Monday 3 June 1929, James Carson Breckinridge Papers, US Marine Corps Archives, 11-H-4, Box 13, Folder 20.

By the time Breckinridge left MCI, he had developed a set of ideas about the education of Marines. He possessed an understanding for the need of better education throughout the Corps. He witnessed how a system successfully brought education to the enlisted. His time at the Naval War College had challenged him to use his intellectual abilities and develop a philosophical understanding of man and his need for educational development. For the next few years, these lessons stewed and developed while Headquarters Marine Corps assigned to other tasks.

While deployed on U.S. Navy ships, he furthered his education by taking advantage of the Marine Corps Institute's small collection of courses designed for officers and completed the "Foreign Trade Course".¹³⁵ Breckinridge proved his intellectual ability while aboard the U.S.S. Texas. He published an article in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* title "Land Ownership and its Relation to National Stability" in which he argued the necessity of land redistribution to prevent the uprising of peasant populations. Breckinridge used his experiences and travel in Latin America, Russia, and Scandinavia along with historical study to examine various uprisings. He believed that a population given the means to produce their own goods provided a sense of happiness and prevented political unrest.¹³⁶ In writing this article, Breckinridge indicated two things. First, his travels and duty stations around the globe had influenced him outside of military reasons. He gained a sense of social understanding for many cultures dissimilar to his own. This cultural awareness embedded itself into Breckinridge's thinking. Second, Breckinridge demonstrated an understanding of socialist

¹³⁵ Major General Commandant to Colonel James Carson Breckinridge, October 11, 1926, James Carson Breckinridge Papers, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

¹³⁶ Breckinridge "Land Ownership and its Relation to National Stability", 207, 216-217, 219.

principles. Further, he showed his willingness to use such principles to prevent insurrection. In July of 1926, Breckinridge submitted his own personal definition of socialism to *The Forum*. He defined socialism as “A conception of unnecessary inequalities in the existing well-being of humanity, expressing itself in efforts to diffuse the ownership of property.”¹³⁷ Examination of both the article and definition indicate that Breckinridge accepted the values of socialism in preventing the expansion of civilian unrest and insurrection. In writing this article and placing his real name and rank on it, Breckinridge demonstrated a willingness to challenge accepted thought and to accept the wrath and disdain of fellow officers because of his beliefs. This attitude later served him well as Commanding Officer of the Marine Corps Schools.

In May of 1928, Breckinridge received orders to what he came to believe was his most important duty in forty years of active service: commanding the Marine Corps Schools.¹³⁸ Breckinridge’s career included two tours as the head of the Schools. He brought with him experience in the small wars of Latin America, international relations, and shipboard life. The central tenants of Breckinridge’s beliefs could finally come together and shape the direction of the Marine Corps Schools. Social understanding, broad education, and an ability to fight for a new way of thinking directed how Breckinridge wanted to lead the schools. However, while Breckinridge possessed these ideas, he still lacked a coherent philosophy of education. At the end of his first tour of duty at the Schools, Breckinridge found the writings of Alexander Meiklejohn, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, and, from there, learned how to form his educational theory.

¹³⁷ James Carson Breckinridge, Untitled Notes, 17 July 1926, USMC Archives, 11-H-4, Box 13, Folder 17.

¹³⁸ “Biographical Sketch of James Carson Breckinridge” USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, unlabeled folder, 15.

Even before adopting the theories of Meiklejohn, Breckinridge sought a new system of education.

So, I am injecting something new into the art of warfare, something like this – it takes a good man to fight, but a better to honorably avoid doing so. ...the real problem is how to solve this situation by other means. And – a Doctor never treats a symptom, he treats a cause; how can we remove this cause and thus avoid the fight?¹³⁹

He went on to indicate how teaching officers the use of overtures and the selection of words was as important as educating them in the use of artillery and machine guns. Breckinridge, with his experiences in Latin America, realized military leaders possessed a powerful weapon in diplomacy. Yet they lacked the proper intellectual training to develop diplomacy.

The lack of education in diplomacy resulted from the attitude of officers like Smedley Butler, a proponent of enlisted vocational education. Butler believed that diplomacy used on a “...ignorant, treacherous crowd of niggers...” did nothing but waste time and allow insurrectionists the ability to solidify their holdings.¹⁴⁰ According to Butler and the Marines that followed his beliefs, only swift and violent action would end any insurrection. Time spent trying to find a solution outside of military means allowed the insurrectionist more time to organize and grow stronger. Encountering a personal crisis of conscience between the two forms of controlling an insurrectionist population, Breckenridge developed a method to meet his duties and improve the abilities of the officers under the instruction of the Marine Corps Schools.

¹³⁹ Letter to Mary Breckinridge from J.C. Breckinridge, Monday 3 June 1929, James Carson Breckinridge Papers US Marine Corps Archives, 11-H-4, Box 13, Folder 20.

¹⁴⁰ Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington KY: The University of Press of Kentucky, 1987), 75.

Breckinridge pushed officers to look for solutions to *the cause* of the problem rather than simply address the problem.

In another letter to his sister, Breckinridge detailed how the lack of critical thinking in the Marine Corps caused him trouble while in the Dominican Republic.

The military problem was about nil, but there was some other kind of problem that was Greek to me; and that problem stood in urgent need of solution. It was not in the books. There was no sense in destroying the people and the things, and as I said it took me six months to puzzle out what I should do in a case that was outside of my profession. ...Now, if we had all been taught to think in earlier life, instead of having been taught to memorize in order to pass examinations, this situation would never have gone so far, and it would have been met with far greater skill and speed.¹⁴¹

The problem he encountered stemmed from Santo Domingo's failing infrastructure and lack of security. The comments in Breckinridge's letter dug into the heart of the issues that bothered him with the Marine Corps education system. Instead of building officers who could critically analyze a situation and develop a proper response, the existing education system merely required officers to parrot lessons taught to them in the classroom.

Having students memorize instructions and manuals showed only solutions for set problems. Students did not learn how or why these solutions worked nor how to alter them when the situation changed. Officers in this type of school did not receive intellectual education; they received a vocational one. Breckinridge's own experience in his previous thirty years of service created an understanding that no amount of memorization prepared an officer for the diverse duties assigned. In a discussion about the lack of intellectual development in the Corps, he

¹⁴¹ J.C. Breckinridge to Mary Breckinridge, Sunday 15 December 1929, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 13, Folder 20.

wrote, “Curiosity leads to investigation, which opens discussion, which gives rise to opinion, which breeds criticism, which results in improvement. All of this bespeaks a wide freedom in thought (sic) and an acute divergence from the arbitrary.”¹⁴² The current curriculum did not allow for improvement. No ability of critical analysis developed because of the existing school method.

This key fault in the design of the Marine Corps Schools imprinted a dogmatic system “lacking in freedom and originality” on the students. Breckinridge stated that the way the schools operated “...smothers the very thing that Americans pride themselves on most, originality.”¹⁴³ Samuel B. Griffith II, agreed with Breckinridge’s assessment, claiming that the Marine Corps Schools during this period “smothered individuality and initiative rather than encourage it.”¹⁴⁴ The classes assigned to the officers were not the problem. Rather the problem stemmed from teaching the classes in a dogmatic fashion. The design of the school did not promote intellectual stimulus, but created a robotic response based on the single solution problems presented by the schools. The arbitrary style of the class became akin to vocational education. Students must follow the exact processes and steps in order to succeed in the schools. Officers learned a single method of problem solution, which created more problems than it solved.

¹⁴² J.C. Breckinridge, Colonel, USMC, “Some Thoughts on Service Schools” *Marine Corps Gazette* 14 no. 4 (Dec. 1929), 231.

¹⁴³ James Carson Breckinridge, Untitled, Unpublished Essay, USMC Archives, Quantico VA, File 11-H-4, Box 16, Folder 16.

¹⁴⁴ Griffith Oral History, 11.

Contending that the "...military mind should not accept things for no better reason than they are so stated,"¹⁴⁵ Breckinridge took steps to correct the faults of the Schools. Issuing a publication titled *Notes for Instructors* in September 1929, Breckinridge directed the instructors of the Marine Corps Schools to recognize that other solutions to problems existed outside of those proffered by the Schools.¹⁴⁶ Instructors examined each student's answer to the presented problems and rated them based on their ability to solve a problem. Breckinridge designed this portion to ensure students took the initiative and analyzed the problem for the best solution.

With the creation of new school instruction manuals, Breckinridge began his battle to change the Schools. The first tour of duty at MCS allowed Breckinridge insight into the problems of the schools. While there, he developed his understanding of educational theory. Now he looked for a way to apply that theory to improve the Schools. Searching for a new way to advance the schools led Breckinridge to read the writings of educational professionals from the universities of the United States. It was during his first assignment to the Schools that Breckinridge encountered the unorthodox educational theory of a college professor.

Theory of Education

Breckinridge did not come to understand the problems of the Marine Corps Schools and develop an educational theory in a vacuum. Through his personal pursuit of intellectual studies, he exposed himself to the ongoing debates over educational theories in the colleges of the United States. Breckinridge's study of educational theory moved him to look closely at the idea of a

¹⁴⁵ Breckinridge, "Some Thoughts," 231.

¹⁴⁶ J. C. Breckinridge, Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps, *Notes for Instructors*, 1 September 1929, Papers of the Marine Corps Schools, USMC Archives, Unnumbered Box, folder 5, 17.

liberal education based on pragmatism. Liberal education is a system of learning that develops the intellectual abilities of the student as opposed to technical skills.¹⁴⁷ Pragmatism is an early 20th century philosophical theory based on the idea that the meaning of a concept or situation derives only from its practical effect. For John Dewey, an early 20th century American philosopher, this meant that the scientific method must apply to the study of events. Perceptions of events needed critical examination to understand fully their impact.¹⁴⁸ Through his pursuit of educational theory, Breckinridge encountered the concepts presented by Alexander Meiklejohn, a professor at the University of Wisconsin and former President of Amherst College. Meiklejohn used Dewey's pragmatic theories to develop a new way to educate college students.

Alexander Meiklejohn's theories on education resulted from an ongoing debate about the direction of colleges during the early 20th century. The debates focused on finding the best method for preparing young students for their lives outside of college. Prior to 1900, education consisted of rote learning. Professors declared what students needed to know and focused lessons on "...the dissemination of predetermined, ready-made truths."¹⁴⁹ New theories on education began to appear as professors sought ways to improve the quality of graduates. Did students benefit most from a specialized education that prepared them to take over set duties upon graduation or should they receive a liberal education that taught them how to think and deal

¹⁴⁷ Geoffrey Partington, "Liberal Education and Its Enemies," *Canadian Journal of Education* 9 no.4 (Autumn 1984), 395.

¹⁴⁸ David Jary and Julia Jary, "Pragmatism," in *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 381.

¹⁴⁹ David W. Marcell, *Progress and Pragmatism: James, Dewey, Beard, and the American Idea of Progress* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 238.

with a wide variety of subjects? Theorists in education, including Meiklejohn and Dewey, struggled with these questions.

Two prominent forms of education, vocational and elective course style, developed and took the lead in the early 20th century. Vocational education, unlike the traditional college education that stressed the development of the mind, stressed training students for working in industry. Students left school with a specific set of skills designed to make them useful in different fields of production. The Marine Corps Institute's correspondence courses reflected this type of education. Smedley Butler strongly supported this type of education for the enlisted. Many professors, like Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago, however, believed that the introduction of vocational education into colleges trivialized and debased the university. It deprived the college of its reason to exist.¹⁵⁰ Vocational education provided knowledge but failed to develop the intellect.

A second area of debate in higher education dealt with the division of courses into electives. According to many scholars, when a student received an education through the elective system they were cheated out of intellectual growth. J. Crosby Chapman, a 1920's educational theorist, wrote "Instead of a unified and integrated educational experience with a single purpose to which all other aims are subsidiary, each experience remains an isolated unit and the subsidiary aim occupy the focus of attention."¹⁵¹ Meiklejohn, in his 1920 book, *The Liberal College*, indicated his disdain for the electorate system of education.

¹⁵⁰ David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration 1915-1945*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 89.

¹⁵¹ J. Crosby Chapman and Counts, George S., *Principles of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 494.

If you add together a little Mathematics, a little Literature, a little each of History, Physics, Chemistry, Economics, Social Science, International Law, and Art, what do you get? You certainly get a great deal of something, but what is it? In its parts it is knowledge, because within the parts it is organized, but as a whole it is not knowledge, for the different parts are not organized, but are simply thrown together. The boy who gets this education knows a great many things but he does not know the world, nor does he in any real sense know the intellectual life either of himself or his fellows.¹⁵²

Specialization of education limited the intellectual ability of the student. Upon graduating from college, the student did indeed possess knowledge. However, the student lacked the capability to take the large pieces of knowledge and put them together to solve bigger problems. In a sense, the education received limited his intellectual ability.

In the eyes of Meiklejohn, both forms of education failed to develop properly the intellectual abilities of the individual. Vocational education focused on rote learning and did not challenge the student to think. The electorate system gave students a fragmented education and failed to show them how to put the information together. Scholars recognized the need for vocational training for some students but refused to consider it a viable option for providing students with an intellectual background. The fragmented education of the electorate system did not provide the students with an ability to combine their knowledge into a broad scoped theory.

To correct the deficiencies in higher education, Meiklejohn proposed a new method of instruction. John Dewey's pragmatic theory on the social sciences greatly influenced the direction of the new method. Pragmatism, according to Dewey, is learning tempered by experience. Dewey believed that students combined their personal experiences with the

¹⁵² Alexander Meiklejohn, *The Liberal College* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1920), 113-114.

knowledge gained in college to build a “laboratory of the mind.”¹⁵³ Dewey applied the empirical method of science to liberal thought, creating a method of thinking that forced intellectuals to test their beliefs through experimental verification.¹⁵⁴ Pragmatic theory required the intellectual ability of the individual to criticize and analyze the traditional ideas of man to “free intelligence from its impurities.”¹⁵⁵ Failure of beliefs, theories, and ideas to meet the standards of empirical verification forced their discard and opened the door for new theories that might provide better solutions to the problems of society.

The Experimental College established by Meiklejohn at the University of Wisconsin developed a curriculum to apply Dewey’s pragmatic theory. Giving flexibility to instructors, the College took no theories for granted. The design presented an opportunity where “...nothing is fixed, when no procedures can be taken for granted, then everything must be judged and justified, not on the basis of principles previously established, but in terms of ideas growing out of the process itself.”¹⁵⁶ Basing all course work on this theory, Meiklejohn divided the College into lower (freshman) and upper (sophomore) courses. Each course used a curriculum that focused the students’ attention on a broad range of subjects only to tie them together. No longer a disjointed series of elective courses, students encountered a broad spectrum of courses linked together for specific purpose. Meiklejohn intended the education to train the minds of students

¹⁵³ John Dewey, “What Does Pragmatism Mean by Practical?,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 5 no. 4 (13 Feb. 1908), 85-86

¹⁵⁴ John Dewey, “The Development of American Pragmatism” in *The Essential Dewey: Volume 1 Pragmatism, Education, and Dewey*, ed. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 7-8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932), xiii-xiv.

to look at any problem they faced, deconstruct it, and though a pragmatic education help them find a solution. The Experimental College attempted to produce a liberal education above all past attempts. Its main goals? To instill intelligence, knowledge, respect for other cultures and a sense of social obligation. The goals and curriculum of the Experimental College caught the eye of Breckinridge.

Development and Application of Theory

With his curiosity peaked, Breckinridge needed to give the Experimental College a closer examination. On 3 October 1929, he submitted a request to the Major General Commandant for permission to travel to Madison, Wisconsin, and observe the Experimental College in action. Breckinridge stated... “Ever since Doctor Alexander Meiklejohn vacated the office of President of Amherst College, about five years ago, I have watched the educational innovation that he sponsors.”¹⁵⁷ Breckinridge began to follow the development of the Meiklejohn liberal education theory during his assignment to the Marine Corps Institute. One can safely assume that any educational course in the schools attended by Breckinridge did not include the examination of academia. His discovery of Meiklejohn occurred due to his self-directed studies.

The subject matter taught at the Experimental College did not interest Breckinridge, but, the manner in which the students received instruction held great promise for the Marine Corps.¹⁵⁸ Smedley Butler, the Commanding General of the Quantico Marine Corps Base, endorsed the request.

¹⁵⁷ Colonel James C. Breckinridge, Marine Corps to The Major General Commandant, 3 October 1929, NARA USMC.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

While it may be that Colonel Breckinridge will find nothing applicable to our present system of military education at Madison, in view of the reasons noted by him, I am heartily in favor of his making this visit as he may pick up something new that will prove beneficial to our school system.¹⁵⁹

Butler, still focused on the value of a vocational education system, did not seem convinced of the benefit of the trip. However, he wanted to be certain that the Experimental College possessed nothing worthwhile for the Corps. With the endorsement of both Butler and Commandant Neville, Breckinridge began a journey to change the Marine Corps Schools.

Upon his return from Madison, Breckinridge wrote an article for the *Marine Corps Gazette*. In the article, Breckinridge acknowledged the definite need for some rote learning. The Basic School, which provided indoctrination for the newly commissioned, required this type of education. Students in grammar school received an arbitrary education. This education gave them tools such as vocabulary to begin their learning process. Much like grammar school, the Basic School taught its students the ABC's of Marine life. Once the new Marines internalized this arbitrary education, they needed to wean away from it. To continue with it reinforced rote learning and did not challenge officers to think through problems. Breckinridge wanted the Company and Field Officers courses to reject the rote or arbitrary learning and focus on teaching officers to think.¹⁶⁰ The changes Breckinridge wanted to make focused primarily on these two courses and not the Basic School.

Breckinridge clearly reflected on his troubles in Santo Domingo in the 1929 article. After examining the Experimental College, he realized that this form of education allowed

¹⁵⁹ Commanding General to Major General Commandant, October 7, 1929, NARA USMC.

¹⁶⁰ Breckinridge, "Some Thoughts", 231, 237.

officers to closely examine problems and discover a timely solution, a resource he did not possess while facing a possible insurrection in Latin America, a major point of his article.

We need officers who are trained to reason briefly, clearly, decisively, and sanely. Above everything they must have complete faith in the own ability to master whatever they may be confronted with. That calls for confidence both up and down the scale of rank and responsibility. To meet these requirements and to develop this type of officer, is the ambition of the Marine Corps Schools.¹⁶¹

The lack of an intellectual officer corps clearly troubled Breckinridge. In an unpublished article, Breckinridge lamented the fact that the U.S. only possessed one strong theoretical thinker in military or naval matters. The fact that most U.S. officers did not study the theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the foremost U.S. Naval strategist in the early 20th century, until the British Royal Navy adopted them increased the troubles of Breckinridge.¹⁶² How could U.S. military and naval leaders develop intellectual greatness when they did not even recognize it in their own ranks?

For Breckinridge, the Schools held great potential. However, the Schools and their current curriculum caused harm to the Marines. Breckinridge believed that dogmatic thought in the Marine Corps Schools prevented officers from learning to think flexibly and freely. Instead of building up the reasoning mind, it only trained the memory. It smothered originality.¹⁶³ Lieutenant Commander H.S. Jeans of the Navy agreed with Breckinridge's assessment of the schools. In an article published in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jeans listed several problems he noticed as a student at the Field Officers Course. Jeans contended that the system encouraged

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 238.

¹⁶² James Carson Breckinridge, Untitled, Unpublished Essay, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 16, Folder 13.

¹⁶³ James Carson Breckinridge, Untitled, Unpublished Essay, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 16, Folder 16.

students to use only the answer they believed the instructor wanted, students paid less attention to lectures with no bearing on future examinations, and the number of courses on a wide variety of subjects forced students to mechanically memorize facts and not critically analyze problems. Students did not get the time and lacked the encouragement from instructors to go through all of the course work and apply critical thought to the problems. Jeans went on to state that the theories of the Experimental College, mentioned in Breckinridge's article, held the potential to elevate the MCS above its condition of memorization and produce officers of great intellectual ability.¹⁶⁴ Unfortunately, Jeans published his article almost a year after Breckinridge left the MCS.

Work Unfinished

Shortly after Breckinridge published "Some Thoughts on the Service Schools" in December, 1929, he received a transfer out of the schools. The Commandant of the Marine Corps believed the size and importance of the schools required a higher-ranking officer to command it. As a result, Colonel Breckinridge received a transfer and Brigadier General Randolph Berkeley took command.¹⁶⁵

While stationed at various legations in China, Breckinridge retained interest in the MCS, even writing a reply to Jeans article. In the article, Breckinridge stated that he had seen

¹⁶⁴ H.S. Jeans, Lieutenant Commander, USN, "Field Officer's Course at Marine Corps Schools," *Marine Corps Gazette* 15 no. 3 (Nov. 1930), 50,105, 106.

¹⁶⁵ Berkeley joined the Marine Corps during the Spanish-American war. Upon commissioning, he received no formal education. He relied on the instruction of the senior non-commissioned officers to teach him the needed lessons for leading Marines. His career included deployments to Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, China, and Vera Cruz. He attended the Field Officer's School in 1924 and the Army War College in 1926. Berkeley, Randolph Carter, "Autobiography" unpublished manuscript, Randolph C. Berkeley file, USMC Archives, File 3024, Box 1, Folder 1. , Clifford, 43.

improvement in the schools since their beginning. However, this improvement must continue and only the constructive criticism of officers like Jeans would force improvement in the schools.¹⁶⁶ Other officers published on the problems of MCS as well. Major John A. Gray wrote to the *Gazette* in February 1931. In “A Plea for Revision of the Field Officers’ Course” he stated that the school did not meet the requirements of Marine Corps Officers. According to Gray, Jeans correctly criticized the system of evaluating the course work. Gray presented his belief that reliance on an Army curriculum hindered the development of the Marine Corps Officer. Army courses and schools lacked the flexibility to meet the needs of the Corps.¹⁶⁷

While Breckinridge handled legation duty in China, rapid changes in doctrine developed in the Corps. A report from the Major General Commandant Ben Fuller to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the General Board, the Navy’s advisory group, signaled profound changes for the schools. In the report, Fuller defined the mission of the Marine Corps as:

Disregarding the minor tasks assigned (to) the Marine Corps, its primary function is to maintain a force for landing operations in support of the fleet and its secondary function is to support the Navy by furnishing such emergency land forces in time of peace as are necessary for the protection of the interest of the United States in foreign countries.¹⁶⁸

Fuller laid out what he considered the main purpose of the Corps: to take and hold land needed for the operation of the fleet. He considered the expeditionary duties to Latin America, China, and other locations around the world as secondary duties. Fuller stated, in light of the mission,

¹⁶⁶ J.C. Breckinridge, Colonel, USMC, “Col. Breckinridge on Lieut. Comdr. Jeans’ Article,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 16 no. 1 (Feb. 1931), 46.

¹⁶⁷ John A. Gray, Major, USMC, “A Plea for Revision of the Field Officers’ Course,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 16 no. 1 (Feb. 1931), 64.

¹⁶⁸ Ben H. Fuller, Major General Commandant to The Chairman, Executive Committee, General Board, Navy Department, Washington D.C., Ben H. Fuller Papers, USMC Archives, File 340, Box 8, 27.

lessons in landing operations took precedence over other courses at MCS. He directed Gen. Berkeley to begin a methodical change of the curriculum of the schools. Each school year, Fuller wanted more instruction in landing force operations. He intended the change to take place without a radical upsetting of the applecart and at a comfortable pace for the instructors. Events in the early 1930's, however, did not allow for the gradual change. The new doctrine, expeditionary duty, and the return of Breckinridge to the schools transformed the hoped-for gradual changes into radical ones instead.

Return to Marine Corps Schools

In April of 1932, Breckinridge pinned on the single star of a Brigadier General. Upon receiving the promotion, Headquarters Marine Corps ordered him back to Quantico to take over as Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools. Breckinridge returned to the MCS with a well-developed theory on improving them. Under the direction of General Berkeley, the MCS had begun some changes. In 1931, a special Curriculum Board met and directed the MCS to increase its studies of landing force operations.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, Berkeley tasked instructors of the Field Officers School to develop a Landing Operations Manual as well as a Small Wars Manual.¹⁷⁰ The production of the manuals did not get off to a fast start. As a result, the staff remained in preliminary development stage of them in 1932. Breckinridge reported for duty at a slowly changing MCS. The staff of the Schools appeared to be stymied in the development of vital manuals on the missions of the Corps. In his eyes, the MCS needed to experience a radical change to have an intellectual breakthrough.

¹⁶⁹ Frances, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Clifford, 44-45.

Breckinridge received needed support in changing MCS from the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Commandant Fuller abolished the use of all Army curriculum and material at MCS. Army courses and materials used by the MCS for the past decade, forced Marine Officers to study Army tables of organization, tactics, and strategy. The directive by Fuller to remove all parts of the Army curriculum from classes forced instructors to rewrite their class materials.¹⁷¹ Instead of adapting a foreign curriculum to Marine standards, instructors now had the approval to develop their own curriculum that matched the needs of the Corps.

The move to abolish Army learning extended from a major policy change by Commandant Fuller. In 1933, Fuller, with the advice and help of Assistant Commandant John Russell, proposed the creation of the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). The approval of the CNO gave birth to “a permanent organization for the study and practice of amphibious warfare.”¹⁷² Fuller planned for the FMF to serve as a permanent formation of Marines capable of expeditionary duty at a moment’s notice. Instead of throwing expeditionary units together as the need arose, the Marine Corps now had designated units that trained together specifically for this duty.

The creation of the FMF solved a major problem for the Marine Corps Schools. It gave MCS a clear-cut primary mission and relegated other duties to secondary status. The focus on amphibious actions made the use of Army tables of organization impractical. Instructors developed new course material. Directed by the Commandant to develop a manual on opposed beach landings provided the facility and students a road map to follow. Focusing on amphibious

¹⁷¹ Frances, 40., Clifford 44.

¹⁷² Smith, 60.

operations and opposed-beach landings forced them to think and develop their own theories on military tactics and strategy. No military or seaborne force previously had attempted to put together an all-inclusive manual on amphibious landings. The instructors at MCS entered virgin territory in developing the manual. The removal of Army material and concentration on developing a landing force broke through a doctrine resistant to change and allowed Breckinridge to implement the key element of the Experimental College. Breckinridge's move to change the curriculum opened the minds of the instructors to critical thought and analysis.

As a follow up to the removal of Army curriculum, Breckinridge changed the grading system of the schools. Instead of students receiving a percentage or numerical based grade for their problem solutions, they received marks of "Excellent, Very Good, Satisfactory, Fair, (or) Poor."¹⁷³ Breckinridge intended this step to follow Lt. Cmdr. Jeans' suggestion. This move reduced students' reliance on "cramming" to pass the course. Instead, students had to demonstrate an ability to analyze problems, deconstruct the major issues, and determine the best course of action. In spite of these changes, Breckinridge's dissatisfaction with the condition of the schools continued.

Breckinridge wrote a cover letter and memo to the new Commandant of the Marine Corps, John Russell, in December of 1933. In the letter, Breckinridge acknowledged that he was not a conventional thinker and stated that it is his duty, as Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, to speak out about their deficiencies.¹⁷⁴ The attached memo dissected the problems of the schools. To Breckinridge, the MCS did not "...occupy a creditable position in the world of

¹⁷³ Francis 42.

¹⁷⁴ J.C. Breckinridge to General Russell, December 4 1933, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

military education...”¹⁷⁵ He listed the reasoning for his statement in the following paragraphs. MCS only parroted the Army schools, essentially creating Army officers in Marine uniforms. A major part of this problem arose from the education of the staff of MCS. The staff consisted of officers who had attended various Army schools but very few who were graduates of Navy schools. The staff, indoctrinated to Army thought, lacked the ability to understand naval issues and transform Army doctrine into a system that operated in the gap between naval and land warfare. The Schools failed to produce the proper educational material that provided officers with the basic information they needed to learn their duties. The expeditionary duties of the Corps continued to drag students and instructors away from the schools.¹⁷⁶ Breckinridge closed the statement by claiming the listed problems contributed to the lack of self-development in the Schools. The final paragraph showed the importance Breckinridge put on the Schools. “Realize that if a change of attitude and of doctrine is needed (and I believe it is a dire need), the Schools are the only place where it can be brought about. It will be done in the Schools or it will not be done.”¹⁷⁷ Breckinridge felt so strongly about his unorthodox methods and views of the Schools that he offered his resignation to Russell. Breckinridge knew his views did not match that of Russell. The offer of resignation “with grace and without one word of back-talk later on” allowed Russell a chance to replace Breckinridge with a conventional officer.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ J.C. Breckinridge to The Major General Commandant, “The Marine Corps and their future,” December 4 1933, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

¹⁷⁶ Even after the creation of the Fleet Marine Force, designed to maintain a ready body of Marines for expeditionary duty, a possible insurrection in Cuba caused the Marine Corps to through together an expeditionary force. The timing of the Cuban problems did not allow for the proper formation of the FMF. *Ibid.*, 3-5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁸ Breckinridge to Russell.

Russell quickly responded to both the letter and memo. He indicated his faith in the ability of Breckinridge to carry out his duties. He stated that Breckinridge must have a free hand to run the Schools since the products reflected directly on him. While allowing Breckinridge a free hand, Russell differed with Breckinridge on the importance of the Schools. Russell flatly told Breckinridge... “You have our hearty support. On the other hand you must always keep in view, and I am quite certain that you will, the fact that the interest of the schools are not always paramount.”¹⁷⁹ The harshest criticism of Breckinridge’s memo is in the last paragraph. Addressing Breckinridge’s belief in the role the Schools played in developing Marine Corps doctrine, Russell told Breckinridge that the only acceptable doctrine is that approved by Headquarters Marine Corps. The Schools served as the method of indoctrination not as the vehicle of deciding doctrine. Russell’s letter, indicating support for Breckinridge, actually rebuked him for his beliefs and his gall at suggesting what roles the Schools played in the Marine Corps.

Breckinridge’s personal papers contains Russell’s letter with Breckinridge’s hand written replies to each point made in the margins. Breckinridge agreed that “on paper” the Schools met all the requirements of the Corps. The reality of the situation, he maintained, was entirely different. The constantly changing staff, lack of interest in the schools by Headquarters Marine Corps, and an inability to establish a separate identity as a unique school system prevented the Schools from developing into a first class educational institution. In its fourteen years of

¹⁷⁹ Major General Commandant to Breckinridge, December 9 1933, J.C. Breckinridge to General Russell, December 4 1933, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

existence, Breckinridge believed the School failed to advance one new or revolutionary idea in military theory.¹⁸⁰

Breckinridge challenged Russell's statement about the importance of following the administrative directives issued by Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). Anytime the conduct of operations or education conformed itself to administrative requirement it is subordinated to an arbitrary policy that is unimportant. Following administrative policy put unnecessary burdens on the Marine Officers. Developing from precedence, administrative requirements built policies that inhibited original thought and prevented officers from innovating better solutions.¹⁸¹

Breckinridge believed Russell's response indicated how deeply the root of inadequate education penetrated the Corps.

For Breckinridge, officers uneducated in a liberal manner continually ignored the importance of education. While the schools continued to produce a substandard education, the product of their education continued to be substandard as well. Instead of officers advancing through the ranks with strong intellectual abilities, the Corps settled for arbitrary administrative policies and directives that damaged the abilities of officers in the field. Only by breaking away from a misguided administrative policy could Marines establish a system of intellectual education. Breckinridge encountered a problem with no easy solution. He understood that the Marine Corps needed some form of doctrine, but at the same time, officers needed freedom of thought to solve the problems they encountered. Marine Officers must learn to think on their own, avoid blindly following precedent, and transform themselves into innovators. To change

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ J.C. Breckinridge, Brigadier General, USMC, "Some Cogitations About Nothing Whatever" Unpublished Paper, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 16, Folder 9.

the Schools required the support of an administration that focused on precedent. To change the administrative focus of HQMC required the education of officers in innovative methods that ignored precedent. This issue plagued Breckinridge. He needed to figure out how to change the Schools for the better without drawing the ire of Commandant Russell. The old problem of expeditionary duty pulling Marines out of the schools presented an opportunity to implement major changes in the winter of 1933.

Even as Breckinridge penned his December letter and memo to Russell, expeditionary duties reduced the numbers of staff to the point the Schools closed. The remaining instructors received orders to re-write all of their classes to get further away from the Army curriculum. At the same time, Russell, deciding on a doctrine of amphibious operations for the Corps, instructed Breckinridge and the instructors to complete the long awaited manual on landing operations.¹⁸² Breckinridge recognized the closing of the Schools as a great opportunity for changes to take place. After fourteen years of struggle, the staff and instructors of the Schools worked to produce a new and original manual on an unexplored method of warfare: amphibious operations. In another letter to Russell, Breckinridge indicated his satisfaction in the temporary closing of the Schools and the dividends he believed the closing would produce.¹⁸³

In June of 1934, Russell received the first dividend, a completed *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*. Anthony Frances, in his work on the study of the Marine Corps Schools described the importance of the *Tentative Manual*.

This manual constituted one of the greatest single contributions the Marine Corps has made toward the art of warfare. In the light of

¹⁸² Clifford, 46., Frances, 48.

¹⁸³ J.C. Breckinridge to General Russell, February 13 1934, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

subsequent events in the War in the Pacific, this work stands out as a milestone for the Corps as well as a bulwark for the defense of the United States.¹⁸⁴

The manual represented the first construction of a written work designed to give information on landing forces on a defended beach. The manual focused on the assigned duties of the Navy, artillery, infantry, aviation, landing boats, tanks, chemical weapons, logistics, communications, and ship to shore liaison. The manual tied all of these separate specialties into a coherent force designed to take over hostile beaches.¹⁸⁵ Focusing on War Plan Orange, the manual gave the U.S. a viable answer to any threat posed by Japan in the Pacific. Breckinridge viewed the completion of the *Tentative Manual* as a dramatic step forward for the Marine Corps Schools. After years of work to improve the schools and produce an officer corps capable of original thought, Breckinridge finally ran a staff of officers that turned out a manual on amphibious operations. Breckinridge's satisfaction in the production of the manual grew even more when the Navy copied it and renamed it *Fleet Training Publication 167* (FTP-167) in 1938. The Army copied the manual verbatim a short time later.¹⁸⁶ Breckinridge must have smiled at the irony. For years, a Corps stifled by its lack of intellectual development and reliance on the Army doctrine suddenly presented one of the most important theoretical works of the inter-war period.

Even as the staff at the Schools continued to revise the *Tentative Manual*, other instructors and students began work on a second manual. Breckinridge realized that he now

¹⁸⁴ Frances, 49.

¹⁸⁵ I have been unable to locate a copy of the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*. The Navy's *Landing Operations Doctrine FTP-167* is the revised edition adopted by the Navy and Marine Corps both., Frances, 49., Office of Naval Operations and Training, *Landing Operations Doctrine FTP-167* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1938) II-III.

¹⁸⁶ Isely and Crowl, 36.

possessed a staff of intellectual instructors who, with challenging experiences similar to his own, had developed a solution to the many problems associated with amphibious landings. Instead of congratulating the instructors on completing the tentative manual, he put them right to work on developing a manual on Small Wars.¹⁸⁷

Produced by 1935, the *Manual for Small Wars*,¹⁸⁸ served as an example of intellectual development. A definite mix of educational attitudes, parts of it still contained the dry systematic instructions on troop movements and drills. Inside its massive 400 pages, one will find directives on resupply, river crossings, patrolling. Everything an experienced officer from 100 years ago or today even, expected to find in a manual. Nevertheless, this manual is much more. It takes over 30 years' worth of brush fighting and combines it with an intellectual development. The manual provides the reader with the basic arbitrary knowledge yet relies on the intellect of the Marine to decide how to use this knowledge. The manual is not a set of instructions; it is an intellectual tool kit for fighting small wars. It attempted to force officers to think of methods and to solve problems without resorting to war.

When looked at closely, one can see the solutions offered called for the Marine to think about what was appropriate. The first three chapters defined a small war, the general strategy for fighting a small war, and the psychology of this type of warfare¹⁸⁹. While addressing the psychology of one's forces is nothing new, the *Small Wars Manual* looks at the psychology of

¹⁸⁷ Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2001), 213.

¹⁸⁸ This is the original name for the manual. Later revised editions starting in 1940 changed it to *Small War Manual*.

¹⁸⁹ See William Barks' *Tactics*, 1897 and Ardant du Picq's *Battle Studies*, 1902.

the civilian population and insurrectionist forces as well.¹⁹⁰ The manual pointed out that understanding the language, character, and culture of the people involved made for easier operations in the end. Marines sent to solve internal order issues would not understand how to solve them unless the Marines understood the sociology of those having the problem.¹⁹¹ The overall strategy called for constant revision in the face of new issues that might arise. It pointed out that

The Application of purely military measures may not, by itself restore peace and orderly government because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social. These conditions may have originated years ago and in many cases have been permitted to develop freely without any attempt to apply corrective measures.¹⁹²

One cannot help but compare this statement to the one written by Breckinridge in a letter to his sister six years earlier where he related his frustration with the Corps and its education system. The manual actually informed officers to look for solutions to problems that were outside of the realm of military action. A lecture Breckinridge gave to the Senior Class, the new name for the Field Officer's Course, demonstrated his belief against using military force to put down insurrections. In his notes, he listed revolts dating from 73 B.C. to 1917. Each one he tied into problems that had better solutions outside of military force.¹⁹³ The six months that Breckinridge

¹⁹⁰ *Small Wars Manual*, Ibid., 17.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁹² *Small Wars Manual*, Ibid., 15.

¹⁹³ James Carson Breckinridge, Untitled Notes, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4 Box 19 Folder 4.

struggled to find the root cause of the problem in Santo Domingo paid off in the end for any officer who might read the *Small War Manual*.

A second example of Breckinridge's ideology appeared in the "Military-Civil Relationship" chapter.

The Satisfactory solution of problems involving civil authorities and civil population requires that all ranks be familiar with the language, the geography, and the political, social, and economic factors involved in the country in which they are operating. Poor judgment on the part of subordinates in the handling of situations involving the local civil authorities and local inhabitants is certain to involve the commander of the force in unnecessary military difficulties and cause publicity adverse to the public interest of the United States.¹⁹⁴

Small wars required each Marine to think through their actions and act appropriately. To prevent acts of "poor judgment," required the liberal intellectual development of Marines. Only by understanding cultural attributes of the nation the Marines patrolled could they prevent acts of poor judgment. The uneducated officer lacked the ability to develop quickly a cultural understanding. Meanwhile, the intellectual development advocated by Breckinridge allowed the Marine to interpret the cultures and act accordingly.

The difference between a full-scale war and a small war provides the third example of Breckinridge's influence. In a regular war, the officer's main goal is to bring the maximum amount of force and violence to a level of great effect. In small wars, the officer attempts to use a minimal amount of force, if any at all.¹⁹⁵ An officer intellectually trained can evaluate each situation and provide a response to the problem without relying on a maximum level of force.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 31-32.

To Breckinridge, the development of an intellectual officer resulted in Marines capable of cultural understanding, minimizing the use of force, and finding the problem of the social unrest. This ability reduced both military and civilian casualties, collateral damage, and civilian angst against the Marine Corps, while increasing the prestige of the United States.

The production of the two manuals gave Marines access to a wealth of knowledge. The combination of the *Tentative Manual* and the *Small Wars Manual* gave Marines detailed instructions on fighting a small insurrectionist population to participating in full-scale war. At the same time, neither manual constricted or restrained officers to action without thought. The *Small Wars Manual* relied on the creativity of the officer to solve local problems. In early 1934, Breckinridge wrote Commandant Russell “after 14 years we have got it at last!”¹⁹⁶ As Breckinridge closed out his career at MCS towards the end of that year, he remained confident in the advancements the schools made under his tutelage. Several letters written by Breckinridge at the end of his tenure show his satisfaction. A letter to a friend called Ray gives insight into what Breckinridge believed he accomplished. “I have started all who study war to apply their minds with equal force and reason to studying how war can be avoided.”¹⁹⁷ Reflecting on his respect for Dr. Meiklejohn, Breckinridge wrote “My admiration for his work has never slackened; and he is responsible for the bitter battles I have waged here in what now seem to be successful efforts to rectify an archaic educational philosophy and system.”¹⁹⁸ Writing to his sister in

¹⁹⁶ Breckinridge to Russell, 13 February 1934, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 3, Folder 5.

¹⁹⁷ Carson Breckinridge to Ray, 28 September 1934, USMC Archives, 11-H-3 Box 14, Folder 9.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

October of 1934 he stated "...now that I have gotten these Schools so rooted that it would take a major operation to change them after I have gone."¹⁹⁹

Breckinridge recognized an out of date school system that lacked institutional history. Reliance on Army manuals and doctrine to educate Marine officers did not allow for the development of expertise in the duties of the Corps. According to Samuel Huntington, the development of an effective professional military force is impossible without expertise and expertise requires education.²⁰⁰ The ineffective Army curriculum coupled with the misguided self-education of Marines prevented the Marine Corps' cadre of officers from developing into a professional force. Breckinridge experienced these problems first hand, as an officer in the field, an instructor, and director of the MCS.

What role did Breckinridge play in the development of the Marine Corps Schools? Breckinridge was the agent of change at the schools. Not satisfied with the early education system, knowing the Marine Corps must do better, he struggled to find the best method to improve officer education. It is not clear how Breckinridge came across the writings of Meiklejohn. What is clear is that Breckinridge found a pragmatic liberal theory on education on display at the University of Wisconsin's Experimental College. Most military men, including Marine Corps legend Smedley Butler could not see any benefits in studying the Experimental College. Assessing the College's ability to instill a method of clear pragmatic thought, Breckinridge determined that the College offered the Corps a chance to rise out of its mediocrity. He stressed the need for Marine officers to throw off the shackles of an Army curriculum, free

¹⁹⁹ Carson B to Little Sister, 26 October 1934, USMC Archives, File 11-H-4, Box 14, Folder 9.

²⁰⁰ Huntington, 8-14.

themselves from arbitrary direction, and begin to think critically. Breckinridge turned MCS into a group of schools focused on teaching Marines the skills to develop the expertise they needed. Such expertise increased their standing as a professional military force. The production of the *Tentative Manual* and the *Small Wars Manual* gave Breckinridge the first sign that his educational theories worked. The next sign came in the form of a second global war.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This story ends almost the same way it begins. A large group of Marines and Sailors gathered around a ship. Twenty-six years after Breckinridge rode the USS Hancock into Santo Domingo, a new Breckinridge reported for duty: the USS General J. C. Breckinridge, a Pope Class troop transport launched in the spring of 1945. In the decade since Breckinridge left the Marine Corps Schools the world rapidly changed.

Breckinridge attained the rank of Major General in the spring of 1935. Before pinning on his second star, he received a transfer from MCS to the West Coast. For the next six years, he served as Commanding General of the Pacific Marine forces and as the state administrator for Works Progress Administration at Parris Island. Having reached the mandatory retirement age of 64, he left the Corps on 1 October 1941. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Breckinridge applied for reinstatement. Headquarters Marine Corps denied the request, along with all other requests for reinstatement by retired officers. Breckinridge settled into retired life as the Corps geared up for war. Despite the size of the war the U.S. entered, Commandant of the Marine Corps Thomas Holcomb did not believe it warranted the recall of retired officers. Breckinridge died in March of 1942, before he could witness the efficiency of the Marine Corps amphibious assault doctrine.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Mary Breckinridge, "Lieutenant General James Carson Breckinridge, U.S.M.C. (September 1877-March 1942)," *The Quarterly Bulletin of the Frontier Nursing Service* 17 no. 4 (Spring 1942).

The launching of the USS General Breckinridge included the reading of a letter from Commandant of the Marine Corps, A. A. Vandergrift. His words give the best glimpse into the legacy of Breckinridge.

General James C. Breckinridge, throughout his colorful career as a Marine officer, set an example of gentlemanly conduct and professional accomplishment wherever he served. It is my belief, however, that the most far reaching of his many contributions to the Marine Corps was made during the period that he served as Commandant of our Marine Corps Schools. ...General Breckinridge was particularly suited for the task as Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools. He brought to this assignment an enviable background of military education, having attended both the U.S. Naval War College and the Army War College. He possessed, a full understanding of the technique of instruction developed and practiced by the leading civilian colleges and universities, and applied this technique of instruction, where applicable, to military training. We were indeed fortunate that, during this important period in Marine Corps History, a man so eminently qualified professionally was available to command the Marine Corps Schools.

Each passing day the battle reports from our Marine units in the field tell us how effectively the General performed his task. His influence is felt on every front where Marines are engaged in combat. In spirit he shares with us our victories and contributes to the enemy's defeat.²⁰²

Commandant Vandergrift summed up the life and career of Breckinridge in his statement.

Marines fighting in the Pacific put the education system, rebuilt by Breckinridge, to the real world test.

Almost 80 years after his death, Breckinridge continues to influence the Marine Corps. In Iraq and Afghanistan, Marines still read and apply lessons and theories presented in the *Small Wars Manual*. The amphibious doctrine written under the direction of Breckinridge remains the

²⁰² A.A. Vandegrift, May 23 1945, JCB File, NARA USMC.

cornerstone of the Marine Corps mission. The Marine Corps named its research library at Quantico after Breckinridge. In a development Breckinridge would have loved to see, Marine officers and historians work side by side researching the history of the Corps. The Marine Corps Schools evolved into the Marine Corps University. Civilian historians and Marine instructors work year round educating students from all of the U.S. services as well as foreign countries.²⁰³ As a result of the hard work and effort put in by Breckinridge, the Marine Corps now occupies “...a creditable position in the world of military education...”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Marine Corps University, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/default.aspx>, (accessed: May 19, 2011).

²⁰⁴ Breckinridge to Russell, 4 December 1933.

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