

SEMPER FIDELIS

NEWSLETTER FOR RETIRED MARINES



10 November 2020

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

If there were a watchword for 2020, the shortlist would certainly include ‘change,’ ‘uncertainty,’ and ‘adaptation.’ This new dynamic and uncertain environment has impacted how we recruit and train Marines, deploy aboard ship, and even how we honor our Corps’ hallowed traditions. But adapting to change and uncertainty is nothing new for Marines. It is what we have done for 245 years and what is expected of us as the Nation’s force-in-readiness. Where others see challenges, Marines see opportunities. We don’t take a knee. We will always be ready to answer the nation’s call, no matter the crisis.

In a world of seemingly relentless change and uncertainty, some things remain constant – our core values: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. These values are at the very heart of our ability to be, “most ready when the Nation is least ready.” It’s honor that gives us an uncompromising sense of personal integrity and accountability; courage that allows us to face any circumstance with an ironclad resolve to do what’s right; and commitment that binds us together as a family and drives us toward excellence. And while our core values might never change, the way we give life to them requires constant vigilance. This year’s national conversations about race remind us that we must all do better to embody our service’s values.

Commemorating the 245th birthday of our Corps offers us a chance to reflect on our history. We who serve today stand upon the shoulders of giants. While this year’s many challenges are significant and unique, they are not unprecedented, and it is important to remember that our Nation and Corps have endured difficult times in our past. This year, for example, marks the 75th anniversary of brutal battles in the Pacific; when soldiers of the sea defined the term “uncommon valor” on the black sands of Iwo Jima; the 70th anniversary of bitter fighting at Inchon and Chosin Reservoir; 55 years since Marines landed at Da Nang; and a decade since our struggle with the Taliban in the Helmand River Valley. We remember the service and sacrifice of all Marines, and honor the legacy passed down through generations. Our continuing obligation is to honor their legacy by making meaningful contributions to what they started.

From the past, we draw strength, pride, and a responsibility to carry on the warfighting heritage our predecessors built. We must also recognize our tradition of continuous adaptation – one that should inspire our current force modernization and innovation efforts. As has been the case in the past, today’s threats require us to fight as a cohesive team, and our ability to succeed will depend on the Honor, Courage, and Commitment of each individual Marine. From recruiting individuals of great intelligence, strength, spirit, and diversity, to evolving how we train, educate, and mentor Marines throughout their careers, we remain dedicated to developing the world’s finest warfighters, guided by our core values.

In a year of significant change and uncertainty, I am reminded of the words of American novelist, John Dos Passos, “In times of change and danger when there is a quicksand of fear under men’s reasoning, a sense of continuity with generations gone before can stretch like a lifeline across the scary present...” Never forget, what you do today becomes the foundation for the generations of Marines that will follow. There is no challenge we cannot overcome, together, by holding fast to our core values. Happy 245th Birthday Marines.

Semper Fidelis,

David H. Berger
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

Marine Corps Birthday Celebration



3 Nov 17 - Hilton Head, SC. Captain Christina M. Shulman reads Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune's birthday message at the 6th Marine Corps District Ball. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Corporal Jack A. E. Rigsby)

The U.S. Marine Corps begins preparation for its “birthday party” every summer. Activities become more feverish as the fall hues arrive. By early November, every Marine is either rehearsing their 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 day 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, Major 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.

Major 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, Major General 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 Major 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.

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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 is a 1937 ceremony held at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., where Major General Commandant Thomas Holcomb presided at an open 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 scrap-books 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, General Lemuel 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.

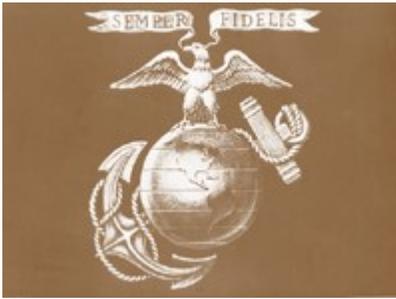
Traditionally, the first piece of birthday cake is presented to the oldest Marine present and the second piece to the youngest Marine present. When and where this tradition began remains unknown. Some records indicate this practice, and others vary depending on the dignitaries present at the ball. First 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 the 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 Drill 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.

Source: Marine Corps Historical Branch

15 Nov 14 - Milwaukee, WI.
Major Charles D. Godwin cuts the Marine Corps birthday cake during Recruiting Station Milwaukee's Birthday Ball ceremony in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The birthday cake is passed from the oldest to the youngest Marine present, symbolizing the passing of history and traditions to the next generation.
(U. S. Marine Corps photo by Sergeant Tia Nagle)



History of the Marine Corps Emblem and Seal



The history of the Marine Corps emblem is a story related to the history of the Corps itself. The emblem of today traces its roots to the designs and ornaments of early Continental Marines as well as British Royal Marines. The emblem took its present form in 1868. Before that time many devices, ornaments, and distinguishing marks followed one another as official marks of the Corps.

In 1776, the device consisted of a "foul anchor" of silver or pewter. The foul anchor still forms a part of the emblem today. (A foul anchor is an anchor which has one or more turns of the chain around it). Changes were made in 1798, 1821, and 1824. In 1834 it was prescribed that a brass eagle be worn on the hat, the eagle to measure 3 ½ inches from wingtip to wingtip.



The large "living" emblem (left) is actually composed of thousands of Marines as shown below. The photo was taken aboard MCRD Parris Island in 1919.



During the early years, numerous distinguishing marks were prescribed, including "black cockades", "scarlet plumes" and "yellow bands and tassels". In 1859, the origin of the present color scheme for the officer's dress uniform ornaments appeared on an elaborate device of solid white metal and yellow metal. The design included a United States shield, half wreath, a bugle, and the letter "M".

In 1868, Brigadier General Commandant Jacob Zeilin appointed a board "to decide and report upon the various devices of cap ornaments of the Marine Corps". On 13 November 1868, the board turned in its report. It was approved by the Commandant four days later, and on 19 November 1868 was signed by the Secretary of the Navy.



The emblem recommended by this board consists of a globe (showing the Western Hemisphere) intersected by a fowl anchor, and surmounted by a spread eagle. On the emblem itself, the device is topped by a ribbon inscribed with the Latin motto "Semper Fidelis" (Always Faithful). The uniform ornaments omit the motto ribbon.

The general design of the emblem was probably derived from the British Royal Marines' "Globe and Laurel". The globe on the U.S. Marine emblem signifies service in any part of the world. The eagle also indirectly signifies service worldwide, although this may not have been the intention of the designers in 1868. The eagle which they selected for the Marine emblem is a crested eagle, a type found all over the world. On the other hand, the eagle pictured on the great seal and the currency of the United States is the bald eagle, strictly a North American variety. The anchor, whose origin dates back to the founding of the Marine Corps in 1775, indicates the amphibious nature of Marines' duties.

On 22 June 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed an Executive Order, which approved the design of an official seal for the United States Marine Corps. The new seal had been designed at the request of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.

The new seal consisted of the traditional Marine Corps emblem in bronze; however, an American bald eagle replaced the crested eagle depicted on the 1868 emblem, and is depicted with wings displayed, standing upon the western hemisphere of the terrestrial globe, and holding in his beak a scroll inscribed with the Marine Corps motto "Semper Fidelis" (Always Faithful) with the hemisphere superimposed on a fowl anchor. The seal is displayed on a scarlet background encircled with a Navy blue band edged in a gold rope rim and inscribed "Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps" in gold letters. Coincident with the approval of this seal by the President, the emblem centered on the seal was adopted in 1955 as the official Marine Corps Emblem.

Source: USMC History Division - Reference Branch

"That two battalions of Marines be raised consisting of one colonel, two lieutenant colonels, two majors and officers as usual in other regiments, that they consist of an equal number of privates with other battalions; that particular care be taken that no person be appointed to office or enlisted into said battalions, but such as are good seamen, or so acquainted with maritime affairs as to be able to serve to advantage by sea."

(Resolution of the Continental Congress, 10 November 1775)

Happy Marine Corps Birthday!

Marine Corps Birthday Message

Marine Corps Order No. 47 (Series 1921)

Headquarters

U.S. Marine Corps Washington

Date: 1 November 1921

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.

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



UNITED STATES MARINES

1775



2020



Master Sergeant Charles A. Litchfield, Jr., (far left) and other unidentified Master Sergeants observe a traditional cake cutting ceremony aboard MCRD Parris Island. Circa 1947-1948.

"The raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."

(James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, 23 February 1945.)

"Among the men who fought on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue."

(Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, 16 March 1945.)

The senior SNCOs acting as cake escorts are carrying M-1 rifles vice SNCO swords.



Photos are courtesy of Colonel David Litchfield, USMC (Ret.)

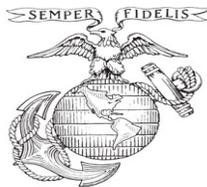
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