



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

The Blood Stripe

Another persistent story in Marine Corps lore involves the red stripe on the blue uniform trouser legs of Marine officers and noncommissioned officers. Marines have spread the legend that this “blood stripe” commemorates the courage and leadership of the Marines who fought at Chapultepec during the Mexican War, where Major Levi Twiggs and Corporal Hugh Graham were among the battle’s casualties. Some Marine uniforms had red stripes prior to the Mexican War, however. The scarlet stripe as it appears today was added in 1904, and there is no evidence it was chosen for a commemorative purpose.

The tradition took on a new life in the twenty-first century, when many Marine units began holding “Blood Stripe ceremonies” to honor new noncommissioned officers and impress on them the seriousness of their responsibilities. While lore may have eclipsed fact, the Blood Stripe nevertheless has come to represent the commitment and professionalism of those who lead Marines and the important role that noncommissioned officer and commissioned officer combat leadership have played in the success of the Corps in battle throughout its history.

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