EMBA Marine rises through the ranks

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In November 2024, Corey Collier (MBA '25) was promoted to master gunnery sergeant, the Marine Corps' highest enlisted rank.

As a Master Gunnery Sergeant in the Marine Corps, Corey Collier (MBA '25) is always looking for the next adventure.

“If you’re a Marine, you're always looking for the next opportunity,” he says. “That’s just the lifestyle. I always tell my juniors to put their hand up first and say yes to whatever presents itself.”

During his two-decade-long military career, Collier has taken a lot of opportunities. He’s done tours in Japan, been a drill instructor in Parris Island, South Carolina, and trained officers in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to name just a few of his assignments.

“I've been lucky to be put in some fun spots,” Collier says. “And most of them I never saw coming.”

Originally from Lansing, Michigan, Collier joined the Marines while he was still in high school and unsure of what to do next.

“At that point, I just wasn’t ready for college,” he says. “I enlisted, and it turns out that joining the Marines gave me a whole new perspective. I got to travel and join this melting pot of people of all backgrounds. It broadened by horizons.”

Today, Collier oversees workforce management as an administrative specialist at Marine Forces Reserve in New Orleans, but for a large portion of his career, he trained and mentored the next generation of Marines as a drill instructor. Looking back, he says he is amazed by how his mentees have progressed.

“When I first met my junior Marines in New Mexico, they were trying to figure out their schedules and struggling with first-year algebra,” he says. “Now, they are starting to take command of their companies and oversee 120 people. Watching them grow has been one of the most gratifying parts of my job.”

Collier himself reached a career milestone in November 2024 when he was selected for promotion to Master Gunnery Sergeant, the highest enlisted rank in the Marines. Each year, during the highly selective promotion process, a board convenes at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia, to evaluate service members’ records, leadership and educational achievements and grant promotions to the most impressive candidates.

“When the board results were released, I was taking a final exam,” Collier recalls. “My phone just started blowing up. Of course, I had to wait until after I was done to check it, and that’s how I found out. It was a huge, celebratory day.”

The promotion reflects Collier’s exemplary leadership as well as his commitment to life-long learning, a central tenet in the Marines Corps’ larger institutional vision. In 2020, then-Commandant of the Marine Corps General David Berger (E ’81) introduced Talent Management 2030, a strategic initiative aimed at modernizing the military by prioritizing troops’ continuous education and intellectual development.

“General Berger’s call for an agile, more educated force resonated with me and in part inspired me to get my EMBA,” Collier says. “Many service members hold associate or bachelor’s degrees, but fewer distinguish themselves through graduate-level coursework. I believe my graduate degree was a key differentiator in my selection for promotion.”

In addition to helping him land his promotion, Collier’s time at Freeman produced lasting memories.

“I have great memories of Professor of Finance Russ Robins,” Collier says. “His instruction in my statistics class fundamentally changed how I analyze and present operational data, but more than that, he was very down-to-earth. He told the class, ‘The reason why you’re not understanding this is because it's difficult, and you're not going to be a master of statistics on the first day.’ To me, his frankness was a breath of fresh air.”

Now, as Collier contemplates a return to civilian life, he has some reservations.

“Now that I’m coming up to the end of my career, I’m realizing there’s less in front of me than behind,” he says. “The prospect of setting roots for the first time in over two decades is both a stressful and exciting.”

Collier may not know what branch of the finance tree he would like to pursue, but one thing is certain.

“I’ve had a great career. And I’m thankful for all of it.”

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