

"The Greatest of All Leathernecks"

The VFW salutes all US Marines, past and present, and pays tribute to the Lt. Gen. Lejeune

Nov 10, 2022

WASHINGTON — We have all heard a lot about Camp Lejeune as of late, but what do we know about the man it is named for?

On this 247th Marine Corps birthday, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) salutes all Marines and pays tribute to the man who has been called the “greatest of all leathernecks,” the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General John Archer Lejeune.

Born in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana in 1867, Lejeune entered the US Naval Academy in 1884 and graduated second in his class in 1888. After completing his two-year cruise, he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps in 1890. From that point on, he would command Marines for the nearly forty years.

From the Spanish-American War to the Philippine-American War, to the Battle of Veracruz during the Mexican Revolution and conflicts in Central America and the Caribbean, Lejeune’s battle proven prowess and exemplary leadership would earn him numerous awards, promotions, elevated positions within the Corps. However, it was his success in World War I that would garner him renown.

Lejeune become the second Marine to ever command a US Army division, leading the 2nd Division to victory in many battles to include the Battle of St. Mihiel. For his accomplishments, Lejeune was awarded the Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre from the French, as well as the US Army and US Navy’s Distinguished Service Medals. Shortly after returning from the war, he was appointed Major General and Commandant of the Marine Corps.

During his time as Commandant, he is credited with founding the Marine Corps League, making marked improvements to training, equipping, education and organization, and transforming the Marine Corps into the amphibious fighting force that would dominate the Pacific theater of World War II.

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It is also because of Lejeune that the celebration of the Marine Corps birthday would become such a time-honored formal tradition. Every year since he issued the order in November 1921, his words continue to honor the legacy of his beloved Marine Corps:

“MARINE CORPS ORDERS

No. 47 (Series 1921)

HEADQUARTERS U.S. MARINE CORPS

Washington, November 1, 1921

759. The following will be read to the command on the 10th of November, 1921, and hereafter on the 10th of November of every year. Should the order not be received by the 10th of November, 1921, it will be read upon receipt.

1. On November 10, 1775, a Corps of Marines was created by a resolution of Continental Congress. Since that date many thousand men have borne the name "Marine". In memory of them it is fitting that we who are Marines should commemorate the birthday of our corps by calling to mind the glories of its long and illustrious history.
2. The record of our corps is one which will bear comparison with that of the most famous military organizations in the world's history. During 90 of the 146 years of its existence the Marine Corps has been in action against the Nation's foes. From the Battle of Trenton to the Argonne, Marines have won foremost honors in war, and in the long eras of tranquility at home, generation after generation of Marines have grown gray in war in both hemispheres and in every corner of the seven seas, that our country and its citizens might enjoy peace and security.
3. In every battle and skirmish since the birth of our corps, Marines have acquitted themselves with the greatest distinction, winning new honors on each occasion until the term "Marine" has come to signify all that is highest in military efficiency and soldierly virtue.
4. This high name of distinction and soldierly reputé we who are Marines today have received from those who preceded us in the corps. With it we have also received from them the eternal spirit which has animated our corps from generation to generation and has been the distinguishing mark of the Marines in every age. So long as that spirit continues to flourish Marines will be found equal to every emergency in the future as they have been in the past, and the men of our Nation will regard us as worthy successors to the long line of illustrious men who have served as "Soldiers of the Sea" since the founding of the Corps.

John A. Lejeune,
Major General Commandant

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Lejeune retired from the Marine Corps on November 10, 1929, fitting for a Marine who contributed so much to the Corps. After serving for eight years as the 5th superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, he would finally retire from military service in 1937, and promoted to Lieutenant General on the Marine Corps retired list in 1942. Lejeune died on November 20, 1942, in Baltimore, Maryland and interred with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

On this 247th birthday of the USMC and just ahead of the 80th anniversary of Lejeune's passing, please join the more than 1.5 million members of the VFW and it's Auxiliary in honoring Lieutenant General John Lejeune by remembering his contributions to the Marine Corps and by saying “thank you” to every U.S. Marine both past and present, who are “Always Faithful” to our great nation.

Happy birthday Marines! Semper Fi!