

FAMOUS QUOTES FROM MARINES

When I hear of famous quotes by U. S. Marines, the one by General Cates (when he was one of the only survivors of his company in Belleau Wood comes to mind.

Lieutenant Cates sent a runner to the remnants of the Battalion Headquarters to report the status of his Company following his assault into the Wood, eventually to be renamed "The Wood of the Marine Brigade" – the absence of his runner of course, reduced the size of his own unit by one man until he could return.

"I have only two men out of my company, and 20 out of some other company. We need support, but it is almost suicide to try to get it here as we are swept by machine gun fire, and a constant barrage is on us. I have no one on my left, and only a few on my right. I will hold."

~ Signed ~ 1st Lt. Clifton B. Cates USMC 19 July 1918

The reason that I particularly remember General Cates' report is that only seven years later (1925), Captain Cates was my Daddy's OIC of the Marine Corps Recruiting Station in Spokane, Washington, about 30+ miles from my ranch in North Idaho.

Rank was a strange thing in those days, and did not come immediately or automatically from pure time in grade. Some individuals deliberately remained "career privates" retiring honorably with 20-years service and a clean record book. As late as 1961 when I was in the 9th Marines on Okinawa, there was a Marine Pfc. serving with the "RASP" (Ryukian Armed Services Police), with 20 years honorable service, retired on the ROCK. Obviously, they would not have allowed a "bandit" to have served with the RASP and have his retirement announced in the Stars and Stripes Newspaper!

My Dad told me that it wasn't unusual for the 1st Sergeant of the Marine Detachment of the Oklahoma to step down for a week, and allow a 20-year private to serve as the 1st Sergeant, and thus retire in the 5th Pay Grade (the highest available until 1926 as I recall), with enough money in retirement to survive and down a few on the Corps. Why would someone deliberately avoid rank for twenty years? Many were apparently individuals who were comfortable living in the security of an organized unit, yet preferred avoiding unnecessary responsibility. I assume this was much like the old professional cowboys who simply enjoyed punching cattle, having 3-squares available while earning enough pay to get screwed up in town on payday. He could then start another month in completely familiar surroundings with like thinking friends with similar attitudes. It was truly a different world, with different social pressures than those that apply today.

The entire Marine Corps was smaller than the New York City Police Force, and there were only 5 pay-grades. You went from Private to Corporal (no Pfc's in those days, and "Lance Corporal" was an acting-rank denoted by a pair of crossed rifles sewed on your sleeve). Assuming a clean record, and being recommended by your superiors, you

"might" be advanced to Corporal during your second enlistment. Generally speaking you could make one rank per hashmark without being considered to be a fanny-kisser. Promotions within the enlisted ranks were organizational, and if you were transferred to a new unit without an opening for say (Sergeant?) and if you were currently wearing three stripes, you had to take a bust back to the next highest rank available. Individuals being transferred (or considering transfer) were sometimes known to "shop around" for a unit having a vacancy in the rank held by the "transferee"... For those who remember the movie written by James Jones about the pre-WWII Army at Scofield Barracks, "From Here to Eternity," 1st Sergeant Warden was speaking of looking to transfer out of his unit (he and the Company Commander were not exactly close friend, although he and the Captain's wife were). Warden mentioned that he had located a company with a vacancy for a 1st Sergeant. Unless you were familiar with the promotional systems of both the Army and the Marine Corps of the pre-WWII Service, you might well have missed a "correct" notation on service life of the time.

Strangely enough, there were some units in the Marine Corps that still had organizational promotions even following WWII. It wasn't until after Korea that the "paperwork Marine Corps" gradually took over, and such things as promotion exams, and promotion boards became the norm.

BACK TO THE STORY...

My Dad, having finished a tour with the Marine Detachment on the USS Oklahoma, and having fought in the Haitian Campaign, (his squad captured a brass Gatling Gun that sat for years outside the Navy Department Headquarters in Washington, D.C.), his first enlistment came to an end. He had studiously avoided any promotions during his first enlistment. It seems that he had enlisted under the pay provisions that had been enacted for "The Great War" which were somewhat greater than the pre-war WWI pay grades. Following the war, the old pay provisions came back into play, and if you took a promotion, you had to agree to be paid under the peacetime pay grades. My Dad was drawing an additional \$5.00/month for Expert Rifleman, \$5.00/month as a 1st Class Gun Pointer on his 5" Gun Mount, was drawing \$3.00/month as a 2nd Class Signalman (signal-flags), ...and was cutting hair in his spare time in the Ship's Barber Shop (which would not have been allowed as an NCO). In short, he would have lost money by taking a promotion. He was also the (Ship's) Captain's orderly – a position only assigned to extremely squared away young Marines, so he wasn't what they used to call a "yard-bird". He was offered promotion to Corporal but figured that he would have lost money by doing so.

He spent a few weeks considering his future course of action, and re-enlisted. He made Corporal almost immediately, and Sergeant shortly thereafter. All of a sudden he was in the position of having made it to the 3rd pay-grade (Sergeant) with only one hashmark! Upppssss... He was (fortunately I assume), assigned to Recruiting Duty in Spokane, as I mentioned before, under Captain Clifton B. Cates.

Having finished his second hitch in the Marine Corps, with a bit of time out training of the Mexican Banditos with the Lewis Machine Gun, he and a friend went into the construction business in San Diego, only to be caught in the Depression in 1929. On his way back to Alabama (he hadn't been home in about 10-years), he stopped to see an old friend, Bob Crowder, from the Marine Detachment on the USS Oklahoma (circa) 1919 who was then on the Dallas Police Force. Bob Crowder eventually retired as the Captain of B Company, Texas Rangers in the early 1970s).

When back in Alabama, my Pap was about to reenlist in the Corps, he heard about a "new" Civil Service Exam being given for the Federal Prison System (the Bureau of Prisons had been manned using the "spoils system" prior to the new exam system). He took the exam, passed with high marks, and was offered a job at considerably higher pay than Corps was willing to pay. He advanced steadily making Lieutenant of the Guards, and being assigned as one of the 1st five Lieutenants assigned to Alcatraz in 1934. He eventually became an Associate Warden (formerly called Deputy Warden) of the lockup in Tallahassee, Florida when the Japanese bombed his old Battleship the Oklahoma. He reenlisted in the Marine Corps without notifying the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and was made a "gen-u-wine" 1st Lieutenant considering his prior experience. This time he stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve following WWII, eventually advancing to Lt. Col. prior to his retirement in 1963.

FAST FORWARD TO 1952...

My Dad was then a Major in the Marine Corps Reserve, and had advanced to Warden of the Federal Facility at Petersburg, Virginia. Following the "dust-up" in Korea, they were rebuilding the Marine Corps Reserve and they had decided to establish a Reserve Marine Rifle Company at Ft. Lee, Virginia (essentially adjacent to the Federal Prison). They asked my Dad to become the Commanding Officer in 1953, which he gladly accepted.

He had to make some sort of meeting at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and it being in the Summer, I went along with him (to wander around loosely on my own in Washington, D.C. looking at the sights – try THAT now, whew!). In those days however, virtually all individuals wore suits when making conferences and similar meetings, and he was so attired when we made a stop at Quantico. While we were heading up the steps to "Little Hall" (the location of the old PX), there was a nicely dressed individual also dressed in a civilian coat and tie coming down the steps.

This gentleman and my Dad stopped and shook hands and engaged in a conversation that must have lasted about an hour or better. I listened with great interest, and it was obvious that he and my Dad were old friends. After we parted company, my Dad and I went up the steps to the Exchange. Unable to contain my curiosity, I asked him who the individual was that he was trading stories with? "Why that was General Cates," he informed me. General Cates had finished his tour as the Commandant in 1951, and apparently not being ready to hang it up as a Marine, he asked permission to step down a rank and assume Command of Quantico for a final tour. Permission was granted, and

General Cates finished his tour, was given his Commandant's stars back and finally retired from the Corps some 38-years after sending the message to his Battalion Commander in Belleau in July 1918.

A different day, a different time, and perhaps a different Corps – we used to win our wars in those days (or at least wind 'em up in a stalemate, if you count Korea).

Semper Fidelis,

Dick