



# Semper Fidelis

## The Official Newsletter for Retired Marines, Surviving Spouses and Families



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# Commandant of the Marine Corps Birthday Message



10 November 2025

## A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Two hundred and fifty years ago, before our Nation declared its independence, a small group of men gathered in Philadelphia and formed a Corps of Marines. From that moment, our story has been bound to the story of America itself. A quarter of a millennium later, Marines remain at the center of our Nation's defense. Ready to fight, ready to win, and ready to uphold the trust placed in us since 1775.

Across centuries, Marines have fought on distant shores and in desperate battles, earning a reputation for discipline, toughness, and valor. From the Revolution to the World Wars, from Chapultepec to today's operations across the globe, every generation has proven worthy of the title Marine. They secured liberty, defended allies, and carried forward the promise of a free Nation, and a free world. We are the heirs of that legacy, and we are its stewards.

This anniversary reminds us that our standards are the foundation of our Corps. Honor, Courage, and Commitment are not abstractions, but the code that binds us to one another and to all who went before. Every Marine, in every clime and place, must hold true to these values. The conflicts ahead will demand nothing less.

I could not be prouder of the Marines I see serving today. At home, at sea, and across the globe, you carry forward our proud traditions with skill and ferocity. It is your discipline, initiative, and fighting spirit that anchor our Corps. The battles of the next 250 years will challenge us in new ways, but I have no doubt we will prevail. Happy Birthday Marines!

**Semper Fidelis,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric M. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized.

**General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commandant of the Marine Corps**

# History of the Marine Corps Birthday Celebration

The U.S. Marine Corps begins preparations for its "birthday party" every summer. Activities become more feverish as the fall hues arrive. By early November, every Marine is either rehearsing his role into always been the case, however. In fact, Marines have not always celebrated their founding on November the 10th.

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

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

On 21 October 1921, Maj Edwin McClellan, Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, Headquarters

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

Accordingly, on 1 November 1921, Lejeune issued Marine Corps Order No. 47, Series 1921. The Order summarized the history, mission, and tradition of the Corps, and directed that it be read to every command on 10 November each subsequent year in honor of the birthday of the Marine Corps. This order has been duly carried out.

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

# History of the Marine Corps Birthday Celebration

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

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

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

It is not possible to determine precisely when the first cake ceremony was held, but there is evidence of a ceremony being held at Quantico, Virginia, in 1935. Also on record was one held at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., in 1937 where Major General Commandant Thomas Holcomb presided at an open house for Marine Corps officers. Ceremonies included the cutting of a huge cake designed after the famous Tun Tavern in Philadelphia.

From 1937, observances of the Marine Corps Birthday appeared to develop spontaneously throughout the Corps as if they had a life of their own. The celebrations were publicized through every media. Newsreels, motion pictures, and displays were prepared to summarize the history of the Corps. In 1943, standard blank Marine Corps scrap books were forwarded to all districts to be filled with 168th anniversary clippings, scripts, pictures, programs, and other memorabilia, and returned to

Headquarters. Unfortunately none of these scrapbooks remain in official files.

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

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

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

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

# Major General John A. Lejeune 1921 USMC Birthday Message

## 1921 Marine Corps Birthday Message

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

**Marine Corps Order No. 47 (Series 1921)**  
**Headquarters**  
**U.S. Marine Corps Washington**  
**Date: 1 November 1921**

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

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



In every battle and skirmish since the birth of our Corps, Marines have acquitted themselves with the greatest distinction, winning new honors on each occasion until the term "Marine" has come to signify all that is highest in military efficiency and soldierly virtue. This high name of distinction and soldierly repute we who are Marines today have received from those who preceded us in the Corps. With it we have also received from them the eternal spirit which has animated our Corps from generation to generation and has been the distinguishing mark of the Marines in every age. So long as that spirit continues to flourish Marines will be found equal to every emergency in the future as they have been in the past, and the men of our Nation will regard us as worthy successors to the long line of illustrious men who have served as "Soldiers of the Sea" since the founding of the Corps.

John A. Lejeune,  
Major General Commandant





# USMC Celebrates 250 Years of Service



Since 1775, the United States Marine Corps has fought to preserve our collective future. Today, we honor their legacy by providing our communities with special ways to connect to and celebrate their 250th year. Explore all the events, tributes, and activations to make the most of this year-long celebration.



250 years of honor, courage, and commitment is worthy of immense praise. The men and women who make up the Marine Corps embody the ideals of the nation they fight so hard to protect. Then and now, the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation has been in lock step with this mission and remains committed to preserving the legacy of The Few during this milestone moment and beyond.

# Celebrations Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps

# Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps



The Marine Corps was honored to be selected to be the lead services for Super Bowl LIX, where we kicked off our yearlong celebration of 250 years of honor, courage, and commitment in New Orleans.



The Marine Corps was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on November 10, 1775. To honor its many ties and the legacy of support and fidelity between America and her Marines, the Marine Corps supported Navy Marine Corps 250 in Philadelphia, PA in October 2025. The Marine Corps, in concert with the Navy, brought a variety of assets to the city of Philadelphia, including static displays, shipborne displays, and aviation support.



# Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps



**Marine Week Atlanta.** The Marine Corps was proud to visit to Atlanta in August 2025 to celebrate our 250th birthday.

Marine Week Atlanta featured an array of military equipment, aircraft, military bands, and opportunities to interact with your Marines.



**Marine Week Boston.** The Marine Corps was excited to visit to Boston in August 2025 to celebrate our 250th birthday.

Marine Week Atlanta featured an array of military equipment, aircraft, military bands, and opportunities to interact with your Marines.

# Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps



**Marine Week Chicago.** The Marine Corps was excited to visit to Chicago in July 2025 to celebrate our 250th birthday.

Marine Week Chicago featured an array of military equipment, aircraft, military bands, and opportunities to interact with your Marines.



**Marine Week Nashville.** The Marine Corps was excited to visit to Nashville in June 2025 to celebrate our 250th birthday.

Marine Week Nashville featured an array of military equipment, aircraft, military bands, and opportunities to interact with your Marines.



# Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps

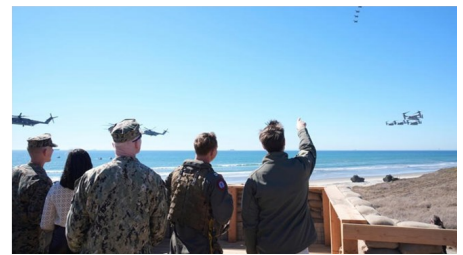


**Fleet Week Los Angeles.** The Marine Corps was excited to participate in Fleet Week Los Angeles in May 2025 to celebrate our 250th birthday.

The Marine Corps participation in Fleet Week Los Angeles, in concert with the U.S. Navy, included static displays of military equipment, aviation displays, and opportunities for the community to interact with your Marines.

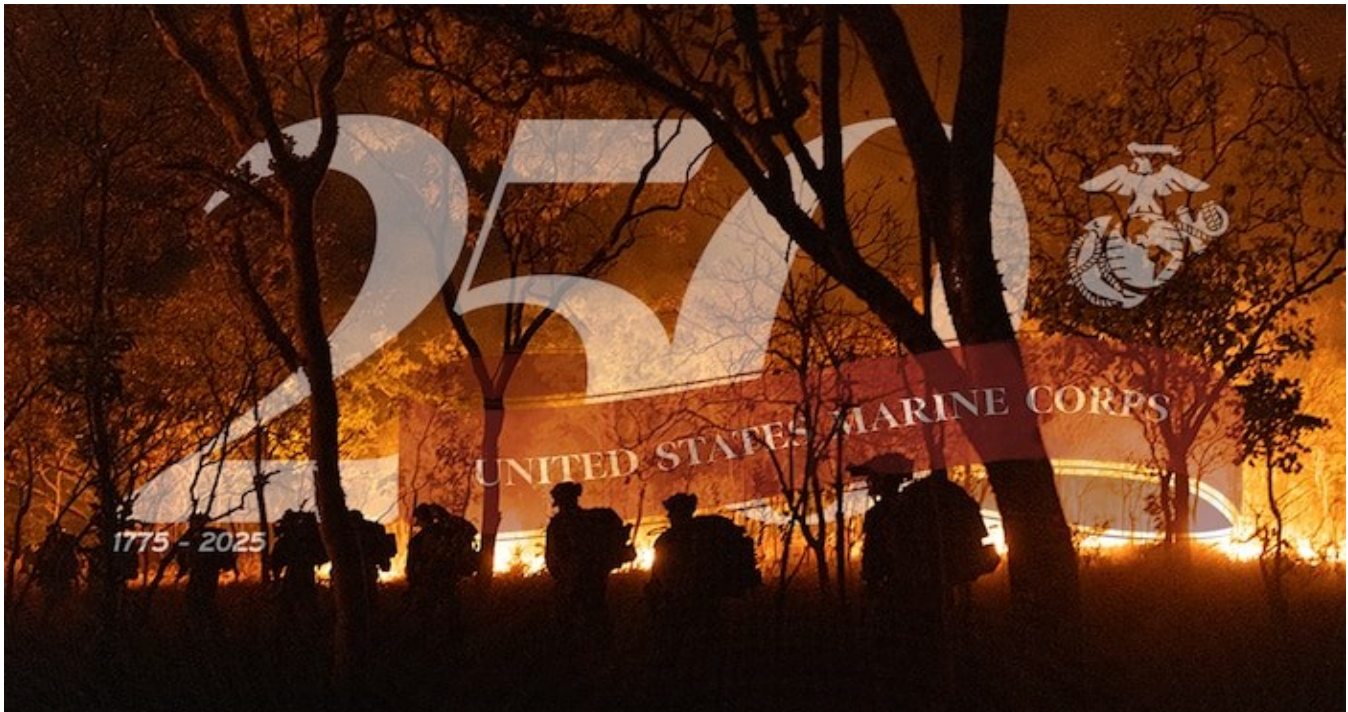


# Live-Fire Demonstrations to Mark the USMC's 250th





# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Celebration Images



## 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Images

# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Celebration Images



## 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Ball Images



# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Balls Images





# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Ball Images





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# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Ball Images





# 250th U.S. Marine Corps Birthday Ball Images







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#### *Retired Services and Pay*

- Address Changes (Note: Annuitants must call DFAS)

- Identification Cards

- Semper Fidelis

- Survivor Benefit Plan

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