



## People Not Machines

**RICHARD C. ZILMER**  
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MHS Class of 1970

“The Marine Corps is about teamwork. You have to understand how to work with others, motivate people and get them behind a common objective,” explains Lt. General Richard C. Zilmer, ‘70.

“Some leaders are very centrist, but it’s not my style. I want to know the people who work for me. I let them know their individual contributions are important. They are people not machines.”

Zilmer adds, “Allowing subordinates to use their own initiative, to bring ideas forward, that is the essence of leadership. When people are partners in solutions they will contribute so much more.”

Zilmer is currently commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) and commands 25,000 troops in a region spanning the western Pacific from Hawaii to Japan. Previously, he commanded almost 50,000 troops (including American, Iraqi and allied soldiers) in Anbar Province, Iraq where he served as Commander of Western Multinational Forces, in 2006-2007. Throughout his more than 30-year military career, Zilmer has earned numerous honors, including the Bronze Star with Combat Distinguishing Device, a Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal, and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Military professionals do not reach this level of authority without having considerable leadership skills. For General Zilmer this means

bringing a human element to his troops, an approach he directly links to his experience at MHS. “Back in the student home, to get along with 15 other kids, you had to work with them. There is always a way to make it work.”

Individuals at the school also had a profound influence on his approach to life.

Zilmer remembers his shop teacher, Hap Hoerner who was meant to teach plumbing and shop, but what he really taught was life.

“Many mornings we would spend two hours in the classroom talking about life, nothing to do with shop.” Mr. Hoerner tried to instill in his students honesty, integrity, accountability, self-discipline, and a strong work ethic.

“Hap would explain the consequences of mistakes. He treated us like men.”

While he attended Kutztown College (now Kutztown State University) and graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in secondary education, the idea of military service appealed to him. He completed Officer Candidate School and began a “three year hitch that turned into a 35 year career.” And throughout his distinguished career, the values he learned at MHS have served as the foundation upon which he has built his life.