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11 Things You Might Not Know About the Marine Corps

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“The few, the proud” who serve are not only part of one of the most effective fighting forces in history, but also one of the most storied organizations in the world. Here are 11 things you might not know about the Marines.

1. THE FIRST RETIRED MARINE TO EVER RECEIVE AN HONORARY PROMOTION WAS IN A STANLEY KUBRICK MOVIE.

In *Full Metal Jacket*, actor Tim Colceri is famous for his helicopter scene where he says over machine gun fire, "Anyone who runs is a VC. Anyone who stands still is a well-disciplined VC." He would have been even more famous in the part for which he was originally cast—as the strict and unrelenting senior drill instructor, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman. That role, however, went to R. Lee Ermey, who had been hired for the film as a technical advisor.

Ermey, a former Marine drill sergeant and Vietnam veteran, filmed a tense 20-minute reel of himself in character dressing down and squaring away the movie’s extras, without repeating himself, all while being pelted with tennis balls and oranges. When director Stanley Kubrick saw the video, he recast Ermey for the role on the spot.

The fictional Hartman became perhaps the most famous gunnery sergeant in the history of the Corps. Ermey retired as a Staff Sergeant, and in 2002, the Marine Corps granted him an honorary promotion in accordance with the rank for which he is most associated. He is the first retiree in the history of the Marines to receive such an honor.

2. FROM THE HALLS OF MONTEZUMA...

The Marines' Hymn famously begins, "From the Halls of Montezuma..." This refers to the Battle of Chapultepec in 1847, in which U.S. Marines conquered Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City and subsequently occupied the city as part of the Mexican-American War. The battle is also famous (according to Marine tradition) for the establishment of the "blood stripe," a red stripe sewn into the trousers of the uniform commemorating the Marines killed at Chapultepec.

3. ...TO THE SHORES OF TRIPOLI

In 1801, the United States decided to do something about piracy in the Mediterranean so President Jefferson sent in the Navy. In 1805, the Marines finished the job. The Battle of Derne, on the shores of Tripoli during the First Barbary War, was the decisive action of the war, and the first overseas land battle fought by the United States military.

4. Why are they called leathernecks?

In 1798, the Marine Corps began issuing "one stock of black leather and clasp" to Marines. The item was worn to protect their necks when fighting with swords. Today, the standing collar on the dress coat of the Marine Corps uniform is a vestige of the leatherneck tradition.

5. THE MARINES WERE HELD BACK AT NORMANDY.

The purpose of the Marine Corps is amphibious warfare, or attacking the land by storming from the sea. And yet the Marines are largely absent from the Normandy Invasion—history's most famous amphibious assault. Why did the Army get the job?

More people. The Army had 89 divisions; the Marine Corps had 6. (As goes the saying, "The Marines win battles; the Army wins wars.") Perhaps more importantly, however, is that there was an ongoing rivalry between the Army and the Marines. Because the leaders of the Allied Forces were Army generals, there was no chance they'd share the spotlight on the biggest operation of the war. Even when the invasion looked grim, the Marines who watched from the U.S.S. Texas were never unleashed. As journalist W. Thomas Smith has written, the leadership didn't want headlines the next day to read "Marines save Rangers at Normandy."

Marines assigned to the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA and U.S. Army Special Forces, were on the ground, however, secretly working as observers of the invasion and facilitators for Army paratroopers who were jumping behind enemy lines.

6. WHEN THE FAST FOOD WARS ARE FOUGHT, A MARINE WILL COME OUT ON TOP.

In the 1993 film *Demolition Man*, Sandra Bullock's character makes reference to the Fast Food Wars, of which only one restaurant survived—Taco Bell. This is probably in no small part because the founder of Taco Bell was Glen Bell, a Marine who served in the Pacific Theater in World War II.

The Fast Food Wars would have been quite savage, however. Mike Ilitch, founder of Little Caesars, and Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza, are also former Marines.

7. AN AMERICAN TO ORBIT THE EARTH? YOU’RE GONNA NEED A MARINE FOR THAT.



During the Korean War, a Marine Corps fighter pilot nicknamed “magnet ass” shot down three MiG fighter jets. (He earned his nickname because of how often his planes were targeted and hit by anti-aircraft weapons.) None of that was scary enough, apparently, because after he got back from the war, he became a test pilot. As part of Project Bullet, he set the transcontinental speed record, flying a Vought F8U Crusader from California to New York at 725.55 miles per hour. (The project was so named because he flew faster than a .45-caliber pistol round.) By the time the pilot—John Glenn—was recruited by NASA and became the first American to orbit the Earth, it must have seemed like a pretty boring day at the office. In 1998, we strapped him into another spacecraft and made him the oldest person to ever go into space, at age 77. It was a safe bet because clearly the man is invincible.

8. THERE ARE SOME PRETTY FAMOUS MARINES WHO AREN’T FAMOUS FOR BEING MARINES.

Before he became famous for co-hosting the *Tonight Show*, Ed McMahon was a Marine fighter pilot with six air medals and 85 combat missions under his belt. While Drew Carey was a reservist in the Marines and looking for a way to make a little extra money, he tried stand-up comedy—it worked. Robert Ludlum’s time in the Marine Corps no doubt informed his novels about a super-spy named Jason Bourne. And Paulie probably could have taken Rocky in a fight—actor Burt Young is a former Marine.

9. THE CORPS WAS BORN IN A BAR.

The U.S. Marine Corps celebrates its birthday on November 10, 1775, the day the Second Continental Congress passed the Continental Marine Act of 1775, ordering, “That two battalions of Marines be raised...” The Continental Marines disbanded in 1783 and was formally reestablished in 1798. The first Marines enlisted at Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, which is considered the birthplace of the Marine Corps.

During the annual birthday celebration, Order No. 47 is read, which says, in part, “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 commanding officer cuts the birthday cake, and the first piece is given to the oldest Marine present, who passes it to the youngest Marine present.

10. THE PHRASE “A FEW GOOD MEN” IS OLDER THAN THE MARINE CORPS.

On March 20, 1779, Captain William Jones of the Continental Marines placed a recruiting advertisement in the Providence Gazette: "The Continental ship Providence, now lying at Boston, is bound on a short cruise, immediately; a few good men are wanted to make up her complement." He's been recruiting Marines ever since.

11. IF YOU'RE FIGHTING A WAR IN SPACE, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A FEW GOOD MEN.

Marines don't just fight on Earth. Popular culture has the Corps on planet Mars in the video game *Doom* ("Nightmare!"); on planet LV-426 in the film *Aliens* ("Game over man! Game over!"); in the tabletop role playing game *Warhammer 40,000* ("Give me a hundred Space Marines. Or failing that give me a thousand other troops."), and on planet Pandora in the film *Avatar* ("I'm a warrior... of the Jarhead clan.")