



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

The Marine Corps' Birthday

On 21 October 1921, Major Edwin N. McClellan, the officer-in-charge of the Historical Section, Headquarters Marine Corps, sent a memorandum to Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune. He suggested that 10 November 1775, the day that the Continental Congress authorized two battalions of Marines be raised, was the proper birthday of the Marine Corps. Major McClellan suggested the date be declared a Marine Corps holiday to be celebrated throughout the Corps, including a commemorative dinner in Washington, DC.

Major McClellan's proposal was not a whim. It was in line with General Lejeune's intent to increase the cohesion and morale of the Marine Corps through a better understanding of and reverence for the Corps' history. Lejeune wanted Marines to see themselves as an elite military force and act accordingly. Pride in the Service's history was prerequisite for that intent. Accordingly, on 1 November 1921, Lejeune issued Marine Corps Order No. 47, Series 1921. The order included a summary of the history, mission, and tradition of the Corps, which was to be read to every command on 10 November. This order has been duly carried out every year since.



Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division

The exact form of celebration of the Corps' birthday has varied. Evidence of birthday cake ceremonies reaches back to 1935. Since 1937, more extravagant celebrations—dinners, balls, pageants, parades, and even mock battles—have been held at various posts. Often, Marines appeared in historic uniforms, and the events were publicized to broaden appreciation for the Corps and its history. On 28 October 1952, Commandant of the Marine Corps General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. directed that the celebration

Collect

Preserve

Promote

Support





be formalized throughout the Corps. He provided an outline for the cake ceremony and other formal observances. This outline was included in the *Marine Corps Drill Manual*, approved 26 January 1956. General Lejeune's message is read to the command, followed by a message from the current Commandant and the cake cutting. Traditionally, the first piece of cake is offered to the oldest Marine present, and the second piece to the youngest Marine present. Even in the field, Marines have taken the time to observe the birthday.

Since 1921, Marines have celebrated their birthday so well that the other Services have begun to emulate the Marine practices. The annual remembrance of the birthday and the reading of General Lejeune's message have become an honored tradition that binds all Marines to their legacy and those who served before them.

You can read Marine Corps Order No. 47 (Series 1921), Major General Lejeune's birthday message, [here](#).