1775: Founding of the Marine Corps

A legacy is born

During the American Revolution, many important political discussions took place in the inns and taverns of Philadelphia, including the founding of the Marine Corps. A committee of the Continental Congress met at Tun Tavern to draft a resolution calling for two battalions of Marines able to fight for independence at sea and on shore. The resolution was approved on November 10, 1775, almost 6 months before the Declaration of Independence, officially forming the Continental Marines.

As the first order of business, Samuel Nicholas became Commandant of the newly formed Marines. Tun Tavern’s owner and popular patriot, Robert Mullan, became his first captain and recruiter. They began gathering support and were ready for action by early 1776. Each year, the Marine Corps marks November 10th with a celebration of the brave spirit which compelled these men and thousands since to defend our country as United States Marines.

Marines have fought in every major battle and war since its inception. Historic Marine figures such as Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon, Lieutenant General Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, Lieutenant General Victor H. “Brute” Krulak, and Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, to name a few, are legends to every present day Marine. One lesser known hero, Corporal John F. Mackie became the first Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor, for his heroism at the beginning of the Civil War. Most people are not aware that during the War Between the States, there were both Union and Confederate Marines.

Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon is remembered for raising the first American Flag on foreign soil at Tripoli during the Battle of Derna. Lieutenant General “Chesty” Puller is the most decorated Marine in United States history. He is the only Marine to be awarded 5 Navy Crosses, the Nation’s second highest award. His service to the Marine Corps spanned from the Banana Wars in the 1920’s, to World War II and the Korean War. Lieutenant General Victor “Brute” Krulak served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Krulak was awarded the Navy Cross and the Legion of Merit for heroism in World War II, a second Legion of Merit for the Korean War, and the Navy Distinguished Service Medal for his service in the Vietnam War. Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism at the Battle of Guadalcanal and the Navy Cross (posthumously) for heroism at the Battle of Iwo Jima. Basilone is the only enlisted Marine to receive the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross during World War II. One of our latest Marine Corps heroes is Sergeant Dakota Meyer. Meyer was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism at the Battle of Ganjgal, part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

In his book First to Fight, General Krulak wrote that in 1935 he asked one of the Marine veterans from that time just how the Marine Corps came by its reputation of being one of the world’s greatest fighting forces. The Marine Sergeant’s reply: “Well lieutenant, they started right out telling everybody how great they were. Pretty soon they got to believing it themselves. And they have been busy ever since proving they were right.” History, on the other hand, clearly indicates that the Marines got off to a shaky beginning and quickly made enemies of the navy and
the army as well as the executive branch of government. But subsequent battles and wars earned them the respect of Congress and the American people. In 1957, Krulak was asked to respond in writing why the United States needed a Marine Corps. His response surprised many. Paraphrasing, he explained that technically the Army can fight on the ground and does well. Technically, the Air Force can fight in the air and it does well also. The Marine Corps fights both on the ground and in the air and, in reality, is not any better skilled in these areas than the Army and the Air Force.

So why does the United States need the Marine Corps? Because millions of Americans believe the Marine Corps is needed. Krulak goes on to explain that the American people believe three things about the Marines. First, they believe when trouble comes our Marines are ready to go at once. Second, they believe that the Marines will turn in a dramatically successful and decisive performance, not most of the time, but always. And third, Marines are good for the manhood of our country. And I would add for the womanhood of our country. Americans believe these things, passionately and honestly.

In times past and present, the executive and legislative departments of our government have tried to either do away with the Marine Corps or absorb or merge it with the Army and Air Force, but the American people will not allow it. On this, the 240th birthday of our beloved Corps, we want to say to America: “Thank you for the privilege of serving our country; we will never let you down.”

**SEMPER FIDELIS!**

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