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Marine Corps Memorial¹

The Marine Corps Memorial is different from most such monuments in that it was modeled on an actual event rather than designed by an architect or sculptor. The event was the raising of the United States' flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, on February 23, 1945. Although it portrays a specific battle and time, the memorial honors all Marines. These words are inscribed on the base of the statue: *In honor and in memory of the men of the United States Marine Corps who have given their lives to their country since November 10, 1775.*

In the battle for Iwo Jima, which began on February 19, 1945, the Marines landed on a beach about two miles wide on the southern coast of the island just to the east of Mount Suribachi. After establishing a beachhead in the face of fierce resistance from the Japanese, the Marines fought north across the island in order to surround Suribachi and cut off the soldiers on the mountain from their comrades on the eastern side of the island. This had been accomplished by the evening of February 22. The Third Platoon became the most decorated unit its size in Marine history for the men's actions that day. The conquest of 550-foot high Mount Suribachi began the next morning. The Japanese were well dug in on the slopes in caves, bunkers and pillboxes; but U.S. troops had reached the top by 10:30 a.m. The victorious Marines raised a small flag from the summit, which could be seen by their countrymen all over the small island.

Fighting continued on the mountain; but by that afternoon, it had been cleared of Japanese. The ceremony was then repeated with a larger flag. Photographer Joe Rosenthal took a picture of the flag raising, which later won him the Pulitzer Prize for photography. This famous photo is the basis for the Marine Corps Memorial.

The men in the photograph became famous, too. The six were Sgt. Michael Strank, Cpl. Harlon H. Block, Pfc. Franklin R. Sousley, Pfc. Rene A. Gagnon, Pfc. Ira Hayes (all Marines) and PhM. 2/c John H. Bradley (of the Navy). Strank, Block and Sousley were killed in the fighting to take the rest of Iwo Jima. The three survivors returned to the U.S. after the war to varying degrees of fame and mixed success in life.

Sculptor Felix W. de Weldon was so impressed by the photograph that he made a small model of the scene. He then made a full-scale model based on the features of the three survivors and information and photographs of the three who had died. The large model was made in plaster and then cast in bronze. The casting took three years and several artisans to complete. Still in pieces, the statue was taken by truck from Brooklyn, New York, to Washington, D.C. President Eisenhower dedicated the monument on November 10, 1954, the 179th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Marine Corps.



A memorial, similar in design to the Marine Corps Memorial, is to be built to honor the nearly 300 New York firefighters who died trying to rescue people from the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Terrorists crashed airplanes into both towers of the World Trade Center. The fire fighters were killed when the towers collapsed.

¹The National Park Service web site:
www.nps.gov/gwmp/usmc.htm

Marine Corps Memorial Questions

1. List 10 research topics suggested by this text on the Marine Corps Memorial.

2. Does the description of the fighting in this text describe the capture of the whole island of Iwo Jima or just the conquest of Mount Suribachi? Give a quotation from the text to prove your answer.

3. Some people say that Rosenthal's photograph was staged and was not a picture of an actual event taken in the heat of battle. Give information from the text to support this argument.

4. What other monument that looks similar to the Marine Corps Memorial is going to be built after 2001? _____

5. Is it appropriate that the Marine Corps Memorial depicts the faces of six specific men or, since it honors all Marines, should the faces have been of generic males? State your opinion and support it with at least three arguments all written in paragraph form. _____

The History of the United States Marine Corps¹

The Marines who invaded the island of Iwo Jima during World War II had as strong a sense of honor and as famous a tradition of fighting as the Japanese descendants of the samurai warriors. The U.S. Marines had won every war they had fought since 1776. Their motto was *Semper fidelis*, meaning “always faithful.” More than 300 Marines have won the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest U.S. military award. The Marines see themselves as an elite fighting force, better than the other three branches of the military service. They are “the toughest troops for the toughest fighting.”²

The first unit of the Marines was organized during the Revolutionary War. They fought against the British on an island in the Bahamas, in several battles in the Middle Colonies, and with John Paul Jones when his ship the *Bonhomme Richard* sank the British ship *Serapis*.

In the early 1800s during President Jefferson’s administration, Marines defeated the Barbary pirates, who were raiding U.S. ships in the Mediterranean Sea from their nations in North Africa. Tripoli was one of the Barbary States, and this is the origin of the line “to the shores of Tripoli” in “The Marines’ Hymn.”

Marines saw action during the War of 1812 on both land and sea. They were with Oliver Hazard Perry on Lake Erie where they helped defeat a British squadron of ships. They also fought under Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans.

The Mexican War of 1846-1848 saw the events that added the phrase “from the Halls of Montezuma” to “The Marines’ Hymn.” Marines fought in California and Mexico. Three hundred forty-six Marines were among those who captured Mexico City.

Marines fought in the Civil War, but they did not play a major role in that event.

Twenty-eight Marines were on the battleship *Maine* when it exploded and sank at Havana, Cuba, thus starting the Spanish-American War in 1898. Other Marines captured the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After the war, the U.S. had gained so much territory that the number of Marines had to be increased to defend the new empire.

The U.S. entered World War I in 1917, and Marines saw action at Belleau Wood, Soissons and Mont Blanc in France. The war brought changes in the Corps including air bombing missions, antisubmarine duty and the enlistment of women for office jobs.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. declared war on Japan and entered World War II. The Marines are amphibious troops—fighting on both land and water—and were, therefore, well suited to the island invasions that war in the Pacific Ocean required. Over three years, from Guadalcanal to Okinawa, the Marines drove the Japanese back to their homeland. The two atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima ended the war, so the Marines did not have to invade Japan itself.

The Marines have continued to play an important part in U.S. engagements since World War II. The Korean “police action,” the Vietnam conflict, the invasion of Grenada to drive out communists and the Gulf War in Kuwait all utilized Marines.



Activity

Students will use their textbooks to do further research on the role of the Marines in one of the wars mentioned above. Have students pick one war or a single battle (if the textbook goes into that much detail) to research. Depending on whether they are right- or left-brained, they can outline their information, put their information in brainstorming bubbles each extending out from a central bubble or draw pictures of the facts and label them.

As a summary activity, the students should write a paragraph of at least six sentences explaining how the information they found shows that the Marines were worthy opponents of the Japanese with their samurai warrior tradition.

¹*The U.S. Marines* by Robert Halasz, Brookfield, Connecticut, The Millbrook Press, 1993.

²*Ibid.*, p. 8.