Berger Takes Over From Neller as Marine Corps Commandant



Gen. Robert B. Neller passes the Marine Corps Battle Color to Gen. David H. Berger, the 38th commandant of the Marine Corps, during a passage-of-command ceremony at Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., on July 11. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Robert Knapp

Gen. David H. Berger relieved Gen. Robert B. Neller on July 11 to become the 38th commandant of the Marine Corps in a ceremony at Marine Corps Barracks, Washington.

Acting Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper said of Berger: "In this era of 'Great Power Competition,' I can think of no better leader to assume the post of commandant."

Berger "understands well the challenges we face in today's complex strategic environment. His work to shape the way we train and equip the Marines for future battles makes him the perfect fit for this position," Esper said, referring the Berger's previous job as deputy commandant for combat development and integration.

"He is a visionary who is committed to marching the Marine Corps down the path of modernizing," Esper added. "He has demonstrated throughout his career, he possesses the intellect, the stamina and courage to lead in this demanding position."

In his initial statement to the Marines he now will lead, Berger said: “I consider it a privilege just to wear the uniform, just to stand in their ranks. Whether commandant or corporal, just the privilege of wearing this uniform, of calling yourself a Marine. It’s an honor.”

“I know we need to modernize the Marine Corps. I know we need to train better. We need to recruit the very best people we can and keep them in our ranks,” Berger added.



Marines with the Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., parade marching staff march across the parade deck for pass in review during the July 11 ceremony. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Robert Knapp

He also repeated a promise from Marine Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was in the audience: “We will never send our force, we will never send our Marines, into a fair fight. I know what we need to do.”

In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Berger said among the most significant challenges he will face as commandant “will be to sustain readiness at high levels for our operating forces while concurrently modernizing the force.”

He predicted “a deliberate redesign of the force to meet the needs of the future operating environment,” which would include divesting legacy equipment and programs and “consider potential end-strength reductions in order to invest in equipment modernization and necessary training upgrades.”

Gen. David H. Berger salutes for the “honors” sequence during the passage-of-command ceremony. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Robert Knapp

With the rising concerns over China, Berger brings highly relevant experience to his new post, having commanded the California-based I Marine Expeditionary Force, then Marine Forces Pacific. He also commanded the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, where the Marines test new equipment and operating concepts and have begun training for high-intensity combat against a peer competitor.

Esper gave extended praise to Neller, who will retire next month with 45 years and six months of service as a Marine officer, calling him “a proven combat veteran” who has commanded at every level and “always took care of his Marines. As commandant, he led the Marine Corps through a critical inflection point,” from two decades of counter-insurgency operations “to a renewed focus on high-intensity conflict against Great Power Competitors.”

In his farewell to the Marine Corps, Neller said among his regrets was that the Corps “has been so slow to make changes” and that “sometimes we may not always have met the mark of the Marine Corps. But that was just a few of us. … If there has been any failing in our Corps, that resides with me and any success belongs to the Marines.”

“At the end of the day, it’s not about me. It’s not about Dave Berger, it’s about our Corps,” about the active

duty and Marine
Reserves “who do the nation’s business. … It’s been a great ride, but its time.
I’ve had my time, but it’s done. I’m going home.”