



President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



As 2012 begins, CPHS remains strong and vibrant.

Restoration of the Las Flores adobe under the direction of Doug

Porter of the University of Vermont Graduate School of Engineering continues. His work is funded in part by our \$28,000 donation.

We are planning a series of events for members living near Camp Pendleton, beginning on February 1 with a visit to an invitation only, private museum in San Diego known as Only Yesterday and Hall of Heroes. It features the owner's extensive, personal collection of vintage automobiles and World War II memorabilia. Having visited it before, I know that those who join us are in for a treat.

Members of the Board will man an information booth at the annual Marine West Military Exposition at the former SNCO Club at Camp Pendleton. This event will be held on February 1, 2012 and our goal and purpose will be to spread the word about CPHS and its mission. Concurrently, during this event, we will be seeking any new or potential members.

We are planning another member event during April 2012 which includes a visit to the Assault Amphibian Vehicle (AAV) School and museum located in the Del Mar area of Camp Pendleton.

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LAST OF THE FIRST CLUB

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

PART 2 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.

Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the division during the Guadalcanal and Solomon Island campaigns and 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps, inspects the Last of the First bottle at a division reunion.

Ralph McGill, editor and publisher of the Atlanta Constitution and a World War I Marine, donated a bottle of Joseph Etournaud & Company Extra Grand Fine Champagne, 1st Grand Cru Cognac to be opened by the last survivor among the Marines and sailors who served in combat with the division during World War II.

Reports from that time estimated the bottle to be over 100 years old and quite valuable. That speculation regarding age was incorrect. Maison Etournaud, which produced the cognac, was not established until 1856. According to cognac heritage experts, the Last of the First bottle most likely dates from 1920 to 1925. Even if its reported age was mistaken, the bottle had great value to club members. McGill placed it in the vault of the 1st National Bank of Atlanta for safekeeping between annual meetings. Fittingly, he wrapped it in the August 9, 1942 edition of the Constitution that reported the landings on Guadalcanal.



Leatherneck file photo

LAST MAN BOTTLE

Photo by Michael Mustacchi/
Marines' Memorial



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One year later the Last of the First met for the second time. That gathering was more formal. It included the cutting of a cake baked in the shape of Guadalcanal and a screening of the movie "Pride of the Marines," starring John Garfield and Eleanor Parker. Garfield portrayed Sergeant (then Private) Albert Andrew Schmid, a machine gunner who won the Navy Cross for repelling a Japanese attack on Guadalcanal.



*Official USMC Photo
Sgt. Al Schmid
receives his
Navy Cross*

Following its establishment in 1947, the 1st Marine Division Association assumed formal custody of the bottle, which remained safely stowed in the Atlanta bank vault, being removed only for formal functions.

In 1965 Sergeant Bob Bowen, a reporter for the Leatherneck magazine, an official Marine Corps publication at the time, received travel orders. He was to proceed to Atlanta, withdraw the bottle from the 1st National Bank, bring it to the 1st Marine Division Association annual reunion at the Park Sheraton Hotel in Washington D.C., and return it safely. In preparation for the journey the Cognac Producers of France insured the bottle against theft, loss, or willful destruction for \$25,000.

The transfer was made with military pomp and planning, beginning with the bank president formally presenting the bottle to Sergeant Bowen, resplendent in his dress blues. A Brinks armored car escorted the sergeant and his charge to the airport. Once on the plane, he handcuffed the bottle to his ankle. Sergeant Bowen reported that the final toast with the cognac was not expected "until around 2000 or 2010." That estimate misjudged the longevity of Last of the First members.

Leatherneck staff member Sgt Bob Bowen in August 1965 securely moving the last man's bottle from the vaults of Atlanta's First National Bank to Washington, D.C., for a First Marine Division reunion.



Leatherneck file photo

Ralph McGill, donor of the cognac, died in 1969, but the bottle remained in the Atlanta bank until 1988, when the 1st Marine Division Association authorized Major Arthur Weise, USMC (Ret) to transport it to the Command Museum at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. The museum accepted it as a temporary loan, keeping it secure in its safe.

By this time the ranks of World War II veterans were thinning noticeably. The same thoughts that must have gone through the minds of old timers in Minnesota's Company B began to surface. In 1991, a 1st Marine Division Association member wrote to the executive director, pointing out that many World War II veterans had died and many of those who remained had become "teetotalers." Rather than wait for the inevitable and waste an opportunity, he recommended that the bottle be opened at the next annual meeting and, starting with the oldest eligible person present, each veteran drink a thimble full until it was empty. His suggestion was noted without action.

The bottle's odyssey continued in 1999 when the association entrusted Gunnery Sergeant Luis O. Arce USMC, a member of the 1st Marine Division Band, to courier it back across country to the association headquarters in Northern Virginia. When the headquarters displaced to Oceanside, California in 2003, the bottle made its third cross-country trip, this time as general baggage without an official escort. There it languished in relative obscurity until 2005 when the association president, Captain Gerald Pendas USMC (Ret), discovered it wrapped in paper lying on the floor near a trash can in the back of the small headquarters. Recognizing its historical value, he placed it in a secured commercial storage space where it remained until 2006, when Colonel Len Hayes USMC (Ret), the association's executive director, found it while conducting an inventory. Hayes saw the need for a better way to preserve and display this treasure. The Marines Memorial Club (MMC) in San Francisco seemed a fitting site.

The MMC is known as the Crossroads of the Corps because since its founding in 1946 so many Marines have met there going to and from destinations in the Pacific. Colonel Hayes wrote to the MMC CEO, Major General Mike Myatt USMC (Ret) and former CG of the 1st Marine Division, asking if the Club would take

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CONNECTION BETWEEN SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO AND RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA y LAS FLORES HISTORY

by Tom Ostensen, President of San Juan Capistrano Historical Society

The connection of San Juan Capistrano's history and the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores dates back to the secularization of the Franciscan mission's under the governance of Mexico. The Pico brothers, Andres and Pio obtained the 133,440 acres of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores in a Mexican Land Grant in 1841 by Governor Juan Alvarado.

Shortly thereafter they obtained additional Mexican Land Grants to the Rancho Mission Viejo and Rancho Trabuco increasing their land holdings to approximately 202,058 acres.

Through difficult financial times, the Picos sold their land holdings to their brother-in-law Juan (John) Forster in 1863. The Forster family, who had been living on the grounds of the abandoned Mission San Juan Capistrano, moved to the rancho and began to expand the two room Pico adobe to include 18 rooms. Juan Forster lived on the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores until his death in 1882.

The Forster heirs, deeply in debt at the time, sold the ranch to San Franciscan James Flood. Flood, the Comstock Lode "Silver King" promised a half interest in the rancho to his friend Richard O'Neill, a San Francisco successful beef wholesaler and cattleman, with the agreement that O'Neill would manage the Ranch.

In 1907, James Flood Jr. fulfilled his father's promise to O'Neill and conveyed an undivided half interest of the ranch. Shortly thereafter, due to declining health, O'Neill deeded his interest to his son Jerome.

In 1923, the ranch incorporated into the Santa Margarita Company.

In 1939, the Santa Margarita Company was dissolved and the ranch was divided between the related families. Jerome's younger brother, Richard J. O'Neill Sr. and his sister Alice O'Neill took



possession of the northern portions of the ranch, Rancho Trabuco and Mission Viejo and the Baumgartners and Floods took possession of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores.

Two years later, as the nation was preparing for war, the United States government announced it would take possession of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores to establish a military base, today known as USMC Base Camp Pendleton.

The Marine Corps has been wonderful caretakers of the Ranch House and Chapel, using it for many years as the residence of the base commanding general.

Despite some modernization such as the addition of plumbing and electricity and other conveniences, the ranch house is essentially the same as it was during O'Neill's ownership and is now a museum.

Jerome W. Baumgartner, Jr. wrote a book of his father's oral history, "Rancho Santa Margarita Remembered" in 1989 including interviews with Carl Romer, Inez Grant, and Harry Whitman. Jerome Baumgartner Sr. was raised on the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores during the ownership of Flood and O'Neill. It is a "must read" book before any visit to the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores and makes the tour of the ranch house so much more meaningful.

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temporary custody of the last man bottle until the final owner was determined. General Myatt agreed and Colonel Jack Kelly, USMC (Ret) delivered the bottle to the Club, where it now fittingly resides in a secure display case attached to a wall in the Leatherneck Steakhouse.

Maj.Gen. Mike Myatt, USMC (Ret), CEO, Marines' Memorial Club, explains the last man bottle to Marines' Memorial Association secretary Pete Paffrath.

*Photo by Michael Mustacchi/
Marines' Memorial*



The seers of 1965 who predicted that the ultimate owner of the Last Man Bottle would be known by 2010 were nearsighted. According to the 1st Marine Division Association, some 1,000 veterans are still in the running for the honor of opening the bottle. Considering what members of the division accomplished for our country during World War II, it is sad to think that there will ever be a winner. Should your travels take you to the Marines Memorial Club, stop by to pay your respects, not so much to the bottle as to the Marines and sailors it honors.

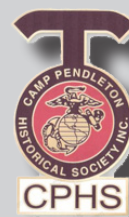
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Our hope is to include lunch in a Marine mess hall. AAVs, as they are known, are tracked vehicles capable of bringing Marines from ships to shore during an amphibious assault and then continuing to support them as the battle moves inland.

Put August 11 on your calendar. That is the date for our 5th annual fundraiser. Once again, we will hold it at the Ranch House (RH). With the help of the RH Docents, it will be a wonderful opportunity to visit and learn about this beautiful and historic home.

I extend my best wishes to all for the New Year and my thanks for your continued support. Without it, CPHS would not be able help preserve and tell the history of Camp Pendleton.

Richard B. Rothwell



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