



President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



Looking back, the first two months of the third quarter were a bit slow as several Board members were on vacation. In contrast, September

was busy and productive.

Over twenty members and guests gathered at the Las Flores adobe on September 20. I was pleased to see and hear about the progress that has been made in restoring this National Historic Landmark. An accompanying article provides additional information on what has happened and what lies ahead. I thank Danielle Page of the Base Environmental Security for setting up the event from the Marine Corps side.

While several members of our Board of Directors and I were at Las Flores, Len Hayes, Don Gressly, and Joe Kirkpatrick represented our Society at Camp Pendleton's 18th Annual Retiree Exposition held at the South Mesa Club. Jim King and the Mechanized Museum provided several vintage vehicles that helped advertise our presence. Their efforts increased awareness of CPHS to a significant number of people with ties to Camp Pendleton.

In another effort to increase awareness of CPHS, I had the pleasure of speaking to about 100 members of the Carlsbad Community Church on September 16.

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LAST OF THE FIRST CLUB

by Col. Richard B. Rothwell, USMC (Ret.)

PART 1 OF 2 PARTS

Editor's note: The 1st Marine Division has been home-based at Camp Pendleton since 1948, when it returned from its World War II combat and occupational duties. The term "home" is relative because the Division has been absent for extended periods while answering our nation's call in Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, and several places in between. This is part of the 1st Marine Division story and, therefore, part of Camp Pendleton history.

"Last Man" clubs are hardly new. Some say the idea began in the 1650s with upside-down Ponzi investment schemes called tontines. They were named after a Neapolitan banker who invented them and became a popular way to raise and invest money. Investors paid a sum into the fund and received annual dividends based on the success of their investment. To make the game more exciting, the shares of any investor who died were divided among the survivors. This, of course, raised the possibility of huge gains for the last man standing. Unfortunately, it also encouraged age gaming. More than one investor was known to have placed his shares under the name of an infant son or daughter. Worse, the rules also encouraged some investors to do away with competitors who stood between them and the benefit of being that last man. Such behavior eventually led to tontines being banned in the United States and Great Britain.

Last Man Bottle Clubs are a more gentlemanly adaptation of this earlier rough and tumble scheme. Typically, comrades from a common adventure, often a military campaign, designate a bottle of fine or not so fine spirits to be kept unopened until only one of their number remains alive. The lone survivor then opens the bottle and drinks a toast to those who have fallen before.

Though less likely to bring out the darker side of human nature, last man bottle clubs have also led to unintended consequences. In July 1885, 34 Civil War veterans of Minnesota Company B formed one of the first such clubs in the United States. The prize was a bottle of wine donated by one of the founders. Each year the group met in a room containing 34 chairs. As years passed fewer and fewer chairs were occupied. By 1928, only three of the original 34 members remained alive. What started as a soldierly, comradely gathering to remember deeds of their youth had become a painful reminder of old friends lost and of the inevitable fate of those who remained. The group disbanded that year.

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Shortly before he died in 1935, Charles Lockwood, the last survivor of Company B, was quoted as saying, "Don't any one ever start another club like this."

Members of a World War II last man bottle club in the state of Washington State take a lighter approach, greeting each other with gallows humor: "How are you doing?" "Great!" "Darn."

Mr. Lockwood's admonition notwithstanding, something compels men who have faced great danger together to keep their memories alive through last man clubs. Perhaps they do it to perpetuate a strong bond forged in combat. Perhaps they hoped it would keep their accomplishments from being forgotten. Regardless of why they do it or whether the "last man" will see his status as an honor or burden, last man bottle clubs remain common among warriors. The Marines and sailors of the 1st Marine Division who fought on Guadalcanal and follow-on Pacific Theater campaigns were no different.

The division landed on Guadalcanal and the nearby, smaller islands of Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo on August 7, 1942. It was the first predominately American ground offensive of World War II. The battles for the three outlying islands were fierce, but short. All were secured within two days. In contrast, the main landing on Guadalcanal met only light resistance. That soon changed.

The Japanese recognized the strategic importance of Guadalcanal to their continued advances and, if lost, as



*Guadalcanal sniper hunt
Official USMC photo*

a threat to their major base in Rabaul. They countered ferociously, bringing reinforcements by sea to stop the Marines. Ashore, the jungle battles against foes and disease were fierce and deadly, fought by geographically isolated forces, dependent on their navies to sustain them. At sea American and Japanese ships and aircraft clashed in a mighty test of power and will. The outcome on the deep would determine the victor ashore.

Relieved by other Marine and Army units in early December, the war-weary 1st Marine Division headed to Australia for rest and rehabilitation and to prepare for its next campaign. While the final outcome on Guadalcanal appeared certain, the replacements continued the struggle until February 1943, when the Japanese finally withdrew the remnants of their forces.

It is hard for many of us today to understand or fully appreciate the significance of what the 1st Marine Division and the U.S. Navy accomplished at Guadalcanal. The advance of Japanese forces in the Southern Pacific was stopped: Australia and New Zealand were saved. On the home front, American defeats at Pearl Harbor, Wake Island, and the Philippines, if not avenged, were mitigated by the resounding victory. To the men who fought with the 1st Marine Division a legacy was born.

Two years to the day after the landing on Guadalcanal 14 Marines who had participated in that battle gathered at the Piedmont Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia to reminisce and establish the "Last of the First," reportedly the first U.S. last man's bottle club of World War II.



*Supplies from the sea on Guadalcanal
Official USMC photo*

LAS FLORES RESTORATION UPDATE

by Col. Richard B. Rothwell, USMC (Ret.)

On September 17, Doug Porter gave 21 CPHS members and friends a walkthrough briefing of his ongoing efforts to stabilize and restore the Las Flores adobe -- a Monterey style home dating from the mid 1860's and National Historic Landmark located on Camp Pendleton near the Las Pulgas Gate . Mr. Porter is a faculty member at the University of Vermont Graduate School of Engineering and an expert on adobe restoration. He has been deeply involved with this project since 2002. In the past year, CPHS has donated \$28,000 towards the restoration of Las Flores.



CPHS members at Las Flores

When the Marine Corps purchased Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores in 1942, the McGee family had been living in the Las Flores adobe for 60 years. President Roosevelt, who visited Camp Pendleton for its official dedication in September 1942, assured Jane McGee, the family patriarch, that she and her family could continue to live there as long as the current generation survived. After that last member died in 1967, the home lay vacant and, as is common with vacant adobes, it quickly began to deteriorate.



Doug Porter addressing CPHS members and friends

Mr. Porter explained that when he first saw the building, it was in a sad state. Not only had the fragile adobe walls begun to waste away, but the historic home had also been badly vandalized. All doors and windows were broken or gone. His first task was to stabilize the building -- stop water seepage that is death to adobes and repair the vandalism. It was not enough just to fix these problems. Work had to be accomplished using authentic materials and methods that preserved its historic character.



Exterior restoration of Las Flores Carriage House

One of the first tasks was to remove the existing window and door frames and send them along with matching locally grown wood to restoration experts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. That repair took six-weeks.

Improvements to drainage systems at the base of the building prevented further weakening of the walls. Workers carefully inserted steel bands in the structure so that all walls would sway together during earthquakes, reducing the danger of damage.

In 2009, Porter and his team fitted the adobe with an unusual type of fire suppression system. Normally, such systems emit a heavy spray of water to quickly douse flames. While that technique may stop the blaze, it can be disastrous to adobes by "melting" the walls. The fire suppression system installed at Las Flores emits a mist of water designed to douse the fire without damaging the walls.



Doug Porter explains interior restoration

Restoration of the main house exterior is largely complete. Future work will focus on its interior and on the exterior of the adjoining carriage house. CPHS will continue to support this project.

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Membership was opened to Marines and sailors of the 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force Pacific, who had “actually participated in active combat operations during World War II and who are active duty or who left the service under honorable conditions.” By August 1944, the Division had gone on to fight in New Guinea and New Britain, making some 20,000 veterans eligible. What the founders could not know was that the battles for Peleliu and Okinawa lay ahead. By V-J Day more than 50,000 Marines and sailors would be eligible to join.

The group elected Warrant Officer Luther A. McLendon as president. Sergeant James R. Northrop must have been a very popular man that evening. His friends elected him vice president, secretary, treasurer, and custodian of the bottle. The reason for his popularity is lost in history, but there is precedent to suggest that he may have been nominated and elected while out of the room.

The founders elected Lieutenant General Alexander Archer Vandergrift, who commanded the Division during the Guadalcanal and Solomon Island Campaigns, as honorary president. However, if he happened to attend a meeting, he would have to leave his insignia at the door. By-laws stated that there were to be no officers or enlisted -- just members.

Part 2 of 2 of Last of the First Club in next issue.

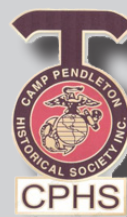
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The hard work of Cal Frantz has again paid off. The County of San Diego has for the second year in a row awarded CPHS a grant of \$3,000 to support the restoration of Las Flores. We are working with the Base staff on the best way to use this money.

I would like to recognize and thank volunteers Don Tryon and Bill Parsons for their research and writing of articles for our 3d Quarter Groundbreaker. Well done, gentlemen.

As always, I thank you, our members, for your continued support. You are vital to our successful efforts to help the Marine Corps preserve and tell the history of the property of Mission San Luis Rey which later became part of Rancho Margarita y Las Flores, the historical buildings/sites which trace their origins to 1827 coupled with the history of Camp Pendleton starting in 1942.

Richard B. Rothwell



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