UCF Veterans Legacy Program

UCF VLP Presents: US Marine Corps History
Episode One: Why History Matters to the US Marine Corps
Written by Jim Stoddard
Edited by Sebastian Garcia

LIAM AMBROSE: Amid shouts and commands, a group of young Americans rush into a classroom. Their heads shaved, clothes stained with sweat, and sneakers—not boots—on their feet, they take their seats.[1] They've been on an island for less than a week, and a change has already started, but only just. They are only recruits—not yet full members of the organization they've just joined. It is week one of thirteen. Over those three months, most, but not all, will achieve that goal. Throughout their training, these recruits will endure challenges, deprivations, and continual stress. They will grow in body, mind, and spirit. One of the many lessons they will receive occurs in this classroom.

AMBROSE: A Drill Instructor, intense and focused, stands before the recruits. They sit attentively with their knowledge books open. In an authoritative and, at times, harsh voice, the drill instructor declares,

DRILL INSTRUCTOR: On 10 November 1775 my Marine Corps was born inside of Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania!

AMBROSE: Thus begins history class aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Marine Corps boot camp isn't only about physical training, drilling, and rifle marksmanship. The training schedule also contains academics, a major component of which is history. In no less than five structured sessions within the first three weeks of boot camp, recruits will receive lectures on the history of the Corps from 1775 to the present. The goal of this instruction is not only to impart the historical lineage of the Corps, but to inculcate these raw recruits into the identity and culture of the Corps—to develop a love for and a bond to it. It is an essential aspect of becoming a United States Marine.

AMBROSE: I am Liam Ambrose and this is ***UCF VLP Presents: US Marine Corps History*, Episode One: Why History Matters to the US Marine Corps**.[2] The United States Marine Corps valorizes its history more than any other branch in the US

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[1] Sound comes from a 2016 video posted by the US Marine Corps, highlighting "spend pick-up," or more commonly known as "Black Friday," during Marine Corps Bootcamp. Sgt. John Lamb, "Black Friday | Welcome to Bootcamp," posted March 25, 2016, by Marines, YouTube, 00:00–00:40, https://youtu.be/U_PeamfAzeo?si=COI8tETaN8IcngwN.
[2] Theme music sourced from the United States Marine Band's "The Marine Hymn (three verses)," https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Portals/175/Docs/Audio/Ceremonial/the_marines_hymn_three_verses.mp3.

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Armed Forces. History remains a critical asset in the arsenal of transforming recruits into Marines and maintaining that title throughout one's career. In other words, history enables and sustains the identity of a Marine and the organization's culture. But why? What about its past causes the Corps to continually rely on it in their present? How exactly does the Corps construct its history? And how do Marines learn about that well-etched narrative? With the help of three Marine Veterans, we will begin to answer these questions. Their unique careers give us a purview into the various ways that the Corps remembers and deploys its history, whether at boot camp, drill instructor school, and even in the high school classroom through the Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program. Collectively, their lived experiences allows us to understand how the Marine Corps has valorized their past and why it continues to matter.

AMBROSE: Jim Stoddard served in the Marine Corps for ten years as an intelligence analyst. When he left active duty, he entered academia. He researches Veteran and Marine Corps History.

JIM STODDARD: My name's Jim Stoddard. I am a Marine Corps Veteran and doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida in its Text and Technologies program. My dissertation deals with Marine Corps history and culture.

AMBROSE: When Ray Fullard retired from active duty in the Marine Corps, he became a Marine Corps JROTC Instructor.

RAY FULLARD: I am Sergeant Major Ray Fullard. I did twenty-seven years plus in the Marine Corps. Had several jobs in the Marine Corps as a supply guy, interrogator intel chief, and finally as a first sergeant sergeant major.

AMBROSE: Our third Veteran voice is Marc Chabot. For a portion of his extensive career, he served as a drill instructor where he transformed recruits into Marines at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California.

MARC CHABOT: I served in the Marine Corps for twenty-seven years, five months, eighteen days. I retired as a Sergeant Major. I was on the drill field as a work and drill instructor from 2005 to 2008.

AMBROSE: The Marine Corps has focused on its history, culture, and traditions for a long time. In 1921, the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, John A. Lejeune, detailed the importance of the spirit and identity of the Corps.

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CHABOT: I got this from the Gray Research Center down at Quantico, but this is a 1920-21 Marine Corps manual. So, this was compiled during the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General John Lejeune. This is kinda like the first publication that was ever drafted in the Marine Corps, talking about the culture piece of it, right? Like, there's some really profound stuff in here. Like the one camaraderieship and brotherhood. “The spirit of camaraderieship and brotherhood in arms and to be in the training camps and on the battlefields. This spirit is too fine a thing to be allowed to die. It should be fostered and kept alive in the moving force in all Marine Corps organizations.” That's 1921. That's never changed.

AMBROSE: Lejeune also explained the role of leadership in imparting that spirit.

CHABOT: And probably my favorite one, teacher and scholar. Says “the interactions must be in no sense of superior and inferior, nor that of master and servants, but rather of teacher and scholar. In fact, a relationship between father and son.”

AMBROSE:[3] So much of the Marine Corps spirit stems from the organization's history and traditions. For most Marines, their first exposure to the history of the Corps came while they were recruits in boot camp at one of the two Marine Corps Recruit Depots, one on Parris Island, South Carolina or the other at San Diego, California.

STODDARD: I was first introduced to Marine Corps history through recruit training, very early on maybe even before that with the recruiters.

FULLARD: So my first introduction, besides watching Gomer Pyle on TV, was going through recruit training, and everything we did had connection to who we are. And I first learned about Chesty Puller there, Dan Daly, John Basilone, through all the things that we did in boot camp. And all the DIs who were well-versed in the history themselves, connecting everything we did in recruit training to that. To me, it starts the day you hit the yellow footprints.

CHABOT: In recruit training, they give you a knowledge book, which is about that thick. In there is a whole bunch of basic Marine Corps history, all the way from Continental Marines of 1775 all the way through, at least when I went through, Desert Storm.

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[3] Sound that plays in between Chabot and Ambrose comes from the United States Marine Band’s Bungle Calls, “Drill Call,” https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Portals/175/Docs/Audio/Ceremonial/drill_call.mp3.

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AMBROSE: Marine drill instructors must conduct nearly all the training that recruits experience during boot camp. Each drill instructor swears a creed to train their recruits and make them Marines.

CHABOT: What I didn't know, what I know now is, when you're a drill instructor, you have a Drill Instructor Creed. “These recruits are entrusted to my care. I will train them to the best of my ability. I will develop them into smartly disciplined, physically fit, basically trained Marines, thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and country.” So every drill instructor gets up there in front of their platoon, with their right hand up, like they're swearing an oath to the Constitution, pledging that creed to those recruits, the same way my drill instructors pledged that to me. So that's powerful. “Thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and country.” And that's what you do. When you're a recruit, you're sitting there and you're receiving all that stuff, so they're basically brainwashing you. The drill instructors are brainwashing the recruits into believing, not in believing, but actually making this mystery come to light.

AMBROSE: That mystery, that mythos of the Corps, told in a historical narrative of gallantry and tradition, helps to develop that love of Corps and country within each recruit.

AMBROSE: The ability for a recruit to *earn* their Marine identity remains a central part of the recruitment pitch. Once in boot camp on Parris Island or at San Diego, drill instructors espouse the Corps' history in various ways.

STODDARD: They're trying to inculcate you into this identity even before you set on those yellow footprints at Parris Island or in San Diego. And, once you're there, there's not only dedicated Marine Corps history classes that you'll sit in a classroom or an auditorium and get a school-style presentation of Marine Corps history from drill instructors, but it's also woven throughout your recruit training. So even when you're just marching around from place to place, the drill instructors are calling out ditties. They'll have a call or a prompt, and the recruits will have a response. So for example, they'll shout out, "Landing strip," and all the recruits will shout back, "Iwo Jima." Or, they might say, "First female Marine," and you'll shout back, "Opha May Johnson.” And, it's all this way to reinforce and repeat the important points in Marine Corps history, whether they're people or places, events, battles, weapon items, like the Mameluke sword coming out of the Barbary Pirate Wars in the early 1800s, the Blood Stripe from the Battle of Chapultepec in the Mexican-American War, all of this, it's regularly brought to mind for the recruit. And as you say these things, as you repeat them, as you hear them in the classroom, you feel tighter and tighter and tighter to the identity of the Marine Corps because you're being reminded of the Marines that came before you.

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FULLARD: We had a small little six by nine little green monster we carried around with us all the time. And no matter where you are, if you had five minutes to stand in line, we had to break out that book and study our knowledge. And we would get told every day what pages to study. That's still me today, everywhere I go, I have a knowledge book with me still. Throughout the book itself, a lot of it had history located in it. So it's embedded in me now.

CHABOT: Like it's real, it's just pounded into you over and over and over again. You get tested on it, you get quizzed on it, you get held accountable to it. If a drill instructor asks you a question that's in your knowledge book and you don't know it, you're getting held accountable.

STODDARD: I've always been a history nerd. So I did some of that digging before getting into the Corps, and I was always the recruit that wanted more from those history classes. Like, you're telling me what I know. I wanna know some more. I want, I want more of that good indoctrination.

AMBROSE: History also constitutes part of the training for the Marine drill instructor. Not only do drill instructors learn the curriculum that they teach to recruits, but some receive additional training in specialized areas, including history.

CHABOT: You're getting a little bit more and you're gonna distill it down to recruits. There's different, they call packages at DI schools that you have, and one of them is the history and tradition package. You get the drill package, you get the physical fitness package. When I was a DI school instructor, I had the basic warrior skills package. So it was like seven or eight of those packages, and each one of the, usually gunnery sergeants, sometimes staff sergeants, the instructors, they have those packages, and then their job is to teach all the students that. And you're also a squad instructor, so you have like two different things that you do.

AMBROSE: However, history lessons don't always take place in the classroom…

STODDARD: You get the formal lecture, but one of the other ways that I liked, as a recruit, was kind of the hip pocket classes, that would come with when there's kind of downtime, you're filling a gap in something 'cause you've hurried up to wait, and now you're gonna gain some knowledge while you're waiting.

AMBROSE: The history lessons don't end when recruits graduate and become Marines. Lessons from Marine Corps history continue throughout one's career. It can

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occur on the job or even in a Marine's personal time through reading books, such as the *Guidebook for Marines*.

FULLARD: Once I graduated, I got one in Okinawa, Japan, a *Guidebook for Marines*, ‘cause there I started trying to advance myself. So my first sergeant told me to go get one from the exchange and start studying it, and gave me certain things out of the study for promotion boards and meritorious boards and Marine of the Month boards and stuff. So I had one of those. As a matter of fact, I still think I have that one in my footlocker at home.

STODDARD: While I was in, it would come up, reading the *Guidebook for Marines*, hearing it in hip pocket classes, going to Corporals Course and reading Marine Corps Institute, like distant learning books and stuff. Even if it was Math for Marines, there's some history that comes in the lessons in some way, and it's always ever present, even if the topic at hand isn't a historical topic or historical lesson plan. So I got it piecemeal and in informal fashion throughout my entire time in the Marine Corps, which as a wannabe historian at the time, I always enjoyed that.

CHABOT: The way it's supposed to work is you progress throughout your career, you take those basic things, and then, you know, you do battle studies, you do PMEs [Professional Military Education]. You figure out, like for me, I was an Amtrac, an amphibious assault vehicle crewman, so like our biggest battle was the Battle of Tarawa during the Pacific island-hopping campaign. Second tracks, second assault amphibious battalion, they have you read the actual book, "Tarawa," like you'll read this, like this is what Amtracker are all about right here, boom. You just keep on building. It's just a building block, just a machine. It's like you just keep on feeding the machine of knowledge.

FULLARD: When I taught NCO [Noncommissioned Officer] school for 2nd FSSG [Force Service Support Group], history was a big part of that also. My classes were more interior guard and inspections, uniform wear, but one of the other instructors had the history part. But yes, throughout a Marine's career, at least back when I was doing this thing, at every level school, history was a part of it.

AMBROSE: While the history remains important, the present situation always takes precedence, especially when it comes to briefing commanders on the conditions in a foreign country or a current conflict.

STODDARD: Going into intel school, we read obviously a lot more history related stuff, and then when I was in the fleet, my NCOs and then eventually, you know, staff NCOs proofreading or reviewing my briefs before I give them, especially if they're

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like country briefs, “Cut back on the history section. There's too much here. That, that's all good stuff, but we need more on the here and now and the, and the present than, you know, this prologue,” that I cared about a lot, but, but they needed to cut a little bit.

AMBROSE: In addition to the written or spoken word, the history of the Corps possesses a physical presence, most prominently featured in the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Virginia, near Headquarters Marine Corps. Most Marine Corps installations have some kind of base museum. Additionally, statues, monuments, and historical equipment dot the landscape.

CHABOT: Obviously I'm biased, but I do believe that the branch that does history and lineage and illustrates itself the best is the Marine Corps. Look no further than the Marine Corps Museum at Triangle, Virginia. There is no service that comes anywhere close to having that level of detail and beauty expressing their lineage and their history. Nowhere else. And there's other little pockets throughout the US where there's other, like the Carolina Museum the Marine Corps just opened down in North Carolina. You got the Yat Yas Museum out at Camp Pendleton at Miramar. We just do it really, really well.

AMBROSE:[4] In some cases, civilians also learn the Corps' narrative. As a Marine Corps JROTC Instructor, Ray Fullard has a relationship with Marine history that extends beyond the Corps and into high school education. Over the last seventeen years, Fullard has witnessed the program's curriculum evolve to maintain the high standards of the Corps in a changing world.

FULLARD: When I first started this job in 2009, there wasn't much training as far as what we did in the classroom. I think the Marine Corps had this understanding that we as staff NCOs or officers knew our history, knew what we're talking about because we lived it all our lives. We had an expectation that we had to meet. And all the curriculum, even now, has been revised, but we're given everything we need as far as curriculum, PowerPoint slides, the national standards. All that stuff is given to us, so we, all we gotta do is read it, understand it, and go teach it. But it's there. Now, since then, we've gotten a little more training as far as how to teach to ensure we're following all the academic standards as a regular teacher does.

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[4] Sound that plays in between Chabot and Ambrose comes from the United States Marine Band’s Bungle Calls, “School Call,” https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Portals/175/Docs/Audio/Ceremonial/school_call.mp3; Music that follows sourced from the United States Marine Band’s “Pass in Review,” https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Portals/175/Docs/Audio/Ceremonial/pass_in_review.mp3?ver=Rd7pshIUQ0spLYCwugU4IA%3d%3d.

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AMBROSE: JROTC Instructors also have to recognize that every student understands knowledge differently. Not everyone learns at the same pace.

FULLARD: Everybody learns differently. And one of the things that we have to do is learn quickly who we're teaching. And once we figure that out, we have to adjust on the fly, 'cause sometimes we'll get kids in our classroom who are quick, and they can read a paragraph and they can memorize it verbatim. But then we'll get that young man, young woman who has the heart of gold, but can't recall a thing at all. So we have to figure that out and adjust how we teach and what we teach. Now, the way the Marine Corps does this with our programs is we do things, we teach in the classroom, but a lot of the stuff that we do is repetition. The drill, the PT [Physical Training], the leadership traits, the leadership principles, the knowledge itself is all repetitive. So a young man, young woman, regardless of level, can attain the highest level in our programs because the repetition that we have. We have all year to cover the material. So if a young man, young woman is not getting it right away, not a problem. We can always go back because it's repetitive, so we can keep it going.

AMBROSE: The Marine Corps JROTC Curriculum includes history, but as in recruit training and life in the Corps, history remains woven throughout the school year.

FULLARD: The history, it starts day one. We tell them who we are and what we've done, and from that point, the kids will ask you questions about who you are and what you've done, and you can relate back to any part in history that you want to. They ask you, well, for example, the nickname Devil Dog, Belleau Wood, World War I. How did we get that? 'Cause we fought like fierce hound dogs. The Mameluke sword, where'd that come from? The Pasha of Tripoli gave it to Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon because the Marines came in and did a wonderful job for them. Where'd the blood stripe come from? The Battle of Chapultepec, where we lost all our officers and staff NCOs. So everything that we do, all the folklore, all the knowledge ties right back. I mean, everything that we deal with in the classroom goes back into our history. So it's not necessarily a block per se. We have blocks, but from day one the history is there.

AMBROSE: Equally important, JROTC instructors must acknowledge that most cadets will not join the Armed Forces and even fewer will join the Marine Corps.

FULLARD: We start off with probably sixty-five to seventy freshmen, and by the time they become seniors, we have about maybe twenty of them still left. Out of that twenty, and it varies year to year, anywhere from fifty percent, forty percent, sometimes twenty, will join the military. And we try to find things for them to do in the military that's gonna benefit them down the road, and we push college first.

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AMBROSE: Whether they be JROTC cadets, recruits, or career Marines, few will detect change in the historical narrative of the Corps. The first *Guidebook for Marines*, which holds a strong narrative connection to the recruit's Knowledge Book, was published in 1946. It told the story of the Corps from its founding to the end of World War II.

STODDARD: The historical narrative from 1946 doesn't change very much up through most of the twentieth century, with the exception of adding new events.

AMBROSE: Generally, once written, few changes occur in follow-up editions for the remainder of the twentieth century.

STODDARD: They might fix a typo, they might add a line or two here, but overall that narrative is tight, and well-etched, because it's proven to be so memorable, so easily taught and easily retained, and precise. And so much like the Marine Corps does, that precision and efficiency comes through in our historical narrative.

AMBROSE: In recent years, the Marine Corps has added to that well etched twentieth century narrative. Most often, the additions include more actors. For example, in the Korean War section, the US Army gets a larger role. As Jim Stoddard details, the more traditional version focused entirely on the Marine Corps.

STODDARD: It is the Marine Corps, 1st Marine Division, fighting the entire war. And if the Army's mentioned, it's as a foil of how poorly they did compared to the Marine Corps.

AMBROSE: Now, in the recent editions the Army receives a more balanced look.

STODDARD: All of a sudden the Army's not so bad, and the Marine Corps is part of this larger joint environment that includes the Army but also the United Nations. And it's this joint front that's fighting the North Koreans and the Chinese.

AMBROSE: The recent editions also highlight women and African Americans more prominently throughout the narrative.

STODDARD: Having dedicated sections on the history of African Americans in the Marine Corps, talking about Montford Point and the desegregation of the Corps, and then also women in the Marines. Opha May Johnson has been talked about for a while within the Marine Corps as the first female Marine going back to World War I, but aside from that you don't really hear very much more about female Marines. In

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the more recent versions you get more than just Opha May involved, talking about the importance of female Marines in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

AMBROSE: The current edition of the narrative maintains the focus on the past, while keeping an ever vigilant eye on the future.

CHABOT: The Marine Corps continues to try to adapt and evolve, not just in war fighting, but also in the way that we learn as well.

FULLARD: We're looking more now to set the tone. We don't wanna be left behind, and we know technology's moving at a cyclic pace. So our commandants who are responsible for the training and manning of the Marine Corps and keeping it ready as a force in readiness, always looking towards the future. So the narrative has not changed, but the Marine Corps is making sure that we're ready for the next threat, wherever it may be.

CHABOT: It goes back to what we talked about earlier with General John Lejeune, like his ability to kinda write out command chronologies and actually do publications and put stuff in black and white and in writing. And then you take that and then you turn that into a war game or a table talk exercise or a PME, and then it just kinda grows legs from there, and just the story just keeps on promoting itself and keeps on going from there. It's really neat how we do it.

AMBROSE: Conflicts such as the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam remain deeply influential to the Marine Corps' history and identity.

STODDARD: There's a whole argument that Korea saved the Marine Corps. Korea is often remembered as the forgotten war. Well, that's not the case within the Marine Corps. It is as remembered as World War I and World War II.

AMBROSE: More recent events, such as 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, have also left an indelible mark on the Corps, its Marines, and the historical narrative.[5]

CHABOT: I was in Twenty-nine Palms. My wife called me at 08:30. She's like screaming on the other end of the phone, "America's under attack." I turned on the television and saw those holes in the Twin Towers.

[5] Music comes from the United States Marine Band's "Marines' Hymn (slow version)," https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Portals/175/Docs/Audio/Ceremonial/the_marines_hymn_slow_version.mp3.

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AMBROSE: To fully understand why history matters to the Marine Corps, we must dive deeper into how the Marines remember these conflicts. In the next episode, we will explore how the narrative of the Corps remembers the early twentieth century, in particular, World Wars I and II. From the perspective of the Corps and its Marines, respect and remembrance of the past remain crucial to the future success of the Marine Corps.

FULLARD: Keeping our history alive and respecting that history and adding our own little flavor to it in our own unique way, and everything that we've done since then, keeps us around. So history is deeply embedded in who we are.

AMBROSE: Thank you for listening to ***UCF VLP Presents: US Marine Corps History***, an educational podcast produced by the University of Central Florida's Veterans Legacy Program. I'm your host, Liam Ambrose.

AMBROSE: ***UCF VLP Presents: US Marine Corps History*** is made possible by the University of Central Florida's Veterans Legacy Program. The UCF VLP is a US Department of Veterans Affairs-funded partnership with the National Cemetery Administration through which UCF students, faculty, staff, and K-12 educators across Florida collaborate to extend the memorialization of Veterans buried in National Cemeteries across the state by using cutting-edge technology and innovative pedagogy.

AMBROSE: This episode of ***UCF VLP Presents: US Marine Corps History*** is researched, written, and produced by Jim Stoddard. This episode is edited and mixed by Sebastian Garcia. Music and sound effects sourced from the United States Marine Corps and Pixabay artists. Executive producers are Dr. Amelia Lyons and Sebastian Garcia.

AMBROSE: Special thanks to Sergeant Major Ray Fullard and Sergeant Major Marc Chabot for their expertise throughout this episode. The UCF VLP thanks them for their service.

AMBROSE: Special thanks to Dan Fandino and Harper Norris for helping us record at the UCF Digital Exploration Center.

AMBROSE: We also thank Heather Gibson and the UCF College of Arts and Humanities for the recording studio at the Nicholson School of Communication.

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AMBROSE: To learn more about the other deliverables we produce as part of our VLP work, such as grade-level Veteran biographies, cemetery mini-tours, K-12 lesson plans, and more, visit our website. The link is in the episode's description.

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