

THE COLD WAR PERIOD AND BEYOND

The Cold War strategy of the United States focused on Europe and the American involvement in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The viability of the Marine Corps role, i.e., its amphibious warfare mission, in U.S. defense strategy was again questioned. During this period the Marine Corps focused on its mission to support the fleet as an expeditionary force in readiness.

Beginning in the 1970s a series of meetings between U.S. presidents and leaders of the Soviet Union led to the signing of several arms agreements and nuclear weapons treaties. These meetings helped to ease some of the Cold War tensions. By the 1980s the Soviet Union's economic plight and a movement toward a more open Soviet society, the Soviet policy of Glasnost, had prepared the stage for the end of Communist oppression in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. A treaty was signed with the United States to destroy certain nuclear missiles, and former Soviet bloc countries declared their independence. Many historians date the end of the Cold War to 1989, when the Berlin Wall, built during 1961 to divide the eastern (Communist) side of the city from the western (democratic) side of the city, was opened.

The Marine Corps During the Cold War

In the late 1970s critics, as they had done periodically since the establishment of the Marine Corps, again questioned the need for a Corps. But the Corps found a niche in the NATO alliance's northern flank, which sent the 2nd MarDiv into the North Atlantic for a new series of exercises and its first major landing north of the Arctic Circle. Then, as the Middle East, Central America, and the Caribbean emerged as serious foreign policy concerns, the FMF again became a popular investment because of the increasing possibility that conventional forces would be required for military intervention.

The passage of the Corps through the 1980s resulted in a personnel and material readiness unparalleled in the history of the Marine Corps, although it was not without turbulence. MCAS New River's units suffered the first casualties of the new decade on 24 April 1980 in the ill-fated attempt to free American hostages in Iran, Operation Eagle Claw, when a fiery collision between an Air Force transport and a RH-53 helicopter at "Desert One" killed three Marines in the Iranian desert. All of Camp Lejeune's tenant FMF commands pursued demanding operational schedules interrupted only to assist in humanitarian efforts, such as the "Marial boatlift," during which Marines from Camp Lejeune deployed to Key West, Florida, to support the U.S. efforts in relocating 114,000 Cuban refugees.

Beirut

Triumphs and tragedies marked the 2nd MarDiv as it wrote new chapters in Marine Corps history during the 1980s. From 1982 to 1984 the 32nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU), which was redesignated as the 22nd MAU on 15 February 1983, and the 24th MAU were on peacekeeping duty in Lebanon as part of a multi-national force attempting to restore stability in the civil war-torn



country. While the 24th MAU (BLT 1/8) was ashore, a truck piloted by one of the warring factions and loaded with the equivalent of 12,000 pounds of high explosives destroyed the BLT headquarters at Beirut International Airport on 23 October 1983. The explosion killed 242, mostly Marines. More Marines died in that horrific explosion than on any other single day since D-Day or Iwo Jima.

The Beirut disaster solidified relations between the military and civilian communities at Camp Lejeune as had no other event since the arrival of the first Marines. President Ronald Reagan, the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense, Commandant General Paul X. Kelley, and many other generals and dignitaries attended the solemn, nationally televised memorial service held at Camp Lejeune's riverside amphitheater behind the division headquarters, Building 2, the following month. Reagan's visit to the base was the first by a sitting president since John F. Kennedy's 1963 visit.

In 1984 the City of Jacksonville planted 270 Bradford pear trees along Lejeune Boulevard, to provide a living memorial to those who had perished in the Beirut explosion or subsequently died. To further honor the peacemakers, a permanent Beirut Memorial sponsored by Jacksonville citizens was begun in May 1986 on 4.5 acres of land donated by Camp Lejeune adjacent to Lejeune Boulevard at the entrance to Camp Johnson. This memorial, inscribed

with the 273 names, was dedicated 23 October 1986. On 22 October 1988 a six-foot, five-inch statue of a Marine designed by Jacksonville native Abbe Godwin was added to the memorial.

Grenada

Two days after the Beirut attack the 22nd MAU (BLT 2/8 and HMM-261), en route to Lebanon to relieve the 24th MAU, altered its course to participate in Operation Urgent Fury. The unit, along with the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, assaulted the Caribbean island nation of Grenada; the Marines expeditiously occupied the northern two-thirds of the island. The Marines' mission was to restore order after a Communist-inspired coup, to safeguard the lives of approximately 1,000 U.S. medical students there, and to preclude further Soviet intervention. Three trees were planted along Lejeune Boulevard as a memorial to the Marines killed in Grenada.



Following the 1983 bombing of a barracks in Beirut that killed 273 Marines, President Ronald Reagan addressed Beirut Service members and families while attending a memorial service at Camp Lejeune for the fallen Marines.

Camp Lejeune's Beirut Memorial is located at the intersection of NC 24 and Montford Landing Road.



Panama

Operation Just Cause, the armed intervention by the U.S. in Panama, executed 20 December 1989 to 31 January 1990, brought the 2nd MarDiv into combat for the last time during the 1980s. Companies K and I of the 3rd Battalion and 6th Marines, and Company D of the 2nd Light Armored Infantry (LAI) Battalion, participated as part of Marine Forces Panama in the restoration of the democratic process there and the capture of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who was wanted in the U.S. for drug trafficking. Company D's Corporal Garreth Isaak, posthumously awarded a Silver Star, was the only Corps fatality.

Cold War Reorganizations

During the Cold War many elements of the Marine Corps were reorganized or redesignated. Marine Corps Reservists, last activated during the Korean War to perform the essential task of augmenting the grossly understrength active-duty units, underwent a complete reorganization on 1 July 1962 when the OMCR was reformed into the 4th MarDiv/4th MAW Team. In 1979, as part of the Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR), the reserve team received its only MAGTF CE (Command Element) and brigade headquarters when the Command Element, 2nd Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB), was activated.

MAGTFs were originally designated as "expeditionary" but became "amphibious" at the onset of the Vietnam War in 1965 as a concession to colonial sensitivities. In 1988 this politically motivated revision was reversed by Commandant General Alfred M. Gray since "expeditionary" better represented the kinds of missions for which he wanted the Marine Corps to prepare. Hence MAUs once again became MEUs, and likewise with other "expeditionary" forces.

In April 1988 at Camp Lejeune, the 2nd MEB CE joined the 6th MEB CE and the II MEF Headquarters (Nucleus), which was later designated as the II MEF CE.

Other activations at Camp Lejeune during this period included the Special Operations Training Group (SOTG), initiated by General Gray in 1984 while serving as Commanding General, FMFLant. The SOTG operated from the former World War II-era cantonment site built for African-American Marines at the Rifle Range. SOTG's primary mission was and continues to be the training of MEUs for their Special Operations Capable (SOC) certification, giving them the capability to execute any one of 18 special missions, such as in-extremis hostage rescues, within six hours of alert. The 26th MEU was the first unit to earn the SOC designation. It deployed with the 6th Fleet on 15 August 1985.

The 2nd Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Intelligence Group (SRIG), a major command under II MEF containing two separate battalions and five additional companies, was activated in September

Marines train in amphibious assault vehicles (AAV7).



1988 with the mission to provide command, control, communications, and the complete spectrum of intelligence support to MAGTFs. SRIG continued for almost a decade before it was deactivated.

Marine Corps Base's headquarters unit at Camp Lejeune, last identified as Headquarters Battalion in 1959, was reorganized and redesignated Headquarters and Service (H&S) Battalion again, then was redesignated as Headquarters Battalion again on 30 January 1980. At the same time Base Material Battalion inherited some of the headquarters functions of H&S Battalion and was designated as Support Battalion. The battalions combined on 12 May 1989 to form Headquarters and Support Battalion, the largest battalion in the Corps.

On 28 April 1987 the ITS at Camp Geiger, the former ITR, was placed under a common syllabus with its West Coast counterpart at Camp Pendleton and renamed the School of Infantry (SOI), East. This was not simply a name change, as the school had undergone significant evolution. Weapons training increased as a result of the new weaponry and structure of the infantry battalion (now reduced to three infantry companies), and there was an upgrade of training in individual and small-unit tactical skills.

On 15 February 1983 a new, \$51 million, 420,000-square-foot Naval Hospital facility providing 205 beds was opened at Camp Lejeune north of Brewster Boulevard on the Northeast Branch of the New River. Venerable old Building H-1, which had served as the base hospital since 1943, was converted to a headquarters facility and later named Julian C. Smith Hall.

By the end of the 1980s the strength of the SMCR stood at a healthy 44,000. Among the personnel, the number of Women Marines had tripled from 3,030 in 1976 to 9,057 in 1980, demonstrating their increased value to the Corps. At the same time the number of African- American officers was approaching 1,000. Camp Lejeune at that time supported a military population of 41,200, nearly one-fifth of the active-duty Marine Corps strength of 195,903. In addition, there were approximately 40,000 dependents, 5,000 civilian employees, and 28,000 military retirees in the area. By 1987 the Camp Lejeune community included 110,000 people, including all active-duty personnel, retired personnel, civilian personnel, and dependents. There were also 3,800 registered students and about 80,000 registered, privately owned vehicles. The direct and indirect contribution of Camp Lejeune to the local economy for that year amounted to \$803,501,000.

From 1981 to 1984 the Tarawa Terrace complex underwent a \$5 million facelift, which was followed in 1982 by a \$9.7 million renovation of Midway Park housing and, later, Paradise Point officers' quarters. The Midway Park units were completely rebuilt, upgraded, and refurbished at the cost of \$13,500 per unit; however, the original heart pine framing and flooring were retained. Forty-six new motel-style barracks were constructed during the 1980s at Courthouse Bay, French Creek, Hadnot Point, Montford Point, and the air station. These new facilities brought the total number of family housing units to 4,454, 232 barracks, and 19 BOQs. At the end of the 1980s Camp Lejeune contained 7,662 buildings and structures.



Post-Cold War Operations

By the time of the fall of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War, the Marine Corps was in a finely tuned state of operational readiness with an inventory of modern equipment and a pressing requirement for more training areas and ranges for the FMF units. Studies conducted in 1986 and 1989 indicated that Camp Lejeune lacked 50,000 acres and 10 ranges to meet current training needs. A 41,100-acre section of real estate between Verona and Holly Ridge and west of U.S. Route 17, part of which was owned by the International Paper Company, was identified as highly suitable for this purpose. The proposal alarmed several dozen residents in the area, who were reminded of the necessary but lamentable displacement of families from the Camp Lejeune area in 1941.

By 1992, however, amicable settlements had been reached and the newly acquired acreage, known as the Greater Sandy Run Area (GSRA), was purchased at a cost of \$41 million. Another \$80 million was invested in construction of the GSRA range complex, which had an estimated completion date of 2005. With the construction of the first two ranges, SR-7 and SR-10, GSRA was officially opened in October 1998.

Camp Lejeune grew overnight to more than 152,000 acres, putting it ahead of the 125,000-acre Camp Pendleton in size, but still trailing Fort Bragg as North Carolina's largest reservation. Fort Bragg currently encompasses 160,789 acres.

In 1990 Jacksonville's City Council officially annexed the inhabited areas of Camp Lejeune and thereby increased its population by more than 40,000 people, jumping from the nineteenth to the seventh largest city in North Carolina with a population over 70,000.

Victory in the Cold War necessitated a reappraisal of foreign policy objectives. For the first time in over 41 years the Soviet Union was no longer the primary threat to American national security, and in consequence President George Bush and Congress saw little reason to maintain the force structure as it had existed in the 1980s. As during other postwar periods, significant budget reductions were to be implemented. For the Marine Corps, this meant a proposed decrease in personnel strength from the 1990 level of 195,903 to 177,000 by 1995, with subsequent reductions to follow. World events, however, would intervene.



Marines prepare to deploy on combat missions.