



The "Ooo Rah"



Newsletter of the Central Florida Chapter
1st Marine Division Association

Volume 23 Issue I

January/February 2026

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Chap. Rep (Director) Mark Cleaves

Newsletter Editor: Mike Galyean
321.276.7515
(with a lot of help from Nancy)

<http://www.cfc1stmardiv.com/>

Next Meeting:

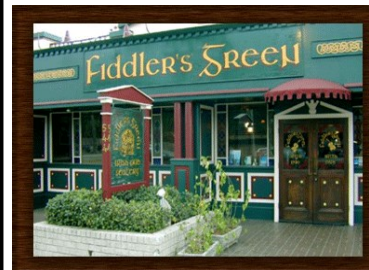
Saturday, Feb. 7

10:30 a.m.



544 West Fairbanks Ave.
Winter Park, FL 32789

Ph.407.645.2050



PRESIDENT'S RAMBLINGS

Members, Marines, and Friends:

For anyone that may not have met me yet, my name is Barron Mills, and it is truly an honor to serve as President of your Chapter. I'm grateful for the trust you've placed in me and excited about the year ahead. I grew up an Army brat, graduated from a military college, and then served for 20 years as a Marine Corps infantry officer. Like many of you, my connection to America and the Corps runs deep, and I view this role not simply as a position, but as a responsibility to our Marines, our families, and the legacy we carry forward.

Before looking ahead, let's pause and recognize the extraordinary service of Mike Galyean. For more than two decades, Mike led this Chapter with dedication, consistency, and genuine care. That kind of sustained leadership doesn't happen by accident. It happens because someone is willing to show up - year after year - without seeking recognition. On behalf of the Chapter, I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mike and his bride Nancy for everything they have done to keep this organization strong.

As we move forward, our focus this year is simple and intentional: Camaraderie, Community, and Legacy.

(Continued on page 3)



February Program ... Central Florida Marine Corps Foundation Upcoming plans, Presented by new Executive Chairman Drina Black

Exciting things are in the development stages at the Central Florida Marine Corps Foundation under the leadership of the new Executive Chair-person, Drina Black.

Drina is no stranger to the CF Chapter and we are thrilled to have her visit with the new title, to talk about upcoming plans for the Foundation.

Drina enlisted Open Contract and was awarded the MOS 1345, Heavy Equipment Operator. She served 4 years and was stationed in MCAS YUMA MWSS 371 ENGINEER OPS.

As an Account Executive at Simple Helix, Drina brings a strong focus on customer excellence, ensuring clients receive tailored solutions that meet their unique needs.

The CFMCF is a 501 (c) 19 charitable, not-for-profit organization comprised of Veterans and current members of the United States Armed Services. Each year the foundation provides thousands of dollars in grants that help drive the recipients to succeed in higher education, community engagement, and more. In 2026, the Central Florida Marine Corps Foundation is strengthening its mission to connect our local Marine Corps units with the Central Florida community in a more meaningful and consistent way.



The U.S.S. Ben Franklin ... a Ship Remembered

By
Sgt. Art Dreves

Editor's Note: We lost Sgt. Art Dreves, who had served as Treasurer of our chapter for several years, in 2019. He contributed many quality articles for publication in the Ooo Rah newsletter. This article, and others, may be found on our chapter website under the "In Their Own Words" heading. Art served in C-1-1 in the Pacific during WWII.

It was March, 1945, and the 1st Marine Division was aboard the transports, leaving Pavuvu, in the Russell Islands, for the final time. Pavuvu had been the home to the 1st Marine Division between campaigns, and it was bittersweet to say farewell to that beautiful tropical resort (although "resort" may be overstating the accommodations!) At any rate, we were off to a new part of the world, and ultimately, to some of the most intense combat we would encounter during the War.

A six-day sea cruise took us to Ulithi, an atoll in the Caroline Islands with a large lagoon, well suited for anchorage (this, we would later learn, was the principal staging area for the U.S. invasion of Okinawa). It was here that we witnessed an amazing piece of U.S. Naval History, up close. After sailing for the better part of a week, we must have pulled into the anchorage overnight, because when I went topside in the morning for chow, as far as the eye could see, there were nothing but ships -- ships of every class the Navy had in its arsenal -- a thousand ships, it seemed to me (though recorded history says there were only 617). Still, it was clearly one of the biggest armadas ever assembled during the War.

At some point, they wanted to move our craft to a different location in the lagoon. I don't recall exactly why we had to change our anchorage, but we moved very slowly through that sea of ships, and thus occurred our encounter with a great warrior of Naval history.

We were probably doing about 5 knots when the public address speaker came on, and called for all hands on deck -- that meant Marines, too. We were called to attention and told to face the starboard side. There she was -- the USS *BEN FRANKLIN* -- still smoking, with a bad list to starboard. We could see immense wreckage -- burned aircraft, stacked on the stern, and a huge, gaping hole in the flight deck, about mid-ship. All hands on our ship were given the order to right-hand salute.

Then came the most vividly memorable moment. There were at least a half-dozen shrouded bodies laid out on the edge of the deck, and a small squad of Marines with rifles at port arms. As we slid by, the command for a gun salute was given, and the shrouded bodies were slipped into the sea -- a most moving event, and one I will never forget.

The *Franklin*, we learned, had taken two direct hits from a Japanese dive-bomber a few days earlier; this was actually the second time she had been hit by the Japanese -- the first being six months earlier -- but this time, the damage was far more severe.

By all rights, the *Franklin* should have sunk. It took on so much water, it was listing 13 degrees; it was heavily damaged internally; and a majority of its crew were killed or injured -- but the tenacity of the *Franklin's* remaining crew refused to let the ship die.

We were honored to see her that day, the day she began making her way home to the States. As history records, after initial repairs at Pearl Harbor, the USS *Ben Franklin* made the rest of the journey under her own power -- halfway around the world, and all the way back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. She remained a proud part of the U.S. Navy until 1967, when she was finally taken for scrap-metal.

As for us -- our fortunes took us in a different direction, departing Ulithi a few days later for what would be our April 1st, 1945 landing ... on the Japanese island of Okinawa ... but *that* is yet another story.



This was roughly our view of the Franklin as we pulled alongside her.

(Continued from page 1—Ramblings)

Camaraderie means strengthening the bonds between Marines - no matter when or where you served. Community means staying connected to the people and places around us and continuing to serve beyond the uniform. Legacy means honoring those who came before us while ensuring Marine Corps values are passed to the next generation.

My call to action is straightforward: stay engaged, be involved. If not with our Chapter, then with another Marine Corps or veteran organization that speaks to you. The strength of our community depends on our participation and leadership.

I look forward to seeing you at our events, hearing your stories, and building the next chapter of this legacy together.

Semper Fidelis! - Barron

CONGRATULATIONS TO SSGT FLORENTINO ON RECEIVING OUR INAUGURAL "BLUE DIAMOND PERFORMANCE AWARD"

The presentation was made in support of Recruiting Station Orlando's end of year awards and holiday party last month. Our sincere appreciation to Maj Matt Galadyk and SgtMaj William Ferrer for welcoming our contribution.

The Marine Corps does two things - makes Marines and wins America's battles. The **1st Marine Division** has been doing the latter for over 85 years now and the first step in making Marines is to recruit the men and women who are to the task of meeting the standards. Our sincere appreciation to RS Orlando for their outstanding performance this past year and for being an integral part of our community. Semper Fidelis!



Baron Mills represents the Central Florida Chapter presenting the "Blue diamond Performance Award" to Staff Sergeant Jonathon Florentino

Hero For Kids "Veteran of the Year" Award

Recently, Barron Mills had the opportunity to attend the 7th Annual A Hero For Kids Real Heroes Don't Wear Capes Awards Gala. As part of this great event, they hand out some community awards and he was privileged (and surprised) to be recognized as Veteran of the Year!



Barron Mills with John Kalish, founder of "Hero For Kids," at their recent gala. Barron received their "veteran of the Year" award.

Barron states that, "What this recognition allows me to do is help put the spotlight on this great charity and all the impactful work that John Kalish and their amazing team does for the Central Florida community."

A Hero For Kids is a veteran-founded all-volunteer 501(c)(3) non-profit that relies solely on the generosity of like-minded individuals, businesses, and organizations to support their mission of making our community a better place. Their efforts and support focus on children, Veterans, and First Responders...what they consider to be both the present and future of what can be a happy, healthy, growing and thriving community. Learn more about them here <https://aheroforkids.org/>

Barron expresses an extra thank you to Maria Cherjovsky for nominating him and for Patricia Murphy being alongside him for another meaningful night.

**NEW OFFICERS OF
C.F. CHAPTER, 1ST MARINE
DIVISION
ASSOCIATION
2026—2027**

At the December meeting of the Central Florida Chapter, we voted on the slate of officers that were presented by the Nominating Committee Chair, Mike Galyean.

There was an opportunity at the meeting to take nominations from the floor for any of the positions named below.

President—Barron Mills
Vice President—Chris Via
Treasurer—Carlos Cuevas
Secretary—Susan Finnigan
Chaplain—Terry Strassburg
Sergeant-at-Arms—
Ron DeVasto
Chapter Representative - TBD

National Association

The following C.F. Chapter members are currently serving the national 1st Marine Division Association in a position of leadership:

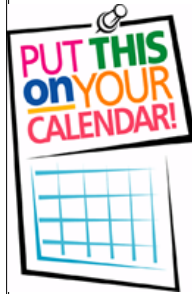
Sgt.-at-Arms—Susan Finnigan
 Deputy VP East—Mark Cleaves
 Deputy-at-Large (DAL) -
 John Matthews
 Director—Mike Galyean
 (Past Pres.)
 Scholarship Fund Director—
 Mike Galyean

Marines, our association is reaching a point where its financial status is threatening the very existence of our association. If you are a LIFE MEMBER and not paying yearly dues, please consider making a donation of at least in the amount of a yearly membership.

I would urge any of you to consider making a small recurring monthly donation to the association. It's easy to do. Just go to the association website, <https://1stmda.org/>

Click on the "DONATE" button at the top and select your amount. Click "MONTHLY" and select your amount.

Mark Your Calendars



**SATURDAY,
Feb. 7 ...**
 Regular meeting
 of C.F. Chapter

**Thursday, Feb.
12...** Valentine
 Sweetheart
 Dinner

Saturday, March 7... Chapter
 Exec. Comm meeting, TBD

Saturday, April 4 ... Regular
 Chapter Meeting, C.F. Chapter

**The Larry E. Smedley
 Detachment of the Marine
 Corps League—**
 Monthly Meeting, 2nd Tues, -
 7pm – 8pm
 American Legion Post 243
 Or call Luis Cambal
 (407)405-1961

**“Heart of Florida”
 Women Marines Assoc.
 Chapter**
 Meets Second Saturday -10am .
 West Osceola Branch Library
 305 Campus St,
 Kissimmee, FL 34747
 Contact: Susan Finnigan
susan@lynnamorris.com

**Central Florida Marine Corps
 Foundation:**
CFMCF1775@gmail.com

Central Florida Chapter

[http://
 www.cfc1stmardiv.com/](http://www.cfc1stmardiv.com/)

Thank you, Rick Dreves!

**Visit the “In Their Own
 Words” page for anecdotal
 articles by members.**



1ST MARINE DIVISION ASSOCIATION

~IMPORTANT~

*Central Florida Chapter members (whether membership is regular or associate) need to be members of the 1st Marine Division Association...contact the FMDA office or visit the **website** give it a look!*

www.1stmarinedivisionassociation.org

Address and contact information

1st Marine Division Association
3784 Mission Ave Suite 148/608
Oceanside CA 92058

Call Us : [1 \(760\) 763 3268](tel:17607633268)
 Open from Monday to Friday
 08.00 AM - 16.00 PM PDT

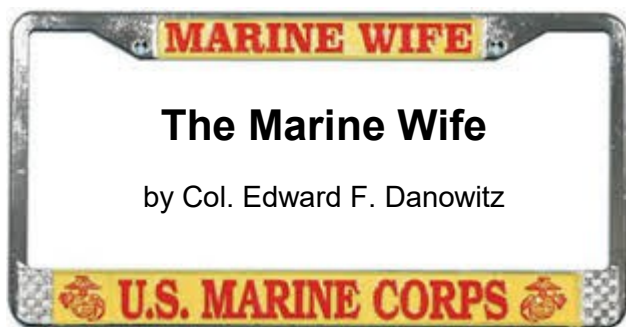
Association President:

Ralph Witkin
 Email: ReconBn70@gmail.com

Staff

Dennis J. Coady
dennis.oldbreed@fmda.us

June Cormier
June.OldBreed@FMDA.us



The Marine Wife

by Col. Edward F. Danowitz

No monument has yet been cast in marble, bronze or stone,

No songs of praise have yet been raised for the valor she has shown.

And but those few who lived life through are mindful of the strife,

That came to those who bravely chose to be a Marine Corps wife.

It mattered not when came the call to move in new directions,

The choice was but to take what came with all its imperfections.

To be alone in peace or war to anchor firm this union,
And pray that God would grant the gift of a lasting, full reunion.

No Saint deserves more glory, no hero more acclaim,
Than the wife who lived life in the Corps, in service without fame.

So stand with me, my brothers, and let our toasts ring true,

For we know that it was only she who made a Marine of you.

Editor's note... We lost Colonel Danowitz in 2012. He was a founding member of the CF chapter in 1988. His beautiful wife Mitzi passed away 2 years ago having lived to the age of 102.

The Saga of the Stolen Marine Corps Guidon

In 1971, amid the long, uneasy nights of the Vietnam War, a small drama unfolded far from the front lines. Two or perhaps more Army soldiers from the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal), recently ordered to disengage from combat and awaiting reassignment, found themselves in the rear with time on their hands and alcohol in their systems.



One night, fueled by heavy drinking and questionable judgment, the soldiers conceived a bold and ill-advised mission: to steal a Marine Corps Guidon. Their target was the headquarters of the 11th Motor Transport Battalion, a nearby Marine unit that likely never imagined becoming the focus of such a caper.

The ringleader of the operation was Sergeant Lonnie Smith. Now, more than fifty years later, Sgt. Smith recalls only fragments of that night: the haze of alcohol, the thrill of the act, and the unmistakable red and gold of the Marine Corps flag. What he does remember clearly is what followed: the Guidon remained in his possession for half a century, carried through a lifetime far removed from the jungles of Vietnam.

Time has brought reflection, and with it, a sense of responsibility. With the urging of his wife, Joan, Sgt. Smith now believes the Guidon's journey should come full circle, returned at last to its rightful owners, a small but meaningful act of closure from a war filled with unfinished stories.

This transfer of the stolen guidon from the culprit to the Marine corps will transpire at the February meeting of the 1st Marine Division Assoc. chapter.



Marine Trivia

The license plate of the Commandant of the Marine Corps reads "1775."

SAVE THE DATE
Thursday, February 12
"Sweetheart Dinner"

Plans in the works!
If you are interested in learning more.
EMAIL: cfc.1stMarDiv@gmail.com



HOTEL SELECTED FOR 1ST MARINE DIVISION ASSOC. 2026 REUNION IN SAN DIEGO

Barron and Kristen Mills

Scheduled from August 24 through August 30

The DoubleTree by Hilton San Diego Bayside will host the overnight accommodations for 2025 annual reunion.

Our group code is **91J** and our group rates are valid for booking through **08/03/26**.

Click here [First Marine Division 79th Annual Reunion](#) to proceed directly to your reservation desk.

The group rate of \$169 per night is available for three days pre and post event based on room availability via the provided link or contact Hilton Global reservations directly at (888) 446-6677.



(Minutes—continued from page 7)

Announcements (Continued)

4. Wreaths Across America – Cape Canaveral – 10am Dec 13, 2025 <https://www.wreathsaacrossamerica.org/pages/15629/overview/?relatedId=0>

5. One More Wave - <https://onemorewave.com/>

6. Next Chapter meeting – Sat. Feb 7, Program TBD

Raffle drawing – Winners: John and Linda Gionet, Brad Sokoly, Ron DeVasto... Mike Pomakis

Closing Carlos Cuevas

Assisted with load for Toys for Tots

Adjourn 12:06pm

Mike and Nancy
Galyean



The Central Florida Chapter

wishes to recognize and honor its members
now serving in the Corps Eternal



Plt.Sgt. Joe Adamik (2014)
Capt. John Adamson 2015
Sgt. Ray Bauer (2015)
Cpl. Chester Bened (2012)
Joyce Bowden, assoc. (2017)
Sgt. Tim Broughton (2013)
Sgt. Glenn Brown (2011)
Col. Harry Clarke (2013)
Amy Clarke, assoc. (2017)
Col. Richard A Connell (2022)
Pfc. John Cromwell (2010)
M.Sgt. Louis Curtis
Wade Curtis (2011)
Col. Ed Danowitz (2012)
1stSgt. Richard DeVasto (2019)
Sgt. Arthur Dreves (2019)
Plt. Sgt Robert Fincher (2014)
Olga Fincher, assoc. (2022)

Capt. David Fowkes (2021)
Capt. William Harwood (2010)
Sgt. Elmer Hawkins, Jr (2025)
Lt.Col. Dick Holt (2008)
Carolyn Immerman, assoc. (2017)
Sgt. Wade Jones (2012)
Sgt. Joe Karlberg (2019)
1stSgt. Russell Kauffman (2023)
Cpl. John "Rick" Kennedy (2012)
Cpl. Louis Lang (2010)
Sgt. Maj. Les LeBlanc (2005)
Capt. Art Littlefield (2024)
C.W. "Bill" Marks (2014)
M.Sgt. Malcolm MacLean (2007)
GySgt. Rudy Miller (2008)
Capt. Ray Nielsen (2008)
Sgt. Donald Neiss (2009)
Col. Patrick Otoole (2018)

Pfc. Athanasse "Al" Parsons (2013)
Capt. Jack Paxton (2018)
MSgt Edward Payton (2015)
Sgt. Victor Petris (2015)
1Lt. Steve Reich (2021)
GySgt. Charles Ross (2013)
1Lt. George Schultz (2008)
Cpl Don Schyberg (2017)
Col. Bill Tate (2019)
Pfc. "Wild Bill" Taylor (2010)
Col. John Terry (2018)
LtCol. John Tomlinson (2014)
M.Sgt. Dale Wasson (2009)
Cpl. James Weinberg (2022)
Sgt. Carl Wenhold (2017)
LtCol. Erich H. Wieler (2022)
Col. Paul Wilson (2019)

Semper Fi, Ladies and Gentlemen.

You'll always be remembered.

MINUTES
Central Florida Chapter, 1st Marine Division Association
Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025
Fiddler's Green Irish Pub
Winter Park, FL

Call to Order, Opening comments.....10:34am..... Mike Galyean
 Opening Prayer Carlos Cuevas
 Pledge to the Flag ... Ron DeVasto
 Welcome to guests..... 27 in attendance..... Member Introductions
 Secretary's Report Approved as printed..... Susan Finnigan
 Treasurer's Report ...\$2,323.62 Savings, \$2,873.23 Checking, \$1,712.03 Paypal, PX Chits Spent...Total:
 \$6,908.88.....Approved..... Carlos Cuevas

PROGRAM: Col. Mike Fallon, career Marine, Historian, Author Mike Galyean
 Book signing – Hill 119, to follow meeting.

Business

I. 2025 Marine Corps Birthday “SOS Breakfast”

1. After Action report Mike Galyean, Carlos Cuevas.
2. Exec. Committee meeting Saturday, January 10 to begin planning for 2026
3. Suggestions? \$2,960 – Reg, Raffle - \$714.79 Total Income - \$3674.79 – Expenses were
 \$2,213.76 - \$1,461.03 Net

II. 1st Marine Division Assoc. report..... Mike Galyean, Susan Finnigan

1. **2026 Reunion**- Susan Finnigan, the reunion chair, to give up-date.
2. Current financial status of the association. Your assistance is needed.
 Members of CF Chapter (Regular and Associate) need to be members of the national association. We are on the “honor system.” Consider a small (preferably recurring) donation.
3. FMDA website: <https://1stmda.org/> Check it out. An impressive website.

III. Election of 2026-2027 officers. Mike Galyean

1. Proposed slate: President – Barron Mills; Vice President – Chris Via*; Treasurer – Carlos Cuevas;
 a. Secretary – Susan Finnigan*; Sgt.-at-Arms – Ron DeVasto; Chaplain – Terry Strassburg;
 b. Chapter Representative (Director) – TBD
2. Nominations from the floor?
3. Vote – Approved as stated
4. Mike Galyean to be removed from our Addition Financial account and Barron Mills to be added in his place.

IV. Russ Kauffman Memorial Stocking Stuffing Event.

1. MC League, supported by FMDA. For residents of the Lake Nona CLC.
2. Delivery time TBD.

Motion:

“That the CF Chapter FMDA contribute \$300 toward the stockings for Lake Nona CLC.”

Motion approved

V. Note received from **Rick Dreves** with appreciation for the card and gift.

VI. Announcements

1. **1st Marine Division challenge coins for sale - \$10**
2. **Barron Mills** – Local Veterans Programs; Camaraderie Program; Veterans Beer Club, etc.
3. **Executive Committee meeting 10 January, 2026.** Location TBD.

(Continued on page 6)

Central Florida Chapter
1st Marine Division Association
746 McIntyre Ave.
Winter Park, FL 32789



In order to belong to the Central Florida Chapter, you must...

Be a member of the 1st Marine Division Association

World War II ~ North China ~ Korea ~ Cold War ~ Vietnam ~ Gulf War ~ Iraqi Freedom ~ War on Terror

Call the 1st Marine Division Association in Oceanside, CA at (760) 763-3268 or email june.ldbreed@fmda.us for information

Central Florida Chapter

Select Membership type: ____ Regular (\$20) ~ ____ Associate (\$20) ~ ____ Life (\$200) ~ Active Duty(\$10) ____
____ New ____ Renewal

PLEASE PRINT:

(Rank / Grade) (First Name) (Middle Initial) (Last Name)

Number and Street or P.O. Box #)

Spouses name

(City)

(State)

(Zip)

I was with: (list two units, max) _____
(Company - Battalion - Regiment/Squadron - Group)

WWII ____ China ____ Korea ____ Cold War ____ Vietnam ____ Gulf War ____ Iraqi Freedom ____ War on Terror ____

Email address: _____ Phone No. (____) _____ Recommended by _____

Please enclose \$20 for Regular / Associate Membership; \$200 for Life Membership; \$10 for Active Duty
Make checks payable to: Cent. Fla. Chap., 1st Mar. Div. Assoc.. ~~~ Return to Mike Galyean, 746 McIntyre Ave., Winter Park, FL 32789
You can now pay on-line by using PayPal. Go to the chapter website at <http://www.cfc1stmardiv.com/>