

Commanders' Business...Returning to a Culture of Stewardship



The Marine Corps has been actively engaged in combat operations for more than ten years. While extremely successful in taking the fight to the enemy, II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) has exhibited several disturbing trends requiring the attention of Commanders to preclude long term risk to the force. As we redeploy from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), it has become increasingly evident that we have lost our culture of stewardship and accountability due to the perception of apparently inexhaustible resources that has permeated every aspect of our business. That period has ended, and we have entered a period of constrained resources that has created challenges in our every endeavor, and has marked a return to doing more with less. Accountability of equipment is not up to our traditional standards; abuse of facilities, lack of discipline in deployment processes, careless handling of ammunition and explosives, improper and unsafe use of training areas, and a number of fundamental issues are bordering on systemic. To the offender these actions appear to increase efficiency, when in reality they create significant inefficiencies, waste resources, limit situational awareness of the Commander, degrade the life span of facilities and equipment, and, most importantly, put lives at unnecessary risk. To ensure the long term health and effectiveness of II MEF, it is imperative that Commanders re-instill a *culture of stewardship* in all processes throughout our MEF.

Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. The Marine Corps carefully board selects officers to command battalion, squadron, regimental, and group-level units; proof that the commander is the "one" to whom that careful and responsible management, as well as leadership of those Marines, is entrusted. Though not specifically referred to, stewardship is a concept embedded in every Marine from the time they join our ranks. The first general order applies: "Take charge of this post, and all government property in view." The concept of stewardship is not limited to only equipment accountability, it encompasses all things "entrusted to one's care," to include people, processes, and things. In the Marine Corps, a commander is ultimately responsible for the unit's successes or failures, which includes the management of the commander's resources.

While stewardship is critical at all levels of command, II MEF's focus shall be placed at the Battalion/Squadron level. This echelon is where the most immediate and lasting influence can occur, as the majority of equipment and facilities in the operating forces reside under the direct care of a Lieutenant Colonel. Moreover, daily access to the next generation of Marine leaders, officer and enlisted alike, is most prevalent at this level. Those Marines will ensure a solid and enduring foundation of stewardship is established across the entire Marine Corps.

To reinvigorate this *culture of stewardship*, emphasis from senior leadership on establishing unit discipline in all aspects of military operations/processes must be reinvigorated. Each commander's efforts must be comprehensive. In addition to attaining exacting accountability of equipment, he must also address maintenance management, supply discipline, facilities maintenance, and regular inspection of processes, and foster an environment of personal accountability.

II MEF continues to actively and effectively engage the enemy in support of OEF, in addition to supporting emergent operations across the spectrum. II MEF has managed to sustain the capability to surge over this extended period because of the talents of the Marines under its charge, and also, largely, because of ample availability of supplemental funding. The seemingly endless level of funding has created a degree of complacency in our attention to unit stewardship. This condition must now be remedied. As a new era of fiscal austerity dawns, a return to a *culture of stewardship* must be embraced and fostered by all. The Battalion/Squadron commander, through the effective use of intrusive leadership, is the keystone to this effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R.C. Fox". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

R.C. FOX
Commanding General
II Marine Expeditionary Force