

November 7, 2024

Marines...

This coming Sunday, we'll acknowledge our military veterans, and the 249th year of the founding of the Marine Corps. With Camp Pendleton so close, this is an important ministry that we do, as are the other ministries that we carry out for Marine families. You might note that the Corps is celebrating its 249th year, but our nation is only celebrating its 248th. Correct! The Marines were formed by a resolution of the Second Continental Congress in 1775, calling for the establishment of two battalions, more than six months prior to the signing of our Declaration of Independence.

As we do every year, we will celebrate our veterans, we will also remember those who have fought and died in the service of our nation, and we will pray for peace. This year's celebration will be particularly poignant, though I'll save the surprise as to why, until Sunday.

I wanted here to highlight a role of our Marines that perhaps we don't think about often enough. That is their role in peacekeeping and in guarding and providing security for our embassies and consulates around the world. Some Marines have lost their lives doing this perilous work, as in the tragic bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut in 1983. We had sent our Marines to be part of a multinational peacekeeping force, to help stabilize Lebanon. The Barracks was bombed by Hezbollah resulting in the highest number of losses for our Marines in a single day since Iwo Jima.¹

Other Marines have suffered to protect our diplomatic staff and Americans abroad, as when the embassy in Tehran was overrun, and scores of Americans, including some Marines guards were initially taken hostage. Some were released soon afterward. But one Marine, Sgt. Kevin Hermening, spent 444 days in captivity.²

The relationship between the Marines and the State Department has endured since 1798. But that relationship was formalized in 1948, when the Marines agreed to provide a force to protect our embassies and consulates around the world. According to State's website:

“The State Department's relationship with the U.S. Marine Corps dates back to 1798, and for more than 200 years, Marines have been engaged in some way with U.S. diplomacy. U.S. Marines have escorted diplomatic personnel, rescued and defended U.S. embassies and consulates, and provided notable support to U.S. diplomatic efforts throughout our nation's history.”³

Those embassies and consulates do the important work of negotiating peace and maintaining relationships with other nations. They facilitate trade and help Americans who find themselves in difficult circumstances abroad, among many other duties. And all that work is made possible by those Marines who keep our people safe overseas. We owe them gratitude and recognition for that service. These Marines also help in evacuations when things descend into chaos in some of those places. Marines assisted with the evacuations recently of US personnel in Sudan, and not long ago in Kabul, and later in Kiev.⁴

We are located just North of Camp Pendleton. It is itself a pretty remarkable place. If you've never been on the base, you've missed something. One thing I marvel at when I'm on base, is how enormous the place is. 125,000 acres in all, including 17 miles of coastline. I believe it is the second largest Marine base in the US. Many probably don't know that Pendleton was also the first base to receive Vietnamese refugees and assist in their resettlement, following the fall of Saigon in 1975, with some 50,000 coming through Pendleton in what was known as “Operation New Arrivals.”⁵

For many, the image they might have in mind of the Marines are those brave souls who storm the beaches, when we send them into combat. And that is a realistic image. But a far from complete one. As noted above, our Marines do much more than that. It is right that we celebrate them, and all Veterans who have given service to our nation in defense of our freedoms.

I found the following article particularly helpful, and an enjoyable read. I hope you find it so also.

<https://www.state.gov/u-s-marines-and-embassies-historic-ties/#:~:text=Though the Marine Security Guard, beginning our nation's history>

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick

- 1 <https://www.state.gov/40th-anniversary-of-the-beirut-marine-corps-barracks-bombing/>
- 2 <https://www.dav.org/learn-more/news/2023/how-one-marine-made-it-through-the-iran-hostage-crisis/>
- 3 <https://www.state.gov/marine-security-guards/>
- 4 <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2023/04/26/13-marine-security-guards-helped-in-sudan-embassy-evacuation/>
- 5 <https://www.marines.mil/News/Marines-TV/videoid/522171/?dvpTag=Vietnam+War>