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The Professional Staff Noncommissioned Officers

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The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Marine Corps or the United States Department of Defense.

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ABSTRACT

THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS, By Lieutenant Colonel Ryan M. Hoyle. 60 pages.

In 1973 the United States military became an organization that relied on volunteers and since this time the role and requirements of the Staff Noncommissioned Officer (SNCO) has evolved to a level that these men and women are professionals. As professionals it is time that the Marine Corps educates this group of individuals on par with the officer profession.

The requirement from a professional education program is to be able to win on future battlefields and to allow seamless integration into civilian society. Both of these requirements are what the Commandant of the Marine Corps says that we do as Marines. “The success of the Marine Corps hinges on the quality of our Marines. This is the foundation from which we make Marines, win our Nation’s battles, and return quality citizens to American society.” The investment in education must occur now as it is a generational change that will take time to reap the full benefits.

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# **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION:**

Schools were founded to produce skillful and obedient citizens who would serve the nation loyally, at 18 youths needed to be not only patriotic but also literate so they could read the Brigadier’s order of the day and draw up tomorrows battle plans, they had to know mathematics in order to calculate the shells trajectory or crack the enemy’s secret code. They needed a reasonable command of electrics, mechanics and medicine in order to operate wireless sets, drive tanks and take care of wounded comrades. When they left the army they were expected to serve the nation as clerks, teachers and engineers building a modern economy and paying lots of taxes.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus*, 2017

The history of the professional military man dates back to the early nineteenth century. While men have conducted warfare for millennia it is only in modern history that the professional soldier has come to light. In the past most armies were paid for their loyalty and few if any fought for the convictions of pride in their country and their way of life. According to Samuel Huntington it was in 1808 that the birth of the Professional Officer occurred.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was at this time that the importance of education in relation to the military came to the forefront.

Just as Huntington reaches the conclusions that the military officer profession was born in the early nineteenth century it is clear to the author that the birth of the professional noncommissioned officer corps in the United States began with the onset of the all-volunteer Force. The all-volunteer force occurred in 1973 as a result of mounting pressure from the citizens during the Vietnam War. Since the on-set of the all-volunteer force in the United States, three significant conflicts (Operation Desert Storm, Operation Afghan Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom) were not enough to undue this cornerstone of modern United States military professionalism.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Since 1973, the professionalism of the noncommissioned officer ranks has increased substantially. As Huntington describes the three phases of the professionalization of the officer corps, only two of these apply to the noncommissioned officers as the aristocratic prerequisite has not been a substantial issue in the United States. The two other phases: “the requiring of a basic level of professional training and competence and the requiring of a minimum general education and the provision of this education in institutions not operated by the military.” [[4]](#footnote-4) The United States Marine Corps established its first formal noncommissioned officer training in 1971.[[5]](#footnote-5) The expansion of noncommissioned officer education began in the early 1980s and has continued to this day, utilizing a combination of resident and nonresident courses. These courses have become requirements for further advancement and have continued to professionalize the noncommissioned officers.

The amount of time and money invested in each Officer for education far exceeds the amount spent for educating staff noncommissioned officers, these are the men and women in the pay grade of E6 through E9 in the United States Marine Corps and E7 through E9 in all other branches of the United States military. A typical high performing officer will spend a total of about three years receiving education that improves their ability to critical think and solve complex problems. This education is targeted in three increments each that involves the Permanent Change of Station (PCS) for the majority of the attendees. Based on the complexity of the future battlefield and the societal requirements for education to enter the workforce; the time has come to shred Huntington’s view of the enlisted soldier at least at the career service level of 10 years to 30 years of service:

“The enlisted men subordinate to the officer corps are a part of the organizational bureaucracy but not of the professional bureaucracy. The enlisted personnel have neither the intellectual skills nor the professional responsibility of the officer. They are specialists in the application of violence not the management of violence. Their vocation is a trade not a profession. This fundamental difference between the officer corps and the enlisted corps is reflected in the sharp line which is universally drawn between the two in all the military forces of the world. If there were not this cleavage, there could be a single military hierarchy extending from the lowest enlisted man to the highest officer. But the differing character of the two vocations makes the organizational hierarchy discontinuous. The ranks which exist in the enlisted corps do not constitute a professional hierarchy. They reflect varying aptitudes, abilities, and offices within the trade of soldier, and movement up and down them is much more fluid than in the officer corps. The difference between the officer and enlisted vocations precludes any general progression from one to the other. Individual enlisted men do become officers but this is the exception rather than the rule. The education and training necessary for officership are normally incompatible with the prolonged service as an enlisted man.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Problem Statement**:

The 21st century brought about a rude awakening for the United States when the World Trade Center was attacked by two enormous suicide bombs. Those airplanes colliding into those prominent skyline features in one of the most iconic cities of the world fundamentally changed the nature of future conflict. With the development of social media and the ever expanding computer and electronic industry the fundamental methods to conduct command and control and maintain situational awareness during military operations has changed. The ability to have sensors and munitions on almost anything that can fly through the sky has created an environment that requires ever increasing more critical thinking and complex problem solving in a shorter period of time.

The education required to receive a livable wage has continued to grow as well as the cost of secondary and post-secondary education. Those men and women that choose to serve in the United States military are potentially entering the job market four years after their peers, admittedly the military member is well compensated for education expenses following successful service, so the burden of student loans are greatly diminished when compared to their non-serving peers. But the focus of this paper is on those individuals that choose to serve in the enlisted ranks for 10 years or more. This amount of time normally equates to promotion to the Staff Noncommissioned Officer ranks (E6 in the Marine Corps, or E7 in the other branches). It is these individuals that the military institutions owes a reformed education system. This reformed educational system should allow for each of these individuals to leave the service and step into jobs without the requirement for significant long term education. The Commandant of the Marine Corps provided a statement concerning the 2017 Presidential Budget request and stated about the Marines, “The success of the Marine Corps hinges on the quality of our Marines. This is the foundation from which we make Marines, win our Nation’s battles, and return quality citizens to American society. The Marine Corps will maintain a force of the highest quality which is smart, resilient, fit, disciplined and able to overcome adversity. Maintaining the quality of the men and women in today’s Corps is our friendly center of gravity. Our goal is to ensure every Marine is set up for success on the battlefield and in life, and understands their value to the Marine Corps and the Nation.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Research Question**:

Do the current education requirements for Staff NonCommissioned Officers (SNCO) fulfill the national security imperatives of success on future battlefields and the societal obligation to return better citizens to society?

**Research Methodology**:

The introduction briefly defined the origin of the professional military officer and introduced that today’s and the future’s global security challenges would require the further education of the professional Staff noncommissioned officers. It also refers to the importance of educating these staff noncommissioned officers to allow their seamless integration and employability in today’s ever increasing competitive job market.

This section will define the research methodology used over the course of developing this paper to answer the research question. The qualitative research method draws from multiple sources in order to describe and define the role and importance of the staff noncommissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps, the future operating environment, compare the officer and enlisted career continuums, and describe the social environment that demands ever increasing levels of education for livable wages. Finally, recommendations will be proposed in order to ensure that the Marine Corps staff noncommissioned officers can win on future battlefields and civilian society.

Qualitative research can be defined in a variety of ways, but one definition is, “a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Using this as the definition, the research will focus in the areas of education, military training and education, and the future battlefield.

**Assumptions**:

The future operating environment will continue to become more complex and unpredictable. This will require decision making to occur at ever increasing lower levels. The Marine Corps will continue to operate at a very high officer to enlisted ratio, especially in the combat arms specialties. The Marine Corps will continue to utilize Maneuver Warfare as the overarching doctrine for all military operations. The Marine Corps will continue to fight and organize as a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). The technical skill Military Occupational Specialties are trained on a specific job skill that normally translates into a similar civilian job and easier transition to civilian life.

**Limitations**:

The available information is unclassified and focused on mainly infantry Marines. The availability of information that is protected or sensitive precluded the ability to analyze mental acuity as a cause for the lack of education.

**Delimitations**:

Analysis will be restricted to the typical path of an enlisted infantry Marine. While the conclusions and recommendations could have implications on other United States branches of service.

**CHAPTER 2 – THE MARINE STAFF NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER**

I am a Staff Noncommissioned Officer in the United States Marine Corps. As such, I am a member of the most unique group of professional military practitioners in the world. I am bound by duty to God, Country, and my fellow Marines to execute the demands of my position to and beyond what I believe to be the limits of my capabilities.

I realize I am the mainstay of Marine Corps discipline, and I carry myself with military grace, unbowed by the weight of command, unflinching in the execution lawful orders, and unswerving in my dedication to the most complete success of my assigned mission.

Both my professional and personal demeanor shall be such that I may take pride if my juniors emulate me, and knowing perfection to lie beyond the grasp of any mortal hand, I shall yet strive to attain perfection that I may ever be aware of my needs and capabilities to improve myself. I shall be fair in my personal relations, just in the enforcement of discipline, true to myself and my fellow Marines, and equitable in my dealing with every man.

United States Marine Corps SNCO Creed

**Traditional Roles**:

The traditional roles of the SNCO can largely be summed up in the phrase, “Lieutenant you have them in the field, and I have them in garrison.” This implies that the officer is responsible for training all the Marines on the tactics and techniques required to be successful on the battlefield. The SNCO would take care of the administration and daily task to ensure Marines were medically and administratively ready to deploy in a rapid manner. The SNCO would also conduct inspections and training on drill and ceremonies, to ensure that their Marines continued to exemplify the persona that exist of a “squared-away professional.”[[9]](#footnote-9) It is this reputation that required the SNCO to ensure clean uniforms, shaves and haircuts were maintained.

In 1912 during congressional testimony it was stated the following about the Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeants: “A candidate for appointment as gunnery sergeant in the United States Marine Corps should be sufficiently proficient in the drill regulations to thoroughly drill recruits and to drill the squad and company. He should be thoroughly conversant with the nomenclature of the rapid-fire and machine guns used in the naval service and be sufficiently acquainted with their drill to be able to act as gun captains and to instruct the enlisted men in their duties at such guns. He should have knowledge of the kinds and quantities of ammunition used in those guns. He should have a thorough knowledge of the instructions pertaining to target practice. He should have sufficient knowledge of the system of accountability of the United States Marine Corps to take charge of and properly render the accounts of a guard aboard ship, and should be competent in all respects to perform the duties of a first sergeant in charge of a guard on ship to which no marine officer is attached; also a knowledge of the duties involved in the subsistence of men ordered on detached duty, as well as the duties of an officer in command of a part of a landing party on shore.

Gunnery sergeants are men selected from the sergeants of the corps on account of superior intelligence, reliability, and mechanical knowledge. The grade was provided with the idea that they should be somewhat higher in standard than first sergeants; that their knowledge of ordnance and of gunnery should be such that they would be able to make minor repairs to guns—to supervise all work in connection with guns; to command detachments which were of such size as not to warrant a commissioned officer being assigned to them.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Many times the SNCO was the married guy in the platoon that could help with martial problems and other issues. This traditional role is not so common anymore with a large percentage of young officer’s being married and many of the young Marines.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1970 described the Marine SNCO as the “masters of the Marine know-how, the keepers of our traditions.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Another Commandant in 1980 described them as, “…the noncommissioned officer represents the first link in the chain of leadership that is the hallmark of our Corps. That vital role must continue for us to have a ready, respected Marine Corps.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

## **Current billet description**:

Today the Staff noncommissioned officer ranks in the Marine Corps are as follows: an E6 is a Staff Sergeant, an E7 is a Gunnery Sergeant, an E8 is a Master Sergeant or a First Sergeant and an E9 is a Master Gunnery Sergeant or a Sergeants Major. The Marine Corps has two E8 and E9 ranks that are distinct with separate promotion and selection requirements. This is different from the other United States military branches that have different billets within these ranks, but the population competes for promotion together.

### **The Staff Sergeant**:

The Staff Sergeant in the Marine Corps infantry is the first rank of the Infantry Unit Leaders, a collective term for all E6 through E9 infantry Maines. As a Staff Sergeant a Marines will normally be assigned as a platoon sergeant with responsibility for a platoon of 42 Marines alongside a Marine Lieutenant.

The platoon sergeant has the following responsibilities:

- Advisor to the platoon commander on issues of personal appearance and discipline; the tactical and technical employment of the rifle platoon as well as looking out for the welfare of the Marines.

- Works with the company first sergeant and keeps the platoon commander informed on all administrative issues with the Marines; Marriage, divorce, birth or adoption of a child, pay and reenlistment.

- Assist the platoon command in the planning of fires integration, the training of the platoon and the conduct of risk management.

- Coordinates all of the logistical support for the platoon to include casualty collection and evacuation.

- Performs the duties of the platoon commander, in his absence or incapacitation.[[13]](#footnote-13)

### **The Gunnery Sergeant**:

The Gunnery Sergeant serves as either a platoon sergeant for specialized platoons or as the company operations chief, also known as the “Company Gunny.” Over the last ten years the Marine Corps has recognized the importance of the Gunnery Sergeant in an infantry company being the senior enlisted tactical and technical expert. With this recognition, the billet was changed from Company Gunnery Sergeant to Company Operations Chief.

The company operations chief has the following responsibilities:

- Senior enlisted tactical and technical advisor to the company commander.

- Assist in the detailed planning of both current and future operations to include fire support and casualty collection planning.

- Responsible for the company combat operations center:

- Ensures the personnel assigned to the combat operations center are trained.

- Establishes and maintains the combat operations center.

- Manages the information flow in the combat operations center.

- Supervises the maintenance, care and condition of the company’s personnel, gear and equipment to include embarkation and debarkation about ship and/or plane.

- Capable of conducting the duties of the company first sergeant.[[14]](#footnote-14)

### **The Master Sergeant**:

The Master Sergeant serves as either the operations chief for the heavy weapons company or as the battalion assistant operations chief. The second billet is a recent change, and for the sake of this section the focus will be on his duties as a company operations chief. The Master Sergeant is the first billet that the infantry training manual list required training for. The manual states that he “must attend GOS and MISTC courses.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Further explanation of available SNCO training and education will be discussed in a following section.

The company operations chief has the following responsibilities:

- Senior enlisted tactical and technical advisor to the company commander and the rest of the company staff; also serves as an adviser on the discipline, appearance and welfare of the Marines.

- Assist in the detailed planning of both current and future operations to include fire support and casualty collection planning.

- Responsible as the subject matter expert for the company combat operations center:

- Ensures the personnel assigned to the combat operations center are trained.

- Establishes and maintains the combat operations center.

- Manages the information flow in the combat operations center.

- Supervises the maintenance, care and condition of the company’s personnel, gear and equipment to include embarkation and debarkation about ship and/or plane.

- Capable of conducting the duties of the battalion operations chief.[[16]](#footnote-16)

### **The Master Gunnery Sergeant**:

The Master Gunnery Sergeant serves as the infantry battalion operations chief.

- Senior enlisted tactical and technical advisor to the battalion commander and battalion operations officer.

- Serves as a mentor to the junior infantry unit leaders in the battalion.

- Assist both the operations officer and battalion commander with operational planning and the embarkation and debarkation of the unit aboard ship or aircraft.

- Supervise the battalion’s combat operations center, the production of orders, training schedules and messages.

- Prior to assuming the job, become certified as an Operations and Tactics Instructor.[[17]](#footnote-17)

### **First Sergeant**:

The company First Sergeant serves as the senior enlisted leader in an infantry company. He has the same paygrade as the Master Sergeant. His responsibilities lay mostly in the administrative and discipline realm. They could be from any military specialty in the Marine Corps. Their specific responsibilities are:

- Advise the company commander on all matters concerning the welfare, morale and discipline of the Marines.

- Responsible for the accountability of all Marines in the company.

- Mentor all junior Marines and officers in the company.

- Advise the company commander on all legal and administrative issues.

- Ensure the good order and discipline of the company.

### **Sergeants Major**:

The Sergeant Major is the senior enlisted leader in an infantry battalion. He has the same paygrade as the Master Gunnery Sergeant. His responsibilities lay mostly in the administrative and discipline realm. They could be from any military specialty in the Marine Corps. Their specific responsibilities are:

- Advise the battalion commander on all matters concerning the welfare, morale and discipline of the Marines.

- Serve as a mentor to all junior Marines and officers in the battalion.

- Advise the battalion commander on all legal and administrative issues.

- Ensure the good order and discipline of the battalion.

## **Importance of the Staff noncommissioned officer in the Marine Corps**:

A Staff noncommissioned officer normally has about eight to ten years of total time in the Marine Corps. The typical path for an infantry unit leader, as a SNCO is referred to, is two deployments with an infantry battalion; a three year tour as a recruiter, drill instructor, Marine Security Guard or Combat Instructor. The Marine Corps extends the Staff Noncommissioned officer rank down to E6, while the other services in the United States reserve this privilege to the E7 rank.

The staff noncommissioned officer has a higher degree of responsibility in the Marine Corps compared to other services based on the ratio of officers to enlisted personnel. In the Marine Corps the ratio is 7.9 enlisted Marines to every officer, across the Department of Defense the ratio is 4.6 and for comparison the United States Army is 4.1.

Inside the Infantry the ratios are even greater. An infantry platoon has one officer and one staff noncommissioned officer with 41 junior enlisted personnel. The infantry company has six total officers and ten total staff noncommissioned officers with 173 junior enlisted Marines. Across an infantry battalion not including the headquarters element of the battalion the ratio of officer to enlisted Marines is near 30:1.[[18]](#footnote-18) Even when factoring in all officers in an infantry battalion the ratio is 17:1. The ratio of staff noncommissioned officers to junior enlisted Marines inside the infantry companies is 17:1.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Inside the United States Marine Corps there is a long and distinguished history of the Staff noncommissioned officer and his importance. Officially the actual ranks associated with the staff noncommissioned officers in the Marine Corps came about at various times. The rank of Staff Sergeant was officially adopted in 1923 to coincide with the establishment of this rank in the United States Army.[[20]](#footnote-20) The importance of this rank cannot be overstated, it is the rank with the ability to have the greatest impact on one young officer and 40 young Marines. Over 73 percent of the total enlisted Marines are under the age of 25.[[21]](#footnote-21) The Staff Sergeant serves as the shining example to that group of junior Marines. He has substantial influence on the decision of a Marine to reenlist or not. The Staff Sergeant has the responsibility to lead the platoon in the officers absence, many times this has been during combat operations.

The rank of Gunnery Sergeant has been around officially since the turn of the twentieth century when a Navy personnel act in 1899 described the rank and its duties associated with ship’s company.[[22]](#footnote-22) The rank of Gunnery Sergeant is possibly the most iconic as it was played by Clint Eastwood in Hollywood’s *Heartbreak Ridge* and real life Marine R. Lee Ermey in *Full Metal Jacket.* These Hollywood portrayals of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant are great for public awareness, but the most famous Marine Gunnery Sergeant is John Basilone.

Basilone served in the Army initially and was stationed in the Philippines where he was a champion boxer. Once his time in the Army was up, he decided to join the Marines and went off to boot camp in 1940. Initially stationed in Cuba he was subsequently sent to Guadalcanal at the start of the United States involvement in World War II. It was here that Gunnery Sergeant Basilone would earn the Congressional Medal of Honor by fighting off a Japanese Regiment with three Machine Guns, his pistol and a machete from October 24-27, 1942.[[23]](#footnote-23) Gunnery Sergeant Basilone came home to America and was used in parades and publicity to maintain support for the war, but he wanted to return to the war. On his second request, the Marine Corps allowed him to return to the war in 1944 just in time for the Marine Corps most iconic battle, Iwo Jima. It was on this island that Gunnery Sergeant Basilone would lose his life but not before being awarded the Marine Corps second highest honor, the Navy Cross.[[24]](#footnote-24) Every Marine officer or enlisted is thorough familiar with Gunnery Sergeant Basilone and the hope to live up to his legend.

All of the historical roles as described above of the Marine SNCO being the keeping of the traditions and the first link in the chain of command are all essential traits today as well. It is because of this great admiration and the immense responsibility and trust bestowed upon them, that the Marine Corps must do better. The Marine Corps must invest in the education of the SNCO to ensure our success on future battlefields and to ensure their success in society after their honorable and faithful service.

**CHAPTER 3 – THE FUTURE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

Fundamental to our character as a Marine Corps is our role as the Nation’s force-in-readiness. We must continue to be ready for operations across the range of military operations (ROMO). At the same time, we recognize the current and future fight may not be what we experienced in the past. It will encompass not just the domains of land, air and sea, but also space and the cyber domain. It will include information operations and operations across the electromagnetic spectrum. It will involve rapidly changing and evolving technologies and concepts, which will force us to be more agile, flexible and adaptable. Most importantly, it will require Marines who are smart, fit, disciplined, resilient, and able to adapt to uncertainty and to the unknown.

General Robert B. Neller, 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps[[25]](#footnote-25)

General Krulak, former Commandant of the United States Marine Corps from 1995-1999, coined the terms “the three-block war” and “strategic corporal” those terms and the subsequent operating concept and strategic vision have brought the Marines success over the last 20 years.[[26]](#footnote-26) The three-block war referred to the necessity of the Marines to be able to conduct high intensity conflict, security operations and humanitarian operations all within the same operational area potentially in the same day. The concept of strategic corporal was as simple as the actions of one Marine leader at the lowest level could have reverberating consequences at the strategic level. While neither of these concepts need to be discarded it is time to move beyond them.

## **The Future Adversary and Battlespace**:

The Future Operating Environment as described in the Marine Corps Operating Concept from September 2016 has five elements.[[27]](#footnote-27) The environment will require innovative and adaptive leaders at all levels.

**Complex Terrain**:

The world continues to grow in the areas that are currently and will continue to be the Marine Corps’ operational area, the littorals. This area continues to be over-populated with varying degrees of infrastructure. The one thing for sure is the observation of surface or aerial approach will occur thus limiting the ability of future Marines from encountering civilians almost immediately. The traditional terrain being classified as key terrain will be joined by other elements such as people and organizations. The most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that the enemy cannot match us in open rural terrain, but close-in urban areas with civilian population evens the sides. This complex terrain will reduce our advantages in combat vehicle mobility, communications, sensors and fires (both aviation and ground).

This terrain will require foot mobile self-sustainable forces that are comfortable both operating in a civilian populated area and with local security forces. The force will need to be light enough to minimize its signature, lethal enough to defeat a larger enemy force and educated enough to win.

### **Technology Proliferation**:

Both state and non-state actors will have access to technologic capabilities that will enhance anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities. These capabilities enhanced with advanced spotter networks will allow adversaries to have significant information with commercially available cheap resources. The ability to buy drones and weaponize them will create an environment that requires rapid decision making.

The ever increasing vulnerability of the cyberspace realm allows adversaries to steal information and rapidly develop capabilities on par for little research and development time and money. The ever increasing capabilities of computers for minimal monetary investment allows high technology capability into the hands of both state and non-state actors. This capability in the hands of nefarious actors allows disruption and debilitation of banking and communication networks with relative ease.

**Information as a Weapon**:

The Arab spring has shown that viral videos and speeches can cause large gatherings of people in short periods of time, quickly overwhelming existing law enforcement or internal security capabilities. The requirement of our message to be accurate and true degrades the time to respond to these adversarial capabilities. Marines have to realize that control of the information domain is as necessary as controlling the high ground and key intersections.

Just as important is the ability for information to be distorted or disproportionately distributed. The ease of creating a “fake news” story is as easy as understanding where major media outlets gathering their information and then manipulating information to suit your agenda. Ryan Holiday describes in scary detail the process and ease of exploiting the mainstream media message in his book, *Trust Me I’m Lying*.[[28]](#footnote-28)

**Battle of Signatures**:

As a result of technology proliferation and social media platforms, our ability to maintain continual situational awareness through connected means will mean compromising our force protection. Marine leaders will need to operate in communication and situational awareness degraded environments.

The adversary will be able to locate and target our force with commercial off the shelf, inexpensive solutions. The ability to employ deception and counter-intelligence will be a must. Marine leaders will need to be able to exploit adversary social media and advanced spotter networks with speed and precision. The ability to think, act and decide will be necessitated at the lowest levels.

### **Increasingly Contested Maritime Domain**:

The rise of peer and near peer naval capabilities has caused the United States’ once assured sea control to become less certain. Contested claims on reefs and rock outcroppings, to include building of artificial islands and forward staging military capabilities have become the status quo in areas of the Southern Pacific ocean. What once was purely a military operation of projecting naval power has become a fight in the diplomatic and economic pillars of national security as well.

Marine Leaders will need to operate from unconventional naval platforms in small dispersed formations. These formations will operate with limited communications and external logistics capability. The necessity to operate with United States government partners and understand the strategic implications of all actions is paramount.

## **The Marine Corps**:

The Marine Corps Operating concept from 2016 provides this view of what the Marine Corps must do in the future, “The Marine Corps, as an integral part of both the Naval force and the Combined/Joint force, must be a tailorable, flexible, and versatile force capable of responding to any crisis across the full range of military operations (ROMO). We must be a coherent and fully integrated Naval Force that can contribute to deterrence, provide maritime security, perform sea control, and project power ashore to impose our will upon adversaries. We must be an Expeditionary Force that is trained and equipped and able to operate in austere conditions and hostile environments. We must be an Agile Force that can navigate the physical and cognitive dimensions of complex situations and seize the initiative. We must be a Lethal Force with a 21st century approach to combined arms that integrates information warfare and seeks to destroy and defeat our enemies across five domains– air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. Ultimately, we must continue to be a Winning Force. As Marines have always done, when our Nation calls upon us, we must fight and win regardless of the dimension or domain. Victory is our legacy — in the past, now, and in the future.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

The Marine Corps Operating Concept from 2016 describes five task that are critical to ensure the Marine Corps is able to win on future battlefields. The following sections will briefly describe each of these task.

### **Integrate the Naval force to fight at and from the sea**:

The Marine Corps will need to experiment and figure out how to project forces from the sea inland on non-standard platforms.[[30]](#footnote-30) The Marines will have to figure out how to communicate and operate in a communication degraded environment. The Marine Corps must operate with partners to ensure access and our ability to operate along-side them. The Marine Corps must be able to integrate into Naval, Joint and Coalition staffs to ensure our future success. The ability to secure advanced naval bases as was a Marine Corps traditional mission is still valid, just the purpose of these operations has changed. The Marine Corps must be able to get ashore in an A2AD environment and win once we get there.

### **Evolve the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF)**:

The MAGTF remains the means by which the Marine Corps will organize. The flexibility and tailorability of this formation is essential for future success. The Marine Corps must be able to seamlessly integrate and provide unified action in the joint, coalition and multi-national military structures. We have to be able to make decisions in communications denied environment, leveraging of commercial off the shelf solutions needs to be enhanced. The MAGTF must be able to fight dispersed based upon the adversary capabilities. This force must be able to fight dispersed and combined just as water flows around rocks in rivers. The Marine Corps will continue to operate with approximately a third of the force deployed.

### **Operate with Resilience in a contested-network environment**:

The Marine Corps must capitalize on the technologies of today and tomorrow, but realize and get comfortable in a less information intensive environment. The protection of our signatures is paramount and utilization of means to defeat our adversary is essential. The ability to utilize networking and processing for more rapid aviation and ground fires should be explored. The balance of computing power at the lowest levels with the means of data entry and processing and the direct fight. Figure out how to capitalize on the gigabytes of information to ensure accurate enemy and friendly situations are available to most decision makers.

### **Enhance our ability to maneuver**:

Maneuver Warfare will remain the Marine Corps’ doctrine. The concepts are valid and our ability to maneuver must be accomplished in the littorals and in the complex urban terrain described above. We must leverage all available technology for logistics and energy requirements. We have to maintain both light and heavy capabilities. Our infantry provides the “asymmetric advantage” because they can operate from the sea and on land with minimal footprint.[[31]](#footnote-31)

### **Exploit the competence of the individual Marine**:

The Marine Corps must continue to recruit the most fit and resilient individuals the United States has to offer, and examine ways to attract thinkers and mental acuity must be exploited. The Marine Corps must further develop Marines for complex environments. The ability to think critically at all levels and have the tenacity to solve problems is essential. Leaders at every level must be developed to operate in the environment described of our future adversary and battlespace. The necessity for critical thinking skills and complex problem solving cannot be overstated. The future environment will require Marines to understand the minutia of culture to not only integrate with partner forces but understand the civilian populace. The Marine Corps must continue to retain our most talented individuals and maintain our promotion system that rewards performance.

The revamping of the current enlisted Marine Corps education system has never been of greater importance. The ability of the Marine Corps to effectively operate and win on future battlefields will be on the backs of educated warriors that are, “…smart, fit, disciplined, resilient, and able to adapt to uncertainty and to the unknown.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

# **CHAPTER 4 – CIVIL CULTURE**

Education has historically given all Americans-rich and poor, black and white-opportunity. It has allowed individuals to achieve their dreams, and it has fueled the continued innovation, growth, prosperity, and security of this nation.

U.S. EDUCATION REFORM AND NATIONAL SECURITY[[33]](#footnote-33)

The education system in the United States is in need of reform as evidenced from the report that the above quote comes from. The entire system of education is outside the scope of this paper, but further exacerbates the urgency for which enlisted education must be fixed inside the United States Marine Corps. Only about twenty-five percent of age eligible males and females are qualified to join the military service. Included in those not eligible are thirty percent who are high school graduates but unable to achieve the minimum mental acuity to enlisted in the Marine Corps.[[34]](#footnote-34)

As the previous chapter referred to our number one priority as Marines, the ability to win our nation’s battles; this chapter looks at the second priority which as stated earlier is to return better citizens to civilian society. The Marine Corps returns nearly 17,000 enlisted Marines to civilian society each year.[[35]](#footnote-35) Many of these Marines will utilize their earned benefit for educational expenses referred to as the Post-9/11 GI Bill. For this group of individuals the Marine Corps is accomplishing its stated goals in the author’s experience and opinion. These individuals will enter college or a trade school with the large portion of their expenses covered for up to thirty-six months.

The Marine Corps returns just over 3,500 Marines to civilian society that have from eight to thirty years of service each year.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is this group that the author feels is being short-changed by the Marine Corps. While it is true that these individuals have earned the same Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit, the age at which these individuals embark on their educational journey will impact their future earning potential. Those individuals that depart the Marine Corps prior to twenty years of service are a small minority of these individuals and still in their mid-twenties and not as effected by a lack of focused education.

The Staff Noncommissioned Officers that serve to twenty years or more are the most disadvantaged by the lack of a coherent educational philosophy for the enlisted Marine. These individuals will typically retire between the ages of thirty-eight and fifty with between twenty and thirty years of service. It is this group of individuals that will be critical for success on the future battlefield and the most affected in the civilian society by their lack of education.

In the United States education is a huge determiner of earning potential. The average wage differential between a high school graduate and a citizen with a Master’s degree is nearly double, $35,256 versus $69,732.[[37]](#footnote-37) Unemployment rate is reduced by over half in these same demographics from 5.4% down to 2.4%. By achieving a bachelors’ degree the Marine on average will surpass the average wage of $860 per week by over $250 per week.[[38]](#footnote-38) Further this raises their earning potential to above the Gross Domestic Product rate per capita in the United States.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The lifetime earning differential between a high school graduate and a college graduate is another area where a substantial gap exist. Over a fifty year earning period, age twenty to age seventy, a high school graduate will earn on average just over $1.5 million. A college graduate will earn just under $2.4 million and finally a person with a graduate degree will earn just over $3 million.[[40]](#footnote-40)

A further effect of not achieving a college degree while serving is the ability to transition immediately from military service into a higher paying civilian occupation. While the military member is drawing a pension from the United States Government, their civilian earning potential is continuing to erode as they age.

The professional education of the Marine SNCO is critical to retaining the best lower enlisted men as well. When investment in the form of professional education is made into the mid-level and top-level supervisors the lower level Marines tend to perform better and have a higher rate of reenlistment. In the civilian world there is an old story of a conversation between a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) that perfectly sums up the paradox that exist between the cost of education and the importance of education. The story goes like this: the CEO gets done with a hard day of mentoring some mid-level managers and calls the CFO to let him know that the company needs to invest in the education of these individuals. The CFO responds that the company does not have the financial resources to do this, and that the employees would just leave for the company’s competition if they did get educated. The CEO pauses for a few seconds and responds, “Just imagine if we do not get them educated and they decide to stay!”

This story speaks volumes to the intangible benefits of investing in an individual’s education. From purely the author’s own experience, the Marine Corps’ investment in my education has created a deep, burning desire to educate myself and further develop my leadership capability utilizing both my own time and money.

The true value of a world class, professional education is hard to measure in terms of merely dollars and time. Additionally the long term benefit may take a generation or more to bear fruit.

# **CHAPTER 5 – OFFICER AND ENLISTED ROADMAPS**

Give priority to promoting Marines who have shown initiative in finding and pursuing the most effective ways of accomplishing our mission. Also note, in this regard, that Marines with the greatest capacity for innovation may have served in billets different from the norm. In the context of a changing Marine Corps, the best-qualified Marines may reflect a variety of backgrounds.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Supplemental guidance for the FY17 Staff Sergeant Selection Board

Training is that activity that prepares you for a specific task or job. It involves hands on experience to master the task. In the Marine Corps it is largely the activities that occur during initial training, specialty training and advanced training. The below will be the path of a typical infantry officer until he reaches enough service to be retirement eligible. The enlisted Marine path will extend to promotion to Master Gunnery Sergeant or Sergeants Major.

**A comparative analysis**:

The evolution of training and education inside the Marine Corps can be traced to around the time I claim the SNCO became a professional warfighter as Samuel Huntington describes the military officer.[[42]](#footnote-42) To understand the divergence it is important to look at the amount of time dedicated to training and education throughout a Marine’s career. As Steve Truelove describes in his handbook for employee training, “Training

endeavours to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to perform job-related tasks. It aims to improve job performance in a direct way.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

**A Marine Officer**:

A future Marine Officer, prior enlisted or not, arrives at Officer Candidate School and will complete either one of three courses to become a Marine Officer.[[44]](#footnote-44) Upon being commissioned, the act of being promoted to Second Lieutenant, the officer will receive training at The Basic School. This course is twenty-eight weeks long and has as its goal to train all Marine Offices to be platoon commanders along the Marine Corps motto that “Every Marine is a Rifleman.” Upon completion of The Basic School, an infantry officer will complete 10 weeks of infantry training to qualify them to be an Infantry platoon commander. Infantry Officer Course is the final required course for an Infantry Officer. Upon completion of this training these infantry officers will arrive at their first duty station, one of the 24 infantry battalions.

Once a Marine infantry officer has completed two deployments and been selected for Captain, around 4 years of total service, the officer will either conduct a “career broadening tour” or transition to civilian life.[[45]](#footnote-45) This tour of duty will normally be in five areas: initial entry training[[46]](#footnote-46), recruiting duty, subsequent training duty[[47]](#footnote-47), Marine Security Guard duty or Security Force duty. Upon completion of this duty the officer will be screened by a board for selection to attend Career Level Schooling (CLS). For infantry officers this could be the 41 week course at Quantico, Virginia, Expeditionary Warfare School or one of the Army schools for 22 weeks at either Fort Benning, Georgia, Maneuver Captains Career Course or Field Artillery Captains Career Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. If not selected for resident school the officer must complete the non-resident course which is offered in four distinct ways: an on-line course, a weekday course, a weekend course or a blended seminar course.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The purpose of this training at Expeditionary Warfare School or one of the Army Schools is to prepare the officer for battalion level staff jobs and company command. Specifically Expeditionary Warfare School states its mission is, “Expeditionary Warfare School educates and trains company grade officers in order to prepare them mentally, morally, and physically for billets of increased leadership responsibility across the Marine Corps and the Joint Force, with emphasis on the warfighting capabilities of a Marine Air Ground Task Force operating within a complex and distributed Naval expeditionary environment.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

The officer will then be assigned to one of the 24 infantry battalions and serve as a company commander. This duty will bring the officer to around ten years of service and in zone for selection to Major. The selection for promotion will normally determine whether an officer will serve until retirement eligible or transition to civilian life. The selection rate since 2014 has not been less than 75 percent with the average age of these individuals being 33 years old.[[50]](#footnote-50)

When a Marine officer is selected for Major a significant amount of resources will be dedicated to them as an individual to ensure and aide in future success. For those with the highest potential an opportunity for two Master’s Degrees with around 82 weeks of dedicated time for education at Command and Staff College and Top Level School.

Upon being selected for Major, the officer will either complete a tour as an operations officer at one of the infantry battalions, or he will be assigned to another “career broadening tour.” If the officer serves as an operations officer, they will attend a six week course that provides the necessary job specific and planning training. At this point, this career broadening tour could be at a Joint or International Command. The completion of Command and Staff College is required before being eligible for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. The completion of Command and Staff College could occur prior to the “career broadening tour” or after. The ability to attend resident Command and Staff College is determined by a board that selects roughly A large percentage of officers at this point spend time at high level staffs, usually at the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) or Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC).[[51]](#footnote-51) Those officers that did not complete a tour as an operations officer, will arrive back to an infantry battalion normally for duty as an executive officer. The time as a Major will normally be the longest period of time at any given rank in an officer’s career. The officer will be nearing 17 years of service upon completion of these tours and Command and Staff College. It is at this point that the officer will be considered for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. Only 65 percent of eligible individuals will be selected.

The selection to Lieutenant Colonel means you have potentially one final opportunity to serve at the lowest level of selected command. A Lieutenant Colonel is screened for command by a board that selects between 20-30 percent of eligible officers to command. If selected to command, the officer will attend a two week course, the Capstone Course. After successfully completing command a Lieutenant Colonel may be chosen to attend Top Level School which normally affords that officer an opportunity as another Masters’ Degree. At this point in an officer’s career he will be near his retirement eligible period.

An officer that has completed a command tour and a follow-on educational experience will have spent almost three full years (thirty-three months) in an academic environment. This academic environment is free of other distractions, as the officers only focus at these times was on their own education and training.

**An Enlisted Marine**:

In this section it would be impossible to account for every potential scenario in the scope of this paper. The below will describe in general the path of an average to above average infantry Marine. The below will touch on training and education provided at specific times in a Marine’s career, but will not analyze in depth the specified education. Additionally the ability for Marines to apply for officer and warrant officer programs during their journey will be highlighted at the appropriate ranks and times in a Marines career below.

A future Marine completes recruit training at one of two locations, Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island or Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. This training occurs over 13 weeks and it is during this time that the individual is transformed from a civilian into a United States Marine. Upon graduation from one of the Marine Corps Recruit Depots, the individual will attend the School of Infantry where they will learn their Military Occupational Skill. The Infantry training occurs during a 9 week course. Upon completion of this training these Infantry Marines will arrive to their first duty station, normally one of 24 infantry battalions.

Ideally these individuals would serve as part of a team, a rifleman in a fire team, a machine gunner in a machine gun team or a mortar man in a mortar team. They would complete one deployment while they perfect the duties inside their specific team and get prepared to assume a position of leadership for their second deployment. Upon returning from this first deployment the Marines with the most potential will go to advanced schools to be trained to serve as a leader in one of the teams. This advanced schooling is conducted over a course of 6 or 7 weeks with the stated objective to produce a leader that has the “knowledge and skills” to serve as either a team, squad or section leader, leading 3 to 12 other Marines.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Once a Marine has completed their second deployment they will be near the completion of their initial service obligation. At this point a large percentage of Marines exit the service and attend college or enter the work force. In general the Marine Corps needs about 25 percent to re-enlist after their initial contract. This exit from the Marine Corps allows for their utilization of education benefits earned by their service and the ability to enter college or the workforce as a more mature individual.

When a Marine decides to reenlist in the Infantry, they will either stay in an infantry battalion for one more deployment or they will execute orders to recruiting duty, drill instructor duty, Marine security guard duty, security force duty or combat instructor duty. These individuals will complete the appropriate training for each of these duties. It is also during this period of time that an infantry Marine may be promoted to Sergeant. Once a Marine is promoted to sergeant he is eligible to complete the Sergeants’ Course, which is a four week resident course that occurs normally at the Marine’s duty station. This course is required for promotion to Staff Sergeant, the first Staff noncommissioned officer rank. It is also near this time that an infantry Marine with some college credits, normally at least one year complete, could apply to become an officer.

An infantry Marine has a specific opportunity to reenlist for the Squad Leader Development program which allows for advanced training and education and either a third deployment at an infantry battalion or instructor duty. This program is worth mentioning in this section as a small percentage of infantry Marines compete for this program. A detailed description and analysis will be conducted in subsequent chapters.

Once a Marine has reenlisted once, the Marine Corps refers to them as career Marines, for the purposes of this paper, I will use the time in service of eight years as a distinguishing characteristic. This is near the time that a Marine would have reenlisted for their second time and near the time that an infantry Marine is being considered for Staff Sergeant.

An infantry Marine is selected for Staff Sergeant and will return to an infantry battalion for duty as a platoon sergeant. In 2017, the Marine Corps began requiring a nearly three month course to earn the military occupational specialty of infantry unit leader.[[53]](#footnote-53) The other required education during this period is a six week course known as the career course.[[54]](#footnote-54) Both of these courses require the Marine leader to be gone from his assigned unit while receiving this education. This period of time is between one half and one third of the total available time between deployments in an infantry battalion. Once a Staff Sergeant has completed two deployments then he will likely conduct permanent change of station order for duty as a recruiter, drill instructor, Marine Security Guard, security forces or combat instructor duty.

Around the fourteen years of service mark, a Marine becomes eligible for Gunnery Sergeant. At the rank of Gunnery Sergeant, a Marine can serve until retirement eligible without any additional consideration.[[55]](#footnote-55) There is one required course during this time of a Marine’s career and it is the six week Advanced Course. This course just as with the Staff Sergeant is a time that the infantry battalion will be without this essential leader. During this time in an infantry Gunnery Sergeant’s career he has a few options; retirement, promotion or infantry warrant officer. The retirement option does not need further elaboration. The promotion choice has two avenues. The Gunnery Sergeant needs to decide if he wants to be a First Sergeant or a Master Sergeant. The reality is that a Marine will be eligible for First Sergeant before he is eligible for Master Sergeant. Because of this reality many infantry Marines list First Sergeant on their evaluation reports so that they do not miss a promotion opportunity. If a Marine does not select First Sergeant on their evaluation report they will not be considered for First Sergeant. Finally the Gunnery Sergeant may decide to submit to become an infantry warrant officer, a Gunner.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The Master Sergeant and First Sergeant serve essential roles in an infantry battalion in completely different ways. There is only one infantry Master Sergeant in a battalion, and there are five First Sergeants. The requirements for training is a short one week course for the Master Sergeant. The First Sergeant will attend this same one week course and also attend a two week First Sergeant Course. As with all of the other enlisted ranks, these courses require the Marines to be absent from their regular duties while attending these courses. While these two ranks share the same paygrade, the time in service for each one is different. A Marine that becomes a First Sergeant could have from 12 to 17 years of service based on this rank being selected from all the specialties in the Marine Corps. A Master Sergeant has served for around 20 years at the time of his promotion.

The Master Gunnery Sergeant and Sergeants Major serve in the most critical enlisted billets inside an infantry battalion. They are both the same paygrade with vastly different responsibilities as was discussed above. The infantry Master Gunnery Sergeant is required to complete a two month course that provides the job specific and planning training for service as the battalion operations chief. The Sergeants Major will attend the same two week Capstone course that Lieutenant Colonels attend.

An enlisted Marine who is assigned as a battalion Sergeant Major or the battalion Operations Chief, the two billets inside an infantry battalion for a Sergeant Major and Master Gunnery Sergeant respectively; will have had the

**CHAPTER 6 – THE SOLUTION**

By reading, you learn through others' experiences-generally a better way to do business-especially in our line of work where the consequences of incompetence are so final for young men. Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flatfooted by any situation, and I've never been at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn't give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead.

MajGen James N. Mattis

The quote above comes from a letter that the current United States Secretary of Defense sent to a friend that inquired about the value of reading. Secretary Mattis was at the time the Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division and was preparing to take the Division back to Iraq in 2004. It really speaks to the general philosophy in the Marine Corps that each individual is responsible for their education. It speaks to the value that the Marine Corps places on professional development as one can see in Annex 1, the current Marine Corps Professional Reading List.

In 2006, four retired Marine generals and two esteemed educators conducted a three month review of the Marine Corps’ officer professional education. This review brought about many recommendations that have been implemented, and most importantly it further reinforced the absolute sanctity that officer professional development had in the eyes of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The study did not discuss any issues involving the education of the enlisted force. A study has never been conducted to focus on the improvement of the Marine enlisted education process.

The Marine Corps views Professional Military Education with three broad lenses: resident education, distance education and self-education. A fourth category has emerged over the past decade that is referred to as blended education.[[57]](#footnote-57) The following paragraphs will explain the current Marine Corps enlisted Professional Military Education programs and provide recommendations to improve the process.

The enlisted education requirements during roughly the first ten years of a Marine’s career account for a total of seven weeks. The Lance Corporal Leadership and Ethics Seminar is a one week course that is conducted by each individual unit. The Corporal Course is a two week course that is conducted by each individual unit. The final course is the Sergeants Course, this course is conducted at one of six locations on Marine Corps bases around the globe. Additionally those Marines selected to serve in leadership positions will likely attend advanced military training in their assigned specialty at one of the two Advanced Infantry Training battalions. This advanced training is not required for promotion and is largely focused on the technical training specific to a Marine infantry job.

The Lance Corporal Leadership and Ethics Seminar was designed in 2014 to bridge the gap between the initial entry training to resident Professional Military Education. This course is facilitated by Sergeants that have completed the resident Sergeants Course. The course has as its goal to produce ethical leaders that will take action. [[58]](#footnote-58)

In addition to completing this week long seminar a Marine is required to complete a distance education module referred to as “Leading Marines.” The instructional method for the Lance Corporal seminar is largely conducted in small group discussions that require student participation. The course is designed to build on the foundations that each individual Marine learned during recruit training and entry level training. This seminar and the distance education module are required before being eligible for promotion to Corporal.

The Corporals Course was originally a resident program conducted at one of the six locations around the globe similar to the Sergeants Course. The current Corporals Course is conducted for two weeks inside an individual unit. The course is facilitated by Staff Sergeants that have completed the resident Career Course. In addition to completing this two week long course a Marine is required to complete a distance education module, “Corporals Course” The goal of this course is to produce leaders that are equipped with the skills and decision making to lead a squad. Before beginning the Corporals Course each Marine must complete an on-line module designed to prepare each student for small group interaction during the course.

The Sergeants Course is the first resident education program for enlisted Marines facilitated outside of each individual unit. The course’s intent is to “enable Marines to serve as ethical leaders, professional warfighters, critical thinkers and sound decision makers.” [[59]](#footnote-59)

This course is conducted at one of the regional SNCO academies and is conducted by a group of permanently assigned uniformed instructors. The successful completion of this four week course is required to be considered for promotion to Staff Sergeant, the beginning rank of the professional enlisted corps.

The above described courses along with around eight years of experience are the only qualifications to ensure you are fully qualified for promotion to Staff Sergeant. This fully qualified is important as it is a distinguishing comment to the promotion board for Staff Sergeant, “… all Marines recommended for promotion must be fully qualified.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

The solution to the lacking coherent education process during the first ten years of an enlisted Marines time in service is rather easy and a model already exist. The Marine Corps needs to form and achieve certification for a Community College of the Marine Corps. This system has existed in the United States Air Force since 1972, almost the same year that the SNCO corps became a professional corps in the author’s opinion. This institution annually issues over 22,000 associate degrees from nearly 70 degree programs.[[61]](#footnote-61) The Air Force Community College is affiliated with over 100 existing Air Force Schools so credit can be instantly awarded by complete required training.[[62]](#footnote-62) This process ensures a Marine can leave the service after four years or thirty years and have an official transcript from a federally certified degree granting institution.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The Career Course is the required course for all Staff Sergeants to complete in order to be promoted to the rank of Gunnery Sergeant. The course occurs over a seven week period of time, where the Staff Sergeant is absent from his assigned unit. The purpose of this course is to “… provide the knowledge and skills necessary to plan and conduct unit training, designed to expand the warfighting skills, core values and decision making skills necessary for the effective leadership of a platoon size unit and subordinate leaders.”[[64]](#footnote-64) This course is also conducted by permanently assigned uniformed instructors and by subject matter expert guest lecturers. A Staff Sergeant in the infantry has just recently been required to conduct an additional course to earn their job title of Infantry Unit Leader and be eligible for promotion to Gunnery Sergeant.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The Infantry Unit Leader Course is an eleven week course that is designed to provide the training and education for an infantry Staff Sergeant to serve as an infantry platoon commander in the absence of the officer. The course helps to develop leadership and decision-making skills.[[66]](#footnote-66) This course is conducted at two locations in the United States and conducted by full time, trained infantry instructors. In the author’s experience and opinion, this course is the best course for enlisted training and education that is available to the enlisted infantry Marine. The course requires that a Marine is absent from their unit for nearly three months, which equates to roughly twenty-five percent of available training time between deployments.

A proposed solution to ensure a SNCO that is a better educates warrior that can win on future battlefields and be better positioned to be better in civil society is to model the Officer education system. The promotion board that selects a Marine from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant would also select a percentage of those individuals to attend resident education as their primary responsibility. This formal full time education could combine the seven weeks of the Career Course and the eleven weeks of the Infantry Unit Leaders Course as a starting point. The expansion of written course work and liberal arts topics such as Psychology and Sociology would enhance the educational experience. The goal of this course would be completion of around thirty credit hours of higher level bachelor degree credits. The ideal location for this course would be in Quantico, Virginia where some educational opportunities could be facilitated with both Officers and SNCOs.

The Advanced Course is the required course for all Gunnery Sergeants to be fully qualified for promotion to either First Sergeant or Master Sergeant, the E-8 rank. The purpose of this course is “… provides the skills necessary for gunnery sergeants to assist field-grade officers (that) lead company and battalion/squadron-level organizations, and to independently supervise processes and procedures, influence officers, and effectively supports the unit's command and control center.”[[67]](#footnote-67) As is the Career Course, the Advanced Course is conducted by a group of permanently assigned uniformed instructors. An infantry Gunnery Sergeant has no other corresponding resident training or education during this period of time.

Once the recommendations for establishment of a Community College and an institution that could grant up to thirty high level bachelor degree credits, an institution that provides the final credit opportunity for a bachelors’ degree could be realized. The selection process for this degree opportunity could occur in conjunction with the Gunnery Sergeant promotion process. A percentage of these newly selected Gunnery Sergeants would be assigned to a school in Quantico as their primary duty. The school would initially only grant one or two types of degrees with the ten year goal of issuing up to ten different bachelors of science or arts. This opportunity could also be opened to E-8s and E-9s that were not selected by the service, but continued to serve.

Upon promotion to First Sergeant or Master Sergeant, each Marine will complete a regional E-8 seminar that last for one week. Each seminar is designed to provide overview briefs and networking opportunities.[[68]](#footnote-68) This course is the only requirements for Master Sergeants, a First Sergeant must also complete the First Sergeant Course which occurs over a two week period of time. The First Sergeant Course is designed to specifically equip the newly promoted First Sergeant with the tools necessary to successfully support their command and commander.[[69]](#footnote-69) Additionally at the rank of E-8 a Marine is able to attend the Senior Enlisted Professional Military Education course conducted since 2008 in Quantico, Virginia for a period of six weeks. The Senior Enlisted course is designed to provide an education experience for the E-8 which had been absent prior to 2008.[[70]](#footnote-70) The course is now conducted five times per year. Through the first two courses in 2018, only fifty-one total infantry Master Sergeants had completed the course out of nearly two thousand total students.

The framework for the final recommendation is already in existence and has been utilized by six SNCOs at this time. These six SNCOs earned their bachelors’ degree on their own time in order to be eligible for the current program. The opportunity for E8s and E9s to earn a masters’ degree at the existing Command and Staff College should be expanded to accommodate a selected percentage of eligible senior SNCOs. Six additional senior SNCOs to include the first Infantry Master Gunnery Sergeant will attend the Marine Corps Command and Staff College in academic year 2018-2019.[[71]](#footnote-71)

The Marine Corps must invest resources in the form of time, manpower and money now in order to ensure that it has enlisted leaders educated to win on future battlefields. Further the investment in education will reap benefits in future generations and ensure that the Marine Corps is actually promoting and retaining the best and most fully qualified. The Marine Corps will truly return a better citizen to civilian society that can thrive and prosper. The time is now.

# **ANNEX 1**

REVISION OF THE COMMANDANTS PROFESSIONAL READING LIST

Date Signed: 5/16/2017

ALMARS Number: 015/17

1. The Commandants Professional Reading List (CPRL)

as promulgated by this message represents an updated version of those books most pertinent for professional development and critical thinking at each rank level.

2. The CPRL is arranged into two sections: "Commandants Choice" and "Grade Levels." Each Marine shall read a minimum of five books from the “Commandants Choice” or “Grade Level” sections each year.

A. The Grade Level titles are separated into five levels for both enlisted Marines and officers. These levels coincide with specific ranks and Marines should attempt to read all titles within their level prior to proceeding to a higher level.

B. Per the references, completion of the CPRL reading requirement shall be noted in the individual Marines fitness report or taken into account when assigning Proficiency/Conduct marks. How a Marine demonstrates completion of the annual requirement is at the discretion of the commander.

C. The CPRL and related information can be found at: http:(slash

slash)guides.grc.usmcu.edu/usmcreadinglist. The website contains

several enhancements to include pictures of book covers, short

summaries, links to electronic versions of the books, additional

materials to enhance unit Professional Military Education (PME) and links to other reading lists (e.g., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, other Services and Marine Corps University schools).

3. Commandants Choice “Leading Marines (MCWP 6-10)" USMC “Sustaining the Transformation (MCTP 6-10A)” USMC

“Warfighting (MCDP 1)” USMC

"First to Fight" V. Krulak

"A World in Disarray" R. Haass

“Legacy” J. Kerr

"Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game" M. Lewis

4. Grade Levels A. Entry Level Enlisted: (Poolee, Recruit) “Battle Cry” L. Uris

“Corps Values” Z. Miller

“The Red Badge of Courage” S. Crane

“Gates of Fire” S. Pressfield

"Starship Troopers" R. Heinlein

B. Entry Level Officer (Candidate, Midshipman)

“Battle Cry” L. Uris

“Corps Values” Z. Miller

“Im Staying with My Boys ” J. Proser and J. Cutter

“My Men Are My Heroes” N. Helms

“The Killer Angels” M. Shaara

“Gates of Fire” S. Pressfield

"Starship Troopers" R. Heinlein

C. Primary Level Enlisted (Pvt, LCpl)

“Enders Game” O. Card

“Rifleman Dodd” C. Forester

“The Last Stand of Fox Company” B. Drury and T. Clavin

“The Marines of Montford Point” M. Mclaurin

“Chesty” J. Hoffman

“The Warrior Ethos” S. Pressfield

“On Call in Hell” R. Jadick

"Ready Player One" E. Cline

D. Primary Level Officer (2ndLt, 1stLt)

“All Quiet on the Western Front” E. Remarque

“The Last Stand of Fox Company” B. Drury and T. Clavin

“The Marines of Montford Point” M. Mclaurin

“With The Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa ” E. Sledge

“Chesty” J. Hoffman

“What It is Like To Go To War” K. Marlantes

“Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology” J. Galvin and R. Hooker

“Fields of Fire” J. Webb

“At The Waters Edge: Defending Against the Modern Amphibious Assault” T. Gatchel

“The Defense of Hill 781: An Allegory of Modern Mechanized Combat” J. Mcdonough

"Ready Player One" E. Cline

E. Career Level Enlisted (Cpl, Sgt)

“Resilience” E. Greitens

“Outliers” M. Gladwell

“The Defense of Duffers Drift” E. Swinton

“The Killer Angels” M. Shaara

“With The Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa” E. Sledge

“Battle Leadership” A. Von Schell

“Ghost Fleet” P. Singer and A. Cole

“We Were Soldiers Once… and Young” H. Moore and J. Galloway

“On Killing” D. Grossman

“Left of Bang” P. Van Horne and J. Riley

"The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming

Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate" R. Kaplan

F. Career Level Officer (WO, CWO2, Capt)

“Attacks” E. Rommel

“Black Hearts” J. Frederick

“Into The Tigers Jaw” F. Petersen and J. Phelps

“On Killing” D. Grossman

“War Made New” M. Boot

“Curious: The Desire to Know And Why Your Future Depends On It" I. Leslie

“Forgotten Warriors” T. Hammes

“Maneuver Warfare Handbook” W. Lind

“Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History Of Amphibious Warfare” M. Bartlett

“The Starfish and the Spider” O. Brafman and R. Beckstrom “Neptunes Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal” J. Hornfischer "The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about coming

conflicts and the battle against fate" R. Kaplan

"Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla" D.

Kilcullen

G. Intermediate Level Enlisted (SSgt, GySgt)

“All Quiet On The Western Front” E. Remarque

“American Spartans” J. Warren

“The Changing Face of War” M. Van Creveld

“This Kind of War” T. Fehrenbach

“Fields of Fire” J. Webb

“Leading Change” J. Kotter

“My Men Are My Heroes” N. Helms

Thinking Fast and Slow” D. Kahneman

“Leading Up” M. Useem

“Once an Eagle” A. Myrer

"The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution" W. Isaacson H.

Intermediate Level Officer (CWO3, CWO4, Maj, LtCol)

“Command Culture” J. Muth

“Defeat Into Victory” W. Slim

“Just and Unjust Wars” M. Walzer

“Military Innovation in The Interwar Period” W. Murray and A. Millett

“The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle” J. Gray

“The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World” R. Smith

“This Kind Of War” T. Fehrenbach

“Team of Teams” S. McChrystal and T. Collins

“Countdown to Zero Day: Stuxnet and the Launch of the Worlds First Digital Weapon” K. Zetter

“After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam” L. Hazelton

“Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power” R.

Kaplan

“Cobra II: The Inside Story Of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq"

M. Gordon and B. Trainor

“The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West” K. Frieser “Storming the City: US Military Performance in Urban Warfare from WWII to Vietnam” A. Wahlman

“The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security“ G. Hammond "The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution" W. Isaacson

"The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology" R. Kurzweil I.

Senior Level Enlisted (MSgt, 1stSgt, MGySgt, SgtMaj)

“Achilles in Vietnam” J. Shay

“Command Culture” J. Muth

“Forgotten Warriors” T. Hammes

“Just and Unjust Wars” M. Walzer

“No Bended Knee” M. Twining

The Face of Battle” J. Keegan

“Team of Teams” S. McChrystal

“Start with Why” S. Sinek

“On Combat” D. Grossman

“Guns of August” B. Tuchman

"The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces

That Will Shape Our Future" K. Kelly

"The Innovators Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great

Firms to Fail" C. Christensen

"The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology" R.

Kurzweil J.

Senior Level Officer (CWO5, Col-Gen)

“Another Bloody Century” C. Gray

“Assignment Pentagon: How To Excel in A Bureaucracy” P. Smith and D.Gerstein

“Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, The Joint Chiefs Of Staff And the Lies That Led to Vietnam” H. McMaster

“Diplomacy” H. Kissinger

“Little Book Of Economics: How The Economy Works in the Real World” G. Ip

“Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime” E. Cohen

“Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln” D. Goodwin

“The Federalist Papers” A. Hamilton

“The Landmark Thucydides” R. Strassler

“Every War Must End” F. Ikle

“The Soldier and the State" S. Huntington

“Strategy: A History” L. Freedman

“Treasurys War” J. Zarate

“Guns of August” B. Tuchman

“Stilwell and the American Experience In China: 1911-1945” B. Tuchman

"The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future" K. Kelly

"The Innovators Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great

Firms to Fail" C. Christensen

5. Action. Effective immediately, Commanding Generals and Commanding Officers are to incorporate the new CPRL into their command and unit PME programs.

6. Semper Fidelis, Robert B. Neller, General, U.S. Marine Corps,

Commandant of the Marine Corps.//

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1. (Harari, 2017, pp. 57-58) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Huntington, 1957, p. 30) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An argument could be made concerning the percentage of the population and social classes that have carried the most recent burdens, but this will not be explored in the scope of this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Huntington, 1957, p. 39) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (MCU History, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Huntington, 1957) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (CMC Posture Statement 2017, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (Hammersley, 2013, p. 13) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (Waddill, 1975) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (Gunnery Sergeant, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. (Murray, 1989) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (Murray, 1989) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. (Infantry Training and Readiness Manual, 2016, pp. 9-14) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (Infantry Training and Readiness Manual, 2016, pp. 9-17, 9-18) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. (Infantry Training and Readiness Manual, 2016, pp. 9-18) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. (Infantry Training and Readiness Manual, 2016, pp. 9-18,9-19) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (Infantry Training and Readiness Manual, 2016, pp. 9-20,9-21) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. (Table of Organization 2021, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. (Table of Organization 2021, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Staff sergeant, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. (Demographics Profile of the Military Community, 2016, p. 36) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. (Gunnery Sergeant, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. (Congressional Record - Sentate, 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. (Congressional Record - Sentate, 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. (Marine Corps Operating Concept, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. (Krulak, 1999) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. (Marine Corps Operating Concept, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. (Holiday, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. (Marine Corps Operating Concept, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The Marine Corps currently only deploys on L-class shipping (Amphibious) and Aircraft carriers. The United States Navy does not possess the inventory of ships to maintain a continual forward Marine presence on the sea. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. (Marine Corps Operating Concept, 2016, p. 22) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. (Marine Corps Operating Concept, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. (US Education Reform and National Security, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. (US Education Reform and National Security, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. (MARADMIN 344/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. (MARADMIN 344/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. (Josephson, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Josephson, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. (GDP, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. (Christopher R. Tamborini, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. (Precept convening the FY17 Staff Sergeant Selection Board, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. (Huntington, 1957) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. (Truelove, 1992, p. 273) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Officer Candidate School for ROTC students is a one-time 6 week course, for other programs of commissioning it is either a one-time 10 week course or two-time 6 week course. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. In the last two years about 80% of infantry officers have continued service. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Duty at one of the two Marine Corps Recruit Depot or at Officer Candidate School. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Duty at The Basic School or one of the two Schools of Infantry. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The weekday course and weekend course meet once per week for three hour sessions with homework in between. The blended seminar course is completed in 4 weeks resident, 12 weeks on-line and 6 weeks resident. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. (Expeditionary Warfare School, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. (USMC Major Promotion boards, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. A Marine Expeditionary Force is the largest warfighting formation inside the United States Marine Corps. It normally consist of a Marine Division, a Marine Air Wing, a Marine Logistics Group and a Headquarters element. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. (Course Dates FY18, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. (MARADMIN 393/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. (MARADMIN 521/14, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. As a matter of policy the Marine Corps has normally allowed Staff Sergeants to continue service until retirement eligible at 20 years, however their continued service is subject to the proceedings of a board for continuation. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. A Gunner is an infantry weapons expert and very well respected in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps only has 105 total Marine Gunners and each Infantry battalion has one. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Blended education is a program that has a combination of distance and resident education. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. (University, Lance Corporal's Leadership and Ethics Seminar Leaders Guide, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. (University, Resident Sergeants Course, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. (Precept convening the FY17 Staff Sergeant Selection Board, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. (Community College of the Air Force, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. (Community College of the Air Force, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. (Community College of the Air Force, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. (Career Course Program of Instruction V2-15, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. (MARADMIN 393/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. (Infantry Unit Leader Course Program of Instruction, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. (Advanced Course Program of Instruction V3-17, 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. (MARADMIN 447/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. (MARADMIN 465/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. (MARADMIN 404/17, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. (MARADMIN 231/18, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-71)