

A Milestone Anniversary: The Marine Corps' Lineage and Honors Program

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“No project undertaken by . . . the section . . . is more important than executing the Lineage and Honors Program.” So stated Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, then director of the former History and Museums Division, in his “Memorandum from the Director” in the summer 1995 *Fortitudine*. This year, the History Division is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the program staunchly advocated by General Simmons. Despite the coveted nature of the issued certificates, many Marines are unaware of this important program’s history, intent, and guiding principles.

The streamers that Marine units proudly display on their organizational colors depend upon an effective Lineage and Honors (L&H) program, which formally began in 1969. Born out of the need to track the adminis-

trative histories and cumulative honors, the L&H program was modeled slightly after the Army’s program. Before 1969, each unit kept track of its own history and battle honors—sometimes not faithfully or accurately. While the program initially focused almost entirely on Fleet Marine Force units, today there are more than 430 units (including a number of non-FMF units) that are eligible for certificates based on specific criteria outlined in the *Manual for the Marine Corps Historical Program*. Since the inception of the program, the historians of the Historical Reference Branch of the Marine Corps History Division have researched, printed, and issued nearly 1,700 sets of certificates. Each set of certificates receives the signature of the Commandant of the Marine Corps and is intended for framing and post-

ing in the headquarters or other centralized location within each unit. It is hoped that this prominent location will stimulate interest in unit history and aid in building esprit de corps.

The Historical Reference Branch receives thousands of queries from units throughout the Marine Corps each year, and many are specifically related to certificate eligibility requirements. In an attempt to clear up misconceptions and ambiguities, the *Manual for the Marine Corps Historical Program* outlines, in clear terms, the eligibility requirements. Only those units of the operating forces that are of battalion (or squadron) size or larger and that rate Type III, Class 1 colors (Marine Corps flag) are entitled to receive certificates. Bases, air stations, and separate companies (such as ANGLICO) are also

A Marine and a member of the 2d Marine Division Association rededicate one of the division’s battle streamers during their 64th birthday celebration in January 2005.

Official Marine Corps photo



entitled; however, units of the supporting establishment, such as security battalions of bases and schools, are not. Those units established for a temporary period of time (i.e., provisional), such as a “proof of concept” detachment, are also ineligible for L&H certificates because these units have no antecedents or no descendants.

Compiling the history and determining the honors of units for L&H certificates requires historians to examine the command chronologies and other pertinent primary documents submitted by units. In recent years, the ability to quickly “copy and paste” has, unfortunately, created a trend of poor quality command chronology submissions. Command chronologies often are the only document that records the unit’s activities and, without specific details on such items as size of detachments and specific dates or locations of deployments, units may not be given proper campaign or service credit, let alone the corresponding streamers. In an attempt to remedy this situation, in recent years the attendees at the Commander’s Course have been briefed on the Historical Program and the significance of the command chronologies.

Marines from 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, uncase the colors during the unit’s reactivation ceremony held 18 April 2008. The uncasings signifies the activation of command by showcasing the colors and battle streamers of the reactivated battalion.

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Force structure changes obviously affect a unit’s lineage. Throughout their history, units are activated, redesignated, deactivated, reactivated, relocated, mobilized, and demobilized, and they participate as well in numerous operations and deployments. All of these activities are recorded on the unit’s lineage certificate. Working with Total Force Structure Division, Aviation Division, and other agencies of Headquarters Marine Corps, the historians of the Historical Reference Branch ensure that the unit’s history and battle honors are perpetuated throughout various changes to the unit’s structure and organization. A prominent example exists from the Global War on Terrorism expansion of the Corps to 202,000 Marines—the reactivation of the three battalions of the 9th Marines. Instead of creating new infantry battalions, the battalions of the 9th Marines were reactivated after a period of more than 10 years of inactivation. Should the Corps need to increase its infantry capability once again, it would be logical and within the tenants of the L&H Program to reactivate elements of the 5th Marine Division, which last saw action during the Vietnam War. Significant force structure changes, such as that which affected the logistics community in the aftermath of Operations Desert

Shield/Storm and Iraqi Freedom, can significantly impact the L&H program, as historians attempt to sort out the intent, mission, organization, and hierarchical echelon of the new units to ensure each is displaying proper streamers and correct history. The historians of Historical Reference Branch today are still working with the units of the old Force Service Support Groups to determine their history and battle honors rated (if any).

Lineage and Honors certificates go hand-in-hand with streamers. History Division is the authenticating authority for streamers. Each unit that desires streamers must first receive the approval from History Division, which ensures that each requesting unit is displaying only those streamers that are authorized for that unit. In the past year, the Historical Reference Branch has digitized its collection of award (Presidential Unit Citation and Navy and Meritorious Unit Commendation) streamers and made them available to Common Access Card users through the division’s intranet portal. Nearly 5,000 pages of citations and supporting documentation are now available to units, which can use them for changes in command programs, color rededications, and professional military education initiatives. Again, correctness in determining streamer entitlements is dependent upon accurate command chronology submissions.

The efficiency of a unit depends not only on its training and experience. Morale also plays a large part in its successful operation. “All Marines know that in battle they will be expected to do the impossible. They will do their duty while ignoring physical hardship, personal danger, and the certainty of no reward. They are motivated by a simple understanding that Marines will always do what must be done, and that Marines of the past in similar situations did likewise.” The late Colonel John W. Ripley’s sage observation sums up what lineage and honors certificates try to capture in just a few pages of parchment—by engaging the individual Marine in the history of one’s unit and traditions, he or she is part of a larger collective and bonded forever. □1775□