2401-HIST-1001/02/03 Marine Corps History

TERMINAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

(1) Without the aid of references, describe common terms, sayings, and quotations used in the Marine Corps without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1001)

(2) Without the aid of references, identify significant events in Marine Corps history without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1002)

(3) Without the aid of reference, identify the historical significance of Marine Corps uniform items without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1003)

ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

(1) Without the aid of references, given a list of choices, identify the origin of the term "First to Fight" without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1001a)

(2) Without the aid of references, given a list of choices, identify the origin of the term "Leatherneck" without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1001b)

(3) Without the aid of references, identify the origin of the phrase, "Uncommon valor was a common virtue" without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1001c)

(4) Without the aid of references, identify the origin of the term "Devil Dog" without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1002a)
(5) Without the aid of references, given a list of choices, identify the meaning of the term "Semper Fidelis" without omitting key components. (2401-HIST-1002b)

(6) Without the aid of reference and in writing, identify historic significance of different places in Marine Corps history, in accordance with the Marine Corps Common Skills Handbook. (2401-HIST-1003a)

(7) Without the aid of reference and in writing, identify historically significant individuals in Marine Corps history, in accordance with the Marine Corps Common Skills Handbook. (2401-HIST-1003b)
1. **MARINE CORPS HISTORY (OLDEST TO MOST RECENT)**.

Since the birth of the Marine Corps, Marines have repeatedly proven themselves a significant fighting force while engaged in our Nation’s battles. From these battles emerged noteworthy leaders, accomplishments, and terminology which has helped shape the culture of today’s Marine Corps. In this lesson we will discuss these noteworthy events in chronological order as well as Marine Corps’ Pathbreakers:

a. **Marine Corps’ Birth.** The Marine Corps was established on 10 Nov 1775 in Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, PA by a resolution of the Continental Congress. Marines have been in the forefront of every American war since the founding of the Marine Corps. They entered the Revolution in 1775, just before the Declaration of Independence was signed. Captain Samuel Nicholas was the Commander of the first two Marine battalions and is considered the 1st Commandant of the Marine Corps. The first Marine uniforms were green coats with white trim and white breeches. Also mandated from 1775 to 1875 was a leather collar to protect the neck against cutlass slashes and to hold the head erect in proper military bearing. Sailors serving aboard ship with Marines came to call them "leathernecks."

b. **A Few Good Men.** The Marine Corps’ slogan “A Few Good Men” was adopted on 20 MARCH 1779. There is no specific battle tied to the Marine Corps slogan, “A FEW GOOD MEN”. The first known use of “A Few Good Men” was in 1779.

On 20 March 1779 in Boston, Capt. William Jones, USMC, advertised for "a few good men" to enlist in the Corps for naval duty. The term seemed ideally suited for Marines, mainly because of the implication that "a few" good men would be enough. This term has survived for over 200 years and has been synonymous with U.S. Marines ever since.

c. **Espirit de Corps.** The Marine Corps term “Esprit De Corps” was adopted in 1780. The “spirit” of a unit is commonly reflected by all of its members. The definition of “Esprit De Corps” is: The common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group. The Marine Corps commonly uses “Esprit De Corps” to describe comradeship, enthusiasm, and devotion to a cause.
d. Derne, Tripoli. In 1805, Marines were sent to destroy the Barbary Pirates who were holding American ships for ransom. The Battle of Tripoli was the first United States land battle on foreign soil, after the American Revolutionary War. First Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon, the first Marine Corps Lieutenant, was awarded the Mameluke Sword for his bravery in the Tripoli Barbary Pirate War. This sword became the model for Marine Corps Officers. In the Marines Hymn, the line "To the shores of Tripoli" refers to the First Barbary War, specifically the Battle of Derne in 1805 after Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon and his Marines hoisted the American Flag over Tripoli.

e. The Indian Wars. In 1836 and 1837, led by General Archibald Henderson, Marines fought in numerous battles with both Creek and Seminole Indians in Florida and Georgia territories. In addition, General Archibald Henderson led the Marine Corps during several years of with Mexico over California and Texas territories. The Grand Old Man of the Marine Corps was the name given to General Archibald Henderson as he served (39 years), Jan 1820 - Oct 1859, as the 5th Commandant of the Marine Corps. In 1830, General Archibald Henderson successfully prevented the Marine Corps from being absorbed into the Army by establishing a “Force in Readiness concept.

f. Veracruz, Mexico. The Battle of Veracruz was a 20-day siege of the key Mexican beachhead seaport of Veracruz, during the Mexican–American War. It was the first large-scale United States amphibious assault, and ended with the surrender and occupation of the city. U.S. Army and Marine forces then marched inland to Mexico City.

Major General Smedley D. Butler, received his first of two Medals of Honor for his heroic actions in the Battle of Veracruz. By the end of his career, Butler had received 16 medals, five for heroism. At the time of his death in 1940, Smedley Butler was the most decorated Marine in U.S. history. “The Fighting Quaker” - was the name given to Major General Smedley Darlington Butler. Raised by prominent Quaker parents, Smedley Butler defied his pacifist lineage by joining the Marines just before his 17th birthday. He served in Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Haiti. Butler was known for his leadership and commitment to the welfare of the men under his command. He rose quickly through the ranks to become, at age 48, one of the youngest major generals.
g. **Chapultepec, Mexico.** Chapultepec Castle was the final stronghold Marines captured during the War with Mexico in 1847. By the end of this battle, when the American Flag was raised in the Halls of Montezuma, 90% of the Marine officers and NCOs were killed.

General Winfield Scott, 3rd Commanding General of the US Army, led the Marines into the Battle of Chapultepec against the outnumbering forces of Santa Anna. By the battles’ end, General Scott found it was the remaining Marines who guarded the streets. Marine officers and noncommissioned officers added scarlet stripes to their blue dress trousers, which are now referred to as “blood stripes,” to commemorate the Marines’ blood shed at the Battle of Chapultepec.

h. **Semper Fidelis.** There is no specific battle tied to the Marine Corps Moto, “SEMPER FIDELIS” meaning “ALWAYS FAITHFUL”. The United States Marine Corps adopted the motto “Semper Fidelis” in 1883, on the initiative of Colonel Charles McCawley, the 8th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

There were three mottos prior to Semper Fidelis including Fortitudine (meaning "with courage") antedating the War of 1812, Per Mare, Per Terram ("by sea, by land"; presumably inherited from the British Royal Marines, who have that as a motto), and, up until 1843, there was also the Marines' Hymn motto "To the Shores of Tripoli". "Semper fidelis" signifies the dedication and loyalty that individual Marines have for 'Corps and Country', even after leaving service. Marines frequently shorten the motto to "Semper Fi".

i. **Boxer Rebellion.** In 1898, the “I Ho Ch’uan”, a Chinese organization known as the (Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists) or more commonly called "The Boxers", began a massive revolt to remove Western Country influence from China. The United States and seven other countries - Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and Russia-all had interests in China and united to confront the Boxer Rebellion. The significant accomplishments from the Boxer Rebellion was the opening of trade and colonization between China and United States allied countries.

Sergeant Major Dan Daly is recognized for earning two Medals of Honor: (1) for heroic actions in the China Boxer Rebellion and (2) for heroic actions in the First Haiti Caco War. When his unit was pinned down and their attack stalled during the Battle
of Belleau Wood, then Gunnery Sergeant Daly yelled to his men, “Come on you sons of b----es, do you want to live forever?”

j. **Belleau Wood, France.** June 6, 1918 is one of the bloodiest days in U.S. Marine Corps history. It was the first day of the Battle of Belleau Wood, which pitted the Marines against the German Army attempting to reach Paris during WWI. Gunnery Sergeant Charles Hoffman, (AKA – Ernest Janson) was awarded his second Medal of Honor for his valor during the Battle of Belleau Wood. GySgt Hoffman killed 2 dozen German soldiers with his bayonet in order to stop an advancing attack.

Fighting through impenetrable woods and capturing untakeable terrain, the persistent attacks, delivered with unbelievable courage soon had the Germans calling Marines "Teufelhunde," referring to the fierce fighting dogs of legendary origin. Today this term is commonly known as “Devil Dogs”.

k. **Blanc Mont Ridge.** What transpired around Blanc Mont in October 1918 was a vicious battle that cost America over 7,800 men, killed and wounded. Marshal Petain (then still a hero) called what happened there the greatest single achievement of the 1918 campaign. Sadly, the Battle for Blanc Mont Ridge has slipped off of History's radar screen, appearing only in official documents and memoirs of the participants. It has become the forgotten victory of WWI. The limestone tower on the ridge, built to honor the Doughboys, might be the least visited monument on the Western Front.

General John A. Lejeune was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his leadership during the Battles of Blanc Mont Ridge and The Soissons Offensive, WWI. During that war he was recognized by the French Government as a strategist and leader, as evidenced by the Legion of Honor, and the Croix de Guerre bestowed upon him by the French. "The Greatest of all Leathernecks,"—was the title bestowed upon General John A. Lejeune, having served as the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps (1920-1929), the first Marine Officer to ever command an Army Division in Combat during WWI and more than 40 years of distinguished active service.

1. **First To Fight.** Not associated to any specific battle; The recruiting slogan "first to fight" comes from the Marine Corps hymn. In 1929, the Marine Corps officially adopted the hymn and immortalized the words of "first to fight for right and freedom" in the memories of future generations of Marines. Marines began actually seeing "first to fight" in France during
World War I, and they still do. Marine Corps Recruiting Command still uses the phrase in promotional materials today.

m. **Wake Island, WWII.** On Dec 8th 1941, just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan air attacked Wake Island. Of the 55 Marine aviation personnel stationed on Wake Island, 23 were killed and 11 were wounded. Eight of the twelve F4F-3 Marine aircraft were destroyed, as well a civilian hospital and the Pan Am air facility. A second Japan attack came on Dec 23rd 1941. After a full night of fighting, of the original 55 Marines, a total 49 Marines were now killed and 2 wounded. The Japanese captured all remaining military and civilian personnel and used them to dig bunkers.

On Oct 5th 1943, Naval Aircraft raided Wake Island. Two days later, fearing an imminent invasion, Japanese Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara ordered the execution of the 98 captive American civilian workers who had initially been kept to perform forced labor. They were taken to the northern end of the island, blindfolded and executed with a machine gun. On 4 Sept 4th 1945, the remaining Japanese garrison surrendered to a detachment of US Marines.

During the defense of Wake Island, Major Henry T. Elrod repeatedly displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty. On the 12th of December he single-handedly attacked a flight of 22 enemy planes and shot down two. On several flights he executed low altitude bombing and strafing runs on enemy ships, and became the first man to sink a major warship with small caliber bombs delivered from a fighter-type aircraft. On November 8, 1946, his widow was presented with the Medal of Honor, posthumously awarded to her husband for his heroic actions during the last bitter days of the defense of Wake.

Honolulu, Hawaii’s National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, commonly known as the “Punchbowl Crater”, became the final resting place of the 98 Wake Island POWs who were murdered. After the war, Sakaibara and his subordinate, a lieutenant commander, were sentenced to death for the massacre of the 98 and for other war crimes.

n. **Guadalcanal, WWII.** The World War II Battle of Guadalcanal was the first major offensive and a decisive victory for the Allies in the Pacific theater. With Japanese troops stationed in this section of the Solomon Islands, U.S. marines
launched a surprise attack in August 1942 and took control of an air base under construction.

When World War II began, Lt Colonel Lewis "Chesty" Puller was commanding the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment at New River (later renamed Camp Lejeune), North Carolina, and was sent with his unit to Guadalcanal in the summer of 1942. Guadalcanal is part of the Solomon Islands, northeast of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. He won his third Navy Cross leading his battalion in defense of the island's Henderson Airfield against an overwhelming force of seasoned Japanese troops.

Capturing Guadalcanal was vital for the Americans, to protect Australia from a Japanese invasion, and to secure the communication lines between Australia and the U.S. The battle ensured safety of the sea route and delivered a severe blow to the strategic plans of the Japanese.

o. **Tarawa, WWII.** The Battle of Tarawa was the first American offensive in the critical central Pacific region. It was also the first time in the Pacific War that the United States had faced serious Japanese opposition to an amphibious landing. Previous landings met little or no initial resistance, but on Tarawa the 4,500 Japanese defenders were well-supplied and well-prepared, and they fought almost to the last man, exacting a heavy toll on the United States Marine Corps. Nearly 6,400 Japanese, Koreans, and Americans died in the fighting, on and around the small island. U.S. Divisions suffered similar casualties in previous campaigns, however they were over months at a time. The massive losses on Tarawa occurred within 76 hours.

On the second day of the Tarawa struggle, Lt Alexander "Sandy" Bonnyman, determined to breach the enemy's strong defensive line, led a demolition team of 21 Marines in an assault on the entrance to a huge bombproof shelter which contained approximately 150 Japanese soldiers. The enemy position was about forty yards forward of the Marine lines. Bonnyman advanced his team to the mouth of the position and killed many of the defenders. His team was forced to withdraw to replenish its supply of ammunition and grenades. Bonnyman again pressed his attack and gained the top of the structure, thereby flushing more than one hundred of its occupants into the open where they were cut down by Marine infantry and a supporting tank. When the Japanese returned fire, Bonnyman stood on the forward edge of the position and killed three of the attackers, but was himself killed as he ordered more charges brought
forward. The battle continued for another 10-15 minutes, with all of the Japanese defenders flushed out. Of Bonnyman's original assault party of 21 Marines, 13 had survived. The Island was declared secured on the same day. For his actions during the battle, Bonnyman was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. The medal was formally presented to his family by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal in 1947. His 12-year-old daughter, Frances, accepted the medal on behalf of the Bonnyman family.

Following the 1943 battle, Lt Bonnyman was buried in Tarawa where his burial site was lost. In March of 2015, History Flight, a Florida-based non-profit tasked with recovering the remains of missing U.S. service members, discovered the remains of Lt Bonnyman and his fellow Marines. 71 years after the Battle of Tarawa, families were reunited with their heroes and provide a proper burial on home ground.

p. **Iwo Jima, WWII.** 19 Feb – 26 Mar 1945 was a five-week battle in which the Marine Corps landed on and eventually captured the island of Iwo Jima from the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) during World War II. The American invasion, designated Operation Detachment, had the goal of capturing the entire island, including the three Japanese-controlled airfields, to provide a staging area for attacks on the Japanese main islands.

Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, was awarded his second Medal of Honor posthumously for his valor during the Battle of Iwo Jima. He was killed in action on the first day of the invasion of Iwo Jima, after he single-handedly destroyed an enemy blockhouse and led a Marine tank under fire safely through a minefield.

Uncommon Valor refers to the victories in World War II, especially at Iwo Jima, the largest all-Marine battle in history. Admiral Nimitz's ringing epitome of Marine fighting on Iwo Jima was applied to the entire Marine Corps in World War II: "Uncommon valor was a common virtue."

q. **Okinawa, WWII.** On April 1, 1945—the Navy’s Fifth Fleet and more than 180,000 U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps troops descended on the Pacific island of Okinawa for a final push towards Japan. This invasion was known as Operation Iceberg. The Battle of Okinawa was the last major battle of World War II.

Major General Roy S. Geiger, assumed command of the 10th Army during the Battle of Okinawa and was the first Marine
Officer to command a field Army. Marine Corps base Camp Geiger in North Carolina is named in his honor.

Hacksaw Ridge refers to a 400-foot vertical cliff heavily defended by Japanese troops hunkered down in a network of caves and dugouts. The fight at Hacksaw Ridge, Okinawa began on April 26, 1945 and did not end until May 6th. Much of the fighting was hand-to-hand and was brutal for both sides.

r. **The Chosin Reservoir.** In the winter of 1950 Marines pushed into North Korea and were surrounded by 10 Chinese Divisions. Marines destroyed 7 of the 10 Divisions, bringing out all wounded and dead Marines and all operational gear.

Colonel William E. Barber, fought on Iwo Jima during World War II and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. Then Captain Barber and his company of 220 men held off more than 1,400 Chinese soldiers during six days of fighting in North Korea.

The Frozen Chosen refers to the US 1st Marine Division, trapped in North Korea’s Chosin Reservoir, November 1950, during the Korean War. These Marines fought during the worst blizzard in a century, the ensuing battle is considered by the United States Marine Corps to be 'the Corps' Finest Hour.' The soldiers who fought there would later become known as the 'Frozen Chosen'.

s. **Hue’, Vietnam.** Fighting in Hue’ City, Vietnam was both intense and the most confusing Battle Marines had ever experienced. Marines and South Vietnamese forces were desperately trying to counter a surprise onslaught that became known as the Tet offensive. First Battalion, Fifth Marines suffered many casualties as they breached Hue’ City’s historic Citadel.

Gunnery Sgt. John Canley led an undersized company of Marines during one of the Corps’ bloodiest urban street battles in Hue City, Vietnam. Outgunned by nearly 10,000 North Vietnamese Army soldiers, who assaulted the urban stronghold in January 1968 as part of the infamous surprise attack that would become known as the Tet Offensive, Canley took command of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment after its commanding officer was severely wounded at the outset of the battle. From Jan. 31 to Feb. 6, 1968, Canley exposed himself on numerous occasions to machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire as he led his company and helped keep his Marines alive.
As the ancient imperial capital, Hué was the cradle of Vietnamese history and culture, and the symbol of a unified Vietnam. Hué stood as a tremendous psychological prize in the struggle for control of that longsuffering country.

t. **Desert Shield / Desert Storm.** After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United Nations intervened with a stern resolution warning Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or be driven out by United States and UN forces. Iraq refused, and Operation Desert Shield began. This operation validated the Marine Corps Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) concept and enacted the concept of tailoring MAGTF units to fit each specific mission.

From the air, Marine pilots used fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft to destroy Iraq's air and naval forces, anti-air defenses and ballistic missile launchers. The 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions broke through Iraq's southern border while 8,000 Marines kept the Iraqi army distracted in the north.

On Iraqi soil, Marines crossed minefields, barbed-wire obstacles, booby traps and fire trenches while under attack from Iraqi artillery. Combining precise air operations, tenacious amphibious assaults and versatile land tactics, the Marines led one of the most successful assaults in modern warfare. Marine ground forces swept into Kuwait and liberated the country, causing severe damage to the Iraqi military capability.

General Norman Schwartzkopf commanded coalition forces during Desert Shield and developed a reputation for leading from the front, thus earning the nickname “Stormin Norman”.


u. **Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).** After the attack on our Nation on September 11, 2001, the entire American military focused its might on defeating Al-Qaeda. Two months later, Marines were the first major ground forces in Afghanistan.

In mid-December, 2001, Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit captured Kandahar Airport and converted it into one of the first coalition command centers in the country.
v. **Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).** The Battle of Nasiriyah was fought between the US 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade and Iraqi forces from 23 March to 2 April 2003 during the US-led invasion of Iraq. On the night of 24-25 March, the bulk of the Marines of Regimental Combat Team 1 passed through the city over the bridges and attacked north towards Baghdad.

Marines assaulted the city of Fallujah after a humanitarian convoy protected by private contractors was ambushed and the contractors were burnt and hung from bridges. Due to false press statements, international pressure forces the Marines to halt the attack.

In August 2004, Marines took the fight to insurgent forces in a door-to-door clearing centered on Wadi As-Salam Cemetery.

During Nov/Dec 2004, Marines recapture the city of Fallujah in Operation Phantom Fury. Tough and chaotic house-to-house clearing is compared to Hue’ City. Citizens were told to leave the city if they didn’t want to fight. Iraqi Insurgents were challenged to come fight Marines in the city.

After Fallujah was secured, the hub of the insurgency moved to Ramadi where fighting was intense and frequent. In August, insurgents executed a tribal sheik who was encouraging his kinsmen to join the Iraqi police and prevented his body from being buried in accordance with Islamic laws. In response, Sunni sheiks banded together to help the Marines drive insurgents from Ramadi.

Corporal Jason Dunham was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for actions in Karabilah, Iraq. Corporal Dunham was the first Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor since Vietnam. Corporal Dunham dove on a grenade with helmet and body shielding everyone else in the squad.

w. **Afghanistan.** 1st Bn, 5th Marines occupied Nawa as part of Operation Strike of the Sword and was considered to be a main part of the Taliban movement in the Helmand Province. By 2011, Nawa was the first district to be turned over to a complete Afghan control.

Operation Moshtarak 2010, Marines from 1st Bn, 6th Marines moved into Marjah, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, believed to be the last Taliban stronghold. Marjah was considered to be the highest opium producing district in the entire country, a primary source of Taliban funding.
The heaviest fighting in more recent years of 2010 and 2011 has occurred with 5th, 7th and 9th Marines who battled Taliban fighters during Operation Sangin Sunrise.

Sergeant Dakota Meyer is the 1st living Marine to receive the Medal of Honor since Vietnam. Sergeant Meyer was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Kunar Province, Afghanistan 2009. Sergeant Meyer purposefully made five trips into an ambush kill zone to locate and extract four Marines who were trapped and killed. He also evacuated over two dozen Afghan soldiers.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), was established by the United Nations Security Council, for the primary purpose of training the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and assist Afghanistan in rebuilding key government institutions.

2. **PATHBREAKERS IN MARINE CORPS HISTORY.**

a. Montford Point Marines. From 1942 to 1949, after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 establishing the fair employment practice that began to erase discrimination in the Armed Forces, African Americans had the opportunity to be recruited into the Marine Corps. During the first 7 years, these Marines were segregated from normal recruit training sites. They were sent to Montford Point (renamed Camp Johnson) which is adjacent to Camp Lejeune, N.C. Approximately 20,000 Marines were trained during those years.

b. Navajo Code Talkers. Code Talkers were young Navajo men who transmitted secret communications on the battlefields of WWII. At a time when America's best cryptographers were falling short, these modest shepherders and farmers were able to fashion the most ingenious and successful code in military history. They drew upon their proud warrior tradition to brave the dense jungles of Guadalcanal and the exposed beachheads of Iwo Jima. Serving with distinction in every major engagement of the Pacific theater from 1942-1945, their unbreakable code played a pivotal role in saving countless lives and hastening the war's end.

c. Women Marines. In 1918, the Secretary of Navy allowed women to enroll for clerical duty in the Marine Corps. Officially, Opha Mae Johnson is credited as the first woman Marine. Johnson enrolled for service on August 13, 1918; during that year some 300 women first entered the Marine Corps to take
over stateside clerical duties from battle-ready Marines who were needed overseas. The Marine Corps Women's Reserve was established in February 1943. June 12th, 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act and made women a permanent part of the regular Marine Corps.

**REFERENCE(S):**

MCRP 6-11B Marine Corps Values: A Users Guide for Discussion Leaders

Millet, R. Allan *Semper Fidelis, The History of the United States Marine Corps*

**NOTES:**