

# Marines Return to Beirut



**Above: The original Post One sign after the April 18, 1983, bombing.**

**Left: At a memorial service at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on Oct. 23, 2016, SSgt Michael J. Corban lays a rose in remembrance of the 241 victims of the Marine Barracks bombing.**

By SSgt Michael C. Woodall, USMC

*Editor's note: The following article is the second-place winner of the Leatherneck Writing Contest. Maj Richard A. "Rick" Stewart, USMC (Ret) sponsored the contest, which is open to enlisted Marines, through the Marine Corps Association & Foundation. Upcoming issues of Leatherneck will feature the third-place winner as well as other submissions.*

**O**n Sept. 6, 2014, the Marine Security Guard (MSG) detachment at U.S. Embassy Beirut, Lebanon, was reactivated after nearly 30 years without a continuous Marine presence. As the Marines hoisted the American flag over the embassy, they stood in the shadow of Beirut's tragic past. The skeletal remains of the U.S. Embassy Annex in the middle of the compound are a constant reminder of the importance of the Marines' as-

signment and the legacy of those who lost their lives on Sept. 20, 1984.

The annex was the site of the last of three deadly attacks on U.S. government facilities in Beirut in the early 1980s. The suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy Beirut on April 18, 1983, left 63 Americans and Lebanese dead, and the devastating attack on Battalion Landing Team, First Battalion, Eighth Marine Regiment, 22d Marine Amphibious Unit, killed 220 Marines and a total of 241 military servicemembers. These attacks would signal the true beginning of what later became known as the global war on terrorism (GWOT), although it would not be officially declared until after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

As the flag was raised over the new embassy, the GWOT Marines became "Beirut Marines," charged with the duties and responsibilities of their namesakes to carry on the tradition of peace through

diplomacy. The detachment activation ritual, however, was different from those previously conducted at embassies throughout the world; during this ceremony the Marine Corps colors were raised after the national ensign.

After an absence of Marines in Beirut for nearly 30 years, veteran Marines proposed and funded a flagpole dedicated specifically to "... a selfless generation of United States Marines—who demonstrated undaunted courage and an unwavering devotion to duty in their willingness to defend those who could not defend themselves; thriving on the hardship and sacrifice expected of an elite warrior class while upholding the highest tradition of the United States Marine Corps" in 2012.

The flagpole was dedicated by General James Mattis (now serving as Secretary of Defense); Major General Carl E. Mundy III, Commander, U.S. Marine Special Forces; and John Dalziel, a retired Federal





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**Beirut Marines conducted a memorial ceremony at the embassy, Oct. 23, 2016. From left to right: SSgt Michael Woodall, Sgt Scott Nault, Ambassador David Hale, Sgt John Ramos-O'Connell and Cpl Chase Ferguson.**

Bureau of Investigation special agent and survivor of the Oct. 23, 1983, bombing. The U.S. Embassy Beirut is the only overseas embassy to fly the Marine Corps colors 24 hours a day, seven days a week as a constant reminder that, "They Came in Peace." The colors continue to honor the legacy of all Beirut Marines and serve as a symbol of the MSG detachment's inheritance of the mission to defend the United States of America's efforts to achieve peace and diplomacy in Lebanon.

The Honorable David Hale, former U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, called the return of MSGs to Beirut a "clear and historic demonstration of integrity, courage, loyalty, and commitment—American values that run deep in the Marine Corps and the Department of State."

The Marines were supplemented in their mission by a number of security force elements to include Embassy Security Force Guards, Security Operations Center watch officers, and the well-known abilities of the Close Protection Unit. Not the average local guard force, the force is made up of all local religions, to include Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians and even Druze and Maronite. They are a highly trained group with experience forged in the flame of decades of crisis, war and terrorism. The first group of Marines quickly integrated with the local forces to facilitate the best defense of the embassy. Training remained intense and realistic and included hands-on familiarization of gear, weapons systems and tactics. Through shared hardship and persistent rehearsals and training,

the Marines found a new family among their Lebanese brethren.

In October 2015, the detachment opened a new Post One, the most prominent feature of MSG duty around the world, with a mission of ensuring the safety of American employees and classified material at the embassy. It would transition as a hub for security efforts on the 17-acre compound, bolstering command and control capabilities and highlighting the efforts and achievements of Marines throughout the embassy. The new post helped to assure the attention of the detachment would remain on efforts to improve the combined defensive capabilities of the embassy and result in a multilateral and multicultural effort dedicated to the safety and security of hundreds of American



**Marines participate in a ceremony in remembrance of the French paratroopers who were killed in a coordinated attack on the Drakkar building in Beirut on Oct. 23, 1983, minutes after the Marine barracks was bombed. From left to right: a French soldier, SSgt Michael Woodall, Sgt Daryl Jimenez, Ambassador Elizabeth H. Richard, LCpl Nathan Rodgers, Defense Attaché COL Ulysses Calvo, COL Glenn Thomas, MAJ Jeffrey Johnson, Cpl Melissa Bridges, Sgt Kyle Garcia, and a French soldier.**



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diplomats and locally engaged staff.

The importance of their history was not lost on the Beirut Marines who also had a critical secondary mission during their assignment—remembrance. On Oct. 23, 2015, the embassy Marines took part in their first memorial ceremony recognizing the 241 Marines and other military personnel who were killed in the bombing of the Marine barracks on Oct. 23, 1983, the Marine Corps' largest loss of life since World War II. The embassy Marines would also take part in ceremonies with the French delegation in remembrance of the 58 French paratroopers also killed on Oct. 23 in a secondary attack on the Drakkar building, which occurred minutes after the attack on the Marine barracks.

Less than two weeks after the ceremony, on Nov. 12, 2015, the detachment experienced its first terrorism incident in Beirut. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) suicide bombers detonated themselves in the Bourj el-Barajneh suburb of Beirut, killing 40. Because the event occurred days before the detachment's Marine Corps Birthday Ball, the decision was made to cancel the event out of respect for those who lost their lives and to ensure the focus remained on the security of

American personnel and diplomatic interests.

In addition to security duties, the Marines worked hard to complete their new MSG residence in order to accommodate increases in personnel, provide a larger security footprint and deliver further capabilities for the embassy. The Marines dedicated hundreds of man-hours to complete the \$27 million hardened alternative trailer system, outfitting it to sustain Ma-

rines on a day-to-day basis while providing storage facilities for their required gear and equipment in the event of a response scenario on the embassy.

In June 2016, the MSG detachment officially opened their new residence. The small, reinforced container rooms—similar to the containerized housing units that are utilized in Iraq and Afghanistan—are a snug, but comfortable, home to these Marines during their assignment. As is



**Cpl Robert McMaugh was killed in the embassy bombing April 18, 1983.**

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tradition in the MSG program, each house has a room used for social gatherings and functions. MSG Marines dedicate the room to a Marine or individual who has had a significant impact on the Marine Corps in that country. The Marines of the Beirut detachment dedicated their gathering room to Corporal Robert McMaugh, the Marine security guard who was on Post One on April 18, 1983, the day of the embassy bombing. Cpl McMaugh was one of the 12 MSG Marines who died in the line of duty.

Despite strict security restrictions and limitations, the Marines found the opportunity to conduct promotions in meaningful sites throughout Beirut while also finding the time to volunteer in the community. Marines had the opportunity to partner with the Lebanese armed forces, the United Nations representatives and State Air contingents to perform memorable promotions. In addition, the Marines found time to volunteer and conduct Toys for Tots activities.

In 2016, embassy Marines conducted their largest ceremony to date in commemoration of the anniversary of the Oct. 23, 1983, attack on the Marine barracks. A crowd of more than 200 was in

**Above: The view of the bombed U.S. Embassy Annex on the new embassy compound. The annex was the site of the last of three deadly attacks on U.S. government facilities in Beirut in the early 1980s.**

**Below: Sgt Daryl A. Jimenez salutes during the Oct. 23, 2016, Beirut Memorial Ceremony.**



FADY DAGHER





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**Marines visit the site of the Oct. 23, 1983, Barracks bombing, now a parking lot near the Beirut International Airport. From left to right: SSgt Michael Woodall, SSgt Michael Corban, Sgt John Ramos-O'Connell and Sgt Nathaniel O'Brien.**

securing diplomacy for the country in the future.

No tour in Lebanon is complete without a visit to the site of the Barracks bombing. Now a parking lot near the Beirut International Airport, it still brings out emotions in the Marines and reminds them of their history. Marines visit the site to pay their respects to those who gave their lives for freedom. It is through their spirit and through unrelenting dedication to their sacrifice that we, as Marine security guards in Beirut, honor our fallen and truly become "Beirut Marines."

*Author's bio: SSgt Michael C. Woodall, a native of Lancaster, Ohio, joined the Marine Corps in August 2007. He was an infantryman with 3/8 before joining Marine Corps Embassy Security Group in December of 2012. He has been posted in Beijing, China, and Tallinn, Estonia. He was meritoriously promoted to staff sergeant in July 2014 and was chosen to be the detachment commander for MSG in Beirut, Lebanon, from October 2015 to April 2016. He is currently stationed in Camp Lejeune with Second Intelligence Battalion.*



attendance, including many dignitaries from other embassies who paid their respects as the U.S. ambassador and Marines read the names of the 241 servicemembers who lost their lives during the attack. Final salutes were given and flowers were laid at the memorial located on the compound, paying tribute to the lives given in pursuit of peace in Lebanon.

At the end of 2016, the MSG detachment carried out yet another historical event—

the 241st Marine Corps Birthday Ball. The embassy Marines had the honor of welcoming back Special Agent John Dalziel, former legal attaché to Lebanon and a survivor of the BLT 1/8 HQ barracks bombing, as the guest speaker at the first Marine Corps Birthday Ball in Beirut, Lebanon, in 31 years. The event allowed the detachment to pay homage to those Marines who came before them and reminded the Lebanese that the Marines were both here to stay and focused on



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**Above left: Guest speaker John Dalziel, a veteran Marine who survived the bombing and later served as an FBI Special Agent and legal attaché to Lebanon, gives a memorable speech at the Marine Corps Birthday Ball in 2016.**

**Above right: SSgt Michael Woodall cuts the first piece of cake at the 241st Marine Corps Birthday Ball.**