



Entering the Temple of Mars

Why There Is No Substitute for the Spiritual in War

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Abstract: Recent scholarship validates the importance of spirituality and spiritual fitness. This article operationalizes the 2023 article “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy: Stoic Philosophy and Spiritual Fitness for Optimizing Warfighter Readiness,” which argues that the U.S. Department of Navy should actively advocate spiritual fitness at the unit level as a means of improving military personnel’s overall health and readiness. Accordingly, this article aims to provide a scholarly response to the concept of spiritual fitness that has been discussed in various official U.S. Marine Corps documents, including *Spiritual Fitness, All Marine Corps Activities* (ALMAR) 033/16 (2016); *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 027/20 (2020); *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 020/24 (2024); *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide*, Marine

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Corps Reference Publication 6-10.1 (2023); and *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, Marine Corps Tactical Publication 3-30D (2023). This article offers a comprehensive understanding of the subject and its relevance to the Marine Corps. It does so by tracing the significance of spirituality in these documents back through Marine Corps history to Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune's famous statement, "There is no substitute for the spiritual in war." As such, the article systematically reviews the importance of spirituality through the statements of famed Marine Corps commandants, other revered Marine Corps leaders, as well as celebrated military leaders, noted military strategists, and philosophers. In so doing, it emphasizes the necessity of operationalizing spiritual fitness at the unit level to improve military personnel's overall health and readiness. To this end, recent scholarship validates the importance of spirituality and spiritual fitness, supporting what many military commanders have always believed about the need for spiritual fitness. As such, the article highlights how command leadership can effectively build character and achieve this result by operationalizing spiritual fitness at the unit level in order to "enter the temple of Mars," if called on to do so. The article concludes by acknowledging that clinical evidence and practical military wisdom validate the crucial importance of spiritual fitness in character development, military readiness, and battlefield victory.

Keywords: spiritual fitness, religion, warfare, character development, resiliency, leadership, chaplaincy

Introduction

For nearly a century, Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune's famous assertion, "There is no substitute for the spiritual in war," has been a summation of the collective knowledge and intuitive understanding of leaders regarding the importance of spirituality in the U.S. Marine Corps.¹ This powerful assertion rightly acknowledges the vital role that the spiritual plays on the battlefield due to its impact on character, readiness, and resiliency, both individually as Marines and collectively as a Corps.² Likewise, Lejeune's statement resonates within the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps. The Navy's current chief of chaplains, Rear Admiral Gregory N. Todd, affirms this essential point, stating that "[t]he Marine Corps has a history of considering the role of the spiritual in conflict going back to General John Lejeune."³

The Chaplain Corps connects with Lejeune's statement by building spiritual readiness.⁴ Todd affirms that "[t]he overarching purpose of the Navy Chaplain Corps, our 'why,' is to build the Spiritual Readiness of warfighters and their families for the rigors of military service. . . . Spiritual Readiness contributes to making the force and families more agile and adaptive, strong and resilient for the challenges we face."⁵ To this end, retired Rear Admiral Terry W. Eddinger, the Navy's deputy chief of chaplains for reserve matters, explains that:

Spiritual readiness is the strength of spirit that enables the warfighter to accomplish the mission with honor. It is the strength of spirit that helps a person get through adversity and stress with the ability to keep on going. This is developed through a personal connection to a Higher Power and through the pursuit of meaning, purpose, values, connections to the sacred, and sacrificial service.⁶

Accordingly, this article explores the impact of Lieutenant General Lejeune's statement on spirituality to determine its impact on Marine Corps leaders and its influence within the institution today. To this end, the first section of the article examines spirituality in the Marine Corps. It contextualizes the importance of spirituality in a review of declarations on spirituality and religion by some of the most eminent commandants of the Marine Corps, beginning with one of the most influential leathernecks of all time, Lejeune. Context is provided by examining the importance of spirituality in the Marine Corps since Lejeune. This is done by reviewing declarations on spirituality and religion by other influential Marine Corps leaders, including General Holland M. Smith and Lieutenant General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller. The article also examines the thoughts of other renowned U.S. military leaders on the matter throughout history, including U.S. Army generals George C. Marshall Jr. and George S. Patton, as well as military strategists such as Carl von Clausewitz, Napoléon Bonaparte, and the preeminent military philosopher in the U.S. Department of the Navy (DON), Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale.

After examining the historical connection of "spiritual fitness" to a number of Marine Corps commandants and other military leaders and strategists, the section concludes with a brief synopsis of three commandants' All Marine Corps Activities (ALMAR) on spiritual fitness and two Marine Corps publications concerning spiritual fitness.⁷ These documents are grounded in the experiences and verbal testimonies of leaders at the highest level of the Marine Corps who emphasize the critical importance of spirituality to enhance resiliency and readiness in the age of expeditionary advanced

base operations (EABO).⁸ Having established the vital importance of spirituality within the Marine Corps to continue to win battles today and in the future, the second section of the article provides clinical evidence supporting spirituality's importance in winning wars. This section demonstrates the positive impacts of spiritual fitness, including on mental health.⁹ Spiritual fitness acts as a force multiplier and positively influences individual Marines and units, increasing readiness for the fight.

The article's third section moves to operationalize spiritual fitness at the unit level. The section opens by answering the "so what?" of spiritual fitness. The second part moves to discussing the chaplain as a 360-degree spiritual fitness leader. The third part provides the framework for success, by leveraging the chaplain for positive command outcomes. Finally, the last part represents "entering the temple of Mars" by means of training scenarios and, as such, serves to model physical training (PT) as a mechanism to operationalize spiritual fitness as an advantage in the twenty-first century.¹⁰ Importantly, this last part is a bridge to the article's appendix, which contains four PT scenarios that can be used "as is" (plug and play) or adjusted and modified to the preference of the PT instructor and the needs of the command. The PT sessions present different scenarios with integrated spiritual fitness lessons from combat leaders who epitomize a warrior-scholar (scenario 1: resiliency); a selfless modern hero (scenario 2: sacrifice for the greater good); the timeless wisdom of the ancients (scenario 3: character development); and understanding the reality of warfare (scenario 4: understanding moral injury).

A simple yet profound point is conveyed in situating these spiritual fitness scenarios within the symbolic imagery of the temple of Mars. In

essence, Marines enter the sacred temple of Mars, where they act as gods by taking life. At the same time, their own lives may be seized from them. While the Marine Corps teaches Marines how to kill, it does not truly teach Marines how to deal with the psychological and spiritual aspects of killing people. The included PT scenarios are intended to deal with the spiritual elements inherent to the Marine Corps, thereby increasing the spiritual fitness of individuals and the unit. By incorporating these PT scenarios, commanders will begin to prepare Marines spiritually for conflict. By doing so, they are operationalizing spiritual fitness within their units and aligning with Lieutenant General Lejeune's assertion that there is no substitute for the spiritual in war. The article concludes by acknowledging that clinical evidence and practical military wisdom validate the crucial importance of spiritual fitness in character development, military readiness, and battlefield victory.

There Is No Substitute for the Spiritual in War

Spiritual Fitness in the Marine Corps

Mark R. Folse writes that Lieutenant General Lejeune "considered the Marine Corps a warfighting establishment and an institution that elevated Americans' lives through healthy living, education, and the inculcation of military virtues."¹¹ In his memoir, Lejeune poignantly recognizes the significance of spirituality. "I often wonder," he writes, "why the religious side of the soldiers' lives is not more often described. Surely it is a theme worthy of the genius of those having the gift of expressing beautiful thoughts in exquisite poetry or in noble prose."¹² Lejeune's thoughts on spirituality are still relevant today, as the Marine Corps acknowledges through recent ALMARs and two 2023

publications that spiritual fitness contributes to the warrior ethos and is a crucial component of combat success as the age of EABO dawns.¹³

In the age of EABO and distributed operations, spirituality has become more prominent in achieving victory on the battlefield and extends beyond Lejeune into the modern era of force design.¹⁴ Many great leaders, including eminent Commandants of the Marine Corps, have recognized this fact. To this end, the term *spiritual fitness* has gained currency within the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in the past two decades, and it allows for a broader construct of spirituality that includes religion, philosophy, and other nondeity understandings. The terminology also allows spirituality to fit alongside the other components of health, such as mental and physical fitness. Accordingly, in 2011 the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael G. Mullen, published the *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*, formalizing an approach in which spirituality was identified as one of the domains of fitness.¹⁵ This framework created the overall approach to fitness within the DOD, which the individual Service branches have tailored to their communities. In 2016, the then-Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert B. Neller, responded with *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 033/16.¹⁶ In 2020, his successor, General David H. Berger, followed up with *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 027/20.¹⁷ The current commandant, General Eric M. Smith, has since followed up with *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 020/24, in 2024.¹⁸

It is significant that three successive Marine Corps Commandants published ALMARs on the importance of this issue. This clearly signals the level of importance they see spiritual fitness having to the Corps. Additionally, the ALMARs serve as a prelude to the most recent doctrinal and tactical publications on the subject, both updated in 2023: *Spiritual Fitness Leader's*

Guide, Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 6-10.1, and *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, Marine Corps Tactical Publication (MCTP) 3-30D.¹⁹ The ALMARs and these publications represent the Marine Corps' authoritative position on spiritual fitness: it is a vital resiliency factor that builds character and instills core values while optimizing readiness as a twenty-first-century military advantage.²⁰

With the initiation of *Force Design 2030*, the Marine Corps is currently strategically reposturing due to heightened tension in the Pacific region, with China identified as the prime national security challenge facing the United States. The effort is underway to make the Marine Corps "into a more agile, technologically advanced force, prioritizing stand-in forces, littoral operations, modernization, force sizing and composition, training, and international cooperation."²¹ However, if military conflict erupts in the region, it could be horrifically bloody, with the United States and its main ally, Japan, likely to lose "thousands of servicemembers, dozens of ships, and hundreds of aircraft" in the first few days.²² Marines will be fighting on the front lines. Author Karl Marlantes wrote about the need to prepare for the temple of Mars in his 2011 book, *What It Is Like to Go to War*. He observes that:

Our young warriors are raised in possibly the only culture on the planet that thinks death is [merely] an option. Given this, it is no surprise that not only they but many of their ostensible religious guides . . . enter the temple of Mars unprepared. Not only is such comfort too often delusional; it tends to numb one to spiritual reality and growth. Far worse, it has serious psychological and behavioral consequences.²³

Operationalizing spiritual fitness at the unit level prepares Marines to enter the temple of Mars, as it addresses key aspects that are unique to military service and prepares Marines to successfully manage them.

Commandants, Military Strategists, and Philosophers

The Marine Corps has emphasized the importance of spiritual fitness for Marines in the twenty-first century and beyond. The 2023 doctrinal and tactical publications, along with the 2016, 2020, and 2024 ALMARs from three successive Commandants, highlight the significance of spirituality, religion, and spiritual fitness. Indeed, these official pronouncements tie into the DNA of the Marine Corps, reflecting the views of a long line of revered Commandants, including Lieutenant General Lejeune, General Alexander A. Vandegrift, General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., General Paul X. Kelley, and General Charles C. Krulak, as well as other esteemed leaders such as General Holland Smith and Lieutenant General Puller. The current spiritual fitness messages from Generals Neller, Berger, and Smith also align with the sentiments of other celebrated U.S. military leaders, such as U.S. Army generals Marshall, Patton, and John W. Hendrix, as well as other military geniuses, strategists, and philosophers such as Clausewitz, Bonaparte, and Stockdale.²⁴

Considering this list of luminaries, a review of the ALMARs described above begins with Lieutenant General Lejeune, who nearly a hundred years ago stated an obvious sentiment of those who have experienced battle: “There is no substitute for the spiritual in war. Miracles must be wrought if victories are to be won, and to work miracles, men’s hearts must be afire with self-sacrificing love for each other, for their units, for their division, and for

their country.”²⁵ Lejeune rightly acknowledged that the path to victory is never easy, especially during war. It takes great courage, determination, and a deep sense of spirituality to endure its rigors. Lejeune also understood all too well that in times of war, the spiritual provides the strength to overcome the most difficult challenges involving the mind, body, and soul as a commander.

Lejeune spoke of the support he received from his faith and his reliance on God during World War I, when he led the U.S. Army’s 2d Division in France:

All the senior officers of the Division came in to congratulate me. I don’t feel at all elated, but I am sobered by the task before me, the necessity of making good, the responsibility for the well-being and the lives of 28,000 officers and men, and, greatest of all, the facts that my acts may in some critical moment have a decisive effect in winning or losing a battle. Every night of my life, I pray to God to take from my heart all thought of self or personal advancement, and to make me able to do my full duty as a man and as a General towards my men and my country.²⁶

According to Lejeune, spirituality is a vital principle that can help one bear the burden of leadership. It is a critical foundation that allows leaders to remain resilient in the face of adversity and make wise decisions while managing the burden of leadership with thousands of lives on the line. Lejeune exemplifies the fact that by nurturing spirituality, leaders can handle overwhelming burdens and inspire those around them to band together in the effort to overcome all adversity and complete the mission with honor.

The words of General Vandegrift, the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps and a recipient of the Medal of Honor, still hold true today. As the

commanding general of the newly formed 1st Marine Division in early 1942, he observed that:

[T]he percentage of men who devoted much time to religion might not make a very impressive showing. The average Marine, or Soldier, or sailor, is not demonstrative about his religion, any more than he is about his patriotism. But I do sincerely believe one thing; every man on Guadalcanal came to sense a “Power” above himself. There was a reality there greater than any human force. It is literally true—there are not atheists in foxholes—religion is precious under fire.²⁷

General Shepherd, the 20th Commandant of the Marine Corps, had an unshakable faith in God and the value of religion. He strongly advocated for the presence of chaplains in the U.S. military, recognizing the tremendous impact that they could have on the mental and emotional well-being of his personnel. His conviction about the importance of military chaplains was unwavering, and he firmly believed that chaplains were essential to maintaining the strength and resiliency of the force. He shared this notion by stating:

I felt very strongly about the spiritual. I felt that we needed the help of the Almighty to carry us on in this war. . . . The fact that we had landed [on Guam during World War II] on Easter Sunday morning had somewhat of a spiritual effect, and I felt that it was only with God’s help that we were able to overcome the adversities with which we were faced. Being a religious man myself, I gave full support in every possible way to my chaplains. I attended services regularly. I always supported

my chaplains and addressed a chaplains' convention in Chicago after the war.²⁸

Shepherd's words on God and religion were nothing short of profound. His insight sheds great light on the importance of spiritual fitness and how spirituality—to include faith and religion as it intersects with chaplains—ultimately guides Marines and the Corps through the darkest of times. He explained:

In battle is when men need spiritual help. In combat there is only one person who can help you and that is God. I recall distinctly during the battle for Guam—I think it was near the close of the campaign—when I was returning from a visit with the troops. I came to a gathering of men in a clearing in a dump of woods and I stopped to see what was going on there. The men were from the 4th Marines and they were having a service. The men had asked the chaplain if he would conduct this service, to thank Almighty God for the victory they had attained during the past several days.²⁹

As stated, Shepherd was a firm believer in the importance of chaplains, and he held them to high standards. He clearly conveyed his thoughts and expectations to all the new chaplains checking into his division. In no uncertain terms, Shepherd emphasized that he wanted his chaplains to be close to the front lines with his Marines during battles rather than staying behind in the command post, where they would be relatively safer. In this way, the chaplains were close to the troops, providing them with spiritual solace and support at every moment when they needed it, where they needed

it, and how they needed it. By being where the action was, the chaplain had a significant impact on the well-being of Marines and helped boost their morale. According to Shepherd:

As a whole, I impressed upon the chaplains to get up there close to the fighting. . . . A chaplain was just one of the command. Therefore, they had to be in physical and mental condition to march and to see men die and to carry on their religious devotions in the field which was foreign to many who had only been in some little parish where all they had to do was to call on their parishioners and preach a sermon.³⁰

During an interview, General Kelley, the 28th Commandant of the Marine Corps who oversaw the Service during a critical period of tragedy and rebuilding after the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, was asked about his faith and how it related to his duties as a Marine. In response, he gave a deeply insightful response that highlights the importance of how his Catholic faith guided his actions and decisions during his darkest days. Contemporary leaders are reminded of his example to expressly recognize how their own faith can be a powerful force for character and values. He stated:

One should never confuse “faith” as exclusively related to religion. I view it in a much broader context. In that regard, let me make two points. First, I do not and never have worn my religious beliefs on my sleeve. I am an orthodox and devout Christian who believes that actions prove more than words. Second, almost six decades ago I took a solemn oath to support and defend our Constitution—a document which clearly delineates the separation of church and state. From the beginning of my service to our country, I have been influenced by the

teachings of the Augustinian Fathers of Villanova University—that the two most important words in life, regardless of one’s religion, are honesty and integrity. For without a strict adherence to both, everything else becomes hollow to meaningless. So, rather than talking about “faith” in a religious context, I prefer to think about my personal adherence to “standards of right behavior.” . . . It is fitting, I believe, that for 230 years Marines have been influenced and motivated by two simple Latin words—Semper Fidelis—Always Faithful. So, when I think of “faith” I also think of “faithful” and then ask: “Wouldn’t it be a wonderful world if each of us were Semper Fidelis to a God of our choosing, to our beloved nation, to our family, and to each other?”³¹

General Krulak, the esteemed 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, was an exceptional leader who believed in the power of faith and its ability to shape character. He was known for his unwavering belief in God, as someone who acknowledged the significant role that his Christian faith played in his life individually and as a Marine Corps leader. With his open and honest approach, he emphasized the importance of his faith and religion in shaping his character and leadership style, as well as his resulting philosophy as the commandant of the Marine Corps. He enjoyed great respect for his leadership style from both his peers and subordinates, who appreciated his unwavering dedication to excellence and his capacity to motivate others to do the same and live virtuously. His remarkable dedication to his faith and his exemplary service as a Marine personified the timeless values of honor, courage, and commitment that the Marine Corps holds dear. He stated:

My belief in the Living God played a significant role in my life as a Marine. I became a Christian while attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and from that moment on, Christ played a major role in almost every decision I made . . . as a husband, father, and Marine officer. The more senior I became, the more time I spent on my knees. I did NOT pray for Chuck Krulak . . . I prayed for those in the Chain of Command, I prayed for wisdom in making decisions, I prayed for my Marines, and I prayed for the Marine Corps. I did not evangelize, but I was not afraid to let people know where I stood regarding my religion. . . . I am not ashamed about that fact. Knowing all of the living Commandants, I am convinced that each of them shared a deep sense of faith and that my beliefs were not unique.³²

Krulak believed that his religious faith and belief in God were essential components of leading Marines. It not only gave him a sense of greater purpose but also connected him with the transcendent and the core values of the Marine Corps. As a result, he found the inner strength to inspire and guide his troops with unwavering conviction throughout all manner of difficulty. His form of spiritual fitness is found within the DNA of the Marine Corps, connecting with Lejeune. Appropriately, Krulak noted:

Survival is not enough. You don't fight just to survive. You fight for a purpose, and the purpose probably has some emotion as well as realism in it, and you know that the odds of survival are something less than 100 percent, and that there has to be a Providence that helps to make the decision that will preserve you and those around you. If you regard it as a mechanical product of learning all about the profession

and just being able, as setting up a computer program, to turn on the current and press a few buttons to get it started, then the whole emotion of being a commander is lost. You might just as well have a computer for a commander, to make your decisions.³³

Lieutenant General Puller was one of the most decorated and esteemed leaders in the history of the Marine Corps. He adds to this impressive list of Marine leaders whose stories relate to faith, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs. His five Navy Crosses attest to his extraordinary bravery and gallantry in action.³⁴ While not openly religious, Puller believed that holding divine services on the front lines was essential. Those religious services, he felt, provided much-needed spiritual support to those who sought it. He was so passionate about this belief that it was said he would sooner give the services himself than not have any.³⁵

Spirituality is also indispensable to the other U.S. military Services, not just the Marine Corps. The World War II-era U.S. Army chief of staff, General Marshall, firmly held this conviction as well. He expressly believed that a soldier's heart, spirit, and soul were crucial to the war effort. Accordingly, he stated, "The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul, are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end."³⁶ In addition, another great luminary, General Patton, who commanded the U.S. Third Army during World War II, believed that wars were not won by weapons but by the spirit of the men who fought them. As such, he averred, "Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of the men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory."³⁷

In the end, those among the most esteemed leaders in the history of the Marine Corps—as well as that of the other U.S. Services—confirm and assure that the soldier’s heart, spirit, and soul are paramount to any war effort. These perennial warfighting traits need to be sustained to achieve victory in battle. In the more recent past, General Hendrix, a highly respected US. Army leader who commanded the U.S. Army Forces Command from 1999 to 2001, eloquently described the modern concept of spiritual fitness and how it fits into warfighting. His insights shed light on the impact of spiritual fitness on character development and its role within the modern military:

Spirituality is an individual matter. We must not cross the line between church and state. But in general, spiritual fitness is important to any organization. Spiritual fitness helps shape and mold our character. Spiritual fitness provides each of us with the personal qualities which enable us to withstand difficulties and hardship. When properly exercised, spiritual fitness enhances individual pride in our unit.³⁸

In sum, many of the greatest Marine Corps leaders, as well as great thinkers both inside and outside the Corps, have recognized that spiritual fitness and spirituality are key elements of success. Without a doubt, spiritual fitness is the animating force that drives Marines to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles.

Other venerated military commanders and thinkers throughout history have also recognized spirituality as the animating force essential for success. Clausewitz, for example, recognized the moral (spiritual) elements, arguing that they were:

[T]he most important in war. They constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole. . . . Unfortunately, they will not yield to academic wisdom. They cannot be classified or counted. They have to be seen or felt. . . . Consequently, though next to nothing can be said about these things in books, they can no more be omitted from the theory of the art of war than can any of the other components of war. . . . One might say that the physical [components] seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.³⁹

Similarly, Napoléon is famously quoted as saying, “In war, moral factors account for three-quarters of the whole; relative material strength accounts for only one quarter.”⁴⁰ Beyond this, Michael J. Regner writes, “either directly or indirectly, all of the notable philosophers and theorists of war . . . have addressed these factors in war.” Ultimately, many esteemed military leaders throughout history agree that the spiritual component of fitness should not be underestimated in its importance.⁴¹

For his part, Vice Admiral Stockdale, a celebrated patriot and warrior-scholar, is the greatest of DON philosophers in his own right. He described himself as a “philosophical fighter pilot” in his 1995 book *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*.⁴² Set against the backdrop of the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” prison in North Vietnam, where he was held captive for 7.5 years during the Vietnam War, Stockdale delved into a range of topics, including character, integrity, leadership, and virtue. Firmly grounded in the ethics of the ancients and stoic philosophy, Stockdale emphasized the importance of maintaining one’s dignity while facing all forms of adversity. It was in this

brutal setting in Hanoi that he practiced his spiritual beliefs daily. As rightly acknowledged, those years at the Hanoi Hilton were pivotal, with a Naval War College commentator acknowledging, “This is Stoicism in practice, not just in theory. It is living philosophy, not just teaching it. This is applied ethics, not merely ethics in theory.”⁴³ Stockdale’s is a life and legacy worth remembering, and his belief system is one that is incredibly important to inject into the bloodstream of the Navy and Marine Corps in the present day.

Lejeune to the Present: ALMARs 033/16, 027/20, and 020/24

The ALMARs on spiritual fitness issued during Generals Neller, Berger, and Smith’s commandancies are essential to understanding the current emphasis on spirituality within the Marine Corps. They connect to Lieutenant General Lejeune and tap into the Corps’ spiritual DNA. The ALMARs affirm the importance of spirituality in achieving victory in battle, aligning with the long-held beliefs of many celebrated military leaders, strategists, and philosophers. They highlight how spiritual fitness can serve as a guiding force in times of conflict and hardship, empowering individuals with the necessary strength and resilience to overcome extreme challenges and emerge victorious. To this end, in *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 033/16, General Neller states that spiritual fitness plays a critical role in Marines’ resiliency, growth, development, recovery, healing, and adaptation. Regardless of an individual’s beliefs or philosophy, Neller argues that spiritual well-being helps Marines be better warriors and people of character who are capable of making good choices both on and off duty.⁴⁴

For his part, General Berger also emphasizes in *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 027/20, the importance of faith, values, and moral living in the

Marine Corps culture of fitness, affirming the responsibility of leaders at every level to communicate this message.⁴⁵ Berger recognizes that spiritual fitness is often underemphasized in comparison to physical, mental, and social fitness and therefore remains “largely within the undercurrents of knowledge and concern among senior officers. The result has been a dearth of any meaningful discussion, let alone purposeful installation in any material way, at the individual or unit level in the Navy and Marine Corps.”⁴⁶

Sensing this disconnect, Berger asserts that spiritual fitness is just as critical in building character and readiness and instilling core values in every Marine and sailor. He notes that character development and spiritual fitness are the keys to strengthening the collective warfighting spirit in the Marine Corps.⁴⁷ He concludes that spiritual fitness aligns with his strategic outlook, urging leaders to serve as role models for their subordinates while “championing” efforts to instill spiritual fitness “in order to advance character development across the Marine Corps and in support of [the *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*].”⁴⁸

In a similar vein, General Smith follows suit with Generals Neller and Berger in *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 020/24, asserting the importance of spiritual fitness. Smith begins by directly connecting the current concept of spiritual fitness within the Marine Corps to Lieutenant General Lejeune, noting that:

Since our founding, General Lejeune and Marine Corps leaders have placed a high priority on the spiritual strength of Marines and Sailors to overcome the hardships of war. Decades ago, our Marine Corps codified the Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The third Core Value charges leaders with caring for the “personal and spiritual wellbeing of their people.” Today, Marine Corps Total Fitness

requires us to be physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually fit. Focusing on these four areas is integral to the warfighter's capacity to carry out the mission in peace and in conflict.⁴⁹

Importantly, Smith argues that spiritual fitness is inner strength from a higher purpose and adds that "[w]hile grit and determination are crucial, Marines and Sailors find greater strength from looking beyond themselves to higher, more enduring sources of meaning and purpose. We need something greater than self alone to meet the challenges of the 'decisive decade' before us."⁵⁰ Paraphrasing the rest of his ALMAR, he notes that spiritual fitness encompasses a wide range of religious and nonreligious sources and practices aimed at strengthening one's inner self. Examples include religious faith, community, the pursuit of meaning and significance, values and character development, and shared sacrifice for the greater good. Those who participate in character formation demonstrate higher education outcomes, self-discipline, and integrity. Spiritual fitness reinforces and sustains resilience and readiness across many areas.⁵¹

Lejeune to the Present: MCRP 6-10.1 and MCTP 3-30D

Lieutenant General Lejeune's stance on the vital role of spirituality within the Marine Corps is not only reflected in the recent ALMARs. Various orders, military research, and tactical publications also align institutionally with Lejeune's views. For instance, *Marine Leader Development*, Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.61, specifically delineated *spiritual health* among the functional areas for character development in the Marine Corps.⁵² The order states that leaders are to focus training and their coaching/counseling sessions on

“fitness,” which includes “[p]hysical, mental, spiritual, and social health and well-being.”⁵³ By order, leaders are not to shy away from the topic of spiritual fitness; rather, they are told to prioritize spiritual engagement to ensure that Marines are at their best and most resilient, ready to execute the most arduous tasks and recover in the shortest time possible.⁵⁴ Both *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide* and *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps* align with Lejeune as well.

Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide, MCRP 6-10.1

Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide is an invaluable resource for all Marines and is designed to promote spiritual fitness and its importance in warfighting.⁵⁵ The leader’s guide is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 defines spiritual fitness and frames it with guidance from Generals Neller, Burger, and Smith in the form of their three ALMARS. This chapter sets the foundation for the MCRP by defining spiritual fitness and its role in Marine leader development. It also provides guidance on how to achieve spiritual fitness, as well as the importance of spiritual fitness in combat situations. Chapter 2 delves deeper into establishing a strong spiritual foundation. It covers both tangible and intangible factors and how they can impact spiritual fitness. By understanding these factors, Marines can develop a strong spiritual foundation that will benefit them in all aspects of their lives. Chapter 3 focuses on self-assessment. It provides insight into the self-assessment process, exercises to determine one’s fitness level, and how to improve spiritual well-being.⁵⁶

Chapter 4 examines common challenges, available resources, and misconceptions related to spiritual fitness. It also discusses moral injury, seeking help, and suicide prevention. By addressing these challenges,

Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide helps Marines overcome obstacles and achieve spiritual fitness. Chapter 5 provides leadership considerations, including the use of stories to lead spiritual fitness discussions. It also outlines how leaders can lead such discussions effectively to help their Marines develop and maintain spiritual well-being. Chapter 6 discusses how spiritual fitness integrates with other fitness domains, such as physical, mental, and social fitness. By understanding how spiritual fitness intersects with these other domains, Marines can develop a holistic approach to well-being.⁵⁷ Ultimately, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide* is an essential resource for all Marines. By promoting spiritual fitness and providing guidance and resources on how to achieve it, it helps Marines become better warriors, leaders, and individuals. As such, *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide* complements *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, which is examined next.

Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps, MCTP 3-30D

U.S. Navy captain Michael D. Brown, delivers a compelling foreword in *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*. His remarks illustrate the importance of this document in guiding the religious practices of the Marine Corps. Brown notes that it provides:

[A] broad overview of religious ministry in the Marine Corps. It applies to any religious ministry team serving with Marines, including operational units at sea or on land, and those providing ministry on installations. The expectations outlined in this publication give commanders what they can anticipate from the chaplains, religious program specialists, and others who support the command religious program. It provides the necessary tools that can enhance the spiritual

fitness and resilience of Marines, Sailors, families, and other authorized users.⁵⁸

Rear Admiral Carey H. Cash, the twenty-first chaplain of the Marine Corps and deputy chief of Navy chaplains, amplifies the importance of Brown's message, stating:

Chaplains and religious program specialists provide comprehensive command religious programs of the highest quality to Marines, Sailors and their families. From combat against the Barbary Pirates in the early 1800s to our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Navy chaplains and religious program specialists have strengthened the souls of Marines. This publication describes the expectations of Professional Naval Chaplaincy and how the Navy Chaplain Corps provides religious ministry within the Marine Corps.⁵⁹

Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps consists of five chapters, each of which covers a particular aspect of the Chaplain Corps' role in delivering spiritual readiness in the Marine Corps. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the mission of the Chaplain Corps, as well as the laws, policies, and regulations that govern its work. It also covers the role of the Religious Ministry Team. Chapter 2 discusses the four core capabilities of the Chaplain Corps: provision, facilitation, care, and advisement. Chapter 3 focuses on the administration of the command religious program. Chapter 4 discusses the expectations for expeditionary religious ministry. It covers topics such as cooperative ministry, ministry during the workup phase, and appropriate ministry at the various levels of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF),

from the battalion/squadron level to supervisory and senior supervisory levels). It also includes a review of the MAGTF ministry on amphibious ships. Finally, Chapter 5 provides extensive guidance on training and resource support, providing insight into how the Chaplain Corps is trained and equipped to support the Marine Corps.⁶⁰

The ultimate goal of these two publications can be distilled into this quote in *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, which encapsulates the broad scope and significance of the work at hand:

General Lejeune's words articulate the affects a spiritually fit Marine or Sailor can have on warfighting and mission accomplishment. There is a spiritual component to the conduct of war, and the Marine or Sailor who is willing to engage in the intangible dimensions of humanity will be the one who is able to demonstrate the spiritual dimension that General Lejeune describes as having no substitute. Leaders who ensure the spiritual readiness of their Marines and Sailors for the conduct of warfighting can better prepare them for the future operating environment.⁶¹

Clinical Research: Demonstrating that the Spiritual Is to the Material as Three or Even Four Is to One

This section presents compelling clinical research that highlights the essential role that spiritual fitness has in promoting human flourishing, which includes the development of one's character, fostering close social relationships, and finding purpose in life. As the data demonstrates, this, in turn, helps improve the overall fitness of the force, leading to increased readiness among Marines and bolstering their determination to fight, both as individuals and as a unit.

Accordingly, this section centers on relaying empirical evidence that demonstrates the positive impact of spirituality, to include religion specifically, on nearly all aspects of health, which can be a decisive factor for warfighters in both garrison and combat conditions.

For example, in a 2010 *Military Medicine* article entitled “Spiritual Fitness,” David J. Hufford, Matthew J. Fritts, and Jeffrey E. Rhodes examined the effects of spirituality on various health-related categories and its potential advantages for military personnel. Notably, the study showed that spiritual fitness had positive outcomes in four key areas for military personnel: resilience and recovery from trauma related to deployment and combat; optimized prevention and/or resolution of moral injury; cohesive unit climate supportive of peak performance; and mature and engaged spirituality that fosters finding meaning and purpose and effective coping.⁶² To arrive at their conclusions, the authors referenced Harold G. Koenig, Dana E. King, and Verna B. Carson’s *Handbook of Religion and Health*, which performed a meta-analysis of 1,200 studies to demonstrate empirically the positive outcomes of spiritual and religious factors (i.e., spiritual fitness) on positive outcomes in individuals.⁶³ According to the research, an increase in spirituality or religion is associated with a statistically significant decrease in suicidality and depression as well as an increase in marital stability. Furthermore, 86 percent of clinical studies found a decrease in anxiety as a result of religious practices.⁶⁴

A key takeaway is that Koenig, King, and Carson’s studies strongly correlate the practice of religion as a key to these results. This suggests, at the very least, that Marines’ religious beliefs strongly connect to the Marine Corps’ recognition of the power of spiritual fitness. Leaders should not shy away

from their own religion but should acknowledge its powerful influence on virtuous behavior. To this end, leaders should lead by example, carrying the weight of their responsibility as owners of spiritual fitness, and attend religious services of their choice, even during exercises, whenever possible. Marine Corps leaders should support and value religion and spiritual fitness as much as Lejeune, Vandegrift, Shepherd, Kelley, Krulak, and Puller.

Hufford, Fritts, and Rhodes also examined the influence that religion had on destructive behaviors. This topic is certainly of great importance to Marine Corps leaders, as destructive behavior occupies a great deal of their time and attention.⁶⁵ Therefore, leaders at all levels should note that according to 76 of 86 clinical studies (88 percent), religious-based practices resulted in reduced alcohol use and significantly less substance abuse in 48 of 52 studies (92 percent).⁶⁶ The bottom line is that the available data indicates that religious-based spirituality can significantly impact a positive command climate.

Understandably, the DOD began to take note of the data showing the correlation between spirituality and increased virtuous behavior as well as reduced destructive behaviors. Consequently, in 2011, the concept of spiritual fitness was formalized with the publication of the *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*. This framework provided the DOD with a construct for understanding, assessing, and sustaining the holistic well-being of servicemembers to ensure the successful accomplishment of their missions.⁶⁷ As such, the framework identified eight domains contributing to wellness, specifically identifying and including the *spiritual* domain as an important factor in promoting and preserving well-being.⁶⁸

With the publication of the *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*, and considering the emergent clinical data from meta-analysis research on spirituality and religion, Marine Corps leaders began to engage on the topic. This led to the publication of the three ALMARs by Generals Neller, Berger, and Smith, as well as *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide* and *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, as discussed above. All of these publications extoll the importance of spiritual fitness on character development and other positive outcomes. At the same time, additional research continues to support these efforts with regard to spiritual fitness, including an increasing number of articles published by servicemembers in military journals.⁶⁹

On the civilian side, Harold G. Koenig, Lindsay B. Carey, and Faten Al Zaben's 2022 publication, *Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains*, argues that while great emphasis is placed on military readiness in terms of munitions platforms and technology, too little attention is paid to the readiness of military personnel, or *warrior readiness*. The authors argue that members of the U.S. military and their allies must prioritize the development and maintenance of spiritual fitness, as it affects all other aspects of warrior readiness, including the psychological, social, behavioral, and physical domains. In other words, spiritual fitness not only contributes to warriors' psychological, social, behavioral, and physical well-being but it also plays a vital role in enhancing their overall readiness, resilience, and effectiveness in completing the mission. In the end, spiritual fitness is the strength of spirit that enables the warfighter to accomplish the mission with honor. Using a meta-analysis of available quantitative studies, the authors conclude that religious practice promotes character, virtue, and meaning in life.⁷⁰

Religious practice also has an effect on destructive behaviors, including suicidality. *Suicidality* is defined by the American Psychological Association as “the risk of suicide, usually indicated by suicidal ideation or intent, especially as evident in the presence of a well-elaborated suicidal plan.”⁷¹ Marine Corps leaders certainly rank suicide as one of their top concerns. After a systematic review of 141 quantitative studies, 75 percent of the studies revealed “fewer suicidal thoughts, attempts, or completions” among people with religious/spiritual involvement.⁷² Regarding depression, 272 of 444 of the quantitative studies (61 percent) identified less depression and a “faster recovery” from depression by those who incorporated religious/spiritual-based practices.⁷³ A 2020 Rand study, *Comparing the Army’s Suicide Rate to the General U.S. Population*, confirmed that during the past 15 years, the suicide rate among U.S. military servicemembers has increased, with the greatest increase observed among soldiers in the Army.⁷⁴ However, wellness has not appreciably improved despite the vast resources that the DOD has poured into programs for fighting suicide, sexual assault, and other destructive behaviors that result in Uniform Code of Military Justice violations. It seems clear that more focus and effort on spiritual fitness are needed if unit leaders are serious about minimizing destructive behaviors. In other words, it is evident that a heightened emphasis on spiritual fitness is crucial for unit leaders aiming to mitigate destructive behaviors.

To examine to what degree Marine Corps commanders actually implement or engage religion or spirituality in any meaningful way at the unit level, Daigle and Goff conducted a survey of five squadron commanding officers and five sergeants major stationed with Marine Aircraft Group 29

(MAG-29) at Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina, in 2020.⁷⁵ In the survey, the authors note that:

While many of the respondents were not familiar with ALMAR 033/16 [*Spiritual Fitness*] or MCTP 3-30D [*Religious Ministry in the Marine Corps*], the importance of spirituality and the Chaplain Corps was evident in their responses and reflections [based] on personal experiences. All respondents were combat veterans with near or over 20 years of service. Their responses highlight three important aspects of spirituality as it relates to resiliency and individual well-being. First, spirituality enables [Marines] to “find inner peace and our sense of purpose in life.” In the military context, this sense of purpose originates from personal belief and allows Marines to focus on the unit’s mission rather than on the personal stress, danger, or discomfort inherent in combat. Second, the respondents identified that, through spiritual fitness, Marines are better able to cope with combat because “[a] spiritually fit Marine is better capable of adapting to the rapidly changing environment of combat due to their foundation in personal beliefs.” This adaptability breeds resilience that enables Marines to perform in rapidly changing environments fraught with potential danger, incomplete information, and the challenges of leading people during times of considerable stress. Last, many of the respondents recognized spirituality as a necessary bridge between their personal beliefs and the USMC’s values of honor, courage, and commitment. They recognized the ability to uphold both personal and organizational values as vital to their ability to lead others through challenging situations.⁷⁶

Although this study had a small sample size and was nonclinical, the survey results likely reflect the general understanding of spiritual fitness by senior officers and enlisted members in the Marine Corps. First, it reveals a concerning lack of awareness among some Marine Corps leaders regarding the Commandants' ALMARs or any of the Corps' publications on spirituality. For example, in this survey, the respondents had a combined length of military service of more than 120 years. Despite this, not one of MAG-29's squadron's commanding officers or sergeants major had heard of or read General Neller's 2016 ALMAR on spiritual fitness. Moreover, they were unaware of any Marine Corps publications or Navy instructions intersecting with spirituality. Despite this, all respondents were intuitively aware and deeply mindful of the vital importance of spiritual fitness in their own lives and in that of their Marines. They were also fundamentally and instinctually aware of the impact of spirituality on the well-being of their Marines individually and the cohesiveness and esprit de corps of their unit. As one squadron commander stated, "I find it difficult to believe that a Marine lacking a spiritual foundation will be prepared to uphold our Corps' values in difficult times."⁷⁷

The MAG-29 survey results show that spiritual fitness operates under the surface at the unit level, is only vestigially alive within units, and is not institutionally engaged or implemented in any meaningful way. As a result, destructive behaviors abound. With regard to persistent destructive behaviors in the military, Rear Admiral Cash suggests that this is reflective of institutional paralysis. He explains:

The Navy's typical response to behavioral problems facing Sailors is to launch top-down training initiatives supported by robust budgets, highly-advertised campaigns, and mandatory dates by which commands must be trained. These campaigns are *capital-ship* programs in the truest sense. They are backed by the concentrated firepower of naval leadership and aim at bringing moral muscle to bear on a given issue. *One Team-One Fight*, *Chart the Course*, and *Full Speed Ahead* are a few examples from recent years. That these programs are effective at some level is probably true. They give a language for identifying challenges and measuring intervention. They provide forums for meaningful conversations. They help us see where discrimination and harassment lie uncontested. But this does not go far enough. Like the battleships of yesteryear, these programs will be most effective when they are used in a supportive indirect-fire role, and not as the main effort. Fundamental change is long overdue. We cannot stage one or two decisive battles a year in the moral theater of war and think we are going to win. Human growth does not work like that.⁷⁸

Cash makes powerful arguments for the inclusion of character education, including moral ethics training, as a means of moving the needle institutionally. He argues for a classical—and decidedly Aristotelian—ethical tradition as the right answer to the crisis the U.S. military is facing, noting that:

This tradition is brimming with insight to speak to the moral landscape that like a Salvador Dali painting, has begun to sag from a lack of fresh thinking. As a philosophical resource the classical tradition is accessible

to people from many different backgrounds and resonates as it speaks from those fundamental categories of habit, virtue, and reward to which people are implicitly drawn. This tradition will be crucial to stemming the individual and institutional erosion of character in our age.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Cash deftly notes that, arguably, Vice Admiral Stockdale's "most enduring contribution was his life-long insistence that naval leaders—all leaders—ought to be, among other things, students of ethics or moral philosophy as he preferred to say, lest they become casualties of character."⁸⁰ His thoughts go hand in hand with a focus on spiritual fitness, as both the Aristotelian ethical tradition and spiritual fitness effectively develop moral excellence. Spiritual fitness and character education by means of classical tradition are two sides of the same coin.

To break the institutional paralysis that Cash speaks about, the Marine Corps should begin to emphasize the importance of spiritual fitness and an Aristotelian ethical tradition throughout the continuum of an officer's career, starting at The Basic School, Marine Corps Base Quantico. This could then be intentionally reinforced and developed during career landmarks at Marine Corps University, such as Expeditionary Warfare School and Command and Staff College. Moreover, spiritual fitness should be carefully examined at the commander's Cornerstone Course and included at other key touchpoints that occur throughout an officer's career. The pattern for enlisted Marines follows the same lines, with spiritual fitness and an Aristotelian ethical tradition being a part of their recruit training. This training continues throughout their career at various levels, such as the Lance Corporal Seminar, Corporals Course,

Sergeants School, Career School, Advanced School, Marine Corps Senior Enlisted Academy, and other enlisted professional military education (PME).⁸¹ Institutionally, there is a need to create meaningful engagement among Marines on ethics and character development as they intersect with spiritual fitness and an Aristotelian ethical tradition. This can be achieved most effectively through the development of training methodologies that use case studies. Case studies are highly effective teaching methods, particularly in ethics and character development, as they help the Marines confront powerful, impactful, and relevant scenarios.

Additionally, the Commandant of the Marine Corps should elevate the importance of spiritual fitness beyond the level of ALMARs, which most senior leaders are unaware of, and develop a white paper to prioritize spiritual fitness within the Service. This white paper would articulate the commandant's clear vision regarding the importance of spiritual fitness, providing clarity and perspective on this issue relevant to the fleet. In reality, spiritual fitness is largely a vague concept for most commanders, with no real practical application at the unit level. If one unit commander is unaware of the ALMARs on spiritual fitness, then there are likely 100 more who are also unaware. Therefore, if the intention is to engage the Marine Corps meaningfully, the commandant should issue a white paper to create the necessary discussion and activity needed among commanders. ALMARs are helpful but are not an effective solution.

At the unit level, the commanding officer should make spiritual fitness a part of daily operations without resorting to annual training briefings, which often generate apathy and low retention levels among Marines. Instead, chaplains should be leveraged as special staff officers (360-degree spiritual

fitness leaders) to help develop spiritual fitness programs that can be integrated within regular PT sessions at the departmental or squad level. Leaders may find it useful to provide a “toolbox of resources” for servicemembers who experience mental health and spiritual issues.

Importantly, this toolbox includes referring Marines to chaplains and chaplain-supported programs whether they identify as religious or not. If the Marine can solve their problem and be back on mission quickly, it becomes a win-win for everyone. On the other hand, if the chaplain believes that the Marine would benefit from or needs a higher level of care, the chaplain will make certain that there are no closed doors to this care and ensure that the Marine gets an appointment with the right care provider, such as a Military and Family Life Counseling or another counselor, thereby securing the right level of care. As such, leaders should confidently turn to their chaplains first as a tool of choice when taking care of their Marines. Since the chaplain is a member of the unit, they are often immediately available to provide care or for triage counseling. Moreover, chaplains and their support programs play a significant role in building resiliency among Marines. In addition, other chaplain and non-chaplain-supported programs may be used to build resiliency. A final recommendation is to establish and conduct regular spiritual fitness training programs that build character and involve discussion groups facilitated by leaders and chaplains to talk about difficult issues concerning loss of life and injury, especially before deployment. The suggested methodology is via PT sessions. The appendix to this article provides four examples of such scenarios as a way and means of operationalizing spiritual fitness at the unit level. The unit chaplain can

develop others on different topics or focal points at the direction of the commanding officer.

Operationalizing Spiritual Fitness at the Unit Level

Answering the “So What?” of Spiritual Fitness

Spiritual fitness is a vital component in achieving victory in battle, and the Marine Corps understands this. However, it is often overlooked and underdiscussed in comparison to other fitness aspects such as the mind, body, spirit, and social domains. To this point, Daigle, Goff, and Koenig emphasize in “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy” that while spiritual fitness remains a crucial component of the Marine Corps, it functions:

[L]argely within the undercurrents of knowledge and concern among senior officers. The result has been a dearth of any meaningful discussion, let alone purposeful installation in any material way, at the individual or unit level in the Navy and Marine Corps. This stands in contrast with the mental, social, and physical components of overall fitness, all of which are widely understood, robustly framed, and integrated within the command.⁸²

As such, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of spiritual fitness, as it plays a pivotal role in character development and readiness, which are crucial for success in any field. Neglecting spiritual fitness not only harms the individual but also the entire unit. Spiritually unfit Marines tend to make poor decisions that can cause harm to themselves and their comrades. Moreover, they can create a disruptive environment wherever they go.

However, when a Marine is spiritually fit, they possess good order and discipline, character development, selflessness, and a fighting spirit, which are essential qualities for the success of any mission. This is why it is crucial to recognize the importance of spiritual fitness in maintaining a strong fighting force. As Daigle, Goff, and Koenig explain:

This is principally so because it hollows [out] the force, leaving servicemembers with limited moral reasons for making the extraordinary efforts and sacrifices necessary to accomplish missions. Servicemembers will fight to avoid being killed; they will fight for their nation, or even the freedoms of other nations; they will fight for their families and way of life; and they will fight out of anger to avenge fallen comrades. But those motivations are often not enough. Warfighters need a higher reason for risking their lives, a reason from above that can be defined as spiritual—to right the wrong, to preserve goodness, and to fight evil that is trying to destroy goodness.⁸³

Therefore, while acknowledging that the above-mentioned factors are preventing the robust implementation of spiritual fitness in the Marine Corps writ large, it is nonetheless important to focus on practical implementation at the unit level. Looking at the doctrine, *Leading Marines*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10, references “spiritual” nine times within the context of the leadership philosophy that distinguishes the Marine Corps. It states that:

The third component of morale is spiritual readiness, which is the resilience to meet the demands of Marine Corps service and the harsh reality of combat. Every man and woman possesses a spiritual

reservoir. It is from this reservoir that we draw strength in the face of difficulty. In combat, Marines face privation, uncertainty, fear, and death. Outside of combat, Marines also face personal stressors, often compounded by deployments and family separation. Marines must replenish their spiritual reservoir from time to time, because when the reservoir runs dry, Marines break. That is the point where Marines freeze up, withdraw, become apathetic, and feel hopeless. Marine leaders must watch their Marines for signs of spiritual depletion and ensure they replenish their reservoir.⁸⁴

Marines often encounter life issues that are not related to mental health problems. However, all too frequently they are made to wait for up to six weeks to get an appointment with a counselor. In many cases, they could have received timely care and advice from a chaplain. This is a matter of concern and requires attention. To this end:

Chaplains and SNCOs should become familiar with the Mental Health Playbook and foster conversations among unit leaders regarding the role of chaplains in the “continuum of care”—not as mental health providers but as subclinical care providers who can address many “people issues” Marines face, which are too often categorized as “mental health” issues. If chaplains do their jobs well, mental health professionals will have more time to provide the clinical care they need. Timely access to medical and mental health care is a great challenge across the Navy and Marine Corps, as illustrated by excessively prolonged appointment wait times that force Marines and sailors to accept social, relationship, and mental health injuries as an

unavoidable consequence of their military service. To address this backlog and eliminate institutional stigma, chaplains can add value to their commands by approaching their role as first responders from a holistic approach to readiness. This entails stepping in to triage individuals and assessing severity with the intent of returning full-duty servicemembers to the fight. While service members should be sent to medical for screening for self-harm, the majority of perceived crises (perhaps 80%) are matters that can be handled at the unit leadership level.⁸⁵

Accordingly, all of the material discussed herein—from Lieutenant General Lejeune to the battle-tested Commandants to the recent ALMARs and other Marine Corps publications—points to the reality that spiritual fitness should be given a high level of importance by unit leaders. It is not only physical and mental health that matters, but the spiritual as well. Another way of putting this is that one's overall well-being is not limited to just physical and mental health, but also encompasses spiritual health. Neglecting any aspect of one's being can lead to an imbalance that can negatively impact one's life. Therefore, it is imperative that Marines prioritize their spiritual health along with their physical and mental health to achieve a state of complete well-being.

Having sufficiently answered the "so what?" of spiritual fitness, the remainder of this section moves to a brass-tacks approach to operationalizing spiritual fitness at the unit level. Accordingly, the authors discuss the chaplain's role as a 360-degree spiritual fitness leader.

The Chaplain as a 360-Degree Spiritual Fitness Leader

John C. Maxwell's book, *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*, introduces the concept of a 360-degree leader. Maxwell's fundamental idea is that individuals with 360-degree leadership skills can lead other leaders effectively from any position within an organization. Within military units, despite not having a formal position of power as a line officer, a chaplain can still be a significant and influential leader. The chaplain's influence is based on trust and respect developed from relationships with noncommissioned officers, senior noncommissioned officers, officers of all pay grades, and the command deck.⁸⁶ By leading these leaders, the chaplain becomes a powerful force multiplier and influential leader, regardless of rank. When this happens, the chaplain becomes an essential figure and a powerful asset to the unit, creating a positive impact that is felt throughout the entire organization.

The importance of spiritual fitness cannot be overstated, especially for Marines. To ensure that Marines are able to live out the core values of honor, courage, and commitment and embody the warrior ethos, it is essential that Marine Corps leaders have a correct understanding of what spiritual fitness really is. According to the *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, spiritual fitness is the process of identifying personal faith, foundational values, and moral living from various sources and traditions.⁸⁷ The Navy's chief of chaplains, Rear Admiral Todd, explains:

To be clear, spiritual fitness is an ethos, a way of life, not a program. It is an ethos that values reflection on (1) one's personal beliefs, (2) the values that grow out of those beliefs, and (3) the decisions that are the outcome of one's values. Chaplains and religious program specialists

(RPs) can provide the moral, ethical, and spiritual “gym,” or grappling space, where Marines can become spiritually stronger. Stretching the analogy a bit further, they function as coaches, helping Marines grapple with the hard questions of life that lead to character development.⁸⁸

To this end, *Marine Leader Development* states: “The development of Marines and Sailors is a deliberate process, driven by commanders and leaders, and includes all Marines and Sailors. Regular teaching, coaching, counseling, and mentoring between Marine leaders and subordinates is vital.”⁸⁹ As discussed earlier, it mandates that leaders are to focus training and their coaching/counseling sessions on physical, mental, spiritual, and social health and well-being. In line with this, Todd explains:

Because spiritual fitness is an ethos, not a program, the benefit comes in the grappling, not in a predefined outcome. Wrestling with hard questions, such as the meaning of honor, the types of courage, or the consequences of commitment, is the terminal objective. Spiritual fitness is like other types of fitness: there is no point when a Marine is done with spiritual fitness any more than there is a point when a Marine is done with physical fitness. Spiritual fitness is a way of life that requires constant exercise. Commanders and leaders at every level have the same responsibility for fostering it as they do for physical fitness.⁹⁰

In light of this, as the command’s 360-degree spiritual fitness leader, chaplains are uniquely positioned to bring tangible value to the command, using their unique subject matter expertise to conduct essential training on

subjects such as military virtues and character development in the Corporal's Course or other PME settings.⁹¹ The importance of character development cannot be overstated. Todd clarifies:

It is important to note that leaders cannot assume the character of those led. Americans arrive at the "yellow footprints" carrying a variety of personal experiences, and their own cultures, traumas, and worldviews. The institutions of American society that traditionally took on the role of character development—religious institutions, youth organizations, organized sports, etc.—are no longer as influential as they once were. Therefore, character development has moved from a societal effort to an individual effort, almost a private endeavor not tackled as part of a larger group but in the confines of one's own heart and soul.⁹²

When doing their part, chaplains serve as 360-degree spiritual fitness leaders, helping develop the moral and spiritual fitness of Marines.

Leveraging the Chaplain for Positive Command Outcomes

In a 2021 U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* article, "From Character to Courage: Developing the Spirit of the 21st Century Warfighter," Rear Admiral Todd discusses the importance of character development. He points out that spiritual fitness is a key priority for Marine Corps leaders at every level and that midgrade professionals, such as staff sergeants and majors, are in a unique position to facilitate it. These individuals have the necessary experience and maturity to drive spiritual fitness on a day-to-day basis and help promote it within the unit.⁹³ With that said, chaplains integrate with

these leaders, in particular, to help build character throughout the unit through various coaching and mentoring opportunities.⁹⁴ For example, chaplains can lead an informal ethical discussion in a school circle; they can provide more prepared remarks on such topics as core values in PME courses; and they can speak about core values during all hands liberty briefs. Unit PT presents unique touchpoints for the chaplain to connect with Marines. During these evolutions, chaplains can offer motivational character tie-ins or lead brief ethical discussions related to moral decision making. Side conversations related to religion or other spiritual, ethical, philosophical, and moral concerns will develop with Marines who would not otherwise venture to the chaplain's office.

In this way, chaplains can foster connections and build relationships with those around them. By prioritizing genuine connections and meaningful interactions, they show that they care, and they become force multipliers that make a meaningful impact on the command. Edgar F. Puryear Jr. provides a noteworthy example:

Identification is important. Sincerity is crucial. Marines have a way of chewing up and spitting out phony-baloney chaplains. Conversely, they cling to chaplains they deem authentic and who truly care. When I first reported to 3d Battalion, 5th Marines [in 1967], troops talked incessantly about their chaplain, Vic Krulak [one of Lieutenant General Victor Krulak's sons, a Marine Corps chaplain]. They idolized him. Why? Because, they said, Chaplain Krulak was always with them in the field as a trusted priest and friend. He gained their confidence the old-fashioned way: he earned it! Although Vic Krulak had transferred from

the battalion well before my arrival, his spiritual presence remained. “Walk your talk” and “practice what you preach” are apt clichés.⁹⁵

Chaplains in combat are presented with unparalleled challenges and opportunities not found in the routine duties typical in garrison. The impact they can have on the lives of those who are fighting on the front lines is immeasurable. Puryear continues:

Combat offers chaplains ample opportunity to live out their sermons about faith, courage, charity, sacrifice, etc. Most chaplains I knew in Vietnam walked the second mile, faithfully. However, in my opinion, some failed to walk the first, doing their utmost to keep from going to the field. Actions speaking louder than words, their sermons were hollow and their talk cheap. The troops knew it, and responded with cold silence and, in private, with verbal scorn.⁹⁶

Commanders have a powerful asset in their chaplains. Given all that the chaplain can do, commanders should leverage their chaplain for positive command outcomes. Recognizing this, then-Colonel Joseph R. Clearfield, who commanded the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit in 2016–18, confronted a slew of destructive behaviors exhibited by his Marines, such as suicides, reckless driving, and other harmful conduct resulting in nonjudicial punishments (NJPs). Turning to his chaplain and sergeant major, he directed them to develop a small-unit PT program incorporating relevant video-guided discussions. One of the tools they employed was a video of the University of Texas commencement speech by Admiral William H. McRaven, “Make Your Bed: Little Things that Can Change Your Life . . . and Maybe the World.”⁹⁷

Following unit PT, the noncommissioned officers then led guided discussions. The results were significant. Suicidal ideation dropped significantly, with zero suicides for more than 1.5 years. Only nine divorces occurred among the 900 couples in the unit, and there were fewer NJPs. By leveraging his chaplain, Clearfield proactively went after these issues, notably reducing destructive behaviors while increasing positive command outcomes.⁹⁸ While it is hard to prove what the exact contributors were that led to a notable decline in destructive behaviors, the emphasis on spiritual fitness and the engagement of Marines almost surely made the difference in command climate and unit culture.

Entering the Temple of Mars: PT as the Ways and Means to Operationalize Spiritual Fitness

Achieving spiritual fitness at a unit level is imperative for Marine Corps training. This article provides a practical way for commanders to operationalize spiritual fitness through PT sessions, given that spiritual fitness is not simply a static theoretical concept but rather an ethos that must be sought after and addressed at the same level as mental, physical, and social factors. Therefore, to operationalize the concept of spiritual fitness, the appendix offers useful exercises to allow Marines to practice spiritual fitness exercises and prepares them to enter the temple of Mars.

The “temple of Mars” concept is premised on the experience of Karl Marlantes, who in 1968 was a young and inexperienced second lieutenant in charge of a rifle platoon of nearly 40 Marines. Fighting the enemy in the highland jungle of Vietnam, the lives of Marlantes’ Marines depended on his decisions. In his book, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, Marlantes describes how

the Marine Corps taught him how to kill but did not teach him how to deal with killing. As the mystery of life and death played out before him, he became conscious that he had entered the temple of Mars, where humans were sacrificed and he was also the priest. This 23-year-old Marine-priest, however, had only been to a seminary called The Basic School, where he learned the ritual of killing but none of its meaning. Marlantes describes how ill-prepared he—as well as the young Marines he led—were for the psychological and spiritual aspects of war and its aftermath. The temple of Mars is never far away and must be in the thoughts of all Marines in preparation for conflict as the United States' force in readiness.

Marines will encounter four spiritual fitness PT scenarios. These scenarios are designed to be used as-is or modified by Marine Corps leaders and chaplains to meet the specific needs of the unit. The four PT scenarios present lessons from combat leaders who epitomize a warrior-scholar (scenario 1: resiliency); a selfless modern hero (scenario 2: sacrifice for the greater good); the timeless wisdom of the ancients (scenario 3: character development); and understanding a reality of warfare (scenario 4: understanding moral injury).

These PT scenarios are intended to deal with the spiritual aspects inherent to the Marine Corps, thereby increasing the spiritual fitness of individuals and the unit. By incorporating these PT scenarios, commanders are operationalizing spiritual fitness within their units and aligning with Lieutenant General Lejeune's powerful assertion that there is no substitute for the spiritual in war. This article concludes by acknowledging that clinical evidence and practical military wisdom validate the crucial importance of

spiritual fitness in character development, military readiness, battlefield victory, and understanding moral injury.

Conclusion

Some of the greatest commandants of the Marine Corps, renowned in the annals of history, relied deeply on their spirituality as they led Marines. They were models of spiritual fitness in the way they exemplified personal faith, foundational values, and moral living, which helped them live out the core values of honor, courage, and commitment; live the warrior ethos; and exemplify the character expected of a U.S. Marine whether in combat or not. They embodied the animating force behind Lieutenant General Lejeune's sentiment when he wrote in his memoir: "I often wonder why the religious side of the soldiers' lives is not more often described. Surely it is a theme worthy of the genius of those having the gift of expressing beautiful thoughts in exquisite poetry or in noble prose."⁹⁹ In the present era, three Commandants—Generals Smith, Berger, and Neller—have all referred to Lejeune in their ALMARs on spiritual fitness as a crucial factor in character development, instilling core values, and enhancing readiness. The Marine Corps' 2023 doctrinal and tactical publications do the same. More than 20 years of thorough, data-driven research supports the significance of spiritual fitness, supporting Lejeune's claim. So too do famous Marine Corps battles at Derna, Chapultepec, Belleau Wood, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Khe Sanh, and Fallujah. Leaders must operationalize spiritual fitness now so that Marines will be at their strongest if a conflict between the United States and China erupts. Achieving spiritual fitness at a unit level is imperative for the strength and vitality of the Marine Corps, as *there is no substitute for the*

spiritual in war. As such, Marine Corps leaders have a moral imperative to steel their Marines spiritually so that they, when called on, will be ready to enter the temple of Mars.

¹ Gen John A. Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine* (Philadelphia, PA: Dorrance, 1930), 40. Lejeune states: "There is no substitute for the spiritual in war. Miracles must be wrought if victories are to be won, and to work miracles men's hearts must be afire with self-sacrificing love for each other, for their units, for their division, and for their country. If each man knows that all the officers and men in his division are animated with the same fiery zeal as he himself feels, unquenchable courage and unconquerable determination crush out fear and death becomes preferable to defeat and dishonor. Fortunate indeed is the leader who commands such men, and it is his most sacred duty to purify his own soul and to cast out from it all unworthy motives, for men are quick to detect pretense or insincerity in the leaders, and worse than useless as a leader is the man in whom they find evidence of hypocrisy or undue timidity, or whose acts do not square with his words. . . . It is indeed true that in war the spiritual is to the material as three or even four to one."

² See Cdr David A. Daigle, CHC, USN, LtCol Daniel V. Goff, USMC (Ret), and SgtMaj Joshua K. Miller, "Character Development in the Age of Distributed Operations: Leveraging the Chaplain, Spiritual Fitness, and Professional Military Education," *Marine Corps Gazette* 108, no. 12 (December 2024), forthcoming. Recognizing Lejeune's assertion that there is no substitute for the spiritual in war extends the spiritual impact on character, readiness, and resiliency, as well as how unit leaders can intentionally cultivate spiritual fitness more effectively, contributing to character development and ethical decision-making.

³ RAdm Gregory N. Todd, CHC, USN, "From Character to Courage: Developing the Spirit of the 21st Century Warfighter," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 147, no. 4 (April 2021). In this article, the author reaches back 100 years to connect with this vital point of Lejeune, saying, "The Marine Corps has a history of considering the role of the spiritual in conflict going back to General John Lejeune." Drawing on history, he observes: "Since the plain of Thermopylae, character is the critical starting point in developing soldierly readiness and will be increasingly important in current competition and future conflicts. Character is, and will be, such a critical element of combat success that all leaders must deliberately approach character development as integral to combat readiness. This is the heart of the spiritual fitness effort in the Marine Corps—preparing the warrior for today's competition and any future conflict."

⁴ See RAdm Gregory N. Todd, CHC, USN, *Strategic Plan for Religious Ministry* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2023). The *Strategic Plan* affirms that spiritual readiness is the "North Star" of the Navy Chaplain Corps. See also Chief of Naval Operations Instruction (OPNAVINST) 1730.1F, *Religious Ministry in the Navy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 9 November 2022). As defined in OPNAVINST 1730.1F, "Spiritual Readiness is the strength of spirit that enables the warfighters to accomplish the mission with honor. Spiritual Readiness speaks to the will to fight and the ability to overcome adversity in the moment of combat or crisis. The skill to fight without the will to fight leaves a hollow force. While the [Chaplain Corps] creates, increases and sustains Spiritual Readiness . . . commanders own the requirement."

⁵ Todd, *Strategic Plan for Religious Ministry*, 2. The Marine Corps' understanding and use of "spiritual fitness" falls under the rubric of spiritual readiness and is understood to be a contributor to resiliency, along with mental, social, and physical fitness. See "Resilience," U.S.

Marine Corps Human Performance Branch (website), accessed 23 October 2024. More specifically, spiritual fitness is the “[i]dentification of personal faith, foundational values, and moral living from a variety of sources and traditions that help Marines live out Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment, live the warrior ethos, and exemplify the character expected of a United States Marine.”

⁶ RAdm Terry W. Eddinger, CHC, USN (Ret), “A Frank Discussion: Readiness, Resilience, and Emotional Readiness,” U.S. Navy Reserve, 4 October 2023. Eddinger defines spiritual readiness as follows: “[W]arfighters are spiritually ready when they are connected to a source of meaning and purpose greater than themselves, able to explain why they serve, and are prepared to do their duty in peace and war. It is the epitome of honor, courage, and commitment. Spiritual readiness helps one perform and endure through a crisis. . . . Spiritual readiness doesn’t require one to be a part of an organized religion. Spiritual readiness may come through studies in philosophy or in a belief in the greater good. Stoicism is a particularly popular philosophy among military leaders in that it is a practical philosophy on how to face life and adversity. Books by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius and the Greek philosopher Epictetus provide great insight into Stoicism. Admiral James Stockdale believed that his practice of Stoicism saved his life during his years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam.” See also Cdr David A. Daigle, CHC, USN, LtCol Daniel V. Goff, USMC (Ret), and Harold G. Koenig, MD, MHSc, “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy: Stoic Philosophy and Spiritual Fitness for Optimizing Warfighter Readiness,” *Expeditions with MCUP* (31 March 2023), <https://doi.org/10.36304/ExpwMCUP.2023.03>. The authors write: “[This] article proposes leveraging both Stoic philosophy and spirituality, to specifically acknowledge and include religion, as synergistic and complementary factors additive to building character, instilling core values, and optimizing warfighter readiness. The article argues that, taken together, Stoicism and spiritual fitness must be emphasized more intentionally, robustly, and systematically by leaders at all levels in the U.S. Department of the Navy (DON) to optimize warfighter readiness and attain a military advantage over the United States’ adversaries in the twenty-first century and beyond.”

⁷ See Cdr David A. Daigle, CHC, USN, Lt William M. Schweitzer, CHC, USN, and Maj Marianne C. Sparklin, “Spiritual Readiness in the Age of EABO: Closing the Gap between the Commandant’s Intent for Spiritual Fitness and the Commander’s Implementation at the Small Unit Level,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 106, no. 11 (November 2022): 72. The authors assert that “the [Marine] Corps has long recognized spiritual fitness to be a critical component of developing the warrior ethos.” See also Cdr David A. Daigle, CHC, USN, and LtCol Daniel V. Goff USMC (Ret), “Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs: Applying the United States Marine Corps’ Concepts and Principles of Spiritual Fitness as a Means toward Increasing the Health, Resiliency, and Well-Being of Lawyers—While Restoring the Soul of the Profession,” *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 59, no. 1 (2020): 102.

⁸ See *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2023).

⁹ See Harold G. Koenig “Spirituality and Mental Health,” *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 7, no. 2 (March 2010): 116–22, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.239>. The author asserts that spirituality is increasingly being examined as a factor in mental health, with recent studies finding that spirituality may serve as a psychological and social resource for coping with stress.

¹⁰ This symbolic imagery is connected to Mars, the Roman god of war, and is premised on Marines entering the sacred temple of Mars during times of war, where they act as gods by *Expeditions with MCUP*

taking life. At the same time, their own lives may be seized from them. This is based on the 2011 book *What It Is Like to Go to War* by Karl Marlantes, who served as a Marine Corps company commander during the Vietnam War. Marlantes notes that while the Marine Corps teaches Marines how to kill, it does not teach them how to deal with the psychological and spiritual aspects of killing people.

¹¹ Mark R. Folse, "The (R)Evolutionary Tenure of Commandant Lejeune," *Naval History* 34, no. 4 (August 2020).

¹² Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *Marine Corps Generalship* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2009), 451.

¹³ Daigle, Schweitzer, and Sparklin, "Spiritual Readiness in the Age of EABO," 72. The authors write: "With the emergence of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations as the Marine Corps' guiding principle, we begin with a simple, yet significant point: spiritual readiness will be more, not less, vital for the Marine Corps in the years ahead."

¹⁴ Cdr David. A. Daigle, CHC, USN, LtCol Daniel V. Goff, USMC (Ret), and Lt Bradley Lawrence, CHC, USN, "From Character to Courage: The Importance of Spirituality in Maximizing Combat Readiness and Warfighter Resiliency in the 21st Century," *Marine Corps Gazette* 106, no. 11 (November 2022): 86. The authors write that "as the age of EABO and DMO [distributed maritime operations] dawns, it is more important than ever to implement spiritual fitness training within units to maximize combat readiness, warfighter resiliency, and the tactical proficiency of Marines in the 21st-century."

¹⁵ *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3405.01 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 September 2011), 1, A-2. The Total Force Fitness model identifies eight fitness domains: psychological, behavioral, social, physical, environmental, mental and dental, spiritual, and nutritional.

¹⁶ *Spiritual Fitness*, All Marine Corps Activities (ALMAR) 033/16 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, October 2016).

¹⁷ *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 027/20 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 3 December 2020).

¹⁸ *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 020/24 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 19 July 2024).

¹⁹ *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 6-10.1 (Quantico, VA: Training and Education Command, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2023); and *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, Marine Corps Tactical Publication (MCTP) 3-30D (Quantico, VA: Training and Education Command, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2023).

²⁰ Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, "Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy."

²¹ Johannes Schmidt, "Force Design 2023: Acquisition for the Future Battlefield," Marines.mil, 29 August 2023.

²² Michael Hirsch, "The Pentagon Is Freaking out about a Potential War with China (because American Might Lose)," *Politico*, 9 June 2023.

²³ See Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), 8.

²⁴ See *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*. Col Eric R. Quehl, director of the Policy and Standards Division of Training and Education Command, recognized that spirituality may be expansively understood, stating in the document's foreword: "While the word 'spiritual' has historically been associated with religion, spiritual fitness takes a broader perspective and considers religious and non-religious beliefs, principles, and values needed to persevere and prevail. This guide will help leaders understand and communicate the cultural shift that has occurred that defines spirituality as encompassing non-religious and religious belief systems, and that both are approaches to spiritual fitness." See also John W. Brinsfield and LtCol Peter A. Baktis,

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USA, "The Human, Spiritual, Ethical Dimensions of Leadership in Preparation for Combat," *Fires Bulletin* (July–August 2011): 57. The authors observe: "Many scholars of world religions agree that [Dr. Jeff] Levin's wider definition of spirituality seems to fit the beliefs of many faith groups, even those with non-theistic views. Two separate books, one by Robert D. Baird and Alfred Bloom and the other by Houston Smith state that although the majority of the world's religions do claim to be the vehicles for a personal experience with God, Allah, Brahman, or one of the other of the world's named deities, there are others for whom spirituality is a non-theistic pilgrimage to individual enlightenment, wisdom, and transcendence."

²⁵ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*. According to Lejeune, spirituality is a vital element for achieving victory in the Marine Corps. It is characterized by a strong connection or attachment to something greater than oneself. By emphasizing the importance of the spiritual, Lejeune tapped into the DNA and soul of the Marine Corps. Marines have always believed that the spiritual is crucial to overcoming all obstacles and achieving victory.

²⁶ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 451. A religious service that Lejeune attended in France on Easter morning is also described: "On Easter morning, we (Lejeune, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, and Daniels' wife) attended an unusual service in a theater located in a Second Division town. Every seat was taken by a soldier, a marine, or a welfare worker. On the stage were Secretary Daniels (Methodist), a Catholic chaplain, a Presbyterian chaplain, and I (an Episcopalian). The Presbyterian chaplain said the prayers, the men sang the hymns, the Catholic chaplain read a chapter from the Bible, and Mr. Daniels preached the sermon." Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 452.

²⁷ Brinsfield and Baktis, "The Human, Spiritual, Ethical Dimensions of Leadership in Preparation for Combat," 63.

²⁸ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 454.

²⁹ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 454–55. Shepherd added: "It was near the end of the campaign, up by Ritidian Point, northern tip of Guam. It had just been captured and the battle was more or less over. The men had called the chaplain and asked him if he would conduct services, to thank Almighty God for sparing their lives in the campaign. So I think the men—to put it very simply—I'm sure they derived great spiritual benefit from the chaplains and they helped to win the campaign. I gave my chaplains full support in everything they did—going to church—I'd always go to Sunday services wherever we were stationed for any length of time. I'd see that chapels were built and services conducted. I attended service, at least one or two every Sunday during training periods and also during battles whenever I was able to do so."

³⁰ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 455. When asked whether he was generally satisfied by the chaplains, Shepherd responded: "Well, I'll tell you, some were and some were not always well prepared, for instance whenever a chaplain joined my division, I would talk to him personally, and I said, 'Now, chaplain, I want you to get out with the men in battle. Your job is to be up there with the front line troops and to give the spiritual help that they require whenever possible and with the Romanists to conduct the last rites for the dying and severely wounded. Furthermore you can do a great deal by being with wounded and writing a note to the man's parents saying, 'I just talked to your son, he has a wound but he's going to come through it all right. He's going to get well, and he just asked me to tell you he is all right.' I said, 'Your place is at the front, not sitting in some headquarters command post.'"

³¹ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 458.

³² Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 453.

³³ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 453. According to his aide-de-camp, Captain Mac Asbill, Smith had great fondness for the clergy and counted Catholic priests among his closest friends and confidants. As Asbill related: “[O]ne of the priests who early in the war wanted to join a Marine Raider battalion that was planning a dangerous mission. Smith thought it too risky and would not allow him to go. The priest then spoke to the Raiders, induced them to pray that he be allowed to join them, and then told the general that if he were not allowed to go, the faith of 1,500 Marines would be destroyed. The general told him he could go.”

³⁴ See “Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller,” Marine Corps History Division, accessed 23 October 2024.

³⁵ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 456–57. Puller expected much from his chaplains during combat. Indeed, his expectations for chaplains in performing their duties were very clear. While Puller was serving as a colonel, a regimental chaplain came to his tent one night as the battle raged: “ ‘Colonel, I want you to get out an order for me.’ ‘I can’t get you an order. See Colonel Frisbie, he’s your man.’ ‘I’m afraid of him.’ ‘His bark’s worse than his bite. If you have a reasonable request, he’ll help you. What’s on your mind? Maybe I can give a hand.’ ‘Well. I want you to prohibit all these good Protestant boys from joining the Catholic Church.’ ‘Holy smoke, man, we can’t do that! If they’re deserting you, there must be a reason. If you fellows would get down to work like the Catholic chaplains, you’d have no trouble.’ The disgruntled minister went away.” Later, when Puller was visiting his troops in the combat area, he and the same chaplain had a terse encounter: “Puller had another confrontation with the same chaplain while in the combat area visiting his troops: The patrol rode the last few miles into the camp at Cape Gloucester. As Puller jumped from a truck he was confronted by an outstretched hand—it was his acquaintance, the Protestant chaplain who had complained of Catholic inroads on New Guinea. Puller was in no mood to befriend him. ‘Where’ve you been all this time?’ ‘Why, I’ve been here doing my best to help out.’ ‘You weren’t up where the fighting was. I think I’ll prefer charges against you for being absent from your regiment.’ ‘Colonel, I was with the medical battalion, aiding the wounded. We worked around the clock.’ ‘They’ve got a chaplain of their own. Your place was with the fighting men—your own battalion. You remember our little talk about Protestant boys joining the Catholics? Well, conduct like yours is one reason for it. They see those priests doing their duty and see you evading it. I can’t work up much sympathy for you.’”

³⁶ See George C. Marshall Jr., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 2, “*We Cannot Delay*,” July 1, 1939—December 6, 1941, ed. Larry I. Bland, Sharon R. Stevens, and Clarence E. Wunderlin Jr. (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1981; Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Marshall wrote: “The soldier’s heart, the soldier’s spirit, the soldier’s soul, are everything. Unless the soldier’s soul sustains him he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end.”

³⁷ See *Selected Quotations: U.S. Military Leaders* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of U.S. Military History, Department of the Army, 1963), 53. Gen Patton stated, “Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of the men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.”

³⁸ Brinsfield and Baktis, “The Human, Spiritual, Ethical Dimensions of Leadership in Preparation for Combat,” 64.

³⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 184–85. See also LCdr Paul R. Wrigley, CHC, USN, “The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations,” *Naval War College Review* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 84. The author notes that Clausewitz was not concerned specifically with the *Expeditions with MCUP*

spiritual, but since religious belief is a moral force—the term *moral* referring to the intangible attributes of the mind and spirit, to include courage—it should not be ignored in the theater of operations.

⁴⁰ Wrigley, “The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations,” 9, citing J. Christopher Herold, trans. and ed., *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 219. See also Elizabeth Knowles, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 538: “In war, three-quarters turns on personal character and relations; the balance of manpower and materials counts only for the remaining quarter.”

⁴¹ Maj Michael J. Regner, “Human Performance Commoditization and Future War: The Requirement for a Dominant Spirituality” (thesis, School of Advanced Warfighting, Marine Corps University, 2016), 5.

⁴² See James B. Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995).

⁴³ See Albert C. Pierce, “Foreword,” in VAdm James B. Stockdale, USN (Ret), *Stockdale on Stoicism II: Master of My Fate* (Annapolis, MD: Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics, U.S. Naval Academy, 2001), 1.

⁴⁴ *Spiritual Fitness*.

⁴⁵ *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*.

⁴⁶ Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy,” 4.

⁴⁷ Daigle and Goff, “Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs,” 86.

⁴⁸ Daigle and Goff, “Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs,” 86. See also Gen David H. Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019).

⁴⁹ *Spiritual Fitness*.

⁵⁰ *Spiritual Fitness*.

⁵¹ *Spiritual Fitness*. Supporting the strengthening value of spiritual fitness, this ALMAR notes: “Data shows those who engage in religious faith and/or spiritual practices are 60–80 percent less likely to take their own lives.”

⁵² See *Marine Leader Development*, Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.61 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 28 July 2017).

⁵³ *Marine Leader Development*.

⁵⁴ *Marine Leader Development*.

⁵⁵ Colonel Eric R. Quehl’s foreword to *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide* explains the publication’s purpose and goals: “[I]t is designed to equip leaders with the information needed to understand and lead in spiritual fitness. This will enable leaders to grow in their own spiritual fitness as well as to lead, teach, and facilitate periods of instruction, professional military education, and professional spiritual fitness discussions. While the word “spiritual” has historically been associated with religion, spiritual fitness takes a broader perspective and considers religious and non-religious beliefs, principles, and values needed to persevere and prevail. This guide will help leaders understand and communicate the cultural shift that has occurred that defines spirituality as encompassing non-religious and religious belief systems, and that both are approaches to spiritual fitness.”

⁵⁶ *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide*, 1-1, 2-1, 3-1.

⁵⁷ *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide*, 4-1, 5-1, 6-1.

⁵⁸ *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, iii.

⁵⁹ *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, iv.

⁶⁰ *Religious Ministry in the United States Marine Corps*, 1-1, 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-1.

⁶¹ *Spiritual Fitness Leader's Guide*, 1-6.

⁶² David J. Hufford, Matthew J. Fritts, and Jeffrey E. Rhodes, "Spiritual Fitness," *Military Medicine* 175, no. 8 (August 2010): 78, <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-10-00075>.

⁶³ Hufford, Fritts, and Rhodes, "Spiritual Fitness," citing Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 1st ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press: 2001). This handbook is the seminal research text on religion, spirituality, and health, outlining a rational argument for the connection between religion and health. Now on its third edition, the handbook is respected as the most scientifically rigorous edition to date, covering the best research published through 2021 and emphasizing prospective studies and randomized controlled trials.

⁶⁴ Hufford, Fritts, and Rhodes, "Spiritual Fitness," 78.

⁶⁵ See "Commanders' Risk Mitigation Dashboard," Navy.mil, accessed 23 October 2024.

⁶⁶ Hufford, Fritts, and Rhodes, "Spiritual Fitness," 79.

⁶⁷ *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*, 1.

⁶⁸ *Chairman's Total Force Fitness Framework*, A-2. The eight recognized domains are medical, nutritional, environmental, physical, social, spiritual, behavioral, and psychological.

⁶⁹ There have been an increasing number of articles written by military servicemembers on the topic of spirituality and spiritual fitness that have been published by military schoolhouses or journals during the same timeframe. See, for example, LtCol R. L. VanAntwerp, USA, "The Greatest Threat . . . Spiritual Decay" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 1992); Maj John F. Price Jr., USAF, "Moral Competence for the Joint Warfighter: The Missing Element in Defense Transformation" (research paper, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, National Defense University, 2006); Maj Charles D. Kuhl, USAF, "Spiritually Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the 21st Century" (research paper, Air Command and Staff College, Air University, 2005); LCdr Frederick M. Dini, SC, USN, "Strategy for a Military Spiritual Self-Development Tool" (thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2008); LtCol Herbert J. McChrystal III, USA, "Spiritual Fitness: An Imperative for the Army Chaplaincy" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 2008); Capt B. Friedrich, "Spirituality in the Marine Corps" (research paper, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2009); Col Patrick J. Sweeney, USA, Jeffrey E. Rhodes, and MSG Bruce Bolling, USA, "Spiritual Fitness: A Key Component of Total Force Fitness," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 66 (2012); LtCol James G. Erbach, USA, "Spiritual Dormancy: The Strategic Effect of the Deprivation of God" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 2013); LtCol Joseph V. Ignazzitto II, USAR, "The Army's Use of Spirituality in the Prevention of Suicide" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 2013); LCdr John M. Mabus, USN, "Strengthening Moral Courage with Spiritual Fitness" (thesis, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2017); Maj Clarissa N. Blair "Spiritual Fitness in the Warfighter: A Marine's Perspective" (thesis, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2018); Kevin P. Johnson, "Spirituality and the Effect on Readiness" (thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2019); Maj Andrew P. Ketter, "Spiritual Fitness: An Unseen Element of Fitness," *Marine Corps Gazette* 104, no. 6 (June 2020); Daigle, Goff, and Lawrence, "From Character to Courage"; Daigle, Schweitzer, and Sparklin, "Spiritual Readiness in the Age of EABO"; Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, "Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy"; and Daigle, Goff, and Miller, "Character Development in the Age of Distributed Operations."

⁷⁰ Harold G. Koenig, Lindsay B. Carey, and Faten Al Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains* (New York: Amazon Books, 2022), 168–69. The authors write: *Expeditions with MCUP*

"In fact, 42 of 45 (93%) quantitative studies that examined the relationship found greater meaning and purpose among those who scored higher on [religious based practices]."

⁷¹ "Suicidality," American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology, updated 19 April 2018.

⁷² Koenig, Carey, and Al Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness*, 165.

⁷³ Koenig, Carey, and Al Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness*, 163.

⁷⁴ Beth A. Griffin et al., *Comparing the Army's Suicide Rate to the General U.S. Population* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2020), 1, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR3025>. The study details that "[s]ince 2012, suicide has claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people each year in the United States (approximately 13 people for every 100,000), making it one of the top ten leading causes of death (CDC, 2015). Like the United States more broadly, the U.S. Army has seen increases in suicides, losing over 100 active duty soldiers to suicide annually over the past three years (approximately 25 for every 100,000) (Pruitt et al., 2018)."

⁷⁵ Daigle and Goff, "Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs," 86. In the 2020 survey, senior officers and enlisted Marines at the squadron level were asked the following questions: "[W]hat is the importance of spirituality as commanders and why is it important to be spiritually resilient in the same way that Marines strive to be physically, mentally, and socially fit?"; "Using General Neller's ALMAR 033/16 as an original source, please comment on the Commandant's message regarding spiritual fitness as well as the importance of spirituality for resiliency"; "Utilizing the USMC website on Spiritual Fitness, please break down the importance of spiritual fitness for Marines, including commentary on personal faith, foundational values and moral living"; and "Using Marine Corps Tactical Publication (MCTP) 3-30D, Religious Ministry in the [USMC] please comment with references on the importance of religious ministry in the Marine Corps."

⁷⁶ Daigle and Goff, "Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs," 86–87.

⁷⁷ Daigle and Goff, "Beyond Lawyer Assistance Programs," 87.

⁷⁸ RAdm Carey H. Cash, CHC, USN, *Recovering the Classical Tradition: The Chaplain's Role as Ethics Educator in the New Moral Battlespace* (Washington, DC: National Defense University), 14–16. Cash explains that: "[T]he Mahanian doctrine of the big-gun, top-down-only, capital program has proven too blunt an instrument to be effective, and we've not adapted. Research in behavioral therapy and moral development tells us that when it comes to helping offenders or those who are on the precipice of offending, blunt force does not work. Behavioral changes can only come by scalpel. That's because underneath outward behaviors are almost always habits that have run silent and deep for months and years."

⁷⁹ Cash, *Recovering the Classical Tradition*, 4.

⁸⁰ Cash, *Recovering the Classical Tradition*, 2. For articles on Stockdale and Stoic philosophy that have been published in military journals, see, for example, Martin L. Cook, "Reflections on the Stockdale Legacy," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 3 (2012): 7, in which the author observes that "Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale holds a unique position in the roster of distinguished American naval officers of the last century" and "vividly recalls the extraordinary moral courage and leadership displayed by Stockdale during his nearly eight years of captivity in a North Vietnamese prison camp." See also Maj Timothy W. Love, "Stoic Values for the 21st Century Profession of Arms" (thesis, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2017), in which the author asserts that "[a]lthough the methods, weapons, and technologies employed in war continue to evolve, many of the challenges faced today are remarkably similar to those encountered by men at arms across millennia. In a world characterized by adversity, the Stoic philosophy provides commonsense lessons on

developing inner resources—principled character, self-control, and rational thought—that empower the military professional to overcome the challenges presented by life in the 21st century profession of arms.” See also LtCol George B. Rowell IV, “Marine Corps Values-Based Ethics Training: A Recipe to Reduce Misconduct” (research paper, U.S. Army War College, 2013; and LtCol Beth A. Behn, USA, *The Stakes are High: Ethics Education at U.S. War Colleges*, Air War College Maxwell Paper no. 73 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 2016).

⁸¹ Strong character taught and reinforced by ethical leaders creates resilient Marines and sailors with the mental and moral fortitude to absorb spiritual and social wounds. Strong spiritual foundations and a clear sense of purpose, coupled with the involvement of active chaplains and small unit leaders, can help Marines and sailors recover more quickly from such things as the loss of a parent, an unfaithful spouse, a setback at work, or, in the most extreme case, the loss of a fellow Marine or sailor in combat. Professional military education (PME) provides Marines with the necessary academic avenues to refine and develop the leadership abilities essential for assuming progressively higher levels of responsibility acquired during their career advancement. This notion is affirmed in *Sustaining the Transformation*, MCRP 6-11D (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2014), which affirms that PME schools are designed to educate leaders—officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and noncommissioned officers—in “whole Marine” character development.

⁸² Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy.” The authors added: “This lack of attention to spiritual fitness may be the result of commanders concerned with being seen as promoting their own religion (proselytizing) or simply having a generalized fear of running afoul with the Judge Advocate General’s Corps or staff judge advocates regarding the establishment clause. It can also be the result of competing priorities as well as dealing with nuanced subject matter. Regardless, it seems that most commanders do not directly address, cultivate, or implement spiritual fitness very robustly in their commands.”

⁸³ Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, “Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy.”

⁸⁴ *Leading Marines*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019), 2-8.

⁸⁵ Daigle, Goff, and Miller, “Character Development in the Age of Distributed Operations.” Accordingly, “Timely access to medical and mental health care is a great challenge across the Navy and Marine Corps, as illustrated by excessively prolonged appointment wait times that force Marines and sailors to accept social, relationship, and mental health injuries as an unavoidable consequence of their military service. To address this backlog and eliminate institutional stigma, chaplains can add value to their commands by approaching their role as first responders from a holistic approach to readiness. This entails stepping in to triage individuals and assessing severity with the intent of returning full-duty servicemembers to the fight. While service members should be sent to medical for screening for self-harm, the majority of perceived crises (perhaps 80%) are matters that can be handled at the unit leadership level.”

⁸⁶ John C. Maxwell, *The 360-Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 265–85.

⁸⁷ *Spiritual Fitness Leader’s Guide*, 1-1.

⁸⁸ Todd, “From Character to Courage.”

⁸⁹ *Marine Leader Development*.

⁹⁰ Todd, “From Character to Courage.”

⁹¹ Daigle, Goff, and Miller, "Character Development in the Age of Distributed Operations."

⁹² Todd, "From Character to Courage."

⁹³ Todd, "From Character to Courage."

⁹⁴ See Cash, *Recovering the Classical Tradition*, 4–5. Cash describes the role and function of chaplains as follows: "By virtue of their calling, education, and theological orientation, military chaplains are uniquely positioned to be on the frontlines of character formation. Chaplains were, after all, the first ones charged with teaching character or 'social hygiene' as one 1918 manual stated. During the Second World War, chaplains understood their duty of care for the moral dimension of the Soldier as part of the connective tissue to the Soldier's strength of soul. However, by the late 1950s, growing ambiguity over what constituted character as well as misconceptions among chaplains and line officers began a steady period of decline in any kind of concerted character movement. Today character programs are at best, locally-derived, facilitated by chaplains or others who may have a particular interest in the subject. In the absence of a clear and coherent strategy, the military will continue to hemorrhage as a culture. . . . If chaplains are to reassert their place as the military's ethics educators, the institution will have to learn from this past and take different lines of effort."

⁹⁵ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 460.

⁹⁶ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 460–61.

⁹⁷ Daily English Speech, "Admiral William H. McRaven: Change the World by Making Your Bed," YouTube video, 19:26, 9 March 2019. See also Adm William H. McRaven, USN (Ret), *Make Your Bed: Little Things that Can Change Your Life . . . and Maybe the World* (New York: Brand Central Publishing, 2017).

⁹⁸ Memorandum from LtCol Christopher Reardon, n.d.

⁹⁹ Puryear, *Marine Corps Generalship*, 451.



Appendix: Spiritual Fitness Physical Training

Objective

In order to build the character and core values of Marines and sailors, *Marine Leader Development*, Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.61, instructs leaders to speak to spiritual fitness during coaching and counseling sessions to develop and maintain the toughness and resiliency needed to adapt to and overcome any challenge.¹

Summary

Three Commandants of the Marine Corps, Generals Robert B. Neller, David H. Berger, and Eric M. Smith, all believe that spiritual fitness contributes to character development, which is crucial for maintaining the Corps' elite reputation and enabling Marines to accomplish the mission with honor. They also believe that spiritual fitness is essential to developing the will to fight and overcome adversity in any setting, whether in garrison or in combat.² Having only the skill to fight without the will to fight leaves a hollow force. Whether derived from religious or nonreligious beliefs or principles, spiritual fitness promotes character development and prevents apathy and hopelessness. It is the responsibility of all Marine leaders to promote spiritual fitness through instruction, education, and discussion in order to build. The physical training (PT) scenarios that follow show how operationalizing spiritual fitness furthers these objectives and fulfills the Commandant's intent.

Suggested Application

Military service is physically, mentally, and spiritually challenging. The four PT scenarios that follow are designed to help military servicemembers develop character while strengthening physical fitness and mental toughness. Leaders are free to modify the scope and length of the PT sessions to meet the specific needs of their command.

Information for Presentation/Training

Case studies are an extremely effective teaching method, particularly in ethics, as Marines confront impactful scenarios that add to character development. It is essential that the case study be relevant to Marines to teach them sound judgment and practical reasoning. The leader's role in such discussions is that of a facilitator who assists Marines and sailors in handling ethical conflicts and decisions effectively. Leaders need not be experts or sources of complete knowledge as they assist Marines and sailors in moral and ethical issues effectively.

Practical Notes

Four distinct PT scenarios have been developed that use PT, demonstrating a creative partnership between the unit chaplain, religious program specialist (RP), and Marine Corps leaders. The aim is to dynamically integrate spiritual fitness content into physical fitness and tactical unit training. The ultimate goal is to build moral character and resiliency by presenting lessons from combat leaders who epitomize a warrior-scholar (scenario 1: resiliency); a selfless modern hero (scenario 2: sacrifice for the greater good); and the timeless wisdom of the ancients (scenario 3: character development); and understanding a reality of warfare (scenario 4: understanding moral injury). By incorporating these PT scenarios, commanders can operationalize

spiritual fitness within their units and align with Lieutenant General Lejeune's powerful assertion that "there is no substitute for the spiritual in war."

Scenario 1: The Warrior-Scholar: Resiliency

Purpose: Discuss and understand the ability to cope with stress and crisis and then bounce back quickly—to withstand, recover, grow and adapt under challenging circumstances.

Length: 45–60 minutes.

Format: Guided instruction/discussion.

Participants: Chaplain/RP (if available), noncommissioned officer (NCO)/senior noncommissioned officer (SNCO)/officer to lead the event, and unit Marines.

Preparation: Prior to the PT session, the discussion leader consults the chaplain to discuss the spiritual fitness lessons from the "Stockdale paradox."

Note: Unit PT for 30 minutes in any setting. Leverage a force fitness instructor to help develop a PT session.

15–30 Minute Character Tie-In

Provide the context surrounding Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale's nearly seven years and multiple rounds of torture in the "Hanoi Hilton" prison during the Vietnam War. Review and discuss the physical, mental and emotional torture he endured and relate to Marines. Read the following conversation between author Jim Collins and Stockdale while at Stanford University:

"I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

I didn't say anything for many minutes, and we continued the slow walk toward the faculty club, Stockdale limping and arc-swinging his stiff leg that had never fully recovered from repeated torture. Finally, after about a hundred meters of silence, I asked, "Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh, that's easy," he said. "The optimists."

"The optimists? I don't understand," I said, now completely confused, given what he'd said a hundred meters earlier.

"The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

Another long pause, and more walking. Then he turned to me and said, "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."³

Discussion

The unit leader should share an experience in which their optimism and reality collided, in line with the "Stockdale paradox" (i.e., maintaining unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time,

having the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be).

During the discussion, the leader should explain how their spiritual fitness supports their optimism and how they were dealt a blow in life or faced a challenge they overcame. Possible discussion points include how their faith/religious beliefs, belief in the mission or cause, or faith, trust, and fellowship in their Marines and sailors helped them get through the situation. The leader should conclude by sharing how this optimism and struggle have influenced their character, making them more resilient, and what lessons they can offer the group. To promote an atmosphere of openness and honesty among the unit members, the leader should also encourage others to share their own experiences.

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Scenario 2: A Selfless Modern Hero: Sacrificing for the Greater Good

"The Murph"—character workout prior to weekends, 72/96 liberty, or Memorial Day 96.

Purpose: Examine why sacrifice is necessary in the military.

Length: 45–60 minutes.

Format: Guided instruction/discussion.

Participants: Chaplain/RP (if available), NCO/SNCO/officer to lead the event, and unit Marines.

Preparation: Prior to the PT session, consult the chaplain and read U.S. Navy lieutenant Michael P. Murphy's Medal of Honor citation and about Operation Red Wings (Kunar Province, Afghanistan, 2005).

Note: Unit PT for 30 minutes in any setting. Leverage a force fitness instructor to help develop a PT session. There are multiple ways to achieve the total repetitions of 100, 200, and 300. For instance, you can follow a 1-10-1 pyramid, which involves doing one pull-up, two push-ups, and three squats, and then reversing the order to complete the cycle. Alternatively, you can also choose to do maximum repetition sets in a circuit, aiming to complete the total repetitions as fast as possible in as few sets as possible.

After conducting a dynamic stretching session, complete as much as possible of the following workout in 30 minutes: a 1-mile run; 100 pull-ups; 200 push-ups; 300 air squats; and a 1-mile run.

15–30 Minute Character Tie-In

After reading Lieutenant Murphy's Medal of Honor citation and comprehending the context of his actions during Operation Red Wings, the discussion leader should concentrate on the sacrifice Murphy made. What would make someone sacrifice themselves in such a manner? What would motivate you to make such a sacrifice? Next, divide the participants into groups of two and ask them to discuss who has sacrificed for them and for whom they have made sacrifices. It is important to note that these sacrifices need not be made in a combat setting. Once the small groups have discussed these questions, have them report back to the whole group. The discussion leader should emphasize that military service involves a significant amount of sacrifice, sometimes even the ultimate sacrifice. Sacrifice is not only made by the servicemembers but also by their loved ones. We must recognize the sacrifices made on our behalf and those we make to improve the lives of those under our charge or our families.

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Scenario 3: The Timeless Wisdom of the Ancients: Character Development

Purpose: Establish a character destination.

Length: 45–60 minutes.

Format: Guided discussion and reflection.

Participants: Chaplain/RP (if available), NCO/SNCO/officer to lead the event, and unit Marines.

Preparation: Prior to the PT session, review the discussion material and read the Marine Corps Training and Education Command's "Character Development Education."⁴ Involve the chaplain or RP in the pre-read. The discussion leader should

start off with one of the four question prompts, and the response should relate to their service and how character impacts the individual and unit.

Note: Unit PT for 30 minutes in any setting. Leverage a force fitness instructor to help develop a PT session.

15–30 Minute Character Tie-In

Seneca the Younger, the Roman stoic philosopher, said, “If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.” This means that if you do not know what kind of person you wish to be, you will never develop your character in a specific manner or direction. Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius is an example of a person with a clear vision of what he wished to become. He created “epithets” for ways he wanted to be remembered after he was gone: upright, modest, straightforward, fair-minded, cooperative, and disinterested. It must be noted that he did not always perfectly embody those attributes. People fail and experience setbacks in life—however, the destination must always be on our mind. Character is not formed by our feelings or thoughts. Our character is an expression of our continual actions. According to Aristotle (Nicomachean ethics): “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”⁵

Define Your Destination

The Marine Corps expects its members to be men and women of exemplary character. Like Marcus Aurelius, who lived by a set of guiding principles and virtues, you, too, should have a list of values and beliefs that align with the core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

Think of your list of 5–7 character traits that describe the person you wish to be. Imagine if someone asked a friend to describe you in 5 to 10 words. What traits would you want them to mention?

- Which traits define you and demonstrate the things you want to be remembered for?
- How could you make those traits more present in your life and actionable here and now?
- Where do you see yourself falling short of your ideal self?

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Scenario 4: The Temple of Mars: Understanding Moral Injury

Purpose: Establish a character destination.

Length: 45–60 minutes.

Format: Guided discussion and reflection.

Participants: Chaplain/RP (if available), NCO/SNCO/officer to lead the event, and unit. Marines. Consider asking a combat veteran to speak about their experience.

Preparation: Prior to the PT session, read the definitions of moral injury. If combat veterans are in your unit, ask them to describe combat and if the experience changed their perspective.

Moral injury refers to the psychological, social, and spiritual impact of events or acts that a person performs, witnesses, or fails to prevent that conflict with one's own deeply held moral beliefs and values. Moral injury is a specific type of psychological injury that reflects an enduring impact on an individual's self-image and worldview.

When a moral injury occurs, the range of outcomes is broad and can include:

- Feelings of guilt, shame, anger, sadness, anxiety, and disgust.
- Intrapersonal outcomes include lowered self-esteem, high self-criticism, self-destructive behaviors, and feelings of being bad, damaged, unworthy, or weak.
- Interpersonal outcomes include loss of faith in people, avoidance of intimacy, and lack of trust in authority figures.

- Existential and spiritual outcomes include loss of faith in previous religious beliefs and no longer believing in a just world.

While moral injuries are strongly linked to military servicemembers due to the conditions of deployments or traumatic events, moral injuries are not limited to serving personnel and veterans. There are three identified primary causes of moral injury:

- An act of commission: when someone does something they should not have done or that strongly contradicts their own moral code.
- An act of omission: when someone should have done something but did not.
- Betrayal: when someone feels betrayed by others, particularly by a higher authority who either acted, failed to act, or compelled an individual to act in a way that goes against their moral code.⁶

A 2009 *Clinical Psychology Review* article discussing moral injury and moral repair in military veterans provide this definition:

Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. This may entail participating in or witnessing inhumane or cruel acts, failing to prevent the immoral acts of others, as well as engaging in subtle acts or experiencing reactions that, upon reflection, transgress a moral code. . . . The event can be an act of wrongdoing, failing to prevent serious unethical behavior, or witnessing or learning about such an event.⁷

Note: Unit PT for 30 minutes in any setting. Leverage a force fitness instructor to help develop a PT session.

15–30 Minute Character Tie-In

Read the following excerpts from Karl Marlantes' book, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, to the group:

Along with food, water, mail, and ammunition came the battalion chaplain. . . . He had brought with him several bottles of Southern Comfort and some new dirty jokes. I accepted the Southern Comfort, thanked him, laughed at the jokes, and had a drink with him. Merry Christmas.

Inside I was seething. I thought I'd gone a little nuts. How could I be angry with a guy who had just put his life at risk to cheer me up? And didn't that Southern Comfort feel good on that rain-raked mountaintop? Years later I understood. I was engaged in killing and maybe being killed. I felt responsible for the lives and deaths of my companions. I was struggling with a situation approaching the sacred in its terror and contact with the infinite, and he was trying to numb me to it. I needed help with the existential terror of my own death and responsibility for the death of others, enemies and friends, not Southern Comfort. I needed a spiritual guide.⁸

Warriors deal with death. They take life away from others. This is normally the role of God. Asking young warriors to take on that role without adequate psychological and spiritual preparation can lead to damaging consequences. It can also lead to killing and the infliction of pain in excess of what is required to accomplish the mission. If warriors are returned home having had better psychological and spiritual preparation, they will integrate into civilian life faster and they and their families will suffer less. But the more blurred the boundary is between the world where they are acting in the role of God and

the world where they are acting in an ordinary societal role, the more problematic the reintegration becomes.⁹

Discussion

Marlantes describes the psychological toll of combat, which can lead to moral injury. It must be noted that moral injury can occur from traumatic situations that are not combat-related. A unit suicide, a mishap that causes severe injuries or death, and being deployed in response to a humanitarian or natural disaster can be sources of moral injury. Because moral injury is a violation of an individual's core beliefs, it is worth understanding the possible dangers of moral injury and how an individual may guard against it. The unit leader should share traumatic experiences they have encountered and how they dealt with the aftermath. Ask the group the following two questions to prompt the individual to consider how military service may collide with strongly held beliefs and what can be done to mitigate those situations or leverage resources (such as a chaplain, a counselor, or unit leadership) to help them overcome the resulting difficulty.

- What do you think could cause moral injury from your military service?
- How do you minimize and recover from moral injury?

Marlantes also describes the spiritual toll of combat. He states that military servicemembers suffer moral injury from their compromises with or even outright violations of society's and religion's moral norms. He notes that these compromises are not generally discussed, and their importance to a warrior's mental health and soul is minimized or even ignored.

Read the following to the group:

Chaplains possess a range of spiritual care practices that are particularly effective in addressing moral injury. These practices include exploring forgiveness; facilitating lament; involving community members as needed; integrating sacraments, prayer, or rituals into moral injury care; and integrating evidence-based practices into their spiritual care. Second Lieutenant Marlantes encountered his chaplain, who tried to “numb him to the pain.” Marlantes said he needed a spiritual guide, not Southern Comfort, to deal with the terror he faced in the temple of Mars, where he was engaged in killing or being killed, feeling responsible for the deaths of his companions, and struggling with the existential terror of his own death and that of others.

The unit leader should ask the group the following questions to prompt the individual to consider how chaplains can help them with their mental and spiritual health.

- How comfortable would you be discussing your own existential fears and a moral injury you have with your chaplain as a spiritual guide? Why or why not?

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¹ *Marine Leader Development*, Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.61 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 28 July 2017).

² *Spiritual Fitness*, All Marine Corps Activities (ALMAR) 033/16 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, October 2016); *Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 027/20 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, December 2020); and *Spiritual Fitness*, ALMAR 020/24 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 19 July 2024).

³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2006), 83–85.

⁴ "Character Development Education," Human Performance Office, Marine Corps Training and Education Command, n.d.

⁵ This aspect of the scenario is derived from an assignment in the U.S. Naval Academy's NE 203, Ethics and Moral Reasoning for Naval Leaders, and the U.S. Naval Community College's NAV101, Naval Ethics and Leadership, courses on character and leadership.

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⁸ Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), 7.

⁹ Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 1.