

ONCE A MARINE, ALWAYS A MARINE

Vol. 82 No. 1 • WINTER 2026

SEMPER FI



The Magazine of the Marine Corps League

ACTIVE DUTY MARINE RECEIVES AWARD FROM MCL NATIONAL COMMANDANT

Running
the 50th
Anniversary
Marine Corps
Marathon



**MCL's Youth Physical Fitness
Hero Coach Bob Martini**

**Do Buddy Checks
Before It's Too Late**

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We're moving to a more modern online sign-in experience — to simplify your options and continue to protect your identity and benefits.



Here's what's changing for VA websites and mobile apps:

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- You'll then have two sign-in account options: **Login.gov or ID.me**.

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Learn why we're making these changes — and how to create your Login.gov or ID.me account.



www.va.gov/sign-in-changes



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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- *Leatherneck* – Magazine of the Marines



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— EST 1913 —

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- Symposiums
- Awards presentations
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- Tactical Decision Games
- Battlefield Studies
- Ethical Decision Games
- Podcasts
- Oral Histories
- Graphic Novels
- Audio Articles
- Video
- Collections
- Case Studies
- References



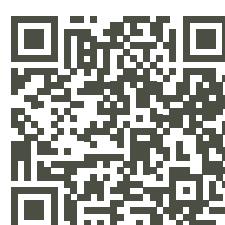
RESOURCES

We provided \$1.7 million in support to tens of thousands of Marines

- Unit libraries of books from the Commandant's Professional Reading List
- Awards at schools and training detachments throughout the Corps
- Chesty Puller award for honor grad at each Depot
- Essay contests



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FREE TO ACTIVE DUTY MARINES
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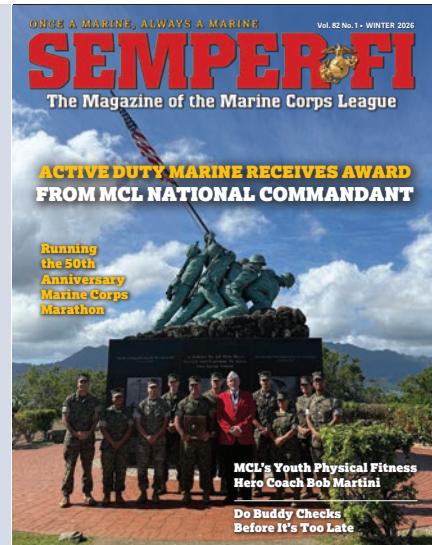
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ON THE COVER:

National Commandant TJ Morgan presented an Enlisted Award to a Marine in Hawaii. The command participated in the event and the Marine was able to be recognized in front of their peers.



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Please visit the Marine Corps League Library's Convention tab (www.mcleaguelibrary.org/convention/) to review the approved changes to the League's Bylaws and Administrative Procedures. The Bylaws and Admin Procedures documents are being revised and will be posted in the Member Library tab (www.mcleaguelibrary.org/member-library/). To submit a change to the Bylaws or Admin Procedures, please review AP Section 10020.

Founded in 1923 by Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune, the Marine Corps League is the only federally chartered Marine Corps-related veterans organization in the United States.



NATIONAL COMMANDANT'S LETTER

TJ MORGAN

Leading the Way: Modern Leadership in the Marine Corps League



MARINES: Leadership has always been the bedrock of the United States Marine Corps — and it remains just as vital in the Marine Corps League today. As a nonprofit, volunteer, veteran service organization, the League thrives on members who step up to lead with purpose, integrity, and vision. But leadership in this environment looks a bit different from what we practiced in uniform. It's less about rank, and more about relationships, inspiration, and commitment to the mission of serving Marines and their families.

Today's leaders in the MCL must balance tradition with adaptation. The principles we learned in the Corps (know yourself and seek self-improvement, set the example, ensure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished) still apply. But in a volunteer setting, influence often replaces authority. Leaders must motivate through respect, communication, and shared goals rather than orders and directives.

Effective League leaders listen as much as they speak. They empower members, recognize individual strengths, and build inclusive teams that reflect the diversity of the modern Marine community. They are transparent about decisions, accountable for outcomes, and willing to delegate; because leadership isn't about doing everything yourself, but about helping others grow.

Best practices include mentoring new members, embracing technology to improve communication, and maintaining strong partnerships with local veteran organizations and communities. Leaders should also remember that passion drives participation; when members feel valued and part of a meaningful mission, they stay engaged.

In short, the Marine Corps League needs leaders who carry the torch of the Corps' values, Honor, Courage, Commitment, and apply them with humility, empathy, and initiative. Leadership isn't just about holding a title; it's about making a difference. Marines never stop leading, they simply find new fields of battle to serve. Is it your time to lead? Take the step; you won't regret it. **Semper Fi!**



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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/COO**BOB BORKA****The People's Marathon
Celebrates 50 Years**

MARINES: Twenty-six miles. That is the distance of the 50th Marine Corps Marathon during the 250th Anniversary of the United States Marine Corps. It was a brisk Sunday morning as 40,000 runners lined up en masse behind the starting line. As the sound of the cannon started the race, I watched droves of people go by as I stood on an embankment. It took almost an hour for all runners to start; including Marine Corps League Members David Porter, Jr. and Mike Hinds. Both finished the marathon and have my deepest respect for such a feat. No, of course, I did not run it—you didn't really ask that, right?

Standing at the finish line with Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric Smith, was Colonel Nicole Mann, NASA astronaut and 2023 recipient of the Marine Corps League's Iron Mike Award. Did you know the Marine Corps Marathon is the largest marathon in the world without a cash prize. It's called "The People's Marathon."

As we sprint into 2026, please consider participating in America250 activities. Communities all across the United States will have a variety of events and celebrations at some point during the year. We hope to see the Marine Corps League out in the community, providing a place for Marines (active, reserve, retired, and veteran) to see us and learn more about us and our mission. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF EVENTS**ROB BROOKS, USMC (RET).****Celebrating Our History**

MARINES: Another year down, and though every year brings a new change, a few more grey hairs, a new version of the iPhone, or just more advanced gadgets, one thing will always remain the same, Marines. We might come from different generations, but we are all cut from the same cloth, sharpened by the same steel, and forged in the same fire. Over the past 250 years, the Corps has gone through change after change in uniforms, warfighting doctrine, MRE options, and tools of war as the battle-fields shift and commands adapt to the latest technology. However, a Marine's fighting spirit and determination to overcome has continued to prove throughout time that there is "no better friend, no worse enemy." In true Marine Corps fashion, Devil Dogs of all ages gathered to celebrate the birth of our Corps, telling tales of glory, passing on our history to our youngest Marines, and raising a toast to another 250 years.

Continued on next page**Marine Corps League National Board Of Trustees****National Commandant**

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Continued from previous page

As we bring in this new year, we have the opportunity to celebrate the country we love and call home as we Americans hit a new milestone. This Independence Day marks 250 years of being a country of free men and women; a country of citizens who believed that, through their creator, no matter their differences, everyone is entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Along with local conferences and conventions leading up to this momentous celebration, please send any information on events supporting "America 250" to me to post on our mobile app for all to see. After all, Marines know how to throw a celebration!

Midwinter Conference is right around the corner, and we're looking forward to seeing many of you there. The Sheraton Inn Pentagon City is under new ownership is preparing renovation plans that will update the look and feel of guest rooms and meeting spaces. This year, we have a trip planned to visit the National Museum of the Marine Corps and are looking forward to a great tour as they have recently opened a new section, Afghanistan and Iraq, 2001-Present. I hope to see you all there, and I hope to receive more events to share with our mobile app! **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF VETERAN SERVICES

PHILIP DU

Same Team, New Mission

MARINES: As a proud US Army Soldier, I did not have the privilege to wear the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. However, I'm humbled to now have that privilege as I wear them serving as your National Director of Veteran Services. Throughout my career, I've helped many Marines and their families obtain the benefits they've earned, and I've trained many Veteran Service Officers that proudly served in the Marine Corps. I'm honored to say that they happened to be the best VSOs I have ever worked with.

The National Veterans Service Program is unique, as it embraces two of the MCL's core missions, strengthen the fraternity of Marines and their families and foster the ideals of patriotic volunteerism. The impact of this program transcends generational lines in a veteran's family, from the veteran's parents to the children. In FY2025, VA estimates the total amount of earned benefits secured by the MCL is more than \$150 million. Behind this number, every dollar represents the life changed by our VA-accredited VSOs, and there is no doubt that the VSOs are the backbone of our organization and living proof that Marines help Marines.

As we move forward, we'll continue recruiting and retaining qualified individuals serving as our national VSOs, representing our veterans before the VA. We will also invest in resources to ensure our VSOs are receiving high-quality training from



nationally respected partners. Training is my priority for our VSOs, as our veterans deserve nothing less than trained professionals to help them. To hold a high service standard, our VSOs get constant training on a weekly basis while receiving national update briefs to stay on top of the most recent VA updates on policies and regulations.

Despite the achievements, there is more that needs to be done. Having a VSO program in each department will immensely strengthen and grow our membership, as VSOs provide tangible, life-changing benefits in our veterans' communities. VSOs are subject matter experts that address issues our veterans care about; VA healthcare, benefits, burial planning, local/federal resources, etc. Many state legislatures even have funding to support VSO programs for veteran organizations like the MCL. For example, the Department of Ohio VSO program helps its members secure millions of benefits

with funding from the state.

To conclude, I challenge each department to establish a VSO program and endorse at least one individual to serve as a national VSO. I'm confident that by having a strong and vibrant VSO program, we can ensure every veteran who served our country will receive the benefits and recognition they and their families deserve. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

JOHN TAYLOR

How Gossip Kills Rapport

MARINES: Gossip may seem harmless at first—a quick chat, a shared rumor, or a casual comment about a member—but it is one of the most destructive forces within any organization. When gossip spreads, it erodes trust, weakens relationships, and destroys the foundation of teamwork and respect that successful groups rely on.

Rapport is built on honesty, integrity, and open communication. These qualities allow people to feel valued and respected. However, gossip replaces truth with speculation and honesty with deceit. Once people begin to share or believe unverified information, it creates an atmosphere of suspicion. People start to question one another's motives, and cooperation quickly fades. In such an environment, individuals become more guarded, communication breaks down, and collaboration suffers.

The effects of gossip extend beyond personal relationships—it undermines the entire organizational culture. When people see gossip tolerated, they may assume it is acceptable behavior. Over time,



morale drops, productivity slows, and turnover increases. Team members who are targets of gossip often feel isolated, anxious, and disengaged. Even those who are not directly involved lose confidence in leadership for allowing a toxic environment to develop.

Leaders and members alike have a responsibility to stop gossip before it spreads. The most effective approach is promoting a culture of respect and accountability. Encouraging direct communication—where concerns are discussed openly and professionally—prevents rumors from taking root. When people feel comfortable addressing issues face-to-face, misunderstandings are resolved quickly, and trust is preserved.

Gossip thrives in silence and secrecy, but rapport flourishes in environments where honesty and integrity are practiced daily. Organizations that focus on transparency and empathy create stronger bonds among their members. Instead of tearing others down, members should be encouraged to lift one another up, celebrate achievements, and offer constructive feedback.

In the end, gossip kills rapport because it poisons the very heart of teamwork—trust. Without trust, no organization can succeed. Building a culture that rejects gossip and values respect ensures that every member feels safe, supported, and motivated to work together toward shared goals. *Semper Fi!*


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NATIONAL PRESIDENT, MCL AUXILIARY

DOTTY SANNING

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Happy New Year and Welcome to 2026!

MARINES: As we begin another year, I'm filled with gratitude for the members of the MCL and for all who continue to carry our proud traditions forward.

In 2025, I had the privilege of speaking at an MCL division conference—an event hosted by a detachment that, at the time, did not have an auxiliary. Their hope, and mine, was to encourage their female family members to form one. Although only a few eligible ladies were able to attend that day, the spirit of camaraderie was strong. It reminded me how vital it is for Marines to invite the wives, widows, mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers, granddaughters, stepmothers, stepdaughters, daughters-in-law, aunts, nieces, mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law that are in their families to take part in the League's mission through the Auxiliary.

A Snapshot of Our Detachments and Auxiliaries

To the right is a quick look at the current numbers of MCL detachments and auxiliary units.

Working Together for Growth

As these numbers show, both the League and the Auxiliary face challenges in maintaining membership and supporting local units. Over the past year, the Auxiliary lost 35 units, while the League saw 19 detachments close. But these statistics are more than just figures—they are a call to action. Every auxiliary unit formed or reactivated strengthens the League and reinforces our shared mission.

When Marines and auxiliary members work together, the results are powerful: stronger communities, expanded veteran support, and a deeper

Division	Detachments	Auxiliary Units	% with Auxiliaries
Central	191	22	11.52%
Mideast	116	3	2.59%
Midwest	72	11	15.20%
New England	73	1	1.37%
Northeast	156	16	10.26%
Northwest	43	6	13.96%
Rocky Mountain	38	7	18.42%
Southeast	166	15	9.04%
Southern	67	4	5.97%
Southwest	88	1	1.14%
Totals	1,010	86	8.52%

sense of family that spans generations.

Looking Ahead

Let's make 2026 a year of partnership, progress, and pride. I will make time to speak with you at the Mid-Winter Staff Conference to discuss how the Auxiliary can partner with your detachments, departments, and divisions. Please remember to invite your family members to learn about the Auxiliary. Encourage them to get involved. Together, we can ensure the MCL and its Auxiliary continue to thrive—serving Marines, veterans, and their families with the same honor, courage, and commitment that define our Corps. *Semper Fi!*

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CHIEF DEVIL DOG

JOE DEANGELO, 62ND CHIEF DEVIL DOG



1.) Skydiving from 14,000 feet in Hawaii.

Honoring the Legacy of the 61st Chief Devil Dog, PDD Jeff Jones



MARINES: It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the passing of the 61st Chief Devil Dog PDD Jeff Jones. His sudden loss leaves an emptiness across the Military Order of the Devil Dogs that words can hardly fill. Chief Jones served with dedication, humor, and an unwavering commitment to the traditions and brotherhood of our order. He was a leader who inspired loyalty, a friend who led with compassion, and a Marine whose example reflected the best of who we are.

Chief Jones believed that every dog had a



purpose and a duty, to keep the spirit of the Order alive through service, fellowship, and fun. His presence at every growl, every pound, and every event brought a unique spark that lifted the entire kennel. As we remember his life, we honor the many ways he strengthened the bonds among us and advanced the order he loved.

But as Chief Jones himself would have wanted, we must continue to move forward. The spirit of the Military Order of the Devil Dogs is built on resilience and loyalty. While we mourn, we also recommit ourselves to his vision: to serve our



This was the last year, in Norfolk, at Midwinter Conference.



Above:
Honorable
Senior, Junior,
and Smart
Dog after we
took office.



During the
banquet in 2022.



During Midwinter Conference 2022.

order, to support our fellow Dogs, and to ensure that the traditions of this great order endure for generations to come.

As I humbly assume the role of the 62nd Chief Devil Dog, I do so with pride, gratitude, and deep respect for those who came before me, especially Chief Jones. His leadership set a standard I will strive to uphold. I promise to remain accessible to every member of the Order. Whether you're an old dog or a new pup, know that my kennel staff and I are always here for you. We will honor our fallen chief not just with words, but through action, unity, and continued dedication to our mission.

Rest easy, Chief Jones. The Order will carry your torch forward.
Semper Fi!

NATIONAL SR. VICE COMMANDANT**RUSS MILLER****Capitalize on Birthday Momentum**

MARINES: It was so incredible to see all the wonderful events that were held across the nation celebrating the 250th birthday of our illustrious Corps as we all flooded social media platforms with the photos and reports of our various birthday balls and cake cutting ceremonies. There will probably be a lot fewer Marines across the nation with the tired excuse of, "I've never heard of the Marine Corps League," after all the exposure we had this past November. I encourage us all to capitalize on the new connections that were made over the last year in our planning and implementation of our Marine Corps Birthday events and reach out to offer assistance with celebrations for the nation's 250th this year across all of our communities. Many of your state/county/local government offices will be looking for color guards and honor guards to perform at the many America250 events. Start inspecting those MCL uniforms and make sure we're in conformity with enclosure 3 of the NAP, and review the MCL Color Guard, and Honor Guard, Policy and Procedures manuals and then practice, practice, practice, practice.

Our 2026 Mid-winter Conference is just a few short days away and, hopefully, many of you have already made plans to attend. There's always a lot of information shared at the conference that keeps us informed of not only what was accomplished in the first half of the fiscal year, but to remind us of what lies ahead for the remainder as



we march toward the 2026 National Convention in Indianapolis.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank you all for your continued efforts to support the Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots program. The program continues to expand year-over-year as we are able to bring smiles to the faces of more and more children each holiday season. Last Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, we were afforded the opportunity to partner with Lt. Gen. James Lester, USMC (Ret.), the president & CEO of the Toys for Tots Foundation in participating with NORAD Tracks Santa. Hopefully, the coverage by CBS News and 60 Minutes highlighting our work together has brought positive attention to all our detachments and departments across the nation. If there isn't a Toys for Tots chapter in your community, now is probably the time to start discussions among your membership/detachment leadership and reach out to the Toys for Tots Foundation headquarters about starting one.

Remember to lift one another up, help those who are less fortunate than yourself, and keep striving to BE the type of MCL member you wish there were twenty more of in your detachment. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL JR. VICE COMMANDANT**DAVID PORTER****Are You Aware of Your Impact?**

MARINES: Just as in the Marine Corps, everyone plays an essential role in the League. It's never too late to add value, and everyone has the choice to make a difference, large or small. This November opened a new chapter in understanding the role we serve. The 250th birthday celebrations emphasized the importance of our Marine traditions. Standing on those yellow footprints to earn the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, whether it was at Parris Island, San Diego, or Quantico, has bonded us for life. Until we report to our final duty station, we all share the responsibility to serve as part of this family. That responsibility is never to forget the traditions our fellow brothers and sisters have practiced before us, ensuring they endure into the future, as well. When brother, friend, and fellow Marine Jeffery "JD" Jones answered his final call, it became our duty to remember the impact he had. The 61st Chief Devil Dog's passing created a void we cannot replace. Jeff's impact on the League created a legacy that will live forever. We all have mentors, brothers, and friends like Jeff that we loved. This is why we cannot let the League fail. We must carry the torch of tradition and those legacies across the bridge to the next generation.

The Birthday Message reminded me of our character. Medal of Honor Recipient Sgt. Dakota Myers said, in part, that succeeding



in war was down to "the level of belief of our people of what they believe in and the standards they hold themselves to." How we hold ourselves as Marines is part of the tradition that has endured for 250 years and provides hope for another 250 years.

Leadership comes with responsibilities. I challenge every detachment commandant or a member of their staff to serve as a mentor to a new member. Second, I believe that if each current member brings in one new member, we could double our membership, which is a critical need right now. Let's not set the bar too high, but maybe aim for at least one-out-of-five members to bring in someone new. As the Junior Vice Commandant, I will lead by example and propose five names I will recruit by the National Convention in August.

It's about listening and observing. Everyone has a story, and all stories deserve to be heard. The more you pay attention, the more you'll find. We need to be the difference in our communities, carrying it forward to educate and inspire others. **Semper Fi!**

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NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE

BRUCE RAKFELDT

Bridging the Gap

MARINES: I have thought about this for quite some time and feel that this is the best forum to discuss it with you.

At the conclusion of each Marine Corps League National Convention, all approved national bylaws and national administrative procedures that lack a specified effective date automatically take effect upon the close of that convention. This immediate implementation is designed to ensure consistency and alignment across all levels of the League. However, a recurring challenge arises when departments delay updating their own bylaws and administrative procedures until their next annual department convention, often months later. This lag can result in department bylaws and procedures remaining out of sync with National's standards for up to ten months.

Such delays not only hinder operational consistency but also risk non-compliance with the very framework that governs the League nationally. Departments operating under outdated bylaws may inadvertently contradict or overlook newly adopted National policies, creating confusion and administrative inefficiencies.

To address this issue, I recommend a proactive and structured approach: departments should commit to reviewing and updating their bylaws and administrative procedures twice annually. The first review should occur immediately following the department's own convention to incorporate any internal changes. The second should follow the publication of the updated "National Bylaws and Administrative Procedures", ensuring that all national-level amendments are promptly



reflected at the department level. This is perfectly acceptable, as no vote of approval is needed by the department membership—these amendments were already approved by the membership at the National Convention.

This biannual review cycle offers several benefits. It promotes uniformity across the League, reinforces accountability, and ensures that all departments remain current with National's directives. Moreover, it empowers department leadership to act swiftly and confidently, knowing their bylaws and administrative procedures are aligned with the latest standards.

By institutionalizing this practice, the MCL strengthens its organizational cohesion and upholds the integrity of its governing processes. Departments that embrace timely updates not only demonstrate their commitment to the League's mission but also set a standard of excellence for others to follow.

Take care of yourselves and each other, and let's always keep our overseas Marines, as well as all of our military brothers and sisters in our thoughts and prayers. See you at Mid-Winter Conference! **Semper Fi!**

JUNIOR PAST NATIONAL COMMANDANT

WARREN "GRIFF" GRIFFIN

Let's Keep Moving Forward

MARINES: We all enjoyed the many celebrations of our 250th birthday of our beloved Corps across this great nation. The Marine Corps and the Marine Corps League did an outstanding job letting the American people know how important our Corps has been with the past growth of our country and the future growth and development our country has yet to achieve. As Marines, we were able to overcome some of the roadblocks in our path, most notably the shutdown of our government. In some cases, functions were beclouded without direct support from the Marine Corps and the reserve units. Did this bring functions to a halt? Absolutely not. We adapt and overcome. One local ceremony in my area is the famous Boston Marine Corps Luncheon. I believe it's the biggest luncheon, if not the biggest function, traditionally celebrating the birthday and hosting 2100 Marines. The guest speaker was to be Assistant Commandant and Assistant Chairman of the Vice Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Christopher Mahoney. Due to the shutdown, General Mahoney was precluded from attending the ceremony. This did not preclude him from taking leave and flying to Boston on his own to join us. As a region, we're very proud of what we have and what we can accomplish.

We now move into the holiday season and begin to show how we are an organization that has the gift of giving within us. Toys for Tots campaigns with our detachments are in full swing, and this is so important. As a former Boston public school teacher, I know how important this



program is for urban kids. Sometimes we forget there really are citizens in our country that are not as fortunate as ourselves. We all share in the good feeling we get when we help others. We're never at a loss for altruistic activities.

Please keep working on expanding the Youth Physical Fitness Program within your communities. Our efforts provide a lasting effect on the youth of our country. Youth interest in sedentary activities

has grown in leaps and bounds. As a result, basic physical fitness has decreased as indicated by the number of potential recruits who cannot pass the basic physical fitness requirements for military service. Small steps form pathways to the future.

We'll always have another mission in front of us. In 2026, the country will be celebrating its 250th year. We experienced celebrators will lead the way in our nation's founding jubilee. We are, and will be, the envy of the world; as Marines, we've played a great roll in all of America's achievements.

As an MCL member, I'm proud of what we've accomplished and know that we are not done. Stay true to your values. **Semper Fi!**

YOUNG MARINES OF THE MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

COL BILL DAVIS, USMC (RET) CEO/NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOUNG MARINES

Young Marines Midyear Update

MARINES: I am writing this just after our Young Marines 60th Birthday and the 250th Birthday of the Marine Corps. We also celebrated the 100th anniversary of the MCL in 2023. The Marine Corps values, kept alive by Marine veterans, are the heart and soul of our respective organizations. The longevity of our programs is a testament to our desire to serve others long after we hang up our uniform.

It was MCL members from Waterbury, Connecticut who stepped up in 1959 to support local youth by providing mentorship and leadership lessons to help these young men become good citizens. Determined to see this movement grow, the Young Marines of the Marine Corps League was officially chartered in 1965, becoming a formal organization within the MCL. In 1980, we moved to a separate corporation. The rest is history, but we are not done. We are driven by these same values to keep this program strong and progressing. Our nation needs programs like the Young Marines now more than ever to help our country's youth become good citizens. The concepts of civic duty and responsibility may be slipping across America, but not on our watch, and not in the Young Marines.

The Young Marines program is vital to America's future, with all

current demographic data points supporting this idea. We may not be the whole solution, but we are definitely part of the answer for the positive health of our nation. Patriotism is in decline. The cost of the all-volunteer force continues to rise while maintaining the quality struggles. Young Marines is not a bona fide recruiting program. Still, young men and women flock to our ranks with many curious about service and hungry for a challenge. Close to 30% of our members report joining the uniformed services. They are often honor graduates. Our Young Marines do not need a prep school for basic training or time to adjust to wearing boots! However, most Young Marines head to careers as first responders, teachers, and the trades. No matter what path, all are productive citizens.

New unit growth is twice the pace of the years before COVID. Last year we had 12 new units and half of them are MCL-sponsored. The funding fight continues here in DC with Congress and the executive branch, please continue to help us by reaching out to your congressional representatives; and a big "thank you" for all you do to help grow our program and keep it supported! **Semper Fi**

YOUNG MARINES LIAISON

JOHNNY BAKER

Young Marines of the Marine Corps League

MARINES: As Marines, we not only care deeply about the future of our great nation, but we also have an obligation to act. Our future is directly tied to the development of our youth. There are many fine youth development organizations across the country. However, we take special pride in what I consider the best youth development program, the Young Marines of the Marine Corps League. Since 1959, the YM program, by living their core values of leadership, discipline, and teamwork, has instilled in our youth a sense of duty and patriotism. The YM provide hundreds of thousands of hours of community service each year, emphasize physical fitness, and living a healthy drug-free lifestyle. The YM program produces well informed, productive citizens. Our YMs are not only good for America; they are America's future leaders.

What makes the YM program work are the hundreds of volunteers, many of them MCL members. In my past articles, I stressed the importance of our members volunteering to be part of the YM program. I've had long discussions with the Chairman of the YM board of directors as well as the leadership of the National YM Headquarters. National Commandant TJ Morgan also fully supports our partnership with the YM. He spreads the word every chance he gets as he travels throughout the country. Currently, we have just a little over 200 MCL detachments that run or are actively involved with a YM unit. We can do better. The partnership between our organizations is paramount in the success of



the YM and our future.

The YM sincerely request more involvement of our MCL detachments. If there is not a YM unit in your area, PLEASE consider starting one. If your detachment doesn't have the manpower to start one, consider contacting organizations in your area that could start a unit. The challenge is to get involved and get the word out to local organizations, schools, Junior ROTC programs, and any other civic organization that is interested in helping our nation's youth. It should be an easy sale, but it is sincerely up to each detachment to take the initiative, get the word out, and push to get more YM units started.

As you take the initiative, the Young Marines National Headquarters' outstanding staff are standing by to assist in creating new YM units, expand existing YM units, and answer your questions on every facet of the YM program. Volunteering with the Young Marines program is an opportunity to turn your care for America's future into action.

The Young Marines Headquarters contact number is **800-717-0060. Semper Fi!**

Thank You For Your Service

By Michael Haas

We've heard those words time and time again,
so often you may have become immune.
There are others to whom we should commend,
their service and pain became bestrewn.

It's not only the veteran that gave to all,
but those that stayed behind and cared.
And to them a celebration too should fall,
they kept our home lights burning and pared.

For every veteran we never detract,
your duty to service has kept us free.
It's parents, spouses, and children who felt the impact,
from days, weeks, and hours of unknowing and need.

Remember always their personal plight,
while you were away and out of sight.
For each of them are veterans too,
albeit different they suffered through.

The next time you hear those thoughtful words,
thank you for your service.
Think of your family and those keeping the burgs,
they stood in the shadows and also deserve this.

Whether Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard or Marine,
your duty was shared on the home front.
Take a moment to reflect on those unseen,
being ever thankful for their share of the brunt.

As I repeat these thoughtful words,
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!
Know they are shared with all that heard,
your call to arms and purpose.

USMC SALUTE

Men's Genuine Sapphire Ring

Two Genuine Black Sapphires

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A Steel and Sapphire Salute to an Always Faithful Marine

To a Marine, wearing the USMC name and emblem is an honor like no other. No matter where they're going or what they're doing, they vow to wear it proudly. With the commitment and loyalty of the United States Marine Corps as our inspiration, we created a men's ring design that captures the signature Semper Fi Spirit that only Marines understand. This striking ring is individually hand-crafted in durable solid stainless steel with ion plating in jet black and 24K gold. The center of the two-tone band features "USMC" finely etched alongside the Eagle, Globe and Anchor emblem, both with black ion plating inside the grooves. Etched inside is the Marine's motto, "Semper Fi," filled with gold enamel, and to complete the distinctive look, the band is hand-set with 2 genuine black sapphires, one on each side. It's a proud expression of the USMC's core values of Honor, Courage and Commitment.

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DIVISION REPORTS

“Make Yourselves at Home!”



Dave Englert
NVC, Central Division



If necessary, commandants, put the meeting in recess and take action. Members will appreciate it and be more willing to jump in. Leadership needs to be positive in expressing concerns and plans of action.

Recognize Abilities and Desires The new member is an accountant. Do you make him the new paymaster only to find out that he hates his job and really wants to become a web-designer or that his real talent lies in fundraising? Spend some time getting to know your membership. Determine their skills and what do they really want to do. Offer them the job they really want. Don't push. Maybe they're not ready yet, but they will be ready in a few months.

Stop the Division Every Marine has earned that title of "Marine" regardless of MOS, regardless of dates served, regardless of location served. Why invite someone to your detachment just to degrade them. Why would you expect anyone to stay with a group that allows this to happen? Take action. Read the story of Corp. Christopher G. Merkle during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Make a Meeting More Than a Meeting Yes, there is business to complete, but offer some social time before and after the meeting. Have a pizza social or pot luck and spend some real time getting to know your Marine family. Do your members feel at home in your detachment? Are they comfortable talking about home life, family, their experiences in the Corps? If not, it's time to take action. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclcentdiv.org

Now Hear This – Did you actually? Welcome 2026



Frank Mathers
NVC, Mideast Division



MARINES: I hope everyone enjoyed their holidays.

A New Year brings new possibilities and a renewed commitment to the Good of the League.

I hope one resolution in the new year is to do a better job communicating with members electronically. It is of the utmost importance to ensure timely and accurate communications to members at all levels of the organization. Are you checking for messages from the League regularly?

Please forward emails to proper recipients.

For example, if an email is sent from Division to Departments to be distributed to the Detachments, I should receive the information at my Detachment, either as an email or at the monthly Detachment meeting.

Some emails sent are time sensitive and may require a reply or even a follow-up document/report.

Do not miss important postings/notifications due to not checking your Marine Corps League (MCL) related emails on a regular basis.

Are your Department and Detachments Report of Officer Installation up to date? Have you verified it?

Be sure your elected and appointed officers' contact information is shared with your members.

Are you receiving all your emails? Is your inbox full? Are your emails going to spam?

Are you using your everyday email address? Doing so may contribute to you missing emails from MCL. You may want to consider having a separate email account for MCL emails, Gmail makes this process easy. <https://support.google.com/mail/answer/56256?hl=en>

You may want to consider setting up a shortcut on your cell phone, laptop, notebook, and/or desktop, for MCL specific emails received and transmitted. I strongly recommend that all group emails be sent as bcc: (Blind Carbon Copy). This helps protect members' email addresses from spammers.

What are you and your members missing that may have impacted on the operations of MCL at all levels?

Empower your members with the most up to date information. **Semper Fi!**

Reminder: The 2026 Mideast Division Conference will be hosted by the Department of Delaware on 17-18 April 2026 in Rehoboth Beach Delaware at the Atlantic Sands Hotel / Conference Center. Please see the Mideast website for further information.

Division Website: mclmideast.com

The Meaning of a Charter



Jim Maevers

NVC, Midwest Division



Throughout American history, the word *charter* has carried tremendous weight. The early American colonies were founded under royal charters; formal documents issued by the British Crown granting authority to establish settlements, organize governance, and pursue defined purposes in the New World. These charters outlined rights and responsibilities, set boundaries, and provided the legal foundation for communities struggling to survive and eventually thrive. They represented far more than administrative documentation; they embodied the seeds of self-governance, civic responsibility, and unity that would ultimately shape the birth of our nation.

In a parallel way, the MCL continues this legacy of authorized purpose through the charters issued to its detachments. When a detachment receives its charter, it becomes an officially recognized body of Marines, FMF corpsmen, and chaplains joined by a common mission: to preserve the traditions and spirit of the Marine Corps, to support Marines and their families, and to contribute to the welfare of their communities.

Just as colonial charters empowered groups of settlers to build organized societies grounded in shared values, an MCL charter empowers local members to create a unit that reflects the Marine ethos of honor, courage, and commitment. These charters establish legitimacy, define expectations, and serve as a constant reminder that membership carries both privilege and responsibility.

Colonial charters helped shape the democratic framework of the United States. Likewise, MCL charters ensure our organization remains strong, accountable, and faithful to its founding principles. Both stand as symbols of unity, purpose, and dedication; threads that connect our nation's early beginnings with the ongoing service of Marines across the country. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: midwestdivisionmarinecorpsleague.org

A Renewed Sense of Pride

MARINES: There has been, and will continue to be plenty of discussion about how to get new Marines to join our ranks.



Pat Maguire

NVC, New England Division



During this past November's celebration of our Corps' 250th birthday, I had the opportunity to attend more Marine Corps Balls than ever before, hosted by both departments and detachments. Each event was a reminder of the strength, camaraderie, and pride that define who we are as Marines. At every ball, I met members from all walks of life, some who had just joined in recent months, and others who had been active longer than I've been alive. Those conversations renewed my pride in the League and deepened my appreciation for the Marines who continue to carry our traditions forward.

One young Marine veteran shared how he noticed his detachment's social media presence needed improvement. He took it upon himself to redesign the page, making it more engaging and accessible. Today, it's not only a source of information but also a window into the detachment's mission, sparking the interest of Marines who might not have otherwise known about the League.

Then there was the 93-year-old Marine who still serves as his detachment's judge advocate and chairs several committees. Staying involved, he told me, keeps him sharp and gives him purpose. And I can't forget the 90-year-old Marine who proudly still fits in his dress blues; dancing the night away at the Ball before heading home early because, as he said, "I've got a Toys for Tots pickup in the morning." He and his battle buddy, another Marine in his 90s, coordinate Toys for Tots in neighboring areas, continuing to serve their communities with dedication and heart.

Yes, our membership numbers may not be where we'd like them, but stories like these remind us our members are out there making a difference every single day. They live the mission. They inspire others through their actions. And they prove that the MCL remains strong; not just in numbers, but in spirit, commitment, and the unbreakable bond we share as Marines.

Had I not attended these balls, I might never have discovered who these Marines are or the incredible things they are doing on behalf of the MCL. Each conversation, handshake, and shared laugh reminded me that the strength of our organization doesn't come from statistics, it comes from the heart of every Marine who continues to serve, lead, and live with purpose. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclnedivision.com

DIVISION REPORTS

The Power of Belonging: Strengthening the League from Within



Robert Ziltz

NVC, Northeast
Division

MARINES: In my last discussion, I explored the importance of purposeful engagement; building membership, developing leaders, and sustaining continuity through mentorship. Today, I want to look even deeper at the force that ties all of these together: belonging.

Why does belonging matter so much? Because people do not stay committed to organizations; they stay committed to communities. A detachment that feels like a community will grow and endure, while one that feels like a meeting will wither. The difference lies in how well we cultivate belonging.

Belonging begins with inclusion. Every Marine who walks through the door should feel that they are not just invited but wanted. Inclusion is more than a greeting; it is finding ways for every member to contribute in a meaningful way. Some Marines may lead projects. Others may prefer to support in smaller but equally important ways. When everyone has a place, everyone has a stake.

Second, belonging is strengthened through our traditions. Ceremonies, recognitions, and shared customs remind us of our common bond and honor the values that unite us. These are not empty rituals—they are touchstones of identity. They remind Marines, both old and new, see that they are part of something larger than themselves.

Third, belonging requires relationships. No manual or checklist can substitute for the personal connections that make Marines feel part of a family. Fellowship outside of meetings, social gatherings, volunteer efforts, even just sharing a meal, cements trust and builds the friendships that sustain our work. When members know they are cared for, they are more likely to stay, to serve, and to lead.

Finally, belonging fuels resilience. Challenges will always come, whether declining membership, competing commitments, or generational shifts. What carries us through is the sense that we are in this together. Marines who feel they belong are Marines who will endure the tough times, who will answer the call, and who will pass the torch to the next generation.

The Marine Corps League is not simply an organization. It is a community, a tradition, and a family. If we focus on strengthening belonging within our detachments, we will not only stop decline, we will unlock growth. Membership will rise. Leaders will emerge. Mentorship will flourish. And the League will stand strong for decades to come. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: nedmcl.org

Rituals and Regulations

Skip Nakashima
NVC, Northwest
Division

MARINES: The MCL was established in 1923 by Gen. John A. LeJeune and chartered by Congress in 1937. Over many decades of existence, although times and challenges have changed, the MCL has continued to thrive and advance its mission.

All organizations have their own policies and procedures for conducting activities and business. As the organization continues to grow, these rules change to ensure continuity and efficiency, keeping the overall mission in mind.

Adhering to the regulations provides continuity throughout the entire organization, nationwide, and permits members to visit other detachments and understand meeting protocols, including the proper uniform of the day. These have evolved to our present rituals for meetings.

Just as any other successful entity, our organization established our by-laws and administrative procedures and constantly improves and adapts them to current situations. This is done in an orderly manner through the use of the by-laws committee and a majority vote at the National Convention. These changes are then passed down through the chain of command to the detachments so everyone is aware of, and adapts to these changes.

It behooves all members to familiarize themselves with their own detachment's by-laws and it's imperative that all members of the board of trustees know these as they relate to uniforms and the orderly progression of detachment business in order to avoid conflicts.

The MCL fore and aft cover is the only required official uniform and only the gold enlisted EGA is authorized for wear on the cover. MCL pins, USMC division pins, and mini ribbons, etc., are not authorized. There are several additional optional uniforms available. Whenever one of these are selected, be sure to wear it properly and in its entirety. Check enclosures 3 and 4 of the National Administrative Procedures for the regulations pertaining to all approved uniforms for men, women, and associate members.

There is also a good training program on uniform regulations in the member library on MCL's national website.

Please keep in mind whenever you are in public or your photo appears in the media, you are not only representing your unit, you're representing the MCL and presenting an image of our organization to the public. Many common uniform errors are due to a misunderstanding of the regulations. Photos submitted for publication in Semper Fi that contain uniform errors will not be accepted. Members will then be disappointed and don't understand why their photo was not published. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mcl-nwdiv.org

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



All Detachment 476 Marines present at the 2025 250th Marine Corps Birthday Ball in Memphis, TN.



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DIVISION REPORTS

Mentorship & Leadership



Tom Krueger

NVC, Rocky Mountain Division



Leadership is something we have learned throughout our time in the Marine Corps. Now it's time to apply those skills to ensure we are building a strong foundation within our detachments. This takes us back to the 11 leadership principles and traits we were taught in the Marine Corps. Strive to apply those in our daily lives and detachment functions. We need to mentor the new and younger members within our detachment. If we think back to when we started as members within the MCL, we had those older members we would turn to when questions arose or we just need to talk League business.

The MCL is more than what our civilian counterparts call a business. We are a veteran organization that lives and operates with core values and principles we learned and lived by daily as Marines. As we move up the ranks within the MCL, we need to remember the core values we hold so high as Marines when conducting League business.

I ask each member of the Rocky Mountain Division to look towards the future of their detachments and departments if the MCL is to continue as one of the federally chartered veteran organizations, leading the way into the future for our fellow veterans that will follow us. Think about these two words "Semper Fi". Do they still have the impact they once did? We can never forget who and what we are, Marines. Lead, follow or get out of the way, what are you? **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: rockymountainmcldiv.org

Getting New Members: It's Important, So Change If You Need To



Ronnie Broussard

NVC, Southeast Division



Recruiting is the most important thing we do to maintain the League's legacy. New members fill the gaps left by those who have passed on, and they bring fresh ideas, expanded community contacts, and the volunteer power needed for funerals, fundraisers, and Toys for Tots. But to reach young Marines recently returned to civilian life, we sometimes need to rethink our approach.

When I first became detachment commandant in 2017, nine members attending a meeting was considered a great turnout. We tried everything, pizza, sandwiches, even home-cooked meals, to attract members who were already on our roster, let alone new ones. Like many detachments, we wanted younger Marines but were repeatedly told it was nearly impossible to get them through the door.

So, we made a deliberate effort to change our strategy. At the time, we had two young Marines who joined but seemed out of place among our small group of older red coats. We encouraged them to seek out Marines their own age and help grow the detachment. They were eager to contribute, and before long they brought in one or two new young members every month.

We also reconsidered how we talked about what we do. We tried to eliminate the word "meeting" whenever possible. Instead, we focused on the fun and camaraderie—cookouts, family events, fundraisers, community projects, and of course Toys for Tots. We still held a monthly gathering, but it was framed as a chance to look back on the month's activities and plan the next ones. Afterward, we'd go out for pizza and beer. Once the younger Marines saw the impact of our work and the connections they could build, they were excited to be part of the League.

Soon, our attendance grew to twenty members a month. Young Marines began promoting the League to others, and older members returned as the energy shifted. We paired younger members with older ones, combining enthusiasm with experience, and the results were impressive.

Today, we routinely have at least thirty-five members at every gathering. Our average age has dropped from 78 to nearly 60, and our officers, elected and appointed, are largely younger, with the oldest just 51.

If your current approach is working, then stick with it. But don't be afraid to change if you feel you need to. Sometimes a small shift can transform your entire detachment. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: seddiv.org

No Marine Left Behind



Mark Oldmixon

NVC,
Southern
Division



MARINES: There's more to being a League member than wearing the red cover and making it to a meeting. Taking care of Marines and veterans doesn't always require having your picture published in Semper Fi magazine. Optics and self-serving can dilute the reason you're there, causing you to miss the true objective.

Back in August 2025, I failed my cousin Brad, a Marine veteran, when he committed suicide. He lived not too far from me and possibly a phone call or a visit might have made a big difference. Sometimes we are more focused on "stuff" than why we are truly in the League.

"STRENGTHEN THE FRATERNITY" should be more than drinking beer and talking smack. A face-to-face visit to see how a fellow Marine or veteran is doing can positively influence their lives. As my granddaughter Victoria told me when she was around five years old, "Papa, listen to me with your face," meaning put your cell phone down, move away from the idiot box or whatever you're doing; pay attention to the person and truly care. Look them in the eye and listen to what they are saying. Echo, which means repeat what they say and don't just nod your head. Get them out of the house; buy them a cup of coffee or lunch. I didn't know what Brad was going through until it was too late when my cousin Becky informed me of Brad's death.

Even if you think someone is okay, don't ASSUME. Check on a former detachment member who left without saying anything. Call on them even if they have no intention of returning; they are still family. Not just Marine veterans, any vet you know that you might not have seen or talked to for some time. Same with their families; check on the spouse's well-being. The detachment should offer assistance to the family. Grieving is a lifelong process. You learn to live with it but it's always there, especially during the holidays or wedding anniversaries.

We as Marines should be doing our part in reducing the 22-a-day. The goal is zero suicides, no matter what branch the veteran was in. We don't leave Marines behind on the battlefield and shouldn't leave them behind after we've come home. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: southernmcl.org

250 Years of Honor, Courage, and Commitment



Joe Uribe

NVC,
Southwest
Division



MARINES: As we close out 2025 after celebrating the 250th birthday of our beloved Corps, we honored not only our history, but the legacy carried by every Marine, past and present. No other branch celebrates its birthday with such passion or reverence. Marines across the globe gathered to raise a glass, cut the cake, and remember who we are. Some call us a cult, but we know better. We are a family, bound by shared sacrifice, hardship, and pride in belonging to something greater than ourselves.

From the moment the first Marines were formed in 1775 at Tun Tavern, we were called upon to do the impossible. The Battle of Tripoli showed our young nation what American resolve looked like. In Korea, Marines fought through freezing temperatures and overwhelming odds at Inchon and the Chosin Reservoir, showing the world that Marines never retreated, they fought through. At Hue City, during the Vietnam War, Marines took back the city street by street, house by house, with courage that has become legend.

Throughout every generation, the name "Marine" meant something extraordinary. We were called Leathernecks for our adaptability, Devil Dogs for our ferocity, and Devils in the Black Boots for the fear we struck in our enemies. We were not the largest branch, nor the best funded, yet we achieved unmatched victories with limited resources because of our discipline, adaptability, and unshakable faith in one another.

Members of the MCL carry that same fighting spirit into our communities. They serve as living examples of what the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor represent. Whether it's helping a fellow veteran, mentoring young Marines, or leading local initiatives, League members ensure the legacy of the Corps remains strong and visible in every town and city across this nation.

We've had some Marines bring discredit upon the Corps, but those moments paled against centuries of service defined by honor and sacrifice. We prove time and again that Marines stand tall in peace and in war, always faithful to our country, our Corps, and to each other.

To every Marine, whether you wore the uniform decades ago or just returned home from deployment, know that you were part of a lineage built on courage, integrity, and determination. Be proud of who you are and of the emblem you earned. Here's looking at 251. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclswdivision.org

MCL's Youth Physical Fitness Hero Coach Bob Martini

By Christian Klinefelter

Bob Martini has been the head coach for the Penn Hills High School Marine Corps League Youth Physical Fitness Team for 43 years. He caught the fitness bug after competing as a student when his YPF team improved from 15th place in their region in 1966 to third place in the nation in 1968. Bob's individual high score of 494 out of a possible 500 points still stands today as the Penn Hills record.

After serving in the Army and the National Guard, Bob started assistant coaching their fitness team with 70 or 80 boys who all wanted to work out with the Marines (and associate with the "tough guys.") This gave them a shot at competing in a national competition at Marine Barracks Washington, in Washington, DC. During this period, he experienced the following highlights:

- In 1976, he started a girls' team as a demonstration team for the other 30 schools in western Pennsylvania to see. That's all it took. Soon after that, the girl's competition teams were started across the country.
- In 1978, the boys team placed fourth in the country at the national competition at the Marine Barracks Washington, 8th & I, in Washington, DC.
- YPF sponsor General Foods flew the team down to Washington, DC (their first airplane flight.)
- They appeared on Pittsburgh's Channel 4 during a personal visit from Coach Eddie Robinson of Grambling State.
- The late Senator H. John Heinz gave the team a US capitol tour.
- Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger received them in his office.
- The Marine Corps Band serenaded their YPF awards banquet and Marines gave them a private tour of Washington, DC.

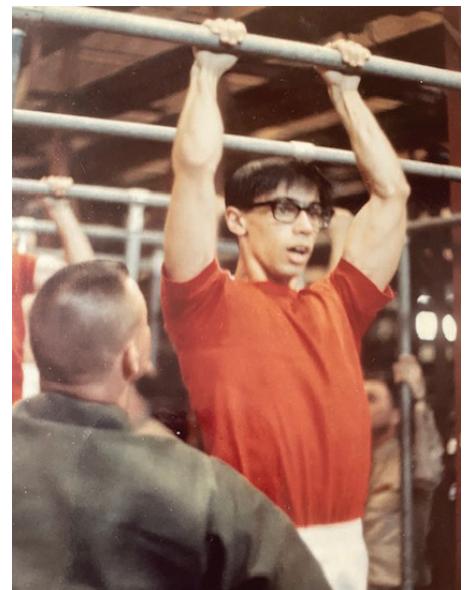


Above, Bob Martini with his assistant coach when they took over the Penn Hills YPF program.

Left, Arnold Schwarzenegger addressing MCRD San Diego National High School Fitness Competition in 1992.



Coach Martini at YPF practice with Penn Hills boys' team.



Bob Martini's pull-ups are graded by a Marine NCO.



YPF coaches at the National High School Fitness Competition on MCRD San Diego.

• Bob's YPF team were special guests of the Commandant of the Marine Corps for the Silent Drill Team performance at the Friday evening parade.

• YPF Head Coach Ford and Bob started a new fitness team at Plum High School in 1979, and their girls team won the national title in 1980.

Bob became the Penn Hills YPF head coach in 1983. His YPF teams have competed in the Marine Corps League's national fitness competition every year since, except for the 2020-22 COVID years. His YPF program was often larger than the football program. He made lifelong friends of YPF coaches across the nation.

During the 1980s, the MCL held these competitions at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. Penn Hills girls earned several third-place finishes and even captured a few second-place awards. A number of Penn Hills girls earned the highest individual score in the country. Gina Giona was the latest, a little girl who could pull out 30

pull-ups so effortlessly she amazed the active-duty Marine Corps judges. Their boys teams took a number of third-places in competitions during that time, with all of the boys often finishing with national competition top 10 scores.

Penn Hills's boys teams especially impressed Coach Martini during the last three years. Jadyn Wright was number one boy in the nation for two years straight. Penn Hills boys teams were undefeated in local competitions for three years. This had never been done in the entire history of Penn Hills fitness. They placed second in the nation as a team in 2024. Their best finish, yet.

These athletes couldn't wait to be immersed in the Marine way of life. Sleeping in the barracks, sometimes having only cold showers, sharing the mess hall with Marines, watching them drill on the parade deck, and of course, the beach, and the Hollywood and Disneyland attractions during their down time. These

things always generated excitement when recruiting for Penn Hills YPF teams.

Coach Martini prides himself on how his YPF program has recruited approximately 40 young men and ladies into military service, mostly into the Marines. He strongly believes competitive fitness and direct exposure to a Marine base convinced them. He consistently perceived that they liked what they saw and wanted to become a part of the organization. Coach Martini tells everyone, "The Marine Corps League's Youth Physical Fitness Program is probably the best recruiting tool that any branch of the service could have, because, nowadays, young men and ladies are moving away from the high cost of college and have an excellent alternative in the military."

Unfortunately, Penn Hills has the only YPF team left in western Pennsylvania. Any possible YPF competitions in Pennsylvania are with schools 275 miles away. So, few local competitions make it hard to attract new students for the team, and YPF is probably the toughest sport at the school.

The Marine Corps League has held an annual YPF national fitness competition since 1960. Coach Martini has the longest YPF participation record. He encourages all MCL members to help reinvigorate the YPF program by seeking local school participation and organizing more local YPF competitions. **SemperFi!**



How Great Ideas Start

Running the 50th Anniversary Marine Corps Marathon

By David Porter and Michel Mike

I was at an event last year called Max Marines at Marine Barracks Washington, 8th & I, celebrating the Marine Corps Birthday. It was not in a bar, but was pretty close to one, given that it was the oldest post of the Corps. I was speaking to Alex Hetherington (Marine Corps Marathon Director), whom I have known for a few years now. Alex mentioned to me that it was the marathon's 50th anniversary. I mentioned to him that it would be great to run the Marathon on the 50th anniversary of the same year as the Marine Corps' 250th Birthday. I figured I had plenty of time to train for this. My second brilliant idea was that I could not share all the glory by myself. I persuaded Mike Hinds to join me. If you haven't figured it out by now, I lead (drag) Mike with me on all my colossal



ideas. I would also like to mention Mike's accomplishments as the department commandant of Massachusetts and the assistant national vice commandant of the New England Division.

I figured we had plenty of time to train, and,



really, how hard could this be? Well, the months went by pretty fast. I found myself with only two months to go before marathon day, and the anxiety and nervousness started to kick in because the training had barely taken off. I was



only doing four miles here and there. I started having some serious doubts about this great idea. A week before the race, I completed 12 miles on a Saturday morning. This was not reassuring, and suggested to Mike that maybe we don't have to run the marathon. Mike stated, "Oh no, we are running it!"

Race day came; it was freezing out, and it was too cold to get on the ground and stretch. I was having some serious doubts about making the famous "Beat the Bridge" time. We were all geared up, thanks to Mike's preparation, with new water bottles in hand, GU in our belts, and Mike's brand-new sneakers. The starting line was pretty motivating; adrenaline was kicking in.

Halfway into the marathon, I was in the mindset of "mind over matter," and my heart knew I could not let Mike down. We accomplished a once-in-a-lifetime event. I cannot thank Mike enough for pushing me and keeping us on pace,

which helped us survive. I give all the credit to a brother I love for helping me cross the finish line.

Getting our picture together after crossing the finish line in front of the Iwo Jima Memorial was a proud moment. Looking back, failure was not an option I could accept. To add to all the motivating emotions and pride, we even saw Gunnery Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps at the end, walking around as proudly as we were!

I would also like to state that seeing all the Marines along the route and finish line was outstanding. Last but not least, I would like to thank you, just Bob, for cheering us on at the start line, and thank you, Liz and Illiana, for hitting four critical locations to help encourage us to keep going. Mike, I am proud of you. Next Year? **Semper Fi!**

—David Porter



Choosing to run the Marine Corps Marathon was a decision I made because it represented more than just a race, it was the culmination of a journey that began back in 2012, when David Porter first pulled me into the Marine Corps League with the Honorable Few, Capt. J.J. Harris USMC Det. 1302. Like many young Marines, I was not exactly sure what the League was all about, but Porter grabbed me by the collar and told me to follow him. For the first couple of years, I was hesitant, unsure if this was truly a place for me, but Porter, who quickly became the big brother I never had, made sure I stayed on course within the detachment, Department of Massachusetts, and the New England Division. He would show up at my house in the morning of the detachment meeting on his motorcycle, and we would ride side by side to the meeting. His guidance, consistency, and belief in what the MCL stood for shaped much of the Leaguer I grew into over the next twelve years.

Porter turned to me one day and said, "I've got a good idea, let's run the Marine Corps Marathon."

I thought he was joking, and I replied, "If you do it, I'll do it."

He mentioned how it's the 50th anniversary of the marathon and the same year as the 250th Marine Corps Birthday, so how could I say no? He showed me his race confirmation; I signed up, began "training", and even though I only managed to run ten miles once, I convinced myself that I am a Marine and "pain is only weakness leaving the body."

As race day approached, we talked strategy, the course, and the critical gauntlets. Then came that brisk 40-degree morning, Marines in Camo's everywhere, and "just Bob" firing us up at the start line. Mile after mile, we pushed forward through Arlington, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., lifted by thousands of supporters. The Blue Mile around mile twelve, honoring fallen U.S. service members, hit hard and reminded me exactly why quitting was not an option. When my legs wanted to stop, my mind refused to accept failure. I could not let Porter down, and I could not fail to accomplish what I said I would do.

When we finished the race, it was such a relief and a personal accomplishment. Sometimes you've got to grab a Marine or veteran by the collar and point them in the right direction, because one day, you might be the one who needs that same guidance. **Semper Fi!**

—Mike Hinds

A Visit to the Sgt. Angel Mendez Detachment 246

By Bob Borka

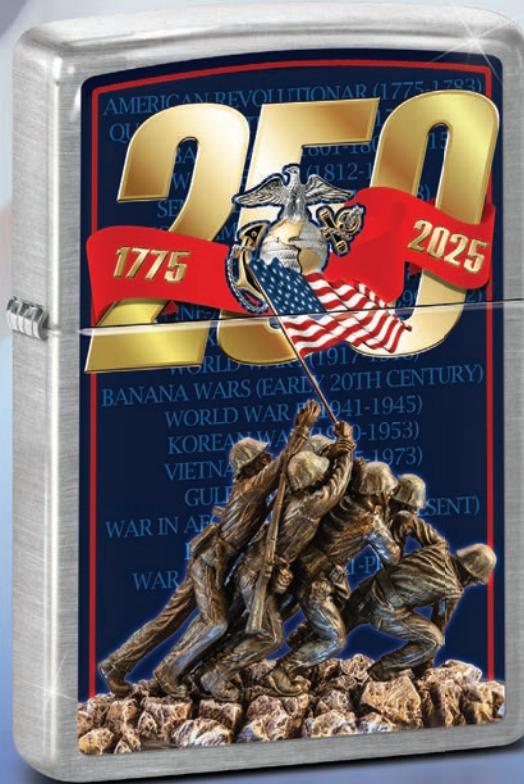
As Mrs. Borka and I traveled through New Jersey and New York, we came to Staten Island. I had never been on the Island and our PNC Dennis Tobin is from the Sgt. Angel Mendez Detachment 246 in Staten Island, New York. Dennis has always spoken highly of his detachment and its dedicated members. It was easy to find, and they had parking! They have great property and a cool building. We took some photos and went inside. This is the best part—we were greeted by friendly people, offered a beer, allowed to use the head, and they had no idea if we were veterans or members. They were just nice. This is the greeting I hope for every time we go somewhere. This is the welcome potential members should look forward to.

Mrs. Borka spoke of the Young Marines, and I identified myself as a Veteran and member (our national executive director), and no, we didn't have a beer. We did engage in some great conversation with the members before getting back on the road. We really appreciated the opportunity to drop in and say hello. Moreover, what a great feeling of brotherhood to be greeted with friendliness. Thank you! **Semper Fi!**



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BOOK REVIEWS

BOOKS FOR, ABOUT & BY MARINES – BY BOB BORKA

Fuji Fire

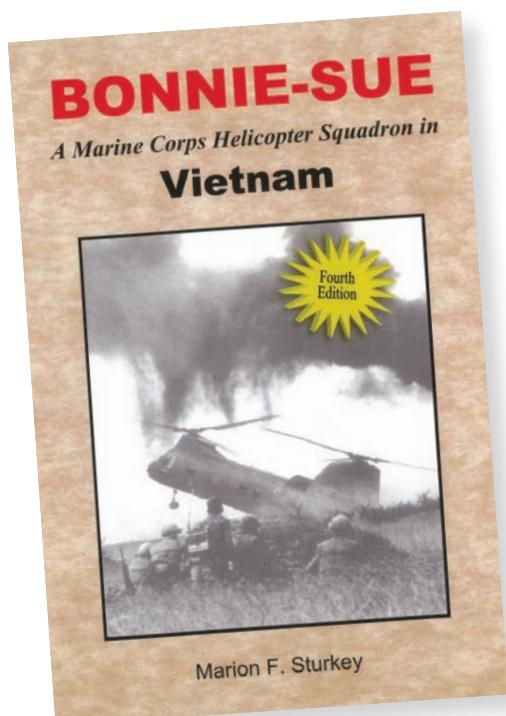
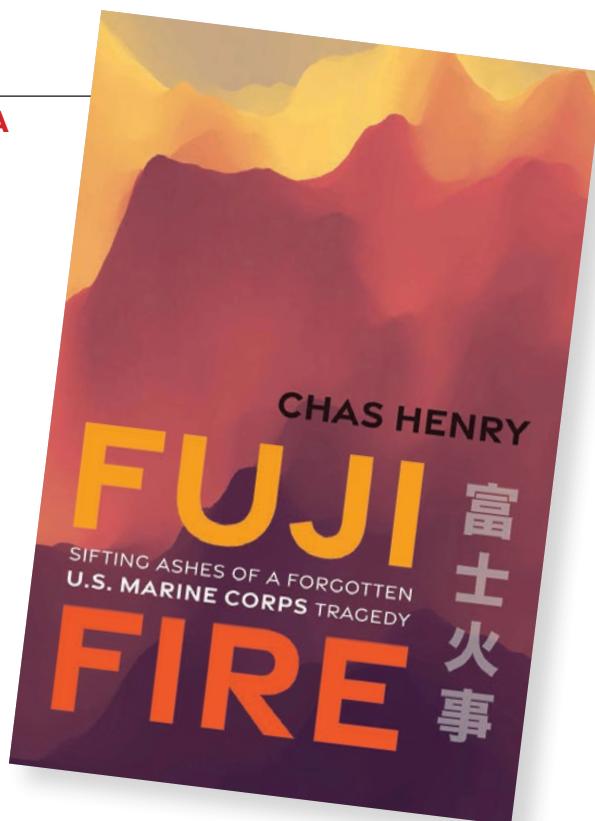
Sifting Ashes of a Forgotten U.S. Marine Corps Tragedy

In 1979 a fire broke out on MCB Camp Fuji in Japan. There were 60 injuries and 13 fatalities. Marine Corps veteran and author, Chas Henry details the tragedy that resulted from the tropical cyclone which created a series of challenging events. Chas had trained on Camp Fuji in 1978. In a Semper Fi interview, he expressed that Marines exemplified fortitude during this emergency.

Henry uses plain language with excellent format. This is a true story that flows well but sometimes emotionally challenging to read. He interviewed more than 130 people involved in the incident, as well as reviewed investigation reports. It's important to not only remember those Marines who were lost that day, but to also see that we have learned a great deal from the event and improved practices related to the incident.

Fuji Fire: Sifting Ashes of a Forgotten U.S. Marine Corps Tragedy

Author: Chas Henry | **Pages:** 328 | **Publisher:** Potomac Books | **ISBN-13:** 978-1640126459



Bonnie-Sue

A Marine Corps Helicopter Squadron in Vietnam

Marion F. Sturkey, the author and Marine Corps League member, brings a terrific story of a helicopter squadron in Vietnam. The chronological events outlined in the chapters provide a riveting story of the progression of the war and support provided by the helicopter squadrons. Especially impactful was the x-ray image of the 60mm mortar round inside the body of an ARVN soldier. The round was surgically removed and he survived (p.240)! The book is very informative and has great photos. The paper used by the publisher is high-quality. A good read with excellent historical reference.

Bonnie-Sue: A Marine Corps Helicopter Squadron in Vietnam

Author: Marion F. Sturkey | **Pages:** 509
Publisher: Heritage Press International | **ISBN-13:** 978-0991301171



Four flags: For the first time in the history of Hawaii, the USMC flags were flown over the State Capital commemorating the 250th USMC Birthday.



The cake detail from Marine Corps Base Hawaii lead by Marine Rich Allen, presents the cake to Det. SVC Vincenti and the guest of honor, Senator Mike Gabbard.

USMC Flags Fly Over Hawaii State Capital

By Carl Vincenti



Marine Patrick "PT" Brent makes a toast to our Corps at the Hawaii State Capital for the first time ever!



The Pound Keeper of Tunnel Rats, Pound 393, Hawaii, Det. SVC Carl Vincenti (holding the bone) with active-duty participants from 1st LAAD Battalion, Senator Mike Gabbard, and special guest Representative Diamond Garcia attended the event.

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



In October 2025, the city of Winter Haven, Florida presented the Heart of Florida MCL Det.1107 with a proclamation announcing the week of November 10 through November 14, 2025 as "UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS WEEK," encouraging its citizens to learn the history and traditions of the Marines.



Members of the Thomas Holcomb Detachment decorating a Christmas tree at our local VA Hospital in Wilmington, DE.



Thomas Seymour, Commandant, Dept. of Ohio, Kevin D. Keller, Senior Vice Commandant, Dept. of Ohio, and Dave Englert National Vice Commandant, Central Division present Kevin Keller with the charter for the new detachment, Miami Valley Det. 1499.

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



Central Delaware Chapter of the MCL Junior-Vice Commandant Santo Faronea, member LaFayette Bell Sr., and member Al Serrano hand out roses, sell model cars, and solicit new MCL members at the Wyoming, De. Peach Festival in August 2025.



250th Cake Cutting Ceremony, MCL Det. 476.



Sgt. Ernest Ferguson, USMC, celebrated his 100th birthday with friends, members of C Company, 4th LAR Bn, USMC, members of the Treasure Valley Det. 878, and family at the Warhawk Museum, Nampa, ID. Sgt. Ferguson fought on Cape Gloucester, Peleliu, and Okinawa in WWII. Col. Michael D. McCarthy, Assistant Division Commander, 4th Marine Division, assisted by Sgt. Maj. Christopher J. Adams, Sgt. Maj., 4th Marine Division, presented a birthday message from General Eric M. Smith, U.S. Marine Corps, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



National Commandant TJ Morgan presented two enlisted awards to Marines in Hawaii. The commands participated in the events and the Marines were able to be recognized in front of their peers. This is a shift from the Enlisted Awards being presented at Modern Day Marine. We found the six awards, presented across the globe, have been impactful. Story by the director of events, Rob Brooks, in our next issue.

Join Roll Call!

ALL MARINE CORPS LEAGUE MEMBERS MAY SUBMIT ROLL CALL ENTRIES

SUBMISSION DIRECTIONS

You may submit photos with short captions in email to semperfif@chipotlepublishing.com. Photos must not be more than 20MB in size.

Captions—Photo captions should briefly describe the event and list persons present in the photo(s) along with detachment number and location. Captions should be no longer than 60 words. Please do not include information about persons not present in the photo(s).

Photos—We cannot use photos that are inserted into an email, PDF or MS Word document. Please make sure each photo is a separate file in the highest resolution possible (specific criteria are in the instructions on the upload site).

Permission—For photos of youth under age 18, please visit the MCL Library for the "Photo Permission Form" under Scouting for the Photo Release Form.

Sorry—There are no guarantees of publication. The most common reasons for Roll Call rejection are: 1) the photo was blurry or too small in size, and 2) the uniforms in the photo did not meet regulations.

If you have any questions about uniform regulations, please contact Jim Powell of the Uniform Committee at the National website: www.mclnational.org.

NOTICE TO MARINE CORPS LEAGUE DETACHMENTS!

Please consider taking a group photo of your detachment's membership. Department and division conferences are another way to

capture some memories. We would love to include your photos in the **Semper Fi** magazine.

REUNIONS

IWO JIMA ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA ANNUAL REUNION

LOCATION: Crystal City, VA – Hilton Arlington National Landing Hotel

DATE: 19 – 22 FEB 2026

CONTACT: Art Sifuentes (IJAA)
703-963-6895, rsifuentes@iwojimaassociation.org

INFO: www.iwojimaassociation.org

USMC WEATHER SERVICE (METOC)

DATE: 14 – 18 JUN 2026

CONTACT: Dave Englert, englertd@psc1.net, (812) 630-2099 or Kathy Donham, kathy.donham@hotmail.com, (252) 342-8459

531 GRAY GHOST SQUADRON

LOCATION: Dallas, TX

DATE: 12 – 18 OCT 2026

CONTACT: Rusty Smith, rustysmith1521@gmail.com or Mike "Horse" Frese, schorse@verizon.net

INFO: All former members of the active duty 531 Grey Ghost Squadron, their family, friends, and other guests are invited. Info and registration at 531grayghostsquadron.org/upcoming-reunion

TAPS

ALABAMA

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STEPHEN A. THOMPSON
RICHARD D. BENSON
WILLIAM DANFORD
FLOYD E. TAYLOR
JEANNINE C. ROBERTS
JOSEPH L. NIST
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DELAWARE

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ROLL CALL**AROUND THE LEAGUE**

For their celebration of the 250th anniversary of the US Marine Corps, members of Antietam Det. 113, paid homage to the birthplace of the Corps by presenting a cake replicating Tun Tavern during their annual Birthday Ball in Williamsport, Maryland. A smaller cake was provided for the ceremonial cake cutting. The two cakes served 150+ persons in attendance.



Actor LaFayette Bell Sr., aka "Sgt. Bell the Rapper", former MLB Pitcher Brett Oberholtzer, and Jet Race Car Driver Dawn Perdue help Kent County, DE with their toy drive at the Dover, DE Buffalo Wild Wings in November 2025. Sgt. Bell the Rapper is the National Toys for Tots Rapper. Photo: LaFayette Bell Sr.



Do Buddy Checks Before It's Too Late

By Bob Borka

I did a thing today. John P. Aufenanger was my friend. We served on the same team in Desert Storm. John died in 2013, and I had not paid my respects until now. Like all combat veterans, we deal with it in our own way. John let his demons get the best of him at 43 years old. He is the only member our team that has PCS'd to the final duty station. John had lost everything. He was drowning in alcohol, lost his job at the VA, lost his family, lost the will to fight—and he didn't tell anyone. Where was I? It was the hardest salute this morning. I was so honored to have served with him and sad that he is gone.

Interestingly, John A. Aufenanger, his father, died this year (August 2025) and was a US Army Vietnam veteran. He is buried in the same grave, with his inscription on the back of JP's headstone. The cut grass is still fresh. The glistening dew evaporating from the morning sun and the air is cool and crisp. It is a beautiful sunny morning at Calverton National Cemetery, Long Island, New York. I nodded in admiration to the NCA workers caring for our deceased, without pay (I visited during the federal government shutdown).

Do buddy checks on your teammates! You don't know who needs you, and that one buddy check may make the difference between hope and the grave. **Semper Fi!**

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WA121- Red Polo

Red polo short with MCL logo,
100% Polyester
Small-XL \$39.50, 2-3XL \$43.00,
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PG S-4XL- Green Polo

Green polo shirt with MCL logo,
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Small-4XL \$44.00



PB S-4XL- Blue Polo

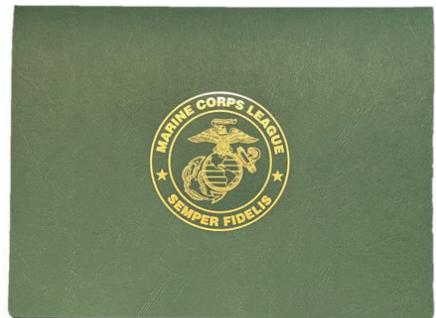
Blue polo short with MCL logo,
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Brown T-shirt with MCL Logo on Breast,
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Green T-Shirt with MCL Logo on Breast,
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Green embossed certificate folder for presentation, 12x9 in.
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**Card01- Get Well Cards**

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I hereby certify that I am currently serving or have served honorably in the United States Marine Corps, "ON ACTIVE DUTY," for not less than ninety (90) days and earned the Eagle, Globe and Anchor; or have served or am currently serving in the United States Marine Corps Reserve and have earned no less than ninety (90) Reserve Retirement Credit Points; or that I have served or am currently serving as a U.S. Navy FMF Sailor who has trained with Marine FMF Units in excess of ninety (90) days and earned the Marine Corps Device (clasp) or the Warfare Device worn on the Service Ribbon. If discharged, I am in receipt of a DD Form 214 or a Certificate of Discharge indicating "Honorable Service." ("Honorable Service" will be defined by the last DD Form 214 or Certificate of Discharge that the applicant received.) General Discharge under Honorable Conditions is acceptable. By signature on this application, I hereby agree to provide proof of honorable service/discharge upon request. I hereby authorize the National Executive Director, Marine Corps League to obtain an un-redacted copy of my latest DD Form 214 from the Marine Corps custodian of Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF), and/or verification of honorable service if deemed necessary to verify my eligibility for regular membership in the Marine Corps League. I understand the DD Form 214 may contain information such as military awards, training, and character of service.

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"I, _____, In the Presence of Almighty God, do solemnly swear, that I will uphold and defend the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America and the Bylaws and Administrative Procedures of the Marine Corps League. That I take this obligation willingly and in good faith and that I will follow the directions and guidance of elected and appointed Officers of the League. That I will participate and support the missions and activities of the Marine Corps League, and that I promise to govern my conduct in such a manner that I will never bring discredit upon myself, Members of the League, or the Marine Corps League, so help me God."

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