



**MAJGEN JOHN ARCHER LEJEUNE**  
*Commander, Second Division, A. E. F., July 1918-July 1919*  
*Commandant of the Marine Corps, June 1920-March 1929*

# The VISION of JOHN A. LEJEUNE

By MSgt Joseph D. Dodd, USMC (Ret.)

**The Corps' unique amphibious mission was charted a half century ago by its 13th Commandant and founder of the Marine Corps Association.**

**G**ENERAL John Archer Lejeune was the quiet one. Not a man to create a legend, nor even to contribute to one, he none-the-less etched a deep mark in Corps history. The etching was personal, inscribed unselfishly in the most devoted interests of the Marine Corps. It was the heritage of this quiet, unassuming Marine, probably the least colorful leader of all, to contribute more to the traditional image of the Marine Corps than any other man.

For John A. Lejeune, 13th Commandant, the Corps was more than a profession; it represented a vision—and the vision was the landing from ships of the men and weapons of war to gain a toehold on a hostile shore. This was the vision that became a highly refined mission accredited by the Congress of the United States. The mission is the amphibious attack.

John A. Lejeune did not, of course, conceive the amphibious concept. Nor did it evolve to grace during his tenure. He retired in 1929;

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the first successful amphibious attack came many years later preceding by three months his death at 75 on 20 Nov 42. But standing today on Onslow Beach or Vieques, he would surely know that his dream had been interpreted in the most splendid fashion.

The historical record indicates that Marine Corps interest in the amphibious attack did not pre-date 1920, the year Lejeune became Commandant. One authority notes that a few shovels had been turned, literally and figuratively, in the area of advance base thinking, but this work was far-removed from any idea of attacking a defended shore from the sea. Rather it was the reverse: the defense of a base against a sea-launched attack. Lejeune, himself, in the very first issue of the *MARINE CORPS GAZETTE* wrote: "It is my belief that the Marine Corps may be called upon to defend an undefended or partially defended naval base, or other important point on the coast irrespective of whether or not it be, strictly speaking, an advance base." Beside the point, but interesting, are Lejeune's clairvoyant powers in predicting the battle of Wake. It is interesting, too, that Marines were considered by Lejeune as the first line of defense against an attack on American shores.

In theory at least, the defense of a beach also implies attacking one but the record is not precise just when the thinking shifted to offensive operations. What has been described as "confused military thought" following WWI completely rejected the concept of amphibious warfare. The Great War was slogging, of trench-type, and typified by long-range artillery and clanking armor. That future wars would follow a similar pattern was the consensus of military thought both in Europe and the United States. Lejeune, a decorated, highly esteemed WWI commander who moved his troops in lightning thrusts did not agree. His success as a division commander in France and Germany was built on solid ground—leadership and esprit. These same two intangibles, plus training and education, would be the framework for a seaborne Expeditionary Force that would seize or destroy an enemy base despite any odds against it.

General Lejeune assumed command of the Second Division, A. E. F., on 8 July, 1918. Contrary to popular belief he was not the first Marine to command the Army division. The division headquarters had been partly organized in the United States and partly in France. BGen C. A. Doyen, USMC, assumed command on 26 October, 1917, and remained so until relieved by Army MajGen Omar Bundy two weeks later. Lejeune was the first Marine to lead an Army division in combat. He brilliantly conducted his division, a

mixed unit of soldiers and Marines, in successful operations at Thiaucourt, Massif Blanc Mont, St. Mihiel and on the West Bank of the Meuse. About this latter action, the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Gen Black Jack Pershing, A. E. F. commander, said: ". . . his division was directed with such sound military judgment that it broke and held, by the vigor and speed of its attacks, enemy lines which had been considered impregnable."

For his services as Commanding General of the Second Division, from July 1918 until July 1919, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, both Army and Navy; the Croix de Guerre, with Palm; and the Cross of a Commander of the Legion of Honor.

He also got an unsatisfactory fitness report from an Army Corps commander whose sleep he had disturbed. It came about like this:

Not long after the Armistice the Second Division was transferred from V Corps to III Corps for the purpose of taking part in the march to the Rhine where it would garrison the Coblenz bridgehead. Fierce fighting in the rain and mud during the final 11 days of the war had extracted its toll. The men were exhausted and Lejeune and his officers were bending their energies rebuilding the division, including the issue of new equipment and clothing. While thus engaged, Gen Lejeune got a call citing immediate marching orders. "Who's speaking," he asked? "Clark of Emerson," came the reply. Lejeune knew the caller, a member of the III Corps' staff. Emerson was the code name for Corps headquarters. Clark explained that the Commander-in-Chief had decided that an American division should start the March to the Rhine from Stenay. Since all of the bridges north of Dun-Sac-Meuse were down, Lejeune knew the nearest Meuse crossing meant a march of 40 kilometers, and another 40 kilometers back to Stenay once the bridge was crossed. He demurred.

"I told him that we had already rebuilt the bridge at Pouilly and could cross there." When the voice from Emerson explained that crossing the bridge at Pouilly meant passing through German lines to reach Stenay, a breach strictly forbidden by Marshall Foch, Lejeune suggested the bridge at Stenay be repaired, citing the exhausted condition of his men and the need for more time to rebuild. Col Clark said he lacked authority to change the order, that the III Corps commander was asleep and he did not care to awaken him. Replied Lejeune: "It is better to disturb one general than to have 25,000 sick and exhausted men march 60 kilometers unnecessarily. I will drive over to Corps headquarters and awaken him myself." The order was modified but the Corps commander never forgot and later assessed the Second Division as lacking in personal appear-

ance, military bearing, discipline and in the conditions of its animals and transportation. It took an inspection by Pershing's inspector-general to set the record straight. Some observers considered the criticism incongruous in light of Lejeune's combat achievements. To this he replied: "None of these achievements, nor all of them together, serve as a shield to my reputation."

Commenting on the incident later, Gen Lejeune explained his actions this way:

"I endeavor constantly to be a leader of men rather than a driver of men. In conformity with this effort I never nagged the men and never bawled them out. I always endeavored to be just and show no favoritism. The few who were guilty of being offenders were severely punished but the treatment of officers and men who did their duty was always kind and considerate. I never hesitated to protect the officers and men under my command from unnecessary hardships and from unjust treatment, even though I had to be insubordinate in doing so."

That Lejeune was an effective leader without resort to cajolery or demeaning manner is part of the Second Division's combat record which, under its Marine commander, began at St. Mihiel.

Early in September, 1918, two U. S. Army corps, III and V, were given the job of removing a pesky thorn that had been pricking the French since 1914. This was the German bastion at St. Mihiel from which the enemy's heavy guns were able to fire directly on the Paris-Nancy railway and disrupt the movement of men and supplies to the front. Gen Pershing selected St. Mihiel as the point of attack for the first all-American offensive. Despite their omission from the action, the French could hardly fault the results. The divi-

sion, spearheaded by the 5th and 6th Marines, caught the Germans in the act of beating a not too hasty retreat. The delay proved costly. Attacking with swift surety, the division reached its objective only hours after it launched its attack, capturing 3,300 prisoners, 120 cannon, and some German-made artillery glasses with which Lejeune and his staff watched the enemy evacuate his once superior position.

The French obviously liked his work. Two weeks later the Second Division became attached to the French Fourth Army under Gen Henry Gouraud (who had lost an arm at Gallipoli). Its objective was a powerfully fortified ridge, behind a bevy of high hills known as "Les Monts." At the briefing at Gouraud's headquarters, Gen Lejeune said: ". . . I am confident [the Second Division] will be able to take Blanc Mont Ridge."

It did, driving forward and seizing in a single assault the strongly entrenched German position. Pressing on to the outskirts of St. Etienne the Division advanced six kilometers before the day (3 Oct 1918) ended. This attack, combined with that of the French divisions on its flanks, routed the enemy on both sides of the Suippe River. Perhaps more significantly, the action by the Division drew four fresh German divisions that were sorely needed elsewhere. Marshall Petain later had published in the Orders of the French Army his personal tribute to Lejeune: "He commanded his division with great ability in the attack on Blanc Mont, seizing in a few hours a position of vital importance and capturing 1,800 prisoners."

The Division's greatest hour under its quietly brilliant leader was yet to come. This was the *Battle of Meuse-Argonne*. Personally selected by the 1st Army commander on the basis of recent



*Second Division Commander and Staff planning St. Mihiel offensive.*

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performance, the Second Division had a vital place in the plan of attack. The salient feature of the attack was to drive a wedge through Landres-et-St. George to the vicinity of Fesse. If this could be accomplished the backbone of hostile resistance west of the Meuse would be broken. The Germans would have to retreat to the east of the river where they would be vulnerable to the 1st American Army.

The Second Division was chosen to carry out this main blow and did so by achieving the desired results in every particular *on the first day of attack* (1 Nov 1918) clearing the enemy all the way to Fesse, a distance of nine kilometers. The corps commander, MajGen C. P. Summerall, considered the advance one of the most remarkable achievements of the war.

The day after the battle, the Division commander published an order that indicates that even quiet-spoken men can be moved by battle to stirring rhetoric: "When the history of America's part in winning this war is written, the renown of the Second Division will stand out pre-eminent. Let us press on and destroy the enemy!"

Nine days later the enemy cried "uncle" and Lejeune led his division on the post-Armistice March to the Rhine, to the Coblenz bridgehead, where it remained until receiving sailing orders for home seven months later. The receipt of

orders once again moved Lejeune to impassioned prose: "The curtain has fallen on the last act of the greatest drama in the history of the world."

The Second Division with its commander arrived home in August, 1919. After a short leave, Gen Lejeune again assumed command of MB, Quantico, Virginia. On 30 June 1920 he was named Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps in what must have been a surprise announcement (the incumbent CMC was in midterm) to everyone but Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels who for many years had been convinced that John Lejeune "was the best man in the Marine Corps." Then, too, he might have known that Lejeune, as a lieutenant colonel, had applied to Daniels' predecessor for the top job 10 years before. The year was 1910 and the politicians were mulling over possible choices to succeed Major General Commandant George Elliot who would reach retirement age, 64, on 30 November.

Word traveled fast in a Marine Corps that numbered fewer than the New York City police department; and the word was that a senior supply colonel with no field experience was favored to take up residency in the Commandant's house at 8th and Eye. Lejeune, a student at the Army War College, and held in much esteem by ranking Army and Navy officers, decided that if none of the eligible line colonels wanted the job (or could survive the political maneuverings), he would take it. He submitted a written application to

***President Harding views maneuvers at Quantico with the Major General Commandant.***



George von L. Myer, the Secretary of Navy. As it turned out, Col William P. Biddle was appointed. He asked LtCol Lejeune to serve as his assistant but was turned down since the latter was by now serving as CO, MB, New York and the move back to Washington would be economically prohibitive. Lejeune later did serve as assistant Commandant under Barnett, after returning from the Vera Cruz expedition.

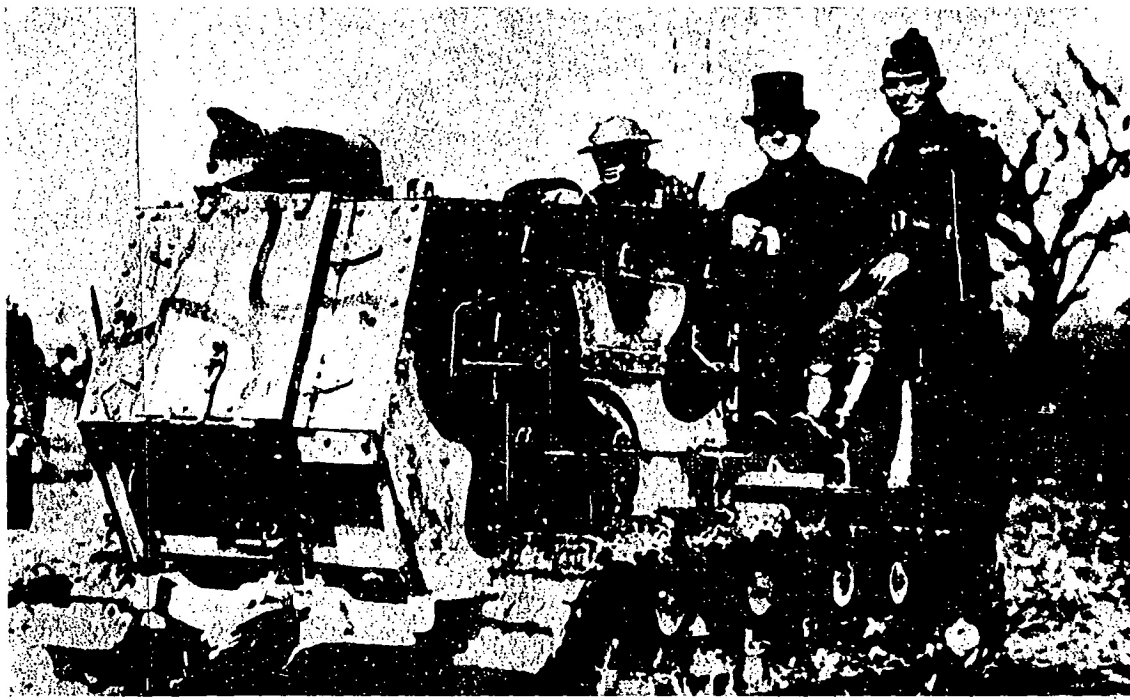
Lejeune's appointment to Major General Commandant was a recess one, and before it could be submitted to the Senate for confirmation, President Harding had entered the White House. The Senate was so impressed by his services in France it waived the usual formality of carrying the nomination over for one executive session. His appointment was confirmed immediately and his commission was the first to receive the President's signature.

Shortly after assuming his new duties an article attacking the conduct of Marines in Haiti was published in New York. Lejeune went to Haiti to see for himself. During his inspection he had a long chat with the chief of staff of the Second Marine Brigade. This was Maj Earl H. Ellis who four years previously had made known his views on the mission of the Marine Corps in the Marine Corps GAZETTE: "The mission of the Marine Corps is to support the Navy . . . by performing the land operations necessary for the successful prosecution of war by the fleet."

There can be little doubt that the results of the

talk in Haiti were far-reaching. That Lejeune and Ellis had much in common when it came to the Marine Corps mission is not strictly speculative. Two weeks after Lejeune returned to Washington, Ellis was transferred to HQMC. A year later he had produced the top-secret document "Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia," an almost unbelievably precise forecast of the amphibious war with Japan. The Commandant took it from there. He knew that its past services with the fleet made the Marine Corps an ideal organ for even more sophisticated ship-to-shore operations than, say the Bermuda landing in 1776. During his first appearance as Commandant before the House Appropriations Committee he expressed the importance of keeping in mind that the Marine Corps had been created for that purpose—active service with the fleet, both in war and in emergency brushfire situations. Each year before the Congress he would belabor this same point: Marines were firemen; they must always be ready for immediate deployment. No orator in the traditional sense, Lejeune could, when moved, invoke a well-turned phrase. The fleet with its Marines was the "bulwark behind which great armies can be organized and trained." This was the parry, followed by the swift thrust: "We cannot be ready unless we have Marines."

Lejeune did not lean entirely on Congress for the Marines he considered necessary to the interests of readiness. When he became Commandant the strength of the Corps, suffering the pangs of



Secretary of Navy Daniels and "the best man in the Marine Corps."

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demobilization, was 16,000. This was 4,000 Marines below authorized strength. During his first month in office the new CMC noted with apprehension only 225 new recruits.

He directed that recruiters be held individually responsible for results attained. The response was so great that by the first of the year (1922) after raising physical standards and accepting only those over 21 ("men instead of boys") he finally had to stop recruiting entirely. When it was suggested it might even be necessary to curtail reenlistments, he replied: "We have a moral obligation not to refuse a reenlistment if the man is otherwise eligible." Under the Commandant's personal guidance the strength of the Corps jumped to 22,115.

With an expanded Corps assured, Lejeune could take the next obvious steps of his well-laid plans for an amphibious force—training, education and equipment. Early in his tenure as CMC he established a G-3 HQMC (The Division of Operations and Training) whose purpose was the study of Marine Corps matters that applied to the mission. The development of the Corps' contingency plans as a result of this division's recommendations were closely tied to the general war plans of the Navy. The nature of the planning included four important precepts:

- Peacetime organization would be such as to enhance mobilization plans.
- Peacetime training would be that which best anticipated the mission.
- Officer education would be such as to enable them to best effect this training.
- The development of arms and equipment would be such as was necessary to accomplish the mission.

In a much-reported speech at the Naval War College in December 1923, Gen Lejeune reiterated the mission.

"... the major wartime mission of the Marine Corps is to support the Fleet by supplying it with a highly trained, fully equipped expeditionary force."

There is no evidence that Lejeune had anything in mind other than the amphibious raid, a ship-launched attack that would contribute to the Navy mission—control of the sea. He certainly did not foresee a Marine Corps capable of sustained ground operations in the style of a land army.

In the same NWC speech Gen Lejeune gave his views on equipment: "... to be burdened with unnecessary and cumbersome equipment is to jeopardize the success of the adventure"; followed by a list of essentials including mobile artillery, searchlights, light tanks and special landing craft. Concerning the latter, early developmental efforts

are chronicled in the photo essay on 52.

Lejeune's vision of a small, precision-trained amphibious assault force never quite materialized during his career which ended voluntarily 5 Mar 1929. Military analysts and historians have offered several reasons for the slow acceptance of the ship-to-shore concept. Lack of money and highly-placed Navy interest were probably the main holdbacks. Then, as now, the Marine Corps carried out its work within a restrained budget; the focus of Navy interest was on warships, not landing craft. Also global commitments in China, Nicaragua and Haiti hamstrung any serious amphibious training efforts.

The fulfillment of the vision began to take shape with the publication of *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* published at Quantico in 1935 (see *School for Doctrine*, page 60). Then, in 1939, BGen Holland M. Smith, destined to be the first CG, FMFPac, was given the 1st Marine Brigade and the mission of training its Marines in ship-to-shore operations. From a base at Guantanamo Bay, Navy and Marines blueprinted the WWII Pacific war, naval gunfire support, combat loading, net operations; and experimented with landing craft.

That it was left to other hands to implement his dream is of no matter. This, too, was in accord with the Lejeune philosophy of esprit de Corps and the tangible benefits that could derive from an intangible substance. This same philosophy is evident in an early Marine Corps GAZETTE prospectus:

"What we need is some means of bringing our officers closer together, as well as an organized system of education. The publication of articles prepared by officers, together with the criticisms by other officers, will offer an incentive to study professional subjects . . . in this way the knowledge and experience of each officer will be available to every other officer."

Lejeune is also the author of the paragraph in the Marine Corps Manual, repeated throughout the Corps on 10 November, that relates to the "high name of distinction and soldierly repute" that each generation of Marine inherits from its predecessor. Which is why every war produces its Dan Daleys, its John Basilonos and Jimmy Howards.

Gen Lejeune best described the heritage as congenital. In recalling to memory the exploits of his Marines in France, he recounted an incident of an earlier war, the Battle of Wagram, in which Marshall Ney, standing on a hilltop in plain view of the attacking regiments, said to his orderly "Hear them shout, see them charge! It's in their blood."

In this same way, Gen Lejeune considered his Marines, and those who would follow: "Once a Marine, always a Marine. It's in their blood!"

USMC