



CATALOGING THE PAST: BRINGING HISTORY OUT OF OBSCURITY



Boxes of accessioned and cataloged items, Camp Pendleton Archives

By Sarah Thornton, Archives Volunteer,
Camp Pendleton History & Museum Division

Anyone who studies history knows that our endeavors to understand the past require a material element. On one hand, protecting “stuff” is pretty simple: give it a safe home, maybe a box or an envelope, and put it on a shelf, away from dust, bugs, and moisture. But without a story, it’s just junk that any unsuspecting passerby might deem worthless and toss in the trash. Objects by themselves cannot convey why they are important, which is why they need documentation to tell their story. And once your collection grows large enough to fill three rooms, how do you even remember everything that’s there? An object’s value is at risk of becoming lost in obscurity. Record-keeping – also known as cataloging – documents the historic value of an object and makes that value findable. It is such an important part of protecting the “stuff” of history, and I find myself personally motivated to do this work.

Since last Fall I’ve been working on updating our digital catalog. This means checking the gift documents and inventories against the content of the boxes on the shelves, and checking both of these against their record in the computer. Unfortunately, things have moved around a lot over the years, and the digital record doesn’t always reflect the current state of the objects. Some items haven’t even been entered into the digital catalog at all. Together with my fellow volunteers Scott and Kathy McElDowney, we have been opening boxes; creating inventories; opening the paper files; tracking down objects listed in previous inventories; creating an index of donors and their collections; labeling and re-labelling objects, shelves and boxes; re-ordering the boxes on the shelves to reflect the numbering system; and correcting or entering all

of this information in the computer. It is sometimes tedious work, but it certainly has its moments.

One day, a few months ago, I was opening boxes to verify the location of certain items on an inventory. I found exactly what I was looking for, intact and as described. I could have checked them off my list and moved on, but something about seeing these just stopped me in my tracks and I knew I needed to have a closer look. In the catalog, the items are recorded as “Letter” and “Envelope” with their dates and names. But sometimes even a catalog entry cannot fully convey how special an item really is.

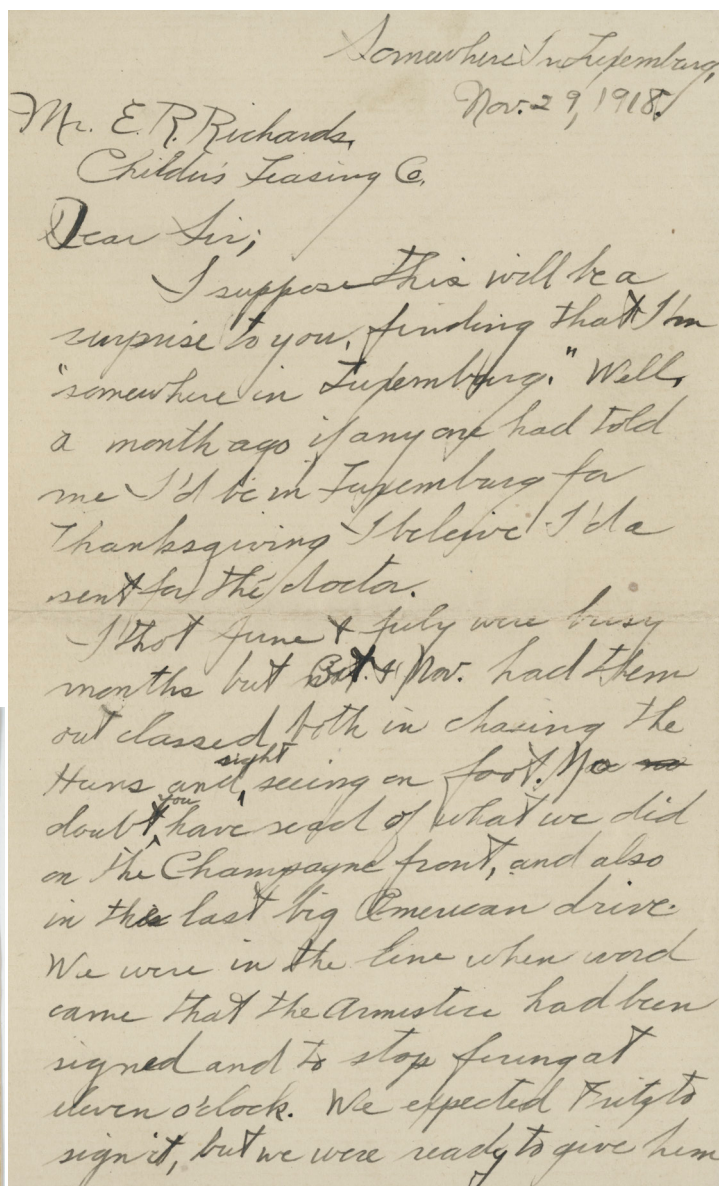
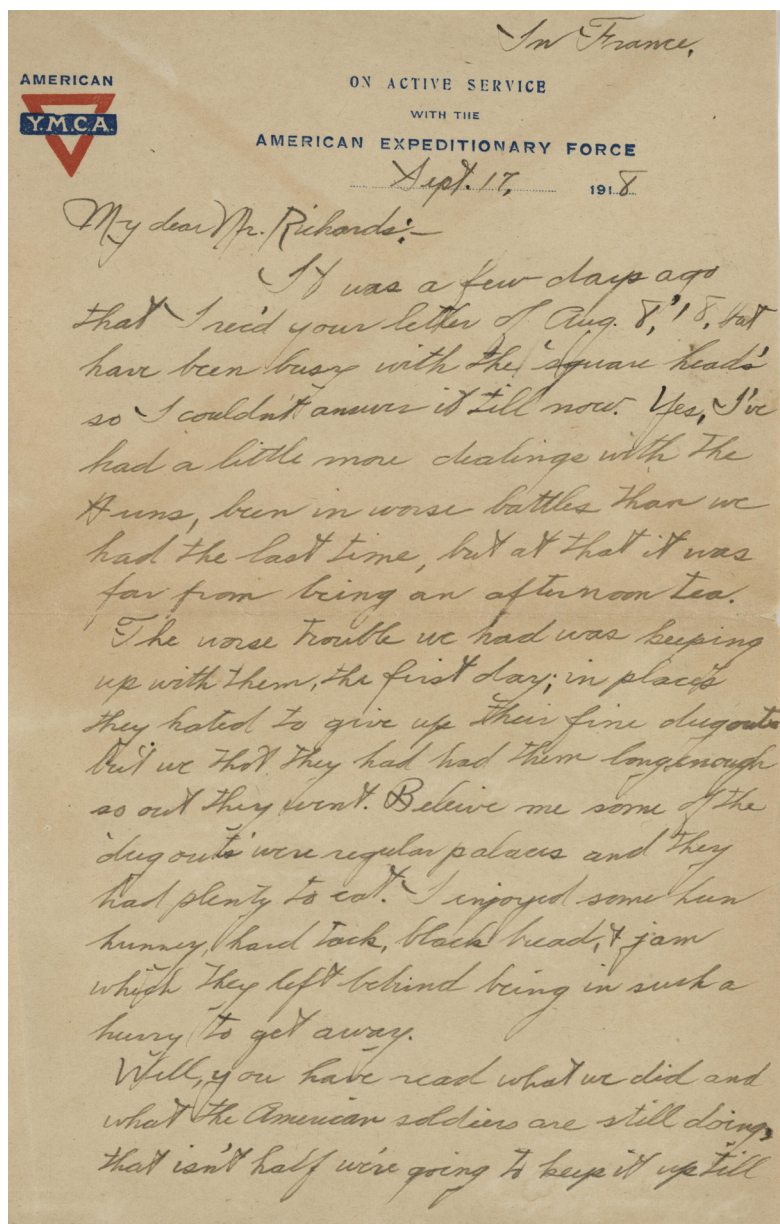
They are three letters, beautifully handwritten in cursive, dated between September 1918 and January 1919. The first is written on letterhead from the “American YMCA” with the heading, “On Active Service with the American Expeditionary Force.” Written by Sgt. Marion Milna to his friend Richard back in Salt Lake City, the letters contain accounts of Milna’s experiences serving in France and Luxembourg during World War I. I have not yet had time to transcribe all three letters in full, but I found this portion of the second letter particularly intriguing:

*Dear Sir,
I suppose this will be a surprise to you, finding that I’m
“somewhere in Luxemburg[sic].” Well, a month ago if any one
had told me I’d be in Luxemburg for Thanksgiving I believe
I’d[sic] sent for the doctor.*

Continued page 2, Cataloging

That June + July were busy months but by Nov. had them out classed both in chasing the Huns and sight seeing on foot. No doubt[sic] you have read of what we did on the Champagne front, and also in the last big American drive. We were in the line when word came that the Armistice had been signed and to stop firing at eleven o'clock. We expected Fritz to sign it, but we were ready to give him more if he didn't.

This letter is dated Nov. 29, 1918, within weeks of the November 11 Armistice of Compiègne which ended the War. The "Champagne front" of June-July likely refers to the last months of the Germans' Spring Offensive, in which American forces participated in the successful defense against the Germans' last push to win the war. The Battle of Belleau Wood in June 1918, now legendary in Marine Corps history, was a part of this effort, and was followed by the Second Battle of the Marne in July. This moment is widely regarded by historians as the turn of the tide on the Western Front. The Allied advance that succeeded this, known as the 100 Days Offensive, brought the war to an end. Writing this letter from



Sgt. Marion Milna's Letter, Nov. 29, 1918 (Camp Pendleton Archives)



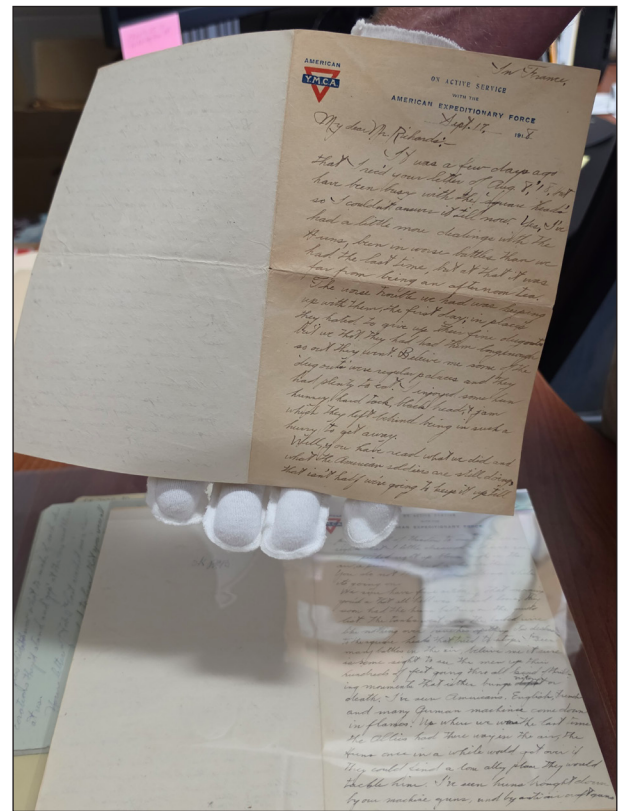
Envelope addressed to Mr. E. R. Edwards, 1918 (Camp Pendleton Archives)

Left: Sgt. Marion Milna's Letter, Sept. 17, 1918 (Camp Pendleton Archives)

Luxembourg in November of 1918 would be “surprising” to Milna, because only a few months earlier he would have had to cross the German lines to get there. Writing from Luxembourg meant Allied victory.

While Milna’s description does not include any tactical information, or even an account of the fighting that might satisfy historians’ questions about the battles themselves, it includes something better. The passage clearly expresses the patriotism, and even bravado, that Milna felt at that moment, earned through a hard-won victory. Even without the benefit of historical hindsight, Milna knew that “what we did on the Champagne front” made a real difference, and he took pride that his service there mattered in the course of human events.

Letters like this offer a glimpse into what people may have thought and felt: relief, surprise, pride. They dismantle any sense that history is merely a chronology of inevitable events that we read about for our entertainment. History was made by people. We have this opportunity to connect with people like Milna through the “stuff” that lives in archives. But only if we do the work to keep it safe.



Right: One of the original World War I letters from U. S. Marine Sgt. Marion R. Milna. Sgt. Milna was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment while fighting in France, 1918. (Romascan Collection, Camp Pendleton Archives)

President’s Message

Jay Bullard



Dear Members and Supporters,

As we approach the Fall, I would like to thank everyone for their support and participation in our 10th Annual Golf with a Hero Tournament. We had 106 golfers, of which 33 were active-duty Sergeants and below. Everyone had a wonderful time and MCCS put out a fabulous spread for

us. We were able to have drawings where our junior enlisted received golf clubs and other golfing accessories. I’d be remiss if I didn’t recognize our major sponsors’ – Frontwave Credit Union, Judith Burns, Cal Frantz, and Bart Moore of The Bartley Group, Inc. In addition to our major sponsors, Jackie Ellis with TaylorMade provided golf clubs and accessories that we were able to give away. Jackie’s father was the Sergeant Major of 1st Marine Division from 1971 to 1974. Without the backing of our donors and sponsors, we could not continue our support to base historical programs as well as our community outreach to local high schools with scholarship awards. Next year, our golf tournament will be held on Friday, May 7, 2027. Please save the date, this event is our primary fundraiser and a wonderful opportunity to have some fun.

Every year we reach out to the local school districts and high schools to solicit participation in a short essay contest about the history of the land Camp Pendleton occupies. Students compete for scholarship awards and prize money. We allow the students to research and write about any point in history including: Native Americans, Spanish Missions, Rancheros, and USMC. We grade the essays on accuracy, interest,

organization, and presentation with approximately \$3,000 in scholarship and prize money being awarded. This year was our strongest showing; we had 13 students from 7 schools participate. Unfortunately, we were not able to recognize our Essay Contest winners at the Ranch House, due to a heightened base security status. Therefore, we had to deliver some awards to the schools and other awards were mailed. In addition, we ensured each non-winner received a \$50 Amazon gift certificate for their participation. We plan to do this again next year, as part of our community outreach while preserving and sharing the history.

Please save the date for Friday, Nov. 6, 2026 as we will hold our 251st USMC Birthday celebration. We will hold our celebration at the MCB Camp Pendleton Golf Course / Windmill Canyon restaurant from 4:00-8:00 pm. Our celebration is a happy hour setting with hors d’oeuvres and open seating where we can all socialize with each other while celebrating our history. The dress code is business casual (open collar) and all members are more than welcome, even if you didn’t serve in the Marine Corps. We will send out invites by early September, and please RSVP.

As we celebrate America’s 250th Birthday, it’s fitting to reflect on the history of our great Nation. Our country has succeeded because of the generations of men and women have remained committed to our freedom and to a service greater than themselves. Throughout our Nation’s history, our beloved Corps has always been there to preserve our Nation’s interest. I sincerely thank everyone for their continued support and participation. Our story is a story worth telling and sharing with future generations.

Jay Bullard

The Barbary Coast & The Battle of Derna (1804 to 1805)



Painting, *The Assault on Derna*, by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR (Ret)

*By Bill Parsons, Archives Volunteer,
Camp Pendleton History & Museum Division*

In 1801, Thomas Jefferson became President of the United States. He quickly decided to put an end to the thuggery of the Sultanates that were the northern coast of Africa in the Mediterranean Sea. These small nations had been harassing and seizing American ships. Cargoes were confiscated, passengers and crews were held for ransom and continued tributes were demanded of our nation even after initial ransoms were paid. In April, President Jefferson refused to pay a tribute demanded by the Bashaw (the political and religious leader) of Tripoli, Yusef Karamanli. Jefferson made it clear, the United States would refuse to make any future payments of this type to the group commonly known as the Barbary Coast Pirates.

As a result of the President's refusal to pay, on the afternoon of May 11, 1801, an emissary from the Bashaw arrived at the American consulate in Tripoli to deliver the Bashaw's response: "The Bashaw has sent me to inform you that he has declared war against the United States and will take down your flagstaff on Thursday, the 14th". Thus began the First Barbary Coast War (1801-1805).

The President would send a flotilla of four ships and men to the Mediterranean Sea to enforce the freedom of passage for American ships. The first flotilla would be followed by a second a year later. There were several confrontations between the parties, and, frankly, with America on foreign soil, in what would be the first truly international conflict in its short existence, it would be safe to say she was losing the battle, at least in the early stages. America had lost several major military assets.

Enter William Eaton, a former US Army Captain and current Consul to the American embassy in Tunis. In his position, Eaton was able to observe and document much of the illegal activity by the Sultanates. He began to formulate a plan of attack against the Sultanate of Tripoli and the Bashaw, Yusef Karamanli. If successful, the plan would put an end to the attacks on American shipping in the region and would

reinstate the brother of the current Bashaw and rightful holder of the office, Hamet Karamanli.

Eaton planned a military movement that seemed improbable, if not impossible. A forced march of his "army" across the Sahara Desert from Alexandria, Egypt to Derna on the eastern shore of the Bay of Tripoli. A 521-mile trek through typically hot, arid desert weather, with insufficient provisions, support or manpower to fight a war. They would need to count on being able to supplement what supplies they were short of, which was just about everything, along the way. By November 1804, Eaton, who by this time had awarded himself the rank of General, had received permission from President Jefferson to form his army and finalize plans to assault Tripoli by land.

Initially, Eaton's army – which was closer to squad strength – consisted of Eaton, two U.S. Navy midshipmen and eight U.S. Marines, including their leader, Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon. By February 23, 1805, the deposed brother, Hamet Karamanli, had been found south of Cairo. Eaton obtained a signed agreement on behalf of the United States enlisting Hamet in the upcoming attempt to overthrow his brother Yusef, as Bashaw. It was a bizarre beginning to one of America's strangest military campaigns. The first leg of the trek would begin at Alexandria, Egypt; the march would continue from there to Tripoli. Hamet arrived with 100 of his followers in tow. Eaton and O'Bannon immediately began recruiting mercenaries in Alexandria. Those enlisted were from a wide range of nationalities, cultures, and backgrounds, each having their own personal, as well as secretive, reasons for enlisting. Ultimately, a force of some 400 men was recruited. But it didn't take much insight to see that this army was going to be a challenge to manage if they were to arrive ready to do battle.

According to the book *Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates* by Brian Kilmeade, the expedition began on "March 6, 1805", with 200 additional camels and handlers in tow. Add the constant and ongoing conflicts between the many cultures, nationalities, religions, and personalities of their mercenary army; had it not been for the seriousness of the mission and the strength of character of Eaton and O'Bannon, the entire effort would have been a total and complete comedy of errors. One example came just a few days into the expedition when word was received that Derna had revolted against the sitting Bashaw of Tripoli in favor of Eaton. To celebrate, the leaders of the column began firing their rifles into the air. Those at the rear of the column were uninformed and thought the column was being attacked by Bedouins and returned fire. As the various groups were lining up to wipe each other out, Eaton managed to regain control of the column before it annihilated itself over a misunderstanding. The information of a revolt was proven false.

Tensions between Eaton and the various factions of the expedition continued to heat up. Yet, for some inexplicable reason, the group would continue to its destination. Within a few more days, the rag-tag army would pause about sixty miles from Derna, rest for about a week and strategize their attack before the final drive to the city. The plan was a two-



Engraved sword scabbard (Fegan Collection, Camp Pendleton Archives)

pronged attack. An assault force of 60 Marines and mercenaries, led by O'Bannon, would attack the city's barricades. Hamet and 200 horsemen would attack from the south. The remainder of the Arab cavalry would stay south of the city to act as a reserve and to prevent any relief forces from reaching Derna. The entire assault would be covered by cannon fire from three American vessels: the Argus, the Hornet and the Nautilus offshore in the Bay.

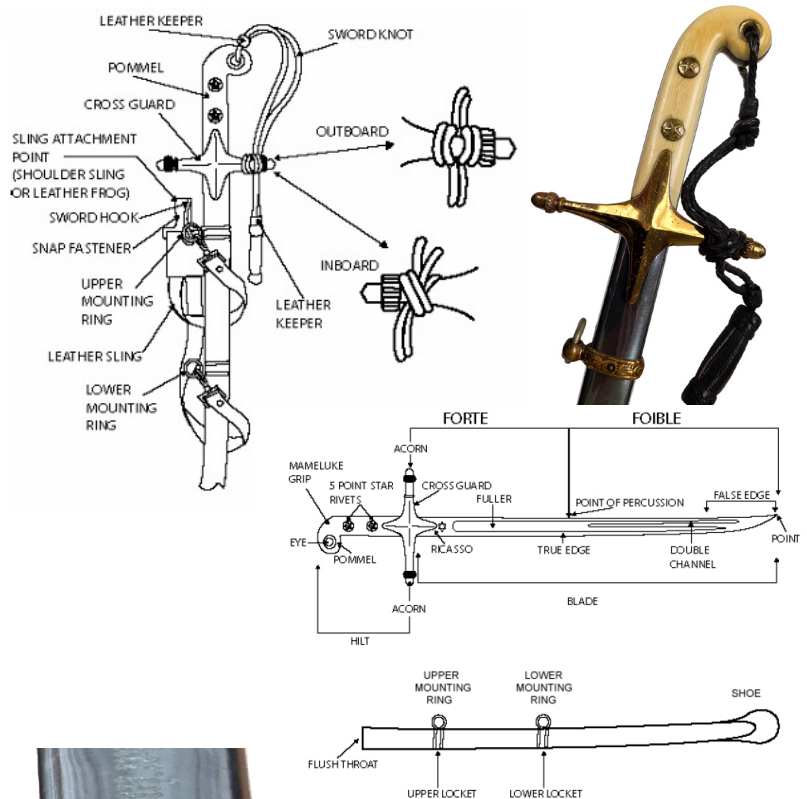
The attack on Derna would begin in the early morning hours. The battle went well for all except O'Bannon and his men. They had been pinned down in their direct attack on the city by an outnumbering force of defenders. Eaton decided an immediate, direct assault was the only option. Amazingly and inexplicably, the outnumbering defenders of the city allowed Eaton and his strike force to enter Derna. Eaton captured the barricades and the shore batteries, winning the battle and raising the American flag over Derna.

The capture of Derna would become one of the most celebrated victories in American military history. As with many such events accomplished by America and the Marine Corps during this early period of our history, there would be several firsts for each:

- For America: the First Barbary Coast War (1801-1805) is the first time that a major war had been fought by America outside the New World.
- It is the first time in American history that the Stars and Stripes had flown over a foreign territory or nation.
- For the Marine Corps: The Barbary Coast War inspired and is memorialized in the second line of the Marine Corps hymn, "from the Halls of Montezuma . . . to the Shores of Tripoli . . ."

Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon, USMC, was awarded a Mameluke sword by the Ottoman viceroy Prince Hamet Karamanli as a gesture of respect, praise, and gratitude for his extraordinary bravery and leadership during the Barbary Coast War.

Later, officially adopted by Commandant Archibald Henderson in 1825, all officers of the US Marine Corps are authorized to have and carry the Mameluke sword during formal events. Over the centuries, the Mameluke sword has become a symbol of bravery, of honor, and of victory under conditions others would find impossible, and is why it was selected to represent the United States Marine Corps.



Nomenclature, Marine Officer's Sword (Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual)



(Above) duty assignments engraved on sword scabbard; (Right) photo of Maj. Gen. Price and Maj. Gen. Fegan (Fegan Collection, Camp Pendleton Archives)

**CAMP PENDLETON'S HISTORY & MUSEUM DIVISION
ANNOUNCES THE START OF HISTORIC SANTA MARGARITA RANCH HOUSE
WEEKLY OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE**

For those interesting in visiting the Santa Margarita Ranch House National Historic Site, an additional opportunity has been made available to the public.



The Santa Margarita Ranch House complex, which includes the Ranch House, Bunkhouse Museum and Chapel, is now open every Monday (except on Federal holidays) between the hours of 10am and 2pm.

During these hours, Docents will be available to welcome visitors and give tours, or simply answer questions related to the history of the ranch and other historic sites on Camp Pendleton.

Visitors without base access credentials can also visit, but must submit their request at a minimum of two weeks prior to their expected visit by calling (760) 725-5758 or emailing MCBCAMPEN_history@usmc.mil.

The Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents, a 501(c)(3) organization supporting Camp Pendleton's History & Museum Division, also provide private tours. To schedule a tour, call (760) 725-5758 or email MCBCAMPEN_history@usmc.mil.



The Ranch House is located on Vandegrift Boulevard, near Basilone Road

For more information on the historic sites aboard Camp Pendleton, visit: <https://www.pendleton.marines.mil/about/#tab/history> or scan the barcode.



Save
the
date

Marine Corps Birthday Celebration

**Camp Pendleton
Marine Memorial Golf Course**

**Friday, Nov. 6, 2026
4:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.**

Cost: \$15 per person

Invitations will be emailed to CPHS members, via Constant Contact; RSVP deadline is Oct. 16, 2026



Marine Corps Junior ROTC Awards - 2026

Fallbrook High School JROTC Merit Scholarship

Cadet 1stLt Tania Martinez was the recipient of this year's award at Fallbrook High School; she was the Operations Officer and Captain of the Marksmanship Team.

Over the last four years, she participated and competed in multiple color guard events. She has been on the Marksmanship Team all four years and has been the highest shooter for that same period.

She also participated in the Drill Team and Raider Team. In Washington, DC, she competed at the National JROTC Leadership and Academic Bowl (JLAB) twice as a member of the JLAB Team.



Tania Martinez and CPHS Vice President Jerry Polyascko

She was a very dedicated member of the MCJROTC program and was reliable to fill in when needed. In addition, she had over 174 Hours of community service.

Well deserved!

Oceanside High School JROTC Merit Scholarship

Cadet Sergeant Samantha Contreras is the recipient of the 2025 Marine Corps JROTC Merit Scholarship for Oceanside High School. Cadet Sergeant Contreras is a junior and has been a member of the Cadet Corps for two years. She currently is the commander of the Color Guard detail and a member of the armed and unarmed drill teams.

She has been selected as the heir apparent commander of the MCJROTC for Oceanside High School. Additionally, she is very involved in extracurricular activities at Oceanside High School as well. She is a member of the Junior Varsity Soccer team as well as the Junior Varsity Golf team, all of this while carrying a 3.7 GPA. She volunteers regularly to help tutor other students and participate in numerous community service activities.

She competed in the 2025 Miss Teen Oceanside pageant and was selected as a princess. Cadet Sergeant Contreras expressed her gratitude and thanks to the Camp Pendleton Historical Society for this award and stated that she will commit to representing the Society with honor and dignity.



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IS A NON-FEDERAL ENTITY. IT IS NOT A PART
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OR ANY OF ITS COMPONENTS AND IT HAS
NO GOVERNMENTAL STATUS.*

Noteworthy News

Welcome aboard to our newest members who recently joined our cause:

Alicia Eddy

Kenneth Frystak

Many thanks to our loyal members for their recent membership renewal:

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