

General: Marines Need to Be 'Grander Thinkers'



Lt. Gen. Kevin M. Iiams, commanding general, Training and Education Command, during his frocking ceremony in Quantico, Virginia, Aug. 3. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Jesse Schremmer*

ARLINGTON, Va. – In a potential future of distributed warfare, Marines on the scene need to be able to have a greater understanding of strategy and operations as well as tactics and technology, the Marine Corps' training boss said.

"How do find Marines who are ... ready to execute mission-type orders and have strategic level effect with tactical-level decision making?" asked Lt. Gen. Kevin Iiams, commanding general Training and Education Command, speaking Sept. 16 in a Defense One webinar.

"We need to be very, very deliberate in the way we groom our young Marines looking to the future and ensure that we imbue them with not only the right knowledge moving forward but the right education is important," Iiams said. "We need to make them much grander thinkers, very good critical thinkers because what we're going to expect them to do in some of these remote places."

The general posited a case of a future young captain "with his MLR [Marine Littoral Regiment] force step off the light amphibious warship on some remote archipelago island. He will start to sense his surroundings, and then he's going to have to start making decisions, because if he is in a denied, degraded, contested environment where [an enemy] is trying to ensure that he or she does not have all of the communications reach-back that one might need to make decisions, have we trained that individual properly?"

Iiams said “these decisions are going to be carried out in distributed maritime operations and expeditionary advanced base operations [EABO]. We’re just now starting to figure out what these actually mean as we look to the future. What does an EABO look like? How do we run one? How do we protect one?”

The general said one challenge is breeding a “new generation of Marines that are more tech-savvy,” but on the other hand, more maturity is needed in the traditionally young Marine Corps personnel.

“We need them to be older to make these mature decisions,” Iiams said, noting that recruiting, training and maturing the needed Marines is likely to be more costly.

He said the Corps needs to maintain an intellectual overmatch over the nation’s adversaries.