

MAY 2024

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# LEATHERNECK

MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

**Eye to the Sky**  
Marine ATCs Support  
Aviators Across Globe

Combat Corsairs—  
Legendary U-Bird  
Was a Menace  
To the Enemy

Preserved in Paint:  
Artist Renews  
Aviation Tradition

— SPECIAL AVIATION ISSUE —

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# From the Publisher & Editor-in-Chief



SGT SEAN POTTER, USMC

**Air traffic controllers, like these Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, play a vital role in the safe, orderly and expeditious flow of Marine air traffic operations across the globe.**

This month's edition of *Leatherneck* marks the return of an annual "aviation-focused" edition of the magazine. Of note, the May edition of *Marine Corps Gazette* also has an aviation focus, and MCA Premium Members can always access both magazines online to read a series of articles covering various aspects of Marine aviation today.

As our cover photo highlights, one of this month's stories focuses on Marine Air Traffic Controllers. Staff writer Kyle Watts' article "Safeguarding the Airspace: Marine Air Traffic Controllers' Critical Role in Marine Aviation" on page 40 tells the story of air traffic controllers from various Marine Corps Air Stations and facilities operating out of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Afghanistan in 2021. We also present articles on the Vought F4-U Corsair and the evolution of aircraft art.

In recognition of Memorial Day and all servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation, we open and close this month's magazine with Memorial Day tributes. On page 18 is a compelling story by frequent contributor Geoff Roecker about a tank crew during the battle of Okinawa. On page 80, our closing Saved Round tells the origin story of Memorial Day which originally began as "Decoration Day" following the U.S. Civil War.

It was carried forward at home and abroad after the First World War and grew into the national day of remembrance we know today.

Finally, I must recognize the passing of a true "giant" of the Marine Corps. In the early morning hours of March 20, General Alfred M. Gray Jr., the 29th Commandant, passed away at age 95. For over half his life, Gen Gray served as a Marine, both enlisted and as an officer, and remained active in support of the Corps. His influence remains vital today in our tactical doctrine and warfighting philosophy of maneuver warfare, and in the Corps' commitment to professional military education and the foundational ethos of "Every Marine a Rifleman." Above all, Gen Gray genuinely cared for the Marines he led. While we are diminished by his loss, he would demand that we all carry on as Marines. You can read more about Gen Gray in the In Memoriam department on page 74. We will continue our coverage of Gen Gray's remarkable career in a future issue of *Leatherneck*.

Good reading and Semper Fi!

Colonel Christopher Woodbridge,  
USMC (Ret)

**LEATHERNECK**  
MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

MARINE CORPS  
**Gazette**



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MSGT JOHN MCRELL, USAF

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**COVER:** Sgt Ian Chryst, a Marine air traffic controller assigned to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, monitors the air traffic control center at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Afghanistan, Aug. 22, 2021. On page 40, read about the vital role Marine air traffic controllers play all around the world. Photo by Cpl Davis Harris, USMC. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending \$3 (for mailing costs) to Leatherneck Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

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# THE MILITARY SPOUSE'S GUIDE TO REDUCING FINANCIAL STRESS

It's common for military members to refer to their spouse as the CFO of the household. While it's a wonderful compliment, it comes with the responsibility and stress of properly managing the family's finances to reach their financial goals.

Building financial success is a long-term plan and doesn't happen overnight. It comes from years of learning, growing, making mistakes, and sometimes pure trial and error. Let's look at steps you can take to help reduce financial stress.

## GET ON THE SAME PAGE

Both spouses don't have to be involved in every detail of financial planning, but you should align on what you're hoping to accomplish. Consider going on a financial date, where you talk openly about your financial planning and begin to formulate a plan designed to reach shared goals. The first time you have this conversation may be difficult, but the more it happens, the easier it becomes.

## HAVE A PLAN AND STAY WITHIN A FAMILY BUDGET

One great benefit of serving in the military is a reliable stream of monthly income. You can use it to precisely build a budget which helps you pay off debt and plan for the future. Use your budget to map out your basic living expenses. Be sure to include saving for both short- and long-term goals.

## AUTOMATE YOUR FINANCES

Automate as much of your finances as you can, including bill payments and savings. Many banks offer free online services that make paying your bills automatic.

For savings, consider using automatic funds transfers to support your long- and short-term savings goals. This increases your chance for financial success.

These tips are just the beginning. Scan this QR code or select [this link](#) to review the rest of these tips and find other resources designed to provide support to military spouses and to help make life a little easier.



## Letter of the Month

*(Leatherneck will pay \$25 for a "Sound Off Letter of the Month" submitted by an MCA member or provide a one-year courtesy subscription to a non-member whose letter is selected.)*

The "From the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief" letter in the February issue of *Leatherneck* brought back a memory from 60 years ago when I was a member of the 1st Marine Air Wing Band. Our band director was CWO-2 George D. Durham. The band members knew that Durham had been a member of "The Presidents Own." What I did not know, and I suspect neither did the other band members, was that Durham had enlisted in 1943 and participated in the Battle of Iwo Jima. I have included a citation, possibly from 2020, that The President's Own wrote about him when they saluted their band members who had served during World War II.

Durham joined the Marine Corps in January 1943. He participated in the land-

ing and capture of Iwo Jima in February 1945. He became a member of The President's Own from November 1946 until June 1957. Upon his appointment to warrant officer, he left the Marine band to join the Fleet Marine Corps field band music program as a band officer. Durham holds his bachelor's, master's, and doctorate from The Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He retired from the Marine Corps in 1965.

In 1944, Durham landed in Waimea, Hawaii, with 20,000 other Marines to train for the assault at Iwo Jima. In August 2003, 58 years after the Battle of Iwo Jima, Durham gave his experience. Here is a summary:

On Jan. 4, 1945, Durham's 28-piece regimental band embarked at Hilo, Territory of Hawaii, with the 2nd Battalion, 26th Marines, an infantry regiment, 5th Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, and other specialized troops; These men departed the next day for Pearl Harbor. From Jan. 5-27, they participated in training, lectures, and rehearsal landings.

From Jan. 27, they sailed to Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall Islands. Upon arrival on Feb. 5, fuel and provisions were taken aboard. On Feb. 7, they sailed to Garapan Harbor, Saipan, arriving on Feb. 11. On Feb. 16, they sailed to Iwo Jima.

"As we approached Iwo Jima, we were amazed by the tremendous bombardment by our battleships, rocket firings by smaller ships, and air attacks on the island. We wondered how anyone could survive that fantastic onslaught of bombs, rockets and shells!

Upon landing ... there were many heavily damaged/wrecked vehicles on the beach, and it seemed to us that the Japanese mortar and artillery fire had increased over the time since about noon. It was hard for us to come to grips with what was happening. It wasn't fear or confusion; it was just a new experience, and unforgettable. We were directed to move up and off the beach and to dig in. Digging a foxhole in that terrible sand was not an easy task.

Regarding the flag-raising on Mount



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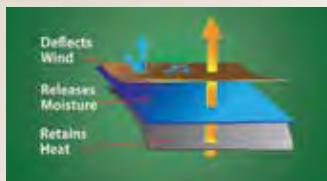
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Suribachi: "Although we were unable to see the event due to our movement and location, we saw the flag later. It was an inspiring moment for us. It still is. Those of us who experienced that event will never forget it."

Durham is buried at East Hawaii Veterans Cemetery No. 2.

Andrew J. Morgret  
Memphis, Tenn.

*What a great firsthand account of the Iwo landing! Thanks for sharing. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

#### Thoughts on the Lejeune Article In the March 2024 Issue

In the March 2024 issue of *Leatherneck*, Maj Skip Crawley delivered an extraordinary story on the greatest leatherneck of all time; MajGen John A. Lejeune, in his article "A Leader Ahead of His Time: Lejeune Set the Stage for the Corps' Amphibious Excellence." Articles like the one by Maj Crawley serve as a fantastic opportunity to educate people about Marine Corps history while also instilling respect for this great general.

Patrick Brent  
Honolulu, Hawaii

It was a pleasure to read the story on MajGen John A. Lejeune in the March issue of *Leatherneck*.

I think Lejeune envisioned a Marine/Navy sledgehammer that could smash the enemy on land or sea. The greatest ability of our forces is that we can defeat our enemies at sea, land mass, or anywhere we find them on this earth, because our great leaders in our military had the vision to see the future of battle on a planet that is mostly made of water. I really enjoy learning about military heroes as they can lead us to victory with the least number of casualties in battle.

John Sanchez  
USN, 1961-1966  
Hanford, Calif.

*Thanks all for the feedback on Maj Crawley's article. We're lucky to have him freelancing for Leatherneck. Expect more in the coming months. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

#### Update on Cold War Netflix Documentary

On page 65 of the March issue of *Leatherneck*, I saw a notice looking for any special assignments during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was there and saw the Smithsonian's 50th anniversary article on the crisis but their photos were taken from the air. I took photos on the ground

and shared them with the Smithsonian. They used my photos in a blog as a follow up. For the 60th anniversary, Netflix is compiling a special release called "Turning Point: The Bomb and The Cold War." I was interviewed by a Netflix producer over the phone last year and went to their studios in New York City for a taping. The documentary was released March 12, and you can see my interview in episode 4!

Bill Ober  
Huntington, N.Y.

*Thanks! We'll take a look. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

#### Carved in Stone

A simple computer search yields the fact that the acronym "rest in peace" is the most commonly used tombstone inscription in the United States. However, in an informal study, I found that among a certain group that another phrase far outnumbered that expression. The subject area was Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., situated on the grounds of one of the nation's largest veterans administration facilities. The words were "semper fidelis," which when translated from Latin means "always faithful."

I found that some of the grave markers I visited reflected a formal "last wish" on part of the decedent to be remembered with those two words. In the third verse of "The Marines' Hymn," the lyrics state that those who wear dress blue uniforms will guard the streets of heaven and those who have faith in that scenario may meet with Saint Peter at the pearly gates where fidelity and evidence of everlasting loyalty could be referred to and justly rewarded.

William K. Bauer  
Largo, Fla.

*Semper Fidelis!—Publisher*

#### Content Suggestions from Readers

From 1965-1966, I was assigned squad leader of "Foxtrot" 2/3, 3rdMarDiv. I always read about the "Starlite" sniper scope. Being a sniper at some point as part of all duty assignments as a 0311, I was given an infrared night scope, which showed green in the 12" lens mounted on my M-14. I had a one-man team who carried a "suitcase" containing two batteries for the unit.

I would love to see photos of this ancient piece of equipment and more information about the use of this scope in an issue of *Leatherneck*.

Kenneth Davis  
Prescott, Ariz.

*We will start researching to see what we can come up with. Thanks and Semper Fi.—Publisher*

First, thank you very much for keeping and raising the bar high in the publishing of *Leatherneck* magazine. I've been reading for over 20 years and honestly it seems to get better each month.

Secondly, I was hoping that at some point in the near future that you could do an article on Hubert H. Hunnicutt. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his gallantry, bravery, courage and fortitude because of his actions in April 1968 while serving with C/1/9. I've attempted with efforts to have his Navy Cross upgraded to the Medal of Honor but have had no luck. At the time Hunnicutt was a corporal and left for dead during the Tet Offensive. His citation is too lengthy to include it with this letter; however, I would love to see his story published to add to the tradition, glory and history of the Corps.

Paul Hout  
Jacksonville, Fla.

*It sounds like you could write the article! Let us know if you would like to give it a try. Thanks and Semper Fi.—Publisher*



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COURTESY OF MIKE MCGUIRE

A group of CH-46 helicopters with HMM-161 taking flight at MCAS Tustin, July 1968.



COURTESY OF CARLOS HOLT

A Goodyear blimp floats next to one of the hangars at MCAS Tustin. The photo was taken by reader Carlos Holt, who was stationed at Tustin from 1987 to 1992.

## Stories from MCAS Tustin

I usually wait for my paper copy of *Leatherneck* but decided to review the March issue online. I came across the follow-up letter in Sound Off regarding Hangar One at the old Tustin base and saw your message about old photos.

I served with HMM-161 and HMT-301 from 1979-1982 and now help organize an annual party for a bunch of us old Marines from 161 to celebrate the Marine Corps Birthday, so I have collected photos and put together a slideshow as well.

Sgt Mike McGuire  
USMC, 1978-82  
Newbury Park, Calif.

I have attached a photo of one of the two MCAS Tustin blimp hangars on the day of an RC airplane club event. As you can see it was also attended by the Goodyear blimp. I took the picture myself as I lived in the barracks there as a corporal and a sergeant with HMM-163 between 1987 and 1992.

I do not know which year it was, but it was likely 1988 or 1990. You can see some of the RC club members looking in the air as other RC planes flew around. You can also make out a few other RC planes still on the deck in front of the owners.

Our squadron space was in one hangar before 89, then after WestPac, we moved into a similar space in the other hangar, so I served in both. Each hangar had spaces for four squadrons: one on each end on each side with either a CH-46 unit or a CH-53 unit mixed in each hangar.

A new CO once made us mop/swab the entire space of the hangar deck that belonged to us. We referred to him as LtCol "Clean-a-lot." Thankfully, he didn't last long. Walking into our spaces very early one morning and being the first one there, I happened to see his picture had been removed from the wall (found out later he moved and retired shortly thereafter).

Carlos Holt  
San Antonio, Texas

There was a time when it was discovered that all CH-46s, when making a hard landing, the back section of the aircraft, at station 416, could crack and in some cases would completely break off and separate from the aircraft.

I was stationed at LTA with HMM-262 as an aircraft maintenance officer and charged with the responsibility of maintaining the inventory of all the parts removed from each aircraft by serial number to make sure that the right parts

were replaced on the right aircraft after the station 416 repairs and reinforcements were completed.

I worked with several factory representatives from Boeing Vertol, which was the aircraft manufacturer, and they were required to ensure that all station 416 repairs were completed to all specifications.

Charles D. Garrett  
Castle Hayne, N.C.

Based on what I could find, it was not until June 1975 that the name became Marine Corps Air Station Tustin. Prior to that date, it was called Marine Corps Air Facility Santa Ana. The sign at the main gate, at which I stood guard for several weeks, stated MCAF Santa Ana.

At the time I was there, the name Tustin was used, but not for the MCAF. Santa Ana was the home of MAG-36 that was four squadrons of UH-34D medium lift helicopters and a squadron of CH-37 heavy lift helicopters. Probably one of the most desirable aspects of the facility at the time was its location in Orange County, Calif., which was becoming the place to be. The front gate opened into the heart of a great entertainment and social area. Newport Beach was a short drive away, Disneyland just up the road, etc.

[continued on page 76]

Photo © USMC

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# In Every Clime and Place

Compiled by Kyle Watts



## MCAS Cherry Point, N.C. East Coast F-35B Squadron Achieves Operational Capability

On Feb. 5, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), became the first East Coast F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter Squadron in the Fleet Marine Force to achieve initial operational capability.

Initial operational capability means that VMFA-542 has enough operational F-35B Lightning II aircraft, trained pilots, maintainers and support equipment to self-sustain its mission essential tasks (METs). These METs include conducting close-air support, offensive anti-air warfare, strike coordination and reconnaissance, and electronic attacks.

“VMFA-542 is the first operational fifth-generation squadron in II Marine Expeditionary Force, giving the aviation combat element the most lethal, survivable and interoperable strike fighter in the U.S. inventory,” said Lieutenant Colonel Brian Hansell, Commanding Officer of VMFA-542. “The F-35B is unmatched in its capability to support Marines against the advanced threats that we can expect in the future.”

The F-35 is a fifth-generation fighter

**Above: Pilots with VMFA-542, 2nd MAW, stage in formation at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on Feb. 13, 2024. (Photo by LCpl Madison Blackstock, USMC)**

**Below: LtCol Brian Hansell, VMFA-542 CO, prepares for flight operations at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on Dec. 28, 2023. VMFA-542 pilots conducted routine flight operations to maintain proficiency and achieve training objectives in support of 2nd MAW missions.**



SSGT DAISHA RAMIREZ, USMC

**Marines with VMGR-152, 1st MAW, unload equipment from a KC-130J Super Hercules aircraft in preparation to transport Department of Social Welfare and Development family food packs at Villamor Airbase, Philippines, on Feb. 11.**



SGT SAVANNAH MESIMER, USMC

jet with advanced stealth, agility and maneuverability, sensor and information fusion, and provides the pilot with real-time access to battlespace information. It is designed to meet an advanced threat while improving lethality, survivability and supportability. The F-35B Lightning II is the short-takeoff and vertical-landing F-35 variant. This capability allows the aircraft to operate from amphibious assault ships and expeditionary airstrips less than 2,000 feet long.

“I am extremely proud of the Marines and Sailors of VMFA-542,” said Colonel James T. Bardo, Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 14, the parent command of VMFA-542. “Achieving initial operational capability at the pace and precision of which they did truly demonstrates what an exceptional unit this is. This milestone demonstrates their hard work, ingenuity and perseverance.”

Achieving initial operational capability also means that VMFA-542 is one step closer to achieving full operational capability and completing its F-35B Lightning II transition, a process that began in December 2022.

2ndLt John Graham, USMC

### **Philippines U.S. Marines Deliver Emergency Relief to Mindanao**

Marines from III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) assisted the government of the Philippines by providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in response to the natural disaster in Mindanao, Republic of the Philippines, from Feb. 12-15.



SGT SAVANNAH MESIMER, USMC

**Marines with VMGR-152, 1st MAW, alongside Philippine military and Coast Guard servicemembers, palletize Department of Social Welfare and Development family food packs in preparation for transportation at Villamor Airbase, Pasay City, Philippines, on Feb. 11.**

At the request of the government of the Philippines, Marines from MAG-12, 1st MAW, supported the U.S. Agency for International Development with 10 support missions, delivering much needed supplies using KC-130J Hercules aircraft. Supplies were appropriated to disaster-affected people in Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur and Davao de Oro provinces.

“III MEF rapidly transported 15,000 family food packs—ensuring over 75,000 people devastated by heavy flooding and landslides had access to life sustaining assistance,” said Ben Hemingway, the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian

Assistance Regional Director. “The rapid deployment and close coordination of the skilled III MEF aviators and logisticians was critical to the delivery of life saving assistance in support of our Philippine Allies.”

III MEF’s forward posture in Japan allows Marines to quickly move personnel and equipment around the region to support allies and partners in times of need. As a crisis response force, III MEF has a long history of providing assistance in support of safety and security in the region.

2ndLt Owen Hitchcock, USMC

A USAF B-52 Stratofortress aircraft is flanked by aircraft from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, during a multinational formation flight over Tinian and Saipan, on Feb 6, during the multilateral exercise Cope North 24. (Photo by Sgt Jose Angeles, USMC)



LCPL DAVID GETZ, USMC

Sgt Carson Driver, an aviation ordnance technician with VMFA-232, signals to an F/A-18C Hornet aircraft during Cope North 24 at Andersen AFB, Guam, on Feb. 19.

### Guam Marine Aircraft Group 12 Concludes Cope North 24

Marines from MAG-12, 1st MAW, completed Cope North 24, a three-week-long multinational aviation training exercise, alongside joint, partner and allied forces in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, from Feb. 2 to 23.

During the exercise, which involved forces from the U.S., Australia, Japan, France, South Korea, and Canada, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 232 accumulated more than 280 flight hours and 140 sorties across multiple islands in the Marianas. The unit also practiced the U.S. Air Forces' Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concept as a coalition force, as well as the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) unilaterally.

"There will always be challenges working with coalition militaries and different standard operating procedures that each military has. It's an excellent opportunity for us to come out here, work together, exercise together, and draw from the differences and similarities to achieve our common goals," said Flight Lieu-



LCPL DAVID GETZ, USMC

**Above: Marines with VMFA-232 and MWSS-171 refuel an F/A-18D Hornet from a forward arming and refueling point during Cope North 24 at North-west Field, Guam, on Feb. 20.**

**Right: Sgt Micah Leone, an aviation ordnance technician with VMFA-232, performs preflight inspections on a captive air training missile AIM-9X-2 at Andersen AFB, Guam, on Jan. 30. (Photo by LCpl David Getz, USMC)**



tenant Thomas Rogers, an officer with 383rd Contingency Response, Royal Australian Air Force.

The Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) concept aims to perform aviation operations in austere environments through low signature generating methods. During the exercise, a KC-130J Super Hercules aircraft with Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR) 152 transported a small package of Marines and refueling equipment from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan to Guam, located over 1,600 miles away, to provide immediate refueling capabilities to F/A-18 Hornet aircraft.

“The concept of EABO allows us to

accomplish our mission in providing fueling support for any aircraft, in this iteration an F/A-18, in any location. So, wherever an aircraft can land and drop off our equipment and personnel, we can then set up and conduct refueling operations,” said Second Lieutenant William Peterson, a logistics officer with Marine Wing Support Squadron 171.

Approximately 2,400 servicemembers and 85 aircraft participated in Cope

North 24 and expended more than 30,000 pounds of ordnance. Initially established in 1978 as a bilateral exercise based out of Misawa Air Base, Japan, Cope North moved to Andersen Air Force Base in 1999. In 2012, it became a trilateral exercise with the addition of the Royal Australian Air Force and is currently U.S. Pacific Air Forces’ largest multilateral exercise series.

Cpl Samantha Rodriguez, USMC

Norway

Nordic Response 24: Marines Conduct Cold Weather Training



CPL JOSHUA KUMAKAW, USMC

Above: Marines with 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2ndMarDiv, conduct a foot movement during Cold Weather Training in preparation for the NATO exercise Nordic Response 2024 in Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 5.

Below: Marines with II MEF participate in a snowmobile course in preparation for the NATO exercise Nordic Response 24 at Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 19.



CPL JACQUILYN DAVIS, USMC



LCPL CHRISTIAN SALAZAR, USMC

**Above: Marines with Marine Ration Force-Europe and NATO allies approach a door during a breaching and clearing mission to display interoperability with allies and partner nations prior to Nordic Response 24 in Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 7.**

**Right: SSgt Russell Marchand, a platoon sergeant with "Alpha" Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2ndMarDiv, commands Marines to push forward during a platoon live-fire maneuver range in preparation for the NATO exercise Nordic Response 24 in Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 23.**



CPL CHRISTOPHER HERNANDEZ, USMC

**Above: PFC Gen Nagamatsu, a radio operator with 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2ndMarDiv, surfaces from water during an ice-breaker drill in preparation for Exercise Nordic Response 24 at Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 1. Exercise Nordic Response is a NATO training event conducted every two years to promote military competency in arctic environments.**



CPL JOSHUA KUMAKAW, USMC



LCPL ORLANYS DIAZ FIGUEROA, USMC

**HM3 William Baldwin, left, and Sgt Colin Rowan, right, both with 2nd LAAD Battalion, MACG-28, 2nd MAW, fire a stinger-launch simulator during a live-fire training range in preparation for Exercise Nordic Response 24 at Setermoen, Norway, on Feb. 29.**



CPL CAMERON ROSS, USMC

**Moldovan police forces practice live fire rifle handling drills during training with U.S. Marines from Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Company, Europe (FASTEUR), in Chişinău, Moldova, on Jan. 23.**

**Moldova**  
**U.S. Marines Train**  
**Moldovan Security Forces**

Marines and Sailors from Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team, Europe (FASTEUR), operating under Task Force 61/2 (TF 61/2), U.S. Sixth Fleet, U.S. Naval Forces Europe (NAVEUR), and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), conducted an Embassy Engagement Exercise (E3) in Moldova from Jan. 18-24. The E3 further enhanced interoperability between FASTEUR, the U.S. Embassy Chişinău Marine Security Guard Detachment, the Department of State and multiple host nation agencies.

FASTUER is dedicated to its mission

of delivering swift-response, expeditionary anti-terrorism security operations to safeguard critical naval and national assets. Their expertise encompasses various specialized areas, including marksmanship, surveillance dedication, compound security and clearance, as well as emergency medical response. These proficiencies are crucial skills that FASTEUR Marines and Sailors are ready to employ and collaborate on when supporting their counterparts in the State Department’s security efforts.

The E3 reached a significant milestone in strengthening international partnerships and security efforts, marking the first time U.S. Marines and Sailors trained

Moldovan security forces. The training included various Moldovan security forces, including border security, “Fulger” brigade, which is very similar to the U.S. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, embassy security and local traditional police forces.

“The Moldovan security forces are some of the best I’ve worked with,” said Staff Sergeant Edwin Orozco, a platoon sergeant with FASTEUR. “Moldova is host to very capable security forces who are professional in nature and tactically proficient.”

The E3 encompassed a range of critical skills essential for law enforcement and military personnel. The training included medical care in high-stress situations, proper detainee handling, tactics for room clearing in hostile environments and marksmanship for accuracy and effectiveness.

The partnership between Marines and the various Moldovan security units holds significance as it represents a pivotal step in bolstering international alliances and advancing security efforts. This collaboration fosters mutual understanding, cooperation and the exchange of vital skills within the realm of law enforcement and security across Moldova’s diverse security forces.

Capt Jacoby Getty, USMC



**Cpl Hunter Smith, a rifleman with Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Company, Europe, communicates with a Moldovan interpreter during detainee handling procedures in Chişinău, Moldova, on Jan. 18.**



CPL CAMERON ROSS, USMC

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# Death in Square 2

## A Marine Tank Crew's Fate on Okinawa

By Geoffrey W. Roecker



CPL WALTER SPANGLER, USMC, COURTESY OF MARSHA GRANT



CPL WALTER A. SPANGLER, USMC,  
COURTESY OF MARSHA GRANT

**Cpl Walter A. Spangler (left) was a photographer who enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942. Spangler carried his personal camera into combat and captured footage of the war, including the aftermath of a mine explosion that destroyed a 6thMarDiv M4A3 tank, Square 2, while on Okinawa (above).**

Walter Spangler knew a good shot when he saw one.

His fascination with photography began in 1936 when his big brother gave him a little box camera for Christmas. Twelve-year-old Walter was soon doing his own darkroom work; by 16, he had a part-time job as a photographer and engraver for the *Vallejo Evening News*. He joined the Marine Corps on Dec. 7, 1942—“just one year and two hours after Pearl Harbor”—and “argued [his] way into photo schools at Quantico.” Between January 1944 and May 1945, Spangler carried his camera across the South Pacific with a whirlwind travel itinerary. He was “a shellback, a short-snorter” and

a 1st Marine Division combat veteran by the time he landed on Okinawa.

Spangler shot motion as well as still frames and was filming some stretcher bearers when the explosion occurred. A medium tank, part of 6thMarDiv’s push toward Naha, lay on its back, sending gouts of flame leaping into the air. Spangler’s trusty 16 mm Bell & Howell whirred, capturing tankers trying to fight the flames with hand-held extinguishers and desperately digging for the buried escape hatches. A dazed and bloodied crewman, miraculously blown free, stumbled toward the wreck and stared numbly at the scene; helping hands led him away as fire licked out of the turret.

Mercifully, Spangler’s camera was unable to record the sounds of roaring flames, of rescuers shouting, or the frantic pounding of the men trapped in a metal coffin.

No sound is needed to understand the emotion captured in Spangler’s lens. The rescuers realize their efforts are hopeless; their shoulders slump; they gather their equipment and move away, slowly and unwillingly, with many backward glances. One man who daringly climbed onto the burning tank just feet from burning gasoline seems especially reluctant to leave. A Marine with a metal detector meanders through the frame, belatedly sweeping for additional mines. The tank’s



CPL WALTER A. SPANGLER, USMC, COURTESY OF MARSHA GRANT

**Above: A group of Marines frantically try to free the three crewmen trapped inside of the tank. During the rescue effort, the ammunition caught fire.**

**Below: A view of the wrecked M4A3 tank with smoke rising from the escape hatch.**



CPL WALTER A. SPANGLER, USMC, COURTESY OF MARSHA GRANT

ammunition explodes, sending chunks of metal flying and shaking the camera, but Spangler films another 30 seconds as if transfixed by what he has just seen. He scribbles a professional description his makeshift slate: “Okinawa, Ryukyus. The Death of a Tank. 5/10 [May 10, 1945], 0800.”

Sometime later, Spangler returned to the wreck. The flames have died out in his final three shots, but smoke still emanates from an escape hatch opened

too late to save the crew. The tank’s unit marking—a white numeral 2 inside a square—stands out starkly against the blackened hulk.

“Death of a Tank” is one of the most enduring images of the battle for Okinawa and a singularly harrowing moment in Marine Corps film history. Its importance was recognized that year; Spangler received a citation from the Navy Photographic Institute for outstanding work “under fire at the risk of the photographer’s

**The rescuers realize their efforts are hopeless; their shoulders slump; they gather their equipment and move away, slowly and unwillingly, with many backward glances.**



**Above: Pvt Billy K. Bledsoe, left, the loader, and Cpl Paul V. Durham, the tank commander, were wounded during the explosion of Square 2.**

COURTESY OF LEAH DURHAM



**Cpl Donald L. Mason**

USMC

life.” The footage appears in documentaries to this day and stills from Spangler’s 16 mm reel are part of the Marine Corps’ official photographic history of the Okinawa campaign. Yet for all this visibility, the crew of “Square 2” is a footnote. Even the most common titles applied to the sequence—“Death of a Tank,” not Death *in* a Tank, or “Death of a Marine Tank” instead of Death of *Marine Tankers*—make Square 2 the tragic hero instead of the three men who died that day.

Fortunately, their names are only obscured instead of wholly erased, and their memory may be preserved with some detective work. Researcher James Molloy, whose father and uncle both served with the 6th Tank Battalion, clarifies the prominent “Square 2” marking. Each of the battalion’s three tank companies fielded four platoons plus a headquarters section: a square indicated First Platoon, followed by a circle (Second), a diamond (Third), a triangle (Fourth), and a shamrock (Headquarters). Battalion headquarters units were designated by a heart. Company assignments were indicated by color. Company A’s markings were red—Molloy notes that the red paint was difficult to see, so tankers mixed in some white to create a pinkish hue—Co B used white, and Co C used yellow. The distinctions are difficult to make in black

and white photographs, but fortunately, Spangler was shooting color film. Thus, the white “Square 2” was the second unit of the 1st Plt, Co B, 6th Tank Bn.

With this knowledge, one can pull muster rolls for Co B, 6th Tanks in May 1945. Thanks to Spangler’s slate, we know that May 10, 1945, was the fatal day for Square 2, and the muster roll shows three fatalities occurring on that date. The violent, dramatic moments that took the lives of Private First Class Earl R. Anderson, Corporal Donald L. Mason and Cpl Bennie B. Woodall, and wounded Cpl Paul V. Durham and Private Billy K. Bledsoe, stood out in the battalion’s collective memory as a story that deserves to be told.

The five Marines assigned to Square 2 at Okinawa represented a peculiar mix of backgrounds and experiences. Three were “old” tank hands. Twenty-year-old Earl Richard Anderson grew up along the banks of the Mississippi River; born and raised in La Harpe, Ill., his world revolved around the small towns of Lomax, Dallas City and Gulfport. He attended high school in the comparative metropolis of Burlington, Iowa, and worked on a dairy farm in the years before the war. Bennie Bill Woodall was just a few months younger than Anderson but saw much more of the country as a boy. He was the eldest of seven Woodall



**Cpl Bennie B. Woodall**

USMC



**PFC Earl R. Anderson**

USMC

kids, and his large family gradually moved westward: from his birthplace in Little Rock, through Arizona, and finally to San Jose, Calif., where he attended school through his sophomore year. He dropped out to work for the Civil Aeronautics Authority in Santa Monica, driving bulldozers, digging irrigation canals and rigging heavy machinery.

Paul Vernon Durham, the second of three siblings, was born in Stella, Mo., in 1923. His father, Reverend Floyd Durham, worked on the souls of congregants in Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas but provided a special service to the people of McDonald County. Whenever a family ordered a new automobile—usually a Ford model, shipped in a packing crate—the Reverend was sure to be on hand to put the vehicle together. Paul inherited his father’s mechanical skills, honed them in the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1939 to 1941, and was operating heavy machinery for a construction company at the time of Pearl Harbor. He took a job at Houston Shipbuilding to help the war effort, even though it meant leaving his new wife behind in Stella. All three men were married before entering the service; Anderson and Durham were new fathers.

Although spread across almost 2,000 miles and three different states, Anderson, Woodall, and Durham enlisted within days of each other in September 1943 and arrived at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego at roughly the same time. Their civilian experience made them natural choices for the eight-week tank battalion training program at Camp Elliott’s Jacques Farm. As qualified light tank operators, the trio was sent overseas to join the 2nd Separate Tank Co (attached to the 22nd Marines) in March 1944. They arrived just too late to participate in the fight for Kwajalein Atoll; instead, they were assigned to “a small deserted island ... supposedly for ‘garrison duty’ ” and were “immediately forgotten,” in the recollections of veteran DeFla “Spike” Strawn. Grenade fishing was the preferred method to stave off boredom and hunger, as rations ran low. The sound of unauthorized explosions—and the smell of an unauthorized fish fry—drew some unwelcome attention, but Durham’s crew soon learned that fixing up an extra plate could mollify even the strictest officer.

The next operation, the invasion of Guam, would be a very different story. On July 21, 1944, the 22nd Marines landed on beaches Yellow One and Yellow Two and forced their way toward the village of Agat. The tanks followed close behind the infantry. Paul Durham had feared violating the all-important

commandment “thou shalt not kill,” but any hesitation vanished when he caught sight of dead Marines littering the sand. While Bennie Woodall was wounded in the fighting for Agat—a contusion on his foot put him out of action until October—Anderson and Durham fought through the entire campaign. Durham even had a chance to save lives: one day, he spotted a woman giving birth in a roadside ditch and swung his tank broadside to block small-arms fire. The terrified woman thought the Americans meant to run her over, so Durham climbed out and got down in the ditch, giving up his shirt to swaddle the newborn. Mother and baby hurried off down the road as Durham returned to his tank to continue the battle.

It isn’t entirely clear whether Anderson, Woodall, and Durham were on the same

**Fortunately, their names are only obscured instead of wholly erased, and their memory may be preserved with some detective work.**

crew before being assigned to Square 2 in the fall of 1944. However, having served together since boot camp ensured a wealth of shared experiences and familiarity. Cpl Woodall became the driver for Square 2, with PFC Anderson as his assistant. Cpl Durham was placed in command. Most NCOs in charge of medium tanks were sergeants or above; Durham’s assignment seems to have been



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**Still images taken from Cpl Spangler’s “Death of a Tank” film footage show a surviving crewman staggering back to the overturned tank (above), while Marines armed with shovels and fire extinguishers (below) desperately try to rescue the three men trapped inside.**



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**An M4A3 of the 6th Tank Bn transports infantry Marines during the early phases of the battle on Okinawa.**

in recognition of personal skill.

The 6th Tank Bn was created on Oct. 1, 1944, by combining three “separate tank companies,” those formerly attached to the infantry regiments of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, into a single outfit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Denig Jr. Like the rest of its parent unit (the recently formed 6th Marine Division), the “Sixth Tanks” was new in name only; many of its members were combat veterans. However, the battalion also had a significant percentage of new Marines taking the places of casualties or men rotating home. These men were drawn from infantry outfits or replacement drafts fresh from the States; some had seen combat, some had been trained to work on tanks, and some had experience with neither. Getting them familiar with the M4A3 medium tank would be no small challenge.

Two of these new men joined Durham in the Square 2 turret. Pvt Billy Kay Bledsoe was the youngest of the group, just shy of 19 when he reported to the 6th Tanks on Nov. 29. A farm boy from Campbell, Mo., Bledsoe was already married and the father of a little daughter when inducted in April 1944; his second child was born just after he joined the battalion. Like his new comrades, Bledsoe drove heavy equipment in civilian life and

went through specialized tank training at Jacques Farm. Now, as the loader of a medium tank, he was responsible for storing and handling rounds of 75mm ammunition, maintaining a .30-caliber machine gun, and working in tandem with the gunner.

The man behind the main gun was Cpl Donald Louis Mason, and his path to the gunner’s seat was highly unusual. Born Aug. 24, 1924, in East St. Louis, Ill., Mason grew up in Fort Worth, Texas, and enlisted immediately after graduating from Polytechnic High School in 1942. After boot camp, Mason attended tank school and qualified as a driver, but instead of deploying to an armored unit, he volunteered for service with the Marine Raiders. He carried a Boys antitank rifle at Wickham Anchorage on Vangunu, participated in the bloodless occupation of Emirau, and weathered the battle for Guam as a machine-gunner with Fox Co, 4th Marines. By the time he joined 6th Tanks in December 1944, Mason had more combat experience than the rest of the crew combined—none of it, though, in a medium tank.

To get his tankers up to speed, LtCol Denig instituted “a review of basic training” for all hands, with additional instruction in specific duties: nomenclature and operation of the M4A3; maintenance

and driving; familiarization with main guns, machine guns and mortars; and firing at stationary and moving targets. This was followed by tank platoon tactics, company maneuvers, and learning how to coordinate with infantry units, ranging from single platoons to regiments. Captain Robert Hall’s Co B—which included Square 2—was tapped to demonstrate this tough training, in which “each infantryman in the division become familiar with tanks and tank-infantry tactics.” Tankers watched endless training films, heard lectures from artillery and air liaison officers, and attended special maintenance and reconnaissance courses. In previous battles, each tank company was part of a regimental combat team, always supporting the same infantry outfit. This could not be guaranteed for future operations, and the rigorous training emphasized communication and liaison work until “both infantry and tanks felt at ease with each other regardless of their partner of the moment.” Their learning continued even as they sailed for their next objective, with men studying pamphlets on Japanese antitank tactics and plaster relief models of a large island called Okinawa.

On the first of April 1945—April Fool’s Day, Easter Sunday, and “Love Day” for Operation Iceberg—the dock landing

ship USS *Casa Grande* (LSD-13) dropped her stern ramp and flooded her well deck. Sixteen mechanized landing craft cleared the ship in minutes and headed for Okinawa's Green Beach 2, disgorging Co B's 15 M4A3s and a bulldozer at 8:57 a.m. Antiaircraft fire barked in the distance, but much to their surprise, the tankers rolled ashore unopposed. A welcome, if somewhat unsettling, development for the veterans of previous beachheads. Capt Hall's company cautiously advanced in support of their old comrades, the 22nd Marines. They were held up at the village of Hanza—not by enemy action but by narrow streets—and infantrymen handily dispatched the few isolated snipers who resisted. The tankers were released from duty and set up their service park for the night. No casualties were reported.

Relatively quiet days became the rule for most of April. Each morning, various platoons of the 6th Tank Bn departed the service park to rendezvous with infantry units pushing northward. Marshy ground and hilly terrain limited tank-infantry coordination, but the Marines met only light resistance (if they encountered any at all). Some days, advances could be measured in miles. Co B generally supported the 22nd Marines but was on call for any unit requiring fire support—or an armored taxi service. An M4A3 could carry approximately 20 infantrymen crammed together on its deck, and if the trip was not exactly comfortable, it certainly beat a long march. The battalion's April 6, 1945, war diary notes that "Baker" Co helped ferry A/1/29th Marines along the west coast to Chuda. A column of medium tanks and M7 self-propelled guns loaded by grinning infantrymen drew photographers like a magnet. A

motion cameraman captured Square 2 as it churned through a small stream, and PFC Robert E. Keller snapped a shot of the waving, shouting 29th Marines as the tank rumbled past. "Fast-moving Leatherneck units now occupy the northern two-thirds of the island," he noted. Later in the day, A/1/29 brushed aside a handful of defenders and occupied Chuda. The tankers returned to their service park without firing a shot.

On the surface, Japanese forces in northern Okinawa seemed entirely unprepared to take on armored units: they "attempted no anti-tank defense except a passive one of blown bridges and a few poorly disguised minefields," according to the 6th Tanks' action report. These simple obstacles caused headaches for tankers on the Motobu Peninsula; while men on foot or in light vehicles could simply bypass a roadblock or cross a stream on stout planks, a heavy M4A3 risked bogging down in soft soil. A well-organized Japanese force might have exploited this advantage, but Marine infantry usually swept aside the isolated and uncoordinated defenders. Thus frustrated, the tankers were frequently released from their missions early in the day and sent back to their park. In fact, between L-plus-9 and L-plus-20, Co B reported no tank operations. Japanese patrols tried to infiltrate the service park at night; the tankers lost some sleep but accounted for "17 well-armed enemy" in the process.

As April drew to a close and 6thMarDiv mopped up and patrolled its sector, the tank battalion drew up an account of its progress. The unit covered 80 miles between the beachhead and its northernmost service park and logged many more miles



**Relatively quiet days became the rule for most of April.**

**Each morning, various platoons of the 6th Tank Bn departed the service park to rendezvous with infantry units pushing northward.**

on combat missions. Maintenance crews kept busy with routine repairs, but no M4A3s were lost to enemy action. The 6th Tanks claimed 33 Japanese troops killed while noting that "no tank battalion personnel were killed, wounded, or missing as a result of enemy action" during the first two phases of the battle. In the entire month of April, the most severe injury in Co B was a Marine accidentally shot in the leg by a buddy cleaning a weapon. In their downtime, some crews added extra armor to their M4A3s. The most common field expedient was welding extra track sections to every suitable surface. "Square 2" reinforced their turret and may have started on their hull, but they never completed the process.

To the south, however, an entirely different scenario was unfolding. Following the successful invasion of Ie Shima by the 77th Infantry Division, soldiers of the 7th, 27th and 96th Infantry Divisions entered "a confusion of little mesa-like hilltops, deep draws, rounded clay hills, gentle green valleys, bare and ragged coral ridges, lumpy mounds of earth, narrow ravines and sloping finger ridges extending downward from the higher hill masses." General Mitsuru Ushijima massed his strength in a series of defensive lines stretching from Yonabaru in the east to Naha, the capital city, in the west. At the center sat the town of Shuri, the headquarters of Ushijima's 32nd Army. The American attack commenced on April 19 with the largest artillery bombardment of the Pacific War, but Japanese troops simply waited out the shelling deep in fortified caves and emerged as the infantry approached. By nightfall, 720 American soldiers were



**A still image from Marine Corps film footage that shows Square 2 transporting Marines across a stream.**

dead, wounded or missing. Among the losses on that bloody day were 22 of 30 M4A3 units belonging to the Army's 193rd Tank and 713th Armored Flame Thrower Tank Bns, knocked out in the area around Kakazu Ridge.

This “shockingly vicious business” presaged the fighting that would define the Okinawa campaign. The 27th and 96th Infantry Divisions endured 10 days of grinding combat before they were pulled off the line on April 30. The 1stMarDiv took over the 27th Division's former sector and the responsibility of reaching the Asa Kawa (Asa River). Meanwhile, 6thMarDiv gave up their blessedly quiet sector of northern Okinawa to the bloodied 27th and began moving south toward the front, taking positions on the east coast directly north of Naha. The 6th Tanks departed from their park on Motobu Peninsula the night of May 5, covering 40 miles “without mishap over

narrow, treacherous mountain roads in a total elapsed time of six and one-half hours.”

The weather began to turn sour. “May 7 saw the beginning of a period of heavy rain, which was to continue almost without interruption, for seven days,” notes historian Bevan Gass. “The thick red dust that had covered the whole country became a deep and gummy mud, which made motor movement most difficult. Trucks, jeeps, and even tractors often were mired down, finding movement beyond their powers.” Vehicle traffic in 6thMarDiv's sector was limited to just two roads, and Japanese artillery had bridges and crossroads pinpointed. The main bridge across the Asa Kawa was shelled into ruins, preventing American armor from crossing. Reconnaissance patrols found the bridge “impassible for either foot or vehicular traffic,” while the river was “4-feet deep with a bottom of gelatinous silt ... insufficiently firm to bear tanks.”

Rain, water, mud, silt—the morass north of Naha spelled trouble for a planned assault across the Asa Kawa to the heights beyond. On the night of May 9, teams from the 6th Engineer Bn worked in darkness to throw a footbridge over the estuary. If the infantry could seize a foothold on the southern bank—or, even

better, the hills overlooking the river—the engineers could build a Bailey bridge for vehicles and repair the main span. The 22nd Marines would spearhead the assault, with their old buddies of B/6th Tanks standing by to provide fire support and cross when possible. In preparation, special bomb disposal squads swept the approach route and “cleared lanes through the mines which the Japanese had sown in great profusion.”

At 3 a.m. on May 10, the Marines of 3/22 crossed the Asa Kawa footbridges and established a toehold on the southern bank. Another battalion followed before Japanese mortar fire knocked out the bridges. The infantry fought hard and took some high ground but badly needed the direct support of tanks. Capt Hall had two platoons standing by and wasted no time getting his men on the road. If bridges were out of the question, he hoped to find a fordable river crossing. Hall put his 1st Plt in the vanguard, with First Lieutenant Howard M. Jennings' Square 1 leading the way. Cpl Durham's Square 2 and Sergeant Jack E. Gordon's Square 3 followed at 25-yard intervals. The tanks were tracking each other along a well-traveled path, aligning their treads to minimize the risk of undetected mines.

Tankers had a healthy respect for Japanese mines. While comparatively few minefields were noted on Okinawa, “single ... and scattered small groups of mines were liable to be encountered anywhere.” Horned mines were easy to spot on dry ground, but they were occasionally rigged with remote detonators and could destroy a bogie assembly. Pottery mines damaged wheels and tracks, their clay bodies impossible for sweepers to detect. “Tape measure” mines were deemed the least effective but were often used to set off charges of picric acid. These types of mines would not destroy a tank but could send it back for repair or immobilize it, to be picked off by feared 47mm antitank guns. Improvised mines, on the other hand, might be anything from a 30-pound box charge to a heavy artillery shell or aerial bomb. The boxes were also challenging to detect and had to be carefully probed out with long stakes.

After rolling past the village of Jichaku, Capt Hall's tanks left the well-traveled track and turned toward the Asa



**The area of operations for the 22nd Marines and the 6th Tank Bn on Okinawa, May 1945. Square 2 was taken out somewhere between Jichaku and the Asa Kawa River.**



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Stills from Cpl Spangler’s “Death of Tank” film captures an explosion as a result of the tank’s ammunition storage catching fire (above). In the aftermath, a blackened heap of metal (below) is all that remained of the M4A3.



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Kawa, just a few hundred yards away. A group of engineers was sweeping the soft ground ahead with metal detectors, marking a path for the armor. Hall halted his tanks, and the crews hopped out to stretch, smoke, and shoot the breeze. PFC Shirley “Reggie” Joyner, the driver of Square 3, saw Paul Durham’s crew “walking around outside [their] tank during the brief break.” When 1stLt Jennings gave the signal to mount up, Anderson, Woodall and Mason disappeared inside their tank. The M4A3 had separate turret hatches for the commander and loader, so Durham and Bledsoe perched on top to enjoy a few more minutes of fresh air.

With sweepers leading the way, the Square platoon moved slowly forward in single file—“all tracking one another perfectly,” according to Sgt Gordon. Tank treads dug deep into soil soaked from the

recent rains, and Cpl Bennie Woodall had no problem following in the ruts left by Square 1. He counted a few seconds to mark his interval, then pushed the steering levers forward.

Seconds later, he was airborne.

The Square 3 crew were spellbound at the sight of a 34-ton M4A3 being flung into the air like a toy. “The tank done a complete forward flip and landed on the turret and driver’s hatch,” recalled Gordon, while Joyner “saw Paul V. Durham and Billy K. Bledsoe being thrown off the top of the tank by concussion.” Square 2 came to rest upside down, her upper hatches buried in the mud, and her belly hatch warped and jammed by the force of the explosion. Ruptured fuel lines spilled gas into the engine compartment, where it ignited. Black smoke rose into the sky, drawing attention to the “gruesome sight of the

**Square 2 came to rest upside down, her upper hatches buried in the mud, and her belly hatch warped and jammed by the force of the explosion. ... Ruptured fuel lines spilled gas into the engine compartment, where it ignited.**

burning tank.” “I was in my jeep leading my tanks to our attack position, and heard the blast and saw the smoke,” remembered Capt Phillip Morell of Co A, 6th Tanks. “The black smoke ... seemed to go straight up and could be seen for miles around.” Even tankers in the 1stMarDiv sector some distance to the east recognized the smoke as a funeral pyre.

Square 2 had fallen victim to an improvised mine, later determined to be a pair of 500-pound bombs that had somehow eluded the sweepers. During the brief halt, 1stLt Jennings’ Square 1 had parked virtually on top of the device but was spared by muddy ground too soft to trip a pressure detonator. The “tracking” tactic doomed Square 2: the lead tank’s treads compressed the earth just enough for the next tank’s weight to explode the bomb.

Cameraman Spangler arrived as the first rescuers converged on Square 2. “Our [attempt] to get them out was a race between the fire and suffocation,” said Sgt Gordon. “All the fire extinguishers in all the tanks were brought up, but the fire could not be extinguished. We tried to dig out under the driver’s hatch, which was buried fairly deep.” Joyner bravely took Square 3 out of the column and tried to pull the stricken tank upright, trying “in three or four different positions” before the cable snapped. Marines “tried to pound and pry off the escape hatch,” spurred by the sound of frantic fists beating on the other side of the armor plate. Paul Durham climbed onto the blazing tank, ignoring the heat and danger to get his crew out. It sounded to Gordon like two men were still alive.

Suddenly, the hatch gave way—Joyner thought the rescuers pried it off; Gordon thought the desperate men inside wrenched it open—and for a split second, it looked like they had won. Then, the sudden influx of oxygen created a downdraft, fanning the flames and turning the tank into a crematorium. “Flames shot out, making it impossible

to get in,” reported Gordon. Durham, terribly burned on the chest and face, finally jumped from the tank and stumbled away. Reggie Joyner spotted a bloodied Billy Bledsoe staggering past his tank and jumped out to help his buddy to an aid station. “As we got away from the tank I looked back and the ammunition went off,” he said. “It ripped the whole bottom out of the tank.” The four gas tanks exploded, and a full load of 75mm and .30-caliber ammunition banged and popped irregularly. Square Platoon survivors looked on with numb resignation. “The once-proud Marine tank was left to blow itself to bits, as would-be rescuers looked on helplessly,” Spangler wrote. “One Marine cried.”

Although badly shaken by the episode, the Marines had to move out and continue their mission. Their “detailed reconnaissance” of the riverbank failed to find a ford, and three men, including Capt Hall and 1stLt Jennings, were severely wounded. Some M4A3s tried to cross the estuary at a low ebb, but they bogged down in the silt and had to be rescued in a race against the tide. They came under extremely accurate rifle fire, causing more casualties, and the company’s M32 Tank Recovery Vehicle had to lay down a smoke screen before winching the stuck units free. That night, engineers constructed a Bailey bridge over the existing abutments, and the Marines crossed the Asa Kawa the next

morning. Ahead of them lay Sugar Loaf, Halfmoon and Horseshoe Hills and Naha itself: bloody steps on the road to victory.

Square 2 was left behind. The wreckage blazed with such intensity that “the tank remained hot for many hours, keeping everyone at a distance,” even after the flames subsided. A salvage crew arrived on May 11 to recover spare parts, but pickings were slim: the tank

**In November 1945,  
a Graves Registration team  
located the rusted,  
burned-out hulk of Square 2  
“one mile east of Machinato  
Airfield, Okinawa.” In the  
crew compartment, their  
trained eyes picked out  
human remains ...**

was a blackened shell, the interior gutted. Anyone who chanced to look through the yawning hatch would have seen little more than burnt metal, debris, and ash—nothing recognizable as the remains of three men. Witness statements confirmed the deaths of Anderson, Mason and Woodall, with a caveat added to the muster roll: “No remains as a result of

tank fire and explosion.” They were the first of 11 fatal casualties in the 6th Tank Bn between May 10 and June 21, 1945. Mines remained a problem, accounting for almost half of all repairable damage, and six of the 12 tanks were destroyed in action during the same period.

Paul Vernon Durham was so severely burned that aid station personnel thought he would die. They refused to waste morphine on hopeless cases, and he lay in bandaged agony for hours, unable to see. In time, a surgeon’s voice rang out. “There’s a chance we’ll get hit by infiltrators tonight. Anybody who can shoot, get yourself a weapon.” Durham sat up. “I can’t see, but I can pull a trigger if someone aims for me.” He remembered “a man with a broken elbow” sitting up with him through the night. The enemy never came, and Durham surprised the doctors by surviving. After treatment at field facilities, Durham was transferred to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Aiea Heights, Hawaii, and then to San Diego for plastic surgery before his honorable discharge in October 1945. He settled with his family in Houston and put his natural talents to work as a diesel mechanic and Sears-Roebuck auto parts salesman. Durham joined the Marine Corps Reserve in 1947 and was called to active duty in 1950 but quickly realized that a corporal’s pay wasn’t a living wage for his family of four. Although he left the service for good in 1951, his family notes that “he was a



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**The salvage crew looks grimly at the remains of Square 2. The tank had some of the track sections removed, possibly to reuse on other tanks.**

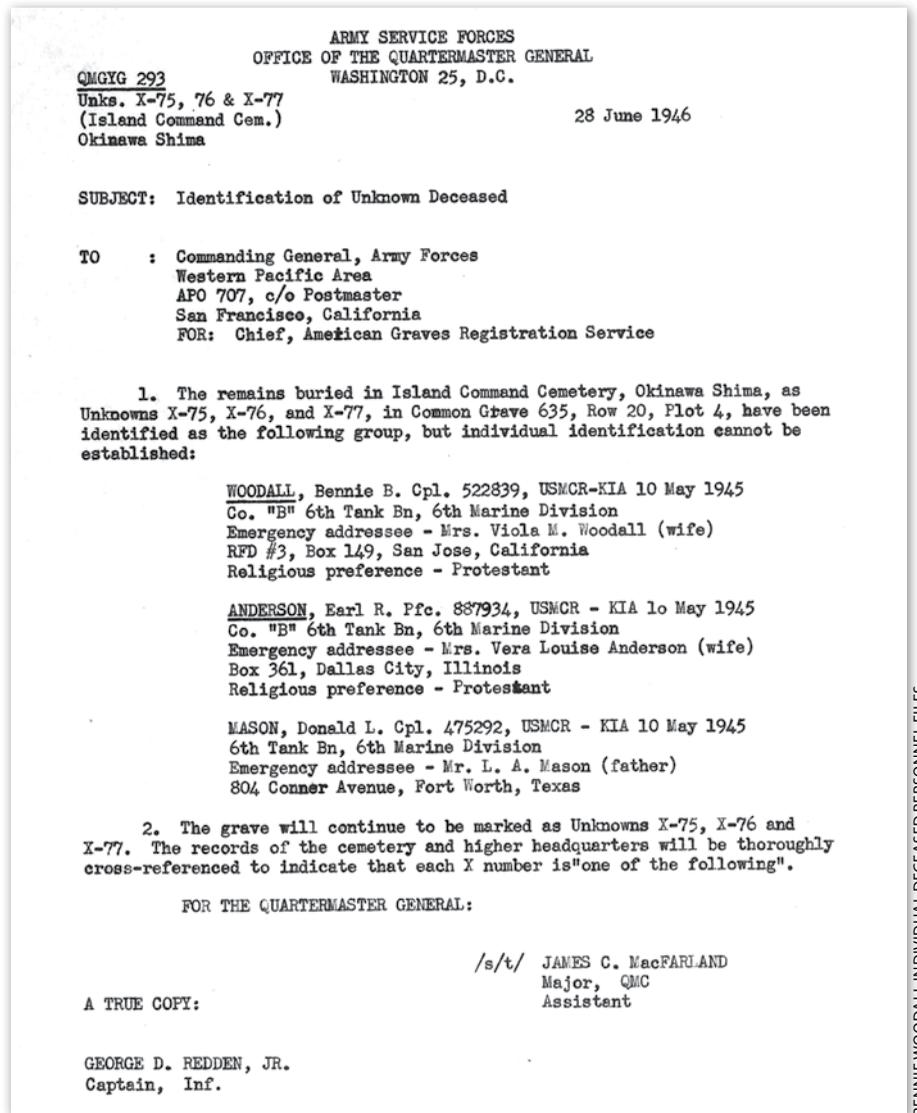


Marine until the day he died” in 2003.

Durham always believed that he was the only Square 2 survivor—but fortunately this was not the case. Pvt Billy Kay Bledsoe, also shocked and burned by the mine, was treated for a simple fracture of the elbow suffered on May 10. He may have been the Marine who helped Durham hold his rifle at the aid station. Bledsoe was evacuated to Naval Base Hospital No. 19 on Tinian in the Mariana Islands. He made excellent progress and rejoined his old company on Sept. 4, just in time to celebrate the Japanese surrender. Bledsoe served on occupation duty in Tsingtao (Qingdao), China, and was shipped back to the United States for discharge in January 1946. He returned to Campbell, Mo., to reunite with Mrs. Peggy Bledsoe and little Sharon—and to meet Susan Annette, born while he was overseas. Billy was quite content to stay in Campbell for the rest of his days, working as a farmer, truck driver, and father of three; he was also active in the Campbell American Legion and Church of Christ. He died of cancer in 1987 at the age of 61.

The families of the Square 2 victims were told that their deceased Marines were dead but not buried. “I received a report to the effect that you were unable to locate my son’s grave,” wrote Marie Johnson, mother of Cpl Mason. “I learned some time ago just how he met his death, and in all likelihood, there is no grave. If you can’t locate the grave, will you please have [a] marker put in the 6th Marine Div. cemetery on Okinawa with his name on it? At least he deserves to be listed among his comrades.”

In November 1945, a Graves Registration team located the rusted, burned-out hulk of Square 2 “one mile east of Machinato Airfield, Okinawa.” In the crew compartment, their trained eyes picked out human remains “intermingled beyond accurate segregation” and a single ID tag for “Woodall, B. B. 522839.” Every identifiable piece of bone was carefully removed from the tank and buried in a single grave in the Okinawa Island Command Cemetery as Unknowns X-75, X-76, and X-77. In the postwar attempt



to identify unknowns, investigators considered Woodall’s identification tag, muster rolls and casualty data from the 6th Tank Bn. They declared a group identification of Anderson, Mason and Woodall in 1946. Four years later, the three tankers were buried in Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Maxwell, Nebraska. A single headstone commemorates their sacrifice: a crew bonded together for eternity.

Walter Spangler probably never knew the names of the men whose deaths he recorded for posterity. He followed 1stMarDiv through the conquest of Okinawa and added “Saipan, Japan, Guam, Pearl Harbor, [and] San Francisco” to his travel list. As a combat veteran, Spangler devalued his prestigious award: the Navy Photographic Institute Citation for “exceptionally meritorious photography” was “a nice piece of paper, but you can’t eat it.” In civilian life, he took portrait and commercial pictures before landing a prime job with International News Photo in San Francisco. “I have

a philosophy,” he declared. “A man can be my employer, or more intelligent than I, or more wealthy, but no one, I repeat, no one mortal is my superior. I’m an independent guy, of which there is no ‘whicher.’ That’s my philosophy, right or wrong.”

Right or wrong, the veteran of Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa re-enlisted in the Marine Corps. On June 19, 1951, while standing in mess formation at Camp Pendleton, the now staff sergeant dropped dead on the deck, the victim of a massive heart attack at the age of 26. “That’s the way it goes,” he once wrote to a friend, “here today, gone tomorrow.” Gone, like his fellow Marines in Square 2, long before his time.

*Author’s note: Special thanks to Marsha Grant and the Durham family.*

*Author’s bio: Geoffrey W. Roecker is a frequent contributor to Leatherneck. His extensive research into missing World War II-era personnel is available online at [www.missingmarines.com](http://www.missingmarines.com).*

## MCAS Miramar, Calif.

### Memorial Honors Fallen Marines of HMH-361

Five Marines of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 361, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, were honored during a memorial ceremony on the afternoon of Feb. 16. More than 550 Marines, family and friends gathered to pay tribute to the Marines who lost their lives as the result of a CH-53E mishap on Feb. 6, in Pine Valley, Calif. The fallen were:

- Lance Corporal Donovan Davis, 21, CH-53E helicopter crew chief.
- Sergeant Alec Langen, 23, CH-53E helicopter crew chief.
- Captain Benjamin Moulton, 27, CH-53E helicopter pilot.
- Capt Jack Casey, 26, CH-53E helicopter pilot.
- Capt Miguel Nava, 28, CH-53E helicopter pilot.

The ceremony took place in hangar 4, home of the HMH-361 "Flying Tigers." The 3rd MAW deeply mourns the loss of our Marines and honors their sacrifice, knowing that their spirit and contributions live on within the squadron.

1stLt Andrew Baez, USMC



SSGT ANTONIO DE LA FUENTE, USMC



SSGT ANTONIO DE LA FUENTE, USMC

## Arlington, Va., and Clarksburg, Md.

### Montford Point Marines Laid to Rest

On the mornings of Feb. 5 and 8, two Montford Point Marines, Brigadier General Albert Bryant Sr., and Private First Class John Henry Chaney, were laid to rest. Bryant was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., while Chaney was buried at John Wesley United Methodist Church Cemetery in Clarksburg, Md.

Bryant and Chaney were drafted into the military in 1943, beginning their service at Montford Point in Jacksonville, N.C. Both men joined the ranks of the legendary Montford Point Marines, the first Black Americans to earn the title of United States Marine. Both men fought at the harrowing Battle of Iwo Jima and witnessed the raising of the American flag on Mount Suribachi.

After the war, Bryant attended Xavier University in New Orleans, La., becoming a pharmacist. He continued his military service as an officer in the Army Reserve, rising to the rank of brigadier general, the highest rank achieved by a Montford Point Marine.

After Chaney's return from the Pacific, he worked as a bricklayer until 1953, when he went to work at the State Highway Administration. After selling his family business and retiring from the State Highway Administration, Chaney spent his time playing basketball, being with his family, and devoting himself to his local church as an usher and choir member.

Cpl Jack Gumbin, USMC



SSGT KELSEY DORNFIELD, USMC



LCPL JOSEPH DEMARCUS, USMC

## Arlington, Va.

### Five Iwo Jima Veterans Reunite For 79th Anniversary of the Battle

Five Iwo Jima veterans attended a wreath-laying ceremony at the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va., during the Iwo Jima Association of America's 79th Anniversary Reunion of the Battle of Iwo Jima from Feb. 15-18. From the left: Frank Wright (4th Raider Battalion and 21st Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division), Juan Montaña (U.S. Navy coxswain), Louis Boutgault (21st Marine Regiment, 3rdMarDiv), Julian Smith (Merchant Marines), and Ivan Hammond (5thMarDiv, Joint Assault Signal Company).

These five veterans traveled across the country for the anniversary. Montaña, who retired from the Navy in 1963 and was a coxswain on battles throughout the Pacific, says Iwo Jima was the worst one, and the rest of these men agreed. Wright fought in three other battles with the 3rdMarDiv before Iwo Jima. Boutgault fought in two others before Iwo Jima. On Iwo Jima, Hammond remembers hearing Lieutenant Colonel Chandler Johnson, Commanding Officer of 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, say that the first flag that inspired the Marines was going to remain



CRAIG BENNETT, IJAA

with the 5thMarDiv that had raised it and sent a man out to a ship to get another flag. Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal took the iconic photo of the second flag raising that inspired the nation. Smith said, "We delivered what they needed."

Submitted by: Ray Elliott

**"Corps Connections" highlights the places and events through which active-duty and veteran Marines connect with one another, honor the traditions of the Corps and recognize the achievements of their fellow leathernecks. We welcome submissions of photos from events like the ones featured here. Send them to: *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or email them to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org). Submission does not guarantee publication, and we cannot guarantee the return of photos.**

# History of the Marine Gunner:

## Unearthing the Roots of This Misunderstood Distinction

By Edward T. Nevglowski, Ph.D.

*Executive Editor's note: This article explores the origins and inception of the Marine gunner and is the cornerstone of an upcoming series in Leatherneck tracing its often-mistaken evolution. Written using official Marine Corps history, it draws extensively from the documents and personnel records stored at the U.S. National Personnel Records Center and National Archives in Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, Mo., and at the Marine Corps Archives in Quantico, Va.*



**The original bronze Marine Gunner "bursting bomb" service insignia from the World War I era. (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress)**

One of the Marine Corps' three original warrant officer ranks, the Marine gunner is arguably the most coveted in the service's nearly 250-year history. It is also the most misunderstood. In more than a century since its inception in 1916, the Marine Corps has abolished and reinstated the Marine gunner on three occasions. The Marine Corps eliminated the rank and in its distinctive "bursting bomb" insignia first in 1943, only to restore both in 1956 as a designation for non-technical warrant officers. After discontinuing both in 1959 and restoring and revising their use in 1964 as a designation limited to warrant officers in combat arms military occupational specialties, the Marine Corps dissolved both again in 1974. Finally, in 1989, the title and insignia returned for warrant officers assigned as crew-served infantry weapons officers, where they still reside. Unfortunately, with no official written history to reference, the Marine gunner has become an institutional treasure cloaked in confusion.



COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE ROYAL MARINES MUSEUM

**Above: A Royal Marine Artillery Gunner wearing the flaming or "bursting bomb" collar insignia. In the USMC, the title of Marine Gunner and its insignia was abolished and reinstated several times before returning in 1989 for warrant officers assigned as crew-served infantry weapons officers.**



COURTESY OF BRUCE BASSETT-POWELL

**Above: The 1864 rank insignia of the Assistant Gunnery Instructor for the Royal Army Artillery.**



COURTESY OF THE DEAR SURPRISE

**An illustration of gunners in Aubrey's Royal Navy firing a cannon from the hull of a ship.**



COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE ROYAL MARINES MUSEUM

**Royal Marine Artillery Gunner insignias throughout different eras. Many insignias have a similar “bursting bomb” design.**

**Naval Origins**

To understand the evolution of the Marine gunner is to understand the origins and historical background of the warrant officer itself. The earliest known warrant officers date back to around 1040 in England. According to British naval historian Nicholas Roland, to compensate for the lack of experienced seamanship on the part of the English noblemen and, later, the army officers placed in command of maritime expeditions, skilled civilian journeymen accompanied the ships’ crews to supervise its more technical functions. Hundreds of years later this practice continued to allow commissioned naval line officers to focus on the tactics of fighting a ship and not its operation. This custom extended to providing persistent crew training and equipment maintenance during and between expeditions.

As a reward for an acumen uncommon among its line officers who received their authorities from the king or queen of England, the Royal Navy’s Board of Admiralty issued to select journeymen warrants granting them what naval historian Russell Borghere defined as permanent or “standing” officer status while onboard a ship. An element of the agreement between the board and these warranted or “warrant” officers was they remain with a ship from its construction to its decommissioning, unlike line officers who might transfer to another ship following an expedition. Although an appointment held less authority than a commission, it offered higher pay and seniority over the ranking enlisted Sailor. In time, warrant officers proved to be a necessary and vital link between a ship’s crew and its commissioned officers and the ship’s captain.



**U.S. Navy Gunner Illinus Jacobus, accompanied by a chief petty officer, stands by a depth charge on board USS *Venetia* (SP-431), Feb. 26, 1919. A flaming bomb insignia is visible on the collar of his uniform.**

battles,” artillerymen and grenadiers in several European armies adopted gunner as a title to distinguish themselves from line soldiers. Still today, the Royal Army artillery’s equivalent to the American rank of private is gunner. Royal Navy artillerymen adopted the title for the junior-most seaman and even elevated its significance by using it as the gunnery warrant officer’s official rank and title. To distinguish between the two, commissioned officers and seamen refer to the gunnery warrant officer as “the gunner” to emphasize his singularity, expertise, and authority—and as a matter of prestige.

Warrant officers in American military history date to October 1775, when the Second Continental Congress authorized General George Washington to assemble a colonial fleet to make war with England. Washington used the Royal Navy as the model from which he organized his fleet, including the practice of warranting standing officers “under the rank of third lieutenant” in accordance with Congress’ Naval Committee directives. Among Washington’s warrant officers were gunners. When the new U.S. Congress established a navy in 1794, gunners were again one of its seven standing officers and performed the same duties as their Royal Navy predecessors. The U.S. Navy further institutionalized its warrant officers after the American Civil War by extending appointments to its most experienced enlisted Sailors demonstrating exceptional technical skill and leadership potential.

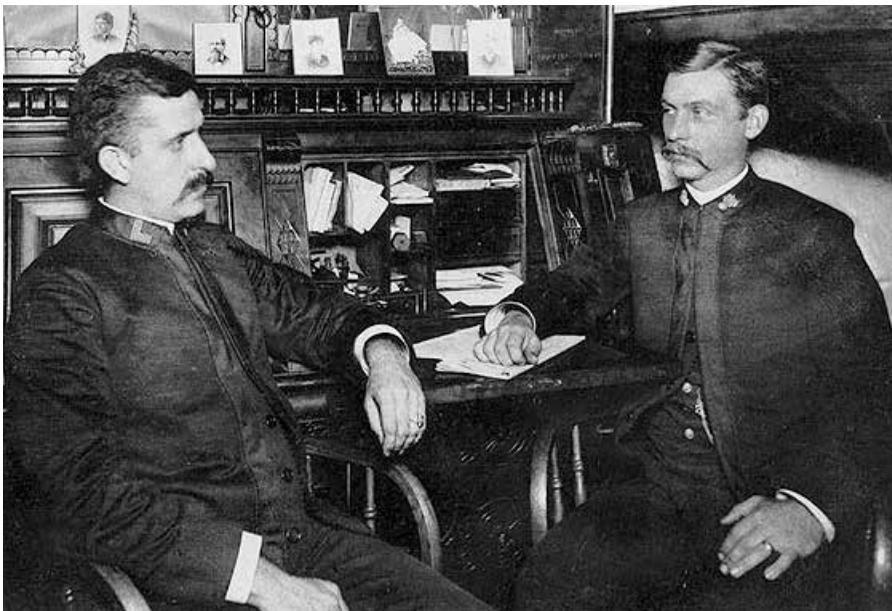
Warrant officer uniforms in the U.S. Navy were similar in every way to a commissioned officer’s and distinguished only by a half-inch long by quarter-inch wide blue and gold cloth stripe on the uniform cap beginning in 1853. Beginning in 1864, select English, French, and Italian infantry and artillery units incorporated a “flaming grenade” insignia for wear on their helmets and coats as a mark of distinction. In 1883, when the Navy added insignia devices for each warrant specialty, officials approved for wear on the gunner’s frock coat collar and on the collar of the blue service coat a version of the flaming grenade insignia. The Navy went as far as to distinguish between gunners with 20 years in grade, who wore an insignia cast in silver, from those with less than 20 years, who wore a gold insignia. Overseers of the naval uniform regulations added a blue and gold stripe and the flaming shell to the coat sleeves in 1899.

That same year, the Navy added a commissioned warrant rank to offer its senior warrant officers an opportunity to advance and take on positions of greater authority. As an aside, the Admiralty Board in England warranted the rank of gunnery sergeant major to that of a Royal Marine gunner, an equivalent rank to the Royal Navy’s gunnery warrant officer in July 1910. The Royal Marines adopted the ‘flaming shell’ as well.

**Two Navy warrant officers in their state-room on board USS *Boston*, 1888. The warrant officer on the right wears a bursting bomb on his collar. Gold and silver castings on these insignia were used to determine years of service.**

The Royal Navy’s first warrant officer ranks (and their corresponding departmental functions and titles) were the boatswain and the master. The lengthier expeditions of the 15th and 16th centuries brought about new functional specialties requiring a warranted officer. The sailmaker, carpenter, surgeon and purser were but a few additions. In response to advances in military engineering, the Royal Navy replaced its vintage cannons with large artillery pieces on their ships of the line in 1571. The change required extensive and continuous crew training on operating procedures, supervised maintenance on the ship’s guns and gunnery equipment, and preservation of the gunpowder, ammunition, cartridges and gunlocks stored inside a ship’s magazines. The Admiralty Board addressed the transition from cannons to artillery pieces by adding veteran army artillerymen to ships’ crews and warranting them to the rank of naval gunnery officer or “gunner.”

A popular Scandinavian term (and name) meaning “one who





**Marines and French soldiers conduct signals training, circa 1918. Signals were crucial to communicating with crewmen on ship.**

USMC

### Search for a Mission: The Advance Base Force

The Spanish-American War arguably marks the birth of the modern Marine Corps and the end of the service's search for a mission. Previously, Marines were primarily ships' guards, provided physical security at naval stations and American embassies around the world, and formed small landing parties for minor seaborne raids and assaults against enemy coastal defenses. This changed for good in April 1898 when Secretary of the Navy John D. Long directed Marine Corps Commandant Major General Charles Heywood to organize a battalion for duty with the Navy's North Atlantic Squadron. By June 10, five infantry companies and an artillery battery under Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Huntington's 1st Marine Battalion was ashore at Guantanamo Bay where it established an expeditionary base for operations against Spanish forces a mere two months after America declared war on Spain.

Although the Guantanamo landing was not the Marine Corps' first, it was its first attempt at establishing an expeditionary base comprising fixed defensive positions with integrated advanced weaponry and equipment like medium machine guns, light artillery, naval gunfire, searchlights and signals

communications. The expeditionary or advance base concept changed significantly how the Marine Corps viewed its role in modern naval warfare and how technological advances impacted its success. It would also become the genesis of its creation of a warrant officer structure, namely that of the Marine gunner.

The war against Spain was a byproduct of a doctrine established in 1823 by President James Monroe to prevent European powers from encroaching upon American interests in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba's bid for independence from Spain was the first real test of the Monroe Doctrine. Control over the former Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico and Cuba in the Caribbean and Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines in the Pacific at war's end meant the U.S. now had to develop an approach to defending these territories from a strengthening German and Japanese hegemony in both regions. An advisory committee, the General Board of the Navy, recommended to Secretary Long that he assign Marines with "emplaced naval guns, high angle artillery, machine guns, infantry and water and land minefields" to the mission.

Between 1901 and 1913, the Marine Corps tested and evaluated the advance base concept. In February 1914, the commanding officer of the 1st Advance Base Brigade, Colonel George Barnett,



**Marines on Quantico participating in a machine-gun drill, circa 1918.**

USMC



USMC

**Marines fire 3-inch cannon in the Dominican Republic, 1916.**

assumed the Marine Corps Commandancy. Among his chief concerns was managing the service's commitment to the concept while at the same time providing Marines for protracted naval expeditions to Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Believing also that America and the Marine Corps would enter the war in Europe, Barnett wanted Marines organized into larger tactical formations equipped with the latest battlefield technologies. To prepare for potential war, the Navy's number of warrant officers, ranging normally between 200 and 300, rose to more than 1,000 in 1916 after the House of Representatives' Committee on Naval Affairs authorized a 34 percent end strength increase. In much the same way the new Navy Secretary, Josephus Daniels, was expanding and modernizing the Navy to counter Germany and Japan, Barnett petitioned he do the same for the Marine Corps.



USMC

**Marine officers in training prepare a trench line at Quantico, Va., circa 1917.**

## The Case for Gunners In the Marine Corps

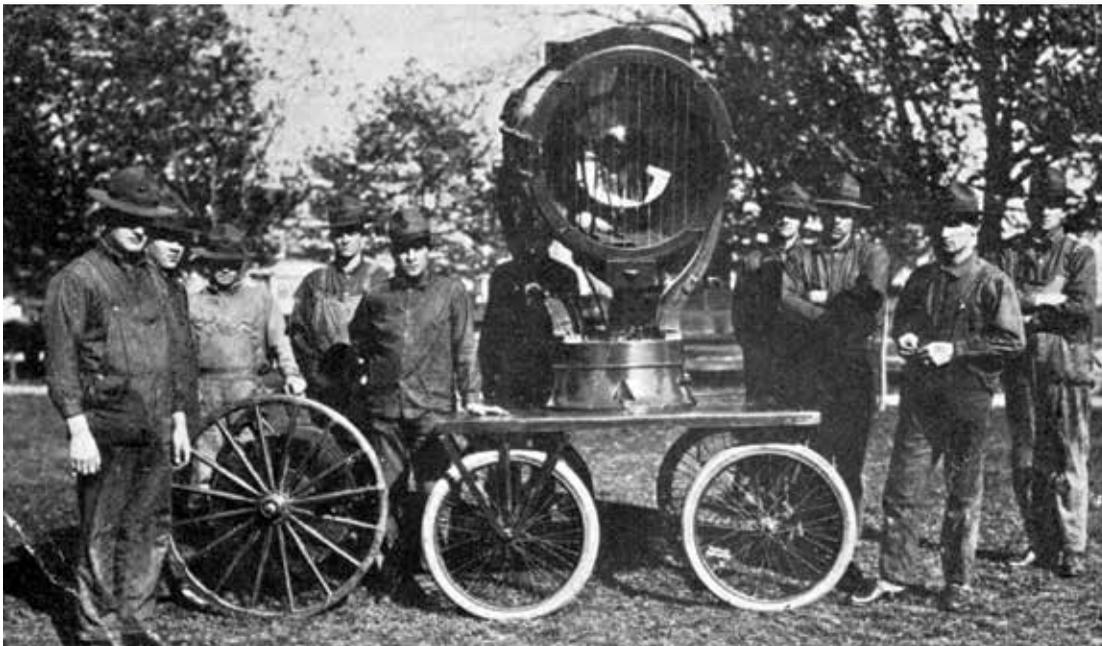
Essential to modernizing the service and ensuring its mission success, in Barnett's judgement, was the continued retention of experienced senior enlisted Marines and getting the most from their leadership and their proficiency with the latest military technologies, particularly advance base force weapons and equipment. In an Oct. 11, 1915, memorandum drafted in advance of his annual testimony before the House of Representatives' Committee on Naval Affairs, Barnett wrote that the "reenlisted noncommissioned officers constitute, next to the officer, the most important part of any military organization." As for their specific role, Barnett conceived that since "the services of warrant officers are just as badly needed in the Marine Corps as they are in the Navy," making them officers might be the best approach

to maximizing their continued service.

Barnett conveyed the same to the House Naval Committee on Feb. 29, 1916. Describing the most recent expeditions as "naval mission[s]" contributing directly to the "highly technical" advance base concept, Barnett stressed that integral to the concept's continued success hinged upon maximizing experienced noncommissioned officers skilled in caring for and maintaining "the heavy guns, submarine mines, searchlights, [and] field wireless stations" and to serve as "infantry, as engineers, and as aviators, etc." Their continued service in one of the recommended two "grades of warrant officers," Barnett offered, was not only beneficial to the Marine Corps but "an act of simple justice to the senior noncommissioned officers" who "perform the most responsible kinds of duty in an extremely efficient manner." After his testimony, Barnett took questions from committee members. As to what he intended to call these warrant officers, he replied, "We would call them marine gunners and quartermaster clerks."

News that the U.S. Senate had approved the committee's House Resolution 15947 reached Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels in early August, prompting Barnett's staff to draft Marine Corps Order (MCO) 27 on Aug. 18, establishing the service's first warrant officer screening and appointment process. President Woodrow Wilson signed the Naval Appropriations Act of 1916 into law on Aug. 29, specifying that "the warrant officer grades of [M]arine gunner and quartermaster clerk shall be created, and that 20 [M]arine gunners and 20 [M]arine quartermaster clerks shall be appointed from the noncommissioned officers of the Corps." These were to be the only permanent appointments, though the act prohibited neither Barnett from recommending nor Daniels from approving any number of temporary appointments on an as-needed basis.

In accordance with Article 1645 of the Navy Regulations, MCO 27 directed that only after being "satisfied from their records" that applicants were "mentally, morally, and physically qualified" could Barnett recommend a Marine for appointment. The mandatory first step in assessing the applicant's moral aptitude was through an interview with a commanding officer. Measuring the applicant's mental fitness would come through a battery of written academic and military-specific tests. Those



**Marines in Quantico, Va., stand in front of an Advanced Base Force searchlight, 1918.**

USMC

applicants scoring high enough on the written exams would undergo a thorough medical screening.

Barnett organized an examination board comprised of four Marine officers whose responsibility was to track the process and then recommend to him the names of 11 noncommissioned officers to serve as technical specialists and another nine for non-technical or 'general duty' leadership positions requiring Marine officers. The fields and specific areas of expertise necessitating a "warrant gunner" were:

- Main Battery (Advance Base): ordnance and gunnery, fire control, handling heavy weights, and boat seamanship.
- Submarine Mines: use, care, and preservation of submarine mines; fire control; electricity; and boat seamanship.
- Field Artillery: field artillery and drill regulations, fire control, field service regulations.
- Searchlights: use, care, and preservation of portable searchlights; electricity; and gasoline engines.
- Signals: use, care, and preservation of various forms of visual signal, telegraph, telephone, and wireless outfits; electricity; and gasoline engines.
- Engineering: military field engineering; military field topography; demolitions; explosions; construction of bridges, roads, etc.; and field service regulations.
- Aviation: use, care, and preservation of aeroplanes; dirigible balloons; balloon kites; captive balloons; gasoline engines, and military topography (especially with reference to terrain observation from air machines).
- Machine Guns: use, care, and preservation of the various types of machine guns; machine gun tactics; and field service regulations.
- General Duties: firing regulations, field service regulations, and administration.

MARINE CORPS ORDERS,  
No. 27 (Series 1916.)

HEADQUARTERS  
U. S. MARINE CORPS,  
WASHINGTON, August 18, 1916.

238. (1) The Naval Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1917, contains a proviso authorizing the appointment of twenty (20) Marine Gunners and twenty (20) Quartermaster Clerks. All of the Marine Gunners and sixteen (16) of the Quartermaster Clerks will be appointed from noncommissioned officers of the Marine Corps.

(2) Any noncommissioned officer desiring to take the examination for appointment as a Marine Gunner or Quartermaster Clerk will submit an application therefor. Commanding officers will, in each case, forward such applications with appropriate recommendations.

(3) Each field officer and captain of the line as per the Navy List of January 1, 1916, and each post commander and each officer of the Adjutant and Inspector's Department will submit, on Form N. M. C. 750, the names of the noncommissioned officers recommended by them to take the examination for appointment as Marine Gunners. These warrant officers will be distributed among the various Marine Corps specialties as follows:

Main Battery, Advance Base:	3
Submarine Mines:	1
Field Artillery:	2
Electricity (Searchlights):	1
Signals:	1
Engineering:	1
Aviation:	1
Machine Guns:	1
General Duties:	9

(4) Post commanders, field officers of the line as per the Navy List of January 1, 1916, and all officers of the Adjutant and Inspector's and Quartermaster's Departments, will submit, on Form N. M. C. 760, the names of the noncommissioned officers recommended by them to take the examination for appointment as Quartermaster Clerks.

(5) Each man recommended as prescribed in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4, will submit his application for designation to take the examination, in his own handwriting. These applications will contain a statement of the applicant showing the nature and extent of his service in the Marine Corps. These statements should give the dates (inclusive) of his service at each station, the names of the officers under whose immediate command he served, and the character of the duty performed.

(6) The recommendations submitted will be regarded as advisory in their nature, and all of the men recommended will not necessarily be designated to take the examinations.

(7) All applications and correspondence concerning the appointment of the above-mentioned warrant officers, will be addressed to the Major General Commandant, Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps, Washington, D. C.

**EXAMINATION OF NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS  
FOR APPOINTMENT AS MARINE GUNNERS  
AND QUARTERMASTER CLERKS.**

(8) These examinations will consist of a physical, mental, moral and professional test. The professional examinations

(176)



Above: Navy Gunner Abraham DeSommer was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1914. A flaming bomb insignia is visible on the collar of his uniform. (USN photo)

Right: *The Washington Post* updated the public on the officer screening process.

Below: A posting in the *Dayton Daily News* reports on new officer promotion opportunities.

**Officers of Marines Shifted.**

Capt. Randolph Coyle, of the marine corps, has been assigned to command of the marine detachment of the Wyoming, relieving Capt. Richard H. Tebbs, jr., who has been assigned to command of the detachment to be organized for the armored cruiser Seattle (formerly the Washington). This completes the changes among marine officers of the Atlantic fleet made necessary by recent promotions.

A board of marine officers, consisting of Brig. Gen. John A. Lejeune, Col. Charles G. Long, Lieut. Col. William B. Lemly, assistant quartermaster, and Maj. Harry Lay, is engaged at the headquarters of the marine corps in examining recommendations of commanding officers and other papers pertaining to enlisted men that have been recommended or that have applied for appointment to the new warrant grades of marine gunner and quartermaster clerk. The board will determine which of these men will be ordered before examining boards for examination for appointment.

The law authorizes 20 of each grade. The only ones so far appointed are four former field clerks that were legislated out of office by the new law, and they immediately were appointed quartermaster clerks.

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**NEW AVENUE**

Of Promotion Opened Up For Non-Commissioned Officers.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 9.—A new avenue of promotion for worthy non-commissioned officers who have been barred from commissions because of over-age, lack of education, or other deterrent circumstance, opens up in the provision made in the navy appropriation bill for the appointment of forty warrant officers in the United States marine corps.

These warrant officers will be known as marine gunners and quartermaster clerks, and their pay and allowances will range from \$17500 to \$2500 a year.

Enlisted men who are "able to do things" will get the appointments, and the theoretical element will not enter into their examinations, say marine corps officials at headquarters.

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## Getting the Word Out

For years the Marine Corps kept its personnel and the public informed through announcements in national and local newspapers. Promotions, assignments, retirements and deaths, and news of interest all appeared in print. Two additional sources were the *Recruiter's Bulletin*, published by the Marine Corps Recruiting Bureau, and the Marine Corps Association's *Marine Corps Gazette* (and *Leatherneck* beginning in 1917).

As early as Sept. 9, Ohio's *Dayton Daily News* reported the Naval Act's details. One article in particular spoke to an advancement opportunity for noncommissioned officers whose "over age, lack of education, and other deterrent circumstance" precluded them from the traditional path to becoming Marine Corps officers. The article went on to explain that "these warrant officers will be known as [M]arine gunners and quartermaster clerks and their pay and allowances will range from \$1,250 to \$2,000 a year." An unnamed Headquarters Marine Corps official interviewed emphasized that the service was seeking worthy enlisted men over 30 years of age and simply "who are able to do things."

In the weeks and months ahead, newspapers like *The Washington Post* kept Marines apprised during each step in the screening process. On Dec. 3, the *Post* announced that a board "engaged at the headquarters of the marine corps in examining recommendations of the commanding officers and other papers pertaining to enlisted men" who seek to become Marine gunners.

## The Marine Examining Board

The phased screening process laid out by MCO 27 began when an interested noncommissioned officer initiated his intentions to apply for an appointment and culminated with Barnett forwarding the names of selectees to Secretary Daniels for appointment. Each applicant first had to complete an interview with his commanding officer (field or post command and naval command) to obtain a command endorsement. Endorsements had to attest to the applicant's moral fitness to perform the duties of a Marine officer. Applicants then submitted handwritten requests to the board to take the required medical and professional exams. The interview results, command endorsement and hand-written request had to be sent to Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, D.C., by early December, when

the next phase of the screening was to begin.

In between the endorsement interviews and the final selection were the actions of the "Board for Recommendation of Marine Gunners and Quartermaster Clerks," known also as the Marine Examining Board. Barnett issued a letter on Nov. 20 directing Brigadier General John A. Lejeune to preside over the board and the second screening step. Present at his House Naval Committee testimony, Lejeune understood what Barnett desired in warrant officers. Joining him as board members were Colonel Charles G. Long, Lieutenant Colonel William B. Lemly and Major Harry R. Lay. Their primary task after reviewing applications and applicant service records was "recommending to the Major General Commandant the names of noncommissioned officers" to take the medical and professional exams.

According to its official signed report, the board met daily between Nov. 25 and Dec. 5 and reviewed applications from 117 noncommissioned officers who applied for Marine gunner.

They selected 54 to advance to the third phase, which was the professional exams. In preparation, the board solicited from subject matter experts in each field and specialty exam questions and answers as well as to determine how the professional exams were to be administered. As the questions and answers arrived, the board mailed them to some 16 separate locations, 11 of which were naval stations along with three ships, and, finally, to the Marine commands deployed to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

As the screening process and exam preparation played out, questions as to what the Marine gunner's rank insignia would consist of surfaced. Barnett's choice was a chased spherical shell three-fourths inch in diameter similar to the Navy's device with the flame five-eighths inch high. The 1917 revision of the 1912 Marine Corps Uniform Regulations dictated that the Marine warrant officer's uniform requirement "will be the same as prescribed for a second lieutenant, but that the Marine Corps emblem and the sword knot will not be worn." In lieu of the emblem would be an insignia of "silver on the collar of the undress and white undress and of bronze on the summer field and winter field coats and on the shoulder straps of the overcoat and on the collar of the flannel shirt when the coat is not worn." Marines would soon after refer to the insignia as a "bursting bomb."

The *Washington Post* announced on Dec. 17 that the Marine Examining Board had issued notices to selected applicants to report to various naval stations within the continental U.S. on Jan. 29, 1917 for the medical exam and, if cleared for duty, to take the week-long professional exam. Those overseas were to return to America at once if commanding officers could not arrange an adequate exam facility. A memorandum released by the board directed that the professional exam period run from Jan. 31 to Feb. 7, with at least one test administered each day except Sunday.

### The Professional Exam

Three components made up the professional exam required for Marine gunners with a maximum of 100 total points. The first measured the applicant's aptitude in composition, reading, writing and spelling as well as basic arithmetic, with the second testing the general knowledge of the Army's Infantry Drill Regulations. The material covered in these first two components were identical and subject to the same grading values with a maximum possible combined score of 30 points.

The third component challenged the applicant's advanced knowledge and proficiency in their identified fields and specialties. Depending on the field and specialty, an applicant could expect a different number of tests, though each required the interpretation and drafting of schematics and calculations to answer the many scenario-based questions taken from actual events related to the areas of expertise highlighted in MCO 27. Each area had specific grading values with a maximum possible combined score of 30 points. Testing for aviation and engineering applicants covered six separate specialty areas with main battery and submarine mines tests covering four different areas. Field artillery, searchlights, signals, machine guns and general duties applicants underwent testing in only three specific areas.

The remaining 40 points would come from the board's review



USMC



USMC

**BGen Charles G. Long (left) and Maj Harry R. Lay (right) were members of the Marine Examining Board, which was responsible for reviewing officer applications and recommending names to move forward to the exam portion of the screening process.**

of each applicant's official service record, including the results of their commanding officer's interview. The board considered recommendations from past commanding officers or officers in charge, expeditionary service, marksmanship, and military and civilian education and training, as well. Applicants had to obtain an overall average of 75 percent to undergo further consideration.

### Conclusion

On March 16, Barnett received from Lejeune the board's report, ranking highest to lowest in order of exam averages the names of 20 noncommissioned officers. Barnett signed and forwarded the list to Secretary Daniels, who issued the signed appointment letters on March 24. The board then sent telegrams to the commands of selectees and released the names to the *Recruiter's Bulletin* and news outlets. The *Washington Evening Star* was one of the first papers to reveal the names on April 2. In the hometowns of those selected, local papers published more personalized announcements. On April 4, the *Daily News* in Lebanon, Pa., announced "Lebanon Boy Gains Distinction in the United States Marine Corps." The following day *Democrat and Chronicle* in Rochester, New York, bragged "Rochester Man Goes Up In The Marine Corps: Promoted After Passing Competitive Examination." Across the country, towns celebrated those "rising from the ranks."

The first 20 noncommissioned officers proudly pinned the bursting bomb insignia on their stock collars for the first time in Marine Corps history only days after Daniels signed their appointment letters. Several received orders to the 1st Advance Force Brigade. Those already overseas on expeditionary duty in Haiti and the Dominican Republic remained with their commands and assumed various leadership roles. Others boarded transport carriers at Quantico for movement across the Atlantic to France; some would not come home. All, however, played a part in fostering the reputation retired Marine Major Gene Duncan spoke of in his 1982 book "Fiction and Fact from Dunk's Almanac."

"God made Warrant Officers to give the junior enlisted Marine someone to worship, the senior enlisted Marine someone to envy, the junior officer someone to tolerate, and the senior officer someone to respect."

*Author's bio: Dr. Nevglowski is the former director of the Marine Corps History Division. Before becoming the Marine Corps' history chief in 2019, he was the History Division's Edwin N. McClellan Research Fellow from 2017 to 2019, and a U.S. Marine from 1989 to 2017.*



## SEA STORY OF THE MONTH

### A Hard Lesson Learned

I went through a personal crisis about a month into boot camp that, in retrospect, is one of those major corners that have to be turned during an adolescent's way to adulthood. It seems to me that most young people would have dealt with this same corner sooner or later although I suppose for some it never happens or the corner does not get turned. Joseph Campbell, the learned and prolific author of many books about mythology, in his televised 1985 interviews with Bill Moyers, says this phenomenon is not uncommon among young military recruits. It is rebirth as an independent adult—a man—from the gestation of adolescence.

My corner developed like this: We were allowed a little free time on Sunday afternoon, after “organized recreation,” to write letters home or work on our personal gear. I wanted to write a letter to my parents so I sat down on my bunk with a pencil and paper. Now, for the past weeks I had begun to realize the enormity of my decision to enlist. I found myself in a very unfamiliar and stressful situation.

I was here of my own volition. The realization of what an emotional burden I had been to my parents the last couple of years at home was clear and strong, and I was heavy with guilt and remorse. There was an incident about five months before I enlisted when, after drinking more than a few illicit beers, I had decided that moving to Florida was a fine idea. At

midnight, with three or four unopened beers and a pack of cigarettes on the front seat of my '37 Ford sedan, a half a tank of gas and the irresistible desire to drive far into the night, I got as far as Monroe, Mich., about 50 miles from home, before the police stopped me. The police officer later told my father that I was driving OK but the stock headlights on my old Ford were dim. He stopped me for that and soon discovered my less than sober condition and possession of alcohol as a minor and took me straight to jail. I went to court the next day and got sentenced to five days. Got out in three probably because of my mother's tearful plea to the judge before my sentencing that I was “a good boy.” The judge dismissed her assessment with a wave of his hand, but apparently reconsidered afterward and quietly told the jailers to let me out early. That incident was really the worst of it. Other than that, just the normal teenager experimenting to find the limits of the old envelope, which inevitably involves clashes with parental authority.

But on that Sunday afternoon in San Diego, Calif., those transgressions took on epic proportions. I tried to write to them about how sorry I was for causing them such heartache and sorrow. A softball-sized lump rose in my throat, and it was all I could do to keep from throwing myself down on my bunk and crying uncontrollably. Only the thought of the taunting I would suffer from the other guys in the hut kept me from doing that very thing. I managed to hold it to a few tears and some quiet sobbing while I wrote

to them of my remorse. Then I slowly regained my composure. From that moment on I never looked back. I was on my own.

Wayne Bonkosky  
Santa Rosa, Calif.

### A Mess-ed Up Situation

Enlisted ranks from E-1 to E-3 were subject to 90 days of extra duty detail a year in 30-day segments. These extra details were mess duty, guard duty and barracks detail. Thirty days of guard duty at Kaneohe meant you would be assigned to the guard barracks and issued a .45 or riot gun to walk patrol around certain facilities such as the hangars at night or the special weapons depot. On barracks detail

**“He went over each pan and utensil before he found a microscopic piece of fried chicken stuck to a pair of tongs. He ranted as if I were trying to poison the troops and told me to start all over ...”**

you would be assigned janitorial duty in your barracks for 30 days. The most odious of these extra duties was 30 days of mess duty. My number came up for 30 days mess duty. As a mess man, morning muster was at 4 a.m., which meant wake up was at 3 a.m., and the workday went until 8 p.m. seven days a week under the supervision of a mess sergeant. We were not allowed to quit

for the day until the mess sergeant inspected the final cleanup. This could stretch quitting time to much later. The work was dirty and unrelenting with hardly a break. Our duties consisted of food preparation and cleanup of three meals a day for the troops on the air wing side of the base. My first assignment was to the pot shack. As the name implies, this was where the pots and pans got scrubbed.

One night, after the last meal, we were cleaning up when a late-arriving group showed up for chow. It was the base basketball team just back from a local tournament. The mess sergeant had to open the doors for them, but we had already cleared the food from the serving carts. Most of the leftover food had been dumped into garbage cans and moved to the loading docks for trash disposal. The mess sergeant ordered us to open the garbage cans, sort through the slop, and spoon it back onto the serving trays for the late arrivals. They never knew what they were eating. This incident was very fortunate for me as it led to an easy job in the mess hall. The absolute worst job in the pot shack was cleaning the large, flat pans used when they served fried chicken. It took major elbow grease to clean off the baked and hardened pieces of chicken and batter that stuck to the pans and utensils.

One day after one of these meals, I had finally finished the cleaning job and called the mess sergeant over for inspection. This was the same sergeant who ordered slop to be fed to the late arrivals. He went over each pan and utensil before he found a microscopic piece of fried

chicken stuck to a pair of tongs. He ranted as if I were trying to poison the troops and told me to start all over cleaning every pan and utensil in the building. By now I was salty and determined that I was not going to be intimidated by this guy, so I reminded him of his serving of slop from the garbage and strongly suggested that he reconsider his orders to me because the officer of the day would be very interested in the story. He stepped back a bit and told me to secure and go back to the barracks without doing what he had ordered. Next day he reassigned me to be the outside man, the best job in the mess hall, mowing the lawn and trimming the hedges in the fresh air and sunshine. I was lucky enough to never get another extra detail duty after that.

Cpl Norm Spilleth  
Minneapolis, Minn.

### Backseat Ride at Kaneohe

I got a backseat ride in an F9F-8T fighter trainer once when I was a plane captain stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, in 1962. The pilot took it through a few maneuvers including the “over the shoulder” or “loft” bombing run where he put it in a power dive from 30,000 feet straight down and then stood it on its tail. It was how they delivered nukes back then, releasing the bomb on the upward course and flipping over to do a 180 to escape the blast. Pulled enough Gs when he stood it on its tail that the wings creaked like rusty hinges. Anyway, after that, I asked if I could take the stick. He said, “you got it.” This was long before I got a pilot license. He said put your right wing down and then the left wing down. No problem. He cautioned me not to touch the rudder

**“I asked if I could take the stick. He said, ‘you got it.’ ... Then I asked if I could try an aileron roll. ‘Go ahead if you think you can,’ says he.”**

pedals. Then I asked if I could try an aileron roll. “Go ahead if you think you can,” says he. So, I yanked the stick over into my right-side lap (this was probably at 20 or 30 thousand feet) and the plane flipped on its back. I was staring up at the ocean and the plane wasn’t flipping over. The pilot said, “let me have the

stick”! I was a little slow, and the plane was falling upside down, I could see white caps on the water, when I heard the pilot shout into the interphone: “Let go of the damn stick!” which got my attention. He took over before I turned it into a surfboard. The pilot didn’t talk to me for the rest of the flight.

Cpl Norm Spilleth  
Minneapolis, Minn.

Do you have any interesting stories from your time in the Corps that will give our readers a good chuckle? We would love to hear them. Write them down (500 words or less) and send them to: Briesa Koch, *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or email them to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org). We offer \$25 or a one-year MCA membership for the “Sea Story of the Month.” 🦁



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# Safeguarding the Airspace:

## Marine Air Traffic Controllers' Critical Role In Marine Aviation



By Kyle Watts

**M**arine Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) represent a small slice of the active-duty component. Less than 1,000 of these Marines exist in the service today, with even fewer operating in capacities actually controlling aircraft. Though small in number, these Marines perform a vital “behind the scenes” function for Marine aviation, providing safety and order within their assigned airspace.

The path to achieving the Marine ATC

designation 7257 looks different from other MOS training pipelines. Following boot camp and Marine Combat Training, prospective ATCs attend entry-level training at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, Fla. Marine and U.S. Navy instructors teach students the fundamentals of air traffic control, tower and radar operations, and provide them with a baseline understanding of Navy and Marine Corps policies and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. Graduates depart less than six months later as 7251 Air Traffic Control trainees. Each

trainee receives an assignment to one of the 10 permanent Marine Corps ATC Facilities around the world, where the training continues.

A controller’s credentials vary depending on the facility to which they are assigned. In order to control aircraft inside the assigned airspace, new trainees must complete certifications within an allotted timeframe from the day they check in. This process can take over a year in some cases. Because of this extensive training, ATC candidates enlist for an initial period of five years, rather



**Marine ATCs with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron monitor routine flight operations from the air traffic control tower aboard MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, on March 7. Air traffic controllers coordinate with pilots to maintain and oversee the safe, orderly and expeditious flow of civilian and military air traffic operations for the air station and surrounding airspace. (Photo by Pvt Saul Hernandez, USMC)**

than the standard four-year contract. During their training period, Marines are cleared to operate from the tower, communicating with aircraft actively landing or departing the runway, and the radar room, keeping an eye on the entire airspace and communicating with incoming aircraft beyond visual range.

In a world where specific credentials are required to hold increasing levels of responsibility, Marine Corps rank structure matters little in deciding who performs what duties. Lance corporals on their first enlistment might act as

tower supervisors, watching over corporals as they talk with aircraft and instruct sergeants or staff sergeants who just checked in. This practice is largely unique to the ATC field. Every duty station requires its own set of credentials to understand the specific airspace and the types of aircraft it accommodates. As a result, moving to a new location at any rank can be like starting over again. Career Marines can easily spend three or four years away from their craft on a special duty assignment such as recruiting, drill instructor or Marine Security

Guard. Loss of currency, coupled with the requirement to obtain credentials upon return to the community, can be a daunting task.

At the Marine Corps Air Facility in Quantico, Va., roughly 40 Marines control the airspace in shifts around the clock. Corporal Abraham Gamboa serves as one of the tower supervisors.

“Painting the picture for the pilots will solve all the problems,” Gamboa said, breaking down the essence of his job in its simplest terms.

Tower-related aircraft mishaps typically



Marine ATCs in the tower at MCAF, Quantico, Va., (above) bring a USAF C-17 Globemaster in for a safe landing. Marines at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, (below) utilize a radar surveillance scope to assist aircraft in making their final approach. The combined competencies of tower and radar represent the two primary functions that Marine ATCs are certified to perform. (Above photo by Nancy S. Lichtman)



PVT SAUL HERNANDEZ, USMC



NANCY S. LIGHTMAN

**Left: Cpl Abraham Gamboa works at MCAF Quantico, Va., as a Marine ATC. Gamboa is certified as a tower supervisor and instructor.**

**Right: The insignia of the 1st Marine Air Warning Group, established in 1943. These pioneering Marine ATCs focused their radar capabilities on fighter direction and early warning. (USMC History Division)**



result due to a lack of communication between controllers and pilots. It is the responsibility of the ATCs, Gamboa explained, to inform the pilots of anything that might inhibit their safe landing or departure. During a *Leatherneck* visit to the tower at Quantico, Gamboa demonstrated this tenant of air traffic control with a sophisticated simulator. All kinds of variables can be entered to throw off the ATCs. While another Marine demonstrated how he would bring in a simulated plane, Gamboa manipulated helicopters circling, weather patterns changing, flocks of birds swarming, and even a herd of deer sprinting across the runway.

“We sequence, we separate, and we make sure everyone abides by the rules to remain safe within the airspace,” explained Staff Sergeant Marcus Beacham, ATC Training Chief at MCAF Quantico.

Controllers assigned to USMC air stations and facilities, like the Marines at Quantico, are also somewhat unique because they are non-deployable. They serve as permanent staff members of each Marine Corps installation. To deploy, controllers must achieve their 7257 designation and be assigned to an Air Traffic Control Company. These units fall under the Marine Air Control Groups of their respective Marine Aircraft Wing. Marines train for deployment in scalable units, from single Marines deploying as liaisons to allied airfields around the world, to a full company deployment into a combat zone. The capabilities they offer scale in relation to the size of the unit going forward and the gear they carry. This quality of Marine ATCs makes them the only branch of service with ATCs trained and equipped to provide expeditionary Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) services.

Marine ATCs have accompanied avi-

ators in combat since WW II. The first of these Marines served with the Marine Air Warning Group established in 1943, focusing their radar capabilities on providing early warning and fighter direction. Post-war changes upgraded and reformed the group into Marine Air Traffic Control Units (MATCUs). By the Vietnam War, MATCUs offered a full complement of all-weather capabilities.

A small detachment from MATCU-62 served admirably in one of the most high stress and high visibility settings of the war. Led by Captain William J. Flahive Jr., the section of controllers and radar operators arrived at Khe Sanh in February 1967. The North Vietnamese Army shut down all road traffic to the base by the fall of that year. Defenders depended on aerial resupply to keep them in the fight. The ATC detachment faced difficulties of every variety in their effort to orchestrate a continuous flow through

the airstrip. A deep gorge just beyond the end of the runway threatened to swallow any aircraft that ventured beyond the tarmac. Thick fog often formed in the warm air, making it difficult for pilots to locate the base in the mountainous terrain. The enemy, however, presented the most deadly and consistent obstacle to overcome.

North Vietnamese antiaircraft and indirect fire kept the Marines under constant attack. The ATCs performed their duties regardless. On Jan. 31, 1968, NVA artillery and rockets struck the airstrip, killing Capt Flahive and wounding other Marines of the detachment. More enemy rockets destroyed the primary ground approach control radar a few weeks later. The Marines adapted another radar system, typically employed for bombing missions, to take over this vital task.

As the demand for supplies increased, and enemy fire limited the availability of



**The radar equipment of Marine Air Traffic Control Unit 62 at Khe Sanh Combat Base, Vietnam. In 1968, these Marine ATCs played a key role in keeping the base supplied during the siege. (USMC photo)**

the runway, the ATCs played a critically important role coordinating with aircraft to drop supply crates under parachute. They worked directly with pilots, communicating compass headings and wind conditions in order to precisely time each drop into the designated zone. At the prescribed release point, pilots nosed up and applied full power, forcing pallets of supplies to roll backward out the open cargo door. By the end of the siege at Khe Sanh, the MATCU-62 detachment coordinated nearly 500 container drops, equaling roughly 8,000 tons of supplies.

Marine Air Traffic Control evolved further after Vietnam. By the beginning of the global war on terror, a new de-

ployable team of ATCs existed within the Marines' organization; the Marine Mobile Air Traffic Control Team, or MMT. MMTs operate today as the smallest scaleable unit capable of providing air traffic control services. A textbook MMT is composed of six Marines; one team leader, three ATCs, and two equipment maintainers. In Iraq and Afghanistan, MMTs worked in conjunction with IFR Detachments, today the equivalent of a full Air Traffic Control Company.

Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Kiley, currently serving as the Commanding Officer of Marine Air Control Squadron 1 out of Yuma, Ariz., remains one of the few Marine officers still on active duty

that deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan with a full IFR Detachment under his command.

"Marine air traffic control is what makes the Marine Corps an all-weather aviation force," Kiley said. "For a flying squadron to be all-weather and instrument rated, that means somebody has to be on the other side of the microphone with radar capabilities providing you with instrument flight rules air traffic control services. If you go back to OIF or OEF, IFR Detachments were out there with the ability to provide full radar services and precision recovery."

Two IFR Dets deployed to Iraq, and one to Afghanistan. These units, nearly 150 Marines strong, provided the crucial capability for Marine aviators to fly 24/7 and beyond visual range. Numerous MMTs moved further out from the main air bases providing ATC services on the front lines. The equipment they carried limited their services to visual range. From January to August 2008, Kiley served as the IFR Det Commander at Al Taqaddum Air Base in Habbaniyah, Iraq. U.S. Navy ATCs augmented the Marines as the detachment became overtasked with air traffic control requirements to support the war. Four MMTs under Kiley's command went forward from Al Taqaddum to provide ATC services in Fallujah, Ramadi, Mudaisis and Rawah. Controllers in these locations routinely endured enemy fire while performing their duties.

"We've always been a hot spot for the pot shot," Kiley reflected. "You can't put a tower on top of a building and not expect your adversary to shoot at it."

In one example, Kiley described the conditions faced by the MMTs stationed in Ramadi at Camp Blue Diamond. "The Marines who manned that tower would peek over a wall just to be able to control aircraft in and out."

While serving as the Ramadi MMT leader from January to August 2007, Kiley explained the creativity the Marines used in tower construction. "We took previously destroyed humvees and removed their up-armor and put it in the walls of the towers we built. We used their ballistic glass windows as the windows for the tower. The early days of just covering your position with cammie netting were gone. We had to adapt, overcome, and harden those towers with whatever we could get our hands on to make it a little bit safer for the Marines."

Marine ATCs remained in Iraq and Afghanistan until the very end of Marines' involvement. They supported the withdrawal from Iraq during 2010 and 2011, and again from Afghanistan in



LCPL JACQUELYN DAVIS, USMC

**Marines with "Charlie" Detachment, Marine Air Control Squadron 2, Marine Air Control Group 28, 2nd MAW, set up an expeditionary air traffic control tower in preparation for Service Level Training Exercise 3-21 at MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, Calif., March 30, 2021.**



MSGT RICHARD SCHULTZ, USMC (RET)

**The Instrument Flight Rules Detachment on the flight line at Al Taqaddum Air Base in Habbaniyah, Iraq. IFR Detachments, equivalent to a full modern day Air Traffic Control Company in size and capability, deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the global war on terror.**

2014. In Iraq, during Operation New Dawn, Kiley partnered with U.S. Air Force personnel and the Iraqi government to develop the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority, their version of the FAA, and design their airspace so that Iraq could take over management from the Marines and Air Force.

Outside of combat, the skills of Marine ATCs have been showcased time and time again through disaster scenarios and aircraft emergencies. Corporal Justin McDaniel earned a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal in December 2015 after an AV-8B Harrier pilot declared a state of emergency while coming into Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, N.C. When his navigation system suddenly died, the pilot was unable to locate the airfield through the darkness and inclement weather. Seated at his radar station, McDaniel calmly communicated with the pilot, guiding him to the runway for a safe and successful landing.

**Sgt Laura Rodriguez, an air traffic controller assigned to VMM-165 (Rein), 15th MEU, communicates with aircraft at a forward refueling point in San Luis Obispo, Calif., during the 15th MEU's Realistic Urban Training exercise on Aug. 23, 2023.**

In 2013, Marines deployed to the Philippines in support of Operation Damayan following a catastrophic typhoon. Marine ATCs scaled an exterior stairwell to the top of a damaged air traffic control tower in Tacloban to coordinate the arrival of disaster relief supplies. The typhoon blew out every window in the tower, leaving the Marines exposed to the elements and noise of the flight line

and the surrounding devastation. The storm destroyed part of the only available runway, leaving extremely limited space for aircraft to land, park, and offload supplies. The Marines worked tirelessly alongside volunteer civilian controllers to maintain safe separation in the sky as planes waited to land, and the efficient arrival, unloading, and take off of planes on the ground.



LCPL GARRETT KIGER, USMC

In this view from the air traffic control tower, families affected by Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda line up at the Tacloban airport to leave the area. Joint Task Force 505 provided airlift support to displaced residents, as well as search and rescue and supply drops to areas in need during Operation Damayan. (Photo by MC3 Jonah Z. Stepanik, USN)



Marines performed similarly during a stateside natural disaster in 2017. That September, the category 5 hurricane Irma pummeled the Caribbean before making its way up Florida's Gulf Coast. Just two weeks later, another Category 5 storm named Maria struck the Caribbean before swinging wide of Florida's Atlantic coast and proceeding out to sea. U.S. Navy personnel evacuated Naval Air Station Key West. In their stead, Marines de-

ployed into the disaster zone to keep the airfield running and ensure the arrival of relief supplies.

"We took over NAS Key West as the air traffic control authority," remembered Master Sergeant Kevin Haunschild, leader of the Defense Support Civil Authority Detachment from the 26th MEU, deployed to Florida for humanitarian relief operations. "There was only one Navy controller that remained behind

when we showed up, so myself and the team that I took down there ended up taking over the airport with a couple of handheld radios out of the back of a F-350."

The conditions Haunschild and his team faced in Florida would pale in comparison to the obstacles that he and the MMT from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) endured several years later, performing their duties through another humanitarian crisis with the eyes of the world watching.

On Aug. 13, 2021, Haunschild and Gunnery Sergeant Julio Jose Mendez, the 24th MEU MMT leader, arrived at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. The airport was calm and operating under normal conditions, despite the deteriorating situation outside the gates. Everything changed less than 48 hours later. As the Taliban overran the city, the civilian Department of Defense employees controlling Kabul



CPL N.W. HUERTAS, USMC

**Cpl Justin McDaniel assists a pilot over the radio at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on Dec. 3, 2015. McDaniel was presented the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for his quick and precise problem-solving skills that led to the safe landing of an AV-8B Harrier that had experienced navigational equipment failure.**



MSGT ANTOINE ROBINSON, USMC

**The Air Traffic Control Center on Nov. 23, 2013, aboard Tacloban airfield at Tacloban, Philippines. Marines and civilian controllers used the damaged tower to monitor air traffic coming in and out of the airport.**

tower were ordered to evacuate. The 24th MEU MMT remained the only air traffic controllers on the ground able to take their place.

“We were at a meeting with the colonel when the civilians were ordered to leave,” remembered JoseMendez. “The colonel turned to MSgt Haunschild and said, ‘the controllers evacuated the tower. How long until you can get your team up?’ Master Sergeant looked at him and said, ‘Fifteen minutes.’”

Haunschild and JoseMendez arrived in Kabul as part of the MEU’s advanced party. The rest of the MMT remained aboard a U.S. Navy ship. They took a pair of handheld radios and set up on the ground near the taxiway. The new “Kabul tower” location proved safer than the actual control tower due to the increasing security threat. They worked with U.S. Air Force Special Operations Combat Controllers to connect with pilots and let them know an air traffic control authority had returned. The Marines sat on the ground or stood as they controlled aircraft, exposed to the baking sun, noise of planes taxiing on the runway, and rotor wash of helicopters constantly flying low overhead. At some point, an airman brought out a cheap pop-up canopy and couple of commandeered office chairs to upgrade their new home.

“Typically, an MMT is only sustainable

for 72 hours,” Haunschild said. “We were able to do it for 17 days. We didn’t do it with much, but we did it.”

On Aug. 15, Haunschild was on shift working the radio when, across the flight line, civilians started pouring over the airport’s outer wall. Hundreds became thousands. A crowd converged on the runway preventing air operations. Haunschild left the tent at Kabul tower and joined the Marines of “Alpha” Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, as they attempted to push the crowd off the runway. A C-17 taxied through the mass of people. Prior to the now-infamous video of the plane lifting off with civilians clinging to the outside, Haunschild walked alongside the aircraft removing civilians as they held on for the ride. Everyone watched in shock as the plane departed and people fell from the sky.

“At that point, we weren’t in a position to control any aircraft,” Haunschild reflected. “We were in fight or flight mode. We were trying to do crowd control, and it just wasn’t working. Those first four days were the most chaotic and, unfortunately, the most memorable. You just really can’t explain it.”

By the evening of Aug. 16, the crowd retreated from the runway. GySgt Jose Mendez put on his headset and keyed up once again.

“I wanted to let everybody who was still flying know that there was an air traffic control authority still on the ground,” he said. “We were going to prop back up the control functions and enforce some form of procedures to make the

pilots feel safer and know this was not yet the wild west.”

The rest of the MMT arrived the following day. With Sergeant Ian Chryst, another Marine ATC, now on deck, the team paired each Marine with a USAF controller in three shifts operating around the clock. The tempo increased as more and more civilians processed through for evacuation and loaded onto waiting aircraft. Traffic flowed constantly through the single available runway. The Marines coordinated an average of 110 aircraft per day, nearly five coming or going per hour around the clock. Stateside rules and procedures went out the window as the Marines did what they had to do bringing in aircraft of all types and sizes, one right after another in whatever order they arrived.

At one point during the evacuation, as the situation devolved into chaos, a small Afghan Air Force plane landed without clearance and stopped on the runway. The pilot and crew inexplicably abandoned the aircraft and disappeared into a nearby hangar. Was the plane left as a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device to sabotage the airfield? The Marines knew it had to be moved and no one else was going to move it. Aircraft stacked up overhead waiting to land. Haunschild, JoseMendez, and two Special Forces operators drove a pickup truck onto the runway and inspected the plane. They determined it was not rigged to detonate and towed it out of the way to resume operations.

Personnel on the ground presented



**Sgt Ian Chryst, left, and GySgt Julio JoseMendez, right, assigned to the 24th MEU, monitor the air traffic control center at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 22, 2021. (Photo by Cpl Davis Harris, USMC)**

The Marine ATCs of the 24th MEU witnessed the masses of Afghan civilians pour over the runway at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Afghanistan on Aug. 16, 2021. The crowds had retreated significantly by the time this photo was taken, but a U.S. Army Apache attack helicopter still flies low over the runway, forcing people back with its rotor wash.



CAPT ZACKARY DAHL, USMC

24th MEU MMT Marines at “Kabul tower,” Hamid Karzai International Airport, in Kabul, Afghanistan. From left to right: MSgt Kevin Haunschild, Sgt Hunner Boswell, Sgt Ian Chryst, Sgt Jacob Scarlett, Sgt Christopher Payne and GySgt Julio JoseMendez.



GYSGT JULIO JOSEMELENDEZ, USMC

front of them. They immediately understood what had happened.

“We ceased all air operations for two to three hours as vehicles started coming across the runway with casualties,” Haunschild remembered. “We cleared the airport so they could get over to the medical facility. After that two to three hours, we started landing C-17s at the cyclic rate, strictly to get casualties out.”

The MMT remained at Kabul tower until the very end of the evacuation, finally leaving on the evening of Aug. 30 in one of the last American planes to depart. They handed control over to the Air Force Combat Controllers with whom they had partnered throughout

**Below: When an Afghan Air Force plane landed without clearance and blocked the runway at Hamid Karzai International Airport, the ATCs from 24th MEU swiftly towed it out of the way. Their rapid response was just one example of how they minimized delays and confusion while orchestrating the entire evacuation.**



GYSGT JULIO JOSEMELENDEZ, USMC

one of the greatest threats to the flow of aircraft. At any given time, a vehicle or group of people on foot might cross the runway, leaving the ATCs scrambling to call off an incoming or outgoing plane. At one point, a bus full of people crossed the runway directly in front of a jet barreling down the runway for takeoff. The ATCs stood in shock as the plane crept off the runway and missed the bus by less than 20 feet. Miraculously, throughout the evacuation, zero aircraft mishaps occurred.

Operations continued uninterrupted until Aug. 26. That afternoon, Haunschild and Chryst manned the radios at Kabul tower when the explosion at Abbey Gate detonated across the airfield directly in

the evacuation. Little remained to be done as the final few aircraft prepared to leave. Despite the myriad of obstacles, primitive conditions, lack of supplies, and skeleton set of equipment, the Marines accomplished a critical mission under the microscope of the world, one they didn't even know would be their task until they arrived on the ground and took the initiative to get the job done.

“It's what Marines do,” said GySgt JoseMendez. “Sometimes, you have to do more with less. Sometimes, you're going to be put in a position where it's not a specifically fine-tuned and planned situation. It's a crisis, and no matter what your cards are, you have to play them to the best of your ability.”

For their outstanding performance in the evacuation, Haunschild and JoseMendez both received a Bronze Star. Chryst received a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. The MMT's experience in Kabul serves today as the most recent major example of the type of situation Marines can encounter at any time.

“God forbid another MMT finds themselves in this kind of situation where everything is unknown,” Haunschild reflected. “You run out of food. You run out of water. You run out of resources. Your logistics chain is cut off. You land, you walk out, and you don't know if you're going to leave. This is why we train, this is why we consider ourselves consummate professionals within our MOS, so we can do it anywhere.”

For now, MMTs offer the primary source of deployment with each MEU. The expeditionary capability that Air Traffic Control Companies provide will no doubt be called into action in the event of a major conflict. New gear has been distributed to the companies to upgrade their capability in austere environments and more thoroughly integrate their data into the overall aviation command and control systems. The MMTs deploying with MEUs, or ahead of airfields in a combat zone, will also see changes in the near future.

“Our current organization limits the ATCs within a MMT from providing the full capability of what those Marines are trained to provide,” said Kiley. “We are currently rewriting our Marine Corps Task to unchain our folks and acquire the equipment that allows them to be much more capable, similar to the actions that occurred in Kabul. What those Marines did was herculean. They acquired equipment and gear and did things well beyond the scope of an MMT. The future MMT will be a robust C3 node. They will be able to disaggregate into multiple teams to support multiple sites.”

The necessity for the all-weather capabilities Marine ATCs offer will only be magnified in the next war. As they stand poised to provide this critical enabling function for Marine aviation in combat, the future for these Marines looks dynamic and active.

*Author's bio: Kyle Watts is the staff writer for Leatherneck. He served on active duty in the Marine Corps as a communications officer from 2009-2013. He is the 2019 winner of the Colonel Robert Debs Heintz Jr. Award for Marine Corps History. He lives in Richmond, Va., with his wife and three children.*



SGT ERIN A. VANDEHOEF, USMC

**SSgt Shelbie Allen, an air traffic controller with H&HS, MCAS Camp Pendleton, Calif., trains with the Integrated Range Status System on Jan. 30, 2023. Allen was recognized as the 2024 Marine Corps Installations Command Enlisted Marine of the Year.**

Allen explained. “I helped coordinate for 180 meals at no cost to the Marines, it was a big success. We even had enough food to bring a plate to all the Marines, Sailors and civilians who were working to ensure they had a meal going into the holiday.”

Taking care of people has always been a priority for Allen. Throughout her time in the Marine Corps, she makes a point to ensure the Marines around her have everything they need. Putting on food drives and barracks bashes are just some of the ways Allen supports her Marines.

When asked to give advice to other Marines about how to be successful in the Marine Corps, she strongly encourages Marines to think about the whole Marine concept. Excelling technically and tactically in many areas should be a priority for all Marines wanting to be successful, Allen said, adding that Marines should keep in mind that improvement must come from all directions,

## **2024 Marine Corps Installations Command Enlisted Marine Of the Year**

Every year, Marine Corps Installations Command recognizes a hardworking top performer as the enlisted Marine of the Year. The 2024 winner is Staff Sergeant Shelbie Allen, an air traffic controller with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Camp Pendleton. The award was presented at the Marine Corps Association’s Installations and Logistics awards

dinner, in Alexandria, Va., on March 6.

Allen is an avid volunteer. Two times a month, she commits her time at the MCAS Camp Pendleton food and diaper drive. Over the last year, this drive has helped more than 1,000 servicemembers and their families in the Camp Pendleton area. Along with her participation here, she also assists with the organization of events for Marines all year long at MCB Camp Pendleton.

“I was involved in the planning for a Thanksgiving dinner at the barracks,”



ANDREW NOH

**SSgt Shelbie Allen, an air traffic controller at MCAS Camp Pendleton was presented with the 2024 Marine Corps Installations Command Enlisted Marine of the Year award at a Marine Corps Association dinner in March. From the left: LtGen Charles G. Chiarotti, USMC (Ret), MCA president and CEO; LtGen Edward D. Banta, Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics; Gen Christopher J. Mahoney, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps; SSgt Allen; SgtMaj Robert E. Catching, H&HS Sergeant Major; and Tom Birchard, representing MSC Direct, which sponsored this award.**



**The final class of maintainers for the AV-8B Harrier II's F-402 engine stand with the course instructors and Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training leaders during the graduation ceremony of the last class of fixed-wing power plants mechanics at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on Jan. 29.**

LCPL LAURALLE WALKER, USMC

to include personal life, not solely job proficiency.

Being awarded as the 2024 Marine Corps Installations Command Enlisted Marine of the Year has meant a great deal to Allen. Being someone another Marine can look up to and count on is one of the main reasons she loves being a leader. Receiving this award is validation of Allen's hard work and dedication to her Marines and to the MCAS Camp Pendleton mission.

"Being passionate about your job is admirable," she said. "Any job can be beneficial; if you are going to commit to it, the end result will always be worth the effort."

Sgt Erin Vandehoef, USMC

### **Marine Corps Trains Final Class of Harrier Mechanics**

On Jan. 29, the final class of fixed-wing aircraft power plants mechanics, who repair and maintain the AV-8B Harrier II F-402 jet engine, graduated from the Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training Unit (CNATT), MCAS Cherry Point, N.C.

After 60 days of hands-on training, learning about the fundamentals of the Harrier's jet engine and associated gas turbine starter, the class of five Marines will be assigned to Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron (MALS) 14, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW)—the only remaining unit in the Marine Corps. Gunnery Sergeant Ryan Fife, a fixed-wing aircraft powerplant mechanic and instructor at CNATT Cherry Point, re-



**Sgt Brooke Roper, a fixed-wing power plants mechanic instructor, supervises students PFC Hunter Dority, LCpl Justin Luy and LCpl Tyler Henderson during a class at MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., on Jan. 23.**

LCPL LAURALLE WALKER, USMC

marked on his pride in teaching the last class of Marines to learn this skill set.

"Teaching this class is bittersweet, I am proud to pass on knowledge to the last generation of students," Fife said. "On the other side, this is the end of an era for the Marine Corps."

With the final flight of the Harrier nearing the horizon, Fife has passed the torch to the last generation of Marines to uphold the legacy of the aircraft. The consolidated remnants of the AV-8B Harrier II's maintainers, along with the newest Marines in the military occupa-

tional field, will continue to operate the aircraft through its final flights. Those Marines will then have the opportunity to separate from the Corps or make a lateral move to an MOS of their choosing.

Private First Class Landyn Powers, a fixed-wing powerplants mechanic student at CNATT Cherry Point, described his feelings of his upcoming graduation from the class. "It's mind-boggling to me, knowing that I'm going to the fleet soon and there is nobody else taking this class after me."

With two years left before the AV-8B



LCPL ETHAN MILLER, USMC

**Above: GySgt Bryan V. Labiosa, a drill instructor with MCRD Parris Island, S.C., is awarded the Drill Instructor of the Year award by Gen Christopher J. Mahoney, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, during the Fiscal Year 2023 Commandant's Combined Awards Ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va., on Feb. 8.**



LCPL ETHAN MILLER, USMC

**Marines are recognized at the Fiscal Year 2023 Commandant's Combined Awards Ceremony on Feb. 8. The ceremony recognized and awarded eight Marines with the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for their exceptional performance in their respective special duty assignments.**

Harrier II is retired, the Marine Corps has shifted its priorities to prepare for the transition of the F-35 Lightning II, America's premier fifth-generation fighter. The F-35 Lightning II, designed to operate from ship and shore, provides the Marine Corps with operational flexibility and unmatched lethality and tactical supremacy.

LCpl Lauralle Walker, USMC

### ACMC Awards Top Performing Marines at CMC Awards

Eight Marines earned awards for their performance within their respective special duty assignments during the annual Fiscal Year 2023 Commandant's Combined Awards Ceremony at National Museum of the Marine Corps, Triangle, Va., on Feb. 9.

The Assistant Commandant of the

Marine Corps, General Christopher J. Mahoney, awarded two Marines from each SDA—recruiters, drill instructors, combat instructors, and Marine security guards—for their exceptional work that surpassed their peers.

“Those eight assembled behind me represent the top of all of those four categories, and I'm happy to share in their recognition today,” said Mahoney.

Recruiters Gunnery Sgt Russell B. Cowan with Recruiting Station San Diego, Calif., and GySgt Tristan R. Wiggin with RS Tampa, Fla., competed against 3,200 others, earning their spots as the recruiter of the year and runner-up respectively.

“These recruiters are the hunter-gatherers,” Mahoney said. “They are the ones who go out and sell inspiration to the best of America's youth; they create motivation and then bring it into the Marine Corps.”

Gen Mahoney then pointed his attention to the drill instructors, “They take what the hunter-gatherers bring,” speaking of the relationship between recruiters and drill instructors, “take that inspiration, and they build it into the Marine Corps ethos of honor, courage, and commitment.”

The Drill Instructor of the Year was GySgt Bryan V. Labiosa from Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, S.C., and the runner-up was Staff Sergeant Jonathon R. Savage from MCRD San Diego, Calif.

Then there were combat instructors; out of 791 of them, GySgt Jose R. Acevedo Jr., from the School of Infantry East, earned the Marine Combat Instructor of the Year, and GySgt Russell M. Regehr from SOI West, was awarded as the runner up.

“They put truth to the maxim, ‘every Marine is a rifleman,’ ” Mahoney said of combat instructors.

Each awardee received a Navy Marine Corps Commendation Medal from the ACMC and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps for their duties, recognizing them as the top performers of their SDAs.

“Let me leave you with a fourth number: 1629,” he said next. “That's the number of Marine security guards on duty right now in 137 countries around the world. They are a symbol of the strength of the United States all around the world.”

From Marine Security Guard School, MCB Quantico, Va., GySgt Matthew M. Kinsman earned MSG of the Year, and from Marine Corps Embassy Security Group, Beijing, China, GySgt Trevor J. Bowen earned the runner-up award.

LCpl David Brandes, USMC



MSGT JOHN MCRELL, USAF

**A USMC XQ-58A Valkyrie, a highly autonomous, low-cost tactical unmanned air vehicle, conducts its second test flight with two U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., on Feb. 23.**



SAMUEL KING JR.

### **Marine Corps XQ-58A Valkyrie Completes Second Successful Flight**

The Marine Corps' XQ-58A Valkyrie, a highly autonomous, low-cost tactical unmanned air vehicle, successfully completed its second test flight on Feb. 23 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

The XQ-58A provides the Marine Corps with a testbed platform for developing technologies and new concepts in support of the Marine Air Ground Task Force, such as autonomous flight and unmanned teaming with crewed aircraft. The Marine Corps' continued experimentation with the XQ-58 is sponsored under the Department of Defense's Rapid Defense Experimentation Reserve program, which accelerates the delivery of capabilities to the joint force.

The successful flight is a key milestone in implementing Project Eagle, the service's aviation modernization strategy in support of broader Force Design modernization efforts. The XQ-58A and other Project Eagle research and experimentation platforms will inform capabilities needed in future conflicts out to 2040. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab and

the Deputy Commandant for Aviation's Cunningham Group, an internal working group responsible for planning and implementing Project Eagle, played an instrumental role in coordinating across the Department of Defense for support for the flight.

"The future battlespace demands new aviation platforms that embrace the austere environment and bring the fight to the enemy at a place of our choosing," said Lieutenant Colonel Bradley Buick, future capabilities officer for the Cunningham Group.

This joint collaboration was supported by the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, the U.S. Air Force's 40th Flight Test Squadron, the U.S. Air Force's 96th Test Wing, the Naval Air Systems Command and the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division's AIRWorks. This broad team facilitated ongoing research, development, test and evaluation for the aircraft for its first two flights.

"Working alongside our naval and joint partners is a testament to joint innovation as Marine aviation adapts and evolves

to the changing character of conflict," said LtCol Gavin Robillard, lead aviation strategy and plans officer for the Cunningham Group. "Aligning these test flights with Project Eagle informs future support to the Marine Air Ground Task Force, which guides the foundation for the next Marine Aviation Plan."

Future test flights of the Marine Corps XQ-58A Valkyrie play an integral role in the Marine Corps' efforts to modernize and enhance capabilities in a rapidly evolving security environment. The XQ-58A has a total of six planned test flights which will evaluate the effectiveness of autonomous electronic support to crewed platforms like the USMC F-35B Lightning II and the potential for AI-enabled platforms to augment combat air patrols. The XQ-58A is envisioned to provide capability to the Marine Air Ground Task Force that ranges from electronic warfare support to delivering or supporting lethal fires.

Capt Alyssa Morales, USMC 



COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

A Marine dressed as a World War I aviator prepares to exit a 1918 De Havilland DH-4 with an eagle, globe and anchor painted on its side, May 1966.



# Plane to See

## The Evolution of Marine Corps Aircraft Art And the Artist Keeping the Tradition Alive

By Briesa Koch

As a tradition, aircraft art in the Armed Forces has been encouraged by some branches while being heavily regulated in others. And though there is currently a massive resurgence of interest in aircraft art, which has become more widespread within the Marine Corps and generally accepted over the years, that was not always the case. What was once a wartime tradition has now become a way for Marine aviators across the Corps to connect with their squadron's history and their roots as Marines. One artist, through her experience in the Air Force, has dedicated her time to helping depict these histories, using military aircraft as the canvas and bringing new life to the practice of aircraft art as a form of expression.

Placing personalized decorative images on attack aircraft first gained traction among German forces in World War I

after a sea monster was painted on the nose of an Italian Macchi M.5 flying boat in 1913. By this time, some squadrons had started to use general unit identification markings. The sea monster was meant to be menacing, a way to grab the attention of enemy pilots and stand out from others in the unit. Upon their return from missions, Allied pilots said they had seen German fighters painted in a multitude of colors soaring through the skies and took inspiration from the unique art. Soon after, Allied forces everywhere, including Marine pilots, began painting aircraft art of their own.

But aircraft nose art did not rise in popularity among U.S. forces until World War II, where it was primarily used as a method to boost morale during the war as it progressed, although it was not officially authorized. The United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) pilots had

more freedom to personalize their aircraft and were even encouraged to do so by their command, while the strict regulations upheld by the Navy were put in place to ensure that no markings aside from squadron badges or national insignia were permitted on its airplanes. That regulation made it particularly difficult for Marines to participate in the popular practice, which is why there are more existing USAAF bombers with distinctive nose art displayed in museums than Marine ones.

"The Navy did not want the Japanese to be able to identify particular units and recognize when, for instance, a particular carrier was in the area or not in the area," said Larry Burke, the aviation curator at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. "So, for much of the war, there is no readily visible individual identifier [on the aircraft] other than the Navy



COURTESY OF SAM FOLSOM

**Above: An F8-U Crusader flown by Marines of VMF-235 the "Death Angels" displays red and white stars painted across the nose and tail of the aircraft. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)**

**Left: VMF-212 fighter pilot Sam Folsom stands next to his F4F-4 Wildcat while on Faeloa in American Samoa. Folsom painted Popeye, a popular cartoon character, wearing dress blues on the nose of his aircraft. Though the Navy strictly regulated art on all aircraft, that didn't stop Marine aviators from doing it anyway.**

Bureau number. But those are small and generally not terribly visible once you get a few feet away from the airplane.” And though that regulation came long before World War II, the rules have been broken from time to time, particularly in the Pacific, where the crews rarely saw top brass. In other words, Marines did it anyway. Paintings of pinups were some of the most popular displays of nose art. But pilots would paint anything from animals to squadron mascots or even Disney characters on their attack aircraft, along with distinctive names for further personalization.

In fact, Walt Disney’s relationship to the military was largely personal. Not only did his older brother Roy O. Disney serve in the Navy during World War I, Walt Disney himself also served in the military as a Red Cross ambulance driver during the same war, where he decorated his ambulance and others in his unit with cartoons. Those ties had a big impact on the appearance of Disney cartoons on military aircraft, which started in 1933. Walt Disney Productions provided more than 1,200 insignias during World War II, creating designs of recognizable characters that would later be used for flight jacket patches, pins and nose art.

These designs were done by the studio free of charge and provided to Allied military units as a donation to the war effort.

According to an article on Disney aircraft insignia in World War II published by the Department of Defense, Donald Duck was the most requested Disney character, with over 216 requests. But Pluto, Goofy, Mickey Mouse and Dumbo were other highly requested characters. Marine Utility Squadron 252 displayed their nose art painting of Disney’s Dumbo on the side of their Curtiss R5C Commando, calling it “The Flying Elephant.” Other squadrons, like Marine Utility Squadron 352 and Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 344, requested insignias that featured Donald Duck with the eagle, globe and anchor tattooed on his left wing, and a bulldog, bearing a similar resemblance to Disney’s Butch the Bulldog, holding a skull-decorated bomb in his paws.

The end of World War II marked the steady decline of aircraft art across all branches—mostly due to the end of wartime activity, but also due to the disappearance of the airplanes themselves. After the war, the United States dismantled what was left of the 300,000

warplanes or sold them off. Nose art would resurface during the Korean and Vietnam wars but was still more commonly seen on Air Force aircraft. However, that did not stop Marine aviators from taking part in the tradition, even though Navy restrictions on nose art never truly relaxed.

Aircraft art has continued to fluctuate in and out of use during the turn of the century. Peacetime regulations between wars dimmed the spark of tradition that was eager to grow and evolve, and many were unsure of how to continue the legacy of the aircraft artists before them. But hope was not lost. For over 20 years, one artist has dedicated her time to helping aviators across the Armed Forces carry on the legacy of those who came before them through the artistry she paints on the aircraft they fly. Her name is Shayne Meder, and she is a retired U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant who works under the alias “Flygirlpainter.” Alongside her work as a restoration manager at March Air Reserve Base in California, MSgt Meder has volunteered her services to help military flight crews express their pride and dedication in the form of art. For the Marine Corps, whose history details a strenuous fight to em-



SGT LOU LOWERY, USMC

“The Flying Elephant” (left) was a Curtiss R5C Commando flown by Col Niel R. McIntyre of Marine Utility Squadron 252 during the Battle of Saipan. The design of the elephant painted on the nose was based on Dumbo, a popular Disney character used as squadron insignias for military aviators during WW II. Insignias featuring other Disney characters like Butch the Bulldog (above) and Donald Duck were also requested.

brace aircraft art as a tradition amid strict uniformity, her services are welcomed and highly praised.

Meder's work as an artist started long before she began painting aircraft art for military aviators. "My grandmother was a painter, so I was doing art before I even went into the Air Force," she said. "I was in support equipment maintenance and did some aircraft maintenance inspection over the years. Once they find out you can paint, you end up painting everything from designs on hangar doors to toolboxes." In 1987, while working in Strategic Air Command, MSgt Meder began painting nose art on B-52 bombers before transferring to California in 1990. Shortly after, the base where Meder was stationed was put on a closure list, prompting her to retire. However, that did not stop her from working on aircraft. Years of experience in the Air Force brought along new opportunities, and shortly after retiring, she signed on as the Restoration Manager at March Air Reserve Base in California after it transitioned from military to private operations. Meder continued to work on and maintain old military aircraft like she had during her days in the Air Force, but it would not be until 1999 that she



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

**MSgt Shayne Meder retired from the Air Force in 1995 and continued working with aircraft as a restoration manager at the March Air Reserve Base in California before starting to volunteer to paint aircraft for military aviators in 1999.**

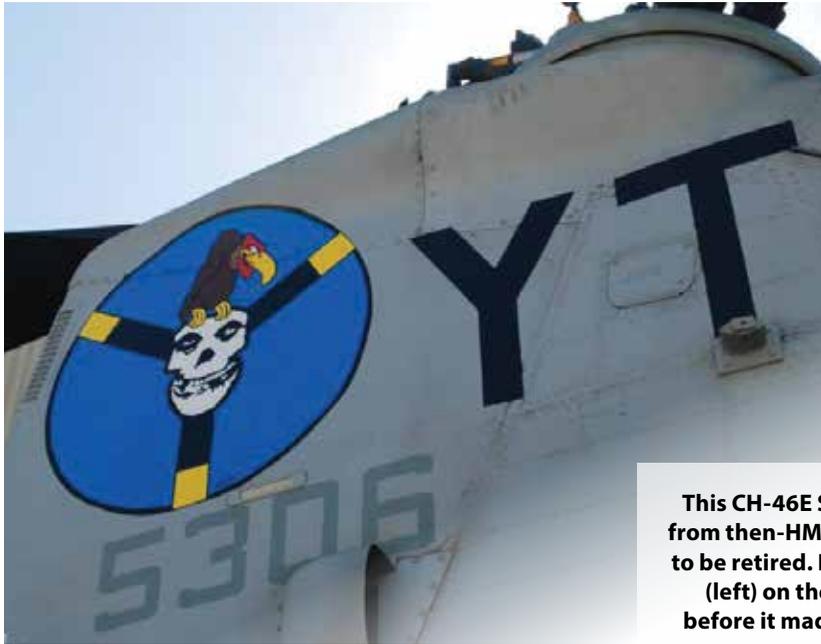
**Right: 1stLt Jeffery B. McAnnally, a pilot of Marine Attack Squadron 211, smiles proudly next to a painted patch of the Wake Island Avengers on the fuselage of his A-4E Skyhawk jet in honor of his father who fought on Wake Island in WWII.**



1STLT JOE COLLINS, USMC



**Below: Vought F4U-4 Corsairs of Marine Fighting Squadron 323 are lined up on the flight deck of the escort carrier USS Sicily (CVE-118) near the coast of Sasebo, Japan. Featured on the nose are rattlesnakes painted on some aircraft representing the squadron's nickname, the "Death Rattlers." (USN photo)**



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

**This CH-46E Sea Knight was one of the first helicopters (above) from then-HMMT-164 to fly during the Vietnam War and the last to be retired. In 2015, Shayne Meder painted a skull and vulture (left) on the aircraft to commemorate the squadron's history before it made its last flight to an aircraft boneyard in Arizona.**

would begin her journey as Flygirlpainter.

While painting a piece of nose art on a B-17 at the March Airfield Museum, a Navy crew in the area stopped by on their way back from the San Bernadino Mountains. The previous year, there had been a crash, and the crew had traveled back to the crash site to pay tribute to their fellow Marines. One of the crewmembers saw the work that Meder was doing and asked her to paint the tail of an H-60 Seahawk for them. "They wanted this blue tail with a hawk and an eagle on it ... I had never painted a helicopter like that before." Though she was unsure at first, the crew persisted, and in 1999 they flew the helicopter from San Diego, Calif., to March Airfield Base, providing paint and other materials for her to create the design for their show bird. Meder got straight to work.

"I'd always been doing nose art on the base for the KC-135s. And I still do that, but it just steamrolled into this huge thing." Since then, MSgt Meder has offered her services to any flight crew that has reached out, as long as travel expenses, room and board, and painting supplies are provided. Over the course of her years working as Flygirlpainter, Meder has painted over a dozen V-22B Ospreys for various aircraft squadrons across the Marine Corps, and the number of requests grows with each passing day. For Meder, her work is a way to give thanks to those who serve and have served, and to keep the tradition of aircraft art alive. "I know a lot of people

support our military," Meder said. "They might make cookies or send them care packages, and I love all that, but if I can make them happy and help them by painting them a bird, then that's what I'll do." Her dedication and commitment have garnered her a large following of military aviators all over the country who seek out her services regularly.

Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 764 "Moonlight," VMM-364 "Purple Foxes," VMM-268 "Red Dragons" and VMM-162 "Golden Eagles" are just a few of the Marine squadrons that have worked with Meder over her years as Flygirlpainter. The designs are striking and detailed, illustrating each squadron's story in a colorful and creative way. Recently, VMM-268 and VMM-364 spoke with *Leatherneck* about the work that Meder has done for them and what each of their tail designs represent.

As support squadrons with the Marine Air Ground Task Force, VMM-268, located at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and VMM-364, located at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., provide assault support transport of combat troops as well as supplies and equipment during expeditionary, joint and combined operations. Their coastal locations, combined with the long-range capabilities of the MV-22B Osprey, allow the squadrons to conduct transpacific assault operations day or night, under all weather conditions.

"Our job is to insert Marines into key positions on the battlefield so that they

can attack the enemies' critical vulnerabilities. As they execute their role as the front-line war fighters, we ensure that they stay supplied with what they need to continue the fight. And when that fight is done, we bring them home," said Captain Casey "Mouth" Funk, a pilot with VMM-268. Having always aspired to become a pilot, Funk enlisted in the Corps for the opportunity to fly but was also drawn to the Corps' values and cultural environment. "It's a community of service built around a requirement to constantly better oneself and help those around you do the same," he said. While nose art united Marines of the past with their shared longing for home, today's Marine aviators can find community through art that represents the squadrons' past and its future.

In 2019, MSgt Meder traveled to Hawaii to paint the tail of an MV-22B Osprey for VMM-268. The design featured two starkly different images, one on each side of the tail. One side displayed the squadron mascot, Trixi the Red Dragon, which was inspired by the dragon Smaug from J.R.R. Tolkien's book "The Hobbit." The painting of Trixi also pays tribute to VMM-268's legacy of night operations, which began in 1982 when then-Marine Medium Helicopter (HMM) Squadron 268 became the first Marine Corps squadron qualified to fly with night-vision goggles. The other side of the tail features an image of two surfers looking out over the ocean at the setting sun. That image is known as "Endless Summer,"

Marines of VMM-162 “Golden Eagles” (below) board the V-22B Osprey that features Meder’s tail design (right), which depicts the squadrons mascot, the golden eagle, painted with the American flag behind it.



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

Below: Shayne completed her first commission as Flygirlpainter in 1999 when she painted tail art on an H-60 Seahawk for Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 77. In 2015, she would return to repaint that same aircraft before the squadron was reassigned and moved to Japan.



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

**The MV-22B Osprey with VMM-364 "Purple Foxes" with Shayne's tail art design is shown flying through the sky (above). The centerpiece of the piece is the face of a purple fox clawing through metal.**

based on surfers Robert "Wingnut" Weaver and Patrick O'Connell, who were documented in a 1994 film titled "Endless Summer II," directed by Bruce Brown. During the film, the two surfers travel the world in search of the perfect wave. "This squadron has a passion for excellence, and every day we show up in search of the perfect flight," Capt Funk said. "That image, and the spirit carried with it, have long been a part of the squadron." Though completely different in appearance, both paintings show a different part of VMM-268's history and the fundamental purpose of the artistic expression that aircraft art brings for military aviators.

Nearly three years later, Meder would make her way to Camp Pendleton to paint a tail art design for VMM-364, the "Purple Foxes." Once designated HMM-364, the squadron was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for their service during the Vietnam War and became well known throughout the Corps for descending into landing zones to support ground troops while under fire. On Oct. 9, 2014, the squadron was redesignated. During the redesignation ceremony, all CH-46 Sea



COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

Knight helicopters were retired and have been replaced by the MV-22B Osprey.

"The Purple Foxes have a couple of historic stories that blend together to form where that [mascot] came from," said Lieutenant Colonel John C. Miller, the commanding officer of VMM-364. "HMM-364 was formed in the early '60s, and the squadron members would visit a bar called the Purple Fox. So that was where the original name came from. They liked this bar, and they would visit on R&R. As they started deploying to Vietnam in combat operations during the war, they acquired a fox pelt that was dyed purple, and that supported the purple fox name that they acquired through the bar."



Their design features the face of a fierce purple fox ripping through metal with sharpened claws on both sides of the tail. "The purple fox on the aircraft is the traditional patch that we wear around. It's a more aggressive, I would say, warfighting logo, and it takes up the whole tail of the aircraft," LtCol Miller said. As with most squadrons who have had aircraft painted by Flygirlpainter, VMM-364 first discovered her work through her social media, where Meder showcases her work and the service she offers for military aviators. In all, it took a week and a half for Meder to complete the painting, but with the help and hospitality of the Marines of VMM-364, the process went smoothly, and the final product pays



Shayne Meder, center, stands with Marines of VMM-268 “Red Dragons” in front of the completed tail art of “Endless Summer,” which represents the squadron’s coastal history and continuous search for the perfect flight. The opposing side of the tail features the squadron mascot Trixi the Red Dragon.

COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

COURTESY OF SHAYNE MEDER

homage to the squadron’s history and the legacy that they carry with them.

But it isn’t just the artwork itself that differs from the wartime art of the past. As aircraft art continues to resurface within the Marine Corps, aviators who fly a variety of aircraft have the desire to take part in the tradition. This leads to the invention of new ways to express pride and dedication to the Corps without the perception that aircraft art is reserved only for attack aircraft. “The tail is a great canvas for us to show our squadron art. It is easy to see even from a distance,” said Funk, when asked about the importance of featuring art on the tail of an aircraft. “The art on the nose was always meant to look menacing ... the art

on the tail for assault support aircraft is a signal of hope to the troops on the ground that the Red Dragons are here, and we will not stop flying as long as they need us.”

The significance of what Marine aviators do and how they support their Corps is something that Flygirlpainter has been able to depict on the aircraft they fly. Her artwork signifies that there are no limitations to art, whether it’s on an easel or an aircraft. “For an aviation unit, artwork is everything to a squadron. It represents the culture, and each individual squadron that is dedicated to the mission that they have,” LtCol Miller said. Flygirlpainter embodies this mentality in her work. By

revisiting this old tradition, Marines have the opportunity to express their love for the Corps, to celebrate those who passed their legacies on, and to take pride in the hard work, the long hours and the sacrifice that it takes to serve as a Marine.

*Executive Editor’s note: You can see more of MSgt Meder’s incredible work on Instagram and Facebook under the name @Flygirlpainter, or on her website: [www.flygirlpainters.com](http://www.flygirlpainters.com)*

*Author’s bio: Briesa Koch is the editorial assistant for Leatherneck and a graduate student at Old Dominion University where she is earning a master’s degree in library and information science.*



# Leatherneck Laffs



"Isn't that nice?  
Gunny remembered my birthday."





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**CAPTAIN MADISON REYNOLDS**  
ADJUTANT, 4TH MARINE CORPS DISTRICT

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Corsairs with 2nd Marine Air Wing in the skies over Okinawa, June 10, 1945. The Corsair more than held its own in a dogfight with Japanese aircraft. (USMC photo)



# F4U CORSAIR:

## Naval Aviation's Premiere Carrier-Based Fighter in WW II

By Skip Crawley

**T**he F4U Corsair first flew in 1940. Only four months after its initial test flight, it “was the first American [single-engine] fighter to exceed the magical 400 mph mark in level flight,” wrote author and naval aviation historian Barrett Tillman in “Corsair: The F4U in World War II and Korea.”

The Corsair was well-regarded by the commanding officers and pilots of the first two Navy fighter squadrons to be equipped with the new plane in 1943: Fighting Squadron (VF) 12 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Joseph C. “Jumpin’ Joe” Clifton, and VF-17 under the command of LCDR Tommy Blackburn. These two squadrons worked diligently to make the Corsair carrier-capable, and by mid-1943, had proven that the Corsair could operate safely from carriers. Major General Marion Carl, the

legendary Marine fighter pilot had this to say about the bent-wing aircraft.

“The Corsair was a great mount, head and shoulders above its contemporaries. An airplane like the Corsair only comes along occasionally ... the best flying machine in its time.”

The Corsair was a phenomenal fighter and in a dogfight was more than a match for the vaunted Japanese Zero; loved by Marine aviators of Aircraft Solomons (AirSols) responsible for neutralizing Rabaul, the main Japanese base in the South Pacific at the northern tip of New Britain Island 650 miles northwest of Guadalcanal. It even flew from the Navy’s carriers in very limited numbers as a night fighter from early 1944 onward. So, what kept Corsairs from flying from the Navy’s carriers in large numbers until the beginning of 1945?

Conventional wisdom says this was the result of the Corsair’s many technical

problems at the beginning of its development. Many believe the Corsair’s technical issues weren’t resolved for a long time and therefore F4Us were not approved for carrier duty until well into the war. It is generally believed that Marines flying Corsairs from islands in the Solomons proved the aircraft’s worth; only *after* the Royal Navy successfully flew it from small escort carriers, and only *after* the advent of the kamikaze threat in late 1944 when the Navy needed every possible fighter on its carrier decks, did the Navy reluctantly approve its use as a carrier-based fighter and come to embrace the Corsair. While much of the above is true, the story of why the F4U Corsair, developed for the express purpose of being the Navy’s premier carrier fighter in World War II, remained off the Navy’s carrier decks for so long, has less to do with supposed unresolved technical issues and more to do with the

Officers with Navy Squadron VF-17 pose with the unit “scoreboard,” circa February 1944. The commanding officer, LCDR John T. Blackburn, seen in the center of the first row, was credited with shooting down 130 Japanese aircraft during his career.

Navy’s comfort level with the F6F Hellcat and logistics.

Yes, the Corsair had technical difficulties at the dawn of its birth—all airplanes have technical bugs that need to be worked out. But most of them were resolved, or well on their way to being resolved by mid-1943, when the Navy was gearing up for its Central Pacific offensive with new *Essex*-class carriers and their new air groups. I believe the Navy made the conscious decision to utilize the Grumman F6F Hellcat as their primary carrier-based fighter—which started out as the backup to the Corsair—because it was easier to fly and more forgiving of mistakes by novice aviators. From a logistical standpoint, it was easier to support—maintenance and parts-wise—a single type of fighter onboard the carriers, vice two different fighters with their own logistical and maintenance requirements.

The Navy was quite aware that the Hellcat’s performance was inferior to the Corsair. And more than a few pilots looked upon their fellow aviators flying the Corsair with envy. But the F6F’s performance exceeded the Zero’s by a very significant margin. Once the decision was made to use the Hellcat, it was convenient for the Navy to use the Corsair’s supposed unresolved technical difficulties as the justification to keep it off carrier decks. In reality, the Navy didn’t want to complicate logistics by having to support two different fighters in large numbers with different engines.

### Background

From 1930-1944, prop plane technology advanced rapidly; a new generation of Navy single-engine fighters was produced about every two years with increased performance. In 1931, the Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer) within the Department of the Navy, which was responsible for all aircraft procurement for the Navy and the Marine Corps, bought its first Grumman fighter FF. In

**An F4U Corsair (top) with 1st MAW carries eight high-velocity rockets and two napalm bombs as it takes off for combat from an air base in Korea. The Navy favored the F6F-3 Hellcat (bottom) as a backup aircraft during the initial use of the F4U.**



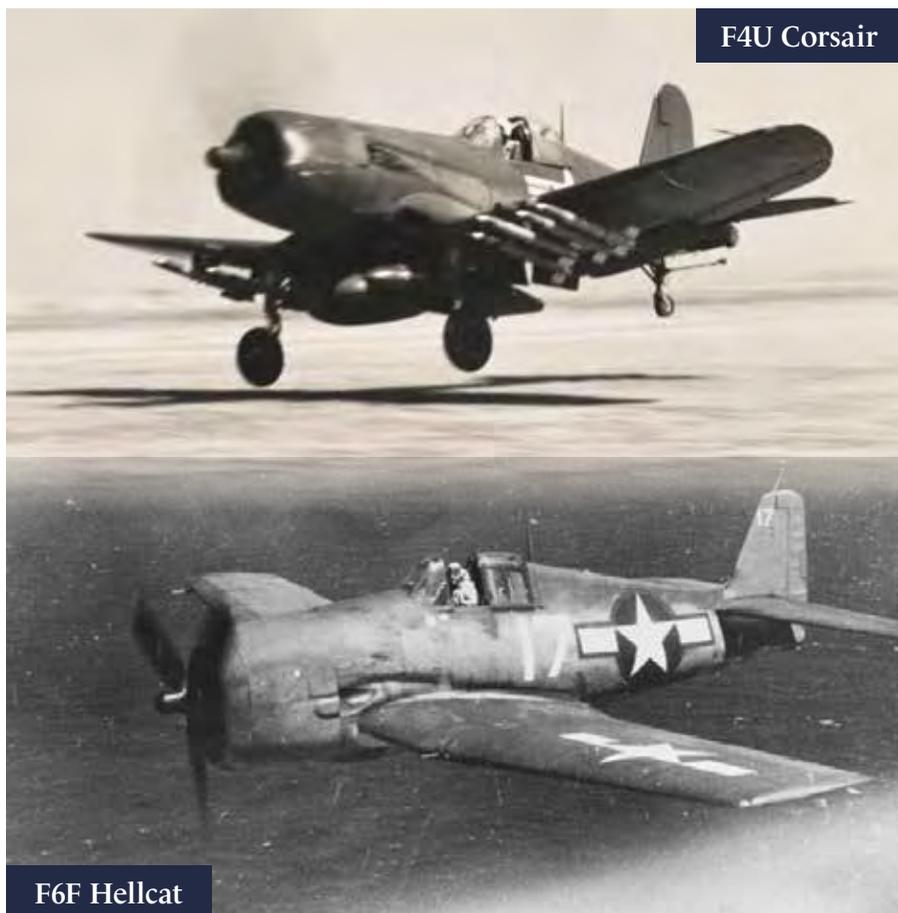
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1940, the F4F Wildcat entered service; in 1942, the F6F Hellcat entered service, and in 1944, the F8F Bearcat entered service. Each of these aircraft represented a generation of increased performance from its predecessor.

In the 1930s, as a rule of thumb, BuAer bought 150% of the number of airplanes needed to equip the carrier-based squadrons. For example, if there were four carriers in commission when BuAir bought a new fighter, and therefore four carrier

air groups each with an 18-plane fighter squadron, BuAer would buy 108. Airplanes were cheap, accidents common and a new fighter would be entering the fleet shortly to supersede what was currently in the inventory.

The other thing BuAer had a tendency to do was to have a primary fighter and a backup fighter in the procurement pipeline. While this was primarily done to have a backup if the primary airplane failed to meet expectations, this was also



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motivated by the desire to maintain the aviation industrial base during the lean years of military procurement.

In the case of the Corsair, BuAer requested proposals from aviation companies for a new carrier-based fighter in 1938, which eventually became the Corsair. By 1940, the initial Corsairs, designated XF4U-1, flew. At the same time, in June 1941, the Navy contracted with Grumman to build the XF6F as the backup to the Corsair.

### The Birth of a Legend—Almost

“Whistling Death: The Test Pilot’s Story of the F4U Corsair” was written by Boone T. Guyton, a former naval aviator and Vought test pilot during World War II. Guyton was the Corsair’s lead test pilot and was directly involved in its testing and demonstration throughout the war. Guyton’s discussion of the problems of the early Corsair models was an eye opener and completely changed my perception that the Corsair wasn’t fit for carrier duty until well into 1944.

Before reading “Whistling Death,” I too believed the conventional wisdom that only massive technical problems kept the Corsair off the Navy’s carrier decks until the kamikazes precipitated a huge increase in fighter strength; forcing the Navy to fly them from carriers and learning that the F4U Corsair was indeed

a very good carrier-based airplane. While all new aircraft have technical problems that need to be resolved, the Corsair had more than its share.

Why was this? In my opinion, it was because Vought skipped a generation of fighters in performance. Note that the Corsair made its appearance in 1940 but had the performance of the F8F Bearcat that came out in 1944. In other words, it had the performance of a 1944 fighter in 1940, resulting in more than the normal problems any new aircraft experiences.

Guyton was immediately impressed with “this magnificent, bent-winged bird—its power and speed” and described it as a “phenomenal flying machine.” But he was also just as aware of the F4U-1’s many bugs that needed to be worked out. Guyton worked directly with the first two Navy Fighter Squadrons to fly the Corsair, the VF-12 and VF-17, in order to solve most of the technical difficulties experienced by the Corsair.

### Problems with the First Corsairs—Visibility, Bounce and Stalling

There were three crucial problems with the F4U-1, the first production model of the Corsair which was without the below discussed modifications that greatly hampered its suitability for carrier operations: Lack of visibility over the Corsair’s long nose; bouncing upon

landing and stalling upon coming in for a landing.

**Visibility:** Landing a plane aboard an aircraft carrier is the most challenging part of carrier aviation and what separates it more than anything else from land-based aviation. Forward visibility is paramount. Before the advent of jets on tricycle landing gear, pilots of all tail wheel aircraft or “taildraggers” had a hard time seeing over the nose of the airplane. But the F4U had a *very long* nose, compared to contemporary single engine fighters. Why? Vought found the most powerful aircraft engine in existence in 1940 and built the Corsair around it. “Pratt and Whitney’s new Double Wasp [R-2800] radial engine was the soul of the Corsair,” writes Tillman. “The radical configuration was based upon use of the Double Wasp and its three-bladed Hamilton Standard propeller.”

Fortunately, two relatively straightforward fixes significantly reduced the problem. The pilot’s seat was raised 8 inches and the F4U-1s original “birdcage” canopy was replaced by a “frameless, clear-vision ‘bubble’ canopy... [which was] made standard in the F4U-1A” and follow-on models, according to Tillman.

**Bounce:** The next problem took more time and effort to resolve—the Corsair’s tendency to bounce on landing. According

After receiving its final check to its armament of bombs and 5-inch rockets, this Corsair prepares to strike on enemy forces in Korea, circa 1950.





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**A Corsair from VF-113 lands on USS *Philippine Sea* (CV-47) after successfully attacking targets in Korea.**

to Cory Graff's "How The Navy Tamed the 'Killer Corsair'" article in *Air & Space* magazine, when the Corsair thumped down on the deck, the landing gear's oleos—shock-absorbing struts—bottomed out, then bounced back like giant pogo sticks, causing the airplane to bound over the arresting wires.

"The Corsair's rigid landing gear oleo caused a potentially disastrous bounce in any but a smooth touchdown," writes Tillman. "It was not only noted on carriers, where hard landing are the norm, but also on runways."

The reason the Corsair had such long main landing gear was because the nose of the airplane needed to be raised in order to accommodate the large Hamilton propeller necessary to get the most out of the engine. Which leads to the reason the Corsair has the easily recognizable classic inverted gull wing. The inverted gull wing "... allowed a shorter landing gear than would have been possible with a straight-wing design, thereby giving sufficient ground clearance for the 13-foot, 4-inch prop," writes Tillman.

Like many solutions to the Corsair's problems, Lieutenant Commander Tommy Blackburn's VF-17 led the way regarding the bouncing issue. According to Tillman, the engineering officer, Lieutenant M. W. "Butch" Davenport, worked with Vought representatives in solving the landing gear oleo problem. Experimentation with the oil level and air pressure in the gear strut eventually

found the right combination. It was a relatively easy procedure to correct the rigid oleos as they arrived from the factory. With a softer oleo piston stroke owing to greater air pressure, the jolt and landing bounce was alleviated. But not without hard-won experience.



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**LCDR Tommy Blackburn**

Unmodified F4U-1s were employed on USS *Bunker Hill's* (CV-17) shakedown cruise to Trinidad in the summer of 1943. There were no losses, but one Corsair was written off when it bounced high and was smashed back onto the deck by the engagement of the arresting hook. Other planes suffered tire blowouts, but

the F4U was demonstrated to be a viable carrier aircraft.

**Stalling When Coming in For a Landing:** The last major problem was loss of lift in the left wing when coming in for a landing. This was potentially deadly for a pilot landing aboard a carrier.

In the fall of 1942, LCDR Sam Porter tested the feasibility of operating the Navy's bent-wing fighter from the deck of the escort carrier USS *Sangamon* (CVE-26) steaming in the Chesapeake Bay. After four terrifying landings, he called it quits, certain the airplane was on the verge of killing him.

But the compromised visibility and wild bounce didn't frighten Porter as much as the airplane's behavior during the moments in between. Seconds from touchdown, flying slow and low, with flaps, gear, and arresting hook buzzing in the slipstream, the Corsair suddenly stalled.

As the airspeed bled off, the left wing—with almost no advance warning—lost lift, rolling the airplane abruptly to port. Porter rightly feared that when a less experienced aviator was faced with the Corsair's nasty behavior, he would instinctively jam the throttle forward in a desperate attempt to grab raw horsepower to claw his way out of trouble. The sudden torque unleashed from the fighter's powerful R-2800 engine and its 13-foot, 4-inch propeller would exacerbate the bank to the left, promptly flipping the aircraft onto its back just feet above the

waves. According to Graf, that would have been a deadly predicament that not even the most skillful flier could escape from.

More than any other technical difficulty, I think this was probably the biggest reason the Corsair got the unwarranted reputation that it wasn't suitable for carriers. While it took considerable effort and time to come up with the solution, the solution itself was straightforward. Graf said the "installation of a small spoiler on the leading edge of the starboard wing, outboard of the guns" reduced "the violence of accelerated stalls and provide[d] better stall warning."

### Logistics—And Its Impact On Fielding the Corsair

The Navy squadrons that first fielded the Corsair were given logistical reasons for why they either had to be land-based or exchange their Corsairs for Hellcats. Prior to *Bunker Hill* arriving at Pearl Harbor in early October 1943 with VF-17 embarked, Blackburn was told by *Bunker Hill*'s Commanding Officer, Captain John J. Ballentine, that the office of the Commander, Naval Air Forces, Pacific Fleet had ordered VF-17 to be detached from Air Group 17 and land based in the South Pacific. It was being replaced by VF-18, a Hellcat-equipped fighter squadron.

In Tom Blackburn's "The Jolly Rogers: The Story of Tom Blackburn and Navy Fighting Squadron VF-17," Blackburn wrote, "[Captain Ballentine] and I had

talked about the possibility of something like this happening and we both thought we knew why. As the Navy's only carrier-based Corsair squadron, our place in the supply system was ambiguous, to say the least, and troublesome. All the other carrier-based fighter units were equipped with F6F Hellcats ... The hard realities of the supply system, we guessed, had simply overwhelmed the front office's authentic desire to see us operating Corsairs from the carrier. I suspected that the decision had been made without emotion at AirPac headquarters, for they, after all, would be the people who would have had to jump through hoops to keep us supplied. [Captain Ballentine] was later told by AirPac staffers at Pearl that this was indeed the reason we were relieved, and definitely not because the front office thought the airplanes were unsuitable for carrier work.

LCDR Clifton's VF-12 had a similar experience.

Tillman writes "... when VF-12 reached the South Pacific that summer, it exchanged its Corsairs for Hellcats. The squadron was already assigned to operate from the *Saratoga* (CV-3), thus the conversion. But the change in equipment was not due entirely to the F4U's deck-landing problems. The main reason was apparently that no Corsair parts or equipment were in the supply pipeline for carriers."

Keep in mind, both squadron commanders were "true-believers" in their Corsairs and powerful advocates for

its use as a carrier-based aircraft, but their desire to operate their Corsairs from carriers foundered in the reality of logistics.

### Marine Corsairs in the Solomons Islands

Marines flying Corsairs in the Solomon Islands is well known due to "Black Sheep Squadron," a TV series that ran on NBC from 1976-1978. But VMF-214, under Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, was just one of many Marine squadrons that flew Corsairs in the Solomon Islands from 1943-1945.

The Corsair entered combat in February 1943 with VMF-124 on Guadalcanal and would develop a reputation as an outstanding fighter as U.S. forces leapfrogged up the Solomon Island chain to the main Japanese air and naval base of Rabaul on New Britain Island. In "Corsair: The F4U in World War II and Korea," Jiro Horikoshi, the designer of the Zero, had the following to say about Corsairs:

"The first single-engine American fighter to seriously challenge the Zero was the Chance Vought Corsair. In a short period of time the excellent qualities of the Corsair became only too evident. ... Faster than the Zero in level flight and capable of infinitely greater diving speeds, the Corsairs soon proved to be a great nuisance to our fighters."

Eventually "the F4U would fly well over two-thirds of its combat sorties during the Second World War," according to Tillman. Once the Solomons became a backwater, Marine Corsairs would be stationed on numerous islands in the Central Pacific to keep bypassed islands neutralized as the Central Pacific Offensive moved westward closer to Japan.

### Philippine Islands

Not well known to many, including Marines, Marine F4U Corsair squadrons supported General Douglas MacArthur's Philippines campaign. The campaign began on Oct. 20, 1944, with MacArthur wading ashore on the island of Leyte, declaring "People of the Philippines, I have returned!" A little over a month afterwards, airfield construction was way behind schedule due to the water-logged terrain.

With the Navy's carriers having "already stayed in the Philippines 'almost a month longer than had been planned,'" the Navy suggested that the 1st Marine Air Wing be brought up from the South Pacific to relieve their carriers from protecting MacArthur's forces from kamikaze and other Japanese air threats. Marine Air Group 12 and MAG-14, 1st

**Pilots scramble to their planes while on Bougainville (below), circa 1944. LCDR Blackburn (right) was ordered to detach from Air Group 17 and operate on land in the South Pacific due to the Navy being unable to logistically support the Corsairs they flew.**



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Marines of VMF-214, the "Black Sheep" squadron, gather for a photo in front of a Corsair at Turtle Bay, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, 1943.



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Maj Gregory "Pappy" Boyington climbs aboard his F4U Corsair. He was the leading ace in VMF-214; he was shot down and taken prisoner on Jan. 3, 1944. He was the recipient of the Medal of Honor in 1945.

MAW, both Corsair units, conducted both day and night air defense operations; ground support for Army troops; air cover for amphibious landings and air strikes against Japanese convoys attempting to reinforce and resupply their troops in the archipelago.

But as General Clifton B. Cates, the 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps, writes in the forward of the USMC Historical Monograph "Marine Aviation in the Philippines," "The campaign was important to the Corps in that the Marine aviators, who had battled two years for air control over the Solomons, moved into a new role, their first opportunity to test on a large scale the fundamental Marine doctrine of close air support for ground troops in conventional land operations. This test they passed with credit, and Marine flyers contributed materially to the Philippine victory. Lessons learned and techniques perfected in those campaigns form an important chapter in our present-day close air support doctrines."

### Corsairs Aboard the Carriers— Marines to the Rescue

As mentioned above, due to the advent of the kamikazes in October 1944, the Navy scrambled to increase the number of fighters aboard their large *Essex*-class carriers. Prior to the kamikazes, an air group aboard an *Essex*-class carrier was 54 F6F Hellcats, 24 SB2C Helldivers and 18 TBF Avengers. Afterwards, and for the rest of the war, an air group consisted

**A deckload of F4U Corsairs, F6F Hellcats and TBM Avengers on board USS *Essex* (CV-9) somewhere in the Philippines, Jan. 25, 1945. (USN photo)**



of 72 F6F Hellcats or F4U Corsairs and 15 SB2C Helldivers and 15 TBF Avengers. The Navy had only two immediately available sources of additional fighter pilots in theater—transitioning current dive bomber and torpedo bomber pilots to the F6F Hellcat for the rest of their combat cruise and embarking land-based Marine Corsair fighter squadrons aboard the carriers.

Tillman writes the following: “Rear Admiral J.J. Clark, an experienced task group commander, recognized Marine squadrons as the best interim anti-kamikaze defense. Less than two weeks after the suicide menace appeared, Clark met with Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher in San Diego and suggested using Marine F4Us aboard CVs until the Navy could fill the gap. Mitscher, recently relieved as the fast carrier commander, took the idea to Washington. Before the end of November, a high-level conference in San Francisco resulted in approval from Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations. Ten F4U squadrons were authorized for immediate carrier qualifications and deployment to the Fast

Carrier Force. Thus, in an atmosphere of frantic haste, Corsairs were sent to carrier duty. Five *Essex*-class ships were each to receive two 18-plane F4U-1D squadrons over the next three months.”

As might be suspected, the urgency of the threat did not always allow sufficient time for the previously land-based Marine Corsair squadrons to become proficient at landing and taking off of an aircraft carrier, but they were a welcome addition to the fighter strength of the Fast Carrier Task Force in the last eight months of the war.

I feel some historians have an exaggerated view of the problems Marine aviators had landing aboard carriers. It should be noted that pilots who had previously flown dive and torpedo bombers and were then told to get into the cockpit of a Hellcat and fly it off the carrier without the proper training also had problems initially.

In the end, the Corsair was fully embraced by the Navy as a shipboard fighter.

Tillman writes, “by now the U-Bird was firmly established and fully appreciated aboard carriers. Operational

experience had shown that in a given deck space more F4Us could be parked (wings folded) than F6Fs. It was hard work for the plane handlers, interlocking wing stubs and stabilizers, but it was true. And the F4U-1D, not to mention the -4, was proving superior to the Hellcat in most tactical considerations—especially speed and offensive payload.”

As usual, when there was a difficult and challenging situation, Marines rose to the challenge and successfully completed the mission.

### **“Marine Corps” Carriers**

The most intriguing aspect of the Corsair’s story is the successful introduction of all-Marine Air Groups aboard escort carriers toward the end of the war. At the end of 1944, Marine aviation had a problem. Having done yeoman work in the Solomons and the Philippines, land-based Marine squadrons were stuck on various islands “with no place to go.” Eventually, the Marine Corps had so many squadrons that “... fifteen of these units were decommissioned and their personnel reassigned.” General A.A.

Vandegrift, the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps, took steps to solve the problem of Marine Squadrons being wasted in the backwater of the war and to get Marine-provided air support to the ground Marines conducting amphibious assaults. “Thus was established Marine Carrier Groups, Fleet Marine Force,” writes Tillman.

Each Marine Carrier Air Group (MCVG) “was to contain an eighteen-plane Corsair squadron and a twelve-plane Avenger outfit” aboard an Escort Carrier (CVE). Before the end of the Okinawa campaign, four MCVGs aboard four separate escort carriers had operated off a Okinawa, though “never as a unit” and “There would have been four more had the invasion of Japan been necessary...” according to Tillman.

### Post-World War II and Korea

During World War II, the Navy contracted with Grumman to produce the F8F Bearcat whose sole purpose was to provide a fighter with the performance (or better) of the Corsair that could operate from the Navy’s smaller aircraft carriers and provide adequate protection to the pilot. The Bearcat met these expectations, and one squadron of Bearcats aboard an *Essex*-class carrier was enroute to the Western Pacific when the war ended.

With the F8F Bearcat, the Corsair soldiered on after World War II. Corsairs and Bearcats were the primary fighters aboard carriers up until 1950. But by the time the Korean War started in 1950, Bearcats were no longer aboard the carriers—only Corsairs. In fact, the Corsair remained on the decks of the carriers off Korea until the end of the war in 1953 due to its outstanding ground attack capabilities.

Marine Corsair squadrons, both land-based upon and embarked aboard escort carriers, and Navy Corsair squadrons based upon the large *Essex*-class carriers of Task Force 77, provided outstanding close air support to Marines during the Korean War.

### Conclusion

Guyton writes that the legendary Corsair was in action as a combat aircraft longer than any propeller-driven fighter ever built. Its kill ratio was an even more impressive statistic. By the end of World War II, pilots flying F4U’s had shot down 2,140 of the enemy for a combat loss of only 189 Corsairs, a ratio of 11 to 1!”

According to Tillman, the F4U’s “speed and ceiling both exceed” the Navy’s expectations when it first flew in 1940. It is the opinion of the board that generally the F4U is a better fighter, a

better bomber, and equally suitable carrier airplane as compare with the F6F ... It is strongly recommended that carrier fighter and/or bomber complements be shifted to the F4U type.

Guyton continued: “For all of us at Vought, this recommendation for the F4U—whose Navy detractors had once found the airplane ‘dangerous and unfit’—was a signal victory. It higher performance and versatility was sorely needed now—and not it was “carrier” ready. It had been a long ordeal and we now considered the F4U a “complete” Navy fighter.”

When the Corsair arrived on carrier decks on large numbers, it vindicated its numerous supporters; outlasted all of its piston-engine contemporaries and served as a front line plane well into the jet age. When the Corsair was withdrawn from front-line service in 1953, it had had the longest active service of any Navy fighter plane up to that time.

*Author’s bio: Maj Skip Crawley, USMCR (Ret) was an Infantry Officer who was in 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He is currently the Marine For Life Central Region Network Coordinator based in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area.* 🇺🇸



This VMF-212 Corsair on the catapult of USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116) is ready to launch another mission in the fall of 1950.

## Families, Retirees Can Use the Family Member Employment Assistance Program

If you're a military spouse or Department of Defense ID cardholder looking for employment or assistance finding employment—military family members over the age 16, and retirees included—the Family Member Employment Assistance Program is designed to help you. FMEAP, a Marine Corps Community Services program, offers employment consulting, help with resume review, education and training opportunities, workshops and access to computers, printing and other office tools.

According to Lucy Arruffat, an FMEAP specialist, the assistance this program offers can make a significant difference for the many people eligible for its services.

“Military families often face unique challenges related to frequent relocations, deployments and the demands of military

life,” said Lucy, “which can make it difficult for spouses to establish and maintain meaningful careers.”

FMEAP offers resume review, interviewing techniques, career assessments and coaching, and help with job searches via USA Jobs and social media. While



FMEAP focuses on consulting and offering resources to assist with the employment search, the program also works with and connects people to other programs to land jobs, such as the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), Military Spouse Career Advancement Account Program (MCAA) and the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program (SECO). All these pro-

grams are designed to help military family members to achieve their education and training goals and land transportable careers.

Even though FMEAP is available on every Marine Corps installation, Arruffat believes it is still relatively unknown and wants to change that.

“FMEAP recognizes the sacrifices and contributions made by military spouses and family members,” she added. “It plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of empowerment and independence among military spouses, allowing them to thrive in their careers despite the unique circumstances they may encounter.”

To find out more about this program, services offered, and upcoming workshops, visit <https://quantico.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/military-family-life/family-member-employment-assistance-program> or contact [mccsquanticoppdregistration@usmc.mil](mailto:mccsquanticoppdregistration@usmc.mil).

Shaehmus Sawyer, MCB Quantico



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## Marine Corps Passes FY23 Audit

Following a rigorous two-year audit pilot, and for the first time in Department of Defense history, the Marine Corps received an unmodified audit opinion, which is the highest audit opinion that can be achieved.

This report provides results for the Fiscal Year 2023 audit and highlights seven areas where the service needs to improve.

“General Smith and I have spoken about the audit findings and are extremely pleased with the announcement,” said General Christopher J. Mahoney, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. “This audit reflects the hard work of hundreds of Marines and civilians. They have put an incredible amount of effort into some groundbreaking work. We have enjoyed the best teamwork I have ever witnessed across the department. Now, we can take what we’ve learned and share across the DOD enterprise to improve fiscal processes for all the military services.”

The two-year audit pilot provided time for the Marine Corps to stabilize its new accounting system and inventory assets at Marine Corps bases and stations across the globe.

The Marine Corps worked with Independent Public Accountants to validate accounting balances and records and to audit physical assets at installations and bases across the globe.

This included counting military equipment, buildings, infrastructure, and every type of supply and inventory in the Marine Corps systems. The auditors counted and validated the service’s resources and cross-checked accuracy in its information systems.

This was only possible through the support and hard work of numerous dedicated Marines, civilian Marines and many other partners across DOD. The full audit is available at: <https://www.pandr.marines.mil>.

HQMC

## Navy Clears Return to Flight For V-22 Osprey

Naval Air Systems Command has cleared the tiltrotor V-22 Osprey to return to flight.

The aircraft have been grounded since Dec. 6, 2023, following the crash of an Air Force V-22 Osprey off the coast of Japan that killed eight airmen on Nov. 29, 2023.

“This decision follows a meticulous and data-driven approach prioritizing the safety of our aircrews,” a Navy official said.

Lifting the grounding means the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force can return the aircraft to service. The services grounded the aircraft when Air Force officials investigating the Japan crash found “a materiel failure of a V-22 component.” Officials used the time to do a thorough review of the mishap and test risk-mitigation controls.

All of the services worked together to ensure the aircraft is safe, officials said during a call with reporters. They would not identify the component that failed, but they said the processes they put in place will allow a safe return to flight.

The services all have different processes in returning the aircraft to the skies. “Maintenance and procedural changes have been implemented to address the materiel failure that allow for a safe return to flight,” the Naval Air Systems Command official said.

Jim Garamone, DOD News



CPL AYDAN MILLETTE - USMC

**Marines with VMM-365 (Rein), 24th MEU, conduct a Functional Check Flight with an MV-22 Osprey at MCAS New River, N.C., on Feb. 28.**

## General Alfred M. Gray Jr.

General Alfred M. Gray Jr., the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, whose influence shaped current tactical doctrine and warfighting philosophy, as well as the Corps' commitment to professional military education and the foundational ethos "Every Marine a Rifleman," died March 20 at his home in Alexandria, Va. He was 95.

"Today I mourn with all Marines, past and present, the loss of our 29th Commandant, Gen Gray," said Gen Eric M. Smith, 39th CMC. "He was a 'Marine's Marine'—a giant who walked among us during his career and after, remaining one of the Corps' dearest friends and advocates even into his twilight. His contributions are many, including the development of our maneuver warfare doctrine, "Warfighting," which remains, to this day, the philosophic bedrock of how we fight as Marines. Although he will be missed by all, his legacy will endure, and his spirit will continue to live among us."

During Gen Gray's tenure as CMC, he oversaw significant changes in the Marine Corps including the development and publication of Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, "Warfighting." This document is the Marine Corps' capstone warfighting doctrine and remains the foundation for how the Marine Corps thinks about, prepares for, and executes combat operations.

"Gen Gray's seminal book, 'Warfighting' (FMFM-1), has been in my opinion, one of the most important contributions toward doctrinal development in Marine Corps history," according to Dr. Charles Niemeyer, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel and former director of the Marine Corps History Division. "Warfighting," published in 1989, during Gen Gray's tenure as Commandant, mapped out the tenets of maneuver warfare and was a prime example of his leadership philosophy, according to Colonel Mary H. Reinwald, USMC (Ret), in a 2018 profile she wrote about Gen Gray for *Leatherneck*.

"This book describes my philosophy on warfighting. It is the Marine Corps' doctrine and, as such, provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight," wrote Gen Gray in the book's forward. "I expect every officer to read, and reread this book, understand it and take its message to heart."

Gen Gray was responsible for focus-



**Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr.,  
29th Commandant of the Marine Corps**

ing the Corps on preparing for war, instituting Marine Combat Training for all enlisted Marines who didn't have an infantry MOS. He also understood that success in battle required a well-rounded and well-trained Marine who approached warfighting as a profession. To that end, he established Marine Corps University and what is now known as the Commandant's Professional Reading List. He was the driving force behind improving Marine Corps professional military education for officers and enlisted Marines.

Born June 22, 1928, in New Jersey, Alfred Mason Gray Jr., began his military career in 1950 as an enlisted Marine, rising to the rank of sergeant before he was commissioned in 1952. After completing The Basic School at Quantico, Va., and Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Okla., he was assigned to 1st Marine Division in Korea. In 1955 he attended The Communications Officer school and then served overseas in special command billets. In the early 1960s he served in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and in Vietnam.

He was the recipient of the Silver Star for his actions on May 14, 1967, during a subsequent tour of Vietnam. While he was the commanding officer of the Composite Artillery Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division, then-Major Gray entered a heavily mined area to assist three Marines who had inadvertently detonated a mine. Gray and another Marine "calmly and skillfully probed a

cleared path 40 meters through an unmarked minefield to the side of the wounded men. Directing his companion to guide stretcher bearers along the cleared route, Major Gray moved one of the casualties away from a sensitized mine and began administering first aid to the injured Marines. ... he directed the safe evacuation of the casualties through the minefield," according to the award citation.

In 1975, then-Colonel Gray was the commander of Regimental Landing Team 4 and was in charge of the withdrawal of the ground security force from the American Embassy in Vietnam. "Some of my worst moments were ... when we had to finish the evacuation of Saigon," Gen Gray said in his 2018 interview with *Leatherneck*.

In 1983, Gen Gray faced what he said was his most significant challenge. On Oct. 23, 1983, he was the commanding general of 2nd Marine Division when the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines Headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon, was bombed by terrorists, killing 241 U.S. servicemembers, including 220 Marines. He told *Leatherneck* in 2018 it was the worst day in his decades of service. "I was in command of all the Marines and the 12 Sailors and the three soldiers that were killed. They were all my people," Gen Gray said.

When Gen Gray was selected as Commandant in 1987, it was somewhat of a surprise to Washington, D.C., insiders because he was not considered one of them. "There was a big criticism of this and that, and that I didn't have any couth and chewed tobacco. It was a whole laundry list of criticisms," Gen Gray told *Leatherneck* in 2018. "They thought I had never done anything with the Congress. They didn't know how many times I briefed them about NATO." Gen Gray proved his critics wrong as he set about to shape the Marine Corps' future, advocate for the Marine Corps, and most importantly, advocate for Marines.

He began his career in the enlisted ranks, and he never forgot where he came from. "I think as excited as I ever was as a young Marine ... my proudest day probably was when I got to put corporal on my return address on the envelope [home]," Gen Gray told *Leatherneck* in 2018. "That was a very, very good day." He was the first Commandant to insist that he would wear a camouflage utility uniform in his official photograph and

portrait, and he has often been quoted for remarking that “every Marine is first and foremost, a rifleman. All other conditions are secondary.”

Gen Gray was as beloved by Marines after his 1991 retirement as he was during his service. He remained connected to the Marine Corps, speaking to students at Marine Corps University until just recently. He was also a fixture at Marine Corps Association dinners, and special events, often arriving unannounced, where he always made time to talk with active-duty Marines of all ranks. He is the namesake for the MCA’s annual General Alfred M. Gray Award recognizing leadership and superior performance by a Communications Officer, said MCA President and CEO Lieutenant General Charles Chiarotti, USMC (Ret).

“Gen Gray was devoted to his Marines. The Marine Corps Association was honored to benefit from his commitment to professional military education for all Marines and his understanding of the value of recognizing superior performance.”

Nancy S. Lichtman

**Reinaldo R. Baca**, 97, of Albuquerque, N.M. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1943 and saw action in the Pacific theater.

After the war, he joined the Albuquerque Police Department and held various other director roles in public and federal services until retiring in 1996.

**David Buechner**, 76, of Green Bay, Wis. His service from 1965-1967 included a tour in Vietnam. After returning to civilian life, he worked as a mail carrier for 20 years before retiring. His awards include the Purple Heart.

**Col Arthur B. Colbert**, 91, of Riverside, Calif. He was a Marine aviator who had 9,000 hours of flight time and completed more than 300 combat missions.

After graduating from college in May 1953 with a degree in political science from the University of Missouri, he was commissioned and attended The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. He later completed flight training, earning his naval aviator wings.

He spent four years with HMX-1 where he flew presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He also served as the executive officer of HMM-164 and HMM-165 during the Vietnam War. He later was the commanding officer of MABS-24 at MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and MAG-16 in MCAS El Toro, Calif.

He retired from the Marine Corps in 1980 after 27 years of service and went

to work for Northrup-Gruman Aviation on the B-2 Program before his final retirement in 1995. He was the president of Pop-a-Smoke, the USMC Combat Helicopter Association. His awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Legion of Merit and Purple Heart. He is credited with helping to give the CH-46 its nickname of “Phrog.”

**Leon R. Drzewiecki**, 85, of Green Bay, Wis. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1956 and served at Camp Lejeune until his honorable discharge in 1959. He later worked at Curative Connections Workshops in Wisconsin.

**George E. Moss**, 80, of Albuquerque, N.M. He was a Recon Marine who served three tours in Vietnam. After returning to civilian life, he dedicated his time to volunteer work.

In Memoriam is run on a space-available basis. Those wishing to submit items should include full name, age, location at time of death (city and state), last grade held, dates of service, units served in, and, if possible, a published obituary. Allow at least four months for the notice to appear. Submissions may be sent to *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, Va., 22134, or emailed to [leatherneck@mca-marines.org](mailto:leatherneck@mca-marines.org). 

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**SOUND OFF**  
[continued from page 9]

I completed nearly six months of training at the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Lakehurst, N.J., and served as a 6811, Marine aerologist. I reported to 3rd MAW at MCAS El Toro in November 1963 and within hours I was assigned to MAG-36 at MCAF Santa Ana. Within hours of arriving there, I was reassigned TAD to Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, which managed base and airfield flight operations. Base flight operations included air traffic control, crash crew, air route planning and weather support, to name a few.

Cpl Lawrence Krudwig  
USMC, 1961-65  
Nixa, Mo.

I arrived in El Toro in May 1951. The sergeant picked eight of us for a new squadron called VMO-2. When we arrived at the LTA hangar, the American Can Company had the hangar half-full of empty cans and Howard Hughes had eight antique aircraft stored there. Squadron HRM-62 was at the other end of the hangar and the Naval Reserves had one blimp. American Can Company and Howard Hughes were given two weeks to remove

their property. The hangar had not been cleaned since World War II and was very dusty and dirty. The eight of us spent the first two weeks sweeping the hangar. After that, planes, helicopters and other personnel started arriving for training.

Eugene A. Counts  
Bridgewater, Va.

*Thanks to all our loyal readers who've shared their photos and memories of MCAS Tustin and their time with Marine aviation. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

**Turning Business Cards  
Into USMC Art**

My project that I started a few years ago began with a business card. One of the first ones I made was a laminated card with the Marine Honor Guard on it that I sent to Mark Edwards, a lawyer in Paducah, Ky. He was also a lawyer for JAG at Camp Pendleton in the 1980s, and it just so happens that I was TAD there in 1979, so we have something in common. I've made cards up for occasions as well including one of me and another Marine veteran that I am in the Marine Corps League with.

LCpl Mike King  
USMC, 1977-81  
Paducah, Ky.

*Great idea. I'm sure many Marines would jump on unique or personalized cards. Thanks for sharing. Semper Fi.—Publisher*

**Leatherneck Feature Update**

Olympic hopeful Captain Riley Tejcek, USMC, teamed with Sydney Milani to place fourth in the 2-Woman Bobsleigh at the North American Cup on March 10 in Lake Placid, N.Y. Tejcek was highlighted in the March issue.

A Support Officer at the Expeditionary Warfare School, Tejcek is competing to be the first female active-duty Marine to qualify for the Winter Olympics, which will be held in Italy in 2026. She is scheduled to deploy to Iraq this month.

*Leatherneck*

Feel like sounding off? Address your letter to: Sound Off, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or send an email to: leatherneck@mca-marines.org. Due to the heavy volume, we cannot answer every letter received. Do not send original photographs, as we cannot guarantee their return. All letters must be signed, and emails must contain complete names and postal mailing addresses. Anonymous letters will not be published. —Executive Editor 🐻

# Are You Ready?



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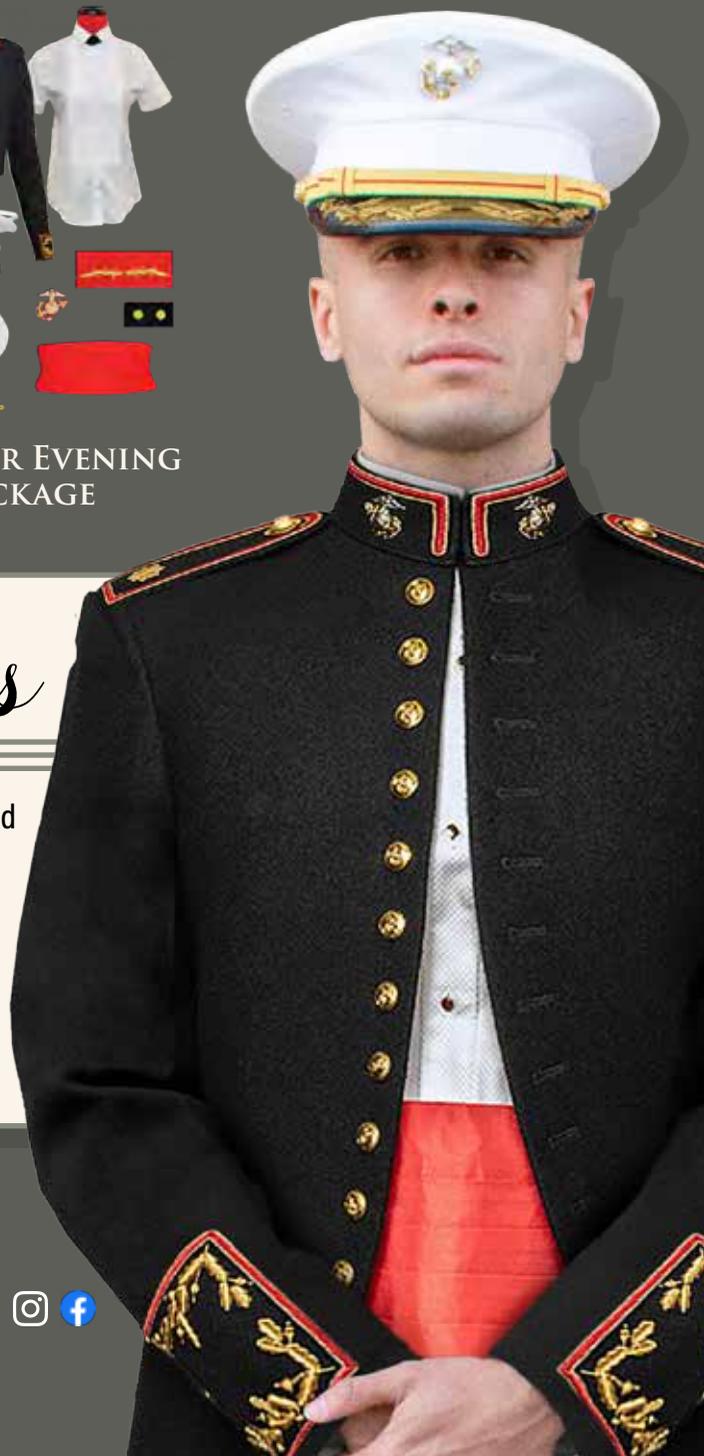
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## Reunions

• **FMFEUR/MARFOREUR (London)** is planning a reunion. Contact Kurt Stinemetz, (334) 590-8016, kstinemetz@charter.net.

• **Echo 2/3 Vietnam Vets 1965-1969**, April 29-May 3, Swansboro, N.C. Contact Bill Smith, (925) 997-8041, dal90@aol.com.

• **Embassy Guard Association**, May 16-19, San Antonio, Texas. Contact Bob Lighty, (717) 433-1105, bob.lighty@embassymarine.org.

• **TBS Class 2-91 Co B**, May 23-25, New Orleans, La. Contact LtCol Jay Senter, USMC (Ret), (540) 446-7864, j.senter.III@gmail.com.

• **Marine Corps Weather Service**, June 16-21, Billings, Mont. Contact Kathy Donham, (252) 342-8459, kathy.donham@hotmail.com, or Dave Englert, (812) 630-2099, englertd@psci.net.

• **Mike Co 3/7 (1965-1970)**, July 31-Aug. 4, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact David Ray, (612) 860-8932, davidrayray49@gmail.com.

• **Adak Marines**, Aug. 3-10, Adak, Alaska. Any Marines who served at Adak are welcome. Contact Barry Erdman, (920) 540-1585, beefoot2@aol.com.

• **1st Marine Division Association**, San Antonio, Texas, Aug. 18-25. Contact June Cormier, (760) 763-3268, June.oldbreed@fmda.us.

• **National Montford Point Marine Association**, Aug. 21-24, Jacksonville, N.C. Contact Ron Johnson, (504) 202-8552, vice\_president@montfordpointmarines.org.

• **1st Bn, 5th Marines, 1985-1992**, Sept. 5-8, Macomb, Ill. Contact Scott Hainline, (309) 351-2050, ptimfi@yahoo.com.

• **Golf Co 2/7, 1965-1970**, Sept. 18-22, Tucson, Ariz. Contact Travis Skaggs, (775) 291-6813, tskaggs6@email.com.

• **Recruiting Station Baltimore, Md.**, Sept. 21-22, Dorsey, Md. Contact Ed Wakeley or Matt Cicchinelli, rsbaltreunion@outlook.com.

• **Marine Corps Engineer Association**, Sept. 26-28, Myrtle Beach, S.C. Contact

LtCol George Carlson, USMC (Ret), (931) 307-9094, treasurer@marcorengasn.org or visit www.marcorengasn.org.

• **USS Saratoga (CV/CVA-60)**, Oct. 2-6, Jacksonville, Fla. Former *Saratoga* shipmates (Ship's company, air wing and MarDet) welcome. Contact Mark Kikta, (202) 262-1294, mdkikta@msn.com.

• **Kilo 3/7**, Oct 16-24, Rapid City, S.D. All eras welcome. Contact Bill Gerke (631) 433-8575, msggerke@aol.com.

• **USMC A-4 Skyhawkers**, Nov. 11-13, Pensacola Beach, Fla. All drivers, maintainers, and aficionados welcome. Contact Mark Williams, (702) 778-5010, rogerwilco14@gmail.com.

## Mail Call

• Raymond Taylor, (509) 942-4186, P.O. Box 954, Colville, Wash., 99114, is looking to hear from **anyone who served at Marine Barracks Moffett Naval Air Station in Mountainview, Calif., in 1967.**

• Bobby Lipps, (765) 969-3789, rllipps@comcast.net, is looking to hear from **platoon members and drill instructors SSgt H.T. Tucker, SSgt J.B. Christopher and Sgt J.L. Bilbo from Platoon 3006, MCRD San Diego, October 1973.**

## Wanted

• Jerry L. Jackson, jsj1008@aol.com, is looking for a **graduation book for Platoon 1076, MCRD Parris Island, 1986.**

• Mac McCullough, bobmacref@msn.com, is looking for a **1971 platoon graduation book from MCRD San Diego. Platoon number unknown. Drill instructors were SSgt Nunnery, Sgt Gomez, and SSgt Winkle.**

• Mark Pacey, markp@mstn.govt.nz, is looking for **photographs, interviews, letters, and any other information on Americans stationed in New Zealand during WW II.**

Entries for "Reader Assistance," which include "Reunions," "Mail Call," "Wanted" and "Sales, Trades and Giveaways," are free and printed on a space-available basis. *Leatherneck* reserves the right to edit or reject any submission. Allow two to three months for publication. Send your email to leatherneck@mca-marines.org, or write to Reader Assistance Editor, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134. 🦁

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# Saved Round

By Kipp Hanley



COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**HONORING HEROES**—Marines in Chaumont, France, fire a rifle volley on Decoration Day, May 30, 1918, to honor the men buried at the American Cemetery there. Now known as Memorial Day, Decoration Day was the brainchild of Civil War Army General John A. Logan. Logan chose May 30, 1868, as a day to adorn the graves of fallen Union troops across the nation. After World War I, Memorial Day was set aside as a day to pay tribute to servicemembers killed in all American wars. Since 1971, Memorial Day has been observed as a federal holiday on the last Monday in May. Marines and civilians alike pay tribute to our nation's fallen servicemembers through ceremonies, parades and other traditions such as placing flags on the graves at national cemeteries.

According to the Marine Corps History Division, more than 41,000 Marines have been killed in action since the Corps formed in 1775. 🇺🇸

A close-up photograph of a man in a military camouflage uniform, smiling broadly and looking upwards and to the right. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting.

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