



## President's Message

*Richard B. Rothwell*



Your Society continues its efforts to preserve and tell the history of Camp Pendleton. In my last report I mentioned our plans to reformat and reframe a series of original paintings by Col. Charles Waterhouse. They tell the story of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees who stayed on the Base in 1975 and of the Marines and sailors who cared for them. The reframing is underway and the paintings will be available for display shortly.

Major General Michael Lehnert, Commanding General, Marine Corps Installations West, and the last general officer resident of the Ranch House has been a helpful and generous friend to CPHS. Most recently we have benefited from his hobby. Many members are probably unaware that he is an expert wood worker who makes exquisite bowls from unusual pieces of wood. He has very generously crafted two bowls for CPHS. We will donate one in the name of Major General and Mrs. Lehnert to the Marine Corps for permanent display at the Ranch House. The second bowl will be offered for sale at a future fundraising event. CPHS deeply appreciates Major General Lehnert's support.

Your Society continues efforts to obtain grants to support our programs. Recently, we applied for a grant from the National Park Service. If we are successful that money and matching funds will be sufficient to complete the restoration of the Las Flores adobe. You can learn the story of this National Historic Landmark from the video posted on our website.

CPHS recorded its first oral history in March. The subject was one of our members, Bob Carrick, who has a wealth of knowledge about the early Base.

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## San Clemente's Marine Monument is area landmark

*This article and photographs courtesy of the The Heritage of San Clemente Foundation.*

If you have not been to Park Semper Fi, Marine Monument, San Clemente, you have missed one of the Landmarks in San Clemente. Standing tall silently, majestically on a hillside over looking the blue Pacific Ocean a twelve foot bronzed statue of a Marine in Dress Blues saluting the American Flag erected in the middle of Park Semper Fi. The artists are Bill Limebrook and Lauren St. Vincent. The Statue depiction is of an actual Marine from Camp Pendleton.

Dedicated in November 2005 for Marines, "Past, Present and Future", The Heritage of San Clemente Foundation, a non-profit tax deductible 501(c)(3), created this endeavor. Park Semper Fi itself is planted with California native plants, irrigated by a water saving drip system and maintained by the San Clemente Garden Club and Glen's Landscaping and Lighting. Since completion, the small original plants have grown to full spring and summer blossom.

The suggestion came to Wayne Eggleston, Executive Director of the Foundation, current councilmember and Mayor 2005-2006, by some of his Marine friends. With an initial anonymous donation to get started, the project took off with donations from the community and grants from a number of corporate donors. The city of San Clemente donated this magnificent piece of land and with the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce, local contractors, and a dedicated employee of Parks and Recreation Department, the project came to completion in two short years.



There are two major events at Park Semper Fi each year. On Memorial Day, hundreds of patriotic Americans attend service and the 1st Division Band has in the past played patriotic music along with a number of local performers. In November, the Marine Corps Birthday is celebrated with one of the Marine Bands from Southern California.

Throughout the year, Park Semper Fi also has a number of other activities: Marine weddings, Memorial services, re-enlistment ceremonies, military retirement ceremonies, and 4th of July. Should you wish to book the Park for a special event, please contact Parks and Recreation Department at 361-8237 for an application.

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## Camp Pendleton Between WWII and Korea

### By Jim O'Neill, former Staff Sergeant, USMC

#### Now living in Congers, New York...

I enlisted in the US Marine Corps from New York in September 1947 and graduated from Parris Island boot camp in December of that year. After some leave I traveled from PI to Camp Pendleton via train. I was on my way to six months of radio, teletype and cryptography school at Pendleton.

We were in three or four old pre-WW-2 cars with brocade seat covers that looked like they carried troops during the Civil War. For chow, they would march us through the regular passenger cars to the dining car before or after the civilians ate. After four days of that, when we got to Phoenix, they had us put our dress greens on (no going out in public in utilities in those days), to do close order drill on a deserted platform for an hour or so to get some exercise.

We arrived in Oceanside after traveling down from Los Angeles passing through orange groves much of the way. As we transferred to Camp Delmar, (a section of Pendleton West of Highway 101) by truck, the fog was so thick you could only see less than 100 yards. The fog persisted for almost two weeks and all we saw was the inside of our barracks, school rooms and the mess hall. Imagine our surprise when one morning, we arose to see the sun and there was the ocean about 300 yards down the hill. In those days, Delmar housed not only the communication school, but the Amtrac battalion and the 17th Marines, 1st marine Division, FMF.

After radio school, I joined H & S Company, 17th Marines. This was the division Shore Party Regiment, although it operated as a single battalion during the peacetime years after WWII. We got to know every inch of beach north to San Clemente, almost constantly supporting amphibious landings by the 1st, 5th and 7th Marines stationed up in the "main side". Some old China hands that stayed on with the detachment of the 17th when they returned in 1948 and 1949, plus a few Navajo "talkers" that were career corporals or PFCs in the battalion made for some interesting liberty runs.

For a few hours away, we often walked south on the beach to Oceanside where there was a nice USO (pictured above). It was very good duty. Our barracks overlooked the beach area where much of the John Wayne epic, "Sands of Iwo Jima" was filmed. The "Tarawa" site was right in Delmar and the presence of the "Hollywood Marines" certainly improved chow during the time they were there.

The other thing we did regularly was to fight the forest fires in the brush and scrub out in the eastern edges of the reservation. No fire equipment to speak of, just 10 gallon galvanized water containers strapped to our back and a squirt hose. Safety equipment consisted of an entrenching tool in case we got trapped and had to dig a hole.



### *Oceanside USO*

In late 1948, we started preparing for cold-wet weather exercises in Kodiak Alaska by spending 6 delightful weeks on the sands of Coronado Island across from San Diego. January 5, 1949 found most Division headquarters units heading to Kodiak for the first ever winter exercises for the FMF, (there was no Pickle Meadows in those days). We spent three months there testing our communications gear and heavy winter clothing that was much better than anything we had ever seen before. The famous, but ineffective, "shoe-pac" was introduced on those maneuvers and the excessive number of frostbite cases apparently got people started on development of thermal boot, which was not initially available for either the Brigade or the Division in Korea.

Soon after that, there was a Division reorganization that found me transferred to the newly formed Division Signal Battalion. We had similar duties as before, but with much closer support for the infantry regiments and other support battalions. Enlisted quarters throughout Pendleton in those days were still un-insulated WWII wooden 2 story barracks with four squad bays in each one. Meals were served in battalion mess halls and there were no civilian KP personnel. Fortunately by this time I was a Corporal.

Major General Graves B. Erskine was the Division CO for all the time I was there and was considered a fine leader by those serving under him during that time.

Having served most of my three year enlistment without leave home, orders were cut for transfer to Quantico for discharge in mid-June. The Korean War started just as I was detached and on my way to Quantico. The announcement was made on that Sunday afternoon and by Monday morning the entire base was on full alert. I was heading for the main gate to catch a bus across the country when a sergeant friend (also from New York) said, "Here are my car keys – please drop my car off in Mt. Kisco when you get there.

Shortly thereafter I was selected to attend advanced Telephone Technician training at the Army Signal Corps Schools and after graduation was assigned to Parris Island for the remainder of my regular tour. I never made it to Korea, but still miss my friends who went and never made it home.

*Continued from page, Monument*

Donations continue to be accepted and acknowledged on the beautiful Donor Plaque. Many donors contribute in memory or honor of a loved one, military and non-military. Each year the Exchange Club of San Clemente has a Golf Tournament and a portion of the proceeds benefits Park Semper Fi, and in 2007, they contributed to a Marine Flag and pole for the site, which waves proudly next to the American Flag.

It is a sacred oasis as there are a number of named dedicated benches for seating throughout the Park for quiet reflection and you will see many military families visiting the Monument and leaving mementoes

around the base, which are maintained by volunteers, as is the daily clean-up of Park Semper Fi itself. At night it is beautifully lighted and perhaps is one of the most beautiful times to visit, as it has spectacular views of the ocean and historic San Clemente Pier. It is a perfect place to bring your families and visitors to pay respect to the United States Marine Corps and all branches of the military.

Park Semper Fi is located in the Pier Bowl area on a hillside at Avenida Victoria and Avenida Del Mar.

For further information, please visit the website: [www.marinemonument.com](http://www.marinemonument.com) or call 949-498-4958.



**"OUR MARINE FAMILY"**  
THE MARINE MONUMENT AT PARK SEMPER FI, SAN CLEMENTE, CA

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He grew up in San Juan Capistrano before World War II and often rode his horse through through the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Ranch. In 1942, while still in high school, he landed a summer job as a carpenter's assistant with the construction company that built main side. Later, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and became a driver for the Base quartermaster and, on occasion, the Base commanding general. We will retell some of Bob's remembrances in future newsletters.

As always, I thank you for your support. We cannot succeed without our loyal members. I look forward to reporting to you again in our next newsletter.

*Richard B. Lathwell*

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### Get on Board

One of the keys to building awareness of CPHS is networking with our friends. To help members become familiar with our story, we are offering two brochures for distribution. Please order your free copies by e-mail to Howard Blair at [hgblair@cox.net](mailto:hgblair@cox.net) or phone 858-583-0067.

### Next Issue

What is the legend of Chappo Flats (22 Area)? How did it get its name? The next issue will cover this story along with the profile of the CPHS member who knew the son of Chappo.

Also, other interesting areas at Camp Pendleton and how they were named.



### Stay Tuned

We invite our readers to contribute stories of their experiences aboard Camp Pendleton for publication in future issues. Humorous pieces would be particularly welcome. Please e-mail your 300 words or less to [hgblair@cox.net](mailto:hgblair@cox.net), subject line "CPHS." Submissions may be subject to editing.

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### Preserving a Rich and Colorful History

[www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org)

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