



September 17, 2009

Getaway: Halls of honor and tradition

The Museum of the Marine Corps puts visitors in the shoes of the United States' most elite soldiers.

by Cheré Coen

There are faces of Marines staring down from the circular heart of the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, Va., just outside of Washington, D.C. These photos were chosen at random, but since the museum opened in November 2006, marines have walked in and recognized themselves.

In addition, war veterans and Vietnam visitors have recognized their photos in the museum's many exhibits.

"History walks in here every day," said docent Don Martin, who served 30 years in the Marines and now teaches Marine Corps history.

Since the museum's opening, about 500,000 visitors have walked through its doors every year, said Gwenn Adams, public affairs director.

"In less than two years, we've had our million visitor," she said.

The museum was built by money from Congress and raised by private donors and today consists of one wing, which showcases Marine Corps history from the Continental Congress to today, including the assistance of hurricane recovery in New Orleans. A new wing will open in the summer of 2010 that will "immerse" visitors in World War I, plus more are planned.

"What we're doing here is to make you feel what it's like to be a Marine," Martin said. After entering into the heart of the museum, with its pole stretching heavenward at a 60-degree angle in honor of the famous photos of Marines capturing the hill at Iwo Jima, visitors can enjoy a movie, then the many historic galleries.

But first, you have to enter boot camp. A fun exhibit showcases what a marine must go through from when he first gets off the bus. Visitors can even stand in designated spots and hear the sergeants yelling or feel the combat load of 60 to 110 pounds that marines must wear on a hike during training.

"That's why we're so dangerous to our enemies," Martin said of the vigorous training. The many galleries explore the wars fought over the years, including World Wars I and II, the Korean War and Vietnam. Visitors can hear the original radio broadcast announcing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, experience the cold of the Chosin Reservoir in Korea (the temperature in the room is dropped significantly) and stand in the air transport planes of Vietnam.

The exhibits contain realistic mannequins created with the help of live Marines, Martin said. Some exhibits also show the compassionate side of war, such as the medic helping a wounded Vietnam woman.

Also included in the museum are revolving exhibits, a list of Medal of Honor recipients and an area dedicated to the attack on New York on Sept. 11, 2001. In addition, there are tidbits of information everywhere, including the history of the Color Guard and Cap. William Jones, who was “looking for a few good men” in 1779.

More than anything, Martin said, it’s an honored place for Marines, both past and present, to visit.

“To a Marine, they are walking into a sanctuary,” he said. “To a marine, this is home ground.”

Upcoming events

- Author Richard Botkin and retired Marine Colonel Jerry Turley will be guest speakers at a 1 p.m. luncheon Sept. 25 on the Overlook of the National Museum of the Marine Corps. They will discuss Botkin’s book, *Ride the Thunder*, an account of U.S. Marine Corps advisors to the South Vietnamese Marines during the 1971-1972 North Vietnamese offensive. Reservations are required by calling (703) 649-2350. Tickets are \$15.
 - A Family Day titled *The USMC in the Civil War: A Corps Divided* will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Oct. 10.
-