

Marines Mean Business: From Boot Camp, to the Battlefield, To the Boardroom

By Dennis Carpenter



Fred Smith

COURTESY OF DENNIS CARPENTER

After graduating from Yale with a degree in economics, **Fred Smith** was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps and deployed to Vietnam. As a Marine company commander, he was involved in 27 operations during his first tour of duty.

For his second tour, after completing flight school, Smith flew more than 200 ground-support missions in Quang Tri Province. Mustering out of the Corps with the rank of captain, Smith had earned a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts among his numerous combat awards.

Smith returned to civilian life in 1970, and the following year he incorporated Federal Express. Within a few years the company began to show its first profits, and by the mid-1980s it was rated as one of the top 10 companies in the United States.

Today, FedEx amasses revenues of more than \$20 billion. Smith said, "While I have greatly enjoyed business, nothing compares to the pride and honor I feel having to be privileged to lead Marines in Vietnam."

Fred Smith's accomplishments are representative of countless individuals who have worn the uniform of the United States Marine Corps and later moved on to successful business careers, continuing to serve America, but in a different fashion.

One of the many ways Smith continues to serve is through his active support of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. His membership in the Foundation's Founders' Group, the volunteer leadership board whose support is instrumental to the success of the National Museum of the Marine Corps, has been generously constant.

J. Gary Cooper graduated from Notre Dame University with a degree in finance in 1968 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant through the school's Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. While serving in Vietnam, he became the first African-American to command a combat infantry company in Marine Corps history. For his service, he earned the Distinguished Service Medal, two Purple Hearts and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross.

After his active duty ended, Cooper returned home to Mobile, Ala., and subsequently became an Alabama state legislator. He moved on to found Alabama's first minority-operated national lending institution, Commonwealth National Bank.

Over the years Cooper, as a Marine Corps reservist, earned the rank of major general. Looking back on a career of considerable accomplishments, MajGen Cooper said he "instilled [his] Marine Corps

values in [his] children, and as a result they have become outstanding contributors to making this a better world."

MajGen Cooper continues to serve the Marine community. He is currently a member of the Marine Corps University Foundation's board of trustees.

James H. Amos Jr. arrived in Da Nang as a second lieutenant platoon leader with the Ninth Marine Regiment. During his two combat tours in Vietnam, he earned the Purple Heart and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross, among other decorations. He resigned his commission with the rank of captain in 1973. He asserted that, "I have had many blessings in life, but some of my proudest moments have been in the uniform of the United States Marines."

Later, Amos embarked upon a career in business franchising. In 1996, he joined Mail Boxes Etc. as the company president and eventually rose to become the company's CEO. Amos has written a Vietnam War semi-autobiographical novel, "The Memorial: A Novel of the Vietnam War," and his book "Focus or Failure: America at the Crossroads, Where Are You?" relates his analysis of America's business practices.

One of America's great chefs, **Marcel Desaulniers**, incredibly never pulled duty in a Marine Corps mess hall. In 1966, after working in some of New York City's most prestigious restaurants, Desaulniers was drafted and served with a rifle company whose battalion was headquartered in Phu Bai, Vietnam.

After his discharge, Desaulniers returned to New York to work as a saucier at the Plaza Hotel before he moved on to become an assistant chef for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Later, Desaulniers was a co-owner of the Williamsburg Food Brokers, and in 1980, he opened the Trellis Restaurant in the historic Virginia town. Today, this internationally known establishment caters to an estimated 200,000 diners a year, grossing more than \$5 million in revenue.

Desaulniers has been listed in *Food and Wine* magazine's Honor Role of Chefs and in *Cook's Illustrated* magazine's Who's Who of Cooking. He also is the author of a series of best-selling cookbooks. In addition to his writing, Desaulniers has been a co-host of two popular Public Broadcasting Service cooking series, "The Grilling Maestros" and "Cook-off America." Desaulniers currently is active in charitable ventures including the American Cancer Society and the Child Development Foundation.

Looking back on his Marine Corps service, Desaulniers stated proudly, "The extraordinary Marine Corps training I received imbued me with a sense of organization and loyalty that have contributed sig-



J. Gary Cooper

COURTESY OF MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION



James H. Amos Jr.

COURTESY OF DENNIS CARPENTER



Marcel Desaulniers

COURTESY OF DENNIS CARPENTER



As a young man, Mike Ilitch signed a minor league contract with the Detroit Tigers organization, but moved on to other endeavors, never losing his love of the game. With energy and drive, he built Little Caesars Pizza into a top international pizza chain with stores on five continents. He continues to hit "long balls" in his 15th full season as the owner/director of the Detroit Tigers. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Arend, Ilitch Holdings Inc.)



Mike Ilitch

COURTESY OF DENNIS CARPENTER

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nificantly to the discipline it has taken to be a successful chef and cookbook author."

Marines have also proven themselves to be among America's greatest fast-food impresarios. Mike Ilitch, Tom Monaghan and Glen Bell completed stints in the enlisted ranks of the Marine Corps before moving on to make their fortunes satisfying the nation's insatiable appetite for a quick meal. They embody the belief that confidence, ambition and hard work can provide a guideline for success in America's competitive business environment.

His dream was to play shortstop for the Detroit Tigers, but instead, **Mike Ilitch**, the son of immigrant parents, became a fast-food magnet and sports franchise owner.

Ilitch joined the Corps in 1948 and finished out his enlistment in 1952. After a short stint in the Tiger farm system, Ilitch tossed pizza and sold aluminum

siding to support his family. He and his wife invested their savings to buy a carryout pizza parlor dubbed "Little Caesars," located in Garden City, Mich. By the early 1960s, the couple sold their first franchise, and the number of Little Caesars stores continued to grow throughout the next two decades.

In the early 1980s, when he had more than 300 stores open, Ilitch purchased the NHL Detroit Red Wings for \$8 million. In 1992, he achieved wider national recognition when he bought the Detroit Tigers for \$85 million. Immediately thereafter, he rehired veteran Marine and Hall of Fame broadcaster Ernie Harwell whose contract had lapsed in 1991.

Ilitch is an unassuming man, affectionately known

to his employees as "Mr. I." He also has founded Charities for Children, a nonprofit dedicated to improving the health, education and recreation resources for needy children. Ilitch's holding company sponsors the Little Caesars Amateur Baseball Federation, and more than 17,000 children in the Detroit area participate in Ilitch sports programs.

Tom Monaghan, one of the nation's leading philanthropists, is the founder of Domino's Pizza. Monaghan's childhood was difficult. After his father died, Monaghan and his brother lived in a series of foster homes. As a teenager, he worked at odd jobs

Tom Monaghan and his brother opened a small pizza parlor in Ypsilante, Mich. He renamed his expanding business Domino's Pizza in 1965, and by 1983, Monaghan owned more than 1,000 stores.

including soda jerk, bowling alley pin-spotter and farm laborer.

Monaghan joined the Marine Corps in 1956 and served until 1959. Today, the former Marine corporal says, "Being in the Marine Corps was the best thing that ever happened to me. It can do a lot for a young guy. I owe a lot to the Marine Corps. If I had a son, I'd want him to be a Marine." After his service obligations ended, Monaghan enrolled at the University of Michigan but was forced to drop out of school because of financial reasons.

In 1960, Monaghan and his brother opened a small pizza parlor in Ypsilante, Mich. He renamed his expanding business Domino's Pizza in 1965, and by 1983, Monaghan owned more than 1,000 stores, which generated millions in revenue. Monaghan bought the Detroit Tigers baseball team for \$50 million, and the team he had loved since childhood went on to win the World Series. He later sold the team to fellow Marine Mike Ilitch.

Monaghan retired from business ventures in 1998 and subsequently devoted his life to furthering worthy charitable endeavors. He is reported to have donated more than \$1 billion to charity and also has provided the impetus for a major initiative in Catholic higher education with the founding of Ave Maria University based in Naples, Fla.

In addition to his support for the university, Monaghan hosts an annual "Gyrene Gala" at Ave Maria that was designed to raise scholarship funds intended to encourage current and veteran Marines and other military personnel to attend the university.

After Marine Corps service during World War II, **Glen Bell**, founder of Taco Bell, opened a hot dog stand, Bell's Drive-In, in 1946. It was with this inauspicious effort that Bell began to learn the subtleties of the fast-food business. By 1952, he sold his original stand and moved on to perfect Mexican take-out food. Bell began selling various hot dogs, including a chili dog, and tacos.

Bell opened a second stand in Barstow, Calif., and in 1962, he built his first Taco Bell in Downey, Calif. Two years later, Bell sold his first Taco Bell franchise,

and when he started his company, it was entirely a family-owned business. When he sold his interests to PepsiCo Inc., Bell became an immediate multimillionaire. In 2000, Taco Bell, the company founded by the Marine veteran entrepreneur, donated \$6 million to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and was instrumental in opening 51 new facilities nationwide.

The life of **Quang X. Pham**, a Marine pilot and successful entrepreneur, is emblematic of the human capacity to overcome adversity to achieve one's goals in life. When he was 10 years old, Quang, his mother and three sisters were on a plane leaving Vietnam in 1975 just days before the fall of Saigon. Quang's father, a pilot in the South Vietnamese Air Force, was not so lucky; he was separated from his family for more than a decade while being "re-educated" in a Vietnamese prison camp. Quang grew up in America at a makeshift refugee camp.

After struggling to learn English, Quang attended UCLA and later completed Marine Officer Candidates School. After attaining his commission as a lieutenant, Quang flew with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 during the 1991 Gulf War and earned an Air Medal for his efforts.

Later, he would fly United Nations personnel into Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1992. "My Marine Corps experience changed my life for the better and exposed me to fine Americans from different generations and all walks of life," he said. "The Corps represents what America is about: duty, opportunity and a sense of adventure."

After military service, Quang worked as a pharmaceutical representative and established Lathian Systems, which provides technology-based solutions for life-science companies. Quang is currently the CEO and director of Lathian Systems.

In 2005, Quang wrote his memoir, "A Sense of Duty: My Father, My American Journey," an account of his remarkable life's journey. Similar to other community-minded Marines featured in this article, he continues an active life of service, frequently speaking about overcoming adversity to various youth groups, including giving talks at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

Obviously what these notable enterprisers have in common is their Marine Corps service. At the same time, they, and dozens of others, have demonstrated a commitment to giving back to their respective communities or helping fellow Marines in need. Perhaps one might conclude that the Marine Corps, which emphasizes a "can-do" attitude, discipline and duty to the nation's well-being, helped prepare them for success in civilian life and the competitive world of business.

Editor's note: Dennis Carpenter, a writer, teacher and publisher in Great Neck, N.Y., has updated his out-of-print two-volume set, "Anyone Here a Marine?" The new book, titled "Anyone Here a Marine? The Marines, the Media and the Movies," is available from Marine Corps Association bookstores, or you may purchase the book directly at Brightlights Publications, 16 Steamboat Rd., Great Neck, NY 11024.



Tom Monaghan

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Quang X. Pham

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