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RACE RELATIONS--A CASE STUDY
3RD MARINES 1971-1973

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THE 3RD MARINES, 1971-1973

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"You are about to assume the most important duty that our officers are called upon to perform--the direct command of combat units of American soldiers. To succeed requires two fundamental qualities--thorough professional knowledge and a capacity for leadership."

--George C. Marshall

"TO THE OFFICERS OF THE MARINE CORPS

. . . You should never forget the power of example. The young men serving as enlisted men take their cue from you. . . . Be kindly and just in your dealings with your men. Never play favorites."

John A. Lejeune
Major General, Commandant

"There are no bad regiments--only bad colonels."

--Napoleon Bonaparte

RACE RELATIONS -- A CASE STUDY

THE 3D MARINES, 1971-1973

Purpose.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the problem of race relations as it existed in a Fleet Marine Force Infantry regiment in 1971-1973, describe the command efforts to cope with the problem, and finally to draw those conclusions which seem justified by the events. The paper is written from the command point of view since the author was privileged to be the Commanding Officer, 3d Marines, FMF, from July 1971 to July 1973.

Background.

The 3d Marines redeployed from Vietnam in late 1969 under rather confusing circumstances. At the time, the Marine Corps was deactivating the Fifth Marine Division. One^e battalion of that division, the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines was located in Hawaii, and it was redesignated as 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. The original 1st Battalion, 3d Marines assumed the designation 1/26, returned to Camp Pendleton, California with the remainder of the regiment and was ultimately disbanded. Throughout 1970, the 3d Marines (-) remained at Camp Pendleton with the 1st Battalion located at Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe as the

the ground element of the 1st Marine Brigade, FMF. In June of 1971, the regiment departed California by ship to join its 1st Battalion as part of the Brigade. Because of an anticipated shortage of existing barracks at MCAS Kaneohe, the 3d Battalion remained at Camp Pendleton pending completion of new barracks scheduled for 1974. The regiment sailed with only a cadre of personnel as equipment caretakers. It was intended to be gradually built up, first with Brigade personnel assets and ultimately with drafts of new Marines.

The 3d Marines as constituted for duty with the 1st Marine Brigade is unique. It is the only infantry regiment in the Marine Corps which has permanently attached those non-infantry elements necessary to initiate and support combat action. Thus, the regiment has in addition to its infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, a reconnaissance company, a shore party company, an engineer company, a truck company, and a medical company.

The 3d Marines became part of the 1st Marine Brigade, FMF, itself a unique organization. It is the only permanently organized air/ground team in the Marine Corps. The Brigade consists of a Headquarters element, a ground combat element (the 3d Marines), an air element (Marine Air Group 24), and a service support element (principally a Service Battalion). It is commanded by a Brigadier General.

The Brigade is a tenant at MCAS Kaneohe, a relatively small station on Oahu's windward side. As a landlord, the

Commanding Officer of the air station provides almost all the support for the tenant FMF activities. These include messing, barracks, exchanges, medical and dental services, military police, etc. Certain activities such as Special Services, education and Human Relations training are conducted through joint Air Station/Brigade offices. Although there may be more than 8,000 Marines aboard the station, usually only about 700 belong officially to the Air Station. Tenant units, through the Fleet Assistance Program (FAP), provide personnel on temporary duty to assist in mess duty, MPs, police, maintenance, and operations, etc. These usually amount to about 10% of the strength of an FMF unit. They are available for deployment with the parent unit, but are normally billeted and supervised by the Air Station.

During 1969 and 1970, MCAS Kaneohe had experienced a considerable degree of racial conflict and turbulence even including what can only be termed rioting. Racially initiated assaults involving mugging and strong arm robbery were frequent. Deliberate confrontations with authority, presentation of militant demands and the threat of a breakdown of order and discipline could result from the most trivial incident.

Without first hand knowledge, it is impossible to attribute direct causes of the situation. There were, however, several underlying causes which, on a continuing basis resulted in a climate where disaffection could grow.

First, there was, and to a large extent, de facto segregation. Black Marines were predominantly in the infantry unit of the 1st Marine Brigade (at that time 1st Battalion, 26th Marines later 1st Battalion, 3d Marines). By virtue of the educational and aptitude requirements for various military occupational fields, blacks with lower scores were assigned to lower skill level occupations. This placed disproportionate numbers of black Marines in the ground combat units. At Kaneohe, however, they were in basically an aviation environment and they could see the almost totally white complexion of aviation units. Additionally, ground units usually filled the FAP quotas for low skill housekeeping jobs with the air station. It should not have been unexpected that black Marines would conclude that they were second class citizens in second class units when confronted with the glamour of virtually all white flying organizations.

Secondly, Hawaii itself created problems. In spite of the state's claims of a complete lack of prejudice and discrimination, in every day life there is a very definite pecking order among the various caucasian, oriental and black elements of its population. Blacks are relatively low in that order, with perhaps only Samoans below them. There is no sizeable black community. This creates a very serious liberty and morale problem. The young black Marine is forced to bring his liberty frustrations back to the base, and the prospect of a

two year tour of duty in Hawaii does not have the same appeal that it has for the white Marine. There is an extensive special services program, but the young black Marine from a major urban area does not turn on to golf, tennis, scuba diving, sailing, horseback riding and such activities unless he is led into their enjoyment.

Third, there was an almost total lack of credibility given by black Marines to authority. They did not feel that there was any serious concern with their problems or feelings. They resented and, in fact, denied the prevailing establishment attitude, "There are no white Marines or black Marines, just Marines." There was in fact very little effort to understand black culture, values, life-styles and aspirations.

Fourth, during the 1969-1970 period there was an exceptionally high degree of personnel turbulence within the Marine Corps. The requirement to fully man Southeast Asia commitments while at the same time redeploying units in accordance with the draw-down schedule caused unusually high turn-over rates. Up through 1969 and into 1970, the turn-over rate in the infantry unit at Kaneohe exceeded 100%.

Command efforts to ameliorate the situation fell into two basic categories.

First, there was an effort made to provide a channel for redress of grievances through Human Relations Councils. Following a particularly ugly outbreak of racial disorders in

1969, these were formed in all units. The object was to provide an advisory and information service to Commanding Officers which would help them to identify and correct problems in their formative stages. They had some positive accomplishments. The Post Exchange began to stock black magazines and products for black consumption such as toiletries and cosmetics. The station library procured and emphasized a wide selection of readings on black culture and history. The education office arranged for regular off-duty courses in Black History. However, it can only be concluded that Human Relations Councils failed as a device to promote stable and harmonious race relations. By mid-1971, the racial problem was still the major command problem and reliance on Human Relations Councils had been abandoned.

Second, a continuing effort was made to educate leadership at all levels to be more responsive to the problems and needs of all Marines, black and white. This program received its impetus from the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific (CGFMFPAC). The PEOPLE (Promote Enhancement of Personal Leadership Effectiveness) Program was implemented in 1970.

Changes of command of both the Brigade and the Air Station in the last half of 1970 introduced new commanders who were sincerely motivated to provide not just a climate of order and discipline, but one where harmony and a reasonable measure

of satisfaction could be found by all Marines. Unfortunately, changes at the top alone were insufficient, particularly with respect to the Brigade. Too many subordinates continued to operate with the objective of suppressing the problem rather than attacking its roots and alleviating the problem situation. From mid-1970 until mid-1971, the basic situation remained unchanged although there was some reduction in the degree of confrontation encountered and in the incidence of assaults. This was accomplished largely through police measures, increasing MP patrols, improved lighting and prompt reaction to incidents as they occurred. On the part of the Air Station, sincere efforts were made to meet requests for recognition of black identity and culture. 'Soul food' items appeared on mess hall menus, 'soul nights' were featured in the Enlisted Men's Club and a black barber was hired by the PX to cut 'Afro' haircuts.

Narrative.

In July of 1971, with the arrival of the 3d Marines at Kaneohe, there was a joint change of command for both the regiment and the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines. The new regimental commander had served the previous year on the Brigade staff. For the most part, he was able to have assigned as subordinate commanders for newly arrived elements of the regiment, officers whom he had evaluated and selected during this period.

The new commander for the 1st Battalion was a recent arrival in Hawaii.

At the time of assumption of command, it was recognized that the major command problem was and would be race relations. It would be impossible to assimilate new Marines, develop a viable training ^{gram} ~~problem~~, and build a combat ready organization unless some degree of racial harmony prevailed. There was a pre-conception that the existing racial problems were in essence leadership problems--a failure in leadership. A brief initial period of observation and inspection reinforced this hypothesis. The majority of racial incidents occurred after normal working hours. Of those that took place during duty hours, the majority were in or around the mess hall. In both circumstances, there was a notable lack of presence of officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) other than the minimum of duty personnel. It was also evident that there was a high degree of mutual hostility and suspicion between many young black Marines and older officers and SNCOs. The situation was estimated to be serious with a major outbreak of disorder or violence quite possible. There were almost nightly gatherings and meetings of Black Marines where grievances, real and imagined, were aired and inflamed by openly militant and disaffected individuals. Any over-reaction or misstep by authority carried the threat of exacerbating a precarious situation. In some cases, however, failure to act was tantamount to condoning breach of discipline.

A command decision was made to concentrate every effort in five major areas; leadership, credibility, morale, attitudes, and equal opportunity. In every action considered, a basic guideline to be followed was that it must be in consonance with Marine Corps policies and the practices of good leadership. Nothing would be done which would undercut command authority or subvert the chain of command. This did not mean, however, that subordinate commanders would expect to have the same latitude they previously enjoyed. There would be more specific and firmer guidance which they would have to follow.

The initial steps to improve leadership involved increasing the presence of command personnel in areas and at times when they had not here-to-fore been in attendance. This meant random visits on a regular basis⁵, by commanders at all levels and by key SNCOs, to their barracks areas outside of working hours. These were not be inspections, but visits. One object was to make it clear that interest in and control of the organization was continuous, not just from 0630-1700, Monday through Friday. A second and more important object was to improve informal communications within the unit. Leaders were expected to take the initiative in developing conversation with Marines to impart command policy and attitudes and, most importantly, to generate feed-back of reaction to these policies.

A second step required all officers and SNCOs to have at least three meals (One each, breakfast, dinner, supper) a week in the regimental mess hall. In the past, the Regimental Duty Officer, a lieutenant, had sole responsibility for the maintenance of order and discipline there. It was a duty that most dreaded. Approximately 3,000 Marines passed through the two serving lines at each meal. They were virtually anonymous, thus encouraging disruptive behaviour by those so inclined. The situation was particularly suited for those militant blacks desiring to confront authority with practically no risk of disciplinary action. Short of using his sidearm, the OD had virtually no way to apprehend a man who chose to just run out of the mess hall when asked for his ID card.

Concomitant with other steps which will be discussed subsequently, every effort was made to increase the standard of discipline. The actions of a relative few, highly disaffected, black Marines were serving as an example and an encouragement to others. For those without malice, it seemed an exciting game. This was particularly true in the mess hall as mentioned previously. In the case of major incidents, it was established as policy that disciplinary problems would be handled totally within the command. This meant that the Regimental duty personnel, guard, and commanders would deal with all incidents rather than the Station MPs who had previously been called for every gathering, assault or incident.

Effective leadership depends on credibility. It was recognized that the major task facing the command was the restoration of confidence in the ability and the desire of authority to redress grievances and advance the interest of the individual Marine. Central to this in the Marine Corps is the request mast system. Every Marine has the right to request an appearance (mast) before his commanding officer. If the results are unsatisfactory to the Marine, he has the right to pursue his request through the chain of command until he has had a hearing before a general officer. It was obvious that the system was not working as intended. First, there were unnecessary administrative delays in processing requests and second, requests were being ignored or at least discouraged. Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of many, particularly older SNCOs, to regard a request for mast as "trouble making" or an adverse reflection on their leadership. Interference with request mast was made cause for disciplinary action. Each level of command was allowed twenty-four hours to respond to a request or forward it to the next higher level. The Brigade Commanding General agreed that he would see any Marine referred by the regimental commander within forty-eight hours. As a matter of policy, while no Marine would be refused request mast, none would be permitted to appear as a group spokesman. Presentation of group grievances or demand would be rejected. Individuals were the basis on which the system worked. The only organizations recognized were the formal ones.

Two further programs were promptly implemented to enhance command credibility. A Platoon Leaders Information Program was instituted with one half-hour of the weekly training schedule devoted to it. This was to consist of frank and open, informal discussion of command problems and policies led by the platoon leader. Company, battalion and regimental commanders and executive officers would visit various sessions to lend weight and scope to the program. Troop opinion and feed-back was solicited.

Also implemented was a rumor control program. This was necessitated by the circumstances. Distorted and occasionally malicious rumors were common. They served to worsen tense situations and provide psuedo-grievances. The regimental intelligence officer was tasked with immediate preparation of a "Fact Sheet" concerning any incident giving rise to a rumor. These were promptly disseminated via the chain of command, sometimes early enough to have a head start on potential rumors. All of the known facts were included. While ~~names were not~~ names were not always mentioned, no concealment or equivocation was permitted.

It was believed that an improvement in morale and development of esprit and a strong sense of unit identification would not only be desirable in itself, but would help to ameliorate any feeling of isolation or apartness based on race. To help generate cohesiveness and unit solidarity, several approaches

were followed. The company is the basic administrative unit and while the Marine identifies with his fire team, squad and platoon, it is logical that he should consider his company as his basic organizational entity. Accordingly, every effort was made to promote this concept. From a running guard, the regiment switched to using a regimental guard company. Each company (including support companies) assumed a two week tour filling that duty in turn. The duty not only entailed the guard. All working parties and police details were part of the assignment. This had the added advantage of ensuring that all other companies were free to train without interference.

The entire training plan was revised. In spite of difficulties imposed by lack of training facilities, line companies would rigorously follow a schedule in which they would spend alternate weeks in the field, operating from bivouacs in training areas on Oahu, Molokai and Kuai. Typically, every other week, each company would leave Kaneohe by helicopter on Monday to return on Friday. Weeks in garrison would be spent in routine training, but with a minimum of classroom time. Training schedules incorporated a certain amount of 'adventure' training--mountain climbing, rubber boat drills, etc. as well as strong emphasis on physical fitness. The object was to provide physical and mental challenge with stress^{SS} on unit accomplishment.

For companies in garrison, a program using one afternoon a week for recreation was started. The object was to

introduce Marines to the special services activities available. Company officers and NCOs acted as instructors for golf, riding, sailing, scuba, handball, and other sports. It was hoped to overcome the natural hesitancy and beginner embarrassment which was believed to inhibit use of many of these facilities.

Habitability standards of all barracks were to ^{be} improved as quickly as possible. Fortunately, the Air Station was in the process of letting a contract for repainting the interior of all barracks. It was arranged that priority would go to those of the 3d Marines. Drapes and a vastly increased allowance of recreational furniture were procured. Marines were solicited to submit interior arrangement plans for their barracks. Ultimately most utilized some type of four man cubicle partitioned off by wall lockers to provide more privacy and comfort. The Air Station found sufficient funding to have a professional decorating firm redecorate the mess hall. Eventually \$50,000 converted what had been a drab barn into the equivalent of a good commercial cafeteria. Mess hall personnel responded enthusiastically. Special snack bar lines were set up to run continuously from 0630 to 2100 at night. Normal meal service improved drastically in appearance and atmosphere.

The problem of engendering new attitudes on the part of many officers and NCOs was recognized as critical and central to the problem of improved race relations. The basic approach

was built around the FMFPAC PEOPLE program and later the Marine Corps Human Relations Program. This was augmented with local leadership training. The latter stressed the fact that the existence of race problems indicated only one thing--we had failed as leaders. A commander or leader whose Marines caused or contributed to such problems either had failed as a leader or was using improper techniques. The requirement for sincere personal efforts to reach every Marine was stressed. While discipline would not be relaxed, authoritarian, impersonal (sometimes abusive) leadership techniques would no longer serve. Each Marine joining the regiment would be personally welcomed aboard and briefed by the regimental commander, his battalion commander and his company commander. The briefing would stress his (the Marine's) importance to the Corps and to the unit.

Above all else, absolute equality of opportunity had to be ensured. It was evident from statistics that black Marines were not receiving a proportionate share of promotions and were receiving a disproportionate share of disciplinary action and working parties. In some respects, justification existed. Black Marines did have a higher incidence of disciplinary problems. In other instances, however, there was reason to suspect that conscious or unconscious discrimination existed. Procedures were instituted to ensure that promotion to Private First Class and Lance Corporal was based solely on required time in grade. Unless there had been disciplinary action,

each Marine was accorded these as a right. No positive recommendation for promotion would be required. Promotion higher, to the NCO ranks, requires merit and positive evidence of leadership. Unit promotion boards were established for these. Reports of promotions, disciplinary actions and abstracts of conduct and proficiency marks were required to ensure equitable treatment of all Marines in a unit. Individual counseling with regard to marks assigned became an absolute requirement. Publication of all working parties and all punishments, not just those resulting from courts-martial, was established.

The results of these initial efforts were not immediate or startling, but they were positive. During July and into August, following assumption of command, the regimental commander was called to the regimental area an average of four or five nights a week regarding racial incidents. The majority involved gatherings or meetings by informal groups of black Marines which had the potential to generate a serious incident or over-reaction. In every instance, prompt appearance of unit commanders and the absence of MPs maintained order and averted any real breach of discipline. Assaults and muggings began to taper off. In October, virtually the last racial incident occurred. From October, 1971 until July, 1973, the 3d Marines experienced only two further racial incidents.

In November, a reassessment of the situation was made. It was concluded that the actions taken and the policies

implemented were steps in the right direction. However, mistakes had been made and learning how to deal with the situation could not stop.

A series of meetings was held prior to Christmas to re-evaluate existing policies and determine future courses of action. The results of these sessions did not produce any new or innovative programs for the future. With regard to the past, it was more apparent by this time that a significant change in the situation had occurred. This was attributed to four factors; leadership, discipline, stability, and training.

Increased supervision, personal interest and responsiveness had made a significant improvement in morale and credibility. The request mast system was working. Black Marines, especially, had begun to recognize that there was a legitimate channel open to them. The policy of freely using inter-battalion transfers to permit a Marine who was a disciplinary problem in his old unit to start again, at his request, in a new environment was basically successful.

Fair and equitable justice, tempered with mercy had improved discipline as well as credibility. To the maximum extent possible, suspended sentences and minimum use of confinement were employed. For the 'hard-core' offender, the regimental commander had the full support of the Commanding General with administrative discharge authority. The use of such discharges for twelve recidivist black Marines who were a major cause of

agitation and turbulence helped to provide a climate where leadership could be effective.

The increasing stability of unit personnel, especially leaders, markedly improved the opportunity for leaders to exert their influence. Effective leaders had tenure. Others did not. Two company commanders had been replaced and a command decision was made to seek a replacement for the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion. Unfortunately, a replacement was not made available until April, 1972. This was a marked disadvantage of a small unit such as the Brigade with a limited officer pool.

Training together with the other efforts was beginning to produce cohesiveness and unit pride. Skill and physical toughness reinforced a carefully nurtured attitude of being "the toughest mothers in the valley." There was a real growing recognition that the FMF infantry unit was the cutting edge and the combat strength of the Marine Corps. Being a part of that unit was a reason for pride.

The effect of PEOPLE training and Human Relations Training was impossible to assess. No way was found to measure attitudes. It was evident that externally there was a decrease in hostility, tension and suspicion. Fundamentally, however, the unit was still bi-polar, that is, there was very little commingling of blacks and whites except in the line of duty. It was obvious that such training had a long way to go.

The period 1972-1973 could be characterized as one of stability. A basic foundation had been established. The task was to strengthen it and build on it. With two exceptions, the means employed would be the means already established.

Early in 1972, the regimental commander proposed to the Commanding Officer, MCAS, Kaneohe that permission be sought from the Commandant of the Marine Corps to name the refurbished 3d Marines mess hall after a deceased Medal of Honor winner from the 3d Marines. Specifically, it was to be dedicated to the memory of Lance Corporal James Anderson, a black Marine who had smothered a grenade with his body in Vietnam to save the lives of two members of his fire team, both white Marines. CMC concurred, and the regimental Sergeant Major was made the project officer to arrange for a memorial, a display and a dedication ceremony. CMC would fund for the travel of L/Cpl Anderson's parents to the ceremony. The 3d Marines, by subscription, provided travel for his sisters and an aunt and uncle, hotels and sight seeing in Hawaii. Inside Anderson Hall, a display consisting of a large photograph of L/Cpl Anderson, his lucite encased medals and a massive blow-up of his citation was prepared. A memorial garden built around a bronze plaque mounted on a lava rock memorial was emplaced at the entrance of the mess hall. At the dedication ceremony, L/Cpl Anderson's sister (with no prompting) made a short but intensely moving address on the interdependence of all races, citing her brother as an example.

Although the whole project received a great deal of publicity, both in print and on television, it was not a race relations gimmick. The object was to emphasize the contribution of black Marines and to provide visible evidence of the legitimate basis for black pride. It was unanimously and enthusiastically received as such.

Annually, in September, the Marine Corps conducts a competition at Quantico to determine the best rifle squad in the Marine Corps. One entry from each infantry regiment is permitted. It was determined that in 1972, the entry from the 3d Marines would win. Intra-battalion competitions were held locally in July. Inter-battalion competition was conducted in August and a regimental entry selected. Given the composition of the 3d Marines this squad could not help but be multi-racial. In September, they were acknowledged the best in the Corps. The achievement of these 13 Marines, eight white, four black, and one Mexican-American, not only legitimized a claim that theirs was the best regiment, it provided a focal point for unit pride which transcends racial differences.

By July 1973, it was an effort to recall the racial difficulties of two years previous. There was in fact, a large measure of racial harmony. Black Marines and white Marines did not always seek each other out as companions but there was a high degree of association. Mixed groups at athletic contests or leaving on liberty were common. Effective communication existed. The informal organization was no longer divided along racial lines.

CONCLUSIONS.

The one inescapable conclusion of experience in this instance is that racial problems are leadership problems. They are not intractable. Good leadership resolves them. That they were in large measure resolved was due to the professionalism and dedication of the overwhelming majority of leaders at all levels in the 3d Marines during this period.

The maintenance of command credibility is essential for the avoidance of racial turmoil. Prompt and honest dissemination of the facts of any incident is mandatory. The highest levels of command must be readily available to every Marine to establish and maintain this credibility.

Firm discipline is vital. Any evidence of indecision or lack of resolve is an invitation to racial disorder. This does not imply that repression can avoid the problem. It can only make it worse. The discipline must be fair. All hands must be aware that progress is only made (and can only be made) through official channels and the formal organization.

Commanders must make a special effort in supervision to ensure equal opportunity. This may entail a higher level of supervision and more reports than are otherwise desirable, but it must be done. The subtleties of discrimination (working parties, proficiency and conduct marks, etc.) may go undetected unless a special effort is made to monitor them.

There can be no hesitation about promptly replacing any commander who shows that he lacks the determination or the

capability to be an effective leader. Indiscriminate relief of commanding officers is not implied, but it is necessary to be almost ruthless when sufficient evidence warrants relief. The question of the effect on the individual's career must be weighed against the adverse effects of his continued in command. The decision is usually obvious. This means that suitable replacements must be readily available.

A major problem, usually beyond the command level, is de facto segregation. If this is not resolved by AVF recruiting of higher mental groups and educational levels, the service will have to resolve it through some device such as remedial education. Related to this is an over-riding requirement to broaden the officer base to include proportionate numbers of all ethnic and cultural groups. These portend long term problems and can negate any leadership exerted at the command level.



⁰⁶ "YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE
SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL—
CUZ I'M THE TOUGHEST MUTHA IN THE VALLEY!"⁰⁷

