United States Marine Corps
Birthday Ball

244th

November 10th 1775
Sequence of Events

Invocation
Sound Attention
Sound Adjutants Call
Official Party March In
Honors to Guest of Honor
National Anthem
13th Commandant Message
Present Commandant Message
Passing of the Cake
Guest of Honor Speaks
Retiring of the Colors
Marines’ Hymn

Ceremony Personnel

Commanding Officer
Col Kelvin Gallman
Guest of Honor
LtCol (Ret.) Howard DeCastro
Adjutant
Capt Marcos Nunez
Chaplain
CMDR Brian Kimball

Sword Detail
Maj Geoffrey Troy
Maj Stanton Gardenhire
Capt Vincent Alvarez
Capt Travis Powell
GySgt Michael Creamer
GySgt Anthony Martinez
SSgt Charles Yaklin
SSgt Isaiah Hildreth
Sgt Mathew Schumacher
Cpl Victoria Wright

Color Guard
Sgt Vinh Nguyen
Maj Geoffrey Troy
Cpl Claudia Nix
Capt Vincent Alvarez
LCpl Mackenzie Vandelden
GySgt Michael Creamer
LCpl James Vansant
SSgt Charles Yaklin

Cake Escort
Sgt Hyrem Johnsen
LCpl Molly Donahue
LCpl Bradley Morgan
LCpl Karl Hendrix Aliten
LCpl Charles Yaklin

Oldest Marine
LtCol (Ret.) Howard DeCastro

Youngest Marine
LCpl Christopher Burgess
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.

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 is 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.

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.

This high name of distinction and soldierly repute 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

This year, the Marine Corps celebrates 244 years of warfighting excellence and uncommon valor. United States Marines define the world’s image of elite warrior-citizens. We take great pride in the legacy built by those who came before us and in carrying that legacy into the future. Capabilities, battlefields, and adversaries change, and Marines continue to adapt to every challenge - prepared to fight and win wherever and whenever our Nation calls. What does not change is the Marine spirit - a warrior spirit rooted in our core values.

The strength of our Corps is our Marines. Our success depends on all Marines embodying the values in which our Corps was founded; it requires leveraging the talents and ingenuity of every Marine to strengthen our Corps. Since 1775, courageous Marines have answered the call to fight for freedom and shaped our reputation as the most feared fighting force the world has seen.

Marines from each generation approached every battle with a lethal combination of versatility, perseverance, and adaptability that has allowed us to prevail in any clime and place. Throughout the 244-year history of the Marine Corps, our Nation has required Marines to adapt capabilities and fighting styles to defeat adversaries in all domains. The Marines who took to the seas with naval counterparts to combat the Barbary Pirates solidified our role as a naval expeditionary force in-readiness. World War I saw Marines fighting sustained land campaigns and returning from those battles to immediately begin redesigning how to go to war. Those innovations laid the foundation for the amphibious landings of World War II. Combat operations in Korea and Vietnam brought harsh climates and unforgiving terrains that again forced Marines to adapt and overcome. In Iraq and Afghanistan, urban battlefields and counterinsurgency tactics demanded innovations in warfighting strategies and capabilities. Today, we find ourselves once again facing new and evolving threats in different operational environments. Like our predecessors, we will move forward with the lessons learned from past conflicts while redesigning the force and innovating for future conflict with any adversary who dares to fight.

Marines, congratulations on 244 years of excellence. Like the first birthday message published by 13th Commandant General John Lejeune in 1921, this message serves as a reminder of the legacy we are charged with upholding. Today is our day to celebrate our heritage and to honor the sacrifices of those who fought before us. It is also a day to recommit ourselves to our core values and resolutely pursue the strength of character that defines United States Marines. And it is a day to look toward future battlefields, to prepare to uphold the distinguished warfighting legacy of our predecessors wherever our Nation calls.

Happy Birthday, Marines!
David H.B. General,
U.S. Marine Corps Commandant of the Marine Corps
LtCol DeCastro enlisted in the Marine Corps and entered Boot Camp on 28 August 1958, at MCRD San Diego. There, he was tested for flight training and selected for the Marine Aviation Cadet (MARCAD) program and began pre-flight training in August 1959. LtCol DeCastro earned his wings and commission in Kingsville on 28 March 1961, with designation V-17476.

LtCol DeCastro’s first Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) assignment was with Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron (VMF(AW)-542) where he flew the Douglas “Skyray” at El Toro and deployed to Atsugi from October 1962 to October 1963. Following deployments included Atsugi to Iwakuni, Okinawa, and Taiwan.

LtCol DeCastro was then assigned as a flight instructor in Training Squadron 31 (VT-31), flying the TS-2A. LtCol DeCastro was later assigned to VT-23, instructing in the F-11A. In June 1965, VT-23 switched from the F-11A to the F-9F and he finished his last year as an advanced jet instructor, flying the TF-9s and AF-9s.

After completing Amphibious Warfare School, LtCol DeCastro was assigned to VMFA-122 at El Toro, to prepare for deployment to Vietnam. LtCol DeCastro flew 380 combat missions in Vietnam including breaking the siege at Khe San. His tour was from September 1967 to August 1968.

Following Vietnam, he was assigned to the First Marine Brigade at Kaneohe, Hawaii. Soon after, he was assigned as the Commanding Officer of First Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, and a year later was assigned as the Safety Officer of MAG-24. He served at VMFA-235 as the Assistant Maintenance Officer and then as the Executive Officer. During this tour, he attended the Navy Fighter Weapons “Top Gun” School.

Following Hawaii, he was assigned to VMFA-531 at El Toro as the Operations Officer to prepare for a Mediterranean cruise aboard the USS Forrestal. There, he was assigned as the Fighter Operations Officer for the Forrestal and developed the plan that was used to escort the U.S. Air Force C-130 Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) aircraft on its route near Libya. That plan continued to be used and several years later the Navy and Marine Corps fighters shot down a Libyan fighter that attacked the C-130.

LtCol DeCastro returned to El Toro and remained with VMFA-531 for one year, during which time he was selected as the “Marine Aviator of the Year” and received the Alfred A. Cunningham Award. His next assignment was Staff Secretary to General Quinn, Commanding General 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

LtCol DeCastro’s last duty station was Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, where he served as a Staff Projects Officer tasked with developing a new media based training course for Marine Corps and Navy F-4 pilot and Radar Intercept Officer training. Additionally, he worked on the formulation of Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1), before being assigned as Operations Officer of the Training Group.

“Project 19” was the plan to improve the aviation support to the ground forces by conducting integrated aviation training using the full capability of an augmented Marine Air Group to support a ground scheme of maneuver. Over a two-year period with strong support from General Hal Vincent and General Andy O’Donnell, the plan was developed, approved by General Tom Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation and General Wilson, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and tested using Marine Aviation Training Units Pacific and Atlantic. The concept proved worthy and MAWTS-1 was formed in Yuma, Arizona, in July 1978.

LtCol DeCastro was named the first Commanding Officer of MAWTS-1 and commanded the squadron through August 1980. While recognizing that FMF squadrons, not MAWTS-1, would be fighting wars, the emphasis from the start was to gain the best knowledge and skills possible and pass them to the FMF through graduates of the Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) courses, held twice yearly, and through MAWTS-1 instructor training visits to FMF squadrons and groups. MAWTS-1 has proved to be a valuable addition to the Marine Corps’ combat capability and has gained recognition for the significant role it has played in Marine Corps’ combat actions since 1978. On 1 September 1980, at the completion of his Command Tour at MAWTS-1, he retired from the Marine Corps with 22 years of service.