

## **UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

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HIST 1006  
SEP 2014

### **MARINE CORPS HISTORY 6**

**TERMINAL LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** Without the aid of references, identify significant events in Marine Corps history without omitting key components. (OCS-HIST-1002)

**ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVE(S)**

1. Without the aid of references, identify influential contributors to the history of the Marine Corps from 1976 to 2000 without omission. (OCS-HIST-1002x)
2. Without the aid of references, describe Marine participation in Limited-scale Operations throughout Marine Corps history from 1976 to 2000 without omitting key components. (OCS-HIST-1002y)
3. Without the aid of references, describe Marine participation in Major Operations throughout Marine Corps history from 1976 to 2000 without omitting key components. (OCS-HIST-1002z)
4. Without the aid of references, trace the history of Marine Corps Amphibious Doctrine from 1976 to 2000 without omitting key components. (OCS-HIST-1002aa)
5. Without the aid of references, trace the history of Marine Corps Aviation from 1976 to 2000 without omitting key components. (OCS-HIST-1002ab)

1. **THE STATE OF THE CORPS**

a. After Vietnam, which the Marine Corps had not lost, but turned out to be a loss for the country, the Marine Corps was left confused and unsure of what it meant to be light infantry force for a superpower.

b. The mission of providing defense for NATO's "northern flank" in Norway led to the creation of a Mountain Warfare Training Center at Bridgeport, in the mountains of northern California. The Marine Corps still uses this facility to train today.

c. Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Allan R. Millet called the Post-Vietnam years the Marine Corps' 15 year Long March, comparing it to the Long March of Mao-Tse-Tung and the Communist Chinese. The march was difficult and arduous, and not without its sacrifices, but it strengthened the core of Mao's Communist Party, and the same thing happened to the Marine Corps. The Corps had to address problems with drug use, lack of discipline, and low morale. Gen Louis Wilson, for which the headquarters building of OCS is named, made it his agenda to purge the Corps war bloated ranks of the druggies, malcontents, and racial agitators with an expeditious discharge program and a promise that he would have a quality Marine Corps if all that was left was him and the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

d. There were serious questions raised about the possibility of Marine Corps amphibious operations against an equally technologically advanced enemy, like the Soviet juggernaut. To rise to this challenge, the Marine Corps made some changes to who it recruited from, requiring in 1976 that all enlisted Marines be high school graduates. At the time this was unprecedented. The Corps also refined its doctrine and acquired a slew of new equipment, much of which is still in service today, such as the Harrier, HMMWV, LAV-25, and the M1-A1. General Alfred Gray, who served as the 29th Commandant from 1987-1991, focused heavily on crafting the doctrine and providing the vision that would contribute to the Corps' stellar performance in the Persian Gulf War and the conflicts that followed.

2. **LEBANON**

a. Traditional divisions between Christian and Muslim Lebanese exacerbated by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) displaced by continued conflict with the Israeli state.

b. Civil War in Lebanon gradually develops between Christian and Muslim militias.

c. In July 1976, when protracted factional fighting in Beirut threatened the lives and safety of American citizens, a Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) on routine deployment to the Mediterranean responded to assist in a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO).

d. They controlled the orderly evacuation of 160 American civilians and 148 foreign national s on 27 July. Despite efforts of the international community to alleviate the bloodletting in Lebanon, the fighting continued, fluctuating with the fortunes and the strength of each of the factions. The Marines entered Lebanon once again in June 1982, destined to play a larger role than they had ever anticipated.

e. **Lebanon 25 August 1982 – 31 July 1984**

(1) On 25 August 1982, the 32d MAU went ashore peacefully in Beirut, and joined the Italian and French contingents. Their mission was to evacuate the PLO fighters to help stabilize the situation.

(2) The Multinational Force (MNF) assisted in moving 6,500 armed PLO fighters to Cyprus. On 10 September, the Marines left, never having fired a shot.

(3) Four days later, Lebanon's Christian president was murdered. In retaliation, Christian Phalangist (Christian) forces massacred nearly one thousand unarmed Palestinian civilians, many of whom were family members of those who had moved to Cyprus.

(4) The PLO returned, and in this turmoil the Marines landed again. Their new mission was to provide "a presence in Beirut that would in turn help establish the stability necessary for the Lebanese government to regain control of their capital." The Joint Chiefs argued against this redeployment, but President Reagan insisted. To accomplish the mission, the MAU dug in around the perimeter of Beirut International Airport. The Italians and French moved to other locations in Beirut.

(5) The 24th MAU relieved the 32d MAU in October. Their mission expanded to include security. Marines were finally permitted to return fire and even preempt perceived hostile intent. In February 1983, the 22d MAU replaced the 24th MAU. The Muslims began attacking the MNF because they felt that the Americans were showing favor towards Israeli forces. In April, the Marines returned fire for the first time. At the end of May, the 22d MAU was again rotated out and the 24th MAU moved in. Violence escalated throughout the summer. Soon afterwards, tragedy struck.

(6) A few minutes after dawn on Sunday, 23 October 1983, an Iranian zealot driving a yellow Mercedes truck dodged the barriers erected around the headquarters building of the battalion landing team. The force of the explosion, equivalent to 12,000 pounds of TNT, leveled the building where 300 troops slept. Marines and sailors, Italians and Lebanese, British and French all helped dig through the rubble. Seven hours after the attack, the last living person buried in the rubble was rescued. By the time all were accounted for, 220 Marines, 18 Navy corpsmen, and 3 soldiers were dead. Across town, 58 French paratroopers died in a similar bombing.

(7) Marines continued their mission in Beirut; however, their security measures were significantly heightened. In July 1984, the MNF was withdrawn from Lebanon and by the end of July, the Marines had left.

(8) This tragedy highlighted the importance of force protection and looking back at it with hindsight, foreshadowed the type of tactics that terrorists and insurgents would increasingly use against U.S. Forces. The security posture the Marines had that morning was based on what they had previously experienced. The guards on the gate at the compound were not carrying loaded weapons, and by the time they had locked and loaded, the bomber was inside the compound.

(9) This instance led to much review of force protection procedures and the rules of engagement, and resulted in a bedrock tenet of rules of engagement, the commander is always expected to take measures to ensure the safety of his unit, and ensuring that every U.S. service member understands their inherent right to self-defense.

3. **GRENADA**

a. In October 1983, President Reagan ordered a joint Marine/Army force to land on the small Caribbean Island of Grenada. He was concerned about safety of American lives and the deteriorating political situation.

b. Operation Urgent Fury began at 0500, 25 October. Marines from the 22d MAU, embarked aboard the USS Guam, landed ashore in order to rescue American medical students endangered by the spreading violence in

Grenada. A helicopter assault on Pearls Airport had it secured within two hours. By 0712 the next morning, the Marines had secured the governor's residence. Two Army Ranger Battalions parachuted onto the Port Salinas Airfield. Elements of these battalions later captured Grand Anse, where a number of Americans were attending medical school.

c. Six Marine helicopters then evacuated the medical students. By 28 October, all organized resistance had ceased and the mission was accomplished. Despite the success of the mission, there was serious concern about the coordination of joint special operations and joint communications. Commandant, General (Gen) P.X. Kelley, ordered the institution of the MAU (SOC) program to enable MAU's to more effectively function in the special ops environment.

#### 4. **PANAMA**

a. Panama and the United States have had a long running relationship built around the Panama Canal. In 1983, a Panamanian general, Manuel Noriega, became the de facto military dictator of Panama (although Panama still had an elected president). Relationships with the United States and Panama began to deteriorate and General Noriega started to solicit and receive military aid from communist countries, namely the USSR, Cuba, and Libya. In May of 1989 Panama held presidential elections and it was widely believed that an alliance of parties opposing Noriega's regime won the election by as much as three to one, although once the votes were counted by Noriega's government, it was declared that his supporter had won the presidency. President George H.W. Bush called for Noriega to honor the will of the Panamanian people, further deteriorating the relationship.

b. In October, Noriega defeated a coup attempt from among his Panamanian Defense Force (PDF), and in December, he got Panama's legislature to declare that due to U.S. meddling in Panama, a state of war existed between the two countries. The next day, on 15 December, four U.S. military officers, a Marine captain and first lieutenant, a Navy lieutenant, and an Army captain, traveling from Fort Clayton military base on their way to dinner in Panama City, were stopped at a PDF checkpoint and fired upon. The Marine lieutenant was killed and the Marine captain was shot in the foot. Another naval officer and his wife who witnessed the incident were detained by the PDF. The officer spent two weeks in the hospital recovering from his beating. The day after the checkpoint incident, President Bush ordered the invasion of Panama set to commence at 0100 on 20 December. He explained the purpose of the mission hours after it started, to safeguard the lives of U.S. citizens in Panama, to defend democracy and human rights there, to combat drug trafficking (which Noriega was believed to be involved with), and to protect the neutrality of the Panama Canal (the US had the Torrijos-Carter Treaties which promised this).

c. All four branches of the U.S. military participated, with the Marine Corps providing Marine Security Forces Panama, as well as elements from 3/6, Marine Fleet Antiterrorism Security Teams, 2d LAR, and 2d MLG.

d. As a result of the U.S. intervention, the rightful president-elect, Guillermo Endara, was sworn into office and Manuel Noriega was captured and stood trial in both the United States and France for drug trafficking and money laundering. In 2011 he was extradited to Panama to serve time for charges of human rights violations. The U.S. lost 23 service members and 325 were wounded in action. The number of Panamanians who died in the invasion is widely contested, with figures varying between 500 and 4,000. The international community largely condemned the U.S. action in Panama. The General Assembly of the United Nations voted 75-20 (with 40 abstentions) to condemn the U.S. invasion as a violation of international law.

#### 5. **PERSIAN GULF WAR**

a. Before we talk about the Persian Gulf War, here is a quick orientation of the area. Iraq is located in the Middle East nearly landlocked between six countries. Kuwait is a small, oil-rich country that sits along the Persian Gulf between Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Iraq believed it had historic claims to Kuwait, which was awarded autonomy as a principality during British colonial rule.

b. Iraq was fresh off of fighting Iran from 1980 to 1988 and was in debt from that long, drawn-out conflict. They planned to pay off this debt by selling oil, which they possessed about 10 percent of the world's supply. This plan was not working out as well as Iraq had hoped, however, as oil prices collapsed in the late 1980's. Saddam Hussein believed this was at least in part due to neighboring Kuwait exceeding their Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas and therefore driving down the cost of oil. He described this as economic warfare, and knew that if he were to annex Kuwait, he could double his access to oil, possessing over 20 percent of the world's supply and having further influence over market prices. Although the Iran-Iraq War was costly in lives and money, it did provide Iraq with the world's fourth largest army, which was battle hardened from the last near

decade of combat. On 2 August 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded his southern neighbor Kuwait. He claimed annexation of Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province. Saudi Arabia, concerned that Saddam Hussein would not just stop at Kuwait, immediately requested international assistance in defending their sovereignty.

c. Immediately, President Bush ordered a military buildup in the region in concert with the government of Saudi Arabia to halt further aggression by Hussein. The Marines were immediately on the move. Marines from the East Coast deployed on amphibious shipping and airliners to Saudi Arabia. There they were met by Maritime Pre-positioning Ships (MPS). The MPS are cargo ships that carry a full complement of equipment and vehicles for a Marine unit. They are continuously forward-deployed at sea to provide a rapid response capability. Within five days of activation, the MPS ships arrived, the equipment was off-loaded and the Marines were moving north ready to fight.

d. This deployment of forces was called Operation Desert Shield. The world's leaders decided that Kuwait could not fall into the hands of an aggressive regime such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq. His army was the fourth largest in the world at the time. The United States banded together with 34 other nations to form a coalition sanctioned by the United Nations. It even included other Arab countries that condemned Hussein's actions and demanded the complete withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

e. During Operation Desert Shield, Marines at sea helped enforce a maritime blockade of Iraqi shipping. The Navy and Marine Corps team conducted many highly publicized amphibious "rehearsals" to show the Iraqis their capabilities. Because of these demonstrations the Iraqis committed three divisions to defending the Kuwaiti coast against an amphibious landing from the sea.

f. **Operation Desert Storm.** President Bush issued a strong warning to the Iraqi government that America would not hesitate to use force. That use of force was known as "Desert Storm." On 16 January 1991 the war began. The U.S. first established complete air supremacy, and then pounded Iraqi forces unmercifully for over a month.

g. Coalition forces, headed by U.S. armed forces took up positions in the Persian Gulf and surrounding countries. Operation Desert Storm was the largest combat operation in Marine Corps history. Marines were embarked aboard 31 amphibious ships, and the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions were ashore along with the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.

h. **Al-Khafji.** The abandoned Saudi frontier town of Al-Khafji was the site of the first ground engagement with Iraqi forces. An Iraqi mechanized division crossed the Kuwaiti border into Saudi Arabia and seized the town. Coalition aircraft, including Marines stopped most of the Iraqi division before it entered the city. Saudi Arabian and Qatari forces supported by Marine Forward Air Controllers counterattacked successfully and drove the Iraqis out of the city.

i. After the air campaign, the ground campaign began at 0400, 24 February (23 February, 2000. Eastern Time). The 1st and 2d Marine Divisions' mission was to conduct a frontal attack across the berm, through two Iraqi minefield/obstacle belts and directly into Kuwait. Marine forces at sea executed an amphibious demonstration to divert the Iraqis' attention. This fixed the Iraqi forces and enabled coalition forces to hit the Iraqis with a huge, armored "left hook", advancing around their left flank deep into Iraq and hitting the Iraqi rear.

j. Operation Desert Storm was a success. The Iraqis were completely out maneuvered and defeated in just 100 hours of combat. The Iraqis' rapid defeat was due in part to the poor fighting ability of their armies and to our overwhelming air superiority. More importantly the 100 hours battle proved the lethal effectiveness of our well-trained disciplined Marines.

## 6. **SOMALIA**

a. Civil war in the east African state of Somalia had created a massive humanitarian crisis where tens of thousands of people were starving. After brokering a sensitive cease fire between the two main belligerents, General Mohamed Farrah Aidid and "President" Ali Mahdi Muhammad, the United Nations first responded in April, 1992, with United Nations Operations in Somalia I (UNOSOM I), which intended to maintain the ceasefire with a small peacekeeping force (less than 1,000 personnel) and distribute food and other aid to relieve the suffering of the Somali people. However, these shipments of aid were often not reaching the Somali people who needed it due to the intervention of numerous armed Somali factions.

b. The ceasefire quickly started to deteriorate, and by November, General Aidid announced that he would no longer allow UN peacekeepers in his territory and would consider all UN personnel hostile. In response, the United Nations decided to invoke Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to restore peace in Somalia, but did not have the means to do this alone. The United States offered to lead the effort and United Nations Task Force (UNITAF) was formed, a U.S. led multi-national task force which entered Somalia on 5 December 1992. This force would include 37,000 troops from 24 countries, of which 25,000 were American. Marines were the first U.S. combat troops dedicated to the mission.

c. The 15th MEU landed on 9 December 1992 amid a media circus. Battalion Landing Team 2/9 was able to conduct simultaneous heliborne assaults into Mogadishu International Airport and small boat assaults to secure the port of Mogadishu. Shortly after, the 1st Marine Division's Air Contingency Battalion (ACB), 1/7, was able to land at Mogadishu Airport to reinforce the 15th MEU.

d. The Marines had good success in protecting humanitarian convoys and enforcing the cease fire agreement. The Marines landed in Mogadishu on December 9, 1992. Their mission was to secure the port complex, airport, and the abandoned U.S. Embassy. Once ashore Marines broke the gridlock of food distribution and assisted the U.N. in establishing Humanitarian Relief Sectors in central and southern Somalia. Marines traveled in combined-arms convoys, and seized control of urban centers. Firefights with bandits were frequent. Deadly incidents erupted in Mogadishu as the warrior clans tried to oppose the Marines' humanitarian operations. Hidden snipers shot at several Marines. By 1993 the Marines successfully allowed the distribution of food and the crisis subsided. The United Nations took command of the operation and the Marines withdrew.

e. From 3-4 October 1993, Task Force Ranger, composed of U.S. Army Special Forces, engaged in a seventeen hour firefight while trying to conduct a raid to capture General Aidid at the Olympic Hotel in Mogadishu. Eighteen Americans were killed and another 84 were wounded. Later that week President Clinton announced that the US would end its mission in Somalia by 31 March 1994. The last U.S. troops to leave Somalia were 1,100 U.S. Marines on 25 March. After a two-year absence, the Marines returned in 1995 during Operation United Shield. The United Nations had failed to restore order to Somalia so they requested the United States to help withdraw U.N. forces from the country. The Marines were engaged in 27 firefights during the evacuation of U.N. forces.

**NOTES:**

**REFERENCE:**

1. Millett, A. R., *Semper Fidelis: The revised and expanded edition*. New York: The Free Press. 1991.
2. Reynolds, Nicholas E. *Just Cause: Marine Operations in Panama 1988-1990*. Washington, D.C.: History and Museum Division, Headquarters, USMC. 1996.
3. Poole, Walter S. *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992 – March 1994*. Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 2005