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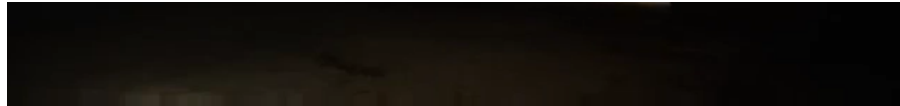
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1st Marine Division



The First Marine Division was one of the first two division-sized unit ever formed by the Corps. It was established in February 1941 aboard the USS Texas in Cuba around the nucleus of the pre-war First Marine Brigade. The Division's first commander was the amphibious warrior, BrigGen Holland M. Smith. There was no record of an activation ceremony since the division was deep in the preparations for FLEX 7, the last of the pre-war fleet landing exercises. On completion of the exercises, the Old Breed redeployed to Marine Corps Base, Quantico. Due to shortages of barracks there, the Seventh Marines was billeted at Marine Corps Base, Parris Island. In June 1941, the entire First Marine Division moved into garrison at the newly established Marine base at New River, North Carolina. MajGen Phillip Torrey took command the same month and the Division continued the serious business of expansion and training.



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History

Outbreak of World War 2

When war came in December 1941, only 8,918 Marines were assigned to the Old Breed, far short of the authorized strength of almost 20,000. In March 1942, the Third Marine Brigade, organized around the **Seventh Marines**, sailed for Western Samoa. In May 1942, the rest of the Division sailed from Norfolk Naval Base bound for New Zealand. Arriving in June 1942, the Division was alerted for combat operations in the South Pacific.

Solomon Islands

On 7 August 1942 the First Marine Division landed at **Guadalcanal** in the Solomon Islands under the command of MajGen Alexander Vandegrift. So began Operation WATCHTOWER, the first major ground offensive of the war. This was a misnomer in reality, since the Division went into a defensive cordon around Henderson Field, an important American airbase on the island. The fighting around Guadalcanal, called simply "the 'canal" by Marines, quickly evolved into a complex series of air, ground and sea actions.

The First Marine Division found itself short of food, fuel, water and ammunition. Forced to subsist on captured Japanese rations, the Marines were pummeled by long range enemy artillery, nicknamed "Pistol Pete." They also endured some of the heaviest naval gunfire barrages and air raids of the war. In one of the most desperate fights of the war, Marines on Edson's Ridge stood firm against wave after wave of suicidal Japanese attackers on Edson's Ridge during the night of 13-14 September 1942. Before the battle, Col Merritt "Red Mike" Edson told his Marines, "There it is. It is useless to ask ourselves why it is we who are here. We are here. There is only us between the airfield and the Japs. If we don't hold, we will lose Guadalcanal." They held.

Melbourne

Ravaged by malaria and malnutrition, the Old Breed pulled off of the 'canal between December 1942 and February 1943. They went into garrison in Australia, first to Brisbane, and then to Melbourne. The Marines fell in love with Australian, and the Aussies reciprocated the affection. Almost all of the young Americans would remember their stay down under as one of the happiest periods of their lives. Of course, they weren't there for a vacation. Instead, the Old Breed built its strength as it rested and refitted in preparation for future combat. While in Australia, the Division band adopted the song "Waltzing Matilda" as a favorite and it soon become the official song of the First Marine Division. MajGen William Rupertus assumed command of the Division in the summer of 1943.

Cape Gloucester

On 26 December 1943, the Division landed at **Cape Gloucester** on New Britain. As part of the campaign to secure New Guinea, the combat on New Britain took place in some of the most rugged terrain anywhere on earth. Clothing, paper, leather — it all quickly rotted or fell apart in the intense humidity and heavy rainfall. Weapons and ammunition corroded almost in front of men's eyes. Marines moved out from the beach head into the almost impenetrable jungle to locate and destroy the Japanese defenders. Securing Hill 150, Aogiri Ridge and

Hill 660, the Division's infantry regiments secured a lodgment around the landing beaches at Borgen Bay.

Pavuvu

During April 1944 the Old Breed deployed to its new home on Pavuvu in the Russell Islands. Pavuvu was a far cry from the bright lights of Melbourne and the Division's Marines were bitterly disappointed when they first set eyes on Pavuvu. It was a tropical hole infested with sand crabs and covered by coconut plantations. The first order of business was to erect a tent city and clear out the millions of rotting coconuts that covered the ground. Entire battalions turned to in working parties to lay crushed coral roads and trails without any mechanized support. It was backbreaking work, but at least Pavuvu was free of malaria. One of the most pleasant memories of that time for most of the Division's Marines was Bob Hope's USO show just before the next operation.

Peleliu

On 15 September 1944, the First Marine Division assaulted **Peleliu** in the Palaus group. This campaign had only been expected to last for three months before the island was secured. By the time it was relieved by the Army's 81st Infantry Division on 16 October 1944, the Old Breed had entrenched Japanese defenders. Only a few points off the equator, Peleliu was a brutally hot and humid place under the best of conditions. Air support stripped much of the vegetation

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by flying shards of broken coral, propelled at high speed from explosions.

Return to Pavuvu

The Division returned to Pavuvu in October 1944 and MajGen Pedro DelValle assumed command the following month. Once again, the Division rebuilt and prepared for another campaign. After Peleliu, some of the old timers from the Guadalcanal days said goodbye to their buddies and shoved off for assignments stateside. Replacements streamed in to fill the depleted ranks. Training was the order of the day and units marched around and around on the Shore Road around Pavuvu. Each Marine qualified with his individual weapon and practiced the old skills; shooting, maneuvering, communications.

Okinawa

Again, the Old Breed moved out, this time bound for **Okinawa**, a major island in the Ryukus only 350 miles from the southern Japanese home island of Kyushu. In the largest amphibious assault of World War II, Marine and Army units — among them the First Marine Division — landed on the Hagushi beaches on 1 April 1945. For most of April, the First was employed in a hard-driving campaign to secure the northern sections of Okinawa. On 30 April 1945, that all ended when the Old Breed went into the lines against the teeth of the Japanese defenses on the southern front.

The Division smashed up against the Shuri Line, and in a series of grinding attacks under incessant artillery fire, reduced one supporting position after another. As May wore on, heavy rains flooded the battlefield into a sea of mud, making life misery for all hands. Meanwhile, Japanese kamikaze attackers exacted a fearsome toll from the supporting ships offshore. Finally, on 31 May 1945, Marines of the First completed the occupation of Shuri Castle, nothing more than a pile of rubble after so many days of unrelenting combat.

Under the overall command of Tenth Army, the Division continued the push south against the newly established enemy positions around Kunishi Ridge. Marine tank-infantry teams adopted a technique called "processing" to destroy Japanese positions with flame and demolitions. Finally, organized resistance ended on 21 June when the last Japanese defenses were breached. By now, many of the Old Breed's battalions had been reduced to nothing more than small rifle companies.

End of War and China Assignment

Rumors swept through the ranks that the Division would ship out for Hawaii, even as units fanned out across the battlefield for the dirty job of mopping-up. But hopes were dashed when the Marines learned they wouldn't be sailing for an exotic post of call. Instead, they were ordered to remain establish camps on Okinawa. Every member of the Division was bitterly disappointed, but one Marine was reputed to have said, "Well, dammit, if they can dish it out, I can take it."

Events moved quickly in the summer of 1945. Expecting a protracted and brutal assault against the Japanese home islands, the Old Breed got a new lease on life with the end of the war in August 1945. On 30 September, the Division was ordered to Hopeh Province, China, for occupation duty. With its headquarters in Tientsin, the Old Breed remained in China until 1947.

Return Home

Returning stateside for the first time in almost seven years, the Division was based at Camp Pendleton, Calif. In the future, the First Marine Division would again receive the call to duty in many climes and places; from the frozen hills of Korea to Vietnam's tropical jungles and the deserts of the Middle East. The World War II era members of the Division set a high standard of sacrifice and devotion to duty that were a beacon to every Marine and Sailor who would later serve with the Old Breed.

"Up there on the line, with nothing between us and the enemy but space (and precious little of that) we'd forged a bond that time would never erase. We were brothers." - With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa by E. B. Sledge

Units

1st Marine Regiment

The **1st Marines** stood at a low state of readiness at the beginning of the war having just been reconstituted from cadre status however they did possess very strong leadership at the higher levels.^[1] They set sail from the San Francisco in June 1942 on board a mix of eight ships headed for the South Pacific.^[2] The 1st Marines landed on the island of Guadalcanal, part of the Solomon Islands, on August 7, 1942 and would fight in the Battle of Guadalcanal until relieved on December 8, 1942.^[3]

Some of the heaviest action the regiment would see on Guadalcanal took place on August 21, 1942 during the Battle of the Tenaru, which was the first Japanese counter-attack of the campaign.^{[4][5]} Following their first campaign, the regiment was sent to Melbourne, Australia to rest and refit. During their stay there they were billeted in the Melbourne Cricket Ground until leaving in September 1943.^[6]

The 1st Marines would next see action during Operation Cartwheel which was the codename for the campaigns in Eastern New Guinea and New Britain. The regiment would be the first ashore at the Battle of Cape Gloucester on December 26, 1943. They fought on New Britain until February 1944 at such places as *Suicide Creek* and *Ajar Ridge*.^[7]

The next battle for the 1st Marines would be the bloodiest yet at the Battle of Peleliu. The regiment landed on September 15, 1944 as part of the 1st Marine Division's assault on the island. The division's commanding general, Major General William H. Rupertus had predicted the fighting would be, "...*tough but short. It'll be over in three of four days - a fight like Tarawa. Rough but fast. Then we can go back to a rest area.*"^[8]

The 1st Marines fought on Peleliu for 10 days before being pulled off the lines after suffering 56% casualties and no longer being combat effective.^[9] The regiment was decimated by heavy artillery and accurate small arms fire in the vicinity of *Bloody Nose Ridge*. Repeated frontal assaults with fixed bayonets failed to unseat the Japanese defenders from the 14th Division (Imperial Japanese Army).^[10] Ten days of fighting on Peleliu cost the 1st Marine Regiment 1,749 casualties.^[11]

The last World War II engagement for the regiment was the Battle of Okinawa.

In September 1945, the 1st Marines deployed to North China to take part in the garrisoning of the area and in the repatriation of former enemy personnel. It remained in China until February 1949. They returned to Camp Pendleton and were deactivated on October 1, 1949, only to be reactivated one year later.

Known Marines

- [Robert Leckie](#)
- [Lew Juergens](#)
- [Wilbur Conley](#)
- [Bill Smith](#)
- [Sidney Phillips](#)
- [Ronnie Gibson](#)
- [Hugh Corrigan](#)
- [Larkin](#)
- [Jameson](#)
- [Stone](#)
- [Stern](#)

5th Marine Regiment

After the outbreak of war, [5th Marines](#) deployed to Wellington, New Zealand in June 1942. During World War II they fought on Guadalcanal, New Britain, Eastern New Guinea, Peleliu and Okinawa. Immediately following the war in September 1945 they deployed to Tientsin, China and participated in the occupation of North China until May 1947. They were redeployed to Guam in May 1947 and reassigned to the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade. In 1949 they were relocated to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. It is the most highly decorated regiment in the Marine Corps.

Known Marines

- [Eugene Sledge](#)
- [Merriel Shelton](#)
- [Romus Valton Burgin](#)
- [Jay De L'Eau](#)
- [Bill Leyden](#)
- [Charles Womack](#)
- [Elmo Haney](#)
- [Robert Oswald KIA](#)
- [Andrew Haldane KIA](#)
- [Edward Jones KIA](#)
- [Hamm KIA](#)
- [Tony Peck](#)
- [Robert Mackenzie](#)

7th Marine Regiment

On 1 January 1941, the [7th Marine Regiment](#) was re-activated at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The regiment moved to what is today Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. On 18 September 1942 the regiment landed in the Solomon Islands on Guadalcanal. For four long months the regiment relentlessly attacked the Japanese defenders and repulsed banzai charges and suicidal attacks. During the Battle of Guadalcanal the heroism of Medal Of Honor recipient "[Manila John](#)" [Basilone](#), Mitchell Paige, and Navy Cross recipient [Lewis "Chesty" Puller](#), represented the actions of the Marines of the 7th Marine Regiment.

Arriving in Australia in January 1943, the vast majority of the regiment suffered from malaria, wounds or fatigue.

Again and again the Regiment was called upon to storm the Japanese-held islands in the Pacific. The Seventh Marine Regiment fought in such places as Eastern New Guinea, New Britain, "Bloody Peleliu" and the island fortress of Okinawa. 7th Marines saw intense fighting on the island of Okinawa where they would sustain 700 Marines killed or wounded in the fighting to take Dakeshi Ridge and another 500 killed or wounded in the fighting near Wana Ridge.

^[1]

After the surrender of Japan, 7th Marines took part in the Occupation of Northern China from 30 September 1945 through 5 January 1947. They returned to MCB Camp Pendleton,



1st Marines Patch



5th Marines



7th Marines

California in January 1947 and were reassigned to the 1st Marine Division. The regiment was deactivated on 6 March 1947 as part of the Marine Corps' draw down of forces after the war. 7th Marines however was quickly reactivated on 1 October 1947 but only as a shell of its former self as it consisted of only four companies. Company "C" deployed to China from 2 May through 23 June 1949 to safeguard the withdrawal of Americans and was the last element of Fleet Marine Force to depart China.

Known Marines

- [John Basilone](#) (transferred to the 5th Marine Division)
- [J.P Morgan](#)
- [Manuel Rodriguez](#) KIA
- [Lewis Puller](#)
- [Cecil Evans](#)
- [William LaPionte](#)
- [Ralph Briggs](#)

11th Marine Regiment

With the approach of World War II and the consequent expansion of the Marine Corps, an 11th Marines (Artillery) was activated at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on 1 March 1941. Activation of the regiment's organic battalions already had been underway since 1 September 1940 when the 1st Battalion was created. After its return to the United States from Cuba, the regiment (less the 1st Battalion) shipped overseas with the 1st Marine Division to New Zealand in June-July 1942. The 1st Battalion went to Samoa with the 7th Marine Regiment in March 1942.

The 11th Marines participated in the Battle of Guadalcanal in August with the 1st Marine Division and played an especially significant part in the Battle of the Tenaru and the Battle of Bloody Ridge. The 1st Battalion rejoined the regiment in September on Guadalcanal. On 15 December 1942, the 11th Marines left Guadalcanal for Australia, rested and reorganized, and then reentered combat on New Britain at Cape Gloucester on 26 December 1943. Here the regiment furnished support to the infantry in their capture of the Japanese aerodrome. Following the New Britain campaign came a period of preparation for the Peleliu landing where the regiment was actively engaged.

For the first two weeks after the initial landing on 15 September 1944, the regiment took part in the Battle of Peleliu. All artillery support was handled both novelly and conventionally, providing massed preparatory, harassing, and interdicting fire. Later, the artillery was used to fire directly into the mouths of enemy caves. In March 1945, the 11th Marines participated in the Battle of Okinawa, its final combat operation of World War II. There the regiment played an important defensive role with effective counter-battery fire, and steadily suppressed enemy attempts to counter-attack objectives already won by U.S. forces. With the war won, in the fall of 1945 the 11th Marines moved to Tianjin in North China where it was soon involved in trying to keep peace in the midst of the increasing conflict between rival Chinese factions. Early in 1947, the regiment returned to the United States to be reduced virtually to a battalion-sized unit.



11th Marines

The Story of the Division Patch

The First Marine Division was never really a green outfit in the sense of a newly formed military unit. When it was activated early in 1941, the Division was filled by Old Corps Marines with many years of expeditions and campaigning behind them. Filled with these Leathernecks, many with service going back to World War I, the Divisional name, "The Old Breed," made its way into common usage. The name fit, and it stuck.

Through the war, many of the old timers were killed, wounded, or became sick in the harsh conditions of the Pacific. But they left an indelible stamp on their Division that endured long after they had packed their seabags.

Except for the interlude of 1943 in Australia, the First Marine Division spent its years of service in austere conditions. This helped cement its inner feeling of being somehow different and set apart from the rest of the Marine Corps. The Divisional history noted that, "We never really came out of the boondocks..."

The story of how the Divisional patch was adopted is described on pages 143-144 of *The Old Breed*, by George McMillan:

"They sat in facing bucket seats, between the litter of packs, seabags, typewriters, briefcases — the kinds of things that staff officers would necessarily bring out of battle.

General Vandegrift had begun to be a little bored with the monotony of the long plane ride. "Twining," he said, "what are you doing?"

"An idea I have for a shoulder patch," said Twining. "The stars are the Southern Cross."

Vandegrift looked at it for a moment, scribbled something on it, and handed it back to Twining, who saw the word, "Approved," with the initials, "A.A.V."

They had been on the ride from Guadalcanal to Brisbane. Because the first few days in Australia were hectic, Twining did nothing else about the patch until one morning he was called into Vandegrift's office.

"Well, Twining, where's your patch?" Vandegrift asked to the discomfort of Twining.

"I bought a box of water colors," Twining says in recalling the incident, "and turned in with malaria. I made six sketches, each with a different color scheme. In a couple of days I went back to the General with my finished drawings. He studied them only a minute or so and then approved the one that is now the Division patch."

Twining knew there was more to his mission. He placed an order for a hundred thousand with the Australian subsidiary of an American woven name manufacturer although money was one of the things the Division did not have when it arrived in Australia.

"I convinced the Army PX people that they should supply credit until our outfit could get some folding money," Twining remarks.

The patches went on sale in February [1943], three weeks after Vandegrift approved Twining's design."

Gallery



20 June 1942-Wellington Harbor, New Zealand. MajGen A. A. Vandegrift, CG, 1st MarDiv, (wearing overcoat) and BrigGen William Rupertus, ADC, 1st MarDiv, (foreground) debark from the USS Wakefield (AP-21). Still image from USMC motion picture film



20 June 1942-Wellington Harbor, New Zealand. MajGen Vandegrift (wearing overcoat), and BrigGen Rupertus (center), confer dockside after debarkation. Still image from USMC motion picture film



20 June 1942-Wellington Harbor, New Zealand. Troops of the 1st MarDiv debark from their transport after over a month at sea. Most of them wear the winter service uniform and they are still equipped with the M1903 rifle. Still image from USMC motion picture film



20 June 1942-At their new camp outside of Wellington, Marines of the 1st MarDiv find their bunks under the watchful eye of their platoon sergeant. The Marine standing in the door is a BAR man and his NCO carried a Reising submachine gun. The division only stayed in New Zealand for a very short time. Still image from USMC motion picture film



Lt Col Lewis B. Puller marches at the head of 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, during the campaign for Guadalcanal, 1942. Puller earned the third of his six Navy Crosses while commanding 1/7 on the 'canal, and he was wounded in action there. Still image from USMC motion picture film



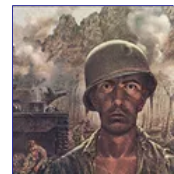
During a visit to Guadalcanal in 1942, Adm Chester Nimitz, CINCPAC, decorates Col Merritt 'Red Mike' Edson with the Navy Cross for heroism in action while in command of the 1st Raider Battalion in the assault on Tulagi from 7-9 August 1942. Still image from USMC motion picture film



A posed shot of 1st MarDiv troops reading their mail, Melbourne, Australia, 1943. Australian War Memorial



A 6 x 6 truck of 3rd Bn, 17th Marines, plows through the morass of a trail at Cape Gloucester, 1944. Australian War Memorial



Down From Bloody Nose Ridge, by Tom Lea, depicting a combat fatigued Marine of the 1st MarDiv on Peleliu. In the background is the Umurbrogal complex. Lea wrote of this subject: "As we passed sick bay, still in the shell hole, it was crowded with wounded, and somehow hushed in the evening light. I noticed a tattered Marine standing quietly by a corpsman, staring stiffly at nothing. His mind had crumbled in battle, his jaw hung, and his eyes were like two black empty holes in his head. Down by the beach again, we walked silently as we passed the long line of dead Marines under the tarpaulins." U. S. Army Art Collection



Sundown at Peleliu by Tom Lea. U. S. Army Art Collection



1 April 1945, L-Day on Okinawa. An infantry Marine moves across the beach under cover of an LVT(A)-4 amphibian tank. Still image from USMC motion picture film



1945-Marines in combat on southern Okinawa. The First and Sixth Marine Divisions fought in this, the last campaign of the war. The island's rugged terrain posed an extreme challenge that required the utmost in courage and tactics. Still image from USMC motion picture film



A First Marine Division NCO presents the image of soldierly appearance and bearing. On his left shoulder is displayed the Divisional patch.
USMC Photo



Sgt Lloyd Crusan was part of the first group of Old Breed Marines to rotate home in 1944 after over two years in the Pacific. he was a veteran of the campaigns for Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester and earned the Navy Cross in January 1944. Here Crusan is being fitted for a new set of dress greens at MCB, San Diego. The tailor is checking the position of the First Marine Division patch and rank insignia.
Leatherneck Magazine



First Marine Division Medal of Honor ceremony at Balcombe, Australia, 21 May 1943. In this photo are the first Marines of the Division to receive America's highest honor in World War II. L-R: MajGen A. A. Vandegrift, Col Merritt Edson, 2ndLt Mitchell Paige, PltSgt John Basilone USMC
Photo

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