



President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



CPHS held its third annual fundraiser, "An Afternoon at the Ranch House," on June 26. Once again Howard Blair chaired the organizing committee. Thanks to Howard's leadership, the committee's hard work, the support of our loyal guests, and the contributions of our major sponsors: The Rancho Mission Viejo Corporation, Pacific Marine Credit Union, Major General Wilbur Simlik USMC (Ret) and Mrs. Simlik, and an anonymous donor; it was an unqualified success. Not only did we raise awareness of the Society and the history of the Camp Pendleton, we netted more than \$6,700

A number of organizations that contributed to the successful event deserve recognition. Volunteers from the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents brought the stories of the historic hacienda to life. I extend special thanks to Master Gunnery Sergeant James King, USMC (Ret) and his "Dirty Docents" from the Camp Pendleton Mechanized Museum for their display of historic Marine Corps vehicles and to the School of Infantry for providing two Light Armored Vehicles (LAV) and crews. Thanks also to the Base History and Museums staff who helped with traffic control.

You may recall from my previous messages that a major focus of CPHS over the past several years has been to assist with the restoration of the Las Flores adobe -- the Monterey style home and National Historical Landmark located on Camp Pendleton. During the "Afternoon at the Ranch House" I had the honor of representing your Society in making a donation of \$25,000 to the Marine Corps to help continue that restoration. Our donation was made possible by the profits from previous fundraising events and the support of our members. Department of Defense regulations require local commanders to seek approval from higher

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Afternoon at the Ranch House: A Success Story

The CPHS fundraiser, Afternoon at the Ranch House, turned out to be both a financial and public relations success. The event, which took place on Saturday, June 26th from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., attracted close to one hundred paid guests. CPHS members, families and interested parties who came to the event could view many displays, which included "Images at War's End," two Light Armored Vehicles with full crew; thirteen vintage vehicles from the Mechanized Museum and some beautiful Camp Pendleton countryside. If that were not enough, you could take a tour of the famous Ranch House or eat heavy hors d'oeuvres while listening to music played by a jazz quartet from the First Marine Division Band.



The highlight of the afternoon was CPHS President Dick Rothwell addressing the guests and presenting a check for \$25,000 to Col. Robert Hellman, Assistant Chief of Staff for Facilities at Camp Pendleton, for work toward the restoration of the Las Flores Adobe. During the presentation, Col. Rothwell also gave a brief history of the Ranch House and thanked all present.



National Museum of the Marine Corps

by Maj. Carl Frantz, USMC (Ret)

The National Museum of the Marine Corps was dedicated and opened to the public on 10 November 2006. It instantly became a must see location for Marines and Marine families living in the national capital region and visiting from more distant locals. It has since become a favorite for visitors from across the nation and around the world, whether or not they have an affiliation with the Marine Corps. Indeed, it has enjoyed remarkable success in fulfilling its mission of presenting American history as seen through the eyes United States Marines.



The history of the museum itself is a remarkable story. Were it not for the founding of the Marine Corps Historical Foundation in 1979; were it not for the vision of two members of that Foundation in the mid 1990's; and were it not for the extraordinary work of the Foundation's President, Retired LtGen. Ron Christmas, and his very small staff, the National Museum would never have come into being. This story will be the subject of a four part Groundbreaker series of articles, beginning with this issue.

To be a Marine is to know the history and traditions of the Corps. This has always been so, as was noted by the famous military historian Hanson W. Baldwin when he wrote "...they live tradition, the United States Marine bears upon his shoulders the nation's past and the nation's hope for the future." But preserving this treasured legacy was a continuing struggle for the Corps, due to staffing and budget limitations in the History and Museums Division at Headquarters. So it was in 1979 that a small group of Marines formed the Marine Corps Historical Foundation to assist the Corps in this mission.

Incorporated in the District of Columbia on January 9th of that year, the original Board of Directors included a virtual who's who of Marine Corps leaders and historians. The group was headed by former Commandant General Wallace M. Greene. Signers of the articles of incorporation were BGen. (Ret.) Edwin H. Simmons, Col. (Ret.) Franklin B. (Brooks) Nihart, and Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr. The address of the initial registered office was that of Col. (Ret.) Robert D. Heintz, Jr, at 2400 California St, N.W., Washington, D.C. Also on the original Board of Directors were MajGen Donald M. Weller, BGen. (Ret.) James F. Lawrence, Col Thomas M. D'Andrea (USMCR), and noted author Robert L. Sherrod.

Some wondered, at first, why the need for an Historical Foundation. MajGen. Weller addressed this perception in a 1981 Marine Corps Gazette article, where he pointed out that the History and Museums Division was simply overloaded with just the task of recording the Corps' experiences in Vietnam. The newly formed Historical Foundation took steps to augment the work of the History and Museums Division by establishing an annual \$10,000 research grant fund, and initiating an annual award for the best magazine article pertaining to Marine Corps history published in the previous year. The prize, named after Col Heintz, consisted of bronze plaque and \$250 cash. Such were the modest beginnings of the Marine Corps Historical Foundation. It is doubtful that any original directors or charter members of the Foundation ever envisioned a new National Museum of the Marine Corps in the future. But, as we shall see, the fledgling Marine Corps Historical Foundation had come into being just at the right time and in the right place. Were it not so, the National Museum of the Marine Corps would not be.



Letters to the Editor

Excerpts from a letter by Maj. Randy Mitchell, USMC (Ret)

Reading the first edition of the Groundbreaker this year about the story of the railroad that used to follow the main road into Camp Pendleton, I was reminded of a story that pertains.

Go Back to 1950. I was a reserve officer (Captain) then and a member of the 9th Infantry Battalion in Chicago that met every Thursday late-afternoon on The Pier. As an artilleryman in an infantry unit, I was made S4 (editor's note – S4 designates the supply officer). (editor's note: Although Major Mitchell does not specify in his letter, we assume the reserve unit was activated and headed for Camp Pendleton).

When we departed the Windy City, we left on three trains from two stations (or was it three?). Anyway, I arranged to be on the train that had all the equipment on a couple of freight cars, so that I would arrive with all the gear for which I had signed. As "luck" would have it, that did not work. Lt. Col. John Bathum, the CO, decreed that all officers would ride on his train (several of us had to hire some of the troops to drive our cars to California, but that was O.K.).

Through a break in circumstances, we reached Las Vegas and "Bathhouse" John (he headed the Aquatic Division of the Chicago Park System, thus the nickname "Bathhouse") made certain our train was properly equipped to make it over the coastal mountains without mishap. He had all the troops lined up in formation by the tracks and had me call the conductor forward. The Skipper then announced to him that no one was going back aboard until all brakes had been replaced. The conductor objected on the grounds that "he was in charge of the train". The Colonel reminded him (in front of the troops) that the railroad was working for the Marine Corps and that he (the CO) was concerned about the safety factor for all those Gyrenes.

Having arranged the rail transport in Chicago, I recall that I was told then that at that particular time the rails were transporting more people over that short period of time than ever in the history of U.S. railroading. Our car had no bunks and was equipped with a pot bellied stove for heat-which was really academic in July! The rail lines had put everything that could roll back in use. By the time we got underway again (with new brakes) we had lost our position in line. So, when we hit Camp Pendleton and disembarked at the foot of Rattlesnake Canyon, there stood our baggage cars with doors wide open. I cringed and as soon as we were settled in quarters I high tailed to the base QM office to straighten thing out. I was relieved of all the gear by Memorandum Receipt. So much for accountability.

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, subject line "CPHS." Submissions may be subject to editing.



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authority before accepting gifts of such amounts. In the past, approvals for similar gifts have taken many months. I was pleased to learn that ours was accepted in less than one week.

For several months, volunteer Cal Frantz has spearheaded our efforts to obtain supporting grants. I am pleased to report that his hard work is beginning to bear fruit. Since my last report, the Camp Pendleton Officer's Wives Club and the County of San Diego have honored CPHS with grants of \$600 and \$3,000 respectively. We sincerely appreciate their support. Both contributions will further our efforts to restore the Las Flores adobe.

CPHS, the Carlsbad Rotary Club, and the Army-Navy Academy of Carlsbad, worked together to plan and arrange the visit of the Lost Heroes Art Quilt to San Diego County from July 1-10. Artist Julie Feingold created the 15 feet by 5 1/2 feet Quilt to memorialize 82 U.S. service men and women who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. For more than a year a team of volunteers led by gold star mother Nancy Hecker and her husband, Bill, have shepherded the Quilt on a journey to all corners of our country.

CPHS and our partners arranged for the people of San Diego County to view the Quilt at the USS Midway Museum in San Diego, and the Camp Pendleton South Mesa Club. It was a moving experience for which CPHS is proud to have played a role.

As always I thank you, our members, for your support. It is through you that we are able to make meaningful contributions that enhance the historical programs of Camp Pendleton. I look forward to reporting our future activities to you in coming Groundbreaker issues. Together we are making a difference.

Richard B. Lathwell

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*Lost Heroes Art Quilt
in Arlington National Cemetery*

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 or phone 858-583-0067.



Preserving a Rich and Colorful History

www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org

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