



## I remember. . .

by Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr.,  
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In view of my forty-two years active duty service as an officer in the United States Marine Corps, I have been requested to comment on the article *Marine Corps Birthday Celebrations* published in the current issue of the MARINE CORPS GAZETTE.

This is an excellent article, substantially correct, and indicates considerable research by the author for which she is to be commended.

I was commissioned in the Marine Corps in April 1917. During that year and the following three I do not recall any mention of a Marine Corps Birthday either in July or November. This may be due to my service overseas during this period.

In December 1920 I was assigned duty at Headquarters Marine Corps as an aide-de-camp to Gen Lejeune, Commandant of the Corps.

In the early fall of 1921 I distinctly recall Maj Edwin McClellan, officer in charge of the historical section at Headquarters, discussing with Gen Lejeune the desirability of designating 10 November as the official Marine Corps Birthday.

From research, Maj McClellan had apparently verified the historic resolu-

tion enacted by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia on 10 November 1775 to raise two battalions of Marines for service with the Navy. He therefore recommended to Gen Lejeune that this date become the official birthday of the United States Marine Corps.

General Lejeune approved Maj McClellan's recommendation which resulted in the publication of Marine Corps Order No. 47 Series 1921. This order has remained in effect since that date.

In regard to Maj McClellan's suggestion that a Marine Corps Birthday dinner be held in Washington, 10 November 1921 to which prominent individuals would be invited, I do not believe this dinner materialized due to the arrival in Washington on 9 November of the remains of the American Unknown Soldier.

From a diary I kept at the time, I note the following entry:

November 10th, 1921—. . . in the afternoon I accompanied Generals Lejeune and Neville to the Capitol to place a wreath from the Marine Corps on the casket of the Unknown Soldier. At the time of our visit the Honor Guard consisted of five Marines in Dress Blue Uniform standing motionless at Parade Rest around the casket.

In view of the period of national mourning in honor of the American Unknown Soldier whose remains were buried in Arlington Cemetery on 11 November, Armistice Day, I am certain that any plans Maj McClellan may have had for a Marine Corps Birthday dinner on 10 November 1921, were cancelled.

On 10 November, 1922, 1923, and 1924, I was on sea duty and have no records in my diary of a Marine Corps Birthday ceremony aboard the ships on which I was serving.

On 10 November 1925 and 1926, I was on duty at the Marine Barracks, Norfolk Navy Yard. My diary shows that the commanding officer of the Barracks assembled the command on these dates and read General Lejeune's order, but I

have no entry of a Marine Corps ball or cake-cutting ceremony.

On 10 November 1927 and 1928, I was serving as regimental adjutant of the Fourth Marines in Shanghai, China. In 1927 due to the potentially serious military situation that existed in Shanghai at the time, and the widely separated areas in which my battalions were billeted, I do not recall any observance of the Marine Corps Birthday. In 1928 however, my diary shows that "in the forenoon of November 10th the Regimental chaplain made an excellent address at the enlisted club followed by the singing of the Marine Corps Hymn. In the afternoon the officers assembled at the American Club and drank a toast to the Corps on its 153rd Birthday."

During the period 1930 to 1936, I do not recall attending a Marine Corps Birthday ball. This may have been due to my four years' service in Haiti and assignments to duty other than on a Marine Corps post.

My first recollection of a Marine Corps Birthday ball was at Quantico in 1937. I had been assigned to the post the previous June and in addition to my regular duties was serving as chairman of the entertainment committee of the officers club.

In October, Gen Breckinridge, the post commander, called me to his office and inquired what plans I had made for a Marine Corps Birthday ball. I informed him the entertainment committee had scheduled a dance on the night of 10 November to be held at Harry Lee Hall. He then said "I want you to have a Marine Corps Birthday cake-cutting ceremony at the dance."

Upon inquiry I learned that on 10 November of the previous year an officers dance had been held at Harry Lee Hall. During the evening a birthday cake had been rolled onto the dance floor by four Marines wearing colonial uniforms and that the first slice had been cut by the commanding general.

Since it appeared desirable to me at the time to vary the previous year's ceremony, I worked out one of my own conception. Instead of having the Marines who rolled in the cake dressed in Revolutionary War uniforms (which were difficult to procure) I prescribed that officers participating in the ceremony wear Dress Blues.

The ceremony I devised was similar to the one currently conducted throughout the Marine Corps except there was no commentary nor display of period uniforms previously worn by Marines.

Apparently the ceremony was a success, as the following year when Gen Breckinridge inquired what type of ceremony the entertainment committee had decided to hold on the Marine Corps Birthday. I replied that I had exhausted the resources of my imagination the previous year and was unable to originate a different one. To this Gen Breckinridge said, "Conduct the same ceremony as you did last year. It was excellent in every detail. If we continue to follow the same ceremony for several more years it will become tradition."

During the next four years while I was stationed at Quantico this same ceremony was conducted at the Marine Corps Birthday balls held on the post. When I became Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1952, I issued an order standardizing the ceremonial procedure, which I had originated at Quantico in 1937.

In recent years the Marine Corps Birthday ball ceremony has been improved by a commentary on the illustrious history of the Corps and a display of period uniforms. Since the latter are not always obtainable by the smaller posts and stations it seems desirable for the participants of these detachments to wear Dress Blues and to follow the originally prescribed procedures for our Marine Corps Birthday cake-cutting ceremony. As Gen Breckinridge prophesied some forty years ago, this ceremony has now become a tradition.

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