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**Message to the Force 2019: "Continue the Attack"**

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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

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37<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps

Effective: 25 January 2019

## **2019 MESSAGE TO THE FORCE: “CONTINUE THE ATTACK”**

During each of the last three years, I published a message identifying what the Corps had to focus on to remain the Nation’s Force in Readiness. This year, I call on all of us to continue the attack – to advance on multiple lines of effort in preparation for future conflicts. We are in a fast-paced, exciting time in our Corps’ history as we create additional specialties to fight in new domains, modernize our aging equipment, up our game in training against thinking foes, continue to take the fight to our Nation’s adversaries, and prepare for the unknowns of the future fight. We are responsible for remaining the Corps the Nation needs, expects, and wants – we control our destiny. But we have to continue the attack because the only thing holding us back is ourselves.

For many Marines this is the first Message to the Force they will read. I ask all Marines to review the previous Messages, along with an annual review of our cornerstone documents: Warfighting, Leading Marines, and Sustaining the Transformation. Most importantly, I need Marine leaders at all levels to discuss these lines of effort and ideas with their Marines.

In order to know where you are going, it is helpful to consider where you have been. So this year, I want to update you on the progress the Corps has made over the past three years so we can continue the attack. Specifically, those areas (1) where we are strong, (2) where we are improving but must continue to work, and (3) where we are challenged and need to work as team to improve.

### **Strengths:**

Marines do many things well. However, three areas stand out: recruiting and making Marines, operational excellence while forward deployed, and warfighting innovation.

As long as we continue to find men and women of virtue, character, fitness, and discipline and transform them into Marines with the same resolve, intellect, cohesion, and fighting spirit as those who preceded us, we will remain worthy successors of our legacy. Today, we do this well due to the hard work of our recruiters, MCRDs, SOIs, and all entry-level trainers. Yes, we can always get better and the effort to recruit and make Marines will not get easier. Nevertheless, through the hard work and focus of all involved, we have a strong and ready Marine Corps.

We then take this Force, form it, train it, and deploy it around the world. Our constant preparedness, expeditionary mindset, and aggressive warfighting philosophy remain a driving force that distinguishes the Marine Corps. Through positive leadership, hard training, discipline, and an uncompromising resolve to accomplish the mission, Marine units continue to earn a well-deserved reputation for operational excellence and combat effectiveness. This is what the Nation expects from her Corps.

Marines have always adapted well to the changing demands of the operating environment through innovation. We established the MEF Information Group to outmaneuver our adversaries in the information battlespace. MARFORCYBER has pushed new cyber capabilities to the tactical edge. The deployment of F-35s has greatly increased the lethality of the MAGTF for a high-end fight. And, to improve close combat lethality, every Infantryman will be outfitted with new equipment in the coming years.

### **Improving:**

The lines of effort and ideas laid out in the first three Messages remain enduring pursuits, both for our units and for ourselves. We must continue to improve our readiness...this includes the material condition of our equipment and the training level of our units and ourselves. From meeting flight hour goals to sustaining and improving MOS qualifications and achieving T&R Manual standards, we must continue to work to get better day and night. The battlefield is a competition that does not reward runner up

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teams...we cannot just show up and expect to win. This means we must train hard, smart, and efficiently, and never have a day go by when we are not seeking to be more ready, more lethal, and more capable. While training prepares us for the known in combat, education prepares us for the unknown. We must continue to develop leaders with the analytical and critical thinking skills required to adapt and win.

We must understand that our potential adversaries see us as their pacing competitor, and they must never surpass our effort to be ready to deploy and fight tonight. Additionally, we will continue the attack on multiple lines of effort...from reinforcing our role as a naval expeditionary force with a focus on greater interdependence within the Navy and Marine Corps team; to our own personal commitment to excellence; to improved force fitness and medical readiness; to training to face a peer fighter by taking advantage of demanding live training and simulation to get the max number of repetitions; to ensuring our concepts are tested, trained, and rehearsed; to the readiness of our families. So from more resilient C4I, to additive manufacturing, to the fielding of new equipment and capabilities, we must work hard every day to be ready for whatever mission comes our way.

### **Challenges:**

A strength of elite organizations is the ability to self-correct...to see where they are falling short or need to change in order to remain effective without suffering a loss or a defeat. I do not want to lose to learn! Quite simply, the U.S. Marine Corps is expected to be excellent in all things and at all times.

Our focus on modernization and readiness recovery requires us to divest some legacy capabilities and commitments that hinder our progress. Marines at all levels must help identify the wasteful and ineffective use of resources to ensure we have the Marine Corps we need to win the next fight. Our legacy of fighting and winning is not attached to any piece of equipment, but to our creativity and resolve to defeat our enemies. We cannot afford to carry the burden of outdated or obsolete capabilities, or expend readiness on low-priority commitments.

When the American people hear or read about Marines who don't meet our standards of honor, courage, and commitment, they are both confused and disappointed. Though we are talking about a very small percentage of the force, it would still be of concern if it were only a single Marine. We know the standards...there are no secrets. We must remain disciplined and focused at all times...whether forward deployed, preparing to deploy, or in a support role; the same standards of discipline, commitment, and conduct remain in effect in all locations at all times. Specifically, we must eliminate the conduct that prevents us from going to the next level. Behaviors such as drunkenness, sexual assault, sexual harassment, inappropriate conduct on social media, hazing, recklessness, and general lack of discipline do nothing to help our readiness. The relationship between alcohol and destructive behavior cannot be denied or ignored. We have to change our views of alcohol and have adult conversations with our Marines about drinking responsibly.

I am personally compelled to say something about suicide and mental health. No one goes through life without dealing with stress and pain, which is why we continue to resource and grow programs to address mental health and the growing problem of suicide, both within our active duty Marines as well as our veterans; but we have to continue to do better. We pride ourselves on building tough, resilient, mission-focused Marines; but we also pride ourselves on taking care of our own. If you need help, please ask/speak up...we will be there for you. Consider the lasting impact on your family, friends, and unit – none of whom will ever truly recover. Don't choose a permanent solution to a temporary problem that can be resolved with the help of your teammates. While there is no dishonor in coming up short or needing help, there is no honor in quitting. **MARINES NEVER QUIT ON EACH OTHER!** For those who are struggling...our Marine Corps, our families, and our Nation need you; we can't afford to lose you.

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### Conclusion:

In our democracy, the Marine Corps can only exist through the support of the American people. Today, due to the hard work of our predecessors and the continued efforts and exemplary performance of Marines, the American people maintain unprecedented trust, esteem, and support for their Marine Corps. They trust us to fight, to win, and to be Marines of character. Marines worldwide continue to maintain that trust.

I want all Marines to understand that the Marine Corps is an idea, and the idea is this: we don't care where you come from; if you're rich or poor; male or female; your race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation; but what we DO care about is that you earned the title “Marine.” As such, we expect that you're going to show up every day and give 100%...not just when you feel like it, but always. We care that you're going to live up to the commitment you made when you took the solemn oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. This idea is not about any weapon, capability, or platform; it's defined by our people and our chosen way of life; members of a band of brothers and sisters. “Once a Marine, always a Marine” isn't some empty slogan, but part of a creed, branded on our soul from the first moment we earn the title. I charge all Marines to continue to be Marines of character and virtue...be selfless and humble...seek self-improvement...be a good teammate...do your job and take care of each other. The path to success is simple, there is no rocket science involved. There is no substitute for hard work and commitment...grit! When things get hard, that's when you double down.

In the year ahead, we must continue the attack on multiple fronts. We must continue to find those men and women who have the mettle to earn the title “Marine.” All Marines share the responsibility to find the next generation of our Corps, and our best recruiters are our first-term Marines. We recruit best, not with a salesman's pitch, but by being good Marines – fit, disciplined, standouts of American youth whom younger contemporaries want to emulate. Once we identify the best and brightest, we need to make them into Marines, train them effectively, integrate them into our units, train those units for combat, and deploy. We must continue to provide trained and ready forces to the Combatant Commanders to do whatever mission is required. This takes effort. Discipline. Focus. Leadership. Leaders must listen to Marines in their charge and hold those who fall short accountable. We have done these tasks for the past 243 years for the Nation. As long as the United States exists, Americans will expect their Marine Corps to be there – to fight and to win.



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