

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT MILSTEAD,
COMMANDING GENERAL, MARINE CORPS RECRUITING COMMAND, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT:
RECRUITING FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 TIME: 2:58 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 31,
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's
bloggers round table for Tuesday, March 31st, 2009. My name is Lieutenant
Jennifer Cragg, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs,
and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to our bloggers on the line: Please remember to clearly state
your name before asking your question.

Today our guest is Major General Robert Milstead. He's the commanding
general, U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Major General Milstead will
discuss the current state of the Marine Corps enlisted and officer recruiting
for fiscal year 2009. Sir, I'd like to turn the floor over to you, if you'd
like to start with an opening statement.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Well, hey, good afternoon, everybody. I think it's
been several months since we did this before. And I think this is a good
opportunity for me to answer your questions and to engage with you all, because,
again, I feel that what you do and this whole blog thing -- which I still don't
have my arms around, being over, you know, 40 years old -- is very important.

And what you all do has a great deal to do with how we get our message
out and how we get truth out.

So with that, let me just -- I listened to everybody check aboard. I
recognize several of your names. And so let me just open it up to you and start
answering your questions. I've been at this now almost 10 months. So I guess
can't use being the new guy as an excuse. So fire away.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, with that, let's go to Bryant first. Bryant, your
turn.

Q Yeah, General, as the corps moves to 202K quicker than you all
anticipated or had planned for, will you guys be pulling back any resources or
changing the way you are doing your aggressive approach right now to recruiting?

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah, that's true. You know, you have to be careful not to be a victim of your success. You know, I like to say that failure stalks success.

We have been successful. And, you know, I like to make it up front, right away, that it is -- a great deal has to do with retention as it does recruiting. I'm not taking anything away from our recruiters. They've done a fantastic job. And -- but also, we got young men and women that are hanging around the Marine Corps and they're reenlisting.

And you know that I work off of a mission. So the commandant, he said, hey, you guys are jacking it out of the park. A couple years ago, he'd given us about -- between 5(00) and 600 extra recruiters. He wanted some of them back. And so we did it a science project, for instance, and did the calculus and figured out what we could give him back. And right now the plan is to give him 134 recruiters back. I'll give him 48 this year and the remainder next year.

So we're looking at ways to, you know, to -- for efficiencies, if you will, based on our success.

Does that kind of answer -- does it give you an example of -- one example?

Q Yeah. How about the money, as it's been -- I know the amount of money has been, you know, triple, quadruple what it was just a few years ago.
GEN. MILSTEAD: Oh, that's a -- that's another good point. Thanks for tickling me on that. Bonuses -- I think you will see, again, much of this is run from upstairs in M&RA. It's kind of out of my lane.

But we're seeing -- stuff is going -- more stuff is going onto the chopping block. You know, we had -- we had the college loan replacement program. We had a signing bonus for officers. There were some reenlistment bonuses that were being offered.

Some of that is being scaled back. So I -- you know, my instincts tell me that this next year you're going to see fewer and fewer bonuses. Of course, it all depends on the total budget. And Congress has been good to give us the money, but -- you know, if we don't need it, we don't need it.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's go over to --

Q Excellent. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Bryant. Let's go over to Andrew. Andrew, next.

Q General, Andrew Lubin. Good to talk to you again, sir.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Hi, Andrew.

Q Good. Glad you take the time to be with us.

General, got a question for you about the quality of the recruits. With the corps having made this mission three years instead of five years, are you able to concentrate now on getting the kids down at Parris Island, down at -- down in California, a better-caliber recruit so you get fewer washouts?

GEN. MILSTEAD: We -- well, some of that, Andrew, has been a second order of consequence. We've done very, very well; we've seen that our pool attrition -- and you understand the pool -- the pool attritions are down. We're seeing historic lows on our recruit depot attritions. That's due to the fact that these kids are -- that they're a higher quality and that they are in the pool a little bit longer.

You see that last year, for instance, we were almost 97 percent high-school graduates that we brought in. But yeah, we can be a little bit more -- discreet's probably not the word -- a little bit more picky. But you know, the strength of the corps is the full spectrum of the young men and women that come into the corps.

And so those mental Category 4s, for instance, do we still want some of them? Yeah, you betcha we do, because, you know, they may be Hispanic or they may be -- you know, English may not be their native tongue. And so they may do their mental calculus in their head, translate it to English and then put it onto the paper when they take that ASVAB test, and so they score a little bit lower. But I'll take those Cat 4 guys any day, because for us to enlist them, they have to be a Tier 1, meaning they had to have been a high-school graduate. And that means they're stickers, and they make good Marines.

So yeah, we're being a little more choosy, but you don't want to be overly choosy. You just -- you want the full width and breadth of what this nation has to offer, within a -- certain parameters.

Q Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Kevin?

Q General, hi. This is Kevin Baron from Stars and Stripes. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how the economy is affecting your numbers and your efforts out there. And, you know, there's an assumption that whenever the economy tanks, recruitment goes up for the military because there's no jobs elsewhere or people just see the opportunity.

Are you seeing those numbers? Do you expect those numbers? Or are there other circumstances -- you know, number one being that there are wars going on -- that will still keep the numbers of applicants lower than you would expect?

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah, I know exactly -- I know exactly the -- what you're asking, Kev.

I would tell you, for the enlisted, that it has not made a difference. I would say that it's increased the office traffic. It's increased the number of young men and women walking in the doors, with the economy down -- not those kids where we focus, that are in high school right now, about to -- but those kids that are out there that have been looking for a job and they're already out of high school. Or maybe they're not -- maybe they don't have high-school degrees, or maybe they just have a GED. But they're looking for something, with the economy, and they're walking into the services.

The Marines, of course, we're turning them away. We have our standards. So we're seeing more, but no, the young men and women that join the Marine Corps join the Marine Corps today for all the same reasons that they joined the Marine Corps, you know, four years ago -- the intangibles.

And the example is that my sister service -- the one that we, you know, compete with more than the others -- they offer money, where we don't offer any money. And so a young man will join the Marine Corps -- will walk away from that money to join the Marine Corps because he wants to be a Marine.

Now, that's the enlisted side. So I would offer that yeah, it's helping a little bit, but, you know, we're not really seeing significant improved -- you know, we just don't need it. The officer piece -- I think you all remember me talking about the challenge we had with officer recruiting the last time we spoke, and I would offer that it -- that this economy has indeed made a difference there. In the 10 months that I've been here, I've seen almost a reversal.

I was beating up my OSOs, my officer selection officers, telling them to get out there and canvass; you know, they had to get out of their office. Now we're seeing kids coming in, they're interested in joining the Marine Corps. And it will help with diversity in the officer corps, as well.

So I would throw out that this economy has more of an impact in my officer recruiting than it does in my enlisted recruiting, if that makes sense to you.

Q Yeah, it does, absolutely. And just to follow on about the -- the, you know, other effect, you mentioned the people coming in today for the same reasons as a few years ago, but I'm more interested in compared to more than a few years ago, more like eight years ago, before 9/11, before the wars began, when, you know, there were statistics showing that did have an effect on who was coming in, who was asking to join.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Well, that may be the case, you know. I don't have the figures -- I could pull them -- that go back prior to 9/11.

Q Okay.

GEN. MILSTEAD: I think, though, that given over -- since 9/11 -- for instance, the past eight years -- that it's pretty consistent. For the last decade, we have made mission. And the kids that join the Marine Corps join for the reasons that they always have. You know, we make them one promise, one promise only: that they'll be a United States Marine.

But again, this officer piece, it's -- it's critical. And real quick, my analogy. You get a kid coming out of high school. He throws 90-mile-an-hour heat. He's got good movement on the ball. LSU says, "Hey, come to us. We'll give you a full four-year scholarship, full ride." The Atlanta Braves tell him, said, "Hey, you come for us. We're going to -- we're going to draft you in the first round of the amateur draft, son. You're going to be pitching in the show before you're 21." Where's that kid going? He's going to follow the money. And so we've competed with major industry for these kids coming out of college, and oftentimes they don't come to us because of the money. Like, I would offer that kids join the Marine Corps as officers maybe for a little bit different reasons than the enlisted. And so the economy has had a -- has had a significant effect, I believe, on our officer recruiting.

Q Thanks.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's go over to Bryant, because I know, Andrew, you said you have some follow-on questions. So, Bryant, let me give you a chance.

Q Yeah, once again, you've touched on minority recruiting.

Last year -- I'm not sure if it was last year or the year before, but the number of black officers could be counted on one hand that the Marine Corps recruited that came in to be second lieutenants and actually went through the whole process. What are you guys doing to address that, to ensure that 20 years hence there are black colonels and there are black generals?

GEN. MILSTEAD: We're working hard at it, and that's a good question. But I'll tell you, for -- we are making some improvements. If you look at officer -- African-American accessions in '07 for officers, were there 68, about 3.6 percent. I've got these charts right here in front of me, because when I came in here 10 months ago, one of my priorities was diversity. And diversity's not necessarily the color of your skin. It includes women, too. And I wanted to improve it.

But you know, we have a challenge. Of all the people that graduate from college, 5.9 percent -- I know these numbers by heart -- 5.9 percent of college grads are African-American. Okay?

So you take that 5.9 percent. Now, 67 percent of those are women. So right now the target of opportunity for black/African-American males is significantly reduced.

And oh, of those, probably a percent don't -- can't qualify, you know, with the minimum ACT or ASVAB or SAT score. So it is a small -- you know, a small -- very small target for us.

So where are we? Here for officers, (2.4 ?) percent -- last year we were at about 3.6 percent. Then the enlisted side we're doing much better. We've gone up from 9 -- 9 and change to almost 10 percent.

So we're working very hard, very hard, which -- I want to talk to you all little bit later, when I get to bounce back on you on the blogs. This goes counter -- all that stuff that you hear about the -- a disproportionate number of African-American and Hispanics and low-income serving in our armed forces.

So -- Jane (sic; Judy) Woodruff asked that question during the debates. It's totally wrong. And I'd like to talk to you all about it, because I think you can get the truth out.

Q When you say you're working very hard, specifically, what kind of tactics are you employing to go out and find this very small target of opportunity talk them into being a Marine Corps -- GEN. MILSTEAD: Okay. Last month was February, which was Black History Month. We targeted -- (off mike) -- specific commercials, one -- on two general officers, one on General Bolden, Panther Bolden, an astronaut, and the other on -- oh, I just had my senior moment -- (pause) -- yes -- Frank Petersen.

Frank Petersen. I had a -- here we had a senior moment on my blog interview. Frank Petersen, a retired three-star combat pilot in Vietnam and the first three-star. Plus we did one on Montford Point. We had ads in Black Enterprise, Ebony, Jet Magazine.

We've done things -- we have hired a diversity officer, believe that diversity needs to be a part of everything you do. Hired a young captain, a Howard grad, has got his stuff squared. And he is involved in everything, because it needs to be a part of what we've done. We're involved in getting out on the college campuses.

Here's something that he brought to my attention. We're doing a leadership forum, and we're doing leadership forums on the college campuses with the young men. He brought to light the fact that this year is the hundredth anniversary for a lot of the black college fraternities and sororities. And they're the leaders on the campus, not the NC double -- I mean the NC -- double -- but that's where the leadership is on the campuses today, and so we're trying to target them. Things like that. Things that we didn't do in the past.

Q Very good. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Andrew, over to you, please.

Q Thank you.

General, I want to talk to you about the tattoo policy briefly. And not as far as the young recruits, you know, kids coming in, you know, age 17, 18, 19. It is what it is. But it seems to me that the Marine Corps is losing a lot of really good senior enlisted who are (here ?), the young men who aren't able to re-up because -- they've got a couple years of combat experience -- (inaudible) -- tours overseas, got whatever stupid tattoo. You know, not gang related and not, you know, offensive, but just dumb, and now they can't re-up again.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Oh, that's, Andrew --

Q Isn't this making -- isn't this a rather short-term answer to a problem?

GEN. MILSTEAD: That's not the case, Andrew. You can't -- unless it's something that's inappropriate and the guy could use a little bit of laser to take the cosmetics off, for instance, a nudity or something. That's not the case. The commandant said, "I don't like all these tattoos." He put out a new policy, but he grandfathered these -- everybody. You've got a guy -- I've got Marines that have full sleeves.

I can't -- I will not enlist -- we will not enlist somebody with a full sleeve today, nor will we --

Q No, I understand that. That's why I wanted to switch you back to the kid who's 22 years old, who wants to re-up. But the --

GEN. MILSTEAD: He's grandfathered, Andrew. If they take --

Q He still is? I thought that was two years gone, now.

GEN. MILSTEAD: No. No. Absolutely not.

Q Okay.

GEN. MILSTEAD: A kid that has a tattoo and wants to reenlist, as long as he's grandfathered, that tattoo does not come into play. He's grandfathered. And he'll sign something that says "no mas." You know?

Q Fine. That's fair enough. Okay.

GEN. MILSTEAD: No more. Absolutely not.

Q The idea in the street is that the sergeant major's not letting anybody back in regardless.

GEN. MILSTEAD: No, that's bum -- that's bum gouge.

And if there are sergeants major out there that are telling a kid he can't reenlist, well, you know, we need to deal with that. But I don't think that's the case.

And I know Sergeant Major Kent. I speak to him every week. It's not the case. These kids are grandfathered, and they can reenlist.

Now, what they can't do is they won't -- they can't put in for an officer program, for instance, if they have a full or half sleeve.

Q Right.

GEN. MILSTEAD: They can -- they can finish out a 30 year career and someday become sergeant major of the Marine Corps. Absolutely.

Q I know officer track -- (inaudible) -- track and some of the others were closed. But okay, this is great news. Thanks very much.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Andrew, is that all the follow-up questions you had? You had said that --

Q No, but I -- since there's only three of us, I mean, Kevin can go, you -- we can keep going around the circle. Go ahead.

LT. CRAGG: Loop around the horn one more time.

Q Yeah, we can go around again.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Sounds good -- sounds good to me.

Q So General, this is Kevin again, Stars and Stripes. And I just wanted to know if you could explain some of the -- what are the specific skills that you're recruiting for right now? Where -- you know, where's the Marine Corps short and where are you flush after -- you know, after seven years of war and, you know, different fluxes in the size of the force?

GEN. MILSTEAD: I would say that, you know, we don't -- when we go out and recruit, certainly a young lad that speaks Arabic or has a high ASVAB score where he could maybe be in sig intelligence or something like that -- some guy or gal -- they're going to get a bonus and we're going to -- they're going to put a -- we'll get a little step.

But from my perspective of this of 10 months, I'm not out there banging away for specific skill sets, per se. I've got -- you know, I've got my non-prior service mission. And I have my non-prior service reserve mission. I have a small number prior service -- those folks that have gotten out of the Marine Corps, want to come back in. And certainly if they have a special skill there, that will enhance their ability to get back in.

That's -- your question is more to the folks upstairs when they start looking at the reenlistment piece. And you know -- you know what (FCAP ?) is. And we made it already. We're already there.

So I would offer that, you know, three years ago, when we kicked this off, I equate it to the great Oklahoma land rush. The guy fired the cannon and everybody went hauling ass. And, you know, in the -- it was -- you want to reenlist? We're going to reenlist you. Well, now, the aperture is closing down. The great Oklahoma land rush is over. We're at 202K. We'll probably go over it just a little bit, and then work our way back down to it. We're there.

So now we're starting a little -- it's tougher to reenlist. Last year -- you want to reenlist, you got a good record, we'll reenlist you. That's not the case now. (Off mike) -- we're going to see some good Marines, some of those Marines like what Andrew was just talking about, three combat tours that want to reenlist that may not be able to reenlist.

But we're focused on certain skill sets more for the reenlisting piece.

Once I get these guys to boot camp, how they're actually -- you know, what program -- we bring them in under a program family. The specific MOS kind of comes from upstairs.

Q Right.

GEN. MILSTEAD: So I can't really sit here and speak to that. But I think the spirit of your question is more for the reenlistment phase, if you get what I'm trying to say.

Q Sure do.

Thanks.

Q (Inaudible) -- with military.com again.

GEN. MILSTEAD: (Inaudible.)

Q You say we're going to work our way back to 202K. Obviously when the Congress authorized this, and we threw these numbers up, the calculus was based on situations on the ground, in Iraq and Afghanistan, which for the large part have changed for the better.

With that in mind, how long do we hold the Marine Corps at 202,000 Marines? And more importantly when we start to draw down, what is the impact going to be? Now you're talking about trouble reenlisting already. Is that just because we've hit it prematurely?

Obviously -- maybe not obviously but I assume we won't stay at this very long because of economic considerations.

GEN. MILSTEAD: No. I think that, you know, that's kind of -- I've got to be careful here, because you're sucking me -- you're sucking me over, onto the edges of my empire, into somebody else's. And he's a very, very tall guy. You know who I'm saying. He's got a whole lot more bling on his collar than I do.

Q No. I get it. I get it. I'm -- GEN. MILSTEAD: No. But you know, he has come out and said that 202 -- he doesn't believe that 202 is where we'll be, you know, once all this goes away, that it would probably be a little bit smaller.

But that's for I don't know when. That's -- you know, we've got Iraq. Things are good in Iraq. But we're getting ready to move into Afghanistan. And who knows what else is going to go on in the world.

But for right now, 202 seems to be the right figure, for our Marine Corps, to allow us that dwell, so that we can pay attention in, you know, Afghanistan -- let me just -- I'll just speak to Afghanistan, that part of the world -- and still train and be prepared to do those other things that our nation expects, as the Marine Corps, to be most prepared when those are least, you know, ready.

Korea; we need to get back up into Bridgeport, to do winter training. We've got a whole generation of young men and women, especially in our officer corps, that have never been aboard a United States vessel of war.

You know, amphibious operations is part -- is one of our core competencies. And it's been pushed to the side, as we focus on being a second land army for the nation. And that's not what we need to do.

So we've gotten heavy. We need to lighten up. A lot of these MRAPs and things can't go aboard boats. We can't transport them ashore. We need to get back to our nautical nature.

I think Afghanistan is very much a good place for the MAGTF, with what we do. But 202 seems to be about the right number right now. But I don't think you'd get any argument from our commandant about, if Afghanistan goes away, if we were to go back to the way the world was before, that we could probably shrink some.

How far? I don't know.

Q I ask only because the early 1990s seemed like a dark time in the corps, when there was these massive cutbacks, and a lot of good Marines were losing their jobs just because of a shrinking Marine Corps. Is this -- you know, are a lot of these Marines being brought in under the 202K destined for that fate five years from now?

GEN. MILSTEAD: No, I don't think so. I think it'll be a gradual thing.

But you all know that before this I was in the operational forces -- I mean, before my -- I'm in PA, but before that, you know, I was in Iraq and in the operational forces. Nothing's harder on the operational forces than that full-left, full-right rudder thing. And this commandant gets it.

And that's why when I say "come down" -- you know, you're going to allow the Marine Corps to go up above 202(,000), get -- being an aviator, let me use aviator lingo -- you know, I'll get up above 202(,000); let me level it off, trim the airplane up, and then I'll do a controlled descent down to 202(,000). I think that'll have the minimum adverse impact on the fleet.

But we got to start grade-shaping. We got to start, you know, figuring out what MOSSs we need.

Again, you know, it's a cute saying, but the great Oklahoma land rush is over. We've got to now structure the Marine Corps on what a 202(,000) Marine Corps looks like. And that includes the reserves. And so we're looking at what kind of reserves we need to support a 202(,000) Marine Corps. There's a lot of -- there's some churn that we need to do, and this churn is taking place at -- in a time when we're engaged in combat. So it makes it a little tougher, but not insurmountable.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: And does anyone have a last -- one more final question, just to -- (inaudible) -- our time.

Q Yeah, I have -- I have another one for something.

Q I'll have -- I'll take one more also, if you can. GEN. MILSTEAD: I got time.

Q Great.

Q Great, thanks. Hey, General, Andrew again.

I see another major newspaper chain has gone bankrupt today, the Chicago Sun-Times, with, what, 28 or 30 additional papers under them.

With this happening, are you going to start changing your recruiting/advertising emphasis into new media and television? And are these bankruptcies going to affect your Educators' Workshop program at all?

GEN. MILSTEAD: You know what?

We want to get you guys on an educator workshop. And I would like to think that we recognize this new thing. That's the whole reason I'm sitting here talking to you guys and I'm not out running on a beautiful afternoon.

I -- I would love to hook you up, for instance, with our advertising folks, because we're on -- we're on Facebook; we're on MySpace; we've got our website; we've got officer.com that we're launching that's got interactive links. We recognize change in the -- in the dynamics of media. We've got it to where we've got electronic EPPC now, to where somebody can hit the computer and in hours, we know who this kid is and that he's interested in the Marine Corps, and we're calling him.

That said, I -- I grieve for the loss of written press. You know, I will sit down with my martini on a Friday afternoon and read The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal -- and maybe take a second pour, you know, over that ice. But I won't do that sitting at a computer and reading my news. I mean,

now, maybe I'm a dinosaur, but I think it's going to serve us -- serve us to the detriment, the number that we're losing.

Q Oh, I tend to agree with that. Can we get that Facebook information off of Major Devine later on, then?

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah. And we can also do a follow-up, and I'll hook you up with a young -- (audio break) -- Diaz, Captain Diaz, that can talk -- talk your ears off on all this new stuff we're doing. And she works in our advertising. And I was just up there in New York last week, looking at it, and it's eye-watering. It really is.

Q Okay, great. Thank you. We'll do that, then.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, with that, I think that is all the questions. One more final shout-out. Does anyone have any follow-on questions?

Q Yeah, I'll take a last shot.

GEN. MILSTEAD: No, I'm going to get the last shot, but you can go --

Q Well, yeah -- (laughs).

LT. CRAGG: You are going to get the last shot, but I just wanted to make sure -- Q Bad terminology. I apologize. (Laughs.) So, again, this is Stars and Stripes, Kevin Baron. So in the last couple of months, the commandants and some other commanders around D.C. have -- you know, have repeated this phrase, how, you know, the military is not going to win the war in Afghanistan alone. And in one of these sessions they -- I believe it was the commandant himself saying that, you know, while Marines are ultimately trained killers, in Afghanistan they're going to have to look Afghans in the eye, to level with them, like what happened in Iraq, and they're going to have to, you know, be sent into local communities and build trust.

So as a recruiter, how does that translate? What do you tell applicants when -- you know, what's the message to applicants coming into the Marine Corps today of, you know, are you going to be the expeditionary, fighting, you know, image of a Marine that we may imagine? Or is it going to be the peacekeeping, nation-building, you know, reaching-out-to-the-community Marine that we're hearing about, you know, needs to exist as well? It seems like a tough kind of --

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yes. But you know, General Krulak, our former commandant, nailed it when he called it the Three-Block War.

You remember that. I mean, what a great way to put your arms around it. You're handing out food in one block. You're doing civil- military operations in another one. And you're in heavy combat in a third.

We kind of saw that in Al Anbar. When I was in Al Anbar province, and we'd have people come out and visit us, and I'd sit them down at the table, be them congressional delegations or media or whomever, I would always tell them that it's more about economics out here than it is about gunpowder.

You know, you will never defeat an ideology with a gun. You look in history. We have never done it. The military is only one of the tools of statecraft. And there's other ones. And we as Marines, we get that.

I'd like to believe that Marines are well-led, that we look at the culture of a nation. And I think that the fact that we looked beyond purely kinetics is why we did so well in Al Anbar province.

You know, we -- the Marine Corps is built on those three pillars, right? The first one is, we make Marines. We bring these kids in and then we win America's battles.

But to get to that point, we transform them. And these kids are transformed. And I think -- I don't think they join the Marine Corps because they're cold-blooded killers and they want to kill people.

They join the Marine Corps because they want some excitement. They want to serve their nation. And they want to be a Marine. And in that process, that transformation, I think, is where it's up to us to teach them that, hey, there's a time for everything, like that old Byrds song.

You know, there's a time to shoot people. But there's also a time to feed them, to help them. And these people need to trust us. And they need to understand that we're there to help them. And you're just never, ever, ever going to do that by the strong -- having a strong hand.

Look at the Russians. And that's why they say Afghanistan, right, is the graveyard of nations. Because everybody that's gone in there and lost has always gone in there heavy-handed and not looked at the holistic way to help these people. And you kind of got me on the soapbox. But I hope that makes sense. Q Yeah, it does.

Anything more specific on, you know, what you say to those applicants? You spoke about them generally. Is there a message to them? Or is there a targeted way, to describe what the expectations should be?

GEN. MILSTEAD: I mean, they're Marines. And that's part of the message. I mean, you look at our commercials. It's not all about popping caps and kicking in doors. It's about, you know, other things.

It's about being a Marine. It's about the way people look at you. It's about wearing the uniform. I've been at this for 34 years. And the Marines is a part of my life.

You know, when you look at -- you know, I've got more than my share of kicking-in-door time and being in combat. But a lot of it's -- you know, Thomas Hobbes said, the reputation of power, you know, is power.

If people know you're out there and that you can come in and kick their ass, sometimes that's all that's required. You don't have to go in and kick their ass.

x x ass.

So I think the way these kids, when they check into a battalion and they're mentored by their leadership, both officer and NCO and staff NCO, they learn very quickly that it's more than just pulling triggers, you know. So --

Q All right. Thank you.

GEN. MILSTEAD: All right.

LT. CRAGG: So with that, sir --

GEN. MILSTEAD: Oh, what -- I'm sorry. Is it my turn?

LT. CRAGG: Oh, I was going to turn the floor back over to you, if you'd like to end with --

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah. I just want you-all to help me. You know, here -- for instance, we're just talking -- Military.com. I get a media readout -- I try and read it every day -- on the blogs. And I get frustrated. It's not you-all. You-all do a great service and a -- on your blogs, because you open it up and you allow people to talk. It's a bulletin board, people that talk.

But I see some of the things that people see, and I see so often that people say -- and here's one that came off of Military.com. And again, it's not you. It's what somebody posted on your thing. They talk about, you know, quote, "I said this many times before; it's nothing more than a backdoor draft for the poor and middle class." Someone else here says, "Well, bravo for the military. Lower standards in education, height, weight, you know, mental categories. Minimum rules have been reduced, and now a sagging economy to draw those who wouldn't normally volunteer."

I see it time and time again, and it frustrates me. And like I mentioned earlier, you know, even to the point of people of education, like a respected journalist like Jane (sic; Judy) Woodruff, when she's moderating, you know, an Obama-McCain debate, and she speaks to the, quote, "disproportionate number of African-American, Hispanic and low-income serving in the armed forces" -- nothing could be further from the truth.

Look at our high school grads. Look at the diversity. I mean, we're struggling to raise the diversity because we don't feel that it properly reflects the fabric of our nation. The high school grads, like I speak, the quality of the young men and women coming in.

And then you can look at things like their income. They don't come from poor families. Quite frankly, research shows that they come from middle to upper middle class, at least middle class. This isn't the Vietnam poor inner-city guy fighting for the man, but yet that's the perception out there, and it just frustrates me, I guess.

So I just had to vent at you-all, because you've got the -- (audio break).

Q No, I appreciate what you're saying. Military.com -- I mean, we have to delete quite a bit because people go so off the handle. But you know, that's the price of freedom of speech.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I'm not saying not to put it in there. We're going to try and engage. I think it's important that we get involved. We can stick our hand in the sand, or we can engage. We want to educate people, and we try and educate people through our commercials we put out there. And there will always be the few. You know it. There will always be the few, and sometimes they're the most vocal. But like you said, that's their right.

And it's our job to make sure that they've always got that right.

Q No, I -- and you go a long way in doing things like this to counter those ideas, when people see multiple respected news organizations reiterating the same thing. And, you know, it goes a long way to clarify those misconceptions that, no, the Marine Corps doesn't have enough blacks. Okay, I didn't realize that.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah, absolutely. Okay --

Q Obviously.

GEN. MILSTEAD: -- we'll try and get you all -- I think it'd be great to get you all on an Educators' Workshop. We'll hook you up with Chris (sp), get you some of the stuff. I'd really like you to talk to Catherine Diaz (sp).

Could -- I'm just an old guy that can't answer questions about this new-media stuff. I'm learning as we go, but my daughter won't let me anywhere near the house computer at the house. So, you know, you get with her, she'll explain all this stuff to you. But I think you'll be impressed in what we're doing. We got to come to them. If we want them, we got to come to them, not sit back and expect them to come to us.

Okay?

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. I --

Q General, thank you so much.

LT. CRAGG: And I assume that was your closing statement, then, sir.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Yeah. How was that? Okay?

LT. CRAGG: I thought that was great. I just wanted to add, I wanted the listeners --

Q Shorter than usual.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Shorter than usual, and I never said the F word!

LT. CRAGG: You did very good. (Chuckles.) One of the listeners on blogtalkradio -- we also stream this -- a Wayne Klingman (sp) -- wanted to say thank you for your service and all of the work the brave men do. So --

GEN. MILSTEAD: Well, thank you. And to all those people out there, you know, we don't do it alone. It's the American public that's standing behind us. We feel their presence.

LT. CRAGG: And a note to everybody on the line: Today's program will be available online, on defenselink, on the "Bloggers" link; also a story based on today's call, as well as the audio file and the transcript. And again, thank you, sir, and thank you for the bloggers that joined us.

And this concludes today's event. Thank you, sir.

GEN. MILSTEAD: Thanks! Bye.

Q Okay. Thank you.

END.