

SEMPER FIDELIS

NEWSLETTER FOR RETIRED MARINES

GENERAL ERIC M. SMITH

39TH COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

General Smith is currently serving as the 39th Commandant of the Marine Corps. Born in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised in Plano, Texas, General Smith graduated from Texas A&M University and was commissioned in 1987. He has commanded at every level, including Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment during Operation Assured Response in Monrovia, Liberia; 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom; and 8th Marine Regiment/ Regimental Combat Team 8 during Operation Enduring Freedom. He also served in Caracas, Venezuela as part of the U.S. Military Group.

As a General Officer, he commanded U.S. Marine Corps Forces Southern Command, 1st Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

General Smith's staff assignments as a General Officer include serving as the Director of Capability Development Directorate, Combat Development and Integration; Senior Military Assistant to both the Deputy Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Defense; Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration; and the 36th Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.





10 November 2023

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

For 248 years, Marines have earned a reputation as the most disciplined and lethal warfighters in the world. This legacy of honor, courage, and commitment passed on to us was paid for in sweat, blood, and sacrifice. From Belleau Wood to Inchon and Tarawa to Sangin, Marines have stepped forward to defend our Constitution when others either could not or would not. Our history is filled with heroes like Chief Warrant Officer 4 Hershel “Woody” Williams, Private First Class Hector Cafferata Jr., Sergeant Major Dan Daly, and thousands of others who performed acts of bravery which went unseen in the heat of battle. We stand on the shoulders of these Marines, and we owe it to them to earn our title “Marine” each and every day.

Marines have given, and have been willing to give, their lives for Country and Corps in every fight our Nation has entered. Our actions turned back the tide of tyranny in Europe during the Great War, defeated fascism in Asia during World War II, fought for democracy in Korea and Vietnam, and offered the hope of self-determination in the Middle East. We go to war whenever our Nation calls, and in the interwar periods we train, we prepare, and we innovate. We have chosen a life of service and sacrifice – an honorable life that has meaning. We sacrifice so our fellow citizens don’t have to, and we seek nothing in return but a chance to be first to fight. Most will never understand why we choose to attack when others do not, why we revel in being covered in mud, why we snap to attention when “The Marines’ Hymn” is played, or why we say, “Ooh Rah. We understand it, and this message is for us, for the Marines.

As Marines, we live on a war footing because someone must. This means that we ruthlessly adhere to our standards of excellence – Marine standards – as we know this will best prepare us for the wars of the future. Our high standards are a prerequisite of professional warfighting, and how we keep our honor clean in the cauldron of combat. They prepare us for the most difficult mission there is: fighting from the returning to the sea. Most importantly they shape our unique Marine culture which is respected at home and across the globe.

Sergeant Major Ruiz and I are proud of all that you have done this past year to protect and enhance our reputation as America’s best warriors. We hope you know that we will be with you every step of the way as we prepare for the fights ahead. We ask that every Marine – active, reserve, and veteran – honor the legacy of those who went before us by continuing to uphold our high standards.

Protect your fellow Marines and our shared legacy. Happy Birthday Marines!

Semper Fidelis,

Eric M. Smith
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

SEMPER FIDELIS

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Some of the information compiled for Semper Fidelis comes from other sources to include experts in their respective fields, i.e. , DFAS, VA, and TRICARE. Content was current at the time this publication went to press. Any delays in mailing may be due to unforeseen circumstances and we apologize for the inconvenience.

NOTE: The newsletter is posted online before it is mailed.

Semper Fidelis accepts unsolicited material for publication for regular columns such as Second Career and Reunions, but reserves the right to reject any unsolicited material deemed inappropriate or illegible for publication.

Semper Fidelis is published quarterly by MMSR-6 to inform retired Marines and their family members on information of interest on their rights, benefits, and privileges. Items in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Marine Corps or the Department of Defense.

2023 TRICARE Open Season November 13 - December 11

TRICARE Open Season is the annual period when you can enroll in or change your health care coverage for the next year. In 2023, TRICARE Open Season begins November 13 and ends December 11. Any enrollment changes you make will go into effect on January 1, 2024. Open season applies to anyone enrolled in, or eligible for a TRICARE Prime option or TRICARE Select.

If you're eligible to participate in TRICARE Open Season, you have three options:

- **Stay in your plan.** If you want to stay in your current TRICARE health plan, you don't have to re-enroll. You'll continue in your current health plan through 2024 or as long as you're eligible.
- **Enroll in a plan.** If you're eligible for a TRICARE Prime option or TRICARE Select but not enrolled, you can enroll in a plan now.
- **Change plans.** If you're already enrolled in a TRICARE Prime option or TRICARE Select, you can switch plans and switch between individual and family enrollment.

What Happens if I Don't Take Any Action?

If you aren't already in a plan and don't enroll in a plan during open season, you'll only be eligible for care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available.

Making Enrollment Changes Outside of Open Season

Outside of TRICARE Open Season, you can enroll in or change enrollment to TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select following a Qualifying Life Event (QLE).

A QLE is a certain change in your life, such as marriage, birth of a child, or retirement from active duty, which may mean different TRICARE health plans are available to you and your family members. A TRICARE QLE opens a 90-day period for you to make eligible enrollment changes. A QLE for one family member creates a chance for all eligible family members to make enrollment changes. To learn more, visit www.tricare.mil/lifeevents.

Outside of the Federal Benefits Open Season, you can only enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) or make changes to your existing FEDVIP plan if you experience a FEDVIP QLE. Remember, FEDVIP QLEs may be

History of the Marine Corps Birthday Celebration

The U.S. Marine Corps begins preparations for its "birthday party" every summer. Activities become more feverish as the fall hues arrive. By early November, every Marine is either rehearsing his role in the "party" or pressing, polishing, and spit-shining in order to appear at his or her best for the Birthday Ball. This has not always been the case, however. In fact, Marines have not always celebrated their founding on November the 10th.

Formal commemoration of the birthday of the Marine Corps began on 10 November 1921. That particular date was chosen because on that day the Second Continental Congress resolved in 1775 to raise two battalions of Continental Marines.

Until 1921 the birthday of the Corps had been celebrated on another date. An unidentified newspaper clipping from 1918 refers to the celebration of the 120th birthday of the Marine Corps on 11 July "as usual with no fuss." It is doubtful that there was any real celebration at all. Further inspection of documents and publications prior to 1921 shows no evidence of ceremonies, pageants, or parties. The July date was commemorated between 1798 and 1921 as the birthday of the Corps. During the Revolution, Marines had fought on land and sea, but at the close of the Revolution the Marine Corps and the Navy were all but disbanded. On 11 July 1798, President John Adams approved a bill that recreated the Corps, thereby providing the rationale for this day being commemorated as the birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps.

On 21 October 1921, Maj Edwin McClellan, Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, Headquarters Marine Corps, sent a memorandum to Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune, suggesting that the original birthday on 10 November 1775 be declared a Marine Corps holiday to be celebrated throughout the Corps. Maj McClellan further suggested that a dinner be held in Washington D.C., to commemorate the event. Guests would include prominent men from the Marine Corps, Army, and Navy, and descendants of the Revolution.

Accordingly, on 1 November 1921, Madigan Lejeune issued Marine Corps Order No. 47, Series 1921. The

Order summarized the history, mission, and tradition of the Corps, and directed that it be read to every command on 10 November each subsequent year in honor of the birthday of the Marine Corps. This order has been duly carried out.

Some commands expanded the celebration during the next few years. In 1923 at Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, the celebration of the Marine Corps' 148th birthday took the form of a dance in the barracks that evening. Marines at the Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia, staged a sham battle on the parade ground in commemoration of the birthday. The battle lasted about twenty minutes, and was witnessed by Portsmouth and Norfolk citizens. At Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the birthday was celebrated on the 12th, since a special liberty to Santiago had been arranged on the 10th. The morning activities included field and water sports, and a shooting match. In the afternoon the Marines won a baseball game, 9-8, over a Cuban team. In the evening, members of the command put on a variety show followed by four boxing bouts.

The first so-called "Birthday Ball," such as suggested by Maj McClellan, was probably held in 1925 in Philadelphia. No records have been located of one prior to 1925. Guests included the Secretaries of War and Navy, Major General Commandant Lejeune, famous statesmen, soldiers, and sailors.

The principle event was the unveiling of a tablet on the site of Tun Tavern. The tablet was a gift from the Thomas Roberts Reath Post, American Legion, whose membership was composed exclusively of Marines.

The celebration was held in conjunction with the annual convention of the Marine Corps League. A parade included Marines, Regular Army, and Navy detachments, National Guard, and other military organizations. The evening banquet was held at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel and a ball followed at the Bellevue-Stratford.

It is not possible to determine precisely when the first cake ceremony was held, but there is evidence of a ceremony being held at Quantico, Virginia, in 1935. Also on record was one held at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., in 1937 where Major General Commandant Thomas Holcomb presided at an open

Continued from page 4

house for Marine Corps officers. Ceremonies included the cutting of a huge cake designed after the Famous Tun Tavern in Philadelphia.

From 1937, observances of the Marine Corps Birthday appeared to develop spontaneously throughout the Corps as if they had a life of their own. The celebrations were publicized through every media. Newsreels, motion pictures, and displays were prepared to summarize the history of the Corps. In 1943, standard blank Marine Corps scrap books were forwarded to all districts to be filled with 168th anniversary clippings, scripts, pictures, programs, and other memorabilia, and returned to Headquarters. Unfortunately none of these scrapbooks remain in official files.

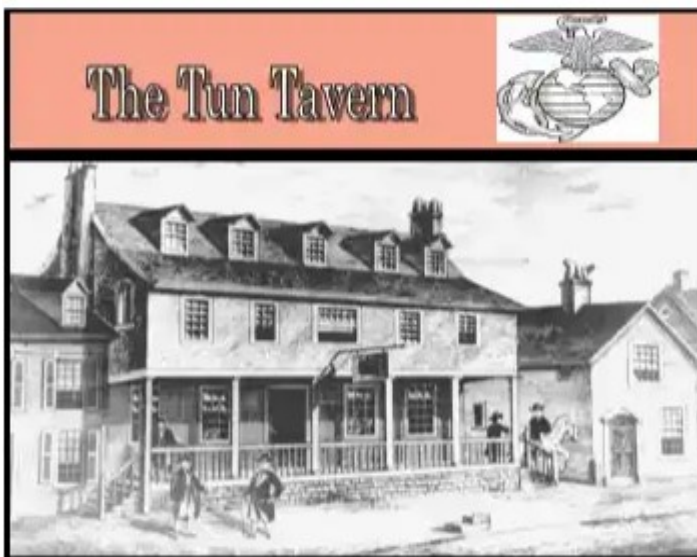
In 1951, a formal Birthday Ball Pageant was held at Headquarters Marine Corps. Similar to the pageant today, the script described the Marines' period uniforms and the cake ceremony. Although this is the first substantive record of a pageant, *Leatherneck* magazine of 10 November 1925 pictures Marines at a pageant in Salt Lake City, Utah, which had taken place "several years ago."

On 28 October 1952, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, [Gen Lempel C. Shepherd, Jr.](#), directed that the celebration of the Marine Corps Birthday be formalized throughout the Corps, and provided an outline for the cake ceremony, as well as other formal observances. This outline was included in the Marine Corps Drill Manual, approved 26 January 1956.

Traditionally, the first piece of Birthday cake is presented to the oldest Marine present and the second piece to the youngest Marine present. When and where this tradition began remains unknown. Some records indicate this practice, and others vary it depending on the dignitaries present at the ball. First pieces of cake have been presented to newlyweds, the Secretary of the Navy, governors, and others, but generally speaking, the first pieces of cake go to the oldest and youngest Marines at the ball.

At present, celebrations of the Marine Corps Birthday on 10 November differ at posts and stations throughout the Corps. All commemorations include the reading of Marine Corps Order No. 47, and the Commandant's message to those assembled. Most commands sponsor a Birthday Ball of some sort, complete with pageant and cake ceremony as prescribed in the Marine Corps Manual.

Like the Corps itself, the Birthday Ball developed from simple origins to become the polished, professional function that all Marines commemorate on 10 November around the world.



Marine Corps Birthday Celebration Guadalcanal, circa 1942

LtCol W. W. Stickney, the commanding officer, cuts a Thanksgiving cake with a Japanese officer's sword at Guadalcanal, as hungry Leathernecks look on."
(Official USMC Photograph)



1921 Marine Corps Birthday Message

The following will be read to the command on the 10th of November, 1921, and hereafter on the 10th of November of every year. Should the order not be received by the 10th of November, 1921, it will be read upon receipt.

Marine Corps Order No. 47 (Series 1921)

Headquarters

U.S. Marine Corps Washington

Date: 1 November 1921

On November 10, 1775, a Corps of Marines was created by a resolution of Continental Congress. Since that date many thousand men have borne the name "Marine". In memory of them it is fitting that we who are Marines should commemorate the birthday of our Corps by calling to mind the glories of its long and illustrious history.

The record of our Corps is one which will bear comparison with that of the most famous military organizations in the world's history. During 90 of the 146 years of its existence the Marine Corps has been in action against the Nation's foes. From the Battle of Trenton to the Argonne, Marines have won foremost honors in war, and in the long eras of tranquility at home, generation after generation of Marines have grown gray in war in both hemispheres and in every corner of the seven seas, that our country and its citizens might enjoy peace and security.



In every battle and skirmish since the birth of our Corps, Marines have acquitted themselves with the greatest distinction, winning new honors on each occasion until the term "Marine" has come to signify all that is highest in military efficiency and soldierly virtue.

This high name of distinction and soldierly repute we who are Marines today have received from those who preceded us in the Corps. With it we have also received from them the eternal spirit which has animated our Corps from generation to generation and has been the distinguishing mark of the Marines in every age. So long as that spirit continues to flourish Marines will be found equal to every emergency in the future as they have been in the past, and the men of our Nation will regard us as worthy successors to the long line of illustrious men who have served as "Soldiers of the Sea" since the founding of the Corps.

John A. Lejeune,
Major General Commandant



MARINES PAY HOMAGE TO FALLEN COMRADES, DURING MARINE CORPS BIRTHDAY



(Photo by Lance Corporal Thomas)

The fallen comrade table is displayed for attendees during the III Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group celebration of the 247th Marine Corps birthday on Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan, Nov. 3, 2022. A ceremonial ball is held every year to celebrate the Marine Corps birthday. During the ball, Marines across the globe reflect on their legacy and honor the fallen.

Fallen Soldier table Script

“A single, lone table draped in black with one empty chair is placed near the entrance so everyone who walks past it never forgets why we are free,” he said.

“This signifies all of our fallen comrades who are not with us because they have given the full measure of devotion to our country and to our beloved Corps.”

On top of the table sits a candle.

“This single-lighted candle reminds us of the flame of eternal life so that the memory of our fallen comrades will be with us always,” he said.

A medal, for the one who has been injured in combat, identification tags and dinner setting has its place as well.

“The Purple Heart Medal is displayed to reflect the shedding of blood and the ebb of life in battle,” Robinson continued. “The identification tags, blank, yet they could bear the name of any Marine.

Toys for TOTs Across America

By Marine Forces Reserve



UNITED STATES -Every year, thousands of Marines, their families and local communities work together to spread holiday cheer to children in need through the Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tots Program. The organization was founded in 1947 when Marine Corps Reserve Major (Maj) Bill Hendricks was asked by his wife to deliver handcrafted dolls that she made to an agency that helped children in need. When they could not find any organization, they decided to create one. Within the first year they donated 5,000 toys to children in need all over Los Angeles, Calif., where Maj Hendricks' Marine Corps Reserve unit was located.

The next year in 1948, the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Clifton B. Gates, directed all Marine Reserve sites to implement a Toys for Tots campaign, transforming the local initiative into a national communication action program. At the time, Maj Hendricks worked as the Director of Public Relations at Warner Brothers where he became friends with Walt Disney. Mr. Disney designed the first Toys for Tots poster that included a miniature three-car train that was adopted as the Toys for Tots logo. Every year since then, posters have become a recognized part of the program.

For over 70 years, every Marine Corps Reserve unit in the Marine Corps leads an annual Toys for Tots donation drive for their local communities, although any person or company can host a donation drive. Since its creation, the foundation has distributed 604 million toys to 272 million children in need. Of those contributions, the Marine Corps and its surrounding communities have distributed 572,259 toys and supported 352,858 children. Some of the installation campaigns across the regions are Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Blaze, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, MCB Hawaii and MCB Quantico.

The Toys for Tots Program has had a lasting legacy on the nation and has garnered support from numerous professional sports teams, businesses and celebrities, including First Lady Nancy Reagan, who was the national Toys for Tots spokesperson in 1983.

Today, Toys for Tots is governed by a board of directors, all of whom are veteran Marines and business owners throughout the country. The foundation was founded in 1991 as a not-for-profit and is headquartered outside of MCB Quantico main gate in Triangle, VA. To learn more about your local Toys for Tots Program, visit <https://www.toysfortots.org>.

Happy Birthday Marines!

A blast from the past



Marine Corps birthday celebrated at VFM Post 3345, Strongsville, OH 238th, 2013

Photo by Terry Brlas

Third Battalion, the Women Marines' unit, Celebrated the 178th Birthday, 1953

Official USMC Photo



Birthday Run

U.S. Marine LtCol Andrew D'Ambroggi, the commanding officer of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211, leads The Wake Island Avengers, Royal Navy Sailors and Royal Marines during a motivational 2.11 mile, 246th Birthday run on the flight deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Gulf of Aden on November 10, 2021.

Official USMC Photo



Cake cutting Ceremony, Marine Corps Base, Camp Blaz 2021

U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Jorge Aguilar, a network administrator assigned to Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, eats a piece of cake during a cake cutting ceremony held on Naval Communications telecommunications Station Guam, Nov. 10, 2021. MCB Camp Blaz held the ceremony to honor the Marine Corps 246th birthday.

Photo by Cpl. Andrew King

Marine Barracks Washington's Marine Corps Birthday Ball 2017

Photo by LCpl Damon Mclean



Happy Birthday Marines!

Photo by Chicago English Bulldog Rescue, Inc

Naperville, IL Marines 246 Birthday Ball

Photo by James Hoch Photography



Observe the Cut

November 9, 2021 U.S. Marine Corps SgtMaj Jorge L. Ortiz, (right), Sergeant Major, Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501, Marine Aircraft Group 31, observes Capt Zachery Ybarra, (left), adjutant, VMFAT-501, MAG 31, cut the Marine Corps Birthday cake, during VMFAT-501's cake-cutting ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina, Nov. 5, 2021. The cake-cutting is a long-standing tradition where Marines worldwide celebrate the birth of the United States Marine Corps.

Photo by LCpl Julia Cochrane

Company E, 4th Reconnaissance Battalion's Birthday Ball

Photo by Company E, 4th Reconnaissance Battalion



HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS (MMSR-6)
 JAMES WESLEY MARSH CENTER
 3280 RUSSELL ROAD
 QUANTICO, VA 22134-5103

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Separation and Retirement Branch (MMSR)

Dr. Bobby Anderson, *Branch Head*
bobby.t.anderson.civ@usmc.mil

Maj Deborah L. Queen, *Assistant Branch Head*
deborah.queen@usmc.mil



Retired Services and Pay Section (MMSR-6)

Vincent P. Tate, *Human Resources Manager*
vincent.tate@usmc.mil

Donald J. Saucier, *Writer-Editor*
donald.saucier@usmc.mil

Human Resources Specialists

Beverly T. Britt
 Pamela Karp
 Rose M. Thomas
 Glenda Williams
 Donald Saucier

Marine Admin Staff
 GySgt Ransom, Justin

WHO TO CONTACT:



MMSR-2: (703) 784-9322/23 Enlisted
 (703) 784-9324/25 Officer
Active Duty Separations and Retirements

- **Officer**
smb.manpower.mmsr2o@usmc.mil
- **Enlisted**
smb.manpower.mmsr2e@usmc.mil

MMSR-4: (703) 784-9308/09/21
Disability Separations and Retirements
smb.manpower.mmsr4@usmc.mil

MMSR-5: (703) 784-9306/07
 Fax: (703) 784-9834
Inactive Reserve Separations and Retirements
smb.manpower.mmsr5@usmc.mil

MMSR-6: (703) 784-9311/10; 1-800-336-4649
 Fax: (703) 784-9834
Retired Services and Pay

- Address Changes (Note: Annuitants must call DFAS)
- Identification Cards
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smb.manpower.mmsr6@usmc.mil

