

# EVERY MARINE AN HISTORIAN



*Col Caldwell is presently assigned as Head, Historical Br, G-3, HQMC. He shared in the history of the Marines at Guadalcanal, Bougainville and at Iwo Jima where he earned the Navy Cross while commanding Company F, 26th Marines which he trained and led in assault on the island. He served in Korea as ExO, 2/7.*

*In a certain sense, all men are historians.*  
—Carlyle

By Col Frank C. Caldwell

*To achieve within the Marine Corps a realization that military history is a basic source of knowledge for the solution of problems . . . in the theory and practice of military science is not the sole mission of the historical program.*

**N**OW that Marines are again making history; can we be assured that their operations will be fully recorded to provide raw material for the preparation of classified studies and future published histories? The answer is a resounding yes, for a number of measures have been taken to guarantee full coverage of every aspect of current Marine Corps activities. Not only will these activities be fully reported, the resultant reports will be more detailed and contain a broader spectrum of subjects than ever before. The story of the many-faceted role of the supporting establishment is equally as important as that of the operating forces.

The overall role of the Marine Corps in present-day crises differs considerably from that played in both World War II and Korea. Marine historical accounts of the earlier conflicts are almost purely operational in nature, and only briefly touch on the strategic decisions which led to the commitment of Marine Corps units into battle. A broad view of the expeditions to Lebanon and the Dominican Republic, the Cuban Crisis, and

---

## EVERY MARINE A HISTORIAN

---

the situation in Viet-Nam cannot be gained, however, without recognizing the full involvement of Headquarters Marine Corps in top-echelon decisions which governed the activities of the unified commands in each of the instances named. In order to accumulate all available and pertinent information for the preparation of the histories of recent and current Marine Corps operations, papers relating to the significant aspects of decisions made on the highest levels (JCS, HQMC, CinCPac, CGFMFPac, and ComUSMACV) and on the formulation and execution of policy must be secured. Also important in this context are the operational reports of units down to and including the battalion/squadron level. Much major policy material is included in reports that have already been and will be prepared on a continuing basis by CGFMFPac, CinCPac, and ComUSMACV. In late 1965, the latter established a historical branch to which was assigned a Marine officer who assists in the preparation of the annual ComUSMACV command history, and is the "expert" on Marine Corps matters in the branch.

To ensure that a full reckoning of decisions affecting Marine Corps operations and a description of these operations and their results is gained, HQMC has recently published several orders which provide for the preparation of reports and interviews, and the collection of relevant documents. All of these will serve as primary source material for the preparation of a history of our times.

Enough information now exists in the past and present experience of the Marine Corps to aid in the solution of its current and future problems. In order:

To achieve within the Marine Corps a realization that military history is a basic source of knowledge for the solution of problems and the attainment of advances in the theory and practice of military science; and

To make the historical experience of the Marine Corps available for practical study and exploitation; and

To inform the American people about the Marine Corps' past . . .

a Marine Corps historical program and reporting procedures were established. Specifically charged with the staff supervision for making this a viable and functioning program is the Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps.

### Command Chronologies

In recognition of the increased and widespread commitments of the Marine Corps and to obtain a fully documented report of significant events, the Commandant issued *MCO 5750.2* in July 1965. Previously, the historical program had been concerned with the operations of Marine forces in

combat or near-combat situations. The history of a considerable portion of the Corps, therefore, was left unrecorded and numerous gaps—some large—exist in the overall records of Marine Corps experience. As a consequence, it has been almost impossible to write a complete history of the Marine Corps in certain given periods.

The purpose of the Command Chronology, which virtually every field unit and base organization in the Marine Corps must prepare and submit, is to provide a concise review of the highlights considered to be of special significance in the activities of each reporting organization. It is to include or list basic research material bearing on the subjects referred to in the document. When completed, the Chronology will enable the reporting command to have a clearcut periodic summation of its past functions, and will assist it in future planning and orientation of new personnel. More importantly, the Chronology will serve as a vital source of information for officers of Headquarters Marine Corps and major field commands. Because many readers of this article will either direct or assist in the preparation of the Chronology, or even actually prepare it, the importance of the final product cannot be overemphasized here.

What is the Command Chronology expected to consist of and what material is to be included? The Order relating to this report provides a fairly adequate frame of reference. Generally, Fleet Marine Force units are to note events related to their preparation for and their execution of assigned missions. Support, development, and training organizations should emphasize significant actions taken relative to how they accomplished their respective missions, and should pay particular attention to their progress on existing programs, the institution of new programs and procedures, important policy decisions that have been made or implemented, their experiments with new or existing equipment and doctrine, and the like. Base-type organizations are expected to report on much of the above, if applicable to their particular situations, and in addition should provide data on changes in plants and facilities. All three of these types of Marine Corps activities should include with their reports evaluative and interpretive comments, when appropriate. For obvious reasons, the inclusion of these comments as well as commanding officers' analyses is most appropriate in the case of those reports submitted by FMF units.

The reason that the Command Chronology order goes into so much detail regarding what the report is to contain and what supporting documents are to be appended to it is simply because historical diaries and reports prepared in the field as recently as the Korean War were deficient in these matters. The Chronology narrative should be amply supported by such basic documentation

as: operational and administrative plans and orders issued and those received from other than Marine Corps commands; journals; periodic reports of units and general staff sections; aviation combat reports; general and special staff studies and estimates; standard reference maps; and other documents of operational and/or historical significance such as sketches, photographs, briefing notes, local newspapers, telephone books, and other supporting documents. Of such is history made.

The Marine reader may also participate in several other current Marine Corps historical projects. Under the provisions of *MCO 5750.3* (Historical Interview Program for Viet-Nam Returnees), published in October 1965, he may be either an interviewer or interviewee. Like the Command Chronology, this program was instituted to obtain as complete a record as possible of all aspects of Marine Corps operations. The one difference, of course, is the fact that the Chronology is concerned with the record of the unit, while the interviews are concerned with the individual and his observations of events and problems encountered in South Viet-Nam. Like the official histories of Marine Corps operations in World War II and Korea, such a history will be written and widely distributed when the fighting has ended, all reports are in, and the subject matter has been declassified.

A third current historical project is the preparation of a Headquarters Marine Corps Chronicle. Based upon the weekly reports submitted to the Historical Branch by HQMC staff agencies, the Chronicle includes a compilation of policies rendered, actions taken, lessons learned, etc., affecting events and recent developments in WestPac. The objective of this document is to record events occurring on the Headquarters level, and to show the background of the development of CMC decisions and how they are implemented.

### The Marine Field Historian

To assist the Marine who, as a commander or staff officer, is involved in the preparation of the Command Chronology or any other aspect of the Marine Corps historical program, *MCO 5750.1* (Duties of the Marine Field Historian) was published in May 1965. Admittedly, this order only gives a broad-brush treatment of what the Marine field historian is expected to do and how he is expected to function. But, until specific T/O billets established for Marine field historians are filled, this order will have to serve as a guideline to current requirements.

What is apparent from all of this is that, to a very large degree, the direction and quality of the historical program in the field depends upon the individual initiative, application, and interest of commanders in supporting the Marine Corps historical program overall. In many cases, some commanders will serve no other function than to

collect and forward documents to higher echelons, where field historians will collate and process them for further transfer to Headquarters or other using agencies.

Field historians are not an innovation in the Marine Corps. Several historical teams appeared in the Pacific in the late stages of World War II to cover the Okinawa campaign. With the end of the war, these teams were disbanded and their personnel either released from active duty or assigned elsewhere in the Corps. In the late 1940s steps were taken to correct the mistakes that had been made during World War II regarding the collection and recording of historical information of both immediate and lasting value.

One corrective action taken was to begin a program of identifying reserve officers who were professional historians and who could be employed, when mobilized, in furthering the historical program. As a start the MOS of 4330 was established for Historical Officer. In addition, tables of organization for Force Historical Platoons were developed and a mission outlined.

With the onset of the Korean War, the 1st Provisional Historical Platoon, FMF, consisting of seven commissioned and seven enlisted Marines, was mobilized and assigned to FMFPac, and further deployed as historical teams to the division and the wing. The platoon commander and later an assistant remained at Pearl Harbor. Basically, the mission of these teams was to assist the unit to which they were attached in preparing its historical reports; to assist in the preservation and eventual shipment to HQMC of primary documentary materials from which HQMC could reconstruct events; and to augment these documentary sources by observation and interview. As it happened, the need for the preparation of adequate historical reports and diaries had been anticipated in the field, with the result that, in the case of the 1st Marine Division, an officer was appointed as historical officer to prepare the division's diary and to assure that subordinate units likewise prepared and submitted diaries. In effect, the historical teams found that much of their job was already being done for them.

Consequently, the teams, especially those with the division, spent most of their time conducting interviews to develop material that would supplement the division reports. As the fighting in Korea wore on, however, the diaries and reports became more comprehensive and answered most, if not all, of the Force historian's questions.

In the end, the FMFPac historians in the field became dubious about their role as interviewers, and the force historian repeated this doubt in view of the obvious fact that both the division and the wing preferred and operated well with their own historical officers. As a result, this unsatisfactory situation was resolved by the disbanding of the provisional platoon in December 1951 in favor

---

## EVERY MARINE A HISTORIAN

---

of organic historical sections at force, division, and wing level.

Col V. H. Krulak, then FMFPac G-3, commented on the problem in a note written about February 1951 to LtCol G. D. Gayle, Head, Historical Branch. Among other things, he said: "... There must be historical sections in the several special staffs" and "I concur (with the force historian) that professional Marines may not write as well, but they will probably produce better historical raw material than professional historians." Once the Korean War had ended, the job of processing all of the material sent to HQMC fell to the Marine and civilian historians in the Historical Branch, and until recently, nothing further had been done about ensuring proper coverage of Marine Corps activities in the field and establishing a billet for a field historian who would prepare a report of those activities.

### The Historical Branch, HQMC

As the recipient of the multitude of historical reports and diaries flowing in from Korea, the Historical Branch was fulfilling just one phase of its mission. In its nearly 50 years of existence—it was established in 1919 as a section within the Adjutant and Inspector's Department at HQMC—the historical agency of the Marine Corps has had a varied and often checkered life. In its early years, in fact almost to the end of World War II, the Historical Branch (or Section, or Division, for it has been all three) was a very small office in the headquarters of a military service dedicated to economy. Its principal task was applied research; it was the answer-finding service for almost every HQMC staff agency, units in the field, other Government agencies, and the general public. This reference capability, still a major function of the Historical Branch, is now paired with an equally important writing program, which is largely a development of the past two decades.

When scores of units were deactivated in the post-World War II reduction of troop strength, the Historical Section, then a part of the Division of Public Information, was literally flooded with tons of retired records. It was years before the World War II records were adequately accessioned and collated, far too late to do anything about the frequent and glaring gaps in small unit records that were discovered.

Despite this archival headache, the beginnings of a substantial and sustained historical writing program were made. The Historical Section initiated and had approved a monograph program, which would cover the principal campaigns in which Marines had participated in World War II. The monographs were to be as comprehensive and objective as possible with the view that they would provide the framework for a later project,

a five-volume general history covering the whole breadth of Marine Corps operations in the Pacific during the war.

### Marine Corps Histories

The World War II writing program, which eventually encompassed 15 monographs, evolved from works which were small 50-75-page pamphlets to substantial histories involving extensive research and hundreds of pages of documented narrative detail. The authors of these monographs were, with a single exception, Marine Corps officers, some with historical backgrounds. Other officer-authors of the monographs had writing experience as journalists, and the rest had no research or writing experience at all except that gained in normal school and active duty assignments. When the outbreak of the Korean War required an expansion of the Historical Division, civilian research historians were hired to assist the officer writers. Eventually, these civilians, who often wrote substantial portions of draft narratives, evolved from research assistants into collaborators, and the last monograph, *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific*, is the product of an officer-civilian historian team.

Since 1956, when the writing of the overall *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* was begun, civilian historians have been included among the authors. As officers were increasingly diverted to other writing projects, civilian historians were given a larger role in writing and research on each succeeding volume. At present, the final three books in the series now being readied for the printers are all being written by civilian historians.

Historical coverage of the Korean fighting profited from the lessons learned in World War II. Forewarned by experience with World War II documents, and helped by the localized and smaller scope of the Korean War, the Historical Branch (then part of the G-3 Division, as it is today) was able to handle the workload imposed by the Korean records. This material is well catalogued, cross-referenced to some extent, and readily available for research.

In December 1950, a prominent civilian historical writer, Lynn Montross, was hired by the Historical Branch and given the task of writing a series of articles for the Marine Corps GAZETTE, based on the Korean action records. These articles were to cover the story of what had happened as soon as the material became available and security regulations would allow. From early 1951 through the summer of 1953, Mr. Montross and other members of the Writing Section of the Historical Branch prepared 20 historical reports for the GAZETTE, covering all aspects of the combat and support operations of Marine Corps units in Korea. This body of narrative, documented in its draft form, constituted the preliminary stud-

ics for a comprehensive Korean War history, also in five volumes, like the World War II project. The authors of this series, in addition to Mr. Montross, have been Marine officers who were veterans of the Korean fighting. Now, as the fifth volume is being prepared, the writing team is composed of an officer and a civilian historian. This mixture of civilian and military writers has proved to be an effective one in most cases, as professional experience in historical research and writing is balanced by extensive military knowledge.

Although the two series of multi-volume histories of World War II and the Korean War, now nearing completion, have been the major publications of the Historical Branch for the past ten years, many other shorter historical studies on a wide range of topics have been produced. These works, published as pamphlets in a series that is uniform in appearance, have usually been initiated in response to requests from field units or HQMC agencies. In addition to these unclassified studies, the Historical Branch has compiled, and is currently preparing, classified historical studies that may one day be the basis for histories published for general public consumption.

### You And History

Many Marines, conditioned by the past decade's flood of free-wheeling historical novels and popular war histories, wonder why official accounts often seem dull, repetitious, and hard to read by comparison. It's a good question and deserves an answer. Readability in writing is a fetish with the Historical Branch, but far less a one than accuracy and completeness. It is relatively simple to highlight the actions of a few units in a campaign and to concentrate on the activities of a few individuals and come up with a good story out of the highly subjective result. But the mission is not one of glorifying any one unit or the Marine Corps itself, or of making a hero out of any one man. It is essential to paint a complete picture, one that will last and be of use to this and future generations. It is *the* Marine Corps account of *its* activities, and errors in writing must be on the side of recording the facts rather than tickling the reader's funny bone, catering to his appetites, or feeding his prejudices.

One point might well be driven home. The official histories are only as good as the material that forms their basis. Marines provide that material. When you as a report writer, as a chronicler, as an interviewee, or as a commentator on draft narratives fail to provide color and personality, interesting descriptions, and thoughtful analysis, you fail the end result, too. If you figure someone else will do the job for you, you may be right, but don't count on it. Many of the busiest senior officers in the Marine Corps have devoted hours of their time to review and comments aimed at making our histories accurate. Some of their

juniors, when given a chance for an equal hearing, have neglected this opportunity. Combat records are often incomplete and the testimony of key participants is vital to intelligent accounting of what happened. Chances are, the opportunity to improve official history will come your way during your career; make the most of it! Put yourself in the place of the official historian and remember his charge to write an account of lasting value.

### The Marine Corps Historical Program

The present Commandant has long felt that there is need for a greater appreciation and more effective use of Marine Corps history, both within the Corps and by outside agencies and the general public. In order to obtain a clear and continuous review of the possibilities for expanding the Marine Corps historical program to provide increased benefits for the Marine Corps as a whole, in 1964 Gen Greene appointed a Commandant's Advisory Committee on Marine Corps History. The membership of this group consisted of designated general officers attending the 1964 General Officers Symposium.

The purpose of the Committee was to examine the historical program with the aim of providing policy guidance and establishing priorities of effort. As a result of its deliberations, the groups submitted a number of comments and recommendations to the Commandant. In essence, it recommended that the Advisory Committee should be continued. Regarding the historical program itself, the Committee recommended the establishment of new priorities in the assignment of projects in the writing program.

In the period before the advent of the Advisory Committee, Historical Branch personnel worked diligently on previously assigned projects. For the Writing Section, this meant completing the World War II and Korean War histories, and beginning certain current studies topics. The Historical Reference Section (known previously as the Records and Research or Archives and Library Section) worked on Marine Corps Chronologies for the periods 1935-1946 and 1947-1963, bibliographies, and various reference publications. In addition, Section personnel often had to stop short in the middle of one of these projects to process a high-priority inquiry emanating from a Headquarters staff agency or equally important source. This, of course, meant a severe disruption of normal routine, a fact of life to which there was no school solution.

Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, certain new projects were added to those already being prepared, and all were given the following priorities:

Priority I—Establishment and continuation of a program to prepare, on a periodic basis,

---

## EVERY MARINE A HISTORIAN

---

a chronology and related bibliography of significant events, actions, and decisions at HQMC and to integrate this chronology/bibliography with similar ones to be prepared by major FMF and supporting establishments.

It can be seen from what has been said earlier that the genesis of the Command Chronology, the Viet-Nam Interview program, and the Order concerning Marine Field Historians is to be found in the requirements laid on in this priority.

**Priority II—Special Studies** having applicability to operations analysis and the interpretation of the Marine Corps contribution to crises or other implementations of national security policy.

Under the broad spectrum of special studies, the Historical Branch has completed or is in the process of completing writing projects such as those dealing with Marine Corps activities in the Lebanon Expedition, The Cuban Crisis, the Dominican Republic, the Development of LARA, and Operations in South Viet-Nam. More special studies projects will be undertaken and assigned to Branch personnel in the future, especially as the World War II and Korean War projects phase out, and as we take advantage of heightened interests and the increasing input of relevant materials accessioned by the Branch. Up to now, most special studies have been prepared in the Branch by experienced officers, and in general, any officer assigned to the Historical Branch can expect to work on either special or current studies.

**Priority III—Histories of Marine Corps activities in World War II and Korea** to be published by the Government Printing Office.

The histories of Marine Corps operations in World War II and Korea are already well known, and little can be said about the items in this priority except for the fact that it is anticipated that the last volume in the Korean series will be completed in June 1967 and that the final work in the World War II group will be ready to go to GPO in December 1966.

**Priority IV—General historical briefs and studies including bibliographies and chronologies of a non-current nature.**

All of the projects listed in this priority have been assigned to the research/reference historians in the Historical Reference Section. Their primary duty, however, is to provide reference service in the following order to Marine Corps headquarters agencies and field units, communications media, recognized authors and scholars, and aca-

dem institutions, and finally, in answer to inquiries from the public. Because of the time involved in fulfilling this aspect of this Section's mission, the target dates assigned to the projects listed in Priority IV have been made somewhat flexible.

**Priority V—Unit histories of special groups or posts and stations.**

In view of the nature and relative importance of the subjects in preceding priorities, it is not difficult to see that the topics listed in this priority have to take a back seat to all others.

The Historical Branch is presently concerned with another category not included in the priority system of the Advisory Committee's special historical projects. Under preparation in this area at the present is a Historical Program Directive/Manual. The purpose of this projected publication is to consolidate both new and previously published information relating to various aspects of the historical program and to make this information available to the Marine Corps in one ready reference. Additionally, it is intended that the manual will provide some guidance as to the intent and methods of operation relative to that program.

Most of the host of books published in the past 20 years have drawn extensively on material in the archives of the Historical Branch and Branch publications for information. Even a cursory glance at the prefaces, forewords, and appendices of these popular works will indicate numerous credits to the Branch and its personnel for their help. It is a safe bet that even those who didn't credit the Branch for assistance received, drew extensively on information provided by its publications, either first- or second-hand. Although not detailed as such in our mission, the Branch reviews—when requested—books, movie and television scripts, and the works of other Services for historical accuracy.

The historical program of the Marine Corps, and the Historical Branch in particular, has experienced many changes in the nearly 50 years since the Major General Commandant, George Barnett, approved the establishment of a Historical Section at Headquarters. In the half-century transition period, the turnover of personnel, various title redesignations, and attempts to transfer the Branch out of the headquarters complex have not impaired the desire and aim of those responsible for the program to produce history that is worthy of the men and Corps whose actions are described. Every Marine should recognize that, in order to perpetuate on record the qualities which have made our Corps outstanding and unique through 190 years of tradition and history, the Marine historical program deserves your fullest support.

USMC