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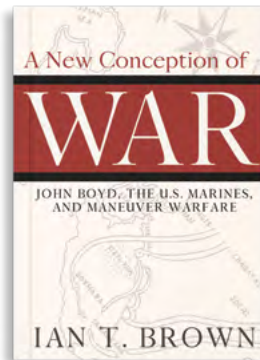
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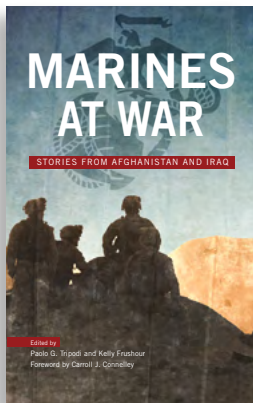
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Remembrances of Commandant General Alfred M. Gray Jr.

By Allan R. Millett, PhD

In life or death, General Alfred Gray is unforgettable. I think I met him in the late 1970s when he had become a brigadier general and a public figure for his command of the air and ground Joint forces that evacuated Saigon and Phnom Penh. I do know that I knew him when I commanded 3d Battalion, 25th Marines (1980–81), and we went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for annual training duty. As a major general, he had become commanding general of the 2d Marine Division, and he visited our command post during the week-long exercise to see how we were doing. He knew that my history of the Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis*, had just been published (1981), and he had already read it. I had dined at his quarters the week before, so we had already talked about the book, which he liked. At our second meeting, he complimented our battalion on its operational competence and enthusiastic training. The spiritual lift helped since the 4th Division commander had just reamed me out for protesting the transfer of my best

Dr. Allan R. Millett retired in 2005 after 37 years as a professor of history and faculty associate of the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at the Ohio State University. He then became the Ambrose Professor of History and director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans and senior military advisor at the National World War II Museum. He is the author or coauthor of 10 books. In 2008, Millett received the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing. An infantry officer in the Marine Corps, he retired as a colonel from the Marine Corps Reserve in 1990.



RG 330 Records of the Secretary of Defense, Combined Military Service
Digital Photographic Files, 1982–2007, NARA
Retired CMC Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr.'s official portrait in his camouflage
utility uniform, 1 January 1995.

and largest rifle company, Lima of western Pennsylvania, to make up manning shortfalls in the 4th Service Support Group. The change had been made without

my consultation, but I was being blamed for allowing my battalion to fall short of its manning requirements. I was mad, and it showed. The commanding general had dressed me down in front of my staff for challenging his decision. Who was I, a mere lieutenant colonel, to challenge the wisdom of the 4th Marine Division commander and his staff? (I had already been selected for colonel, which the commanding general ignored.) General Gray reassured me that his evaluators, headed by Colonel Carl E. Mundy Jr., thought we were doing fine. My reputation did not rest solely on my writing.

Duly promoted, I returned to Quantico for a second tour on the Marine Corps Command and Staff College adjunct faculty and to write operational doctrine guidebooks. I worked on the first version of *Warfighting*, FMFM-1 (1988), and then flected up to be deputy director, Marine Corps History and Museums Division (Mobilization Designate), and officer in charge, Mobilization Training Unit DC-4, whose members did a brilliant job covering the Gulf War (1990–91). In 1987, General Gray, now Commandant, asked me to form a group of Reserve colonels to work with the Commandant's Special Study Group, a high-powered collection of Headquarters Marine Corps senior officers answerable only to the Commandant and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were Generals Louis H. Buehl and Thomas R. Morgan. As the senior officer of the Special Projects Reserve Component, I received tasking assignments for our group from the Commandant. My regular counterpart was then-colonel James L. Jones.

During those three years, I served General Gray as well as I could, and I learned nothing that diminished my respect for him. He soldiered on despite his reservations about the Joint Chiefs, the secretary of defense, Navy budgeting, and Washington politics. The fact that he thought out loud did not help with inter-Service politics. He missed the troops and traveled as much as he could. He never wavered in his love of Marines, and he looked constantly for ways to make the Marine Corps better for Marines. He despaired when Marines abused their families, cheated their troops, and quit trying to excel in their operational



CMC Alfred M. Gray Jr. meets with troops following a live fire demonstration at Camp Hansen, Japan, 30 September 1987.
 CMC Alfred M. Gray Jr. meets with troops following a live fire demonstration at Camp Hansen, Japan, 30 September 1987.

assignments. He wanted the Marine Corps to be as good as it boasted it was to others. Washington service drains even the best officers, ambitious or not, and Gray did not fancy many of the duties that came with being Commandant, especially in taking congressional inquiries and demands seriously.

The Al Gray I knew never allowed his demanding tour as Commandant to diminish his desire to help Marines be more professional and dedicated and to be winners on the battlefield. He was never a poster Marine, and he knew that “good Marines” came in all shapes and sizes. He wanted performance and selflessness beyond human reality, but I know his leadership made many of us want to be better Marines. That is his enduring legacy.