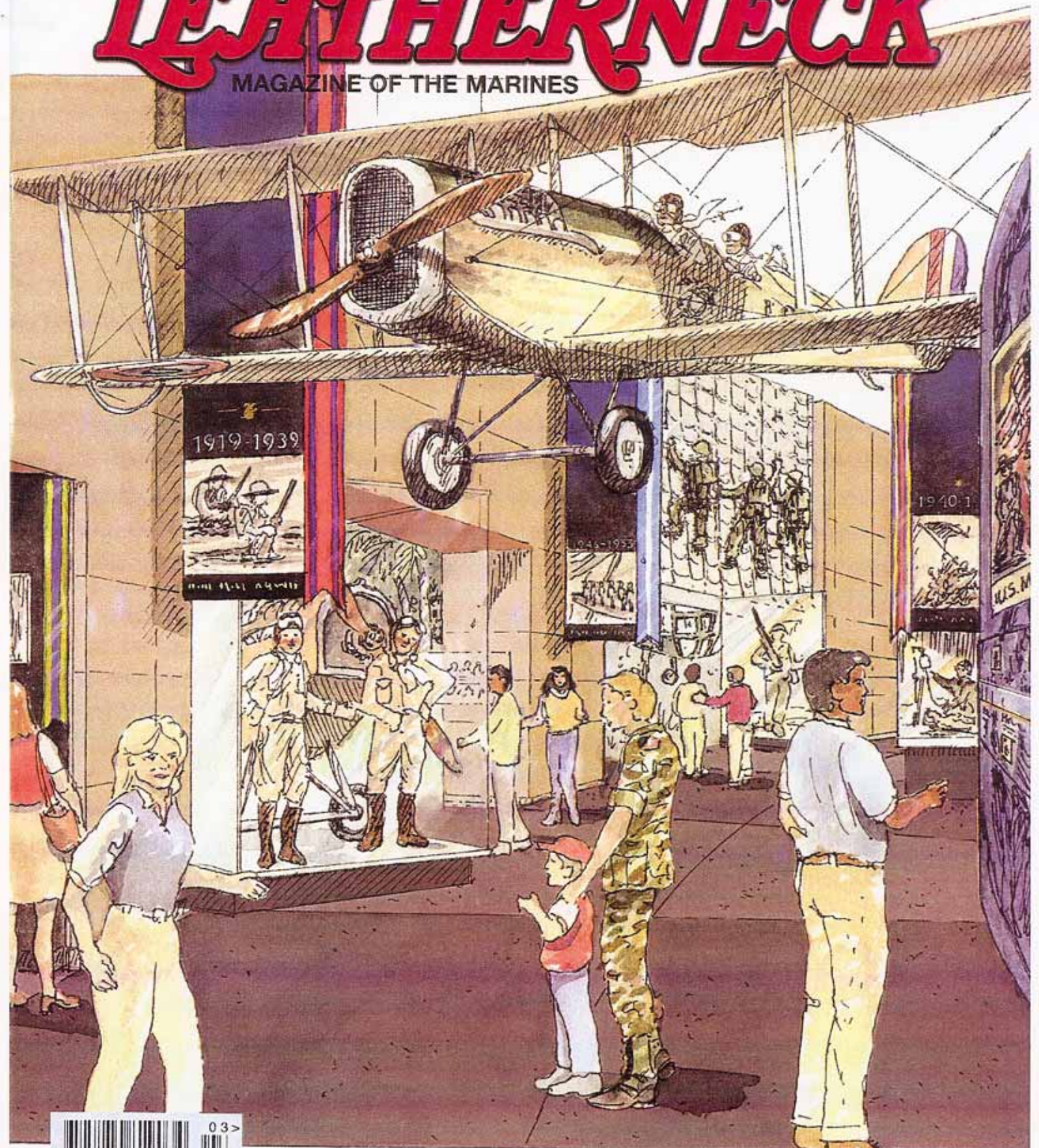


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**The Marine Corps Heritage Center—**  
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# MARINES, FIREFIGHTERS Find Common Ground

By Joseph R. Chenelly

**T**he similarities between surviving a fire and fighting fires are evident to those who've swapped a camouflage uniform marked with the letters USMC for a reflective coat bearing the initials FDNY (Fire Department New York).

Deputy Chief Raymond Downey, a Marine veteran and the most decorated man in FDNY's storied history, understood the similarities between the military and the fire department, so he sought to establish a relationship that has evolved into joint training and war gaming. Downey, who was the deputy chief for FDNY's Special Operations Command, died in the line of duty while helping others escape from the fire and collapse scene of the twin towers at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

"Well before 9/11, we began to recognize that we were moving into a new age of fourth-generation warfare," said Stephan Hittmann, Ph.D., Executive Director, Fire and Life Safety, FDNY. "We were concerned with nuclear, biological, chemical, incendiary weaponry."

The department went to the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., because of its robust gaming department. The institute detailed a Marine major to assist FDNY in getting gaming underway. The fire department began working with the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab in Quantico, Va.

"They [the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab] were well beyond what we traditionally have done," Dr. Hittmann said. Scenarios thrown at FDNY included "things like a suitcase nuke in the Lincoln Tunnel. Things like a suicide bomber on the Staten Island ferry—it's November 10, it's 30 degrees, hypothermia, you're dead in 10 minutes. I've got 5,000 people 50 times a day on the Staten Island ferry. We're the first responders."

The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab's war-gaming division also included FDNY in its Dynamic Decision-Making Series. The evolution examined nonmilitary organizations to study command and control issues that are pertinent to the digital "battlefield" of the 21st century.

"We're privileged to look forward to an expansion on that," Dr. Hittmann said.

"We're looking to learn and share. Last summer, we took 150 jarheads and put them through our confined space course."

The Chemical/Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF) of Fourth Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Antiterrorism) brought leathernecks to New York for the course, which demonstrated what it's like to be in a collapsed building. The Marines were shown how to rescue somebody from such a situation—even in a contaminated environment. A mass-casualty exercise was held as well.

"It was really an 'oorah' event, and we're looking forward to doing more," Dr. Hittmann said. "We did live-agent training with the Corps in Canada. We need to do more. We need to do it sooner, and we need to do it in a regular manner."

The department has improved its level of preparedness and is increasing the range of training.

"Understand that [if a terrorist] hijacks a helicopter over Yankee Stadium, when we have 50,000 people watching the Yankees win again, and he releases a white powder, we're going to have a major event,

and our responsibility is going to be consequence management," Dr. Hittmann said.

"If it is a dirty bomb, it will be, respectfully, a day before the military shows up in force. Our guys are the first line. We have to enhance their skills, training and equipment to protect and save themselves so they can, in turn, protect and save the public."

One way the fire department has found to expand skills and improve training is through war gaming with the Marines.

Now the department has a recently retired Army major on its staff to mechanically administer gaming and serve as a liaison as it increases its gaming.

"We're in it together. We need [the Marines'] help," Dr. Hittmann continued. "We need to understand through [the Corps'] experience how we can do everything we need to do as first responders to secure the operation so that [Marines] can do their job. This is a combined, shared responsibility. We believe we have much to learn, and we also believe we have some experience to share."

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Staff Sergeant Walter R. Rodriguez, operations chief, 2d Small Craft Company, displayed his pride in firefighters by pasting the "Never Forget" sticker on the side of his Riverine Assault Craft at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The sticker was given to him by a member of FDNY.

do with the police, but it is. The nozzle is our machine gun.”

After the formal training, each probationary firefighter is assigned to a firehouse and placed under the wing of a senior person there, Reddan said. “Just like in the Marine Corps, you can’t teach everything in boot camp.”

The vast majority of FDNY recruits want to go to the busiest truck companies just like the recruits coming into the Corps, according to Tom Gaby, who is a Marine Vietnam veteran and the First Aide to Chief of Operations, FDNY. “They want to see action and make a difference.”

When they do get into the “action,” Marine training assists both junior and senior firefighters.

“When you go into some of these burning buildings, it is still scary—even after all these years,” Newman said. “Marines learn how to deal with that fear and develop a personal confidence. You take half a breath and continue to march.”

The department is losing its senior men and women quickly to retirement because the pension they receive is based directly on the amount of hours worked their last year. With all the overtime firefighters had after Sept. 11, the time is financially right for many with 20 years or more to hang up their boots.

“We’re privileged to have a lot of guys in the department who are Marines. We’ll need their leadership skills more than ever,” Dr. Hittmann said. “We’re dealing with a very young fire department—both chronologically and experience-wise. This is something the Corps and the other services deal with routinely, but we have not had to in a long time.”

At least some members of FDNY see the department as the Marine Corps of the New York agencies.

“We have to do more with less, which is like a secondary motto for the Marine Corps,” Newman said. “We can’t afford to make mistakes in spending. Our situation is very like the Marines’ in that we’re always getting the job done even if we’re working with old, leftover equipment.”

Firefighters take pride in always maintaining a presence. Professionalism is a trait stressed from the first day of FDNY’s academy.

“There is a difference between us and other people,” Newman said. “No matter how bad it is, cold it is, how dirty of a job it is, firefighters get out there and do it professionally. We might moan, but we do it. Just like a Marine would.”

Marine veterans have found that being a firefighter fills a void that comes with leaving active duty.

“Back out in the civilian life, you’ve got your friends, but not guys you can

really rely on like you can in the Marines,” said Gaby. “Then when you get in the fire department, you find it again. It is like a family in the firehouse. You fight and you love all in the same house.”

Sept. 11, 2001, was a day that changed everyone’s lives. The men and women of FDNY were perhaps more affected than any other group.

More than 340 firefighters perished that fateful day. FDNY lost 20 percent of its special operations staff. The chief of the department, the first deputy commissioner, deputy chiefs, battalion chiefs, captains and lieutenants all were killed.

“The [attack on the] World Trade Center was much worse than anything I saw in Vietnam. It was horrific,” Gaby said. “Operating in the street that day, and being in the building when it came down, I really felt the Marine Corps training helped me. I was able to calm myself down a lot faster than I would have. War and a catastrophe like that are obviously two very different things, but I believe there is a common denominator in how your mind functions.”

The terrorist attacks hit the department’s leadership corps particularly hard.

“Much like the Marine Corps, FDNY leads from the front,” Dr. Hittmann said. “As a result of that, guys stepping up, being a boss, being a leader, being a unit commander, 89 out of 343 senior officers died September 11.”

The department’s men and women instantly became national heroes, and they take pride in the fact that their prior planning enabled them to save far more than died.

“Because of the relationship we had already built with [the military], they knew our capabilities,” Dr. Hittmann said. “That enabled us to re-equip, to partner with other assets that were being made available to us.

“We had 300 floors incinerated—over 16 acres—as a result of a terrorist event. It was a new day. While there were problems we experienced, it was a new experience. Nobody in America goes to work in the morning thinking they’re not going to go home that night [because of a terrorist attack]. That may be commonplace in other countries but not here. Obviously, that acquainted us with a new sense of vulnerability. While the sacrifice was profound, 25,000 people were rescued. It was the largest single rescue effort in history, and it was led by FDNY. We’re proud of that.

“We paid a heavy price, but firemen did what firemen do,” Dr. Hittmann continued. “We believe that we continue to be absolutely ready for anything.”

