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2023**

The Bursting Bomb

**ISSUE
1-23**

**MARINE GUNNER ASSOCIATION
QUARTERLY MAGAZINE**



Editor: CWO-5/Gunner Christian P. Wade USMC (Ret.)

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On the Cover: Gen Alfred M. Gray Jr. USMC (Ret.), 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps and father of the 0306 Marine Gunner (Infantry Weapons Officer) Program.

SITREP...from the Editor:

Greetings, Happy New Year, and welcome to the first issue of The Bursting Bomb for 2023. The MGA continues to grow with new members, and friends continue to reconnect—some reestablishing connection after decades of lost comms. I very much look forward to seeing everyone at the MGA Annual Dinner event in August. The Annual Dinner will be held at a venue, still to be determined, in the National Capital Region (Northern Virginia). The MGA will publish more detailed information in the next issue of The Bursting Bomb and via email.

In this issue, my most personally rewarding contribution is the first of many interviews with distinguished members of our association beginning with a Gunner from our first class (35 years ago!). I am proud of this quarterly magazine, and I sincerely hope that it serves as a mechanism to bring Gunners together, perhaps even after decades of lost contact. I will continue to endeavor to connect the very first class with the most recent class (and with every one of us in between these 35 years of Marine Gunner service to our Corps).

I have also deeply enjoyed updating the quarterly historical sections on the Service Rifle and I have added a historical piece on our beloved US Marine Corps utility knife, the Mk2 “KA-BAR”. I hope you enjoy reading these as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

The goal of this periodical, first and foremost, is to support the mission statement of the Marine Gunner Association as defined by the President of the MGA:

- 1. Gunner Outreach and Recruitment**
- 2. Provide Support for the Gunner Community and Infantry Marines**
- 3. Provide Support to Children of Gunners and Infantry Marines**

I believe this magazine must...

- 1. Be attractive for readers and be interesting enough to be shared among friends.**
- 2. Not be boring. Perhaps the worst I can do is bore you. In 1986, GySgt Thomas Highway USMC (*Heartbreak Ridge*) had something to say about boredom.**
- 3. Create a situation whereby a reader learns at least one thing they did not know when they started reading it. History matters!**
- 4. Be more than the ramblings of a [single] mad man. I will endeavor to include contributions from as many Gunners as possible. As the magazine matures, readers will be treated to much more material from other contributors.**

Before turning the page, please indulge me a story. In 1992, I reported to NCO School aboard MCAGCC 29 Palms, CA. As I waited in line to be admitted, I turned around and struck up a conversation with the Sergeant standing behind me. I asked him which unit he was in, and he replied something to the effect of “MWSS 374” (or something like that). He then asked me which unit I was in, and I proudly responded, “3/7”. He cocked his head slightly to the side and with an inquisitive look on his face, responded, “**What’s 3/7?**” (cue the abrupt turn-table needle skipping across the vinyl record, stopping the music). The horror...

The Main Effort of the US Marine Corps is the Rifleman in the Rifle Squad.

He will never forget that.

I very much hope to see all of you at our upcoming events.

Christian Wade
The Editor



BREAK, BREAK— Standby for FRAGO...

Gunners and family members, here is the information we currently know about the Marine Gunner Association Annual Dinner. Please be advised that the West Coast Dinner has been canceled:

What: MGA Annual Dinner

When: Thursday August 17th, 2023, time TBD

Where: Manassas, Virginia (exact venue TBD)

Who: Members of the MGA accompanied by one guest per member

Why: Camaraderie, friendship, and connection. To enjoy each others company in keeping with the mission statement of the Marine Gunner Association.

*Exact details will be published in the next issue and sent to each member via email comms well in advance of the event.

MGA Membership

Application for annual membership is currently open by way of the MGA website (<https://www.marinegunnerassociation.net>).

The link for membership is located on the top center portion of the MGA website homepage.

Membership requirements:

(Full membership)-

*0306 Marine Gunners Active and Retired (Honorable Discharge)

*Annual renewable memberships are \$50 per year

*Membership includes four issues of “The Bursting Bomb” quarterly magazine, two seats to the MGA Annual Dinner, access to exclusive events, and family member benefits.

(Associate membership)-

*\$100 per year. Applications will be reviewed by the Executive Staff

*Associate membership includes four issues of “The Bursting Bomb” quarterly magazine and two seats to MGA Annual Dinner and other events.



Group photo from a recent MGA Annual Dinner near MCB Quantico, VA. Photo: Kevin Gonzalez



MGA Executive Staff



*President
Matthew Carpenter*



*Vice President
Matthew Anderson
CWO-5/Marine Gunner USMC,
DC, PP&O, HQMC*



*Treasurer
Kevin Gonzalez*



*Secretary
Sean Flannery*

Message from the MGA President

Members and Friends of the MGA,

I sincerely hope this finds you and your families healthy and happy. With the close of 2022, the MGA Staff, both Board of Directors and Executive Staff, were hard at work preparing for this year. We are excited to announce our MGA Annual Dinner, this August in northern Virginia. We look forward to awarding our first Scholarship(s) and planning for further events. Many details are included in this edition of the *Bursting Bomb*, so please take the time to read this outstanding publication.

The 2023 MGA Membership Open Season has begun—please go to the webpage to sign up. We are looking forward to doubling our membership (Members and Associates) this year. Please get the word out, every Member is an MGA Recruiter!

I am continually humbled by the efforts of your MGA Staff. Their dedication to our organization is truly amazing. I would like to thank Mrs. Annie Carpenter for her hard work as Event Coordinator. We are already anticipating our magnificent MGA Annual Dinner in August, which Annie is hard at work coordinating. This association could not function without the dedication and sacrifice of many within the staff. Thanks to the Board of Directors, Executive Staff, and our dedicated Committees for the incredible contributions over the past year. I am truly humbled and grateful for everything you do for us.

Our Editor, Brother Chris Wade, has (again) knocked it out of the park with this current edition of the *Bursting Bomb*. Chris' interview with our Brother Dr. Ray Leach USMC (Ret.) in "Such as Regiments Hand Down Forever..." is a **MUST READ** for every member and friend of this association. I met

Ray at our first dinner held in Stafford, VA in August 2021. Ray and his lovely wife Dr. Marian Leach drove from North Carolina to lend their support for our forming association. Seated in a cramped conference room in a hotel, Ray voted in support of creating the MGA and has continued to support our efforts. You will read why his advocacy is so important to our association, but even more important is his contribution to our Corps, Country, and his Community. Ray and his fellow members of the 1989 class, as well as the members of what I refer to as the "First Decade of Gray's Gunners" (1989-1999), paved the way for us who followed in their footsteps.

Please take note of the picture of General Alfred M. Gray Jr., our 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps who adorns our cover. To those of us who have been honored to wear the bursting bomb over the past 35 years, we are all "Gray's Gunners." His initiative to resurrect the Marine Gunner program is only one of many lasting impacts this great leader contributed to our Corps and Country. Those of the 35th Class of Gunners, now poised to start their studies at The Basic School, are encouraged to learn about the man who "brought us back."

My goal as your president is to cultivate an association that ties our community together—from the First Class to the 35th. Through the efforts of our great staff, we will accomplish this goal. Again, I ask each of you to please encourage those brothers who have not joined to do so.

As we move into the new year, please keep our Brothers and families who have suffered loss, sickness, or hard times in your thoughts and if you know a Brother or a family member who is struggling, please reach out to

Message from the MGA President

them and remember our Outreach Committee Chair, Cannon Cargile, stands ready to assist.

I wish you and your families a happy 2023 and look forward to seeing you at one of our events this year!

Semper Fidelis,

Matt Carpenter



Message from the MGA Vice President

I hope everyone had a great holiday season and best wishes to you and your families in the New Year. As we lean in to 2023, the Marine Gunners are as busy as ever. Between continued support to operational requirements across the globe, Force Design transition plan and initiatives, as well as institutional marksmanship innovations, the Marine Gunners continue to be at the forefront ensuring the Ground Combat Element is ready for current and future threats.

Marines and Sailors forward deployed remain ready to answer the Nation's call. Since our last newsletter we have had battalions return home following successful deployments. I'd like to take a moment and say welcome home and job well done to these units:

22nd MEU, Battalion Landing Team 2/6

31st MEU, Battalion Landing Team 2/5

Unit Deployment Program, V 3/7

Unit Deployment Program, V 3/3

On 13 Jan 2023 3d Battalion, 3d Marines was deactivated. In 1942 3d Battalion, 3d Marines was activated and played a key role in the Battle of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. 3d Battalion, 3d Marines distinguished itself throughout numerous battles to include Guam, Iwo Jima, Vietnam and the Gulf War; and most recently was instrumental in both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Although the battalion's colors will fold on 13 January and the monitors will disperse the Marines and Sailors throughout the service, the memory of 3d Battalion, 3d Marines will never be extinguished," Lt. Col. Felix Guerra III.

The FY23 Chief Warrant Officer promotion message was recently approved and published by the Secretary of the Navy.



A Javelin Missile travels into the blue Virginia sky. The missile was fired by a student Marine Gunner of The Basic School, Quantico, Virginia during the Infantry Weapons Officer Course. Photo: Gunner K. Eggers USMC.

Message from the MGA Vice President

Congratulations to the following Gunners and their families:

CWO5 Select
Keith Eggers

CWO4 Select
Stu Shine, Jon Puckett, Jeremiah Johnson, Matt Rea, Dustin Rose, James Archbell, and Matt Merry

CWO3 Select
Adam Adam, Mark Terrell, Scott Jackson, Travis Ball, Dan Hubbert, Levi Stuart, Phil Castro, Barret Schmelz, Mike Lane, William Smith, Aaron Agee, Jeff Speaks, Andrew Nasty, and Matt Easy

Lastly as a public service announcement on behalf of the TSA, if you happen to find yourself traveling with an anti-tank weapon as checked luggage; please ensure it is declared to the airline and stored in a locked case in accordance with FAA regulations. And you may still want to avoid using the San Antonio Airport.

Semper Fidelis,
Matt Anderson



Message from the MGA Secretary

Brothers,

I hope this finds you well. I am honored to serve as a member of this organization. It gives me an opportunity to continue to serve alongside talented professionals.

I hope to see you all at the MGA Annual Dinner in August. It is a great link-up with likeminded folks to talk about things that truly matter. These dinners are a great opportunity to interact with active and retired Marines.

The day I retired, I drove straight out of the state and didn't look back. I don't miss the crazy hours or short fused "emergencies", but I do miss being around individuals with character and guts. For me, the association is that; a chance to engage with people who I respect and admire.

For those of you still in uniform, don't worry, retirement is awesome. I look forward to seeing you out here. We want your transition to be successful, and when your time comes, please let us know how we can help you in that endeavor.

For those who have already retired, let us help you stay connected. I was skeptical when I first heard about this organization, but we go to great lengths to avoid the drama, listen to everyone's opinion, and do things that support our community. We believe that the strength of the Gunner is our brotherhood, and we will always work to promote that fellowship.

To all, we are an email or phone call away.

Sean Flannery



Message from the MGA

Treasurer

Members and Friends of the MGA,

We greatly appreciate the continued financial support in the way of donations from the MGA members, MGA sponsors, and our industry partners. Our main mission is to support the active-duty service member, veteran, and their families.

As we move into 2023, we are actively patrolling for additional sponsors and/or industry partners that would like to assist in making this year better than the last.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our upcoming events.

Semper Fidelis,

Kevin Gonzalez



Events Committee

MGA members,

We are working on the 3rd Annual East Coast Marine Gunner Association Dinner. The event will be held Thursday, August 17th, 2023. Due to the time of year and high temperatures, as well as the growing attendance, we will not be hosting the event at the Bel Air 1740 venue again this year. There are several venue options near Quantico, Virginia we are looking at for the event. We will be utilizing BluSage Catering again for this year's event. More details come by way of the magazine and email correspondence, but please save the date.

Annie Carpenter

MGA Events Chairperson



Gunners from the Infantry Weapons Officer Course conduct live fire training with the M3A1 MAAWS (Carl Gustav). Photo: Gunner K. Eggers USMC.



Gunner Keith Eggers (CWO-5 select) joined the newly Commissioned Gunners of the 2023 class during their promotions and pinning ceremonies on 1 Feb 23. Photo: Gunner Mark Erhardt USMC.

“Such as Regiments Hand Down Forever...”

An Interview with Dr. Ray Leach USMC (CWO-3/Marine Gunner Ret.)

By: Christian Wade

The FY23 class of newly Commissioned Marine Gunners has just reported to The Basic School (TBS) aboard Quantico, VA. This new class is the 35th class of Marine Gunners to attend TBS. These Gunners will also attend the Infantry Weapons Officer Course (IWOC). Both TBS and IWOC are painstakingly well developed and evolved Programs Of Instruction (POI) which will prepare our newest Gunners for their demanding service to the Marine Corps and her Marines. Once the 35th class of Gunners graduates IWOC, they will execute orders to their first duty stations, ready and primed for service. They will be welcomed by eager commanders and Marines at all levels, from platoon to battalion. Given their extraordinarily high levels of experience and wisdom, these Gunners might even enjoy the benefits of their own office and parking spaces. While these perks are not a requirement for Marine Gunners to succeed (Gunner are often in the field), they are basic enablers for success and efficiency and simple signs of respect. Most importantly, the Officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) will welcome these new Gunners because they all understand the mission, nature, and value-added of the Marine Gunner program. **Editor's note:** I originally wrote this with a large slice of sarcasm on the side. While proof reading and to my astonishment, I realized the depiction is now mostly true. In fact, for units whose Gunner billet has been gapped, Commanders are now likely calling, emailing, and texting the Headquarters USMC Gunner daily, demanding their new Gunner...with early IWOC graduation, no less.

While we, as a service, are now far closer to what I have described, it was not always this way—not even close in many cases. I recently

had the honor to sit down with Dr. Ray Leach, a distinguished graduate of the Marine Gunner class of 1989—the very first class of the Gunner program as we know it today. Suffice it to say that I thought I had a good appreciation for the hard-fought battles of those Gunners who went before us, to earn our community's respect, to educate Marines as to our task and purpose, and to prove value-added in accordance with MCDP-1. Some who went before us had to fight for a simple parking space or to not be assigned as the Battalion Adjutant. One minute they were a First Sergeant. The next they were explaining why they were standing on a unit quarterdeck wearing Service Alphas with reporting orders in hand.

Dr. Ray Leach is a pioneer and a trailblazer. The Marine Gunner community owes all the Gunners of those first classes a huge debt of gratitude. In the first years of the program, there were no Gunner Symposiums at any level, no email, and no cell phones.



1989- The first class of Marine Gunners under the current [Commandant Gray] construct. Gunner Ray Leach is on the left. Much of the credibility and trust we currently enjoy as Marine Gunners is a direct result of their hard work, perseverance, and success. Photo: Gunner Keith Eggers USMC.

“Such as Regiments Hand Down Forever...”

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Gunners had no part in Ground Combat Element (GCE) advocacy. Imagine being a Marine Gunner and having no voice in the process whereby, for example, a Service Rifle is procured. Commanders had little idea as to their purpose and Gunners were forced to rely almost entirely on the force of their personality to gain access to the Marines within their units. There was no Plans, Policies, and Operations (PP&O) Gunner, in fact, there were just enough Gunners to fill about half of the active-duty infantry battalions (the first class graduated 14 new Gunners). At times, some Gunners had to fight for direct access to the Commanding Officer instead of reporting to the Operations Officer. The order of the day was “Deploy, deploy, deploy.”

The purpose of this part of The Bursting Bomb is to educate the Gunner community, active and retired, regarding our extraordinary history by publishing interviews with extraordinary people. Let us begin with Marine Gunner Ray Leach, USMC (Ret.).

Gunner Leach joined the Marine Corps and attended Recruit Training in the summer of 1972. Ray grew up as the fourth youngest of a family of eight brothers and two sisters. Several of his brothers served in the armed forces, but none had earned the title Marine. Ray considered the Marine Corps and mentioned this to his mother. While he did not intend to cause her grief, Ray could tell, based on her very emotional reaction, that he had chosen the right service (she was very upset). In his estimation, the Marine Corps must be the most intense if it could elicit that type of response from her. After graduating Recruit Training, Ray attended Infantry Training School at Camp Pendleton, CA where he earned a Meritorious Promotion

to Lance Corporal as one of the Honor Graduates. He requested orders and was assigned to the Marine Barracks, Washington DC. His performance there as a member of the guard quickly earned him promotions in both billet and rank. He earned a Meritorious Promotion to Corporal and within 18 months from entering the USMC, Ray was promoted to Sergeant upon reenlistment. One can imagine that earning promotions this quickly, among peers of young men in this age group, caused Ray to “take some flak”, so to speak, from the Marines with whom he served and led. There were even times when Ray was enforcing good order and discipline among his fellow Marines, that he was called an “Uncle Tom”. Fortunately for those Marines, Ray transcended this negativity and racism. He continued to lead from the front for the good of the service and the Marines under his charge. Because of his leadership and hard work, Ray was awarded Marine of the Year for the entire Marine Corps.



Sergeant Ray Leach is recognized as the US Marine Corps Marine of the Year while assigned to Marine Barracks 8th&I. Photo: Dr. Ray Leach.

“Such as Regiments Hand Down Forever...”

An Interview with Dr. Ray Leach USMC (CWO-3/Marine Gunner Ret.)

When Ray reached four years of active service, he was transferred to the HQ Company of the 9th Marine Regiment aboard Okinawa. Soon after arriving, he was informed that he had been selected for Staff Sergeant. What he had not known was that his previous Commanding Officer had submitted an Accelerated Fitness Report, pulling Ray into the promotion zone. He was promptly given orders to Drill Instructor duty but was allowed to serve a complete year overseas so that he could fulfill his Overseas Control Date. Ray, as usual, thrived during this demanding duty, graduating as an Honor Graduate of his Drill Instructor School class. He also earned a Meritorious Promotion to Gunnery Sergeant near his seventh anniversary of service in the Corps. Imagine attending unit social functions while wearing the rank of Gunnery Sergeant with one hash mark.... As we

can imagine, Ray took some brotherly grief for that.

At this point, I would like to remind readers about the often-precarious racial situation in the US Armed Forces at that time. In the 1970's and 80's, it was not uncommon for Marines and Sailors to be required to attend periodic race relations training. The USMC may, in fact, continue this training as part of “annual training” because of this history. Given Ray's pattern of extraordinary performance, some of his leaders took notice and he was being encouraged along a path toward, to quote Ray, “—potentially becoming the first Black Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SMMC)”. Remember that he was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant in seven years.

Upon completion of Drill Instructor duty in 1980, Ray was transferred to Camp Lejeune, NC (CLNC) where he was assigned as an instructor at the SNCO Academy. After a successful tour there, he was transferred to 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines. During this assignment, he participated in combat operations in Grenada and Beirut, Lebanon. During this tour, Ray was presented an opportunity to separate from active service to attend the NC State Police Academy. Many readers can relate to the time(s), during our decades of service, where we came to the proverbial “fork in the road”. With some mentorship and advice from his senior leaders and a healthy bonus in hand, Ray reenlisted and pushed forward in his USMC service. Ray continued to serve in leadership billets within the 2nd Marine Division until his promotion to First Sergeant. It was during his assignment in 1988 as the Inspector and Instructor First Sergeant for 1st Battalion, 25th Marines where he submitted for



Gunnery Sergeant Ray Leach, a 7-year Gunnery Sergeant, while assigned to Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, SC. Photo: Dr. Ray Leach.

“Such as Regiments Hand Down Forever...”

An Interview with Dr. Ray Leach USMC (CWO-3/Marine Gunner Ret.)

and was selected as a Marine Gunner. In early 1989, Ray reported to TBS and attended the Basic Officer Course (BOC) along with the newly Commissioned Lieutenants. Upon graduation, he then attended the Infantry Officer Course (IOC)—the course every prospective Infantry Officer Lieutenant must attend...not the abbreviated IOC which many Gunners attended in the early 2000 time frame. Readers should understand that the POI for Marine Gunners had not been developed by this time. Initial Marine Gunner instruction was simply the same program designed for entry level Lieutenants. Marine Gunners have been developing the current POI for 35 years to get us to this point. There simply was no unique POI for Marine Gunners in 1989. Ray and his fellow Gunners from the initial classes fought for years for the creation of a unique and targeted POI for new Marine Gunners (i.e. IWOC). Years later, this allowed the leadership of the Gunner community to not only continue to improve the entry level training, but to also create and implement progressive and professional training for Gunners at higher levels of service (i.e. Advanced Infantry Weapons Officer Seminar (AIWOS)).

Focus back to Ray in 1989, as a newly minted Marine Gunner, fresh from TBS and IOC. Ray reported for assignment as the Battalion Gunner for 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. As readers can imagine, when Ray reported for duty, no one in his battalion had much of a clue as to who he was or how to employ him. And thus began the fight to establish the legitimacy of the Marine Gunner, for the purposes of maximizing their potential to support Marines and their commanders in their preparation for and conduct of warfighting.

In 1990 and 1991, Ray and his battalion participated in combat operations during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. During these operations, Ray first unleashed his full potential, and that of a Battalion Gunner, in



*1st Battalion, 6th Marines Gunner Ray Leach disembarks an amphibious assault ship at a port in Saudi Arabia in preparation for Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM
Photo: Dr. Ray Leach.*

creating range and training areas for his Marines. He designed and supervised live fire training to prepare his Marines for combat. When the ground war commenced, Ray went into battle alongside his battalion and assisted his commander in the execution of the battle.

Upon return from the war, Ray continued to ensure his unit was well trained, manned, and equipped, as Gunners do. He also participated, as well as could be done at

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the time, in informal Gunner advocacy, when as many Gunnery who were able (often only a few) would come together to discuss the future of the Gunner program. In those early days, there were only infantry battalion level billets available—all deploying billets. Regimental Gunner boat spaces were soon created, and by 1992, the first class of Gunnery began being promoted. Junior Officers who had benefitted from the mentorship and assistance from the early Gunnery began to be promoted, as well. This cycle continues to this day—2nd Lieutenants in 1989 are now serving as General Officers. They remember the value of their Battalion, Regimental, and Division Gunnery, in fact, they don't know a Marine Corps without their trusted Gunner. Ray, and those Gunnery with him in those early years, set the foundation of a [now] 35-year program that has matured and grown in structure and influence that would be unimaginable to the Gunnery of the first classes while they were fighting the fight in their battalions.

In the summer of 1993, Ray reported to the School of Infantry-East for duty as the Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) Company Gunner. During this time, he worked to develop POI's for the courses of the AIT Battalion, as we know it today (i.e. Infantry Squad Leader's Course, Scout-Sniper School, etc.). He also served as the AIT Company Commander and later as the Executive Officer and unit Operations Officer. Ray also directly trained and supported the 2nd Marine Division “Super Squad” competition and was able to attend the award ceremony at Marine Barracks 8th & I with the winning Rifle Squad.

In 1995, Ray was contacted by the Monitor for Marine Gunner assignments, a billet

then solely assigned to an 0302 Captain. Readers should remember that there was no PP&O Gunner at this time. In 1995, the Gunner program was only six years old, just enough time to create Chief Warrant Officer (CWO)-4's within the Gunner Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). In other words, the 0302/0306 Monitor had complete control over assignments within the entire community. Today the PP&O Gunner controls the Marine Gunner slate and his decisions are endorsed by the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (DC PP&O) and *then* implemented by the 0302/0306 Monitor. There is simply no reason for an Infantry Captain to concern himself/herself with Marine Gunner assignments since they are arguably wholly the wrong person to make these decisions (yet that is the way it worked back then). Ray was informed that the Monitor believed he had been “homesteading” and that it was time that he receive orders to Camp Pendleton. What the Monitor did not understand is that Marine Gunnery, at the time, might have the same home address for years, but would be locked in a cycle of seemingly never-ending deployments and inter-Division transfers which would rarely ever find them in the home in which they appeared to be “home steading”. It was at this time that Ray decided that for the sake of his family, he would retire from the US Marine Corps after 23 years of service. The matter of “home steading” and “cross pollination” continues to be a contentious subject within the community, but the decisions are now discussed and ultimately made within the community, and *then* passed to the Monitor for generation of Orders. The difference between Ray's time and now is that decisions to transfer Gunnery are

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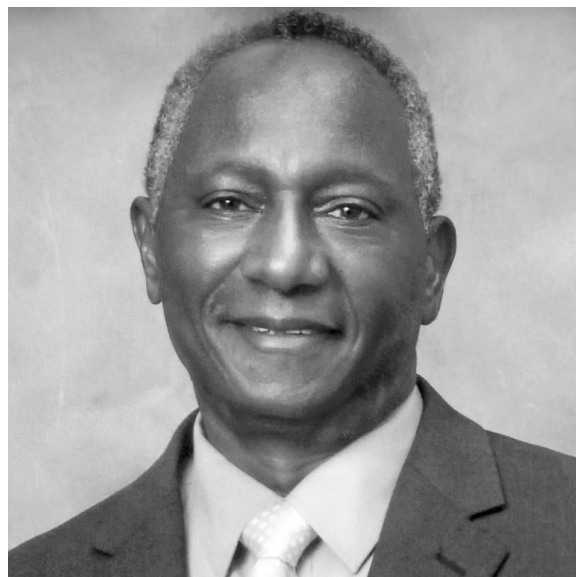
made with not only consideration for rank to billet matching, but with considerations sincerely applied to what is best for individual Gunners, units, families, the personnel health of the Gunner community, and for the cohesion (on a case-by-case basis) of a Commanding General or Commanding Officer and his/her Marine Gunner. Perfect? No. Much better than 1989? The evidence strongly suggests that it is.

In interviewing Ray for this edition, his love for Marines and his passion for the Marine Corps, even after 28 years of retirement, shines brightly through everything he says and does. He credits the discipline and work ethic he learned in the Marine Corps as instrumental in his success in earning his Doctoral degree after retiring from active duty. What does he miss most about his service? The camaraderie with his fellow Marines and Sailors he deeply enjoyed for over two decades. He also misses training Marines for combat. Ray is an ordained Minister and currently serves as the Chancellor of a theological seminary in North Carolina, a position of service for which he volunteers. He expressed his excitement about the creation of the Marine Gunner Association and the connections and positive effects our organization can and will have.

Ray is a very welcome and honored

member of the MGA who hails from the First Class—those who cut a path for all of us to follow. We honor Ray and his service as our first interview among many. The 35th class of Marine Gunners will have direct access to the first class and everyone in between.

Ray and his wife Marian, who has also earned her Doctorate, currently live in coastal North Carolina. They continue to volunteer their time and effort to improve their community and the lives of those around them.



*(Top) Dr. Ray Leach today.
(Bottom) The First Class 1989.
Photos: Dr. Ray Leach/TWOC archives.*



TBS and IWOC Updates



Gunner Mark Erhardt has recently assumed his new duties as The Basic School (TBS) Gunner. His most recent assignment was serving as the Infantry Officer Course (IOC) Gunner. Gunner Keith Eggers who was the TBS Gunner, has assumed his new duties as the Training and Education Command (TECOM) Gunner in keeping with his selection to Chief Warrant Officer (CWO)-5.

Perfect timing, in that the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 class of 18 Marine Gunners has just reported for duty as students at the Warrant Officer Basic Course (WOBC) of TBS. These 18 student Gunners have begun a well developed and thorough WOBC Program of Instruction (POI) that lasts approximately three months.

Upon graduation from WOBC, the newly Commissioned Gunners will attend the Infantry Weapons Officer Course (IWOC)—their detailed Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) school. WOBC serves as the entry level Officer equivalent for Gunners and Warrant Officers in a similar way that the Basic Officer Course (BOC) serves for entry level Lieutenants. Readers should be advised that the first classes of student Marine Gunners at TBS were required to attend the IOC with the entry level Lieutenants which proved insufficient in preparing Gunners for the demands and massive scope of their new responsibilities. Thankfully, after many years of hard work and advocacy by the first three decades (+) of Gunners, IWOC does an excellent job of preparing Gunners for service in the Fleet and TECOM construct. We, Gunners, believe that the student should eventually transcend the teacher for the evolution and continuous improvement of the art and science.



An IWOC student Gunner from a recent class conducts Combat Marksmanship Program (CMP) training at the [Marine Gunner] Calvin A. Lloyd Range Complex, Quantico, VA. Photo: IWOC archives



IWOC student Gunners from a previous class prepare an explosive Anti-Personnel Obstacle Breaching System (APOBS) for action. Photo: IWOC archives

TBS and IWOC Updates (Cont.)



The 2023 (35th) class of Marine Gunnery Officers fresh from Commissioning aboard Quantico, VA. (On left): Matt Carpenter, MGA President. Photo: Annie Carpenter

On Tuesday, February 1, 2023, the newest class of Marine Gunnery Officers were Commissioned as CWO-2's and received their Bursting Bombs. Every Warrant Officer or Chief Warrant Officer (select) who reports for duty as a potential student at the WOBC must first conduct a comprehensive screening to ensure they [continue to] meet the requirements for Appointment (to W-1) or Commissioning (for CWO-2's). The screening consists of, among other tasks, the Physical Fitness Test and a height and weight check. Readers should remember that nearly a year has passed from the time that applications were prepared and submitted. Warrant Officers and Marine Gunnery Officers from classes from 1989 until 2006 were selected and Commissioned at their respective duty stations and *then* transferred to TBS. In 2006, the Commanding Officer of TBS changed the promotion and reporting policies to ensure only



Gunner Rich Charette (1991 class) and Gunner Shaye Carter (2023 class) at the Commissioning ceremony. Photo: Annie Carpenter

TBS and IWOC Updates (Cont.)



Several Gunnery Sergeants chose to conduct their pinning ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. Active and Retired Marine Gunnery Sergeants attended, some traveling from out of state. Photo: Mark Erhardt.

Marines who met all USMC standards, in real time, would be Appointed or Commissioned and begin the WOBC POI. This eliminated any administrative chance that TBS might have to revert an Officer who reported in an “out of regs” status to their previous Enlisted rank, defer their training until the following year, or separate them from service. Admin note: The USMC maintains several Enlisted to Warrant Officer programs— Reserve and Regular Warrant Officer selection programs, a Recruiting Operations Officer program (can select directly to CWO-2), and a Marine Gunner program (selects all directly to permanent CWO-2). The average time in service for Marines who typically wish to become Marine Gunnery Sergeants or Recruiting Operations Officers creates a situation where promotions to W-1 would create a significant loss of pay and other entitlements. This proves to be untenable for senior Marines (especially Master Sergeants and First Sergeants who might otherwise consider applying).

The 2023 class of Marine Gunnery Sergeants now begins approximately three months of WOBC; a

course designed to facilitate their transition to service as a Marine Officer. The Basic Officer Course and the WOBC are also designed to create provisional infantry Officers, in keeping with the “Every Marine a Rifleman” philosophy.

Gunnery Sergeants from this class will also earn their lineal standing based on the order in which they graduate from WOBC relative to their fellow Gunnery Sergeants. This lineal number will have a significant effect on the order in which they are placed into “promotion zones” for the rest of their careers. In early Gunnery Sergeant classes, Gunnery Sergeants received their lineal number based on the Enlisted rank (and Time in Grade for same rank individuals) at the time of Commissioning before reporting to TBS. Naturally, the MGA will continue to gather these historical facts (i.e. when the lineal system was changed) and present them in this publication.

Congratulations to the 2023 class of newly Commissioned Marine Gunnery Sergeants. We are very proud of you, and we also sincerely wish you success in your service as Marine Officers.

Editors note (opinion): Newest Marine Gunnery Sergeants, please give WOBC everything you have even if you find it relatively “easy”. Frankly, and with all sincerity and respect to TBS, the course is designed for Officers with generally far less experience than you. All your experience, success, and skill will serve as an advantage for Marine Gunnery Sergeants at the WOBC. Please always be on the look out for instances where your talents might also serve to help your fellow student Warrant Officers—Marines who simply do not have your many years of intense Infantry and/or Reconnaissance service to our Corps. You will be directly serving the USMC when you help your fellow students succeed.



Man, Train, and Equip

The Marine Rifleman—An MCDP-1 doctrinal/philosophical discussion



An Infantry Marine conducts live fire training aboard CLNC. Could we lighten this rifle and make it more portable? We're back to M16A4 overall lengths with the addition of a suppressor and M1 Service Rifle weights with all the attached enablers. Photo: II MEF COMSTRAT

Considerations

The M27 is one of the finest infantry rifles ever created, however, no weapon is perfectly suited for every battlefield task. The M27 has an overall length of approx. 34 inches and with the addition of the KAC QDSS-NT4 sound suppressor, it approaches 39 inches—about the length of an M16A4. Moreover, the suppressed rifle, with 30 round magazine, bipod, optic, sling, and night aiming device, exceeds 10 lbs.

Questions:

- Currently, only Recon Battalions and MARSOC employ Short Barrel Rifle (SBR) Upper Receiver Groups (URG) as part of a modular weapon system (Mk18 and HK 416A5). Should the USMC procure this enabler for regular Infantry Marines?
- If so, which Marines in the Infantry Battalion should employ it? And why? LAR Scouts?
- With the reduction in projectile velocity and ballistic profile changes, can we accept a change in

- performance of the 5.56mm round by issuing an M27 SBR URG to all Marines in the Squad?
- If not, are there select Marines within the Rifle Squad (and/or battalion), for example, where we could accept the ballistic performance change (i.e. a MAAWS and/or other Crew Served Weapons team)?
- Is there 5.56mm ammunition that can mitigate the change in performance with an SBR URG?
- Is there a Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) solution/item that can plug-and-play with current M27 SL-3 items, most notably the KAC QDSS-NT-4 suppressor?
- If any elements within SOCOM employ the HK416 rifle, how have they addressed this issue? Different suppressor? Special tuning?
- Are there COTS improvements to the Free-Floating Rail System (FFRS) which could reduce M27 system weight and reduce rail flex?
- What is possible and legal in accordance with the Federal Acquisitions Regulations (FARs)?

Man, Train, and Equip

The Marine Rifleman—An MCDP-1 doctrinal/philosophical discussion



*HK produces several COTS options for SBR URGs. This example is a 10.4 inch barrel model. HK produces models with adjustable gas blocks and different barrel lengths, as well.
Photo: Heckler & Koch*

The USMC currently employs a Heckler & Koch 11” 5.56mm SBR URG in the Recon Battalions as the Reconnaissance Weapons Kit (RWK) similar to the photo above. This URG is based on the HK416A5 model with an adjustable gas block. Photo: Heckler & Koch.

Considerations (cont.)

-For Ground Combat Element (GCE) Marines and Sailors, armed with M4s or M4A1s, could they also benefit from the addition of a Supply System Responsible Item (SSRI) Special Operations Peculiar Modification (SOPMOD) Mk18 SBR URG?

USSOCOM Operators and law enforcement agencies have employed SOPMOD and other Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) SBR URGs for many years with great success. Naturally, there are compromises with any engineering design and these must be considered in a Commander’s mission and risk analysis. Two successful “plug & play” examples are shown below.



*(Top) Geissele URG-I SBR URG 5.56mm
(Middle) Crane/DD Mk18 SBR URG 5.56mm
Photos: Open sources.*



*(Above) A Marine Raider conducts operations in Afghanistan, armed with a Colt M4A1 LRG with a Crane Mk18 SBR URG with QDSS-NT4 suppressor and GLOCK 19 Gen3. Arguments have been made that the Mk18 SBR URG lacks sufficient capability for Infantry Marines—yet somehow the Mk18 has been among the weapons of choice for USSOCOM Operators in Iraq and Afghanistan (and everywhere else) for many years. Have these Operators been less likely than Infantry Marines to experience enemy contact?
(Opinion): I think not. Photo: USMC.*

*“The older I get, the shorter my AR [15] gets.” -Jeff Eby (2013)
said in the context of portability and maneuverability and not specifically related to terminal ballistic performance.



The Infantry Rifle 1850-2023

An MGA Quarterly Magazine Historical Series

Part II: Continued from the 2-22 Edition

1873-1897- The US Navy and Marine Corps employed the Springfield 1873-1884 Trapdoor Rifle(s). In those days, the US Congress had not yet become directly involved in weapons/equipment procurement for the individual armed forces, and the US Navy/USMC and US Army used different small arms weapons.



Springfield 1873/84 Trapdoor Rifle/Carbine

- Shoulder fired, single shot, breach loading, black powder (round nose bullet)
- Caliber: .45-70-405 (Carbine used a 305 grain bullet and lighter powder charge)
- Rifle: OAL: 52 inches. Barrel: 32.5 inches
- Carbine: OAL: 41". Barrel: 22 inches
- Manuf. 1873-1884 by US Army Ordnance Depot Springfield, Mass.



****Historical Footnote:** For a brief time in the mid/late 1880's, a few units within the USMC employed a relatively small number of Remington-Lee 1885 .45-70 Govt. bolt action rifles. Far ahead of its time, this is a rifle worthy of study for its own sake.

Notes: The USMC employed this rifle until replaced, for a brief time, by the M1895 Lee Straight Pull 6mm rifle, beginning in 1896. Marines fought with the 1873 Trapdoor rifle, for example, during the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) while the US Army had already fielded the Springfield Krag-Jørgensen. The 1873 Trapdoor rifle was also used in the Philippine Insurrection.

* At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the US Congress became involved in the acquisition process, directing the US Navy and USMC to begin adopting the same small arms weapons as the US Army. The USMC-issued Springfield 1873-1884 rifles/carbines and Winchester Lee Straight Pull service rifles were replaced by the Springfield Krag-Jørgensen service rifle—and eventually the Springfield M1903 series.



(L) A Marine Detachment aboard ship in formation, armed with Springfield 1873 Service Rifles c. 1880.



(R) US Marines prepare for landing, armed with Springfield 1873 Service Rifles c. 1889. Photos: USMC.

The Infantry Rifle 1850-2023

An MGA Quarterly Magazine Historical Series

Part II: Continued from the 2-22 Edition

1896/1897- The US Navy and Marine Corps begin to retire the Springfield 1873/84 Trapdoor Service Rifles and adopted the Winchester Lee "Straight Pull" "Navy" 6mm Service Rifle (the rifle depicted on the USMC Good Conduct Medal).



M1895 USMC Service Rifle

- Shoulder fired, straight-pull, internal magazine fed, stripper-clip loaded, smokeless powder (round nose bullet)
- Caliber: 6mm Lee Navy (.236")
- Rifle: OAL: 47.75 inches. Barrel: 28 inches
- Manuf. 1895-1898 by Winchester Repeating Arms Co. (*a rare instance where before the AR-15/M16 series, a US armed service did not procure/employ a service rifle manufactured by the US Armory and Arsenal at Springfield, MA).



Notes: The M1895 Service Rifle is the US Navy and USMC's first centerfire service rifle to use a smokeless powder cartridge. Also of note, this rifle fires a cartridge ("6mm") that was ahead of its time (the US Army has recently adopted a new Service Rifle in the 6mm diameter domain). This is also the first time the USA used a metric designation for a firearms cartridge, which remains standard practice today. The M1895 served in combat in the Philippines, Cuba, China, and with Marine Detachments aboard ships (some rifles remained in sea service until the 1920's).

In December 1898, a joint board of US Army, Navy, and USMC Officers decided to standardize the .30 Army cartridge for rifles and machine guns. This resulted in the USMC adoption of the Springfield Krag-Jørgensen rifle, a joint acquisition.



A sea-going Marine armed with a M1895 USMC Service Rifle. Photos: USMC/MCX.



A closeup of the action of the M1895 USMC Service Rifle. Photos: Open source.

The Infantry Rifle 1850-2023

An MGA Quarterly Magazine Historical Series

Part II: Continued from the 2-22 Edition

1898- The US Navy and Marine Corps began to issue the Springfield M1898 Krag-Jørgensen rifle, a joint Federal procurement among all [three] US armed services (naturally, there was no Air Force and Space Force at that time). Like the M1895 Service Rifle, the M1898 would have a very short service life, largely due to capability gaps demonstrated in close combat by enemy rifles (the Mauser bolt action rifle). Even at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Marines were talking about “over match” ...even if perhaps they did not use that exact term. In this case, the enemy’s rifle, a Mauser, was more capable than ours.



A closeup of the M1898 bolt action, magazine, and loading gate. Photos: Open source.

M1898 Krag-Jørgensen USMC Service Rifle

-Shoulder fired, bolt action, internal magazine fed, smokeless powder (round nose bullet)

-Caliber: .30 Army (.30-40 Krag)

-Rifle: OAL: 47.75 inches. Barrel: 28 inches

Notes: The proliferation of the Mauser rifle among our enemies during the Spanish American War demonstrated the capability gaps in US service rifles. The services once again searched for a service rifle that was not at a capability disadvantage to our enemy’s. The M1898 served for little more than a decade before being replaced by a more capable rifle and cartridge design.



(Above): One of the finest rifles ever produced, the Mauser bolt action rifle (Gewehr 1898 shown). Readers could mistake this rifle for the replacement to the Krag-Jørgensen, the Springfield M1903 (a Mauser 98 copy). Photo: Swedish Army Museum.



US Marines in the Philippines with M1898 Service Rifles. Photo: USMC

The Infantry Rifle 1850-2023

An MGA Quarterly Magazine Historical Series

Part II: Continued from the 2-22 Edition

1903- We will pause this discussion just prior to the development, acquisition, and fielding of the famous Springfield M1903 Service Rifle and its variants. Ironically, the M1903's predecessor, the M1898, was "over-matched" in general physical capability by the German Mauser bolt action rifle design. The Springfield M1903 series was nearly entirely based on the Mauser rifle design.



M1903 (and variants) USMC Service Rifle

-Shoulder fired, bolt action, stripper-clip loaded, internal magazine fed, smokeless powder (1903-1906 round nose bullet and 1906- Spitzer [pointed] bullet)

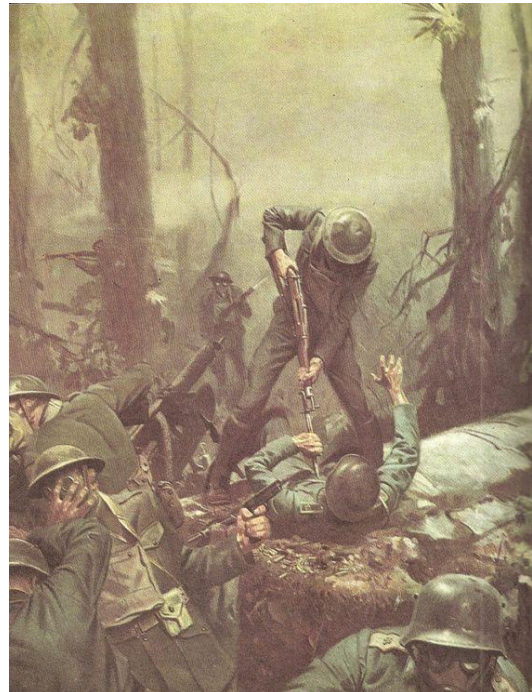
-Caliber: 1903-1906 .30-03 Springfield, 1906- .30-06 Springfield

-Rifle: OAL: 43.2 inches. Barrel: 24 inches

Notes: The rifle and ammunition designs are largely based on the Mauser rifle and ammunition (including the pointed "spitzer" bullet design). The US was, in fact, sued for patent infringement, lost in court, and was forced to pay \$200,000.00 in royalties on the rifles to Mauser Werke and \$412,520.55 (interest added to 1928) to Deutsche Waffen Munitionsfabriken.

Springfield M1903 Service Rifle variant. Photo: Open source.

Historical considerations 1850-1903- During the 19th century, the USMC was nothing like the large, effective Marine Air Ground Task Force that we know today. In those years, Marines served in small detachments aboard ships and fought in small wars around the world, seldom completely independent from the US Army. The US Navy and USMC employed several different service rifles and cartridges throughout the later 19th century. Creation of competitive marksmanship and practical combat marksmanship programs were nearly impossible because of the state of small arms and ammunition technology—until the development and procurement of bolt action, centerfire rifles chambered for smokeless powder small bore (~24-30 caliber) cartridges (i.e. the M1895, M1898, and especially the M1903 Service Rifles).



Painting of a US Marine killing a German soldier at Belleau Wood with M1903 Service Rifle. Artist: Tom Lovell, USMCR



The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

1942- In the early days of WWII, US Marines found deficiencies with their WWI Mk1 Trench Knives and Raider fighting knives—high cost, fragile blades, and designs not well suited for general utility. For example, the Marine Raider knife, like the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger, was designed for stabbing which caused it to be fragile when used as a general-purpose cutting or prying tool. The Mk1 trench knife, on the other hand, was expensive and time consuming to produce. Initially, Marines and Sailors were left with little other options but to purchase Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) knives.



*(Top) WWII US Marine Raider stiletto knife—a Fairbairn-Sykes clone
(Middle) WWI US Mk1 Trench Knife
(Bottom) WWII US Navy Mk1 knife
Photos: Open source.*



The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

Early WWII: Marines soon began procuring Bowie style and hunting knives at their own (or unit) expense. These designs proved much more useful, durable, and cost effective for general purpose utility tasks while still providing the ability to efficiently knife-kill enemy personnel. The PX aboard some Marine Corps bases carried, for example, the PAL RH36 hunting knife. Once Marines and Sailors began to deploy, PX shelves were rightfully and quickly stripped bare. To meet these increasing demands, the USMC procurement agency submitted a request to industry for samples (based largely on the US Navy Mk1) of an individual fighting knife. Marines worked with Union Cutlery Co. (now KA-BAR Knives), producing an improved general-purpose utility and fighting knife, based in part on the USN Mk1 (previous page).



(Above/left) WWII USMC PAL RH36. (Above/right) RH36 ricasso stamp. Many US Marines used the PAL RH36 as a COTS interim solution prior to or in lieu of the USMC Mk2 "KA-BAR". Some preferred this model over the Mk2. Photos: Editor.



(Above/left) WWII US Cattaraugus 225Q. (Above/right) Cattaraugus 225Q ricasso stamp. While this model was issued as a "Quartermaster" general purpose knife in the US Army, some Marines employed this knife in the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO). Photos: Editor.

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

1942 (cont.)- The USMC prototype knife was called “1219C2” and was recommended for procurement and fielding. This recommendation was denied by the USMC Quartermaster. (Editor’s note: Direct the word “Denied” or “No” at a Marine Gunner and see what happens). This “denial” was overridden by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the 1219C2 was formally adopted by the USMC on Nov. 23, 1942. The first knives, manufactured by the Camillus Cutlery Co., were delivered to USMC forces in Jan. 1943. The US Navy soon also adopted the 1219C2 to replace their Mk1’s and other variants. The USMC then renamed the 1219C2 the “USMC Mk2 Combat Knife” or the “Knife, Fighting Utility”. Note: Camillus (Latin) is [also] a town in New York in which the manufacturer was located until 2007 and is pronounced “Kah-MILL-iss”, with main emphasis on the “Mill” syllable.



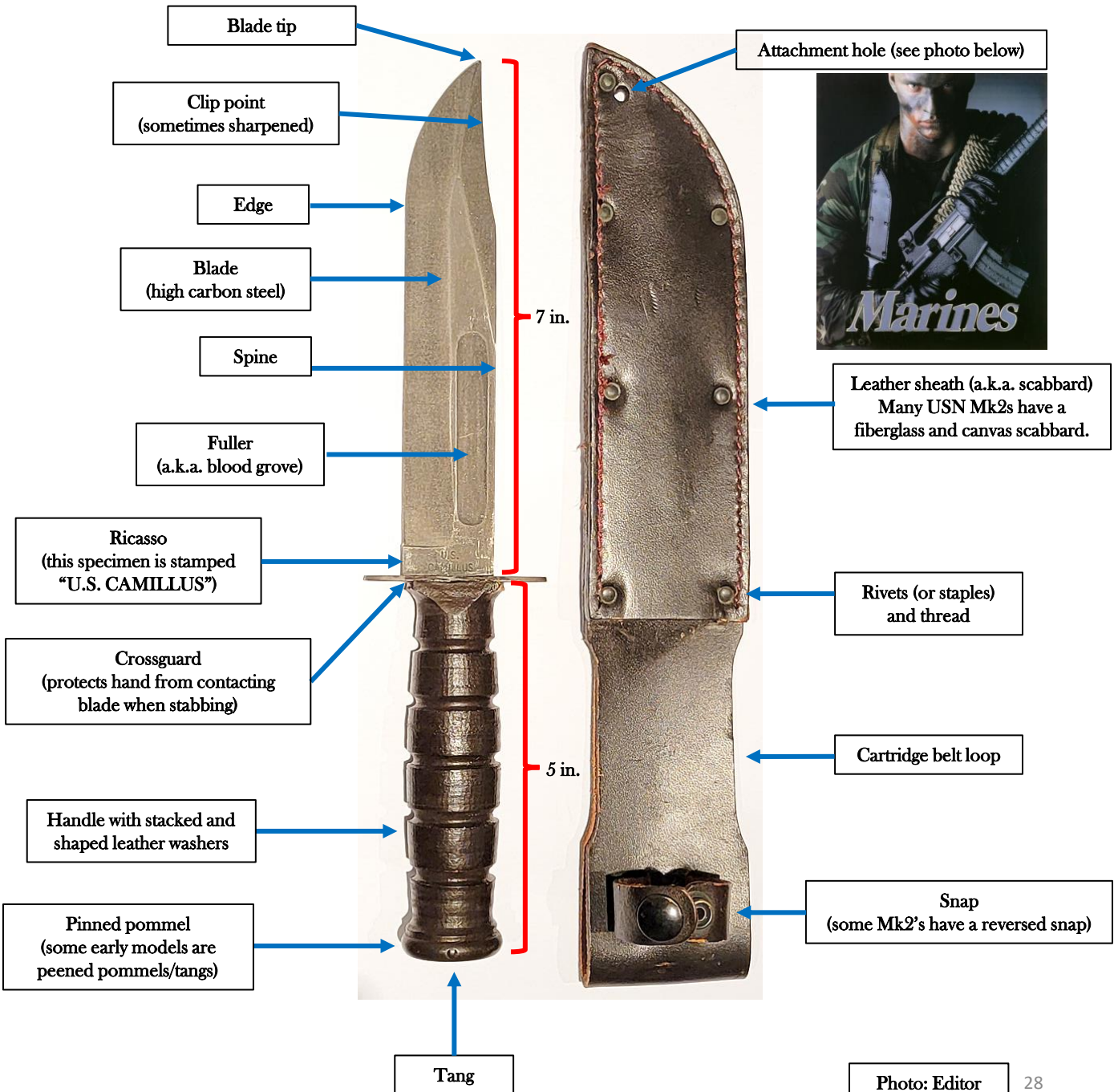
Top: WWII USMC Camillus Mk2 knife. (Note: small staples on sheath)

Bottom: WWII US Navy Mk2 knife (note USN sheath design). Photos: Open source.



The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

Anatomy of a Mk2



The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

1943-45- During WWII, the Camillus Cutlery Co. produced the first (and the most) Mk2 knives for the USMC and USN. By 1944, however, Marines and Sailors generally referred to Mk2 knives, regardless of manufacturer, as a “KA-BAR” (the phenomenon whereby a large population refers to a specific product, made by several/many manufacturers, by [only] one of the company names—like in the use of the name “Band-Aid”, a trademarked Johnson and Johnson name, describing all adhesive bandages).

During WWII, the USMC and USN received Mk2 knives from Camillus, Union Cutlery (KA-BAR), the Robeson Cutlery Co., and the PAL Cutlery Co. Naturally, Mk2 knives from this era are highly collectable today, the rarest and most expensive being from Robeson (Shuredge) and PAL.



Several Marines in this famous photo are armed with Mk2 “KA-BAR” knives. Photo: Joe Rosenthal



The Marine in the foreground is armed with an M1 Carbine and a Mk2 knife. Photo: Staff Sergeant Louis Lowery, USMC.

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

1945-2003- The USMC continued to procure and issue the Mk2 knife, and Marines and Sailors (in fact the world) continue to call the knife the “KA-BAR”. The “KA-BAR” name became synonymous with the Mk2 knife, so much so that the Union Cutlery Co. formally changed its name to KA-BAR Cutlery Inc. in 1952. Up until that point, Union Cutlery Co. had only used the term “KA-BAR” on select hunting knives after reportedly receiving a letter from a customer. In the letter, the customer was reliving a story where he had shot and wounded a Kodiak bear which subsequently attacked him, forcing him to kill it with his Union Cutlery Co. knife. Apparently, the letter was damaged or poorly written and “killed a bear” looked more like “K A BAR”, and thus a legendary name was born.



A fine specimen, a WWII Robeson Shuredge Mk2 USMC fighting knife. Today, these fetch a premium on the collector's market, especially with the red spacers in the leather washer grip. Photo: eBay.

1945-2003 (cont.)- The USMC maintained the Mk2 knife program until 2003. “KA-BAR” fighting/utility knives were typically issued to crew served weapons operators, Officers, Scout-Snipers, and many other Marines and Sailors. In most units, anyone who wished to carry one and who was not issued a Mk2 per the unit Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E), could privately purchase one and integrate the knife into their field equipment set. Since Mk2 knives were not serialized from the manufacturer, units often spray-painted local set numbers on the sheaths and the blades to facilitate efficient “Sight Counts” and prevent theft. After WWII, the USMC procured Mk2 knives from additional manufacturers. Many readers may remember being issued “KA-BARs” that were manufactured by the Conetta Cutlery Co. and the Ontario Knife Co. Mk2 knives were also manufactured by the Utica Cutlery Co. and M.S.I., but the editor is unable to verify if any of these were procured by the USMC (and if procured, they may have never been issued before being disposed of (DRMO). Total Mk2 production estimates are well over two million.

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study



*Top: A USMC Mk2 made by the Ontario Knife Co. (OKC). These were all black with a black leather sheath.
Middle: A USMC Mk2 made by the Conetta Cutlery Co.
Photos: Editor.*

Below: Three examples of recent production Mk2 knives from (L-R) and their ricasso stampings Camillus, Conetta, and OKC. Photos: Editor.

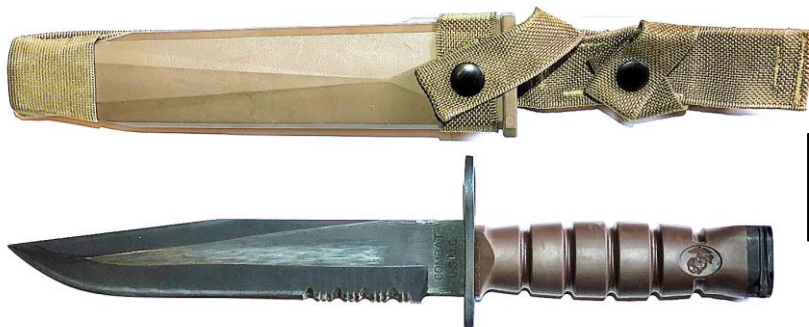


The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study



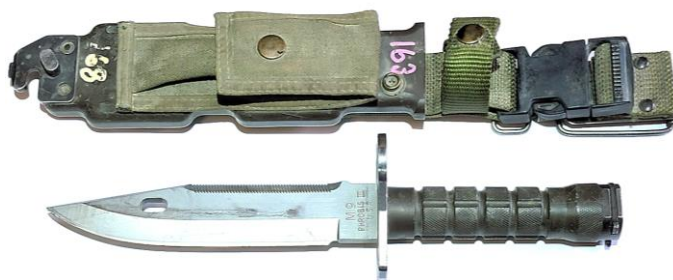
Above: We know these well. From top to bottom, a USMC Camillus, Conetta, and Ontario. Note the differing dyes and shapes of the leather components. There are also differences in the machining of the blades and handles and different finishes on the exposed metal parts. These were never required to be precision weapons. Photo: Editor.

2003- Alas, the end of an era and the retirement of a legend. Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) retired the USMC Mk2 “KA-BAR” knife and the M7 bayonet (*and any of the very limited quantity of USMC unit-purchased M9 bayonets which may have remained in unit armories*) in 2003 and began issuing the OKC3S bayonet. MCSC currently purchases OKC3S bayonets from the Ontario Knife Company (OKC) on a single source contract. The OKC3S is designed to be employed as a stand-alone utility/fighting knife or affixed, as a traditional bayonet, to the M4 Carbine series, M16 series, M27 rifles, and M590 shotguns. The OKC3S is a proper edged weapon, but it is even larger than the Mk2 which can make attachment to load bearing combat equipment challenging for Marines in the field.



*(L) “Now this is a knife...”
The USMC OKC-3S bayonet
Photo: Editor*

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study



Above: (L) M7 bayonet in M8A1 PWH (Pennsylvania Working Home [for the Blind]) sheath. The USMC typically issued M7 bayonets to Marines and Sailors armed with M16 series rifles and issued Mk2 “KA-BARs” to everyone else. The US Army’s replacement for many of their M7 bayonets was the (R) M9 Phrobis III. The USMC continued to issue the M7 and Mk2 edged weapons until 2003 when the OKC3S bayonet (shown below) replaced them. There are reports that units within the USMC “open-purchased” M9 bayonets during the Gulf War. The M9 bayonet is shown to relative scale in the photo below. Photos: Editor.

1986- The US Army adopted the M9 Phrobis III bayonet and began replacing hundreds of thousands of M7 bayonets. The USMC continued to issue the M7, likely due to budget concerns (and many might be justified with the argument that, “It’s [just] a bayonet.”) The US Army has procured well over 400,000 M9 bayonets. For reference purposes, the Ontario Knife Co. sells M9 bayonets for ~\$238.00. A used M9 Phrobis III can fetch over \$700.00 on the collector’s market, despite still being one the issued bayonets of our sister service. This fact may not bode well for US Army unit bayonet sight counts. The USMC OKC3S also sells for ~\$235.00.

One wonders, “When will the requirement for a rifle mounted bayonet become obsolete (assuming this has not already happened)? Regardless of the question, there will likely always be an edged weapon requirement which will inevitably cause acquisitions personnel to seek to create a utility/fighting knife and bayonet hybrid, which is precisely what the M9 and OKC3S bayonets are. Still, Marines and Sailors often find these edged weapons too large to attach to their external fighting load, and/or rifle



Above: (Top to bottom and to relative scale) US Army M9 Phrobis III, USMC OKC3S, USMC [Conetta Cutlery Co.] Mk2, and AKM Type 1 (Avtomat Kalashnikova Modernizirovanny) bayonet.

suppressors are “in the way” [of the bayonet], causing them to look elsewhere for lighter, more portable, and practical utility/fighting knives.

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study

2023- Enthusiasts can still collect and enjoy owning Mk2 combat knives (**Editors note:** readers should check their local laws). Vintage Mk2's can often be found at antique stores nationwide. A quick and easy internet search will likely offer many Mk2 knife specimens for purchase, from Union Cutlery Co, (now known as KA-BAR), Conetta, PAL, Robeson (Shuredge), Ontario (OKC), and Camillus. Naturally, collectors should beware of counterfeits and/or false advertising, whether intentional or not, regarding the date of manufacture or provenance of any Mk2 specimen.

The KA-BAR Cutlery Co. and OKC still manufacture USMC Mk2 knives; the OKC model being identical to what was issued in the USMC for many years. The most common KA-BAR model is a commemorative version with coloring and stampings to the sheath which are different than the older USMC (Govt Issue) versions. KA-BAR also makes many other models from specific commemorations to made-to-look-vintage replicas of “red spacer” models. The editor has noticed that some KA-BAR Cutlery models sometimes have sheath retention straps that are installed in reverse (see photo below). Collectors can also purchase new M7, M9, and OKC3S bayonets from OKC, a current Berry Compliant USMC and US Army edged weapon vendor.



A very collectable WWII era USMC PAL Mk2 knife. Photo: Open source.



The KA-BAR company still produces USMC Mk2 knives which can be purchased at sporting goods stores and on the internet. These differ in fit and finish from the originals but make for excellent gifts and collectables. Note: Sheath retention strap/snap reversed. Photo: KA-BAR.



Some Marines and Sailors, despite their love for the Mk2, left their KA-BARs in the armory. Mk2 knives are relatively large and can prove unwieldy and challenging to integrate into body armor and equipment. “ServMart”, the GSA store on most bases, sells alternative utility knives for unit purchase. Pictured is the popular Gerber 06 Automatic tanto folding knife—a high-quality and very portable general-purpose utility knife often carried in lieu of a Mk2. Photo: Editor.

The US Marine Corps Knife, Fighting/Utility, Mk2—A Historical Study



Above: 2007 Al Karmah, Iraq.- Gen Peter Pace USMC (on right), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, presents a commemorative USMC Mk2 "KA-BAR" fighting knife to the [then current] Platoon Commander of the platoon 2ndLt Pace first commanded in Vietnam (2nd Plt, Co G, 2nd Bn, 5th MAR, 1 MAR DIV). The Platoon Commander (on left) is [then] 2ndLt Chad Cassidy USMC (now a retired Major). Gen Pace retired soon after returning home from this presentation.

*An example of another presentation grade KA-BAR is shown below.
Photos: Major Chad Cassidy USMC (Ret.) and open source.*



In the Next Bursting Bomb...

MGA SITREP & Message Traffic from the Executives and Staff

Interview with a Marine Gunner

Update on the Marine Gunners at TBS and IWOC

USMC Fireteam Concepts

USMC Rifle Squad - The History of the M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle

United States Service Rifle and Marksmanship Historical Study

A Commanding General's Reflections on the Marine Gunner

Contributions from our Members

Mental Health Concepts



*The US Marine Corps M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle
Photo: Heckler & Koch.*

****If you, or someone you know needs help, support is available 24/7. Service members and their families can call Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647, or chat at militaryonesource.mil. Service members, Veterans, and their loved ones can also call the Military and Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat at veteranscrisisline.net, or text to 838255. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available to anyone at 1-800-273-8255.**



*"The 2000 Yard Stare"
Painting by Thomas Lea
Battle of Peleliu.*

