SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS

MEMORANDUM

Ball Celebration Memo 24 July 2020

SMMC MEMO 01-20

What Matters Most. Marines, unique to the Marine Corps is how we celebrate the legacy and history of our Corps; specifically, the Marine Corps Birthday. With the fall comes the time to intentionally reflect and focus on what is most important to us as Marines. We do this wherever we are in the world and in every operational state. This year, that state likely will be in one of a global pandemic.

First, we must continue to train, to fight in order that we continue to win! Leaders are trusted to ensure safety of training, pandemic or no.

Second, we must maintain our long legacy and traditions as the world's finest fighting force. One of our most cherished traditions is the celebration of the birth of the Corps. Under normal circumstances, this time of year sees commands all over the Marine Corps well into the planning of their Marine Corps Ball ceremonies. The planning consists of looking for formal occasion venues that offer dinner, dancing, and the space to celebrate with our fellow Marines, friends, spouses, and significant others. We relish "going big" and making a grand celebration of the founding of our Corps. Like you, I enjoy these occasions, and look forward to when we are not challenged by COVID mitigation measures such as travel restrictions, social distancing, and size restrictions on gatherings.

Although health protection measures may alter this year's festivities, the most meaningful aspects will remain untouched. Allow me to share with you my most memorable marking of our birthday. In 2005, I was a 1stSgt in G Company, 2d Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment conducting combat operations in Iraq. On the evening of November 10th, a week into offensive operations, my company commander and I patrolled through the streets of Husabayh to each platoon's defensive position. We had a small formation with each platoon, we cut an MRE Pound Cake, we presented a piece to the oldest and youngest Marine in the platoon, and we read General Lejeune's Birthday Message. We did all this by flashlight. As we spent the night moving from position to position, I was reminded of what is most unique and most important to us as a Corps, that is: being with Marines, accomplishing the mission, and staying true to our customs and courtesies, even in the midst of our shared adversity.

I would ask that no matter the situation, no matter the restrictions, we ensure that we mark the occasion of the birth of our Corps. Although many celebrations this year will be conducted differently, we still have the opportunity and obligation to do what Marines all over the world have done in years past - recognize the birth of our Corps no matter where we are and no matter what we are doing.

Lastly, I ask that each unit and command maintain the required safety measures when determining how you will celebrate the birth of our Corps. Remember, the only required elements are a troop formation (it can be a socially distanced one), recognition of the oldest and youngest Marine, cutting of a traditional cake, and reading of General Lejeune's birthday message.

Be safe, be wise, and always, TRAIN TO FIGHT AND WIN!

Mission First, Marines Always,

Troy E. Black

TROY E. BLACK
19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps