



# A Tribute to BGen James D. Hittle, USMC(Ret)

by Gen Paul X. Kelley, USMC(Ret)

*A eulogy and graveside remarks honor the passing of a unique Marine.*

**B**Gen James Donald Hittle—devout Christian—great American—Marine officer—gentleman and gentle man—loving husband—caring father—always a friend in deed!

Commissioned a Marine second lieutenant in 1937, Don Hittle was a “plank owner” when MajGen Holland Smith activated the 1st Marine Division for World War II—was G-4 for the 3d Marine Division under MajGen Graves Erskine on Guam and at Iwo Jima—and after the war commanded 2d Battalion, 7th Marines in the occupation of North China.

After serving his Corps for 23 years, Don Hittle’s future life could easily qualify him as a quintessential “Renaissance Man.”

He was Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, syndicated columnist for Copley News Service, commentator for Mutual Broadcasting System, Special Counsel for both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, a founder and Director of the DC National Bank, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Senior Vice President for Pan American Airways, consultant to the President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, advisor to several Secretaries of the Navy and Commandants of the Marine Corps—and the list goes on and on and on.

Col Don Hittle came into my life during the summer of 1956 when MajGen Jim Riseley dragged me kicking and screaming from a cushy tour in what was then the Territory of Hawaii to the labyrinthian corridors of Headquarters Marine Corps. As many of those here today will recall, this was the long, hot summer of Ribbon Creek, and Don Hittle was Legislative Assistant to Randolph McCall Pate, our 21st Commandant. I was a young, eager, starry-eyed captain, very naive in the arcane world at the Seat of Government—but, I was soon to learn. My first lesson was a negative one—that a junior officer should never ask the Legislative Assistant to the Comman-

dant for a description of his duties and responsibilities. With that said, I did notice that every time Col Hittle came charging into Gen Riseley’s office he closed the door behind him. While I readily admit to not being a “rocket scientist,” I did surmise that there were some “big time” discussions underway. But, as the saying goes: “Nothing succeeds quite like success.” I was soon to learn that by working closely with the Congress, where Members and their staffs knew him, respected him, and trusted him, Don Hittle had effectively minimized the repercussions from Ribbon Creek. One senior Member from the House of Representatives was heard to say: “Don Hittle is the best damned Legislative Assistant the Marine Corps has ever had.”

One could go on for hours, perhaps days, about Don’s myriad contributions to his country and his Corps. As an example, I could tell you how he more than any other saved the Army Navy Club from extinction. Senator John Warner, who is here with us today, could tell you that when he was Secretary of the Navy he never had a more imaginative and dedicated Assistant Secretary. Joe Bartlett, the former House Reading Clerk and a retired Marine Corps general, could tell you how Don Hittle was responsible for the creation of the dynamic Congressional Marine Club. Incidentally, Jim Lawrence, who is also with us today, once said of this organization:

Congress created the Marine Corps—Congress has sustained the Marine Corps—Congress has mandated the mission of the Marine Corps—through this organization we are now bonded to each other forever.

In the end, however, all of his many other contributions to his country and to his beloved Corps pale by comparison to what he accomplished as a member of the renowned “Chowder Society,” that elite group of brilliant Marine officers who, in the aftermath of World War II when the very life of our Corps was threatened, ensured that our existence, our roles, and our missions were written into law.



Don's critical role in the survival of his Corps was best described by Gen Merrill Twining when he inscribed his book, *No Bended Knee*, "To: Don Hittle, Who saved our Corps." There can be no doubt that the Corps we have today, with three active divisions and wings written into law, owes an enormous debt of gratitude to BGen James D. Hittle, USMC(Ret).

Isn't it ironic to remember that 55 years ago certain groups, whose objectives were inimical to the survival of our Corps, were attempting to relegate us into insignificance. Today, with a lion's share of the credit for making it possible going to Don Hittle, we have just heard that Jim Jones, our 32d Commandant, is soon to be the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Our congratulations go to Jim—his Corps is very proud—Don Hittle is very proud!

Several years after my retirement, Don asked me to join him for lunch at his Army Navy Club. His purpose was to ask if I would give his eulogy. I was honored beyond belief, but did not look forward to the day when it would become a reality.

Before closing, let me share with you a story that Joe Bartlett told me last week.

Jinny and Joe are members of a Bible class at their church. As a gesture of their love and caring for those who are terminally ill, the class prepares an audio tape for their listening. On one side they include the patient's favorite hymns, and, on the other, a medley of their favorite tunes. During Don's last days with us—a time when he was under heavy sedation—Joe swears that Don's body stiffened to attention every time "The Marines' Hymn" was played.

In closing, let me remind you that Don lived by two simple words—words which have given inspiration to our Corps for over 200 years—Semper Fidelis—always faithful.

Don Hittle was always:

Semper Fidelis to his God.

Semper Fidelis to his country.

Semper Fidelis to his family.

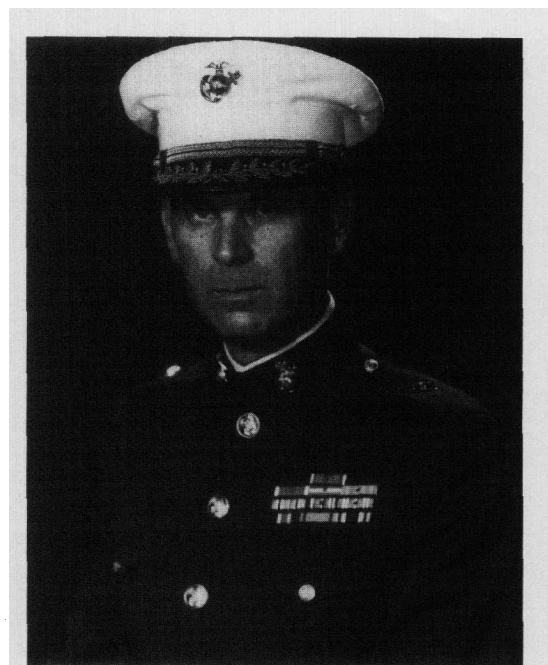
Semper Fidelis to his Corps.

And, Semper Fidelis to his fellow man.

In Don's memory, then, let us share these meaningful words with each other as we leave this holy place—and let us pray that one day we can live in a world where all of its citizens are Semper Fidelis to each other. Don Hittle would like that.

#### Graveside Remarks of Ben Frank

I was moved when I was asked to say a few words about Don, because, in the "Pantheon of



Giants" of the Marine Corps, Don Hittle stood as one of the tallest. Few Marines today know of his role and contributions in saving the Marine Corps from extinction in the post-World War II unification controversy. That he did so at the possible threat to his career illustrates his courage, judgment, and love of Corps. He was one of a handful of Marine officers dedicated to fighting the efforts of the Army to diminish the roles and missions of Marines in the national defense to simply guarding coal piles in Navy yards. Don's role in the unification fight was to prepare strong and sound position papers for the Commandant to use in his congressional testimony. He also pressed the Marine Corps position in his contacts with veterans' associations, the media, and politicians, all of which strongly influenced American public opinion. During the course of oral history interview sessions with Gen Bill Twining, who led the Marine Corps fight to survive, the subject of the unification fight often arose. He repeatedly told me Don, by his actions and undertakings, had saved the Marine Corps. I believe this also. Most likely, somewhere there is a Valhalla for Marines, where Don is now sitting in a chair long saved for him. So long, Don. Semper Fidelis and God bless.



>Gen Kelley served as the 28th Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1983–87.

>>Mr. Frank retired from the Marine Corps Historical Division in 1997 where he was the Chief Historian.