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A Brief History of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Diego

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[The Marines during the Mexican War](#)
[First Marine Corps Base Established: Camp Thomas](#)
[Here to Stay](#)
[Camp Howard](#)
[Panama-California Exposition](#)
[Marine Barracks, Balboa Park](#)
[A Permanent Marine Corps Base in San Diego](#)
[Marine Advanced Expeditionary Base, San Diego](#)
[Marine Corps Base, Naval Operating Base, San Diego](#)
[Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, San Diego](#)
[Camp Holcomb](#)
[Camp Elliot](#)
[Camp Linda Vista](#)
[Green Farm Camp](#)
[Jacques Farm Camp](#)
[Parachute School, Marine Base, San Diego](#)
[Camp Gillespie - Gillespie Field](#)
[Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla](#)
[Camp Matthews](#)
[Camp Pendleton](#)
[Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar](#)
[Closing Remarks](#)

The U.S. Navy has long been visible in San Diego. However, for nearly 90 years, U.S. Marines have guarded the most sensitive areas of San Diego. While the Navy likes to show the flag, there's another military presence which, while significant, has been less visible.

Since its beginning, the Marine Corps in San Diego, California has been surrounded by the Spanish heritage of Southern California. Among the more conspicuous are place names such as Kearny Mesa, La Jolla, Miramar, and San Diego itself, are a consequence of California's earlier years under Spanish influence. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the United States-Mexican War, Mexico ceded a large block of territory, including California, to the United States, and San Diego began to achieve importance as an American port city of major military importance.

The presence of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Diego dates back to the days of the Mexican War.

The origins of this elite group of men can be traced back to the colonial battalions of Marines raised in America during the Revolutionary War. On November 10, 1775, the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia passed a resolution stating that "two Battalions of Marines be raised" for service as landing forces with the fleet. This resolution, established the Continental Marines and marked the birth date of the United States Marine Corps. Even though the Marines were modeled after their British counterparts, the use of the Marine as a fighting force both on "land and at sea" is solely an American innovation.

Following the Revolutionary War, even though a number of states maintained small warships, the newly formed Republic had not a single armed vessel. With the surrender at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on November 30, 1783, peace forced the temporary disbandment of the American Navy --along with it, the disbandment of the U.S. Marines. It was not until March 1794 that Congress took steps to reactivate the Navy, authorizing the construction of six frigates, each of which was to have a detachment of Marines. However, it would be another three years, under a Congressional Act of 1 July 1799, before the Marines would again serve on ships.

Even though the U.S. Marines were considered to be a part of the U.S. Navy, the Corps was initially placed under the direct orders of the President, to be attached either to the Army or the Navy, "according to the nature of the service in which they shall be employed."

As the Marines tell it, after the Revolutionary War, all that remained was a corps of mules and two battalions of Marines. The army and the navy tossed a coin to determine who would take the mules and who, the Marines. The army, according to the story, won the toss --and took the mules. And, the Marines have been a part of the U.S. Navy ever since.

These traditions give the Marine Corps its flavor and are the reason the Corps cherishes its past, its ways of acting and speaking, and its uniforms. The traditions of the Marine Corps, its history, its flags, its uniforms, its insignia, make the Corps what it is and set it so distinctly apart from other military organizations and services.

The Marines during the Mexican War

The presence of the United States Marine Corps in San Diego, California, first occurred on July 29, 1846 when a detachment of Marines from the Sloop-of-War CYANE landed to raise the first American flag on the Plaza of Old Town San Diego. After that brief episode, the Marines participated in several military actions with the U.S. Army and Navy, in the San Diego area, both during and following the Mexican War.

Although the Mexican War had great significance to the fledgling American nation, many often forget the contributions of the U.S. Marine Corps in that war. But with the Mexican War at an end and California now secure, the Marines departed the San Diego area for the last time until March 1911.

First Marine Corps Base Established: Camp Thomas



Camp Thomas, circa 1911

The Marines had again been called upon as a result of the civil disorder in Mexico in 1910. Recurring problems with Mexico during the presidency of Porfirio Diaz alarmed President William Howard Taft, and in 1911 he dispatched 4th Provisional Marine Regiment to San Diego for deployment to Mexico.

Under the command of Colonel Charles A. Doyen, USMC, the 4th Provisional Marine Regiment, in March 1911, became the first Marines to occupy San Diego since the Mexican War.

The 4th Provisional Marine Regiment established a military camp on North Island, in San Diego bay, and named it Camp Thomas in honor of Rear Admiral Chauncey Thomas, USN, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet. The regiment bivouacked, heading towards the border, but tensions eased in Mexico before the Marines could cross the border. The Marines were brought back to San Diego. The officers and men from the 4th Provisional Marine Regiment were disbanded, returning to their regular bases and units. Camp Thomas would not again serve as a camp for the Marines in San Diego.

Here to Stay

When political turmoil erupted again in Mexico in 1914, the 4th Marine Regiment were destined to returned to North Island. Reorganized at the Puget Sound, Washington, and Mare Island, California Navy Yards in April, 1914, the regiment, this time under the command of [Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton](#), USMC, embarked aboard the USS SOUTH DAKOTA, WEST VIRGINIA, and JUPITER and proceeded to the Gulf of California as a show of force. As an acceptable degree of stability returned to the Mexican government, and the need for the Marine presence diminished, the regiment again sailed for San Diego. This time, the 4th Marine Regiment would not be disbanded.

Camp Howard



The 4th Marine Regiment arrived in San Diego harbor on July 6, 1914 and were once again encamped on North Island. The 4th Marine Regiment, under the command of Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton, USMC, followed the camp naming precedent established in 1911 by naming the new camp area Camp Howard after the incumbent Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Rear Admiral Thomas B. Howard, USN.

From the date of July 6, 1914 to the present, the Marine Corps has been stationed in San Diego. The tie that eventually bound the Marines to San Diego was the peaceful Panama-California Exposition. However, North Island would no longer continue to serve as their base location. On December 22, 1914, Camp Howard on North Island was closed with the establishment of the Marine Barracks at Balboa Park.

Panama-California Exposition

With the completion of the Panama Canal in August 1914, the cities of San Diego and San Francisco planned major events to commemorate the start of a new era of intercourse between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. San Francisco opened the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and San Diego the Panama-California Exposition.

To mark the occasion, the Commandant of the Marine Corps ordered the 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment to exposition duty at San Francisco and the 2nd Battalion to the Panama-California Exposition located at Balboa Park in San Diego. Each of these units received orders to establish and maintain model camps and to provide in various ways Marine Corps exhibits as part of their displays.

Marine Barracks, Balboa Park



In San Diego, the result was the establishment of the Marine Barracks in Balboa Park. The Marine Barracks, Balboa Park was originated on December 19, 1914, under Col. Joseph Pendleton. Major William N. McKelvy, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, became the first commanding officer of Marine Barracks, Balboa Park, San Diego. Colonel Pendleton established regimental headquarters in the Science and Education Building.

Popular with the public and with San Diego's civic and political leaders, the Marines would remain in Balboa Park until the Marine Base on Dutch Flats was opened in 1921.

A Permanent Marine Corps Base in San Diego

A few weeks after establishing Camp Howard on North Island, Colonel Pendleton, on September 6, 1914, was the guest speaker at the U. S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego. The subject of his speech was "San Diego, An Ideal Location for a Permanent Marine Corps Base." The drive behind his lecture was the unsatisfactory conditions and the less than convenient location of his men and staff at Camp Howard.

About this same time, Colonel Pendleton wrote to the Marine Corps Commandant at Washington D. C. about the deplorable conditions at Camp Howard and presented the idea of the possible establishment of a permanent Marine Corps base in San Diego.

Located only twelve miles north of the Mexican border, and with the southernmost deep water harbor on the west coast of the United States, the San Diego area presented itself to the strategic planner as a favorable site for an advanced expeditionary base. Convenient to the Pacific approaches, San Diego could also serve as a port of embarkation for forces needed in the South and Central American areas as well as in the Orient.

In the meantime, when the Panama-Pacific Exposition opened in 1914, Colonel Pendleton was ordered to set up a model Marine camp on the fairgrounds in Balboa Park which became the Marine Barracks.

Colonel Pendleton's foresighted thought in realizing the strategic value of San Diego with her proximity to South America, the Panama Canal, the Hawaiian Islands, and the Orient brought a visit from Undersecretary of Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the summer of 1915 with a personal inspection of the tidelands area called Dutch Flats which Pendleton had recommended as the future site of a permanent Marine Corps base. Following his inspection, and several meetings with city officials, Mr. Roosevelt gave a positive report on the proposition to Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Josephus Daniels.

The Navy General Board approved the establishment of a base on January 8, 1916 and the Marine Corps' base on the bay tidelands called Dutch Flats was authorized by a Naval appropriation bill of August 29, 1916, in large part due to the efforts of Congressman William Kettner.

But the tideland area around Dutch Flats had to be dredged and filled before groundbreaking could begin in 1919 for permanent buildings. The Marines moved from Balboa Park to the new Dutch Flats installation after it was commissioned in December 1921.

Marine Advanced Expeditionary Base, San Diego

On 1 December 1921, the new post stood ready for service. On that day General Pendleton placed it into commission as the Marine Advanced Expeditionary Base, San Diego, California with Headquarters, 5th Marine Brigade as the senior command present. The marines from Balboa Park moved in and took up residence in the newly constructed barracks. Although several of the major buildings had been finished, or were close to being completed, several years would pass before all the construction would be completed.

Shortly thereafter, a new tenant became a part of the San Diego base. In August 1923, the Marine Recruit Depot for the West Coast located at the Mare Island Navy Shipyard in Vallejo, California, moved to its new home at the San Diego Marine Base.

Marine Corps Base, Naval Operating Base, San Diego

On 1 March 1924, the base that had been developed as a result of the vision and efforts of General Pendleton became, officially, the Marine Corps Base, Naval Operating Base, San Diego. The base would be known by that designation for the next twenty-four years.

The newly established Marine Corps Base, with its seven barracks buildings, became the home to the 4th Marine Regiment upon their return from eight long years of service in Santo Domingo. The base would later become the headquarters for the Fleet Marine Force in 1935.

Expansion of the Marine Corps Base began in early September 1939 as the base became a recruit training depot. Thousands of men during and prior to World War II would receive basic training here, under its new name, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, prior to advance training at Camp Pendleton.

The expansion included construction of warehouses, new barracks and mess facilities, a post exchange, dental and medical dispensary buildings, hundreds of 16-man capacity hut-tents for the

recruit training depot, a recruit training parade ground, a railroad, and several new roads. The addition of an Officer's mess facility, bachelor officer's quarters, various athletic and training facilities, a communications school, a new administration building, and auditorium were added a short time thereafter.

Despite the expansion activity, the facilities of the Marine Corps Base could not adequately fulfill its dual capacity as a recruit depot and as a Fleet Marine Force base. Prevented from expansion to the north by a developed part of San Diego, on the east by the municipal airport, and on the west by the Naval Training Station, the base could obtain additional acreage for growth only by reclaiming tidelands of San Diego Bay. This process had reached its limit and necessary areas for training had to be found elsewhere.

Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, San Diego

On 1 January 1948, the Marine Base, Naval Operating Base, San Diego officially became the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.

With its redesignation as the Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot, for the first time, the Marine Base was removed from the command influence of the Naval District Commander and fell directly under the Commandant of the Marine Corps for all matters.

For more on the history of MCRD, San Diego, [CLICK HERE](#)

Growing Pains

Camp Holcomb

Training requirements for the San Diego Fleet Marine Force units resulted in the need to obtain more land. In 1934, in anticipation of the need, land in the Kearny Mesa section of San Diego had become known after World War I as Camp Holcomb, named after the then Commandant, Major-General Thomas Holcomb.

Camp Holcomb was constructed as part of Camp Kearny, a World War I Army camp, where both the 40th and 16th Divisions had trained. By 1940, volunteers began to pour into the recruit training depot at the San Diego Base. To provide needed space for recruit training expansion, the Fleet Marine Force units moved from the San Diego Base to the camp in the Kearny Mesa area. Applied collectively to the many semi-permanent buildings constructed in the area, Camp Holcomb would be only temporary. In 1940, the name of the camp changed from Camp Holcomb to Camp Elliot.

Camp Elliot

On June 14, 1940 the camp was formally designated Camp Elliot in honor of Major General George F. Elliot, the Marine Corps tenth Commandant 1903-1910.

While construction was underway the Marines had to live in tents. Early construction progressed quite well and by October 1940 twelve barracks and a mess hall was completed. Additional land acquisition for Camp Elliot was accomplished through a Declaration of Taking on April 8, 1941- Including the main camp area of 19,298.25 acres which came under federal ownership. This was further expanded to 26,034 acres.

In September 1942, Camp Elliot became the home of the Fleet Marine Force Training Center, West Coast with the mission of training individual replacements for combat duty. In January 1942, with over 10,000 Marines in the San Diego area, the 2nd Marine Division, under the command of Major-General C. F. B. Price, assembled at Camp Elliot and assumed the responsibility for the conduct of the training

there. Although thousands of Marines passed through Camp Elliot enroute to Pacific duty, even this area could not meet the expansion needs for the training of the overseas replacements.

Camp Elliot, on 1 July 1946, became War Assets Administration Property for disposal and decommissioning. Portions of this training area came under Navy control and, in 1944, the Navy took over Camp Elliot from the Marines, who were later transferred to Camp Pendleton. Camp Elliot continued to function through the Korean War. The Navy maintain control of Camp Elliot and let the U.S. Air Force use it for the Orion Project testing in 1960.

In 1961 Camp Elliot was given to the City Of San Diego.

In addition to the main Camp area there were other training camps established on the Camp Elliot reservation –Camp Linda Vista, Green Farm Camp and Jacques Farm Camp, as well as a Parachute School.



Camp Linda Vista

On the site of the old railroad station, a half mile due north of the main camp and opposite the auxiliary air station was Camp Linda Vista. During World War II, among other units, the 2d Parachute Battalion was stationed.

Green Farm Camp

Green Farm Camp was located a mile out on the old Escondido Road two miles northeast of the main camp.

Jacques Farm Camp

Jacques Farm Camp was located 3 miles due south of the main camp and opposite Grantville. Unlike the main camp where the infantry regiments were at these other camps were predominately tent camps.

Parachute School, Marine Base, San Diego

With the input of men to Camp Elliot the Marines trained everywhere. The paramarines jumped onto both the airfield and the flat area to the northeast of the camp. In early 1942 the Commandant received approval from the Secretary of the Navy to establish Parachute School, Marine Base, San Diego effective May 6. The school was established in tents at Camp Elliot and the first group entered on May 27 and was followed by a second group on June 1. The parachute school was maintained at Camp Elliot until September when new training facilities at Camp Gillespie were ready.

Camp Gillespie - Gillespie Field

In 1942, the Marines also acquired land in El Cajon Valley for training parachute jumpers and named it Camp Gillespie in memory of Archibald M. Gillespie, a Marine captain who had participated in the United States seizure of San Diego from Mexico. The parachute training later was abandoned and the air field became designated Gillespie Field, which later became an auxiliary to the Marine Air Station at El Toro. The 256 foot high towers, used in conjunction with the training, were removed in 1954-55 after the county received title to the 700 acre field. The site, still known as Gillespie Field, now serves as a county airport.

Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla

Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla, was established in the later part of 1918 for training purposes. The initial work consisted of the first eight targets of "A" range which the Marines built themselves with pick and shovel. But very little was done in the way of expansion until 1925 when five more targets were added. The camp's first buildings were added in 1927 for headquarters buildings and the following year the first detachment barracks were built. Following this construction there was a lull until just prior to World War II. With the war, Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla, would undergo a name change.

Camp Matthews

Up to World War II the camp had no name and was known simply as the Marine Rifle Range, La Jolla, and fell under the command of Marine Corps Base, San Diego. The camp was officially designated Camp Matthews on March 23, 1942 in honor of Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier General) Calvin B. Matthews, USMC., a distinguished Marine marksman of the 1930s period.

Camp Matthews continued to serve as the firing range for the Marines with a permanent garrison of 700 men. In March 1942, a new administrative building was ready for occupancy, along with a large mess hall, a post office, swimming pool and outdoor theater.

Marine Corps recruitment following Pearl Harbor so taxed the ranges limited facilities, that some 5,000 Marines who enlisted shortly after Pearl Harbor, had to be rushed to an Army camp at [San Luis Obispo](#) for their weapons training. During the peak of the war as many as 9,000 men were rushed through the range every three weeks. The rifle range was also used by Marine Aviation units, as well as Army and Navy units.

Camp Matthews continued to function through the Korean War and into the 1960s. In May 1963 it was necessary for the Marines to discontinue using one of their 65 target ranges because of civilian encroachment and consequent safety hazards. Finally it was decided to relocate Camp Matthews and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot's weapons training to Camp Pendleton.

Closing ceremonies occurred at Camp Matthews on 21 August 1964 and 46 years of Marine training at that portion of the San Diego Marine Base came to an end.

Camp Pendleton

In the early 1940s, both the Army and the Marine Corps were looking for land for use as a large training base in Southern California. The Army lost interest in the project, but in April of 1942 it was

announced that the U.S. Navy had purchased 132,000 acres of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores.

The Marine Corps moved quickly to acquire the lands of the Santa Margarita y Flores Rancho, a part of an original Mexican land grant, which was situated in San Diego County.

A Federal Court condemnation order gave the Marines immediate possession of Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, on July 9, 1942. The final judgment, ten months later, gave the Marine Corps 121,387 acres for which they paid the estate and heirs the sum of \$4,110,035. A number of acres were later added.

Construction of the base started March 23, 1942, with the awarding of a contract to build training facilities for amphibious forces. After five months of furious building activity, the 9th Marine Regiment, under the command of future commandant Colonel Lemuel Sheppard, marched from Camp Elliot in San Diego to the new West Coast training base, becoming the first troops to occupy the new base.

The base was named for [Major General Joseph H. Pendleton](#), USMC, who had long advocated the establishment of a West Coast training base. On September 25, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt arrived at the Camp for the official dedication of Camp Pendleton.

On the eve of World War II, as the Marine Corps doctrine of amphibious warfare was being refined and tested, the training of Marines was limited to Quantico and Parris Island on the East Coast, and San Diego on the West Coast. When expansion of all U.S. armed forces was authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's proclamation of unlimited national emergency on May 27, 1941, there was an immediate need for additional training area on both coasts. The creation of Camp Lejeune in North Carolina filled the critical need for training facilities along the Atlantic Coast.

Combat Marines were not the only people to populate Camp Pendleton. Women Marine reservists arrived here in 1943 and were able to keep the administration of the base running smoothly. The Ranch House Chapel was restored and opened primarily for their use.

Camp Pendleton was declared a "permanent" installation in October 1944, and in 1946, General Alexander A. Vandegrift, Commandant, stated that the base's future role was to be the center of all West Coast activities and the home of the 1st Marine Division, the peacetime strength of which would be 12,500. It was during this period of peacetime that Major General Graves Erskine, commander of the base then known as Marine Barracks, Camp Pendleton, was determined to develop the base into "the finest Marine post in the world."

Tent camps were torn down and Quonsets put in their place, 17 area barracks were renovated into officers quarters, a beach club was opened at San Onofre and a commissary opened in 1948. The base library opened in 1950 in a small frame building across from Division Headquarters where it remains today.

Peacetime activities, however, came to an abrupt halt in 1950 with the outbreak of the Korean War. Reservists crowded into Camp Pendleton, headed for the front, faster than the base could process them. The training was tough and realistic. A combat town was constructed to simulate a North Korean village where troops were exposed to as much realism as possible. Cold-weather training was moved from Idylwild to Pickle Meadows in the High Sierras because Idylwild wasn't tough enough. Cold-weather training was definitely survival training for those soon to be sent to Korea. Camp Pendleton's role as a training and replacement command was reflected in the nearly 200,000 Marines who passed through the base on their way to the Far East.

The Vietnam years again saw a buildup of men and machines bound for Indochina. The movement of the 1st Marine Division to the Far East occurred more gradually than in Korea and World War II. Replacements were rotated in and out of combat zones through a Staging Battalion, which took a

Marine arriving at the camp and gave him 15 intensive training days before sending him to Vietnam. The Korea combat village became a Vietnamese jungle village, complete with deadly booby traps. The combat environment and training methods changed over the years, but the purpose remained to train Marines to fight and get them to battle.

The Corps broadened its mission capabilities during the 1980s as "amphibious" became "expeditionary." Marines combined infantry, armor, supply and air power according to the task at hand, then demonstrated the effectiveness of the air-ground team in Grenada, Panama, Persian Gulf and Somalia. The rapid projection of self-sustaining military power was clearly shown when Camp Pendleton forces and their equipment were deployed halfway around the globe in just days.

Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and the operations in Afghanistan are just the latest in a 225-year history of unequalled national service, and it was the training here at Camp Pendleton that made many of these successes possible.

With more than 125,000 acres of varied terrain and 17.1 more miles of shoreline, Camp Pendleton is one of the Department of Defense's busiest training installations. The base's varied topography, combined with its amphibious training areas, inland training ranges and airspace, offers maximum flexibility for Marine Air Ground Task Forces and other service units that require a realistic combat training environment. Each year more than 40,000 active-duty and 26,000 reserve military personnel from all services use Camp Pendleton's many ranges and training facilities to maintain and sharpen their combat skills.

Today, Camp Pendleton is home to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and two of its major subordinate commands — the 1st Marine Division and 1st Force Service Support Group. This finely tuned fighting force is the principal user of the base's training facilities.

For more Information on Camp Pendleton, [CLICK HERE](#)

Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar

What began as an Army Air Corps field on Kearny Mesa, which the Navy acquired from the Army, was put into service in 1943 for use by the Marines as an air supply and logistics center. It was simply called Miramar, which in Spanish means overlooking the sea.

During the 1940s, both the Navy and the Marine Corps occupied Miramar. After World War II, all military facilities were combined and the base was designated in 1945 Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. This lasted just 13 months, however, when the Marines moved to El Toro in 1947. Miramar was then redesignated as a Naval Auxiliary Air Station.

After an absence of more than half a century, a major part of Marine air power returned to San Diego. In 1993, the Base Realignment and Closure committee recommended that Naval Air Station, Miramar be redesignated as a Marine Corps Air Station. The realignment involved relocating all Navy's F-14 Tomcat and E-2 Hawkeye squadrons. Top Gun and the last F-14 squadron left the air station in 1996 to make way for Marines from Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro and Marine Corps Air Facility, Tustin.

The first Marine squadrons, support units and their F/A-18 Hornets began making the move from MCAS El Toro in August 1994. On Oct. 1, 1997, Miramar once again became a Marine Corps Air Station as the Marines landed back home after a 50-year absence.

The final chapter in the transition process was etched July 2, 1999, with the closing ceremony for MCAS El Toro and MCAF Tustin. This historic event marked an end to a 52-year presence in Orange County and signified the final step in a move that spanned nearly five years.

Where the Navy's F-14 fighters once covered the tarmac, Marine CH-46E Sea Knight and CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters now rest in orderly formation next to the Marine's fixed-wing F/A-18 Hornets and KC-130 Hercules refueling squadrons. A new and larger air-traffic control tower is now in service, leaving the one old one from Marimar's Top Gun days standing empty. With the move complete, the support commands Marine Wing Support Group 37 and Marine Air Control Group 38 have now been established. These achievements, combined with the near completion of approximately \$400 million in construction, means that MCAS Miramar has taken its long-awaited, rightful place as the home of the Marine Corps' West Coast air power.

The Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases, Western Area, is Major General William G. Bowdon III, USMC, whose command is actually made up of three Marine Corps air stations –MCAS, Miramar, MCAS, Camp Pendleton, and MCAS, Yuma, Arizona –which make up COMCABWEST. With the closure of MCAS, Tustin, and MCAS, El Toro, COMCABWEST commands all three air stations from his headquarters at Miramar.

Miramar has gone through many changes over the years, from the dusty tent camp of Camp Kearny, which played a major role in the development of San Diego, to the Marine Corps' West Coast air power center of today.

For more information concerning MCAS Miramar, [CLICK HERE](#)

Closing Remarks

From those early days of the Mexican War, the marines made important amphibious landings along the Gulf coast of Mexico and the California coast. But it was throughout the 19th century, when ships' detachments of marines from San Diego were used in small-scale punitive expeditions and interventions to protect American lives and property.

Colonel Pendleton's foresight in realizing the strategic value of San Diego with her proximity to South America, the Panama Canal, the Hawaiian Islands, and the Orient, proved to play an important role in the interventions in Latin America and the Orient. These actions led to the garrisoning of Marines in China (1905-41), Panama (1903-14), Nicaragua (1910-13, 1926-33), Haiti (1915-34), and the Dominican Republic (1916-24).

During World War I (1917-18), the Marines from San Diego served as the American Expeditionary Force in France. By 1933 the Advance Base Force had evolved into the Fleet Marine Force; the Marine Corps, through theoretical studies and fleet exercises, had developed an amphibious doctrine that would be used by all U.S. and Allied forces in World War II. During the course of that war the U.S. Marines grew to six divisions and five aircraft wings, with a peak strength of about 485,000, many of whom were trained here in San Diego.

Again, during the Korean War, the Marines played important roles in active combat operations. Marine Corps unit involvement in the Vietnam War lasted from 1962 until 1975.

In 1983, Marines from San Diego served as part of a multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon and constituted most of the U.S. force that invaded Grenada in October of that year. Substantial U.S. Marine forces from San Diego served with distinction in the Persian Gulf War in 1991.


Today, the Marines stationed in San Diego stand ready to continue in the proud tradition of those who so valiantly fought and died at Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, Chosin Reservoir and Khe Sanh. As stated by the Corps' 31st Commandant, General Charles C. Krulak:

"Our warfighting legacy is one of duty, strength, sacrifice, discipline, and determination. These themes are cornerstones of the individual Marine and of our Corps. Indeed, they are woven into the very fabric of our battle color. However, while we reflect on our past, let us also rededicate ourselves to a future of

improvement. For, as good as we are now, we must be better tomorrow. The challenges of today are the opportunities of the 21st century. Both will demand much of us all."

San Diego shares a long and proud heritage of faithful service that has kept the Marine Corps the "best of the best."

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