
Chapter 1.

Our Legacy

HISTORY

In 1775, the second Continental Congress voted to raise two battalions of Marines to support the Navy in the fight for independence against Great Britain. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the Marines were

disbanded, the Navy ships were sold, and both of the services were determined to be unnecessary. It was another 15 years before the Marines were again called upon to defend the

When we collectively understand [the history of those who came before us] we better appreciate the legacy that has been passed onto us.

—Then-Brigadier General Roberta Shea¹

newly formed United States of America. Since then, the Service has gone unbroken; today, Marines stand ready to go forth wherever the mission requires.

Historically, the Marine Corps has been an incredibly adaptive and innovative Service, transforming to constantly meet the Nation's needs. Originally formed to defend ships against pirates and keep Sailors "in line," Marines quickly found other ways to make themselves useful. In the Battle of Nassau in 1776, they left the ships and began rushing to shore to engage in direct conflict.

Marines fighting in World War I were no longer storming beaches, but instead engaging in trench warfare. Shortly after that, Marines found themselves in the South American jungles fighting a rebel militia while also filling interim government positions to create political stability. At the same time, Marines continued to build their stellar reputation during the Boxer Rebellion in China, where Marines earned more Medals of Honor than the Army and Navy combined.

World War II required more adaptation and innovation as Marines conducted island-hopping campaigns through the Pacific region. It continued through the war in Korea, when fierce fighting in the freezing Chosin Reservoir region meant Marines had to adapt yet again. Their relentless fighting spirit was emphasized by Army Major General Frank Lowe when he said, “The safest place in Korea was right behind a platoon of Marines. Lord, how they could fight!”²

By the time the Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, Marines from the 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigade responded from the sea with ground troops, combat aviators, and special operations and combined arms teams supported by Maritime Prepositioning Squadron-2. Marines today continue to adapt and innovate new ways to accomplish the mission, creating new history.

HERITAGE

Nearly two and a half centuries of existence have yielded a broad description of a Marine’s service. Marines have served in times of conflict and in times of peace. They have served within the

borders of the United States and on foreign soil. They have performed their duties on land, at sea, and in the air. Marines fill positions of combat arms, support, intelligence, administration, logistics, and dozens of other roles.

Every Marine's service looks different from others, but the one thing that unites all Marines is the sense of belonging that comes with earning the title. Active, Reserve, or veteran; deployed or in garrison; commissioned or enlisted—all Marines share a sense of belonging to the institution and to each other. It does not take much more than a t-shirt logo or a bumper sticker to connect one Marine with another. The stories told over and over link Marines to their past, remind them of the reputation they have inherited, and inspire them to live up to and maintain that reputation.

Marines are, first and foremost, warfighters; every Marine is trained in the basics of combat and marksmanship. From the rifleman on the front lines to the inventory management specialist in support, every Marine is trained to fight enemy combatants. Each Marine has a mission, and is given the training and education to succeed at that mission and to respond without fail when called. They are not, however, limited to only acting as an offensive force, as demonstrated through the security provided to embassies and humanitarian operations; they respond to whatever the Nation requires.

At some point in their service, most Marines hear some variation of what Lieutenant General Victor Krulak wrote to Commandant General Randolph M. Pate in 1957: "The United States does not need a Marine Corps. However, for good reasons which

completely transcend cold logic, the United States wants a Marine Corps.”³ This sentiment has continued to echo true throughout the decades. The Marine Corps’ existence is not guaranteed. It is earned every day through the actions of those who claim the title.

Much has changed in the Marine Corps. For nearly 150 years, women and minorities were barred from joining the Marine Corps ranks. Today, anyone who meets the standards of service can attempt to earn the title. Although physical, mental, and moral standards have changed countless times, all Marines are expected to uphold them, whether they are enlisted or commissioned, volunteer or drafted.

As the force has changed in size and make-up, and technology and equipment have evolved, some question whether the Corps of today is the same Corps they once knew. It is easy to see the Marine Corps has changed since its inception, but each generation of Marines has raised the standards set before them and pushed into the future. When confronted with the most challenging moral and physical situations, Marines have stepped up and fulfilled the legacy handed down over generations. Marines have always remained faithful to their purpose—to win battles. This standard applies to all who wear the uniform and emblem.

SUSTAINING THE TRANSFORMATION

The title of Marine comes with a responsibility that some may not fully comprehend or appreciate. Focus moves away from the

individual to being part of a team. Once Marines earn the right to wear the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, each one must continue the transition process, each growing in character and abilities as they strive to become more than just someone who meets the requirements to be a Marine, but to be the Marine needed for the future mission. This transformation must be intentional and continuous to ensure the Marine Corps remains a force in readiness.

Marines are ambassadors and representatives for the Marine Corps and the United States. The word “Marine” evokes a picture of a professional, disciplined warrior who stands ready to defend the United States and its allies. This perception is not limited to US citizens, as many around the world consider Marines the pinnacle military force in readiness. Whenever Marines are subject to public attention in a positive or negative light, they are first recognized as Marines, even if it has been years since they last put on the uniform. The Nation holds Marines to a higher standard, in and out of uniform. Marines cannot follow in the footsteps of their predecessors’ successes without acknowledging their predecessors’ failures, and are accountable to their successors for their own success and failures. Marines have proven themselves consistently throughout history and have risen to each occasion with honor and integrity. Although some may stumble along the way, those who have earned the title have taken their place in the halls of history.