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HOUSE ARMED SERVICE COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF
MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT NELLER
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
ANOTHER CROSSROADS? PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION TWO
DECADES AFTER THE GOLDWATER-NICHOLS ACT AND THE SKELTON PANEL.
ON
NOVEMBER 30, 2010**

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Chairman Snyder, Ranking Member Wittman, distinguished sub-committee members.

Good morning. Thank you for permitting me to discuss the Marine Corps' views on *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Two Decades after the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*.

The Marine Corps deeply appreciates the extensive research, analysis, and documentation contained in the report. The work of the subcommittee provided a thorough assessment of the status of Professional Military Education (PME) and more importantly, provided sound recommendations on a variety of issues that will improve our educational programs. We have carefully reviewed the report and are already at work implementing many of the recommendations. Additionally, we are working closely with the Joint Staff and other services to ensure a coordinated approach as we examine each issue.

The Marine Corps, and Marine Corps University (MCU) in particular, is constantly reviewing and revising PME programs to ensure we meet the needs of the operating forces and prepare our leaders for the complex environments in which they will operate. Over the past few years, we have strengthened the faculty and staff of our schools and colleges and continually reviewed our curricula for relevance. Additionally, we have planned infrastructure improvements and technology enhancements that will dramatically improve the learning environment for our students. While we continue to make our quality resident officer programs even better, our current emphasis is the improvement of our enlisted PME programs. We ask an unbelievable amount from our enlisted leaders and they deserve the same quality education as our officers. We are actively revising our enlisted curricula to ensure relevance at all levels from corporals to senior enlisted leaders. Online distance education modules are being developed to both better reach Marines participating in PME programs, and to provide a higher quality

educational experience. These distance programs will ultimately serve as a prerequisite for resident courses. This will allow the resident programs to focus on the application of warfighting skills, critical thinking, and communication skills. The recent implementation of our Senior Enlisted PME Course fills a critical void in the enlisted PME continuum by enhancing the knowledge of our senior leaders to allow them to more effectively serve as senior advisors. As noted in the *Issues for Further Study* section of the report, progress has been made but much work remains to fully prepare our enlisted leaders.

Last month, General Amos published his Commandant's Planning Guidance identifying professional military education as one of his top priorities. His guidance directs the development of plans to increase the number of Marines attending resident officer and enlisted education programs and to continue to develop MCU into a world-class institution. We are in the process of developing options to increase attendance in our programs without sacrificing quality or desired learning outcomes. World-class status is achieved through world-class faculty, world-class students, world-class curricula, and world-class facilities and resources. Although work remains, as noted earlier, we have made substantial progress in strengthening faculty, students, and curricula. We are also on track to make significant progress in facilities. For example, over \$120M in military construction is programmed over the next three years for our educational facilities. I am also pleased to report that the Expeditionary Warfare School Distributed Education Network (EDEN), an item of interest during a subcommittee visit, is now fully funded and will be operational as soon as possible. Our institutional commitment toward PME, coupled with the Commandant's commitment to achieve world-class status, illustrate the Marine Corps is totally dedicated to educating our future leaders. The Commandant's Planning

Guidance and the subcommittee report complement each other and provide a good roadmap to improve our already strong PME programs.

I will address some of the key recommendations of the subcommittee's report, particularly those that relate directly to the Marine Corps.

The report correctly identifies the need to clarify the role of education in preparing officers for joint duty assignments. We agree that PME, and Joint PME (JPME) in particular, plays an important role in preparing officers for these challenging joint assignments. We further believe that a combination of training and education is needed to fully prepare officers. Surveys of supervisors of our graduates indicate that our programs are meeting this goal. In fact, for the past two years, 98% of the supervisors indicated that Command and Staff graduates are prepared for joint assignments, while 100% of supervisors indicated that MCWAR graduates are prepared for joint assignments. Surveys of the graduates of both programs were equally positive. Additionally, our educational programs provide comprehensive coverage of the competencies identified in the report as appropriate for educational venues in the development of joint staff officers. Service capabilities, the ability to conduct research, critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills are emphasized in all our colleges and schools. Over the past five years, MCU has continually raised the bar for effective communications. Most recently, MCU identified "Strengthening Leadership through Enhancement of Communication Skills" as a key effort for student learning and for submission as a component for regional accreditation. Under this program, MCU has established a Leadership Communication Skills Center, standardized assessments, and provided individualized communication skills assistance to numerous students. We view these skills as crucial for all officers, regardless of a particular billet assignment.

We agree that development of officers must be approached in a holistic fashion. Education is a critical component, but varied assignments, unit training, and individual developmental opportunities all ultimately contribute to the maturation of our leaders. MCU works closely with Manpower and Reserve Affairs to ensure PME programs are aligned with those of the manpower community. Ongoing planning to substantially increase attendance at officer resident PME programs will require close coordination with manpower to meet the Commandant's guidance, while maintaining adequate levels of manning in our operating forces. As suggested in the committee report, we are investigating innovative approaches to deliver PME in conjunction with operational assignments and other developmental opportunities.

The report correctly notes that the Marine Corps is the only service that does not have a formal program that allows Marines to pursue a doctoral degree. The Marine Corps is currently conducting a comprehensive education study to identify positions requiring specific educational degrees. This study will validate all existing structure positions, but more importantly, will identify opportunities for Marines to pursue degrees in a wide variety of disciplines. Doctoral degrees will be a key component of this study. MCU has proposed to the institution a program whereby selected Marines can attend civilian institutions to obtain a doctoral degree. Under this proposal, the officer will spend 18-24 months at a civilian institution to complete course work and comprehensive examinations, and then will be assigned as teaching faculty at MCU while completing his or her dissertation. The program will benefit the officer and the Marine Corps. We value the liberal arts education provided by civilian institutions and, as noted in the report, do not view internal-administered programs as substitutes for these developmental opportunities.

We concur with the report's observation that strategists are developed through a combination of experience and education. We believe that our PME programs are properly

constructed to provide a thorough understanding of the principles of the strategic level of war and the complexities of developing well-reasoned strategy. In particular, our School of Advanced Warfighting provides a world-class curriculum for complex problem solving and planning and the Marine Corps War College is focused on development of strategic leaders. The previously mentioned graduate education study will identify positions that will provide unique developmental opportunities for Marines of all ranks. Additionally, we recently conducted a pilot Senior Planners Course for Colonels to hone their planning skills as they assume key positions in the operating forces. The results of the pilot were very positive and we plan to continue to offer the course to better prepare many of our senior leaders.

We understand the rationale of the report's recommendation that general criteria or credential requirements should be developed for leaders of PME institutions. While these would be useful in vetting candidates, we believe that demonstrated leadership performance should be the basis for selection of individuals to lead our PME institutions. Academic credentials are important, but the ability to lead large complex organizations, completion of PME at each level, and a concern for properly educating leaders are the key factors in selecting these leaders.

We appreciate the support of the subcommittee and we will review the associated recommendation to amend the 2007 legislation so as not to preclude the possibility of Joint Duty Assignment credit for non-host faculty at JPME I institutions. This is an important issue for our intermediate level service institutions as we seek to attract the most qualified personnel as faculty. The window of opportunity, however, is narrow for these officers as they must balance command, staff assignments, professional developmental opportunities, and joint duty assignments. These faculty members continually work joint matters such as national security strategy, campaigning, joint planning processes, joint capabilities, and the integration of service

capabilities. Even though officers may self-nominate for the awarding of joint credit, this is far from a guarantee. We wholeheartedly agree with the subcommittee's recommendation to review the provisions of faculty hiring under Title 10 authority. The current statute has served us very well as we have been able to hire exceptional faculty for our 10-month officer PME programs. As mentioned previously, our enlisted leaders deserve the same quality educational experience. We view this as a key step in improving our enlisted programs and more closely aligning them with officer PME.

In summary, your Marine Corps Professional Military Education programs are strong and are producing leaders who are competent, able to think critically, and capable of solving complex problems. We appreciate the work of the subcommittee and believe the recommendations contained in the report will make our programs even stronger.