

ONCE A MARINE, ALWAYS A MARINE

Vol. 82 No. 3 • SUMMER 2026

SEMPER FI



The Magazine of the Marine Corps League



Director of Events Rob Brooks (left) and Director of Veteran Services Philip Du (right) are two strong additions to the Marine Corps League leadership team.

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The Magazine of the Marine Corps League



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ON THE COVER:

Rob, a retired Marine who served as a Drum Major, is an essential part of planning for our co-hosting Modern Day Marine as well as the National Conference, National Convention, as well as managing our Mobile Application.

Philip, a retired Soldier (Army), served in the Army Medical Department and brought with him a strong background of experience as a National Veteran Service Officer. Philip also has a keen understanding of legislative affairs and assists the National Executive Director with interactions on Capitol Hill.



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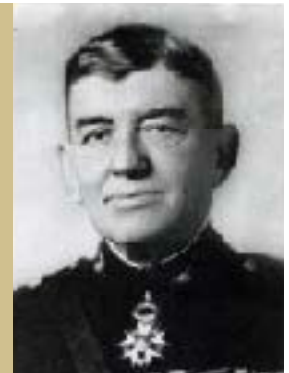
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Founded in 1923 by Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune, the Marine Corps League is the only federally chartered Marine Corps-related veterans organization in the United States.



NATIONAL COMMANDANT'S LETTER

TJ MORGAN

Fair Winds and Following Seas

MARINES: At the time I am writing this article, I prepare for my final months serving as the 66th National Commandant of the Marine Corps League, I find myself reflecting not on accomplishments alone, but on gratitude. The opportunity to serve this great organization has been one of the highest honors of my life. To stand beside Marines, FMF Corpsmen, veterans, and patriots across this nation has reminded me daily that the strength of our League is not found in titles or positions, but in people united by purpose and service.



Purpose is one of the greatest gifts we can possess in life. For many Marines, service to country shaped who we are. The uniform may eventually come off, but the calling to serve never truly leaves us. That is what makes the MCL

so special. It provides a continued mission — a way to support veterans, mentor young Americans, care for our communities, and preserve the proud legacy of the United States Marine Corps.

As my term comes to an end this August, I do not view it as the conclusion of service, but rather the continuation of it in a different role. Leadership positions are temporary; commitment is lifelong. Every member of this League has the ability to make a difference long after titles change hands. The future of our organization depends on those willing to continue stepping forward with humility, integrity, and dedication. I leave this office deeply thankful for the friendships formed, the lessons learned, and the unwavering support shown to me and my family throughout this journey. Serving as your national commandant has been a privilege I will forever cherish. **Semper Fi!**



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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/COO

BOB BORKA

Veterans Service Organization



MARINES: The Marine Corps League was congressionally chartered as a veteran service organization in 1937 under Title 36 of the United States Code. The organization provides free, accredited assistance to veterans. MCL national headquarters is not funded by federal, state, or county governments.

VETERANS — Our focus is on the women and men who signed the dotted line to serve and defend our nation and who retired or were discharged under honorable conditions.

SERVICE — The service we provide to our veterans includes, but is not limited to, accredited representation before the VA, a legislative voice in Congress, funeral honors, color guards, Toys for Tots, and a continuing range of support.

ORGANIZATION — A company formed as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit with a special IRS exemption and organized under 26 USC 170(c)(6), which allows federally chartered veterans organizations to receive tax-deductible donations. Our organization is formed into 10 divisions, with a Marine Expeditionary Force-level volunteer group of veterans.

We sincerely appreciate each member's contribution to the legacy of our Marine Corps League. Thank you for being a member and for your past, present, and future service. *Semper Fi!*

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF EVENTS

ROB BROOKS, USMC (RET).

Success Through Failure



MARINES: When on active duty, serving in a command billet, one of my key talking points when conducting a check-in brief with a new Marine was this: "Don't be afraid to fail, because only through failing can we achieve success."

A simple statement on the surface, but one with some uncomfortable truths to accept. As Marines, we are bred to achieve success the first time. There are no second chances on the battlefield, and those around you depend

on your ability to make the right decision. We rely on constant training for every scenario we can think of before we put boots on the ground anywhere. We preach doctrine, review after-action reports, and wargame as many probable situations as possible until muscle memory becomes second nature. But we can't always think of everything, and more often opposing forces counter our actions in ways we never saw coming.

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Continued from previous page

I believe, as Marines, we embody this idea: “adapt and overcome.” I’m sure we can agree that failing at something doesn’t mean you’re incapable; it means you haven’t mastered it yet. Only when you stop—when you give up and quit—do you truly fail.

Through my short time with the Marine Corps League, I have had the privilege and opportunity to contribute to the success of events that have had to evolve to meet new needs and challenges. Most notable is the Modern Day Marine Expo. This amazing annual event has been growing in scope and size over the past several years and, like any large-scale event, has had plenty of failures along the way. The key to its continual success

is the ability and willingness of those behind the scenes to never give up when faced with challenges and to work together to find the right, or better, way forward.

As we prepare to meet at the National Convention, what challenges are you currently facing in your local area? What can we do to better our recruitment efforts and reach out to our fellow Marines and service members looking for that specific brand of camaraderie we find only with each other? I continue to look forward to new opportunities where I fail until I master whatever new skill is needed to serve you all better. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

JOHN TAYLOR

Using Artificial Intelligence to Support Communication

MARINES: Artificial intelligence, or AI, is becoming an essential tool for organizations looking to expand their reach, improve communication, and engage audiences more effectively. For Marine Corps League departments and detachments, AI provides a powerful way to strengthen recruitment, enhance public relations, and streamline operations while preserving the core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

One major advantage of AI is improved communication. MCL departments and detachments can use AI to quickly generate professional, polished content for social media, newsletters, and press releases. Instead of spending hours drafting posts, AI can produce clear, engaging messages in seconds. This allows leadership to focus more on mission execution and member engagement rather than administrative workload.

AI also strengthens recruitment efforts. By analyzing trends and audience behavior, AI tools help identify what content resonates with potential members. Whether highlighting community service, camaraderie, or Marine Corps heritage, AI helps tailor messaging to attract veterans seeking purpose and connection after service. Consistent, high-quality content keeps your detachment visible and relevant in today’s digital space.

Another key benefit is visual content creation. AI-powered design tools can produce eye-catching graphics, flyers, and promotional materials that reflect the pride and



professionalism of MCL. Strong visuals increase engagement on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, helping departments stand out and communicate more effectively with Marines and the local community.

AI also supports event promotion and coordination. From creating announcements to sending reminders and follow-ups, AI helps ensure nothing is missed. It can assist with agendas, talking points, and after-action summaries, improving efficiency and professionalism across all activities.

Great uses for AI:

- **Content Creation:** Draft posts, emails, and announcements by entering key points.
- **Graphic Design:** Generate posters and promotional images from simple prompts.
- **Scheduling:** Automate posts for consistent outreach.
- **Engagement:** Review performance and refine messaging.
- **Editing:** Proofread and polish communications for clarity.

In conclusion, AI is not a replacement for leadership; it is a force multiplier. When used correctly, it strengthens communication, improves recruitment, and enhances overall effectiveness. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF VETERAN SERVICES

PHILIP DU

One Year In: A Foundation Is Built

MARINES: As everyone within the Marine Corps League is excited about the 2026 National Convention, this Convention has personal meaning for me: it marks my first year serving you as national director of veteran services and leading the revamped National Veterans Service Program.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of traveling and meeting with many MCL members and leaders. In spring, I traveled to the MCL Northeast Division Conference and to departments in Nevada and Colorado, delivering training, meeting with leadership and VSOs, and learning about the work our volunteers are doing in detachments across the country. No matter where I go, I see the same thing: Marines who want to do right by their fellow veterans and who can do it better when they have the right tools. That readiness is exactly what our VSO program is designed to support, ensuring VSOs have the right tools whenever MCL members and veterans need their assistance.

With the expansion of our VSO program, we created MCL Claims Operations & Reviews Process Standard (CORPS), a standardized process for how MCL handles veterans claims work from end to end nationwide. CORPS brings consistency and accountability to every step of the claims journey: intake, development, submission, and appeals. It is how we ensure that a veteran walking into any



MCL VSO office receives the same quality of service, regardless of geography. It also ensures that new VSOs are ready to conduct claims by simply following CORPS.

Alongside CORPS, MCL will reestablish our institutional presence across the country. This includes meeting with high-level government officials, testifying before Congress, and engaging more actively with VA at the local level through our VAVS and VSO programs. We will visit VA regional offices and hospitals across the country to assess the claims environment, identify staffing and resource gaps, and build the working relationships that cannot be forged through email or coffee with executives in D.C. alone.

On the policy front, we will initiate a research study on Operational Blast Overpressure Exposure (OBOE) and advocate for our veterans, especially Marines and FMF personnel, on Capitol Hill. Marines are disproportionately affected by blast exposure from heavy weapons fire, breaching operations, and IEDs. The science shows the neurological toll is real, lasting, and underrecognized by VA. The PACT Act proved that veterans are stronger when we speak together. MCL believes OBOE is our next chapter, and we need every MCL member to help us carry it home. **Semper Fi!**

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



Group photo of MoH recipient Army SP5 Dwight Birdwell (checked sport coat) and Marine veteran and Iwo Jima survivor, 103-year-old Captain Joe Ihle (on Birdwell's left) along with the members present from the Albert E. Schwab Det. 857 in Tulsa, OK.

NATIONAL PRESIDENT, MCL AUXILIARY

DOTTY SANNING

NATIONALMCLA.ORG

Our Mission for Generations to Come



MARINES: What a remarkable journey these past two years have been. Serving as National President of the Marine Corps League Auxiliary has been both the greatest honor and the greatest challenge of my 26 years in this organization. Along the way, I have had the privilege of meeting dedicated members of both the Auxiliary and the League, witnessing firsthand how strong and effective we can be when we work together toward a common purpose. I have also seen how easily organizations can become fragmented when communication and commitment begin to fade.

As I prepare to pass the helm to a new national president, I find myself reflecting on where we are today and where we need to go in the future. One of our greatest challenges continues to be membership. While we work hard to recruit new members, we have not replaced many of the members we have lost over the years. Attrition is often cited as the reason, but what does that truly mean? It means members leave and are not replaced. Some of our members have passed away, some have relocated to areas without auxiliaries, and others have become associate members within detachments rather than remaining active in their auxiliaries. We are grateful that they continue to serve in meaningful ways.

Recently, my husband and I attended our granddaughter's high school graduation here in

Missouri. Out of a graduating class of 112 students, only three planned to enter military service. That means just 2.68 percent of those young men and women chose a path of service to our country. Seeing those numbers made one thing very clear to me: We need a serious call to action.

As I look ahead, I have made it a personal goal to speak with as many young men and women as possible about the opportunities and importance of military service. I hope many of you will join me in this effort. Recruiting new League and Auxiliary members remains vital, but we must also educate the young people in our communities about the many opportunities military service can provide. For some, it may offer career training that matches their talents and interests. For others, it may provide educational benefits, health care, retirement opportunities, leadership development, and a lifelong sense of purpose and camaraderie.

Military service is not the right path for everyone, but every young person deserves the opportunity to understand the possibilities available to them. The Marine Corps League Auxiliary will continue to stand beside our Marines and support the mothers, sisters, spouses, daughters, and all female relatives of those who choose to serve. That support has always defined who we are and will remain central to our mission for generations to come. **Semper Fi!**



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MARINE CORPS LEAGUE FOUNDATION

JERRY HOLT

PRESIDENT, MCL FOUNDATION

The Mission of the Marine Corps League Foundation

MARINES: During the past year, the Marine Corps League Foundation has provided meaningful assistance to Marines, Marine veterans, and their families during times of real hardship. We helped one Marine veteran with temporary rental assistance while he was unable to work because of a serious illness. We assisted another Marine veteran and his family after an accident left him temporarily unable to earn income. We have also helped Marines and veterans facing emergency travel needs, food insecurity, medical expenses, and short-term housing challenges.

The Foundation does not simply hand out money. Every request is carefully reviewed. We verify veteran status, income, expenses, the circumstances creating the need, and the applicant's plan for moving forward. Our mission is to help, but we also have a responsibility to be good stewards of the donated funds entrusted to us.

Each year, the Foundation also helps fund nearly 200 scholarships for members of the Marine Corps League and Auxiliary, as well as their children and grandchildren. These scholarships represent more than financial aid. They are an investment in young people connected to our Marine Corps family and a reminder that their hard work, character, and future matter.

Last year, our expenditures for scholarships and humanitarian assistance significantly exceeded our income. The need for assistance is not going away. In fact, we expect requests for help to continue. That is why we are reaching out to corporations, businesses, organizations, League departments, detachments, and individual members for support.



YOU CAN HELP

One of the most effective ways to help is through a recurring monthly donation. A gift of just \$15 per month can make a real difference when combined with the support of others across the League. Donations can be made at www.mclfoundation.org or by scanning the QR code. Contributions may be made through PayPal or Zeffy.



The Foundation has also expanded its fundraising efforts. We now accept donated automobiles and almost any type of motorized vehicle. Details are available on our website. Visitors may also enter a drawing for a chance to win a fiddle autographed by Charlie Daniels. The drawing will be held at the National Convention in August 2026,

and the winner does not need to be present.

We also offer custom memorial certificates for deceased League members and Marine veterans. Available in a red folder, picture frame, or plaque, these embossed certificates provide a lasting tribute for families—far more enduring than flowers. They also help support scholarships, youth programs, and humanitarian assistance.

Please visit www.mclfoundation.org and donate today. We need your help to continue helping Marines, veterans, and their families. *Semper Parati*



CHIEF DEVIL DOG

JOE DEANGELO, 62ND CHIEF DEVIL DOG

Leading and Mentoring Within the Order



MARINES: Woof Woof! As you read this, we are gathering in Indianapolis for the 86th Supreme Growl. What a year it has been for our great Order. I hope everyone is doing well as we continue moving the Military Order of the Devil Dogs forward together. The hard work being done throughout the pounds, packs, and divisions across the country continues to show the dedication and pride our members have.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about servant leadership within the Order and what it means to me personally. Servant leadership is a philosophy in which a leader's primary goal is to serve others rather than accumulate power or recognition. By prioritizing the growth, well-being, and success of our members, servant leaders empower those around them to perform at their highest potential. Leadership is not about titles or positions; it is about setting the example and helping others succeed.

What does that mean for us as Dogs of the Order? It means taking the time to mentor our newer members and giving them the guidance, tools, and confidence they need to excel. Every one of us was once a new dog learning the traditions, structure, and purpose of this organization. None of us got here alone. Someone took the time to teach us, guide us, and encourage us, and now it is our responsibility to do the same for the next generation.

Servant leadership also means trusting your team, delegating authority and empowering your members to take ownership of tasks and responsibilities. Strong organizations are built when responsibilities are shared and members are given opportunities to grow. With that authority comes accountability. We must hold ourselves and one another accountable for our actions and commitments while continuing to uphold the standards and values of the Order.

A true leader listens more than he speaks and understands that every member has value. Some of the best ideas and future leaders simply need an opportunity to step forward.



Celebration of life for a great friend, PDD Craig Reeling, PDVCCD, MED



Installing the officers of the New Jersey Pack.

Encourage participation, build confidence in others, and recognize dedication when you see it. Sometimes a few encouraging words can motivate someone to become more involved than they ever thought possible.

As we continue moving the Order forward, we



A walk down memory lane: 3rd Platoon, Daytona Beach, at the 82nd Supreme Growl.



Installing the Maryland Pack. Woof Woof!



Installing the pack leader of the Maryland Pack, PDD Chris Burns.

must never lose sight of why we are here. We are an honor society built on camaraderie, tradition, and taking care of one another. Continue recruiting quality members, supporting our charitable causes, and keeping the “fun” in the fun and honor society. Fellowship and

camaraderie are what keep members active and engaged for years to come.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Indianapolis and working together as we continue strengthening this great Order for future generations of Devil Dogs. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL SR. VICE COMMANDANT

RUSS MILLER

Putting the “S” Back in VSO

MARINES: It is encouraging to see how the League has been working diligently across the country to reemphasize the “S” in VSO. Whether referring to the acronym VSO, as in veterans service organization, or to veteran service officers, the key words are the first two in both. When we serve our brother and sister veterans and their families, we provide a tangible answer to the old question we hear so often when recruiting and retaining members in the League: “What’s in it for them?”

Like myself, many of you are probably involved in any one or a number of other vet-centric groups that are far more interested in what the veteran can do for the organization, rather than what the organization does for the veterans and their family members. While camaraderie definitely has its place, as was alluded to in the last issue of SF, the telling of one’s story can aid in healing their worry (those invisible wounds), and shifting our focus outwardly (instead of inwardly) is providing great results in growth and retention all across the League.

Here in what will be my last article as your Sr. Vice Commandant, I ask that we all consider that as the only congressionally chartered and VA-recognized Marine Corps veterans service organization, we should be ever-mindful of the responsibility that such distinctions carry. As a knuckle-dragging crayon-eater myself, I often try to look at things from a different perspective to help cement a concept in my aging brain-housing-group. I thought back to the words from promotion warrants that we all heard read a million times



on active duty. It dawned on me how those words are still applicable not only to myself, but to our whole organization.

Picture it like this: “To all who shall see these presents, greetings: Know Ye that reposing special trust, faith, and confidence in the fidelity and abilities of... The Marine Corps League... We can begin to see how our nation and its leaders have delegated to the League a special “rank”

and confidence as a VSO. Those promotion warrants would later go on to list a plethora of expectations:” *Effective with this appointment, you are charged to carefully and diligently execute the duties and responsibilities of a... veteran service organization... possessing technical and tactical proficiency... unwavering devotion to duty... complete dedication to the moral and ethical imperatives necessary to accomplish all assigned missions... keeper of institutional core values, customs and traditions... embody the qualities we desire all VSO’s to emulate... trusted advisor to your peers... providing responsible and candid advice... influence the welfare, capabilities, and character of future generations... be guardian of our culture and an exemplar who leads with firmness, fairness, dignity, and respect...*”

To sum it all up, let’s keep moving toward being the type of veteran service organization that we wish there were 20 more of in our communities. **Semper Fi!**

NATIONAL JR. VICE COMMANDANT

DAVID PORTER

The Impact and Effectiveness of a Servant

MARINES: Being a Marine isn’t defined by the uniform on our back; it’s defined by the character forged in the dirt of Parris Island, San Diego, or Quantico. The discipline, grit, and fundamental drive ingrained in us gave us the ability to say, “I’ve got this.” That accomplishment laid the foundation for us to continue serving. To serve comes with challenges, but also rewards. Every day gives us two choices: to see problems or possibilities, to complain or to be grateful. The choices we make lead to actions that affect the lives of those around us. If we are positive servants, our actions will remind others that their community is a place worth fighting for.

It really is incredible how the Marine Corps manages to feel like a tight-knit family despite its massive footprint. The “seven degrees of Kevin Bacon” comparison is spot on. It often feels more like two or three degrees of separation once you start swapping stories. Race Director of the Marine Corps Marathon Organization, Alex Hetherington gave me a great opportunity to see how amazing our community is and how far we spread out. I was invited to Fredericksburg’s Semper Fred 5K road race as the race starter and honored guest in May. This was a first, and a humbling experience in a community full of Marines. I was even able to meet with Jack Maas Detachment 1379 at a booth during the Historic Half Marathon Expo. Thank you, Sr. Vice Erest Bartosh, and your team, for sharing how your detachment is growing. It was great meeting and speaking with base commander of Quantico Col. Colegate and Sgt. Maj. Williams at the race. Later that evening, at the Oscar Mike Awards reception on the grounds of



George Washington’s childhood home at Ferry Farm, we celebrated the people who keep the local community thriving during the Historic Half Marathon and America’s 250th anniversary commemoration. The Marine Corps Marathon will return in October.

I know some detachments are struggling, and the challenges can be overwhelming. I say to you, “You’re doing the best you can with what you have.” On the days no one else shows up, you still can. There were times when I wanted to step back, but then I remembered why I volunteered and how many great friends I have connected with whom I now consider family. That’s why our community is so important as we continue to serve. As a servant, accepting that your current best is enough—even if the outcome isn’t perfect—is essential.

I would like to give a quick shout-out to Lt. Col. Mike Hunter (ret.) for a fantastic piece of insight regarding the 15th trait, empathy. Empathy is not sympathy, but a force multiplier that helps the community grow as a family. It builds a tight-knit unit where individuals instinctively look out for one another.

I would like to end this article by leaving you with one challenge: replace one complaint today with one act of gratitude. **Semper Fi!**

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NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE

BRUCE RAKFELDT

Guardrails, Not Speed Bumps: Why Process Protects the League

MARINES: Marines are trained to act decisively. From our earliest days, we learn the importance of mission accomplishment, clarity of command, and moving forward under pressure. Those instincts serve us well in uniform—and they continue to shape how we lead within the Marine Corps League. But in a volunteer organization built on shared commitment rather than command authority, decisiveness must be balanced with something equally essential: process.

Bylaws, grievance procedures, appeals, and investigations are sometimes viewed as obstacles—speed bumps that slow progress or frustrate leaders eager to act. In reality, they serve a far more important role. They are guardrails. They do not impede leadership; they protect it.

In the Marine Corps, accountability systems are never optional. Rules of engagement, inspections, and investigative procedures exist to protect Marines, preserve trust, and ensure legitimacy, especially when decisions are difficult or emotions run high. The MCL is no different. Our processes exist not because we distrust leaders, but because we respect members.

Most organizational divisions are not caused by disagreements over outcomes; they arise when people question how decisions were made. Members are far more likely to accept decisions they dislike when they know the rules were followed, both sides were heard, and leaders acted deliberately rather than impulsively.



When steps are skipped—even with good intentions—trust erodes quickly.

Leadership also requires restraint. The authority to act does not always mean acting immediately. Sometimes the most disciplined decision is to slow down, ensure the record is complete, and apply the bylaws exactly as written. That restraint signals fairness and protects leaders as much as it protects members.

Process safeguards everyone. It shields leaders from accusations of favoritism, protects organizations from lasting damage, and reinforces confidence that the MCL belongs to all members—not just those holding office.

Disagreement, when raised through established channels, is not disloyalty. Appeals and grievances are signs of engagement and faith in the organization. Marines have always been taught to speak up when something is wrong—and the League is strongest when that principle is respected.

Process does not weaken leadership. It legitimizes it. Guardrails do not prevent progress—they make sure we arrive together, intact and united. *Semper Fi!*

JUNIOR PAST NATIONAL COMMANDANT

WARREN “GRIFF” GRIFFIN

Thank You for the Opportunity to Serve

MARINES: As we enter this new period of Marine Corps League leadership, this will be my final column as Junior Past National Commandant. I want to thank everyone for the opportunity you have given me to serve. I hope you feel I have served with honesty and integrity. It has truly been a pleasure.

Looking back, I am proud that my goal of establishing a Marine Corps League Veterans Service Officer program for our members is fully up and running, with many successes. When I was sworn in as National Commandant, I stated that one of my goals was to “get ready on the right, ready on the left,” and then reach out to help our brothers and sisters who need support.

There are many veterans eligible for VA support who are lost or unaware of how to access the support they have earned. These benefits support not only the veteran but also family members in many ways. As Marines, we do not always reach out for help, but the VA is there to help us adapt and overcome.

Unfortunately, when filing a claim, a person may believe they can do it on their own. The VA uses a specific lexicon to rate claims. If a claim is submitted using that lexicon, a fair judgment can be rendered. If the same claim is submitted without the accepted lexicon, it may be rejected. That is why we are there



for them, as we should be.

Another goal I had hoped would succeed is our Youth Physical Fitness program. This program carries forward the ethos of physical fitness. The youth of today need a program such as this, as too many have become overly sedentary with the takeover of their lives by the computer world. This is not merely an opinion; it is measurable. Our

program could, in some small way, make an impact on the next generation, and it gives us a unique name in the veteran community.

As I have always stressed, the final clarion call is for membership. There are many brother and sister Marines who are unaware of our League. There are many Marines out there we can help. Keep banging the gong and let them know it is a benefit to join together with us.

Wishing all good health and good fortune in the years ahead. *Semper Fi!*

YOUNG MARINES OF THE MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

YOUNG MARINE SGT. MAJ. QUINN LAWTON

2026-2027 NATIONAL YOUNG MARINE OF THE YEAR
UPSTATE YOUNG MARINES, GREENVILLE, SC

Thank You, MCL Members!

MARINES: I am Young Marine Sgt. Maj. Quinn Lawton, and I am honored to serve as the 2026–2027 National Young Marine of the Year. I represent a program dedicated to building stronger, disciplined, drug-free young Americans through leadership skills, teamwork, and service to others.

I joined the Young Marines at a point in my life where I needed direction. I wanted challenge and structure, and to be part of something that meant something. From day one, the Young Marines program gave me that and more. It pushed me to grow, held me accountable, and surrounded me with people who refused to let me settle for being average.

What makes this program different is not just the training or the rank structure; it's the values and the emphasis on living a healthy, drug-free lifestyle, respecting others, and stepping up as a leader even when it's uncomfortable. Those lessons don't stay on the drill field; they carry into school, sports, and everyday life.

The Marine Corps League is not just connected to the Young Marines; you are part of the foundation. Your mentorship, presence, and willingness to invest your time into young people like me is what takes this program to another level. You bring



real-world experience of leadership, and examples of what it looks like to live out the values we are taught.

I've had the opportunity to meet and learn from many of you, and those moments matter more than you probably realize. When a Young Marine hears your story or gets advice from someone who has lived a life of service, it changes how we see our own potential. It makes what we're working toward feel real.

This program is not just about today; it's about the future. The Young Marines are developing future service members, community leaders, and Americans who will carry forward the same values you have upheld for decades. That only continues if

the connection between the Marine Corps League and the Young Marines stays strong.

My goal this year is to help strengthen that bond and ensure every Young Marine understands the legacy they are stepping into and the responsibility that comes with it.

Thank you for continuing to show up, lead, and invest in us. The impact you are making is real.

Thank you for your service. **Semper Fi!**

YOUNG MARINES LIAISON

JOHNNY BAKER

Young Marines' Alumni Association

MARINES: The Marine Corps League and the Young Marines are partners in helping America's youth lead healthy, drug-free lives, develop leadership skills, strengthen citizenship through community service, and become productive members of society.

The Young Marines program focuses on building character one challenge at a time. Every obstacle overcome, challenge accepted, and act of service performed helps shape a Young Marine into a leader others can respect and follow. The Young Marines is a national youth program for kids aged 8 through high school graduation. It is designed for youth who want to work hard, lead with integrity, grow into confident leaders, work effectively with teams, maintain a healthy lifestyle, solve problems under pressure, and lead by example. The lessons learned through the program often last a lifetime.

The Young Marines Alumni Association helps reconnect former Young Marines with the organization and with one another. Since the program's founding in 1959, tens of thousands of young people have participated. The association provides opportunities for alumni to engage with fellow former members and inspire future generations of Young Marines. Information about the association is available through the Young Marines website. One alumnus stated, "The Young Marines brought reasoning and stability to my



life. It motivated me to do better and give one hundred percent. It gave me, for the first time, something to strive for and an opportunity to become a mentor for others." Such comments reflect the lasting impact the program has on many alumni. If you are a Young Marines alumnus, consider joining today.

I would like to leave you with the Young Marines Oath: "From this day forward, I sincerely promise I will set an

example for all other youth to follow, and I shall never do anything that would bring disgrace or dishonor upon my God, my country and its flag, my parents, myself or the Young Marines. These I will honor and respect in a manner that will reflect credit upon them and myself. Semper Fidelis."

This powerful oath reflects values that benefit the youth of our nation. Today's youth need the Young Marines, and the Young Marines need the support of the Marine Corps League. The MCL should stand ready to assist the Young Marines in developing leadership, teamwork, and discipline. **Semper Fi!**



Joint Chiefs of Staff on Memorial Day

Memorial Day 2026



MCL MCLA MODD Wreath Laying Memorial Day 2026



MODD MCLA MCL rendering honors on Memorial Day 2026



Veterans Affairs Secretary rendering honors

Tradition is Our Compass, Not an Anchor

By Jim Breen

Marines are famous for many things, but perhaps nothing defines our mindset more than the ability to improvise, adapt, and overcome. It is the mantra that has served us island hopping in the Pacific and fighting in the urban terrain of the Middle East. Yet, there exists a paradox within our ranks. While we pride ourselves on our adaptability in the face of the enemy, we often find ourselves digging in our heels when it comes to changes within our own organization.

We are guardians of tradition, and rightly so. Our history is sacred, and our customs set us apart. But as we look to the future of the Marine Corps League, we must ask ourselves a critical question: Are we using tradition as a compass, or as an anchor?

The Difference Matters

A compass uses a fixed point—our core values of honor, courage, and commitment—to guide us through new and unfamiliar terrain. It allows for movement, for exploration, and for progress, ensuring we never lose our way even as the landscape around us shifts.

An anchor, however, is designed to stop movement entirely. It holds a ship in one place, preventing it from drifting, but also preventing it from sailing forward. When we resist change simply because, “that’s how we’ve always done it,” or because a new idea feels



uncomfortable, we are dropping an anchor. We are choosing stagnation over survival.

A Retrospective on Change

If you doubt the necessity of change, simply look back at our own time in the Corps. Posit for a moment where the Marine Corps would be today without the many changes that were made during our careers—changes that were often met with grumbling and resistance at the time.

■ Where would we be if the Corps had refused to evolve its weaponry, clinging to the M1 Garand instead of adopting the M16 and eventually the M4/M27? We would have been outgunned.

■ Where would we be if we had resisted the integration of digital communications and satellite technology, insisting

that radios and wire were “good enough”? We would have been deaf and blind on the modern battlefield.

■ Where would we be if we had not adapted our tactics from the linear warfare of the past to the maneuver warfare and combined arms coordination of today?

Without those changes, the Marine Corps would not be the lethal, premier fighting force it is today. It would be a relic. The leadership of the past understood that to preserve the spirit of the Corps, the methods had to evolve.

Moving the League Forward

The Marine Corps League faces a similar battlefield today. Our mission is to preserve the traditions and promote the interests of the United States Marine Corps, but we cannot do that if we refuse to modernize how we operate, how we communicate, and how we recruit.

Embracing inevitable changes—whether it be digital outreach, new meeting formats, or welcoming the fresh perspectives of younger veterans—does not mean we are abandoning our identity. It means we are securing it for the future.

Let us use our traditions as our compass to ensure we never deviate from our principles. But let us weigh anchor, catch the winds of change, and sail this organization forward. **Semper Fi!**

DIVISION REPORTS

Welcome to Indianapolis: The Crossroads of America Awaits the Marine Corps League



Dave Englert

**NVC, Central
Division**



MARINES: The Department of Indiana Marine Corps League and the Central Division are proud to welcome Marines, FMF corpsmen, associates, families and guests to the 2026 Marine Corps League National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. As you arrive in the Circle City, you are stepping into a community that honors service, celebrates tradition and embraces the spirit of camaraderie that defines our Corps.

Indianapolis has long been known as the Crossroads of America, and in 2026 it becomes the crossroads of MCL pride. From its iconic monuments to its Midwestern hospitality, the city offers an ideal backdrop for a week of connection, reflection and forward momentum.

The Department of Indiana has worked tirelessly to create an experience that blends MCL tradition with the energy of a modern American city. Expect meetings, workshops, ceremonies and social events designed to strengthen our mission and deepen the bonds that unite us.

Beyond the convention hall, Indianapolis offers rich military heritage and cultural landmarks. Visit the Soldiers & Sailors Monument, stroll the Canal Walk, or tour museums and memorials that honor America's veterans.

Above all, this convention is about Marines supporting Marines. It is about celebrating our shared legacy, honoring those who served, empowering those who continue to serve, and inspiring the next generation.

On behalf of the Department of Indiana MCL, welcome to Indianapolis. We are honored to host you, proud to stand beside you and excited for the week ahead. Together, we continue the mission. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclcentdiv.org

Why We Do What We Do



Scott Kirby

**NVC, Mideast
Division**



MARINES: "Semper Fidelis" — Always Faithful — is more than the motto of the U.S. Marine Corps. It is a lifelong commitment that continues long after the uniform is folded away for the last time.

People often ask why Marines continue serving their communities years after active duty. Why do they volunteer for funeral honors, support Toys for Tots, mentor young veterans, and dedicate countless hours to organizations such as the Marine Corps League? The answer is simple: because being a Marine is not just something we did — it is who we are.

From the first day on the yellow footprints, Marines are taught that the mission comes before self. We learn discipline, sacrifice and responsibility. More importantly, we learn that true leadership means serving others. That

lesson never leaves us.

Even after military service ends, Marines continue looking for ways to make a difference. We understand the importance of purpose and belonging. The Corps showed us what it means to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and once you experience that kind of brotherhood, you never truly walk away from it.

We also continue serving because we remember. We remember the Marines who stood beside us during difficult times. We remember those who never made it home. Every act of service becomes a way to honor their sacrifice and continue the legacy they helped build.

In a world that often focuses on individual success, Marines still believe in teamwork, honor and commitment. We believe in showing up when people need help. Whether assisting a fellow veteran, supporting a local community project or mentoring the next generation, Marines continue answering the call because service is part of our identity.

That is what "Semper Fidelis" truly means: always faithful to our country, our Corps and one another.

Marines do what they do because somebody once invested in them, believed in them and stood beside them. Now it is our turn to do the same for others. The uniform may come off, but the values never do. Once a Marine, always a Marine. **Semper Fi!**

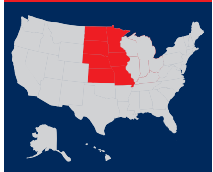
Division Website: mclmideast.com

Midwest Division Conference Review



Jim Maevers

**NVC, Midwest
Division**



MARINES: I am writing following the successful conclusion of the Midwest Division Conference held in Des Moines, Iowa. First and foremost, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the members of Larry Nehring Detachment 103 for their outstanding efforts in hosting this event. From registration to the closing gavel, the conference was exceptionally well organized and attended. The strong participation demonstrated the commitment of our members to the continued growth and success of the Marine Corps League.

Friday afternoon featured several informative presentations. Sarah Covert provided valuable guidance on detachment compliance requirements at both the state and federal levels. Capt. Seth Hammer delivered an excellent

overview of the Marine For Life Program and the resources available to transitioning Marines and veterans. We also heard from the founder of Dorothy's House, an Iowa-based nonprofit organization dedicated to combating human trafficking and supporting survivors. The evening concluded with a successful auction hosted by the local detachment.

Saturday began with our Memorial Service honoring members who have passed since our last conference. This solemn tradition reminds us of the sacrifices, friendships and legacies that continue to shape the MCL.

National Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Bob Borka provided a detailed briefing on current national MCL operations and initiatives. Division staff officers and department commandants also presented reports. Members are encouraged to review the complete conference minutes available on the Midwest Division website.

I am deeply honored to have been reelected as your national vice commandant for another two-year term and look forward to serving alongside newly elected Assistant Vice Commandant Jeff Strause. I have also appointed Brian Burlingame as Midwest Division chief of staff and Sarah Covert as director of detachment development and compliance, positions that will strengthen support to our departments and detachments.

Our banquet concluded with an inspiring presentation from Cpl. Todd Nicely, a combat-wounded Marine who lost all four limbs in Afghanistan. His story of resilience, leadership and determination, chronicled in his book "Your Choices Change Lives", reminded us that adversity does not define a Marine—our response to it does. His remarks and appreciation for the Focus Marine Foundation left a lasting impression on everyone in attendance. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mwdmcl.com

Inclusion is Key



Pat Maguire

**NVC, New
England Division**



MARINES: We're just a couple of weeks out from the New England Division Conference, and things are really starting to ramp up. This year feels a little different because the old Quad State setup is now rolling into one main division conference. It's been discussed for a while, so it's good to finally see it come together. From everything we've seen so far, it should be a solid weekend.

The conference is set for Springfield, MA, and the schedule is already full. Registration numbers are looking good, and hopefully more people will join as it gets closer. These events are always better when more members attend because they bring more energy to the entire event.

Planning a conference can be exhausting and frustrating at times, and it can raise stress levels quickly. In the end, however, everything usually comes together as intended. Whether it is a department event or a detachment function, it is often a small group of members doing most of the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

Involvement is something that always stands out. Recruiting and retention matter, but keeping members active after they join is just as important. Many of us remember joining and quickly noticing that a handful of members were doing much of the work—setting up events, running meetings, filling roles and keeping things moving.

The key is finding ways to bring more people in without overwhelming them. It does not have to start big. Helping set up a room, serving on a committee or taking on a small task is often enough to help members become comfortable and engaged.

Many newer members are balancing work, family and other responsibilities, so time is limited. Starting small allows them to ease in without feeling pressured.

At the end of the day, it's about making sure people feel included. When members feel they are part of the organization, they tend to stay involved and, over time, naturally grow into larger roles. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: newenglanddivmcl.org

DIVISION REPORTS

Passing the Torch: Preparing the Next Generation



Robert Ziltz

NVC, Northeast Division



MARINES: Growth strengthens our detachments, but growth alone is not enough. Numbers may give us strength, yet without leaders to guide that strength, we will falter. The future of the Marine Corps League depends on how well we prepare the next generation to take the torch of leadership.

Too often, leadership transitions are treated as emergencies rather than opportunities. A vacancy appears, and we scramble to find someone willing to step up. While this may fill a position, it rarely sets a new leader up for success. Leadership succession is not an event; it is a process that begins the moment a new member joins.

Preparation starts with mentorship. Every officer and committee chair should identify Marines who show potential and

invite them into the process. Sharing responsibilities, asking for input and explaining the reasoning behind decisions creates confidence and competence.

Training is equally vital. Leadership schools, workshops and online modules provide knowledge, but knowledge must be paired with practice. Giving Marines opportunities to lead projects, chair committees or represent the detachment at community events develops real-world leadership skills.

Encouragement matters as well. Many Marines hesitate to take on leadership roles because they doubt their readiness. Leadership in the MCL is not about perfection—it is about service. When we encourage and support future leaders, we give them the confidence to accept responsibility.

Finally, we must model the right mindset. Leadership is not about clinging to authority or recognition; it is about stewardship. True leaders understand that success is measured by how well their successors are prepared. Passing the torch is not loss—it is legacy.

If each of us commits to mentoring, training, encouraging and modeling, we will never lack capable leaders. The torch will always be ready to pass, and the League will always be ready to move forward. **Semper Fi!**

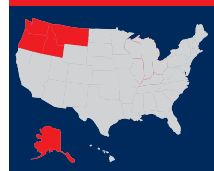
Division Website: nedmcl.org

So... What Do You Do?



Skip Nakashima

NVC, Northwest Division



MARINES: After World War II, President Truman and others considered eliminating the Marine Corps. Their position was that the Marine Corps was simply a smaller version of the Army and that the Army could perform the same missions. Several Marines opposed the proposal and alerted Congress and the public. The resulting public response led President Truman to comment that the Marines, “have a propaganda machine that is almost equal to Stalin’s.”

With activities celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States, this is an excellent time to increase public awareness of who we are and what we do. A common response to response when pushing for publicity is, “I don’t need recognition; I’m doing it for the community.” While that may be true for

the individual, it does not help build public awareness of the MCL.

Whenever we engage in activities, we should be mindful of the image we present. Is it obvious that we represent the Marine Corps League, or do we simply appear to be a group of Marines helping out? Are we dressed consistently? Do we appear organized and professional? Are we displaying a flag, banner or sign identifying us as a local MCL unit?

In addition to social media efforts, have you established relationships with local media outlets? Television, radio, and local newspapers are effective ways to increase public recognition. Once those relationships are established, media representatives learn which activities are important and how to communicate their value to the community.

Have you noticed that some organizations seem to receive more media attention than others? Often it is because someone took the time to demonstrate that the organization is well organized and making a meaningful contribution. We know this is true of the MCL; we simply need to help others see it as well. Remember, “Public relations is relations with the public.”

Semper Fi!

Division Website: mcl-nwdiv.org

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



Fort Worth Roll Call luncheon presentation in May 2026 of an Iwo Jima flamethrower to Don Graves, who is 101 years old, in recognition of his service. The event also saw honorary membership in Teufelshunde Det. 1392, Fort Worth, Texas bestowed upon Wayne Hickman, Roy Cuevas, Don Graves, and Rick Russell



On Fridays we wear RED! Members of the Fox Valley Marines Det. 1233 gathered at Veterans Serenity Park in Oswego, IL.



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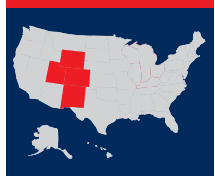
DIVISION REPORTS

Looking to the Future



Tom Krueger

NVC, Rocky Mountain Division



MARINES: Marines and FMF Navy personnel of the Rocky Mountain Division, I am asking each member to look to the future of not only their own detachment or department, but also the future of the Marine Corps League. I challenge each member to identify potential new members and consider ways to improve member retention.

One way to strengthen retention is by becoming more involved in our communities. The MCL offers several youth programs that can help increase visibility for your detachment. Assisting with these programs demonstrates that a detachment is active both internally and within the community. Few people want to join an organization that is not active. Information about these youth programs can be found on the national website.

Retention is an area where we, as members of the MCL, must continue to improve. While we lose some members through natural attrition, others leave because of a lack of activity or engagement. Fostering a sense of belonging through events, communication and recognition of member achievements can help members remain active and invested. Opportunities for personal growth and leadership can also encourage long-term participation.

I ask each department and detachment commandant to ensure compliance with state requirements and IRS regulations. Make certain your records are current and that the Report of Officer Installation (ROI) is completed and submitted through the chain of command following elections.

Proper paperwork is equally important. Membership forms, event documentation and youth program records should be completed accurately and submitted on time. Good recordkeeping supports communication, promotes compliance and helps detachments serve members and communities more effectively. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: rockymountainmcldiv.org

Preserve What Has Been Built



Ronnie Broussard

NVC, Southeast Division



MARINES: The strength of the Marine Corps League is found not only in its traditions, ceremonies and accomplishments, but also in the dedication of those who preserve its history for future generations. Every detachment is built upon years of sacrifice, volunteerism and leadership by Marines and associate members who gave their time to strengthen the organization. It is our responsibility to ensure that their legacy continues long after they are gone.

One meaningful way detachments honor their history is through awards named after respected members who have passed away. These awards serve as lasting reminders of the values those Marines represented—leadership, dedication, patriotism and service to others. When a Marine of the Year award or scholarship bears the name of a former

member, it tells future generations that the individual made a lasting impact worthy of remembrance.

Newsletters also play a critical role in preserving detachment history. Far more than simple announcements, newsletters become historical records documenting accomplishments, community service projects, awards, donations, ceremonies and the achievements of individual members. Maintaining organized digital and printed archives creates a valuable timeline of a detachment's history.

Preserving a legacy also means preparing for the Marines who will assume leadership in the future. Organized records, written procedures, historical binders, digital archives, award histories, photographs and officer continuity books help ensure important knowledge is not lost during leadership transitions.

Researching the past is equally important. Speaking with senior members and past commandants helps preserve stories that may never appear in official records. Recording the names of past commandants, Marines of the Year and other award recipients creates pride and continuity within the organization.

The MCL was founded to preserve Marine Corps traditions and strengthen the bond among Marines. By protecting the history of each detachment today, we ensure that future generations understand the sacrifices, accomplishments and spirit of the Marines who came before them. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: sediv.org

Bylaws and Administrative Procedures



Mark Oldmixon

**NVC,
Southern
Division**



MARINES: As most of you know, national bylaws (BL) and administrative procedures (AP) are amended each year at the national convention. Some years bring only a few amendments, while others result in substantial changes. It is the responsibility of departments and detachments to obtain and review the amended national BL and AP documents.

At the conclusion of the national convention, previous versions become obsolete. As a result, department and detachment bylaws may become noncompliant if they have not been updated regularly. It is the responsibility of the detachment commandant to appoint a committee to review local BL and AP documents and, when necessary, submit proposed amendments for membership approval.

As a past Department of Texas judge advocate, I have seen detachments operating under BL and AP documents that had not been updated in decades. In one instance, a detachment lost its bylaws and neither the detachment nor the department judge advocate had a copy on file. Until new bylaws are created and approved, that detachment must operate under the national BL and AP.

Electronic recordkeeping makes preservation much easier. Detachments should maintain backup copies of BL and AP documents and make them available to members when needed. Some detachment bylaws are only a few pages long, while others resemble an encyclopedia. Regardless of length, they should address essential items such as quorum requirements, meeting schedules, officer elections, EIN records, IRS Form 990 filings and required state documentation.

Detachments may also benefit from using transfer and inventory forms when officers change positions. Maintaining BL and AP documents is an ongoing process that helps ensure compliance, continuity and organizational stability. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclsouth.org

Southwest Division Report



Joe Uribe

**NVC,
Southwest
Division**



MARINES: The Southwest Division continues to move forward, adapting and advancing the Marine Corps League while preserving the traditions that define us. Across the division, departments are updating websites, bylaws and standard operating procedures to better serve members and meet changing needs.

The Dept. of Arizona recently completed a comprehensive redesign of its website, creating a highly functional resource for Marines, veterans and MCL members. The platform includes expanded information, streamlined communication tools, online membership applications and automated reporting features. The Dept. of California continues to lead recruitment efforts through its proximity to active-duty Marine Corps installations, introducing transitioning Marines to the MCL and its mission. The Dept. of Nevada

maintains strong membership and promotes the MCL through the Leatherneck Club in Las Vegas, one of the nation's most recognized Marine veteran establishments.

The past year has provided many opportunities to honor both our Corps and our nation. Members throughout the division participated in ceremonies, commemorations and community events recognizing the Marine Corps' 250th birthday and America's continuing 250th anniversary celebration.

In Hawaii, efforts continue toward the goal of forming a full department. Progress remains steady, and we look forward to continued growth and success in the years ahead.

During our recent division convention, I was honored to be reelected as Southwest Division National Vice Commandant. I also congratulate Antonio Espino, commandant of the Dept. of Arizona, on his election as assistant division vice commandant. Thank you for your trust and confidence in our leadership team.

As we commemorate the Marine Corps' 250th birthday and America's 250th anniversary, let us remember that we are stewards of a proud legacy. Honor, courage, commitment and service remain as relevant today as ever. It is our responsibility to preserve those traditions, strengthen the MCL, mentor the next generation and ensure the sacrifices of those who came before us are never forgotten.

Together, we will continue to uphold the ideals that make our Corps and our nation exceptional. **Semper Fi!**

Division Website: mclswdivision.org

HAPPY 250TH USA

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WORD LIST

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Puzzle: Dan Shaw,
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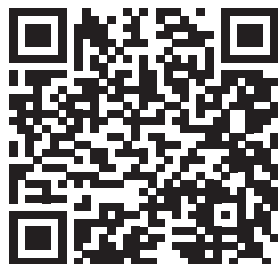
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LEATHERNECK
MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES





Mission First, Business Next:

A Marine Builds for the Future

By Bob Borka

Maj. Ashley-Anne Wallace, USMCR, is creating a community hub in the town of Quantico (Q-Town), Virginia, right across the street from the Marine Corps League's new building. The American bistro, coffeehouse and event space is designed to serve Marines and their families, as well as the business professionals and residents who frequent Quantico.





Maj Wallace



2ndLt Wallace

Service to our country extends beyond wearing the uniform. The bistro is opening with a fresh look for Quantico. A clean and updated décor is meant to inspire reinvestment in Quantico, Virginia. The transformation of an old bank into a bistro has been challenging and has required the use of the time-honored values of a dedicated Marine.

Shirley's is named after Ashley-Anne's Scottish-born grandmother, who was proud to become an American. Ashley-Anne learned from her grandmother that a meal served in an intentionally built space brings comfort and joy. This inspired the creation of a community gathering place in a cozy café. Ashley-Anne is proud to bring that sense of family to the town of Quantico.

Maj. Wallace serves with pride as a U.S. Marine with eight years of active-duty service and is currently serving on active orders in the Marine Corps Reserve. She works on Marine Corps Base Quantico. Her dedication to Marines and esprit de corps, combined with her master's degree in historic preservation from Savannah College of Art and Design, helped bring to life a place for Marines and their families to gather. As all veterans know, the transition to civilian life can be a challenge. Organizations such as the Marine for Life Network and the Marine Corps League help support Marines during that transition.

As Ashley-Anne builds this place for the Marine community to gather, she is also building what will become her future career while supporting esprit de corps. The two-and-a-half-year journey has included major challenges and setbacks. Her contractor mismanaged funds and abandoned the project, but Ashley-Anne pressed forward to accomplish the mission and execute the vision. The setback left the project short of funding, and she has sought donations to support the effort.

The renovations are moving along well, although restoring and transforming a bank into a café is a significant undertaking, including the installation of a specialized HVAC system. The event center is taking



shape on the second floor, and the first floor will feature a private dining room. Comfortable seating and a television above the fireplace will create an inviting space to gather for a game or a professional meeting. The process has been much like a crucible, but anticipation continues to build ahead of the planned August 2026 opening.

Shirley's American Bistró will serve fresh American fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner and feature a coffee bar with a community atmosphere. There will be gathering spaces for professionals, Marines and families, as well as a play area for children. The private dining area will be available for business dinners, family gatherings and celebrations among friends.

The long-term initiative is to preserve the character of Quantico while encouraging revitalization. The hope is that other businesses will participate in community investment to enhance and protect the town for future Marines and their families.

In the short term, the bistro is nearing



its grand opening. Maj. Wallace has extensive experience planning and executing missions while taking care of her Marines. The transition to civilian life is no different. Rather, it is a continuation of the leadership skills she developed and earned as a Marine.

Look forward to seeing you in Q-Town

— at the Semper Fi Store, Marine Corps League National Headquarters and, of course, Shirley's American Bistró.

Visit Shirley's American Bistró at 301 Potomac Ave, Quantico, VA 22134.

More info is available at **www.shirleysbistro.com**

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Marines, Runners and Volunteers Power 19TH Marine Corps Historic Half Weekend

By Alex Hetherington

Director, Marine Corps Marathon Organization

The 19th annual Marine Corps Historic Half Weekend in Fredericksburg, VA, attracted 5,899 registrants across its featured events, continuing the tradition of celebrating the strong bond between the city of Fredericksburg and the U.S. Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps Historic Half highlights the close and enduring relationship between Fredericksburg and the Corps. With the National Museum of the Marine Corps and many of the Corps' key training and headquarters functions located nearby at Marine Corps Base Quantico, the installation is widely recognized as the "Crossroads of the Corps." Fredericksburg's deep historical significance has also long positioned the city at a crossroads of American history, particularly during the Colonial and Civil War eras.

The Semper Fred 5K returned as a standalone event May 16, featuring a redesigned course that highlighted some of downtown Fredericksburg's most scenic and historic areas. The race drew 1,333 registrants and 1,102 starters.

Stephen Harrison, 37, of Fredericksburg, VA, captured the men's title with a time of 15:56, while marine spouse Judi Spinks of Stafford, VA, claimed the women's title in 17:44. Guest of Honor David Porter was recognized for his lifelong dedication to service and leadership as a Marine veteran, longtime Cambridge, MA, police officer, senior leader within the Marine Corps League, and finisher of the 50th Marine Corps Marathon.

The Historic Half followed May 17 with



4,566 registrants and 3,698 starters. Naphtali Moulton, 29, a second lieutenant assigned to The Basic School at Quantico, won the men's division in 1:10:54, the ninth-fastest time in event history. Fredericksburg native Natalie Daniels, 34, secured her record-setting fourth women's title while establishing a new course record of 1:20:54.

Daniels' performance came one day after being recognized as a 2026 Oscar Mike Award recipient. The Oscar Mike Award serves as the event's hall of fame, honoring the builders, supporters, and standout champions who have helped shape the Historic Half throughout its history.

The Esprit de Corps Challenge, which combines completion of both the Historic Half and the Semper Fred 5K, returned for its second year and attracted 698 participants.

The 6 a.m. start time, first introduced in 2024, again proved effective in mitigating heat-related medical concerns despite warm forecast conditions. The event recorded 58 minor medical encounters, primarily involving routine first-aid injuries, along with four cases of heat stress.

The event was supported by 384 Marines assigned to Marine Corps Base Quantico and its tenant commands, along with 205 civilian volunteers. Co-guests of honor were Maj. Gen. Fridrik Fridriksson, director of Manpower Management at Marine Corps Base Quantico, and Fredericksburg Mayor Kerry P. Devine. The official host and senior Marine overseeing the event was Col. Jenny Colegate, commander, Marine Corps Installations National Capital Region—Marine Corps Base Quantico. **Semper Fi!**

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



National Executive Director Bob Borka presented the John A Lejeune Award to Marine Corps Command and Staff College recipient Major Andrew Litecky USMC-AR at an awards ceremony at Marine Corps University, MCB Quantico, Virginia.



Robert recently took his first Honor Flight in April 2026, on his 104th birthday. Bob was a seagoing Marine and served aboard the USS California from 1942 to 1945. He is a member of MCL Det. 74 Illinois.



104-year-old Retired Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Filko was presented with a Congressional Certificate from Congressman Tom Barrett and a certificate from the Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps for his service in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam over his 25-year career. Filko is a life member of Capital Det. 148, Lansing, MI.

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



A scene from the Central Division conference, in Lexington, KY in March 2026. From left, Associate Member Amy Smith, Senior Vice Commandant Shannon Nichols, Ohio Pack Leader Stan Williams, Paymaster Roger Smith, ACDVC (with flag) Tim Sherman VSO, and Commandant Department Of Ohio Kevin D. Keller

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 semperfi@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.

ROLL CALL

AROUND THE LEAGUE



Attendees at the Lou Diamond Det. 272 Landing Party Breakfast in April 2026. This event has been held annually for at least the last 40 years. From left are Department of Ohio Senior Vice Commandant Shannon Nichols, the next three people are all World War II Marine veterans, but we did not record their names.



Not veterans service organization work but replacing a flagpole and U.S. flag today for MCL member Marion Thompson, who has departed to guard the streets.



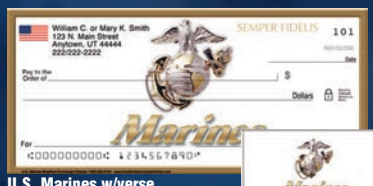
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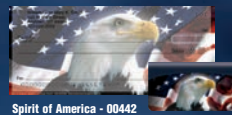
America's 250th Anniversary
- 01558 ▲ Leather Cover and Labels - 01558



U.S. Marines w/verse
"Semper Fidelis" - 00305
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Same Here

Poem By Chad Luyster

In Memory of his father Marine Richard C. Luyster

He was a man of granite and grit,
Built of the things he did, not what he said.
He didn't have the breath for flowery wit;
He used his hands to earn our daily bread.
A steady mountain, quiet in his pride,
With shoulders broad enough
to bear the gale,
He kept the deepest parts of him inside,
Behind a heart that never seemed to fail.
He carried scars from jungles far away,
A young Marine who stood
his ground in hell.
The things he saw, he never had to say;
The stories were for him alone to tell.
That quiet wasn't empty—it was earned,
A peace he found after the fire and smoke.
From muddy trenches, this
is what he learned:
The deepest truths are very seldom spoken.
I looked at him and saw a hero's face,
Not for the medals, but the way he stood.
He was my anchor and my steady place,

The definition of a man made good.
I'd lean against that strength
and say the words—
The "I love you" that hung soft upon the air.
He wouldn't soar in songs
like summer birds,
But simply nod and whisper, "Same here."
It wasn't that sentiment was small,
Or that he lacked the grace to say it back;
It was his way of standing through it all,
Filling in the words that the
world might lack.
"Same here" meant that his
blood was mine to keep,
"Same here" meant he would
never let me fall.
It was a promise, resonant and deep,
The shortest, truest answer of them all.
The house is quiet now, the mountain still,
And silence is a weight I have to bear.
But when I look up and say, "I
love you Dad" — and I will —
I will be listening for his reply: "Same here."

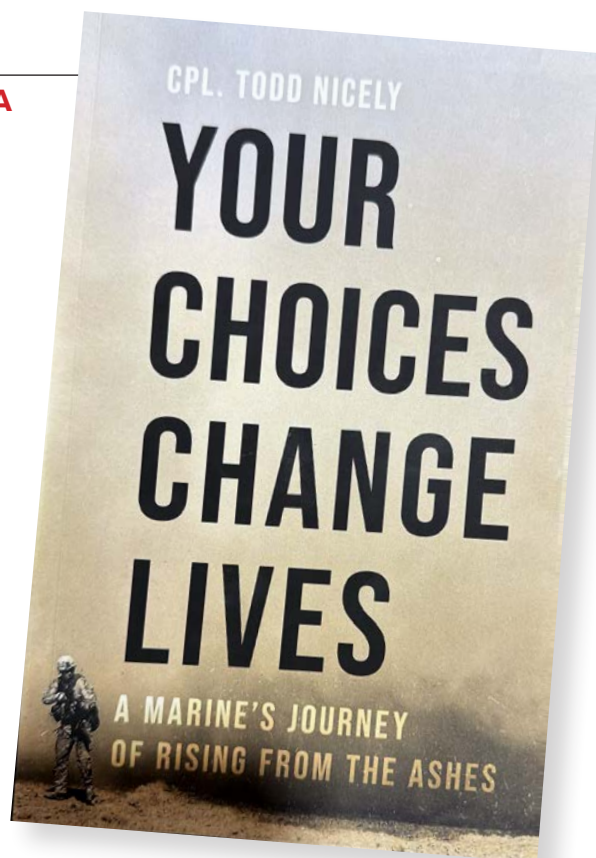
BOOK REVIEWS

BOOKS FOR, ABOUT & BY MARINES – BY BOB BORKA

Your Choices Change Lives

A Marine's Journey of Rising from the Ashes

Marine Corps League member Todd Nicely shares a powerful story of resilience, recovery and determination. After suffering life-changing injuries from an IED explosion in Afghanistan, Nicely faced challenges that would test anyone's resolve. The author was a guest of honor at a recent division conference and proved to be the same straightforward, inspiring Marine reflected in these pages. One of the book's most memorable messages is, "Strength isn't about how much you can handle alone. Real strength is knowing when to ask for help." The book is an engaging, easy read that is difficult to put down. Nicely also highlights the important support provided by organizations such as the Focus Marines Foundation and Tunnel to Towers, which played key roles during his recovery journey.



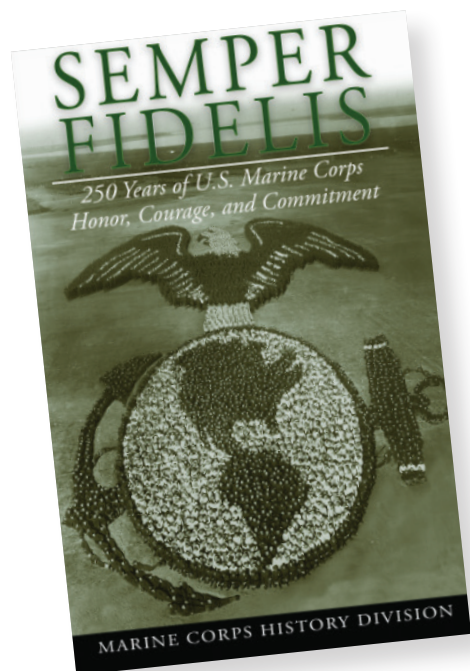
Your Choices Change Lives: A Marine's Journey of Rising from the Ashes

Author: Todd Nicely

Pages: 116 pages

Publisher: Reflek Publishing

ISBN-13: 978-1968164096



Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment

The Marine Corps History Division has produced a remarkable volume that captures 250 years of Marine Corps history. Available through the Marine Corps History Division website, this book offers readers an opportunity to explore the legacy, achievements and evolution of the Corps. Readers may find themselves wondering what legendary Commandant Archibald Henderson would think of everything that has transpired since his tenure. The foreword, written by Gen. Eric Smith, Commandant of the Marine Corps, highlights enduring themes that have defined Marines for generations: readiness for the next fight, continuous adaptation and modernization, and respect for the Marines who came before them. This commemorative volume is a worthwhile addition to any Marine's library.

Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment

Author: Marine Corps History Division

Pages: 428

Publisher: Histories Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA

ISBN-13: 9798987849101

I Answered My Country's Call

By Michael J. Haas

Perhaps it came by letter or post
Maybe I had a number drawn
Or saw a poster from our host
Nevertheless, I answered thon

I carried myself, the fear tucked in
I entered the storm clearly and tall
I did the job I was trained to begin
And I answered my Country's call

With the battles raging all around me
I led or followed into the squall
I fought the battles to keep us free
And I answered my Country's call

On land and sea I did my duty
I saw and lived in horror's thrall
In a time of fear with little beauty
I solely answered my Country's call

When you think of me and remember
Know I did my best and gave it all
With an open mind, I was a service member
And now I answered the Almighty's call

Shed a tear or cry for me if you must
Think of me in winter, spring, summer or fall
Know I was guided by duty and trust
And willingly I answered my Country's call

REUNIONS

46th ANNUAL MARINE CORPS LEAGUE REUNION

LOCATION: A La Carte
Catering, 429 Lisbon Street,
Canfield, OH 44406

DATE: 15 AUG 2026

TIME: Saturday, 6-10 p.m.

CONTACT: Chester
Kaschak, (330) 533-6084,
or Mark Carver,
(330) 398-9938

INFO: No ticket sales at the door. All ticket orders must be received before 8 AUG 2026. The event is open to all Marines, their families, and service members who served with or supported Marine operations. The cost is \$36/ea. for dinner buffet and open bar. Expect door prizes, silent auction, and more. Make checks payable to: MCL Tri-State Detachment 494 and mail to either: C.M. Kaschak, 7425 S. Palmyra Rd, Canfield, OH 44406
Mark A. Carver, 2924 E Garfield Rd., New Springfield, OH 44443

(AAONHC) AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF NAVY HOSPITAL CORPSMEN REUNION

LOCATION: Mount
Rushmore, SD

DATE: 26-30 AUG 2026

CONTACT: Paul Denis,
(315) 439-8383

INFO: AAONHC website
at www.aaonhc.org

MARINE CORPS ENGINEER ASSOCIATION (MCEA) REUNION AND AWARDS BANQUET

LOCATION: DoubleTree
by Hilton Sacramento,
2001 Point West Way,
Sacramento, CA 95815

DATE: 17-19 SEP 2026

CONTACT: Lt. Col. George
Carlson USMC (ret.),
treasurer@marcorengasn.org, (931) 307-9094

INFO: MCEA website at
www.marcorengasn.org

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

CAC/CAP VIETNAM 1965-1971 MARINE AND NAVY CORPSMEN

LOCATION: San Diego, CA

DATE: 6-10 NOV 2026

CONTACT: Mark Morales,
mrmo@bellsouth.net, (601) 918-5008

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Fleet Week 2026

By Bob Borka



A-Rod and Bob.



Detachment 17 Commandant Ashley Towry presents certificate to Michael.



Big Stick Det. 1496 Commandant Luis Gallegos and Bob on the Iowa.



Group on the USS Iowa.

The Marine Corps League (MCL) was out in force for Fleet Week 2026. MCL Members were spending time at vendor tents speaking with attendees and vendors. They certainly interacted with the Marines present. Son of a Gun BBQ was able to feed the working servicemembers and first responders everyday thanks to sponsorship donations.

MCL Member Amadeo Rodriguez (A-Rod) founded the BBQ, and they serve Marines aboard Camp Pendleton and across Southern California. There is extensive social media of his group providing great BBQ, creating meaningful connections, and putting smiles on service member's, first responders, and their families faces. Check out SonOfAGunBBQ.com.

The MCAS El Toro Det. 17 and the Big Stick Det. 1496 coupled with the mega-motivating Marine veteran Jason Parks brought the "service" in the "Veterans Service Organization". Det. 17 Commandant Ashley Towry invited the National Executive Director "Just Bob" to the Friday evening event. A grand time was had by all!

Our National Executive Director said, "Every time I see these two detachments in action, I am awe-inspired! They consistently prove that detachments can work together, serve the community, and make something awesome."

Bravo Zulu, Detachments
17 and 1496! **Semper Fi!**

Marine Corps League Detachment Holds 16th Annual Mud Run

On June 2, 2026, the 16th annual Marine Corps League Det. 1075 Mud Run was held at the Jomeokee Park and Campground in Pinnacle, NC. The 5K course consisted of more than 15 obstacles, including four mud pits, an ice pit, the “Ho Chi Minh Trail”, “Mount Suribachi” rope climb and walk of shame, slip and slide, meat grinder, “A-Frame” cargo net climb, and a grenade throw. During the 6 hour event, 880 runners between the ages of 2 (pollywog) and 78, from 12 different states, navigated the obstacles and got dirty for a good cause. Funds generated from the event are used to support a wide range of charities including the Semper Fi & America’s Fund with Wounded Warrior Battalion-East at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC. Other beneficiaries include the Marine Corps League Toys for Tots, Fisher House and the Wreaths Across America, and more.



Marines warming up the runners.



Marine corps encouragement at final mud hole.



Runners in the final mud hole.

Runners in one of four mud holes.

HAPPY 250TH USA (ANSWER KEY)

H	G	S	O	L	J	Z	H	H	A	V	G	M	K	I	C	Y	I	L	U
Q	M	V	S	X	R	K	A	D	I	H	A	N	C	O	C	K	F	D	S
I	B	D	M	E	T	N	O	I	T	U	T	I	T	S	N	O	C	R	N
L	X	A	N	Z	R	K	N	T	Q	D	A	M	S	G	I	B	W	O	N
A	D	M	O	S	Q	G	Z	R	V	X	C	X	X	V	G	L	N	C	N
A	C	O	T	R	V	K	N	T	K	V	I	D	X	J	Q	O	J	N	V
N	K	D	G	E	M	W	J	O	R	E	R	G	N	V	I	M	V	O	X
F	T	E	N	D	S	J	M	R	C	A	E	J	J	T	G	N	C	C	Z
S	T	E	I	N	U	K	O	O	O	V	M	G	A	Q	P	Z	O	Z	X
F	V	R	H	U	C	J	Q	V	U	T	A	R	K	C	Y	H	L	V	J
H	Z	F	S	O	G	R	E	A	B	H	A	P	T	Y	C	O	O	N	U
S	G	W	A	F	W	E	M	P	M	L	J	H	E	U	W	A	N	Y	Y
D	Y	N	W	H	F	V	Z	W	C	Q	E	O	B	R	R	H	I	D	O
E	Z	O	A	V	Q	O	R	E	T	K	F	Y	O	E	T	X	E	Q	N
R	O	S	F	X	P	L	D	O	I	Y	F	H	U	P	I	Y	S	Y	Q
P	U	H	I	O	U	C	W	J	H	E	I	K	U	K	R	C	E	E	
H	M	W	E	W	G	T	C	N	N	K	R	O	B	N	B	G	N	M	
Y	S	W	A	Y	S	I	M	P	A	L	S	J	Y	L	M	N	R	X	X
R	Z	T	H	P	H	O	I	N	P	A	O	M	K	I	V	V	Z	M	X
F	O	E	T	R	A	N	M	S	S	V	N	A	C	C	U	N	E	O	F



MARINE CORPS MARATHON

ROUND 2



BEAT THE BRIDGE!
CARRYING THE LEGACY FORWARD

OCTOBER 25, 2026

Marine Corps League National Junior Vice Commandant,
David Porter & Assistant National Vice Commandant New
England Division, Michael Hinds will be Co-Captains of the
Marine Corps League Team

"The People's Marathon"

#RunWithTheMarines

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SB-T-Shirt Black MCL

100% Cotton T-Shirt w/MCL Logo on Breast
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SG-T-Shirt Green MCL

100% Cotton T-Shirt w/MCL Logo on Breast
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100% Cotton T-Shirt w/MCL Logo on Breast
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100 Coin-100th Anniversary MCL Coin

100 Year Coin MCL
Logo, 'LT GEN JOHN A LEJUNE'
\$10.00



Card03- Blank Cards

10 Pack Blank Cards w/Embossed MCL
Logo and Envelopes
\$12.00



Card02- Sympathy Cards

10 Pack Sympathy Cards "OUR DEEPEST
SYMPATHY IN THIS TIME OF LOSS" w/
Embossed MCL Logo and Envelopes
\$12.00



Card01- Get Well Cards

10 Pack Get Well Cards "BEST WISHES
FOR A SPEEDY RECOVERY" w/Embossed
MCL Logo and Envelopes
\$12.00

THE SEMPER FI STORE

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Code#	Quantity	Item Description	Size	Price Each	Total Cost

HANDLING & POSTAGE

AMOUNT OF ORDER.....CHARGE

UNDER \$10.....\$7.99

\$10.01-\$25.00.....\$8.99

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\$35.01-\$50.00.....\$11.99

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Full Name _____ Member Number _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Date of Birth / / Join Date ---/---/-----

Membership Type - Regular () Associate () Dual ()

Please indicate the amount enclosed: -----

Member's Signature

Upon completion, turn into your Detachment Paymaster with required payment.

***For Members At Large (MAL), remit this form with check or money order In the amount of \$30 to: Marine Corps League, National Headquarters
P.O. Box 1990, Stafford, VA 22555-1990.***

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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP - MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

Full Name _____

Street Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email Address _____

Date of Birth / / Date of Enlistment/Commissioning / / Date of Discharge/Retirement/Separation / /

Type of Application – New () Membership Type - Regular () Associate () Dual ()

Have you ever been convicted of a felony? () YES () NO If YES is checked, I agree to waive my rights under the Privacy Act and disclose the nature of the felony conviction for consideration of membership in the Marine Corps League.

() I hereby apply for membership in the _____ Detachment, Marine Corps League and enclose \$ _____ for one year's membership.*

-OR-

() I hereby apply for membership in the Marine Corps League as a Member-at-Large (MAL), and enclose \$30 for one year's membership.*

*Includes free subscription to *Semper Fi, The Magazine of the Marine Corps League*

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.

(Sponsor where applicable)

Applicant's Signature (see reverse side)

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***Upon completion, turn into your Detachment sponsor with required payment. Applicants for MAL Membership, remit this form with check or money order In the amount of \$30 to: Marine Corps League, National Headquarters
P.O. Box 1990, Stafford, VA 22555-1990.***



OATH OF MEMBERSHIP

"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."

Signature _____

Incorporated by an act of Congress in 1937, the Marine Corps League perpetuates the traditions and spirit of ALL Marines who proudly wear or who have worn the Eagle, Globe and Anchor of the Corps.



OATH OF MEMBERSHIP

"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."

Signature _____

Incorporated by an act of Congress in 1937, the Marine Corps League perpetuates the traditions and spirit of ALL Marines who proudly wear or who have worn the Eagle, Globe and Anchor of the Corps.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL AND DUES PAYMENT REMINDER

It's time to renew your membership. August 31st is just around the corner. All annual memberships expire in August. If you are an annual member, your dues are due now.

Don't wait and don't forget.

Fill out the form below and provide it to your detachment paymaster along with your annual dues payment. While you're at it, please remind your fellow members it's time to renew. It is a good idea to renew early so that, when life happens, you're already paid up.

Remember, you are paying ahead, not paying behind. Membership makes your detachment strong and doing your part, like paying dues on time, helps keep it that way. Please do not procrastinate. Square it away today.

Please fill out the form and provide to your detachment paymaster along with your annual dues.

RENEWAL FORM



Please fill out this form and give to your Detachment Paymaster along with your annual dues.

Member Number: _____ Detachment Number: _____

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ Middle Initial: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Join Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ ☐ Home ☐ Cell ☐ Work

Email: _____ Dues Total: _____

Please mail this form, along with your annual dues, to your detachment paymaster or give it to them at the next meeting. Detachment contact information can be found in our locator.



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MARINE®**

April 13 – 15, 2027

Walter E. Washington Convention Center | Washington D.C.

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THE DATE**